

MULUNGA OLD MULUNGA. 'GOOD CORROBOREE', THEY RECKON

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INTRODUCTION:

The Mulunga 'corroboree' is one of the best-recorded of all travelling ceremonies (see Mulvaney 1976:90-92). Various recorded in the past as the Molonga or Mudlunga ceremony (see Hercus 1980:5), it was a ceremony which illustrated 'rapid diffusion of ideas' (Mulvaney 1976).

In this account Walter Smith Purula, born 2 July 1893, discusses his memories of the ceremony. His pronunciations of all words have been retained, with pauses indicated by blank lines. A brief biographical note on Walter Smith appears at the end of this description of the ceremony.



WALTER SMITH IN 1981, ABOUT 88 YEARS OLD
[PHOTO: R.G. KIMBER]

Although Walter Smith had indicated, in casual discussion during May 1981, that he remembered the Mulunga ceremony (as he pronounced it), the actual recording of his memories took place over the next year. I tape-recorded discussions on six occasions from 3 June 1981 to 12 March 1982 and also made notes of a discussion on 26 May 1982. My questioning and commentary have been edited to eliminate superfluous words and reiterative summaries. Similarly all discussions have been edited into one account, with end notes indicating any changes of emphasis or focus.

Peter Austin, R.M.W. Dixon, Tom Dutton and Isobel White, eds
Language and history: essays in honour of Luise A. Hercus, 175-191.
Pacific Linguistics, C-116, 1990.

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My research since the tape-recordings were made has indicated that the observations could not have occurred before mid 1914, but that they almost certainly did occur in the latter part of that year and into 1915.

THE MULUŃA CEREMONY

On 3 June 1981 I (RK) introduced the topic of the MuluŃa ceremony to Walter Smith (WS) by reference to the L. Hercus (1980) account, 'How we danced the MudluŃa': memories of 1901 and 1902'.

I attempted several pronunciations of the word MudluŃa before striking one to which Walter responded.

WS MuluŃa!

RK Where did you first hear of that corroboree?

WS Oodnadatta.

RK Was that the time you were working for Charlie Sadadeen?¹

WS That's Charlie Sadadeen time now. Bout ____.

RK Were you a big boy or a man then? (RK suggested various ages too.)

WS I was a big boy then. Bit older [than 15-16 years] I think. I must've been [about 18 years old], must be like that.²

(RK, having mentioned the alternative name Tji-tji-ngarla, not known to WS, showed WS a photograph of the ceremony, published in the Hercus article.)

WS Yeah, MuluŃa [stated confidently]. I can just see that [photo], y'know. By gosh, eh!

RK When you saw the corroboree, you said [at the time of the May 1981 casual discussion] it was a camp corroboree³. Can you discuss it?

WS Yeah, camp corroboree, it's a camp corroboree.

Well, they used to have a ____ it was a ____ made out of a, like a, like a pipe or something, but it's a hollow tree. And they used to blow it, Pu! Pu!

And they used to say: 'Oh, MuluŃa comin' now. We got to leave our work and we got to meet up with these people; big dance tonight'. Y'know. And they muster all the boys up too. And some need to ____ didn't like to go, y'see. They hide themselves. Get in [amongst] the pack-saddle[s], under the pack-saddle or something. They reckon they might make him wati [man] too, y'know.⁴

RK What was the size of the pipe?

WS Oh, about two foot [0.6m]. Just like a ____bit, something like a water-pipe, y'know. Bit skinny. (Diameter of approx. 6-7 cm indicated.)

RK Did they have a name for that pipe?⁵

WS No, they only called it Kulpma. That Kulpma corroboree was called Kulpma⁶ and they called that damn thing they used to blow, Kulpma too.

RK Kulpma. So that trumpet, they used to use it to call them up for the Mulunga corroboree, but that trumpet came from the Kulpma corroboree? Kulpma was a different corroboree? (RK was confused here.)

WS Mulunga. (Stated at the same time as RK in the previous comment.) Kulpma. I don't know what [why] they called [trumpeted] that [drone-pipe] for. It was 'long to Mulunga. Yeah.

RK When they blew on them [it], did it just make one noise [note]?

WS Yeah, one noise all the time.

Just 'Pu:u:u:u' ____ 'Peh! Peh!' (Peh! is the call given by the drone-pipe blower immediately the drone call is finished.)

He'll sing out [call 'Peh! Peh!'] too then. He's painted up too, with paint. White, white. His legs are painted up white too. Four lines. (Four lines of white, from the knee to the trunk, were indicated.)

RK [The] chest?

WS I think he was _____. I think that was black here [indicating chest]. Painted black, yeah. Big _____. Just one [big band] plast[ered] right across. (A conventional shoulder to shoulder band of black, looping down and across the chest, was indicated.)⁷

RK Any head-dress please?

