

Barrow Point at the Turn of the Century

THE INVASION OF THE COOKTOWN HINTERLANDS

By 1900, the gold that had brought European invaders into far North Queensland twenty-five years earlier was largely played out.¹ In place of the miners, pastoralists had installed themselves in the richest country and at sources of fresh water, casually (and often illegally) incorporating into their workforces the remnants of Aboriginal populations whose lands they had appropriated. Fishermen began to visit the coasts, in search of inexpensive Aboriginal labor and other diversions. Disruption of precontact patterns of subsistence, introduced disease, routinized murder, contact with at least the fringes of the European economy coupled with a growing dependence on its commodities, and a general dislocation that made ordinary patterns of social life impossible for Aborigines soon reduced their numbers and distributed them in new ways across the landscape.

At the turn of the century there seem to have been two identifiable Aboriginal populations in the area centering on Barrow Point and Cape Melville. Archival accounts of the people from around Barrow Point are scanty, but they allow a patchy set of inferences about life in the area after European invasion.² Walter Roth, the first northern protector of Aborigines, made several visits to Barrow Point in the late 1890s, taking anthropomorphic measurements of two men whose names he gave as Onquilba and Onawin.³ Roth counted twenty men and ten women at Barrow Point in December 1898, though he commented that the normal population was certainly higher, "the main mob having left for C. Melville."⁴

Local tradition suggests that people came to concentrate in just a few camps, including one at Ninian Bay, as a result of police "dispersion" of coastal groups following the Lizard Island affair in 1881. A European woman, Mary Watson, put to sea and died stranded on a coral island after Aborigines—probably Guugu Yimithirr speakers from around Cape Flattery—stormed her house and speared her Chinese cook.⁵ The events scandalized the European population of the north and prompted punitive police attacks on coastal Aborigines south of Barrow Point.

In the early years of the European invasion of the north the govern-

ment had several devices for the "pacification" of its Aboriginal inhabitants. Through the institution of the protectors of Aborigines—usually, at the local level, police officers or magistrates—the government tried to enforce a series of laws regulating the legal employment of Aboriginal labor. By nominating certain designated Aboriginal elders "kings" of their respective "tribes" (themselves in part bureaucratic inventions), the protectors in turn sought to install their own proxy agents in positions of authority in what was perceived to be a diffuse native sociopolitical structure. Most important, the government made extensive use of "native troopers," men recruited from already "pacified" Aboriginal groups. Usually under the nominal command of a European officer, these Aboriginal policemen were outfitted with uniforms, weapons, and sometimes horses, as well as with considerable license to perform mayhem in the name of civilizing heathen tribes. Although at first native troopers were brought to the north from southern parts of Queensland, as areas gradually came under European control, their Aboriginal inhabitants often found that the policemen raiding their camps and stealing women and children were their kinsmen from neighboring territories, and sometimes even closer relatives from their own tribes who had left to seek employment on stations or in towns.

The events at Lizard Island were probably too far away to have had a direct effect on Aborigines at Barrow Point. But stories record other massacres. For example, in the clan area of the **Muunhthi-warra**,⁶ from the Jack River, south of Tanglefoot, police troopers are said to have made regular raids, shooting people indiscriminately. On one occasion a large group of survivors was reported to have fled to Cape Melville, where they hid in a cave. In another story, survivors of a police rampage on a salt pan inland from the mouth of Wakooka Creek came upon one of the native troopers abusing a local woman and killed him on the spot.

By 1902,⁷ Roth was tracing the activities of an Aboriginal miscreant from Barrow Point, one Charlie Bushman, who had committed "two or three murders of other than members of his own tribe—as well as threats to Europeans." Roth commented that "his removal has not yet been effected," using a standard euphemism, "removal," for the practice of forcibly deporting Aborigines to penal settlements far from their home areas.

By the end of the first decade of this century, the initial violent confrontation between black and white in the area had settled into a pattern of relationships more routine, if for Aborigines equally devastating. Individual Aborigines seemed to move widely through the area, occasionally finding themselves in difficulties with the authorities. Sgt. Bod-

man, of the Cooktown police, reported a trip in December 1910 to a coastal Aboriginal camp at Red Point, an area some "60 miles north of Cooktown," whose people were closely related to those from Barrow Point. The policeman had a warrant for the arrest of an Aboriginal man called Chucky who was wanted for horse theft.

There were about sixty boys and gins in the camp, and the boys were all armed with spears. When we arrived at the camp Chucky was not there and three of the boys came at us with spears and threatened us not to take any boys from camp. They were a dangerous crowd . . . On enquiries we learned that Chucky had left a few days previous and had gone up to Barrow Point.⁸

Bodman abandoned the search at that point.

Chucky was apprehended in April 1911 as he got off a boat in Cooktown.⁹ Protector Bodman recommended his "removal" to Barambah, on the following grounds:

This Aboriginal is a very bad boy and has several times been in prison for stealing . . . Government notes were issued for his arrest [for stealing a horse after his release from jail in Townsville] . . . some days later police found Chucky at Cooktown, but they were unable to prove the charge and he was discharged . . . I as Protector of Aborigines am holding Chucky until . . . [ordered to deport him] which I would strongly recommend as this boy has given the police a great deal of trouble, and I have received several complaints from . . . miners and others of robbing their camps in this district. He is a good worker and would be better away from this district under supervision.¹⁰

Chucky was ultimately sent to Brisbane with a number of other Aborigines who had been recently removed from Laura.¹¹

CONTACT FROM THE SEA

Contact proliferated between Aborigines and commercial fishermen whose boats regularly visited coastal camps, as well as between nomadic Aborigines and Europeans whose settlements and mining operations extended into the hinterlands. As the Aboriginal reaction to the police visit to Red Point suggests, these relations were not always amicable. The Cooktown police reported in 1910 that several Aboriginal men had ac-

cused a Japanese boat captain of having killed one of his Aboriginal crew members.¹² The correspondence in the case reveals that the boat captain had several times been denounced to police up and down the coast as "a bad man." One Aboriginal told police at Cardwell that the captain "had killed one boy like himself" by "biting him and knocking him over the side."¹³ Cooktown police were at the time holding in jail a group of eleven Aborigines who had signed on to the ship in question but who had since run away. The original permit to the Japanese captain named twelve "local boys" ranging in age from 16 to 28. Seven of the twelve, including the missing man, were shown as natives of "Barrow Point."¹⁴ (See Pl. 3.)

Roger Hart remembers hearing as a child from a crew of Barrow Point boatmen that their Japanese captain had flown into a rage against one of their companions, picked up a rifle, and shot him through the heart. The crew rose up against the captain and tied him to the mast, taking him to the nearest port to denounce him to the police.

Young men spent months and even years working on fishing trawlers and luggers along the Queensland coast. Reconstructing family histories from Barrow Point turns up many cases of men, like Roger Hart's maternal uncle or older brother, who signed on to boats and were never heard from again. The office of the chief protector of Aborigines tried to regulate the fishing industry by requiring that boat captains officially contract to employ Aboriginal labor and that they pay salaries directly to the local protector for "safekeeping." The government also tried to prohibit the established practice by which a captain would pick up men from one part of the coast and later simply put them ashore wherever it was most convenient, sometimes in a completely different part of Australia or even farther afield. Roger Hart says that many people from Barrow Point ended up marrying at Lockhart, Bamaga, or on the Gulf of Carpentaria and never returned to their homeland. Others never married at all and died, he imagines, in such places as Cherbourg to the south, Thursday Island to the north, or, for all he knows, even in Japan.

Missionary Schwarz at Cape Bedford, who had by the early 1920s begun to take a protective interest in the Aboriginal population to his north, was a particularly eloquent critic of the whole *bêche-de-mer* trade and its noxious effects on Aboriginal social life. Writing to Chief Protector of Aborigines Bleakley in his yearly report for 1926, he observed of the Cape Melville and Barrow Point camps:

At present nearly all the able-bodied men out of these two northern tribes are away on fishing boats for about nine months of the

year, come home at the end of their term with a hard earned but very slender supply of provisions, a new rig-out of clothes, a few useless articles of personal adornment, etc., all of which is either discarded or used up in a ridiculous short time, that one would think these boys would come to the conclusion that it would be better to stay at home and help their wives and families (the latter very scarce now-a-days) to make a better living. However the thought never seems to strike them and when the recruiting boats come back after two or three months, a few drinks of something more to their easily acquired taste than "sugar-bag" soon induces them [to sign on again].¹⁵

Against the suggestion that employing Aborigines in such productive work enhances their "civilization," Schwarz wrote,

Up along the coast where these boys have been recruited from, we find a "camp" of Aborigines, a miserable sorry lot, not to be compared with their relations in the same locality 40 years ago, which were fine healthy people. There are some old people, not many, there are a lot of women, many suffering from filthy diseases, some children—not many either—some of them half castes . . . This . . . I think could rightly be called "Starvation, misery and syphilization."¹⁶

Still, for many people to sign on to a boat meant to escape from the heavy restrictions placed on young men by watchful elders, including very limited possibilities for correct marriage. Japanese boats would anchor at Cape Melville, and young men would travel there in search of work, spending months at sea and only from time to time bringing provisions from Cooktown to their parents who had remained in camp. Boat skippers, like Captain Monaghan in the *Spray*, would make a series of stops, dropping off men and supplies, as the Christmas season (and accompanying monsoons) approached. He would call in at Barrow Point, then at Cape Melville, and continue northward, where he would ultimately drop off the "Island fellows"¹⁷ in his crew.

Fishing boats rarely stopped at Ninian Bay for long, although they frequently collected fresh water at various places up the coast, especially at Cape Melville itself. Roger remembers that people in the camps were always on the lookout for the boats and that they would set large signal fires when they saw a boat approaching. Other crew members would rarely accompany the Barrow Point men to shore—"I think they [were]

frightened of bama"—except when there was some sort of dance organized.

Boat work was both physically exhausting and dangerous. Aboriginal crewmen diving for trochus shell or collecting bêche-de-mer worked with no equipment other than simple diving goggles and their lungs, and the fishing boats frequently left them for hours on barely exposed reefs. Roger Hart's Barrow Point kinsman Yagay used to describe how one of his fellow divers was simply snapped up by a shark—its jaws clapping shut with a characteristic "tuk!"—leaving behind no trace except a spreading stain of blood.

The Japanese boat captains left singular impressions on the Aboriginal population, and many Hopevale people believe that their deportation southward during World War II was due as much to their long association with Japanese on boats as to Missionary Schwarz's German nationality. Barrow Point men worked on boats for one Black Otto, master of the boat *Sunshine*, another captain called Moo Kai, and also for a Captain Sakata. Barney Warner, an old timer from Barrow Point who spent much of his life at sea, used to tell Cape Bedford boatmen about his adventures with the latter, whom he considered a "real gentleman." Sakata's reply to the Cooktown harbormaster who wanted to borrow the Japanese master's dinghy in order to make a daybreak trip to the beacon opposite the Cooktown wharf—"Early morning go!"—remains a classic example of "Japanee English" for Aboriginal storytellers.

The boat captains left a rather different impression on those concerned with Aboriginal welfare. The same Captain Monaghan who called frequently at Barrow Point was reputed to pay his white crew members £3 per week. By contrast, Missionary Schwarz reported in 1925 to Protector Bleakley that the Aboriginal boatmen were paid a truly pathetic wage. He describes a conversation, evidently with Captain Sakata.

If these boys were recruited without the introduction of strong drink, treated fairly and paid on a scale somewhat in accordance with the amount of money they earn for their masters, little could be said against their employment on boats. But how do their wages compare with the earnings of such boats? The master of a Japanese boat called here about a month ago. I have known this man for a good few years. He seems to me to be a man far above the average Japanese masters of boats one meets up here. In the course of conversation he volunteered the information, he had—during this season—shipped already 43 tons of Trochus Shell and that he would easily get another 10 tons. The price of

shell he informed me was £90. It is not hard to figure out what, approximately, Owner and Master of this boat will be able to divide amongst themselves at the end of the season and what the crew of that boat (by the way in this case boys from Barrow Point and Cape Melville) would receive as their share of this wealth they procured by their labour. By these figures the gross proceeds from the season's sale of Trochus shell would be nearly £5000.

Schwarz continues,

This captain informed me that their wages were £1/8 a month. I don't know if this is true, it seems too ridiculous to be so, for the value of the shell they often gather in ONE day, exceeds the amount of wages paid to a whole crew of Aboriginals for a whole season. It can hardly be fair that these simple Aboriginals should be signed on to work on these fishing boats for a nominal wage, piling up fortunes for Japanese and wealthy ship owners, whilst their own families are forced to starve or become a burden to your department or to the various missions.¹⁸

Schwarz suggested £5 as a fair monthly wage that the industry could bear.¹⁹

Aborigines around Barrow Point and Cape Melville also had regular contact with other boats that visited their coast, many of which stopped to take on fresh water from known springs in the area. Supply ships heading north to Cape York and New Guinea also passed inside the reef, often in sight of coastal-dwelling people. King Harry of Cape Melville knew many of those who sailed up and down the coast. He had several stepchildren through his many wives whose biological fathers were non-Aboriginal seamen and others whose father was the Danish lighthouse keeper at Pipon Island.²⁰ However, not all of his interactions with passing boats were amicable, as the following story from Roger Hart illustrates.

KING HARRY IS THROWN INTO THE SEA

This is a story I heard when I was little, but I didn't know it very clearly. Then Banjo and Toby told me about it again. It's about King Harry, old man Bob's father.²¹

There was a big steamer called the *Kalatina*. I used to see that steamer going past on its way to Thursday Island.

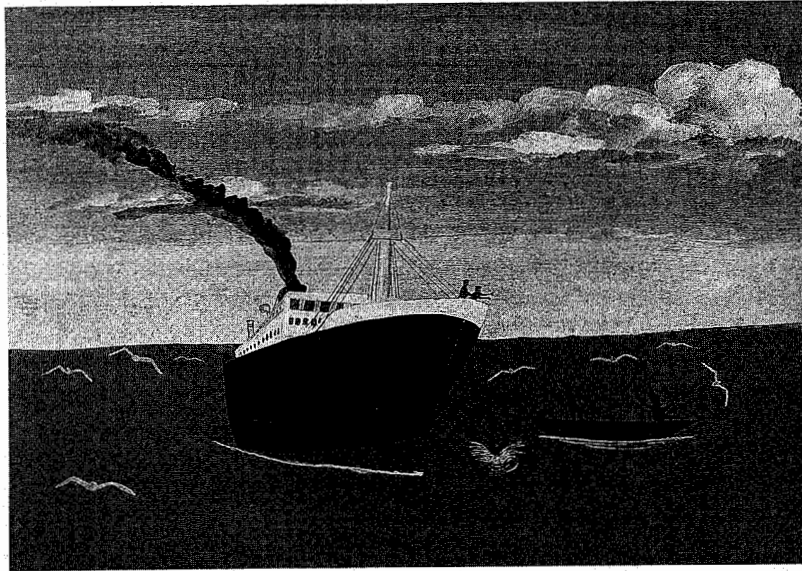


Figure 6. King Harry thrown overboard

One day a big boat came into view from the east, around the point at Cape Melville. It was that same steamer *Kalatina*.

