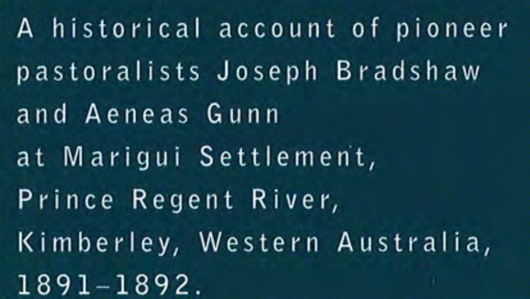
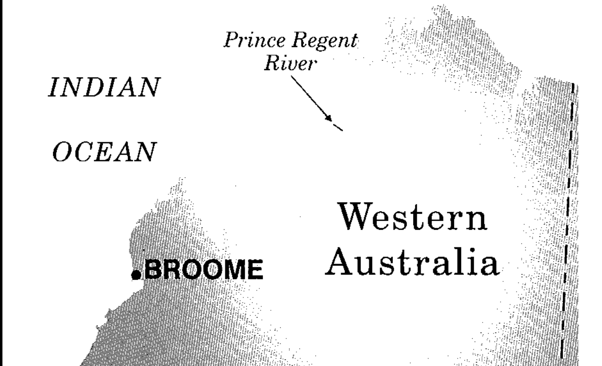
UNDER A REGENT MOON



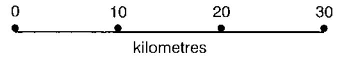
A historical account of pioneer pastoralists Joseph Bradshaw and Aeneas Gunn at Marigui Settlement, Prince Regent River, Kimberley, Western Australia, 1891–1892.

By Tim Willing and Kevin Kenneally

YORK SOUND
Coronation Islands
INDIAN OCEAN
Cape Torrens
MOUNT ANDERDON
Port Nelson
Boongaree Island
PRINCE FREDERICK HARBOUR
Ivy Cove
Careening Bay
Mitchell River
Cape Brewster
Cape Wellington
Hanover Bay
MOUNT TRAFALGAR
Marigui
Moran River
Roe River
St Andrew Island
Port George IV
ST GEORGE BASIN
KUNMUNYA MISSION (est. 1916)
Prince Regent Nature Reserve
PRINCESS MAY RANGES
Youwanjela Creek
Camp Creek
King Cascade
Glenelg River
Cascade Creek
Prince Regent River
Quail Creek
Blyxa Creek
Womarara Creek
Calder River
Bachsten Creek



PRINCE REGENT RIVER



UNDER A REGENT MOON

A historical account of pioneer pastoralists
Joseph Bradshaw and Aeneas Gunn
at Marigui Settlement,
Prince Regent River,
Kimberley, Western Australia,
1891–1892.

Incorporating Aeneas Gunn's memoir
published as 24 articles in the
Prahran Telegraph, the St Kilda Advertiser
and the Malvern Argus, May–November 1899

Edited with an introduction
and explanatory notes

by

Tim Willing and Kevin Kenneally

Tim Willing is currently the Conservation Officer (West Kimberley) with the Department of Conservation and Land Management. He was born in East Africa (Kenya) and graduated from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He has lived in Broome since 1980 and until 1996, was a horticulturist with the Shire of Broome. In 1985 he was awarded a Churchill Fellowship and undertook tropical horticulture studies in Africa and Madagascar. He is a co-author (with Kevin Kenneally and Daphne Edinger) of the award-winning book *Broome and Beyond: Plants and People of the Dampier Peninsula, Kimberley, Western Australia.* Tim's first visit to the Prince Regent River was in 1990, as a contract botanist with Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy. He has since made many journeys along the Kimberley coast, for both research and as an environmental guide aboard charter vessels and the Sail Training Ship (STS) *Leeuwin II.*

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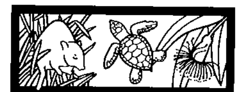
Front cover–Top: Handwriting of botanist Ferdinand Mueller.
Centre: View of Mount Trafalgar.
Below: Corrugated iron from Marigui site.

Back cover–Top: Flowers of *Lindernia macrosiphonia*, a plant restricted to the Kimberley and first collected by Joseph Bradshaw.
Below: View of Mount Waterloo from Mount Trafalgar.

For permission to reproduce photographs, sketches, letters etc. we are indebted to: Angela Berry; John Bradshaw; Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales; Colin Taylor; Port Albert Maritime Museum; Devonport Maritime Museum; State Archives of Western Australia and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

Access to the Prince Regent Nature Reserve is restricted under the Wildlife Conservation Act and permission is required from the Department of Conservation and Land Management to enter this area.

Department of Conservation
and Land Management, Western Australia.


LANDSCOPE EXPEDITIONS
Working at the Frontier of Discovery

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS v

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT 1

PART ONE: *Bradshaw* 1

- *Joseph Bradshaw's 1890 Leases* 1
- *Bradshaw's 1891 Overland Expedition* 1
- *Botanical Discoveries* 4
- *An Error of Navigation* 4
- *A Serendipitous Discovery* 4
- *The Bradshaw-Guy Wedding* 4

PART TWO: *Marigui* 5

- *The Voyage to the Kimberley* 5
- *The Name "Marigui": Origin Disputed* 5
- *Bradshaw's Correspondence* 5
- *Marigui Abandoned* 7
- *The Marigui Country and Its People – A Century On* 7
- *Prince Regent Nature Reserve* 8
- *Marigui: Site Rediscovered* 8

PART THREE: *Gunn* 9

- *Emigrant Scots* 9
- *Aeneas Gunn: Prahran Librarian & F.R.G.S.* 9
- *Gunn's Newspaper Articles* 9
- *The Gunn-Taylor Wedding* 10
- *Return to the Northern Territory* 10
- *Gunn's Demise* 10
- *Mrs Aeneas Gunn: Immortality in Print* 10

THE LITERARY LEGACY 12

- "Pioneering in Northern Australia" 12
- *Aeneas Gunn: A Writer Eclipsed* 12
- *The Text* 12
- *Aeneas Gunn's Sketches* 12
- *Gunn's Place-names* 13
- *The First Consolidated Edition* 13

BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES 14

BRADSHAW'S VESSELS 15

REFERENCES 16

GUNN'S NEWSPAPER ARTICLES 19

"Pioneering in Northern Australia" (PINA) Summary 19

No.	Date	Page
No. I.	May 20, 1899	21
No. II.	May 27, 1899	24
No. III.	June 3, 1899	26
No. IV.	June 10, 1899	27
No. V.	June 17, 1899	29
No. VI.	June 24, 1899	31
No. VII.	July 1, 1899	33
No. VIII.	July 8, 1899	34
No. IX.	July 15, 1899	36
No. X.	July 22, 1899	38
No. XI.	July 29, 1899	40
No. XII.	August 5, 1899	41
No. XIII.	August 12, 1899	43
No. XIV.	August 19, 1899	45
No. XV.	August 26, 1899	46
No. XVI.	September 9, 1899	48
No. XVII.	September 16, 1899	50
No. XVIII.	September 23, 1899	51
No. XIX.	September 30, 1899	53
No. XX.	October 7, 1899	55
No. XXI.	October 14, 1899	56
No. XXII.	October 21, 1899	58
No. XXIII.	October 28, 1899	60
No. XXIV.	November 11, 1899	62

APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 65
- Appendix 2 66

MAPS

- Prince Regent River *inside front cover*
- Kimberley Coast 2
- Kimberley Coast 3
- St. George Basin 18
- Australia *inside back cover*

For Alison Spencer and Irene Ioannakis

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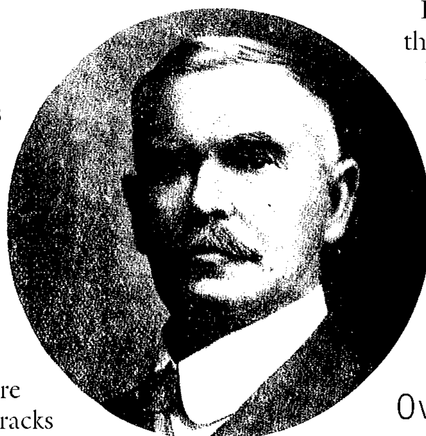
We are grateful to the Kimberley Society and the Kimberley Region of the Department of Conservation and Land Management for their financial support of this publication.

The *Historical Context*

This account begins in 1890, when Joseph Bradshaw of Melbourne was drawn into the exploration and pastoral development of the remote north-west Kimberley region of Western Australia. With the purchase of a schooner, Bradshaw and an assorted crew were able to sail to the Prince Regent River and establish Marigui Homestead. In this endeavour he was assisted by his bride, Mary Jane, and cousin, Aeneas Gunn. After the Marigui venture failed, both Joseph Bradshaw and Aeneas Gunn established another pastoral empire on the Victoria River in the Northern Territory. However, in 1895, Gunn returned to Melbourne, where he soon assumed a new career as librarian and journalist. In 1899, some seven years after the Marigui adventure, Gunn wrote his remarkable memoir *Pioneering in Northern Australia* in two dozen articles of graphic prose. It is these long-forgotten items which comprise the bulk of the present book. At the close of 1901, Gunn married and returned with his wife to manage Elsey Station in the Northern Territory. Gunn was to die tragically soon in 1903. However, by a quirk of fate, he became immortalised as "The Maluka" in his wife's classic memoir, *We of the Never-Never*, published in 1908.

PART ONE: *Bradshaw*

Joseph Bradshaw's 1890 Leases



Following Alexander Forrest's expedition of 1879 across the Kimberley, millions of hectares were allocated as pastoral leases and townships established. Much of the land acquisition was of a speculative nature, and focused on the fertile floodplains of the Fitzroy and Ord Rivers.

Epic feats of cattle-droving were achieved by families such as the Duracks from Queensland and the MacDonalds from New South Wales. However, there was little interest in settling the remote coast of the north-west Kimberley.

Painful memories still lingered of the Camden Harbour fiasco of 1864–65, when Victorian families had attempted settlement and sheep-farming in the remote Kimberley with tragic consequences (Figures 9 and 11). Beckoning "pastures" of green, observed from seaward, proved an illusion. Closer inspection revealed prickly spinifex and cane grass, masking a harsh landscape of outcropping rock and stones, defended by hostile Aborigines (Richards 1990).

Against such a background, any pastoralist leasing a million acres (404 858 hectares), sight unseen, in the vicinity of Camden Harbour showed courageous commitment – or absurd optimism! Yet this was precisely what Joseph Bradshaw did in October 1890, when he leased from the Western Australian Government twenty blocks of 50 000 acres (20 242 ha) each, straddling the Prince Regent River, upstream from St Georges Basin. Describing himself as an "Investment Agent" of 584 Little Collins St, Melbourne, Bradshaw's initial lease fee was 500 pounds, for the leases 71/183 to 71/202 inclusive.

Leases 71/183 to 71/193 occupied the north side of the Prince Regent River, from west to east, with lease 71/202 immediately east of 71/193, at the headwaters.

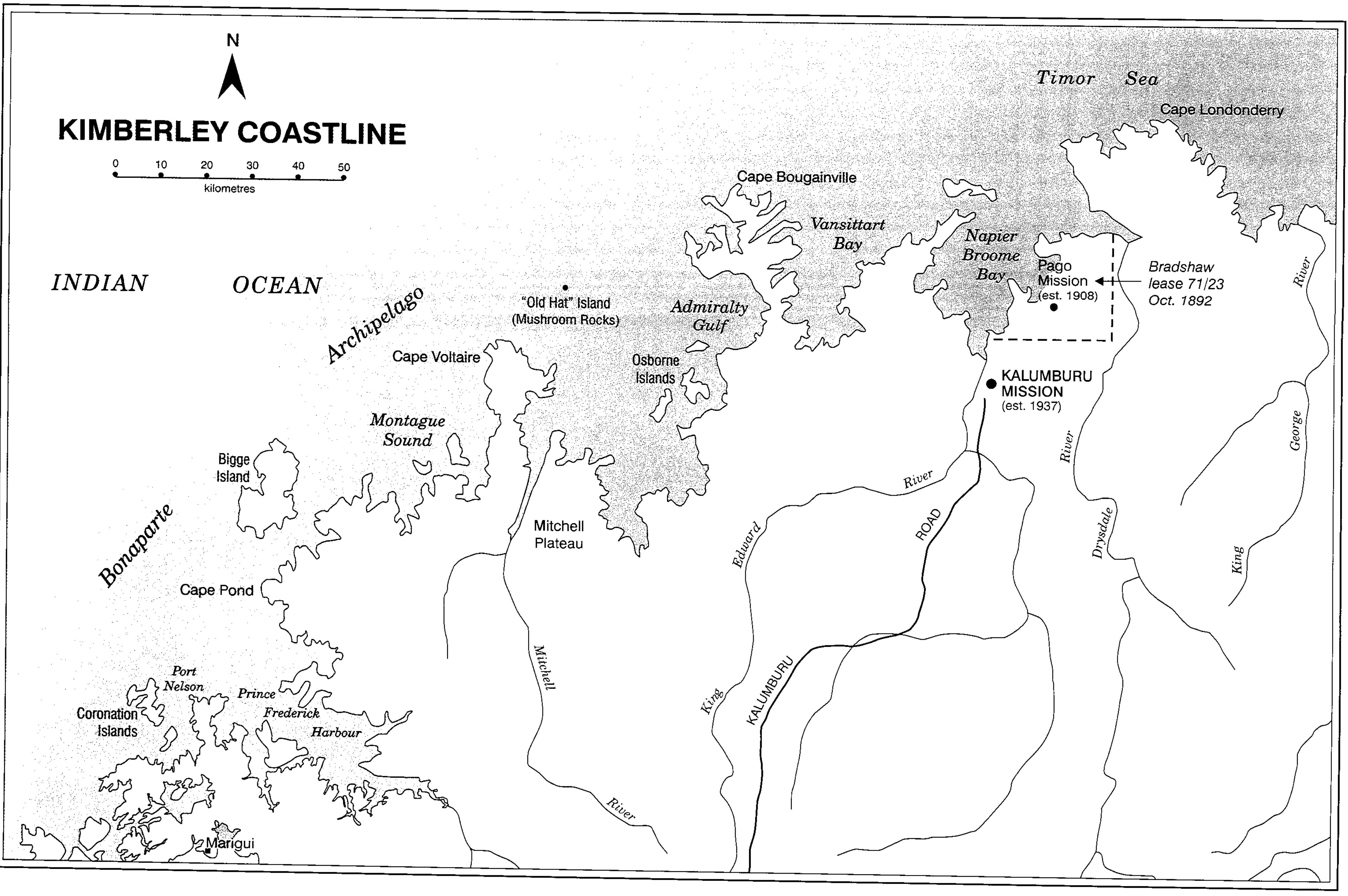
On the south side of the River were leases 71/194 to 71/201, from west to east, with lease 71/201 at the headwaters (Clement 1993).

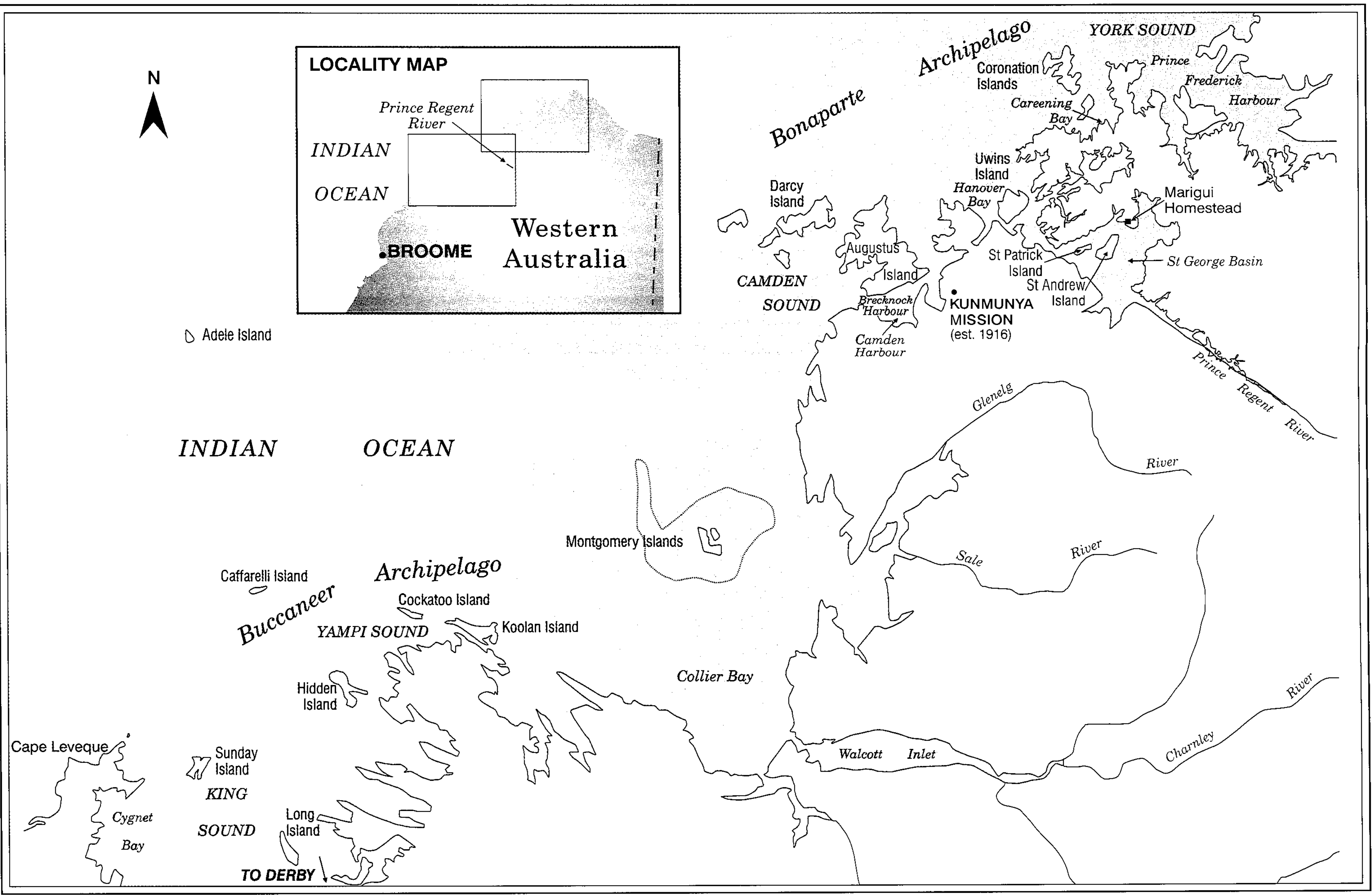
Bradshaw's 1891 Overland Expedition

On 31 January 1891, Joseph and his brother Frederick, together with another Victorian, William Tucker Allen, left Port Melbourne aboard the *Aramac*. After arriving at Port Darwin, in the Northern Territory, Bradshaw secured, on 7 March, the services of Harry Pinadhy and Slocum, both Larrakia Aborigines. The party sailed the following day by the *South Australian* for the port of Wyndham in the east Kimberley, arriving amid devastation wrought by a passing cyclone. After purchasing eleven pack-horses and being joined by another Victorian, Hugh Young, the expedition left Wyndham on 14 March. Passing Mount Cockburn, the party crossed the Pentecost River, living on rations of corned beef and cabin biscuits with ample wet season grass for their horses. The Durack River was crossed on 19 March. Eventually, the party reached the mangroves at what was perceived to be the mouth of the Prince Regent River on 12 April.

In the nearby river-gorge, Bradshaw (1892, p. 97) observed:

> The natives appeared to carry on extensive fishing operations at each rapid, where the shallowness of the water enabled them to spear the passing fish. From the


KIMBERLEY COASTLINE
N
0
10
20
30
40
50
kilometres
INDIAN
OCEAN
Timor Sea
Cape Londonderry
Cape Bougainville
Vansittart
Bay
Napier
Broome
Bay
Pago
Mission
(est. 1908)
Bradshaw
lease 71/23
Oct. 1892
River
KALUMBURU
MISSION
(est. 1937)
"Old Hat" Island
(Mushroom Rocks)
Admiralty
Gulf
Osborne
Islands
Archipelago
Cape Voltaire
Montague
Sound
Bigge
Island
Bonaparte
Cape Pond
Mitchell
Plateau
River
Edward
ROAD
River
Drysdale
George
King
Mitchell
River
King
KALUMBURU
Port
Nelson
Prince
Frederick
Harbour
Coronation
Islands
Marigui



N
LOCALITY MAP
Prince Regent River
INDIAN OCEAN
BROOME
Western Australia
Adele Island
Bonaparte Archipelago
YORK SOUND
Coronation Islands
Prince Frederick Harbour
Careening Bay
Uwins Island
Hanover Bay
Darcy Island
Marigui Homestead
Augustus Island
St Patrick Island
St Andrew Island
St George Basin
CAMDEN SOUND
Brecknock Harbour
KUNMUNYA MISSION (est. 1916)
Camden Harbour
Prince Regent River
Glenelg River
INDIAN OCEAN
Montgomery Islands
Sale River
Caffarelli Island
Buccaneer Archipelago
Cockatoo Island
YAMPI SOUND
Koolan Island
Collier Bay
Hidden Island
Cape Leveque
Sunday Island
KING SOUND
Cygnet Bay
Long Island
TO DERBY
Walcott Inlet
Charnley River

number of shells strewn about the deserted camps I inferred that turtle was a favorite and plentiful article of diet with them ... for the present our acquaintance was confined to seeing them in the distance clamber over the rocks like spiders, and after peeping curiously at us for a moment, disappear in the stony recesses or ambushes of scrub which abounded in the rangy country.

On 21 April, Joseph Bradshaw ordered the expedition's return. By 6 May, they were back at Wyndham, where Hugh Young was left in charge of the horses and equipment. The Bradshaw brothers embarked on the *Rob Roy* for Darwin, whence they sailed for Sydney by the *Chingtu* on 19 May. After stops at Thursday Island and Moreton Bay, Joseph disembarked at Sydney on 5 June where he caught an express train for Melbourne, leaving Frederick to complete the voyage to Port Phillip. On arrival in Melbourne, Joseph was met by his younger brothers, John and Ben Bradshaw.

Also, there was his twenty-nine year old cousin, Aeneas Gunn. By his own account, Aeneas already regarded Joseph as a heroic figure.

The last entry in Bradshaw's Expedition journal foreshadowed his plans:

> All the Blocks west of the Regent River may be abandoned at once as useless. And if I decide on carrying on the enterprise, I would suggest that all the peninsula between the Roe and Regent Rivers be taken up. This would occupy 12 or 14 Blocks, the remaining 6 or 8 blocks could be taken up in various places where ever there was a track [*sic*] of good country with permanent water. By this plan, we could control 3 or 4 million acres of country while only paying rent for one million.
>
> The only means of getting articles to the place is by water, which would require a ketch or small schooner of 80 or 100 tons. I was not able to find a landing place, but Captain Hillier who was in St Georges Basin two years ago, tells me there are numbers of fine landings on the east shore.

Botanical Discoveries

Plant specimens, collected on the expedition by Bradshaw and Allen, were passed to the eminent Melbourne-based botanist, Ferdinand Mueller, who shortly afterwards listed their collection (Mueller 1891). Altogether 161 different species were collected. Among them were a few novelties which Mueller went on to name and describe in detail: a handsome wattle, *Acacia kelleri;* a white-flowered herb *Ramphicarpa* [now *Lindernia*] *macrosiphonia;* and a curious shrub *Triumfetta bradshawii.* W.T. Allen was honoured with *Corchorus allenii*, a name now regarded as synonymous with (and accordingly supplanted by) *Helicteres cana.*

An Error of Navigation

In 1901, the surveyor F.S. Brockman rediscovered the Bradshaw expedition's blazed tree "B91" on the Moran River: an indication that Bradshaw's actual course was well north of the Prince Regent River (Brockman 1902).

As Burbidge (in Miles and Burbidge 1975) observed, Bradshaw apparently mistook the Roe River for the Prince Regent. In Bradshaw's own account he states that:

> a curious feature of the Prince Regent River is that for more than 50 miles of its course it forms the line of demarcation between two distinct types of bedrock. On the eastern side the formation is basaltic, while that on the west is sandstone.
> (Bradshaw 1892, p. 100).

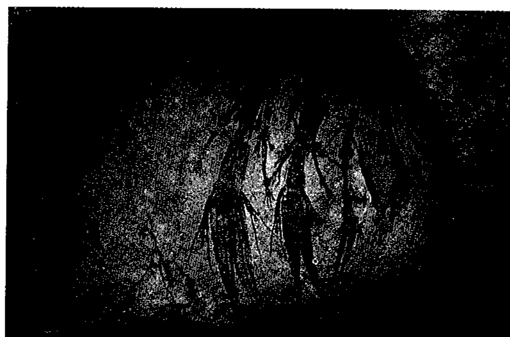
Such a description could only apply to the Roe River. It was an error never publicly acknowledged by Joseph Bradshaw.

In retrospect, it is clear that Bradshaw's "mangrove terminus" can only have been at the mouth of the Roe River, in the south-east corner of Prince Frederick Harbour.

A Serendipitous Discovery

Bradshaw had made rough sketches of some remarkable rock art observed in one of a group of caves:

> Some of the human figures were life-size, the bodies and limbs very attenuated, and represented as having numerous tassel-shaped adornments appended to the hair, neck, waist, arms, and legs.
> (Bradshaw 1892, p. 100)



This ancient style and period of rock art has since come to be known as "Bradshaw" or "Gwion Gwion" and has, in recent years, attracted increasing international attention with the work of Grahame Walsh (see Walsh 1994 & 2000; Kenneally *et al.* 1997a).

It was only in July 1997 that the actual cave containing the rock art sketched and published by Bradshaw, was finally relocated, near the junction of the Roe and Moran Rivers, following extensive detective work by Michael and Wendy Cusack (Anderson 1998).

The Bradshaw–Guy Wedding

On 5 August 1891, Joseph Bradshaw married Mary Jane Guy at the Presbyterian Church in Camberwell, Victoria. Wedding documents describe the bride as thirty years old and her occupation as musician. Joseph Bradshaw was described as a pastoralist, aged thirty-six. It appears to have been an unheralded match, as no account of the wedding seems to have featured in Melbourne newspapers of the time.

PART TWO: *Marigui*

The Voyage to the Kimberley

Almost simultaneously with Bradshaw's wedding, his newly-acquired ketch-rigged schooner *The Twins* was clearing Port Phillip Bay (Victoria) with supplies for "Hanover Bay, West Australia." Aeneas Gunn sailed aboard. It would be 33 days before she reached Port Darwin, after sailing *via* Torres Strait.

In a column of the *Argus* (12 August 1891) the "exports" aboard *The Twins* were listed as:

> 8 packages groceries and oilmen's stores, 10 bags rice, 3 bags oatmeal, 6 bags metalware, 33 packages sugar, 5 packages tea, 4 boxes candles, 2 cartons milk, 3 cartons meats, 3 packages merchandise.

On 19 September 1891 Joseph Bradshaw presented a paper entitled "The Future of North Australia" to a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia in Melbourne.

Shortly afterwards, Joseph and Mary Jane Bradshaw proceeded to Port Darwin by the steamer *Catterthun,* arriving on 16 October 1891 to join Joseph's schooner *The Twins.* Mary Jane was described as:

> displaying commendable spirit in resigning the pleasures of southern society for life in the far North-West, where no white woman ever set foot before, and hundreds of miles from the nearest neighbours.
> (*Northern Territory Times* 16 October 1891).

The narrative section of Gunn's *Pioneering in Northern Australia* commences with a vivid description of *The Twins'* voyage from Port Darwin to the Prince Regent River. The tale continues with the selection of a suitable homestead site, christened Marigui, beneath Mount Waterloo, on the shores of St. George Basin.

The Name "Marigui": Origin Disputed

In Bradshaw's account of his overland expedition (1892 p. 99) he describes an encounter with a large party of Aborigines, and goes on to state:

> They indicated themselves by the word "Woolyammi," and the locality where we were, the creek and the direction of their camp by the name "Marigui." The latter word may have a common origin with "marega," which, according to Dampier and King, was the name applied to the coast opposite this region by the Malayan cruisers for more than 200 years past.

The "Malayan cruisers" he refers to are Indonesians who sailed across the Timor Sea to northern Australia in search of trepang, also known as bêche-de-mer or sea-cucumbers. This quest is believed to have commenced before AD 1700 (MacKnight 1976).

Lieutenant Phillip Parker King who had conducted three hydrographic surveys of the Kimberley coast between 1819 and 1822, anticipated encountering Indonesians during his voyages. He noted in the published account of his journeys (King 1827, vol.1, pp.64-65): "we are informed by Captain Flinders [that Malays] make annual visits to this part of the coast in large fleets, to fish for bêche-de-mer". King had gathered information on Indonesian voyages to the north Australian coast when he had visited Kupang (Timor) in 1818. He was advised by one of the fleet leaders that the Indonesians called the coast 'Marega' (King, *ibid.*, p.135). This term was applied to Arnhem Land and the Gulf of Carpentaria and the term 'Kaju Jawa' or 'Kai Jawa' to the Kimberley coast. The term Kaju Jawa apparently derives from a type of mangrove tree, the bark of which was used to give the bêche-de-mer a distinctive red colour (Crawford 2001). According to Stokes (1846 vol. 2, p. 185), the word "marega" signified "man-eaters".

In a letter dated 20 April 1892 to the Commissioner for Lands, Perth, Western Australia, Bradshaw states "I have named the promontory and seaport formed by the Regent and Roe Rivers "Marigui" (Abor) (King voyages etc)". Bradshaw's orthography was legitimized when H.C. Princep instructed a Mr Wyglesworth:

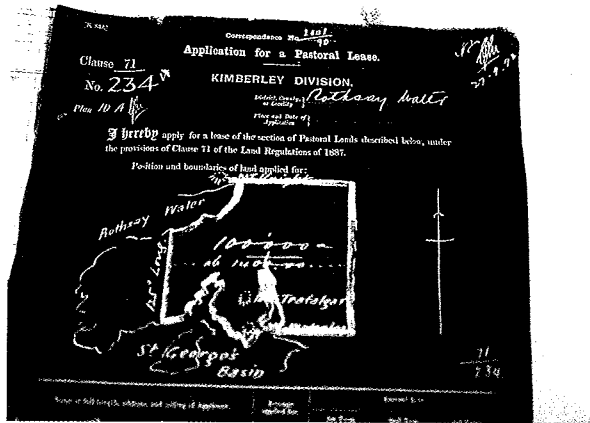
> Please insert the local names given by Mr Bradshaw on the working plans and instruct lithographer to insert them on stone before further printing.
> (S.A.W.A. Acc. 541 AN 3/3 File 2041 Letter 1583/92).

Another letter in the same file, dated 1 December 1893, indicates that Bradshaw also named his residence in Camberwell, Victoria "Marigui"; this house was evidently in Brinsley Road.

However, in apparent contradiction to available evidence, is an anonymous article in the *Northern Territory Times* of Friday, 8 August 1930. This summary, entitled "Pioneers in the Northern Territory", states that Marigui was named "in honour of Mrs Bradshaw .... a phonetic rendering of her maiden name." Mrs Bradshaw's maiden name was Mary Guy. Perhaps rather, it was a happy coincidence? It is also of interest to note that, in modern cartographic usage, the "Marigui Promontory" now refers only to the land lying between Rothsay Water and St George Basin: a small portion of the area so intended by Bradshaw.

Bradshaw's Correspondence

Three files of Bradshaw's correspondence still survive in the State Archives of Western Australia (Acc 541 AN 3/3 File 2041/90; Colonial Secretary's


Correspondence No. 1801/90

Application for a Pastoral Lease.

Clause 71

No. 234

KIMBERLEY DIVISION.

Plan 10 A

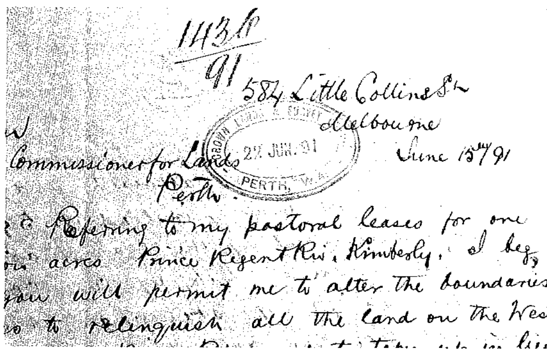
District, County, or Locality: Rothsay Water

Place and Date of Application

I hereby apply for a lease of the section of Pastoral Lands described below, under the provisions of Clause 71 of the Land Regulations of 1887.

Position and boundaries of land applied for:

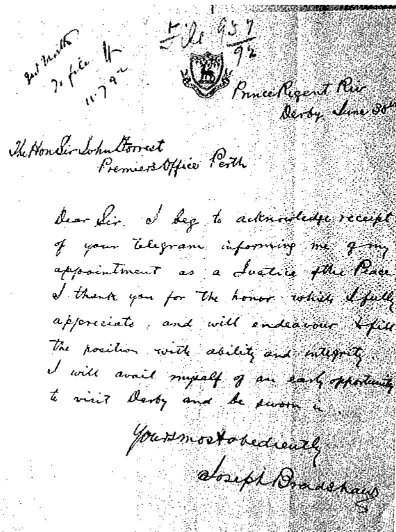
(*above*) A map from Bradshaw's application for a pastoral lease in the Prince Regent River.
(*below*) Examples of Bradshaw's correspondence.


1143/91

584 Little Collins St
Melbourne
June 15th 91

Commissioner for Lands
Perth

Referring to my pastoral leases for one ... acres Prince Regent Riv, Kimberly, I beg ... you will permit me to alter the boundaries ... to relinquish all the land on the Wes...

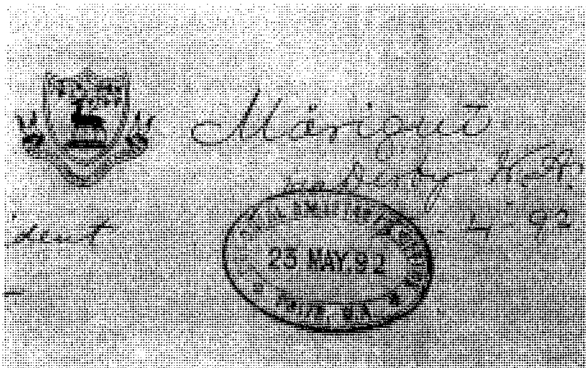

File 957/92

Prince Regent Riv
Derby June 28th

The Hon Sir John Forrest
Premiers Office Perth

Dear Sir. I beg to acknowledge receipt of your telegram informing me of my appointment as a Justice of the Peace. I thank you for the honor which I fully appreciate, and will endeavour to fill the position with ability and integrity. I will avail myself of an early opportunity to visit Derby and be sworn in.

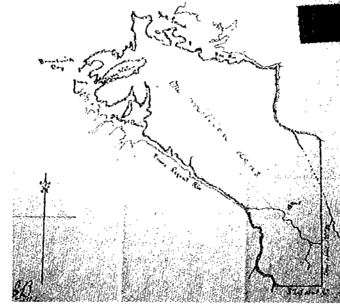
Yours most obediently
Joseph Bradshaw


Marigui
Derby W.A.
4 92

23 MAY 92
PERTH, W.A.

Office (CSO) Files 819/92 & 957/92). The first file contains eight letters, written between October 1890 and January 1894, all to the Commissioner for Lands.

The first two letters were penned from 584 Little Collins St, Melbourne. The second letter of 15 June 1891 is notable for a fine hand-drawn map reproduced (*below*) by Bradshaw, showing his desired lease adjustment to "one million acres" between the Roe and Prince Regent Rivers, outlined in blue wash.



The next four letters of 1891–92 are all penned from the Prince Regent River – two specifically state "Marigui". Finally, there are two letters from Camberwell, Victoria in 1893–94.

The CSO files contain four letters, written in 1891–92, which all relate to Bradshaw's request to be appointed a Justice of the Peace (J.P.). One is addressed to the Government Resident, Derby and the other three directly to the Premier, Sir John Forrest.

In a letter from Marigui, dated 20 April 1892, Bradshaw had stated:

> The Bingi Natives are very numerous, and daring; they are of splendid physique, and of tawny or olive colored complexion; as their movements are daily becoming more aggressive I must apply to the Government for police protection or else for license or executive power to protect the lives and property on the settlement at my own discretion.

Bradshaw's appointment as a J.P. was eventually announced in the *Government Gazette* of 16 June 1892 and, in the final letter in that file, he promises to visit Derby to be sworn in.

Only the first Bradshaw letter of October 1890 is on plain paper. Thereafter all the letters, on good quality paper, display an embossed heraldic crest, featuring a stag under a fruiting grape vine with a French inscription: "Qui vit content tient assez", which means "Who lives content holds enough". Examples of these letters are reproduced on this page.

The letter of 15 June 1891 is unique in that it features an uncoloured embossed crest. Thereafter, three 1891 and one 1892 letters display a blue crest, while all subsequent correspondence has a red crest.

According to the classic heraldry text *Armorial General* by J.B. Rietstap (1998), this crest and inscription are associated with Baron Bradshaigh de Haigh of Lancashire, England (1679). However, according to John Bradshaw of Parramatta, New South Wales, a relative of Joseph, there is no genealogical evidence to support a family connection with such noble ancestry (pers. comm., 16 January 1996). Apparently, heraldic appropriation was a fashion of the time and designed to impress!

Marigui Abandoned

On 27 May 1892 Bradshaw had advertised for "500–600 well-bred heifers, from one to three years old", to be delivered to Hall's Creek (*Northern Territory Times*). Presumably, these were intended to stock Marigui.

Bradshaw strongly endorsed the potential of the Kimberley as a cheap source of mutton supply for Darwin (*Northern Territory Times* 30 September 1892).

In the same month, Bradshaw's request to drastically reduce his Prince Regent holdings to a mere 100 000 acres (40 484 ha), centred on Marigui, was approved with the issue of lease 71/234 (Clement 1993).

In October 1892 Bradshaw was also successful in securing another lease of 150 000 acres (60 726 ha) at Napier Broome Bay. Although allocated lease number 71/237, it was apparently never taken up by Bradshaw but was later selected by Benedictine monks as the site of Pago Mission.

Through enactment of the Stock Act of 1893, Western Australia unilaterally imposed a stock tax of two pounds per head on animals crossing the border. The economics of moving cattle and sheep to develop Marigui were changed overnight.

The *Northern Territory Times* of 2 February 1894, reported that Joseph Bradshaw had arrived at Port Darwin aboard the steamship *Changsha* and went on:

> From what we can hear it is doubtful if this gentleman will persevere with his station on the Prince Regent river (W.A.). He complains bitterly of the obstructive stock tax imposed by the western colony, and the upshot of his disaffection is going to be that he will establish himself on a run in the Victoria River district instead.

Bradshaw immediately took up a pastoral lease covering 12 432 km^2 (4800 square miles) in the estuary of the Victoria River of the Northern Territory. The station came to be known as "Bradshaw's Run". With the assistance of Gunn and Hugh Young, the station was stocked with sheep and serviced from Port Darwin by the schooner *The Twins* (Ogden 1989). The sheep suffered severely from the depredations of dingoes and had to be corralled at night (Hammond 1938). Bradshaw eventually replaced the flocks with cattle.

