

THE PITJANTJARA AND THEIR CRAFTS

BY PETER BROKENSHA

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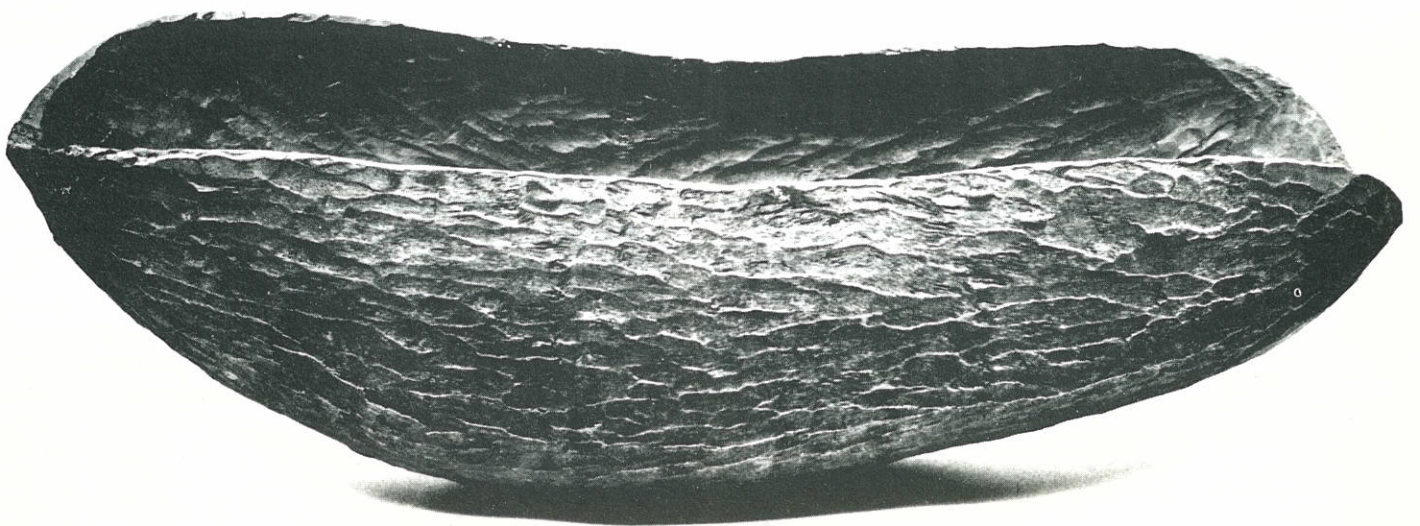
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BY PETER BROKENSHA



FOREWORD TO THE THIRD PRINTING

One of the major themes of this book when written in 1975 was that the return of the Pitjantjatjara people to their homelands offered them the potential to control their own lands and to determine their own future. In the foreword to the second printing in 1978 I noted the progress which the people had made towards achieving land rights from the South Australian Government and how they had formed their own political organisation the Pitjantjatjara Council. It is appropriate for the reader to ask what has happened to the Pitjantjatjara since 1978 with respect to the vital issues of land rights, self-determination, health, the return to the homelands movement and the integrity of their culture and their crafts. It is impossible to do more than lightly brush the surface of some of these complex issues in a short foreword.

LAND RIGHTS

The most important event was the achievement of land rights that occurred when the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act became law on March 18th 1981. This Act vested 103,000 square kilometres of land under inalienable freehold title in an unique incorporation of all Pitjantjatjara people — the Anangu Pitjantjatjaraku. The other important provisions of the Act as described by Toyne and Vachon (1984:108) were:

*All non Pitjantjatjara (with some statutory exceptions such as police and members of parliament) would require permits from the land holding incorporation to enter the lands. Miners wishing to enter and explore must first be approved by the Department of Mines and Energy and then negotiate directly with the land holding incorporation. Any agreement reached would include social and environmental protection provisions and the right of the **anangu** to receive payments of compensation for disturbance to their lands, the people and their way of life. Any mineral or petroleum explorer aggrieved by a refusal of the incorporation to allow entry could apply for arbitration before a Supreme Court judge. In considering his decision the arbitrator was heavily directed towards protecting Aboriginal interests. The judge had to consider the importance of the exploration to the state and the nation.*

The land holding incorporation is also entitled to one third of the Crown royalties on minerals and petroleum extracted on the lands. Another third is distributed to other Aboriginal people in the state and the government receives the final third.

Hailed as model land rights legislation it was not won without a long frustrating struggle. As predicted in the 1978 foreword to the second printing of this book the [then] Premier of South Australia, Don Dunstan, did place a Bill before Parliament in November 1978 to provide land rights for the Pitjantjatjara. The first set back for the Pitjantjatjara occurred when Dunstan resigned due to ill health in February 1979 before the Bill was passed. The Labor Government then lost office in September 1979 to the Tonkin Liberal Government. In February 1980 the Pitjantjatjara travelled to Adelaide, camped on the Victoria Park Racecourse in the heart of the city and forcefully put their case to the new government and the media. The story of how this uncommitted and somewhat uncomprehending government was finally convinced to pass very similar land rights legislation has been well told by Toyne and Vachon (1984) and by Hope (in print). The favourable outcome is a tribute to the unswerving determination of the Pitjantjatjara people to have title to their rightful lands and in no small part due to the brilliance and tenacity of the Pitjantjatjara advisers and lawyers, particularly Philip Toyne. This Act applies only to Pitjantjatjara lands within South Australia. The Pitjantjatjara and their neighbours the Nyaangantjara in Western Australia have only in late 1986 been offered a leasehold over their traditional lands. The Pitjantjatjara and their eastern neighbours the Yakuntjatjara who are the traditional owners of the Ayers Rock area in the Northern Territory received title to their lands in 1985 with a 99-year lease back to the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service.

HEALTH

The moves towards Aboriginal control of health services have continued. In 1982 a state-wide community controlled South Australian Aboriginal Trachoma and Eye Health Committee was formed to co-ordinate Ophthalmologist screening and treatment programs throughout Aboriginal communities in South Australia (Foley, 1984:22).

In the Pitjantjatjara lands a further important step was the formation of the Pitjantjatjara Community controlled Nganampa Health Council Inc. in 1984. This Council provides primary preventative and public health services as well as education and community development services throughout the Pitjantjatjara lands. The Council operates seven community health centres, has a total medical and paramedical staff of forty and attends to some 45,000 patients per year.

In 1985 the Mutitjulu/Imanpa Health Service was also established at Ayers Rock.



Plate A Amata Settlement 1984

Despite all the work being done, the inputs from European society of diseases, processed foods and alcohol have continued to maintain Aboriginal health standards at an appallingly low level compared with levels in the white population. One of the major health/social problems which the Pitjantjatjara (and other groups) face is the incidence of regular petrol sniffing amongst children and young adults.

In some communities well over 50% of children from ages 5 and 6 years to 20 years are regular daily petrol sniffers.
(Foley, 1984:50)

At Amata in May 1986 there were some 50-60 sniffers in a school age population of between 80 and 90.
(Hope, 1986:19)

As the white community has learnt more of this problem through visits to settlements by the media and politicians so concern has grown to find solutions. Many have been tried over many years with apparent success in some communities and little or none in others. Some informed researchers suggest that petrol sniffing is one obvious and distressing symbol of the effect of white culture contact.

THE HOMELAND MOVEMENT

Since 1978 the Pitjantjatjara homeland answer movement has continued to grow as more and more Pitjantjatjara disperse themselves over their traditional lands. I am indebted to Ushma Scales who has worked and lived with the Pitjantjatjara since the mid-1970s for the following up-to-date information. Mr. Scales has categorised the geographic settlement pattern of the Pitjantjatjara in the following way.

1. Large Settlements

All the original settlements and missions set up by the governments or churches have remained, although in most cases the population is smaller. Many of the settlements have taken on a softer Aboriginal ambience as under Pitjantjatjara control the old colonial style emphasis on order and neatness has faded as trees and vegetation have been let to grow where they may (See Plate A). These large settlements tend to contain a diverse and sometimes artificial collection of Pitjantjatjara at a place which may not be their traditional country but offers other attractions such as schools and stores. It is interesting to note that Pipalyatjara which is described in Chapter 5 as a small typical homeland camp when I lived there in 1975 is now categorised by Scales as a major settlement with between 100 and 200 people, resident whites and a store and school etc.

2. Homelands

These are locations to which the traditional 'owners' of an area and their families have returned. These may be permanent camps or places where the members of the appropriate descent groups live occasionally.

3. Outstations

These are camps which have no particular sacred significance and no identifiable local descent group in residence. There are usually outstations relatively close to a major settlement.

4. Ceremonial Homelands

These are particularly significant sacred sites where large numbers of Pitjantjatjara gather periodically to perform ceremonies specifically related to that site but there is no permanent habitation.

5. Occasional Homelands

These are camps where the descent group owners do not live permanently but visit from major settlements at weekends or when vehicles are available to take them there.

In 1975 there was only a handful of homelands on the Pitjantjatjara lands. The growth of the decentralisation movement has been such that in 1986 Scales recorded in South Australia alone the following numbers of locations of the types mentioned:

17	Permanent Homelands
27	Occasional Homelands
3	Ceremonial Homelands
19	Permanent Outstations
4	Occasional Outstations
70	Total

If the adjacent lands of the Pitjantjatjara and their neighbours in Western Australia and the Northern Territory are included the number of homelands and outstations swells to 116. Some of these are shown on Plate B.

Scales also points out some of the factors which are inhibiting the development of the homeland movement in the central desert area:

There is a problem in knowing which government agency is responsible for what because multiple agencies are involved reporting to three state governments and the federal government.

Each of the four governments involved has different ideas about appropriate models and directions for the homeland movement.

Educational support for homelands has been inadequate and there is little recreational activity for youth. These factors have skewed the population in the homelands towards the elderly.

Because many homelands are very isolated and in a harsh environment their ability to survive is dependent on the supply link for food and maintaining water bores. This link is often fragile and dependent on the homeland group having a reliable vehicle.

However despite these problems the homeland movement has continued to develop and grow.

