National Year of Reading 2012
Writer in Residence Workplace Literacy Project

Indigenous Rangers in the Northern Territory

Stories from Indigenous rangers working for joint-managed parks in the Northern Territory

Supported by

National Year of Reading 2012

Northern Territory Government

Library
The National Year of Reading 2012 is a collaborative project joining public libraries, government, community groups, media and commercial partners.

The National Year of Reading funding partners

Prepared for Northern Territory Library Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport
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Cover photo: Ranger Lance Spain in Katherine Gorge

Warning
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that images and names of deceased persons are included in this publication. Some quotes and references made in the content of the publication reflect past attitudes and values and may contain slang or language which is not considered acceptable or appropriate today. These references have been included as part of accurate quoting of individuals and is referenced only as evidence of attitudes and values of a former era and is not to be seen in any way as endorsement or indicative of those attitudes or values.
The National Year of Reading 2012
The catalyst which united Australian libraries behind a National Year of Reading (NYR) initiative was the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey 2006 that found 46% of working age Australians struggled with everyday tasks such as reading newspapers, making sense of timetables or filling in OH&S forms.

Another survey by the Australian Industry Group in May 2010 of major employers found that more than 75% felt their businesses were affected by low levels of literacy and numeracy in the workforce, and the issue was further highlighted by the Industry Skills Council’ No More Excuses report, which came out in early 2011.

According to the Productivity Commission’s Links between literacy and numeracy skills and labour market outcomes, published in August 2010, an improvement in literacy and numeracy skills from level 1 to level 3 would increase the likelihood of labour force participation by about 15% for women and about 5% for men, and increase hourly wage rates by about 25% for women and 30% for men.

The ability to read with confidence would also contribute to people’s personal well-being, health, social and economic outcomes, and it would help with vocabulary and attention-span.

The NYR 2012 campaign, driven by the founders, is about:
- Children and adults learning to read and keen readers finding new sources of inspiration.
- It’s about supporting reading initiatives while respecting the oral tradition of storytelling.
- It’s about helping people discover and rediscover the magic of books.
- Most of all, it’s about Australians becoming a nation of readers.

About the Writer in Residence program
Throughout 2012 eight writers will be ‘in residence’ in workplaces around the country, as part of NYR’s Workplace Literacy Campaign. This initiative contributes to literacy and social inclusion priorities by engaging writers-in-residence in workplaces.

This was the first writer-in-residence project undertaken, with Territory writer Kaye Aldenhoven, who spent a week with four NT Parks and Wildlife Rangers from Mary River National Park, and another week with a NT Parks and Wildlife Ranger from Garig Gunak Barlk National Park (pronounced Gah-rig Goon-uk Bar-loo) on the Coburg Peninsular.

Kaye worked closely with park rangers to help them tell their stories about the unique and challenging work that they carry out. This was all aimed to engage, collect and write stories about a work place that can be used to encourage staff in the workplace with low literacy levels, to get more engaged in reading.
Project Coordinator - Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS)

Founding NYR Partner, the Northern Territory Library is a division of NRETAS, who fully coordinated and supported this project, and nominated park rangers from its NT Parks and Wildlife division as project participants.

NRETAS work with Territory communities to:
- Ensure the demands on natural resources are kept within sustainable limits;
- Celebrate their unique histories; and
- Foster life long artistic expression and involvement in sport and recreation

The long-term economic and social well-being of the Territory depends on Territorians living in a healthy natural environment and fulfilling their potential through work, education, culture, sport and recreation.

Project supporter - NT Writers Centre

In collaboration with the Northern Territory Library, the NT Writers’ Centre nominated long time member, Kaye Aldenhoven, for this NYR Writer in Residence project in 2011.

The NT Writers’ Centre offer advice and direction for writers, and assist members to set up writing projects in their communities. Their goal is to maintain a diverse program of literary activities in the Northern Territory, while embarking on new initiatives to encourage and support the development of young writers, Indigenous writers, and writers from non English speaking backgrounds.

About the Writer in Residence

Kaye Aldenhoven is an important NT poet, using her experience of the country to inform her work. Through her involvement in the Northern Territory Writers Centre in Darwin, Kaye helps to foster many literary projects. Kaye is the author of In my Husband’s Country (2001) her recently released second book Skin. Kaye has also published numerous other works, including poetry and short stories.
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Cynthia Cooper of Garig Gunak Barlu

Garig Gunak Barlu National Park
Cobourg Peninsula Northern Territory, Australia
Iwaidja tribe, Madjunbalmi clan.  
I am Cynthia Cooper. I live on the Cobourg Peninsula in the Northern Territory of Australia. I am a member of the Iwaidja tribe, Madjunbalmi clan.

My traditional name is NaweeLungGul, and my skin name is Fire.

I was born in Darwin  
My father’s mother came to Croker Island and took me from my mother there, and brought me to Cobourg Peninsula. My grandmother and my step grandfather grew me up.

When I was a baby, I didn’t know my mother.

Then as I got older my family told me about my mother, and Granny took me to Croker Island quite often to visit her.

My outstation Gamuragi  
I live on my outstation just around the bay from Black Point, right on the beach. It is nice there. On my days off, it’s good, because I can go hunting for crabs, longbums, oysters, turtle, and yams. Some days I clean my house, do other stuff.

Aunty Ruby and Aunty Heidi live at Gamuragi too. Aunty Ruby’s mother Janet visits us also.

Thunder Rock School  
All of my schooling was at Thunder Rock School, just down the road from the Black Point Ranger Office, about half way to my outstation Gamuragi. Sometimes someone would drop me there on their way to work. I used to ride my red bike up the road to school. The school opened in 1985 and closed in 1996. I designed and painted a section of the mural in our classroom, and it’s still bright, in good condition.
At Araru, two hours’ drive from Black Point, the kids study with Katherine School of the Air, using computers and satellite phones to communicate with their teachers.

Soon my Uncle Freddy Baird and his wife, my Aunty Judith, will take over the old school and make it their outstation home.

They live at Jim Jim Ranger Station in Kakadu National Park and my Granny Lorna lives with them. When I fly home from Darwin in a week, I hope Granny Lorna will come home with me to Gamuragi.

Thunder Rock, Black Point, a dangerous place
People cannot go onto Black Point. It is a dangerous dreaming place; lightning and thunder will punish us if some-one walks on it.

Working
I have been a ranger for nine years. I am a Level 1 Ranger and I want to work towards getting my Level 2. Alan encourages me to get qualified for Level 2. He has known me all my life. I already have some of the certificates, in a safe box in the office. He has been mentoring me. I wanted to work, but no-one else here did. Uncle John and Uncle Greg Williams worked as rangers here and they encourage me too.

Alan encourages me to do more courses, get more certificates and work my way from Level one ranger to higher up. My father was working at Raffles Bay as a sea ranger until earlier this year, but then no money, so that program stopped and he came back here.

Did I mention that I am the only woman ranger at Black Point, and the only indigenous ranger at Black Point Ranger Station? See me at my computer.
The basics
A list: maintaining vehicles, water, fuel, tyres, cleaning them, checking campgrounds, cleaning toilets and showers, operating the pump that squirts water for toilet and shower cleaning, filling the mobile tank and watering young trees, cleaning barbeques.

In the mornings as I collect the rubbish I always talk to the visitors, speak friendly. Every visitor must have a permit and must register at the office. This means that we rangers have an opportunity to speak personally to every one of the several thousand tourists who visit Garig Gunak Barlu Park annually. Those visitors ask a lot of questions. Where can we fish? Is the walk open? Where can I photograph Banteng? What are those tall palms? They like to know about me and my work too.

I talk to them about the basics. Have you got a permit? If you put your boat in the water you must record the time and your destination and sign off when you return. That whiteboard is on the outside of the office door. I warn them about crocodiles, tell my latest little croc story. They tell me stories too. We watched a croc come over the croc crossing last night!

We want all visitors to have a good time, learn a bit about our country and return safely home. I enjoy talking to the visitors, they are always happy.

Checking, measuring, counting
Yesterday I drove around the airstrip fence, checking it was fine, noting that I still need to bring dirty oil here to blacken the ring around the wind sock. Aviation Safety mob asked us to do that. I get the oil from servicing the generators.

The fence is to keep the strip clear of animals. One morning a huge black Banteng bull was inside. When he saw me he jumped out over the barbed wire.

I saw this with my own eyes!

Banteng stay around the wet side of the strip, resting in the shade during the hot part of the day – I counted 11 this morning.

Only one bull of course, and his family of nice brown cows.

Turtle surveys - every week I make a survey of Smith’s Point Beach, looking for evidence of turtles, their tracks and their nests, the hatchings. I record this information. Checking, measuring, counting, recording, are important aspects of caring for Garig Gunak Barlu.

Banteng cattle, Bos javanicus
The British attempted their third northern settlement at Victoria, on Port Essington in 1838. Part of our ranger duties is to protect the historic ruins. Before Victoria was declared a failure by the British government, many water
buffalo Bubalis bubalis, pigs, and deer were brought in from Indonesia, usually the port of Kupang. The Dutch governor of Bali sent a shipment of Banteng cattle not long before the settlement was abandoned. Most of these animals were brought for food, and eaten, but enough escaped to begin the wild herds of Banteng cattle, buffalo and feral pigs that are pests on Cobourg Peninsula.

**Garig Gunak Barlu**
The name of this park is Garig Gunak Barlu. Garig is the language that the traditional owners spoke, the Madjunbalmi clan. Gunak is the land itself. Barlu is deep blue water. So the meaning of this park is sea and land. Cobourg Peninsula was the first declared Wetland of International Importance – a UNESCO World Heritage site. It is protected by a RAMSAR agreement.

**Learning culture**
My father’s mother and my aunties taught me about my country. They taught me what foods to collect, how to prepare and cook them. They taught me bush medicines, what plants to collect, where they grow, the method of preparation, and the doses, and administration of medicines. They taught me language, clan territories, old stories about old times. From Aunty I learned the story of Warramurrangunji, our Earth Mother, who created the land. She put two people, a man and a woman, in each clan territory and she taught them how to use plants and animals. She gave each couple their own language – Garig, Iwaidja, Amurag, Ulbu, Gagudju. Warramurrangunji moved over the country and she made the Law.

**Making sure it is right**
Ranger Cynthia and her grandmother Lorna advise Pam of Parks and Wildlife Interpretation Department on cultural matters, in preparation for new displays at Garig Gunak Barlu Cultural Centre.

