

How did Aboriginal Australians resist British colonisation?

Investigating four case studies at the National Museum of Australia

British occupation of Australia began in 1788.

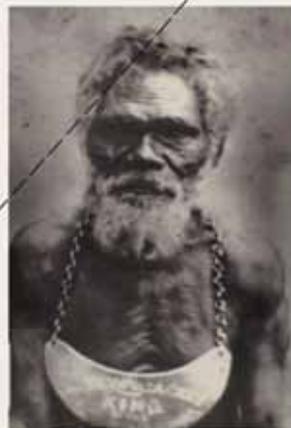
The British authorities believed they were legally entitled to occupy the land and set up a permanent gaol for convicts. Later most immigrants believed that they were legitimate settlers in a new land.

To the Aboriginal people, however, this was their land. Where they had once lived under their own rule they were now forced to accept the laws of the newcomers. The newcomers had not been invited and they were generally not welcomed.

The lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were profoundly changed by the arrival of British colonists in 1788. Lives were lost and land taken as the colonisers attempted to impose new social, economic and religious orders. New animals, plants and diseases were introduced.

The question every Aboriginal person faced was: **how do we react to this situation?**

In this unit we look at the new *Resistance* exhibit in the Gallery of the First Australians at the National Museum of Australia, to explore some examples of the different ways Aboriginal people responded to that question.



kamalyaripa



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IMAGINE THAT . . .

Imagine that you wake up to learn that a foreign and more powerful group has come into your area.

The intruders do not speak your language. They have a different religion and set of beliefs. They have different attitudes and values. They have different and superior weapons. Their way of living interferes with your use of the land and your spiritual beliefs. They quickly outnumber you, and start to take over your land. You fear that they will soon dominate you and change your way of life.

What do you do?

List a variety of possible responses. Briefly outline the main advantages and disadvantages of each possible action. Discuss these in class, and decide which one you think you would choose in this situation.

| Possible action | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|-----------------|------------|---------------|
| | | |
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| | | |
| | | |

How did you protect yourself and your people?

Some of you probably chose to take the most drastic course — *active resistance*.

Others might have thought that it was smarter to resist more subtly, *undermining* the invasion while maintaining your own traditional way of living as far as possible.

Some of you might have decided to *cooperate* (go along with) and even *collaborate* with (actually help) the occupying forces.

These and other responses to occupation are found many times throughout history. You might see if you can find examples of ways people have resisted invasion in different places, cultures and times, and discuss them in class. See if you can list three examples here.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

This unit looks at four examples of Aboriginal people's reactions to the British occupation of Australia that started in 1788.

The four case studies are:

- YAGAN (c.1795-1833) in south-west Western Australia
- FANNY BALBUK (1840-1907) in south-west Western Australia
- BILIN BILIN (c.1820-1901) in south-east Queensland
- KAMALYARRPA JAPANANGKA (or 'Bullfrog') and the 1928 Coniston massacre in Central Australia.

Work through the four case studies. Groups may be allocated one each, or you may want to individually study all four.

After you have examined all the information on a case study complete a summary table like this.

| | Yagan  | Fanny Balbuk  | Bilin Bilin  | Kamalyarrpa Japanangka ('Bullfrog')  |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Who was this person? | | | | |
| Where did the events take place? | | | | |
| When did the events take place? | | | | |
| Why was there a need for resistance? | | | | |
| What was the main type of resistance shown? | | | | |
| How successful was this resistance? Why? | | | | |
| What is your opinion towards this person? | | | | |
| How is this person remembered today? | | | | |

After you explore these case studies in class, use this as a model to investigate what happened in your own area.



Yagan

Below is a selection of the evidence and information in the National Museum of Australia's new *Resistance* exhibit.

- 1 Provide a heading for each source. For example, source A might be: **Yagan killed**
- 2 Re-organise the sources into a sequence that tells the story of this person and his resistance. You might physically cut them out and re-arrange them, or you might number them in order, from 1 to 11.
- 3 Complete the table on page 3.
- 4 In approximately 100 words complete a summary of what this case study tells you about one type of resistance to the foreign invasion that existed among Indigenous Australians.
- 5 To compare your ideas to the NMA display and to find out more about this person go to the website: www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/now_showing/first_australians/resistance/index.html.

A On 11 July 1833, Yagan was travelling with two settler companions — shepherd boys William Keates (aged 17) and his brother James (aged 13). They stopped by the Swan River to make damper and there William shot Yagan at close range.

B *He held a beautifully tapered and exquisitely pointed spear, grasped like a stiletto, about fourteen inches from the point, while the shaft lay over his shoulder.*

George Moore, Perth settler, 1833

C Speartrower 19th century

D Although Yagan trusted the Keates brothers, they were desperate to return to England and there was a large reward on Yagan's head. William was speared in retaliation and died, but James later claimed the reward and returned to England.

