

Chapter Five

Past Rites, Present Rights

Early anthropological work together with information presented during land claims and in other research has shown that Aboriginal people within the Darwin area have active, diverse and complex relationships with the land, the sea surrounding it and with each other. One of the means by which the Larrakia maintain links with their country during the continuing process of colonisation is through their knowledge of the land/sea and a utilisation of their resources. Another is through extended family groupings and social networks which have as their basis Larrakia identity. While the Northern Territory Government has, to some extent, recognised Larrakia traditional ownership of land in Darwin through the granting of the Kulaluk lease, sites representing spiritual, ceremonial and cultural significance to the Larrakia have not received much attention. Some would argue that not only do Aboriginal interests in land need to be considered in future town planning but that so should issues of Aboriginal cultural, spiritual and historical heritage. A look at some sites of significance to the Larrakia in the Darwin area provides some context to an understanding of the general appreciation of Larrakia traditional ownership of this region.

Dariba Nungalinya

In attempting to gain recognition and protection for sites of significance in the Darwin area the Larrakia have experienced many frustrations. Dariba Nungalinya or 'Old Man Rock' as it is commonly known is a site of significance to the Larrakia. It is situated off Casuarina beach and is a familiar landmark to anyone who regularly visits the area. There are several stories for the cultural significance of why Dariba Nungalinya came to be lying in water off the coast of Darwin. In evidence given at the 1989 hearing of the Kenbi Land Claim a Larrakia man, Richard Barnes, told that Dariba Nungalinya came from Koolpinyah which is the name for a waterhole on Koolpinyah Station:

He came from there. He left that area because he accidentally killed one of his wives. He had two wives and he accidentally killed one. And he was so upset about it that he came here and sat on this beach for a while, and later on moved out into the water. One of his wives came to the beach looking for him and she travels up and down through these sand dunes here, calling out to him. And sometimes takes the form of a bird and flies over to see him (Barnes 1989:873).

A 1931 newspaper article headed, 'Aborigines Idea of Earth Tremor', reported that the 'Larrakeyah blacks of Northern Australia, have their own theory of the cause of the earth tremor that occurred at Darwin on Saturday night. At Casuarina is a large stone close to the sea. They believe this to be the King God, the first Aborigine and the creator of all others. Occasionally the tides reach up to the stone, and the Aborigines state that the King God must have turned over in his sleep - 'Big fish been bite 'um,' thus causing the earthquake' (*The Adelaide Advertiser*, 31 March 1931:9). For many Aboriginal people in Darwin the belief that Dariba Nungalinya will cause danger if disturbed continues to be strong. In 1975 George Mungalow requested:

Please tell that Government that nobody touch that old man, him very important, it is very dangerous to touch him. You break him, all Darwin die, everybody. Not even white fella or police can touch him. You can walk around or take picture but no touching or breaking, it is too dangerous. You tell that Dick Ward, he know me, him my brother ... I know judge when little boy, he know that story, he should help us. We are very much afraid. Please tell him that nobody touch that rock or blow it up or something. Do not walk on it or take stone away. Please help us boss and that judge. This too important. Thankyou (in NTRS 75 (1)).

Casuarina Beach FUN DAY
OLD MAN ROCK RACE

(NUNGALINYA)

Lowest tide of the year
17 October Sunday
10.00 am

Sandcastle tug of war helicopter rides kites
stalls refreshments land boat races lots more