**Being shy and getting over it**
Uncle Greg Williams, who is a ranger, said ‘You must speak. Be a strong woman.’ So I practised answering the telephone. I didn’t like talking on the radio, and I was just quiet, didn’t answer, but Alan, Head Ranger said ‘You must answer the radio. We want to know where you are.’ They didn’t know where I was in the bush. When I was at base, they didn’t know if I had heard their message. Now I do it. When I went to study courses in Darwin, it would take three days before I could speak, but I am getting much better. I feel comfortable.
I enjoy talking to tourists, they ask many questions, and want to know about my Granny Lorna’s mother’s country. It was hers so that’s why I am looking after it. I have worked here a long time, so there are many things I know. This year when the camp ground went underwater because we had an enormous Wet season, Alan and Steve were trying to get the water pump from Camp-ground One to push through to Camp-ground Two. When they switched the top valve it still did not work. They asked me. I had to speak up. I was the one who knew that there was another valve under the water and mud. Alan had to go down and turn it on while Steve kept guard with a pistol, ready for crocodiles that might be interested in a ranger entering their flooded environment. We went to Croker Island, Adrian and I, to do Croc-wise, an educational program, with those school kids. The students are my family members, but I was nervous. Adrian and I practised what we would say, how we would talk to the kids, show them pictures, tell them stories. It was very good.

Technology
A list: in the morning I read my emails. I down-loaded and printed off a form to confirm my attendance in Darwin at Bio Diversity Workshop. I faxed the completed form to the Darwin co-ordinator, checked the North Australia Fire Information (NAFI) website, which monitors and displays bushfires by satellite, checked the messages on the answering machine, answered the two way radio. I accessed the Port Essington tide tables, printed it for tourist information. I drive a four wheel drive Toyota light truck (in Australia we call them utes), use a GPS, fly to Darwin when necessary, order my food by fax, keep a buffalo hindquarter in the freezer room, manage bores and small pumps, valves, boats, and I regularly

Adapting new technologies
Aboriginal people on Cobourg Peninsula have always been alert to new technology and adapted it quickly for our own purposes. Makassans came here every season, starting in the seventeenth century, to gather trepang for the Chinese trade. They sailed from Ujung Padang with supplies for themselves, and gifts to trade with my people because they helped with their trepang industry. From the Makassans we got iron which we used for shovel-nosed spears, for killing large animals like buffalo, and woven cotton cloth, rice, glass. My ancestors learned to make dug-out canoes like the Makassans. We called them ubun. We buy aluminium dinghies with outboard motors now. New technologies always bring change.
Two sets of knowledge
In my daily work I use two sets of knowledge, my traditional culture and Science. Both are necessary for me to manage the land well. Garig Gunak Barlu Park is jointly managed by the traditional owners of the land and Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission. The Board of Management meets regularly.

Languages spoken and lost and recorded
My father’s uncle, I call him Grandfather Nelson, spoke Makassan. Into our language came many Makassan words that we use today, like *balanda* for white person, *rupiah* for money.

- My Grandfather Nelson spoke Garig, Iwaidja, Amurag, Gagudju, English, and Makassan.
- My father can speak Iwaidja and English, and he listens for Amurag and Tiwi.
- Janet, the mother of my Aunty Ruby, can speak Gagudju, Iwaidja, Amurag, and English.
- I speak Iwaidja and English, and I am learning Amurag from Janet.
- Oscar is the last speaker of Garig, and he has recorded it with the linguist. Many of the place names on the map are Garig, which is the language of our Madjunbalmi clan, the traditional owners of this land.

Losing languages comes from change.

Getting back our land
All Cobourg Peninsula people moved to Croker Island in the early 1960s, when the government closed the store at Cape Don Lighthouse - no store for food, no fuel, so people were forced/encouraged to move to the Mission on Croker Island. My father was at school in Darwin, where he boarded with a Japanese family which farmed at Coconut Grove. All suburbs now. When his grandmother got sick he was attending new Casuarina High School, but he went home to look after her at Croker. We didn’t come home to our own country until 1981. My Grandfather Nelson told the family and his mother Lily to go back to Cobourg and make an outstation. When our family said they wanted to go back, the government had to change the law so we could. The Northern Territory Government legislated The Cobourg Peninsula Sanctuary Board. My father’s family left the mission and returned to our own clan territories.
A whole generation
A whole generation of my family, my clan, had lived and worked off our estate, so when my Dad came back here as a young man, he had to learn this country as an adult. The old people taught him. I was just a baby then, so I have been learning this country from my old people, and how to look after, it all my life.

Crocodiles and their management
Midnayaj is Iwaidja for salt water crocodiles, Crocodylus porosus. Monday morning I check the bores on my way to the campgrounds. The bores sit along an old sand dune line, and the road runs between the sea and the billabong. Just past the bore is a large ‘slide’, like something has been dragged across the sandy track – that something is a large salt-water crocodile. It has moved from the sea to the billabong during the night.

Tuesday morning I drive that track, and the crocodile slide tells me he has moved back into the sea again, 24 hours later. That is why we must have croc warning signs everywhere. The beach looks so beautiful, the billabongs have clear water, but nowhere is safe to swim.
I drive along the new fence line, and stop at the sea.
I look across Port Essington to the historic site of the failed British Victoria Settlement.
I look down at the sea, looking for the big croc that lives here at Barrow Bay. ‘Look, there’s a croc,’ I say to my passenger.
We watch him swim, he submerges and disappears, surfaces further out.
He moves his tail quite gently, but quickly he is a long way from shore.
My passenger is too slow to get this photo!

Looking in the sea, Barlu eyes
I am always looking at the sea, at the beaches, estuaries, cliffs, bays, islands, reefs. You might think I am looking for a good place to hunt mud-crabs on my weekend. And I am. But it is more than that.
I am checking the tides, as they ebb and flow, as they change seasonally, and each month.
In October 2008 tracking devices were attached to two female turtles nesting on Smith Point Beach. Wardagil nested two more times before swimming 1,100 km in 21 days to her feeding place in Sir Edward Pellew Islands in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Matilda, the second turtle, nested once more before migrating to a coral reef near the sea.
Pulau Sermata in Maluku (Molucca Islands of Indonesia), taking just 13 days to travel 560 km.

I feel happy standing on the cliffs at Record Point, watching a big yellow tail mullet chase a school of small fish through the shallows. Then Hugh drops anchor and a huge manta ray leaps fully from the water and spreads it wing flaps. Splash!

The shadow of the long-tom on the sandy bottom is easier to see than its long thin transparent body. I watch huge crocodiles, and huge sharks.

Last month I went to Field Island at the mouth of the South Alligator River, and I worked with Kakadu National Park rangers to conduct a survey of sea turtles. That is one of the ways we care for our resources, by getting greater understanding of natural processes and life cycles

I keep a look out for boats, boats I recognise, like Hugh’s, or the large white Paspaley Pearls boat that services the pearl farms, powering smoothly around from Raffles Bay to Knocker Bay, then to Darwin.
I look out for illegal fishing boats, usually traditional wooden boats from Indonesia. Boats may carry illegal migrants - refugees have found their way here.
I was still at school when David Luan, a young fisher man from the village of Namfalus on the south coast of West Timor, drifted into Smith Point Beach near the camp-ground. Twenty one days he had been at sea, eating seaweed and leaves, drinking rainwater he caught in a plastic sheet. His small wooden boat is displayed in Black Point Cultural Centre.
In the Build-up I go to make an annual survey of porpoise and whale with scientists. Oil spills management and AQIS (Australian Quarantine Inspection Service) requirements are sometimes our responsibility, because we see them first.
My eyesight is excellent and it has been trained by knowledge.
**Cyclone Ingrid 2005**
It is easy to see the damage caused in 2005 by Cyclone Ingrid. Campground One was badly hit, and almost every tree was uprooted. The campground was so hot and sunny that shade shelters had to be erected. Clearing the debris and re-establishing services was long hard work. Quick growing Black Wattles have been the first to grow, and these trees will then make a place ready for more diverse plants brought in by seed eating birds.

Black Wattles grow fast but they don’t live long. When they die, the seedlings grown from fruits eaten by Fruit doves, orioles, figbirds, and Torres Strait pigeons will be ready to take their place.

At Davidson’s old safari camp site, hundreds of Eucalyptus trees blew down, blocking the track. To gain access the track had to be cleared, as did all roads on the peninsula.

The amount of work was enormous – chain sawing, clearing the main roads of huge trees blown out of the ground, dragging heavy timber off the road. Where trees fell across firebreaks they had to be removed so fire could not jump the breaks to destroy resources like safari camps, the old school, the office and houses, my outstation, my house, our lives.

In from the coast mature stringy barks did not topple but damage to their upper limbs was so severe that they did not recover. Thousands stand up dead, bare and grey. At the mouth of Caiman Creek, the mature casuarinas along the beach side were up-rooted - their trunks are still there. Small mangrove trees have germinated. Hundreds of them 30 to 40 cm tall. Salt water now separates this section of sand from the mainland, creating an island at high tide. Cyclones bring extremely heavy localised rain and that caused damage to road surfaces, prevented access to some areas. In almost every area I still see damage from Cyclone Ingrid after 6 years.
Cyclone Season
Cyclone Season is an important part of our yearly cycle.

- Cyclones represent great danger to humans, to the people who live on Cobourg Peninsula.
- The park is closed during Cyclone season, but we rangers take shelter when necessary in the cyclone shelter at Black Point Ranger Station.
- Cyclones cause a lot of work for us rangers if they pass through the park. Trees are uprooted and roads and buildings must be cleared as fast as possible.
- Essential services like water supply and power must be restored.
- Animals and plants and the land itself may be damaged or killed.
- Eco-systems may be changed eg at the mouth of Caiman Creek.
- Flooding from extreme rain damages roads.
- Extreme high tides combined with strong winds cause coastal erosion.
- Salt water incursion will kill some plant communities.

My bush tucker walk
Each Wednesday morning during visitor season, May to October, I give a Bush Tucker walk and talk at Wuwurdi Billabong next to Black Point Ranger Office.
In the early Dry season there are lots of fruits to show and talk about. Later in the year there is less.
I always tell a little story about crocodiles to remind my audience to keep a respectful distance from the water’s edge.
Here are a few features of my bush tucker walk and talk:

**Murrala,** Pandanus spiralis
Pandanus nuts ripen in August and September. They fall to the ground when they are ready, bright orange with hard woody covers. The nut must be cracked, but inside it a delicious seed, like a pine nut, and we eat it raw, tastes like pine nut.

