

**WOMEN AND LANDSCAPE: NSW WESTERN  
PARKS PROJECT**

**An Historical Study of Women and  
Outback Landscapes for the Cultural Heritage  
Division of NSW National Parks and Wildlife  
Service**

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## Executive Summary

This report is an historical study of women and outback landscapes in western New South Wales. It focuses on the south-western NSW region with two case studies of Western Parks: Willandra and Mungo National Parks.

The project was commissioned by the Cultural Heritage Division of National Parks and Wild Service who are interested in examining the ways that national parks are presented to the public and how people respond to them. The *Women and Landscape: NSW Western Parks Project* is part of a wider study into gendered experiences of national parks and their encompassing landscapes.

Firstly the report identifies the concept of place as one through which to develop inclusive histories and interpretation. It explores gendered historical representations of outback places and promotions of the NSW outback. Secondly the report investigates historical literature of western NSW to explore the place of women in those histories. Thirdly the case studies of Willandra and Mungo National Parks, where primary research through oral interviews and site interpretation were conducted, are discussed.

The report finds that women in their diversity remain marginalised and often excluded across the mainstream historical discourse that informs the historical interpretation and popular conceptions of outback parks. This is particularly apparent in the histories of pastoralism, a concern to National Parks as at least part of all their outback parks have at some time been incorporated into pastoral properties. Despite their invisibility in much nationalist and historical narrative, women in their diversity have been active historical protagonists across outback landscapes.

An alternative framework for researching and interpreting histories of outback parks is argued to be needed in providing more inclusive interpretations. Histories that retain their central focus on economics, politics and other aspects of the public domain inherently work to exclude large categories of people. A place-centred approach allows a wider inclusion of women in their diversity and other historical actors who have shaped and been shaped by those places.

# Introduction: Women and Landscape in Outback New South Wales

Ask interested people whether more women's stories should be included in outback histories, most will say 'for sure' – 'there aren't enough stories about women' in such places. Turn the question around and ask the same people whether women were significant in the history of outback places, the answers are more ambivalent. 'They were just out there for the men'; 'they didn't do much'; 'they weren't doing the really interesting things', 'they're not in the history books so I don't think they were seen as very important'.<sup>1</sup>

This report is the outcome of a twelve-week research project for the Cultural Heritage Division of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) on a history of women and landscape in outback New South Wales. At the beginning of the twenty-first century this report finds that the stories of the women who live/d in outback NSW, usually attached to some aspect of the pastoral industry, remain marginalised in many of those places and histories.

The dominant mode of outback and pastoral history writing that simply fails to mention the presence of women is so entrenched that people, both women and men, often forget to look for them. This lack of conscious awareness about the presence, activity and significance of women in outback places is reflected in elements of NPWS presentation of their outback parks.

This report is one of two in a larger National Parks project called Gender and Landscape, initiated and managed by Catherine Snelgrove and Sharon Veale of the Cultural Heritage Division.<sup>2</sup>

The project aims to ensure that women have an appropriate presence in the narratives which surround national parks and the places of cultural significance within them and that we have some understanding of gender specific responses to landscapes managed by NPWS.<sup>3</sup>

The aim of this project as stated in the brief was:

To gain an understanding of women's representation in, experiences of and relationship to, the Western Parks in the NPWS reserve system.<sup>4</sup>

A case study of two of the Western Parks was carried out: Willandra and Mungo National Parks in the southern section of the Western Division of NSW.

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<sup>1</sup> Various responses from interviews between 13<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> May 2003.

<sup>2</sup> The first report by Dr Bronwyn Hanna provides a theoretical background to the study, including a literature review and long essay on the place of women within landscapes using a feminist framework. Bronwyn has also undertaken a case study at Hill End Historic Site. Bronwyn Hanna, 'Re-Gendering the Landscape in New South Wales', Draft Report to the Cultural Heritage Division of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Hurstville, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Snelgrove and Sharon Veale, Project Mangers, 'Gender and Landscape Project Brief' NSW NPWS.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

Through a literature study and fieldwork component incorporating oral interviews, the results of the report were to produce:

- €# 'An engaging regional history based on gender and gender relations concentrating as far as possible on responses to landscape'
- €# 'A report with a concise description, analysis and critique of current interpretative media in the study areas'
- €# and 'suggestions for how the interpretation could be made more inclusive.'

The rest of this introduction outlines the framework and rationale of the report in accomplishing the project brief. It provides an overview of each section, methodology used, project limitations and authorship of the project. At its core the report is an historical analysis of women and outback NSW, incorporating a reading of influential secondary texts and primary research through oral interviews.

The same people who were ambivalent about the significance of women in outback histories had other things to say. Referring to white people on pastoral properties, a repeated comment was: 'Of course, the men wouldn't have been out there without the women'. Conversations ensued about educating children, renowned horsewomen in the district, the pleasures of keeping a good house, the confinement of domestic duties, grandmothers who maintained cultural knowledge, mothers as teachers, women in professions, working the land, fencers, rabbiters, cooks, social occasions, committees – women, historically and today, as active participants in the life ways of outback places.

## **overview of the sections**

The central components of literature review and historical survey of the report are offered in three sections, with the fourth containing conclusions and recommendations.

Section one 'Gendered Histories in Outback Places' explores the key concepts of the research project predominantly through academic secondary analyses. It firstly discusses the concept of place as a framework for writing inclusive National Parks histories. It goes on to focus particularly on the ways Australian historians and other cultural analysts have elucidated the history of outback and gender relations, and examines ways that this has influenced NSW outback promotion. Section one is best read in conjunction with the first report in

the 'Gender and Landscape Project' - Bronwyn Hanna's essay that provides a theoretical analysis of women and landscape only touched on in this section.<sup>5</sup>

Section two is 'Reading Western NSW History'. A central source for any NPWS staff or consultant developing historical interpretive information for parks is the secondary historical writing available on the area. This of course includes the history section of Conservation Management and Cultural Tourism Plans (CMCTP) where they exist – both as historical sources themselves as well as their reading of historical texts.

Therefore in presenting a 'regional history' of women and landscape in outback NSW, as well as critiquing 'interpretative media' in the study areas, section two explores some of the main secondary histories of the region and their representations of women in western NSW. In doing so it also provides a context for the case studies of Willandra and Mungo National Parks.

The findings in reading such texts are that women in their diversity are rarely mentioned at all, let alone as significant players in the colonisation, settlement and expansion of outback places. However, alongside seeking out other material, they can still be read 'against the grain' to produce more inclusive interpretation.

Section three 'Willandra and Mungo National Parks: Big Country' provides the substantive material on interpretation and regional focus on Western Parks through case studies, including a landscape overview and description of each park. It provides in-depth analysis of sources available on, and interpretative information for, the pastoral homestead and property at Willandra National Park, as well as comparative analysis between Willandra and Mungo National Park. Oral interviews were conducted in both places informing this section as well as broader understandings of women and outback NSW.

Both parks fall within National Parks definition of 'outback parks'. In choosing these two parks in the southern section of the Western Division of NSW the case studies provide broadly applicable outcomes to other western parks as well as ones in less remote places as both are close to towns. They were chosen because both parks have been given high focus in National Parks promotion of its outback parks, the current website advertising them as two of their 'focus' outback parks.

Willandra National Parks staff have recently completed a substantial renovation program of the homestead and shearing precincts of the famous Big Willandra merino stud, and are marketing the park for its variety of

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<sup>5</sup> Hanna op.cit.

accommodation in those buildings including home-stay style accommodation at the homestead.

Mungo has one of the most substantive CMCTPs and is one of NSW's and Australia's most famous parks. While the physical landscape of the Walls of China dominate all promotion of the park, and its archaeological significance remains central, recent National Parks interpretation has also acknowledged its contemporary Aboriginal custodians and soldier settler history. Neither park landscape is gender neutral where stories of women's lives as well as contemporary Aboriginal politics disrupt dominant representations of each place.

The final section provides concluding remarks and recommendations for more inclusive park histories and interpretations. The central message to convey is that NPWS staff and consultants, men and women, need to be consciously and deliberately alert to the inclusion of women in their diversity into places where women still remain marginalised.

Despite the dominant historical and nationalist discourse that has marginalised women, they have not only been present throughout outback landscapes for as long as humans have resided there, but have also been core to the processes of invasion, colonisation, settlement and survival in those places. National Parks interpretation is not uniformly exclusive of women. However without more considered and complex inclusion of women in outback parks and histories, the stories of those places are potentially partial and thin.

## **sources and methodology**

The research for this project has been carried out through a review of secondary literature and primary research in the field. The secondary reading has predominantly been of academic analyses, commissioned reports for NPWS, historical texts on the study area and tourism promotion of outback NSW. A thorough search of all available material on Willandra, Mungo and Kinchega National Parks was carried out through the Historic Sites Register and library at Head Office in Hurstville. I also searched the Mitchell Library and the Mildura library for sources on outback NSW.

The fieldwork consisted of site investigation at Willandra and Mungo National Parks and oral interviews carried out with women associated with both landscapes that included a trip to Dubbo. The use of oral testimony as a primary source is an invaluable one in exploring histories of people who have been marginalised or excluded from mainstream historical discourse. I am also aware

of the power of the oral historian to shape her story through the choice of interviewees, the process of the interview and editing.<sup>6</sup>

As more historians have become interested through oral sources in the histories of the every day and 'ordinary people', Ann McGrath noted in a recent conference that while discussions over the privacy of our living historical subjects remains one of intensity, professional guidelines have only recently begun to be developed.<sup>7</sup> She asked who we should name or whether we must become 'social-science-ish' and call everyone Mr A. or Ms B. or use pseudonyms. Do we only name the famous people and if so, do we deny 'ordinary people' a 'true factual place in history'.<sup>8</sup>

In this project people's names have been used with their permission and the passages and sections in which I have referred directly to them in the report have been checked with participants. Indeed one participant does not wish her taped interview to be accessible to people who were not part of the background deliberations and resulting interview, feeling that the contexts for our discussion may not be fully understood.

After the return of my detailed untaped interview notes to another participant, she has requested that they not be made available. In the end she felt they do not tell enough of her story to be an accurate reflection of her long life. I have been able to use aspects of both women's interviews in the report with their permission, and our discussions were very important to my broader understandings of women's diverse lives in western NSW.

These are essential negotiations if we are to use oral testimony ethically. Therefore the use of oral testimony as a primary source is a highly time consuming process in maintaining the necessary communication to ensure interviewees are participants in the project rather than archival-source-objects.

Use of names and the presentation of their voices in the final outcome will vary from project to project depending on the nature of the project. For example where issues are controversial real names might not be appropriate. Alternatively direct quotes in which people are given genuine space to put competing arguments may be best. The use of oral testimony needs to be individually investigated and scrutinised in each new project.

The photographs for this trip that appear in the report were mostly my own. If they have come from another source, that source has been credited in the

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<sup>6</sup> See Robert Perkins and Alistair Thomson (eds) *The Oral History Reader*, Routledge, London, 1998

<sup>7</sup> See Sharon Veale and Kathleen Schilling, *Talking History: Oral History Guidelines*, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Research Unit, Cultural Heritage Division, September 2002.

<sup>8</sup>Ann McGrath, 'Challenging Australian History: Discovering New Narratives Conference. National Library 14-15 April 2000' in *AHA Bulletin*, 90, 2000, 67.

photograph's caption. I took my scanner on the fieldtrip and people willingly gave me photos to scan. However there was little of direct relevance to the national parks.

## limitations

The subject of women and outback landscapes is indeed a big one and obviously this report only begins to purvey the scene. Western NSW is also a large geographical area. So in producing a regional history and review of relevant literature in the time available I mainly concentrated on finding sources with reference to the south western region of the Western Division of NSW rather than the whole region. While also reviewing broader academic debates around gendered history and landscape, I narrowed my focus to looking at outback discussions that might shed light on the NSW outback rather than the red centre/wilderness aspects of 'the outback'.

There was no time to look more deeply for primary sources such as letters, diaries or other literature that may shed further light on settler/colonial or Aboriginal women's lives in the region. There are leads that can be followed up on the wives of the prominent managers at Willandra, and further primary research needs to be continued into the histories of other non-Aboriginal women who lived and worked there. Aboriginal women's history, and Indigenous relations more generally, is very poorly represented at Willandra although the *Willandra National Park Historic Heritage Conservation Management Plan* and other documents noted in section three do suggest more material is to be found. This is an area urgently needing further archival and oral research.<sup>9</sup>

As is described in section three, rain meant that I was 'trapped' at Willandra for extra time thus reducing my stay in the Mungo region. Consequently I was unable to carry out a full site investigation, or carry out planned investigation of primary materials held on Mungo at the Lower Darling NPWS office at Buronga.

I was also unable to carry out a number of planned interviews. Unfortunately this was where I had been able to make contacts with Aboriginal women and was unable to follow up many of them. It was also where I had planned to speak to women and men involved in the tourism industry, including people at the Aboriginal company Harry Nanya Tours. It is recommended that such interviews be followed up in a further study. All the interviews I did do in my

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<sup>9</sup> NPWS Cultural Heritage Services Division, *Willandra National Park Historic Heritage Conservation Management Plan (Final)*, NPWS, Hurstville, August 1999

three days were imperative in understanding women's perceptions of, and relationships to, parts of the western NSW landscape.

## **authorship**

This report was researched and written by Jo Kijas, Consultant Historian (Dr Johanna Kijas, PO Box 789, Brisbane Albert Street, Queensland 4002).

# 1. Gendered Histories in Outback Places

The outback is imagined in different and often competing ways across time, gender, culture and location. City tourists see a different place to those country people who live in the place, just as female tourists can experience those landscapes differently to male tourists. While images of the outback as a white masculine place endure in historical interpretation and tourist promotion, they do not go unchallenged or therefore unchanged.

This section analyses significant academic research focusing on the key concepts relevant to writing histories of women and outback landscapes. The first part identifies the concept of place as one through which to develop inclusive histories and interpretation. The second part examines gendered history and the central historical conceptions of outback places, landscape and representation in promotional material of the NSW outback.

By linking gendered history, outback and place, the analysis provides a framework for integrating women into the writing of National Parks' histories and interpretation. Further review of historical sources relevant to the project is taken up in section two on western NSW history.

## storied places

People tie themselves to places in a myriad of ways, for example through physical manifestations etched into and onto the landscape, ceremonies and commemorations and through the stories they tell of those places. The telling of stories, and the power to have them heard, helps construct places in the visions and images of the tellers. Hence they are powerful in the history making of places and like all history, there is never just one true story. No place has only one set of meanings.

'Telling stories' has many connotations, for example the passing down of knowledge, the entertainment of audiences, the spreading of untruths and lies. A story, according to one of the 1998 Macquarie dictionary's ten definitions, is 'a narration of a series of events'.<sup>10</sup> Many historians now explore the concept of story telling as part of the cultural production of history making, going beyond the belief in the possibility of the one true story, while not retreating from the belief in honesty in the history-telling process. Seeking out the diversity of people's

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<sup>10</sup> *Macquarie Concise Dictionary* 1998:1151.

stories attached to a place allows for the rich and complex histories that actually make up outback and pastoral places.<sup>11</sup>

By making *place* central to the historical investigations of National Parks, it provides ways of inclusion of all – or least many – of the elements of significance to a National Parks' property: the environment and its non-human life (animals, plants, geological formations, climate); the physical and cultural landscape; and the diversity of people who have related, impacted, shaped and been shaped by that place in the past and in the present, and looking to the future. Place centred approaches are familiar to researchers across the disciplines in the Cultural Heritage Division.<sup>12</sup>

Place centred histories can allow for much greater inclusion of women and other people than those dominant historical practices which focus their research to public events, economics, politics and other aspects of the overtly public sphere which has excluded large sections of society. However it does not guarantee inclusion of gender, as recent examples demonstrate where the histories of relations between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians still often tend to ignore gender.<sup>13</sup> The shaping influence of women and gender relations has to be constantly and consciously remembered.

The public sphere of economics, politics and science, for example, are of course essential to understanding the contexts of local places, but are never the only, or necessarily the overriding factors that have historically created those places. In any case, as Kay Saunders and Ray Evans argue, the 'private sphere' has been as significant as the public in 'building the nation', and the two 'spheres' are interactive and interpenetrative ones. 'Men and women have inhabited them both and related dynamically within and between them'<sup>14</sup>

None of this is straightforward as understanding people's stories and the landscape brings with it all the competing elements that create history. By asserting identity, as anthropologist Rosita Henry pointed out in her work on competing visions for the Queensland town of Kuranda, people transform places.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand environmental historians insist that this is never

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<sup>11</sup> See Jo Kijas, 'Moving to the coast: Narratives of belonging on the Mid-North Coast of New South Wales' in *The Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, 22, 2000, 89-97. *History Workshop Journal*, 39, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> For example the project *Mapping Attachments* by Denis Byrne and Maria Nugent.

<sup>13</sup> Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfellas' Point: An Australian History of Place*, UNSW Press, 2002; Some articles in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds), *Words for Country: Landscape and Language in Australia*, UNSW Press, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans, 'Visibility Problems: Concepts of Gender in Australian Historical Discourse', *Australian Historical Studies*, 27 (106), 1996, 150.

<sup>15</sup> Rosita Henry, 'Kuranda at War: Contested Space and the Politics of the Market Place' in *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 5(3), 1994, 294-305.

accomplished independently of nature as agent.<sup>16</sup> The focus of this part of section one is to review aspects of an ever-burgeoning literature useful to historians in understanding the relationships between people, place and history.<sup>17</sup>

The concept of place is where the social, the material and the spatial are inseparably intertwined, known only through our historical and culturally specific understandings. Rather than being fixed or naturally occurring entities - the location of bounded and homogenous communities, or merely the stage on which historical events unfolded - places are historically contingent, constantly contested, interrogated and reinterpreted in our material and imagined worlds.<sup>18</sup>

A central influence on my understanding of place is geographer Doreen Massey's conception of 'progressive place' in the new world of accelerated globalisation, discussed below. Meaghan Morris referred to the shaping pressures of global economic, political and technological shifts in which people:

confront the collapsing of old economies of 'work' and 'home'; the fraying of social bonds and political alliances that once secured, for some, a progressive sense of history; and an abrading of familiar boundaries of 'culture'.<sup>19</sup>

In this environment, places have again become consciously articulated as people seek ways to hold on to the distinctiveness of localities amidst rapid global change. NPWS has become a large landowner in western NSW at a time of accelerated rural economic, social and political upheaval where competing interests in place are intense.

Massey kept up a long running argument with fellow geographer David Harvey on the possibilities of the retention of place as a useful concept. Harvey maintained that place-centred projects are inherently bounded and nostalgic, hence inevitably conservative, backward looking and reactionary in their aims or outcomes.<sup>20</sup> Massey, on the other hand, argued that local places are never independent from the outside, global world of their historical and contemporary construction, and hence do not necessarily fit this description.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> William Cronon, 'Modes of prophecy and production: placing nature in history' in *Journal of American History*, 76, 1990, 1123-31; Donald Worster, 'Seeing beyond culture' in *Journal of American History* 76, 1990: 1142-47

<sup>17</sup> The 1990s saw a burgeoning of literature across many relevant disciplines in exploring space and place, of course very strongly in the area of cultural geography. Here I have reviewed some of the texts I have found particularly helpful to me including reference to Australian historians working in the area.

<sup>18</sup> See John Allen, Doreen Massey, and Allan Cochrane with Julie Charlesworth et al, *Rethinking the Region*, Routledge, New York, 1998

<sup>19</sup> Meaghan Morris, *Too Soon Too Late: History in Popular Culture*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1998:22.

<sup>20</sup> David Harvey, 'From space to place and back again: Reflections on the condition of postmodernity' in Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putman, George Robertson and Lisa Tickner eds, *Mapping the Futures: Local cultures, global changes*, Routledge, London, 1993, 3-29

<sup>21</sup> Doreen Massey, 'Power-geometry and a progressive sense of place' in Jon Bird et al *Mapping the Futures: Local Culture, Global Change*, Routledge, London, 1993, 59-69

Rather than retreating back into exclusive, essential representations of place as settled, stable and culturally homogenous, Massey argues for its retention in a progressive sense. She argues for place construction to be understood as a process, lacking defined boundaries and acknowledging the internal differences and conflicts that have always been part of the history of local places.<sup>22</sup>

Hence places should be understood as always in flux and consequently local, place-specific projects can and should be dynamic, progressive projects. This becomes critical when examining the outback, a place of contrasting and competing stories, especially when contemplating the role of women as their presence is often most notable by their exclusion from different histories.

In Australia, the explicit early histories of place that made some deliberate inroads on discussing the construction of places as a complex interrelationship between the social and the natural, were rarely professional historians but historical geographers.<sup>23</sup> However, while professional historians directed their attention to national histories laid onto places as an 'inert scene', Tom Griffiths argued that local history focused on 'intimate allegiance' and loyalty to place and people, where special influence was given to either environment or heredity.<sup>24</sup>

Such constructions of local history most directly reflect Harvey's concern about nostalgic, reactionary place-studies. Heather Goodall showed how such local histories continue to be generated to endorse certain rural groups as the most authentic spokes-people, to the exclusion of others, in the face of rapidly diversifying regional Australia. While women have often been invisible in local histories, they have also been the authors of these 'fixed' readings of local places.

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However, as academic historians have joined others in casting their gaze back to local places as essential to understanding the complexities of broader regional, national and global worlds, local histories of places such as National Parks properties should not replicate the process of imagined bordered, exclusive places. Rather, progressive place histories can provide ways to integrate the wide gamut of issues of centrality to National Parks interests.

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<sup>22</sup> See Allan, Massey et al, *op .cit.*, on their extension of this as 'relational regionalism', arguing that local places are directly connected into global processes.

<sup>23</sup> See R.L Heathcote *Back of Bourke: A Study of Land Appraisal and Settlement in Semi-Arid Australia*, Melbourne 1965 and J.M. Powell *An Historical Geography of Modern Australia: The restive fringe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991/1976 and see Powell, 'Strangers and Lovers: Disputing the Legacy of Environmental History' in Livio Dobrez ed., *Identifying Australia in Postmodern Times*, Bibliotech, Australian National University, 1994, 87 -103/1994 for comment.

<sup>24</sup> Tom Griffiths *Hunters and Collectors: the Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*, Cambridge University Press 1996:220-221, referring to comments about local history from Les Murray and Paul Carter.

<sup>25</sup> Heather Goodall "'Fixing" the Past: Modernity, Tradition and Memory in Rural Australia', *UTS Review: Localising Modernities*, 6 (1), 2000, 20-40.

Some social historians in Australia have long had an interest in understanding the places in which their histories have unfolded, understanding them as an active, intrinsic part of the story. Amongst those professionals most interested in place have been non-Aboriginal writers of Aboriginal history, gleaned through oral sources. They have understood such elements as the topography, water sources, feral and pastoral animals and plants, and the cultural histories that drove land use and human practices, as embedded relationally between places and people.<sup>26</sup> Others who have focused onto ecological and environmental imperatives in their histories have found American environmental historians such as William Cronon, Donald Worster, Caroline Merchant and Alfred Crosby influential.<sup>27</sup>

More recently, to understand the intertwined cultural and environmental historical processes of place-construction, some of these historians have turned their attention to stories. They include Peter Read's search for non-Aboriginal stories of their emotional attachment to places from which Aboriginal people have been dispossessed, Heather Goodall's exploration of the ways stories illuminate both publicly silenced knowledges as well as competing constructions of the same places, Paul Sinclair and Damian Lucas's river stories and Rebe Taylor and Maria Nugent's work on indigenous places in settled Australia.<sup>28</sup> However gender has not necessarily been incorporated into their analyses.

