ARABANA AND THE GHAN
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Abstract

ARABANA AND THE GHAN

This thesis explores the interactions in northern South Australia of the Arabana people and the old Ghan railway from 1884 to 1983. The Ghan is the common name for the railway that now links Adelaide and Darwin. This latter destination, however, is only a 21st century development. For most of the period covered by this thesis the railway line extended only from Adelaide or even conceptually from Port Augusta to Alice Springs. In general, a railway was considered a symbol of modernity and European superiority over its colonised peoples. For the Arabana, however, this railway offered opportunities to engage with the white settler society which were denied to other Aboriginal peoples. The Arabana helped survey, construct, service and work on the railway from its beginnings in 1884. By the 1930s, Arabana started to be employed in skilled occupations and had wage parity with white workers. The railway also provided the Arabana with opportunities to travel beyond their country and participate in settler society. As this thesis contends, the Arabana’s experience challenges the widely held views of Australian Aboriginal-white settler relations as being solely marked by exploitation and dispossession. In the Arabana’s contrasting case, a determining factor was the opportunities offered by the Ghan. As the stories of individual Arabana show, they were important contributors in the development and maintenance of one of this country’s most important infrastructure developments while, critically, maintaining connection to country and culture. And this contribution was acknowledged with equal pay starting some forty years before the Equal Wage case of the 1960s.
Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.
Student signature:

(Insert electronic signature) Date: 16/3/2017

The undersigned hereby certify that the above declaration correctly reflects the nature and extent of the student and co-authors' contributions to this work.

Main Supervisor signature: (Insert electronic signature) Date: /2017
Acknowledgements

So many people have helped this project come to fruition. I thank Arabana Elder Reg Dodd, who introduced me to the idea of Arabana benefiting from the Railways. All the people who agreed to be interviewed and have their stories appear. Professor Veronica Arbon, Arabana Academic, was very kind and helpful and introduced me to her wonderful family. And, of course, former head of Ularaka, now Arabana Aboriginal Corporation, Aaron Stuart for undertaking the task of providing an introduction from the Arabana people.

The staff of the National Archives of Australia in Canberra and Sydney, the State Records of South Australia, State Librarians in South Australia, the helpful librarians at AIATSIS, the staff of the Coinda Centre in Port Augusta, Geraldine Mate of the Ipswich Railway Workshops Museum and William Watt, Manager, Land Tenure and Statutory Support, Development Division, Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure, South Australia. Malcolm McKinnon, film-maker, whose six short films about Arabana were very enlightening. Luise Hercus, distinguished linguist of ANU, gave me much time and several volumes, including a comprehensive Arabana vocabulary. Greg Wilson, linguist, was very humorous and full of insights. Mick Garrett patiently drew the several versions of the maps. John Mannion, railway historian and Deane Fergie gave me useful tips.

Especially for many many hours over the past four years, my supervisors for the Monash University thesis Dr Tom Heenan, initially assisted by Karen Hughes and Liz Conor in 2012.

Visits to the National Railway Museum Adelaide and the Ghan Railway Museums in Oodnadatta and Alice Springs were illuminating and indispensable.

Monash University in general and its administration staff who helped me navigate the complexities of contemporary tertiary education.

Finally, I thank my wife Margaret who travelled with me throughout Arabana country and met many of the Arabana people along the way. She has been encouraging and ably helping at all stages.
Map of Arabana Country
Mick Garret 2015.
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Definitions:

**Conductor:** term used in other countries for a guard.

**Fireman:** person who, in a steam locomotive, tends the furnace which powers the engine.

**Ganger:** person in charge of a gang, five or more workers, plus a cook, who travelled the railway line doing maintenance and repairs. They often lived in tents: “the flying gang” or more permanent gangs had houses at 15 Km intervals up and down the line. Some of the houses survive; most along the old Ghan line have been trashed.

**Guard:** person who travels on and ensures the safety of the train, its passengers and freight as it travels the length of the railway line. He or she carries out control and information activities on the train. A guard monitors the carriages or trucks of the train and their equipment, checking on possible defects that might jeopardise the safety of the operation. A guard may check the tickets and issue supplementary fare tickets in passenger trains. He or she may provide information on routes and travel times. He or she can check the lighting and heating in carriages.

**Locomotive Engineer:** steam engine driver.

**Navvy, Fettler:** railway track worker, - these workers install and maintain railway tracks, as well as the tracks that are used in quarries and by the mining industry. They lay and fix the foundations and sleepers for tracks, cut rails to length, install railway switches, and repair and maintain worn or rough rail ends. They can be welders of track. They remove damaged track parts, examine and maintain switch signal lamps and the wheel bearings of rolling stock, and may also assist with the righting of derailed rolling stock. Railway track workers work in both the passenger and freight rail service industries and are therefore required all over the state, from the busy passenger lines to freight lines.
**Train Examiner:** person who inspects rolling stock in railway yards, terminals and stations to ensure adherence to safety standards and operational rules and regulations.

**Yardmaster:** this occupation is responsible for overseeing the operations of a rail yard and assigning duties to workers. These duties include placing and pulling carriages and wagons, switching inbound or outbound traffic, reviewing train schedules, moving railcars, performing inspections and making repairs. Yardmasters ensure that all cargo and railcars safely reach their intended destinations in a timely fashion. They must be aware of any train or rail problems, and plan alternate routes as necessary (http://study.com/articles/Railroad_Yardmaster Job_Description_Duties_and_Requirements.html).
Dedication

To the Arabana people of the south and west of Kati Thanda/Lake Eyre, including the Lake itself, wherever they may now be, and Elders past and present.

Warning:

Deceased Aboriginal Australian persons are discussed and depicted in these pages.
Aaron is currently working at Centacare Port Augusta.

I wish to thank Aaron for writing this introduction and for his time and interest. As well as the prose about our conversations which occurs later in the book, he also gave me and my wife Margaret a driving tour of Finnis Springs with commentary in 2014.

Mike Duke

"Hello every one

My name is Aaron Clayton STUART, I am the son of Rex STUART who has passed away about 15 years ago, currently I am the Arabana Chair and have been for the past 8 years, My grandfather Laurie Stuart was one of the original Native title claimant’s for the Arabana, he also was traditional cultured man who knew a lot of our customs along with being born and raised in the bush, he too has passed away leaving knowledge only to a select few.

I am honoured to write about the Arabana People (Tribe) to describe how important they were into opening up one of the most harshest environment in the world “the Australia’s outback” showing the early explorers and the Afghan Camel trains where water could be found along the sacred paths of the Dreaming Stories that sustained Arabana people for over 40 thousand years leading into the National Railway line thru to Alice Springs in the Northern Territory.
It would be a fair comment to explore the actual life forces that was hidden from many except the Australian Aboriginal only to be found in many Aboriginal tribes stories and song lines creating a path that opened a continent from South to North by the giving water of life, these are the mound springs.

In Arabana country these mound springs are in large volumes sustaining a way of life that was before the Afghan cameleers, pastoralist and the early explorers. The Arabana were connected to this land not for the riches of wealth, money, pastoralism or minerals but to live a way of life that connect them to the earth with an animistic focus that prolonged a greater life expectancies in harmony. This came to an end with the introduction with aristocratic style of ownership from a system that never had the right to claim or take land in the beginning, many times using harsh methods to rid of the Arabana people this included policy and death after being showed the life giving outlets from this large land. When it was realised that this great resource of water was underground and could develop this nation the Arabana simply fell or placed into system that would always oppress them and provide a second class life than what they had using them for what they could do and knew, once this action was completed the remaining Arabana were absorbed into a European Western way of working life mainly on cattle station and the Railways that ran straight thru their land.

Some not many would become great employees to the Railways and the rest would fall back in the new Australian society that treated them different and always changed with the evolution of education and service delivery that seemed to be totally different from the dream time. Away of long ago is slowly being lost like the railways to a new ever
changing landscape that covers all spectrums of life innovative change that the Arabana find it hard to keep up”.

Aaron Stuart
Preamble:

Why am I qualified to write this thesis? I have never worked on railways and I am not an Aboriginal Australian. But I have been involved with the Victorian Aboriginal community since 1987, when I helped establish the Victorian Adult Aboriginal Mental Health Network, the first mental health service for adult Aboriginal Australians. ¹ I subsequently worked personally in the health service from 1998 to 2008, probably helping treat about 1,000 Aboriginal people directly. I started a Special Interest Group in the Victorian Branch of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists and helped develop the curriculum for them on Aboriginal issues in psychiatry. Two academic articles have ensued ²,³. I received the Mark Sheldon Prize from the RANZCP in 2012 for “noteworthy contributions ... to Indigenous mental health in either Australia or New Zealand”. I have visited a number of Aboriginal communities, for example, the Adnyamathantha, Bunuba and Wardaman peoples, learning more since the end of my psychiatric Aboriginal work in Melbourne.

I have written a book, a pseudo-biography, of Arthur Upfield’s fictional “half-caste” Aboriginal Australian detective Bony ⁴, in the course of researching which I

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travelled many areas of Australia talking to Aboriginal people. As a part of this book’s research, in 2010 I was in Marree in northern South Australia, in the country to the west of Lake Eyre, Arabana country. We were touring with Arabana Elder Reg Dodd, his sister Esther Kite and nephew Vincent with their company, Arabunna Aboriginal Tours.

We were on country for a week learning about the Arabana people and their culture. But the whole countryside was littered with reminders of the Old Ghan line. At the end of the week, Reg mentioned that he had worked on the Commonwealth Railways for 26 years, becoming a Train Examiner and only ending his career with them in 1986. I was astonished. No one had ever told me about Aboriginal people working on the railways. I had seen pictures of Aboriginal Australian people selling knick-knacks beside the Indian Pacific railway. I guess I had seen many American movies about the clash between so-called “cowboys and Indians” where the railway was a source of conflict. The idea that Aboriginal people from Central Australia or anywhere else across Australia were involved with the railways as workers was new to me, and sparked my curiosity.

On my return to Melbourne, I delved into the topic. At first I discovered nothing. But as I dug deeper, I discovered so much. Many Arabana had worked on the railway starting even before World War II. Other Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders had worked on the railways but almost entirely away from their own countries, from which much dispossession had occurred. I then asked the Ularaka, now called the Arabana Aboriginal Corporation, members of whom I had by now met, whether they would be interested in the true story of the Arabana and the Ghan being written. They
consented, in writing, and this thesis is the result. It follows the National Guidelines for Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Furthermore, Ethics Committee approval was obtained from the Monash University Ethics Committee. I undertook a number of visits to Arabana country, to the National Australian Archives, the State Archives of South Australia and visited Arabana in Alice Springs, Port Augusta, Adelaide, Darwin, Bendigo and Melbourne.

This thesis explores the largely untold and important contribution of Arabana to the railways of South Australia. The thesis contends that the Arabana had a different history and opportunities to other Aboriginal Australian groups because of the railway. They had helped survey for the new technology’s impending utilisation of their land or, more precisely, a corridor through their land. The arrival of the railway in 1884 was greeted by the Arabana by their labouring upon the lines immediately. The thesis shows that the railway was directly influenced by the Arabana themselves. They were actively involved in linking Australia’s southern cities with the centre of Australia. In this they “over-wrote” their portion of the song lines running from Port Augusta to the Tiwi Islands with that revolutionary technology, the railway. They engaged with the dominant economy in ways quite different to the near-feudal pastoral industry, and were paid equal wages from 1926 onwards, quite different to most other Aboriginal workers in other industries ⁵, and occurring forty years before the Equal Wage case of the 1960s. A rare exception to slavery or trivial wages in the 1860s was David Edgar of Pine Hills Station near Harrow, who paid

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equal wages to his Aboriginal Australian shepherds (signage at Harrow Museum and direct oral information from David Edgar’s descendants), and I discuss the seafarers later.

The resurgent Arabana still live predominantly up and down the old railway line from Darwin to Adelaide and have gained Native Title for much of their traditional country. Twenty-first century Arabana are now involved with the ecological changes associated with global climate change, with green energy projects and re-greening their own country, as well as proselytising about uranium mining and other diverse issues.

The Old Ghan continues to fascinate people. With the Overland Telegraph, which also traverses Arabana country, the Ghan is one of the great infrastructure projects in this nation’s history and among the world’s iconic rail journeys. It has not only linked the country’s southern cities to the centre and the north, but has also been crucial in the nation’s economic development and defence. The commemorative “Anzac Ghan” runs annually from Adelaide to Darwin, commemorating the 20,000 or so troops who took that route to defend Australia during World War II against the likelihood of a Japanese invasion. The “Anzac Ghan” trip not only contributes to the region’s tourism sector, but highlights the national importance of the railway line. The trip includes historical talks on board, and a trip on an old steam train, the Pichi Richi Railway, which travels a part of the Old Ghan line from Port Augusta to Quorn. Many tourists travel the iconic Oodnadatta Track, which parallels the Old Ghan route much of the way, and was originally the service road for the railway. Museums dedicated to the Old Ghan exist in Alice Springs and Oodnadatta, and now in Marree (which opened on 4th November 2016), and old buildings
such as railway stations have been converted into restaurants, telecommunications centres and so on. A couple of settlers’ cottages, spaced every 16 kilometres along the track, are still in reasonable condition, although more could be done to preserve or restore them, while signage about the Ghan Trail is ubiquitous. But celebration of the people who helped construct and maintained the railway line and its trains has been lacking. Hidden within this history is the story of the Arabana who were involved in all stages of the railway’s development.

The thesis commences with a discussion on the development of the railways and how they were perceived as emblematic of both Western civilisation and the British Empire’s progress. The chapter also explores how such progressivist views justified the conquest and dispossession of indigenous peoples, and the proliferation of race-based theories to support the latter’s exclusion from so-called white, civilised societies. As chapter one details, throughout the nineteenth century, the railway was a central symbol of the superiority of the British over lesser races. The thesis explores the paradox that Aboriginal Australians were both rejected on racial grounds as a source of labour, yet needed because of their knowledge of, and ability to work in, country. Yet, as argued in chapter two, their stories have rarely been told. As chapter three shows, Aboriginal Australians were involved in the development of many of the railways in Australia. Chapter four seeks to redress this lack by plotting the history of the Arabana’s dealings with the white settler society and economy.
This provides the context for chapter five which looks specifically at the role of the Arabana in the surveying, construction and maintenance of the Central Australian Railway, also called the Great Northern Railway, nicknamed the Ghan railway, while chapter six examines the railway’s impact on the lives of the Arabana. As the chapter reveals, because the Arabana were deemed essential labour on both the railway as well as the pastoral industry, they had greater opportunities to engage with the settler society and were not as harshly subjected to the strictures of the Aboriginal Protection Board. Chapter seven explores the railway’s impact by detailing the stories of individual Arabana. Through their stories it becomes clear that the railway provided them with the opportunities denied to many Aboriginal Australian peoples. In doing so, the chapter highlights the individual contributions of Arabana people in one of Australia’s most important infrastructure projects and overall history.

Physical and social mobility are outcomes of the railways. Arabana capitalised on this. Having been forcibly moved from their traditional culture to pastoral serfdom they added to their repertoire by casual then permanent work on the railway. They adapted, by gaining an education in Western literacy and numeracy, to win promotions and further opportunities in the dominant white society. It became, as a Nukunu locomotive engineer has said to me of the Arabana, “their way of life”. The community which had been disrupted had been partially replaced by a society based on the railways. Their descendants are now gaining tertiary education and employment in trades and professions outside Arabana country, but also have opportunities to re-assert aspects of their traditional culture. As this thesis shows, the railway has been central to these
developments. As E.M Forster was moved to write, "They (railways) are our gates to the glorious and the unknown" (in Williams, 2005, p240).

The clear limits to my research were, firstly, the blocking of my viewing unexpurgated personnel records of Arabana employees at State Records of South Australia; secondly, not all Arabana were prepared, even when happy to be interviewed, to have their own personal stories used in the production of the thesis. Clearly the first was unable to be breached and the second was respected. The Commonwealth Railways personnel records at the National Australian Archives in Chester Hill were more accessible. Significant also is the fact that I am not Arabana, so a number of families who are Arabana are not easily identified and my sample group is not comprehensive. Having said that I did attend three Annual General Meetings of Arabana at Marree, Finniss Springs and Port Augusta in 2012, 2013 and 2014. During these I made presentations about the thesis and invited further contributors. The AGMs helped me identify from a welter of names in the records those who were Arabana. Even now, in 2016 and 2017, some people are coming forward, although they would be aware that the data collection is over. The final limitation to be noted is that I did not have an Arabana co-investigator. Funds were never available for paying any such, and this project has been predominantly self-funded.

Oral history, an important part of the production of data for the thesis, has its limitations as well as advantages and I cover some of these in the first chapter. I just note
here David Gross's book *Lost Time: on remembering and forgetting in late modern culture* 6. Appendices 2 and 5 carry approved records of conversations with Arabana and people from other Aboriginal Australian groups respectively.

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CHAPTER 1: Literature Review and Methodology

"There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" – Walter Benjamin (1969)

The Arabana people’s contribution to the pioneering and development of the Australian nation has not been told. Their knowledge and labour were crucial to the extension and servicing of communication links between Australia’s south and north. The absence of the Arabana from the nation’s developmentalist history is another instance of Stanner’s “great Australian silence” (1968). As the original inhabitants of the country around the west and south sides of Lake Eyre/Kati Thanda (Arabana name reclaimed 2013), the Arabana have been important contributors to the surveying, construction and servicing the rail link from Adelaide to Alice Springs. It is time to put Arabana’s contribution ‘back on the train’ in Australian history.

A number of elements of the extant literature appear in the chapters called “Living in ‘The Desert’” and “Songlines to Trainlines”. This chapter covers the more generic literature reviewed. This chapter encompasses the idea of progress, valuing novelty, race theory and its impact upon colonisation, consequential transport history, “corridor theory”, labour history and Aboriginal history. Arabana men and women working upon the railway come out of the shadows and assume their rightful place in this narrative. The contribution of Aboriginal Australian pastoral workers have become increasingly recognised, as I note below, but their position has been portrayed as subordinate, serf-like or enslaved (for instance, Frank Stevens, 1974, Alec Morgan and Gerry Bostock, 1982; Ann
McGrath, 1987; Deborah Bird Rose, 1991, Dawn May, 1994, Thalia Anthony, 2004). After the 1965 Equal Wage Case, many pastoral worker Aboriginal Australians' conditions even worsened as they were driven off their ancestral lands onto missions and into small towns, often combining peoples who had been traditional enemies. The Aboriginal Australian contribution to railways was different.

The British Empire, Railways and the Idea of Progress:

This thesis contributes to the literature about the complex interface between Aboriginal Australian peoples, the white settlers and the revolutionary progressive technology of the railway. Railways were seen as emblematic of progress: “the age of steam” is a metonym for nearly the entire nineteenth century, where steamships, railways and factory machines fuelled the Industrial Revolution. The idea of “progress”, the new and revolutionary being desirable, emerged especially during the Industrial Revolution (Le Goff, 1992). The Enlightenment era from the early seventeenth to the early nineteenth century saw an explosion of such technological innovations, which were perceived as liberating for humanity from labour-intensive drudgery and helplessness before the powers of nature. Trevithick’s and Watt’s steam engines were invented by the end of the eighteenth century (Chamber’s Encyclopaedia, 1895). Steam-powered machines from the Spinning Jenny to steamships (Ashton, 1998) and the Railway changed everything. As Doyle (1932, p3) had a character say in his period novel “We and our fathers have lived much the same life, but they with their railway trains and their steamboats belong to a different age”. These inventions and their utilisation were accompanied by colonisation of many areas of the world by the rising Western powers.
This thesis is framed around the position that this notion of progress underpinned the Europeans’ sense of racial and cultural superiority and consequential justification that the settlers felt as they appropriated Aboriginal land and substituted their animals and crops for those already in existence and utilised in the country.

Throughout most of the era of colonisation of Australia, Western thinking held that so-called “primitive” peoples, usually marked by different skin colouration, were inferior to “Occidentals”. The emerging technologies driven by steam invented in the western world seemed to bolster this position. And it was during this time, when the Western world valued “progress” above all, that steam railways, the Iron Horse, part of the “Age of Steam”, were brought to Australia in the 1850s. As this thesis shows, Arabana challenged that inferiority notion as the railway moved into their country. The idea of progress is often a part of the hegemonist narrative of the European powers. This thesis demonstrates the fallacy of this hegemonist fantasy by showing the Arabana’s crucial contributions.

The historian John Darwin (2009) has noted that the British Empire evolved rapidly over the nineteenth century. Adam Smith writing in 1776 had called British society, as it operated then, the “project of an empire” (Smith, 1776, p785); it was embryonic, nascent, but not yet realised. By the mid nineteenth century the project had become not just an empire, but the British Empire, upon which the sun never set. Perhaps the defining moment of this emergence is when Britain assumed direct control of India after the 1857 so-called Sepoy Mutiny. Darwin (2009) suggests this empire project, or British world-
system as he calls it, rested on three pillars: naval and military superiority; the commercial power of the City of London, and, crucially, rapid communications. The glue which held this sprawling empire together was the communication and transport systems. These included the telegraph, steamship and the railway, linking British colonies to the metropole, London, and to each other.

When the telegraph and the railway came to Central Australia, Arabana were interested in these changes from the outset. Stanner (1958, p101) had noted Aboriginal Australians’ interest in change before, though without associating it with employment of Aboriginal people specifically on railways. He wrote that in becoming their own “voyagers”, the “aborigines (sic) claimed, coaxed and fought an opening into an otherwise incomprehensible new world”. He acknowledged that many died (although he was coy about how), and many others were ruined, but those who survived found they could not go back; and it seems they did not want to. He said he did not meet Aboriginal Australians who wanted to return to the old bush ways, even if their new circumstances were very miserable indeed. He believed, or at least stated he believed, that they stayed in the settler society because they wanted to. In reality they had no choice. History is not reversible.

Stanner seems to be ignoring the colonists’ dispossession of land and the oppressive control over Aboriginal Australians’ lives. For instance, for many years, even trivial matters were decided by representatives of the Crown. As late as 1955, for instance, in Marree even the choice of site for huts and washing facilities for non-railway Arabana families was chosen by the Superintendent of Reserves and Constable Henwood.
(GRG52/16/Vol 2: 1954-7; 21st September 1955). Stanner also seems to ignore the engagement of many Aboriginal Australians in full employment associated with the Second World War, and its consequential exposure of many Aboriginal Australians to other nations’ peoples, and ideas, especially Black Americans (Maynard, 2005). The progressivist European view of history often excludes Indigenous peoples. In not being part of this version of reality, the Arabana contradict Stanner’s phrase, the “great Australia silence” (Stanner, 1968, in Manne, 2009, p182). And this thesis aims to further make “noise” about Arabana and their contribution.

The Arabana, Race Theory and Dispossession:

Settler colonisation of Australia entailed philosophical, religious, political, legal, agricultural and population based arguments and ideas. To achieve their freedom from ideas embedding racial prejudice against Indigenous peoples in general, the Arabana used their involvement with that epitome of modernity, the railway. Fortunately, the north of South Australia had relatively benign landholders, unlike in some areas, who encouraged the Arabana and other Aboriginal Australians who were in that country to take on roles other than just pastoral serfdom.

The philosophy of “races” seemed to start latterly being expressed with the idea, articulated by Thomas Hobbes in “Leviathan” (1651), that groups of humans naturally competed and had lives nasty, brutish and short. The Spanish theologian and academic Francisco de Vitoria (1492-1546) of Salamanca University had earlier contested the ideas of
racial superiority and the morality of colonisation (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Francisco-de-Vitoria) but Hobbes and his successors prevailed in that later era.

That Europeans, considering themselves in the centuries from the “conquest” of the New World as the “superior race”, undertook colonisation and overran so-called “inferior” cultures. This was considered natural, inevitable and unlikely to change (Russell, 2006, p35). This race-oriented view was expressed by explorer and pirate William Dampier (1729), for instance, who wrote of Northern Australia

"The inhabitants of this country are the miserablest People in the world. The Hodmadods of Monomatapa, though a nasty people, yet for wealth are gentlemen to these; who have no houses and skin garments, sheep, poultry and fruits of the earth, ostrich eggs &c. as the Hodmadods have: and setting aside their humane shape, they differ but little from brutes." (p. 464).

Clothing, housing, agriculture, and animal husbandry are seen by Dampier as the hallmarks of superior culture. This notion is strangely echoed in the foundation document for South Australia (South Australia Act, 1834), whereby being clothed, participating in agriculture, living in houses and being converted to the truths of Christianity are stated directly and enjoined upon the Aboriginal Australians.

Within this hierarchy of “race”, once “discovered” by the Western powers, Aboriginal Australians were seen as the bottom of the chain. They were conceived of as relics, as people who had not “progressed” (my inverted commas), from the Europeans’
Stone Age and as unlikely to catch up with their “more evolved” contemporaries (De Gobineau, 1853-5, Chapter XVI, esp pp205-12 [http://media.bloomsbury.com/rep/files/primary-source-131-gobineau-the-inequality-of-the-human-races.pdf]; Herrstein and Murray, 1994; Douglas and Ballard (eds), 2008). These views used to be mainstream views. With this pseudo-evolutionary paradigm, it was assumed that Aboriginal Australians would die out once confronted with the “superior” Europeans (Colonial Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 1853, cited in Aird and Klaasen, 1985). The mechanisms, to be sure, were glossed over. As a sop to Western science, Europeans thought that Aboriginal Australians should be studied. Scientists were intensely interested in the Aboriginal Australians’ perceived lack of intelligence, and they felt the need to study them as genetic and cultural forebears of the “superior” Europeans. Again the Europeans were seeking to self-justify their prejudices and the conquest of Australia. Differing skull capacity and other anthropological data (Anderson, 2005) were put forward as evidence of and justification for the domination by the European peoples. Ironically slavery, mainly of Black people of African origin, was abolished in the British Empire in 1807, although it persisted in England itself until a new Emancipation Act in 1833 (Chambers Encyclopaedia, 1895, Vol 9, p504). Slavery did continue in some British colonies like Burma for another century. In Australia convicts, Aboriginal Australians and later “Kanakas”, indentured labourers, South Sea Islanders, filled the role vacated by the slaves. Until the demise of the triumphalist versions of history in the latter half of the twentieth century, these groups were not considered worthy of mention in official and school textbook versions of history (my own high school text Dunlop and Pike, 1962, for instance).
John Locke (1689) added intellectual weight to this argument by theorising that labour added to land equalled property. When it came to Aboriginal lands in the Australian colonies, the Europeans, like John McDouall Stuart traversing Central Australia, the land of the Arabana, could not see the work of Aboriginal people in making the land like a great park, and they discounted their efforts (Gamage, 2012). As with all Aboriginal Australians, the Arabana moulded nature for productive purposes for thousands of years, but this work, this labour, was invisible to European eyes. Even if not invisible to the explorers and settlers, it was written out of official histories (see Pascoe, *Dark Emu*, 2014)

"The Truths of Christianity":

From a religious perspective, Europeans believed that the truths of Christianity had to be shared with, and taken as their own by, ignorant or inferior peoples not yet acquainted with this religion. Missionaries and similar workers were among the early arrivals in the Australian Europeans’ influx (for instance, Kenny, 2007, Le Griffon, 2006). Ministers of religion had been influential in the movement to abolish slavery, asserting the common humanity of slaves and free, but these views clearly had their limits in the periphery of the British Empire. Arabana were latecomers to this formal religious intervention. The United Aborigines Mission (UAM) at Oodnadatta did not open until 1924, some sixty years after white settlement of the area, and after the post World-War 1 pandemic of influenza had killed nearly half the Arabana population (Barry, 2009, pp 375-6; Basedow, 1921). The Mission at Finnis Springs followed even after this in 1939. Actually and paradoxically, rather than training for subservience, this thesis shows that
this latter Mission school helped Francis Dunbar Warren, the landholder, and the Arabana and other Aboriginal children to prepare for their interpolation into the wider world of the dominant society and economy and for higher level technical work on the Ghan.

Perceived Lack of Agriculture:

Agriculturally the settler colonists sought to create “neo-Europes” (Crosby, 2004), importing and growing plants and raising beasts from the old Europe, to then send “home” and feed the population of the metropole, pandering to their dietary tastes. Native plants and animals were either overlooked or dismissed as pests taking feed from the desired European ones. That Aboriginal Australians thrived on the native plants and animals was ignored. After the colonial depopulation of the Aboriginal Australian population of the continent, there arose an erroneous idea that the so-called ‘natives’ were few because of the poor native food stocks. I cover this fallacy in a later chapter. Nonetheless, after the denudation of their lands, Arabana had to re-orient their food acquisition practices to what the pastoralists could and would provide, what ration stations issued and some residual hunting and gathering. Introduced rabbits, for instance, were the poor man’s “boon” (Eather and Cottle, 2015). Given this situation, the Ghan also became a lifeline for food and other necessary supplies.

In South Australia, the South Australia Act, or Foundation Act of 1834 stated clearly that the British Crown regarded South Australia as “waste and unoccupied lands” (The Foundation Act, p 2; http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/
The British population had burgeoned in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This was seen as a natural reason to (a) feed them from colonial lands' produce and (b) export many people to make the world as British as possible. One in six of the British population emigrated in the nineteenth century (Marshall, 2001). Population limitation - of British people - except by accidental epidemics, wars and famine was not seen as politically feasible. One key role of the Empire's railways was to supply the metropole with their preferred foodstuffs, sheep and cattle products, as well as raw materials such as wool and minerals. In Arabana land the main export is even nowadays cattle by road trains to seaports and Australian metropolises and the residual Ghan line from Leigh Creek taking coal to the cities.

The Logic of Elimination:

Wolfe (2001) asserted the paradoxical idea of the “logic of elimination”. This theory states that the settler colonists wanted nothing but the land. Aboriginal peoples were extraneous and to be replaced like the native fauna and flora with European stock. Indeed Aboriginal Australians were sometimes counted with the native flora and fauna, indicative of their social standing in relation to settler society and perceived subhuman status. But when this replacement failed to occur or where there was labour shortfall, Aboriginal Australians became a variable workforce, to be used where labour was scarce or when times were good and required more workers, but to be turned off when times were bad or where European labour was available. Missionaries were party to this devil's bargain as they formed reservoirs of labour called “missions”.
Similarly, Jean-Paul Sartre, in his introduction to Memmi’s *The Coloniser and The Colonised*, suggests that there is a contradiction inherent in the colonial system. He states “the system wills simultaneously the death and multiplication of its victims” (Sartre, in Memmi, 1965, p25). This is because a large labour force of the Indigenous people keeps labour costs low, whereas their elimination or assimilation would cause costs to rise. Arabana have been at times in low numbers, for instance after epidemics, and sometimes quite populous, whereupon other means of oppression such as child removal and incarceration have been put in place. The Ghan railway removed them from this historic “boom and bust” cycle by offering ongoing opportunities in country. The Arabana saw and seized these.

**Labour relations:**

Work is conceived of in a variety of forms by different theorists. Feudal times were associated with the idea of a master who owned the bodies and labour of peasants. It took the Black Death and the breakdown of readily available labour in Europe, and numerous other variables such as the growth of the idea of individualism in the Enlightenment, for this to be gradually replaced by the Capitalist idea of workers as vendors of skills and labour to bosses and managers (Holton, 1985). Aboriginal Australians, however, partly because of the race theory, were seen as outside this system and treated more like slaves or beasts of burden than fellow humans and workers (Biskup, 1973). It is a fact that Arabana and other Aboriginal workers were often in receipt of no pay, were not able to leave their employment on threat of punishment up to death, were given rations and clothing only,
and given or rather loaned the work tools which they were not considered to own (Biskup, op cit). As noted, they were to be replaced in the “logic of elimination” (Wolfe, 2001) where possible so the settler colonists could usurp the land.

The case of the Arabana, however, differed from many other Aboriginal people. The railway ran through their land from 1884. Opportunity rather than solely threat stemmed from the iron horse. As Reg Dodd stated: “The railways were good to us” (Reg Dodd, pers comm. 2010). Rowley (1970, p16) saw Australian colonialism as particularly destructive to the pre-invasion peoples' cultures: “(they) took all the land and only the land – ie, on which even the labour of the Aboriginal was unwanted as long as other labour was available”. But Rowley (1970) was taken aback by Marree in Arabana country in 1965, stating:

There was apparently little difference in employment or other status between Aboriginal and other, although the reserve group would probably depend either on pensions or on the pastoral wages paid to Aborigines. ...the main wage employment was on the railway, which is the type of employment in which from one end of Australia to the other the Aboriginal worker seems most welcome...

There is another side to all this, and it indicates a quiet assumption of responsibility on the part of Aboriginal people (Rowley, op cit, p76).

Rowley’s observation was contradicted by the folklorist and populist historian, Patsy Adam-Smith (1976), in her work on the Australian railways. Adam-Smith collected
'campfire' stories from railway workers, but Aboriginal Australians rarely featured. In fact, she says forthrightly, "Aborigines have never cared for railway work" (1976, p.129-132). Adam-Smith's work slotted in to the old accepted trope on Aboriginal Australians; they were not prepared to work. It also pre-dated proper academic inquiry into the contributions of Aboriginal workers to the settler economy. Adam-Smith's comments went unchallenged at the time because there was a limited scholarship in the area. The academic literature on Aboriginal labour is an emerging field.

Aboriginal Labour Histories:

Ann McGrath and Kay Saunders (1995) collection commented on the dearth of published material despite the obvious use of Aboriginal Australians in the Australian colonial workforces from the outset of settlement. Ann Curthoys and Clive Moore (1995) also surveyed the extant information, emphasising that it was "abundantly clear" that historians have ignored the presence of Aboriginal workers over the two centuries of permanent white presence. Pacific Islander labour and Torres Strait Islander labour has now been well documented (Lui-Chividzhe, 2011). But the absence of an Aboriginal as distinct from Islander voice echoes Stanner's "great silence". This collection including information about the railways rarely mentions Indigenous workers except for a brief mention of Torres Strait Islanders (p15).

Thalia Anthony has re-evaluated the perceived agency of Aboriginal people in the cattle industry of the Northern Territory and Kimberley (Anthony, 2004) and assesses McGrath (1994) and Rose (1991) as understating the brutal prequel to the establishment of
the stations and involvement of the Aboriginal Australians as workers – in a feudal arrangement. This feudalism may have retarded growth of such novelties as railways in those areas. Why pour capital into infrastructure if one has free or cheap (Aboriginal Australian) labour? Again, railways did not feature in her work.

In other recent reviews of labour history for Aboriginal people (Host and Milroy, 2001, Keen, 2010; Kerwin, 2010, Pascoe, 2014) the Aboriginal contribution to the railways has still been neglected, though Keen does note the involvement of Torres Strait Islanders (Host and Milroy, 2001; Keen 2010). Most recently, Katie Maher (2014) uncovered the fact that Aboriginal people worked on the construction of railway lines in NSW, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory as packers and carriers, sleeper cutters and track layers. Women also worked as laundresses and washerwomen, though documentary evidence for this is very thin, she states. This thesis draws on some of the available information in the chapter called “Australian Aborigines in the Railways” and, of course, adds to it.

As a parallel case to the one being made here, historian Lynette Russell (2012) has started the investigation of Aboriginal whalers and sealers, both male and female. She found that the occupation rather than the “race” became the marker utilised by their peers, as also happened with the Iron Road. Not rarely equal pay was received. This was half a century or more before the inland was “settled”, but the opportunities have significant similarities. (also State Library of NSW, 2010, Mari Nawi Exhibition). Some Aboriginal Australians involved in these maritime trades emigrated, such as Thomas Chaseland, to
New Zealand or elsewhere. Chaseland received a Maori name, Tame Titirene, and married a Maori princess. The coastal pursuit of seals and whales, obviously, is not possible in central Australia, and the feudal relationships of white landholders and Aboriginal Australians persisted there in the pastoral industries. For many Arabana, the train line provided the means to move from their country and seek employment in railway settlements, towns and cities.

Kerwin (2010) asserts that in pre-colonial times Aboriginal peoples had settlements in many places with specialist labour division, such as negotiator, merchant, spear maker, trader and so on. He delineates a pre-invasion economy based on scarcity of materials in one region and plenty in another. This led to the establishment of a network of trading routes throughout Australia, with large “fairs” or “markets” in particular places including Marree in Arabana country. The well-known and celebrated “Afghan” cameleers followed these old Aboriginal routes (Rajkowski, 1987; Stevens, [1989], 2002). [I should add that these cameleers were far from all “Afghan”, as they came from many areas such as Baluchistan, Kashmir, Sind, Rajasthan, Egypt, Persia, Turkey and Punjab, and they were Hindu, Parsee, Islamic and other religions. The fiction of “Afghan”, however, does carry over to the name of the train line, the Ghan]. At Marree, in Arabana country, Aboriginal traders bartered Pukardu, Arkapa, sacred red ochre, for such items as shields made from beanwood, spear shafts, some boomerang types and pituri. Kerwin describes a songline or route for these trading expeditions that runs from the northern coast of Australia down to Port Augusta. The route runs through Arabana lands along the mound springs, the only reliable sources of water there. The ensuing train line followed a very similar path, shown
to the surveyors by Arabana (noted for instance, by Jessop, 1862). This songline or
dreaming track route was the one overlaid and overwritten by the Ghan train line.

With the arrival of settlers, Vallee (2008) suggests, many women found the
pastoralists, police, “Afghan” cameleers and train construction workers, including
Indians, Chinese and white people, offered a better life for them. These women left
traditional male authority and labour structures behind, Vallee asserts. Although the
Victorian newspaper The Healesville and Yarra Glen Guardian asserted that there were no
women in railway construction camps 7, this is patently not true as there were large
numbers of subsequent children. Whatever the reasons these ladies left the tribal network,
the children of such connections formed a large part of the population of Aboriginal
Australians today, including the Arabana (Gale, 1964; Shaw, 1995). The arrival of railways
in 1884 in Arabana lands was not entirely a discontinuity with demographic changes
already happening because of the earlier pastoral stations. But it greatly accelerated them.
The concertinaing of distance, great numbers of new people, both Aboriginal and non-
Aboriginal Australians, and a large number of new available roles once the railway
arrived all constituted a significant shift allowing Arabana access to the dominant
economy while remaining in their own country and practising culture.

Work on railways:

Work on railways is diverse: coal shoveller, train driver, fireman, carriage attendant,
cleaner, caterer, toilet worker, porter, fettler, ganger, train examiner, engineer, train repair

7 Healesville and Yarra Glen Guardian, 26th June 1937.
and maintenance workers, ticket seller, station hand and so on. Virtually all these roles were occupied by Arabana workers from the late 1920s onwards once the Commonwealth Railways assumed control. I attach an extract from the Railway Commissioner’s Report for 1930 which indicates the broad range of required recruits, into some of which roles Arabana stepped. In the chapter entitled “Arabana Working on the Railway” I cover the roles which named Arabana undertook.

Training for these jobs and trades can involve an array of subsidiary skills such as being able to read and write, understand diagrams and technical drawings, and to use the
language of the invaders in professional ways (Davies et al, 2103). Initially, however, work for men obtained was through “walk-up” hiring usually for a day or a few days. No extensive human resource management involvement - just show up and talk to the ganter. As I record in the conversations under “Arabana Family Stories”, Arabana seized these opportunities from the outset. Much later, education and formal processes supervened. The first Arabana train driver, John Hodgson, qualified in 1968 (Charlie Hodgson, pers comm., 2011; Veronica Arbon, pers comm. 2011, National Australian Archive D1556, barcode 07522972). Adrian Wallace also became a locomotive engineer. Reg Dodd was recruited and became train examiner from 1966 to 1986 (pers. comms. 2010). Mervyn Dodd who latterly occupied the critical role of Yardmaster, is Arabana. There is negligible literature on such Aboriginal participation beyond the employment records of the South Australian State Railways from the 1880s to 1920s and the Commonwealth Railways from 1920s to 1970s.

Human Transport in South Australia:

Prior to trains being invented and used from 1826 onwards, the main means of transport for humans and their goods in South Australia was horses or camels (from the 1860s: Rajkowski, 1987) or wagons drawn by these animals (Lee, 2010). Although river transport was used in the eastern States, this was not possible in South Australia. Away from the Murray-Darling system, the rivers were few and sporadic in flow (Marshall, 1988). The steam engine changed transport and rail transport virtually immediately became a substantial part of the way of life for a whole century from the 1820s on and in South Australia from the 1850s (Stewien, 2007).
In this thesis the emphasis is on rail transport in Arabana country and the responses of the local people to this. A railway is a revolutionary technology in the following ways: it shrinks country twenty to thirty-fold because of the speed of the train. A journey formerly taking many weeks can be accomplished in a day. Trains carry vast quantities of goods – for export, for import - and can be used for altering or adjusting earlier modes of customary activities. In the Arabana’s case it initially enabled the transport of traditional 20-30Kg lumps of Pukardu, Arkapa, sacred red ochre, to be carried back to their country, 300Km away, in a day rather than three weeks (Jones, 2007). For the settlers, sheep or cattle raised in the Arabana lands were able to be transported for export to Adelaide in a day rather than weeks with smaller losses en route. Raw materials out, manufactured goods in, both to the profit of the Empire. People themselves travel upon trains for many purposes: business, trade, curiosity, flight from pursuers or persecutors, as stolen individuals, to move to far places to better their lot, even to gamble, commit crimes, and all can occur in large numbers.

In more sombre mode, this thesis notes that trouble spots can be controlled using the railways. “Well done steam! Smoke, thou art wonderful, and a reformer!” enthused General Sir Charles Napier, writing in 1839, who was thrilled to be able to travel by train to London, ready to load troops to quash a threatened rebellion in Manchester (Westwood, 1980, Napier’s diary 29th March 1839). Troops can be sent by train to crush danger to the imperium in record time, as occurred in the American Civil War (1861-5) (Hodges, 2009), and in the Canadian war against the rebellious Metis (1885) (Brown, 1993). The sudden
arrival of extra police or troops was a constant threat in Arabana country, although never fully realised. I have scrutinised Police reports in the State Records and this appears to be correct, even though Police were stationed in these lands continually.

In a very recent history Lee (2010) writes of Aboriginal Australians and transport as if the local peoples were and are uninvolved in anything other than pre-colonial modes of transport, let alone working upon the railways from early times. This thesis demonstrates that this is not true. Before this century the illusion of “Stone Age” people scarcely participating in the contemporary life of all Australians seemed to be prevalent (for instance “mine tink it they fit” Pelaco shirt advertisement from 1917 to the 1950s in Broome, 2000).

“Mine tink it they fit” -

Mulga Fred by A.T Mockridge
A popular recent book by journalist Paul Lockyer (who ironically died at Lake Eyre just before the Lake got a traditional name back – Kati Thanda) (Lockyer, 2011) only has Arabana mentioned in Chapter 1, not contemporaneously. A contemporary ABC journalist maintained Stanner’s great silence. And the very recent Stephen Brooke’s old-fashioned titled book *Australian Railways: How the Land Was Conquered* comes from the same year, 2011! A very reversionary set of ideas.

**Transport: “Corridor Theory”:**

Whebell (1969) has adumbrated a theory of corridors initially in urban systems. His article proposed five stages in a developing economic landscape: initial occupation (in Australia’s case, invasion and over-writing former occupation), commercial agriculture, railway transport, motor transport (not invented, of course, in 1884) and metropolitanism. Bishop, Duruz and Mayne (2008) have expanded this theoretical perspective. In northern South Australia this assumed fivefold sequence has not occurred, as the commercial agriculture has always been fragile and urbanisation of “remote” towns like Marree and Oodnadatta has not occurred. Nonetheless the idea of a corridor is useful. A corridor does not just join formerly discrete places. It is its own type of place. Railways may threaten previously held notions of place, as indeed they did and do with Arabana, but simultaneously they set up different connections and perspectives. There is, they say, echoing Bachelard (1969), a poetics of corridors because it pays attention at the same time to the impersonal and the intimate, the public and the private, the mobile and the static. The railway corridor consists of diverse places, some permanent and some transient, within which people live and work. In Arabana country this meant that the old Dreaming
Tracks, Songlines, pilgrimage and trade routes were partially over-written by a new settler-colonist narrative, that of white ownership of territory, agriculture, and a relationship to a remote metropole. This concept overlaps with that espoused by Lynette Russell of a “third space”, where binaries can disappear into a more nuanced set of relationships.

Heidegger (1975) would characterise this as “gathering” landscapes and cultures, which “generates new places, perspectives, meanings and experiences” (Bishop, Duruz, Mayne, op cit, p28). The railway, they say, has been instrumental in shaping a multicultural postcolonial federalism. This is arguable, as it is by no means clear that Australia has reached a post-colonial phase. Nonetheless, The Ghan reformed the identities of the regions through which it passed and the people within that corridor. Inside the train itself, the compartment creates new places for negotiations around meanings and experiences. Watching the landscape flash past is an entirely different perspective from walking it. The usually transient relationships between passengers are utterly different from those of the workers watching the train go by. Arabana were initially beside then quickly on the train, formally and informally. Their identities already changing transformed from tribal estate, country-based to that also associated with the corridor and its characteristics.

Methodology and Sources:

“To articulate what is past does not mean to recognise ‘how it really was’. It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger”.

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To address the scantness in the histories to date and capture the stories of the railway’s impact on the Arabana, this project has drawn upon archival material, books, articles, and oral testimony of living Arabana people. To contextualise the Arabana’s involvement with the railway, some understanding is required of the early white exploration and settlement of the region. Written sources about the Arabana start in the late 1830s with the records and journals of explorers and scouts of the settlers. The thesis draws on the published journals of explorers John Eyre, John McDouall Stuart and Peter Warburton. Their journals are used to confirm their reliance on Aboriginal guides who directed them to water sources in the region. These sources were critical to both pastoralists and the later steam trains. As this thesis shows, the location of water sources determined the route of the railway, and Arabana were involved from the start.