AMPOL

BEACH SPRINT
\$1000 PRIZE

Pink Panther Printing

Enquiries Darwin Surf Club
Nominations at Ampol Stations

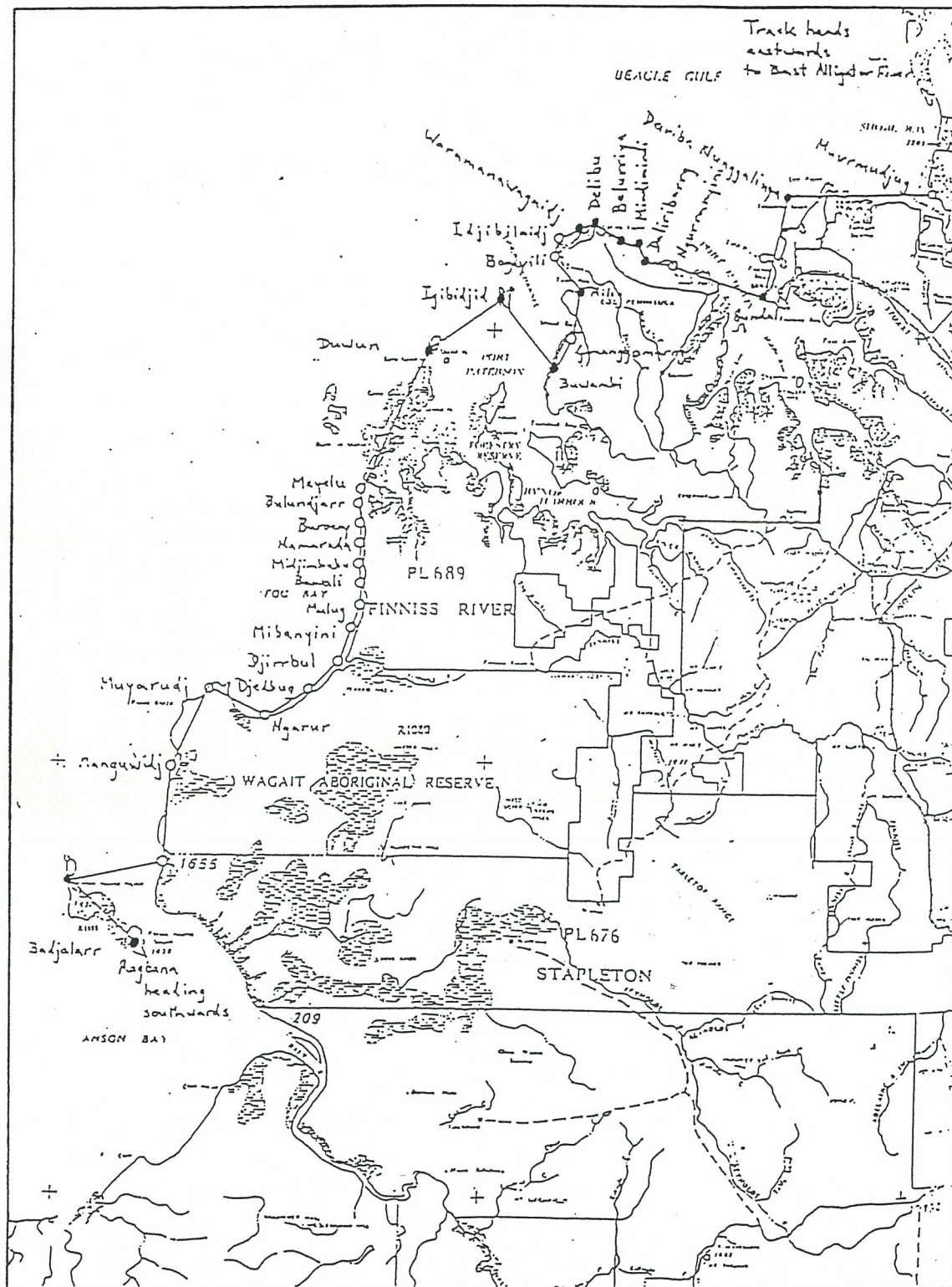
8. Advertisement for the Annual Darwin Surf Club 'Fun Day' which has as its focus a race to Dariba Nungalinya.

The idea of the Darwin Port Authority placing warning beacons on the rock alerting boats to the potential shipping hazard of the rock therefore made the Larrakia especially apprehensive. Recognising that boats needed to be aware of the potential danger it was suggested to the Interim Aboriginal Land Commissioner, who heard evidence concerning this site, that beacons be erected on either side of the rock rather than actually on it and that the Larrakia hold an appropriate ceremony for the erection of these beacons (Wilders 1975). In 1982 the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Authority approved the registration of Old Man Rock as a sacred site which meant that it is now protected under special legislation and permission from the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority is required to go near the site (Ritchie 1982). *Bunji* celebrated, 'One hundred and thirteen years ago, white settlement began in Larrakia country. At last settlers have decided to recognise and protect Daribah Nungalinya!' (*Bunji*, January 1982).