WS What the devil they [have] ____? They had 'em. That feather they used to put there y'know. Y'know, white cockatoo?⁸ They get the feathers and cut [pull] them out, tie 'em on the stick [a slender pointed stick is used as a central support] and stick 'em in the head here [on the crown of the head]. Tie the strings [forehead band of hair-string] up then. He got pretty. And then put that white _____. What the devil [do they call it]? The Luritja⁹ call 'em ____ panta. Panta yeah. This white rag, rag a _____. (RK here mentioned that the Warlpiri used tea-tree bark to fashion a white head-band in the 'early days'). Yeah, tea-tree bark and the strings too. Make it white an' ____ might be about eight or nine of them. Those little strings about that wide [indicated three fingers wide] for the forehead, for here see [indicating], so they can tie 'em up here.

(From WS's description, a very broad forehead band was indicated, about three fingers wide. Such forehead bands are broader than usual and, being whitened, are intended to be eye-catching or 'flash'.)

WS Yeah, three fingers across; sometimes three, sometimes four. He might be big forehead that bloke [as can be seen] by that [broad band] y'know. Right back. [His hair is pulled back very firmly to expose the forehead so that the head-band is seen to best advantage.] And pull it back whiles he got it pulled out with a stick.

RK So the hair is pulled out to give a broad forehead for display of the band?¹⁰

WS Yeah, by gee. Yes, I tried that too. No good. By god it makes you sing out [cry out because of the pain]. (WS chuckled.) Like three. By god — the damn thing. In the fence, mate. (The latter section is indistinct. The intimation is that the broad white forehead band stood out like a fence.)

- RK (Reiteration of details of Mulunga corroboree preparation (paint, head-dress etc..))
Did they have any leaves?¹¹
- WS Yeah. Leaves tied up here [indicating right ankle] and there [left ankle].
And here too [indicating the wrists].
- RK Were these leaves tied to the wrist, Walter, or just [held]?
- WS Yeah, tied to the wrist. To the ankle too.
- RK And that way when they were dancing, stamping up and down...
- WS Swish! Swish! Swish!
- RK I know what you mean. (A kind of percussion effect is obtained.)
Did they carry anything, like a spear or a stick or anything?
- WS No, only that trumpet thing.
- R.K And they had some feathers, white cockatoo feathers?
- WS No, eagle.¹²
- RK And they did not have that big tall one [cone-like head-dress], they just stuck them [the feathers attached to a pointed stick] in the head-band? Eaglehawk feathers.
- WS Yeah, just stuck in, yeah.
That's Mulunga. Head-dress.¹³
Oh, they come about ____ get ready, about five o'clock [p.m].
They'll be down on the corroboree ground then. Everybody take tea an', y'know, bit of tucker with them, *kuka* [meat], everything. They have their big corroboree then, their sing-song. They all dance and all that.
- RK It was one [ceremony] where everyone could join in [be present], all the family.¹⁴
- WS Yeah, everyone.
- RK Did the women have a dance too?
- WS Oh yes, yes.
- RK Was there a story for that corroboree?
- WS Yeah, [but] I don't remember that story. They, they did have a story 'long [belonging] to it.
- RK [It] must have come from another country. They learnt the song and they learnt the dance, but the meaning was left behind a bit.
- WS Yeah. Yeah, left behind a bit, I think.
- RK Do you know what the main language was? Was it a language from somewhere else when you were singing it?
- WS No, it were just Luritja and Aranda. That's all they [used].
- RK Was it a new or an old corroboree?

- WS No, it was a new corroboree.¹⁵
- RK Had it been carried to Oodnadatta some time before [you saw it], or was it new [when you were first present]?
- WS No, it was a new corroboree. No-one carried that one before.
- RK When you first saw it at Oodnadatta, was it Oodnadatta people or a different people who sang out?
- WS That mob came from place called Wantapilla [Wantapella, an extensive claypan swamp near the present town of Marla in northern South Australia].
- RK What was the name of the white people who owned that Wantapilla?¹⁶ (The name Lennon was suggested by RK on the basis of prior discussions with WS about other matters.)
- WS Tom William[s] and Mr _____. Brian Lennon, Brian Lennon, Brian Lennon and ____ Jim Lennon. (Repetition of the name Brian Lennon is an alternative by WS to a long pause.)
- RK Did it come from somewhere before Wantapilla?
- WS (Indistinct. Probably said 'No' on the basis of all other evidence.)
Old fella named ____ he was a native ____ old fella named Butcher Dick, he owned that corroboree now.
- RK Did he have a skin? [i.e. Do you recall his sub-section?]
- WS Butcher Dick. Butcher Dick _____. Yes, he was a Pananga man, I think.
- RK Where was he from?
- WS Todmorden [station] and this Wantapilla, an' _____. And that claypan we always talk about. Mala-malu something. Malu-malu something.
- RK Marla Bore.
- WS Yes that's the one. That's Jim Lennon's. He [Butcher Dick] couldn't go no further, that was his boundary, y'know like.¹⁷ Them days they was pretty ____ little bit no good them people in the Luritja days. But they ____ [became] steady, they got sort of friendlier then.
- RK What did you mean by those 'Luritja days'?
- WS He's tough people. (WS then indicated that the Luritja people, the Antikerinja of Indulkana-Wantapilla area, held onto everyone who belonged to that country, preventing movement easterly into Southern Aranda country until after 1914.¹⁸ However as time passed the senior men instigated reciprocal exchange of songs so that, 'They make friends then, y'see'.)
- RK Minor reiteration of the discussion thus far.
- WS That Mulunga mob came from there [Wantapilla]. Came down to Oodnadatta, they had it there for a while ____.¹⁹
- RK So you heard it first at Oodnadatta and you were a big boy. (WS here indicated that he was a young man.) When it was at Oodnadatta, how long did it go on? One day, one night?
- WS They kept that goin' there for _____. That corroboree must've been there for a month. Like, [Aboriginal] camel-men and horsemen, an' everyone comin'. They go back [to their home

