

Published legends of Aboriginal people in the Milparinka area.



The Rainbow Serpent. Artwork by Shane Bates

Content:

The Story of Crow and Eaglehawk

Kalthi

Legend of the Koonenbury Range

The legend of the blood-red flowers: Sturt's Desert Pea

The two rainbow serpents: original texts

The seven sisters of the sky

The Story of Crow and Eaglehawk

Waku the Crow was camping with Pilyara, the Eaglehawk, and Eaglehawk's son who was also called Eaglehawk. I don't know how that was. [They were camping near Mutawinji]. The old fellow [Eaglehawk] was away hunting. Crow was sitting by the fire. The boy came up with a bandicoot he'd just killed. Waku said, 'My son, that's you!' It was funny calling the boy son and the Bilyara cousin. 'Nyi,' said the young feller and started cooking the bandicoot.

When it was cooked he pulled it out. The old Waku said to him, 'Give us a bit of the liver son?' 'No, my father's spear might slip.'

The boy goes down to the river to have a drink of water. When he comes back from the water the old Crow sings out to him, 'Come here, you lost the bandicoot's heart' 'I ate the lot.' Crow still said, 'No it's here.' The boy comes over. 'No, open your mouth.' So the boy opens his mouth. Crow pulls out a little pebble from the fire dropped it into his mouth.

He killed the boy.

He set to work making lots of tracks. The father came back and saw him. Then the old Crow said, 'cousin, some ghost got him.' The Eaglehawk said, 'Intya — oh!' So they went down and dug a hole. The Eaglehawk said, 'lie down and measure the hole.' When the Crow did this, he threw the kid in the hole and threw earth into it. Crow hopped about in the grave, dodging the earth, 'I'll come out over here—I'll come out over there.' Eaglehawk buried them and went away. But Crow burst out of the grave, 'Hello cousin, here I am!'

By that time Eaglehawk had got away. Crow followed him. He made a trap. He arranged some sticks to look like a bandicoot's nest, with a sharp bone hidden inside, and making it move by pulling a string to look like there was a bandicoot inside. Eaglehawk

came along and Crow said, 'Cousin, here's a bandicoot.' Eaglehawk said, 'I'll get him with a spear'. Waku said, 'Don't scare him. You might miss him. Tread on him.' So he jumped on it and the bone went through his feet and killed him. Crow went away.

Old Kunpara, Spider, comes along with some dogs. The dogs came and told Spider. Spider said, 'where is he?' The dog said, 'I think he's dead, here's his feather.' 'We'll go and look for him.' One of the dogs went and came back with a feather. "Intya — Here we are.' Spider said, 'give it to me, go and look for more.' The dogs came back with more 'Here's more'. The Spider would say, 'go again.' They'd find some more. Spider heaped them up and brought Eaglehawk back to life. He lifted the body up and blew on him. He said, 'you can go with this song, uncle.' And Spider said, 'you can do the same to him.'

When Eaglehawk saw Crow going ahead he cried out, 'Is that you cousin?' 'Yes. 'He caught up with him and they camped together that night. Eaglehawk made a little rain drive through Crow's door. So the Old Crow got up and moved the door. Then Eaglehawk made rain come in that door, so he got up and closed it altogether. The Old Pilyara came over and set fire to it. Then he sings out, 'Get me cousin!' 'Where?' 'Here', and he shoved another fire stick in. The same thing over there. So the Crow got burned and black like he is today. But came alive again to what he is today, as a bird.

(George Dutton, 1957)

Kalthi

"Kalthi the emu, flies horizontally across the sky throughout the year, chasing her suitors. She can be seen in what is more widely known as the Milky Way. During March and April she is more vertical, sitting her tail toward the ground to lay her kapi (eggs).

Aboriginal people then know it is time to collect eggs from the nests. She lays between 10 - 25 eggs in one clutch, depending on the type of season they know is ahead. We are taught never to take more than we need as it disrupts the natural cycle.

The father emu fiercely guards the nest, if he refuses to leave we know the eggs are fertilised and to leave them alone.

The female Kalthi then raises her tail as she continues her chase across the sky for other suitors.

Legend of the Koonenbury Range.

The Koonenberry Range lays proudly over the plains to the east of Packsaddle.

The ancestor, *Cooloerberroo*, caught a large kangaroo and skinned the animal to make a giant bag to carry water. The *Kooningberrie* was formed where the kangaroo lay down to die.