This recognition has not transcended to the Darwin Surf Life Saving Club who, on the lowest tide of the year, holds a Casuarina Beach Fun Day which features a 'fun run' to 'Old Man Rock (Nungalinya)'. It is a popular event and many partake in the festivities which usually result in people climbing over the rock. Last year's event was billed a 'total success' as 'hundreds of people flocked to Casuarina Beach to take part in the rare opportunity of walking the 2.5km to Old Man Rock' (*NT News*, 18 October 1993). However, one girl was stung by a box jelly-fish, another received cuts on her feet from coral on the rock and a woman and two children were stranded on the rock as the tide turned (*NT News*, 18 October 1993). Topsy Secretary received news of the event and accidents with disbelief and a sense of foreboding (pers. comm. 1994). After a recent unexplained boat accident near the rock Secretary spoke to a local newspaper of her concerns that many Darwin people might be unaware of the awesome power of Old Man Rock, 'Dariba Nungalinya is a real sacred site. It's not a joke. People might think it's superstitious but it's not, it's real' (*NT News*, 30 April 1994). Perhaps the site needs to have more constant monitoring and attention drawn to its cultural significance. In addition further attempts could be made by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority to negotiate with the surf club certain conditions for holding the annual fun day.

Gundal

During 1975 the Interim Aboriginal Land Commissioner also heard evidence pertaining to the cultural significance of the Larrakia ceremonial site, Gundal. Information presented to Justice Ward during the inquiry from the traditional owners showed the site to be a traditional initiation ceremonial site barred to women and young people. As Darwin developed, ceremonies which required more privacy were conducted at more distant locations although as late as 1927 a newspaper article detailed that a 'tribal ceremony ... with all due solemnity and prescribed rites according to the ancient custom was brought to a successful conclusion on Wednesday last ... the whole business lasted about two feller months and after a lengthy sojourn along bush it finish up along Point Emery' (*The Northern Standard*, 10 June 1927 in Northern Land Council 1979). However, with the positioning of the Larrakeyah Army Barracks on the site during the second world war the site was no longer used as a ceremonial ground (*Bunji*, July 1975). The Gwalwa Daraniki Association's submission to Justice Ward urged that Emery Point 'be preserved for all time as open space in the trust of Aborigines who will be able to ensure that its religious significance will always be protected and respected'. The Gwalwa Daraniki Association did not want to restrict public access to the area except on particular days nominated by Aborigines. It was further advised that the area be under the control of Aboriginal trustees and that the area be used as a naturally landscaped park with a plaque erected to ensure the public respect the significance of the area. The Gwalwa Daraniki Association's submission concluded that it was 'unacceptable that this, the heart of Larrakia culture and unbroken history dating back perhaps 40,000 years should not be returned to the tribe as part of the Government's



stated Land Rights policy' (Gwalwa Daraniki Association 1975). After hearing the evidence as to the traditional significance of the site, Justice Ward recommended that the area be granted in perpetuity as a Special Purpose Lease to the traditional owners. Although the Defence Department at first seemed willing to adopt Ward's recommendations any decision on Gundal was delayed.

By 1979 the Minister for Defence decided that the land was of use to the Department and thereby halted any negotiations. This resulted in the traditional owners petitioning the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Authority to protect Gundal. The Authority commissioned anthropologist, Michael Walsh, to prepare a report on Gundal which would give an account of the significance of the area; identify the custodians for the area and those who have an interest in it; outline the wishes Aborigines have for this land and propose some recommendations to the Authority (Walsh 1981:1). Walsh reported that Gundal was part of an extensive dreaming track as well as having significance as a special ceremony site. He recommended that the area be recognised as a sacred site although he warned of this causing conflict between the traditional owners and the Army. As was advised in submissions to Ward, Walsh recorded that the traditional owners wanted recognition of the significance of the area but weren't necessarily interested in making it a prohibited area. Walsh recommended that a sign be erected as suggested by the traditional owners; that the offer of limited access as proposed by the Army be accepted but open to later negotiation; that the custodians be encouraged to visit the area to ensure that the Army is aware that they are operating under an agreement; and finally that the Authority seek more information about Gundal during future negotiations for sites in the Darwin area (Walsh 1981:16). On the strength of Walsh's report and after further study the Authority notified the Department of Defence that 'had it legal competence over Commonwealth land, it would be prepared to designate the area as a 'sacred-site' in terms of the definition of the Act (Ellis 1981). Although Gundal is recognised and recorded by the Authority as a sacred site and access to the site has been negotiated between the traditional owners and the Defence Department, control of the land remains the prerogative of the Commonwealth Government.

Mindil Beach

Another example which considers the importance of Aboriginal heritage in the Darwin area concerns the Mindil Beach and adjacent Diamond Beach Hotel Casino site. The Casino and the weekly Mindil Beach market are extremely popular with local residents and tourists. During the construction of ablution facilities and other 'improvements' in the Mindil Beach area and the building of the Casino a total of thirteen skeletons were unearthed. These 'discoveries' occurred over a fourteen year period and each time such a 'discovery' was made major controversy over the identity of the skeletons erupted. Larrakia, Tiwi and Wadjigan people have maintained that the skeletal remains are Aboriginal and that the Mindil Beach area is a widely recognised Aboriginal burial ground.

