

First published 2002 by
FREMANTLE PRESS

Second edition first published 2015.
This edition first published 2026.

Fremantle Press Inc. trading as Fremantle Press
PO Box 158, North Fremantle, Western Australia, 6159
fremantlepress.com.au

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A project of the West Pilbara Oral History Group.

Cover design and illustration by Jenna Lee, jennalee.art
Printed by Everbest Printing Investment Limited, China



A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

ISBN 9781760995645 (paperback)

ISBN 9781925162127 (ebook)



Fremantle Press is supported by the Western Australian
State Government through the Department of Cultural
Industries, Tourism and Sport.

Fremantle Press respectfully acknowledges the Whadjuk people of
the Noongar nation as the Traditional Owners and Custodians
of the land where we work in Walyalup.



Bringing up nine children of your own is a major achievement in itself. Bringing up a further 15 foster children is truly remarkable ...

Alice Bilari Smith had lived in the Pilbara all her life, on stations and in the bush, on government reserves and in towns. As a girl on Rocklea Station she narrowly avoided removal from her family by 'the Welfare'. Instead, Alice learned to cook and launder, sew and clean; shoe horses, chop wood and milk cows. Her working life on stations continued as a young married woman and she added mustering, dingo scalping, shearers' assistant and sheep-yard building to her skills.

Alice Bilari Smith also grew up in the ways of her country, hunting, cooking and building in the traditional manner. Some of her children were born in the bush; others in hospital. By the time she had five children of her own she was playing an active role in caring for other Aboriginal children and she initiated the establishment of a Homemakers Centre in Roebourne.

Both a remarkable life and a typical life, Alice's story is insightful and inspiring.

Under a
BILARI TREE
I BORN

ALICE BILARI SMITH

with Anna Vitenbergs
& Loreen Brehaut

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are respectfully advised that deceased people are referenced in this publication.