areas after witnessing the Mulunga ceremony] y'know, an' they tell the other ones. Well then [the others say], 'Oh well, we must get a job an' get down then, and see this corroboree'.

RK So a lot of people were coming in?

WS Oh, yes.

RK It must have been easy to move there. Was it after mustering? Or was it summer, or winter?

WS Yeah, little bit on the winter time, winter time, yeah. Because I remember them, they used to ____; anyone got [who had] camels, y'see, they used to go to the Afghan and ask him, 'Can we cart one load of wood for this Mulunga, we want to see Mulunga tonight, y'see?'. Old Afghan say, 'Yes, you go and cart 'im'. An' might give four camels, or something [like that number, to assist]. And 'nother one might be workin' for [a different] Afghan too and ask him, 'Can we have a couple of camels, or something, can you give us some camels to cart wood for this Mulunga?'

RK So enough wood was carted for all the mob?

WS Yeah. All the mob.

RK Were women and kids allowed along?

WS No, whole lot. Yeah, women and men and all.

RK Can you remember any of the song?

WS God, I remember it, if I can _____. I remember it. Easy one too.²⁰

RK Can you say the route of travel?²¹

WS It starts from Wantapilla, went down to Oodnadatta _____ must of been there for nearly twelve months.²² And I don't know for sure, whether they walked it across to Birdsville, so's the _____. Because Aranda and Arabana, they was all one, y'see.

RK They was [sic] good mates.

WS Yeah, they was good mates, yeah. And that Arabana and Wongkunguru, Wongkunguru come in then, that's from Birdsville side. He [Wongkunguru people] got mixed up with that [that is, were associated with the travelling ceremony].

RK (Reiteration of the evidence for travel as previously given, with reference to the Mulunga ceremony passing from group to group, including the people at Anna Creek.)

WS They learning it all the time. Yeah, yes it went to Anna Creek. It went to place called Old Peake Station, and Warrina, all that, all that place near there. Travelled down that way.

RK Did you see it at Old Peake Station or only at Oodnadatta?

WS I seen it at _____ old truckin' yard there, down from _____ up from Old Peake Station. What the devil [do they call that place] _____? Warrina.

RK (Brief comment that he knew Warrina Creek and railway area, with a building in ruins and an old waggon beside it.)

WS Had a store there.²³ That's him [referring to recall of the waggon]. Yeah. All waggons and drays was there in the early days, y'see. Left [abandoned] y'know, like.

- RK So you saw it [the Mulunga ceremony] at Oodnadatta and Warrina too?
- WS Yeah. I went down [to Warrina] for some camels. They sent me down for camels. Yeah. I come back and told those old people, 'Oh, that corroboree's way down Warrina Station now'.
- Oh! Oh yes, he [the ceremony] got to go right through, he got to go to that Lake country [Lake Eyre country, various localities] and he go across then, he can go along Queensland.
- RK What was the next place southerly?²⁴
- WS Went to a place called Warrina. From Warrina he [the ceremony] went down again. He went to a place called Anna Creek. And from Anna Creek he turned off, he got on this river side then, goin' back to a place called Birdsville. That River ____ Finke. Up here at the top. I don't know what they call him [the river] there, bottom end.²⁵ (The Diamantina River is the intended reference.)
- RK From Warrina to Anna Creek, then turned back?
- WS He went down again, yeah went to a place called _____. Old station there 'long [belong] to old Crombie brothers, Scobies, all them people, out from Marree. On the Birdsville [Track].
- What they call that station?²⁶
- Yes, that, what they call the Wongkonguru and the Tiari [Tirari] people [were the traditional owners]; they [the Crombie and Scobie families] took it [the country] on then. Took it _____. Up Birdsville Track into Queensland.
- RK The Mulunga did not go to Marree, it cut across?
- WS I think so. He went the top side of the Lake. He never went up close to the Lake, he went little bit top side. He went to Birdsville.
- RK So the corroboree travelled [from] Anna Creek to Birdsville. And Lake Eyre is the Lake?
- WS Yeah, Lake Eyre, Yeah. Blackfellow call him Arrantja. Arrantja, yeah. Waterbag! Natives' water-bag [is the meaning].
- RK Oh, that kangaroo [hide] one. That's that Dreaming. (See McBryde 1987:258 for further details.)
- WS (chuckling) Yeah, that's kangaroo. That's that Dreaming.
- RK Do you know any places out there [on the north side of Lake Eyre]?
- WS No, I don't _____. But he [the Mulunga ceremony] kept on the north side of Lake Eyre. That north side. He didn't go right up to the Lake. He went over to where this Scobies' country [was]. Birdsville.
- RK Place called Clifton Hills, that's south.
- WS That Clifton Hill is south. That's that Tiari, most of 'em come there. Wongkonguru and Tiari, they mix up [at] that Clifton Hill country.
- RK He [the Mulunga ceremony] didn't go straight north from Birdsville?

