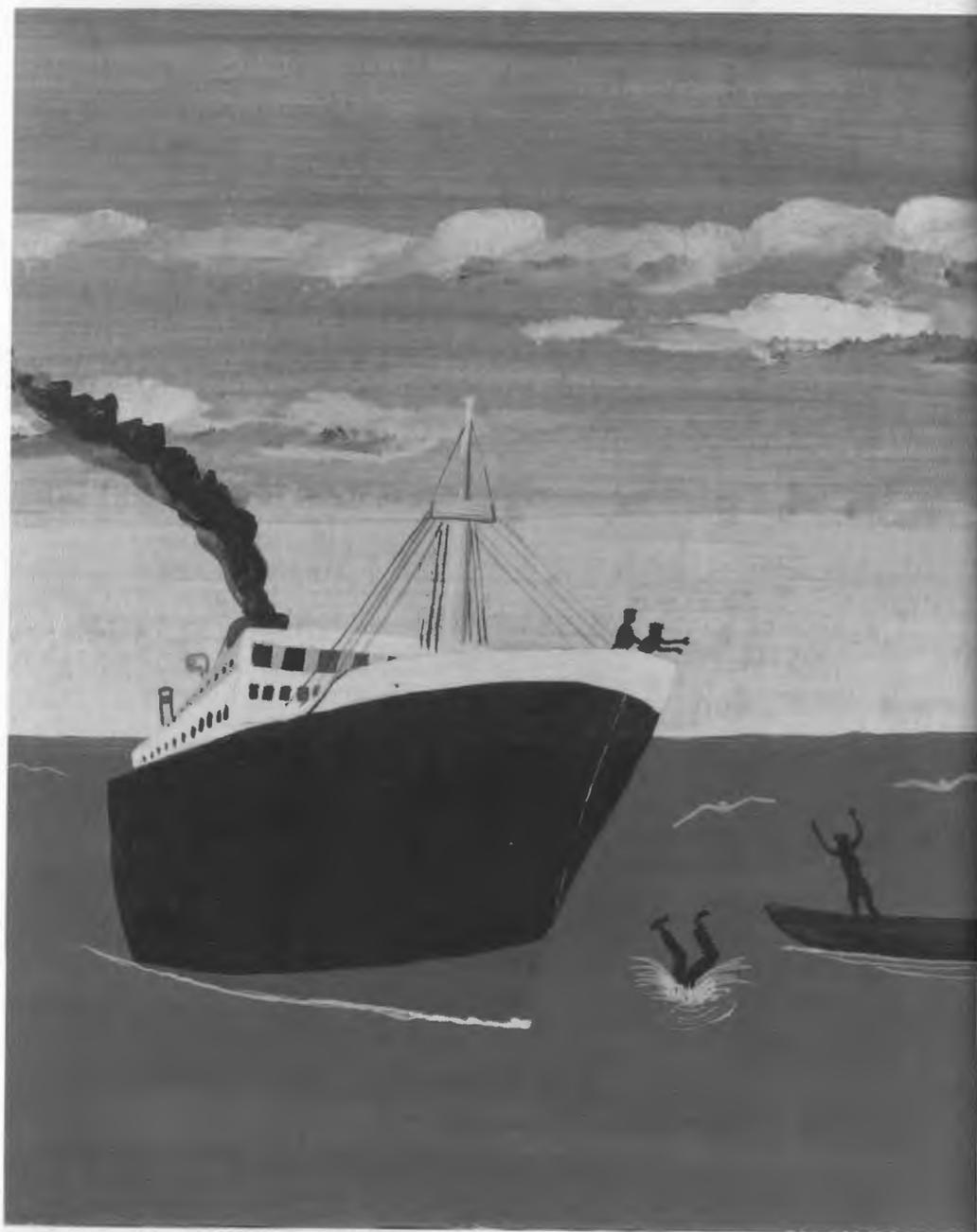




OLD MAN FOG

An Aboriginal
of Barrow Point

John B. Howland with Roger Hall
Illustrations by Tula Golden



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**Contents**

FOREWORD ix

*Noel Pearson*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS xiii

INTRODUCTION: "WILL YOU WRITE DOWN MY LANGUAGE?" xv

**Part One**

THE STORIES OF BARROW POINT

Hopevale and Hope Valley 3

Wurrey 13

Fog Visits Guraaban 16

The Giant Dingo Dog 19

The Stories: Owners and Morals 23

Swallowed by the Earth 30

**Part Two**

BARROW POINT

Barrow Point at the Turn of the Century 35

Bush Tucker 50

Yiithuu-warra 55

The Porcupine 65

Nganyja 68

Witches 75

The Problem of "Half-Caste" Children 78

From Barrow Point to Cape Bedford 88

A Sunset Glow 92

The Scrub Python at Cape Melville 94

**Part Three**

DIASPORA

The Barrow Point People Visit the South 99

The Second Trip South 107

Point Lookout 111

Escape from Wawu Ngalan 115

The Missioner's Revenge 117

Exile 123



Figure 1. Tulo Gordon's story map of Barrow Point

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Two themes recur in Roger's story that merit special comment. The first is the massive and pervasive intervention in Aboriginal life—one could almost say its deliberate dismantling—by European society in the first half and particularly the first twenty-five years of this century. The second is a special dilemma of identity, felt most acutely by Aborigines of mixed descent, manifest in a deep personal ambivalence people like Roger Hart experience about who they are in the world. The effects of the first were already apparent, and the seeds of the second had already been sown, in Roger Hart's childhood at Barrow Point.

Words and expressions in Guugu Yimithirr, the language of Cooktown and the area north to the Starcke River, are written in **bold** when first introduced. Words in Barrow Point language are rendered in *bold italics*. A potentially confusing array of kinsmen and other characters will march across the pages that follow, and some genealogical notes about what Roger calls "relations" appear in the endnotes. In keeping with the customary practices of Aboriginal people, many references are made to places, territories, and clan estates—the traditional "runs" of different Aboriginal families and groups—and these, too, are sometimes amplified in notes. Contrary to customary etiquette, on the other hand, I have made more use of the names of people now deceased than Aboriginal propriety would ordinarily permit.

I moved away from Australia in 1985, and work finishing our book was postponed again and again. Our collaborator Tulo Gordon died in 1989, and in the following year Roger Hart began to invest his energies and his knowledge of tradition in efforts to regain his lands and those of his kinsmen under new Aboriginal land rights legislation in Queensland. Now, almost twenty years after we began, we finally bring Roger's story and Tulo's pictures to publication. It is perhaps ironic that we assembled the materials for this book in an era when the very idea of "land rights" for Queensland Aborigines was remote. Even though the book itself remained unfinished, some of the materials gathered for it were already serving as evidence in the highly charged arena of land claims in the 1990s. Let me apologize to Roger, my cous', for the fact that "writing down" his "language" has taken considerably more "free time" than any of us could have imagined when we first met on a rainy morning at the Hopevale store in 1979.



## Part One

### THE STORIES OF BARROW POINT



Figure 2. Fog throws old lady Curlew down among her fish

"How did this water get so dirty?" she asked.

"I don't know, what do you suppose?" he replied.

"Oh, well, come with me then." She led him down to the south side of her camp, to the big lagoon.

"Don't make a sound," she said. "Just go down slowly and quietly, and then you can drink *that* water." She was afraid Fog might frighten the fish and make them jump about. She thought he didn't know they were there.