Much of the following information about these findings is from varying reports by David Ritchie of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority. In June 1977 workers on a sewerage pipeline at Mindil Beach uncovered skeletal remains from four bodies. A subsequent police report detailed that they had been buried with their skulls towards the beach and covered with sheets of corrugated iron. Less than a week later another skeleton was uncovered in an identical position. The five skeletons were sent to the Forensic Science Section of the Institute of Medical and Veterinary Science in Adelaide. The resulting report showed that the remains were of three men and two women and were all in their late middle age (by European standards) at the time of death and that they had all been buried for more than thirty years. An analysis of the measurement of the craniums by the Director of Forensic Pathology, Colin Mancock, indicated that the skeletons were not of Caucasian origin and that the characteristics indicated the skeletons to be of 'native peoples'. Mancock did not believe the skeletons

to be those of traditional Aborigines because of the lack of dental attrition caused by eating a large amount of grit with traditionally prepared foods. As the skeletons did not show any signs of bone damage Mancock suggested that death by drowning was a possibility.

Just over a year later three more skeletons were unearthed in a similar condition and position to those preceding them. The skeletons were again sent to Adelaide for investigation. This was carried out by Forensic Pathologist, Ross James, who found that the remains were those of one man and two women and concurred with the earlier findings that the remains were not European. James felt that the skeletal remains were possibly Indonesian, and that death could have been caused by drowning. He did not discount the possibility that the remains could have belonged to Australian Aborigines except that 'some features appear unusual' (Ritchie 1989:2). In November 1980, a further three skeletons were unearthed during work at the Mindil Beach Casino site. The skeletons were found in the same position as those preceding these and again the remains were sent to Adelaide for investigation. Mancock subsequently reported that the remains were not Caucasian and that 'the differentiation between Australian Aborigines and Indonesian Natives is difficult on anthropometric measurements, as it is believed that both groups have a common ancestral stock'. Mancock maintained that the 'remains represent a group of Indonesian fisherman who died an accidental death after settlement of the Darwin area' (Mancock in Ritchie 1989:2).

Although several media reports and local authorities accepted as fact the forensic reports suggesting that the remains were of Indonesian origin many Aboriginal people from this region challenged this interpretation. Margaret Rivers, a senior Wadjigan woman, sent a letter to the Federal Member for the Northern Territory, Grant Tambling, stating that she knew of many burials of Aborigines in this area and requested that the area be identified 'so that future development does not impinge on the area and cause embarrassment to local Aboriginal people' (Rivers in Ritchie 1989:3). Ritchie, together with Rivers and Larrakia elder, Bobby Secretary, compiled a list of twenty eight names of Larrakia and Wadjigan people they personally knew of buried in the area. Ritchie then collected more information from senior members of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community in Darwin and ascertained that in the 'course of the investigation, it became apparent that there was strong evidence that the beach area between Myilly Point and Bullocky Point had been regularly used as a burial ground by Aboriginal groups in the Darwin area up until the mid-thirties' (Ritchie 1989:4).

Disregarding continued assertions by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the Darwin community that they had witnessed Aboriginal burials in this area, the official position taken by the Darwin City Council was that the remains were not Aboriginal but of Indonesian fishermen. Ritchie believes that the Council's position was influenced by the forensic reports 'but also no doubt constrained by his [Lord Mayor, Cecil Black] desire to avoid controversy over the casino site, where actual construction was now under way' (Ritchie 1989:7). This stance made it difficult for the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Authority to resolve the issue in a way which would ensure future protection of the site. The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority subsequently proposed that the excavated skeletons be released from the Forensic Science Section of the Darwin Police and that they be reburied in the Mindil Beach area with an appropriate ceremony. It was also proposed that the undeveloped area remain as parkland and a monument be erected notifying the public of the significance of this area. The contractors for the Casino, Federal Hotels, and the Darwin City Council were not in support of these proposals unless it could be conclusively proved that the remains were Aboriginal (Ritchie 1989:8). In addition the Moslem community became involved because of concerns that the remains may have been of Indonesian Moslems (Ritchie 1989:8). Growing controversy and pressure to resolve the situation resulted in the instigation of a full Coroner's Inquiry into the matter and it became the onus of the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Authority to prove that the bones were Aboriginal (Ritchie 1989:10). After extremely lengthy legal proceedings and a full examination of

the historical and anthropological research, the Coroner's Court finally found that three of the skeletons were 'fully Aboriginal' while the other five were of mixed descent involving Aboriginality (Ritchie 1989:12).

