

Banyjima Connection to country

Horace Parker was a remarkable man who maintained his family's connections to country and in later years established the Youngaleena community excised from Mulga Downs. In a eulogy, Louis Warren acknowledged Horace's efforts:

In the early 1960s, Mr Parker started work as a dogger for the Agricultural Protection Board, where he worked for many years.

Importantly, this work kept him in touch with his country at a time when opportunities to leave the Onslow district and go back to station work in Banyjima country were limited.

Mr Parker should always be remembered for the passion with which he pursued the maintenance of his people's cultural heritage and identity. In the late 1980s he began his first steps to bring his family and other Banyjima back to the lands they traditionally occupied.¹

Clarke and Smith (1982:9) wrote: 'The Panjima were consulted about the survey [to Weeli Wolli] at Onslow. Herbert Parker and his brothers were regarded as the most appropriate informants. The survey area was Herbert's grandfather's country...' O'Connor (1996:10) also commented on Horace's responsibilities:

From the commencement of the consultation process it became clear that apprehension over the future of the Springs had been one of the main reasons for Mr [Horace] Parker calling such a wide-ranging meeting. His fundamental position in this regard was that the springs are a cultural resource for all Aboriginal people associated with the Fortescue River catchment area and that, as senior elder for this group, responsibility for protection of these Springs had been placed upon his shoulders.

Tonkinson and Veth (1986) also consulted the Parker family when conducting heritage surveys for the BHP Yandi development. They describe their initial contacts:

By telephone I contacted Mr Slim Parker, in his capacity as Chairman of the Pilbara Aboriginal Land Council and also as a member of the Parker family which speaks for

¹ *North West Telegraph*, Wednesday April 12, 2000, page 7.

Barnjima interests in the Yandicoogina area. Slim had accompanied his father, the late Herbert Parker, into the area during the earlier survey, to be shown the sites there (Tonkinson and Veth 1986:2).

Percy Tucker had died 18 months before Brown conducted his survey for the Great Northern Highway realignment (Brown 1983:6). Brown consulted Herbert Parker who knew the general area around the Lake Gundawuna and Munjina claypan and gorge. He knew of Aboriginal sites in the gorge and wanted these recorded. Brown (p.10) states:

In the present situation, there seems to be no descendants of specific 'owners' of, or of local descent groups from, this area of land. Percy Tucker seemed to have the strongest claim in this regard. Generally the Pandjima have taken responsibility to 'speak for the country'. Specifically Herbert Parker and his two brothers appear to be the 'caretakers' and spokesmen for this area. However, Jerry Wing [Top End Banyjima], who is recognised as being the most authoritative person for an area west of the survey area, seems to have the most knowledge of the southern Packsaddle area.

Brown and Mulvaney (1983b:6) describe the Packsaddle area as 'a "divide" (watershed) with water courses draining north and east to the Fortescue River and south and west to the Ashburton River.'

Greg Tucker, who has ancestors from both families, has worked tirelessly to establish a community and Law Ground on Mulga Downs station. Greg's connection to the area is supported by a statement made by his mother, Blanche Tucker, who told the Seaman Inquiry in 1984:

I was born and rared up [sic] on Mulga downs. Mulga Downs is my cousin Alec Tucker's country. It is my son Greg's country too. It has been handed to them through Aboriginal law. They know all about that country through the old people. I have some country at Mulga Downs through my grandfather but it is not really my place to talk about it. Alec has more right to talk about it. It is my spirit country. (ALS 1984).²

² Statement given to Sandy Toussaint by Blanche Tucker in Roebourne, 1984.