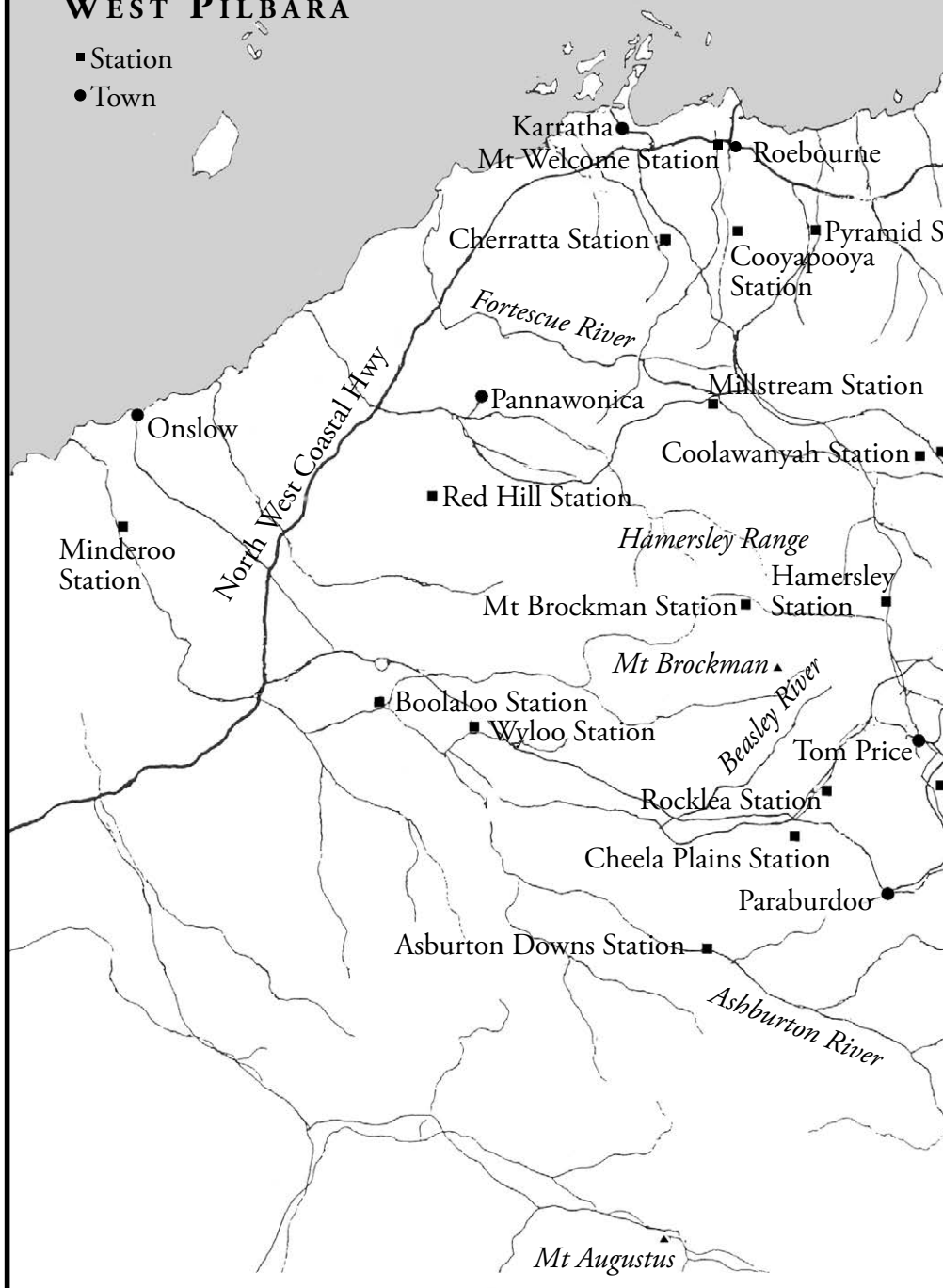


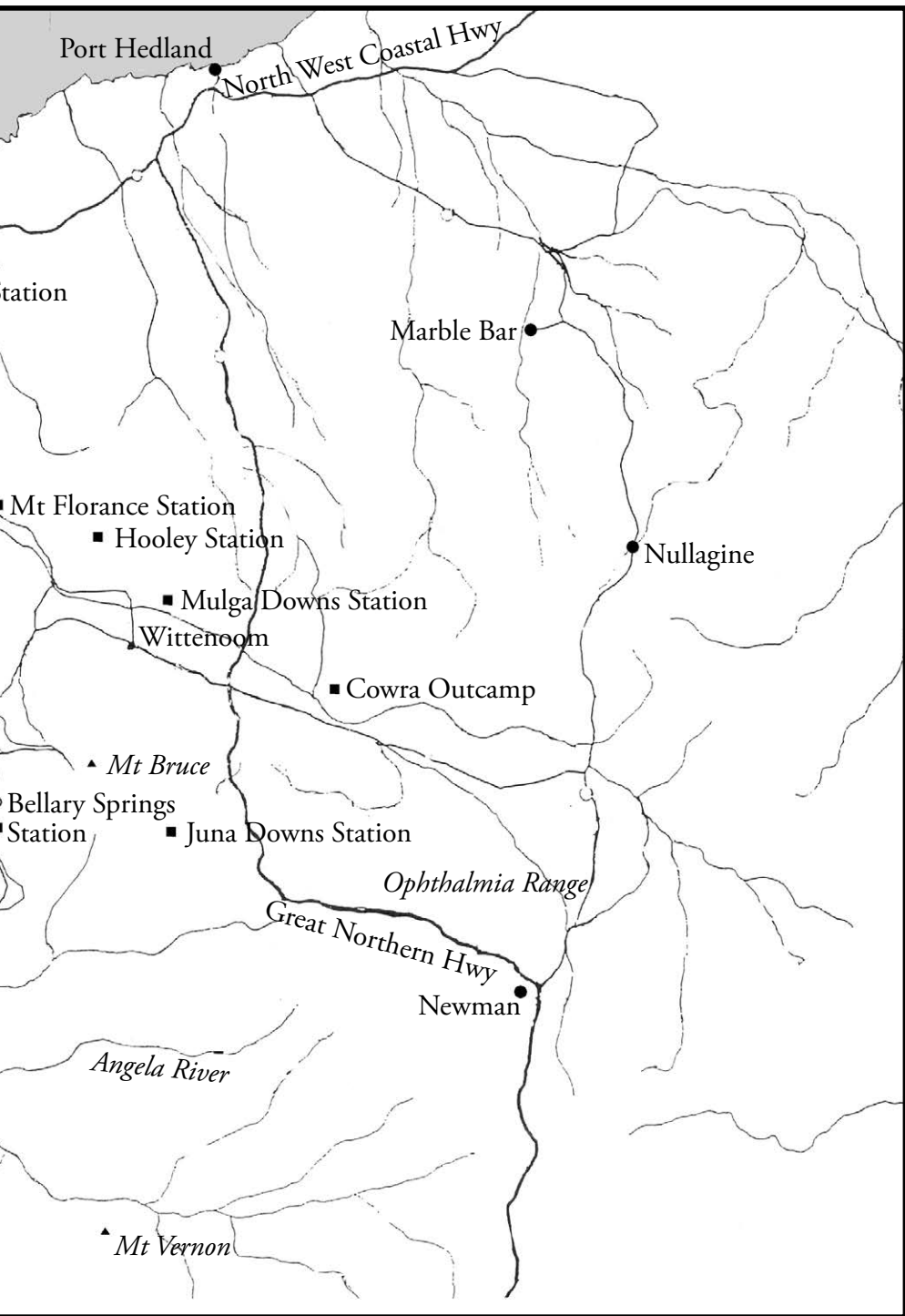
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*For
my sons and daughters,
grandchildren, great-grandchildren
and cousin family*

