

Part Four

RETURN TO BARROW POINT



Tipwulin

The idea of returning to Barrow Point had begun to grow on us like an obsession. Our thoughts, both awake puzzling over Barrow Point words and in dreams doing the same thing, focused on Roger's homeland **guwa** 'to the west' where he hadn't set foot since he was a little boy. Bush fruits, profusions of oysters, dugong on the mudflats, wild yams—all called Roger home through his hungry childhood memories.

In the late 1970s old bush tracks were being reopened. Four-wheel-drive vehicles, bristling with fishing gear, pushed their way north from Cairns to Cooktown and beyond. A trip to Barrow Point began to seem possible. In the early spring of 1980 Roger, Tulo Gordon, and I, along with a group of Hopevale elders, took part in a two-car expedition to Cape Melville, reopening an overgrown track unused for twenty years, traversing abandoned cattle stations from the Starcke River in the south to the very tip of Cape Melville in the north. In the process we winched ourselves across the Jeannie River, forged a track to Cape Bowen, climbed Jones's Gap, descended to Wakooka Station, feasted on wild pig, and crossed sandhill and salt pan—freshly imprinted with the hoof marks of wild horses—to reach the beach at Cape Melville where the bones of the giant Scrub Python had been transformed into a huge mountain of black boulders. Our guide then was Pastor George Rosendale, a Lutheran minister at large and grandson of the woman from the Bloomfield River who had been sent with her mixed-descent child to the Cape Bedford community early in the century. In the 1950s Pastor George had been one of Hopevale's crack stockmen. He had been the bulldozer driver at Starcke who opened many of the original tracks we were trying now to follow. After a couple of weeks in the bush, running short of sugar, tobacco, and petrol, we returned to Hopevale without trying to make our way to Barrow Point.

Since then Roger, Tulo, and I had been plotting to try to reach Roger's birthplace. From former stockmen who had worked the area thirty years before we had gathered expert opinion about the best way to approach Barrow Point. An old stock road that some remembered was sure to be overgrown by now and cut by creeks. Several people offered to accompany us with a second vehicle, but ultimately all backed out, their cars broken down or with something better to do. We decided to strike out on our own, two sixty-year-olds and a tenderfoot Yank. We would head



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**.¹ 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**,² 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.'

"I didn't know what they meant. I thought they were joking. When they took me farther east to Cape Bedford, I found out what they had been talking about. I cried and cried."

"How many people came with you from Barrow Point?"

"Well, I reckon about thirty—perhaps a few more. A lot of people didn't come. King Nicholas stayed behind at Barrow Point with his family. Toby Flinders didn't come. But there were several children, young men, and women. Toby Gordon and I played together on the trip."

"Were you the only half-caste fellow?"

"Yeah. There weren't any others. They left me with the missionary, but they took all the other children back with them. Toby Gordon and his brother Banjo wanted to stay, you know, when they saw the other children at the mission. They said, 'Why do they only keep the kids with that kind of skin there? We want to stay, too.'"

"Did the two of them ever go to the mission?"

"No, *thawuunh*,³ only when we came back from Woorabinda after the war. Well, they came then. Banjo died at the mission. His brother Toby stayed for a while, but he had married a woman from Lockhart, and when she wanted to go home, he went with her. Never came back to the mission."

"Those were your playmates when you were at Barrow Point?"

"Yes, we used to play all around. Banjo was a little bit bigger, then me, then Toby. Also Nicholas Wallace and Hector Wallace, they were both still just little fellows.⁴ There were a few others, too. Who knows what happened to them? Even old man Harrigan⁵ used to play around that camp—that's what Toby Gordon told me. This was after they had taken me away."

Later as we ate a meal of bread, fresh roasted fish, and sweet milky tea, Roger reminisced about the adults at Barrow Point during his childhood.

"Old man Barney Warner, *Wulngurrin*, he was up and down from Barrow Point to Cooktown.⁶ He was my uncle, *urrbithu athunbi*, already a full grown man at that time. When he was living in the camp at Instone's place he had a wife, Tommy Christie's mother *Magurru*. Then he went out working on the boats. Along came my 'nephew' old man Christie and stole Barney's wife away, even though her husband was still alive."

"Who were the other grown men?"

"Well, aside from Barney, there was old man Charlie Angry. They also called him Charlie Hungry. He later drowned at the wharf in Cairns when somebody hit him over the head with a bottle. He married *Nambaji*, after Mundy her first husband died. Then he drowned, and old

man Jackie Red Point married her. I knew old Charlie while I was still in Barrow Point. But I met him again. He and Banjo Gordon were working on a boat called the *Noosa*. They used to take supplies up to the stockmen at Port Stewart.

"I was already working on the mission boat myself at that time, the *Ramona*. We were docked in Cooktown, and the *Noosa* came in.

"Someone said to me, 'Barrow Point people on that boat.'"

"So I walked north to the wharf. I stood on the east side of the wharf. I saw Charlie Hungry coming from the west side. I recognized him clearly.

"Hello, mate,' I said.

"He didn't know me. He kept walking east. I didn't tell him who I was. I just went to look inside the boat to the west.

"I saw Banjo stretched out beside the stove. He said, 'Come here, come here!' I went over and we started to talk. 'Did you meet Charlie Hungry?' he asked me.

"Yes, I saw him there to the south.'

"Then he said my name. 'If you see Roger Hart, tell him that you met me. Tell Bob Flinders, too, and all my relations. Tell Roger Hart,' he said.

"There I was, Roger Hart, and I was supposed to tell myself!

"Do you know me?' I asked him.

"No, I don't know you.'

"Man, I *am* Roger, I am *Urrwunhthin*!

"Oh, it's you!'

"So we hugged each other.

"That was about 1938, and it was the first time we had seen each other since I had said goodbye to him at the McIvor River, before they took me to school.

"Just like Nicholas Wallace.⁷ I last played with him at the Jeannie River. We were jumping back and forth from tree to tree. Later, when he came to the Cape Bedford Mission I didn't know him. He had grown tall by then."

The next morning we set out again. More vehicles, probably belonging to Cairns fishermen, had obviously been along this road since our previous trip two years before. We no longer had to winch the car up the banks of the Jeannie River, nor did we have to fill in the track where swollen creeks had washed it out.

By mid afternoon we reached the abandoned Wakooka Station. We followed the Wakooka Creek toward the coast, camping by the Rocky Waterhole where we found traces of a recent fisherman's camp.

At the crack of dawn on 1 October 1982, we left our Land Cruiser on a sandhill overlooking a wide salt pan bordered by mangroves, near the mouth of Wakooka Creek. We repacked our swags for a long walk, carrying bread, flour, tea, sugar, and our fishing gear. Tulo—the best shot of the group—shouldered the rifle. Roger took the spear. I hauled along a couple of liters of fresh water, my tape recorder, and a supply of batteries.

After searching for several hours for a clear path through the mangroves, we finally made our way out to the beach, where we could see the hill atop Barrow Point rising some 13 kilometers to the north. Roger recalled only one large creek we would have to cross on our trek between here and there. We cooked and ate a scrub turkey that Tulo had bagged on the salt pan, and then we set out at a quick pace, a strong southeast wind stinging our right ears. We wanted to catch the low tide at the creek mouth.

The walk turned slow and steady, and the wind made conversation impossible. Roger walked through the small waves blowing across the beach, spear in hand, looking for something edible. Whether he was visited by thoughts of the past I do not know. Tulo, his humor darkened by thirst and shortness of breath, straggled somewhat, though he stooped to pick up a ball of ancient **gambarr**—pitch for making spears, testimony to an old bama camp somewhere nearby—in a sand dune as we passed north of Saltwater Creek. It joined the tobacco in his shirt pocket.

It was late afternoon when we reached the end of the beach and started to scabble our way up the rocky hill that stood atop Barrow Point itself. Or at least the map said it was Barrow Point. By the time we had reached the summit and surveyed the prospects, watching the sun setting over distant mangroves, Roger Hart was confused and worried.

"This is not the place, thawuunh," he muttered, as I examined the map, and Tulo grunted in a kind of hungry disbelief. "I don't know this place."

By now we had finished our meager supply of water. No more tea. We were all exhausted from the long walk. Where were the old campsite, the freshwater spring, the **bulgun** or refuge from the wind we had been promised for laying out our swags?