Historians arrange the disjointed and unstructured artefacts of the past into histories through the narrative structure of our telling. That this process silences other stories that do not fit the plot has been widely discussed in postmodern and other critiques.<sup>29</sup> All historians, as Cronon says:

...configure the events of the past into causal sequences - stories - that order and simplify those events to give them new meanings. We do so

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<sup>26</sup> For example Ann McGrath, *Born in the Cattle*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987 Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1996.

<sup>27</sup> Griffiths *op,cit*; Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin, *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1997.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places*, Cambridge University Press, 1996 and *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000; Heather Goodall and Damian Lucas, 'Country Stories: oral history and sustainability research' *Sustainability and Social Research Conference*, Australian Association for Social Research, Charles Sturt University, 1997; Paul Sinclair *The Murray: A River and its People*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton 2001; Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths *Words for Country: Landscape and Language in Australia*, UNSW Press, 2002; and the doctoral work of Jo Kijas, Damian Lucas, Maria Nugent and Rebe Taylor. Also Ruth Lane, 'Oral histories and scientific knowledge in understanding environmental change', *Australian Geographical Studies*, 3510, 197-207; Denis Byrne and Maria Nugent, *Mapping Attachments*, NPWS forthcoming.

<sup>29</sup> Hayden White *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Understanding*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1987; Dominic LaCapra *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Languages*, New York, 1983.

because narrative is the chief literary form that tries to find meaning in an overwhelmingly crowded and disordered chronological reality.<sup>30</sup>

Much has been written about the ways and reasons why people remember things as they do. That it is never only an individual process but one that is also socially conceived is discussed in the work on social or collective memory. Therefore much recent work seeks out stories not in a belief that they can reflect what actually happened in the past, but rather that they provide an insightful way of understanding how people find meaning in changing places in diverse and often contested ways. Memory is understood in this work as a social process grounded in the present, where 'people frequently mobilise particular accounts of the past not only to explain but to justify and authorise their current choices, alliances and decisions.'<sup>31</sup>

In understanding place as a fluid part of social relations, the power of naming also becomes apparent. Language is not a mirror of a real world, but is itself productive of that world.<sup>32</sup> The language people use to attach themselves in place therefore powerfully constructs landscapes where diverse meanings are held across intersected social practices of gender, race, class, location and other areas of difference. The same places hold within them diverse and often-competing stories about whose place it is, and who has the right to act in them.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore there are no single, coherent stories to tell of local places such as National Parks properties and their encompassing landscapes. In Massey's progressive sense of place making, history is an inevitably fluid project which has no one truth in its telling, but is deeply implicated in the production and politics of that place-making. While this opens up National Parks histories to complex, competing and hence often uncomfortable renderings of past and present attachments to those places, it provides a framework for broad inclusion of stories that are otherwise hidden or buried.

Dominant nationalist and historical narratives are one significant strand of influence in the ways people understand and construct their stories of place. Outback places hold particular resonance in these discourses in claiming authentic Australian identity and culture. Women often disappear in these stories both as individual subjects, and also under supposed universal histories. In exploring

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<sup>30</sup> William Cronon 'A Place for Stories: Nature, History and Narrative' in *Journal of American History*, 78 (4), 1992: 1349.

<sup>31</sup> Goodall and Lucas *op.cit* ,3.

<sup>32</sup> Compare two influential texts on history, language and landscape from 1988; Kay Schaffer *Women and the bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988 and Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988.

<sup>33</sup> Tim Creswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996, and see Denis Byrne on settler landscapes in Denis Byrne, Helen Brayshaw and Tracy Ireland, *Social Significance: a discussion paper*, Research Unit, Cultural Heritage Branch, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Hurstville, 2001.

outback places and their histories as deeply gendered, the second part of section one reviews influential analyses on Australian history and outback landscapes.

## gendered history

Before the advent of feminist scholarship in the 1970s, Australian history was certainly a simpler and, thus, a seemingly most self-assured discipline. With men's activities always foregrounded and women invariably removed from the picture, there was, to begin with, a lot less explaining to be done.<sup>34</sup>

Feminist historiography provided insights into, and challenges to, patriarchal society where women have been excluded from History precisely because certain men so overwhelmingly inhabit/ed the public realm of which historians wrote. Public history was understood as the only history that mattered, and was seen to speak universally for all. It was here the realms of formal power lay, and from where men also worked to control the private sphere.<sup>35</sup>

Feminist history unveiled the hidden assumptions behind universal terms, such as 'the Australian people', to mean a particular category of men as encapsulated in the title of Catherine Hall's history *White, Male and Middle Class*.<sup>36</sup> Jan Jindy Pettman pointed out that universality is a powerful camouflaging tool:

Gender is a feature of social relations and public power where women are absent as much as where they are included or contained. Yet the association of public with male, and the naturalising of men's spaces are frequently represented as ungendered or neutral. Thus gender is coded to mean women, as race is coded to mean black... The norm is defined through the creation of the 'other'.<sup>37</sup>

In the late 1980s Marilyn Lake complained that even as mainstream texts came to incorporate women, it was only to see a progression 'from absence to other'. Women remained 'reduced to the specificity of their sex' while male historical actors continued to masquerade as the 'workers, merchants, the bourgeoisie, the unemployed...'.<sup>38</sup>

In challenging the public-male-domain histories and the additive women's histories, feminist historians have taken various paths over the last thirty years in telling different stories, and the same stories differently. The special issue of

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<sup>34</sup> Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans 'Introduction', Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds) *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, Sydney, 1992, xvii.

<sup>35</sup> Saunders and Evans, *op.cit*, 1996.

<sup>36</sup> Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992.

<sup>37</sup> Jan Pettman, *Living in the Margins: Racism, Sexism and Feminism in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992, 61.

<sup>38</sup> Marilyn Lake in Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans 'Introduction', Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds) *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, Sydney, 1992, xviii

Australian Historical Studies, *Twenty Years On*, provides a range of views on Australian feminist history writing.<sup>39</sup>

One of the shifts that did intrude onto the different pathways of women's challenges to mainstream history, reflected across feminist theorising, was the painful recognition that *women* as a unified category was highly problematic. For example, women had been the colonisers and subjugators of other women on the basis of race, class and sexuality and other elements of difference.<sup>40</sup>

Personal accounts of these shifts in Ann Curthoys' *For and Against Feminism* in Australia, and Catherine Hall's introduction to *White, Male and Middle Class* for Britain, remain enlightening reading of the challenges for feminist historians in writing inclusive histories.<sup>41</sup> Curthoys argued then, as she has since, that the challenges of inclusive history writing across difference, in not privileging one element over others, remains intense.<sup>42</sup>

Another enduring debate within feminist history is the degree to which one should focus on gender relations in history, rather than on women explicitly. In part the argument revolves around the question of whether women have yet gained enough visibility to survive a softer language shift to gender. Two important Australian historical texts remain Kay Saunders and Ray Evans edited collection *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, where they placed emphasis on the relational aspects of men and women, and *Creating a Nation*, where the authors set out to place women at the centre stage of national history.<sup>43</sup>

That these conjoined agendas still struggle to impact mainstream history is suggested in Kate Hunter's review of the 2001 revised edition of *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*. She was 'curious' why a topic like 'women's suffrage' should be absent from the text. For her the most glaring persistent gap was 'the continuing absence of men as self-consciously researched and interrogated subjects.'<sup>44</sup>

There are few other areas of Australian history more resilient to this demand for men to become self-consciously gendered subjects than outback and pastoral histories. The figures who inhabit the mythological outback landscape

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<sup>39</sup> See Ann Curthoys, 'Visions, Nightmares, Dreams: Women's History, 1975', *Australian Historical Studies*, 27 (106), 1996 for an overview.

<sup>40</sup> See Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History*, Verso, London, 1992

<sup>41</sup> Ann Curthoys, *For and Against Feminism: A personal journey into feminist theory and history*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988; Hall *op.cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Curthoys *op.cit.* 1988; Saunders and Evans *op.cit.*, 1996.

<sup>43</sup> Saunders and Evans, *op.cit.*, 1992; Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly, *Creating a Nation*, McPhee Gribble Publishers, Ringwood, 1994

<sup>44</sup> Kate Hunter, Review *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* Edited by Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre, *Australian Historical Studies*, 121, 2003, 194.

still often remain men 'masquerading' as the universal characters of pastoralists, settlers, shearers, squatters and national parks rangers.

## outback

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, even after authors in the 1990s like Robert Drewe argued that the national outback mystique had faltered in favour of the beach, the shelves of reputable bookshops sag under the weight of new and re-released epics of outback adventures.<sup>45</sup> The vast majority of Australians may live in coastal cities, but iconic outback landscapes still crowd dominant images of national identity and popular culture shaped by art, history writing, literature, advertising, tourist brochures and our politicians.

In their recent book on 'unsung outback heroes', Peter Rees and Tim Fischer argue that the outback has usually been located in the west, beyond the Great Dividing Range and out the back of Bourke.<sup>46</sup> Tom Griffith however is less east coast-centric. In his chapter 'The Outside Country' on outback NSW, he specifies the geographic notion of 'The West' in relation to the states of NSW and Queensland.<sup>47</sup>

Notions of 'the West' however reach beyond any physical location. 'It is not so much a place', as the Queensland Museum's exhibition *Women of the West* suggests, 'but a condition and a way of life in remote and difficult places'.<sup>48</sup> Griffith compares the 'westering' in Australia with America's West, sharing similar ideas of progressive hope for the frontier, while Australia's environmental limits meant settlement was never as sustained and limits were regularly confronted. 'The Australian frontier could never be said to have 'closed' as America's was declared to be in 1890: the Never-Never never ended'.<sup>49</sup>

The outback often correlates to the concept of frontier. But rather than a boundary or line, frontiers have been reanalysed as territories or zones where previously distinct societies meet.<sup>50</sup> The outback remains a zone without fixed

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Drewe, 'The beach or the bush? Or the shark versus the dingo' *Island*, 60/61. 1994, 4-6.. The Australian History section of Borders Bookshop, Brisbane, carries the entire series of re-released Mary Durack and Len Beadle epics as well as many new titles and other classics. Perhaps one of the more lasting successes of the 2002 Year of the Outback has been to promote such literature.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Rees and Tim Fischer, *Tim Fisher's Outback Heroes: And Communities that Count*. The New Spirit of the Bush, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2002.

<sup>47</sup> Tom Griffiths, 'The Outside Country' in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds) *Words for Country: Landscape and Language in Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, 222-44. In South Australia we say the outback is 'up north'.

<sup>48</sup> *Women of the West* Queensland Museum current exhibition, <http://www.qmuseum.qld.gov.au/features/wow/index.asp> [accessed 15/4/03]

<sup>49</sup> Griffith, *op.cit.*

<sup>50</sup> Howard Lamat and Leonard Thompson in Mary Anne Jebb and Anna Haebich 'Across the Great Divide: Gender Relations on Australian Frontiers', Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds) *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, Sydney, 1992, 20.

boundaries within which resides the constant reworking of competing stories between people and environment, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, city and country, settlement and exploration, past and present, women and men.

For one recent commentator on western NSW, the outback retains enduring images of vast emptiness. It is full of 'out-of-the-way places'; 'outlandish places'; 'lonely places'; 'fantastic places'.<sup>51</sup> As Ann McGrath has pointed out, 'the outback' is measured in its distance from European settlement, therefore identifying the term as fundamentally colonial.<sup>52</sup> Debra Bird Rose, amongst others, has noted that those same empty inland spaces often deemed so alien to European settlement are Aboriginal homelands crowded with life and meaning.<sup>53</sup>

Over the past two centuries landscape in Australia has stood as a foundation for grappling with national identity and belonging, where particular ideas of outback landscapes have predominated.<sup>54</sup> And there is a tension about where that authentic outback might be found. David Carter argues that over the last two decades there has been a significant shift around which landscapes represent the image of the nation today. This shift has been away from the landscape of the bush – a populated 'westerling' landscape of pastoralism even at its starkest - to that of the desert and 'wilderness'.<sup>55</sup>

Any cursory glance at international and national Australian tourism advertising and the landscapes backgrounding four-wheel drive advertisements could confirm this claim. Anecdotal responses from city friends and colleagues also firmly place the outback well beyond Broken Hill, heading into the centre and further west and north.<sup>56</sup>

However for the women who contributed to the 2002 outback edition of the NSW Rural Women's Network newsletter *Country Web*, there is no question that western NSW is their outback. Rather than an adventure landscape to be consumed by the tourist, the outback for those who live there is a social

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<sup>51</sup> Morna Sturrock, "'Have drill, will travel'" *The Country Web: For Rural Women and Their Families. 2002 Year of the Outback*, 28, Winter 2002, 8-9. Morna was describing her recent travels with a dentist across remote western NSW.

<sup>52</sup> Ann McGrath, 'Travels to a distant past: mythology of the outback' in *Australian Cultural History*, 19, 1991, 113-124.

<sup>53</sup> Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*, Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra, 1996.

<sup>54</sup> See Kay Schaffer, *Women and the bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988

<sup>55</sup> David Carter, 'The Wide Brown Land on the Small Grey Screen: The Nature of Landscape on Australian Television' in *Everyday Wonders: Australian Popular Culture. Journal of Australian Studies*, 58, 116-133.

<sup>56</sup> A good example of this can be found in the assumptions of the outback as desert in Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein (eds), *Australia For Women: Travel and Culture*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, 1994, part 2.

perception of a way of life.<sup>57</sup> But no matter where the authentic outback is argued to be found, the *idea* of being outback retains its power in conveying particular, contested messages about being Australian.

The focus of this project, the western NSW outback, is the archetypal landscape of the Australian Legend and Pioneer Legend - the pastoral, peopled landscape to which Carter referred. Throughout the twentieth century it was an imagined landscape through which a range of analysts argued the case of Australian national identity.

Historians have vigorously debated the type and origins of the 'typical' Australian character that inhabited the outback landscape, as advocated in Russell Ward's famous thesis in *The Australian Legend*. Popularised through the radical nationalist tradition of the 1890s, championed by the labour movement and set down in the literary traditions made famous in the weekly paper the *Bulletin*, Ward argued that the Australian nation defined itself by the values and attitudes of the bushman.<sup>58</sup>

The original bearers of the bush ethos of the nineteenth century outback were the shearers, drovers and other migratory labourers, whose individual anti-authoritarianism was aligned to mateship and a collectivist and egalitarian attitude towards their fellows. For indeed, as many have since pointed out, Ward's national character was inescapably male in a community of white men.<sup>59</sup>

In a special issue of the journal *Australian Historical Studies*, the Australian legend was debated. Graeme Davison argued that instead of the legend originating from the folklore of the outback bushman, the urban journalists and writers of the 1890s *Bulletin* created it.<sup>60</sup> In the same issue John Hirst argued that an equally powerful legend, also emerging in the late nineteenth century, celebrated all European settlers as pioneers. The pioneer legend emphasised individual resourcefulness and forbearance in the battle with the land, rather than collective egalitarianism.<sup>61</sup>

For Marilyn Lake, these debates epitomised the core values of Australian history writing as about and for white men. Her 1986 article in *Historical Studies*, 'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context', was a

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<sup>57</sup> *The Country Web: For Rural Women and Their Families. 2002 Year of the Outback*, 28, Winter 2002,

<sup>58</sup> Russell Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1958.

<sup>59</sup> Ann Curthoys, 'Expulsion, Exodus and Exile in White Australian Historical Mythology' in *Imaginary Homelands: The Dubious Cartographies of Australian Identity: Journal of Australian Studies*, 61, 1999.

<sup>60</sup> Graeme Davison, 'Sydney and the Bush: An Urban Context for the Australian Legend', *Historical Studies*, 18, no. 76, October 1978, 191-209.

<sup>61</sup> John Hirst, 'The Pioneer Legend', *Historical Studies*, 18, no. 76, October 1978, 316-37

significant intervention not only into the debate about national identity, but also into masculinist historiography.<sup>62</sup>

She argued that far from the 1890s being a time where (white) women were invisible, first wave feminism brought the gender conflict into mainstream political debate. The nineties witnessed a battle for fundamental control of the national culture between emergent feminism and a well-organised masculinism, as promoted by the *Bulletin* and other journals.<sup>63</sup> To ignore this gender battle in historical analyses of the burgeoning national character, as was the case in the debates above, was to provide evidence of the marginality and contempt for women as historical actors.

In Kay Schaffer's poststructuralist reading of women and the Australian bush, she argued that to understand women's inscription in the national mythology one had to understand white, native-born man's struggle for identity. This was with reference to his battle with the land, Aborigines and others which he was not, framed against the British parent culture. And although the actual figures of women were said to be absent from the discourse of national identity, she argued that the idea of the feminine figured metaphorically in the landscape as the category of difference for the masculine.<sup>64</sup>

For Schaffer the white Australian native son battled against a hostile female landscape and environment. Sometimes actual women were the enemy, but more often the category was filled by the fires, droughts and floods where men posited their identity as 'Australian' in opposition to his others – women, Aborigines, other migrants and the land.<sup>65</sup>

Within the Australian legend the outback landscape ennobled and freed the bushman, while in the pioneer legend the settler battled the land in an attempt to win it over. In her autobiography *The Road From Coorain*, Jill Ker Conway pondered why it was that the recurring subjects of the great Australian paintings were of the 'red earth, the blazing sun and the broken hearts of these settlers' rather than the 'lyrical beauty of the fertile slopes beyond the Blue Mountains'.<sup>66</sup>

Ann Curthoys has argued that this attraction to stories of suffering, sacrifice and defiance in defeat is a powerful white 'victimological narrative' deeply embedded in Australian national identity, fostered not only through

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<sup>62</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context' [*Australian Historical Studies*, 22,86, 1986] in Susan Magary, Sue Rowley and Susan Sheridan (eds), *Debutant Nation: Feminism Contests the 1890s*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Schaffer, *op.cit.*, 21-23.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, see particularly chapter 4.

<sup>66</sup> Jill Ker Conway, *The Road from Coorain*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Vintage, London, 1998, 218.

painting and history but also novels, journalism, poetry and political discourse.<sup>67</sup> The pioneers/settlers have been central in this narrative where Anglo women across class have (at times) been incorporated and admired as bringing domesticity and civilisation to the outback.<sup>68</sup> George Essex Evans' 1902 poem 'Women of the West' is redolent with this imagery.<sup>69</sup>

Feminist historians of the 1970s and 80s contributed to the pioneer tradition, emphasising the suffering of white women in the face of the common foe of nature, but also men themselves.<sup>70</sup> Susan Sheridan has examined the writings of white women between the 1880s and 1930s in the cultural production of nation building that incorporated the pioneer woman.<sup>71</sup>

She also problematised the place of race. For as Curthoys pointed out, across the enduring myths of the Australian and Pioneer legends, the silence on race and ethnicity bind the legends where gender and class differentiate them. The men, women and children 'battling' the NSW western plains landscape, as described in Jill Ker Conway's memoir of her childhood home of Coorain, were exclusively white and predominantly of British-Scots heritage.<sup>72</sup> Curthoys' victims narrative enables white Australians to claim the land hard won. Of course this view has not gone uncontested, both in the earlier twentieth century as well as more recently.<sup>73</sup> Contested histories of belonging have been intense in the past three decades.

Despite this the Australian and Pioneer legend prevails in the tourist promotion of outback-western NSW, where white masculine mythology predominates.<sup>74</sup> 'The outback is a place where we locate our stories, breed our legends and store our dreams'.<sup>75</sup> The quote comes from a comprehensive NSW tourist booklet called *The Kidman Way* that highlights towns on the roads between Jerilderie in the south and Barrington on the Queensland border. The introduction promises:

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<sup>67</sup> Ann Curthoys, 'Expulsion, Exodus and Exile in White Australian Historical Mythology' in *Imaginary Homelands: The Dubious Cartographies of Australian Identity: Journal of Australian Studies*, 61, 1999, 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>69</sup> Accessible through the *Women of the West* Queensland Museum current exhibition, <http://www.qmuseum.qld.gov.au/features/wow/wow.asp>

<sup>70</sup> Curthoys, *op.cit.*, 1999.

<sup>71</sup> Susan Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and Nation in Australian Women's Writing 1880s – 1930s*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1995.

<sup>72</sup> Ker Conway remarked on how it took her till adulthood to understand the power of the white mythology of settling the land which excluded Aboriginal people who had worked at Coorain.

<sup>73</sup> For example see Fiona Paisley's account of white feminists challenges in the 1920s and 30s to conventional ideologies about colonisation and Aboriginal rights; *Loving protection?: Australian feminism and Aboriginal women's rights 1919-1939*, Melbourne University Press Carlton South, 2000

<sup>74</sup> See Robin Trotter, 'Pioneering the past: a study of the Stockman's Hall of Fame' in Tony Bennett, Pat Buckridge, David Carter and Colin Mercer (eds.), *Celebrating the Nation: A critical study of Australia's Bicentenary*, Allen & Unwin, 1992, 160-174.

<sup>75</sup> *The Kidman Way: Where the Legends Begin*, n.d., 40

The Kidman Way passes through some of Australia's most stunning outback country and brings together a vast sweep of outback western New South Wales... You will also brush shoulders with the origins of much of our cultural heritage and many of our enduring legends.<sup>76</sup>

Tourist landscapes tap into dominant historical frameworks where 'national identity has been constantly employed as a marketable commodity to differentiate 'brand' Australia from other holiday destinations'.<sup>77</sup> As Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan argue, the tour brochure directs expectations, influences perceptions, and thereby provides a preconceived landscape for the tourist to 'discover'.<sup>78</sup> That the production, interpretation and consumption of heritage is gendered - privileging white, male heterosexual versions of the past - has been much discussed.<sup>79</sup>

In much of *The Kidman Way*, photos of large agricultural equipment, mining operations and shearing sheds capture the attention, and the 'legends' focus around the white male bush characters of Henry Lawson and Charles Bean. Exceptions are the inclusion of Aboriginal legends, but here too they are also male. 'So the storyteller was considered the richest man in the tribe because he held the keys to the important questions. This is still true'.<sup>80</sup>

It is a booklet that has set out to be inclusive of families in its language and photos, however the exclusion of women in its stories is so complete as to be taken-for-granted. The front cover to Moree's *Gateway to the Outback* brochure is a more benign and feminised one, with photos of an attractive young white woman and Aboriginal children in traditional style dress in a pale golden landscape. These are unthreatening, beckoning images appealing to an ever-increasing 'grey' tourism trade.<sup>81</sup>

The gendered tourist landscapes of masculine adventurer or seductive feminised ones are argued by analysts to direct tourism advertising internationally and locally.<sup>82</sup> Pritchard and Morgan argued that:

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 2

<sup>77</sup> Gordon Waitt, 'Selling Paradise and Adventure: Representations of Landscape in the Tourist Advertising of Australia', *Australian Geographical Studies*, 35(1), 1997, 48.