CULTURAL INTEGRITY

The pervasiveness and appeal of European artifacts and technology would seem to provide overwhelming threats to Aboriginal culture. However, the Pitjantjatjara have demonstrated a determination to maintain their cultural identity and are learning to adapt European organisation and technology for that purpose. The way the Pitjantjatjara Council has developed and how it is used by all the Pitjantjatjara as their political and administrative organ demonstrates this. Communications over this vast landscape are improving. In 1984 a major road building program began and most homelands have solar powered radio transmitter/receivers to enable the people to receive the Pitjantjatjara Council news broadcasts or to communicate with other centres on their 'Chatter Channel'. An historic event in 1986 was the granting by the Australian Government of the only central Australian television transmitting licence to the Aboriginal people through the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association. By this enlightened decision, made against considerable other commercial interest pressure, the Australian Government has hopefully ameliorated for a time at least the threat to their culture from the effects of foreign junk television. Hope (1986:35) suggests that the use of video and television may provide some constructive and elegant alternatives to enable the Pitjantjatjara to revivify their relationships with the land in the face of a sedentary life style.

PITJANTJATJARA CRAFTS

The Pitjantjatjara people are now making more of their beautiful high quality traditional and adapted crafts than ever before. In 1984 the people established their own regional craft co-operative. Maruku Arts and Crafts, to handle the development and marketing of craft from the whole Western Desert region. The co-operative is based at Ayers Rock where it has a major retail outlet. Every month the buyers from Maruku travel up to 1,000 kilometres to all the settlements and homeland to buy the craft produced by over 400 Pitjantjatjara craftsmen and craftswomen.

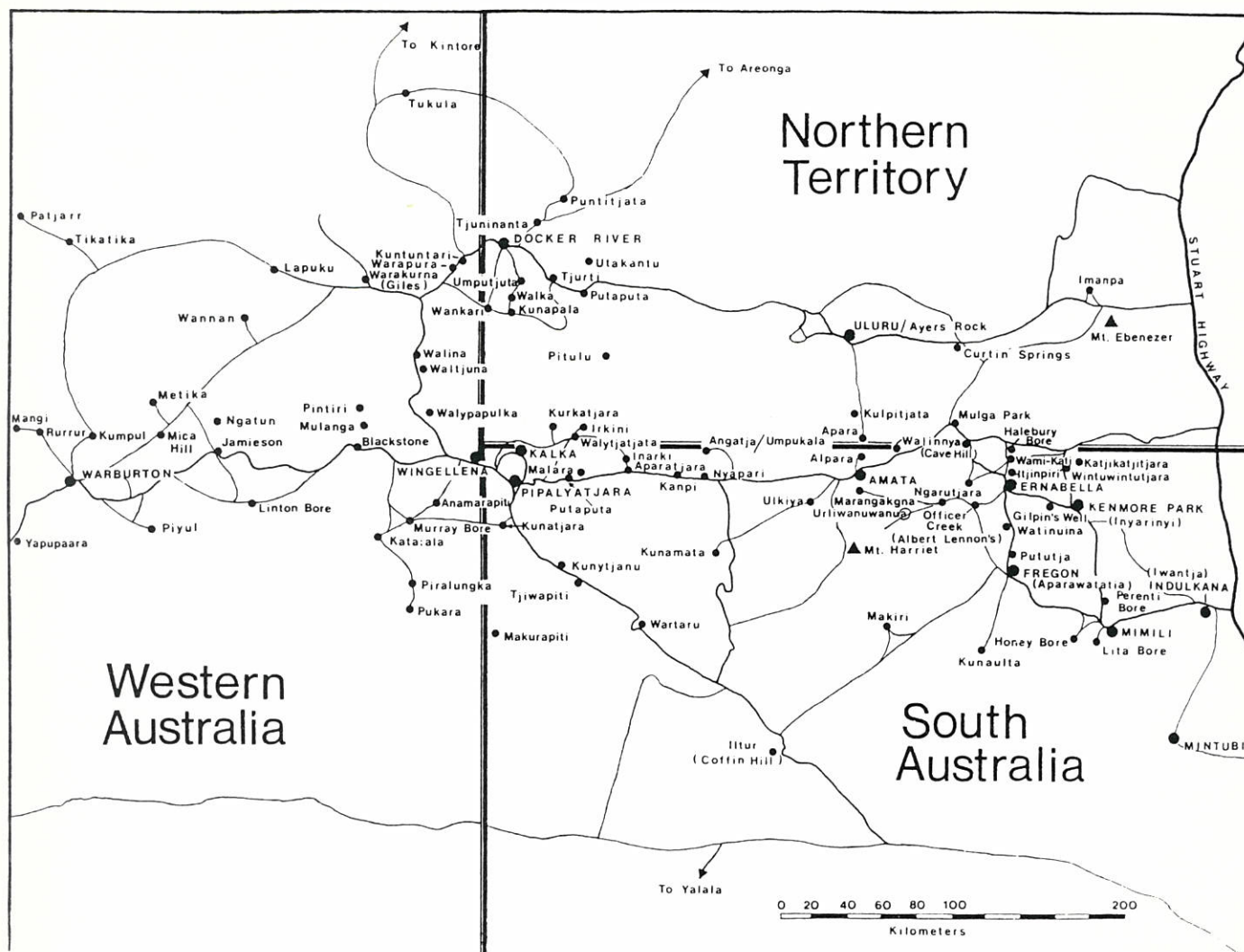


Plate B Some Pitjantjatjara Nyaangantjara and Yangkuntjara Settlements and Homelands.
(Reproduced by permission from Report of the South Australian Aboriginal Customary Law Committee — Adelaide 1984).

THE FUTURE

As this brief foreword indicates, a lot has happened to the Pitjantjatjara since 1978. As for the future I refer again to Toyne and Vachon (1984:156) who were so closely involved in events over this period.

Anangu are no longer the same people whom Duguid met in the 1930s. Nor are they the same people who first met and spoke to Dunstan about their land and land rights. And they are not the 'traditional' backwash of Australian society presented so often in the media. Along with their unique religious and social system, they are developing new organisations and relationships to solve the problems of a new world and, in some measure, to exert control over their development.

When and how the Pitjantjatjara will finally be able to fully control and determine their future remains as always largely in the hands of the white society who have been slow to listen, to learn and to understand the values and needs of a civilisation which has outlasted their own by millennia.

Peter Brokensha
Adelaide, February 1987

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FOREWORD TO SECOND PRINTING

It is only three years since the publication of this book. It is indicative of the rapid rate of change in Aboriginal societies that a great deal has happened to the Pitjantjatjara in such a short period.

The most significant development has been the formation by the Pitjantjatjara, Yakuntjatjara and Ngatatjara people of a political organisation, the Pitjantjatjara Council, embracing Aboriginals living in the huge triangle bounded by Warburton (W.A.), Docker River (N.T.) and Indulkana (S.A.).

The reasons for its formation in October, 1976, have been clearly expressed by the Council's secretary:—

"The Pitjantjatjara Council was made to help people understand and see how the Pitjantjatjara people work and what the Pitjantjatjara people want. Also the Pitjantjatjara Council was made so that white people can see and understand us more and also to see that we have one law and we are one, no matter where we come from, we have this one law and we've got one law all the time. We still have this law and that's why we are asking for land because this land is ours. It belongs to us. We kept this land for a long, long time and that's why we want you to see very clearly that this land is ours. We don't want to have two laws — white man's law and Aboriginal law. We want you to see that this land is the Pitjantjatjara's land. That's why the Pitjantjatjara Council was made. So that we can fight and get our land back, because this land is very important to us and we have strong rules and strong laws."

Until very recently the Pitjantjatjara had never doubted their ownership of their land. However, once doubts were raised by news of the Northern Territory Land Rights Legislation they acted quickly to organise their Council and politely yet firmly ask the South Australian Government to protect their ownership of their land. They received a most sympathetic hearing from the Premier of South Australia, Mr Don Dunstan, who has long supported and progressively legislated for Aboriginal rights. As a result a Government Working Party was set up to ascertain the wishes of the Pitjantjatjara with regard to ownership and management of their land and legislation is now scheduled for 1978, which will vest freehold title in the Pitjantjatjara people of some 90,000 square kilometres of land comprising the present North West Aboriginal Reserve and the adjacent pastoral properties of Ernabella, Kenmore Park and Mimili.

Another major achievement has been in the field of health care. In 1975 I wrote: *"Nobody really cares about doing anything positive to alleviate short or long term problems of Aboriginal health in this area."* Happily, this is no longer true. In 1976 the National Trachoma and Eye Health Program organised by the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists and funded by the Australian Government commenced working in the Pitjantjatjara area. They found an alarming incidence of eye disease with, for example, a trachoma rate in children under 11 years of age varying from 33% at Ernabella to 80% at Wingelina. Treatment programs and where necessary, surgery were carried out and follow up programs are still continuing with the result that sight impairment and blindness have been markedly reduced. Many tragic examples of neglect were rectified by the work of the trachoma team's surgeons, such as an old Pitjantjatjara man from Pipalyatjara, who could see again after being completely blind for fifteen years. The most

significant development in the field of health was the commencement early in 1978 of the Pitjantjatjara Homelands Health Service. This has come about largely because of the determined efforts of Mr Glendle Schrader, who was community adviser at Pipalyatjara from 1975 to 1977. Appalled at the lack of provision for health care or training by the responsible State health authorities, he sought and gained approval from the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Ian Viner, for funding to initiate a health program to cover all Pitjantjatjara homeland centres. The service is now providing health care to at least 15 homeland communities dispersed over an area of approximately 100,000 square kilometres in Western Australia, Northern Territory and South Australia. The service is unique and that it is controlled by the Aboriginal people themselves through the Pitjantjatjara Council. Other than a minimal European staff of doctor, administrator and health worker educator, it has all Aboriginal staff including seventeen Pitjantjatjara health workers providing grass roots services in their own communities.

The decentralisation initiative of the Pitjantjatjara has accelerated since 1975 with new homeland centres, as they are now referred to, established at Kunamatta, Kunytjanu, Iltor in South Australia, Walytjitjara in the Northern Territory and Kata:la in Western Australia to name only a few. These homeland centres have no permanent white presence and are serviced with stores somewhat irregularly from Amata.

Despite the positive changes I have reported, the Pitjantjatjara are at some locations facing increasing problems arising from the withdrawal of the European authority structure in the name of fostering self determination. Because there has been little emphasis on training and development of Pitjantjatjara, particularly in spheres of organisation and management, the resulting authority and leadership vacuum is causing a major breakdown in services and control at some locations.

At this critical period in their history, the Pitjantjatjara don't need European buildings and facilities but do need trained, energetic and sympathetic people who will work as clients of the people, maintaining services and training the Pitjantjatjara in the management of their own affairs. These Europeans must not only develop management skills in the Pitjantjatjara, but also believe in the future of self reliance for the people.

