NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

The 1st General Meeting of the Society for 1984 will be held in the Museum Education Building, North Terrace, Adelaide on:

MONDAY 26TH MARCH 1984 AT 8.00 pm.

AGENDA

1. Apologies.

2. Minutes of the previous General Meeting:
   Minutes of the previous General Meeting held Monday 24th October 1983, to be confirmed. A copy of these minutes is attached.

3. New Members:
   No new members were elected to the Society this month.

4. Papers and Journals:
   Papers and journals from affiliated Societies and Organisations will be tabled at this meeting.

5. Business.

6. Speaker: Neville Pledge, Curator of Fossils at the South Australian Museum will address the meeting. The title of his address will be:

   "Ancient Indian Culture of Northern Arizona"

7. Supper will be served and a Trading Table will be held at which past surplus journals will be sold.

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This paper is based on an honours thesis presented to the History Department of the University of Adelaide.

CONFLICT BETWEEN ABORIGINES AND EUROPEANS ALONG THE MURRAY RIVER THE DARLING TO HE GREAT SOUTH BEND (1838-1841)

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2. CONFLICT : ABORIGINES AND OVERLANDERS

Between 1838 and 1841 relations between Aborigines and Europeans who came into contact in the Upper Murray area of South Australia and across the border with New South Wales to the Darling Junction, had deteriorated to such an extent as to be described simply as war. By 1840 it seemed that any European party entering this area would come into violent conflict with the local inhabitants. Of course the South Australian government, having proclaimed the Aborigines as Her Majesty's subjects, viewed the problem as one of law breaking activity. The most hostile Aboriginal groups were situated between Lake Bonney and the Darling Junction.[1] (See Fig. No. 3). It was not, however, permanent settlers who were coming into conflict with these groups, but the overlanding parties who brought desperately needed stock to the newly established Colony of South Australia. This conflict had begun with the first explorers and reached a peak with the massacre of Aborigines by a combined force of officials and overlanders at Rufus River in 1841.[2] This situation provides an example of the occurrence of intense conflict prior to first settlement, a situation not encompassed by Elkin's scheme of contact and described as improbable by Reay's in his examination of resistance.[3]

This chapter will examine the conflict that occurred between the Aborigines and overlanders in the area covered by this study. The analysis of explorer contact with traditional Aboriginal society in the previous chapter, will enable a better understanding of the conflict recorded in overlanders' diaries, contemporary newspaper reports and reminiscences. The escalation of hostilities during this period will be explained in terms of European actions and the traditions and changing motives, objectives and tactics of the Aboriginal resistance - much the same as in Reynolds' analysis of resistance.[4]

The overlanders were travelling through an extremely populous area and through the very portions where the largest groups of Aborigines could be expected to be encountered. Friendly relations had not preceded them and both Sturt and Mitchell had precipitated
feelings of animosity on their expeditions. In some areas Aboriginal groups would have been seeking revenge for wrongs committed against them by the explorers. Mitchell was continually plagued by groups he felt were seeking revenge for murders committed by his party. Sturt was also aware of an element of revenge in the hostility shown towards his party on the homeward trip, as he approached the Darling Junction area, the spot where he had refused to distribute gifts to the apparent owners of the land. It had been shown, particularly by Sturt, that if messengers or ambassadors were provided by Aboriginal groups, acting as forerunners carrying news of the European party’s friendly intentions, and that if gifts were given to Aborigines during initial contact, then a reasonably safe passage could be expected. However, most of the overlanders did not possess this understanding of Aboriginal convention and many were not interested in acquiring it. Overlanding teams were composed, as one author puts it, of “desperados” and “hardbitten convicts”, along with gentlemen like Eyre and Sturt.\[5\]

The first of the overlanding parties to attempt the trip from Sydney to Adelaide was led by Joseph Haudon in 1838.\[6\] Hardy, in Lament for the Barkindji, describes the journey as being full of goodwill on both sides.\[7\] However, it seems to me that goodwill is a poor explanation of the reasons for the occurrence of peaceful relations and during the journey there were a number of significant examples of other than friendly encounters. One of the main factors governing the outcome of a meeting was whether or not the conventions pursued by Sturt—the initial exchange of goods and the dependence on Aboriginal messengers—were followed. Haudon often provided gifts to the groups he encountered and on many occasions he received goods in return. “In return for a trifling present which I made him, he gave me his belt of opossum down which he wore round his waist.”\[8\] News of the European goods travelled rapidly and the most attractive article seemed to be the tomahawk; often such items as nets were offered in return by the Aborigines.\[9\]

