

**‘PLENTY OF OPAL BACK THEN: OPAL
PULKAH’: A HISTORY OF ABORIGINAL
ENGAGEMENT IN THE NORTHERN SOUTH
AUSTRALIAN OPAL INDUSTRY c.1940–1980**

Mike Harding, BA, BA (Hons) (Anthropology), BA (Hons) (History)



Jacqueline Hick: *Opal Miners*, c.1965, oil on composite board, 59.5 cm x 114 cm; University of Adelaide Visual Art Collection; image used with permission from Jacqueline Hick's family; photograph by Peter Hoare.

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of
Adelaide**

August 2016

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
DECLARATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
ABBREVIATIONS	ix
CONVERSIONS	x
LIST OF FIGURES AND MAPS	xi
MAPS	xii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: ABORIGINAL–SETTLER RELATIONS BEFORE THE OPAL ERA	30
CHAPTER TWO: THE EMERGENCE OF THE OPAL INDUSTRY AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS	55
CHAPTER THREE: ABORIGINAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE OPAL INDUSTRY	79
CHAPTER FOUR: THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF ABORIGINAL WORK IN THE OPAL INDUSTRY	101
CHAPTER FIVE: CULTURAL CONTINUITY AND THE ABORIGINAL OPAL COMMUNITY	124
CHAPTER SIX: THE RESPONSE OF GOVERNMENT	151
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE DEMISE OF ABORIGINAL ENGAGEMENT	172
CONCLUSION	187
APPENDIX ONE: PEOPLE INTERVIEWED DATE AND LOCATION	193
APPENDIX TWO: ETHICS CLEARANCE COVER LETTER 2012	196

APPENDIX THREE: ETHICS CLEARANCE 2012	197
APPENDIX FOUR: ETHICS CLEARANCE 2015	198
BIBLIOGRAPHY	199

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the role of Aboriginal people in the northern South Australian opal industry, in particular the Andamooka and Coober Pedy fields, from 1940 to 1980, and the distinctive nature of their participation. It explores an aspect of Aboriginal engagement in the economy that has not been examined in a scholarly way, making considerable use of oral testimony. This thesis also highlights the agency of Aboriginal people, who participated in the industry while also maintaining cultural continuity in an era when the official government policy of ‘assimilation’ was in full swing. The small-scale and informal nature of the opal industry attracted Aboriginal people because of the level of workplace autonomy it provided, and how it accommodated important economic, social and cultural practices.

The opal industry shared a number of similarities with the northern pastoral industry, a large employer of Aboriginal labour which also accommodated significant cultural practices and so provides a useful comparative framework throughout the thesis. In addition, there was considerable movement of Aboriginal people between both industries. Using the ‘hybrid economy’ model, which demonstrates how Aboriginal people in remote Australia participated in the market, public and traditional customary economies, this thesis argues that Aboriginal people were able to participate actively in the South Australian opal industry in a variety of meaningful and skilled occupations, often in trying conditions that required patience and determination. At the same time Aboriginal opal miners vigorously maintained important aspects of their traditional economic, social and cultural lives, which the industry readily accommodated.

Recognising the significant engagement of Aboriginal people in the opal industry and an emerging Aboriginal opal community, the state government intervened in several ways to assist. These activities included assisting Aboriginal people attain fair prices for their opal, and some basic accommodation and welfare services. The level of this assistance varied considerably on both major opal fields, and this thesis examines the extent of this and longer term implications. The opal industry provided many Aboriginal people with a regular source of income for many years, but by the 1970s, their engagement began to dwindle. A number of factors contributed to this, including declining levels of opal production, new technology driven by increasing fuel prices and the extension of unemployment benefits to Aboriginal people in remote areas.

DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide, and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

Signed _____

Date _____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank all the oral history participants who so generously shared their time, stories and knowledge with me. As these people are too numerous to individually thank on this page, a list of everyone who met with me for recorded interviews appears in Appendix One.

I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor Robert Foster for his insightful comments, support, and patience. My co-supervisor Paul Sendziuk was also very encouraging and provided valuable advice. Postgraduate Coordinator Claire Walker was also very supportive and encouraging over the journey. I appreciate the grant of an Australian Postgraduate Award, and the support of various administrative staff in the former School of History and Politics and the current School of Humanities. I also acknowledge and thank Mary-Jo O'Rourke, an Accredited Editor with the Institute of Professional Editors, for proof reading and editing this thesis. Anna Rivett of University Collections helped me access the cover image. I thank the family of the artist Jacqueline Hicks and photographer Peter Hoare for allowing me to use this image.

A special vote of thanks goes to a wonderful band of fellow postgraduate students with whom I have shared an office with over the last four years: Alexia Moncrieff, Amy Morrison, Jill MacKenzie, Adele Lausberg and Paul Relf-Christopher.

Pam Aagaard, Peter Waring and Bruno Rescignano at the Department of State Development (DSD) were most helpful in advising me on mining information, publications and maps. Numerous staff at the State Records of South Australia cheerfully assisted me accessing files there, and particular thanks go to Andrew Wilson and Jay Morrison. I also thank the staff at the Division of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation of DSD, who processed numerous requests to view Aboriginal Affairs files which have access restrictions. Staff at the Lutheran Archives and the South Australian Museum also offered useful advice and support.

A number of other people in Adelaide provided assistance and advice throughout my candidature. These included Bernard Haseloff of CartoTech Services for mapping, Tom

Gara, Andrew Collett, Tim Wooley, Jan Scott, Don Grund, Petter Naessan, Skye Krichauff and Amanda Nettelbeck. Jonathon Nicholls (interviewer) and Rose Lester (interpreter) from the Anangu Lands Paper Tracker radio program in Adelaide allowed me to be interviewed live in order to publicise my research to the Aboriginal community. Kahliah Alice from the South Australian Native Title Services also helped promote my research, by way of an article in its quarterly *Aboriginal Way* publication. My thanks also to Peter Kolomitsev at the State Library of South Australia and Andrew Moncrieff at Derringers Music in Forestville for their advice on using digital recording equipment.

In Coober Pedy, friends George and Ali Laslett were great company, providing me with accommodation and a base to work from in their fantastic dug-out dwelling, and were a great source of information on the local Aboriginal community. Judy Underwood from the Coober Pedy Historical Society and Sonia Mazzone were also particularly helpful. I also appreciated interviewee George Cooley driving me around a number of the Coober opal fields. Without his guidance I would have been hopelessly lost in an extensive maze of mine shafts that are extremely hazardous.

Margot Duke and Peter Taubers were delightful hosts in Andamooka who provided considerable advice and allowed me to view their files of newspapers clippings and their extensive collection of opal publications. Deb Allen was another very helpful source of information there, as was Rob Hancock, who provided me with an electronic version of some local archival material and information.

My gratitude also goes to a number of people in Port Augusta. Staff at the University of Adelaide campus in Port Augusta, Kerry Steer, Rolf Geerling and Tanetta Cameron, provided access to office facilities and great accommodation. Gwen Crombie was also extremely helpful and supportive of my research. My thanks also go to Dwaylene Brown at Umeewarra Media for interviewing me and willingly publicising my research to the Port Augusta Aboriginal Community. Staff at the Pika Wiya Health Service and the Kokatha Aboriginal Corporation there also kindly allowed me to display a poster advising people about my research.

Particular thanks to several people on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands who I have known for many years, for their accommodation and advice: Yami Lester and Bronya Dineen at Wallatina, and members of the Ramzan family at Warabalina.

Finally, thanks to Nisha and family members who gracefully put up with not seeing me for extended periods of time in the final stages of my candidature in order for me to finalise my thesis.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAB	Aboriginal Affairs Board
AARD	Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation Division
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
ALT	Aboriginal Lands Trust
APA	Andamooka Progress Association
APB	Aborigines Protection Board
APY	Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
CPHS	Coober Pedy Historical Society
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
DCW	Department of Community Welfare
DME	Department of Mines and Energy
<i>DMERB</i>	<i>Department of Mines and Energy Report Book</i>
DMGG	Director of Mines and Government Geologist
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia
EWSD	Engineering and Water Supply Department
GRG	Government Record Group
GRS	Government Record Series
LA	Lutheran Archives
LRWE	Long Range Weapons Establishment
NAA	National Archives of Australia
PSPP	Precious Stones Prospecting Permit
RCBNTA	Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia
<i>SAGG</i>	<i>South Australian Government Gazette</i>
SAM	South Australian Museum
SANTS	South Australian Native Title Services
SAPD	South Australian Police Department
<i>SAPP</i>	<i>South Australian Parliamentary Papers</i>
SLSA	State Library of South Australia
SRSA	State Records of South Australia
WPA	Woomera Prohibited Area

CONVERSIONS

Before 1966 Australian currency was measured in Australian pounds (£), shillings (s) and pence (d). There were 12 pence in one shilling, and 20 shillings in one pound. When Australia changed to decimal currency in 1966, £1 was equal to 2 dollars (\$).

Australia used the imperial system of measurements until 1971 when the process of metrification began. Measurements are given in either imperial measures or metric measures, depending on the time they were made. Conversions are as follows:

Length

1 foot = 30.5 centimetres

1 mile = 1.61 kilometres

Area

1 square mile = 2.59 square kilometres

Weight

1 lb (pound) = 0.45 kilograms

1 oz (ounce) = 28.35 grams

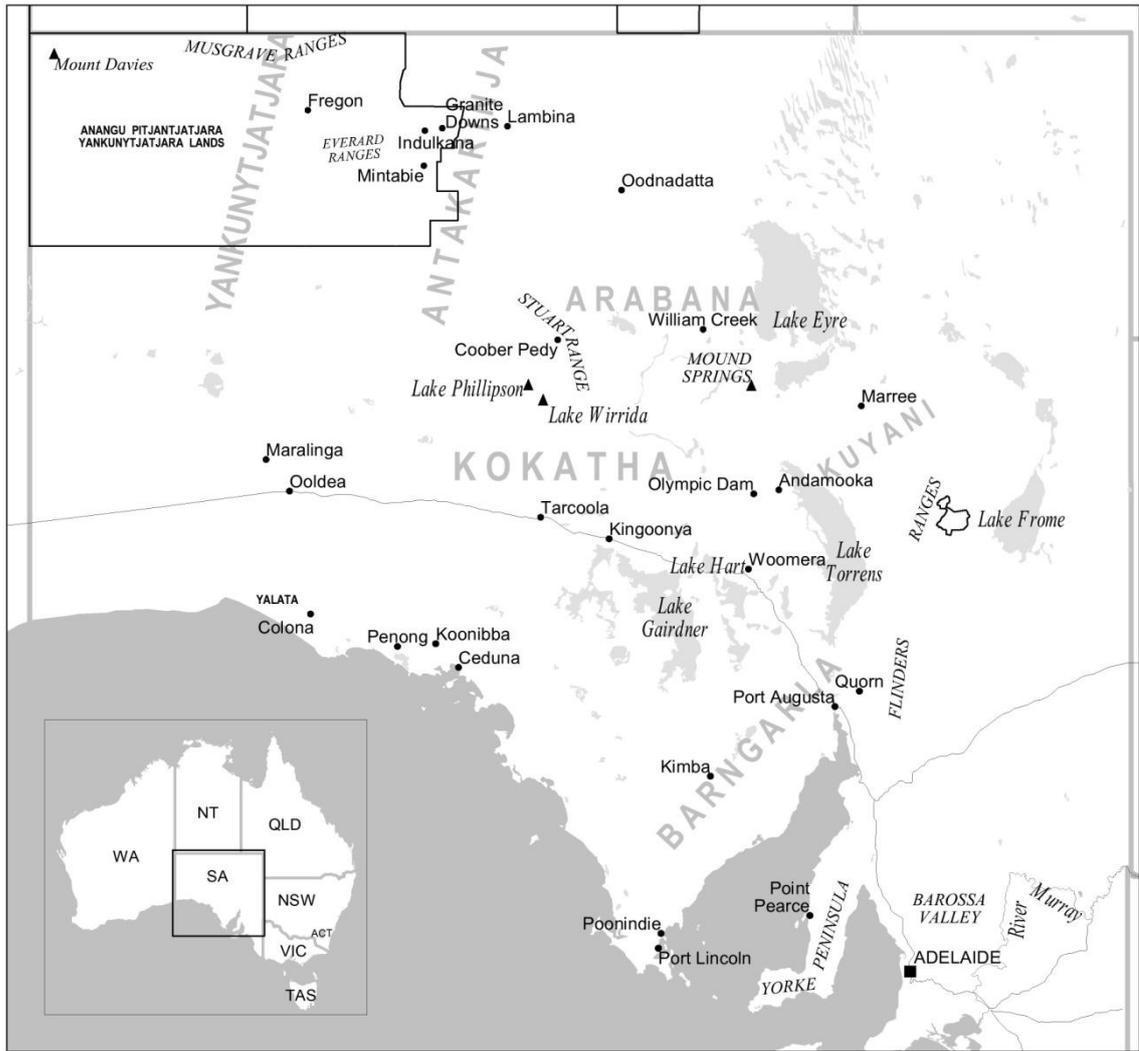
LIST OF FIGURES AND MAPS

FIGURES

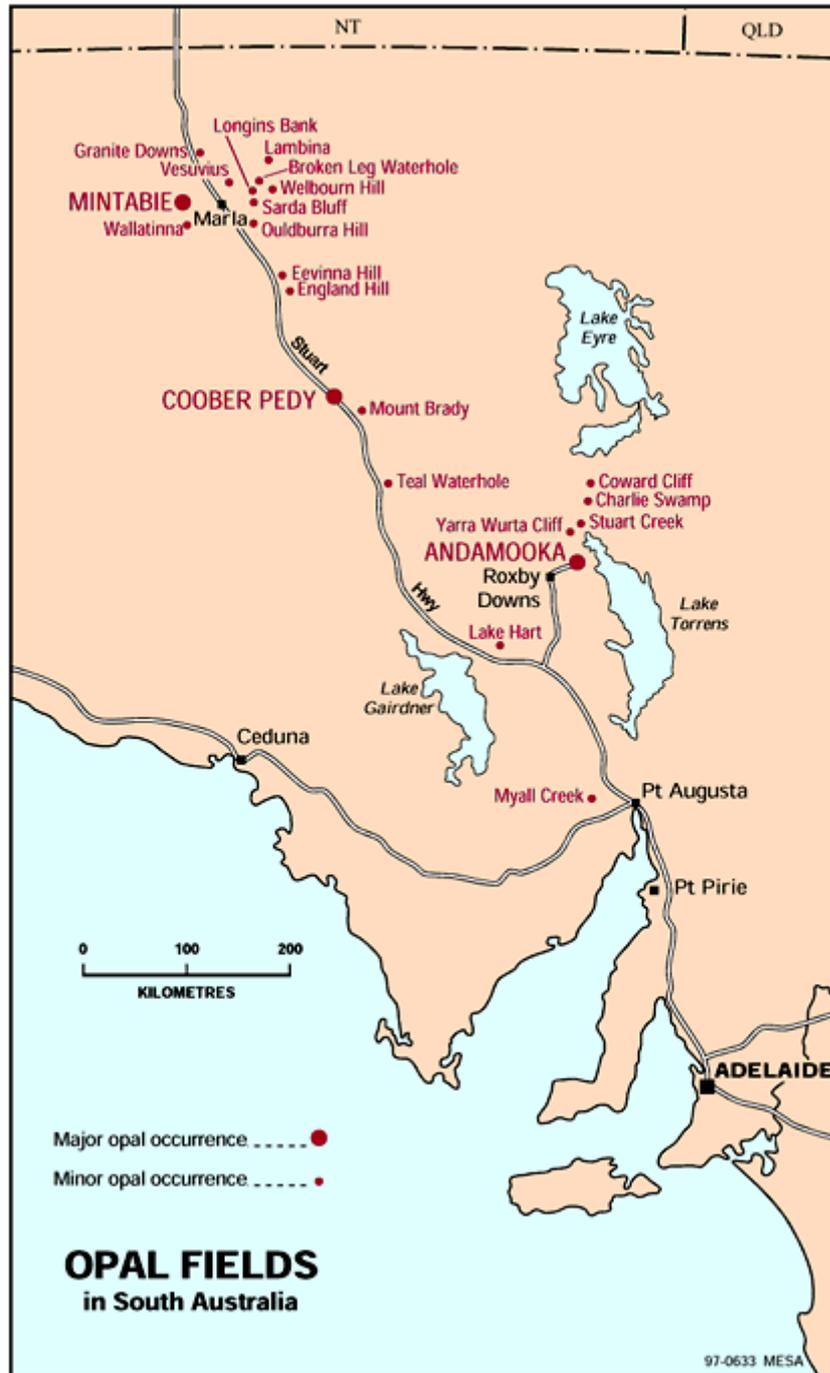
One: The Coober Pedy ‘Eleven Mile’ opal field	2
Two: Tottie and Charlie Bryant	64
Three: Noodlers at work on a rich dump at Flat Hill, 1960.....	104
Four: Checking the level in a bulldozer cut, 1970	112
Five: Opal dealer Don Field buying stones from Aboriginal people from Indulkana, Coober Pedy, 1963	156
Six: Aboriginal people showing opals to Don Busbridge, c.1962.....	159
Seven: Noodling Machine	177

MAPS

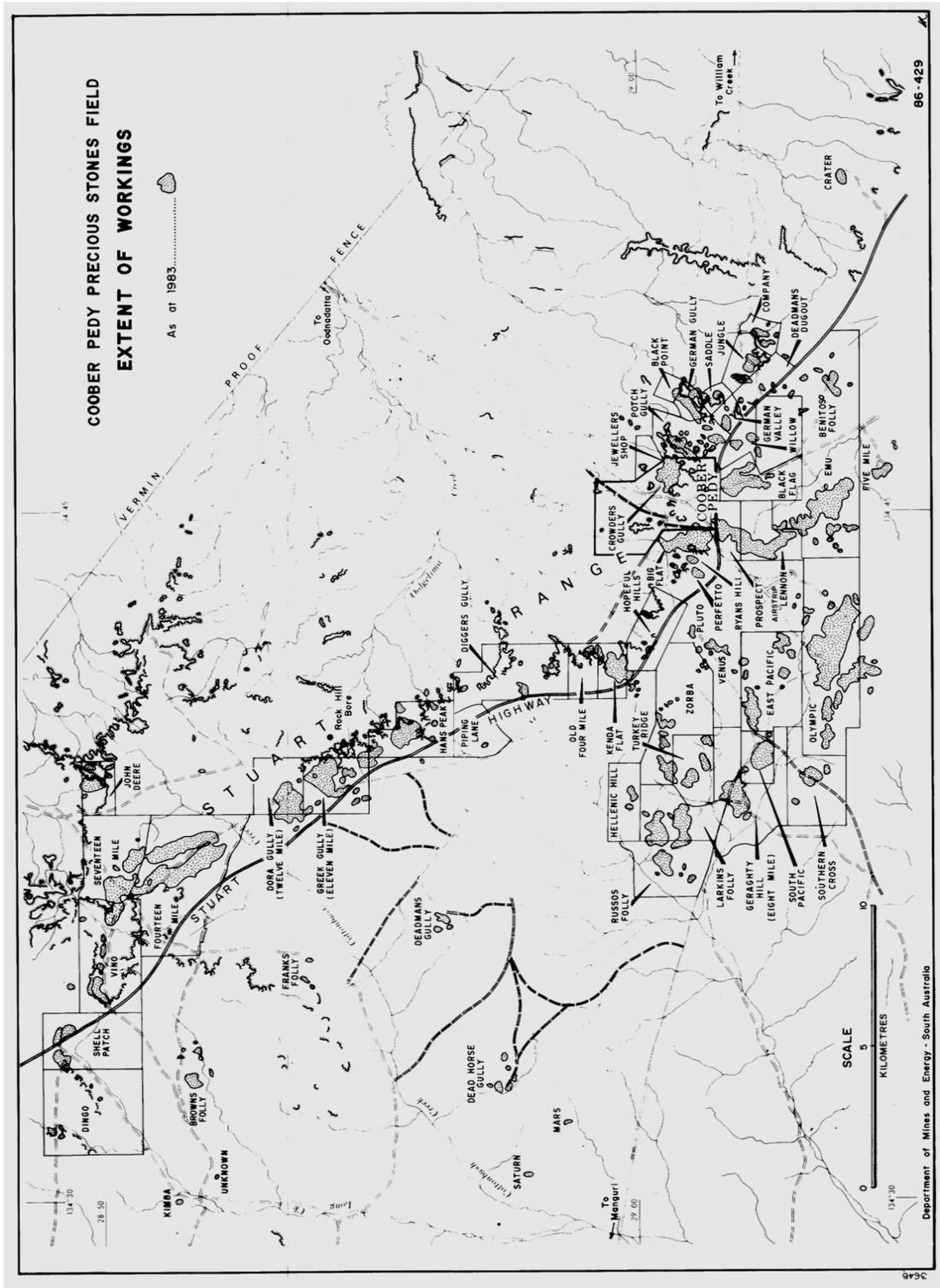
One: Principal places referred to in this thesis and location of Aboriginal groups in the Andamooka-Coober Pedy region	xii
Two: Opal fields in South Australia	xiii
Three: Coober Pedy precious stones field	xiv
Four: Andamooka precious stones field	xv
Five: Pastoral leases in the Andamooka–Coober Pedy region	xvi



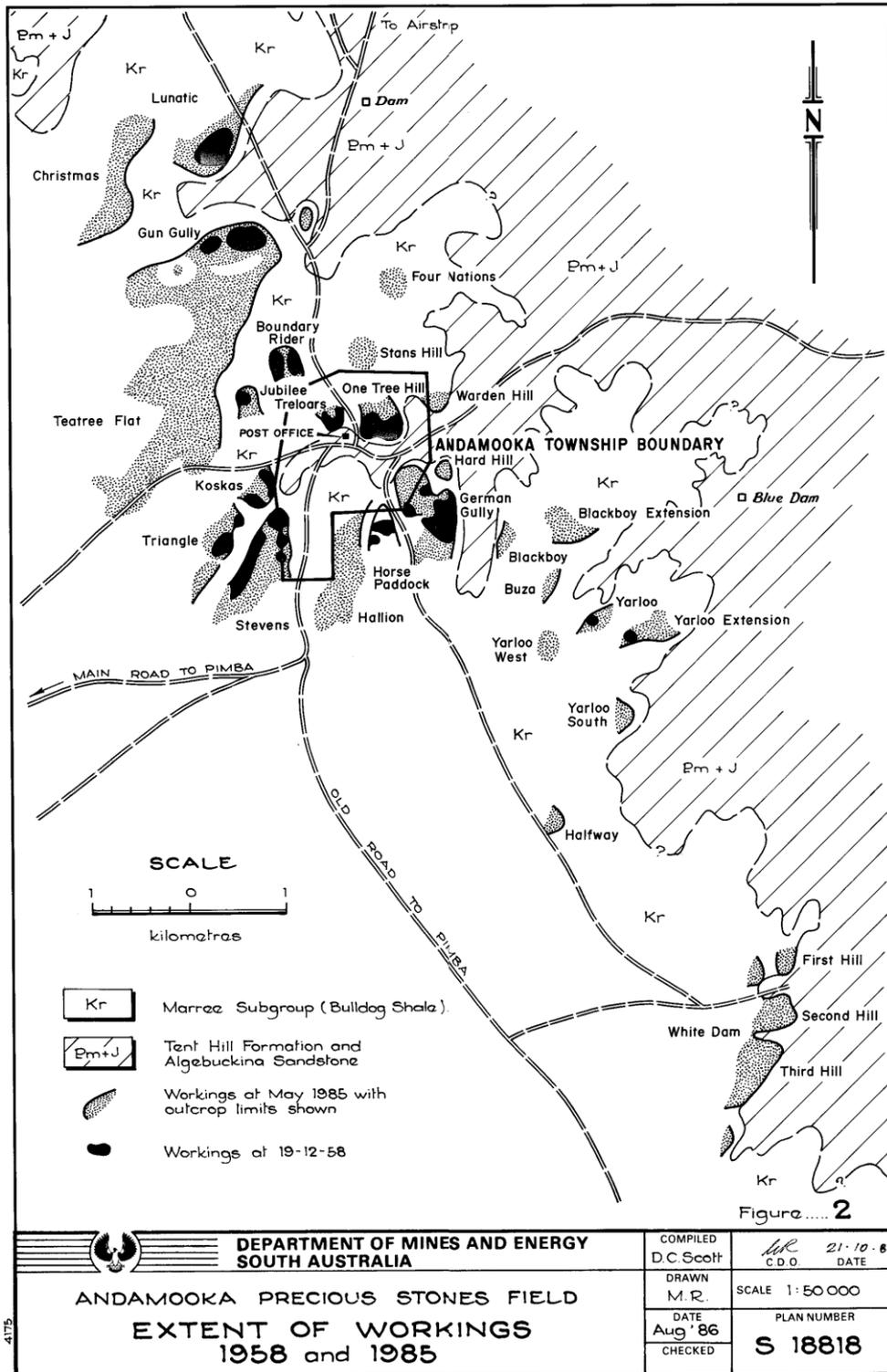
Map One: Principal places referred to in this thesis and location of Aboriginal groups in the Andamooka–Cooper Pedy Region. CartoTech Services.



Map Two: Opal fields in South Australia. Department of State Development, South Australia.



Map Three: Coober Pedy precious stones field. Department of State Development, South Australia.



Map Four: Andamooka precious stones field. Department of State Development, South Australia.



Map Five: Pastoral leases in the Andamooka–Cooper Pedy Region. CartoTech Services.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In 1959 filmmaker Charles Chauvel visited the opal fields at Coober Pedy and described Aboriginal people as “living with their dogs in the most dreadful hovels ... and trading the results of their scavenging of the mullock heaps ... to the mission store for their hand-outs of food”.¹ This was typical of a widespread view that Aboriginal people were merely ‘noodlers’ of opal, and reliant on hand outs.² But this view is incorrect. In this thesis I will argue that, contrary to the view that they were marginal or irrelevant to the opal industry, Aboriginal people were active agents, participating in a variety of meaningful employment activities in the industry which provided a reasonable income and a considerable degree of workplace autonomy, while also maintaining many of their customary economic, social and cultural practices. What evolved around the opal fields was a ‘hybrid economy’, similar to that which had developed in the northern pastoral industry. Both of these industries also shared a number of similarities which suited Aboriginal people. In response to the emergence of a significant Aboriginal population on the opal fields, which in other circumstances the government might have discouraged, it actually sought to encourage their participation in the industry, and this thesis examines its extent and effectiveness.

In exploring this question I will examine the history of Aboriginal engagement in the northern South Australian opal industry from the 1940s to 1980, highlighting its unique nature throughout this period. The two major opal mining centres of Andamooka and Coober Pedy in northern South Australia account for a significant percentage of the world’s total commercial production of this gemstone.³ However, little is known about

¹ Charles Chauvel and Elsa Chauvel, *Walkabout*, London: W.H. Allen, 1959, p.186.

² ‘Noodling’ is the “practice of sifting through mullock heaps for small pieces of precious opal inadvertently discarded by miners”. See R.S. Robertson and D.C. Scott, *Geology of the Coober Pedy Precious Stones Field: Results of Investigations, 1981–86*, Report of Investigations 56, Adelaide: Government Printer, 1990, p.9. Noodling is derived from the term ‘nodule’, which was used to describe the small egg-shaped opals found in Queensland, and is commonly used on Australian opal fields. See E.F. Murphy, *They Struck Opal! Tales of Men and Mines in the Heyday of Australian Opal*, Sydney: Associated General Publications, 1948, p.129. I demonstrate later in this thesis that Aboriginal people often earned good incomes from noodling.

³ There are a number of smaller opal fields, categorised as minor diggings, which have been worked sporadically and yielded little precious opal. These include Charlie Swamp, Yarra Wurta Cliff, Coward Cliff, Teal Hole, England Hill, Oulduburra Hill, Sarda Bluff, Longins Bank, Welbourne Hill, Broken Leg

the history of Aboriginal participation in this process. This time period was chosen because it coincides with the period when Aboriginal people began being attracted to the industry through to the end of their active presence several decades later. In exploring this history there are a number of questions that need to be addressed. Were Aboriginal people marginalised by the opal industry, or active agents able to participate meaningfully in a variety of employment activities? Were Aboriginal people able to maintain important traditional practices, cultural, social and economic, despite engagement in the opal industry? Was the state effective or otherwise in assisting Aboriginal opal seekers negotiate a fair and reasonable return for opal, to help maintain Aboriginal engagement in the industry, and to provide adequate accommodation and welfare services to emerging Aboriginal opal communities? And, finally, what were the factors that eventually led to Aboriginal people disengaging from the opal industry by the mid to late 1970s?



Figure One: The Coober Pedy ‘Eleven Mile’ opal field. Royal Automobile Association of South Australia.

Waterhole, Vesuvius, Lambina, Wallatina, Granite Downs, Lake Hart and Myall Creek. See L.C. Barnes, I.J. Townsend, R.S. Robertson and D.C. Scott, *Opal: South Australia’s Gemstone*, Handbook No.5, Revised Edition, Adelaide: Department of Mines and Energy, 1992, pp.64–6, 114–41.

Background and Context

Mining “forms an integral part of Australia’s economic, social and political history”.⁴

Gold discoveries in the nineteenth century transformed the Australian economy, making mining “the most important sector of the economy”. The names of prominent mining towns such as Ballarat, Bendigo, Broken Hill, Kalgoorlie and others became iconic and are as familiar to Australians as major capital cities.⁵ In his landmark publication *The Rush That Never Ended*, Geoffrey Blainey wrote that “perhaps in no other continent has European colonization been so affected” by the search for mineral wealth.⁶ In South Australia, mining had become a significant activity by the end of the first decade of colonial settlement, with minerals such as copper, silver and lead discovered in various locations. A considerable number of people were employed in South Australian mines by the end of the 1860s and, despite some later downturn, the industry provided the colony with a high level of growth in its first three decades.⁷ Although opal was first discovered in Queensland and New South Wales in the late nineteenth century, South Australia has become the leading commercial producer of this gemstone since its discovery at Coober Pedy in 1915.

The formation of opal is a complex process involving the conversion of silica into the gemstone over an extremely extensive period. From at least the first century AD it has been highly regarded for its colour and value, and the perception of bringing good fortune.⁸ Opal is found in a number of locations throughout the world, but Australian opal “has dominated world markets” because of its exceptional durability and quality.⁹ The importance of Australian opal was recognised as far back as 1924 when the pioneering Australian opal dealer T.C. Wollaston suggested that since the 1890s, “Australian opal has been the *only* opal on the world’s markets”.¹⁰

⁴ W.H. Richmond and P.C. Sharma, ‘Introduction’, in W.H. Richmond and P.C. Sharma (eds), *Mining and Australia*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983, p.1.

⁵ Richmond and Sharma, ‘Introduction’, pp.1, 4.

⁶ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended: A History of Australian Mining*, Fourth Edition, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993, p.2.

⁷ Nic Klaasen, *Sliding Rock: To Mine or Not to Mine*, Adelaide: Nic Klaasen, 1986, pp.7–16.

⁸ Barnes *et al.*, *Opal*, pp. 5–6, 13; Andrew Cody and Damian Cody, *The Opal Story: A Guidebook*, Melbourne: Andrew Cody and Damian Cody, 2008, p.11; Ion L. Idriess, *Opals and Sapphires: How to Work, Mine, Class, Cut, Polish, and Sell Them*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1967, pp.9–10.

⁹ I.J. Townsend, ‘Mintabie Opalfield Mining and Geology’, *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book* (henceforth *DMERB*), 90/73, November 1990, p.2.

¹⁰ T.C. Wollaston, *Opal: The Gem of the Never Never*, Adelaide: Limited Editions Reprint by Flinders Press, 1995, p.5 [originally published London: Thomas Murby, 1924]. Original emphasis.

The unique geological and physical conditions of the country many millions of years ago and the Tertiary-era weathering process have led to the formation of precious sedimentary-opal in a number of arid and semi-arid regions in Australia. All of the Australian opal fields lie within the area once covered by the vast inland sea, now a semi-desert region “which closely follow the limits of the Great Artesian Basin”. The area has little rainfall and high temperatures, providing the conditions necessary for opal formation, with seams of the gemstone predominantly occurring in beds of sandstone and clay.¹¹ In South Australia the major opal fields are located on land that is culturally significant to Aboriginal people.

A geologist’s report in 1908 claimed that a find of opal at Charlie Swamp in northern South Australia was “the first authentic find of anything really approaching the precious opal in this state”.¹² However, this did not lead to any prospecting or exploration, but opal discovered in the Stuart Range area in 1915, adjacent to the current town of Coober Pedy, was heralded as “probably the most important mineral discovery in South Australia for many years”.¹³ Opal mining has continued there ever since, although the industry has experienced low points and high points. While opal mining in Coober Pedy was relatively dormant in the 1940s, a major find of opal in 1945 by a local Aboriginal woman, Tottie Bryant, significantly reignited interest and activity there.¹⁴ Opal was discovered on Andamooka Station in 1930 and, although the initial finds were kept relatively secret, it soon attracted people to the region.¹⁵ Opal was also found at Mintabie in the 1920s, but due to its remoteness early mining activity was extremely intermittent. As it was not until the mid-1970s that significant mining began there, it falls outside the scope of this study.¹⁶ These fields remain active today

¹¹ John Colahan, *Australian Opal Safari*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1973, p.11; I.C.H. Croll, ‘The Opal Industry in Australia’, *Bureau of Mineral Resources, Geology and Geophysics Bulletin*, no.17, 1950, p.17. Beyond the Great Artesian Basin opal deposits were also reported in several Victorian locations, for example, Beechworth, Sunbury and near Gippsland, but were never worked. See Barrie O’Leary, *A Field Guide to Australia Opals*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1977, p.10. Small deposits of opal were also found near Coolgardie in Western Australia but there is no record of any commercial production. See Croll, *The Opal Industry*, p.10.

¹² H.Y.L.Brown, *Record of the Mines of South Australia*, Fourth Edition, Adelaide: Government Printer, 1908, p.360.

¹³ Len Cram, *A Journey with Colour: A History of South Australian Opal, 1840–2005*, Lightning Ridge: Len Cram, 2006, pp.15, 25.

¹⁴ Cram, *A Journey with Colour*, p.67. Tottie Bryant was also known as Tottie Kendall and Tottie Turner.

¹⁵ Cram, *A Journey with Colour*, p.239.

¹⁶ Townsend, ‘Mintabie Opalfield Geology’, p.1; Department of Mines and Energy, South Australia, *South Australia’s Opal*, Adelaide: State Publishing, 1990, p.28.

and contribute approximately seventy per cent of the world's opal production.¹⁷

According to one official report the estimated total value of opal production from the South Australia fields between 1916 and 1970 was \$204.3 million.¹⁸ Opal is now the official gemstone of both South Australia and Australia.¹⁹ It is also reputed to be one of Australia's "most recognisable icons, on par with kangaroos, koalas and Vegemite".²⁰

These major opal fields proved to be an attraction to Aboriginal people, who came from distant locations to live and work there. The Coober Pedy Aboriginal population was estimated at about 200 in the late 1930s and up to 400 in 1955.²¹ Anthropologist Isobel White, on the basis of field work in northern South Australia, believed 400 Aboriginal people were living in Coober Pedy in 1968, including many from distant locations, attracted by opal. White observed that there were opportunities in both Coober Pedy (and Andamooka) for Aboriginal people to earn reasonable incomes from opal mining, while enjoying the autonomy and absence of "the boss/employee relationship" found in most other forms of employment.²²

At Andamooka, one estimate suggested that there were up to 250 Aboriginal people making a living from opal in the late 1940s.²³ According to the *Andamooka Heritage Survey* conducted by Brasse and Sanders in 1984, it was estimated that Aboriginal people numbered about 100 in both 1958 and 1959.²⁴ However, another estimate in 1957 indicated that 300–400 Aboriginal people resided on the Andamooka fields

¹⁷ Department of Mines and Energy, South Australia, *South Australia's Opal*, Adelaide: State Publishing, 1990, p.16.

¹⁸ P.P. Crettendon, M.W. Flintoft, S.J. Ewen and D.C. Watkins, 'The Opal Industry in South Australia', *Mineral Resources Review SA for the Half-Year Ended 31 December 1979*, no.151, 1979, p.27.

¹⁹ Bernard O'Neil, *Above and Below: The South Australian Department of Mines and Energy 1944 to 1994*, Special Publication No.10, Adelaide: South Australian Department of Mines, 1995, p.538.

²⁰ Patrice F. Rey, 'Precious Opal: Millions of Years in the Making', in Angela Lush (ed.), *Opal*, Adelaide: South Australian Museum, 2015, p.53.

²¹ Kerry E. Medway, *Coober Pedy: Opal Wonderland of Australia*, Seventh Edition, Coober Pedy: Catacomb Church, 2005, p.13; Cram, *A Journey With Colour*, p.87.

²² Isobel White, 'The Aborigines of the North-West of South Australia: Their Present Conditions and Future Prospects', in J.W. Warburton (ed.), *The Aborigines of South Australia: Their Background and Future Prospects. Proceedings of a Conference held at University of Adelaide June 13–16, 1969*. Publication no.19, Department of Adult Education, University of Adelaide, 1969, pp.124–25.

²³ Peter Morton, *Fire Across the Desert: Woomera and the Anglo-Australian Joint Project 1946–1980*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1989, p.80.

²⁴ Lothar Brasse and Margaret Sanders, *Andamooka Heritage Survey*, Adelaide: Department of Environment and Planning, 1984, pp.7–8.

compared to a European presence of 70–80 persons.²⁵ During the mid-1950s the South Australian Aborigines Protection Board (APB) appointed a representative at both Coober Pedy and Andamooka to look after the interests of Aboriginal people generally, including assistance in helping negotiate fair prices for opal, and to encourage ongoing Aboriginal participation in the industry.

Literature Review

The study of Aboriginal people's participation in the Australian economy and their active agency has been relatively neglected until the last few decades. This participation risked remaining “conceptually and analytically trapped within ‘that great Australian silence’” which had characterised the neglect of Aboriginal people in Australian history for much of the twentieth century.²⁶ According to historians Anne Curthoys and Clive Moore, the discipline had “been markedly unsuccessful” in locating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in labour history, which has been portrayed as “once the proud preserve of white males writing about the struggle of white workers under capitalism”.²⁷ Anthropologist Ian Keen has also observed “the relative invisibility of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in economic histories”.²⁸

Such a void which “rarely allowed space for the history of Aboriginal work”, may have also helped create a range of negative and racist stereotypes characterising Aboriginal people as lazy or unproductive that still flourish in some quarters of contemporary Australian society.²⁹ From the earliest time of colonial settlement Aboriginal people were viewed as inferior and considered to be marginal to the labour market, with the expectation that they would be “incorporated into the lower occupational stratas” of the European workforce as manual labourers or domestic servants. Even the education

²⁵ E.P.D. O’Driscoll, ‘The Possibility of Augmenting Groundwater Supplies—Andamooka Opal Field’, *Mining Review for the Half-Year Ended 31 December, 1957*, no.107, 1959, p.42.

²⁶ Raelene Frances, Bruce Scates and Ann McGrath, ‘Broken Silences? Labour History and Aboriginal Workers’, in Terry Irving (ed.), *Challenges to Labour History*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1994, p.189.

²⁷ Ann Curthoys and Clive Moore, ‘Working for the White People: An Historiographic Essay on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Labour’, in Ann McGrath and Kay Saunders with Jackie Huggins (eds), *Aboriginal Workers*, Special Issue of *Labour History*, no.69, November 1995, pp.1,7.

²⁸ Ian Keen, ‘Introduction’, in Ian Keen (ed.), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010, p.2.

²⁹ Ann McGrath and Kay Saunders, ‘Introduction’, in McGrath *et al.*, (eds), *Aboriginal Workers*, p.vii.

system was used to reinforce this status, and to ensure that Aboriginal workers would not compete with other workers.³⁰ In addition, Aboriginal workers were often portrayed as “poor or indifferent workers”, a view enshrined in some popular literature.³¹ However, emerging research has shown that from time to time Aboriginal people provided vital roles in the colonial labour market. They demonstrated their adaptability and innovation in some instances by combining their bushcraft skills with work, and were often highly regarded by employers.³² In some instances they were even preferred to European workers at the time.³³

As researchers began examining Aboriginal participation in the Australian economy more seriously, the focus tended to be on the exploitative nature of Aboriginal employment, particularly in parts of remote northern Australia.³⁴ Aboriginal labour relations on northern pastoral properties, for instance, have been described as having “feudal qualities that helped sustain the cattle industry for over a century”.³⁵ The view that “cruelty and slavery ... characterised colonial relations” was evident in much of northern Australia, seen in the ill-treatment of Aboriginal workers and the non-payment

³⁰ Dawn May, ‘The Role of the State in Fabricating a Black Working Class in the North Queensland Cattle Industry’, in Deborah Wade-Marshall and Peter Loveday (eds), *Employment and Unemployment: A Collection of Papers*, Darwin: Australian National University North Australia Research Unit Monograph, 1985, pp.208, 211.

³¹ Richard Broome, ‘Aboriginal Workers on South-Eastern Frontiers’, *Australian Historical Studies*, vol.26, no.103, 1994, p.202.

³² See for example Alan Pope, *Resistance and Retaliation: Aboriginal–European Relations in Early Colonial South Australia*, Bridgewater: Heritage Action, 1989, p.29; Diane Barwick, ‘Coranderk and Cumerooogunga: Pioneers and Policy’, in T. Scarlett Epstein and David H. Penny (eds), *Opportunity and Response: Case Studies in Economic Development*, London: C. Hurst, 1972, pp.14–5; Robert Castle and Jim Hagan, ‘Settlers and the State: The Creation of an Aboriginal Workforce in Australia’, *Aboriginal History*, vol.22, no.1, 1998, p.29; Bobbie Hardy, *Lament for the Barkindji: The Vanished Tribes of the Darling River Region*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1976, pp.85–6; Dawn May, ‘The Articulation of the Aboriginal and Capitalist Modes on the North Queensland Pastoral Frontier’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol.7, no.12, 1983, p.43. Peggy Brock and Doreen Kartinyeri, *Poonindie: The Rise and Destruction of an Aboriginal Agricultural Community*, Adelaide: South Australian Government Printer and Aboriginal Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Planning South Australia, 1988, p.46; D.J. Mulvaney, *Encounters in Place: Outsiders and Aboriginal Australians 1606–1985*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1989, p.93; Bain Attwood, ‘Off the Mission Stations: Aborigines in Gippsland 1860–1890’, *Aboriginal History*, vol.10, 1986, pp.145–6.

³³ R. J. Anderson, *Solid Town: The History of Port Augusta*, Port Augusta: R.J. Anderson, 1988, p.25.

³⁴ C.D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*. Ringwood: Penguin, 1972; Frank Stevens, *Aborigines in the Northern Territory Cattle Industry*, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974.

³⁵ Thalia Anthony, ‘Labour Relations on Northern Cattle Stations: Feudal Exploitation and Accommodation’, *The Drawing Board: An Australian Review of Public Affairs*, vol.4, no.3, March 2004, p.117. See also Geoffrey Bolton, ‘The Development in the North’, in Richard Preston (ed.), *Contemporary Australia: Studies in History, Politics and Economics*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1969, p.128.

of wages. Raymond Evans, for example, has concluded that despite the emotive nature of the term ‘slavery’ in some quarters, “the phrase ‘Aboriginal slavery’ may be applied not simply as a loosely analogous term of opprobrium, but as one which may be defended with academic precision and rigour”.³⁶

Aboriginal labour became crucial in much of northern Australia from the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, where European labour was scarce and competition for work unlikely. Aboriginal labour became the “mainstay” of the northern colonial Australian economy, predominantly in pastoralism, as well as the pearling and *beche-de-mer* industries, and by the beginning of the twentieth century about 10,000 Aboriginal people were working for Europeans in the north. The recruitment of cheap Aboriginal labour may have saved employers about fifty pounds per employee per year in these northern industries, effectively:

a massive ‘subsidy’ ... and a critical ingredient in the economic survival of individuals and industries alike ... [which] ensured the viability of European settlement over at least one-third of the continent.³⁷

More recent research has shifted the emphasis to the agency of Aboriginal people in their imaginative and creative approaches to a range of employment activities while also maintaining their cultural integrity, and is similar to the situation of Aboriginal opal miners throughout the study period. The nature of pastoral employment, for instance, accommodated many aspects of Aboriginal traditional life.³⁸ The rural economy enabled Aboriginal people to work on their own terms with minimal supervision, reflected in their preference for contract or piecework, giving people time to maintain important traditional practices.

An important marker of this ‘revisionist’ shift was Ann McGrath’s *‘Born in the Cattle’: Aborigines in Cattle Country*, which examines the contribution that Aboriginal people

³⁶ Raymond Evans, “‘Kings’ in Brass Crescents: Defining Aboriginal Labour Patterns in Colonial Queensland”, in Kay Saunders (ed.), *Indentured Labour in the British Empire 1834–1920*, London: Croon Helm, 1994, pp.184, 202–3.

³⁷ Henry Reynolds, *With the White People*, Ringwood: Penguin, 1990, p.227.

³⁸ See Ann McGrath, *‘Born in the Cattle’: Aborigines in Cattle Country*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987; Dawn May, *Aboriginal Labour and the Cattle Industry: Queensland from White Settlement to the Present*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1994; Mary Anne Jebb, *Blood, Sweat and Welfare: A History of White Bosses and Aboriginal Pastoral Workers*, Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2002.

have made to pastoral stations in the top half of the Northern Territory and the Kimberley region of Western Australia from 1910 to 1940.³⁹ It seriously challenges the notion that Aboriginal participation in the northern pastoral economy was merely a form of “intelligent parasitism”, as described by anthropologist A.P. Elkin, in which Aboriginal people were dependent on the industry but provided minimal effort in return for basic subsistence.⁴⁰ This proposition was even used by pastoral interest groups “as the basis for arguments against paying Aboriginal pastoral workers a wage equal to others” in the Commonwealth Arbitration Commission in 1965.⁴¹

McGrath contends that Aboriginal people were active participants and often used the industry creatively to their advantage: they were not swamped by it. The pastoral industry readily accommodated traditional Aboriginal cultural practices, as Aboriginal workers skilfully “incorporated cattle life into their world, consciously adapting and integrating it”.⁴² In her ‘cultural history’ McGrath emphasises the importance and centrality of Aboriginal cultural priorities in challenging a number of stereotypical attitudes. Aboriginal shared work practices were not a sign of laziness or incompetence, but an extension of traditional kinship practices and obligations, while ‘going walkabout’ was not a sign of laziness or immaturity, but a refusal to treat work as a sole priority, and enabled the continuity of ceremonial activity and other traditional practices.⁴³

Following on from McGrath, other contemporary studies of Aboriginal labour, both historic and ethnographic, have also emphasised the creativity of Aboriginal people in the face of economic transformation.⁴⁴ Several of these studies draw upon the work of

³⁹ McGrath, ‘*Born in the Cattle*’.

⁴⁰ A.P. Elkin, ‘Reaction and Interaction: A Food Gathering People and European Settlement in Australia’, *American Anthropologist*, vol.53, no.2, 1951, pp.164–86.

⁴¹ Jebb, *Blood, Sweat and Welfare*, pp.1–2.

⁴² McGrath, ‘*Born in the Cattle*’, pp.ix–x.

⁴³ McGrath, ‘*Born in the Cattle*’, pp.146–8, 153, 159. See also Lyn Riddett, ‘Aboriginal Employment in the Pastoral Industry (N.T. 1930–1966)’, in Wade-Marshall and Loveday (eds), *Employment and Unemployment*, p.205.

⁴⁴ See: Lorraine Gibson, “‘Who You Is?’ Work and Identity in Aboriginal New South Wales”, in Keen (ed.), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies*, pp.127–39; Sally Hodson, ‘Nyungars and Work: Aboriginal Experiences in the Rural Economy of the Great Southern Region of Western Australia’, *Aboriginal History*, vol.17, pt.1, 1993, pp.73–92; Barry Morris, ‘From Underemployment to Unemployment: The Changing Role of Aborigines in a Rural Economy’, *Mankind*, vol.13, no.6, April 1983, pp.499–516; John White, ‘Peas, Beans and Riverbanks: Seasonal Picking and Dependence in the Tuross Valley’, in Keen (ed.), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies*, pp.109–26.

British historian E. P. Thompson, who has described how in many pre-industrial societies, working priorities are often task-oriented, rather than time measured, and that there is often little demarcation between ‘work’ and ‘life’.⁴⁵ This area of research highlights the importance of Aboriginal social and cultural systems in relation to employment practices in a number of rural industries, which readily accommodated important aspects of Aboriginal social and cultural life. For many Aboriginal people, employment was just one aspect of a busy life where family responsibilities were paramount, and where they were prepared to “subordinate financial and employment priorities to the important aspects of social relations”.⁴⁶ The option of contract work in these industries also suited Aboriginal people, provided a distinct sense of autonomy and pride, and allowed them to readily exploit their traditional economic base. These more nuanced and culturally informed understandings of Aboriginal labour are evident in the nature of Aboriginal participation in the northern South Australia opal industry, and therefore provide a useful comparative perspective.

Akin to the broader literature on the history of Aboriginal people and their involvement in the Australian economy, literature examining their involvement in mining displays some similarities. Archaeological evidence indicates that Aboriginal people had utilised and traded resources from the ground or below for millenia. These resources were often carried over lengthy trade routes and under arduous conditions that underscored the importance of these items long before the arrival of Europeans, as archaeological and historical evidence suggests.⁴⁷ A variety of mined stone tools used in hunting and

⁴⁵ E.P.Thompson, ‘Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism’, *Past and Present*, no.38, December 1967, pp.56–97.

⁴⁶ Diana Eades, ‘They Don’t Speak an Aboriginal Language or Do They?’, in Ian Keen (ed.), *Being Black: Aboriginal Cultures in ‘Settled’ Australia*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988, p.99.

⁴⁷ Daniel S. Davidson, ‘Notes on the Pictographs and Petroglyphs of Western Australia and a Discussion of Their Affinities with Appearances Elsewhere on the Continent’, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol.96, no.1, February 1952, pp.76–117; Galiina Ellwood, ‘Aboriginal Prospectors and Miners of Tropical Queensland, from Pre-contact Times to ca.1950’, *Journal of Australasian Mining History*, vol.12, October 2014, p.61; Josephine Flood, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime: The Story of Prehistoric Australia and its People*, Revised Edition, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1999, pp.269–273; Luise Hercus, in collaboration with Barry Cundy, Pamela and Colin McDonald and Vlad Potezny, ‘A Hole in the Ground and a Quarry’, in Ingereth Macfarlane with Mary-Jane Mountain and Robert Paton (eds), *Many Exchanges: Archaeology, History, Community and the Work of Isabel McBryde*, Aboriginal History Monograph 11, Canberra: ANU Press 2005, pp.185–98; Philip Jones, *Ochre and Rust: Artefacts and Encounters on Australian Frontiers*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2007, Chapter 9; New South Wales Department of Primary Industries, ‘Mining by Aborigines—Australia’s First Miners’, *Primefacts*, no.572, February 2007, pp.1–4.
<www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/109817/mining-by-aborigines> accessed 15 August 2015.

gathering, food preparation, carving and tool manufacturing that are more than 40,000 years old have been found in northern and eastern Australia.⁴⁸ Ochre, for instance, was a particularly sought-after commodity, and was traded extensively among Aboriginal people throughout Australia for thousands of years: ochre mines in the Flinders Ranges were a particularly important source.⁴⁹ At Wilgamia in the Murchison district of Western Australia archaeological evidence indicates extensive mining of ochre involving large-scale excavation and tunnelling to a considerable depth with the use of scaffolding. Described by archaeologist Daniel S. Davidson as a “most impressive excavation”, this mine site indicates a high level of sophistication and hard work, considering the relatively small Aboriginal population in this arid region over a period of several millennia.⁵⁰

Aboriginal people were long involved in European mining activity as helpers, guides or discoverers, but this has received little acknowledgement. Historian Henry Reynolds devotes just three pages to mining in his work on the importance of Aboriginal people to Australian exploration and development.⁵¹ Geoffrey Blainey’s few references to Aboriginal people in *The Rush That Never Ended* were to their roles as guides and carriers in various parts of Australia.⁵² Aboriginal people were sometimes instrumental in mineral discoveries, although this often went unacknowledged. According to Blainey, “the honour of finding many valuable fields no doubt belonged to, though was never credited to, Aborigines”.⁵³ According to Aboriginal historian Galiina Ellwood, the contribution of Aboriginal people to the Queensland mining industry has “been mostly ignored or whitewashed out of history”.⁵⁴ In Western Australia Aboriginal people were generally absent from accounts of gold discoveries, and often portrayed as a threat to goldminers or viewed as “a curious colourful feature of the landscape”.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ New South Wales Department of Primary Industries, ‘Mining by Aborigines’, p.2.

⁴⁹ Peggy Brock, *Yura and Udney: A History of the Adnyamathanha and the Flinders Ranges*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press in association with Aboriginal Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Planning, South Australia, 1985, pp.28–30.

⁵⁰ Davidson, ‘Notes on the Pictographs and Petroglyphs’, pp.81–4.

⁵¹ Reynolds, *With the White People*, pp.224–6.

⁵² Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended*, pp.25,145,168,177.

⁵³ Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended*, p.168.

⁵⁴ Ellwood, ‘Aboriginal Prospectors and Miners’, p.62.

⁵⁵ Ian Coates, ‘Golden Reflections: Artists, Entrepreneurs and Aborigines on the North-West Australian Goldfields’, in Iain McCalman, Alexander Cook and Andrew Reeves (eds), *Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.174.

Several contemporary publications have examined Aboriginal engagement in mining, but their focus has been on participation in large-scale mineral production, and policy and socio-economic factors with no Aboriginal input or ‘voice’.⁵⁶ However, there are a small number of life histories of Aboriginal people involved in mining throughout Australia that indicate varying degrees of participation and success in the industry. These examples demonstrate that Aboriginal participation in some mining activities was successful, particularly smaller-scale operations where there was a high degree of autonomy associated with self-employment, resembling the nature of Aboriginal engagement in the opal industry. For instance, Aboriginal author Robyne Bancroft has described how her ancestors worked on the Clarence River goldfields in northern New South Wales from the 1870s and into the early twentieth century, successfully maintaining their cultural integrity and relationship with the land while engaged in mining.⁵⁷

Aboriginal family historian Glenda Morris recalled how family members in north Queensland engaged intermittently in tin and wolfram mining from the 1930s to the 1950s. She noted her grandfather’s expertise as a successful professional miner and ‘rockologist’, that several generations of this family worked as miners and how even younger members of the family helped adults on the fields, a situation analogous to Aboriginal participation on the northern South Australian opal fields.⁵⁸ A biography of World War I Aboriginal serviceman Norman Baird also revealed how he and his brother made a successful living as fossickers on the Herberton tin fields.⁵⁹

An important theme of this thesis is Aboriginal agency, and some mining history research has provided pertinent examples of this which provide a useful point of comparison. One notable example is historian Sue Harlow’s account of the Jawoyn

⁵⁶ See David Cousins and John Nieuwenhuysen, *Aboriginals and the Mining Industry*, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984; Peter H. Rogers, *The Industrialists and the Aborigines: A Study of Aboriginal Employment in the Australian Mining Industry*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1973.

⁵⁷ Robyne Bancroft, ‘Aboriginal Miners and the Solferino and Lionsville Goldfields of Northern New South Wales’, in Kerry Cardell and Cliff Cumming (eds), *A World Turned Upside Down: Cultural Change on Australia’s Goldfields 1851–2001*, Humanities Research Centre Monograph no.14. Canberra: Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, 2001, pp.131–45.

⁵⁸ Glenda Morris, *Looking Back the Way I Came*, Mareeba: Pinevale Publications, 1991, pp.18–21, 34, 37–8; Glenda Morris, *The Con Goo Line*, Townsville: Glenda Morris, 1994, pp.80–92.

⁵⁹ Kathleen Denigan, *Norman Baird—A Spark Within*, Cairns: Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation, 2006, p.13.

people in the Maranboy region of the Northern Territory, who worked in the local tin mines there for several decades in the early to mid-twentieth century.⁶⁰ The small-scale nature of these mines, which were leased by individuals, and the task-oriented approach of Aboriginal people towards employment there provided a considerable degree of autonomy and flexibility.⁶¹ Aboriginal people involved in mining there also maintained a high degree of cultural continuity, which the industry readily accommodated.⁶² This was a situation analogous to Aboriginal engagement on the northern South Australian opal fields.

Anthropologist Christopher Anderson's history of Aboriginal participation in the north Queensland tin-mining industry from the late 1880s to the 1940s has highlighted how the Kuku-Nyungkul people creatively responded to the incursion on their traditional land by miners.⁶³ The Kuku-Nyungkul participated in a variety of jobs on the tin fields, often in the form of contract work, while also camping close to the mines, which also gave them ready access to their traditional economic base, which was regularly exploited.⁶⁴ Both tin mining and the opal industry were relatively small-scale ventures which provided Aboriginal people with employment opportunities, unlike large-scale mining ventures which tended to bring in outside labour.

The Pilbara region of northern Western Australia also provided Aboriginal people with employment opportunities, particularly from the 1940s to the 1960s in small-scale labour intensive mining activities.⁶⁵ Aboriginal work practices there also resembled

⁶⁰ Sue Harlow, *Tin Gods: A Social History of the Men and Women of Maranboy 1913–1962*, Darwin: Historical Society of the Northern Territory, 1997. See also M.J. Reilly, *Bowyangs and Boomerang: Reminiscences of 40 Years' Prospecting in Australia and Tasmania*, Hobart: Oldham, Beddome and Meredith, 1944, pp.70–83; Spider Brennan, 'Tin Mining', in Peter and Jay Read (eds), *Long Time, Olden Time: Aboriginal Accounts of Northern Territory History*, Alice Springs: Institute for Aboriginal Development Publications, 1991, pp.109–114.

⁶¹ O'Reilly, *Bowyangs and Boomerangs*, pp.71–2.

⁶² Harlow, *Tin Gods*, pp.4, 49; O'Reilly, *Bowyangs and Boomerangs*, p.73.

⁶³ Christopher Anderson, 'Aborigines and Tin Mining in North Queensland: A Case Study in the Anthropology of Contact History', *Mankind*, vol.13, no.6, April 1983, pp.473–98.

⁶⁴ Anderson, 'Aborigines and Tin Mining', pp.485–8.

⁶⁵ See for example Sarah Holcombe, 'Indigenous Organisations and Mining in the Pilbara, Western Australia: Lessons from a Historical Perspective', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 29, 2005, pp.107–35; Jolly Read and Peter Coppin, *Kangkushot: The Life of Nyamal Lawman Peter Coppin*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1999; C.D. Rowley, *The Remote Aborigines*, Ringwood: Penguin, 1972, pp.251–9; John Wilson, 'The Pilbara Aboriginal Social Movement: An Outline of its Background and Significance', in Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt (eds), *Aborigines of the West: Their Past and Present*, Perth:

characteristics of the northern South Australian opal industry. Based on a system of “traditional Law, and kinship ties”, historian Charles Rowley has asserted that these smaller, labour-intensive mining operations by Aboriginal people in the Pilbara demonstrated:

the enterprise and ingenuity of people who had not lost all social cohesion, and found in this operation a means of adapting to new ways in accordance with their own traditions.⁶⁶

However, capital-intensive mining on a much larger scale in the Pilbara from the 1960s caused the demise of Aboriginal participation in the industry.⁶⁷ Anthropologist Robert Tonkinson, who worked in the region, observed that by 1970 Aboriginal labourers who had worked for a large iron ore producer at Mount Newman were no longer welcome there. This employer had made “quiet efforts to rid itself” of not only these workers, but also local Aboriginal people living on the outskirts of the town.⁶⁸

There are no academic studies of Aboriginal engagement in the northern South Australian opal industry. There is a body of literature about opal mining that is geared to the popular market with occasional references to Aboriginal people noodling or finding opal, but these make no mention of the varied and specialised roles that some undertook. For example, opal historian Len Cram’s *A Journey with Colour: A History of South Australian Opal, 1840–2005*, is based largely on secondary sources, newspaper accounts of life on the opal fields and some interviews with European people. While several references to Aboriginal people noodling are made in this publication and Tottie Bryant’s important find of opal at the Coober Pedy ‘Eight Mile’ field (noted earlier) is acknowledged, Aboriginal people are often seen as just transients on the fields and incidental to the presence of Europeans there.⁶⁹ A recent publication by the South Australian Museum to commemorate the centenary of opal being found in Coober Pedy has only a one-sentence reference to Tottie Bryant finding opal in 1945.⁷⁰ There are a number of other accounts of opal mining that make occasional references to

University of Western Australia Press for the Education Committee of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations, 1979, pp.151–68.

⁶⁶ Rowley, *The Remote Aborigines*, pp.168, 254.

⁶⁷ Rogers, *The Industrialists and the Aborigines*, pp.36–7.

⁶⁸ Robert Tonkinson, *The Jigalong Mob: Aboriginal Victors of the Desert Crusade*: Menlo Park: Cummings, 1974, pp.149–50.

⁶⁹ Cram, *A Journey with Colour*, pp. 52, 65, 67, 200, 261, 266.

⁷⁰ Nicholas Kollias, ‘Opal Mining in South Australia: From Picks and Shovels to Modern Noodling’, in Angela Lush (ed.), *Opal*, Adelaide: South Australian Museum, 2015, p.43.

Aboriginal people, although their main focus has been on geological and geographical information, while others are observations by travellers.⁷¹ While miners are often depicted as hardy, innovative outback characters, the few references to Aboriginal people are generally of a demeaning and ethnocentric nature, and portray them as on the fringes of the industry or hapless noodlers, as noted by Charles Chauvel earlier.

One exception to the general disregard of Aboriginal people in this literature is a publication by French journalist Rena Briand, who lived in Coober Pedy in 1969, and devoted one chapter to Aboriginal people.⁷² Responding to comments made to her by a local Aboriginal man that kinship obligations of sharing made it difficult for Aboriginal people to “live white”, Briand acknowledges the importance of sharing and reciprocity, conceding that such aspects of traditional Aboriginal life are logical – a point other writers have failed to acknowledge – and cautions us not to “mock or reproach them”.⁷³ Only one short article written in 1984 actually refers to how Aboriginal people worked in a variety of roles in the opal industry in Coober Pedy. This included employment as noodlers, machinery operators and opal buyers, and this is further examined in Chapter Four. The authors were a local Aboriginal health worker and a nursing sister married to an opal miner and long-term resident.⁷⁴

Some pertinent insights come from Aboriginal autobiographical narratives and life histories which reflect on various aspects of life in the Coober Pedy region, including employment on the opal fields there, and to a lesser extent Andamooka.⁷⁵ These

⁷¹ Clifford Austin, *I Left My Hat in Andamooka*, Melbourne: Wren Publishing, 1973; M.D. Berrington, *Stones of Fire: A Woman's Experiences in Search of Opal*, Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1958; Rena Briand, *White Man in a Hole*, Melbourne: Phuong-Hoang Press, 1971; N. Perry and R. Perry, *Australian Opals in Colour*, Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1969; John Summers, *Road to Andamooka*, London: Robert Hale, 1965; P. Vin Wake, *Opal Men*, Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1969.

⁷² Briand, *White Man in a Hole*, pp.87–97.

⁷³ Briand, *White Man in a Hole*, p.91.

⁷⁴ Dorothy Lennon and Vicki McCormack, ‘A Health Worker at Coober Pedy’, *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker*, vol.8, no.3, September 1984, p.37.

⁷⁵ Some of these include Emily Munyungka Austin, *My Young Days*, Coober Pedy: Umoona Aged Care Aboriginal Corporation, 2006; Eileen Unkari Crombie, *He Was a South Australian Film Star: My Life with Billy Pepper-Tinyma*, Murray Bridge: Nyiri Publications, 2003; Marty Dodd, *They Liked Me, the Horses, Straightaway*, Canberra: Ginninderra Press, 2000; Wendy Harris, *Wendy Harris: A Coober Pedy Pioneer*, Murray Bridge: Nyiri Publications, 2006; Jessie Lennon, *And I Always Been Moving! The Early Life of Jessie Lennon*, Coober Pedy: J. Lennon, 1996; Jessie Lennon, *I'm the One that Knows This Country! The Story of Jessie Lennon and Coober Pedy*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2000; Edna Tantjingu Williams and Eileen Wani Wingfield, *Down the Hole, Up the Tree, Across the Sandhills: Running from the State and Daisy Bates*, Alice Springs: IAD Press, 2000.

narratives have described the communal and family-oriented nature of opal mining, how people from far afield travelled to work on the fields, and emphasise the importance of sharing the proceeds of opal finds. These sources are used throughout the thesis and are complemented by the oral history research I conducted.

References to Aboriginal participation in the Australia opal industry generally are also scant. For example, on the Lightning Ridge opal fields of New South Wales there is little more than a cursory mention of Aboriginal people finding small amounts of opal, and of one individual described as a “champion opal cutter”.⁷⁶ One exception to this general absence in the literature is the biography of Aboriginal opal miner Jimmie Barker, who lived at Lightning Ridge for several years in the 1960s. While accounts of this aspect of his life are confined to a few pages, it describes how Barker owned his own mining claim, learned to value opal and was able to assist other Aboriginal people to avoid being exploited by dealers. Barker enjoyed the lifestyle immensely and, while his earnings from opal were minimal they helped to supplement his pension, but he finally left the fields in 1969 to find “an easier life”, as he was elderly and found mining increasingly strenuous.⁷⁷

Methodology

This thesis has used a range of official sources, for example, files relating to the activities of government agencies responsible for Aboriginal affairs, the Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia (RCBNTA), the Department of Mines and Energy (DME) and the South Australian Police Department (SAPD). These files are held at State Records of South Australia (SRSA), which is the most important repository in South Australia.⁷⁸ The most crucial records relating to Aboriginal affairs are the Correspondence Files of the Aborigines Office and Successor Agencies, which date from 1866 to 1968.⁷⁹ This file series contains fundamental information about

⁷⁶ For example see Stuart Lloyd, *The Lightning Ridge Book*, Mumbil: Stuart Lloyd, 1967, pp.8, 28, 41, 46; Len Cram, *A Journey with Colour: A History of Lightning Ridge Opal, 1873–2003*, Lightning Ridge: Len Cram, 2004, pp.73, 176, 301.