During the proceedings of this case another skeleton was unearthed at the Mindil Beach Casino site. This event was kept quiet by the company building the Casino and by the Police and was not mentioned in the local media. At the expense of Federal Hotels, all the skeletal remains were reburied with a ceremony which involved the erection of Pukamani poles on a memorial island near the Casino. At that stage the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority concluded that it was a 'successful resolution of a potentially difficult and divisive situation' (AAPA Annual Report 1982-3:16). Yet, in spite of the agreement between the Authority and the Darwin City Council that consultation with the traditional owners must take place before work was undertaken in this area, another skeleton was unearthed at the Mindil Beach site in February 1992. This skeleton was identified as female and buried approximately 50 years ago. The bones were reburied according to Larrakia ceremony and a burial plaque and monument now highlight the significance of this area (see photographs 31 & 32).

"We lived on the corner of the Esplanade and Bennett Street and the main Larrakia camp was at Lamaroo Beach. The Tiwi would come in their canoes and meet the Larrakia at Mindil Beach which was then buried in very dense jungle. They would line up across the beach facing each other with barbed spears ready and then the fight would begin. It would go on for two or three hours sometimes and then end as suddenly as it had begun. I once saw five killed in one battle, 4 Tiwi and 1 Larrakia. The Tiwi always buried their dead in the dense jungle near the beach but the Larrakia usually took their dead somewhere else. Roy Green and I used to watch the battles by climbing the coconut palms. There were hundreds of them and we used to barrack for the Larrakia. I think that it is a scandal that the casino is being built up there. What would white people do if the Tiwi went to Adelaide River and dug up those graves? The area should be made into a scenic garden to commemorate the native war graves" (Vern Marsh recorded by Barbara James in Ritchie 1989:19).

Lyn Riddett and David Ritchie have written excellent papers on this subject which focus on the particular events of each 'discovery', the subsequent legal proceedings and why or how such a thing was able to occur. Riddett asks why the desecration of the site occurred on so many separate occasions and questions the impact of social memory on such events. According to Riddett, there were either 'too few links in the chain of oral memory to allow the site to become a feature in non-Aboriginal social memory' or 'it would appear that, on the whole, the non-Aboriginal community placed no value on keeping the memory of Mindil Beach as a burial site' (Riddett 1995:41). In a broader analysis of the construction of 'history' in settler societies Riddett questions how the history of a community is maintained? and who maintains the memory upon which that history is built? (Riddett 1995:38). For Riddett, the non-Aboriginal appropriation of the site has resulted in any social memory connected with it primarily relating to settler activity (Riddett 1995:40). The reality that it has not usually been social memory or oral history which determines 'what is history' is also an important part of the equation.

Riddett also suggests that as Darwin is perceived as a public service town it is subject to both fluctuations and transience within the work force. For Riddett, 'transience exaggerates the effect of an especially selective social memory'. People who may have provided challenges and variety to social memory move on from Darwin and the notion of transience has become so much a part of the social fabric of Darwin 'that even those who stay are affected by it, they do not have to 'own' their past actions (Riddett 1995:45). Riddett further suggests that all communities 'if left unchallenged, will construct a history based on social memory which ignores uncomfortable and negative 'facts'. This, together with a 'process of social amnesia ... allows the separation



Photograph Thirty: Mitbul (Prince of Wales), Lena Henry, Jack Phillips (L to R) at launch of Bill Day's *Bunji: a story of the Gwalwa Daraniki movement 1994* (photograph by Robin Hooper ©)



Photograph Thirty-one: Plaque marking the Mindil Beach Burial Ground monument



Photograph Thirty-two: The Mindil beach Burial Ground monument



Photograph Thirty-three: Fred Fogarty's camp, 1995

between the groups to continue; it sanctions the separation of settler social memory from Aboriginal social memory; it reinforces the settler identity as a group which continues to struggle against the odds; and it privileges settler history over a more comprehensive and inclusive history' (Riddett 1995:45). The strong evidence provided during the investigation as to the area being a known burial site also leads Ritchie to question the 'ethnocentric selectivity of our perception of history' (Ritchie 1989:4).