Then the old lady went back to her camp and sat down again, paying him no more mind.

When she was gone, Fog walked down to the lagoon. He didn't bother to have a drink, you see, since he wasn't really thirsty. He only pretended to drink. Then he went back and said to old lady Curlew, "I think I'm going away now. I'll see you next time." He kept on telling lies.

Fog went back toward the east and picked up his net from its hiding place. Then he sneaked back to the lagoon. He looked around again to make sure that the old lady wasn't watching.

He took his net and started throwing it into the lagoon, pulling up heaps of fish. They were great big fish, and they splashed about in the water.

The old lady heard the noise. She jumped up and ran to the lagoon to find out what was wrong. What could be causing the splashing?

When old lady Curlew saw Fog throwing his net and stealing her fish, she began to curse and swear at him. She called him all kinds of awful names.

It made Wurrbal angry. He left his net and ran over to the west. The old lady was standing there swearing at him. He picked her right up off the ground. He carried her back to where the fish were thrashing around in the net, and he heaved her right into the middle of them.

"Ngaanhigay!" she shrieked, "Ow, ow ow!" She howled with pain.

The fins on the fish had jabbed her in both knees. Well, those Curlew birds today have big lumpy knee joints. That's how it happened. Old lady Curlew's knees swelled up after being jabbed by the fish spines. Curlews carry that mark right until today. They still have swollen knees.

She kept on howling: "Ngaanhigaaay!"

Even now you sometimes hear Curlew sing her sad cry at nighttime. She's weeping because of the pain in her swollen knees.

That's where old Fog's story starts, at the big lagoon by the Jeannie River.

Old Fog left Curlew where he had dropped her. He was in a hurry to take his fish away. He started pulling the net, dragging it down the river. The Jeannie River never used to dry up. It used to have water all the time, although it wasn't very deep even in those days.

Well, now there were two **Duburrubun** brothers, two magpies. They used to camp with old lady Curlew. The old lady looked after them. When old Fog came around, the two brothers had gone out hunting to bring the old lady some meat.

While old Fog was dragging the fish down the river, the two Magpies came back to the old lady's camp. They heard her singing out, crying and wailing.

"What's wrong?" they asked.

"Oooh, that rotten old Fog threw me down among the fish," she said, "and their spines jabbed me in the knees."

"Where is he now?"

"He's gone down that way. He's taking my *minha* down the river."

The Magpie brothers jumped up and started after old Fog. The older brother ran down the west bank of the river, and the younger brother ran down the east bank. After a good way, they stopped, hoping to catch old Fog. But Fog was dragging his net downriver, and it caused a great flood where he passed. He was still going.

The brothers rushed farther downriver. They pulled up again to have another look. Wurrbal had already gone on, turning north now.

Off they went again. But every time they stopped to look at the water, it was still. The big flood had already passed. Old Fog was still ahead of them, pulling the fish along in his net.

Finally the two Magpies came right to the mouth of the river. They looked around. Where was he? They looked north, and they saw that Fog had tied his net to a rock just north of the river mouth. He had released all those fish into the sea. That's how some of the freshwater fish species from Curlew's lagoon got out into the sea in the first place.

Old Wurrbal had disappeared, heading inland. He was off, on his way.

"Oh, well, there's nothing we can do." The two Magpie brothers couldn't catch up to him before he got to the sea.

They didn't give up, though. They just headed inland, following his tracks, and you may as well know that they met Wurrey again by and by.

That was Fog's first adventure. That was when he started telling lies.

### Fog Visits Guraaban

After he released the fish, Wurrey headed west, back inland. He traveled a little bit west and a little bit north. After a while he came close to a mountain called **Guraaban**, Brown's Peak. There was a big mob of people living in a camp there.

Old Fog marched up from the south and right into camp.

"Here I am! I've come," he said. Then he added, "I have a terribly hungry belly after walking all this way."

The people in the camp were glad to see him. They thought he might have brought some news.

"Ma, you sit down." They showed him where to rest. "Go over there in the shade."

Once Fog was seated comfortably, straight away they started asking



Figure 3. Wurrey eats honey at Brown's Peak

him for news. "What's happening in the east," they asked. "How is everyone out that way? Are all the people well? How's my uncle? How's my grampa?"

Well, Fog had to give them an answer. He started to invent some news.

"Ah, everyone over there is well. They're all right," he began. "Only this one's Granny died," he went on, pointing at one of them. "Your grandmother died over there to the east."

He started telling lies now.

"Yes, she died, only yesterday it was."

People started wailing and crying now.

Wurrey was just getting started. "Yes," he said, "and this fellow's father died, too."

He spoke to him: "Your father died yesterday, I am sorry to tell you. He was speared to death."

So all that lot started crying, too. They smeared themselves all over with white clay to mourn for their dead relatives.



Figure 4. The Magpie brothers throw Leichhardt fruit down onto the Carpet Snake

She kept looking and looking. Nothing.

The younger Magpie brother picked a piece of raw fruit from the tree, and he chucked it down at her. It hit her on the back, as she was bent over searching for fruit on the ground.

"Ngaanhigay!" She cried out in pain. "Something hit me on the back! The fruit is just now falling off the tree!"

So she picked up that fruit and gulped it down.

The younger Magpie brother broke off more fruit and threw it down. It was the younger one's idea, see? He kept throwing unripe fruit down. The old lady would pick it up and eat it.

Then she said, "Where is that *mayi* falling from?" She looked up. At that very moment, he threw another piece of fruit, and it hit her right on the nose.

"Ngaanhigay! Now it hit me on the nose!"

In fact, the fruit hit her so hard that it flattened her nose right out. If you see a carpet snake nowadays you'll see that she has a flat head. Well, it's for that reason.

Anyway, she recognized the two Magpie brothers up in the tree. She sang out to them, "So, it's you two larrikins!<sup>2</sup> Come on down from there! Oh, my poor nose!"

The two Magpie brothers climbed down from the tree.

Then the old woman made them a promise. She said, "Tomorrow I'm going to send you my puppy. It's a really nice little dog." But she was tricking them. "I'll bring you my little dog, and you can train it for hunting."

"All right, bring it to us," they said.

She let them go, and they headed south again.

They started to talk it over. The younger brother asked his older brother, "Is that old woman telling the truth? She says she's going to give us a nice puppy dog."

The older brother answered: "Puppy dog? Why, that's a huge dog. We'd better run away from here. Otherwise, the dog will eat the both of us right up! Let's go!"

So the two of them ran off. They ran and ran, *di di di di*,<sup>3</sup> toward the south.

Meanwhile, old lady Carpet Snake went back west to her camp. She fetched her giant dog and sent it after them. The dog headed down from the north, barking and whining, on their trail.

The Magpies could hear the dog coming, so they kept running farther south, farther south. Well, nowadays Jones's Gap is fairly wide, but in those days it was just a narrow passage through the mountains. That was many thousands of years ago. The two brothers split up. One climbed up the south side, and the other climbed up the north side. They had decided to try to save themselves by spearing that giant dingo.

Meanwhile the huge dog came along below. His tongue was just coming into view.

The younger brother spoke up. "I'm going to spear him now." The younger brother was left-handed, you see.

His older brother told him, "No. You might miss. Better leave him to me."