By this time, Bradshaw had purchased *Red Gauntlet*, which was described as "a small steamer of 70 or 80 tons capacity formerly in the Gippsland Lakes trade" in Victoria (*Northern Territory Times* 17 November 1893). Under the command of Captain Lindsay, *Red Gauntlet* sailed from Port Darwin for the Prince Regent River, *via* Wyndham on 15 February 1894 (*Northern Territory Times* 16 February 1894).

On 13 March 1894 Joseph Bradshaw wrote what appears to be a final letter from the Prince Regent River to the *Northern Territory Times.* The letter was entitled "South Australia's Black Buffalo"; in this, Bradshaw denied that the Northern Territory was a "white elephant" and vigorously defended its prospects (*Northern Territory Times* 16 March 1894).

It is likely that the dismantling of the Marigui homestead commenced on this voyage, but the historical record is silent. In Hill's version (1951 p. 246) the Bradshaw brothers "moved everything round by sea – station buildings, windmills, furniture, sawmills, engines, stores – to begin again".

A few weeks later *Red Gauntlet* had returned to Port Darwin. It was stated that both she and *The Twins* were proceeding to the Victoria River with Joseph Bradshaw "for the purpose of initiating the occupation of the pastoral country acquired by him a short time ago" (*Northern Territory Times* 6 April 1894).

In August 1894 Bradshaw's lease at Napier Broome Bay (71/237) was unsold at auction, as was Marigui (71/234) in September 1895 (Clement 1993).

The Marigui Country and Its People – A Century On

In 1912, a Presbyterian mission was established at Port George IV, close to Hanover Bay, near the entrance to the Prince Regent River. Access to the outside world was by sailing lugger. In 1916, the mission was moved inland to nearby Kunmunya. Kunmunya Mission played a major role in familiarising Wororra and Ngarinyin people with European culture and technology. At the same time it was a focus of linguistic and anthropological research by scholars, including the Reverend J.R.B. Love, author of the classic text *Stone-Age Bushmen of Today* (1936).

Kunmunya Mission was abandoned in 1951 and the resident Aboriginal population was briefly relocated to Munja, at the head of Walcott Inlet and, subsequently, to Wotjulum on the Yampi Peninsula. Despite the moves, extreme isolation and supply logistics remained serious problems. Finally, in 1956, the mission population was relocated to Mowanjum, on the outskirts of Derby (McKenzie 1969). Consequently, most descendants of Aborigines associated with the Prince Regent River, principally Wunambul, Wororra and Ngarinyin peoples, nowadays reside at Derby.

In 1972 three Ngarinyin elders abandoned nomadic life in the bush and came in to Beverley Springs Station (Blundell 1975, p. 35). Since that time, the Prince

Regent country has been – in effect – completely depopulated.

Aboriginal aspirations for their traditional land continue through – as yet undetermined – native title claims.

Prince Regent Nature Reserve

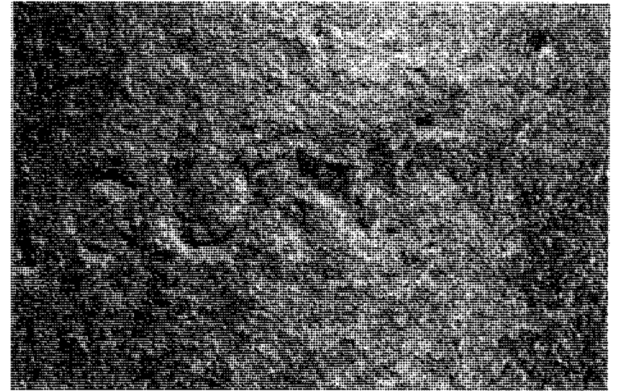
In April 1964, most of Bradshaw's old leases and the site of the Marigui homestead were incorporated into the conservation estate with the declaration of the 633 825 hectare Prince Regent Nature Reserve, now administered by the Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management.

In 1978, the Prince Regent Nature Reserve was nominated as a "World Biosphere Reserve" by UNESCO, in recognition of its outstanding intact wildlife and pristine values.

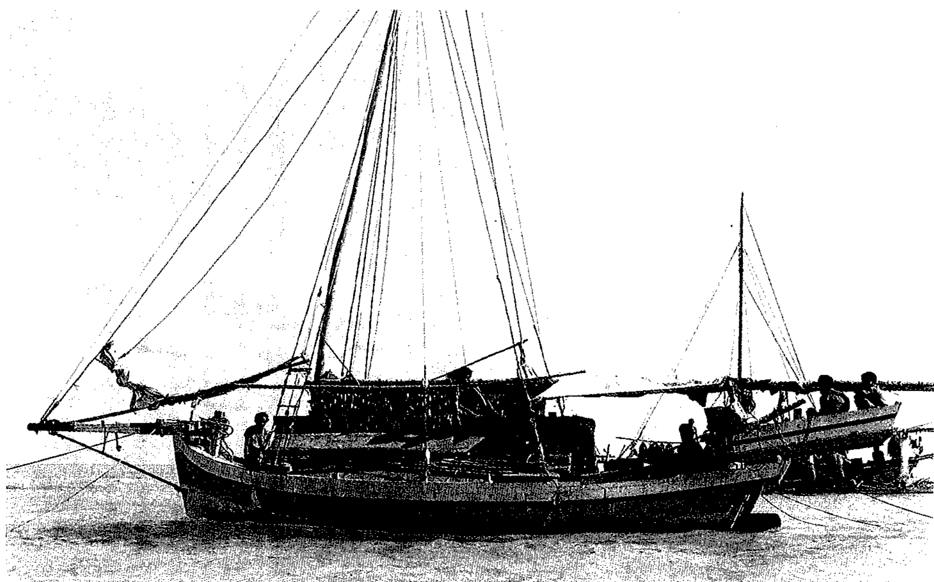
Marigui: Site Rediscovered

In 1988, staff of the Department of Conservation and Land Management, in the course of examining sites for a possible field research station, located, near the base of Mount Waterloo, rusting corrugated iron, crumbling stone walls and a small dam (Burbidge *et al.* 1988). An old anchor was also found on rocks at low tide (Chris Done, pers. comm.). By chance, the Marigui site had been rediscovered. Plans for the field station were later abandoned.

Through the encouragement of the Department of Conservation and Land Management's Regional Manager, Chris Done, a subsequent *LANDSCOPE* Expedition returned to investigate the Marigui site in July 1997. Expedition members walking through dry grassland in the shadow of Mount Waterloo, found the inscription "A.J. GUNN" carved into the trunk of a boab tree; another nearby boab was inscribed with the letters "H","D" and "L". (Kenneally *et al.* 1997b). A further boab, riddled with bullet holes, had evidently served for target practice (Figure 4).



Top: Close-up of the "GUNN" inscription in the boab tree at Marigui settlement site.
Above: Large boab tree near Marigui site inscribed with the letter "H".



Above: An Indonesian fishing fleet photographed in June 1977 at Ashmore Reef in the Timor Sea.

PART THREE: *Gunn*

Emigrant Scots

The Gunn family or clan are of Norse origin, claiming descent from Gunni, Son of Olaf the Black, who ruled Orkney and the Isles in the 13th Century. The clan's ancestral lands include Caithness, in the far north of Scotland. It was from here that Aeneas Gunn's parents came to Australia. His father, the Reverend Peter Gunn, had been brought to Melbourne to minister to the Presbyterian congregation of the city, many of whom were Gaelic speakers.

As Forrest (1990) remarked, what distinguished the Scots from other early settlers to Australia was their superior education, which allowed them to maximize opportunities available in the new country.

Aeneas James Gunn was born to Jane Gunn (nee Scott) in the manse of the Scots Church at Campbellfield, Victoria on 10 February 1862 (Linklater 1980). He was the couple's third child. Little is known about Aeneas' upbringing and adolescence, but by his own account, he spent much time on farms in rural Victoria, and read books avidly.

Aeneas Gunn: Prahran Librarian & F.R.G.S.

By November 1895, owing to his ill health, Aeneas Gunn had severed his connection with Bradshaw's Victoria River venture (Ogden 1989). He returned to Victoria.

In June 1898 Aeneas was appointed Librarian with the City of Prahran. According to documents now held in the Prahran Archives, his salary was 134 pounds per annum and he was required to reside in quarters attached to the Library. In Gunn's job application, he stated:

> I may mention that in recognition of some original work in the exploration of the North West Australian littoral I was, on the proposition of the late Baron Von Mueller, supported by Dr Bride and the Rev.Canon Potter, elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society of London.

Unfortunately, the archivist of the Royal Geographical Society has advised that no evidence of Gunn's F.R.G.S. status or membership can now be located (pers. comm., 26 November 1999).

Gunn's Newspaper Articles

It was during the Prahran episode of Gunn's life that he penned the series of articles *Pioneering in Northern Australia,* in the role of part-time suburban journalist. The 24 articles in the series appeared simultaneously in weekly editions of the *Prahran Telegraph, St. Kilda Advertiser* and *Malvern Argus* between May and November 1899.

The three papers were owned by Osment and Sons of 223 Chapel Street, Prahran, who advertised their business as "the most complete Commercial Printing House south of the Yarra" and boasted that their coverage comprised "The Most Populous, Wealthy and Aristocratic Districts in the Colony of Victoria."

Gunn's original printed articles survive at the State Library of Victoria in bound folder editions of the *Prahran Telegraph* and/or *St. Kilda Advertiser.* Some of the papers are torn while others have folds or oval stamp imprints. Very few pages of the *Malvern Argus* of 1899 now exist. All the papers are in poor condition, owing to the low grade of paper in use at the time, and are regarded as priority conservation items. Consequently, present-day researchers can normally only access the material *via* microfilm copies.

Gunn is known to have written further newspaper articles in 1900. These include two pieces on the Victoria River (Northern Territory) in the *Prahran Telegraph* of 14 and 21 April and six items entitled "Pearl Shelling in the Far Nor'West" in the same journal between 19 May and 14 July. Finally, there is a splendid account of the voyage of the schooner *The Twins* from Port Phillip to Port Darwin in 1891, with vivid portraits of her captain and crew. This saga was curiously entitled "The Ways of Northern Waters, And Many Other Ways" and appeared in six instalments in the *Prahran Telegraph* between 25 August and 6 October 1900.

Unfortunately, few researchers in the Northern Territory and Kimberley appear to be aware of the journalistic gems mentioned above, which have "evaded capture" in published bibliographies.

During 1901 Gunn was busy undertaking a major reclassification of the Prahran Library (*Prahran Telegraph* 20 July 1901). Under the pseudonym "Hawkeye", he describes a voyage to Geelong with sly portraits of fellow passengers (*Prahran Telegraph* 24 August 1901).

Eight articles describing a voyage on the coastal steamer *Tyrian* (*Prahran Telegraph* 19 October – 7 December 1901) look suspiciously like Gunn's work, although no author is given. The voyage from Melbourne includes impressions of Sydney; comments on the beauty of Brisbane; the sugar industry; Kanaka labour (he calls the White Australia policy "a nonsense");

Rockhampton and the Great Barrier Reef; the Whitsunday Islands; impressions of Townsville; the Japanese as cooks; and north Queensland separatism.

Gunn's next adventure, with a Dr Bennett, appeared in the *Prahran Telegraph* of 14 December 1901 as "A Narrow Escape". The pair visited a lamb and rabbit freezing works at Hamilton, to discover that the locally patented freezer door which had closed behind them, could only be opened from outside:

> Mr Gunn and his doctor friend were undergoing, with good humored unconcern, a slow death by freezing. Ice began to form on their moustaches from congealing breath, and heavy pain settled in their chests.

The laconic tale relates how the pair were only saved by the penetrating powers of Gunn's piercing "coo-ee"!

The Gunn–Taylor Wedding

On 31 December 1901, Aeneas Gunn married a teacher, Jeannie Taylor, a graduate of Melbourne University. She was aged 30 and he 40. Like Aeneas, Jeannie was of Scottish ancestry. Both were avid readers and book lovers, who enjoyed horse riding. Jeannie had established a private school in the Melbourne suburb of Hawthorn (Nesdale 1977).

Return to the Northern Territory

The newly-wed couple swiftly proceeded to Darwin, as Aeneas had accepted a position as manager at Elsey Station, 480 kilometres south-east of Darwin, on the Roper River. The Gunns sailed from Port Phillip aboard the Eastern and Asiatic mail steamer *Guthrie* via Queensland ports. The vessel reached Port Darwin on 16 January 1902, while the whole journey to the Elsey homestead took one month (Nesdale 1977).

Within a few months, Aeneas was writing periodic humorous letters to the *Northern Territory Times* regarding incidents of station life at the Elsey.

Gunn also contributed two further articles to the *Prahran Telegraph*, under the title "The Never Never Land". The first (29 March 1902) is an amusing account of insect life in the wet season, and in particular the exasperating lavender bug. The second article (5 April 1902) describes the journey to the Elsey from Port Darwin, the homestead and its setting.

Gunn's Demise

Barely a year later, in March 1903, tragedy struck with Aeneas' untimely death from malarial dysentery. He was 41 years old.

An editorial in the *Prahran Telegraph* of 28 March, entitled "Echoes of the Week", lamented:

> The sad news received in Prahran of Mr AE Gunn's death at Elsey Station, via Port Darwin, Northern Territory, on Saturday, cast quite a gloom among the many friends of the late librarian. Mr Gunn died of malarial fever on the 10th inst. Mr Gunn was a gentleman, who, by his genial nature endeared himself to all he came into contact with, and he was beyond this a gentleman of considerable culture and with a strong sympathetic insight into literary matters. He was of the best class of Bohemian, and his superficial faults ever leaned to virtue's side. The Prahran library under his guidance progressed in a most satisfactory manner, and he threw his heart and soul into the work. He had spent some of his early life in the north, and the fatal fascination of the tropics never left him. His heart always turned thither, to the land of the Never Never, to wild and primitive nature. A chance to resume the old life came and he seized it; was married, and started out full of hope 15 months ago to carve out a new life in tropical Australia. His cup of happiness was full, with his new hopes and aspirations, but, alas, when all the future was opening bright and promising fate stepped in, and poor, bright, genial, good-natured Gunn "passed in his checks," as he himself would say, and he has solved the great secret, which formed the subject of thought in many of his pensive moments. As yet we possess but the meagre intelligence of his death, but 'tis enough that he is dead, and that bald fact has aroused many a sigh for poor Gunn. The Prahran council last Monday night passed a special resolution that a letter of condolence be sent to Mrs Gunn, in the sentiments of which many unknown friends will deem it a sad privilege to join.

Following Gunn's death, a company winding up his estate disposed of numerous letters and diaries of exploration. As Ernestine Hill deplored (1951, p. 247):

> worthless vouchers and receipts were carefully preserved, but Gunn's wealth of records was destroyed as personal and insignificant affairs ... a great writer and historian was lost to Australia.

Nesdale (1977, pp. 27–28) remarks of Aeneas that:

> there seems to have been a restlessness in his makeup; a compulsion that drove him into varied occupations...He has been described as 'naturalist, navigator', as 'seafarer, journalist, cattleman, scientist, librarian and adventurer'.

In Greek and Roman mythology, Aeneas, meaning "praiseworthy" was a Trojan hero, esteemed for his piety, prudence and valour. Aeneas features in Virgil's epic poem the *Aeneid,* escaping from Troy to establish a kingdom beyond the seas. Arguably, Gunn's own life had some parallels.

Mrs Aeneas Gunn: Immortality in Print

Following Aeneas' burial, a grieving and widowed Jeannie returned to Hawthorn, Victoria. Residing with her father, she soon commenced writing her memoirs of life at Elsey Station, under the name "Mrs Aeneas Gunn". Her first work was *The Little Black Princess* (1905), a comic account of an Aboriginal orphan girl and her puppy. However, it was *We of the Never-Never* (1908), which catapulted her to national fame. In this classic of Australian literature, Aeneas appears as "The Maluka". This was the deferential name by which Aborigines referred to Gunn. According to Merlan

Above: Bronze plaque erected on Gunn's grave.

(1996) the word derives from 'marluga' or 'old man' in the local Yangman language at Elsey. Nesdale (1977, p.55) described the guise as "a likeable, kindly character, but shadowy". Later she elaborates on Gunn's virtues, noting his competence as a manager; decisiveness; sensitivity in dealing with men; good humour; personal courage in the face of danger and practical skills. Not least, he was a good marksman.

In 1941, in a move decreed by the Commonwealth Government, many of the other celebrated male characters of *We of the Never-Never* (e.g. "The Fizzer", "The Dandy", "The Sanguine Scot") were reburied alongside Aeneas at the Elsey Cemetery, near the Stuart Highway.

An elaborate bronze plaque was erected on Gunn's grave, featuring the heraldic shield of Clan Gunn. Beneath is the Latin motto '*Aut pax, aut bellum*' meaning 'Either peace, or war'.

Jeannie never re-married and died at the age of ninety-one on 9 June 1961. During her lifetime she was an ardent supporter of servicemen and in particular the Returned Services League (RSL) at Monbulk, Victoria. In 2000, the latter published posthumously Mrs Aeneas Gunn's book *My Boys: a book of remembrance*, commemorating the men of Monbulk who saw service in World War One.

In more recent times, as an icon of white Australian pioneering mythology, *We of the Never-Never* has come in for critical re-evaluation. Historians, in particular, have drawn attention to the brutal realities of the pastoral frontier. While often conveniently overlooked, the tragic past remains vivid to many Aboriginal elders, men and women alike (Merlan 1978).

An especially contentious issue is the role of pastoralists and police in undertaking "patrols" which sometimes perpetrated massacre and murder on the Aboriginal population. Other key issues relate to Aboriginal dispossession via land appropriation, and the pivotal role of unpaid Aboriginal labour in the cattle-based economy, as well as a range of traumatic social and cultural impacts inflicted on Aboriginal society.

Elsey Station, covering 5334 square kilometres, was returned to Aboriginal ownership in February 2000 (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 February. 2000).

The *Literary Legacy*

"Pioneering in Northern Australia"

Aeneas Gunn: A Writer Eclipsed

It is ironically curious that, although immortalised as a name through his wife's writing, Gunn's own writings have remained largely unread for close to a century. Conserved in far-off Melbourne, few Australian academics, bibliographers, anthropologists or historians have been aware of their existence.

Gunn's friend from Port Darwin, Alfred Searcy, later an author, cited several long descriptive passages verbatim from *Pioneering in Northern Australia* (*PINA*) in books he published prior to the First World War. Of Gunn, he wrote (*In Australian Tropics*, p. 29) " a dear old chum of mine...who had great experiences on the north coast, and who had a pathetic end on an inland station."

During the latter half of the twentieth century, only three authors – all women – namely, Ernestine Hill (1951), Ira Nesdale (1977) and Barbara James (1989) have quoted tantalising snippets from Gunn's account of the Marigui episode. Ernestine Hill had the advantage of having sailed the Kimberley coast herself by yacht in 1934 (Hill 1951, p. 86). Captivated by its magic, she was later to write:

> This far north-west coast between Derby and Wyndham, split into a thousand fiords breathtaking in their colour and beauty, is far and away the loveliest in Australia. It will one day be a world-famous tourist resort. Now it is known to few. (Ernestine Hill, *The Territory*, p. 245)

The Text

For the general reader, Gunn's humour, vivid descriptions of nature and scenery, as well as the unfolding drama of hazardous voyages, candid violence, moonlit madness and pensive reflections, provide an eclectic cocktail. The sheer range of emotions, plumbed in Gunn's saga, is vast.

There is no disguising that some of what Gunn has to say is offensively racist, gender-biased, downright patronising or thoroughly unfashionable! It is, however, all too easy to apply such judgements from a modern time and place to a text which reflects the attitudes and milieu of a long-dead, colonial Australia.

Gunn's "warts and all" account adds substantially to the history and literature of the Kimberley frontier. It is undoubtedly unique in its presentation, scope, impact and detail.

Despite any perceived shortcomings, the breadth of Gunn's general knowledge and the range of his vocabulary remain remarkable. Ira Nesdale (1977, pp. 63–64) makes the comment that Aeneas' writing:

> has a professional gloss and mastery, while his wife's has warmth, comfortable vitality, and a straightforward simplicity. Both are filled with humour, but the difference in expression is very marked.

Furthermore, Aeneas' discourses reveal "keen observation complemented by an unusual command of descriptive English".

Gunn's descriptive prose occasionally verges on "purple", for example in the thunderstorm description (*PINA* No. VIII). By modern standards, his sentences can appear far too long. Furthermore, the punctuation is sometimes dubious with the odd printing error thrown in for good measure! The editors have endeavoured to adhere as closely as possible to the text, as it was printed in 1899. Minor errors of spelling, printing and some punctuation have been rectified in order to maintain narrative flow.

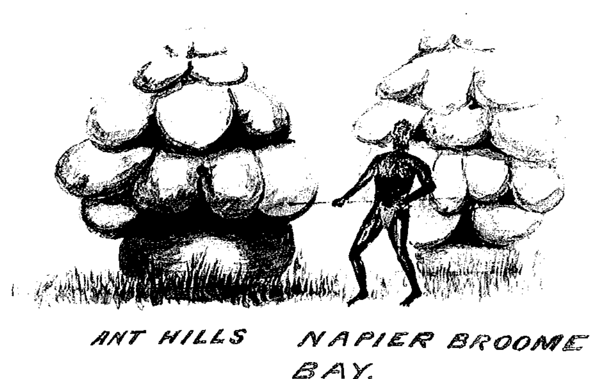
However, American spellings which abound in the original text, have been retained. Typical examples include: labor, harbor, odor, color and civilization. Indiscriminate switching from American to English spelling – even within the same article – is also occasionally apparent.

Trying to locate Gunn's erudite poetic, literary, classical, and sometimes obscure, allusions has not always proved successful, as the notes accompanying the text attest. Further contributions from interested readers and especially literary or classical scholars are welcome!

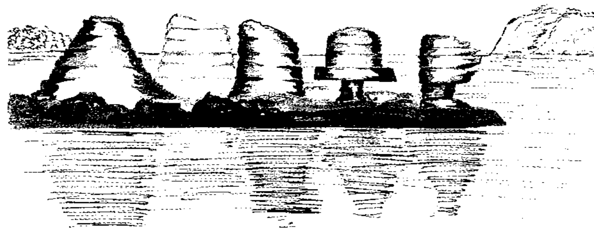
In the absence of an index, a brief summary of the content of the 24 articles has been added, generally using key phrases from Gunn's own vocabulary.

Aeneas Gunn's Sketches

The Mitchell Library in Sydney holds four original, unsigned sketches by Aeneas Gunn, executed in 1891, which are reproduced here.



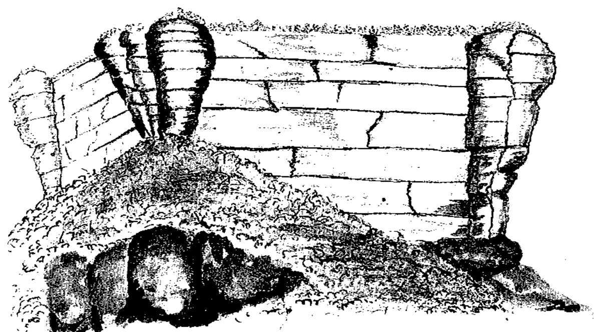
ANT HILLS NAPIER BROOME BAY.



OLD HAT ISLAND, INSTITUT GROUP,
ADMIRALTY GULF.
N. W. COAST.

CASTLE HD   CAMDEN HARBOR   PT OF AUGUSTUS ID

PORT GEORGE FOURTH.



SUMMIT OF MT TRAFALGAR.

Following the death of Mary Jane Bradshaw in 1942, the sketches were presented to the Mitchell Library by her nephew F.M. Bradshaw (Library correspondence, 8 March 1996).

Gunn's Place-names

One way, perhaps, of compensating for Aeneas Gunn's prior neglect from Kimberley history might be to reinstate as topographic place-names three locations he christened in the proximity of the Marigui Settlement:

- Gunn's Spring (mentioned at the end of *PINA* No. II)
- St Mary's Island (mentioned at the start of *PINA* No. VII)
- Basalt Point (mentioned at the start of *PINA* No. XIV)

The First Consolidated Edition

In July 1899, one Arthur Forbes of Prahran, Victoria wrote to the Editor of the *Prahran Telegraph,* asking if "Mr. Gunn could be prevailed upon to publish his experiences and descriptions *in extenso* in pamphlet form for public use." A mere century on, Forbes' modest request is finally realised and his letter is reproduced here in Appendix 1.

Left: Gunn's sketches–courtesy of Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales (ML ref. SSV5B/KIMB D/1-4).

Brief *Biographical Notes*

William Tucker Allen: Born Geelong, 1846. Married Emily Barnes in 1873 in Victoria. They had 4 children: Anne May (b. 1874); Violet Emily (b. 1877); William Henry (b. 1881); John (b. 1883).

Frederick Maxwell Bradshaw: Born 1849 in Victoria. Elder brother to Joseph. Axed by Aborigines *c.* 24 November 1905, near Cape Scott, Northern Territory, while asleep in the hold of the launch *Bolwarra*. Buried on Bradshaw Station, atop a rocky hill, overlooking the Victoria River. According to Hill (1951, p. 253) his coffin was "of crude beer-case, with naked blacks as pall-bearers".

Joseph Bradshaw: Born Doutta Galla, Victoria on 6 October 1854. He was "first mate of a British India ship in the days of sail" (Hill 1951, p. 244).

Following setbacks at the Victoria River, the irrepressible Joseph Bradshaw floated the Eastern and African Cold Storage Supply Company in England in 1902 (Hill 1951, p. 218; Forrest 1990, p. 9; Cartwright 1999, pp. 59–61). The Company acquired 51 800 square kilometers of north-east Arnhem Land, as the Arafura Station, which it attempted to stock from existing Northern Territory properties. According to Forrest, the venture "was really a scam" and had failed by 1908. In the oral history of Arnhem Land, the Company remains notorious for its genocidal punitive expeditions, led by Jock MacLennon, the "Sanguine Scot" (see Merlan 1978, pp. 86-88). Bradshaw was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society (F.R.G.S.) in February 1896 (Appendix 2). Bradshaw continued to manage his Victoria River property. He died in Darwin Hospital on 23 July 1916 of diabetes and gangrene of the foot, after an accident. He was 62 and left his substantial estate of 2540 pounds to his wife, Mary Jane (James 1989, p. 232). His plain grave lies in Palmerston Cemetery, off Goyder Road in the Darwin suburb of Parap.

Mary Jane Bradshaw: (nee Guy). Born at Richmond, Victoria, 14 January 1860. Daughter of William Guy, a printer, and Elizabeth (nee Tonkyn), of Hartwell, Victoria and Truro, England. A musician, she married Joseph in Camberwell, Victoria, 5 August 1891. Their son, Joseph Guy Bradshaw, b. Melbourne 1893, was an engineer who died in Melbourne in 1922. Mary Jane died at 27 Princess St, Kew, Victoria on 15 February 1942 (*Argus* 18 February. 1942, p. 2).

Jan Larsen: Killed by Aborigines on board Bradshaw's launch *Wunwulla* on the Daly River *c.* 1904 (Linklater & Tapp 1968, p. 207; Hill 1951, p. 249–250).

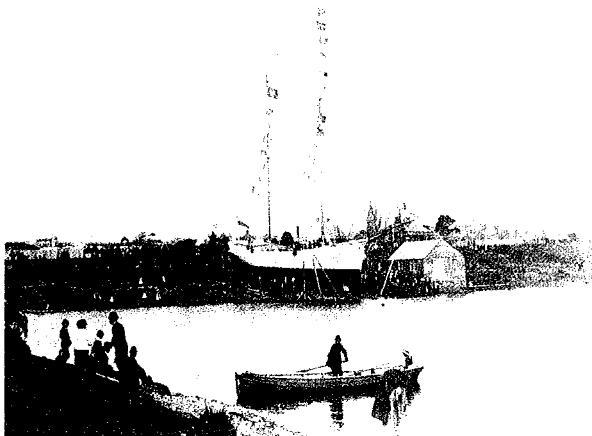
Hugh Young: Planted the boab trees at Katherine from Victoria River nuts. "He would ride in four hundred miles and make for the piano in the [Katherine] pub where all others made for the bar...when Hughie played, the bearded bushmen...would gather round him spellbound" (Hill 1951, p. 247). Died at Bradshaw's Run, Northern Territory of fever in July 1900. Joseph Bradshaw engraved a slate slab for his grave (Ogden 1989, p. 8).

Bradshaw's *Vessels*

The Twins

A ketch of 39.94 tons. Official number 78069. *The Twins* was launched in July 1880 at East Devonport, Tasmania, by the boat builder Edward Higgs. The vessel's name derived from the birth of twin sons to Edward Higgs' wife, Mary. Registered at Launceston and under the command of G. Bennett, *The Twins* traded out of Port Frederick to Victorian ports, especially Melbourne. In January 1882, registry was transferred to Melbourne. In April 1884, she struck the notorious Lonsdale Reef, but was recovered and repaired. Higgs later sold *The Twins* to a Gippsland brewery (date unknown). It was probably from this source that Bradshaw acquired the vessel in 1891. Her 33 day voyage from Melbourne to Port Darwin (August–September 1891) is vividly recounted by Aeneas Gunn (*Prahran Telegraph* 25 August – 6 October 1900). Gunn lamented that the vessel's hull was by then ruined by teredo worm and she was laid up in Darwin Harbour. The eventual fate of *The Twins* is unclear. Gunn always called her *Gemini,* to the confusion of many writers since!

Above: Edward Higgs
Below: Launching of the large ketch *Lizzie Taylor* at Edward Higgs' shipyard, East Devonport, Tasmania (Sept. 1892).

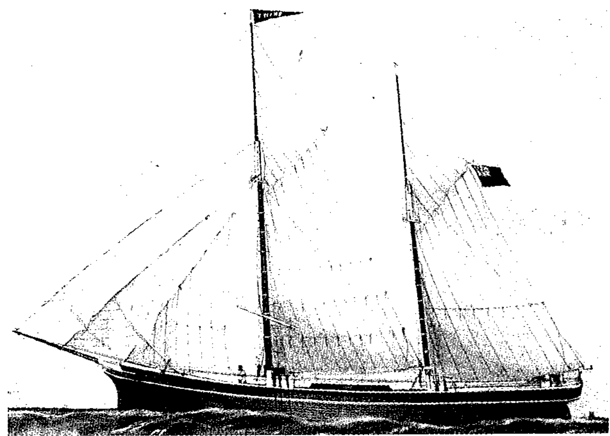


Red Gauntlet

A steamship of 38.96 tons. Official number 79291. Built 1890 at Leith, Tasmania by Smith, Jones and Finlayson for Mr H.C. Stephens, an engineer supervising the construction of railway bridges. Mrs Stephens launched the vessel, which was registered at Launceston. *Red Gauntlet* left for Trial Harbour on the west coast of Tasmania on 4 May 1891. *Walch's Almanacs* of 1892 and 1893 list her as a Launceston steamer. Sold in June 1893 to Thomas Bissell, master mariner of Glenferrie, Victoria, and Jesse Bissell, engineer of Melbourne. Resold in October 1893 to Joseph Bradshaw and registered in Melbourne.

On voyage from Melbourne to Port Darwin, *Red Gauntlet* put into Newcastle, New South Wales "to repair some slight damage to her machinery" (*Northern Territory Times* 5 January 1894) and was delayed at Thursday Island in January 1894 "in consequence of the illness of her chief engineer" (*Northern Territory Times* 19 January 1894). From Thursday Island to Port Darwin took 14 days as, crossing the Gulf of Carpentaria, "the steamer encountered an extremely heavy sea with squally head wind, against which she could only make headway by constantly tacking" (*Northern Territory Times* 26 January 1894). Under Captain Lindsay, Bradshaw employed *Red Gauntlet* to service Marigui (briefly) and his Victoria River property. In June 1896, Bradshaw sold the vessel to Burns Philp and Co Ltd and she was re-registered at Sydney. She was eventually broken up at Thursday Island and her register cancelled on 24 June 1902.

Below: The ketch *The Twins,* typical of Bass Strait trading vessels in the 1880s.



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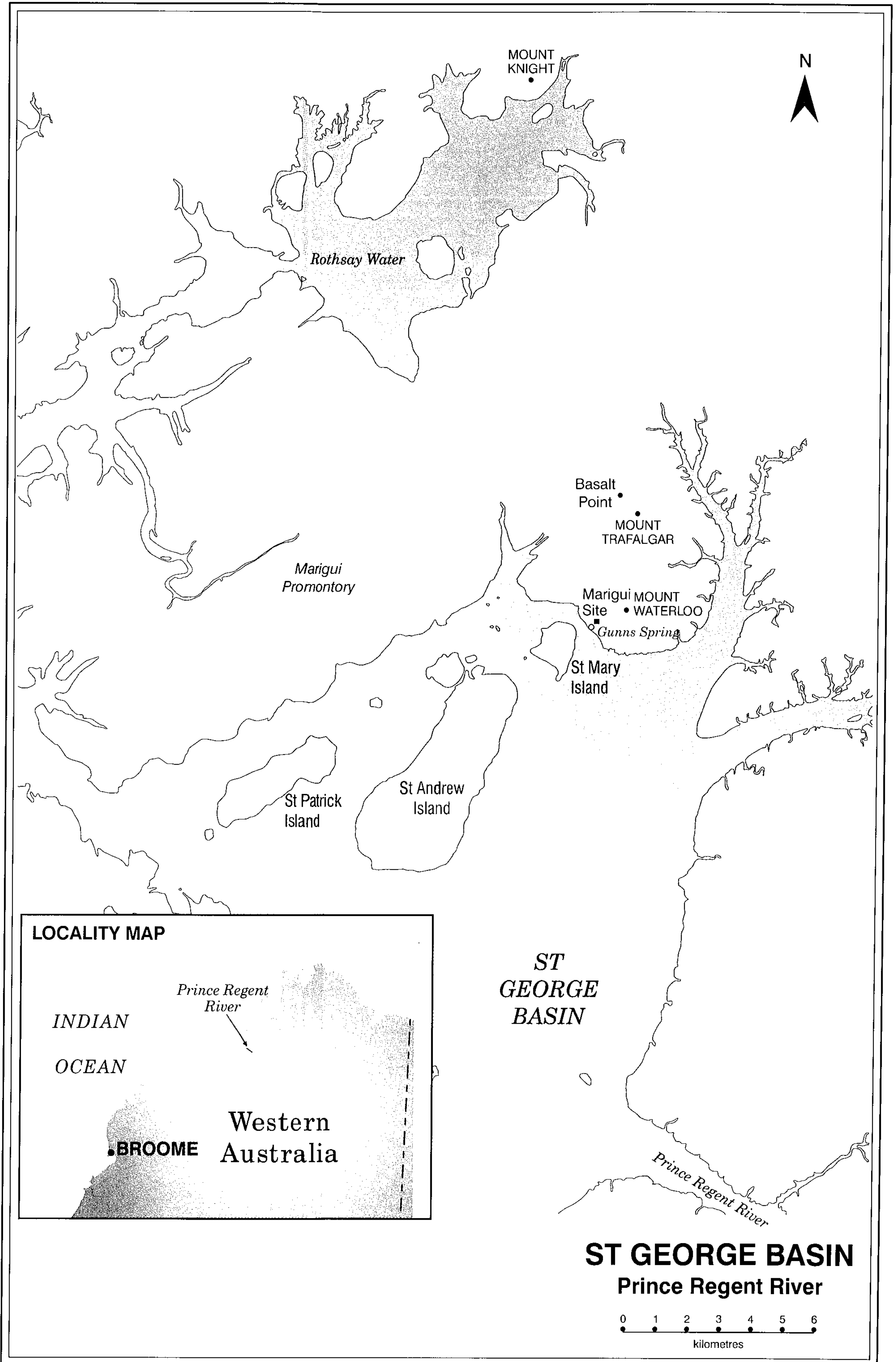
MOUNT KNIGHT
N
Rothsay Water
Marigui Promontory
Basalt Point
MOUNT TRAFALGAR
Marigui Site
MOUNT WATERLOO
Gunns Spring
St Mary Island
St Patrick Island
St Andrew Island
LOCALITY MAP
Prince Regent River
INDIAN
OCEAN
Western Australia
BROOME
ST GEORGE BASIN
Prince Regent River
ST GEORGE BASIN
Prince Regent River
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Gunn's *Newspaper Articles*

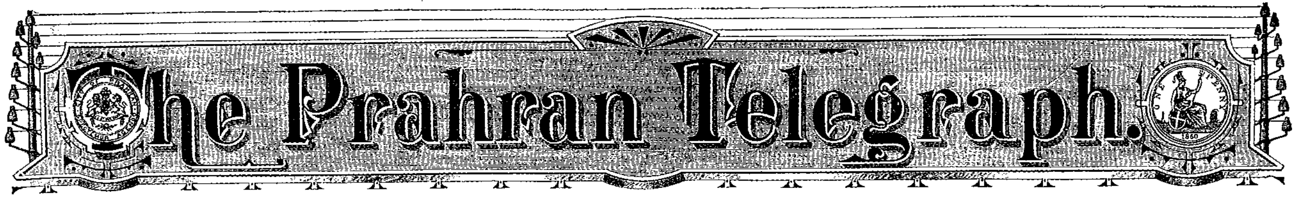
Summary of "Pioneering in Northern Australia"

No.		CONTENTS
1	I	Exploration and settlement of North and North-West Australia;
2	II	Voyage of *The Twins* – Becalmed in the Timor Sea – Kimberley coast – Careening Bay – Prince Regent River – St. George's Basin – Camp near Mt.Waterloo;
3	III	Dangers of Aboriginal attack – Mosquitos – Lack of nets – "Burketown mosquito net" – Mangroves – Sandflies – Suitable clothing;
4	IV	*The Twins* sails for Wyndham – Isolation of Marigui party – Firearms – Aboriginal aggression – Ligar and Mulligan attacked near Victoria River, N.T.;
5	V	Aborigines – Aggressive nature – Physical features – Relationship with other races – Rites and customs – Cannibalism – Letter-sticks – Future prospects;
6	VI	Marigui: birds of the dawn chorus – Green tree or "Fenian" ants – Signs of seasonal change – Difficulties of working in the heat;
7	VII	Musical soirees – Euchre, crib and dominoes – Insect pests – Nocturnal visit of 13 foot python to Mr & Mrs Bradshaw's tent – Observing the Sabbath – Washing, mending and writing letters – Religious service abandoned;
8	VIII	"Willi-Willi" or cyclone – A tremendous "Kokk-i-bob" or thunderstorm – 3.21 inches of rain – Fireflies;
9	IX	Storms – Christmas Day – Bradshaw's ascent of Mt. Waterloo – Mt.Trafalgar – Vegetation – Perilous ascent by Franciso Blanca and Aeneas Gunn – Magnificent panorama – Descent;
10	X	Baobab trees – Link with Africa – Size and shapes – Flower and fruit – Aboriginal food use – Age of trees – Indicator and source of water – Aboriginal and historic trunk carvings;
11	XI	Termites or "white ants" – Society – Destructive habits – Varieties of termite hills – Entombment of stockman Bill of Pine Creek, Northern Territory;
12	XII	*The Twins* returns from Wyndham – Damaged in storm – Loss of four horses – Repairs – Arrival of Hugh Young, Charlie Kolumboi and Phil Du Bois – First encounter with "Wahgomerah" Aborigines and "Rev. John" – Chase up Mt. Trafalgar – Weapons seized – Evidence of tragedy;
13	XIII	Murder of Norwegian pearler Martin Liljroth and companion at Prince Frederick Harbour – Cowardice of Malays – Capt. Biddles' reprisal party;
14	XIV	Punitive expedition beyond Mt.Trafalgar – Discovery of basalt downs – Sighting and pursuit – Aboriginal camp and weapons – Fruitless search of mangroves;
15	XV	Misery in the mangroves – Dehydration and fever – Grim tally of Charlie Kolumboi and Franciso Blanca – Fatiguing return to camp;

No. CONTENTS

No.		
16	XVI	Mrs Bradshaw's birthday party – Vegetation in the moonlight – Sounds of the night: birds and frogs – Swashbuckling party dress – Music, song and recitals – Auld Lang Syne – Bradshaw: a heroic figure – Thwarted plan to exploit New Guinea – Annexation by Queensland Government.;
17	XVII	Hard labour in January – Carrying materials ashore – March flies – Estuarine crocodiles – Loss of Dubois' collie dog – Fate of a trophy crocodile skin;
18	XVIII	*The Twins* departs for Derby with Mrs Bradshaw – Shore party timber-cutting for house-building – Bush musicians – Bob Johnson: a talented negro singer and harmonica player – Bullocky Sam: a concertina maestro;
19	XIX	An illusion of fireflies – Gunn's gift: supersensual powers of discernment – Advantage in childhood – Aboriginal interest in old bottles – Dubois' nocturnal perambulations – Old man "Solitary" and son: Aboriginal scouts – Multitude of asthmatic "mopokes" – Warrior caught in a shaft of light – Shots in the night – Narrow escape from massacre;
20	XX	Horseback excursions – House and dam building – Fencing – Benefits of idleness – Termites and pythons – A week of rain;
21	XXI	*The Twins* returns from Derby – Tale of outward voyage – Almost wrecked in Camden Sound – Dan Darroch's heroic rudder repairs – Perils of Derby roadstead – Mrs Bradshaw transferred to steamer *Australind* – Bradshaw purchases sheep and horses – Pearlers of Cygnet Bay – Recruitment of two West Indian negroes and five Sunday Islanders;
22	XXII	Pleasure of newspapers and letters from family and friends;
23	XXIII	Marigui: no place for a gourmet – Food problems: flour, sugar, salt beef, jam and antique lime juice – Failure of poultry – Lack of game in wet season – Bushfruits – Dangers of eating unidentified fruits and tubers – Antics of sheep poisoned by purple lily;
24	XXIV	Epicurean Patrick White of Auvergne Station, Northern Territory – Scathing about settlers' reliance on beef and damper and stockmen on "lizarding" – Modern stockman's improved diet – Various cooks: their virtues and failings – Phil Du Bois, Bob Johnson, Konran Von Engel and Tang Ta – Water supply flavoured by a corpse.