Peter Brokensha
September 1978

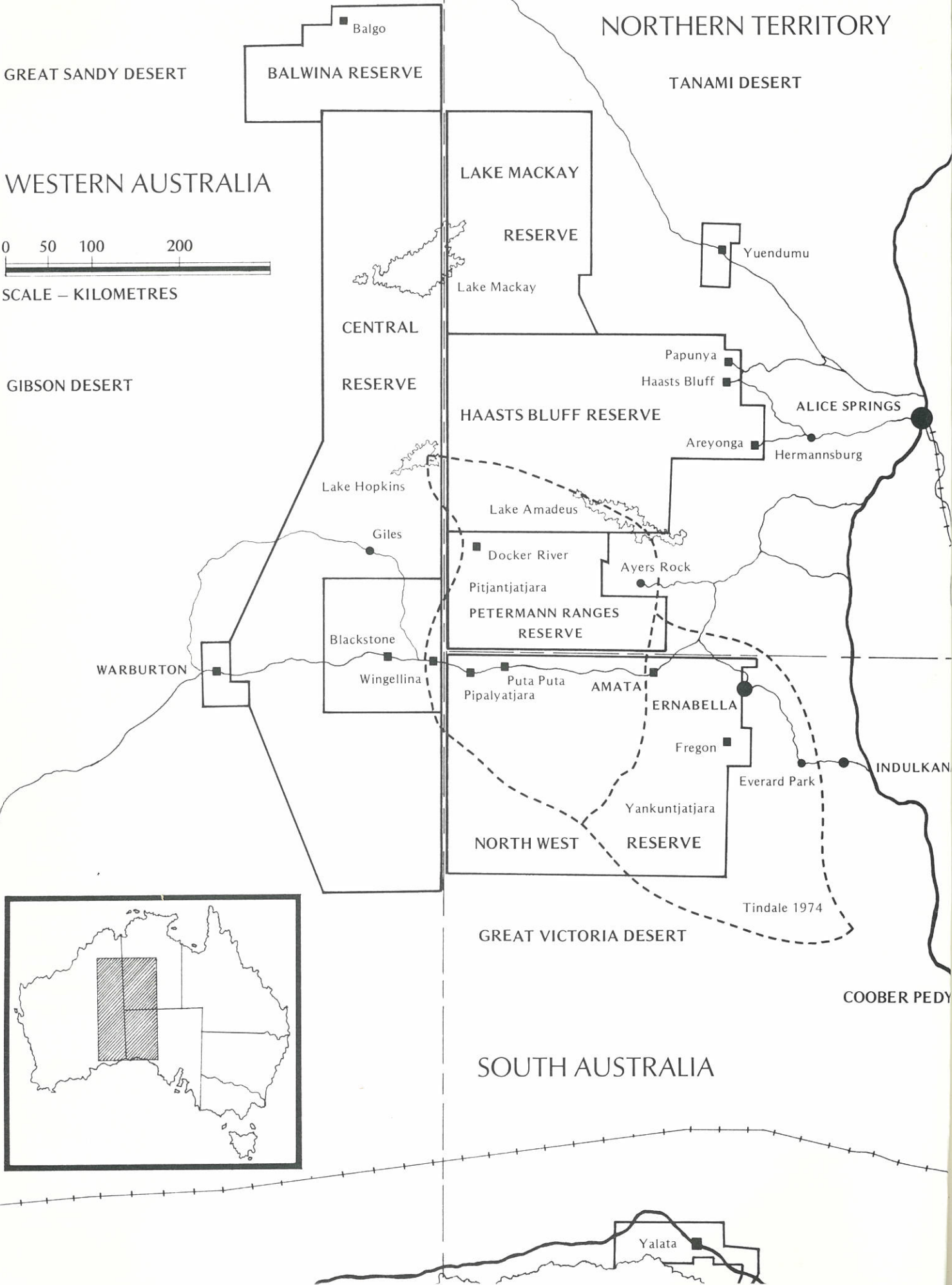
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INTRODUCTION

3	All over the northern and central parts of Australia Aboriginal people who for a generation or more have been institution-
5	alised on missions and settlements are leaving them to set up
8	their own small decentralised communities back on their
10	traditional lands. Whilst some groups have tried this spasmodi-
13	cally for many years it is now being undertaken within a new
17	Government framework which avows a policy of self deter-
17	mination for Aboriginal people.
19	This monograph deals with one such group of Pitjantjatjara
19	who left Amata settlement and Ernabella mission to establish
19	new self determining settlements in the Mann and Tomkinson
25	Ranges in the far north-west of South Australia.
32	The history of the peoples contact with Europeans is discussed,
33	their departure from their homeland and their return. The
34	way of life of the Pitjantjatjara in a new decentralised com-
35	munity is also outlined and the range as well as the method of
36	manufacture of traditional and adapted crafts is described.
37	The development of the artifact industry is traced and its
68	importance to the people discussed.
70	The final chapter discusses some of the problems the people
	are facing in this new situation and suggests ways in which
	these groups may be assisted to survive.
	This work is based on intermittent contact with Amata settle-
	ment since 1971 and a period of approximately three months
	spent with the Pitjantjatjara at Amata and a decentralised
	settlement early in 1975.
	Because of the relative brevity of contact this paper is pre-
	sented as a set of preliminary observations. It is written now
	as it is felt that in the interests of the groups themselves, it
	is important in a rapidly changing situation for people involved
	in Aboriginal affairs to have ready access to all available
	information. Some of the strongest impressions gained were:
	■ This decentralisation initiative is not only a reaction to a
	situation imposed on them by Europeans but is motivated
	by their traditional religious relationship with the land to
	which they have returned.
	■ The problem of adapting traditional norms of conduct to
	new situations is creating stresses in these communities
	particularly in the areas of political organisation and
	leadership.
	■ Maintenance of a strong traditional craft activity is impor-
	tant to the people both culturally and economically and
	should be given every assistance and encouragement.
	■ The people themselves are determined to make a success
	of their own self determining decentralised communities.
	However, there are signs that this desire could be frustrated
	unless Government administrators are prepared to give the
	type of patient and unobtrusive help for which the people
	are asking without being subject to excessive pressures
	towards assimilation and modernisation.

FIGURE 1



THE PITJANTJATJARA AND THEIR LAND

The people whom we now refer to as Pitjantjatjara presently live and probably lived for a very long time in an area generally referred to as the Western Desert. Berndt (1959:81) describes the Western Desert as the region which extends across western South Australia into eastern and north-eastern Western Australia and includes part of the mountainous range country of northern South Australia and central Australia. The area therefore includes part of the Gibson and Great Victoria deserts as well as the Petermann, Rawlinson, Warburton, Blackstone, Tomkinson, Mann and Musgrave Ranges. (see figure 1).

Whilst the area does not fit the popular conception of a sandy wasteland it quite correctly falls into the geographical classification of a desert. Evaporation exceeds precipitation, there are no permanent streams and rainfall is low but extremely variable from year to year.

The average annual rainfall over most of the Western Desert area is of the order of 200 mm but this is quite misleading because of the extreme variations. Figure 2 shows the annual rainfall at Ernabella in the Musgrave Ranges from 1936-1974 which demonstrates a variability from approximately 50 mm to 750 mm annually.

The annual average evaporation is in excess of 3000 mm per annum and the sky is generally monotonously cloudless with a daily average of 9.6 hours of bright sunshine at Giles weather station near the Rawlinson Ranges. Daytime temperatures are consistently very hot in summer and temperate in winter. The January and July mean of maximum recorded daily temperatures at Giles are 30°C and 19°C respectively. Nights are temperate in summer and cold in winter. The January and July mean of minimum daily temperatures at Giles are 24°C and 7°C respectively. Occasional shade temperatures range from over 46°C in summer to below freezing point in winter.

Rainfall records from the periphery of the Western Desert at Laverton W.A. (from 1900) and from Hermansburg N.T. (from 1888) confirm the pattern depicted for Ernabella of variable and uncertain rainfall with irregularly recurring periods of several summer months with virtually no rainfall at all. This coupled with the high evaporation rate would indicate uncertainty of water supply was a factor of pre-contact Aboriginal life in the Western Desert. Certainly natural rockhole catchments could not be relied upon as was evident in the Tomkinson Ranges in February 1975 when after only two months with little rain most of the major rockholes were dry. Just how long during periods of drought the people could obtain water from soaks, claypans or from

the water bearing trees, shrubs and roots listed by Johnston (1941:34-35) has yet to be fully explored as has the precise relationship between rainfall and the availability of vegetable foods and desert fauna.

Nevertheless it could be assumed that the Western Desert was a difficult environment for its inhabitants and according to Mabbitt (1971:78) such climatic changes as have occurred over the last 30,000 years are unlikely to have changed this. It is probable that in this environment the Pitjantjatjara were forced to adopt a pattern of wide ranging mobility in search of food and water.

In a discussion of the Pitjantjatjara and their material culture it is relevant to consider who exactly the Pitjantjatjara are, where their traditional country was and what forms of local organisation they had. The answers to these questions are not straightforward and involve considerable conjecture. Whilst, as will be described later, the Pitjantjatjara are now widely dispersed and new lifestyles and forms of organisation are being developed. The manner in which groups of the people are returning to certain areas to set up their own settlements may yet provide some new insights to these questions.

Tindale (1940 and 1974) as part of his monumental work on the distribution of Australian tribes, defined the boundaries of the Pitjantjatjara. These are shown, along with the boundaries of the Yankuntjatjara, on figure 1. He argues that groups called tribes in the Western Desert have the same political value as tribes in other parts of Australia and that they occupied discrete areas.

Others disagree with this view. With regard to language Douglas (1964:1-3) points out there is one language across the whole of the Western Desert area with many dialects. What he calls "nicknames" are given to various dialects. The people in the eastern part of the area call the people who use the word "*pitjantja*" instead of "*yankuntja*" for "came" the Pitjantjatjara, whilst conversely the Pitjantjatjara call them the Yankuntjatjara, (*tjara* = with or having). However, as he points out there are so many other overlapping variations in the vocabulary that a major division on this basis would be unreasonable.

The people themselves seldom refer to their language or to themselves as Pitjantjatjara. However, this is changing under the influence of more contact with Europeans who use the term Pitjantjatjara to identify both the people and the language over most of the Western Desert area. It could be argued that Europeans have constructed a total identity for

the Pitjantjatjara which did not exist in the past and does not exist today.