Old man King Harry was staying there then, with a big lot of people from Flinders Island. They saw the steamer passing, and they jumped into their dugout canoes to go north to try to meet it, maybe to beg a little bit of food.

They managed to catch up with the ship while it was in the passage between Stanley Island and Flinders Island itself. King Harry used to do that all the time, see? He was always coming around that boat in his canoe, asking them to give him some food.

Those white fellows were probably getting a bit tired of it. They found him something of a nuisance.

This time, the men on the steamer saw the canoes coming. They pulled up.

"Let's wait for them," they said.

They threw down a rope ladder, and those bama climbed on board. Even King Harry climbed up, wearing his plate on his chest.²²

The crew members said, "All right, we'll give you some food." But in-

stead they picked King Harry up off the deck. They shook him like a stick and heaved him overboard. He fell straight down into the water.

Well, that old king climbed back into his canoe and paddled away. After that he didn't come begging food any more.

They were all white men on that boat—some of the same crew members as used to sail on the *Melbidir*²³ during the war. I think they were sick of him, and when they got wild they threw him into the water, poor thing.

EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT AROUND BARROW POINT

People in the Barrow Point camps were seasonally nomadic. They traveled to exploit traditional sources of food, to maintain social relations within a severely reduced population, and in response to the encroachments of European settlement. They visited inland tribal sites near Wakooka during the wet season and in the dry season migrated between Barrow Point, Cape Melville, and beyond, along the coast or to coastal islands. Though all the sites on these migratory routes had Aboriginal "owners," many places were largely depopulated by the early decades of this century.

The European move into the hinterlands had disastrous consequences for Aborigines who had managed to survive the violence of the gold miners in the latter part of the previous century. As gold mining waned, authorities turned their interest to more settled and durable exploitation of "vacant Crown land," which officials considered to be "a real no man's land." Europeans gradually settled the territory north of Cooktown, pushing Aborigines still living in the bush into ever smaller refuges and, ultimately, to the fringes of European settlements.

Though most of the area north of Cooktown had been declared open for occupation in the late 1880s, settlers only began to apply for occupation licenses around the time of the First World War, when special benefits were offered to returning soldiers. Two large occupation licenses were squarely in the middle of what Roger Hart describes as his tribal territory.

ABBEEY PEAK

Abbey Peak, on the shores of Ninian Bay, included the area called *lip-wulin*, Roger Hart's birthplace.²⁴ The area around Barrow Point was already in unofficial use by pastoralists before the First World War.²⁵ In 1916, a Mr. James Bennett, a former sapper with the Australian Army,

had applied for an area of 50 square miles that appeared to be "lying idle" despite there being adjoining properties under 30-year lease to a certain Maurice Hart and to two brothers named O'Beirne.²⁶ It was recommended that, because Bennet was a returned soldier, his aspirations should be accommodated if possible, and in August 1916, he was granted a 25-square-mile occupation lease, "which includes Parrow [*sic*] Point Creek," adjoining a similar-sized area granted to his partner, Thomas Edmund Thomas of Cooktown.²⁷

Sapper Bennett does not seem to have spent much time actually living on his newly acquired property, since he reenlisted within the year and leased his property to one of the O'Beirne brothers.²⁸ Bennett's fate is not revealed in Lands Department records.

By 1918 several pastoralists were in a struggle to acquire the Barrow Point holdings.²⁹ The government decided to consolidate several occupation licenses into a single run, a preferential pastoral license to be called Abbey Peak.³⁰

The property was finally transferred on 18 June 1920 to Allan Critchley Instone of Cooktown for the sum of £227.³¹ Instone's property on the shores of Ninian Bay formed the central magnet that attracted the Barrow Point Aboriginal settlements when Roger Hart was a little boy. Instone stayed at Barrow Point until 1926, when he sold his lease to the larger neighboring Starcke Station.

Instone apparently did not have a family when he lived at Barrow Point, although several Aboriginal girls kept house for him. He also officially "signed on" or contracted with the local protector of Aborigines legally to employ a few Barrow Point men as stockmen, gardeners, and boatboys. Cape Bedford's Rev. Schwarz, in a letter to the chief protector of Aborigines in which he discussed plans to try to move the entire Barrow Point population south onto the mission reserve, mentioned two such cases.

Jackie Red Point was here for a considerable time until, by your special permission, he was signed on by [Cooktown police constable and] Protector [of Aborigines] Kenny to Mr. Instone. With King Nicholas (another of Mr. Instone's boat boys) all our boys seem to be well acquainted, although I myself do not remember seeing him here [at Cape Bedford] unless it was under another name.³²

Jackie Red Point later returned to Cape Bedford and worked on mission boats. King Nicholas, the government-appointed "king" of the Barrow



Figure 7. Instone's house

Point camp, resisted the missionary's plans to move the Barrow Point people from their own land to Cape Bedford and was ultimately deported to the penal colony at Palm Island.

King Nicholas, Nelson, Billy Salt, Toby Flinders—all people that Roger Hart remembers from his childhood—worked on Instone's boat or helped clear his yards, plant melons, and look after the farm. Jackie Red Point tended the garden or fished with a net in the bay, the children following behind hitting the water with sticks to chase the fish into the net and to pick up whatever came their way. They might also beg a few potatoes from Jackie or his wife Sara. Other men maintained the property—fencing, digging, mustering, that is, rounding up cattle. Instone also kept a large vegetable garden, tended by a Malay gardener whom the Aborigines knew as Sam Malaya.³³

Instone was generally very strict with the Aboriginal children and did not like them to play around his yards and gardens, even less around his high house. He kept what Roger recalls as a savage dog to chase the children away. Still, the little boys occasionally raided the garden when they could sneak in without being seen.

The settler's house, gardens, and stockyards sat on several small hills just to the west of a large rocky outcropping that jutted out from the

southern shore of Ninian Bay. Amidst the mangroves lining the beach, Instone's workers had cleared a landing place for his boat, the *Iona*, which an Aboriginal crew sailed to Cooktown in fair weather, to bring supplies. Although commercial fishing boats moved freely along the coast and frequently picked up young Aboriginal crewmen, Instone refused to allow such boats in his own harbor at Ninian Bay, perhaps to protect his exclusive access to local Aboriginal labor.

Instone's official responsibility to the Aborigines living on his station under the Protection Acts was unclear. Roger Hart thinks that he was "something like a superintendent," supplying official government Aboriginal rations—blankets, steel tools, fish hooks and line, flour, tobacco, and the like—to the nearby camps. Barrow Point people who later came to the Cape Bedford Reserve reported that Instone had misappropriated wages channeled through him for delivery to men who had been discharged from fishing boats. Instead of simply paying the monies out, he demanded work, or as Roger Hart put it, "double time . . . he used to make them work first." According to local lore, two Barrow Point men, Tracker Billy McGreen, Sr., and Jackie Red Point, sailed to Cooktown in the ketch *Soapbox* to report Instone for malfeasance—"he was making bama work for their own money."

WAKOOKA

Wakooka Station to the south was the other large pastoral holding in the Barrow Point people's traditional territory. Maurice Hart, whom Roger Hart conventionally mentions as his non-Aboriginal genitor, began raising cattle in the area north of Starcke sometime before 1916. Having survived a fire on his previous holding, Hart began a campaign to acquire lands in the Wakooka area.³⁴ He feuded with his neighbors at Mt. Hope over grazing and droving rights.³⁵

In November 1916, giving his residence as Ninian Bay, Hart applied for the lease of Occupation License 397, known as Wakooka.³⁶ He immediately began to build improvements, run cattle, and raise a family on the property. Hart remained at Wakooka until 1932, when his property, like Instone's at Abbey Peak, was absorbed into the vast Starcke holdings.³⁷

In the mid 1920s Missionary Schwarz was trying to persuade the government to move the remnants of northern tribes, including the people at Barrow Point, to the Cape Bedford Reserve, where he was the superintendent. In a letter to the chief protector of Aborigines he listed possible obstacles to his plan to bring the Barrow Point people south.³⁸ One of

these was the presence of cattle stations. Schwarz wrote of two properties between Cape Melville and Barrow Point that made free, and illegal, use of the local Aboriginal labor force.

Although, as a rule Aborigines are considered a nuisance anywhere near a cattle station—I do not think that any of these cattlemen would like to have the Aborigines removed from up there and assistance in the matter could therefore hardly be expected.³⁹

Maurice Hart may have been the sort of Cape York cattleman Schwarz had in mind. Although Hart employed Aboriginal workers to clean his yards and to muster his stock, he restricted the movement of Aboriginal bands across his land. If Hart encountered people hunting for honey on his property, for example, he was likely to whip them before running them off.⁴⁰

Other Europeans frequented the Barrow Point area as stockmen, yard-builders, or harvesters of sandalwood.⁴¹ Stockmen gathered at campsites around Barrow Point for mustering, and Roger and the other children knew them to be potential sources for bread, damper, or tea. One person Roger particularly remembers was old Billy Burns, a famed yardbuilder throughout the region. He had a severe hunchback, and in order to lay out his swag he would first make a space for the hump by digging a hole in the sand.

In the second decade of the century, when Roger Hart was born, the properties of European settlers like Instone and Hart had attracted semi-permanent Aboriginal camps, oriented both inland to the settlers, who provided meager domestic and stock work, and also outward to the sea where most young men made their livings, usually exchanging hard labor on Japanese luggers for flour, tobacco, and a minimal wage. Settlers' and fishermen's interests crucially involved Aboriginal labor, but they ignored or actively obstructed claims on the local environment from Aboriginal camp life.

THE CAMPS AT BARROW POINT

Exactly how the Barrow Point people understood their "ownership" of the land where they lived is difficult to reconstruct fully from current memories. Before the European invasion of their country, Aborigines in this area were organized into small groups, nowadays often called clans. The territory was dotted with named places, some of great ritual or economic significance, and people knew to which groups each place be-

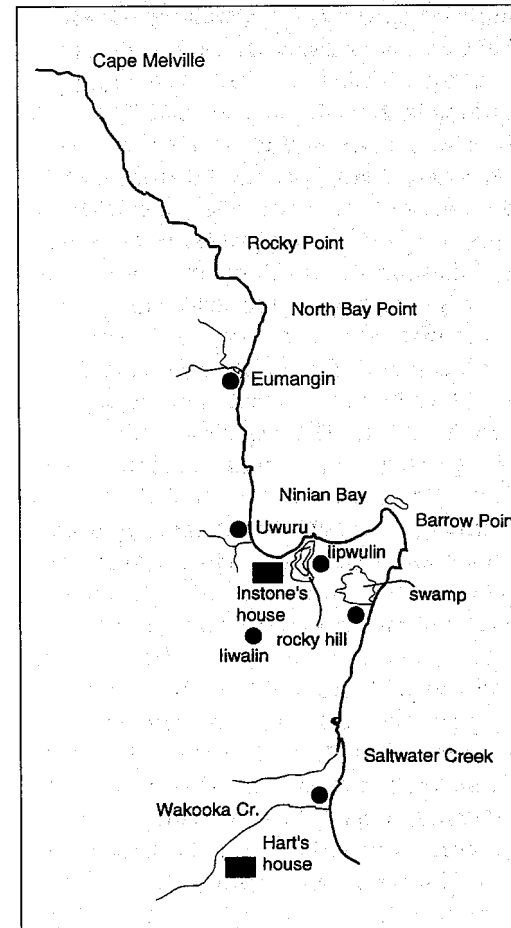
longed. Similarly, individual Aborigines were associated with named "runs" or areas, within which specific sites lay. Normally one gained one's language and territorial affiliation from one's father, although ties to the land and language of mothers and grandmothers were also significant. From your clan you also inherited an often discontinuous mosaic of "home" sites across the landscape, as well as a series of stories, totems, and kinsmen. Different clans could also be linked by shared claims to places and stories as well as by marriage ties that often endured over several generations. A person thus "belonged" to places, to languages, to stories, and to other people. Talk about places, words, and stories is the idiom in which both social distinctiveness ("this is my word; that is his") and social cohesion ("we are both one for that story") were phrased.

When Roger was growing up, clan affiliations, rather than personal names, were the polite way to refer to people. To identify someone seen from afar people might say, "Ah, **bama yalngaa-ngu**—it's the person from the [clan area called] **yalnga**." They would not simply call out the person's name.

The Aboriginal settlements at Barrow Point straddled Instone's Station and stretched out along the shores of Ninian Bay. The largest camp was called *lipwulin*,⁴² on the beach just to the east of the rocky outcropping that separated it from Instone's Station. The camp extended for several miles farther east, as far as the mangroves that grow along the northern edge of Barrow Point itself. It was watered by seasonal creeks and by a large permanent lagoon inland to the south, also a favorite hunting place for fish and game. *lipwulin* was Roger Hart's birthplace. It served as the main campsite in the whole Barrow Point area, the central home of the "older brother" half of the Gambiilmugu people. From this camp people would travel to the coast or south and east to other campsites and tribal areas.⁴³

Instone's Station was a source of supplies and work for Aborigines at Barrow Point. Roger Hart recalls that the men "would go over to the west [from *lipwulin*] for tobacco. A few *bama* used to work as stockmen. Those who worked for Instone would bring tobacco for the others. But not too much, just a bit."

Another large Aboriginal camp was located inland from Instone's compound, on the high, flat ground to the south, where another freshwater creek could be found. This camp was named *liwalin*. There was also a small camp on the beach at the western end of the mangroves in Instone's harbor where families of Aborigines who worked on Instone's Station stayed.