⁷⁷ Janet Mathews, *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker: The Life of an Aboriginal Australian 1900–1972, as told to Janet Mathews*, Canberra: Australia Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1982, pp.171–5.

⁷⁸ See Cameron Raynes, *‘A Little Flour and a Few Blankets’: An Administrative History of Aboriginal Affairs in South Australia, 1834–2000*, Adelaide: State Records of South Australia, 2002, for an extensive summary of Aboriginal Affairs records.

⁷⁹ State Records of South Australia (henceforth SRSA), Government Record Group (henceforth GRG) 52/1.

Aboriginal engagement on the opal fields, population estimates, as well as ceremonial life, provided by Aboriginal affairs staff, police officers and local pastoralists. Included in this file series (and the RCBNTA files) are the reports of the Woomera Native Patrol Officer (NPO) Walter MacDougall, and to a lesser extent his colleague Robert Macaulay, which provide some of the best observations of Aboriginal people on the opal fields and cultural life in the 1950s and 1960s.⁸⁰

DME files contain information about Aboriginal people holding Precious Stones Prospecting Permits (PSPP), as well as observations of their work on the opal fields by its staff.⁸¹ These files are complemented by the Department's unpublished Report Books (*DMERB*), which also furnish useful first-hand accounts of Aboriginal work practices and population information on the opal fields. A number of SAPD files ranging from 1934 to 1954 provide regular information about police patrols to Aboriginal camps on the opal fields, including population estimates.⁸²

However, access to the Aborigines Office and Successor Agencies files has conditions which are unduly time-consuming and a source of frustration. This has caused problems for researchers in the past, perhaps best exemplified by Adelaide historian Cameron Raynes, whose experiences are documented in his short monograph *The Last Protector*. Here he described how his access to this complete file series was revoked by the South Australian Attorney-General when he raised concerns about the existence of files withheld because of legal professional privilege.⁸³

⁸⁰ MacDougall was appointed NPO by the Department of Lands and Housing in 1947 and subsequently transferred to the Department of Supply. His role was to safeguard the interests of Aboriginal people in remote areas of the state throughout the duration of the Woomera Guided Missiles Project and British Nuclear Testing program. See Haslam to Director-General of Works and Housing, 7 April 1949, SRSA, Government Record Series (henceforth GRS) 1002/1/8. MacDougall remained in the position until his retirement in 1972. The NPO's area of responsibility was more than a million square kilometres. See Morton, *Fire Across the Desert*, pp.81, 93. A second NPO, R.J. Macaulay, was appointed in 1956. Middleton to Controller, Weapons Research Establishment, 28 May 1956, SRSA, GRS 1278/1/Box 56, vol.5.

⁸¹ File series SRSA, GRG 30, GRS 6038, GRS 8296, GRS 8573, GRS 9226.

⁸² SRSA, GRG 5/318.

⁸³ Cameron Raynes, *The Last Protector: The Illegal Removal of Aboriginal Children from Their Parents in South Australia*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2009, pp.xiv–xv. For examples of access restrictions to certain Aboriginal Affairs files in other states see Kate Auty, 'Western Australian Courts on Native Affairs 1936–1954—One of "Our" Little Secrets in the Administration of "Justice" for Aboriginal People', *University of New South Wales Law Journal*, vol.23, no.1, July 2000, pp148–172; Rosslyn Kidd, *The Way We Civilise. Aboriginal Affairs: The Untold Story*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1997, p.xi.

Access to these files, which were once readily available to *bona fide* researchers, now requires the written permission of the originating agency, the Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation Division (AARD) of the Department of State Development. Once these files are cleared for viewing by an AARD officer, a written undertaking confirming non-publication without further approval is necessary prior to viewing them. Files which contain a legal opinion of the Crown Solicitor of South Australia are not accessible. The access regime has tightened considerably since I previously used this file series as an anthropologist in a former workplace (2007–2011) and as a part-time Honours history student (2009–10).

In addition to this, researchers must now pay for digital copies of the records they are given access to, without the opportunity of viewing them first to see if they are useful or not. For instance, I was charged \$100 for some digital copies of files which I could have easily viewed at the Archives in several hours, and which were of no use. This now makes it increasingly difficult for Aboriginal people who may not have the financial means to pay for this ‘service’, and is potentially another obstacle to accessing archival records that Aboriginal researcher Henrietta Fourmile has detailed.⁸⁴ Several historians have also detailed how access to records of the National Archives of Australia (NAA), which are generally open access has also been delayed, as the originating government agencies have adopted “an increasingly cautious approach” when files requested are referred back to them by the NAA for advice.⁸⁵

Because of these restrictions, my access to some of these files was delayed and in some instances denied, which required ongoing negotiation with AARD staff to resolve this. Frustrated at the time delays, I wrote to the Premier of South Australia in late 2014 and the Attorney-General in early 2015 in order to have the access restrictions reviewed, and after a three-month delay was given access to some additional files. SAPD files also have access restrictions and I was unable to view files beyond 1955. A Freedom of Information request to access files after that date was unsuccessful. The destruction of files relating to my research was also encountered. For example, actual files relating to

⁸⁴ Henrietta Fourmile, ‘Who Owns the Past? Aborigines as Captives of the Archives’, *Aboriginal History*, vol.13, no.1, 1989, p.3.

⁸⁵ Tomoka Akami, Frank Bongiorno and Alexander Cook, ‘From the Editors’, *History Australia*, vol.11, no.1, April 2014, pp.3–4.

DME permits issued to Aboriginal miners identified in an index for the period 1959–1971 had been destroyed. However, I was able to locate the actual records of Aboriginal miners holding PSPPs from 1972 to 1979. While the Andamooka Progress Association (APA) also provided me with some digitised records of information about opal mining and life in the area, including some oral history transcripts, a fire in 2006 at the school which housed its records destroyed much of its collection.⁸⁶

Having worked extensively as both an anthropologist and historical researcher with the South Australian Native Title Services (SANTS) in the north of the state, I have an excellent knowledge of the region, and over the years have developed good working relationships with Aboriginal people who have either worked in the northern South Australian opal industry, or have ancestors or other family members who had done so. One of the major activities I was involved in during the early 2000s was assisting Native Title holders on Work Area Clearances for mining projects in the Coober Pedy region to ensure that Aboriginal cultural heritage was safeguarded. My interest in Aboriginal labour also comes from working for the Australian Government in central Australia, in the Aboriginal employment, education and training sector in the 1980s and 1990s.

An anthropological approach has been fundamental in the advancement of this thesis. Being familiar with much of the anthropological literature that was used to inform my analysis was significant, as was my oral history research (discussed below) which follows the anthropological practice of field work. The scholar Bernard Cohn, who has straddled both the disciplines of anthropology and history, rightly asserts that:

Taking the anthropological experience into the archive or library enables the historian to better appreciate the significance of what would otherwise appear to be mere trivia, to understand how other cultures can be structured and constructed.⁸⁷

One obvious example of this is how the practice of sharing among Aboriginal people on the opal fields has been trivialised by some observers, as noted above, a tendency I have also observed in some archival material. In fact, these practices are important

⁸⁶ *Monitor*, 30 March 2006, p.1.

⁸⁷ Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987, p.48.

markers of reciprocity which are highly valued and important in Aboriginal society, and this is outlined in some depth in Chapters One and Five.

Contemporary 'Aboriginal history' and the 'new social history' have emphasised the use of oral sources to help portray the lives of those people generally under-represented or 'omitted' from history, in order to help make this representation "more democratic".⁸⁸ Oral history fundamentally rests upon memory, which has "a degree of presence that documentary historical sources seldom have", and also "challenges the discipline's foundational premise of the clean break between the past and present".⁸⁹ Memory can be important, as it conveys a first-hand experience of an activity or event: a "reliable account of the past because it is history as experienced by someone who was actually there".⁹⁰ Contemporary oral history has also broadened understandings of subjective memory processes by using memory as a 'resource' to understand human behaviour and actions in historical contexts.⁹¹ According to Heather Goodall, the practice of oral history has:

exposed the divergence between the complex, rich and active field of memory, whether individual or community, and the artificially simple and 'static' truth of much empiricist history.⁹²

The use of oral history, however, has been the subject of some scrutiny and its critics have challenged its subjectivity, perceived unreliability and mundane nature.⁹³ Critiques of oral history have effectively reinforced the privileging of archival and written sources over oral sources, reflecting "the obsession with the archive that marks our age", although documentary records may have been "highly selective and partial

⁸⁸ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, p.7.

⁸⁹ Bain Attwood, 'Aboriginal History, Minority Histories and Historical Wounds: The Postcolonial Condition, Historical Knowledge and the Public Life of History in Australia', *Postcolonial Studies*, vol.14, no.2, 2011, p.178.

⁹⁰ Sharon Veale and Kathleen Schilling, *Talking History: Oral History Guidelines*, Sydney: Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW), 2004, p.4.

⁹¹ See for example Luisa Passerini, 'Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism', *History Workshop Journal*, no.8, 1979, pp.82–108.

⁹² Heather Goodall, "'The Whole Truth and Nothing But ...'", *Some Intersections of Western Law, Aboriginal History and Community Memory*, in Bain Attwood and John Arnold (eds), *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, Special Edition of *Journal of Australian Studies*, no.35, 1992, p.118.

⁹³ Patrick O'Farrell, 'Oral History: Fact and Fiction', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 5, 1983, p.3.

and ... even partisan”.⁹⁴ Official records tainted by attitudes and values of the era may portray biased or inaccurate observations of Aboriginal people, or those groups generally under-represented in historiography. As historian Penelope Edmonds has observed, some written account of Aboriginal people in archives and other documented sources may be “partial and biased, [and] constructs Europeans as initiators and Indigenous peoples as mere reactors”. She further contends that European accounts of Aboriginal people “are often stereotypical and derogatory, and this necessitates counter readings”.⁹⁵

Oral histories that portray the lives of “non-elite people” often overlooked in historiography should not just “be treated as a source of some narrative, but rather as one of many versions of an individual’s past”.⁹⁶ Aboriginal oral testimony may also have a social dimension and needs to be appraised in the context of people’s relationships to each other, their cultural landscape and major life impacts, rather than just in linear time.⁹⁷ According to historian Tom Gara, oral testimony from Aboriginal people:

can enrich the documentary record, as well as filling in some of the gaps in that record ... [and] provides evidence that never made it into the documentary sources because no European was there to record these events. At the same time, the documentary record provides an historical context and chronology for [Aboriginal] oral histories, which may be temporally ordered in terms of important historical events.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*’, *Representations*, no.26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter Memory, Spring 1989, p.13; Deryck Shreuder, ‘The Heroic Study of Records: Problematising Archival and Textual Sources of Historical Writing’, *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no.16, 1994, p.68.

⁹⁵ Penelope Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19th Century Pacific Rim Cities*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010, p.18. See also Judith Raftery, *Not Part of the Public: Non-Indigenous Policies and Practices and the Health of Aboriginal Australians 1836–1973*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2006, pp.14, 19, 96.

⁹⁶ Emily Honig, ‘Striking Lives: Oral History and the Politics of Memory’, *Journal of Women’s History*, vol.9, no.1, Spring 1997, pp.139–40.

⁹⁷ Anne Curthoys, ‘The Proof of Continuity of Native Title: An Historian’s Perspective’, *Land, Rights, Laws: Issues of Native Title*, Issues Paper no. 18, 1999, p.1; Oliver Haag, ‘From the Margins to the Mainstream: Towards a History of Published Autobiographies and Biographies’, in Peter Read, Francis Peters-Little and Anna Haebich (eds), *Indigenous Biography and Autobiography*, Aboriginal History Monograph 17, Canberra: ANU Press, 2007, p.6.

⁹⁸ Tom Gara, ‘History, Anthropology and Native Title’, in Mandy Paul and Geoffrey Gray (eds), *Through A Smoky Mirror: History and Native Title*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2002, p.77.

While caution should be used in relying exclusively on oral testimony, or any other single source of information for that matter, its judicious use as part of the historian's overall package of research methods and techniques actually has many practical benefits by "bringing into play new sources to be evaluated alongside written sources and material remains".⁹⁹ Accordingly, Aboriginal voices, in the form of oral histories conducted with Aboriginal people, have been a crucial element of the thesis research, as has been the use of anthropological sources, in order to understand Aboriginal perspectives on their engagement in the opal industry.

In the course of my research I interviewed 53 people (Aboriginal and European) at various locations in South Australia in 2013 and 2015, with most conducted in the north of the state.¹⁰⁰ The selection of people to be interviewed was made following my meeting with Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy in December 2012 to discuss my research proposal, and follow-up discussions between that date and my initial period of oral history interviews. A number of people who I discussed my research proposal with, and subsequently interviewed, were known to me, as I had previously worked with them. Notifications of my research and visits to the local community were posted on the notice boards, as well as personally discussed, at several Aboriginal organisations in both Coober Pedy and Port Augusta – where many former Aboriginal opal miners from both Coober Pedy and Andamooka resided – in order to publicise my research project, and also at the office of the Port Augusta campus of the University of Adelaide.¹⁰¹ I was also interviewed on a radio program in Adelaide produced for an Aboriginal audience and by a regional Aboriginal media outlet in Port Augusta, about my research project and advising when I would be in remote areas conducting oral history interviews.¹⁰² Both of these radio stations broadcast throughout much of the state. Notification of my research and oral history recording was also publicised in a quarterly issue of a SANTS publication in 2013.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ John Tosh, with Sean Lang, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, Fourth Edition, Harlow: Longman Pearson, 2006, p.334.

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix One for details.

¹⁰¹ Kokatha Aboriginal Corporation, Pika Wiya Health Service and Umeewarra Media, Port Augusta. Umoona Tjutagku Health Service, Coober Pedy.

¹⁰² Anangu Lands Paper Tracker Radio Show broadcast by Radio Adelaide, and Umeewarra Media, Port Augusta.

¹⁰³ *Aboriginal Way*, no.53, July 2013, p.19.

The oral history interviews were formally structured and generally ranged from 45 to 90 minutes, although some went for longer periods, while others were of a shorter duration. Interviews were generally carried out at the homes of participants, as most expressed a preference for this. Many interviews with Aboriginal people were held either on their home verandahs or in shaded areas in their yards, and occasionally other family members or interested persons in attendance made comments or provided information during the interview. This informal, 'cross-cultural' approach to interviewing made Aboriginal people more comfortable in expressing themselves, while at the same time passing on information to others present in the traditional way of storytelling.¹⁰⁴ With the exception of two brothers who wished to remain anonymous, all people interviewed agreed to having their names included in the thesis.

Aboriginal people interviewed were either former opal miners who had worked in the industry since the 1950s, or the descendants of Aboriginal opal miners who had clear recollections of ancestors or other family members' engagement in the industry. Aboriginal people interviewed also remembered the opal mining era as a positive one, expressing a sense of pride, and some were regretful that this era was now over. "History and memory are family affairs" and, despite many Aboriginal people having grown up subject to forms of discrimination and derision, they did "not recall their youth as suffused by misery or anger, but rather by the pleasures that were available. These positive memories convey more than simple nostalgia".¹⁰⁵ This was clearly evident among Aboriginal opal miners interviewed. Also abundantly clear throughout the interview process was the consistency of memories relating to the names of Aboriginal opal miners, and the various fields in both major locations where they worked and resided, which reinforces the accuracy of their testimonies. Other opal miners I interviewed who had been in the opal industry since the 1960s were also consistent in their recollections of Aboriginal participation in the industry.

¹⁰⁴ This approach has been advocated by other researchers conducting oral history with Aboriginal people. See for example Jebb, *Blood, Sweat and Welfare*, p.16.

¹⁰⁵ Gillian Cowlishaw, "'On 'Getting it Wrong': Collateral Damage in the History Wars", *Australian Historical Studies*, no.127, 2006, pp.187-8.

Conceptual Framework

A number of theoretical or conceptual frameworks have been posited for Aboriginal engagement in various sectors of the Australian economy, for example, ‘internal colonialism’ and ‘colonised labour’.¹⁰⁶ However, these frameworks do not provide an understanding of Aboriginal agency, nor are they relevant to how Aboriginal people engaged in the northern South Australian opal industry while also maintaining much of their customary economy at the same time. The concept of the ‘hybrid economy’ developed by anthropologists provides a more useful framework for understanding Aboriginal engagement in the South Australian opal industry, as it highlights the agency of Aboriginal people, their choices and their decision-making. Christopher Anderson, for example, has observed how Aboriginal people on the Cape York Peninsula were engaged “as rational, active decision-makers” choosing to participate in what he has termed “a multiple-enterprise subsistence economy” based on wage labour, the traditional economy of hunting, fishing and gathering, and access to social security payments.¹⁰⁷

Anthropologist Jon Altman has more recently used the term ‘hybrid economy’ to describe how Aboriginal people were able to move successfully between market/private economies, the customary economy and the state sector – which often overlapped – as a strategy for adaptation, creativity and agency.¹⁰⁸ As economic historian Christopher Lloyd writes, ‘socioeconomic hybridity’ refers:

¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of ‘internal colonialism’ see Jeremy Beckett, ‘The Torres Strait Islanders and the Pearl Industry: A Case of Internal Colonialism’, *Aboriginal History*, vol. 1, pt.1, 1977, pp.77–104; Mervyn Hartwig, ‘Capitalism and Aborigines: The Theory of Internal Colonialism and its Rivals’, in E.L. Wheelwright and K. Buckley (eds), *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*, vol. three, Sydney: Australia & New Zealand Book Company, 1978, pp.119–41; Christine Jennett, ‘Theorising Internal Colonialism in Australia’, *International Journal of the Humanities*, vol.9, no.5, 2012, pp.169–180. The concept of ‘colonised labour’ is well articulated by Bill Thorpe, ‘Aboriginal Employment and Unemployment: Colonised Labour’, in Claire Williams with Bill Thorpe, *Beyond Industrial Society: the Work of Men and Women*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992, pp.95–98.

¹⁰⁷ Christopher Anderson, ‘Multiple Enterprises: Contemporary Aboriginal Subsistence Strategy in Southeast Cape York Peninsula’, in N.C. Stevens and A. Bailey (eds), *Contemporary Cape York Peninsula*, Brisbane: Royal Society of Queensland, 1980, p.77.

¹⁰⁸ See Jon Altman, ‘Foreword’, in Natasha Fijn, Ian Keen, Christopher Lloyd and Michael Pickering (eds), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies II: Historical Engagements and Current Enterprises*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2012, pp.xiii–xviii. For other pertinent discussions on the ‘hybrid economy’ model see Susie Russell, *The Hybrid Economy Topic Guide*, Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, 2011; Christopher Lloyd, ‘Settler Economies and Indigenous Encounters: The Dialectics of Conquest, Hybridisation and Production Regimes’ in Fijn *et al.*, (eds), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies II*, pp.17–39.

to the emergence of a socioeconomic formation with elements from the very contrasting systems of Indigenous and settler societies ... there are elements of traditional as well as settler/market relations, technologies and economic power ... [and that] there is a retention of a significant degree of human agency by the Indigenous people.¹⁰⁹

Anthropologist John White has also ascribed the model of the hybrid economy to the employment patterns of the Yuin people of the southern coast of New South Wales from the 1930s to the 1970s.¹¹⁰ The Yuin worked in a variety of agricultural occupations throughout this period which were seasonally based, and in the off-season reverted to their traditional economic base, or government rations from the New South Wales Aborigines Board, demonstrating the “intersecting and overlapping fields that comprised the hybrid economy” they engaged in.¹¹¹ From the late 1930s to the 1970s Aboriginal people at the Ernabella mission in the far north-west of South Australia also participated in a hybrid economy, moving between seasonal work such as shepherding and ‘dogging’.¹¹² These were seasonal activities and traditional economic pursuits, with the state involved in providing rations and health and education services through the local mission.¹¹³ The hybrid economy model as a conceptual framework is clearly applicable to Aboriginal involvement in the northern South Australian opal industry throughout the study period, as this thesis will show.

Summary of Chapters

To understand the nature of Aboriginal engagement in the northern South Australian opal industry, it is necessary to understand the important features of Aboriginal culture of the region, and their previous relationships with European people. Chapter One

¹⁰⁹ Lloyd, ‘Settler Economies and Indigenous Encounters’, p.29.

¹¹⁰ John M. White, ‘On the Road to Nerrigundah: A Historical Anthropology of Indigenous Settler Relations in the Eurobodalla Region of New South Wales’, unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2010, pp.94–5, 220–25; John M. White, ‘Histories of Indigenous–Settler Relations: Reflections on Internal Colonialism and the Hybrid Economy’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no.1, 2011, pp.81–96.

¹¹¹ White, ‘On the Road to Nerrigundah’, pp.220–1.

¹¹² Aboriginal people often collected dingo scalps as part of a government program to minimise their threat to pastoral stock in the far north of South Australia. They exchanged the scalps with European bushmen known as ‘doggers’ for cash and goods, an activity dating from the 1920s to the 1960s. See Diana Young, ‘Dingo Scalping and the Frontier Economy in the North-West of South Australia’, in Keen (ed.), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies*, pp.91–108.

¹¹³ Alan O’Connor, “‘Always Anangu-Always Enterprising’”, in Fijn *et al.*, (eds), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies II*, pp.97–115.

begins with a brief overview of Aboriginal life in northern South Australia at the time of European arrival. It examines the local 'tribal' groups who occupied the opal field regions, and their systems of land tenure, the environment and economy, and the importance of land, mythology and sites that were central to their ceremonial lives. It also outlines the economic, social and cultural practices that characterised life for Aboriginal people in these locations which were maintained well into the twentieth century, and would influence their engagement in the opal industry. The second part of this chapter briefly examines the increasing involvement of Aboriginal people in the European economy, in particular, the pastoral industry prior to the emergence of the opal industry. The northern pastoral industry relied heavily on the services of Aboriginal workers, and for many was their first introduction to European employment. It also gave Aboriginal people a considerable degree of autonomy and could accommodate their important cultural practices. Pastoral employment for Aboriginal people was similar in some ways to the opal industry, especially the level of autonomy it provided and the accommodation of important cultural, social and economic practices. The pastoral industry therefore provides a comparative framework for investigating the activities of Aboriginal opal miners throughout this thesis. Chapter One finally reviews early government Aboriginal affairs policies, notably the establishment of the ration distribution system depots, an inexpensive 'hands-off' form of administration which was the first exposure of Aboriginal people to officialdom in northern South Australia.

To appreciate the unique nature of Aboriginal involvement in opal mining, it is also necessary to understand the distinctive characteristics of the industry. Chapter Two details the discovery of opal in South Australia, the establishment of the opal fields at Coober Pedy in 1915, and Andamooka in 1931, and how Aboriginal participation in the industry began to occur by the 1940s. The unique nature of tenure on the South Australian opal fields, where large-scale production was prohibited, suited individual or small partnership arrangements. This chapter examines why the opal industry appealed to many people, and the reasons include the autonomous nature of the industry, its informality, and the element of risk and chance. Workers from other rural industries were also attracted to the industry in order to supplement their incomes, notably some farmers, and Aboriginal people employed in the pastoral industry.

Chapter Three examines the emergence of Aboriginal involvement in the opal industry, which began in the 1940s, to its peak in the 1970s. While opal may have initially been a curiosity for Aboriginal people passing through the vicinity of the fields, employment there soon became serious as people from nearby pastoral stations, and later from further afield, began working and residing there. In 1946, a significant find of opal by an Aboriginal woman on the Coober Pedy Eight Mile field helped revitalise the industry there which had been experiencing a downturn. This chapter also details the establishment of a significant Aboriginal presence on the opal fields, noting population estimates and forms of residence.

Having now established the nature and extent of Aboriginal engagement in the opal industry, Chapter Four goes on to explore the significance of their work. Noting that many Aboriginal people successfully noddled on the mullock heaps and earned reasonable incomes, this chapter also examines how some Aboriginal people undertook more specialised roles. As well as actually owning precious stones claims, some engaged in more skilled tasks such as being specialised ‘checkers’ and bulldozer drivers, highly regarded and sought after by other miners, particularly in Coober Pedy. Several became opal classers and valuers and, because of their success in the opal industry, two Aboriginal people were able to establish small independent contracting businesses.

While Aboriginal people seriously participated in the opal industry, it was largely done on their own terms. Chapter Five reveals how Aboriginal people maintained significant aspects of their traditional culture at the same time, a situation the opal industry was able to accommodate. I examine how the opal industry enabled Aboriginal people to reside close to both the opal fields where they worked, as well as the countryside where they could participate in a hybrid economy by exploiting their traditional economic base, as well as participating in the introduced mainstream economy. Camping near the opal fields and the family-friendly nature of the opal industry also enhanced the maintenance of important social practices. This chapter also reveals how cultural continuity was clearly aided by the distinct nature of the opal industry, as its flexible

and autonomous characteristics readily accommodated the needs of Aboriginal people in relation to their ceremonial lives.

As Aboriginal participation in the opal industry was increasing in the 1950s, the government began taking a greater interest. Chapter Six firstly examines the extent and effectiveness of the government's response to exploitation by assisting with the sale of their opal, and efforts to encourage Aboriginal people to mine more systematically. This chapter also reviews the effectiveness of the government in providing adequate welfare services and resources to Aboriginal opal miners and their families.

Chapter Seven examines the decline of Aboriginal involvement in the opal industry. A number of factors, economic, technological and social, in the 1960s and 1970s would adversely affect Aboriginal participation in the northern South Australian opal industry. These included diminishing levels of opal production, which reduced the amount of opal available for Aboriginal people to mine. The introduction of new technology in the form of automated noodling machines as a result of changing economic circumstances was also a significant cause of Aboriginal disengagement in the opal industry. At a time of social change and an increase in services available to Aboriginal people, the introduction of unemployment benefits became a disincentive for some people to work in the industry. Around this time there was a significant decline in the Aboriginal population at Andamooka, with many people moving to more urbanised locations to avail themselves of better services and increasing employment opportunities. The final part of this chapter reviews how some Aboriginal people worked briefly in an Aboriginal tourism venture in Coober Pedy and several other opal fields from around the 1980s.

A Note on Terms and Aboriginal English

Throughout the thesis I use the term 'Aboriginal people', rather than 'Indigenous'.

Aboriginal people I have worked with and interviewed have expressed a preference for the former, as it better reflects Australian Aboriginal identity, while the latter is thought of as a more generic global term.¹¹⁴ I have also used the term 'engagement' extensively

¹¹⁴ Others scholars have also expressed similar reasons not to use the term 'Indigenous'. See for example Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003, p.351; Skye Krichauff, 'The Narungga and Europeans: Cross-Cultural Relations on Yorke Peninsula in the Nineteenth Century', unpublished MA thesis, University of Adelaide, 2008, p.1; Christine J. Lockwood, 'The Two Kingdoms:

to describe the role of Aboriginal people in the northern South Australian opal industry throughout the study period. In the field of contact between Aboriginal people and outsiders, 'engagement':

stresses the active involvement of both sides, it is not necessarily a once-only event, and it can refer to a process. Engagement also implies that both sides have made a conscious decision to be involved. It must be remembered that not all native people chose to engage with visitors to their lands.¹¹⁵

This term aptly describes how Aboriginal people responded creatively to the northern South Australian opal industry and participated meaningfully.

From time to time Aboriginal English is used by Aboriginal people interviewed in this thesis, and in some of the Aboriginal life histories referred to above. Aboriginal English, which is spoken widely throughout Australia, is considered a distinct dialect which shares some of the features of standard Australian English, has its own linguistic rules and is a significant marker of Aboriginal identity.¹¹⁶

Lutheran Missionaries and British Civilizing Mission in Early South Australia', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, 2014, p.19.

¹¹⁵ Robin Torrence and Anne Clarke, 'Negotiating Difference: Practice Makes Theory for Contemporary Archaeology in Oceania', in Robin Torrence and Anne Clarke (eds), *The Archaeology of Difference: Negotiating Cross-Cultural Engagements in Oceania*, London: Routledge, 2000, p.16.

¹¹⁶ Eades, 'They Don't Speak an Aboriginal Language', p.97; Ian G. Malcolm, *Language and Communication Enhancement for Two-Way Education*, Perth: Edith Cowan University and Education Department of Western Australia, 1995, p.19.

CHAPTER ONE: ABORIGINAL–EUROPEAN SETTLER RELATIONS BEFORE THE OPAL ERA

Introduction

To understand the nature of Aboriginal involvement in the northern South Australian opal industry, we first need to understand the Aboriginal people and culture of the region, and their existing relations with Europeans. By the time Aboriginal people became involved in the opal industry by the 1940s they had already experienced many decades of contact with European society in northern South Australia, primarily through the establishment of the pastoral industry. The first part of this chapter provides a brief account of traditional Aboriginal life in the region, and economic, social and cultural practices in northern South Australia at the time of the arrival of European people in the region, and on the threshold of the opal industry. Included in this discussion are some aspects of Aboriginal land tenure, the environment and evidence of long-term occupation, economic and kinship systems, and the importance of land, mythology, ritual and ceremonial practices. Aboriginal people continued to maintain elements of their traditional life throughout the study period, which influenced their participation in the opal industry.

The second part of this chapter briefly examines early European contact in the Andamooka and Coober Pedy regions through the establishment of the pastoral industry. As the first major European economic activity in these regions, the pastoral industry became a significant employer of Aboriginal people, many of whom would later be involved in the opal industry. For Aboriginal people, the pastoral and opal industries shared a number of similarities, including their capacity to accommodate significant cultural practices. The pastoral industry therefore provides a useful point of comparison throughout this thesis and warrants some discussion here. The final part of the chapter provides a brief overview of government efforts at administering the Aboriginal people of the region, and regulating their relations with Europeans at the time of first contact in northern South Australia and on the eve of their involvement on the opal industry. This provides some context for later chapters where the role of

government in relation to Aboriginal opal miners is explored in some detail. While government policy changed from one of *laissez faire* and indifference to more interventionist and ‘protectionist’ by the early twentieth century, Aboriginal people in much of northern South Australia largely avoided the strict controls and regulations imposed in other parts of the state. The ration distribution system, which was the government’s major policy initiative in the north of the state, was an inexpensive, ‘hands-off’ form of administration, which facilitated the first official contact with many Aboriginal people in the region, as well as helping to develop the unique relationship between them and local pastoralists. Between the 1920s and 1930s there was also a gradual shift from the previous protectionist policies to one of assimilation, which intensified in later decades until its abandonment in the 1970s.

The Aboriginal People of Northern South Australia

Anthropologist E.P. Elkin considered the Coober Pedy/Stuart Range area as just within the ‘territory’ of the Arabana people, while ethnologist Norman Tindale has ‘located’ Coober Pedy on the ‘border’ of Arabana and Kokatha country.¹ The Stuart Range region, according to linguist Petter Naessan, was traditionally occupied by the western Arabana and was an important meeting place for Arabana and Western Desert people prior to European contact, and is situated geographically where the Western Desert and Central Lakes cultural blocs intersect.² The Western Desert cultural region of related Aboriginal people comprises some 600,000 square kilometres, and includes large parts of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Aboriginal society in this cultural region is characterised by related dialects, common kinship systems and social organisation, and shared mythological stories.³ Because of shared ritual and

¹A.P. Elkin, ‘The Social Organization of South Australian Tribes’, *Oceania*, vol. 2, no.1,1931, p.45; N.B. Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia. Their Terrain, Environmental Controls, Distribution, Limits, and Proper Names*, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974, Tribal Boundaries Map Australia S.E.sheet, n.p.

²The Arabana people were part of the Central Lakes cultural region of north-eastern South Australia, which had different social systems and culture from the Western Desert cultural region. However these different groups participated in joint traditions and rituals, and there was also linguistic borrowing. See Petter Naessan, ‘The Etymology of Coober Pedy, South Australia’, *Aboriginal History*, vol. 34, 2010, p.223. See also Trevor J. Hobbs, *The Breakaways Reserve: A Resource Inventory*, Adelaide: Department of Lands, 1987, p.9.

³Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt, ‘A Preliminary Report of Fieldwork in the Ooldea Region, Western South Australia’, *Oceania*, vol.12, no.4, June 1942, p.324; Philip A. Clarke, *Discovering Aboriginal Plant Use: Journeys of an Australian Anthropologist*, Sydney: Rosenberg, 2014, p.70; Elkin, ‘The Social Organization’, pp.60–1. Anthropologist Ronald Berndt believes that the expression ‘Western Desert societies’ is more appropriate than the term ‘tribe’. Ronald M. Berndt, ‘The Concept of “The Tribe” in the Western Desert of Australia’, *Oceania*, vol. 30, no.2, December 1959, p.105.

ceremonial sites in the nearby Breakaways region of the Stuart Ranges, also known as the ‘*Kanku*-Breakaways Conservation Park’, Kokatha and Yankunytjatjara people both have joint interests and obligations there.⁴ Many Yankunytjatjara people also claim a relationship to Coober Pedy on the basis of birth there, or it being the birthplace of their grandfather, which provides a genealogical link.⁵ Another group with a significant interest in the Coober Pedy region are the Antakarinja people with ‘territorial’ interests to the north of the town, although some Yankunytjatjara speakers also identify as Antakarinja.⁶

According to Norman Tindale, the Andamooka region was traditionally occupied by the Kuyani people.⁷ However, it was more likely that four Aboriginal groups had a significant association with the general region, the Kokatha, Kuyani, Barnjarla and Arabana, given the flexibility of tribal ‘boundaries’ and their interaction.⁸ More contemporary anthropological research, however, has suggested that it was likely that the Andamooka/Olympic Dam area may have traditionally been Kokatha country. The Kokatha were part of the distinct Western Desert cultural region, located at its eastern extremity, although there is evidence that they had adopted some cultural practices and beliefs of the adjacent Central Lakes groups.⁹ The ‘territory’ of the Kokatha is generally considered to have extended from the Ooldea region of far western South

⁴ Naessan, ‘The Etymology of Coober Pedy’, p.218; Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, *The Kanku-Breakaways Conservation Park Draft Management Plan*, Adelaide: Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, 2015, p. 2.

⁵ Petter Naessan, ‘Some Tentative Remarks on the Sociolinguistic Vitality of Yankunytjatjara in Coober Pedy, South Australia’, *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, vol.28. no.2, 2008, p.105.

⁶ Ingkama Bobby Brown and Peter Attila Naessan, *Irrititja–The Past: Antikirrinya History from Ingomar Station*, Southport: Keeira Press, 2012, p.13; Petter Naessan, ‘Manta Tjamiku, Manta Kamiku – Grandfather Country, Grandmother Country: A Philological and Sociolinguistic Study of the Concept ‘Antakirinya’’, unpublished MA thesis, University of Adelaide, 2000, p.78; Paul Reader, *The Heritage of the Antikirinya, Arabana and South Aranda Land*, Adelaide: National Estate Grants Programme, 1983, p.1. Linguist Arthur Capell has noted that the Antakarinja language is almost identical to Kokatha and that a number of Antakarinja speakers were observed on the Andamooka opal fields in the early 1960s. A. Capell, *Linguistic Survey of Australia*, prepared for Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Sydney: Sydney University Monograph, 1963, p.2.

⁷ Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes*, p.213.

⁸ Tom Gara, *The Kokatha Heritage Survey*, Adelaide: National Estate Grants Programme, 1989, p.5. Alternative spellings of the names of these groups who have traditional interests in the country around the South Australian opal fields exist. For examples see Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes*, pp.211–3. Throughout this thesis I use the spelling which reflects that recorded in their respective applications for grants of Native Title.

⁹ Gara, *The Kokatha Heritage Survey*, p.4. For a useful comparison of the distinct Western Desert and Central Lakes cultural regions see Elkin, ‘The Social Organization’, pp.44–73; S.J. Hemming and P.A. Clarke, *Aboriginal People of South Australia*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1992, pp.3–7.

Australia northwards to the Coober Pedy region and as far east as the Lake Torrens area, including Andamooka.¹⁰

In describing the traditional ‘territory’ of Aboriginal people who inhabited the Coober Pedy and Andamooka regions, it is acknowledged that the notion of distinct Aboriginal land boundaries is problematic. Geographer Jane Jacobs has challenged the fascination that some anthropologists have had trying “to express cartographically the spatial organisation of Aboriginal society”, particularly the arbitrary nature of boundaries that are more suited to European states.¹¹ Jacobs argues that Aboriginal territory is “culturally and spatially flexible”, and that a number of different groups may have customary rights and interests in a specific geographical area, through birth, kinship or mythological ties.¹² Linguist Petter Naessan, working with Aboriginal people in northern South Australia, observed that many of his informants considered “the concept of ‘boundaries’ or ‘borders’ is virtually non-existent or at best peripheral”.¹³

Another reason for being sceptical about the existence of distinct tribal boundaries is the “widespread dislocation” of Aboriginal people that has occurred since the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Migratory patterns among Aboriginal people were evident at the time of European occupation of northern South Australia, further complicating the notion of fixed territorial boundaries. According to anthropologist Ronald Berndt, Aboriginal people from far northern South Australia had moved to Ooldea in the far west of the state by 1917, and formed a large proportion of the population there, while Aboriginal people in the central northern and north-western regions of South Australia had also moved in a south-westerly direction. Berndt added that migration movements in the Western Desert had also occurred before European contact and occupation.¹⁵

¹⁰ J.T.Platt, ‘The Kukata–Kukatja Distinction’, *Oceania*, vol. 38, no.1, September 1967, p.63; J.T. Platt, *An Outline Grammar of the Gugada Dialect: South Australia*, Australian Aboriginal Studies no.48, Linguistic Series no.20, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1972, p.1; W.J. Oates and Lynette F. Oates, *A Revised Linguistic Survey of Australia*, Australian Aboriginal Studies no. 33, Linguistic Series no.12, Canberra; Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1970, p.76.

¹¹ Jane M. Jacobs, ‘Understanding the Limitations and Cultural Implications of Aboriginal Tribal Boundary Maps’, *The Globe*, no.25, 1986, pp.2,4.

¹² Jacobs, ‘Understanding the Limitations’, p.2.

¹³ Naessan, ‘The Etymology of Coober Pedy’, p.221.

¹⁴ David Horton, *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History, Society and Culture*, vol.1.A–L, Canberra: Published by Aboriginal Studies Press for Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1994, p.555.

¹⁵ Ronald M. Berndt, ‘Tribal Migration and Myths Centring on Ooldea, South Australia’, *Oceania*, vol.12, no.1, September 1941, pp.1, 4–5,19. For other sources on Aboriginal migration see Peggy Brock,

However, with the arrival of European people in much of South Australia, many Aboriginal people who may once have returned to their place of origin, as was the practice in the past, now permanently relocated.¹⁶

Traditional Aboriginal Life in Northern South Australia

The Western Desert region of Australia has been described as “probably the most undependable and impoverished habitat anywhere in the world where people have succeeded in living entirely off the land”.¹⁷ Population densities in the Western Desert region at the time of European occupation are estimated at between one person per 200 square kilometres, and one per 80 square kilometres.¹⁸ The region is extremely arid and experiences extreme temperatures in summer and mild winters, although sub-zero temperatures can be experienced at night and early morning. The average annual rainfall in the Andamooka–Coober Pedy region is about 150 millimetres.¹⁹ Because of its arid nature and low and variable rainfall, the search for water was an important factor for Aboriginal people that necessitated a considerable degree of mobility.²⁰

Aboriginal people in the Western Desert, however, used their environment creatively, and were able to utilise water that was available from peripheral waterholes that may have been periodically filled after rainfall, and they would have concentrated and foraged around these areas. For instance, Aboriginal people in the Andamooka/Arcoona Plateau Region utilised the freshwater lakes and canegrass swamps when rainfall occurred. This area sustained a considerable degree of flora and fauna, and supported small nomadic groups of Aboriginal people that would increase when rain fall filled the lakes, and archaeological surveys in the area have revealed campsites and “densities of artefacts so great that it is impossible not to walk on them”,

‘South Australia’, in Ann McGrath (ed.), *Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines under the British Crown*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995, p.217; Kim Doohan, *One Family, Different Country: The Development and Persistence of an Aboriginal Community at Finke, Northern Territory*, Oceania Monograph no.42, 1992, pp.20–1; Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes*, pp.211–3.

¹⁶ Doohan, *One Family, Different Country*, p.20.

¹⁷ Richard Gould, ‘The Archaeologist as Ethnographer: A Case from the Western Desert of Australia’, *World Archaeology*, vol.3, no.2, October 1971, p.145.

¹⁸ Ian Keen, *Aboriginal Economy and Society: Australia at the Threshold of Colonisation*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2004, p.110.

¹⁹ Ron Hewitt, ‘The Arcoona Plateau—An Outline of Aboriginal Habitats and Relics’, *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia*, vol.16, no.6, August 1978, p.8; *Coober Pedy Regional Times*, 24 April 2014, p.4.

²⁰ Keen, *Aboriginal Economy and Society*, p.31.

indicating significant human occupation.²¹ Creeks and swamps in the vicinity of the Coober Pedy Eight Mile and Twelve Mile opal fields also provided water to Aboriginal people, including those who worked on these fields from the 1940s to the 1970s.²²

Aboriginal people in the Western Desert also possessed technology appropriate to the effective utilisation of the regions economic resources. The need for mobility necessitated items that were portable, and these included a variety of stone tools, such as hammers, scrapers, knives, hafted stone axes and adzes, grinding implements and digging sticks, as well as wooden items such as spears, spear throwers and wooden bowls.²³ Considerable archaeological evidence indicates the presence of Aboriginal people in the opal-bearing regions prior to European arrivals. Coober Pedy historian Anne Johnson observed from over three decades of “walking the bushland” in the area many Aboriginal stone tools and discarded flaked stones, indicative of a lengthy Aboriginal presence in the region. Significantly, many artefacts located were near sources of water, even if they were temporary or seemingly insignificant, challenging a general European perception that there was little water and therefore little likelihood of Aboriginal occupation of the area.²⁴ In the *Kan̄ku*-Breakaways Conservation Park twenty five kilometres north-west of Coober Pedy, evidence of ancient human occupation has been found with jasper and silcrete stone tools and flakes found in abundance, and quarries of jasper and ochre also located there.²⁵ Closer to the Coober Pedy township ancient stone arrangements have been found intact, metres from extensive diggings at the Fourteen Mile opal field.²⁶ Such arrangements are a good indicator of ceremonial significance.

²¹ Hewitt, ‘The Arcoona Plateau’, pp.6, 8,11. According to Hewitt, the Arcoona Plateau is a geographic region north of Port Augusta centred roughly on the Woomera township, and includes Andamooka and surrounds. Its uniqueness is based on its “environmental factors and a plethora of Aboriginal relics”. Historian Tom Gara noted that the plateau region is characterised by undulating gibber country, largely devoid of trees and bushes and grasses, but dunefields in the area support some native vegetation. Low dunes and sandy areas occur around salt and freshwater lakes and canegrass swamps. Aboriginal people had a preference for campsites in the sandy areas, and artefact are found in such areas, particularly where freshwater is located nearby. Gara, *The Kokatha Heritage Survey*, p.9.

²² Brown and Naessan, *Irritija–The Past*, p.17.

²³ Keen, *Aboriginal Economy and Society*, pp.84–90.

²⁴ Ann Johnson, *Digging Around Coober Pedy: Exploring Life in the Little Opal Mining Town with a Big Profile*, Coober Pedy: Sandstone Press, 2006, p.43.

²⁵ Hobbs, *The Breakaways Reserve*, pp.15–6.

²⁶ Umoona Aged Care Aboriginal Corporation, *Tjilpi Tjuta Kanyini Heritage Protection Project 1997–1998*, Coober Pedy: Umoona Aged Care Aboriginal Corporation, 1998, p.6.

Archaeological evidence in the Andamooka/Arcoona Plateau region also indicates significant Aboriginal occupation and usage of its natural resources over a long period of time. In the broader Andamooka/Olympic Dam region, for instance, over 17,000 archaeological sites were recorded between 1980 and 2013, comprising mainly artefact scatters, as well as knapping floors, quarries and hearths.²⁷ Artefact density in the Arcoona Plateau has been estimated at 100 or more per square metre, in some areas including extensive artefact scatters by the Andamooka Waterhole. A broad range of artefact material is found in the region, including items made from chert, jasper and chalcedony, as well as grindstones, hammerstones, anvils and pebble tools, pirri points, backed blades, adzes, scrapers and other small tools.²⁸ There is also archaeological evidence of Aboriginal art and ceremonial activities in the region, including stone circles and stone arrangements, such as one found at the Andamooka Homestead. Rock engraving and painting sites are also found on the Plateau, particularly in the rocky uplands and, while “a small fraction of the total” have been officially recorded, there is a strong likelihood that there are many other such sites that occur along creeks draining into the lakes in the region.²⁹

In the Western Desert, Aboriginal hunters and gatherers formed small ‘residence groups’ or ‘bands’, comprising family or kin groups who cooperated in economic and social activity.³⁰ These groups may have consisted of between six or eight people to thirty or more, comprising members of related families bound by kinship or friendship, although membership may have varied from season to season, depending on ecological and social factors.³¹ These groups traversed a large geographical area, often hunting and gathering food in other people’s territory, as it was not always possible to obtain

²⁷ Philip Hughes, Marjorie Sullivan, Peter Hiscock and Angela Neyland, ‘The Need to Have Understood Your Local Geology: Nature and Sources of Material Used to Manufacture Stone Tools at Olympic Dam, South Australia’, *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia*, vol.38, December 2014, p.109.

²⁸ Gara, *The Kokatha Heritage Survey*, pp.9–10. See also Ron Hewitt, ‘Aboriginal Adze Stone Hoards Found on the Arcoona Plateau near Woomera South Australia’, *Australian Archaeology*, vol.4, 1976, pp.14–52.

²⁹ Gara, *The Kokatha Heritage Survey*, pp.11–2; Hewitt, ‘The Arcoona Plateau’, pp.17–8.

³⁰ According to anthropologist Ian Keen, ‘residence group’ is a more appropriate term than ‘band’ in the Western Desert. The term ‘band’ implies a level of endurance or permanence that may have been more relevant in north-east Arnhem Land. In the Western Desert, however, the mobile nature of Aboriginal people mitigated against such a definition. Keen, *Aboriginal Economy and Society*, p. 308.

³¹ Robert Tonkinson, *The Mardu Aborigines: Living the Dream in Australia’s Desert*, Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1991, p.71.

sustenance from one's own country.³² While Aboriginal 'residence groups' were associated with an 'estate', which was the land they owned and had ritual responsibility for, the area they hunted and foraged over was known as a 'range', and these both formed part of a 'domain' or an Aboriginal "ecological life-space".³³

Despite what appeared to be a marginal environment, Aboriginal people in the Western Desert are known to have utilised up to thirty-eight edible plant species and forty-seven animal species, including grubs and insects. While vegetable and plant foods were the main diet, protein was available through meat sources such as lizards, kangaroos and emus.³⁴ It has been estimated that even in the harshest Australian environment, Aboriginal people need spend no longer than six or seven hours a day in productive economic activity to satisfy their needs.³⁵

The division of labour was gender based, although there were sometimes complementary activities. Men generally hunted kangaroos, emus, bush turkeys and smaller animals such as lizards and goannas. Aboriginal women used their gathering knowledge and technology to collect a large variety of native fruits such as quandongs, figs and tomatoes, berries, honey and gum, as well as seeds and plants for medicinal purposes. In addition, women collected eggs from emus and goannas, and dug for items such as tubers and smaller animals such as marsupials, lizards, witchetty grubs and honey ants.³⁶ Women enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy as independent gatherers and distributors of food, which anthropologist Catherine Berndt has termed "interdependent independence".³⁷ However, there were also instances of overlap in gender roles, where for example women might catch kangaroos using dogs if the

³² Ronald M. Berndt, 'Traditional Concepts of Aboriginal Land', in Ronald M. Berndt (ed.), *Aboriginal Sites, Rights and Resource Development*, Perth: Published for Academy of Social Sciences in Australia by University of Western Australia Press, 1982, p.8.

³³ W.E.H. Stanner, 'Aboriginal Territorial Organization: Estate, Range, Domain and Regime', *Oceania*, vol.36, no.1, September 1965, p.2.

³⁴ Gould, 'The Archaeologist as Ethnographer', pp.145–6.

³⁵ Charlie Fox, *Working Australia*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991, pp.11–2.

³⁶ W.H. Edwards, *An Introduction to Aboriginal Societies*, Wentworth Falls: Social Science Press, 1988, p.29.

³⁷ Catherine H. Berndt, 'Digging Sticks and Spears, or the Two-Sex Model', in Fay Gale (ed.), *Woman's Role in Aboriginal Society*, Second Edition, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1974, pp.70, 74–5; Catherine H. Berndt, 'Mythical Women, Past and Present', in Fay Gale (ed.), *We are Bosses Ourselves: The Status and Role of Aboriginal Women Today*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1983, p.14.

occasion arose, or men might gather native fruits when feeling hungry.³⁸ The distribution of food was also based on kinship obligations and therefore both Aboriginal men and women “made an interlocking investment in food supplies”.³⁹

The contribution of women to the traditional Aboriginal economy has generally been acknowledged as more significant than their male counterparts in relation to collecting food: the women’s “digging stick played a more important role than the spear in traditional Aboriginal society”.⁴⁰ Anthropologist Robert Tonkinson has estimated that the contribution of Aboriginal women to the food supply in the Western Desert ranged from sixty to eighty per cent.⁴¹ Another anthropologist working in central Australia estimated Aboriginal women’s contribution to the diet was up to eighty percent.⁴² Aboriginal women’s food gathering activities were often more dependable than male hunting, which was more “unpredictable and unreliable”, and women rarely came back from gathering empty handed.⁴³ As well as economic activity, women’s gathering was also an educational activity, with children being instructed in the art of gathering and where important food sources were located.⁴⁴

Notwithstanding the perceived notion of Aboriginal people living a marginal existence or struggling economically in an arid environment, an opposing view has been posited. Aboriginal people were part of an “original affluent society”, as there was no need economically to meet “endlessly expanding desires”, and enjoyed significant periods of leisure time.⁴⁵ The traditional economy remained a crucial part of the lives of Aboriginal people on both the Andamooka and Coober Pedy opal fields throughout the study period. The ‘task-oriented’ nature of Aboriginal economic utilisation was also similar to labour patterns in the northern South Australian opal industry.

³⁸ Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt, *The World of the First Australians. Aboriginal Traditional Life: Past and Present*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1992, p.119; Keen, *Aboriginal Economy and Society*, p.307.

³⁹ Fox, *Working Australia*, p.5.

⁴⁰ Marlene Chesson, ‘The Social and Economic Importance of the Women in Jigalong’, in Gale (ed.), *We are Bosses Ourselves*, p.41.

⁴¹ Tonkinson, *The Mardu Aborigines*, p.43.

⁴² Diane Bell, ‘Consulting with Women’, in Gale (ed.), *We are Bosses Ourselves*, p.25.

⁴³ Betty Hiatt, ‘Woman the Gatherer’, in Gale (ed.), *Woman’s Role in Aboriginal Society*, p.5.

⁴⁴ Annette Hamilton, ‘Aboriginal Women: The Means of Production’, in Jan Mercer (ed.), *The Other Half: Women in Australian Society*, Ringwood: Penguin, 1975, p.175.

⁴⁵ Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, London: Tavistock, 1974, Chapter One; Keen, *Aboriginal Economy and Society*, p.4.

Aboriginal kinship systems were a crucial aspect of Aboriginal society throughout Australia and the Western Desert, and influenced how people interacted, socially and economically. Kinship encapsulates the networks of relatedness that Aboriginal people share and “is *the* basic organising principle” for Aboriginal society throughout Australia, providing rules for ongoing relationships and a model for interpersonal behaviour.⁴⁶ Aboriginal people trace kinship relationships far more broadly than in European society, with all members of a particular Aboriginal language group able to trace their relationship to all other members of that group, as part of their overall “social universe”.⁴⁷ In the Western Desert, Aboriginal people employ a “classificatory system of kinship” which extends the range of relationships. For instance, siblings of the same sex are considered to be equal, and an individual’s father and uncles, and mothers and aunts are essentially considered to be the same.⁴⁸

Kinship systems also provided a basis for responsibilities related to sharing that were crucial for sustaining Western Desert societies. Sharing economic resources equitably was crucial in the desert environment and a vital practice in times of economic hardship. In Aboriginal society, status was gained through sharing rather than accumulating material items.⁴⁹ The importance of kinship networks and responsibilities of reciprocity and sharing were continually emphasised in the socialisation of the young.

Land, Mythology, Sites and Ceremonial Life

Ceremonial activities continued to be an important aspect of Aboriginal life on the opal fields throughout the study period. Aboriginal ceremonial life was intertwined with the land and associated mythology. Land in the Western Desert was ‘held’ or ‘owned’ by Aboriginal people with “intrinsic connections to country”, by ‘country groups’ or ‘local descent groups’.⁵⁰ Aboriginal people could claim connection to a site in the Western Desert through multiple pathways, including:

birth, spirit conception, conception at a place associated with the same or a related ancestor, place of circumcision, one’s parent’s or grandparent’s link

⁴⁶ Tonkinson, *The Mardu Aborigines*, p.57. Original emphasis.

⁴⁷ Ian Keen, ‘Aborigines and Islanders in Australian Society’, in Jake M. Najman and John S. Western, (eds), *A Sociology of Australian Society: Introductory Readings*, Melbourne: MacMillan, 1988, p.188.

⁴⁸ Edwards, *An Introduction to Aboriginal Societies*, p.47.

⁴⁹ Tonkinson, *The Mardu Aborigines*, p.53.

⁵⁰ Keen, *Aboriginal Economy and Society*, p 277.

to a place by one or more of those grounds, living in the area, and the death of a close relative at or near the place ... The coincidence of a number of grounds strengthened a person's claim.⁵¹

Central to the lives of Aboriginal people throughout Australia and the Western Desert was the concept of the 'Dreaming', often referred to as the '*Tjukurpa*'. The *Tjukurpa* is a "metaphysical construct" and an "ideological system that connects people to place".⁵² The *Tjukurpa* refers to a period in the past when ancestral beings were believed to have lived on Earth and created the current landforms and physical features before leaving, or being "metamorphosed into stones, other natural features or celestial bodies", while their spirits are believed to have remained, and maintain a "continuing interest in human affairs ... [and] ultimate control over the reproduction of all plants, animals, and humans".⁵³ The mythical ancestral beings provided the source of religion for Aboriginal people, which became "the mainstay of social existence" for them.⁵⁴

"Aboriginal spirituality, culture and society can be defined in one word: *land*", a powerful statement that highlights its profound significance.⁵⁵ Land in the Western Desert was not seen as a commodity by Aboriginal people, but "as a religious and spiritual as well as an economic resource".⁵⁶ Because of the creation of land by the mythological ancestors, it is considered sacred from a traditional Aboriginal perspective:

because the deities shaped it, humanized it and put within it the resources it now contains ... the presence of deities in the land is symbolised by the

⁵¹ Keen, *Aboriginal Economy and Society*, p 281.

⁵² Kingsley Palmer, 'Piety, Fact and the Oral Account in Native Title Claims', *Anthropological Forum*, vol.21, no.3, November 2011, p. 281; Mike Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia's Deserts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p.216.

⁵³ Tonkinson, *The Mardu Aborigines*, p.21. '*Tjukurpa*' is a Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara term referring to the creative period and commonly used throughout the Western Desert. See Cliff Goddard (compiler), *Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, Revised Second Edition, Alice Springs: IAD Press, 1996. p.184.

⁵⁴ Bruce DeBelle, 'Aboriginal Customary Law and the Common Law', in Elliot Johnston, Martin Hinton and Darryle Rigney (eds), *Indigenous Australians and the Law*, London: Routledge-Cavendish, 2008, p.87.

⁵⁵ Kumantjayi Ross, 'Foreword', in Peter McEvoy and Pamela Lyon (compilers), *The Land is Always Alive: The Story of the Central Land Council*, Alice Springs: Central Land Council, 1994, p.vii. Emphasis added.

⁵⁶ Berndt, 'Traditional Concepts of Aboriginal Land', p.4.

sites: sites which are spiritually alive, a constant source of protection and reassurance for the future.⁵⁷

Significant mythological sites and associated ritual practices around Coober Pedy and Andamooka still retain their importance. In the Coober Pedy region, one area of profound mythological significance is the *Kanku*-Breakaways Conservation Park, which was noted earlier for its archaeological significance. These archaeological sites are also associated with ritual and ceremonial sites, as a number of mythological stories are associated with the area, including the ‘*Ungkata*’ (bearded dragon), ‘*Kalaya*’ (emu) and ‘*Papa Kutjara*’ (two dogs). Limited exploration and opal mining had occurred in several locations in the park prior to the early 1970s.⁵⁸ However, because of its importance to Aboriginal people, the entire park is now a registered Site under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988*.⁵⁹ The importance of Aboriginal sites of significance in the Coober Pedy Precious Stones Field, an area of nearly 5,000 square kilometres, has recently been recognised in an Indigenous Land Use Agreement under the *Native Title Act 1993*, which provides for their protection.⁶⁰

The Andamooka–Woomera region has been described as “a cultural hot spot” of Aboriginal sites and mythological tales, and one of the many major stories associated with the region is the ‘Seven Sisters’.⁶¹ As well as this particular mythology, others in the Andamooka/Olympic Dam region included ‘Sleepy Lizard’ ‘Snake’ and ‘Orion’. The importance of mythological sites to Aboriginal people in the Andamooka region was highlighted during the 1980s when concerns were raised about damage to sites because of the Olympic Dam mine development nearby and protest action ensued.⁶²

⁵⁷ Berndt, ‘Traditional Concepts of Aboriginal Land’, p.9.

⁵⁸ Timothy Fuhlbohmer, *The Breakaways Reserve Recreation Management*, Adelaide: Department of Lands, 1987, p.6.

⁵⁹ Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, *The Kanku-Breakaways Conservation Park Draft Management Plan*, pp.5–6. A number of Aboriginal people interviewed also indicated the significance of this area. These included Ian Crombie, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 24 August 2013; Jack Crombie, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 26 October 2013; Peter and Christine Jones, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 1 November 2013; Elaine Moosha, interview with Mike Harding, Quorn, 8 November 2013.

⁶⁰ National Native Title Tribunal, *Coober Pedy Precious Stones Field Indigenous Land Use Agreement*, SI2015/003, 28 April 2015, pp.1–3.

⁶¹ Andrew Starkey, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 11 November 2013.

⁶² R. Keith Johns, *A Mirage in the Desert? The Discovery, Evaluation and Development of the Olympic Dam Ore Bore at Roxby Downs, South Australia, 1975–88*, Adelaide: O’Neil Historical & Editorial Services, 2010, pp.34–8.

Aboriginal people also believed that the *Tjukurpa* ancestors left behind ‘the Law’, “which provides their lives with a sense of balance and existential security”.⁶³ The law was a body of rules or ‘master plan’ providing guidance for appropriate behaviour and social order, including rules for kinship, social organisation, exchange systems, systems of land tenure and ritual practices.⁶⁴ Ritual practices were particularly important to ensure that the activities of the creative ancestors were “immortalised in myths, songs and rituals”.⁶⁵ Strict compliance with the law was necessary (and still is in much of remote Australia) to ensure the continuity of human life and essential plant and animal requirements, and was achieved through ongoing ritual ceremonies. For Aboriginal people, as anthropologist Diana James has aptly put it:

the land itself is imbued with religious significance. The interconnectivity of humans and the sentient land is celebrated in song, story and dance. The land comes alive as the places, food and water sources created by the ancestors are re-energised through caring for *Tjukurpa* in place and spirit.⁶⁶

Ceremonial practices, often known as ‘corroborees’, were crucial in conveying knowledge, and instructing future generations of Aboriginal people.⁶⁷ Aboriginal traditional knowledge and ritual centred significantly on dances, narratives, songs and songlines, about the activities and travels of the creative ancestral beings, while providing knowledge about “laws, correct behaviour, healing, food sources and a host

⁶³ Helmut Petri and Gisela Petri-Oderman, ‘Stability and Change: Present-Day Historic Aspects Among Australian Aborigines’, in Ronald M. Berndt (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology: Modern Studies in the Social Anthropology of the Australian Aborigines*, Perth: Published for Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies by University of Western Australia Press, 1970, p.252.

⁶⁴ Tonkinson, *The Mardu Aborigines*, p. 57. There is an extensive body of literature on the *tjukurpa* and the law. See for example Berndt and Berndt, *The World of the First Australians*; Edwards, *An Introduction to Aboriginal Societies*; A.P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, Revised Edition, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1979; Fred R. Myers, *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place, and Politics Among Western Desert Aborigines*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986.

⁶⁵ Tonkinson, *The Mardu Aborigines*, p.21. Myths are sacred tales “about how the world came to be the way it is, about a superordinary realm of events before (or behind) the experienced natural world”, and dramatised through ongoing ritual performances. See Roger Keesing, *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective*, Second Edition, Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981, p.342.

⁶⁶ Diana James, ‘*Tjukurpa* Time’, in Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb (eds), *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place*, Canberra: ANU Press, 2015, p.34.

⁶⁷ Noel M. Wallace, ‘European Domination and Cultural Confusion: Forced Change Among the Pitjantjatjara’, in Robert Tonkinson and Michael Howard (eds), *Going It Alone? Prospects for Aboriginal Autonomy: Essays in Honour of Ronald and Catherine Berndt*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1990, p.89.

of other items". In addition, "rights to land and relationships to country are articulated" through the performance of these activities.⁶⁸

Aboriginal ceremonial life frequently involved extensive travel and time, and was "sufficiently complex to require meticulous organisation, within a sophisticated society well able to accommodate detailed advance planning and management".⁶⁹ It was not aimless, as sometimes perceived by other people, but "purposeful and systematic", following defined routes along mythical pathways, while combining traditional hunting and foraging activities.⁷⁰ Throughout much of Aboriginal Australia, including the opal-field regions, the two most important ceremonial practices related to male initiations, which began the pathway to adulthood and the gradual acquisition of important ritual knowledge that would otherwise be restricted, and 'increase' ceremonies, which were believed to help "revitalise the species and natural phenomenon personified in the totemic ancestors".⁷¹

The importance of ceremonial activity to Aboriginal people is reflected in the use of the word 'business' to describe such activities. Historian Ann McGrath wrote that:

This word is an interesting choice as it conveys the Aboriginal perception of the European's economic activities as being of prime importance to them, as compared with their serious business of religious preoccupations.⁷²

The expression 'business' is still commonly used by Aboriginal people today to describe both male and female ceremonial involvement.⁷³ I have observed this term used extensively in over thirty years of working and researching with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory and South Australia, including the opal regions.

⁶⁸ Catherine J. Ellis and Linda Barwick, 'Antikirinja Women's Song Knowledge 1963-72: Its Significance in Antikirinja Culture', in Peggy Brock (ed.), *Women, Rites & Sites: Aboriginal Women's Cultural Knowledge*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989, p.21; Richard M. Moyle, *Songs of the Pintupi: Musical Life in a Central Australian Society*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1979, p.10. Mythological stories can also be told through visual art mediums such as rock and cave art, and ground or body painting. See R.M. Berndt, and C.H Berndt, *The Speaking Land: Myth and Story in Aboriginal Australia*, Ringwood: Penguin, 1989, p.9.

⁶⁹ Wallace, 'European Domination and Cultural Confusion', p.85.

⁷⁰ Mike Donaldson, 'The End of Time? Aboriginal Temporality and the British Invasion of Australia', *Time and Society*, vol.5. no.2, 1996, p.194; Ann McGrath, *'Born in the Cattle': Aborigines in Cattle Country*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987, p.5.

⁷¹ Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia's Deserts*, p.216.

⁷² McGrath, *'Born in the Cattle'*, p.170.

⁷³ Helen Payne, 'Rites for Sites or Sites for Rites? The Dynamics of Women's Cultural Life in the Musgraves' in Brock (ed.), *Women, Rites & Sites*, p.47.

Aboriginal Involvement in the Northern South Australian Pastoral Industry

Aboriginal people in the region first encountered Europeans in the mid-nineteenth century. Following exploration in the region, pastoral expansion gradually ensued in the following decades.⁷⁴ As Europeans moved into northern South Australia in the late nineteenth century, Aboriginal people increasingly began to interact with them, participating in the emerging pastoral industry for several generations before Aboriginal engagement in the opal industry began by the 1940s. Although pastoralists had some control over their lives, including providing inducements in the form of rations, this was generally less intrusive than the more regulated life and “censorial control” that many Aboriginal people experienced on missions.⁷⁵

The pastoral industry provided numerous Aboriginal people with their first experience of the European economy. It not only provided employment for many Aboriginal people, who soon gained a good reputation for their skills, but also became heavily reliant on them.⁷⁶ It was even considered to be ‘aboriginalised’ in northern Australia, as Aboriginal people provided the majority of its labour, although generally receiving little acknowledgement for their contribution and “still largely missing from the ‘credits’”.⁷⁷ Numerous sources, both official and unofficial ranging from the 1890s to

⁷⁴ See R. Cockburn, *Pastoral Pioneers of South Australia*, vol.1, Adelaide: Publishers Limited, 1925, p.109; Leith Yelland, *Holding the Line: A History of the South Australian Dog Fence Board, 1947 to 2000*, Adelaide: Primary Industries and Resources South Australia, 2001, p.9; Norman Richardson, *Pioneers of the North-West of South Australia, 1856–1914*, Facsimile Edition, Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1969 [originally published Adelaide: W.K. Thomas, 1925]; Robert J. Munro, *Kingoonya. A Way of Life. The History of the Kingoonya Township and District*, Adelaide: Robert J. Munro, 1997.

⁷⁵ Peggy Brock, ‘Pastoral Stations and Reserves in South and Central Australia, 1850s–1950s’, in Ann McGrath and Kaye Saunders with Jackie Huggins (eds), *Aboriginal Workers*, Special Issue of Labour History, no.69, November 1995, pp.107–8; Robert Foster, ‘Rations, Co-existence, and the Colonisation of Aboriginal Labour in the South Australian Pastoral Industry, 1860–1911’, *Aboriginal History*, vol.24, 2000, p.25.

⁷⁶ H.H. Finlayson, *The Red Centre: Man and Beast in the Heart of Australia*, Third Edition, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1936, p.137; A.J. Greenfield, *Two Good Men: The Greenfield Brothers: Northern Pioneers of South Australia 1856–1926*, Mount Gambier: Jim Greenfield, 2003, p.124; Munro, *Kingoonya*, p.9.