**Primary Sources:**

**Arabana – Written Sources before the Train Line:**

To get to the narrative beyond the archives, nonetheless the archives must be examined. Prior to the railway era from the 1880s onwards, written sources about the Arabana start in the late 1830s through to the 1850s with the records and journals of the “explorers”, the scouts of the settlers. These expeditions were headed successively by Europeans Edward Eyre (Eyre, 1841, Gutenberg Project, on line), Herschel Babbage (interestingly the man engaged to build the first railway in South Australia) (Symes, 1969), John McDouall Stuart (McDouall, Stuart, 1858 et seq) and Peter Warburton (Warburton,
1875). Their published journals indicate that Eyre, Warburton and Stuart (at least initially) had Aboriginal guides. Were it not for the Aboriginal guides, the “discovery” of the sacred mound springs critical to both pastoralists and the later steam trains may have been delayed or possibly not happened. A mound spring is an upwelling from the Great Artesian Basin which often, although not always, creates a mound of material around the spring itself; such water sources are rare in this desert or salt-encrusted landscape (Mudd, 1998).

One striking comment from explorer John McDouall Stuart was his enthusiastic description of Arabana country as “wonderful country, scarcely to be believed” (Sunday 5th June 1859 near Mt Younghusband). He notes native tracks everywhere and meets people not infrequently. Exploring the area in 1858 and 1859, he certainly did not echo the idea of a “dead heart” or “red centre”. He used expressions such as “…the range is a beautiful grass country to the very top. In the creeks the grass and other plants are growing luxuriantly…” around Finniss Springs, “good feeding country, timbered with box and gum-trees”, “we came to the banks of the two creeks passed by Major Warburton, splendidly grassed”, and near Chambers Creek “About four miles from last night’s camp the chain of large water holes commences, and continues beyond to-night’s camp. They are indeed most splendid water holes — not holes, but very long ponds; they are nearly one continuous sheet of water, and the scenery is beautiful”. Again he journaled on 9th May 1859 “I have not seen better runs in the colony, and in the driest summer the furthest distance from water will not be above five miles at the most, but the feed is so abundant that they would not require to go so far”. But what does he mean by this “wonderful”? Fit
for sheep of cattle to graze upon. He thinks of the manicured grass plains as ripe for European animals and not as the source of seed for feeding all these “natives” he has seen. And proto-agriculture is beyond his ken (Pascoe, 2014).

In terms of further archival materials, the thesis draws on South Australian Railways’ records from the 1880s to the 1920s, Commonwealth Railways’ records from the 1920s to the 1970s and the Aboriginal Protection Board reports. Some of these are housed in the State Records of South Australia. The Commonwealth Railways records are mainly in the National Archives of Australia in Canberra and Sydney. The railway records are important because they indicate the names and possible roles filled by Arabana workers and the requisite training involved for their employment. As suggested in the chapter entitled “Arabana Working on the Railway”, exploring the training requirements is important, because it reveals that many Arabana could read and write in English, had the knowledge and understanding to comprehend diagrams and technical drawings, and could apply them in professional ways.

Oral History:

“But the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction of perpetuity... Without the favour of the everlasting Register, the first man had been as unknown as the last, and Methuselah’s long life had been his only Chronicle”.

Sir Thomas Browne, *Hydriotaphia*, (1658. Chapter V)
Oral history has plusses and minuses. Concentrated listening can provide insights not otherwise easy to obtain. But memory is fallible. Since Sir Frederic Bartlett’s pioneering experiments nearly a century ago, memory has been shown to be not only retrieval of data but a reconstruction from numberless dispersed fragments. These are inevitably tinged with more recent feelings and beliefs, so people constantly reconfigure their imagined past. Stories can be forgotten, elided, altered, made to fit preconceived ideas or ideologies. My own conversations with Arabana do make the perhaps unwarranted assumption that what they told me is what happened, although these records are surely viewed through a retrospectoscope. I have also left out some anecdotes or yarns which I heard but did not form part of my recording. “Deep listening” (Hamm, 2008) is said to be an Aboriginal Australian methodology not particularly different from the Associative Anamnesis method I employed. I wrote notes and sent each participant a written transcript which they had to approve. Only approved transcripts have been used in this thesis.

Nonetheless oral tradition can enrich any story - and make it more ambiguous. Explorer John McDouall Stuart had a young male Aboriginal guide (name unknown) for

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his First Expedition (14th May 1858 to 11th September 1858) but not his Second. (This information is given on the John McDouall Stuart Society website). As an example of oral history contradicting or adding to written records, Arabana informant Charlie Hodgson stated “this young man was killed by Arabana elders between the First and Second Expeditions (this latter from April to July 1859) because he had revealed secret information such as the whereabouts of sacred waterholes and mound springs”. The Second Expedition revealed what Stuart thought of as virgin land, that “wonderful country... scarcely to be believed” (http://johnmcdouallstuart.org.au/first-five-expeditions) as noted above, which he then claimed as a pastoral lease. Charlie asserted that Arabana people were killed on this Second Expedition. No other source echoes this. It is possible that this time in 1859 is when a Smallpox Epidemic swept through the Arabana for the first time (Dick Kimber, 1988). But which account should be held as “real”? The origins of the epidemic remain debatable to this day.

Surveying for the train line in Arabana country was carried out partly by George Warren, uncle of Francis Dunbar Warren, pastoralist and descendant of the first John Warren of Springfield and Strangways Station. Strangways was the first Station established in Arabana country, in 1863. Oral history states that Francis’ Uncle George Warren (21/9/1820 - 26/2/1895), had the involvement of Arabana men from the Strangways Station (Clarrie Warren, pers. comm.) who helped survey for the train line

New Sign Along Oodnadatta Track next to the old railway line
between Marree and further west and north. John Ross, another surveyor, was also said by my informants to have had major assistance from the Macumba Arabana Aborigines. This oral history is an important part of this thesis, as the written sources have consistently ignored Aboriginal contribution.

Since I started this project, the Arabana have also escalated their own retrospective roles with keener recollections. The attached personal photograph from 2013, two years after the thesis was launched, indicates this evolution.
Records From The Authorities:

The train-line staff provided reports to their own hierarchy (GRG 42/131, GRS 90 and others in the National Archives Branches). Each of these domains as it applies to Arabana and the railway has been accessed and is commented upon later in this thesis, in the chapter “From Songlines to Trainlines”.

Records of people and goods moved upon the Ghan are rudimentary but do get aggregated in Annual Reports from the South Australian Railways, Commonwealth Railways and its successors. Monty Luke’s seminal book *Riders of the Steel Highways* (1997) has records of finances, freight and passenger carriage, which has been drawn upon for this thesis. Much of import to this thesis is just missing – for instance how many Aboriginal people traveled upon the trains, except where individual travel passes were issued. Most such travel, I have been told, was just arranged informally by the relevant Station Master, or Arabana just climbed aboard in between train stations.

South Australian Police Reports have been examined by the researcher. In northern South Australia the pastoralists, telegraph workers and the railway were later supported by police, and Far North Division police reports include the role of Aboriginal Sub-Protector (Inspector Bryan Besley [1836-1894] of Port Augusta and his successors, various dates) in files GRG5/318 and GRG5/314. I explored mentions of Aboriginal Australian involvement with Police as well as the routine Annual Reports in their role as Sub-
Protector. These records give an insight into the attitudes and thinking of the authorities in white society and those who made matters known to them.

| Treasure TROVE: |

Various events in the north of South Australia concerning the Ghan and its surroundings made the local newspapers and TROVE was trawled for such reports. One fascinating snippet is from Mr Butterfield, MP, in 1921, where he says in Parliament “what do we find – a handful of aborigines (sic) or Afghans running the north (of South Australia), a few boundary riders, and the country not being improved”. This backhanded acknowledgement of the real state of affairs by a Member of Parliament jumps to the eye. By this time, Arabana and a few other Aboriginal Australians were already working some of the time upon the railway. It was about this time that the railway even found its name “The Ghan”, not “The Great Northern Railway” nor “Central Australian Railway”. Mr Butterfield also has clear ideas about what constitutes “improvement” which may not be congruent with any of the actual local peoples’ ideas.

Dr Herbert Basedow:

Almost contemporaneously to this MP’s comment, Dr Herbert Basedow made three expeditions to assess the health of Aboriginal Australian people, and his original reports were viewed. They describe specifically named Arabana suffering from infectious diseases and other maladies (Basedow, 1921; GRG 23/1 1921 330). None were examined at or near the Ghan; all were on pastoral holdings but general conclusions can be reached by this
survey. That Arabana were not surveyed near the railway line speaks to the legal ban on such proximity in that era, but does not rule out that Arabana did in fact live near the railway. Arbon (2010) notes that her ancestor Lily Strangways and her family lived at an “Arabana stronghold” near Curdimurka, a station on the Ghan, during the 1920s and 1930s. In the TB survey of 1959 at Curdimurka, 51 Aboriginal Australians were Mantoux tested and 12 received BCG vaccinations (GRG52/1/0/156/151/ 1959). Hercus (1994, pp20-22) echoes this idea of a stronghold by stating that

...the presence of the railway made a considerable impact on the pattern of living and caused greater dispersal of people than is implied by Spencer and Gillen. (This ‘dispersal’ is used in its innocent sense, not that of the settlers nor Queensland Native Police who used the term to mean ‘massacre’ (Roberts 1978)). Since the various railway sidings and stations were suitable depots for the distribution of rations, not all Arabana people went to the pastoral stations; instead they camped near the railway and got their rations and lived in a semi-traditional fashion.

All such primary documentary sources have a shadow side of oral tradition which has been a part of the exploration undertaken in interviews with former Ghan workers and reported upon in this thesis.

| Anthropologists:
I have examined anthropologists' and historians' writing about Arabana starting from George Taplin (1879), Edward Curr (1886), J East (1889), Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen (1899, 1912) through Peter Elkin (1931, 1934), Isabel Mcclyde (1987, 2000), Ronald Berndt and Catherine Berndt (1988), Luise Hercus (1985, 1994, 2005) and Bruce Shaw (1995). Spencer and Gillen in 1912, for example, talk of the difficulties in getting to the centre of Australia by train, but make no other comments pertinent to Aboriginal people and the railways. Otherwise only Hercus and Shaw, the last two of these, mention the railway line, although all but Taplin were writing in the time after it had penetrated Arabana lands and impacted upon their lives. Arabana themselves do not have their own recorded material before the 1980s when Hercus and Shaw both started on new history. This selective blindness about the actual lived lives of their co-participants in data gathering is now seen as regrettable, but echoes the worldview of Aboriginal Australians being uninvolved in the "modernity" that the train represents. Informants for these historical investigators were living beside, getting rations from, trading with and working upon the railway; they were marrying and having families with rail workers. All this is ignored until the second half of the twentieth century in the literature (see Kimber in Downes 1996; Shaw 1995). The investigators also missed out on much information by dwelling on the past of the Arabana and not reporting their contemporary lives. Not only was this an example of the quest for antiquity, as noted above by Le Goff, but also played on the trope of the "noble savage" which Dryden (1672) and others later popularised. It also suited the pastoralists and other power bearers that both involvement with modernity and the down-sides of contemporary Aboriginal life were ignored (Gray, 2007).
Pastoralists and Telegraph Builders:

Upon the explorers' heels there came pastoralists such as John Warren from 1863 onwards, the Overland Telegraph Line in 1872 and then the train from 1884. Charles Todd who instigated and built the Overland Telegraph did make a contribution to Edward Curr's Volumes (Book VI, Chapter 42, 1886) giving about 100 words of Arabana vocabulary. The new pastoralists John Warren and John Hogarth of Strangways also contributed (Chapter 45) so relationships had already been established and some forms of cooperation.

Talking to Arabana:

The shared authority section of this thesis, the oral history, has involved talking with Arabana people who have themselves or had family involved with the Ghan railway. Conversations with descendants of such railway worker Arabana who are now involved in other pursuits such as Professor Veronica Arbon, former Professor of Indigenous Knowledge Systems at Deakin University, and formerly Director, Wirltu Yarlu Aboriginal Education, University of Adelaide, have also been collected. Their lived experiences are recorded and woven into the framework linking Aboriginal history, labour history and transport history. Conversations have taken place over the four years, in venues chosen by the Arabana participants. The interviews were offered on a one-to-one basis, but some chose to have an audience. The technique is that of Associative Anamnesis, a non-directive system (Deutsch, 1939). This allowed the Arabana participant to spontaneously raise
material which was then elaborated by ongoing iteration. It is more participant-focused than any structured interview or questionnaire could be. Occupational health and safety for the participants, both interviewer and interviewees, was covered by vicarious liability insurance. I also placed advertisements asking for informants in the Herrgott Herald and the Koori Mail, at the suggestion of Aaron Stuart, but these did not draw any further people. The transcripts of these conversations as read and signed for with explicit written consent for that content only, form an Appendix of this thesis.

Personnel records:

Personnel records were asked for by name and in a number of cases I had specific consent forms from the families concerned. The search for personnel records was not entirely easy. The South Australian Government expurgated files on grounds as written in a direct quote from one of their officers “Decisions are made according to the sensitivity of the material, the connection of the applicant to persons about whom information is held, and assessments of legal professional privilege and relevance” (the full letter is appended to this thesis). Given this restriction, the lives as lived of the fettlers, gangers and other workers are more opaque than they could be. This must be borne in mind as the thesis is read. The National Archives of Australia were more obliging and Commonwealth Railways personnel records were viewed in entirety (see extracts about wages in Appendix 4).
The thesis expands the knowledge of a resilient people who have endured the time of invasion and its aftermath of continued colonial impact. The threats and opportunities from the arrival and later departure of the Ghan Railway are teased out. This work links the domains of Aboriginal, labour and transport history in detailing how the Arabana negotiated the incursion of white settler society on their country. In doing so, it expands on the work of previous scholars who have explored the contributions of indigenous labour to Australia’s development. As will be revealed in this thesis, the Arabana were crucial contributors in one of Australia’s most important infrastructure projects, the Ghan railway. By drawing on their stories, this thesis attempts to fill an important gap in the literature.

I did not search specifically for other Aboriginal Australian peoples in either the State Records of South Australia nor the National Archives of Australia during the four years of data collection from 2011 to 2014. In searching the former Records I was assisted by Andrew Wilson, the Aboriginal Australian officer in the State Records. Some records did record Aboriginality, although I have been told that this was not universal. Of the non-Arabana personnel cards seen and recognised by me as Aboriginal Australian, there appeared to be a similar egalitarian treatment in terms of positions held, transfers, sick leave noted and disciplinary acts. Pay appeared to be equal for the same positions, regardless of “race” (see Appendix 4). I have subsequently talked to several people from other Aboriginal Australian groups up and down the line and their reminiscences are recorded in Appendix 5. In summary most had to move out of country to work on the railway and their experiences were thus different from the unique Arabana.
Chapter 2. RAILWAYS AND OTHER ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES IN AUSTRALIA: THE AGE OF STEAM ENTERS THE DREAMING

It is impossible for anyone to ignore the presence and contribution of railways to Australia’s development. This chapter considers the contribution of Indigenous peoples in this development throughout the states and territories of Australia, particularly in the parts of South Australia beyond Arabana country. The railways were important in the spread of white settlement throughout Australia. As this chapter emphasises, the period from 1863 to 1912 witnessed the building of most of Australia’s major railway lines. There was a further burst of construction activity after World War II when mining companies around Australia built and used railways to transport their ores to port facilities. An even later development, connected to the thesis, was the construction of the “new Ghan” line, connecting Alice Springs to Darwin, which was completed in 2004. As this chapter asserts, the Indigenous peoples contributed both to the construction and servicing of these railways. In the case of the Old Ghan the route followed the Aboriginal Australian peoples’ trade routes and Songlines. However, unlike in the pastoral industry, the contributions of Aboriginal Australian peoples in these developments have not been fully recognised in Australia’s history. This chapter seeks to redress this by exploring the stories of Aboriginal Australian people who were involved in building, servicing and maintaining railways throughout the States and Territories. The most notable aspect of many of these stories is that the majority of Aboriginal Australians concerned were out of country to get these opportunities and a number did not assert their own Aboriginality at the time of
employment.

**New South Wales (settled by white people 1788):**

The official history of “*The Railways of New South Wales 1855-1955*” (Paddison, 1955) does not mention Aboriginal people at all. Paddison’s history of the State’s railways is dated and was published at a time when Aboriginal Australians had no place in the nation’s White Australia historiography. However, a 2011 brochure published by the Barani Barabugu organisation asserts that Aboriginal Australian people played a greater part in the expansion of the railways in New South Wales than given credit for in the official account (Barani Barabugu Walk Brochure June 2011). Given the absence of Aboriginal Australian labour in the official history, these pieces of ephemera are important in beginning to gain an insight into their contribution in the development of rail in NSW.

The construction of the railways in Sydney and its surrounding areas started in 1855 (Paddison, op cit). At this time, a number of Aboriginal people were said to be living near Cleveland Paddock in Redfern, which became the location for railyards and Eveleigh Workshops. Building of the workshops commenced in 1882 and they were finally opened in 1886. Eveleigh railway yards was Sydney’s largest employer from the time it opened and one of the biggest employers of Aboriginal people living in Sydney. Many Aboriginal men also worked in the Alexandria goods yard loading trains with kegs and potatoes and on the waterfront docks at Walsh Bay and Darling Harbour (Barani Barabugu brochure). Following the closure of the Eveleigh railway yards in the 1980s, the former workshops on
either side of the railway line were converted for other uses. On the southern side in the
former locomotive Workshops is the Australian Technology Park, and on the northern side
is Carriage Works, a hub for contemporary arts and culture. At both sites, there is
information exhibited that describes some of the work practices that took place here.
Aboriginal Australian people can be identified visually in photographs there but their
contributions have yet to be fully explored.

Michael Davis (July 2012) has written *Aboriginal Connections with Eveleigh: a report
prepared for the Sydney Metropolitan Development Authority*. Regrettably, as he says, “details
of Aboriginal workers at the Workshops have yet to be established, *(but*) it is known that
the site was an important focus for employment for Aboriginal people”. Professor Lucy
Taksa (1999, 2003, 2005 and personal communication) alludes to Aboriginal workers in her
academic papers but again has negligible documentary confirmation for the Eveleigh
Workshops. Possibly local Gadigal people worked there, although most workers would
certainly have been incomers from rural NSW, displaced by pastoralists, and their
descendants. One man is mentioned by name, Phillip James Campbell, but his clan or
tribal attribution is not given. Davis (op cit, 2012) states that hundreds of Aboriginal
people travelled from their own lands to work in the boiler room, foundry and goods
yards. Given the discrimination against Aboriginal peoples, and regime of forced removals
from family after the crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1812, many would have been
reluctant to reveal their indigeneity. Hence the Indigenous contribution has been ‘whited-
out’ of the history. There is no specific literature on Gadigal men or women working in
Eveleigh (for instance, see Heiss, 2002).
However, there are individual memoirs that tell the stories of Aboriginal Australian rail workers. These men, as they all are, worked outside their own country, and thus differ in their experiences from Arabana who mostly were able to stay where they were from. I deal with them in chronological order by date of birth (if known).

Bandjalung elder Charles Harold Moran, born 1930, (2004, pp 91-2, 109-12, 114 and 129-31) says that the NSW and Queensland railways employed many Aboriginal people, including his brother Peter and himself. Moran recalled these people working in a variety of capacities, including engine drivers, stokers (firemen), waitresses, guards and track foremen (ganger) and settlers. His own work duration in the railway system was, however, spasmodic and he regretted this later, saying he should have stayed on. He was employed several times, and up to acting ganger for seven years in the Queensland Railways at Kagaru. The railways offered better pay and conditions than most forms of labour for Aboriginal Australians at the time. This peak of employment for Aborigines in the NSW Railways, according to Moran, was from the 1960s onwards, that is, starting much later than Arabana, even though railways had begun as early.

Vince Wenberg, probably Yaegl people, born in 1932 at Ulgundahi Island, Maclean, NSW, (Oral History Project 2001; http://stolengenerationtestimonies.com/testimonies/1000.html) was removed from his family aged 8 and placed at La Perouse, Sydney. With a foster family briefly, he was reunited with family before again being removed and sent to the notorious Kinchela Boys’ Home in Kempsey in 1944. He joined the railways in 1954
(Oral History Project, 2001, p20). He started in the Eveleigh Workshops, then joined the millwrights' section then became a brickies' labourer. In 1956 he joined the Eveleigh Running Sheds, starting as a cleaner. He passed the exam for fireman and was promoted to locomotive driver in 1960. He drove both freight and passenger trains all over the State. He stayed with the railways until retiring in 1993. His story surfaced as one of the Stolen Generations' testimonies as noted above. The experience of forced removals from his family had instilled in Wenberg a reticence about revealing his indigeneity. His story offers insights into why the indigenous contribution to the railway is missing from the history. The past taught the like of Wenberg to hide their Aboriginal Australian identity if they wished to advance in white Australian society. More hearteningly, in more recent times a daughter of his also became an engine driver.

Another to find employment in the railways was Raymond (Tiger) Kelly (1938-2007). He was a Dunghutti man from the Macleay region of the Mid-North Coast of New South Wales. He spent the first sixteen years of his life on the Bellbrook Mission near Kempsey. He joined the railways aged sixteen in Sydney but only worked there for a year. In 1973 Ray was the first Aboriginal person employed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Kelly in Maynard, 1999).

A Kamilaroi man, Norman Munro, was quoted in the Railcorp NSW publication "Join Our Team", their Aboriginal Recruitment handbook (2006-7 Annual Report), "My parents were railway workers. Dad was a Per-Way (permanent way; the railroad track) worker and Mum was a Gatekeeper. We have a family tradition of approximately 100
years with my two brothers Lyall and Bruce both working for the railways, as well as my three uncles. In the early days a lot of Aboriginal families could only get work on the railways - I travelled to Newcastle (well out of country) and got a job with the railways on the 16 February 1959; I’ve been here ever since. It was always my dream to work on the railways, just like my Dad”. Apart from his story, no documentation exists about the employment of other family members. This reflects the hidden nature of Aboriginal Australian employment. They were assimilated into the rail system and so not documented as Aboriginal Australian workers. Hence, their contribution is not acknowledged in populist rail histories of the Hunter region.

This is also evident in McKillop and Sheedy’s book (2008) Our Region, Our Railway - The Hunter and the Great Northern Railway 1857-2007. Despite the above anecdotal accounts, there is no mention in the book itself of the Aboriginal Australians being employed on the railways. This work has no index mention of local Aboriginal Australians, in this case the Awabakal people.

John Maynard (2001), however, has written of Aboriginal workers in the Awabakal country around what is now Newcastle. They moved around the region seeking seasonal work and better opportunities for their families. In the early 1930s it was recorded that Aboriginal people had moved back into the Lake Macquarie district to work on the construction of railway lines. They lived in tents along the railway lines. Where these people had originally come from one can only speculate on, Maynard says, but Aboriginal people of this period were prone and able to move great distances in their attempts to
make a living.

Dr Greg Blyton has written “Sixteen pound hammers, settlers and railway tents: the demographic relocation of Aboriginal people from rural to urban areas of New South Wales in the Assimilation Era 1950-1967” (Blyton, 2009). This paper has looked at the impact of assimilation policies on the lives of Aboriginal people in New South Wales through employment in the NSW Department of Railways. During this much later period hundreds of Aboriginal people were employed on the construction of railway track throughout many parts of New South Wales, which resulted in not only the relocation of Aboriginal employees from traditional rural settings to urban areas, but their entire families as well. This paper explored the nature of railway life for Aboriginal people and their families; the hard arduous labour of track laying, twelve hour working days swinging sixteen pound hammers, families living in railway tents alongside railway tracks and the eventual permanent relocation of these families from rural to urban areas.

In another domain, writing for Muswellbrook Shire, Blyton penned, “The Impact of Dispossession: Railway Tents, 14lb Hammers and Assimilation” Blyton wrote that employment in the railways was a major factor in causing Aboriginal people to come to the Upper Hunter Valley from places such as Scone, Aberdeen and Muswellbrook which were once the scene of numerous tents sited along the railway tracks. One Aboriginal man, Blyton commented, recalled that while there was discrimination against his people in the railways there was equal pay. He states that this man and other Aboriginal workers
camped near Scone. There was still a stigma about Aboriginal people and they were fighting for just basic individual rights. In the railways they were treated equally for equal work. Aboriginal men often lived with their families in tents, which were hired from the Railway Department for around 5 shillings a week with optional extras such as wooden planks which served as floors and larger two room tents. There was no electricity and kerosene lanterns provided light at night, while food was cooked on fires. Despite employment in the white world Aboriginal people maintained a cultural sense of place and identity.

In the published version of his 2009 paper, Blyton (2013) expanded his focus from railway work to demographic movements of Aboriginal Australians in general, but included details of Aboriginal Australians and families moving to railway work. He also states that railway workers had equal pay well before the 1967 referendum (pages 180 to 182 especially).

In “Rivers and Resilience” (2009) Goodall and Cadzow write of Aboriginal people from the Salt Pan Creek area on the Georges River taking casual work on the suburban railway developments of the Great Depression era. Aboriginal Australians were routinely refused the new Unemployment Relief rations and work in many areas. Some of the men found work putting the railway line through to East Hills. A married man got two weeks on and one week off. A single man got one week on, three weeks off. This casual work is a contrast to Arabana options where many were ongoing employees, and stayed on country with their families.
Tasmania (settled by white people 1803):

Tasmania's first (1600 mm gauge) line opened in 1871 (Quinlan and Newland, 2000), from Deloraine to Launceston and was converted to 1067 mm gauge in 1888. By this stage the Tasmanian Aboriginal Australians had long been decimated, the survivors rounded up, placed on Wybaleena on Flinders Island, reduced numbers further, been transferred back to southern Tasmania, and been officially written out of history. Lyndall Ryan (1996) in her seminal “The Aboriginal Tasmanians” does not even mention trains, rail or the like in her index. The more recent “Tasmanian Aborigines: A History since 1803” (2012) by the same author does not add to this information.

The renascent Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples probably number about 5,000 now but are more occupied with contemporary life where railways are much less significant than cars, trucks, buses and air transport.

Queensland (settled 1824; separate State 1859)

Aboriginal Australians are not mentioned as working on the railways in the official histories until the 1950s (https://www.queenslandrail.com.au/ourhistory; Cole 1944). There is massive concentration in the literature on the nineteenth century frontier wars, which were particularly bitter, and then the use of “Native Police” for decimating the survivors (Richards, 2008). From the 1840s onwards South Sea Islanders were induced or
kidnapped to work as “sugar slaves” 12 on sugar plantations in Queensland, a practice called “blackbirding” (Palmer, 1871). This only ended in 1904, well after Federation in 1901.

Railways had arrived in 1865. Katie Maher (2012, 2013, 2014) states that she learned that Aboriginal people worked on construction of railway lines as packers and carriers, sleeper cutters and track layers. Women are said to have worked as laundresses and washerwomen. The women not infrequently married in and had children with railway workers. Documentary evidence for this remains very thin.

**Torres Strait Islanders in Queensland and Western Australia:**

Leah Lui Chividzhe (2011) has written of the arrival and settlement of Torres Strait islanders recruited to work on the Queensland and West Australian mining railways from the 1950s. About ten per cent of the Torres Strait population left the islands and many worked on the railways. They hold a track laying record, from 1968, still celebrated. I have spoken to one Torres Strait Islander man, Harold Matusia, who worked upon the Ghan, married into Arrernte and now lives in Aputula (the old Finke) on the old Ghan line.

Herb Shields (in Bitomsky and Mylne, 1995, p20) was reared in the Purga Mission near Ipswich. He was recruited aged 27 as a railway cleaner in which job he worked for four years. He must have been capable and ambitious as he qualified as a fireman.

thereafter. He became a train driver and locomotive inspector from the 1960s to the 1980s, albeit mostly working away from family and home. He remained a member of the Salvation Army for all of his life and was very actively involved in community activities. After a short illness he died in December 1999 aged 75 years. It was not until much later in his life that he sought out his own Aboriginality (http://www.ipswich.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/9919/some_of_the_characters.pdf).

In his own quoted words, he cites other Aboriginal Australians working upon the Queensland rail: one at Maryborough, one at Mayne Junction and a few around Hughenden. Unfortunately no names are given nor do they appear elsewhere in the text.

Albert Holt (DOB 22nd November 1939) (2001, p108) born in Inala but reared in Cherbourg Mission worked on the railways as a settler in the 1950s and asserts that “you just had to show up and the ganger could appoint you there and then”. Later, like Paul Tanner of the Arabana, he worked in the Justice system, initially from 1995 as an Indigenous Police Liaison Officer, then helped establish the Murri Courts to reduce Indigenous incarceration and recidivism. Albert was State Finalist Senior Australian of the Year in 2010. In his birth suburb of Inala, a Community Housing development has been named the Uncle Albert Holt Terraces. He was President of Inala Wangarra, the local Aboriginal organisation, in 2013.

Dr George Skeene, a Yirrganydji Elder, born 1948, grew up on an Aboriginal Reserve in the Cairns area, and joined the railways in 1967 (Skeene, 2008). George's father,
also called George, was already employed and was in the flying gang, which at that time was working strengthening the curves between Almaden and Forsayth in far north Queensland. George in his quoted words said there were already a lot of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders working on the railways. George’s brothers, Mick, Rodney, Warren and Chris all later joined the railways. Sister Lesley married another flying gang member. Only one white person was in that flying gang. Like Arabana they supplemented their diet by hunting and George records hitting a plains turkey with a rock flung from a section car. George was in the flying gang until 1983 when he moved into the carpenters’ and plumbers’ shop. After six years of this and when Bitomsky and Mylne was published in 1995, he was still working as a railway gardener. He retired in 2003 and published his autobiography Two Cultures in 2008. He was given an Honorary Doctorate by James Cook University in 2013 for his work researching his culture and artefacts. A significant basis for his later contributions to the community was laid by his railway involvement.

Geraldine Mate (2012) from the Railway Workshops Museum in Ipswich held an Exhibition in May 2012 called “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad” which toured Australia, including in the National Archives in Canberra (until 18th May 2014). In the accompanying brochure she summarised the Exhibition. Through the 1950s, 60s and 70s, there were renewed large scale developments of rail infrastructure across Australia. In the hot and dusty or wet and humid environments of the inland north, it was a common scene to find Torres Strait Islanders, Australian South Sea Islanders and Aboriginal people working long and hard in all weathers. This exhibition explored the little known railway
stories of Aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islanders and Australian South Sea Islanders and their contribution to the development of rail across Australia. The stories are about their achievements. The camp life, the realities of the work, the hardships, the separation from their land, islands and family and the opportunities and challenges of working on the railway. “Today”, the brochure concluded, “Torres Strait Islanders, Aboriginal people and Australian South Sea Islanders work across the full spectrum of roles that make up railway activities”.

There was just one mention of South Australian Arabana in this Exhibition, a photograph labelled “re-sleepering” but according to my Arabana informants, dealing with a derailment, as a Guard in uniform is present, which would not have been the case for a resleepering gang.

Western Australia (settled 1829; declared a separate State in 1890)

Given the Western Australia’s vast size and small settler population, there has been a much higher dependence on Aboriginal Australian labour than in other states. As has been related in the Literature Review above, the pastoral industry relied heavily on Aboriginal Australian workers. A similar reliance did not occur in the early development of the State’s railways. In 1889, the privately built Great Southern Railway in the southwest corner of Western Australia was opened with subsequent economic growth to the regions along the line. The Government took over the line in 1896. The wheat industry
did not really get established until construction of railways allowed transport of the produce. A railway line had reached Coolgardie (from Perth) by 1896. West Australian Aboriginal dispossession and lack of involvement in this and later railways as builders or railway workers was the norm.

The Transcontinental Railway was built after Federation in 1901 (Burke, 1991). The colonies of Australia were negotiating about Federation at the end of the 19th Century. The colony of Western Australia was encouraged to join this new nation, *inter alia*, by promise of a transcontinental railway, linking this isolated western region with the eastern colonies. Thus it is similar to the Canadian situation where British Columbia was promised a rail link in 1871 if it joined Canada in its federation. There were rail systems in the separate States but a 1,996 kilometre gap existed in the system between Kalgoorlie in Western Australia and Port Augusta in South Australia.

On 17 October, 1917, in a remarkable surveying and engineering feat, two construction teams, one starting from Port Augusta and the other from Kalgoorlie, made an historic achievement, meeting to join the lines at what is now the tiny South Australian siding of Ooldea on the Nullarbor Plain. This was the longest railway ever built as a single project in Australia, taking five years to complete. It was constructed using the most basic tools – pick and shovel, carthorse and camel. Again land grants were given to the successful contractors – 12,000 acres (nearly 20 square miles) per mile of rail built. At 10:15am on 25 October, 1917, the first eastbound passenger train, the Transcontinental Express, departed Kalgoorlie for Port Augusta.
The Transcontinental Railway had an adverse impact on the local Aboriginal Australian people. Steam trains used huge amounts of water and Ooldea Soak was a major source. This spring, used for time immemorial by the local Aboriginal peoples, was run dry by the railway within a few years and was abandoned in 1926 as a water source.

Daisy Bates’ *Passing of the Aborigines* (1926, Chapter 15, pp), written while she lived and worked at Ooldea, continued the myth of extermination.

So with the survey of the east-west railway began the extermination of the central native groups, not by the deliberate cruelty of the white man, but by the impossibility of amalgamating two such extreme races, Palaeolithic and 20th Century, and through the natives’ ready, and even eager, adoption of the white man’s vices.

As the construction proceeded, with a great influx of railway workers of all classes and nationalities, along 1,000 miles of previously uninhabited (!) country, they straggled in to the line in increasing numbers, drawn by the abundance of food-stuffs and the new fire-drink [Kala-gabbi] that made them “head no good.” [Kooramba] Each group through whose territory the line was passing saw its waters used up, the trees and bushes destroyed for firewood and fence-posts, and the whole country turned to strange uses. In their eagerness to “make the most of what they yet may spend,” they did not know that they were bringing about their own annihilation. They thought that the train and its people would go away.
and leave them the things to play with.

(http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks04/0400661.txt; not paginated).

Daisy Bates set up her camp at Ooldea in 1919 and provided food, clothes and some medicine to the Aboriginal Australians who had gathered there. It was normally a temporary site for ceremonies, but the train induced more permanent habitation. She stayed until 1934. David Burke (op cit), says that the local Aboriginal Australians called the train “Maletna”, great snake. The local Aboriginal Australians did not necessarily welcome Daisy Bates’ presence. Later Ooldea became a Mission which only closed in 1952. Most inhabitants were moved to Yalata.

One of Peter Elkin’s famous constructs is “intelligent parasitism”, first voiced in the 1940s (McGregor, 1996). This evolving idea suggests that Aboriginal Australians made use of the Transcontinental Railway in their own way. They made artefacts specifically for sale. They borrowed babies to appear more appealing to tourists and other train travellers. He saw this as a phase to, hopefully, intelligent appreciation then assimilation into settler culture (Elkin, 1951). Elkin does not record Aboriginal Australian workers upon the line, although there certainly were.

There is a South Australian Teachers’ Guide to a module called “Tea and Sugar” concerns the ration cars on trains of the Trans-Australia Railway (http://www.ontherails.com.au/pdf/TeacherNotes_TS.pdf). These ration cars ran from 1917 to 1996. The Guide comments that most of the film clips used in On The Rails do not feature
Aboriginal Australians at all, or only incidentally. At this time, Aboriginal Australian people were considered an unimportant and insignificant element of Australian society. These films about railways praised European concepts like certain types of technology, industry, modernisation, progress, mineral exploitation and ‘taming a savage and/or otherwise worthless land’. On The Rails was a celebration of the settler society’s achievements, through the Transcontinental, and so Aboriginal Australians were excluded.

Jane Jolly published Tea and Sugar Christmas in 2014 with beautiful illustrations by Robert Ingpen. This book is about a young Aboriginal Australian who is called Kathleen and he anticipation of and joy at the arrival of Father Christmas on the train. The mother of this young lady is clearly Aboriginal Australian, but is never identified by name nor Aboriginal people of origin. Father looks non-Aboriginal. Kathleen is deracinated completely, yet another recent and rather subtle example of removing Aboriginal Australians from their own origins.

Mining railways:

I have covered the Torres Strait Islander involvement with laying tracks in the Queensland section, but Western Australia in the Pilbara was also the scene for such feats. Torres Strait Islander Mr Percy Maillie, one of whose sons married into Arabana lady Shirley Arbon’s (nee Hodgson) family, was awarded a silver spike for his work on the northern railway lines of Western Australia (Personal communication, 2013).
Aboriginal Australian people from South Australia did move to the East-West line, particularly after the closure of Killalpanina in Dieri country (see South Australian section), but information about these families is negligible.

Victoria (settled 1834; declared a separate state in 1851):

The first railway between Melbourne and Port Melbourne opened in 1854 (Quinlan and Newland, 2000). The Melbourne and Suburban Railway Company's line from Princes Bridge railway station to Punt Road (Richmond) opened in 1859. In the same year the Geelong and Melbourne Railway Company opened its line from Melbourne to Geelong. Subsequently the Victorian Railways built new railways to connect farming and mining communities to the ports of Melbourne, Geelong and Portland. In 1862 lines reached the great gold rush towns of Bendigo and Ballarat. In 1864 a line was opened to the Murray River port of Echuca. In 1883 the first connection with another State's rail system was made when the North East line was completed to the New South Wales Government Railways station at Albury, requiring a break-of-gauge to New South Wales' 4 ft 8 ½ in (1,435 mm) standard gauge Main Southern line. In 1887, Victorian Railways met South Australian Railways at Serviceton, with both systems using broad gauge.

Aboriginal workers on the Victorian railways.

Gary Presland (2001) does not mention railways at all in his book on Aboriginal Melbourne. Richard Broome (2005) does not even mention the railways in his work on
Aboriginal history in Victoria since 1800. The Koorie Heritage Trust has written to me and emphasised that Aboriginal people in Victoria after 1853 needed permits to travel anywhere including to work. This prohibition on movement was breached (see, for instance, *Jackson’s Track* (1999)) but hindered Victorian Aboriginal Australian involvement in the railways and other industry until much more recently (personal communication, 2012).

Some people escaped this restriction. Lester Marks Harradine (1920-2010) was a Wotjobaluk man whose family lived on the Ebenezer Mission in North West Victoria. He was born in Bordertown South Australia in 1920 but raised in Dimboola, and was interviewed for the Victorians at War Oral History Project (2001). He describes coming back from World War II and joining the railways in 1946 (aged 26). He trained as a fireman which he did for five years until qualifying as a locomotive driver in 1951. As far as I can tell, he was the first qualified Aboriginal locomotive engineer. He played for the Australian Rules Football team of the railways when away from his home town of Dimboola. He stayed with the railways until retiring in 1980 aged 60. He helped establish Wurega Aboriginal Corporation and as a senior Wotjobaluk Elder he played a key role in establishing his family’s claim in an historic 2005 Federal court decision to finally recognise native title rights and interests in the Wimmera (13th December 2005; http://www.nntt.gov.au/searchRegApps/NativeTitleClaims/Pages/Determination_details.aspx?NNTT_Fileno=VCD2005/001).

Harradine’s case was the exception rather than the rule. Given the restrictive
legislation on Aboriginal movements in Victoria there was little opportunity for Indigenous peoples to gain work on the railways. Without this opportunity, Victoria’s Aboriginal Australians remained largely segregated from the settler society and, consequently, were the most impoverished members of the community.

In a rather more sober event, in 2006 Yarra Yarra Tribal Elder Aunty Dot Peters (awarded basket and eel trap weaver) approached her local Returned and Services League to play the didgeridoo in honour of her father, who died when she was aged 12, on the Thai Burma Railway where he was a Prisoner of War of the Japanese (RSL website 2011; Yarra Ranges Museum, 2015). They did so and subsequently the RSL started proper recognition of all Indigenous service men and women.
Skipton Jacky Jacky and His Tribe At the Opening of the Beaufort Railway 1874 - clearly seen as well off the train of progress.
South Australia: (settled 1836 officially):

Ngarrindjeri lands:

First railway in South Australia

Goolwa - Port Elliot Railway

In 1851 the Harbour Commission set up by the Legislative Council at the urging of Lieutenant Governor Fox agreed to build a railway between Port Elliot and Goolwa at a cost of £20,000. It ended up costing £31,000 and wasn't finished until 1854. This was through Ngarrindjeri land and was just seven miles long. It was, by any measure, a bit of a disaster. It rarely made a profit as the trains carrying the goods travelled at about 10 km/h and had to be unloaded before the goods could be moved to the ships because the waters at Port Elliot were too shallow and the jetty was not long enough. After ten years of horse-
drawn rail operation in which seven ships were wrecked off the coast, the port was moved to Victor Harbor instead (Stewein, 2009).

First bridge and rail traffic across the Murray

The first bridge across the Murray was built at Murray Bridge (Pomberuk) in 1879 (also Ngarrindjeri land) - this largely replaced a number of ferry and punt crossings further down river. This bridge was initially for road traffic but in 1886 was finally ready to carry the railway line. This line extended to the South Australia/Victoria border. The bridge at Murray Bridge had a long genesis, having been proposed in 1864; the bridge spans were ordered from England, and received long before the final decision was made on where to place the bridge. By the early years of the 20th century road traffic was being delayed for several hours when the bridge was closed to allow trains to cross. A second bridge to carry the railway was proposed, and this was finally opened in November 1925.

From this area, Charles Runga appears in Geoffrey Manning’s unpublished work: this Ngarrindjeri or Buandik man worked for 14 years in the South Australian Railways from 1874-1888 (The Public Service Review, 1896).

Another survivor was an Aborigine with the European name of Charles Runga and an 1888 newspaper report says:

There is working on the Kingston to Naracoorte line... an Aboriginal named Charles Runga who has been on the line in the South East from its commencement, I believe. He had a few acres of land given to him where he built a cottage and until lately has been able to go home.
every evening to his wife and family. A few days ago this hard working industrious black received notice to leave in a fortnight... Now he is a workman equal to any on the line... One time they thought of making him a ganger and he ran the line daily for years... [Editor's note - There is no truth in the above statements but we have learned from another authority that the dismissal was made on economic grounds.] (This is said to be derived from Geoffrey Manning’s unpublished manuscript “A History of the Lower South East District of South Australia in the 19th Century”).

Other Aboriginal people than Arabana have been involved but probably mainly since the Second World War. Gladys Elphick (1904-1988), Kaurna/Ngadjuri descent, worked at the South Australian Railway’s Islington Workshops (Australian Dictionary of Biography, 2007). She won an award for an invention improving the shop floor. She was awarded the MBE in 1971 in recognition of service to the Aboriginal community and South Australian Aborigine of the Year in 1984. She helped establish the South Australian Aboriginal Medical Service in 1977. A plaque for her is in the Jubilee 150 plaques along North Terrace, Adelaide.

Another Aboriginal Australian man, Bobby Smith, is recorded by Ron Fitch as “my favourite Aborigine” and as being in charge of the Pedirka gang between 1949 and 1954 in his railwayman’s memoirs (Fitch 2004). Pedirka is about 100Km northwest of Oodnadatta; there was a train station there from 1928 to 1968. It is not clear which
Aboriginal people Bobby Smith belonged to. It is also unknown whether this is the same man as Robert Smith who with his brother William later established a successful Aboriginal labour hire company.

Prominent activist Charles Nelson Perkins (1936-2000) was a stolen Arrernte child, mother Arrernte, father Kalkadoon from western Queensland. He was the first Aboriginal University graduate. He worked on the South Australian Railways (Perkins, 1975, Chap 5, pp53-4; Read, 1990, p58) in the yard as a fitter and turner in the early 1960s, again with equal wages prior to the Equal Wages case in the later 1960s. He became an activist with the 1960s Freedom Rides and was instrumental in organising the Referendum in 1967 which led to Aboriginal Australians being counted in the Census for the first time and enabling the Federal Parliament to make laws about Aboriginal Australians. Perkins' working career as a tradesman in the railways supported the contention that unlike other industry sectors such as pastoralism, they provided a means for Indigenous peoples to both progress and eventually challenge the right of settler politicians to determine their lives. Perkins never worked on country, and would count as an example of "pan-Aboriginality".

I cover Aboriginal Australians who come from domains along the old Ghan line itself apart from Arabana in Appendix 5.

The Northern Territory had a train line running from Darwin to Larrimah during the tenure of this land by the South Australian Parliament. Arabana spread up to work on
Alec (Bumbolili) Kruger (DOB 25/12/1924; Mudburra people) was born on the banks of the Katherine River (Kruger and Waterford, 2007). He was removed from his family aged 3 1/2. Reared in institutions such as the harsh Bungalow in Alice Springs, he then became a stockman in Arrernte country. He joined the Army in 1942, during World War II - equal pay for the first time. One of his colleagues in the Aboriginal Unit was Jack Hughes, of mixed Afghan and Aboriginal descent from the Marree area. After the War Alec and his Aboriginal friend Billy Goodall joined the railways at Hawley as fettlers together with his older brother George (ibid, pp151-3). He was only there for six months before moving on to other work. Much later he worked in Queensland pulling up and replacing sleepers on the Mt Isa to Townsville railway line (ibid, p216). He adds that he also worked as a fettler on the railway in Quiradella siding out of Djarra but “(T)hat was lonely work and I gave it away” (ibid, p233). In 1954 he again got work on the railways, working from Alice Springs down to Ooriminna. He worked with the Ah Chees, who are from Oodnadatta and some of whom identify as Arabana. Alec names other Aboriginal Australians on the line with him, Nugget Blackmore and Les Thompson. He says (ibid, p233) that “it turned out to be really good having a job at the railways”. He stayed with the train line until the early 1960s when he got better money unloading copper ore trucks. Alec had many other roles until retiring and getting a Veteran’s Pension after 1989, but never went back to rail. Alec was a claimant in the Stolen Generations High Court challenge in 1997 which was lost by the Aboriginal Australians. Alec has never been able
to live and work in his own country.