A plant specimen label from the Herbarium of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne (in Ferdinand Mueller's handwriting) denoting the new species, *Triumfetta bradshawii*, described from the material collected by Joseph Bradshaw, and named in his honour.



PIONEERING IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

By AENEAS J. GUNN, F.R.G.S.

Saturday May 20, 1899

No. I.

When Marcus Clarke bestowed on Australia the title of "The Land of the Dawning," the epithet was happy and apposite, as it left the imagination plenty of space to fill up with pictures of the possibilities of our immense and fertile land[1]. But many a blue day has dawned since the words were written, and the parts of Australia Marcus Clarke knew and described so well, can now no longer be characterised in the picturesque terms he employed. Southern, Eastern, and a considerable portion of Western Australia, have already "dawned," and the bizarre features that made the likeness so true at the time it was written have in a large measure disappeared. They have been destroyed, pushed aside, or forced back like the black fellow, the kangaroo, and the emu by the ever onward marching of the invincible forces of civilization until now, in the whole of our broad land, they are only met with in the Never-Never-land, the arid deserts of Central Australia, and the wild sparsely-settled districts of the North Australian littoral. But still, in this continent, such conditions as Marcus Clarke described, do prevail, and there is yet a large tract of country that is fitly described as either *Terra Incognita*[2] Australia, or the Land of the Dawning, and it is the purpose of these papers to give some account of these "new and naked lands."

Those portions of Australia, washed by the tepid Arafura and Timor seas, and marked on old maps as Arnhem's Land, De Witt's Land, Dampier's Land and Tasman's Land[3] (all good old names of doughty sea rovers or maritime speculators that should have an imperishable place on the charts for the very association of the names, be they British, Portuguese or Dutch), and now called the Northern Territory and the East and West Kimberley comprise many thousands of square miles upon which the sun of progress has not yet dawned, upon which the very initial steps of settlement have not yet been set, and upon many of which they never will be set. Still on many of them the ever resolute army of Australian pioneers – the squatters – that has steadily, step by step, marched in the van of Australian enterprise is surely advancing. Already, with its handful of tame black boys and its straggling team of pack horses, it has driven its mobs of cattle and flocks of sheep across the trackless, waterless miles of "the ruthless Australasian wastes," and settled in scattered detachments over wide areas of country, facing, with indomitable courage, fierce privations, want, drought and lively dangers in doing so; and it was as a humble private in this worthy Australian Corps of "the unlisted legion" that I gained the experience which comprises the personal matter of these notes. However, before giving my own experiences, which may after all possess only a personal interest, it might be instructive to give a summarised account of the much more praiseworthy exploits of the early navigators and explorers who "were the very first that ever burst upon those silent scenes"[4] and have given such admirable accounts of their adventures in many graphic pages of their journals. I do this advisedly, as I feel that Australians generally, and city Australians particularly, know too little of the noble and disinterested labors of the heroic band of adventurers who have opened their land to profitable occupation.

Dampier, the first English voyager to these regions, left the coast in disgust before he reached the part to which I relate. The Dutch navigators left nothing but their names upon the map. De Freycinet[5] in 1788 skimmed the coast and labelled many a bold island and rugged headland with the great names of France. In 1820 Captain King[6], in the ill-found 80 ton cutter "Mermaid," with no little heroism, boldly explored the coast, ventured where it seems almost a miracle he should have reached and a still greater marvel that he should ever have escaped to recount his adventures. On his recommendation successive attempts at colonization under unpractical military rule were made in 1824 at Raffles Bay and Fort Dundas, Melville Island, and subsequently some years later at Port Essington, in Arnhem's Land[7]. All in a few years languished and were abandoned owing to want of the requisite experience in their government, thereby casting a damning stigma on the Northern Territory, which is only now wearing off. Sir George Grey[8], that noble personage who has figured with such conspicuous honor in so many and various episodes of colonial and imperial expansion, in 1837 outdid his numerous other achievements by sojourning for many months, with a small band, in the wild but romantically beautiful country that surrounds the fine harbours of Camden, Brecknock and Port George the Fourth. Beset by hostile blacks, his party enfeebled by sickness incidental to the hot wet season, wounded by a blackfellow's spear, he did wonders of exploration in despite of extraordinary privations, and laid us under

tribute by the discovery of the rich and fertile valley of the Glenelg river. Following closely in Sir George Grey's wake came in the "Beagle", Captains Stokes and Wickham[9], intrepid mariners both, who still further explored the coast and enriched geographical knowledge at the time by many valuable discoveries. Then for nearly 20 years not a keel but those of Malay trepang proas ploughed the slumbering seas[10]. The reign of solitude was unbroken until Gregory, accompanied by Baron Von Mueller[11], landed on the Victoria River from the schooner "Tom Tough" and the ship "Monarch," explored the lower reaches of the river, discovered the magnificent pastoral downs of its hinterland, crossed the territory into Queensland and so on down to Moreton Bay. While Burke and Wills[12] were hopelessly squandering the exceptional advantages that a splendid equipment provided them with, J.Macdouall Stuart[13], with a small band and limited equipment, was slowly but surely plodding his way across the hopeless wastes of the Centre to the northern seaboard. He reached his goal in 1861, touched salt water in Van Diemen Gulf and accomplished the finest achievement in the whole annals of Australian exploration. Early in the sixties a Victorian Company, enthused by the glowing descriptions Sir George Grey had given of the country about the Glenelg River, established a settlement on Camden Harbour. The country was unsuitable for the purpose to which it was put – sheep breeding. The enterprise ended in disaster and all that remains to mark the site of the station are a few ruined stone houses, some tenanted graves on Cemetery Island[14] and a few head of weedy "brumbies"[15]. For twenty years after that no further exploration of the Kimberley district, or De Witt's Land[16], was attempted until Alec Forrest[17] travelled across the now inhabited portion of the Kimberley district, made a note, with a keen eye for its value, of the country through which he passed, and shortly afterwards the barque "Amur" carried the first cargo of sheep up the Fitzroy river (discovered by Stokes) and the present satisfactory pastoral occupation of the Kimberley district was inaugurated. Meanwhile MacKinlay[18] and others were exploring the Northern Territory. A settlement under Colonel Finniss[19] was established at Escape Cliffs but was relinquished on account of dissensions in the party. The township of Palmerston on the picturesque shores of Port Darwin was founded a little later. Sir Charles Todd[20] steadily, stolidly in face of almost insuperable obstacles, marched his line of telegraph poles in Indian file across the continent towards Port Darwin, and linking them together with a subtle sensate wire, put Australia in almost vital touch with her sister continents by uniting the submarine and overland systems at Palmerston in 1872. From that date practically commences the history of the Northern Territory. A few adventurous pastoralists had followed the line of Stuart's march. Private prospecting parties were going to and fro through the land, seeking mineral and pastoral country. D'Arcy Uhr[21] discovered gold in the Pine Creek district. Settlement spread like magic over the auriferous country. The West Australian Government despatched, Hardman[22], its geologist to the Kimberley district. Hardman made a wonderful painstaking examination of the geological features of the extreme North West, and indicating the likelihood of the existence of gold near Hall's Creek and the Margaret, the precious metal was a little while afterwards found by a party of prospectors and the now historic rush to the Kimberley took place. But the belt of country stretching from Cambridge Gulf to King Sound, and immediately north of Forrest's line[23], was still *Terra incognita*. It was not until late in the last decade that Joseph Bradshaw, my principal, imagining that some hidden wealth lay behind its forbidding ranges, organised a small expedition, penetrated its fastnesses and discovered many fine waters and much excellent grazing land. He secured a large pastoral concession, embracing 3,000,000 acres[24], from the West Australian Government, and it was in connection with his enterprise in that Ultima Thule[25] my acquaintance with the land, labor and conditions of life in North Australia began.

[1] The phrase "The Land of the Dawning" was made by Marcus Clarke in the preface to Adam Lindsay Gordon's *Sea Spray & Smoke Drift* (1867).

[2] *Terra incognita*: Unknown land (Latin).

[3] And marked on old maps as Arnhem's Land, De Witt's Land, Dampier's Land and Tasman's Land: Vast tracts of the Australian coastline were named by early sailors. Arnhem's Land was all of the northern coast, lying to the east of North West Cape and extending to the Gulf of Carpentaria. It was discovered in 1618 by Zeachen; De Witt's Land extended north from the Tropic of Capricorn to the present Western Australian/Northern Territory border; Dampier's Land extended from the Pilbara coast north to King Sound and overlapped De Witt's Land; Tasman's Land (or Van Diemen's Land) was discovered by Abel Jans Tasman in 1642 during a voyage of discovery into the South Sea.

[4] The phrase "were the very first that ever burst upon those silent scenes": appears to be a misquotation from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, part ii, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834): "We were the first that ever burst into that silent sea."

[5] De Freycinet in 1788: The year given by Gunn is incorrect. The French names of the Kimberley coast derive from the Baudin Expedition in 1801–03, on which Louis de Freycinet prepared the charts and was later given command of the schooner *Casuarina*.

[6] Captain King: Philip Parker King carried out hydrographic surveys of the Australian coast in the *Mermaid* and *Bathurst* between 1818 and 1822. He was accompanied by the plant collector Allan Cunningham. An account of his voyages was published as a *Narrative of a survey of the intertropical and Western coast of Australia, performed between the years 1818 and 1821*. Two volumes, John Murray, London, 1827. A more popular account of his voyages is found in Marsden Hordern's book *King of the Australian coast*, The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne University Press, 1997.

[7] Raffles Bay; Fort Dundas; Melville Island; Port Essington; Arnhem's Land: Are all located on or adjacent to the coastline

of the Northern Territory. Raffles Bay was named by P.P. King in 1818 and commemorates Sir Stamford Raffles the Lieutenant Governor of the Island of Java. Fort Dundas was established as a military trading post on Melville Island in 1824 by Captain (later Sir) Gordon Bremer. Melville Island was named by P.P. King after Viscount Melville, the First Lord of the Admiralty. It lies to the north of Darwin and is separated from the mainland by Apsley Strait. Arnhem's Land was named after the Dutch ship Arnhem recorded as the first European vessel to make contact with the Northern Territory coast in 1623. Port Essington (on the Coburg Peninsula) was named by P.P. King after Vice-Admiral Sir William Essington. The first attempt at settlement here took place in 1824 but was abandoned, due to lack of water, and moved to Fort Dundas on Melville Island. In 1838 the Victoria Settlement was established at Port Essington. This settlement was abandoned in 1839.

Alfred Searcy quotes Gunn verbatim from "In 1820" to "wearing off", see *In Northern Seas* (1905) p. 64.

[8] Sir George Grey: Lieutenant George Grey (1812-98) came to Australia after serving with the British army in Ireland. He proposed to the Colonial Office in London that he lead an expedition to find a site for settlement in north-western Australia. In 1837 and 1838 Grey led two expeditions – during the first he was speared by Aborigines, and on the second he was shipwrecked. Accounts of these journeys were published in George Grey, *Journal of two expeditions of discovery in north-west and Western Australia during the years 1837, 1838 and 1839,* 2 vols, T. and W. Boone, London, 1841.

[9] Stokes and Wickham: John Lort Stokes and John Clements Wickham carried out hydrographic surveys of the Australia coast between 1837 and 1843. Significant discoveries included Port Darwin and the Victoria River in the Northern Territory. Their voyages of exploration were published as J. Lort Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia; with an account of the coasts and rivers explored and surveyed during the voyages of HMS Beagle, in the years 1837, 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, 1843,* Vol.1, T. and W. Boone, London, 1846; and by J.C. Wickham as "Outline of the survey of part of the north-west coast of Australia in HMS Beagle, in 1838, *Royal Geographical Society Journal,* Vol.8, 1838. A more popular account of their voyages can be found in Marsden Hordern's book *Mariners are warned,* The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne University, 1989.

[10] Trepang proas: trepang: bêche-de-mer, Holothurian sea cucumber, a marine slug, sought after for the Chinese market;

proas: traditional wooden sailing craft of the Indonesian region, usually with lateen sails.

[11] Gregory, accompanied by Baron Von Mueller: Sir Augustus Charles Gregory (1819-1905), was a surveyor in Western Australia and later Surveyor-General in Queensland. Gregory explored the north-west of Western Australia, Queensland and later the Northern Territory. Sir Ferdinand Jakob Heinrich Mueller (1825-96) was Government Botanist, in Victoria from 1852-96). He was probably the greatest Australian botanist and, in his time, the most famous scientist in the southern hemisphere. In 1855-56 he was attached as botanist to A. C. Gregory's expedition searching for traces of missing explorer Dr Ludwig Leichhardt (1813-48). The plants collected on this expedition were described in a paper by Mueller, "Botanical report on the North Australia exploring expedition, under the command of A. C. Gregory Esq.", *Proceedings of Linnean Society London,* (Botany) 2:p.140, 1858.

[12] Burke and Wills: Robert O'Hara Burke (1821-61) and William Wills. Burke led the first expedition to cross the Australian continent from south to north in 1860-61. William Wills was his second-in-command. His expedition, the first to use camels, departed Melbourne in 1860. After foolishly splitting his party he and Wills made a dash to the Gulf of Carpentaria arriving in February 1861. Burke and Wills perished on the return journey.

[13] J. MacDouall Stuart: John MacDouall Stuart (1815-66) arrived in South Australia in 1839 and undertook work as a surveyor. He accompanied Charles Sturt on expeditions in the 1840's. He experienced great success when he led northern expeditions in search of gold, pastoral land and stock routes in the 1850's. In 1861-62 he became the first explorer to cross the continent from south to north and survive. His explorations served as a foundation for the overland telegraph line to Darwin.

[14] Cemetery Island: presumably Sheep Island, which had seven known burials in 1864–65.

[15] "brumbies": Australian expression for wild unbroken horses.

[16] De Witt's Land: Comprises all that portion of the west coast of Australia, lying between the Tropic of Capricorn and the parallel of 15 degrees south longitude. It was discovered in 1628, on behalf of the Dutch East India Company, and commemorates the name of the commodore who commanded the fleet.

[17] Alec Forrest: Alexander Forrest (1839-1901) was an explorer and entrepeneur. Alexander and his brother John (later Sir John, the first premier of Western Australia) began as surveyors. They achieved early prominence through transcontinental expeditions in 1870 and 1874. In 1879 Alexander explored the Kimberley region and published an account of his journey "North-west exploration: Journal of expedition from De Grey to Port Darwin" Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council (Western Australia), 1880, Paper No. 3. The only biography of Alexander Forrest is by G. C. Bolton; *Alexander Forrest: His life and times,* Melbourne University Press, 1958.

[18] MacKinlay: John McKinlay came from Scotland and farmed at Gawler, South Australia. "Ten thousand miles of adventure and a name among the explorers he won in the years in between. Searching for Burke and Wills in 1861, he crossed the continent from Lake Eyre to Carpentaria, first to drive sheep and cattle, as stores for his expedition, through the Queensland west. With a presentation gold watch from the Royal Geographical Society, he had settled down to a quiet time when the South Australian Government called him to follow the no-hoper [Boyle] Finniss, to find the capital and the colony in the north". Ernestine Hill, *The Territory,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1951, pp. 86-87.

[19] Colonel Finnis: Colonel Boyle Travis Finnis was a partner of the founder of Adelaide (South Australia), Colonel William Light. In April 1864 he led a party, by sea, to Escape Cliffs at Adam Bay near the mouth of the Adelaide River in the Northern Territory. On 1st July 1864 the party proclaimed a colony "around a barrel of beer in a tent" (Ernestine Hill, *The Territory,* 1951, p. 83). However, dissension among the group, attributed to the "incapacity and misconduct" by the Territory's first Government Resident Finnis, led to the abandonment of the settlement. An account of the settlement and its difficulties appears in Pickman Stow's, *The voyage of the Forlorn Hope from Escape Cliffs to Champion Bay 1865,* Sullivan's Cove, 1981.

[20] Sir Charles Todd: Charles Heavitree Todd (1826-1910) supervised the building of the overland telegraph line, between 1870 and 1872, from Port Augusta, South Australia, to Darwin in the Northern Territory.

[21] D'Arcy Uhr: D'Arcy Wentworth Uhr, drove 400 head of cattle from Charters Towers (Queensland) to Darwin (Northern Territory) in 1872.

[22] Hardman: In 1882 Edward Townley Hardman of the Geological Survey of Ireland was appointed Government Geologist for Western Australia. He became a pioneer geologist of the far north of Western Australia and his expeditions during the years 1882-84 laid the foundations of geological knowledge of the Kimberley. His publications include "Report on the geology of the Kimberley district, Western Australia", Votes and Proceedings, Western Australia, 1885, No. 34.

[23] Forrest's line: the exploration route of Alexander Forrest in 1879.

[24] 3,000,000 acres: 1,214,574.9 hectares. In fact, Bradshaw's pastoral empire in the Kimberley never exceeded 1,000,000 acres (404, 858 ha).

[25] Ultima Thule: the remotest northern point in the Roman world, variously identified with the Shetland Islands, Iceland, Norway etc.

Saturday May 27, 1899

No. II.

On a steaming day in October, nearly a decade ago, the ketch rigged schooner "Gemini", 40 tons register, bound from Melbourne to the Prince Regent River, lay helplessly wallowing in the long lazy swell of the Timor Sea[1]. Moving about her decks (hampered with hen-coops, dogs, dog-kennels, and a predacious nanny and billy goat), or reclining wherever the sails cast a scanty shade from the vertical rays of the sun, were twelve roasting human beings. The twelve represented the "ship's" company and the personnel of the party that was to form the first white settlement at Marigui on the Prince Regent River. Two of the party were women – Mrs Bradshaw, wife of the organiser and owner of the settlement, and her maid[2]. The male section of the little community on the crowded decks comprised Mr Bradshaw, the captain, the writer, whose nominal function was ordinary seaman, the mate, three A.B's. [able bodies], a Chinese cook, and two boys[3]. All twelve remained on deck because they preferred being roasted to being boiled. A descent into the forecastle or the cabins was a foretaste of a similar journey into Avernus[4]. All looked vainly for the cat's paw[5] that was to herald a breeze. One besought San Antonio to blow and rumble the mast[6]. Another blew that low hissing whistle sailors use to arouse tardy Boreas from his lair[7]. The captain, a thin, nervous, wiry Scotsman, with a red face and a bibulous nose, walked the limited deck space with an impatience that had been growing for nine days. Occasionally he would dive into the cabin, viciously tap the "Set fair" barometer, vent his rage in passionate curses, and come on deck looking redder than before.

Not a breath of air had frosted the sea with a friendly cat's paw for nine weary days, during which days the sun had shed its intolerable tropic rays on the little vessel until she sweated pitch from every seam –

> Day after day, day after day,
> We stuck, nor breath, nor motion,
> As idle as a painted ship,
> Upon a painted ocean[8].

Day after day the regular oily undulations of the sea, glistening and glancing in the glowing sunshine, resembled a gigantic sheet of galvanised iron, to the corrugations of which some mysterious agent had imparted motion. For nine blistering days we had been doomed to listen to the dismal, idle flapping of the empty sails, to the banging of the blocks, to the thudding tugs of sheets and guys that threatened to wrench the cleats and runners from the deck and stanchions, as the schooner fell splashing into the trough of the sea.

The hot air was laden with an offensive musty smell that came from long yellow bands of foetid "whale feed," which rose and fell on the greasy waves like floating sandbanks. It seemed as if

> The very deep did rot: O Christ!
> That ever this should be.
> Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
> Upon the slimy sea[8].

Ungainly jelly fish, many of them redeemed from hideousness by rich markings of rings and fringes in blue, green and purple and magenta, with sprawling tentacles pushed through the water. Yellow and black or green or buff sea snakes rose to the surface and wriggled over the waves or floated in the whale feed. Quaint flotillas of swimming crabs paddled past us and mocked our laggard progress. Lazy sharks with leering, beady eyes rolled in the cool green shadows of the vessel's hull. At night the incandescent glow of the stars was reflected in shimmering lines of silvern light on the glassy water. Phosphorescent fires lit the sea with a pale uncanny glow, or blazed into white flames where the schooner lurched into the water. At last, on the tenth morning after leaving Port Darwin, a cat's paw was seen dimpling the face of the water ahead. A faint air came aft. It grew and strengthened. The sails filled and the sheets tautened. A soft prattle, that had at first welcomed the light air, became a continuous song round the bows. The "Gemini" with a saucy grace in her shapely prow, commenced to romp with the laughing waves that ran athwart the swell. A long wake, like a well marked waggon track over green hummocks, was left astern as we sped goosewinged before the lively breeze that freshened every moment. Shortly afterwards Cape Londonderry, the most northerly point of the West Australian mainland, was "picked up." The run thence to the Prince Regent River was along a coast, the scenery of which is to the voyager a long panorama of wild grandeur. Huge scowling cliffs and bluffs of sandstone frown with red-hot angry faces on intruding ship and encroaching sea. The faces are scarred, gashed and wrinkled by the eternal onslaught of the elements. Centuries of ceaseless change have contorted the mountain masses into wild fantastic shapes, or built

them into semblances of ruined towered cities, battered fortresses or crumbling amphitheatres. The pushing tides have gnawed deep bays, long reaches, and wide harbours out of their stern adamantine walls or wrenched from them masses of rugged rocky islands.

Day by day we sped past towering islands, clad with rich folds of tropical vegetation from rocky base to flat-topped summit, past tall commanding promontories with rounded basalt bases, down narrow channels fretted through wild lines of ragged rocks, and through noble straits dotted with islands and indented by secret coves and broad bays. At night the schooner, like a tired bird, would fold its wings and rest in some quiet haven hewn out of rocky hills, or lie rolling to her anchor in some wide gulf, for the course is sown with coral reefs, sunken rocks and sandy shoals, and night sailing is not indulged in by the most reckless mariner of those waters. Even by day, navigation, without local knowledge, has to be conducted to "the sound of the sobbing lead," with the assistance of a mast head lookout, the immense range of tides, varying according to locality from four to seven fathoms, putting a quite different aspect on the face of the water every trip one makes. No one who has not sailed every mile of the coast at dead low water of spring tides can be said to know it. There were, however, at least nine pairs of more or less intelligent eyes on the course of the "Gemini", and without mishap we came to anchor in Careening Bay, Port Nelson, on the outskirts of the Prince Regent possession. Two essential requisites for our settlement were a good harbor and a plentiful supply of fresh water sufficiently close to the shore to be availed of by shipping. The harbor of Port Nelson answered all requirements being commodious, almost land locked and deep water close in shore, but no fresh water could be found near enough to the shipping port. The only interesting discovery that was made being a Baobab tree, which Captain King had marked when careening the "Mermaid" seventy years before. In foot letters, perfectly clear after the lapse of so many years, stood on the broad grey trunk of the tree, the memorial–

H.M.C.
MERMAID
1820.

Lacking water, the country round Port Nelson lacked everything, though it lacked nothing else, and a course was shaped for the Prince Regent River.

The Prince Regent River is one of the many noble streams that penetrate far into the silent solitudes of the North Australian littoral, and provide ample highways for whatever commerce may result from settlement on their banks and basins. For seventy miles of its course it is navigable by the largest vessel afloat, further navigation being barred by a wall of sandstone that runs across its stream. The river enters the sea at Hanover Bay, about midway between the two most northerly towns of West Australia – Wyndham on Cambridge Gulf and Derby on King Sound. For the first few miles of its course it is a wide tide torn area of seething water fenced by low ragged hills and points of broken sandstone, overgrown by hardy timbers, wiry herbage and grasses, and hedged along the shore by struggling growths of mangroves. A few miles from the mouth its course is contracted to half a mile by a tall towering wall of sandstone, then it gradually opens out into a long, straight, spacious stream, walled on one side by steep cliffs hundreds of feet high. On the other side for a few miles the shore line is low and broken, but as it sweeps back from the river, rocks piled on rocks, build hills, and hills piled on hills, form long, wild mountain ranges. On the port side the tall cliffs take a sharp turn and disclose a noble panorama of water and landscape. A great shimmering sheet of water, called St. George's Basin, lies in a wide hollow in bold ranges, everywhere softened at the water's edge by soft green masses of mangrove foliage. Large islands of basalt and sandstone occupy its northern spaces. A slender strip of shining straits flows between them and the northern rim of the basin, where stand in bold outline a succession of tall cliffs and noble headlands, set off by emerald gullies of tropical verdure. Mounts Trafalgar and Waterloo, two lofty peaks of remarkable aspect, built of terrace upon terrace of brown basalt, overgrown by a rank and luxuriant vegetation, and capped with summits of red faced sunburnt sandstone, bathe their mangrove-slippered feet in the north-east corner of the basin. Into the midst of this scene, gliding ghostlike on the strong flood tide, swept the schooner with her expectant community of souls. A search for water was at once instituted, and after several days' careful examination a strong spring was found trickling to the shore through a grove of pandanus palms on the western slope of Mount Waterloo. On the 11th November the old station log records, "Some tents were taken ashore to-day and pitched beneath some Baobab trees on a plateau between the base of Mount Waterloo and the seashore, and about 200 yards up the rise from Gunn's Spring," and on November 12th the record runs, "After tea to-night Mr. and Mrs. Bradshaw and Mr. Gunn were rowed ashore in the moonlight, and commenced the occupation of the territory by sleeping ashore, making the tents their temporary residence."

[1] Gemini: the vessel's registered name was, in fact *The Twins* (Official No. 78069). Hull measurements were 66.2 ft. x 16 ft. x 6 ft. She had one deck, two masts, a round stern and a standing bowsprit; carvel-built at East Devonport, Tasmania in 1880 by the boat-builder Edward Higgs. The unusual name celebrated the birth of twin sons to Higgs' wife Mary. *The Twins* was initially registered at Launceston. In April 1884, the vessel struck the notorious Lonsdale Reef but was recovered and repaired. Higgs later sold *The Twins* to a Gippsland brewery, from where Bradshaw in turn acquired the vessel. [Information courtesy of Maritime Museum of Tasmania, Hobart.]

[2] Her maid: i.e. Mrs Du Bois.

[3] The captain: never named anywhere in the text but believed to be T. Bannetyne (see the *Argus* of Wednesday 5 August 1891). However, an earlier shipping column in the *Argus* of Saturday 1 August 1891 has the captain as "T. Bannetzal".

[4] Avernus: the entrance to the underworld in Roman mythology and believed to be a volcanic crater-lake, west of Naples; it is nowadays known as Lago Averno in Italian.

[5] cat's paw: slight breeze rippling the water.

[6] San Antonio: St. Anthony.

[7] Boreas: the north wind in Greek mythology.

[8] The verses commencing "Day after day" and "The very deep did rot" are from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834).

Saturday June 3, 1899

No. III.

When we were passing through Port Darwin, on our way to the North-west, we were solemnly assured on all hands that we were going to a certain martyrdom in the cause of Australian enterprise. The natives on the Prince Regent River were reputed to be the most truculent savages on the Australian mainland, and we were informed that if our party were allowed to affect a landing at all, it would certainly be massacred and eaten the very first night it camped ashore. But Port Darwin people, with the notable exceptions of Alfred Searcy, the collector of Customs, Gustav Sabine, the Government Surveyor, and one or two others, are only glorified Cocknies doomed to live on the highest salaries, at the best tables, in the blandest climate, on the loveliest harbour in Australia and know very little about wild life or wild blackfellows[1]. Most of our party knew, if possible less, but we had plenty of confidence in our leader, Mr. Bradshaw, who had come through many a tough tussle and tight place in the course of a long experience of overlanding and settling throughout Australia, and when he, Mrs. Bradshaw, and I commenced the occupation of the territory by camping ashore, there was not a tremulous nerve in the three of us. An inaccuracy has crept into the old station log in recording that event. We are described as "sleeping ashore." One of us has a painfully vivid recollection that one at least did no such thing. A worse enemy than any prowling savage was abroad. It came not as single spies, but in battalions and it murdered sleep. Sancho Panza invoked a blessing on the man who first invented sleep[2]. Had he been squiring Don Quixote through North Australia he would have called down a thousand blessings on the inventor of the travelling mosquito net, for without it sleep is impossible. There are some Northerners who profess to be impervious to mosquito bites. There are few of them and they are principally impervious to truth. They nearly all carry nets, or make use of "Burketown mosquito nets" to deaden their feelings[3]. A Burketown net is popularly defined as "a skinful of snake juice." Our equipment, fitted up regardless of expense in other respects, lacked mosquito nets (it had even only a limited supply of the Burketown variety), and when the Prince Regent mosquitos commenced to pipe the first querulous strains from their soul-stirring serio-tragic opera of Ruddigore and began to take long draughts of our blood by way of liquid refreshment, we wished we had forgotten our rifles and revolvers and remembered our mosquito nets[4]. We resorted to all sorts of devices to ward off the assaults of the "Scots Greys," "Coldstream Guards," "Royal Sappers," and "Pile Drivers," as the various brigades of northern mosquitos are suggestively named, but without avail, and we were destined to listen to the droning of their pipes, and to endure their venomous punctures during the whole of the first and many succeeding nights of our stay there. Perhaps in devoting so much space to so small a subject as the *Culex pipiens*, one is sinning against proportion, but the little tormentor makes many pointed claims to be considered a problem in North Australian settlement, and generally succeeds in getting the claims recognised[5]. The insect pests, the heat, and a variety of complaints resulting from it, are usually reckoned infinitely greater nuisances than the more considerable drawbacks to life in North Australia, as they militate more persistently and directly against one's personal comfort. It is comparatively easy to be heroic in the face of great danger, to be stoical while undergoing great pain and to be a philosopher amid privations and hardships, but when we are assailed by a lot of lesser evils, our heroism vanishes and our stoical philosophy dissolves into petulant ill-humour. I have known a man, who would face a mob of hostile blackfellows single-handed with perfect composure, to quail with abject fear if he thought a centipede desired to share his mosquito net, of such peculiar essence is courage. And our sojourn in those huge heartless solitudes was to make us acquainted with many strange bed-fellows, many unique experiences and many sinister situations.

The first trying task that fell to our lot was to cut a track through the mangroves that fringe the shore, so that the schooner's boats could pass freely to and from the coast with cargo. The mangrove is one of the most characteristic growths of North Australia and is the chief agent in land reclamation wherever it can get root hold. It is the fabled Antaeus in the form of a tree[6]. A seed is deposited by the tide on a detritus bank. A long, slender green shoot rises from it and throws out branches. It swells into a trunk. From the trunk are shot out aerial roots that take an elliptical course and strike into the mud at all angles. From those roots others are projected and they, too, reach the mud. Then the boughs begin to expand and drop down more roots from their extremities. The tree blossoms, bears fruit, and drops seeds which spring up and expand in the way the parent plant has done. Each fresh shoot and new root supplies a new source of vitality to the tree and renders it practically imperishable. A dense far reaching jungle of interlacing roots, trunks, and boughs is formed.

Standing knee-deep in the water, or often completely submerged at high tide, the jungle entangles floating matter and matter held in suspension by the water in its ramification of branches and roots. Drops it on to the bank as the tide recedes and it becomes embedded in the mud. The flotsam and jetsam of the tide are embraced, stranded and held by the long grasping arms. More detritus deposits are left. Decayed vegetable and marine matter, the washings of rivers and shores are carried into the net-work of roots and branches and are permanently arrested. The level of the bank gradually rises as layer after layer of matter is added to it until it becomes permanent dry land. There are many such delta lands at the mouths of northern rivers held in position by the grasping, binding habits of the mangrove that would otherwise be mere shifting mud banks. The heavy glossy foliage of the trees makes a roof through which the sunshine strives in vain to penetrate. A dense, humid, miasmal atmosphere is generated in the thick shadows. Sandflies of unusual venom are bred in the mud. The secret places of the impenetrable jungle are haunted by alligators, and to cut a passage a hundred yards long through such a place is to acquire an experience one never forgets. The heat is stifling, and permeated with an offensive odor. The axe sinks into a hollow trunk and a Hadean stench is exuded[7]. A hand is scratched by a decaying bough and a virulent blood poison is introduced to the system. The sandflies sink their venom into every bare patch of skin, and dozens of irritating swellings are raised all over one's anatomy. The common field flies (much too common in these regions) add their torments to the Inferno by coming out in millions from the shore and commence climbing, crawling, creeping peregrinations over one's face and body, prying, probing, peeping, peering into nostrils, eyes, ears, and mouth, from which it is impossible to dislodge them except by using hands covered with loathsome mud that reeks with poisonous matter[8]. Our hands and legs were scratched and sore, and the flies with the instincts of the realist, found out the festering spots and made them worse with their noxious attentions. But the track was put through, and looking back over the years it seems to me we accomplished naught else so heroic in the whole course of our Northern career. We may have done many things that would appeal more directly to the imagination, but there was not one of us who would not sooner have fought a hundred blackfellows single-handed than do five minutes work in that fever bed, with the sun pouring down on our heads 140 degrees of boiling liquid heat.

The climate of North Australia is invariably warm, except when it is hot, hotter, or hottest; very often it is hottest. The thermometer never gets above boiling point, but it often records a degree of heat that makes work quite unnecessary as a means of stimulating blood circulation. Clothing, except in the early morning of the mid-year months, can be comfortably dispensed with. Many of the Northerners never wear anything but a pair of trousers and a hat, very often they dispense with trousers and hat and wear a towel or calico skirt of a width that would make a ballet girl blush through her paint. Sometimes some of them only wear a belt and a revolver. My first adoption of that light and airy costume was fraught with painful experiences. My skin was fresh and soft and the sun raised blisters on my back to the size of dish covers. I persevered, and hordes of March flies, sand-flies, and mosquitos held mammoth Sunday-school picnics on my back. Gradually I got used to those inconveniences pretty much as an eel is reported to get used to skinning. Eventually I could go about quite comfortably in a costume of native modesty, freckles and a cotton handkerchief.

[1] Alfred Searcy (1854–1925), the Collector of Customs: resided in Darwin 1882–1896. Encouraged to write by Jeanie Gunn, he was noted for his laconic books: *In Northern Seas* (1905), *In Australian Tropics* (1909) and *By Flood and Field* (1912). As mentioned by Nesdale (1977, pages 61 & 64) Searcy refers to hunting trips in the Northern Territory with Gunn and quotes Gunn's description of mangroves in his 1905 & 1909 books. In the 1912 volume (pp. 66–68) Searcy recalls a visit to Fort Dundas, Melville Island, on a pearling lugger, in company with Aeneas Gunn.

[2] Sancho Panza invoked a blessing on the man who first invented sleep: see *Don Quixote*, part ii, ch.68, by the Spanish author, Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616). *Don Quixote* was written in 1605.

[3] "Burketown mosquito nets": Burketown is a Queensland outback town near the Gulf of Carpentaria. According to *Australian words and their origins* (1989), one definition of a "Burketown mosquito net" is a bottle of rum and a cowdung fire!

[4] Ruddigore: an opera by Gilbert & Sullivan (1887).

[5] *Culex pipiens*: this mosquito has since been taxonomically reclassified as *C. australasicus, C. katherinensis* etc.

[6] Antaeus: in Greek mythology, an African giant who forced all strangers to wrestle with him, growing stronger each time he touched his mother, the earth.

[7] Hadean: Hades in Greek mythology was the gloomy subterranean abode of departed spirits.

[8] Inferno: Hell, where evil-doers are punished, especially in fire. An allusion to Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Saturday June 10, 1899

No. IV.

After discharging her cargo the schooner was made ready for sea, her tanks were replenished with water from the spring, her hold was filled with black-oat and bundle-bundle grasses, harvested on the hill sides, and she was despatched to Wyndham for the horses, plant and remnant of the original Prince Regent River Exploring Expedition[1]. The party left at Marigui to

maintain the settlement against fire, famine, and the natives, consisted of Messrs Bradshaw, Gunn, Larsen (cook), Franciso Blanca, with Mrs Bradshaw, Mrs Du Bois, and her two children.