Haudon was however, also ready to meet any threats with force and he made this point quite clear to one Aboriginal who, “... told Mr. Bonney, as a great secret, that after dark the blacks intended to spear us. We laughed at him, and told him that if they came near us for such a purpose, we would kill them all with our guns.”\[10\] He soon encountered an Aboriginal group which was not full of goodwill and interestingly he was in the area where Mitchell's party had clashed violently with the local inhabitants.\[11\] After a day of harassment by the Aborigines, he decided to make camp and one-hundred-and-fifty armed warriors threatened to close around his drays. He chose to, as he puts it, “show them the bayonets on our muskets to intimidate them.”\[12\] One “old chief asked” him where he was going to sleep and made the question seem somewhat of a threat by accompanying it with a push. Haudon reacted violently using the butt end of his pistol to return the push.\[13\] This incident naturally increased the tension and Haudon makes the following comments in his journal: “Whether their intentions were really for war or peace, we did not much care.”\[14\]

He just wanted to be rid of the troublesome “sauvages” and where establishing friendly relations required any sort of effort or
compromise he was happier to avoid the situation or if threatened to respond with threats.[15]

The incident involving the old "chief" was soon followed by an act of retaliation and a clear show of resistance to European intrusion. Haudon reports:

In the evening the blacks were about us in great numbers and set fire to the small patch of grass which I had selected for the stock to feed on. My men turned out, under arms, to extinguish the fire, upon which the Blacks took to the river, ... When they landed on the opposite bank they raised a yell or rather a shout of defiance and set fire to the few reeds growing along the margin of the water.[16]

He further reports that the Aborigines burned everything that could be eaten by the cattle for many miles. The tactical use of fire to destroy the fodder of white man's stock, was a widespread practice in Australia and it stemmed from the Aboriginal use of fire to control the growth of natural resources and to aid with hunting.[17]

The Darling Junction area, the area where Sturt had received opposition from a particularly large group of Aborigines, was again characterized by hostility. Haudon came into contact with one group of hostile men, who abruptly motioned him to leave.[18] Soon afterwards a second group was met with and they were more curious than the first, creating much confusion amongst the overlanders and according to Haudon a shooting incident was narrowly avoided.[18]

The value of gift giving in determining the future pattern of contact is illustrated clearly by a meeting between Haudon's party and a group of Aborigines near the Rufus River.[20] This group was particularly curious about all manner of things European and Haudon presented an elder of the group with a tomahawk. He was very pleased with the gift and arranged for ambassadors to announce the Europeans' arrival to the next group. From this point, according to Bonney - Haudon's second-in-command - messengers were sent from "tribe to tribe" to give prior notice of the overlanders' approach.[21] The Aborigines also sought European goods in return for the services of their women. Haudon reports, however, that his men did not accept these offers.[22]

Haudon did experience hostility from some of the Aboriginal groups along his overland route, but when he presented gifts and was preceded by Aboriginal messengers, then peaceful exchanges usually occurred. In the areas where Sturt and Mitchell had experienced conflict, he did meet with hostile groups, although in the area where Mitchell's party clashed violently with Aborigines, he encountered the most serious shows of aggression. Fire was employed as a weapon against him in this area. It certainly appears from the patterns of hostility experienced by Haudon that the action of those Europeans who had preceded him did have an effect on the contacts he made. Finally, his trip was made during late spring and from the seasonal land use patterns examined in the previous chapter, one would expect him to have come into contact with slightly smaller groups than those encountered by Sturt. In fact, this seems to be the case and although the groups he met near
the Darling Junction and the Rufus River were large, they were smaller than those reported by Sturt.

Eyre was the next person to overland cattle to South Australia and he arrived during the winter months.[23] In a letter published in the South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register on 21st July 1838, he described his trip and emphasized the fact that he had experienced little trouble with the Aborigines.[24] He also drew attention to the importance of gift giving in avoiding trouble with the Aborigines.[25] Eyre encouraged the exchange of such items as Aboriginal nets for tomahawks—the latter were very popular among Aborigines. The attraction that European goods had upon the Murray Aboriginal groups has been documented in the journals of the explorers and with the first overlanding parties this attraction appeared to increase.