WEST PILBARA

- Station
- Town





Port Hedland

North West Coastal Hwy

Station

Marble Bar

Mt Florance Station

■ Hooley Station

■ Mulga Downs Station

Wittenoom

■ Cowra Outcamp

Nullagine

▲ Mt Bruce

Bellary Springs
Station

■ Juna Downs Station

Ophthalmia Range

Great Northern Hwy

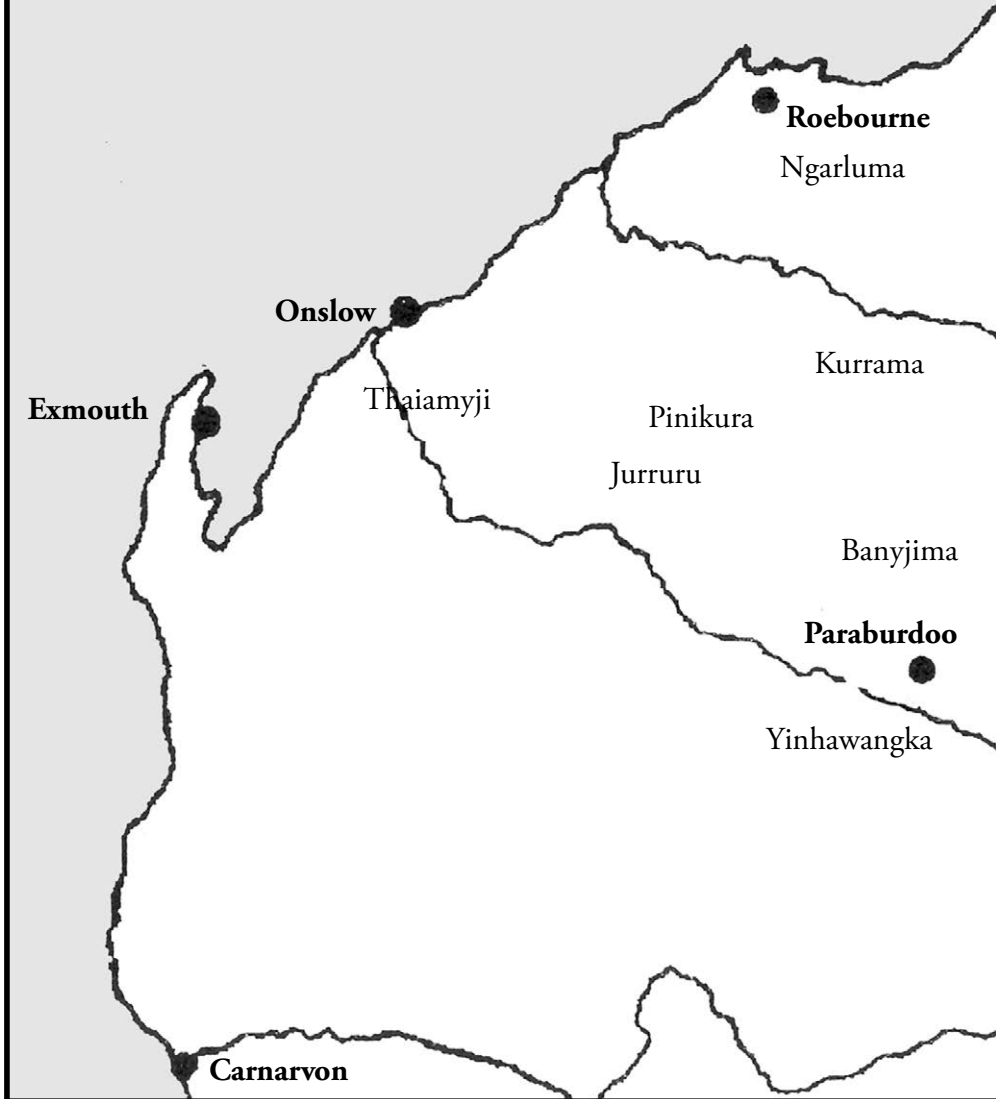
Newman

Angela River

▲ Mt Vernon

ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE GROUPS

(Courtesy Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre.)





Ngaria

Port Hedland

Kariyarra

Nyamal

● **Marble Bar**

Yindjibarndi

● **Nullagine**
Palyku

● **Wittenoom**

Niyaparli

Kartujarra

● **Newman**

● **Jigalong**

CONTENTS

Authors' Note	i
Birth and Family: Country and Station.....	1
Childhood on Rocklea Station.....	15
Staying with the Whitefellas.....	32
Learning the Traditional Ways	53
Growing Up.....	77
Marriage and Family.....	85
Working Life in the Bush.....	101
Bringing Up the Family in the Bush	119
Schooling for the Family	140
Moving Towards Town	149
Living in Roebourne	158
Appendices	189
Glossary	213
Illustration Acknowledgements.....	217

AUTHORS' NOTE

This book was a true three-way collaboration. Alice had met Anna and Loreen in conjunction with their recording of Aboriginal oral histories and asked them to work on her story. After several other projects were completed by Anna and Loreen, the work began, assisted by a grant celebrating the centenary of women's suffrage from the Government of Western Australia. Alice and Anna met regularly and twelve tapes of oral history were recorded. These were transcribed by Loreen and organised into a draft manuscript. Chapter by chapter, Loreen read this version back to Alice for her comments and approval. Changes, additions and deletions were made according to Alice's wishes, and all three were satisfied with the result. The project took over two years to complete and, despite the difficulties presented by the fact that Alice lived in Roebourne, Anna in Point Samson and Loreen in Perth, they were proud of their joint effort and all enjoyed the experience of working together and becoming good friends.



A bilari tree (Acacia atkinsiana).

1

BIRTH AND FAMILY: COUNTRY AND STATION

Under a bilari tree I born, on Rocklea Station

I am Alice Smith, but my real name Bilari, because under a *bilari* tree I born, on Rocklea Station. I never had whitefella name, they used to call me Aborigine name: Bilari. Sometimes they say Bidayi; it's easier. Walter Smith wrote it down in his station book; the whitefellas used to have a record when we born. A few years ago we went to the museum in Perth, to see all the old papers, and when my daughter follow them history way back, from Rocklea Station, my name is there: Bilari, and I born 1928.