The lot of the party left on the station was remote, unfriended, solitary, slow. We were two hundred miles from the nearest township – Derby or King Sound – with which communication was only possible by water. Our next door neighbour was one hundred and fifty miles away, and if we wished to drop in on him for a pannikin of afternoon tea and a quiet game of cribbage in the evening, such was the nature of the country between us, that we would have to travel five hundred miles to carry out the pleasant little social function, and run the gauntlet of many hazards in doing so. The coast was comparatively unfrequented. A pearling lugger, with a swarthy crew of Malays and mixed breeds, might pass the river's mouth now and then, on a prospecting cruise in search of some fresh ground. A small steamer, that buckled the girdle of steamship communication around Australia, passed along the coast once every two months, on her way to and from Port Darwin and the West; but shunning the dangers of the inner route, of some of the lurking reefs on which she had on several occasions fallen foul, gave our seaboard a wide berth[2]. Our only means of communications with civilisation, had any mishap befallen the schooner or a massacre thinned our party, was a crazy old boat, as water tight as a coffee strainer. The most intrepid of us would not have ventured more than a mile from the shore in her, and would probably have had to swim back through alligator-infested waters as a reward for such temerity. However, we had no need to seek escape from our situation. We were amply provisioned for twelve months; and the Maregas, or man-eating natives, of Malay tradition, had given no token of their present existence. That they had at one time been numerous in the neighbourhood was evidenced by well-trodden paths, and their complete disappearance from their old haunts occasioned us much surprise. We were not a large party to repel an attack should they have displayed any hostility. Two of us only were passable shots, and one of the two never levelled a rifle at anything more formidable than kangaroos. The cook was a more dangerous enemy to his friends than to the enemy, and Francisco Blanca had a wild, enthusiastic way of shooting that was costly in the item of cartridges, but likely to be inexpensive to life in the ranks of the enemy. Some of the arms too were not of the type we would have chosen on longer experience. My revolver was a small British Bull-dog that spat "450" bullets with emphasis, but "bucked" and threw high[3]. If I fired at a mark head-high on a tree trunk I was almost sure to bring down a blossom. Our Colts repeating rifles, the sweetest weapons imaginable for fancy practice shooting, had a perverse way of jamming when they ought to have performed their functions with precision and dispatch[4]. Firearms are, after mosquito nets, the most important articles in the equipment of a North Australian settler. They may not always, nor often be required, but the Northern career in which, at some period or other, they do not play an important part is singularly and exceptionally fortunate, and it is essential that they should be reliable and efficient. There are few, if any, of the Northern pioneers who would not prefer to live at peace with the natives. But hostilities are, in the majority of instances, forced upon them. The truth of the matter is that the blackfellow is almost everywhere a refractory ore in the crucible of civilization and does not submit readily to its processes. He almost invariably opposes the inevitable and invincible march of progress, and his case has to be tried under the eternal, implacable natural law of the survival of the fittest. Practically he contributes less than nothing to the development of the country. He kills the squatters' cattle, horses and sheep in wanton lust of blood, and he often spears the squatter's men for the sake of seeing them wriggle and writhe in mortal agony. Hardly a station has been settled or a goldfield opened without the sacrifice of one or more valuable lives. The roads to the Kimberley gold-fields[5] are lined by graves of men killed in cold blood by the blacks. And many a station has a little fenced mound that tells the same pathetic tale. Southern people and Exeter Hall philanthropists[6], to whom the blackfellow is either a name or a bogie to scare children with, have got the impression that the whites are often murdered because they interfere with the blackfellow's women. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the accusation is a contemptible slander. Fully half the murders are committed in places where whites have seldom or never been before, and by tribes with whom travellers have had no previous intercourse. Many of the outrages have been perpetrated upon harmless inoffensive people who have been travelling through the country for the first time. A long and convincing list in support of this contention could be made out, but a few unimpeachable instances from the records of early explorers only need be cited. Dampier's men[7] were attacked while searching for water on the Ninety-mile beach; Captain King's party was attacked several times, at different places along the coast; Sir George Grey was speared in the Camden Harbour County; Captain Stokes was struck by a spear at Point Pearce; several of the sentries at the Fort Dundas settlement on Melville Island were murdered at their posts; and Kennedy[8] was killed while pushing his way from Moreton Bay to Cape York. One of the most atrocious of unprovoked outrages occurred recently on the Victoria River. George Ligar and Jack Mulligan, two waggoners, who were carting stores from Goldsborough Mort's depot, on the Victoria River, to the Victoria River Downs station, had "turned out" for the night in a narrow, rugged valley on the way to the station[9]. Their relations with the natives were above suspicion. They had always been kind to them, too kind the Victoria River settlers thought, and to their own boys especially so, and it is typical of the treachery of Australian blacks that they were attacked by a horde of the local tribe, with whom their own boys leagued. The blacks opened the attack at sunset, and, with the assistance of the firearms of the traitorous

boys, kept up a lively fusillade of rifle bullets and rustling spears during the greater part of the night. Ligar and Mulligan hastily erected a barricade of bags of flour and packing cases, and replied to the assault whenever a black showed himself clear of ambush. But the fight was unequally contested. The blacks were in great numbers and made the night darker by their multitude. Early in the affray Mulligan was disabled by a spear head that was made from a discarded spear blade. The formidable weapon made a terrible gash behind the knee, completely severing the tendons between the calf and thigh. Although badly hurt by a spear wound in the back, which reached into his lungs, and by a glass spear head, which passed from cheek to cheek under his nose, Ligar pluckily kept on fighting. When daylight disclosed the enemy, the two hardy fellows, who had never lost heart although their case appeared hopeless, made better shooting and succeeded in driving off their assailants. On the first cessation of hostilities, Ligar, with much difficulty, secured two horses, and assisting Mulligan to mount, all speed was made to the nearest cattle station, 30 miles away. The station was poorly provided with medical and surgical necessaries, and the wounds became very painful. It was fully a fortnight before the two brave fellows could be conveyed to Port Darwin, where their wounds were treated. Mulligan is crippled for life, and the last time I saw Ligar, some months after the encounter, air gurgled out of the hole in his back when he breathed, and every time he blew his nose he dislodged a chip of the glass spear head, which had broken in.

[1] Black oat and bundle bundle grasses: black oat grass is probably a reference to *Themeda triandra*; bundle-bundle grass could be either a species of *Dicanthium* or *Heteropogon contortus* commonly called bundle spear-grass.

Prince Regent Exploring Expedition: i.e Joseph Bradshaw's overland expedition from Wyndham to the Roe River (mistaken for the Prince Regent) and back in March-May 1891.

[2] The small steamer: the schooner-rigged, single-screw steamer *Rob Roy* (232 net tons) of the Adelaide Steamship Company, which plied between Darwin and Fremantle via North-west ports.

[3] British Bull-dog revolver that spat "450" bullets: probably the .450 (11.18mm) calibre Adams Bulldog revolver, in common use during the era.

[4] Colts repeating rifles: probably the .44 calibre, Colt Lightning slide-action repeating rifle of 1885; named for Samuel Colt (1814–1862), a famous U.S. inventor of firearms. Repeater rifles, characterised by having a number of cartridges, stored in a magazine, were a major technical innovation of the era.

[5] Kimberley gold-fields: payable gold was first discovered in Western Australia in 1885 at Halls Creek in the East Kimberley.

[6] Exeter Hall philanthropists: believed to be named for a building in the Strand, London, where meetings were held by humanist groups.

[7] Dampier's men: William Dampier, a crewman on the English vessel *Cygnet* under Captain Read, visited King Sound (West Kimberley) in 1688 and published an account of this trip in *A new voyage round the world,* James Knapton, London 1697. Dampier, as captain, returned to the Western Australian coast in 1699 on a voyage of discovery and published this account in *A voyage to New Holland,* James Knapton, London, 1703. A more popular account of his natural history exploits can be found in A. S. George, *William Dampier in New Holland,* Bloomings Books, Hawthorn, Victoria, 1999.

[8] Kennedy: Edmund Besley Court Kennedy (1818 - 1848). Kennedy arrived in Sydney on 18 March 1840 aboard the barque *Globe*. He qualified as a surveyor in the Surveyor-General's Department in 1840. Kennedy accompanied Sir Thomas Mitchell on his 1846 expedition. He performed so well that he was appointed to lead his own expedition the following year to follow up Mitchell's discovery of a river which was thought to flow into the Gulf of Carpentaria. Although it was soon evident that Mitchell's river was in fact Cooper's Creek, Kennedy persevered with the survey and went on to discover the Thomson. The expedition had to be cut short when it was found that Aboriginals had dug up and destroyed a cache of supplies. Only Kennedy's courage and leadership skills saw him and his men return safely. This success gained Kennedy an appointment to lead the 1848 Cape York expedition. The expedition was to travel overland from Rockingham Bay to Cape York via Princess Charlotte Bay. After receiving provisions from a supply ship at Port Albany near the tip of Cape York it was then to travel down the west coast of the peninsula to the mouth of the Mitchell River and then to follow this up to its junction with the Lynd. The expedition was to then strike off in a west-south-west direction to connect with Mitchell's 1846 expedition on the Belyando and from there to return to Sydney. Based on hopelessly misleading information the expedition was put ashore at Tam o' Shanter Point near Mission Beach. The trek inland through coastal swamps and mangrove forest took so long that the party missed the resupply ship, forcing Kennedy to leave eight sick men (including the botanist William Carron), two horses and a little flour at Weymouth Bay. Near Shelburne Bay, one of the party of five who had pressed on, accidentally shot himself in the shoulder and Kennedy left him and two others there while he and the aboriginal guide Jackey Jackey pushed on to meet the supply ship *Ariel* at Port Albany. Early in December Kennedy and Jackey Jackey reached the mangrove swamps of the Escape River, almost within sight of their destination. Here they were attacked by a group of Aborigines and Kennedy was speared to death. Jackey Jackey escaped and struggled on for nearly a fortnight before reaching the *Ariel* with news of Kennedy's fate.

[9] George Ligar and Jack Mulligan. According to Alfred Searcy (1909) *In Australian Tropics,* pages 204–205, the attack mentioned took place at Jasper Gorge, Northern Territory.

Saturday June 17, 1899

No. V.

It would be easy to multiply instances in which settlers have been ruthlessly murdered by the natives without a shadow of provocation. Three-fourths of the deliberate assaults are due entirely to innate bloodthirstiness, and have no reference whatever to revenge. In unsettled districts one seldom goes a hundred yards from camp

without a revolver, and never a mile without a rifle as well, as it is always considered probable that "a subtle point might be inserted" at an unexpected moment. On many of the northern stations the hands will not allow the local tribe to approach within a quarter of a mile of the homestead, as they fear the natives will get to know "the lay" of the place so well that they may, some night, have to entertain a black surprise party, whose cordiality is not always of an agreeable quality. It has been the well nigh invariable experience of northern settlers that until the blacks have been drastically and efficiently chastised for their wanton acts they are much safer and more reliable enemies than friends; and that until they have learnt that the clanging alphabet of the language of the gun is capable of giving expression to smart, sharp things that are akin to wit, they will never be converted into even a comparatively useful segment of society.

The type of the aboriginal inhabitants of the North is only slightly different from that of the pristine occupant of the Southern colonies, any essential dissimilarity being brought about by a more or less liberal admixture of Malay blood. But in many individual instances, the height, color, and stoutness of the limbs of the Northern natives mark a considerable divergence of type from the Southern. Occasionally a distinctly aquiline cast of countenance may be noticed, particularly in those whose colour is lighter than the average. Frequently the height of the Northern native runs up to and over six feet, and many of the coastal lubras or gins are remarkably handsome, well-developed specimens of femininity. Now and then under-sized units of both sexes may be seen, but they are sufficiently uncommon to attract special attention. The average North Australian native is a tall, broad-shouldered fellow, with a fine chest and muscular development, and in physique is a much finer type than his southern brother. There are very sufficient reasons why he should be so, the chief ones being that he is able to procure, with less trouble, much more, and a great deal better food than the southern native, and there can be little doubt that much of his stalwart chest development is due to the regularity of the range of temperature. The days and nights are invariably and uniformly warm, and the diseases of the chest that so ravaged the system of the southern tribes – particularly since the introduction of the artificial requirements of civilization – are practically unknown in the North. Clothes are never worn by the savage in his wild state, and as he seldom or never erects more commodious houses than are provided by a few sheets of bark, or a few boughs thrown loosely together, colds are rare. It is probable, owing to his immunity from colds, that the northern native will longer survive the pernicious influences of civilization than the southern natives have done, and in places such as Port Darwin, where the whites and the blacks live side by side on perfectly amicable terms, it is reported that the blacks are on the increase. If this should be the case after a 20 years acquaintance with, and ready acceptance of, the worst vices of the white, Chinese and Malay population, the permanence of the type might be assured, were it not that the mixture of blood is likely to produce a crossbred race that will neither be good black, bad white, nor indifferent Chinese.

That the type is worth preserving from destruction and contamination must be manifest on reflection, as there can be little doubt the Australian aboriginal was wandering a houseless savage, within the limited areas of his respective tauria[1], long before the rise and fall of great civilizations began to make history, and to anthropologists and ethnologists he is the most interesting figure on the face of the earth to-day.

There has always been considerable discussion as to the probable origin and birth-place of the Australian race, and the most satisfactory solution of the problem, over which *savants* have worried themselves grey and bald, is arrived at by Mr. Sowerby, in his little work on *The Dawn of Civilization,* wherein he answers the question of the inquisitive speculator into the genesis of the race, with Topsy's reply to her mistress "I 'spects I growed."[2] Speculation really seems to be able to get no further in its researches, and the endeavour to trace resemblances between Australians and Dravidians, Papuans, or Africans seems quite idle, as with the solitary and doubtful exception of one South African tribe – the Bushmen – the races have nothing much in common, except flesh, blood, bone and the vital spark[3]. The Australoids are, as Huxley classes them, a race by themselves, and have no connection with any other living people on the other side of the water[4]. If a tally be sought for them in other lands it must be where representatives of characteristic Australian flora and fauna are found–in geological strata–for Australia is–

> An ark adrift upon the flood of Time,
> Preserving through unnumbered days and years,
> The fruitful pairs of a primeval life,
> Long vanished elsewhere and forgotten quite.

Amongst the continents of the world, Australia is at once the smallest and most isolated, and hence its plants and animals are in general of a less developed and more archaic type than those of other continents. For the same reason aboriginal man has remained in a more primitive state than elsewhere. In the struggle for existence, progress depends mainly on competition: the more numerous the competitors the fiercer is the struggle, and the more rapid, consequently, is evolution. Lacking the stimulus of competition, and the fierce fight for existence, which characterize it in other lands, life in Australia illustrates the hypothesis of arrested development, and we are shown a race which preserves in its traditions the laws which governed men at the dawning of the world. The rites and customs observed by the uncontaminated Australian savages to-day are similar to those which lie at the base of all human folklore and religion, although many of the totemic systems in use now are more directly concerned with

Figure 1. (*above*) View south-west over St George Basin, Prince Regent River with Mount Trafalgar in the foreground.

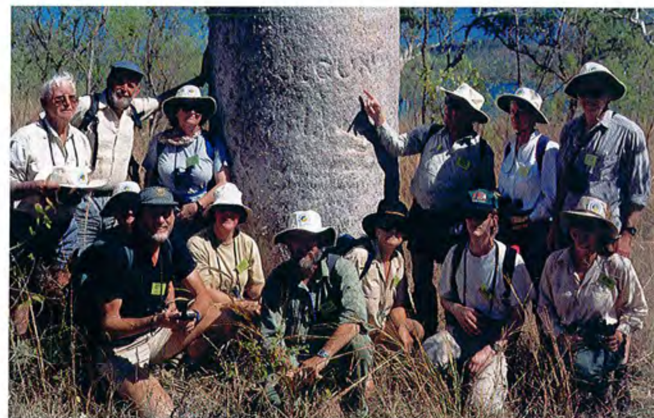


Figure 2. (*right*) Members of the July 1997 LANDSCOPE Expedition gathered around the boab tree inscribed "A J GUNN" at the site of the Marigui settlement.

Figure 3. (*below*) Gunn's Spring at the Marigui site fringed by screwpine (*Pandanus spiralis*).

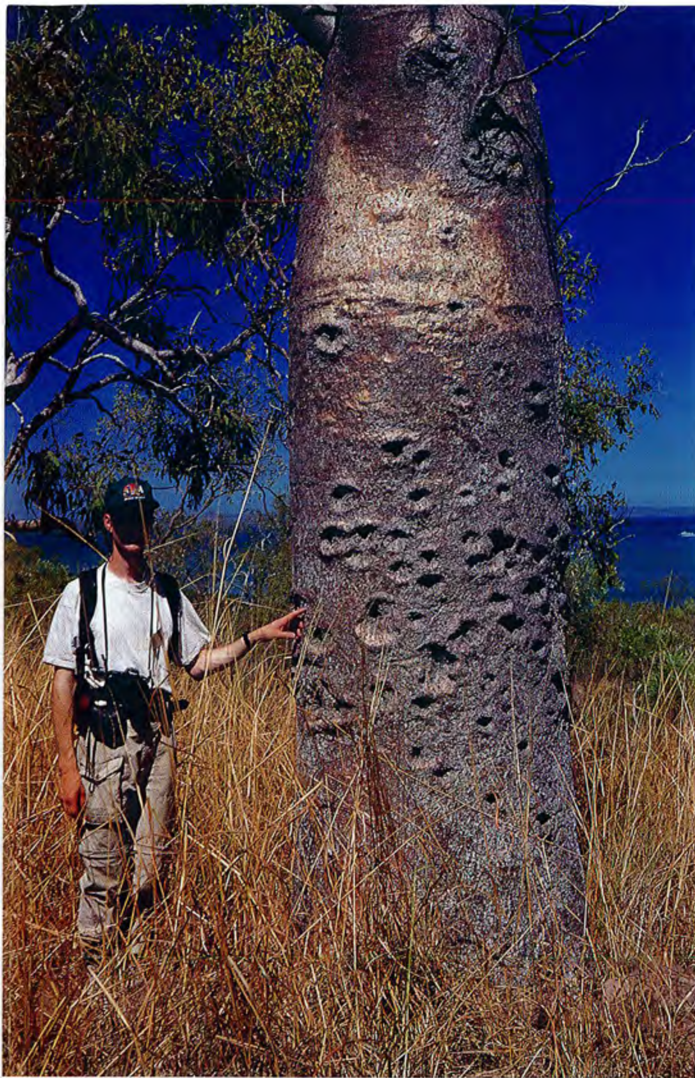


Figure 4. (*above left*) A boab tree near the Marigui site bearing bullet scars resulting from target practice by Bradshaw's party.

Figure 5. (*above*) An example of Bradshaw style Aboriginal figurative rock art from the Prince Regent River area, first documented by Bradshaw on the 1891 overland expedition. Aboriginals refer to this rock art as *Gwion Gwion*.

Figure 6. (*left*) A large boab tree located near the Marigui site and inscribed with the letters "H", "D", and "L".

Figure 7. (*below*) The shrub *Triumfetta bradshawii* first collected by Bradshaw on the 1891 overland expedition and named for him by botanist Ferdinand Mueller.

Figure 8. (*top*) A nest of green tree ants (referred to by Gunn as "Fenians") that form shelters in trees by weaving broad leaves together. The ants vigorously attack *en masse* when disturbed.

Figure 9. (*above*) Ruins of the Government Camp established at Camden Harbour in February 1865 and abandoned in October 1865.

Figure 10. (*top*) The boab tree at Careening Bay inscribed "HMC MERMAID 1820".

Figure 11. (*above*) Pottery and glass shards collected from the Government Camp site at Camden Harbour.

Figure 12. (*below*) A stand of the mangrove *Rhizophora stylosa* illustrating the dense, impenetrable, prop roots.

Figure 13. (*above*) Mary Jane Pascoe, a casualty of the failed Camden Harbour settlement was buried on Sheep Island in 1865.

Figure 14. (*above right*) An example of an Aboriginal glass spear-head made from discarded bottles.

Figure 15. (*right*) A "canebrake" of dense grass (up to 3 metres tall) of *Mnesithea rottboellioides* located around the base of Mount Trafalgar.

Figure 16. (*below*) Wet season Kimberley electrical storm referred to by Gunn as a "kokk-i-bob".

magic for social and economic purposes than with religious observances. The resemblance between many Australian rites and those appertaining to the Semitic religions is especially marked, and recent investigations into many of their theories, particularly relating to the propagation of life, disclose the interesting fact that, probably before the days of Adam, a crude idea of the immaculate conception, and a belief in the reincarnation of souls were two governing principles in lives of the Australian natives[5].

It is not generally known, but it is none the less a grisly fact, that the Australian aboriginal is a cannibal. Many tribes deny indulgence in the practice, others again make no secret of their predilection for a leg of Picaninnie done to a turn, a piece of the hind quarters of a Chinaman, or the rib of a well "topped up" warrior killed in battle. The pearlers on the north-west coast swear to the veracity of a story that circulated freely round the fleet. Some Japanese divers, who had been paralysed by diving in very deep water, were taken ashore and buried at Cape Pond[7]; next day several more died, and they too were taken ashore to be buried, when the hideous discovery was made that the blacks had unearthed the corpses of the previous day and had made a royal cannibal banquet upon them.

Of the useful arts employed by the Australian aborigines, the most remarkable, after the evolution of the throwing stick and the invention of the boomerang, is the letter stick. These sticks illustrate a distinctly interesting effort of the untutored savage to construct for himself a written language and the characters he employs are more universally understood among the black-fellows than are spoken words, as there is a total difference in the language of tribes fifty miles apart. Noteworthy manifestations of an artistic strain in the native temperament are those which find expression in rock and tree carvings and cave paintings. But the most interesting facts about the blackfellow are that he exists, that he defies identification with other living types, that he has existed without considerable modifications of type or custom longer than any other human being, and that his inevitable destiny is to be, in a few years, trampled down by the march of Progress, or to become a pariah, a reproach, a scarecrow in the cast off garbs of civilization.

[1] Tauria: home range.

[2] *Savants:* persons of great knowledge on some subject (from French).

The Dawn of Civilisation: Pictorial Aboriginal History of Australasia (1898) was a tract, published by H.H.Warner, Melbourne (32 pages).

Topsy's reply to her mistress "I 'spects I growed": Topsy was a young negro girl in the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896). Topsy's reply as to who made her and whether she had heard of God has often been quoted since, when the origin of something is unknown.

[3] Dravidians: peoples belonging to the group of related languages of southern India, particularly Tamils.

[4] Huxley: Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895), British scientist, wrote *On Races, Species and their Origin* in 1860.

[5] Semitic religions: the Jewish and Muslim religions of the Middle East.

[6] Paralysed by diving in deep water: This condition was commonly referred to as 'The Bends'–a condition affecting divers and more correctly referred to as decompression sickness. It is due to the appearance of nitrogen bubbles in the body, particularly in the joints, when divers rise too swiftly to the surface of the water. It is prevented by a slow, controlled ascent.

[7] Cape Pond: 14°44'S, 125° 09' 30"E: a promontory of the Kimberley mainland, almost opposite Bigge Island, at the southern entrance to Scott Strait.

Saturday June 24, 1899

No. VI.

Our life at Marigui, however, was not at the offset, concerned with problems for the preservation of our lives at the expense of the blacks, and it was allowed to run on without violent events to punctuate its periods. The work of house building, dam making, and timber cutting proceeded without active molestation from any more formidable enemies than the insects and the heat. Long before the hot red face of the sun glowered over the broad shoulder of Mount Waterloo, in the morning, and while the Jacko Jacko bird was vigorously calling the cook with its characteristic note, we would leave our stewing bunks and stretchers, and, in the simulated freshness of dewy dawns, wend our way to work through waving green fields of black oat grass[1]. Every morning the same brown pheasants, sitting hidden in the foliage of coolibah or pear trees, or flopping down into the tall grass, would deride our toil with mocking "boo hoos."[2] Sometimes the northern jackass, a much more brilliantly plumaged kingfisher than his southern congener, would come and sit on a tree near by, and, critically surveying the efforts of the workmen, laugh at their failures, with a cracked old mannish cachinnation, that bears little resemblance to the bluff, hearty laugh of the Momus of our southern woods[3]. A soft purring cooing is going on in the cane grasses, or low shrubs, and presently a dainty picture of birdish elegance shows itself in a beautiful little dove, clad in a neat fitting garb of mauve, prettily marked with dark brown spots and streaks and stripes[4]. A general chorus of bird voices rises on the air, and down by the camp our stately Brahma poutra rooster raises a lusty voice in response to the universal call for song[5]. A momentary hush, that makes an aching void in the air, as does the sudden stoppage of the cicadas' song, succeeds the unwonted sound, and is followed by a lively declamation of surprise from the throats of a thousand feathered songsters. Just

before the sun spread a golden glow of hot light over the landscape, great flocks of white cockatoos, that had for some time been petulantly complaining of the intrusion of dawn upon their resting places, would rise from the mangrove jungle below us, and, with an ear-piercing chorus of screams, wing their way to the hill slopes, and settle like a shower of snowflakes on trees and ground[6]. Not infrequently while at work, we would make the, not always desirable, acquaintance of some new insects. One of us one morning commenced to fell a tree. The tree was the property of a colony of green or Fenian ants[7]. We had no previous knowledge of the Fenian ant, and could not reasonably be expected to understand he would consider an unwitting infringement of his pre-emptive rights as an unfriendly act, but he does, and he takes surprisingly quick measures to let one know it. He is not a big fellow, but he has the pluck and derring-do of a bull dog[8]. He is gregarious, he is very well organised and he is decisive. You are trespassing on his preserves and he acts without previous parley. He strides up to you, and his stride means business; you can see that if you are observant and wise. If you don't go to him for it he brings wisdom to you. In a very few seconds after he has taken the first stride, you are aware of having been nipped in a few thousand places, and if you don't retreat with more haste than dignity you will be nipped in a few thousand more places in the next few seconds. He is an interesting little fellow to investigate – under a microscope – but he should be very dead, otherwise investigation might be the other way round – and painful. Perhaps it is due to that circumstance that one never meets the Fenian ant in works on Natural History. I had a fat, lazy Peruvian working for me once. He was innocent – in some respects. I told him to cut down a green ant's tree, and have always been amazed at the amount of energy that was in Pedro – latent, for the most part. The bite of the Fenian ant is not venomous, and leaves no sore swelling, but there is a certain memorableness about it that satisfies one there is a good deal of truth in the saying "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."[9] At eight o'clock, by which time the perspiration would be streaming from our bare bodies and saturating our belts and revolver pouches, the cook's bell would ring for breakfast, and a truce with labor would be proclaimed until late in the afternoon. The climatic conditions were daily becoming more tropical. The dry, arid airs, wafted up from the wastes of the interior on the wings of the south-east winds, that prevail from April to October, were giving place to the wet, warm atmosphere brought down from the Indian Ocean by the north-west monsoons. The humid air at first takes the character of a heat haze of a delicate hue that envelopes everything with a thin diaphanous blue veil, creates distance, makes vistas and touches the harsh reddish grey of the rocks, the greyish green of the foliage, and the sere yellow of the grasses with a mellowing effect of blueness. As the season wears on the moisture appears to condense into great fleecy masses of scud, that float leisurely across the azure ocean of sky and build imposing snow-capped continents of cloud in the south-eastern horizon. Fitful flashes of lightning flit about their brows as evening falls, and angry thunders grumble and growl, mutter and mumble menacingly in their hollows. Every evening they become more demonstrative and grow bigger with portents of storm. The short, sharp, decisive wet season is imminent. There is much need to proceed vigorously with the erection of more substantial shelter from the inclemencies of the weather than tents provide, but it is impossible to work during four hours of mid-day. The season may have been, as was generally stated, the hottest ever experienced in North Australia. It certainly was the hottest during my stay there, and I do not want to experience another like it, here or hereafter. The handles of tools and sheets of galvanised iron were much too hot to hold, and I am sure, Miss Flora Smith's scepticism on the point notwithstanding, we could have cooked a steak on a galvanized iron roof quite sufficiently to suit the palate of any fastidious gentleman who wanted it "a trifle underdone."[10] Pools of water left by the receding tide would scald the feet if left in for a few minutes. The rocks and ground were too hot to be touched with bare flesh. The bird, animal and insect life was completely overpowered during the middle of the day, and an oppressive silence reigned throughout nature. The mosquitos and flies, even, rested from their labors, and we enjoyed a happy respite from their attentions, as we lolled, in light and airy garments, in the shadow of an awning, and played dominoes, talked, read or sketched, or sometimes only silently smoked. And despite our isolation and the manifest discomforts and drawbacks to life our little society of three, which constituted "the boss's mess," passed the time pleasantly enough.

[1] Jacko Jacko bird: blue-winged kookaburra *(Dacelo leachii)*.

Black oat grass: probably *Themeda triandra*.

[2] Brown pheasants: pheasant coucals *(Centropus phasianinus)*.

Pear trees: probably *Planchonia careya* or possibly a species of *Gardenia*.

[3] Northern jackass: blue-winged kookaburra *(Dacelo leachii)*.

Cachinnation: a loud laugh.

Momus: in Greek mythology, the god of ridicule, criticism or fault finding.

[4] A beautiful little dove: the description suggests the bar-shouldered dove (*Geopilia humeralis*).

[5] Our stately Brahma poutra rooster: an Asian breed of very large domestic fowl, having pea combs and feathered legs; the breed occurs in light, dark and buff-coloured varieties. Named after the Brahmaputra River in India.

[6] White cockatoos: probably sulphur-crested cockatoo *(Cacatua galerita)*.

[7] Green or Fenian ants: green tree ants *(Oecophylla smaragdina)* create stitched nests in trees by weaving together broad leaves and

vigorously defend their adopted foliage territory. They will readily 'attack' human intruders by swarming over heads, limbs and clothing and stinging exposed skin with formic acid. Avoiding foliage contact is the best precaution! Fenian refers to the Irish Republican Brotherhood, founded in New York in 1858, with the aim of establishing an Irish republic, independent of Britain; the Irish Republic (Eire) eventuated in 1922. Gunn's use of 'Fenian' in this context is humorous, green being so associated with Ireland and these ants so troublesome!

8 Derring-do: daring action or bravado.

9 "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" is from *St. Matthew* 6, verse 34: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

10 Remnants of galvanized iron roof sheets were still present around the Marigui homestead site in May 2000. Interestingly, the sheets were held together with copper rivets, and a sample was sent to the Western Australian Maritime Museum for a materials analysis report. Dr Ian MacLeod commented that the use of copper rivets could be "an indication of the impact of ships' carpenters on the construction methods used in the fabrication of the settlement building" (pers. comm. 8 Sept. 2000).

Saturday July 1, 1899

No. VII.

In the evening an organette would be produced from the dark recesses of the main tent, and we would "fleet the time carelessly," while Mrs Bradshaw sang us many a song in the twilight when the lights were growing dim, or played old familiar airs on the little organette, while all the wild things of the woods stopped their nocturnal songs and listened to the strange sweet sounds that swept the forest aisles with flooding tides of melody[1]. Sometimes, the organette put away and the song hushed, a lamp was hung from the ridge pole of the awning and we tried our varying fortunes at cut-throat euchre, three-cornered crib., or dominoes, while the shrill stridulation of tree frogs cut the still air with sharp sounds, and a lonely mopoke on the near hill slope, called, with melancholy note, for an unwilling mate whose emphatic negative to the invitation came back from St. Mary's Island like a sharp echo[2]. The mosquitos, like the poor, we had always with us, and when, as not infrequently happened, they were reinforced by moths, beetles, flying ants, swarming termites, and legions of nameless winged insects, which were attracted by the light, we would find it expedient to evacuate the field of our games, and retreating to our tents, court fickle slumber to the lullaby of the curlews' eerie cry and the dismal howl of distant dingoes[3].

Usually our slumbers were undisturbed by abnormal sounds, but one night, when the camp was sleeping soundly – that is figuratively, the mosquitos were attending to the actual – we were aroused by a series of rattles in the main tent that sounded suspiciously like the noise spear shafts would make. Mrs Bradshaw called her husband, who was rivalling the fabled seven of Ephesus in his slumber[4]. On repeated calls he muttered "What's the matter," and was told there was something in the tent. He murmured soothingly, "All ri'. It's only a lizard," and curled up for another sleep, apparently. Another rattle louder than before roused him to action. He got up, rummaged round the tent for matches, and lit a lantern. The light showed that a tin of cocoa, a bottle of smelling salts, and several other articles, had been knocked off the organette which, when off musical duty, was used as a combination sideboard and dressing table[5]. Closer inspection revealed several sections of a huge snake, as thick as an average man's arm, wound round the legs of the organette. We did not then wait to consider (cook did not seem disposed to wait for anything, but was given the lantern, to steady his nerves) whether the snake, yielding to the traditional love of its species for music, had been attracted to the spot by the dulcet harmonica the organette had a little time previously set afloat upon the air, and, yearning for more, had set about untwisting all the chains that tied the hidden soul of harmony. We remembered that an injunction had been set upon us to bruise the head of all snakes, ever since that unfortunate day in Eden, when the father of all serpents tempted poor dear old grandmamma Eve to sample the fruit that grew on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and she, with characteristic feminine curiosity, yielded to the temptation and found wisdom and tears. The head of our serpent not being visible, Mr Bradshaw selected a broad part of its back and discharged his Smith and Wesson[6]. When the smoke cleared away the cook jumped as if he, and not the snake, had been shot, for just between his feet a broad, blunt head was piloting a long length of black buff snake. A sabre stroke on its back, a few convulsive wriggles and the snake was dragged away to die in the darkness. The snake was of the python or boa-constrictor order and measured thirteen feet five inches; it has been growing ever since[7]. The last time I heard the cook telling about the encounter, the python was nineteen feet six inches long[8]. Perhaps that measurement was true from the cook's standpoint. Cook had abnormally large feet; they were the standing joke of the camp.

Sabbath day on stations is usually kept holy by the hands performing rites essential to that service which is next to godliness – it is almost wholly devoted to washing, and sometimes to mending. Occasionally it is set apart for writing home letters, now and then for hunting, and sometimes for a carouse on whatever beverage may be obtainable. It is almost invariably recognised as a holy day or holiday of some sort or other. It does not matter how far one may be without the radius over which the rich chorus of a city's church bells roll with a holy invitation; however far one may be removed from the great, noisy panting, rumbling city where the benign spirit of the day of rest has, with hushing finger on her lips, bidden the din and turmoil cease on her holy day; however distant from a place where people are wont to assemble themselves together

on the Sabbath, there is yet borne on the responsive air a suggestion of peace, relaxation and rest as the seventh day is ushered through the opulent tapestries that drape the gleaming portals of the east. "All jars, and strifes obscene, and turbulent throes" sink "blended in a unity of rest." Nature herself, so callous, so apparently lawless in her perfect law, seems to assume a reverential mood. Toil, with his manifold notes of drudgery, has either wandered off to some less fortunate region, or has put on his Sunday pyjamas, lit his favorite pipe and sits contemplative. And a poor solitary – a forlorn and ship-wrecked brother – castaway on the wilds of the world without a calendar or notched stick to tell the tale of the day's slow flight, will know by nature's intelligible articulation when the Sabbath comes. And if he be one to whom the church bells' chime, was in other years a familiar sound, in whom pulpit oratory had stirred slumbering emotions and one in whom the heard melodies of the choir awoke responsive the sweeter unheard melodies of the heart he will find, as the holy day steals on, all echoed by the jocund waves that wash around his desolate isle or repeated in the wind-stirred leaves of his solitude. Doubtless as the years steal past the voices wane weaker. Some notes are lost in the dim aisles of Time and the strain comes fainter ever fainter like the sound of the song the sailor sings as the ship slips out on the ebbing tide. And if it has not been his wont, in the yester years, to wend his way to the family pew he will, from the force of old association, gather round him a group of spirit cronies and while the time away in imaginary talk to the tune of innumerable fragrant pipes smoked in eloquent silence. Some of the solitaries on the Regent had been church-goers when occasion offered, and a service was inaugurated on the first Sabbath ashore. The recollection of other services in the past was the truer and more reverential worship. There was no congruity in our congregation. One of the worshippers was an Anglican. Two were Roman Catholics. Another was an Independent. One a Lutheran, and the sixth was a rigid Presbyterian. The Episcopalian service was read. The Presbyterian ridiculed the ritual as a relic of popery, and religious riots were feared. The services were discontinued, and we sewed, sketched, smoked, explored or found tongues in trees, books in running brooks, and sermons in stones[9]. It would be continuing the quotation outside the realm of veracity to say we found "good in everything."

[1] Organette: a small portable organ or large accordion.

[2] Mopoke: either the boobook owl *(Ninox novaeseelandiae)* or the barking owl *(Ninox connivens)*.

St. Mary's Island: a name seemingly coined by Gunn's party for the still officially unnamed island opposite Mount Waterloo.

[3] The curlews' eerie cry: probably refers to the spooky, wailing whistle of the bush stone-curlew *(Burhinus grallarius)*, or beach stone-curlew *(Esacus neglectus)*.

[4] The fabled seven of Ephesus: in ancient legend, seven noble youths who hid in a cave to avoid the persecution of Christians. They fell asleep only to re-awake hundreds of years later, when the cave was re-opened. Celebrated in Goethe's poem *The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus*.

[5] Smelling salts: scented ammonium carbonate, sniffed as a popular cure for faintness in the Victorian era.

[6] Smith and Wesson: Bradshaw probably used the American made, .45 (11.43 mm) single-action, Schofield Model revolver of 1875.

[7] The python: olive pythons *(Liasis olivaceus)*, occasionally reaching 8 metres in length, are the largest snakes in the Kimberley.

13 ft 5 in = 4.11 metres.

[8] 19 ft 6 in = 5.94 metres.

[9] Found tongues in trees etc: the full quotation from *As You Like It*, 2.1.12 by William Shakespeare is "And this our life, exempt from public haunt, finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything."

Saturday July 8, 1899

No. VIII.

"Willi-Willi" and "Kokk-i-bob" are the supposed Aboriginal names of the two most characteristic atmospheric disturbances of the North-west Australian hot, wet season. The Willi-Willi of the lower west is, if one may judge of it from a recent picture in a metropolitan weekly, a moderately harmless circular wind, of a narrow range, that is almost identical with the whirlwind one may see anywhere in Australia on a calm hot day. It answers to the same natural law that produces water-spouts at sea, but, instead of the aqueous element, gathers dust, ashes, leaves, scraps of paper, straw hats and other comparatively imponderable substances and waltzes them across the country in a spiral revolving column. In the north-west, where the name originates, the Willi-Willi is a terrific hurricane that blows with tremendous fury for any time from twelve hours to two days, sweeps a wide swathe of country and travels long distances. It belongs to the same general order of storm as the typhoon, the tornado, and the pompara. Its breath is devastation. It uproots trees, wrecks houses, sinks ships, and writes havoc in big capitals wherever it goes. Mariners mention it with bated breath, and talk of its effects with awe. Often, too often, despite the warning of barometers, it has caught the north-west pearling fleet in unsheltered waters and flung it to ruin; and more than once it has wiped the town of Cossack out of existence[1].