E Asked by his elders in the 1950s to look for Yagan's head, Ken Colbung began the search. In Ken's words, 'Yagan was our hero and a great warrior'.

F Early relations between Swan River settlers and Noongar people were complex and often volatile. Yagan, a prominent Noongar man, was involved in early conflict with settlers, but also had good relations with some of them.

In June 1832 Yagan escaped from Carnac Island, where he had been exiled for the revenge killing of two settlers. After another alleged murder, he was declared an outlaw and a large reward was offered for his capture, dead or alive.



G We must take note of Yagan and stand up and fight.

Ken Colbung, 1997



H Flintlock fowling piece of the type carried by farm hands in colonial Perth about 1820s.



I Noongar placenames and territories of south-west Western Australia as told to settler Robert Lyon by Yagan 1832.



J After Yagan's death, he was decapitated. His head was taken to England, preserved as a scientific curio. More than 160 years later, it was located in an unmarked grave in Liverpool. In 1997 Noongar elders brought Yagan's remains home, wrapped in a kangaroo skin cloak.

K Noongar delegation arriving at Perth airport with Yagan's remains 1997.



When you have re-arranged the information and worked out the story, complete the table on page 3 for Yagan.



Fanny Balbuk

Here is a selection of the evidence and information in the National Museum of Australia's new Resistance exhibit.

- 1 Provide a heading for each source. For example, source A might be: **Map based partly on Fanny Balbuk's knowledge**
- 2 Re-organise the sources into a sequence that tells the story of this person and her resistance. You might physically cut them out and re-arrange them, or you might number them in order, from 1 to 10.
- 3 Complete the table on page 3.
- 4 In approximately 100 words, complete a summary of what this case study tells you about one type of resistance to the foreign invasion that existed among Indigenous Australians.
- 5 To compare your ideas to the NMA display and to find out more about this person go to the website: www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/now_showing/first_australians/resistance/index.html.



A Settlers occupied and changed the land. Their actions disrupted Indigenous people's lives. In the 1890s, Perth's railway station was built on a swamp where Fanny Balbuk had gathered eggs and caught turtles and crayfish.



B Traditional food of the area.



C Wanna (digging stick) 1890s.

D Fanny Balbuk's cultural knowledge continues to be relevant to Noongar people today. Her memories and descriptions of Noongar life in the Perth region were used in a Noongar native title claim over parts of the Perth metropolitan area.

E Basket 2008. Noongar artist Sharyn Egan's work deals with Noongar people's sense of loss and displacement, and the trauma that is carried through the generations.



G *When a house was built in the way, she broke its fence-palings with her digging stick and charged up the steps and through the rooms.*

Daisy Bates, 1938

H *To the end of her life she raged and stormed at the usurping of her beloved country.*

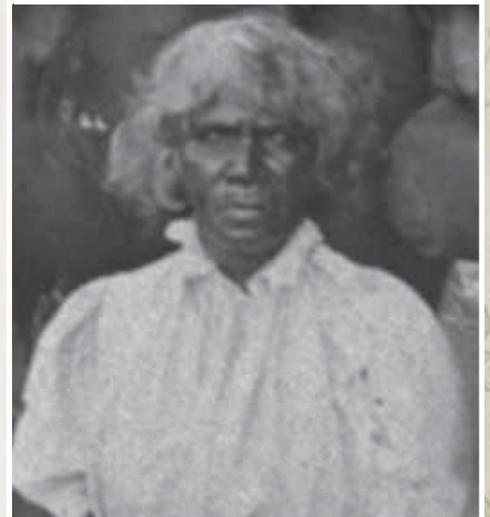
Daisy Bates, 1938

I Sharyn Egan is a Noongar artist and descendant of Joobaitch, Fanny Balbuk's uncle. Sharyn admires Fanny's 'courage and the way she was not afraid to just be herself and damn the consequences'.



F Noongar rally.

J



When you have re-arranged the information and worked out the story, complete the table on page 3 for Fanny Balbuk.



Bilin Bilin

Here is a selection of the evidence and information in the National Museum of Australia's new *Resistance* exhibit.

- 1 Provide a heading for each source. For example, source A might be: **A descendant's comment on Bilin Bilin**
- 2 Re-organise the sources into a sequence that tells the story of this person and his resistance. You might physically cut them out and re-arrange them, or you might number them in order, from 1 to 10.
- 3 Complete the table on page 3.
- 4 In approximately 100 words complete a summary of what this case study tells you about one type of resistance to the foreign invasion that existed among Indigenous Australians.
- 5 To compare your ideas to the NMA display and to find out more about this person go to the website: www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/now_showing/first_australians/resistance/index.html.

A *Look into the eyes of Bilin Bilin ... they tell a story of the burden he was forced to bear when these intruders failed to respect his family and his land. The metal plate and chains are symbols of this burden.*

Ysola Best, Bilin Bilin's great-great-granddaughter, 1993

C Bilin Bilin's descendants.