Meanwhile the big dingo came closer still. His head sprang into view, as he moved along to the west. The older brother picked up his spear and threw it from the north down toward the south. At the same time the younger brother threw his spear from the south. The two of them kept throwing their spears from opposite directions.

There used to be a big flat plain down below, to the east. It was on that big flat area that the two brothers finally killed that giant dingo dog. It thrashed around and knocked down all the trees.

Once they had killed the dingo, the brothers began to cut the animal up. They cut and cut and cut. All right. When they had finished, they lifted up the meat and carried it west. They carried it a long way, until they came down to the Wakooka Creek.



Figure 5. Fog enters his cave at Bathhurst Head

lects, especially the Flinders Island language spoken around Cape Melville. He knew neither English nor Guugu Yimithirr, the language of Cooktown. The one Cape Melville boy already living at Cape Bedford had largely lost his own language, so Roger had to learn to communicate all over again. In school at Hope Valley he learned a slightly old-fashioned schoolbook English and became fluent in Guugu Yimithirr, still today his most comfortable modes of expression.

It was clear that, as he put it, Roger had in many ways “forgotten about” his own language. Once he had entered the mission school, when his Barrow Point relatives visited Cape Bedford, he was afraid to approach them. For the little mission boy, educated into a select group of part-European Lutherans at Hope Valley, these heathen Aborigines had now become visions of danger and the un-Christian life.

When Roger was a young adult, one of his uncles, a man he remembered from Barrow Point, came to Cape Bedford as a boatman and taught fragments of the Barrow Point language to the young men of the boat crews. Roger made a conscious effort to reacquire his native tongue

and with it bits of Barrow Point history and tradition. He also began to reconstruct life histories for his Barrow Point kinsmen, now mostly dead or scattered across the Aboriginal landscape. After the war, the exile in the south, and his return to the reconstructed mission community, in the late 1960s and early 1970s Roger Hart lived away from Hopevale mission, sharing a house with his childhood playmate Toby Gordon, by then elderly and in poor health but still fluent in the Barrow Point language. This friend had lived all his life “on the outside,” on stations, in Aboriginal camps and settlements. Never having experienced the institutionalization that was Roger’s lot as a result of the color of his skin, Toby Gordon was able to spark Roger’s dormant memories of a Barrow Point childhood.

The more we probed Roger’s knowledge of the Barrow Point language, the more his linguistic intuitions proved to be intertwined with a vast collection of memories and stories. Dredging words out of the past became an obsession. Often we would be stumped by a Barrow Point equivalent for some familiar Guugu Yimithirr noun or verb. At the crack of dawn the next morning, Roger would be knocking on my door.

“*Anggatha*,” he would exclaim in triumph, “it came to me in a dream!”

The lexical problems were compounded by the environment itself. Around Hopevale, even the plants and animals seemed to speak their names naturally in Guugu Yimithirr, the language of the place. But what was the name of that particular fruit or tree that Roger could picture from his childhood at Barrow Point but was nowhere to be found here in the south? After we began to work on his language in the late 1970s, Roger’s linguistic reconstruction gradually gave way to a full-scale autobiographical excursion. Looking for the name of a tree or fish brought back memories of the places where one had seen such trees or caught such fish. “Remembering the past” and “telling about the past” collapsed into a single activity. Recalling a fragment of a story or the name of a kinsman set off chains of recollections: a man who had acted like old Fog, a woman bitten by a snake at a particular spot, or a forgotten relative whose name flashed to mind at the mention of a long ago event. The past began to pervade the present.

As our conversations stretched over several years, Roger, Tulo, and I began to share a repertoire of Roger’s stories. His vanished kinsmen became our companions, and their doings became our gossip. Tales were told, retold, refashioned, and reinterpreted, often altering but never completely abandoning the original voices—usually a polyphonic, multi-lingual chorus—of our first hearings.

There was just that one old lady who survived. She wasn't swallowed up. Only her leg was caught in the earth. Her foot was covered by the great hole, and her leg was broken. She was trapped there.

By and by someone returned to the camp from hunting. He found the old lady with her leg stuck in the earth.

"Why, where are all the people?" he asked.

"All the people went down into the earth. They're inside. A great **yiirmbal**<sup>5</sup> swallowed them up."

They managed to lift the old lady out of the hole she was trapped in. They took her north then to Barrow Point.

After a while her broken leg healed. That's when Toby's grandfather married her. She had a good few grandchildren, too. I saw that old woman when I was a boy. I used to call her **gami**, too, 'grandmother'. She was lame from her broken leg. Oh, she was a terribly old lady, too. I think she was from the tribal area of Wuuri. Down there in Pinnacle, they had women from all over, from the Jeannie River right west as far as Princess Charlotte Bay.

Me, I've never seen that country. I've only seen the mountain from afar. I think you go through a place they call Cockatoo Yard, and from there west, to the corner of the mountain, and from there south. Some people still know the place, though, because Banjo used to take them around there.<sup>6</sup> He told them, "Don't go over there! You might go down!"

The **yiirmbal** swallowed all the people for being lawless and disobedient. It punished them before they did any greater damage, before they destroyed Aboriginal people. You see, that Pinnacle mob had great power, and all the tribes along the coast were afraid of them. "Don't get mixed up with those **Yiithuu**<sup>7</sup> people!" they would say.



## Part Two

### BARROW POINT



Figure 6. King Harry thrown overboard

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT AROUND BARROW POINT

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

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

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

#### ABBAY PEAK

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

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

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

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

The property was finally transferred on 18 June 1920 to Allan Critchley Instone of Cooktown for the sum of £227.<sup>31</sup> Instone's property on the shores of Ninian Bay formed the central magnet that attracted the Barrow Point Aboriginal settlements when Roger Hart was a little boy. Instone stayed at Barrow Point until 1926, when he sold his lease to the larger neighboring Starcke Station.

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

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

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



Figure 7. Instone's house

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

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

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

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



Figure 8. Balln.ga hunting

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Figure 9. Balln.ga speared

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

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

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

Now they called out to the north.

"Here I am."

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

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

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

"Here I am."

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

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

"I am over here."

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

"Aha! Here she is!"

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



Figure 10. Men dancing at initiation

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

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

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

That's all the story I know.

## Witches

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

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

Roger Hart heard from old Mickey Bluetongue<sup>1</sup> one version of the events surrounding the death of old man Billy McGreen,<sup>2</sup> a native trooper originally from one of the Barrow Point clans. The events took place at Elderslie, a property on the McIvor River where a semipermanent Aboriginal camp lasted until the 1930s. McGreen, whose clan area was **Manyamarr**, south of Cape Bowen, had been involved in the arrest and deportation of many Aboriginal men and women. For example, in the late 1920s he was reported to have come across Charlie Burns<sup>3</sup> while the latter was chopping honey at Glenrock, another property on the McIvor River. Long Billy offered him tobacco. When Burns approached, McGreen slipped handcuffs on the other man and delivered him to the police for "removal" to Palm Island for an offense that people now remember as cattle theft.<sup>4</sup>

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



Figure 11. Setting out with Roger

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

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

"We stayed in the camp at Glenrock, on the McIvor. A big mob of Barrow Point people stayed there, but there were a lot of strangers, too. I was playing around with the kids. I remember Tom Charlie<sup>5</sup> and some others. But I was older than they were, see? They were a bit smaller."

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

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

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

"I wouldn't go."



Figure 12. Roger tied up by his father

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

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

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

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

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

"'Bring him back, then.'