Tulo and I sat in ill-tempered silence as Roger anxiously searched the horizon for some familiar landmark. Perhaps we needed to head farther up the coast? But maybe there was something familiar about the dark pattern of the mangroves to the west, now fading into the shadows of the evening.

"Come this way," Roger urged.

We pulled ourselves up and set off, at the fastest pace we could man-

age in the darkening twilight, stumbling down the rocky hill to the west, following what appeared to be an old bullock or pig track down onto a flat grassy plain, staying just inland from a thick mangrove swamp.

We trudged on in the dark, with Roger leading, picking his way barefooted through mud, then sand, heading with what seemed to be growing confidence always to the west. We met a small creek, narrow but very deep. Once we had managed to cross it, we found ourselves once again on a clear beach. There was only a little moon.

"I think this is it, **thuway**,"⁸ Roger remarked optimistically to Tulo.

In any case, we could go no farther. Throats dry, with not a drop of fresh water, we stretched out our swags by a forlorn fire.

Roger urged me to ignore my thirst. "If you're hungry, thawuunh, eat. When I feel a little bit thirsty, I just chew on some bread."

He brightened. "Don't worry. We'll have a drink of water over there to the west, tomorrow. The creek in the corner of Ninian Bay runs down from above, and that water never goes dry. It's fresh water if you go up the creek a bit. It's only brackish down near the beach, where the crocodiles are."

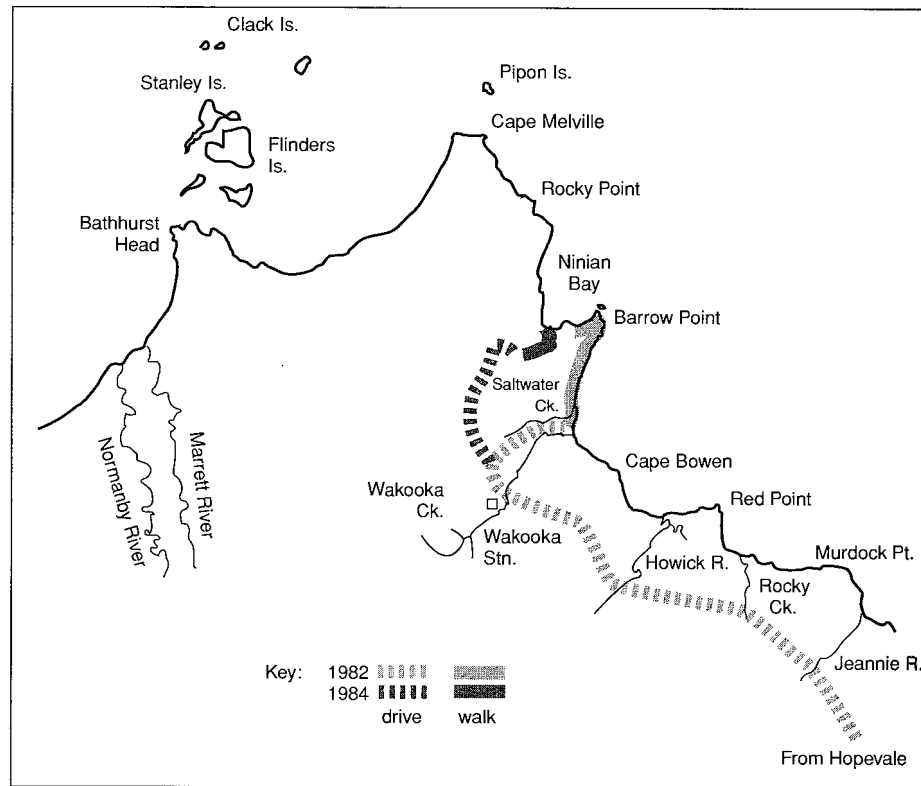
Tulo and I were not to be consoled. "My back aches," Tulo complained. "My legs are tired. Tomorrow I think I'll go swim about half a mile!"

Only Roger was cheerful. "I'm feeling really good. I don't feel body sick, only a bit tired," he said.

A bird flew overhead and sang out in the darkness. "'My countryman has come,' he says." Roger was now feeling certain that we had reached his homeland.

We sat by the flickering fire, thinking of food. Tulo muttered that we were a mighty long way from anywhere. Back at Hopevale there had been talk of efforts to secure Aboriginal land rights in other parts of the country. But even if bama could reclaim an outstation this far into the wilderness, Tulo observed, and even if it were supplied by ships, people might only stay a couple of days and then go back. You would have to stockpile supplies. "Even old Muuni," he said, referring to the missionary at Cape Bedford, "when he killed a **buligi** ['bullock'] would salt most of the meat for storage."

"When this tide goes out," observed Roger, "it will leave the rocks on the point exposed. The mangroves here to the west aren't like the ones we just walked through. They're only few. There's another little beach around the point. Don't worry." He pointed west, where a rocky hill jutted out into the sea. "We won't go hungry tomorrow. Those rocks are covered with oysters."



Map 3. The walks to Barrow Point

We threw out our lines to try to catch a couple of fish. We had only old bait, still clinging to the hooks. As we sat hoping for bites, Roger's memories began to sharpen. He was beginning to understand how our walk had gone wrong.

"I think these pandanus trees here are the only ones left. There used to be a good few standing here. The rest must have died by now. There also used to be a couple of coconut trees over there farther east."

"It's just as well we didn't try to walk right around the tip of Barrow Point. I thought that when people said 'Barrow Point' they meant our old camping place. But what they call Barrow Point is really over there to the east. Our camp was here, on this beach."

Tulo asked, "Doesn't Barrow Point have a name in language?"

"I think they call it *Wayamu*.⁹ That little island out to the north is *Mulganhbigu*. This is all my country, from that point right through inland to the south." He had now decided that on the other side of the hill to our west was the old station where the white settler Instone had lived.

"There used to be a really good path across there, one time ago. The bama camp used to be on this side. Here to the south there was a big swamp." Roger promised that we would find fresh water there tomorrow.

"Very few people used to camp over on Instone's side," Roger went on. "They were mostly over here in this big camp, here at lipwulin. This is where I was born."

Roger began to tell us about the old people in the camp, how they had been taken away to Lockhart. He checked himself, with an embarrassed laugh. "Don't say the names of the dead. They might come and grab us by the neck."

"They wouldn't recognize us," replied Tulo. "Anyway, I'm an Australian bama, too!"

Roger kicked at an old beer bottle, half buried in the sand on the beach, its label bleached white by the sun, silent testimony to strangers—perhaps fishermen off passing boats—who had camped here.

"How do you suppose this got here, thawuunh? Might be stockmen brought it with them from the south. Oh, it makes me sorry, this place."

A breeze blew up from the east. Roger launched into another story-memory from childhood.

"When I was a little fellow, thawuunh, it was blowing just like this out of the east. All the bama's camp was just over there, a bit farther west.

"You know that 'kerosene grass'? There used to be a lot of that growing around here—it might still be here. They told me to burn the grass.

"Just go over there to the east and set fire to the grass, tidy the place up."

"So I set the fire, but the flames blew up high on the east wind. They went rushing along and burned up all the humpies. Our houses used to be made out of tea-tree bark, and the fire just cleaned them out.

"I still remember that plainly. The place looks just the same to me." (See Pl. 11.)

Roger's enthusiasm about his homeland would have to wait until we had rested and found some water for a drink of tea. We prepared to sleep. Not to be outdone by Roger's memories, Tulo told his own story, aiming a bit of practical advice at me.

"Thawuunh, don't sleep out there on the open sand. There might be stray crocodiles around here, you know.

"I remember we once went out turtle hunting at Cape Flattery. We

came up to the beach, with one big turtle we had speared. We laid it on the beach. Then we all went to sleep right there.

"The next morning when we got up we saw crocodile tracks—they were this wide." He stretched out his arms to their full span. "Truly! We had been sleeping here. The croc had come up right next to us, to pick up that turtle shell. Nobody saw him. He took the shell away. If there hadn't been a shell, he would have picked one of us."

