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Looking for ngamunpurru *by Meg Mooney*

Martha directs me along a wide dirt road
cutting straight from the new bitumen airstrip
to the outstation near the rocky foothills
the other tracks, pottering across the plain,
are no good now she says

we can't find the old way from the outstation
so we head along the main dirt road
towards the great bare range looking over us
its curves and folds blue and purple
we've only gone a short way
when Martha shouts at me to stop, go back

she's spotted a bush among the spinifex and sennas
some distance from the road
we find it covered with white star-flowers
Martha's greatgrandchildren point out a few berries
drops of green among the fine leaves
'not ready yet', smiles Martha
'that awalyurru same' – another shrub with berries
we find some the next day, she's right of course

so we go back east to her outstation, away from that time
when the old ladies hit branches with sticks
to make the berries fall on a cloth
used a long wooden bowl to winnow out the leaves
soon the dish was full of shiny, dark fruit
Martha picked by hand, her beautiful face
concentrating as she filled a large milk can
from the little stand of bushes in the foothills

I wore a favourite yellow and black patterned skirt
took photos, did not think the old ladies
would collect ngamunpurru like this only a few more times
the younger, less-skilled women would not be so keen
tracks would close up, weeds threaten
and this bounty would end

Meg Mooney is a natural scientist and poet and has been in central Australia for 23 years now, living and/or working in remote Aboriginal communities for most of that time. Her poems often have a strong narrative and attention to detail and focus on her association with Aboriginal communities and the landscape. *For the dry country: writing and drawings from the Centre*, by Meg Mooney and artist Sally Mumford, was published by Ptilotus Press in 2005. She has had poems published in a range of journals and anthologies.