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

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

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

like such a camp of natives near by, it affords them opportunities of obtaining cheap labor—and the numbers of half-white children are proof of other uses these poor people are put to. The King of the Mclvor blacks had two wives, he had no children of his own; his wives had three half-caste sons who are now under the care of Hope Valley Mission. The king, his wives, his tribe, all are dead. King Jacko<sup>2</sup> a few years ago decided to settle on the Mission Reserve, he brought along about forty to sixty people. They had six half-caste children among them. On the Mission there are half-Europeans, half-Japanese, half-Malayan!<sup>3</sup>

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

### The Scrub Python at Cape Melville

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

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

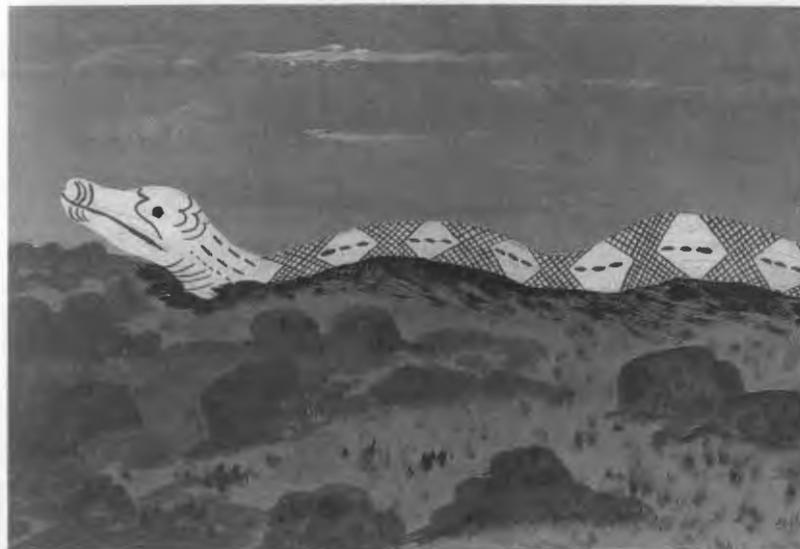


Figure 13. Mungurru traveling

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

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

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

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

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

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



### Part Three

### DIASPORA



Figure 14. Stockmen in the camps

the stockmen from Starcke, a white man named Billy Wallace, came for a visit while the people were camped on the beach south of Barrow Point, they told Toby and his brother to hide. But the brothers said to each other, "Why should we hide. We like riding horses!" When they showed themselves, they were straight away thrown on top of a pack horse and taken to Roy O'Shea, the overseer at Starcke, who put them to work.

The two boys were taken to the Manbara Station on the Starcke holdings, to start a new life as adolescent cattle workers. They thus missed the visit of the *Melbidir* and the subsequent razing of the Barrow Point camp at Ninian Bay. When he heard that his people had been taken from Barrow Point, Toby began to wonder what had happened to his mother. He ran away from his stock job and traveled on foot to Cape Melville where he jumped on a boat and went in search of his Barrow Point relatives at Lockhart. He found his mother still alive, and thereafter settled down to work<sup>11</sup> and to marry at Lockhart.

A similar story about children dragooned into stock work can be reconstructed from police removal records almost a decade later. Roger Hart, Tulo Gordon, and I visited the late Bendie Jack in Melbourne in 1984. Bendie had moved south as a successful boxer after World War II.

He told us about working as a stockman at Starcke when he was a very young boy. His parents—Guugu Yimithirr-speaking people<sup>12</sup>—were still living nomadically when the boy was picked up by stockmen and taken away to the cattle station. Bendie was ultimately "rescued" by police and brought to the Cape Bedford Mission, where his three older brothers had already been placed in school.<sup>13</sup>

### Roger Hart at the Cape Bedford Mission

It was about 1923 when Roger Hart was left locked in the Cape Bedford hospital building, his arms and legs tied with sisal hemp. Tulo Gordon was a small child, not yet living in the mission dormitory but still with his parents, who cared for the mission's herd of goats. It was at the hospital that Tulo first encountered the little boy from Barrow Point: locked up and "singin' out and cryin' and kickin' the wall." Roger in turn tried to poke out Tulo's peering eye by jabbing a stick through the slat sides of his makeshift prison.

After staying for a while with Tulo and his family, Roger finally was moved to the dormitory and began school. He recalls a time of solitude and confusion. There was no one for him to speak his language with, and he was ignorant of the routines of mission life.

"They took me north to the dormitory. They had a cat there, you see. The boys used to talk to me, but I couldn't understand them. So I said, 'Oh, it's no use playing with them.' Well, I got the pussycat, and I used to play around with the pussycat. That was my friend, then."

The other boys dubbed him by the only word they had picked up from his language.

"They didn't know my language, but some of them used to sing out to me, '*Arrwala! Arrwala!*' That means 'Come!' They were naming me '*arrwala*,' too. That's the only language they knew.

"We used to go west to get damper for our meal. Mrs. Schwarz would give out the food. Each one got a single piece of damper. She would cut one damper into eight pieces. Well, I got my share and was walking along eating it. Some of those other boys were coming behind me. When they called out '*arrwala!*' I went back again—I thought they would give me another piece, you see."





Figure 15. Instone's house seen from Uwuru

again for the abandoned Wakooka Station and follow an old track down to the Rocky Waterhole on Wakooka Creek. From there we would make our way out to the coast, fighting through what was described as a formidable mangrove swamp, where stockmen remembered having once turned up a mass grave with many skulls, testifying to some early massacre.

If we got that far, we reasoned, we could walk the dozen or so miles up the beach to Barrow Point itself. Sixty years earlier Roger Hart had trekked along this same coastline as his tribe took him south to Cape Bedford. He had never been back.

After several weeks of planning, on 29 September 1982, Roger Hart, Tulo Gordon, and I set out from Hopevale, heading *guwa*—(north)west. We drove an old and battered Toyota Landcruiser, borrowed from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. We had packed supplies for the bush: sliced bread from Cooktown's German baker, butter and tinned meat, flour, sugar, tea leaf, baking powder, tobacco, powdered milk, several borrowed plastic containers filled with extra petrol, an old .22 cal-

iber rifle with a handful of bullets, our swags into which we had each rolled a Chinese tin cup, a spoon and a plate, a couple of large milk tins converted into billycans, fishline and hooks, one rapidly defrosting package of frozen prawn bait, matches, and my small portable tape recorder with a supply of cassettes and batteries. I carried a topographic map showing Cape Melville and Barrow Point, folded up in my pack. We strapped to the top of the car the one long bamboo fishing spear, with four sharpened wire prongs, which we had managed to wheedle away from Tulo's grandchildren. Roger also tossed a wommera into the back.

We followed the dirt road north out of the mission, passing the McIvor River, then the Morgan River that ran beside the mission outstation at Mount Webb, then on to the massive Starcke holdings. Spring was young, and the road was not yet completely dry. Still, clouds of bull dust billowed up in our wake as we followed the track past 12-Mile. We were aiming to camp that night on the Starcke River itself, several miles up from its mouth, where the river bent sharply just beyond a pair of lagoons known as Bluewater, where we had camped two years previously. We arrived just before the light failed, choked with dust, and thinking about the fat half-meter blue mullet we had speared in the river on our last visit.