B Bilin Bilin's breastplate reads 'Jackey Jackey King of the Logan and Pimpama'. This photograph was taken shortly before his death in 1901.



D Bilin Bilin's descendants tell the story of how he used to bring honey and other food to a widowed settler who was raising a large family on her own. He may have carried the food in a sugarbag like this.



E Bilin Bilin learnt English and worked for the settlers, as workers were unlikely to be killed or removed. By doing so he was able to stay in his country and maintain traditions. Today Bilin Bilin's descendants believe their living culture and identity are the result of the hard decisions made by their ancestor.

F Patch of bush between the Albert and Logan rivers, south-east Queensland, in Bilin Bilin's country, where the stone axe on display was discovered.



G Gold Coast.



H Residents of Deebing Creek mission.



I In 1860 a detachment of Queensland Native Police led by Lieutenant Wheeler shot dead members of the Yugambeh at Fassifern. In evidence, Wheeler asserted that the only punishment Aboriginal people accused of offences understood was 'shooting them'.

J This axe is from Bilin Bilin's country. He would probably have grown up using one like it. Split in half, the two pieces were discovered 20 metres apart.



When you have re-arranged the information and worked out the story, complete the table on page 3 for Bilin Bilin.



Kamalyarrpa Japanangka ('Bullfrog') and the Coniston massacre

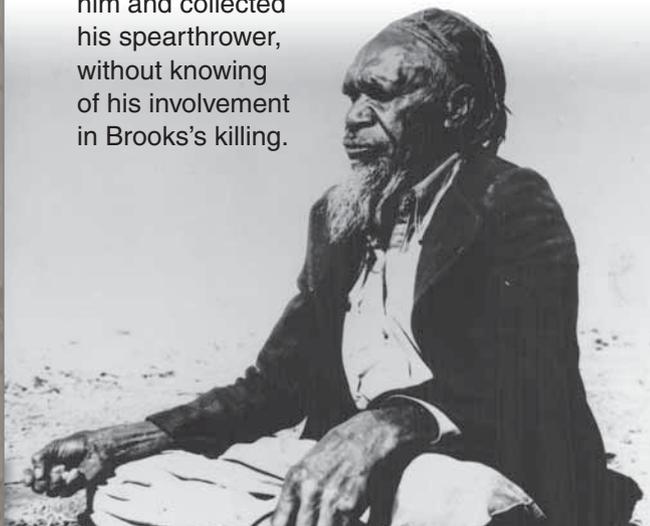
Here is a selection of the evidence and information in the National Museum of Australia's new *Resistance* exhibit.

- 1 Provide a heading for each source. For example, source A might be: **Kamalyarrpa Japanangka ('Bullfrog')**
- 2 Re-organise the sources into a sequence that tells the story of this man and his resistance. You might physically cut them out and re-arrange them, or you might number them in order, from 1 to 13.
- 3 Complete the table on page 3.
- 4 In approximately 100 words complete a summary of what this case study tells you about one type of resistance to the foreign invasion that existed among Indigenous Australians.
- 5 To compare your ideas to the NMA display and to find out more about this person go to the website: www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/now_showing/first_australians/resistance/index.html.

C Brooks's killer was a Warlpiri man, Kamalyarrpa Japanangka ('Bullfrog'). Bullfrog's granddaughter, Rosie Nungurrayi, said in 1975, 'At Yurrkuru my grandfather killed a whitefella. He hit the whitefella because the whitefella stole his wife'. In Warlpiri society breaches of marriage law were considered capital crimes.

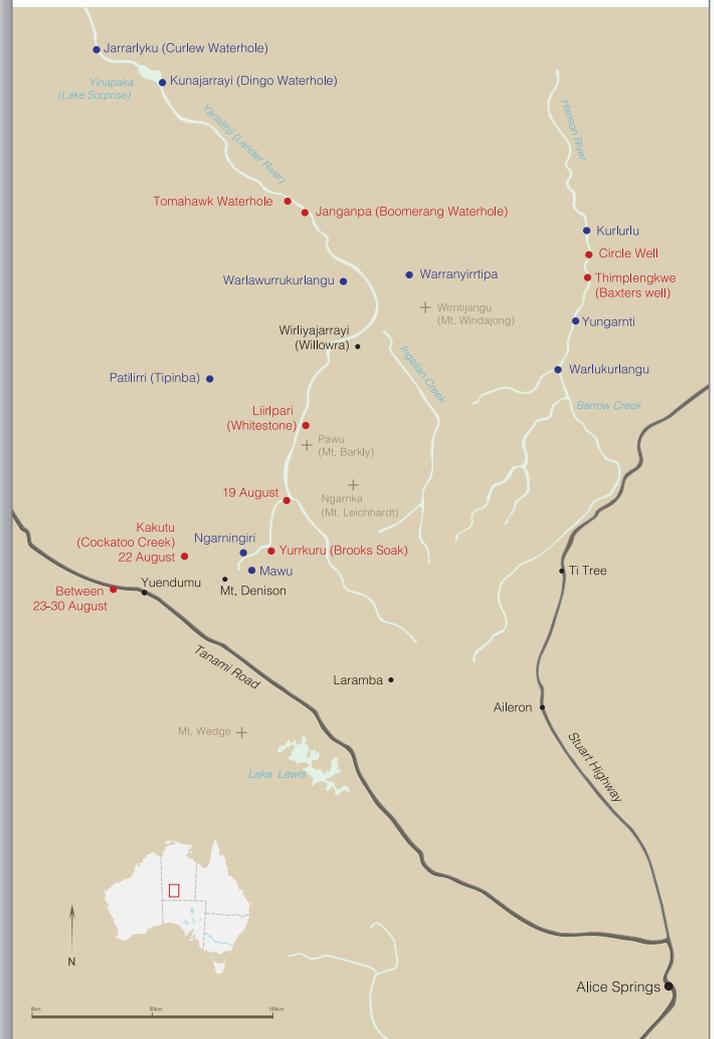
D The Coniston Massacre took place over a wide area of central Australia. Here red dots are places where killings occurred, as identified in the 1928 Board of Enquiry. Blue dots are places where Aboriginal people have identified that other killings occurred.