When I awoke the next morning, Tulo was still asleep. Roger was nowhere to be seen. There was no sign of a rogue crocodile, but fresh pig tracks ringed our little camp. I surveyed the country. The sea was very calm, lapping at what seemed slabs of hardened clay at the water's edge. The beach stretched for 3 or 4 kilometers to the east, from where we had come the previous night. Mangroves darkened the far end of the beach, and a small island could be seen just north of Barrow Point itself. To the west, the rocky hill sloped down to the shore, projected big boulders into the water. It looked about one hundred meters high.

To the south was dense scrub. There, perhaps, lay the swamp that Roger remembered. As I looked, Roger himself walked into view, wearing a triumphant grin and carrying our water bottles, now full.

"A bit brackish, mate," he announced, "but still sweet."

Unable to sleep, he had set out early to reconnoiter. He had not found the freshwater creek he had remembered, but he had found the swamp. After a drink and a good wash, he had returned full of enthusiasm.

We roused ourselves, breakfasted regally on old bread and fresh tea, and set out to explore Roger's homeland.

Delousing

While Fog was making mischief with the giant dingo's head, the two Magpie brothers stayed behind to eat the rest of the meat. Once they had finished it all up, it was a long time before they felt hungry again. When finally they decided to go out hunting for more meat, they set out toward the south. (See Pl. 12.)

They were great hunters, you know, those two Magpie brothers. In the past, though, they never used to have to sneak up on their prey. They could just walk up to the animals, spear them, and kill them.

When the two brothers came to the south, they looked around. One brother spied a big mob of animals. They were red kangaroos, stacks of them, and wallaroos.

"Where's the minha?"

"Standing over there. Let's kill some."

They started over toward the kangaroos, which weren't feeding, you know, but just sitting down resting in the shade. The Magpie brothers walked straight toward them. When the animals saw them coming, they all got up and ran away.

The two brothers went hunting for another lot, now. But the other animals ran away, too.

The younger Magpie said, "What's wrong with all this minha? They seem to have gotten eyes just like people. They can see us coming."

His older brother replied, "Didn't you notice? We gave old Fog the head of that giant dingo dog. He must have put a spell on it. Now all these animals have good eyesight." (See Pl. 13.)

Well, it was no use. The two Magpie brothers gave up their hunting and headed back north. When they came to the beach, they set up camp.

Meanwhile, what had happened to old Fog? They wondered where he was. "He must be hiding somewhere. Who knows where? He told all these lies and caused all this trouble," they said. "He's afraid someone will spear him."

They were still hungry, so they decided to try their luck at hunting turtle. They got their canoe ready, and they prepared themselves for the hunt.

Now these brothers had two sisters, too, who had come to stay with them. They decided to leave their sisters at the camp, on the beach. "You two stay here," the brothers said, "while we go out for turtle."

All right, they set out in the canoe.

While they were out on the ocean, looking around for more minha, where do you suppose old Fog was? He suddenly sprang up out of the south, near the camp where the two girls were.

"There comes our grandfather, from the south," sang out one of the sisters.

"Oh, so he's coming," said the other.

"Hello, grandfather," they said as he approached the camp.

"Yes, it's me. I'm here," he said. "What are you two up to?"

They were delousing each other. "We're looking for lice," they said.

"Yes?" Old Fog looked at them. "But your eyes are no good," he said. (I'm going to have to use a few bad words, now.)

"Your eyes are no good. You ought to let me have a turn looking for lice. I have really good eyes," he said. "Give me a chance."

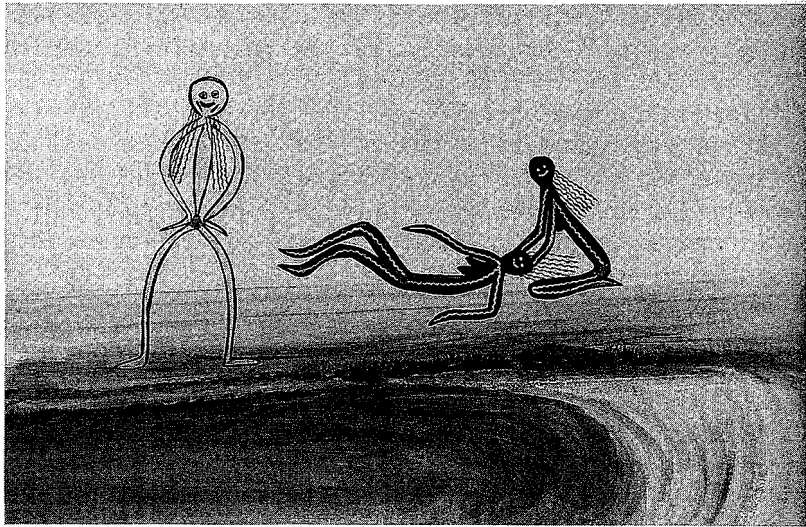


Figure 16. Delousing

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.

By now all the stones had gotten hot. They took the stones from the fire and stuffed them down inside the turtle's body, too. Then they closed up the hole in the neck, so the hot air and steam inside couldn't escape.

They left one especially hard stone on the fire. They didn't put it inside the turtle. They kept that stone very hot.

Then they put the turtle back on the fire. They covered the shell with coals so that the meat would cook both inside and out. It cooked and cooked, and the special stone cooked, too. They kept it to one side.

Finally the meat was ready. They took the turtle off the fire and let it cool.

Guilty old Fog was still asleep.

Finally, they opened the turtle up. They threw away the stones and the coals. They opened the shell and cleaned it out. They took out the meat from the chest part, which was now well cooked. They took out meat, and more meat, and more meat.

They went to find a bailer shell. It was to dip the soup out from inside the turtle shell.

Finally, when everything was ready, they woke old Fog.

"Grandfather, come here! Come here, and eat some soup!"

Fog came over from the west.

They were still keeping that special stone hot.

The elder Magpie brother said, "**Ngathi**, come here." He covered Fog's eyes and made him open his mouth very wide. "Open up," he said.

Then he poured the soup straight down into the old fellow's mouth.

Fog said, "Aaah, I really like to eat this soup. Give me more, more, more."

So they got more soup, dipping it out with the bailer shell. Once again, they covered his eyes and poured the soup into his mouth, right down his throat. He drank that lot of soup, too.

"Come on, come on, one more time, one more time," called out old Fog.

The older Magpie brother went back to the fire, but instead of soup he got the hot stone. He brought it over. Once again they had covered Fog's eyes.

"Open very wide!"

Fog opened his mouth up, and they stuffed that hot stone right down inside his mouth. He swallowed it!

It was so hot, old Fog just blew up, right then and there. He exploded! Pieces of his body went flying around everywhere. There was nothing left of him—his bones were all smashed toward the south. Only one part

of him survived intact: his genitals. They flew straight up in the air, heading north. They kept on flying *yii* . . . until they landed squarely on an island. They call it Stanley Island, *Indayin* in the Flinders Island language.