Quickly we built our camp, started a fire to boil the billy, laid out our swags, and rushed down to the bank above the swirling tidal flow of the Starcke River. Sitting well back from the water, so that no crocodile would take us by surprise, we fished for our supper, trusting to store-bought bait for the first night's meal.

Roger recalled his first visit to the Starcke River mouth as a child. He and his family were approaching the midpoint of the long trek from Barrow Point, heading toward Cape Bedford.

"All the bama had a camp here to the east, just north of the mouth of the river, on a little beach. There were people there from Barrow Point, and also from *Galthanmugu*.<sup>1</sup> We stopped there for a few days on our walk from the west."

"Was that where the other children started to tease you about the 'beard'?" I asked.

"No, that was farther east."

"At *Mangaar*,<sup>2</sup> then?" suggested Tulo.

"No, still farther east. We were playing with spears, made from broken stalks of *jigan* grass. We were spearing each other with them. Well, I must have speared one of the other boys a little too hard. He turned around and said, 'Poor fellow, they're going to leave you with the white man there to the south.'

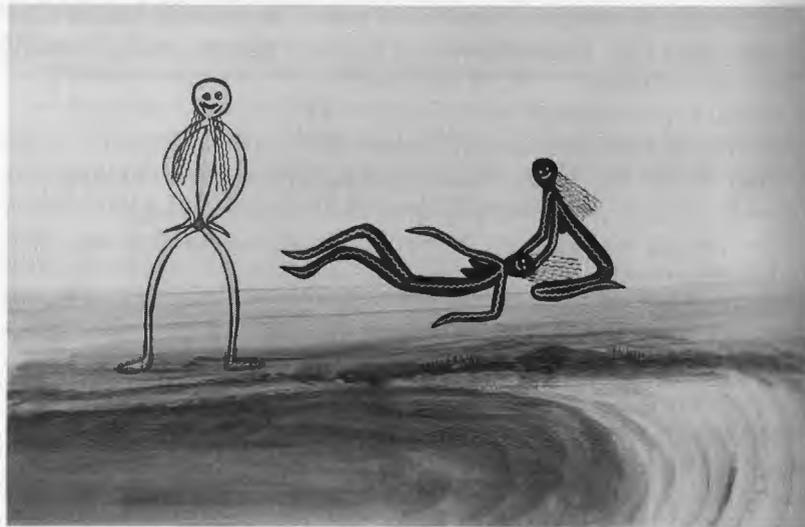


Figure 16. Delousing

He sat down and started delousing the two sisters. He started up on top, looking for lice on their heads. He picked all the lice off, *di di di*. All right.

"Well, these are finished."

Then he started killing lice from their armpits. He killed them and killed them and killed them, until the armpits were finished.

"Go on, go on," the sisters were saying now, "go lower, go lower!"

So old Fog kept going lower. He started picking the lice from their pubic hair.

"Yes," said one of the sisters, "please delouse our pubic hair."

So Fog kept killing and killing and killing lice. But he kept on running even farther down

(You know, I can tell this story to my grandchildren, but not to everybody.)

He kept going lower and lower, deeper and deeper.

"Wait there, one went inside farther down! Spread your legs wide, spread them wide," he told the one sister. The girl spread her legs wide, and that old fellow just jumped on top of her! He started to penetrate her, now.

The other sister jumped up then and ran off. Old Man Fog started

chasing her. She went to hide, crawling inside a hole in the rocks. But old Fog got on top and sent his penis down through the hole: down, down, until he stuck her from above!

Anyway, when he had finished with the two sisters, the wicked old fellow went off and just lay down to sleep.

After a while, the two Magpie brothers came back from hunting turtle. They had a lot of meat.

Old Fog was sleeping peacefully, playing the innocent—the old liar!

"There come our older brothers, from the east," said the two girls. "Let's go over there and have a look at the turtle."

They went east. "Oh, you've speared a really big one," they said.

Then they started to tell the whole story.

"Our disgusting old grandfather is over there to the west, asleep. He molested us. He interfered with us."

"What?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't say anything about it. Just keep silent. We'll see what we can do about it," they said.

The brothers went over to the canoe and took all the turtles out. They pulled the meat west, back to their camp. Then the brothers said, "Look. Go and gather some stones for the earth oven." They wanted some special hard stones, you see.

The girls started looking around for stones then.

"Is this one all right?"

"No, not that kind. Get another one. That stone is no good."

They picked up another stone. "What about this one?"

"No, get another one."

They wanted those hard, black, "bouncing" stones—big, round ones, very smooth. People used to make tommyhawks out of such stones—it might be granite.

"Get that kind! That's the one. Gather up those stones."

They picked up a heap of hard rocks. They brought them over to the fire and started throwing them on, more and more, until they had enough. Then they piled still more wood on top, to make the stones very, very hot.

They were ready to prepare the turtle. They slit its throat and pulled out the guts. They pulled and pulled and pulled—that's how we cook turtle up in my country. They took out all the intestines and cleaned them, taking out all the muck from inside and washing them all very carefully. Once the guts were clean, they pushed them back down inside through the hole in the turtle's neck, filling up its belly once again.

from what looked like the remains of a wooden platform. Everywhere the bush had reclaimed the country. It was hard to imagine a working cattle station here, with supply boats in the harbor, stockmen riding about on horses, or children playing along an open beach.

By mid morning we had fought our way over most of what used to be Instone's property. Roger had found many of the landmarks he was looking for, but not all. He felt his memory was playing tricks on him. Where was the nannygoat yard? Hadn't it been close to the well?—that really was the well we had found. Where was the old track heading back south into the hills?

Thirst had again overtaken us, and it was time to look for drinking water. We set out through dense scrub and swamp to the west, looking for the creek Roger remembered as Uwuru. We broke out onto a wide beach. Farther west, in the corner of the bay, a small, dark pool of water was visible behind a sand hill.

I was in the lead, anxious for a drink. Tulo was coming behind with his rifle. As I approached the creek I found myself staring into the eyes of a gigantic crocodile, floating motionless just under the surface of the water. I gave a little shout and gestured for Tulo to come and look. The crocodile, unchallenged king of Uwuru for decades, watched us for a moment without concern, then slowly submerged and disappeared from view.

We followed the creek upstream and filled our water bottles. On our return, Roger spotted several large silver mullet, near the edge of the pool at the creek mouth. Hurling his spear bare handed, without his womera (which had been left behind in the abandoned Toyota), he speared one long silvery fish. We pulled it out, staying as far as we could from the water's edge. Once on shore it was plain that the fish was already wounded, a huge mouthful of flesh recently chomped out of its back.

Roger recalled another time he had been on this part of the beach.

"We never used to stop in one place, you know. Once we were camped just around here, and we went up toward Eumangin. We saw a big wallaroo, and we started to chase it around. I don't know how that animal happened to come right out on the beach—maybe a dingo had frightened it. The men were trying to spear it, and the dogs were barking after it. There's a big rock up there, and the kangaroo was running round and round. It was a big one, an old one."

"Did you catch it?" asked Tulo, throwing the wounded mullet back to its fate.

"We killed it, took it up to the camp, cooked it in an earth oven, and ate it for several days."



Figure 17. Spearing kangaroo

Too much talk about food. It was time to find Roger's promised oysters. We walked back through the swamp, more confident now of our path.