WS He cut around there. He's somewhere not far from Scobies' country, this ____, what do you call it again? On the east, little bit east [of Birdsville]. Not far from Birdsville, he _____. It was a town. Had big stores and pubs, an' something.²⁷ It travelled on the lead road then.

From Birdsville it went into Queensland, and he [the ceremony] come back to Mount Isa _____. Not Mount Isa, [but the] head of the line there. Before Mount Isa [was reached he come [turned] back, old Mulunga.

He went that way, down Wongkonguru, and Tiari, come around, back to Wongkonguru again, and Alyowera, to this place end of the railway line ____ what the ____ Djarra! [Dajarra]. Yeah, Djarra.

RK Do you know any other place they went to [i.e. between Birdsville and Dajarra]?

WS They went into ____ station there, they call it _____. East again from a place called Boulia. It went in there, and it started to go up that way then. North again, yeah.

RK Can you think of that station, Walter?

WS I can't think of it. It's opal country, y'know. Opal mine. Opal mine there, opal. No [I cannot remember].

RK Thereafter, where?

WS He come back to Boulia then again. And went [towards] that Barkly Tableland then, goin' back up along the railway line then. To Djarra. He come down the river there then [the Georgina River, west of Dajarra] to a place called _____. What that, that place? ____ Irrandantji [Urandangi]. Yeah, he come back to Irrandantji and he turned off and he went that way [west] then. He got back here to ____ Quartz Hill country. Mr Cavanagh [is the present station-owner; Ambalindum is the station]. Aranda country, he comes back there.

RK I think you said [on another occasion] it came from Urandangi through the Toko Range.

WS No the bugger [the ceremony] must have went back up north again. It went to ____ not Velvet Top, not Lake Nash.. it come back from ____ damn place, when I was there, I carted wolfram through that road to a place called Djarra, end of the line, end of the line was Djarra then. (From later discussions the wolfram field was Hatches Creek (see Kimber 1986:37).)

RK Not [through] Tobermorey?

WS North from Tobermorey.

(From Hatches Creek the ceremony was travelled via Ooratippra to Lucy Creek, then as follows.)

It come past Jervois. Bonya, it come past that. He stopped on the north side [of the Plenty River]. Well, it'll be _____. Eighteen miles from Orobera it stopped. It's on the other side of the creek, on other side of the Plenty. On the east side of the Plenty, big old mica show there. That's where that corroboree stopped. 'Bout seven miles, seven or eight miles from Marshall Bore, little bit south-west. [The] mica mine where that corroboree stopped, they [the Aborigines] call it Tjukulpa. Tjukulpa. That's natives' name but _____. Queen Mine! The Queen Mine.

- RK (reiterating) Now, that one, you told me how she [the Mulunga ceremony] came all the way ____ from around that Wantapella way, right through and everything ____.
- WS Yeah. Right through. He went straight past Birdsville, went to that Arabana people, Wongkonguru and Dieri. Tiari, he's that place too.
- RK Yeah, yeah. And she went in a big circle, big circle, pretty well.
- WS It came from Aluritja people. It must be _____. First one that started that corroboree, old fella named Butcher Dick. He took it into Oodnadatta. And took it from Oodnadatta down along the line [to Warrina, Old Peake Station etc.], end down [across] to Birdsville. And from there he went across then, into Queensland.
- RK Did Butcher Dick go with it all the way?
- WS No, he went to _____, I don't know [remember] what that river [was called]. Can't think of it. It's a river run from Queensland to that Lake now. That waterbag Lake [Lake Eyre]. What the devil do they call it now?
- RK Diamantina?
- WS No, not the Diamantina.
- RK Georgina?
- WS Georgina! Yeah. They followed that one up there. Plenty of fish. They went in to this place, what the hell they call it? Oh, that damn station I always forget. I got my eyes cut out [operated on] there too.
- RK (after suggesting Winton and referring to Urandangi) Did Butcher Dick go all that way?
- WS No, he went up _____ he went along that _____. He went up _____. He turned back, and went into Irrandantji there. But the mob went straight on. They [the people carrying the Mulunga ceremony] went straight on _____. (Butcher Dick apparently returned to his home country of Todmorden Station to Wantapella at this stage.) This old bloke we always talk about, he was in with it too. That old Sandhill Bob.²⁸
- RK Golly gosh!!
- WS Yeah.
- RK What, did he _____ he picked 'em up somewhere in his own country, did he?
- WS He picked them up at a place called _____ other side of railway [in Queensland]. Place called Boulia.
- RK Oh, right _____. He came in right [all the way] from Boulia with them?
- WS Yeah, yeah.
- RK Oh, I suppose everyone wanted to get in on it, Walter?
- WS Oh, yeah.
- RK Well, it must have been important?²⁹
- WS Oh yes, they reckon, 'Good corroboree', they reckon. Yes, everyone enjoyed it.
- RK Yeah, but she finished up [ended].