The body of the kangaroo now dominates the landscape. Its head is clearly defined, as are the bones of its tail, which form the small hills at the other end of the range.

Cooloerberroo used his waterbag to fill the rivers.

Gail Hunt



Figure 1 Painting by Ludwig Becker, Burke and Wills Expedition

The two rainbow serpents: original texts **2**

Texts (Sections 2.1. to 2.4.) are presented here exactly as recorded in notebooks by Jeremy Beckett in 1957-8. This means that the original spelling used in the notebooks has been retained here: it is based on the then newly practiced system of Arthur Capell.¹ In this spelling 'j' represents the sound of 'y' as in 'yes', and voiced consonants are used instead of the now preferred unvoiced consonants: that is 'g' is used instead of 'k', 'd' instead of 't' and 'b' instead of 'p'.

2.1. George Dutton's version

They started off from Ularada waterhole (that's on the Paroo 6-7 miles south of Wanaaring). They were Paroondji first.

Then they travelled across through Urisino station (before the station was there). The blacks must have noticed a lot of willows as marks to follow.

They went on past Number Seven Bore and they went into a place they called Yattla. (There's a tank there.) Here they talked Bandjigali. When they got there they was at the top end of the Creek at Yancannia station.

Then they followed the creek down. They came to a place they call Big Wunu and Little Wunu, after the little creeks come in about seven miles from the station.

Then they went down to a place they call Tartu wanyara [*tartu* is head].

Then they go down to Mingabulka (it means a dead hole as far as I can tell).

Well they went on a bit further then to a place they call Garrabala (there was a lot of sandstone there and they camped there one night and the old fellow called it Garrabala).

Then they went on to the next waterhole and that was Yancannia. They went on a bit further down to a waterhole they called Galbagarabuga (there's a quandong tree there, it was small when they came there). The old girl said, 'there's some *galbaga* (quandong) there!' So the old chap said, 'We call it Galbara buga.' Then they went down to a little waterhole in the bend of the creek. They saw some nardoo. She said, 'There's some nardoo'. 'Oh', said the old fellow, 'We'll call it Nardumuru.' (*mur* means black.)

Then they went on then and they saw a water hen trap, *malgaba*, just as if it had been made. They called the place Ngindatji (poor) *malgabala*.

Then they went on down to the next waterhole and saw a lot of *yarnda* (stones). then the old fellow turned to the old girl and said, 'We'll call this place Yanda:maga.' Then they went over to another place and saw a black oak growing in the water. Then the old woman said, 'There's a *garlku* there!' Then he said, 'Oh, then we'll call this place Galkwanbara.'

They went over and away to a fair sized waterhole, they called Ngaralba. They saw some sort of a bird, a little spotted one. They went over to another waterhole in amongst the stones. 'Oh, we'll call this Yarnandaya – a lot of stones.'

Away they went down the creek and they come to a place and had a bit of a feed there of *moley* apples. 'We'll call this place Maleanbala.'

Then they went on then to a place where they saw some caterpillars which might've bit them or raised a lump, they called it Yantabindaga (caterpillar nest).

Then they went on from there and came to a place they call Dalungga – it's a swamp.

They go on from there to where the *dinja* (Fog) used to camp. When he heard them coming he ran away. Then they said, 'Hallo, *dinja:bara*.' Then the old fellow called it Dinjawirga.

They went on from there to another waterhole and saw the willy-wagtail – *dindidindi*. The old fellow saw him up the tree and called the place Dindidindi ga murda (willy-wagtail's hole).

Then they went down then to another swamp and they seen a snake there. And he said, 'Oh we'll call it the snake brake, Duru gardu.'

Then they went on then to where the creek branched off and they parted there at Ngadjji galbadidji (snake creek).

They joined up again at the place where they make the rain, Birndi walpi (thunder place).

Then they called another little place Banmara. I don't know what they saw there. Then another little waterhole they called Bilamora (pig weed).

The next place they came to they call Badu duru (*badu* is burr).

Then they went on from there and they saw a brake – like a snake place – they called it Gadu (brake) warlandi.

Then they went over and they seen a bird – like a bat – *diewaluru*, and they named that swamp Diewaluru.

They went on then, they seen a tree covered with green parrot – *gilguru*. Well they called that place Giburbula.