This privileging of certain aspects of history and selectivity in what constitutes the 'historical' for Darwin aided the public as well as officials in believing that the skeletons were anything but Aboriginal. Such things as Forensic Scientists suggesting that the skeletal remains were not Aboriginal because of the lack of dental attrition could be explained by the historical knowledge that Aboriginal diet and cooking methods within the Darwin area underwent changes after colonisation and would have affected levels of dental attrition. If the knowledge that there were territorial fights between neighbouring Aboriginal groups; that ceremonies were performed on particular areas of lands; that earlier this century Aborigines were not permitted to bury their dead in the designated town cemetery; and that the historical control of the movement of Aboriginal people in the Darwin area meant that the Mindil Beach area was used extensively by Aboriginal people after colonisation (and most probably before this) were part of an accepted, all encompassing history it would have made it difficult for officials to challenge the identity of the skeletal remains.

The Kenbi Land Claim

Questions of identity and Aboriginal traditional rights in the greater Darwin area have also come into focus because of Aboriginal land rights legislation. While the struggle to have Kulaluk recognised as an official Aboriginal living area was being waged the passage of the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976 made possible a claim to vacant crown land on the Cox Peninsular and nearby islands by traditional owners belonging primarily to the Larrakia and Wagaitj language groups. In March 1979 the Northern Land Council made a formal application to the Aboriginal Land Commissioner to claim an area of land including the Cox Peninsular and adjacent islands - the Kenbi¹ Land Claim. Prior to this, in December 1978, the Administrator of the Northern Territory had made regulations under the Town Planning Act to extend the Darwin town boundaries to take in the Cox Peninsular². As the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act precluded the claiming of land within a town boundary the Kenbi Land Claim was in effect nullified. The Northern Land Council challenged the validity of the NT Administration being able to extend the town boundaries in the High Court which subsequently ruled that the Aboriginal Land Commissioner could examine the purpose for which the regulations were made in order to determine whether they were valid and whether the claim should proceed. The Aboriginal Land Commissioner, Justice Olney, found in 1989 that the regulations were made 'for the purpose of defeating the land claim and therefore did not represent a valid exercise of power under the Town Planning Act' (Blowes 1991:15). Ten years after the submission of the original claim and after the death of several key traditional owners the Kenbi Land Claim was heard by the Aboriginal Land Commissioner, Justice Olney.

Many changes including a broader constitution of the local descent group were found in the revised Kenbi Land Claim submission. The Aboriginal Land Rights legislation has demanded that both Aborigines and non-Aborigines 'develop and articulate definitions of a unique Aboriginal identity' (Jacobs 1988). This, together with the frustrations

¹ Kenbi, a Wadjiginy word, refers to a mythological dreaming track which links the principal islands in the area to the Cox Peninsula. From Belyuen the dreaming track crosses to Kulaluk (KLC 1979, 165). In the Wadjiginy language 'Kenbi' also means crocodile, tunnel and bamboo (didgeridoo) (KLC 1979, xvii).

² Extending the town boundaries meant that the town of Darwin went from covering an area of 142 square kms to 4,350 square kms (Walsh 1989).

brought about by the NT Government's dealings of the Kenbi Land Claim and a history of legislation designed to distinguish between particular groups of Aborigines, has resulted in questions of identity, rights to the land and recognition of traditional ownership status continually being challenged by disparate groups within the Darwin region. From an outsider's perspective it seems that what is really being questioned is not the legitimacy of Larrakia identity but who has the rights to control a particular resource - in this case, the land on which Darwin is situated and its immediate surroundings. The challenging of urban Aboriginal identity by non-Aborigines is also about protecting conceived non-Aboriginal rights to areas which have been heavily settled.

The Aboriginal Land Commissioner found, after hearing the Kenbi Land Claim that '[u]pon inquiry being made into the application I find that there are no traditional Aboriginal owners within the meaning of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* of the claim area or any part of it'. Olney's decision was based on being unable to find a group who possessed a common spiritual affiliation to any site on or relevant to the claim area. Nevertheless, Olney did recommend to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs that '[n]otwithstanding my findings as to traditional Aboriginal ownership ... I recommend ... that in the very special circumstances of the case he use his good offices to negotiate with the Government of the Northern Territory to obtain for the use and benefit of the descendants of the Larrakia people, sufficient areas of suitable land on the Cox Peninsula as may be necessary to satisfy the reasonable aspirations of those people to maintain and enhance the cultural traditions of their ancestors' (Australia 1991). A damning report following the release of Olney's findings claimed that the finding:

was an indictment on our community ... If the Commissioner was right, then the Land Rights Act requires amendment. An Amendment to ensure that the definition of traditional Aboriginal owners is, as it was thought to be, flexible enough to cover a broad range of Aboriginal cultures and patterns of social organisation including what is left of the traditions of those most ravaged by non-Aboriginal contact (Blowes 1991).