Map 2. Aboriginal camps around Barrow Point

Farther west, in the southwest corner of Ninian Bay, was another fair-sized camp, centered around the freshwater creek, *Uwuru*.⁴⁴ In the summertime the people would shift camp to the mouth of this creek, which emptied into Ninian Bay and provided easy access to a series of reefs and to campsites higher up the creek where other sorts of bush foods could be harvested. Roger remembers that people from Cape Melville, Bathurst Head, and others he associates with the area called **Walmbaarrga** on Princess Charlotte Bay camped here frequently when visiting Barrow

Point. During the dry season this corner of the bay was a good place to hunt dugong, and Roger recalls Uwuru as a well-fed camp. "Bama used to harpoon turtles [there]. On the low tide you could see the reef, poking up from the corner of the bay right north to *Imeenhthin*."⁴⁵

A more frequent campsite was slightly farther up the coast, about halfway to Eumangin Creek, where freshwater flowed from a spring right on the beach. During mustering season, many adult men with their families would move to the creek at Uwuru to take part in the cattle work, which Instone evidently sometimes performed jointly with his neighbor Maurice Hart from Wakooka. The stockmen were paid with tobacco, flour, and tea leaf, which they shared with the others.

The creek at Eumangin marked the northern edge of the territory of Roger Hart's clan, the people of Gambiilmugu. There were small groups of Aborigines living right up the coast. The territory of the people known as *Thagaalmugu-warra* began at Eumangin, according to Roger, and extended north to North Bay Point, then west to Cape Melville, and beyond to Flinders Island.⁴⁶ Although he considers the camp at Iipwulin to have been his home, as a boy Roger Hart visited areas as distant as Cape Melville and Bathhurst Head in one direction and Cape Bowen in the other, all before he was six or seven years old.

In the territory of the "younger brother" half of the Barrow Point people there were also several camps. By the mid 1910s, most people from this region no longer maintained semipermanent independent camps but instead lived near European settlers' properties. The Aborigines who lived and worked at Wakooka Station came from many different groups in addition to the Gambiilmugu tribe. The main camp in the area was located on the beach near the mouth of Wakooka Creek, a way station between Barrow Point and Cape Bowen to the south.⁴⁷



Bush Tucker

Living on the shores of Ninian Bay, the Barrow Point people depended on the sea. They fished and caught shellfish on reefs exposed at low tide. They pulled mud crabs, bottom-feeding fish, and shell bait from the mud flats around the mangroves. They harpooned more substantial marine game—turtle and dugong—from dugout canoes.

There were seasonally plentiful fruits growing along the beach, both introduced plants like coconut and native foods like *ngundarr*, 'wongai plum', a datelike fruit that grows in great abundance along the coast from Cape Bowen to Cape Melville, ripening from a bright inedible red to a sweet inky black as the rainy season gives way to spring and summer.

Nonetheless, Roger Hart remembers the Barrow Point camp as a hungry place, for children at least. First of all, many foods were prohibited to children, declared off limits or *thabul* (*awiyi*) for them by the older people.

"We were not to drink any honey with wax inside. We could only have it really clean. They never used to give us scrub turkey eggs; that was taboo food.

"Don't eat that scrub turkey egg!' they would say, 'lest Thunder strike you!'"

"We couldn't eat emu. If they killed and cooked a crocodile, no child was to eat it, because afterwards a crocodile might turn around and eat a child.

"There were lots of other things we couldn't eat, but I've forgotten many of them. I never used to eat a lot in those days. My belly was narrow, then."

When they traveled in the bush, Roger's mother would mix something up in ashes and give it to him to drink, to diminish his appetite. A similar treatment was meted out to children who cried too much for food.

Honey was a central part of the diet, and its importance is still evident today although few people have the patience or skill to track native bees to their nests as they fly through the air. Roger points out, "You've got to have a good eye to see it. Most of us just walk around without noticing anything." In the camps, people would soak a sponge made out of dry grass in the liquid honey to extract it from the nest. The favorite way to consume the honey was then to mix it in water. A billycan full of *mula*, drunk in the morning, provided energy for a full day's trek.

On our walks through the bush, Tulo and Roger repeatedly pointed out old scars on trees where bees' nests had been chopped, or new nests waiting for more energetic souls to open. On a trip to Cape Melville, when most of our store-bought sugar was ruined by a leaking gasoline container, several elderly men preferred to forego fishing and crabbing to spend the day tracking down and robbing a bucketful of *mula* to sweeten the tea.

At Barrow Point, honey near the beach was quickly exhausted in the fine weather months of the spring when people concentrated on hunting for fish, turtle, and dugong. The bees, likewise, were not collecting nectar and storing honey in the winter dry season. It might be February before

the rains would drive people inland, to Wakooka and beyond. From February to June honey would be plentiful. People who had moved inland in this season would also hunt echidna and other small game.

As elsewhere on Cape York Peninsula, individuals were associated with particular bee species—an affiliation that you also inherited from your father. People were therefore partial to certain kinds of honey. The two varieties of native bee that distinguish the two basic “kinds of people,” or moieties,¹ throughout the Guugu Yimithirr area, *walarr* and *thuuru*, were also to be found at Barrow Point. The first variety, called *Ulmuru* in Barrow Point language, builds up a long tunnel-like entrance to the nest. The second, called by the generic *uulgaal*, is the tiny black “bally bee.”

Green ants were used for medicine to treat everything from flu symptoms to diarrhea. They could also be chewed on long treks between fresh water sources, when their refreshing sourness would moisten the mouth and replenish one's saliva.

Fresh meat was roasted or boiled without salt. Sea turtles and shellfish such as crabs or lobsters were usually cooked in seawater. Men speared red kangaroos, gray wallaroos, as well as smaller wallabies. They also hunted lizards and goannas.

“They were eating such things, and they weren't starving.”

Nowadays wild pigs abound throughout his homeland, but Roger Hart remembers that spearing pigs in the early days, before the territory was abandoned to such animals, was extremely rare.

The search for seasonal foods took the Barrow Point people as far as Princess Charlotte Bay, to the south past Cape Bowen, and inland beyond Wakooka. They used to dig for yellow yams and make starchy breads out of white yams. They also gathered the tubers of wild lilies, *unthiin*,² in the inland swamps and lagoons. The old ladies would travel great distances in search of these plants when they were in season. Roger remembers a favorite place for gathering lilies on a lagoon upriver from the mouth of the Mack River, south of Cape Melville.

“Now only pigs eat them. But in those days there were no pigs. The old ladies would get the roots of the lilies, and also the seed pods, once the flowers had fallen off. They would cook big heaps of them in earth ovens. Once the pods were soft they would take out all the seeds, and then scrape the pulp off, make something like bread out of it. That was good *mayi*.”

The final process involved baking the pulp of the roots once they emerged from the earth oven to make a kind of bread or damper. Roger remembers that *ayi unthiin* was “good, but tasted a bit like water inside. It was dry, though, something like cooked potato.”

At Barrow Point in addition to various yam species, people also used to eat the fruit of white mangroves, called *udan*.³

Other bush foods required more preparation. Throughout this part of Queensland, Aborigines gathered the nut of the zamia palm, which had to be pounded and leached of toxins before it could be eaten. The same sort of preparation was required for *yulnga* or “matchbox” nuts.⁴

One of Roger's childhood playmates was too impatient to wait.

NICHOLAS AND THE ZAMIA NUTS

We were staying up near the creek at Uwuru. All the old ladies were sitting around in a circle, preparing the nut of the zamia palm, *uthiwi*. They had put the nuts into the ashes to roast, and they were just taking them out of the fire. They would pound on the shell of the nut, take out the edible part inside, and throw it onto a heap. The *mayi* was already soft.

Nicholas⁵ was watching them, and he must have thought, “Well, nobody is looking at me now.” He grabbed some of that food and ran off with it. He sat down to eat it. He got very sick after that, because even though they had softened it in the ashes, it was still raw.

After they open the nut, they pound it flat on a rock. Then they put it in a dilly bag and tie it in a stream or under a waterfall, where the water is running swiftly. They might leave it for weeks, or even months. When you take it out, it's bland, no taste. That's the way that *mayi* is. You have to put honey on it.

Dugong and turtle were the most prized game of all. Neither was easily found off the beach where Roger's people had their main camp. Therefore men embarked on harpooning expeditions north to Cape Melville, east beyond the tip of Barrow Point, or south toward Cape Bowen.

“This used to be a great place for dugong—might still be a good few here, if we went out in a dinghy.

“People used to go out hunting from Iipwulin. Some would go by boat, and others would walk. The oldest people, who couldn't walk, would also jump on the boats. They would go right around the point, and head south down the beach. The other men would cut across inland, and come out onto the beach to the east. They would meet up then, having agreed on a place in advance.

“If they caught a dugong, they would make camp, cut up the meat. They wouldn't shift camp again until the dugong was finished.

“I still remember that Long Billy went out hunting one time with old man *Ngamu Wuthurru*.⁶ Ngamu Wuthurru was a loner, and he didn't

hunt much with the other men. But that time he went with old Billy, looking for turtle. It was morning, and we were camped up at Cape Melville. We were about to shift camp from there. I still remember the place.

"Well, that morning they caught no turtles, but they harpooned a baby dugong. They brought it up on the beach and cut it up. Then we had to stay in camp there to cook the dugong in an earth oven. It was a good feed."

Despite the great variety of bush foods, the proximity of Instone's property exerted a profound influence on the Barrow Point people's diet. Men visited the station in search of tobacco, and women frequently were paid for domestic labor with wheat flour.

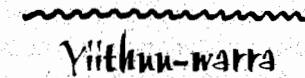
When old man Jackie Red Point hauled out Instone's fishing net, probably provided by the protector of Aborigines for the benefit of the Aboriginal people living in the camps, the children would follow him into the water in hopes of a few gift fish. Roger and his playmates would also pay covert visits to Instone's gardens. Sam Malaya tended the tomatoes, which Roger and the others occasionally tried to steal. His garden also had lettuce, cabbage, and sweet potatoes.

"We had to watch him all the time," Roger remembers. "We didn't want to come close to him. He knew we were stealing tomatoes, from the broken plants, but he wouldn't say anything to Instone about it. He didn't like us to come near the garden, so we were afraid of him, but other than that he was a good bloke. He didn't get angry."

The kids used to follow Sam Malaya around when he went hunting. He chewed plug tobacco, which they tried to cadge. He had a rifle, Roger remembers, and often went shooting birds, or the whistling duck species called **digalaba**.

He was also a source of fishhooks and other gear that camp people used. Roger remembers his mother fishing for jewfish with a line and fishing pole she had made from bits and pieces she had gotten from Sam Malaya.

The Barrow Point people used to travel to the west of Bathhurst Head for **ambaarr**, bamboo for fishing spears. They used the heart of black palm, **thuguy**, as well as **abulthabul**, 'grass tree' and a hardwood called **wurrbuy** for bullet spears, and they made harpoons for dugong from ironbark wood. They would also use stingaree barbs for fighting spears and purloin settlers' fencing wire to make the prongs on their fishing spears.



Yiithuu-warra

The early decades of this century saw massive restructuring of Aboriginal life in north Queensland, and virtually all aspects of social organization among Roger's people were in transition. The vagaries of abduction, adoption, serial marriage, and rape, as well as the violent dispossession of territory occasioned by the European invasion had seriously complicated the relationship between individuals, "tribes," and **bubu**, 'home country'.¹

By the time Roger Hart was born, conditions of Aboriginal life had led to significant adjustments in the principle of inheriting from one's father, as well as to the social nature of clan affiliations. The devastating effects of dislocation and disease, coupled with exploitation of Aboriginal men and women by local settlers and fishermen, made it difficult for the Aboriginal population to reproduce at all, let alone to maintain the social and ceremonial practices that clan organization entailed. The European invasion brought about massive depopulation, a drastic reduction in traditional food and water resources for Aborigines, and the violence of forced relocations ("removals") and murder ("dispersions"). By the beginning of the century, the majority of surviving young Aboriginal men were involved in work that took them far from the camps. Many Aboriginal women were abducted from their own clan areas or pressed into various sorts of service by non-Aboriginal employers. An increasing number of children whose fathers were non-Aboriginal were born to Aboriginal mothers, complicating the question of "following your father's line." Should such children belong to the clans of their mothers' husbands? Should they be associated with their mothers, or even with their birthplaces? Or were they simply outcasts, nonpersons?

Sites associated with particular clans were often completely abandoned, and clans themselves began to disappear as their members died or became too few in number to sustain either ritual obligations or seasonal exploitation of their territories. Camps like those at Barrow Point came to be refuges for people from many different areas, transient stations in a continual series of migrations between European settlements—where tobacco, flour, blankets, and other provisions could be exchanged for occasional work—and more remote areas where traditional food collecting, socializing, and ritual could still be conducted.

Roger Hart assembled his knowledge of Aboriginal law and custom under these complex and unsettled circumstances. The clan affiliations

he now attributes to individuals come not from where they lived but from what people said about their fathers, grandfathers, or in the case of part-European children like Roger himself, their stepfathers, their mothers' Aboriginal husbands. In Roger's childhood, people identified as belonging to the "younger brother" mob of the Gambiilmugu tribe lived side-by-side in the same camps as those from the "older brother" mob. Barrow Point people moved widely over the countryside, sharing campsites and social relations with people from widely scattered and often distant clans.

Although details of the kinship terminologies varied from language to language, Aboriginal people in this part of Queensland reckoned their kinsmen according to a largely shared system of categories. This system divided the social world into two halves, or moieties: those of one's father's line and those of one's mother's line. To a man, for example, this meant that one took one's own identity—language, clan affiliation, sacred animals, home territory, and stories, among other things—from one's father. One found one's spouse in one's mother's line, that is, from the other side. Indeed, an appropriate marriage partner was the child of a person categorized like a mother's brother—a distant uncle, for example, from the opposite moiety—and terminology identified such uncles and their wives as potential parents-in-law, people whose offspring would be the "right ones" for a person to marry. Such future in-laws received marked deference and respect. Siblings were ranked by birth order, and the oldest children in a generation were, in principle, "bosses" for their families, invested with a certain authority over more junior siblings, nephews, and the like.

Roger uses Guugu Yimithirr kinship terms to distinguish the two halves of the Barrow Point "nation"—**gaarga**, 'younger brother' and **yaba**, 'older brother':

"My tribe belonged to the 'older brothers', to the west. My 'younger brothers' were people like Toby Gordon and old man Yagay, from the south. Those 'younger brothers' used to breed too much. They wanted to be the bosses. They were truly great hunters. *Uwu dhaga*— they had strong words. If people from the north spoke out against what they were doing, the younger brother tribe threatened to spear them."