Then they went over from there to a swamp and they camped there for the night. Well the old man got up then, next morning, and saw her without a cover (it must have been summer time). He said, 'What made your old mick swell up?' They called that Munyu (vulva) baruda bagu (swelled up).

They went across to another swamp, joining that one and they called that Gaganganda (end).

Then they went across from there to Dilingga swamp – a big lake. The old woman got up and saw his two pricks. She said, '*dirli galbalu imamba*' (two pricks splitting laying).

Then they went over to a place a waterhole where they made a fire. 'We'll call it Wi:mani.' (*wi*: fire).

They went to another place and camped there. But the ants started biting them there so they called it Muningga (ants).

They came to Yantara Lake and saw two ducks. They called the lake Yulidinya (ducks-two).

Then they went on then to the end of the lake and came to some willows growing at the edge of the water. They pulled up there and had a feed. Them trees what they call *gamuru* and they called that place Gamuruganda.

Then they went from there to Yantara – *yantara* (stick).

Then they went on from there to a little waterhole they called Galili gurna (shit).

They went over from there across a salt lake [break] and to another lake they called Wonaginyi (boomerang broken) where a man had left a broken boomerang.

(Galti bula [two emus?] two lakes joined into one near Wanaginyi.)

Then they went on to another swamp further down, Meruna (*meri* – face) – could have been a rock or mud looked like a face.

Then they went on to another waterhole they called Bingara (some animal).

And they went on to another swamp and saw some reeds in the water. ‘We’ll call it Bulyubulyu.’

They went from there to Gurnana (shit) waterhole.

Then they went from there and saw a *gani* (lizard) up a tree. They called it Gani gutjana (lizard climbing).

They went up there to Mt Brown to a hill called Gambigambandi (blanket sewing) – they were Malyangapas and Wadigalis then – because they saw a man sewing a rug.

They went from there to Mt Arrowsmith which they called Binbili.

They went on and saw a *malbaru* (kite hawk) and called the place Malbuiu mida (kite hawk camp). [Marginal note: Quinyambie]

They went across to a lake called Gungumbi (dog).

Then they came to a waterhole called Mindilba, which brought them to Biriliba and Wadigali country.

Then they came to Dirabina (box tree big) swamp.

Then on to Balgiri (stream) waterhole.

Then on the main Yandama creek again and there they camped the night and went again in the morning. When they stopped the old girl said, ‘Christ! We left our rugs behind.’ So the old fellow said, ‘We’ll call it Gambi (rugs) gudianda (lost).’

Winadi lake. Ngamadangga – one tree, downstream from Yandama. Angoni. [Not clear where these all fit: Mt Poole – manibudadi. Didigarli. – (?bill’s house). Dirawanda.]

When they get down to Bulka (beyond Yandama Lake) they travel down through a good bit of country but I don’t know the names. Anyway they got about 50 miles on into the Walpi and Biralipa mob and some of the Dieri. They got on to the waterhole where there’s a hot spring. At this point all the mobs there shouted, ‘Go home to your own country.’ Then they turned around and said

'Alright, *wilgamana*, but this hole got to be called Ngaba galala ganda (water hot).' That's why the water stayed hot.

[Note in margin: Galyamaru lake between Calabonna and Moolawatana in South Australia.]

They turned back from there. They came back practically the same places till they came to the place where they divided off – 'Ngadji galpadidji'. When you come to that places there's a little sandhill there they call Murlgulu (little bush). When they got there they stood up at each end of the hill. Just down from the sand hill is the waterhole Birndiwalpi. Their young they had left behind at Ularada waterhole had gone along underground and come up here. That's how the water got there. When they arrived there they saw their parents' shadows and started talking the Malyangapa language. They said '*Winea gulbila*' – 'Who's shadow's this?' '*Ingani nganu gulbiri*.' 'This is my shadow here.' Then they realised they were looking at their mother's and father's shadow. '*Yaga ngama bula dumabula*' – 'That's father and mother.' Then the parents said, 'What are you fellows doing here? – *Mina wandin dara. Ibani wirada* – go into the hole.' And they stopped there.