Some other names appear in the Aboriginal Protection Board’s minutes from 1954-7 (GRG52/16). Immanuel Mack was with the South Australian Railways working at Mile End in 1954. Thomas Henry Newchurch, married with eight children, from Point Pearce, was on the South Australian Railways at Blythe and successfully petitioned for furniture for his home on 3rd August 1955. Similarly Herbert Milera was given furniture while with the South Australian Railways at Black Rock on 6th June 1956. Showing how microscopic was the APB’s control is the subsequent annotation that the Board had approved his purchase of six rabbit traps (6th February 1957). Presumably a relative, Bryan Victor Milera, was given furniture while working with SAR at Black Rock on 4th July 1956. William James Newchurch was with SAR at Koonibba on 17th November 1956. The Mileras and Newchurches have married into Arabana families and the names appear in Marilyn Hull-Stuart’s genealogy (1998). Despite working for the railways, the lives of these workers were heavily regulated by the Board. Indeed, all purchases made by workers had to be approved by the Board.

As can be seen from the above individual stories, Aboriginal Australians did work upon railways all over Australia, but many were out of country and a number did not identify as Aboriginal Australians when working upon the railways. Arabana were different in that they mainly stayed on country to work on the Ghan and were able to practice culture parallel to the western work.
Chapter 3. LIVING IN “THE DESERT” - “AUSTRALIA’S RED HEART”

AND WORKING FOR MIDHLHA-PITYIRINHA (WHITE PERSON)

THE ARABANA BEFORE BRITISH SETTLEMENT

The Arabana lived and flourished in some of the least hospitable (particularly to white people) country on the west of Lake Eyre, now also Kati Thanda (reclaimed name 2013), in the centre of the Australian continent. The Lake was so named after explorer John Eyre by Europeans in 1860 after a suggestion in the Adelaide Register of 27th January [Madigan 1936; Spencer and Gillen, 1912]. Paul Carter (1988) and Adams & Mulligan (2003) have argued cogently that this renaming was in itself an act of white appropriation. Most years this Lake is a dry salt pan. At about ten to fifteen year intervals the lake floods, with the sources of water mostly far away in the Queensland coastal ranges. It has been estimated that Aboriginal Australian people had inhabited the Lake and its surrounds for over 20,000 years (Mulvaney and Kamminga 1999, p114) although there was probably a temporary retreat during the severe glaciation period (LGM, last glacial maximum; ibid, p191). They called their country Wangyu (Shaw 1995) or Wadalu (Arbon 2008) and Lake Eyre, Bundu (Reg Dodd, personal communication 2010), or Kati Thanda (Spencer, 1912; Arabana Aboriginal Corporation, pers comm, 2013). One story given about the Lake’s origin is that of a kangaroo skin, thrown down by an ancestor, which then filled with water.

The pre-colonial lifestyle of the Arabana consisted of observing the Law/Lore/Ularaka (Spencer and Gillen 1912; Arbon 2008). This lore is transmitted by stories, called
Wibrna, which are tales with mnemonic, moral, mythic, legal aspects and usually associated with particular locations and ceremonies of maintenance or increase. Their land is a “storied landscape” (McBryde, 2000). These stories both name and bring spiritual significance to the land, and reflect that there was, and still is, an Arabana way of interpreting the country. For instance, one Dreaming Track to do with two dingos followed mound springs down from between Coober Pedy and William Creek (Cadiwarrawirracanna [shortened name]– stars dancing on water) to the ochre (arrkapa, pukardu) mines near Parachilna (Elkin 1934). Another important Dreaming Track runs all the way from the Gulf of Carpentaria through Arabana country down to Port Augusta. This is the Urumbula, or Native Cat (Quoll) Dreaming (Kerwin, 2010, p 94). One would expect that in many cultures such usurpation of critical resources like the mound springs would have led to massive confrontation and loss of life by warfare or its frontier equivalent (Reynolds, 1982; Foster, Hosking and Nettelbeck, 2001). It appears that in the case of the Arabana this did not occur (Hercus, cited in Shaw, 1995, p8; Paterson, 2008), although a Police post was established later in the southern parts of Arabana country.

In the way of life for Arabana in pre-colonial times, goods were not accumulated nor amassed for their own sake. Trade did occur for needed items not present in their own country from as far away as Cloncurry in Queensland, but this was an equitable barter system and no excess value was retained (Mulvaney & Kamminga, 1999; Kerwin, 2010). Marree was a terminus or trade entrepôt (Kerwin, 2010, p107 and 112, Duncan-Kemp, 1933, pp208-9 and pp284-5; 1961, p134) where pituri from the northeast, stone mortars and pestles, spear shafts, furs, seeds and ochre were all traded. In addition, the Arabana were...
reputed to be specialists in making netted bags for trade (McCarthy, 1939, p430). As they lacked stone for axe heads in their country, they traded for these from the Macdonnell Ranges and Queensland (McCarthy, op cit; Basedow, 1925, p 336). On the other hand, they had stone for mortars and traded these into Simpson Desert areas.

There was no exploitation of land to exhaustion nor of labour, as there was no division between a working life and any other aspect of existence. Want did occur in poor seasons such as droughts or extensive flooding and this could lead to visitation to neighbours temporarily. When white settler society entered Arabana country, it was engaging with a people with long established trade ties to other Aboriginal Australian groups. The white settlers and workers became another group through which the Arabana could extend these ties.

Agriculture predating European settlement is recorded (Pascoe, 2014). Mitchell Grass (Astrebla pectinata) and Native Millet (Panara or Panera, Panicum decompositum) known as Nardoo grow in Arabana country and it is known that this was harvested, the seeds ground and bread made (Spencer and Gillen, 1912). This crop was planted deliberately (Tindale, 1977; Kimber, 1984). The train station name Wangianna means “winnowing dish” in Arabana language, indicating the prevalence of this activity nearby. (This is very ironic when the white people renamed Government Gums, further down the railway line, “Farina”, Latin for wheat/flour which they erroneously hoped would grow there).
Yams (including *Inka*, *Vigna lanceolata*) *Amapina* (large yam) and *ariltyi* (pencil yam), *mutyarri*, *waRala*, and *yarrakarla* in Arabana) are also mentioned by Freddie Ah Chee in Shaw (1995). Algebuckina, a significant place on the Ghan line, actually means “digging yams”. Other plants likely to be cultivated were button grass (*Dactyloctenium radulans*), Common purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) and Bush tomato (*Solanum ellipticum*). “Bush onion” (*Yalka* in Arabana; *Cyperus bulbosus*) used to grow near Curdimurka and Coward Springs according to my informants and many other parts of Arabana country as well. I have been told of such onions growing to about 30cm in diameter (pers. comm. 2014, although this may be hyperbole). Indeed Baldwin Spencer mentions this plant as a significant food source when he is camped at Charlotte Waters at the north end of Arabana country (Baldwin Spencer, 1901-2, 31st March entry, p13). Poultry raising was also an intermittent activity. When Kati Thanda/Lake Eyre had water in it, pelicans nested there and had chicks. These chicks were corralled and then eaten like chickens today in western diet. The convenience was that the parents kept feeding the chicks instead of Arabana having to do it (Kerwin and Breen, 1981, Section D, 295-7; Mulvaney and Kamminga, 1989, p81).
Aboriginal grain belt (in “Dark Emu”, Pascoe 2014, p29, with permission)
Aboriginal Trade Routes (Kerwin, 2010, with permission)

In the Marree Arabanna (sic) Community Centre, there are several types of fighting boomerangs and shields. This implies that interpersonal conflicts and community versus community conflicts did occur between males, although the scale must have been small. In Aboriginal Australian communities, women also fought, using their digging sticks,
various clubs and opportunistic stones. Revenge parties also travelled to neighbouring tribes to wreak vengeance on a perceived malefactor, who may have been identified as causing an unnatural death among Arabana. Such scraps or “tribal” feuding were largely disregarded by white people once they arrived (GRS.12387/0001, Protector of Aborigines annual reports), even if fatalities occurred.

**Bundu or Kati Thanda:**

Lake Eyre, Bundu, Kati Thanda, was “discovered” by Europeans in 1839. Major flooding occurred in 2010 for the first time in over a decade, although floods occurred throughout recorded times at irregular intervals. Great Artesian Basin freshwater springs do break though and one, Dingo Island in the middle of the Lake, is used by dingoes to give birth to and rear their young. Other creation stories around Finniss Springs Station towards the southern end of Arabana country (named after Boyle Travers Finniss, first Premier of South Australia in 1856) concern the various natural features and include: Pregnant Woman (Bullaburra), Crested Pigeon (Mulapara), Three Brothers, and Bearded Dragon (Kudni).

**Red Ochre and Pituri Before the Railway:**

Along Dreaming tracks established probably for thousands of years, Aboriginal men made pilgrimage trips to a Red Ochre mine near Parachilna in the Flinders Ranges. Before the railway and any other mode of transport, the returning men would carry a
30-35Kg moulded lump of Red Ochre on their heads. When the camels and their cameleers arrived in their country, Arabana and other tribes commissioned the cameleers to carry their loads instead, while they still walked back to their traditional lands. Loads of red ochre and pituri were also carried by mail coach later (Jones, op cit, p372). The railway changed that method.

**Arrival of Explorers and the Coming of White Settlers:**

Europeans did not penetrate this area until the 1830s, fifty years after the Port Jackson colony, and not in any significant numbers. By the 1850s there were probably about 800-1,000 Arabana, living in small groups scattered across the landscape, with concentrations near the sacred mound springs, and near other permanent water holes (Tindale, 1941, cited in Mulvaney & Kamminga, 1999; Shaw 1995).

I have mentioned John McDouall Stuart above. Gammage (2011) emphasises that there was blindness to the managed estate aspect of these terrains and the estate managers, the Arabana. Otherwise the local people would have to have been regarded as “gentry”, proper landholders, and a usurper could not do that. When white settlers arrived, the whole Arabana population was dispossessed, under the continued fiction of *Terra Nullius* (British Law Officers, 1819, cited in Darwin {2012, p 64}), the country mostly re-named, and they were denied political, economic, social and human rights despite notionally being British subjects (Prest, 2001, Price, 1950; Berndt & Berndt, 1951; Jenkin,
1979). This process started well before explorers and settlers arrived in country (see below).

Smallpox:

It would appear that a smallpox epidemic swept through the Arabana in 1858 or 1859, just five years before Strangways Station, the first pastoral station, was established. This epidemic probably caused the death of about fifty per cent of the Arabana population (Cumpston, 1914, Kimber 1988 and Campbell 2002). Because of the epidemic’s toll, it seems possible that Arabana society was disorganized by this “invisible invader”, and the society was thus less able to mount any strong armed resistance to the pastoralists, as had happened elsewhere.

PASTORAL LEASES AND THE OVERLAND TELEGRAPH LINE

European Settlement of South Australia:

In May 1839, William Wyatt, the then “Protector of Aborigines”, announced publicly that it appeared that the natives occupied no lands in the especial manner described in the original instructions. Indeed, the settlers passed separate legislation to justify their activities. There was an earlier Aborigines Ordinance Act, no 12 of 1844 on the books, but when the colony become self-governing in 1857, the statute virtually became a dead letter (Raynes 2002). Parry and Austin (1998, p10) do list the official duties of the Chief Protector and Sub-Protectors as follows: “watch over the general interests of the
Aborigines, and be the responsible means of communication with the Government”; “dispense justice summarily, in all matters of dispute between natives themselves, as also between natives and Europeans, to the extent of at one inflicting punishment on the native, if the culpable party, or of committing the European for trial, if it was evident that he had infringed the law in a gross manner”. The Chief Protector was supposed to be assisted by the Sub-Protectors to attend to the physical needs especially of the aged, infirm and ill, to train Aboriginal people “to steady industrial habits and manners of civilised life” and to open their minds to “the truths of Christianity” (Raynes, Introduction, citing South Australian Parliamentary Papers, Number 165, 1860, p 2). There was, however, no Chief Aboriginal Protector appointed from 1856 onwards until new 1911 legislation, over fifty years. The functions of the Chief Protector were to be overseen by the Commissioner for Public Works; there was no separate department. In fact settlers and police in the far north of South Australia were left pretty much to their own devices regarding their treatment of Aboriginal Australians by the Government for that whole fifty year period (Rowley, 1970).

There were Sub-Protectors such as the minister John Parker Buttfield (1822-1885) (appointed 1866 and lived at Blinman; also Special and Stipendiary Magistrate from 1869) over that time but most tended to be Police Officers such as Inspector Bryan Besley based as far south as Port Augusta (Vallee, 2006, p101), in post from 1892 to 1900. The reports (only 1878 to the ending of this type of oversight are available) from these men show the tenor of the Protection (SRSA GRS/12387). Control and perhaps education was the leitmotif. Only Buttfield was in post prior to the Great Northern Railway being laid as far
as Arabana country. The treatment of Aboriginal Australians in the north could be benign or malign. In his seminal *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Rowley states “...race relations were a matter for the settler and the local Aborigines without effective Government interference” (Rowley, 1970, p 205). This is a possibly unique situation in Australia where every other Government imposed increasingly severe restrictions on native peoples from as early as possible. But “South Australia beyond the farming areas... formed another whole region where the settlers were subject mainly to their own consciences for many decades” (Rowley, op cit, p 206).

Some sub-protectors were diligent in their duties, and their reports detail the plights of the Aboriginal Australian peoples in the north. An example from 1867, four years after Strangways Station was established, is as follows: “There has been a great amount of sickness but little mortality among the natives. ... I always carry in my waggonette medicine and medical comforts and thus have been enabled to render needful assistance to many poor sufferers....The almost total absence of native animals, and the failure of other resources (this was in the middle of a severe drought), have placed a large number of Aborigines in most trying circumstances and dependant upon the government's generosity....They are for the most part patient, peaceable and well disposed, occasionally an unprotected hut is robbed of stores and there have been one or two instances of crimes of a more aggravated nature”. No further comments nor investigations apparently ensued about these “crimes of a more aggravated nature”. In 1868 Buttfield wrote “I can note no appreciable increase of native animals. For years to come the Aborigines will remain more or less dependant upon the government for support, a
contingency which would not have arisen but for the flocks and herds of the invader during the long and disastrous drought". Some years later, however, he reported that the Aboriginal Australians had endured great hardships and many had died from sheer want (Buttfield Family History: http://www.southaustralianhistory.com.au/buttfield.htm; the reports for these early years are not in the State Archives ). Buttfield's reports highlight that the introduction of the sheep and later cattle industry had led to a decrease in the traditional Aboriginal Australian food sources. A major cause of this was the establishment of Strangways Springs Station in 1863.

Strangways:

Now abandoned, Strangways Springs Station was the first pastoral property in the west of Lake Eyre area in the traditional land of the Arabana. This region had been explored by both McDouall Stuart and Peter Warburton in the previous five years. It was set up by Julius Jeffreys, future member of Parliament, John Warren, one of the founder members of the Pastoralists' Union in 1890, and William Bakewell, who served as Crown Solicitor (Warren, 1930; Cockburn, 1925). The local Arabana both male and female were enlisted, dragooned really, as free or cheap labour to care for the sheep.

The administration of Strangways in the early 1860s was disturbed by increasingly large Aboriginal parties travelling through on the red ochre dreaming track on the western side of the Flinders Ranges. These parties increased in size in the 1860s, partly because of the numbers of sheep and cattle available as food sources. The climate was also quite favourable before a drought from 1864-5. It would also appear that Aboriginal groups had
also started coming for plunder from the settlers (Jones, 2007, p364).

Julius Jeffreys called for police protection in 1863, the same year he and his colleagues had set up Strangways. So first appropriation occurred then a call for “legitimate” police protection from the real local people. He wrote in June 1863 “it is with much regret that I have the honour to inform you that the Aborigines have now become really dangerous and unless immediate steps are taken by the government some frightful calamity will take place” (South Australian Parliamentary Papers 1863). Just five months later, in November 1863, a massacre did occur at Beltana, south of Arabana country, to a red ochre pilgrimage party. Probably fifty Aboriginal men were killed or died of wounds (Jones, op cit, p363). Even prior to that, Police Commissioner Peter Warburton had toured the area. He wrote to the Government “I do not deny that the settlers at times suffer loss from the natives, but I do not think the only remedy lies in shooting the plunderers” (South Australian Parliamentary Papers 1864, No 134, tabled 20th October 1863). He recommended that the red ochre pilgrimage parties be offered rations at the main homesteads of each station to avoid conflict as they passed through. This groundbreaking relatively benign policy was implemented slowly. There had been ration stations from the late 1830s-1840s (Foster 2000) but they proliferated after Warburton’s recommendation.

At Strangways in 1865, the manager John Churchill Oastler originally resisted Warburton’s benign idea, and dealt with a passing party by putting a bullet into a stump near the demanding Aboriginal Australians, who sensibly fled. Interestingly the demand had been put in pidgin English, which the spokesman had already learned, according to
Oastler’s own account. In drought years, ochre parties dwindled (Oastler, 1908).

The whole Arabana area was subject to drought in the late 1860s and Strangways lost 6,500 sheep. A mortgage was taken out with Thomas Hogarth, John Warren’s father-in-law, and the station managed to struggle on. About 150 Arabana were living at Strangways by then. Some continued to live “wild” but there was regular interchange between the groups (Paterson, 2008). Roles for both male and female Arabana at Strangways included being shepherds, lambing surveillance, shearing and wool scouring, dogging, tracking and fence repair. In earlier days, Arabana also showed white people areas to graze and water the stock. Some work was seasonal and some fulltime. Only a very few Arabana received any pay. Most were given rations and minimal clothing.

Over the 1870s and 1880s, the two groups, Aboriginal Australians and settlers, gradually came to an accommodation along the lines suggested by Warburton. Strangways acted as a ration station as did its replacement as the head station, Anna Creek, later on. Later there were government sponsored ration stations rather than just private ones. There were Arabana encampments near the railway after the Oodnadatta extension opened in 1891 at Bangadillina Creek near Warrina, Duff Creek, Oodloodlana Spring, Algebuckina and some other places along the line such as Curdimurka (Hercus, 1994, p 21).

Pastoral life did attract many Arabana. In an article in the journal “Historical Archaeology” called “Early Pastoral Landscapes and Cultural Contact”, and then in a later
book, *The Lost Legions*, Professor Alistair Paterson (1999, 2005) described archaeological investigations into Strangways sheep station. Strangways Springs Station continued to be operated as a sheep station until about 1900 when operations were transferred to Anna Creek. Strangways continued as a repeater station for the Overland Telegraph.

Using both archaeological excavation and documentary evidence, Paterson traced both European and Arabana contributions to the operation of the station at Strangways Springs (called Pangki Warrunna [white ribs] in the Arabana language), during the period of initial cultural contact, when settlement patterns of both were affected by the needs of the station, and by the needs of both groups. He has found that artefacts of European manufacture are distributed not only around the Station itself, but occur all over Arabana land. Such goods were passed among the Arabana themselves, and were given, bartered or sold to Arabana by outlying stockmen.

Clearly the Arabana had made an early adaptation to this intrusion. The Arabana became a vital source of labour on the Station. In 1875, just twelve years after the arrival of British settler-colonists at Strangways Springs Station, Frank J. Gillen wrote that “all the shepherds employed at this station are Niggers[sic] ...and do just as well as the whites” (Gillen 1995, 49).

**Sheep Station Settlement Patterns**

In addition to the head station with stone buildings and permanent facilities, early sheep stations (ca 1860-1882) included residential outstations, where in seasons with
adequate rainfall, large numbers of sheep could be kept on rainwater; smaller outstations near permanent springs where uncertain rain conditions required smaller groups of sheep; and work camps, for scouring and shearing sheep. Later adaptations included new technologies, such as bores dug into artesian deposits for permanent access to water and the addition of railroad spurs.

Apart from relationships, trade and artefacts, Alistair Paterson has written of the environmental degradation of the Strangways Spring area, brought about by the introduction of these new animal species, the construction of fencing, and the over-use and mismanagement of artesian water resources. Most importantly, Paterson traced the complex changes in the pattern of interaction between Aboriginal and European populations. In all, he concluded, the complexity revealed in the documents and archaeological studies suggest a two-way process of adaptation and change, as the technology changed, and as the two groups learned to adapt to one another (Paterson, 2008 and cited in McBrayne, 1987).

Strangways partially relocated north to Anna Creek Station in 1872. John Hogarth ran Anna Creek until 1893, followed by his younger brother Thomas until 1913. George Warren followed for twelve months, then Francis, his younger brother until 1918. The Station was sold in 1918 to Malcolm Reid and Leslie Taylor. Malcolm Reid was a brother of Sidney Reid, who was married to Elma, a daughter of Sir Sidney Kidman. Kidman had 33% of the property by 1927 and owned it all by 1934.
Edward Cranswick, whom this author met with Kevin Buzzacott, Arabana, in 2012, (https://candobetter.net/node/436) has written of Anna Creek. He says “My grandfather’s family were members of the Hogarth-Warren business partnership that began with the marriage of his aunt, Margaret Hogarth, to John Warren in 1865, and it became one of the largest pastoralist enterprises in South Australia in the late 1800’s -- Anna Creek, SA, now the world’s largest working cattle station, occupying an area greater than that of Israel, was just one of their properties”. He is certain that “The success of the family business was based on the presence and labour of hundreds of Aboriginal people, mostly Arabuna (sic), who worked on the station, starting with the many Aboriginal stockmen who mustered the thousands of cattle and sheep; reciprocally, the Aboriginal people became dependent upon the rations provided by the pastoralists of European descent because the overgrazed land could no longer sustain the native food supply”. This mixing of fortunes of the two peoples “inevitably” led to “the mixing of blood”, that is marriage and the like, and the production of “mixed race” children. He adds “I have met many of my cousins of Aboriginal descent whose grandfather was Francis Dunbar Warren, a pastoralist who had married the Arabuna (sic) mother of his children as formally as was then possible for a black and white to marry in that day. Francis acted to live the best life with those with whom he shared life -- their example is a light from the past that beckons us into the future”.

These relationships assisted the Arabana people into entering the dominant settler society and economy. Indeed, by the turn of the century the Arabana were pivotal to the Warren-Hogarth pastoral empire. Other developments in the region would reinforce their
importance to the settler economy.

The Overland Telegraph Line:

Overland Telegraph Line 1870-72 (reconstruction), personal collection

The Overland Telegraph line was put through from 1870 - 1872 from Port Augusta on the Spencer Gulf to Darwin (Moyal, 1984; Livingstone, 1996). In Arabana country, this line followed the mound springs shown to the explorers and surveyors by Arabana. John McDouall Stuart returned to Arabana country in 1862 to survey for the Telegraph line. Pastoral settlement followed and Arabana were incorporated into this project, as noted above, but also utilised in subsequent surveying for the settlers and the telegraph, because
Stuart's maps were fragmentary and eight years out of date (Moyal, 1984 p 42). For instance, another surveyor, John Ross, "enterprising young manager of Thomas Elder's far north cattle stations" (Moyal, 1984, p43), appointed by Todd on 7th July 1870, was exploring hundreds of kilometres ahead of the construction crews. He evidently had Arabana companions or guides as he used the Arabana name for Koorakarinja waterhole on Frew's Creek (Giles 1995). Alfred Giles was a member of this expedition and stated that Frew's Creek was properly called Cookoolinah (Giles 1995). This is an Arabana word kukurla meaning plump little bandicoot. Ross could clearly communicate with Arabana people, most probably those who had been on Umbum Station south of Oodnadatta (Kimber 2009).

In John Ross's diary of that expedition (GRG154/000001/000001), he also uses other Arabana names for geographic features: Algebuckina ("digging yams" in Arabana) waterhole and Cadnia-Owie Creek and waterhole. The Aboriginal members of his expedition are quite "invisible" (even horses are named but not the Aboriginal people) and only mentioned in one place. On Sunday 15th January 1871, a white member of the expedition, Hearne, had been missing for several days. Ross writes "...sent Hearne 'a good tracker' (unnamed) mounted on the best and only shod horse I have got...". Other Overland Telegraph and Great Northern Railway surveyors' field notebooks (GRG35/258) do not contain such details. It is most likely that the Arabana came from Peake Station or, as noted, Umbum Station.
Marree - First Telegraph Station (From Moyal, p21)

This very Aboriginal invisibility is exactly what this book seeks to dispel. Most expeditions had Aboriginal Australians accompanying them, even if not acknowledged. The later Ernest Giles expedition across Australia, for instance, had Tommy (Oldham) [see picture, p77] (http://www.heritageaustralia.com.au/downloads/pdfs/Heritage0909_Ernest%20Giles.pdf) and the Aboriginal Australian accompanying Stuart on his first expedition has already been mentioned (https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/stuart/john_mcdouall/journals/complete.html).

The settlement of Marree, at that time called Hergott Springs, became a large camp
full of the builders of the telegraph line. A police presence in the form of three mounted constables only arrived in Hergott in 1882, some ten years after the Telegraph line was constructed, so the behaviour of the Telegraph line builders at that place may have been less troublesome than elsewhere (Litchfield 1983).

There were ten telegraph repeater stations set up along the line to boost the Morse code signal because it faded over distance. Two of these were on Arabana land. The repeater stations were located at Beltana, south of Arabana land, Strangways Springs and The Peake, both in Arabana country, then Charlotte Waters, Alice Springs, Barrow Creek, Tennant Creek, Powell Creek, Daly Waters and Yam Creek. Each repeater station was staffed by a stationmaster, with up to four operators and a linesman to repair line faults. As far as any documented records or oral history reports from Arabana to whom I spoke report, Arabana did not become telegraph operators nor any other position within these facilities.

**Travellers & Anthropologists and the creation of Aboriginal Stereotypes**

Accounts from anthropologists suffer from what Fabian (1983) has described as a fabled ethnographic present. By the time of anthropologists’ recording Arabana lives and culture, the traditional practices had already altered as a result of the arrival of Europeans themselves. The anthropologists also seldom mention the real situation in which they found Arabana when they talked to them (through interpreters). Their impressions formed the basis for creating derogatory stereotypes about the Arabana. These stereotypes were
disseminated in the colonies’ major urban centres under the banner of scientific enquiry. The Arabana, being on the Telegraph and railway route, were prime candidates to be framed within this stereotype.

This is evident in the work of J J East who travelled through Arabana country in the mid-1880s. On 16 July 1886, J J East told the Field Naturalists’ Section of the Royal Society about his trip through Arabana country. His views were subsequently published in his 1889 volume, *The Aborigines of Central and South Australia*. East noted, unflatteringly, that the “Urominna” were also called this by “neighbouring nations”, meaning that they were a “literally short or small people” (East, 1899). East noted that the “Urominna” were “physically the most unprepossessing natives of the province, and downright ugly in nature and disposition. Gratitude or kindness is totally unknown to them, and they are truculent to a degree” (East, 1889). Furthermore, they believed that all deaths are due to ‘witchcraft.’ The “bewitcher” was thought to belong to a neighbouring tribe and had to be located and killed. The result was a series of raids between the Urominna and its nearest neighbouring tribe, the Kokatha. These raids were still happening in the 1920s and 1930s, and the remnants are evident in the Marree Arabunna (sic) Community Centre’s collection of fighting boomerangs and shields which are on public display (personal observations, 2012, 3, 4). East, however, noted them and used them to assert his superiority over the Aboriginal Australians. East’s most significant observation was that the Urominna were travellers, prepared to walk “long distances to the ‘Bookitta’ ochre deposits near the Blinman, to obtain supplies of this pigment for ornamenting their persons.” East was
noting a journey that had already changed with the coming of the camelmen and the railway.

Moreover all early anthropologists necessarily relied on limited numbers of informants. Spencer and Gillen travelled with two Aboriginal Australians – Erlikiliakirra and Purunda (aka Perrurle).

Photograph of Gillen, Spencer and policeman Harry Chance with Warwick Perrurle and Jim Kite Erlikiyika (Telegraph Station Alice Springs).

[also present in Batty, Allen & Morton, 2007]

Their expedition was utterly dependent on these guides who gave them entrée into Aboriginal Australian communities. "Erlikiliakirra acted as a very important anthropological interpreter for them ... I've been through Spencer’s notebook and it’s quite clear that he just jotted down literally what he was being told and then he wrote it
up for publication. So really it was Erlikiliakirra’s material that provided a very large chunk of the book that Spencer and Gillen produced as a result of that expedition” (John Mulvaney on Radio National “100 Years, The Australian Story”, 2001; Spencer, Walter Baldwin, 1928). Elkin (1931) in his article, “The Social Organisation of South Australian Tribes”, amended some ideas that Spencer and Gillen put in their book, mostly by having more informants, but did not fundamentally alter their findings. The focus of these anthropologists was to observe the Aboriginal Australians in what they perceived as their traditional state. In the case of the Arabana this could not be done. The Arabana had already been involved in the pastoral industry, mining, cameleering and the railway for thirty years by the time Spencer and Gillen made their records in 1899.

One interesting and possibly pertinent finding from both Spencer & Gillen (1899) and later Bronislaw Malinowski was that when non-Aboriginal or even non-Arabana Aboriginal men arrived in Arabana country, one possible customary relationship which could be formed was called Piraunguru (Malinowski, 1913). This was the giving of a married woman to an outsider without recriminations from the Arabana men, and indeed such relationships could be organised by a woman’s elder brothers and the elders, so allowing for the dictum “where fraternity fails, maternity may prevail” (a mantra from the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service about 1998). Thus when male pastoralists, telegraph workers, miners, cameleers or railway workers entered into relationships with Arabana, they were considered by Arabana to have become Arabana and their Piraunguru children were seen as Arabana.
This was highly adaptive of Arabana, as many of the incoming non-Aboriginal workers were in the region only briefly, whereas the children stayed on with their mothers, being reared as Arabana and not taken away by the fathers, as would have happened in Victorian England at the time. The children staying with the Arabana meant learning that way of life, but ongoing contact with non-Arabana also meant that other learnings could occur. This is similar to what other writers call “hybridisation” (Bhabha, 1994), “creolisation” (Bolland, 1998), “accommodation” (Russell, 2012) or even “mimicry” (Bhabha, ibid). But probably the best descriptor is “creation of fictive relationships”, which is how McDonnell (2015) describes a similar practice among the Great Lakes Indians of North America. Kinships are created which can lead to political influence and alliances. The Arabana had long used such relationships with Wangkanguru, Arrernte and Dieri in this regard although Kokatha seem to remain traditional rivals.

By way of a contrasting view, Mattingley and Hampton (1988) suggest that Arabana women were taken by force by railway construction workers and other non-Aboriginal men, once they were in the country. Evans et al (1988, p106) assert that “rape and subjugation of Aboriginal women was a key feature in European/Aboriginal sexual relations”. Mattingley and Hampton do accept that some men formed permanent voluntary liaisons with Aboriginal women (op cit, p146, no reference given; Cowlishaw 1999) and this is what Arabana told me. And in any case, Piraunguru does not require permanence.
Indeed the best known Arabana woman was Topsy Smith, who founded The Bungalow in Alice Springs for Aboriginal children in 1914 with help from local policeman Sergeant Stott. Topsy was born about 1875, the daughter of Mary Kemp, Arabana, and Arthur Evans, an Oodnadatta policeman, a white man. In her early teens Topsy was taken to see the new Railway, which was in fact, The Ghan. She married Bill Smith, a Welsh miner, so another white man, in the early 1890s but he died about 1914 and Topsy took their large family to Alice Springs. Topsy and Ida Standley ran The Bungalow, a children’s home, until the latter’s retirement in 1929. One of her sons, Walter Smith (1898 - 1990) was a key informant to Richard Kimber, whose works are cited in this thesis. As noted on the information boards of the National Pioneer Women’s Hall of Fame, Topsy died in Alice Springs on 15 April 1960. Smith was a strong woman, and throughout her long life there is no evidence of her been subjugated by, or subject to violence from, men. Smith was an example of the emerging Arabana who could not just survive in, but contribute to, the dominant white settler society. She was a product of a people who had learned to interact with, and adapt to the ways of the settlers. As is evident from the experiences of the Arabana as the pastoral workers of Strangways, Anna Creek and Finnis Springs’ stations, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people not only worked together, but also raised families in contravention of the laws of the day.

John Churchill Oastler, manager of Strangways and Anna Creek for many years in the later nineteenth century, had a very dark complexion. He says himself (Oastler 1908) that he was held in high esteem by the local Arabana who saw him as the reincarnation of one of their famous chiefs, Makoovookoo Marunda (also quoted as Narcoo Noocamarunda)
(Shaw, 1995, p 15). Oastler also says the Arabana called him “father” (Paterson, p183). In any case, this cross-cultural identification as a reincarnation of a “chief” by both Oastler and the Arabana elders may have been a very clever way of binding and setting up relationships of mutual obligation. Oastler was a classical exemplar of the culture clash. He was utterly determined to “break these wild tribes into something like obedience, and to teach them that the law of ownership of property, and that their laws must give way to the white man’s law” (Oastler, 1908, p205). But his published talk to Adelaide burghers may not be the entire truth. Did Oastler get given Aboriginal wives? This would be normal under the social structure of the Arabana (Docid and Gibson, 1989). It is just possible that Oastler had Annie, his adopted son Kalli Kalli’s sister, as a mate. Kalli Kalli is mentioned often in the correspondence and his sister, Annie, a “little shepherdess” (Paterson, p176) also features. Oastler did marry a divorced white woman, Clarissa Sidney Pope on 23rd September 1884 at the age of 47 years, but they had no children. Genetic studies of the acknowledged descendants could settle this question of Aboriginal marriage and perhaps children for Oastler, but are unlikely to ever occur now.

In John Warren III’s memoirs (p7) he writes that his father or uncles (William, Tom, Robert or David Hogarth) used to bring down herds of cattle for market with a popular Aboriginal stockman called Billy Rowdy (Ooioo adloo Marunda) who, inter alia, used to entertain the three boys with his comedic impersonations. Paterson has photographs of Rowdy and his family on the cover of his book (op cit 2008) and in the text. This shows the closer personal but not necessarily sexual relationships with Arabana and pastoral families (see McGrath, 1984).
After the Ghan had arrived in Arabana country in 1884, Baldwin Spencer and Francis Gillen’s later writings from 1912 indicate a further reduction in numbers of Arabana. They say “the remnants of the Urabunna (sic) are gathered together at the few outlying cattle stations...they help in the work of the station”. In fact the station would have been impossible to run without cheap Aboriginal labour, as Gillen noted as far back as 1875 (as quoted above). “They have long since, except in a very small way, given up the performance of their old ceremonies – even the ordinary corroborees have dwindled down to a mere nothing – and only the older men know anything about, or indeed take any interest in, matters of tribal lore” (Spencer and Gillen 1912). Even if true, the reasons for this are not given. Whether it was just a matter of concealment from the inquisitive outsider, or whether Spencer’s statement is true we have no way of knowing. If true, then not bullets, but bacteria may be a likely explanation. My informants, by way of contrast, say that the last full initiations of Arabana men took place in the 1950s at Curdimurka.

The worldwide pandemic of influenza in 1918-19 killed a lot of Aboriginal Australians in this region, an all too common aspect of globalisation (Sub-Protector Opie’s report for 1920). The death rate was much higher for Aboriginal Australians than white people in Australia (although not overseas - in Italy, for instance, the death rate was four times higher than Australia (Barry, 2009, 376)). Other diseases were rife such as the somewhat earlier smallpox, tuberculosis, measles, venereal disease and so on (Basedow 1921). Children and elders were especially vulnerable. It is possible that body lice and
typhus carried by the workers and passengers on the Ghan also impacted upon Arabana numbers, as it did the Russians, although direct evidence is lacking (Argenbright 2008). Diphtheria and whooping cough (pertussis) need to be added as likely high killers of children.

**Child Removals:**

Then there was an active policy of child removal particularly of “half-caste” children starting in the twentieth century under new legislation post-World War 1. Even earlier, John Warren (the second), in his role as a Member of the Legislative Council, had asked questions (South Australian Parliamentary Papers 1911) about removal of children. The fathers, you may be sure, were not necessarily Aboriginal Australians. Moreover, at this time in history, no Arabana person was likely to have English writing skills. It was not long after this that more draconian provisions were passed by the Parliament to control the movements and associations of Aboriginal people throughout South Australia. Instead of dying out, the Aboriginal and particularly “half-caste” population was increasing!

Still later, the UAM established a Mission at Oodnadatta on Arabana territory in 1926. This moved some children away from their parents who were frequently not returned. They also established in 1929 another new mission at Nepabunna, east of Copley, which was a special place of the local Andyamathanha. Later, Arabana children, such as subsequent Korean War veteran Steve Dodd, were sent to Colebrook in Quorn, out of country. When that last alleged “full blood” died in 1973, so it is said that ended the
handing down of special dreaming stories that could only be handed down to fully initiated members of the tribe. Eileen Wingfield, however, told me that she is teaching one of her daughters some stories associated with the Seven Sisters Dreaming.

Route of Dr Herbert Basedow's Third Medical Relief Expedition: May 1920

Basedow's Third Medical Relief Expedition in 1920 examined 850 Aboriginal Australians from Marree to Hermannsburg and found very poor health among the living, and greatly excessive mortality. Basedow and his team, and equipment, arrived by special train in Marree – one of the many uses of the Ghan (Kaus 2008). Some 65 Arabana were examined and their personal details recorded. The train line is not mentioned with regard to Arabana people themselves – all are examined on pastoral stations. The Arabana and
other Aboriginal Australians were supposed to be kept away from the railway by then, so it was perhaps just politeness or tact by Basedow that he did not mention the Aboriginal Australians proximate to the line.

The highly regarded Francis Dunbar Warren:

Francis Dunbar Warren (died 1958), seventh and youngest son of John Warren (3/9/1830 to 13/9/1914) of Strangways, the son of John Warren of Springfield, Mount Crawford (established in the 1840s), moved to re-establish Finiss Springs Station moving from Anna Creek in the post-World War I period and to “New Well” in 1922. He was the landholder together with William Wood. With F D Warren were his partner, an Arabana woman named Laura Beralda ((also known as Laura, or Baralda and as Nora Beralda or sometimes spelt Paralta), and later their children. Under the 1911 Aborigines Act such relations between and a white and an Aboriginal Australian were illegal but as with many matters, the law and people’s behaviour do not necessarily coincide.

Other Aboriginal Australians joined the Arabana later. For instance, when Killalpanning Mission in Dieri country closed in 1915 (partly due to anti-German sentiment due to the First World War), some came to Finiss Springs Station (Stevens, 2002). Similarly, when the Oodnadatta Mission closed in the 1940s, some Arrernte moved to Finiss Springs too. When severe droughts occurred, other Aboriginal Australians moved in from even more desert regions (McKinnon and Dodd 2008).

Francis Dunbar Warren employed mostly Aboriginal people and encouraged them
to live in family units at the homestead. At a time when Aboriginal and especially part-Aboriginal children were routinely removed from their families to receive a European education, Warren refused to allow the Finnis Springs children to be taken away. Initially he had no way of providing them an education, as he was reluctant to allow churches to become involved in Finnis Springs, fearing they would want too much control.

**Buzzacott, Wood and Dodd Families:**

FD Warren's Aboriginal wife, Laura, bore thirteen children. His eldest daughter was called Merna, also known as Mona or Lena. Some of the others, as recalled to me by Reg Dodd, were his mother Amy, Flora and two sons, Arthur and Angus.

Amy (who may have been the eldest although another reference [Austin, Hercus and Jones, 1988] says the eldest was Merna), married an Arrente man Alan Buzzacott (the surname is spelt “Bossicott” by Hercus), and later bore Reg Dodd and other children (recalled names by Reg: Esther, Percy, Norman, Don, Arnold, Ronnie, Phillip, Kenny, Kevin and Trevor, Sissy, Nancy). Amy had been married before to Thomas Dodd. She also had children to Bill Wood, the co-owner with Francis Dunbar Warren (Norman Wood is mentioned). As the Arabana have been matrilineal from pre-colonial times so the mother was the clear descent line as recognised by the Arabana themselves.

By the 1930s there was a large Aboriginal community living at the Finnis Springs station homestead, possibly 400 people. Initial contact with F.D. Warren for a Mission was rejected, as noted, but he subsequently consented and gave much practical help. He contracted with Andrew Pearce of the United Aborigines Mission to open a school at
Finniss Springs in 1939. At first an all-purpose brush shed was built and school began in March 1939 with sixteen children. Then wood and iron were ordered for a missionaries room and school was transferred to their tent, which had to be lowered in storms in case it was torn apart. Soon concrete blocks were moulded on the site by the Arabana themselves (Reg Dodd, personal communication, May 2010) and a combined school and church was built by 1940. F.D. Warren gave permission for this to occur because it meant that the people could remain together in one place.

There was some fear among these “station blacks” of Kokatha parties coming down the Deep Creek which runs through the Station especially at night to seek revenge for perceived slights or magical deaths, steal women or the like (personal communications, several Arabana).

The Second World War did not take Arabana away to fight as soldiers for the Allies. One railway worker’s name, Allan James Stuart, did come up as Aboriginal Australian and serving in the Merchant Navy, but it is still unknown whether he was Arabana. Some continued either as pastoral employees albeit usually with trivial wages, or backfilled other roles. Attitudes had not necessarily improved towards Aboriginal Australians. Constable Collins of the Marree Police Station wrote to Inspector Parsonage, the Protector of Aboriginals, on 15th July 1942: “... I have had several enquiries from drovers and Stations regarding working aboriginals, these as you are already aware receive wages, and it is generally recognised that whilst they are employed it is the duty of their respective owners to provide adequate clothing and food...”. “Owners”: slavery had been abolished
in the British Empire a century before, in theory. They were at best akin to indentured labourers, there to serve the needs of their pastoral overlords.

In the Second World War, a number of Arabana were riding flat-top rail cars which were sandbagged at each end and fitted with guns to defend trains from possible Japanese attack. This civil defence role is a far cry from the earlier possible threat to use police or troops brought up by train against Arabana or other Aboriginal Australians.

Control of Arabana by police representing the Aborigines Protection Board continued to be draconian and micromanagement. The same letter from Constable Collins cited above has the heartless refusal to allow a nearly blind Aboriginal lady, Ruby Murray (the wife of Arthur Warren), to have Arabana Ida Stewart as an accompanying person to take her to the hospital in Port Augusta from Marree on the Ghan. This was despite a supportive letter from Mrs Pearce, wife of the Missionary Alexander Pearce at Finnis Springs (GRG52/1). The UAM now clearly supported the ideas of F D Warren about more egalitarian human-human relationships. Clearly some tension between Mission and the local authorities existed. The same Constable Collins did give Finnis Springs people Bertha and George Murray single (not return) tickets to get to Port Augusta Hospital from Alberrie Creek when Mrs Murray was clearly very pregnant and quite ill.

Rations of tobacco, flour, rice, sugar and tea were being approved by the Aborigines’ Protection Board, but in small amounts, as all able-bodied Aboriginal Australians were expected to be working and were said to be “well paid” (GRG52/1, 1924
report). Golden Syrup and Baking Powder were also supplied in small amounts. The situation was the same in the 1940s (GRG52/1, 1943 report). There was, however, "no need for clothing" to be supplied (GRG52/1, 1st August 1944 letter), suggesting either that the Aboriginal Australians were supposed to remain naked or that employers were supposed to supply workers and their families with clothes. Or that they bought clothing from those "good wages". On the railways, clothes and other supplies came on order from the store at Port Augusta. On 9th May 1946, however, second hand clothing was to be sent to the Police at Marree for distribution. Moreover, Aboriginal Australians working on sheep or cattle stations also had no mechanism of getting clothing, tobacco etc except by the station holder appealing to the Aborigines' Protection Board, quite different from the railway workers at the same time (GRG52/1, letter from Callanna Station 26th January 1945). So in reality, the Arabana at Anna Creek and Finnis Springs were at the mercy of the Board and the Warrens who controlled all aspects of their lives. Fortunately, in the case of the latter, however, it was a benign dictatorship, paternalistic but fondly regarded by all Francis Warren's current descendants.

By 1948, the local landholders were prepared to "dob" in others who were mistreating their Arabana employees. In an expurgated letter of 17th September, Ernest Murray of Murnpeowie Station states that Henry Rowlands has been flogged and imprisoned without food or water on Clifton Hills Station by Mr and Mrs Rowlands, landholders (GRG52/1).

By 1950 the Flying Doctor Service was visiting Marree directly (GRG52/1/0/98/34)
and would recommend, for instance, rail transfers on the Ghan to Hospital at Hawker or Port Augusta. The Police still had to approve such travel and seek confirmation from the Aborigines’ Protection Board. The Mission and school continued until the late 1950s then were replaced by a UAM School in Marree in 1965. Finnis Springs had struggled due to the lack of water and eventually people could not continue just carting water for their needs (Aborigines Protection Board Report 1960).

F.D Warren was not the only local station owner to have an Aboriginal family. Dick Nunn, manager of Anna Creek from 1954 to 1981, has fifteen children altogether, seven from his white wife and eight from the Aboriginal ladies on the station (Dawkins, 2012). His son Stuart took over Anna Creek until 1994. Married to Stuart’s sister Margy Nunn was Gordon Warren, head stockman, one of the large Warren clan and a Ghan worker.

When FD Warren died in 1958 he was theoretically not allowed to bequeath the Station to his Aboriginal children (under a ruling from the Commissioner for Crown Lands dating back to October 1867) (South Australian Parliamentary Debates, 1867). Nonetheless, the property was passed to his Arabana son, Arthur Warren (http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/warren-arthur-15847, Hercus, 2012). Like his father, Arthur had married an Aboriginal Australian, Rosa Murray, who was a Dieri woman, in September 1941 at the Finnis Springs Mission school. Arthur faced insurmountable odds in managing the station. Arthur ended his working life as manager of Maree’s Railway Rest House. When he died in 1989, he was survived by four daughters and three sons. Stan Warren, youngest son of Francis Dunbar Warren with Laura, however, states that he
ran the station for a number of years after F D Warren’s death (see Appendix).