To reinforce this contention and to explain the manner in which some Western Desert groups are now redispersing, it is relevant to refer to the conclusions reached by researchers with regard to traditional forms of local organisation.

A basic factor, as Hiatt (1962:284) points out, is to distinguish two kinds of relationships between people and land, the economic relationships and the ritual relationships. Based on extensive field work with Western Desert people at Ooldea in 1941 and in eastern Western Australia in 1957-9, Berndt (1959:95-106) identified five types of social units.

The first was the dialectical unit of groups speaking the same dialect. As Berndt pointed out this was an "open" group territorially anchored only in relation to the local groups that comprised it. Whilst minor differences in dialect are still readily recognisable as one moves from Ernabella west these dialectical distinctions are becoming blurred particularly as the Pitjantjatjara literacy programs in schools are largely based on the dictionary and grammar prepared at Ernabella.

Then there were three types of social units based in Hiatt's terms on ritual relationships between the people and the land

- Local patrilineal descent groups whose members had special spiritual and ritual ties with certain totemic sites. These groups could be termed the land owning groups.
- Religious cult groups consisting of adult male members of local groups whose totemic sites lie along adjoining sections of one ancestral route.
- Wide ritual groups of up to 200-300 people who would come together seasonally for major ceremonies.

The fifth type of group is what Berndt called the horde whose members had an economic relationship with the land over which they moved in search of sustenance. This unit was the land occupying group which had as its core the male members of a local group plus unmarried females plus wives and children of male members but could include transients and members of other patrilineal descent groups.

Berndt concludes that the term tribe as generally used is not applicable to any social unit found in the Western Desert and as Hiatt (1962:285) points out there is considerable evidence to suggest that the totemic sites of many patrilineal descent groups were not enclosed by territorial boundaries and that the food seeking or land occupying groups moved freely over the totemic site areas of other groups. Thus it seems that in the total Western Desert area where the people had a demonstrably similar culture and language, there were no meaningful discrete groups either socially or territorially which is important if attempts are made to define traditional territorial boundaries in relation to land rights.

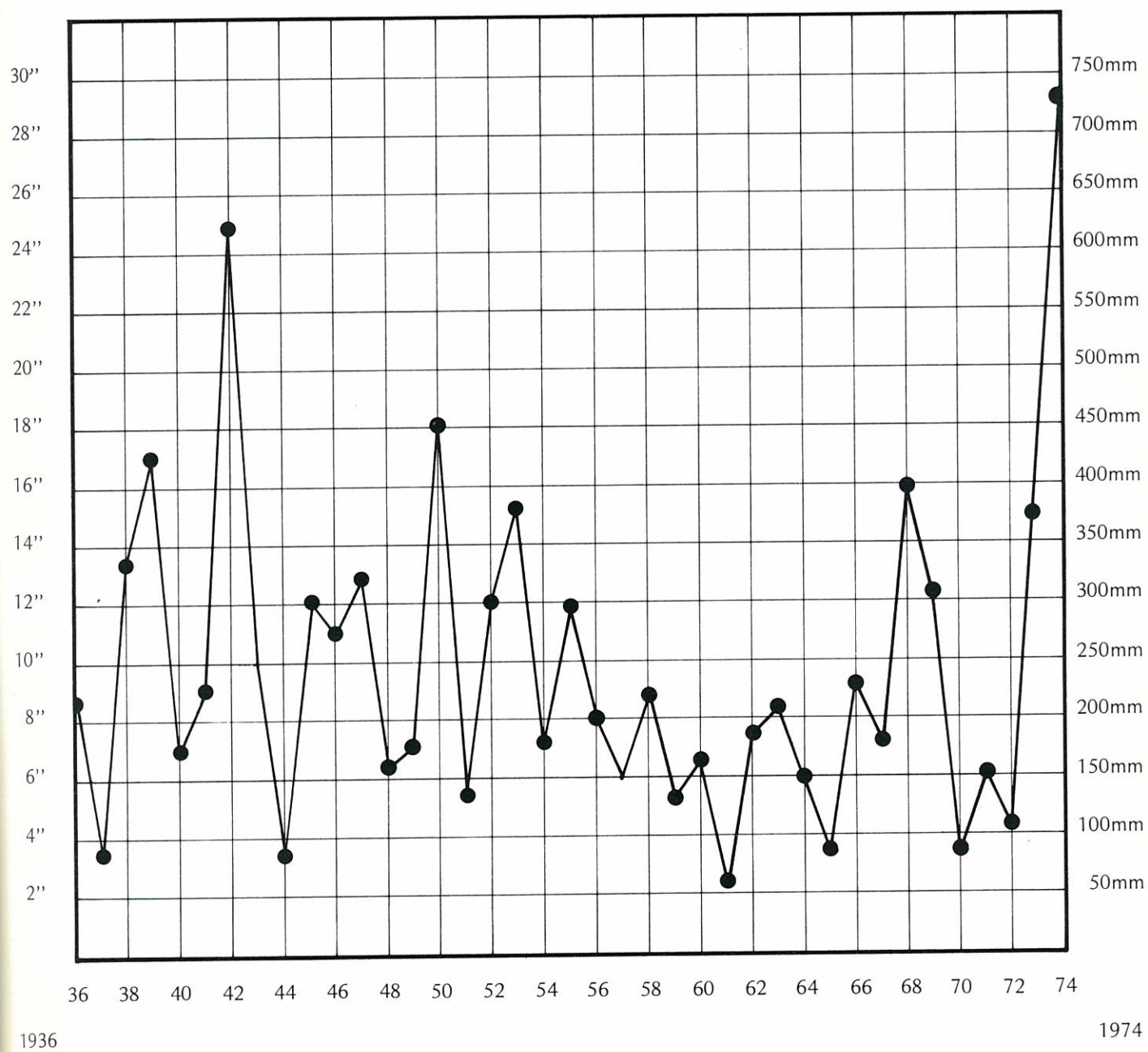
Whilst more work has to be done on the subject it is relevant to record some preliminary observations on the visibility and importance of the traditional groupings in present day Pitjantjatjara society.

Dealing with each of the five groupings in turn, the first dialectical group appears to have become blurred and largely lost significance. However, the descent groups whose members have special ritual ties with certain totemic sites still form a strong cohesive unit and it is this grouping that appears to have determined the pattern of the decentralisation initiative. The people who have ritual ties with the *malu* (kangaroo) totemic sites have moved to Pipalyatjara near where their sites are located, whilst the *ili* (fig) totem people are organising to return to Kunamatta near their sites and likewise the *ngintaka* (goana) people are organising to return to Lake Wilson and so on. The membership of these groups is no longer as clearly defined as it may have been traditionally because not all constellations of sites have a bore in the proximity, which is an essential requirement for a new camp under present conditions. For example there are men at Pipalyatjara with ties to the *nyinyi* (finch) totem sites in the Bellrock Ranges who have expressed a strong desire to return and live there but meanwhile have moved to the closest available camp.

Feelings occasionally run high between these groups, with each group denigrating the importance of the others sites at least in the presence of Europeans. My impression is that this is to some extent a new rivalry engendered by competition between groups for European resources. However, it is evident that members of these totemic groups or a slightly wider group embracing people with affiliations to sites in adjoining geographical areas, perceive and articulate a notion of separate group identity. This wider grouping may relate in some way to Berndt's second grouping arising from affiliations with adjoining sections of one ancestral route although this is by no means clear and the question of how this new political factor of competition for European resources is affecting local group composition is yet to be explored fully. Yengoyan (1970: 83-85) touched on this subject when discussing the relationship men claimed with the Mount Davies (Pipalyatjara) area in order to gain access to the intermittent chrysoprase mining activity there in 1966. He noted how in one case which is relevant to the grouping under discussion, a man gained access to the group because of his ritual relationship with the adjacent *tjurki* (owl) totemic sites.

Despite these developments Berndt's third wider ritual groups are still very much in evidence. The availability of vehicles has enabled this activity to be widened and increased far more than would have been possible traditionally. During the period from June 1974 to June 1975 a group of about 200 Pitjantjatjara travelled to Papunya, to all the sites between Amata and Blackstone and to Yalata. The final economic unit, the horde, has little significance today although vehicles are used to range widely in search of game and it is interesting to note that there is still no overt sense of territorial ownership of resources. Any Aboriginals may go anywhere and hunt without the local group feeling that their land is being wrongly utilised.

The above is intended to give a general idea of the Pitjantjatjara and their land. The remaining sections of this monograph will be mainly concerned with the history and present way of life of one specific group who have moved back to the vicinity of their totemic sites in the Tomkinson Ranges.



European contact with the Western Pitjantjatjara had until the 1930's been negligible and even today intrusion by Europeans into their traditional lands in the Mann and Tomkinson Ranges is very minimal. The area was not visited at all until the expeditions of Giles in 1872 and 1873-4, Gosse in 1873 and Forrest in 1874. It was first surveyed by Carruthers (1892) in 1888-1890 followed by the Elder Scientific Expedition which traversed the southern and western part of the area in 1891. Helms (1896:237-332) recorded information about the customs and material culture of the people as did Basedow (1904:12-51) who was a member of the first Government prospecting expedition into the Mann and Tomkinson Ranges in 1903.

Occasional small prospecting parties visited the area at the turn of the century and up until the 1930's. These prospectors evidently had little contact with the Aboriginal people and generally were disinterested in and fearful of the people whose lands they were traversing. Terry, who led a prospecting expedition through the area in 1930 using camels and the first truck, records (Terry 1932:110) that although the Tomkinson Range people were quite friendly he made it clear that he did not want them within 200 yards of his camp and "we wished them gone for ever and a day".

However, unwittingly these prospectors performed a valuable service for the Western Desert people. Their prospecting expeditions found nothing of value and they exploded the myth that the area was rich in gold. As the country was too rugged and the rainfall too sparse and unreliable to attract potential pastoralists and as there appeared to be no mineral wealth, ideas of economic exploitation were forgotten and apart from occasional doggers seeking the dingo scalp bounty, the area west of the Musgraves was left undisturbed until the 1930's. During this period the policy of Governments was to isolate and "protect" the remaining tribal members of a race for whom little hope of survival was held. Aboriginal reserves were created in the area; in Western Australia (The Central Reserve 1918), in the Northern Territory (The South West Reserve 1920) and in South Australia (The North West Reserve 1921). These three adjoining reserves now comprise an area of

approximately 100,000 square miles (see figure 1). The gazetting of reserves provided no real territorial security for the Western Desert people against political or economic exploitation as shown by the intrusions into the area in connection with the Woomera Rocket Range in the 1950's, the excision of 7,000 square miles in the Wingellina area in 1958 for nickel mining operations and the excision of the area containing Ayers Rock and the Olgas in the same year.