⁷⁷ Ann McGrath, ‘Aboriginal Economy: The Pastoral Industry’, in James Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People: An Encyclopaedia of the Nation, its People, and Their Origins*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson 1988, p.208. In recent years there has been significant research into the valuable contribution of Aboriginal labour in the northern Australian pastoral industry. Some notable examples include McGrath, ‘Born in the Cattle’; Dawn May, *Aboriginal Labour and the Cattle Industry: Queensland from White Settlement to the Present*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

the 1940s attests to the importance of Aboriginal labour to the industry.⁷⁸ Aboriginal people were actively sought after by pastoralists even beyond that date. For instance, in 1960 R.P.Fels, the manager of Bon Bon station, wrote to several Aboriginal men living on the Coober Pedy opal fields to work for him during the forthcoming shearing season. It may have been that Fels was recently appointed to this position, as he noted in his correspondence to each individual that “I have been told you allways [sic] come here during shearing”.⁷⁹

Aboriginal people had developed enduring relationships with pastoral properties and often identified with owners and managers and adopted their surnames.⁸⁰ Large family groups related to individual Aboriginal pastoral workers often lived on the stations and formed part of the cheap labour pool, with children between the ages of eight to ten years often working in droving or stock camps.⁸¹ According to one Aboriginal opal miner whose family was extensively involved in both the mining and pastoral industries:

each Aboriginal family belonged to a station. If you talk about Strangways [family] they come from Wirraminna or that area and you talk about certain families that, ‘oh yeah, they were at Mt Eba’ or ‘they were at a different place’.⁸²

The labour of Aboriginal women was also significant for much of this period and exceeded the stereotypical role of Aboriginal women as merely domestic workers.⁸³

⁷⁸ Besley to Hamilton, 25 March 1892, State Records of South Australia (henceforth SRSA), Government Record Group (henceforth GRG) 52/1/1892/106; Besley to Hamilton, 19 March 1893, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1893/93; Field to Hamilton, 24 March 1900, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1900/102; ‘Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals (henceforth CPA) for the Year Ended June 30, 1917’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers* (henceforth SAPP), no.29, 1917, p.17; ‘Report of the CPA for the Year Ended June 30, 1919’, SAPP, no.29, 1919, p.15; ‘Report of the CPA for the Year Ended June 30, 1924’, SAPP, no.29, 1924, p.5; ‘Report of the CPA for the Year Ended June 30, 1939’, SAPP, no.29, 1939, p.2; ‘Report of the Aborigines Protection Board (henceforth APB) for the Year Ended June 30, 1943’, SAPP, no.20, 1943, p.1.

⁷⁹ Fels to Alec Crombie, Henry Brown and Billy Brown, 20 February 1960, South Australian Museum Archives (henceforth SAMA) 1053/05/10–12.

⁸⁰ Doohan, *One Family, Different Country*, p.45; Greenfield, *Two Good Men*, p.125.

⁸¹ Doohan, *One Family, Different Country*, p.45.

⁸² Chris Larkins, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 30 October 2013.

⁸³ There is a considerable body of research that has identified the important role of Aboriginal women in the northern Australian pastoral industry. For earlier sources see Finlayson, *The Red Centre*, p.137; Alfred Searcy, *In Australian Tropics*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1907, p.173. For more contemporary sources see McGrath, ‘*Born in the Cattle*’; Ann McGrath, ‘Aboriginal Women Workers in

Indeed, much of the work undertaken by Aboriginal women was arduous, physically demanding and often unsupervised.⁸⁴ In their published life histories, several Aboriginal women who were also opal miners described how they mustered cattle and sheep and worked in woolsheds on pastoral leases in northern South Australia.⁸⁵ Opal miner Eileen Wingfield recalled that she was about 18 years of age when she first worked in the pastoral industry:

I got my job and worked in Mabel Creek mustering cattle and then when that run out, we packed up and went across back to Nilpinna. Went there and sat around there and then from there, I had to go right back to the river, Diamantina River, mustering cattle.⁸⁶

Of particular importance to Aboriginal people was the pastoral industry's capacity to accommodate many of their important cultural and social practices. Aboriginal customary rights were accommodated by South Australian pastoral leases in 1851 which gave Aboriginal people unimpeded access across these areas, as well as occupying the land and utilising its resources.⁸⁷ The pastoral industry "provided a breathing space for Aboriginal culture" as Aboriginal people were able to remain on their traditional country and maintain their customary associations with their land while

the NT., 1911–1931, *Hecate*, vol.4, no.2, July 1978, pp.177–185; Amy Laurie and Ann McGrath, 'I Was a Drover Once Myself: Amy Laurie of Kununurra', in Isobel White, Diane Barwick and Betty Meehan (eds), *Fighters and Singers: The Lives of Some Aboriginal Women*, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985, pp.76–89; Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt, *End of an Era: Aboriginal Labour in the Northern Territory*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1987; Alan Powell, *Far Country: A Short History of the Northern Territory*, Second Edition, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988; Diane Bell, *Daughters of the Dreaming*, Second Edition, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993; Sharon Firebrace and Greg Gardiner, 'Surviving the Frontier: The Role and Contribution of Indigenous Women in the Development of Australia', *Monash University Koorie Research Centre Discussion Paper*, no.5, 1997; Henry Reynolds, *With the White People*, Ringwood: Penguin, 1990, pp.204–5. This research challenges the image of the stereotypical pastoral worker who was male and white which formed part of the image of 'Australian identity'. See Rodney Harrison, *Shared Landscapes: Archaeologies of Attachment and the Pastoral Industry in New South Wales*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004, p.9.

⁸⁴ McGrath, 'Aboriginal Women Workers', p.181.

⁸⁵ Emily Munyungka Austin, *My Young Days*, Coober Pedy: Umoona Aged Care Aboriginal Corporation, 2006, pp.10, 27; Eileen Unkari Crombie, *He Was a South Australian Film Star: My Life with Billy Pepper-Tinyma*, Murray Bridge: Nyiri Publications, p.3.

⁸⁶ Eileen Wingfield, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 1 November 2013.

⁸⁷ Shaun Berg, 'A Fractured Landscape: The Effect on Aboriginal Title to Land by the Establishment of the Province of South Australia', in Shaun Berg (ed.), *Coming to Terms: Aboriginal Title in South Australia*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2010, p.20; Robert Foster, 'The Origin of the Protection of Aboriginal Rights in South Australian Pastoral Leases', *Land, Rights, Laws: Issues of Native Title*, Issues Paper no. 24, August 1998, pp.6–7.

also participating in the industry when required.⁸⁸ It enabled many Aboriginal workers to exchange their labour for the right to remain on their traditional land, and provided continuing access to it in order to maintain important sites of significance and continue ritual practices, in contrast to many locations in southern Australia where significant dispossession had occurred since earlier colonial times.⁸⁹

The intermittent, task-oriented and seasonal nature of the pastoral industry suited many Aboriginal people and was not “entirely alien to traditional land use patterns”, enabling a considerable degree of cultural continuity.⁹⁰ Pastoralists were generally uninterested in the ritual and ceremonial lives of Aboriginal workers, as this posed no interference to the operation of their properties.⁹¹ In some ways traditional cultural practices actually suited pastoral lessees in northern South Australia, particularly when Aboriginal workers participated in lengthy ceremonial activities, often disparagingly referred to as being on ‘walkabout’, which generally coincided with the quieter months in the pastoral industry. Absences from work at these times also obviated the need to provide wages or rations. Historian Robert Foster has detailed how “this complementarity between traditional life and station life” operated in northern South Australia from the late nineteenth century to the late 1960s, revealing how Aboriginal pastoral workers regularly participated in traditional practices while also maintaining employment in the pastoral industry.⁹² This was a situation analogous to Aboriginal participation in the opal industry. Having access to their traditional lands enabled Aboriginal people to utilise their traditional economic base while also participating in what has been termed the ‘cattle economy’ of cash and introduced food. The ‘bush economy’ of foraging and hunting remained important, with traditional food sources highly sought after.⁹³ Despite “the commoditisation of Aboriginal labour in station work, an active and independent way of life was maintained”.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: Black Response to White Dominance 1788–1980*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1982, p.136.

⁸⁹ Brock, ‘Pastoral Stations and Reserves’, p.103; Fox, *Working Australia*, p.46.

⁹⁰ Robert Foster, *De Rose Hill Native Title Claim: Expert History Report*, Adelaide: Report for the Native Title Unit, Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement, November 2000, p.38; Pamela A. Smith, ‘Station Camps: Legislation, Labour Relations and Rations on Pastoral Leases in the Kimberley Region, Western Australia’, *Aboriginal History*, vol.24, 2000, p.83.

⁹¹ Broome, *Aboriginal Australians*, p.136; Foster, *De Rose Hill Native Title Claim*, p.66.

⁹² Foster, *De Rose Hill Native Title Claim*, pp.66–68.

⁹³ McGrath, ‘*Born in the Cattle*’, p.153.

⁹⁴ Doohan, *One Family, Different Country*, p.52.

One area of concern, however, was the issue of poor remuneration and exploitation in the pastoral industry. Official documents throughout the 1950s and 1960s noted the lack of standard rates of pay on pastoral leases in the far northern cattle districts, as there was no award coverage for ‘full-blooded’ Aboriginal people, a lack of legislation regulating Aboriginal employment and little likelihood of any such regulations being developed.⁹⁵ An Aborigines Protection Board (APB) patrol officer at Coober Pedy reported in 1967 that wages for Aboriginal pastoral workers in far northern South Australia ranged from what he suspected as nothing in some locations to \$160 per month and food on one station. He believed, however, that ninety per cent of these workers received income, including rations, less than the basic wage.⁹⁶ Only Aboriginal shearers enjoyed coverage under the federal Pastoral Industry Award.⁹⁷

Aboriginal involvement in the pastoral and opal industries had a number of similar features and there was a considerable degree of movement between both. Aboriginal people on pastoral properties generally camped near their workplace, but also close to their traditional economic base, as did Aboriginal people on the opal fields. Elements of family participation in the pastoral industry mirrored the situation in the opal industry, where family groups including women and children also actively participated. Aboriginal people in both industries also maintained a high degree of cultural continuity, which the task-oriented and seasonal nature of such work accommodated. One significant point of difference, however, is that while Aboriginal pastoral workers were employees, Aboriginal opal miners were often their ‘own bosses’, earned reasonable remuneration and were often able to enter into satisfactory partnerships with European miners.

⁹⁵ See for example correspondence on the following files SRSA, GRG 52/1/1954/5; GRG 52/1/1955/1; GRG 52/1/1957/203; GRG 52/1/1967/9.

⁹⁶ Robin Percy, ‘Annual Report’, 21 June 1967, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1967/9.

⁹⁷ I. Schulz, ‘The Pastoral Industry’, *Aborigines Advancement League of South Australia. Wages and Employment of Aborigines in S.A.*, Proceedings of the Seminar held on October 9th 1965, University of Adelaide, p.6., State Library of South Australia (henceforth SLSA), SRG 250/6/4; Bartlett to Evans, 26 October 1959, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/91.

Aboriginal People and Government on the Eve of the Opal Industry

At the time of the pastoral industry's emergence in northern South Australia, the government's level of support and services for Aboriginal people was minimal: a *laissez faire* approach premised on the widespread belief of the time "that Aboriginal people were dying out".⁹⁸ Because of the "vacuum left" by the government's paltry approach to Aboriginal administration, church missions established to "segregate and protect the Aborigines in their declining years" and philanthropic bodies generally assumed responsibility for services to them.⁹⁹ The government had effectively outsourced its responsibilities, and this is similar in some ways to how it initially organised an opal trading service to be managed by the Lutheran Church for Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy during the 1950s.¹⁰⁰

By the early twentieth century, however, the government's approach changed significantly to one that was more interventionist and protectionist, evident in the *Aborigines Act 1911*, which was introduced during "a period when policy makers were obsessed with regulation and control".¹⁰¹ From the early to mid-twentieth century, Aboriginal people in South Australia were often "segregated on reserves, their economic, social and sexual lives were strictly regulated and they were denied freedoms taken for granted by other Australians", a situation analogous to Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory at the time.¹⁰² A major reason for this more hard-line approach being taken in South Australia was to remove mixed-descent children from Aboriginal camps, an issue "both ... racial and moral", and this was actively pursued in the following decades.¹⁰³ Another was to take control of established church missions in the south of the state, such as Point Pierce and Point McLeay, which were criticised "for relying too heavily on charity and not enough on thrift and industry", and to develop them as 'industrial institutions'.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Cameron Raynes, *A Little Flour and a Few Blankets: An Administrative History of Aboriginal Affairs in South Australia, 1834–2000*, Adelaide: State Records of South Australia, 2002, p.24.

⁹⁹ Peggy Brock, *Outback Ghettos: Aborigines, Institutionalisation and Survival*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.14.

¹⁰⁰ This is discussed at length in Chapter Six.

¹⁰¹ Robert Foster, "Endless Trouble and Agitation": Aboriginal Activism in the Protectionist Era', *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, no.28, 2000, p.15.

¹⁰² Brock, *Outback Ghettos*, pp. 12–7.

¹⁰³ Robert Foster, *Aboriginal Policy and its Administration in South Australia 1900–1962*, Adelaide: Report for the Native Title Unit, Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement, February, 1997, pp.15–6.

¹⁰⁴ Foster, *Aboriginal Policy*, p.13.

During this period, however, the government's role in much of northern South Australia remained largely non-interventionist. Aboriginal people in these areas were generally "deemed to be less of a problem for the government" and many were employed in the pastoral industry, where their work was highly regarded.¹⁰⁵ The principal arm of Aboriginal administration was the ration distribution system, which for well over a century was effectively the only official 'initiative' in remote areas, and this minimal involvement in their affairs "suited the government purse".¹⁰⁶ Established in the 1840s to help pacify Aboriginal people in areas of violent unrest, the ration distribution system gradually increased as European expansion into inland areas continued, and extended to pastoral leases by the 1870s.¹⁰⁷ Rations were provided to aged, sick and infirm Aboriginal people, while the able bodied were expected to provide their own food, through either hunting or employment, which in northern Australia was predominantly the pastoral industry. In fact, a distinct relationship between Aboriginal people and lease holders had developed based on "the systematic distribution of rations, and the protection of Aboriginal customary rights on pastoral lands", which lasted well into the 1950s.¹⁰⁸ This minimal, hands-off form of assistance by the government in some ways resembles its response to Aboriginal engagement in the opal industry, which I examine in Chapter Six.

While the Protector of Aborigines in Adelaide oversaw the issuing of rations to Aboriginal people, local police officers and station managers were also periodically appointed as local protectors in remote areas, primarily for this purpose.¹⁰⁹ For many Aboriginal people in northern South Australia, the ration distribution system was their first encounter with government. In the region between Andamooka and Coober Pedy, for example, rations were issued by either the police or pastoralists at locations such as Mount Vivian, The Peake and Mount Eba.¹¹⁰ Official correspondence also noted the recommendation to move a ration depot from South Gap station to Andamooka in

¹⁰⁵ Judith Raftery, *Not Part of the Public: Non-Indigenous Policies and Practices and the Health of Aboriginal Australians 1836–1973*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2006, pp.129, 132.

¹⁰⁶ Brock, *Outback Ghettos*, p.13.

¹⁰⁷ Foster, 'Rations, Co-existence', pp.4–7.

¹⁰⁸ Foster, 'Rations, Co-existence', pp.1, 25.

¹⁰⁹ Foster, 'Rations, Co-existence', p.10; Raynes, *A Little Flour and a Few Blankets*, pp.18–20.

¹¹⁰ See for example correspondence files SRSA, GRG 52/1/1884/313; GRG 52/1/1885/317; GRG 52/1/1886/106; GRG 52/1/1886/178; GRG 52/1/1886/271; *South Australian Register*, 6 October 1884, p.4.

1895.¹¹¹ By the late nineteenth century the ration distribution system was well entrenched and would endure until the middle of the twentieth century. Aboriginal people who worked in the opal industry from the 1940s onwards were likely to have had rations supplied to them when they had previously worked on pastoral leases in exchange for their labour.

This “exceptionally cheap and largely ‘hands off’” form of administration” that was used to encourage Aboriginal participation in the pastoral industry clearly suited the government.¹¹² It also suited many pastoralists, who by issuing rations had access to a cheap but skilled labour force which could be utilised and dispensed with as required and, despite some complaints about having to distribute rations, they were effectively given a large government subsidy towards their labour costs.¹¹³ In addition, the ration distribution system helped “facilitate surveillance” by enabling the authorities to centralise the locations of Aboriginal people and prevent them from congregating in towns and settlements.¹¹⁴ While unscrupulous pastoralists may have periodically exploited the ration system and used it to exert some control over the lives of Aboriginal people, the system not only helped facilitate employment in the pastoral industry, but also enabled them access to their traditional country and therefore to maintain important traditional economic and cultural practices.¹¹⁵

During the earlier part of twentieth century, the Aborigines Department based in Adelaide was minimally staffed and did not undertake travel to the state’s northern districts.¹¹⁶ In 1913, the Protector of Aborigines reported that his Department consisted of himself, a junior clerk and a Sub-Protector in Port Augusta who did not receive payment for these duties, and admitted that the agency was unable to carry out its functions effectively.¹¹⁷ The Port Augusta Sub-Protector was also an Inspector of Police and his duties involved responding to requests for Aboriginal rations by pastoralists in remote areas, and compiling annual reports on the conditions of

¹¹¹ Hamilton to Field, 14 August 1895, SRSA, GRG 52/7/7/111.

¹¹² Foster, ‘Rations, Co-existence’, p.25.

¹¹³ Foster, ‘Rations, Co-existence’, p.25.

¹¹⁴ Foster, ‘Rations, Co-existence’, pp.4–5.

¹¹⁵ Foster, ‘Rations, Co-existence’, p.25.

¹¹⁶ Regular visits to the north of the state by this agency did not begin until after Aboriginal people had established a presence in the opal industry after 1940.

¹¹⁷ ‘Progress Report of the Royal Commission on the Aborigines: together with minutes of proceedings, evidence and appendices’, *SAPP*, vol.2, no.26, 1913, pp.vii,1–2.

Aboriginal people, and population numbers in the far-north, based on intelligence gathered by local police officers in remote areas. In the absence of Aboriginal Affairs officials who did not travel to the north, the police were effectively the ‘ears and eyes’ of the department for many years.¹¹⁸ Remote area police would continue to provide reports to the APB during the 1950s and 1960s about Aboriginal participation in the opal industry and conditions on the fields, as later demonstrated in this thesis. The APB would also employ dedicated staff in Port Augusta and Coober Pedy to report on conditions on the opal fields during this period. It also relied on the reports of the Woomera Native Patrol Officers (NPOs), who were appointed by the Commonwealth government to safeguard Aboriginal interests in northern areas where long-range missiles were being tested and nuclear testing conducted.¹¹⁹

From the early to mid-twentieth century, missions in South Australia “acted as official and unofficial agents of government” in pursuing “its agenda of assimilation and rescue”.¹²⁰ Several were established in areas relatively close to the opal mining centres, such as Oodnadatta (1924), Port Augusta (1937) and Ernabella (1937), but these were less intrusive on the lives of Aboriginal people than others in the state.¹²¹ In addition, people were able to continue their customary economic and cultural practices relatively unimpeded for many more decades. One establishment that Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry, and later opal industry, would have a close association with was the Umeewarra Mission in Port Augusta, but this did not impact on their ability to work. This mission was principally a children’s foster home in its earlier years, and Aboriginal parents often placed their children there for periods of time while they worked in either of these industries.¹²²

Around the time that Aboriginal participation in the opal industry began, there was a shift from protectionism to “more clearly articulated policies of assimilation”.¹²³ This

¹¹⁸ Brock, *Outback Ghettos*, p.15. Numerous requests for rations, and reports on Aboriginal people are contained in the SRSA file series GRG 52/1, and annual ‘Reports of the CPA’ for various years contained in the *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*.

¹¹⁹ The NPOs’ reports are contained in file series SRSA GRG 52/1, and Government Record Series (henceforth GRS) 1002, and GRS 1278.

¹²⁰ Raftery, *Not Part of the Public*, p.153.

¹²¹ Raftery, *Not Part of the Public*, p.153.

¹²² Antonia de Lawyer, ‘Davenport and Umeewarra Since 1937’, unpublished BA (Hons) thesis, University of Adelaide, 1972, p.53; D. Hollinsworth and J. Craig, *Aboriginal Missions in South Australia*, Adelaide: Nunkuwarrin Yunti of South Australia, 2003, p.21.

¹²³ Foster, *Aboriginal Policy*, p.22.

shift had its beginnings in the 1920s and 1930s as a variety of lobbyists, including anthropologists and scientists, began to influence attitudes in relation to the social inclusion of Aboriginal people.¹²⁴ In 1937 a major conference of senior Aboriginal Affairs administrators from all states and the Northern Territory recommended – using rather rudimentary classifications – that “the destiny of the natives of aboriginal origin, but not of the full-blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth”. It also made recommendations in relation to employment and industry, along these lines. For example, children of mixed-descent should be educated:

at white standards, and their subsequent employment under the same conditions as the whites with a view to taking their place in the white community on an equal footing with the whites.

The conference also recommended that ‘full-blood’ Aboriginal people be educated in order to find “employment in lucrative occupations”, while those deemed ‘semi-civilised’ be kept “under benevolent supervision in regard to employment”.¹²⁵

The “assimilationist era” of government policy persisted for almost two and a half decades after 1945, but by the 1960s opposition and resistance to it had increased and it was subsequently abandoned in the 1970s.¹²⁶ Despite the rhetoric of assimilation, which roughly coincided with the period that Aboriginal people began to seriously engage with the opal industry and subsequent years, I will show that it had little impact on their engagement. Aboriginal people participated in the opal industry of their own volition, while at the same time maintaining the most important elements of their traditional lives.

Conclusion

Prior to European contact, Aboriginal people in northern South Australia had successfully lived in this harsh region for millennia. Aboriginal people utilised the economic resources of the area with a range of effective technology which did not

¹²⁴ Foster, *Aboriginal Policy*, p.22; Raftery, *Not Part of the Public*, p.164.

¹²⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Affairs Authorities, Canberra, 21 to 23 April 1937, Canberra: Commonwealth Government Printer, 1937, p.3.

¹²⁶ Russell McGregor, ‘Governance, Not Genocide: Aboriginal Assimilation in the Postwar Era’, in A. Dirk Moses (ed.), *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Indigenous Children in Australian History*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2004, p.290; Andrew Armitage, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation: Australia, Canada and New Zealand*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995, p.75.

impede the need for mobility. Aboriginal kinship systems were a crucial element of Aboriginal life which determined how people should interact, and emphasised the importance of sharing that was fundamental to living in a challenging environment. Aboriginal belief systems relating to the creation of the Earth's physical features, mythological sites, and associated rituals and ceremonial practices were another important feature of Aboriginal life that had also endured for thousands of years. These practices remained an important element of Aboriginal life on the opal fields and would influence how Aboriginal people participated in the opal industry.

The arrival of Europeans in northern South Australia during the mid to late nineteenth century heralded the establishment of the pastoral industry, which became a significant employer of Aboriginal people, whose labour was invaluable. The pastoral industry readily accommodated Aboriginal cultural and social practices, allowing Aboriginal people to maintain a considerable degree of independence and cultural continuity, as did the opal industry, and therefore provides a useful comparative framework for this thesis. However, while pastoral workers were employees and subject to some workplace scrutiny, Aboriginal opal miners will be shown to have more autonomous workplace arrangements as self-employed individuals, or to have been able to negotiate satisfactory partnership arrangements with other miners.

The role of government was also briefly examined in this chapter as Aboriginal people in the region encountered official policies first hand. While adopting a more interventionist approach to Aboriginal administration in the southern districts of the state in the early twentieth century, the government's hands off approach in the north continued. This was characterised by the provision of rations to facilitate the engagement of Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry. This anticipates an analogous approach, which is discussed in Chapter Six, where the few government initiatives in the opal industry were also directed at facilitating Aboriginal engagement.

CHAPTER TWO: THE EMERGENCE OF THE OPAL INDUSTRY AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

Introduction

This chapter explores the emergence of the opal industry in northern South Australia and examines its unique characteristics that made it attractive to Aboriginal workers. Once established, the opal industry ebbed and flowed, particularly in the Coober Pedy region, but a significant find of opal by an Aboriginal woman there in the mid-1940s helped rejuvenate it. By the 1960s, the opal industry was well established. As a small-scale industry, it suited individuals or small partnerships, while its anonymity and unregulated nature also suited miners. Other appealing features included its autonomous nature, while ‘opal fever’ and the element of risk and chance also proved enticing. The industry attracted a significant immigrant population who were generally highly regarded by Aboriginal people on the fields. The opal industry also provided an opportunity for Europeans as well as Aboriginal people in other rural industries to supplement their incomes during seasonal downtimes or quieter periods.

The Discovery of Opal in South Australia

While opal had been discovered in South Australia prior to the first significant finds of this gemstone in Queensland (1872) and New South Wales (1884), no commercial production was undertaken. Initial finds of opal in South Australia were made in 1840 by the German mineralogist Johann Menge, who had arrived in the colony in 1836 and was paid by the prominent colonist George Fife Angas to survey his land selections in the Barossa Valley for mineral deposits. Menge wrote to Angas, who was still in England in 1840, advising him that opal abounded in Flaxman’s Valley.¹ In that same year Menge lectured to the Mechanics Institute in Adelaide, informing his audience of the possibility that South Australian opal could be more valuable than that found in Hungary and Mexico, which at the time were two of the world’s significant opal

¹ Len Cram, *A Journey with Colour: A History of South Australian Opal, 1840–2005*, Lighting Ridge: Len Cram, 2006, p.12.

producers.² The find of opal in the Flaxman Valley in 1845 was reported on favourably by the press at the time.³ Despite these initial positive descriptions, however, no commercial production of opal resulted from the colony's southern findings. Further north, opal was found at Lake Frome in the 1890s and Lake Hart in 1901, but these did not present commercial opportunities.⁴ Lake Hart opal was described as "a common variety, and it possesses no commercial value, but it may indicate the presence of a marketable quality of the mineral in the locality".⁵

When explorer John McDouall Stuart passed through the Stuart Range region in 1858 near to where the town of Coober Pedy is now located, he wrote in his journal on 11 July that the ground "is very stony, composed of hard milky-white stones".⁶ Stuart's course appears to have taken him through an area now known as German Gully, on the eastern outskirts of the Coober Pedy town boundary. It is likely that what he saw was coloured but weathered and valueless opals known as 'floaters', which are readily found on the surface in the area: he had unknowingly "walked right across the richest opal field in the world".⁷

In 1904 the South Australian Government geologist H.Y.L. Brown reported a find of opal at Charley's Swamp, near the present township of Andamooka. Although he declared that this particular find was common opal, he considered it "the first authentic find of anything really approaching the precious opal in this state" and was hopeful that high-grade opal would be discovered soon.⁸ In 1915, more than five decades after Stuart had first passed through the Stuart Range, opal was 'officially' discovered there

² *South Australian Register*, 26 September 1840, p.4; L.C. Barnes, I.J. Townsend, R.S. Robertson and D.C. Scott, *Opal: South Australia's Gemstone*, Handbook No. 5, Revised Edition, Adelaide: Department of Mines and Energy Geological Survey of South Australia, 1992, pp.13–4.

³ *South Australian*, 10 June 1845, p.3.

⁴ Cram, *A Journey with Colour*, pp.13–4.

⁵ *Register*, 19 July 1901, p.4.

⁶ J.M. Stuart, *The Journals of John McDouall Stuart During the Years 1858, 1859, 1860, 1861 & 1862, When he Fixed the Centre of the Continent and Successfully Crossed it from Sea to Sea*. Edited from Mr. Stuart's Manuscript by William Hardman, M.A., F.R.G.S. &c. With Maps, a Photographic Portrait of Mr Stuart, and Twelve Engravings Drawn on Wood by George French Angas, from Sketches Taken During the Expedition, Second Edition, London: Saunders, Otley and Co., 1865, n.p.
<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/stuart/john_mcdouall/journals/> accessed 24 September 2013.

⁷ Philip D. Gee and Ifeta Gee, 'John McDouall Stuart, South Australian Explorer: The Search for Wingilpin—Tracking Part of his 1858 Exploration', *South Australian Geographical Journal*, vol. 94, 1995, pp.31–3.

⁸ H.Y.L Brown, *Record of the Mines of South Australia*, Fourth Edition, Adelaide: Government Printer, 1908, p.360.

and was heralded as “probably the most important mineral discovery that has been made in South Australia for many years”.⁹ Brown’s prediction a decade earlier had begun to materialise and South Australian production would eventually surpass those of Queensland and New South Wales.

Early Developments on the South Australian Opal Fields

Opal was found by chance in the Coober Pedy region in 1915. In 1914 Jim Hutchison, his son Will and two other individuals formed the New Colorado Prospecting Syndicate with the aim of finding gold. Jim Hutchison had sighted quartz reefs near Anna Creek in far northern South Australia in 1895 and now wished to resume searching in the area. In late 1914, in the midst of severe drought and extreme temperatures, members of the Syndicate travelled to northern South Australia and this culminated in Will Hutchison locating opal in the Stuart Range on 1 February 1915. According to an account of this in the Adelaide press two decades later, Jim Hutchison wrote that Will, who had been left in charge of the prospector’s camp while the others left by camel to search for water, disobeyed his father’s orders by leaving the camp, but eventually returned with both water and pieces of opal.¹⁰

The first opal claim was pegged on 9 February 1915.¹¹ Jim Hutchison applied to the Minister of Mines in Adelaide for a licence to search for precious stones in the area where the opal was found.¹² Writing to his mother from William Creek station later that month, Will Hutchison informed her that:

We have taken up 20 sq miles of country in the Stewarts [sic] Ranges. It is all opal country and we sent a box down to Adelaide and it is the most valuable opal that has been found in South Australia.¹³

The samples found by Hutchison and sent to the renowned opal dealer Tullie Wollaston in Adelaide were soon found to be worthless, as exposure to the sun had caused them to ‘craze’ and bleach, but nevertheless indicated the presence of opal in the Stuart

⁹ L. Keith Ward, ‘Notes on the Stuart’s Range Opal Field’, *Review of the Mining Operations in the State of South Australia*, no.25, 1917, p.44.

¹⁰ *Adelaide Chronicle*, 7 April 1938, p.53.

¹¹ Kerry E. Medway, *Coober Pedy: Opal Wonderland of Australia*, Seventh Edition, Coober Pedy: Catacomb Church, 2005, p.5.

¹² J.R. Hutchison, Application to Search for Precious Stones, 23 February 1915. Hutchison Correspondence, Coober Pedy Historical Society (henceforth CPHS).

¹³ Hutchison to Mother, 28 February 1915. Hutchison Correspondence, CPHS.

Range.¹⁴ However, the expedition was forced to give up its search for opal and focus on finding water again as the supply found by Will was exhausted after eight days.¹⁵

Within several months of Hutchison's find, the brothers Jim and Dick O'Neill, who were experienced opalers from White Cliffs in New South Wales, arrived at the location of Hutchison's camp, but decided to move northwards to where the existing township of Coober Pedy is now located. They are reputed to have found £17,000 worth of opal in the first nine months there and Wollaston subsequently took samples of their opal to America to sell.¹⁶ According to Coober Pedy historian Sue Britt, Wollaston was greatly excited by the O'Neill's parcels as he had never seen "such chunky opal before", and its discovery was instrumental in creating "a world market for the stone that had never before been seen in such quantity and quality".¹⁷

When government geologist L. Keith Ward visited the region in October 1916, work on the fields was "intermittent" due to the lack of water that restricted its use. He noted, however, that while the opal field was temporarily abandoned, miners were expected to return soon.¹⁸ The "first real influx" of workers to the fields occurred following the completion of the transcontinental railway line between Sydney and Perth in 1917.¹⁹ At the end of World War I a number of veterans also arrived at the fields, accelerating opal production there and introduced "the dugout style of living" in order to cope with the climatic extremes of the region, which is still a popular form of accommodation today.²⁰ Soon afterwards a mail and passenger transport service was established between Coober Pedy and the nearest railway siding at William Creek, 150 miles to the west.²¹

¹⁴ Robert G. Haill, *Opals of Australia*, Adelaide: Axiom Publishing, 2003, p.13. 'Crazed' opal is prone to develop a network of hairline cracks. C.M. Willington (compiler), 'A Review of the Opal Industry in South Australia', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book* (henceforth *DMERB*), 59/151, 15 December 1964, p.11.

¹⁵ *Adelaide Chronicle*, 7 April 1938, p.53.

¹⁶ Barrie O'Leary, *A Field Guide to Australian Opals*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1977, p.17.

¹⁷ Sue Britt, 'Coober Pedy: Chance Discovery Changes the Physical and Social Landscape', in Angela Lush (ed.), *Opal*, Adelaide: South Australian Museum, 2015, pp.35–6. A parcel refers to a number of opals that are either rough or cut, and for sale at the same time. Cram, *A Journey With Colour*, p.366.

¹⁸ Ward, 'Notes on the Stuart's Range Opal Field', p.42.

¹⁹ Medway, *Coober Pedy*, p.9; P. Vin Wake, *Opal Men*, Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1969, p. 24.

²⁰ Department of Mines and Energy, *South Australia's Opal*, Adelaide: State Publishing, 1990, p.6; Anne Johnson, *Digging Around Coober Pedy: Exploring Life in the Little Opal Mining Town with a Big Profile*, Coober Pedy: Sandstone Press, 2006, p.30; *Mail*, 23 October 1926, p.2.

²¹ Arch Burnett, *Wilful Murder in the Outback*, Adelaide: IPPS Book Production Services, 1973, pp.58, 60.

According to mining historian Bernard O’Neil, following the Stuart Range discoveries the *Mining Act Further Amendment Act* of 1918 included a proviso “to place ‘precious stones’ next in priority to gold and before mineral claims such salt, gypsum, coal, oil, and guano”.²² By 1918 there were five specific opal fields around Coober Pedy, named as follows: ‘Company’, ‘Jeweller’s Shop’, ‘Crowder’s Gully’, ‘Big Flat’ and ‘Saddle’.²³ A newspaper report in 1920 noted that despite the existence of the fields there for some five years, it was only in the last 12 months that they had “been worked to any extent”.²⁴ A police station was also opened there that year.²⁵ Transport operator Arch Burnett described 1920 as a boom year with increasing arrivals of opal seekers to the Coober Pedy fields, including the first two women to settle there, who with their husbands commenced digging at a field named ‘Jungle’, some five kilometres east of the township. Burnett also recalled that around this period a number of good finds were made, in particular the ‘Shellpatch’ field to the north-west of Coober Pedy, which was named after the many opalised mussel shells found there.²⁶ This period also saw the arrival of several opal dealers to the fields.²⁷

On 26 June 1920 the Stuart Range Opal Fields Progress Committee met to discuss an official name for the opal fields. The following proposed names were proposed: Coober Pedy, Gemville, Hutchison and Opal Range, and following a vote Coober Pedy was decided upon.²⁸ The tendency for miners to dwell below the ground is reflected in the naming of Coober Pedy. According to Rena Briand, a French visitor to Coober Pedy who documented her time there in a publication titled *White Man in a Hole*:

²² Bernard O’Neil, *In Search of Mineral Wealth: The South Australian Geological Survey and Department of Mines to 1944*, Special Publication No.2, Adelaide: Department of Mines and Energy, 1982, p.230.

²³ R.S. Robertson and D.C. Scott, *Geology of the Coober Pedy Precious Stones Field: Results of Investigations, 1981–86*, Report of Investigations 56, Adelaide: Government Printer, 1990, p.25.

²⁴ *Register*, 29 October 1920, p.7.

²⁵ *South Australian Police Gazette* (henceforth *SAPG*), no.15, April 13, 1921, p.114.

²⁶ According to one source, the Shellpatch field may have been worked since 1923. Robertson and Scott, *Geology of the Coober Pedy Precious Stones Field*, p.25. Considering that Burnett’s memoirs were written some five decades after he first went to the field it is not surprising that there may be some discrepancies in the dates.

²⁷ Burnett, *Wilful Murder*, pp.60–1.

²⁸ Minute Book of the Stuart Range Opal Field Committee, 26 June 1920, CPHS.

Coober Pedy is the bastardisation of the Arabana dialect for Kupa (or Goober), meaning male child or adult who has not been initiated by rites of circumcision and sub-incision, plus Piti, meaning cavity in the ground. Lee Robbins, an old-timer who was present at the meeting in 1920, said the name was chosen to signify White Man's Burrow. (Since white men are not subject to initiation rites, they are also called goober by the natives). By popular belief it simply translated as White Man in a Hole.²⁹

South Australian linguist Petter Naessen has recently "assess[ed] the diverging etymologies of 'Coober Pedy' ... in the search for the original and post-contact local Indigenous significance associated with the name and the region".³⁰ Naessen has suggested that the naming of Coober Pedy reflected a post-contact meaning and it is a Kokatha 'loan blend' of the Parnkalla (Barngarla) word '*kupa*' meaning 'ghost' or 'whitefella' and the Kokatha (and Western Desert) word '*piti*' meaning 'quarry'.³¹

The origins of opal mining at Andamooka, 600 kilometres to the north of Adelaide, and 500 kilometres south-west of Coober Pedy, rest in a chance discovery of opal in 1930 by two boundary riders, Sam Brooks and Roy Shepherd, at a location known as 'Treloar's Claim'. It was subsequently identified as precious opal by the station manager Bruce Foulis on 29 August 1930. The area was initially worked by two gougers by the name of Treloar and Evans for several months and yielded about £1,500 worth of opal before this discovery became well known. However, once this closely guarded secret had been revealed, opalers from other Australian fields moved to Andamooka.³² Andamooka soon became another significant opal-producing centre, particularly renowned for its matrix opal, "a cloudy stone of variable porosity showing flashes of colour" that was unique to the area.³³ A number of other opal fields emerged at Andamooka between 1932 and 1935. These were named: 'Boundary Rider',

²⁹ Rena Briand, *White Man in a Hole*, Melbourne: Phuong-Hoang Press, 1971, p.18.

³⁰ Petter Naessen, 'The Etymology of Coober Pedy, South Australia', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 34, 2010, p.217.

³¹ Naessen, 'The Etymology of Coober Pedy', pp. 229–230. According to linguist Cliff Goddard, *piti* means a hole in the ground. See Cliff Goddard (compiler), *Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Directory*, Revised Second Edition, Alice Springs: IAD Press, 1996, p.139.

³² R.W. Segnit, 'Andamooka Opal Field', *Mining Review for the Half-Year Ended 30 June, 1935*, no. 62, 1935, p.55.

³³ J.L. Keeling and M.G. Farrand, 'Origin and Formation of Matrix Opal from Andamooka South Australia', *DMERB*, 84/47, July 1984, p.2.

‘German Gully’, ‘Koskas’, ‘Stevens’, ‘One Tree Hill’, ‘Triangle’, ‘Gun Gully’ and ‘Horse Paddock’. It was not until 1948 that other opal fields emerged at Andamooka.³⁴

There are several views as to how Andamooka was named from local Aboriginal language, and opal historian Len Cram contends that the “most accepted” meaning is “large waterhole”.³⁵ John McDouall Stuart traversed the region on his first major inland expedition and wrote on 21 June 1858 that it “halted at a large permanent water hole (Andamoka)”.³⁶ However, another version of the naming suggests that it may have been derived from the words *jantamuka* or *jandarimoko*, with *janta* meaning ‘wide’, and *jandari* meaning ‘meteorite’, while *muka* or *moka* means ‘hard object’. As there are large numbers of *jandarimoko* or australite meteorites found in the area, anthropologist Norman Tindale has suggested that this may have been a factor in the naming, although he could not be entirely certain.³⁷

The Opal Industry: Early Production and Consolidation

Opal production at Coober Pedy increased significantly in the early years following World War I, as the influx of miners led to a significant escalation of activity, and its value was estimated at £24,000 in 1920, although this figure was not exceeded until 1946.³⁸ The lack of a reliable water supply hampered early production, although this was rectified to some extent when the government installed a large underground water tank in 1921. In that same year another significant opal field was established, the Twenty Mile (Hard Hill), extending an opal-bearing area of 64 kilometres along the Stuart Range.³⁹

However, the opal industry there would soon begin to experience a number of slumps that a recent article claims “characterised the boom and bust history of the town”.⁴⁰

³⁴ S.G. Carr, J.G. Olliver, C.H.H. Connor, and D.C. Scott, *Andamooka Opal Fields: The Geology of the Precious Stones Field and the Results of the Subsidised Mining Program*, Report of Investigations 51, Adelaide: Government Printer, 1979, p.11.

³⁵ Cram, *A Journey With Colour*, p.239.

³⁶ Stuart, *The Journals*, n.p.

³⁷ Norman B. Tindale cited in Frank Leechman, *The Opal Book*, Walkabout Edition, Sydney: Ure Smith, 1969, p.235. See also Wake, *Opal Men*, p.101.

³⁸ P.P. Crettenden, M.W. Flintoft, S.J. Ewen and D.C. Watkins, ‘The Opal Industry in South Australia’, *Mineral Resources Review SA for the Year Half-Ended 31 December 1979*, no. 151, 1979, p.27.

³⁹ M.N. Hiern, ‘Report on Coober Pedy Opalfield’, *DMERB*, 60/82, 30 April 1965, p.4.

⁴⁰ *Coober Pedy Regional Times*, 11 April 2013, p.4.

The Coober Pedy fields were affected by severe drought and depressed markets in the years 1922–1924. One Melbourne newspaper reported in 1924 that the population had dwindled from 400 to less than 100 because of a declining market and European trade slump.⁴¹ The following two decades also proved to be a difficult period and the production of opal “came to a near standstill”, due to the Great Depression and low prices.⁴² One newspaper reported in May 1935 that “the great days of Coober Pedy have ceased”.⁴³

While the opal industry at Coober Pedy had experienced difficulties in its early decades, new discoveries of commercially significant opal in the mid-1940s would be a turning point and would help to consolidate the industry. A major find of opal just west of the Coober Pedy township by an Aboriginal woman in 1945 contributed appreciably to turning around the industry’s fortunes. Tottie Bryant found opal by chance at Geraghty Hill, which later became known as the ‘Eight Mile’ field.⁴⁴ There are several accounts as to how and when this significant discovery of opal occurred. For example, one newspaper reported in 1946 that:

An ‘unbelievably rich’ opal field, which has already yielded about £16,000 worth of opals was discovered last February by a wandering black who found a small piece of opal scratched out by a rabbit ... and a handful of Aborigines are now making a fortune.⁴⁵

Another press account in 1946 described “how a party of Aboriginal stockmen were digging out a rabbit burrow last October when they unearthed large pieces of low grade opal”. A dealer who bought this opal from its Aboriginal discoverers then urged them to continue digging at the location, but they were unable to find any significant deposits there, although opal was subsequently found at the burrows by some European miners.⁴⁶ However, in an interview many years after the event, Bryant recalled that

⁴¹ *Australasian*, 1 November 1924, p.60.

⁴² Lindsay Hogan and Peter Berry, ‘Mining and Regional Australia: Some Implications of Long Distance Commuting’, *Australian Commodities: Forecasts and Issues*, vol.7. no.4, December 2000, p.649.

⁴³ *Advertiser*, 1 May 1935, p.20.

⁴⁴ Cram, *A Journey With Colour*, p.52.

⁴⁵ *Canberra Times*, 23 July 1946, p.2.

⁴⁶ *Advertiser*, 7 August 1946, p.9.

while tending to some sheep with her dog she kicked over a stone and saw opal.⁴⁷ Because she and her partner were elderly they were unable to sink a shaft, but using a pick found opal within 30 centimetres of the ground surface, enough for five parcels, and registered their claim.⁴⁸

A number of Aboriginal people clearly remembered her discovery. According to Jessie Lennon:

They got that big opal down here again too – they got it at Eight Mile. They got it on the Mt Clarence Station road. She seen the opal there, dugged [sic] that out.⁴⁹

Senior Aboriginal woman Eileen Wingfield knew Bryant very well, and recalled how she and her partner Charlie Bryant had a dugout in Coober Pedy, and how they used to go hunting in a Model T Ford with their kangaroo dogs. At the time of this discovery, Wingfield and her family were moving sheep from Mount Penrhyn to Mount Clarence, two pastoral leases in close proximity to Coober Pedy, but found out about it soon afterwards. This prompted renewed interest in opal mining in the area and she remarked “well after that – when she got her parcel, everyone was digging”.⁵⁰

According to opal historian Len Cram, Bryant was able to keep her find a secret for several months and sold five parcels to the opal dealer Jack Kemp. In January 1946 the well known dealers Ernie and Greg Sherman purchased more opal from her to the value of £2,500.⁵¹ Following Bryant’s discovery, one newspaper report suggested that some miners had recently “won fortunes of thousands of pounds”, that the Mines Department had received dozens of enquiries about the situation there and that there were currently 20 miners and 40 Aboriginal people working at the new Eight Mile opal field.⁵² Bryant’s discovery “caused great excitement and proved to be the turning point in Coober Pedy’s future prosperity which eventually led to the development we know today”.⁵³ The annual opal production figure for 1946 was £54,792.⁵⁴ A senior

⁴⁷ Coralie Rees and Leslie Rees, *Australia: The Big Sky Country*, Sydney: Ure Smith, 1971, p.23.

⁴⁸ *Coober Pedy Regional Times*, 1 April 2013, p.4.

⁴⁹ Jessie Lennon, *I’m the One that Knows This Country! The Story of Jessie Lennon and Coober Pedy*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2000, p.49.

⁵⁰ Eileen Wingfield, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 1 November 2013.

⁵¹ Cram, *A Journey With Colour*, p.51.

⁵² *Advertiser*, 7 August 1946, p.9.

⁵³ Cram, *A Journey With Colour*, p.52.

government geologist wrote that following this significant find “the era of deep mining from the plateau began. The spectacular increase in production recorded in 1946 is largely attributable to this discovery”.⁵⁵ Although there were some fluctuations in subsequent years, they were considerably smaller than in the period prior to Bryant’s discovery.



Figure Two: Tottie and Charlie Bryant. John Wake personal collection.

The early erratic nature of opal production on the Coober Pedy opal fields was not as apparent on the Andamooka fields. The Andamooka opal fields came into existence fifteen years after Coober Pedy, were never as geographically extensive and its population was smaller, but its annual opal production did not fluctuate to the same extent. At certain times opal production at Andamooka even exceeded that of Coober Pedy, particularly during the 1940s. By the 1950s there was a considerable degree of stability on the Andamooka opal fields, and the demand for opal there was at one stage stronger than at Coober Pedy, because of its better quality and its “more regular and less erratic operation” in comparison.⁵⁶ For many years the government considered that

⁵⁴ Crettenden *et al.*, ‘The Opal Industry’, p.27.

⁵⁵ Hiern, ‘Report on Coober Pedy Opal Field’, p 4.

⁵⁶ W. Johnson, ‘Andamooka Opalfield’, *Mining Review for the Half-Year Ended 31 December, 1956*, no.105, 1958, p.65.

the Andamooka fields were just “a temporary phenomenon” and did little to regulate or accommodate their presence, however, it continued to grow significantly after World War II. In 1966 a visiting employee of the Lands Department described Andamooka as “a shanty town” and noted that an additional 74 shacks had been built there in a 12-month period, and estimated a population fluctuating between 500 and 1500 residents.⁵⁷

The opal industry in northern South Australia had now become well-established. Contributing factors were the entry of Japan as a serious consumer in the mid-1950s as well as increased sales to West Germany and the United States, which boosted the industry considerably.⁵⁸ The 1960s was a boom period, as mining machinery improved production, and markets for opal continued to expand.⁵⁹ By 1962, opal production estimates for South Australia were never less than \$1,000,000 one million per annum, rising to \$4,000,000 in 1970.⁶⁰ Prior to 1950 there were fewer than 50 precious stones claims registered per annum on South Australian opal fields, but by 1960 this had increased to 200 claims. By 1970 about 1,000 claims per annum were being registered, rising to 4,500 by 1980.⁶¹

Pastoralists around Coober Pedy, and even the South Australian Pastoral Board itself had once been concerned about opal mining in this area, despite pastoral lease conditions that permitted such activity to occur. However, by the 1960s it was acknowledged that opal mining was now a significant activity and it should be allowed to “expand unhindered by the restraints of a locally insignificant pastoral industry”.⁶² Dedicated reserves where opal mining is permitted, known as Precious Stones Fields (PSF), were declared at Andamooka and Coober Pedy in July 1972. The Coober Pedy PSF covers an area of 4,690 square kilometres.⁶³ The Andamooka PSF is 263 square

⁵⁷ Peter Donovan, *In the Interests of the Country*. A History of the Pastoral Board of South Australia 1893–1993, Adelaide: Pastoral Management Branch of South Australian Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 1995, p.115.

⁵⁸ Willington, ‘A Review of the Opal Industry’, p.1.

⁵⁹ Britt, ‘Coober Pedy’, p. 37.

⁶⁰ Crettenden *et al.*, ‘The Opal Industry’, p.27.

⁶¹ Bernard O’Neil, *Above and Below: The South Australian Department of Mines and Energy 1944 to 1994*, Special Publication No.10, Adelaide: South Australian Department of Mines, 1995, p.253.

⁶² Donovan, *In the Interests of the Country*, p.134.

⁶³ Robertson and Scott, *Geology of the Coober Pedy Precious Stones Field*, p.5.

kilometres.⁶⁴ According to one official report Australian precious opal production is now estimated at 95 per cent of the world's total output, almost entirely coming from South Australia. The estimated total value of opal production in the state between 1916 to 1977 was \$204.3 million.⁶⁵ Opal production in 1979 was estimated at \$35 million and "in terms of value was the second most important mineral produced in South Australia" that year.⁶⁶

The Uniqueness of the Opal Industry

The unique nature of the opal-mining industry appealed to both European and Aboriginal people. Mining historian Bernard O'Neil has described a number of features which made the opal industry attractive. It was a relatively small-scale activity, which appealed to hardy, independent and innovative individuals prepared to endure extreme heat and dust working alone or in small partnerships, in a relatively unregulated and informal environment with a "no questions asked" economy, and often living in frontier-style accommodation, with minimal services, infrastructure and government activity.⁶⁷

The opal industry's small-scale nature enabled relatively easy access to prospecting for individuals or partners that other forms of capital intensive mining precluded. In a comparison of early Australian gold mining and the contemporary opal industry in Coober Pedy, sociologist Joan Carr has described the latter as a "petit bourgeois" activity where participants "own their own means of production and employ little or no labour power other than their own".⁶⁸ Carr describes how a tributing system at the White Cliffs opal fields around the turn of the twentieth century that benefited larger operators was abolished following a Royal Commission into the industry, and leases were instead provided to individual operators by the government.⁶⁹ Carr's analysis highlights elements of this unique industry with its potential for occupational

⁶⁴ South Australian Department of State Development, *Opal*. <http://minerals.state.development.sa.gov.au/mining/opal_mining> accessed 18 November 2015.

⁶⁵ Crettenden *et al.*, 'The Opal Industry', pp.18, 27.

⁶⁶ Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, South Australian Office, *South Australian Yearbook*, no.17, 1979, Adelaide: Government Printer, 1979, p.446.

⁶⁷ O'Neil, *Above and Below*, p.249.

⁶⁸ Joan Carr, 'The Political Economy of Early Australian Gold and Opal Mining Communities and Contemporary Opal Miners at Coober Pedy', *Flinders Journal of History and Politics*, vol.10, 1984, p.12.

⁶⁹ Carr, 'The Political Economy', pp.13–4.

autonomy, and a lifestyle that would appeal to both miners and Aboriginal people, who became increasingly attracted to the Coober Pedy fields from the 1940s.

The lessons of White Cliffs were apparent to the South Australian government as early as 1916, when its senior geologist acknowledged that opal mining required little capital and was therefore essentially suited to individual prospectors rather than companies.⁷⁰ It subsequently legislated to ensure that small-scale mining operations which suited the interests of individuals were favoured at the expense of larger scale capitalist activity, and that the undesirable social conditions of the tributing system were avoided.⁷¹ A Miner's Right costing five shillings per annum in 1918 was compulsory for the mining of a precious stones claim, and without it a penalty of £1 per day could be imposed for unlawful prospecting. A precious stones claim was a pegged area of 150 feet by 150 feet, and required that one individual must be constantly employed per claim, which meant eight hours per day for five working days and four hours for Saturday.⁷² The small-scale and low-cost nature of the opal industry, which in its earlier stages required a minimal amount of equipment to operate in, not only suited many miners, but also Aboriginal people wishing to participate at low cost.

This situation has prevailed for nearly a century, although in 1969 the South Australian government attempted to grant two special mining leases of 1,872 and 2,585 square kilometres respectively to a large mining company just to the north of Andamooka. This antagonised local opal miners, who were constrained to leases of fifty square metres, and, fearing that they would be "squeezed out" by a large company, lobbied firmly against such moves. The government's action appeared to be "somewhat naive and inadequately considered" given the uncertain nature of the opal industry and the leases were surrendered the following year.⁷³ Coober Pedy historian Anne Johnson notes that larger mining companies have not been allowed access to the Coober Pedy opal fields, observing that:

⁷⁰ Ward, 'Notes on the Stuart's Range Opal Field', p.44.

⁷¹ Carr, 'The Political Economy', p.14.

⁷² Anonymous, 'Notes for Opal Miners', *Mining Review for the Half-Year Ended December 31 1918*, no.29, 1919, p.5.

⁷³ O'Neil, *Above and Below*, pp. 253–4. For newspaper coverage of this see the *Truth*, 2 January 1971, p.29, 9 January 1971, p.8, 23 January 1971, p.38.

The basic rule of ‘one man, one claim’ has kept them out because the opal miners themselves have always boldly asserted their rights as individuals entitled to ‘have a go’ at finding opal. The fact that this rule has been maintained here underscores *the independent, free spirited nature of our opal miners*.⁷⁴

Another appealing feature of the opal industry for many miners was “the anonymity that government indifference and isolation brought”.⁷⁵ This particularly suited opal miners, who were characterised by one newspaper as an eclectic mix of individuals, including “one-time business leaders ducking the city rat race, the conferences, the parking stickers and the breathalysers”.⁷⁶ Basic services and infrastructure were lacking on the Coober Pedy and Andamooka opal fields for many years: water, for example, remained in short supply on both fields and had to be carted and used very sparingly. Despite the lack of services at Andamooka, miners there exhibited a sense of pride and freedom “reflecting the basic tenet of the Andamooka lifestyle – the freedom to derive one’s income and to live as one wishes”, with little interest in municipal services or land titles.⁷⁷

Opal miners clearly took advantage of the carefree, independent nature of this environment, “free from the bustle, discipline and regulations associated with city living and regular employment”.⁷⁸ When the senior Mining Warden inspected the Andamooka and Coober Opal fields in September 1959, he reported that the mining trenches “generally left much to be desired” and tended to be poorly marked out. In addition, lease pegs often had insufficient information on them, while there were also pegged claims that had not been registered. The Warden did, however, observe that at Andamooka the “claims pegged out by the aborigines were very well done”.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Johnson, *Digging Around Coober Pedy*, p.61. Emphasis added.

⁷⁵ O’Neil, *Above and Below*, p.249.

⁷⁶ *Advertiser*, 16 October 1971, p.9.

⁷⁷ Lothar Brasse and Margaret Sanders, *Andamooka Heritage Survey*, Adelaide: Department of Environment and Planning, 1984, p.3.

⁷⁸ Carr, ‘The Political Economy’, p.15.

⁷⁹ V.T. Geraghty, ‘Inspection of Claims at Andamooka and Coober Pedy Opal Fields’, 25 September 1959, State Records of South Australia (henceforth SRSA), Government Record Series (henceforth GRS) 6038/16/88/1959/1740.

The informal nature of the opal industry was also aided by the lack of permanent Mines Department staff on the opal fields until 1963.⁸⁰ Bob Larkins for instance, recalled that his father:

just had a Miner's Right, and they'd just stick pegs in the ground, any mulga sticks or whatever. And then they'd put a line of rocks going in at right angles from the bottom of the post to indicate which way the claim went and that sort of thing. But yeah, no-one actually registered claims those days. It wasn't until – I never saw a Mines Warden there until – I think one used to come every now and again, but I don't remember seeing that Mines Warden Landrover until the late fifties, maybe early sixties.⁸¹

This relatively unregulated environment was also conducive to dangerous practices and breaches of regulations. For example, a Mines Department employee visiting Coober Pedy in 1962 warned two miners for smoking while handling detonators and gelignite.⁸² This was also an era when it was common for miners to attend the local drive-in theatre with mining equipment and explosives in their vehicles.⁸³ Even when permanent departmental officers were stationed on the opal fields, illegal practices often persisted, and in 1965 the Officer in Charge at Coober Pedy expressed his concern at ongoing illicit mining activities and the meagre penalties handed down by the courts.⁸⁴ Nearly a decade later the Senior Mining Warden reported that “there is still considerable ignorance of, and/or evasion of, the law by opal miners at Coober Pedy”.⁸⁵

The informal nature of business transactions on the opal field also appealed to the independent ‘free-wheeling’ miner with minimal paperwork and where partnerships characterised by secrecy were “agreed on a handshake”.⁸⁶ One magazine noted the nature of a typical opal transaction in Coober Pedy, where the opal “buyer has cash in his hand, the miner has opal in his. It is a clean swap with no paperwork”.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ O'Neil, *Above and Below*, p.252.

⁸¹ Bob Larkins, interview with Mike Harding, Wilmington, 23 October 2013.

⁸² J.W. Thoroughgood, ‘Inspection of Andamooka and Coober Pedy Opalfields’, *DMERB*, 55/127, 7 December 1962, p.3.

⁸³ Johnson, *Digging Around Coober Pedy*, p. 32.

⁸⁴ Watkins to State Mining Engineer, 14 June 1967, SRSA, GRS 6038/12/21/1965/1732.

⁸⁵ ‘Annual Report of the Director of Mines and Government Geologist (henceforth DMGG) for the Year Ended June 30 1974’, SRSA, GRS 9226/1/1, p.102.

⁸⁶ Carr, ‘The Political Economy’, p.15.

⁸⁷ Colin Mann, ‘Look What's Under Coober Pedy’, *Australia*, vol.1, no.1, 1973, p.22.

Commenting on the lack of opal being found on the Coober fields in 1946, one newspaper correspondent reported that many miners “were getting more blisters than banknotes from their labours”, and those with some success were secretive about their finds or loath to tell the taxation authorities.⁸⁸ Opal mined at Andamooka in 1969 was estimated at \$4,000,000, according to one unofficial source, who suggested that the actual value may have been double that, given that the “temptation to understate your income is always there”.⁸⁹ Several government mining publications in the previous decade even lamented the difficulty in accurately substantiating opal production in any reporting period, as the main suppliers were individuals or small partnerships with a tendency to secrecy and to understating the extent of their discoveries.⁹⁰

The autonomous nature of the opal industry and the ability to work one’s own hours was another enticing feature. Jan Hood, an opal miner with five years experience on the Coober Pedy opal field, described the highs and lows of the industry with its back-breaking work and its lean times, punctuated with periods of pleasure at opal finds, followed by further periods of fruitless digging. However, the freedom that “she had never known before” in working the hours that suited her more than compensated for the difficulties sometimes encountered.⁹¹ This characteristic of the industry was clearly evident in the testimony of a number of people interviewed. For instance, one Hungarian immigrant who first mined at Andamooka for a decade before moving to Coober Pedy in 1975 described the industry as an attractive proposition with the potential to earn “easy money”. What was particularly attractive to him was that many opal miners had no employer and were just accountable to their mining partners, stressing that he and others often worked just a few hours a day or hours that suited them. He even recalled that in the 1970s he and his colleagues often spent more time in a Coober Pedy hotel than actually mining at the nearby Shellpatch opal field being worked at the time.⁹²

Indeed, the autonomy and freedom of the opal industry was important for Aboriginal people throughout the study period, as strongly asserted by a number interviewed.

⁸⁸ *Cairns Post*, 22 August 1946, p.7.

⁸⁹ Don Sharpe, ‘Andamooka: Opal Outpost’, *Walkabout*, vol.36, no.7, July 1970, p.14.

⁹⁰ Anonymous, ‘Australian Gemstones’, *Australian Mineral Industry Quarterly Review*, vol.12, no.1, November, 1959, p.21; I.C.H. Croll, ‘The Opal Industry in Australia’, *Bureau of Mineral Resources, Geology and Geophysics Bulletin*, no.17, 1950, p.8.

⁹¹ *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 1 January 1969, p.9

⁹² George Weisz, interview with Mike Harding, Railway Bore, 20 August 2013.

According to one Aboriginal man who worked extensively in the opal industry in both Andamooka and Coober Pedy for many years, its major attraction was that “you’re your own boss, and whatever you make, it’s yours”.⁹³ An Aboriginal woman who lived on both major opal fields in the 1960s and 1970s, and the daughter of parents involved in the industry, also agreed that the autonomous nature of the industry and having “no boss” was important.⁹⁴

The choice of working hours was also particularly appealing to Aboriginal people. John Cooley grew up in Coober Pedy and as a young man learned how to operate bulldozers in the 1970s. He recalled that the opal industry allowed him to work flexible hours, and when summer temperatures were excessive, time on the opal fields was minimised. He remarked that:

even when you’re operating dozers ... you go until it’s too hot and you knock off. So you start early and knock off by lunchtime or a bit after lunch ... [and] if you were on opal, you might just go there, you might do one rip for the day ... just dig the opal out and you’ve got to fill the bucket up, two buckets and you just buried everything back over and went. Knocked off for the day.⁹⁵

The fascination with opal has been the cause of ‘opal fever’ or the ‘opal bug’ for many miners, to the extent that they were prepared to endure the ongoing hardships and risks associated with the industry.⁹⁶ Opal author Alan Osterstock has described opal fever “as an infectious disease, that is subject to sudden outbreak on the opal fields” and cannot be cured.⁹⁷ A former Andamooka nursing sister recalled how her husband had developed the opal bug, and when it was later suggested the family move to a drier climate to assist a family member with a serious medical condition, Andamooka was chosen.⁹⁸ Aboriginal opal miner George Cooley also revealed how his father, a brumby

⁹³ Bill Lennon, interview with Mike Harding, Mount Willoughby, 26 August 2013.

⁹⁴ Maureen Williams, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 30 August 2013. See also Kevin O’Toole, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 21 August 2013; George Cooley, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 22 August 2013, who both reflected on the advantages of Aboriginal opal miners working for themselves and managing their own time.

⁹⁵ John Cooley, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 27 October 2013.

⁹⁶ Jann Einfeld, *Life in the Australian Outback*, San Diego: Lucent Books, 2003, p.68.

⁹⁷ Alan Osterstock, *Andamooka Opal*, Adelaide: Alan Osterstock, 1976, p.74.

⁹⁸ Mary Good, interview with Joan Durdin, 6 March 1978, Adelaide. J.D. Somerville Oral History Collection OH17/47. Transcript held at the State Library of South Australia.

shooter, “got bitten by the opal bug” after travelling through Coober Pedy in the late 1950s and subsequently relocated the family there, while other Aboriginal people also developed the opal bug as they engaged in the industry.⁹⁹

The element of risk clearly appealed to some opal miners, in an industry where “the chances of striking it rich are about the same as winning a lottery”.¹⁰⁰ One newspaper in the 1920s remarked that in Coober Pedy:

The usual element of luck is just as much in evidence on the opal fields as in other mining. The unlucky man may dig for months without seeing colour, and a new chum may secure his fortune from his first sinking. It needs no brains, but plenty of endurance and pluck.¹⁰¹

An English journalist who visited the Coober Pedy opal fields in 1977 described “the constant stream of miners lured like bush flies to honey, in the hope of striking it rich overnight”. The reality was rather different, with only about five per cent of miners making big money, thirty five per cent making a reasonable living and the rest leaving “as they had come, penniless”.¹⁰² Another journalist, visiting the Andamooka opal fields in 1971, remarked that only the local opal dealers could “expect any regularity in their income” and without enduring the harsh conditions faced by miners.¹⁰³

One opal miner, resident at Andamooka on and off since the mid-1960s and attracted to the fields because “we like to be individuals”, likened the industry to “playing a chance game”.¹⁰⁴ Another miner from the same township with lengthy opal industry experience also commented on this aspect of industry, informing me that he had found \$700 worth of matrix opal in a 10-minute period just after arriving there in 1968 and soon got opal fever. He thought the opal industry was generally “an easy life” with the likelihood of making good money if you were lucky.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ George Cooley, interview, 22 August 2013.

¹⁰⁰ Cram, *A Journey With Colour*, p.62.

¹⁰¹ *Independent*, 9 July 1921, p.2.

¹⁰² *Canberra Times*, 7 June 1977, p.16.

¹⁰³ Sharpe, ‘Andamooka: Opal Outpost’, p.12.

¹⁰⁴ David Spargo, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 28 October 2013.

¹⁰⁵ Stefan Bilka, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 29 October 2013.

The ‘chance game’ or boom and bust nature of the opal industry is reflected in the comments of one long-term Coober Pedy resident who first worked on the opal fields in 1975. He liked the “excitement” of the industry during his early years in the township, when he thought it was possible to make a good income. He even recalled \$20 notes being thrown around in a restaurant one evening, reflecting the “easy come-easy go” nature of the industry, which added to its appeal.¹⁰⁶ In subsequent years he went for extended periods without making significant income and at times just managed to pay his bills, but was content to remain in Coober Pedy because of the possibility that a good find might be just around the corner, as well as enjoying the carefree lifestyle and the advantages that self-employment brought.¹⁰⁷

The excitement and chance nature of the industry also appealed to Aboriginal people. Native Patrol Officer (NPO) MacDougall observed in 1957 that “the excitement and the gamble of searching for opal has possessed some of these people who persist in their search even during winter”.¹⁰⁸ Several Aboriginal people interviewed also described “the gamble” associated with the industry as an appealing feature and likened it to winning a lottery.¹⁰⁹ However, the risks associated with opal mining, like gambling, were high. As one Aboriginal miner remarked, a significant find of opal could mean a good financial reward, but conversely the income gained “for a year’s work when you don’t find nothing is nothing”.¹¹⁰

The risky boom-and-bust nature of opal mining also had a “class levelling effect”, reflected in opal miner Jan Hall’s comments about the lack of class distinctions in Coober Pedy:

You rub shoulders with the very rich and the very poor. The rich can’t afford to put on an act or be rude to anyone as they never know who is going to be richer the next day.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ The Acropolis Restaurant in Coober Pedy was “the hot nightspot in town” during the 1960s and 1970s where opal miners celebrated good finds of opal with generous quantities of alcohol and tips for waiting staff. Money was also thrown onto the stage in appreciation of good entertainment provided by strip-teasers and musical performers. See Johnson, *Digging Around Coober Pedy*, p.33.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Butler, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 22 August 2013.