When a TB survey was done at the end of 1959, there were 292 Aboriginal Australians living up and down the Charn line. The names are not necessarily all Arabana but most match names I already know (GRG52/1/0/141/23 1959). Initiations were still occurring; Gale (1964) writes “a young half-caste from Marree was encouraged by older men to go north to Anna Creek, to be made into a ‘young fella’”.

Micromanagement did continue. For instance on 12th May 1960, Constable Neale at Marree requested and was given permission by the Aborigines’ Protection Board to buy a load of firewood, cost not to exceed 5 pounds. Rail passes continued to be required for any Aboriginal Australian travelling officially by the train who was not a railway employee (my emphasis).

The dispossessing pastoral prequel to the establishment of the railway had, nonetheless, already allowed Arabana people to interact with, adapt to and cause adaptations from the white people. It would appear that Finiss Springs and the earlier Strangways had been paternalistic but relatively benign in intent and deed by the standards of the time. Against the backdrop of global changes including Federation, the formation of Commonwealth Railways, World War 2 and decolonisation movements worldwide, nonetheless Arabana had gross limits until and unless they engaged in employment with the Railways. As for many Aboriginal Australians, employment on the railways offered social mobility, and the opportunities to travel and trade with the broader
settler society. More importantly, it allowed them to make an important contribution to
one of Australia’s most crucial infrastructure projects, a fact which has been largely written
out of this country’s history. And uniquely, they stayed on country.

Jennett (1996) remarks that the Australian State responded to continuing demands
for Aboriginal sovereignty by containing it within a framework of traditionalism and
uniqueness. This pushed sovereignty back to civil rights and land rights under the
restrictive Native Title legislation. Evolution and development by specific Aboriginal
peoples are excluded from consideration in such claims. Arabana still labour under
disadvantage despite Native Title and a lease over the old Finnis Springs. The railway has
gone which bound them into a polity beyond the tribe. The Arabana Aboriginal
Corporation has taken the tribe’s place, but operates well outside the land boundaries of
the present scattered Arabana population.
Chapter 4. FROM SONGLINES TO TRAINLINES:

"Architecture ... power made visible" (Hitchens, 2010, p 39)

Early railways in SA:

The Colony of South Australia was just 11 years old when railways became a political issue. The success of the English in setting up commercial railways powered by steam locomotives from 1826 had excited interest in Europe and all around the world interested in “progress”. The first ordinance or Act of Parliament regulating the construction of railways in South Australia was passed in March 1847 (State Records of South Australia, South Australian Railways Preamble, 2000; GRS42). The Railways Clauses Consolidation Act (No 7 of 1847) did not authorise the construction of any specific railway but outlined the conditions under which any companies seeking such a right could undertake the tasks. The actual construction of any specific railway required further Acts for each separate length of railway (SRSA Introduction to holdings on Railways, GRS42).

The financiers and engineers responsible for these constructions were no respecter of persons. As Hunt (2004) states, the building of landmark London railway stations and their rail lines were built, 120,000 people were displaced from their houses between 1840 and 1900 without recompense. These were white people at the Empire’s core, displaced for “progress”. This did not augur well for those Aboriginal populations of South Australia whose traditional lands were seen as being required for the construction of railway lines.
This ruthlessness was seen in the State of Victoria where railways started to be built in 1854. By that time, Victoria had become a separate colony, gold had been discovered and pastoral enterprises were widespread. Travel by foot and horse drawn coach was manifestly inadequate. Nonetheless, the Argus (12th September 1854), usually thought of as a conservative newspaper, suggests that not all of the inhabitants of that State would welcome the innovation. The train, according to the paper, would “flash past the gunya of the native black” filling him or her with “wonder” or “vague terror”. The train symbolised “Christian England, the great, the powerful, the intelligent, the good!”.
newspaper spoke of the other side of white progress - the stealing of Aboriginal lands, “destroy(ing) your game”, it will “inoculate you with her vices”. “Christian England’ will shew her Christian spirit by dooming you to ‘extirpation’”. Ironically The Argus concludes “Rejoice, you dark-skinned savage, at the advent of your kind, magnanimous, and most Christian brother”.

Early horse-drawn railways were opened at the same time in South Australia to the south of Adelaide, the land of the Kaurna people, Peramangk and Ngarrindjeri without recompense. Indicative of the exclusion of Aboriginal people from their own lands is a poignant reminder in “A History of the South Australian Railways” (Stewien and Thompson, 2007). On the cover is a picture by Henry Glover showing Torrens Bridge in 1856. A group of dispossessed Aboriginal Australians is depicted in the foreground, looking up at the train and the white settlement on the hill. The area north of the river was known from 1837 to 1845 as the Native Location. In the centre of the painting is the Iron Store, one of the few Native Location buildings still standing in 1856. A few Aboriginal people continued to live in the area after 1845 but the majority had left or died by the time of Glover’s painting. It had become a painterly tradition to have Aboriginal Australians, like decorative fauna, in pictures of the Australian landscape, and Glover is no exception, painting the natives as marginal figures, and off the metaphorical train of progress.
Building Railways to the north of South Australia: Beginnings of The Ghan

Part of the pastoral expansion into the north of South Australia involved the dream of construction of a railway (Newland, 1887, 1888, 1902). This would enable stock to be rapidly and safely transported to markets, goods such as coal and wheat to be moved to ports, and labour to be quickly available from the metropole to mining and agricultural regions. As noted above in an earlier chapter, in case of a threat from any quarter, the railway would also be able to transport troops or police rapidly to the trouble spot. Moreover the idea of linking southern and northern parts of the continent gained "steam" when the fears of invasion from "Asian hordes" as well as other European powers escalated. Joining Adelaide and Palmerston, later called Darwin, was the original aim, not achieved for 120 years after the Central Australian Railway was started. Prior to that, the line, even under Commonwealth control, had terminated at Alice Springs with nearly a 1,000 Km gap to Birdum in the Northern Territory.

In 1862 the Port Augusta and Overland Railways Act was passed by the South Australian parliament (Fuller, 1975, p28). Railway building contractors were offered two square miles then four square miles of land in a chequerboard pattern beside the railway for every mile built. The Aboriginal owners of the land were not considered nor consulted, under the continued fiction of terra nullius. Subsequently in 1876 Act No 26 was passed by the South Australian legislature which authorised "the formation of a line of railway from Port Augusta to Government Gums" (Fuller, op cit, p36). When the line finally started being built in October 1878 contractors Barry, Brookes and Fraser, were being offered ten square miles of land per mile of railway built.
The financial viability of the line from Port Augusta to “Government Gums”, later called Farina, was based on an overly optimistic assessment of the potential of the land for growing wheat. But there was a hidden Aboriginal Australian aspect to the route. It followed the old red ochre trading route used by Arabana and other Aboriginal people since time immemorial. In those days, as mentioned above, no thought was given to compensating the Aboriginal peoples for the use of their land for any loss of amenity imposed by the railway. Several Aboriginal Australian peoples, whose lands and trading routes were taken for the railway, were savagely treated by the encroaching settlers. The resultant massacres are still acutely remembered by the descendants of the surviving Aboriginal Australians (Brock, 1995, Jared Thomas, personal communication 2016).

However, there is another aspect to these events that involves interaction and cooperation between these two groups. The Aborigines’ trading and ceremonial routes, songlines, were known by white pioneers to skirt areas prone to flooding, and this was imparted to the surveyors (Fuller, 1975, p 39). So, in considerable part, the railway survey was shaped by the paths once taken by the red-ochre traders and pilgrims (Fuller, op cit, pp39-40). Pioneer William Jessop in his book Flindersland and Sturtland or, the inside and outside of Australia (1862) described the longstanding Aboriginal track (his route is described running from north to south). He wrote that it left a gorge near Aroona, an important source of the sacred red earth for several Indigenous peoples, winding southwards across the site of Port Augusta and on to the Noarlunga district.
Aboriginal trading camps were spaced at intervals of about 100 miles (Jessop, op cit.). One of these camps was on the site of the present-day Marree. Here, Jessop noted, the coloured clays were exchanged for shields, spear shafts and other material unobtainable in the Flinders Ranges and southern regions. The red-ochre track continued northwards following the future route of the railway through Parachilna and the Hergott Springs (later called Marree) district. Afterwards the red ochre track struck north-eastwards to Boulia, with a branch snaking through Kopperamanna to Charleville. When barter was completed, Jessop states, visiting parties of never more than three strong left at once, with each man carrying on his head a block of ochre weighing up to fifty pounds (about 25Kg; cited in Fuller, p 40).

Work on this section of the complex narrow-gauge rail route from Port Augusta to Farina took a remarkably short span of three years. Aboriginal Australians are not recorded as members of the construction gangs. But as Deborah Rose Bird (1991, p 46), in paraphrase, has said, all Aboriginal Australians had to do to be in the way was stay at home.

Once the line from Port Augusta to Farina had been completed with the official opening on 17th May 1882, the next phase from Farina to Hergott Springs was immediately put out to tender. It had been authorised by a new Act, No 226 on 18th November 1881, similar to that of 1876. Again the contractors were to be awarded ten square miles of land adjacent to the railway line for each mile of track built. A further dispossession of the Kuyani Aboriginal Australians on the route. New contractors,
Moorhouse, Robinson and Jesser won the contract and work started on 10th November 1882 in Farina. On 6th January 1884 the railway reached Hergott Springs (Lichfield, 1983, p10), a town proclaimed just two months before, and in October (1884) the railway station was finished. It included a running shed large enough for an engine and tender and two carriages; a goods shed, sixty feet by forty-five feet; staff offices; and a large water-tank for the supply of locomotives. Until this time, locomotive water had been obtained from a pipe leading across country from the Hergott springs. Now an artesian bore, 140 feet deep and five and a half inches in diameter, was sunk for railway use. This bore was situated within the railway enclosure and, since, under its own pressure, water rose from the piping to a height of sixty-four feet, the tank, some 200 yards distant, could be supplied without the use of a pump. So the spring itself was only used for 10 months before the bore was sunk. A great irony, as had the bore been sunk earlier, the spring area could have been left alone. Alternatively a rail route directly across country from Farina to Callana would have left the Marree Aboriginal Australian trading hub alone. As it was, the Aboriginal people’s traditional watering place was encroached upon and then white settlement stayed. Though the railway was an initial source of exclusion, nonetheless it did become a further means by which the Arabana, in particular, began to interact further with the dominant settler economy and in particular move beyond pastoral servitude.

**Aboriginal Australians Working on the Railway:**

Almost immediately at Marree the local Aboriginal people were employed by the railway. After the bore had been sunk, a coaling stage was built close to the water-tank. The practice was to carry coal in large baskets from a bulk store in the yard. When full, a
basket weighed eighty-four pounds (about 38Kg). Raised to the platform by means of a hand-operated hoist, it was emptied by hand into the waiting tender. One hundred and thirty baskets were needed to fill a small tender. To manhandle this quantity of coal required two hours of hard, sweating toil (Fuller, p108).

Coaling before 1922 (Jennings, 1973, with permission)
Along the length of the line it became the custom for train crews to pay Aboriginal Australians to do this heavy manual work. The practice was popular with station staffs who were supposed to assist in coaling. Apparently it was popular with the Aboriginal Australians too, for they are said to have delighted in working the hoist. Mainly Arabana and Kuyani in that area, they would have been employed on a walk-up basis. They were paid usually in food and tobacco. It seems logical that they had known the railway was coming for several years from their neighbours and their own observations as they made pilgrimages south for the ochre. The records of the employment of staff for the railway from 1858 to 1913 do not have any names of such early-employed Aboriginal Australians (State Records of South Australia GRG/42/131). Such employment was invisible to the official records. Moreover, the history of this work did not even pass down to subsequent generations of Arabana (Dodd, pers comm. 2010).

Marree to Oodnadatta:

Urged on by pastoralists, and funded by land sales (Morison, 2012, p57) the next stage of building of the railway was directly on Arabana country from Marree to Oodnadatta. The rail route between Marree and Oodnadatta is far from direct. Why did the train line take that course? As steam trains need water, and lots of it the question arose of where could water be found in that seemingly bleak landscape? The Arabana people knew. Arabana had guided the German-born artist and surveyor Herrgott and his colleagues and “explorers” such as Stuart to the mound springs where copious amounts of water could be found. Some of these, it is admitted, stand out as green beacons in a desolate landscape, but some are much more subtle. John McDouall Stuart’s diaries, for
example, record many Aboriginal tracks and trails leading him and his party to water, springs, waterholes and so on. These were not animal pads, but Arabana tracks. Any Aboriginal Australian living a traditional lifestyle could disguise or obliterate tracks, so this was deliberate (http://johnmcdouallstuart.org.au/first-five-expeditions).

The educationalist and geographer Charles Fenner himself also stated (Fuller, op cit, p 105) that the decision to take the railway to Oodnadatta was greatly influenced by the “discovery” of the presence of mound springs along the south-western border of the Great Artesian Basin. As Fenner pointed out the distribution of pastoral population and the location of stock routes was related to the artesian basin springs, which rise from great depth through fissures in a fault that occurs where the floor of Lake Eyre basin meets ancient rock to the west. Thus springs such as Blanche Cup (“Dirga”, the oven), the Bubbler (“Bidilina”, snake’s writhing) and other free-flowing springs providing completely reliable supplies influenced the advice that the railway surveyors, guided by Arabana, gave the Government in the matter of the route to be followed by the railway.

On 26th September 1883, the South Australian legislature passed Act No 281 authorising the building of the line of railway from Hergott Springs to Primrose Springs (east of the present Algebuckina, see endpaper map; Fuller, op cit). This last, Primrose Springs, has the Arabana name Papu-ngaljuru (Blue Egg); it was a large mound spring set amid sandhills north of the Neales River. It was well known and used by Arabana in pre-colonial times. Because of a local economic downturn, so it was said, the Government itself decided to run the building project rather than contract it out to external contractors.
Building the rail line north of Marree from 1884 to 1891 was undertaken mainly by formerly unemployed white men, partly because of a recession in white South Australian society at the time. It was not without risk. In the Marree cemetery is a memorial to five workers killed at the Finniss on 21st April 1886, during construction of the next section of the line to William Creek (personal observation).

Tribute in Marree Cemetery erected to the memory of five men killed building the Marree to Oodnadatta section of the railway.

This was an industrial accident not Aboriginal violence.
Not having external contractors also meant that there was no necessary hand-out of land to anybody during the section from Hergott Springs to Oodnadatta. How extraordinary: the only part of the old Ghan line where land was not handed out 
\textit{gratis} to white contractors was Arabana country! Construction started on 16\textsuperscript{th} July 1884. Use of unskilled labour rather than regular navvies, however, meant that the building of the line went much more slowly than the previous two phases. The Government use of its own labour force saved the Strangways and other pastoral properties from being resumed for the railway contractors. Unlike the Darwin to Pine Creek line, however, Eric Rolls stated that the Government did not use many Indian and Chinese labourers (Rolls, 1996). Shaw (1995), however, notes families of Ah Kits and Ah Chees at Oodnadatta from early times so this assertion by Rolls may not be totally true. Labourers were paid on a daily basis; it was only station masters and the like who had annual salaries (Railway Commissioner’s Reports, 1884-1891).

The various Arabana families through whose land the new railway line passed were, of course, not compensated, nor even considered. I could not find records of any Arabana people employed on the train line during the Marree to Oodnadatta construction years, 1884 - 1891 (Railway Commissioner’s Reports list all employees hired and persons dismissed: GRS42/131). Professor Veronica Arbon, Arabana elder and academic, told me, however, that Arabana, working as stockmen on Strangways Springs Station, supplied meat to the railway construction teams (pers. comm., 2010). By that time, as noted in the previous chapter, many Arabana were living on pastoral stations or “runs” which had
been taken up, expropriated, by the white settlers since 1863. The semi-feudal life recorded by Frank Stevens (1974), Dawn May (1994) and others was being lived by most Arabana. Nonetheless, the Arabana had realized that there were benefits to be gained from these infrastructure projects. For instance, the Overland Telegraph Line, which had been put through between 1870 and 1872, had introduced Arabana living more traditional lives and using stone tools to the joys of ceramics and glass for sharp implements. Even here, compromise and recognition of differing needs seems to have prevailed (Thomson, 1999).

Marree itself had police from 1882 (Litchfield, 1983, GRG5/307), two years before the arrival of the railway, but ten years after the Overland Telegraph. The construction workers on the railway further north, however, were thought to require the presence of another police station, which was established on Strangways Station itself in 1886 through to 1888 (Paterson, 2008). It would seem that these construction workers were suspected to become disruptive so necessitating a police station in the middle of the railway construction between Marree and Oodnadatta. Evidence of actual disruptiveness, however, does not appear in the available police records. Five to six hundred men lived in tents about 2Km north of the Strangways repeater station. Temporary structures such as Bennett’s Eating House and Store arose. There were sheds for clerks and tents for a butcher and saddler. Even a hotel was built in 1886 and sly grog sales were part of the police role to deter. Race meetings and the inevitable gambling kept the men entertained. The Arabana pastoral workers nearby kept a close eye on these novelties (Paterson, 2008, p140). The police were there to control the construction crews, not the Arabana. There was a further police station built at Peake Station, further north on Arabana land. Both these
police stations were abandoned when Oodnadatta became the new railhead in 1891 and the rail construction teams were no longer present.

Aboriginal Australians’ marginal status is poignantly emphasised in Professor John Gregory’s account of his expedition. Appointed Professor of Geology at the University of Melbourne in 1899, he led an expedition to central Australia in the summer of 1901-2 and has left a lively account in his 1906 book *The Dead Heart of Australia* (Gregory, 1906). He travelled by train to Marree, then still called Hergott Springs, and gives a description of the town at that time just after the turn of the century. He emphasises the camelmen who were ubiquitous, as Hergott was the terminus for the stock route in southwest Queensland, where no railway ran. He adds “Until recently all communications to the back blocks of Queensland, even the customs’ books and police officers, were sent from Brisbane via Melbourne and Hergott, a journey of 2,553 miles, including 330 miles by cart, to reach a place only 530 miles from a station on the Queensland railways”. Although he describes the place as dreary, he does admit it has a beauty of its own. “The pure colours at dawn and sunset, ... the thatched, mud-walled huts of the Afghan camp and its turbaned inhabitants, all give the country an Oriental aspect”. The exotic East, as so heavily commented upon by Edward Said, had come to outback Australia.

Gregory hired Aboriginal Australian guides “from time to time” but no names, let alone tribal names, are given. He does not mention the Arabana inhabitants of Marree itself. Later in the book, however, he gives a detailed description of his views of the “Lake Eyre Aborigines” (p166-235). To his credit he disdainfully dismisses and refutes the racist
speculations of various writers who had described the Aboriginal Australians as “the zero ...of all anthropological analysis” (Thomas, W. quoted in Creed, Mildred, 1901). He writes “Instead of finding them degraded, lazy, selfish, savage, they were courteous and intelligent, generous even to the point of imprudence, and phenomenally honest; while in the field, they proved to be born naturalists and superb bushmen”. Gregory also managed to observe a corroboree at the Peake Station near the Neales River which must have had Arabana participants (1906, p210-221), as this is part of their traditional lands. Gregory either does not see or does not record involvement with the railway of Aboriginal Australians he meets. He does not mention the Aboriginal Australians who had gravitated to Marree or the railway sidings, or those who had established relationships with white men, although this could be because he supported the idea of segregation.

Charles Kunoth (1988) grew up on Muloorina Station at the south end of Lake Eyre on Frome Creek from 1908 to 1920 then was in Marree for the ensuing ten years. He says that even in the 1920s “Aboriginals in those days preferred to live their own lifestyle” (p23). This, as we have seen, was grossly untrue given the appropriation, subjugation of sovereignty and introduction of alien animals which they were not allowed to hunt; travel was constrained and pastoral life the norm for many. He also has a vivid description of a train trip undertaken on the Old Ghan from Oodnadatta to Marree in the early twentieth century (p43-44):

There was a timetable but no one knew where it was or cared. Only the day was known. When it (the train) left Oodnadatta an engine would be fired up at William
Creek in case of a breakdown. It took about four hours for a steam engine to get up enough steam to work it. On arriving at William Creek lunch would be served in the dining room of what was then the wine saloon for anyone wanting a meal.

On the side of the carriages written in chalk would be ‘ladies and children’s carriage, ‘drunks’ carriage’, ‘smoking carriage’ etc.

From the tanks on top of the passengers’ carriages there was water for toilets and hand basins.

Professor Alistair Paterson, who worked on archaeological digs at Strangways Station in the late 1990s as written about above, mentions the railway on several occasions in his book, *The Lost Legions* (2008). For pastoralists, he says on page 167, the railway was a great boon. It enabled stock to be transported faster and more safely to markets. Instead of six to eight miles a day with cattle, they could be moved at thirty miles an hour! This shrinks the distance, in terms of time, thirtyfold. It also meant that drovers’ time could be minimised, which meant lower labour costs, a critical consideration for those marginal farms. Cattle or sheep also arrived in better condition at the sale yards in Adelaide.

The further interactions between the railway construction teams and the Arabana are not recorded, but it is indisputable that Aboriginal Australian people congregated around railway sidings once they were built, until regulation was passed to try and preclude this in 1926 when the line was being extended further north. The line had been laid as far as Oodnadatta by 7th January 1891 but took another thirty-eight years to reach Alice Springs on 2nd August 1929, the hiatus being mainly for financial reasons - the South
Australian Government nearly beggared itself with large-scale public works such as the Overland Telegraph Line and the Great Northern Railway. During this long interval Oodnadatta was the depot and terminus. Over that long time Arabana people came and settled in the town or around it. As noted above there was no enforced prohibitive legislation, as there was in other States, until the 1920s.

There is a relative dearth of written sources about the ensuing years from 1891 until the 1950s. “Beltana - Six Miles” (Payne, 1974) is a perhaps unreliable exception. “Beltana” means “running water” in the local language. In this account, written by the daughter of a white settler about the years between 1899 and the First World War, Aboriginal Australians are peripheral. They are seen laughing outside a dance hall where Europeans are celebrating. One is visited as he is “boned” and his transfer to a hospital is arranged. Nothing else. As Attwood (1994) says, “a life together, a life apart”. The Aboriginal people were essential workers but lived lives in different accommodation with ongoing traditional beliefs and behaviours. The later chronicler Bruce Shaw (1995) has some Arabana informants who tell their stories of life on the train line although much later in date. Mattingley and Hampton (1988) write of the Finnis Springs Mission but not of the railway.

Simpson Mara Newland (1926), South Australian MP, went to England in 1906 to raise money to further extend the railway. He, incidentally, wrote a sympathetic account of Aboriginal people being mistreated and massacred as white people defended the Overland Telegraph Line, in Blood Tracks in the Bush (1900). Disconcertingly, the South
Australian Government rejected Newland’s international fund-raising efforts and the subsequent World War I between 1914 and 1918 increased the State’s debt so nothing came of his ideas. Arabana in their own appropriated lands were not involved in any of this and there is no evidence that they served in World War I. Despite his sympathies and personal involvement with both Ngarrindjeri and Barkindji peoples, Newland, a one-time treasurer in the Downer Ministry of the 1880s, did not consult the Arabana.

Even after World War I, the influenza pandemic and with high interest rates, the South Australian Parliament believed “no railways, no progress” (Jennings, 1973, citing Hansard for 1911, p1105). But only uneconomic lines were built until the late 1920s by the State, a subject scathingly treated by former rail worker Dr Reece Jennings. And progress, as has been discussed, is an elusive concept. Worcestershire Sauce and Curry have outlived the heyday of Telegraph and Railways.

Given the loss of their land, the railways provided sources of food for the Arabana and other Aboriginal peoples (Rowse, 1998), and the Arabana settled in and around the rail towns. New types of relationships were formed between the Arabana and white settlers and workers. The Arabana were offered work, albeit performing menial tasks on a sporadic basis, and intermarriage occurred. As Shaw (1995) noted, many non-Aboriginal workers on the railways and telegraph line, or connected to the pastoral and cameleer industries married Arabana women. Before the introduction of legislation restricting Aboriginal Australians’ movements in the 1920s, there were no prohibitions on their movements or behaviour, as there were in other states. But there were concerns for the
welfare of the "race". With numbers estimated to have reduced nationally to 60,000 in 1920, Aboriginal Australians were considered by most white Australians as "a dying race" (http://australianmuseum.net.au/indigenous-australia-timeline-1901-to-1969). One egregious example of this false idea was expressed by the respondents to an endowment by Lady Henrietta Smith of Dunesk in Scotland. She laid aside money to buy land in the colony to help the Aboriginal Australians. The Colonial Committee of the Free Church of Scotland in 1853 specifically advised her that this would be useless as the "Aborigines were a dying race" (Aird and Klaasen, p132). As we know this false idea was a scarcely disguised wish that this was true, or would become so with "the logic of elimination".

In reality the churches were involved throughout the colonial period. Robert Bruce Plowman was the padre for a huge area in Central Australia but based at Oodnadatta for many years. He has written two books of his experiences, The Man from Oodnadatta (1933) and Camel Pads (1935). The former describes a trip to the Northern Territory out of Arabana land but the latter has quite a lot of information about Oodnadatta itself and the train line. For instance he describes the arrival of the fortnightly train in an un-named year before the extension to Alice Springs, so before 1926, in vivid and amusing terms. Everybody in town made some excuse to come and visit the station to enquire when the train may arrive. Replies grew more and more terse as the day wore on and no arrival had occurred. Plowman also notes the Camelmen: as this was the end of the line for those thirty-eight years, all supplies henceforward went by camel train. He concludes this section with the excitement of the train coming in.
By seven o’clock odd groups of bushmen and children began to form near the station-building. By seven-thirty half Oodnadatta was there. At eight o’clock the only residents missing were the hotel and boarding-house staffs – prevented from being present by the necessity of having meals ready for the train’s passengers – and old Dicky. The very young children were there in their mothers’ arms or hanging on to their skirts. Older children raced around, filling in time until the moment of major excitement arrived.

The eyes of the adults kept turning towards a rise some miles down the track where they could catch the first sight of smoke in summer, or of the engine’s lamps in winter.

“Here she comes!” someone would call; and all Oodnadatta – the padre and the Sister included – congregated on the space between the buildings and the rails which was dignified by the name of platform to greet the train, its crew, and especially its passengers.

So the Christian padre was very much part of the white establishment in Oodnadatta, and seems to have felt the “Afghans” and Aboriginal Australians were relatively apart from his parish. He had a “black boy” of his own called Dick Gillen and another reluctant and truculent one called George. In The Man From Oodnadatta Dick Gillen is very much part of the padre’s camel expedition around his 160,000 square miles parish north of the train line, but the only Aboriginal Australian we meet on the circuit is a “quadroon” (“quarter-caste”) who is marrying a bashful Aboriginal bride. In Camel Pads he
meets many others but generally describes the Aboriginal Australians to the west of Oodnadatta as “wholly uncivilised and treacherous” (for objecting to white occupation of their land) [1935].

Nonetheless, there they were, the Aboriginal Australians, in the township, and getting rations. Employment of this group in the town itself just after the First World War seems not to be prevalent, except as helpers to the “Afghans”. Plowman describes a lady from this area as a “camp lubra”. Elsewhere in the book Plowman writes of Harry Gepp, the storekeeper, who is said to have been a cameldriver of the Inland in the past. Gepp describes to Plowman that “the blacks” as “very bad in those days as there weren’t many whites about” and also says “Sometimes even when we go to water we couldn’t camp on account of the blacks”. Whether this was in Arabana country or elsewhere is not made clear. And wishing he’d had a partner, “Of course, I had a team of black boys, but you know a man can’t talk to them”. Now Gepp is a very common Arabana surname, so Mr Harry Gepp almost certainly did have at least one “mate” and either the Aboriginal people called Gepp are descendants or just named themselves after the white man, as did the Strangways family. Once a storeman, however, Gepp acquired a white wife from town and a “black boy” called “Gepp’s Charlie”.

Plowman also writes of several train journeys including one by a nursing sister on a railway tricycle of 127 miles to William Creek to nurse a very sick boy through the night. His own excursions included taking a sick man to the Port Augusta Hospital (three days with overnight stops in Marree and Quorn) and a memorable trip with increasingly
drunken navvies who had acquired their alcohol at Coward Springs. More grimly he also writes of "black prisoners":

Slowly advancing towards the township from the west was a remarkable procession. At its head were six naked blackfellows, four of them fastened together by chains attached to a central plate of iron, two in front and two behind. Beside them were two more, one in front and one in the rear. The outside two were chained neck to neck and each was handcuffed to the blackfellow on his left. Behind the six walked a blacktracker with a rifle over his shoulder. There followed about a dozen naked and unchained blacks, a police trooper and another white man riding side by side on camels, several pack-camels led by a black boy, and, tailing in the rear, a mixed mob of lubras, piccaninnies, friends and relations of the two groups of blackfellows up in front.

Plowman gives no more details and just relates his own apprehension about visiting that area. In the same book, Plowman has other references to the critically important train line. He writes of the crippled stationmaster/porter-in-charge and his wife (who acted as postmistress), the only two (white) inhabitants of Warrina (p236). He writes of flying gangs who worked up and down thirty miles of line, moving camp as required (p243). He describes the two room stone cottages set every ten miles along the line, which served as housing for the twelve men who made up the gang – ganger (in charge) cook and ten navvies. The navvies are not described as any particular background but one ganger at Boorthanna is said to be an old Etonian (p244). The padre gets to travel with the gangers on their section car (Chapter 36) and evaluate the train line and its bed himself.
He also helps out as a volunteer line inspector, saving the ganger from Anna Creek (also known as Balaraung) some of his sixty mile round trip doing that inspection. By this time there is also a railway doctor, the incumbent being a well-regarded graduate of Guy’s Hospital London.

William Creek is described: it is “hardly large enough to deserve the name of township; it consists of the railway station, post-office, residences belonging to each, two other cottages, a tiny school, and a wine-shanty”. Aboriginal Australians around are not mentioned. Nowadays William Creek is scarcely larger. Black stockmen get numerous mentions, as do the “black boys” who are everywhere with each white man. But Aboriginal rail workers are not mentioned in these books of the 1920s. The padre continues back to Oodnadatta beside the train line, passing Algebuckina train station, with its tremendously long bridge, originally designed to cross the Murray.

Aboriginal prisoners were transported to Port Augusta on the Ghan line and often housed overnight in the Marree Police Station on the way, with all meals and lodging paid for by the Aborigines’ Protection Board (one pound for four men on 23rd May 1934 for two days and nights, for instance, not a large amount {GRG5/307}).

Cecil Thomas Madigan (1936) wrote of his travels in Central Australia (separately administered from 1926 to 1931) and found Aboriginal people to be mainly on pastoral stations. He was pessimistic about the future of Aboriginal people, thinking they may die out or be “preserved” by deliberate isolation. He accepts that 1 in 4 people he met was
“half-caste” or similar and that such people were usually acknowledged by their fathers, unlike in many places. Nonetheless, these people were considered Aboriginal by both themselves and the authorities. Madigan, however, did not consider the significance of this. It reflected the truth that, underlying the attempt by visitors to the region to paint a bleak picture of Aboriginal Australian-settler relations, there was a high degree of both interaction and covert acceptance on all sides.

This sparse literature suggests that Arabana had moved from their original involvement with the train line in the 1880s and 1890s to predominantly a pastoral station life, or a life living beside the train line near ration depots, or still living “myall”, wild by the time of the First World War, 1914-1918. The subsequent post-War influenza pandemic may have killed up to half of this population and it was not until the 1920s that there were a larger number of Arabana people. Francis Dunbar Warren’s sanctuary Finnis Springs helped renew the people.

**1926 TO 1929: TRAVELLING NORTH: THE GHAN IN THE NORTH OF ARABANA COUNTRY**

In 1927, however, the Chief Aboriginal Protector, Mr F. Garnett, commented in his Annual Report:

A proclamation has been made concerning the railway now in process of construction from Oodnadatta to Alice Springs, prohibiting aboriginals (sic) not in
lawful employment from being within 10 miles east and west of the line.... I recently visited Oodnadatta and its neighbourhood, and am convinced that the police officers will find this step helpful in minimising the evils which would result from the camping of aboriginals (sic) along the line of work.

The workers for the extension this time were white people from Australia, England and elsewhere, as well as Asians and, yes, some Aboriginal Australians, many of whom had worked on the Northern Territory line building as far south as Pine Creek from Darwin (Rolls, 1996). Stevenson (1979) states that Aboriginal Australians were employed as timber cutters and general hands for this section of railway construction. The mere fact of wishing to ban Aboriginal Australians is proof that they did live and work up and down the line. The caveat of “not in lawful employment” also logically means that some Aboriginal Australians were already workers upon the train line.

This next stage of building between 1926 and 1929 took the railway through another people’s country: the Arrernte. It is no accident that Reg Dodd’s father Alan Buzzacott was southern Arrernte – the railway line linked these peoples in ways scarcely possible before. Obviously there had been prior contact but it was greatly enhanced and accelerated by the train line. For instance, cattle started to be brought by Arrernte drovers to the railway for shipment south (Strehlow, 1969).

The contract for building the next and final linking section was offered for the ensuing part of the whole line from Oodnadatta to Pine Creek in the Northern Territory on
the land grant system at the extraordinary rate of 79,725,000 acres for the 1,063 miles to be built. This works out at 75,000 acres per mile of railway built; about 120 square miles per mile of railway. This would have been through the lands of the Arrernte and half a dozen other tribes. Despite this offer there were no takers and the proposal lapsed with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929.

Because of the financial struggles, it is not such a surprise that the Northern Territory, controlled by South Australia since 1863 when it was proclaimed as separate from New South Wales by the Imperial Government, was ceded by the South Australian Government to the Federal Australian Government in 1911. The Federal Government took over control of the Northern Australian Railway completely on 1st January 1926 and it then became called the Commonwealth Railways.

The Second World War made a major impact on Aboriginal employment. Oodnadatta in 1948 was the site of a visit from the Berndts, who have written about this in From Black to White in South Australia (1951). The railway having moved its railhead to Alice Springs had shrunk the population of Oodnadatta to about 324 people, mostly Aboriginal Australians. The Berndts considered that the main groups were Antakarinja, Pitjatjantjara, and Arrernte. Arabana were living mainly further south by now. There were three Aboriginal sections to the town: “camps” of usually temporary dwellings of poor quality around the edge of town, some “in-betweens” and a group usually married into the broader community with some accepted social status. Employment was high, as non-Aboriginal people were so few. Rail workers did include day labourers, gangers and
settlers. They comment that this "classification" was not hard and fast: personality made a big difference. A big measles epidemic had scourged the town in 1948 and killed at least 100 Aboriginal Australians, mainly the old and infants. Aboriginal Australians in that area who were not employed by the Commonwealth Railways were paid a lower rate than other workers, and pastoral employers were opposed to equal pay. This situation continued until the 1960s. For instance, the basic wage in 1965 was 15 pounds and eighteen shillings a week. Of 32 Aboriginal stockmen employed on a northern pastoral station, only three were paid the basic wage. White stockmen usually got more. Sixteen Aboriginal stockmen got half the basic wage while the rest got even less (Gale, 1964, p 89). The railways consistently offered equal pay from the outset of taking over the South Australian Railways, including the Ghan, in 1926 (See Appendix 4).

Most "Group I", "Camp Aborigines" in Oodnadatta knew little English and used "pidgin", despite employment, just as the Aboriginal negotiator had with Strangways manager John Oastler 100 years before. The diet was poor. Gambling took a lot of money. Rations and clothing were issued to aged and infirm by the local constable. "Group II" Aboriginal Australians dressed cleanly, looked after their possessions and had the same diet as non-Aboriginal Australians. "Group III" were very similar to white folk.

Alice Springs, a mere repeater station for the Overland Telegraph before the railway was put through, became a town of 3,000 people by 1962 (Rose, 1965). He also states that the carrying capacity of the cattle stations increased six-fold due to the availability of transport to move the stock by rail to markets in Adelaide. The Aboriginal Australians
from Angas Downs, it would seem, however, did not use the train. They either still walked, or used camels or in some cases were flown, if ill, by the Royal Flying Doctor Service. The use of motor transport by Aboriginal Australians by themselves in that area came after 1962.

There are a number of records by travellers on “the Flash Ghan”, the passenger train, in those days between 1929 and 1980, but the workers are mostly invisible, apart from the iconic train driver and conductor. One conductor told author Derek Whitelock (1986) that his wife, upon being told he would be home on Friday, asked, which Friday? On the other hand, a Territorian in the Todd Tavern in Alice Springs told him “it was our lifeline, mate”. His Chinese grandfather had worked for 47 years as a fettler and had photographs of the track after a bad flood twisted like barbed wire. The English author Michael Frayn recounted to Whitelock the hoary story about a woman who protested the slow progress of the Ghan as she needed to arrive in Alice Springs in time for maternity care. When the conductor retorted that she should not have boarded the train in that condition, she replied that she wasn’t in that condition when she had boarded.

There are further uses of the Ghan line recorded. An Aboriginal lady with a sick child was conveyed on the train to the Hospital at Port Augusta (9th November 1931 [GRG5/307]). It was not all good, however. When Arabana lady Doris Strangways, in her sixties, by then diabetic as so many Aboriginal people have become with western diet, broke her insulin syringe needle on 6th April 1955, the new one was sent by Motorised Section Car on the Ghan line from Alberrie Creek to Curdimurka (47Km). The Railway
charged seven pounds, one shilling and five pence for this service! (GRG52/16 Vol 2 1954-7).

In the middle of Arabana country, from the mid-twentieth century, Arabana families inhabited the side of the tracks, and hence were involved both in maintaining the line, dealing with emergencies such as derailments as well as taking care of Business, and were on the edges of the line in Marree and Oodnadatta and other areas such as Curdimurka. The Aborigines’ Protection Board records visiting Marree on 21st September 1955 to select sites to erect houses and washing facilities for Aboriginal Australians in Marree itself (GRG52/16 Vol 2 1954-7). Control was frighteningly micro - even a purchase of three rabbit traps was supposed to be approved by the APB - no wonder the Arabana felt more freedom at Finnis Springs and working directly for “Charlie Riley”, the Commonwealth Railways.

Overall, in summary, the Arabana influenced the route of the old Ghan, worked casually on it for the ensuing fifty years, then became more permanently employed from the 1930s onwards. Many families lived alongside the line. Many Arabana married non-Arabana men, white, Afghan and Chinese, and their children are considered Arabana. Traditional practices such as ochre pilgrimage parties continued until the First World War, after which the reduced population, cultural change and increasing strictures from Government caused cessation of the practice openly. By the end of the Second World War, Arabana were working fulltime on the Ghan, started living in railway towns such as Marree and Oodnadatta, and even Darwin. The line had not only provided the Arabana with the geographical mobility to move well beyond their country, but the social mobility to secure a foothold in white society.
Chapter 5. ARABANA ON THE RAILWAY:

Documentary information

- “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad” (traditional)

SLSA B53762. 1910. The Ghan steaming into Oodnadatta (with permission)

The early days of Steam in Arabana country:

As noted in the previous chapter, Aboriginal Australian people carted coal for the trains from the very time that the train arrived in Marree in 1884 (Fuller, 1975). Perhaps they had even done so further south when the train reached Government Gums, later Farina, as they went on their pilgrimages for the sacred red ochre. Evidence for this phase in history is negligible.
These ochre pilgrimages would have been central in introducing the Arabana to the railways. Philip Jones in his fascinating book *Ochre and Rust* (Jones, 2007, especially pages 369-70) notes that the substance was conceptualised in many sacred transformations including “emu’s blood”, *Kurringie Warragurta*, by the local Adnyamathantha tribe who were in charge of the ochre mine 25 Km southwest of Parachilna near the entrance to Brachina Gorge. The Arabana are recorded by Elkin (1934, p188) as seeing the same ochre as “Dingoes’ Blood” after a hunter had tracked and killed them. Jones notes that it was the train line which enabled Aboriginal Australians to travel quickly and safely to the ochre mines and back. It saved them about two weeks’ walking either way. The 35Kg lumps of ochre could just be put on the train rather than carried on their heads until disembarkation. It saved them from trigger happy white settlers along the route - they could just sail by on the railway. Indeed, in 1863, there was an abrupt cessation of ochre pilgrimages when the manager of Beltana Station shot three Aboriginal Australians on their trip (Aird and Klaasen, 1985, pp30-31). The arrival of the railway enabled the pilgrims to bypass this sort of deterrent. Sometimes, however, it seems, it was just to take a ride - they became tourists. “Reminiscing in the 1980s, F.J. Finn recounted that Aboriginal men who had inveigled a free ride from the Marree station-manager by pleading the necessity for more red ochre sometimes alighted at Commodore siding and then waited for the next train to take them north again, without even venturing into the Ranges” (ibid, p370).

Jones also comments that the Marree Station Master let ochre parties travel on flat trucks under tarpaulins. They usually got off the train rather outside the main station at
Marree, apparently to avoid attention and also because of the secret nature of the intertribal Mindari ceremonies (Jones, op cit, p371). The Arabana had their own Wilyaru Ceremony which includes reference to the “Native Cat” or Quoll (Howitt, 1904, pp658-662) but about every two years, participated in an intertribal Mindari ceremony.

Jones seems to interpret the Arabana use of the railway at this time through the constructs of convenience, speed and safety. These ideas are very Western notions and there is an alternative explanation possible. As noted in the previous chapter, the railway followed the Dreaming Tracks necessarily followed by the pilgrims to the ochre mine and hence was permissible and even necessary for the Arabana to travel along. It was a palimpsest, an overlay to their own Dreaming tracks. But as mentioned earlier, shooting of Aboriginal men on this pilgrim route in 1863 had stopped the trips for several years until the railway made it safe (Aird and Klaasen, 1985)! Jones thus affirms that the railway enabled the ochre pilgrimages to continue for at least another generation.

Working for the White Men:

There was no Chief Aboriginal Protector after the resignation of Matthew Moorhouse in 1856 through to 1908 by direct decision of the colonial South Australian Governments (Gale, 1964). There were Sub-Protectors. Aboriginal Sub-Protectors for the Far North provided Annual Reports. I have mentioned some of these in the “Living in ‘The Desert’” Chapter. I now turn to those reports provided during the operation of the Ghan railway. Protector Field reports in 1901 that Anna Creek pastoral station had 139
people of whom 85 were able bodied Aboriginal Australians, and 20 were constantly employed. Two were reported as dying from scurvy in the previous year, which is quite horrifying when one knows of the vast range of dietary vegetable plants available prior to white settlement which would avert this disease. The nature of the constant employment is tacitly assumed to be pastoral work, but this is not explicit. Oral testimony from my own informants suggests that, at the least, Arabana were providing food through their work on Strangways Springs/Anna Creek to the railway workers and probably day labour on the line itself. Field also states that there were 113 Aboriginal Australians in Oodnadatta the same year, but employment is not mentioned. Field makes specific comment on the large number of “half-castes” living “in the blacks’ camp”. The Chief Protector was the legal Guardian of all these people, even as adults.

William Garnet South was Chief Protector from 1908 when he assumed the post until 1922 (with a gap in 1911 and 1912). Originally a policeman, South thought that “full-bloods” would die out and that “half-caste” or even lesser “mixtures” should be separated from their parents. He states in an early annual report that Aboriginal Australians in the Far North were getting wages of 10-15 shillings per week for pastoral work - this was at a time when settler railway workers got 22 shillings and 6 pence per week (Railway Commissioner’s Annual Report 1910). It is unclear, as elsewhere in Australia, whether the pastoral worker Aboriginal Australians ever saw these putative wages. Ronnie Dodd, Arabana settler from the 1950s, specifically states that railway wages were the first money he had seen.
By 1919, the Annual Reports state that “the condition of the Aborigines in the Marree district is exceedingly good, there being plenty of employment for the able bodied men who earn good wages at droving and camel driving, the wages being from 4 pounds to 7 pounds a month plus keep”. As noted above, it is likely that Arabana were employed on a short term basis by the railways as well.

The Influenza pandemic then supervened from 1919 to 1922: nearly half the Aboriginal Australian population up and down the Ghan are reported to have died (Aboriginal Protector’s Report 1924 and Basedow, 1921).

1920s and 1930s:

As covered above, Arabana people were living on pastoral stations, in camps beside railway sidings for instance at Curdimurka, and had moved into Oodnadatta and Marree. Their numbers had reduced, as noted, partly because of the post-World War 1 influenza pandemic but were increasing once more, including many “half-castes”. Traditional practices had been interrupted, although language and customs had continued. In 1923 the Aborigines (Training for Children) Act was passed which meant that Aboriginal children could be removed from their families against their will and sent to institutions until they were adults. The enactment of former Chief Protector South’s vision provided the new Chief Protector with the power to commit any Aboriginal child to an institution and to detained until they reached the age of eighteen. Because the Aborigines (Training for Children) Act sought to train Indigenous children to be “useful” members of the dominant white society, it further – and intentionally – weakened traditional Aboriginal Australian
culture. This assault on culture was sustained and the removals of children from their families continued for 40 years under the near total authority of the Chief Protector. Many Arabana children, however, were not removed because of the efforts of F D Warren. As his own children with Laura and those of other Arabana ladies and other men were considered ‘half-castes’, and as there was no schooling on Finniss Springs Station, they were raised according to Arabana culture and able to speak Arabana language. When police, acting on behalf of the Protection Board, tried to remove Warren’s children in the 1910s, he removed them from his Anna Creek property at gunpoint (Hercus, Australian Dictionary of Biography). Consequently, few Arabana, were taken away by the revitalized Aboriginal Protection/Native Welfare. Finniss Springs Station, re-established in 1922, became a haven for Arabana, Dieri and others from the 1920s, and a Mission from 1939, with school and church.