As we passed the site of the old station, Roger finally gave in to an urge that had been with him all morning. Starting with a couple of matches, and then more deliberately with a tea-tree bark torch, he set fire to clumps of overgrown grass. The wind swiftly whipped up a blaze, pushing the flames west across Instone's former property and back the way we had just come. "Never mind," Roger said to me, "this is *awurr aliinbi*.<sup>1</sup> Might as well clean it up."

We made our way through the mangroves and approached the rocky point from the west. The tide was out. Sure enough, the exposed boulders were carpeted with oysters, large and small, piled one on top of another. We each took a fist-sized rock and waded out into the mud for a feast. Roger showed me how to aim a glancing blow at the oyster clumps to loosen them. The oysters that broke open were eaten on the spot. The rest we dropped into my net bag.

Tulo built a small fire on the shore. When we had all eaten enough raw oysters to make our knees weak, we hauled the rest of our collection

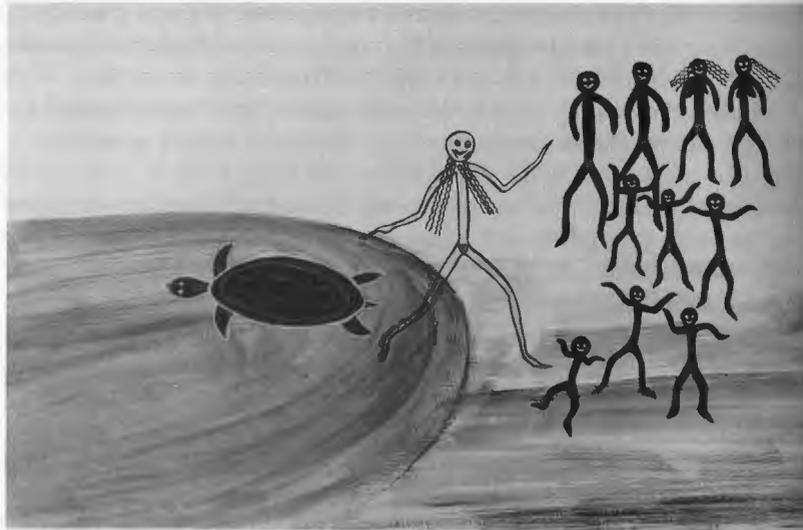


Figure 18. Fog arriving at Mack River

"Well, you two hold on to that rope, see? Just let me dive down and catch that turtle. I'll haul it back up to the surface for you."

With that, he jumped overboard and dived into the deep water. Soon he found the turtle. He grabbed it, and he pulled the barb of the harpoon out. Then he dived down even deeper. He found a big rock, and he tied the rope to it, tangling the rope up in the coral.

While he was still under water, he caused a great wind to come up. He made a terrible storm. Then he took that turtle and swam off again, leaving the Magpie brothers in the middle of the big storm, holding the rope that was tied to a rock. They nearly drowned, you know.

Fog headed south a long way, *yli*, under water. Finally he reached the shore at the mouth of the Mack River.

A big lot of people were camped there, too. They saw him coming.

"Oh, this fellow has popped up," they said.

"Yeah, it's me all right." Old Fog jumped up out of the water.

From there, he just kept running, a long, long way to the west. Up toward the west where the Mack River starts he camped with his relations. He stayed there for a good long time.

## "All These People Gone"

Standing on the beach at Barrow Point, Roger Hart had remarked with the loneliness of a last survivor and the triumph of a little boy who escapes his tormentors: "All these people gone, *nhila wanhthaa-buthu*—now wherever are they?"

The ground upon which we stood, the surrounding rocks and hills, the swamps and springs, even the trees and animals, resounded with memories of his childhood, the friends and relatives with whom he had grown up, virtually all of whom he had, by now, lost. His ancestry and light skin had meant a lifelong banishment from his own country. The same accidents of genealogy had probably allowed him, alone of all his boyhood friends, to survive to see it again.

Once Roger embarked on the task of teaching me his language, it became obvious that his memories of his language were bound up with his homeland, with the camp at Iipwulin, and with the other places he had spent time as a child. All these places were populated by ghosts, the shadows of the people who had walked this country before Roger, with him, and after he had been taken away. The ghosts dogged our steps, shared our meals, and slept by our sides. Some of them were, like me, strangers to the country, brought there by circumstances of history that embraced everything from abduction and fictive kinship to foreign invasion and the search for food. Others were true owners of Barrow Point.

Untangling the identities of these ghosts from the past proved to be a complex and difficult task. Answering my repeated question, "Who was living here at Barrow Point?" pushed Roger Hart to the edges of his knowledge about kinsmen, country, European settlement, and time. Even putting names to the ghosts was far from straightforward. Aboriginal language names, of which individuals ordinarily had several, are interlaced with nearly forgotten traditions and totems, while their English monikers—both surnames and first names—shifted like the seasons, the economy of the region, and the camps of their bearers.

This is true of Roger Hart himself. His best-remembered Barrow Point name, preserved in the name of one of his grandchildren, is *Urrwunthhin*. When he was living in the Barrow Point camps, he was known in English as Stephen, but also sometimes as Jackie. When the bigger boys came back to the camp after working on fishing boats, they would sing out, "Where's Stephen?" When he first arrived at Cape Bedford, other boys dubbed him *arrwala* "Come here!" the only word they knew of his

eat. He ate and ate and ate. When he was full, he sat down to wait for morning.

At dawn, they all awoke.

"Ma, right," said old Fog. "I'm going north. I'm going home now."

"Ma," they replied. "Go on go back home, then."

"I'll come back again later, certainly."

He set out, and he traveled north, north, for a long way. However, he sat down again when he got to Tanglefoot, where the rest of Thunder's yams were. Tanglefoot is the mountain you can see if you look toward the south from Jones's Gap. That's where Fog dug up all Thunder's yams.

He dug and dug and dug, *yii*, until he had filled up a whole dilly bag. He lifted up the food and set out north again carrying it on his back.

As he was traveling north, he chanced to see a little lizard. It was a *duguulmburr*. He put a spell on it. He said, "*Suuu, suu, suu*. Turn into a child! Turn into a child! Then we two'll eat this food I'm carrying."

That lizard turned into a human being. Old Fog hoisted him up onto his shoulder and kept going north, still carrying all those yams. He kept going north. It was about mid-morning.

Just then a great wind started blowing up out of the north. We call that north wind a *walburr*. It's a hot wind, and it dried out the leaves of the yams that Fog had dug up. It blew them to the south. All those leaves fell down right in front of old Thunder.

"My food! Who's stealing it? *Anunda unyjay*? Who's trying to screw me?" He was using curse words, see? "Who is messing with my food?" But he used a deeper word than that. He cursed the thief properly.

Fog kept heading north. He went a long way. He knew he had done something wrong, you see, and he knew where to hide in the north. He came all the way up out of the south, and then he turned west, heading for Bathhurst Head. That's where he had his cave, and that's where he still stays even today. He entered the cave toward the south.

He settled down there, then, with his little son, the lizard boy. They ate the food, ate and ate and ate. But they never went outside, except in the daytime. Fog knew that Thunderstorm would come after him, see. They would go out only in the day. At night, they would return to the cave, to the south, to hide. They kept eating the yams.

Meanwhile, down in the south, old Thunderstorm had become very angry. Rather than travel by day, he set out at night, coming up from the south. He came all the way to Fog's cave. He sat down above its mouth. He waited for old Fog to come out of the cave so that he could jump on him.