Sometimes this "older brother"/"younger brother" terminology conflicted with what Roger thought were genealogical relationships, testifying to the confusion created by rapid social change. Here is how Roger responded to my question about his kinship relation with old man Yagay.

"At first he was my *uguya* [classificatory mother's brother]. But then they changed it and he became my *yaba*" [classificatory older brother].

Perhaps surprisingly, even in precontact times, kinship relations *could* change. After a death, for example, relationship terms were sometimes systematically altered, in order to help "forget about" or respect the memory of the deceased.

"But I am supposed to be Yagay's older brother, really, because we on the north were the 'older brothers.' Those people on the south were the 'younger brothers,' and they were supposed to follow that [for calculating kin relations], see?"

The interrelated clans from Barrow Point northward to Cape Melville and Flinders Island shared a social identity outside their own area. Just as the brash, disobedient, bellicose, and sinful "younger brothers" from Pinnacle had "hard words" and were feared up and down the coast, all the people from the Cape Melville and Barrow Point mobs, known collectively in Guugu Yimithirr as **Yiithuu-warra**, enjoyed a fearsome reputation.

"The people from around Cooktown, or the **Thiithaarr-warra** people from Cape Bedford, used to say, 'Watch out for those **Yiithuu-warra**; stay away from them!' They used to keep that in their minds, not to come too close to them. They were good hunters and good fighters, too."

Tulo Gordon, himself a Guugu Yimithirr man from **Nugal**, echoed these sentiments. "I still remember at the North Shore [of the Endeavour River, opposite Cooktown, where there was a large Aboriginal transient camp], that I heard the people talking about strangers coming at night. 'Beware of those **Yiithuu** people,' they said. 'They are dangerous, **warra thuul nubuun**.'"²

The Pinnacle mob was swallowed up for violating a strict Aboriginal code governing marriage and sexual relations. This "law" is the aspect of social life that resonates most strongly in Roger Hart's discourse about "old ways," even if "bama law" seems to have been more rhetoric than practice during his own lifetime, when almost everyone, whether by choice or necessity, married "crooked."

Early marriages were ideally contracted over long distances, frequently spanning different languages. Sometimes there were recurrent exchanges of women between clan groups. For example, Nicholas, the Barrow Point "king," was married to **gamba**³ Rosie, a woman from the Lockhart River far to the north. Roger says: "The old people wouldn't let him to get married with their own relations, and so he went up there." When the Barrow Point people were afterward removed to Lockhart Mission in the late 1920s, they were brought into contact with distant people with whom they had already established links of marriage.⁴

Nonetheless, even the early history of the area is peppered with mar-

riages unacceptable by strict Aboriginal standards. Severe depopulation coupled with disruption of previously normal social and ritual contacts between groups perhaps made it progressively more difficult to find genealogically appropriate partners to marry. Competition for marriageable women must have been intense.

A SPEAR FIGHT

My brother used to work on the boats. His boss was Mr. Monaghan, the skipper of the *Spray*, the same boat that the Cape Bedford Mission later purchased. A big lot of Barrow Point people used to work for him. Old man Charlie Monaghan used to work on that boat. He got his name from the white owner.

My brother used to sail far up to the north on those boats, as far as New Caledonia.

There was another man in the camp at Cape Melville named Yalunjin. In English they called him Jackie Barrow Point. He was my uncle. He was terribly jealous of my brother. The problem was a girl called Mary Ann, the stepdaughter of old man Imbanda. She was in love with my brother. That made Yalunjin jealous. He wanted her for himself—she was only a girl at that time.

Yalunjin asked the girl's stepfather if he could marry her. Imbanda refused. "You can't marry your own grannie," he told him. Mary Ann was like a grandmother to him, a **gami**.

Yalunjin got very angry because my brother was his rival. "You get ready there on the north," he said to my brother. He had his spears ready.

My brother jumped up on the north side. So did old man Imbanda, as a **mala-digarra**, my brother's champion or protector. He was there to block the spears as the other man threw them.

Yalunjin threw one spear after another at his rival, and old Imbanda knocked them aside. Imbanda was standing in front, and my brother behind.

When he blocked one of the last spears, he only managed to send its tail end askew. The spear flew up and hit him right in the eye. Old man Imbanda, there on the north, fell to the ground, speared in the eye.

Then Yalunjin threw one last spear. My brother fell to the ground, too, speared right through the side.

All the people cried out. Yalunjin, the guilty one, ran off toward the west, having speared his rival.

"Why have you speared my nephew, here to the east?" they called out

after him. Old man **Wathi**—Billy Salt—wanted to spear him in return. He quickly ran off even farther to the west, to block Yalunjin's escape.

Yalunjin came running along the beach from the east. When he was very close, Wathi suddenly stood up. He called out to the fugitive, "Where are you running?"

Yalunjin couldn't run this way or that—he was too close. Wathi picked up his bullet spear and threw it. Yalunjin couldn't dodge it; he could only hold up his hands to block the throw, but the barbs of the spear tore deep into his arms. He fell to the ground.

They had to knock the stingaree barb off the end of the spear to pull the shaft back out. They carried the culprit back east to camp.

My mother took her digging stick. It was an iron bar, which she used for digging yams. She struck that man on the head, hitting him hard until the blood ran out. Again he fell to the ground. Then all the others took turns jabbing their spears into his leg and pulling them out again. We call it **wabu daamaayga**—pay-back spearing. That was his punishment for having speared my brother.

After my brother recovered from the spear wound, he went back out on the boats again. But he still had something inside him from the spear. He never really healed properly inside.

On the boat, he used to go diving for shells. Well, the cold got into that deep wound—perhaps it was pneumonia or something. He got really sick, and he died down there. Old Monaghan used to go south and sell the shells in Rockhampton, and he told me my brother died at Keppel Sands, near Rockhampton.

They couldn't bring my brother's bones back in a bark trough. "Never mind, leave him there," they said, when the news of his death reached Barrow Point.

After that they sent Yalunjin away to Palm Island. He died down there under the name of Jackie Maytown.

Most of the people living permanently in the Barrow Point camps were elderly. The young men spent most of their time working on boats, leaving their wives behind. The wives, in turn, were easy prey for others to abduct.

"Bama used to come from farther west—from Port Stewart, Princess Charlotte Bay, or farther up Cape York Peninsula—and steal those women. Their husbands were out on the boats. The young men would come home and find their women gone. Then they would turn around and go back out on the boats again."

"Did they like working on the boats?"

"Oh, yes, they wanted to go out. I think they wanted to get away from those strict laws—like avoiding their sisters or their mothers-in-law. Or the rules about food. Some of the younger men got married in other places, like Lockhart, or even Kowanyama. They had their children there, and that's where their families grew up."

"When men abducted women, would they never ask permission first from the parents?"

"No, thawuunh, you know why? The old people used to follow the 'law.' If a man asked for a girl in the right relationship, like a cousin, and she was a full grown girl, the parents would willingly give her away.

"Take her,' they would say, 'you're a good hunter.'

"That's if the girl was the daughter of an *imoyir*,⁵ or the daughter of a proper father-in-law. But if she was from the same side as you, or like a *gamintharr*⁶—well, that's bad. They wouldn't let you marry that way. You had to follow the father, see?"

Young women were carefully supervised once they reached marriagable age. Old people kept girls "in one place; they never let them wander about." Girls went on short errands and were expected to return directly. If they went hunting or gathering, they remained in the company of mother, auntie, or grandmother. When they were of an age to get married, the parents would be sure to give them away to "the right bama," to an appropriately related man.

For Lutheran-educated Hopevale people like Roger Hart there are parallels between Aboriginal law and biblical precepts about proper marriage. Roger describes an Aboriginal levirate, in which a younger brother might take over the wife of a deceased elder brother.⁷ The principle of classificatory cross-cousin marriage was guaranteed to be observed by such a match if the older brother himself had married properly. But in the violent first decades of the century, abductions and shortages of appropriate partners produced many marriages that ignored the strictures of such law.

Young women were liable to other predations, as the biographies and child-bearing histories of many individuals make plain. Women were *wali wali* 'all over the place,' living unsettled lives and sometimes traversing great distances as they moved from one husband to the next. Abduction of women was not limited to native troopers and European settlers. Roger Hart even has a little story to tell about how one woman escaped from her would-be husband.

ABDUCTION MAGIC

I don't know where she was stolen from—somewhere to the east of Barrow Point, I think. That girl didn't like her husband much. She was forced to come with him, you see. But they set out, and they walked and walked.

After a while it got to be late afternoon, maybe four o'clock. They wanted to make a fire. So the man got out his firesticks and tried to make a flame. He was facing to the west. The girl was sitting on the east side, but not facing east—at his back, you see? She was watching him.

Well, this fellow tried to get his fire started with the fire sticks. He twirled them round.

The girl cast a spell. She said to the fire, "**Suuuu!** Fire, don't come! **Suuu!** Flames, don't fall!"

Her husband kept on twirling and twirling his firesticks. He was so intent on making the fire that he forgot about that girl. He forgot about everything except his firesticks. His mind just more or less went to sleep.

Then the girl stood up. She started to walk away. She walked and walked and kept going. She left for good, never came back.

Meanwhile, that man was still twirling his firesticks. At last, the fire fell. He said, "Right! Bring me some tea-tree bark!" He looked around, but she wasn't there. She had gone back to her mother. He wasn't game to go back after her, since he had stolen that woman in the first place. If he had gone back, they would have speared him.

Many women from Cape Melville and Barrow Point were abducted by native troopers, but some crooked marriages seem to have been the result of less violent liaisons. One such "improper" union was contracted between an adult man from the Pinnacle mob and the same girl over whom Roger's brother had been speared. She was growing up at the Barrow Point camp with her stepparents, who came from the Mack River area near Cape Melville.

MARRYING WRONG

People used to come to our country from other areas farther west. Then they would mix up with our people. Old man Imbanda was a **Burru-mun.ga** man, who became old Johnson's father-in-law. Johnson married Mary Ann. Imbanda was her father—well, really her stepfather. He was her **mugagay**, her uncle. She used to stay with Imbanda and his wife. I don't know who her real father was.

Now, old Johnson, they wouldn't let him get married to her, because he was a near relation. They were all near relations to us. Johnson and his brother were supposed to be like **mugur** [classificatory maternal uncle] to me, but later they changed it and told me they were like cousin-brothers. We all shared the same language. Toby Gordon called them "father"—they were like uncles to him.

Well, Johnson was always trying to get a wife.

That girl was staying permanently with her stepfather. We had moved to a camp at the Mack River. We were living in some little humpies there.

One night Johnson came over near our humpy. He said he was looking for a small billycan he had lost.

They said, "Nothing down here."

He was just putting it on, you see. He said, "Maybe it's over there?" He went over to the girl's humpy to look. Instead of searching for his billycan, he was trying to make love to her. It was night, and nobody saw what he was doing. That girl was only about sixteen years old at the time, staying with her stepfather. He just grabbed her and threw her down.

"I don't want you. Get out of here!" she said. She didn't like him, and she chased him off. He left her alone that night.

The next day he got his spear, and the disobedient fellow tried to spear old man Imbanda. Luckily the old man didn't get speared—Johnson missed him. Then they restrained him.

"Leave it alone! Don't spear him! Forget it!" they told him. He calmed down.

Not long after that they took me down to Cape Bedford. I never heard how he finally got married to that woman. When I left the camp, he was still a single fellow.

One day when I was working down in Mossman—just in recent years—I got to wondering: how did old Johnson finally manage to marry Mary Ann? I asked Toby Gordon. He told me the whole story.

They were staying to the west at Cape Melville, right on the beach not far from the point. There's a fresh water spring there, and they used to camp near it. After a while they decided to shift camp over to the east side of the point. There used to be an old path there, and it's not far to walk around to the east.

They started to shift camp. All the adult men were walking along. They had spread out to look for game.

The ladies, too, were carrying their stuff around to the east side of the Cape. They walked and walked. Before they had reached the beach, that

girl Mary Ann—she was still unmarried at the time—stepped on a sharp stick. It lodged in her foot. She sat down and began to weep. She couldn't pull the stick out, and the other women started singing out for help.

Now old Johnson wasn't too far away from them. He heard them calling out, and he thought, "Maybe someone is trying to abduct our women."

So he called back, "Oooy!"

"Come here! Come here!"

He went north and found them. "What's wrong?"

"She has a stick lodged in her foot."

Johnson had a look. He pulled the stick out. He bound her legs, and then he just lifted her up. The old lady—her auntie—couldn't say anything about it. She couldn't stop him.

They continued east. He was carrying her on his shoulders. He said to her, "Look. Now you aren't going to leave me. Now you must stay with me." He was trying to cast a sort of spell on her.

When they got to the east side of the cape, he made himself his own house, separate from the rest of the camp. Old Imbanda and his wife couldn't say anything. They just left the matter that way. And from that time on, he kept that woman until he himself died, down in Yarrabah.

Other marriages contravened normal standards of propriety not because of incorrect kin relations, but because the forced relocation of Aboriginal people by government and mission authorities brought together strangers whose kinship relationship could not be easily reckoned. This happened to Barney Warner, a Barrow Point man who had gone as an adult to live at the Cape Bedford Mission. He had only one child, the product of a union with a widow whose tribal land was well to the south near Proserpine.

THE THIEF'S WIDOW

There was a man at Cape Bedford called **Marrbugan**, 'Cave'. Once he stole some tinned meat, which he had found on a white man's boat that used to be tied up at the old mission wharf. He was hungry, and he ate the meat.

Missionary Schwarz came to hear about the theft. He said, "Who ate that meat?"

Poor Marrbugan confessed. "I ate it," he admitted.

They wouldn't keep him on the mission after that. He had to be sent

away for stealing from that white man. Schwarz said to Marrbugan and his wife: "Go! Leave!"

About that time Barney Warner came up from Cooktown. He was working on boats all the time, and he passed through the mission camps on his way home.

Marrbugan asked him, "Where are you headed?"

"I'm going west to Barrow Point."

"I'd like to go with you," said Marrbugan. He was half sick, too. I think he had a guilty conscience, or maybe he was sick from eating that tinned meat.

Anyway, Missionary Schwarz approved the plan. He said to him, "Leave now. Go with Barney to his country."

So they set out. They headed north. The first night they camped at the McIvor River mouth. Marrbugan was feeling worse. Barney couldn't persuade him to stop there. "You stay here, and I'll go on by myself," he told him, but Marrbugan wanted to keep going.

