NOTICE OF ORDINARY MEETING

The eighth General Meeting of the Society for 1978 will be held in the Museum Education Building, North Terrace, Adelaide at

8.00PM MONDAY 23 OCTOBER 1978

AGENDA

1. Apologies.

2. Minutes of the General Meeting held on Monday 25th September 1978 to be confirmed. A copy of these minutes is attached.

3. New Members.
The following new members have been elected to the Society.

   Mrs. June ELLERS
   Mrs. Kay JOHN
   Miss Rosemary WILDE.

Papers and Journals from other Societies and Organizations will be tabled at the meeting including the following :-

   Anthropological Society of Vic., Newsletter No. 140.
   The Artifact, Vol. 3 No. 3.
   The S.A. Naturalist, Vol. 53 No. 1.

5. Business.

6. Speaker.
   Mrs. Val Campbell, Past President of the Society, will give an address to the Society entitled :-

   "PRELIMINARY ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF COASTAL SITES LOCATED SOUTH OF ADELAIDE."

7. Supper.
   Coffee and Tea with biscuits.

VERN TOLCHER,
Honorary Secretary,
213 Greenhill Road,
EASTWOOD. S.A. 5063.

Telephone Office 272 2311
Address given to the Society on Monday 25th September 1978, by Professor T.G.H. Strehlow.

IN THE BEGINNING.

"In the beginning everything was resting in an impenetrable thicket of night, and all men (i.e., the totemic ancestors) were dwelling in this impenetrable thicket of night. They were waiting: 'How should we be able to see anything while this deep night lasts?' Others, such as the kangaroo men and the eurymen said: 'We men of the night shall dwell happily in darkness.' Others, such as the emus, the turkeys, and the goannas, retorted: 'No, we desire the sun.' Some iwuta men were living at Ntamarra. They had gone eastward during the night, and now they saw a sight: southward, at Ilbalintja, dawn was breaking. And they sat down, (and may be seen) as low hills. Thereupon Ilbalintja grew red with the dawn, and they rejoiced exceedingly. Other men disliked the sun (which had risen from the earth at Ilbalintja in the form of a man), as, for instance, the euros, the kangaroos, the possums, the wallabies, and many tiny birds: all these are today wanderers in the night."

The above paragraph is a quotation from the opening of the Ilbalintja myth told to me in 1933 by my Northern Aranda friend Gura (Tjenterama), now dead for almost a quarter of a century. Despite his hopes in 1933 the whole myth has not yet been published in English, and perhaps it never will be. For even the recent publication of a small number of my colour photos of secret Central Australian aboriginal ceremonies in "People" magazine, Sydney, without my knowledge or permission has aroused strong personal criticism (so far from one person only with a heavily vested interest) and press hints of alarm regarding my alleged betrayal of the trust placed in me by my aboriginal friends over the years. A word of explanation about the whole business to my readers would therefore seem to be most opportune, as the first twelve months' run of Pamphlets (Vol. 1) draws successfully to its conclusion.

Back in 1933 the highly venerated Northern Aranda elder, Gura, who was the last ceremonial chief of the great gura bandicoot centre of Ilbalintja, came to me with an urgent plea after showing me over the sacred centre which had been placed under his undisputed control by his own dead predecessors. He told me that, after he had talked the situation over carefully with his next of kin and all old men who had any property rights over the sacred traditions, the sacred objects, and the sacred ceremonies of Ilbalintja, he and his fellow-owners had reached the conclusion that these traditions, objects, and ceremonies would all pass into oblivion after their own deaths as far as any of their descendants were concerned. Few of these old men had any sons or grandsons; and the few descendants that could be named anywhere no longer believed implicitly in the religion of their forefathers, or wished to learn the traditions fully or perform the sacred ceremonies. As for the sacred objects, Gura and his fellow elders dreaded that after their deaths, these young men, if shown the repositories, would take them out and sell them cheaply to the hated whites. The Ilbalintja bandicoot clansmen had therefore hit upon the following plan. They were going to ask me to come to a convenient site called Njonta in the hills some four miles north-west of Alice Springs. This was not in Ilbalintja territory; but the Ilbalintja soak had been dynamited by white men decades earlier, and had been virtually dry ever since. By choosing a soak close to Alice Springs, they hoped that a few of
the remaining Ilbalintja local group male descendants could be induced to
turn up at Njonta at least on some of their evenings (after working in Alice
Springs during the day). My presence would help to keep any white intruders
from their camp, and also assure food supplies for themselves: they would
stage their ceremonial festival in one of the wider flats inside these hills,
with my tent placed astride the entrance to the site, so that I might warn any
inquisitive whites from proceeding further. For, as Gura told me, "We old
men of Ilbalintja want to go through all our ceremonial acts for the last
time before we die; and we don't want our great site (pmaara kngara) Ilbalintja
to die with us. You are a white man, and know how to write down our songs and
our myths, and you also know how to take photographs. We shall tell you
everything about Ilbalintja, and you must write down everything. We shall
perform all our acts, and you must photograph all of them. In that way you
will keep Ilbalintja alive, once we are dead. You will be the ingkata of
Ilbalintja, and all the sacred objects will be your own property too: they
will have no one else who would know how to care for them. We ask merely
that you will tell no one in the Alice Springs area about what you have heard
or seen. You must take everything south with you when you leave, and look
after everything just as we have looked after these things: we will tell you
everything we know ourselves, just as our dead forefathers have handed it to
us. And when you grow old yourself, you may perhaps find wise and honorable
men of importance down south, to whom you can in turn entrust what we have
entrusted to you. And so the great centre of Ilbalintja will live on, and
never die."