Women in my family collect pandanus leaves. *Careful, they are barbed,* I warn my audience. My grannies keep on collecting the leaves, even when they are bleeding, their skin full of little hooks. They remove the prickles from their hands only when the work is done. The leaves are torn into narrow strips and dried. Then the strips are boiled, sometimes with bush dyes, and woven into baskets, dilly bags and mats. In the Cultural Centre you can see a mat woven by my Grandmother Mary in 1989. Pandanus is tough, and long-wearing.

The stripping is time consuming. The dyes are plants collected from the bush, some are roots that must be dug and chopped with an axe. Hard work. The best weaving is fine and tight.

**Umudji and Wurrbadji,** Strychnos lucida, *Strychnine*
Strychnine plant has very pretty round shiny orange fruit, but they are poisonous. When we were kids we liked the look of them. *Never eat these,* my Grannies warned. My grandmothers taught us what to eat and what not to eat. In the war, strychnine fruits were collected and used to poison rats in Darwin.
**Gardunggun, Erythrophleum chlorostachys, Ironwood**

Ironwood is used as an antiseptic. I bang the bark of the tree with the back of my axe, to bruise it, then I chop with my axe to get chips of dark red bark. This red bark we boil in water, when the water is red we bathe cuts and infected sores. We can use this medicine for two days, then we must make a fresh batch. Bathe the injuries several times a day, until they heal.

Ironwood leaves are very important in funeral ceremonies. The leaves are wrapped in paperbark and we light them to make smoke for smoking ceremony. We smoke the deceased’s vehicles, cars, boats that he has been in. We call out to the spirit but we don’t say the deceased person’s name. The spirit will go back to his own country, to walk where his father and grandfather walked, to be with his ancestors.

The mix of ironwood leaves and paperbark makes good smoke but it also makes a crackling noise that is important. That sound means the spirit will go to a good place. In our Law, if we want to hunt food in that part of our estate, we must smoke that food, like crab, or fish, before we eat it.

**Green ants**

You can eat the green abdomen of green ants. Sour like a drop of lime, and good for you. They don’t bite very hard. Their nest is sewn together of green leaves. The queen is the biggest and she is the best to eat.

**Look up! Lungon**

*Lungon*, Dioscorea transversa, yam. We look up and we see yam seeds in the bare trees, telling us yams are ready to dig here. Yams are a vine. We eat the tuber.
Yams grow in soft sandy soil by Wuwurdi Billabong. In the late Dry season this is an important food for us. The leaves of most trees have fallen off. We look up and we see the seeds in the air, telling us where to dig for yams. We choose a place with soft soil because the yams are deep. There were 7 twists of vine above the ground, climbing the tree, so we knew we would get at least 6 or 7 yams from this hole. It’s about one metre deep and my family did get about 6 or 7 big yams.

They dug with an axe, digging stick, shovel and empty powdered milk tin. Carefully my grandmothers break off the top of each yam and replant that so they know that next year the yam will have grown again and we will harvest again next year. The yams sit in the ground safe for us until the rains come, like they are in a safe cupboard! We like to roast big yams in the coals of a fire, but I enjoy crunchy young raw ones too.

Thank you Granny Lorna and Janet All these holes. All that hard digging work. Granny Lorna and Janet dug these yams and left the hole open for my talk.

**Guldi, Dioscorea bulbifera, cheeky yams**
We also harvest cheeky yams. These are cousins to long yams. We dig these out, but they must be prepared a different way because they are cheeky. Cheeky means toxic, poisonous.

**Marruny, Gronophyllum ramsayi**
Dotted through Eucalyptus woodland and Livistona humilis communities are these beautiful, endemic palms. They may grow to 30 metres, but this is only a baby maybe 3 metres tall. Traditionally we used to eat the heart of palm, that is the young leaves. From the wide leaf stem...
bases we made baskets to carry water and sugar bag honey.

**Dawu, Ficus virens, Banyan, strangler fig**

We use this tree to make string and rope. The rope is strong and we used to tie it to a spear to make a harpoon for hunting turtles, and dugong. Strong ropes were used for dragging heavy turtles, and tying boats. Many people worked together to make rope.

**Checking the bore**

I check the bores on my way to the campgrounds. The bores sit along an old sand dune line, and the road runs between the sea and the billabong. Out at the campground the bore is powered by a solar panel. Black Point Ranger Station is powered by a diesel generator that I service regularly. I have been asked to teach my Dad and Frank to service the generators. It is a vital task and we should all be capable.

**Salt water woman**

On my days off I often give a Bush Tucker walk at Venture North safari camp near Record Point. We walk along the beach, collect sea food, get into the mangrove mud for *Ngarlwak* mud mussels - *Polymesoda erosa*. We collected *Kirwar*, milk oysters - *Sarcostrea amasa*, a couple of crabs, and lots of *Marrkika*, the longbumps - *Telescopium telescopium*. The tourists get very dirty, but they really enjoy it, and so do I. Last weekend there were two German families with children, nice to work with them, and Hugh invited me to stay for lunch because the German family wanted to talk with me longer. Hugh does great lunches!
Ferals and Fences

Banteng, wild pigs and buffalo. These animals were abandoned in 1849 when HMS The Meander took all the British settlers back home. They have had a wonderful time here ever since. Maybe there are 5 000 Banteng or 10 000 here now, too many and they mage the environment.

The Traditional Owners do not want them all removed, because they are an important resource – food for our families, and income derived from safari shooters who pay well for their experiences further down the Peninsula. Sambar deer seem quite rare. The pig shooters were shooting from helicopters a couple of weeks ago but only got 130 or so.

In the early Dry season this year, before the park opened to visitors in May, we built a fence across Cobourg Peninsula, from Bremer Bay to Barrow Bay, to prevent movement of buffalo and Banteng. When the park closes to tourists at the end of October then professional shooters will reduce the feral pig population. Last Wet I saw many pigs lying in the muddy ditch along the main road, playing in mud and water.

Building the fence was an enormous job. Material came by barge and by truck along the road, organised and ordered many months before. Some staff from Darwin Office came out and worked too. Frank Dwyer came from Western Australia. Sea Scouts came and worked. Dad and Frank have only just finished the last bit into the mangroves at Bremer Bay. It was too boggy earlier. Some of the country was very hard – rocky, up and down where the wire doesn’t touch the ground and we had to add more pig wire to make it animal proof. We built two tracks, one each side, for bringing in wire, star pickets etc. We’re proud of that fence, because of how hard we worked. Ramming in those star pickets!
Croc crossing
Near Campground One, where the beach is close to the billabong, crocodiles cross backwards and forwards. The ranger team were worried about how to warn people. And we did not want a crocodile to be run over. I suggested a sign, Croc Crossing. It works great, because crocs and people are safer and there is that extra bit of excitement for the campers. On Saturday one family told Andy they had seen one that evening. Everyone can see the worn path the crocs use. That’s not human footprints.

Making our own road, memory and muscle
My grandfather Nelson made the road to Record Point when he first got a motor car. He and his family cleared the track with axes. My Dad was a young strong man then but it was very hard work clearing away the trees with hand axes. They knew the way because Grandfather used to walk to get to that beach when he was a young man. I was very small when the track was made, and we used it to go hunting at Record Point. Then for many years it was not used and became overgrown. When Venture North Tours wanted a concession lease, I remembered that place, and the road Nelson had made. We took the business people there and they liked it.

Memory, muscle and GPS
This week we made a new track to Danger Point, cutting across country to where the creek drains from the swamp into the sea. We used to hunt there but we haven’t been there for many years by that track. Dad and I remember well where the track left the Danger Point Road, but though we looked hard we could see no trace of it after years of disuse. Steve got the Danger Point co-ordinates and put them into the GPS.
This is the strategy, said Steve. Andrew and I will clear debris, Frank and Cynthia will drive, slowly following us. Two vehicles will mark the track more clearly, and provide back-up.

Andrew blazed the track with bright pink flagging tape. In this photo you can see much fallen timber, and Steve is chopping out a stump. I think I will have to check out this swamp on Google Earth before I go back there hunting, I said.

A specialised vehicle

- Ready for hard terrain, Cynthia’s vehicle is all wheel drive.
- High beam spotlights are mounted above the number plate.
- A winch mounted below the number plate can be used to pull the vehicle forward if it is bogged.
- Near the driver’s door is a ‘snorkel’ - a high level air intake that allows Cynthia to drive through deep water.
- Air intake openings in the front grille are reinforced with a wide gauge mesh and then netted with finer metal screen to prevent insects from jamming the flow of air, especially when Cynthia drives at night.
- The engine and headlights are protected with a strong bull-bar which folds around both sides to protect from hard impacts eg, hitting a buffalo on the road at night.
- Inside is a two-way radio.
- Each ranger vehicle has particular equipment mounted on the back tray, eg for fire lighting, a water tank for fire fighting, watering young trees, cleaning toilets and showers.
- Vehicles use specialised springs for strength. A cubic metre tank of water on the back weighs a tonne.
- The vehicle can be identified from the air by a large number on the bonnet.
**Nothing is simple**

My country is unique. Managing it is hard, interesting work. Every day is different, but I am looking after this country because it is my Grandmother Lorna’s country. That’s why I should do it.

On Dad’s birthday we sat on the cliffs and watched the sun set. Andy had cooked a cake for Dad, and we sang Happy Birthday and watched a big croc watching us from the sea below.

The sunset was good too.
Wildman Ranger Station, Mary River National Park
Northern Territory, Australia

Greg Peckham of Wildman Ranger Station
I love the Wet. The water flows down to the delta, and runs five to ten kilometres wide, and by the time it reaches the sea there’s only water.

**My Nan grew me up**
My Nan talked to me when I was younger. That’s what I remember anyway. We lived in Katherine.
She had worked as a housemother in Darwin when she was younger, then she had eight kids, and some of her kids had six or eight or ten kids too, so I had a very big extended family. Our Uncles and Aunts and cousins lived up and down The Track (Stuart Highway), and when friends and relations travelled through, they called into our Katherine house on their way out and on their way home.
Nana always had a very hearty pot of stew on the stove to feed the hordes of visitors. Always visitors. Lunchtime, after work, always visitors. Always talking, carrying news.
Nana was strict with me. I had to be home before dark, even when I was a teenager.