¹⁰⁸ MacDougall to Cleland, 20 March 1957, SRSA, GRS 1002/1/6/5.

¹⁰⁹ Chris Larkins, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 30 October 2013; Stan Starkey, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 7 November 2013.

¹¹⁰ George Cooley, interview, 22 August 2013.

¹¹¹ *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 1 January 1969, p.9.

Hall's observation on the possibility of potential windfalls highlighted another element of the industry's appeal, evident in the abundance of stories of miners giving up their claims only for new leaseholders working them to find significant quantities of opal soon afterwards. For example, Archie Kalokerinos and several partners found a significant quantity of opal in the wall of a recently abandoned mine they had resumed at the Six Mile opal field. The previous owners had missed spotting the opal "not even by a fraction of an inch", as the dust created by their final blast of explosives in the roof of the mine and poor lighting had obscured it.¹¹²

A similar example of this was provided by Bob Larkins, an Aboriginal man who spent the first decade of his life in both major opal towns in the 1950s and 1960s, when giving an insight into the origins and naming of the Larkins Folly opal field west of Coober Pedy. He recounted the story his older brother told about how the field named after his family was discovered by chance, several years before his birth. His father and older brother:

found floaters, what they call floaters, opal washed on rock and so the old man went back ... him and my brother I guess, and dug a hole, dug a shaft and apparently found opalised shells, got about 80 quids worth ... and then decided to ... go ... back to Andamooka. And before he left old Bob Roberts came and asked him whether he wanted to go back there, whether he was going to go back to the shaft and the old man said, 'No, no, you're welcome to it.' Well apparently Bob Roberts dug down another six feet or eight feet or something, found another level and got 40,000 or 60,000 pounds or something. That's why it's called Larkins Folly but that's a pretty common story.¹¹³

The opal industry attracted many immigrant workers, who were highly regarded on the opal fields, particularly by Aboriginal people. "The free and largely ungoverned lifestyle" of the opal fields particularly appealed to many immigrants who had left war-

¹¹² Archie Kalokerinos, *In Search of Opal*, Sydney: Ure Smith, 1967, pp.90–2.

¹¹³ Bob Larkins, interview, 23 October 2013. The opal field at Larkins Folly is also known as the Nine Mile field and was reportedly discovered in 1946. See Barnes *et al.*, *Opal*, p.74. This time period is consistent with Larkins' account.

torn Europe, Soviet-bloc countries, repression and poverty.¹¹⁴ One immigrant at Andamooka, who had risked his life fleeing Yugoslavia in 1957, acknowledged that “it was the freedom, the independence, the excitement of the desert township” that primarily attracted him there.¹¹⁵ Another immigrant had fled Slovenia to escape the Communist regime there, arriving in Andamooka in 1960 after briefly working on the Snowy River hydroelectric scheme, which was also a common progression for many others from overseas.¹¹⁶

Numerous nationalities were represented on the opal fields during the study period. Warning signs were erected by the Department of Mines in five languages on the opal fields in 1966, alerting people to the hazards of mining.¹¹⁷ Opal miner Archie Kalokerinos recalled how in the 1960s Saturday was the regular mail delivery day in Coober Pedy:

A long queue formed at the post office for letters, and how the postmaster managed his business I will never understand. Letters came addressed in Greek, Italian, German, English and practically any European language you care to name. And the spelling was often as puzzling as the language.¹¹⁸

Miners from overseas contributed significantly to the northern South Australian opal industry. For example, a group of Italian miners arrived in Coober Pedy in 1959 bringing an air compressor to the field and discovered one of the largest parcels of opal ever found within three weeks. Prior to this opal mining was conducted entirely with hand tools and explosives.¹¹⁹ In 1966 several miners from Greece made a significant find of opal south-west of Coober Pedy and named the field ‘Olympic’, after Mount Olympus. It subsequently became one of Coober Pedy’s largest and most productive fields.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Nicholas Kollias, ‘Opal Mining in South Australia: From Picks and Shovels to Modern Noodling’, in Angela Lush (ed.), *Opal*, Adelaide: South Australian Museum, 2015, p.44; John Mannion, ‘The Times They are a Changin’ at Andamooka’, *Word of Mouth*. Newsletter of South Australian/Northern Territory Association of Oral History Australia, no.62, Autumn 2012, p.17.

¹¹⁵ *Truth*, 2 January 1971, p.29.

¹¹⁶ Cram, *A Journey with Colour*, pp.270–1; Dick Clarke, interview with Michael Green, Andamooka, 1 July 2008. Transcript in possession of the author.

¹¹⁷ ‘Annual Report of the DMGG for the Year Ended June 30 1967’, SRSA, GRS 9226/1/1, p. 49.

¹¹⁸ Kalokerinos, *In Search of Opal*, p.78.

¹¹⁹ Cram, *A Journey With Colour*, p.63.

¹²⁰ *Coober Pedy Regional Times*, 14 August 2014, p.11.

Coober Pedy became “a forerunner of the multi-cultural society which the rest of Australia has become”.¹²¹ Despite “the potential for this enormous cultural melting pot to explode”, the need to work and survive in a harsh environment was a major unifying factor.¹²² Kevin O’Toole described how immigrant miners gave Aboriginal people “a fair go” on the opal fields, and believed that their empathetic approach was often influenced by the difficulties encountered in their own countries before coming to Australia.¹²³ Numerous Aboriginal people I interviewed spoke highly of many immigrant opal miners on both the Andamooka and Coober Pedy fields, who they believed were considerate to Aboriginal people, allowing ready access to their mines to noodle and often informing people in advance when and where they would be mining.¹²⁴ Lynette Strangways, for example, recalled how immigrant miners at Andamooka in the 1960s would often advise her family on suitable places to search for opal and even brought buckets of material they had pushed out for them to search through.¹²⁵

The opal industry also attracted people working in seasonally based agricultural industries wanting to supplement their incomes, both European and Aboriginal. Drought and depression often made farming unsustainable for some primary producers. Bernard Grund from Kimba on the Eyre Peninsula travelled to the Andamooka opal fields in 1938 with his family, remaining there for five years and finding enough opal to purchase a house and eight acres of land in Adelaide. Other members of the extended Grund family also worked at both the Andamooka and Coober Pedy opal fields with

¹²¹ Cram, *A Journey With Colour*, p.63

¹²² Kollias, ‘Opal Mining in South Australia’, p.44.

¹²³ Kevin O’Toole, interview, 21 August 2013.

¹²⁴ See for example Robin Walker, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 24 August 2013; Bill Lennon, interview, 26 August 2013; Glenys Dodd, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 29 August 2013; Pauline Lewis, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 2 September 2013; Sadie Singer, interview with Mike Harding, Davoren Park, 10 December 2013.

¹²⁵ Lynette Strangways, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 2 November 2013. For examples of good relationships between immigrant miners and Aboriginal people in northern and central Australia see Sir Ralph Cilento (compiler and editor) with the assistance of Clem Lack senior, for Historical Committee of the Centenary Collections Council of Queensland, *Triumph in the Tropics: An Historical Sketch of Queensland*, Brisbane: Smith & Patterson, 1959, p.200; Christopher Anderson, ‘Aborigines and Tin Mining in Northern Queensland: A Case Study in the Anthropology of Contact History’, *Mankind*, vol.13, no.6. April 1983, pp. 491–2; David Hugo, ‘Mica Mining at Harts Range, Central Australia, 1880s–1960s: A Study of Ethnicity and the Impact of Isolation’, unpublished PhD thesis, Northern Territory University, 1995, pp.136–54.

different family members working the opal fields on a rotational basis when farming activities permitted, and remained in the industry until the 1990s.¹²⁶

Other farmers also became “part-of-the-year gougers” when seasonal wheat cropping finished and worked on the opal fields for several months a year, often going back to the leases they had worked on previously. For example, farmer Reg Carlaw and his family, who were well-known identities in Coober Pedy, would return there annually for up to six months at a time.¹²⁷ Several Aboriginal people recall farmers working on the opal fields in the 1970s and bringing heavy earthmoving machinery with them. An Aboriginal earthmoving equipment operator personally recalled several farmers at Coober Pedy and Mintabie in the late 1970s.¹²⁸ Another Aboriginal man recalls farmers coming to the Andamooka and Coober Pedy opal fields in the 1960s and 1970s “to do their part-time stuff in the off-season” bringing with them compressors, jackhammers and bulldozers.¹²⁹

The opal industry also enabled Aboriginal people working in the pastoral industry to supplement their incomes as they were increasingly being drawn into the monetarised economy at a time when government benefits were not readily available. Seasonal downturns in the pastoral industry periodically necessitated the search for other sources of money, and the lure of the opal fields attracted many Aboriginal people to both Andamooka and Coober Pedy.¹³⁰ This included Aboriginal people from locations such as Port Augusta and centres in far western South Australia, who by the 1950s began to participate in opal mining, not only during periods of unemployment on stations, but also taking annual leave, and occasionally leaving their children at church homes in the

¹²⁶ Undated personal papers titled ‘The Grund Family’s Involvement in Opal Mining at Andamooka S.A.’ and ‘The Grund Family at Coober Pedy’ provided by Mr Don Grund of Adelaide. See also J.E. Grund, ‘Chasing Opal at Coober Pedy 1940’s Style’, *Australian Gold Gem & Treasure*, vol.27, no.12, December 2012, pp.53–7; *Coober Pedy Regional Times*, 19 December, 2013, p.9. An opal field named ‘Kimba’ exists within the Coober Pedy PSF, located approximately 25 kilometres north-west of the town. Robertson and Scott, *Geology of the Coober Pedy Precious Stones Field*, p.9.

¹²⁷ Rees, *Australia*, pp.17–9.

¹²⁸ John Cooley, interview, 27 October 2013.

¹²⁹ Bob Larkins, interview, 23 October 2013.

¹³⁰ Fay Gale, ‘The Role of Employment in the Assimilation of Part-Aborigines’, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch*, vol.60, December 1959, p.54.

locations they came from, such as Port Augusta, Quorn Ooldea and Koonibba, while they mined.¹³¹

Conclusion

The chapter has outlined the origins and development of the opal industry in northern South Australia. Subject to intermittent fortunes in its earlier stages, particularly in Coober Pedy, the opal industry began to thrive by the middle of the twentieth century. It was a small-scale industry that appealed to both Aboriginal and European people, largely because of its informality and autonomous nature. ‘Opal fever’ and the risk and chance nature of the industry also appealed to many people, and fortunes could be readily made or missed. Miners from overseas formed a large part of the opal mining community, making a significant contribution, and enjoyed good relationships with Aboriginal people. Workers from other rural industries were also attracted to the industry as it enabled them to supplement their incomes, notably farmers and Aboriginal people employed in the pastoral industry. Having traced the development of the industry in northern South Australia and its unique features, the following chapter examines the establishment of a major Aboriginal presence on the opal fields as Aboriginal people began to seriously engage with mining

¹³¹ Gordon Briscoe, ‘A Social History of the Northern Central Region of South Australia: 1950 to 1979’, unpublished MA thesis, Australian National University, 1991, p.101.

CHAPTER THREE: ABORIGINAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE OPAL INDUSTRY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the way in which Aboriginal people became involved in the opal industry, and the growth of their participation from the 1940s onwards. While opal may have initially been a curiosity for Aboriginal people passing through the vicinity of the fields, engagement in the industry soon became more serious as people from nearby pastoral stations, and from further afield, began working and residing there. I show that opal began to provide an important source of income to Aboriginal people, who were often instrumental in helping Europeans locate sources of it. As a permanent Aboriginal presence on the opal fields developed, I detail how people often resided in camps close to their working environment and their traditional economic base, although others later chose more permanent forms of accommodation. The opal industry provided Aboriginal people with ongoing employment over several decades, which other mining activities in South Australia at the time were unable to do.

Curiosity certainly attracted Aboriginal people to the opal fields and the industry, with the novelty of European commodities a particular attraction. As noted in Chapter One, mobility was an integral part of Aboriginal lives in northern South Australia, and Aboriginal people would have traversed the opal-bearing regions periodically for ceremonial and economic purposes. While the pastoral industry was the first sustained contact that Aboriginal people had with European people and their commodities, the arrival of opal miners in larger numbers and more intense settlement would have provoked a considerable degree of inquisitiveness. An example of this is evident in the Oodnadatta Police Journals of 1934. In both February and March of that year the Oodnadatta police travelled to Coober Pedy, a distance of approximately 160 miles, to investigate the theft of flour and sugar from a miner's camp there by an Aboriginal person from the Everard Ranges in the state's far north.¹

In an account of life on the Coober Pedy opal fields in the late 1920s, a young English woman Minnie Berrington, who arrived there in 1926 and was one of only four women

¹ Oodnadatta Police Station, various journal entries dated February and March 1934, State Records of South Australia (henceforth SRSA), Government Record Group (henceforth GRG) 5/318/3.

on the fields at the time, observed a visit to Coober Pedy by Aboriginal people from stations in the William Creek area.² She believed that drought in the area and the resulting lack of natural food resources prompted their visit.³ However, there may have also been a ritual element to this visit, evident in Berrington's description of their appearance:

There must have been about sixty of them, a more woebegone company would have been hard to find. Those who wore anything were dressed either in rags or *corroboree decoration or paint*.⁴

The curiosity of these Aboriginal visitors was also evident in how some “did the rounds of the dugouts” one afternoon, while several who had worked as station hands went to the store to buy flour, sugar and tea. Some people also sought to find clothing for them, and “hunted out everything we could possibly spare and our proteges later appeared in some breath-taking fashions”.⁵ Berrington later observed how the dresses worn by the Aboriginal women were shared around, as was their food, and remarked how “the aborigines were a lesson in community living. They practised communism in the dictionary sense of the word”.⁶

This account is a rare example from someone who experienced life on the early opal fields which contains some ‘ethnographic content’, and is less demeaning than some later observations by other writers who were often just visitors to the region.⁷ She noted that some Aboriginal people had been adorned with ceremonial paint, an indication of ritual activity in the area, and touched briefly upon several other important elements of Aboriginal life, including mobility patterns and sharing. These features remained crucial to the lives of Aboriginal people and had implications for their engagement with the opal industry.

² M.D. Berrington, *Stones of Fire: A Womans' Experiences in Search of Opal*, Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1958, pp.109–114. Berrington does not provide an actual date of these observations. She did, however, leave for the Andamooka fields when opal was discovered there in 1930. I therefore consider her first Aboriginal observations in Coober Pedy to date from the late 1920s.

³ Berrington, *Stones of Fire*, p.109.

⁴ Berrington, *Stones of Fire*, pp.109–10. Emphasis added.

⁵ Berrington, *Stones of Fire*, p.110–11.

⁶ Berrington, *Stones of Fire*, p.114.

⁷ See for example, Charles Chauvel and Elsa Chauvel, *Walkabout*, London: W.H. Allen, 1959, pp.174,186; Clifford Austin, *I Left My Hat in Andamooka*, Melbourne: Wren Publishing 1973, pp.20, 28; Michael Tarpey, ‘Journey to the Centre of Centre’, *Walkabout*, vol.39, no.9, September 1973, p.20.

The novelty of the settlement in particular appealed to younger people, both the rewards for finding opal, and the allure and colours of the gemstone. As a young girl in the late 1930s, Jessie Lennon recalled how she and other children would noodle for opal at Coober Pedy and then exchange what they had found for fruit or cool drinks.⁸ Wendy Harris was born in northern South Australia in 1932 and recalled going to the Coober Pedy opal fields in the early 1940s and living there for a short period of time. She recalled being given clothing for the first time and remembered the names of several Aboriginal people who have had a long association with the area. Jim Lennon, a renowned local identity, was there and he was:

buying opal from us little kids and giving us apples and oranges, hoping we could find the opal on the ground. We were galloping around looking for the opal. Apples and oranges we were selling it for. That was a long time ago but I remember it.⁹

Dolly Ramzan, the younger sister of Wendy Harris, also recalled going to Coober Pedy as a young girl in the early 1940s with her aunt and uncle on camels. She remembered that there were many other Aboriginal people there without recalling names, and how she and her sister played with opal stones, attracted by the colours and unaware of their value:

We used to kick them around. We'd get a handful and throw them at other kids you know ... it didn't dawn on us it was valuable ... it was plentiful, it was just lying all over ... you could just walk anywhere and there would be opal ... like I said, I don't know the value of it even, was just flashing nice colours.¹⁰

The value of opal may not have initially been realised by Aboriginal adults either. Jack Crombie, who was born in 1930, recalled that he was about nine or ten years of age

⁸ Jessie Lennon, *I'm the One that Knows This Country! The Story of Jessie Lennon and Coober Pedy*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2000, p. 41.

⁹ Wendy Harris, *Wendy Harris: A Coober Pedy Pioneer*, Murray Bridge: Nyiri Publications, 2006, p.13.

¹⁰ Dolly Ramzan, interview with Mike Harding, Warabalina, 19 August 2013. According to one anthropologist camels "have featured prominently in Indigenous socioeconomic landscapes" and played an important role in "the incorporation of Indigenous people into the encapsulating society". See Petronella Vaarzon-Morel, 'Camels and the Transformation of Indigenous Economic Landscapes', in Nataha Fijn, Ian Keen, Christopher Lloyd and Michael Pickering (eds), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies II: Historical Engagements and Current Enterprises*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2012, p.75.

when his father began looking for opal at The Flats field in Coober Pedy.¹¹ He thought at that time that money was not such an important consideration, and that opal was generally exchanged for very little cash or in return for food: “opal was for the tucker”, he remarked.¹² Bobby Brown, who was born in 1939 and walked from Ingomar Station to the Coober Pedy fields with his father when he was very young, also remembered how Aboriginal people were paid in kind, for example, a bag of sugar for a good piece of opal.¹³

These early visits by Aboriginal people were often transitory and may have been motivated by inquisitiveness, as was their initial engagement with the opal industry where remuneration was in kind, rather than cash. While Aboriginal people may have been unaware of the value of opal in their earlier interaction with the industry, this began to change. By the 1940s Aboriginal interest in opal was no longer just a matter of curiosity, but became increasingly recognised as a viable source of income. This is similar to the Victorian goldfields, where an appreciation of the value of gold by Aboriginal people there by the 1850s also prompted some to seriously begin searching for it.¹⁴

The opal industry attracted many people from pastoral stations, who gradually began to seriously participate in mining. As noted in Chapter Two, Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry began moving freely into the opal industry by the 1940s in order to supplement their incomes, given the seasonal nature of pastoral activity. Typifying this movement between pastoral stations and the opal industry was Arthur Baker, an Aboriginal employee at Bon Bon station near Coober Pedy, where he was born in 1914. Writing to the Protector of Aborigines in relation to an exemption under the *Aborigines Act Amendment Act 1939*, Baker stated that his present occupation was “opal gouging at Coober Pedy but there is work for me on Bon Bon ... whenever I like to go back”.¹⁵

¹¹The Flats opal field was also known as ‘The Big Flats’ as noted above, and was one of the earlier important productive fields that was established between 1915–16, in Coober Pedy, and is now contained in the existing township. Lennon, *I’m the One That Knows*, p.40.

¹² Jack Crombie, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 26 October 2013.

¹³Bobby Brown, interview with Mike Harding, Whyalla, 3 November 2013. Ingomar Station is approximately 70 kilometres south of Coober Pedy.

¹⁴ David Cahir, ‘Black Gold: A History of the Role of Aboriginal People on the Goldfields of Victoria, 1850-1870’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Ballarat, 2006, p.96.

¹⁵ Baker to Penhall, 29 November 1947, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1947/20B. Under this Act selected Aboriginal people could be exempted from their legal status as ‘Aboriginal’, and offered citizenship

Baker's comments also highlights the degree of choice that Aboriginal people had in the matter and that they could return to station employment if opal prospecting was lean, as part of their strategy to maximise their employment and income capacity.

Minnie Berrington observed the presence of Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy from outlying stations as early as the late 1920s. Drought, and the curiosity associated with the arrival of Europeans in large numbers, may have been motivating factors behind their visit.¹⁶ Another miner who arrived in Coober Pedy in 1930, and camped on a watercourse just north of the township, recalled being "joined a few weeks later by about four hundred Aborigines who gathered there from stations and settlements hundreds of miles away".¹⁷ Undoubtedly, news of the increasing presence of Europeans in Coober Pedy would have spread widely among Aboriginal people working on outlying pastoral properties.

Correspondence with the Aborigines Protection Board (APB) by the 1940s shows that pastoralists in northern South Australia began to notice the increasing interest of Aboriginal station workers in the opal industry. While the pastoralists' main intent was to obtain government issued rations for their Aboriginal employees from the APB, their comments about Aboriginal people on the opal fields are insightful. For example, J.E. Pick, the manager of Coondambo station, wrote to the Secretary of the APB in Adelaide in 1946, informing him that one of his Aboriginal employees had recently "found quite a good patch at Coober Pedy", while another Aboriginal employee "has cleared out from here for Coober Pedy just when we were depending on him to work here during one of our busy times. He did the same last year".¹⁸ Pick's letter indicates that opal mining was becoming increasingly attractive for Aboriginal people, with the prospects of earning a reasonable cash income, as opposed to the earlier non-currency

rights, access to government benefits only available to non-Aboriginal citizens and freedom from harsh restrictions in the Act. It meant, however, denying one's Aboriginality, and was a major tool in the government's assimilation strategy. For a summary of the exemption system see Robert Foster, *Aboriginal Policy and its Administration in South Australia 1900–1962*, Adelaide: Report for the Native Title Unit, Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement, February 1997, p.41; Judith Raftery, *Not Part of the Public: Non-Indigenous Policies and Practices and the Health of Indigenous South Australians 1836–1973*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2006, p.181.

¹⁶ Berrington, *Stones of Fire*, p.110.

¹⁷ Anne Johnson, *Digging Around Coober Pedy: Exploring Life in the Little Opal Mining Town with a Big Profile*, Coober Pedy, Sandstone Press, 2006, p.73.

¹⁸ Pick to Penhall, 26 July 1946, SRSA, GRG, 52/1/1946/77.

payments received by some people. It also indicates that Aboriginal people were making clear choices about how and where they worked.

The manager of the nearby Mount Clarence pastoral lease also observed an increasing number of Aboriginal people converging on the opal fields around this time. He wrote that several Aboriginal families from his station were now spending their spare time at the fields, about twenty miles away, and indicated that he was prepared to cart water to them.¹⁹ In 1949 the manager of Mount Barry station wrote to the Secretary of the APB, informing him that he was not sending a ration acquittal advice form for the month of April: no rations were issued to his Aboriginal workers as they had gone to the Coober Pedy opal fields.²⁰

Aboriginal people themselves had clear recollections of moving between the pastoral and opal industries, and the increasing attraction of the gemstone. For example, Eileen Wingfield, who was born in the 1930s, recalled travelling extensively with her family around various pastoral properties in and around the Coober Pedy opal field region when she was young. She recalled that her parents regularly looked for opal when they visited Coober Pedy and the family camped on the fields:

Oh, they look for opal, yeah, about just noodling; that's all they used to do. You used to try with a pick and shovel ... Yeah, awful long time. All around there Twelve Mile that's at Coober Pedy, Twelve Mile everywhere out from Coober Pedy there down to Eight Mile then, that's when we come back from north, we found out Eight Mile was new then and we stayed there for a while and we just got a little bit there, what was left in the mine.²¹

Marty Dodd was another individual who alternated between both industries, initially during periods of leave or seasonal downturn in the 1940s, before becoming more permanently entrenched in opal mining.²² He recalled that during this period Aboriginal

¹⁹ Kunoth to Penhall, 5 August 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/40.

²⁰ Kempe to Penhall, 26 May 1949, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1949/90.

²¹ Eileen Wingfield, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 1 November 2013. Jessie Lennon recalled growing up with Eileen Wingfield, then a young girl living in Coober Pedy with her family. See Lennon, *I'm the One that Knows*, p.47.

²² Marty Dodd, *They Liked Me, the Horses, Straightaway*, Canberra: Ginninderra Press, 2000.

people were working around fields such as The Flats, Jewellers Shop, Potch Gully, and later the Eight Mile, and how they camped in these areas:

Before the bulldozers, I was mining with the windlass and buckets to chuck the dirt out. We used to work down The Flat and used the shovel to throw the dirt out. It was only shallow diggings. Sometimes I worked with partners but mostly on my own. Found a lot of good opal.

It was a long time before the bulldozers came in, and when they did, they gave me the job of checking behind the dozers.²³

Marty Dodd remained in Coober Pedy for the remainder of his life and had extensive involvement in the opal industry.

Monty O'Toole was another example of an Aboriginal man who moved from the local pastoral industry to the Coober fields around the 1940s, and became significantly involved in the opal industry. Moving from Anna Creek station in the far north of the state, his early days at Coober Pedy were spent mining with a pick and shovel at The Flats, and he described how some shafts were up to sixteen feet deep, and how it was difficult to get dirt to the surface from such depths without a windlass.²⁴ Peggy Brown and Ronnie Brown also worked and lived on Anna Creek station and first visited Coober Pedy on holidays, but moved there permanently when their daughter was born. Peggy recalled that on her early visits she and her family looked for opal at the Jewellers Shop field and they lived near the government water tank.²⁵

The attraction of opal also enticed Aboriginal people from pastoral properties to the Andamooka opal fields, although this is less well-documented compared to Coober Pedy. However, one early observation was made by Minnie Berrington, who noted in the early 1930s that two Aboriginal station workers had sunk a shaft in Andamooka, but subsequently abandoned it.²⁶ By the 1950s, however, official records begin to show regular movement between the pastoral and opal industries in that region. In letters written in the mid-1950s, A.B. Jay, the Range Superintendent at the Long Range Weapons Establishment (LRWE), about 110 kilometres west of Andamooka, noted

²³ Janet Skewes (compiler), *Coober Pedylanguru Tjukurpa: Stories from Anangu of Coober Pedy*, Coober Pedy: Umoona Community Council, 1997, p.39.

²⁴ Skewes, *Coober Pedylanguru Tjukurpa*, p.66.

²⁵ Skewes, *Coober Pedylanguru Tjukurpa*, p.48.

²⁶ Berrington, *Stones of Fire*, p.187.

how Aboriginal people from pastoral stations in the region were moving to the opal fields there. He provided a list of names of some prominent Aboriginal families associated with the Andamooka (and Coober Pedy) opal fields, for example, O’Toole, Wells, Egan and Strangways. The families were from various pastoral stations in northern South Australia, including Arcoona, Parakylia and Mount Vivian, and according to Jay intended to return to the Andamooka opal fields when shearing and lambing were finished for the season.²⁷

Bill Lennon first went to the Andamooka opal fields in the late 1950s while working on the nearby Arcoona station, initially on weekends, but found enough opal there to purchase a block of land and residence, and to move there more permanently. He mined there on a full-time basis for nearly a decade and made sufficient money to establish his own rural contracting business, servicing local pastoral properties in the region.²⁸ His sisters, Emily Austin and Milly Taylor, also lived at Andamooka, and Emily recalled that “we used to get plenty of opal back then”, and how they once found £700 worth of opal and purchased a substantial dwelling for their family.²⁹ The Lennon family had long-term relationships with both the Andamooka and Coober Pedy opal fields, as well as the regional pastoral industry.

While Aboriginal people coming regularly to Coober Pedy were often from local pastoral stations, increasing numbers from more distant locations were also attracted to the opal fields. The anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt, who undertook major field work in the early 1940s at Ooldea in far western South Australia analysing recent tribal migrations and movements, noted the emerging “Kupapidi Opal Mines in the middle east” of the state. The Berndts obtained this information from their Aboriginal informants at Ooldea, although they were unclear about the number of people who had been attracted to the fields.³⁰ As ceremonial movements were always of crucial importance to Aboriginal people, they would have meant potential exposure to the opal industry at an early stage of its development, when passing through the opal-bearing

²⁷ Jay to Weightman, 21 June 1956 and 28 June 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/18.

²⁸ Bill Lennon, interview with Mike Harding, Mount Willoughby, 26 August 2013.

²⁹ Emily Munyungka Austin, *My Young Days*, Coober Pedy: Umoona Aged Care Aboriginal Corporation, 2006, p.41.

³⁰ Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt, ‘A Preliminary Report of Field Work in the Ooldea Region, Western South Australia’, *Oceania*, vol. 12, no.4, June 1942, pp.305–7. The distance from Ooldea to Coober Pedy is approximately 310 kilometres.

regions. It may well have been that the Aboriginal people Minnie Berrington described passing through Coober Pedy, noted earlier, were travelling for ceremonial purposes, given some were adorned with paint.

A caption beneath an image of Aboriginal people from Ooldea camping at Coober Pedy in 1947 noted that the cart they travelled with was pulled by either a camel or horse, and indicated that it was a common sight at the time. While the caption does not indicate whether they had travelled to Coober Pedy to search for opal or for ceremonial purposes, it does indicate the effort that some people were prepared to make to travel long distances, and shows the innovative use of introduced technology.³¹ However, within a few years reports of Aboriginal people from Ooldea seriously looking for opal began to emerge. When Native Patrol Officer (NPO) MacDougall visited Coober Pedy in January 1952, he reported that there were about 100 Aboriginal people from Ooldea there, “mainly for the purpose of looking for opal”.³²

Kayleen Miller, who was born about 1943, was aware of Aboriginal people coming to the fields from Ooldea when she was a teenager at Coober Pedy. She recalled how some of these people would catch the train from Ooldea to Tarcoola and then walk the remaining distance to the opal fields, a distance of around 170 kilometres.³³ Kevin O’Toole, the son of a well-known Aboriginal opal identity Monty O’Toole, recalled living at the Eight Mile field in the 1960s, and how some Aboriginal people had walked there from Yalata, also in the far west of the state.³⁴ John Cooley recalled how his mother used to go noodling on the Coober Pedy fields in the 1960s with a friend from Yalata named Martha Edwards.³⁵

Ian Crombie, born in 1958, has lived in Coober Pedy most of his life and described the opal industry “as a drawcard for *anangu*”, with people from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands in the far north of the state moving to the opal fields,

³¹ Lennon, *I’m the One that Knows*, p.42.

³² MacDougall to Aborigines Protection Board (henceforth APB), 24 January 1952, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1952/52.

³³ Kaylene Miller, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 15 August 2013.

³⁴ Kevin O’Toole, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 21 August 2013.

³⁵ John Cooley, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 27 October 2013.

including his grandfather, Minyungu Peter Russell.³⁶ According to his daughter Eileen Unkari Crombie, Russell was working at the Twelve Mile field around 1950.³⁷

Kathleen Chamberlain was born at the Eight Mile field in 1943 or 1944, and as a young girl learned English and Antakarinja (her mother's first language). She remembered groups of Aboriginal people from other areas at her father's camp on the opal fields and remembered languages other than her own being spoken, including Pitjantjatjara.³⁸

George Cooley, who first attended school at Coober Pedy in 1960, recalled a number of Aboriginal children from areas such as Maralinga and Yalata, as well as surrounding districts, whose parents were no doubt attracted to the opal fields.³⁹ The words of Monty O'Toole, that "Arabana, Yankunytjatjara, Antikirinya, Kokatha people all mix up [and] live here", aptly reflect the nature of movement by Aboriginal people from a range of locations to the Coober Pedy fields.⁴⁰

Andamooka, like Coober Pedy, also attracted Aboriginal people from other locations, and not just adjacent pastoral properties. Many also came from western South Australian locations, such as Ceduna, Ooldea, Koonibba and Yalata. An APB officer visiting Andamooka in May 1959 reported an "influx" of Aboriginal people from these locations.⁴¹ A report from the APB agent at Andamooka in September 1958 also revealed that a number of Ngarrindjerri people from the south of the state had arrived at Andamooka, as had a number of Aboriginal people from Point Pearce on the Yorke Peninsula, and this was indicative of the trend.⁴² Bob Larkins has clear memories of Aboriginal people at Andamooka in the 1950s and 1960s from a variety of other places and where they camped. For instance, there were Adnyamathanha people from the Flinders Ranges, as well as Aboriginal people from far western South Australia, from

³⁶ Ian Crombie, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 24 August 2013. The term '*anangu*' is a Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara noun for Aboriginal people generally. See Cliff Goddard (compiler), *Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, Revised Second Edition, Alice Springs: IAD Press, 1996, p.6.

³⁷ Eileen Unkari Crombie, *He Was a South Australian Film Star: My Life with Billy Pepper-Tinyma*, Murray Bridge: Nyiri Publications, 2003, p.4. See also Skewes, *Coober Pedylanguru Tjukurpa*, p. 26.

³⁸ Kathleen Chamberlain, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 24 October 2013.

³⁹ George Cooley, 'Early Days Experience at Coober Pedy School 1958/1960 to 1965', March 2010. Notes in possession of the author.

⁴⁰ Skewes, *Coober Pedylanguru Tjukurpa*, p.66.

⁴¹ J. Weightman, File note, 4 May 1959, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/181.

⁴² Bills to Bartlett, 1 September 1958, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/45. Bill Lennon also confirmed that Aboriginal people from southern South Australian locations such as Point Pearce and Point McLeay (also known as Raukkan) worked on the Andamooka opal fields, as well as Aboriginal people from the far west of the state. Bill Lennon, interview, 26 August 2013.

Point Pearce on the Yorke Peninsula, and even people from the far north of the state, including Oodnadatta, and the APY lands.⁴³

Chris Larkins, the younger brother of Bob Larkins, also spent much of his earlier life on the Andamooka opal fields and resided there until the early 1970s, even remaining there when the rest of the family left the district in 1963.⁴⁴ He was able to clearly recall the names of Aboriginal people from various other locations who lived and worked at Andamooka when he was there, and indicated their residential location on a map of the fields. Lynette Strangways recalled prominent Aboriginal families from the west coast of South Australia who moved to the opal fields, as well as families from the Murray River region, including one girl who became a lifelong friend: we “grew up together like sisters” there.⁴⁵

Aboriginal people soon began to find significant quantities of opal and contributed to the industry. For instance, the government surveyor and road builder Len Beadell observed in the early 1950s how an Aboriginal man who brought a large bag of opal to the local storekeeper at the Eight Mile field received a payment of £2,000 in exchange for it. Beadell continued:

It turned out that the Aboriginal had climbed down a hole sunk years before, lit a kerosene lamp, and started gouging. Just beyond where the last prospector had stopped he struck this pocket of pure opal, over three centimetres thick and at least forty-five centimetre across, which literally tumbled out with every blow of his pick on the underlying chocolate opal dirt. Whipping out his knife he sawed off the legs of his trousers which he knotted, then proceeded to fill by shovelling in the fabulous gemstones with his hand. Penniless, he had climbed down the hole at two o'clock that afternoon ... and he had emerged at four, thousands of pounds richer.⁴⁶

The opal industry would become a regular source of income for Aboriginal people by the 1950s.

⁴³ Bob Larkins, interview with Mike Harding, Wilmington, 23 October 2013.

⁴⁴ Chris Larkins, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 30 October 2013.

⁴⁵ Lynette Strangways, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 2 November 2013.

⁴⁶ Len Beadell, *Still in the Bush*, Sydney: New Holland, 1975, p.162.

In addition, Aboriginal people were instrumental in helping others locate opal, and finding significant specimens. Their ability to spot opal under difficult conditions was highly regarded. According to the Secretary of the APB, Aboriginal people “seemed to have a particular flair for going through the old dumps and with their good eyesight finding opal that was missed by other miners”.⁴⁷ The previous chapter noted how Tottie Bryant’s find of opal at the Coober Pedy Eight Mile field in 1945, helped to rejuvenate the industry there. Several opal fields in the Coober Pedy region are actually named after their Aboriginal discoverers, for instance, Larkins Folly discovered around 1946, and Browns Folly and the Lennon fields in the 1960s.⁴⁸

Gordon Traeger recalled in 1964 that an Aboriginal man named Mulgathing Jack found opal floaters at a location now known as the Olympic opal field and alerted him to this. Traeger unsuccessfully mined here, but two years later several Greek brothers found significant qualities of opal, and this field, which has been one of the most prosperous in the region, is still mined today.⁴⁹ In the mid-1940s a group of Aboriginal people at Andamooka found a significant matrix opal known as the ‘Noolinga Nera’, four metres below the ground. This was one of the largest specimens ever found and is now housed at the Cranbrook Institute of Science in the United States.⁵⁰

While the opal industry may have once been a transitory experience for Aboriginal people, it soon became a more permanent activity for many who began to “adopt totally the new mining town or fringe camp culture”.⁵¹ Estimates of Aboriginal population numbers on the opal fields indicate a significant presence as early as 1938. These estimates do not differentiate between numbers of Aboriginal people residing on the fields and working on them, or how many may have been there for other activities. However, the relatively consistent presence of Aboriginal people on the opal fields throughout the 1950s to the 1970s suggests that mining was a significant aspect of their

⁴⁷ Broadcast on ABC News Service 29 July 1955. Copy on SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/287.

⁴⁸ R.S. Robertson and D.C. Scott, *Geology of the Coober Pedy Precious Stones Field: Results of Investigations, 1981–86*, Report of Investigations 56, Adelaide: Government Printer, 1990, pp.25–6; *Coober Pedy Regional Times*, 21 May 2015, p.1.

⁴⁹ *Coober Pedy Regional Times*, 14 August 2014, p.11; Rhonda and Gordon Traeger, interview with Mike Harding, Hindmarsh Island, 2 September 2015.

⁵⁰ Allan W. Eckert, *The World of Opals*, New York: John Wiley, 1997, pp.98, 146; George Farwell, ‘Opals With Luck’, *Walkabout*, vol.28, no.12, December 1962, p.17.

⁵¹ Gordon Briscoe, ‘A Social History of the Northern Central Region of South Australia: 1950–1979’, unpublished MA thesis, Australian National University, 1990, p.102.

lives. It is also highly likely that a considerable number of Aboriginal people on the opal fields for any length of time were engaged in the industry in some capacity. This is premised on the fact that the opal industry was not totally male dominated: Aboriginal women also made a significant contribution to the industry, while children were often involved as well, and this is explored in the following chapter.

An early approximation of the Coober Pedy population was made by a long-term Aboriginal resident and opal miner, Barney Lennon. He believed that there were about twelve Europeans, who he described as “old blokes”, and 200 Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy when he arrived there in about 1938. He was about twenty years of age at the time and clearly remembered a number of significant details, such as the names of early well-known identities in the township and where they lived.⁵² Approximate estimates of the Aboriginal population at Coober Pedy were regularly made from the mid-1950s until the early 1970s. While these population numbers fluctuated periodically, they do indicate an ongoing Aboriginal presence in the opal industry.

A government geologist reported in 1956 that there were 30 miners on the field at the time, as well as a “floating population” of Aboriginal people ranging from 80 to 250 persons who worked individually and sporadically, and supplied “quite a large quantity of opal to the buyers”.⁵³ Following a visit to the Coober Pedy fields in 1962, the Mining Warden reported that of the total population of approximately 700, about 250–300 were Aboriginal persons.⁵⁴ An anthropologist working in the region estimated that about 400 Aboriginal people were living there in 1968. Aboriginal population information is less clear by the 1970s.⁵⁵ A 1972 report indicated a population of 275

⁵² Kerry E. Medway, *Coober Pedy: Opal Wonderland of Australia*, Seventh Edition, Coober Pedy: Catacomb Church, 2005, p.13. According to an undated, unsigned and anonymous hand written note by a missionary at Ernabella in far northern South Australia, Barney Lennon was reported to be living in Coober Pedy in 1939. See file SRSA, GRG 52/1/1939/52. As noted in the previous chapter, the 1930s was a period of decline on the opal fields, and this is evident in Lennon’s observation that there were very few Europeans on the fields.

⁵³ W. Johnson, ‘Coober Pedy Opalfield’, *Mining Review for the Half-Year Ended 31 December 1956*, no.105, 1958, p.62.

⁵⁴ J.W. Thoroughgood, ‘Inspection of Andamooka and Coober Pedy Opalfields’, *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book* (henceforth *DMERB*), 54/150, 15 May 1962, p.3.

⁵⁵ Isobel White, ‘The Aborigines of the North-West of South Australia: Their Present Conditions and Future Prospects’, in J.W. Warburton (ed.), *The Aborigines of South Australia: Their Background and Future Prospects. Proceedings of a Conference held at University of Adelaide June 13–16, 1969*. Publication no.19, Department of Adult Education, University of Adelaide, 1969, p.125.

living at the Coober Pedy Aboriginal Reserve.⁵⁶ However it is likely that there may have been other Aboriginal people living in or around the township, as camping adjacent to opal fields was a common practice.

A significant Aboriginal population also emerged on the Andamooka opal fields. According to Dick Clarke, a long-term resident who arrived there in 1946, there was an estimated Aboriginal population of 200 in the late 1940s. He remembered how “the first lot come here in a big wagon, pulled by camels, with about two hundred dogs underneath it. The men never worked, only the women”. He also noted that Aboriginal people were even coming from interstate to work on the fields.⁵⁷ Another estimate suggested that there were up to 250 Aboriginal people at Andamooka making a living from opal in the late 1940s.⁵⁸

From the 1950s until the late 1960s, there were a significant number of Aboriginal people residing on the fields. Approximate Aboriginal population numbers in 1956, for example, varied from 100 to 120 according to one source.⁵⁹ At times the Aboriginal population exceeded the European population.⁶⁰ An estimate provided by a government geologist visiting the fields in June 1957 put the Aboriginal population at 300–400, compared to a European population of 70–80.⁶¹ In 1963 it was believed that 170 Aboriginal people were resident at Andamooka, and in 1964 it ranged between 100 and 120.⁶² The last recorded Aboriginal population figure for Andamooka indicated 75 people were there in 1969.⁶³ It was around this time, however, that Aboriginal engagement on the Andamooka fields began to diminish, due to a variety of reasons, and this will be examined in Chapter Seven.

⁵⁶ ‘Report of the Director-General of Community Welfare for the Year Ended June 30, 1972’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers* (henceforth *SAPP*), no.23, 1972, p.48.

⁵⁷ Dick Clarke, interview with Michael Green, Andamooka, 1 July 2008. Transcript in possession of the author.

⁵⁸ Peter Morton, *Fire Across the Desert: Woomera and the Anglo-Australian Joint Project 1946–1980*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1989, p.80.

⁵⁹ W. Johnson, ‘Andamooka Opalfield’, *Mining Review for the Half-Year Ended 31 December, 1956*, no.105, 1958, p.65.

⁶⁰ Bob Larkins, interview, 23 October 2013.

⁶¹ See E.P.D. O’Driscoll, ‘The Possibility of Augmenting Groundwater Supplies—Andamooka Opal Field’, *Mining Review for the Half-Year Ended 31 December, 1957*, no.107, 1959, p.42.

⁶² ‘Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board (henceforth AAB) for the Year Ended June 30, 1963’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1964, p.16; ‘Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30, 1964’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1965–1966, p.11.

⁶³ ‘Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30, 1969’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1969, p.27.

A significant Aboriginal presence on the opal fields prevailed throughout the study period, despite the instigation of defence activities in northern South Australia by the federal government such as the LRWE at Woomera from the late 1940s and British nuclear testing program to the west and north-west of Coober Pedy in the 1950s and 1960s.⁶⁴ These activities meant that travel restrictions were imposed upon considerable areas of land around both the Andamooka and Coober Pedy regions with the potential to hamper travel to these locations. In 1953 a number of Aboriginal people on the Coober Pedy Twelve Mile opal field were adversely impacted by nuclear fallout, experienced illness and left the area for some time.⁶⁵ In addition, some Aboriginal people faced the threat of having their children allegedly ‘at risk’ removed by state welfare authorities, in some instances even resorting to hiding them down mine shafts to avoid detection.⁶⁶ Others relocated to avoid having their children taken.⁶⁷ Notwithstanding that there were some unpleasant effects and inconveniences associated with these activities, the extent to which they fully impacted on Aboriginal people’s ability to mine has not been fully determined.

For many years Aboriginal people camped on or near the opal fields as their participation in the industry intensified, although more permanent forms of accommodation later became available. However, some people still preferred camping even when other types of accommodation were available. The tendency for some Aboriginal people to camp in ‘humpies’, old car bodies or tents has been the subject of

⁶⁴ For further information on the LRWE and how it impacted on Aboriginal people see Morton, *Fire Across the Desert*, Chapters 5 and 6; Alice Gorman, ‘The Cultural Landscape of Interplanetary Space’, *Journal of Social Archaeology*, vol.5, no.1, 2005, pp.85–107; Anti Bases Campaign, *Weapons in the Wilderness: The Exploitation of the North-West of South Australia*, Adelaide: Anti Bases Campaign (SA), 1991. Excellent sources relating to British nuclear testing and the impacts on Aboriginal people include Lallie Lennon, ‘Maralinga Dust’, in Adele Pring (ed.), *Women of the Centre*, Apollo Bay: Pascoe Publishing, 1990, pp.89–98; J.R. McClelland, J.R. Fitch, and W.J.A. Jonas, *Report of the Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1985; Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta Editorial Committee, *Talking Straight Out: Stories from the Irati Wanti Campaign*, Coober Pedy: Alapalatja Press, 2005.

⁶⁵ Lennon, *I’m the One that Knows*, p.97; Emily Betts, interview with Mike Harding, Ethelton, 29 September 2015; Bernard Lennon, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 22 August 2013.

⁶⁶ Edna Tantjingu Williams and Eileen Wani Wingfield, *Down the Hole, Up the Tree, Across the Sandhills: Running from the State and Daisy Bates*, Alice Springs: IAD Press, 2000; Maureen Williams, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 30 August 2013; Elaine Moosha, interview with Mike Harding, Quorn, 8 November 2013.

⁶⁷ Williams and Wingfield, *Down the Hole*, p.46.

some criticism, including reports by government agencies.⁶⁸ However, this fails to acknowledge that westernised forms of accommodation are not always desired by Aboriginal people, that camping was their mode of living for many thousands of years, and clearly provided some advantages on the opal fields. Many Europeans also chose to live in “make-do accommodation” that was common on the opal fields.⁶⁹ Camping near the opal fields gave Aboriginal people ready access to the working environment, as well as close proximity to their traditional hunting and foraging grounds, which throughout the study period were regularly exploited.

As early as the 1930s, official evidence of regular Aboriginal camps at Coober Pedy and their persistence began emerging, noted in the records of the Police Department and the APB. In October 1936 Mounted Constable Badenoch of Tarcoola visited Coober Pedy and asked that Aboriginal people camped near the water tank relocate to another part of the township.⁷⁰ A number of other reports from the Kingoonya and Tarcoola police stations during the 1940s and early 1950s record significant Aboriginal camps around the Coober Pedy opal fields and how police officers would often remove Aboriginal people from these locations, and destroy their dogs.⁷¹

Despite being temporarily removed from their camps, large numbers persistently remained in the area, moving to various fields following the ‘opal trail’, particularly around Coober Pedy. This is clearly evident in official records from the 1950s. A medical team in 1955 tested 10 Aboriginal people camped near the Coober Pedy water tank and 77 Aboriginal people camped at the Seven Mile opal field.⁷² As many as 59 Aboriginal people were reported to be living in a number of camps on the Potch Gully field in 1958.⁷³ In 1959, 30 Aboriginal people were reported camped at the Jungle

⁶⁸ See for example Chauvel and Chauvel, *Walkabout*, p.186; ‘Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30,1963’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1964, p.12.

⁶⁹ Lothar Brasse and Margaret Sanders, *Andamooka Heritage Survey*, Adelaide: Department of Environment and Planning, 1984, p.3.

⁷⁰ Tarcoola Police Station Journal entry dated 15 October 1936, SRSA, GRG 5/318/4.

⁷¹ Various journal entries in file series SRSA, GRG 5/318/9, 5/318/10. This file series was only accessible until the end of 1955 as a 60-year restriction has been imposed. An application submitted in January 2015 to the South Australian Police Department under the *Freedom of Information Act 1991* to view files beyond the 1955 date range was refused.

⁷² ‘TB Survey Coober Pedy 16 November 1955’, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/29.

⁷³ Marks to Bartlett, 14 May 1957, SRSA, GRG 52/1/155/287.

field.⁷⁴ The major camp around Coober Pedy appeared to be at the Eight Mile, where up to 200 Aboriginal people had been observed living in late 1958, despite the lack of water, which had to be carted there.⁷⁵

Many Aboriginal people interviewed had clear and consistent recollections of camps around the Coober Pedy opal fields, as well as the names of family members and individuals who lived and worked there. Around Coober Pedy, Aboriginal people generally camped in makeshift accommodation relatively close to the field “within walking distance or no more than a couple of kilometres, and often consisted of three or four families”.⁷⁶ This enabled them to observe when other miners were “pushing out opal”, although some made sure they were not so close that if something went missing, they would be blamed.⁷⁷ Camping close to the fields also prevented claim jumping, as potential offenders would be seen.⁷⁸

Kevin O’Toole revealed how he and his family camped near various Coober Pedy opal fields such as the Eight Mile, Twelve Mile, Fourteen Mile and Shellpatch, following the “opal trail”.⁷⁹ Kathleen Chamberlain recalled Aboriginal people camping at a number of opal fields, including the Eight Mile, the Twelve Mile and Seventeen Mile, in small family groups, including her family and members of the Williams family who were also extensively involved in the industry.⁸⁰ According to Elaine Moosha it was common for Aboriginal people to camp near the opal fields, and when her family were in Coober Pedy they based themselves at field such as the Eight Mile, Twelve Mile and Larkin’s Folly, and even recalled how some people would go down mine shafts to keep cool in extreme summer temperatures.⁸¹

⁷⁴ Meier to Bartlett, 1 August 1958, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/200. I visited the Jungle field with Ian Crombie, who advised me that Aboriginal people were still living at this location in the 1970s and that there were up to 100 people living there. He recalled the names of a number of Aboriginal people, including family members. Ian Crombie, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 1 September 2013.

⁷⁵ Meier to Bartlett, 1 January 1959, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/177.

⁷⁶ George Cooley, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 22 August 2013.

⁷⁷ Robin Walker, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 24 August 2013.

⁷⁸ Ian Crombie, interview, 24 August 2013; Maureen Williams, interview, 30 August 2013.

⁷⁹ Kevin O’Toole, interview, 21 August 2013.

⁸⁰ Kathleen Chamberlain, interview, 24 October 2013.

⁸¹ Elaine Moosha, interview, 8 November 2013.

George Cooley and I visited the Seven Mile field in August 2013 and located a major campsite there. He remembered the names of prominent Aboriginal families living there in the 1960s and 1970s, including the O'Tooles and the Browns, and an individual named Coober Pedy Jimmy.⁸² This field was a central residential location with a good water supply and vegetation, and was relatively close to Coober Pedy, while also near to adjacent fields such as the Twelve Mile and Larkins Folly. According to Cooley, considerable numbers of Aboriginal people camped here and at other locations nearby, and would have collectively noodled opal on the adjacent fields which they would have cleaned up at their campsites. Aboriginal people camped in makeshift structures such as traditional bush shelters or humpies with iron, or under natural windbreaks such as *eremophila* shrubs.⁸³ Although this camp is now deserted, there was considerable evidence of significant past habitation that reflected the era, such as old cans, bottles, flour drums, oil cans and an old vehicle axle, as well as some very small, valueless opal chips. Natural water was available from nearby creeks and a swamp.

A number of other people also recalled the presence of large Aboriginal camps in the area. Vin Wake recalled a large camp at Centipede Creek near the Coober Pedy Eight Mile field, where almost nightly “those living near them hear the korobori [sic] songs: monotonous yet pleasing chanting, accompanied by the clicking of hardwood sticks tapped together as an accompaniment”.⁸⁴ John Dunstan was also aware that Aboriginal people camped close to a number of fields, for example, around the Eight Mile in the late 1940s and 1950s in a creek running nearby, and that:

as soon as somebody’s pulling dirt out of their claim, you know dumping it, they’d know that’s the one that’s got opal and would quickly be there and start noodling.⁸⁵

⁸² A list of Aboriginal people tested for mantoux at Coober Pedy in 1955 indicated 77 Aboriginal people were camped at the Seven Mile field, including members of the O’Toole family among others. Untitled typescript, 16 November 1955, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/29.

⁸³ George Cooley, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 29 August 2013.

⁸⁴ P. Vin Wake, *Opal Men*, Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1969, p.96.

⁸⁵ John Dunstan, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 25 August 2013. It is likely that the creek referred to was Centipede Creek. I visited this location with George Cooley on 29 August 2013 and was informed that numerous families had camped there in the 1950s and 1960s.

However, some Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy also availed themselves of more permanent forms of accommodation when they were obtainable, for instance, dugout dwellings. Dugouts in Coober Pedy were often abandoned and taken up by newcomers to the fields.⁸⁶ By 1947 the APB were aware that some Aboriginal people working on the Coober Pedy opal fields were now living in dugout residences, which suggests a degree of permanence, and were grazing their horses at the water reserve, the property of the Mines Department, which had no objection to the presence or conduct of Aboriginal people. The Secretary of the APB wrote that:

In my opinion the natives have as much right to work and live at Coober Pedy as any other persons, and provided they do not usurp possessions or dug-outs belonging to other people, I see no reason why they should not live in these premises if they wish.⁸⁷

Two years later a senior APB officer, A.M. Bray, visited Coober Pedy and saw “several natives who were comfortably camped in the dug-outs” and appeared to be making a reasonable income digging opal. At the suggestion of a local pastoralist, Bray also visited an Aboriginal woman, Mrs Larkins, who was supervising two of her five children with school correspondence lessons. Bray was advised by Mrs Larkins that her family made “quite a good living out of opal”, and was impressed by the way in which she supervised her children’s education and their progress, and the clean and tidy state of the family dugout.⁸⁸ One of her daughters, Elaine Moosha, recalled that in the 1950s her family occupied a dugout near the government water as did her son, Bob Larkins, who described it as “like a mining hole dug in the side of the hill someone had mined”.⁸⁹

By the 1960s, however, more Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy began to live on the Aboriginal reserve there, which was established in 1959. Within a decade more Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy were living on the reserve than on the opal fields, and some in purchased accommodation.⁹⁰ The Aboriginal population remained stable

⁸⁶ Lennon, *I'm the One that Knows*, p.44.

⁸⁷ Penhall to Commissioner of Police, 22 August 1947, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1947/29.

⁸⁸ A.M. Bray, ‘Report on Visit to Woomera and Pastoral Stations en Route to Mabel Creek and Return via Kingoonya’, 3 April 1949, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1949/10.

⁸⁹ Elaine Moosha, interview, 8 November 2013; Bob Larkins, interview, 23 October 2013.

⁹⁰ ‘Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30, 1969’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1969, p.20.

there, as the lure of opal had become a key factor in the development of a community identity in Coober Pedy. A significant Aboriginal community exists in Coober Pedy today and many of these people have had a lengthy association with the town, either as the descendants of Aboriginal people who first encountered opal around seven decades ago or as actual participants in the industry at a later period.

Significant Aboriginal camps were also established at Andamooka, although official information about them is not as detailed. However, one report from the Woomera police station in 1954 noted a visit to an Aboriginal camp at the Andamooka opal fields, and the destruction of their dogs after reports of sheep being killed on the nearby Andamooka station.⁹¹ An official report in 1956 indicated the presence of between 150 to 200 Aboriginal people there, while expressing concern about living conditions and the lack of sanitary facilities for the camps.⁹² A report later that year noted the presence of some Aboriginal people camping in ‘wurlies’, although others resided in semi-dugouts.⁹³ A large Aboriginal camp in the sandhills near Andamooka was visited by an APB welfare officer in 1958.⁹⁴

Aboriginal people also remembered extensive Aboriginal camps at Andamooka. Bobby Brown was a child at Andamooka when his family resided there for several years, and remembered camping on the sandhills north-west of the township, but close to the fields.⁹⁵ According to two sisters who lived at Andamooka during the 1960s there were “camps everywhere”, which were often inhabited according to traditional tribal affiliations.⁹⁶ Bob Starkey also confirmed this, remarking that “all the Kokatha mob and all the Western Desert mob, they all camped on one side”, while Aboriginal people from more southerly locations camped elsewhere. For instance, “the Kaurna mob and Ngarrindjeri mob that come up there and New South Wales mob, they all camped off – away from us”.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Woomera Police Station Journal entry dated 7 June 1954, SRSA, GRG 5/318/10.

⁹² Bartlett to Superintendent of Reserves, 24 May 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/181.

⁹³ Bills to Bartlett, 25 July, 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/179; Millar to Bartlett, 13 July 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/181.

⁹⁴ Weightman to Secretary APB, 9 May 1958, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/181.

⁹⁵ Bobby Brown, 3 November 2013.

⁹⁶ Irene Dingaman-Johnson, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 4 November 2013; Barbara Dingaman-Amos, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 4 November 2013.

⁹⁷ Bob Starkey, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 11 November 2013.

European miners were also aware of large camps at Andamooka, and how Aboriginal people would camp near the productive areas where opal was being found. During the 1960s, according to one miner, there was an Aboriginal population at Andamooka of about 200–300 people living in a number of camps relatively close to the opal fields, often in groups of 30 to 40 people at times.⁹⁸ Other miners there also remembered camps around various opal fields, including a major one near the current cemetery, and sometimes Aboriginal people camped in nearby sand dunes.⁹⁹

A number of Aboriginal people in Andamooka also lived in more permanent types of accommodation. These generally differed from the dugout style of Coober Pedy, and were more of a semi-dugout, because of the higher clay content of the soil at Andamooka making it unsafe for large-scale excavation.¹⁰⁰ For example, a report to the APB by its secretary advised that a number of Aboriginal people on the Andamooka afield were living in semi-dugout dwellings, in addition to camps.¹⁰¹ According to Chris Larkins, a number of Aboriginal people there in the 1960s also lived in stone or mud-brick dwellings that were common in the region.¹⁰²

While opal mining was a viable occupation that would sustain many Aboriginal people over several decades, this was not a common pattern elsewhere in the state. For instance, small groups of Aboriginal people and individuals intermittently worked various small mines around the Flinders Ranges from around 1940 to 1957, extracting silver, lead, copper, talc and barytes, and were supported by the local United Aborigines Mission as part of a strategy to develop an economic base.¹⁰³ However, despite the interest and commitment shown by Aboriginal people, these were not viable or sustainable activities. The mining of chrysoprase, a semi-precious gemstone, was sporadically undertaken by Aboriginal miners on a communal basis in the 1960s and

⁹⁸ David Spargo, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 28 October 2013.

⁹⁹ Stefan Bilka, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 29 October 2013; Geoff Watson, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 30 October 2013.

¹⁰⁰ Brasse and Sanders, *Andamooka Heritage Survey*, p.10.

¹⁰¹ Bartlett to APB, 25 July 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/179.

¹⁰² Chris Larkins, interview, 30 October 2013.

¹⁰³ Peggy Brock, *Yura and Udnyu: A History of the Adnyamathanha and the Flinders Ranges*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press in association with Aboriginal Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Planning, South Australia, 1985, pp.50, 54–5; Peggy Brock, *Outback Ghettos: Aborigines, Institutionalisation and Survival*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp.141,144; Nic Klaasen, *Sliding Rock: To Mine or Not to Mine*, Adelaide: Nic Klaasen, 1986, p.83. See also file SRSA, Government Record Series (henceforth GRS) 6038/17/8/1950/426.

early 1970s at Mount Davies in far northern South Australia, and encouraged by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) as an activity that would promote economic self-reliance. The primary consideration for Aboriginal people, however, was that sites of significance in the area be protected, and this became their “overriding motivation”, rather than mining per se.¹⁰⁴ The partial collapse of a trench in 1978 subsequently halted mining activities there.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

While Aboriginal people may have initially been attracted to the opal fields because of curiosity, by the 1940s they had become serious opal seekers. The opal industry attracted Aboriginal people from outlying pastoral properties, as well as from missions and settlements throughout the state. The industry began to provide Aboriginal people with a regular source of income by the 1950s as they established an enduring presence on the opal fields, with significant numbers of people living in camps, and others later finding more permanent forms of accommodation. In contrast to the opal industry, other small-scale mining ventures undertaken by Aboriginal people in South Australia at the time were not successful or sustainable. Having traced the emergence of an Aboriginal presence in the South Australian opal industry, the following chapter looks at the significance of Aboriginal labour in the opal industry and how it far exceeded what has generally been portrayed in the literature.

¹⁰⁴ Jim Downing, *Ngurra Walytja: Country of My Spirit*, Darwin: Australian National University North Australia Research Monograph, 1988, p.59.

¹⁰⁵ C.H.H. Connor, ‘Chrysoprase and Moss Agate Deposits Mount Davies, North West Province Report No.3–Mining Activity, 1975–1978’, *DMERB*, 79/118, November 1979, pp.3–4.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF ABORIGINAL WORK IN THE OPAL INDUSTRY

Introduction

This chapter challenges perceptions that Aboriginal people played little part in the northern South Australian opal industry, and demonstrates that Aboriginal engagement far exceeded what has generally been portrayed in the literature. Historian Peggy Brock has written that Aboriginal people in rural South Australia frequently demonstrated “quite remarkable ingenuity and adaptability” as they engaged in local industries, often teaching themselves new skills on the job. This was in an era when Aboriginal people were expected to perform only menial roles, and little official effort was made to provide them with new skills.¹ However, Aboriginal adaptability and agency were features of their engagement in the opal industry and this is the subject of this chapter.

This chapter begins by examining the range of work that Aboriginal people undertook on the fields. Much of this work was skilled, and required patience and dexterity in conditions that were often very hot and dusty: Aboriginal people were not just unskilled workers. Many Aboriginal people worked successfully as noodlers: women were particularly adept at this, and children often took part in this activity as well. Some Aboriginal people also had their own mining claims. Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy were often sought after by miners to work in more specialised roles such as ‘checkers’ searching for opal behind heavy earthmoving equipment. A small group were actually employed as operators of such equipment and were highly regarded by miners. A number of Aboriginal people also had partnerships with other miners. Aboriginal people took particular pride in their work and in preparing their opal for sale, while a small number also worked as opal classers, helping Aboriginal miners to obtain fair prices from opal buyers. A few were also able to establish their own businesses from the income generated by their involvement in the opal industry. Significant numbers of

¹ Peggy Brock, *Outback Ghettos: Aborigines, Institutionalisation and Survival*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.164.

Aboriginal people worked in the industry over an extended period, earning good incomes.

Perceptions of Aboriginal Work in the Opal Industry

The nature of Aboriginal labour on the opal fields has often been derided, or generalisations made that Aboriginal people were merely noodlers of opal, afraid to mine underground, and perceived to be on the fringes of the industry. On several occasions when I was briefly introduced to people from one mining town and explained the nature of my research, I was told that Aboriginal people were really only noodlers and not serious miners. However, some miners I formally interviewed spoke highly about Aboriginal involvement in the opal industry.

Accounts of Aboriginal people in the opal industry in the literature of the time have often been less than flattering. Visiting Coober Pedy in the late 1950s, filmmaker Charles Chauvel described how Aboriginal people “seldom ever do the hard digging: they leave that to the white man out in the noonday sun”.² According to Australian author Ion Idriess, Aboriginal people considered opal mining a:

foolish waste of energy, digging holes in the ground to look for a stone when there were a million stones lying upon the sunlit surface! The aborigines could never understand such absurdity.³

Generalisations have also been made that Aboriginal people were fearful of opal because it was seen as “a manifestation of the devil”, and avoided mining underground.⁴ Such comments misrepresent the serious nature of Aboriginal engagement in the opal industry.

Aboriginal people on the opal fields quickly adapted to the industry and seriously participated in a variety of roles. They also challenged the notion of “intelligent parasitism”, an expression coined by anthropologist A.P. Elkin to describe Aboriginal labour in the northern Australian pastoral industry as a form of dependence and where a

² Charles Chauvel and Elsa Chauvel, *Walkabout*, London: W.H. Allen, 1959, p.178.

³ Ion L. Idriess, *Opals and Sapphires: How to Work, Mine, Class, Cut, Polish, and Sell Them*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1967, p.63.

⁴ Allan W. Eckert, *The World of Opals*, New York: John Wiley, 1997, pp.199–200.

minimal amount of effort was expended in return for a basic subsistence.⁵ Written at a time when the official policy of ‘assimilation’ was at its zenith, such discourse influenced debate at the time, as seen in several twentieth century studies of Aboriginal people in south-eastern Australia which implied that the seasonal horticultural work they engaged in reinforced a state of dependence.⁶ Aboriginal people engaged in opal mining voluntarily and seriously, not in a state of dependence.

The task-oriented nature of the opal industry particularly suited Aboriginal people. British historian E.P. Thompson wrote that in some pre-industrial societies, or those less influenced by modern capitalism, labour is often task-oriented rather than time-oriented, and there is often little demarcation between ‘work’ and ‘life’.⁷ This was evident in the nature of Aboriginal engagement on the opal fields. Long hours were worked when necessary, and this is consistent with Thompson’s concept of task-orientation, where “the working-day lengthens or contracts according to the task”.⁸

One observer in the 1950s wrote that many Aboriginal people “dig and work like white people”, and how he saw up to 50 individuals working on one claim.⁹ If Aboriginal people “were on a find they’d be out working like any normal person”, according to Andamooka miner David Spargo.¹⁰ For some Aboriginal people hard work and persistence on the opal fields was often necessary in order to provide for their families. Lulu O’Toole-Boland and Kathleen Chamberlain, who were born on the Coober Pedy opal fields and lived there for many years, both told of their respective fathers having to

⁵ A.P. Elkin, ‘Reaction and Interaction: A Food Gathering People and European Settlement in Australia’, *American Anthropologist*, vol.53, no.2, 1951, p.168.

⁶ James Bell, ‘The Economic Life of Mixed-Blood Aborigines on the South Coast of New South Wales’, *Oceania*, vol.26, no.3, March 1956, p.186; R.G. Castle, and J.S. Hagan, ‘Dependence and Independence’, in Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus (eds), *Who are our Enemies: Racism and the Australian Working Class*, Sydney: Hale and Iremonger in association with Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 1978, p.159.

⁷ E.P. Thompson, ‘Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism’, *Past and Present*, no.38, December 1967, p.60. For further commentary on the nature of Aboriginal labour and time see Mike Donaldson, ‘The End of Time? Aboriginal Temporality and the British Invasion of Australia’, *Time and Society*, vol.5, no.2, 1996, p.203; Charlie Fox, *Working Australia*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991, p.1.