<sup>78</sup> Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan, 'Privileging the male gaze: gendered tourism landscapes', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 27 (4), 2000, 884-905

<sup>79</sup> See Gail Reekie 'Women and Heritage Policy' in *Culture and Policy* 4, 1992,

[www.gu.edu.au/centre/4-08-Reekie.html](http://www.gu.edu.au/centre/4-08-Reekie.html) [accessed 19/4/03] ; Morris Miranda, *Placing Women: A Methodology for the identification, assessment and interpretation of women's heritage in Tasmania*, 1997, and *Placing Women II: A national framework for ensuring the visibility of women in heritage*, Tasmanian Office of the Status of Women, Hobart, 1999.

[www.women.tas.gov.au/resources/reports/placewomen.pdf](http://www.women.tas.gov.au/resources/reports/placewomen.pdf) [accessed 19/4/03]

<sup>80</sup> *The Kidman Way*, 40.

<sup>81</sup> Both booklets are included in the accompanying blue folder to the report. See statistics for the year ending 2001 for the 'Living outback region' of NSW which show an increase in the numbers of women and retired couples to the area. Bureau of Tourism Research 'The Living Outback Region Tourism Profile Year end June 2001, Tourism New South Wales <http://www.tourism.nsw.gov.au> [accessed 12/4/03]

<sup>82</sup> See Waitt *op.cit*; Pritchard and Morgan *op.cit*.

While it would be far too simplistic to suggest that these scripts are the product of some monolithic masculine conspiracy, extant research on advertising imagery confirms that the range of images used to represent women has been and continues to be very narrow. Goffman's seminal work (1979) highlighted the dominance of desirable female attributes such as youth, beauty, sexuality, or the possession of a man and identified the prevalence of stereotypes of sweetly submissive and sensual women and powerful, "macho" men in advertising. Despite the dawn of a new millennium and a wealth of academic work which has explored the relationship between sex, gender, and society, these advertising images have hardly changed, either in terms of essence or extent.<sup>83</sup>

Of course these are the analysts who have noticed that gender is a centrally constructing social practice. For example in David Carter's engaging analysis about the shifting nature of Australian landscapes that represent national imaginings, where he argued desert wilderness has eclipsed the bush legend, gender hardly disturbs his argument.<sup>84</sup> However, as Gordon Waitt argued in his examination of the Australian Tourism Commission's (ATC) advertising, it is just these landscapes that are promoted as men's adventure playgrounds and where women's roles are marginalised and only part of the background.<sup>85</sup>

The same trend can be seen in a NSW National Parks 1990 promotional video for its outback parks, 'A Land of Vivid Colours', which provides examples of such gendered visions. The startling red landscape of isolated Sturt National Park, for example, is traversed by three white male figures in their four wheel drives. The only places where (white) women are to be seen are in large groups being shepherded around the landscape by white or Aboriginal male rangers. An authoritative 'cultured' male voice tells the audience about the abundant and unique wildlife, 'stark and rugged landscape' in a 'timeless land'.<sup>86</sup>

As detailed in a recent ATC report, when Aboriginal people are included in tourism promotion they continue to be marketed through an older, highly influential anthropological tradition which constructed the authentic Aboriginal subject as male, desert dwelling, at one with 'nature' and living in a time warp. The report is headed with a photo of an older Aboriginal man, large hat, National Parks insignia on his shirt and silhouetted against Uluru. Little in this image has changed since the familiar one of the desert male with spear, red loin cloth and one crooked raised leg, except that this man is clothed and larger.<sup>87</sup>

Eight of the other ten photographic images in the report included Aboriginal people, all of whom were male - parks rangers, art gallery hosts,

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<sup>83</sup> Prichard and Morgan, *op.cit.*, 892.

<sup>84</sup> Carter, *op.cit.*

<sup>85</sup> Waitt, *op.cit.*

<sup>86</sup> NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 'A Land of Vivid Colours: Outback NSW National Parks', 9 minute promotional video, Apricot Film and Television, NSW, 1990

<sup>87</sup> Australian Tourist Commission, *Segment Insights Pack Market Research Intelligence on Aboriginal Tourism*, Prepared By Market Insights Unit, March 2003

bush tucker experts - and living in 'the outback'. In searching for the 'authentic' indigenous experience that the report emphasised, women as well as urban people are entirely invisible. This static construction portraying Aboriginal people as an homogenous group based on 'traditional' cultures continues to infuse popular discourse about Aboriginal cultures and society and direct tourism marketing.<sup>88</sup>

Despite the tenacious representations of those who inhabit outback landscapes, those landscapes do not remain unchanged in peoples understandings. Rather they are fluid in their conception as the social and cultural environments in which they are imagined have shifted greatly.

An earlier geographic idea of landscape as the static result of the intermixing of nature and human, which could then be objectively assessed through scientific processes, has been challenged by cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove's much paraphrased understanding of landscape as an 'ideologically-charged and very complex cultural product'.<sup>89</sup> In turn, environmental historians such as Cronon and Worster challenged what they regarded as the excesses of post-structural textual readings where landscapes became merely cultural inventions, divorced from the non-human environments that have taken an active role in their creation.<sup>90</sup>

What is often agreed upon amongst historians, geographers and others is that landscape is something observed.<sup>91</sup> However Barbara Bender explicitly reminds us that this is a western, middle-class conception of landscape, where the position of the viewer is privileged, constructing an ego-centred landscape of views and vistas.<sup>92</sup> The ego-centred view is neither shared by all other cultural groups, nor consistent over time and place.

Divergent understandings of Lake Mungo in outback NSW is one example of the interlayering of culture, history, identity, perception and physical place in the landscape idea, shifting over time. In his painting trip around drought ridden outback NSW, Russell Drysdale painted the now famous Walls of China at Lake

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<sup>88</sup> For an overview of these now-long running debates see Tim Rowse, *After Mabo: Interpreting Indigenous Traditions*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1993 and Heather Goodall on tradition as a process rather than a fixed body of knowledge; "'Fixing" the Past: Modernity, Tradition and Memory in Rural Australia', *UTS Review: Localising Modernities*, 6 (1), 2000, 20-40.

<sup>89</sup> Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin, 1998, 11.

<sup>90</sup> Cronon, *op.cit* 1990; Donald Worster, 'Seeing beyond culture' in *Journal of American History* 76, 1990: 1142-47.

<sup>91</sup> See Barbara Hanna 'Re-Gendering the Landscape in New South Wales', Draft Report to the Cultural Heritage Division of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Hurstville, 2003 for an extended discussion of landscape and gender.

<sup>92</sup> Barbara Bender, 'Introduction: Landscape - Meaning and Action' in her (ed.), *Landscapes: Politics and Perspective*, Berg, Oxford, 1993, 1-18.

Mungo in 1945.<sup>93</sup> The menacing atmosphere created in this and other paintings of this period of his work is attributed to the threat of the land. The outback was depicted as 'hostile, primeval and inimical to a human presence'.<sup>94</sup>

The same landscape is now celebrated in complex and often contradictory ways quite different from Drysdale's *terra nullius* view. Recently National Parks has begun to present a more inclusive and critical readings of that landscape which incorporates living Aboriginal people's connections to the Lake's ancient history as well as settler history incorporating both the women and men who lived there.<sup>95</sup>

As one of Australia's, and arguably the worlds, most significant archaeological sites the Mungo landscape remains a contested one between those who wish to claim human antiquity which denies contemporary Aboriginal attachment under the threat of native title, and those who acknowledge ongoing custodianship. Regardless of the position taken however, the intervening decades of social, political and cultural history provide a different engagement with the Mungo landscape since Drysdale's reading.

It is only recently that the landscapes on which historical events and debates have been played out have begun to be understood as participating ingredients in those histories. According to geographer Allan Pred, referring to the field of human geography, the places in which history unfolded were understood as the 'frozen scenes for human activity'; 'an inert, experienced scene'.<sup>96</sup> Taking the spatial aspects of landscape seriously into historical accounts broadens the possibilities in engaging complex alternative historical readings.

Can one find, for example, a starker representation of the power of patriarchal-consigned space than the outback homestead?<sup>97</sup> Imagined in the vast expanse of the Australian flat treeless interior (despite its actual diversity), the homestead represents the spatial confinement of women to the home in ways more visually arresting than the suburban home. Domestic and racial violence in

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<sup>93</sup> See Hanna *op.cit.*, 2003 for her discussion of Drysdale's most famous painting 'Woman in a Landscape', first interpreted as an insult to outback women and later understood as an artist's tribute to them.

<sup>94</sup> Lesley Head, 'In Space and Time: Lake Mungo' in Goulbourn Regional Art Gallery, *Revisited: Lake Mungo*, Goulbourn Regional Art Gallery and the University of Wollongong, NSW, 2000, 6. An image of the painting is included in Godden Mackay Logan, *Mungo National Park Historic Heritage Conservation Management and Cultural Tourism Plan*, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Draft Report, June 2002, 42.

<sup>95</sup> See section three.

<sup>96</sup> Allan Pred, *Place, Practice and Structure: Social and Spatial Transformation in Southern Sweden: 1750-1850*, Polity Press, Oxford, 1986,6.

<sup>97</sup> See Doreen Massey, *Space, place and gender*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994, for one of her extended discussions on the gendered nature of space.

lonely places, such as starkly portrayed in the images of Tracey Moffatt's photographs, might inhabit such scenes.<sup>98</sup>

In this view the outback landscape itself is the geographical space of white men, and the white women who 'ventured' out there took their 'proper place' in the home, whether tent or hut or more established house. Even for those women who evaded the confinement of the inside landscape of the home prior to having children, were usually defeated after they entered the world.

Here the word *men* can encompass all cultural groups – Anglo, Aboriginal, Chinese, Afghan - where *women* is more complex. The arrival of white/settler/colonial women in the outback also brought a slow but encroaching confinement of Aboriginal women to the dominant and powerful ideology of the domestic sphere.<sup>99</sup> The presence of non-Anglo, non-Aboriginal women in the western NSW outback often remained rare through to the later twentieth century, where they have since become important minorities in towns like Broken Hill.<sup>100</sup>

However to portray the lives of women merely within the contexts of male

dominance, a criticism levelled at some of the feminist history writing of 1970s and 80s, ignores the rich and complex lives of women's autonomous spaces, shared spaces across difference, contested spaces around difference and challenges to broader modes of patriarchy.<sup>101</sup>

Landscapes and their histories are not fixed, as noted with the Mungo example, and dominant constructions of national identity within outback landscape are contested and challenged. That the figure of the heroic-individual-white-male of the Australian legend



<sup>98</sup> 'Man's mastery over the land' (Kay Sheffer) in *Frontiers of Ray Williams* View images at <http://www.diacenter.org/exhibs/moffatt/project/index.html> [accessed 15/6/03]

<sup>99</sup> See Sheffer, *Frontiers of Ray Williams* of encounters between settler women, Aboriginal women, and less so on non-Anglo women. See for example Section One in Saunders and Evans *op.cit.*, 1992, and Pringle Adele (ed), *Women of the Centre*, Pascoe Publishing, Apollo Bay, 1990, for Aboriginal women's autobiographical accounts of living in outback South Australia.

<sup>100</sup> See Muir et al, *op.cit.*

<sup>101</sup> On colonial white women's relations with indigenous women, culture and places see Maggie Pickering, 'Looking through the Fawn-Skin Window: White Women's Sense of Place in the New Worlds of Australia and Canada' *Challenging Histories: Reflections on Australian History. Australian Historical Studies*, 33 (118), 2002, 223-238; Alison Cadzow on white women explorers 'Footnoting: Landscape, Space and Writing in the Exploration Diary of Caroline Creaghe' *Southerly*, 56(4), 219-233. Less is available of Aboriginal women's stories from that period of course as written accounts of their own lives are nearly non-existent. We usually only hear of them through the words of white women. Aboriginal women's autobiographical and biographical accounts provide ways into different relationships with the land. See Jennifer Sabbioni 'Aboriginal Women's Narratives: Reconstructing Identities' in *Australian Historical Studies: Twenty Years On*, 27 (106), 1996, 72-78.

still looms large is strikingly apparent in the most recent edition of *R.M. Williams OUTBACK: The Heart of Australia*, touted as 'Australia's fastest growing' magazine.<sup>102</sup> In 1988 Schaffer wrote: 'Man's mastery over the land which in a nationalist tradition attempts to secure the illusion of coherent identity is known to be impossible now in a post-modern world.'<sup>103</sup> Despite the persistence of the image, 'those wily colonial boys' are now less certain in a changed world. For example they are confronted by the active, politically represented voices of women in their diversity across regional Australia; still outnumbered and often marginalised, but nevertheless challenging in ways not previously experienced.<sup>104</sup>

Unlike *Outback Australia* where women *only* appear as wives/partners and models for R.M. Williams clothes<sup>105</sup>, the two government funded publications which emerged from the 2002 NSW Year of the Outback placed women as equal partners as well as leaders in outback landscapes.<sup>106</sup> At times of rapid change, as Margaret Alston has pointed out, rural women are often identified as both community and family innovators, as well as in enduring roles of providing the stable influence of rural places.<sup>107</sup> Here the term 'women' does not necessarily assume white women, as Aboriginal women have also been portrayed in their prominent roles in community relations.<sup>108</sup> However, more often terms like 'rural women' universalise and camouflage white women just as surely as 'workers' did for men.

## conclusion

It hardly needs to be said that the more one looks for stories the more there is to find. I will still add my surprise at just how much is germinating on women and outback landscapes.<sup>109</sup> For example the website of the *National Pioneer Women's*

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<sup>102</sup> *R.M. Williams OUTBACK: The Heart of Australia*, 27 (29), 2003

<sup>103</sup> Schaffer, *op.cit.*, 49

<sup>104</sup> There has been a growing body of feminist analysis of rural society internationally and in Australia through the 1990s. See Margaret-Ann Franklin, Leonie Short and Elizabeth Teather (eds), *Country Women at the Crossroads: Perspectives on the lives of rural Australian women in the 1990s*, University of New England Press, Armidale, 1994; articles in *Rural Society* eg Ruth Beilin's work on landcare and farming women, and Jo Little's work in England such as her recent review 'Rural geography: rural gender identity and the performance of masculinity and femininity in the countryside' *Progress in Human Geography* 26,5, 2002, pp. 665–670.

<sup>105</sup> The exceptions are stories about women nurses and a governess, neither deviating from the gendered roles this magazine upholds. Both the women and men represented are overwhelmingly white, Anglo with a couple of Aboriginal inclusions in typically gendered roles, and no other minorities included. *R.M. Williams OUTBACK* is an archetypal example of the racialised and gendered outback.

<sup>106</sup> Emma Wise, *Inside the Outback: Mapping the West*, Regional Arts NSW and WEST2000, Sydney, 2001; Sonia Muir, Sylvia Porss and Trudy Glasgow, *Living Out Back: People of Western New South Wales*, NSW Agriculture, 2002.

<sup>107</sup> Margaret Alston, *Women on the Land: The Hidden Heart of Rural Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1995.

<sup>108</sup> See Muir et al, *op.cit.*

<sup>109</sup> In the genre of autobiography (which vary widely) recent published accounts which join Ker Conway, *op.cit* are Kim Mahood, *Craft for a Dry Lake*, Anchor, Sydney, 2000; Kerry McGinnis, *Heart Country: A Woman's inspiring life in the outback*, Penguin books, Camberwell, 2001; and fiction

*Hall of Fame* in Alice Springs claims that women all across outback Australia are busy writing their and other women's stories.<sup>110</sup> And the Queensland Museum has a permanent exhibition called *Women of the West* exploring women's spaces which do not just remake an older genre of pioneering women, but present them as active, significant players in their own right in outback places. The challenge remains in establishing women's stories as central to the dominant representations of outback places.

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include a dazzling array of recent Mills and Boon romances carrying on an earlier tradition noted in Sheridan op.cit include Anna Darcy, *Outback Heat*, Harlequin Mills and Boon, 1998; Lynne Wilding, *Heart of the Desert*, Harper Collins, 1998; and Margaret Way, *Outback Fire*, Harlequin Mills and Boon, 2002.

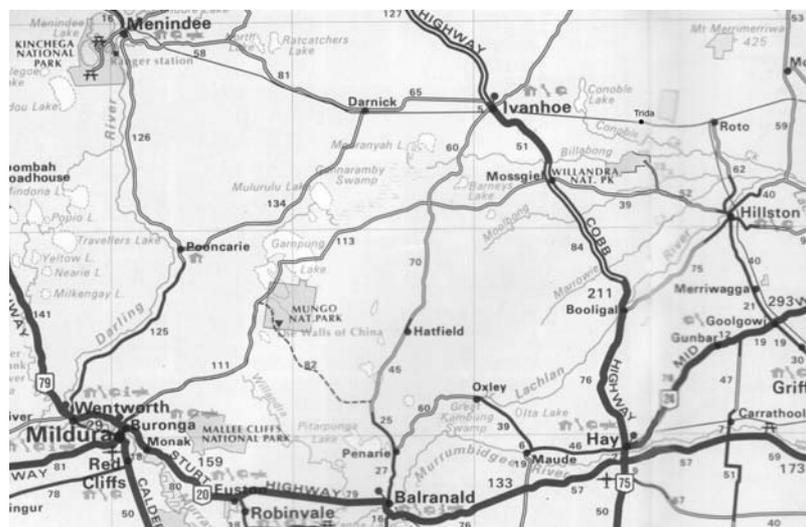
<sup>110</sup> National Pioneer Women's Hall of Fame online, <http://www.pioneerwomen.com.au/welcome.htm> [accessed 15/4/03]

## 2. Reading Western NSW Histories

In the south-western corner of NSW the outback is said to start 'west of the Lachlan'. Under the Crown Lands Act of 1884 the boundary of the Western Division was formed along a corridor of rivers: up the Lachlan from the Victorian border and northeast along the Barwon to Queensland.<sup>111</sup> This is 'the red country' that C.E.W. Bean wrote about in his famous book on the NSW wool industry *On the Wool Track* and later Bobby Hardy in her constantly cited book of the region *West of the Darling*.<sup>112</sup>

In fact it is country of many coloured soils – white, black and grey to add to the iconic red of the outback. From the flat expanse of plains country that sweeps west of the Lachlan, through the undulating sand hills of casuarinas and pine, it is a landscape of diversity. One of the enduring spatial and cultural contrasts of the Western Division is between the riverfront country, especially the main arterial source of the Darling, and the backcountry.

It is all the 'outside' country for those who live nearer to the coast – the 'inside' country.<sup>113</sup> Section two explores some of the most influential historical texts written about this country - outback NSW - and in so doing presents a brief contextual overview through which to read the case studies of the southwestern outback national parks of Willandra and Mungo (section three).



Study area of south western NWS (adapted from Reader's Digest Motoring Guide to Australia, 1996)

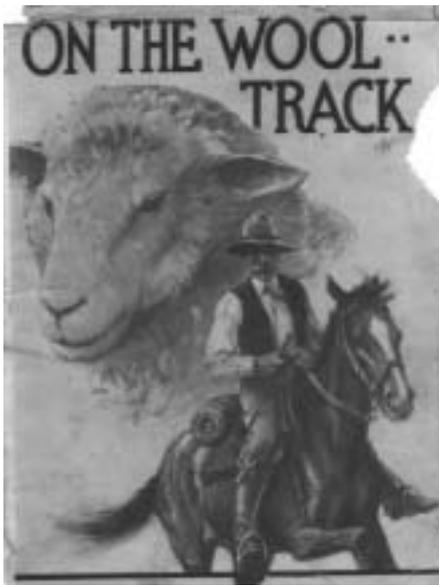
<sup>111</sup> D.N.Jeans, *An Historical Geography of New South Wales to 1901*, Reed Education, 1972

<sup>112</sup> C.E.W. Bean, *On The Wool Track*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1916; Bobby Hardy, *West of the Darling*, Rigby Seal Books, Adelaide, 1977 [first published in 1969 by Jacaranda Press].

<sup>113</sup> See Annette Irving 'The Outback – past and present' *The Country Web: 2002 Year of the Outback*, 28, Winter 2002, 6-7; Bean *op.cit.*

## 'all men are interesting'

Bean's *On the Wool Track* was first published in 1910. By then a journalist, the career that would make him so famous as Australia's First World War correspondent, he was given the task of writing about the wool industry.<sup>114</sup> His style makes for engaging and often empathetic reading that provides insights into particular-remote-life ways as well as dominant discourses of his day. His opening chapter foreshadows aspects of western NSW history writing throughout much of the twentieth century.



*Cover of the 1916 edition*

On the first page of his book he twice talks about 'the men and women' who lived in 'the red country'.<sup>115</sup> By the second page women no longer appear. What 'turns out' to be 'the most interesting things' for him about the wool industry are the men. 'And so the articles dealt with men'.<sup>116</sup> On the third page he notes that the red country takes up more space in his book than is actually warranted in learning about wool. That is because '[i]t is a country where bad men are very bad, and good men are magnificent: but where all men are interesting'.<sup>117</sup> He then recounts stories of a diversity of individual men as well as categories of men, from bullockies and swaggies to managers.

Bean only mentions women again to lament their lack in numbers in the outside country. However, as can often be found in other histories, his stories about the presence of children (or in other cases schools) suggest more complex realities. Bean tells the story of lost children miraculously found in the red country: what were they doing living out there without women?<sup>118</sup>

As has often been noted in feminist analyses, men have been understood as the bearers of the interesting stories, where women have been assumed to be wives and mothers. Hence they have often been regarded as universal,

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<sup>114</sup> He wrote for the *Sydney Morning Herald*: Bean *op cit*, 9

<sup>115</sup> Bean *Op. cit.*, 9.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 10

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>118</sup> For example see *Ibid*, 35.

unchanging, ahistorical (and hence somehow less interesting).<sup>119</sup> And while actual women do not appear in his story, allusions to the harsh landscape and animal life as femal provide ample evidence of Kay Schaffer's contention that the idea of women was not absent in such historical constructions.<sup>120</sup>

There is no argument that men outnumbered women in the Western Division when Bean spent his time in the area. And some places more than others were overwhelmingly populated by often highly mobile men. But even in 1901 the total (assuming white) recorded numbers of females to males in the Western Division was 26,739 to 38,431. While the majority of both women and men lived in the 'municipalities' of the Western Division, 8,494 women were recorded living in the non-municipalities compared to 16,054 recorded men. European male numbers doubled those of European females living beyond the western towns, however they also clearly show that white women were not physically absent.<sup>121</sup>

The question of women's absence from outback and pastoral histories is of course not to do with numbers. Pastoral histories particularly have excluded women as significant bearers of history in their focus on the public spheres of economics, politics and policy, dominated by the names of elite white men and nods to the usually unnamed male pastoral workers.

It is an area of particular concern to National Parks as over 95% of NSW parks have at some time been managed as part of a pastoral landscape.<sup>122</sup> Over the last three years the Cultural Heritage Division of NPWS has been carrying out a vital project researching the shared history of pastoralism between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The project makes the point that Aboriginal people have often been marginalised or excluded from pastoral histories, leaving a partial and distorted history.<sup>123</sup>

A detailed review and annotated bibliography of sources for the project discusses the attention given in some revisionist pastoral histories to Aboriginal women's active role – not just as domestics but also in the outside work. However the review treats the non-Aboriginal players as almost entirely male. White women only appear as wives or when local stories highlight an individual woman

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<sup>119</sup> See Bronwyn Hanna 'Re-gendering the Landscape in New South Wales': Literature review for the 'Gendered Landscapes Project' for the Cultural Heritage Division of NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003. Hanna notes the diversity of theoretical analyses that argue through the debates about capital, male supremacy and colonialism. Also see references in Section one.