A Kamalyarrpa (Bullfrog) was never caught or tried for Brooks's murder. Three years later, anthropologists working in the area met Kamalyarrpa. They photographed him and collected his spearthrower, without knowing of his involvement in Brooks's killing.



B *The blacks saw me coming and threw a couple of spears at me. I jumped off my horse and fired four or five shots with my rifle. I do not know whether I hit them or not. I certainly tried.*

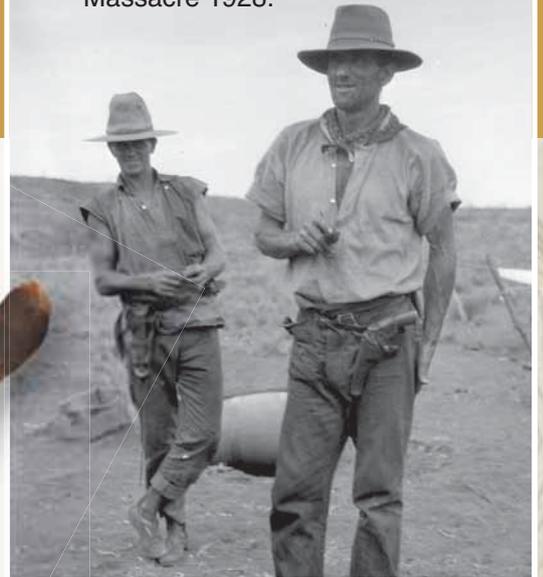
Jack Saxby, 1928 Board of Enquiry



E In August 2003, a commemoration was held to mark the 75th anniversary of the Coniston Massacre. The event was attended by Aboriginal people (survivors and their families), representatives of the Northern Territory Police and descendants of Constable George Murray, who led the reprisal party.



H Jack Saxby, friend of Fred Brooks and member of the reprisal party, just before the Coniston Massacre 1928.



F 2003 Memorial.



I Chert flakes from *Kanti*, a Warlpiri stone knife quarry.



J Kamalyarrpa's spearthrower 1931.

K Hooked boomerang.

M Yuendumu women dancing around monument, 75th anniversary of Coniston Massacre 2003.



G In 1977, Alec Jupurrurla, who was living nearby at the time of Brooks's murder, recalled the event:

'One boomerang he put right through here [indicating throat] and ... he cuttem with stone knife. Finish'.

L Lee Enfield short magazine Mk III .303 rifle of type adopted in 1928 by Central Australian police 1920.



When you have re-arranged the information and worked out the story, complete the table on page 3 for Kamalyarrpa Japanangka.

Conclusions

- 1 What have you learned about the nature of resistance by Aboriginal Australians to the arrival of the Europeans to their area? Discuss your ideas.
- 2 The text introducing the exhibition in the National Museum of Australia reads:

'Duggai gulli yahngu – the whitefellas are here to stay.' (Yugambah community, south-east Queensland, 1872)

The lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were profoundly changed by the arrival of British colonists in 1788. Lives were lost and land taken as the colonisers attempted to impose new social, economic and religious orders. New animals, plants and diseases were introduced.

Indigenous people responded in a variety of ways. Some fought back with weapons. Others developed different strategies to survive this new and hostile presence. Here we present four of these stories.

'Ngulli yahnbai gulli bahn! – we are still here now!' (Yugambah community, south-east Queensland, 1986)

Museum curators have strict limits on the number of words that can be used in exhibitions. This summary contains 104 words. Write your own summary, using no more than 100 words. Compare your description with some others in your class. Discuss the difficulties you had in providing an accurate summary of the display and its ideas in so few words, and the strategies you adopted to try to overcome these problems and limitations.