They set out again and finally came to Cape Flattery. Marrbugan was really weak now. "Stay here," Barney told the sick man and his wife. "You're too sick to keep traveling." But he couldn't persuade them.

They shifted once more, traveling west now. They came to a place just to the east of Point Lookout. The beach is called **marramarranganh**. They camped there.

Marrbugan was very sick and also very hungry. Barney said to the woman: "You stay here and look after him. We need some food." He headed out fishing.

While Barney was fishing, poor old Marrbugan died. His wife went to call Barney. "Come," she said, "he has died."

Barney returned to camp and dug a grave for the dead man. They buried him right there. Barney wouldn't just leave him though. They stayed and waited by the grave for a long time. They camped there for several weeks. Finally, when they had mourned him long enough they had to decide what to do.

Marrbugan's wife was one of the people from the south, from the Marie Yamba Mission near Proserpine.⁸ Her name was Daisy.

Barney didn't want to take that woman with him to Barrow Point. He was afraid of what the other people would say. Why was he bringing a strange woman home with him? They would get angry. He couldn't run off with her himself.

"I think I'd better take her back," he decided. Off they went again to Cape Bedford.

Missionary Schwarz met them. "Barney. So you've come back again?"

"Yes, I have brought this woman back. Her husband died after all."

Schwarz must have thought they had been living together for a long time already. "Why didn't you just take her to your country in the west?"

"No, I brought her back."

Even the woman's kinsmen at the mission urged him to take her away with him. They were all George Bowen's⁹ people, from Proserpine. "Take her." They freely wanted to give her to him.

But all the Barrow Point people told him he couldn't marry her. "Leave her," they said.

He began to feel shame for having stayed with her. "Well, never mind," he thought, "I'll leave her."

After a while he set out again, alone, back to Barrow Point. He stayed there in the camps with us then.

That woman had a little girl, and later she married another man. George Marie Yamba his name was, from her own country down Bowen way. That little girl, Barney's daughter, was called Connie.

Connie went to school with the other girls at Cape Bedford until the missionary sent a big mob of them away to live at McIvor. That is where she died.



The Porcupine

Here's a story about porcupine.¹ I call it **arriyil**, and in Guugu Yimithirr they call it **balin.ga**. This story belongs to the beach south of Barrow Point. Bama used to hunt for porcupines near a big swamp just inland from there. I don't know if all those porcupines are still there. Maybe they've died out by now. (See Pl. 4.)

Some porcupines live in the soft ground near the swamps, but not in the water. People used to set bush fires near the swamps. They would walk over the burned country hunting for food. They could see where the porcupine had dug its cave. It would show up like a lump in the ground. Then they would dig out the animal and kill it for its meat.

Long ago porcupine used to be a human being, a woman. Porcupine-



Figure 8. Balin.ga hunting

girl was terribly disobedient. She wouldn't listen to anybody. We say *uyiin-mul*, 'no ears'. She used to go off by herself, walking all around, hunting.

Now this girl had a baby. She had to look after her child. Who knows if it was a boy child or a girl child?

When the baby grew, porcupine thought, "Well, this baby is a little bit bigger now. I can leave it with other people and let them take care of it. That way I can go off hunting on my own."

After that, she would go off every day hunting. She would leave her baby with someone else, and they would have to look after it for her.

Once, after the porcupine-woman had left it for a good while, the baby got hungry. The baby was crying. The people went out looking for the mother. They sang out to her, "Where are you? Your baby's hungry!"

She answered them from the south. "Here I am."

But when they went down to the place where she had answered, she wasn't there.



Figure 9. Balin.ga speared

They called out for her again. "Where are you?"

Again she answered, "I'm over here, to the east!"

They went looking to the east, but she wasn't there.

Now they called out to the north.

"Here I am."

"Come back. Your baby is crying for you."

When they went north to look, there wasn't a sign of her.

Finally they went to the west and called out for her. "Where are you?"

"Here I am."

They kept on like that following the sound of her voice, but they could never find her. The people began to get wild with her. They all went back to camp and picked up their spears. Once again they began to search for her.

She kept doing the same thing. She would call out from all sides, and the people would go around following the sound of her voice.

"I am over here."

But now they were getting closer to where she was calling out.

"Aha! Here she is!"

They took their spears, and they speared her properly. They speared

her and speared her. They left her totally covered with spears. Those same spears turned into her quills today.²

Now when you see porcupine walking around covered with spines, those are really bama's spears.

Nganyja

Aboriginal law defined proper behavior around powerful "story places." Large stones mark the earth oven at Jones's Gap where the Magpie brothers butchered and cooked the Devil Dingo. Roger Hart says that people would not pass too close to the spot. When they were nearby, they would remain silent, speaking if at all in hushed tones, anxious lest they attract the attention of the giant dog.

The boulders on the east side of Barrow Point were also avoided, probably because they concealed ancient graves. People walking that way would pass in silence. The custom was to throw leaves onto the path. Before starting up the mountain, people would break a few branches and carry them along, laying them down one by one as they passed silently over the crest of the hill.

On the range of mountains just inland from Cape Bowen was another sacred place, a bald spot surrounded by a small round scrub. As a child Roger Hart was taught that when a person from his tribe died, his or her spirit would travel first to that spot, atop the mountain at Cape Bowen, where it would rest for a time. Afterwards the spirit was said to fly north. "It didn't go up to heaven but to New Guinea."

A *yiirmbal*, or guardian spirit creature, was said to inhabit *Wurrnguulnyjin*, Noble Island, east of Cape Bowen.¹ This was a place that the old people told Roger one could not visit. Barrow Point canoes always stayed well to the south of the island when traveling along that coast.

BURIAL

Complex practices and ritual prohibitions surrounded the treatment of the dead. Roger Hart has particularly strong memories of this aspect of the Barrow Point life from his childhood. A newly deceased person would be buried under ground. After about a week the rest of the group

would dig the body up again and take it out of the grave. They would take off all the skin just as, in Roger Hart's comparison, one skins a scalded pig. They would also pull out all the hair, separating the hair from different areas of the body. This they would make into amulets, to pass on to the deceased's relatives.² The body prepared in this way was called *munun urdiiga* "[with] skin opened/removed."³ When they had finished cleaning the corpse, they would bury it again.

Once the body was fully decomposed, the dead person's relatives would collect the bones, especially those of the chest, the legs, and the head, leaving the other remains in the grave. They placed the selected bones in a bark trough, which they carried for several months as they shifted from camp to camp. Only after about six months of such care would they finally finish mourning the deceased and take the bones to a mountain cave to be hidden away permanently. The burial site was thereby rendered "sacred" or "taboo."

ETIQUETTE

Aboriginal law, even in the somewhat desperate social conditions of Barrow Point in the first part of this century, extended to realms of conduct more mundane than marriage rules and taboo places. Proper behavior was partly a matter of ways of talking: polite and impolite, respectful and insulting, angry and conciliatory. There were also rules about silence. Roger Hart's stories about life in the Barrow Point camps give glimpses of propriety and impropriety, about how people were supposed to comport themselves as well as how they actually did.

Alongside stories of spearings and physical violence, Roger remembers how old people dealt with verbal aggression. When the party of adults who had taken Roger to Cape Bedford Mission returned to their homeland without the little boy, one man in the camp became enraged over their decision to leave the boy behind.⁴ "Why leave a child with white people?" he shouted, picking up his spears.

Rather than respond, the rest of the adults simply sat in silence, saying nothing. Had they spoken, Roger thinks, they would have provoked the angry man to action, and he surely would have speared someone.

"That was the rule. If someone shouted at you, wanted you to fight and argue, you didn't give him an answer back. You stayed silent. Whoever spoke up would be speared straight away. Better to let the angry one talk and calm down."

Story telling in the camps was a formal affair, often with a single orator, whom Roger characterizes as "something like a preacher." While the

rest sat in the shade, one man would stand up and declaim. He would recount old spear fights, grudge or pay-back killings. He might pick up his own spear and wommera, acting out the events, showing how one protagonist hurled his spear, how another was hit or fell to the ground.

STORIES AND MISCHIEF

"One day Toby and I were digging in the ground behind the meeting place. One man was walking back and forth telling his story. He stepped backward without looking, and his heel caught on the edge of our hole. Down he tumbled.

"All the people jumped up then, wild with us, and they chased us down the beach."

Aboriginal Australia is celebrated for elaborate speech styles, including special vocabularies that were appropriate around people—especially certain in-laws—one had to treat with special respect.⁵ Nothing remains of any such avoidance vocabulary from the Barrow Point language, but Roger Hart describes the special etiquette that surrounded interaction with men or women who stood in a potential mother-in-law or father-in-law relationship.

"They never used to talk to in-laws. If I had to do an errand like take something to my brother-in-law or father-in-law, I couldn't take whatever it was—food or something—straight over to the person and just give it to him. I would have to go carefully, bent over, carrying it with both hands, and set it down near him. He would pick it up. Then I would back away, still bent over. That could be for someone like a sister's husband, a mother-in-law, or a sister-in-law.

"Suppose I were going to give him some tea. I would have to hold the billycan up with both hands and hand it over very carefully."

In the camps, even children were taught to identify and show deference to potential in-laws, the relatives of the people who could properly become their husbands or wives.

"Even with a namesake, *wurri-yi*,⁶ a person who shared my name, I had to do the same thing. He might ask me for tobacco. Well, I would hold it out to him with both hands and drop it into his hands without touching him. Sometimes you would take food to someone like that, but he would be facing away from you, facing north, say. You would set it down some distance away, to the south of him. When you went away, he could turn around from the north and pick it up.

"You had to respect such people. Even little children if they were

naked couldn't approach their taboo relatives; they had to cover themselves with their hands or put something around their waists."

Male initiation, which still survived in some form into the 1920s, was closely connected with story places. Initiation brought together all parts of Aboriginal law, from knowledge of territory and tradition, to social norms and marriage rules. Most vivid in Roger Hart's memory is the initiation linked to *Mungurru* 'Carpet Snake', which he saw at Cape Melville.

NGANYJA

The mountain at Cape Melville where the bones of *Mungurru* are scattered was worshipped by bama. That's where all the young men were brought to be initiated, to be made *thabul* or *awiyi* 'sacred'. It was something like a festival.

Many of the young men had returned from the boats, which stopped work during the Christmas monsoon season. All the camps gathered together. The old people decided that it was a good time to do the ceremonies and to initiate the youths.

I was in the camp then, just a little boy.

The elders went around the camp picking out the uninitiated men and boys. They couldn't refuse.

"No, no, I don't want to be initiated."

"Never mind, you come anyway," the elders would say.

They took married men who hadn't been through the ceremony yet. They also took young boys. Only when a boy's grandmother would come and put a little breast milk on his head, then they wouldn't touch him—he was too small then. They did put that milk on my head, so I wasn't taken, but maybe they took Banjo. I'm not sure. Toby and I were a bit smaller. I think their father had just died a short time before that—sometime in the early 1920s. I think perhaps Johnny Flinders⁷ and his older brother Diver were in that initiation, too.

They took all the boys, and they watched them closely. They were not allowed to eat any rubbish. If they drank honey, it had to be completely clean, strained of any bits of wax or other parts of the nest. They couldn't eat any eggs. When they were allowed to eat they could only take a little bit. The old people watched over them.

The initiates were not allowed to walk about. They couldn't visit their wives, if they were married.

We stayed in that camp for a long time, perhaps a month, and they watched over those boys the whole time. Then we shifted away from that place, heading south to Blackwater, near the turn-off that leads out to Eumangin on the beach. We set up camp there, north of the place they now call Billy's yard or Billy's paddock. That is a couple of miles from Cape Melville. Plenty of good water there.

They took all the new initiates there, too, although the rest of us were camped some distance away, apart from them. We weren't supposed to meet those young men, to look them in the face, or even to come close to them. They were *thabul*, you see. *Awurr awutha awiyi aamila* 'don't go to sacred ground'.

There were four or five old men there watching over the young men. One of those old men was *Ngamu Wuthurru*, and another was my father *Wanyjarringga*, but there were other elders, too, some from farther west, from Flinders Island or Princess Charlotte Bay. They built a special house near a small hill, digging a kind of pit in the ground all around. They kept the young men inside there. They used to go out to hunt and bring back meat. They would spear it, but they couldn't eat it.

The young men were not supposed to meet or talk to anyone: not their wives, not their children, not their relations. They were to stay well away from the rest of the camp for several months, even if the whole group shifted several times in the meantime. The ceremony might start in, say, January, and it wouldn't finish until March or April.

Well, I still remember one night. We were all lying down. It must have been about nine o'clock at night. The young men had their camp off to the east side, whereas our main camp was on the west side. We were asleep. My *mugagay* [senior uncle] Barney Warner was there, too. Maybe he was guarding the young men.

Suddenly I heard a loud noise. It was like an explosion, in the camp-fire over in their camp. It was just like dynamite or a cannon. BOOM! People started to run in all directions.

As soon as they heard the explosion, the old men knew that something was wrong. "Don't run," they said. They spread out and started checking all the young men. Who was it?

One fellow was missing, you see. He had sneaked away to visit his wife.

They went straight to where that woman was. When they found the missing man, let me tell you—they nearly speared him on the spot. If there had been a more ill-tempered leader among the elders, they would have put a spear straight into him for breaking the law. This time, though, they let it pass.

Later I asked Barney about it. He told me it was the *yiirmbal* of that

place that caused the explosion. He knew who the man was who had sneaked away, too. It was Nelson, the brother of Wathi—the same Nelson who died later at the mouth of the McIvor River.⁸ He had gone off to sleep with his wife, you know, and they nearly killed him for his misbehavior.

"Don't do that next time," they warned him. "Leave such things aside. That's bad. The spirit of this place caught you," they said.

They knew the giant Carpet Snake had caused the explosion. Its spirit saw him sneak away and knew he was doing the wrong thing. The people had great faith in that mountain.

They never used to have such initiations at Barrow Point. Instead they would wait until people from all the camps gathered together at Cape Melville. That was the right place for it, because of the Carpet Snake mountain there. But they wouldn't have the ceremony every year, only every ten or eleven years. They would wait until a number of boys were big enough to be made *thabul*.

After the explosion, they decided to shift camp again. They told the rest of us to go to Eumangin. They would come along afterwards. So we moved out to the coast and waited for them.

I don't know what they were making those young men do. I suppose they were teaching them how to behave: not to do this, not to do that, teaching them the law. They kept them away from women, taught them to marry only the right way.