Old Fog's spirit is over there now, still living on that island. And the mark where his balls came down can still be seen today.¹

~~~~~ On the Beach at Barrow Point

Early on October 2, 1982, after boiling up our morning tea from Roger's brackish swamp water, we were ready to start exploring. We gathered up spear, rifle, and fishing gear and set out across the hill that separated our beach camp from the old settlement. Roger hoped to locate several spots at Instone's old compound, relying partly on his own memory and partly on what he had heard from Hopevale stockmen.

The sun was hot, and the grass had grown up tall, scratching at our legs as we passed, promising snakes. Roger was not pleased. "Used to be really clean here one time ago," he said, fingering the matches in his pocket. In the old days, he told me, people would never have let the country get so overgrown. They used to set fire to the bush and then hunt comfortably over the resulting *thulingga*—the burned country where fresh shoots promptly sprang up again.

Coming over the top of the hill we found what seemed to be the remnants of wartime tracks, broken cement slabs. We made our way down to a short patch of beach, on the western side of the rocky hill, where Roger's memory told him we should find Instone's old wharf. Instead there were only sprouting mangroves, and the beginnings of a swamp. Here, too, everything was overgrown.

We started to explore. Roger first found a rotting wooden beam sunk into the sand, part of what might have been an old dock. We then discovered a line of termite-infested fence posts apparently leading back to one of Instone's yards. As we penetrated more deeply into the scrub, we chanced upon other remnants of the abandoned settlement, which Roger pieced together from the jigsaw map in his memory. Here were what looked like house posts, which would have put the well over there. There in another corner was a large rusty piece of water tank, not far

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?—if 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 allinbi*.¹ 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

up onto the beach and tossed the oysters shell and all into the fire. We boiled up a billycan of Alligator Creek water, and Roger rolled a cigarette. I asked him more about the camping places nearby.

"People used to go to the south side of that big swamp where I went for water this morning. There's a big flying-fox camp somewhere there. But they didn't often climb those rocks on the top of Barrow Point. I think some early explorers heaped those rocks up—maybe in Capt. Cook's time. Bama didn't go there."

"What do you call **baarrabaarra** [mangrove] in Barrow Point language?" I asked, trying to remember.

"**Althaan**. And this pandanus tree is called . . . **ubiir**. The young men used to make armllets out of it: **thambal ubiir-yi** 'arm with pandanus' they called it. All the young fellows used to put that on. Oysters we call **waman**."

Ours were beginning to sizzle as they roasted in their own juice on Tulo's fire.

"What do you call flying fox?"

"**Waguul**. But the old people didn't let us boys eat it when we were little. They used to go over here to the southwest, to the big sandhill, hunt lots of scrub turkeys there. They wouldn't let us have any of that, either.

"'Oh, go on, give them some, poor things,' a few would say. So they would give us a couple of turkey eggs, and we'd eat them shell and all.

"They'd go south a couple of miles, and then turn east a bit, come to another big marsh—not really a lagoon. There used to be lots of game there."

Roger was still thinking about Instone's well. "I was looking at the soil, see? I wondered if it was still hard, but it was half sand. So I went farther south, keeping the tank stand to the east. But that well got me beat. The wild pigs have probably covered it over by now."

"If Instone never put any fence or posts around it," observed Tulo, "no wonder they dug it up."

"The water just ran out of that well like a spring," said Roger. "From where we found those posts in the old yard, the well was off toward the west. There used to be a big mango tree there. It was good black soil.

"Instone had nannygoats, too, but I don't know what happened to them. I think when the department² sent a boat up here to shift the people away, they also took the nannygoats. They had brought the goats from Pison Island. They had a shed for them here somewhere."

We pushed the roasted oysters away from the fire with a long stick and started to eat them, burning our fingers on the shells. Our long walk

and the hungry night had left us with prodigious appetites. We ate several dozen oysters each, then had a brief nap, then ate again.

"A lot of bama who lived around that big swamp in the south used to come up to visit. They would set out at night from the east and get here about sundown. They would meet the people here, sit around and exchange news and stories, get some tobacco. Then late at night they would start back again, walk back to the east, get home the next day.

"Have some more oysters, thawuunh. It's the last chance. We won't eat like this anymore."

We made one last trip to the mudflats to pick up hermit crabs for bait, and then we clambered back over the rocky promontory toward Iipwulin, to fish for our supper.

As we stood around the campfire late that night, Roger marveled at the passage of time.

"This place, thawuunh, it's like I was just here yesterday! Looking that way, it's like I was seeing Cape Melville when I was a boy. The only thing that puzzles me is how the scrub has grown up so fast around Instone's place. It used to be completely clear there."

As we retired for the night we watched the glow from Roger's bushfire, spreading back inland from Instone's place, lighting up the night sky as it cleaned up the land of the Gambiilmugu people.

October 3, 1982. After the bounty of Roger's country the day before, we had cooked the fish we caught in a **gurrma**, a small earth oven filled with hot rocks and covered with leaves. We opened it to eat some of the roasted fish, before setting out on our return trip. Again Roger urged us to eat.

"Finish those fish, Tulo. My country is a long way from yours,³ and we'll only find coconuts to eat on the way back."

Roger talked more about old Fog and his stories.

"Wurrey has two names, you know. He was also called **Wuurmba**. That was his name among the 'younger brothers' from the inland half of the Barrow Point nation."

Roger asked me to take some photographs, so he would have something to remember the place by if he never managed to make the walk back.

"What do you suppose happened to Instone?" I asked.

"After he left this place, Instone lived in Cooktown. He used to come out to the Eight-Mile bridge.⁴ Once some of the other boys told me he

was there. I badly wanted to get a look at him again, but he left too fast. I would have said to him, 'You know me?' By that time he might have been glad to see some of the bama from Barrow Point, but he was mighty cruel to the lot of them when they were up here."

Following Roger's urgings as host and owner of this fat country, we ate as much of the roasted fish as our bellies could hold. Then we rolled up our swags for the long walk back. We intended to strike out southeast and inland, to avoid the mangroves along the coast, the rocks of Barrow Point itself, and the swampy country farther south. Having great confidence in Tulo's directional acuity, we elected him to be the guide. "He never gets bush," Roger told me.

By late morning we had made our way back out to the long beach that stretched southward from Barrow Point to the mouth of the Wakooka Creek. We started off into the breeze, walking briskly. We reached the old camping place Roger had spotted on our walk up. There stood a lone coconut tree. We had no bush knife, and no one was game to climb up, so Tulo took careful aim and shot some coconuts down with a couple of his .22 bullets.

As we ate, Roger told a story he had heard from Bob Flinders, who had camped around here as a child with his family from Cape Melville. Old lady Yuuniji^s was trying to cut Bob's hair, but he wouldn't sit still, and he ended up with a cut in his ear. People would camp here in large numbers, drinking water from the lagoon just inland from the beach, and catching freshwater fish and eels.

It was early afternoon when we reached the Saltwater Creek, about two-thirds of the way down the beach. The tide was beginning to come in, so we hurried across the still shallow waters of the mouth. We decided to fish with our Barrow Point bait to catch something for supper. The three of us fanned out along the southern edge of the creek, as the rising waters swirled around our ankles. The sun was hot, and we were all half asleep from the long walk. Only a few fish were biting.

Suddenly I felt something hard hit me on the leg. Looking down, I was astonished to find that it was an ancient wommera, carved from ironbark wood and black with age, floating half submerged in the creek.

I called out to Roger, "Gaw! What's this?" He and Tulo came over to examine it. Unlike the wommeras of the Guugu Yimithirr people around Cooktown, this one was very broad and thin, like a sword, carefully worked smooth on both sides. Tiny holes were still visible where pitch had once secured both hook and shells on the handle.

What could have brought me this wommera? No Aboriginal camps had been here for almost forty years, and the people who had made this

Barrow Point style of wommera were long departed. Perhaps it had been buried in the sand on the banks of the creek for decades and had chosen this propitious moment to stir itself in the currents of the creek.

"*Andula thamu ami,*" said Roger with a grin. "You found a ghost. Or perhaps a ghost found you."

We spent that night—our last before driving back to Hopevale—sleeping on the beach just north of the mouth of the Wakooka Creek. We dug fresh water from an abandoned spring on the beach, and we ate the last of our roasted Barrow Point fish. The next morning we found our old Toyota and set out south again, traveling fast, covering in one long day the same trajectory that Roger had taken weeks to walk sixty years before.

~~~~~ Wurrey's Ghost

After they had blown up Fog, the Magpie brothers and their sisters finished eating the turtle meat. "Finally, that awful old Fog has been killed," they thought. (See Pl. 14.)

A few days later the whole lot of them set out north in their canoe. By chance they arrived at that very same Stanley Island where Fog's genitals had landed. They didn't know that old Fog's spirit had flown all the way to that island, too.

After the Magpies had stayed for a good while on the island, one brother said, "Come, let's go out hunting turtle again. What do you say?"

The two brothers set out once more in their boat. They sailed along for awhile, and then one of them harpooned a big *ngawiya*, a green-backed sea turtle. They waited while the turtle raced around. The harpoon barb, tied to a rope, was stuck into its back.

All of a sudden—I don't know how it happened—old Fog appeared again. It was his ghost. There he sat in the stern of the canoe, on the west side. One of the Magpie brothers turned and saw him.

"What? Our grandfather has come back again!"

Old Fog didn't answer him. He only said, "Hey, what sort of *minha* have you harpooned?"

"It's a big turtle."

