NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

The 7th General Meeting of the Society for 1984 will be held in:

THE CONSERVATION CENTRE
120 Wakefield Street
Adelaide.
(use the wire gate and go to the back of the building)

MONDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER 1984 at 8.00 pm.

AGENDA

1. Apologies:

2. Minutes of the previous General Meeting:
Minutes of the previous General Meeting held in the Conservation Centre on Monday 27th August 1984 to be confirmed. A copy of these minutes is attached.

3. Papers and Journals:
Papers and journals from other societies and organisations received since the last general meeting will be tabled at the meeting.

4. Business:

5. Speaker: Mr Steven Hemming, Curator of Australian Ethnology, South Australian Museum, will address the Society. The title of his address will be:-

"Aboriginal Art in South Australia."
The address will include discussion of wood carving and decoration. Slides and films from the S.A. Museum Archives will be shown.

6. Supper will be served.

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This research paper grew from the curiosity provoked by my discovery of a letter in the S.A. Museum Archives. The letter was written in December 1904 by a Dr. P.F. Shanahan of Hawker and was addressed to Dr. E.C. Stirling, Director of the S.A. Museum.

The letter describes the final stages of an Aboriginal expedition to a red ochre mine in the Flinders Ranges. Dr. Shanahan accompanied a group of Aborigines to the mine and recorded what he saw. In the letter he recounted the mythology connected with the mine and stressed the significance of the ochre obtained from it. He expressed concern that Aboriginal access to the mine was being threatened by the operation of a mining lease in the area.

The letter raises several important themes. These themes, and connected issues, cast new light upon the nature of Aboriginal society both before and after European contact, and upon the history of the contact period itself.

The Shanahan letter raises these themes in a lively, forthright way and provides a valuable addition to the ethnography of red ochre and its place in Aboriginal culture. Shanahan himself appears as something more than a conventional philanthropist; he is moved by a sense of social justice rather than sentiment. Like many of the best contemporary commentators on Aboriginal life and customs, Shanahan records his impressions matter of factly and deals with the more incongruous realities which he encounters with a developed sense of irony. It is worthwhile quoting the letter in full.

Hawker
26/12/04

My dear Professor,

I must apologise in the first place for my apparent neglect in delaying an answer to your letter but as I knew little then concerning the ochre deposit and its legends and even that little was only hearsay I deemed it advisable to visit the place, see for myself and learn on the spot from the King himself all that I could.

Before I go further I must thank you very sincerely for the immediate and deep interest you manifest in the endeavour to secure a reserve for the natives of the particular spot which they consider not only sacred, but their richest inheritance.

When we consider that the ochre from this one particular area is distributed as far as the Northern and North-Eastern boundaries of Australia, Locally East and West as far as I know, South as far as our tribes survive, that the ochre is used in nearly all of their ceremonies and is essential in the performance of the majority of their rites, we can easily understand the attitude of the aborigines and the justice of their demands.

King Harry informed me that the King of the Yerkinna (Parachilna) tribe is responsible to all other tribes for its supply - no other tribe can take it without his permission, and in his presence, unless he appoints a deputy who then acts as a regent. Should he not be able to secure the ochre on account of its being leased by white men (who would not allow him access to the sacred spot) his speedy death would follow and also his successors. Reprisals would follow also on the

This paper is based on an address to the Anthropological Society of S.A. given 27.8.84
whites if not in localities near at hand at least on many living outback - the area claimed would not require to be more than twenty acres. There are thousands of tons of this ore in sight that the blacks do not want. The lode being 30 to 40 feet wide and running across ranges for miles. It is a clayey ironstone, the colouring matter being red oxide of iron, it is known to contain a small percentage of mercury. It is embedded in a crystalline limestone and cambrian fossils are plentiful in the vicinity.

Our party of six included Mr. R.J. Matheson of Nilpena Station, the prime mover in seeking to obtain from the Government a reserve for the Aboriginals and Mr. F.R. George, Assistant Government Geologist. The latter will send a report of the nature of the deposit to the Mines Department, he also was successful in defining the exact locality of the spot which has not hitherto been done. Mr. George with a small Kodak was enabled to photograph the excavations. Possibly the geological features you would like to possess can be obtained from the Mines Department.