After some time, one of the old men came with a message. "They'll be arriving here tomorrow," he said. This business of making them sacred—I am not sure if it was the same as *nganyja*⁹—was coming to an end. So we waited. Round about two o'clock another message came: they were on their way; they were just to the west.

Around four o'clock, we could hear their shouts as they approached. They were carrying a long piece of tea-tree bark, and they danced along shouting and crying out. They would stop and then start up again, shouting and dancing. We watched them as they approached the beach, coming down from the west.

The women were all happy. "Our husbands are coming back," they thought, "The hunters are returning!"

The piece of tea-tree bark that they carried was very long, tied together out of many smaller bits. It was painted white and yellow to represent the Carpet Snake. They had decorated it themselves, using different clays to make the colors. Another part was red. They were trying to copy the markings of Mungurru.

They kept coming to the east. They left that long tea-tree snake behind, then. They took up their spears and continued to approach, bran-

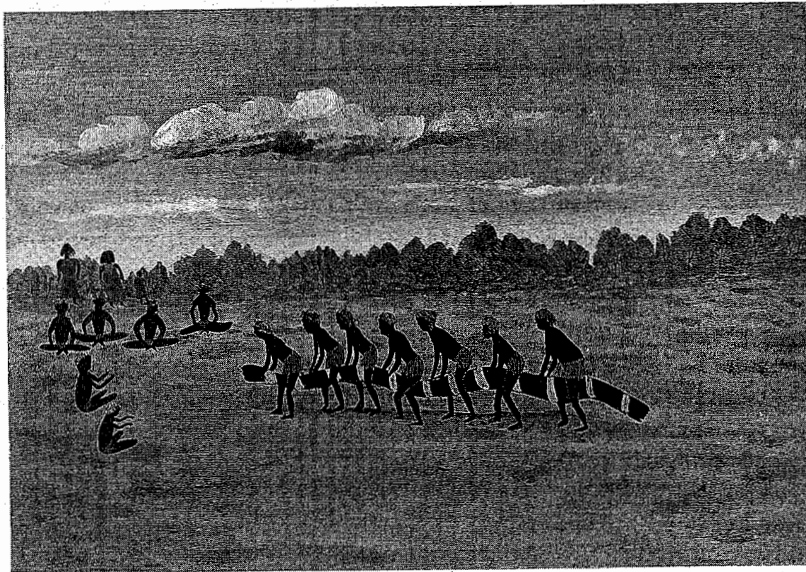


Figure 10. Men dancing at initiation

dishing them. They had grass spears, with tips of wax. When they reached the beach to the east, they split up into two groups, the **thuru** men on one side and the **walarr** men on the other.¹⁰ Then they had a kind of mock war. They speared and speared each other with their wax-tipped spears until finally they had had enough.

That was the end. They were finished now. They had been made sacred. They knew the law about proper behavior and marriage. They could all go home. Some waited for the boats to come and pick them up, to take them back out diving for trochus shell. Others headed back to Instone's place or to the other camps.

Of course, some of those boys never got married at all. They went out on the boats. They got sent away, who knows where. They might have ended up down in Cherbourg or somewhere else in the south. A lot of those boat crew were Japanese, living up at Thursday Island, and maybe some of the boat crew got taken away to Japan and died there. Other boys would come back to marry and would find that people from the west had come down and stolen away their sweethearts.

That's all the story I know.

Witches

Witchcraft and the fear of revenge by witchcraft were pervasive in north Queensland Aboriginal society in the early part of the century. Adults who came and went from the Cooktown area often took refuge in the "heathen" camps of non-Christian adults on the Cape Bedford mission reserve because they feared witches. "Well, a few of them old people were knocking around inside the mission boundary here. They used to go **dambun** [i.e., witch] one another," is how Roger Hart put it.

Revenge killings by witchcraft were often suspected many years after the events that gave rise to a grudge, and even in subsequent generations. Because native troopers took part in the abduction and murder of other Aborigines, they or their descendants were especially vulnerable to revenge. Several men in the Barrow Point camps worked as trackers for one Sgt. McGreen at the Laura police station, and they were implicated in the removal of people to penal settlements such as Palm Island. Later, according to Roger Hart, other people "knew they had been trackers and had sent many of their relatives away. Well, they couldn't catch that bloke [i.e., the tracker himself], so they turn around [and do something] to his children."

Roger Hart heard from old Mickey Bluetongue¹ one version of the events surrounding the death of old man Billy McGreen,² a native trooper originally from one of the Barrow Point clans. The events took place at Elderslie, a property on the McIvor River where a semipermanent Aboriginal camp lasted until the 1930s. McGreen, whose clan area was **Manyamarr**, south of Cape Bowen, had been involved in the arrest and deportation of many Aboriginal men and women. For example, in the late 1920s he was reported to have come across Charlie Burns³ while the latter was chopping honey at Glenrock, another property on the McIvor River. Long Billy offered him tobacco. When Burns approached, McGreen slipped handcuffs on the other man and delivered him to the police for "removal" to Palm Island for an offense that people now remember as cattle theft.⁴

Some years later, a group of people came up to the McIvor from another large Aboriginal camp at Flaggy on the Endeavour River with the express purpose of performing witchcraft on old Billy McGreen. They made a large fire and heated an iron bar in it. This bar was then magically used to cause McGreen's death.⁵ "But when they do that thing,

when they witch that bloke, you don't see anything on the person's body. It leaves no visible mark."

People from one area were often suspicious of people from others. They would be constantly on the lookout lest some strange enemy manage to slip them a dangerous substance or catch them with a spell. In the Guugu Yimithirr area, people from Barrow Point and elsewhere in the west were feared as potential witches. When they came to visit, the Barrow Point people camped separately from the others and kept separate food supplies and campfires. The late Peter Gibson, from Hopevale, recalled that as a young man he used to sneak across the mission boundary in order to visit the old people at the McIvor River, who would give him tobacco. On one visit he was invited by the Barrow Point people to have a drink of wild honey in a **bila**, or leaf cup. Afraid to drink their offering, Gibson followed the example of old man Fog: he poked a hole in the **bila** and pretended to finish the honey while secretly letting it all run out.

In the Barrow Point group itself there were several people known to be dangerous. The legendary Ngamu Wuthurru (Old Man of the Night) was already grizzled and ancient, with white hair and a full beard, before Roger Hart was taken to Cape Bedford.

All the people at Barrow Point used to get a bit nervy for him, because he had the habit of witching people. Barney Warner told me a story about him. It was after I had left the camp. A little girl had died at Iipwulin, and they had buried her. One day, some months after that, all the men were sitting around telling stories. Ngamu Wuthurru spoke up. The little girl was already in her grave.

He said, "I have killed many men. I have witched them. I started right down in the east. **Ugu imbay-ayu**. I killed this one. I killed one at **Thi-ithaarr** (Cape Bedford). Then I moved west. I killed another one at **Yuuru** (Cape Flattery). Then I killed another at **Thanhil** (Point Lookout). Then I moved along, farther and farther west. I killed another at **Galthanmugu** (Red Point), another at Wuuri (Cape Bowen). I have [magic] bones for killing people," he told them.

Well, they heard him bragging about witching people all the way from Cooktown to Barrow Point. Then they thought, "So, probably this old man was the one who killed that little girl."

They grabbed him. They took him south to the lagoon. Some started chopping wood. Others went hunting. One man had a flat iron bar, and he smashed Ngamu Wuthurru with it. The old man fell down.

Just at that moment there was a very loud noise. All the people were

frightened, so they left the old man there, right by the lagoon. Perhaps the spirit of that place caused an explosion, because they had tried to kill the old man. When they heard the noise, they all went running back to their camp, leaving Ngamu Wuthurru for dead.

They waited for a good long time, and then they ventured back to the lagoon to look for him. They found the place empty.

"Where has he gone?" they thought.

They started searching for him, all around there to the south. Finally their search took them back to the beach. The other people from the camp, who had been hunting, had heard the noise. "What was the explosion?" they asked.

"Well, we killed the old man there to the south, by the lagoon. Who knows what the noise was?"

They kept looking around. They were sure Ngamu Wuthurru must be dead, you see, because that metal bar had cut him deeply in the forehead. They blamed him for the death of the little girl.

But they hadn't killed him after all. By and by my father just happened upon that old witch, sitting down by himself, still alive.

"They tried to murder me," he said.

My father warned him. "You just go on and keep killing people! You'll see what happens to you then," he said.

But Ngamu Wuthurru didn't stop witching people. Many years later he was camped at **Muguulbigu**, north of where Hopevale is today. He went out hunting with old Norman Arrimi—Roy Dick's father.

They found some honey, and they came down to the creek at Billy Boil to mix it with water. The old man started to brag again. "I killed this fellow, and I killed that fellow, and then again I killed this other fellow."

His companion also got to thinking. "Aha, perhaps he's the one who killed my wife."

Arrimi grabbed his tommyhawk and planted it right in that old man's chest. He, too, left him for dead.

Then he went back to his camp. The other people asked him, "Where's that old man?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Who knows where he is?"

But the very next day, late in the afternoon, that old man appeared in camp again. "They tried to kill me," he said.

He must have had nine lives like a pussycat, I think.

In later years, when he was an extremely old man, Ngamu Wuthurru's exploits as a witch were still known to people living on the Cape Bedford mission. It was said that he could appear on a boat anchored off the

coast, causing crew members to choke in their sleep.⁶ He was also reputed to have had a wrestling match with King Jacko, of the Cape Bedford Reserve, after the latter had caught him trying to sneak up on the Bridge Creek camp, where many non-Christian adults lived.⁷

The Problem of 'Half-Caste' Children

When Roger Hart was a child, travel was the norm for Aboriginal people. The coastal camps had become refuges for people who claimed widely scattered areas as their own. Roger remembers that speakers of half a dozen different languages lived off and on in Barrow Point camps. Many of these people came from the north, but even Guugu Yimithirr speakers from far to the south, from Cooktown and the McIvor River, camped at Iipwulin. Roger's kinsmen from inland around Laura would walk across the Jack River, through Jones's Gap, and out to Wakooka and Barrow Point, visiting for weeks or even months before returning the way they had come.

Aborigines were driven to travel partly by a desire for European goods, such as tobacco, flour, metal tools, and blankets, which they could earn in exchange for work. They also responded to the rhythm of the seasons. In the winter months, when the weather was fine, people would live on the coast, fishing and hunting. When the rainy season was upon them, from January to June, they would head inland, chopping honey, hunting bandicoots, perhaps picking up a few dingo pups, and settling in areas around Wakooka, Tanglefoot, and the Pinnacle Range. As the weather permitted, they would return to their coastal camps, coming again into contact with settlers like Instone or Hart and the ubiquitous Japanese fishing boats.

In the first two decades of this century the missions and the government, under the auspices of the protectors of Aborigines and their enforcement arm, the native police, took an ever widening interest in regulating—and ultimately eliminating—Aboriginal camp life. By the time Roger was a child, the people at Barrow Point actively avoided areas where they ran the risk either of violence or of being "removed" to penal settlements in the south. When King Nicholas, the government-appointed spokesman for the Barrow Point camps, would return from

work at Instone's place with news of impending police visits, in Roger's words "bama [would] just roll up [their swags] and get away." Native trooper Chookie McGreen, Roger's maternal kinsman, worked as a tracker for the Laura police station. Although he was careful to warn his relatives of impending raids, so that the Barrow Point children would not be removed from their parents, several children from Cape Melville were nonetheless taken away in the 1910s.

Ironically, life was freer and more secure for Aboriginal men and women who worked for European settlers than for those who remained in bush camps. Nonetheless, living in proximity to white people was fraught with other dangers. People who set up camp with their families on European properties exposed themselves to the whims of their landlords. The Wallace brothers, long-time property owners at the McIvor, were notorious for flogging Aborigines, both men and women, who were caught hunting honey or game and "unsettling" the cattle. Although their children were less likely than those living "wild" in the bush to be sent away to reformatories, Aboriginal parents living under the "protection" of European landlords were liable to have their children abused in other ways.

The clearest evidence of the interactions between Aborigines and the foreign invaders of their territory is indirect: the proliferation of part Aboriginal children, called in the parlance of the time "half-castes."¹ Government policy had long considered the very existence of such children not only a problem but an embarrassment. As early as 1896, the northern protector of Aborigines, Archibald Meston, in a report on Aboriginal conditions in Queensland, viewed the circumstances with alarm. He wrote that "freedom for the [Aboriginal] women to come and go when and where they please will ensure a permanent increase of half-caste population."²

Northern Protector of Aborigines Roth's 1899 report described what he regarded as a common practice, infanticide of light-skinned children born to Aboriginal mothers. He outlined plans to improve the situation, essentially by abducting children—especially part Aboriginal and female children—and placing them in institutions.

It is . . . quite within the realms of possibility that when once the blacks can be made to understand the intentions of the Government in making provisions for these waifs, this form of infanticide will cease. The little girls have especially claimed my active and earnest solicitude, and arrangements continue to be made for their removal to different Mission Stations. My recommenda-

tions . . . are not necessarily made on account of present ill-treatment, etc., but only for the future welfare, care and happiness of the children themselves. It is far better to know that all such are ultimately legally married and protected by the missionaries, and through them by the State, than to realise that as soon as they get old enough to be tampered with by unscrupulous whites—the present normal condition of things—they are sent back into their camps as bad girls and left there to ultimate disease and ruin. My efforts to ameliorate the condition of the little true-blooded girls lie in a similar direction.³

In his 1901 report, Roth bluntly assessed the future of part Aboriginal children.

Half caste children should enlist our sympathies perhaps even to a greater extent than the full-blood ones. If left to themselves the majority of the girl half castes ultimately become prostitutes, and the boys cattle and horse thieves.⁴

In some parts of Queensland part-Aboriginal children were especially sought after as domestic servants, prompting Roth to further observations.

As no inconsiderable animus appears to have been unwarrantably raised among certain sections of the public over my action in advising the transfer of half-caste and true-blooded children from the hands of private employers to the various Mission Stations and Reformatories, it may be as well to state here that all action . . . has invariably been with a view to carrying out . . . the spirit of the law . . . My chief aim is to ensure the future welfare and happiness of the children themselves . . . As things are at present, the majority of these female children are engaged mostly as nurse-girls, kept in a false position by being brought up as “one of the family”—a fact which will probably account for their receiving no regular wages—and when they get into trouble are no longer wanted, but packed off to shift for themselves as best they can.⁵

Exactly such a case almost a decade later can be inferred from correspondence, dated 20 April 1910, between the chief protector of Aborigines in Brisbane and the Cooktown protector of Aborigines, Sgt. Bod-

man. Bodman requested a removal order for a half-caste woman who was in the employ of a Mrs. Gorton, on the McIvor River.

