

Daisy Bates Papers

MSS 572.994 B32t

Series 5: 'Notes not for legends or included in Aborigines: Odd notes only'

Series V, 8 (2 p.) Australia's 'The Big River' and its lost people, transcribed J. Walkley

The Great Murray River which runs under various aliases – through practically all the states except Western Australia, entering South Australia as the Murray and emptying itself in the wide waste of sandbars and coastal lakes known as the Coorong, was peopled under all its aliases by virile aboriginal groups who from time immemorial inherited well defined land and river and island rights throughout its long course. From its great codfish to its littlest carp-goldfish, its waters supplied every group on its banks with fish diet – most of the year. Flood years or drought years – it was their standby. On its banks grew the Murray lily whose bulbous turnip-like roots gave them vegetable food in its season.

They must have been numerous groups – having both land and river to draw upon for their daily food. They made themselves canoes of bark or log to wander down its floodwaters for corroboree or battle with their kind. A fierce people I should say, living in such a fertile area.