We used to get fruit from that bilari tree, when they in season. He still standing too, that tree, but you can see we've been chopping it. He *big*, now! It's in Sandy Creek on Rocklea Station. Not only me – lots and lots of kids been born in that little gully.

My mother was a full-blood Aborigine; Banyjima mother, Kurrama father. Her name was Yalluwarrayi, that's her

Aborigine name, Yallu for short. Yalluwarri is the name of the windmill where she born. Maggie is her whitefella name. Her husband was George, and Yinba, that's his Aborigine name, he was my Aborigine stepfather. He had another name, too: Bindarnjadi.

My whitefella father was old Alex Stewart. I could picture his face still, whitefella proper father mine. He used to drive

Alex Stewart was registered as an elector in the Pilbara district in 1929, and as a teamster on Pyramid Station.

a wagon with a camel team, coming up from Roebourne to take the food back to Rocklea. When the ship in Cossack, he used to come and get all the flour and things for every station up that way on the Top End. Then he come up the Big Hill on the old road from Roebourne.

He do the contract, and if he have spare time, he work for Rocklea Station.

Yinba, the one been married to my mother, and they been sharing a wife, those days. Before, they was fighting, Aborigine and the whitefellas, killing one another; that's the start-off. When they friends, that's what they done, sharing a wife now. My Aborigine father used to send my mother to go and get the tucker from my whitefella father, sleep with him and bring the food back in the morning, and that's how I come to be half-caste. They was both looking after me: I was a white kid, and my stepfather is a full-blood Aborigine; he was still looking after me.

My stepfather used to let me go with the whitefella father



Camel team and truck meet, Mount Herbert (Big Hill).

to camp one night along the road. We used to go with the camel team, chopping all the posts to build the shearing shed in Rocklea. We used to come to Turner River, near Wyloo, got all the timber and bring back to build the shearing shed. Yes, they both was looking after me: Aborigine father and a whitefella father. Alex Stewart had a white wife there too, and he had my stepsister and a brother. I only know the brother, Archie Stewart, but I forget my stepsister name. We all about the same age, we used to play together. Where that main stockyard in Rocklea now, that's where they used to be camping. They had a tent on the station. My father's wife accept me really good, and she used to tell me, 'That's your stepbrother and stepsister.' She didn't mind, she was good, too. We used to have a cake and a cup of tea, and she used to make all them Milo and things. She used to make a skirt and a blouse for us. She have that little sewing machine with the handle, early days one. She used to sew it

with that. She was a nice lady, but she never been there very long, she had to went back to Sydney, because her two was schooling then.

So when they was about ten, eleven years old they went back to school, then; she wanted to keep them in the school in Sydney, and so I never heard anything more from them. She only come for a sort of Christmas holiday, and then they went back. Because too dangerous for the other Aborigine people; somewhere the wild Aborigines still around, so them two young one might be wander round, run into these people there. That's why they went back. We could have teach them how to work with the secret site and things, but the school was important to them. So mother take the two kids back to Sydney then. And then I think she died, and that's why we lose the boy and the girl then. That's what I heard from my dad, when he was alive. I never see them again. Even my father never heard anything from them again, when they went back, and he wasn't very long working then, my father, and he got sick. I still remember his face, because I was twelve years old when he died in Onslow, very old man. I think he went to hospital there. I still remember.

Sometimes you get bad people; not only whitefella

When the Aborigine and the whitefella first met up, they was fighting, kill one another. Sometimes you get bad people. Not only whitefella – we used to get bad Aborigine people

coming from Meekatharra side. They used to come just like a big mob of army to spear them other lot Aborigine people in Turee and Rocklea, early in the morning before the sun come up. Not the Jurruru people that used to be there, and Pinikura people – they used to be good tribe. But the tribe from Mount Augusta, they used to be bad from there, they used to come early in the morning and kill all the people in here. They fight like soldiers, with them spears. They used to chase one another! You don't know when they coming. They used to spear the kids and all, same as the whitefellas. They kill the kids and wife and then all the man and boys.