She has a half-caste girl since she was 4 years of age . . . given to her by Dr Roth. This girl is now seventeen years of age . . . She is now in the family way and expects to be confined very shortly. This half-caste will not say who the father is. Mrs Gorton is very anxious that this half caste should be sent to Yarrabah [an Anglican mission station outside of Cairns] as soon as possible.⁶

“WAIFS AND STRAYS”

At the turn of the century, Roth had envisioned that missions and reformatories should be special refuges that would offer practical training to Aboriginal children, especially those of mixed ancestry.

Many employers have screened themselves behind the 4th section of the Act, which does not deem to be ‘aboriginals’ those half-castes who . . . were not living or associating with aborigines as children . . . I was obliged to have recourse to the Reformatories Act; without the latter I could have claimed no rights whatsoever for these little waifs and strays . . . The State takes upon itself the responsibility—a serious one, to my mind—of taking such children from their aboriginal environments, but at the same time hands them over to the various Mission Stations which are now under direct Government supervision and control.⁷

The Cape Bedford Mission, where Roger Hart was destined to land, was one of the mission stations Roth had begun to use to implement his plans. Missionary Schwarz had for many years refused to accept the “waifs and strays” that the protectors of Aborigines wanted to send his way, hoping instead to insulate the small population of newly Lutheran Aborigines from evil outside influences, both black and white.

Circumstances conspired to force him to change his policy. First, the sister Lutheran mission on the Bloomfield River, south of Cooktown, ran into serious difficulties, including the birth of a light-skinned child whose mother was a Christianized mission inmate and whose self-confessed father was a European mission worker.⁸ Ultimately both mother and child were banished to Cape Bedford, obliging Rev. Schwarz to accept at least one locally produced part-European child onto the mission.

Second, the failure of the Lutheran Marie Yamba Mission near Proserpine just at the turn of the century meant that a large group of Aborigines from the Bowen area was also sent to Cape Bedford. Some of these people were part-European, and one of them grew up to be an important leader at Cape Bedford who later established a large and influential family.⁹

Several other light-skinned children whose treatment in the bush brought them to the attention of the local Cooktown authorities also found their way to the Cape Bedford Mission, sometimes as a result of direct petition from their Aboriginal parents who preferred to deposit them with Missionary Schwarz than to leave them on the "outside."¹⁰ Archival sources document the case of Dora, the woman who was later to become Roger Hart's mother-in-law.

DORA, DAUGHTER OF MATYI THE RAINMAKER

Rev. G. H. Schwarz, the missionary at Cape Bedford, maintained cordial relations with the first northern protector of Aborigines, Dr. Walter E. Roth.¹¹ In February 1902, Schwarz wrote to Roth shortly after the protector had visited Cape Bedford. In his letter Schwarz mentions that he hopes to get a few new children for the Hope Valley school from surrounding tribes, especially the group of Aborigines living on the McIvor River. He goes on:

That half caste among them, a girl about ten years of age, of whom I was speaking to you is still in the camp. Her relations do not want to leave her here, but it is a pity to see her grow up in the camp. Could you not have her removed to Yarrabah?¹² It would be good for her if she could be taken away soon. Her mother's husband is Matyi, the rainmaker among the McIvor blacks.¹³

This casual mention comes in the first letter of an extensive file among the records of the northern protector of Aborigines. The file relates to the official disposition of the girl Dora, who eventually was taken to the Cape Bedford Mission, went to school there, married, and raised four children, including one daughter who later became Roger Hart's wife.

Within a week of receiving Schwarz's letter the northern protector of Aborigines had written to the undersecretary for Home Affairs asking for "authority to have this child brought before the Cooktown bench as a neglected child and sent to the Yarrabah reformatory."¹⁴ Shortly thereafter, Roth instructed the Cooktown police to arrange for Dora's re-

moval, suggesting that Rev. Schwarz could give them more information about the girl's whereabouts. There followed several months of wrangling while Constable Kenny of Cooktown tried to take the girl from a settler named Charles Wallace, who held her at Glenrock, his property on the McIvor River.

The first attempt to remove the little girl was on 23 June 1902. Constable Kenny reported calling at Glenrock where he had heard that the girl "has been employed occasionally." His description in dry police prose continues:

The constable informed Wallace that he was instructed to take the half caste and send her to the reformatory at Yarrabah. Mr. Wallace at once sent her inside and shut the doors as she was on the verandah at the time. He then informed the constable that she could only be taken by force as he would not consent to give her up, as she was given them by her parents and he intended to fight it out. The constable then took no further steps but informed Mr Wallace that he would notify his superior officers with whom he Mr Wallace would have to deal in future.¹⁵

In a subsequent note, Kenny explained that Wallace had applied for an official permit to employ the little girl the preceding February, but that shortly thereafter the girl had run away from Glenrock and no permit had been issued.¹⁶

For his part, Charles Wallace wrote directly to the home secretary asking to be allowed to keep the girl.

I am writing to you in reference to a half caste gin. Constable Kenny came out to my place and wanted to take her away. I objected to him doing so until he shewed me some authority for doing so. I know myself that it is the law that they shall all be taken from the blacks, but the facts of the case are this: that the father and mother of this gin brought her in to my place and begged of my wife to take her and keep her. I may also tell you I have a half caste boy from the same tribe and have had him ever since he was a baby, and he is about 10 years old. The mother has just about died, and makes me promise I would look after the boy. How that promise has been carried out can largely be ascertained if you wish to make any enquiries. I am sending him in a p[ri]mary school here with my own two children. . . The gin herself does not want to leave.¹⁷

Although Wallace was notorious then (as today in people's memories) for mistreating the Aborigines who lived on or near his property, he portrayed his relationship with them in a positive light.

Dr. Roth¹⁸ can also if he wishes inform you of the treatment my wife would be likely to give any child, although he and myself had a misunderstanding over blacks, I am quite certain he is too much of a gentleman to stoop to saying anything false on that account. I can't understand why this particular gin has been singled out to you when there are many others employed by my neighbours about the same age, and who haven't been taken . . . You must have been led to believe she was still with the tribe. She is perfectly contented and happy. I think you will see she does not wish to be forced away against her own parents' wishes . . . She and my children have become very much attached to each other and I don't like to part with them.¹⁹

Because of the settler's protests and complaints it was not until August of the same year that official moves were again taken to have the girl Dora removed to Yarrabah. The protector of Aborigines was by this time considering legal action against Wallace, basing his position on a further detailed report furnished by Constable Kenny:

The constable reports the half caste above alluded to has been known to him for the past four years and during that time she has been in the blacks' camp until recently. Her mother belongs to the tribe known as the Binjouwara²⁰ and about fifteen months ago a young black from a neighbouring tribe was desirous of annexing her according to their custom. This the parent objected to and the tribe to which the black belonged being the stronger of the two the parents became alarmed that their girl would be taken by force. As a result she was taken and placed for protection in Mr. Gorton's care where she remained a short time until the feud had been settled, when she again returned to her tribe, at this time camped at McIvor River near Mr Wallace's, and at whose place the Constable next saw her. Mr Wallace informed him, the Constable, that the parents have given the half caste to him and he applied in the usual way for a permit. The blacks however told the constable that Mr Wallace had given the parents a bag of flour for the half caste. The constable at that time was on his way to the Starcke goldfield, and on his return he

called at Mrs Wallace and [she] informed him that the half-caste Dora had ran [sic] away, and asked the constable to bring her back and caution the blacks not to keep her. This the constable refused and informed Mrs Wallace that it was no use forcing half-caste into agreement if she was not willing to stop with her. This took place at the end of February of this year 1902. Some time afterwards the constable learned that Mr Wallace had brought the half caste back and was subsequently informed by a European that she had again ran away, which she did several times, and each time Mr Wallace brought her back. On the 23rd of June 1902 the constable called at Mr Wallace's and at the same time read a communication to him which he the constable had received through his inspector, instructing him that the minister had authorized the removal of the half caste to the Yarrabah Mission Station. Wallace refused to give her up, telling the constable that she would have to be taken by force, the authority was not sufficient, and in any case he intended to fight it out and see whether the half-caste could be taken from him or not. Shortly after Wallace again applied for a permit to employ the half caste Dora which was objected to by the police and refused by the protector. The only thing known about Mr Wallace in his dealing with the blacks is a complaint by the blacks in May '99 when they informed the constable that Mr Wallace had used the stock whip upon them, and threatened to shoot them if they did not keep away from his cattle, many of which were running on the Aboriginal Reserve at the time.²¹ The constable told the boys to inform Dr Roth. As regards Mr Wallace himself, he is an old resident of this district, and so far has no police record against him. Although his actions at times are not above suspicion. As regards to the home, she would be far better off at Yarrabah, where she would be removed from the immediate vicinity of her tribe and the influence which the tribe and parents would exercise over her, in spite of all Mr Wallace's care and vigilance, and furthermore she has shewn by repeatedly absconding that she is not by any means content to remain in the employ of Mr Wallace.²²

Roth, commenting on Kenny's report, writes that "on my way out to Cape Bedford I came across Dora's father, Matyi 'the rainmaker' who told me also that Wallace had bought the girl for a bag of flour some sugar and tobacco, and that he had seen her on a chain."²³

In September 1902 the Home Office again issued orders that Dora be

taken from Glenrock and removed to Yarrabah. Wallace continued to protest that he was being unfairly singled out since "there are other half castes about here."²⁴

In October 1902, Constable Kenny reported that Dora had again run away from Glenrock. Her tribe had taken her to Cape Bedford and asked Rev. Schwarz to keep her.²⁵ There followed a further wrangle in which Wallace accused the police constable of having threatened Matyi with deportation unless he handed his stepdaughter Dora over to the authorities.²⁶ Kenny answered Wallace's charges in a subsequent report.

The last time the Constable saw Matyi, father of the half-caste Dora prior to her [removal . . .] to the Mission station by the blacks, the constable was accompanied by Dr Roth and the Rev Schwarz. Matyi then complained to those gentlemen that his child had been ill-treated by Mr Wallace. This statement Dora herself amply bore out when recently interviewed by the Constable at the Cape Bedford Mission School. The blacks themselves without any threat or inducement from the Constable took the half caste Dora to the Mission Station and entreated the Rev Schwarz to take the child and keep her. This the Rev Schwarz told the blacks he could not do. The blacks however went away and left the child at the station. Rev Schwarz then sent word informing the Constable of the fact. The Constable then wired Dr Roth for advice. That gentleman gave his sanction for Dora to remain at Cape Bedford.²⁷

Despite Wallace's later complaint that Dora was put to work "doing housework at the Cape Bedford Mission station if what the blacks tell me is true,"²⁸ the little girl was allowed to stay at Cape Bedford. Some years later she married one of the mixed-descent young men who had come from the failed Marie Yamba Mission, a man from the Bowen area. Dora's children, in turn, all married people with non-Aboriginal ancestry. Her daughter Maudie married Roger Hart shortly before the Second World War.

By the end of the first decade of the century, its difficult financial situation obliged the Cape Bedford mission to accept several more waves of removals, including many children with mixed parentage, in order to guarantee continued government support. After several years at the mission, a group of "removed" children was baptized at Cape Bedford at Easter 1916, prompting Dr. Theile, the president of the Lutheran Church

of Australia at the time, to offer the following thoughts about the "so-called 'neglected children'" who had come to Cape Bedford from all over Queensland.

Most spoke good English when they came, which made schooling easier for them. Nonetheless some came directly from an Aboriginal camp and spoke not a word of English, but only their own tongues. For them the first few weeks on the station were difficult; for example three girls came from the west coast;²⁹ they knew not a word of English; they were not at all clean, and they had sore eyes and therefore hung dirty handkerchiefs over their heads, so as to look as becoming as they could. They soon learned that they were among friends and eventually joined in the play of the other children. It made one think of the 137th Psalm. It wasn't long before homesickness and homeland were forgotten and they were as happy and cheerful as the other children. What surprised me most was the speed with which they learned English. They were not full-Aborigines: one had a Japanese father, others had South Sea-Islanders as fathers. In fact, of the seventeen girls [baptized on this occasion], eleven were half-castes. But now they have all found their true home. Whatever their descent they have found their Saviour.³⁰

Many of the children sent to Cape Bedford in the first decade of the century came from distant areas of Queensland, ranging from the northern tip of Cape York Peninsula to places as far south as Stonehenge.³¹ At Cape Bedford they joined a community mostly derived from survivors of local Aboriginal groups from Cooktown, Cape Bedford, and the McIvor River. By the 1910s, however, children from the Cooktown hinterlands began to be sent to missions and settlements at an ever increasing pace, starting with children of mixed ancestry and gradually extending to any children caught in the bush.

Children from Roger Hart's people farther to the north were not spared. Four girls whose biological fathers were non-Aboriginal were removed from Cape Melville to Yarrabah in 1916, and another boy, their brother the late Bob Flinders, was taken from Cape Melville to Laura in 1918 and sent on to Cape Bedford the following year.³² Roger Hart had faint memories of a visit to Laura Station with his mother in 1919, watching as Bob was taken away to Cooktown on the train.

From Barrow Point to Cape Bedford

Roger Hart escaped abduction by native troopers. It was his own relatives who in the end gave him up to the care of the missionaries. (See Pl. 5.)

Roger's mother was called Alice in English. Her Aboriginal name, as recalled by the old people of Cape Bedford, was *Tharrwiilnda*. Her tribal country was Muunhthi, an area around the source of the Jack River. Her life was typical of many young women of her time: moving from place to place, abducted by a succession of men, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

Roger's mother was still a young, unmarried woman when she first came to the Wakooka area in the company of her brothers,¹ who worked for Maurice Hart at Wakooka Station. A large group of Aboriginal people from the region would camp near Wakooka at that time. People were on the move, arriving at the coastal camps and nearby properties from all directions, then moving on. As Roger put it, "young-fellow-galaaygu"—'young people were like that'—in those days.

When Roger was born around 1916, his mother's husband was Charlie Lefthander, a claimant of the Gambiilmugu-warra mob from Barrow Point. The family moved between the old man's home base at Ninian Bay and other camps in the region. It is from his Aboriginal father that Roger derives his Barrow Point tribal affiliation.