Sturt arrived in Adelaide with cattle in September 1838 and although he travelled through the Darling Junction area in the winter months, when the Aboriginal groups would have been smaller, fewer and less troublesome, he still made the following report to the Governor:

We passed among the Natives on generally friendly terms, but still in the neighbourhood of the Darling; and where they are in any numbers they are forward and insolent, and I fear that they will sooner or later commit some act of violence. I mention this to prevent misfortunes by timely warning.[26]

In March 1839 Eyre arrived in Adelaide with the first sheep to be brought overland and on this occasion he appears to have changed his opinions about the Aborigines and he expresses similar opinions to those of Sturt, "...they are both cunning and treacherous, and frequently refrain from acts of violence only from dread of a superior force."[27] Unlike his first trip overland, he travelled in summer when the largest groups of Aborigines were gathered and conflict was more likely to occur. To add to this it seemed that sheep attracted more problems than cattle—they were easier to spear and became favourites of the Aborigines.[28]

The first actual attack on an overland party was reported in March 1839, in the South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register.[29] A party led by Wetherell, Watson and Huon was attacked on the Darling in early March, by a group of as many as 500 Aborigines. Few details of the event are given, however, it is known that they were bringing cattle and not sheep—the target preferred by the Aborigines. Soon after this attack James Crawford brought a mob of cattle overland and he reports in his diary that he was attacked on the Rufus River in May 1839.[30] Shots were fired at the Aborigines and they fled. The fears that Sturt and Eyre had expressed were now being realized and hostility and tension were such that virtually every overland party, from this point on, clashed violently with the Aborigines.

The Rufus River and Darling Junction areas seemed to be where most of the attacks took place and being important traditional meeting places and strategically suitable for attacks—the overlanders had to split their parties so as to cross these rivers.
- this comes as no surprise. However, as yet, no white lives had been lost between the Darling Junction and the North West Bend, but this was soon to change. Crawford describes the hostilities that were occurring on the Murrumbidgee Frontier: "at this time, the beginning of 1839, war was going on on the Murrumbidgee Frontier, not an open fight, but a regular guerilla warfare."[31] This sporadic fighting on a frontier where settlers were the main target was very different to the continued conflict existing between the overlanders and the Aborigines, particularly in the Rufus River and Darling Junction areas.

The first white fatalities were recorded in the latter part of 1839. Thomas Churnside, himself an overlander with little sympathy for the Aborigines, describes two violent events that took place in October 1839.

Mr. Chisholm's party, from Yass, who followed me, had all their stock taken, and the whole party killed except one man. Mr. Snodgrass followed and lost a great many sheep by the natives.[32]

Few details of these incidents were recorded, but several similar collisions took place in the latter part of 1839 and early 1840.[33] This was during the time of year, once again, when the Aborigines were gathered in large numbers. Stock, particularly sheep, was being captured by the Aborigines and this, combined with the killing of white men, appeared to signal changes in their objectives. They were also more willing to face being fired upon by whites, without retreating and a group of Europeans led by McLeod, who were on their way to the Darling to take an overland party some provisions, were ambushed and forced to return to Adelaide.[34] They were surprised by the Aborigines' willingness to keep fighting after being fired upon, "After half an hour of sharp firing, which the natives stood admirably ...."[35]

Here was an example of an Aboriginal group intent on resisting a party of whites and their determination was such that their usual fear of firearms was overcome. The invasion of Aboriginal lands had become too intense for peaceful relations to exist. The Europeans had not only used violence which, according to Aboriginal law had to be revenged, but they had transgressed too many customs and traditions. The nature of the resultant conflict was not only effected by the actions of the European invaders but largely determined by the individual responses of different Aboriginal groups to varying sets of circumstances. These responses were mainly governed by traditional factors.

The large number of parties bringing stock overland in 1839 and early 1840, led by men like Finnis, Dutton and Tooth, naturally increased the opportunity for conflict.[36] The nature of this conflict was determined by both European and Aboriginal actions. Some of the reasons for its increased intensity, during the early period of overlanding, have already been discussed. However, the data contained in a diary kept by Alexander Buchanan, an overlander who reached Adelaide in December 1839, provides an excellent opportunity for a more detailed analysis.[37]

Buchanan's diary was never intended for publication and, as he himself points out, some of the incidents recorded from his
Journey could never have been related to the government without the possibility of official action being taken against him.[38] These include a number of occasions where Aborigines were shot. The following character description, however, describes him as a more than acceptable member of the community:

As a man his high character and sane judgement commanded a respect and confidence so great that over a wide extent of country his counsel and advice was freely availed of for the adjustment of differences between neighbours and friends.[39]

With this kind of recommendation from his contemporaries, I feel reasonably safe in selecting his overland expedition as a fairly typical example, in an attempt to determine more clearly some of the reasons for the conflict between overlanders and Aborigines during this period.

