NOTICE OF ORDINARY MEETING

The next meeting will be held in the Museum Education Building, North Terrace, Adelaide at
8.00 P.M. ON MONDAY, JUNE 25, 1973.

AGENDA

1. Apologies.
4. Election of New Members.
5. Mr. R. Luebbers will give an address entitled:
   "A COMPARISON BETWEEN NORTH AMERICAN COASTAL
   ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND THOSE OF SOUTH-EAST
   SOUTH AUSTRALIA"
   Mr. J. Hodges - "The Gilman Excavation".

R.W. Ellis,
Honorary Secretary,
C/- S.A. Museum,
North Terrace,
Adelaide, S.A. 5000.
THE GUNAVIDJI PEOPLE OF NORTHERN ARNHEM LAND

Address by Rev. G. Armstrong.

Geographically, Gunavidji territory in north central Arnhem Land is bounded by the Liverpool River on the east, the Tomkinson River flats in the south, the tip of Balbanara billabong in the east, and the Arafura Sea in the north. Neighbouring tribes are the Walang (or Gunbalang) on the western bank of the Liverpool, the Gungaragone among the hills and middle Tomkinson area to the south-east, and the Nakara to the east. More distant neighbours with whom they have some, but less association, are the Gunivinggu on the upper Liverpool River, the Rembaranga on the upper Cadell River and the Burera speaking people on the Blyth and lower Cadell River.

The area is ecologically rich. It receives 45 inches of rain during the Wet Season (November - April). The vegetation consists largely of open forest with stands of stringy bark, cypress pine, and the short palm, Livingstonia humilis. There are small patches of monsoon forest, and savannah woodland along the coastal sand ridges. Along the fresh water reaches of the rivers or creeks, there are swamps and billabongs where staple foods such as the water lily grow.

Along the tidal reaches of the creeks and rivers there are dense forests of mangroves.

Geographically situated on the sea - Gunavidji life has a definite sea-ward aspect. This is particularly noticeable when compared with the inlanders.

I once asked a Nakara man if he ever went hunting at Maragabidban on the Upper Liverpool. He smiled in surprise and said "No! We can't go there! We are salt water people."

On the other hand Rembaranga women from the inland (or "from Arnhem Land" in popular speech) may venture down only to the high tide line for a small species of shell fish and never down the beach and into the mud or on to the rocks where our Superintendent counted 200 women and children gathering the larger cockles and oysters.

Trade routes tended to move along the coast from the Blyth across the Liverpool to Goulburn and Cape Don.
Goods coming up from Mainoru tended to go up the Cadell River across the Blyth and into the eastern Arnhem Land trading cycle, and or fork away westward to Oenpelli with minimal movement toward the coast.

The Size and Population of Gunavidji Territory.

A striking feature about this ecologically rich territory is its smallness. It covers approximately 170 square miles. The distance from the Liverpool River to Balbanara is 18 miles — and Juda to the Tomkinson River is 13 miles. This is about ½ the size of the 250 square miles for the average size for western Arnhem Land tribes (Elkin) or the 350 square miles of an eastern Arnhem Land clan. It is I would imagine, much smaller than South Australian tribal territories.

Similarly the present Gunavidji population is approximately 140. This includes two families living at Goulburn Island and one at Oenpelli (dispersed in the pre-settlement era). They are surrounded by other smaller tribes: Walang (100), now widely dispersed with only a handful at Maningrida, 25 Gungaragun (probably much smaller than earlier days) and 80 Nakara.

In contrast, the average size of an Australian tribe is, according to Tindale, 500. And while the larger tribes like the Walbiri in Central Australia and the Murungin constellation of clans in eastern Arnhem Land pride themselves on their tribal strength and independence, the Gunavidji are strongly dependent on other tribes for marriage, co-operation in major ceremonies, and in their hunting range, extend particularly into Walang and Nakara territory.

Some anthropologists hesitate to apply the term 'tribe' to these groups because of the smallness and prefer to call them linguistic units.

If you ask Jockey Bunda Bunda for example "What is your tribe" he will most likely say "I speak Gunavidji language".

The Gunavidji language belongs to the western Arnhem Land bloc indicated by the fact that its verbs are prefixing:

- go = -yara
- I go = ngu-yara
- she goes = nyo-yara
- they go = biri-yara
Gunavidji in various comparative studies has been classified as one of the Gunivingguan languages, but it is evident that it is not a dialect but a language. Joy Kinslow and Harris using very sophisticated linguistic methods found that while Walang is close to Gunwinggu, Gunavidji showed the greatest dissimilarity.