He waited and waited and waited.

"Isn't that fellow ever going to come out from the south there?"



Figure 19. Thunder drops pebbles

He picked up some gravel and threw it down in front of the cave mouth. He kept dropping it, letting the gravel trickle down in front of the cave.

You see, Thunder thought he would trick old Fog into believing that a porcupine was crawling above the mouth of the cave, sending down little showers of pebbles.

But old Fog just stayed where he was. He couldn't be tricked that easily. He knew what Thunderstorm was up to. He saw the pebbles falling, but he didn't come out.

After a while, the little boy—the one that had been a lizard before—needed to relieve himself. "*Ilwadhu*," he said, "Father. Take me outside for toilet."

"No, no, no. You can't go outside. Just wait," said old Fog. "Your brother-in-law is up there, waiting for us. He might spear us."

"No, you have to take me outside. I want to go for toilet."

"No, no, just do it here in my hand," said Fog.

But the little boy didn't want to, you know.

"Come on, just do it here on my chest."

"No, no. Take me outside."



Figure 20. Thunder kills the lizard boy

"Well, then, do it here in my mouth," said Fog.

But the little boy still said no. "I want to go outside."

"Well, all right, then," said Fog.

He took the lizard boy to the mouth of the cave. The little lizard boy jumped out to the north, with Fog behind him to the south. As Fog came near the entrance, his beard first came into view, just sticking out of the cave mouth to the north.

Now Thunder was watching, and when he saw that beard poke out, he thought, "There's Fog now." Thunder took his lightning bolt spear and threw it.

The spear killed the little boy straight out, and it cut off Fog's beard.

Fog ducked back inside the cave, still alive and unharmed. He stayed inside the cave, crying and mourning his little son. He couldn't go outside to get the body, since he was afraid that Thunder might still spear him. He waited, and he waited.

When daylight came, Thunderstorm departed, thinking he had speared his victim. He went home again.

Fog spied all around the place. "Nothing there—he has gone," he said to himself. He went outside, took the child's body, and prepared to bury him.

"I'll let the remains of that dead child decompose, first," he thought. When enough time had passed, Fog dug up the remains again. He made a kind of coffin. Then he took all the little boy's bones, and he put them inside.

Then he waited. "Let that fellow there in the south forget all about it," he thought. "Then I'll go to have my revenge."

### Camping at Uwuru

In October 1984, two years after our first trip, Roger Hart and I walked back to Barrow Point, this time by ourselves. Our friend Tulo Gordon was now in ill health and reluctant to set out again. In the time since our previous visit to Barrow Point Tulo had completed a series of paintings about Roger's life and homeland, and about the adventures of old man Wurrey. The landscape was firmly fixed in his mind.

While Tulo was now content to stay home, Roger and I were eager to return to Roger's country. After the previous visit, Roger's memories had become more vivid, his reminiscences more complex. Even his confidence in reconstructing his language had grown. Now he wanted to explore the country with more care, to find other landmarks he had remembered at Instone's settlement, to walk over an area that he thought the protector of Aborigines had pegged out for a possible Aboriginal reserve, and to revisit sites of other newly recalled events from his childhood.

In the first half of the 1980s there was a general reawakening of interest in the bush areas north of Cooktown. Not only Hopevale people, thinking about their homelands or the country they had known in their youths as stockmen, but also non-Aboriginal tourists and fishermen had begun to explore wilderness areas long abandoned up the Cape York Peninsula. At the beginning of October 1984, Roger and I had accompanied a group of young Hopevale men and a few aging former stockmen on a combination fishing trip and exploration of the inland routes leading north toward Cape Bowen and Cape Melville. Our companions, missing the comforts of home, abandoned the trip before Roger and I could convince them to try to visit Barrow Point. We did spy a rough track, heading east across the sandhills north of the ruins of Wakooka

sometimes he seemed almost surprised when a particularly fluent phrase would spring from his lips as if of its own accord.

Now, however, we were in his homeland. Facing Uwuru, Roger launched into a fluent peroration in his native tongue—the first time I had ever heard him speak with such effortless fluidity. He addressed the giant crocodile as a kinsman, identifying himself as a long lost relative now returned to his own land. “We are countrymen,” he declared, “and if you leave me in peace, I will also leave you in peace.” Gesturing in my direction, he added, “And he’s with me.”

That night in our camp we were content with more stories and a meal of the remaining Hopevale food. Tomorrow we could look for bait in the mangroves and fish for our dinner.

“I know they used to pick up *waathurr* somewhere around there,” he said, referring to a mud whelk with a long conical shell that inhabits the mangrove roots. “They would gather that for bait. They used to catch rock cod with it, and with the hermit crabs that live in that same shell.

“One night I was out hunting for bait with my mother. She was looking around for frogs. Not the long nosed ones, the fast ones, called *arrill-malin*; *arrilla* means ‘run!’ I was carrying a tea-tree bark torch. I would shine it in the mud, and if she saw a frog she would club it with a stick. Then I was supposed to pick it up.

“She hit one frog, and there it lay dead. I reached out my hand to pick it up, and at the same time a *yigi*—a ghost—put out its hand and grabbed me on the arm.

“I let out a screech, gave us both a big fright. Well, we didn’t do any fishing *that* night.”

We stacked our bonfire high with wood. The breezes blew up from the sea, and the stars blinked. Despite Roger’s eloquent speech to the crocodile, we both slept, as one says, with one eye open.

The next morning, when I awoke, Roger had already been out to reconnoiter. Down near the creek mouth he had found the tracks of *anhiirr* returning from a night’s hunting sometime before dawn. We drank our morning tea on the beach, facing Ninian Bay.

As a little boy, Roger recalled, he liked to accompany his mother when she went fishing. Sometimes she would leave camp at the very spot where we now sat and go walking on the reefs at low tide looking for fish and lobsters.

“Once she set out east to that little reef just north of here—if the tide were low enough it would be sticking up there, look. I wanted to go, too, so I followed her. She wanted me to stay behind.



Figure 21. Roger hunting with his mother

“‘You stay here,’ she told me. But I kept on following her anyway. I was disobedient.

“Probably she was thinking, ‘How am I going to get rid of him, make him stay home?’ I was still following behind, even when she tried to chase me away.

“She headed out east along the top of the reef. Suddenly she pointed down and said to me, ‘Watch out for that snake down there!’

“I froze. I just stood there. I was rooted to that spot for hours and hours. She kept on going, but I never moved from there. I stood where I was while she went hunting, and I never moved from that spot until she came back.

“Then I got a good flogging.

“It was my own fault, I suppose. She tried to stop me; but I just kept following her. I always used to hang around her when she went out hunting.”

We decided to walk north up the coast toward Eumangin Creek before going back toward Instone’s old place. We passed a freshwater spring, bubbling up out of the sand on the beach, just as Roger had remembered.

We climbed a hill that projected into the bay, and Roger pointed out the creeks along the beach that extended to North Bay Point and on to



Figure 22. Chasing the goanna

## A BITTEN FINGER

We used to camp at Cape Melville, near the very tip of the point. There was a long line of **nguundarr** trees there on the beach. That's the wongai plum. Just to the east of the last fruit tree there used to be a big camp. People used to come there from farther west. My family would camp nearby, too, but we never used to mix up with them—they spoke a different language, you know. *Ama uwu yindu*.