<sup>120</sup> Schaffer Kay, *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988. See chapter two of Bean *op.cit.*

<sup>121</sup> 'Population by Age and Sex, 1901' Appendices in Jennifer Lee, *A Black Past, A Black Prospect: Squatting in Western New South Wales 1879-1902*, Master of Arts, Australian National University, 1980; accessed through the Historic Sites Register, NPWS Hurstville.

<sup>122</sup> NSW NPWS 'Living and Working on the Land'

[www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Contents/Living+and+working+on+the+land](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Contents/Living+and+working+on+the+land) [15/4/03]

<sup>123</sup> 'Shared Histories of the Pastoral Industry' see *Ibid*; Rodney Harrison, 'Shared histories and the archaeology of the pastoral industry in Australia' in *After Captain Cook: The Archaeology of the recent Indigenous Past in Australia*. Sydney University Archaeological Methods Series 8,2002, 37-58

for an event deemed out-of-the-ordinary. The role and significance of white women is rendered almost invisible in the thematic review of sources.<sup>124</sup>

Pastoral histories also rarely analysed the landscape itself as significant other than the stage on which the exploits of men were carried out.<sup>125</sup> While Bean, as other commentators of his day, noted the devastating impact of *man* and his sheep on the outback landscape of NSW, he used the red country as the platform through which to tell his stories. The place itself had little further interest for him.

In his introductory pages, not unsurprising for his time, Bean also noted a further exclusion from his text. Beyond even the outback places where he travelled was the centre of Australia – ‘uninhabited’.<sup>126</sup>

## traditional owners

Mutthi Mutthi (to the south), Ngiyampaa (through the centre), Paakantji (to the west) and Wirradjuri (to the east) today assert the land between the Lachlan and Darling Rivers as their traditional country.<sup>127</sup> Even as late as the 1930s more numerous language and cultural groupings partitioned these large tribal groups. However death, dispossession, forced removal and intermarriage away from their traditional country has narrowed this diversity. Despite this the post contact histories that have driven their families into other country are widely known, and people identify their mothers and fathers country.<sup>128</sup>

By the time Sturt had entered the Darling in 1829 and Mitchell in the 1830s, European diseases had already struck the Aboriginal people of the river districts.<sup>129</sup> As squatters made their incursions up into this country along the river passages Aboriginal resistance, especially on the lower Darling and Anabranche, was very fierce. Bobbie Hardy reports that Barkindji fighters were able to force back European settlement through the early 1850s until pastoralists, still mostly

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<sup>124</sup> Anna Cole, *Review and annotated bibliography of sources for a shared history in pastoralism in NSW*, Research Resource Series No 2, Cultural Heritage Division, NSW NPWS, 2001.

<sup>125</sup> See J.M. Powell, ‘Strangers and Lovers: Disputing the Legacy of Environmental History’ in Livio Dobrez ed., *Identifying Australia in Postmodern Times*, Bibliotech, Australian National University, 1994, 87 -103.

<sup>126</sup> Bean, *op.cit.*, 11.

<sup>127</sup> This is the preferred spelling of the Mungo National Park Joint Management Advisory Committee as confirmed by the Executive Officer, Gary Pappin (pers.com. 12/6/03). Diverse spellings between documents abound. For example both Barkindji (used in the Mungo National Park Conservation Management and Cultural Tourism Plan)/Barkindtji and Paakantji (used in the Kincheha NP CMCTP) are current. See *Willandra National Park Historic Heritage CMP* for the diversity of language groups in that area.

<sup>128</sup> See Jeannette Hope, Tamsin Donaldson and Luise Hercus, ‘A History of the Aboriginal People of the Willandra Lakes Region: Part of the Study on the Significance of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Region to Aboriginal Communities’, 1986; Sarah Martin ‘Aboriginal Ties to the Land’ Report to the Department of Lands and Water Conservation Menindee Lakes ESD Project.

<sup>129</sup> Mark Dunn ‘Historical Overview’, Godden Mackay Logan *Mungo National Park Historic Heritage Conservation Management and Cultural Tourism Plan*, Draft Report, June 2002, 13-47

men at this stage, were able to reclaim abandoned runs in the late 1850s with the aid of native police.<sup>130</sup>

In the backcountry between the Lachlan and Darling, around the ancient lakes country, European incursion came much later and Aboriginal resistance was less. By 1860 Aboriginal people were still living in the watered areas of the Willandra Plains and probably still accessing the soaks around the dry lakes. They came to establish working relations with incoming pastoralists on their country.<sup>131</sup>

Hardy's treatment of indigenous history in *West of the Darling* presented the West Darling groups as landowners who fought for their land and were treated appallingly in the colonising process. She went on to write a separate book *Lament of the Barkindji: The Vanishing Tribes of the Darling River Region*.<sup>132</sup>

As one can tell from the title her understandings were grounded in the premise of the time of a loss of culture for 'half-caste' people in settled Australia. However her uncompromising language about warfare, dispossession and displacement, and her interest in race politics, provided a quite different tone to other contemporary accounts of a passive peoples of the distanced past. Her interest in named individual Aboriginal people and their stories means her book remains an important source of Western Division history.

## european colonisation

European occupation of the lower section of the Western Division came from the east and the Victorian side through the Riverina, where for example Willandra back blocks were taken up from the 1840s.<sup>133</sup> However occupation of the river frontages wasn't complete until the 1860s, helped by the push up stream of the riverboats from Wentworth. The backcountry, for example through Mungo and the Willandra Lakes system, wasn't successfully stocked with sheep until the 1870s when tanks and bores were sunk. The historical overviews for the Mungo and Kinchega Conservation Management and Cultural Tourism Plans (CMCTP) provide comprehensive summaries of the land acts and their consequences in promoting the spread and type of European settlement through these regions.<sup>134</sup>

These lively historical studies provide overviews of pre-contact Aboriginal geography and chart the chronological and thematic processes of European

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<sup>130</sup> Hardy *op.cit.*, 1977, 69.

<sup>131</sup> Hope et al, *op.cit.*

<sup>132</sup> Bobby Hardy, *Lament of the Barkindji: The Vanishing Tribes of the Darling River Region*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1976.

<sup>133</sup> Jamie Kronborg, *Big Willandra: A Pastoral History of the Willandra Estate*, Willandra Marine Stud, Australia, 1986

<sup>134</sup> Dunn *op.cit.*; George Main 'Historical Overview' Peter Freeman Pty Ltd, *Former Kinchega Station Sites: Kinchega National Park Conservation Management and Cultural Tourism Plan*, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Final September 2002. Also see Hardy *op.cit.* 1977.

invasion and settlement of the western lands as required by their briefs for National Parks. However in typical fashion reflecting the dominant genre of pastoral history, and unquestioned in the briefs, no mention of European women's presence or activity in these landscapes is to be found.<sup>135</sup> Brief mention only is made of Aboriginal women's work in the Kinchega CMCTP.

It is interesting that many of the authors of the substantive histories of the Western Division have been women.<sup>136</sup> That does not necessarily mean they were more inclusive of women than male authors. The dominant historical discourse until recently discouraged the exploration of the private or the 'ordinary' – seen often to be the domains of women.

For example hardly any women are mentioned in the written text of Sandra Maiden's history of the lower Western Division, *Menindee: First Town of the River Darling*, except for a couple of public figures such as the town's postmistress in 1863 and matron in 1874. It is a history full of descriptions of people 'doing' things, where the landscape is only described as a way of setting the scene for their exploits. But whether they are establishing stations, sinking wells, stealing sheep or working the river steamers, they are men. Women and children appear in passing in a few sad tales of loss or the hardships of bearing children.<sup>137</sup>

That does not mean one can learn nothing more about the presence of European women from such books. For example photographs of wives (sometimes named and sometimes not) bear witness to white women on the river frontier from at least 1858. A painting of the river at Cuthero Station below Kinchega in 1866 was by a woman, Helene Forde and a photo of a grave was of 'Bridget Pain, wife of Tom Pain who built the Menindee Hotel in 1852-53, died in Menindee in 1864' leaving four children at the age of 33.<sup>138</sup> Less can be learnt about Aboriginal women, were the brief comments on Aboriginal people appear as ungendered 'natives'.

Maxine Withers' *Bushmen of the Great Anabranck*, covering a neighbouring location and similar period to Maiden, provides the same scenario for all her chapters except one. She devotes a chapter to family life in the bush

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<sup>135</sup> The exception is a fleeting mention of Venda Barnes in the Mungo CMCTP.

<sup>136</sup> Far from the centres of academia it was generally left to non-academics to write the histories. Having lived in Broken Hill for a number of years Hardy said that she wrote her histories because it was a neglected region. Withers and Maiden (see below) both had family connections with the lower-western region and secreted aspects of their family histories into their books. R.L.Heathcote's historical geography *Back of Bourke: A Study of Land Appraisal and Settlement in Semi-Arid Australia*, Melbourne 1965, is one of the few academic texts focused on the broad region (north east/ Warrego District) until more recent times.

<sup>137</sup> Sarah Maiden, *Menindee: First Town of the River Darling*, The Sunnyland Press, Red Cliffs, Victoria, 1989

<sup>138</sup> Maiden *op.cit.*, 44.

where women are named and central. Following individual women's stories, one is able to build some sort of picture of the life of women and families who ventured to the region just south of Kinchega in the last part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>139</sup>

Withers' picture is at times romantic with soft descriptions of life beside a peaceful river; despite having been told in other places in the book that it often did not flow. However it provides relief from, and a more complex story to, the stereotypical portrayal of early outback women (where they appear) as lonely and often desperate living a desolate existence.

In 1872 Ruth Rosetta Panter married Henry Pring, both from Cuthero Station. She wrote to her mother in South Australia saying how happy she was. They had 'three good goats', she had her own horse to ride as she pleased and she described a great diversity of foods including wild peaches to make jam and buying wild ducks and swans eggs 'off the blacks' for threepence each. 'You see we have got plenty to eat'. 'Ned has made me a nice safe and dressing table...The only thing I want is to see you'.<sup>140</sup>

It is interesting to note Ruth's mention of buying food from Aboriginal people. Certainly not all Europeans ate bush foods and were very choosy about what they regarded as acceptable. April Blair, who grew up on stations in the 1960s in a similar area to that covered by Withers, remembers that the non-Aboriginal families who ate bush foods were healthier than those who deemed it was below them and stuck to diets of mutton, potatoes and flour. As indigenous people working on stations, April's family always had a full, varied and nutritious diet of bush and other foods.<sup>141</sup>

In 1896 Emma Bennett came as a new bride to Redbank Lake, a little further north from Cuthero and below Kinchega.<sup>142</sup> The 'house' at which she arrived was a hut of two unlined rooms. Emma cut up wool bags and sewed them together to line the walls of their hut, and lined the ceiling with new sheets from her trousseau. There she had five of her twelve children. Slowly the house was built on and she developed a garden that was extended as more permanent water

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<sup>139</sup> Maxine Withers, *Bushmen of the Great Anabranch*, Gillingham Printers, Adelaide, 1989; see chapter 9 'Life in the Bush'.

<sup>140</sup> Withers, *op.cit*, 117-8.

<sup>141</sup> April Blair, Interview NPWS-WL-01, 12.5.03.

<sup>142</sup> Withers, *op. cit*, 111-3. Withers tells us that Emma told her story to the *Adelaide Chronicle* many years later. Otherwise, unfortunately, Withers doesn't reference her sources except for general citations at the back.

supplies became available. 'We longed most of all, I think, for fruit'.<sup>143</sup> The landscape around the house was transformed by her presence.<sup>144</sup>

Her story of coming to a hut, or no house at all, is a familiar one that continued well into the twentieth century in the backcountry.<sup>145</sup> For example in 1924 when Venda Barnes (nee Stirrat), her mother and siblings came out to live on her uncle's soldier settlement property of Zancie, neighbouring Mungo Station, they all lived in tents until the first small house was built.

Venda's memory of her mother Ida presents a combination of characteristics reflected in some of the letters of nineteenth century settler women recorded in Lucy Frost's well known book *No Place for a Nervous Lady*.<sup>146</sup>

Mother loved the outback. She loved riding – she could do all those things. Others will remember that she always had the table set properly – even in the tent – the linen, serviettes, cutlery and crockery. People did that in those days. She still kept the right way to live. She was very strict. She'd been a schoolteacher and she taught us all by correspondence.<sup>147</sup>

Here was a strong-minded woman maintaining her own level of standards in the enduring Victorian middle-class culture of the time, and adding a sense of adventure.

After the 1884 Crown Lands Acts the huge properties like Kinchega, Cuthero and Willandra were split up for closer settlement.<sup>148</sup> Members of the Bennett family took up adjoining leases on Kinchega in 1896 and all helped each other out. Withers tells the story of widowed Phoebe Andrews who procured a homestead lease on Kinchega in 1897 that she called Huonville after her birthplace in Tasmania; located on the current NRMA road map on the Menindee to Broken Hill Road.<sup>149</sup>

In the backcountry the huge Gol Gol property was split up to form Mungo, Zancie and the other Soldier Settlement stations in the 1920s. From the 1930s three Barnes brothers and their wives bought adjoining stations and worked cooperatively to enable the properties to be viable.<sup>150</sup> Owner of Mungo Station with her husband Albert, Venda was returning as a married woman to the station neighbouring where she had grown up.

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<sup>143</sup> Withers, *op. cit.*, 112.

<sup>144</sup> See Susan Martin 'Public and Private Space in 1890s Australian Women's Gardens' in Bonj Szczygiel, Josephine Carubia and Lorraine Dowler, *Gendered Landscapes: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Past Place and Space*, The Centre for Studies in Landscape History, Pennsylvania State University, 2000, 131-138.

<sup>145</sup> For example Jill Ker Conway's mother at Corrain. *The Road from Coorain*, Vintage, London, 1998

<sup>146</sup> Lucy Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady: Voices from the Australian Bush*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1984

<sup>147</sup> Venda Barnes, Interview NPWS-WL-09, 22/5/03.

<sup>148</sup> For a comprehensive account see Heathcote *op cit*; Hardy *op.cit.*1977. D.N. Jeans also provides a brief and accessible overview of this period, Chapter 17 'The Pastoral Industry, 1861-1901' in his *An Historical Geography of New South Wales*, Reed Education, Sydney, 1972.

<sup>149</sup> Withers, *op.cit.*, 120.

<sup>150</sup> See section three.

Hardy also takes a somewhat less stereotypical path in her book through folding social history approaches into aspects of her text. By weaving individual stories through parts of her text she includes the occasional woman's story where she has found relevant historical sources. So she follows the story of Matilda Wallace who wrote an account entitled *Twelve Years' Life in Australia* about her travels and work with husband Abe from 1863 around the Darling.<sup>151</sup> Despite the sympathetic and fascinating glimpse of an outback woman's life offered in Hardy's vignette, it is still told to give focus to Abe's exploits. We are told that after loosing the station in 1888 that they had worked so hard for, 'Wallace, a broken man, died soon afterwards'.<sup>152</sup> No more is heard of Matilda.

Matilda was not untypical in maintaining the sheep work as well as domestic work on their poor selection while her husband was away working for long stretches of time. From a careful reading of Hardy we learn of women's activities across the West Darling, on stations, proprietors of shops on steamers and of pubs, furnishing homesteads, warding off dangerous men, creating garden landscapes and working with the sheep as well as in the house. Women were busy 'doing things' throughout this outback landscape.

## **transforming the western landscape**

Emma Bennett arrived in the Western Division during the devastating drought of the 1890s and the disastrous arrival of rabbits. At the same time falling wool prices throughout the 1880s had been offset by greater numbers of sheep on pastures, where 1892 was 'the peak of westward advance'.<sup>153</sup> On top of that the 1890s brought economic depression. The combination wreaked havoc on the western landscape.

Around Willandra Station as across large sections of the Western Division, the saltbush, which had been destroyed through overstocking and drought, never recovered.<sup>154</sup> Only now is it being resown in rows across places like the Hay Plain and beyond Balranald. As has been widely documented the cloven hooves of introduced animals and the invasion of countless hordes of rabbits ate out the native vegetation and ground the fragile soils to dust.<sup>155</sup> Bean was not alone in

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<sup>151</sup> Hardy *op.cit.* 1977, 135-139

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, 139

<sup>153</sup> Jeans, *op.cit.*, 287.

<sup>154</sup> Noted in Kronborg, *op.cit.* As a visually obvious plant and edible by sheep, this is the plant most widely noted as having been wiped out across large areas of outback NSW from the late nineteenth century. Many other plants, especially the perennial grasses, were also destroyed.

<sup>155</sup> See Dick Condan, *Out of the West: Historical Perspectives on the Western Division of NSW*, prepared for the Lower Murray Darling and Western Catchment Management Committee, 2002.

recognising at the time that there was 'good reason to fear that ... permanent damage was done before the West was understood'.<sup>156</sup>

By the end of the 1890s there were fewer Europeans living in the Western Division than the 1860s.<sup>157</sup> Withers recorded that William Bennett said of Emma:

I married in 1896, the year of the beginning of the long drought. It was fortunate that I did for it was only due to the wonderful help and self sacrifice for my partner that I was enabled to get through that terrible time. Right through her cheerful help and encouragement were an inspiration, and without that I would have 'gone under' as so many others did.<sup>158</sup>

Pastoralists had borrowed heavily from the banks throughout the late 1800s and the depression and drought bankrupted many of them. Willandra was just one amongst many of the huge outback properties that ended up in the hands of companies or offshore banks; in Willandra's case the London Chartered Bank of Australia.<sup>159</sup> The cultural landscape shifted away from owner-occupiers on the huge estates to a constant flow of managers.

Katie Langloh Parker and her husband were one such couple forced to leave their property, Bangate Station north east of Wilcannia. In describing the drought in her diary *My Bush Book*, she mapped out her public perceptions of their different experiences and spatial lives in the outback according to gender.<sup>160</sup>

I thank God that I'm a woman, even if it does mean a daily grin to hide an inward groan, a daily smelling of bad meat, a daily rounding up of lazy blacks, a daily growing uglier and a daily growing more stupid under skies so blue that they transmit their blueness to those beneath them, and even the grey trees lose their leaves... But my life is better than Matah's. He has to bear all the responsibilities, has daily to see his stock perish and be powerless to save them.<sup>161</sup>

Concurrently, and in contradictory fashion, the push for closer settlement under the 1884 Crown Lands Act accelerated the process of breaking up the huge holdings into smaller owner-occupied selections. It dislocated 'the already vulnerable economies of many stations on land that was unable to support it'.<sup>162</sup>

This was vindicated by the findings of the 1901 *Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Condition of the Crown Tenants in the Western Division of NSW* which the NSW government had set up to investigate the traumatic environmental and economic collapse there. However the findings were ultimately

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<sup>156</sup> Bean, *op.cit.*

<sup>157</sup> Jeans *op.cit.*; Hardy *op.cit.* 1977

<sup>158</sup> Withers, *op.cit.*, 130.

<sup>159</sup> Kronborg, *op.cit.*

<sup>160</sup> It was known that she wrote the diary with the idea of publishing it. Marcie Muir (ed), *My Bush Book: K. Langloh Parker's 1890s story of outback station life*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1982,

<sup>161</sup> Katie Langloh Parker in Marcie Muir, *op.cit.*, 136.

<sup>162</sup> Hardy, *op.cit.*, 185

ignored in the push for small landholdings.<sup>163</sup> Heathcote provides an enduring account of the circumstances and outcomes of the Commission and pastoralism in the drought prone region.<sup>164</sup>

## river people and dryland people

The drought and economic depression that wreaked havoc for European pastoralists and selectors was also a disaster for Aboriginal people. Hardy said:

By 1901 the homeland of the Barkindji people was so ravaged by pastoral occupation that it had turned into a veritable wasteland... The ruined squatter and his white station hands could leave and start afresh elsewhere, but the disaster area was the Barkindjis' homeland, the last vestige of their link with a meaningful past.<sup>165</sup>

In this she misunderstood Indigenous cultural dynamism and denigrated European attachment to place. Nevertheless it is a potent reminder of the ways European practices and economies inescapably intersected with Aboriginal people's fate, so often ignored in pastoral and outback histories.<sup>166</sup> Drought and Depression of the 1890s and again in the 1930s would see forced removals from ancestral country that had previously been resisted. A disaster for all groups, the river peoples and the dryland peoples fared differently as the economic fortunes of pastoralists in those places fluctuated.

Aboriginal people across the Western Division found a diversity of work on pastoral properties through the nineteenth century as open warfare had subsided. At this stage many were able to remain on their own country as they negotiated the trauma and dislocation of invasion. Heather Goodall in her alternative reading of land settlement to the celebratory pastoral histories, *Invasion to Embassy*, referred to this as 'dual occupation'.<sup>167</sup>

For example, as Europeans pushed up the Darling, Anabranh and other rivers, Aboriginal people had taken on shepherding jobs. It is almost impossible to know the true gender roles involved as authors who noted these jobs invariably referred to 'natives', 'blacks' or Aborigines, assuming (one assumes) men. 'Nearly all the work here is done by blacks... They make splendid shepherds...'<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> See Main for reference to submissions to the Commission from landholders around Kinchega, *op.cit.*, 30-1: *NSW Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings* 'Royal Commission on Western Lands – Minutes of Proceedings', Vol 4, 323-1184, 1901.

<sup>164</sup> Heathcote, *op.cit.* Also see Hardy 'The Red Dust Rises' in *op.cit.*

<sup>165</sup> Hardy *op.cit.*, 1976, 174-5

<sup>166</sup> See Harrison *op.cit.* and forthcoming publications on the shared histories project; Cole *op.cit.*

<sup>167</sup> Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1996

<sup>168</sup> James Jervis 'The West Darling Country: Its Exploration and Development', *Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol XXXIV, 1948, 167

As wire fencing caused the loss of much Aboriginal employment, it also provided new sources of employment still within people's country. Certainly we know of more recent accounts where Aboriginal women worked on fencing jobs so there is no reason to think these were exclusively male tasks.<sup>169</sup> The same can be said of stock work, where women like Ngiyampaa elder Beryl Carmichael in her youth did paid stock work. In fitting with the dominant western 'ideology of domesticity', however, Aboriginal women are more often recorded in their domestic work for white women.<sup>170</sup>

As rabbits moved up the rivers and into the backcountry by the end of the nineteenth century the massive efforts to eradicate them, where millions were recorded killed, included Aboriginal labour. Rather than the immediate assumption that men were 'the rabbiters', according to Hardy it was:

...the women who set to with their digging sticks, babies in hessian bags slung to their sides often taking a pull at the breast as mother worked.<sup>171</sup>

However it didn't provide secure employment in those desperate economic times as Jeannette Hope et al note from the NSW Aboriginal Protection Board (APB) Report for 1895:

The year has been an unfavourable one for Aborigines in the interior, the drought having rendered their means of subsistence more than usually precarious. Native game has now become scarce in a great many districts – in some extinct; and by the discontinuance of rabbiting on nearly all sheep-stations the Aborigines have lost one of their main sources of employment. The demands upon the Board have in consequence been more than numerous.<sup>172</sup>

As pastoralists either abandoned holdings or shrank their workforces, not only individual Aboriginal workers but also their families were forced off stations.<sup>173</sup> The people of southwest NSW who had previously been generally free of missions now found themselves forced to seek assistance from the APB. For example Ngiyampaa and Wiradjuri people in the broad Willandra region lived on two nearby reserves, one at Hillston gazetted in 1904 and one at Mossiel gazetted in 1907.<sup>174</sup> Some of these people later congregated on Carowra Tank Station east of Ivanhoe near Trida above Willandra – an unsupervised APB

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<sup>169</sup> For example Mary Pappin talks about her grandmother fencing on Tin Tin station southeast of Mungo, Interview NPWS-WL-08 20/5/03; and Ruby Lanford wrote about fencing in station country near the Queensland and NSW border. Ruby Lanford, *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1988; Pringle Adele (ed), *Women of the Centre*, Pascoe Publishing, Apollo Bay, 1990, for Aboriginal women's autobiographical accounts of living in outback South Australia.