THE LEGEND

Two dogs (= Kintacawoola) named respectively Kilowilinna and Periltingunina chased an emu (= Kuringil) starting from near Innaminaka, down the Cooper pasing through Tinga-Tingga, Carawena, Monte Collina, Mr. Freeling (here the emu had a drink and left in the solid rock the imprint of its foot) the emu then skirted the western slope of the Flinders Ranges to Mr. Aliak (this mountain the blacks maintain is the emu petrified), here it turned and ran through the Lake Torrens Plain, dodged once more and made for the Flinders travelling due East, the first hill it met was a man who had a pack of dogs one named 'Thorijurra', a savage brute. The bird raced up the staircase. (I will define the staircase later on) but the dogs caught it on top of the hill. The man assisted in the bird's despatch with a yam stick and was instantly turned into a hill (note the parallel with the unfortunate saline disaster which Biblical teaching tells us befall Mrs. Lot). The blood from the emu (Emu's blood = Kuringie Warragurta) now forms the ochre (Warragurta) deposit at the sacred cave (Yerkinna).

Opposite the Yerkinna cave, due west on the next steep hill and situated about a quarter of a mile from it is another cave into which the dogs went for a rest and there died, the dogs which perished there after death rolled down the hill and are now symbolised by huge dolomite limestone boulders rounded off by the influence of rain.

The original dogs of the chase - Kilowilinna and Periltingunina are represented by two high mountains, one St. Mary's Peak the other unnamed in the Flinders Ranges.

THE MURRAGURTA RITE

The blacks (male only) assembled at the Yerkinna Creek (Parachilna Creek) and stripping naked, corroboree all night, no sleep being allowed, under a big penalty. They must not collect any water or food en route, except such as they can carry in wallyba skins. The varying corroborees pertain to different phases of the chase of the ancestral emu. Iguanas are caught en route and killed and roasted to provide grease at the first stopping place where they make the sacred fire (at the time of my visit there were many skeletons strewn around). At the sacred fire they may take their last drink but no
food until their return, a mile from here at the same trot, in single file with bodies all greased with iguanas' fat they meet the stone representing the first dog Kilowilimna. Each native hurled stones at him with vim and vengeance. Further on more dogs including some sluts with puppies (all limestone boulders) are encountered and treated with similar ceremony. The scars on the rocks and the carins at their bases signify a rather hot fusilade. Next comes the staircase it is about a mile in length and ascends very nearly at an angle of 45° about three yards wide and composed of huge boulders, some three feet others 10 feet high. It is a succession of steps and flats the flat being about the same length as the height to be climbed (the journey accomplished at my leisure suggested to me the necessity of a further course of training). Arriving within about 40 feet of the cave we met a flat area where all the younger blacks are left while the initiated proceed to the cave and chanting the Emu dirge proceed to gather his blood, the Murragurta. The dust alone may be collected, not the pieces - a Paseke [Pitjant] three times full (a vessel shaped like a coolamon and about the size of a soft felt hat) is handed to each man, he is warned neither to waste nor to spill a drop. The initiated then proceed to where the dogs are and paint the bodies of the whole of those present with ochre which adheres readily to their bodies anointed with goanna grease. The King then running making a detour, all the young fellows chase him. He eventually pulls up at the Jerkina cave and he initiates them into the Murragurta rite. After their descent they remain at the sacred fire and feast off the iguanas remains and may drink water which they brought with them. There is a spring close by but they dare not touch it. One native in a fainting condition begged on one occasion for a drink but was told by the King it was poisoned, which was untrue. At the ochre cave the natives digest themselves of every hair on their body save their heads and scatter it about to represent emu feathers. No-one but the King or his deputy can visit the cave where the dogs died.

a) No lubras are allowed within miles of this place, if discovered to have visited the vicinity they are speared, if found within sacred area they are thrown down a precipice and never touched afterwards for burial.

b) No bird, animal or reptile is allowed to be killed from the sacred fire to the ochre cave the penalty being death.

c) It is the oldest mine in Australia.

d) The devastation of hair on the body of the natives is now done by a stone knife or a pocket knife. Formerly it was burnt off with a glowing fire-stick.

e) About 30 years ago [1874] whilst natives were at the Murragurta site, 30 natives were entombed in the excavations, one only escaped and he belonged to the Dearri - quainie tribe (Kilalpanima).

f) Natives coming from a distance to the ochre follow the track taken by the emu in the chase. If the whole of the track is covered by them the chase occupies from one month to six weeks.

Dear Professor if this somewhat hurriedly written account be of any service to you, you are at liberty to make what use you like of it. My desire is simply to obtain the fullest possible particulars which ethnologically may be of value, of a race which will before long be as dead as the dodo. The only credit I aim is to certify as to its authenticity.

I might relate a stunning rejoinder given by King Harry to one in my presence who ventured the remark that "he (King Harry) knew that ochre was not emu's blood, it was only a religion that he had been taught and handed down by his ancestors". "Oh", said King Hal, "just the same as your Christ, you have never seen Him".
Wishing you the Season's Compliments and every good wish.