Firstly, it must be remembered that Buchanan was passing the Darling Junction and Rufus River areas in late spring and this was, according to Allen, the time of the year when the Aborigines began moving back to the areas near the river.[40] This made it highly improbable that he would avoid coming into contact with large groups. He was, however, prepared, with the least provocation, to use force to obtain his passage through the Aboriginal lands. Conciliation was far from his mind and he was armed and ready for any sign of trouble as he approached the Darling Junction area - the Aborigines of this region had obtained a particularly bad reputation from the overlanders.[41]

From Buchanan's diary it is clear that the Aborigines were often afraid to approach his party and a fear of firearms was strongly evident.[42] However, they did try to make peaceful contacts, but Buchanan was only interested in keeping away from them and he often threatened violence at the mere approach of an Aboriginal group.

A great many blacks on opposite side of the river, two canoes came over five in each, but we made signs to them to be off. They did not go, we showed them the muskets and they went off then.[43]

Avoiding the advances of the indigenous inhabitants, as Sturt had experienced on a number of occasions, frequently led to aggressive behaviour. Not establishing friendly relations, indulging in gift giving or having introductions made for you by Aboriginal messengers, was a strong formula for disaster. The tensions that had been steadily building between the overlanders and Aborigines would only have been heightened by Buchanan's actions.

Sheep had become a keenly sought commodity by many of the Aboriginal groups along the overland route. Often demands were made for the "jumbuck" of the Europeans and small scale spearing occurred as overlanding parties proceeded.[44] Buchanan's diary confirms this pattern and it was becoming common knowledge that it was much safer to overland cattle than sheep.[45] It appears, therefore, that a strong economic motivation for Aboriginal aggression was developing alongside of the hostility created by
transgressions of customs and European acts of aggression.

The Aborigines were also developing tactics to use in their attacks upon overlanding parties. Buchanan's party was attacked whilst in the process of crossing the Darling.[46] This effectively split his force. The following is an extract from Buchanan's account of the incident:

All the muskets but two were over the Darling and the men immediately presented them thinking they would make off but they waved their spears and the men fired upon them but did not drop any of them and we from the opposite bank fired upon them and we also killed the old chief ... There were five or six Killed and a good many wounded.[47]

This must have provided the Aborigines of this area with a strong requirement for revenge. They had lost one of their elders and when someone was killed in Aboriginal society, revenge had to be extracted to retain the balance upset by the death.[48] Revenge must have been a particularly significant motive for Aboriginal resistance. It was also given as an excuse by Buchanan for the killing of further Aborigines; but this was in retaliation for sheep spearing.[49]

Revenge, the attraction of European goods and stock, and payment for trespass, can all be extracted from Buchanan's diary, as motives for Aboriginal aggression. The growth in the intensity of conflict, as overlanding increased, can be clearly seen from a comparison of the events recorded in Hawdon's diary, with those in Buchanan's.

The overlanding period had started comparatively peacefully with the expeditions of Hawdon, Sturt and Eyre and a similar pattern of contact to that experienced by Sturt, during his 1830 explorations, was evident. Eyre, particularly, emphasized the rules to be followed, if friendly relations were to be had.[50] However, with the increase in overlanding activity, so the intensity of conflict increased and both Sturt and Eyre, on their second overland trips, noticed the deterioration in relations. Not only were motives for resistance like revenge and non-payment for trespass being exhibited by the Aborigines, but economic motives such as attraction to sheep and European goods, were also leading to aggression. The overland route was of great importance to South Australia, and particularly to the wealthy and influential citizens who were profiting directly from the overlanding of stock. It was not long before they were petitioning the government for protection from the increasingly hostile Aborigines.

3. GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION AND ABORIGINAL RESISTANCE

During 1841 the conflict between the Aborigines and the overlanding parties intensified, particularly in the Darling Junction and Rufus River areas. Due to the economic importance of the overlanding ventures, to the Colony of South Australia, the
colonists sought government intervention to make the route from New South Wales safe for the passage of stock. Three official expeditions were dispatched to the Rufus River area in 1841.[1] The final expedition was led by the Protector of Aborigines, Matthew Moorhouse. He was under instructions to capture some prisoners from an Aboriginal group which had attacked and killed a number of overlanders.[2] These prisoners were to be brought back to Adelaide as hostages, as an assurance of their "tribe's" future good behaviour. According to official reports, however, a large group of Aborigines attacked Moorhouse's party and at least 30 were killed as they fled or tried to hide in reeds along the shore of the Rufus River.[3] This event signalled the end of open hostilities between the overlanders and the Aborigines.

However, the Aboriginal groups of this area had succeeded on a number of occasions in defeating parties of intruding Europeans.[4] They had also co-operated, at least at tribal group level, to bring large numbers of warriors into conflict with overland and official parties sent from Adelaide. For a short time at least, they had disproved the following assertion made by Kathleen Hassell:

The colonists need not have feared very formidable resistance. Scattered thinly over great areas, and speaking widely divergent dialects, the natives had little race consciousness. Even a single tribe, with its wandering members loosely organized under the authority not of one chief, but all the older men, had not much power of combining against intruders.[5]

The Murray River possessed some of the highest population densities in Aboriginal Australia and even with the influx of disease, prior to the contact period, the area was still populous.[6] The seasonal congregation of large groups near the river frontage, gathered to exploit the bountiful resources it provided especially during summer, was an important feature determining the nature of conflict with Europeans. These large Aboriginal groups along the Murray had strong lines of communication with each other. The Murray was an important trade route and as Eyre points out, during the summer months Aboriginal groups would pay visits to each other, to hold ceremonies, exchange women and participate in trading.[7] The Aborigines in areas like Lake Victoria spent much of the year in large social gatherings and they possessed the organization to easily bring large groups of warriors into play against European intruders.

Although there had been other serious attacks on overlanders, it was the attack on Field and Inman's party, in April 1841, that seems to have been the first example of an official expedition being sent to the overland route, in response to Aboriginal hostility.[8] Perhaps it was the loss of so many sheep that particularly angered the South Australian public. However, the reports relating to the incident provide enough information for a useful analysis of the Aboriginal role in the conflict.

The attack occurred at a time of the year, when according to seasonal patterns, large groups would not have been expected on the Murray frontages. However, 1841 was a drought year and this
combined with the 5000 sheep brought by Inman's party, may have provided enough reason for the strong Aboriginal presence and the attack on the overlanders.[3] The Aborigines may have been short of food and they certainly had a taste for mutton — attested to be Inman's report of several sheep being speared after his party had crossed the Darling. [10] The Aboriginal group that attacked Inman's party did not disperse when firearms were used; as would have been the case a few years earlier. The overlanders, after providing the Aborigines with an excellent example of the ineffectiveness of firearms, were forced to retreat, leaving their sheep, possessions and one casualty behind. Upon receiving news of this incident Major O'Halloran, the Commissioner of Police, and a party of twenty-one were despatched by Governor Gailer; with very specific instructions.[11] O'Halloran's own intentions can be deduced from the following excerpt from his diary kept during the expedition:

I think that a sever lesson to this fierce tribe would greatly conduce to the preservation of life hereafter both to themselves and the overlanders.[12]

He was, however, never to reach his destination because on the 30th April he received instructions from Gailer to return to Adelaide.

As stressed by Robert Cline in an article, *At War with the Natives* from the Coorong to the Rufus, public opinion was strongly against this decision and an unofficial party headed by Captain Field set off to recover the sheep captured by the Aborigines.[13] They were accompanied by a number of police officers who had been ordered to go no further than the border of the province. This was believed to run through Lake Victoria, but a lot of uncertainty existed with relation to its exact location.[14] The accounts of the conflict that followed provide some interesting insights into the development of the tactics employed by the Aborigines against the Europeans.

The Aborigines were encountered near the Rufus River and two hundred fighting men, apparently being co-ordinated by "chiefs", advanced in a crescent formation and attempted an encircling movement.[15] They certainly did not retreat or disperse when some were killed by gunfire and Hawk reports the presence of spear bearers in the group.[16] It appears from these reports that the Aborigines were particularly well organized to meet threats by European groups and the colonists certainly saw the conflict as a war; and a war which the Aborigines, momentarily, appeared to be winning. Any European party entering the Rufus River area was attacked and the undermanned overlanding parties were particularly open to Aboriginal aggression.