⁸ E.P. Thompson, ‘Time, Work-Discipline’, pp.59–60.

⁹ Robert Bruderer, ‘The Coober Pedy Opal Fields’, *Walkabout*, vol.23, no.9, September 1957, p.36.

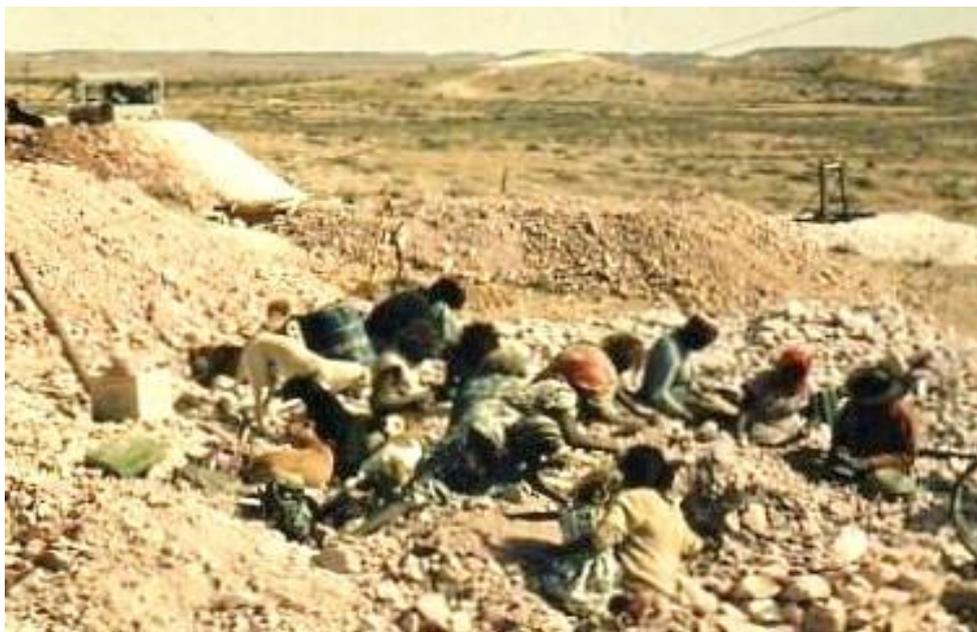
¹⁰ David Spargo, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 28 October 2013.

work hard in search of opal to feed their families.¹¹ These examples challenge stereotypes that Aboriginal people were generally lazy or not prepared to work hard.¹²

Noodling

Most Aboriginal people working on the opal fields did so as noodlers. Noodling was a serious activity for both Aboriginal and European people, who sifted through the residue from mine shafts and open-cut diggings:

with their sieves and rakes and digging sticks, turning over the dirt, swooping down on a piece of colour. The noodlers move slowly, often on their hands and knees, searching through the soft dirt with their fingers. Many a big find has been unearthed in this way, much to the frustration of the miner who abandoned the open-cut after so much hard work.¹³



**Figure Three: Noodlers at work on a rich dump at Flat Hill, 1960.
Coober Pedy Historical Society**

Observers often commented that Aboriginal people were adept at this work because of their visual skills. Coober Pedy miner Brian Underwood thought that Aboriginal people

¹¹ Lulu O’Toole-Boland, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 12 November 2013; Kathleen Chamberlain, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 24 October 2013.

¹² Office of the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Rebutting the Myths: Some Facts About Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1992, pp.2–3.

¹³ Robert G Haill, *Opals of Australia*, Adelaide: Axiom Publishing, 2003, p.87.

“had very good eyes for seeing changes in the ground”. He believed this was an extension of the traditional skills involved in tracking and hunting animals, as “I think they were used to following the ground and looking for stuff all the time to eat and it just naturally transferred to looking for pieces of opal”.¹⁴ Andamooka miner Geoff Watson remembered how Aboriginal people “had eyesight you wouldn’t believe” and were able to locate opal in a mass of white sandstone that could be easily missed.¹⁵ Some people have even suggested that Aboriginal people had the ability to “smell out opal”.¹⁶

Noodling also requires considerable patience and stamina. An ABC documentary made in the mid-1960s described Aboriginal people as “part of the character of the opal fields” in South Australia, who possessed “amazing patience for this noodling and equally amazing stamina for long periods of exposure to the heat”.¹⁷ Long-term Coober Pedy resident Faye Nayler described Aboriginal people “as the greatest noodlers” on the opal fields there, aided by their “exceptional eyesight” and patience, exemplified in an excerpt below from a ballad she wrote titled ‘The Noodler’:

It takes patience to sit out on the dumps
In all kinds of weather
Sifting through the dirt and dust
It can really be a bother.
Sometimes they search for days on end
It can be unrewarding
But many as [sic] family has been kept from harm
By a noodler’s patience undaunting.¹⁸

Aboriginal women were particularly adept at noodling, despite Australian mining being portrayed as a predominantly male activity and women traditionally under-represented

¹⁴ Brian Underwood, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 28 August 2013.

¹⁵ Geoff Watson, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 30 October 2013. See also Albert McCormack, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 14 August 2013; George McCormack, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 23 August 2013.

¹⁶ See Hail, *Opals of Australia*, p.78; John Dunstan, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 25 August 2013; George Weisz, interview with Mike Harding, Railway Bore, 20 August 2013.

¹⁷ Mark Van Cleefe and Barry Pitman (directors), *Opal*, Town and Country Series, DVD, Sydney: ABC Commercial, 1966.

¹⁸ Faye Nayler, *Warm in My Heart: Ballads and Stories of the Coober Pedy Opal Fields*, Brisbane: Pinto Australia, 2003, pp.82–3.

in its history.¹⁹ A number of Aboriginal life histories commented on the serious nature of women's involvement in the opal industry.²⁰ Bill Lennon described Aboriginal women mining at Andamooka as "a bit of an eye opener" when he first went there in the 1950s.²¹ Europeans also acknowledged Aboriginal women as important noodlers, generally working harder than men, who often retreated to the shade of a tree or vehicle to watch them work.²² Similar observations were made by a journalist visiting the Pilbara region of Western Australia in the 1930s and 1940s, and how the "burden of labour" fell upon Aboriginal women.²³

Archie Kalokerinos, who mined at Coober Pedy in the 1960s, observed that the presence of Aboriginal people on opal dumps was an indicator that good opal was being pushed out to the surface.²⁴ Brian Underwood also noted that the presence of Aboriginal people noodling was an indicator of opal to others, and how in earlier days some people would come and "rat on your claim", adding that Aboriginal people were honest and never indulged in this practice.²⁵ The presence of Aboriginal people who camped in close proximity to the opal fields was actually welcomed by some miners, as

¹⁹ Katrina Alford, *Gilt-Edged Women: Women and Contemporary Mining in Colonial Australia*, Working Papers in Economic History, no.64, Canberra: Australian National University, February 1986, p.28; Susan Lawrence, 'Gender and Community Structure on Australian Colonial Goldfields', in A. Bernard Knopp, Vincent C. Pigott and Eugenia Herbert (eds), *Social Approaches to an Industrial Past: The Archaeology and Anthropology of Mining*, London: Routledge, 1988, p.39. Some exceptions noting the importance of women mining in remote regions in the Northern Territory include Barbara James, *No Man's Land: Women of the Northern Territory*, Sydney: Collins Australia, 1989, pp.204–5, 209; Diane Bell, *Daughters of the Dreaming*, Second Edition, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, pp. 69–70. The importance of Aboriginal women mining in the Pilbara region of Western Australia is noted in Marjorie Bickerton, *Dust Over The Pilbara*, East Perth: Artlook, 1980, pp.11–2, 18; M.J. O'Reilly, *Bowyangs and Boomerangs: Reminiscences of 40 Years' Prospecting in Australia and Tasmania*, Hobart: Oldham, Beddome and Meredith, 1944, p.48.

²⁰ See for instance Emily Munyungka Austin, *My Young Days*, Coober Pedy: Umoona Aged Care Aboriginal Corporation, 2006, p.41; Eileen Unkari Crombie, *He Was a South Australian Film Star: My Life with Billy Pepper-Tinyma*, Murray Bridge: Nyiri Publications, 2003, pp.4, 19; Milly Taylor, 'Born out Bush', in Adele Pring (ed.), *Women of the Centre*, Apollo Bay: Pascoe Publishing, 1990, p.149.

²¹ Bill Lennon, interview with Mike Harding, Mount Willoughby, 26 August 2013.

²² Yanni Athanasiadis, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 28 August 2013; John Dunstan, interview, 25 August 2013; Geoff Watson, interview, 30 October 2013.

²³ John K. Ewers, 'Yanding for Tin at Moolyella', *Walkabout*, vol.1, no.7, May 1935, p.24; John K. Ewers, 'In and Around Marble Bar', *Walkabout*, vol. 15, no.2, February 1949, p.35.

²⁴ Archie Kalokerinos, *In Search of Opal*, Sydney: Ure Smith, 1967, p.99.

²⁵ Brian Underwood, 28 August 2013. 'Ratting' or 'nightshifting' on an opal producing claim sometimes occurred at night, or when the owners were away. Len Cram, *A Journey With Colour: A History of South Australian Opal, 1840–2005*, Lightning Ridge: Len Cram, 2006, p.366.

it assured them that ‘ratters’ would probably steer clear of their diggings in fear of being observed.²⁶

One long-term resident of both the Coober Pedy and Andamooka fields wrote how Aboriginal noodlers often found opal which other miners had discarded, because they failed to remove enough of the exterior of the potch, which may have contained opal inside. In some instances pieces of opal may have been discarded when miners viewed them by candlelight and did not think they were valuable: a further examination in the light of the sun may have revealed better quality stones.²⁷ George Cooley thought that some miners “didn’t know the trade that well enough to go through the dirt and tailings thoroughly enough” and that some “were less sophisticated and went full bore blasting and often blew up opal”.²⁸ He also recalled how some Aboriginal people went back to re-noodle some of the old grounds around Coober Pedy, particularly in the 1970s when the smaller opal chips that had once been discarded because they were considered to be worth little had since become more valuable.²⁹

Aboriginal people noodling on the dumps were even known to have informed other miners that they were failing to recognise opal. According to George Cooley:

on more than one occasion ... it was due to the noodlers being on the dump that the miners started to realise that they were on opal and pushing opal out. A lot of them didn’t find opal on the ground, they’ve pushed it all out until they woke up ... *anangu* used to sit on the dumps and start noodling ... and I remember a lot of occasions where some of them say look, you’re pushing opal out, you should check.³⁰

²⁶ Ian Crombie, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 24 August 2013; Maureen Williams, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 30 August 2013.

²⁷ P. Vin Wake, *Opal Men*, Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1969, p.106.

²⁸ George Cooley, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 29 August 2013.

²⁹ George Cooley, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 22 August 2013; George Cooley, interview, 29 August 2013. Small chips were often discarded when miners clipped their parcels of opal and thought that the value of the off-cuts was minimal, but later they were found to be of some value if sufficient quantities were collected. See Hail, *Opals of Australia*, p.63. A Swiss visitor to the Coober Pedy opal fields in 1957 noted that dumps made thirty years before were being re-noodled for stones that were thought to have no commercial value at the time. See Bruderer, ‘The Coober Pedy Opal Fields’, p.36.

³⁰ George Cooley, interview, 22 August 2013.

Geoff Watson also recalled how Aboriginal people at Andamooka would sometimes offer to return pieces of opal pushed out by miners.³¹

Throughout much of the study period Aboriginal people were welcome to noodle, although this situation would begin to change by about 1980 with the emergence of automated noodling machines and this is examined later in the thesis.³² According to two long-term miners at Andamooka, Aboriginal people were welcome to noodle there, and in their view were entitled to the dirt and anything of value in it that had been pushed out of a mine and discarded.³³ Marty Dodd remembered noodling at the Coober Pedy Eight Mile prior to the 1960s, and how some of the miners there would evenly distribute buckets of discarded dirt from their shafts to different Aboriginal groups of noodlers to ensure that all got a fair chance.³⁴

Claim Ownership

Aboriginal people often owned their own claims. One example was Marty Dodd, who not only noodled from time to time, but also held mineral claims and owned basic mining equipment such as winches, as well as picks and shovels. He recalled purchasing a 12 month Miner's Right that cost £5 per annum which enabled him to peg a standard claim of 50 metres by 50 metres, and how Aboriginal people pegged their own claims on fields such as Jeweller's Shop, Potch Gully and German Gully that were close to the Coober Pedy township, as well as several of the fields more distant, for instance, the Eight Mile, Eleven Mile and Twelve Mile.³⁵ This was an era when it was safe to leave a claim and the equipment on it unattended without the fear of pilfering, and small groups of people often banded together to work collaboratively.³⁶

Bob Larkins remembered his father, Ted Larkins, having Miner's Rights in the 1950s in both Coober Pedy and Andamooka.³⁷ Ted Larkins also helped other Aboriginal people get mining permits, according to his daughter Elaine Moosha.³⁸ *A Register of*

³¹ Geoff Watson, interview, 30 October 2013.

³² Haill, *Opals of Australia*, p.68.

³³ David Spargo, interview, 28 October 2013; Geoff Watson, interview 30 October 2013.

³⁴ Marty Dodd, *They Liked Me, The Horses, Straightaway*, Canberra: Ginninderra Press, 2000, p.63.

³⁵ Dodd, *They Liked Me*, p.64–5.

³⁶ Dodd, *They Liked Me*, pp.64–5.

³⁷ Bob Larkins, interview with Mike Harding, Wilmington, 23 October 2013.

³⁸ Elaine Moosha, interview with Mike Harding, Quorn, 8 November 2013.

Miner's Rights between 1940 and 1955 shows that a number of prominent Aboriginal people in the opal industry had been issued with Miner's Rights. These included the following family names: Austin, Bryant, Cassidy, Dodd, Egan, Gilbert, Johns, Larkins, Lennon, Pepper and Williams.³⁹ In a 1957 report following a recent visit to Andamooka, APB secretary Bartlett wrote that many Aboriginal people had purchased Miner's Rights and were now sinking shafts, rather than just "combing the surface dumps".⁴⁰ In a two-day period in 1957 the postmaster at Andamooka issued 28 Miner's Rights to Aboriginal people.⁴¹

According to George Cooley, there were some Aboriginal people with Miner's Rights around Coober Pedy in the 1960s, and at least a dozen had basic mining equipment and worked together.⁴² In the same era, Sid Waye also recalled Aboriginal people at Coober Pedy such as Barney Lennon and his son Bernard, as well as Norman Hayes and Archie Badenoch, who had pegged leases in the area.⁴³ The Department of Mines and Energy (DME) *Register of Correspondence Files* between 1955 to 1972 indicated that precious stones permits were issued to a number of prominent Aboriginal people in the opal industry on both major fields, for instance, the Badenoch, Brown, Cooley, Davis, Dingaman, Gilbert, Indich, Larkins, Lochowiak, Tilmouth and Turner families. However, the actual files relating to these people had been destroyed by the Department and I was unable to ascertain any more details.⁴⁴

By the 1970s Miner's Rights were replaced by the Precious Stones Prospecting Permit (PSPP). Claim owners were now required to peg out their claims and adequately mark them, in contrast to earlier haphazard methods, with permit numbers and the date of pegging marked on each corner post. Once a PSPP was pegged and registered, the owner(s) were permitted to prospect, and mine, and had ownership rights on any opal found on the claim.⁴⁵ A search of the *Register of Precious Stones Claim (PSPP)* of the DME for the years 1972–1980, which consisted of a series of cards with the names of

³⁹ See file series SRSA, GRG 30/12–13.

⁴⁰ Bartlett to APB, 19 June 1957, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/180.

⁴¹ *News*, 20 June 1957, p.1.

⁴² George Cooley, interview, 22 August 2013.

⁴³ Sid Waye, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 12 November 2013.

⁴⁴ The actual register is located on SRSA, Government Record Series (henceforth GRS) 8573.

⁴⁵ Alan Osterstock, *Andamooka Opal*, Adelaide: Alan Osterstock, 1976, p.14.

applicants and the location of the opal field, revealed that there were at least 65 PSPPs issued for periods of 12 months to Aboriginal people in Andamooka and Coober Pedy during that time, although some Aboriginal people held more than one claim.⁴⁶ Some of these PSPP holders had previously held permits dating back to the 1940s. A number of these PSPPs were also applied for jointly by Aboriginal and European mining partners.

PSPP holders were also permitted to use explosives. Writing in 1969, a Coober Pedy miner described being directed by an Aboriginal man to some opal diggings that had been “abandoned by other Aborigines because they were too frightened to use gelignite”.⁴⁷ However, some Aboriginal people were competent explosives users and aware of the risks. When filmed a decade ago, Aboriginal miner and claim owner Norman Hayes recounted the practice of using gelignite to find opal around Coober Pedy. After drilling holes underground with an auger to place sticks of gelignite in and then lighting the fuses, he then had to allow sufficient time to ascend the mine using the step holes carved into the wall and get a suitable distance away.⁴⁸

George Cooley recalled how several Aboriginal people he knew on the Coober Pedy fields would use dynamite on their claims when necessary.⁴⁹ His brother, John Cooley, while acknowledging that some Aboriginal people were reluctant to use explosives, also used them when necessary. This was an era when there was little regulation and you could “get gelignite and that off anyone in them days”. He preferred to use explosives in open cuts rather than underground, for safety reasons:

We never use to mess around because I always think about fumes and that underground ... but you do it in open cut, fumes clear up straightaway. You more or less can walk down there and have a look straightaway. But you give it enough fuse so you can get out of it.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ See file series SRSA, GRS 8295/1–2. There may have actually been other Aboriginal people, whose names were not known to me. While I am aware of the more prominent Aboriginal people associated with the opal industry, on the basis of my research and long-term working association with people in the region, there may have been some individuals working in the industry whose names are unknown to me.

⁴⁷ *Australian Women's Weekly*, 1 January 1969, p.9.

⁴⁸ Warwick Thornton (director), *The Old Man and the Inland Sea*, DVD, Canberra: Ronin Films, 2005.

⁴⁹ George Cooley, interview, 22 August 2013.

⁵⁰ John Cooley, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 27 October 2013.

Checkers

By the late 1960s a group of up to 20 Aboriginal people were also hired as specialist checkers on the Coober Pedy fields because of their visual skills, working behind bulldozers soon after when they were introduced to the fields.⁵¹ The arrival of bulldozers and increased open-cut mining were met with reluctance by some miners, and a degree of official ambivalence: it was believed that while they hastened the process of finding opal, it could also be destroyed in the process.⁵² Despite these obstacles and the high fuel and operating costs, there were estimated to be 150 bulldozers operating at Coober Pedy during the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁵³

The checkers would walk behind the bulldozers as they ripped aside the overburden in an attempt to reveal traces of opal, or even pockets and seams. The checkers' role was crucial, as seams of opal that are exposed could quickly be buried by the scything bulldozer blades. In the event of opal being found, the checkers would use hand tools to work down to the opal level, while the bulldozer moved away from the cut.⁵⁴ This process was continuously repeated over an extensive area of ground, and once the first floor of an area was cut and cleaned, subsequent cuts down to an agreed, and often considerable, depth continued.⁵⁵ Checking required patience, thoroughness and good vision, as opal could be potentially missed where "a thin veneer of dirt can hide a pocket ... worth many thousands of dollars".⁵⁶ There was also an element of danger for checkers, as they were not always visible to bulldozer operators manoeuvring or reversing their equipment. Checkers needed to be aware of this, and there have been some fatalities because of being too absorbed in looking for opal and unaware of the bulldozer changing direction or heading towards them.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Pers. Comm., George Cooley, 29 January 2016.

⁵² A.T. Armstrong, 'Report on Andamooka and Coober Pedy Opal Fields', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book* (henceforth *DMERB*), 55/5, 5 July, 1962, p.5.

⁵³ R.S Robertson and D.C Scott, *Geology of the Coober Pedy Previous Stones Field: Result of Investigations, 1981–86*, Report of Investigations 56, Adelaide: Government Printer, 1990, p.12.

⁵⁴ Haill, *Opals of Australia*, pp.51, 76.

⁵⁵ Jann Einfeld, *Life in the Australian Outback*, San Diego: Lucent Books, 2003, p.73.

⁵⁶ Haill, *Opals of Australia*, p.76.

⁵⁷ Eckert, *The World of Opals*, p.192.



Figure Four: Checking the level in a bulldozer cut, 1970. Coober Pedy Historical Society.

Aboriginal checkers were eagerly sought after by other miners, and usually engaged on a percentage basis. Marty Dodd started working as a checker in the 1960s, at a time “when the bulldozers were in full swing”.⁵⁸ He recalled that a number of miners were aware of his particular skills as a checker and were keen to engage him. On one occasion he earned £800 for a day’s work, but there were also times when a week or even a month elapsed before any more opal was found. However, he was content with the lifestyle and what he considered to be the relative ease of the job, compared with hard digging.⁵⁹

Checking required a considerable degree of knowledge of the ground and opal levels. For a skilled and experienced miner “The ground tells a story. It slides and runs in

⁵⁸ Dodd, *They Liked Me*, p.75.

⁵⁹ Dodd, *They Liked Me*, pp.75–6.

levels, and a good miner can read that ground”.⁶⁰ Opal levels may occur from 1 to 30 metres underground and surface features may indicate its presence: for example, flat-capped sandstone hills or coloured bands of sandstone wedged between dirt could mean the presence of vertical faults below ground containing opal.⁶¹ Because the Coober Pedy fields lack a distinct opal level, compared to that found in Andamooka, it makes opal harder to locate.⁶² One former Aboriginal checker there explained:

they say you need good eyesight but I think it’s more to the knowledge of the ground and knowledge of what you’re trying to look for. I mean a lot of people – really literally a lot of them don’t know what they’re looking for when they look for opal.⁶³

Because of his skills as a checker Marty Dodd found regular employment, adding that “if they reckon he’s all right and good enough to check for them—they keep him as long as they can”.⁶⁴ His daughter, Glenys Dodd, recalled her father working as a checker, and one day in the 1970s when her father predicted a good find of opal the family watched him walking behind the bulldozer. She witnessed his prediction come true and the delight the miners expressed at the time: “next minute it was on, they were screaming”.⁶⁵ Two Aboriginal men with long-term involvement in the opal industry in Coober Pedy also recalled Marty Dodd, and another Aboriginal man Norman Hayes, regularly employed as checkers on a good percentage basis.⁶⁶ Emily Austin remembered how she and another Aboriginal woman Sadie Singer used to work as checkers, walking behind bulldozers and collecting pieces of opal in a bucket, moving from field to field depending on where it was being found.⁶⁷ During my interviews a number of Europeans at Coober Pedy spoke highly of the skills of Aboriginal checkers.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ Haill, *Opals of Australia*, p.79. See also Simon R. Pecover, ‘Australian Opal Resources: Outback Spectral Fire’, *Rocks & Minerals*, vol.82, no.2, March/April 2007, p.114.

⁶¹ Einfeld, *Life in the Australian Outback*, p.71.

⁶² Stephen Aracic, *Rediscover Opals in Australia*, Lightning Ridge: Stephen Aracic, 1999, p.212.

⁶³ George Cooley, interview, 22 August 2013.

⁶⁴ Dodd, *They Liked Me*, p.76.

⁶⁵ Glenys Dodd, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 29 August 2013.

⁶⁶ Bernard Lennon, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 22 August 2013; John Cooley, interview, 27 October 2013.

⁶⁷ Emily Austin, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 2 November 2013.

⁶⁸ For example Albert McCormack, interview, 14 August 2013; George McCormack, interview, 23 August 2013; John Dunstan, interview, 25 August 2013.

Machine Operators

About a dozen Aboriginal men who were prominent miners were also employed as machine operators on the Coober Pedy fields, within a few years of these machines arriving, and became highly sought after because of their expertise.⁶⁹ Some of them had progressed from noodlers to checkers beforehand, and several would continue to have some involvement in mining beyond the study period. Men like the brothers John and George Cooley, Bernard Lennon, the son of prominent miner and machinery operator Barney Lennon, and Sid Waye recalled that they had learned to drive bulldozers in their teens.⁷⁰ Two Aboriginal brothers interviewed recalled their father working in the 1960s as an operator with several prominent miners in the area. The fascination of seeing their father driving machinery that was relatively new to the opal fields, and being one of the first Aboriginal operators at the time, stand out in their memory.⁷¹ Emily Austin's late husband also drove bulldozers for several years in the 1960s, in between working on pastoral stations in the region.⁷²

John Cooley was a particularly well-known Aboriginal miner whose primary motivation for working in the opal industry was his love of machinery. Although on occasions he worked with other miners on a percentage basis, he also worked for himself. His expertise in being able to “read the ground” was crucial to locating opal while operating machinery:

depend what field you [are] in. You look at the ground and you'd know exactly what colour the ground was, where the opal was ... different opal was formed in different coloured ground and we'd know all the time.

He contended that some inexperienced operators were not aware of this and “ended up pushing heaps out all the time. I wasn't going to tell them that ... More money for us on the dump”.⁷³

⁶⁹ Dorothy Lennon and Vicki McCormack, ‘A Health Worker at Coober Pedy’, *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker*, vol. 8, no.3, September 1984, p.37; George Cooley, interview, 22 August 2013.

⁷⁰ George Cooley, interview 22 August 2013; John Cooley, interview, 27 October 2013; Bernard Lennon, interview, 22 August 2013; Sid Waye, interview, 12 November 2013.

⁷¹ Anonymous Individuals, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 12 November 2013.

⁷² Emily Austin, interview, 2 November 2013.

⁷³ John Cooley, interview, 27 October 2013. Many bulldozer drivers around Coober Pedy have unknowingly missed out on fortunes because they were unaware of which levels in the ground contained opal, and pushed out sandstone they thought was useless. Aracic, *Rediscover Opals*, p.209.

According to George Cooley, his brother John and Bernard Lennon “were the two main operators and they were being chased all over the place by a lot of miners”.⁷⁴

Bernard Lennon was also known to have trained Europeans in how to successfully operate heavy machinery.⁷⁵ A number of European miners acknowledged the skills of Aboriginal machinery operators, including one who named John Cooley “the velvet operator because he was so smooth and used to do as much as anyone else” and was “equal to the best”.⁷⁶ George McCormack also considered John Cooley one of the best operators he had ever worked with, and generally thought that Aboriginal machine operators were more proficient in finding opal than others.⁷⁷

Partnerships

The skills of Aboriginal people as machinery operators and checkers enabled them to negotiate good partnership arrangements with other opal miners. Some Aboriginal and European people also jointly applied for PSPPs. Partnerships were common on the opal fields, particularly with open-cut mining: the high costs of diesel fuel and maintenance of heavy machinery necessitated this.⁷⁸ Partnerships were usually based on “a gentleman’s agreement or handshake”, for a certain percentage of any opal found, and typified the informal nature of business on the opal fields.⁷⁹ There is documentary evidence of one such arrangement in Coober Pedy as far back as 1941, when a local miner, R.G. Campbell, wrote to the APB, and informed them of a partnership he had with “an old native, a fine old chap, as straight as a die, and between us we are managing to make a living at opal”.⁸⁰

Many Aboriginal people interviewed recalled individuals involved in partnerships with Europeans. Elaine Moosha, for example, recalled how several members of the Larkins family had partnerships with miners at Andamooka. She noted that these partnerships were verbal and sealed with a handshake, but generally honoured.⁸¹ Her younger

⁷⁴ George Cooley, interview, 22 August 2013.

⁷⁵ Kevin O’Toole, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 21 August 2013.

⁷⁶ Albert McCormack, interview, 14 August 2013.

⁷⁷ George McCormack, interview, 23 August 2013. For other miners with a similar view see Peter Butler, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 22 August 2013; John Dunstan, interview, 25 August 2013.

⁷⁸ Hail, *Opals of Australia*, p.87.

⁷⁹ Aracic, *Rediscover Opals*, p.56.

⁸⁰ Campbell to Penhall, 2 August 1941, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1941/88.

⁸¹ Elaine Moosha, interview, 8 November 2013.

brother, Chris Larkins, also recalled how both he and another brother worked in partnerships, and he had recently moved back to work at Andamooka in such an arrangement.⁸²

Opal miner Evangelos Lekkas first went to Coober Pedy in 1975, and recalled how partnerships with Aboriginal people at the time were common. He had a number of partnerships there, and later at Mintabie, with Aboriginal people, who he thought more honest than Europeans.⁸³ George McCormack also had a number of successful partnerships with Aboriginal people over the years, for example, machine operators such Barney Lennon, Bernard Lennon, George Cooley and John Cooley, as well as checkers like Marty Dodd.⁸⁴ John Dunstan described his dealings with Aboriginal people who found opal but needed someone with earthmoving equipment to extract it:

If they found a spot and had samples to show a person, including myself, [they] would come to me, would come and see if you could make a cut and do a deal, 50/50 or 60/40, and a lot of the time you'd find opal where they showed you.

He thought that most partnership arrangements were equitable, and that experienced Aboriginal people “knew where they could get a fair deal”.⁸⁵

The proceeds of partnership arrangements were often complicated, depending on who owned the claim and who owned the machinery being used, as the costs of fuel and maintenance were extremely high, however, there was general agreement that Aboriginal people were fairly paid.⁸⁶ John Cooley recalled being able to make \$50 per day in the 1970s when involved in partnerships on the Coober Pedy fields, and during periods where little or no opal was being found it was possible to earn extra money noodling. Bernard Lennon estimated working on a basis of twenty per cent when driving a bulldozer, while he thought a checker might earn ten per cent.⁸⁷ Marty Dodd

⁸² Chris Larkins, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 30 October 2013.

⁸³ Evangelos Lekkas, interview with Mike Harding, Mintabie, 17 August 2013.

⁸⁴ Albert McCormack, interview, 14 August 2013.

⁸⁵ John Dunstan, interview, 25 August 2013.

⁸⁶ A long-term Coober Pedy miner advised me that he could spend \$1,000 a day on diesel fuel for a bulldozer. John Dunstan, interview, 25 August 2013.

⁸⁷ Bernard Lennon, interview, 22 August 2013.

was offered between eight to ten per cent of any successful finds in partnerships he was involved in, which was considered a fair amount.⁸⁸

Opal Selling and Classing

Aboriginal people made considerable efforts in presenting the opal they found for sale, demonstrating their seriousness and pride in their work. According to Kathleen Chamberlain it was important “to see the colour, you know ... and to be proud at the end of the day for ... the effort you put into working, collecting and cleaning”.⁸⁹

According to Eileen Wingfield, in the earlier days of opal mining Aboriginal people would place their opal in newspapers or dry clean rag and take it to the dealers, but as they became more experienced they began soaking it in water before trading.⁹⁰

Aboriginal people began to present their opal more professionally, and many began to clean their stones by rubbing them on cement with soap powder and water to enhance their appearance.⁹¹

Aboriginal people also used modern technology to enhance the opal they found, for example, small tumbling machines consisting of a trough and agitator were used to remove the loose dirt around them. Cecil Betts described this process to me and how one of his relatives made a tumbling machine for him, using a washing-machine agitator powered by an electric motor.⁹² George Cooley was also filmed using a tumbling machine and then sifting the processed opal into a number of wire-mesh pans to sort into different sizes. Finally, careful snipping using special pliers was done to remove the remaining sandstone casing around the opal once it had been sorted.⁹³ This was a delicate but important step in ensuring that the opal was well presented, as incorrect snipping of the outer casing could reduce the amount of opal inside. Extreme

⁸⁸ Dodd, *They Liked Me*, p.75. In north Queensland, some Aboriginal people also engaged in partnerships with European miners on the goldfields. Although Aboriginal people there were able to obtain Miner's Rights and claims, they were not granted actual mining leases unless they entered into a partnership arrangement. See Galiina Ellwood, 'Aboriginal Prospectors and Miners of Tropical Queensland, from Pre-Contact Times to ca.1950', *Journal of Australasian Mining History*, vol.12, October 2014, p.72.

⁸⁹ Kathleen Chamberlain, interview, 24 October 2013.

⁹⁰ Eileen Wingfield, interview with Jan Scott, Port Augusta, 19 July 2005. Transcript in possession of the author.

⁹¹ Lennon and McCormack, 'A Health Worker at Coober Pedy', p.37.

⁹² Cecil Betts, interview with Mike Harding, Ethelton, 29 September 2015.

⁹³ Roger Whittaker (director), *Million Dollar Gamblers*, VHS, Sydney: Roger Whittaker Films, 1982.

care was also necessary in order to avoid damaging or blemishing the opal.⁹⁴ George Cooley can recall in the late 1950s and 1960s Aboriginal people on the Coober Pedy fields using pliers or tile cutting snips, a tool also favoured by other miners, to clean their opal, either where they resided or under the shade of a tree.⁹⁵

Matrix opal from Andamooka was made more attractive by soaking it in a sugar solution and boiling it in sulphuric acid, a time-consuming process that required a considerable degree of caution.⁹⁶ As young boys, Andrew and Bob Starkey often visited relatives at Andamooka in the 1970s, and remembered how they would boil up the matrix opal they found in acid to enhance the colour. Bob Starkey later lived there for some years and recalled how he, his aunt, and uncle:

would just drive around for hours and getting it all. We'd get buckets – flour buckets full of it, and bring it back, and I'd help him [uncle] light the fire and he'd put the acid in it and then that would make the colour come out of it.⁹⁷

Several Aboriginal men on the opal fields also established themselves as successful intermediaries between Aboriginal miners and opal dealers by becoming classers. According to Archie Kalokerinos, “Good opal classers are rare and precious” and “the best insurance that one can buy. If his work is right the buyers have very little ground on which to argue”.⁹⁸ Classers ensure that parcels of opal are sorted into grades depending on quality and colour, and careful snipping is required to ensure that the opal is presented to its best appearance and not damaged.⁹⁹ Ricky Brown was a well-known Aboriginal man in Coober Pedy who some Aboriginal people used to sell their opal because of his ability to successfully negotiate good prices with the dealers: he was “pretty smart at haggling” according to Kevin O’Toole. There is also an image of him selling opal in a large-scale mural on the side wall of a prominent business in Coober

⁹⁴ Haill, *Opals of Australia*, p.103.

⁹⁵ George Cooley, interview, 29 August 2013. See also Bobby Brown, interview with Mike Harding, Whyalla, 3 November 2013; Nicholas Kollias, ‘Opal Mining in South Australia: From Picks and Shovels to Modern Noodling’, in Angela Lush (ed.), *Opal*, Adelaide: South Australian Museum, 2015, p.46.

⁹⁶ Jeffrey G. Olliver, Steven G. Carr, Colin H.H. Connor and Douglas C. Scott, ‘Andamooka Opalfields: A Geological Guide for the Prospector’, *DMERB*, 78/86, 1978, p.7; Osterstock, *Andamooka Opal*, p.74.

⁹⁷ Bob Starkey, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 11 November 2013.

⁹⁸ Kalokerinos, *In Search of Opal*, p.105.

⁹⁹ Haill, *Opals of Australia*, p.103.

Pedy.¹⁰⁰ Coober Pedy opal miner Brian Underwood recalled another Aboriginal man there named Billy Brown, who he described as “an exceptional classer”.¹⁰¹ Other Aboriginal opal classers at Coober Pedy included Barney Lennon and Monty O’Toole.¹⁰²

Ted Larkins was also a well-known opal classer whose activities were clearly remembered by several family members. His son, Bob, described how his father:

was pretty knowledgeable. So a lot of the Aboriginal people bought their opal, little parcels to the old man to class it for them. Clean it up, class it, put a price in it and sell it for them. Even myself, I used to run around and sell 20 quids’ worth or 10 quids’ worth, 40 quids’ worth of opal too—you know, I tout it around to the different buyers, and the old man would say ‘ask for 50, if they give you 40 take it’.¹⁰³

Ted Larkins’ daughter, Elaine Moosha, also recalled how Aboriginal people would come to him to get their opal classed, as they trusted him to negotiate a fair price. She also thought that many Aboriginal people were sufficiently astute to realise if they were being taken advantage of:

I think that most times they knew if they were being ripped off or not. So they would come and Dad would help them. I can remember he had this little pair of scales, and he used to weigh them all and put them in different sections and classify them.¹⁰⁴

Ted Larkins had extensive dealings with the well-known opal dealer Greg Sherman, whose family had been involved in buying opal on the South Australian fields since 1919.¹⁰⁵ According to Elaine Moosha, her father was actually approached by Sherman to become an opal buyer and he was even prepared to train him to do so, but Larkins

¹⁰⁰ Kevin O’Toole, interview, 21 August 2013.

¹⁰¹ Brian Underwood, interview, 28 August 2013.

¹⁰² Janet Skewes (compiler), *Coober Pedylanguru Tjukurpa: Stories from Anangu of Coober Pedy*, Coober Pedy: Umoona Community Council, 1997, p.10; Lulu O’Toole-Boland, interview, 12 November 2013.

¹⁰³ Bob Larkins, interview, 23 October 2013.

¹⁰⁴ Elaine Moosha, interview, 8 November 2013.

¹⁰⁵ Cram, *A Journey With Colour*, p.25.

declined the offer because he felt it “would compromise his relationship within the [Aboriginal] community”.¹⁰⁶

Establishing Businesses

Several Aboriginal people were able to establish their own businesses because of their success on the opal fields. Although Aboriginal machinery operators were less evident at Andamooka, Bill Lennon was a successful operator there. Having started mining at Andamooka in the late 1950s, he made sufficient money to purchase a small D6 bulldozer, a front-end loader and backhoe, which enabled him to establish his own infrastructure contracting business on pastoral stations in the local area. This in turn enabled him to move to Coober Pedy, where he was extensively involved in the opal industry there. This included owning a mine at the Potch Gully field, and a family retail business selling opal from his mine, which he learned to cut and polish, as well as running tours and operating an aeroplane refuelling contract, well into the 1980s.¹⁰⁷ Ted Larkins was able to establish a successful rural contract fencing business because of the income earned from opal mining, and alternated between both the pastoral industry and opal industry.¹⁰⁸ Several of his children worked with him at various times, and recalled how working as an independent contractor was far more lucrative than working as a station employee.¹⁰⁹

Significance of this Work

While many Aboriginal people regularly noodled for a living it is difficult to quantify actual numbers. The autonomous and informal nature of the industry meant that individuals or small family groups may have worked irregular hours. In addition, the scattered nature of the opal fields over many kilometres also meant that Aboriginal people working on them may not have always been obvious to others. Official records relating to employment numbers for this period are also very minimal. However, in 1956 a geologist estimated that in Coober Pedy, there were 30 European miners compared to a floating population of Aboriginal people ranging from 80 to 250, “working individually in a sporadic manner”, and supplying on an aggregate basis large quantities of opal to buyers there. He also noted that opal was in demand and buyers in

¹⁰⁶ Elaine Moosha, interview, 8 November 2013.

¹⁰⁷ Bill Lennon, interview with Mike Harding, Mount Willoughby, 27 August 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Elaine Moosha, interview, 8 November 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Bob Larkins, interview, 23 October 2013; Chris Larkins, interview, 30 October 2013.

the field were unable to get enough to meet their needs.¹¹⁰ On a visit there the following year, Native Patrol Officer (NPO) MacDougall reported that there were “100 Aborigines, most of whom are engaged in fossicking for opal”.¹¹¹

However, it is apparent that Aboriginal people were able to earn reasonable incomes from opal. The opal industry soon became a regular source of income for Aboriginal people to the extent that one source believed it could potentially provide “a degree of economic security unique in the Western Desert”.¹¹² In 1962, the APB estimated that two Aboriginal people had earned £2,000 each from opal mining that year in Coober Pedy, while several others had earned at least £1,000 for the same period. It also concluded at the time that the opal industry enabled “all able-bodied adults ... to earn their own living”.¹¹³ A senior government officer formerly based at Coober Pedy estimated that in the 1962–1963 financial year, several Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy actually earned over £3,000, with considerably more earning amounts of £2,000, and that some women and children had also “handled a few hundred pounds”.¹¹⁴

The Aboriginal Affairs Board (AAB), established in 1963, acknowledged in 1969 that the Coober Pedy reserve was the one place in South Australia where “ample opportunity for self-employment exists” in the opal industry, with an average income for families estimated at \$2,500 to \$3,000 per annum.¹¹⁵ At that time the average weekly wage for a male worker in South Australia was \$63.10, or \$3,281 per annum.¹¹⁶ Most Aboriginal workers in the northern South Australian pastoral industry around the

¹¹⁰ W. Johnson, ‘Letter to the Chief Geologist–Coober Pedy Opalfield’, *DMERB*, 43/26, 17 August 1956, p.1.

¹¹¹ MacDougall to Superintendent Woomera, 16 July 1957, SRSA, GRS 1002/1/6/6.

¹¹² Isobel White, ‘The Aborigines of the North-West of South Australia: Their Present Conditions and Future Prospects’, in J.W. Warburton (ed.), *The Aborigines of South Australia: Their Background and Future Prospects. Proceedings of a Conference held at University of Adelaide June 13–16, 1969*. Publication no.19, Department of Adult Education, University of Adelaide, 1969, p.124.

¹¹³ ‘Report of the Aborigines Protection Board (henceforth APB) for the Year Ended June 30, 1962’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers (henceforth SAPP)*, no.20a, 1962, p.11.

¹¹⁴ D. Busbridge, ‘Government Reserves and the Opal fields’, *Aborigines Advancement League of South Australia. Wages and Employment of Aborigines in S.A.*, Proceedings of the Seminar held on October 9 1965, the University of Adelaide, p.3, State Library of South Australia (henceforth SLSA) SRG 250/6/4.

¹¹⁵ ‘Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board (henceforth AAB) for the Year Ended June 30, 1969’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1969, p.21. Emphasis added. In 1963 the APB was replaced by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) with C.J. Millar appointed as its Director, and a new advisory body, the AAB, established. *South Australian Government Gazette (henceforth SAGG)* 21 March 1963, p.693.

¹¹⁶ Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, ‘Average Weekly Earnings, March Quarter 1969’. <[www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/free.nsf/0/65CAF876A476737BCA2575160011324D/\\$File/63020_MAR1969.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/free.nsf/0/65CAF876A476737BCA2575160011324D/$File/63020_MAR1969.pdf)> accessed 26 January 2016.

same time were actually receiving less than the basic wage.¹¹⁷ Aboriginal people continued to successfully participate in the opal industry in the following decade. A report by the Department for Community Welfare (DCW) in 1973 estimated that most Aboriginal people on the Coober Pedy fields “earn an income roughly equal to the normal living wage”.¹¹⁸

Information about numbers of Aboriginal miners and their earnings in Andamooka is less clear. However, when the APB Superintendent of Reserves, C.J. Millar, visited Andamooka in 1956, he observed that many people were mining successfully to the extent “that nearly every family possessed a motor car of some description”, suggesting that reasonable amounts of opal were being found.¹¹⁹ Motor vehicles were a particularly prized item for Aboriginal people, as the following chapter will demonstrate. NPO MacDougall visited Andamooka later the following year and also observed how Aboriginal people were successfully mining, and canvassed the possibility of self-sufficiency. He believed that:

an average of approximately £200 a week is obtained from opal by the native community, and there is, therefore, a possibility of setting up a small self-supporting community.¹²⁰

J.D. Weightman, an APB welfare officer, visited Andamooka in September 1958 and reported that a number of Aboriginal people there had found good supplies of opal and were able to make a reasonable living if they could “apply themselves to it”. He was advised by the Andamooka Progress Association (APA) that £1,000 had been earned by Aboriginal people in the month prior to his visit.¹²¹ Visiting the Andamooka fields in 1959, Weightman wrote that:

¹¹⁷ Robin Percy, ‘Annual Report’, 21 June 1967, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1967/9.

¹¹⁸ ‘Report of the Director-General of Community Welfare for the Year Ended June 30, 1973’, *SAPP*, no.23, 1973–74, p.32. The Department for Community Welfare was established on 1 July 1972 and assumed responsibility for Aboriginal affairs in South Australia. Cameron Raynes, *A Little Flour and a Few Blankets’: An Administrative History of Aboriginal Affairs in South Australia, 1834–2000*, Adelaide: State Records of South Australia, 2002, p.65.

¹¹⁹ Millar to Bartlett, 13 July 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/181.

¹²⁰ MacDougall to Bartlett, 27 November 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/180.

¹²¹ J.D. Weightman, ‘Andamooka Report’, 20 September 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/181.

Almost without exception the natives are making a good living from opal and their camps are almost entirely deserted throughout the day, the men working down holes and the women on the dumps.¹²²

Two years later, another NPO, R.A. Macaulay, noted that most able-bodied Aboriginal men and women worked on the fields there, including some who had “their own shafts and have as much success as the white prospectors”.¹²³ An official report in 1963 also noted that as Aboriginal people at Andamooka were “able to earn their living from mining very little [welfare] relief is necessary”, and how they (and Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy) “live and work in the same conditions as the rest of the community”.¹²⁴ The same agency reported in the following year that all Aboriginal people there “over school age are engaged in opal mining”, either noodling or working their own claims.¹²⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the meaningful way in which Aboriginal people participated in the northern South Australian opal industry, despite some negative perceptions about their involvement. Aboriginal people performed a range of tasks on the opal field that required patience and skill, principally working as noodlers. However, a number of Aboriginal people had their own mining claims, while a small core group undertook specialised work as checkers and heavy earthmoving equipment operators that was highly valued by other miners. Some worked in successful partnerships with other miners, some became opal classers and several were able to establish their own businesses through the profits made from mining opal. Overall, many Aboriginal people were successfully involved in the opal industry for an extensive period and earned regular incomes. Having described the extent of Aboriginal involvement in the opal industry, the following chapter examines how Aboriginal people maintained important aspects of their traditional economic, social and ceremonial lives, which the industry readily accommodated.

¹²² Weightman to Bartlett, 26 August 1959, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/81.

¹²³ R.A. Macaulay, ‘Some Descriptions of Certain Aspects of Ceremonial Life’, November 1961, SRSA, GRS 1278/1/Box 58, Vol.12, pp.2–3.

¹²⁴ ‘Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30,1963’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1964, p.16.

¹²⁵ ‘Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30,1964’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1965–66, p.12.

CHAPTER FIVE: CULTURAL CONTUNITY AND THE ABORIGINAL OPAL COMMUNITY

Introduction

While Aboriginal people participated seriously in the opal industry and earned good incomes, there were more than monetary considerations involved. The opal industry's autonomous, unregulated and task-oriented nature particularly appealed to Aboriginal participants as it enabled them to maintain significant aspects of their traditional lives. This chapter details how a high degree of cultural continuity prevailed, evident in a range of important traditional practices maintained by Aboriginal people on the opal fields. For instance, the traditional economic base was continually utilised as part of the 'hybrid economy' strategy that Aboriginal people engaged in at the time. Important social practices were also maintained on the opal fields, where kinship practices were continually reinforced, and also influenced how Aboriginal people searched for opal and shared it. Engagement in the industry also enabled Aboriginal people to continue a range of significant cultural practices. This chapter examines how a strong Aboriginal ceremonial life prevailed on and around the opal fields, with mourning practices continuing to be observed, and discipline and customary law order maintained. While traditional Aboriginal cultural practices were enduring, they were also amenable to change.

Aboriginal people successfully adapted to the opal industry, worked hard, performed a range of skilled tasks and gained regular incomes. However, what was particularly appealing about the opal industry and made it unique was its autonomous and unstructured nature, allowing a considerable degree of workplace flexibility that suited Aboriginal people, and helped them to maintain significant economic, social and cultural aspects of their customary lives. Aboriginal opal miners demonstrated "the innovative and socially meaningful ways in which Aboriginal people interact with the

economy” that anthropologist John White believed was evident in Aboriginal participation in other industries throughout Australia.¹

The policy of ‘assimilation’, premised on the belief that Aboriginal people would “eventually abandon their own cultural heritage and adopt the same values as the dominant white society”, was prevalent throughout much of the study period. However, by the 1960s it had become apparent that the policy had failed, as Aboriginal people generally rejected these ideals.² The Director of the Aborigines Advancement League Victoria, S.F. Davey, questioned “the arrogance of the assumptions of the policy” which implied that Aboriginal peoples’ lifestyles and culture were of little value and they were unable to cope with modern society. He argued in 1966 that many Aboriginal people:

have not adopted our customs and beliefs, nor are they likely to by discounting their own ... The stimulus for a great majority of Aboriginal workers may come from providing opportunities which do not oppose the customs and beliefs which they consider important.³

These views clearly echo the experiences of Aboriginal opal miners in South Australia, and Aboriginal workers in other locations, who maintained important economic, social and cultural practices while also actively participating in the labour market.⁴

¹ John M. White, ‘Peas, Beans and Riverbanks: Seasonal Picking and Dependence in the Tuross Valley’, in Ian Keen (ed.), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010, pp.110-1.

² J.C. Altman, ‘Aboriginal Economy: Economic Status’, in James Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People: An Encyclopaedia of the Nation, its People, and Their Origins*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1988, p.206.

³ S.F. Davey, ‘The Recognition of Aboriginal Cultural Values in Industry’, in Ian. G. Sharp and Colin M. Tatz (eds), *Aborigines in the Economy: Employment, Wages and Training*, Melbourne: Jacaranda Press in association with Centre for Research into Aboriginal Affairs, Monash University, 1966, p.263. Davey was also Secretary of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

⁴ For some interstate examples see Malcolm Calley, ‘Economic Life of Mixed-Blood Communities in Northern New South Wales’, *Oceania*, vol.26, no.3, March 1956, pp.200–13; Sally Hodson, ‘Nyungars and Work: Aboriginal Labour in the Great Southern Region, Western Australia 1936–1972’, unpublished MA thesis, University of Western Australia, 1989; White, ‘Peas, Beans and Riverbanks’; John M. White, ‘On the Road to Nerrigundah: A Historical Anthropology of Indigenous–Settler Relations in the Eurobodalla Region of New South Wales’, unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2010.

The Hybrid Economy

The autonomous nature of work in the opal industry which allowed Aboriginal opal miners to manage their working hours and conditions meant that there was time to engage in traditional economic pursuits. Despite the arrival of European foods, the traditional Aboriginal hunting and foraging economy was maintained. Traditional food resources remained an important part of the diet on the opal fields, and often complemented European varieties.⁵ Aboriginal people on the opal fields effectively participated in a hybrid economy or multiple economy strategy, successfully participating in the mainstream cash economy while also utilising some of their traditional resource base to satisfy their needs.⁶

The emergence of significant Aboriginal camps around the Coober Pedy opal fields was first observed in the 1930s, and they persisted for many years. As late as 1965 a government geologist reported that many Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy still preferred to camp, for instance, near the Big Flat field, despite the recent establishment of an Aboriginal reserve there.⁷ Strategically camping in close proximity to the opal fields was crucial in two respects. Firstly, it enabled Aboriginal people to be relatively close to the working environment. Secondly, it provided ready access to traditional hunting and foraging grounds, which were continually utilised, as well as to maintain socialisation and kinship practices in an environment where immediate and extended families lived together.

Despite the introduction of European foods items, Aboriginal people emphasised the continuing importance of traditional food sources around the opal fields which were still highly prized. Eileen Wingfield recalled a number of plant foods around Coober Pedy and the delight in finding them:

⁵ George Cooley, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy 29 August 2013; Sid Waye, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 12 November 2013.

⁶ See for example Christopher Anderson, 'Multiple Enterprises: Contemporary Aboriginal Subsistence Strategy in Southeast Cape York Peninsula', in N.C. Stevens and A. Bailey (eds), *Contemporary Cape York Peninsula*, Brisbane: Royal Society of Queensland, 1980, pp.77–81; Susie Russell, *The Hybrid Economy Topic Guide*, Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, 2011; Christopher Lloyd, 'Settler Economies and Indigenous Encounters: The Dialectics of Conquest, Hybridisation and Production Regimes' in Nataha Fijn, Ian Keen, Christopher Lloyd and Michael Pickering (eds), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies II: Historical Engagements and Current Enterprises*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2012, pp.17–39.

⁷ M.N. Hiern, 'Report on Coober Pedy Opalfield', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book* (henceforth *DMERB*), 60/82, 30 April 1965, p.6.

We had plenty of bush tucker when we used to get way out in the creek and something like ripe banana and whatever. We used to dig it down too and get a thing like a potato, long thing ... we really loved it. Taste real nice ... we really enjoyed it, our wild food, and another one was like a little onion you dig down and get, we used to get a lot of that and cook it and clean it.⁸

Several other people also attested to the variety of plant foods in the same area.⁹ Some of the plant foods they recall being used by Aboriginal people included wild potatoes, bush onions (*tjanmata*), edible berries (*wangki*) and wild peaches or quandongs (*mangata*). These plants were often prolific after rain, and Emily Betts recalled how:

about a week after it [rain], two weeks after it you notice that all the berries, the fruits are starting to grow and then you know when to go out then after it's ripe, yeah, you can smell those bush tuckers.¹⁰

Wild tomatoes were found around the Andamooka opal fields, as was a plant called *tjunktul-tjunktul* which was valued because of the water contained in its root system, and Aboriginal children were taught about the natural environment and how to search for plants in local creek beds and sandhills.¹¹ A range of meats including kangaroo, emu and rabbit, as well as a variety of lizards were also regularly hunted and consumed in the Andamooka region.¹² George Cooley recalled how traditional meat sources were also prolific around the Coober Pedy opal fields, and how Aboriginal people hunted on

⁸ Eileen Wingfield, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 1 November 2013. Bush banana, or *urtirralya* is regarded by Aboriginal people in the region as “the number one food”, reflecting its importance, and may be eaten raw or cooked. Ingkama Bobby Brown and Petter Attila Naessan, *Irrititja—The Past: Antikirrinya History from Ingomar Station*, Southport: Keeira Press, 2012, p.40.

⁹ Cecil Betts, interview with Mike Harding, Ethelton, 29 September 2015; Emily Betts, interview with Mike Harding, Ethelton, 29 September 2015.

¹⁰ Emily Betts, interview, 29 September 2015. The Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara plant names provided by these two interviewees are noted in brackets. They are consistent with the names of such plants recorded in Cliff Goddard (compiler), *Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Directory*, Revised Second Edition, Alice Springs: IAD Press, 1996, pp.298–300. These plant foods are still commonly used today. See Jessie Lennon, *I'm the One that Knows This Country! The Story of Jessie Lennon and Coober Pedy*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2000, p.30.

¹¹ Bob Starkey, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 11 November 2013; Lynette Strangways, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 2 November 2013. *Tjunktul-Tjunktul* was also valued by Aboriginal people in the Coober Pedy region. See for example Emily Betts, interview, 29 September 2015; Anne Johnson, *Digging Around Coober Pedy: Exploring Life in the Little Opal Mining Town With a Big Profile*, Coober Pedy: Sandstone Press, 2006, p.43.

¹² Bob Starkey, interview, 11 November 2013.

most days and brought back food to share.¹³ Wood duck and malleefowl were also found in swamps around the fields.¹⁴

Several miners observed Aboriginal people regularly exploiting these economic resources. As a teenager on the Andamooka opal fields in the 1960s, John Dunstan was aware of the importance of the ‘bush economy’ to Aboriginal people, and also went hunting with his Aboriginal friends. He recalled the range of traditional foods found including wild onions and potatoes, witchetty grubs, lizards, rabbits and kangaroos, which were especially favoured.¹⁵ Another miner at Andamooka also recalled Aboriginal people there hunting kangaroos with dogs, and women chasing blue-tongue lizards.¹⁶

On some occasions traditional sources of food were the only option when opal income was scarce, therefore camping near these sources was a necessity. According to George Cooley “there was a balance back then. I mean you still had enough bush tucker and bush knowledge and bush skills to carry on that lifestyle with or without money”.¹⁷ Being able to “live off the land” was a necessity, according to Elaine Moosha, particularly when opal supplies were meagre or the local store at Coober Pedy had limited supplies of foods: on many occasions “bush tucker was the main diet”, she recalled.¹⁸ In some instances Aboriginal people also mixed traditional food and introduced foods. Emily Betts recalled how her father would:

go and buy a bag of flour – main things that we can use like flour, jam and things and baking powder to mix with the flour to make your damper and then he’ll go and get all the bush tucker like kangaroos or whatever he gets first.¹⁹

¹³ George Cooley, interview, 29 August 2013.

¹⁴ Pers. Comm., George Cooley, 4 December 2014.

¹⁵ John Dunstan, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 25 August 2013.

¹⁶ Stefan Bilka, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 29 October 2013.

¹⁷ George Cooley, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 22 August 2013

¹⁸ Elaine Moosha, interview with Mike Harding, Quorn, 8 November, 2013.

¹⁹ Emily Betts, interview, 29 September 2015.

While exploiting the traditional food resource base required patience and skill, there was also a considerable degree of leisure and socialising involved. Searching for both opal and traditional plant foods could be combined, and:

when you go for opal too, same time you can bump into them bush tuckers
... so you just have a good feed then and go looking for opal, same time,
yeah.²⁰

This is reminiscent of how traditional Aboriginal culture often did “not segregate time into work time or leisure time”, a task-oriented approach that typified many small scale societies.²¹

The preference to camp near the working environment and traditional economic base was a pattern common to Aboriginal rural workers elsewhere during this era. During “the middle decades of the twentieth century” Aboriginal seasonal workers in the South Australian Murraylands camping adjacent to the fruit blocks they were employed on took advantage of bush foods nearby.²² Similarly, Nyungar people in the Great Southern region of Western Australia often located their camps close to their work sites, which provided access to traditional hunting and foraging grounds, enabling them to complement their non-Aboriginal diet with bush foods, which were highly relished.²³ The Dhan-gadi people in central New South Wales also camped near their work environment, while maintaining strong links with their traditional economic resource base which provided an important part of the diet, complementing introduced European commodities such as flour, tea and sugar.²⁴ These groups all participated in what anthropologist Christopher Anderson has described as a “multiple-enterprise subsistence economy”, which was a rational strategy of choice and illustrates how these people all had “a degree of control over this aspect of their lives not normally attributed to them”.²⁵

²⁰ Emily Betts, interview, 29 September 2015.

²¹ Charlie Fox, *Working Australia*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991, p.1; E.P.Thompson, ‘Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism’, *Past and Present*, no.38, December 1967, p.60.

²² Mandy Paul and Tom Gara, *In and Out of View: Aboriginal Fringe Camps in South Australian Country Towns*, Paper Presented at the History Trust of South Australia State History Conference: *Country Connections*, Tanunda, 4 August 2007, p.7.

²³ Hodson, ‘Nyungars and Work’, pp.119–21.

²⁴ Barry Morris, ‘From Underemployment to Unemployment: The Changing Roles of Aborigines in a Rural Economy’, *Mankind*, vo.13 no.6, April 1983, p.505.

²⁵ Anderson, ‘Multiple Enterprises’, p.77.

Social Practices

Engagement in the opal industry also ensured that important customary social practices were maintained. The informal and family-friendly nature of the industry allowed Aboriginal children to participate in it, as part of the traditional socialising process. The importance of kinship and reciprocity were also emphasised on the opal fields and influenced work practices. Camping near the opal fields along family lines allowed Aboriginal people to socialise and reinforce significant aspects of their customary lives. Aboriginal camps, which were also common in much of rural South Australia until the 1950s and 1960s, not only provided access to workplaces, but also played an “important role in the keeping and transformation of Indigenous knowledge and culture ... in a space largely out of the view of the colonising culture”.²⁶ Around the Coober Pedy fields it was common for several extended families to camp together to avail themselves of the opal nearby, and this was also an opportunity to teach younger people, as opal noodling was a particularly family-friendly activity. Children were generally exposed to the opal industry at a young age, often following their parents or other adults onto the fields.²⁷

Although children may have played on the fields, and swum or frolicked in the open cuts when there had been rain, it was also an opportunity to look for opal.²⁸ The daughter of a prominent Aboriginal opal miner in Coober Pedy recalled, as a young girl, accompanying family members to various opal fields, in the late 1960s and 1970s, initially playing on the opal dumps, but gradually learning from her older sisters and parents to seriously look for opal.²⁹ This was also consistent with the traditional practice of training young Aboriginal people in hunting and foraging skills at a relatively young age.³⁰

The flexible and family-friendly nature of the opal industry allowed important aspects of the traditional kinship system to be maintained. Kinship obligations of sharing, and reciprocity, the mutual obligations arising from it, are enduring in Aboriginal society, where status is not achieved by accumulating material possessions: instead an

²⁶ Paul and Gara, *In and Out of View*, p.3.

²⁷ George Cooley, interview, 22 August 2013.

²⁸ Lynette Strangways, interview, 2 November 2013.

²⁹ Lulu O’Toole-Boland, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 12 November 2013.

³⁰ Fox, *Working Australia*, pp.3–4.

individual's "willingness to give is one of the most significant indicators of social worth".³¹ Aboriginal people were "motivated to hunt because they receive prestige by being so identified".³²

The traditional hunting and foraging lifestyle of Aboriginal people necessitated a considerable degree of mobility and "mitigated against accumulation of material possessions".³³ In such societies the sharing of resources was necessary in order to sustain all members of a group, and to ensure that no one was deprived of basic necessities. For Aboriginal people, financial considerations are not always a first priority, as their "understandings of relatedness often take precedence over working for the sake of work or for the pay packet".³⁴ This influenced the behaviour of Aboriginal opal miners, and a fundamental reason that opal was shared with others was to "give those without a sharing hand".³⁵ According to George Cooley:

Opal was like everything else, like the food, you take what you need and what you want and what's left over with the family can take, or if they leave enough for you to come back in the next day, fine.³⁶

A European visitor to the Coober opal field in 1946 remarked that when Aboriginal people found opal it mattered little who found it as "it always belonged to everyone, and the families shared it around. It was their way of life".³⁷ However, Aboriginal kinship obligations were often trivialised by other observers. A storekeeper in Coober Pedy remarked in 1946 that Aboriginal people "were spending money like water on dresses and petticoats for their wife and children in amazing quantities".³⁸ One long-term Coober Pedy miner wrote that opal mining gave Aboriginal people the opportunity to "earn an independent living", but they were "handicapped" by their

³¹ Robert Tonkinson, *The Mardu Aborigines: Living the Dream in Australia's Desert*, Second Edition, Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1991, p.53.

³² Nicolas Peterson, 'Demand Sharing: Reciprocity and the Pressure for Generosity among Foragers', *American Anthropologist*, vol.95, no.4, 1993, p.866.

³³ Calley, 'Economic Life of Mixed-Blood Communities', p.207.

³⁴ Lorraine Gibson, "'Who You Is?'" Work and Identity in Aboriginal New South Wales', in Keen (ed.), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies*, p.132.

³⁵ Sid Waye, interview, 12 November 2013.

³⁶ George Cooley, interview, 22 August 2013.

³⁷ Gordon Bartram, unpublished memoirs cited in Len Cram, *A Journey With Colour: A History of South Australian Opal, 1840–2005*, Lightning Ridge: Len Cram, 2004, p.54.

³⁸ Cram, *A Journey With Colour*, p.67.

kinship obligations of sharing and reciprocity.³⁹ Following a visit to the Andamooka opal fields in the late 1960s, Nancy and Ron Perry wrote that when Aboriginal people found opal and sold it “every last member of the tribe hears about it, and descends to share in the bonanza. It is not unusual for large sums of money to be spent on drink and frivolities”.⁴⁰ A senior government official reported in 1966 that a large find of opal “meant that the extended family would all receive a new outfit of clothes, and there would be good entertainment for a week”.⁴¹

While Aboriginal people throughout Australia – and around the opal fields – have often been chastised for failing to meet the expectations of Europeans, what was of primary importance to them “were the social relations forged by the exchange of gifts”.⁴²

Several observations of Aboriginal life on the opal fields were more understanding of Aboriginal kinship practices. For instance, a Swiss opal buyer on the Coober Pedy fields in 1957 considered Aboriginal people to be “the most socially minded”, because they shared the proceeds of any opal they found.⁴³ French journalist Rena Briand belatedly acknowledged the importance of sharing and reciprocity, conceding that such aspects of traditional Aboriginal life are logical, and cautioned not to “mock or reproach” these practices.⁴⁴

The importance of sharing and leaving some opal for others is also documented in several published Aboriginal life histories, which describe how extended family groups worked together, pooled their resources and shared their opal finds. Emily Austin and

³⁹ P. Vin Wake, *Opal Men*, Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1969, pp.95–6.

⁴⁰ N. Perry and R. Perry, *Australian Opals in Colour*, Sydney: A.H. & A.W.Reed, 1969, p.56.

⁴¹ D. Busbridge, ‘Government Reserves and the Opal fields’, *Aborigines Advancement League of South Australia. Wages and Employment of Aborigines in S.A.*, Proceedings of the Seminar held on October 9 1965, University of Adelaide, p.6, State Library of South Australia (henceforth SLSA) SRG 250/6/4. The purchase of clothes by Aboriginal people was not wasteful or trivial. The practice of wearing clothes symbolised access to European commodities and provided a sense of ease when dealing with Europeans, as well as providing protection from harsh climatic conditions. Clothing could also be passed on as part of reciprocal kinship arrangements. See Christopher Anderson, ‘Aborigines and Tin Mining in North Queensland: A Case Study in the Anthropology of Contact History’, *Mankind*, vol.13, no.6. April 1983, p.487; Peggy Brock, ‘Nakedness and Clothing in Early Encounters Between Aboriginal People in Central Australia, Missionaries and Anthropologists’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol.8, no.1, 2007, pp.8, 18.

⁴² Robin Torrence and Anne Clarke, ‘Negotiating Difference: Practice Makes Theory for Contemporary Archaeology in Oceania’, in Robin Torrence and Anne Clarke (eds), *The Archaeology of Difference: Negotiating Cross Cultural Engagement in Oceania*, London: Routledge, 2000, p.17.

⁴³ Robert Bruderer, ‘The Coober Pedy Opal-Fields’, *Walkabout*, vol. 23, no.9, September 1957, p.36. Bruderer also visited the Coober Pedy opal fields in 1951 and 1952.