- 3 There is not a story or case study of collaboration included, only of resistance and accommodation. One example that may seem to be active collaboration by Aboriginal people was the Native Police. Research an example of the Native Police in Australia. Suggest reasons why some Aboriginal people might have chosen this way of responding to the occupation.
- 4 Some history courses ask students to carry out a **site study**. A site study could involve analysing the way a museum represents the response of local Indigenous people to occupation. Use the table on page 52 to help you analyse the National Museum of Australia representation of the issue in this unit. You can also use it for a display in a local or regional museum.

- 4 Statue of Yagan, Perth. Photograph Cindy Hogan
C Photograph Lannon Harley, National Museum of Australia
- 5 I Photographs George Serras and Kipley Nink, National Museum of Australia
K Reproduced courtesy of *The West Australian*
- 6 A Photographs Charlotte Crombie and Lannon Hartley, National Museum of Australia
B Photographs Elizabeth Bright, National Museum of Australia
D Ivan Webster collection, WA Museum. Photograph Lannon Hartley, National Museum of Australia
- 7 E Photograph Lannon Harley, National Museum of Australia
F Photograph Chris Owen
J Batty Library
- 8 B State Library of Queensland
C Rory O'Connor, Yugambah Museum
- 9 F Photograph Hague Best
G Gold Coast City Council
H Yugambah Museum
J Photograph Lannon Harley, National Museum of Australia
- 10 A Northern Territory Archive Service NTRS 1706 CP 3
- 11 E Photograph George Serras, National Museum of Australia
F Photograph George Serras, National Museum of Australia
H Photograph Lannon Harley, National Museum of Australia
I National Library of Australia
K Photograph Lannon Harley, National Museum of Australia
L Photograph George Serras, National Museum of Australia
M Photograph Lannon Harley, National Museum of Australia

SITE STUDY — analysing a museum display

| Aspects to consider | The museum display |
|---|--------------------|
| What does the display show? | |
| Is the historical context explained clearly? | |
| Is the significance of this display clearly explained? | |
| Is there a variety of evidence displayed? | |
| Are the objects displayed authentic for that event or period? | |
| Are the text descriptions clear and informative? | |
| How is the display arranged? | |
| Do the surroundings influence my impression of the display? | |
| Is there a particular message being conveyed? | |
| Is the nature of the event clearly identified? (e.g. am I told if it is controversial or contested? Should I be?) | |
| If so, are various viewpoints clearly and fairly presented? | |
| Do I know where the evidence has come from and what sort of evidence it is? How do I know? | |
| Is it presenting a particular message to me, or is it allowing me to make my own judgements? | |
| Is its purpose to present objects (neutral), or to explain (impartial), or to argue a particular view (partisan)? | |
| At the end, do I feel that I really understand the situation? | |
| My initial impression of the display | |
| My final judgement about the display | |

