<sup>170</sup> See section one.

<sup>171</sup> Hardy, *op.cit*, 1976, 192.

<sup>172</sup> APB Report quoted in Hope et al, *op.cit*, 113.

<sup>173</sup> Hardy, *op.cit*, 1976

<sup>174</sup> NPWS Cultural Heritage Services Division, *Willandra National Park Historic Heritage Conservation Management Plan (Final)*, NPWS, Hurstville, August 1999

reserve being notified there in 1907, changing to a supervised station in 1927 (see the map at the beginning of this section).<sup>175</sup>

According to Hope et al, Ngiyampaa people around the Mossgiel to Ivanhoe area retained a very stable population from 1889 to 1915. Remaining on their own country they maintained languages and pre-contact cultural traditions longer than neighbouring groups, through to the 1930s. They worked on the surrounding pastoral properties as stationhands, shearers, stock workers and domestic help. Aboriginal stock workers and domestic staff were known to have worked on Willandra Station through the 1930s.<sup>176</sup>

However as drought persisted through the 1920s the arid back country around Ivanhoe suffered more severely. By 1933 the water supply dried up at Carowra Tank and the newly empowered APB decided to 'concentrate' the approximately 100 residents, as well as people from Wilcannia and down the river at Pooncarie, onto the Menindee Reserve on the Darling. As Goodall says the Wangaaypuwan (Ngiyampaa) and Wiradjuri from Carowra Tank were forced entirely away from their country and were on alien land amongst strangers.<sup>177</sup>

The social and cultural groups who were forced into cohabitation at Menindee were entirely different – not least dryland people being forced into river country. At least Paakantji (Barkindji) people of the Darling River towns were on their own country. Goodall reports that tuberculosis was prevalent at Menindee and was highest amongst the Ngiyampaa. Paakantji people were eventually able to escape the reserve as employment opportunities increased along the Darling; less the case for the drier country of the Ngiyampaa to the east. They were trapped at Menindee to a greater extent than the Paakantji.<sup>178</sup>

The dry plains had however been less attractive to selectors than the river country and many of the stations had remained large enough to retain workforces for longer. In this the Mutti Mutti and others who lived on traditional country or had moved to Balranald for work on the southern edge of the backcountry were able to maintain employment on pastoral properties, moving all through that country.

Dianne Barwick reported that in 1882 the APB said there was no need of government assistance to Aborigines in the area as they worked on pastoral stations or lived by hunting and fishing. By 1892 an unsupervised reserve had

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<sup>175</sup> Diane Barwick in Charles Rowley, *Outcasts in White Australia: Aboriginal Policy and Practice Volume II*, ANUP, Canberra, 1971, 177-180. See Heather Goodall on the shift from unsupervised reserves to the 'concentration camps' under managers: 'Under the Dog Act' in *op.cit.*, 173-260.

<sup>176</sup> NPWS Cultural Heritage Services Division, *op.cit.*; and note in Kronborg *op.cit.*

<sup>177</sup> Goodall, *op.cit.*, 201-203.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*

been established from which the able bodied returned through their seasonal employment.<sup>179</sup>

Mary Pappin, an elder whose country encompasses the shared Mungo area, said that her aunts worked as domestics all up through the stations around Hillston and across to Roto and Ivanhoe. Her father, a Waambaa Waamba man from around Swan Hill, and her mother, a Mutthi Mutthi woman, drove sheep crisscrossing the backcountry west of the Lachlan before settling with their growing family to work on Greendale Station outside Balranald.<sup>180</sup>

Aboriginal people from other places came to the broad region throughout the twentieth century in search of the station work that kept people close to the land. April's parents brought the family north from Swan Hill where they grew up around the backcountry stations including in the broad Mungo area such as Top Hut, Arumpo, Petro and Hatfield, as well the Anabranche and Darling River country noted above. Her brothers worked on stations south of Ivanhoe.<sup>181</sup>

In 1964 Charles Rowley noted that Aboriginal people at Balranald continued to work on the pastoral stations while at least two families were 'in the town itself'.<sup>182</sup> One of these was the Kelly family, Mary's family, and her mother Alice Kelly who holds Mutthi Mutthi knowledge of the Mungo Lakes area.

Along the Darling the lessons of the 1890s drought were more quickly ignored in the European desire to own land and Paakantji were progressively squeezed off their land by the carving up of the large properties.<sup>183</sup> Hardy provides vignettes of named Paakantji individuals and families that remain important today, despite her problematic use of 'half caste' and 'full blood'. For example she talked of Sarah Cabbage, who sometimes made a little money as a laundress at stations and hotels, and her husband George who spoke little English, 'travelling the old tribal beat' on the lower Darling till 1913.<sup>184</sup>

She also referred to Katie Wyman who came from a 'highly regarded family at Cuthero' and married a Queensland drover, Tommy Bugmy. Over the years of moving camp they had 13 children and in the 1930s they moved to Wilcannia so that the children could go to school.<sup>185</sup> Hardy notes in all these stories that the children learnt the 'ways and teachings' from their mothers and grandmothers. Alice Bugmy is pictured below with Alice Kelly and other knowledge holders of the Mungo region.

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<sup>179</sup> Barwick, *op.cit.*

<sup>180</sup> Mary Pappin, *op.cit.* See section three.

<sup>181</sup> April Blair *op.cit.*

<sup>182</sup> Charles Rowley, *Outcasts in White Australia: Aboriginal Policy and Practice Volume II*, ANUP, Canberra, 1971, 161.

<sup>183</sup> Hardy, *op.cit.* 1976.

<sup>184</sup> Hardy, *op.cit.*, 1976, 189.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 198



*Rear: Tibby Briar (left) and Alice Bugmy  
Front: Alice Kelly (left) and Elsie Jones at the Walls of China, Mungo National Park.*

*Four Elders of the Mutthi Paarkinji and Ngyiampaa tribal groups on the Co-operative Management group who share the Mungo Lakes region.*

*Photo on the wall of the Mungo National Park Information Centre.*

By the time the Menindee reserve was expanded with the arrival of the Cawora Tank, Pooncarie and other groups, employment for the original residents had already declined. By 1939 the APB was concerned that nearly all of the able bodied men on the reserve were unemployed, a much higher percent than any of its other reserves.<sup>186</sup> Dunn noted that Aboriginal women in the west Darling had fewer work opportunities than the men.<sup>187</sup> Hardy said of Aboriginal people generally in the region:

They were casualties of a continuing system of subdivision that created holdings which were worked almost exclusively by the single family they were designed to support.<sup>188</sup>

## **soldier settlement in the outback**

The 1901 Royal Commission had found that encouraging closer settlement into the western lands that could not sustain it had compounded the disastrous circumstances of the 1890s. But these lessons were soon forgotten in the early twentieth century as better conditions brought grasses to the pastures and the landless poor sought security in land ownership.<sup>189</sup> The ideology of the yeoman farmer was given new impetus with the return of soldiers from the First World

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>187</sup> Dunn, *op.cit.*, 39.

<sup>188</sup> Hardy, *op.cit.*, 1976, 217

<sup>189</sup> Dunn *op.cit.*,31.

War as primary production was seen to be the economic and social salve of the post war society.<sup>190</sup>

Most of the productive and easily accessible land was already occupied by then, and people yearning for independence and the promised security of landownership were pushed into environmentally marginal country. Coorain, Jill Ker Conway's parents' property taken up in 1929 and 60 kilometres west of Willandra, was typical of Western Division pastoral soldier settlement blocks. Carved out of huge pastoral leases it had no ground water, the saltbush and other herbage was heavily overgrazed, and the topsoil was blowing away in the 1920s drought.<sup>191</sup>

Despite her father's death in later years, Ker Conway's mother was able to hold on to the property because they had enough capital behind them. They were in a minority however, as all texts on soldier settlement point out.<sup>192</sup> Two other families who held on through drought and poor economic times in similar country were the Barnes brothers and their wives Venda and Jean. When Venda married Albert in the early 1930s they were able to buy Mungo Station with family assistance. The same source lent money to Albert's brother Alec and his wife Jean, Venda's younger sister. They bought Jounlie station next door.<sup>193</sup>

A third brother Clarrie and his wife Gladys bought Leaghur Station in the early 1940s. All three stations were bought by National Parks to make up Mungo National Park over the years (see section 4). There was no ground water on any of the stations and access to Mildura was slow and unpredictable. The families

and one or two employees, at the most, worked these small pastoral blocks.

Gladys had her own vehicle in which to muster and do other sheep work, while also maintaining the home and other domestic and social tasks. She told me of one day when she was ready to head off to a CWA meeting and Clarrie needed



*Gladys and Clarrie Barnes at Leaghur Station just before they sold to NPs in 1997. (photo courtesy of Gladys Barnes)*

<sup>190</sup> Marilyn Lake, *The Limits of Hope: Soldier Settlement in Victoria 1915-1938*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1987; J.M. Powell, 'Debt of honour: Soldier Settlement, 1915-29' in his *An Historical Geography of Modern Australia: The restive fringe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, 90-120.

<sup>191</sup> Jill Ker Conway, *The Road from Coorain*, Vintage, London, 1998

<sup>192</sup> Lake *op.cit* 1987; Powell, *op.cit.*1991

<sup>193</sup> Venda Barnes *op.cit*; Main *op.cit.*

help with the sheep. She covered her newly done hair in a scarf, put on her work clothes and headed out, before returning, showering and putting on her town clothes. Life on Leaghur for Gladys and Clarrie was a close working partnership across the property.<sup>194</sup>

Gender and class divisions were played out in different ways to the large properties such as Willandra. For example the spatial separation of buildings which kept shearers and other workers quite separate from the homestead family and staff at Willandra was not as stark in places like Leaghur and Mungo where the quarters were still partitioned, but much closer to the houses.

As a child at Corrain, Ker Conway worked with the men at shearing time and socialised with them after work. As we were looking at a black and white photo of a bunch of shearers, I asked Gladys if she ever felt that it was a man's world out there. Certainly not she said, 'well I knew them all'. She and Clarrie



*The Shearing team at Leaghur, c.1955.  
(photo courtesy of Gladys Barnes).*

were able to name all the shearers in the photo, one of whom was her brother Lindsay Wakefield.

Gendered and class spaces were not necessarily any less apparent or subdued. Ker Conway's parents only invited the wool classer or shearing manager onto their veranda for drinks in the evening. And it was Clarrie who

determined a separation for Gladys between the shearing shed and the house. But these gendered and class practices were acted out and experienced in different ways between the big pastoral properties like Willandra, and the smaller family oriented ones. Gladys always considered herself part of the shearing – the men came and socialised on their veranda in the evenings and they always had a big dance at 'cut out' time. And it was only in later years that Ker Conway came to understand the full force of class and race differences between she and the men in the shearing sheds<sup>195</sup>

Oral histories and biographies provide insights into more dynamic lives than are presented in the written histories of the region. In preparing the interpretations for the various outback-pastoral properties that National Parks now owns, these complex and diverse aspects of gender, class and race need to

<sup>194</sup> Gladys Barnes, discussion after formal Interview NPWS-WL-07, 19/5/03

<sup>195</sup> Gladys Barnes, *Ibid.*

be carefully researched and elucidated, as no one common story is out there to find.

## **conclusion**

The dominant genre of outback and pastoral histories, as reflected in this review, wrote out women across race and class as insignificant to their telling. Or where they are present, they appear merely to fill out the story of the men who lived there or because they have been remembered for an event deemed 'interesting'. The framework on which they were developed sees the public sphere of economics, politics and technological development as what matters, where certain men filled those spaces.

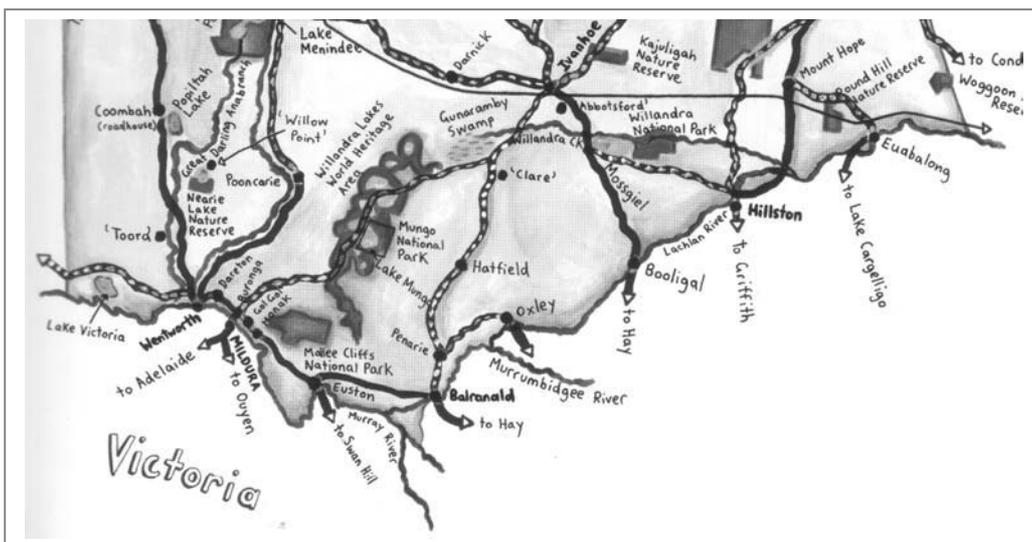
The published accounts examined here provide important ways into outback NSW history, especially for NPWS or consultant historians with limited time to do extensive primary research. However they must always be read critically for the 'gaps and silences' earlier feminist, class and race historians have advocated. Reading such texts 'against the grain' can find women, for example, as present and active throughout the outback.

However such histories should not form the framework/model from which to write as they exclude rather than include the diversity of historical actors that actually inhabited, constructed, and were shaped by a place. In making the place the central focus of historical endeavour, rather than the public domain of certain men, an enlarged vision of the richness and diversity of places can be accomplished.

### 3. Willandra and Mungo National Parks: Big Country

9/4/03: Tomorrow I fly from Brisbane to Sydney, heading out on my field trip the following morning. Today my partner pointed out something rather obvious. I'm about to spend two weeks driving around outback NSW and I am, after all, a woman. So why not, he suggested, keep my own diary of thoughts and experiences of the outback landscapes I'll find 'out there'.... I'm greatly looking forward to returning to red dirt country. A South Australian by birth and currently living in Brisbane, I miss it. My childhood was full of outback tales as my mother and her parents had been station people, firstly in drought-ridden country north of Oodnadatta, and later in the sweeter blue-bush country north of Burra. My favourite holidays were the ones where we children went driving with our mother around outback landscapes. We would all yell 'Big Country' as we swooped over the crest of an occasional low hill and looked out onto the vast expanse of red, brown, yellow, blue. The outback was never empty. It was full of stories.

The outback of the Western Division of NSW is indeed big country. Therefore a confined geographical location had to be settled upon for a case study of women and outback parks and landscapes. In dry weather Willandra and Mungo National Parks are only three hours apart in conventional vehicles; 235 kilometres as the road takes you. They both emerge out of the vast plains country between the Lachlan and Darling Rivers that once generated the extensive waterways of the Willandra Lakes System, now recognised for their great archaeological significance. A trip taking in Willandra and Mungo National Parks, and their neighbouring towns, seemed a manageable geography for the short period available.



Section of Emma Wise map of the Western Division of NSW showing Willandra and Mungo National Parks. (Emma Wise, *Inside the Outback*, 2001)

Despite their generally easy geographical reach in today's terms, there are many contrasts and comparisons between the two parks which impact onto reflections about women's presence in outback landscapes, making them relevant case studies for this project. The main promotion of Willandra National Park centres on the settler pastoral history of the famous Big Willandra sheep stud, promoted by National Parks through images of the beautifully restored Homestead. Mungo National Park, on the other hand, is promoted through images of the Walls of China; red desert-looking landscape where human antiquity is captured in the ancient bones of Aboriginal peoples. Neither landscape is gender neutral, where stories of women's lives and contemporary Aboriginal politics will be shown to disrupt dominant representations of each park.

This section, exploring the case studies of the two parks, constitutes my field trip between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2003.<sup>196</sup> It begins with some comparisons between the two parks before discussing each park separately. There I provide a general introduction to each park, descriptions of the landscape, and for Willandra an analysis of on-site interpretation and promotional materials and examination of central historical sources available to NPWS staff. The women in both locations who told me about their connections to those landscapes influenced my understanding about each park.

## comparing parks

*12/5/03: I got here [Willandra] about 7.30pm. It was really worth the detour to Dubbo to interview April Blair as she was able to provide me with some great perspectives of growing up on stations in this broad area – as a female and an Aboriginal person... It was already well and truly dark as I made my way out here, so I haven't seen the country in the daylight... But I've been looking at the map all day and I'm not really sure – am I in the outback yet?*

Both Willandra and Mungo National Parks are part of the southwestern section of the Western Division. They are highlighted on the NSW National Parks website as two of their featured 'Outback Parks'<sup>197</sup>. Willandra is 64 kilometres from its nearest town of Hillston, and Mungo is 110 kilometres from Mildura. I wondered if these quite short distances from townships could really constitute them as isolated enough to be the outback. For some of my city friends who have traversed the main road from Sydney to Adelaide and seen the signs, they perceived my destinations as just mallee country and farmland. This, for them, was not the real outback.

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<sup>196</sup> Left Brisbane by plane pm the 10<sup>th</sup> May and returned 24<sup>th</sup> May.

<sup>197</sup> NSW NPWS Website [www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) [15/4/03]

By asking my question of whether it was the outback for all the women that I met in both places, I learnt an interesting contrast between these two parks. Despite the fact that Willandra National Park is half the distance from the closest town than Mungo, the women I spoke to who lived/still live at Willandra were unequivocal in their assurance that it was indeed outback – the isolation, distance from schools and shops, poor access to TV and radio, and mobile reception a joke. For them the outback is manifest in terms of accessibility to social and economic resources for their families and themselves.

For Susie Gardiner, who since 1988 has lived at both parks raising her two boys with her field-officer husband Ross Gardiner, Willandra is undoubtedly the outback. You can get stranded out there for days and weeks on end with just a bit of rain and so the isolation can be palpable, even today.<sup>198</sup> However the different soil type that constitutes the dirt road from Mungo to Mildura means that it takes a lot of rain to make it impassable. While everyone agreed that it used to be the outback, Susie and other non-Aboriginal women from around Mungo who I talked to felt that it had really ceased to be since access to Mildura had become an easy car trip. But those who live in Mildura or on the river properties still know it as outback.

However for the Aboriginal women with whom I talked about the broad Mungo region, it is their outback. It means the real bush – their country where they feel comfortable with their ancestors or where they grew up. For Mary Pappin, whose traditional country includes Mungo, the outback is distanced from European remnants and where bush foods and medicines remain known and accessible.<sup>199</sup>

I had wondered whether April Blair, Aboriginal Heritage Officer with NPWS, who grew up on station country between Mungo and the Darling, might shun the idea of the outback – that colonising term Ann McGrath identified as measured in relationship to European settlement.<sup>200</sup> However, as language is continually manipulated to the ends which different peoples direct it, *outback* for the Aboriginal women I talked to, including April, meant the ‘true country’ of their own people. I asked how April would describe it. She said it was

‘the bush’ – away from towns, away from bitumen roads, away from shops – where you can smell the wood and the trees, the smell of the rain and the animals and the fish in the river. Of course there are dust storms and bushfires too.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Susie Gardiner, Interview NPWS-WL-05, 17/5/03

<sup>199</sup> Mary Pappin, Mary Elizabeth Pappin, April Blair.

<sup>200</sup> Ann McGrath, ‘Travels to a distant past: mythology of the outback’ in *Australian Cultural History*, 19, 1991, 113-124; Section one ‘outback’.

<sup>201</sup> April Blair, Interview NPWS-WL-01, 12/5/03

And for me, an outside visitor, the outback is manifest as colours and features in the landscape – red dirt, silver-grey foliage, big country. Amongst the women I talked to, the outback was revealed for me as a perception that differs between cultural groups, generations, individual personality and between those who live in a place and those who visit.

The physical landscapes of the two parks also provide contrasts, in some ways countering the social perceptions of what is outback expressed by the non-Aboriginal women who lived there. Andrea Cashmere, the ranger in charge of Willandra and who trained at Mungo while living at Mildura, could understand Susie's greater sense of isolation at Willandra. Visitation is small and seasonal compared to the large and constant visitor numbers to Mungo.<sup>202</sup> However for her it is the Mungo landscape which is 'much more outback looking – it has a deserty look to it – and it *feels* more isolated when you visit out there.'<sup>203</sup>

Susie compared the landscapes by colours – the startling and enlivening contrasts at Mungo of reds, pinks, bright white and blue, and to her the more monotonous blue-greys and green of the colours around the homestead at



*One of Susie Gardiner's postcard photos of the Walls of China which she sold at the Mungo NP Visitors Centre.  
(Courtesy Susie Gardiner)*

Willandra. At Willandra endless miles of flat, near-bare plains interspersed with occasional tree lines in creeks stretch beyond the homestead, while at Mungo undulating hillocks of pine and mallee meet the flat lakebeds and towering white sand hills. April also described that landscape through colours – 'the white and red sand country'.<sup>204</sup>

The two parks are further contrasted in their histories and consequential promotion. As is noted in more detail below, National Parks took ownership of Willandra after the station owners decided to sell in 1971. With assistance from Boral, a second package of land was added in 1975, which included the homestead precinct. Over the history of the park the emphasis has changed to

<sup>202</sup> According to Andrea, Willandra gets about 5,000 visitors annually while Mungo got about 30,000 in Susie and Ross's time there in the 1990s.

<sup>203</sup> Andrea Cashmere, pers. com. 15/5/03

<sup>204</sup> April Blair, *op cit.*

focus on the pastoral history of the property, with the homestead and its precinct taking centre stage.

It can be argued that this casts Willandra into the image of the populated outback of the Australian Legend – of men ‘masquerading’ (in Marilyn Lakes terms) as the gender neutral characters of the squatters, shearers, drovers, well sinkers and swaggies.<sup>205</sup> In so doing it provides an excellent case study in examining the place of women in interpreting settler pastoral history in an outback landscape.



*The most recent designs for Willandra and Mungo National Parks brochure and guide book (May2003)*

Mungo National Park, on the other hand, has until recently eschewed its settler history. Its international reputation is built on the archaeological discoveries made from the late 1960s of ancient Aboriginal remains, set within the arresting ‘lunar’ landscape known as the Walls of China. In 1979 the park was proclaimed after purchasing Mungo Station the previous year, becoming the centre of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage area declared in 1981.