**Thinking about writing**
I have been thinking about writing my life story. I have two daughters and a brand new grandson only two weeks old.
My grandmother was an enormous influence on me.

**Listening**
Sometimes my grandmother would tell me little stories about the Kahlin Compound, where the stolen children were kept in because they were half-caste.
She taught me to play cards, and that’s how I learned to count, and I could count long before I went to school. I was so quick at number that when the teacher was teaching the other kids the three times table, I already knew my twelve times by heart. Nana played cards with her friends too.
After the funeral ceremony for one of Nan’s friends, Darwin women came back to our house and talked with my grandmother. They talked excitedly of their childhoods, and growing up in Darwin together. They talked about the war beginning, and I expected to hear about the bombing, and then I realised they were talking about World War One. My Nana had been born 1901! All these ladies were in their eighties. Their conversation was fascinating, and funny, and their memories were as clear as a bell. the Great Depression, the 1942 bombing of Darwin, the evacuation and then returning to Darwin. I was only a teenager, listening!
Walk like a Peckham
My father knew hundreds of people. My Nana’s and my family was huge, and our family had very extensive networks of friends. In Katherine and in remote communities where I had not been before, people often said: ‘You must be a Peckham. You have the Peckham walk.’ Isn’t it strange that we inherit our father’s walk?

Get an education
The one thing Nana made me do was get an education. I was too scared to wag school.
I watched my friends climb the fence, they invited me to join them, but I wasn’t game. She would have known if I’d wagged before I even did it!
My Dad drove trucks for Noel Buntine, who invented the road train industry. Dad made his history, because he was Noel’s original first driver. When I could attend school, when I was five, I was allowed to spend school holidays driving around with Dad. Dad drove trucks to earn money so I could attend school. Dad knew hundreds of people, and they knew him.
I went to school and completed Year 11 and ended up with a trade. Motor mechanic. I did that for a while, then I did nothing for a year. I just wanted a break, but the blokes who got me through my apprenticeship kept coming around to the house with work for me. After work my friends and relations visited and they’d ask, ‘Can you just have a look at my car?’
A friend asked me why I was doing so much work without getting paid. Why was I?
I chose to go and study at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. I earned an Education qualification.

Teaching young fellas
I took a job with Centre for Appropriate Technology in Alice Springs, preparing young fellas for trade training, teaching them the names of tools, how to use them, how to maintain them, how to weld. I had no trouble with these young fellas, even though I was the same age as them. Sometimes they were a bit older. They recognised that I knew a lot and they respected my skills and knowledge. What I had already achieved shocked some of them, I think.
After three years I was too homesick, so I headed back to Katherine. Parks and Wild-life wanted to build a steel staircase up the escarpment and were looking for a welder.
A friend dobbed me in. When that job was completed, I got a job with Parks. They discovered fairly quickly that I was not just a welder, that I had other skills, that I had a trade useful to their organisation, that I was good at training young people and novices and that I had education skills and certificate. I could fix anything.
Soon I was leading and supervising staff.
I can do anything on any engine – small motors, boats, air boats. I have been
showing staff shortcuts since then. Safety of staff is our priority, and efficiency comes next. If a fire fighting unit breaks down it is expensive in terms of work time lost and dollars to fix it. I am able to approach staff and can build their skills and confidence. I do the task while they watch. Then I give them a turn to do it, staying nearby to guide. I stay calm and patient. I see these skills as a basic knowledge that I can teach them and which may save their life.
I get some satisfaction from observing their progress.

**Scary spot**
An airboat can only go forward, left and right. No brakes at all. No reverse. We were moving up a channel when we spotted an enormous crocodile up on the bank, about a metre above water level. He was 10-15 metres away when we spotted him so we roared past, worked our way around, and came back down the channel to get another look at the fellow.

He lay in a puddle with his head out one side and his tail out the other. He was a monster, enormous. As we trawled past, 10 metres away, eight metres, five, he lifted his head and looked at us. In a split second he leapt into the water. We passed over the top of him, missing him by that same split second. No brakes. If we had been faintly slightly faster he would have been in the airboat with us.
We laughed the laugh of those who have survived.

**Big boys**
A five metre croc is a huge crocodile. In Wildman River Park I’ve only seen 13 or 14 that size. I know where each one is. Five metres are big boys.

**Another scary spot**
One afternoon we beached the airboat. How? Going too fast round a bend, but you have to remember that airboats have no brakes! An airboat moves on water, and this one had none. We hitched the airboat to a freshwater mangrove tree and tried winching the airboat out, but it wouldn’t budge. So we stood in the mud, muck and heat for nearly an hour, before I noticed a massive croc head watching us scoop up the muddy water. Bugger that! We clambered into the airboat and revved it up.
By rocking and wriggling it from side to side we worked it out into the water after about 15 minutes.
No, this did not happen in slow motion. The movies are wrong.
Slow motion
Last Wet I walked out after work along the hills near Wildman Ranger Station. This country is so beautiful in the Wet Season, and I walked through the bush about 3.5 km. As I turned for home a huge storm came up behind me. That hilly ridge is ironstone and they say lightning is attracted to iron in the ground. I glanced fearfully back, and saw a bolt of lightning hit a tree about 50m away. In slow motion that tree exploded. Just blew up. I watched pieces fly outwards as time stretched. I power-walked all the way home.

Photography and floods
As I grew up I got into photography. In the Katherine flood of 1998 I lost a lot of my old film. Twenty odd years of photos gone. I lost a whole big veggie box of my work, negatives, film.
I started going digital, but lost some several times as computers died.
Now I save my photos separately, backing them up. I take photos at work, family events like weddings and funerals. I take my camera everywhere.
In the 2006 Katherine flood the river rose 19 metres. I was working up the gorge. I have a coxswain’s certificate and I was teaching Park staff to take a boat safely up through the gorge. A ten foot dinghy escaped and was caught further downstream when the mooring rope caught in the trees. I captured the dinghy and brought it up the flooded river. Somebody thought I was crazy to risk it.
I had my camera during this flooding, so I took a lot of photos from a helicopter as we surveyed the water levels. I like taking photos.
Senior Staff asked ‘Who wants to go in the helicopter to take photos?’ Usually I went in a helicopter for a specific task, like fire lighting, and rescues. I take my camera every-where. From a helicopter I can take photos of the country.
Katherine Gorge - Nitmiluk
I grew up in Katherine but it took me 30 years to get to Katherine Gorge. Then I got to see it all. That country is magnificent and I have walked it, flown over it, quad-biked it, drove around it, boated some too.

I’ve seen water-falls, followed the chain of gorges, found rock paintings. I have seen Katherine Gorge in flood twice. I have followed the Katherine River a long way, but I’m still working on reaching the mouth.

I have followed the Katherine from the headwaters. It rises from a little hill, a little hill where four major rivers arise, moving out in different directions like the fingers of a hand. East Alligator River, South Alligator River, Katherine River and Mann River.

Good fun
As a kid I jumped off the High Level Bridge in Katherine and floated down to the Low Level. You can’t do that now, too many crocs, but then they were still being shot. We boys played chasey along the banks, chased each other to throw prickly spear grass seeds into our backs, dodged round trees, bounced on springy skinny pandanus trunks hanging over the water. Good fun. No wonder we Aboriginal boys showed good physical skills when we started playing footy.

All dirt roads
Our streets were dirt in Katherine in the 60s, only the main road was bitumen. Every-one, knew everyone else. Katherine was safe, we never locked our doors. Keys were kept in the ignition. We knew our manners. We enjoyed ourselves, had a lot of freedom. We never, ever got in trouble.

You speak very good English
I worked on the Information Desk at Katherine Gorge, where thousands of tourists arrive and depart. The ones that come for an hour or two and miss more than 99% of the glorious park, I called them ants. Ants scurry along a trail following the scent of the one before them, too busy to break the habits of a follower, and see only the backside of the individual in front of them. That is sad, that narrow glimpse. One kind visitor complimented me on my good English. ‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘but I do understand some local languages.’
When I was asked what university I attended, I pointed outside at the bush. It took a few minutes for her to understand that I was saying that much of my education comes from the bush.

A balanced life? Well, I don’t seek a balanced life, because I know I have one. It just happens. Some people go on holiday just to enjoy the things I do for work!

**Our job, my job**

In my work experiences I see a wide range of life skills – and in this job I can compare, assess. Our job is managing the land – fires, feral animals, fences, weeds, biodiversity, and visitors. When we are spraying weeds, a quad bike breaks down. We are far from home. It may be just a loose wire, but if the ranger cannot fix it there can be severe consequences. A long walk home at least, and many hours wasted locating the late vehicle and getting it and the ranger home safely. Many more hours wasted taking the quad 150+ km into Darwin for repair, and important time wasted in the fight against weeds. I try very hard to impart some mechanical skills to all the workers I supervise.

**Boundary burn, cooperatively**

I opt to lead the Mimosa Weed scientists to an area where I think they will be able to set up trial plots to evaluate Mimosa pigra removal. I drive my Toyota and they follow down the red dirt road.

We follow the boundary fence along Melaleuca Station, where smoke still lingers from a burn managed cooperatively between Wildman River Rangers and station workers, to create a firebreak that will benefit both of our enterprises. I am very satisfied with both the process and the result.
Invent, adapt, manufacture
I am busy at the rear of a vehicle equipped for weed spraying. I am making a holder for the twin hose sprays, so we can spray narrow strips like fence lines and verges. In a short time I have the angle grinder out and it is making loud noises, I am measuring a steel pipe.

Gamba grass
After lunch Ted and I agree to drive to the resort and test my new invention on a persistent infestation of Gamba grass, a pastoral grass introduced from Africa. It has run amuck in the Territory. We head north. We pass through sandy country and a wonderful natural orchard of red apple trees, Syzygium suborbicularum.

Their glossy green leaves contrast with dry grass. The dry grass is Gamba, tall, with a high fuel load which burns too hot at any time of the year. Australian bush is resistant to fires, specially adapted from thousands and thousands of years of fire by Aboriginal people. The fuel load from Gamba is so high, the heat ignites the canopy and this firing destroys the trees. When Gamba burns, perhaps from October lightning strike, the fire will be so hot many trees will be killed, especially seedlings, so there is less recruitment, the forests will die. My invention works.