- WS [It come] Right back to Aranda country. Right back here to ____ just on the side of Plenty River. Plenty River, Plenty. He come through, come past the Jervois, Jervois Range. And that old rain-makin' place, 'Robera [Oorobera of maps]. And that old bloke [who] was boss for 'Robera, he brought it back then, and he left it there [at Tjukulpa, the locality of the Queen mica mine]. They left it there [that is, performances of the Mulunga corroboree ceased], like, something went wrong; one of their [the Wantapella people's] cousins, or brothers, someone died [who was travelling with, and important to the Mulunga ceremony]. And they [the people carrying the corroboree] had to go back to ____ [their home country]. That was the end of it, it never come back no further. The tribe sort of died down a bit. (In other tape-recorded material Walter Smith indicated that the severe influenza epidemic of 1919 killed many Aborigines and brought a great deal of ceremonial life to an end.)
- He [the ceremony] finished here. Just on the other side of the Plenty.
- RK Quartz Hill country.
- WS Yeah, Quartz Hill country, like. It come back there, but [and] the natives got to Quartz Hill, but that corroboree didn't. They left their corroboree sticks behind, on the other side of the Plenty.
- RK Well, I think you said it stopped because the boss who was carrying it, his cousin or some relation died.
- WS Some relation died, something. Something happened there. Couldn't say what it was, but it's something wrong there, y'know. He must of died this old bloke [who] was carrying it [the ceremony], y'know. He must have been half Wongkonguru and half Aranda. Aranda from that end, South Australian side, y'see [that is, a Southern Aranda from the general originating area as opposed to an Eastern Aranda from the locality at which the ceremony ceased]. They was going to bring it right back here [to Alice Springs], and send it down this way [south] to place called Arnabella [Ernabella]. And ____.
- RK A question has occurred to me. When the Mulunga was travelling, were there some men who went with it all the way?
- WS Must've. That fella must've died or something [else of a drastic nature] went wrong where [it stopped].
- RK Like he [who died] was a big [important] man for it.
- WS Yeah.
- RK The Queen Mine called Tjukulpa is where it stopped.
- WS Mulunga corroboree stopped. Yeah. I think that old bloke, he got crippled, or whether he died there or _____. He might've died at Oorobera, y'know. Something happened there. Stopped there, and some people mixed up [closely associated with the ritual leader, travelled north to investigate] from this, old Jim Lennon's Station.
- RK Yeah. Down Wantapilla.
- WS From Wantapilla. He [they] come all the way up there to go and see where the corroboree stopped, see. Must've been somebody finished [died] there, y'know.

- RK He [they] wanted to see whether everything was alright [that is, that there had not been foul play involved].
- WS Yeah, something like that y'know. Yeah. Two young fellas and two old men.
- RK They came up there [to Tjukulpa]?
- WS They come up there, they went there, right to this Tjukulpa. They had to sit down there for a couple of weeks and find out, I suppose, what happened. And they sent 'em back on camels again. They went there with camels and they sent 'em back with somebody. (An Eastern Aranda man accompanied them back, to ensure that they were well attended to wherever they camped, is the implication from other discussions.)
- RK So everything was squared off.
- WS That was the ____, that was right then. Yeah. They must have knew something must've happened [that was acceptably natural and unavoidable about the ritual leader's death]. And they went back. They come back [to the Oodnadatta country] pretty happy anyhow, they [did]. Yeah.
- RK You can remember him [the Mulunga ceremony] coming alright!
- WS Yeah, yeah. Old Mulunga! It finished it there, on the other side of the Plenty. North side. Something happened. He had to go back, so it never come this far [to Alice Springs]. They reckon it [was] going to come right through here [Eastern Aranda country to Alice Springs], go back [south] to Finke River, and go back to Nura Arnaballinna [Ernabella], and go back to Mungapiti, and go back that way [to Wantapella-Oodnadatta area].
- RK But it finished up.
- WS It finished up there [at Tjukulpa].

DISCUSSION

The Mulunga (Molongo/Mudlunga) ceremony has previously been so well-considered (see Bibliography) that but a brief discussion is warranted. Roth reported its very rapid spread in the period 1893-1896, from the 'Georgina headwaters and Northern Territory' over a very wide area including Boulia and the Middle Diamantina, and 'making for the Lower Diamantina' (Roth 1984 [1897]:116). The interesting point about Walter Smith's 1914-1915 account is that it was undoubtedly important that, in its return travel of that year of performances, the ceremony be carried to its originating people – as well as elsewhere.