To reiterate, the Commonwealth Government, having assumed control of the railways from 1926 (Fuller, 1975), had built an extension from Oodnadatta to Alice Springs between 1926 and 1929, as noted in the previous chapter. The South Australian
Government, allegedly concerned about the negative impact of railway construction workers upon Aboriginal Australians, passed a proclamation under Section 33 of the Aborigines’ Act prohibiting Aboriginal Australians from being within 10 miles of the train line unless “in lawful employment” (Annual Report, 1927, p5). Clearly this meant that Aboriginal Australians had been living next to or visiting the train line. Rather than pastoral work or indigence, Aboriginal Australians could work on or get rations directly from the railways. The statute was not effective in Arabana country because the Arabana did provide food to the railway workers initially, then labour, which was the loophole.

One of the reasons for this was that after the Commonwealth Government assumed responsibility for the line in 1926, it offered Aboriginal Australians wage parity with white employees. This was not offered in other lines of work, and particularly affected was the pastoral industry. By 1933, the Chief Protector’s Annual Report complains “many refuse employment in (pastoral) stations because they want award wages”. This is precisely what the Commonwealth Railways were offering. Arabana and others were voting with their feet. With increasing educational opportunities and proximity to the line, Aboriginal groups such as the Arabana and Dieri increasingly sought and secured work on the railways, attracted by the increased freedom and the money. Mr Aiston, Sub-Protector in Dieri country, writes that “a lot to cross over to the Finniss in the Arabunna district” and interestingly “one fairly large party from here have sent me back word they are in the Kingoonya district on the East-West line” (Aborigines Protection Board Annual Report 1933). That is, both groups were heading to the railways. If the Ghan line did not suffice, the East West line attracted them. Chief Protector W G South had repeatedly complained
about this from 1922 onwards. Gale (1964, p277) writes “In the Northern part of the State the pastoral industry is the only significant employer of labour except the Commonwealth Railways and a few mining enterprises (Leigh Creek and Andamooka). This contrasts sharply with other parts of the State where “most Aborigines are semi- or untrained and are employed only seasonally” (Gale, 1964, p280). Arabana told me that the pay came in a special white carriage attached to the train and they were given the money in little yellow envelopes. As everyone said, the pay was the same for the same work. It was nearly double what pastoral workers received, at the least (See Appendix 4). There are Commonwealth Railways staff registers which record personal details, changes, transfers, promotions, and some pay details. In the early days, with walk-up hiring on a daily basis, this information is regrettably trivial.

1940s onwards:

During the Second World War trains on the Ghan line increased from two a week to seven a day. Some sources say from three a week to 56 a week (Wadlata Centre signboard). Troops, munitions and armaments not just Australian but other Commonwealth countries and people from the United States were using Australia as a base to fight the Japanese. Moving these up to the north and bringing personnel back for rest and recreation, or to recover from wounds meant much higher volumes of traffic. Moreover, labour was at a premium. Women, Italian prisoners of war and Aboriginal Australians were recruited (Wartime History of the Commonwealth Railways, http://www.comrails.com/wthcr/w01.html). Arabana stepped up, as happened elsewhere in Australia (May, 1994). Bruce Shaw records ongoing casual mobile employment from the 1940s on the train line for
Aboriginal Australians, among others, to fix washaways and continue maintenance (Shaw, 1995, interview with Fred Ah Chee, p56-59). Arthur Ah Chee (2000) said that his father (also Arthur) helped many family members become railway workers, including becoming fettlers and gangers. In between such employment some of the men would drive stock for landholders such as Sidney Kidman. The world of work reflects the dictum that “the Aborigines stepped into the shoes of the convicts”. They constituted a free or cheap labour force which could be “switched on” or “switched off” depending on demand (also Foster, 2000), but the Commonwealth and other Railways started a trend for equal pay for equal work.

The trend to employ Arabana on the Ghan accelerated after the War. Their employment marked a shift in the status of the Arabana and other Aboriginal Australian workers on the line. The War had provided the impetus for advancement both economically and socially for these workers. Many Aboriginal Australian workers, not just Arabana, are listed in the Commonwealth Railway’s records.

There was one fascinating instance of how Aboriginal Australians were still regarded when Walter Kidman, son of the “cattle king” Sir Sidney Kidman, wrote to the Chief Civil Engineer, Mr Hannaberry, on 19th March 1946 after the Second World War and said that he wanted his Aboriginal Australians back to work on pastoral stations such as Macumba. The Railway Commissioner, after due deliberation, wrote back and said that Mr Kidman could have the “Full-Bloods” but they would keep the “Half-Castes”, some of whom have been employed for “quite some time” (Railway Commissioner’s
Correspondence, 1946). There was still, even after World War II, that sense that Aboriginal Australians were owned by the white pastoralists. This retention and further recruitment of Aboriginal “half-caste” workers was reiterated in a further letter of 25th August 1960.

The Commonwealth Railway was benefited by recruitment of the Arabana as they lived with their families beside the train line. Fettler and gangers lived in stone houses some ten miles (fifteen kilometres) apart and serviced the line forward and back five miles each way. They initially did not leave the area except to transact traditional business (similar to practices recorded by May, 1994). This was quite unlike “foreigners”, also called “aliens”, who would mostly come, work for a time then leave. Immigrants and refugees, displaced persons, who came after the War were very much part of the broadening of horizons for their Arabana co-workers. Gradually Arabana families moved into Marree, initially on the “wrong side of the tracks” then in the main part of the town. Many prominent Arabana families, such as the Warrens, Strangways, Buzzacotts, Stuarts and Dodds from Finnis Springs, found work on the railway. Like many in the region, they gravitated from the pastoral industry to settlements along the line. Indicative of this is the fact that 85 of the 100 residents of Marree are said to be Dodd family members (Reg Dodd, 2010). Alan Buzzacott, the father of current Arabana elder Reg Dodd, was recruited as a fettler around 1954. It coincided with the end of Reg’s formal education at the age of 14. As was the trend, after working in the pastoral industry at Stuart’s Creek Station, he gained work on the railway in 1960, and continued until the line closed completely in 1986 (personal communication, May 2010).
Shaw (1995) also records that Arabana men, but not women on ochre pilgrimages, continued to travel as passengers on the train from other places to go to Curdimurka to perform Business, that is traditional ceremonies, so the intermingling of 20th century capitalism and Aboriginal social practice continued. (op cit, Brian Marks interview on page 52).

Michael McKinnon has made a series of six short films about the Arabana called “Marree Arabunna Museum: Six Short Films” (undated but on internal evidence about 2009) and one is called “the railway was good to us”. This recounts the work experience of several men from the Dodd family. As noted earlier, they were paid real money wages in little yellow envelopes. For at least one, Ronnie Dodd, it was the first money he’d ever seen and signified his entry into the mainstream economy. Like many Arabana rail workers, the railway provided a means for economic and social advancement. One significant career is that of John Hodgson, the uncle of the Aboriginal Australian academic, Professor Veronica Arbon. He became the first Arabana to qualify as a train driver. Later, Arabana man Adrian Wallace also became a train driver (pers. comm. Prof V. Arbon, 2016) Another is Mervyn Dodd, who became the Yardmaster, a highly responsible position, at Port Augusta. The line provided the mobility for the Arabana to advance in the railways, and laid the basis by which future generations could contribute to trades and professions well beyond Arabana country.
"The Cold War" Period:

"Where they make a desert they call it peace" (Tacitus, *Agricola*, 30)

The onset of the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s had a direct and profound impact on the Arabana and their country. After the Second World War, the Australian Government assisted the British Government by testing atomic bombs in the western desert. Over seven hundred nuclear explosions were detonated. For instance, on 15th October 1953 Totem One distributed a large radioactive dust cloud eastward over Arabana country (Williams 2010, Chapter 6 “Stopping the Poison” and Lennon, 2011). Many Arabana were affected by respiratory and skin complaints and later an increased incidence of cancers (Reg Dodd, personal communication 2010), as were other Anangu peoples (Yalata and Oak Valley Communities with Mattingley, C, 2009).

Many more Arabana now worked on the Commonwealth Railways after the easing of restrictions after 1961, the year when Aboriginal Australians were allowed to vote. The Commonwealth Railways became Australian National Railways in January 1976. One Arabana man, Dudley Barnes, declared “the railway was number one for blackfellas”. What he as a fettler had to do was lay nine new sleepers then “sit down the rest of the day and do your own business”. “Fresh tucker, clothes” and other goods were sent up on the train from the dedicated stores at Port Augusta and “we lived like kings”. Then there was the “tea and sugar” train, carriages with supplies sent up the line, and a butcher’s shop.
also in a wagon. Milk came up on the train and there were up to three cars full of stores: “it was like Christmas”, chuckled Barnes, when these arrived. One carriage was also set up as a movie theatre. The railway corridor provided goods and services, and access to the dominant white society and culture which was denied to other Aboriginal peoples not in contact with the line.

Children grew up around and playing on the railway and its surrounds. Matt and Colleen Strangways, children of Syd Strangways, recall playing in the rail sheds on weekends at Alice Springs in the 1970s. They would enter the locomotive shed and use the gantry as a swing. Holidays were taken by travelling on the train to Marree, Stirling or even holiday houses at Glenelg owned by the railways. The family would go on the goods train which was slow and involved much shunting, and not on the “Flash Ghan” which was reserved for passenger traffic. It would take three days to get to Port Augusta from Alice Springs (conversations at Lake Eyre/Kati Thanda, 2013).

Other technological changes were also starting, however to make inroads on the hegemony of the railways. “Beef roads” and road trains started to replace the railroad. Air Commercial air services provided a quicker mode of transport between Adelaide and inland towns and settlements. It also provided a more effective form of healthcare. The Royal Flying Doctor Service started coming directly to Marree from Broken Hill and later Adelaide, and access to radio and television (from 1956 in Australia) altered people’s knowledge and perceptions (Briscoe, 1991, Chapter 5).

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The international rise of global decolonizing movements and Black Power in the United States all started to make conscious changes in Aboriginal peoples in Australia (Jennett, 1996). The 1939 Cummeragunga Walk-Off, the 1946 pastoral workers’ strike in the Pilbara, the 1966 Wave Hill Walk-Off, then the 1967 Referendum all increased the power of Aboriginal Australians within their own lands. The referendum result altered the political landscape, paving the way for the recognition of Aboriginal land rights and native title. In 1967, the Gurindji people petitioned the Holt Liberal Coalition Government for the excising of 1295 square kilometres of land from Vesty’s pastoral leasehold. This culminated in the handing back of land to the Gurindji people in August 1975 by the Whitlam Government. The Mabo decision of 3rd June 1992 allowed recognition finally of the fiction of Terra Nullius. Prime Minister Paul Keating, the following year, passed the Native Title Act. The Wik Determination (1996; http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/latest-news/wik-peoples-win-final-native-title-claim/story-fn3dxiwe-1226493772777) watered this Mabo finding down but Native Title claims have continued to the present day.
THE END OF THE OLD GHAN LINE:

- "This Train Is Bound For Glory"

1986 to The Present Day:

The Ghan changed to diesel instead of steam engines in 1957. Thus the use of natural springs or bores derived from the Great Artesian Basin became unnecessary. That year also, 1957, standard gauge was installed as far as Marree which then became a change of gauge station. For the next eighteen years, Marree became the station where passengers and goods changed to trains fitted for the ensuing narrow gauge stage to Alice Springs. The station at Marree by that time had 25 miles of track in a fairly small area (personal communication, 2016). Nonetheless there were ongoing problems all up the line with floods, washaways, sand blowing over the line and so on, quite apart from the
maintenance of all the bridges and culverts associated with the railway. A new Ghan route based on standard gauge started to be laid in April 1975, starting from Tarcoola, a long way west of the old route and out of Arabana country. It was situated 160 kilometres west of the original route, and ended in Alice Springs. The route was plotted on higher ground than the old Ghan line, to avoid the constant floods that had interrupted the train service. With the opening of the new line, the old one closed down permanently in 1986.

The actual tracks and some sleepers from the Old Ghan were torn up and sent to Queensland where new rail lines were being built, mostly for mining (information at Alice Springs Old Ghan Museum). When the Old Ghan closed all the Arabana workers were either forced to move away from their own lands to maintain employment or to stay in their traditional country and seek other work. In Oodnadatta as other railway workers moved away from the town from about 1981 onwards, Aboriginal people leaving the pastoral stations bought the houses and now constitute over half the population (article in “The Outback” magazine, Issue 100, April/May, 2015).

Reg Dodd has opened Arabunna Aboriginal Tours and has run this with increasing success over the past fifteen years (personal communication May 2010). Dodd’s business taps into the increasing Outback tourism market, and the expanding local and international interest in traditional Aboriginal culture. It shows non-Arabana people the extent of the country, some of its former secrets and some of the cultural aspects of traditional and post-contact life. Some of his family also take part in this enterprise such as Esther Kite, his sister and her husband Neville, Vincent, his nephew and others. Some
other former rail workers went to Government jobs such as National Parks, Aboriginal Affairs and so on.

The New Ghan was extended to Darwin finally in 2004, one hundred years after Federation and more than a hundred and fifty years after South Australia expected the project to link north and south of Australia. This time, however, Social Impact Assessments were prepared and all the Aboriginal Australian peoples along the extended line obtained benefits or compensation. Bruce Chatwin’s often maligned book, “The Songlines”, has as the author’s guide through central Australia the character Arkady, who is engaged in mediating between surveyors for the Ghan extension and the Aboriginal peoples along the proposed route. This stems from the legal recognition of native title and the passing of land rights’ legislation, such as the 1976 Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act and the 2010 Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Act which modified access rights to Aboriginal Australians’ lands.

Tourists now drive the Oodnadatta Track, which parallels the Ghan line for many hundreds of kilometres. The New Ghan train is a luxury rail trip, one of few such in the world, along with The Orient Express, the Trans-Siberian and the Rocky Mountaineer. It has even featured on Chris Tarrant’s BBC production, Extreme Railways. However, the Arabana’s contribution to the original line is rarely noted. It is not that it has been edited from the official history of the line. The Arabana were rarely featured in the history in the first place. There is even an ANZAC Ghan, which has run annually for several years now,
and is the subject of a Photo Essay in The Outback Magazine (Issue 94, May/June 2014, pp76-81). Arabana do not rate a mention.
Chapter 6: Arabana Rail Workers and Their Families: Annotations on Their Stories

The Aboriginal contribution to the railways of Central Australia is minimised in the mainstream histories of rail and infrastructure development in this country. This chapter suggests that the Aboriginal Australian contribution has been much more significant, particularly in the case of the Arabana. In seeking to detail the Arabana’s contribution, this chapter is based on their stories as told to me, and not on archival materials which were covered in an earlier chapter. The chapter, therefore, is based on my notes from open-ended interviews with Arabana people who have associations to, and memories of, the railway. The interviews are arranged roughly according to the age of the interviewees. Their dates of birth range from 1927 to 1969 and combine to detail the Arabana story of living on and beside the railway line. As the stories reveal, the most important early Arabana contribution to the railway was providing surveyors with knowledge of their Dreaming tracks which formed the basis for the route of the railway line. Consequently, the railway became part of the Arabana’s Dreaming tracks, providing the means to visit family, undertake pilgrimages, and conduct trade with other Aboriginal Australian groups and the dominant settler economy. However, as these stories reveal, the railway also ‘westernized’ many Arabana, as they learnt the railway trades and became casual then permanent workers, travelled the line, and even used it to go on holidays.

The ubiquitous nature of the railway was a feature of Arabana life for a century. It was, as a Nukunu locomotive engineer, Darryl Thomas, commented on Arabana, “their way of life”. Many Arabana worked as day-labourers on the Ghan. As mentioned
before, often this involved the ‘walk-up’ hiring of the Arabana who were paid in cash at the end of the day’s work. Records of this casualised employment are absent or rudimentary at best. Most were hired for blocks of two to four weeks for specific tasks. But a significant number were hired on an ongoing basis. Though each type of employment is apparent in the interviews, the prime focus is on recording the experiences of long-term employees, as they indicate the impact that the railways had on Arabana life. Female interviewees are fewer in number, although most Arabana men had their families alongside them on the line. Some women worked as cleaners, laundresses or in clerical capacities, evident in their stories.

The Story of Eileen Wani Wingfield,

Eileen Wingfield’s story encapsulates the shift within the Arabana people from pastoralism towards urban settlements which stemmed from ready access to the train line. I met Eileen Wingfield in March 2012 in Port Augusta. A respected Arabana elder and committed environmentalist, she has been involved in anti-uranium protests since the 1980s and was awarded the internationally acclaimed Goldman Environmental Prize in 2003 which honours ‘grassroots’ environmental activists. Wingfield was born in 1927 and had three grandmothers; Maggie, Minnie and Jenny. Her mother was Winnie and her father was Tim Allen, also known as Nilpinna Tim. He was named after the Nilpinna pastoral station and mound spring, located between William Creek and Oodnadatta, near Peake Creek and west of the Oodnadatta Track.

As a child she travelled with her father throughout Arabana country, especially
around Warrina, Edwards Creek and Mount Margaret. She lived at Mount Barry, and then for a prolonged period on Mount Margaret Station, before moving to Algebuckina. All of these places are significant Arabana Dreaming sites. After travels through Coober Pedy and Mabel Creek, she returned to Warrina where she married and had children. Some of her children were taken by Welfare. Though the children had foster parents, they were allowed to visit Wingfield every two to three weeks. The train assisted in keeping the family in contact. The children were finally returned to Wingfield when they were aged 18.

She first saw what she termed the “Flash Ghan”, passengers only, which missed some of the sidings and stops that the slower mixed or goods trains made, while mustering cattle. She recalled Arabana elders travelling to Finniss on the railway. She recognized the Ghan’s potential to lessen the Arabana’s traditional commitment to country. Wingfield emphasized that she and her sister, Alma, attempted to keep the country “alive”, especially during their time on Mount Margaret Station, while other Arabana were leaving the region on the train. Her younger brother, Archie Allen, played a similar role at Finke (now Aputula). She, too, eventually moved from country by train to Port Augusta where she now lives.

Over the past twenty years, Wingfield has fought the mining of uranium on Arabana and neighbouring Aboriginal Australian peoples’ lands. Her son, Glen, is a prominent campaigner against the Roxby Downs uranium mine. Wingfield attributes this to concerns about the drying up of the Mound Springs and the overuse of water from the Great Artesian Basin because of the mine’s activities. As with her son, she has travelled the
world, campaigning against uranium mining and for the protection of the environment. The train has been instrumental in the dissemination of her views. Not only did the train enable the movement of goods, services and people, it also precipitated the spread of ideas such as environmental protection and the Aboriginal Australian opposition to uranium mining. The dissemination of these viewpoints is found in Wingfield’s commitment to keep Arabana country alive. The train has provided a means for garnering national and international support to achieve this.

The story of the Hodgson family

Betty Bowditch, Shirley Arbon, Zena Richards and Daphne May are the daughters of Charles Dean “Geordie” Hodgson and his Arabana wife, Myra Hull. They agreed to meet me in Darwin in December 2013 to tell the story of the ways in which the railways had impacted on the Hodgson family. As his name suggests, Geordie Hodgson was born in the Tyneside region of north-east England in the early 1900s. He migrated to Australia with his brother, Alex Hodgson, in the early 1920s. While Alex remained in Victoria, Geordie moved to Oodnadatta to work on the Great Northern Railways around 1926, when it became the Commonwealth Railways. He started as a fettler and then was a ganger, after which he became a Roadmaster’s Clerk based in Marree and later in Alice Springs. He also organised the picnics for railway families at Callanna until his death on 2 July 1966 in Alice Springs. His wife, Myra, was the daughter of the Arabana woman, Clara (Mudlu) Hull. Born at Anna Creek in 1914, Myra was only sixteen when she married Geordie who was nine years her senior. They had thirteen children. The railways played prominent roles, not just in Geordie and Myra’s lives, but also in those of their children.
For example, it provided access to midwives and hospital care for Myra during her pregnancies. Births of children were spread across towns and settlements along the line. The eldest three children were born in the AIM Hospital in Oodnadatta, while the next five entered the world in Marree. Subsequent births took place in Port Augusta, Marree and Alice Springs. Though the family was poor, rail work provided a regular wage and formed a vital part of their lives. They got free travel on the Ghan, and would use the train to go on holidays to Coward Springs, where relations ran the local pub, and to Curdimurka for various Arabana celebrations. From Port Augusta to Oodnadatta, they used the train to visit relatives who had moved into settlements along the line. The places the family lived had been determined by the route of the railway.

Their interdependence with the line continued into many of the children’s later lives. Of the thirteen children, many either gained employment on the Ghan itself, or married workers who were employed on the line. Marjorie, the eldest, married a non-Arabana man, Phil Wallace, who himself was a railway worker. Their son Shane was a shunter before his death in 1996, while another son, Adrian, was a train driver. This latter moved onto the mining industry, living and working at the Roxby Downs uranium mine, another employer of local peoples. Another brother, John, was a train driver. He trained at Port Augusta, at the railhead of the Ghan, but worked mainly on the Darwin-Larrimah line until his death in June 1979.
Betty Bowditch (nee Hodgson) was born 2 July 1932 in Oodnadatta. She recalled that when she was aged seven the family left Oodnadatta and moved to Marree. The family lived in a railway house next to the train line. With the onset of the Second World War, she recalled the many troops travelling northwards through Marree. They would hand out some of their rations to the Hodgson children, though the soldiers would also steal the family’s chickens at night. She also recalled her father’s worry for his family in England. He longed to visit them, but this never happened because of the high travel costs. Geordie died without seeing his family of origin again.

The train provided Betty with educational opportunities unavailable to the majority of Aboriginal Australian children. She was sent to Adelaide to boarding school, attending St Dominic’s Priory in North Adelaide. For four years she travelled to school on the Great Northern’s Railway’s steam train, the Ghan line, returning to Marree for holidays. Betty also remembered the family ordering goods from the Railway Stores in Port Augusta. As a railway family, the Hodgsons received favourable treatment. Meat was sent by train from Alice Springs, while tinned foodstuffs arrived from Port Augusta. Because of the Arabana’s favourable location on the line, they had access to a far greater choice of goods than more isolated Aboriginal Australian peoples.

By 1948 the Hodgson family had moved to Alice Springs and again the railway played an instrumental part. They moved by travelling in the guard’s van on the Ghan. The extended family’s movements were still subject to the Aborigines Protection Board. On 14 June 1948, Geordie requested the Board’s dispensation to allow two of Myra’s
sisters, Grace and Millie Hull to come to Alice Springs to look after his wife who had severe arthritis. The request was denied in a return letter of 1 July 1948, without any reason being given by the Board. Despite the increased capability of the Arabana to travel, they still faced restrictions on their movements by the government.

For some of the Hodgson children, the railway yard in Alice Springs was their playground. They would always go to the station to meet the Ghan, play in the locomotive shed where the trains were kept, and raid the tucker box for biscuits. There was also a water tank near the shed which all the railway children used as their swimming pool. When the Ghan or the cattle trains were in Alice Springs, "they were very long and [the children] had to jump over the couplings to be able to get to school."

The children grew up in a white world that the train had brought to them. All of the Hodgson women regretted not having the opportunity to learn the Arabana language. Their mother spoke it, but Geordie would not allow her to teach the children. As the women explained, their mother could not even read or write. When Child Endowment was introduced during the 1940s, she was taught to sign her name so that she did not have to use a thumb print. While the children were products of the wider world which had been introduced with pastoralism, the Telegraph and the railway line, Myra retained many aspects of her Arabana culture.
The story of Syd Strangways

Syd Strangways was born on 15 July 1932 to Arabana parents. His father Henry (Wapili) Strangways was born in 1881, while his mother Edie (Edith) Sargant was born in 1902. She had been taken from her family when young and placed in Adelaide to work for a white family. Henry worked on the railways, though his actual job is unknown, possibly as a cook in a settlers’ gang.

Syd is a spirited member of the Arabana Aboriginal Corporation, and campaigned for the restoration of Kati Thanda as the name for Lake Eyre. He also had a long career on the Ghan. We met first in Alice Springs’ Oasis Hotel over coffee in early March 2012. In preparation for the meeting, Strangways had written his recollections of the railway’s impact on the Arabana. He recalled hearing of the impact of the influenza pandemic after the First World War, which killed many Arabana living and working along the line. Many of those deaths, he revealed, were not noted by the authorities.

Strangways’ working life did not begin on the railway line. As Strangways related, “I was born on and grew up on a property that ran both sheep and cattle”. In these days the area was called New Well and the property was primarily a horse stud for the Finniss Springs Station. According to Strangways, the station moved to the New Well Spring after the old Finniss Spring had become salty. F D Warren initiated the move. He had sold his stake in the Anna Creek Station in 1917 and moved to Finniss and subsequently New Well. As Strangways explained “All I ever knew from birth was the life of a stockman. And like
every other Arabana who grew up on Finniss Springs Mission, I was very good at it”. (typescript from Syd).

Strangways’ story exemplifies the shift in many Arabana from the pastoral industry to the railways. In his case, the shift was not by design but occurred “by accident”. A relative, Clem Dodd, had agreed “to break in a large mob of horses” on the Cordillo Downs Station, situated on the South Australian-Queensland border, and Strangways offered to “give him a hand”. At the time they were on the Finniss Springs Mission, “dead broke” and unemployed, and without money to travel to Cordillo Downs. They decided to get work on the railways for a few weeks which would provide them with enough money to “catch the Mail Truck up to Cordillo Downs.” They “sign[ed] up” for work at the Roadmaster’s Office in Marree and then were sent to Port Augusta for a medical examination. On completion, they were assigned to a fettlers’ camp somewhere on the narrow gauge line to Alice Springs and were issued with free travel passes. On the night that they were meant to travel to Cordillo Downs, Strangways “went to a party and got so drunk that [he] missed the train completely”.

Nonetheless Strangways was sent to the fettlers’ camp at Curdimirka. He knew the area well, having spent time there with his grandmother, Lily. Two gangs were stationed at Curdimirka, maintaining the line north and south of the settlement. Strangways recounts that the men in charge of each gang were Arabana. He joined the gang to the north of Curdimirka, which included the Coward Springs Hotel where they could get “the occasional carton of beer”. He and Dodd still planned to go to Cordillo Downs. Dodd
had become romantically entangled with a woman from Silverton, west of Broken Hill. They had met in Port Augusta and Dodd followed her to Broken Hill. Shortly after his arrival, he was killed in a horse handling accident. Without Dodd, Strangways decided against taking the stockman’s job at Cordillo Downs. Instead, he stayed with the Commonwealth Railways for over 40 years.

This wasn’t Strangways first stint on the railways. He could not remember the exact year of his first employment stint, but “it rained and rained and there were floods and volumes of water everywhere”. The flooding washed away the tracks. At Canterberry Creek, he said, “almost a mile of track” had gone “and it ended up a mess of tangled and twisted metal and broken sleepers”. The Commonwealth Railways called for more manpower to repair the track. Because the Finnis Springs Mission was nearby, they asked for men to come and help. Strangways was still at school, but with “[s]ix or seven men volunteered to assist”. The Railways had established a camp of about 40 to 50 men at the Wangianna Siding who were given the job of laying a new track. As Strangways suggests, “It was here when I met my first ‘New Australian.’” He had never seen “any foreign men before”. Those working on the line were “from the Baltic States…and were referred to as ‘Balts’”. It was another indicator of how the train had brought the outside world to those Aboriginal Australian peoples along the line. The train also provided these peoples with money. A few weeks after the job was completed, Strangways was called to Alberrie Creek to meet the slow mixed train, the Chaser, which ran weekly to Alice Springs. It was the pay-train and was welcomed by Strangways. As he noted, once paid “we all felt like as if we were millionaires!” It was indicative of why so many Arabana were attracted to the
railways. It was in country and paid much better than the pastoral and other industries in the area.

Strangways “spent about three or four years at Curdimurka.” From the money he earned he bought a Landrover and secured promotion to the position of ganger. He was “transferred to Wangianna to start up the gang there as the previous one had lapsed”. On weekends, he would return to Finnis Springs. This was during the late 1950s when the railway was attracting more Aboriginal Australian people to towns like Port Augusta and Marree. In early 1964, Strangways “got itchy feet and put in for a transfer to Alice Springs”. Despite opposition from the Roadmaster and Engineer-in-Charge, Strangways secured a transfer to the Alice Springs yard, commencing work in May 1964.

As Strangways recounted, “the Alice...was a real friendly place” in those days. It also provided him with opportunities to advance within the railways that would have been denied to him in more remote locations. As with many Arabana, the railways were a vehicle for social and economic advancement. Strangways “was a fully qualified ganger” and so management “were reluctant to leave me as a fettler in the Alice Springs yard gang”. He moved through the ranks, “working at various places and locations as a trouble shooter and as a stand in for other gangers”. This involved not only working on different sections of the track, but also dealing with staff and personnel problems. Tiring of the travel along the line, Strangways sought a permanent position. He attempted to transfer to the Mechanical Branch in Alice Springs, but was unsuccessful. After a dispute with the
“engineer-in-charge”, he resigned. He quickly found work in the Alice Springs’ loco sheds as a lifter’s (wagon fitter) off-sider.

Strangways liked the Railways. There was no discrimination based on race or status. The loco sheds were “like a big family [with] workers and bosses...on [a] Christian name basis”. Again, Strangways moved upwards through the ranks from being an off sider to becoming a fully qualified lifter. He also worked as a “wagon painter”, but found it a dirty messy kind of job. He transferred to the position of train lighting examiner, “responsible for all lighting [and power] in brakevans and carriages” on all trains including the Ghan. Strangways fondly recounted his time with the Commonwealth Railways. He was popular with his workmates, earning the nickname of “Banga” because “[he] was always banging on about something.” But the circumstances under which he and many of workmates left the railways still rankles him.

As Strangways explained, for most of his working life the railway was under the overall authority of the Commonwealth Government. In July 1975, however, the Commonwealth Railways were brought under the authority of a commission and rebadged as the Australian National Railways. The Commonwealth Railways were heavily subsidised by the Australian Government, but under the Commission they were required to stand on their own financially and turn a profit. According to Strangways, “[i]n the late 1980s [and] the early 1990s...everything seemed to be going well”. However, the Federal Government decision to sell the railways to “private concerns” alienated older members of the workforce. As Strangways recalled, many considered that the Government
had “[g]iven it away [for] free”. Many workers, he explained, “left in great numbers and the new owners were forced to hire and recruit new personnel”. Strangways left in 1994, accepting like many of his workmates a redundancy package. It was a “pretty sad day, really.” A few of his workmates returned to the railways to work for the “the new owners who called themselves National Rail.” The whole enterprise was privatised and was sold to Great Southern Rail in 1997. For Strangways, “life in the service of the railways was never the same again. It had lost its feel or identity”. He felt indebted to the line. Like many Arabana, he was essential labour in the maintenance of the line, in remote locations. Furthermore, the railway had provided him with a trade and the means to contribute to a major infrastructure project and, in doing so, to advance in within the dominant culture, during a period which for the most part was marked by widespread discrimination.

The Story of Clarrie Warren

I met Clarrie Warren at Oodnadatta in June 2013. He was born at Finnis Springs in 1936 to Arthur Warren, the eldest son of Francis Dunbar (F D) Warren and Laura Baralda. Though born into a pastoral family, Arthur had worked on the railway line. So too did Clarrie’s brothers, Max and Ross, and his sister, Jennifer. They followed a family tradition of involvement in the spread of the railways both in Australia and Britain.

Clarrie echoed the tradition which is documented in Ian Morrison’s (2012) history of the Warrens. F D Warren’s uncle, George Warren, was trained as a surveyor, graduating in 1841, and was involved in the first surveys of rail routes in Scotland. On migrating to Australia, he conducted similar work in the north of South Australia, assisted by Arabana
and Afghan workers, from the late 1840s. George died in February 1895. He was hit by a train locomotive while attempting to cross the track in a buggy (Morison, 2012).

Clarrie’s early life was spent at Finnis Springs where he attended the UAM school. He was one of 46 Aboriginal children who were taught by Reverend Andrew Pearce. At the age of 13, in 1949, he left school and became a stockman working at Witchelina. Like many Arabana, he joined the Commonwealth Railways in 1956, initially as a fettler in Farina. His uncle, the late Dave Warren, who worked on the railways for 36 years, was his first ganger. Dave Warren’s gang of six to eight workers was responsible for inspecting and maintaining the line from Farina to Copley. Clarrie was also involved in the laying of the standard gauge line, which reached Marree from Port Augusta in 1957. His career was interrupted by sickness and family matters, but he returned to the Commonwealth Railway as a fettler at Curdimurka, aged 23. Clarrie emphasized the bond between the fettlers. As he suggested, there were fettlers from “many nations” and all remained “friends”. There was also a bond between the pastoral station owners and the railway workers. The pastoralists supplied meat to the fettlers who, in return, worked on the stations during weekends.

Clarrie worked in numerous places along the line. He was a fettler at Alberga and Abminga, and became a relief ganger at Coward Springs. Clarrie married Audrey Stewart from the Macumba area in 1976. With the birth of his children, the family moved to Port Augusta. He was determined that his children should receive a good education, though he continued working on the line. He subsequently moved to Oodnadatta, where he has
lived for many years. He was the last Aboriginal ganger in Oodnadatta when the Old Ghan closed. Rather than more to the New Ghan, he retired. He felt a loyalty to the Old Ghan, because it had provided him and his family with a home and financial security, and allowed him to stay in Arabana country. The family tradition has continued. Clarrie’s two sons worked on the railway, one in a special re-sleepering gang. Throughout the railway line’s history, the Warrens have been instrumental in surveying, constructing and maintaining a pivotal national infrastructure project.

The Story of Kevin Buzzacott

Kevin Buzzacott is a respected Arabana elder. As mentioned above, he is a committed environmentalist and anti-uranium mining campaigner. He has fought a long battle against the Roxby Downs Uranium mine. Buzzacott has a strong knowledge of the Arabana’s past interactions with the non-Aboriginal Australian society. As he related, his ancestors assisted the “explorers”, the Afghan cammeleers, the pastoralists, and the Telegraph and railway workers. He recalled that his grandfather, Francis Dunbar Warren, settled at Finniss Springs in 1906. He took the region’s Aboriginal people with him to Finniss; not only the Arabana but also the Dieri and the Arrernte. According to Buzzacott, the South Australian Government wanted Warren to assume responsibility for the welfare of all Aboriginal Australians in the area, but he refused. It was too much. Nonetheless, on his Finniss Springs station, Warren housed over 300 Aboriginal people, Buzzacott estimated.
Buzzacott talked of the northward movement of white settlers in the region. From
the 1860s onward, they established “way stations” or rolling depots. They were the
precursors of settlements such as Hawker, Farina, Beltana and Marree. As the narrow
gauge railway moved northward, Buzzacott added, the “way stations” grew into towns.
The Arabana played pivotal roles in this development. As Buzzacott related, they worked
for pastoralists, which allowed them to remain in their country. But there was also a bad
side. Aboriginal stockmen were exploited. They were not paid in money, but in clothes
and rations. The pastoralists, and the trains and mines dispossessed the Arabana of their
lands. With the introduction of uranium mining, Buzzacott declared, Arabana lands were
misused and abused. It is an issue which has become the major focus of Buzzacott’s life.

The rail line had been used to transport uranium.

The railway had played a pivotal part in Buzzacott’s family history. According to
Buzzacott, as far back as the Boer War days, the Arabana would “jump the train” and
travel up and down the line to find work. He had heard stories that the Oodnadatta
extension line, which was completed in 1891, was delayed because rails were brought out
from England by ship. Buzzacott also knew that the railway became a major employer of
Arabana labour in the 1940s. Prior to the War years, Francis Dunbar Warren had supplied
Aboriginal stockmen for musters on other stations and for shearing. This altered in the
1940s with more Arabana men gravitating to work on the railways. In World War Two,
felll one were involved in civil defence. Flat tops were fitted with sandbags, as were the
stations, and the men were issued with rifles. The felll one, including many Buzzacotts,
rode the line between Alice Springs and Marree on the flat tops, guarding against a
possible Japanese invasion. As a child, Kevin used to play with discarded cartridge cases, an old machine gun and similar detritus of war. Shell cases would be used as toy cars.

Buzzacott recalled that during this period there was a big ‘washaway’ of track north of Marree. About two miles of track had been affected. Sleepers had vanished and the steel rails were found bent around trees like liquorice. According to Buzzacott, the railways contacted F D Warren because they needed workers immediately. Many Arabana men went, including Allan Buzzacott, Kevin’s father. Because they were good workers, Buzzacott recounted, the Commonwealth Railways kept them on. He suggested that by this time there was quite some competition for ongoing Aboriginal workers, as they were a highly desired, hard-working labour force.

Allan Buzzacott and his family stayed with the railway for more than 20 years and settled in Marree. As his son Kevin recalled, the pay was reasonable and equal with white workers, which was unusual for the time. Initially the workers stayed in fringe camps, but gradually moved into railway houses, some of which still stand and are occupied today. According to Buzzacott, the Arabana became gangers, foremen and virtually ran the railway in Marree. Kevin was present as a child when the standard gauge came to Marree in 1957. He was photographed with his uncles and visiting dignitaries, including Sir Arthur Fadden, the then acting Prime Minister, and Sir Thomas Playford, the South Australian Premier. He followed the family tradition and joined the railways, though on “off-and-on” basis. The work was conducted in extremes of cold and heat, and the bosses were “slave drivers.” The work involved heavy lifting. Rails increased in size and weight
from 20 kilograms to 90 kilograms. Hence, the workers had to carry heavier and heavier loads. There were fettlers’ camps each 15 to 25 miles along the track. Some were mobile, while others were standing camps. He recalled dealing with buckled tracks, ‘washaways’, derailments, and clearing sand that had covered the track. He remembered a derailment just north of Algebuckinia. Fifteen trucks jumped the track. It was very hot and they had to rebuild the line. On cold days, Buzzacott told of using coal which had fallen from the old steam trains’ tenders to keep warm. Not only the fettlers gathered the coal, but also the surrounding Arabana. As there was no natural water supply, the fettlers’ camps relied on dams and tanks. One of Buzzacott’s jobs was to pump water into the tanks. Once at William Creek, he recalled, there was a derailment and food supplies for the 150 passengers on the Ghan were running short. Buzzacott carted food in old tea chests packed with ice, pulled along on a section car. It took twelve hours to get the food to the passengers. Then he and his gang worked through the night to repair the track. There was no overtime then, he added!

After the old Ghan line closed to usual traffic in 1983, Buzzacott recalled that the rails were collected and sent to Queensland for the sugarcane railways. He and some of his colleagues originally wanted to keep a section of the line between Marree and Curdimurka open for tourism, but this did not happen. Nowadays, Buzzacott is fighting for the return of Arabana land. A motivating factor is the protection of the burial sites of old Arabana people which are spread throughout the country. He related there are a number of burials sites up and down the line. Arabana workers were just buried where they dropped. They now needed to be respected, Buzzacott declared.
He is also concerned about the impact of uranium mining on the Mound Springs. It will not recover, if at all, for over twenty years, he suggested, with the amount of water being taken by the uranium miners to process the mineral. Road construction for the mines, he added, had also destroyed Arabana sacred sites. Buzzacott is suing BHP Billiton and the Australian Government over the desecration of these sites.

The Story of Reg Dodd

Reg Dodd was born in 1940 on Finniss Springs Station to Tom Dodd and Amy Warren, the daughter of Francis Dunbar Warren and Laura Baralda. Unlike Aboriginal Australians born on neighbouring pastoral stations, Dodd knows his exact date of birth. Under the Warrens, Finniss Springs issued birth certificates for each Aboriginal child born there. Reg was schooled until the age 14 at the Station's UAM School. On leaving school in 1954, Dodd worked on the Anna Creek pastoral station for several years. He then joined the Commonwealth Railways in 1960, initially as a fettler, but was later promoted to train examiner. On the railways, his nickname was "Cheese" because of his wide smile. Altogether, Dodd worked for 26 years on the railways, outlasting the old Ghan. He retired in February 1987.

Dodd sees the railway as providing the Arabana with the means to move from hunter-gatherers to become participants in the dominant settler society and economy. The railway offered greater opportunities than pastoral employment, Dodd argued. Rail workers were paid in money rather than in goods or rations. Furthermore, as Dodd
explained, regular wages, equal to workers from non-Aboriginal backgrounds, were novelties for the Arabana and other Aboriginal Australians in the pastoral industry. Those Aboriginal Australians employed on the Ghan received equal wages from 1926 onwards, when the Commonwealth assumed responsibility for the Great Northern Railway. But Dodd was not dismissive totally of pastoral work. Station life provided a more fertile environment in which whites and Aborigines mingled.

The Story of Ross Warren

Ross Warren was another Arabana who had a long career on the railways. Warren was born at Finniss Springs in 1941 to Arthur Warren, the son of Francis Dunbar Warren and Laura Baralda, and a Dieri woman, Rosa Murray. He had four sisters and two brothers, Francis and Clarrie, both of whom worked on the railway. Arthur Warren, his father, worked upon the railways for many years. Ross, too, joined the railways at Marree on 8 September 1960 aged 19. He worked initially at Port Augusta and then Curdimurka as a fettler, putting in new steel rails and wooden sleepers on the narrow gauge line from Marree to Alice Springs. With little machinery, the work involved heavy manual labour. The work was a source of pride and also competitive. His proudest achievement was breaking the record set by an American crew for putting in concrete sleepers on a section of rail from Port Pirie to Crystal Brook.

Warren was posted to numerous places on the north-south and east-west lines. He retired in 1993 after 33 years on the railways. He then came to Bendigo where he now lives with Lyn, his wife, who is a member of the Stolen Generations. Warren enjoyed his
working-life on the railways, meeting people and seeing a lot of the country. The line was a window on a broader world beyond Arabana country and many items which were not available to more remote Indigenous communities. He especially recalled the broad range of goods that were available through the Commonwealth Railway shops at Port Augusta, Stirling North, Tarcoola, Cook and Rawlinna. Another attraction was the train’s cinema which ran monthly and was housed in a special carriage. The train provided Warren with the opportunity to experience a broader world and the means to move beyond Arabana country.

The Story of Martha Watts

Martha Watts is one of the Arabana’s members of the Stolen Generations. She was born on 11 December 1943 at Finniss Springs. She was the eldest of five children of Percy ("Nobby") Dodd and Sheila Strangways, both of whom were Arabana. Percy was one of ten children of Amy and Tom Dodd, an Arrernte fettler; while Amy was the daughter of Francis Dunbar Warren and Laura Baralda. Sheila was the daughter of Henry (Wapili) Strangways and Edie (Edith) Sargent.

At the time of Watts’ birth Finniss Springs had become a haven for Aboriginal Australians, with approximately 150-200 people living on the property. As Watts recounted, not all were Arabana. When Killalpaninna Mission in Dieri country closed during World War II, some Dieri people came to live at Finniss Springs. Watts was schooled at the Finniss Springs’ Mission. Either at the age of 13 or 14, she was kidnapped from Finniss and flown in a Royal Flying Doctor Service aeroplane to Broken Hill, whence
she was sent by train to Sydney and onto Lake Macquarie. She was placed with a family and forced to live in a shed away from the house. According to Watts, the family “did not even speak proper English”. Later she was fostered to six families around Adelaide, and was not allowed to mix with other Aboriginal Australian people, though she did so covertly. On one occasion she was fostered to a family of a minister of religion. Though she attended the same school as a minister’s two daughters, she had to catch a different bus. She was also subjected to a curfew, while the other children were not. Watts ran away several times. The last occasion was in 1959 aged 16. She travelled home to Marree from Adelaide on a goods train, managing to meet her family. Watts gained employment at the Marree Hotel as a waitress and cleaner. At 18 she joined the Commonwealth Railways as a carriage cleaner. Her job was attending to the first class carriages. After trips from Alice Springs, the carriages were full of fine, red sand. She would sweep, mop and varnish the walls of the compartments, “Brasso” the taps, and make 130 beds in one shift. The railway provided her with the means to improve her life. With her first pay from the Commonwealth Railways, she bought a transistor radio to play music while she worked. Through working on the train she met an Englishman, Peter Watts. He came to Australia at the age of six as a “ten pound Pom”, and later got a job carrying bags of ore from Darwin to Adelaide by train and truck. Peter later worked painting railway cottages and married Martha. They had a son, Peter Junior. Martha recalled that he, her father Percy, and some others would go hunting up the train line, and catch rabbits by throwing stones at them. They would use the section car or “tuk-a-tuk”. Percy died on the job. He had been head ganger out at Wangianna and Alberrie, and the family say he would have lived had there been someone with a knowledge of first aid around at the time.
Nowadays, Peter and Martha have three children and live in suburban Adelaide. Peter Junior is involved with Uncle Kevin Buzzacott in the anti-uranium mining movement. He also works with the Kurta Tirkandi Learning Place within the TAFE system of South Australia. It helps employers deal with the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes of their non-Aboriginal Australians.

The Story of Dean Stuart

Dean Stuart was born at Finniss Springs on 8 March 1945 and is a son of Laurie and Doreen Stuart, the granddaughter of Fred Strangways. Fred had children earlier with Laura Baralda, including a daughter, Doris, the mother of Doreen. Thus, Dean counts as his great grandmother, Laura Baralda, and grandfather as Fred Strangways, both of whom were Arabana. Laurie was a son of Jack Hele and Louisa Ferguson. Louisa later married Tom Stuart and the children took his name.