The "Kokk-i-bob" is a much less disastrous blow, nevertheless it is unlikely the first settlers of the Prince Regent River will ever forget their introduction to it in its native haunts. From early morning he knew something unusual was going to happen. There was a death-like stillness in the air. Not a leaf fluttered, not a

grass blade waved, and only the tides pushing up from the ultimate sea made motion on the face of the waters. The barometer rose steadily until about noon, when it stood still at the extremely high register of 30.65. From noon to 3 o'clock the heat was terrible. The thermometer, a low range English glass, burst when exposed to the sun. Nothing moved. Birds and insects sought the deepest shadows and were voiceless. Our dog, the sole remnant of our canines left us by the rapacious alligators, died of heat apoplexy. The sky was a vast undimmed dome of intense blue. The atmosphere was not only clear and still, it seemed to be crystallized to a magnifying degree. Distant hills looked strangely near. Outlines of rocks and hills were unnaturally clear and distinct. Shadows were as sharply defined as if made by an electric arc lamp. Trees appeared to be petrified in their livery of green. The whole scene, except where heat waves rippled and ran over the ground, or a mirage cut fantastic figures out on the Basin, might have been an enamelled landscape by Andrea del Sarto – perfect in color, in form, in outline, but lacking genius, energy, life[2]. Mr Bradshaw declared there was going to be a cataclysm. We didn't know what it meant, but we believed him, and prepared for it by securing the tents with extra pegs, guys, and ropes, and by rolling ponderous rocks on the flaps of the tarpaulins covering the stack of stores. A little after three o'clock a group of silvern cupolas of cloud, dominated by a towering central dome, gleamed, like the roofs of an oriental city, above the sullen sandstone ranges in the south-eastern horizon. Slowly the mass rose in the lower spaces of the sky and, gathering, growing, swelling as it rose, flowed from form. It changed from chaos to cosmos, and from cosmos back to chaos, and ever as it changed, and evolved order out of disorder, or hurled order back into disorder, faint flames of lightning flared about its brows and loud thunders rumbled in its belly. It seemed as if a new world were being formed by mighty unseen Titanic powers[3]. We all stood or sat and watched it. One remarked "It interprets Wagner," another replied "Wagner interprets it."[4] Francisco Blanca leaned over a tent rope, and invoking the help of the Mother of God, said "It's a pompara."[5] Gradually the concourse of cumulus clouds assumed a cumulo-stratus form and resembled a huge pile of snow-clad mountains whose foundations were set deep below the horizon. About an hour before sundown a gigantic and perfectly symmetrical aggregation of clouds nearly filled the eastern spaces of the sky. Immediately along the land-line was a low, dense wall of grey-blue cloud, in which there was no gap or breach. Over-hanging the wall, or pedestal of the storm, and jutting out clear from the mass at both ends, was a great, brown girdle of thick, heavy, stratus clouds that resembled a ring of Saturn in that it seemed independent of the main body. Directly above this girdle was a wild, free sweeping belt of cirro-stratus clouds, with ends flying clear into blue spaces of sky. Bright, glitteringly white above the rings rose a majestic mass of cumulus clouds, as round as cobble stones, and having the appearance of an immense pile of fleeces of the snowiest of washed wool. Sharp shadows lurked in the crevices between each fleece and threw them into greater relief and close haloing the imposing white forehead of the storm, like an aureola, was an ethereal wreath of feathery cloud. Above all was the deep, blue impassive dome of heaven. The storm advanced slowly without any appreciable change of form, but as the sun slipped down its shining western path, and shot the sky with gold and orange and ruddy lights, the total effect of the oncoming continent of cloud was marvellously magnificent. The base of the pile, overshadowed by the girdle, became a dark blue-black, that gleamed with something of the metallic tints that glint in a drake's feather. The girdle was a great band of ruddy gold. The cirro-stratus belt was a crimson sash, and the cumulus mass gleamed like great balls of burnished copper here, there they were glowing gold, and large piles, that were thrown into the shadow, were of the pallid, ashen hue of death. The aureola was of violet. Forked and jagged lightning quivered round the storm and shot veins of sudden silver light through its black base. The sky was purple above it. Five minutes before the sun set a sharp breeze sprang up from the north-west and ran out to meet the storm. The lower belt, a whirling avalanche of cloud, reached over us, and blotted out the sun as it was disappearing behind the summit of St. Patrick's Island. No one spoke. It was an awe-ful sunset. There was a furious rushing, roaring sound in the south-east. In a moment the waters of the Basin were lashed into lather, and in an instant later we were in the midst of a tremendous clamour that might have been made by an assault of the massed cavalry and artillery corps of the world, with all their drums beating and bands playing. There was a quick, rapid beat as of legions of horses' flying feet. There was a terrifying bellow. Dun battalions of clouds sped like swift chargers through the lower spaces of the sky or whirled in gyrating eddies in the impetuous current of air. Above the rolling, tumbling mass was a wide, sweeping, whirling concave of sullen leaden cloud that filled the higher altitudes of sky and made a grey gloomy vault of the world. "The proud music of the storm" redoubled its volume[6]. We were almost hurled off our feet by the impact of a mighty wind that bent and broke trees with its blast, sent branches flying like feathers before it, streamed foliage on the air like the locks of a swift-footed runner, carried sheets of galvanized iron on its breath, as if they were leaves, and crumpled them up like tissue paper, flattened out the tall grass as if with a roller, and would have blown our tents away like toy balloons had they not been effectually safeguarded by a net-work of ropes. Night fell – black, murky, inky night, that was lit by lurid streams of lightning – lightning that shot horizontally along the clouds, blazed earthwards in balls that glowed like the setting sun, spread heavenwards in forks and branches like leafless trees, stabbed the earth with jagged silver swords, or wrote legends of chaos on the black pall of clouds. Deafening cannonades of thunder boomed incessantly in the gloom and broke terrible waves of

mighty sound on the craggy hills. The wind roared through the air, howled through the trees, groaned through the shrubs, and shrieked past our tent ropes. Rain fell in driving waterfalls, blowing through our tents as if through nets, saturating everything, and bathing the hot ground with sheets of water that ran inches deep in a few moments. An improvised rain gauge registered three inches 21 points in the first hour and then overflowed[7]. After blowing with fierce energy for over an hour, the wind slowly moderated to a steady, strong breeze, and finally blew itself out, while lurid lightning held high carnival in the clouds, and the reverberant roar of thunder crashed through the air. Fire-flies lent a quaint and unlooked-for adjunct to the general illumination of the night by lighting their phosphorescent lamps, and wandering through the gloom like little twinkling stars on eccentric orbits. The storm was one of the primal, elemental passions of nature. Its power and might and majesty were awe-inspiring, unimaginable and indescribable, but one of us, at least, has the interpretation of Wagner in his heart.

[1] Cossack: the modern-day ghost port, near Roebourne, in the Pilbara. It was a major pearling centre in the 1880s, until its harbour silted up.

[2] Andrea del Sarto: a famous Italian painter of religious scenes, resident in Florence 1486–1530 and noted for his almost photographic, perfectionist artwork.

[3] Titanic: In Greek mythology the Titans were the twelve gigantic children of Uranus, the Sky and Gaia, the Earth. They came to power after Cronus, one of the male Titans, emasculated his tyrannical father with a sickle provided by Gaia, his long suffering mother. The eventual battle between the older generation of gods, the Titans led by Cronus, and the younger generation, the Olympians led by his son Zeus, lasted ten years.

[4] Wagner: the German composer Richard Wagner (1813–1883).

[5] Pompara: 'Pompare' in Italian is the verb 'to pump up', which seems appropriate for cumulo-nimbus clouds!

[6] "The proud music of the storm": is the title of a poem by Walt Whitman (1819–1892).

[7] Three inches 21 points = 76.4 millimetres of rain.

Saturday July 15, 1899

No. IX.

The Kokk-i-bob inaugurated the wet season. It was Nature's overture to her grand opera, the north-west monsoons, which had been advertised largely on sky and air, hill and valley for some weeks previously[1]. Almost every evening we were treated to magnificent displays of electrical fireworks, accompanied by great winds, heavy rains and fanfarronades of thunder; and on Christmas eve the lightning performed a wild, weird and awful pantomime on a black stage of clouds[2]. It was a dry storm, but left in the sky a deposit of clouds to go to the credit of the next evening's entertainment.

Christmas Day was the coolest we had experienced since landing at the Regent. It is doubtful whether the thermometer would have registered over 80 degrees had its services still been available. The sun's course could only be traced as a dull light behind a canopy of leaden grey clouds, and our first Christmas dinner at Marigui was consumed in moderate comfort. After dinner, taking advantage of the comparative coolness of the day, Franciso Blanca and I essayed the ascent of Mount Trafalgar, one of the twin peaks that are such remarkable features of the Prince Regent River landscape[3]. From the camp the summit of Mount Trafalgar presents the appearance of a perfectly symmetrical castellated hill, while that of Mount Waterloo is rugged, rough and broken and easily scalable. Mr Bradshaw had one morning safely achieved the summit of Waterloo, and I am sure had exclaimed

> Oh summer land of silence,
> Oh land of beauty rare,
> Where solitude lies brooding,
> O'er hill and valley fair.

as he was wont to do with enthusiasm on every position which commanded a prospect of his possessions[4]. The slopes of the hills are sparsely wooded with the quaint grey boles of the huge arborescent monster – the baobab tree, grey boxes or coolibahs, bauhinias, cabbage gums, straggling nux-vomica trees, beefwoods, stunted acacias, and pines[5]. Wild vines and endless varieties of ground creepers and yams wander irresponsibly about and twine themselves in and through the shrubs and tall grass[6]. In the valleys and on alluvial flats screw palms, river ashes, paperbark trees, and many representatives of the eucalyptus family fight hard for existence with dense growths of tropical vegetation, and open glades are clothed with heavy crops of succulent sorghum grass, as thick as wheat crops[7]. Walking through the tangled mats and nets of vegetation was difficult and tedious, and when the ascent of the slopes was commenced the difficulties were doubled by contact with boulders of basalt, hidden beneath lawyer vines and rock creepers. After toiling up over terrace after terrace of the basalt bases of the hill, we finally achieved the foot of the sandstone summit. Here we paused gasping. Astonishment, admiration, awe, wonder, loss of breath, all contributing to the effect. We cursorily admired the scenery from this standpoint, but hoping for a broader view from the greater coign of vantage of the summit did not linger longer than a rest necessitated[8]. A curious-looking corner piece, that appeared from the camp to be an attached tower at the west end of the mighty castle, we found to be a collection of towering crags built, on a fantastic design, of immense blocks of sandstone rock. The sides of the hill were unbroken perpendicular walls that rose some hundreds of feet in clear line from verdure-clad basalt foundations, and flung back with red hot angry faces, the first lurid

streaks of the rising sun and caught up its last red gleams, as it sank to rest behind the bluffs of the channel[9]. On those sullen walls is not root-hold nor possible nourishment for shrub or creeper. Not Jannedik nor any goat, however nimble-footed, could find a path along them, and the very wild fowl wheel around them in their flight, and then wing away to more inviting roosts on swaying limbs of distant trees[10]. But in chinks of the crags at the corner of the hill, hardy creepers and shrubs get hold and it was there Franciso and I attempted the ascent. Franciso in his native Verdes had acquired considerable experience in rock climbing, and, discarding his boots and all superfluous gear such as rifles and revolvers, led the way[11]. At one place we would have to pull ourselves up a ledge of rock by a mere catch with our finger tips on its sharp edge, at another squeeze our bodies through holes or under overhanging rock, where we were in frequent danger of being jammed altogether, again we would have to swing with precarious hold on swaying creepers, and then through "chimneys," with hands and feet on either side, wriggle up fathoms of pipes that resemble mining shafts, and at one place we had to swing clear into the air around a corner of the crag, to an insecure foothold on a narrow ledge, dangling like a rock creeper, in the air, and seeing, a hundred feet below us, the brown basalt boulders of the base. A slip or mistake and we would have been as hard to gather up as Humpty Dumpty[12]. Gradually by diverse ways and taking many risks we achieved the top, and how amply we were repaid for the ardors of our climb![13] What a magnificent panorama of land-and-seascape was spread before us! Right over against us in the South East sat Mount Waterloo brooding in sombre, sullen, silence, its feet clothed on nearly all sides with the glossy foliage of the mangrove. Threading their way through wide areas of jungle ran slender strips of saltwater creeks, and gleaming like dull eyes in dark masses of leaves, lay large salt encrusted marshes. Past Mount Waterloo, St. George's Basin lay like a silver shield, set in emerald borders, and beyond it, in a greying distance, rolled the blue ranges that bound the valley of the Prince Regent River, whose course we could trace by a dip and a line of soft haze. In the south and the east and the west rolled range after range of nameless hills, like the monster swell of a mighty sea, until cloudland and highland met in the dim and hazy distance and closed the view. In the north Mount Knight, a peaked hill of considerable eminence, looked small and insignificant amidst a mass of piled up mountains that run down to the sea and form the broken, indented outline of the coast[14]. Slashing the scene like the sweep of a silver scimitar lay the beautiful secluded reach of Rothsay Water, with a few small islands, that looked like rust spots, dotting its surface. Over the north-eastern hills we could see the great expanse of Prince Frederick Harbor, almost mirroring on its still face the frowning walls that bound it. The coast from north-east to north-west was like a ragged edge to the silky skirt of the mobile sea. Promontories and peninsulas tore it with great gashes, and rounded headlands were scalloped out of its smooth folds. Hundreds of islands lay like dark holes in it. Away out towards the horizon "behind which ships sink down and continents lie hidden," grey curtains of rain draped it with a fringe. We looked for signs of sail or steam, as we were expecting the schooner to arrive almost any day, but nothing moved upon the waters. The vast panorama of land showed no sign of life, and the white specks of our tents, glimmering through the tree tops, were the only tokens of human presence in the whole wide region. It was a beautiful wilderness, and we sat long in silent contemplation of a scene over which no civilised eye had wandered, and were loth to leave a point of view upon which no civilised foot had ever before trodden, but we were warned by a gleam in the west that day was waning, and when the sun shot a single shaft of red light through a rift in the leaden pall of clouds, we commenced the descent. It is always easier to drop down a precipice than to climb up one (it may not be safer) and we came down from Trafalgar at break-neck speed, dropping from shelf to shelf, jumping from stone to stone, slipping from rock to rock where, on our ascent, we had to climb with tooth and nail and knee, and were never too sure of our hold. Such experiences as the view from Mount Trafalgar are worth any risks.

[1] Kokk-i-bob: Australian slang, refers to very severe storms, with squalls and usually associated with thunderstorms. Usually spelt 'cockeye bob'.

[2] Fanfarronades: a fanfare (from French and Spanish).

[3] Mount Trafalgar (391 metres) and Mount Waterloo (344 metres) were named by Phillip Parker King in 1820 after the famous British military victories. Being a Royal Navy lieutenant, King seems to have ensured that Nelson's naval triumph (1805) rated a higher peak than Wellington's army triumph in 1815! In current Wororra orthography, the preferred spelling for Mount Trafalgar is Ngayangkarnanya (Joyce Hudson, Kimberley Language Resource Centre, Broome). Burbidge *et al.* (1988, page 50) note that Mt Trafalgar is also known as Widulgup, meaning 'split in half'. According to a now-deceased elder: "Long ago when the sea-level was lower and the present-day NW Kimberley coastal islands were part of the mainland, ancestors of the Wororra asked their northern neighbours, the Wunambul, to share with them a piece of their high country. It was agreed and a certain high, flat-topped mountain was split in half. The Wunambul people kept one half and it now stands in the sea, known by Europeans as Montalivet Island. Help was sought from some fishes and crustaceans who wriggled under the other half. They lifted it on to their backs and, with buckling knees, carried it down a road they had made, far south into Wororra country. But they had trouble getting out from under where they parked it. They couldn't get it straight and so it remains now with a tilt to the south. Also, when they emerged it was discovered that they were squashed flat by the weight they had borne; their offspring, the rays, shovel-nosed sharks and crabs, remain that way today. The Wororra are very proud of the mountain, even though it tilts a little bit and is not finished." [For a more recent version of the story see "How they carried Mt Trafalgar", pp. 49–56 in Daisy Utemorrah (2000) *Worrorra Lalai* (Kimberley Language Research Centre: Halls Creek).]

[4] Joseph Bradshaw's ascent of Mt Waterloo (called Nubungarri by the Wororra Aborigines) appears to be the first documented ascent by a European.

[5] Grey boxes: *Eucalyptus tectifica;* bauhinias: *(Bauhinia cunninghamii);* cabbage gums *(Eucalyptus grandifolia* or *E. clavigera)*; nux-vomica trees: strychnine trees *(Strychnos lucida)*; beefwoods: *Hakea* spp.; stunted acacias: *Acacia* species, such as *A. gonocarpa, A. retinervis* or *A. stigmatophylla,* which are all common in the area; and pines: cypress pines *(Callitris intratropica)*.

[6] Yams: the north-west Kimberley has two species of true yams – round or "cheeky" yam *(Dioscorea bulbifera)* and long yam *(D. transversa)*, which is a prized Aboriginal bush tucker.

[7] Screw palms: *Pandanus spiralis*; river ashes: probably *Alphitonia incana;* paperbark trees: *Melaleuca* species.

[8] Coign of vantage: a place affording a good view.

[9] Basalt: a dark, fine-grained igneous rock. The basalts of the Prince Regent area are nowadays regarded by Kimberley geologists as a component of the Carson Volcanics, dated to the Lower Proterozoic era.

[10] Jannedik: possibly a type of antelope. The term "Jane Doe" was also used to refer to an unnamed female party in legal proceedings; "Jannedik" could be word play by Gunn, given that "doe" is also an antelope, as is "dik" in African usage.

[11] His native Verdes: Gunn in *PINA* No. XVII refers to Blanca's "Spanish ancestors". However, Blanca's usage of the word 'pompara' in *PINA* No. VIII suggests he was Italian.

[12] Humpty Dumpty: An allusion to the personified egg in English and European nursery rhyme folklore that breaks after a fall and cannot be repaired or restored to its original shape.

[13] The perilous ascent of Mount Trafalgar by Franciso Blanca and Aeneas Gunn appears to be the first documented climb. Tim Macartney-Snape, the first Australian mountaineer to climb Mt Everest, ascended the formidable overhanging north-east face of Mount Trafalgar with Roland Tyson in July 1991. The ascent was described and illustrated in the colour magazine of *The West Australian* (Perth), 24 August 1991, in a report by Mark Thornton entitled "Journey to the land that time forgot".

[14] Mount Knight: the peak climbed by the botanist Allan Cunningham and surgeon James Hunter from Careening Bay in late September 1820; they named it "after Thomas Andrew Knight, Esq., the President of the Horticultural Society." [See P.P. King (1827) *Narrative of a survey of the Intertropical and Western Coast of Australia Performed Between 1818 and 1822* (2 vols., John Murray : London) : vol.1, page 424–425.] From Mt Knight, Cunningham and Hunter were able to gaze on the river and its lower basins, prompting exploration and naming in King's cutter *Mermaid*. The country was largely burnt out or ablaze with bushfires and the lack of game to shoot caused disappointment to Hunter. [See M. Hordern (1997) *King of the Australian Coast* (Melbourne University Press), pages 249 & 253.]

Saturday July 22, 1899

No. X.

Along with the physical equipments necessary in the personality of the North Australian settler there should go the mental endowments of, at least, a smattering of botany, geology, and natural history. By the possession of such knowledge his appreciation of his surroundings will be enhanced, and his resources increased; and if to all be added the aesthetic perceptions which assist him to realise thoughts that lie too deep for tears in the meanest flower that grows, monotony, however great, will be robbed of its sting, and solitude, however huge, cheated of its victory. He will find a perpetual fount of interest in the flora and fauna of the region surrounding him, and will in the end arrive at a more or less intelligent interpretation of the strange scribblings of a nature learning how to write. None of our party were scientists nor artists to any remarkable degree. One certainly claimed to be "something of a geologist," but when he declared a certain stone, which bore a striking resemblance to ordinary road metal, to be "mother of opal," his pretensions to geological knowledge were discredited. But there were two specimens of natural history in our surroundings which especially interested us, partly, perhaps, because they lent themselves in a striking manner to the decoration of the landscape, and partly also because they were peculiarly interesting in themselves. One – in the botanical world – was the strange form of the Baobab tree, and the other – in the insect world – the white ant, or termite, and its peculiar hill.

The Baobab tree *(Adansonia gregorii)* is found only in the limited area of country that lies between the Victoria River and King Sound, or directly opposite the habitat of an African variety, *Adansonia digitata* which resembles it in almost every essential particular, any extrinsic dissimilarity being due to the modification of local environments. The occurrence of Baobab trees, and white ants, and their hills, in similar latitudes in Africa and Australia, has been cited in support of the opinion of geologists that the two continents were once joined by dry land, but were separated by a gigantic terrestrial subsidence in a remote epoch of the world's natural history. Whatever truth there may be in the opinion it is quite as worthy of acceptance as that of another scientist who declared lately that the Baobabs "had been brought over and planted." Landscape gardening over an area of 600 miles is a "large order," and it is much more credible that the Baobab, like the blackfellow, the kangaroo, and the platypus has been here all along; but whatever theories may be deduced from the existence of the tree in the two countries, it is certainly a most interesting figure in the North Australian botanical world. Without a pictured representation, one can hardly realise the peculiar appearance the tree presents. The trees attain great growth in many instances, and I have measured specimens that had a circumference of 75f[ee]t[1]. Their height is inconsiderable, and is seldom more than 40f[ee]t[2]. Frequently they run to strange shapes, and the stems and trunks are mostly squat and ungainly. Here they resemble a whisky bottle, sometimes, though rarely, a lemonade bottle; one I know is exactly like a huge pewter teapot, of an old fashioned pattern, another is like an enormous onion, with a long straight stem springing from its bole; but

here and there a graceful shape, like a granite column, rises from out the tall waving spear-grass, and beefwood and pine scrubs. It is, however, on alluvial flats the tree attains its most vigorous growth, and achieves the maximum of its development. It is in such situations a welcome adjunct to the landscape. Its massive trunk stands like a leaden-grey tower in the midst of prodigal vegetation, and in the wet season spreads a great canopy of leaves, decorated with blossoms, over a wide radius of ground. In most instances the limbs are short and contorted. The leaves, shaped like those of the fig, are deciduous and bunched in bright green masses on short, thick twigs. The baobab blooms early in the wet season, and the flowers, shaped like a dinner-bell, are either white or of a rich cream color, and are heavily odorous of honey. The fruit of the tree is of an oval form, and runs from 3 in[ches] to 6 in[ches] in length. It is covered with brittle husks that have a short furry nap. When young the fruit is an acid jelly, in the centre of which are embedded several small, kidney-shaped seeds. At this stage the natives roast the fruit and seem to relish a repast on it, but a blackfellow relishes pelican. I found the fruit, however cooked, acrid, insipid, and unpalatable. When ripe the jelly becomes a consistent white substance that can be powdered easily, and is very like cream of tartar. It may yet be found to possess a considerable commercial value, as the fruit of the African variety is an article of trade throughout that continent. The trunk of the baobab is formed of innumerable alternate successions of pith and fibre by which Adanson, the discoverer of the species, considered he could estimate the age of the tree[3]. On his computation it is reported to achieve the unimaginable age of 5,000 years. The estimate is probably incorrect, as also are two other fables in connection with the tree. For a long time it was believed to be indestructible, and the idea was supported by the instance of a hale old monster at Derby, which had been cut down to make room for a tramway. Rolled to the roadside, the tree still continued to deck its few remaining boughs with fresh green leaves as each wet season was ushered, and probably does yet. And as no dead baobab had been seen in the Kimberley district the belief in their practical immortality was a generally accepted article in the creed of North Australian bush lore. But the creed was based on insufficient data. Many even young healthy trees die. I have seen several "dead, defunct without any doubt, the lamp of their lives decidedly out," and the reason the report gained ground is due to the fact that speedy disintegration of its particles takes place after the death of the tree. Another fable that gained considerable credence was that subterranean water would almost certainly be found anywhere within 20 f[ee]t of the tree. Whatever gave rise to the idea is a mystery. On the strength of it I sank several shafts in the centre of groves of the trees, and found the ground, as empty of water as the fable is of truth. The tree may be seen clinging like a huge wart on the face of sandstone cliffs, or squeezing its enormous bulk out of clefts in the rocks, where it is impossible to imagine any permanent supply of water could exist. The late Baron von Mueller, who was with Gregory's expedition in the far North, and was the first to systematically decide the position of the Australian baobab in the botanical world, bore me out in my opinion, that so far from its being dependent upon extraneous supplies of water during the dry season, one of the characteristic habits of the tree is to absorb and store sufficient in its spongy trunk during the prevalence of the rains to last it through the south-east season[4]. Bushmen of experience, recognising this habit of the tree, have, when compelled by stress of circumstances to go through dry stages of country with insufficient water, resorted to the device of cutting down young trees and, draining off their vital fluid, obtained enough to last them for a day's stage ; and several instances are current in the traditions of North Australian travel in which lost travellers have sustained life by resorting to the same expedient. Other trees, such as the mulga and the Coolibah, and a certain frog in Central Australia, have somewhat similar characteristic traits; and the bushman, whose lore includes those useful scraps of natural history knowledge, enters on his journey with an addition to his equipment that will some day or other stand him in good stead[5]. The bark of the baobab is composed of a thick closely-packed grain, about an inch through, and is coated with a thin grey skin that peels off in small flakes, but leaves the main fabric of the bark intact. The bark is easily cut, and the natives frequently employ it as a sort of illustrated magazine and limn in carved lines on the boles pictorial illustrations of their obscure demonology, their grotesque humor, and their natural history[6]. One tree at the Regent had carved on it a quaintly hideous figure of great age, that we called "The Spotted Devil of the Wahgomerahs." The figure probably had some significant connection with the totemic rites of the natives, as it immediately overlooked a circle of sacred stones on the shore of an island opposite. Early explorers also found on the bark of the trees convenient tablets on which to leave records of their visits, and besides Captain King's tree, mentioned in an early number of these papers, I found trees on the Victoria River that were marked with the sign and date of Gregory's expedition in 1855[7]. These inscriptions will probably last as long as the trees, and are valuable historic relics.

[1] 75ft. = 22.86 m.

[2] 40ft. = 12.19 m.

[3] Adanson, the discoverer of the species: refers to Michel Adanson (1727–1806), a French naturalist, who visited Senegal in West Africa 1748–1754 and described the African baobab in detail.

[4] Baron von Mueller (1852–1896), the greatest Australian botanist of his century, accompanied A.C. Gregory's expedition to the Victoria River, Northern Territory in 1856. The first European to collect botanical specimens of the Kimberley

boab was Allan Cunningham (in September 1819) the naturalist on the *Mermaid*, under the command of Captain Phillip Parker King. Cunningham never formally named the tree.

[5] A certain frog in Central Australia: probably *Cyclorana platycephala*, one of the so-called 'water-holding' burrowing frogs.

[6] Limn in : paint or portray

[7] Trees on the Victoria River .... marked with the sign and date of Gregory's expedition in 1855: probably refers to the tree near Timber Creek, Northern Territory with the inscription "I July 1856 Letter in oven". This tree is illustrated in Pat Lowe (1998) *The Boab Tree* (Lothian, Port Melbourne, page 71).

Saturday July 29, 1899

No. XI[1].

The white ant is much more widely distributed throughout Australia, and tropical regions elsewhere, than the Baobab tree, and may be found inhabiting fallen logs, and decaying trees, or occupying wooden walls in Victoria, as well as residing in the spacious house of many mansions it erects for itself in tropical Australia and Africa. The white ant, by the way, is not an ant at all, but a termite, and belongs to the order of Neuroptera, which includes dragon flies and lion ants (another misnomer), while the true ant belongs to the more extensive family of Hymenoptera, the most familiar types of which are wasps, bees and ants[2]. The term white ant is, however, quite good enough for popular usage, as scientific naturalists must have exercised a very nice discrimination in determining the difference between the species, the governmental system of a colony of termites and that of a hive of bees, or a nest of ants being practically similar. A colony of white ants is divided into workers and soldiers, both sexless, but possessing rudimentary sexual organs, drones, males and females, and a queen mother, as is the case with most varieties of bees and ants. The workers and soldiers are reputed to be blind, but the former evince a remarkable perspicacity in discovering the whereabouts of a piece of edible wood, the natural aliment of the termite. Once found, it is wonderful what unanimity of purpose pervades a colony of termites that is bent on appropriating some cherished bit of property of man, or some tree or piece of wood that mayhap provide it with toothsome food. And it is marvellous what destruction can be wrought under the influence of that animating purpose in one night. White ants are children of darkness. They never voluntarily expose themselves to the light of day, or the assault of predacious birds and insects, for which their juicy bodies provide tasty tit-bits. All their work is done either under cover of night, through subterranean tunnels or closed in viaducts of their own construction. Their methods of subversion are as esoteric as those of a Nihilist organisation[3]. Secretly, silently, insidiously they invest the object they are in pursuit of with such skill and address that its complete absorption is soon accomplished. Bags, boxes, books, boots, even, left on the ground over night, are, as often as not, found, in the morning, completely riddled with holes, or ramified with mud-cased tunnels. So speedy are they in their attacks on anything they wish to misappropriate that Northerners call after a messenger with a laggard reputation, to soothe, solace and comfort him on his way, "Now, hurry up, or the white ants will be into you." In North Australia there are few native woods, and less imported timbers, that are impervious to the inroads of the termites, and houses, to be at all secure, have to be built on piles, capped with galvanised iron or tin, and frequently to make assurance doubly sure, and it is none too sure at that, piles are sawn in two and another plate inserted through the cut. Sheet lead will not do as the strong mandibles the white ants are provided with can gnaw through that comparatively soft material; zinc also is ineffectual as they employ a natural acid to corrode holes in it. Paperbark trees (a giant variety of ti-tree), bloodwood (a eucalyptus), Leichhardt and another variety of pine tree are the only building timbers, indigenous to North Australia, which the white ants will not devour[4]. Almost all fruit trees, or trees producing commercial commodities, except the coffee plant and India-rubber trees, are liable to destruction from their attentions, and the arboriculturist or tropical planter of the future will have much difficulty in selecting plants that will not ruin their enterprise. At Springvale station, on the Katherine River, Northern Territory, Mr A. St John Giles succeeded in raising an orchard in which custard apples, persimmons, mangos, guavas, lemons, oranges, bananas and pawpaws throve vigorously for some years, but gradually, one by one, the trees died, and all that were left alive in the end were the pawpaws and bananas. The white ants had entered and destroyed all the rest.

But one of the most remarkable traits of the termite is that which is exercised in the construction of its peculiar hills. The hills are mostly built of a reddish brown clay, to which are added small slips of grass and chips of wood, and the whole fabric is cemented with the saliva of the termites. In the long dry months, when the sun burns with a steady, continuous heat, the masonry of the termites hardens to the consistency of bricks, and to other than human attack their castles are unassailable. The hills lend the landscape a novel and interesting aspect, particularly in such places as Fountain Head, Brock's Creek, and Burrundie, on the Palmerston and Pine Creek railway line, where, with a base of not more than five feet in diameter, the structures are raised to any height from 10 to 20 feet. These hills are often surmounted by shapely minarets and slender spires which add a few more feet to their stature, and some – not superfluous – elegance to their appearance. Generally speaking, throughout the north the typical ant hill is a rough, irregular mass of from two to 10 feet high, and presents few readily distinguishable features; but in the Napier Broome Bay district, in the extreme north of

West Australia, the hills are not infrequently wider in the middle than at the base, and are built of a collection of mushroom shaped lumps that overlap each other, and present the appearance of a collection of old-fashioned straw bee-hives, piled on a central pedestal[5]. In some parts of the Kimberley district, particularly on heavily-grassed plains, hundreds of sharp-pointed little pinnacles, like large cones of loaf sugar in shape and hardness, are clustered on every acre of land, and when the grass is at its tallest, gallops after runaway steers result in frequent falls to riders and ridden from contact with the hidden stumbling blocks. But the most peculiar of all houses which the curious little entomological mound builder erects for itself are those which are called meridional ant hills[6]. These are not more than five or six feet high, about five or six feet long, and from two to three feet wide at the base. They taper sharply to the apex and resemble a broad wedge. They almost invariably point about S.S.E. and N.N.W, and are probably so built to present the least surface resistance to the south-east and north-west monsoons.

It is a moot point why the white ant builds such goodly mansions for itself, and bush naturalists incline to the theory that the mound is first raised round some tree-stump, or other object it may wish to convert into food, and this is possibly the correct reason if a story that went the rounds of the north be true. A stockman, who had taken a Burketown mosquito net, was camped at the Stuck Up, outside Pine Creek[7]. He slept soundly until early morning when he was aroused by the tickling of a million creeping things crawling over him, and occasionally sampling him. He tried to move his arm to scratch himself, but couldn't shift it. He tried to wriggle, but found he was held by a firm, even pressure all round his body. His dawning consciousness revealed to him the fresh unctuous odor of newly-turned earth. His first definite impression was one of amazement. His next sensation was one of speechless fear. He thought he had somehow been mistaken for dead, and, having been buried in a state of coma, was being prematurely converted into earthworm's food. A cold sweat broke out all over him. He made superhuman efforts to free himself from the mould, but made no impression on it. He thought his case hopeless, and did what anyone else would have done in the situation – he yelled. He struggled some more. It was a useless expenditure of energy. He was getting suffocated, and he yelled again. His waking mates near by heard the muffled yells and seeing nothing – wondered. More muffled yells, evidently of a mortal in agony, bestirred them to action. They looked about and were surprised to find the yells came from an evident ant hill. They knocked some lumps off it, and would have run away for fear of the nature of the discovery they made. They saw a human foot. Curiosity held them to the spot. The foot palpably kicked. They knocked some more earth from the mound and were astonished to find more parts of human anatomy. More earth was hastily cleared away, and they were more than ever surprised to find their mate Bill, who they thought they had left in the public house at Pine Creek the night before, beneath the mound. Bill had fainted, but when he came to, his language was lurid and smelt of sulphur. He upbraided his mates with "Why the dot, dash, asterisk, did you blank, dash, blanky, fools, blank well blanky, bury me like that." Note of interrogation, hyphen, full stop. "Did you blanky well think I was dead ?" "We didn't bury you, you screaming idiot. Look! It's the white ants." Many poor bushmen lose their lives that way[8].

[1] Alfred Searcy (1909) *In Australian Tropics,* pages 324–330, quotes verbatim Gunn's entire article on termites. Searcy's *By Flood and Field* (1912) pp. 128–129 also quotes Gunn on termites.

[2] Neuroptera: termites are now considered to belong to the order Isoptera.

[3] Nihilist: nihilism is the rejection of all religious and moral principles; also a philosophic doctrine holding that nothing has real existence. Nihilism was popular with the revolutionary movement in late Czarist Russia.

[4] Paperbark trees: *Melaleuca* species.

Leichhardt tree: *Nauclea orientalis;* the pine tree referred to is cypress pine *(Callitris intratropica).*

[5] Napier Broome Bay: Evidence of Gunn's exploration in this area came to light in May 1911, when a party (including Father Planas and Abbot Torres) located a carved boab tree, 15 km ESE of Pago Mission. The inscription 'A E Gunn XIX/XII/XCII' indicated that Gunn marked the tree on 19 December 1892. [Information from diaries, held in Archives of the Benedictine Community, New Norcia, supplied by Wendy McKinley, archivist.] In October 1892 Bradshaw had acquired lease 71/237 of 150 000 acres (60 726 ha) at Napier Broome Bay. It proved to be his last lease acquisition in the Kimberley (Clement 1993).

[6] Meridional ant hills: the so-called 'magnetic' anthills, constructed by the termite *Amitermes meridionalis* occur only in the "top end" of the Northern Territory. The currently favoured explanation is that the north/south alignment minimises overheating in the middle of the day.

[7] Burketown mosquito net: i.e. a bottle of rum!

[8] Many poor bushmen lose their lives that way: Gunn is only joking!

Saturday August 5, 1899

No. XII.

But neither white ants, nor baobab trees, nor the ever changing glories of sky and sunset and storm wholly engaged our attention. The erection of homestead and station buildings, interrupted often, proceeded when atmospheric conditions were favorable, and by the time the schooner returned from Wyndham, about the middle of January, or six weeks after her departure, the skeleton of a commodious house was elevated and capped with a galvanised iron roof, and a dam that

might have been sunk in "bibulous Blythesdale Braystone" for all the water it would hold, was constructed. The schooner brought the tale of a woeful voyage. She had barely reached the open sea, with her freight of live stock, when tempestuous weather, accompanied by mountainous waves, assailed her. An exceptionally heavy sea carried away her rudder, and while temporary steering gear was being arranged, she pitched and tossed so violently in the wild confused sea that four of the eight horses she had on board were hopelessly injured, and had to be heaved overboard. After the usual tackling employed in such contingencies as the carrying away of a rudder had been fixed up, it was deemed expedient to put back to Wyndham to effect more reliable repairs, and on a fresh start being made, the return voyage was safely accomplished in despite of adverse weather. The sight of the bonnie little vessel, gliding silently up the quiet waters of Bradshaw's Straits, was a welcome apparition to the lonely settlers as she had been looked for with some anxiety for several weeks. Moreover, she brought with her besides, mails, horses and pigs, three invaluable acquisitions to our party in the persons of Mr Hugh Young, one of the members of Mr Bradshaw's original exploring expedition, Phil. Dubois, an excellent cook and useful handyman, and Kolumboi, a young Myall blackfellow[1], whose native haunts were to the south of the Kimberley goldfields, where for countless generations his tribe had been compelled to seek their meat from God, and Kolumboi, like most inland blackfellows, had developed a truly wonderful faculty for tracking game. But Mr Young was the most welcome addition to our staff. He was particularly capable and adroit in every department of frontier life. He was resolute, daring, and resourceful. Like Gunga Din, "he didn't seem to know the use of fear."[2] He had, too, the additional advantages of a Dookie College education, and had been during the exploring expedition, an understudy of Mr. Bradshaw, than whom no more resourceful bushman lives, unless exceptions can be made in the instances of M. Cartney, a son of the old Melbourne dean, Phil Saunders, an overlander, prospector, and explorer of northern fame, and "Old Bluey" Buchanan, the Natty Bumpo of Australian back-blocks' bushcraft[3]. But besides possessing the essential qualities of a successful bushman, Hugh Young was a good fellow to boot, and the only fault I could find with him while we were associated, which was practically during the whole course of my northern career, was that he was not a commendable shot. And it was not long after he joined our party that the utility of being able to hold a gun straight was illustrated. The schooner had been despatched to Prince Frederick Harbor to meet a pearling schooner whose owner had kindly agreed to meet our vessel there with mails. While she was away, Kolumboi, with a look of absolute unconcern on his saturnine face, came to the camp and informed us that there were "lots, plenty wild blackfellow sit down, all about coole-y-up (close up, or near to) that one water hole." Equipped like brigands, with rifles, revolvers, and cartouche belts, Mr Bradshaw despatched Young and me to interview the dusky warriors, and, if there should be any necessity for shooting, gave us instructions not to waste a shot[4]. Kolumboi led the way to the spot where he had seen the natives, who had, in the meantime, fled to the hill tops, where we could see them perched like crows on the rocks. Kolumboi made signals of amity to them, and in a little while about half a score of tall, handsome, athletic-looking savages, as naked as Adam, came cautiously down to us. Walking with the erect, easy grace peculiar to people unhampered with clothes, and showing their hands, in token of their defenceless condition, they came to within three or four yards of where we stood, and then sat down. One of the natives was a remarkable-looking old man, who stood over six feet in his stockings. His forehead was high and broad, and his head almost bald. He was not very thick lipped, nor yet broad nosed. His color was more that of copper or bronze than of black, and I should say he had unmistakable traces of Malay blood in him, for he certainly did not appear to be pure Australian, nor did any of the men who were with him. His manner was urbane and bland, and, in more ways than one, he reminded me of a clergyman of my acquaintance. He had the same sweet, insinuating smile, and a precisely similar air of oiled and honeyed deference. But we were "brutal Britons," and had an ingrained distrust of excessive suavity. We told the old gentleman – for he was a gentleman, and no shop-walker could possibly have a finer manner – that it was our intention to "sit down" there, and that he and his people must "vamoose the ranch," "inspan and trek," or "tip their nags a gallop," which same language, illustrated with dumb show, he, at first, affected not to understand[5]. Gradually, and after much consultation with his fellows, during which Kolumboi kept urging us to "Kill 'em now," it was borne into the intelligence of the old man that he was expected to "get up and get." He prepared to comply with such reluctance that, to emphasise our wishes in the matter, Mr Young discharged his rifle in the air. The savages ran for about forty yards when they stopped, and to our astonishment stooped down and picked up spears, which they had dragged down from the hill with their toes, a very common practise that we had not suspected at the time, as their walk appeared perfectly unhampered. Even Kolumboi, a savage of savages, and perfectly versed in all the arts and artifices of aboriginal warfare, was deceived, and he hurled rude epithets in his native vernacular (punctuated with revolver shots) at the wily warriors whose deceit had outwitted his experience. For a moment they hesitated between fighting and running, but seeing our rifles levelled with fell intent, retreated in extended order at double quick time. Perhaps their decision saved our party the bother of a burial service. One of us had drawn a perfect line on a retreating figure and pulling the trigger found that someone, who had been practising with the gun, had left an empty cartridge in the barrel. That is a defect which, with repeating rifles, can be remedied with a jerk, but the stupidity of "going into

action" without a preliminary inspection of his piece might, in other circumstances, have taught him a lesson that would not have required repetition. We gave chase to the natives, who ascended the rocky slopes of Mount Trafalgar with wonderful agility, and we very nearly surprised them in a rugged declivity, where they had evidently assembled to hold a council of war. The position was clearly theirs had they chose to avail themselves of it, for the ground was very rough, and the tall grass, massive boulders, and prodigal vegetation provided them with ideal ambushes, from which they could have speared us with little or no risk to themselves, but accepting the cover as a safe means of retreat, they left us in possession of the field. Our only spoils of war were a bundle of spears with flint points, a rattan cane hoop, and a small bundle wrapped up in paper bark. The purpose of the rattan hoop puzzled us until Kolumboi told us it was generally used as a sort of noose to slip over the head of a foeman and hold him in position while his head is being pounded with a waddie – a species of "putting in Chancery" that is an improvement on the method of schoolboy pugilism[6]. Very likely the hoop had been recently used, for in the parcel, besides a perfect piece of crystal, we found a strip of blue dungaree cloth and a rag of red handkerchief, both clotted with dried blood. We got the explanation of those blood-stained trophies of civilization when the schooner returned from Prince Frederick Harbor. We thought they spelt tragedy and our interpretation of the ghastly symbols was not incorrect.