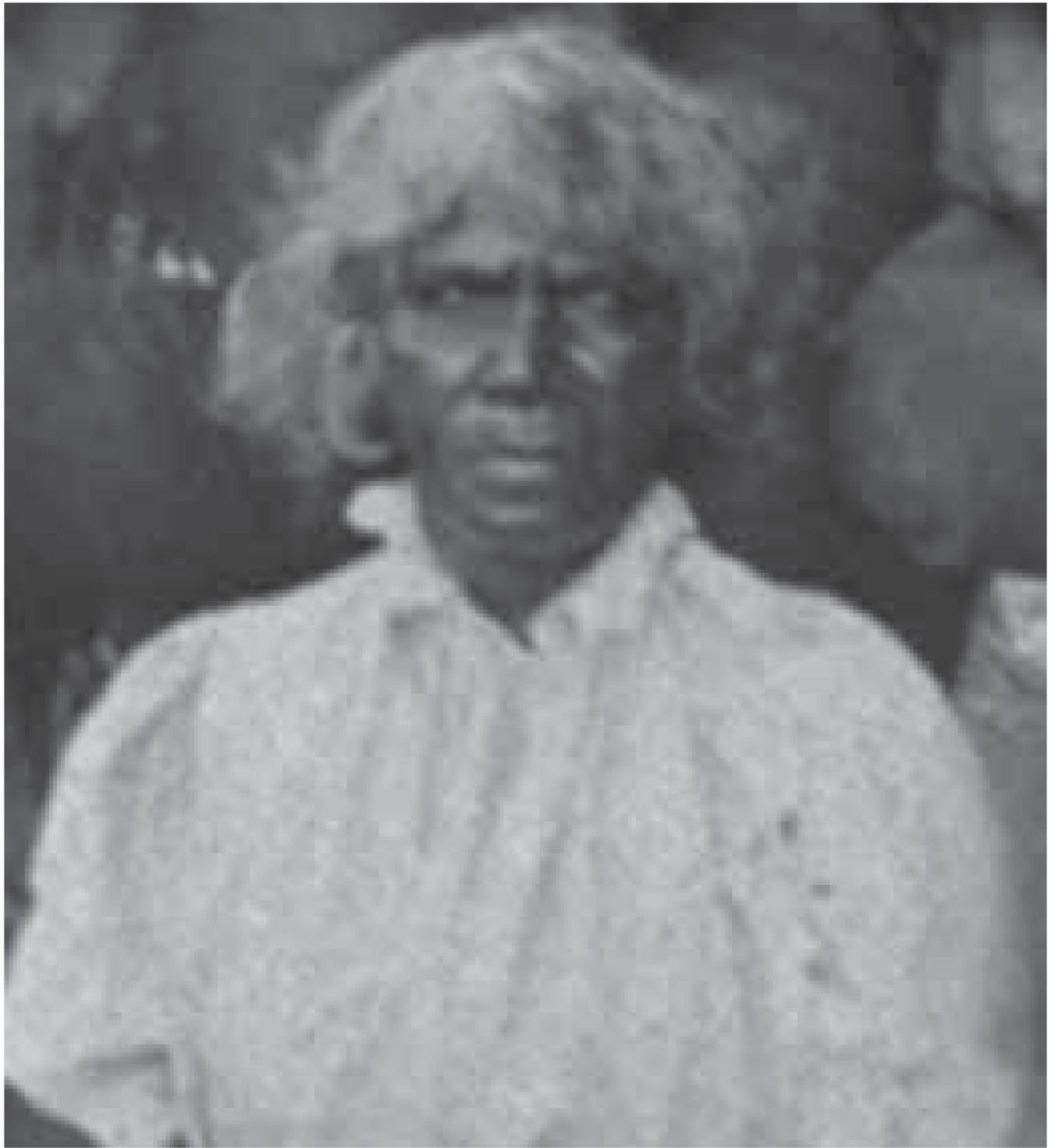




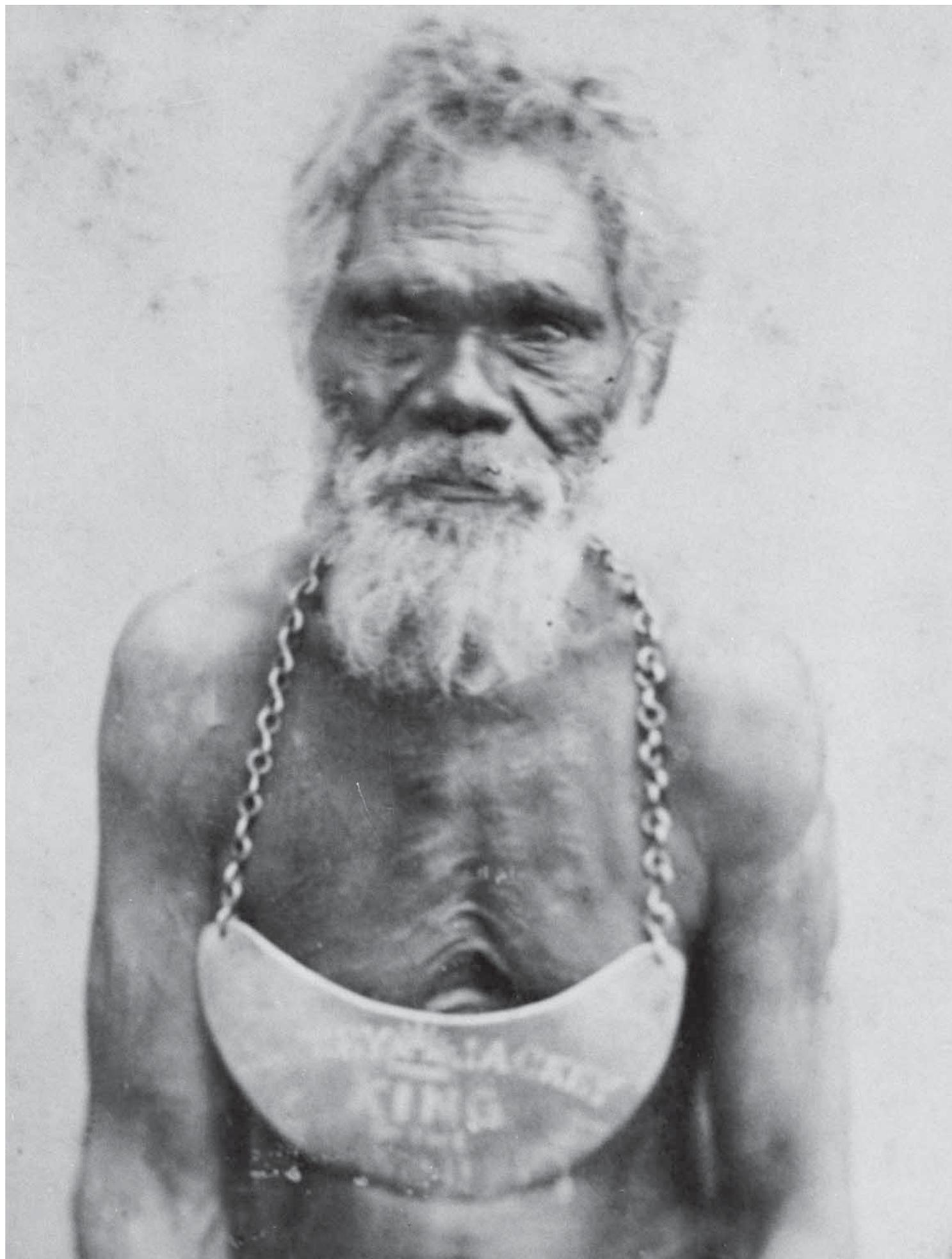














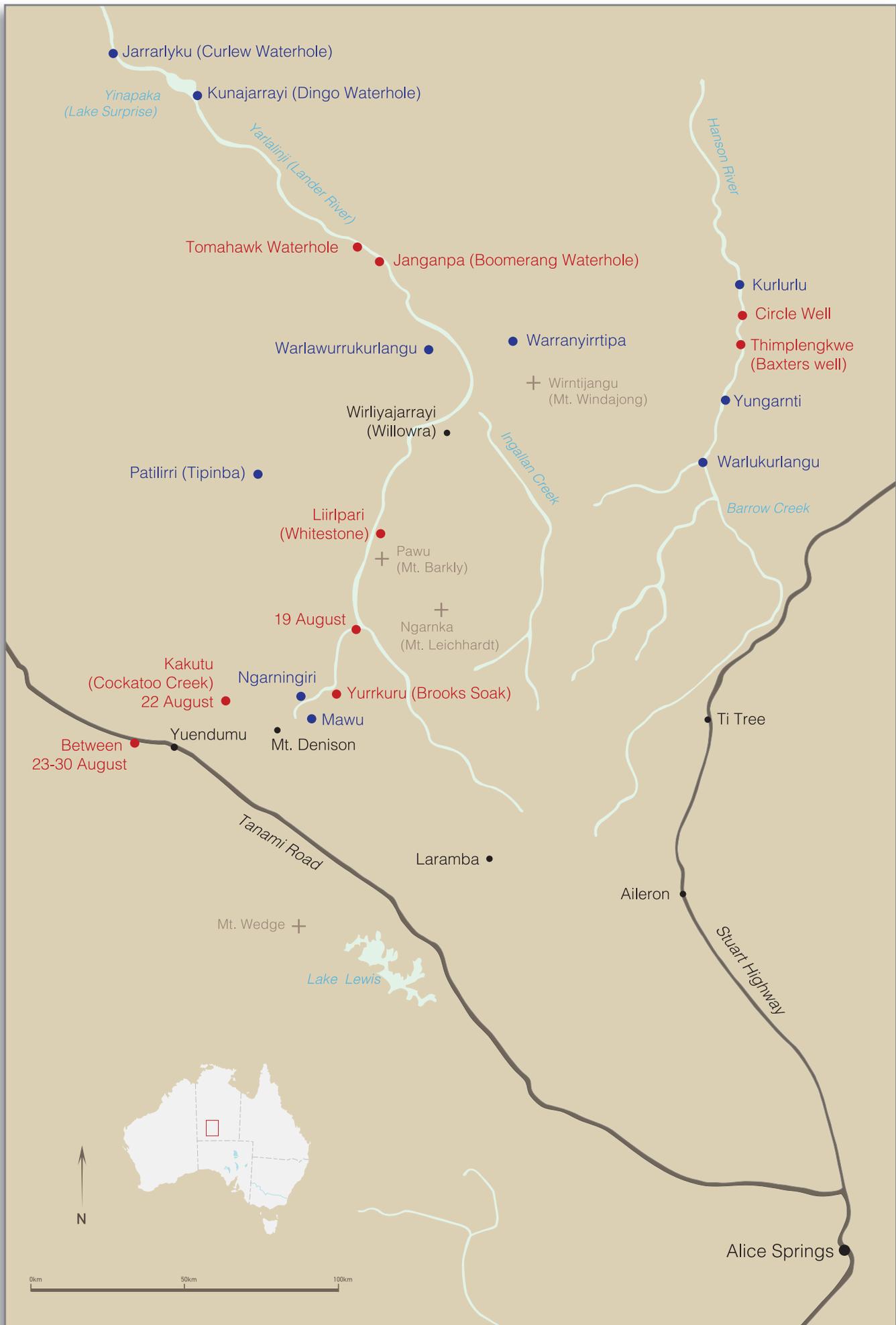














IN 1928 NEAR THIS PLACE
THE MURDER OF FREDERICK BROOKS
LED TO THE KILLING OF MANY INNOCENT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE
ACROSS THE REGION