Unlocking a gate
I unlock a gate at Shady Camp to drive into an “Authorised Entry Only” area. We drive around the edge of the flood plain, pretty bumpy surface, and we startle wallabies which bounce for higher stony ground and safety. My passenger thinks the wallabies are beautiful, but none stand still to pose for a photograph. On the weekend I made a protective burn here, and pairs of turkey bustards and wallabies are taking advantage of exposed food, and the tender new shoots that burst forth, stimulated by a “good” burn.
Advisor to scientists
I explain my reasons for choosing this site to the Mimosa Research team.
In previous years I have slashed the weeds here, and sprayed mimosa, but it is still resisting control. I point to the nearby wire fence where, on Opium Creek station, a large plantation of tall luxuriant mimosa grow, in a position to spread its remarkably persistent and numerous seeds downstream every Wet Season, to annually contaminate the country we want to protect.

For years no-one listened to us. We were just Aboriginals, without a university degree, so what would we know. Times have changed, now they listen to us, explain issues and concepts, and ask our advice.

Banyans are mothers of rainforest
I sprayed herbicide around a line of huge Banyans at the end of the Wet to protect them from Gamba grass. They are the mothers of rain forest. Around the sheltered environment their leaves and branches provide, seeds dropped by fruit-eating birds and animals will germinate and survive. Banyans harbour possums, bats, and birds, and all contribute fruit seeds.

We stop on the edge of the wetlands, near the old cattle yards, and I note that this year, tall sedges are growing here. I have not seen them in this spot before. They have migrated from upstream.
Feral pigs cause changes
Here on the floodplain half grown pigs flee from our vehicle. These pigs were released by the early British settlers in the 1800s. Now Australia has more feral pigs than people. This is probably just one litter. Feral pigs cause a lot of damage to our environment. They eat food, competing with native animals and people for tubers, fruit. They carry diseases like Tuberculosis. They dig in the soft soil at the edge of the wetlands. See the large disturbed areas in the photo. We conduct a feral pig eradication and control program.

Feral buffaloes
Buffaloes were brought from Indonesia by the early British. They ran wild in the Top End of the Northern Territory where the wetlands provide excellent conditions. Unfortunately, buffalo are not excellent for the country. They compete with native animals for food, carry the diseases of tuberculosis and brucellosis, cause erosion and spread weeds. Buffaloes break down banks and levee barriers and so allow salt water incursion which threatens the entire freshwater wetland habitats.

Learning to live
Nana was all I knew. She came to get me when I was eight months old. That house was a focal point. We knew everybody. She taught us that we are equal. There were no favourites. We were all equal. Every-one was equal – the whole world. My grandmother taught us all to cook. She made us cook. First we sat down and watched her. Then we had a turn with her guiding us, helping us. Then she said: ‘It’s your turn now.’ A pot of rice was the first thing I learned to cook. Then we started on cooking big meals, like great big stews, ready for all the visitors. We had chores too. If we cooked we still had to clean. Sundays I cleaned the yard. My Aunties and Uncles kept us in line. Kicked us in the bum. We’d get clipped under the ear. If I played up Nan told me to get a stick. It might take me two hours to fetch the stick, but I would get it. Get the stick she would wack me with.
Or a rubber thong. My friends were surprised that I would be willing to fetch my punisher, but I knew I would get double if Nana had to fetch it. In the mornings she had the kettle boiling and our breakfast cooking. Once we visited Aunty and a huge German Shepherd dog rushed out at us, barking, snarling. We were terrified and jumped back in the car, but Nana got out. She stepped forward and gave it a hard backhand that sent it yelping away to hide. My grandmother could speak Tiwi, salt water language, but she also spoke Wailpiri, a desert language. She was an expert communicator and I am pleased that I am able to talk to visitors from all over the world, that I have the skills to make them feel welcome on this country. That’s the most important. My mechanical knowledge is a bonus. My teaching skills are a bonus, but being comfortable talking to people is essential.

**Very fortunate**
My childhood was very fortunate. I’ll tell you a story to show how fortunate I was. When I was 11 or 12 I was home by myself when it started to sprinkle. I went out the front door to look. There was a rainbow on the road. I walked out and put my hand into it. My hand was rainbow light. I stepped into it. I knew I was in the rainbow. I stepped again and I was out of it. Then stepped again and I was rainbow light, then another step and I was out of it, and yet another step and I was rainbow. People talk about rainbows, and take photos of double rainbows. I have seen a triple rainbow! Listeners to my story always ask me if I saw the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. One afternoon at Edith Falls I was riding the quad bike home in the late afternoon when I saw a rainbow through the trees. I could not tell if it was very close or as far as 5 km away. As I watched and travelled through the dry eucalyptus woodland the rainbow seemed to move close, then recede, closer, then recede. At Katherine Gorge I looked up from my work and saw a rainbow around the sun. I guessed it was my polaroid glasses causing this unusual effect, but when I took them off there was still a rainbow encircling the sun. Where’s that pot of gold? I know where it is.
Leo Goodman of Wildman Ranger Station

Wildman Ranger Station, Mary River National Park
Northern Territory, Australia
Young fella
The young fella. They all call me the young fella. I live at Kapalga, and I came into Wildman Station last night. When I want to go home, I phone my family and they drive to get me. And some one organises my trip back to Wildman Ranger Station to start work again. There’s always some one coming and going along the Arnhem Highway.

All my family used to be there at Kapalga, my Uncle Sampson and my Mum. Before we moved to Kapalga, we lived in an old tin shed on Koolpinyah Station. I have been working here at Wildman Ranger Station this year, 2011 as a trainee ranger. Last year I came in on the Indigenous Flexible Employment Program. I got my traineeship from that. Stepping stones. I like working on my own country.

Right place, Right time
After I finished school I worked day labour with Old Victor (Cooper) out on Carmor Plains, and I worked around Jabiru Town a bit. After a couple of years I started thinking I wanted to work looking after my own country. Christmas Day I drove into Jabiru (the town in Kakadu National Park) to visit my old Granny, and Greg Williams (District Supervisor) came past her house and he asked: ‘Who wants to get paid to look after their own country?’

Right place. Right time. I was getting ready to go for an interview at Yellow Waters for a gardening yardman job.
My country
My country from my mother’s side Marangungu, is neighbour for Teddy Hayes’ country, same sort of area. On my mother’s side Limilngan country stretches from Adelaide River to Kapalga, country. It’s a huge estate. When I was young we used to go up to the coast. My Old Grandma used to take us to the coast near Point Stuart. Granny, my brothers, about six of us, my mum, and my uncle, aunty, and their three kids, my cousins. Two troop carriers full. No boat, but we hunted our food from the sea, and around the rocks. We hunted longbums, mud-crab, oysters. We carried an axe to chop roots for mangrove worms.

Not a photo of me
This photo from horseback times shows young buffalo hunters relaxing, playing the didgeridu. It does remind me of our holidays, of having fun, but the buffalo hunters worked very hard, until the rains started. At Christmas Old Felix walked home to his family.

West Alligator Heads
In the Dry season, when I came home from school for the mid-year holidays, we went camping at West Alligator Heads. Here the water is clear, and we speared stingrays. If only we had photos to show you.

My Nilya
This was my grandmother from my mother’s side, my nilya. In English we don’t have a word for that relationship, but we do in aboriginal languages. My grandmother on my father’s side, I call her mungi. Same for grandfather – my mother’s father is nangyil, and my father’s father is nimming.
Because it made her cry
That language from my nilya is all gone now. My nilya spoke to me when I was little, that’s how I picked it up. I asked her to tell me stories, her stories. I asked her to tell me stories about Old Time, and she would tell me in her own language. But nilya cried too. I asked her because it made her cry. I was very young but I understood she cried because her language group had passed away, and she had no-one to talk to. I was there. I was there all the time.
At Kapalga I teach my younger brothers and sisters the words that I know. That language is all gone with the old people.

Languages
I am speaking to you in English. I can speak Tiwi too, from my mother’s mother. She was married from there, and she also spoke Larrakia. She was often helping that mob from Darwin, interpreting for them. And she spoke Limilngan too.
We were looking after Old Felix, my grandfather, when I was young, and I knew I would not have time to learn his language well.
‘Old Felix’ was the last speaker of Limilngan. He was born about 1905 alongside the tick yard where bullocks were dipped at Humpty Doo Station near Darwin.’
Stephen Davis wrote that about Felix in Under Capricorn. Those are my grandfather’s words. And two photos of him, you can see them.

Losing, shifting, moving
Losing language. That’s from all that buffalo hunting. They got my mob to move to Humpty Doo. That’s a long way from my grandmother’s country, but she came with us.

Humpty Doo Station and Koolpinyah Station
The buffalo hides were what the hunters wanted. My nilya was at Koolpinyah Station. Half our mob went there for work, and when that work (buffalo hide industry) stopped, they still lived there. Below, this shed at Humpty Doo Station is still there. Felix Holmes, the station owner is on the left by the water tank. That’s where Grandfather Felix took his name and my grandfather Goodman took his name from the manager. That’s why I am Leo Goodman.

Dad and I identified this photograph as being near Donald Camp, looking
towards south, ie up-river from Beatrice Hill towards Whitestone and Acacia.

**Donald Camp**

I was still in primary school when we went to Scott Creek, Adelaide River, Donald Camp. At Donald Camp we swam in a billabong, in chest-deep, waist-deep water to hunt turtles.

You can’t do that now, too many crocodiles. All my family made a line and then we moved across to catch long-neck turtles. File snakes (*Achrochordatus arafurae*) lived in the shallow water across the other side, in the red lilies. Turtles are delicious, but I don’t eat file snake. Donald Camp is on the Adelaide River floodplain verge, not too far from Window on the Wetlands Information Centre at Beatrice Hill.

**A name too hard to say**

Daly mob were at Koolpinyah too. Leo, a Daly River man, had a traditional name too hard to say, so they called him Leo. He was my father’s grandfather. I am named after him. That Old Leo was my father’s grandfather. Ernest Goodman, my grandfather, used to shoot buffaloes from horseback. A bit of history there!

There are photographs of my Old Leo in Windows on the Wetland display, and also my Mum and Dad, photos on the computer. It is really good, interesting for me and Dad to look at these old photographs.
Choosing photos, learning a little bit of history
After lunch, I was going to look at old photos that Kaye brought from the Northern Territory Library, old photos from horseback times, when Grandfather Felix was shooting buffalo. My Dad, Harold arrived, so I invited him to look at the photos too. I am glad Dad arrived because he knows more about the family stories than I do.