2.2. Alf Barlow's version

The she-*ngadji* laid an egg at Jularada waterhole before they set out. They set off along the Paroo, then they come to Piree Lake that's where they left the Paroo and made up towards White Cliffs way. They were crawling around near where the opal dump is. Those opals are the *Ngadji's* shit. Then they went out past the race-course and they were rolling about making a few swamps there and when they were going along they made a big wind that cleared the country and made it clear of trees. Then they got into a big gum creek and went past Noonthurungie Station and got up into a hill and made a big gap in the hill, but the old fellow said that this was not the place, and they went down the creek. At Blackfellers waterhole they saw a lot of blackfeller there, '*winbidja jabara*'. They came to Bancannia Lake and made it.

They went up then into the sandhill country. You can see their track $\frac{1}{m}$ about 30 yards wide. Then they made Starvation Lake and then over the sandhills again. (They must have known where they were going.) They rolled around in Lake Muck. Then they came to Bulka Lake. They went over the sandhills again.

They came to a waterhole and named it 'Dilarga'. They come to Cooney Bore and then across the sandhill again. They seen a big snake and when the snake seen them coming he ran away waving about and so made a sandhill 'Durugulili'. Then went again they come to a salt-lake, Maliga Lake. They went into the

neck of the Salt Creek, 'Mangunguru'. Here some other Ngadjis stopped them and drove them back. They come straight back on the same road all the way back to Bulka Lake and went over a bit of a stony rise and camped on top of that hill formed a bit of a cane grass swamp on top of the rise. They were going down the Box(?) Creek and saw a *gani* (goanna) up a tree sunning himself and they named it 'Gani gudjanda'. They went on down the creek and they saw a wild dog, sitting down shitting and they called it Gunana. They went on and then they see snake track then – at Coally bore (on the Tibooburra road), and then they called that 'Durujababa'. Oh they said, 'he'll bite us we'll have to turn back'. Away they went down the flat country and then the old woman wanted to pee and they call it Dibara diriladja (pee emission). The same flat they came to a *widjadjugula* 'cocky'. 'Hello there's a cocky in the hollow tree'. They called it 'Gagalarinjabara ('cocky' hollow tree)'. They went down to a salt lake tank and they seen a bit of a spring there. There was some sort of animal there. They called that 'Warudarbaba'. They turned back then towards Yantara. They got down towards the neck of the Yantara Creek. They reckoned they saw a big blackfeller camp on one side. They made the creek deeper. They named the place 'Gumbagunbara (blackfeller)'. Then they went into Yantara Lake. They see a lot of duck then. 'Look at the *juli* there' – they called it 'Julidinja (duck lake)'. They went back across to where they came from and they come to a big waterhole and they called it 'Julunbugu'. They deepened the creek. They went on to 'Wimarni (fire burning)' Bore. Then to 'Dilinja' a box swamp. The old mother got a bit of a fright there and they called the lake 'Dingga'. They went down to another waterhole. They saw a shellparrot close to No 1. They saw these on a tree and called them 'Djirgowabulu'. They went down to Big Tree out in the middle of the creek and the old woman she got sick that night and swelled up in the belly. You can see the Box tree thick and round in the butt, standing up 'Murmurgali (sore behind)'. They went along again, Big Lake there. They call'm 'Ngunani'. They went along to Gagaldi and on to 'Muninga (ant's bed)', 'Diawaliru – they picked up a bit of blackfeller teeth'. They went down to the neck of the lake and saw an emu – 'Galidunggulu (stinking emu)'. They went down to Yantara swamp. Then to 'Murmurgali' (a different one). They went on and saw a *dinja* and called the place 'Dinjawirga'. Then on to 'Ngadji galbadidji (snake made a gutter here)' (where Number ?) goes away to Yancannia Creek. Then they went to Mungulbiri. They camped there one night and away they went. And then they could hear a noise. It was the young people singing

bu:jebu:je banmarana

bu:jebu:je baduduru

jarawala namagulu

gumagula dunggadunggaramaida

jardijardi

They got down the spring and shut the young ones in the hole and got in themselves. The eggs had come down an underground hole in the Paroo. This was at Birndiwarlbi.

The old fellow go up a box tree way up. The young ones could see his shadow in the lake. He got off the tree and the old woman was waiting there. They fastened their tails together. Then they started into the lake in up the water-courses. He went the other way and then their heads met – they shifted whole sandhills while they were doing it. Then they pushed the young back into the spring.

2.3. Walter Newton's version

As noted by Jeremy Beckett, August 1957.