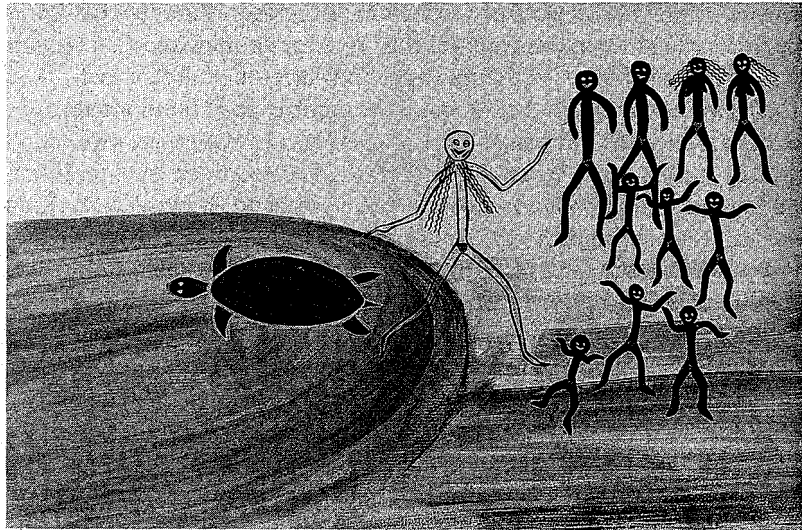


Figure 18. Fog arriving at Mack River

"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, *yii*, 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 *Urrwunhthin*. 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

Barrow Point language. Then he was called Lex. The missionary's wife, Mrs. Schwarz, who doubled as schoolteacher, decided that there were already too many boys named Lex at the mission, so to avoid confusion she gave him the new name Roger.

Most Cape Bedford people got along without any surnames whatsoever until they were evacuated to Woorabinda during World War II. At that point to comply with the new settlement's registration procedures a few community elders handed out surnames to reflect different reckonings of people's origins and antecedents. It was commonly supposed that Roger's biological father was Maurice Hart, leaseholder of the Wakooka property where Roger's mother had worked as a young woman. Roger was thus entered into official Woorabinda records as Roger Hart. Though born long after his mother had left Wakooka, Roger's younger brother Jimmy was also called Hart.¹

Many people were known by multiple names, reflecting at once both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestors, employers or owners of stations on which they spent time, places associated with their fathers or mothers, larger regions of which they were traditional owners or which they had assumed or adopted, and a multitude of other links, including those established by marriage and adoption or, in the case of some nicknames, by simple accident.

Shifting names were an index of shifting identities. The shifts were never more pronounced than in the period of Roger Hart's childhood when Aboriginal life in the hinterlands north and west of Cooktown was under shattering attack from the outside.

By the 1910s even camps remote from centers of European settlement had been profoundly affected by the approach of white society. Fertility was low;² disease was rife; many young men were away from camp working on boats. Violence and abduction were routine. People had fled far from their own countries, taking refuge with relatives in distant areas, or settling near whatever settlements offered employment and food. Whole clan areas were bereft of owners, and whole languages were left with few if any speakers. It appears that people might switch or adopt new territorial or clan allegiances in order to fill such gaps (Sutton 1993). These were the circumstances that shaped Roger's memories of people who were living in the Barrow Point camps where he spent his childhood.

Although the names of people from the past are ephemeral and liable to change, Roger Hart keeps careful track of two parts of their identities: their kinship relation to him, "what I call them," and their links to places, "where they belong to." Even these apparently immutable facts

have undergone reinterpretations over time. Like the fates of many individuals of whom Roger has only early memories, they are matters about which he has actively consulted with his relatives and acquaintances in later life. Like other Aboriginal people of his generation, Roger prefaces almost all discussions of other people with a short genealogical discourse, often mixing Guugu Yimithirr or Barrow Point kinship terms with standard English labels for analogous relationships and always interleaving talk about the places that people "belong to." These are the important facts about other people in Aboriginal social order, for they determine not only how one should act with another person but also how one should feel: what one owes and what one can expect from the other.

"Joe Rootsey and I are like brothers," he says, for example. "Old Barney Warner, *Wulngurrin*, he's really my *mugagay*, like uncle. Barney Warner and Ernie McGreen and them lot, they're my full uncles, all those *Muunhthi-warra* people. Well, this old man is Gambiilmugu-ngu, this old man Barney Warner, that's his tribe, on the west side, like old man Yagay. But King Nicholas and I, our country belongs fully to here, to Iipwulin. And then this country here to the east belongs to the *Wuuri-warra-wi*, straight through from there to the south."³ Such a compact and casual summary represents a dense package of kinship, social history, and geography.

Roger here mentions five people by name. The first is Joe Rootsey, son of another man known as Albert *Wuuriingu*, the second word here being a clan or territory name. Both father and son appear on published genealogies with the surname "Barrow Point." Joe, according to Roger, had a Barrow Point language name, *Alamanhthin*, which was also attributed to his father's father. He was only a little baby when Roger was in the camps.

Second, Roger mentions Barney Warner and Ernie McGreen, both his "uncles." Barney, who also had the name *Wulngurrin*, was one of the oldest of the full grown younger men in the Barrow Point camps during Roger's childhood. An experienced boatman, he ultimately came to Cape Bedford to work after Roger Hart had left school. He was responsible for the contact many young mission men had with the Barrow Point language and traditions, as he used to teach bits of his language to the boat crews. Roger considered him a close kinsman, a senior male of Roger's Aboriginal father's line, though he was from the "younger brother" half of the Barrow Point people. So, too, was old Yagay, another man who survived the demise of the Barrow Point camps and who reconnected with Roger later in his life.

Roger can reckon his kinship with these people in more than one way: he remembers he was taught to call Barney Warner *urrbi-thu*, 'my uncle'—i.e., father's brother⁴—and that old Barney called him *thurrbiyi*, 'nephew' in return. But Roger was also told to regard them as 'older brothers,' perhaps recalculating his relation on the basis of the relationship his childhood friend Toby Gordon had with them. This latter relation in some ways contradicted the pseudo-kin relation that obtained between the two halves of the Gambiilmugu-warra, the "Barrow Point people," as a tribe. The kin labels reflect the direct link between these men and Roger's father's lineage.

Ernie McGreen, on the other hand, was only an infant when Roger was at Barrow Point. He was the son of a native trooper known as Charlie or Chookie McGreen, who was associated with the same clan territory as Roger's mother. Roger calculated his kinship with the "uncles" from this lineage through his mother.

Finally, Nicholas, "king" of Barrow Point, was one of the people who, like Roger's Aboriginal father, laid direct claim to the territory at Ninian Bay, the "older brother" half of the Barrow Point people. He was thus also effectively in Roger Hart's own patriline.

Roger refers to three "clans," using Guugu Yimithirr expressions⁵ that denote groups of people associated with a named place, showing the close link between person and place in his understanding of social identity. He gives the names of the two main groups of people associated with the area known in English under the label of Barrow Point, namely, (1) his own Gambiilmugu group, divided into "older brother" and "younger brother" tribes, to the west of Barrow Point itself, and (2) the coastal area to the south of Barrow Point associated with the Wuuri-ngu group whose name is preserved in the "surname" of Joe Rootsey's father. Finally, he names the clan area associated with old man Chookie and his own mother, Muunhthi-warra from around the Jack River. Roger's quick characterization of people and their genealogies also includes the Barrow Point language name for the area lipwulin, where we actually found ourselves as he spoke, relating it in space to other unnamed areas associated with particular people.

Roger did not carry the social map of the Barrow Point universe with him when he was taken from the camps as a child. He has constructed it with great care throughout his life, placing new people he has met into an elaborate and shifting network of kinsmen and acquaintances. Born into the disintegrating world of Barrow Point, and removed abruptly from it, Roger's fate was to reconstruct a new social world for himself.

Thunder and Fog

After camping at the head of the Mack River for a long time, old Fog began to miss his family. (See Pl. 15.)

"I wonder how my children are, there in the south."

He decided he would go right down to Muunhthi. That's where old Thunderstorm was staying, you see, near the Jack River. He was Wurrey's son-in-law. He was married to the old man's two daughters.

Fog stayed at the Mack River for a little while longer, and then he decided to set out. He headed south, *di di dii*, camping all along the way.

When he had come a long way south, he passed through the area they call Tanglefoot. There old Fog came across Thunderstorm's farm. It was Thunder's private property.¹ No one else was allowed in that area, because Thunder had lots of yams growing there. That area belongs to us Barrow Point tribes. Those yams were ones Thunder had planted.

Well, old Fog didn't take all that food. He only dug up a couple of yams. But he said to himself, "When I come back, I'll dig the lot."