Ian Morris shot a buffalo at East Alligator Ranger Station, Malangangerr, at the back of his house. My mother, in a blue dress, is watching. My father’s younger brother, Balang, his English name is Phillip Goodman, is skinning on the left. In the middle is Justin Cooper who now lives at Coburg with his wife and six children. Skinning out the neck is Victor Cooper, who lives at Kapalga now.

The front cover
My mother’s big brother, my Uncle William Henry and my father’s uncle are pictured on the cover of that book about crocodile hunters, hunting Finniss River way. This book you can buy at South Alligator store, and at Bark Hut shop.
After shooting buffalo, then my uncles were bull-catchers, catching wild buffalo on the Marrakai instead of shooting them. My uncles were bull catchers, then they became rangers. My Grandpa worked with Terry Baldwin on Annabaroo Station, here where we are sitting now. You should read Terry’s book about it – The Last Muster. There are photos of that Old Leo with his rifle, and of my Mum and Dad at Windows on the Wetland at Beatrice Hill. In Kakadu Man, Big Bill Neidjie’s book, there are two photos of my grandfather Felix with his brother Big Bill. You know, Aboriginal way, I call both Grandfather. On the front cover of Under Capricorn is a photo of Iyanuk, that’s the traditional name for Felix Holmes. He took his English name from a white station manager. Iyanuk is explaining a rock art site in this photo.
Back to Kapalga, our own country
When that buffalo industry finished, that’s when my family moved back to our own country, to Kapalga. I was already born. I was born in 1986. When the bull catching ended because the export industry finished up, my family moved back to Kapalga.

Kapalga - a mission first
Kapalga is based between the West and South Alligator Rivers. Kapalga Native Industrial Mission was established near the South Alligator River in 1899, but lasted only four years. Two decades of research for the monsoonal tropics were undertaken at Kapalga Research Station by the CSIRO from 1974 to 1995.

Family graves
My nilya and I were taken back to Koolpinyah Station to see my mother’s and my uncle’s history, where they grew up. There’s family graves at Koolpinyah too, from horseback days. Maybe five or six graves. I haven’t been back there for a while but I would like to. Now my Uncle’s got a Toyota we can go. At Kapalga there’s graves for my family too, my old Uncle William Henry.

Inspiration, eh?
Whenever I hear a story about Uncle William Henry or remember him, it makes me feel good, and I want to get out on country and work hard. Inspiration, eh? I want to follow in his shadow. Good inspiration for me. And I hope I will inspire my brothers and sisters.

Uncle William Henry was very funny too. Made me laugh. He had a short hand, lost his fingertips. He was yarding buffaloes and he went to shut the steel gate. One female buffalo rushed it. Uncle William Henry was jumping around, and the catchers saw him and ran to help him. Saw that little finger wriggling like a worm on the ground.

My father picked that finger bit up, put it in a bottle with cold water. They went took William Henry to the hospital, but it took too long so it was too late to put it back on.

Dad and I think the man on the second horse is Uncle Roger Yates, because he always rode the white horse.
One story I’d like to tell you
Story about my totem. We believe before we come into being ... That’s the story I will tell now.
When my mother and father were still working buffalo hunting, they went out fishing at the Finniss River, and my mother was luring, standing on the bank and throwing out the lure and dragging it back in, for barramundi.
Mum was pulling in the lure and she saw rib. Her lure was caught on a crocodile’s rib. As the crocodile came out onto the bank, he saw Mum and Dad and Dad’s youngest Uncle. The crocodile wriggled, tore the hooks from his skin, and escaped. The spirit passes from the animal into that person before they are born. The crocodile’s spirit passed to me. The crocodile carried my spirit on his shoulder, before he gave it to my mother and father. Before I was born into this life, I was a crocodile walking around.
My Dreaming, that’s my totem, is saltwater crocodile.
My father’s Uncle said to Mum: ‘You are going to have a baby.” My Mum did not know until then. Those old people know every-thing.
I even have on my side, on my rib, the mark of the lure, where the hooks were dragged out of the skin. You can see it.

My father had been planning to leave his job before he knew I was coming. He joked to Kaye: ‘Now I had to keep working so I could grow up this handsome young man here.’

Hard work fire fighting
The smoke is rising from the right of the photo. We worked from 8am one morning until 5 am the next, 21 hours, then we ate, showered, rested and went back three hours later.
We worked another 14 hours before we slept.
Then another whole day before it was under control.
Hard work. We were all working, the whole team. The fire was burning towards the resort accommodation.

Leo ready to fight the fire Sept 2011
Photo Greg Peckham
Books and films referred to by Leo:

Baldwin, Terry and Kath. 2000. *the last roundup*. Buffame, PO Box 38832 Winnellie, NT 0821, Australia.


Information on Buffalo hunting

By the 1880s the number of buffalo released from early settlements had increased to such an extent that commercial harvesting of hides and horns was economically viable. The industry began on the Adelaide River, close to Darwin, and moved east to the Mary River and Alligator Rivers regions.

Most of the hunting and tanning was done towards the end of the dry season, when buffaloes congregated around the remaining billabongs. During the wet season hunting ceased because the ground was too muddy to pursue buffalo and the harvested hides would rot. The buffalo-hunting industry became an important employer of Aboriginal people during the dry season months.

Aboriginal men on foot were employed to stalk and flush the animals out of dense vegetation onto open floodplain, where shooters on horseback could run down the animals, shooting them in the spine. Hides were taken to local waterholes and cleaned before salting. Salting was primarily the task of Aboriginal women and was done repeatedly over a number of days. The hides were then dried, folded and transported to a river landing to await shipment by lugger to Darwin. Until World War II Aboriginal workers throughout the Northern Territory were paid in supplies, usually of the most basic kind - tobacco, flour and tea.

The fortunes of the buffalo industry fluctuated over the industry’s 70 years of operation for a number of reasons, but its final collapse is attributed to poor processing of the hides, the development of synthetic substitutes, and the disruption to shipping caused by the 1956 Suez crisis (Press et al. 1995).
Lance Spain of Wildman Ranger Station

Wildman Ranger Station, Mary River National Park
Northern Territory, Australia
Head Ranger
I have been Head Ranger at Wildman Ranger Station for three years. Before I came here I was a ranger at Jardine River on Cape York Peninsula. I worked one year at Katherine Gorge (Nitmiluk) for Parks and Wildlife, then I worked at Edith Falls (Leliyn). I also worked in Litchfield National Park. A few weeks ago I was told that I have the position at Keep River, close to the Northern Territory/West Australian border only 35km from Kununurra. My wife Karen and I have wanted to work in a remote area for a long time. When I was sick of waiting, that’s when I packed up and went to work in Queensland at Jardine River, on Cape York Peninsula.

From station to station
I was born at Mt Isa in 1960. My parents moved from station to station, working seasonally. All cattle station work is seasonal. We lived on Killala Station close to the channel country, Ardmore, Linda Downs and Carondotta Station. On and off we lived in little bush communities. They moved from station to station until I was old enough to go to school.

Dajarra
Then we moved to Dajarra in Outback Queensland. Dajarra is due south of Mt Isa. Dajarra was once the largest trucking depot in the world. I remember when more cattle were trucked from here than from Texas. Drovers brought the cattle in to put them on trains. The town is home to Aboriginal tribes from around the Diamantina River, The Gulf of Carpentaria and Northern Territory. Mt Isa is 150 km away.

Corrugated iron, wood and spinifex grass
I lived with my grandmother in the West end of Dajarra. We walked one and a half miles into town. Up on the ridge we lived in humpies built of corrugated iron, wood and spinifex grass. It was freezing cold in winter, the wind whistled through and we stuffed the chinks with spinifex to try to stop draughts. Our mob, our clan are Wulyawarra, but different mobs were living there from all over – Dempseys, Bonnings, Sullivans, Craigies, Granny Ruby, Desatjes, Ahwons – many
poddy dodging. You don’t know poddy dodging? Stealing un-branded calves. I grew up in Dajarra. I walked to school every day, did school stuff, then never went straight home, went down the creek. We played cow boys and Indians, war games. I got a hiding every night for coming home late. Thought it was worth it. Night-time we played armies.

‘Little black bastards’
Every one in Dajarra had horses. We’d catch a horse each and ride, playing Cowboys and Indians. Cattle were often placed in the Dajarra Common. We mustered cattle up and played drovers, cutting the cattle out. When we were finished we’d let them go. The manager sometimes chased us, but when we headed across the sandy creek-bed, his vehicle couldn’t follow. ‘Little black bastards. Leave my cattle alone,’ he’d shout at us.

An onion and salt and pepper
We went hunting up in the hills with shanghais. I always had a shanghai in one pocket and an onion and salt and pepper in the other. I hunted pigeons, galahs, and cooked them in the coals. Sometimes we got goanna, echidna. We cooked and ate them out in the hills, never took any home. Too many kids. So we ate it all. We were always hungry.

Always hungry
We rode off on any horse we could catch, shanghais in our pockets, double banking, the back kid hanging onto the rider. We’d ride a long way looking for something to eat.
At home we kept goats. Nanna locked up the goats at night to keep them safe. I got sick of eating goat milk sago. Every morning we had porridge made from sago and a big spoonful of castor oil. If the sago ran out we ate Johnny cake with syrup. We had our own fruit trees.
At night we sneaked out across the river and into the back of the shop to steal chooks eggs. We also stole oranges off trees in gardens in the winter.
In winter the drovers came in to Dajarra, and they’d drop a bullock or two. We walked down each day, cut up the meat to take home and cook. Next day the same. We lived like kings when the drovers were in.

The Dunny Train
When Grandfather got a job with Railways, we moved into town. The Dunny Train collected all the dunny cans from the railway cottages. We cleaned them, put the empty ones back in the toilets. We had to work! My grandfather and my uncle made us work. We wanted to go with them on the train, muck around. When we got sick of doing it, we bailed out.
**Wire and powdered milk tins**

We cut wire from the Dajarra Common fence to make steamrollers using the stolen wire with empty powdered milk cans or syrup cans. The steam train was the only transport to Cloncurry hence steam. When road trains began, we called our wire and can toys road-trains.

**Never bored**

We’d walk out to The Gap, ten miles out of Dajarra, sit on the side of a hill, wait for a lift in the dogbox and give them a hand to unload cattle into the trucking yards. We did it just for fun! No money.

When the drovers came, we sat in the creek bed. The Georgina was 400-500m wide.