Walter Smith and Len Smith, two whitefella brothers, they was single when they came looking for a station they could start somewhere. First thing they went to Bellary. They had only brush houses, made out of leaves, and the Aboriginal old people helped them to make a big boughshed. Later on they was building Rocklea Station. That was all Kurrama country.

Len Smith and Walter Smith had no white girlfriend, only Aborigine girlfriend. Walter Smith was the older one – he was about forty or fifty when he get there. He had a girlfriend, but he never had any family. Len Smith, the young one, been going around with the different wives. Jack Smith, my husband, was the first son Len Smith had. And then he found another woman and he got Clarrie Smith, another son. And the next son was Mundy* Smith – son of my sister, Annie Black. That was Len Smith's three sons.

Stations those days always had sheep, but no yards and no fences. The Aborigine people used to shepherd the sheep. They used to make a brush yard out of leaves, and they used to camp there, right round the yard, to save the sheep from the dingoes. My stepfather, when he was a boy, he start work for Len Smith and Walter Smith in Bellary Station. He was a mustering man, shepherding sheep, and my mother come there, married to her first husband, an old fella. Bellary was the station, and Date Palm Spring was where they used to keep the sheep, because one side of the spring there is a steep hill, like a wall. They put brush around it and kept all the sheep in the corner, and they used to shepherd them out, feeding them.

My stepfather was a full-blood Aborigine, Kurrama man, and he used to be cattle mustering and sheep mustering, putting the shearing through. He was head stockman in the

The three Smith brothers: Augustus, Frederick Walter and Oscar Leonard, went to the North-West in 1890, and worked as teamsters. Their father, Alfred Smith, also invested in the north, and was buried in Roebourne in 1897. The brothers formed a partnership and founded Rocklea Station in 1905. Augustus (Gus) Smith stayed on Pyramid Station near Roebourne, which he managed for the Meares family, while his brothers Walter and Len went up to the tableland country and ran Rocklea. Len Smith died in 1949 at the age of sixty-four, and is buried in Onslow cemetery. Walter's name was no longer on the Pilbara Electoral Roll after 1950. By then he was seventy-seven years old and, as Alice says, too old to run the station by himself. He seems to have left the district, but no definite record of his death has been discovered.

team, next to the overseer. One whitefella used to be overseer, running the big mustering team, but he was head stockman. And my mum used to drive the big spring-cart, moving all the stuff way out to the mustering camp.

And they all moved to the new station, now: Rocklea Station. Rocklea's the whitefella name, Jarrungka-Jarrungka is the Aborigine name. When they get Rocklea Station, they had three different breed horses. Wagon horses, the big draughty horse – big cart horse. And they had the stock horses to get the cattle, and they had the sheep horses. All the cattle horses, they used to put them in another paddock so they can breed there. And the sheep horses, they used to keep them near Rocklea, up by the Beasley River. Separate, because they got to have a stallion in it – the father of all the ponies. If they put them together, they'll be fighting. Everything was good. They used

PASTORAL PERSONALITIES-32
MR. FREDERICK WALTER SMITH.

The subject of our photograph this week is Mr. Fred. Smith, a partner in "Rocklea" Station. This holding is situated on the Ashburton Watershed and slightly north of the Tropic of Capricorn. The country is of a very undulating nature, and within view of the station is the highest mountain in our State, viz., Mt. Bruce, 4024 feet. The climatic conditions are good and admirably suited for stock raising. The rainfall is fairly regular, and the average registrations range from 8 to 9 inches. The pastures are mainly plain



MR. FREDERICK WALTER SMITH.

and silver grass, salt bush and other edible shrubs, together with a fair area of mulga country. Water is readily obtained with large supplies at shallow depths.