Its further reported spread in the period 1896-1918 (see Hercus 1980:7; Mulvaney 1976:90-92) illustrates two very distinctive clusters of dates. Between 1896 and 1902 it spread to Alice Springs, Kilalpaninna and Peake Station – that is, again almost as recorded by Walter Smith for its early travelling stages in the 1914-1915 period, although his record tends to be in reverse order throughout (with Alice Springs an intended destination). Thereafter, in these earlier accounts, it reached Penong on South Australia's West Coast in 1915 and was recorded 'on the Nullarbor Plain, via Streaky Bay in 1918'. Although Walter Smith was quite sure that it did not travel as far south as Marree in 1914, and was equally sure that it came to an end in the Plenty River country north-east of Alice Springs in 1915, the possibility exists that the 1914 revival was that which culminated in performances at

Penong and the Nullarbor in 1915-1918. I postulate, with no proof other than the history of rapid spread and the evidence presented, that after reaching the Birdsville Track in the Mungerannie – Clifton Hills area in 1914 it spread south as well as north. From Marree its spread further south could well have been rapid via the railway line – as indeed it could have been (but apparently wasn't) as early as 1901-1902.

Although the period 1893-1918 appears to be crucial, and as far as the most detailed records indicate rather final, T.G.H. Strehlow (1964:55) also noted that at some stage after 1901 'it came north to Horseshoe Bend, and by 1950 it had reached as far as Maryvale Station, on the Hugh River in Central Australia'. It seems improbable that this spread occurred other than in the 1901-1915 period, given the enthusiasm for the ceremony and the camel train and teamster traffic along the Overland Telegraph Line at the turn of the century.

Several other points are worthy of mention.

The 'hard-line' attitude of the Antikerinja referred to by Walter is confirmed by Farwell (1975 [1950]:165-166), who indicates that 'emissaries of the Andredikeri [sic] tribe' exerted pressure 'on the remnants of the Dieri tribe...to return to tribal ways of life' after the Lutheran Mission on the Birdsville Track collapsed as an evangelist venture. The years of pressure are indicated as being 1915 to 1920 (pp.157,165) with the Antikerinja sometimes executing those who did not conform (pp.165-166).

On a more positive note, Walter's account clearly supports early references which tell of the ceremony being one that was greatly enjoyed by all, and also supports statements that change in body decoration and other aspects of performance was an integral part of the travelling ceremony. Use of the wooden drone-pipe as witnessed by Walter appears to have been an important Wantapilla – Oodnadatta area variation. Such a trumpet was known to the Aranda as Ilpirra (Spencer and Gillen 1968[1899]: 606-607) and, although not used in the variation of the Mulunga ceremony recorded by them in 1901 (1912:237-244), in 1894 Stirling (1896:72-75) had reported its use in the Atnimokita ceremony held in Alice Springs. It may be that use of a trumpet, effectively calling people up to the ceremonial ground in the Mulunga ceremonies witnessed by Walter Smith, gave emphasis to the open nature of the ceremony.

As a final point, the enjoyable enthusiasm with which the Mulunga ceremony was rapidly carried from group to group over vast distances, where languages were often quite distinctive and in which local traditions brought about great changes in aspects of the performances, challenges the perceptions of ultra-conservatism which have prevailed in much of the literature. Spencer and Gillen 1968 [1899], and Strehlow (1964) are amongst those who have emphasised the conservative aspects of Aboriginal culture with respect to inter-group and inter-tribal boundaries, art, ceremonial performances and many other aspects. There is no need to deny this as a general proposition any more than it could not be denied of most societies on earth. However the Mulunga ceremony illustrates the dynamism of Aboriginal cultures, and their flexibility – their proselytising, in fact, of new ideas so long as there is a basic framework of understanding. This dynamic aspect of the various Aboriginal cultures within Australia is as important (one might well argue is more important) to understand as those which reflect conservatism.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Walter Smith was, according to one hospital record, born 2 July 1893 at Arltunga, east of Alice Springs. He lived easily with his background of Welsh mining father and Arabana-descent mother and, although he did not boast of it, was proud to be considered a bushman – an Australian bushman of the central Australian deserts, his home country.

Although learning the practical skills associated with mining, stock-work, yard-building, well-sinking and other bush jobs, he had no formal schooling. He was, as one friend put it, 'a battler' all his life.

Throughout his active life he remained interested in prospecting but, in addition to certain stock 'borrowing' activities a little outside the law, he was also a cameleer with loading out from the then railhead at Oodnadatta, dogger (hunter of dingoes for their scalps), drover, station-hand, construction worker on the railway line between Oodnadatta and Alice Springs in the late 1920s and traveller in the company of Aborigines. These experiences, his role as a rain-maker, medicine-man and ritual leader, are legendary. He travelled the great arid lands of Australia for much of his life, from Cloncurry in Queensland to Laverton in Western Australia, and from Marree in South Australia to Pine Creek in the Northern Territory.

A biography, *Man From Arltunga*, was published in 1986. As with all biographies it was selectively illustrative of his life. The account of the Mulunga ceremony is here published for the first time.