Nevertheless, a combination of the fortuitous circumstances of isolated location, climate, lack of minerals or pastoral potential and the creation of reserves, meant that intensive European contact with all its consequences for an Aboriginal society did not occur until very recently. The first more detailed record of the way of life of the Western Desert people was made by Tindale who visited the area from the Musgraves to the Mann Ranges in 1933. He recorded details of myths and ceremonies and made valuable films of the people who were "still wandering freely as hunting nomads in their own country . . . subject to few outside influences . . . they had not yet obtained any metal substitutes for their stone tools" (Tindale 1935:221). From Tindale's records and films and from the accounts of the older Pitjantjatjara men it is clear that at that time the Western Desert people were living a truly traditional nomadic life.

The older Tomkinson Range men remember well the period before they saw white men. They were able to show me the rockholes where they were born and the constellation of rockholes and sacred sites which were the focus of their true country. As will be discussed later their material culture was meagre — for the women wooden bowls, a digging stick and a pair of grinding stones (see plate 2:1). The men hunted with a spear thrower and spears and possessed little else. From the reports and films, mainly by Tindale, it appears that this traditional lifestyle continued right up into the late 1930's and even later. The first sign of European influence was the use of pieces of sharpened discarded metal in place of stone tools. Plate 2:2, from a photograph taken by Dr. Hackett, in 1933 shows the addition of a steel tipped adzing tool to the basic spear thrower and spear kit.

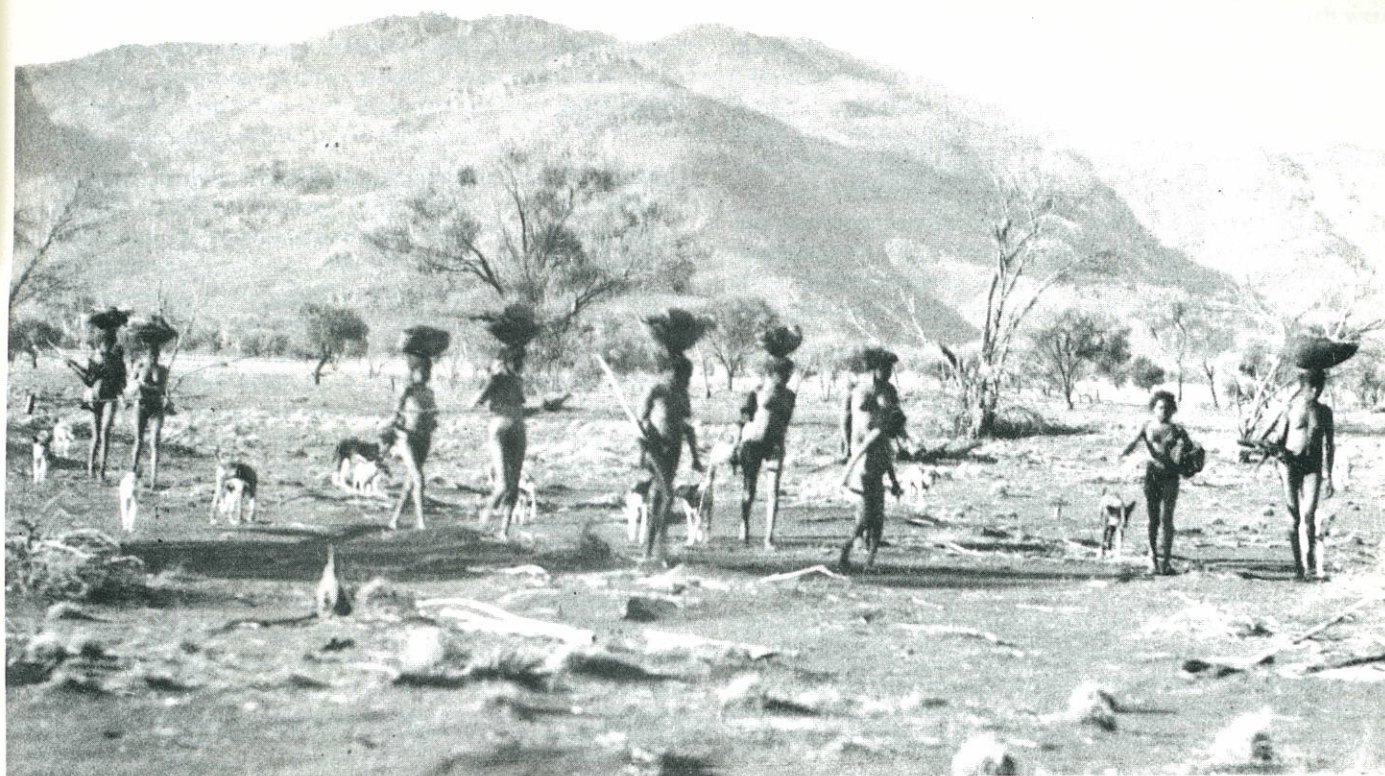


Plate 2:1 The Pitjantjatjara in common with other Aboriginal groups were nomadic hunter/gatherers who continually moved about their tribal lands in a never-ending quest for food. Pitjantjatjara women moving camp in the Musgrave Ranges in 1933.

Plate 2:2 The Pitjantjatjara had few tools and weapons. This man carried only a spearthrower, two spears and an adzing tool. Musgrave Ranges, 1933.



Well before the 1930's Western Desert people had been moving south to Ooldea Water and along the transcontinental railway as reported by Daisy Bates (1921:73-78). Detailed studies by Berndt (1941:1-20) and Johnston (1941:33-65) indicate not only some permanent migration southwards to European settlements but a whole complex pattern of tribal routes which were used before contact for trade and ceremonial purposes.

In this account I am concerned more narrowly with the Western Desert people who were living in areas around the Mann and Tomkinson Ranges and their departure from this area. Whilst a few of the people both to the east and west of this area had moved to live in towns and cattle stations, the major impetus to movement was provided by the establishment of missions in the Western Desert area itself in the 1930's.

The first mission in the western edge of the area was established at Warburton in 1934. Tindale visited Warburton mission in 1935 and his comments (Tindale 1936:483) are very relevant. "This depot under the auspices of the United Aborigines Mission trades with the natives, receiving dingo scalps valued at £1 each in Western Australia in return for European white flour and second hand clothing transported to the Warburton Range at high cost (£40 per ton). It is to be hoped that the presence of a nucleus of European occupation so far (330 miles) beyond the white man's country is justified and will outweigh the undoubted disadvantage of having the natives (who are at present free from serious epidemic diseases) in close proximity to Europeans with the probabi-

lity of transmitting to them the simple ailments of our race — coughs, colds, influence and measles — whose ravages elsewhere have been stated to be a serious factor in depopulation". Tindale's fears were well founded as by 1956 when Grayden visited the area as leader of a W.A. Government select committee he reported (Grayden 1956:9) that 80% of the children at the mission had active trachoma and the incidence of pneumonia, other chest complaints, syphilis or yaws was high. His later book (Grayden 1957) details attempts to discredit the committee findings by officials and sections of the press.

More significantly in the eastern fringes by the 1930's European influence had started to intrude into the Everard and Musgrave Ranges with the granting of pastoral leases one of which (Ernabella) was taken over as a Presbyterian mission in 1937. Soon after Ernabella was established many of the Mann and Tomkinson Range people settled there while some were living at Mulga Park Station and finally with the establishment of Musgrave Park (later called Amata) Government settlement in 1961, the settlement of these western people, outside their traditional estate, was well established. Berndt (1941:4) suggests that even well before this the Pitjantjatjara had been moving eastwards displacing the Jankuntjatjara who with the Antakirinja, had since 1917, been moving gradually south to Ooldea. Elkin (1939:203) states that the western South Australian people had been in a continuous state of migration southwards for some decades and that this movement was in progress before the coming of the white man and explains the similarities of dialects, kinship systems and mythology over such a vast area and also the difficulty of fixing definite tribal boundaries and names. However, some researchers with more intimate knowledge of the Pitjantjatjara

and the Jankuntjatjara in their own lands, have suggested that any concept of permanent migration is alien to the Western Desert people whose whole existence involved movement and admixture of dialectical groups for social and ceremonial reasons but still with some form of anchorage and return to their own core constellation of totemic sites.

To the north also the Pitjantjatjara people from the Petermann Ranges had according to Long (1963:4) been moving east to cattle stations, Hermannsburg mission, Alice Springs and Jay Creek settlement. Strehlow (1968:9) comments "on my own camel journeys in 1936 and 1939 I met only a few scattered groups of nomads in the very heart of the Pitjantjatjara country the Petermann Ranges." The establishment of ration depots at Haasts Bluff (1940) and at Areyonga (1943) attracted more Petermann Range people and both these places became Government settlements in 1953. When Munn (1965:1) was at Areyonga almost all the people, at times over 300, called themselves Pitjantjatjara and identified their homeland mainly as individual rockholes and sites in the Petermann Ranges.

Thus progressively the Western Desert people had left their own country. This movement which started in earnest in the late 1930's and 1940's was forcibly finalised in the 1950's when Government patrols were sent to ensure that no people were still anywhere in the vicinity of Woomera Rocket Range which virtually traversed the whole area.

Given that the people had strong religious ties with their own country why then over this period did they leave to live in missions and settlements mostly well outside their traditional estate? The reason was generally given by the people themselves, and has been accepted, as simply that they wanted the white man's goods such as tea, flour and sugar. With reference to the Walbiri to the north Meggitt (1965:23,27) points out that they were content to maintain a pattern of sporadic contact with Europeans indefinitely as it enabled them to obtain some of the goods they desired yet keep returning to their homeland to maintain their independence. He further suggests that after the extremely severe drought of 1924-1929 which had forced the people out of the desert, they became so accustomed to the new white man's goods and other material possessions that they had no desire to return to the rigorous life in the bush.

Whilst more research is needed on this subject I feel the reasons why the Pitjantjatjara left their homeland and have stayed away from it for up to 20 or 30 years, are more complex than suggested by Meggitt for the Walbiri.