The Northern Territory Government has continued to negotiate with the Northern Land Council over the land in question but the neither the claimants nor the Land Council have been satisfied with the deals offered by the Government and have preferred to await the outcome of a repeat trial of the claim - which is currently in progress (see Neate 1989; Advise 1989; Walsh 1989 & Blowes 1991). The resolution of the Kenbi claim in favour of the traditional owners would be an eminently tangible expression of a mature, multi-racial society's recognition of the importance of history in the continuing relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups today and would suggest a willingness to reconcile past relationships between the newcomers and indigenous Australians.

The Significance of Naming

There are means of ensuring that Aboriginal history or sense of place or perception of landscape is not stifled by non-Aboriginal perspectives. The act of naming suggests what and who is important in the ongoing construction of an image or identity for a particular place. Sometimes the use of Aboriginal names or words is a mere appropriation of Aboriginal culture with no real respect for or understanding of that name. For example a new housing estate on the outskirts of Darwin has been named 'Bellamuck' after a traditional owner in the Darwin area when Darwin was colonised. It is a great irony that this new housing estate has recently been mooted as the focus of a potential Larrakia native title claim³. Even so, the importance of representation in

³ In July 1994 the NLC, on behalf of the Larrakia people, lodged an application for native title over land in the Palmerston area. Larrakia Association President, Billy Risk, 'said the Larrakia were not anti-

naming places and creating an identity for a place is shown in a paper presented to the ICOMOS⁴ conference by John Ah Kit. Ah Kit tells the story of the Northern Territory Government recently deciding to name a park on the corner of Bagot and Totem Roads after the Queen mother. As Ah Kit states:

The naming of a park in Darwin after an elderly member of the British royal family must have been a puzzle to most Territorians, but to many Aboriginal people in Darwin it was deeply offensive. And it was offensive not just because the park was to be named for a member of the ruling family that dispossessed our people 206 years ago, but because the site selected by the Government has important historical associations for many Aboriginal families in Darwin (Ah Kit 1994:17).

This particular park was the former site of the Retta Dixon Home where 'half-caste children', taken away from their families, were raised. About a week after this announcement a group of Aborigines staged a 'dawn raid' on the park and erected a sign proclaiming that the park was to be re-named Karu Park' - Karu being a Gurindji word for child. This was seen as necessary by the Aboriginal community as 'the experiences of those of our people who went through Retta Dixon continue to shape today's Darwin Aboriginal community' (Ah Kit 1994:17).

Ah Kit points out that aspects of Aboriginal culture which have been deemed significant to Australia's heritage are those which can be marketed, '[t]here's lots of rock art around, you don't have to pay copyright on it, and it doesn't pose difficult questions about the situation of Aboriginal people today' (Ah Kit 1994:18). According to Ah Kit it is because much of the last two hundred or so years of Aboriginal heritage is about colonialism and its affects on Aboriginal people or about Aboriginal resistance to colonialism that makes 'the heritage industry uncomfortable' (Ah Kit 1994:18). Ah Kit asks 'Why is there this blindness to the Aboriginal part of the Northern Territory's heritage?' and recounts the story of an Aboriginal arts and crafts organisation in Katherine attempting to 'promote wider understanding of Aboriginal heritage'. The organisation lodged a proposal with the local tourism association which involved funding the design, production and erection of approximately thirty signs around the town which would show the traditional significance of sites in this area to the local traditional owners. The proposal was referred to the Katherine Town Council who 'refused permission for the project on the grounds that it would foster division in the community' and because 'people might take pot shots at the signs with rifles' (Ah Kit 1994:19). That is, 'to acknowledge Aboriginal heritage *at all* was something that *would* provoke hostility' (Ah Kit 1994:19). For Ah Kit, this 'blindness' stems from the fact that Aboriginal heritage is a 'living heritage ... not something that can conveniently be stuffed into a museum and forgotten or viewed as mere ethnic curiosities, or relegated to the 'Dreamtime' of rock paintings and so on'. Just as the rock art in Kakadu depicts ceremony or cultural practices which continue to have meaning for Aborigines today so too do sites like Retta Dixon. 'People choose to be blind to this living heritage because it confronts them with a shared history of colonialism in the Northern Territory - and it makes them uncomfortable' (Ah Kit 1994:19).