Mungo is almost exclusively promoted visually through unpeopled landscape photos, providing it with hints at the wilderness outback image where the presence of indigenous culture comes in ancient and distanced form. Mungo enables insights into contemporary race politics where the demand of custodial

<sup>205</sup> See Section one.

recognition of living Aboriginal people, with whom National Parks has been actively working, disrupts easy notions of antiquity and science. The human remains found at Mungo are understood by living people to be their ancestors. Of the three groups who share Mungo country, it has predominantly been a group of women elders who are holders of the stories. These issues are touched on at the end of this section.

Also shifting the previous focus of antiquity in the park's promotion are the stories of the white property owners who sold their land which enabled the creation of the park. As small owner-occupied soldier settlement properties, they provide interesting contrasts with the Willandra Station enterprise in aspects of class and gender on the land.

## **willandra national park: pastoral heroism**

*When I was planning my trip out west Andrea said 'Hire a four-wheel drive Jo. You never know, it just might rain'.*

The northern boundary of Willandra National Park is the Willandra Creek. Until about 14,000 years ago it ran into the Willandra Lakes to the north east; the lakes system that gained World Heritage status in 1981.<sup>206</sup> This distinction is important as people have been known to head too far north through confusing the dry lakes system for the National Park.

The Park's *Plan of Management* states that Willandra Creek probably formed a rough boundary between the Wiradjuri people to the south and the Wogaibon people, commonly referred to as the Ngiyampaa, to the north. Ngiyampaa people were able to maintain aspects of pre-invasion traditions in the area until 1933 when they were removed from Ivanhoe (Carowa Tank Station above Willandra) to Menindee. The Creek was an important travel route and source of food for Wiradjuri to the west, and probably enabled other groups to travel south east to the Murray Darling Junction.<sup>207</sup>

The park encompasses 19,385 hectares of what used to be the much larger Big Willandra Sheep Station, made famous in such nationalistic poetry as *Flash Jack from Gundagai*. The Station was split up in 1971, part of which was

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<sup>206</sup> Jeannette Hope, Tasmin Donaldson and Luise Hercus, 'A History of the Aboriginal People of the Willandra Lakes Region: Part of the study on the Significance of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Region to Aboriginal Communities', 1986 (copy of draft held at NPWS, Hurstville, Historical Register Collection); National Parks and Wildlife Service New South Wales, *Willandra National Park Plan of Management*, NSW NPWS, Hurstville, 1989.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, 15; Hope et al *op.cit*; NPWS Cultural Heritage Services Division, *Willandra National Park Historic Heritage conservation Management Plan (Final)*, NPWS, Hurstville, August 1999

established as national park in 1972, and then added to in 1975 through Boral Limited's donation that included the homestead precinct.<sup>208</sup>



*Andrea Cashmere (centre) and students from Yarram Secondary School at Willandra Homestead, May 2003*

The Griffith-based Ranger in charge of Willandra is Andrea Cashmere. She has been there a number of years and oversaw the extensive renovations of the Homestead and shearing precincts that were completed between 1996 and 2001. The Field Officer of many years is Ross Gardiner. He lives in the old overseers cottage while for the past two years his wife Susie and two sons live in Hillston through the week for schooling.

## country

The park sits on the red and black soil of the Western Plains. Having driven into the park in the dark from Hillston, I recorded in my diary that all I really knew about the landscape that night was that it was *flat, flat, flaaaaat*. Rather more evocative are Jill Ker Conway's descriptions in her book about the plains country surrounding Coorain Station, 60 kilometres west down the Hillston to Mossiel road.

Very occasionally, where a submerged watercourse rises a little nearer the surface of the earth, a group of eucalyptus trees cluster. Worn and gnarled by wind and lack of moisture, they rise up on the horizon so dramatically they appear like an assemblage of local deities. Because heat and mirages make them float in the air, they seem from the distance like surfers endlessly riding the plains above a silvery wave. The ocean they ride is blue-grey, silver, green, yellow, scarlet, and bleached gold, highlighting the red clay tones of the earth to provide a rich palette illuminated by brilliant sunshine, or on grey days a subdued blending of tones like those observed on a calm sea... On the plains the horizon is always with us and there is no retreating from it.<sup>209</sup>

<sup>208</sup> National Parks and Wildlife Service, op. cit., 1989; NPWS Cultural Heritage Services Division, *Willandra National Park Historic Heritage conservation Management Plan (Final)*, NPWS, Hurstville, August 1999.

<sup>209</sup>Jill Ker Conway, *The Road from Coorain*, Vintage, London, 1998, 4-5

It was a landscape too far from civilisation for schoolgirls Phoebe Neibon and Tanya Rendell, members of the Yarram Secondary College from Gippsland staying at the park at the same time as I.

The journey suddenly changed from travelling by green pastures and a modern atmosphere, to rarely seeing an inhabited building, or a living tree... Relief passed through everyone at the sight of the sign: 'Willandra National Park 20 km'. Then buildings appeared: shearing sheds, the cottage, the homestead and finally, the Men's Quarters... our home for the next five days.<sup>210</sup>



*On the Hillston to  
Mossgiel Road,  
about half way  
between Willandra  
and Coorain*

Compared to the more arresting landscape of Mungo, Andrea finds Willandra a more subtle landscape:

You will never get claustrophobic at Willandra. You can see the horizon in every direction, beautiful sunsets and amazing stars. Dusk is the best time; the place is just so peaceful. It's a place you have to take time in to really appreciate, it hides itself well, the changes are subtle but if you take the time it's a truly amazing place.<sup>211</sup>

Drought has struck this country hard over its history of white pastoralism. After the devastating drought of the late 1890s and decimation by rabbits, the saltbush never recovered in this section of the Willandra run.<sup>212</sup> In 'good years' the plains flourish with a variety of low herbage. But that is not what I saw. In recent years cattle have trampled the fragile soils to a fine powder in the bare paddocks leading up to the park boundary on the entrance road, and kangaroos on the park have grazed low the current drought ridden plants trying to hang on. The rain that has come to this country over the last two years has not been enough to break the drought.

When it does come it is debatable whether it is the red or the black soil, so rapidly turning from sand to mud after a bit of rain, which sticks more

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<sup>210</sup> Phoebe Neibon and Tanya Rendell, 'A Beep of Relief', unpublished essay, Yarram Secondary School, May 2003.

<sup>211</sup> Andrea Cashmere, email communication, May 2003.

<sup>212</sup> Jamie Kronborg, *Big Willandra: A Pastoral History of the Willandra Estate*, Willandra Marine Stud, Australia, 1986.

emphatically to the underneath of your boots so that you feel like you're wearing 1970s platform heels. And what it does to the city tyres of a rental four-wheel drive is hardly worth mentioning. Suffice to say that after a few kilometres the wheels no longer turn.

For it did indeed rain on my first morning, preventing retreat in a city car in an astoundingly short period. This resulted in an extra three days at Willandra that took away that time around Mungo, but provided a wealth of boggy stories from the otherwise dry and dusty Willandra Plains. The consequence for this report is that the Willandra section is more detailed in its investigation of sources and on-site interpretation than the Mungo section.

The school group of sixteen teenagers and five adults from Gippsland also spent those extra days at the park. For Natasha Kemp and Gabrielle Bland being stuck in the wet outback was not their idea of fun. This vast landscape turned out to be one of confinement.

Leaving green Victoria  
Coming to a dry, flat land  
In Willandra, New South Wales...  
Excitement settled in.

Then came the dreaded rain  
And mud clung to our boots;  
Confined to the Men's Quarters,  
Boredom settled in.

The road cannot be travelled.  
We cannot get out.

We are trapped!<sup>213</sup>

## **sources**

Rangers and other NPWS staff who produce historical on-site interpretation and information for brochures are rarely professional historians. Even for those with an interest in such things, they don't have the time to dig for archival material or seek out extensive oral stories. On the whole, as Andrea Cashmere pointed out to me, they must work with the source material at hand.<sup>214</sup>

Therefore one of my tasks for this report was to explore and analyse what materials were available to those preparing historical interpretation material for Willandra National Park. This was carried out from sources in the Historic Sites Register at head office in Hurstville, and assisted by Andrea at Willandra.

Photographs have been a major source of information on the Willandra Station utilised in the on-site interpretation for the Homestead and are discussed below. Of the written material, the *Willandra National Park Historic Heritage*

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<sup>213</sup> Natasha Kemp and Gabrielle Bland, 'Trapped...' unpublished poem, Yarram Secondary School, May 2003.

<sup>214</sup> Andrea Cashmere, pers.com. 15/5/03

*Conservation Management Plan (CMP)*, finalised in August 1999, provides one of the most accessible historical contexts for park staff. For information relating to the white pastoral history of the Willandra Estate, the CMP relied on an abridged history of the Estate by a previous NPWS historian Joan Kent and early twentieth century articles on the Willandra Estate that Kent had also used.<sup>215</sup>

The articles reveal a stereotypical absence of women, even in their descriptions of the homestead and its gardens. Pastoral properties were the kingdoms of heroic male enterprise – in particular in Willandra’s case, of the manager from 1906 to 1928 Frank Laird. Laird took over management from his brother and brought with him his wife Annie who had three children while living at Willandra - May, Hilda and Archie.<sup>216</sup> However, having made no mention of the existence of Laird’s family until the concluding sentence in the 1929 article, the erasure of Annie was complete. ‘[Mr Laird’s] family consists of two daughters and a son.’<sup>217</sup>

The most influential source in interpreting the pastoral history of Willandra is not the CMP or the Pastoral Homes articles, but Jamie Kronborg’s 1986 *Big Willandra: A Pastoral History of the Willandra Estate*.<sup>218</sup> Kent relied heavily on the book in her abridged history, and hence it finds its way strongly into the CMP. I borrowed the Griffith office’s copy and I had that extra bit of time to read it thoroughly while at Willandra.

Except for some photos in the book that bear witness to the presence of white women throughout the property’s history, one could be excused from thinking it was inhabited exclusively by white men. There is no mention in the text of any woman who lived on the property. This is unsurprising in the genre of pastoral and outback histories as noted in section two. Kronborg’s text provides an excellent example of the historical silence on women. Due to its influence in interpreting the history of the Willandra Estate, some further exploration of his text is warranted in its treatment of women.

This is a history about prominent white men and sheep. Aboriginal men do not appear in the written text and rarely are the white male employees

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<sup>215</sup> Joan Kent, ‘An Abridged History of the big Willandra Station’, unpublished paper prepared for inclusion in the Conservation Plan for the Historical Resources of Willandra National Park due for completion in 1990, nd; Pastoral Homes of Australia, ‘The Willandra Estate’, *Pastoral Homes of Australia: New South Wales and Queensland*, The Pastoralists’ Review Pty. Ltd., Melbourne, 1911, 61-72 [1-12]; Pastoral Homes of Australia, ‘Willandra, Booligal, New South Wales. The Property of the Willandra Pastoral Company Limited’, *Pastoral Homes of Australia: New South Wales and Queensland*, The Pastoralists’ Review Pty. Ltd., Melbourne, 1929, 49-60. Photocopies of these articles are held in the NPWS Historic Register, Hurstville.

<sup>216</sup> ‘The Laird Family Album’ photocopy of an album made available by Mrs May Frappell nee Laird, nd. Copy held in the NPWS Historic Sites Register and at Willandra Homestead.

<sup>217</sup> Pastoral Homes of Australia, *op.cit.*, 1929,60.

<sup>218</sup> Kronborg *op.cit.*

mentioned.<sup>219</sup> The majority of the book documents the ownership, management and economic record of the Willandra Estate as it developed on the Willandra Plains prior to its break-up in 1971, all of which is valuable background information. It documents the development of its famous stud Merino flock. The final chapters of the book follow the Willandra stud sheep to new pastures.

In many ways it helps fulfil Jill Ker Conway's desire in the 1950s to know more about breeding practices. She complained of Australian histories written by urban writers where absurdities arose: '[s]heep which had been hair-bearing were supposed to have sprouted fabulous coats of wool on being exposed to the Australian climate. How had it really happened?'<sup>220</sup>

However Kronborg's history reveals more than merely a forgetful silence of women in Willandra's history. There are a few mentions of women throughout the text. The first gives example to the terrible circumstances of the 1890s depression. It is a long quote about a woman who is found to have burnt her newborn baby in a bonfire in Melbourne's slums.<sup>221</sup> The second tells a story about Jessie Dowdle, wife of a station hand at a neighbouring outstation who made magnificent scones with clotted cream and jam. Another tells of Lady Wakehurst's memories of accompanying her husband, the NSW Governor of the time, to the Willandra homestead in the 1930s. And John Robb, the son of the then manager, also remembered the visit saying that 'we never had extra maids, although we had an Aboriginal girl who waited-at-table. Every night she was in proper uniform.'<sup>222</sup>

Except for the Aboriginal 'waiting' girl, none of these women lived on the Willandra Station. No mention is made of the managers' wives, such as Robb's wife who must have hosted the Wakehurst's visit, or Annie Laird before her who must have been busy with the running of a large house and maintaining community networks for her enterprising husband.<sup>223</sup> Their place in keeping the estate sociably viable, as noted in Grimshaw et al about elite women, was vital to the overall success of the stud. However their role is deemed so insignificant in Kronborg's account as not even to rate a mention in the stereotypical but

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<sup>219</sup> However see the section on 'Billabong Bushmen' where working white men on the property are individually named and identified as 'true sons of the outback'. Kronborg, *op.cit.*, 114.

<sup>220</sup> Ker Conway, *op.cit.*, 185.

<sup>221</sup> Kronborg, *op.cit.*, 52.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid*, 113. That is the only mention that I found in the written text about Aboriginal people. There is one photo of a group of Aboriginal people at the beginning of the book however with the caption 'Willandra station Aborigines 1886'.

<sup>223</sup> John Robb does mention his mother, remembering the water rats he caught in the billabong to make her a coat.

nevertheless important domestic role, for example, of keeping house and garden.<sup>224</sup>

One might assume that throughout Willandra's pastoral history on the plains the outside world of handling sheep was undoubtedly the domain of men. But we do not know to what extent that was true. For example Kronborg includes a photo of Margaret Robb, the manager's daughter, on a horse behind a mob of sheep. One can infer from the photo that she was mustering, but as no mention is made of her in the text nothing more can be learnt from that source.

The important things that happened on pastoral stations were understood to be enacted by men, where women's roles were deemed so insignificant to the historical record that they rarely made the pages of such texts. Kronborg is part of a much broader pattern where women remain invisible, thereby helping construct outback places as if they were/are the domains of men.

Two comments were echoed amongst most of the women and men with whom I spoke about this project. One was a near universal enthusiasm from both sexes for seeking out and including stories of women in outback histories, as people felt they were missing. The second was a general agreement that they really hadn't thought much about it before.

The exclusion of women in their diversity has often been so complete in pastoral and outback histories until very recently, that people forget to look. The fundamental step of bringing women in their diversity into the consciousness of NPWS staff, consultants and the visitors to parks, is necessary for more inclusive and therefore more complete portrayals of those who lived on outback parks.

## interpretation

In 1911, *Pastoral Homes of Australia* described Willandra Station as 'one of the most notable of the large holdings in the Western Division of New South Wales'.<sup>225</sup> In his much-referenced history on the Western Division, *On the Wool Track* (referred to in section two), Bean drew a picture of a typical 'outside' station that amply described Willandra in the early twentieth century.

Over the face of the real Australia there are scattered at very wide intervals, each in some corner of its enormous run, what are really small villages. Four or five miles before you come to them you can make them out, somewhere mixed up in the mirage – probably with a streak of blue sky below them as well as above – not one white roof, but anything up to a dozen. They peep over dark foliage that is strange in these grey plains but familiar to you – tiny oases of orange trees and peach trees in a wee patch

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<sup>224</sup> Patricia Grimshaw et al, *Creating a Nation*, McPhee Gribble Publishers, Ringwood, 1994, Ch 8 'Gendered Settlements'. In Kronborg the homestead and its gardens, including the work of the first Chinese vegetable gardener Ah Yen, are discussed without any mention of women, *op.cit* , 86-88.

<sup>225</sup> *Pastoral Homes of Australia, op. cit.*, 1911, 61[1].

of civilised flowers and vegetables, bordered by hedges, tenderly nursed and irrigated.<sup>226</sup>

At Willandra National Park the six-bedroom homestead, maids quarters, tennis court, garden, office, two cottages, ram-shed, stables, workshop and men's quarters which make up the current homestead precinct hold the central focus of park promotion, interpretation and visitor attention. Just within sight of those buildings is the shearing precinct, both areas having been carefully and successfully rejuvenated to provide a sense of the extensive built environment of the busy estate.

What it cannot emulate is the hum of activity that filled this village complex, for indeed today it feels more isolated than it must ever have done for most of the twentieth century.<sup>227</sup> According to Les Finch, who worked at Willandra in the 1930s as a well and windmill expert, there were four jackaroos, an overseer and bookkeeper, two maids, a woman cook, a laundress, five members of the manager's family (the Robbs) and 'about twenty blokes down in the huts'. At the time there were nine outstations, of which the eight boundary riders were married with families, and the Robb's also employed a governess and a Chinese man as gardener.<sup>228</sup>

Historical interpretation of the park is offered in a beautifully presented booklet called *Big Willandra*, and in photographs, captions and individual stories in the Homestead. The booklet can be collected in a small room that is always open at the side of the Park's staff office. It offers five trails to the visitor through which to 'gain an insight into an extraordinary time in Australia's pastoral history'.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> C.E.W. Bean, *On The Wool Track*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1916, 100.

<sup>227</sup> Andrea says that people who used to work or visit the station often note how quiet it is now.

<sup>228</sup> Les Finch, 'Les Finch', unpublished story, Willandra National Park homestead. These numbers, with minor variations, are also noted in Kronborg *op.cit.* and Kent *op.cit.* Although not mentioned, it would also have been likely that at least the overseer was married and more families on the property than noted here.

<sup>229</sup> Willandra National Park, *Big Willandra*, NSW NPWS Riverina Regional Office, Griffith, nd, 2. The booklet is included in the accompanying blue folder.



*Front cover of the Willandra NP booklet. A copy of the booklet is included in the accompanying blue folder to this report.*

### ***the booklet***

The language used in the introductory remarks to the booklet is inclusive of both women and men. It introduces 'William Haines and his wife Emily' who arrived at Willandra in 1869, bringing their nine children – with no accommodation. Use of the plural 'they' instead of 'he' sets a tone of a shared journey into the outback and pastoral life.

The first of the trails described in the booklet is '*Homestead Hierarchy*', exploring the homestead precinct. The evocative strip of photographs provides evidence of a diverse and busy community that includes women, children, and of course large sheep. The written text notes the existence of homestead cooks and maids and where they were housed. The photos of women, however, only portray the manager's wife at leisure or needlework.

Remembering the ranger's comment that one can only work with the sources at hand, it is likely that no photos of women as workers were available. It raises an important issue however about how women are often ignored as paid workers in historical interpretation.<sup>230</sup> Having also noted the title of '*hierarchy*', in a place where strict boundaries of class prevailed, working class women are rendered further invisible as working men are included amongst the photos.

The second trail is '*Pastoral Pleasures*', exploring the homestead and gardens. The photo strip reveals extensive gardens, aspects of the refurbished house and a focal point drawn to manager Robert Robb on the phone. In keeping with the idea that the presence of women has to be actively remembered, where pastoral and outback histories have routinely ignored them, a prominent photo of a manager's wife within her domain of the homestead would have been appropriate here.

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<sup>230</sup> See Maria Nugent, 'Women and Domestic Labour' *Women's Employment and Professionalism in Australia: Histories, Themes and Places*, Australian Heritage Commission, 2002, 9-16.

Time to enjoy the '*pleasures*' of the homestead where likely only for the manager's family and guests. The washing, cooking three hot meals a day, cleaning and serving the household's needs would have provided little leisure time for the workingwomen of the household. And one is left to wonder at the circumstances of the unnamed Aboriginal girl who waited-at-table, mentioned by John Robb in Kronborg above.

The third trail, '*Fleece Followers*', explores the shearers precinct. The photos on these pages are interestingly free of people, except for a young Les Finch noted as a well-man. The other photos showcase the renovated shearers quarters and shed, and feature a lovely close-up of a sheep. Women are remembered in the text as the loved ones left waiting for the shearer's return to a home far off.

Surely here one should not expect to find women, for this was almost exclusively a man's world, wasn't it? Historically shearers were men, with few exceptions. The shearer's precinct is an obvious place where discussion and acknowledgement of the Australian bush legend as a particular white male character - rather than an un-gendered, universal national character - can be made. An absence of female influence does not mean that places and landscape are not highly gendered.

But even shearers' quarters are not quite the unambiguously male domain that histories depict. The shearers' cooks were not always men and families sometimes accompanied husbands and fathers. And the quarters had other uses. For example the Willandra shearing quarters was home to Elsa Warr and her family in the early 1950s after they returned to work on the station. In her fourteen years on the station, Elsa cooked for the homestead and the men's huts, and lived with her family at Merton outstation where her husband was a boundary rider and station hand. In their six months at the shearers' quarters one of her jobs was to wash the jackaroos shirts in kero tubs – white ones in that red dirt country, as she said they wore no other colour.<sup>231</sup>

The last two trails in the booklet offer enticing walking and driving tours of the Park, exploring the natural and Aboriginal cultural heritage as well as the presence of Europeans. Amongst the coloured landscape photos of the last trail, '*Beyond the Dust – Merton Driving Trail*', is a black and white photo of a large family who lived at Merton outstation. The text notes the isolation of these places and their families. Beyond the homestead itself, the other place on Willandra where women were to be found throughout its history were the outstations. As Bev Widderson, who spent some of her early teenage years on one Willandra

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<sup>231</sup> Elsa Warr, Interview NPWS-WL-03, 14/5/03

outstation remarked to us, the men probably wouldn't have stayed out there without their wives and families.<sup>232</sup>

### *the homestead*

*16/5/03: 3.30pm and the thick mist still hasn't lifted and there isn't a breath of wind. Not good drying weather! I was meant to leave for Mungo at 7am this morning for a day with the ranger and an interview at Mungo Lodge. Susie brought Andrea and I back out through the mud from Hillston yesterday in the Suzuki – an intrepid driver and vehicle to be sure. We careered past the silly city car stranded on its pile of mud. It was pretty clear then that no one without a Suzuki was going anywhere today. So I left my exploration of the homestead till this morning. Leaving the nice warm staff quarters - it was just plainly cold over there. I struggled to appreciate the cool breezes on the large verandas and I found it hard to imagine the 114 degrees fahrenheit that were mentioned in the stories. The Willandra billabong that helped provide such a relief in this usually dry dusty place just looks a dirty grey to match the sky. Could have done with my ugh boots – muddy boots left at the front door.*



*Strip of photos from Big Willandra booklet 'Pastoral Pleasures' 6/7*

The other place to find historical interpretation at Willandra National Park is inside the homestead. This is predominantly through the framed photos and captions to be found in each room, and a series of stories in folders available to be read in the sitting room. The front door remains open for visitors to the Park and the homestead is available for overnight accommodation, catering for couples and families to large groups. The rooms have been elegantly refurbished in period style except for the kitchen, somewhat to the chagrin of women who once cooked there, which has been modernised to cater for guests.<sup>233</sup> Rather than a museum therefore, the homestead has been successfully renovated as a functioning living space.