Stuart recalled that his family would travel by horse and cart from Finniss Springs to Curdimurka, an important siding on the Ghan, to visit Uncle Len Stuart. This was before the steam train was replaced by diesel in the mid-1950s, and the family could see the Ghan approaching from miles away by its huge column of smoke. The train’s arrival provided the opportunities for the Stuart children to buy chocolates and sweets from the window in one of the train’s vans.
Dean was schooled at the UAM Mission School on Finniss Springs, and left aged 14 with a Proficiency Certificate, the highest available qualification at the time for an Aboriginal Australian. He worked at Stuart’s Creek doing pastoral jobs until he joined the Commonwealth Railways in 1963 aged 18. To secure the job, Stuart put up his age, as workers were not supposed to be recruited until they reached the age of 21. Stuart worked with Uncle Syd Strangways at Wangianna where the latter was the ganger. Strangways was in charge of a team of six men and a cook. They lived in fettlers’ cottages, and were responsible for maintaining a ten mile stretch of track. Stuart recalled that inspections of the track were usually done twice a week. There were the usual emergencies to deal with, such as floods, ‘washaways’, sand covering the line and derailments. He also recounted that the line would slip out of alignment and crowbars were used to prise it back into place. Stuart had fond memories of this period. Stores would be brought up by rail from Port Augusta and the gang “lived pretty high”, with stews, curries and sweet desserts, and packed sandwiches for their lunch.

Stuart met Kitty (Katherine), who is not Arabana, in 1967 and they married in 1968. They have five children. As with Stuart, the railway was a central part of Kitty’s family. Her cousin, Geoff Eames, was a locomotive driver in the 1940s, and she and her sisters, Pauline and Joy, were train cleaners at Marree. Dean is now the Treasurer of the Arabana Aboriginal Corporation, and has an interest in reviving the Arabana language. He is working with Uncle Syd Strangways in compiling a dictionary of Arabana words. Stuart sees it as his responsibility to pass onto future generations the Arabana’s stories. He remembers his grandmother mourning the loss of the many babies who died in the
numerous epidemics that swept through Arabana lands. These epidemics included the post-World War I influenza pandemic, and the little known 1950s’ measles epidemic which killed a number of young people and infants. Stuart recalled that his mother, Doreen, sought to protect him by greasing him with emu fat.

He considers the railways were important in many ways for the Arabana. For starters, the railway allowed people from many nations to mix amicably. It also linked the region’s cattle industry with the wider world. But the railways also created a dependency on the supply of goods from the Commonwealth Railway stores at Port Augusta. This era has now passed, with the redirecting of the train line away from Arabana settlements.

The Story of Audrey Stuart

Audrey Stewart was born in June 1949 on the Macumba Station. She is the daughter of an Arrente-Arabana woman, Nellie Stewart, and Pompey Reid, a stockman and member of the Antakarinja people. Because of pressure from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, or “the Welfare” as Audrey called it, the family moved to Oodnadatta in the late 1950s so as the children could be sent to school. Her father worked on Allandale Station, as well as undertaking gardening jobs in the town. He then became a police tracker and they lived at the police station. Her mother could speak Arrernte, Luritja, Arabana and English. These languages were lost to the family, when Nellie became demented and died in a home in Port Augusta.
Audrey recalled that Oodnadatta was a meeting place for many tribes and that corroborees continued into the 1960s. Eventually, her uncles banned these traditional practices. She was told that during the Second World War Oodnadatta was a fuelling stop for warplanes. Air crews would throw blankets and food out of the planes as they passed over the Aboriginal camp. But the family was removed from the conflict to Australia’s north. As Audrey recalled, her father, Pompey, did not even know the War was on.

Her paternal grandfather, her step-grandfather and father mustered stock on horseback, then drove them from Alice Springs or Birdsville to Marree, whence they would be taken by train to Adelaide. Though the Aboriginal stockmen were theoretically innumerate, she added, they could count up to three hundred sheep, and also be aware if one was missing.

Audrey worked as a cook for ringers so that she could be near horses. She loved riding and was skilled enough to be able to ‘tail the bullock’ or keep stock together in an unfenced area. Audrey is an Arabana elder and her second oldest daughter is heir to the Dreamtime stories. Audrey is now a Seventh Day Adventist and campaigns about the evils of alcohol. To keep the stories of the Arabana alive, she would like her own life-story to be heard by future generations.

The Story of Veronica Arbon

Veronica Arbon never worked on the train line. Her generation could use the train to leave Arabana country to seek educational and employment opportunities in the major
towns and cities. Veronica at the time of first meeting in 2011 was the Professor and chair of Indigenous Knowledge Systems at Deakin University. Previously, she had been the Chair of the Ularaka, now Arabana Aboriginal Corporation, and the Director of the Batchelor Institute in the Northern Territory.

She was born in December 1950 at Alice Springs. Her mother, Shirley, who now lives in Darwin, married Ray Arbon, and they had seven children, of whom Veronica is the eldest. Her maternal grandmother was Myra Hull. Born in 1914, Myra married Charles "Geordie" Hodgson in about 1930. At the time cross-racial marriages were illegal. Geordie and Myra had ten children. Veronica’s maternal great grandmother was Clara (Mudlu-Wada) Strangways who married a Yankunytjatjara man, William Hull. Clara’s mother was Lily Strangways, while Hull was the son of Adam Hull, a white store keeper from Mount Crawford, South Australia, and Ruby, a Yankunytjatjara woman who was born around 1890, probably in Oodnadatta.

According to Veronica, a Seven Sisters Songline lies beneath the train route. She was also told by family members that Aboriginal people congregated near the Warrina siding and at Algebuckina as there is a permanent water source there. As Veronica explained, Algebuckina is a convergent point for a number of Dreamings. These include the Crane and Fish story from which her grandmother took her name. Veronica holds that it is possible that the Arabana, when helping the surveyors George Warren and John Ross plot the future course of the train line, steered them away from some sacred sites. In support of this, she notes that the actual route deviated from the one that was passed by the South
Australian colonial legislature. As with other Arabana, Veronica Arbon attempts to pass on to future generations the stories of her people. She has combined with Arabana elders to co-author *Wathili Family, Wilma Stories, Waahlu Country* in a collaboration of academia with members of the tribe (2010).

The Story of Wilfred Strangways.

I met Wilfred in Port Augusta on 27th July 2014. Wilfred David Strangways was born in 1951, son of Bert Strangways and Ethel Wilton (Adnyamathantha). Going back some three generations, Lily (Arabana) and Rang (Baguwida) had six children, including Henry (Wapili) Strangways. Wilfred’s father Bert (Herbert) was a son of Henry (Wapili) Strangways and Edie Sargent (Arrernte).

He shared some of his recollections with me. Wilfred was born in Hawker but reared in Copley, where he went to school. Neither town is in Arabana country. His father Bert had an Exemption Certificate from 8th February 1950, and the family was consequentially “stuck in the middle”, not allowed by law to associate with their Aboriginal Australian kin, and not accepted by the white society either. There is information about Bert being in trouble with police for associating with other Aboriginal Australian people. In Copley they lived in a “tin shed”. Father Bert was working on the Commonwealth Railways himself.
The local school closed when Wilfred was in Year 7 and that was the end of schooling for him. In 1966 the family moved to Port Augusta where Bert continued to work on the Railways, and was supplied with a house. Bert drove graders and other heavy plants. Wilfred put up his age to join the Railways (a person was supposed to be aged 18 at that stage) and spent five years as a shunter at Port Augusta. Later he trained at what he called “Bonehead College” in Port Augusta to become a guard. He then worked as an assistant guard, with a monthly run to Alice Springs on the Mixed (passenger and goods train).

In 1971 he was based at Port Augusta as an assistant guard when ninety Englishmen were recruited. They struggled with the heat, which was so hot you could fry an egg on the guard’s van floor. His son died (Dwayne aged 14 months) and he hit rock bottom. He ended up in Adelaide. But he rallied and attended the Aboriginal Community College in 1978. He traced his relatives through Link-Up and has found relations all the way from Kadina, Adelaide, Alice Springs, Darwin and Marree.

Wilfred married Shirley Grantham and has two daughters by her. Corrinna is married to Henry Thompson and has two children. Cynthia, called Cindy, is married to David, called Jock, Anderson and has four daughters. He remembers especially the glorious sight of Lake Eyre/Kati Thanda in flood in 1974 as he watched it from the train by a big full moon with its reflections in the water.
Nowadays Wilfred lives in Port Augusta in a house of his own, where he gets daily visits from daughter and grandchildren. He dreams of the railway days and recalls fondly memories of the mates he made. Wilfred said that the railway track was laid directly on the bed of the Finke River, as a trial of putting in piles for a bridge led them to just sink out of sight into the deep sands of the river bed. He has given me photographs of the track lying directly on the river sands. It was this sort of slapdash construction and its consequences that exasperated the hierarchy and led to the re-routing of the Ghan line out of Arabana country.

The Story of Marilyn Ah Chee

Marilyn Ah Chee was born in October 1953 and is the daughter of Daisy Hull from Anna Creek and Alec Kruger. Marilyn is the sixth of Daisy’s fifteen children. Daisy was a daughter of Clara Strangways and William Hull. With her younger sister, Phyllis, Daisy was a member of the Stolen Generations. Removed from her parents, Daisy was taken to Colebrook, then Quorn and Nepabunna, but escaped at the age of sixteen. Marilyn, herself, lived with her mother and stepfather, Mr Milera. He worked on the East West or Transcontinental Railway at Pinba, Rawlinna and Deakin. The railway was good to Aboriginal workers’ families, providing them with clothes, food, toys and entertainment. Marilyn remembered that Father Christmas would arrive by train each year with toys. The railways also provided the children with an education. Marilyn attended railway schools. According to Marilyn, many Aboriginal people did well from the railways. Unlike in other jobs, on the Ghan they were promoted because they knew the
country and were able to survive in trying climatic conditions; and were ‘bush mechanics’, able to make do with limited resources.

Marilyn married Charlie Ah Chee. He initially worked on the railway at Oodnadatta and later in Alice Springs. Charlie’s family had a tradition of railway employment, working on the line at Perdika and Finke. When the couple married, Oodnadatta was a boom town. However, as Marilyn recalled, it was also a sad town. Police and Welfare workers would bring Aboriginal children to Oodnadatta who had been removed from their parents. From Oodnadatta, they would be transported to homes in Adelaide. Marilyn secured employment as a cleaner on the trains in the 1970s. She was one of ten women cleaners in a team. According to Marilyn, they were paid quite a lot of money for the time. They used the train to do their shopping. The women would place orders with the railway stores in Port Augusta. All payments were deducted from their pay. Marilyn is currently the Chair of Dunjiba, the Aboriginal organisation in Oodnadatta. The organisation runs the local hotel, store and museum, amongst others things. Dunjiba also has interests in health and the maintenance of Aboriginal heritage. As with Veronica Arbon, Marilyn has an interest in handing down the stories of her people to future generations of Arabana.

The Story of Lionel Dodd

Lionel Dodd was born on 2 March 1954. He is the son of Percy “Nobby” Dodd and Sheila Strangways, both of whom are of Arabana descent. Percy was a son of Amy Warren, a daughter of Francis Dunbar Warren and Laura Baralda, while Tom Dodd was an
Arrernte stockman. The family had a long association with the railway. Percy was employed on the Ghan as a fettler out of Marree. His responsibility was to measure the faults covering an area from Marree to Alice Springs. Later, he was head ganger out at Wangianna and Alberrie. Lionel joined the Commonwealth Railways in the 1970s after a number of other jobs. He started in the ‘Yard Gang’ in Marree, before moving into the role of fettler at Beresford, Curdimurka and Alberrie Creek. He qualified as a ganger on 23 November 1977, and took up the position at William Creek, where he met his New Zealand born wife Susan Hill. Their marriage in 1979 provides an example of how the line opened the Arabana to not just other Australians but international residents. The couple lived in Marree until the old Ghan line was closed in 1983. He subsequently has worked for the Highways Department and on a dairy farm in New Zealand for about ten years. In more recent years he has driven buses. His story reflects the impact of the line’s closure on Arabana working on country.

The Story of Paul Tanner

Paul Tanner has been Chairman of the Arabana Aboriginal Corporation. He worked on the railways for sixteen years from 1975-91. As with many Arabana, Tanner got his start on the railways. The eldest son of Mildred, nee Hull, and Frederick Tanner, he was born in 1955. He joined the railways after working in the clean-up and reconstruction of Darwin in 1975 after Cyclone Tracy. With a group of Torres Strait Islanders, he got a job loading and unloading trains, but moved to Port Augusta after the closure of the railway line to Katherine. As Tanner related, he started at the bottom, sweeping the platform and number-nicking. But he undertook training in other areas and was eventually promoted to
shunter. He spent a lot of time in the Marree yards as a relief shunter, yardmaster and an assistant guard on the old Northern line to Alice Springs. He worked along the line on the slow-mixed passenger and goods trains to Alice Springs, and would be away from home for one to three weeks. Tanner also relieved as a station assistant at Finke and Oodnadatta, and spent some time on the East-West Transcontinental line. Later, he became a leading shunter based in Port Augusta, tired of being away from his family and living out of a tucker-box and suitcase.

All of Tanner’s uncles worked on the railways. As he related, men could just walk in off the street and pick up a job fettling or shunting. With the introduction of concrete sleepers, the need for fettlers was reduced. As a consequence, employment opportunities decreased and morale declined. Tanner continued to live in Marree and was present when the last Ghan train came through the town in 1983. After the line closed completely, he said that many Arabana went to work on the Indian-Pacific, the relocated Ghan line running through Tarcoola, and the Northern Territory section of railway line that finally linked the northern and southern sections of the railway. The railway provided Tanner with a stepping stone for employment in other sectors. Upon leaving the railways in 1991, he entered the justice system, working extensively with the Aboriginal Australian Courts throughout South Australia. His career reflects the importance of the railways in providing the Arabana with opportunities beyond their country.
The Story of Charlie Hodgson

Charlie Hodgson, who talked to me in 2012, was aged 47 years. He is the Men’s Health Coordinator for Central Australia Remote Services in Alice Springs. The old Ghan train stopped in 1983 and he has no personal recollection of the train line. But he has collected a great deal of historical information on Arabana country, especially about the times before the train. According to Hodgson, the explorer John McDouall Stuart drew on the knowledge of a young male Arabana guide during his 1858 First Expedition of the region. Hodgson suggests that the young man was killed by Arabana elders before Stuart’s Second Expedition in 1859, because he had revealed secret information on the whereabouts of sacred waterholes and mound springs. According to Hodgson, Arabana people were killed during Stuart’s Second Expedition. There was also conflict with the Warramunga people near Tennant Creek on Stuart’s Third Expedition in June 1860.

Hodgson plots the history after Stuart’s expeditions. He relates that pastoral stations on Arabana country followed almost immediately. The first, Strangways, was established in 1863. With this and the onset of the railway, Arabana people moved into the towns along the old Ghan because their water supplies were taken by the pastoralists. According to Hodgson, the Arabana worked on the railway from 1884 onwards as it provided one of the very few alternatives to feed their families. Strangways, Anna Creek and Finniss Springs stations, however, were supportive of Arabana people. While the Arabana congregated there, other Aboriginal peoples elsewhere were being shot, a fact known at the time to the Arabana.
Hodgson also detailed the impact of Afghan cameleers on the Arabana. From 1866 the Afghans and their camels traversed Arabana land, taking supplies to pastoral stations. At first, the Arabana did not mingle with these non-Aboriginal people. But over time, Afghans and Arabana intermarried and there are a number of genealogies with Afghan names, like Dadleh, which are now claimed as Arabana by the Aboriginal people. Old trading routes, or Dreaming Routes or Songlines, were traversed by the Afghans, especially the Chilpa or Quoll line.

Hodgson’s paternal grandparents were Charles “Geordie” Hodgson and Myra Hull. According to Charlie, they had 8 daughters and three sons, including John Hodgson who later became the first Arabana locomotive driver. John had started his rail career as a shunter at Marree with Kenny Dodd. He did an engineering course from 1968 to 1970 to become a locomotive driver. Charlie is John’s son. As John was the first Arabana locomotive driver, Charlie is campaigning to have one of the new Ghan locomotives named after his father. Charlie’s mother was the great-granddaughter of George Hayes, a linesman on the Overland Telegraph, and a Kaytetye lady from near the Barrow Creek Telegraph station. Within Charlie Hodgson’s family history are combined the stories of two of this country’s pioneering infrastructure projects.

The Story of Dennis Amos

Dennis Amos was born on 16 September 1961. Amos recalled that his father had reminisced about being born at Warrina in Arabana country. His father remembered that this was at a time when settlers were still called by the English title of “navvies”, short for
navigational engineers, and from a time when this group was responsible for the construction of canals for transport. Amos’s early years were spent in Port Augusta, where many Arabana lived and still do. He and his family would go to Finnis Springs for holidays, sometimes with Clarrie Warren.

Joining the Australian National Railways in 1979 in Western Australia, Amos worked replacing wooden with concrete sleepers on the Transcontinental line between Kalgoorlie and Port Augusta. Working in a gang of sixty-strong, they would remove the old wooden sleepers with a pick and shovel, and insert the new concrete ones. As Amos related, he worked on this job for about a year after which he became a welder on the rails. He returned to Port Augusta where he worked as a builder and met his partner, Glenys. In 1985, Amos rejoined the railways, working as a settler at Barton on the East West line. With the employment came a railway house which he and Glenys rented for a modest $20 per fortnight. Amos worked his way up through the ranks, becoming a road foreman in charge of a team of twelve. They were responsible for attending to larger problems on the line such as derailments. The Amos family moved to Tarcoola in 1987, where they lived for nine years before returning to Port Augusta. It was here that Amos moved to road works. He worked on the Birdsville and Strzelecki Tracks, as well as the William Creek to Coober Pedy Road. He moved back to rail work on the old Ghan line at Leigh Creek, still used for coal exports, from 1998 until 2005, using his skills as a welder. Like many Arabana, Amos’s working life was spent mainly on the railways. It provided him with a trade, a decent wage and the opportunity to travel. He retired on the grounds of ill health in 2009.
His sons, Mark and James, briefly followed in their father’s footsteps, but they are now both truck drivers.

The Story of Aaron Stuart

Aaron Stuart is a Director of the Arabana Aboriginal Corporation. He was born in 1968. His father was Rex Stuart. Born at Finniss Springs, Rex was a fettler on the Old Ghan at both Marree and Port Augusta. Stuart’s mother, Angeline Shirley Mackenzie, was Adnyamathanha from the Flinders Ranges’ Wirrealpa Station. Stuart explained that Finniss Springs had two sides. On one side of the creek there was Francis Dunbar Warren’s Aboriginal family, with houses, a school and a church. On the other side were the more transient Aboriginal families.

Stuart’s paternal grandfather was Laurie Stuart, the son of Jack Hele and Louisa Ferguson. Louisa later married Tom Stuart and the children took his name. Stuart’s paternal grandmother, Doreen, was a grand-daughter of Fred Strangways and Laura Baralda. According to Stuart, Louisa moved from Peake Creek to Mount Dutton in the 1950s, probably because of an epidemic that was sweeping through Aboriginal families. The families who survived later moved to Oodnadatta.

Many of Stuart’s uncles and aunties worked on and were paid by the railways. Marree was then a change of gauge station. As Stuart noted, passengers on the Old Ghan used to get out of the silver carriages, which had come up from Adelaide, and transfer to the old wooden ones with leather seats. They were “squeaky, dark inside, like in old
British movies”, he recalled. For the young Stuart the railway offered adventure, opportunity and the chance to engage with the settler community. He remembered when aged eight or nine going out with his father, grandfather and uncle looking for gold at Edward’s Creek near Warrina Siding. “It was midsummer and about 47 degrees”, he recalled. Stuart’s grandfather used to exchange the gold for food with the rail workers. The railway was also a source of “mischief”. As kids he would take a section car and go for rides up the line, hoping no train was coming in the opposite direction. On one occasion they were caught by the settlers and “got a bit of a flogging”. As Stuart related, “the train brought us new clothes, new people and was exciting for a boy living in a small country town”.

Stuart remembered the final journey of the Old Ghan from Alice Springs to Marree in 1983. It coincided with the centenary of the line. In his early teens he saw the track being dismantled. One of the original contractors, Ray Gosse, still lives in Marree, Stuart added. The end of railway was “big blow to…Marree”. The population declined and there were fewer children at school. Stuart recalled that he was photographed at the event to celebrate the running of the first train of the New Ghan to Darwin. He wore a memorial baseball cap, produced to recognise the occasion. The event had a significant impact on Stuart. It emphasised to him the considerable contribution that Aboriginal people had made in the construction, servicing and maintenance of the Ghan. As he related, this contribution needs to be recognised and acknowledged.
The Story of Peter Watts

Peter Watts is the son of Peter Watts (senior), a non-Indigenous man, who worked on the railway, and Martha nee Dodd, an Arabana train cleaner. His maternal grandfather, Percy Dodd, was also a rail worker, being a head ganger at Wangianna and Alberrie Creek, and uncle, Mervyn Dodd, also worked on the railway. The Dodds are the children of Amy Warren, daughter of Francis Dunbar Warren and Laura Baralda, and Tom Dodd a member of the Arrernte tribe. Peter recalls going on holidays to Finnis Springs and Anna Creek. They would go out on section cars, hunting for foxes and rabbits in the areas directly off the railway track. Fox hunting was quite lucrative. In either 1977 or 1978, Peter realized the section car was missing. His grandfather had taken it to Alberrie where he died. Even in the death, the railway was important.
Conclusion: Arabana Making History

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Aaron Stuart is a Director of the Arabana Aboriginal Corporation. He was present as an honoured guest on 1st February 2004 when the New Ghan made its first trip from Adelaide to Darwin. The hundred year project had finally come to pass. By this time, Aboriginal people were on the scene, front and centre. In 1957 Arabana had been on hand as apparently marginal spectators when the Standard Gauge rail track made it to Marree, but then their significant contribution as workers was not acknowledged. Caroline Winter (2007) argues that the Europeanisation of Australia’s history necessarily excluded Aboriginal Australians, as well as Afghan cameleers after whom the Ghan is ironically named. The gaze of the tourist or other white traveller upon the Ghan looked upon a fictive landscape created by their own imaginations and marketing. The change in that half century from 1957 to 2004 was part of larger political shifts but still left unknown the true story of Arabana on the Ghan. This Thesis puts the story of the Arabana back into focus as both on the train and beside it.

How did Arabana survive and thrive after several devastating blows to their people and culture starting from the 1850s? Most pastoralists around the west of Kati Thanda/Lake Eyre did not offer Arabana any more than subordinate existence. There were cordial relations and mutual adaptations between the settlers and Arabana, but landholder Frances Dunbar Warren, in the early twentieth century, was an exception to this general rule. He was a strong proponent for the local Aboriginal Australians and had
his Aboriginal family and many others with him on the re-established Finnis Springs Station.

The coming of the railway, however, routinely offered more and better prospects than pastoralism, which opportunities were seized by the Arabana. Even the initial survey for the Ghan line included Arabana as co-workers with the white people, albeit unpaid. There was equal participation as a worker, in the western sense of wages and conditions, from the 1920s when the Commonwealth assumed control. Rail offered education beyond the skills to be pastoral landholders' assistants. The railway provided a pathway for a future beyond the passing of the train line itself. Arabana have subsequently moved into skilled trades, academia, into tertiary educated professions and other aspects of the dominant economy without shedding their self-asserted identity.

Other Aboriginal Australians worked upon railways, both State and Commonwealth, but although equal wages were paid by the latter, most men and women had to work out of country (see Appendix 5). Arabana were able to both work on the railway and live on country, continuing traditional practices until the 1950s. Nowadays there is language revival which would have been virtually impossible without this continuation of inhabiting their own land. But Arabana also climbed the ranks of the Railways and have thus had an accelerated entry into the dominant settler economy.
There has been a settler-colonialist backlash to equal participation with restrictions and racism continuing into the present day, but Arabana have organised to meet this. How have they done this? Edward S Casey (1993) avers

Every culture has its place in some natural region, however much that region has been devastated and levelled into a scene of sites. Culture, that last fastness of the collective ego, reconnects, despite itself, with a wild realm of natural places. In order to sustain and renew itself, it must touch base with the wild earth from which it arises.

Arabana would, however, contest that their realm was “wild” in any ordinary sense of the word (untamed, unoccupied), because it was and remains a storied landscape (McBryde 2000), with well-known places of former agriculture, Ancestral Beings’ activities (who include animal totemic beings) and journeys, and actual placement in the landscape. Nonetheless the insistence that Casey has of the primacy of place is an important notion for all peoples. The railway ran from Marree to Oodnadatta as a literal iron rod through the heart of Arabana country. Every aspect of life was affected by the train line. But contrariwise also the train line itself was affected by the Arabana. They were never just ghosts or spectators. Their sacred sites and mound springs, shown to Europeans, determined the route of the Old Ghan. They fed the construction crews. They worked from the start on the line, other aspects of infrastructure, its engines and rolling stock until the line was discontinued, a period of 100 years. They travelled to transact customary and
contemporary business on the train itself. They transcended the construct of being “on the sidelines” and participated in the dominant economy on their own terms.

Without the different radicalisation of many east coast Aboriginal peoples in the twentieth century such as Gary Foley, Bob Maza, and so many more (2011), who pressed for civil rights, Arabana took a different road, the collective iron road. This is a more nuanced history than a monolithic thrust to civil and then land rights. Arabana were participants into the world of the settler colonists straight away from 1884 onwards, rather than being a subordinate part of the pastoral landscape and neo-Europeanisation of their country. Russell (2012) has argued that the coast and the seas are “liminal spaces” where interactions between colonisers and colonised are more flexible than other domains. People are recognised for their skills, not just as a group to be used and controlled.

Individuals have a degree of agency even within a more generally oppressive society. The corridor of the railway offered a similar opportunity. The opportunities were far from perfect as the diseases brought in by rail attest, but the nadir of Arabana population and degree of freedom about 1920 started being reversed by the late 1920s, with the Commonwealth Railway being a key mechanism. With the onset of climate change being recognised, well after the environmental degradation of the neo-Europe had occurred, the Arabana are shifting towards their own management of this phenomenon.
Latterly in 2013 the Arabana have gained Native Title to most of their old traditional lands, which has been important to the older people in particular. They have gained leasehold in 2014 over the old Finniss Springs Station and Mission. The titles are not freehold, nor Torrens Title, and are held by an organisation, the Arabana Aboriginal Corporation, not individuals. This is not necessarily an unalloyed step forward. It can in some ways hinder things. For instance, Australian law now makes public thoroughfares exempt from Native Title claims. The very Dreaming Tracks which led settlers into Arabana lands remain stolen. These corridors are literally different spaces. Arabana use them “like everybody else”, but cannot, under this “law”, belong to or own them. Torrens Title, devised by Sir Robert Torrens in 1858, on the other hand, captures ALL interests in a property, including transfers, mortgages, leases, elements, covenants, resumptions and other rights in a single
Certificate of Title. It constitutes, once registered with the State, indefeasible evidence of title (Donnelly, undated). Native Title is a weaker title. Metaphorically, it is as if the Arabana now own the body but not the arteries of their own land.

Moreover, the Arabana under Native Title cannot develop their land but only practice traditional activities such as hunting, fishing and gathering. For instance, a commercial Solar Farm on most of Arabana land could fuel all of South Australia, but is not legally possible except perhaps on the leased Finnis Springs itself (Australian Law Reform Commission, Review of the Native Title Act 1993, Issues Paper 45). The Act limits Arabana on traditional lands to “traditional” subsistence. There has been agreement by the Corporation to mining exploration well away from Finnis Springs, which had also been carried out on that station in the 1920s or so, but no commercial venture has yet eventuated. Fortunately Arabana people have diversified, moving to many places and working in professions: miners at Leigh Creek and Roxby Downs, bus drivers, conservation officers, truck drivers, real estate manager, tour guide, justice officer, hospitality staff, dancer, actor, playwright, fashionista, academic professor, and so on.

Culture is always multicultural. Stuart Hall asserts that it is not black or white, high or low, good or bad, but constantly shifting and reflects the people who create and consume it (Stuart Hall, 1996, p 4). For instance, the railway, as a harbinger of western civilisation, induced Arabana to wear clothes when travelling upon it, even when undertaking ochre pilgrimages. Of course this had been preceded by pastoralists’ clothing handouts to the Arabana. Nakedness was seen by Victorians as savage and clothing as
civilised (Conor, 2014). The use of these literal trappings continued the recognition of and some markers of integration into the white culture. Metaphorically clothing covers and disguises the body. Arabana “fit in” to the overculture while beneath the clothes can be their own private selves.

Another value held by the white settlers and Arabana themselves is reading and writing - literacy - which gives access to knowledge other than the more secret orally transmitted knowledge that Arabana traditionally used. When Francis Dunbar Warren allowed a Mission on Finniss Springs in 1939, and when the UAM established their children’s home establishment in Oodnadatta in 1924 (which closed in 1927), the resulting literacy and numeracy expanded opportunities on the railway and elsewhere. Knowledge of this “whitefella“ skill set is power in a very literal sense on the railway - an Arabana locomotive engineer will actually control the levers that run this massive powerful engine. Adding to traditional modes of knowledge such as tracking and information about plants and animals, the sky and the seasons, plus the metaphysical world of ancestors and Dreamtime stories, literacy multiplied Arabana options.

And a train travels much faster than any earlier modes of transport. As noted, a journey from Alice Springs to Adelaide formerly taking six weeks could be undertaken in three days. This increase in mobility is another emblem of western-ness that Arabana embraced from the time the railway arrived. Ochre pilgrimages were done in rapid safe comfort; visiting relatives up and down the line became normative. It increased contact with other Aboriginal peoples. Moreover, speed and steam are synonymous for the
Victorian mind with the concept "progress", highly valued! Working and travelling on the train, metonym for progress itself, meant Arabana were, to a degree, on the same social level as white people. It is highly ironic that the train became called "the Ghan", as cameleers just walk everywhere with their beasts of burden. This pace is the one which humans have used since they became this species. In no sense are cameleers symbols of "progress" as the train is with its elements of speed, its greediness for water, a limited natural resource, and huge carrying capacity. Train riding and servicing Arabana leap into modernity.

Again, in the late 1920s, when the extension of the railway from Oodnadatta to Alice Springs was being built, and the railway to Perth had been running since 1917, the South Australian Parliament passed a regulation forbidding Aboriginal Australians from proximity to the railway unless they had legitimate business there. Not only did this seek to push back the tide of "modernity" from involving Aboriginal peoples, and fly in the face of the reality in Northern South Australia, but probably marks the nadir of alienation and racism in that State. But by then Arabana were already participants.

In the present day Arabana, descendants of the enterprising survivors of the transport and cultural revolutions, have internalised the iron rod to be their own backbone: strong, flexible, bearing heavy loads, with vision beyond the narrow compass of the line itself. This book has shown the paradoxical effect that the train was indeed good for the Arabana. The book provides a counterweight instance to the many stories of continued remorseless negative aftermath of Australian colonisation and colonialism.
The other fascinating impact of this project has been the articulation of this book’s argument by the Arabana themselves. This iterative process was not anticipated by me, as I falsely thought that I would get merely “historical” information. But the project creates history not just records it. The Arabana now have signs up along the train route celebrating that the Ghan was constructed and maintained with “Aboriginal knowhow”. The Ghan offered the Arabana opportunities whilst retaining aspects of their traditional culture. Forty years or more before citizenship in 1967, before the Equal Wage Case of the 1960s, Arabana riding the “steel highway”, that liminal space, jumped into modernity. Their stories act as counterweights to the traditional view of all Aboriginal Australians as victims. The Arabana were major contributors in this nation’s development and could live “two-way”, participating in the western world and living on country, keeping it alive.
APPENDIX 1: ARABANA RAIL WORKERS and Their Families: THEIR STORIES

"Fire and water - they’re elementals, aren’t they?" Flying Scotsman veteran 2016

This chapter is a series of records of conversation with a number of Arabana railway family members. They are arranged roughly in order of age of informant, ranging from date of birth in 1927 to 1969. They present a vivid picture of life lived on, with and beside the line. The Arabana overwrote some of their Dreaming Tracks with the Railway and continued to traverse these tracks with the new technology, sometimes with traditional intentions such as visiting family, undertaking pilgrimages, singing the country, trade and so on but also more western ideas such as “taking holidays” in Port Augusta, learning railway trades and travel just for the pleasure of it.

My own interpolations, where present, are part of the written transcripts supplied to the informants and approved by them.

The ubiquity of the railways for Arabana is a remarkable feature, despite all the other family, geopolitical, micro political and quotidian concerns. The patterns of labour, however, bear comment. A lot of people worked as day labour. Often this was walk-up hiring and people were paid in cash at the end of the day’s work. Records are absent or rudimentary. Most people were hired for blocks of two to four weeks at a time for specific tasks such as dealing with floods, washaways, sand-drifts over the line etc. A significant number, however, were hired on an ongoing basis. I cover each type of labour pattern in the ensuing conversations and interviews, but my contacts, the records and my bias really
is towards the more longterm employees. Female informants are fewer in number, although most Arabana men had families and children alongside them on the line. Some women worked as cleaners, laundresses, or in clerical capacities and some examples are given here. The group of people interviewed whose stories appear here are a consenting sample, and by no means all of the workers still living.

Eileen (born 1927) is a respected elder who has been keenly involved in anti-uranium protests since the 1980s and has been awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2003. She showed me the actual certificate and her extensive entry in Who’s Who 2007.

She said she had three grandmothers, Maggie, Minnie and Jenny. Her mother was Winnie and father Tim Allen, known as Nilpinna Tim (Nilpinna is a pastoral station 760 Km from Adelaide and about 130Km from Coober Pedy; it is between William Creek and Oodnadatta near Peake Creek, and west of the Oodnadatta Track).

(Old Nilpinna mound spring has three main vents, of which two are inside a fenced area of about 5ha. Fencing was done in 1992. The fenced area includes the remains of the Old Nilpinna homestead. The introduced bamboo is predominant at the outlet of the main vent. Three fish species have been recorded at Old Nilpinna. Mature date palms (Phoenix dactylifera) are present at the head of vent 1 (i.e., adjacent to the former homestead) (Friends of Mound Springs, 2007).

Her father took her to various areas throughout Country, especially Warrina, Edwards Creek and Mount Margaret. She lived at Mount Barry then the new Mount Margaret Station. She also knew pastoral station manager Archie McLean of Stuart Creek and his son Neil, who grew up with Arabana and spoke the language. She was there a long time. She then went up to Algebuckina. (All these places are significant Dreaming sites).
She saw people travelling the "Flash Ghan" (*rapid passenger train*) while mustering cattle. She saw other (Arabana) Elders travelling to Finniss on the railway. Her three grandmothers are buried there at Finniss.

Thereafter she went to Coober Pedy then Mabel Creek then back to Warrina. Back on country she met her first husband and had children. These are Marlene, then she had David and Jennifer.

She considers that she and sister Alma kept the Country alive, especially around Mount Margaret, when others were leaving, going up or down the railway line. Alma lost two children than had five others: Sandra, Raylene, Elaine, Lynette, Charlie and Timothy. Her younger brother Archie Allen was at Finke and kept that Country alive.

She later moved to Port Augusta by train and has lived here since. Some of her children were taken by Welfare: Rebecca (*whom I have met*), Joan (who has died), Janice (*whom I have met*), Judy, Glen and Winnie. They were returned when they were about aged 18. They had foster parents but were allowed visits every two to three weeks.

Son Glen is now finding lots of evidence at Roxby Downs Uranium Mine about Aboriginal occupation of the area.

Over the past twenty years or more she and others have been fighting the Uranium
mining on Arabana and their neighbours’ lands. She attributes the Mound Springs drying up to the mine and its profligate use of water from the Great Artesian Basin. She has traveled the world in this pursuit and received the Prize noted above.

There is a sacred Seven Sisters Dreaming women’s story of which she is part guardian. She is passing this knowledge on to appropriate people.

She considers she has had a happy life.

This living beside or near the Ghan line and keeping the country alive is considered a vital occupation.
BETTY BOWDITCH, SHIRLEY ARBON, ZENA RICHARDS AND DAPHNE MAY, a conversation at The Jetty, Darwin, on 13th December 2013

These ladies are the second, third, seventh and ninth of the children of Charles Dean “Geordie” Hodgson and his Arabana wife Myra Hull. I was introduced by Shirley Arbon’s daughter, Professor Veronica Arbon, whom I had originally met in Geelong at Deakin University. We also met (apart from Betty who was in Hospital in Adelaide at the time) very briefly at Finniss Springs in May 2013 then we had this arranged meeting in December. There were apologies from another sister, Lorraine Mills, who lives in Humpty Doo and could not attend.

Betty was the eldest attending and said she is older than Syd Strangways, hence his interview appears later!

Oodnadatta 1926-1939:

Geordie was born in the north of the United Kingdom, Tyneside, *(date of birth not given, but probably 1905)* and came to Australia with his brother Alex Hodgson who stayed on in Victoria. Geordie moved to work on the railways, possibly in 1926. Geordie started as a settler in Oodnadatta, then ganger then later became a Roadmaster’s Clerk, based in Marree and later at Alice Springs. He organised all the picnics for the railway families at Callanna. Geordie died on 2nd July 1966 in Alice Springs.
His wife Myra, Arabana, daughter of Clara (Mudlu) Hull, was born at Anna Creek, or at Coward Springs according to oral tradition, in 1914 and was only sixteen when she legally married, nine years junior to Charles. She had thirteen children. She had a hard life but was not removed from her family of origin, unlike sisters Gracie, Phyllis, and Daisy and some of her brothers. She died in Darwin on 19th August 1965.
Of the thirteen children of Geordie and Myra, Marjorie, the eldest, married non-Arabana man Phil Wallace, who himself was a railway worker. Their son Shane Wallace was a shunter (deceased 1996) and son Adrian a train driver. Adrian lives and works at Roxby Downs Uranium Mine. Marjorie and Phil’s daughter Michelle Cooper and another sister Maree lives in Port Augusta.

I touch on the second and third children, Elizabeth (Betty) and Shirley below.

The fourth child of Myra and Geordie, Douglas was a jockey, now deceased. (He is cited in “Aborigines and ‘The Sport of Kings’” by John Maynard). He has two daughters and three sons all living in Adelaide.

Pamela, number five, was not discussed. Her married name was Pamela Anne Pension.

The sixth child was John Charles Adrian Hodgson ((dob 24/2/43; died 23/6/79) who was a train driver. (Qualifications confirmed by reference to National Australian Archives personnel file). He trained at Port Augusta and Darwin but worked mainly on the Darwin to Larrimah line. I have met his son Charlie who is in Alice Springs and whom I have interviewed (see below).

The eldest three surviving children of Geordie and Myra were registered in the AIM Hospital in Oodnadatta, the next five in Marree, Maureen was born in Port Augusta, Daphne in Marree, Lorraine in Hawker and Gerald in Alice Springs.
They were very poor, despite the regular wage from the railways, and it was a very hard life for Myra. Clothes were made from flour bags. Nonetheless they all considered that the train was a vital part of their lives. They got free travel. They would go on the train on holidays to Coward Springs (where Auntie Evelyn was the publican’s wife), to Curdimurka for various celebrations or Marree to visit relations or back to Oodnadatta once living in Marree. They visited Quorn, Port Augusta and Stirling North to stay with family Marjorie and Douglas.

Auntie Evelyn and Sid had one son, Frank Churches. Betty remembers him visiting Marree while in Army uniform in 1946. His whereabouts are currently unknown.

Granny Clara often traveled on the Ghan regularly to Finiss Springs, Oodnadatta, Marree, Finke, Port Augusta, Coward Springs and Alice Springs to visit them in Alice Springs when they were young women, in the 1950s or 1960s, most likely.

Marree 1939-1948

Betty was born 2nd July 1932. The family left Oodnadatta when Betty was aged 7 and moved to Marree. They all lived in a railway house next to the train line. When the War was on, there were many troops travelling through Marree mainly going north. They would hand out some of their rations to the Hodgsons. On the down side the soldiers would steal chickens at night!
Dad was very worried about the War’s impact on his family of origin in England. I was given copies of two letters to Geordie’s family, identified as Beatrice and Joe. The earlier, dated 22\textsuperscript{nd} October 1940, from Marree, expresses patriotic concerns and family concerns. He also mentions another male child who had died by 1940. Two male babies died shortly after birth, hence the total of thirteen born to Myra. In the other letter of 11\textsuperscript{th} September 1941, he does say that Douglas is very energetic and that Myra is well. He longed to go back to visit people in England but the family say this never happened due to cost of fares. He died before retirement.

Betty was sent to Adelaide to go to boarding school, St Dominic’s Priory in North Adelaide, for four years and travelled to and fro on the old steam engine train. She enjoyed holidays coming home and to the other places mentioned above. She also talked of the ability the family had to order goods from the Railway Stores in Port Augusta. It was easier than now along the old Ghan line to obtain goods, and Railway families were especially favoured. Meat was sent to them from Alice Springs and tinned foodstuffs from Port Augusta.

Shirley Arbon (dob 4/2/1934) attended school in Marree. She remembers Dougie used to swing on the train coupleings as the train was moving out of the station. She married Raymond and they had seven children. They moved around between the Territory and Queensland.
Zena (dob 23/2/42 in Marree) married Colin Richards and has four children, all born in Darwin.

Maureen Valerie was born on 5th January 1945 in Port Augusta, married Steven Clark and was not further discussed.

Daphne May (dob 5/6/46, born in Marree) married Samuel and has two children.

Lorraine was born in Hawker on 2nd May 1947. She married Francis Mills.

Gerald, the youngest, was born on 25th February 1950 in Alice Springs but was not further discussed, although it was noted he lives in Darwin.

Alice Springs 1948 - end of childhood:

By late 1948 the Hodgson family was in Alice Springs. All cried on leaving Marree. They moved by travelling in the Guard’s van on the Ghan. Dust storms in the Alice were very bad, and their house had to be swept out of all the sand that had accumulated. From Alice Springs, Geordie wrote to the Aborigines Protection Board via Mr Pearce (probably the missionary at Finnis) on 14th June 1948 asking for dispensation to allow Grace and Millie Hull to come to Alice Springs to be with and look after his wife and their sister Myra, who had severe rheumatoid arthritis. This request was denied in a return letter of 1st July 1948, no reason being given.
For Maureen, Daphne and Lorraine, the Railway yard in Alice Springs was the playground when young. They used to always go to the station to meet the Ghan. They would play down the loco shed where the trains were kept and raid the tucker box for biscuits. There was also a water tank near the loco shed which all the Railway kids used as their swimming pool. When the trains were in like the Ghan and the cattle trains “they were very long and we had to jump over the couplings to be able to get to school. It wasn’t very nice doing that with the cattle trains because they would get restless and move around a lot”.

All the ladies regretted not being able to learn Arabana language. Their mother spoke it but their Dad would not allow her to teach the children. Mum could not even read or write. When Child Endowment came in during the 1940s, she was taught to sign her name so she did not have to use a thumbprint.

Mike Duke, Betty Bowditch, Shirley Arbon, Zena Richards, Lorraine Mills and Daphne May
February 2013.
Syd Strangways: “Me and the Railways”: an annotated typescript, with conversation held with Mike Duke in Alice Springs, Friday March 9th 2012.

Syd was born on 15th July 1932 and turned 80 in July 2012. He kindly wrote this set of recollections for this project, and then we discussed the text at the Oasis Hotel over coffee in a private room. He remains a spirited member of the Arabana Aboriginal Corporation and gave the address at the May 2013 restoration of the name of Lake Eyre as Kati Thanda.
"I was born on and grew up on a property (Finniss Springs) that ran both sheep and cattle. (It was called New Well then; this was before the Mission was established in 1939. It started as a horse stud for the old Finniss Springs but moved to this site because of the new well and the old Finniss Spring had become salty. Francis Dunbar Warren had sold up his stake at Anna Creek and moved initially to the Old Finniss about 1917 and then to the New Well. Syd's father was Henry Wapili Strangways, the cook at Finniss, who had worked on the Railway earlier before Syd was born). All I ever knew from birth was the life of a stockman. And like every other Arabana who grew up on Finniss Springs Mission, I was very good at it.

"I joined the Railways by accident, I guess. A friend of mine, a relative actually, had an agreement with the manager of Cordillo Downs, just up over the order of South Australia and Queensland to break in a large mob of horses in the New Year. He asked me if I was interested in going up and giving him a hand. It was Christmas time and we were in Finniss Springs Mission. Dead broke. Both without a job. We came up with the idea of getting a job with the Railways for a few weeks to get some money so we could catch the Mail Truck up to Cordillo Downs. So we go into Marree and front up to the Roadmaster’s (Joe Kelly) office and sign up. The requirement then was to go down to Port Augusta to pass a medical examination before being assigned to a settlers’ camp somewhere along the narrow gauge line to Alice Springs. We were both issued with free passes. However, on the night that we were both to catch the slow mixed train down to Pt Augusta, I went to a party and got so drunk that I missed the train completely. Clem (Dodd) went, of course. On his own."
“A couple of days after, when I had sobered up, I fronted up to the Roadmaster’s office in Marree and they gave me a pass with the instructions to go to Leigh Creek to do my medical and then proceed to the settlers’ camp at Curdimurka. On this instance, I did what was asked of me, and having passed the medical, duly turned up at Curdimurka to start work. This suited me as I knew the area around Curdimurka fairly well. (Syd had spent time there as a child with his grandmother Lily). There were two gangs at Curdimurka at the time. One looked after twenty five miles of track to the north and the other looked after twenty five miles to the south. The bonus for me was that the men in charge of the gangs, as gangers, were both Arabana. Lenny Stuart was the ganger for the northern gang and his father, Laurie, was the ganger of the southern gang. (A gang had five men and a cook. The old section cars were belt driven and were nicknamed “red birds”; later ones had a motor). I joined Lenny Stuart’s gang on the northern section which suited me as this section included Coward Springs where we could get the occasional carton of beer. In those days it was big bottles in a box of a dozen. Coward Springs had been a famous pub in days gone by but its licence had expired (the hotel closed completely in 1962). Roy Lewitzki, a noted outback character, was there at that time and we had an understanding with him (Nancy Sheila Lewitzke was the licence holder from 1953). Roy was an expert leather worker and saddler and was a son in law to the famous Kidman manager of Anna Creek, Archie McLean, a very well-known bushman. Roy Lewitzki was a very old man at that time.