We’d sit up in a tree, cattle saw us, would not go round us to get to the water at the other side. Drovers threw stones at us to get us out. We kids were never bored. We just swapped around.

Old Haynesie the publican, he’s finished now, put his wild horses in the yard out the back. At night we boys chased them, used ropes, threw saddles on them and rode them. Haynesie reckoned those horses were getting quiet, tame. They were exhausted from us riding them every night!

When the rains came we just went hunting – collected fruit, bush bananas - *alangwa*, splitjack - *nula*, and conkerberries. We chopped trees with a tomahawk to get sugar-bag honey. We swam and fished in the Carbonne River. Around Dajarra are a big mob of rivers – Wills Creek, named after the explorer, Sulamein Creek, Waverley, The Georgina.

About Christmas time, school holidays, we went out to stay with Dad wherever he was working – Walgra Corner, Roxborough Downs Station, Linda Downs, Binyeah, and Edgingly Station where my Mum had been born.

**A big, big man**

While we were travelling Granny told us lots of stories. My first grandfather was George Bubbler, known as Nemo. This grandmother was Dorothy Major, and she talked around the campfire in the cold weather time, telling us about her husband, my grandfather. He went around by horse and buggy, pulling bores and looking after the Dog Fence. Grandfather was a travelling Kadaitcha man, strong in his culture. A big, big, man.

**Greenhide ropes and a Turk’s Head**

Granny’s second husband Harold worked on the railway. This grandfather would drive out to Glenormiston station in an old Landrover. Where the gidgee tree grew, poisonous, we called it 1080 tree, bullocks died from eating it. This tree is the Georgina Gidgee, also known as Acacia georginae. Grandfather Harold dragged the dead bullocks home to the station. My Uncle Kenny and Uncle Jimmy and I skinned them and pegged them out to dry. We made green-hide ropes from them. I still know
how to do this, though I would have to think a while to remember how to tie a Turk’s Head knot.

Mt Isa, Boulia, Mt Isa
In 1967 we moved 200 km south to Boulia, and we lived in the compound on the Aboriginal Reserve. Not in a house, just camping, roughing it, down by the shower blocks so we could wash, get water easily.

I went to Boulia School. Then we moved into a house in Boulia, and then we moved back to Mt Isa. At Boulia every kid went to school. If one of us was missing, the headmaster sent us all out to get the wagger.

At Mt Isa I won a few art competitions. My brother and I drew the winning design for Healy State School in Mt Isa, and it was built to our ideas. They still have my paintings in the office.

Living
At Mt Isa Mum and I lived in the Aboriginal Reserve.
At Cloncurry we camped by the shower block and lived in humpies under prickle bush trees.
At Urandangi on the Georgina, Mum worked in the shop all day. They did not pay her much. She brought home a few pennies and I went back to the shop with a list written on cardboard and bought sugar, tealeaf, not much else, with this small money she had stolen.

Sitting up there laughing at us
My grandmothers and my Aunties wore layers of dresses to keep warm in the winter. The cleanest, newest one went under next to their skin and the oldest dirtiest was on the inside. They built these layers as the weather grew colder. The south east wind could blow straight through you, cruel, and they had no house with walls to keep it out, only humpies stuffed with grass. Those old ladies are probably sitting up there laughing at us.

Best opportunity
The best opportunity I had was when my great grandmother and grandmother were still alive.

I remember my grandmother took me to a funeral. I was a toddler, young enough to go without trousers. I was sitting in her lap, and when men came out crying, I laughed out loud. My grandmother slapped my bare bum.

My dad died last year, aged 84 years.
My Uncle is 85. I phoned him last weekend. ‘I am still alive. Not dead yet.’ He is the last one left.

**Run away to the Rodeo**
The Boulia Rodeo at Easter is a big event. I wanted to go. I ran away and stayed with Nana at Boulia. I was in the main street in Boulia, barefoot, wearing my school uniform because that was all I had. Eleven years old. Yes, eleven.

My Uncle Sammy Dawson and my Uncle Alfie Major asked me if I wanted a job, for money. My two friends and I agreed. I pointed out we had no gear for station work. We met these two uncles on Sunday morning, and they came around to Nana’s house and picked us up. We were driven to Marion Downs Station in the Channel country, a couple of hours drive from Nana’s house. They took us in the station store and outfitted us with boots, belt, trousers, hat and shirts. Real life cowboys.

We had to pay off this book-up at the store. We worked a couple of years seasonally. We mustered, branded, did general stock work, camped out bush for months away from the homestead, getting fats for the market. The cattle were yarded into bronce yards, that is, yards made of wire. It was an open camp draft and we kept the fats and let the rest go, gathering fats daily until we built a herd of 2000-2500. We took them back to Main Station for trucking. We’d restock our stores, get a new plant of horses, have a few days’ rest and get back to it. We did this for two years.

**Floods, 1973/74**
The Channel country was flooded. In 1975 I started work with Boulia Shire Council as a labourer, on road works across the Channel country. I mixed a lot of cement, no cement trucks out there, then. Shovel, muscle. Shovel it in, pour it into formwork for bridge foundations. I went home to Dajarra, and worked on lots of cattle stations – Ardmore, Stanbrook,
Linda Downs - a big mob of places, all seasonal work. In 1980s I went up to the Gulf of Carpentaria, still cattle work, at Gleason.

**Riding for fun**
In 1975 I had my first rodeo ride, at Boulia Rodeo. I never broke many bones, a collarbone, and I've been in a coma in Mt Isa Hospital twice. In 1986 my cousin Buggsy and I went to Mt Isa Rodeo, and won some money. We decided to go to Alice Springs Rodeo. We stayed for a while in the Northern Territory.

**Driving a bull-catcher**
By 1989 I had ended up in Katherine, and I went out bull-catching and buff-catching on Scott Creek Station working for Ronnie Ogilvie. I learned to drive a bull-catcher, and my work mates were Henry Campbell, Shane Litner, Chongie (Ron Chong).

**Jawoyn**
Next I worked for the Jawoyn Association, local Aboriginal corporation. I was putting up fences to control the movement of buffalo and cattle as part of the BTEC Program - Brucelosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign. Feral cattle and water buffalo thought to be maintaining disease amongst the country’s herds were rounded up and destroyed. Tested stock could not be allowed to mix with untested, uncontrolled feral animals. I worked at Eva Valley, Beswick, Bishop Bore, putting up a lot of fences, working with a couple of Traditional Owners. Robert Lee and John Fletcher asked me to work with rangers at Katherine Gorge, making walking tracks. Then Parks and Wildlife Commission asked me to fence the top of Katherine Gorge, six kilometres of fence in rough stone country along the Eva Valley boundary. I used a Parks vehicle and Jawoyn workers. We completed this project in 1995.

**That’s where it started**
Mark Anderson of Parks had liked my cementing and fencing work. ‘Would you like to be a ranger?’
He asked me to put in a resume. I told him I had never seen a resume. Mark offered to help. I won that position, T1 Ranger. That’s where it started.

**Learning the trade**
I’ve done most of my studies – Ecology mentored by Charley Delacourt and Mark Anderson. I now hold a Certificate 3 in

Lance in Katherine Gorge     Photo NRETAS
Land Management. I did some of my training in my grandmother’s country between Lake Nash and Tobermory. I spent two weeks there with Dr Peter Latz, Darren Larkham, John Williams, 3 or 4 scientists, 9 Parl’s staff. We surveyed flora and fauna. I found sticknest rats, recorded as endangered. I found a big mob up in the hills. Last time I saw Peter Latz, Karen and I were sitting enjoying Wangi Falls. Peter walked past. He was collecting for a seed bank against Climate Change. I did a few training camps – one at Sleisbeck in Kakadu.

Too frightened to say No
I got a phone call - ring the Director urgently. I wondered what I had done wrong. ‘I have a proposition for you. T2 Ranger at Edith Falls.’ I was too frightened to say No. Old Johnny Brumby, a Traditional Owner for that area, came to Edith Falls with me. We worked together for 6 or 7 years. He helped me a lot in my relationship with the Warrabin community. He’s passed away now. Me and Dazza worked there for 4 years. We up-graded all the walking tracks, carrying bags of cement on our backs up the escarpment. Then we built gas barbeques.

How to cook seeds
Larkham taught me a lot about rehabilitation, erosion, and how to cook seeds to trigger germination. When the new car-park was being constructed, I asked King Contractors foreman to rip up a patch of degraded land between the ranger houses and the campground. I offered him a carton of beer for the favour. He said: ‘On the weekend I’ll leave the key in the grader. You do it.’ After the rains came, everything sprouted – grevillea, kapok, acacias. Beautiful.

Swiss backpacker
I met my Swiss wife Karen at Edith Falls. She was waiting for her visa to expire. We were married at Edith Falls. Now we have two sons. Her parents visit us most years, and we have taken the boys to Europe, seen Disneyland, the works. I transferred to Litchfield national Park, working with John Mc Cartney, Alan withers, Mark Fogarty, Dave Fuller, Andy Woods, Danny Burroughs, Michael Barrett, Stewart Woerle. My responsibility was Douglas/Daly region and Umbrarwarra Gorge – putting in new campgrounds, upgrading facilities. I did this until the end of 2001.

Every year
Every year Parks staff are asked where they want to go. Every year I wrote Keep River and Timber Creek – remote parks. I was fed up with being ignored. I applied for Jardine River ranger position on Cape York and I got it. Resigned. We had Christmas with friends at Lakefield, and the rain bucketed down. Karen and I and our two sons drove to Cooktown, in two cars, my work vehicle and our private car. It was still raining, we couldn’t get through. We had to turn around and go back.
We were waiting at each creek for the flood to go down. I knew there were lots of crocs. On the black soil plains we found two Dutchmen walking. Their car was hopelessly bogged. We picked them up and took them to Coen. I couldn’t just leave them in the black mud for four months, could I?

Key in power box
When we finally made it to Jardine, there was no-one there. A note said: Key in power box.
For the first two and a half years my family was all there was. Dillon was a baby and Shawn was two years. I looked after the whole park myself, - campgrounds, patrols. Phil Wallace, a traditional owner came and worked with me, clearing tracks with a chainsaw, pumping water up to tanks. Michael Hicks and Sally Eden were appointed to Jardine and together we upgraded all facilities – built new toilets, built a boardwalk, took turtle surveys, crocodile surveys.
At Jardine I studied and got my Diploma of Land Management. RPL, Recognition of Prior Learning gave me a substantial base to achieve my diploma.