⁴⁴ Rena Briand, *White Man in a Hole*, Melbourne: Phuong-Hoang Press, 1971, p.90.

her sister, Milly Taylor, for example, once found opal at Andamooka worth about £700, but instead of keeping the proceeds for themselves purchased a family dugout there.⁴⁵ Aboriginal people often took just enough opal out of the ground to satisfy their immediate needs, leaving the remainder for others. Marty Dodd remarked that often by mid-morning he had found enough to satisfy his needs:

We know there'll be a lot of opals on the Flat there. We don't mind sharing it. No, just get out enough money for our tucker, clothes, whatever we had to buy.⁴⁶

A number of Aboriginal people interviewed also stressed the importance of sharing. Kevin O'Toole used the analogy of hunting and sharing kangaroo meat to sharing opal, suggesting that "it's like ... with the *malu* [kangaroo] ... you go out cook the *malu* and share it around with the family ... opal was like that too".⁴⁷ Several Aboriginal people recalled giving any opal they found to their parents automatically, rather than keeping it for themselves, although they were sometimes allowed to retain small quantities.⁴⁸ Utilising the skills of other family members was also important. As Pauline Lewis stressed, "sharing has always been in our culture", emphasising the importance of using other family members' skills by ensuring that:

if someone was a good noodler we made sure you took that person all the time ... you know they'd find something if you didn't find something, so that's how the system worked for us.⁴⁹

The family-friendly nature of the opal industry provided an important means of socialising and reinforcing the importance of sharing and kinship obligations to future generations of Aboriginal people. This began as people were exposed to the industry at an early age. As a young girl in Coober Pedy, Eileen Crombie was able to earn

⁴⁵ Emily Munyungka Austin, *My Young Days*, Coober Pedy: Umoona Aged Care Aboriginal Corporation, 2006, p.41.

⁴⁶ Marty Dodd, *They Liked Me, the Horses, Straightaway*, Canberra: Ginninderra Press, 2000, pp.63–4.

⁴⁷ Kevin O'Toole, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 21 August 2013. Kangaroo was highly prized game and sharing it with others was based on reciprocal obligations and strictly observed rules: the best cuts of meat were given to parents in-law, and other cuts to other relatives. This system ensured that if the hunter was unsuccessful on other occasions, or unable to hunt, he would receive a share in future kills. See Phillip Toyne and Daniel Vachon, *Growing Up the Country: The Pitjantjatjara Struggle for their Land*, Melbourne: McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books, 1984, p.17.

⁴⁸ Jack Crombie, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 26 October 2013; Eileen Wingfield, interview, 1 November 2013; Lynette Strangways, interview, 2 November 2013.

⁴⁹ Pauline Lewis, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 2 September 2013.

considerable amounts of money from time to time just using a crowbar, however, she “never worried about money for it: I’d give the money to my old Aunty”.⁵⁰ Emily Betts recalled that when she was young and went opal mining with other family members, anything found was given to her father, and how it was equitably distributed, depending on the personal needs and circumstances of other family members: that was “how he grew us up, taught us”.⁵¹

Cultural Practices

Significant cultural practices continued around the opal fields, as the industry readily accommodated Aboriginal ceremonial life. A strong ceremonial life actually persisted in much of northern South Australia throughout the study period, in stark contrast to other locations in the state. In the Flinders Ranges region, for instance, significant aspects of Aboriginal culture had been discouraged by missionaries to such an extent that male initiation ceremonies were said to have ceased by the 1940s.⁵² According to George Cooley, the opal industry did not discourage Aboriginal people from attending regular ceremonial activity, quite the reverse: its autonomy invariably helped them to maintain their “cultural obligations”. He believed that the opal industry “would have helped them ... you’re your own time-keeper in that type of business ... you’re self-employed ... you manage your own time”. In addition, some of the most important ceremonial activities also took place in summer, which coincided with the opal industry’s quiet period due to excessive heat.⁵³ Miners in partnership with Aboriginal people also recognised the importance of ceremonial practices and were able to accommodate this within their working arrangements.⁵⁴

The maintenance of Aboriginal ceremonial life remained important in northern South Australia, where a number of significant Aboriginal mythological stories that describe the activities and journeys of the mythical creative ancestors pass through the opal fields and beyond. These mythological storylines have a regional nature, traverse

⁵⁰ Eileen Unkari Crombie, *He Was a South Australian Film Star: My Life with Billy Pepper-Tinyma*, Murray Bridge: Nyiri Publications, 2003, pp.4,19.

⁵¹ Emily Betts, interview, 29 September 2015.

⁵² Peggy Brock, *Yura and Udnyu: A History of the Adnyamathanha and the Flinders Ranges*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press in association with Aboriginal Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Planning, South Australia, 1985, p.50; Jane M. Jacobs, ‘The Construction of Identity’, in J.R. Beckett (ed.), *Past and Present: the Construction of Aboriginality*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988, p.33.

⁵³ George Cooley, interview, 22 August 2013.

⁵⁴ Albert McCormack, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 14 August, 2013.

considerable distances and ceremonial activities follow their paths. Different Aboriginal local groups also own sections of a mythology that passes through its territory and are responsible for ceremonial performances. Aboriginal mythologies may often have restricted elements of performance, as well as general public versions and even gender-restricted sequences.

One particularly pertinent example of a mythological story is the ‘Native Cat’ or ‘*Tjilpa*’ song series, which extends from Arrernte territory in Central Australia, to the Port Augusta region, and then travels northwards to the Top End region of the Northern Territory. Ethnomusicologist Catherine Ellis observed in the late 1960s how Aboriginal women in the Coober Pedy, Marree and Oodnadatta regions of northern South Australia “actively maintained their knowledge of, and believed in the importance of the female sections of this [particular] songline”.⁵⁵

The ‘Emu’ song-cycle from the western Simpson Desert traverses the Coober Pedy region, passing through the nearby Shellpatch bore and the site of an opal field, before heading further west.⁵⁶ Another significant Aboriginal myth, the ‘Two Women’, has a northern version known to Antakarinja people, as well as a more southerly one. This latter version titled ‘Two Women from Parachilna’ depicts how the mythical women travelled through the territory of a number of Aboriginal groups, including that of the Kuyani and Kokatha, passing through the Lake Torrens region in the general Andamooka region and then travelling as far north as Alice Springs.⁵⁷ Another major creation story, the ‘Seven Sisters’, is also connected to the Andamooka–Woomera region, which has been described as “a cultural hot-spot” containing “very culturally important ... creation stories for Aboriginal people”. The ‘Seven Sisters’ story is just “one of many significant stories associated with Andamooka and that region, and stories basically criss-cross the country”.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Cited in Diane Smith, ‘The Kokata in the Context of Aboriginal Music in Central and South Australia’. Appendix 5, Sutton and Partners, *Olympic Dam Project Environmental Studies. Anthropological Baseline Studies Literature Review. A Restricted Report to Kinhill Stearns Roger*, Adelaide, 1981, p.8.

⁵⁶ Petter Naessan, ‘The Etymology of Coober Pedy, South Australia’, *Aboriginal History*, vol.34, 2010, p.223.

⁵⁷ Smith, ‘The Kokata in the Context of Aboriginal Music’, pp.9–10.

⁵⁸ Andrew Starkey, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 11 November 2013; Tom Gara, *The Kokatha Heritage Survey*, Adelaide: National Estate Grants Programme, 1989, p.12.

A number of official reports ranging from the late 1940s to the late 1960s have highlighted the continuity of Aboriginal ceremonial life in and around the opal fields, and its broader regional nature, evident in the extensive distances that Aboriginal people travelled to attend ceremonies. In December 1949, for instance, Native Patrol Officer (NPO) MacDougall observed this in the Coober Pedy region, reporting that:

A movement of blacks occurs periodically from the north and continuously from Ooldea in the west, on the east-west rail line. Station managers and owners report that often the blacks could be on their stations some days and even a month without their presence being known. It is understood that a large number of blacks in the area still continue tribal customs, and corroborees held at Lake Wirrida, Lake Phillipson, Mabel Creek stations.⁵⁹

In December 1954, the officer in charge of the Penong police station in far western South Australia, Constable Wood, informed his divisional manager that a large number of Aboriginal people from this region had gone to Coober Pedy for initiation ceremonies. It was also reported that several Aboriginal men from Koonibba working on the opal fields had been initiated there by men from Ooldea. Woods further acknowledged that:

Coober Pedy has always been recognized by the Ooldea natives as sacred ground and no doubt they knew the Koonibba natives were working at Coober Pedy and that decided them to make the trek and capture them away from civilization.⁶⁰

Staff from the Yalata Mission, west of Coober Pedy, advised the APB that 120 Aboriginal people had returned from Coober Pedy after completing ceremonies in May

⁵⁹ W.B. MacDougall, 'Report: Range Reconnaissance December 1949', State Records of South Australia (henceforth SRSA), Government Records Series (henceforth GRS) 1278/1/Box 56, vol.1. Lake Wirrida, Lake Phillipson and Mabel Creek are all relatively close to Coober Pedy. Lake Phillipson is a particularly significant location for Aboriginal people and an important water and food source in times of rain. Jessie Lennon remembered as far back as a young girl in the 1930s Aboriginal people travelling to this location and camping there. Lennon, *I'm the One that Knows*, pp. 28–31.

⁶⁰ Wood to Officer in Charge, Western Division, 12 December 1954, SRSA, Government Record Group (henceforth GRG) 52/1/1941/44. Adelaide linguist Petter Naessan has noted the Stuart Range in and around the Coober Pedy township as a pre-contact meeting place for Aboriginal people. See Naessan, 'The Etymology of Coober Pedy', p.223.

1955, but had subsequently left for another “big walkabout” three months later.⁶¹ Further correspondence from the Yalata Mission to the APB early the following year revealed that about 85 Aboriginal people from Yalata who had been trapping in the region were now intending to travel to Coober Pedy to participate in male initiation ceremonies.⁶² Cecil Betts, an Aboriginal miner from far western South Australia, informed me that many Aboriginal people from the Yalata region who had visited the Coober Pedy region regularly for ceremonial purposes also took advantage of the opal industry and often worked casually on the fields there.⁶³

Aboriginal people from a variety of other locations again participated in ceremonies around Coober Pedy. A 1955 report from NPO MacDougall highlighted the importance of male initiation practices:

There is a mixed group of about 50 camped at 17 Mile Water Hole [near Coober Pedy]. They come from Alice Springs, Oodnadatta and Colona. They are ... living by begging, stealing and free issues of rations whilst they await another crowd from Anna Creek. The object is to semi-initiate young men and arrange several marriages as there are a few young women left over. It is again the situation where young stockmen submit to semi-initiation to secure the young women.⁶⁴

Numerous Aboriginal people recall a strong and vibrant ceremonial life in and around the opal fields, and how Aboriginal people from other areas also participated. Kathleen Chamberlain was a girl in the 1950s when she attended her first ceremony at Coober Pedy near the reserve, remembering how she was painted for the occasion, and observed Aboriginal people from Yalata in attendance.⁶⁵ John Cooley also recalled a strong ceremonial life around Coober Pedy and beyond in the 1960s and 1970s, and how people from Yalata and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands held ceremonies near the Aboriginal reserve.⁶⁶ At Andamooka, Bill Lennon recalled in

⁶¹ Kleining to Bartlett, 26 May 1955, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/29; Footner to Bartlett, 24 August 1955, SRSA GRG 52/1/1955/29.

⁶² Footner to Bartlett, 28 January 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/29.

⁶³ Cecil Betts, interview, 29 September 2015.

⁶⁴ MacDougall to Aborigines Protection Board (henceforth APB), 17 October 1955, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/73.

⁶⁵ Kathleen Chamberlain, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 24 October 2013.

⁶⁶ John Cooley, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 27 October 2013.

the 1960s how Aboriginal people from other areas, for example, the Antakarinja and Arabana, would participate in major ceremonies there, often in a large sandy creek located nearby.⁶⁷

The duration of ceremonies throughout the study period was also extensive, as the following examples demonstrate. Between 200 and 300 Aboriginal people were reported to have been attending ceremonies in the Coober Pedy and adjacent Mount Clarence region in September 1955, which were anticipated to last another six to eight weeks at the time that they were reported.⁶⁸ Reports in 1959 indicate that up to 300 Aboriginal people had gathered at the Coober Pedy opal fields, including people from Western Australia, with the intention of holding ceremonies estimated to last from two months to one year. This impacted locally, with nearby pastoralists unable to hire Aboriginal labour for some months, while also putting pressure on the local water supply to the consternation of other residents there.⁶⁹

A strong Aboriginal cultural life of extensive duration in and around the Coober Pedy region was still evident in the 1970s with annual ceremonies relating to men's initiations generally taking place between October to March. Other ceremonial obligations meant that Aboriginal people could be involved in them for periods ranging from three to six months.⁷⁰ Chris Larkins also recalled a vibrant ceremonial life around the Andamooka fields, and how people would move away for ceremonies for extended periods of time, as did his siblings Bob Larkins, and Elaine Moosha, remembering their father, Ted Larkins, regularly going away for important ceremonies.⁷¹

Age and gender restrictions that were traditionally associated with ceremonial life in the desert regions were still enforced. Separate men's and women's ceremonial domains, ritual practices and objects existed, although there were often complementary

⁶⁷ Bill Lennon, interview with Mike Harding, Mount Willoughby, 26 August 2013.

⁶⁸ Lawrence to Trials Director, Woomera Long Range Prohibited Area, 3 September 1956, SRSA, GRS 1278/1/ Box 56, vol 6.

⁶⁹ APB to Field, 24 March 1959, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/60; Field to APB, 31 March 1959, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/60.

⁷⁰ George Cooley, interview 29 August 2013.

⁷¹ Chris Larkins, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 30 October 2013; Bob Larkins, interview with Mike Harding, Wilmington, 23 October 2013; Elaine Moosha, interview, 8 November 2013.

ceremonial practices.⁷² Younger children, both female and male, were often permitted to view “non-secret versions” of ceremonies.⁷³ A number of Aboriginal women growing up on the opal fields recalled the gendered nature of some ceremonial activities. As a young girl at Andamooka in the 1960s, Lynette Strangways remembered how women and children were covered with blankets when certain parts of a ceremony were not allowed to be observed.⁷⁴ Elaine Moosha was a young girl in the 1950s and 1960s on the opal fields and remembered:

going out on trucks, and being on the back of Dad’s truck with the females and ... we’d have to cover up, because we weren’t allowed to see certain things. So we’d have to be covered with the camp sheets.⁷⁵

Her brother, Bob Larkins, also recalled how he and other young boys were covered up at certain times during ceremonies.⁷⁶

This evidence of Aboriginal people creatively adapting to labour market participation while maintaining important cultural practices is consistent with what is known about the northern pastoral industry. In her study of Aboriginal employment in the colonial Kimberley region of Western Australian, archaeologist-historian Pamela Smith noted how:

seasonal cycles and the nature of cattle work involved a mobile existence not entirely alien to traditional use patterns, and Aboriginal stockmen, in particular, were able to maintain a greater degree of continuity with their culture.⁷⁷

This was particularly evident in the northern Australian wet season when pastoral activities were scaled back.

⁷² Annette Hamilton, ‘Dual Social Systems: Technology, Labour and Women’s Secret Rites in the Eastern Western Desert of Australia’, *Oceania*, vol. 51, no.1, 1980, p.5.

⁷³ Catherine J. Ellis and Linda Barwick, ‘Antikirinja Women’s Song Knowledge 1963–72: Its Significance in Antikirinja Culture’, in Peggy Brock (ed.), *Women, Rites & Sites: Aboriginal Women’s Cultural Knowledge*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989, p.29.

⁷⁴ Lynette Strangways, interview, 2 November 2013.

⁷⁵ Elaine Moosha, interview, 8 November 2013.

⁷⁶ Bob Larkins, interview, 23 October 2013. Anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt also observed how Aboriginal women and children were covered in blankets at certain times during a ceremony they witnessed at Oodnadatta in the 1940s. Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt, *From Black to White in South Australia*, Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1951, p.184.

⁷⁷ Pamela A. Smith, ‘Station Camps: Legislation, Labour Relations and Rations on Pastoral Leases in the Kimberley Region, Western Australia’, *Aboriginal History*, vol.24, 2000, p.84. See also Fox, *Working Australia*, pp.14, 45; Ann McGrath, *Born in the Cattle’: Aborigines in Cattle Country*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987, pp.38, 158.

Traditional mourning practices were also observed on the opal fields. The death of an Aboriginal person in the Western Desert was always traumatic. The deaths of significant persons left particularly “large gashes in the social fabric”, as in the course of a lifetime they had developed considerable networks of personal ties.⁷⁸ Death required that the residential camp of that individual be abandoned for some time, as it was believed that the spirit of the deceased may still be present, and to avoid unhappy memories for surviving relatives. In addition, the property of the deceased was destroyed and their name became taboo. People with a similar sounding name were given a term with a meaning akin to ‘no name’ by which they became known for a certain period of time.⁷⁹

The abandonment of Aboriginal camps due to death occurred on the opal fields from time to time, an indicator that Aboriginal people still adhered to this customary practice. For example, Minnie Berrington observed the mourning practices of wailing, the abandonment of the camping area and people even leaving the Coober Pedy township following the death of an Aboriginal man there in the 1920s.⁸⁰ In 1957 it was reported that that death of an Aboriginal man at a camp in Coober Pedy prompted other Aboriginal people to camp some distance away.⁸¹

Similarly, a statement from APB Secretary Bartlett broadcast on ABC radio in 1959 revealed that:

About seventy or eighty aborigines who’ve been fossicking for opals at Coober Pedy, in the far north of South Australia have forsaken the area, chiefly because of native superstition. Mr Bartlett who recently returned from Coober Pedy, said that the natives had disappeared before he got there, mainly because there’d been a couple of deaths among them.⁸²

⁷⁸ Tonkinson, *The Mardu Aborigines*, p.103.

⁷⁹ Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt, *The World of the First Australians. Aboriginal Traditional Life: Past and Present*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1992, pp.454–7; Tonkinson, *The Mardu Aborigines*, pp.103–4. Naming taboos among Western Desert Aboriginal people are still common today. While working on the APY lands in the 1990s and early 2000s I was called *Kunmanara*, meaning ‘no name’ on several occasions when someone with a name similar to mine had died.

⁸⁰ M.D. Berrington, *Stones of Fire: A Woman’s Experiences in Search of Opal*, Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1958, p.114.

⁸¹ Marks to Bartlett, 30 January 1957, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/287.

⁸² Copy of ABC Radio Broadcast, 29 July 1959, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/287.

Lynette Strangways revealed that her family left Andamooka in 1970, when she was young, following the passing of her father and grandfather. She also felt that the deaths of other older Aboriginal people there may have been one reason for so many leaving Andamooka around that time.⁸³

Discipline in relation to ceremonial practices and behaviour was maintained on and around the opal fields, as was traditional customary law, by a number of senior ritual leaders. At ceremonies in Coober Pedy in 1959, it was reported that some “older natives were insisting that the younger ones participate in the ceremonies, and obtained their end by threatening to poison or spear any who disobeyed”.⁸⁴ Coober Pedy opal miner Brian Underwood, who arrived there in 1975, noted how a senior Aboriginal man named ‘Aeroplane George’ was reputed to be a ‘*kadaitja* man’ (a ritual executioner) whose presence was to be avoided when he visited the township or opal fields.⁸⁵ Aeroplane George was reputedly given this name because of his ability to travel extraordinary distances in short periods of time, which some attributed to “Aboriginal magic”.⁸⁶

Several instances of severe ritual punishment for transgressing Aboriginal law were also reported in the Coober Pedy region in the 1960s. In Aboriginal society the divulging of sacred information, or revealing certain sacred objects to unauthorised persons, were serious transgressions against important codes of behaviour and practices laid down by ‘the Law’.⁸⁷ “Customary law sanctions were vigorous”, and often warranted the death of the offender which was carried out by the *kadaitja*.⁸⁸ A number of unexplained deaths in central Australia that were generally “accompanied by a ‘wall of silence’” and attributed to *kadaitja* practices, are known to have occurred as late as

⁸³ Lynette Strangways, interview, 2 November 2013.

⁸⁴ Weightman to Bartlett, 4 April 1959, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/60.

⁸⁵ Brian Underwood, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 28 August 2013.

⁸⁶ Howard Jacobson, *In the Land of Oz*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987, p.318. According to A.P. Elkin, some senior Aboriginal “men of high degree” with mystical powers, and known as ‘medicine-men’ or *kadaitja*, were able to travel at high speed for extraordinary distances because they “can make their spirits take them along very quickly”. A.P. Elkin, *Aboriginal Men of High Degree*, Second Edition, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1977, pp.6, 55. According to Ann McGrath, “Distance and power were linked; the magic men travelled faster and further than anyone else”. McGrath, *Born in the Cattle*, p.5.

⁸⁷ Bruce DeBelle, ‘Aboriginal Customary Law and the Common Law’, in Elliott Johnston, Martin Hinton and Darryle Rigney (eds), *Indigenous Australians and the Law*, London: Routledge-Cavendish, 2008, p.88.

⁸⁸ Joan Kimm, *A Fatal Conjunction: Two Laws Two Cultures*, Sydney: Federation Press, 2004, p.47.

the 1950s, involving individuals who had committed serious violations of Aboriginal law and order by revealing details of secret rites and information to unauthorised persons.⁸⁹ Despite some general acceptance of European laws and customs, many Aboriginal people still remained in fear of the *kadiatja*, and parents sometimes used it to frighten misbehaving children.⁹⁰

One Aboriginal man who had periodically mined for opal in Coober Pedy was put to death for the alleged theft of sacred artefacts. According to journalist Rena Briand who lived there in the late 1960s, the identity of the “executioners” was unlikely ever to be known, as “Tribal people remain silent on these issues, but there is no ‘getting away’ from their justice”, reflecting the importance of traditional behavioural norms, and how they were maintained on the opal fields during this period.⁹¹

Another Aboriginal man was also put to death in that same decade by six Aboriginal men in camp near Coober Pedy, for stealing sacred ritual items that he had given to tourists some years previously.⁹² There is also some speculation that he may have taken opals from a sensitive area, or “sacred ground”.⁹³ In convicting the six offenders, the trial judge clearly acknowledged in his sentencing remarks the importance of customary Aboriginal cultural practices, and that the theft of sacred ritual objects was a serious transgression that was punishable by death in Aboriginal society. He also acknowledged that several of the younger offenders would have been punished for disobeying senior Aboriginal men if they had not participated. Taking this into consideration, he imposed nominal jail sentences of one year for two of the participants and two years for the remaining four people.⁹⁴

A strong ceremonial life and the enforcement of customary discipline was also evident on the Andamooka opal fields. NPO MacDougall noted in 1956 that several senior Aboriginal men involved in the opal industry were competing for ritual leadership

⁸⁹ H.S. Kitching, ‘Observations of Customs Associated with Kadaitja Practices in Central Australia’, *Oceania*, vol.31, no.3, March 1961, p.210; T.G.H. Strehlow, ‘Geography and the Totemic Landscape in Central Australia: A Functional Study’, in Ronald M. Berndt (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology: Modern Studies in the Social Anthropology of the Australian Aborigines*, Perth: Published for Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies by University of Western Australia Press, 1970, p.120.

⁹⁰ Kitching, ‘Observations of Customs’, p.211.

⁹¹ Briand, *White Man in a Hole*, p.89.

⁹² *Advertiser*, 4 March 1964, p.1; 5 June 1964, p.14.

⁹³ Briand, *White Man in a Hole*, p.90.

⁹⁴ Decision of Judge Chamberlain dated 13 July 1964, contained in South Australian Museum Archive (henceforth SAMA), Series AA60/03/5/27.

there, and that one of them was alleged to be spreading “fear of possible trouble from old superstition if directions in regard to corroborree are not obeyed”.⁹⁵ Opal miner and classer Ted Larkins was a significant ritual leader in the Andamooka area in the 1950s and 1960s, as remembered by several of his children, including Chris Larkins and Elaine Moosha.⁹⁶

Ted Larkins’ cousin Ted Egan, who was also involved in the opal industry, was another well-known ritual leader there, and this is acknowledged by a number of other Aboriginal people, including Lynette Strangways, who described him as a highly respected “strong lawman”.⁹⁷ Max Thomas was another well-known senior Aboriginal man in the Andamooka region who participated in the opal industry and was responsible for significant Aboriginal heritage sites in the region.⁹⁸ Several opal miners I interviewed recalled a strong ceremonial life and how discipline was maintained by senior Aboriginal ritual leaders at Andamooka in the 1960s.⁹⁹

Despite the resilience of Aboriginal cultural life, official attitudes ranged from ambivalence to objection. For example, the importance of Aboriginal ceremonial practices was recognised by APB Secretary Bartlett in 1955, who wrote that:

I am of the opinion that it is a good thing to allow the aborigines to continue in certain of their ceremonies provided there is no real harm done to the person concerned. Most important of all, it allows the old men of the tribe to retain control, particularly of the young men. As soon as the old men lose control the young men will immediately lose respect not only for their own people but towards all concerned and soon become drunkards, and often thorough wasters.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ MacDougall to Bartlett, 27 November 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/181.

⁹⁶ Chris Larkins, interview, 30 October 2013; Elaine Moosha, interview, 8 November 2013.

⁹⁷ Lynette Strangways, interview, 2 November 2013.

⁹⁸ Stan Starkey, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 7 November 2013; Bob Starkey, interview, 11 November 2013; Gara, *The Kokatha Heritage Survey*, p.8.

⁹⁹ John Dunstan, interview, 25 August 2013; Geoff Watson, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 30 October 2013.

¹⁰⁰ Bartlett to Evans, 2 December 1955, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/91. Bartlett’s predecessor, W.R. Penhall, was also of the view that Aboriginal male initiation ceremonies were “important in instilling pride, a sense of responsibility and a moral code in young men, and respect for the elders”. See Penhall to Wood, 23 February 1955, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1941/44.

On the other hand, Bartlett was also adamant that traditional forms of punishment that resulted in death or severe wounding should be “immediately suppressed”, as should “the forceful initiation of part-aborigines”, but conceded that it was “very difficult to set down an actual policy as the natives vary so greatly from the primitive or almost-primitive to quite civilised types”.¹⁰¹ This official ambivalence was similar in the northern pastoral industry, where there was little concern shown by officials or pastoralists as long as traditional practices did not “unduly interfere” with station work, and an important Aboriginal ceremonial life has persisted.¹⁰²

In late 1956, NPO MacDougall informed Bartlett that several Aboriginal men who had been at Coober Pedy and Anna Creek for ceremonies had later visited Andamooka, where some Aboriginal people had “asked that the visitors be restrained from compelling their young people to attend the corroboree”. MacDougall and the police officer accompanying him to Andamooka responded by informing “the ceremony bosses that no one is to be coerced” into participating.¹⁰³ However, Aboriginal cultural life on the Andamooka fields remained strong, and in 1959 many Aboriginal people from Andamooka travelled to Anna Creek for major ceremonies.¹⁰⁴

Ceremonial life persisted on the opal fields despite some objections, as several official documents in the late 1960s reveal. In a somewhat contradictory report written in 1968, the APB superintendent at Coober Pedy noted that while some interest in traditional ceremonial life there may have been waning, cultural practices remained important to some:

While culture and ceremonies play very little part in the lives of the Aborigines at Coober Pedy it is certain that the adults at least are to a great extent still affected by them ... they have certainly not, except on a very superficial level, accepted European culture to a meaningful extent.¹⁰⁵

In his 1968 Annual Report, the APB patrol officer at Oodnadatta observed how:

¹⁰¹ Bartlett to Evans, 2 December 1955, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/91.

¹⁰² Robert Foster, *De Rose Hill Native Title Claim: Expert History Report*, Adelaide: Report for the Native Title Unit, Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement, November 2000, p. 66

¹⁰³ MacDougall to Bartlett, 27 November 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/181.

¹⁰⁴ Bills to Bartlett, 19 February 1959, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/45.

¹⁰⁵ Robin Percy, ‘Annual Report’, 26 June 1968, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1968/9.

in the bush camps I patrolled Ceremonies or Corroborees are carried out at frequent intervals. I have been lucky enough to be invited to some of them. In my opinion these ceremonies are unaffected in any way by Western Civilization, even Western clothing is discarded at these times.¹⁰⁶

Aboriginal cultural practices persisted, while at the same adapting to change, which actually enhanced some elements of them. Some scholars believed that concept of the *Tjukurpa* (as noted in Chapter One) was ‘primitive’ and unchanging, and as a consequence Aboriginal culture and religion were considered to be static, and unresponsive or unadaptable to change. Anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner, for instance, believed that Aboriginal people had “an unprogressive material culture” and had “become a-historical in mood, outlook and life”.¹⁰⁷ This is countered by a more considered view of other anthropologists, notably Ronald Berndt, that Aboriginal people were prepared to accept cultural change or innovation “within an established framework, but to some extent serving to modify that framework”, and an appreciation that all cultures are periodically subject to some modification and change.¹⁰⁸ While the basic values and religious ideology remained the same for Aboriginal people generally, change and innovation that did not challenge its traditional basis could be accommodated.¹⁰⁹ This was clearly the case for Aboriginal people around the opal fields and much of northern South Australia.

Aboriginal ceremonial life remained resilient because of its ability to adapt or modify some of its aspects. In Aboriginal societies there were extensive networks of trade, perhaps more appropriately characterised as ‘exchange’ and ‘distribution’, of not only artefacts and raw materials, but also the diffusion of ideas, including ceremonial dances, rituals and songs, highlighting their vibrant and changing nature.¹¹⁰ Coober Pedy lies almost directly midway between Port August and Alice Springs, a route along

¹⁰⁶ Don Pedder, ‘Annual Report’, 9 July 1968, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1968/9.

¹⁰⁷ W.E.H. Stanner, ‘The Dreaming’, in W.E.H. Stanner (ed.), *White Man Got No Dreaming*, Canberra: ANU Press, 1978, p.38.

¹⁰⁸ Ronald M. Berndt, ‘Traditional Concepts of Aboriginal Land’, in Ronald M. Berndt (ed.), *Aboriginal Sites, Rights and Resource Development*, Perth: Published for Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia by University of Western Australia Press, 1982, p.3.

¹⁰⁹ George Spindler and Louise Spindler, ‘Foreword’, in Tonkinson, *The Mardu Aborigines*, p.vii.

¹¹⁰ Josephine Flood, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime: The Story of Prehistoric Australia and its People*, Revised Edition, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1999, pp.268, 273; Tonkinson, *The Mardu Aborigines*, p.134.

which the trading of ceremonies and ceremonial objects was particularly “well established”.¹¹¹ NPO MacDougall described in 1955 how a new ceremony was being passed on by one group of Aboriginal people to another. He observed how a large number of Aboriginal people from Colona in far western South Australia were camped at Coober Pedy, along with local Aboriginal residents waiting for the arrival of a group of Aboriginal people from the north of the state for this to commence.¹¹²

Adaptability is also evident in the way Aboriginal people embraced opal as a form of income generation without it adversely affecting their important cultural practices, by accommodating it in their mythical realm and challenging the perception of a static and inflexible Aboriginal world view. Generalisations have been made that Aboriginal people were fearful of opal and reluctant to search underground, and one supposed belief was that opal was avoided because it was seen as “a manifestation of the devil”.¹¹³ One newspaper suggested in 1933 that Aboriginal people would not venture near Coober Pedy, describing it as “the haunt of the devil, half-serpent, half-human that lives in a hole in the ground, and lures men in with flashing stones of evil magic”.¹¹⁴ The suggestion that Aboriginal people avoided opal because of its association “with the devil” has little basis considering previous discussion in this thesis demonstrating Aboriginal association with the opal industry.¹¹⁵ Aboriginal people exposed to the opal industry were clearly adaptable, and freely sought to exploit this resource as it increasingly became a valuable economic commodity.¹¹⁶

Throughout Australia a number of Aboriginal mythological tales explain how certain minerals were created. For example, the coal deposits in the Flinders Ranges of South Australia are believed to be the charcoal remains of large fires made by a mythical

¹¹¹ Ellis and Barwick, ‘Antikirinja Women’s Song Knowledge’, p.30.

¹¹² MacDougall to Bartlett, 23 March 1955, SRSA GRG 52/1/1955/73.

¹¹³ Allan W. Eckert, *The World of Opals*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1997, pp.199–200.

¹¹⁴ *Advertiser*, 16 December 1933, p.16.

¹¹⁵ See also Eckert, *The World of Opals*, p. 200. Eckert rightly observes that there is no basis to such assertions given Aboriginal engagement in the opal industry.

¹¹⁶ Aboriginal people would have been aware of the presence of opal but until the development of the opal industry there was no need to exploit it. Aboriginal people in other locations would have been aware of deposits of other mineral resources such as copper, gold and coal but there was no need to extract or use them. See Bernard O’Neil, *In Search of Mineral Wealth: The South Australian Geological Survey and Department of Mines to 1944*, Special Publication No.2, Adelaide: Department of Mines and Energy, 1982, p.1.

ancestor, the ‘Kingfisher Man’, known as ‘Yulu Yuluru’.¹¹⁷ A creation story for opal around Andamooka described how a mythical ancestor came to Earth on a great rainbow to instruct Aboriginal people on law and practices, before returning to the sky. Where the rainbow had rested was a large area of rocks and pebbles of all colours glistening in the sun which became the first opals.¹¹⁸ Another Aboriginal opal mythology relating to the origins of opal at Coober Pedy comes from the far west coast of South Australia and tells of the ancestral creator known as ‘Wirangu Man’. Travelling eastwards, the Wirangu Man reached Coober Pedy and lit a fire to cook on, but the heat was so fierce that perspiration from his body dropped onto the ground and was captured by stones which also contained water. The colours from the raging fire turned these stones into the bright colours of opal.¹¹⁹

One particular opal creation story tells how a mythological ancestor, the rainbow-coloured Kingfisher, traversed the Australian landscape in search of a place to lay her rainbow-coloured eggs, and left them at Coober Pedy.¹²⁰ Opal author Allan Eckert has expressed some scepticism about the Kingfisher mythology and questioned why the story only emerged in the 1930s, some years after the discovery of opal in Coober Pedy.¹²¹ Copies of the published mythologies noted above were shown to a number of Aboriginal people, and some were either not familiar with or sceptical about them. Some Aboriginal people also declined to comment or indicated that detailed stories of how the opals were created could not be revealed to me, as an uninitiated European researcher, and this is consistent with the practice of restrictions relating to status and gender.¹²² Several Aboriginal men did allude to the mythical story of how opals were created being linked to the formation of Lake Eyre, but declined to discuss this further.

¹¹⁷ Nic Klaassen, *Leigh Creek: An Oasis in the Desert*, Adelaide: Flinders Ranges Research, 1997, p.16; Hans Mincham, *The Story of the Flinders Ranges*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1964, p.275.

¹¹⁸ Ainslie Roberts and Melva J. Roberts, *Dreamtime: The Aboriginal Heritage*, Sydney: Rigby, 1981, p.26.

¹¹⁹ Education Department of South Australia, *We Come from the Land*, Adelaide: Education Department of South Australia, 1992, pp. 32–3.

¹²⁰ Len Cram, *Beautiful Opals: Australia's National Gem*, Brisbane: Robert Brown & Associates, 1994, p.55; Eckert, *The World of Opals*, p.200.

¹²¹ Eckert, *The World of Opals*, p.200.

¹²² Having worked as an anthropologist in northern South Australia I am acutely aware of gender, age and status restrictions relating to certain ritual and mythological information, and the sanctions imposed for divulging information that cannot be revealed.

While some basic details of this particular mythology have actually been published, many aspects of it remain restricted to all but initiated Aboriginal men.¹²³

A more recent 'public' version of how opal was created around Coober Pedy is contained in a DVD that is sold at the local Umoona Opal Mine and Museum. This story reveals how opal was created in the region at the time it was still submerged beneath the ancient inland sea. During this period, at an island now known as Umoona Hill, a group of shellfish buried themselves on the shores to avoid being taken by a mythical eagle searching for food. Over time the seas dried up and the buried shellfish became stones that glistened with colour.¹²⁴ Interestingly, this mythology is consistent with the theory of how opal was geologically created, and several Aboriginal people gave credence to this story. It also reveals that there are certain Aboriginal mythological stories that may be disclosed to the public without their restricted content.

The innovative nature of Aboriginal cultural adaptation, evident in the increasing use of modern technology in aiding traditional practices, has been apparent for some decades. Archaeologists Robin Torrence and Anne Clarke have noted how Aboriginal people are not just "passive recipients of superior European technology", but have incorporated European commodities and technology into "their own established systems of values and exchange" and, despite some "acceptance of the material trappings", have used them to enhance and maintain important cultural practices and traditions.¹²⁵

The use of new technology has also enhanced ceremonial transportation. By the 1940s, Aboriginal people began to attend ceremonies using the East-West railway line, and often "travelling en masse 'jumping the train'", despite Commonwealth Railways policy objecting to Aboriginal passengers.¹²⁶ Because of the importance of ceremonial activity, the change in the modes of transport, from foot to camels, horses, donkeys, trains and eventually motor vehicles, did not affect traditional ritual practices in terms

¹²³ A.P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, Revised Edition, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1979, p.250; Jennifer Isaacs (compiler and editor), *Australian Dreaming: 40,000 Years of Aboriginal History*, Sydney: Lansdowne Press, 1980, p.48.

¹²⁴ Umoona Opal Mine and Museum, *Eagle Dreaming*, DVD, Coober Pedy: Umoona Opal Mine and Museum, 2004.

¹²⁵ Torrence and Clarke, 'Negotiating Difference', pp.5, 11, 18.

¹²⁶ Lennon, *I'm the One that Knows*, p.24.

of their meaning and relevance, according to researcher Noel Wallace.¹²⁷ A report from the superintendent of the North West Aboriginal reserve noted how ceremonial activities in the region by the late 1960s had been “facilitated by the increasing use of motor vehicles” owned by Aboriginal people.¹²⁸ Pitjantjatjara Council anthropologist Daniel Vachon observed in the following decade how “ceremonial obligations are being satisfied with less effort, but more often”, as Aboriginal people in the region took advantage of new technology such as motor vehicles and mobile radio communications “to continually re-establish their spiritual and social connections”.¹²⁹

It is extremely likely that some of these vehicles were purchased from the sale of opal, given the likelihood that some Aboriginal people from this region would have engaged in the industry from time to time and that there were strong ceremonial links between the various groups of these regions. This raises an interesting point, as Aboriginal opal miners were often subjected to ridicule and criticism for purchasing motor vehicles. A welfare officer visiting Coober Pedy in July 1954, for instance, reported that Aboriginal people appeared to be finding good quantities of opal but were struggling “to improve their lot with the money”, often getting into debt and purchasing “useless motor vehicles”.¹³⁰ From an Aboriginal perspective, however, mobility and ceremonial travel were crucial, and owning vehicles was a high priority. A more considered understanding of this is evident in a report from F.H. Traeger, the APB agent at Coober Pedy in 1960. While he thought that Aboriginal opal miners were often sold excessively priced cars by unscrupulous dealers, he believed that vehicles provided better access to the opal fields, and travel generally.¹³¹

A number of people I interviewed recalled the increasing use of motor vehicles by Aboriginal opal miners to undertake ceremonial travel. Barney Lennon owned trucks

¹²⁷ Noel Wallace, ‘Changes in Spiritual and Ritual Life in Pitjantjatjara (Bidjandjadjara) Society, 1966 to 1973’, in R.M. Berndt (ed.), *Aborigines and Change: Australia in the 70s*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1977, pp.76, 87.

¹²⁸ ‘Report of the Superintendent of the North West Aboriginal Reserve dated 29 July 1967’, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1967/9. For a similar example in northern South Australia see ‘Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board (henceforth AAB) for the Year Ended June 30’, 1967’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers* (henceforth *SAPP*), no.20, 1967, p.16. The North West Aboriginal Reserve was gazetted in 1921. Following the passing of the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act 1981*, the area was extended and is now known as the APY lands. Toyne and Vachon, *Growing Up the Country*, pp.23, 111.

¹²⁹ Toyne and Vachon, *Growing Up the Country*, p.19.

¹³⁰ Report by Sister McKenzie to APB, undated, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1954/84.

¹³¹ Traeger to APB, undated, SRSA, GRG 52/1/158/157.

from time to time, which his son, Bernard, used several times to take Aboriginal people to ceremonies in the far north of the state.¹³² Elaine Moosha also believed that access to vehicles purchased through opal sales helped Aboriginal people attend ceremonies. She remembered one occasion when her father, Ted Larkins, drove from Andamooka to the APY lands via Coober Pedy to attend ceremonies there.¹³³ Her brother, Bob Larkins, recalled his father having a two-or three-ton Commer truck and taking Aboriginal people beyond Lake Torrens and as far north-east as Mound Springs and other locations.¹³⁴ Coober Pedy miner Albert McCormack would make allowances for his Aboriginal opal partners to go away for ceremonies and remarked that when John Cooley “went away, we wouldn’t call it ‘walkabout’, we’d call it ‘motorabout’”, but he would always return to work.¹³⁵

Conclusion

Aboriginal people successfully adapted to the opal industry and, while earning a living from it, were also able to maintain important traditional economic, social and cultural practices which the industry readily accommodated. While engaging with the mainstream economy, Aboriginal people utilised their traditional hunting and foraging base, as part of a hybrid economy strategy. Traditional social attitudes and values centred around the importance of kinship and reciprocity also influenced their engagement in the industry, particularly in how opal was found, conserved and shared. A range of cultural practices were also maintained on the opal fields, a strong ceremonial life prevailed and customary mourning practices, law and discipline were upheld. Aboriginal cultural practices were also amenable to change and innovation, evident in how opal was incorporated into a mythical world view, and in the use of motor vehicles for ceremonial purposes. Having explored how Aboriginal people maintained a high degree of cultural continuity on the opal fields, the following chapter examines how the government responded to their engagement in the industry.

¹³² Bernard Lennon, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 22 August 2013. Barney Lennon was reported to have a Blitz truck and a Buick Tourer in 1951. See Blower and Brewster to Penhall, 8 September 1951, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1951/64.

¹³³ Elaine Moosha, interview, 8 November 2013.

¹³⁴ Bob Larkins, interview, 23 October 2013.

¹³⁵ Albert McCormack, interview, 14 August 2013.

CHAPTER SIX: THE RESPONSE OF GOVERNMENT

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the response of the South Australian government to Aboriginal engagement on the northern opal fields. The government was generally ambivalent about Aboriginal cultural practices, albeit expressing disquiet about some aspects, as noted in the previous chapter. However, the government generally approved of Aboriginal involvement in opal mining, which was considered evidence of industry, and a means of ongoing integration into the mainstream economy and society. Acknowledging the level of Aboriginal involvement in the industry, the government sought to assist by firstly intervening to prevent exploitation by unscrupulous buyers, particularly in Coober Pedy, through the implementation of an opal-buying service. The government also provided some minimal material support in order to enhance the industriousness of Aboriginal people and increase the extent of their participation in the industry. This involvement and the extent of its effectiveness are reviewed in the chapter. As Aboriginal populations stabilised on the opal fields, the government also provided some support in the form of accommodation and welfare services. There were differences in the level of these services to the respective fields, particularly at Andamooka where they were less extensive and so may have had longer term implications for Aboriginal engagement in the opal industry there, as well as overall community development.

Exploitation and the Response of Government

By the 1950s the Aborigines Protection Board (APB) began to take an increasing interest in the activities and welfare of Aboriginal people on the opal fields, as their presence there and engagement in the industry was growing. Instances of Aboriginal people being exploited were an issue that would soon attract the attention of the government. A number of Aboriginal people recall such instances on the Coober Pedy fields. In one case, an Aboriginal man recalled how his father was paid with a bag of

sugar or a few pounds for good pieces of opal at Coober Pedy in the 1950s.¹ Another recalled how an uncle found a significant piece of opal at Mount Penrhyn in the 1960s, only to receive a second-hand vehicle and a small amount of cash in return.² At one particular retail store, Bob Larkins saw an Aboriginal man place some opal on the counter and in exchange was given:

some tucker for it, got a tin of bully beef and a pound of plums or something, and something else and off he went. There was probably £10 worth of opal but got ripped off, yeah, but I suppose that that went on a lot in those days. That's one of my recollections of Coober Pedy.³

Issues of exploitation and unscrupulous activities by Europeans in the Coober Pedy region were noted as early as 1947 by a local pastoralist. The manager of Mabel Creek station, A.A. Turner, informed the APB and the police at Tarcoola about the activities of an individual named R.G. Campbell, purporting to be a middleman between Aboriginal sellers and European buyers. He also noted that a parcel of opal offered for sale through Campbell had been returned to the Aboriginal owner minus five of the best stones. Although these stones were subsequently returned after some questioning, Turner felt that this transaction had “a very fishy smell” and warranted further attention.⁴ APB Secretary Penhall subsequently informed the commissioner of police that his agency had given Campbell no authority to act “as an agent for native miners who desire to dispose of the opal they found”.⁵

Native Patrol Officer (NPO) MacDougall also reported on Aboriginal exploitation following concerns from two Coober Pedy storekeepers that Aboriginal people were not receiving fair prices for their opal. They alleged that Aboriginal people were being forced to sell their opal to a rival storekeeper who would otherwise not sell them food, and were being intimidated by buyers who “are like vultures, hanging over them & worrying them”.⁶ In response to these allegations, MacDougall visited in October 1951.

¹ Bobby Brown, interview with Mike Harding, Whyalla, 3 November 2013.

² Bernard Lennon, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 22 August 2013.

³ Bob Larkins, interview with Mike Harding, Wilmington, 23 October 2013.

⁴ Turner to Penhall, 10 August 1947, State Records of South Australia (henceforth SRSA), Government Record Group (henceforth GRG), 52/1/1947/29.

⁵ Penhall to Commissioner of Police, 22 August 1947, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1947/29.

⁶ Blower and Brewster to Penhall, 17 June 1951, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1951/64.

He subsequently reported to the APB that Aboriginal people had found good quantities of opal at the Twelve Mile field and had expressed satisfaction at the sale prices they received, although some Europeans thought that storekeepers and buyers were exploiting them. While MacDougall was unable to specifically “find anything on which to base a complaint of exploitation”, he was aware of unsatisfactory business transactions that had occurred in the past and how this could “leave the door wide open for exploitation”.⁷ Two year later MacDougall raised further concerns about the exploitation of Aboriginal people to the APB, citing how one Aboriginal man at Coober Pedy had been paid £600 by a local storekeeper for a parcel of opal later valued at £1,600.⁸

Following an interview with a Coober Pedy resident alarmed at the treatment of Aboriginal people there, the incoming secretary of the APB, Clarence Bartlett, wrote to the commissioner of police in January 1955. He requested that the police investigate allegations of Aboriginal people being supplied with liquor in exchange for opal.⁹ At the time, the supply of liquor to Aboriginal people was an offence. In response, an officer from the Kingoonya Police Station visited Coober Pedy with MacDougall soon afterwards, and reported that he was unable to obtain sufficient evidence to prosecute instances of illegal alcohol supply. He opined, however, that exploitative practices were conducted by both competing local stores, and that there was considerable tension between the two. He concluded that:

The only way to overcome all the difficulties at Coober Pedy with their Opal is not to allow either store to buy Opal from the Natives and set up a ration Station on the field with a reliable person in charge with the rights of buying opal from the natives alone.¹⁰

Later that month, Bartlett wrote to the APB and the Minister of Works expressing his concern that Aboriginal people were being exploited in Coober Pedy. He informed them that he had held discussions with the Lutheran Church with a view to them appointing an officer to Coober Pedy who would serve as a missionary and resident

⁷ MacDougall to Penhall, 30 October 1951, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1951/64.

⁸ MacDougall to Penhall, 3 November 1953, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1954/75.

⁹ Bartlett to Commissioner of Police, 6 January 1955, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/1.

¹⁰ McLeod to Armitage, 1 March 1955, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/1.

APB agent and welfare officer. Bartlett requested that the government authorise such an appointment in order to purchase opal from Aboriginal people there at a fair price, as well as selling stores and providing for their spiritual needs. The APB would contribute £500 per annum for salary costs, plus an allowance for motor vehicle usage.¹¹

Paul Koehne was appointed to the position in 1955, but left the following year.¹² Koehne's frustrations in having to spend too much of his time on the needs of travellers passing through Coober Pedy and the medical needs of Europeans at the expense of his missionary duties were recorded in the minutes of an APB meeting in January 1956.¹³ Two subsequent appointments of APB agents were less than satisfactory, and allegations relating to unfair opal trading and the issuing of rations were raised. The behaviour of one of these agents prompted a local individual to write to the APB secretary in September 1956 informing him that Aboriginal people had:

complained of getting an apple & orange or handfuls of sweets for their opal. They cannot exist on that. I know that they do not get a fair price for their opal.¹⁴

The same writer, and another, alleged in 1958 that an APB appointed agent at Coober Pedy would not issue rations to Aboriginal people unless they gave him opal in return.¹⁵ Other allegations included shooting cattle on an adjacent pastoral property under the guise of hunting kangaroos for Aboriginal people and, following a visit to Coober Pedy in February 1958, APB Welfare Officer Weightman recommended that a more "missionary minded person be urgently appointed" as a local APB agent.¹⁶

A subsequent replacement in late 1958 was Ed Meier, who was given a broad range of official duties to perform. Meier was instructed to prevent the exploitation of Aboriginal

¹¹ Bartlett to Aborigines Protection Board (henceforth APB), 16 March 1955, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/1; Bartlett to Minister of Works, 17 March 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/1.

¹² Bartlett to APB, 18 November 1955, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/287; 'Minutes of the Meeting of the APB', 6 June 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/16/2.

¹³ 'Minutes of the Meeting of the APB', 11 January 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/16/2.

¹⁴ Brewster to Bartlett, 3 September 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1955/287.

¹⁵ Brewster to Bartlett, 5 June 1958, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/60; Carlaw to Bartlett, 25 May 1958, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/163.

¹⁶ Weightman to APB, 11 February 1958, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/40.

people, to purchase opal at a fair price from them before selling it onwards and to report quarterly to the APB head office in relation to opal sales and trading. In order to increase their industriousness, the agent was to encourage Aboriginal people to search for opal not only as noodlers, but also as underground miners, by providing material support in the form of basic mining tools and windlasses, which would remain the property of the Crown. The agent was also responsible for the operation of a trading store, performing missionary duties to Aboriginal people as well other Coober Pedy residents, and issuing rations and blankets and clothing to the infirm.¹⁷

Meier's appointment was relatively short, but in a report to the APB in December 1958 he described how the initial keenness among Aboriginal people to mine opal appeared to have dissipated to some extent.¹⁸ In a subsequent report to the APB just days later, Meier suggested that Aboriginal people form a syndicate to work claims on a community basis, with the APB supplying equipment such as power winches and augers up to the value of £450, which would be repaid when good quantities of opal were found.¹⁹ However, there is nothing in the files I viewed to indicate whether the APB provided equipment, nor is it possible on the evidence sighted to form any conclusion about the effectiveness of Meier during this period.

Pastor Fred Traeger replaced Meier in April 1959.²⁰ In his first report several months later, Traeger informed the APB that he had opened a small store in Coober Pedy and had begun to purchase opal at what he considered to be fair prices, although he had incurred a small trading loss and faced competition from business opponents determined to "do their best to stop us".²¹ Realising that his experience in opal dealing was limited, Traeger initially implemented a pooling system, but soon found that Aboriginal people still took good finds of opal to bigger buyers, leaving him with

¹⁷ Bartlett to Meier, 11 August 1958, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/124. Rations were issued to Aboriginal people who were unemployed, ill, infirm, widowed or aged. For an Aboriginal adult, the following ration weekly scale applied: 7 lbs flour, 2 lbs sugar, 1 lb rice, 1lb salt, 2 ozs tea, 1 tin of syrup, honey or jam, 1 lb potatoes, 1 lb onions, 3 lb meat, and tobacco and papers where necessary. For a child, the rate was half that of an adult. Bartlett to Minister of Works, 28 July 1957, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1957/104.

¹⁸ Meier to Bartlett, 26 December 1958, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/200.

¹⁹ Meier to Bartlett, 1 January 1959, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/177.

²⁰ F.H. Traeger, 'History of the Coober Pedy Lutheran Mission', unpublished manuscript, n.d., p.1, Lutheran Archives (henceforth LA), Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia (henceforth ELCA), Coober Pedy Hanging File; *Coober Pedy Regional Times*, 4 July 2013, p.6.

²¹ Traeger to APB, 10 July 1959, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/177.

smaller or poorer lots.²² After abandoning this system and gaining more experience, Traeger sold over £30,000 worth of opal found by Aboriginal people in his first year there.²³



Figure Five: Opal dealer Don Field buying stones from Aboriginal people from Indulkana, Coober Pedy, 1963. Photographer Robin Smith. National Library of Australia, nla.obj-6484922.

In a report to the APB the following year, Traeger acknowledged the difficult and time consuming nature of opal buying, but several of the local mines had been producing large quantities of opal during the year and, Aboriginal people noodling had earned good money. Traeger had arranged to sell the Aboriginal opal he acquired to a Sydney dealer he considered fair and reputable, and was therefore able to pay Aboriginal people the full market value. Traeger also considered that this had given Aboriginal people unprecedented spending capacity and, although in his personal opinion some

²² Traeger to APB, 10 October 1959, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/177.

²³ Traeger, 'History of the Coober Pedy Lutheran Mission', p.4.

money was squandered, he noted that their health had improved because of spending on good food and no signs of malnutrition were evident.²⁴

In a summary report for the year 1960, Traeger informed the APB that he had purchased in excess of £20,000 worth of opal, with weekly parcels ranging from £400 to £1,500.²⁵ Traeger acknowledged that it had taken some time to gain the trust of Aboriginal people, but considered that he had been able to do so successfully, as well as now having the experience to distinguish the types and quality of opal. Traeger concluded, however, that the time involved in examining, classing, valuing and packing was excessive, in addition to the considerable missionary workload he undertook, and expressed a desire to be relieved of his APB duties, suggesting that opal buying warranted a full-time presence.²⁶

Traeger informed the APB in May 1960 that he intended retiring in late November 1960.²⁷ In response to charges relating to his alleged failures to provide the APB with ongoing quarterly opal and store trading reports, Traeger responded by saying that he had complied with such instructions to the best of his ability, given the excessive workload he faced, although admitting that his reporting may have not been as detailed as they would have liked. Traeger was also critical of the APB for not providing basic mining equipment such as windlasses, shovels, picks and ropes, and that he had provided his own windlasses, which were still being used. Traeger added that although some Aboriginal people sold part of their opal directly to other buyers, they continued to bring most of their opal to him to trade, remarking that “Natives are not so silly. They know a bit about opal, the quality and the value. And they know on which side their bread is buttered”.²⁸ A number of Aboriginal people, although very young at the time, recalled Traeger supplying food to people and taking provisions and water out to the fields.²⁹ However, less was recalled about the marketing of opal, although several

²⁴ Traeger to APB, 28 April 1960, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/177.

²⁵ Traeger to APB, undated, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/177.

²⁶ Traeger to APB, undated, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/177.

²⁷ Traeger to Bartlett, 12 May 1960, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/200.

²⁸ Traeger to APB, 24 May 1961, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/124.

²⁹ Kevin O’Toole, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 21 August 2013; Maureen Williams, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 30 August 2013.

individuals acknowledged that he was a fair trader and may have paid better prices than other dealers.³⁰

At a subsequent meeting, the APB Board expressed “extreme dissatisfaction of Pastor Traeger’s agency at Coober Pedy”.³¹ Bartlett subsequently wrote to the Minister of Works expressing the APB’s disappointment with the previous appointments to Coober Pedy, which he described as failures, again restating the APB’s desire to assist Aboriginal people in their search for opal and purchasing it to avoid exploitation by unscrupulous buyers. In order to facilitate this, Bartlett recommended that a full-time APB welfare officer be appointed at Coober Pedy, a trading store be established and the Treasury provide an advance of £2,500 in order for the incumbent to have enough cash on hand to conduct opal transactions.³² Although this was thought somewhat risky by senior government officials, it was approved and a system of accountability procedures developed.³³

Don Busbridge was subsequently appointed to Coober Pedy as the APB Superintendent in April 1961. Aboriginal opal purchases through Busbridge were initially slow and the APB’s Annual Report for the 1960–1961 financial year shows opal sales receipts as only £63. While conceding that Aboriginal opal purchases had not “reached any large proportions” during that period, the APB reported that Busbridge’s presence and ability to pay fair prices for opal had meant that other buyers there were also paying fairer prices.³⁴ As his knowledge of opal values improved and he increasingly gained the confidence of Aboriginal people, the level of business also increased and opal purchases by Busbridge in the last four months of 1961 totalled around £1,700.³⁵

It soon became apparent to Busbridge that he had insufficient cash on hand and was therefore not able to purchase every parcel offered to him. Bartlett informed the APB

³⁰ Bernard Lennon, interview, 22 August 2013; Sadie Singer, interview with Mike Harding, Davoren Park, 10 December 2013.

³¹ ‘Minutes of the Meeting of the APB’, 21 June 1961, SRSA, GRG 52/16/3.

³² Bartlett to Minister of Works, 1 September 1960, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1960/141.

³³ Auditor-General to Under-Treasurer, 18 October 1960, SRSA, GRG 52/1/169/141; Under-Treasurer to Treasurer, 1 November 1960, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1960/141.

³⁴ ‘Report of the APB for the Year Ended June 30, 1961’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers* (henceforth *SAPP*), no.20, 1962, pp.13,16.

³⁵ Auditor-General to Assistant Under-Treasurer, 10 January 1962, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1960/141.

that Busbridge was not infrequently offered parcels of opal valued up to £500 and on one occasion £1,800, and was concerned that having insufficient cash on hand might see some people selling their opal to less reputable buyers.³⁶ Bartlett's request for an additional advance of £1,000 was subsequently approved by the Treasury.³⁷



Figure Six: Aboriginal people showing opals to Don Busbridge, c.1962. George Cooley personal collection.

Busbridge advised the APB in February 1962 that he had issued nearly 500 individual receipts to Aboriginal people for opal purchases, but thought that most were discarded and suggested that a weekly summary sheet detailing the name of the individual who sold the opal, the amount paid, its weight and value assessed be forwarded to the APB.³⁸ According to the APB it was difficult to estimate the total earnings of Aboriginal opal miners, as many still sold larger parcels of good-quality opal to other buyers on the field. For the 1961–1962 financial year, £5,423 was expended by the APB on opal purchases and sales were £5,800, realising a surplus of £377.³⁹

³⁶ Bartlett to APB, 2 December 1961, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1960/141.

³⁷ Under-Treasurer to Treasurer, 11 January 1962, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1960/141.

³⁸ Busbridge to Bartlett, 28 February 1962, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1960/141.

³⁹ 'Report of the APB for the Year Ended June 30^h, 1962', *SAPP*, no.20a, 1962, pp.11,18.

Unfortunately, further financial transactions relating to Aboriginal opal purchases and sales are not recorded.

The foregoing discussion indicates that the APB was initially serious in its efforts to ensure that Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy were paid fairly for their opal. However, after Busbridge left Coober Pedy there is almost nothing on file to indicate the APB's ongoing role with opal sales. The last official correspondence relating to Aboriginal opal sales that I was able to locate was written by Busbridge, in his capacity as AAB Superintendent of Reserves in late 1963. Here Busbridge urged the current superintendent at Coober Pedy to persist with buying opal from Aboriginal people, despite the low demand for what was perceived as relatively low quality uncut opal, in anticipation that there would be an increased demand in the following year. He continued:

If there are needy circumstances confronting some Aboriginal miners, do not hesitate to make a few purchases, and if possible, sell to a reputable buyer, or forward the opal to Head Office. Naturally, tread cautiously while gaining experience, but don't withhold from this form of genuine welfare because of over-caution.⁴⁰

To what extent Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy required government assistance with opal sales after 1963 is unclear. However, the fact that Aboriginal opal sales through the APB never surpassed the amounts that Traeger achieved in 1959 and 1960 suggests that exploitation had begun to diminish, and that Aboriginal people were now in a better bargaining position and had likely developed their negotiating skills. The APB's presence may well have pressured other buyers to deal more ethically with Aboriginal miners. The son and daughter-in-law of Traeger lived at Coober Pedy from 1963 to 1968, and believed that Aboriginal people by then had developed an appreciation of the value of opal, and that the reserve superintendent could now give his attention to other duties, rather than concentrate on opal sales.⁴¹ In addition, there were also a number of Aboriginal people on the Coober Pedy fields who were competent classers, as noted in the previous chapter, who could advise and help people achieve fairer prices for opal.

⁴⁰ Busbridge to Superintendent, Coober Pedy, 27 November 1963, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1960/141.

⁴¹ Rhonda Traeger, interview with Mike Harding, Hindmarsh Island, 2 September 2015; Gordon Traeger, interview with Mike Harding, Hindmarsh Island, 2 September 2015.

A number of Europeans, such as Albert McCormack and John Dunstan, were adamant that many Aboriginal opal miners in Coober Pedy were able to negotiate successfully for reasonable opal prices and knew the value of opal.⁴² The son of a prominent Aboriginal opal miner thought that some people may have been poorly paid the first time they traded, but gradually learned to haggle effectively.⁴³ A number of other Aboriginal people interviewed also believed that Aboriginal opal miners could negotiate successfully.⁴⁴ According to John Cooley:

Most of the people ... like old Norman Hayes, Marty Dodd and Bernard [Lennon], and my brother and myself, we used to get a pretty good deal off them [the buyers]. We used to always get paid up.⁴⁵

While there was some exploitation of Aboriginal people on the Andamooka fields, there is considerably less detail in the official record compared with Coober Pedy. One notable example was a particularly high-profile incident in 1958 that was noted earlier in the thesis, where several Aboriginal people received a very low price for opal that later sold for an extremely high price and was displayed abroad.⁴⁶ While it was acknowledged that Aboriginal miners at Andamooka were able to earn good money from opal, particularly for larger parcels, it was also reported by APB Welfare Officer Weightman that some Aboriginal people went directly to buyers with their opal, rather than having it valued beforehand, making it easier for them to be exploited. In addition, he thought that there was a perception that some buyers had “one price for the whites and another for the natives”. On a visit to Andamooka in March 1959, Weightman met with Aboriginal people and a local miner, Dick Clarke, who he described as “perhaps the most sensible and honest person there”, to look at better sales procedures. They canvassed the idea of having Aboriginal people auction their opal once a week under

⁴² Albert McCormack, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 14 August 2013; John Dunstan, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 25 August 2013.

⁴³ Kevin O’Toole, interview, 21 August 2013.

⁴⁴ See for example Simon Dare, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 9 November 2013; Maureen Williams, interview, 30 August 2013.

⁴⁵ John Cooley, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 27 October 2013.

⁴⁶ Weightman to Bartlett, 25 November 1958, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/181; *Advertiser*, 20 June 1959, p.3.

the supervision of the local APB agent, Fred Bills, to ensure that there was some degree of fairness, but thought that such a system was unlikely to work in practice.⁴⁷

In 1964 the newly established Aboriginal Affairs Board (AAB) reported that exploitation was not an issue at Andamooka because many Aboriginal people had a good working knowledge of opal values and took advantage of the competition on the field, as there were eight buyers there at the time.⁴⁸ This was also the view of Andamooka miner Geoff Watson, who considered that Aboriginal people were able to negotiate successfully due to competition between a large number of buyers on the fields, and where a standard price of £5 was paid for a small medicine bottle of opal chips. Aboriginal people would return to the same buyer if they were paid fairly, so it was advantageous to look after their interests. He also added that some Aboriginal people occasionally took advantage of buyers by placing the better quality opal on the outside of glass jars and the inferior pieces on the inside in an effort to deceive them, and so obtain a better price.⁴⁹

Systematic Mining

It is more difficult to discern the level of support or commitment from the government to assist Aboriginal miners to engage more systematically in the opal industry, as the official record is scant, other than an occasional reference to Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy being supplied with basic mining tools, as noted earlier. One official report in 1964 did note that the AAB had persuaded Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy, through “An energetic educational campaign”, to maintain an active interest in opal mining and encouraged them to mine underground. It also reported how women and children not involved in mining were provided with supplementary meals at the Aboriginal reserve in an effort to “encourage the bread-winners in their efforts” at opal mining.⁵⁰ This minimal support is similar to the pastoral industry, where basic rations issued by the government were distributed by pastoral lessees as a form of subsistence while simultaneously facilitating Aboriginal employment in the industry. As “an

⁴⁷ Weightman to Bartlett, 9 March 1959, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/181.

⁴⁸ ‘Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board (henceforth AAB) for the Year Ended June 30, 1964’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1965–66, p.12.

⁴⁹ Geoff Watson, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 30 October 2013. See also Bob Larkins, interview, 23 October 2013.

⁵⁰ ‘Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30, 1963’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1964, p.12.

exceptionally cheap, and largely ‘hands-off’ form of administration” which suited the government, the ration distribution system actually gave many pastoralists in the state access to a subsidised labour force.⁵¹

Departmental correspondence later in the decade reveals that several of its patrol officers based in Coober Pedy had encouraged Aboriginal people to prospect for opal and minerals. In one particular instance, a patrol officer was prepared to assist interested Aboriginal people obtain Miner’s Rights in the Granite Downs and Indulkana regions north of Coober Pedy, although there is nothing on file to indicate to what extent this was pursued.⁵² A report in 1968 highlighted the government’s desire for Aboriginal people to maintain their engagement in the opal industry and become integrated into the broader society, declaring that:

Opal mining affords a measure of economic independence and, together with the encouragement by Departmental Officers, has prepared the Aboriginals for a further acceptance of responsibility.⁵³

However, there was no specific information in the report indicating what this encouragement entailed. No further documentation relating to any official support after this period was located, despite searching official records up until 1980.

The level of assistance provided to Aboriginal people at Andamooka in relation to their opal sales was considerably less compared to Coober Pedy. In relation to assisting Aboriginal people to mine more systematically in Andamooka, it appears that there was little official effort to do so. In 1958 the APB approved some financial assistance for windlasses to be constructed by the Andamooka Progress Association (APA) and loaned to local Aboriginal people in order for them to be able to mine further underground, as well as providing some picks and shovels, in all totalling £40.⁵⁴ However, there is nothing on file to indicate whether this actually came to fruition.

⁵¹ Robert Foster, ‘Rations, Co-existence, and the Colonisation of Aboriginal Labour in the South Australian Pastoral Industry, 1860–1911’, *Aboriginal History*, vol.24, 2000, pp.24–5.

⁵² Hull to Director, Department of Aboriginal Affairs (henceforth DAA), 8 May 1967, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1967/153.

⁵³ ‘Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30, 1968’, *SAPP*, no.20 1968–69, p.15.

⁵⁴ Bills to Bartlett, 20 September 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/180; Bartlett to APB, 3 October 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/180.