Marcia Langton suggests that although certain aspects of Aboriginal culture such as art and music have to some extent been appropriated by non-Aborigines, they have also been important mediums through which Aboriginal people have formed a power base from which to communicate to non-indigenous people an indigenous world view. In terms of changing the way 'other Australians think about things - Australian identities, Australian landscapes, and cultural differences' - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists have made a significant impact (Langton 1994:43-44). Prominent Darwin based

development ... But we wish to ensure that our native title rights are recognised and properly taken into account' (NT News, 28 July 1994).

⁴ The International Convention on the Management of Sites.

entertainers, The Mills Sisters, have played an important role in highlighting Darwin Aboriginal history through their performances. Langton suggests that '[i]f as a nation, we are to continue moving toward a genuine celebration and utilisation of our cultural diversity, and towards a reconciliation with Australia's indigenous cultures' several measures need to be initiated. Langton recommends the introduction of culturally appropriate copyright and trademark laws; cultural mapping across the country; increasing the general levels of awareness of indigenous plant and animal foods which includes their nutritional, medicinal, aesthetic, environmental, spiritual and potential commercial values; the provision of funds for the recovery of bush foods, fibres, oils and medicines; and the return of items of cultural significance to their indigenous owners under a joint management system (Langton 1994:44).

Lorraine Williams, a Larrakia woman based at the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory, is currently working with some senior traditional owners to establish a register of indigenous plant names and uses in the Darwin region. In addition, some Larrakia representatives have travelled to South Australia to view the museum's material culture collection from the Darwin area. It is expected that funding will soon be available to establish a Darwin Aboriginal cultural centre which could see some of these items finally being displayed in the place where they are actually from. The Northern Territory Museum of the Arts and Sciences recently funded a position for a Larrakia person to research and write the text for a forthcoming exhibition of Larrakia history, artefacts and artwork. People from Kulaluk recently painted poles in Darwin's Botanical Gardens highlighting the Larrakia and Aboriginal plant use walk in the gardens which stretches from the top of the garden to Mindil Beach. Financial assistance has also been given to Aboriginal artist Donna Brown to assist the Kulaluk community to prepare their float for the annual Bougainvillea Parade (see photograph 26).

In addition to the return of items of cultural significance to their traditional owners, displays of cultural heritage and the recording of information from traditional owners another means of ensuring that Aboriginal history secures a significant place in Australian history is by promoting Aboriginal people gaining access to and having control of records which are about them held in libraries and archives throughout Australia. For Henrietta Fourmile, non-Aboriginal 'ownership of the past' imposes a 'serious barrier to Aboriginal people in the making of our own history' (Fourmile 1989:2). The lack of a cultural policy between Aborigines and Governments which would give Aboriginal people control and ownership of Aboriginal cultural and historical resources as well as facilities to house these comparable with those that house non-Aboriginal Australia's resources is interpreted by Fourmile as 'part of a deliberate strategy of assimilation, the real agenda behind the official policy rhetoric of self-determination' (Fourmile 1989:7). A precedent has recently been set in a case before the High Court concerning the taking of Aboriginal children from their parents which has resulted in the Australian Archives agreeing to make accessible previously restricted documents concerning this policy and employing an Aboriginal research officer to facilitate this process. The Australian Heritage Commission has recently recognised that there is a need for increased consultation with Aboriginal people about Aboriginal heritage. In a report released in 1991 which dealt entirely with the issue of consulting with Aboriginal people about Aboriginal heritage several recommendations were made which if implemented effectively would 'contribute to more adequate protection of the heritage of Australia and of the world's oldest living culture'. Much of the recommendations deal with informing Aboriginal communities about the role and work of the Heritage Commission as well as the significance of the Register of the National estate in conserving Australia's heritage. The appointment of Aboriginal liaison officers, revising the heritage listing nomination forms in consultation with Aboriginal people to increase their accessibility and expanding the role of already functioning parts of the Commission were some of the measures recommended to assist this process (Jonas 1991:26-37).

The granting of the Kulaluk Special Purpose Lease was both an important recognition of Larrakia traditional ownership of the Darwin area and an acknowledgment of some of the needs of Aborigines living in urban areas. Further recognition of sites of cultural, spiritual and social significance to the Larrakia and other Aboriginal people would assist in making more apparent, especially to non-Aborigines, the continuing significance of an Aboriginal landscape in Darwin.