Yours sincerely,

P.F. Shanahan.

Under separate cover I am forwarding addressed to you at the Museum a cake of ochre with head gear as made up and carried by the blacks hundreds and hundreds of miles and exchanged as barter for pitchuri etc. If you are having the notes typewritten I will ask you to have a copy made out for me - cannot obtain same here. P.F.S.1

EXTENT OF TRADE IN FLINDERS RANGES RED OCHRE

Shanahan's assertion of an Australia-wide distribution for Flinders Ranges red ochre is not accurate. The evidence suggests that it was taken at least as far north as Boulia (in exchange for pituri),2 perhaps as far as Cloncurry.3 It was collected from as far east as the western boundary of the Barkindji, near the Darling.4 Westward, ochre expeditions are recorded as coming from the Oodnadatta region.5 Mountford's claim of expeditions from the Southern Aranda territory requires corroboration.6 So too does the claim that members of the Port Lincoln Nauo and the Adelaide Plains Kaurna travelled north to fetch the ochre.7 We do know that the ochre mine was significant to the Ngadjuri in the mid-north of S.A., and that it was collected by Aborigines from the Port Augusta region.8 From there it may well have been traded further south. It is worth noting that one of the Kaurna words for red ochre, recorded by Teichelmann and Schurmann is karko,9 very similar to the Dieri term karku. The Kaurna word jernbana, according to Teichelmann and Schurmann means "a species of red ochre, brought from the Far North".10

It is clear that whatever its furthest limits, the trade of Flinders Ranges red ochre was a notable feature of Aboriginal life in the Lake Eyre Basin. The ochre deposit represented a focus for the Aboriginal groups belonging to the Central Lakes culture region. Most of these groups have been recorded as visiting the mine area, some (the Dieri for example), with greater frequency than others.

There is also evidence to suggest that the ochre was traded beyond the Central Lakes region. This proposition can be tested by spectrographic analysis of the ochre found on Museum artifacts collected from as far away as Katherine, N.T.

USE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OCHRE

In Aboriginal Australia red ochre was not reserved for ceremonial use, either in the Lake Eyre Basin or elsewhere. In the S.A. Museum's collection it is found on children's toys, men's and women's utensils and weapons, as well as on ritual objects.

The Rev. J.W. Reuther's Dieri manuscript provides us with the clearest picture of red ochre's use among an Aboriginal group in the region. The numerous references to red ochre in the manuscript fall into several categories.

Firstly, red ochre was used medically, in the form of an ointment to be applied to wounds, bruises and swellings.

karkujeli ngato nina dapa dijana warai, nauja wolja tepirila
nganai = in having spread red ochre over the wound I have checked the wound, so that it will soon be healed.11

Red ochre was used also as a magic charm, when mixed with water and blown from the mouth, it could abate the heat of the sun or the force of the wind.12

Red ochre was also an essential part of a rainmaker's equipment. It was used as a symbol of spiritual renewal and of ritual cleansing; widows were released
from their prescribed mourning period by an application of red ochre and women were anointed with it after the completion of menstruation cycles. Youths entering the phase between boyhood and initiation as men were coated in red ochre as a symbol of this transition. Finally, red ochre was used for decorating ritual objects used in ceremonies and the bodies of the performers themselves. This applied particularly to the Mindiri (emu) ceremony in which all of the major Aboriginal groups of the region east of Lake Eyre participated.

In all of these examples, red ochre is a medium or agent of transcendence, from sickness to health, death to renewal, uncleanness to cleanliness, the secular to the sacred, the present reality to the state of "Dreaming". The point is underlined by Reuther's description of red ochre as a substance of "life" and of "joy" and his translation of the phrase ngani kalumarai marukuturi as "I am craving for red ochre".

A further generalisation, that red ochre represented the blood of mythic ancestors, is supported by most works of Australian ethnology touching on the subject. The chemical similarity between the composition of haemoglobin in blood, and the iron-oxide present in red ochre is worth remarking here.

Although it is safe to say that red ochre in general, and Flinders Ranges ochre in particular, represented mythic blood, it is difficult to go further and to tie the story of the ochre deposit's origin to one particular myth. Apart from the myth in the Shanahan letter there are at least four other accounts of the deposit's origin. No one account was the property of any single group.