“Meanwhile, Clem had gone to Pt Augusta alright as intended but had got romantically entangled with a local girl and had forgotten about his medical. He was a good looking
lad, my mate. Worse still, after a short while, he dumped the local girl for a pretty young lady who was visiting Pt Augusta from Silverton, west of Broken Hill in New South Wales. The upshot of it all was that when she went home, Clem also followed. Not to worry, I thought when I heard about it all, I will work here for a fortnight or maybe a month then collect my pay, follow him over to Silverton and maybe then we could still go on that horse breaking contract. Unfortunately things didn’t work out that way.

“I had only been working as a fettler for little more than a fortnight when I got the grim news. Clem had taken on a job at Silverton, a job that he loved and that is breaking in horses. Clem was a reputable rider, as good as any I’ve seen, and he was an outstanding horseman. The stockyards that he had been working in was made from lengths of discarded railway line. He was riding the horse that had been handling in that yard when it somehow suddenly reared up, slipped and fell causing Clem to hit his head heavily against the railing as horse and rider came down. That fall was fatal. The news when I heard it sickened me and I felt great loss. It also placed me at the crossroads. I could not go up to Cordillo Downs and take on the horse breaking job as the contract was in his name. So I said to myself, what the heck, I’ll stay on in the Railways for a while and see what I could do with myself later on. Little did I know that ‘later on’ would stretch into forty years or more.

“Curdimurka was not the first time I was employed by the Commonwealth Railways. I don’t know what year it was but it rained and rained and there were floods and volumes of water everywhere. The railways were badly affected by flooding and washaways and at
a place called Canterberry Creek alone, the floods had washed away almost a mile of track and it ended up a mess of tangled and twisted metal and broken sleepers (possibly 1946). The Commonwealth Railways sent out an urgent call for manpower in all directions for help in repairing the damages to the line. Finnis Springs Mission was close by so they desperately asked for men to come and help. I was still going to school then. Six or seven men volunteered to go and, I don’t know how, it must have been school holiday time.. but I also went along. (Others included Percy Dodd, Alan Buzzacott, Norman Woods and a couple of Warrens possibly Lennie and Roy). We all joined up at Alberrie Creek which was our nearest Railway siding. After a couple of days working on washaways and washouts to the north and south of Alberrie Creek, we were shifted to the big one at Canterberry Creek. The Railways set up a big camp an Wangianna Siding which was about ten miles from the site. A large team of about forty of fifty men set about the task of repairing the track. A completely new bed had to be prepared for the permanent way and new rails and new sleepers put in for a mile or so. It was hard work and mostly was done by pick and shovel.

"I was here when I met my first 'New Australian'. I have never met or seen any foreign men before, not even Germans or Italians. Of course, I had heard of them ... like in school and such. Most of the foreign men who worked there came out to Australia from the Baltic States in Europe and were referred to as 'Balts'. It took us the best part of a fortnight to repair the track enough to let a train pass over. The bloke in charge then brought us back to Alberrie Creek by section car and we walked back into Finnis Springs from there. A few weeks after, we had to go into Alberrie Creek again to meet the slow mixed train (the
Chaser) that ran weekly to Alice Springs and which was also the paytrain to collect our pay. *(The pay van was painted white)*. We all felt like as if we were millionaires!

“I spent about three or four years at Curdimurka in which time I managed to buy a second hand short wheel base Landrover and we used to go everywhere in that. I got promoted to ganger and was transferred to Wangianna to start up the gang there as the previous one had elapsed. On weekends, we used to go back to Finnis Springs. At that time, most people were starting to drift away and move into towns like Marree or Pt Augusta *(mid to late 1950s; Finniss closed completely in 1958)*. Then in early 1964 I got itchy feet and put in for a transfer to Alice Springs. After initial opposition from my Roadmaster and Engineer-in-Charge, I finally got permission from the Chief Engineer for a transfer to the gang in Alice Springs yard.

“I arrived in Alice Springs on the 16th of May 1964. There were only about five thousand people in the Alice in them days and everybody knew everybody and it was a real friendly place. As I was a fully qualified ganger and had my papers and qualifications like ... the Railways were reluctant to leave me as a fettler in the Alice Springs yard gang. It was not long before I was moving up and down the line working at various places and locations as a trouble shooter and as a stand in for other gangers. So I was away from the Alice quite a bit working on different sections of track that were a concern to the powers that be on Pt Augusta and working out problems with staff and personnel. Of course, there were Roadmasters who generally supervised all this but they did not do any actual physical work. I was stationed at Rodinga for a while when I again decided on a change of scenery
so I put in for a transfer to the Mechanical Branch as this would then leave me permanently in Alice Springs. I was then with the Civil Engineering Branch. My application, however, was refused so I had a little argument with my engineer-in-charge. Stuff this, I thought, so I came into the Alice and applied for a job at the loco sheds, which at that time had employed just under a hundred men. I went back to Rodinga and put in my fortnight's notice after which I came back into town and started work in the loco sheds as a lifter's (wagon fitter) offsider.

"All this was in the old Commonwealth Railways days. There were principally three main departments. The Civil Engineering department, the Mechanical Engineering department and the Transport Section. The heads of the departments were all responsible to the Commonwealth Railways Commissioner. Everything ran fairly well and the Railways, as a whole, was like a big family. (Workers and bosses were on Christian name basis).

"I progressed from being an offsider to be a fully qualified lifter and worked at that for a while. I had another change in job description when I was successful in my application for a vacant position of wagon painter. Most rolling stock and wagons had to be repaired, repainted and re-lettered every three years or so. Mostly all rolling stock was painted in the colour red with white letters and numbers. I worked at that for a time but found it was a dirty messy kind of job so when the position of train lighting examiner became vacant, I put in an application for it. The Train Lighting Examiner was responsible for all lighting in brakevans and carriages and this included the carriages on the passenger train, the Ghan. The Ghan, of course, always had a power van attached which generated power
throughout the train but the brakevans and carriages on slow and mixed goods trains and other trains relied on a bank of twelve two volt batteries, carried on the carriage itself, for lighting and power. It was up to the train lighting examiner to maintain these and keep them in good working order to provide lighting and power. I worked at the train lighting job for some time before moving back to the loco sheds to work again as a Lifter (wagon fitter). It was hard work and noisy, I guess. My mates and colleagues gave me the nickname of ‘Banga’ because I was always banging on about something. It was a take, I think, from my surname, Strangways, as they also sometimes called me ‘Stranga’.

"During my time working there the Railways changed its name from the Commonwealth railways and formed itself into a Commission and called itself the Australian National (1st July 1975). To many of the old workers and people around, the Commonwealth Railways was referred to as ‘Charlie Riley’ and it was not uncommon to hear old railway people say ‘I am working for Charlie Riley’. As the Commonwealth Railways, the railway was heavily subsidised by the Australian Government. As a commission, it started to make its own way and began to make a profit in its own right. In the late 1980s or the early 1990s, when everything seemed to be going well, the powers that be down south (the Commonwealth Government, I think) decided in their wisdom to privatise the Railways and sold it off to private concerns (Gave it away free, some people said).

A lot of the old railway men, in disgust, left in great numbers and the new owners were forced to hire and recruit new personnel. A lot of us were offered redundancy packages and I left the services of the Railways in 1994. Pretty sad day, really. A few of the men who
were made redundant signed up again with the new owners who called themselves the National Railways. But life in the service of the Railways was never the same again. It had lost its feel of identity”.

Syd’s father Henry (Wapili) Strangways was born in 1881, son of Lily and Rang (Baguwida) Strangways. His mother Edie (Edith) Sargent (born 1902) was from Horseshoe Bend but had been taken when young and placed in Adelaide to work for a white family. Syd was the second youngest of seven. I have interviewed Wilfred, son of Syd’s elder brother Bert (Herbert) Strangways and this conversation appears later.

Henry’s work upon the railways is not known.

Syd said to me in October 2014 that the down side of railways was the introduction of diseases such as the post-World War I pandemic of Influenza which killed many Arabana living near the train line. Official statistics recount that 10,000 people died in Australia as a result of this illness but many Aboriginal Australians’ deaths were not notified to the authorities. (Barry, 2009; Basedow in his 1920 visit did note the depopulation due to this pandemic).
Interview with Clarrie Warren 24/6/2013 at Oodnadatta

Clarrie (or Clary) was born at Finniss Springs in 1936 to Arthur Warren (born 10th May 1910; died 1989; Arthur himself was the eldest son of Francis Dunbar Warren and Laura Baralda) and Rosa Murray (Dieri people). Arthur himself worked on the railway line and was interviewed by Bruce Shaw, appearing in the book “Our Heart is the Land” (1995). Clarrie had five sisters and two brothers. Brothers Max (Francis Maxwell) and Ross both worked on the railway (Ross’ interview is elsewhere recorded). Sister Jennifer worked on the railway.

Clarrie was reared at Finniss Springs where he attended the Mission school of some 46 Aboriginal children run by Andrew Pearce. Francis Dunbar Warren, his grandfather, taught him to drive a vehicle. At the age of 13 in 1949 he became a stockman working at Witchelina. He was in Farina weekly.

In 1956 he joined the Commonwealth Railways as a fettler in Farina. His uncle Dave Warren, who worked for the railways for 36 years, was his first ganger. Clarrie considers that Dave taught him everything he knows. There were six or sometimes eight in a gang and they inspected the line from Farina to Copley three times a week. If there were no defects there was still regular maintenance to be carried out. The remains of Clarrie’s house are still to be seen in Farina. Clarrie was involved in the change to standard gauge which reached Marree in 1957. This went all the way from Port Augusta to Marree which remained a change of gauge station, becoming narrow gauge from there to Alice Springs.
Clarrie then had time off with sickness and for family reasons. He returned to the Commonwealth Railways at Curdimurka at the age of 23. His house there was lit by Tilley lamps, had a kero frig and a donkey (wood-fired boiler) for hot water. Other fettlers from many nations were friends. Pastoral station owners supplied meat to the fettlers and in return the railway men used to help out on the stations on weekends.

He has also worked at Alberga, Abminga and elsewhere. He became a relief ganger and worked at Coward Springs. When his children were young he moved to Port Augusta for their education and continued on the railway working all the way from Copley to Alice Springs.

Two of his sons worked on the railway too, one in a special gang re-sleepering.

Later Clarrie married Audrey Stewart (Macumba area) in about 1976 and he has lived at Oodnadatta for many years.

He was the last Aboriginal ganger in Oodnadatta when the Old Ghan closed. He retired rather than move to the New Ghan.

Clarrie says that grandfather Francis Dunbar Warren’s brother George Warren was involved in surveying for the old Ghan line.
(Mike Duke says: Morison gives the following: George Warren, FDW’s uncle, born 21/9/1820, was trained as a surveyor, graduating in 1841. He apparently surveyed for the route of one of the first railways in Scotland. After 1848 work on local Springfield matters had been completed in South Australia and George was able to concentrate on other survey work further north. Afghans and Arabana were involved with him during these years. George died on 26/2/1895 two days after a train accident, trying to cross the line in a buggy in front of the locomotive. Morison is silent on George’s work with regard to the Old Ghan survey. There was a second George Warren, but he was only 19, albeit at Anna Creek, by the time the Old Ghan line was completed to Oodnadatta).
Record of Conversation Between Mike Duke and Kevin Buzzacott held 23rd March 2012. Also present were Julian (undertaking video recording) and Edward Cranswick, whose house we met in.

Kevin Buzzacott is a respected Arabana elder who is involved in political activity. He is fighting against the Roxby Downs Uranium mine and its expansion. Edward Cranswick, a “white” man, through his Hogarth forebears, is related to Kevin.

Kevin started by asserting that “we are in a war”, but then moved to a more general discussion.

His ancestors, the old people, met “explorers”, then Afghans, then Telegraph workers, settlers and so on. The explorers had reported great land for the picking (the concept of *terra nullius*) and the settlers followed. Grandfather Francis Dunbar Warren took up Finnis Springs in 1906. He took Aboriginal people onto Finnis, not only Arabana but lots of others. These included Dieri, Arrernte and others. In the end the Government wanted him to take over their role with other Aborigines and Warren refused. It was too much. There were over 300 Aboriginal people on or about Finnis Springs. A number of Arabana now live in places like Port Augusta, Coober Pedy, Oodnadatta and Alice Springs.

As the settlers moved north (from the 1860s), they established “way stations” or rolling depots, like bridgeheads into foreign country: Hawker, Farina, Beltana then onto Marree.
Narrow gauge railway was the means of such way stations being supplied. Towns grew up along the way.

Arabana worked for pastoralists and this enabled the people to stay on country. That was the good side. Aboriginal stockmen were mainly paid in clothes and rations. But there was the down side of the arrival of the pastoralists and the train too. Dispossession occurred, as later people were put off the land for the stock and later miners, and then there has been the misuse of the railway to carry Uranium. As far back as Boer War days, however, Arabana would jump the train and travel up and down to get a job.

The Oodnadatta extension line (completed in 1891) was delayed because rails were brought out from England by ship. The Algebuckina Bridge was designed to cross the Murray River but was put over this river instead.

Francis Dunbar Warren supplied Aboriginal stockmen for musters on other stations, for shearing and then from about the 1940s, men to work on the railways. There had been railway work in the Great Depression (1929 to mid 1930s). Up and down the line now known as Pichi Richi, Chinese workers had been used, especially for stonework at which they were expert. In the 1940s there was a big washaway north of Marree, with about 2 miles of track washed away; the steel tracks were bent around trees like liquorice. Sleepers were gone. The Railways rang Francis Dunbar Warren because they needed workers immediately. Lots of Arabana men went including Alan Buzzacott, Kevin’s father. As they
were good workers, the Commonwealth Railways kept them on. By then there was quite some competition for Aboriginal workers as a desired hard working labour force.

Alan Buzzacott and his family stayed with the railway for more than 20 years and settled in Marree. In time off work, the families could catch up with each other. Pay was equal – unusually for the time - and reasonable. They initially stayed in fringe camps, then as houses became available, they moved into the railway houses. Some still exist and are used today. Some have been bought and sent elsewhere.

Arabana became gangers, foremen and so forth, and virtually ran Marree. In World War 2, fettlers were involved in civil defence. Flat tops were fitted with sandbags, as were the stations, and the men issued with 303 rifles. The fettlers, including Alan Buzzacott and other uncles and brothers in law, rode the line between Alice Springs and Marree on these flat tops in case the Japanese came. As a child, Kevin used to play with discarded cartridge cases, an old machine gun and similar detritus of war. Shell cases would be used as toy cars.

Kevin was present as a child when the standard gauge came to Marree in 1957. He can be seen in a photograph with various uncles published in the newspaper of the day with the dignitaries (including Sir Arthur Fadden, Acting Prime Minister and Sir Thomas Playford, SA Premier).
Kevin worked for the Railways on and off. Rails increased in size and weight from 20Kg to 90Kg to carry heavier and heavier loads, up to 40 tonnes. There were fettlers’ camps each 15 to 25 miles. Some camps were mobile and some were standing camps. They dealt with buckled track, washaways, derailments, sand covering the track and so on. It was hard work in heat and cold. Bosses could be like slavedrivers. Coal fallen from the old steam trains tenders was picked up by the fettlers and other Arabana to use as fuel for their fires. There were dams and tanks, as many fettlers’ camps had no natural water supply. One job Kevin used to do was pump water into the tanks.

Once at William Creek there was a derailment and food supplies for the 150 passengers of the Ghan were running short. Kevin carted food in old tea chests packed with ice, pulled along on a section car. It took half one day and half a night and was a slog until he pulled up about midnight. Then he and his colleagues worked overnight to repair the track itself. There was no overtime then!

He also worked on a derailment just north of Algebuckinia where fifteen trucks jumped the track. It was very hot and they had to rebuild the line. Sometimes spur lines were put in while the original tangle was sorted out.

Kevin was there when the piggyback trains came in (after the change of gauge). They had to stop the engines to do the transfers. He thinks that the locomotives were Swiss and sleepers came originally from the UK, then WA but local timber was used if none other available.
Kevin was a ganger at Tarcoola and encouraged his Aboriginal colleagues to study hard, including a man who has stayed on with the current private rail company and become a boss.

After the Ghan line closed (in 1983), the rails were sent to Queensland for the sugar. The Leigh Creek coal mine train line still runs. He and some colleagues originally wanted to keep a section between Marree and Curdimurka open for tourism, movies etc, but this did not happen.

Nowadays Kevin is fighting for return of Arabana land. He says that the old people have been buried in many places around country and they need their respect. Mound Springs will not recover, if at all, for over twenty years with the amount of water being taken by the Uranium miners to process their mineral. Other sacred sites have been destroyed through the putting through of roads for the mines. There are a number of burials up and down the line also as workers were just buried where they dropped.

Kevin is suing BHP Billiton and the Federal Minister responsible for this desecration. Fukushima was a wake-up call.
Reg Dodd was born in 1940 on Finmiss Springs Station to Tom Dodd and Amy Warren, daughter of Francis Dunbar Warren (born 1878) by his Arabana wife, Laura Baralda. Reg was schooled to age 14 at the Mission School on the Station. Finmiss Springs, unlike other pastoral stations, had birth certificates for each Aboriginal person born there, there were bank accounts and bank books for Aboriginal workers, and the Flying Doctor Service used to specifically visit that Station.

Reg is sure that Arabana in the person of his great grandfather, Laura Baralda’s father or (in white people’s terms, possibly uncle), together with Francis Dunbar Warren, persuaded Aboriginal men coming for a sacred ceremony around “Hermit Hill”, Pregnant Woman, Bullaburra, not to attack a construction camp for the Overland Telegraph Line, which had been sited about 800 metres from this “St Paul’s Cathedral”. They also persuaded the men to move the ceremony to a more secret and private place near Curdimurka. Thus massacres and reprisals did not occur in Arabana country unlike, say, in Dieri lands.

Reg after leaving school then worked on Anna Creek Station for several years from about 1954. His other father, Allan Buzzacott, had got an ongoing job on the railways in 1954, hired by Roadmaster Des Dunning. Reg then joined the Commonwealth Railways, initially as a fettler, later promoted to Train Examiner. Reg was on the railways for 26 years altogether, including after the Ghan ceased to run, through to February 1987.
Luise Hercus and Ted Strehlow involved Allan Buzzacott, who was Southern Arrernte, in their research on Aboriginal people in the 1980s. Reg himself went with Luise Hercus to Hamilton Station, to the old people’s camp, where, to the anthropologists’ surprise, Reg was greeted as a known person. This Station is 100Km north of Oodnadatta and 135Km south of Aputula/Finke.

Reg was part owner of Finmiss Springs Station, which had been left by Francis Dunbar Warren to his Aboriginal family. His mothers Flora and Amy had fought to keep the Station but this lapsed about 1978. He started the Marree Arabunna People’s Committee. He worked with Environment and Planning. He worked with South Australian Aboriginal Heritage. He was a key informant for Jen Gibson and Bruce Shaw. He now continues to run Arabunna Aboriginal Tours. He has been involved with Pembroke College in Adelaide from 1995. His own grandchildren from daughter Jackie and Ronnie Dadleh, Kyle and Curtley, have been to Trinity College in Melbourne. His son, Terrence, known as Kootchi, works for Centrelink.

Reg has strong traditional links all up and down the old Ghan line, for instance to the Doolans at Aputula, the old Finke. He is connected to Audrey Stewart, a custodian for the Macumba, now living in Oodnadatta (see interview). This set of connections via the railway is a palimpsest of the older story or songlines which run all the way from Port Augusta to the Tiwi Islands.
Reg sees the railway as part of a transitional mechanism for Arabana people to move from hunter gatherers to join modern economic society. It was different to pastoral ways, as money was used as a reward, rather than goods or rations. Pastoralism had some advantages in that quite personal relationships were set up between Aboriginal people and white people: He cited Frank Booth, the mailman from about 1900 to 1920, who had an Aboriginal wife. Archie Maclean from Peake Station worked with Reg’s uncle, Arthur Warren, and learned Arabana himself. He cited Tom Kruse, the famous mailman and his Aboriginal partner Henry Butler, who appears in a 1954 video clip and is named in Kristin Weidenbach’s biography of Kruse, “Mailman of the Birdsville Track” (p101-2).

But regular wages, equal to those of other workers from non-Aboriginal backgrounds, were a novelty for Arabana and other Aboriginal pastoral workers. Thus the Commonwealth Railways, which paid such equal wages from the time they took over the Great Northern Railway, the Ghan, from 1927 onwards, was a significantly different employer.
Interview with Ross Warren 1/7/2013 at his home in the company of Lyn, his wife.

Ross was born at Finnis Springs in 1941 to Arthur Warren (died 1989; himself the son of Francis Dunbar Warren and Laura Baralda) and Rosa Murray (Dieri people). He had four sisters and two brothers: Francis Maxwell, Francis Clary (or Clarrie), Gloria (Colson), Ross himself, Betty and Peggy (both Larkins), and Jennifer. Brothers Max (Francis Maxwell) and Clarrie both worked on the railway and Mike Duke has interviewed Clarrie in Oodnadatta (see above).

Ross was recruited to the Railways at Marree on 8th September 1960 aged 19. He went initially to Port Augusta then Curdimurka where he worked as a fettler. There were about 10-14 men there and they worked putting in new steel rails and wooden sleepers on the narrow gauge which still ran from Marree to Alice Springs. Concrete sleepers were tried between Beresford and Coward Springs but were not successful at that time.

They had very little machinery and work was done by heavy manual labour.

By the time Ross was at Curdimurka no traditional activities were occurring there, he says.

He was at Curdimurka for about 2-3 years and then at Wangianna with Syd Strangways as ganger.
Subsequent postings included: Nullarbor, Barton, Tarcoola, Ooldea, O'Malley and Hughes, Cook, Kingoonya, back to Barton on the Special Gang, Winanowie, Port Augusta then Tent Hill, Brachina, Farina, Stirling North, Wilktana, Nevrolda, Mingary, Manna Hill, Yunta, Cockburn, Peterborough, Crystal Brook, Balaclava, Gawler and Barossa Valley.

He finished in 1993 after 33 years on the Railways. He then came to Bendigo where he now lives with Lyn, his wife. (Lyn says that she is Stolen Generations herself, discovering her heritage in her forties. She is Yorta Yorta/Wemba Wemba and a cousin is my former boss Lance James. She is the great niece of both Granny Geraldine Briggs and Marj Tucker)

He enjoyed his life on the Railways, meeting people, seeing a lot of the country. He had many international co-workers.

Achievements he is proud of include breaking the record for putting in concrete sleepers from Port Pirie to Crystal Brook (beating the Americans).

He recalls the excellent range of goods available through the Commonwealth railway shops at Port Augusta, Stirling North, Tarcoola, Cook and Rawlinna. He recalls theatre (cinema) on a monthly basis in a special carriage on the train. He recalls bringing sick kids by Section Car to medical aid. He recollects finding green tektites from meteorite impacts on the Nullarbor.
He has a daughter Lyn who is married to Lionel Milera (Arabana), one grand-daughter, one grandson and two great grandchildren.
Martha was born on 11th December 1943 at Broken Hill, eldest child of the 6 children of Percy ("Nobby") Dodd and Sheila Strangways, both Arabana. Martha’s other siblings were Mervyn, Leon Michael, Rhonda, Lionel and Theresa.
Percy himself was one of the sons of Amy and Tom Dodd.

Percy’s wife, Sheila, was a daughter of Henry (Wapili) Strangways, Arabana, and Edie (Edith) Sargent, Arrernte.

After a rural childhood, including schooling at the Mission school on Finniss itself, Martha was kidnapped from Finniss aged 13 or 14 and flown by Royal Flying Doctor Service aeroplane to Broken Hill. This move makes her one of the Stolen Generations. From Broken Hill she was sent by train to Sydney then Lake Macquarie. She was placed with a family who put her in a shed out the back. Martha says this family “did not even speak proper English that I could understand. It was very upsetting for one as young as i was at the time”.

Later she was sent to six further homes around Adelaide, all private families. She was not allowed to mix with other Aboriginal people, but did so covertly. Even getting to school was discriminatory: she attended the same school as a Minister’s two daughters but had to catch a different bus. She was kept under curfew even when other white children in the household were not.

She ran away several times, using Government pocket money. She was released or escaped for the last time in 1959 aged 16 and got home to Marree from Adelaide via the Mixed Goods Train. With that device of many uses including escape, the train, she
managed to get back with joy and relief to her family. Meanwhile Finniss Springs had become non-viable and the families had mostly moved into Marree.

Martha then worked in the Marree Hotel as waitress and cleaner. Thereafter aged about 18 she joined the Commonwealth Railways as a carriage cleaner. She did the first class carriages. After the trip from Alice Springs the carriages were full of fine red sand. She would sweep, mop, varnish the walls of the compartments, Brasso the taps. She would make 130 beds in one shift. She had to lug the mop and bucket, full of the cleaning water, all the way from the loco shed via the transhipping area. Also got up at 5am to clean the Bud Car from Port Augusta as well as cleaning the Ghan.

There were few women in the cleaning team, some men and some Afghans. Other names she recalled were Betty Bowditch, Jean (surname not recalled) and Margaret Bejah.

With her first pay from the Commonwealth Railways she bought a transistor radio, to play music while she worked.

She met Peter Watts, who was working on transhipping copper ore. Peter says he was UK born but came to Australia aged 6 as a “ten pound Pom” and is “South Australia bred”. The ore came from Darwin to Larrimah by train, then was Trucked to Alice Springs. From there the train took the ore down to Marree where it was transferred to be transported on the standard gauge railway down to Adelaide for export.
Peter later worked painting railway cottages and would have a drink with Percy Dodd, Martha's father, who was always immaculately dressed. Percy would always have two longnecks. One night, he says, Peter said to Percy "I think I want to marry your daughter". Percy said "Talk to me tomorrow when you're sober". He did. Peter and Martha married in Adelaide in 1966.

Peter and Martha met at the old Marree Picture Theatre. Peter would be teased by Martha's baby sister who would call out "gecko coming" or "scarecrow coming" as he was often covered in residue and dust from his work. Both will be married 50 years on 28th June 2016.

Peter (junior) has a story about going out on the "tuk-a-tuk", the section car, with his young pals and some Arabana elders and his grand-dad Percy. They would go hunting up the train line, catch rabbits by throwing stones at them, and maybe cook them for lunch. They would then turn the tuk-a-tuk around and motor home.

On the very morning Grand-dad Percy died, Peter came out a bit late with his cousin and Percy had already gone. Percy had been head ganger out at Wangianna and Alberrie. Percy died on the job but the family say he would have lived had there been someone with acknowledge of first aid available.
Nowadays Peter and Martha live in suburban Adelaide. Peter is a very keen fisherman, not a pastime possible in Marree! Martha has the house as neat as a new pin - and no red sand to clear out.

Peter and Martha have three children, Peter (Junior), who is involved with Uncle Kevin Buzzacott in the anti-uranium movement, Dwayne who runs Boma’s Graphics in Adelaide, and Amanda. Peter also works with Kurta Tirkandi - Learning Place within the TAFE system of South Australia which, *inter alia*, helps employers deal with the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes of their non-Aboriginal employees.
Interview with Dean Stuart in his home on 27th July 2014.

(Revised 14th April 2016 by telephone feedback)

Dean Stuart (on the right) with Snooky Varcoe about 1963, standing in front of Syd Strangways car at Wangianna.

Dean Stuart was born at Finniss Springs on 8th March 1945. He is a son of Laurie Stuart and Doreen Stuart, stepdaughter of Fred Strangways.

Fred had married Doris Baralda Strangways, mother of Doreen. Thus Dean counts his great grandmother as Laura Baralda and step grandfather as Fred Strangways, both Arabana.
Laurie was a son of Jack Hill and Louisa Ferguson, but Louisa later married Ted Stuart and the children took that name.

From Finniss Springs his family would go by horse and cart to visit Curdimurka, an important siding on the Ghan, where brother Len Stuart was working. They could see the Ghan coming for miles by the huge column of smoke. This was before the steam train was replaced by diesel in the mid 1950s. The children would be able to run across and buy chocolates and sweets from a window in one of the vans.

Dean was schooled at the UAM Mission school on Finniss Springs but left aged 14, with a Proficiency Certificate, the highest available qualification at the time. Dean then worked at the mission, for instance fencing. He and Grannie Fred then went to Stuart’s Creek then Coward’s Springs on the horse and cart and got doing pastoral jobs under Dick Nunn, having asked head stockman Ernie Ellis, until he joined the Commonwealth Railways in 1963 aged 18, having put up his age, as one was not supposed to be recruited until age 21.

He worked with Uncle Syd Strangways at Wangianna, where Sid was the Ganger. A Ganger is in charge of a team of six men and a cook. They lived in settler’s cottages and monitored five miles of train line one way and five miles the other. Inspections were usually done twice a week. Any maintenance needing to be done was then assigned. Sometimes there were emergencies such as a flood, washaway, sand over the line or a particular crisis, such as a derailment. Crow bars were used to prise the line back into alignment as required. (In the southern United States, these bars are called “Gandies” and the men are called “Gandy Dancers”).
He worked back and forth from Wangianna to Stuart’s Creek, alternating railway and pastoral work. He lived in the single men’s quarters in Wangianna in 1963-4. Stores would be brought up from Port Augusta and he considers they “lived pretty high”. He remembers the cook Barney “Combo” cooking stews, curries and making sweet desserts. The gang would be given sandwiches for their lunch before setting off for the day on the tuk-a-tuk (motorised section car).

He recalls a particular incline on the track leading to Wangianna near an underground water tank where the train would scrape the steel of the rails trying to get up. Uncle Sid used to sit atop the section car here and be pushed up the incline by two men on each side, just to get up Wangianna Hill. Dean can still recall Sid’s famous words, as he sat perched on the old section car, in Arabana “yukapei” - let’s go!

Later Dean worked from Marree down to Farina in the No 1 Gang on the standard gauge line.

Dean met Kitty (Katherine) in 1967 and they married in 1968. They have five children. Kitty’s cousin Geoff Eames was a locomotive driver driving up to Alice Springs in the 1940s. She and her sisters in law Pauline and Joy were all train carriage cleaners at Marree.

Dean is now the Treasurer of the Arabana Aboriginal Corporation but a big interest is reviving the Arabana language. He is working with Uncle Syd Strangways, following the lead from father Laurie and brother Rex Stuart who compiled a dictionary.
He has clear recollections of his grandmother mourning the loss of many babies who died in the epidemics that went through Arabana lands. This may be the post World War I influenza pandemic or even the 1950s measles epidemic which killed a number of young people and babies. Mother Doreen sought to protect him by greasing him with emu fat.

He considers the railways were important in many ways for the Arabana. Obviously they linked the cattle industry with the wider world - cattle were shipped from Coward Springs. They did create a sort of dependence on the supply chain of goods from the Commonwealth Railway stores at Port Augusta, which can no longer occur now. The railway allowed people of many nations to mix amicably.
Interview with Audrey Stewart 18/6/2013 at Oodnadatta

Audrey was born in June 1949 at Macumba Station, the daughter of Nellie Stewart (born 1932, Arrernte/Arabana people) and Pompey Reid, stockman on a cattle station (Antakarinja people). Uncle Sidney Stewart was a tribal man but himself worked on the railway in the 1960s. Because of pressure from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, “the Welfare”, the family moved to Oodnadatta in the late 1950s so the children could be sent to school. Meanwhile her dad worked at Allandale Station and did gardening in the town itself especially for Ben and Robyn Greenwood. Then he became a police tracker and they lived at the police station. (Bruce Shaw says that Audrey told him old Pompey went blind in 1966 aged 70). Mother sewed them their clothes. Mother could speak Arrernte, Luritja, Arabana and English. Eventually she became demented and died in a home in Port Augusta.

Oodnadatta itself is a meeting place for many tribes and corroborees continued until the 1960s. Eventually her own uncles banned the practices. Audrey says Oodnadatta is not Arabana land, although others dispute this.

She has been told that during WW2, Oodnadatta was a fueling stop for warplanes. The pilots and crew would give or throw blankets and food out of the plane as they passed over the Aboriginal camp. Her dad, Pompey, did not even know World War 2 was on!
Her paternal grandfather, her step-grandfather and father used to muster stock by horse, then drove the sheep or cattle all the way from Alice to Marree. The Aboriginal stockmen, theoretically innumerate, could count up to three hundred sheep and also be aware if just one was missing. Stock would be taken across country for example from Birdsville. Once the railhead was reached, the stock would be taken to Adelaide.

Audrey herself worked as a cook for ringers so she could be near horses. She loved riding and was able to “tail the bullock”, keep stock together in an unfenced area. By the 1950s cattle predominated and by 1990 motor bikes took over completely from horses.

Audrey is an Elder herself and her second oldest daughter is heir to the Dreamtime stories. Sidney’s stories were recorded by Luise Hercus and may be in the Archives in Melbourne.

Audrey had a heart attack in 2008. Nowadays she is a Seventh Day Adventist and teaches especially about the evils of alcohol. She is growing healthy native plants in her own garden such as the Quandong. She would like her own biography to be heard, audiotaped and transcribed for future generations.
Conversations with Professor Veronica Arbon, Director Wirltu Yarlu, University of Adelaide over 2012 to 2014.

Veronica never worked on the train line herself but many family members did. Veronica was born on 23rd December 1950 at Alice Springs. Veronica travelled with her family from Port Augusta through Marree, where they changed from the silver “Budcar” to The Ghan.

Genealogy:

Veronica’s Mother Shirley (now living in Darwin) married Ray Arbon and there were seven children, of whom Veronica is the eldest.

Veronica’s maternal grandmother was Myra Hull (born 1914) who married maternal grandfather Charles “Geordie” Hodgson about 1930. Geordie was a white man from Yorkshire, who worked as a ganger, then a porter then a station master. Geordie was later a clerk on the railways at Marree. This “cross-racial” marriage was illegal at the time. Geordie and Myra had ten surviving children. The eldest, Marjorie, married Phil Wallace and worked at the pub in Birdsville. Betty, the next, was sent to boarding school in Adelaide. Shirley helped to take care of after the younger ones.

Veronica’s maternal great grandmother was Clara (Mudlu-Wada) Strangways whose partner was William Hull (Yankunytjatjara is thought to be his heritage by some, although Veronica argues he is actually also Arabana).
William was the son of Adam Hull, a white store keeper from Mount Crawford, South Australia, and Ruby (Yankunytjatjara and Arabana as noted above) and was born about 1890, probably in Warrina where Adam Hull ran a small shop.

Clara’s mother, so Veronica’s great great grandmother was Lily Strangways (Arabana).

Extended Family:

There are many maternal aunties and uncles: eight women and three men altogether, including John Hodgson, the locomotive driver, about whom further information is of great interest to the family.

A John Hodgson is referred to by Elkin in 1948 as working on Elsey Station (see attached letter). Given Veronica’s uncle was born in 1943, this could be a different person, although the date given on the document is questioned by the family.

Uncle John trained in Port Augusta or Darwin as a locomotive driver but worked mainly in NT. He married Caroline Hayes about 1971 in Adelaide. He mainly drove from Darwin to Larrimah and back.

John was born in 1943 in Marree and worked on Urapunga Station as a young man with Ray Arbon, Shirley Arbon’s (nee Hodgson) husband. He was one of Shirley’s younger
brothers who initially trained and worked as a stockman on Urapunga Station then worked on Elsey Station (We of the Never Never) before he went to Arabana country. Later he moved back to live and work in NT.

Nanna Myra’s sisters Daisy and Phyllis were placed in Nepabunna Mission. Their parents (Bill Hull and Clara) who sometimes worked at Coward Springs sought to get them out with success. However, the girls had to go back and the Police were written a letter to get them on the train. There are letters to the Protector about this from these parents and from one of their older daughter Evelyn Hull’s partner Sid Churches.

Evelyn, was partnered to Sid Churches, who ran the Coward Springs Hotel before it burnt down. Sid used to send a barrel of beer up to Alice Springs to Grandfather Geordie (according to his son Douglas Hodgson now deceased).

**Railway information:**

Veronica says that there is a Seven Sisters Songline underlying the train route around Coward Springs and other places. Eileen Wingfield says this is the case and is teaching a daughter.
There were three railway houses near the current Telecentre in Marree. The Hodgson family lived in the nearest one to where the Telecentre now is when they moved from Oodnadatta to Marree when Grandpa Geordie was promoted to an Office job as Clerk.

Aboriginal people congregated near Warrina siding and Algebuckina (as there is permanent water there) from what family have told Veronica. Algebuckina is a convergent point for a number of Dreamings. These include a Crane and Fish story from which her grandmother took her name. At Warrina there was a big camp on the north side of the Creek.

It is possible that the Arabana, when helping the surveyors George Warren and John Ross for the train line, steered them away from some powerful sites, given that the route was altered from that legislated.

Other information:

Peake Station has a very powerful site not too far away, she has been told.

Mount Hamilton Station near Wabma Kadarbu ("snake’s head") mound springs had sixteen police sent in the early days organised by John Warren. This was allegedly because Kuyani had bailed up whites in the early 1860s and there was some fear expressed by those on Strangways Springs, as is recorded in the Warren letters (Arbon and Elders, 2010).
There is a song sung by Glen Hull in the book "Moonlight at Eva Creek" and songs which relate to an Arabana train or car song and a lullaby. There is a still-known lullaby from a waterhole on the Macumba also recorded in this book. Lake CadibarraWirracanna (this is the shortened name; it means "stars dancing on water") north of the road between William Creek and Cooper Pedy, is also important to Arabana people due to the stories that belong to that place.

Veronica has been a member of the Ularaka, now Arabana Aboriginal Corporation. She became Director of Batchelor Institute in the Northern Territory and then Professor and Chair of Indigenous Knowledge Systems at Deakin University, Geelong. She is the sole author of *Arlathirnda, Ngurkarndha ityirnda: being, knowing, doing: de-colonising indigenous tertiary education* (Arbon, 2008). She is co-author of *Wathili Family, Wilma Stories, Wadhlu Country* with Arabana Elders.
Interview with Wilfred Strangways in Port Augusta, 27/7/2014

Wilfred David Strangways was born in 1951, son of Bert (Herbert) Strangways and Ethel Wilton (Adnyamathantha).

Going back some three generations, Lily (Arabana) and Rang (Baguwida) had six children, including Henry (Wapili) Strangways. Wilfred’s father Bert was a son of Henry (Wapili) Strangways and Edie Sargent (Arrernte).

I met with Wilfred in Port Augusta where he shared some of his recollections with me. Wilfred was born in Hawker but reared in Copley, where he went to school. Neither town is in Arabana country. His father Bert had an Exemption Certificate from 8th February 1950, and the family was consequentially “stuck in the middle”, not allowed by law to associate with their Aboriginal kin, and not accepted by the white society either. In Copley they lived in a “tin shed”.

The local school closed when he was in Year 7 and that was the end of schooling for him.

In 1966 the family moved to Port Augusta where Bert continued to work on the Railways, and was supplied with a house. Bert drove graders and other heavy plants.

Wilfred put up his age to join the Railways (a person was supposed to be aged 18) and spent five years as a shunter at Port Augusta. Later he trained at what he called “Bonehead
College” in Port Augusta to become a guard. He then worked as an assistant guard, with a monthly run to Alice Springs on the Mixed (passenger and goods train).

In 1971 he was based at Port Augusta as an assistant guard when ninety Englishmen were recruited. They struggled with the heat, which was so hot you could fry an egg on the guard’s van floor.

His son died (7/2/1973 aged 14 months) and he hit rock bottom. He ended up in Adelaide. But he rallied and attended the Aboriginal Community College in 1978. He traced his relatives through Link-Up and has found relations all the way from Kadina, Adelaide, Alice Springs, Darwin and Marree.

Wilfred had married Shirley Grantham and has two daughters by her. Corrine is married to Henry Thompson and has two children. Cynthia, called Cindy, is married to David, called Jock, Anderson and has four daughters.

He remembers especially the glorious sight of Lake Eyre/Kati Thanda in flood in 1974 as he watched it from the train by a big full moon with its reflections in the water.

Nowadays Wilfred lives in Port Augusta in a house of his own, where he gets daily visits from daughter and grandchildren. He dreams of the railway days and recalls fondly memories of the mates he made.
Wilfred said that the railway track was laid directly on the bed of the Finke River, as a trial of putting in piles for a bridge led them to just sink out of sight into the deep sands of the river bed. He has given me photographs of the track lying directly on the river sands.
Conversation with Marilyn Ah Chee nee Hull, aka Hull-Stuart on 24/6/2013 at Oodnadatta in
the Pink Roadhouse

Marilyn (dob 26/10/1953) is the daughter of Daisy Hull (dob 22/7/1925 at Anna Creek) and
Alec Kruger (1924, Katherine). Daisy had fifteen children and Marilyn was number 6.

Daisy’s children: June, Veronica, John, Jane, Irene, Marilyn then Kevin, Dorothy, Rowena,
Ian, Sharon, Rosilyn, Debra, Lionel and Janette.

Daisy was Evelyn (Hull) Churches’ younger sister. Evelyn had married Sid Churches at Curdimurka and they later ran the Coward Springs Hotel from 1937 to 1946. Other aunts
include Betty Bowditch, Daphne May, Shirley, Lorraine Mills and Cathy, who all have
memories of visiting there.

There was also Uncle Doug Hodgson, married to Shirley. Doug is a son of Geordie
Hodgson and Myra nee Hull. (That is, he is Charlie Hodgson’s uncle). Myra and Charles
Hodgson (Geordie), who died 2/7/66 had Marjorie, Elizabeth, Shirley, Douglas, Pamela,
John, Zena, Maureen, Daphne and Lorraine (see interview above with Betty and her
sisters).

Daisy was a daughter of Clara Strangways and William Hull. The other children of
William and Clara were: Jessie Hull/Ah Chee, Myra Hull/Hodgson, Evelyn as noted,
Glen Hull, Roy Hull, Daisy herself, Phyllis Marks, Gracie (b 7/6/33) Ah Fat/Warren and
Millie Tanner.

Clara herself was a daughter of Rang (Baguwida [died 1930]) Strangways [who had been
examined by Dr Herbert Basedow in the 1920s at Anna Creek] and Lily (Arabana). William
was a son of Adam Hull (white) and Ruby. Adam ran the shop at Warrina, a station on the
Old Ghan. He lived in an old stone house and traded with Aboriginal people for dingo scalps, exchanging them for tea, sugar and so on. Ruby lived there for a while.

Rang and Lily’s children were: Sarah (Gudjibuga) b 1880, d 1972; Henry (Wapili), b 1881, d 24/10/1961; Clara (Mudlu), b 1889, d 15/5/65; Tim (Midlangila), b 1891, d ?; Fred (Murili), b 1896, d 7/4/70; Sidney, b 1898, d ?.

Clara Hull was related to Rosie Ah Chee, nee Naylon.

Clara died on 15th May 1965 at Port Augusta.

Marilyn’s other grandmother was Sarah Hele nee Strangways, who married Andrew Hele (d 20/7/1958). Children were May, Dudley, Kathleen and Steve. Jennifer Newchurch counts herself as Arabana through father Steve. (Mother Audrey nee Eaglehawk; Pitjantjatjara). Steve worked as a settler.

Daisy and her younger sister Phyllis were of the Stolen Generations. Nanna had hidden the other children from the Welfare. Daisy was taken to Colebrook then Quorn and then went out to Mr and Mrs Eaton at Nepabunna (in Adnyamathanha country). She escaped aged 16. She went to Coward Springs where she helped Auntie Evelyn who had fallen sick.

Later Daisy went to Alice Springs and Marilyn was born there on 26th October 1953.

Later Evelyn split up with Sid Churches and married Henry Cox. They lived at Millers Creek Station. They grew up one of Daisy’s daughters, Deborah and one Uncle’s daughter, Charmaine.

Great Uncles Glen Hull and Roy Hull worked on the railways around Finniss Springs and Curdimurka.
Marilyn herself lived with her mother and stepfather Mr Milera. He worked on the East West or transcontinental Railway at Pinba, Rawlinna and Deakin. Marilyn attended railway schools. The railways were able to bring them clothes, food and entertainment. Welfare never chased them. They were able to make their own toys and made their own fun. For instance, boxes were used as toy trucks.

Father Christmas used to come on the train each year with toys.

Many Aboriginal people did well from the railways. They were promoted, knowing the country, being able to survive the climate, being bush mechanics and could make do. Fettlers became gangers.

Marilyn married Dean Ah Chee, who worked on the railway at Oodnadatta, later in Alice Springs. His father Charlie’s family were railway people. They also worked at Perdika and Finke.

Oodnadatta was a boom town. It was a hub for many peoples but also a sad town as the Police and Welfare would bring Aboriginal children there and have them sent to Homes in Adelaide.

In the 1970s Marilyn worked on Carbine in the train cleaning shed in Marree. She worked cleaning all the way from the guard’s van to second and then first class carriages. There were about ten women doing this at the time, some with children. It was solid work when the train was in – but usually finished by 2pm. There were about two trains a week then. There were also goods trains whereby she would clean the brake vans as well as carriages. Dining cars were made gleaming clean. Metal showers and toilets in sleeping cars had to be spotless.

If the supervisor was not satisfied the worker had to stay back and re-do the whole carriage. There were two or three carriages per worker. The women would help each other out.
They were paid in little envelopes, quite a lot of money for the time. They would get orders made up in Port Augusta from the railway stores and sent up to them. Clothes, blankets and so on. All paid for with deductions from their pay.

Marilyn has two sons, Hayden and Phillip, neither of whom works on railways.