After so much time, effort, thoughtfulness and money have gone into the building renovation and the booklet, it is disappointing to find such scant and often poor interpretation inside the homestead. A number of the photos and some of the captions are an excellent means of telling part of the story of social life over the years on the estate. However other photos are ill matched to the original function of the rooms and poorly presented and worded captions, sometimes

<sup>232</sup> Bev Widderson, Interview NPWS-WL-02, 13/5/03.

<sup>233</sup> The bathrooms have also been modernised for paying guests.

missing altogether, detract from the overall sense of history manifest in the renovated homestead.<sup>234</sup>

Despite applying for money for historical research, Andrea was unable to secure funding. Therefore she had to work with the photos and information supplied predominantly through Joan Kent's earlier research. Original captions were kept where the photos had been sent with accompanying words, and Andrea added further personal information where she could find it. Other photos had no information with them.<sup>235</sup>

The carefully inclusive language in the booklet is not always maintained in some of the homestead interpretation where original captions have been kept. In the office to the left of the entrance hall one finds a larger photo of the Merton outstation family from the booklet, dated to around 1914. The words that accompanied the photo read: 'Mr Bill and Ada Woods and family moved to Willandra, he went to Merton, a back station at Willandra. He would be the last man to live there'. As Andrea and I now know from one of our interviews, Ray and Elsa Warr lived there with their family in the 1950s. Regardless of this mistake, the language of the caption obviously provides some confusion. Did Bill leave Ada and the family somewhere between the homestead and Merton?

The bedrooms and dining room display photos of life around the homestead and the building at different periods in an engaging manner. But it is unfortunate that the room neighbouring the kitchen and the maids' quarters - the working and living spaces of women - house photos inappropriate to those historical spaces. Men hauling wool bales, sheparding the big merinos, and proudly driving their 1920s cars are out-of-place.

If photos appropriate to these working and living spaces cannot be found, it would be better to decorate these rooms with artefacts that have some resonance with those who lived there. These might include framed needlework or packs of cards that helped fill their leisure moments and perhaps a decorated vase or jug (cemented to something solid?). The maids' quarters incorporate some pertinent interpretation questions about the positioning of beds where an older woman could have kept an eye on the younger ones. More such interpretation based on historical knowledge, asking questions to provoke the imagination, could be included throughout the homestead.

It is obvious from the photos that women lived at Willandra. But this isn't apparent in the stories in folders laid out on the table in the sitting room. I really

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<sup>234</sup> A family portrait sits on the table in the entrance hall. It has no caption. A photocopy in the Haines family file in the sitting room reveals it is Emily, William and their children who were introduced to us at the beginning of the *Big Willandra* booklet.

<sup>235</sup> Andrea Cashmere, pers.com. 16/6/03.

liked the idea of the individual stories that one could sit and read in a chair or on the steps of the veranda.

I asked some of the school children if they had read them and some said they had scanned the stories and others had read deeply and with interest.<sup>236</sup> 'It brought the place alive' was one comment. Knowing what my project was about however, two of the women on the school trip volunteered their view that they were sorry women were missing from the property's history. They were referring to the stories.

In fact three of the folders provide the only written clues to women's presence in the properties history. The folders on the Haines, Laird and Robb families, who managed Willandra at various times between 1869 and 1938, at least provide some names of the women.<sup>237</sup> However they are entirely peripheral to the central story of the male managers. The other stories are of men, workers as well as managers. They make great reading and what is needed are some stories of women across different areas of the property to add to the files on the table.

## **four women's stories**

The final section to the Willandra case study incorporates some of the stories elicited from women interviewed with connections to the station or national park. Without the Ranger these interviews would not have happened as she both initiated and organised them. Working with Andrea on two of the three interviews below allowed us both to input different aspects of the project into our questions. For example Andrea asked questions which were specific to the Park, emanating from her intimate knowledge of the place of which I was unfamiliar. Collaborating with the local ranger, field officer or Aboriginal heritage officer provides much richer oral material than working on ones own.

The interviews were all carried out with non-Aboriginal women as, despite attempts through a series of avenues, no contacts were made with Aboriginal women. This does not mean that Aboriginal women or their children have no

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<sup>236</sup> The files also provide indication of having had little funding for their presentation. They each require a cover page that introduces the person, their relationship to the property, era of involvement and the source of the information. This would provide easier access into the stories, overcoming a sense of initial confusion that some students said deterred them from reading more thoroughly.

<sup>237</sup> Conflicting information about the length of stay of the Haines family occurs between great-granddaughter Frances Morton's reminiscence in the Haines files at the Homestead and Joan Kent's abridged history and Kronborg.

stories to tell of the Willandra landscape and is an aspect of research that needs to be followed up.<sup>238</sup>

Especially in the presence of men, an older generation of non-Aboriginal outback and rural women will often be the first to deny they have anything interesting or indeed legitimate to tell. As Sharon Veale reported in her *Land Use History of Culgoa National Park*, pastoral women will often defer to their husbands and sometimes reject attempts to be interviewed.<sup>239</sup>

The reticence of at least some women mean that people interested in the inclusive history of pastoral and outback places need to make a greater, conscious effort to seek out women's stories. More often it is just that no one really thought to ask women what they have to tell about living in the outback.

By the twentieth century class physically segregated many of the village complexes of the large Western Division properties east of the Darling, described by Bean and given example at Willandra, more overtly than race. For example unlike the big camps of Aboriginal families who lived separately on stations in the far west of NSW providing workers until the 1920s, and longer across central and northern Australia, Aboriginal workers on Western Division properties such as Willandra often lived with the other workers in the quarters available to their positions.<sup>240</sup>

The buildings were all designed to maintain class boundaries even to the extent of building fences by the workingmen's huts that the jackaroos from the homestead complex were not meant to breach after dark.<sup>241</sup> At the shearing precinct the veranda to the overseer's cottage faces away from the nearby men's quarters to maintain their status.<sup>242</sup> In exploring women's stories also, class as well as race issues need to be considered, and care taken not to emulate dominant historical genres where only the manager's wives might be the ones named and discussed. Nor, of course, should they be ignored. Four brief accounts of women at Willandra are provided across class and time.

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<sup>238</sup> I left phone messages and sent emails to relevant NPWS staff but did not receive any replies. I obviously needed more time to build relationships that would have allowed me to find relevant people to talk to.

<sup>239</sup> Sharon Veale, *Culgoa National Park Land Use History*, Cultural Heritage Services Division, NSW NPWS, Hurstville, May 1997.

<sup>240</sup> This doesn't mean that other forms of racism weren't practised, such as making domestic staff eat separately in some places or with different utensils. At Willandra the Chinese gardener had his own hut. Physical separation also occurred on stations such as outside Balranald where Charles Rowley described twenty Aboriginal people living permanently in sheds, huts and caravans in the 1960s; *Outcasts in White Australia: Aboriginal Policy and Practice Volume II*, ANUP, Canberra, 1971, 161.

<sup>241</sup> Elsa Warr, Interview *op.cit.*

<sup>242</sup> *Big Willandra op cit.*



*Annie Laird and the children. From the 'Laird Family Album' courtesy of Mrs May Frappell and Willandra National Park*

*Annie Laird* lived on Willandra between 1906 and 1928. She was the wife of the prominent manager Frank Laird, and they had three children, Archie, Hilda and May. The only reason we know that Frank wasn't a bachelor from Kronborg is his statement that 'The Laird's moved into Merrowie homestead' when the new house was being built in 1918.<sup>243</sup> According to the caption on a photo in the entrance hall of the homestead, Annie's brother Alan was manager on the neighbouring property of Trida. One of the folders on the sitting room table is 'The Laird Family Album' with a number of photos of Annie in different situations around the home and Kent notes that Laird's wife was a good supporter of community affairs.<sup>244</sup> Otherwise I know nothing more about Annie.<sup>245</sup>

Some of the Yarram College girls commented to me that she seemed to get larger in the photos probably, they thought, due to having little to do. After all she had a governess, a cook, housemaids and a gardener. In the introduction to her book of edited letters of colonial women and the bush, Lucy Frost comments on how much Mrs Agnes Henty hated living in the bush. Frost said this was not because of the landscape but because, as the wife of a wealthy man, she was trapped in a lonely lifestyle where 'her role was to do no work at all'.<sup>246</sup>

This is too simplistic however. While the constraints of the separate spheres were overwhelmingly tighter in the times of Annie Laird and Agnes Henty, like today the characteristics of individual women equipped some better than others for an outback life. Like Annie and Agnes, Katie Langloh Parker was married to a wealthy man who owned Bangate Station north east of Wilcannia. She kept a diary of her life there in the 1890s that portrays a lively and busy life of a woman comfortable in her landscape.<sup>247</sup>

While her husband clearly set spatial boundaries which she notes early on their arrival at Bangate, she was obviously active outside, for example riding

<sup>243</sup> Kronborg, *op. cit.*, 88.

<sup>244</sup> Kent, *op. cit.*, 12.

<sup>245</sup> Andrea is currently following up oral stories about Annie with her grandson Peter Laird.

<sup>246</sup> Lucy Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady: Voices from the Australian Bush*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1984, 8.

<sup>247</sup> Marcie Muir (ed), *My Bush Book: K. Langloh Parker's 1890s story of outback station life*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1982. That is not to say it was a comfortable landscape as they lived through the terrible drought of the 1890s which eventually drove them from Bangate (see section 2).

horses until an accident, managing a large garden, trying to raise healthy chooks, and chopping branches for the milking cows through the terrible drought. She painted scenery, the flora and fauna, and is best known for her interest in Aboriginal culture.<sup>248</sup> Deeply steeped in the racist and class culture of her time, she described her daily 'domestic prowl' to supervise the housework of the Aboriginal female domestics. She was not bored or lonely, according to the diary.

At Willandra possibly the girls had a point about Annie's sedentary life and weight gain. For example we have no evidence of her working in the garden or riding horses, only photos of her busy at needlework or standing in the garden. However as Patricia Grimshaw et al in *Creating a Nation* argue, European settlement of Australia was a female as well as male enterprise. Once the hardships of initial pioneering had occurred for elite women (like Emily Haines) they:

...adapted to the more subtle, though by no means less important, undertaking of displaying the taste and refinement, and sustaining the social networks among their kind, which transmuted a husband's labour and money into an enviable style of living, to be perpetuated through daughters' felicitous marriages and sons' openings to landed or business careers.<sup>249</sup>

The fame of Big Willandra in the 1920s was not just built on Frank Laird's breeding techniques that produced the huge Merinos, but was also secured through the social fabric that must have been maintained by Annie Laird.

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<sup>248</sup> See Grimshaw Patricia and Julie Evans, 'Colonial Women on Intercultural Frontiers: Rosa Campbell Praed, Mary Bundock and Katie Langloh Parker', *Australian Historical Studies*, 27 (106), 1996, 79-95

<sup>249</sup> Grimshaw et al, *op.cit.*, 122.



*Elsa Warr at home in Hillston,  
May 2003*

*Elsa Warr* lived on Willandra for about 14 years from 1947, with a two-year break away. Amongst her various paid work roles she was cook for the homestead and for the men's huts. With her husband Ray they raised six children on Willandra, one girl and five boys. Andrea and I interviewed Elsa at her home in Hillston on 14<sup>th</sup> May.<sup>250</sup> Not unsurprisingly Elsa would have agreed with the girls' assessment above about the life of the manager's wife. We asked what they did - 'walked around looking pretty. They never did much'.

Elsa was born in Hillston and started cooking on stations from the age of 14. She said she loved cooking and that it was the life she chose for herself. She described a relentless daily routine, seven days a week. On one of her first stations she cooked for eight jackaroos, six station hands, a gardener and a groom. At Hunthawong Station near Hillston she gave a graphic example of the maintenance of class division. There were three dining rooms: one for the men, one for the children and the other for the manager, wife, jackeroos and guests. She had to cook different meals for each dining room at all three sittings throughout the day – pretty ridiculous she snorted.

After marrying Ray, who she met while cooking for the soldiers at Albury, they came to Willandra where her first job was cooking for the homestead. For the main dining room she cooked for eleven jackeroos and the boss, wife and kids. Someone else cooked for the 22 men in the huts, a job she also later did.

The homestead precinct was a busy hive of activity. You bought all your groceries from the station store, and people came in from the outstations regularly to get their mail, supplies and to socialise. She was friends with the overseer's wife and the women from the outstations, and she remembers the windmill man had a wife and in one of the tiny huts beyond the men's huts there was a married couple.

That still made a lot more men than women and we asked if she ever felt like it was a man's world? 'No' – the men were 'more or less friends, so you just

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<sup>250</sup> Interview NPWS-WL-03

didn't feel anything. It was nice to see a woman come, but, it made no difference'. From this one is lead to understand that she did not regard the world in which she lived as a male domain, or one in which she, as a woman, was out of place. It was just her place.

The Warrs also spent 4 or 5 years at both Merton and Boney outstations. Boney was a really snakey place and she has fonder memories of their home at Merton. She had a 'good garden' that she built up there – it 'made the house feel more homey'. Elsa told us that she's always said that Merton was 'a good family life'. Her days were full with bringing up six children, where Ray was obviously also an active participant. 'We sort of shared what we done' – had to with six kids. But the life of an outstation employee still meant that Ray usually came in late and might be out for a few nights at a time, for example tracking wild cattle.

For Elsa the bush was the life she chose and they moved on and off stations throughout their working lives. She only got sick of it the once – but she had no kids left with her at that stage and she reckons that could have contributed to it. She and the children came in to live in Hillston for a few years once the youngest child reached school age, as that was too many children to try and educate. That was the usual practice amongst families at Willandra, where Elsa doesn't remember many older children on the Station. Ray came back out to work – separate lives were just what you had to live with for those years.

There were funny things that happened on Willandra, and bad ones. She nearly died after a miscarriage at the time of the mid 1950s floods when you couldn't get out for six months. That time they'd dragged the ute behind a tractor to the creek where an ambulance from Hillston was waiting on the other side, and she'd had to walk across a pole where the bridge had been washed away. Another time they had a scare with one of their sons, again when they couldn't get out. Over the phone the doctor had instructed the manager to inject him with a ram's needle and the boy recovered.

We asked Elsa if Willandra was the outback. 'Yeah you'd call it outback, I'd say.' Jo: 'What do you reckon outback means?' Elsa: 'Loneliness (pause) - but you don't – when you're on a back place like that you don't feel lonely.' Elsa summed up her memories about Willandra – the best of the places they'd lived on. 'There was never a dull moment I don't reckon. I rather liked it.'



*Bev Widdison at  
Murrumbong  
Outstation, May  
2003 and 1958.*

In 1958 at the age of 12, *Bev Widdison's* parents brought the family to live on another Willandra outstation. Murrumbong was to the south of the homestead, and the most isolated and terrible place that the five children felt their parents could have brought them to. At the age of 14, as soon as she could, Bev escaped into Hillston to become a domestic. Her parents stayed on until National Parks purchased the property in 1971.

Andrea brought Bev and her adult daughter Suzanne, who had never been to Willandra, out to the Park on that fateful morning of the first day of rain.<sup>251</sup> We were able to visit the outstation before the rain really started, and it was we four making our unsuccessful retreat to Hillston in the silly city car who Susie Gardiner in the Suzuki rescued and drove into town.

The Murrumbong house was brand new when the Widdisons arrived. It was the best house Bev's mother had lived in throughout their married life as it had proper floors, a roof over the bathroom and other such luxuries. But it was a tiny house, Bev remembering her parents' discussions about the builder having mistakenly made the rooms too small. On our return to the house Bev was astounded by just how small it was in which to raise five children.

More shocking however was that the house is now derelict and the lawn on which the twelve-year-old Bev played dressups is now just red sand. Her father had developed a garden that surrounded the house with the lawn, exotic trees, an ever-growing vegetable garden, geraniums, rose bushes and any other flowers that could survive the salty water. No sign is left except for a concrete strip at the front that had been part of his vine trellis and the foundations of the fishpond at the side. 'You would never even think anything had ever been there, would you', said Bev '... now there is nothing'. It was all too much for Suzy who couldn't fathom how her mother had lived there.

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<sup>251</sup> Interview NPWS-WL-02. For all I know Andrea's sedan is still out at the park!



*Sheila Widdison in her  
Land Army uniform  
(courtesy of Bev  
Widdison)*

Bev had come to tell us what she knew of her mother's life at Willandra. Shirl had been a Land Army girl from Sydney when she met Bev's father Artie. They had spent their early-married years on farms throughout central and highlands NSW. Because her father had not gone to the war they had never had the opportunity to get their own land, and jobs were scarce once soldiers returned. They heard about the boundary rider's job at Willandra because Shirl's Auntie Hazel was already living at 'six-mile' outstation with her husband, Arthur McAlpine.

Bev told us at first that she really didn't know what her mother did half the time out there. What could she have done? She read like anything, Bev remembered, and played crib with her friends. She played hopscotch and other games with the kids, she was always good like that. But she didn't have anything else to do really, thought Bev.

Of course she made all their clothes. She'd cook chops for Artie every morning before he left, and Bev remembers what fun it was to be pulled around the newly polished floors on rags to make them shiny. They only had a horse and buggy and her mother would go into the homestead to get the provisions. Probably she hadn't just sat around, Bev laughed.

The children felt they'd come to the ends of the earth. In other places they'd had neighbours close by, you could hear the traffic in the distance, there were people around. As they didn't have a car the children were left on their own while their parents got a ride into Hillston for an occasional weekend.

Bev was very glad to have Auntie Hazel at Willandra, although they didn't visit that often. But she was a woman who greatly influenced Bev – she was interested in everything. She preserved everything, even to fish heads, made wonderful cakes with fancy icing and would climb trees with the children to show them eggs. She experimented with growing all sorts of seeds in her outstation garden, she sketched – to Bev, unlike memories of her own mother, she seemed to always be busy.

Bev wrote out a list of things for me that she did out at Murrumbong.

Bev's Hobby's – pastimes: sketching, member of Argonauts Club, Lone Guide, reading, penfriends in Malay, Sweden, NZ; playing cards with mum and her friends, gardening, stamp collecting, listening to the radio. Favourite magazine – Girlfriend- Charlie Chucklers - favourite book series 'The Brumby' series and Enid Blyton's 'Secret 7' and books on 'Saddlers Wells' ballet series. Adult book that I remember most. *The Assent of Mt Everest*. Mum's books and *Reach for the Sky*, also Mum's book.

\$ Out door activities: Rabbit trapping, yabbing, collecting dead wool, chipping burrs 10 shillings a week, selling skins and wool to Hector Mallone in Hillston – sold yabbies to Pub in Hillston.

Maybe it wasn't *the* worst place on earth. But Bev remembers standing in the paddock beyond the house one day and watching a plane way up in the sky, and suddenly finding herself being left behind on the ground becoming smaller and smaller... feeling so insignificant and that she was nothing. Not unlike some of the Yarram school students, Bev had felt trapped in that landscape.



*Susie Gardiner and the Suzuki at Willandra National Park, May 2003*

*Susie Gardiner* lived at Willandra National Park from 1988 for two years, returning six years later until recently. She still comes out regularly through the week and weekends, but at the moment she and her two sons live in Hillston for the boys to go to school. Her husband Ross, the Field Officer at Willandra, lives at the Park. They count down the years until the

youngest son leaves school and they can again share the same house more often than weekends. I interviewed Susie, with Ross, on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> May. She and the boys had come to stay for the night – her third trip that week in the Suzuki - having brought out more food for the stranded school group.<sup>252</sup>

Unlike Bev who couldn't wait to escape the isolation of Willandra, Susie has loved it. If she hadn't found Ross she reckons she would have happily been a hermit, so Willandra has suited her well. One can go weeks without seeing anyone at Willandra as visitors to the park have usually been highly seasonal. And, as we now know, it doesn't take much rain for the roads to become impassable.

The park can also be a busy place. Susie has learnt to cater for large groups and deal with crises on her own. Like the time she was in the middle of cooking for a group of 60 at the men's quarters when the electricity gave out and no other staff were around. That's what Ross regards as a characteristic of outback life – learning to cope with anything and innovate.

Over her years at Willandra and their six years at Mungo, Susie thinks she's probably done every craft there is, she's written a couple of books,

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<sup>252</sup> Susie Gardiner, Interview NPWS-WL-05, 17/5/03.

practiced her photography, explored widely with the boys and developed her gardens. In fact Susie's gardening fame had preceded her as I'd already been told of the Willandra one around their cottage. An entirely modest person, these accomplishments were only shared with me to explain a full, varied and interesting life in the outback.

She grew up in the rice-growing town of Coleambally and they came to the park when she was only just pregnant with their first child. Ross said that when they were living out there first and Susie had a six-month old, he might be away for ten days at a time fighting fires. He said she has often been left alone with the two boys over the years.

Susie said she hadn't remembered that. Where the isolation and distance has counted for her has been since the boys reached school age. The unpredictable roads and petrol costs meant that even on a good day the 64 kilometres into Hillston could not be taken on lightly – and when the boys caught the school bus they spent over three hours a day getting to and from school which was not sustainable. Hence the tough decision to move into town, and away from Ross and the place she's happy in.

## **places of separation and inclusion**

Towns on the edges of the backcountry are full of women like Susie and Elsa before her, who have brought children in to educate them while men remain out back working on the properties. In Sonia Muir et al's recent book on outback NSW, where women populate its pages, stories of people in the towns proliferate as that is where many of the women live.<sup>253</sup> These separated lives cross class and race, although are experienced differently.

The stories of Elsa and Bev however also shed light on shared places. It is easy to think there would have been plenty of places on Willandra that were exclusively male spaces, for example the men's huts. However both Elsa and Bev talked about the men's huts as the places they spent a lot of time at. For Bev it was where the family's friends lived – the people with whom the kids played and the social companions of both her parents.

For Elsa, the men's huts were for a time where she worked as the cook. But it was also where she socialised along with her husband and the other men and their wives on the station. Further research is needed to find out how non-Anglo residents fared in these communities; for example the male Chinese gardener and the Aboriginal workers of both sex.

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<sup>253</sup> Sonia Muir, Sylvia Porss and Trudy Glasgow, *Living Out Back: People of Western New South Wales*, NSW Agriculture, 2002

The same can be said of home life, targeted as the sole domain of female domesticity. However Elsa told us that the kitchen was always Ray's domain on Sundays. Much to Elsa's annoyance on the occasion of expected visitors, Ray always cleaned out all the cupboards, regardless. It was also his day to cook. And at Bev's place it was her father who did the garden, from the vegetables to the roses. Gendered assumptions can mask much more dynamic realities.

In assuming such places as men's huts were exclusively male, without the research to decide one way or the other, one potentially denies the more complex and rich community life on pastoral stations – not only for the females (children and women) but also for more dynamic male spaces.