Then he set out southwards again.

When he finally appeared in the south, one of his daughters sang out, "Oh, our father has arrived. Our father has come."

"Yes."

"Come, then," Thunderstorm ordered, "come and build him a house, separate from our camp. Put it there to the east."

"No, don't put my camp there," said Fog. "Put it to the north."

You see, he didn't want to be upwind. He was a bit of a rogue, old Fog. He was afraid Thunderstorm would smell the yams, you see.

"Don't put my camp there to the east."

He was really thinking about the yams that he planned to cook later that night. He wasn't going to cook them openly, you see, since he had pinched them from his son-in-law.

So they put his house to the north, a bit apart from their own camp. It was out of the easterly wind.

Fog went to his camp, and he sat there on the north, wide awake. He was listening for old Thunderstorm to start to snore up.

"Oh, he's snoring now."

He took out one yam and buried it deep down in the fire, so that no smell would escape.

That food cooked and cooked until it was ready. Fog dug it up and set it aside for a while, to let it cool down. Then he got up and started to

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 Bathurst 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. "*liwadhu*," 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."

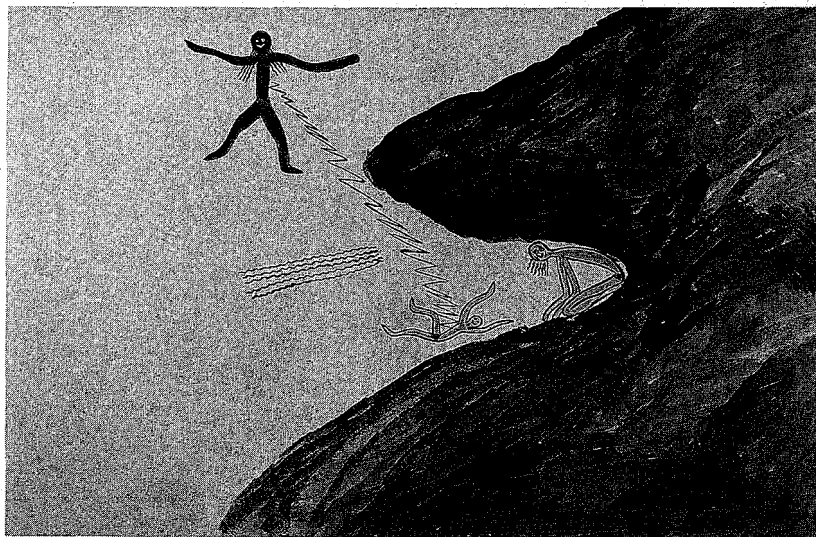


Figure 20. Thunder kills the lizard boy

"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

Station, which looked as if it might reach Roger's homeland by a route more direct than our previous trek up the beach.

Finding no one who wanted to accompany us on another expedition, Roger and I once again set out on our own, on 15 October 1984. Driving another borrowed Landcruiser, we again headed **guwa**, '(north)west' from Hopevale, camping along the road as we made for Wakooka. Early bush fires had begun, and we crossed smoldering landscape and lines of fire, watching through clouds of smoke as wild horses and terrified emus fled the flames.

On the third day, we rediscovered the traces of the old road we had noticed a month before. Carefully wiping away our tire tracks with branches, to discourage from following any Cairns fishermen who might also have braved the bushfires, we set off to the northeast into uncharted territory. From the top of the ridge we could make out in the distance the familiar contour of Barrow Point, some 10 to 15 kilometers away. The intervening terrain was thick bush, forest, and sandhill, traversed by a few rocky ridges.

We forded a couple of creeks, but in a few hours we were exhausted by hauling rocks and filling washouts. We found ourselves above a creek which we decided the Landcruiser could not cross. From here we would have to proceed on foot. To one side of our road we found a large patch of bush where the bushfires had already passed, a zone of charred grass and small trees still smoldering, where we thought it safe to leave the vehicle.

Anticipating a rough walk, we packed the lightest of swags, no rifle or spear, only fishing gear and makings for tea and damper. Without the benefit of Tulo's directional acuity, I also stuck a compass into my pocket. If we walked always northeast, we reasoned, sooner or later we would have to come out to the coast to one side or another of Barrow Point. We intended to follow the creeks we encountered down once again to Roger's birthplace at Ninian Bay.

The walk took us two days. Roger was suspicious of my compass, preferring whenever the surrounding bush was dense to trust his own sense of direction. He would send me scuttling up trees to try to catch a glimpse of the horizon. As darkness fell in the bush late on our first day of walking, we simply dropped our swags where we stood, built a fire, and stretched out to talk as we waited for the billy to boil.

LIGHT SKIN

There was a big sandhill south of the Barrow Point camp where people used to go to hunt echidna. The method was simple and dramatic: set

fire to the bush and then explore the burned out ground, peering and poking into "porcupine" holes that were exposed to view.

There were what Roger remembers as "cork trees" growing on the sandhill. Children used to play with the burned bark from these trees, using it to decorate their bodies. Once Roger painted himself from head to toe with charcoal. Toby Gordon, his playmate, went running to the adults shouting, "Look, look, his skin's turned all black!"

The color of Roger's skin figures in many of his childhood memories. There were few children around, and women seemed to have great difficulties in caring for those they had. Settlers and native troopers alike were "chasing bama women," and the children of mixed descent put heavy strains on the social fabric of Barrow Point life.

Roger remembers meeting the native tracker, old Harry Moll, when he went with his mother on a trip to Laura.

"He told her to throw me into the creek. '**Wangaarbi ganggal, thulawi thambarra**. It's a white man's child. Throw it into the flood!' he said."

One of Roger Hart's siblings suffered just such a fate.

"It was at Eumangin Creek. We had all gone out hunting, and they had left that little boy for someone to look after in the camp. I don't know who was supposed to be taking caring of him.

"The little fellow was crawling around. He crawled off to the north and fell into the water. They didn't run and pick him up. They just let him drown there. 'Leave him. He's a white man's child.'

"That was long before my brother Jimmy was born.

"When we came home that evening, we found out he was dead. He drowned.

"They didn't care. I think we put the body into a bark container and carried him with us for a couple of months. Then we buried him somewhere—I don't remember exactly, probably to the south around Jones's Gap.

"I didn't know how he died until after we came back from Woorabinda, after the war, when Toby Flinders told me the story.

"I was called **Urrwunhthin**, and my little brother's name was **Ugurung-gun**. He was called Nicholas in English. My mother might have gotten him when she went up to Laura for tobacco—like that."

Roger and Toby Gordon often talked about what happened to light-skinned children who were removed by police, occasionally hearing of someone at Palm Island or Cherbourg who remembered his or her parents as coming **guwaalmun**, 'from the west,' around Barrow Point and Cape Melville.

"But the police didn't pick up **bama buthun.gu**, 'real Aborigines.' They wouldn't bother. They would just shoot them outright with rifles. It was a cruel time, **thawuunh**. It was very bad to take those children from their parents. Kids who were taken away just ended up lost. They learned a strange language, and they forgot their own. They didn't know where they came from."

Because of his Aboriginal father's "touchiness," Roger remembers a childhood of constant movement. The old man was reluctant to mix up with other families and was always on the lookout for police. Sometimes Roger and his parents would leave the main camp and hide out with just his family.

Once his parents and a couple of other women took the little boy to stay in a cave in the mountains above Cape Bowen, where they camped for several weeks alone. They were worried by a report that the policeman from Laura would be coming to the Barrow Point camps. (See Pl. 16.)

"We went south toward Cape Bowen, and we crossed a large salt pan there. I still remember. When we came to the end of the salt pan, old lady **Arniirnil** was bitten by a red-bellied black snake. The sun was already low in the afternoon sky. We had left the camp in the west early that morning.

"They cut the wound.

"How are you?"

"I'm all right," she said.

"**Ma**, come on!"

"We kept going south, and we started to climb. As we went up the mountain it started to rain. We went through the scrub and camped half way somewhere. It was still raining, but the rain stopped before morning. The next morning we continued the climb.

"When we got to the top, my old man said to me, 'We'll stop here. There's a good cave to camp in.'

"He went down and told the others. 'Come on up here, this is a good dry place.'

"Then we went inside.

"'You sleep over here to the east,' he told the women. 'We'll sleep here on the west.' My father slept to the north, I was in the middle, and my mother to the south.