In English we have three genders but Aboriginal languages often have more, called noun classes. Bureria has four, Maung 6, Gunavidji 2.

Even though the Gunavidji only numbered 140 there were at least two dialects—possibly three. Coastal people speak "sea language", around the Tomkinson, Gana gana or "mosquito language" was spoken and is still known by a few old people. This is said to have some affinitie's with Gungoragone.

It is historically well documented that the Indonesian and Macassan trepang fishermen who visited the north coast up until 1911 had a base at Entrance Island. Two wells, a stunted tamarind tree and various remains including some pottery remain. People point to the thick mangrove stands Gajawang appa where they cut firewood to smoke trepang and also point to a small beach Prinba Ganajiyena where a small Macassan boat was blown ashore and broken up in a storm.

In the latter half of the 19th Century relations between the Gunavidji Aborigines and Macassans were bad, particularly so between the Gunavidji. Alfred Learey the Government Customs Officer stationed at Mala Bay landed there in 1888 and heard how the Gunavidji had killed the captain of a prau whose brother returned the following year and pretended to be friendly, coaxed a number of people into canoes at Julia to sail across to Entrance Island. While in mid-stream he turned his cannon upon them. A spring called Balenda bindi borne (literally: "they killed the balandas (not Aborigines) there"), witnesses this fact.

The Japanese pearl fisherman did not need shore bases as the Macassans did, but used to anchor in the estuary and take on fresh water. A certain amount of trading took place and some associations between Japanese and Aboriginal women took place. There is one Nakara and a Waland man whose features were obviously Japanese.

The Explorers.

Captain King, in 1819 named the Liverpool River. The 'Beatrice' visited the area in 1866, and Cadell (1867) spent two months in the area. Lindsay also skirted the area in his
walk from Katherine.

It is interesting that the people showed ambivalent attitudes. The Walang on the west were friendly, "animated gesticulations of joy at seeing us" Cadell reported, while the Gunavidji either attacked or avoided strangers. Yet staff reported them to be among the friendliest people on the settlement.

Captain King in 1819 at a beach calculated to be south of the present town of Maningrida surprised a group of 25 people. Such a group gives an insight into the number of people who lived together in camps from which they went hunting.

The 'Beatrice' reported two men who had spears ready to throw.

At the present time there is a great deal of interest in matters relating to land ownership now that Mr. Justice Woodward has been appointed to enquire into ways and means whereby land rights can be given.

At Maningrida some Aboriginal leaders have proposed that the whole of the Arnhem Land Reserve be held under some kind of group title by all the people on the Reserve. This seems to be a wise proposal in the light of traditional land ownership.

Gunavidji territory as a whole is divided into nine estates, i.e. nine defined areas of land in which there are named sites including two or three sacred sites and to which a group of people related to each other matrilineally have ownership rights.

The patrigroup is known locally as Yakarrara. There is evidence that some Yakarrara merge and at other times when the members of a Yakarrara all die that their estate is incorporated into the territory of another Yakarrara. An example of merging appears to have taken place at Juda. Here people list five separate names of the land owning Yakarrara. Normally the land owning group has two names - a "big" name and a "small" name. Here 'Wurnal,' 'Abelguidji', 'Yaringoyt', 'Mulanjaritj' and 'Naygudir' are given. The people themselves are at a loss to give any reason for this. Possibly numbers of an original group were destroyed by the Macassans or simply not replaced by natural increase and one or two other groups were invited to amalgamate with them. Hiatt found two land owning groups amalgamating among the Nakara.
In contrast the "nganiboral" land owning group own three major areas - Biynjewa, an important ritual site at Balbanara, Namonba on the Anamayirra Creek where they are 'company with' the Nakara, and away to the south-west, Mangarabola, south of the Tomkinson River. Here it is likely that Ngani borala's estate was initially two estates.

One interesting problem. Two brothers who were very good informants for another thesis I was writing in 1963-64 told me that their country was on the western side of Rolling Bay. I fully accepted this. Then one afternoon on a small ship going around past Entrance Island to Goulburn Island I was discussing places and names with an old man and I said "And that's Horace's country over there". His reply was "No, no, that's all Walang country - Gunavidji are over here".

On returning to Maningrida I saw Horace and told him what the old man had said. He was more adamant than before that Junction Bay was his country. Who was right?

A Nakara man said "Horace really belongs to my country". Then later Lazarus Lamilanu said that when Horace was a young man he used to meet him near Navy Landing - his wife's country - and then, in the past war years, he was in the Rolling Bay area.