Sadly 'Uncle' Walter Smith Purula, as he was known to all long-term residents of Alice Springs, suffered a stroke in 1981. This old bushman was arguably the last of the traditional old desert travellers, the last cameleer to let go the lead-rope to his string of camels, the last person to have experienced the Aboriginal culture of the 'inside' Simpson Desert. After the stroke he lived at the Old-Timers' Home on the outskirts of Alice Springs until his death on 14 June 1990.

NOTES

1. Charlie Sadadeen was a well-known 'Afghan' Cameleer whose home was in Alice Springs. He was one of many people engaged in bringing the loading from the then rail-head at Oodnadatta to Alice Springs. A sub-division, road and school in Alice Springs are named after him. Walter began working for him mid 1914.
2. In fact Walter must have been a minimum 21 years.
3. The expression 'camp corroboree' implies a ceremony which can be enjoyed by all people rather than one which only adult men or adult women can attend.
4. The time of initiation into manhood, usually from about 12 to 18 in central Australia, is both an exciting and somewhat fearful time for the youths. To hide was a natural enough reaction until the purpose of the ceremony was made clear.
5. This question and the next by me, together with Walter's responses, derive from a tape-recording of 10 June 1981.
6. In a tape-recording of 27 August 1981 the word Kwilpma was used. It is clear that Kwilpma and Kulpma are one and the same, possibly reflecting dialectal differences. (However, on 12 March 1982 Kwulpma and Kwurpma were used.)

7. During a tape-recording session of 10 June 1981 Walter gave a considerable variation on the body decorations. He seemed more certain, in fact, on 10 June 1981 than on 3 June 1981, but a point about the ceremonies is that 'great changes' in words and costumes did take place (Gregory 1906:218). The differences may therefore have been actual differences Walter witnessed during different performances at Oodnadatta and further south. This being a possibility the account of 10 June 1981 now follows.

RK Can you recall any details of their [the dancers'] appearance?

WS Yes, they used to paint their legs, one, two, three marks [lines].

White feather [down could be used]. (As he spoke WS indicated where the lines were applied.)

RK Three white lines down [the] thigh as far as the knee.

WS Yeah. Both sides [that is, both legs]. And white this way [indicating the chest], four marks.

RK Four marks, right across the chest, white ones.

I think you [previously, on 3 June 1981] said they used to have a broad, thick head-band that was white [too].

WS Yeah, yeah. White, thick. Yeah. They used to have that white band...[indistinct]. That's the bloke [wearing the broadest band] who'll blow the bloomin' pipe.

8. Probably feathers of the Little Corella, *Cacatua sanguinea*.

9. Luritja is a name often used for people living west of the Western Aranda, but also for all people living south-west of Alice Springs in the NT and along the SA-NT border. Walter knew all of the specific tribal names too. From later discussions it is clear that his use of Luritja or Aluritja in his comments on the Mulunga ceremony referred to the Antikerinja (see Tindale 1974:210 and map).

10. Depilation for various purposes was common practice in Aboriginal Australia. Walter expanded on the process in a tape-recording of 12 March 1982 as follows. My questions have been edited out unless of some import.

WS They pull this one out [indicating forehead hair]. From here [indicating just on top of the forehead, perhaps up to four centimetres back from the natural hair-line].

Get a little stick, 'bout that long [approx. 20-25 cm]. And twist it [hair] around the stick and give a little jerk then. Pull it out.

RK Oh gosh. When they did that ____ did they do anything to [prepare] the stick or did they just get any old stick?

WS Oh no. They got to _____. It's got to be very hard wood, and they got to cook it for a while. Take all the sap out of it. And make him [the stick] like a lump of steel then. And they use it for corroboree too then, after. (Implied is that the stick is rounded in song-stick fashion, but more slender — probably closer to finger thickness.)

[They] got to clean him [the green stick] up [remove the bark and shave off any irregularities]. And sort of roast him then.

Put it in hot ashes or something [similar], you know. Mustn't let the cold get at it. Look out the wind don't get at it. See [Don't] burn it, just roast it.

RK Did they have to sharpen the ends?

WS Yeah, yeah. One end sharp; one end a little bit sharp, like my finger like, you know like, sort of that.

RK Did they have any name for that stick, Walter?

WS Oh yes, its _____. No, can't [recall the name]. Yes, its got a name. They used to _____. In this old [Mulunga] corroboree, other side of Plenty [River] now, they'd get a stick. Get that same [kind of] stick, and [using two] sing out then. And this one [the especially prepared one] sort of makes the music. Song-stick, yeah. And 'stead of putting [clapping] two boomerangs together, they said have a bit of stick and [Walter made the song-stick clapping motion] _____ just like that, then.

RK (After brief reiteration, RK asked again whether WS recalled the name of the stick, but Walter responded with the alternative name for the ceremony, puzzling over its pronunciation and any possible association with the stick used for depilation and as a song-stick.)

WS Kwulpma! Kwulpma. [Repeated several times]. Kwulpma that name that corroboree. [RK got WS to repeat the word slowly and recorded Kwulpma as the likely end-preferred word.]