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*18/5/03: 8pm Sunday evening and I'm in Ivanhoe. Not on the itinerary! Yesterday the mist cleared earlier – about 3pm. But we all expected a clear night and were hopeful of no mists this morning. No mist - instead it rained! That wasn't meant to happen. There were some very grey faces on the school group. However the skies cleared to cloudless blue by late morning and the wind blew up – and by 4pm everyone was suddenly clearing out. Even Ross... Once I was on the 'main road' Susie told me not to worry – I'd see a thin silver track in the sun that would guide my way along the churned up road. Not to worry which side of the road it took – just follow it. And, Ross said, if a bigger vehicle than you approaches from the other way – make them get off the road (yeah right!). Not that I had to worry – I only met sheep... Ross drove the school bus out to the main road, where they turned left, and as I came out later to turn right onto the lonely Hillston to Mossgiel road I saw him returning. We said our goodbyes and then he cheerfully added – 'remember it's a closed road so make sure you don't damage the vehicle'. Thanks Ross.*



*Composite photo by Rod Sims of two photos of the Hillston to Mossgiel Road, late afternoon, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2003.*

## **mungo national park: aboriginal antiquity**

*New signs on the approach to Mungo National Park from the Ivanhoe side, 19<sup>th</sup> May 2003*



Today one can approach Mungo National Park on dirt roads from a number of directions. The busiest routes are from the south, travelling 110 kilometres northeast from Mildura or 147 kilometres northwest from Balranald. Or one can head 165 kilometres down to the park from Ivanhoe to its northeast.<sup>254</sup> Tourists have been coming to Mungo on organised bus tours since the mid 1960s and curious visitors long before that.<sup>255</sup> Even before Jim Bowler's first archaeological discovery of ancient human remains in 1969, non-Aboriginal pastoralists and visitors had been attracted to the unique landscape of the Walls of China. For example Russell Drysdale visited there in 1945 on his painting trip through western NSW.<sup>256</sup>

However visitor pressure on the area increased enormously after the archaeological discoveries of the late 1960s. National Parks began discussions with the owners of Mungo Station, Albert and Venda Barnes, from 1971. This was as increasing concern was voiced over the need to protect the archaeological sites and the fragile dune environment of the Walls, and the Barnes concern about the detrimental management and financial impact on their property.<sup>257</sup>

After a drawn out process NPWS purchased the property from the Barnes in 1978, one of the first such purchases by the Service and eagerly awaited by the Barnes.<sup>258</sup> This was followed in 1984 by the purchase of part of neighbouring Zancie Station, and by further properties in 1997.<sup>259</sup>

The Park's national and international fame lies in the ancient history of Lake Mungo. Over tens of thousands of years, as the lake system filled with fresh

<sup>254</sup> A minor road also heads west to Mungo starting opposite the Hillston/Mossgiel Road where it meets the Cobb Highway. However it was too wet for me to take as originally planned.

<sup>255</sup> Mark Dunn, 'Historical Overview', Godden Mackay Logan *Mungo National Park Historic Heritage Conservation Management and Cultural Tourism Plan*, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Draft Report, June 2002, 13-47

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>257</sup> Dunn *op.cit.*; Venda Barnes, Interview NPWS-WL-09, 22/5/03

<sup>258</sup> See Dunn *op.cit.*, 43-44.

<sup>259</sup> Pers. Com. Jo Gorman and Lars Kogge, Lower Darling NPWS Office, June 2003.

water and dried out, layers of sand and silt built up to form the lunette surrounding the lake's edge. Part of it formed the park's most famous landmark of the Walls of China.<sup>260</sup> The paradox of human impact on what is seen to be a natural landscape is pointed out below.

Aboriginal people occupied the area and have left behind considerable evidence in the form of burial sites, hearths and artifacts. Although the first non-Indigenous people undertook relatively little clearing and pasture improvement, introduced animals had a major impact on the vegetation, particularly along the Walls of China. Ironically, it was the loss of plant cover in this area that exposed the topsoil to wind erosion, thereby revealing the archaeological evidence of prior Aboriginal occupation.<sup>261</sup>

Mungo Lady, the first significant skeleton found in the 'shifting sands', revealed the earliest known use of ritual burial practices and after that other skeletal remains were found.<sup>262</sup> In recognition of the significance of the archaeological and geomorphological features of the region, in 1981 the broader Willandra Lakes System with Mungo National Park at its heart was listed as a World Heritage Site.

At the time of its listing there was little interest in, or recognition of, contemporary Aboriginal people's attachment to the area.<sup>263</sup> The era of Aboriginal confidence to reassert their cultural custodianship in the face of anthropological, historical and popular analyses of a 'loss of culture', to be found in such texts as Hardy's sympathetic history of the Barkindji/Paakantji (section two), was yet to come.

The following two decades marked a decisive shift in Aboriginal political activism and non-Aboriginal academic engagement in Indigenous heritage. At the Willandra Lakes Region World Heritage Area (WHA) this eventuated in the formation of the Three Traditional Tribal Groups Elders Committee, comprising the three groups with traditional attachment to the area. These are the Mutthi Mutthi, Ngiyampaa and Paakantji peoples. In early 2000 the Elders Committee entered negotiations with the National Park to formalise the involvement of the traditional groups in the management of the park. This was ratified as the Joint Management Agreement in March 2001.<sup>264</sup>

Over the last two to three years National Parks internal documents and site interpretation in the Visitors Centre have shifted the previous sole emphasis on the archaeological and environmental history of the area, to include

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<sup>260</sup> See Allan Fox, *Mungo National Park: Part of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area. Guidebook*, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, revised edition, 1997.

<sup>261</sup> Godden Mackay Logan, *Mungo National Park Historic Heritage Conservation Management and Cultural Tourism Plan*, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Draft Report, June 2002, 54.

<sup>262</sup> Edward Stokes, 'Skeletons in the Sand', *Geo*, 3(3), 27-49, Fox *op. cit.*

<sup>263</sup> For an interesting example of the beginnings of hesitant recognition of contemporary Aboriginal concern and typical absence see Stokes *op.cit*

<sup>264</sup> Mungo National Park Joint Management Advisory Committee Agreement, 2001

contemporary Aboriginal and settler pastoral attachment to the place. In disrupting assumptions of an ancient human past unsullied by contemporary lives and politics, National Parks has importantly begun a more dynamic, complex and inclusive reading of the Mungo landscape.

As I set off for Mungo and Mildura from Ivanhoe early on the 19<sup>th</sup> May I had already lost three of my six days in the area. I had an appointment in Mildura with Gladys Barnes of Leaghur Station that I was determined to keep, and I hoped I had time to drop in to talk to Jody Grant at Mungo Lodge on my way through. I knew I was coming back to Mungo the next day with Mary Pappin.

Unfortunately about the time I was sweeping down one of those low red sand hills with expansive views over country that I felt was unquestionably 'outback', I was meant to be at a rescheduled meeting with the ranger in charge of Mungo, Ray Dayman, and long-term archaeologist in the region Harvey Johnston. Their busy schedules meant we were unable to meet in the time I was in Mildura.

As a consequence of this I was unable to access the site-specific resources needed and no detailed on-site interpretation work was completed for this report. I concentrated on the interviews and the local research on the region that I had planned to do so as to produce the 'regional history' aspect of the project brief. This work has informed section two, and earlier and following parts of this section.<sup>265</sup>



*Approach towards the Mungo sand hills (in the far distance on the left) from Ivanhoe.*

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<sup>265</sup> I interviewed Jody Grant at Mungo Lodge, Gladys Barnes and Clarrie Barnes of Leaghur Station, Mary Pappin and her daughter Mary Elizabeth Pappin, Vanda Barnes of Mungo Station and her daughter Barbara, and April Blair (Dubbo) on the area.

## visiting mungo with mary pappin

I returned to Mungo with Mary Pappin the following day. Mary has done this trip with many curious visitors, but it has not dimmed her delight to be able to introduce a new person to her country. She thinks women are often not heard enough, especially Aboriginal women. So, she said, she was happy to talk to me about her history and her country.

A Mutthi Mutthi woman from Balranald, Mary has been coming out to Mungo since the early 1970s when her mother Alice Kelly was an active member of the WHA Elders Consultative Committee. She has also been a long-time active member of many committees to do with the park and the lower Murray Darling Basin.

Mary was careful to explain early in our drive out that Mungo is a 'sharing place' and that Mutthi Mutthi are one of three tribal groups with traditional responsibilities at Mungo. In turn I explained that I was interested to hear her



*Mary Pappin at the Walls of China, May 2003*

stories of growing up in this broad outback country as I had other individual women, rather than anticipating any representative notion in her being an Aboriginal woman. As with some of the other interviews on the fieldtrip, her story influenced my understanding of the history of the area in section two.

Mary said that her mother and some of the other women from the other groups have the stories to tell about Mungo. That is why the older women like Tibby Briar, Alice Bugmy, Elsie Jones and her mother were the ones on the Elders Committee for the World Heritage Region. Her father was a Wamba Wamba man from around Swan Hill, and did not interfere unless he was asked something. He was, Mary said, respectful of being on other people's country. However he had also worked and travelled across that country for most of his adult life.

She is impatient with the claims of those who say that Aboriginal people disappeared from the backcountry around Mungo once the lakes dried up, with the direct inference that therefore contemporary claims of people like Mary, her mother and her children to traditionally belonging to Mungo country are fabricated. For example this ignores her own and other families histories of

grandparents, parents and their own experiences of working on pastoral properties throughout the region; fencing, tree clearing, droving, mustering, rabbiting and so on.

For Mary her confidence in an intimate knowledge of the landscape, through understanding where to find bush foods and medicines, is central to connecting her to country. 'This is all my country'. From Willandra Creek to the Murray, to the Murrumbidgee and Balranald to the Lachlan and all through Mungo. 'I know I can resource that country. I can get traditional resources. I can get a good feed out of that country and get medicines. It's all the same country'.<sup>266</sup> Pride in the knowledge about bush tucker is something one will often hear repeated amongst Aboriginal women particularly.<sup>267</sup> It is an enduring way in which women assert their attachment to the landscape through practice.

The Wentworth, Dareton, Mildura and Pooncarie region was where I had been able to make contacts with Aboriginal women prior to my visit, well supported by the NPWS Executive Officer of the Joint Management Advisory Committee Garry Pappin. So it was a great pity for this project that I was unable to take up the opportunity to work collaboratively with Mary and Garry and follow up other contacts that had been provided to me through the assistance of April Blair.

## landscape of diverse meanings

As Aboriginal women have returned in more overt terms to the Mungo landscape, non-Aboriginal women have departed the area. This departure (rather than the return of Aboriginal women) is one of the central shifts in the landscape discussed amongst the non-Aboriginal women I interviewed. Moving into Mildura for schooling children is part of it. However, unlike Willandra Station that was maintained as a large property despite being whittled down through the history of closer settlement, the Mungo region was full of small properties.

Since the 1978 sale of the Barnes property of Mungo Station, National Parks and other government agencies have bought a further six family properties.<sup>268</sup> While men are seen to still be working in the district for National Parks and the remaining stations, resident women are noticed as having left. Not only has the NSW government as a landowner become a prominent player in the western NSW economic landscape, it has had a particular impact on the gendered vision of the place.

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<sup>266</sup> Mary Pappin, Interview NPWS-WL-08, 20/5/03

<sup>267</sup> April Blair *op. cit.*,

<sup>268</sup> Zancie was purchased in 1984, followed by Garnpang, Leaghur, PanBan and Balmoral in 1997 and Joulie by another department. NPSW staff Lower Darling Office June 2003.

Nevertheless Mungo is a landscape less open to unambiguously gendered readings than some outback places. It is not immediately apparent as a masculine adventure landscape, although Venda Barnes tells her story about the rather 'rough looking' men who turned up on more than one occasion in the early days of growing tourist interest in the place, towing a boat and demanding to know where the 'bloody lake' was.<sup>269</sup> And it is certainly not promoted as a soft feminised one.

However the deep human history that beckons aware tourists provides a complex association that can have more resonance with reflective and spiritual perceptions often associated with women than stereotyped competitive experiences of men. When I asked Andrea to compare the landscapes of Willandra and Mungo (where she trained), she said it was 'all about age'.

Mungo just seems so old compared to Willandra, the landscape looks older; it could be my subconscious also knowing that Mungo has a huge history. I think Mungo is harder country, it's less inviting and doesn't really welcome you like Willandra. At the same time I find Mungo really spiritual and I believe that's because of the people who have been before us.<sup>270</sup>

Mary Elizabeth Pappin, Mary's daughter, evocatively described the feeling of being in the Mungo landscape - 'it's just you and it'. When I asked what she meant when she had said earlier it was out in the middle of nowhere, Mary said:

well, you're on your own out there - but you're not alone. There's so much out there - the wildlife, the trees, the plants. And you know your own people are out there - your ancestors were out there who lived on and off that country.<sup>271</sup>

Jody Grant, owner of Mungo Lodge with her husband Graham, thinks that it is often the women tourists who are much more interested in the place, asking the questions about its history and ready to experience the landscape as the colours change near evening. For her the men are more easily bored at Mungo, and find interest in the tangible aspects of the settler history - the woolshed and tanks.<sup>272</sup>

Of course none of this means that women necessarily find greater appreciation in the landscape to men.<sup>273</sup> Venda Barnes and her daughter Barbara who grew up at Mungo were both very clear in their descriptions of the landscape. They both said there was 'nothing out there' and could never understand why the international tourists loved it so much. However both women made it clear they wished to differentiate between the visual landscape they 'hated', and their love for their home out there.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Venda Barnes, Interview NPWS-WL-09, 22/5/03

<sup>270</sup> Andrea Cashmere, email contact May 2003

<sup>271</sup> Mary Elizabeth Pappin, Discussion, 21/5/03

<sup>272</sup> Jody Grant, Interview NPWS-WL-06, 19/5/03

<sup>273</sup> I didn't interview enough Aboriginal women to gain a great diversity of views.

<sup>274</sup> Venda Barnes, Interview NPWS-WL-09, 22/5/03 and Barbara Barnes, Discussion 22/5/03

Gladys Barnes from Leaghur Station also talked with warmth about the home she and Clarrie created. But unlike Venda and Barbara, she conveyed a sense of comfortableness in the landscape, although she did not describe the landscape itself. She described her feelings about it through what others used to say of their view from the large lounge room window overlooking the completely flat treeless lake – ‘great view’ they’d say, but they didn’t mean it. But Gladys said she didn’t mind it, it was her view.<sup>275</sup>

Her lack of providing a direct landscape description was similar to Elsa Warr at Willandra. Elsa had answered my question about describing the landscape for someone who had not seen it by talking about Willandra being a good place to raise the children, with a good social life - an ‘interesting’ place, and the best station they had lived on.

At no stage did she comment on what the landscape looked like or how she felt about it. Heather Goodall has discussed how common it is that rural interviewees have little to say about the landscape itself if asked such a question. In her interviews and reading of local histories written by women, it is the network of families and relationships that they define ‘as “the country”’.<sup>276</sup>

National Parks interpretation inside the Visitors Centre includes some of these more complex and inclusive readings of the place, not just as an archaeological landscape housing ancient human history (which of course is a central component of the interpretation, most obviously in the audio available on the driving tour around the park).<sup>277</sup> Inside the Centre the same landscape is presented both as full of Aboriginal meaning through painting and stories of the sky, land and dry lake, as well as containing settler history of white women and men.

An interesting breach is apparent between the CMCTP, which focused on Albert Barnes as owner and manager of Mungo Station where Venda’s involvement is peripheral, and the Visitors Centre interpretation.<sup>278</sup> There Venda is presented as an active partner in the station’s history, where it is her story that links the different properties in the region and carries through to the increasing visitor population travelling to the lake in the 1970s. Albert had been dead for a number of years before Venda was interviewed as part of the CMCTP and later by

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<sup>275</sup> Gladys Barnes, Interview NPWS-WL-07, 19/5/03

<sup>276</sup> Heather Goodall, ‘“Fixing” the Past: Modernity, Tradition and Memory in Rural Australia’, *UTS Review: Localising Modernities*, 6 (1), 2000, 23.

<sup>277</sup> The driving tour is a 70km loop where one can turn on the radio and hear the authoritative male voice commentary on various sites on the loop. Mary and I only went to the Walls of China and I therefore am unable to comment on the audio content.

<sup>278</sup> Alan Fox’s revised guide book on Mungo only mentions Albert as owner of Mungo; *Mungo National Park: Part of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area. Guidebook*, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, revised edition, 1997

the interpretation consultant who developed the Visitors Centre material. Therefore I assume the differences are produced through the individual worldviews of each interviewer.

While individual lives are viewed in the 'settling' stories, the interpretation that clearly declares that contemporary Aboriginal people have ongoing attachments to the area presents a homogenous script of those people. Individual stories are not offered. I don't know to what extent this may have been the outcome of discussions with the Joint Management Committee. However I would have been interested to hear something of the stories, for example, of the four women of the three tribal groups noted in section two and viewed in the large photo as one leaves the Centre. Juxtaposing named non-Aboriginal settlers with generalised text of Aboriginal people unwittingly perpetuates colonising historical practices.

All this clear sense of living people's attachment to the Mungo landscape, however, is not reflected in the promotional images of the National Park where it can be found featured in all the regional, national and international tourism promotion of lower western outback NSW.<sup>279</sup> It is the primordial vision of the Walls of China, finding resonance with other places where ancient human remains have been found, that overwhelmingly dominates.

The shift in the Visitors Centre has not necessarily been welcomed or generally understood by the visiting public. For example some in the broader community meet contemporary Aboriginal custodianship claims with hostility, and the relevance of interpretation in the Visitors Centre acknowledging them and contemporary settler attachments, rather than focusing on the scientific/archaeological history, is questioned by some tourist operators.<sup>280</sup>

While tourism promotion both hooks into dominant imaginings of places as well as perpetuates them, they are not static. In providing alternative readings of Mungo history, at least in the Visitors Centre, National Parks is taking an active role in educating visitors in the much broader and diverse meanings which exist in that same landscape.

Inclusive history telling challenges dominant visions of a place and hence can be uncomfortable or even confronting. It also has its own challenges to confront in not offering a consensual and conflict free history. However a commitment to presenting places as cultural landscape requires these alternative

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<sup>279</sup> A internet search of all tourism sites which promote the area will confirm this.

<sup>280</sup> See Godden Mackay Logan, *Mungo National Park Historic Heritage Conservation Management and Cultural Tourism Plan*, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Draft Report, June 2002; personal communication to Jo Kijas.

readings that move beyond dominant conceptions of places and fill them with the diversity of meaning they actually contain.

## conclusion: stories

*Willandra 18/5/03: The rain brings out stories of wet times, and it doesn't take long amongst outback women for stories of women to emerge. They are often connected to childbirth or children, like the story of the woman who drove herself into Hillston with the toddlers in the back seat, pushing the automatic as it rolled along in first gear each time she got bogged – while in labour. We were told this story by Susie as we had morning tea sitting in her favourite place, at the end of the meshed-in porch with an old tree leaning its sprawling branches to shade the sitters, the green lawn and flower beds to soothe any weary body – bush birds flitting through the blossoming hakea. It's true that I had to try hard to imagine a hot day in which to seek shelter here, but the red dust clinging to the wooden walls was evidence that it really is dry out here and the sun does shine.*

The archetypal outback biographies of men such as R.M Williams and Charlie Schultz, or the journalistic history of C.E.W. Bean, are full of stories of individual characters, almost invariably men, categories of men such as shearers or bullockies, and their own exploits with stock, machinery and the land.<sup>281</sup>

Where women appear at all they usually fit into one of a few patterns: because they have become famous in the district for an event such as warding off men of some variety (Aboriginal/ 'blacks', suspect white swaggies or drunk men in their pubs), have died 'tragically' in lonely circumstances, or are the nameless accompanying partners of their men.<sup>282</sup> None of this is surprising nor warrants refusal of interested reading – but rather fits the dominant pattern of gender relations that have empowered certain stories to be told and others to be silenced or not even considered.

As already noted in section two, women who have published do not necessarily challenge this pattern. Oral history, however, can offer up different patterns and themes. The oral stories told by the women interviewed for this project included the ones about individual male characters. But they were also full of stories of community life, children, the trials of schooling, families, other women, shared places and the landscapes in which they lived. While these have often not reached into the pages of the history texts, they have been central aspects of the lived histories that have shaped, and been shaped by, the outback places where people lived.

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<sup>281</sup> R.M. Williams, *I Once Met a Man... True Stories from one of Australia's greatest folk heroes*, Angus & Robertson, Pymble, 1989; Charlie Schultz and Darrell Lewis, *Beyond the Big Run: Station Life in Australia's Last Frontier*, University of Queensland Press, 1995.

<sup>282</sup> Charlie Schultz has a chapter called wife and kids. His wife is mainly noted for her first painful horse ride to the isolated top end property (a heroic feat indeed when considered), while most of the other sections returns to Charlies exploits.

People's stories are so important in providing glimpses into worlds experienced in quite different ways than the dominant modes of exclusive history writing often portray. However while they may often be a poor source of accurate dates, times and numbers, they are powerful bearers of individual and community feeling. Stories are powerful tools in the construction of knowledge and history making and are no less opaque than the written documents that historians understand need context and analysis.

Of course this raises a myriad of ethical and conceptual issues. Inclusive history means offering conflicting and contrasting stories rather than seamless accounts. It means time and openness in seeking partnerships with the history-tellers, and willingness to provide ways into stories that can jangle uncomfortably with more ideal imaginings of a place. However if conflicting stories are provided rather than submerged they can help open up pathways to education of alternative ways of understanding pasts and futures.

## 4. Conclusion

This report has reviewed debates about the meanings of place, history, outback landscapes and their gendered conceptions. In reading western NSW histories and carrying out oral interviews, the project found that while women have often been marginalised or entirely excluded from the written histories of outback places, they have nevertheless been active historical actors in those places.

The research for this project has found that it still takes a conscious and deliberate effort to include women, in their diversity, into historical accounting of outback and pastoral places and as a consequence into National Parks historical interpretation. That is because the power of dominant discourses where women have been deemed insignificant to the histories and mythologies of land settlement in Australia continue to permeate both popular thinking and professional output.

Beyond the complexities of their environmental protection role, National Parks are 'for everyone'. A commitment to inclusive historical interpretation requires a different framework that moves beyond the public domain as the only history that matters, to one where the diversity of people's experiences that actually make up a place are represented.

However the complex intersections of issues such as gender, race, class or age have not disappeared in a postmodern world, where privileging one aspect over another continues to challenge thoughtful analysts and practitioners. For example, while some Aboriginal people's stories, and the cultural and racist processes of colonisation, are now more consciously considered in historical accounts, gender relations as contributing factors, and women in particular, are often still ignored.

I have argued that a progressive place-centred approach to historical research will provide National Parks with a framework for inclusive interpretation. It is a concept already familiar to areas of National Parks research. This means understanding local places as dynamic and always connected into the global world, holding within them at any one time an array of diverse meanings that are impacted on by gender, culture and class – as well as shifting over time.

As a centrally constructing practice, gender needs to be overtly remembered in the research and interpretation of places. This reminder may seem surprising at the beginning of the twenty-first century, after thirty years of second wave feminist analyses and greater societal debate. That very claim, however, can lead

to complacency – a feeling that gender, and specifically a focus on women, no longer needs to be explicitly addressed.

Women understand and act within places differently to each other as well as to men, shaped in part by gender, but never exclusively or simply by gender. However what does draw women together is their ongoing exclusion from many areas of historical, promotional and interpretative material of outback and other places. Rather than a sense that women might now be adequately represented in outback NSW landscapes, the findings of this project are that National Parks needs to vigilantly foreground interest in the lives and experiences of women in those places.

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