As a boy Roger also had sporadic contact with his mother's relatives. He remembers, for example, a long canoe trip with his mother's father, along with another old man called German Harry, or *Wujilwujil*,² who took the boy all the way to Flinders Island and then down to Lakefield, where German Harry had a second wife.

When Roger was just a child, his mother was abducted by old man Wathi, Billy Salt, from the clan known as Wuuri-warra. A group of people from Barrow Point, including his mother, had gone to Laura "to get a bit of a smoke." Roger, who was a lad of no more than six, had stayed behind at Iipwulin, as had his father, "taking care of me, I think." His mother had intended to visit kinsmen in Laura. She never returned. Roger later learned that Billy Salt had stolen her away from Laura and taken her south, as far as Innisfail, and later back to Mossman.

"THE LAST TIME I SEEN THEM, AND NO MORE"

After his mother left Barrow Point, Roger's Aboriginal father began to find the presence in the camp of a small, motherless, light-skinned child to be more and more of a problem.³ Native troopers had blanket authority to raid camps where part-European children were to be found and to take these children away by force. It was known that several light-skinned children had been picked up from Cape Melville and taken away to mission stations farther south. Some of the Barrow Point people were already planning a visit down the coast to the Lutheran mission at Cape Bedford, just north of Cooktown, in search of government rations. A decision was made to take the little boy along and leave him there. It was around 1923.

Roger's account of the trek south is a jumble of images, with many gaps and chronological twists. It is a dramatic and heart-wrenching tale, one well known to the people of the Cape Bedford community. A large group including Roger's Aboriginal father and several of the boy's playmates set out toward the south.

"We kept coming down the coast from the west. We didn't walk straight through. We would camp for a few days, might be two nights, and then off again; then another two nights a little farther on, and off again. Sometimes we'd jump into our dugouts, when it was rough country. When there was good beach, we would walk instead."

Roger had no idea why his tribe was taking him away. Even now his understanding of their motives is filled with ambivalence. "You see they wanted to get rid of me," he says, thinking of the native police who preyed on camps where part-European children were known to reside.

"I didn't know they were taking me to Cape Bedford you see. I heard that old fellow [his Aboriginal father] saying to me, '*Nhanu walaarbi wuthinhu nagaar*,' I'm going to give you to the Beard there to the east.⁴ Well, I couldn't understand what he was meaning."

On this trip, Roger Hart ventured farther from home than he had ever been before. They reached Cape Bowen, where he had camped once in a cave, but rather than turning back they continued down the coast.

"We stayed at Cape Bowen, camping for a few days. Then one morning we set out further east . . . We left the coast and traveled inland, I don't know how many days and nights, until we reached the Jeannie River, not far from the lagoon where Wurrey caught all the fish in his net. We went downriver in our canoes and kept on traveling down the coast.

"That is when they told me they were going to leave me with the white man, the *walarr* 'beard'. That's what they called the missionary at

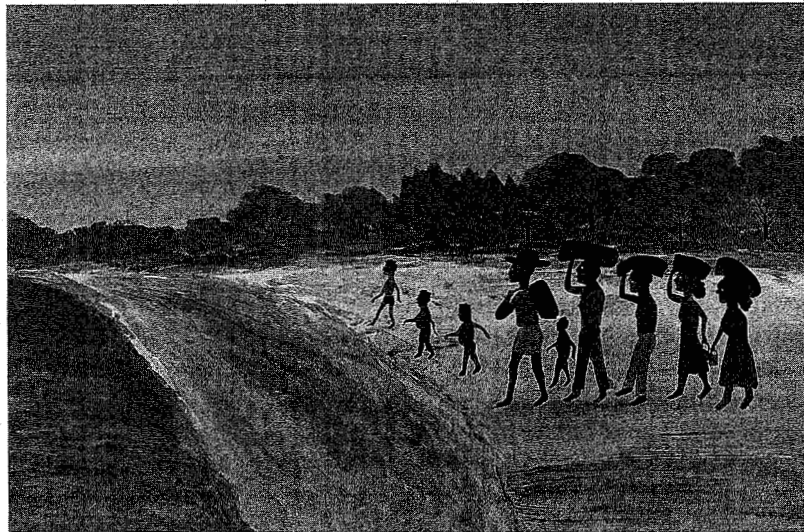


Figure 11. Setting out with Roger

Cape Bedford, although I didn't understand them at that time. The kids started teasing me about it, and then the adults, too. They were all making fun of me. I thought they were joking. But I didn't cry about it until later, not until they finally left me at the mission."

The Barrow Point group passed through several large Aboriginal camps, first at Starcke, then on the McIvor River, where established groups of Aborigines lived near white settlers' properties. Roger met some of the children he was later to know at the mission.

"We stayed in the camp at Glenrock, on the McIvor. A big mob of Barrow Point people stayed there, but there were a lot of strangers, too. I was playing around with the kids. I remember Tom Charlie⁵ and some others. But I was older than they were, see? They were a bit smaller."

At the same camp were several old men of the Cooktown tribes who mediated relations with the German missionary, Rev. Schwarz—known as **Muuni** 'black' in Guugu Yimithirr. These elders urged the Barrow Point people to deliver Roger to this man, known for his flowing white beard.

Ultimately Roger went to Cape Bedford with his father and one of the local elders, old man **Gun.gunbi**.

"When I saw Mr. **Muuni**, I was frightened of his beard, see?" Roger refused to move into the boys' dormitory, as the missionary instructed.

"I wouldn't go."



Figure 12. Roger tied up by his father

Instead, after staying at the mission only two days, Roger accompanied the adults back to the camps. The Barrow Point people remained for several months in the mixed, shifting communities of Aborigines who alternately squatted on the fringes of white settlement and led a more traditional life in bush areas around the McIvor River.

"We used to stay at the property called Flagstaff, on the north side of the McIvor River. I used to go over to the south side to **Buga Thabaga**. That's where **Dabunhthin**⁶ lived. I would visit the camp there."

Missionary Schwarz did not forget about the little light-skinned boy, however, and he soon sent orders that Roger be returned to Cape Bedford to attend school.

"After a time, word came again. Schwarz asked, 'Where's that little boy gone?'

"'Oh, he's west at Glenrock.'

"'Bring him back, then.'

"It was old man Arthur, Willie Mt. Webb's father.⁷ He came up to the McIvor with orders from Schwarz.

"'Hey, that little boy is wanted to the east. Better take him back.'"

Accordingly, Roger's father and some of his tribesmen went back to the mission station at Cape Bedford and handed the boy over to Mr.

Muuni. The missionary tried again to persuade the child to stay in the dormitory, where there were other part-European children his age.

"Schwarz said, 'All right, take him to the dormitory.' Leo Rosendale and Bob Flinders⁸ came to take me, but I didn't want to go with them. I was frightened, and they didn't know my language. I didn't know English."

Schwarz dispatched the terrified little boy, with his father, to the wooden hospital building, at the edge of the mission settlement, where there was a large plantation of sisal hemp bushes. This time his father made sure Roger would not try to follow him back to the camps.

"We went south to the old hospital. My old man said, 'Come here.' He went off to the west and started breaking some sisal hemp shoots. Well, I didn't know what he was breaking them for. He took the shoots back east and sat down on the verandah. Then he started teasing the fibers, breaking the sisal hemp into strips. I was just sitting down there. I didn't know what was going on. He was making a rope.

"Suddenly he grabbed me. He tied my legs, and he tied my arms. He lifted me up. He put me inside the old hospital building, and he locked the door."

With Roger safely locked in the wooden hospital building, his Aboriginal father and the other Barrow Point men left Cape Bedford. The little boy, abandoned by his tribe and family in a Lutheran mission hundreds of kilometers from his home, with no near kinsmen and no one with whom to speak his language, was not to see his birthplace or return to the camps of his childhood for more than sixty years.

A Sunset Glow

Forced deportation of people from their Aboriginal homelands, children of mixed-ancestry, violent encounters between Aboriginal owners of the land and European and Asian invaders—all suggest the tumultuous and fragmented state of Aboriginal life during Roger Hart's childhood. Europeans in this period uniformly believed that the native people were destined for extinction, and in fact the same view had already been expressed decades before. Johannes Flierl, the Bavarian missionary who

had founded the Cape Bedford Mission in 1886, wrote in his 1898 report on the progress of the tiny community:

In our work in Elim and Hope Valley we ministered to the few people who represent the remnants of tribes which are dying . . . All the mission can really achieve for them is a kind of Christian burial service, a kind of promising sunset glow, which cannot be followed by any bright dawn in this life here on earth . . . Mission work is hard and not very rewarding, but it is sufficient to know, that we have at least some success in lighting the way to extinction with the guiding torch of God's Glad Tidings.¹

Nearly thirty years later, a few years after Roger Hart's Barrow Point childhood had been supplanted by a Lutheran education at Cape Bedford, the social Darwinist confidence of the first years of contact between Aborigines and a European population convinced of its natural superiority had been somewhat tempered by a clearer, if still fatalistic view of the circumstances local Aborigines faced. Mission Director Theile described the camps nearby the mission in 1926 in the following terms:

When 40 years ago the work amongst the natives of the Cooktown district was begun the Lutheran Mission had around it a large population of fullblood Aborigines. Today the situation is totally different. Rev Schwarz says where today there are 10 natives there were 100 forty years ago. I.e., for the 200 under influence of the mission today there were then 2000, and the 200 of today are about two thirds full bloods and one third half castes. The Aborigines as a people, as a nation, are dying out . . . there are still a few small camps of blacks to be found . . . but their ancient customs are gone, their old-time worship has vanished, and whatever moral force was contained therein has also gone. Hangers-on they are to the various cattle stations and small towns, campbummers, pitiable creatures . . . The white race has not dealt fairly with them, and as it has usurped the land which was the birthright of the Aboriginal, it has robbed them of self-respect, of manliness and of moral standing.

They have no fixed place of abode; as nomads they roam about the bush, or they live semi-permanently near a township or a cattle station, sometimes working, sometimes hunting. Station owners and residents of townships and small towns rather

like such a camp of natives near by, it affords them opportunities of obtaining cheap labor—and the numbers of half-white children are proof of other uses these poor people are put to. The King of the McIvor blacks had two wives, he had no children of his own; his wives had three half-caste sons who are now under the care of Hope Valley Mission. The king, his wives, his tribe, all are dead. King Jacko² a few years ago decided to settle on the Mission Reserve, he brought along about forty to sixty people. They had six half-caste children among them. On the Mission there are half-Europeans, half-Japanese, half-Malayan!³

The Cape Bedford Mission Station became a last refuge for many Aboriginal groups. The Cooktown language, Guugu Yimithirr, was by default the *lingua franca* of the community, spoken by traditional owners, Aborigines from elsewhere, and missionary alike.⁴ Guugu Yimithirr to a large extent supplanted other Aboriginal languages spoken farther away, such as Roger Hart's native Barrow Point language. Although small groups of Aborigines continued to live in independent camps both on and off mission territory until the Second World War, only the Lutheran enclave at Cape Bedford permitted continuity of social life for most Aborigines in the Cooktown hinterlands.

The Scrub Python at Cape Melville

This is a story about *Thuurrga*, the Scrub Python. Guugu Yimithirr people call him Mungurru. His story starts at **Manyamarr**. This Scrub Python used to have his camp there, on the top of the mountain range just above Cape Bowen.¹ There is a mountain there that looks red in the afternoon sun. As a boy, I once camped in a cave on that mountain called *wundal uyiirr*—a place filled with rats. Near there was Scrub Python's camp.

Scrub Python would lie about in the day. At night he would crawl down from the mountain and hunt for food. In the morning when he woke up he would climb back up the mountain. There he would stretch out again in the sun.

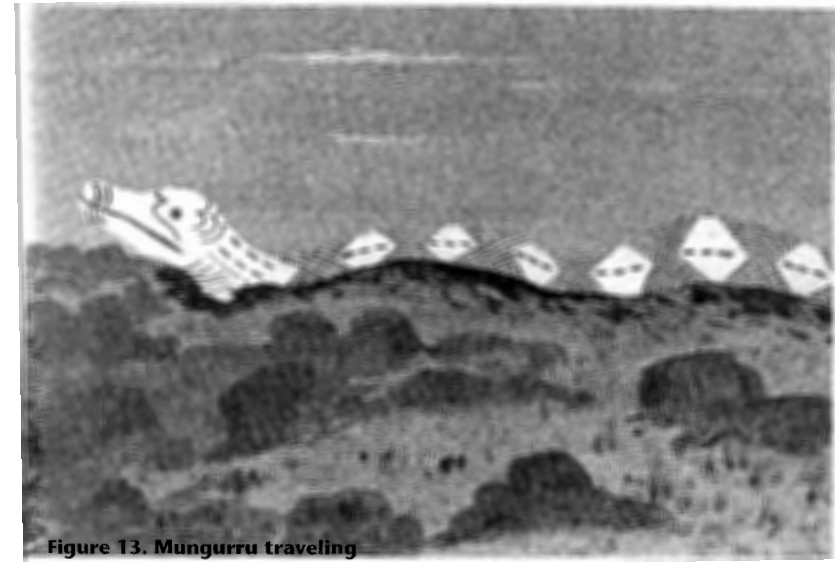


Figure 13. Mungurru traveling

By and by, along came **Gujal**, the Eaglehawk. He started to annoy python by pecking at him. Poor python's skin began to get sore from all Eaglehawk's pecking. He began to ache all over.

Finally Scrub Python made up his mind to move. He descended from the mountain top. He crawled right under the earth, to escape his tormentor. He headed north, moving underground. He kept going north, kept going and going.

At last he poked his head up to look around. There's a little black mountain there, all alone, north of Wakooka, near the Mack River. That's where his head came out.

Well, he ducked down under ground again and kept going. He poked his head up again a little farther north. By now, his body was sick all over. When he came up out of the ground at Cape Melville, he could go no farther. His head was pointing north, out to sea, and his body was stretched out behind. By now he was dead tired and sick. There he died, with his head lying in the water to the north.

Up came flocks of little birds. There was Scrub Python, stretched out, dead. The birds began to eat his flesh. They pecked and pecked at his body. They stripped his bones clean. (See Pl. 6.)

BARROW POINT

Those bones little by little turned to stone. The sun burned them, turned them hard. There they remain to this day. People say that's the **guurrbi**, the sacred place of the Scrub Python. It belongs to Barrow Point people, to Cape Melville people, and to Bathurst Head people. The final resting place of that python became the initiation ground for all those tribes.²



Part Three
DIASPORA