I was deeply touched by this last testament of Gura and his fellow elders.
But sensing the great difficulties of carrying out my proposed task, I tried
with all my energy to avoid getting involved in the scheme. I had little
money and no legal powers to keep out white intruders. But my protests proved
unavailing. In the end I felt that any further resistance would be taken as a
sign that I did not even value my friend's greatest treasures, but had the
normal white man's contempt for these things. So I gave in. A camp was
established which lasted for almost two months. For my Ilbalintja friends, it
was their last period of happiness and a time of great pride in their
traditions. A few young men came along occasionally; but none stayed long
enough to imbibe much worthwhile knowledge. Fortunately no white intruders
came to disturb our peace. The only near-accident that could have shattered
our security happened on the day a young man called Eknjambarinja, who was
minding the many hundreds of goats belonging to one of Alice Springs' most
important white citizens, Mr. Norman Jones, spent a whole day at the camp and
could not find his goats in the evening. Next day all the younger men in the
camp turned out to recover the strays. Fortunately they were found browsing
in the hills, and could be yarled up before Mr. Jones had to be told about
their loss. The secret of our camp was thereby preserved.

And so the hills around the camp echoed night after night to the singing of
the ancient songs by men who had not witnessed a full ceremonial cycle for
some decades, all of them happy in the knowledge that the new white ingkata —
myself — would take care of their beloved Ilbalintja after their deaths.
It was an unforgettable experience for me.

Later in 1933 I was invited to view, record, and photograph the traditions and
ceremonial acts of the Horseshoe Bend area; and in 1935 I was similarly
invited to Arltunga, to view, record, and photograph the Lower Hale River
traditions and ceremonial acts. Subsequently I recorded the traditions and ceremonies of many further local groups in Central Australia. I travelled scores of thousands of miles, first on camels, then with motor vehicles, to record sacred sites; and I put my own "spare" money into films and into the traditional counter gifts known as tjauerilja for my "informants". With so many sacred centres entrusted to my keeping, I was now labelled the Urunbuluk ingkata - the ceremonial chief of ceremonial festivals in general in Central Australia.

With the deep and full knowledge thus acquired, I attempted to set down the religious beliefs, the social systems, and the history of the Central Australian "tribes" with all the skill at my command, and always sympathetically. For the black fully-trained elders of all local groups throughout the Centre were my loyal friends, and I had the greatest admiration for their great culture, their artistry, their poetry, and their fine human qualities. It was these things above all that I wished to set before a world public.

But one thing always worried me - how could I keep the memory of their great centres alive, which now lived on only in my records and photographs? When Gura pleaded with me in April 1933 to come to Njonta, I was only 24 years of age; and I believed that it would not be impossible to find at least a few "wise" and "honorable" men in Australia to whom I might pass on all that had been entrusted to me by my friends. I had been trained to regard our Universities, not as collections of ivory towers inhabited by owl-like absent-minded professors, but as the very citadels of Truth and Knowledge.

The years passed on, too quickly for my liking; and the stream of time has now brought me to the same point at which my, now long-dead, friends stood in 1933. I soon realized that few of my "academic colleagues" were in the slightest degree interested in "keeping alive" either Ilbalintja or any other centre. My own reaction was to keep pictures of all ceremonial out of all my own publications. Thus my "Songs of Central Australia" (published in 1971 but largely written between 1946-49) contained not a single picture, even though the Ilbalintja Cycle was described in it. I had point-blank refused all pleas of the publishers both for the addition of illustrations and the issuing of a disc giving the actual song verses discussed in the book. Yet long before that date all my Ilbalintja friends were dead, and I was the sole heir they themselves had appointed as the ingkata of Ilbalintja to keep their revered great centres alive.