But while all the land was under water, God got the Holy Devil and his wife. This land was just flat with no drainage in it, no creeks, no rise or fall in the ground to make the creeks run either way; there were no rivers, no lakes. God gave the Holy *ngadji* instruction to bore out the lakes and to make a river. That's why the River Darling is like a snake's track – where they travelled along and bored a channel to make the river. They bored out lakes, they coiled around and scooped out the sand into sand hills. And they made channels to drain into the lakes, such as creeks. To make the water to run this way and that, they rose the ground up. Now after all this was done, right through Australian land, they lived at Peak Tank for a week, and that formed the Peak Hill. And they said, 'We'll go back to our children'. They went from there past Yancannia Station to a place called Birndiwalpa. When they came there they said, 'Oh we can hear the children playing.' And when then saw their parents coming they were excited and they ran down into the burrows.

And there was an ordinary big snake – poisonous – just beside the burrows – *muna* they call him, He's supposed to have been laying on his side singing songs – a *mura*. The two Holy *Ngadji* said, 'We'll sneak up on this *mura* and kill him.' However, something woke him up just as they were on him, and made down his hole. They just grabbed a couple of feet of his tail. That's how they got the [*dulpiri*] *mura*, and they dance a corroboree to that. They sharpened up emu leg bones and anyone who'd done wrong had to push that bone through his balls. This was because they'd eaten carpet snake before it was given to them to eat.

That hole was only the outdoor of the real house. They went down right through like a big rabbit burrow or tunnel and followed their children back to the Paroo. Everywhere was smaller then, God expanded the ground and creeks since.

2.4. Comment by Hannah Quayle

As noted by Jeremy Beckett, August 1957.

Jularada waterhole

Two *ngadji* travelled to Guliamaru in South Australia. The water was drying off. They died at the lake.

Barlow said '*galia maru*' meant 'bottomless'.

2.5. Comments by Cecil Ebsworth

The neighbouring Wangkumara/Kungardutyi people also had some knowledge of a *Ngatyi* story similar to the Dutton-Barlow-Newton one. This is evident for instance from the words of Cecil 'Knocker' Ebsworth (Wangkumara).² References to *Ngatyi* country are in bold:

They had a song for all of them (the Water-snakes), big *mura*, see. He was a snake, they thought he was. He travel right through, right through Cobham Lakes, Salisbury Lake **all them Yancannia**, the *paritha* (the Wangkumara name for the *Ngatyi*).

George McDermott (Wangkumara) in 1971 sang a series of verses connected with the Water-snakes, but unlike George Dutton he did not tell of any distinct line of travel. The main Wangkumara tradition of the '*Paritha*' was clearly connected to country on the Cooper and probably had links to the *Ngatyi* story, but nobody recalled a continuous route in the way that George Dutton and Alf Barlow did. The Wangkumara tradition emphasises the idea that the line of travel of the Snakes is by subterranean channels, which are marked by the *kamuru* ('willow'-trees), George Dutton's text also mentions these trees as occurring near Yantara. Cecil Ebsworth continued:

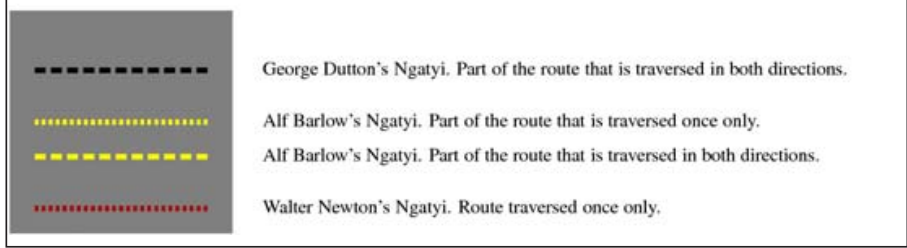
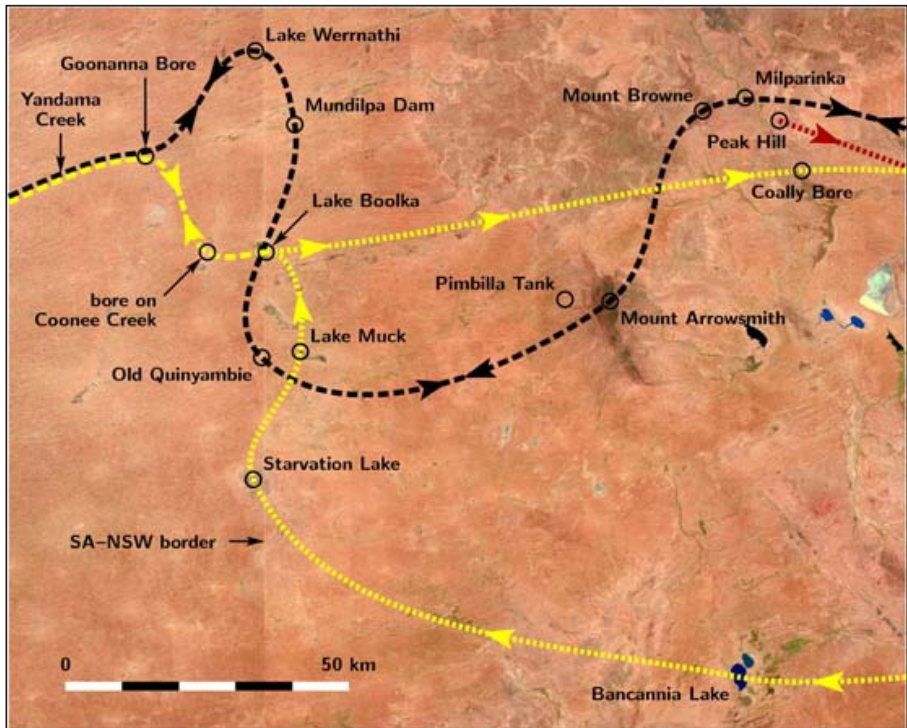
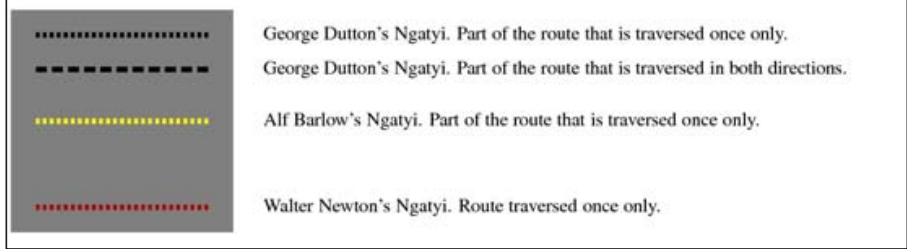
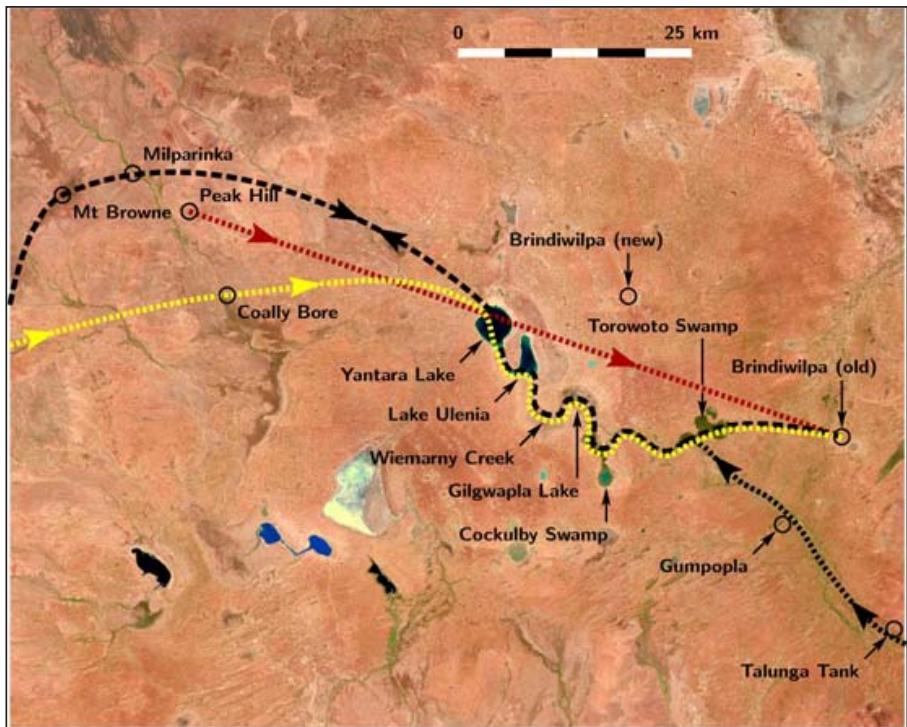
You can still follow the trees, though, one line of trees. Might be a couple of miles long, then might be only half a mile. If you keep going in that direction you might go ten or fifteen miles then you might see another one, going the same way. That is where the *mura* went.