The policy adopted by the Government during — as the majority of settlers considered it — a state of war with the Aborigines, came in for much criticism. J.W. Bull, a prominent citizen of the times, shows something of his feelings in the following passage:

However, orders were immediately given to the Commissioner of Police to prepare for an expedition to the disturbed district, and a large number of colonists were sworn in as special constables — peace
of officers to meet victorious blacks with spears in
their hands.[17]

O'Halloran was again selected to lead an expedition into the
country of the hostile Aborigines but, on this occasion, he was
provided with specific orders not to fire on Aborigines unless
first attacked. This was the policy that upset J.W. Bull and it
definitely went against the ideas of O'Halloran. However, the
Aborigines in the Rufus area did their best to avoid the sixty-four
men strong party, led into their country by O'Halloran and his
presence went, wisely, unchallenged. During his trip to the Rufus
he observed the use of signal fires by the local Aborigines; he
felt they were being used to warn the Rufus people of his
approach.[18] The Rufus Aborigines certainly timed their movements
to perfection and as O'Halloran was travelling along the Murray,
they were attacking Langhorne's overlanding party at Langhorne's
crossing on the Rufus River.[19] The usual tactics of allowing the
overland party to split its forces, as the river was being crossed,
were once again employed. In the ensuing clash four whites were
killed and O'Halloran came across the desperate survivors, who felt
they were soon to be killed.[20] He also located "the stinking
carcasses of about 2,000 sheep, wantonly speared".[21] They were
the sheep he was looking for; having been captured from Inman's
overlanding party. The Aborigines realized the importance of these
animals to the Europeans and they had obviously decided not to
allow their repossessioo.

O'Halloran took a deposition from Mr. Miller, the wounded
overseer of Langhorne's cattle party.[22] The information gathered
is particularly interesting with respect to certain comments
relating to the gradual increase in hostility shown towards the
overlanders by the Aborigines. Cline also examines this
information and he summarizes Miller's statement as follows:

... he had worked on three overlanding parties from
Adelaide to Sydney. During the first journey the
Europeans had found the natives friendly and helpful.
The natives neither stole from them, pilfered their
supplies nor speared their livestock. On the second
journey overland, however, the natives had become more
bold and aggressive. Some sheep had been speared and
overlanders shot at the natives. Miller's third and
last overland journey speaks for itself of the
deterioration in relations between black and white.[23]

He uses it, however, to argue that relations deteriorated because
of the use made of Aboriginal women by overlanders without
providing some form of payment.[24] Miller's statement, however,
illustrates the effects of many factors, including conflict over
women, on the relations between black and white. Factors such as:
revenge for killings; the growing attraction for European livestock
and goods; and the most basic - the invasion of Aboriginal lands
without any understanding of the rights and customs of its owners.

The bodies of the dead overlanders from Langhorne's party had
received special attention from the Aborigines. The traditional
sign of peace, the green branch, had been placed mockingly in the
hands of one of the victims.[25] The body had been mutilated and, most interestingly, the kidney fat had been removed.[26] The Aborigines from this area traditionally removed the kidney fat from the bodies of their enemies and if eaten, it was supposed to provide extra powers.[27] Perhaps a reason for this special attention may have been that Miller was in the overland party that had killed "Bluebeard".[28] He was a well known "elder" in the Rufus area who had gained a reputation for friendliness from his contacts with Sturt.[29]

The final expedition to the Rufus area was sent in August 1841 and it was accompanied, once again, by Moorhouse.[30] It was despatched as a protectionary measure for a group of overlanders, led by Robinson, who were expected to meet with hostilities in the Rufus River area.[31] The accounts of this expedition provide evidence of large scale co-operation existing between Aboriginal groups intending to attack or resist European parties. The first time that a large official expedition had entered the Rufus area, it was led by Major O'Halloran and the Aborigines decided to avoid conflict on this occasion.[32] However, in August 1841, it appears from evidence gathered by Moorhouse, that the decision had been made to resist the intrusion of a European party.[33] The following extract from one of Moorhouse's official reports shows that the Aborigines had first gathered to attack an overland party:

... in consequence of a black scout coming down the river, the bulk of the active natives had gone upwards on being called on "to congregate and attack a party coming down the river with bullocks, sheep and clothing. I received the report with doubts, but as we travelled along the Murray I noticed an unusual absence of native camps, which soon led me to believe the story.[34]

As the official party came closer to the Rufus area, reports were received that a large group of hostile Aborigines was waiting for them, filling in their time with weapon construction.[35]