While an official report in 1964 noted that Aboriginal people at Andamooka were “encouraged to mine systematically and regularly”, there are no further details.⁵⁵

Accommodation and Welfare Services

In addition to its assistance to Aboriginal people to achieve fair prices for opal in Coober Pedy, the government began to provide basic welfare services. The local Member of Parliament, R.R. Loveday, had observed the stability of the Aboriginal population there because of their engagement in the opal industry, and lamented the “primitive” living conditions that they endured. In a speech to the House of Assembly in 1960, Loveday hoped that there would be an improvement of services in the region as:

The stability of occupation is there because many natives can get a useful living from opal gouging and fossicking on the surface. I hope that everything will be done to encourage this policy in connection with native welfare.⁵⁶

The APB was concerned enough with the health of Aboriginal people on the Coober Pedy fields to appoint a full-time nursing sister to attend to their medical needs in 1955.⁵⁷ The establishment of an Aboriginal reserve there in 1959 was a particularly significant event which was ostensibly linked to Aboriginal engagement in the opal industry and exploitation, as it would become a base for the APB agent to operate from. Moreover, as the Aboriginal population had increased and became relatively stable, the reserve also became an administrative base for welfare services.⁵⁸

The possibility of establishing an Aboriginal reserve in the region was first considered by the APB in 1941 at nearby Mount Penrhyn, where the pastoral lease was unoccupied at the time. APB Board member Charles Duguid believed that establishing a reserve there would help deter Aboriginal people from frequenting the East-West railway line and the opal fields, but this proposition was never realised as the lease was

⁵⁵ ‘Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30, 1964’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1965–66, p.12.

⁵⁶ R.R. Loveday, Budget Debate Speech in House of Assembly, 5 October 1960. Copy in SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/200.

⁵⁷ ‘Minutes of the Meeting of the APB’, 17 August 1955, SRSA, GRG 52/16/2.

⁵⁸ ‘Report of the APB for the Year Ended June 30, 1961’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1962, p.13.

subsequently reoccupied.⁵⁹ While the influential APB member Duguid may have thought it desirable to deter Aboriginal people from the opal fields in the 1940s, the increasing engagement of Aboriginal people in the opal industry provoked more serious government interest in the following decade. The possibility of establishing an Aboriginal reserve in Coober Pedy with basic shelter accommodation, latrines, storage facilities, residence for a welfare officer and even a school was discussed at several meetings of the APB in 1955 and 1956.⁶⁰ However, this was not acted upon at the time because of problems with the local water supply.⁶¹

In relation to government assistance on the Coober Pedy opal fields, MacDougall wrote directly to APB Deputy Chair J.B. Cleland in March 1957, noting that the “gamble and excitement of searching for opal” was so prolific that Aboriginal people persisted even in trying wintry conditions, suffering hardship and distress, as Coober Pedy could be an unpleasant camping environment in the colder months. While he suggested that a missionary-controlled organisation that could help market Aboriginal opal and provide relief during periods of low opal returns be established, he was also adamant that an Aboriginal reserve should not be established at Coober Pedy, particularly as the issue of supplementary rations “would encourage improvidence and laziness with all its accompanying failures”.⁶²

Despite such reservations, as well as objections by the Engineering and Water Supply Department (EWSD) due to water supply issues, an Aboriginal reserve was proclaimed there in 1959.⁶³ Bartlett undertook to discourage large numbers of Aboriginal people from remaining in Coober Pedy unnecessarily, in order to counter objections from the EWSD and some miners that could have jeopardised his plan to see the reserve established.⁶⁴ Bartlett also made it clear that he did not want it to replicate “a Mission in the ordinarily accepted sense” and that Aboriginal people should be encouraged to

⁵⁹ ‘Minutes of the Meeting of the APB’, 26 February 1941; 23 April 1941, SRSA, GRG 52/16/1.

⁶⁰ ‘Minutes of the Meeting of the APB’, 17 May 1955, SRSA, GRG 52/16/2; 22 August 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/16/2.

⁶¹ ‘Minutes of the Meeting of the APB’, 17 April 1957, SRSA, GRG 52/16/2.

⁶² MacDougall to Cleland, 20 March 1957, SRSA, Government Record Series (henceforth GRS) 1002/1/6.

⁶³ Bartlett to Director of Lands, 8 October 1959, SRSA, GRG 52/1/158/63.

⁶⁴ Bartlett to Meier, 10 December 1958, SRSA, GRG 52/1/156/167.

seek employment.⁶⁵ Instead, the intent of the reserve was to be an administration and service centre to assist Aboriginal opal miners who were self-supporting, and in its early days very few Aboriginal people resided on it.⁶⁶

The establishment of the reserve enabled the APB to construct buildings and infrastructure there and coincided with the appointment of Traeger as APB Welfare Officer. The newly established reserve provided Traeger with an initial base to buy opal from Aboriginal people on the outlying fields while also carting water, rations and food supplies to them.⁶⁷ Traeger and his wife also undertook missionary work, including transporting Aboriginal children each day from the Eight Mile field to the primary school that they had lobbied to have established, and ensuring that they were bathed and cleanly attired, at the request of APB.⁶⁸ There were 21 Aboriginal children and one European child when the school opened in February 1960.⁶⁹ In the event of poor individual opal finds, some temporary work was also available on the reserve, on the proviso that recipients were expected to eventually resume their search for opal, as the industry generally provided able-bodied Aboriginal adults with the opportunity to earn a living.⁷⁰

With the establishment of the reserve, the provision of better accommodation was proposed.⁷¹ Increasing numbers of Aboriginal people began to live there, as the opal industry encouraged a degree of permanence, and by the early 1960s a number of Aboriginal people were purchasing small pre-fabricated cottages from their pension trust accounts. APB staff, concerned that some Aboriginal people misspent the money they made from opal, encouraged this by ordering the building material for cottages to be held on site.⁷² In 1961 and 1962 volunteers from Adelaide travelled to Coober Pedy to assist in the erection of cottages, ablution facilities and a small government store on

⁶⁵ Bartlett to Meier, 10 December 1958, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/167.

⁶⁶ 'Report of the APB for the Year Ended June 30, 1962', *SAPP*, no.20a, 1962, p.10.

⁶⁷ F.H. Traeger, 'History of the Coober Pedy Lutheran Mission', pp.1-4; Rhonda Traeger, 'No Empty Desert', in Madeline Brunato (ed.), *South Australian Scrapbook: Glimpses of Colourful People and Events*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1979, p.152.

⁶⁸ Bartlett to Traeger, 27 October 1959, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1959/133; Traeger, 'History of the Coober Pedy Lutheran Mission', p.4.

⁶⁹ Kerry E. Medway, *Coober Pedy: Opal Wonderland of Australia*, Seventh Edition, Coober Pedy: Catacomb Church, 2005, p.28.

⁷⁰ 'Report of the APB for the Year Ended June 30, 1962', *SAPP*, no.20a, 1962, p.11.

⁷¹ 'Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30, 1965', *SAPP*, no.20a, 1965-66, p.6.

⁷² Bartlett to APB, 6 June 1962, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1962/31a.

the reserve.⁷³ In 1963 the superintendent of the reserve informed the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) that he was in a position to sell two cottages immediately, and requested that he be allowed to hold another on hand “in the event of a substantial amount of Opal being dug by an aborigine”.⁷⁴

Throughout the 1960s increasing numbers of Aboriginal people began to reside on the reserve rather than the opal fields, with improvements to power, water and ablution facilities, and with housing repair and maintenance programs being implemented.⁷⁵ Local opal miner and author Vin Wake observed that by the late 1960s fewer Aboriginal people were now camping near the fields, preferring to live on the reserve, while still involved in the opal industry.⁷⁶ The Annual Report of the AAB for 1969 notes that “Coober Pedy continues to be the one Reserve” in the state where Aboriginal people could be self-employed, estimating the average income obtained from opal for an Aboriginal family to be in the range of \$2,500 to \$3,000 per annum. It also expresses reservations that some Aboriginal families still moved between the various fields, and the implications that this had for erecting permanent housing.⁷⁷ Clearly the AAB underestimated the advantages that some Aboriginal people felt residing close to the fields, giving them ready access to opal mining and their traditional economic base, as well as the benefits of camping close to kin, as noted in the previous chapter.

By 1967 there were 10 houses for Aboriginal people on the Reserve, as well as administration buildings, a workshop, a hall, a clinic and ablution facilities. There were also several bush-shelters and dugouts on the reserve.⁷⁸ An Aboriginal Housing Society was formed in Coober Pedy in 1973 and received a grant of \$50,000. As an officially incorporated entity, it gave the local Aboriginal community the ability to control their own affairs in relation to housing through the establishment of a duly elected committee, and the capacity to collect rent, and provide repair and maintenance

⁷³ Millar to APB, 6 June 1962, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1961/31a; Australian Council of Churches Press Release, ‘Coober Pedy Work Camp’, 28 August 1961, State Library of South Australia (henceforth SLSA), PRG 1564/1.

⁷⁴ Superintendent Coober Pedy to Director DAA, 18 December 1963, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1962/31a.

⁷⁵ ‘Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30, 1969’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1969, p.20.

⁷⁶ P. Vin Wake, *Opal Men*, Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1969, p.150.

⁷⁷ ‘Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30, 1969’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1969, p.21.

⁷⁸ R.H. Highman, Superintendent Coober Pedy, ‘Annual Report—Coober Pedy Reserve and Coober Pedy Area. 1966–67’, 20 July 1967, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1967/9.

services.⁷⁹ In 1975 the Coober Pedy reserve was transferred to the Aboriginal Lands Trust (ALT) and leased back to the local Aboriginal community, which adopted the name Umoona, meaning ‘red mulga tree’.⁸⁰

Some services were also provided by the state at Andamooka, although they were more basic compared to Coober Pedy. Due to the number of Aboriginal people now working on the opal fields and reports of their unsatisfactory living conditions, as well as issues with the local water supply, the possibility of establishing a dedicated Aboriginal reserve at Andamooka was raised by APB Secretary Bartlett in 1956.⁸¹ In response, the APB superintendent of reserves visited and, after discussions with the APA, considered that a reserve was not necessary, as Aboriginal people appeared to be living harmoniously with the general community. There were generally no complaints against Aboriginal people there, other than “occasional over indulgence in liquor” which could be readily dealt with.⁸² MP Loveday, whose electorate included Andamooka, was also aware of the situation there and considered that it was not necessary to establish a reserve there.⁸³

In response to the situation at Andamooka, local school teacher and secretary of the APA, R.J. Bills, was appointed the APB’s part-time representative there in July 1956. He was paid £100 per annum and vested with “authority to give constant supervision to sanitation, hygiene and medical attention”, as well as issuing rations to those Aboriginal people who needed them at the time.⁸⁴ Bills served as the APB’s agent until 1960 when he left the district, and several other part-time occupants were appointed, including J. Mills and T.M. Clarke, who had also worked there as a nurse.⁸⁵ The APB provided a small galvanised-iron building for use as a hospital building in 1958 and appointed Clarke to nurse the Aboriginal community, which she did for 12 years while

⁷⁹ ‘Report of the Director-General of Community Welfare for the Year Ended June 30, 1973’, *SAPP*, no.23, 1973–74, p.30.

⁸⁰ Medway, *Coober Pedy*, p.35.

⁸¹ Bartlett to Superintendent of Reserves, 24 May 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/181.

⁸² Millar to Bartlett, 13 July 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/156/181.

⁸³ Loveday to Bartlett, 30 April 1957, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1957/63.

⁸⁴ Bartlett to Bills, 26 July 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/179.

⁸⁵ Weightman to Bartlett, 7 December 1960, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/180; ‘Minutes of the Meeting of the APB’, 14 December 1960; 23 March 1961, SRSA, GRG 52/16/3.

also serving the general community for no additional remuneration.⁸⁶ By 1959, however, concerns were raised that the roles of school master and APB agent were too much for one individual.⁸⁷ This was raised again in 1962 when it was suggested that the Port Augusta–based APB welfare officer visit more regularly.⁸⁸ Eventually the APB considered that the needs of Aboriginal people at Andamooka warranted its permanent presence there and a full-time welfare officer was appointed in 1962.⁸⁹

The government provided some very rudimentary assistance in accommodating Aboriginal people at Andamooka. In 1956, for instance, the APB provided several bags of cement for an Aboriginal pensioner and former miner who wanted to construct his own dwelling.⁹⁰ In 1957, the APB arranged for several tons of second hand galvanised iron from Woomera to be given to Aboriginal people at Andamooka to construct their own shelters.⁹¹ Eva Strangways lived on the opal fields there for 16 years, and recalled how the government provided her family with a two-room shack which had no running water or power, but thought that it was “good enough to live” in.⁹² Her daughter, Lynette Strangways, also remembered that the shack was provided by the government, and how “a partition was put in to divide it into two sections. Kids slept in the front kitchen area but most of the time we camped outside”.⁹³

The AAB reported in 1964 that Aboriginal housing was not a problem at Andamooka, as all Aboriginal people there on a permanent basis lived in huts and were “at all times encouraged to buy suitable dwellings”.⁹⁴ For instance, the former APB had earlier arranged for the purchase and erection of a simple garage-type dwelling for a pensioner

⁸⁶ Andamooka Area School, *Andamooka Then and Now*, Andamooka: Andamooka Area School, 1980, p.47: Bartlett to APB, 15 January 1958, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/3.

⁸⁷ Macaulay to APB, 22 May 1959, SRSA, GRS 1278/1/Box 58, vol.10.

⁸⁸ Macaulay to APB, 26 February 1962, SRSA, GRS 1278/1/Box 58, vol.12.

⁸⁹ ‘Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30, 1963’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1964, p.16.

⁹⁰ ‘Minutes of the Meeting of the APB’, 22 August 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/32/91.

⁹¹ Bartlett to Bills, 10 August 1956, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1956/180. See also ‘Minutes of the Meeting of the APB’, 7 November 1962, SRSA, GRG 52/16/4 where another example of basic housing assistance to an Aboriginal person at Andamooka is detailed.

⁹² Eva Strangways, ‘Travelling the Stations’, in Adele Pring (ed.), *Women of the Centre*, Apollo Bay: Pascoe Publishing, 1990, p.134. See also Bartlett to Bills, 25 October 1960, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/45; Bills to Bartlett, 3 November 1960, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1958/45, for comments on the APB providing assistance to the Strangways family for a pre-fabricated dwelling.

⁹³ Lynette Strangways, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 2 November 2013.

⁹⁴ ‘Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30^h, 1964’, *SAPP*, no.20, 1965–1966, p.12.

valued at £140, which was to be repaid from her trust account.⁹⁵ In contrast to Coober Pedy, however, there was never a dedicated Aboriginal reserve in Andamooka for the reasons noted earlier, and by the late 1960s and early 1970s most of the Aboriginal community had left. Some of the reasons for this are detailed in the following chapter.

In contrast to Coober Pedy, the level of official Aboriginal affairs support at Andamooka was considerably less and in June 1967 the welfare officer there was relocated due to a declining Aboriginal population.⁹⁶ Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy continued to engage extensively in the opal industry on the Coober Pedy fields well into the 1970s, while those at Andamooka began leaving the industry during this period. Today there is a large Aboriginal community in Coober Pedy, estimated in the range of 300 to 500 people.⁹⁷ There is also a wide range of services available to Aboriginal people, although their engagement in the opal industry is far less extensive than in the 1960s and 1970s. In Andamooka there is no resident Aboriginal community, although one Aboriginal person has recently returned to mine opal there on a part-time basis with several European miners.⁹⁸ It is tempting to speculate on what may have happened at Andamooka, and whether Aboriginal people may have persisted with opal mining had a reserve and more favourable accommodation and services been provided.

Conclusion

As Aboriginal engagement in the opal industry began increasing, the government responded by providing some support in order to encourage the industriousness of Aboriginal people, with a view to their integration into the broader Australian society. In order to encourage Aboriginal people to mine for opal and to prevent exploitation, the government established a buying system in Coober Pedy. This appeared to have had

⁹⁵ 'Minutes of the Meeting of the APB', 7 November 1962, SRSA, GRG 52/16/4.

⁹⁶ 'Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30, 1967', *SAPP*, no.20, 1967, p.17.

⁹⁷ Petter Naessan, 'The Etymology of Coober Pedy, South Australia', *Aboriginal History*, vol.34, 2010, p.217. According to Naessan, an Adelaide-based linguist who has worked in northern South Australia including the Coober Pedy region, the Aboriginal population there is hard to estimate precisely as a number of its residents are highly mobile, and he has arrived at these figures after discussions with both Aboriginal and European people in the area. Naeesan has conducted significant research in the region since 1999. See for example Petter Naessan, 'Manta Tjamaku, Manta Kamiku—Grandfather Country, Grandmother Country: A Philological and Sociolinguistic Ecology of the Concept 'Antakirinya'', unpublished MA thesis, University of Adelaide, 2000; Petter Naessan 'Yankunytjatjara Continuity and Change: A Linguistic Ecology of the Yankunytjatjara Language With Particular Emphasis on Coober Pedy, South Australia', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, 2009.

⁹⁸ Chris Larkins, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 30 October 2013.

some success and Aboriginal miners were able to negotiate fair prices. In contrast, this support was not provided at Andamooka, where it was felt that a more competitive buying environment existed and that Aboriginal people had not been exploited to the same extent. While the state offered some encouragement for Aboriginal people to systematically mine, and attempted to provide some support in the form of rudimentary equipment, there is little evidence to gauge its seriousness or success.

To support an established Aboriginal opal-fields community, a range of basic accommodation and welfare services were also provided at Coober Pedy, and to a lesser extent at Andamooka. For instance, a dedicated Aboriginal reserve was established at Coober Pedy, initially to assist Aboriginal people enhance their engagement in the industry as self-supporting miners and as a base for their opal sales, in addition to providing housing, but no such facilities were provided at Andamooka. There is currently a large established Aboriginal community at Coober Pedy, although engagement in the opal industry has seriously declined. There is no extant Aboriginal community at Andamooka, with a significant number of people having left by about 1970. The reasons for the general decline in Aboriginal engagement in the northern South Australian opal industry and the departure of the Aboriginal community from Andamooka are the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE DEMISE OF ABORIGINAL INVOLVEMENT

Introduction

This chapter examines the changing nature of Aboriginal participation on the opal fields after several decades of sustained and successful mining activity. Aboriginal involvement in the industry began to decline significantly in Andamooka in the late 1960s, and at Coober Pedy a decade later, for several reasons. The first of these were diminishing levels of opal production, which heralded the end of the ‘golden era’ of mining. Significant oil price rises in the 1970s and increased operating costs led to technological change which would also contribute to the demise of Aboriginal participation in the industry. The most significant technical innovation which adversely affected Aboriginal participation in the industry, particularly around Coober Pedy, was the automated noodling machines. Simultaneously, the impact of recent policy changes, in particular the extension of unemployment benefits, also had major implications for Aboriginal people working on the opal fields. With opportunities for Aboriginal people diminishing on the opal fields, there was also an increasing movement to more urbanised centres by many Aboriginal people from Andamooka, in order to access better services and employment opportunities.

The Declining Opal Industry

A significant decline in the Aboriginal and European population on the Andamooka opal fields began to occur during the mid to late 1960s, coinciding with a general downturn in activity around this period. It is estimated that by the late 1960s Andamooka had an overall population of 2,000, with 300 to 400 people working on the fields at the time.¹ However, this has dwindled to approximately 450–500 since the 1970s and has not recovered.² A more recent estimate suggests that only about 25–30 people are currently mining on the fields there.³ In 1957 the Aboriginal population

¹ Stefan Bilka, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 29 October 2013; Dick Clarke, interview with Michael Green, Andamooka, 1 July 1978. Transcript in possession of the author.

² *Advertiser*, 3 August 1977, p.23; Jeffrey G. Olliver, Steven G. Carr, Colin H.H. Connor and Douglas C. Scott, ‘Andamooka Opalfields: A Geological Guide for the Prospector’, *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book* (henceforth *DMERB*) 78/86, 1978, p.2.

³ Stefan Bilka, interview, 29 October 2013.

there peaked at between 300-400 and throughout the early 1960s exceeded 100.⁴ However, the last recorded estimate of Aboriginal people there was 75 in 1969.⁵ Due to the declining Aboriginal population at Andamooka, the Aboriginal Affairs Board (AAB) even transferred the resident welfare officer it had appointed there in 1964 to another location three years later, with the township now being serviced from Marree in the state's far north.⁶ By the 1970s few Aboriginal people remained on the opal fields: the exceptions were Max and Lorna Thomas, who continued noodling there in the 1970s and 1980s, and Peter Tilmouth, who died in a mining accident in 1973.⁷ There is currently only one Aboriginal man, who has recently recommenced mining at Andamooka on a part-time basis with two European partners, after a successful career away from the industry.⁸

While there was a significant population decline in the Aboriginal community in Andamooka, this was not the case in Coober Pedy, where there is still a large Aboriginal population, although their involvement in mining has dwindled, as have levels of activity on the fields. While the 1970s were regarded as “the golden days” of opal mining in Coober Pedy with about 1,000 people mining for opal, there are now fewer than 100 miners actively prospecting.⁹ The number of Aboriginal people working on the Coober Pedy fields also began to gradually decline in the late 1970s, and one long-term Aboriginal resident and opal miner recently estimated that fewer than 20 Aboriginal people were engaged in full-time mining by the 1980s, and this number decreased again in the 1990s.¹⁰

⁴ See E.P.D. O'Driscoll, 'The Possibility of Augmenting Groundwater Supplies—Andamooka Opal Field', *Mining Review for the Half-Year Ended 31 December, 1957*, no.107, 1959, p.42; 'Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board (henceforth AAB) for the Year Ended June 30, 1963', *South Australian Parliamentary Papers* (henceforth *SAPP*), no.20, 1964, p.16; 'Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30, 1964', *SAPP*, no.20, 1965–66, p.11.

⁵ 'Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30, 1969', *SAPP*, no.20, 1969, p.27.

⁶ 'Report of the AAB for the Year Ended June 30, 1967', *SAPP*, no. 20, 1967, p.17. Chris Larkins, who was living in Andamooka at the time remembered how it was serviced from the AAB's Marree office. Chris Larkins, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 30 October 2013.

⁷ Bob Starkey, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 11 November 2013. Information relating to this fatality is contained in State Records of South Australia (henceforth SRSA), Government Record Series (henceforth GRS) file 6038/4/16/1973/715.

⁸ Chris Larkins, interview, 30 October 2013.

⁹ L.C. Barnes and B.W. Atterton, 'The Opal Industry in South Australia, Report No.4. The 1981 Survey of Mining Equipment and Calculation of Value of Opal Produced', *DMERB 82/75*, October, 1982, p.6; *Sunday Mail*, 2 March 2014, p.62.

¹⁰ George Cooley, interview with Mike Harding, 29 August 2013, Coober Pedy.

In contrast to Andamooka there is still a large Aboriginal community at Coober Pedy where a few still occasionally mine opal on a recreational or part-time basis. The Aboriginal population at Coober Pedy was estimated to be about 260 in 1983, when the total community numbered 3,000–4,000.¹¹ Linguist Petter Naessan has estimated that there were 300–500 Aboriginal people around Coober Pedy in 2010, although the population is highly mobile.¹² In comparison, a recent estimate of the town's total population was around 2,500.¹³

One significant reason for declining Aboriginal involvement in the opal industry at Andamooka were the falling yields and declining profits, which resulted in many miners leave the industry or relocating to Coober Pedy, which would remain profitable for a few more years. According to one Andamooka opal miner, the departure of many miners resulted in the amount of material left for Aboriginal people to noodle decreasing.¹⁴ Searching for opal had also becoming increasingly difficult for Aboriginal people at Andamooka as it now necessitated deeper digging, requiring machinery that most Aboriginal people lacked, and this may have prompted some to move to Coober Pedy.¹⁵ Opal mining in Coober Pedy around this time was relatively easier, according to one Aboriginal woman, as “you didn't have to dig down so deep to find the opal ... we found lots of those [opalised] shells and fish bones and found good opal”.¹⁶

Opal production at Coober Pedy was also declining by around 1980, which the Department of Mines and Energy (DME) attributed to the depressed price of rough opal, increases in the cost of fuel, explosives and the general cost of living, and a lack of significant new opal fields being discovered. Opal production at Coober Pedy was estimated at \$33 million in 1979, but had gradually declined to about \$16 million in

¹¹ Jan Sundberg, *Umoona Review: Housing Needs and Intentions of the Aboriginal Community in Coober Pedy*, unpublished manuscript, 1983, p.4.

¹² Petter Naessan, 'The Etymology of Coober Pedy, South Australia', *Aboriginal History*, vol.34, 2010, p.217.

¹³ *Sunday Mail*, 2 March 2014, p.63.

¹⁴ Geoff Watson, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 30 October 2013.

¹⁵ Chris Larkins, interview, 30 October 2013; Stan Starkey, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 7 November 2013. A less significant reason that several people have suggested is that extensive unseasonal rainfalls in the early 1970s caused considerable flooding of mines at Andamooka, which made it more difficult for Aboriginal people to noodle at a time when opal production there was declining. Alan Osterstock, *Andamooka Opal*, Adelaide: Alan Osterstock, 1976, p.11; David Spargo, interview with Mike Harding, Andamooka, 28 October 2013.

¹⁶ Elaine Moosha, interview with Mike Harding, Quorn, 8 November 2013.

1986, and in response the DME again undertook a subsidised exploration program with 221 exploratory shafts drilled.¹⁷ Despite such initiatives to locate new fields and increase understanding of the regional opal geology, the industry has never returned to its earlier ‘golden days’, and in December 2010 the entire annual South Australian opal production was estimated at only \$6.17 million.¹⁸

Technology and Economic Change

The opal industry was also affected by technological and economic change, a phenomenon throughout Australia in the 1960s and 1970s that saw the disappearance of many jobs in rural industries that had been undertaken by Aboriginal people. Opal mining in its earlier days relied on the use of simple equipment such as picks, shovels and hand windlasses. However, as prices for opal began to increase, a range of mechanical aids began to emerge in the 1960s to assist miners on the opal fields and these enabled them to rework old diggings.¹⁹ These included bulldozer and backhoes, power winches, mechanised hoists, vacuum blowers, bucket elevators, tunnelling machines, Calweld and auger drills, and noodling machines.²⁰ While the use of bulldozers had created some employment opportunities for Aboriginal people, particularly on the Coober Pedy fields, as noted in Chapter Four, the impact of noodling machines in the 1970s would have less favourable effects.

The introduction of noodling machines was linked to changing economic circumstances. The Australian economy, like those of many industrialised economies, enjoyed a successful period from the 1940s to 1970 known as ‘the long boom’, which was characterised by strong economic growth and low unemployment.²¹ However, this world economic boom “spluttered out” during the early 1970s due to crises in the

¹⁷ R.S. Robertson and D.C. Scott, *Geology of the Coober Pedy Precious Stones Field: Result of Investigations, 1981–86*, Report of Investigations 56, Adelaide: Government Printer, 1990, pp.5, 11.

¹⁸ Mark Correll, ‘South Australian Mineral Resource Production for the Six Months Ended 30 June 2010’, *DMERB*, 2010/0024, 2010, p.2.

¹⁹ Stephen Aracic, *Rediscover Opals in Australia*, Lightning Ridge: Stephen Aracic, 1999, p.47.

²⁰ L.C. Barnes, I.J. Townsend, R.S. Robertson and D.C. Scott, *Opal: South Australia’s Gemstone*, Handbook No.5, Revised Edition, Adelaide: Department of Mines and Energy Geological Survey of South Australia, 1992, pp. 27–36.

²¹ Rodney Maddock, ‘The Long Boom 1940–1970’, in Rodney Maddock and Ian W. McLean (eds), *The Australian Economy in the Long Run*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp.79–80.

international money system and major oil price rises, and Australia was not immune.²² Prices for Arab oil nearly quadrupled in a three-month period in late 1973, which further induced inflationary pressure at a time when economic growth was slowing.²³ According to one official report, increasing fuels costs were a contributing factor to a 27 per cent decline in opal production in South Australia between 1973 and 1974.²⁴ A number of Aboriginal people who worked in the opal industry also recall how the oil price rises in the 1970s hit the industry hard.²⁵

Because of high operating costs, many miners were now forced to reprocess waste material that was discarded and left in dumps by bulldozers or tunnelling machines. In the past some opal may have been missed in this process, but it was often considered unprofitable to re-search the waste material and it was left for noodlers. However, as economic circumstances changed, increasing numbers of miners began to reprocess discarded material using noodling machines. Discarded mullock from old dumps was fed into a hopper, with the finer material screened out and the coarser material placed on a conveyor belt that passed through a darkened cabin of the noodling machine. Material passing through the noodling machine was exposed to ultra-violet light and opal, which was identified by its fluorescent appearance, was then manually collected by hand.²⁶ This process subsequently led to the recovery of significant quantities of opal “for many years from all fields”.²⁷

²² Rodney Maddock ‘The Australian Economy in the Very Long Run’, in Maddock and McLean (eds), *The Australian Economy*, p.16; Adrian Pagan, ‘The End of the Long Boom’, in Maddock and McLean (eds), *The Australian Economy*, pp.116, 128.

²³ Anonymous, ‘The Australian Economy’, *Australian Economic Review*, vol.6, no.4, December 1973, p.4; Barry Hughes, *Exit Full Employment*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1980, p.xiii.

²⁴ ‘Annual Report of the Director of Mines and Government Geologist (henceforth DMGG) for the Year Ended 30 June, 1975’, p.14, SRSA, GRS 9226/1/1.

²⁵ George Cooley, interview, 29 August 2013; John Cooley, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 27 October 2013; Maureen Williams, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 30 August 2013.

²⁶ Barnes *et al.*, *Opal: South Australia’s Gemstone*, p.36; Robert G. Haill, *Opals of Australia*. Adelaide: Axiom Publishing, 2003, p.76.

²⁷ Jenny Davidson and Judy Underwood (compilers), *Images of Coober Pedy 1915–2015*, Coober Pedy: Coober Pedy Historical Society, 2015, p.98.



Figure Seven: Noodling Machine. Department of State Development, South Australia.

Noodling machines were introduced onto the Coober Pedy opal fields in the mid-1970s, and John Cooley first recalled their presence on the Fifteen Mile and Seventeen Mile fields around this time.²⁸ Kathleen Chamberlain, who was born at the Coober Pedy Eight Mile, recalled leaving the district for some years and observed noodling machines for the first time in the 1970s when she returned.²⁹ By 1980 there were, according to one official report, 15 noodling machines in operation at Coober Pedy, but none in Andamooka.³⁰ Official figures in 1986 indicate that there were 24 noodling machines at Coober Pedy and six at Andamooka.³¹ Opal miner John Dunstan also believed that there were close to 30 noodling machines in Coober Pedy in the 1980s.³²

A number of Aboriginal opal miners interviewed were clearly aware of the economic pressures confronting the industry. According to John Cooley, the reason for old dumps being reworked was:

²⁸ John Cooley, interview, 27 October 2013.

²⁹ Kathleen Chamberlain, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 24 October 2013.

³⁰ Barnes and Atterton, 'The Opal Industry in South Australia', p.6.

³¹ I.J. Townsend, and P.P. Crettenden, 'The Opal Industry in South Australia, Report No.9. The 1986 Survey of Mining Equipment and Calculation of Value of Opal Produced', *DMERB*, 87/102, August, 1987, p.2.

³² John Dunstan, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 25 August 2013.

fuel prices was [sic] getting high, plus they [European miners] were throwing out heaps too. That was one of the main reasons. Yeah. Fuel prices. That sort of messed it up for everyone.

He also made the point that second-grade opal that had once been discarded was increasingly being sought by Chinese opal buyers who were now coming to the fields to purchase material that could be processed far more economically by cheap labour in their home country, hence a further incentive for miners to rework the dirt.³³ His brother, George Cooley, also thought that some European miners who had been less sophisticated in the past were also now more aware of the benefits of working the dumps and tailings more thoroughly.³⁴

Because of these machines there was less material for Aboriginal people to noodle, with serious consequences for many who were no longer able to do so profitably: they effectively “killed the individual fossicker”.³⁵ According to Stan Starkey, noodling machines were “a kick in the guts” for Aboriginal people, and a contributing factor in some leaving the industry.³⁶ For many Aboriginal people noodling was “their bread and butter” and the arrival of noodling machines made earning a living much harder.³⁷

Emily Munyungka Austin declared that:

Every day I'd get up early and go out to the opal fields. Plenty of opal back then. Opal *pulkah* – a lot on the old dumps. It was before the noodling machines so there was plenty of opal lying around.³⁸

A number of Aboriginal people interviewed also expressed their displeasure with noodling machines and how they were no longer welcome on the opal dumps as ‘no noodling’ signs became commonplace.³⁹ Describing the noodling machines as “a nuisance”, one individual described how some people resisted the prohibition on

³³ John Cooley, interview, 27 October 2013.

³⁴ George Cooley, interview, 29 August 2013.

³⁵ Yanni Athanasiadis, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 28 August 2013.

³⁶ Stan Starkey, interview, 7 November 2013.

³⁷ Bill Lennon, interview with Mike Harding, Mount Willoughby, 26 August 2013.

³⁸ Emily Munyungka Austin, *My Young Days*, Coober Pedy: Umoona Aged Care Aboriginal Corporation, 2006, p.67. Original emphasis retained. *Pulkah* is a Yankunytjatjara adjective/adverb that can mean ‘big, large, much or many’. See Cliff Goddard (compiler), *Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, Revised Second Edition, Alice Springs: IAD Press, 1996, p.142.

³⁹ Glenys Dodd, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 29 August 2013; Pauline Lewis, interview with Mike Harding, 2 September 2013, Coober Pedy; Maureen Williams, interview, 30 August 2013; Emily Austin, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 2 November 2013.

noodling and, although no longer welcome to do so, maintained that “we still sit out there and noodle; we just don’t care what he [sic] say”.⁴⁰ Another Aboriginal person also recalled how some people resisted this:

Sometimes we’d go out, sneak our way in, hey. Take that sign down that says ‘no noodling’. We’d still go there and we’d watch ... where that hole is – they’ve got that noise [the sound of the winch cable] coming up and that wire coming up. As soon as we see that [wire] start moving, because they’re coming up from the bottom, off we go, off in the car we go.⁴¹

The introduction of new technology on the opal fields and its impacts were in some ways similar to those of other rural industries that were significant employers of Aboriginal people.⁴² This included the northern pastoral industry, which had relied on cheap Aboriginal labour for many years and began to restructure in the 1960s, partly in response to the introduction of award wages to Aboriginal workers, and the removal of discriminatory clauses relating to Aboriginal employment in federal and state industrial awards. However, another significant contributing factor to the large-scale loss of Aboriginal workers in the pastoral industry was its changing nature from being labour intensive to becoming more capital intensive, and increasing mechanisation which required specialised contract labour.⁴³

⁴⁰ Irene Dingaman-Johnson, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 4 November 2013.

⁴¹ Lulu O’Toole-Boland, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 12 November 2013.

⁴² For a discussion on the demise of rural employment in other parts of Australia and the implications for Aboriginal people, see Jon Altman and Ann Daly, ‘Do Fluctuations in the Australian Macroeconomy Influence Aboriginal Employment Status?’, *Economic Papers: A Journal of Applied Economics and Policy*, vol.11, no.3, September 1992, pp.33, 37; Charlie Fox, *Working Australia*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991, p.154–5; Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770–1972*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with Black Books, 1996, pp.263–4; Sally Hodson, ‘Nyungars and Work: Aboriginal Labour in the Great Southern Region, Western Australia 1936–1972’, unpublished MA thesis, University of Western Australia, 1989, pp.87–92; Barry Morris, ‘From Underemployment to Unemployment: The Changing Role of Aborigines in a Rural Economy’, *Mankind*, vol.13, no.6, April 1983, pp.499–516; John M. White, ‘On the Road to Nerrigundah: A Historical Anthropology of Indigenous–Settler Relations in the Eurobodalla Region of New South Wales’, unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2010, pp.179–180.

⁴³ Thalia Anthony, ‘Labour Relations on Northern Cattle Stations: Feudal Exploitation and Accommodation’, *The Drawing Board: An Australian Review of Public Affairs*, vol.4, no.3, March 2004, pp.129–30; Peggy Brock, ‘Pastoral Stations and Reserves in South and Central Australia, 1850s–1950s’, in Ann McGrath and Kay Saunders with Jackie Huggins (eds), *Aboriginal Workers*, Special Issue of *Labour History*, no.69, November 1995, pp.111–2; Antonia de Lawyer, ‘Davenport and Umeewarra Since 1937’, unpublished BA (Hons) thesis, University of Adelaide, 1972, p.30; Rodney Harrison, *Shared Landscapes: Archaeologies of Attachment and the Pastoral Industry in New South Wales*,

The Changing Nature of Government Policy

Around the time that employment opportunities for Aboriginal people in the opal industry were diminishing, changes in government policy also began to reduce its attraction to some. The introduction of unemployment benefits had major implications for some Aboriginal opal seekers and was a particularly contentious issue that had begun to surface in the 1960s. This was because they were seen to be “poised uneasily between being a ‘welfare’ and a ‘workforce’ program”, and considered by some as a disincentive to work.⁴⁴ According to several Aboriginal opal miners, the introduction of unemployment benefits in the 1970s was a major disincentive that caused some people to lose interest in opal mining. According to one:

they stuffed it up when they bought the dole money in ... it made people lazy ... nobody didn't go out noodling anymore because money's there ... thinking about it, it just stopped people from working.⁴⁵

Other Aboriginal people also expressed similar sentiments, reflecting on how “sit-down money”, as one person referred to unemployment benefits, made some people lazy and uninterested in opal mining.⁴⁶ It was also emphasised that prior to the introduction of unemployment benefits, working in the opal industry was necessary in order to survive financially, without having to resort to being issued with rations or rely on other forms of assistance.⁴⁷

Several Europeans also observed how the introduction of unemployment benefits in the 1970s was a disincentive for Aboriginal opal miners to continue working on the fields.⁴⁸ In 1976 a lay missionary at Coober Pedy informed the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs that easier access to

Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004, pp.45–6; Jane M. Jacobs, ‘Aboriginal Land Rights in Port Augusta’, unpublished MA thesis, University of Adelaide, 1983, p.224.

⁴⁴ Will Sanders, ‘The Politics of Unemployment Benefit for Aborigines: Some Consequences of Economic Marginalisation’, in Deborah Wade-Marshall and Peter Loveday (eds), *Employment and Unemployment: A Collection of Papers*, Darwin: Australian National University North Australia Research Unit Monograph, 1985, p.137.

⁴⁵ Bernard Lennon, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 22 August 2013.

⁴⁶ For example Bobby Brown, interview with Mike Harding, Whyalla, 3 November 2013; Kathleen Chamberlain, interview, 24 October 2013; John Cooley, interview, 27 October 2013; Ian Crombie, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 24 August 2013.

⁴⁷ Bernard Lennon, interview, 22 August 2013; Bill Lennon, interview, 26 August 2013; Anonymous Individuals, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 12 November 2013.

⁴⁸ Yanni Athanasiadis, interview, 28 August 2013; John Dunstan, interview, 25 August 2013.

unemployment benefits had discouraged some from working on the opal fields.⁴⁹ In contrast to an earlier period when the level of Aboriginal engagement in the opal industry was significant, a review in 1983 found that only 34 per cent of household heads in Coober Pedy were employed at the time, with the remainder receiving some form of social service payments.⁵⁰

Demographic Change

The changing social environment around the time that Aboriginal participation in the opal industry at Andamooka was beginning to decline resulted in many moving to Coober Pedy or larger urban locations, most notably Port Augusta. This was a general Australian phenomenon which by the 1960s had seen a gradual drift of Aboriginal people from smaller communities to urban centres, and within two decades an estimated 35 per cent of the Aboriginal population were living in small towns. There were a number of contributing factors towards these demographic shifts, including access to improved education and medical services, social services and employment opportunities.⁵¹ This also coincided with the reduction of rural labour market opportunities in industries that employed significant numbers of Aboriginal people throughout Australia.

A lack of services in Andamooka at the time was a significant contributing factor to some people leaving, coinciding with an increase in resources provided in Coober Pedy and Port Augusta as the government took more interest in Aboriginal affairs.⁵² As noted earlier in this thesis, there was already a considerable degree of mobility between the Andamooka and Coober Pedy opal fields as Aboriginal people mined at both centres. However, as the boom period at Andamooka diminished, and mining opportunities began dwindling in the 1960s and 1970s, both Aboriginal and European people began moving to Coober Pedy.⁵³

⁴⁹ Schrapel to Johnson, 4 May 1977, Lutheran Archive (henceforth LA), 'Coober Pedy SA Correspondence, etc (1971–1977)', Coober Pedy Congregational Boxes 550.000, LA 1996/666.

⁵⁰ Sundberg, *Umoona Review*, p.10.

⁵¹ Gordon Briscoe, 'A Social History of the Northern Central Region of South Australia: 1950–1979', unpublished MA thesis, Australian National University, 1991, p.57; E.K. Fisk, *The Aboriginal Economy in Town and Country*, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin and Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1985, p.9.

⁵² Bob Starkey, interview, 11 November 2013; Stefan Bilka, interview, 29 October 2013.

⁵³ Rena Briand, *White Man in a Hole*, Melbourne: Phuong-Hoang Press, 1971, p.141.

In addition to the establishment of the Aboriginal Reserve at Coober Pedy, the Aborigines Protection Board (APB) was also keen to ensure the presence of a major administrative and service centre there.⁵⁴ Such services were limited at Andamooka and, as noted earlier in this chapter, the APB welfare officer there was relocated in 1967.⁵⁵ During the 1970s Aboriginal organisations in Coober Pedy began offering an increased range of services to Aboriginal people, while also providing more local employment opportunities. Several prominent Aboriginal miners, including George Cooley and Bill Lennon, found employment with local Aboriginal community organisations.⁵⁶

Another location that Aboriginal people from Andamooka began moving to around this time was Port Augusta, a major regional centre situated approximately 300 kilometres north of Adelaide at the head of the Spencer Gulf. According to geographer Fay Gale, people often came to Port Augusta for access to medical services and ended up staying longer to be closer to family members. Because of the importance of kinship, the presence of family members in Port Augusta was an incentive to ‘migrate’ to Port Augusta (and other urban centres), and this “snowballing effect” was similar to patterns of southern European migration to Australia.⁵⁷ By 1980 Port Augusta had the second largest Aboriginal population in the state outside of Adelaide.⁵⁸

The reason for some Aboriginal people from Andamooka moving to Port Augusta was also the establishment of a reserve and associated services that they were not able to access previously. Aboriginal people from pastoral stations and the opal industry had for many years used the Umeewarra mission in Port Augusta, which later became the Davenport reserve, often during periods of industry downturn.⁵⁹ A number of

⁵⁴ ‘Report of the Aborigines Protection Board (henceforth APB) for the Year Ended June 30, 1962’, *SAPP*, no.20a, 1962, p.10.

⁵⁵ Stefan Bilka, interview, 29 October 2013; Chris Larkins, interview, 30 October 2013.

⁵⁶ George Cooley, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 22 August 2013; Bill Lennon, interview, 26 August 2013. Both of these men also retained an ongoing interest in the opal industry while employed with Aboriginal community organisations. Bill Lennon returned to the opal industry and established his own business in Coober Pedy, as noted in Chapter Four.

⁵⁷ Fay Gale, *Urban Aborigines*, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1972, pp.74, 85; Fay Gale, ‘Aborigines in Australian Society: Urbanisation’, in James Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People: An Encyclopaedia of the Nation, its People and Their Origins*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1988, p.240.

⁵⁸ Jane M. Jacobs, ‘Politics and the Cultural Landscape: The Case of Aboriginal Land Rights’, *Australian Geographical Studies*, vol.26, no.2, 1988, p.252.

⁵⁹ de Lawyer, ‘Davenport and Umeewarra Since 1937’, pp.53–4; ‘Report of the APB for the Year Ended June 30, 1956’, *SAPP*, no. 20a, 1956–57, p.9.

Aboriginal people who were actively involved in the opal industry had an association with the Umeewarra mission over the years, including the following families: Amos, Austin, Brown, Crombie, Dingaman, Lennon, Strangways and Waye.⁶⁰ Several Aboriginal people associated with the opal industry I interviewed clearly remember childhood experiences and schooling at Umeewarra.⁶¹

A range of employment opportunities in Port Augusta also became available to Aboriginal people at the time opportunities on the Andamooka opal fields were diminishing, providing another incentive to move there. Aboriginal people living on the Davenport reserve were given some work there, while government jobs were also becoming more accessible as affirmative action policies for Aboriginal workers were being implemented at this time, as part of a national trend.⁶² Administrative and clerical employment became available to Aboriginal people in agencies delivering services to Aboriginal clientele in the Port Augusta region, while there were increasing blue-collar work opportunities in road maintenance and the Commonwealth Railways, which was a particularly large employer there.⁶³ Former opal miner Sid Waye is one example of an Aboriginal person who went on to have a lengthy career in the railways.⁶⁴

While Aboriginal engagement in opal mining at Coober Pedy was beginning to wane in the mid to late 1970s, the township's potential as a tourist destination was being acknowledged and marketed. For instance, while lamenting the fact that the opal industry paid no royalties to the state, the Director of Mines did acknowledge its "great appeal to tourists".⁶⁵ As tourism began increasing, the local Aboriginal Umoona

⁶⁰ D. Hollinsworth and J. Craig, *Aboriginal Missions in South Australia*, Adelaide: Nunkuwarrin Yunti of South Australia, 2003, p. 22; Christobel Mattingley and Ken Hampton, *Survival In Our Own Land: 'Aboriginal' Experiences in 'South Australia' Since 1836*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1988, p.249.

⁶¹ Emily Austin, interview, 2 November 2013; Irene Dingaman-Johnson, interview, 4 November 2013; Barbara Dingaman-Amos, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 4 November 2013; Bill Lennon, interview, 26 August 2013. See also Austin, *My Young Days*, p.29.

⁶² D.L. Busbridge, 'Aboriginal Employment Problems in South Australia', in Ian G. Sharp and Colin M. Tatz (eds), *Aborigines in the Economy: Employment, Wages and Training*, Melbourne: Jacaranda Press in association with Centre for Research into Aboriginal Affairs, Monash University, 1966, p. 99; Altman and Daly, 'Do Fluctuations in the Australian Macroeconomy Influence Aboriginal Employment Status?', p.33.

⁶³ R.J. Anderson, *Solid Town: The History of Port Augusta*, Port Augusta: R.J. Anderson, 1988, p.199; Brock, 'Pastoral Stations and Reserves', p.112.

⁶⁴ Sid Waye, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 12 November 2013.

⁶⁵ 'Annual Report of the DMGG for the Year Ended June 30, 1976', SRSA, GRS 9226/1/1, p.7.

Community Council with the help of government funding established the Umoona Opal Mine and Museum in 1975 which would become a major tourist attraction. As well as housing a museum, it also provided retail and underground camping facilities. Driven by the local Aboriginal community aiming to create a viable business and generate employment opportunities, it trained several Aboriginal people in cutting and selling opal.⁶⁶

Initially the business was run by the Aboriginal community, who employed a European manager, but by 1984 financial losses caused the business be put up for tender, which was won by local miner and businessman Yanni Athanasiadis, who currently manages it today on behalf of the community.⁶⁷ During the 1980s a number of Aboriginal people undertook opal-cutting courses, including Bill Lennon, George Cooley and David Brown. However, Bill Lennon was the only person who persisted with this. The owner of a mine and a business called *Apu Waru* Tours which included an opal retail outlet, he recalled that:

I had a mine and getting a fair bit of opal out of that mine, you know, so I thought, oh, well, I'll do training for cutting and polishing, putting my own opal in that – in this shop instead of buying opals from somebody else.⁶⁸

Today Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy generally only mine on a casual or recreational basis. A number of people interviewed reminisced positively about the past, that the opal industry provided “a good lifestyle”, and that they really missed that experience.⁶⁹ Not only did Lynette Strangways have personal regrets about leaving the opal industry but so did her mother, and recalled how “she used to talk about it all the time” after her family moved from Andamooka to Port Augusta.⁷⁰ One long-term

⁶⁶ Department of Aboriginal Affairs, ‘A Community Digs in at Coober Pedy’ *Aboriginal Affairs Newsletter*, vol.1, no.2, December 1979, p.11; Haill, *Opals of Australia*, p.46; *Advertiser*, 27 April, 1977, p.6; 7 May 1977, p.20.

⁶⁷ Yanni Athanasiadis, interview, 28 August 2013.

⁶⁸ Bill Lennon, interview with Mike Harding, Mount Willoughby, 27 August 2013. He informed me that *apu* is a Yankunytjatjara noun for ‘stone’, and *waru* a noun for ‘fire’.

⁶⁹ John Cooley, interview, 27 October 2013, Emily Austin, interview, 2 November 2013; Simon Dare, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 9 November 2013. Aboriginal people involved in seasonal bean picking in New South Wales also expressed similar sentiments, and thought that they “were happier”, before the demise of employment opportunities in that industry in the 1970s. White, ‘On the Road to Nerrigundah’, p.202.

⁷⁰ Lynette Strangways, interview with Mike Harding, Port Augusta, 2 November 2013.

Aboriginal miner also recently expressed concern that there was “a generation of Aboriginal kids today that haven’t even been out on the field”.⁷¹

There was some Aboriginal participation in the emerging fields of Mintabie from the late 1970s and Lambina from the late 1980s, however, this was relatively shortlived in comparison to Coober Pedy and Andamooka. Mintabie is located on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands and approximately 260 kilometres north of Coober Pedy. Miners in Coober Pedy were aware of opal there as far back as the 1920s, but its remoteness made it relatively inaccessible and exploration there was sporadic.⁷² A number of Aboriginal people from Coober Pedy moved to Mintabie to work on the opal fields there, including John Cooley, George Cooley, Kevin O’Toole and several of his family members, and Marty Dodd. A number of Aboriginal people from communities in the APY lands also worked there during the 1980s. George Weisz recalled how his Aboriginal wife, Sadie Singer, and other friends would travel, often on daytrips from the communities of Fregon and Indulkana, to Mintabie in the 1980s, and how on one occasion found opal worth \$10,000.⁷³ Another miner who worked on the Mintabie fields for several years on the 1980s recalled that “hundreds” of Aboriginal people from APY communities would come and camp for a few days when good opal was being found.⁷⁴ However, mining at Mintabie began to decline significantly in the 1990s, and this was attributed to lower prices and demand for opal generally, and the limited size of the fields.⁷⁵ A report to a parliamentary inquiry in 2003 reveals that mining activity in Mintabie was less than one third of what it had been in the early 1990s, largely as a result of the size of the field and declining interest in opal mining.⁷⁶

While the opal fields at Mintabie were becoming less productive, the emerging fields about 90 kilometres to the north-west at Lambina became increasingly mined. A Native Title agreement between the South Australian Opal Miners Association and the Antakirinja and Yankunytjatjara traditional land owners was signed in June 1998,

⁷¹ George Cooley, interview, 22 August 2013.

⁷² Allan W. Eckert, *The World of Opals*, New York: John Wiley, 1997, p. 229; I.J. Townsend, ‘Mintabie Opalfield Mining and Geology’ *DMERB*, 90/73, November 1990, p.5.

⁷³ George Weisz, interview with Mike Harding, Railway Bore, 20 August 2013.

⁷⁴ John Dunstan, interview, 25 August 2013.

⁷⁵ ‘Report of the Director-General Mines and Energy for the Year Ended June 30,1991’, *SAPP*, no.26, 1991, p.26.

⁷⁶ District Council of Coober Pedy, ‘Submission to the Inquiry into Resource Exploration Impediments’. Standing Committee on Industry and Resources, House of Representatives, Parliament of Australia, n.d., p.3.

which facilitated increasing access to European miners, with 200 claims registered in the following four months and a camping area set aside for miners, although permanent residences were not allowed. In addition, first rights to noodle were negotiated for Aboriginal people.⁷⁷ John Dunstan recalled several Aboriginal miners having leases there in the 1990s, but by the end of the decade opal mining there was “almost dead”.⁷⁸

Conclusion

A combination of factors that had their origins in the 1960s and 1970s impacted severely upon Aboriginal engagement in the northern South Australian opal industry. Opal production began to diminish on both of the major opal fields around the 1970s, although this was more pronounced in Andamooka, with significant numbers of Aboriginal people leaving the field there. Oil price rises and increasing business costs led to technical innovations such as noodling machines, which also impacted unfavourably on Aboriginal opal miners. Amidst a period of social change with increasing government services to Aboriginal people, the extension of unemployment benefits had adverse impacts in relation to attitudes to opal mining. In addition, demographic changes reflected in the move to more urbanised locations became evident during this period, particularly with the relocation of many Aboriginal people from Andamooka. While Aboriginal engagement in the opal industry in Andamooka and Coober Pedy was beginning to diminish, increasing opal production at Mintabie from the mid-1970s and Lambina from the late 1980s saw some Aboriginal participation there. However, this was not as significant or sustained as mining on the major opal fields throughout the study period. Current Aboriginal participation in the opal industry is casual and recreational in most instances.

⁷⁷ Jack Townsend, ‘Lambina Opalfield – A Gem in South Australia’s Far North’, *MESA Journal*, no.33, April 2004, p.25.

⁷⁸ John Dunstan, interview, 25 August 2013.

CONCLUSION

When introduced to several people from a major opal-mining community in northern South Australia and asked about my research, I was informed that Aboriginal people were not really opal miners, but just noodlers. Similarly, Aboriginal people have generally been overlooked in the opal mining literature, where references to them are derogatory and more preoccupied with their appearance or lifestyles, rather than their attributes as workers on the opal fields. This thesis is the first substantive study of historic Aboriginal engagement in the northern South Australian opal industry, and I have shown how Aboriginal people's involvement was far more extensive and significant than has previously been acknowledged.

Aboriginal people began moving into the opal industry by the 1940s and their engagement remained significant until the mid to late 1970s, when a number of factors contributed to their declining participation. The documentary records that I have examined provide considerable evidence of Aboriginal participation in the northern South Australian opal industry, showing many Aboriginal people were able to make reasonable incomes, often the equivalent of an average worker's wage and more than the local pastoral industry offered. These records also reveal how Aboriginal people were simultaneously able to maintain important customary practices. The extensive use of oral history throughout this thesis, combined with published Aboriginal life histories, has added considerably to the documented sources. Actual Aboriginal 'voices' have provided first-hand accounts and understanding of the reality of Aboriginal participation in the opal industry, and customary life and practices on and around the fields. The Aboriginal people I interviewed were either opal miners themselves or the descendants of miners. Their recollections of Aboriginal participation in the industry were clear and consistent. Other opal miners interviewed also provided consistent evidence of Aboriginal participation in the industry, and the maintenance of their important economic, social and cultural practices.

The opal industry appealed to Aboriginal people for many of the reasons it appealed to Europeans. Its autonomous nature, with the ability to work individually or in small partnerships, and to choose to work when it suited, was a significant attraction. Aboriginal people from nearby pastoral stations were attracted to the opal industry and there was a considerable degree of movement between these two industries, which shared some similar characteristics. Aboriginal people from other more distant locations were also attracted to the opal fields as the industry began to expand significantly and provided a regular source of income.

While Aboriginal people were initially drawn to the emerging opal fields as a matter of curiosity, the attraction of the industry soon took hold. The contribution of Aboriginal people who had begun to earn a living by the 1940s was soon apparent, with some instrumental in the discovery of significant opal deposits. The discovery of opal at the Coober Pedy Eight Mile field by an Aboriginal woman in 1945, for example, was a significant turning point in the industry's fortune there. Aboriginal people were also involved in helping find opal in other locations around Coober Pedy, and several fields they discovered are named after them, for example, Larkins Folly, Brown's Folly and Lennon.

By the 1950s there were regular reports of large Aboriginal populations on the opal fields. In Andamooka there were up to 300–400 Aboriginal people on the fields in 1957, and throughout the 1960s in excess of 100 for most of the decade. Population estimates in Coober Pedy in the 1950s and 1960s also indicated significant numbers of Aboriginal people on the fields there. For instance, about 400 Aboriginal people were estimated to have been there in 1968. While there was a degree of mobility among Aboriginal people, their numbers often exceeded those of Europeans on the fields.

While many Aboriginal people were noodlers, this was not an insignificant or marginal activity. Noodling required a considerable degree of patience and skill, in a region subject to extreme climatic conditions and dust. Aboriginal people were persistent in their efforts and made good incomes from their endeavours. Women were highly regarded for their noodling abilities, and children often assisted on the fields as well in an industry that was very family-friendly. Some Aboriginal people actually had their

own mining claims. A number of them were also involved in successful partnership arrangements with miners which although informal were generally honoured: Aboriginal people interviewed considered them fair and equitable arrangements. This included a number of prominent individuals and families who had a long-term association with the opal industry. As holders of Miner's Rights and later Precious Stones Prospecting Permits, these people worked underground at considerable depths and were also competent users of explosives, well aware of the risks associated with this.

I have also shown that Aboriginal people were engaged in specialised tasks. Some were hired as checkers by miners to work behind bulldozers as they ripped open the ground surface while searching for opal which could easily be missed or buried by the fast-moving blades. A small core group was also engaged as skilled heavy machinery operators who were highly valued and sought after by miners in Coober Pedy. Aboriginal people generally presented their opal for sale to a high standard and several became opal buyers, assisting others to negotiate fair prices with dealers. Two Aboriginal men made sufficient money from opal to establish their own businesses.

What this study has also shown is that, while engaging with the mainstream economy, Aboriginal people maintained a high degree of cultural continuity on the opal fields that was not possible in many other parts of Australia. The unique nature of the opal industry and its flexibility accommodated this and, in doing so, closely resembled Aboriginal participation in the northern pastoral industry. One major point of difference, however, is that Aboriginal opal miners had more workplace autonomy than pastoral workers. As self-employed individuals, Aboriginal opal miners were effectively their own bosses, earning independent incomes and entering into partnerships if it suited them.

The task-oriented nature of the opal industry helped facilitate the emergence of a hybrid economy. Importantly, living in close proximity to opal fields gave Aboriginal people access to both their workplace and their traditional economic base. The hybrid economy ensured that Aboriginal people on the opal fields continually utilised their traditional hunting and foraging resource base, enabling them to exploit a broad range

of natural food resources despite the introduction of European foods. Aboriginal people on the opal fields highly favoured traditional foods and these often complemented the introduced variety.

Aboriginal people also maintained their customary social practices while engaging with the opal industry: its informal and family-friendly nature readily permitted this.

Aboriginal children often accompanied and assisted their families on the opal fields, where traditional attitudes centred on the importance of kinship, and its rules governing sharing and reciprocity were continually reinforced. While traditional attitudes to sharing were often derided by European observers, these influenced how opal was shared among people when it was found. In traditional Aboriginal societies where a considerable degree of mobility was necessary and the need to accumulate material possessions minimal, the importance of sharing was a necessity and provision was made for those in need. This is evident in the way opal was distributed, as reiterated by a number of Aboriginal people interviewed. One individual compared sharing opal with the traditional practice of distributing kangaroo meat, stressing that “it’s like ... with the *malu* [kangaroo] ... you ... share it around with family”.¹

Despite a degree of official ambivalence and some discouragement of traditional practices, a rich ceremonial life was readily accommodated by the opal industry. Numerous important Aboriginal mythological stories traverse the opal-field regions and ceremonial practices were regularly noted in these areas, in numerous reports and observations made and the testimony of Aboriginal people. These ceremonies were often major logistical exercises which involved considerable numbers of people for extended periods of time. Other important traditional customs prevailed around the opal fields, including mortuary practices and the maintenance of law and order. The adaptability and innovativeness of Aboriginal ceremonial life is evident in the way Aboriginal people incorporated opal into their mythological world view and creation stories while also participating in the industry, and in the use of motor vehicles to enhance their ability to attend ceremonies.

¹ Kevin O’Toole, interview with Mike Harding, Coober Pedy, 21 August 2013.

By the 1950s, the government was aware of significant numbers of Aboriginal people on the opal fields and, rather than discouraging their presence, sought to facilitate their involvement in the industry. For instance, the Aborigines Protection Board (APB) instigated an opal-buying service in 1956 to ensure that Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy received fair prices for their opal. This was deemed unnecessary for Andamooka because of a more competitive buying environment there. After some initial difficulties with appointments to the position of APB agent at Coober Pedy, the opal-buying service appears to have had some success in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when regular quantities of opal were traded for fair prices. The APB then appointed one of its own staff to maintain the opal-buying service, which continued for a short period before being discontinued. It appears that by the early 1960s Aboriginal people were able to successfully negotiate fair prices for their opal. Efforts at encouraging systematic opal mining by providing some rudimentary equipment were also tried for a time, but not pursued.

The emergence of a significant Aboriginal population on the opal fields also led to the provision of accommodation and welfare services by the government. This varied considerably between Coober Pedy and Andamooka. A dedicated Aboriginal reserve was established at Coober Pedy, which initially provided a base for opal sales, and became an administrative and service centre for Aboriginal miners and later a significant source of accommodation. The government did not consider an Aboriginal reserve at Andamooka necessary, although the APB did employ a local agent to assist Aboriginal people there and also provided some very basic building materials and small dwellings.

The decline of Aboriginal involvement in the opal industry began by the late 1960s and can be attributed to a number of interrelated developments. For instance, declining levels of opal production around this time caused many people to leave the fields, particularly Andamooka, although Aboriginal people in Coober Pedy actively continued their involvement in the industry for another decade. However, by the mid to late 1970s, increased fuel prices and operating costs led to technological change, notably the introduction of automated noodling machines, which seriously undermined the ability of Aboriginal people to noodle unimpeded. Changes in government policy

around this time saw the introduction of unemployment benefits to Aboriginal people in remote areas, which was also a factor in some leaving the industry. Despite the expansion of opal fields at Mintabie from the 1970s and Lambina in the 1980s, Aboriginal engagement in the industry there was not as significant or sustained compared to Coober Pedy and Andamooka. Aboriginal participation in opal mining today is now mainly casual and recreational.

APPENDIX ONE: PEOPLE INTERVIEWED DATE AND LOCATION

Albert McCormack, 14 August 2013, Coober Pedy.

Sammy Brown, 15 August 2013, Coober Pedy.

Kaylene Miller, 15 August 2013, Coober Pedy.

Evangelos Lekkas, 17 August 2013, Mintabie.

Yami Lester, 18 August 2013, Wallatina.

Dolly Ramzan, 19 August 2013, Warabalina

George Weisz, 20 August 2013, Railway Bore.

Kevin O'Toole, 21 August 2013, Coober Pedy.

Peter Butler, 22 August 2013, Coober Pedy.

Bernard Lennon, 22 August 2013, Coober Pedy.

George Cooley, 22 August and 29 August 2013, Coober Pedy.

Christine McCormack, 23 August 2013, Coober Pedy

George McCormack, 23 August 2013, Coober Pedy.

Ian Crombie, 24 August and 1 September 2013, Coober Pedy.

Robin Walker, 24 August 2013, Coober Pedy.

John Dunstan, 25 August 2013, Coober Pedy.

Bill Lennon, 26 August and 27 August 2013, Mount Willoughby.

Yanni Athanasiadis, 28 August 2013, Coober Pedy.

Brian Underwood, 28 August 2013, Coober Pedy.

Glenys Dodd, 29 August 2013, Coober Pedy.

Maureen Williams, 30 August 2013, Coober Pedy.

Pauline Lewis, 2 September 2013, Coober Pedy.

Bob Larkins, 23 October 2013, Wilmington.

Kathleen Chamberlain, 24 October 2013, Port Augusta.

Jack Crombie, 26 October 2013, Port Augusta.

John Cooley, 27 October 2013, Port Augusta.

David Spargo, 28 October 2013, Andamooka.

Stefan Bilka, 29 October 2013, Andamooka.

Chris Larkins, 30 October 2013, Andamooka.

Geoff Watson, 30 October 2013, Andamooka.

Christine Jones, 1 November 2013, Port Augusta.

Peter Jones, 1 November 2013, Port Augusta

Eileen Wingfield, 1 November 2013, Port Augusta.

Emily Austin, 2 November 2013, Port Augusta.

Lynette Strangways, 2 November 2013, Port Augusta.

Bobby Brown, 3 November 2013, Whyalla.

Barbara Dingaman-Amos, 4 November 2013, Port Augusta.

Irene Dingaman-Johnson, 4 November 2013, Port Augusta.

Stan Starkey, 7 November 2013, Port Augusta.

Elaine Moosha, 8 November 2013, Quorn.

Simon Dare, 9 November 2013, Port Augusta.

Andrew Starkey, 11 November 2013, Port Augusta.

Bob Starkey, 11 November 2013, Port Augusta.

Anonymous individual (1), 12 November 2013, Port Augusta.

Anonymous individual (2), 12 November 2013, Port Augusta.

Shirley Brown, 12 November 2013, Port Augusta.

Lulu O'Toole-Boland, 12 November 2013, Port Augusta.

Sid Wayne, 12 November 2013, Port Augusta.

Sadie Singer, 10 December 2013, Davoren Park.

Gordon Traeger, 2 September 2015, Hindmarsh Island.

Rhonda Traeger, 2 September 2015, Hindmarsh Island.

Cecil Betts, 29 September 2015, Ethelton.

Emily Betts, 29 September 2015, Ethelton.

APPENDIX TWO: ETHICS CLEARANCE COVER LETTER 2012



RESEARCH BRANCH
OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS, COMPLIANCE AND
INTEGRITY

SABINE SCHREIBER
SECRETARY
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE
SA 5005
AUSTRALIA
TELEPHONE +61 8 8313 6028
FACSIMILE +61 8 8313 7325
email: sabine.schreiber@adelaide.edu.au
CRICOS Provider Number 00123M

Applicant: Associate Professor R Foster

School: School of History and Politics

Project Title: *A history of Aboriginal participation in the Northern South Australian opal industry*

THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Project No: H-2012-099 RM No: 0000013825

APPROVED for the period until: 30 September 2015

Thank you for the response dated 27.8.12 to the matters raised by the Committee. It is noted that this study will be conducted by Michael Harding, PhD candidate.

Refer also to the accompanying letter setting out requirements applying to approval.

Dr John Semmler
Acting Convenor
Human Research Ethics Committee

Date: 5 SEP 2012

APPENDIX THREE: ETHICS CLEARANCE 2012



RESEARCH BRANCH
OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS, COMPLIANCE AND
INTEGRITY

SABINE SCHREIBER
SECRETARY
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE
SA 5005
AUSTRALIA

TELEPHONE +61 8 8313 6028
FACSIMILE +61 8 8313 7325
email: sabine.schreiber@adelaide.edu.au
CRICOS Provider Number 00123M

5 September 2012

Associate Professor R Foster
School of History and Politics

Dear Associate Professor Foster

PROJECT NO: H-2012-099
A history of Aboriginal participation in the Northern South Australian opal industry

I write to advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved the above project. Please refer to the enclosed endorsement sheet for further details and conditions that may be applicable to this approval. Ethics approval is granted for a period of three years subject to satisfactory annual progress reporting. Ethics approval may be extended subject to submission of a satisfactory ethics renewal report prior to expiry.