[1] Myall: an Aboriginal living in traditional manner.

[2] Gunga Din, "he didn't seem to know the use of fear." From *Gunga Din* by Rudyard Kipling (1856–1936).

[3] Dookie College: a noted agricultural college near Shepparton, Victoria.

M.Cartney: John Macartney, a Queenslander who founded Florida Station c. 1883 on the remote Goyder River, Arnhem Land. After two years of continual warfare with Aborigines, he abandoned Florida and drove the surviving cattle 1600 km west. Here in 1886, he co-founded Auvergne Station on the Baines River, Northern Territory (Hill 1951, pp. 173 & 241).

Phil Saunders (1841–1931): led an expedition to the Kimberley in 1882. He found gold on the upper reaches of the Ord River, precipitating the 1886 (Hall's Creek) gold rush.

"Old Bluey" Buchanan: Nathaniel Buchanan (1826–1901), the explorer and drover. He also pioneered the infamous Murranji Track stock route in the Northern Territory, from Newcastle Waters to the Victoria River. The Duracks gave him the nickname, because of his grey hair.

Natty Bumpo: in American literary folklore, the ideal outdoorsman; kind, strong, honest and resourceful. From the name of the hero in James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*.

[4] Cartouche belts: cartridge belts.

[5] Inspan and trek: Afrikaans (South African) expression for putting oxen into harness and travelling or migrating by wagon.

[6] "Putting in Chancery": a wrestling hold, encircling the neck.

Saturday August 12, 1899

No. XIII.

It is among the most unhappy circumstances of my life that almost every suspicious intuition I have entertained about matters in which I have been interested, has been more or less substantially supported by subsequent inquiries, and when the schooner returned from Prince Frederick harbor, a few days after our encounter with the Wangomerahs, I was not very much surprised that she brought information which went some way towards confirming my suspicions that the "Rev. John," and his friends, were not quite the guileless innocents their suave and deferential manner might have led us to suppose[1]. Prince Frederick Harbor is only thirty miles from our location on the Prince Regent River, and Captain Frank Biddles, of the schooner *Ivy*, and her satellitic fleet of pearling luggers, wrote to ask us to co-operate with him in wreaking vengeance on the natives for their foul and unprovoked murder of Martin Liljroth, his sailing master, and a tame Australian blackboy[2]. Martin, who was a peaceful, well-disposed Norwegian, had been in the habit of fishing with a seine in a salt water arm of the harbor, and, on the occasion of his murder, had gone ashore, as usual, with his blackboy and several Malays. As he had never previously been molested, he apprehended no danger of assault from anything more formidable than the jaws of alligators and the tails of stingrays, and left his firearms in the dinghy. Had his experience been drawn from life in unsettled inland districts, he would have known that his immunity from attack, on a coast where the natives were believed to be the most treacherous and hostile on the Australian mainland, was in itself a suspicious circumstance, that ought to have produced caution, for the Australian blackfellow is very much like Josh Billing's mule, which had a way of being exceptionally docile for six months for the ulterior purpose of getting an effective kick onto its master at an unsuspected moment[3]. There are a million moral and psychological reflections that can be drawn from the knowledge of the existence of that trait in animals – human or inhuman – if one cared to reflect. But Martin's mind was singularly simple and straightforward. He had never done the natives any harm, and having no guile in himself he suspected none in others. Poor Martin! As if things human – civilized or uncivilized – were ever done that way. The inevitable awakening from such child-like faith came swiftly and he went to Valhalla on his one, first, last and greatest disenchantment[4]. A score of stalwart savages, armed with spears, nullahs, and boomerangs, were lurking in the secure ambush of the

dense, sound-stifling jungle of mangroves that lined the creek, and, when the Malays were at the other end of the net, the blackfellows rushed on Martin and the blackboy, and commenced to belabour them with their weapons. The cowardly Malays, who ought to have been strung up on the yardarm of the *Ivy*, as they undoubtedly would have been in the good old buccaneering days when might was right, and the only law of the ship was the master's will, with one consent at once ran to the dinghy, and instead of going to the assistance of Martin with the firearms, pushed the boat out into the water, and were not long in putting a safe distance between themselves and the blackfellows. The blackboy was speedily dispatched, but the hardy Norseman, armed only with a boat paddle, evidently made a stout fight for his life as, when Captain Biddles arrived on the scene he found his mate battered and gashed out of recognition. The boat paddle, dyed with the blood of the natives, was broken into several pieces, and all round Martin's and the blackboy's bodies were bloody evidences of a fierce struggle. The bodies had been denuded of their clothing, and there is little doubt the strips of blue dungaree cloth and red handkerchief, which we found on Mount Trafalgar, were mementos of the affray; and it is not unlikely that the rattan cane hoop had played its part in the tragedy by rendering Martin helpless, while deathly blows were being dealt him with ironwood nullahs[5]. Captain Biddles organised a reprisal party, and went in pursuit of the perpetrators of the foul murder. The result of the expedition is not reported, but the party included Charlie Clark, a Port Darwin blackfellow, whose reputation as the most truculent semi-civilized savage in North Australia is a sufficient guarantee that, if they were overtaken at all, drastic justice followed swiftly in the steps of the murderers. Our co-operation in Captain Biddles' campaign of reprisal was willingly undertaken, as we felt, even on the discovery of the blood-stained rags on Mount Trafalgar, that we had missed an opportunity for avenging the murder of one of our color. It is not in human nature – black or white – to accept with complaisance the fact that one of its kind has been done to death without just cause, and fully half the improperly so-called murders of the blacks by whites, out of which Southern and Exeter Hall philanthropists make so much dead stock, are to be credited, or debited, according to the point of view, to a desire to avenge the death of some friend or fellow[6]. It is useless to argue, as has frequently been done, particularly since my statement of the settler's attitude to the natives in earlier numbers of these papers, that the blackfellows are savages, and do not know any better. For the very reason that they are savages, and do not know any better, they must be shown the error of their ways by methods that are on a plane with their intelligence. Frontier society has to be its own law, police, jury and judge. The justice and mercy of the tribunal rests solely on its own conscience, and if sometimes it makes a mistake, or administers a biased verdict, its fallibility is referable to the circumstance that its welfare is more intimately concerned with its judgement than might be the case with the decisions of the more elaborate judicial systems of more extensive and highly-organised societies. In the present case the evidence against the "Rev. John," and his associates, was purely circumstantial, but was to us sufficiently conclusive to prove their complicity in the murder of Martin Liljroth. Further, the crime was committed in our territory, and the moral effect of allowing it to go unpunished by us would jeopardise our own safety. We were quite of one mind with Shakespeare and Artemus Ward, that "thrice is he armed who hath his quarrel just, and four times he who gets his blow in fust," and if our desire to meet again the dusky warriors, we had let slip so lightly through our hands before, was partly animated by a spirit of just revenge, there was also something in it of an intention to anticipate an act of hostility towards ourselves[7].

[1] Wangomerahs: spelt Wahgomerahs elsewhere by Gunn. According to Blundell (1975), page 87, the northernmost of the Wororra coastal clans were, in reality, the Wunbanguwaja. The latter's estate comprised the coast of St. George Basin, including Mount Trafalgar and Mount Waterloo, as well as St. Andrew Island where "their painted sites are said to be". Only one member of the clan, an old man, was still alive by the mid-1970s.

[2] Captain Frank Biddles: was born in South Australia in 1851. In 1886 he purchased the lugger *The Fly* and began pearling in King Sound. In 1901 he rescued 160 passengers and crew from the *Karrakatta*, wrecked at Swan Point. In 1902 he retired to Fremantle and was later an owner of Thangoo Station, near Broome. He died in 1932 [information from J.S. Battye (1915) *The History of the North West of Australia* (V. K. Jones & Co., Perth), pages 138–140; H.J. Gibbney & A.G. Smith *A Biographical Register: 1788–1939,* volume 1: A–K, page 58.]

The schooner *Ivy:* 59 tons, a two-masted schooner, built at Fremantle by Robert Howson in 1882. Fore and aft rigged, she was acquired by Biddles in June 1890 at Cossack. *Ivy* struck a reef at the Lacepede Islands in November 1896 and sank in seven fathoms. Captain Birnie and his crew were forced to cling to the masts for several hours, before being rescued. The *Ivy* ended up a total wreck. Biddles probably blazed the large boab tree on the NW side of Glauert Island (Coronation Islands) with the inscription "IVY 19.10.91". The tree was noted on a quarantine survey in 1992, which led to the formal gazettal of the name "Ivy Cove" in August 1994. [See next footnote reference.]

Murder of Martin Liljroth (also spelt Liljeroth): took place on 22 December 1891 in a bay near the Anderdon Islands at the mouth of Prince Frederick Harbour. Liljroth's body was recovered and buried above the beach, but no trace was ever found of his Aboriginal companion, Henry. [Information from Ian Elliot (October 1994), "Ivy Cove: a new name in the Kimberley" *Boab Bulletin* 5, page 10–11, Kimberley Society, Perth.]

[3] Josh Billing's mule: 'Josh Billings' was the pseudonym of the U.S. humorist and author Henry Wheeler Shaw (1818–1885). His popular books *Hiz Sayings* (1865) and *Encyclopaedia of Wit and Wisdom* (1874) combined agrarian folk wisdom with satirical comment on government and political corruption.

[4] Valhalla: in Norse mythology, the home of slain heroes.

[5] Ironwood nullahs: clubs made from the hard, heavy wood of *Erythrophleum chlorostachys*.

[6] Exeter Hall philanthropists: possibly named for a building in the Strand, London, where humanist groups held meetings.

[7] Shakespeare and Artemus Ward: "thrice is he armed who hath his quarrel just, and four times he who gets his blow in fast". The first part of the quotation is from *King Henry VI, Part II*, iii, ii, 232; the second part of the quotation is from Ward and 'Josh Billings' (1865) *Hiz Sayings*. Gunn, however, uses the Scottish dialect 'fust'.

Saturday August 19, 1899

No. XIV.

The day after we received Captain Biddles' letter I took a party comprising Hugh Young, Larsen, Kolumboi, and Franciso Blanca on an ostensible exploring expedition to the regions beyond Trafalgar, but my private instructions were to "disperse" any blackfellow's camp we might meet. The excursion was an unforgettable one. Our horses had not yet recovered from the effects of their rough voyage from Wyndham, and were unfit for use. We had to go on foot. The day was one of those boiling ones that are peculiar to North Australia – a blend of tropical humidity with the intense heat of an Australian desert summer. The sun's rays were pitilessly hot. The sorghum grass on the alluvial flats waved its bunches of ears fully eight feet above our heads. Walking through it was like wading through a dense cane brake[1]. The only view we got was a strip of turquoise sky, bound by walls of green. The air was terribly close in the thick grass crop, and we were glad to reach the freer air on the hill slopes. Still we perspired excessively, and, to supply the waste, were tempted to drink at little rivulets, that rippled and ran in slender streams of water, as limpid as the light of a star, or quench our thirst at pellucid pools that gemmed the rock holes. On two or three trials we kept our thirst as the water was as hot as freshly spilt blood. After crossing the saddle of a ridge that connects Mount Trafalgar with a high promontory we called Basalt Point, the grass was shorter and thinner, and the walking much easier[2]. Skirting the foothills of the western slope of Mount Trafalgar, we gradually mounted a long, low range that trended in a northerly direction, from the base of the twin peaks. When we reached its backbone there was spread before us a prospect of rolling basalt downs sweeping in bright green folds, creased with dark bands of foliage, where hidden creeks ran, and flowered with clumps of vegetation on their bossed sides, until they burst in masses of billowy verdure on the rugged walls of a range of wild hills. At the back of Mount Waterloo stretched a wide, apparently unbroken, jungle of mangroves, many thousands of acres in area. The basalt downs country was ideal pastoral land, and as we sat and rested in the welcome shade of a feather tree, we speculated on the importance of our discovery[3]. We made mental calculations of the number of cattle the country would carry, and were discussing the many beauties of the scene, when, about a mile away, a thin wisp of blue smoke was seen curling up from a patch of screw palms, on the edge of a small salt marsh adjoining the mangrove jungle[4]. Kolumboi, on being appealed to, said "Youii! That one blackfellow fire, alright." We carefully examined our rifles and revolvers, and started after our quarry.

Our design was to surprise the natives in camp, and, if possible, make a capture, but the nature of the country between ourselves and the spot from which the smoke arose, was not favorable to such a purpose. From our feet the land fell away towards the mangrove jungle in a long open sweep, with here and there a clump of trees and an occasional hollow, at such wide intervals as to be useless for stalking, while the site of the blacks' camp was only a hop, step and jump from a tolerably secure refuge in the mangroves. Could we have counted on the blacks fighting in the open, we would have rushed the camp, and settled accounts there and then, but aboriginal warfare is an affair of ambushes and surprises, and when they, and not their opponents, are the pursued, they never seem to be "spoiling for a fight." They can fight with much vigor, and great truculence, when the odds are a hundred to one in their favor, but in most other circumstances their military tactics consist in beating masterly retreats. To make as sure as possible of our game, we made a long detour, with the purpose of reaching the mangroves first, and, stealthily working along the edge of the jungle, cut off all means of retreat except by the open downs. But the best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley, and sometimes it is an unconsidered trifle that upsets them[5]. We had not gone very far when we startled a pheasant from its noon tide nap in one of the isolated clumps of trees[6]. A vigorous series of "Poo-hoo-hoos" rang out on the still mid-day air. The blacks, who are almost preternaturally keen in detecting any abnormality in the natural effects surrounding them, were, doubtless, instantly on the alert, for, although we waited long in the hiding the trees assured us, we had hardly commenced to move from cover, when we saw several dusky figures running across the salt marsh into the mangroves. We started in pursuit at a run, but when we reached the camp we found it, as we expected, deserted. The fire was still burning, and the haste in which the blackfellows had left their camp was evidenced by the fact that they had forgotten to take with them what must have been the largest part of their weapons. Boomerangs, spears, throwing sticks, nullahs, shields, and remnants of a half consumed meal of roasted baobab nuts were lying all about the place. We did not then wait to make a collection of aboriginal curiosities, but, picking up the tracks of the retreating savages, followed them into the mangroves. The successful pursuit of blackfellows in such a tangle of roots and branches was almost as hopeless of achievement as the proverbial search for a needle in a stack of hay, but the

chagrin we felt over the defeat of our previous purpose fired our spirits with relentless zeal, and, each selecting a track, we followed the diverging footmarks through that dense, dank, dark, evil-smelling Inferno with the instincts of sleuth hounds[7]. Nothing will ever obliterate from my memory the impressions that hunt made on my mind. The place seemed to be the very heart of the huge solitude in which we were situated. Overhead there was a dark, closely-knitted canopy of leaves. Only here and there a patch of ineffably blue sky, that appeared to be immeasurably distant, gleamed through rifts in the firmament of foliage. Through the apertures the sun shot vertical shafts of golden light that counterfeited gilded pillars, except where their masses were broken by contact with the trunks and limbs of the trees. But the lights that stole through only made the gloom more ghostly and unreal by the contrast. It was like a weird, uncanny under-world – a vast, shapeless vault, whose roof was supported by gnarled and knotted trunks carved with fantastic devices by the processes of nature[8]. Slender flying buttresses vaulted away from the trunks in long series of elliptical arches. The whole scheme of design of the jungle might have been that of an unimaginable mediaeval cathedral, conceived in a nightmare, and executed in a delirium. It seemed to be peopled by unseen, silent, thinking, feeling beings, capable of action; and the twisted and contorted boughs and branches, stretching out hideous mud-stained arms, that appeared ever intent on catching and holding one in their loathsome embraces, intensified the impression. The atmosphere was stifling and permeated with a hot miasmatic vapor. The silence was intense, and broken only by faint sounds of something moving forward, the gasping of shell fish that lay in the mud, or clung to the roots and trunks of the mangroves. So still was it one could almost hear the moisture exuding from the ooze, or the sap coursing in the veins of the trees. But there was a track in the mud, a purpose in my heart, which did not become less insistent, as every now and then, on ahead, I could hear a crack, the sound of a branch pushed aside and its swishing swing back into place. Nothing was visible. There was no distance, no vista, no perspective, only knotted and twisted trunks, a tangle of boughs and branches and roots, of roots and branches and boughs, above, a roof of leaden leaves, underfoot a slushy, noisome ooze of decaying leaves, roots, shells and mud.

[1] Canebrake: probably a reference to the grass *Mnesithea rottboellioides* (formerly known as *Coelorhachis rottboellioides*) which forms dense, almost impenetrable thickets.

[2] Basalt Point: a name coined by Gunn's party for a feature still officially unnamed.

[3] Feather tree: probably the bipinnate *Acacia pachyphloia*.

[4] Screw palms: *Pandanus spiralis*.

[5] Gang aft agley: Scots dialect for "often go wrong".

[6] Alfred Searcy (1905) *In Northern Seas*, p. 25 and (1909) *In Australian Tropics,* pages 29–32, quotes Gunn verbatim from "We had not gone very far" to the end of the article. Searcy's purpose was to emphasise his assertion that a mangrove swamp is "a real depressing, melancholy, heart-breaking place."

Pheasant: pheasant coucal *(Centropus phasianinus).*

[7] Inferno: Hell, where evil-doers are punished, especially in fire. An allusion to Dante's *Divine Comedy.*

[8] Ernestine Hill (1951, p. 248) has an edited quote from Gunn, from this sentence to the end of the article, but erroneously locates the mangrove swamp on the Victoria River.

Saturday August 26, 1899

No. XV.

Away somewhere on my left a dull, stifled rumble startled the silent spirit of solitude. It was followed by another, and another, and another. Then all was still again, save a soft, squidgy, squdgy, sound such as footsteps make in walking on mud covered with leaves. As I pushed forward the noises grew more distinct and clear. The leaves of the trees a little way ahead of me rustled now and then. Once I heard an agitated ejaculation that sounded like "Wurra." Heavy breathing became perceptible. Then a muffled "ping," quite close to me, throbbed on the dead air. The faint voices of nature hushed for a moment in awed silence as if the grim figure of death were stalking past. There was a low groan, a violent bump against a tree trunk, that made the leaves on its topmost boughs rattle, and then there was an almost imperceptible thud that one might make plunging into a feather bed. Overhead, above the mangroves, the shrill cry of a bromli kite split the air[1]. Nature, "red in tooth and claw," took up her wonted strain after its momentary interruption, and I commenced to retrace my steps[2]. The track, however, turned and twisted and doubled so frequently that the longest way round promised to be very much the longest way home, and I climbed one of the tallest mangroves near me to get a bearing for a more direct route out of the jungle. Not a peak of the many tall hills surrounding the spot was visible. My head, like the drop of water at the bottom of a soap bubble, was in a great globe made of an apparently limitless hollow of dark, glossy green mangrove foliage that supported, round its rim, a wide dome of violet sky, studded with downy masses of cream-colored "wool-packs." A few bromli kites hovered over the mangroves, poised on motionless wings or wheeled in ever-narrowing circles in high altitudes of air. There was no Ariadne clew to guide me out of the labyrinth except a slight westerly declination of the sun, which had passed its zenith[3]. Getting my direction, and checking it by occasional glimpses of the luminary, I plodded wearily towards the

site of the blackfellow's camp[4]. Lacking the stimulus of the purpose which gave zest to the headlong rush into it, the journey out of the jungle was infinitely tedious and arduous. I had more time to notice its unpleasant features. The heat probably was not worse than when I was hot on the track of my quarry but it seemed so. The sandflies, which I had not previously noticed, were in myriads, and assailed every bare patch of skin with venomous stings. The irritation of cuticle they produced was almost maddening. The net-work of roots and inter-lacing limbs of the jungle opposed constant obstacles to my progress, and every now and then tripped and entangled me in positions that would have been intensely entertaining to me had I been a spectator of, instead of an actor, in them. In struggling to free myself I got covered with reeking mud. Often in sheer impotent vexation and colossal wretchedness I would sit down on a rustic chair of roots and groan the burden of my sorrow to the unresponsive ghouls that seemed to inhabit the heartless solitude. The misery that can be induced by an excursion through a typical North Australian mangrove scrub, jungle or swamp, on a typical North Australian hot day, has to be felt to be realized. There is nothing in Australia to compare with a mangrove jungle as an ideal Hell. It is the second compartment of the seventh circle of Inferno, with a few minor devils and demons and damned souls added. They all conspire to annoy and irritate the unhappy mortal whose duty or misfortune leads him into the inner recesses of their haunt. The most trifling adverse circumstance produces choler, and when the Ossa of fatigue is piled on the Pelion of discomfort, the climax of the mountain of misery is capped[5]. The scanty clothes, soaked with salt perspiration, cling as if by suction, with a warm clammy grasp to the skin, and sting like a Nessus shirt[6]. The flesh and bones and blood, drained of their necessary sap by excessive sweating, are subject to a dry, hard heat, that burns like a fever. One's feet get as heavy as diver's boots, out of their element. The head throbs as if it would burst, and seems to get two or three sizes too large for the hat. Accoutrements are an unspeakable burden. Life itself becomes an almost insupportable load. I speak feelingly, but without exaggeration. The pursuit of the trail through that jungle, nine years ago, was one of the most memorable experiences of my life. I am not likely to forget it for several reasons, the most important one, for me, being the fact that it well and truly laid the foundation of malarial fever in my system. Subsequent episodes and excursions assisted to raise the superstructure, and all the skill of my medical adviser, assisted by bushels of drugs, has not been able to eradicate the germs. Long before I was out of the jungle I was conscious that some subtle, noxious alchemy was working in me, and I was glad when I finally reached the golden light of day, on a salt-encrusted beach of caked mud, shingle and the flotsam and jetsam of the tides, and could breathe air without a sense of suffocation. A short walk brought me to the blackfellows's camp, where the other members of the party had already arrived. They were all strangely silent – splitting headaches, feverish heat and visible fatigue, and perhaps some secrets jealously guarded, caused the unwonted taciturnity. I asked no questions. It is considered a breach of northern etiquette to ask a man whether he has shot a blackfellow or not. There was, however, a gleam in Kolumboi's eye as he silently cut two notches in his rifle's stock[7]. Franciso Blanca was quietly doing the same, but we watched him sceptically. His gun was a fowling piece with a short range. We sat and smoked in the shade, and made laconic references to the heat, and then, selecting what we wanted of the native weapons, began our weary trudge homewards. We were fully ten miles from camp, and were jaded, footsore and hot. The distance, undertaken without concern, in the morning seemed immeasurable in the afternoon. Every ridge seemed an unsurmountable mountain, every valley an impassable abyss. But with frequent rests, and many draughts of tepid water, we plodded on until we reached a creek, with deep, dark pools, about a mile from the camp. The sorghum grass crop was still to be threaded, and all but one of the party resolutely refused to budge a step further. Casting their revolver belts off their perspiring bodies, four of the party plunged into the pools, and wallowed in the bright water. One only trudged on and reached the camp in a fainting condition. A tumbler of neat brandy, with a grain dose of quinine in it, revived him considerably, and he carried the flask down to the creek to succour the other members of the party. At dusk, a tired, footsore procession, with clinging, wet clothes, listless eyes, and sunburnt faces, reached the camp, and terminated the first organised hunt after the predatory Wahgomerahs. The "Rev. John" never paid us another visit.

[1] Bromli kite: The brahminy kite (*Haliastur indus*): interestingly, the term 'bromli kites' was also used by Alfred Searcy in his book *In Australian Tropics* (1909), pages 208 & 273.

[2] Nature, "red in tooth and claw,": is from the poem *In Memoriam*, lvi, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892).

[3] Ariadne clew: in Greek mythology, Ariadne, a Cretan princess, was the lover of Theseus; when he visited Crete to kill the Minotaur, she gave him a clew (ball of thread) to mark his path out of the labyrinth.

[4] The luminary: the sun.

[5] Ossa: a mountain in eastern Greece, 1978 metres high. Pelion: a mountain in eastern Greece, 1625 metres high. The allusion is to the Greek myth which tells how the Giants tried to storm Mount Olympus and overthrow the gods, piling Pelion on Ossa in order to reach them.

[6] Nessus shirt: in Greek mythology an expression indicating a fatal gift. The centaur Nessus tried to make off with the wife of Heracles, who followed and killed him with a poisoned arrow. As he expired, the centaur gave his tunic to Heracles' wife, saying that the blood that stained it was a potion which would bring back a straying husband. She believed him, and later gave Heracles a tunic impregnated with it, and as a result he died in agony.

[7] Two notches in his rifle's stock. Many years later, the Rev. J.R.B. Love of Kunmunya Mission (1936, page xii) related that "one old woman, who has lately died, used to show a scar in her side, caused, she said, by a rifle bullet fired by one of the Mount Waterloo party."

Saturday September 9, 1899

No. XVI.

The bizarre nature of our life at Marigui was never more characteristically expressed, nor more forcibly impressed upon the participators in it, than it was when Mrs Bradshaw gave a party in celebration of her birthday[1]. I have been present at a variety of social festivities during the currency of a diversified career, but never one of so unique and striking a character as that which was held in the main tent of the lonely settlement on the far Prince Regent River. It was not that remoteness from public haunt keened the edge of solitude, and sharpened the suggestion of novelty, for there was not one of us who had not, at sometime or other, felt more severely alone, and isolated in the heart of thronged cities than we ever did at Marigui. Once banished from the lap of Waterloo by the sufficient exorcism of the ring of the axe and the rattle of musketry, the sombre spirit of solitude seemed to find more congenial surroundings where the weird chant of the aboriginal corroboree rose and fell on the night air, than where the canorous notes of Mrs Bradshaw's organette and Hugh Young's flute made unfamiliar melody in his ears. The sense of solitude was never insistent, and was but an insignificant factor in producing any of the peculiar effects of Mrs Bradshaw's party. There was an element of unreality about the whole scene. The landscape was brilliantly illuminated by a full moon, which poured a flood liquid silver light on glistening grass blade and shimmering leaf. Eolus, Boreas and Zephyrus had retired to rest below the horizon, and were snoring or sighing in their sleep to other ears by sundown seas[2]. The quaint forms of the baobab trees, standing round the camp, with their dense crowns of foliage frosted on top by argent light, and splashed with black shadows underneath, looked strangely unnatural in the bright moonlight. The ghostly, contorted white trunks of the cabbage gums, gleamed like the limbs of maidens, except where patches of shadow from their own broad leaves lay like ink stains on their rounded knees and elbows[3]. The coolibahs, nux vomicas and bauhinias, with lighter foliage, left open spaces for the moon beams to filter through and checker the ground, or paint alternate stems of the long grass with ivory black or silvery white[4]. The landscape immediately around the camp looked like an extraordinary decorative scheme in silver and black, while along stretching vistas the massed lights and shades and sharp contrasts were softened and blended into a mystic, wonderful luminous grey. The effect was not an unusual product of a brilliant Austral tropic moonlit night, but the music, the mirth, and the animated conversation had produced, in a lesser degree, perhaps, that peculiar mental and spiritual exhilaration which any great work of art, grand strain of music, or noble poem that "find" us create, in a greater degree. Our aesthetic perceptions, undimmed by the toil-stained glasses through which we looked on the work-a-day world, were sensibly sharpened, and until the fun and the frolic became fast and furious under the awning, that did duty as a portico to the main tent, we paid more heed to the suggestions of nocturnal nature than was our habit. We peopled the shadows with friendly sprites, and fitted eldritch forms to the unknown voices of the woods, for all the vales are vocal when the moon has set her silver lamp on high[5]. The plovers' plaintive wail, the bitterns' muffled boom, the curlews' keening cry, and the bluff, gruff call of mopokes seemed to strike new chords[6]. Near by, with rasping notes in their voices, tree-toads kept a constant call of "besique, besique, besique," buzzing like a cicada song, or whistled an uninterrupted cricket-like tune[7]. Up from the spring and down from the dam came the rattle of sharp calls that sounded like "quart pot, quart pot," "hot watah, hot watah," "deep watah, deep watah, deep watah," that anyone who listens where big green frogs frequent, will hear, and down in the mangroves aquatic fowls screamed with shrill voices over repasts on the quaint little frog-fish, which the rising tide would keep ever on the move, before its encroaching waters[8]. Cockatoos, forced to vacate roosts on low limbs of the mangroves, as the water rose to them, scolded angrily, and could be heard fluttering on clumsy wings to other perches. These scenes and sights and sounds are all normal to the seeing eye, listening ear and understanding heart, but what would probably have most struck a spectator, dropping unexpectedly from a modern civilized centre, on the solitary settlement by St. George's Basin, would have been the strange spectacle in the main tent. He might have imagined either one of three things, and each would have surprised him equally at that time and place. Our appearance would have suggested to him that we were either a castaway theatrical company, entertaining ourselves, an "out west, Pizen Creek" tea party, or an assemblage of very material ghosts of brave Will Dampier's reckless buccaneering crews, revelling ashore, as was their custom, when a treasure laden galleon had fallen into their hands on the Spanish Main[9]. The only things we lacked to complete the unintentional ensemble, were the rich caparisonings of sumptuous draperies and choice laces, the rings and ornaments of gold, and the long top boots which made the doughty old filibusterers such brave figures[10]. Our party was armed to the teeth. Every man had his cartridge belt filled with death-dealing polished brass cases. Bandoliers, through which glinted the brass wrapping and dull gleaming lead bullets of Martini cartridges, were strapped across the shoulders, over loose fitting khaki jackets[11]. Sheath knives were hung on the belts, the buckles of which

were polished until they counterfeited glowing gold. Revolver pouches, with blue steel butts protruding from their flaps, lay on the hips. Mr Bradshaw and I had military sabres dangling at our heels, much to our inconvenience, although they were reminiscent of old volunteering days, and rifles were stacked by the table, or leaned against the tent ropes, wherever they were readily accessible. We all wore broad brimmed felt hats, jauntily tipped to one side, and generally comported ourselves with the easy swaggering rolling air of typical swashbucklers. Mrs Bradshaw entered freely and fully into the spirit of that, I am sure, most memorable of her birthday parties, and kept the fun going with many a witty sally and humorous rejoinder. With the gallantry of the sailor and the courtesy of the backwoodsman, we one and all yielded her the homage the woman of culture and innate refinement will command anywhere, except in a Parisian *emeute*,[12] and with a charming graciousness and courtly gracefulness, she plied us with music and song, and won from us tributes of praise and applause that were sometimes accentuated with salvos of musketry. Mr Young, too, who is a musician to the finger tips, and plays almost any musical instrument, from a tin whistle to a pipe organ, with equal ease, played many selections on the organette and his flute. The captain of the "Gemini" and Jan Larsen sang us many a rousing sea song, and we joined in the choruses with a vigor that shook "the rafters of far forest aisles."[13] Others of us recited, and there were told that night many stirring stories of the sea and tales of moving accidents by flood and field. Late in the night, or early next morning, a dozen lusty throats rolled forth the familiar strains of Auld Lang Syne, and brought to a close Mrs Bradshaw's birthday party on the Prince Regent River[14].

I have often wondered why Mr Bradshaw ordered all hands to come to the party fully equipped with arms and ammunition. He had not an ounce of fear in his whole frame. He had at one time faced a mob of blackfellows, single handed, with a small bulldog revolver that I despised as much as I respected his cool daring, and in a hundred sinister situations he had proved himself a block of resolute courage[15]. There are only two satisfactory reasons I can give for the order. One is that he perhaps doubted whether the Wahgomerahs had been given a sufficient taste of the quality of our weapons, and desired to provide efficient means to prevent the aborigines turning his wife's birthday gathering into a successful black surprise party. The other reason is that Mr Bradshaw is at heart a buccaneer of the old school, and loves their picturesque way of doing things. In other days and on other spheres he would have filled a much more conspicuous role in life than he has done in Australia. I believe him to be capable of anything. He was the hero of my boyhood, the hero of my youth, and still remains the hero of my manhood. I am not sure that he and I would not long ago have been dead if we had been able to carry some of our favourite schemes into practical effect. We were always planning some enterprise or other which seem to me now to have necessitated dangerous breaches of international law, and some of our projected adventures would inevitably have won a shot across our bows, and the confiscation of our vessel and our persons, if nothing more serious had eventuated. Perhaps it is as well that the cursed lack of pence, that sometimes vexes public and high-spirited men now and then, threw a wet blanket over our schemes. But I'm not sure. It is better to have fought and lost than to have never fought at all. Something almost invariably, to our great chagrin, pricked our bubbles before they were fully blown. But we always flatter ourselves that, as a result of one of our schemes, the British crown acquired a valuable patch of territory. We had formed a small but determined band to exploit the portion of New Guinea not claimed by the Dutch, and pick the eyes out of the country before any of the nations cast covetous eyes upon it. Unfortunately, we communicated with Mr Chester, the Government Resident at Thursday Island, to ascertain from him all particulars likely to be of use to a trading and settling party. He replied evasively, but, we were informed, that he docketed our letter and sent it to the Queensland Government, with the comment that if prompt action were not taken to secure New Guinea from rapacious filibusterers, it might speedily be overrun by unprincipled adventurers, to the loss of the natives and the disadvantage of British prestige[16]. The letter precipitated the famous annexation of the island by the Queensland Government, and we lost the deposit we paid on the purchase money of a schooner. Constitutional Government and British men-of-war killed buccaneering.

[1] Mrs. Bradshaw's birthday: the official birth certificate from Victoria states that Mary Jane Guy was born on 14 January 1860, so it would have been her thirty-second birthday, celebrated here in 1892.

[2] Eolus or Aeolus: the Greek ruler of the winds.

Boreas: the North wind of Greek mythology.

Zephyrus: the west wind of Greek mythology.

[3] Cabbage gums: probably *Eucalyptus grandifolia* or *E. clavigera*.

[4] Coolibahs: probably Darwin box *(Eucalyptus tectifica)*.

Nux vomicas: strychnine tree *(Strychnos lucida)*.

Bauhinias: *Bauhinia cunninghamii*.

[5] Eldritch: a poetic Scottish adjective meaning 'unearthly or weird'.

[6] Plovers: possibly oyster catchers (*Haematopus* species)

Mopokes: either boobook owls *(Ninnox novaeseelandiae)* or barking owls *(Ninox connivens)*.

Bitterns: possibly striated herons (*Butorides striatus*)

Curlews: possibly beach stone-curlews (*Esacus neglectus*) or bush stone-curlews (*Burhinus grallarius*).

[7] Tree toads: possibly Roth's tree frog *(Litoria rothii)*.

[8] Big green frogs: probably *Litoria caerulea* or *L. splendida*. Alfred Searcy's *By Flood and Field* (1912) also features frogs calling "Hot Water!" and "Quart Pot", see pp. 71 & 133.

Quaint little frog-fish: probably a reference to the mud-skipper *(Periophthalmus argentilineatus)*.

[9] Spanish Main: part of the coast of north-west South America, where pirates plundered ships carrying gold back to Spain, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries.

[10] Filibusterer: one who engages in unauthorised warfare against a foreign state.

[11] Martini cartridges: named for the Swiss-born Friedrich Martini, whose rifle design was patented in Britain in 1868. Thereafter, improved model Martini-Henry and Martini-Enfield rifles were widely adopted by the British Army.

[12] A Parisian *émeute*: a riot or civil disturbance (French feminine noun). Barbara James (1989, p. 231) quotes Gunn selectively up to this sentence, in her discussion of Mary Jane's role as a pioneer woman of refined tastes in the outback.

[13] The captain of the "Gemini": T. Bannetyne.

[14] *Auld Lang Syne*: by Robert Burns (1759–1796).

[15] Bulldog revolver: probably the same model "that spat '450' bullets but 'bucked' and threw high", mentioned by Gunn in *PINA* No.IV.

[16] Queensland Government and New Guinea: in 1883, the colonial Queensland Government annexed the south-east portion of New Guinea. However, the British Government revoked the annexation, causing much embarrassment in Brisbane!

Saturday September 16, 1899

No. XVII.