The property carries approximately 16,000 sheep, a small herd of cattle and produces sufficient horses for the station requirements. The improvements of the holding include all the necessary homestead buildings, shearing and other sheds. Vegetables and fruit grow well and the supply of the former is ample throughout the year.

Dalgety's Review,
30 March 1933.



Rock engraving, Bellary Springs, near the old Bellary Station stockyards.

to go branding all the horses, and cattle branding. Yeah, he had cattle, and he had sheep, he had three lots of different breeds of horses in Rocklea. All around where Paraburdoo is now, and Tom Price, that's all horse country.

Walter Smith and Len Smith, they was special men. They know how to work with Aborigine people, and all the people come there from Hamersley and Brockman stations, because they had a bad man managing Brockman Station. He was Jack Edney, and he was a cheeky man, always used the stockwhip on the men. They only had the fathers working in Brockman Station. The mothers and kids, they not allowed to be there, eat all the food – wife and kids got to go somewhere else. That's the sort of man he is. And that's how all the women

come to Rocklea, from Brockman. We used to keep them in there. And old Roberts was in Hamersley Station – Bill Roberts – he’s another cheeky one, too. They used to do the same in Mulga Downs Station – Johnny Hancock. He only want to keep all the men working, and don’t want to feed the family. They used to be bad ones.

Only Len Smith and Walter Smith was a good person. And these two in Rocklea, they don’t care how many family they had. They had *big* mob of people in Rocklea Station. One lot camping this side of the middle paddock, all Banyjima and Kurrama people – we had horse yard and the saddle room and things in the middle. And Yinhawangka other side of all the house and things there. Yindjibarndi people from Hamersley, they come and get mixed up with the Kurrama people; they start mixed up there. Big mob of people was there – I think might be two, three hundred Aborigine people. And they used to work, too, them old people, that’s why Len Smith and Walter Smith liked them.

A big station, in the early days

Four different languages: Kurrama – they belong to the land there; and then my mob, Banyjima – my mum married towards the Kurrama. And then Yinhawangka people come from Turee, and they married towards the Kurrama ladies, and they settled down there looking after the mother-in-law and the father-in-law. And then Ngarla people come;

all the relations from Turee Station. Ngarla, Yinhawangka, Kurrama and Banyjima – four tribe been there, marrying mix – they giving away daughter, because they're not allowed to just marry in the one family.

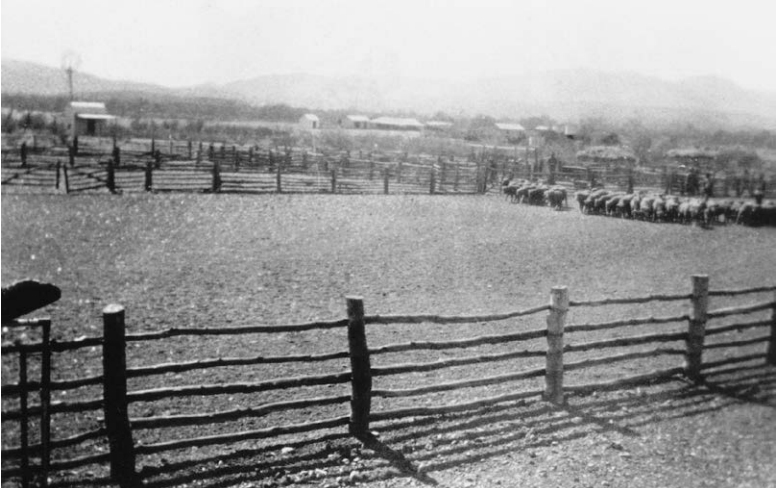
Yinhawangka people and Kurrama people only used Banyjima language then. They lost all the Kurrama and they lost all the Yinhawangka, the young generation kids like me. I had my own language all the time; Banyjima. They all using our language now. We used English as well, but just in the station with the Smith family, that's all.