While we were living there I got really sick. We had been over to the Mack River to collect **mayi mabil**—water lilies. You had to dig around in the swamp, and then come out into the hot sun. I got this whooping cough, I think, a terrible cough. And my head hurt all the time. Maybe it was some kind of pneumonia or something.

They tried to cure me in different ways. First, they crushed green ants and smeared them all over my body. But I didn't get better. Then they tried boiling hot water. They would dip a piece of towel or rag in it and warm my whole body that way. I still didn't get any better, and I was beginning to get very thin and weak, very poorly.

Well, after that they thought of another way to cure me. They collected a heap of rocks, and they heated them all in a large fire. It was just



Figure 23. Sick at Cape Melville

like a **gurrma**, an earth oven. When the rocks were really hot they went to bring a bucket of water. Actually, they filled an old kerosene tin—that was what they used in the early days. It was a square one. They filled it half full with water, and then they tossed those hot rocks in. The rocks made the water very hot.

They made a little frame out of branches and put the tin and hot stones inside. Then they spread blankets over the top and made me sit down at one side. They covered me with more blankets, one on top of the other, and they sealed the edges right around. Just like an earth oven. They didn't put dirt or leaves on top but only held down the edges of the blankets with sand so that the heat wouldn't escape and the wind wouldn't get in.

I lay down in there for about an hour, I think. The sweat came.

Afterwards they opened it up. Well, I didn't know, you see, I was too sick. I didn't remember a thing about it. Perhaps I was about to die from that sickness. But when I got up, I was feeling really good. They told me afterwards, "We put you in there."

I didn't walk around much for a while. I was really thin, really bony. I couldn't eat anything until they did that to me.

Little by little I started getting better. I didn't get sick any more after



Figure 24. A bitten finger

that. I started playing again. I was able to go around with my mother then.

The Flinders Island people used to come around these camps, too. They would come as far as Cape Melville, and I would see them there.

I saw old Johnny Flinders when I was just a little boy. He came right down to lipwulin, right here to Ninian Bay. They had a camp down to the south there.

He was feeling really sick at that time. He was lying down in his humpy under a blanket, which had a hole in it. I kept poking my finger in to see if he was under there. I was trying to poke him in the eye.

He just waited while I jabbed around. Then he bit me on the finger! Ngaanhigay! He wouldn't let go.

I still remember the place where that happened.

Two days later it was time to walk out again. We had some dried fish to eat, and the last of our flour and tea. Roger's tobacco was growing short. We thought the walk back inland across the bare country left by the bushfire would be easier than following our earlier path along the coast. I had my compass in my pocket.

We sat on the beach at lipwulin late in the afternoon, planning an

early start the next morning. Roger again had stories to tell about the endless travel of his childhood. He remembered shifting with his family back to Ninian Bay after camping for months at Cape Melville.

"Too much **bama** there," he recalled, "but once we got back here, we only stayed about three weeks."

Then they shifted again to a new camp on the coast south of Barrow Point.

"It was just here to the east," he remembered, "and there was a river on the south side of the path. They were carrying me on their shoulders, and I could see **juubi** and raffia palms lining the southern bank."

When traveling from place to place, men carried their multi-pronged **banyjarr** spears for fishing and **banggay** or **muthin** spears, whose points were made of a single wire, used for spearing game. They also had general purpose "knife" spears, whose tips might consist of a flat piece of iron, perhaps made from a door hinge sharpened to a double edge and a point at the end.

"An animal dies quickly if you spear it with a knife spear. It loses a lot of blood and falls exhausted.

"We would carry our spears and a couple of government blankets. That was enough for traveling. Also the dogs. If the boys had brought any knives from the boats, they would take them along to cut up game. They used to have billycans for mixing up honey. No tea in those days, or only sometimes. Just honey, to mix in water.

"They never used to carry any clothes along. Just my mother and my old man—they had a few trousers or a gown. But not the kids. We didn't have hats. Only those few people who had worked for the white man wore hats.

"They had spoon and knife, but no forks. They sometimes had matches. When the matches ran out, they would make fire with fire-sticks. Very hard, you know: it makes your hands blister. Some people can make the fire come quickly, but not everyone.

"So they didn't have much gear. Some people were carrying bark containers with the remains of their relatives. But that wasn't very heavy, since they only took the bones. They would carry the containers around until they felt satisfied. **Ganaa wawu buliiga**.<sup>3</sup> Then they would leave the remains in a high cave somewhere."

We set out early the next morning, also traveling light. We followed the contours of the land back the way we had come, trusting to our memories and my compass to guide us over the blackened earth. There was no water to be had between the swamp at lipwulin and our vehicle, aban-

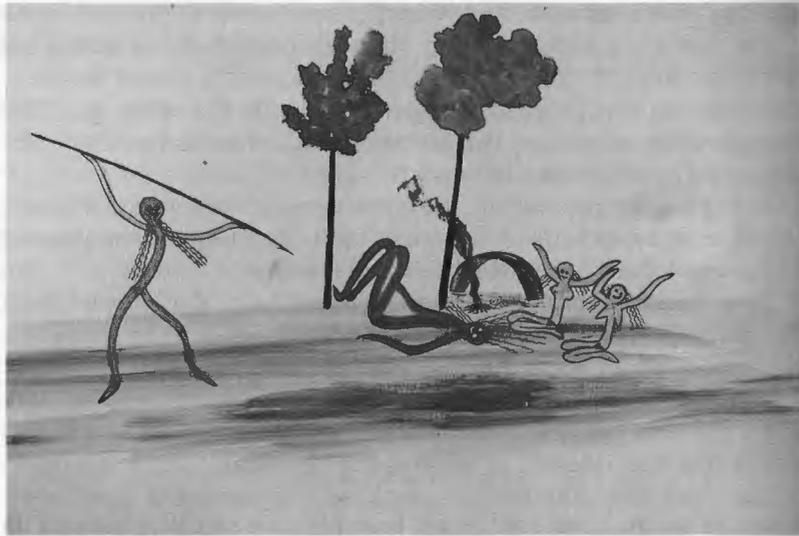


Figure 25. Fog spears Thunder

in his hair. The younger sister knew that her father was coming to spear old Thunderstorm.

When the old man was close enough he suddenly stood up and threw his spear. It went right through one tree, and then through one of Thunder's outstretched legs. The spear kept going: it speared his other leg and went on to spear the tree on the other side.

Old Thunderstorm started to spin and roll. **Buuuu, du du du**. His legs were pinned to the trees by Fog's spear. Thunder tried to throw one of his own thunderbolt spears, but old Fog ducked under it. Thunder threw another thunderbolt to the north, but old Fog ducked again. For a third time Thunder threw a thunderbolt spear to the north, but again Fog ducked under it.

At last, Fog stood up there in the north, and he looked back out of the corner of his eye. At that same moment, Thunder threw his last spear, and this time it chopped old Fog's beard right off.

Fog started running then, all the way home. He ran **di di di diii**, until he came to the Mack River. He didn't stop with the people there. He kept running, turning west. He entered the same cave where the little lizard boy had been speared. He went in there, and that's where he still is today.

When I was a little boy at Barrow Point, we would go up to Cape Melville and look west to Bathhurst Head, where old Fog has his cave. Every morning we would see white fog around that mountain—old Fog's beard floating free, after Thunderstorm speared it.

And that's the end of the story.