After Mrs Bradshaw's party our life descended into the dull routine of drudgery for a while. The task of transporting the stores from the landing to the homestead was undertaken, and tested the stamina of the men composing our party. There were at least fifty tons of what would be styled, by a nautical reporter, general merchandise in the stack. Our horses were only saddle hacks, and quite unsuitable as beasts of burden. The distance the packages had to be carried was 200 yards. The grade of the track was one foot in eight. The month was January, and the sun was within a minute or two of our latitude. There were millions of an active breed of March flies keeping a sharp lookout for repasts of gore. We prayed for the miraculous advent of Coolie labor but our prayers smote the ears of deaf gods. The packages consisted of 200 lb.[1] sacks of Victorian flour, 100 lb. barrels of cabin bread, hundred weight cases of galvanised iron screws and washers, sheets of galvanised iron, and cases of hardware and general stores that seemed to weigh anything up to half a ton. The barrels rolled on our bare backs and damaged hoops dug holes in our skin. The cases sat uneasily and the hoop iron that bound them entered our souls by way of our flesh. Flour clotted the blood from our wounds and scratches and attempted, ineffectually, to dam back the tides of perspiration that flowed from our pores. Salt sweat poured into our eyes and smarted them severely. The March flies, whose stings were like pricks from red hot needles, secure from disturbance by our engaged hands, sat on our backs and drank blood until they were too full to fly away. But not one of us shirked his share of the work, and there was, between the two most powerful members of our party, a good deal of competition as to who could carry the heaviest burdens and last the longest in doing so. Dan Darroch, a young West Highland sailor, with the thews and sinews of Theseus, and the unconquerable spirit of a Celt, outstripped all others, although Francisco Blanca, who was cast in a lighter and more elegant mould, with something of the spirit of his gallant Spanish ancestors, struggled unavailingly to emulate his prowess[2]. Several days were occupied in transferring the goods to the site of the homestead and then house building was re-resumed with occasional diversions. The pursuit of a blackfellow who had come to the bluff at Mount Waterloo and sent up a telegraph smoke was one, and an alligator scare was another.

Alligators, which abound in all northern rivers, and were particularly numerous about the mud banks and mangrove jungles of St George's Basin, had not, up to the end of January, been very much in evidence[3]. One impudent monster had certainly snapped the steering oar out of the captain's hand while he was piloting the ship's boat up a mangrove creek, and the mysterious disappearance of several of our dogs had been attributed to the saurian's well-known appetite for canine flesh, but other than a few tracks in the mud, the frequent violation of the peaceful silence of the night by an unholy roar that might have been the bellow of a lion or the protracted grunting of a pig, we, on shore, had seen or heard nothing of the alligators to cause a moment's concern. Most of us had been in the habit of swimming or wading in the water about the mangroves without giving the alligators a second thought, but a mishap of a comparatively inexpensive nature induced a salutary caution that put an abrupt end to such indiscretions. One afternoon Phil Du Bois and his wife were down on the rocks among the mangroves, chipping oysters off and enjoying an *al fresco* repast on them[4]. There was deep water alongside where they were sitting, and their dog, a handsome collie, was wallowing in it, when an awful jaw, with rows of teeth like a picket fence, opened just beside them, closed with a snap that splashed water over the rock on which they were sitting, and engulfed the dog in a living cavern. Phil and his wife, not being naturalists, nor interested in the difference between alligators and crocodiles, did not stop to debate on whether it was the upper or lower jaw of the saurian that moved. They left for the camp and lost their appetite for oysters. The scare produced by the episode was a mild one, except to Du Bois, whose fright produced such a feverish condition of imagination that for nights afterwards he disturbed the camp with

alarms of fabulous monsters he had seen or heard in the vicinity of his tent. As a matter of fact there are few attacks by alligators on human beings reported, and the dreaded saurian is mainly a bogie. Of land animals, dogs seem to be its favorite diet, and horses, cattle, or sheep watering at or crossing streams frequented by it are often attacked, permanently maimed or killed outright. Now and then, perhaps, a blackfellow, in attempting to swim across a river, may be given a pressing invitation to visit a secluded spot in the bottom of the stream, and may escape with the loss of a leg, but such instances are extremely rare, and there is no Northern record of a white man's life having been lost that way. Still one treats an alligator with a certain amount of respect and does not give it many opportunities for borrowing a leg or a wing or a part of one's breast. Many of the Northern alligators measure fully 20 feet and probably very much more, and the jaw such monsters can extend does not tempt one to linger long in its vicinity unless a Martini rifle be handy[5]. For the most part alligator shooting is unsatisfactory sport, and unless one can surprise the game asleep on a mud bank there is little chance of securing it. No one ever thinks it worth while swimming after and diving for the dead body. One always entertains the suspicion that the alligator might be like Fuzzywuzzy, "generally shamming when it's dead."[6] Usually the only indication one gets of the proximity of a saurian in the water are the two small, leaden-grey lumps of its eyelids and the dirty grey nostrils. It rises to the surface of the water without causing a perceptible ripple, and when on the watch lies as motionless as a log. We found alligator shooting in such circumstances admirable practice, and some of us became quite expert in directing a rifle bullet between the two beady eyes. But of all the dozens we palpably shot, we only once succeeded in getting a skin of sufficient size to be worth securing. The skin measured 17 feet 6 inches, and when mounted would have formed a handsome "trophy of the river and the hunt."[7] Unfortunately it was badly flayed, and exhaled a fragrance that savored not a whit of millefleur essence[8]. The crew of the schooner that was to take it away resented its company, and although it was hoisted to the main truck it still continued to spread an unwelcome fragrance over the deck[9]. One calm evening, when the air was dense and heavy, the flavour was particularly strong, and during my watch below the skin disappeared mysteriously. An albatross was the reputed cause, but the owner of the skin knew enough of sailor ways to know that anything that is objectionable to the crew, from the captain's favourite cat to the cook's grease tin, sooner or later "gets a passage."

[1] lb: the abbreviation for pounds weight; one pound = 455 grams.

[2] Thews and sinews of Theseus: the muscles of Theseus who, in Greek mythology, undertook six labours, killing various monsters including the Minotaur on Crete.

[3] Alligator: all of Gunn's references allude to the estuarine or saltwater crocodile *(Crocodylus porosus)*. True alligators occur in the south-east United States *(Alligator mississippiensis)* with the – now rare – *A. sinensis* in the lower Yangtze River of China.

[4] *Al fresco*: Italian, meaning "in the open or fresh air".

[5] Northern alligators measure fully 20 feet: 20 feet = 6.17 m. The largest-recorded estuarine crocodile reached 8.5 m, but such individuals are extremely rare.

[6] Fuzzywuzzy: in this instance refers to a native warrior of Sudan, not New Guinea. In Rudyard Kipling's poem *Fuzzywuzzy*, the actual line is: "An 'e's generally shammin' when 'e's dead."

[7] 17 feet 6 inches = 5.33 m.

[8] Millefleur essence: a perfume made from the combined extracts of various flowers (from French, meaning 'thousand flower').

[9] Main truck: a wooden cap at the head of the mainmast, through which pass ropes such as halyards, for raising and lowering sails.

Saturday September 23, 1899

No. XVIII.

After the stores had been removed to the homestead, and various other works undertaken and carried out, the schooner was got ready for sea, and her hold filled with grass hay for the succor of stock on her return voyage. Her destination was to be Derby, on King Sound, and she was to take Mrs Bradshaw with her *en route* for Southern Australia. Mrs Bradshaw, who had shown no little heroism in going to such an out of the way corner of the funny old round world at all, had, after a fair trial of it, decided that she and life at Marigui could not agree. Tent life in the Australian tropics even during an ordinary summer season and in the most favourable circumstances, has not a great many features to recommend it to a lady, who has been brought up in the lap of luxury and refinement, and when, as was the case during our first season on the Prince Regent River, the more austere features of the life were exaggerated by an exceptionally hot season, any attractive conditions were reduced to a vanishing point. Feminine nerves used to no more serious strains than a fashionable life in a city imposes upon them, are apt to be injuriously affected by the trivial alarms incidental to life at such a place as Marigui, although the more robust masculine nature would not be appreciably influenced by them. Still, even if the heat had not been excessive, if the insect pests had not been innumerable as the sands of the sea and as restless as its waters, had the thunderstorms not come night after night and battered the camp with fierce winds, torrents of rain, terrible lightnings and terrifying thunders, if big snakes had not been too inquisitive of the contents of our tents and had the blackfellows not taken to prowling about the precincts

of the camp at night, Mrs. Bradshaw must have found the absence of congenial feminine society a sore trial and a sufficient reason for shaking the dust of Marigui off her feet[1]. All hands were very sorry indeed, that Mrs Bradshaw had determined to leave the Regent, although they could not help recognising that it was no suitable place for her. She had herself contributed so much to any of the pleasure they felt in the life, that her departure promised to shear off half its charm, and when, about the end of January, the little schooner sped, close reefed, before a sharp squall, down the straits, and was lost to sight in driving showers of rain, there were at least two hearts the heavier in the small party left ashore to maintain the settlement. The shore party left in my charge consisted of Mr Young, Phil Dubois, his wife and two children, Jack Larsen, and Charlie Kolumboi. Larsen and Dubois were both suffering from a species of ophthalmia, and the only effective hands were Mr Young, Kolumboi and myself[2].

The house was sufficiently advanced to be available for occupation to half its extent. Half the available space was occupied with the stores, and the other half, possessing a deep cool verandah and a large airy living room, Mr Young and I decided to occupy ourselves. A temporary structure was raised for the Dubois family and Larsen, and Kolumboi, to be handy for reference, was given a berth on our verandah until he should have mates for a separate building. Our days were principally occupied in cutting timber for building purposes, and for most of it we had to range far a-field, as in the vicinity of the homestead the trees were mostly coolibahs and cabbage gums, which seldom run more than three or four feet in the straight. There were good straight trunks on the alluvial flats about a mile from the homestead, and every day Young, Kolumboi and I kept echo active with ringing axe blows, and brought home long heavy logs on our shoulders in the evening. At night Young's flute would help to pass the sweltering hours away as we lay in hammocks on the verandah.

Perhaps the most important endowment a man can have for back block's use, after the possession of the necessary physical and practical qualities, is musical ability of some sort or other. A man may possess all the social qualities in excess, may be a good talker, a good listener, or a past-master in spinning yarns, but he is nought beside the man who can play a tune on the tin whistle, the concertina or the flute. The bush musician, however he may have shirked his duties during the day, however unpopular his other qualities may have made him, when evening steals over the camp and the stars come out, and the incommunicable voices of the night whisper in one's ears, is, as the first notes of his whistle or concertina fall on the air, at once the favourite of the hour. All hands lie and listen, and if some garrulous member of the party attempts to break in on the music with a story or reminiscence, he is instantly silenced by a growl of disapproval. We were never without music of some sort in our camps. At first we had Mrs. Bradshaw and her organette, then Hugh Young and his flute and a concertina, and many an hour of the long warm nights of the mid-year months have we lain on the roof of the Marigui homestead and dreamed dullness away, while Young played "common tunes that make you choke and blow your nose, vulgar tunes that bring the laugh that brings the groan." At another camp we had an ebony Orpheus, who was an incomparable artist on the mouth organ[3]. His name was "Bill Johnson, sa', froum Gre'nock," (nearly all negro sailors are Johnsons, and they all almost invariably hail from Greenock), and his birthplace was down Kentucky way[4]. He had an inexhaustible repertoire of airs under the control of marvellous memory that seems to have picked up scraps of melody from every shore and harbor of the world. Catchy little bits that suggested Gilbert and Sullivan, wild, capricious things that bespoke the ardent temperament of sunny Spain, dreamy sensuous airs caught in some blue Mediterranean bay, brilliant sparkling staves that echoed the wit of La Belle France, plaintive, keening dirges that searched and rung the heart like an Irish mother's lament, sweet reminiscences of "the auld Scot's sangs," bits of serenades, scraps of fantasias, and bars and staves from all the operas, practised and perfected by Bill on many a forecastle head, in every sea, were trilled forth in our camp in an almost too generous stream of melody[5]. But it was in the interpretation of negro melodies, and the characteristic music of plantation life that Bill's undoubtedly wonderful art found its best expression and most natural utterance. Accustomed to hear them, as he lay, a meditative ebony picaninnie cradled by an ebony mother, who crooned them as she cradled, they had become part of his spiritual existence, and every cadence, every note and every quaint turn had been graven indelibly on a heart and mind that were evidently naturally adapted to the reception of such impressions. The searching pathos that Bill could realise in some simple little air, was almost exquisitely intolerable, and at times he would have us hovering unpleasantly close to the brink of tears, from which he would rescue us suddenly with some theme full of the uncontrollable drollery of rich negro humor, and then he would set our feet patting to the tune of a wild plantation dance. Often at nights, when we were asleep, dreaming that we were sweltering in hell, while little devils with red-hot forks were torturing us, we would dream within our dreams that some compassionate angel, taking pity on the wretchedness of our lot, while God slept, had stealthily opened the pearly gates to allow the celestial music to float down to us and soothe our sufferings, and waking we would hear Bill breathing reveries of old Kentucky on his mouth organ to calm and soothe the sufferings heat and mosquitos had imposed upon him. We once had another negro who was engaged in the capacity of cook. He also was a Johnson, Sam Johnson, and hailed from the banks of the Clyde. He had once been a vocalist, he said, but had lost his voice. He was always trying to find it, but never succeeded. He had also once been a cook. That also was a lost art. His natural modesty prevented him telling us so. We discovered the loss and set him navvying. But Bill

Johnson's (or Orpheus W. Johnson as we once styled him on a station playbill) musical talent was genuine and rare, and was far above the average of the concertina efforts that constitute the bulk of bush music. Even the concertina is not to be despised when in capable hands, and Hugh Young and one of our men, a Brazilian, Jose Anto, by name, were both competent performers on it. But the most consummate master of it I ever met, was a little fellow known only as Bullocky Sam. Bullocky was a decrepit, disreputable-looking knock-kneed man of about forty. His face was wizened and wrinkled, and pitted with pock-marks. His eyes, small and beady always, were permanently red and inflamed with chronic ophthalmia. He stuttered habitually, and the only picturesque thing about him was his profanity, which perhaps gained point from his stuttering habit. He was toothless, and his jokes had a senile suggestion that was repulsive. But when Sammy got a concertina in his hand and commenced playing, his face became transformed. A halo seemed to encircle his head. An angelic glow suffused his face and reflected its glory in the expressions of his listeners, however rough and wild they might be. His touch of the keyboard of his instrument was magical. His genius dwelt in his concertina, and it was a good genius that lifted his soul from his sordid surroundings, and while it spoke to him and his audience, it awoke aspirations and desires that were long dead. The blackguard died out of him for the nonce[6]. A spirit full of tender associations took possession of him, and music such as a concertina seldom utters, bathed his hearers in a warm tide of pure feeling that had a hallowing, chastening effect on them that lasted for many days. A peculiarity of Bullocky Sam's art, was that, though depraved and sensual in his habitual bent, it was always pure, sweet and tender in its effects on himself and ennobling in its influence on anyone it reached. I have noticed over and over again that nearly all the rude art of the bush has the effect of stimulating the best aspirations in men, and the bush musician, whether playing on a tin whistle, a flute, a mouth organ or a concertina, fills a very wholesome and welcome office in frontier life, and more than once I chose men for the station whose chief qualifications were that they could play either one or other of these instruments with conspicuous ability.

[1] Barbara James (1989, p. 231–232) quotes Gunn selectively up to this sentence, in her discussion of Mary Jane's role as a pioneer woman of refinement in the outback.

[2] Ophthalmia: inflammation of the eye, especially conjunctivitis.

[3] Orpheus: in Greek mythology, the poet-musician who could enchant all. He sailed with the Argonauts in quest of the Golden Fleece and also visited the Underworld to bring back his dead wife Eurydice.

[4] Froum Gre'nock: Scots dialect meaning 'from Greenock', the Scottish port on the Firth of Clyde.

[5] La Belle France: literally 'the beautiful France', an expression referring to pre-revolutionary France.

"The auld Scot's sangs": old Scottish traditional songs.

[6] Nonce: for the time being.

Saturday September 30, 1899

No. XIX.

A few nights after we shifted camp to the homestead, the necessity – not previously recognised – of taking into account and thoroughly analysing any slight aberration in the ordinary processes of the natural phenomena of our environments was illustrated by a trifling circumstance. I was placidly smoking on the northern end of the verandah, when some sound or suggestion that did not register itself on my mind as some definite impression, attracted my attention towards the old camp. I carelessly noted a flutter of fire-fly lights, vaguely thought their flight was lower and more regular than usual, imagined, too, the lights were redder than they ought to have been, but recking nought of any sinister importance in the circumstance, dismissed the matter from my mind[1]. I have through life been gifted with almost supersensual powers of discernment which have enabled me to realise presences, dangers and hostile influences in my surroundings of which the ordinary recognised channels of sense have given me no tokens. As a boy the faculty gave me an enviable pre-eminence among my playmates in the fascinating pastime of hide and seek. No matter how difficult its "plant," I could always find my quarry with a precision and quickness which won for me the nicknames of Eagle Eye by day and the Owl by night, although my organs of sense and sound, to which my prescience was generally attributed, had very little to do with my skill, my organs of sight and sound were never unusually keen. Very often I neither saw nor heard anything that would give me a clue to the presence of the boy for whom I was searching, yet I invariably found him with unerring surety. The only sense I was conscious of possessing to an exceptional degree, was that of smell, which enabled me, until lately, when I took to blowing tobacco smoke through my nose, to scent out native cats, foxes, blackfellows, and other odorous animals with the certainty of a fox terrier. Perhaps, too, my faculty for ascertaining the proximity of unseen presences in my surroundings is due, in a measure, to the fact that the aboriginal instincts of the hunter are largely developed in me, but I have always put it on the higher plane of kinship with the Scotch gift of second sight[2]. I have always thought that the suggestion which prompted me to look in the direction of the old camp that night on the Regent was directed through no ordinary channel of sense, and when, next morning, Kolumboi brought word that the blackfellows had

been to the old camp in great numbers and had taken away all the bottles we left there, I at once knew that the lights I had mistaken for fire flies were in reality blackfellows 'fire sticks[3]. It was, however, the first, last and only time, so far as we are aware, the blackfellows came within 200 yards of our camp without our being apprised by some means or other, that were not always explicable, of their proximity. Dwelling in the midst of hostile environments, forced to rely on our own wit and nerve in coping with our surroundings, the thin veneer with which generations of civilization had coated our senses peeled off and gave play to the primal savage instincts that make for self preservation and a savage joy in the pleasures of the chase. We acquired the habit, possessed by most men whose lot it is to take the hazard of trackless ways, of sleeping restfully, yet being instantly on the alert if anything ruptured the wonted serenity of the night. A twig cracking, an unusual rustling in the grass, a loose stone rattling within 200 yards of us, the startled call of a nocturnal bird, or the sudden stoppage of its notes, the cry of a bird whose habits were diurnal would promptly arouse us and in most instances we would at once be aware of its cause.

A few nights after the schooner left for Derby, Phil Du Bois, who, since his alligator scare, was given to seeing visions, was walking off the effects of a bad dream, when some distance away from camp he came face to face with a stalwart old blackfellow and a young lad of about fifteen. Mutual astonishment and a discontinuance of Phil's nocturnal perambulations were, strange to say, the only results of the encounter, but frequently afterwards we were disturbed by a variety of abnormalities in the sounds of the night and by suggestions we could not interpret. Hugh Young and I invariably went out to ascertain the cause of the disturbance and although we often came on the tracks of the disturbing element in the morning, we never succeeded in sighting our quarry when in pursuit of it at night. The tracks were almost invariably of an adult man and a boy, and we looked upon the two as familiars of a sort, and dubbed them old man Solitary and his son. What the purpose of old man Solitary and his son's nocturnal wanderings were, we never definitely knew, but we surmised they were learning the lay of the homestead and surroundings with the ulterior motive of directing an attack on the settlement when a convenient season arrived. That an attack was premeditated, was evidenced about three weeks after the schooner's departure. Messrs. Edgar and Macdonald, in a recent chapter of their interesting story, "At the Warrigals well," at present appearing in the *Argus*, aver that the blacks never attack a camp at night time. The opinion is an old southern one, and certainly does not apply to the aborigines of North Australia, where more than half the murderous assaults of the blacks are made under cover of night. It is the exception for any organised attack to be made in daylight unless the blacks are in great force and are quite certain they have the whites at a disadvantage. Our custom of keeping the myalls at a respectful distance morning, noon and night, probably saved our party from annihilation. Several nights after our last unsuccessful pursuit of old man Solitary and his son, I was sitting in the house writing. Young had gone to sleep. Kolumboi was slumbering like a log. A very wheezy mopoke call came down the slope of Mount Waterloo[4]. Another one, much fuller and more natural, replied to it from the mangroves below the house. Others took up the strain from various points round the homestead. Young stirred in his sleep with something of the motion a dog makes when he is dreaming of the chase. I put down my pen and chewed the mouthpiece of my hubble bubble reflectively. I thought "well, now, that mopoke up the slope has asthma, and he's got it bad. It's a funny thing, too, there are such a lot of 'em. Mopokes are rather solitary birds as a rule. There are never more than two or three of them about at one time. Here there are at least a dozen, and some of them are out of tune. Besides, they are all around the house. It's niggers." I reached for my Martini, prodded Young with it, and said "Hist! niggers!" He was out in an instant and wide awake. "Listen to that mopoke up the hill and those others round the camp. Poor sorts of mopokes, aren't they, and there are lots of 'em," I said. "Mopokes alright," was Young's answer. "Mopokes, be hanged. Call Kolumboi." Kolumboi came, rubbing his eyes. "Those mopokes, Kolumboi," I asked. "No more mopoke. Too many all about. Munjung blackfellow, I bin think it." We slipped out into the dark and waited patiently until the lamplight faded from the retinas of our eyes. The ring of calls was drawing in all round us. There were not so many of them, but one or two were emphatic. They evidently came from the ground, but we could see nothing, as the tall grass, the ant hills, and tree trunks, provided ample cover. Every now and then, however, a distinct rustle could be heard in the grass, and once or twice a twig snapped and a loose stone rattled. We crouched in the dark with our nerves strung to a high pitch of excitement and expectation that was as exhilarating as a grand passion. It was one of those rare moments when we play the game of life with death and are victors whether we win or lose. The game was the thing. The stakes were nought. We each selected a spot from which the nearest sounds came, and levelled our rifles. I picked on a sound which was dangerously near a beam of golden light our lamp shot through the open door, and watched intently. The light cut a bauhinia bush in half, and shone full on an ant hill about two yards from it. A sound came from the dark side of the bauhinia[5]. An instantaneous photograph of a magnificent savage, bedizened with red ochre, and decked with lines and bands of white bird down, flashed on my mind as he sprang, with spears, throwing stick and shield in hand, across the shaft of light towards the ant hill[6]. I have the photograph yet along the shining barrel of my trusty Martini[7]. For an instant my finger quivered on the hair trigger, and then a sharp bark rang out, followed, almost simultaneously, by two others. There was a solitary groan, a stampede of rushing feet, and a rustling in the

grass as if it were stirred by a mighty wind. Kolumboi slipped into the house and put out the lamp. The mopoke calls ceased. We fired a few more chance shots, and could hear tumbles over stones, boughs snapping and swishing, and the grass rustling in all directions. The sounds rapidly diminished in volume. The natives were in full retreat, and pursuit was hopeless. In a little while agitated mopoke calls answering each other in the north, east, south and west, at a safe distance from the homestead, were heard, and in half an hour the night was as still as a tomb. In the morning we examined the ground round the house, and found we had been encircled by a cordon of blackfellows to the number of about thirty. It was a well organised attack, and had our vigilance and knowledge of natural history not been equal to the blacks' craft, we would in all probability have been massacred, and added another case to the long list of aboriginal atrocities. The mopoke attack was the last assault the blacks made on our Marigui homestead, but it was not by any means the last occasion on which we had a brush with them.

[1] Recking: taking account of.

[2] Scotch gift of second sight: psychic ability of perceiving future or distant events.

[3] Aboriginal use of bottles: Ernestine Hill (1951, page 245), commenting on Gunn's account, remarked: "In the morning there were many tracks and the bottle-dump had vanished to make glass-head spears. These glass-head spears of Kimberley, delicately chipped with a quartz chisel and glittering like faceted beryl, are the most deadly of all. When the spear is pulled out, the splinters of glass remain in the wound."

[4] Mopoke: either the boobook owl *(Ninox novaeseelandiae)* or the barking owl *(N. connivens)*.

[5] Bauhinia: *Bauhinia cunninghamii.*

[6] Bedizened: adorned.

[7] Martini: probably a .45 Martini-Henry (Mark IV) rifle, released in 1887, for the British Army.

Saturday October 7, 1899

No. XX.

One of the characteristic traits of the aborigines is that they look upon leniency and humane treatment at the hands of their enemies as the products of fear, and although on the occasion of the mopoke attack and on other occasions, we had conveyed to their intelligence, by means that expressed more than words, that we were neither afraid of them, nor ignorant of their tactics, we deemed it expedient to take the war into their country whenever opportunity offered. Frequently Young and I took Kolumboi with us, saddled the horses and went out in search of adventures. Mostly our pursuits were fruitless as the natives seemed always to be aware of our proximity, and the only sight we would get of them would be of several black figures clambering over tall cliffs, or rugged ranges, that were inaccessible to us. The country, too, owing to the excessive soaking it had received from successive showers, became a literal bog and our horses were more a hindrance than a help to us. At every step they would sink almost to their knees in the loose, unsound ground, and in the end we took compassion on them for the hardships we were imposing on them and discontinued our hunts. Our determined pursuits, however, had the desired effect, and for many months we were not molested in any way, either by day or night.

A long list of necessary works left me by Mr Bradshaw was undertaken, and although they were not all completed when he returned, many of them were, and others were in a forward condition. A large house, for the men's quarters and a kitchen were built of native timber and galvanised iron. The timber, after being carried on our shoulders for distances ranging up to a mile, was squared and adzed to the required shape for uprights, wall-plates, and rafters. A sheep yard was built near the dam, and the fences for a horse paddock, enclosing about a section of land, commenced[1]. Much of the timber was extremely tough and hard, evidently a provision of Nature to resist the incursions of the white ants, and frequently damaged our tools. To repair them we had to resort to our forge, and to supply fuel for it we had to burn our own charcoal. A dam, above high water, on the rocky shore, below the spring, was on my list of necessary works to be undertaken, and we had to drill and blast the almost adamantine sand stone to make a sufficiently large receptacle for the water[2]. With blacksmithing, carpentering, fencing, building, quarrying, and charcoal burning, our time was fully occupied and the practical resources of our party were tested to the utmost. We were, however, equal to every emergency, and the splendid plant Mr. Bradshaw's forethought had supplied us with provided ample means for repairing any damage to our implements. Still any implements in the hands of inefficient workmen would have been useless, and our party deserves credit for its efficiency. Mr Young's Dookie College education and subsequent experience as a cockatoo farmer, allied to a natural intelligence and capacity, provided him with an unusual equipment for frontier life[3]. Phil Du Bois was a jack of all trades and master of some, and in the course of a wandering career had acquired knowledge in many useful departments of human effort.

I have often thought that the idler is frequently the least idle of men, and in my own case I have proved it so. As a youth, when fortune smiled and brought me many long periods of leisure, I spent many a blue day in apparent idleness watching quarrymen disembowelling mother earth of many a cubic yard of solid blue basalt. But I was not so idle as I seemed, nor yet so idle as I myself thought, for I was all the time unconsciously

absorbing impressions, some of them aesthetic ones, perhaps, of the unstudied poses of the laborers, but most of them practical ones that equipped me with a technical knowledge of quarrying. At other times I lit contemplative cigarettes at the ruddy jets of flame of the village smithy fire, and watched the play of the muscles of the smith's brawny arms and sinewy hands while he moulded the pliable red-hot iron to the shape his mind gave it. If the picturesque shape of the smith's muscular form still survives in my mind, so also does the manner with which he wrought the iron to the required form. Sometimes I would spend whole days watching carpenters rearing the structure of a stately edifice, and when once relaxing in the country, after a period of excessive toil in the city, I assisted throughout in the construction of a house that is an architectural ornament to the district. About the same period, I sent the posts of a fence marching in Indian file over many a pleasant hill and dale. I had watched shipwrights adzing huge pine logs until they took the graceful tapering shape of "the mast of some great admiral," and learnt the secret of the use of the adze[4]. I think I must have been very much under the influence of Whitman and Thoreau and Stevenson's insinuating Apology for Idlers in those days, for I idled and dreamt and thought until necessity laid about me with a whip[5]. All my idling, however, turned into good, practical account when on the Prince Regent River, the conditions of life demanded my knowledge, and the work flew to completion under the united touch of Mr. Young's and my own intelligent labor.

After we had scoured the country for possible black assailants we were subjected to few interruptions to the even tenor of our way. The white ants certainly gave us unnecessary work by invading a stack of fourteen barrels of biscuits and tunnelling through and through the pile. Zinc-coated cases had to be made, and, to save a valuable food staple, all the biscuits had to be repacked into them. Other cases were at times found to be the nests of hideous, but harmless, pythons, and every day or two we had encounters with monsters that were as long as a stock-whip and four times its diameter. But the most serious interruption our work was subjected to was brought about by a continuous downpour of rain that lasted for a whole week, during which time we never once saw the sun. The rain was accompanied by a steady north-west wind that moaned and groaned incessantly and sang a weird melancholy song of disaster in our ears. The air during the blight of the sun was excessively humid, and all our effects speedily became blue mouldy. Everything was wet and uncomfortable, and the blankets which we lay on, never under, were as moist as a sponge. When the clouds finally lifted and the sun came out, the growth of all varieties of vegetation was simply unimaginable. The wild vine, here, by some unaccountable freak of nature, an annual, grew six inches in a night, and the cane and black oat grasses shot up as if by the magic of a Hindu fakir[6]. The sullen hills absolutely smiled in their universal bright green mantles of verdure, and all nature rejoiced that the rains seemed to be over and gone. Cascades of sparkling water fell down fissures in the brown basalt foundations of the hills, and the prattle of brooks and whispering streams made a pleasant murmur on the air. Wisps and fleecy masses of vapor wreathed the weather-beaten foreheads of the rocky hills and wound soft folds of grey down round the trunks of tall hillside trees. Each day was decked with jewels. The skies were deep pure sapphire vaults, the hills and valleys wide fields of emerald, down which wound shining veins of silver. An opaline green was shot through the water of the Basin and pearl- hued clouds wandered over the deep, blue sky. The moist heat, however, was insufferable, and the soaked ground was too soft to be walked on with ease. It was several days after the rain ceased before we could resume work outside, and we had hardly settled down to our tasks again before the schooner arrived from Derby.

[1] A section of land: in early Australia was a tract of land one square mile in area (640 acres = 1580.8 ha); however, in later usage, a "section" was sometimes used for blocks of 80 acres (197.6 ha) or 32 acres (79.04 ha).

[2] Adamantine: unyieldingly hard.

[3] Dookie College: a noted agricultural college, near Shepparton, Victoria.

Cockatoo farmer: a small-scale or hobby farmer.

[4] "The mast of some great admiral" is a quotation from *Paradise Lost*, 1. 292, the epic poem by John Milton (1608–1674): "His spear, to equal which the tallest pine hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the mast of some great admiral, were but a wand;"

[5] Whitman: Walt Whitman (1819–1892).

Thoreau: Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862).

Stevenson: Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894) wrote *An Apology for Idlers*.

[6] Cane grass: *Sorghum* species.

Black oat grass: probably *Themeda triandra*.

Hindu fakir: a religious ascetic, sadhu or itinerant holy man.

Saturday October 14, 1899

No. XXI.

An inspection of the schooner's log on her arrival at the station showed that she had experienced a very rough passage on the voyage to Derby. Heavy winds and "high, confused seas" were met in a big bight, which, on the chart, is distinguished from the Indian Ocean by the name of Camden Sound, but in reality is part and parcel of the feline ocean, and is subjected to all the conditions of wind, weather and wave that prevail over the ultimate sea. The voyage of the "Gemini" to Derby

was undertaken in the very heart of the hurricane season, when weather-wise mariners, with local experience, would have their vessels housed down and securely anchored in sheltered havens, but we were new pupils in the hard school of northern experience, and had our lessons to learn at the expense of many hours of sleepless care and midnight vigilance. The schooner was barely a half-day's sail from the land-locked waters of Brecknock Harbour, where she had already ridden out a fierce storm, when it became painfully evident that exceptionally bad weather was about. Angry skies, growing hourly blacker, wilder and more ominous; the sea becoming greyer, more broken and tigerish; the wind coming away from the north-west in sharp volleys and booming cannonades, and the barometer sagging lower and ever lower, warned the captain to run for shelter from an evidently impending gale. The decision was a wise one, but the first mishap of the voyage occurred when executing it. In threading her way at nightfall through a tortuous channel, between a long line of coral reefs, that fenced a sullen, forbidding stretch of coast, the vessel missed stays when going about and struck heavily on the reef, where she was in imminent danger of becoming a total wreck[1]. Every surge of the sea as it rushed, wild and broken, over the reef, lifted the vessel in its savage clutches and dashed her back on the reef with crashing blows that made her groan in every seam and threatened to jump the masts out of her. But the little vessel was well and truly built, of elastic Tasmanian blue gum, in the tight little island where they know how to build such crafts, and when the tide rose she floated off uninjured, save by the loss of several sheets of Muntz metal sheathing[2]. She lay all night pitching violently and rolling like a drunken marine in the seething seas, and as morning broke, grey, wild and filled with a blare of the mingled noises of mountainous waves pounding on the reef, the constant trumpeting bellow of the wind, and the angry crashing of the breaking seas, the long range of chain, to which she had lain, was heaved in and a safe retreat from the fierce gale was found in a cove gnawed out of an inhospitable rugged sandstone coast. When the strength of the gale had abated somewhat, sail was set and a course shaped to clear the labyrinth of adamantine islands and lurking reefs which guard the passage into King Sound, but the long grey mass of Caffarelli Island was just abeam when another gale was encountered[3]. In the surprisingly short space of time in which a sea can get up in the strong tide ways of that locality, a mad turmoil of waters assailed the schooner, wrenched the gudgeons from the stern post, and left the vessel drifting rudderless at the mercy of the tumultuous seas[4]. It was a trying and anxious situation. Some miles to windward lay the wide ring of a coral atoll, with outlying dangers, and to leeward stretched the hundreds of islands and rocks which form the Buccaneer's Archipelago[5]. The ebb of the tide sets irresistibly towards the atoll, the flood ran ten knots strong through and around the barren, rocky islands of the Archipelago. A drift in either direction was inevitable, unless some steering gear, capable of resisting the swirling eddies and wild, irregular seas, which were holding high carnival round the schooner, could be improvised. The situation was, however, saved by the mate (Dan Darroch), who was of the doughty British sea-dog breed that is always "game" and willing to volunteer for any emergency, however dangerous and difficult. While the schooner was rolling her rail under the tormented billows, Dan boldly went over the stern with the end of the mizzen sheet made fast round his waist, and bored auger holes in the stern post and disconnected rudder while the seas were bumping and battering him under the counter, immersing him in their green masses or pounding him with the disengaged rudder[6]. With indomitable pluck and perseverance he held on to his seemingly impossible task, bored the holes, and reeving wire rope through them, secured the rudder so effectively that the schooner was enabled to reach Derby without further mishap. It was a gallant deed, and if the British Mercantile Marine has many such men as our hardy young Highlander in its service the commerce of the nation is in safe keeping, and the Royal Navy Reserve will never lack capable recruits. But the schooner's troubles did not end when she reached Derby[7]. The roadstead is a very insecure anchorage; the tides were at top springs, and were swift and strong; the bottom is a hard ironstone gravel that is constantly scoured by the tides that rush in and out of the Fitzroy River; furious Kokkibobs were of daily occurrence and with two anchors down and sixty fathoms of cable payed out on each, the little vessel was still at the mercy of the ruthless, forces of nature[8]. She was dragged hither and thither at the dictates of the merciless will of the capricious elements, and was either brought up by drifting on to some of the numerous shifting sand banks that are formed by the meeting of the ebb and flood tides near the mouth of the Fitzroy, or her anchors, in dragging over the bottom, would find tough holding ground in a stiff blue mud that sometimes intersects the belts of gravel. Anchor watches were a vanity and useless vexation of spirit, and often in the morning the schooner would be found several miles from the place where she had lain when all hands took a "watch below" the night before, and once she went dangerously near forming a permanent piece of the landscape of Mary Island, a long, low mangrove-clad delta island that was doubtless a shifting sandbank, until the grasping mangrove got hold of it and converted it into stable earth. Gradually the winds took off, the seas calmed down, and the "Gemini" rested serenely after her buffetings with one anchor down and a sweep of forty fathoms of chain.

Mrs Bradshaw, who had on her voyage to and from the Prince Regent River, experienced all the vicissitudes of calm and storm, and the not unusual sensation, in these waters, of bumping on a reef, was landed at Derby, and doubtless heaved a heavy sigh of satisfaction when the Holt's blue funnel boat (the "Australind") cast off her moorings from the Derby jetty, and steamed down King Sound on her way to southern ports[9]. Mr

Bradshaw purchased and shipped fifty sheep and two horses at Derby, set sail for Cygnet Bay, a favorite rendezvous in King Sound of the north-west pearling fleet in the hurricane season and careened the schooner for repairs on one of the sandy beaches of the secluded coves that are scalloped out of the low mainland that surrounds Cygnet Bay[10]. It was a pleasant haven to linger in, as many of the schooners and luggers of the pearling fleet were at anchor or lying ashore, undergoing their annual overhaul, and the pearlers were excellent company, but the live stock on board the "Gemini" demanded despatch, and after repairing the rudder, replacing the damaged copper sheathings, purchasing fresh stores from the ample "slop chests" of the pearling schooners, and shipping two new hands (West Indian negroes) the schooner started on her return voyage to the station[11].

While waiting for a favourable wind with which to negotiate the impetuous tides of Sunday Straits, Mr Bradshaw landed on Sunday Island and recruited five of the island natives for service aboard and ashore. Clearing the Straits with a fair wind, the passage back to the station was accomplished in three days, and we were all delighted when one of us discerned the saucy prow of the schooner slipping out into the Basin from behind one of the points of St Andrew's Island.

[1] A long line of coral reefs: possibly Montgomery Reef.

Missed stays when going about: failed to change tack. When a sailing vessel is brought up into the wind, with sails shaking, poor handling can result in inadequate ability to turn through the wind.

[2] Tasmanian blue gum: *Eucalyptus globulus*. *The Twins* was built by Edward Higgs in 1880 at East Devonport, Tasmania.

Muntz metal sheathing: Muntz metal is an alloy of 60% copper and 40% zinc, stronger and harder than brass; used here as plating, to protect a vessel's wooden hull from marine borers.

[3] Caffarelli Island: 16°02' S, 123°17' E; one of the outermost of the maze of rocky islands forming the Buccaneer Archipelago; it rises to 78 metres and now features an automatic lighthouse.

[4] Gudgeons: metal sockets, attached to the sternpost of a vessel to receive the rudder pintle (upright pivot pin).

[5] A coral atoll: probably refers to Adele Island (15°31' S, 123°09' E).

[6] Mizzen sheet: the rope controlling the sail of the rear mast, on a sailing vessels with two or more masts.