The ethics expiry date for this project is: 30 September 2015

Where possible, participants taking part in the study should be given a copy of the Information Sheet and the signed Consent Form to retain.

Please note that any changes to the project which might affect its continued ethical acceptability will invalidate the project's approval. In such cases an amended protocol must be submitted to the Committee for further approval. It is a condition of approval that you immediately report anything which might warrant review of ethical approval including (a) serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants (b) proposed changes in the protocol; and (c) unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project. It is also a condition of approval that you inform the Committee, giving reasons, if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

A reporting form for the annual progress report, project completion and ethics renewal report is available from the website at <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/ethics/human/guidelines/reporting/>

Yours sincerely

per
Dr John Semmler
Acting Convenor
Human Research Ethics Committee

APPENDIX FOUR: ETHICS CLEARANCE 2015



**THE UNIVERSITY
of ADELAIDE**

RESEARCH BRANCH
OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS, COMPLIANCE
AND INTEGRITY

LEVEL 7, 115 GRENFELL STREET
THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE
SA 5005 AUSTRALIA

TELEPHONE +61 8 8313 5137
FACSIMILE +61 8 8313 3700
EMAIL hrec@adelaide.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Number 00123M

21 October 2015

Associate Professor R Foster
School of Humanities

Dear Associate Professor Foster

ETHICS APPROVAL No: H-2012-099

PROJECT TITLE: A history of Aboriginal engagement in the northern South Australian opal industry

Thank you for the Annual Report on the Project Status submitted on the 5 October 2015 and additional information on the 15 October 2015 from PhD candidate Michael Harding. It is noted that data collection for the project has been completed and the final writing up stage of the PhD is continuing. An extension request to cover the writing up stage has been reviewed by the Office of Research Ethics, Compliance and Integrity and is deemed to meet the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)* involving no more than low risk for research participants.

The ethics expiry date for this project is: **30 September 2018**.

Ethics approval is granted for three years and is subject to satisfactory annual reporting. The form titled *Annual Report on Project Status* is to be used when reporting annual progress and project completion and can be downloaded at <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/ethics/human/guidelines/reporting>. Prior to expiry, ethics approval may be extended for a further period.

Participants in the study are to be given a copy of the Information Sheet and the signed Consent Form to retain. It is also a condition of approval that you **immediately report** anything which might warrant review of ethical approval including:

- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants,
- previously unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project,
- proposed changes to the protocol; and
- the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

Yours sincerely

Amy Weckert
Human Research Ethics Officer
Office of Research Ethics, Compliance and Integrity

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Archival Collections

Lutheran Archive:

Cooper Pedy Congregational Boxes, Series 550.000.

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia. Cooper Pedy Hanging File.

South Australian Museum:

Bush Heritage Australia Bon Bon Station. Correspondence Relating to Employment on Bon Bon Station, Series SAMA 1053/05.

Sir John Burton Cleland. Correspondence and Reports Relating to Cleland's Position as a Member of the South Australian Advisory Council of Aborigines (1932–1936), and Chairman of the Aborigines Protection Board (1940–1962) and Member of the Aborigines Advisory Board (1962–1965), Series AA60/03.

State Library of South Australia:

Aborigines Advancement League of South Australia. Wages & Employment of Aborigines in South Australia. Proceedings of the Seminar held on October 9, 1965, University of Adelaide. SRG 250/6/4.

Papers of C.J.E. Kempster, Series PRG 1564/1.

South Australian Government Gazettes.

South Australian Police Gazettes.

State Records of South Australia:

Aboriginal Affairs

Aborigines Protection Board, Minutes, Series GRG 52/16.

Correspondence Files of the Aborigines Office and Successor Agencies, Series GRG 52/1.

Letter Book of the Protector and (Chief Protector) of Aborigines, Series GRG 52/7.

Office of Aboriginal Affairs, Handnotes on Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests on Maralinga Lands, Series GRS 1002.

Office of Aboriginal Affairs, Transcripts and Evidence, Maralinga Royal Commission, Series GRS 1278.

Papers of Constance M. Ternent Cooke, Series GRG 52/32.

Mines and Energy

Department of Mines and Energy, Annual Reports of the Director of Mines and Government Geologist, 1958/59–1978/79, Series GRS 9226.

Department of Mines and Energy, Correspondence Files, Series GRS 6038.

Department of Mines and Energy, Register of General Correspondence Files, Series GRS 8573.

Department of Mines and Energy, Register of Miner's Rights, Series GRG 30.

Department of Mines and Energy, Register of Precious Stones Claims (PSPP) Files, Series GRS 8295.

Police

Police Department, Far Northern Division Headquarters Station Journals, Series GRG 5/318/1.

Parliamentary Records

South Australia:

South Australian Parliamentary Papers

‘Progress Report of the Royal Commission on the Aborigines: together with minutes of proceedings, evidence and appendices’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol.2, no.26, 1913.

‘Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines for the Year Ended June 30, 1917’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no.29, 1917.

‘Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines for the Year Ended June 30, 1919’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no.29, 1919.

‘Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines for the Year Ended June 30, 1924’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no.29, 1924.

‘Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines for the Year Ended June 30, 1939’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no.29, 1939.

‘Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board for the Year Ended June 30, 1963’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no.20, 1964.

‘Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board for the Year Ended June 30, 1964’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no.20, 1965–66.

‘Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board for the Year Ended June 30, 1965’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no.20a, 1965–66.

‘Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board for the Year Ended June 30, 1967’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no.20, 1967.

‘Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board for the Year Ended June 30, 1968’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no.20, 1968–69.

‘Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board for the Year Ended June 30, 1969’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no.20, 1969.

‘Report of the Aborigines Protection Board for the Year Ended June 30, 1943’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no.20, 1943.

‘Report of the Aborigines Protection Board for the Year Ended June 30, 1956’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no. 20a, 1956–57.

‘Report of the Aborigines Protection Board for the Year Ended June 30, 1961’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no. 20, 1962.

‘Report of the Aborigines Protection Board for the Year Ended June 30, 1962’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no. 20a, 1962.

‘Report of the Director-General of Community Welfare for the Year Ended June 30, 1972’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no.23, 1972.

‘Report of the Director-General of Community Welfare for the Year Ended June 30, 1973’, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no.23, 1973–74.

‘Report of the Director-General Mines and Energy for the Year Ended June 30, 1991’ *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no.26, 1991.

Commonwealth of Australia:

District Council of Coober Pedy, 'Submission to the Inquiry into Resource Exploration Impediments'. Standing Committee on Industry and Resources, House of Representatives, Parliament of Australia, n.d.

National Native Title Tribunal—Extract from Register of Indigenous Land Use

Coober Pedy Precious Stones Field Indigenous Land Use Agreement. SI 2015/003, 28 April 2015.

Official Government Publications—Mining (South Australia)

Anonymous, 'Notes for Opal Miners', *Mining Review for the Half-Year Ended December 31 1918*, no.29, 1919, p.5.

Brown, H.Y.L., *Record of the Mines of South Australia*, Fourth Edition, Adelaide: Government Printer, 1908.

Carr, S.G., J.G. Olliver, C.H.H. Connor and D.C. Scott, *Andamooka Opal Fields: The Geology of the Precious Stones Field and the Results of the Subsidised Mining Program*, Report of Investigations 51, Adelaide: Government Printer, 1979.

Crettenden, P.P., M.W. Flintoft, S.J. Ewen and D.C. Watkins, 'The Opal Industry in South Australia', *Mineral Resources Review SA for the Half-Year Ended 31 December 1979*, no.151, 1979, pp.18–29.

Johnson, W., 'Andamooka Opalfield' *Mining Review for the Half-Year Ended 31 December 1956*, no.105, 1958, pp.65–6.

Johnson, W., 'Coober Pedy Opalfield', *Mining Review for the Half-Year Ended 31 December 1956*, no.105, 1958, pp.62–63.

O'Driscoll, E.P.D., 'The Possibility of Augmenting Groundwater Supplies—Andamooka Opal Field', *Mining Review for the Half-Year Ended 31 December, 1957*, no.107, 1959, pp.42–4.

Robertson, R.S., and D.C. Scott, *Geology of the Coober Pedy Precious Stones Field: Results of Investigations, 1981–86*, Report of Investigations 56, Adelaide: Government Printer, 1990.

Segnit, R.W., 'Andamooka Opal Field', *Mining Review for the Half-Year Ended 30 June 1956*, no.62, 1935, pp. 51–6.

Townsend, Jack, 'Lambina Opalfield—A Gem in South Australia's Far North', *MESA Journal*, no.33, April 2004, pp.24–27.

Ward, L. Keith., 'Notes on the Stuart's Range Opal Field', *Review of the Mining Operations in the State of South Australia*, no.25, 1917, pp.36–44.

Official Government Publications—Mining (Commonwealth of Australia)

Anonymous, 'Australian Gemstones', *Australian Mineral Industry Quarterly Review*, vol.12, no.1, November 1959, pp.21–25.

Croll, I.C.H., 'The Opal Industry in Australia', *Bureau of Mineral Resources, Geology and Geophysics Bulletin*, no.17, 1950.

Hogan, Lindsay, and Peter Berry, 'Mining and Regional Australia: Some Implications of Long Distance Commuting', *Australian Commodities: Forecasts and Issues*, vol.7. no.4, December 2000, p.649.

Unpublished Reports (Department of Mines and Energy South Australia)

Report Book—Correspondence Opal Field Inspections:

Armstrong, A.T., 'Report on Andamooka and Coober Pedy Opal Fields', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book*, 55/5, 5 July 1962.

Hiern, M.N., 'Report on Coober Pedy Opalfield', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book*, 60/82, 30 April 1965.

Johnson, W., 'Letter to the Chief Geologist—Coober Pedy Opal Field', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book*, 43/26, 17 August 1956.

Thoroughgood, J.W., 'Inspection of Andamooka and Coober Pedy Opalfields', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book*, 54/150, 15 May 1962.

Thoroughgood, J.W., 'Inspection of Andamooka and Coober Pedy Opalfields', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book*, 55/127, 7 December 1962.

Report Book—Geological and other:

Barnes, L.C., and B.W. Atterton, 'The Opal Industry in South Australia. Report No.4. The 1981 Survey of Mining Equipment and Calculation of Value of Opal Produced', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book*, 82/75, October 1982.

Connor, C.H.H., 'Chrysoprase and Moss Agate Deposits Mount Davies, North West Province Report No.3—Mining Activity, 1975–78', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book*, 79/118, November 1979.

Correll, Mark, 'South Australian Mineral Resource Production for the Six Months Ended 30 June 2010', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book*, 2010/0024, 2010.

Flint, D.J., 'Lambina Opal Diggings Geological Survey', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book*, 80/103, June 1980.

Keeling, J.L., and M.G. Farrand, 'Origin and Formation of Matrix Opal from Andamooka South Australia', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book*, 84/47, July 1984.

Olliver, Jeffrey G., Steven G. Carr, Colin H.H. Connor and Douglas C. Scott, 'Andamooka Opalfields: A Geological Guide for the Prospector', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book*, 78/86, 1978.

Townsend, I.J., 'Mintabie Opalfield Mining and Geology', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book*, 90/73, November 1990.

Townsend, I.J., and P.P. Crettenden, 'The Opal Industry in South Australia. Report No.9. The 1986 Survey of Mining Equipment and Calculation of Value of Opal Produced', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book*, 87/102, August 1987.

Willington, C.M. (compiler), 'A Review of the Opal Industry in South Australia', *Department of Mines and Energy Report Book*, 59/151, 15 December 1964.

Published Reports and Policy Papers—Commonwealth of Australia

Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Affairs Authorities, Canberra, 21 to 23 April 1937, Canberra: Commonwealth Government Printer.

Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, South Australian Office, *South Australian Yearbook*, no.17, 1979, Adelaide: Government Printer, 1979.

McClelland, J.R., J. Fitch and W.J.A. Jonas, *Report of the Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1985.

Manuscripts

Hutchison Correspondence, Coober Pedy Historical Society.

Minute Book of the Stuart Range Opal Field Committee, Coober Pedy Historical Society.

Sundberg, Jan, *Umoona Review: Housing Needs and Intentions of the Aboriginal Community in Coober Pedy*, unpublished manuscript, 1983.

Newspapers and Periodicals

Aboriginal Way

Adelaide Chronicle

Advertiser

Australasian

Australian Women's Weekly

Cairns Post

Canberra Times

Cooper Pedy Regional Times

Independent

Mail

Monitor

News

Register

South Australian

South Australian Register

Sunday Mail

Truth

Other Interviews and Unpublished Papers

Clarke, Dick, interview with Michael Green, Andamooka, 1 July 2008. Transcript in possession of the author.

Cooley, George, 'Early Days Experience at Cooper Pedy School 1958/1960 to 1965', March 2010. Notes in possession of the author.

Good, Mary, interview with Joan Durdin, 6 March 1978, Adelaide. J.D. Somerville Oral History Collection OH17/47. Transcript held at the State Library of South Australia.

Grund, Don, 'The Grund Family at Coober Pedy', undated. Notes in possession of the author.

Grund, Don, 'The Grund Family's Involvement in Opal Mining at Andamooka S.A', undated. Notes in possession of the author.

Wingfield, Eileen, interview with Jan Scott, Port Augusta, 19 July 2005. Transcript in possession of the author.

Aboriginal Life Histories

Austin, Emily Munyungka, *My Young Days*, Coober Pedy: Umoona Aged Care Aboriginal Corporation, 2006.

Bancroft, Robyne, 'Aboriginal Miners and the Solferino and Lionsville Goldfields of Northern New South Wales', in Kerry Cardell and Cliff Cumming (eds), *A World Turned Upside Down: Cultural Change on Australia's Goldfields 1851–2001*, Humanities Research Centre Monograph no.14. Canberra: Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, 2001, pp.131–45.

Brennan, Spider, 'Tin Mining', in Peter and Jay Read (eds), *Long Time, Olden Time: Aboriginal Accounts of Northern Territory History*, Alice Springs: Institute for Aboriginal Development Publications, 1991, pp.109–14.

Brown, Ingkama Bobby, and Petter Attila Naessan, *Irrititja—The Past: Antikirrinya History from Ingomar Station*, Southport: Keeira Press, 2012.

Crombie, Eileen Unkari, *He Was a South Australian Film Star: My Life with Billy Pepper-Tinyama*, Murray Bridge: Nyiri Publications, 2003.

Denigan, Kathleen, *Norman Baird—A Spark Within*, Cairns: Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation, 2006.

Dodd, Marty, *They Liked Me, the Horses, Straightaway*, Canberra: Ginninderra Press, 2000.

Harris, Wendy, *Wendy Harris: A Coober Pedy Pioneer*, Murray Bridge: Nyiri Publications, 2006.

Kupa Piti Kunga Tjuta Editorial Committee, *Talking Straight Out: Stories from the Irati Wanti Campaign*, Coober Pedy: Alapalatja Press, 2005.

Laurie, Amy, and Ann McGrath, 'I was a Drover Once Myself: Amy Laurie of Kununurra', in Isobel White, Diane Barwick and Betty Meehan (eds), *Fighters and Singers: The Lives of Some Aboriginal Women*, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985, pp.76–89.

Lennon, Jessie, *And I Always Been Moving! The Early Life of Jessie Lennon*, Coober Pedy: J. Lennon, 1996.

Lennon, Jessie, *I'm the One that Knows This Country! The Story of Jessie Lennon and Coober Pedy*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2000.

Lennon, Lallie, 'Maralinga Dust', in Adele Pring (ed.), *Women of the Centre*, Apollo Bay: Pascoe Publishing, 1990, pp. 89–98.

Morris, Glenda, *Looking Back the Way I Came*, Mareeba: Pinevale Publications, 1991.

Morris, Glenda, *The Con Goo Line*, Townsville: Glenda Morris, 1994.

Read, Jolly, and Peter Coppin, *Kangkushot: The Life of Nyamal Lawman Peter Coppin*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1999.

Skewes, Janet (compiler), *Coober Pedylanguru Tjukurpa: Stories from Anangu of Coober Pedy*, Coober Pedy: Umoona Community Council, 1997.

Strangways, Eva, 'Travelling the Stations', in Adele Pring (ed.), *Women of the Centre*, Apollo Bay: Pascoe Publishing, 1990, pp.130–38.

Taylor, Milly, 'Born Out Bush', in Adele Pring (ed.), *Women of the Centre*, Apollo Bay: Pascoe Publishing, 1990, pp.140–56.

Williams, Edna Tantjingu, and Eileen Wani Wingfield, *Down the Hole, Up the Tree, Across the Sandhills: Running from the State and Daisy Bates*, Alice Springs: IAD Press, 2000.

Unpublished Theses

Briscoe, Gordon, 'A Social History of the Northern Central Region of South Australia: 1950 to 1979', unpublished MA thesis, Australian National University, 1991.

Cahir, David, 'Black Gold: A History of the Role of Aboriginal People on the Goldfields of Victoria, 1850–70', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Ballarat, 2006.

de Lawyer, Antonia, 'Davenport and Umeewarra Since 1937', unpublished BA (Hons) thesis, University of Adelaide, 1972.

Hodson, Sally, 'Nyungars and Work: Aboriginal Labour in the Great Southern Region, Western Australia 1936–1972', unpublished MA thesis, University of Western Australia, 1989.

Hugo, David, 'Mica Mining at Harts Range, Central Australia, 1880s–1960s: A Study of Ethnicity and the Impact of Isolation', unpublished PhD thesis, Northern Territory University, 1995.

Jacobs, J.M., 'Aboriginal Land Rights in Port Augusta', unpublished MA thesis, University of Adelaide, 1983.

Krichauff, Skye, 'The Narungga and Europeans: Cross-Cultural Relations on Yorke Peninsula in the Nineteenth Century', unpublished MA thesis, University of Adelaide, 2008.

Lockwood, Christine J., 'The Two Kingdoms: Lutheran Missionaries and British Civilizing Mission in Early South Australia', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, 2014.

Naessan, Petter, 'Manta Tjamuku, Manta Kamiku—Grandfather Country, Grandmother Country: A Philological and Sociolinguistic Study of the Concept 'Antakirinya'', unpublished MA thesis, University of Adelaide, 2000.

Naessan, Petter, 'Yankunytjatjara Continuity and Change: A Linguistic Ecology of the Yankunytjatjara Language With Particular Emphasis on Coober Pedy, South Australia', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, 2009.

White, John, M., 'On the Road to Nerrigundah: A Historical Anthropology of Indigenous—Settler Relations in the Eurobodalla Region of New South Wales', unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2010.

Heritage Surveys and Reports

Brasse, Lothar, and Margaret Sanders, *Andamooka Heritage Survey*, Adelaide: Department of Environment and Planning, 1984.

Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, *The Kanku—Breakaways Conservation Park Draft Management Plan*, Adelaide: Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, 2015.

Foster, Robert, *Aboriginal Policy and its Administration in South Australia 1900—1962*, Adelaide: Report for the Native Title Unit, Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement, February 1997.

Foster, Robert, *De Rose Hill Native Title Claim: Expert History Report*, Adelaide: Report for the Native Title Unit, Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement, November 2000.

Fuhlbohm, Timothy, *The Breakaways Reserve Research Management*, Adelaide: Department of Lands, 1987.

Gara, Tom, *The Kokatha Heritage Survey*, Adelaide: National Estate Grants Programme, 1989.

Hobbs, Trevor J., *The Breakaways Reserve: A Resource Inventory*, Adelaide: Department of Lands, 1987.

Reader, Paul, *The Heritage of the Antikirinya, Arabana and Southern Aranda Land*, Adelaide: National Estate Grant Programme, 1983.

Smith, D., 'The Kokata in the Context of Aboriginal Music in Central and South Australia', Appendix 5, Sutton and Partners, *Olympic Dam Project Environmental Studies. Anthropological Baseline Studies Literature Review*. A Restricted Report to Kinhill Stearns Roger, Adelaide, 1981.

Umoona Aged Care Aboriginal Corporation, *Tjilpi Tjuta Kanyini Heritage Protection Project 1997–1998*, Coober Pedy: Umoona Aged Care Aboriginal Corporation, 1998.

Discussion Papers, Conference Papers and Issues Papers

Curthoys, Ann, 'The Proof of Continuity of Native Title: An Historian's Perspective', *Land, Rights, Laws: Issues of Native Title*, Issues Paper no. 18, 1999, pp.11–8.

Firebrace, Sharon, and Greg Gardiner, 'Surviving the Frontier: The Role and Contribution of Indigenous Women in the Development of Australia,' *Monash University Koorie Research Centre Discussion Paper*, no.5, 1997.

Foster, Robert, 'The Origin of the Protection of Aboriginal Rights in South Australian Pastoral Leases', *Land, Rights, Laws: Issues of Native Title*, Issues Paper no.24, August 1998.

Office of the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Rebutting the Myths: Some Facts About Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1992.

Paul, Mandy, and Tom Gara, *In And Out of View: Aboriginal Fringe Camps in South Australian Country Towns*, Paper Presented at the History Trust of South Australia State History Conference: *Country Connections*, Tanunda, 4 August 2007.

White, Isobel, 'The Aborigines of the North-West of South Australia: Their Present Conditions and Future Prospects', in J.W. Warburton (ed.), *The Aborigines of South Australia: Their Background and Future Prospects. Proceedings of a Conference held at University of Adelaide June 13–16, 1969*. Publication no.19, Department of Adult Education, University of Adelaide, 1969, pp.119–38.

Secondary Sources

Published Books, Book Chapters and Journal Articles

Akami, Tomoko, Frank Bongiorno and Alexander Cook, 'From the Editors', *History Australia*, vol.11, no.1, April 2014, pp.3–5.

Alford, Katrina, *Gilt-Edged Women: Women and Contemporary Mining in Colonial Australia*, Working Papers in Economic History, no.64, Canberra: Australian National University, February 1986.

- Altman, J.C., 'Aboriginal Economy: Economic Status', in James Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, its People and Their Origins*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1988, pp.201–7.
- Altman, Jon, 'Foreword', in Natasha Fijn, Ian Keen, Christopher Lloyd and Michael Pickering (eds), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies II: Historical Engagements and Current Enterprises*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2012, pp. xiii–xviii.
- Altman, Jon, and Anne Daly, 'Do Fluctuations in the Australian Macroeconomy Influence Aboriginal Employment Status?', *Economic Papers: A Journal of Applied Economics and Policy*, vol.11, no.3, September 1992, pp.32–48.
- Andamooka Area School, *Andamooka Then and Now*, Andamooka: Andamooka Area School, 1980.
- Anderson, Christopher, 'Multiple Enterprises: Contemporary Aboriginal Subsistence Strategy in Southeast Cape York Peninsula', in N.C. Stevens and A. Bailey (eds), *Contemporary Cape York Peninsula*, Brisbane: Royal Society of Queensland, 1980, pp.77–81.
- Anderson, Christopher, 'Aborigines and Tin Mining in North Queensland: A Case Study in the Anthropology of Contact History', *Mankind*, vol.13, no.6, April 1983, pp.473–98.
- Anderson, R.J., *Solid Town: The History of Port Augusta*, Port Augusta: R.J. Anderson, 1988.
- Anonymous, 'The Australian Economy', *Australian Economic Review*, vol.6, no.4, December 1973, pp.4–8.
- Anthony, Thalia, 'Labour Relations on Northern Cattle Stations: Feudal Exploitation and Accommodation', *The Drawing Board: An Australian Review of Public Affairs*, vol. 4, no.3, March, 2004, pp.117–36.
- Anti Bases Campaign, *Weapons in the Wilderness: The Exploitation of the North-West of South Australia*, Adelaide: Anti Bases Campaign (SA), 1991.
- Aracic, Stephen, *Rediscover Opals in Australia*, Lightning Ridge: Stephen Aracic, 1999.
- Armitage, Andrew, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation: Australia, Canada and New Zealand*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995.
- Attwood, Bain, 'Off the Mission Stations: Aborigines in Gippsland 1860–1890', *Aboriginal History*, vol.10, 1986, pp.131–51.
- Attwood, Bain, *Rights for Aborigines*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003.

Attwood, Bain, 'Aboriginal History, Minority Histories and Historical Wounds: The Postcolonial Condition, Historical Knowledge and the Public Life of History in Australia', *Postcolonial Studies*, vol.14, no.2, 2011, pp.171–86.

Austin, Clifford, *I Left My Hat in Andamooka*, Melbourne: Wren Publishing, 1973.

Auty, Kate, 'Western Australian Courts on Native Affairs 1936-1954—One of "Our" Little Secrets in the Administration of "Justice" for Aboriginal People', *University of New South Wales Law Journal*, vol.23, no.1, July 2000, pp.148–72.

Barnes, L.C., I. J. Townsend, R.S. Robertson and D.C. Scott, *Opal: South Australia's Gemstone*, Handbook No.5, Revised Edition, Adelaide: Department of Mines and Energy Geological Survey of South Australia, 1992.

Barwick, Dianne, 'Coranderrk and Cumerooogunga: Pioneers and Policy', in T. Scarlett Epstein and David H. Penny (eds), *Opportunity and Response: Case Studies in Economic Development*, London: C. Hurst, 1972.

Beadell, Len, *Still in the Bush*, Sydney: New Holland, 1975.

Beckett, Jeremy, 'The Torres Strait Islanders and the Pearling Industry: A Case of Internal Colonialism', *Aboriginal History*, vol.1, pt.1, 1977, pp. 77–104.

Bell, Diane, 'Consulting With Women', in Fay Gale (ed.), *We Are Bosses Ourselves: The Status and Role of Aboriginal Women Today*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1983, pp. 24–8.

Bell, Diane, *Daughters of the Dreaming*, Second Edition, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Bell, James, 'The Economic Life of Mixed-Blood Aborigines on the South Coast of New South Wales', *Oceania*, vol.26, no.3, March 1956, pp.181–99.

Berg, Shaun, 'A Fractured Landscape: The Effect on Aboriginal Title to Land by the Establishment of the Province of South Australia', in Shaun Berg (ed.), *Coming to Terms: Aboriginal Title in South Australia*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2010, pp.1–24.

Berndt, Catherine H., 'Digging Sticks and Spears, or, the Two-Sex Model', in Fay Gale (ed.), *Woman's Role in Aboriginal Society*, Second Edition, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1974, pp. 64–84.

Berndt, Catherine H., 'Mythical Women, Past and Present', in Fay Gale (ed.), *We Are Bosses Ourselves: The Status and Role of Aboriginal Women Today*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1983, pp.13–23.

Berndt, Ronald M., 'Tribal Migrations and Myths Centring on Ooldea, South Australia', *Oceania*, vol.12, no.1, September 1941, pp.1–20.

- Berndt, Ronald M., 'The Concept of "The Tribe" in the Western Desert of Australia', *Oceania*, vol.30, no.2, December 1959, pp.81–107.
- Berndt, Ronald M., 'Traditional Concepts of Aboriginal Land', in Ronald M. Berndt (ed.), *Aboriginal Sites, Rights and Resource Development*, Perth: Published for Academy of Social Sciences in Australia by University of Western Australia Press, 1982, pp.1–11.
- Berndt, Ronald M., and Catherine H. Berndt, 'A Preliminary Report of Field Work in the Ooldea Region, Western South Australia' *Oceania*, vol.12, no.4, June, 1942, pp.305–30.
- Berndt, Ronald M., and Catherine H. Berndt, *From Black to White in South Australia*, Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1951.
- Berndt, Ronald M., and Catherine H. Berndt, *End of an Era: Aboriginal Labour in the Northern Territory*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1987.
- Berndt, Ronald M., and Catherine H. Berndt, *The Speaking Land: Myth and Story in Aboriginal Australia*, Ringwood: Penguin, 1989.
- Berndt, Ronald M., and Catherine H. Berndt, *The World of the First Australians. Aboriginal Traditional Life: Past and Present*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1992.
- Berrington, M.D., *Stones of Fire: A Woman's Experiences in Search of Opal*, Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1958.
- Bickerton, Marjorie, *Dust Over the Pilbara*, East Perth: Artlook, 1980.
- Blainey, Geoffrey, *The Rush that Never Ended: A History of Australian Mining*, Fourth Edition, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993.
- Bolton, Geoffrey, 'The Development of the North', in Richard Preston (ed.), *Contemporary Australia: Studies in History, Politics and Economics*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1969, pp.120–50.
- Briand, Rena, *White Man in a Hole*, Melbourne: Phuong-Hoang Press, 1971.
- Britt, Sue, 'Coober Pedy: Chance Discovery Changes the Physical and Social Landscape', in Angela Lush (ed.), *Opal*, Adelaide: South Australian Museum, 2015, pp.27–41.
- Brock, Peggy, *Yura and Uduyu: A History of the Adnyamathanha and the Flinders Ranges*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press in association with Aboriginal Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Planning, South Australia, 1985.
- Brock, Peggy, *Outback Ghettos: Aborigines, Institutionalisation and Survival*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Brock, Peggy, 'Pastoral Stations and Reserves in South and Central Australia, 1850s–1950s', in Ann McGrath and Kay Saunders with Jackie Huggins (eds), *Aboriginal Workers*, Special Issue of Labour History, no. 69, November 1995, pp.102–14.

- Brock, Peggy, 'South Australia', in Ann McGrath (ed.), *Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines under the British Crown*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995, pp.208–39.
- Brock, Peggy, 'Nakedness and Clothing in Early Encounters Between Aboriginal People in Central Australia, Missionaries and Anthropologists', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol.8, no.1, 2007, pp.1–26.
- Brock, Peggy, and Doreen Kartinyeri, *Poonindie: The Rise and Destruction of an Aboriginal Agricultural Community*, Adelaide: South Australian Government Printer and Aboriginal Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Planning South Australia, 1988.
- Broome, Richard, *Aboriginal Australians: Black Response to White Dominance, 1788–1980*, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1982.
- Broome, Richard, 'Aboriginal Workers on South-Eastern Frontiers', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol.26, no.103, 1994, pp.202–20.
- Bruderer, Robert, 'The Coober Pedy Opal Fields', *Walkabout*, vol.23, no.9, September 1957, pp.34–6.
- Burnett, Arch, *Wilful Murder in the Outback*, Adelaide: I.P.P.S. Book Production Services, 1973.
- Busbridge, D. L., 'Aboriginal Employment Problems in South Australia', in Ian G. Sharp and Colin M. Tatz (eds), *Aborigines in the Economy: Employment, Wages and Training*, Melbourne: Jacaranda Press in association with Centre for Research into Aboriginal Affairs, Monash University, 1966, pp. 96–108.
- Calley, Malcolm, 'Economic Life of Mixed-Blood Communities in Northern New South Wales', *Oceania*, vol.26, no.3. March 1956, pp. 200–13.
- Capell. A., *Linguistic Survey of Australia*, Prepared for Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Sydney: Sydney University Monograph, 1963.
- Carr, Joan, 'The Political Economy of Early Australian Gold and Opal Mining Communities and Contemporary Opal Miners at Coober Pedy', *Flinders Journal of History and Politics*, vol. 10, 1984, pp.12–22.
- Castle, R.G., and J.S. Hagan, 'Dependence and Independence', in Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus (eds), *Who are our Enemies: Racism and the Australian Working Class*, Sydney: Hale and Iremonger in association with Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 1978, pp.158–71.
- Castle, Robert, and Jim Hagan, 'Settlers and the State: The Creation of an Aboriginal Workforce in Australia', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 22, no.1, 1998, p.24–35.

- Chauvel, Charles, and Elsa Chauvel, *Walkabout*, London: W.H. Allen, 1959.
- Chesson, Marlene, 'The Social and Economic Importance of the Women of Jigalong', in Fay Gale (ed.), *We Are Bosses Ourselves: The Status and Role of Aboriginal Women Today*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1983, pp.40–3.
- Cilento, Sir Ralph (compiler and editor) with the assistance of Clem Lack senior, for Historical Committee of the Centenary Celebrations Council of Queensland, *Triumph in the Tropics: An Historical Sketch of Queensland*, Brisbane: Smith & Patterson, 1959.
- Clarke, Philip A., *Discovering Aboriginal Plant Use: Journeys of an Australian Anthropologist*, Sydney: Rosenberg, 2014.
- Coates, Ian, 'Golden Reflections: Artists, Entrepreneurs and Aborigines on the North-West Australian Goldfields', in Iain McCalman, Alexander Cook and Andrew Reeves (eds), *Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp.164–78.
- Cockburn, R., *Pastoral Pioneers of South Australia*, vol.1, Adelaide: Publishers Limited, 1925.
- Cody, Andrew and Damien Cody, *The Opal Story: A Guidebook*, Melbourne: Andrew Cody and Damien Cody, 2008.
- Cohn, Bernard S., *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Colahan, John, *Australian Opal Safari*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1973.
- Cousins, David, and John Nieuwenhuysen, *Aboriginals and the Mining Industry*, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984.
- Cowlishaw, Gillian, 'On "Getting it Wrong": Collateral Damage in the History Wars', *Australian Historical Studies*, no.127, 2006, pp.181–202.
- Cram, Len, *Beautiful Opals: Australia's National Gem*, Brisbane: Robert Brown & Associates, 1994.
- Cram, Len, *A Journey with Colour: A History of Lightning Ridge Opal, 1873–2003*, Lightning Ridge: Len Cram, 2004.
- Cram, Len, *A Journey with Colour: A History of South Australian Opal, 1840–2005*, Lightning Ridge: Len Cram, 2006.
- Curthoys, Ann, and Clive Moore, 'Working for the White People: An Historiographic Essay on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Labour', in Ann McGrath and Kay

Saunders with Jackie Huggins (eds), *Aboriginal Workers*, Special Issue of Labour History, no. 69, November 1995, pp.1–29.

Davey, S.F., ‘The Recognition of Aboriginal Cultural Values in Industry’, in Ian G. Sharp and Colin M. Tatz (eds), *Aborigines in the Economy: Employment, Wages and Training*, Melbourne: Jacaranda Press in association with Centre for Research into Aboriginal Affairs, Monash University, 1966, pp. 260–72.

Davidson, Daniel S., ‘Notes on the Pictographs and Petroglyphs of Western Australia and a Discussion of Their Affinities with Appearances Elsewhere on the Continent’, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol.96, no.1, February 1952, pp.76–117.

Davidson, Jenny, and Judy Underwood (compilers), *Images of Coober Pedy 1915–2015*, Coober Pedy: Coober Pedy Historical Society, 2015.

Debelle, Bruce, ‘Aboriginal Customary Law and the Common Law’, in Elliott Johnston, Martin Hinton and Darryle Rigney (eds), *Indigenous Australians and the Law*, London: Routledge-Cavendish, 2008, pp.85–111.

Department of Aboriginal Affairs, ‘A Community Digs in at Coober Pedy’, *Aboriginal Affairs Newsletter*, vol.1, no.2, December, 1979, p.11.

Department of Mines and Energy, South Australia, *South Australia’s Opal*, Adelaide: State Publishing, 1990.

Donaldson, Mike, ‘The End of Time? Aboriginal Temporality and the British Invasion of Australia’, *Time and Society*, vol.5, no.2, 1996, pp.187–207.

Donovan, Peter, *‘In the Interest of the Country’. A History of the Pastoral Board of South Australia 1893–1993*, Adelaide: Pastoral Management Branch of South Australian Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 1995.

Doohan, Kim, *One Family, Different Country: The Development and Persistence of an Aboriginal Community at Finke, Northern Territory*, Oceania Monograph no.42, 1992.

Downing, Jim, *Ngurra Walytja: Country of My Spirit*, Darwin: Australian National University North Australia Research Unit Monograph, 1988.

Eades, Diana, ‘They Don’t Speak an Aboriginal Language or Do They?’, in Ian Keen (ed.), *Being Black: Aboriginal Cultures in ‘Settled’ Australia*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988, pp.97–115.

Eckert, Allan W., *The World of Opals*, New York: John Wiley, 1997.

Edmonds, Penelope, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19th Century Pacific Rim Cities*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010.

Education Department of South Australia, *We Come From the Land*, Adelaide: Education Department of South Australia, 1992.

- Edwards, W.H., *An Introduction to Aboriginal Societies*, Wentworth Falls: Social Science Press, 1988.
- Einfeld, Jann, *Life in the Australian Outback*, San Diego: Lucent Books, 2003.
- Elkin, A.P., 'The Social Organization of South Australian Tribes', *Oceania*, vol. 2, no.1, 1931, pp.44–73.
- Elkin, A.P., 'Reaction and Interaction: A Food Gathering People and European Settlement in Australia', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 53, no. 2, 1951, pp.164–86.
- Elkin, A.P., *Aboriginal Men of High Degree*, Second Edition, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1977.
- Elkin, A.P., *The Australian Aborigines*, Revised Edition, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1979.
- Ellis, Catherine J., and Linda Barwick, 'Antikirinja Women's Song Knowledge 1963–72: Its Significance in Antikirinja Culture', in Peggy Brock (ed.), *Women, Rites & Sites: Aboriginal Women's Cultural Knowledge*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989, pp.21–40.
- Ellwood, Galiina, 'Aboriginal Prospectors and Miners of Tropical Queensland, from Pre-Contact Times to ca.1950', *Journal of Australasian Mining History*, vol.12, October 2014, pp.59–80.
- Evans, Raymond, "'Kings" in Brass Crescents. Defining Aboriginal Labour Patterns in Colonial Queensland', in Kay Saunders (ed.), *Indentured Labour in the British Empire 1834–1920*, London: Croon Helm, 1994, pp.183–212.
- Ewers, John K., 'Yandying for Tin at Moolyella', *Walkabout*, vol. 1, no.7, May 1935, pp.23–4.
- Ewers, John K., 'In and Around Marble Bar', *Walkabout*, vol. 15, no.2, February 1949, pp.29–35.
- Farwell, George, 'Opals With Luck', *Walkabout*, vol.28, no.12, December 1962, pp.16–7.
- Finlayson, H.H., *The Red Centre: Man and Beast in the Heart of Australia*, Third Edition, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1936.
- Fisk, E.K., *The Aboriginal Economy in Town and Country*, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin and Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1985.
- Flood, Josephine, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime: The Story of Prehistoric Australia and its People*, Revised Edition, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1999.
- Foster, Robert, "'Endless Trouble and Agitation": Aboriginal Activism in the Protectionist Era', *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, no.28, 2000, pp.15–25.

- Foster, Robert, 'Rations, Co-existence, and the Colonisation of Aboriginal Labour in the South Australian Pastoral Industry, 1860–1911', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 24, 2000, pp.1–26.
- Fourmile, Henrietta, 'Who Owns the Past? Aborigines as Captives of the Archives', *Aboriginal History*, vol.13. no.1, 1989, pp.1–8.
- Fox, Charlie, *Working Australia*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991.
- Frances, Raelene, Bruce Scates and Ann McGrath, 'Broken Silences? Labour History and Aboriginal Workers', in Terry Irving (ed.), *Challenges to Labour History*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1994, pp.189–211.
- Gale, Fay, 'The Role of Employment in the Assimilation of Part Aborigines', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch*, vol.60, December 1959, pp.49–58.
- Gale, Fay, *Urban Aborigines*, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1972.
- Gale, Fay, 'Aborigines in Australian Society: Urbanisation', in James Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People: An Encyclopaedia of the Nation, its People and Their Origins*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1988, pp.240–4.
- Gara, Tom, 'History, Anthropology and Native Title', in Mandy Paul and Geoffrey Gray (eds), *Through A Smoky Mirror: History and Native Title*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2002, pp. 65–81.
- Gee, Philip D., and Ifeta Gee, 'John McDouall Stuart, South Australian Explorer: The Search for Wingilpin –Tracking Part of his 1858 Exploration', *South Australian Geographical Journal*, vol. 94, 1995, pp.18–35.
- Gibson, Lorraine, "'Who You Is?'" Work and Identity in Aboriginal New South Wales', in Ian Keen (ed.), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010, pp.127–39.
- Goddard, Cliff (compiler), *Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, Revised Second Edition, Alice Springs: IAD Press, 1996.
- Goodall, Heather, "'The Whole Truth and Nothing But ...": Some Intersections of Western Law, Aboriginal History and Community Memory', in Bain Attwood and John Arnold (eds), *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, Special Edition of *Journal of Australia Studies*, no.35, 1992, pp.104–19.
- Goodall, Heather, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770–1972*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with Black Books, 1996.

- Gorman, Alice, 'The Cultural Landscape of Interplanetary Space', *Journal of Social Archaeology*, vol. 5, no.1, 2005, pp.85–107.
- Gould, Richard, 'The Archaeologist as Ethnographer: A Case from the Western Desert of Australia', *World Archaeology*, vol.3, no.2, October 1971, pp.143–77.
- Greenfield, A.J., *Two Good Men: The Greenfield Brothers: Northern Pioneers of South Australia 1856–1926*, Mount Gambier: Jim Greenfield, 2003.
- Grund, J.E., 'Chasing Opal at Coober Pedy 1940's Style', *Australian Gold Gem & Treasure*, vol, 27, no.12, December 2012, pp.53–7.
- Haag, Oliver, 'From the Margins to the Mainstream: Towards a History of Published Indigenous Autobiographies and Biographies', in Peter Read, Francis Peters-Little and Anna Haebich (eds), *Indigenous Biography and Autobiography*, Aboriginal History Monograph 17, Canberra: ANU Press, 2007, pp.5–28.
- Hail, Robert G., *Opals of Australia*, Adelaide: Axiom Publishing, 2003.
- Hamilton, Annette, 'Aboriginal Women: The Means of Production', in Jan Mercer (ed.), *The Other Half: Women in Australian Society*, Ringwood: Penguin, 1975, pp.167–79.
- Hamilton, Annette, 'Dual Social Systems: Technology, Labour and Women's Secret Rites in the Eastern Western Desert of Australia', *Oceania*, vol.51, no.1, 1980, pp.4–19.
- Hardy, Bobbie, *Lament for the Barkindji: The Vanished Tribes of the Darling River Region*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1976.
- Harlow, Sue, *Tin Gods: A Social History of the Men and Women of Maranboy 1913–1962*, Darwin: Historical Society of the Northern Territory, 1997.
- Harrison, Rodney, *Shared Landscapes: Archaeologies of Attachment and the Pastoral Industry in New South Wales*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004.
- Hartwig, Mervyn, 'Capitalism and Aborigines: The Theory of Internal Colonialism and its Rivals', in E.L. Wheelwright and K. Buckley (eds), *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*, vol. 3, Sydney: Australia & New Zealand Book Company, 1978, pp.119–41.
- Hemming, S.J., and P.A. Clarke, *Aboriginal People of South Australia*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1992.
- Hercus, Luise, in collaboration with Barry Cundy, Pamela and Colin Macdonald and Vlad Potezny, 'A Hole in the Ground and a Quarry', in Ingereth Macfarlane with Mary-Jane Mountain and Robert Paton (eds), *Many Exchanges: Archaeology, History, Community and the Work of Isabel McBryde*, Aboriginal History Monograph 11, Canberra: ANU Press, 2005, pp.185–98.

- Hewitt, Ron, 'Aboriginal Adze Stone Hoards Found on the Arcoona Plateau near Woomera, South Australia', *Australian Archaeology*, vol. 4, 1976, pp.14–52.
- Hewitt, Ron, 'The Arcoona Plateau—An Outline of Aboriginal Habitats and Relics', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia*, vol.16, no.6, August 1978, pp.6–19.
- Hiatt, Betty, 'Woman the Gatherer', in Fay Gale (ed.), *Women's Role in Aboriginal Society*, Second Edition, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1974, pp. 4–15.
- Hodson, Sally, 'Nyungars and Work: Aboriginal Experiences in the Rural Economy of the Great Southern Region of Western Australia', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 17, pt.1, 1993, pp. 73–92.
- Holcombe, Sarah, 'Indigenous Organisations and Mining in the Pilbara, Western Australia: Lessons from a Historical Perspective', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 29, 2005, pp.107–35.
- Hollinsworth, D., and J. Craig, *Aboriginal Missions in South Australia*, Adelaide: Nunkuwarrin Yunti of South Australia, 2003.
- Honig, Emily, 'Striking Lives: Oral History and the Politics of Memory', *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 9, no.1, Spring 1997, pp.139–56.
- Horton, David (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History, Society and Culture*, vol.1 A–L, Canberra: Published by Aboriginal Studies Press for Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1994.
- Hughes, Barry, *Exit Full Employment*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1980.
- Hughes, Philip, Marjorie Sullivan, Peter Hiscock and Angela Neyland, 'The Need to Have Understood Your Local Geology: Nature and Sources of Materials Used to Manufacture Stone Artefacts at Olympic Dam, South Australia', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia*, vol.38, December 2014, pp.108–35.
- Idriess, Ion L., *Opals and Sapphires: How to Work, Mine, Class, Cut, Polish, and Sell Them*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1967.
- Isaacs, Jennifer (compiler and editor), *Australian Dreaming: 40,000 Years of Australian History*, Sydney: Lansdowne Press, 1980.
- Jacobs, Jane M., 'Understanding the Limitations and Cultural Implications of Aboriginal Tribal Boundary Maps', *The Globe*, no.25, 1986, pp.1–12.
- Jacobs, Jane M., 'Politics and the Cultural Landscape: The Case of Aboriginal Land Rights', *Australian Geographical Studies*, vol.26, no.2, 1988, pp.249–63.
- Jacobs, Jane M., 'The Construction of Identity', in J.R. Beckett (ed.), *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988, pp.31–43.

- Jacobson, Howard, *In the Land of Oz*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987.
- James, Barbara, *No Man's Land: Women of the Northern Territory*, Sydney: Collins Australia, 1989.
- James, Diana, 'Tjukurpa Time' in Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb (eds), *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place*, Canberra: ANU Press, 2015, pp.33–45.
- Jebb, Mary Anne, *Blood, Sweat and Welfare: A History of White Bosses and Aboriginal Pastoral Workers*, Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2002.
- Jennett, Christine, 'Theorising Internal Colonialism in Australia', *International Journal of the Humanities*, vol.9. no.5, 2012, pp.169–80.
- Johns, R. Keith, *A Mirage in the Desert? The Discovery, Evaluation and Development of the Olympic Dam Ore Body at Roxby Downs, South Australia, 1975–88*, Adelaide: O'Neil Historical & Editorial Services, 2010.
- Johnson, Anne, *Digging Around Coober Pedy: Exploring Life in the Little Opal Mining Town With a Big Profile*, Coober Pedy: Sandstone Press, 2006.
- Jones, Philip, *Ochre and Rust: Artefacts and Encounters on Australian Frontiers*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2007.
- Kalokerinos, Archie, *In Search of Opal*, Sydney: Ure Smith, 1967.
- Keen, Ian, 'Aborigines and Islanders in Australian Society', in Jake M. Najman and John S. Western (eds), *A Sociology of Australian Society: Introductory Readings*, Melbourne: MacMillan, 1988, pp.182–212.
- Keen, Ian, *Aboriginal Economy and Society: Australia at the Threshold of Colonisation*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Keen, Ian, 'Introduction', in Ian Keen (ed.), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010, pp.1–21.
- Keesing, Roger, *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective*, Second Edition, Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981.
- Kidd, Rosalind, *The Way We Civilise. Aboriginal Affairs: The Untold Story*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1997.
- Kimm, Joan, *A Fatal Conjunction: Two Laws Two Cultures*, Sydney: Federation Press, 2004.
- Kitching, H.S., 'Observations of Customs Associated with Kadaitja Practices in Central Australia', *Oceania*, vol.31, no.3, March 1961, pp.210–4.

- Klaassen, Nic, *Sliding Rock: To Mine or Not to Mine*, Adelaide: Nic Klaassen, 1986.
- Klaassen, Nic, *Leigh Creek: An Oasis in the Desert*, Adelaide: Flinders Ranges Research, 1997.
- Kollias, Nicholas, 'Opal Mining in South Australia: From Picks and Shovels to Modern Noodling', in Angela Lush (ed.), *Opal*, Adelaide: South Australian Museum, 2015, pp.43–9.
- Lawrence, Susan, 'Gender and Community Structure on Australian Colonial Goldfields', in A. Bernard Knopp, Vincent C. Pigott and Eugenia W. Herbert (eds), *Social Approaches to an Industrial Past: The Archaeology and Anthropology of Mining*, London: Routledge, 1988, pp.39–58.
- Leechman, Frank, *The Opal Book*, Walkabout Edition, Sydney: Ure Smith, 1969.
- Lennon, Dorothy, and Vicki McCormack, 'A Health Worker at Coober Pedy', *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker*, vol.8, no.3, September 1984, pp.37–9.
- Lloyd, Christopher, 'Settler Economies and Indigenous Encounters: The Dialectics of Conquest, Hybridisation and Production Regimes', in Natasha Fijn, Ian Keen, Christopher Lloyd and Michael Pickering (eds), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies II: Historical Engagements and Current Enterprises*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2012, pp.17–39.
- Lloyd, Stuart, *The Lightning Ridge Book*, Mumbil: Stuart Lloyd, 1967.
- McGrath, Ann, 'Aboriginal Women Workers in the NT, 1911–1939', *Hecate*, vol.4, no.2, July 1978, pp.177–85.
- McGrath, Ann, *'Born in the Cattle': Aborigines in Cattle Country*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987.
- McGrath, Ann, 'Aboriginal Economy: The Pastoral Industry', in James Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People: An Encyclopaedia of the Nation, its People and Their Origins*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1988, pp.207–11.
- McGrath, Ann, and Kay Saunders, 'Introduction', in Ann McGrath and Kay Saunders with Jackie Huggins (eds), *Aboriginal Workers*, Special Issue of Labour History, no. 69, November 1995, pp.vii–xi.
- McGregor, Russell, 'Governance, Not Genocide: Aboriginal Assimilation in the Postwar Era', in A. Dirk Moses (ed.), *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Indigenous Children in Australian History*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2004, pp.290–311.

- Maddock, Rodney, 'The Australian Economy in the Very Long Run', in Rodney Maddock and Ian W. McLean (eds), *The Australian Economy in the Long Run*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp.5–29.
- Maddock, Rodney, 'The Long Boom 1940–1970', in Rodney Maddock and Ian W. McLean (eds), *The Australian Economy in the Long Run*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp.79–105.
- Malcolm, Ian G., *Language and Communication Enhancement for Two-Way Education*, Perth: Edith Cowan University and Education Department of Western Australia, 1995.
- Mann, Colin, 'Look What's Under Coober Pedy', *Australia*, vol.1, no.1, 1973, pp. 22–5.
- Mannion, John, 'The Times They are a Changin' at Andamooka', *Word of Mouth*. Newsletter of South Australian/Northern Territory Association of Oral History Australia, no.62, Autumn 2012, pp.17–8.
- Mathews, Janet, *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker: The Life of an Aboriginal Australian 1900—1972, as told to Janet Mathews*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1982.
- Mattingley, Christobel, and Ken Hampton, *Survival in Our Own Land: 'Aboriginal' Experiences in 'South Australia' Since 1836*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1988.
- May, Dawn, 'The Articulation of the Aboriginal and Capitalist Modes on the North Queensland Pastoral Frontier', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol.7, no.12, 1983, pp.34–44.
- May, Dawn, 'The Role of the State in Fabricating a Black Working Class in the North Queensland Cattle Industry', in Deborah Wade-Marshall and Peter Loveday (eds), *Employment and Unemployment: A Collection of Papers*, Darwin: Australian National University North Australia Research Unit Monograph, 1985, pp. 208–14.
- May, Dawn, *Aboriginal Labour and the Cattle Industry: Queensland from White Settlement to the Present*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Medway, Kerry E., *Coober Pedy: Opal Wonderland of Australia*, Seventh Edition, Coober Pedy: Catacomb Church, 2005.
- Mincham, Hans, *The Story of the Flinders Ranges*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1964.
- Morris, Barry, 'From Underemployment to Unemployment: The Changing Role of Aborigines in a Rural Economy', *Mankind*, vol.13, no.6, April, 1983, pp. 499–516.
- Morton, Peter, *Fire Across the Desert: Woomera and the Anglo–Australian Joint Project 1946–1980*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1989.
- Moyle, Richard M., *Songs of the Pintupi: Mystical Life in a Central Australian Society*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1979.

Mulvaney, D.J., *Encounters in Place: Outsiders and Aboriginal Australians 1606–1985*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1989.

Munro, Robert J., *Kingoonya. A Way of Life. The History of the Kingoonya Township and District*, Adelaide: Robert J. Munro, 1997.

Murphy, E.F., *They Struck Opal! Tales of Men and Mines in the Heyday of Australian Opal*, Sydney: Associated General Publications, 1948.

Myers, Fred R., *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place and Politics Among Western Desert Aborigines*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986.

Naessan, Petter, 'Some Tentative Remarks on the Sociolinguistic Vitality of Yankunytjatjara in Coober Pedy, South Australia', *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, vol.28, no.2, 2008, pp.103–38.

Naessan, Petter, 'The Etymology of Coober Pedy, South Australia', *Aboriginal History*, vol.34, 2010, pp.217–33.

Nayler, Faye, *Warm in My Heart: Ballads and Stories of the Coober Pedy Opal Fields*, Brisbane: Pinto Australia, 2003.

Nora, Pierre, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', *Representations*, no.26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter Memory, Spring 1989, pp.7–24.

Oates, W.J., and Lynette F. Oates, *A Revised Linguistic Survey of Australia*, Australian Aboriginal Studies no.33, Linguistic Series no.12, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1970.

O'Connor, Alan, "“Always Anangu-Always Enterprising”", in Natasha Fijn, Ian Keen, Christopher Lloyd and Michael Pickering (eds), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies II: Historical Engagements and Current Enterprises*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2012, pp.97–115.

O'Farrell, Patrick, 'Oral History: Fact and Fiction', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no.5, 1983, pp.3–9.

O'Leary, Barrie, *A Field Guide to Australian Opals*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1977.

O'Neil, Bernard, *In Search of Mineral Wealth: The South Australian Geological Survey and Department of Mines to 1944*, Special Publication No.2, Adelaide: Department of Mines and Energy, 1982.

O'Neil, Bernard, *Above and Below: The South Australian Department of Mines and Energy 1944 to 1994*, Special Publication No.10, Adelaide: South Australian Department of Mines, 1995.

O'Reilly, M.J., *Bowyangs and Boomerangs: Reminiscences of 40 Years' Prospecting in Australia and Tasmania*, Hobart: Oldham, Beddome and Meredith, 1944.

- Osterstock, Alan, *Andamooka Opal*, Adelaide: Alan Osterstock, 1976.
- Pagan, Adrian, 'The End of the Long Boom in Australia', in Rodney Maddock and Ian W. McLean (eds), *The Australian Economy in the Long Run*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp.106–30.
- Palmer, Kingsley, 'Piety, Fact and the Oral Account in Native Title Claims', *Anthropological Forum*, vol. 21, no.3, November, 2011, pp. 269–86.
- Passerini, Luisa 'Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Facism', *History Workshop Journal*, no.8, 1979, pp.82–108.
- Payne, Helen, 'Rites for Sites or Sites for Rites? The Dynamics of Women's Cultural life in the Musgraves', in Peggy Brock (ed.), *Women, Rites & Sites: Aboriginal Women's Cultural Knowledge*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989, pp.41–59.
- Pecover, Simon R., 'Australian Opal Resources: Outback Spectral Fire', *Rocks & Minerals*, vol. 82, no.2, March/April 2007, pp.102–15.
- Perry, N., and R. Perry, *Australian Opals in Colour*, Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1969.
- Peterson, Nicolas, 'Demand Sharing: Reciprocity and the Pressure for Generosity among Foragers', *American Anthropologist*, vol.95, no.4, 1993, pp.860–74.
- Petri, Helmut, and Giselda Petri-Oderman, 'Stability and Change: Present-Day Historic Aspects Among Australian Aborigines', in Ronald M. Berndt (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology: Modern Studies in the Social Anthropology of the Australian Aborigines*, Perth: Published for Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies by University of Western Australia Press, 1970, pp.248–76.
- Platt, J.T., 'The Kukata–Kukatja Distinction', *Oceania*, vol. 38, no.1, September 1967, pp.61–4.
- Platt, J.T., *An Outline Grammar of the Gugada Dialect: South Australia*, Australian Aboriginal Studies no.48, Linguistic Series no.20, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1972.
- Pope, Alan, *Resistance and Retaliation: Aboriginal–European Relations in Early Colonial South Australia*, Bridgewater: Heritage Action, 1989.
- Powell, Alan, *Far Country: A Short History of the Northern Territory*, Second Edition, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988.
- Raftery, Judith, *Not Part of the Public: Non-Indigenous Policies and Practices and the Health of Indigenous South Australians 1836–1973*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2006.
- Raynes, Cameron, 'A Little Flour and a Few Blankets': *An Administrative History of Aboriginal Affairs in South Australia, 1834–2000*, Adelaide: State Records of South Australia, 2002.

- Raynes, Cameron, *The Last Protector: The Illegal Removal of Aboriginal Children from their Parents in South Australia*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2009.
- Rees, Coralie, and Leslie Rees, *Australia: The Big Sky Country*, Sydney: Ure Smith, 1971.
- Rey, Patrice F., 'Precious Opal: Millions of Years in the Making', in Angela Lush (ed.), *Opal*, Adelaide: South Australian Museum, 2015, pp.53–63.
- Reynolds, Henry, *With the White People*, Ringwood: Penguin, 1990.
- Richardson, Norman, *Pioneers of the North-West of South Australia, 1856–1914*, Facsimile Edition, Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1969 [originally published Adelaide: W.K. Thomas, 1925].
- Richmond, W.H., and P.C. Sharma, 'Introduction', in W.H. Richmond and P.C. Sharma (eds), *Mining and Australia*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983, pp.1–7.
- Riddett, Lyn, 'Aboriginal Employment in the Pastoral Industry (N.T. 1930–1960)', in Deborah Wade-Marshall and Peter Loveday (eds), *Employment and Unemployment: A Collection of Papers*, Darwin: Australian National University North Australia Research Unit Monograph, 1985, pp.199–207.
- Roberts, Ainslie, and Melva J. Roberts, *Dreamtime: The Aboriginal Heritage*, Sydney: Rigby, 1981.
- Rogers, Peter H., *The Industrialists and the Aborigines: A Study of Aboriginal Employment in the Australian Mining Industry*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1973.
- Ross, Kumantjayi, 'Foreword', in Peter McEvoy and Pamela Lyon (compilers), *The Land is Always Alive: The Story of the Central Land Council*, Alice Springs: Central Land Council, 1994, pp.vii–ix.
- Rowley, C.D., *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Ringwood: Penguin, 1972.
- Rowley, C.D., *The Remote Aborigines*, Ringwood: Penguin, 1972.
- Russell, Susie, *The Hybrid Economy Topic Guide*, Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, 2011.
- Sahlins, Marshall, *Stone Age Economics*, London: Tavistock, 1974.
- Sanders, Will, 'The Politics of Unemployment Benefit for Aborigines: Some Consequences of Economic Marginalisation', in Deborah Wade-Marshall and Peter Loveday (eds), *Employment and Unemployment: A Collection of Papers*, Darwin: Australian National University North Australia Research Unit Monograph, 1985, pp.137–62.
- Searcy, Alfred, *In Australian Tropics*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1907.

Sharpe, Don, 'Andamooka: Opal Outpost', *Walkabout*, vol.36, no.7, July 1970, pp.12–5, 17.

Shreuder, Deryck, 'The Heroic Study of Records: Problematizing Archival and Textual Sources of Historical Writing', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no.16, 1994, pp.67–9.

Smith, Mike, *The Archaeology of Australia's Deserts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Smith, Pamela A., 'Station Camps: Legislation, Labour Relations and Rations on Pastoral Leases in the Kimberley Region, Western Australia', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 24, 2000, pp.75–97.

Spindler, George, and Louise Spindler, 'Foreword', in Robert Tonkinson, *The Mardu Aborigines: Living the Dream in Australia's Desert*, Second Edition, Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1991, pp.v–vii.

Stanner, W.E.H., 'Aboriginal Territorial Organization: Estate, Range, Domain and Regime', *Oceania*, vol.36. no.1, September 1965, pp.1–26.

Stanner, W.E.H., 'The Dreaming', in W.E.H. Stanner (ed.), *White Man Got No Dreaming*, Canberra: ANU Press, 1978, pp.23–40.

Stevens, Frank, *Aborigines in the Northern Territory Cattle Industry*, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974.

Strehlow, T.G.H., 'Geography and the Totemic Landscape in Central Australia: A Functional Study', in Ronald M. Berndt (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology: Modern Studies in the Social Anthropology of the Australian Aborigines*, Perth: Published for Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies by University of Western Australia Press, 1970, pp.92–140.

Summers, John, *Road to Andamooka*, London: Robert Hale, 1965.

Tarpey, Michael, 'Journey to the Centre of Centre', *Walkabout*, vol.39, no.9, September 1973, pp. 16–23.

Thompson, E.P., 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present*, no.38, December 1967, pp.56–97.

Thompson, Paul, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Thorpe, Bill, 'Aboriginal Employment and Unemployment: Colonised Labour', in Claire Williams with Bill Thorpe, *Beyond Industrial Society: the Work of Men and Women*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992, pp. 88–107.

- Tindale, N.B., *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia. Their Terrain, Environmental Controls, Distribution, Limits, and Proper Names*, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974.
- Tonkinson, Robert, *The Jigalong Mob: Aboriginal Victors of the Desert Crusade*, Menlo Park: Cummings, 1974.
- Tonkinson, Robert, *The Mardu Aborigines: Living the Dream in Australia's Desert*, Second Edition, Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1991.
- Torrence, Robin, and Anne Clarke, 'Negotiating Difference: Practice Makes Theory for Contemporary Archaeology in Oceania', in Robin Torrence and Anne Clarke (eds), *The Archaeology of Difference: Negotiating Cross-Cultural Engagements in Oceania*, London: Routledge, 2000, pp.1–32.
- Tosh, John, with Sean Lang, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, Fourth Edition, Harlow: Longman Pearson, 2006.
- Toyne, Phillip, and Daniel Vachon, *Growing up the Country: The Pitjantjatjara Struggle for their Land*, Melbourne: McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books, 1984.
- Traeger, Rhonda, 'No Empty Desert', in Madeline Brunato (ed.), *South Australian Scrapbook: Glimpses of Colourful People and Events*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1979, pp.152–8.
- Vaarzon-Morel, Petronella, 'Camels and the Transformation of Indigenous Economic Landscapes', in Natasha Fijn, Ian Keen, Christopher Lloyd and Michael Pickering (eds), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies II: Historical Engagements and Current Enterprises*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2012, pp.73–95.
- Veale, Sharon, and Kathleen Schilling, *Talking History: Oral History Guidelines*, Sydney: Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW), 2004.
- Wake, P. Vin., *Opal Men*, Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1969.
- Wallace, Noel M., 'Changes In Spiritual and Ritual Life in Pitjantjatjara (Bidjandjadara) Society, 1966 to 1973', in R.M. Berndt (ed.), *Aborigines and Change: Australia in the 70s*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1977, pp.74–89.
- Wallace, Noel M., 'European Domination and Cultural Confusion: Forced Change Among the Pitjantjatjara', in Robert Tonkinson and Michael Howard (eds), *Going It Alone? Prospects for Aboriginal Autonomy: Essays in Honour of Ronald and Catherine Berndt*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1990, pp.83–97.
- White, John, 'Peas, Beans and Riverbanks: Seasonal Picking and Dependence in the Tuross Valley', in Ian Keen (ed.), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010, pp.109–26.

White, John M., 'Histories of Indigenous–Settler Relations: Reflections on Internal Colonialism and the Hybrid Economy', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no.1, 2011, pp.81–96.

Wilson, John, 'The Pilbara Aboriginal Social Movement: An Outline of its Background and Significance', in Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt (eds), *Aborigines of the West: Their Past and Present*, Perth: University of Western Australia Press for the Education Committee of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations, 1979, pp.151–68.

Wollaston, T.C., *Opal: The Gem of the Never Never*, Adelaide: Limited Edition Reprint by Flinders Press, 1995 [originally published London: Thomas Murby, 1924].

Yelland, Leith, *Holding the Line: A History of the South Australian Dog Fence Board, 1947 to 2000*, Adelaide: Primary Industries and Resources South Australia, 2001.

Young, Diana, 'Dingo Scalping and the Frontier Economy in the North-West of South Australia', in Ian Keen (ed.), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010, pp.91–108.

Online Sources

Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, 'Average Weekly Earnings, March Quarter 1969'.

<[www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/free.nsf/0/65CAF876A476737BCA2575160011324D/\\$File/63020_MAR1969.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/free.nsf/0/65CAF876A476737BCA2575160011324D/$File/63020_MAR1969.pdf)> accessed 26 January 2016.

New South Wales Department of Primary Industries, 'Mining by Aborigines-Australia's First Miners', *Primefacts*, no.572, February 2007, pp.1–4.

<www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/109817/mining-by-aborigines> accessed 15 August 2015.

South Australian Department of State Development, *Opal*. <http://minerals.state.development.sa.gov.au/mining/opal_mining> accessed 18 November 2015.

Stuart, J.M., *The Journals of John McDouall Stuart During the Years 1858, 1859, 1860, 1861 & 1862, When he Fixed the Centre of the Continent and Successfully Crossed it from Sea to Sea*. Edited from Mr. Stuart's Manuscript by William Hardman, M.A., F.R.G.S. &c. With Maps, a Photographic Portrait of Mr Stuart, and Twelve Engravings Drawn on Wood by George French Angas, from Sketches Taken During the Expedition, Second Edition, London: Saunders, Otley and Co., 1865.

<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/stuart/john_mcdouall/journals/> accessed 24 September 2013.

Audio/Visual Sources

Thornton, Warwick (director), *The Old Man and the Inland Sea*, DVD, Canberra: Ronin Films, 2005.

Umoona Opal Mine and Museum, *Eagle Dreaming*, DVD, Coober Pedy: Umoona Opal Mine and Museum, 2004.

Van Cleefe, Mark, and Barry Pitman (directors), *Opal, Town and Country Series*, DVD, Sydney: ABC Commercial, 1966.

Whittaker, Roger (director), *Million Dollar Gamblers*, VHS, Sydney: Roger Whittaker Film, 1982.