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM ALWAYS

NGANIMPARLU KAPURNALUJANA MANINGU-NYANYIRNI
TAARNGANGKI-JUKU
NWERN DIENHENH KWETETH ITERL-ARERLANETYENH
AYNANTHE ATEWANTHEPE ETELARERRANTYE INTEMAPERTE

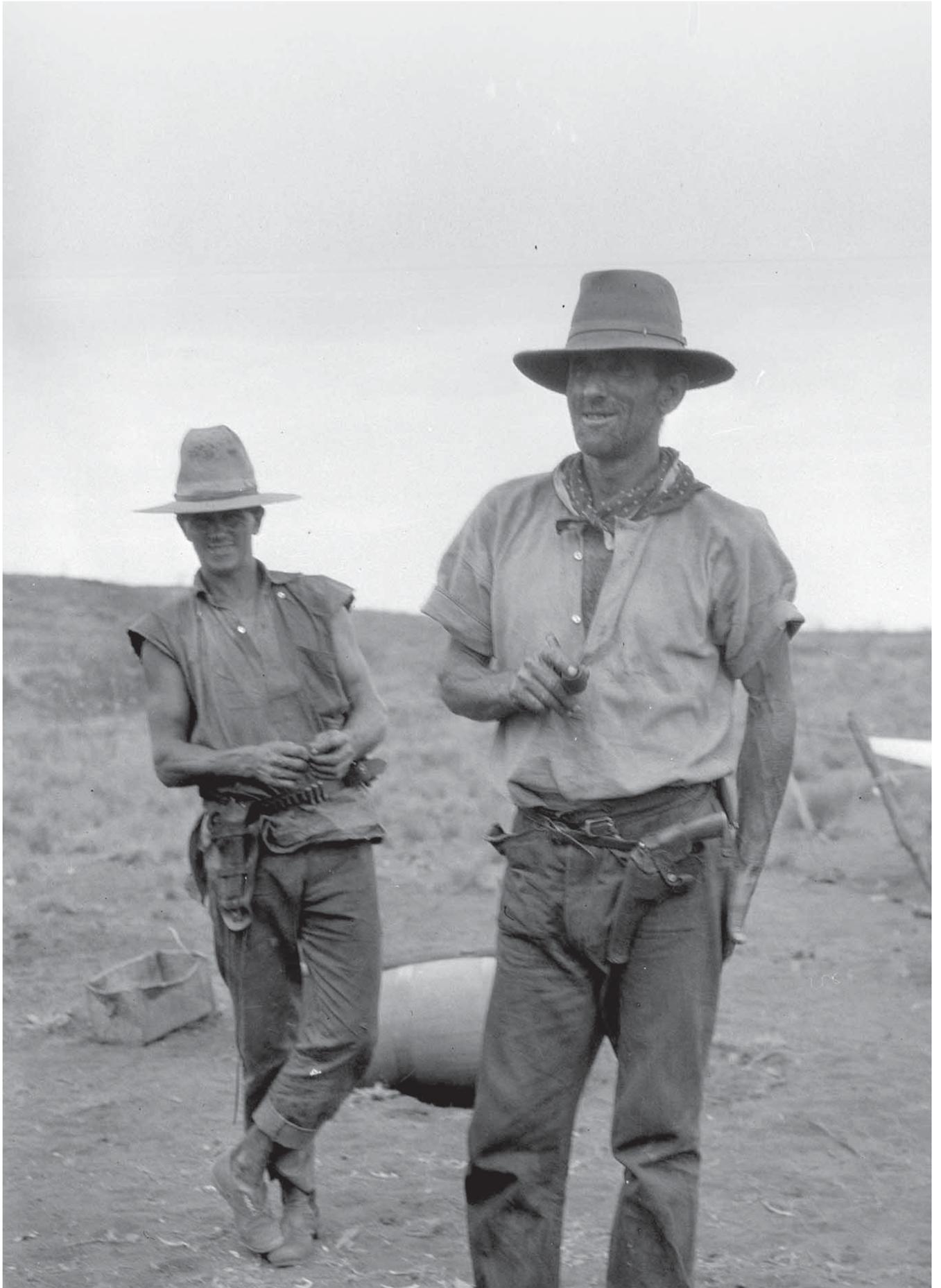
24 SEPTEMBER 2003















IN THIS PLACE, THE PLACE
THE MOTHERS OF PITJANTJARA BRIDGES
LED TO THE ISLANDS OF MANY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE
ACROSS THE REGION
WE WILL REMEMBER THEIR ACTIONS
MURUWUWUWU KUPURUWUWUWU WARRUWUWUWU
TUMUWUWUWUWUWU
WARRUWUWUWUWUWUWUWUWUWUWUWUWUWU
JUNUWUWUWUWUWUWUWUWUWUWUWUWUWU
24 SEPTEMBER 2019