Tindale, for example, recorded an ochre myth from a Ngadjuri man of the mid-north of S.A. In this story the ochre is formed from the blood of a red dog belonging to a cannibal woman who had terrorised Aboriginal people in the Flinders Ranges area. Two variants of the same story were recorded by Mountford from a Flinders Ranges Wailpi man and, interestingly, also by H.K. Fry from Mark Wilson, a Ngarrindjeri man from the Lower Murray.

Another legend, similar in that it tells of the formation of the ochre deposit from the blood of a mythical dog (dingo) killed by a lizard, was recorded by Mountford in the Flinders Ranges and by George Aiston from near Marree.

Elkin records an Arabana myth similar to the emu story but in which a dog is chased and killed to form the ochre deposit. Broughton, in an unpublished report, states that Flinders Ranges ochre was known locally as "dog's blood ochre".

Mountford recorded a completely different explanation, part of the exploits of Witana, the central figure in the myth explaining the second stage of initiation among the Flinders Ranges people. Reuther records the Dieri belief, different again, that the Flinders Ranges ochre was formed by the emergence from the earth of the red ochre mura or ancestor (Timpivalakanaka). A toa or message-post in the S.A. Museum refers to the mythological route to the ochre deposit taken by this totemic being.

It is likely that several of these myths are variants of the one main myth, which a number of Aboriginal groups throughout the region held in common. The fullest version, and the one which appears to be most culturally relevant, is the emu myth described by Shanahan. Elkin, Fry and Aiston all record comparatively detailed accounts of the myth, and link the story to routes followed by ochre expeditions, and to ceremonial activity. The most important ceremony is the Lake Eyre basin, the Mindiri ceremony, which celebrated the mythical emu ancestor, took place as soon as the ochre expeditions returned.
OCHRE EXPEDITIONS

Howitt writes that ochre expeditions set out each year from the Dieri country, in July or August. Some "seventy to eighty picked fighting men of the tribe" travelled as far as 450 kilometres to Flinders Ranges and often had to fight their way to and from the mine. Each man collected up to 170kg of red ochre. Howitt's account is usually accepted by commentators but does need modification.

Shanahan's letter provides the fullest description of the route taken by an ochre expedition. This route is corroborated by accounts of sightings of Aboriginal parties after 1860 and roughly corresponds with the section of the Strzelecki Track south of Innamincka. It appears to have been one of two main routes used from the north. The other route included such localities as Apawandinna, Kilalapanina, Dulkaninna and Farina and corresponds with the southern section of the Birdsville Track.

These routes represented the tracks of mythic ancestors and linked the territories of different groups. It is most likely that expeditions would have met with friendly receptions as they travelled, rather than fighting their way, as Howitt suggests. In fact, an ochre expedition gathered more members as it passed through new country. For example, Mountford writes of the Charleville group joining with the Wongakanguru, meeting the Jandruwanta at Innamincka, the Jauraworka at Coongie, and the Bilatapa, Dieri and Arabana at Mt. Lyndhurst, before the final leg of the journey to Parachilna. By then the party might have grown from 30 to 300 men.

Howitt, Aiston and Siebert speak of the ochre expeditions being organised by the "Blanchewater division" of the Dieri. It is likely however that all of the relevant groups contained a "Blanchewater division" which had a direct interest in and responsibility for the expeditions, through their totemic affiliations. Aiston, who himself had an assigned tribal status, claimed in 1928 that he was the sole remaining representative of the red ochre mura. According to Reuther such representatives had the power to "bewitch" the ochre site, to prevent its misuse by others by creating landslides for example, such as Shanahan refers to in his letter.

The expeditions themselves were not always free from trouble. Fighting did occur along the route, but for specific reasons, temporary imbalances in relations which required specific forms of redress, rather than because of general "trespass". Reuther mentions the existence of rules of "etiquette" associated with trade, which if broken could result in one group closing the trade "border" to another.

One such rule involved sending a messenger down south before the expedition set out, to ask permission from the local group having custody of the mine, to "open the way". Reuther gives an example of the trouble caused when this was not done. Elderly Adnjamathanka men recall being told of such an incident which must have occurred in about 1870. They claim that the required messengers, two women, were not sent down before the main party as was the usual custom. Deprived of their "happy times", as an informant put it, the older men of the local group closed the trade boundary. When the expedition arrived notwithstanding, the locals, led by the notorious Larrikip Tom, ambushed the party in the mine and disposed of them all but one.