Robinson's party had been attacked on the day before Moorhouse's party reached the Rufus River.[36] The hostile Aborigines had been easily repulsed and it was not expected that further attacks would occur. However, it appears that the fatal decision to attack had already been made and once the Aborigines showed signs of attacking, the Europeans began firing.[37] According to official reports thirty Aborigines were killed; unofficial reports place the number as much higher.[38] An official investigation of the incident was held and the actions taken by the Europeans involved were judged as perfectly justifiable.[39]

The period of intense conflict between Europeans and Aborigines along the Murray River from the Darling Junction to the North-West Bend, ended abruptly with the "Rufus River massacre."[40] The Aboriginal groups had learnt a harsh lesson about the potential of European violence. For a short period, however, they had been successful with their attacks on overland parties and they had developed an efficient set of tactics to suit the situation. Small groups of Europeans with large flocks of
sheep were the preferred target. The attack was usually made when
the overlanders were crossing a river - e.g. the Rufus River -
which meant the subsequent splitting of their force. Large scale
co-operation between Aboriginal groups was also evident.

The overland route was extremely important economically to
South Australia and this meant inevitably that the government would
have to step in at some stage and put an end to the attacks on the
overland parties. There was also much pressure exerted on the
government by wealthy colonists, who wanted to see the conflict
ended and the overland route made safe. However, with the defeat
of the Aborigines at the Rufus River and the establishment of a
government post at Moorunde, near present day Blanchetown, the
conflict was brought to an end.[411 Eyre was appointed as Resident
Magistrate at Moorunde and it has been argued that his kind
treatment and understanding of the Aborigines caused the
disappearance of conflict. It seems more likely, however, that the
events at Rufus River and the presence of Eyre's military post at
Moorunde, were the deciding factors. According to Daniel Brock,
Notebook, an Aboriginal of the Rufus River area had the following
warning for some Darling River Aborigines, whilst accompanying
Sturt in 1844:

The substance of his talk was that we (Sturt's party)
were very good fellows, and if we were injured
"Ucumatta" would come up with the police, and destroy
them, as had been done in a great measure with the
tribe to which he belonged on the Rufus. This
Ucumatta is Mr. Eyre.[42]

CONCLUSION

This paper provides an analysis of the conflict between
Europeans and Aborigines along the Murray River from the Darling to
the North West Bend. The conflict experienced in this area was
different from the common pattern experienced in Australia. It did
not involve the usual threat to the Aboriginal land, accompanied by
an influx of settlers. In this area, the peak of conflict occurred
prior to European settlement. The Rufus River massacre provided
this peak and it involved a violent clash between government
officials, overlanders and a large group of Aborigines who had
gathered to attack the Europeans. Tensions had been building in
this part of the Murray since the first explorers had passed
through and a changing pattern of conflict can be observed from the
analysis of the explorer, overlander and official sources.

There are few areas in Australia where an analysis of
conflict prior to European settlement can call upon such a variety
of sources; and conflict situations always seem to rate a mention.
Prior to settlement this area was visited firstly by the explorers
Sturt and Mitchell. They were followed by a period of overlanding
with stock from Sydney to Adelaide. During this stage the
Aboriginal groups, whose lands lay along the Murray frontages,
experienced a continuous stream of trespassing aliens. Conflict
became so intense, as the flow of overlanders increased, that
government expeditions were called upon to "protect" the
overlanders from the increasingly violent Aborigines.

Certain patterns existed in the conflict occurring along the
Murray and from these patterns something of the Aboriginal role in
conflict situations can be viewed. Sturt in his trip down the
Murray in 1831 stumbled across a formula for avoiding conflict. If
the traditions and customs of the Aboriginal groups were followed,
then conflict was often avoided. The intruding European were
travelling through Aboriginal lands and not settling and making
personal claims to it. They were, therefore, treated much as other
Aboriginal travelling through alien areas. If they followed
traditional conventions, like reciprocity and provided gifts in
return for their passage, then friendly relations had a chance of
occurring. Ignoring the advances of local inhabitants and,
therefore, refusing to explain one's presence or reciprocate with
gifts to justify this presence, was usually met with aggressive
reactions.