We had four whitefellas at Rocklea. Walter Smith is the proper boss in the station and Len Smith is the manager, one overseer, and one – my father – is a camel team driver. One of the overseer we had – whitefella, Bedford Delaporte –

Rocklea Station comprised nine pastoral leases, totalling nearly 355,000 acres. It probably reached its productive peak in 1934: that year 28,600 sheep were shorn, giving a total of six hundred bales of wool. After that, successive years of drought resulted in diminishing returns; the wool clip declined each year until 1946, when there were only thirty-one bales. From 1936 until 1946 the Smith brothers applied for and were granted rent relief every year.

he was a mechanic. He was Stanley Delaporte's real father. He's the one taught my husband fencing and sheep yard and the cattle yard and driving motor car and fixing motor car.

Those white people really understand about the Aborigine people, and understand our language, and the Aborigine



*Rocklea Station sheep yards, 1930s.
Stanley Delaporte's father's house is at the left rear.*



Les Kempton carting Rocklea Station wool, stopped at Wyloo Station.

people really got a respect to them whitefellas. They used to be really friend, no fighting or anything. Whatever job the boss tell them to do, all the Aborigine people they do it properly. Not like this time – they do a little bit and go leave the job. But those days they got to finish that job properly. They had a lot of cattle and a lot of sheep and horses. That was a big station, in the early days. The windmills still there – I know all them names, the windmills' name. I've been grow up in Rocklea Station.

Those days there's lot of Aborigine people out in their own country. All the grannies and grandfathers – very old people. They don't want to leave their home – they stay there. And the people from the stations, they used to bring the food for them: bit of flour and tea and sugar, when they go on holiday. They used to take them to the old grandmothers and uncles and aunties. White people never used to have anything to do with them. Len Smith and Walter Smith, they don't interfere with the old people, where they want to live. That's their area, they love to stay there till they die. Some old people used to be in the station, Walter Smith and Len Smith used to look after them, give them rations all the time. Every Sunday we used to get food for the old people: flour and tea and sugar and things; tobacco. Used to be stick tobacco those days, them square ones.

My mother, Maggie, she used to drive the big spring-cart, take all the swags and food and things, forty-four gallon drum, all the things in the back of that spring-cart. Got all

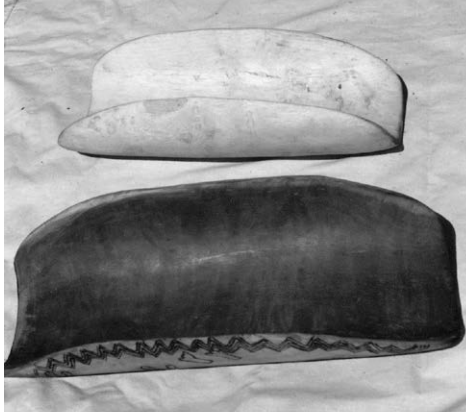


Bumbanha Spring, where Bumah (Dinah) was born.

the food, tuckerbox, swags, everything, wherever they going to make a big camp, and then she do all the cooking. Only men come out unload all the heavy things, and she used to cook – make damper, bread, whatever they want. She had one of my aunty to help: Dinah is the whitefella name, Bumah is the Aborigine name, because she born in Bumbanha Spring, not far from Tom Price.

My mum carried the babies with her. When she cooking, she put them in the blanket on the ground. She put it there when she start cooking and carting water or whatever. We used to have them cyclone bed, but they never used to leave the baby on the bed, because the baby might roll over when she go get the water. Make a bed on the ground and the baby'll be laying on the ground asleep, and she go looking

for wood and all. They used to have the baby with them all the time. If it's a real baby that couldn't sit up or anything, well they had a special yandy dish – wooden one, carry it under the arm. If he's asleep, leave him in that little yandy dish, and put a rock each side to hold it so it don't roll over. And the baby sleeps till he wake up self, while the mother do the jobs. Might be cooking or making fire or carting water.



*Yandy dishes for carrying babies.
Made by Peter Stevens.*