RK But that wasn't the name for that stick, that was a different name.

WS No. Ulla. That [word 'Kwurpma'] was the name of the corroboree. I think they used to call that stick, '[stick] 'long to that corroboree'. He [the stick] was belong to that kwurpma.

RK Why did they pull the hair out?

WS (chuckle) Well, I don't know. Some of my buggers [hairs] been pulled out too. (A jocular reference to his thinning hair, although he had also had his hair pulled out for rituals.) I don't know. I don't know why that _____? They never told me what it was for.

11. This question, and the next five questions/comments by me and responses by Walter derive from the tape-recording of 10 June 1981.
12. Walter almost certainly had in mind here the white down from young wedge-tailed eagle chicks, used for body decoration, whereas I had in mind the head-dress. However, feathers from mature wedge-tailed eagles, rich brown in colour, are also used for head-dresses.
13. The transcription here returns to the tape-recording of 3 June 1981.
14. This comment, and the following seven questions, and the responses by Walter, derive from the tape-recording of 10 June 1981.
15. This notion of it being a 'new' ceremony is incorrect (see Roth 1984[1897]:118). However, it had probably been newly revived, a point which is developed in the Discussion which follows the tape-recorded section.

16. This question is a 'side-track' by me. Walter's response is substantially correct, although the Lennon brothers' names were Bill and Brian. They took up the Indulkana and Wantapella Swamp country after 1914, but were well established by 1918 (see Grant 1981:13, 75, 77-78).
17. Strict inter-tribal boundaries were adhered to prior to major pastoralist and other post-European contact.
18. The building of the Overland Telegraph Line 1870-1871, construction of the railway line north to Oodnadatta in the late 1880s and Oodnadatta's railhead position from the early 1890s onwards, and exploration and pastoralism out from these developments meant that the Antikerinja had considerable direct and indirect knowledge of the changes that were occurring. However, as Walter has indicated, senior people strongly resisted the tendency for younger people to migrate eastwards. The severe drought of 1915 and the spread of pastoralism into their country thereafter (Tindale 1974:69-70; Grant 1981) were pressures contributing to movements eastwards, along with perceived attractions. Butcher Dick Pananga's revival of the Mulunga ceremony may well have been an early response to the various pressures.
19. The account continues, in fact, but for the purposes of this article the description of experiences at Oodnadatta is given before continuation of an account of the travelling route. The tape-recording of 3 June 1981 is still that being used.
20. Although feeling certain that he would recall the song, Walter was unable to, despite my reference to the Hercus account. He recalled use of the bunches of leaves, red ochre and white kopi paint, but not the song.
21. The route of travel was given in place-name outline on 3 June 1981 and on other occasions. This particular section details that immediately south of Oodnadatta to Warrina.
22. Before this Walter has indicated that the Mulunga ceremony was held at Oodnadatta for a month before being carried south. It seems likely that this was the case as far as the travelling of the ceremony is concerned, but that the Mulunga corroboree remained an important ceremony at Oodnadatta for a year.
23. An excellent cameo description of Warrina store as it was in 1918 is given in Grant (1981:63-64). Warrina had been briefly important as head of the railway line in the late 1880s, as construction work was pushed on towards Oodnadatta.
24. This question is a return to the tape-recording of 3 June 1981. However, as several attempts were made to clarify details of the travelling route from this point onwards, all have been amalgamated together to give maximum details without reiteration.
25. I attempted to clarify what was meant by these comments on several occasions. The Mulunga did *not* travel south to Marree, but it did reach Birdsville. Reference to the Finke River is only a geographical pointer via the Macumba River ('up here at the top') to the Diamantina ('bottom end') it seems. Walter knew at first-hand the Macumba River and the Birdsville Track, but appears to have been attempting to recall an Aboriginal placename. The travelling route to Birdsville was almost certainly the reverse of that indicated by Hercus (1980:6), that is, from Old Peake Homestead via the Macumba and various localities to Clifton Hills Homestead and Birdsville.

26. Walter did not recall the name of the station, but he probably meant Mungerannie Station, and more generally the country from there through Clifton Hills Station to Birdsville. (See Farwell 1975 [1950]: 81-111.)
27. I had many discussions with Walter about this town, for at some stage in his young manhood he apparently had his eyes attended to there. Despite reference to various maps it could not be located.
28. Sandhill Bob's tribal name was Alurrpa ('Cold Weather') Pananga. He was the greatest Aboriginal bushman Walter was ever to know (see Kimber 1986: 6, 77-84, 85, 143). It is evident that, apart from his own experiences, Walter learnt a great deal about the travelling route and associated events from Butcher Dick, Sandhill Bob and other senior men involved in the ceremonies.
29. This question begins a brief return to the main tape-recording of 3 June 1981, but clarification over time has meant that the only practical way to allow a free flow of the discussion is to edit and amalgamate from all relevant recordings. The very end section of the description of the cessation of the ceremony also derives from 3 June 1981.

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