"But I couldn't sleep. I had a bad spot. There was a rock sticking right in my ribs. The others had just managed to dodge it, where they were lying down. It rained all that night.

"The next day I went to get some coals from the fire. I wanted to see how they painted boats and other designs. I asked my mother to paint

on the walls of the cave. She was starting to paint a ship, but I made her paint my hand, too.

"Put your hand up here,' she told me, and I did.

"Then she painted her own hand.

"What about the ship?' I said. So she drew a ship.

"When it wasn't raining, I used to climb around outside, playing on the rocks. The clouds would come over. The rocks had a strong smell, where the hot sun had burned off the rain.

"The women had a little bit of flour. They used to get paid with flour, when they did any work for Mr. Hart or the others. Then they would share it. When the food ran out they began to say, 'Let's go back now. Might be that policeman has gone back to Laura.' But they were really thinking about the flour, see? So we all packed up and walked down the mountain, back to the main camp."

On the second day of our trek Roger and I made our way onto a high ridge that sloped gently down toward the north. We began to follow a dry creek bed that promised to take us toward Ninian Bay. The country thinned out, and though we never had an unobstructed view of the sky, Roger began to sense the approaching coast. We came across the unmistakable remnants of an old water tank, its fragments rusted to the color of the dark red soil on which we walked. Although Roger couldn't identify the spot, it proved that we were near the former settlement. Perhaps this tank had been left by stockmen working the Starcke Station decades before.

Rock gave way to sand, and then to tea-tree scrub. Late on the second day, we finally emerged onto the beach just east of Uwuru. Ninian Bay was before us, the site of Instone's settlement and beyond it **Ipwulin** still farther east, to our right.

Clouds were gathering, and we needed fresh water and a feed of fish. We decided to camp nearby, in the sandhill by the creek, just upstream from its mouth. As we made our way to a sheltered spot, we found recent tracks of what must have been the same gigantic crocodile we had glimpsed here two years before: footprints a meter and a half apart, with a furrow down the middle where the animal had dragged its tail across the sand as it headed out to sea to hunt.

We built a large fire and stretched out our swags, well back from the edge of the water. Roger rose to face the creek. We knew that sooner or later the big **anhiir** 'salt-water crocodile' must return.

Back at Hopevale Barrow Point language did not always come easily to Roger's memory. He often had to think hard to dredge up a word, and

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 *arriil-malin*; *arriila* 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

Cape Melville. Near here Roger had camped when he saw an initiation dance. Near here, too, he had played with his childhood mates, Toby and Banjo Gordon. He also remembered little Billy McGreen, Jr., son of the tracker Long Billy McGreen who would come up from the Laura Police Station occasionally to stay with his relatives in the Barrow Point camps.¹

A CHILD'S SPEAR FIGHT

We used to have spear fights. It was something like the young men during their initiation dance. They would have mock wars, pretending to spear one another. We used to do that, too.²

We would collect weeds—**muunun** in Guugu Yimithirr. We would make spears out of that, with little blobs of beeswax on the end of them. That's what we played with. Because of the wax tip, instead of penetrating the flesh the spear would just hit you and fall off. It wouldn't stick, and it didn't hurt much.

We only used to spear each other for fun, for play. That's how **bama** would learn how to throw spears and how to dodge them. We used to make a big heap of spears like that; but we wouldn't use wommeras.

Billy McGreen was a little bit bigger than we were. He used to come around with his mother, old lady Yuuniji. One time Toby and I were playing on the sandhill, just south of Eumangin Creek. We were practicing spearing bark on a tree.

Billy McGreen came along. He said, "Hooo, give me that spear." He took our spears and started to break them.

Toby said to me, "Go on, hit him."

"No, no. He's too big for us. Leave him. Next time we'll take care of him."

A few days later we were playing again. Billy McGreen came along. He did the same thing. He took our spears and broke them all. They were grass spears, **abulthabul**, made from the long stalks of the **bungga** palm.

But we were ready for him. I had another spear hidden in the grass. When he turned to go, I grabbed the other spear and speared him right in the back. That made old Billy cry. He started to howl and ran off to find his mother.

She came back and said, "Who speared my son?"

Then I ran away into the bush.

Roger wanted another look around Instone's place. Although we now knew the way, it was a long walk. Planning to camp again at Roger's

birthplace at Iipwulin, we hauled our swags and fresh water through the overgrown scrub. The afternoon sun was hot, the clouds of the previous evening having blown away.

This time when we reached the place where Instone's compound had once stood, Roger did not hesitate. Rolling and lighting a cigarette, he set fire to the grass. The winds quickly set the blaze running up the gentle slope where the settler once had house and yards. We retreated to the safety of the water's edge to collect bait and let Roger, somewhat redundantly, finish his cigarette. The flames crackled in the distance as the bushfire spread rapidly, sending billowing clouds of smoke into what had been the blue afternoon sky.

TOBACCO AND TEETH

Some of the provisions of Aboriginal life during Roger's childhood had come directly from Europeans. Blankets, for example, were an annual government gift to each Aboriginal soul. Flour, tea, fishhooks, iron axe heads, and a variety of food rations were obtained from boat or stock work.

Then there was tobacco, which everyone smoked.

"We used to get a bit of smoke from Sam Malaya. I was already smoking as a little kid—I remember that even Mr. Bleakley gave me a stick when he came to Barrow Point. It was this long tobacco, they called it 'Rooster tobacco.' In the camps they would to smoke it in clay pipes.

"When the clay pipes broke, they used to make their own pipes out of wood—ironbark or some hard wood like that—so they could keep on smoking.

"When people ran out of tobacco, they might beg some off the people who were working for Instone. Those working men always had smokes, and sometimes the women would have tobacco, too.

"But if all our own tobacco ran out, well, that was it. We just had to carry on until we could get some more. Some people used to smoke bush plants: I forget the name, it had little leaves, all in a bunch, with yellow and pink flowers on it. The plant is like a hedge; it grows anywhere, even on the sandhill. They would gather those leaves and dry them. Then they would smoke it, but it tasted terrible.

"I didn't smoke all the time. One morning I got very sick. It made me almost drunk. I spewed up everything I had eaten. My mother threw water over me, and then I got better.

"Well, I kept smoking until they took me to Cape Bedford. I had to stop then. School children weren't to smoke at the mission. When I left

school I didn't start smoking again until I went out on the boats. They used to say to me: 'Light my cigarette for me.' So I got stuck into the smokes again, since I had to keep on making cigarettes for the rest of them."

Memory of the poor tobacco substitute reminded Roger of another bush plant.

"I used to see those old people burning this other kind of wood and putting the gum from it on their teeth. Old Yagay was telling me that it was the blue gum tree. They call it **binyjin—ardamarda** in my language. I think the gum from that tree might be all right for toothache. If you get a bad toothache, thawuunh, you can't sleep, you know. It makes your head hurt.

"Of course, the old people had pretty good teeth. They were only drinking pure water and a little bit of honey. I don't think honey will give you toothache, eh? But they never brushed their teeth."

After setting fire to the undergrowth at Instone's station, we continued east over the rocky outcropping, coming again to the beach at lipwulin. We set up our camp and prepared to fish for supper, after baking a bit of Johnny-cake in the fire. Hunger and place combined to produce another story.

CYCLONE TIME

We used to sleep in little humpies. But during cyclone season they wouldn't make round humpies like the ones bama make these days. Instead they would dig a hole: dig and dig until the hole was very deep. Then they would put their humpy down in that hole and cover the whole thing over, first with bark and then with sand.

One night we hadn't got anything to eat. It was cyclone time. We were all very hungry.

That night a big cyclone blew up from the north. There was rain! There was wind! Well, we were all inside our humpies, underground.

The next day I was the first one to wake up. I went outside the humpy.

This beach was just covered with crayfish and octopus. **Gurriitha**. Fish, too. They were everywhere. The beach was piled high.

I went back to the camp. "Hey, you people are all hungry. Over there to the north there is a heap of dead octopus. The cyclone killed them." Maybe the lightning and thunder had thrown them all up on the beach.

The people went out then and started collecting all that minha. They cooked it up and had a good feed.