She is currently the Chair of Dunjiba, the Aboriginal organisation in Oodnadatta. They run the pub, the store, the museum, the dump and did run housing (which has been now moved to SA Housing). Health is under Health SA and the local clinic has one RN and two AHWs, one of whom has language. Aboriginal heritage is a key policy direction too. Marilyn is an enterprising and energetic person who is making a significant impact on Oodnadatta.
Interview With Lionel Dodd, initial draft 26th July 2014, final correction 16th May 2016

Lionel’s Story:

Lionel was born on 2nd March 1954, son of Percy “Nobby” Dodd (Arabana) and Sheila Strangways (Arabana). Percy himself was one of the sons of Amy (daughter of white pastoralist Francis Dunbar Warren and Arabana lady Laura) and Tom Dodd, an Arrernte stockman.

Father Percy was a settler in Marree.

One of Percy’s responsibilities was to measure the faults along the line from Marree to Alice Springs on the “chaser” train.

He patrolled from Marree to Lyndhurst and up to Curdimurka, from time to time.

His role involved fixing broken joints and other breakages.

Later Percy was relieving Ganger in Marree, No 2 Gang and was a relieving Ganger for Dave Warren (Arabana) when Dave was out on Patrol.

Percy died on the job.

Sheila, Lionel’s mother, was the daughter of Henry Wapili Strangways (Arabana) and Edie Sargent (Southern Arrernte).

As a youngster Lionel broke his leg and was hospitalised at the Children’s Hospital in Adelaide.
“His parents were able to come and stay nearby. He was transferred for convalescence to Escort House”, said Lionel’s sister Martha.

In his childhood school years, Lionel lived in a cottage on the lefthand side beside the train line at the south end of Marree.

Marree was a change of gauge station, from standard to narrow gauge.

Lionel would spend his school holidays at Finniss Springs or at Stuart Creek with his Uncle Norm and Auntie Jean.

Lionel was recruited into the Commonwealth Railways in the 1970s after a number of other jobs.

He tended to move back and forth from pastoral to railway work.

He started in the Yard Gang in Marree, then worked as fettler at Curdimurka, Beresford and Alberrie Creek. Then, after gaining his Ganger Certificate, on 23rd November 1977, worked as a Ganger at William Creek.

He recalls the big floods in 1974. He was living in Stuart’s Creek at the time, working as a stockman.

While staying with Uncle Syd Strangways in Alice Springs, he did start training as a locomotive driver but left before completing the course. While staying up in Alice Springs he also played for South Alice Football Club.

He recalls one big derailment north of Finniss which delayed trains for a week, 3-4 days maybe.
He was sent down from Alice Springs on a workers’ train with his Uncle Syd Strangways and Kevin Buzzacott to help with the derailment and fixing the line.

Whilst working at William Creek he met his New Zealand born wife Susan Hill.

He married Susan in 1979 and they eventually had seven children of their own.

The old Ghan closed in 1983 and the lines from Alice Springs to Leigh Creek were torn up over the next three years.

After leaving William Creek at the close of the Ghan line from Port Augusta to Alice Springs, he worked on Anna Creek Station, later for the Highways Department and on a dairy farm in New Zealand for about ten years.

In more recent years he has been a bus driver for Light City Buses which is part of Transfield.
Interview with Paul Tanner 16th October 2014 at Finniss Springs

Paul is the current Chairman of the Arabana Aboriginal Corporation. He was on the railways for sixteen years from 1975. He was born 1st September 1955, eldest son of Mildred, nee Hull and Frederick Tanner.

Paul went to Darwin after Cyclone Tracy in 1975 with his cousin brother (their mothers Mildred and Myra were sisters), John Hodgson. A year on in 1975 after Cyclone Tracy, Darwin was still a bit of a mess so he worked with various contractors tidying up and then joined the railways in the goods sheds. John O’Donohue was the manager at the time. He met and worked with some Torres Strait Islanders. Unfortunately he hasn’t seen them since but they were great blokes. There he worked loading and unloading goods with Trans-Shipping. He worked on the gantry crane unloading road trains for about a year, and when the train line to Katherine closed he transferred back to Port Augusta.

Back in Port Augusta he started at the bottom sweeping the platform and number-nicking, but undertook schooling upstairs in the Railway Station and was eventually promoted to shunter. He spent a lot of time at Marree relieving as shunter, yardmaster and also as an assistant guard on the old North line to Alice Springs. When travelling by rail in summer, he was in a non-airconditioned brake van which had the thermometer nearly bursting out of the top. You could cook an egg on flat-tops as it was so hot. He worked along the line on the slow-mixed (passengers and goods) to Alice Springs and would be away from one to three weeks. Washaways would obviously delay his return to family.
He also relieved as Station Assistant at Finke and Oodnadatta. He spent some time on the East-West line.

Later Paul became a leading shunter based back in Port Augusta as he was tired of being away from family and living out of a tucker-box and suitcase. It was still shift work, and sometimes the Yardmaster would get them up at 4am because that is when the train had got in.

The life with ANR was hindered by inefficiency. Sometimes a gang would be left without a Section Car on the old north line, and just while away the time until one was provided.

All his uncles worked on the railways, in those days men could walk in off the street and get a job fettling or shunting. Sadly concrete sleepers reduced the need for fettlers and employment opportunities decreased and morale did decline. It was a bit like motor bikes and helicopters reducing the need for a man on a horse as a stockman.

Off duty time was spent with family as much as possible, mainly in Marree.

Paul was present on the platform in Marree when the last Ghan train came through in 1983. The place was “packed”. After this lined closed completely many Arabana went to work on the other lines - the East-West now Indian-Pacific, the relocated Ghan running through Tarcoola and the line in the Northern Territory, which finally was joined north to south after he had left.

He worked on the railways for sixteen years from 1975.
Upon leaving the railways in 1991 Paul moved to work in the Justice system. He has worked extensively with Indigenous Courts for both Nungas and other Aboriginal peoples throughout SA.

Paul is married with two daughters, Kathryn and Rebecca, neither of whom have worked in the rail system.
Charlie said he is aged 47 years (dob 1/8/1966). The old Ghan stopped in 1981 and he had no personal recollection of this train line but a lot of other information, especially about the times before the train.

Explorer John McDouall Stuart had a young male Arabana guide (name unknown) for his First Expedition (14th May 1858 to 11th September 1858). [This information, although without the designation of the young man as being Arabana, is also given on the John McDouall Stuart Society website [http://johnmcdouallstuart.org.au/first-five-expeditions] ].

Charlie said that this young man was killed by Arabana elders between the First and Second Expeditions (this latter from April to July 1859) because he had revealed secret information such as the whereabouts of sacred waterholes and mound springs. The Second Expedition revealed what Stuart thought of as virgin land, "wonderful country... scarcely to be believed" which he claimed as a pastoral lease. Charlie asserted that Arabana people were killed on this Second Expedition. (It is possible that this time in 1859 is when a Smallpox Epidemic swept through the Arabana for the first time [Dick Kimber]. It is said by the John McDouall Stuart Society that there was conflict with the Warramunga [near Tennant Creek] further north on the Third Expedition on 26th June 1860).
Pastoral stations followed virtually immediately after the explorers. The first, Strangways, was established in 1863. Arabana people later moved into the towns along the old Ghan because their water supplies had been taken over by the pastoralists. They worked on the railway from 1884 as one of the very few alternatives, to feed their families. Strangways, Anna Creek and Finnis Springs Stations were, however, supportive of Arabana people. Aboriginal people elsewhere had been shot, which fact was known to Arabana.

From 1866 Afghans and their camels traversed Arabana land taking supplies to pastoral stations. The Arabana did not mingle with these non-Aboriginal people for some time but then did marry Afghans and there are a number of genealogies with Afghan names who are now claimed as Arabana people (endorsed by Pamela Rajkowski in her books). Dieri women also married Afghans.

Old Trading Routes or Dreaming Routes or Songlines were traversed by Afghans, especially the Chilpa or Quoll line. The Overland Telegraph Line (built between 1870 and 1872) then the Railway (through Arabana country from 1884 onwards) followed these lines as well, because there was water along that way and few others along the west of Lake Eyre.

Charlie's paternal grandfather Charles "Geordie" Hodgson (from Yorkshire), was a clerk on the Railways. Paternal grandmother was Myra Hull, the daughter of Clara Hull, the daughter of Lily Strangways, who was Arabana.
Charles and Myra had 8 daughters and three sons, including John, who later became the first Aboriginal locomotive driver (probably late 1960s or early 1970s). John and his wife bore, *inter alia*, Charlie, the informant today.

Charlie’s mother was the great-granddaughter of George Hayes, a linesman for the OTL, and a Kaytetye lady from near Barrow Creek. Barrow Creek was a telegraph station from 1872. Maternal grandmother came from Neutral Junction Station.

The pastoral stations along the old Ghan line “fed the armies of the world” during World War 2 with sheep and cattle both transported to Adelaide and for the huge numbers of service personnel, including many Black Americans, who came through the Centre during the War.

John Hodgson was a shunter at Marree (along with Kenny Dodd). He did an engineering course from about 1968 to 1970 to become a locomotive driver. There should be a photograph and newspaper article (possibly The Advertiser, possibly The Australian) about this accomplishment. Charlie is very keen to find confirmatory information about this and have one of the new Ghan locomotives named after his father. Charlie does have some pay books which would be useful to check dates etc. John Hodgson worked mainly on the Northern Railway around Darwin.

(Later I was able to confirm this information by a visit to the National Australian Archive at Chester Hill in Sydney.)
John Charles Hodgson (dob 24/2/1943):

Information from the National Australian Archive, Chester Hill:

File Number D1556; barcode 07522972.

16/2/1959: Casual Youth Porter - Alice Springs

14/9/1959: Youth Porter - Alice Springs

16/9/1959: Employment Medical Examination - passed fit

24/10/1959: Resigned

5/9/1961: Youth Porter - Marree

14/2/1962: Left

19/2/1962: Junior Porter - Darwin

28/5/1963: Resigned

25/11/1966: Trainee Engineman - 2 1/2 Mile

5/8/1967: Completed 2080 hours as Locomotive Engineer, Class 2

7/7/1968: Transferred to Chief Mechanical Engineer’s Branch

4/10/1968: Locomotive Engineer Class 2 - 2 1/2 Mile

Throughout that year continued as Trainee and passed his NT Locomotive Engineer examination

4/10/1969: Competent 1st Year Driver

13/9/1970: Locomotive Engineer - 2 1/2 mile

4/10/1970: Competent 2nd Year Driver

4/10/1971: Competent 3rd Year Driver

4/10/1971: Locomotive Engineer Class 1

2/12/1973: Locomotive Engineer Class 1 - Darwin Workshops
7/4/1974: Locomotive Engineer Class 1 - Parap Workshops

10/12/1976: Retrenched

Children given as:

Charles Dean, dob 1/7/1967

Adrian John, dob 20/7/1968

Kia Lee Anne, dob 12/11/1969)
Talk with Dennis Amos at Finiss Springs on 18th October 2014

Dennis was born on 16th September 1961, later in his father’s life, he being aged fifty at the time. His father reminisced about being born at Warrina in Arabana country and when settlers were still called by the English title of “navvies” (short for navigational engineers and from a time when this group of workers built canals). He was reared in Port Augusta, where many Arabana have lived and still do. He and family would go to Finiss Springs for holidays. Sometimes this would be with brother in law Clarrie Warren.

Joining the Commonwealth Railways in 1979 in Western Australia, Dennis worked replacing wooden with concrete sleepers for the East West line between Kalgoorlie and Port Augusta. He was in a special gang of up to sixty men. The old sleepers would have to be taken out by hand with pick and shovel, although there was machinery to help insert the new concrete sleepers. He worked on this job for about a year.

Dennis then worked welding the rails to eliminate the “clicketty-click”. He worked at Hughes doing this. He then moved back to Port Augusta where he worked upon buildings for a year or so. It was there he met partner Glenys. They have three children: Mark, Jacinda and James.

He rejoined the railways working as a fettler at Barton on the East West line in 1985. They lived in a railway house where the rent was a modest $20 per fortnight. They had to supply their own furniture but there was free electricity - but no air conditioning. He
worked his way up to become Road Foreman with a team of twelve under him. They’d do big jobs such as derailments.

In 1987 they moved to Tarcoola so Mark could attend school. They were there for nine years then left and moved away from rail work. Dennis then worked on Highways based in Port Augusta. He worked on the Birdsville and Strzelecki Tracks, as well as the William Creek to Coober Pedy Road.

He moved back to rail work on the Leigh Creek line from 1998 until 2005, using his skills as a welder. This railway is on the same route as part of the old Ghan line. Dennis then came to Victoria where he worked on the railway at Sale, doing re-railing between Sale and Bairnsdale. He was away for a fortnight then returned home.

He was then again on the Highways as a plant operator preparing roads at the mines Prominent Hill and Iluka.

Dennis retired on the grounds of ill health in 2009.

Both sons Mark and James did work upon the railways for a while, but are now truckdrivers.
I was born in 1968. My father was Rex Stuart (born on Finniss Springs, died 2001), a settler on the Old Ghan both in Marree and Port Augusta, and my mother was Angeline Shirley Mackenzie, Adnyamathanha, from the Flinders ranges, Wirrealpa Station. I was third of five children: eldest was Dora, then Nabilene, then me, then Virginia and finally Corrinna.

My paternal grandfather was Laurie Stuart (died 2006) who was himself the son of Jack Hele and Louisa Ferguson. Louisa later married Tom Stuart and the children took his name. Paternal grandmother Doreen was a daughter of Doris, daughter of Fred Strangways and Laura Baralda. My maternal grandmother was Ruth, from Eringa, Bloods Creek.
Louisa moved from Peake to Mount Dutton probably because of an epidemic affecting the Aboriginal families. (This may be the 1950s measles epidemic). There is a siding towards Oodnadatta, and about 4-5 Km away is a little valley with 8-9 humpies, still visible. The families who survived later moved to Oodnadatta.

Finniss Springs had two sides: there was Francis Dunbar Warren’s Aboriginal family, with houses, being given rations, and attending school and church. On the other side of the creek there were more transient Aboriginal families.

Lots of my uncles and aunts worked on and were paid by the railways. Robert Anthony Stuart (dob 17/7/1952), Lenard Stuart (dob 2/3/1957) and Locky Stuart (1/1/1948). Also twin Stewarts, Henry (dob 12/3/1926) and Sydney (dob 12/3/1926) all of whom would have personnel records.

I was put into a “home” for five years as a child at Umeewarra, on the Davenport Reserve.

Marree was then a change of gauge station. Passengers on the Old Ghan used to get out of the silver carriages which had come up from Adelaide and transfer to the old wooden ones with leather seats, squeaky, dark inside, like in old British movies.

One memory I have when I was aged 8 or 9 was going out with my dad, grandfather, a strong man, and my uncle looking for gold at Edward’s Creek near Warrina Siding. It was
midsummer and about 47 degrees. Grandfather used to get gold and sell it to the rail workers for food. We had a gold detector machine. My grandfather didn’t usually swear but he looked at this contraption and said “that turnout may be shit, eh!”.

Another memory is of getting into mischief. Us kids used to take a section car and go for rides up the line – hoping no train would come. One day we got caught by the fettlers because we didn’t put it back in time. Got a bit of a flogging over that one.

Older blokes used to pinch petrol from the railways to go hunting. It had a dye in it so it looked a different colour from normal petrol. Never seemed to get caught.

The train brought us new clothes, new people and was exciting for a boy living in a small country town. The train provided fun. The smell of diesel, the sound of the old NSU train idling sounding like a watch, then powering up are all imprinted on my memory. There were several different types of train: the Old Ghan, also known as the Flash Ghan, passengers only with perhaps some cars, the mixed which had freight and some passengers and the pure goods and stock trains.

The final Old Ghan from Alice Springs to Marree ran in 1983, the centenary of the line starting. I saw the line being torn up when I was perhaps 12, 14 years old. Ray Gosse, an original contractor to do this, still lives in Marree. Freight trains and stock trains continued for another three years up to Marree before the rest of the line was torn up. The train stopping was a big blow to the town of Marree. The population went down, the school
had fewer children. You can see a photo of me as a schoolboy in Lois Litchfield’s book *possibly page 26 back row on the left*. Later there were race meetings and special events but it was not the same.

There is a photograph of me at the first train to run all the way to Darwin, both with my big hat on and the memorial baseball cap (which he showed me). By then Aboriginal people needed to be acknowledged.
Interview with Peter Watts 25/5/2013 at Lake Eyre

Peter is the son of Peter Watts (senior), non-Indigenous, who worked on the railway, and Martha nee Dodd, former train cleaner, Arabana (see above). His maternal Grandfather was Percy Dodd, also a rail worker, being a head ganger working out of Wangianna and Alberrie Creek. Other siblings were Dwyane and Amanda.

Peter recalls going on holidays to Finnis Springs and Anna Creek. They would go out on Section Cars and go hunting directly off the railway track. They cold fling stones and hit the numerous rabbits. Fox hunting was also undertaken, and quite lucrative. In either 1977 or 1978 he and a cousin walked out to the shed to find a Section car missing. Old Grandfather had gone to Alberrie and died there.

Peter had family on many sidings: Wangianna, Alberrie, Coward Springs, Curdimurka, Beresford, Strangways and William Creek. The furthest set of relatives were at Macumba.

The railways were fun for him as a young boy.
Jodie Warren Interview 140613 in Marree.

Jodie, born in 1969, is the daughter of Stan Warren, youngest brother of Arthur Warren and his second wife Dora Stuart. Jodie now lives in Marree and is involved with the Arabana Aboriginal Corporation.

Her recollection of Francis Dunbar Warren’s other children by Laura Baralda (died about 1945) are Mona or Merna (Merrick) b 1912, Angus Warren b 1915, Amy (Dodd, Reg Dodd’s mother), Dave Warren b 1921, Fiona (Murray) and then Stan Warren b 1925.

Father Stan had been a drover. The family lived on Finnis Springs Station from her birth to about 1978, having been running the Station after Francis Dunbar Warren died in 1958. Joanne’s siblings are Darren, Leonie, Gregory, Justin and Clinton and half-sibs are Dorothy, Isabel, Wayne, Roger, Christopher and Francis.

Jodie (Joanne) recalls her childhood as a railway child from about 1978. They used to live near the tennis courts near the platform of the railway station in Marree. She recalls exciting evenings when the Ghan arrived bringing visitors who alighted for an hour while changing to the narrow gauge railway which proceeded to Alice Springs from Marree. Travellers liked to take photographs of the Aboriginal children. There was also the “mixed” train which brought rations and other goods for the rail workers themselves.
Also there in Marree at the time was Dave Warren, ganger, with his family. Dave’s son Terrence was particularly mentioned. Also in Marree was Reg Dodd, by that time train examiner. The gangers at Alberrie were very generous to Stan’s family. Stan had friends and relations all the way up the line.

The family moved to Stirling North then Port Augusta where Stan worked as a train cleaner for many years until he retired in the 1990s. Jodie and her two elder sisters were on the centenary Ghan train from Stirling North all the way to Marree in 1982.

Jodie is of the view that life was less hard for Arabana rail workers and their families than it had been for other Arabana or other Aboriginal Australians.
Kyle is a grandson of Reg Dodd (Arabana Elder), being a son of Jackie, Reg's daughter and Alan Dadleh, boilermaker/welder. He has a brother Courtley, who works at Leigh Creek Coal Mine, and has been the apprentice of his own father as a boilermaker/metal fabricator. His paternal grandparents are Ronnie (who identifies as Afghan) and Sue Dadleh,

He is graduate of Trinity Grammar, Melbourne, which city is now his home. He also obtained a scholarship from Trinity College to undertake his tertiary education.

Kyle was brought up at Leigh Creek but spent most holidays at Marree. He was also at Alberrie Creek siding and recalls the Ghan coming through, with all the children waving from trackside. He has been told of the first diesel which he thought came through in 1954. Leigh Creek itself, the township, was moved six kilometres south when the mine expanded.

Kyle recalls fossicking beside and near the old train line. The track bed was raised and is still visible most of the way along the old Ghan line. There were water tanks at regular intervals, some still in evidence. There is evidence of old beaches and sea and lake floor. Fossilised ripples are tilted, showing ancient earth movements.
He used to find old coins, medicine bottles and other types of bottle. There were ancient fireplaces and fossil worms in petrified wood. There were many artefacts and bones to be found.

Marree, he recalls, was split into two sections, the “white” and “Afghan/Aboriginal” sides.

Kyle had a bit part in a movie, “Serenades”, released in 2001, playing an “Afghan boy”. This film was made in the same area as “Rabbit-Proof Fence”.

Nowadays he works in commercial leasing and property management and sales. He was a political candidate in 2010 for the Liberal Party.

His big interest is photography and he has a number of pictures though Red Bubble website. He has a number of photographs of family and is aware of many more.
APPENDIX 2: ARABANA RAIL WORKERS NAMES:

Confirmed Arabana Railway Workers (National Australian Archive and SRSA, GRG52/1):

(* means spoken to for this work)

*Amos, Dennis
Amos, James
Amos, Mark

*Barnes, Dudley
Barnes, Robert
Buzzacott, Allan
Buzzacott, Hector
Buzzacott, Henry Malcolm
Buzzacott, Kenneth

*Buzzacott, Kevin
Buzzacott, Peter
Buzzacott, Thomas
Buzzacott, Trevor
Dodd, Arnold
Dodd, Bruce Allan
Dodd, Desmond

Dodd, Don
Dodd, Joy
Dodd, Kenny
Dodd, Lennie

*Dodd, Lionel Richard

*Dodd, Martha

Dodd, Mervyn

Dodd, Percy (Percival Richard)

Dodd, Richard Donald

*Dodd, Reginald

Dodd, Ronnie

Gepp, Bob

Gepp, Dudley (AKA Jepp, Dudley)

Gepp, George

Harris, Harold (junior, b 1947)

Harris, Harold (senior, b 1925)

Hodson, Edna Marie

Hodgson, John

Hull, David (aka Milera Kevin)

Hull, Glen

Hull, Roy

*Hull-Stuart, Marilyn

Kite, Esther

Stewart, Henry

Stewart, Joy

Stewart, Sydney
Strangways, Benjamin
Strangway, Brian William
Strangways, Cyril William
Strangways, Douglas
Strangways, Henry (Wapili)
Strangways, Herbert
Strangways, Leon Cyril
Strangways Leonard
*Strangways, Sydney
*Strangways, Wilfred David
Stuart, Allan James
*Stuart, Dean
Stuart, Laurie
Stuart, Lawrence
Stuart, Lenard
Stuart, Locky
Stuart, Malcolm Elwyn
Stuart, Robert Anthony
*Tanner, Paul
Thompson, Pauline
Warren, Arnold Ben
Warren, Arthur
Warren, Benjamin Russell
*Warren, Clarrie (Clary)
Warren, Clifford Gordon
Warren, David
Warren, Frank
Warren, Gordon
Warren, James
Warren, Jennifer
Warren, Keith
Warren, Lance
Warren, Margaret
Warren, Francis Maxwell
Warren, Roger
Warren, Ros
*Warren, Ross
Warren, Stan
Warren, Trevor James
*Watts, Martha

It is certain there were many more where records are just not adequate to identify them.
APPENDIX 3: Letter from South Australian Government:

Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation

Department of State Development

5/11/2015

Dear Mike

Further to our email exchange, I am writing to provide additional information regarding access decisions made regarding restricted Aboriginal Affairs records held at State Records of South Australia, particularly as this relates to your research on the Arabana Aboriginal people and the Ghan.

As you are aware, Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation, Department of State Development (DSD-AAR) has responsibility for determining access to its predecessors’ records. Decisions are made according to the sensitivity of the material, the connection of the applicant to persons about whom information is held, and assessments of legal professional privilege and relevance. Given the nature of some of the information contained within these files, particularly as this relates to individuals, DSD-AAR takes a reasonably conservative approach to granting access to restricted documents. This includes our approach to files within the series you requested, namely GRG 52/1 and GRS 6624/1.

Aside from relevance, which I will address below, the most common reason for declining access to files or redacting certain sections is that the information is of a
personal nature, relating to individuals or families. The type of sensitive personal information ranges from documents relating to the parentage of Aboriginal children, alleged criminal activity and health and family matters.

Additionally, in some cases, researchers are denied access to certain files based on them being considered not relevant to the research topic. These decisions are only made after a thorough assessment of the entire content of a file and, for less sensitive material, a broad interpretation of the research topic. As DSD-AAR appreciates that decisions to prevent access to certain records can be frustrating, more detail is now being included in the assessment determination to avoid relevant material being overlooked, as well as approval being granted for files assessed as being ‘of questionable relevance’.

Should you require any further assistance, please don’t hesitate to contact me or my colleague Tom Rich (08 8226 8940 or tom.rich@sa.gov.au).

Regards

Tess

Tess Mitsoulis

Records & FOI Officer

Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation

Department of State Development
APPENDIX 4: DOCUMENTATION SHOWING PAYMENT OF BASIC WAGE OR
ABOVE TO ARABANA WORKING ON GHAN: Information from Commonwealth

Railway personnel files in National Archives of Australia, Chester Hill:

Ah Chee, Geoffrey Gilbert, fettler, pay rate 21/2/1967 $36.40 [basic wage $36.55] (non-
Arabana)

Ah Chee, Phillip Charles, slinger, stores labourer, 16/3/1973 pay rate $57.90 per week
[basic wage $51.50]; trucker, 30/10/1973 pay rate $69.40 per week [basic wage
$60.10]; adult helper 15/3/1977 pay rate $117.70 per week [basic wage $100.70]

Bejah, Y E, female stores assistant at Cook (non-Arabana)

Buzzacott, Allan, fettler, pay rate 16/5/1964 14 pounds and 15 shillings and 2 pence per
week [basic wage 14 pounds and 8 shillings]; 29/11/1968 pay rate $43.82 per week [basic
wage $38.90]; pay rate at time of death $57.60 per week [basic wage $46.40]; died while
still employed 31/12/1971 aged 61 years.

Buzzacott, Hector, fettler; pay rate 9/12/1958: 13 pounds and 15 shillings per week [basic
wage 13 pounds and 1 shilling]. 3/1/1961 pay rate 14 pounds and 15 shillings [basic wage
14 pounds and 8 shillings]. 8/3/1963 pay rate 15 pounds 10 shillings and 6 pence [basic
wage 14 pounds 8 shillings]

Buzzacott, Henry Malcolm, fettler, 15/3/1972, pay rate $53.10 per week [basic wage
$51.50]

Buzzacott, Peter, fettler, 10/11/1970 pay rate $44.80 per week [basic wage $42.40]

Buzzacott, Thomas, no further information

Buzzacott, Trevor, boilermaker, pay rate 3/3/1972 $72.20 per week [basic wage $46.40];
6/3/1973 pay rate $82.40 per week [basic wage $51.50]

Dadleh, David John, no further information except name
Dadleh, Gerald, 53/3/1969 $41.42 per week {basic wage $38.90} (non-Arabana)

Dodd, Bruce Allan, fettler, machineman class 1, machine foreman.

Dodd, Desmond, fettler, ganger, pay rate 24/11/1974 $70.40 {basic wage 68.10}

Dodd, Lionel Richard, junior fettler, junior trainee engineman, trades helper pay rate
30/1/1975 $30.75 per week as junior {basic wage $76.10}; adult wages not shown.

Dodd, Nelson Leon, fettler, pay rate 11/2/1971: $48.09 per week {basic wage $46.40} (born Point McLeay)

Dodd, Percy, fettler, ganger, died 29/5/1978 aged 52; pay rate 25/11/1966 $41.22 per week
{basic wage $36.55}; 25/3/1968 $42.77 {basic wage 37.55}.

Dodd, Richard Donald (known as Donald), fettler, 19/8/1974 pay rate $73.45 per week
plus allowances {basic wage $68.10}; fettler 27/2/1975 pay rate $104.30 per week {basic
wage $76.10}; fettler 12/2/1977 pay rate $136.20 per week {basic wage $100.70}

Dodd, Simon, fettler, pay rate 24/1/1969: $40.67 per week {basic wage $38.90} (born Point
McLeay)

Dunning, Desmond Alfred, senior roadmaster (non-Indigenous)

Gepp, George, trades helper, pay rate 22/9/1971 $48.00 per week {basic wage $46.40}

Gepp, Robert, fettler, earlier trans-shipping assistant, pay rate 5/1/1970 $43.88 {basic wage
$42.40}.

Jepp, (or Gepp) Dudley, described as “full blood abo” on recruitment form, fettler, pay rate
in 1957 unable to be distinguished; 13/1/1959 13 pounds and 15 shillings per week {basic
wage 13 pounds and 1 shilling, increased during 1959 to 13 pounds and 16 shillings};

Stewart, Douglas, fettler, also known as Robert Anthony Stuart (see below)

Strangway, Brian William, fettler, assistant thermit welder; pay rate as fettler 18/3/1977
$136.61 [basic wage $106.40]

Strangways, Benjamin, trades helper, no further information

Strangways, Cyril William, adult helper, pay rate as adult helper 19/6/1973 $53 per week [basic wage $60.10]; pay rate 18/2/1976 $102.70 per week [basic wage 88.20]

Strangways, Douglas, fettler, pay rate 30/10/1969 $43.20 per week [basic wage $38.90]; pay rate 19/2/1970 $43.75 per week [basic wage $42.40]

Strangways, Herbert, fettler 1945; labourer, plant operator, pay rate 17/1/1956 11 pounds and 7 shillings plus allowance 5 shillings and 6 pence for total of 11 pounds, 12 shillings and 6 pence per week [basic wage 12 pounds and 6 shillings]; pay rate 4/1/1965 16 pounds and 19 shillings per week [basic wage 15 pounds and 8 shillings; pay rate 15/9/1966 $43.70 per week [basic wage $40.80]

Strangways, Leon Cyril, labourer, also adult helper, trades helper. no further data.

Strangways, Leonard, fettler, 21/2/1961 pay rate 10 pounds and 15 shillings a week [basic wage 14 pounds and 8 shillings]; fettler 18/12/1964 pay rate 17 pounds, 4 shillings and 6 pence [basic wage 15 pounds and 8 shillings]; adult helper 15/3/1977 pay rate $117.70 [basic wage 100.70]

Strangways, Wilfred David, junior station assistant, rate of pay 25/3/1969 $22.80 per week aged 17 years; [adult basic wage $38.90]; 6/1/1970 pay rate $38.60 per week = basic wage minus 30 cents, but District Allowance was added which figure is not given but would take pay above basic wage. Fettler pay rate 21/7/1970 $45.39 per week [basic wage $42.40]; junior station assistant 22/4/1971 pay rate $46.10 per week [adult basic wage $46.40]; shunter pay rate 5/6/1973 $64.40 per week [basic wage 60.10]; fettler, concrete resleepering gang, 1974

Stuart, Allan James, ex-soldier, ex-Merchant Navy (?Arabana), trades helper, pay rate
5/10/1950 7 pounds and 3 shillings a week (basic wage 8 pounds and 2 shillings); shed cleaner 11/7/1951 pay rate 8 pounds and 19 shillings per week (basic wage 8 pounds and 2 shillings); trades helper 3/9/1969 pay rate $41.15 per week (basic wage $38.90); had also been cook in breakdown gang, lifter and train examiner by October 1970; pay rate 21/10/1970 $45.30 (basic wage $42.40).

Stuart, Lenard, junior, fettler, fettler, pay rate 23/3/1974 $78.66 per week (basic wage $60.10)

Stuart, Leslie, lifter, died on the job 12/3/1976, natural causes (non-Arabana; returned airman).

Stuart, Leslie Robert, lifter (second file)

Stuart, Locky, fettler, pay rate 30/1/1974 $80.82 per week (basic wage $60.10)

Stuart, Malcolm Elwyn, junior employee, trades helper, rail welding gang.

Stuart, Malcolm Elwyn, boilermaker welder; trainee engineman; pay rate increased on 27/6/1960 because of marriage to the basic wage 13 pounds, 13 shillings per week (basic wage for adult said to be 14 pounds and 8 shillings); 11/1/1961 increased because became adult to 15 pounds 2 shillings and 6 pence per week (second and third file)

Stuart, Robert Anthony, junior employee, station assistant, fettler, shunter; pay rate 24/2/1971 $31.72 per week (basic wage $46.40 for adult); 27/3/1971 pay rate $47.50 per week (basic wage $46.40); pay rate 30/9/1975 $110.02 per week (basic wage $82.90)

Warren, Arnold Ben, junior fettler, fettler, pay rate 13/3/1973 $62.18 per week (basic wage $51.50)

Warren, Benjamin Russell, fettler, shunter; pay rate 28/6/1975 $116.73 per week (basic wage $80.10); increased 11/11/1976 to $132.21 (basic wage $82.90). Later traffic shunter II, adult helper, yard gang; station hand.
Warren, Clifford Gordon, trades helper, later train examiner: pay rate 11/2/1970 $42.50 per week {basic wage $42.40}.

Warren, David, trades helper, fettler, acting ganger, ganger pay rate 13/9/1969 $54.75 per week {basic wage $38.90}; 13/7/1974 pay rate $118.40 per week {basic wage $68.10}; relieving roadmaster April/May 1975 then June onwards, pay rate $156.37 per week {basic wage $76.10}

Warren, Gordon, trades helper, 12/7/1971 pay rate $48.00 {basic wage $46.40}.

Warren, Trevor James, fettler, pay rate 26/3/1970 $45.08 per week {basic wage $42.50}
Appendix 5: Other Aboriginal Australian peoples directly upon the Ghan railway line track from Port Augusta to Alice Springs.

Nukunu, Ngadjuri, Barngarla, Kuyani and Adnyamathanha peoples were directly upon the line of the Old Ghan to the south, and Arrernte to the north. Although the Thesis is about the unique situation of the Arabana, the other Aboriginal Australian peoples also had involvement with the railways and the Old Ghan in particular. Moreover, some Aboriginal Australians whose traditional lands are not upon the Ghan line would have worked upon this line anyway. I have some names, unattributed which people they belonged to. These are from a report to The Aborigines’ Protection Board and dated 1/11/1962. Bear in mind this entity existed until 1963, even after Aboriginal Australians were able to vote (March 1962).

I highlight the Ghan stations. The other stations were upon the Trans-Australia or East-West Railway.

**Port Augusta:** Brady, Dick; Finlay, Frank; McKenzie, Malcolm (Adnyamathaha); Jackson, Neil.

73-Miles: Thomas, James (possibly Barngarla)


Wirrapappa: Bowman, Leo.

Barton: Sumner, John (probably Kaurna)

Ooldea: Wilson, Alban Daniel; Wilson, Clifford Tony.

Cook: Campbell, Rex Condha.
Reid: Wilton, Clarence Ray.

Beltana: Warren, Frank (Arabana)

Telford: Lennon, Stan.

Marree: apart from the Arabana workers (eight identified), there was Ley, Colin; Williams, William.

Wangianna: Two Arabana plus Bendissi, Neil; Argent, Joseph; Carter, James Joseph and Cromby, Dan.

Ilbunga: one Arabana man listed

I have also talked to a number of other non-Arabana people.

These are some of their stories as told to me.

Nukunu:

Record of Telephone Conversation with Darryl Thomas, Nukunu man, on 19th December 2016.

Darryl said he was born in 1949 and raised in Port Augusta. His grandfather Alexander Thomas worked on construction of the Ghan line (possibly the section between Oodnadatta and Alice Springs between 1926 and 1929). Grandfather was also a blacksmith upon the Commonwealth Railways. He told the family about his dismay when the other workers speared a large goanna with their crowbars. Father, a younger brother in his sibship, mainly worked upon the wharves, but Darryl recalls growing up to some extent in a railway house. Father was a carpenter’s assistant on the railway, building houses at the
camps. One Christmas, father and all his mates caught a Section Car home to spend time with families, but all were sacked thereafter. Father’s five older brothers, upon return from WW2, started on the wharves, so father went there too.

A cousin worked in Alice Springs as a Fitter in the Railway Workshops in Refrigeration for thirty years then spent the remainder of his working life at the Hospital.

Darryl himself left school and joined the Commonwealth Railways aged 15, in 1964, as a youth porter. He did leave, went to Western Australia with some shearers and became a shearer himself. He rejoined the Commonwealth Railways in 1970. When he initially joined, he was given the task of clearing along old fence lines, working with the crane crew and yard gang. He said they finished the job in a week, and the boss said he had expected them to take a month; he was working too fast!

He worked in the Workshops. He did some office work and was also a fitter’s assistant. He was up in Marree, the change of gauge station, quite a bit and knows some of the Arabana people I met and some who have died. The cranes for the piggyback freezer carriages not infrequently broke down and he helped the staff at Marree fix them.

He mentioned Reg Dodd, nickname “Cheese” because of his wide smile. He said many Arabana worked upon the Ghan line because it was “their way of life”. They were there (that is, it was their country). They worked as everything from settlers to shunters to station masters.
He became a train driver in 1973 and was Assistant Driver on the Ghan and on the Indian Pacific. He was Assistant Driver with the Queen’s Silver Jubilee Train in 1977 (a great honour). He was due to take his final test when Australian National Railways was privatised in 1978 and he left. He had been based in Coober Pedy at the time, as the new Ghan line expanded north towards Alice Springs from Tarcoola.

One anecdote struck him as we talked. He was based then out at Tarcoola and there had been a derailment at Wilgena, west of Tarcoola itself. Men had been working nineteen hour shifts and came back to Tarcoola on Christmas Eve, very thirsty. The publican closed the pub. The local policeman came and said open up or I shall and serve all the drinks free. The publican opened the pub up.

He left for family reasons, having enjoyed the actual work and camaraderie of the Railways. His two children had been born and he wanted to spend more time with them. Privatisation did reduce the “family atmosphere”. The Roster Clerk told his wife that Darryl was being moved to Alice Springs. He was out at Tarcoola at the time, eating Spam for Christmas dinner. Men with three day tucker boxes were being sent home but not him.

Darryl then moved to work at the Powerhouse where he stayed for the rest of his working life.
Email dated 15/12/2016: Dr Jared Thomas: Nukunu/Ngarudjuri

"I don't know if anything is documented about the impact of the Ghan on Nukunu people but the impact can be considered in the greater context of colonialization and the historical and continued effects of industry on Nukunu.

Moving through Saltia up toward Hawker, the line traverses Nukunu country and the 'Yapala', the track through which groups from other languages entered and travelled through Nukunu country including Pt Augusta.

The rail track passes just by my Great Great Grandmother's birth site at Saltia and the homestead was built near this site too. It was a place that offered access to water.

Eucalyptus albens took a beating for posts and building timber. I'm not sure how it was used in relation to the Ghan. However, the Ghan was steam driven from 1929-51 so water holes, and Nukunu access to them, would have been diminished. The negative impact on esteem is the thing that comes to mind in regards to restricted access to water/ceremonial/significant sites.

I know of other places where the railways sucked up water holes, not on the Ghan line, that are important to us, near ceremonial areas etc.

The use of wood for railway sleepers and fuel would have effected food sources etc.
The establishment of transport routes, like pastoralism, would have been another factor in moving Nukunu off country.

In later times of course, Nukunu people became employed in the Railways. Adnyamathanha seemed to be particularly insistent on encouraging people to take the best of European culture while retaining Aboriginal culture. At some point, probably very on, a particular degree of resistance to industry would have seemed futile. This can best be understood in the context of early massacres relating to land clearing etc”.

Barngarla:

Harold Dare has been nominated as a Barngarla railway worker but was unfortunately at a funeral in Adelaide while I was in Port Augusta to interview.

Kuyani and Adnyamathanha:

Owen Brady was a checker of goods at Marree, and later became a station assistant then a shunter. Later in life he became an Aboriginal Liaison Officer.

Terry Coulthard told me on the telephone that he and his comrades, as children or young people, used to jump the train leaving Port Augusta and travel without tickets on the Old Ghan to get to Copley or near enough where they would alight. If the ticketmaster came by on the train, they would cling to the outside until he had gone. The train travelled so slowly it was easy to run alongside and get on. He would be able to get back to Port Augusta the same way. He did not work upon the railways himself.
Cliff Coulthard was a fettler at Parachilna. When I spoke to him, however, he was more excited by the recent discovery of an Adnyamathanha habitation site going back 49,000 years.

Ken Mackenzie was a fettler (Gale, Fay, 1982, p 116).

Arnold Wilton, dob 1/1/1952, was interviewed in Port Augusta on 23rd February 2017. His parents were Ted Wilton and Eva, nee Driver. He stated that he was born at Hawker, his mother coming by donkey cart from Nepabunna, to Copley then catching the Ghan down to the nearest hospital. After completing schooling he worked on various pastoral stations before coming to Port Augusta where he joined the railways. He was on the yard gang, then became a slinger’s assistant then acting slinger. While he was doing this, and his cousin George Wilton was operating the crane, he had a terrible accident whereby his left forefinger was completely ripped off. He was just aged 21. After recuperating he again worked for the railways for a further five years in the foundry and with the flash butt welding team. He would catch the Marree Mixed back to Copley on Fridays and come back on the following Wednesday. He thinks that many people living in Copley suffered diseases such as lung cancer from the coal trains coming from Leigh Creek.
TIMELINE:

Dates chosen for Timelines reveal the predilections of the chooser. Even the idea of linear time is not the only construct: I may cite an argument about two ideas of Stephen Jay Gould’s “Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle” (1987) for one. I let the reader work out my own views and prejudices from what is included and what is left out. I seek to have Ghan railway history woven into the timeline. Items in bold are directly about Arabana.

**Time immemorial** - Arabana inhabit the Western Kati Thanda/Lake Eyre region

- Arabana around Kati Thanda according to archaeologists (Mulvaney and Kamminga, 1999)

- Macassan traders start visiting Northern Australia (Isaacs, 1980, esp. pp262-276)

- Sydney Cove settled by Europeans

- Pemulwuy, Eora people, resistance fighter, in Sydney area (Willmot, 1987)

- slavery abolished in British Empire (Abolition of the Slave Trade Act)

- first commercial railway ran between Darlington and Stockton, Manchester, England (Ellis, 1976)

- slavery abolished in England (British Slavery Abolition Act, 1834)

- South Australia officially settled by Europeans (Taylor 2002)

- Edward Eyre sighted Lake Eyre (Eyre’s Journals)
1849 - convict transportation abolished to Australia (except Western Australia where it continued to 1868) {Chambers Encyclopaedia, 1895}

1856 - Joseph Herrgott “discovered” mound spring named after him (Babbage’s Journals)

1857 - “Indian Mutiny” – lack of railways contributed to reverses for British (Sharma, 2010)

1858 or 1859 - smallpox epidemic swept Arabana (Kimber 1996)

1861-5 - American Civil War – the first “railway war” (Amsler, 2004)

1863 - Strangways sheep station established on Arabana land

1864 - Samuel Stuckey, camel procurer, exculpated for murder of Dieri man (neighbours of Arabana)

1870-1872 - Overland Telegraph Line built, including through Arabana land (Thomson, 1999)

1884 - Central Australia Railway arrived in Hergott Springs (Marree) (Fuller 1975)

1891 - Railway extended to Oodnadatta (Fuller, 1975)

1894-7 - Tjandamara, Bunuba people, resistance fighter in the Kimberley

1901 - Australian colonies united to form Commonwealth of Australia Federation – white Australia policy established by legislation
1911 - Commonwealth takes control of Northern Territory

1914-1918 - First World War

1914 onwards - Arabana children being removed under legislation

1918 - "Spanish Flu" pandemic swept through Arabana, killing probably fifty per cent

1920 - Dr Herbert Basedow Third Medical Relief Expedition examined Arabana

1922 - Finnis Springs Station re-established by Francis Dunbar Warren; about 150 Arabana lived there

1924 - Australian Aborigines Progressive Association

1926 - Commonwealth assumed control of railway

1928 - Coniston (Northern Territory) massacre

1929 - Railway extended to Alice Springs

1938 - National Day of Mourning on Australia Day; publication of Capricornia

1939 - Finnis Springs UAM Mission established

1939-1945 - Second World War

1940s - Henry Wapili Strangways, Alan Buzzacott and other Arabana people employed by Commonwealth Railways

1945 - United Nations formed.

1946 - Pilbara Aboriginal pastoral workers strike

1947 - India gained independence
1954 - Atomic tests at Maralinga – radioactive clouds drifted over Arabana (Reg Dodd, pers. com. 2010)

1956 - beginning of NADOC (National Aborigines Day Observance Committee)


1960 - Reg Dodd, Arabana, employed as contract labour and, from 1966, train examiner through to 1986

1962 - voting rights for Aboriginal people in Australia

1963 - assimilation policy articulated by Commonwealth (Wells, in Austin and Parry, 1998)

July 1964 - Donald Campbell set land speed record in Bluebird on Lake Eyre’s dry salt bed

1965 - Charles Perkins, Arrernte people, first Aboriginal university graduate

- Commonwealth Arbitration and Conciliation Commission: Transcript of Case 830 of 1965: “Equal Wage Case”

1966 - Wave Hill walk-off

1967 - referendum allowed Aboriginal people to be counted in Australian census for first time and Federal Parliament to make laws regarding Aboriginal Australians
1971 - Neville Bonner, Jagera people, first Aboriginal Member of Federal Parliament

1972 - Aboriginal Tent Embassy established in Canberra

1974 - NADOC composed entirely of Aboriginal Australians for first time

1983 - Old Ghan route closed

1983 - first Aboriginal medical graduate, Helen Milroy, Palyku people from the Pilbara (pers. com. 1998)

1987 - last train left Marree

1992 - Mabo High Court decision

1990s - Native Title claims lodged for Arabana; Arabunna Aboriginal Tours established; Ularaka Arabunna Association established

2010 - Lake Eyre floods

2011 - Helicopter crash with two ABC journalists and pilot killed near Cooper’s Creek; Lake Eyre Yacht Club refused permission by Arabana to sail on Lake (pers com, Marree 2011)

2012 - 22nd May: Native Title granted.

2013 - Leasehold over old Finniss Springs Station.
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