He start off right there near *Wiwilbura* waterhole, that is out from Ngakangura, (Nokanora waterhole on the Cooper) *Wiwilbura*, 'small wood'. He went from there, that is where the *kamuru* trees start from. He went right across then – funny thing – you go right across between Tibooburra and Yantara and you can see them right across go down Yancannia way, same lot of trees, same kind of tree. They never seem to

die. You can follow them right in the Cooper. You might see them only every two or three miles, but they are in the same line.³

Endnotes

1. Capell 1956.
2. Cecil Ebsworth senior was born in about 1919 at *Ngaka-ngura* 'Water-camp', that is the Nokanora waterhole on the Cooper up from Nappa Merrie. His parents named all their children after the places where they were born: the family travelled around a lot mainly on Durham Downs and adjoining stations as the father Albert Ebsworth worked as a station-hand and drover. 'Knocker' was simply an Anglicised version of *ngaka* 'water'.
3. Cecil Ebsworth, recorded by Luise Hercus, May 1985, Kempsey, AIATSIS sound archive.



The legend of the blood-red flowers: Sturt's Desert Pea

“The origin of Sturt's pea is explained in an aboriginal legend. An aboriginal maiden Purleemil was betrothed to Tirlta (red-kangaroo), brutal man who had already killed two wives. She rebelled and eloped with Wimbakobolo from the tribe of the far west. They fled to the fishing camp of his people at Boulka Lake. The elders of Purleemil's tribe ordered a punitive expedition to recapture Purleemil for Tirlta, and to kill Wimbakobolo. However, of reaching Boulka Lake they found that their intended victims had moved to a winter camp beyond their reach.

Whilst away a fine, healthy son was born to Purleemil and Wimbakobolo. Puleemil did not wish to return to the summer camp at Boulka Lake as her dreams filled her with presentments of evil. But Wimbakobolo soothed her fears and they returned.

Her fears were well-founded, as Tirlta's tribe eventually found them, attacking in the night and killing the tribe as they slept. Tirlta himself crept on Wimbakobolo and his family, killing the young man as he sprang to defend them, and then running a spear through the baby. Rather than be forced to return to Tirlta Purleemil plunged the spear through her own body, pinning the child to her body as they both fell lifeless across the dead Wimbakobolo.

When Tirlta's tribe returned the following season to hunt on the grounds of their dead enemies they saw strange lights and found that the lake waters had turned salty.

Undaunted, Tirlta sought to gloat over the bones of his dead victims. Instead, he found a riot of red flowers. Suddenly a barbed spear descended from the sky and lifted him to his feet while an unseen voice scolded him for returning to a place made sacred by blood he had spilt. The spirit then struck and Tirlta fell dead to the ground pierced by the barbed spear. In time the man and spear turned to stone, while the flowers of blood have multiplied and spread across the plains and foothills.



The seven sisters of the sky

The saucepan is one of the first constellations you may have seen in the night sky. The three stars of the saucepan handle make up one side of the belt buckle of the Greek mythological hunter, Orion. Many Australian First Nations people know this as *Djulpan* or the Celestial Canoe with three brothers sitting side by side fishing in a canoe.

The bright stars Betelgeuse and Rigel mark the front and back of the boat; the nebula represents a fish, and Orion's sword is a fishing line trailing behind the canoe.

Look around that constellation. You may see that Orion pursues a tiny, tight patch of stars. What may appear as seven or more stars to the naked eye is a cluster called the Pleiades, the Seven Sisters, but with a telescope you would see many hundreds of stars.

The Greek myth tells of an unwanted suitor (Orion) chasing a group of young women (Pleiades) across the night sky. Versions of this story are strikingly similar amongst many nations, despite being recounted thousands of kilometres apart.

Locally, the Seven Sisters were known as Wirtuwitulya, the creator, Kulawirru, instructed them to go amongst the first people, teaching them lore. As they fled to the sky, they promised our people that they would always watch over them. (Malyangapa legend).