The older men now back in the Tomkinsons, left there in the late 1930's early 1940's and mostly went to Ernabella. They say that there was plenty of water and plenty of game around then but white men came out and said there was a good camp at Ernabella so they went. This in itself was not a major step as traditionally the people had travelled into the Musgraves for ceremonies or when food or water were short. However, the reasons why they stayed at Ernabella and later at Amata are not as clear. The people certainly in these earlier years gained nothing in material possessions, nor in living conditions, as their camps on the fringes of the mission and settlement were composed of humpies and *wiltjas* and they suffered from new sicknesses and many more of their infants died. They could rarely hunt or eat kangaroo and emu meat which they prized but flour and particularly sugar were available

in greater quantities and without the effort of collecting and grinding edible grass seeds or collecting honey ants which were the traditional equivalent. This new source of food, even if it was strange and often inadequate, was available with a minimum of effort and irrespective of the season. It is most likely that this was the major reason why the people came to and at least initially stayed at Missions and settlements. But they did not lose their desire to return to their own country and to renew their spiritual links with it. This hypothesis is supported by the immediate return to their homeland of many of the people as soon as it was known that the authorities were no longer opposed to decentralised settlements.

So at varying times during the period of about 1930-1950 all the local groups comprising Western Desert people left their own country and became dispersed over a wide area. They went to and are mostly still living at Amata Settlement, Pukatja (formerly Ernabella mission), Aparwatatja (formerly Fregon outstation), Areyonga, Indulkana, Warburton Settlements with smaller numbers at cattle station/stores like Curtin Springs and Mt. Ebenezer or at towns like Alice Springs, Oodnadatta and Laverton.

The treatment the Western Desert people received in these new situations varied. Occasionally the owners of cattle stations were kindly, sympathetic men (The Pitjantjatjara men who went to Mulga Park Station in the 1940's still speak of the help and friendship they received) but more often than not they were subjected to brutality, prejudice and rank exploitation (see Stevens 1974).

At missions also the attitudes of the missionaries and their treatment of the people varied greatly. At Ernabella the policy of the founder Dr. Duguid (1972:115) was "There was to be no compulsion nor imposition of our way of life on the Aborigines, nor deliberate interference with tribal custom". At the other end of the scale at Jigalong, the missionaries main aim was to "save the souls" of the Aborigines, whom they considered "children of the devil" and "lost in darkness". All school age children were placed in dormitories to remove them from what the missionaries considered to be the "pernicious influence of camp life". (Tonkinson 1974:33).

On Government settlements the people tended to become statistics in the fluctuating and unwieldy processes of Government and bureaucracy. (See Biskup 1973 with reference to Western Australia). The attitudes of settlement staff towards Aborigines also varied from extremes of high regard for the people to disregard and strong racial prejudice.

Irrespective of individual attitudes towards the people, the whole atmosphere of missions and settlements was one of paternalism. There was no question of the Aboriginal people being treated as equals or having any meaningful rights or decision making powers. Local councils of Aborigines were formed at some settlements but they were given no meaningful authority.

It is with this background and in this atmosphere that a new Australian Government policy of self determination has belatedly been promulgated in the last three years. The resilience of the Aboriginal people is demonstrated by the fact that during these long years of institutionalisation not only have they been able to hold onto much of their own social structure and religion but also by the determination they are showing, despite lack of preparation, in their response to the challenge of self determination.

By June, 1975 well in excess of 300 Western Desert people had left Ernabella, Amata and Warburton settlements to live once again in their own country in the Tomkinson Ranges. What has motivated this return? What type of life style do these people aspire to? Can these new communities be sustained?

The answers to these questions may well be vital in determining the future of these local settlements and indeed in determining the future of Australian Aboriginals as a culturally identifiable people.

It is important to all Aboriginal people as this same decentralisation initiative has been taken by Aboriginal groups at missions and settlements throughout the Northern Territory, Western Australia and to a lesser extent in Queensland.

Coombs (1973:14-18) reviews these decentralisation trends by the Pitjantjatjara and also the Pintubi at Papunya, the Bardi at One Arm Point and several groups at Maningrida. In addition to this and since August, 1973 when Coombs wrote, local communities have been initiated by people who have left Yirrkala (N.T.), Oenpelli (N.T.), Mowanjum (W.A.), Mapoon (Queensland) and Elcho Island (N.T.) and other areas.

Coombs concludes "that the decentralisation trend is an Aboriginal response to the problems which contact with white society has created for them". I propose to examine this proposition in relation to the Tomkinson Range people and to offer some tentative conjectures towards answers to the three questions posed above.

In attempting to establish why the people left the settlements it is difficult (as Coombs also points out) to separate fact from conjecture. The invariable response received in answer to this question was simply "this is my country" (*ngayaku ngura*) and said in such a way as to imply that it was a silly question and where else would they want to live. Traditionally it was for the Pitjantjatjara as Strehlow (1970:135) pointed out for the Aranda, "the totemic landscape formed a firm basis for religion, for the social order and for established order itself".

It becomes conjecture to assess how strong the totality of the man/landscape tie still is and what part this has played in motivating the return. More relevant is the part it will play in sustaining the return in the face of inevitable economic pressures. This total relationship between the local group and its totemic sites is still extremely strong and now that access to vehicles is possible, has provided the over-riding incentive for the people to return and remain on their lands.

A contrary view has been expressed by Capp (personal communication). He suggests the people are concerned with ownership and title to the land and that if this were assured they would be content to only visit their sites occasionally for ritual purposes. Whilst some of the people are very well aware of the necessity to protect their ownership legally particularly in relation to potential mineral or oil exploration, I tend to disagree with this view and will cite some examples which demonstrate the strength of the man/site relationship.

Kunamatta is an isolated mountain about 110 kilometres southwest of Amata. It is the totemic home of the *ili* (fig) totem people and contains several sites of great significance to this local group, particularly a large grove of fig trees and a series of rockholes which are on the path of the ancestral *wati malu*. In June 1974 five elderly Pitjantjatjara who are the owners of the site begged me to take them back there. There were no facilities at Kunamatta except a small shed, a *wiltja* and a bore with a hand pump some 200 metres away (see plate 4:1). Their joy at being back in their own country was demonstratively obvious and these five old people stayed there for several months until problems of maintaining food supplies forced them to return. However, this was the third or fourth time they had done this in the last two years. Despite lack of facilities and lack of a more viable group including some more active younger men they were continually expressing their desire and determination to live in their own country.

Before my visit in February, 1975 the problems associated with a permanent return to Kunamatta had been discussed amongst all the members of this local group which would number in excess of 100 individuals. I use the term local group to mean simply those men and women who identify themselves with this location and express a strong desire to return to it. A key area of further research will be to determine the actual social and ritual basis of their claims on the location and their concept of group membership and identity.

During my visit a meeting of many of these people was organised. The recurring theme of the discussions was the statement of desire by the men to return to live in their own country to look after their sacred sites and to be able to show and teach the younger men about them. Another recurring statement was to mention by name each of the white men to whom they had shown and explained these sacred sites over the last ten years or more and to ask why these men had not repaid this act by getting facilities provided for the people to stay there. It was probably not fully appreciated by the recipients that the act of showing these sites to them was a highly significant act in itself but was also a gift of great value, and a gift which carried with it a reciprocal obligation. It was also realised that the demand for reciprocity had not perhaps been made to the right sources and an approach was made to the Government for funds to expedite the return to Kunamatta. The concept of reciprocal demand giving obligations had been applied to relations between Aborigines and Europeans. Hamilton (1972:41-45) discusses in some depth the importance in the development of black/white relationships of the repeated attempts of Aborigines to apply their own kinship based moral code of generosity to Europeans. As she summarises (page 45) "The Aborigines have passed from one means to another; they have provided sexual services, economic services and are now trying to give their ultimate possession, their spiritual knowledge; all the time at every step trying to get the whites to behave morally, properly and generously".

The other example which suggests the strength of the peoples desire to return and renew the permanent links with their local group's sites concerns the return of the *malu* (kangaroo) totem people to sites in the Tomkinson Ranges. A small group first went west towards the end of 1971 and set up a camp at Puta Puta, 190 kilometres from Amata (see figure 1). The mainstays of this group were older men whose totemic sites were in that area. At that stage there were no facilities whatsoever at Puta Puta beyond a bore with a hand pump. The group was dependent on pension money and stores being brought from Amata. However, their life was by no means easy and at the end of March 1974 there were still 30 people at Puta Puta but they had run out of stores and there was no game to hunt. As a group they decided to walk back to Amata but were met on the way by the stores truck and went straight back to Puta Puta. Because of abnormally heavy rains they were completely cut off from Amata and supplies. In May 1974 most of the people walked 50 kilometres further west to Wingellina where later they received supplies from Warburton. Two of the very old men, with their wives, walked over 130 kilometres back towards Amata before being picked up. They had no food or rifle and lived on the rabbit they caught on the ways. As soon as the road was negotiable these two men, plus about 30 others including women and children moved back to their Tomkinson Range

country. At first they joined a larger group at Pipalyatjara 24 kilometres west of Puta Puta then a smaller group of older men, the traditional owners, moved back to Puta Puta area where they are still. The repeated expression by members of this group, of desire to be back in their own country and close to their sacred sites, has been verified by their action in doing just that in the face of considerable hardship.

The movement of the Tomkinson Range people back to their homeland is gathering momentum. From the initial movement to the larger camp at Pipalyatjara some groups have formed smaller camps at Blackstone, Wingellina and Nyumbantja. Whilst the existence of a bore at each of these locations makes it possible for the groups to exist, it is also true that each of these camps is adjacent to sites of particular significance to the local group. Discussion and observation of the actions of men in the presence of the actual sacred rocks and features of the landscape, indicates that belief in ancestral transformations and the associated ancestral myths of creation remain strong and intact.

I am therefore convinced both from the evidence of the strength of this religious tie between man and landscape and from evidence of the persistent and repeated return of groups to their homeland sites that the principal motivation for this return is what could be termed an act of religious faith.

In suggesting a religious base as the underlying motive for the return I am in no way denying the probability that a whole range of additional interwoven motivations led an individual or a group to take this step. Indeed, given the cultural preconceptions of the observer and the difficulty of meaningful philosophical communication, it would be foolish to be dogmatic on such a complex subject. Coombs (1973: 14-18) reported that in his discussions with these same people they placed overwhelming emphasis on the desire to guard and protect their sacred sites as the reason for their return. Whilst this supports the view of the continued importance of the man/landscape relationship, and protection against intrusion is consequently a vital part of this relationship, the motivation is still much deeper than guardianship.