There was more, too, because the winds had also driven some big trunks of **munnguul** up onto the beach, whole trees. It's like sago palm. Who knows where it came from? Maybe from New Guinea. The people chopped up the trunks, cooked it, and ate it. We had to eat that food because we were hungry; it was soft, a bit like damper without any soda in it.

The next days were spent walking over the freshly burned ground at Instone's old settlement, looking again for signs of the old well, the tank stand, the nanny goat yard, the buggy tracks, and the house posts that Roger thought he remembered. We combed the ground for bits of metal, old bottles, any sign of the early settlement.

Roger Hart's mind was drawn to details of camp life at lipwulin. We fished and bathed in the freshwater swamp inland to the south of our camping place. We walked back east in the direction of Barrow Point to a narrow creek where Roger felt sure we could catch barramundi.

A SAND GOANNA

Once we were staying here at lipwulin, in the main camp. But we boys used to come east from there to this little river. Upstream it was deep, but near the beach it was shallow, and we used to play around here. They wouldn't let us go any farther from camp. "Don't go to the mangroves," they would say, "**yigiingu**, because of ghosts, **ama gunyjiingu**, because of witches." They wanted us to play where they could see us.

Well, we were playing around here, and suddenly we flushed out a great big **manuya**, a sand goanna. I jumped up quickly and went chasing after him. All us boys followed his tracks, which went along and along. Then we saw him, lying down in the short grass.

He got frightened, and ran off that way, to the south. He was following this little creek upstream. We went after him until finally he jumped in the water.

We couldn't get him then. The creek was too deep. I think a crocodile used to be up there before.

So we never caught that **manuya**. It was too dangerous to go any farther, so we went back to camp. Soon after that we shifted away from there.

A tree, the contours of the land, or the call of a bird would bring an image to Roger's mind. Surrounding us as we explored were the spirits of the people who lived now only in Roger's thoughts.



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

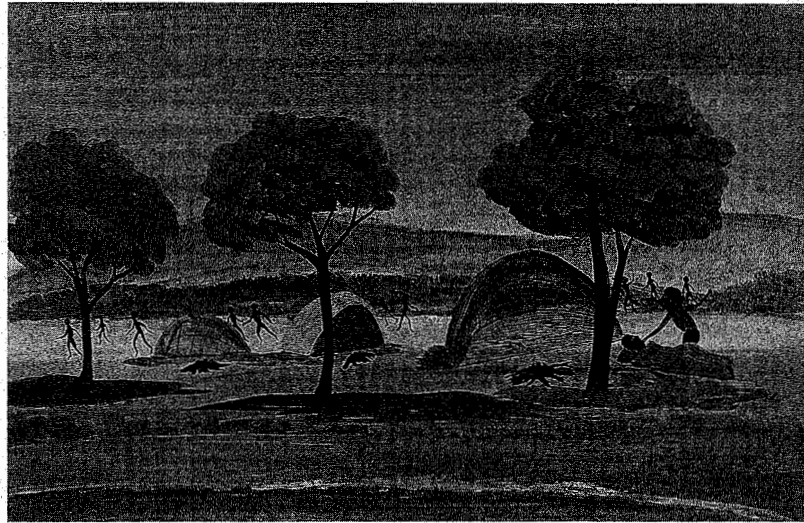


Figure 24. A bitten finger

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 Iipwulin, 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 Iipwulin 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**.³ 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 Iipwulin and our vehicle, aban-

doned somewhere along the overgrown track, so we took care not to get lost or to walk too slowly.

Late in the afternoon we stumbled out onto what Roger recognized as the same old track we had been trying to follow from the Wakooka turnoff. Sure enough, half a kilometer farther west we found the Toyota. We drank the last of the Barrow Point water and photographed ourselves, setting the camera in the crook of a tree. With my grimy hair standing on end I towered over Roger in his baseball cap. Covered with soot from the bush fires, our different skin colors had merged to a single, shared hue.

Fog's Revenge

Fog waited for a few weeks after burying his little lizard-son, and then he got ready to set out again. He wanted his revenge.

"I'll just go and spear that son-in-law of mine, there in the south."

But first he needed a good spear. He decided to try the wood from several trees to make himself a **murranggal**, a bullet spear.

He chopped down the first tree and made a spear of it, but it was no good. Then he chopped down an ironwood tree and made a spear out of it. No good. He tried another spear which he made from black palm. But it, too, was no good.

Finally he made up his mind to go down to the sandhill. There he started searching in the scrub. He found the tree he was looking for: **yigu ithin.gal**. Cooktown people call it **mirrbi**. He made a spear from that wood. When it was ready, he threw it at another tree nearby. The spear went right through the first tree and lodged itself in another tree on the far side.

"Oh, well, this is the good one," he thought.

He made a stack of spears from **ithin.gal** wood.

Early the next day he got up and set out. "I really mean to spear that fellow there in the south."

He went south **yii**, and he camped half way. Then he set out again. He walked and walked. Finally, about three o'clock in the afternoon, he came to the place where Thunder lived.

He approached quietly, sneaking up on Thunder's camp. He looked cautiously over toward the south.

"Ah, they are killing his lice, then."

The two wives were delousing Thunderstorm, who was sitting between two trees. He had one leg leaning up against a tree on this side. The other leg was propped up against a tree on the other side. The younger sister was killing the lice on Thunderstorm's beard, and the older sister was delousing his head.

As Fog was spying on them, the birds came up. They started laughing at him, as he sat crouched down out of sight. They laughed and laughed and laughed. Fog just crouched down even further.

Thunderstorm sent the older sister to have a look. "Go," he said, "and see what sort of animal is over there. The birds might be laughing at a big python or something. Find out what the birds have seen."

She came up from the south. She looked all around under the tree where the birds had been making noise. A huge mob of birds had gathered in that tree, laughing at old man Fog.

The elder wife couldn't see anything. Fog burrowed down even deeper in the grass. He hid himself from his elder daughter, because he was afraid she might tell on him.

He waited and waited, hiding, and finally his daughter went back south. She sat down in the shade.

"There's nothing," she said. "Who knows what those birds are laughing at there in the north."

Still more birds came up, and they made even more racket laughing at old Fog. They were 'tit-tit' birds. This time Thunderstorm sent the younger sister to have a look. "You go, this time. Perhaps you have better eyes."

She walked northward, and she found her father there. Old Fog raised himself out of the grass and called to her. "Come here, my child, come here."

He told her about the lizard-boy Thunder had speared.

"Your younger brother is dead there in the north. Your husband is the one who killed him. That is why I have come. I want to spear him. So don't tell him about me, see?"

"Now, don't you get too close to him. I'm going to spear him. You just go on killing the lice from his head."

Obediently, she went back to the south.

"Well, it's nothing. Who knows what in the world those birds are laughing at."

Old Fog began to sneak up from the north. He moved up as close as he could.

Thunderstorm was starting to snore loudly, as they searched for lice

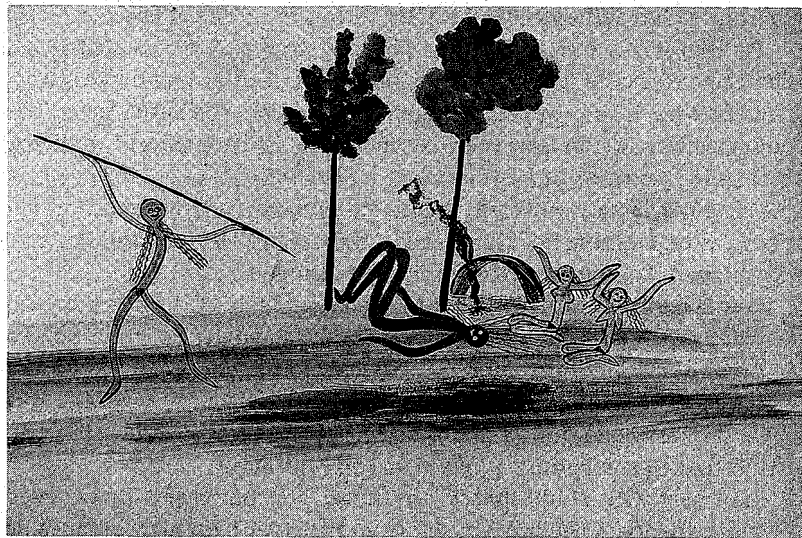


Figure 25. Fog spears Thunder

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 Bathurst 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.