Crocodiles too big to fit in the plane
At Injinoo we removed 3 or 4 dangerous crocs. Jackson Sailer of AQIS, Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service, and James Bond, the real James Bond, Constable Fitzie and Ben and the Aboriginal police gave us a hand with trapping these big predators. Locals helped us to get them out of the traps. Often the crocodiles were put on the barge but sometimes we flew them out to croc farms around Cairns.

Cooperative community burns
We coincided our fire season to burn off with our neighbours, Wendy and Vince at Bramwell Junction, Roger and Edith Spencer at Arnour River and the Nixons. We worked with AQIS, rangers around Coen, Bruce Landsdowne who is an old mate of mine, and my cousin-brother Buggsy. Buggsy same Buggsy that I went to Mt Isa Rodeo with, and then to the Territory. Buggsy is an Aboriginal Liaison Officer at Darwin Prison.
At Wildman
October 2008 I returned to the Northern Territory as T3 Head Ranger at Wildman Ranger Station, Mary River Park.

The job of land management is complex. For me it includes managing staff, developing their skills, using staff to best advantage.

Off the top of my head:

- weeds management means we record data, liaise with scientists, maintain chemicals safely, and equipment, schedule and monitor control programs. We record chemicals used, dose rate, application method, trial plots, early burning, protecting special areas.

- visitors, giving information, ensuring safety, liaising with tour operators and resort management, rubbish collection, toilet cleaning, signage, clearing roads.

- fire management includes fire control, wild fire fighting, use of specialist equipment, liaison and cooperation with neighbours for controlled burns.

- feral animals - includes cattle, buffalo, pigs, horses, cats, and fencing, trapping, shooting, baiting.

- infrastructure - upgrading and development of infrastructure which includes roads, interpretation, visitor facilities like campgrounds, toilets, boat ramps, fences.

- Joint Management. This park is managed by a board comprising Parks representatives and traditional owners. I schedule meetings, ensure that decisions are implemented.

- Staff Training of staff, recruitment, staff meetings, selection of traditional owners

- Recording the basis of sound planning is records of previous activity. Download, input data, train. Keep a diary. Show schedules, track using photography, GPS, computer modelling, flora and fauna surveys.

- Building a good relationship with neighbours who are cattle station managers and resort managers and tour operators.
Looking forward
My family and I are looking forward to living at Keep River. I have been there for the handover and met some of the Traditional owners.

I like this country. I went on the Augustus Gregory re-hard work, with dreadful food.

I broke the rules on authentic food by using berries to catch a barramundi, but surely Gregory’s party had at least one man smart enough to catch a fresh fish in the Victoria River. Kierran Kelly wrote the book *Hard country, hard men: in the footsteps of Gregory*

Reference
Ted Hayes of Wildman Ranger Station

Wildman Ranger Station, Mary River National Park
Northern Territory, Australia
A family working in land management
I have been a T1 ranger for 18 months, working for NT Parks. I worked on land management at Fogg Dam, that’s how I got into this work. Now my two brothers work at Fogg Dam, the youngest started his apprenticeship this year. My sister manages Window on the Wetlands, (an interpretive centre at Beatrice Hill, overlooking the vast Adelaide River floodplains). I really like working here at Wildman Ranger Station. The team is very good, works hard and well. Last weekend I was back at Fogg Dam fighting that big wildfire. They asked me to help because I know that place well.

My country
My country is Daly River, my language is Marrithiyel. Some people call our language Brinken or Brinkin and a sea-side suburb of Darwin has been named after it. My people’s country is around the mouth of the Daly River but now some live at Daly River settlement and some at humpty Doo Station.

Learning new skills
This morning I did the fortnightly scheduled service for the generator. This generator provides our power and pumps our water. There is a matching pair. I service one, then switch over to the other each fortnight. I learned to do this, I didn’t have mechanical knowledge when I transferred to Wildman Ranger Station. It is good for me to do courses, to get trade tickets, more qualifications, develop my skills. I like the team I am working with, and I am learning new skills. I have a certificate for weed control, herbicides and poison safe handling. I know I can spray safely down by the tourist resort, and keep myself safe while using herbicides. I can select the right kind, and mix it to the correct solution, operate specialist spray equipment from a quad bike and from the back of a Toyota truck. I collect data from weed spraying, download it onto the computer where it can be analysed and used to write reports for allocated funding. I can assess chemical use, efficiency, and effects from year to year.
**Responsible for Visitors**
I am responsible for visitors observing by-laws, visitor signage, especially safety warnings and road signage, and some control of visitors, eg surveillance cameras, and road use counters. When I need a sign replaced, I measure the size, take a photograph of the sign text and graphics, and email these to a Resource Officer at Head Office, who gets replacements made and sends them out. There is a lot of specialised equipment here, eg fire fighting trailer, and I use the trailer with the cement mixer, pole, bags of cement, shovel etc, regularly to put up new signs and replace damaged ones.

**Fire management**
I work with the team on fire control, in burning off activities which have several aims, eg reducing fuel loads early in the Dry Season so that when the lightning storms are rife in October and November, there is little potential for dangerous, very hot fires to ignite by lightning. Fire is also used to control weeds, eg we burn in the Wet Season to reduce Gamba grass infestation.

**Keeping records**
This station is very well run. I keep a record of my daily activities and observations in my Work Diary. There are simple effective systems for recording maintenance needs, seasonal processes like fuel reduction burn-offs, fire break maintenance, servicing of vehicles and small engines. Good records help us to plan well.

**Walk and Talk**
At Fogg Dam, before I transferred to Mary River, I did Walk and Talk duties, explaining features of the park to tourists. I like doing it. Last Dry a huge croc was spotted sunning itself on the Fogg Dam wall which is the road and walkway. We set a trap but did not catch it. It is still in there. There must be a female moved in too, because we found a nest and hatchlings. After we spotted that croc we stopped doing Night Walks! Soon we plan to give talks to Mary River Park visitors. We must collect photos, because they are important in giving information. Lance wants us to talk about our work as rangers.
Poachers
At Fogg Dam goose shooters are a problem. They shoot out of season, or they don’t have a licence, or they shoot more than the bag limit, and they shoot protected.
There is only one access road, so we could block that road and check. Caught lots of them.
Some just fillet out the breast and discard the rest. Wasteful. A few magpie geese live at Fogg Dam all year but most spread out over the wetlands during the Wet, to lay eggs and hatch goslings. As the country dries out, the birds retreat to Fogg Dam, and the density of birds is very high, with more species by the end of the Dry.

Helping visitors
I enjoy the wide being a ranger entails at Mary River Park. I like driving around the park, seeing country, noticing the particularities of different habitats. I enjoy talking with visitors and helping them. Some return every year. I like the wetlands, and find it very relaxing to visit places like Couzens Lookout, even if I am cleaning the toilets there.

Two river systems
The park contains two river systems – the Mary and the Wilman, the Wilman flows east of the ridge and the Mary flows to the western side. The road runs along the ridge. Extensive flood plain wetlands support fish, turtle, crocodiles and so much birdlife. This morning I watched a sea eagle cruising the channel, a jabiru, whistle ducks, magpie geese, red-tailed black cockatoos, and a rainbow bee-eater.

Roads under water
During the Wet, many areas are closed because roads are under water. The four wheel drive track from Couzens Lookout is usually open only a couple of months each year, but it will be a lot shorter this year after our enormous rainfall. Probably it will stay closed. In September we start to get a bit of rain and that will keep the water level from dropping. Greg dragged a dead tree across that track on the weekend to block access, but I see that one poacher has veered around through the grass. They are hunting pigs usually, and we do want to eradicate feral pigs, but the poachers are a danger to themselves and tourists. Shooters have no right to be here, they cut up roads that are too wet for traffic, cause erosion, carry feral weed seeds to new areas, shoot anything including protected animals like wallabies.
Learning the country
There are high stony ridges, monsoon forest, rainforest, and then coastal flats, and the sea. All of these environments are unique, and I often wonder about particular features.
Off the Couzens Lookout road is a small patch of country with giant termite mounds, so when I read this bit of country I know there is something specific for them, something that does not exist in the rest of the park.

Curious emus
A little further is a place I often see emus. Emus, a pair, and then later Dad with his chicks. I see them in this area quite often. My grandfather hunted emus. They are very curious, so when you shake a cloth like a shirt maybe, they will come closer to check it out. An emu is very heavy, a lot of food. Grandpa took it back to feed all his family, and cooked it in an earth oven.

Reading the country
I talk about the country and my passenger Kaye shares her pleasure at seeing massive healthy milkwood trees, a stand of extra tall bloodwoods, the rapid changes of vegetative complexes. I like this country too.

We stop at Soda Creek, a natural dam holds a body of water that spills through the ironstone and flows over the road during the Wet. It has usually stopped by July, but this is a late season and it is still flowing. I like driving around the country, it relaxes me. Even when I am cleaning toilets and collecting rubbish I can look out at the country and feel good.

Illegal hunters
I check the closed 4wheel drive track, looking for signs of entry by illegal hunters. I note that Greg has dragged a dead tree across the road, and that only one vehicle has skirted this to get through.
Usually they are pig hunters, sometimes the shooters are after buffalo. They have no right to be here and they are a danger to themselves and others. This afternoon Brinna will install a spy camera to try to identify them.
Garig Gunak Barlu National Park
The Park includes the entire Peninsula, the surrounding waters of the Arafura Sea and Van Diemen Gulf, and some of the neighbouring islands. It covers about 4,500 sq. km. Cobourg Peninsula is the only National Park in the Northern Territory which contains adjoining land and marine areas.
Conserved within the Park area is a mosaic of sandy beaches, dunes and associated coastal grasslands, mangroves, rainforest patches, swamps, lagoons, coral reefs, sea grass meadows and rich marine life.

Activities include camping, wildlife watching, photography, walking, boating and fishing and there are opportunities to learn about the rich cultural and historical values of the area.

Mary River National Park
The Mary River National Park protects part of the Mary River catchment. Mary River is one of eight rivers in the Top End which have large floodplains in their catchments. The Arnhem Highway crosses five of these eight rivers as you travel between Darwin and Jabiru.

Freshwater billabongs, paperbark and monsoon forests provide visitors with excellent opportunities for wildlife watching, fishing, bushwalking and photography.

The Park has many opportunities and places for camping, picnicking, walking, and facilities such as toilets, boat ramps, information and historical markers and commercial accommodation.