The other recurring motivational themes that Coombs found amongst all decentralised groups were questions of social cohesion and control and concern about black/white contacts. Whilst I found as did Coombs that these did not appear to be as important to the Pitjantjatjara as they were to other groups, nevertheless these factors are emerging as important in relation to the more relevant question posed earlier concerning the long term viability of the decentralised groups who have returned to their own country.

Whether or not the initiative of these Pitjantjatjara groups in returning to their homeland succeeds and the decentralised settlements survive, in the way the people themselves wish them to survive, cannot be determined by them alone. The outcome will largely rest on the actions of and the nature of, their interaction with Australian Society as a whole. The problem is complex and there are no ready answers. I therefore propose to report some of the problems the people in these groups are facing, how they are meeting these problems and suggest some directional policies aimed at giving support to this initiative.

The following sections provide an outline of the material culture and way of life of a small decentralised group of Western Pitjantjatjara people in the Tomkinson Ranges during January-February 1975.

5.1 LOCATION AND ENVIRONMENT

The camp is called Pipalyatjara (see plate 5.1:1) which means literally "by the Pipalya tree". It is the name the people have given to their community. The actual location is at the mouth of a long, narrow valley in the midst of the Tomkinson Ranges 25 kilometres south-east of the junction of the W.A.—N.T.—S.A. borders called Warulkulpa which means "rain place". Water is supplied by a bore and hand pump. The camp is serviced from Amata settlement 220 kilometres to the east over a poor dirt road impassable after heavy rain whilst the nearest habitations to the north and west are Giles Meteorological station (210 kilometres) and Warburton Settlement (350 kilometres) respectively. It is thus an extremely isolated location (see figure 1).

Pipalyatjara has an elevation of 600 metres above sea level being located in the centre of an elevated plateau which extends from the Warburton Ranges in the west to the Everard Ranges in the east. The surrounding mountains rise steeply 300 to 450 metres above the intermontaine valleys which give way to the typical desert complex of long parallel sand dunes 25 kilometres to the South.

There is no permanent natural water in the area although in good seasons it is obtained from soaks in the sandy beds of the ephemeral creeks which criss-cross the valleys or less reliably from natural rockholes at the foot of the mountains.

The vegetation in the valleys is normally sparse consisting mainly of scattered mulga (*Acacia aneura*) corkwood (*Hakea suberea*) desert oak (*Casuarina decaisnea*) trees with mulga or silver grass (*anthistinia*) as the most persistent grass. The larger creeks contain magnificent specimens of river red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) which is the *Pipalya* tree from which the community derives its name. In the sand dune country the predominant vegetation is the spinifex bush (*Triodia basedonii*).

Because of the exceptionally high rainfall in 1974 of 750mm, early in 1975 the valleys abounded in wild flowers (*Helipterum floribundum*, *Rutidosis helichrysolides*, *Ailoutus atriplicifolius*, *Helichrysum apiculatum*, *Calandria baloncensis*) and a number of plants from which the people gathered edible seeds, roots and berries. The list of these given below is only a fraction of the known Aboriginal food plant resources of the area (see Cleland 1966:111-158) but records those plant foods the Pipalyatjara people showed an interest in collecting and eating during my stay with them.

The climate of the area with its extremes of temperature has been described earlier. At Pipalyatjara the extreme heat in summer is intensified by its position surrounded by rocky mountains.

Pitjantjatjara Name	Botanical Name	Description and Use
<i>Kaltu Kaltu</i> <i>Wangunu</i> <i>Wakati</i>	<i>Panicum decompositum</i> <i>Eragrostis eriopoda</i> <i>Portulaca oleracea</i>	Grass seeds ground into flour to make traditional damper
<i>Wintalka</i>	<i>Acacia kempeana</i>	Seeds of witchetty bush used as above
<i>Wituka</i> <i>Tjanmata</i>	<i>Beorhavia diffusa</i> <i>Cyperus bulbosus</i>	Plant tubers eaten raw or roasted
<i>Kampurarpa</i>	<i>Solanum centrale</i>	Native tomato eagerly sought and eaten raw
<i>Ili</i>	<i>Ficus platypoda</i>	Native fig eaten raw
<i>Mingkulpa</i>	<i>Nicotiana gossei</i> <i>Nicotiana excelsior</i>	Native tobacco
<i>Ngantjaa</i>	<i>Lysiana murrayi</i>	Small orange berries of the Mulga Mistletoe vine eaten raw

The Pitjantjatjara people have been involved in some form of organised manufacture of craft for sale since 1948 when spinning and weaving of wool was initiated at Ernabella Mission. Creative craft work particularly spinning and weaving, painting and more recently batik has continued ever since with twenty or thirty women being continuously employed on this work. The development of this successful women's adapted craft industry has been chronicled by Miss Winifred Hilliard (1968) who has fostered and guided this work for over 20 years.

The Pitjantjatjara people at Amata and Pipalyatjara are now making a wide range of high quality traditional and adapted craft. Sixty to seventy men and women are involved in making artifacts in varying quantities. The total income to craftsmen and women from the sale of these artifacts is between \$2,000 and \$2,500 per month. This successful enterprise is controlled by the Amata Society with guidance and assistance in marketing and accounting provided by the European crafts officer.

The reasons for the development, complete decline, and current successful re-establishment of this industry are relevant to discussion about future problems of development and maintenance of craft or other enterprises.

The first organised craft was initiated around 1968 but the quality was poor and the sales of craft only about \$500 per year. In 1969 a crafts officer Mr. David Abrams was appointed to Amata and was able to initiate a dramatic upsurge both in quality and quantity of work. In 1972 Mr. Abrams left Amata and the craft industry collapsed entirely until 1974 when a new crafts officer, Mr. Ushma Scales, was appointed and has successfully revitalised the enterprise. The fluctuations are shown in the graph of annual on page 69.

The relevant questions are how was it possible to develop a successful artifacts industry and why did it collapse when the craft officer support was withdrawn?

Mr. David Hope who was closely involved in the development of the Crafts Industry as Superintendent at Amata states (Hope 1973):—

"Two important factors were responsible for the upsurge of quality and quantity. The first was that production was confined to artifacts as such — that is to the familiar and the traditional. The second was that the quality demanded was very high. Crafts people, it was found, responded gladly to the high standards expected. At the end of 1971 the best producers worked towards presenting an exhibition in Sydney. In this way Aboriginal people at Amata were able to bring their art to European people in Sydney. This process contributed not only to group pride but reinforced the feeling among the people that they had something of real value to contribute to the Australian culture generally."

The other factor not mentioned by Hope but which was self evident during a visit to Amata at that time has to do with black-white relationships. The craftsmen's group-pride developed and flourished only because the attitude of the Europeans involved in the craft work held towards the Aboriginal craftsmen. This attitude of respect and admiration for the quality of their work was quickly perceived by the Aboriginal people. As Stanner (1974:7) has pointed out settlements were "total institutions" with Aboriginals in them living in virtual complete dependency on authority for virtually everything. So the craft industry provided an opportunity for Europeans who were eager to accept it, of reversing the dependence subservience roles between blacks and whites which was a corollary of settlement life.

Despite this progress, both in material and philosophical terms the industry collapsed as soon as the European crafts officer left. Again Hope (1973) suggests some valid reasons as follows:

"The fact that the Amata artifacts industry collapsed when those responsible for its development left indicates that something was fundamentally wrong. In the first place the crafts people were not able to form themselves into a legally autonomous group which could be subsidised; which could employ staff and which could decide and put its own policies into action. Secondly there was no marketing organisation. Thirdly the industry was structured by Europeans in institutional terms and once institutional management failed, so the venture failed."

After a lapse of over a year the industry has been re-established and is flourishing.

It has been possible for the crafts officer, who like the Europeans previously involved, has a genuine respect and admiration for the Aboriginal people and their craft, to quickly re-establish the quality and quantity of output. It is obvious that the people like making craft and that they obtain a great deal of satisfaction and pride from it. This is particularly true of the people in smaller decentralised settlements. The people at Pipalyatjara, both men and women, given the slightest encouragement worked away happily making artifacts. At Cave Hill, a small decentralised settlement 20 km north of Amata, craft has become a major activity with work of high standard and artistic merit being produced.

The work of the Pitjantjatjara craftsmen and women has artistic merit. Statements about artistic merit are open to challenge because they are based on a culturally subjective judgement but there are other reasons why statements about Aboriginal art are challenge which I will pursue taking the small wooden incised animal made at cave Hill and shown in plate 6.14:1 as an example.

The first challenge could well be an aesthetic one. The reader is enjoined to look again at the picture of the animal in isolation as a piece of art and consider whether the artist has achieved a sense of balance and proportion and whether she has been able to impose a heavy busy design comprised only of parts of circles onto a form with simple lines and produce a pleasing unity.

The second challenge could be a suggestion that the piece has no meaning that it is non-traditional and an item made for money. I would contest this challenge strongly on the grounds that any piece of original and distinctive art must have meaning to the artist to be created in the first place. As Tuckson (1964:60) points out "man generally speaking, when he expresses himself through visual form does so in relation to his environment. Environment involves not only time and

place, but also the society in which the artist works as well as his training and knowledge and whatever he absorbs through perception of the outer world". The sculpture of the animal is abstract yet part of the artist's environment, the circle design is abstract yet the circle is very much part of the symbolism of the artist's people. The care and complete absorption in their work that is obvious when watching Pitjantjatjara craftsmen, confirm that these works are conscious and meaningful creations reflecting the artist's personality and total environment. I would further observe that the people are demonstrably very happy, when group cohesion is strong, this is reflected in better and more beautiful works of art and craft.

To suggest that art or craft by Aboriginal people is somehow wrong if it is not traditional as Sandall (1973:1-6) points out, is to give culture an absolute connotation which is good in itself and not an adaptive apparatus serving human needs which can be evaluated on end results.

I am therefore postulating that a well conceived and organised craft industry plays an important role in Pitjantjatjara society in developing both personal and group pride in creative achievement. From this stems dignity, group identity and an opportunity for the people to emerge from a dependent situation.

A craft industry provides also the opportunity to earn money in an occupation that is meaningful and congenial to the people which does not involve a total commitment to the Western industrial type economic activity which involves many participants in working for set hours each day at tasks which may be boring and uncreative.

In making artifacts the craftsman works in an environment of his own choosing.