Counter: the underside at the stern of a vessel, slanting in towards the rudder.

[7] Arrival of schooner *The Twins* at Derby: the shipping column of the *Inquirer* newspaper (10 February 1892, page 2, column d) states: "Mr. Bradshaw's schooner Twins arrived at Derby from Prince Regent's River yesterday".

[8] Kokkibobs: cockeye bobs or severe thunderstorms.

Forty fathoms of chain: 73.2 metres (one fathom = 6 feet = 1.83 metres).

[9] *Australind*: Gunn is incorrect in calling the vessel a 'Holt's blue funnel boat'; in fact the steamer of 1019 tons belonged to the Western Australian Steam Navigation Company and had a black funnel with two white rings! The *Australind*, under Captain John Pincombe, had left Singapore on or about 1 February 1892 and arrived at Derby on the morning of 10 February. She called at Broome on 12 February; Ashburton [Onslow]; Carnarvon 17 February; Shark Bay; Geraldton on 18 February and arrived at Fremantle on 19 February [shipping columns of the *Inquirer* newspaper 27 January – 20 February 1892].

Interestingly, the *Inquirer* of 20 February 1892 (page 2, column e) lists the passengers arriving at Fremantle: "From Derby: Mrs Heuston, Masters R. & F. Heuston, Mrs Bradshaw and Mr W. Lukin". Mrs. Bradshaw presumably continued home from Fremantle to Melbourne, by another ship.

[10] Careened the schooner: the process of laying a vessel on one side, to carry out repairs or maintenance to the hull below the waterline.

[11] "Slop chests": stores of clothing, tobacco etc, carried on vessels for issue to crews.

Saturday October 21, 1899

No. XXII

The rattle of the schooner's anchor chain as it ran though the hawse pipes was always a welcome sound at the Marigui moorings[1]. It struck a keynote for a whole gamut of pleasant sensations that vibrated through every chord of our being. Each studded link of the chain was a visible and tangible connexion with the great throbbing heart of the greater palpitating world that lay far and wide outside our tauri, girt with solitude and sail-less seas[2]. Every clanking note of the cable as its ranges ran jumping, like sheep through a gate, off the schooner's deck was to us like the clinking of a telegraph sounder that repeats in microcosm the macrocosm of the big world's doings. It uttered in its own Morse alphabet the thoughts that men were thinking all the world over[3]. It told the tale of wars, revolutions and tumults. It sang the paeans of victory and chanted the dirges of defeat[4]. If a complication with France were predicted; a troublesome Indian hill tribe suppressed; a ministry unseated; a test match lost; a Valkyrie defeated by Yankee chicanery or a fall in wool reported, we read the records in the rune of the cable rushing through the hawse as certainly as the operator feels the pulse of the world in the solitude of a central Australian telegraph station[5].

It never really very much concerned us at Marigui that we did not get, along with our damper and tea in the morning, the daily papers, reeking with the fumes of fresh printer's ink and tedious with the reiteration of the virtues of rival fiscal doctrines of free trade and protection; and we certainly were not sufficiently interested in the average newspaper pabulum to resort to the device of the lonely occupant of a far north-west

Canadian fort who methodically arranged the files of the *London Times* in chronological order, as they arrived in three months' drafts, had them damped with a sponge and served up in regular sequence with his coffee and toast in the morning[6]. Even should there have been any great and clamant event pending, we would not have been content, knowing the complete record was within our reach, to take it in homoeopathic daily doses at our breakfast. We should have been tempted to imitate the inquisitive young lady who always wishes to see how the story ends ere she begins it. We would have anticipated the climax, lifted the skirts of Isis and peeping to the end obtained wisdom[7]. And, after yielding all due admiration for and deference to the stolid patience of the north-west backwoodsman, ours was the better method. We were never betrayed into a fictitious interest in things that did not concern us. We never allowed ourselves to be deluded into a spurious and unnecessary enthusiasm about abortive national enterprises, except once when the schooner brought the inspiring news that the British were going to blow the French gun boats out of the Mekong River, and we sailed five hundred miles along a difficult and dangerous coast to get an account of the adventure[8]. We escaped the contagion of the latest horror, and were innocent of a knowledge of its gruesome details. Our life remote from public haunt was not stayed with metropolitan excitement, nor comforted with suburban frivolities, and we "exercised an infinite tact of omission" in our newspaper reading. We got our story in one volume, not in aggravating serial numbers, and skipped the particulars that were not essential to the development of the narrative. Our nerves were not kept in a state of unhealthy suspense and excitement by idle rumors of impending international complications. We were not deceived by the devices of sensation-mongering journalists nor tricked with the wiles of scheming diplomats. Tendencies that were dragged in like a herring across the trail of events, we could afford to disregard and ignore altogether the trivial and unimportant trend of affairs. The momentous concerns of Little Peddlington did not concern us. Isolated, far distant from the madding crowds' ignoble strife, clear away from the bustle and the din and the dust, the fret and the fever and the heat of the great actions and great questions that were worrying men's frames and agitating their minds, we were critics of, rather than actors in, the great melodrama of existence[9]. We saw life steadily, and we saw it whole. Time and distance from the moment and the sphere of action enhanced the sense of perspective and proportion, and gave us a serene point of view from which to survey the vaunts and feats of the great actors on the world's stage. Tempered by remoteness our outlook on the world was catholic and calm. Affairs in which we should have been bigoted and bitter partisans had we been amidst them looked small and insignificant, and quite unworthy of two words of angry argument. The burning questions kindled by provincial party politicians did not heat a single emotion, and we looked upon "the petty spites of the village of spires" with a secular indifference that had nothing to do with the circumstance that the only church in our neighbourhood was fully five hundred miles away, and had not a spire worth speaking about – only a white ant-riddled belfry whose tottering timbers gave a peculiar unsanctified jangle to the notes of the bell. So our daily paper was not a condiment essential to the digestion of human nature's daily food. It was a movable feast that was often indefinitely postponed, and when it arrived in batches that sometimes embraced five months of issue, Hugh Young and I made a Gargantuan banquet on whatever items appealed with greatest insistence to our individual palates, and then retired to the housetop in the evenings, and talked over the more imposing events far into the bland tropic nights[10].

But it was not only the cornsacks full of newspapers which the schooner brought to Marigui that made the clank of her chains such an agreeable sound in our ears. We could have surrendered that portion of our mail without any considerable contraction of the heart strings, and one of us certainly always experienced more joy over the acquisition of one book than over the possession of a thousand newspapers. But the circumstance in the arrival of the schooner, which stirred deeper emotions was that which put us in possession of despatches from the outlying provinces of our being that existed in the hearts of our friends. The subject of letters from home is a jaded hackney that has carried whole bales of cheap sentiment; but is, nevertheless, one which has a very genuine and deep interest for one who is far remote from sympathetic human society. Whenever the usually adipose mail bags were opened we would each get his individual pile of letters, and enter the precincts of a world that was wholly our own. I claim to be a gregarious animal. I love society. I go in flocks and am poor stuff out of which to make a recluse. I have few reserves in the ordinary affairs of life, and am always willing to surrender any joy or sorrow, success or failure of my own to the commonwealth of comradeship; but when my home correspondence was in my hands I was as shy as a maiden with her lover's first letter in her bosom. I would isolate myself from my companions, seek the seclusion of some "unimaginable lodge for solitary thinking" and pore over the familiar writing of many a charmed page by the hour[11]. Mr Young was singularly affected, and very often he would retire, smiling, within himself for several days. A wall of cautious reserve went up round the text of communications. It may have been only the tittle-tattle of the tea table but it reflected the family life, and the home circle is sacred to members of the family. Its confidences may be infinitely diverting or doleful with "the strain of the song of the unwept tear," but they must be jealously guarded and fenced with impregnable restrictions. The ideal letter from home to distant members of one's family must be written without reserve, and a considerable deal of the pleasure we experienced in the life at Marigui was derived from communion with kith and kin on the "ink ensanguined plain" of many a vivacious letter. Old life, old scenes, old escapades ran before the mind in

pictorial commentary on the letters, and informed them with a vitality and reality that increased their entertainment a thousand fold. They were as the clue of a lock of hair, an old glove, or a bit of ribbon is to the touch of a clairvoyant. They obliterated time, bridged distance, and made the absent palpable, tangible, true by stimulating the imagination. A hundred tender ties were re-woven round our hearts, and a thousand fading wistful interests were renewed. Very often, infinitely the better part of ourselves exists in the hearts of our relations, and we were frequently sensible of a feeling of shame that they should entertain so high an opinion of us as their letters expressed. It often made us involuntary hypocrites, but it tended also to make us more enamoured of our own virtues and to view our vices with more wholesome dislike. It was an ideal world these volumes of letters weaved around us, and a good place to go apart and rest awhile in when some of the more haggard features of our life depressed our spirits. We came back to our work with stouter hearts and sturdier determinations to make the best of our circumstances, and to maintain our dominion in the fair, far provinces of our being with honor and distinction.

After our delight in the receipt of our letters, books, magazines, and papers came the interest we felt in making in new acquaintances with new members of our party, the acquisition of stock, and the supply of fresh stores.

[1] Hawse pipes: metal pipes, placed in the bow of a vessel on each side of the stem, for the anchor chain to pass through.

[2] Tauri: home range.

[3] Morse alphabet: coded signals using long and short sounds, represented by dots and dashes; named after its American inventor Samuel Morse.

[4] Paeans: exultant outbursts or hymns of praise (from Greek).

[5] Valkyries: in Norse mythology, the daughters of Odin, choosers of the slain; celebrated in Richard Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*.

Yankee chicanery: Yankee originally referred to a native of New England, U.S.A.; later it was used to denote northerners from southerners, or Americans in general. Yankees were often typecast as shrewd, hence the reference to chicanery, or trickery.

Rune: a letter of a mysterious, early Germanic alphabet.

[6] Pabulum: food for the mind (Latin).

[7] Lifted the skirts of Isis: looked into the future. Isis was an Egyptian goddess.

[8] Mekong River: the major river of Southeast Asia, which enters the South China Sea in Vietnam.

[9] Far distant from the madding crowd's ignoble strife: the phrase (without 'distant') is from the poem *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* by Thomas Grey (1716–1771). *Far From the Madding Crowd* was later used by Thomas Hardy, in 1874, as the title for his famous novel.

[10] Gargantuan: from Gargantua, a giant in Rabelais.

[11] "Unimaginable lodge for solitary thinking" is from *Endymion* 1, 293, by John Keats (1795–1821): "The unimaginable lodge for solitary thinkings".

Saturday October 28, 1899

No. XXIII.

With the object of compounding for sins I am inclined to by damning those I have no mind to, I desire to say that I have a wholesome objection to falsehood, and an inordinate affection for a sumptuous bill of fare. Persons without discernment have called me a ***gourmand***; I, with a greater discernment, a love of truth and an abhorrence of the sin of gluttony, delete the ***mand,*** substitute ***met,*** and style myself a ***gourmet,*** in the recent and fuller sense of the word[1]. The Prince Regent River, during the first few months of our stay there, was the worst of all possible places for a lover of good eating to get to, and to be perfectly frank, which, I am afraid, I was not in No. XXII, I must confess that a good deal of my interest in the arrival of the schooner was centred in her bill of lading. Manifest, bill of lading and bill of fare were synonymous terms with us, and although we were originally amply provided with all the stores necessary for our use, climatic and other conditions had more or less injuriously affected most of them[2]. The moisture of the atmosphere had penetrated the sacks of flour, and where it had not completely mildewed them, it had rendered their contents dull, heavy and sad. The ingredients of a pile of about fifteen cases of self-raising flour, of a brand from which I had a few months previously made excellent Johnnie cakes[3] while camping out in the valley of the Upper Goulburn, had fused with the moisture, and the packages formed admirable briquettes with which we proposed to build a chimney. The sugar had been tunnelled through and through by the white ants, and in the instance of the ration samples it would have taken a skilful analytical chemist to determine where mud began and sugar ended. Some barrels of originally excellent beef, packed by Messrs Bennett & Woolcock, of Melbourne, had not been sufficiently preserved to resist the heat, and the beef in some other barrels, packed by a rascally Williamstown shipping butcher, were capable of resisting anything – our teeth included. The beef was as tough as buffalo hide, and so salt that we dubbed it Lot's wife[4]. Many of the tins of jam had "blown," and most of the pickles and preserves were more or less damaged by the heat. And some of the stores we had picked up at Port Darwin and Wyndham had evidently formed part of the original cargo of the Ark. One case of lime juice was a particularly interesting archaeological relic. Its labels bore the legend that "This lime juice was examined by T.B Jones, analytical chemist, and is warranted to be fit for use by Her Majesty's army and navy for two years from

date, June 12th, 1872". It probably still forms part of the dead stock of the Marigui store. Our canned meat, preserved in Queensland, however, withstood the climate and was an invaluable stand by whenever tainted salt beef proved too strong for us or Lot's wife too salt and tough. But "tinned dog" palls in time, even if one does not get the impression, after repeated use of it, that one's inside is gradually being subjected to a process of tin lining[5]. Our poultry which, judging from the clamour of its cackling, ought to have provided us with plenty of eggs, failed altogether in the fulfilment of its promise, or some of our party could have taught their grandmothers how to suck eggs, likewise poach them. The season, too, was unfavorable for game as the rains had distributed water very generously over the face of the earth and at billabongs, creeks, and holes where we could reasonably have expected, in the dry months to find a bog with wild ducks[6], pigeons, pygmy geese, and jabirus there was seldom a whirr of wings, and after a day's trudge we often had to content ourselves with a few sulphur crested cockatoos. The native fruits, of which there were few, did not stand us in better stead. The wild grape, a poor parody of the cultivated variety, was just ripening, but its small black berries were scarce worth eating as they were mostly seeds and sweet insipidity, and smarted the mouth with some acrid property in the skin[7]. A small plum, with the flavour of dried prunes, occasionally furnished us with an agreeable repast, and a fig, of a rudimentary woody order, that might have been successfully developed with culture, now and then tempted us to try our teeth on it[9].

It is always useful in cases of emergency to know what a man may or may not eat in the bush and we were always experimenting on ourselves with some of the natural products of the place. Had our knowledge of botany been a little more profound, we would probably have saved ourselves some painful experiences. Mr Young and I were riding one day in search of game when I noticed on a small tree a round yellow fruit, about the size of a quandong seed[9]. Externally, the fruit looked tempting, and on breaking through the thin crisp husk the temptation to taste and try was still stronger. The substance of the fruit was a delicious-looking jelly. It was the fruit of another species of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was evil to taste, and good to look at and leave alone. I merely touched the jelly with the tip of my tongue and my mouth was filled with a hot bitterness that kept me spitting for days. It was like a blend of Tabasco or hell-fire sauce with some doubly concentrated extract of quinine[10]. I have recently been informed that I was in all probability sampling the true nux vomica or strychnine. I only know that whenever afterwards I discovered a tempting looking fruit, I got one of my native boys to sample it and stood by to watch the effect. At one of our camps we were very much struck by the extraordinary behaviour of some of our sheep. The flock would be browsing placidly when without any warning some staid old ewe would forget her matronly dignity and commence a series of absurd antics, while the rest of the flock would watch her with bland looks of dumb amazement. She would stand on her head, do "cart wheels" as nearly as she could, bite the ground, catch her mouth in her two front trotters, turn heels over head, roll about on the ground with her feet going like dislocated battery stampers and finally rush helter-skelter, with her head in the air, through the flock to the detriment of its peace and decorum. For a long while we were at a loss to account for such astonishing antics, and it was not until one day when I plucked a rich, dark purple lily, that shot its beautiful head and lanceolate leaves up amidst the thick grass and gave it to the black shepherd to taste that we unravelled the mystery[11]. The blackfellow imitated the action of the sheep almost exactly, and described his feelings in language that was "frequent, and painful, and free". It is interesting and useful to know the properties of the herbs in one's district, but it would be more strictly in accordance with wisdom to ascertain them by recognised chemical processes than to submit them to the test of one's palate and stomach. When one's flour is not too sweet, when fresh meat is not readily available, and when one's lime juice can only be taken with safety in the presence of a stomach pump, vegetable diet is necessary for the regulation of the human system; and, failing our garden, which had failed us in the hour of our need, being planted too close to the spring, we were compelled to experiment with whatever herbs grew in our neighbourhood. A broad leafed, blue flowering grass, called scurvy grass, had been pointed out to us as a useful substitute for cabbage, but we found it as tasteless and tough as boiled string, and a native spinach proving scarcely more palatable, we cast about for other ingredients[12]. Mr. Young, who seemed to require more vegetable than I, and was more urgent in his search and bolder in his adventures into the field of domestic botany, on one occasion nearly paid the death penalty for his temerity. He had unearthed some yams[13] that bore a strong resemblance to common potatoes, and when served up, smiling with mealy lips through their rent jackets, they looked as innocuous as the innocent tuber *Solanum*[14]. I almost yielded to a strong temptation to try them, but remembering my adventure with the nux vomica, resisted the temptation and awaited results. I had not too long to wait, for Mr Young had only swallowed one mouthful with evident relish when he exhibited all the symptoms of aggravated poisoning and had I not been by to administer emetics, I might have lost a valued mate and the station would have missed its most valuable hand[15].

But it was only in the wet season that we could not replenish the larder with fresh meat of some sort. North Australia is particularly rich in game, and for the most part the fish of the sea, the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the field provided us with plenty of food when the ordinary sources of supply failed us.

[1] *Gourmand*: a lover of good food (French). *Gourmet*: a connoisseur of wine or table delicacies (French).

[2] Bill of lading: a written list of goods, shipped and signed by an agent or owner, agreeing to deliver them safely.

[3] Johnnie cakes: wheat-meal cakes, baked on ashes or fried in a pan.

Valley of the Upper Goulburn: probably on or near the Bradshaw family property of Bolwarra, Victoria.

[4] Lot's wife: was turned into a pillar of salt when she looked back on the city of Sodom, destroyed by fire and brimstone (*Genesis* 19, 26).

[5] "Tinned dog": Australian slang for canned meat.

[6] Wild ducks: would have included plumed whistling duck (*Dendrocygna cytoni*), wandering whistling duck (*D. arcuata*), pacific black duck (*Anas superciliosa*) and grey teal (*A. gracilus*); Pigeons: Common bronzewing (*Phaps chalcoptera*), Green pygmy goose: *Nettapus pulchellus;* Jabirus: black-necked storks (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*); Sulphur-crested cockatoo: *Cacatua galerita*

[7] Wild grape: probably *Ampelocissus acetosa.* Oxalic acid causes the mouth-smarting effect mentioned.

[8] A small plum: perhaps *Pouteria* species.

A fig: possibly sandpaper fig (*Ficus opposita*)

[9] A round yellow fruit about the size of a quandong seed: the description matches the fruit of strychnine tree (*Strychnos lucida*).

Quandong is the bright red, edible fruit of *Santalum acuminatum* of semi-arid southern Australia, popular for jam.

[10] Tabasco or hell-fire sauce: Tabasco sauce, named for a state in Mexico, is a pungent condiment sauce, made from chillies.

[11] A rich, dark purple lily: possibly *Burmannia juncea, Cyanotis axillaris* or *Murdannia graminea.*

[12] Scurvy grass: probably *Commelina*, which has three Kimberley species.

[13] Unearthed some yams: Aborigines of the Kimberley utilised many plant resources and harvested large quantities of root crops (see I. M. Crawford, Traditional Aboriginal plant resources, *Records of the Western Australian Museum,* Supplement No. 15, 1982). Some tubers (or yams) required no preparation and were eaten where they were collected. However, as some plant foods were unpalatable or poisonous in their natural state, Aborigines developed a variety of methods for treating them. The description of the yams collected by Mr Young that it "bore strong resmblance to common potatoes" suggests it may have been the tubers of a species of *Tacca.* Two species of *Tacca, T. leontopetaloides* and *T. maculata* occur in the Kimberley and both flower in the wet season and are very recognisable. The plants have a tuber about the size of a potato. Aborigines recognised that in their natural state the tubers of *Tacca* are excessively bitter and required careful cooking in hot ashes for at least eight hours with this process being repeated up to three times before the tubers were edible.

[14] Innocent tuber *Solanum*: *Solanum tuberosum*, the common, so-called "Irish" potato, originally from the highlands of South America.

[15] Emetics: medicine used to induce vomiting.

Saturday November 11, 1899

No. XXIV.

I should be doing myself an injustice were I to allow the impression to prevail that I was chiefly interested in the arrival of the schooner because she brought mail bags and fresh provisions. The advent of the schooner, with her consignment of sheep and horses and company of new hands, signified to me more than a liberal supply of fresh mutton, pleasant rides and an increased and interesting company. Those circumstances probably had their due weight in my satisfaction, but I primarily saw in the sheep and horses the nucleus of the flocks and mobs that were destined to make our enterprise profitable, and in our new hands I saw the increased efficiency of our party in dealing with the difficulties of our settlement. Doubtless my anticipation was doomed to some disappointing discount in the exacting bank of circumstance, but for the time being it satisfied me. I opened wide my eyes, and looking into the future saw noble steamers trudging through the sleeping waters of our harbor, the most beautiful and perfect in the world, and bearing thence to the teeming east and the thronged markets of the west our mutton, our horned cattle, and our wool; and I felt a glow of pleasure, that had only a slender base on the schooner's bill of lading, that I should have been selected to assist in the founding of a new province that will yet spread over the waiting land that lies between King Sound and Cambridge Gulf, in the far north-west. But temporary trivial details are often important factors in the success of an enterprise, and one of the details, frequently overlooked, upon which the successful management of a station in the Australian tropics often rests, is in the satisfactory organisation of its culinary department.

An old northern friend of mine, Mr Patrick White, of Auvergne station, best of good fellows, worshipper of Epicurus and devout disciple of his prophet Brillat-Savarin, was banished by a harsh decree of fate from the pleasant Parisian boulevards, and still more agreeable provincial auberges of France, where he had lived in early youth the life of an epicure, to a hard existence on an Australian never-never land station[1]. But out of evil cometh good, and he brought to the heathen squatters the evangel of a new Gospel. He found the Australian settler a gross barbarian, whose gastronomic creed embraced but three tenets – damper and beef, and tea for breakfast, beef and damper and tea for dinner, and tea and beef and damper for supper – and he began a propaganda for the regeneration of the station bill of fare. He ridiculed the questionable accomplishments of a Macartney, a Buchanan and a Watson, who would start on a long journey with barely sufficient food in their pack bags to last them over the first few days of their trip, and for the rest to trust in Providence and their Winchesters[2]. He probably underestimated the value of the bushcraft which could tell precisely what brand of iguana was warranted genuine and innocent of deleterious ingredients, just how long an alligator steak

ought to grill on the coals, and at what particular stage a baobab nut was done to turn, but was quite orthodox in declaring that "to deliberately live up to one's knowledge on these points, was to live life low down." And he scathed the parsimonious economy of "hungry" Westralian station owners which made "lizarding" a still necessary and useful accomplishment in the equipment of a "sand groping" stockman[3]. The chief articles of his gastronomic creed, and he was never tired of proclaiming them, were that the cook was the best man on the station, and that, though an incomparable gastronomic artist, who could make meals out of nothing, like the one immortalized by Brunton Stephens, might occasionally be found, he must have the requisite articles for a good dinner close to hand, or the settler would find his "eucalyptic cloisterdom anything but gay."[4] Poor old Pat White, now, I hope, walking the shades with his beloved Brillat-Savarin, based the whole of his station economics on his creed, and he lived long enough among amidst the austere conditions of back country settlement to make his influence felt, and to see his system prevail. The old hard days of "hungry" squatters and overlanders have happily gone out for ever, and the station hand, tired, weary and worn, jogs home from his hard day's work under a pitiless sun with the blessed assurance that he will get a nutritious meal that will go some way towards restoring his impaired vitality. He may still have to resort to damper and beef, and milkless tea, when away out on his limitless run mustering or stock keeping, but he will have in his "tucker bags," to assist digestion, a tin or two of the best Adelaide jam, and a few bottles of the invaluable Lea and Perrin[5]. His flour will be of the best, his damper or Johnnie cakes will be lightened and sweetened with baking powder, his tea will be eighteenpenny, his sugar as white as snow, and if his fishing line or his gun have secured him a bream or a turkey, he will sit down to his evening meal, while a short tropical twilight is painting the rapidly falling curtain of the night with opaline fringes, with a feeling of satisfaction and pleasure that a prince sated with the best of living might well envy[6].

Phil Du Bois, the presiding deity over the destinies of our kitchen and digestion, almost rivalled Brunton Stephen's "celestial Chinee cook" in the mysterious excellence of his dishes, but Phil and the alligators, and the blackfellows, and some of our party could not agree, so he determined to leave us; and with the arrival of the schooner, from which we expected so much, dark days of indigestion were in store for us. She brought not only fresh stores and sheep, with their promise of mutton in its infinite variety of forms, for with her came Bob Johnson, a negro from the West Indies, via Greenock, in the capacity of station cook, and truly, if God sent the meat, as the old adage has it, the devil sent the cook[7]. Man is described somewhere as the only animal that cooks his food. Johnson could not cook our food ergo Johnson was not a man[8]. He was a devil of doubtful gender. Whatever Johnson cooked he spoiled. He roasted legs of mutton until they resembled blackfellow's clubs in color, specific gravity and shape, and boiled mutton came to the table in tattered rags that clung to the bones like strips and shreds of the torn sails of a ship in a gale. Chops were hard lumps of indescribable blackness that even our new dog disclaimed to notice. Johnson as a failure, however, did not dwell in the same neighbourhood with a cook we had when forming a settlement on another northern river[9]. The cook was a Prussian, and he had one speciality – dirt. Had I known the whole of his lamentable distance from godliness I should never have allowed him to take charge of our culinary department, but wisdom only came to me when the whole of the camp was smitten with a very distressing bilious complaint, almost peculiar to tropical Australia, that is called either Belyando or Barcoo Spur[10]. The complaint threatened to become chronic, but fortunately the cook took seriously ill first, and when I discovered the condition of things in the galley, I frequently prayed that a merciful providence would remove Konran Von Engel to a place where he could wallow for ever in his favorite conditions of grease and dirt. The pots, pans, and kettles were buried deep beneath successive layers of dirt, grease, and greasy dirt, and it took myself and my blackboy, with unlimited soap, sand, and ashes, two days to unearth the dishes from the deposits of matter in which they were embedded. My next cook was a Chinese. He was clean, obliging, and civil as most of his race are, but unlike them in one essential respect, he was not a born cook. A few days before we parted he endeavoured to make a damper. He mixed the baking powder in the water first and then added the flour and salt. I was loath to part with Tang Ta, he was so evidently a Mandarin, but his methods were necessarily tentative and I had no desire to be experimented upon with the contents of a store that contained almost every death-dealing substance from dynamite to strychnine.

One has, at times, to put up with many unique experiences in diet and beverages in the vacant spaces of the earth. Water is sometimes scarce, and one cannot always be too particular about its quality. Dead snakes, kangaroos and wallabies frequently add a richness and twang to it that is in the highest degree gamey, but one time, when my blackboy and I were camped away out on one of the back areas of our run, we had an experience that does not often fall to the lot of the settler. The district was comparatively waterless, and our camp was at the only water hole within a radius of many miles. The water in the pool was of an opaque white character, due to the presence of disintegrated chalk and lime in the ground surrounding it, and as it grew less and less in volume, it became richer and stronger in quality. Our tea had an unaccustomed richness, and as the water visibly decreased, it partook of the consistency of soup, with a particularly high flavor. It finally got too strong for even my blackboy's stomach, and on the very day I made up my mind to shift camp, we discovered a partially decomposed aboriginal corpse at the bottom of the pool. We hastened our departure.

[1] Auvergne Station: lies west from Timber Creek, Northern Territory, towards the Western Australian border.

Epicurus: the Greek philosopher of *c.* 300 BC, who held that life should be devoted to refined sensuous enjoyment.

Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755–1826), French lawyer and politician; author of the celebrated work on gastronomy *Physiologie du gout* (1825). It was translated into English in 1884 and is mainly anecdotal with few recipes.

Auberges: inns or country hotels (French feminine noun).

[2] Macartney: John Macartney, a Queenslander who founded Florida Station c. 1883 on the remote Goyder River, Arnhem Land. After two years of continual warfare with Aborigines, he abandoned Florida and drove the surviving cattle 1600 km west. Here in 1886, he cofounded Auvergne Station on the Baines River, Northern Territory (Hill 1951, pp. 173 & 241).

Buchanan: Nathaniel Buchanan (1826–1901), the explorer and drover.

Watson: Jack Watson, second manager at Victoria River Downs, Northern Territory. Nicknamed the "Gulf Hero", he was famous for lunatic stunts. Attempting to swim the swollen Katherine River on April Fool's Day 1896, he was appropriately seized by a large crocodile and never seen again (Hill 1951, p. 232–233).

[3] "Sand groping": sandgroper – a colloquial term to describe a person from Western Australia, derived from the tendency to grope with one's toes when walking through soft sand.

[4] Brunton Stephens, James (1835–1902): a Scottish poet, who migrated to Queensland in 1866.

[5] Lea and Perrin: a brand of Worcester sauce, made from vinegar, spices and soy.

[6] Eighteenpenny: expensive at one shilling and sixpence!

[7] "If God sent the meat" etc: from *On Dr. Goldsmith's Characteristical Cookery* by David Garrick (1717–1779): "Heaven sends us good meat, but the Devil sends cooks."

[8] Ergo: therefore (Latin).

[9] A settlement on another northern river: presumably Bradshaw's Run on the Victoria River, Northern Territory.

[10] Belyando or Barcoo Spur: the Belyando River is a tributary of the Burdekin, while the Barcoo is another Queensland river; 'Spur' is either a printing error or, possibly, a genteel euphemism for 'Spew'! Both afflictions are characterized by a sudden seizure of vomiting; the Barcoo version was said to be prevalent when Cooper's Creek was in flood and lasted for several days; it sometimes accompanied dysentery; a popular, if dubious, antidote was Lea & Perrins' sauce! The mystery ailments are celebrated in a traditional Queensland ditty:

> "On the far Barcoo where they eat nardoo,
> Jumbuck giblets and pigweed stew.
> Fever and ague and scurvy plague you,
> And the Barcoo Rot, but the worst of the lot
> Is the Bellyando Spew."

[Bill Scot (1976) *Complete Book of Australian Folk Lore* (Ure Smith, Sydney), page 375.]

Botanist Ferdinand Mueller's manuscript description of a new plant he provisionally named *Bradshawia macrosiphonia*, based on specimens collected from the Prince Regent River in 1891 by Joseph Bradshaw. In 1891 the species was formally published and named by Mueller, *Ramphicarpa macrosiphonia*. It is now known as *Lindernia macrosiphonia* (see back cover photograph).

Appendix 1

Saturday July 15, 1899

To the Editor

Sir, – Having spent some twelve or fourteen months in the far north of Western Australia, I have read with great interest the descriptions of and accounts of experiences in that comparatively unknown portion of the Australian continent by your very able correspondent, Aeneas J. Gunn, F.R.G.S. From personal experience I can testify to the correctness of his statements as to the sufferings from insect pests, the intense heat, and hardships gone through by those who are doing, and have done in that region what is always the hardest and most dangerous work – the pioneering. Mr Gunn's accounts prove him to be possessed of a varied and valuable knowledge of that portion of the continent, and it would be a pity indeed if it were not made proper use of for public information. His accounts of the country, the blacks, the animals, birds, and trees are interesting and instructive. The knowledge he must have of the coast should not be lost sight of. I think he will agree with me when I state that it is the most dangerous coast of Australia for mariners, and that it has not yet been properly surveyed so that charts may be depended on. This was the cause of the wreck of the steamer *Eddystone* some few years ago, when I was a passenger on her going up to the north[1]. My object in writing these few lines is to ask if Mr Gunn could be prevailed upon to publish his experiences and descriptions *in extenso* in pamphlet form for public use. He may also have some knowledge of the minerals of Kimberley, which would also be most valuable.
–I am, &c.,

ARTHUR P. FORBES.
126 Greville-street, Prahran.
July 13th, 1899.

[1] Wreck of the steamer *Eddystone:* the steamer was wrecked on 7 September 1894, near Depuch Island, off the Pilbara coast, while making for the port of Cossack.

Appendix 2

96.02.12

To Royal Geographical Society
Royal Geographical Society, Archives, Certificates of Fellows.

CERTIFICATE OF CANDIDATE FOR ELECTION

Name Joseph Bradshaw JP
Description Pastoralist
Residence Bradshaw's Run, Port Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia
Being desirous of admission into the ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY, We, the undersigned, recommend him as likely to become a useful and valuable Fellow.

Dated this 12th day of February 1896

Ferd. von Mueller	F.R.G.S { From personal Knowledge
[E.O.Panton]	F.R.G.S.
A. C. Macdonald	F.R.G.S.

Proposed 23rd March 1896
Elected 13th April 1896

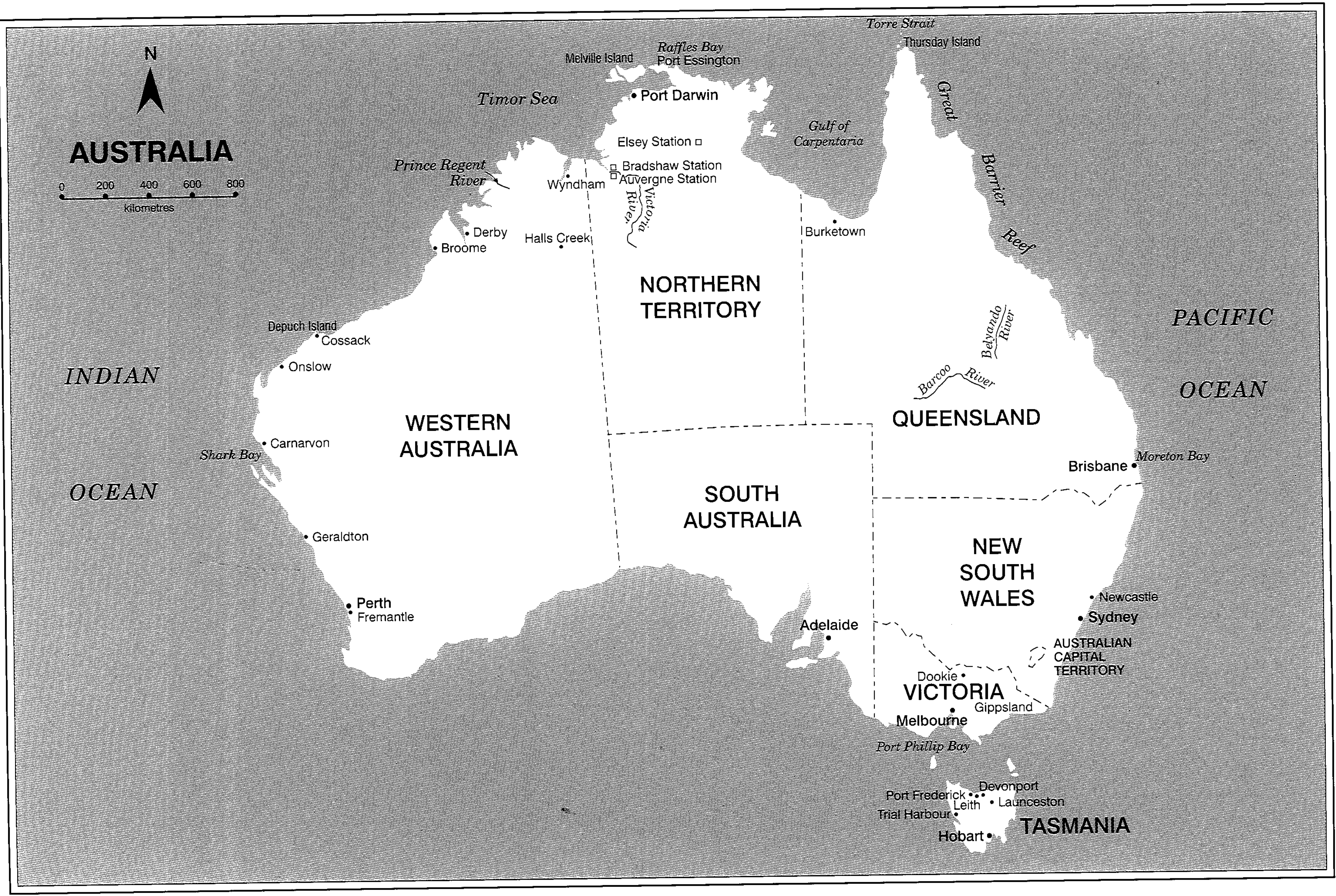
NOTE. -- State for information of the Council the Geographical work or qualifications, if any, of the Candidate

Mr. Bradshaw is the author of two papers contributed to the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (part II Vol IX) "Notes on a recent trip to Prince Rupert's*River" and "The Future of North Australia".

Removed 1918[1]

1 Note added in another hand.

[* An error for the Prince Regent River]


AUSTRALIA
N
0
200
400
600
800
kilometres
INDIAN
OCEAN
Timor Sea
Melville Island
Raffles Bay
Port Essington
Torre Strait
Thursday Island
Port Darwin
Elsey Station
Bradshaw Station
Auvergne Station
Victoria River
Prince Regent River
Wyndham
Derby
Broome
Halls Creek
Gulf of Carpentaria
Burketown
Great Barrier Reef
NORTHERN TERRITORY
Depuch Island
Cossack
Onslow
Carnarvon
Shark Bay
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Geraldton
Perth
Fremantle
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
Adelaide
QUEENSLAND
Belyando River
Barcoo River
Brisbane
Moreton Bay
PACIFIC
OCEAN
NEW SOUTH WALES
Newcastle
Sydney
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY
Dookie
VICTORIA
Gippsland
Melbourne
Port Phillip Bay
Port Frederick
Devonport
Leith
Launceston
Trial Harbour
Hobart
TASMANIA

The Prince Regent River, in the far northwest of Australia, remains one of the country's most remote wilderness areas unchanged since the days of early European exploration. A handful of charter vessels plying the spectacular Kimberley coast provide the only access.

In 1891 an improbable crew, aboard a ketch named The Twins, sailed to the Kimberley from Melbourne and selected this area for a pastoral settlement. They christened it Marigui, after the name given to Australia's northern coast by Indonesian/Macassan voyagers in search of the prized bêche-de-mer.

The tale that unfolds is alternately hilarious and tragic. Spliced together from long-forgotten newspaper memoirs, it is graphically related by Aeneas Gunn, who partnered his cousin Joseph Bradshaw in the ill-fated venture. Gunn was later to be immortalised in his wife's classic tale, We of the Never-Never. Bradshaw was the first European to document the Aboriginal rock art figures unique to the Kimberley region–the enigmatic Bradshaw figures. Under A Regent Moon presents a remarkable and sometimes controversial perspective of scenes and events, unique in the history of the Kimberley frontier.

Gunn's nostalgic memoirs are given new life by editors Tim Willing and Kevin Kenneally. Their fresh historical perspective draws on their extensive knowledge of the region's natural history, archival research and recent discoveries at the Marigui site.

Under A Regent Moon is essential reading for voyagers to the Kimberley coast and anyone with an interest in the tides of its history.

Department of Conservation
and Land Management

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