Such episodes were unusual, and are remembered because of it. Reuther records the fact that the Flinders Ranges people were regarded with fear and suspicion and that they were reputed to lure the unsuspecting into the Ranges where they "mentally confused them" so that their captives lost all sense of their homeward direction. However there is strong evidence to show that the northern visitors were generally treated well by the mine's custodians. Mountford recorded several Dieri ceremonial songs in 1937 known by local people.
at Nepabunna in the Flinders Ranges - a good indication of the level of contact which must have existed in normal circumstances.39

At the least, etiquette demanded that the visitors leave gifts for the mine’s traditional owners, the Blinman section of the Kujani. The S.A. Museum has examples of pituri bags, spears and decorated boomerangs which were brought south for this purpose. In an interview with Luise Hercus in 1976 Jimmy Russell (Wongkanguru, about 1895) recalled the different objects given in exchange for ochre:

In exchange they give black (manganese), boomerangs, sticks suitable for rubbing to make fire, they give down - feathers, and sometimes even grass-seed flour in a bag, a bag meshed in the same way as when they make a net. And they take nets too.

(Trans. Luise Hercus) 39

The ochre was mined in the way described by Shanahan, and was either mixed with water or urine to form large cakes, or placed in bags - specially woven or made from animal skins. The cakes were carried on the men’s heads, cushioned by woven pads. Bruce writes of combined loads of ochre and grindstones from nearby quarries being carried in similar fashion.40 In about 1890 the store-keeper at Wirrialpa Head Station weighed the loads carried by a returning expedition in exchange for a ration handout, arriving at a 601g (130kg) average, close to Howitt’s estimate.41

Apart from the reference to women in the role of messengers, and several documented accounts of wife-stealing, the ochre parties themselves seem to have been all male in composition.42 This fact has less to do with the privations of the journey than with the nature of the enterprise. It was "men's business" from start to finish, usually involving initiation of youths just before the mine was reached. Women were not allowed in the vicinity of the mine, nor were they permitted to see the initiated youths before their return to the home territory, which took place under cover of night and which heralded the start of the important Mindiri ceremony.

An Aboriginal red ochre expeditions to the Flinders Ranges shared many elements with the archetypal religious pilgrimage. It was long (up to 450km), arduous, and was directed to a religious goal which for many participants involved a major experience of catharsis and spiritual renewal. Moreover it allowed direct access to a prized substance with sacramental qualities. Evidence also points to a strong sense of camaraderie and adventure, common to all significant pilgrimages.

TO BE CONTINUED

FOOTNOTES

5. Philip Jones - Ben Murray interview, 3.11.83. Tape in writer's possession.
10. Ibid, p.61.


12. Ibid, v.10, no. 68; v.6, no. 1122, 17; no. 1319, 2; no. 3688.

13. Ibid, v.6 no. 556, 30; no. 1266, 18; no.1419; For purification after contact with the dead see no. 991; no. 1456, 10.

14. Ibid. v.6, no. 1456; 15.

15. For the initiation period see, Ibid, v.6 no. 525.8; no. 1621.4. For ceremonies see no. 880.2; no. 1522.72.

16. Ibid. v. 6, no. 250.6. For ochre defined as "life" and "joy" see Ibid v. 1 no. 164.29; no. 199.9.


20. Mountford, C.P. Notebook no. 24


22. Elkin, A.P. 1934 Cult-totemism and mythology in northern South Australia. Oceania 5; pp171-192, p.188.


27. Elkin, ibid, p.189.


29. Home and Aiston, ibid, p.128.


33. Reuther, ibid, v.11 no.8

34. Reuther, ibid, v.6, no. 345, 37; no 619, 10.

35. Reuther, ibid, v.8, no. 28.

36. Philip Jones - Rufus Wilton interview, 3.11.83. Tape in writer's possession.

37. Reuther, ibid, v.1, no. 124; no. 125.

38. Mountford-Sheard collection.

39. I am indebted to Luise Hercus, ANU, Canberra for the use of her Pukardu manuscript.

40. Bruce, R., 1902 Reminiscences of an Old Squatter, Adelaide, p.84.

41. Mountford Notebook no. 19.

42. This was certainly the case on the way to the mine. As for the homeward journey. Reuther speaks of the secrecy with which an ochre party made its way back to their home territory, and the measures taken to prevent the local women from seeing the men before their arrival. See for example Reuther, ibid, v.8 no.66.

There is enough evidence to suggest, however, that women were brought back from the Flinders Ranges as wives by members of the party. See Horne and Aiston, ibid, p.129 and Reuther, ibid, v.8 no. 28. Elsewhere Aiston describes the ochre expeditions as "a big exogamous raid to get wives". Aiston, G. to W.H. Gill, 10.2.1935. In Gill, W. Letters to W.H. Gill on Australian and Tasmanian Aborigines 1920-1940, v.2, Mitchell Library. This aspect of red ochre expeditions needs further research.

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