From the sources examined it appears that the Aboriginal
groups along the Murray, particularly in the Darling Junction and
Rufus River areas, were, at least for a short period, controlling
the nature of the conflict. They were selecting the place for
attacks and developing effective tactics to deal with the intrusion
of the overlanding parties. There also appears to have been an
economic motive in the aggressions shown by the Aborigines toward
the intruders. The source of food provided by the relatively easy
spearing of, particularly, the overlanders' sheep seems to have
provided one of the reasons for conflict.

In order to understand occurrences of conflict, like the
Rufus River massacre, it soon becomes obvious that an analysis of
both the Aboriginal and the European roles in the situation is
required. However, in the past, historians faced with conflict
situations between Europeans and Aborigines have often assumed
that, "... opposition to invasion is so basic a universal
reaction, that it scarcely warrants discussion..."[1] The
Aboriginal response to intrusion and aggression by Europeans varied
according to the nature of each Aboriginal culture and the nature
of European intrusion. But each response was an intelligent one
and based on the traditions and conventions of the particular
group.
CHAPTER 2: NOTES

1. Moorhouse to Grey, Sept. 4th, 1841, GRS 52/7, p21, S.A.A.
4. Ibid., No. 3; Reynolds, Ch. 3 & 4.
7. Ibid., No. 5.
8. Ibid., No. 6.
9. Ibid., No. 6, p31.
10. Ibid., No. 9.
11. Ibid., No. 6, p32.
12. Ibid., No. 11.
13. Ibid., No. 11.
14. Ibid., No. 11.
15. Ibid., No. 11.
16. Ibid., No. 6, p33.
17. Ibid., No. 16.
18. Ibid., No. 6, p39.
19. Ibid., No. 6, p40.
20. Ibid., No. 6, p41.
22. Ibid., No. 6, p48.
24. Ibid., No. 23.
25. Ibid., No. 23.
27. Eyre, March 2, 1839, S.A. Gazette & Colonial Register.
28. Ibid., No. 5, p49.
31. Ibid., No. 30, p5.
33. S.A. Gazette & Colonial Register, November & January.
34. Notes on Attacks on overlanders by Natives from the Upper Murray, Research Notes 36, S.A.A.
35. Nov. 16, 1839, S.A. Gazette & Colonial Register.
36. Ibid., No. 35.
38. Ibid., No. 37, p76.
39. Ibid., No. 37, p52.
41. Ibid., No. 37, p78.
42. Ibid., No. 37, pp69-70.
CHAPTER 3 : NOTES

1. O'Halloran, April-May 1841; O'Halloran, June 1841; Moorhouse, August-September 1841.
5. K. Hassell, Relations between the settlers and the Aborigines in S.A. 1836-1850 (Adelaide 1966), p11
8. S.A. Gazette & Colonial Register, April 24, 1841.
11. Ibid., No. 10, p186.
13. Ibid., No. 6.
15. S.A. Register, May 1, 1841. Letter from Inman.
16. Ibid., No. 10, p205.
17. Ibid., No. 10, p219.
18. T.S. O'Halloran, Diary, June - July 1841, S.A.A. 127 (June 19, Saturday).
19. Ibid., No. 10, p227.
20. Ibid., No. 18 (June 22, Tuesday).
21. Ibid., No. 18 (June 23, Wednesday).
22. Ibid., No. 10, p224.
23. Ibid., No. 6, p102.
24. Ibid., No. 23.
25. Ibid., No. 18 (June 26, Saturday).
26. Ibid., No. 25.
28. Ibid., No. 10, p229.
29. Ibid., No. 28.
30. Ibid., No. 10, p232.
31. GRG 52/7, Protector's Report, September 4, 1841.
32. Ibid., No. 10, p220.
33. Ibid., No. 31.
34. Ibid., No. 31.
35. Ibid., No. 31.
36. Ibid., No. 31.
37. Ibid., No. 10, p237.
38. Ibid., No. 31.
    Papers relative to South Australia, August 1844,
    Enclosure No. 99.
40. This is the term most commonly used.
41. Ibid., No. 10, p238.
42. D. Brock, Journal, June 1844, D4745, S.A.A.

CONCLUSION : NOTES

1. H. Reynolds, The Other Side of the Frontier (Townsville 1981), p51
Fig No. 2 - BARTER AND EXCHANGE IN SOUTH-EAST AUSTRALIA

(McCarthy, 1939)
Fig No. 3

THE OVERLAND ROUTE

ROUTE OF A JOURNEY OVERLAND
FROM SYDNEY TO ADELAIDE
WITH SHEEP
July to December 1839
BY ALEXANDER BUCHANAN

Areas of intense conflict