The autonomy and incorporation of the Pitjantjatjara groups that Hope (1973) mentioned was necessary to avoid future collapses of the industry is now being achieved in principal if not entirely in fact. The craft activities are subsidised by the Government through the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council and may well need to be for many years to come but in this they are no different to craft associations in European societies. It is the very economics of hand crafts in an industrial automated society that demands assistance from the society for its survival.

The survival of Aboriginal craft industries is essential for as I have shown the preservation of Aboriginal crafts plays a vital role in the preservation of Aboriginal Society itself.

APPROXIMATE VALUE ARTIFACT SALES

AMATA

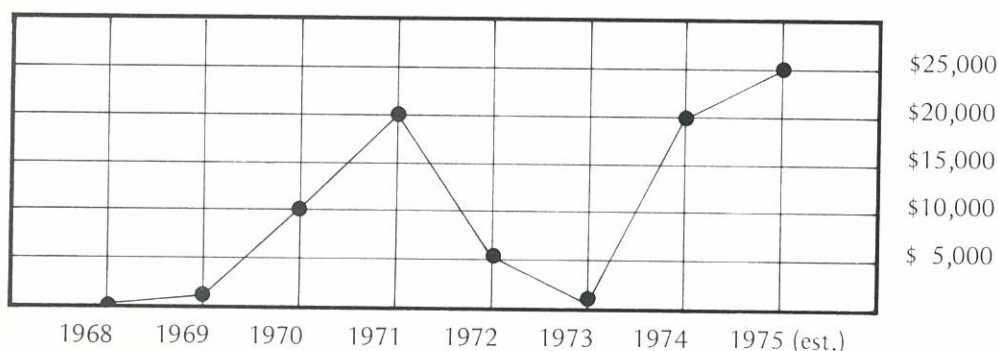


FIGURE 3

In this final section I will outline the problems remote groups of Pitjantjatjara are facing and discuss some ways in which they may be helped to survive. The decentralisation initiative being taken by the Pitjantjatjara and hundreds of other tribal Aboriginals living on missions and settlements elsewhere in Australia, is the last chance the people will have to survive as separate self-determining peoples. If it fails the destruction of Aboriginal society, which began with inhumanity and conquest but none the less has been pursued consciously or unconsciously in the name of humanity ever since, will be completed.

The most crucial and damning problem is one which Australian Society itself has to solve. This is for the white community to decide that it wants Aboriginal Society to survive. There is sufficient evidence from history and current attitudinal studies to suggest that a large section of the community are yet to be convinced of the merit of this proposition. One of the main reasons for this is that attempts to mould public opinion to support the preservation of Aboriginal Society have been largely based on appeals to public morality. Either we should preserve Aboriginal Society because we owe it to them or more often we should preserve their society so they can in turn enjoy the benefits and joys of our own great society. That this approach is doomed to failure in a society which is based on acquisition of personal wealth and material possessions seems obvious.

A demonstrably valid proposition which is hopefully more likely to be accepted by the community in the long term is that knowledge of and contact with Aboriginal Society, albeit itself changing, can benefit and enrich the total Australian Society. Whilst this is implicit in much that has been written about Aboriginal religion, social structure and art it is seldom explicated. On the other hand a somewhat parallel but narrower proposition that European migration to Australia has bestowed benefits of diversification and enrichment to our society is often propounded and receives some measure of acceptance.

A heavy responsibility rests on the unfortunately small band of people who have some understanding and appreciation of the depth and richness of Aboriginal culture. The responsibility is to do all in their power to communicate this knowledge effectively and widely so that the inaccurate stereotype of Aboriginals and their society as backward and primitive can be methodically destroyed. This responsibility is being accepted by many scholars and teachers but this work needs to be stepped up a hundred fold because with respect to the western Pitjantjatjara, time is not on their side. The rate of externally stimulated change is increasing year by year as more money and more Europeans are descending on Aboriginal communities in the name of progress.

To demonstrate the validity of the proposition that the total Australian society can learn and profit from Aboriginal society I will quote one or two authorities to demonstrate the point.

Maddock (1972:177-194) concludes a lucid discussion of "progress" in terms of social philosophy by stating that Aboriginal society has "exemplary value as a model exhibiting many features of social freedom, the realization of which has usually only been speculated upon in Western thought."

An authority in the field of art, Tuckson (1964:68) concludes an analysis of Aboriginal Art and the Western World in the following words: "We have a rich heritage the greater part of which remains neglected. And even if this is not specifically our own heritage, there is no question at all that it will come to have a much greater bearing on our own Australian art in the years to come."

It is in the field of art that most progress has been made in terms of recognition. The support given by the Australian Government through the Aboriginal Arts Board to Aboriginal artists, musicians, writers, craftsmen and dancers, has not only been responsible for many Aboriginal communities being able to maintain some dignity and pride in their own achievements but through display and exhibitions, is helping greatly towards a European understanding of Aboriginal culture.

I have placed great emphasis on the recognition of the value of Aboriginal society by the community and the development by the community of a desire for Aboriginal society to survive. Without it the efforts of Aboriginal groups themselves will be consciously and unconsciously frustrated by Governments, administrations, missionaries and "do-gooders" as they have so often been in the past.

Despite efforts being undertaken to educate the general community about Aboriginal Society, significant attitudinal changes will take a long time. The only hope for the survival of decentralised communities, or indeed of an identifiable Aboriginal Society rests with Governments, particularly the Australian Government, taking decisive action to respond to the wishes of tribal Aboriginal people before it is too late. Some of the actions which should be undertaken with a sense of urgency are as follows:

- The Australian Government should take immediate steps to ensure that its stated policy of encouraging and assisting the decentralisation initiative is carried out. If the experiences of the Pitjantjatjara is any guide their desire to return to their own lands has been continually obstructed by disinterest. I have mentioned how the Kunamatta people have been trying for years to obtain some minimal facilities so that they can return and live at Kunamatta. At a Pan-Pitjantjatjara conference held with Government officials at Ernabella in July 28-30 1975, the same desires were again strongly articulated by

groups of Pitjantjatjara men from Coffin Hill, Wingellina, Lake Wilson, Katala and Mambanyi. A recurring theme expressed by the Pitjantjatjara at this conference was "How many times do we have to tell you these things before you will believe us?"

■ It is essential that the general public and in particular those involved in Aboriginal affairs have an understanding of tribal Aboriginals and their decentralization initiative. Too often when a decentralized settlement has been established there is a tendency for people to pursue the people with elements of Western Society. There is a danger of such settlements becoming replicas of existing settlements with stores, schools, hospitals and a plethora of Europeans. The much publicised policy of Aboriginal self-determination will then become nothing more than a meaningless charade with the people having little alternative left but to submit to the pressures of modernisation and assimilation.

In a most perceptive article Hamilton (1972:39) summed up this process as follows:

"The policy of assimilation . . . seeks to bring about not a new type of social system but the total disappearance of the minority group and the complete eradication of its social and cultural existence. Even if such a procedure is defensible, the evidence is that the means tried in the past, and those relied on today — welfare, health and education services in particular, do not bring about the desired end; they simply result in social chaos".

Tragically Hamilton's predictions are being borne out as some decentralised settlements initiated by Aboriginal people with such high hopes are showing signs of disintegration and social chaos under the pressure of externally introduced change.

■ Most importantly the Australian Government, the State Governments and through them the hopefully fewer Europeans who come in contact with tribal Aboriginal groups, must realise that to insist on pressuring Aboriginal groups to alter their own society to conform to the values and practices of our society is to destroy Aboriginal Society just as effectively and even more rapidly than our ancestors did for most Aboriginal groups with guns, disease and appropriation of lands. Again as Hamilton (1972:39) succinctly points out "Social change which stems from the needs and desires of the people themselves is a different matter. Where people wish to alter their circumstances both as individuals and groups they are likely to find ways of effectively mediating the conflicts brought about by contact between two alien systems, without such mediation being destructive. Such change is usually rapid in some spheres, such as the material, and slow in others, such as belief systems. Nonetheless it is the only form of change which has the potential for continuity without destruction".

In summary the Pitjantjatjara are asking very little. They want support to enable them to form their own communities in their own lands and they want tolerance and understanding from the Europeans who are sent out to give them the support they require. Given these things and provided they are also given inviolate security of ownership of their lands the Pitjantjatjara (and the tribal groups still remaining elsewhere) have every chance of survival.

The Pitjantjatjara have many strengths which will help them in this struggle. Their social and ritual structures are still largely intact, as is the relationship between the men and their land which provides the core for their whole religious belief system. The desire of small groups not only to return to their own country but also to succeed in setting up their own decentralised communities remains strong and unswerving.

This is not to suggest that the Aboriginal people are unaware of the many problems they will have to solve in their new situation. There will be problems of leadership and authority particularly in relation to the control of community property such as vehicles.

There will be problems imposed by the environment particularly if severe droughts occur which will diminish the availability of bush foods. However, this problem may be alleviated by assisting the people to develop irrigated gardens. A successful garden has been in operation at Ernabella for some years and some of the men who want to return to Kunamatta have asked for help to do likewise. Whilst these would be small and employ few people they would provide an essential ingredient for an improvement in diet and health.

There will be great problems in meeting the educational and vocational aspirations of the young without alienation from the community. This hopefully will only be a short term problem as Aboriginals with the necessary skills replace Europeans, and as in the longer term the communities themselves change and develop from within. The present high rate of population growth and consequent "younging" of the Aboriginal population will aggravate this problem.

My firm view is that the Pitjantjatjara people will be able to solve these problems and self-determining communities like Pipalyatjara will survive. But this can only happen if the European administrators provide the sort of climate to let it happen. The necessary climate is one of tolerance, patience and understanding that the solutions the people themselves develop may be quite different to Western orientated solutions which should not be forced on the people.

I am led to this view because of the observable and expressed determinations of the people themselves to survive and succeed as self determining Aboriginal groups in their own traditional land. Because it would appear that the Pitjantjatjara peoples conduct is still largely governed by adherence to the order of things laid down for all time by the Ancestors it is possible that solutions to these new problems will be found by remodelling existing laws and norms to fit these new situations. Such a solution would maintain the unity between religious and secular conduct and avoid the collapse of their religion which in other areas has preceded the break up of the groups society.

Whatever solutions the people choose it is important that they be given time to develop and test them without excessive external pressure. By this I am not advocating the people be left to sink or swim on their own which is the catchcry of the many European cynics and the "I told you so" brigade when failures occur. Rather the remote groups need an unobtrusive and sympathetic European presence at this stage to provide the accounting, administrative and mechanical skills which in many areas we have studiously avoided imparting to the people during their long institutionalisation.