In 1972 at last a plan was formulated, with the assistance of two high-ranking true scientists in the University of Adelaide, that this University would afford me the necessary funds to continue my work even after my retirement in order to bring my labours to a dignified close so that I could translate all my collected myths and songs from the original languages into English, and prepare all my photos of secret ceremonies for publication, but only after my own death. The details of the plan naturally cannot be set down here: the full documents are, however, being preserved by The Strehlow Research Foundation. The cumbersome University committee machinery took two years to process the practical points of these proposals, despite a ready acceptance initially. At the beginning of December 1973 I was at last assured verbally that the scheme had been fully accepted. But my "Jobs for the (White) Boys" article was printed in The Australian of December 20th 1973, and on Christmas Eve 1973, a week before my retirement, I received an agitated
ring from the University of Adelaide to inform me that the whole plan had been torpedoed for lack of money because a prominent South Australian personage had vetoed the necessary funds.

With my staff and salary gone, there followed three years of further futile talks and letters, and then all negotiations were broken off by the University of Adelaide. Political opposition to the preservation of my work, together with the predatory intentions and the determinedly anti-aboriginal policies of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in Canberra had even before this date compelled me to resign in protest from the membership list of the A.I.A.S. The only hope of continuing my work now lay in the establishment of The Strehlow Research Foundation which would, hopefully, attract sufficient donations by public-spirited persons who wished to save my accounts of the high intelligence that had once inspired the aboriginal culture of Central Australia, and the full glory of its sacred art, for future generations of Mankind. For Australia is only a part of the world in general, and cannot survive by itself, as indeed most intelligent Australians have come to realize with more and more force during the past few decades.

A brilliant article by Ian Moffitt, in "The Bulletin" (March 19th, 1977) stirred up a nation-wide response, and some excellent donations (up to $100,000) were promised to the Foundation. But the forces of envy and malice now came out fully, and so did those activists that have bedevilled the work of all those who have worked for years, sometimes for a life-time, to help our aboriginal friends to prepare themselves for entry into the hard world of the twentieth century. There is no virtue in setting up a state of apartheid in Australia, or to keep - to use a phrase often used half a century ago - the Australian indigenes in some sort of "anthropological zoo" where they can be studied like animals by (often poorly-qualified and sometimes completely unqualified) "modern anthropologists" for their own self-interest and, more importantly, profit. A campaign of malicious whisperings and veiled threats was begun against the Foundation, and particularly against myself. The ABC, sadly, was the chief propagator and disseminator of this ignorance and malice, and the would-be donors grew too terrified to give the promised money lest they should be accused of assisting me to destroy (!!!) aboriginal culture, and not to save it. With so many "aboriginal advisers" and "aboriginal spokesmen" (not one of them an aboriginal ingkata) warning the politicians against me on trumped up excuses, all Australian government money was also stopped from coming to the assistance of my research.

But I still felt that I should save Ilbalintja and all the other centres in my care from death and oblivion. To gain a little money for this purpose, I finally agreed early this year that the German magazine "Stern" could publish a short account of my life and work, illustrated by some of my pictures, in Germany. I also hoped that such a publication might lead to the Foundation's gaining some support from overseas institutions and men of good will, so that my work could go on despite the determined attempts made in this country to stamp it out altogether simply because it showed up the phoney "official" rubbish produced at a cost of several million dollars a year in quasi-government bodies or institutions.

The "Stern" story was, so I understand, a "smash hit" overseas. Unfortunately through an office mistake, copies of some of my pictures were sent back to
the "People" magazine in Sydney which, unaware of my iron embargo on their publication in this country, printed them, thereby unwittingly providing further material for the false fulminations of those who have been determined for many years (while feathering their own nests and pitiful careers) to destroy my work. Even the stopping by "People's" editors - as fulfilment of an offer they made voluntarily to myself - of the distribution in Alice Springs (and the N.T. generally) of the two issues containing these pictures has not stopped those ignorant stirrers who are intent on not allowing genuine aboriginal culture to live. A few of my white friends now have been upset by the propaganda raised against my work. And if it dies, so will Ilbalintja and all the great Aranda (and other "tribal") centres that now live on only in my pictures and records. In that case, the human counterparts of Guru's creatures of the night will have won their battle against knowledge and enlightenment. It is not for me to attempt to force my work on a country that refuses to acknowledge the greatness and the glory of the true culture of the aboriginal population of Australia.

In Australia knowledge itself, once proverbially equated with power, has seemingly become a term of derision: "student numbers mean money", appears to be the common University slogan of today. It has already been suggested to me that my best plan might be to go abroad if I wish to continue working. It is for Australians to decide now whether the great Central Australian sacred centres are to live or die. It is now five minutes before midnight, and then will come that oblivion that has no end.

T.G.H. Strehlow.