Eventually Horace agreed to what one or two others said. That the men of this Rolling Bay Yakarrara had all died, there was only one woman left at Goulburn Island. A Walang man invited Horace and his brothers to come and look after it, and so became its owners. They did so, and when Horace died at the end of last year the sand pattern at the washing ceremony was a creek and waterhold from Junction Bay. The men accepting the totmens of this area as their own.

Sacred Sites.

As I said earlier there are usually two or three sacred sites on each estate. Let us look at Juda in particular where there are three sites.

One is Ngariba a carpentaria palm which seem to grow only on this point. There is one splendid tall palm in a semi-jungle area half mile inland. Because it is the tallest, it is called the mother one while there other small palms nearer the point. The trees themselves are called Ngariba. This palm is associated with Bara, the north-west monsoon wind, and no one must damage it. If anyone broke off a frond a great hurricane would come up and blow for six or seven days.
On the beach there is Jalagarra the spotted sting-ray dreaming. At low tide there are two groups of large sandstone boulders about five feet high exposed near the waters edge - and nearer the beach an area of smaller rocks. This is the place of Jalagarra, the sting-ray. She like Ngariba did not travel in the dreamtime but like a lot of the totems in western Arnhem Land simply came up from the ground and took the form of a tree or rocks and her spirit is now in the subterranean depths. There is no taboo on the eating of her flesh - except to boys during their initiation period. Juda men speak of the flesh as "good tucker".

Jalagarra is also associated with rain storms. She is offended by anyone who scratches the sandstone by sharpening fish wire points, or axes or shooting at them with a gun (a man may sometimes try to fish with a gun). In the Wet Season she will send up a great rain storm but apparently in the Dry Season she doesn't mind, as the men pointed out marks on the rock where fish wires had been sharpened.

The Juda men also say that if they are out fishing in a canoe in the Wet Season and a rain squall suddenly descends upon them they spit on the rough sea and talk to the Dreaming:

"O or or o or
Jalagarra .... Malawiya!"

literally - Jalagarra .... Stop!

- or as another fellow put it in another context:
"Relax! Be quiet!"

Presumably a totem should behave with greater consideration to fellow countrymen who "look after" her.

In the dreamtime era, people say there was a land bridge linking Juda with Entrance Island - and this is said to have been a lilly place - i.e. an area in which there was a lot of fresh water billabongs. There is a point here called Gudurrk gudurrk, literally, "the call of the brolga" - and there is a camp song about the brolga who could not find any firm ground in this land bridge to land as it was all lillies.

The bridge became submerged when Jowanja, a dreamtime ancestor, was pursuing two eagles Ragada and Jambalowa, who had stolen his canoe. He made the Land sink so that the canoe would float off the beach and the two eagles would have to fly away. Ragada went to Gabalgu, Entrance Island, and Jambalowa went to Ngaragu at Haul Round Island and at a single
Mangrove is where the Ragada, or Brahminy kite, or as it is more commonly known, the red sea eagle, has its dreaming.

We might wonder, "why is that Jambalowa has a dreaming and Ragada simply remains a mythical figure?" No one knows, but the sand of Haul Round Island is literally covered with the eggs of hens and other sea birds in what is called the jimuru, the cold weather time (June and July), so it is inevitable that a place of such importance for much sought after food should also have some major ritual association.

Other sacred sites include Ngayu "daylight is sleeping", yam, at Manjalama, "a reddish light" in the sky associated with lightning in the Wet Season, Malagduwuruji an old ancestor and his triangular shaped fish net at Namonba, Janaraba, an outcrop of small stones in an area where there are normally no stones, which is the "bad cold dreaming". Banamareka ganora literally, "white ochre is sitting there but young spirit girls here". Biynjowa at Balbanara billabong is the poisonous copper snake which is very important in Kunappipir ritual. Along the Gudjerama there are no sacred sites - but places of mythical association, Bowaliba the spirit who entices lost people away into his camp... said to have been "dangerous before, but not now". From a waterhole in the mid-Gudjerama Lek guraynjiya southward into Gungoragone country - is a dua moiety area known as 'Bovaliba country', and people associate together in the Bowaliba ceremonial dances. There is a sacred site which Gunavidji share in company with Gingoragone at the foot of a hill here.

At Naboloja there is a waterhole about ten feet in diameter made by the Rainbow Serpent and this is the site of the ceremonial dilly bag. To the west there are two outcrops of rocks. People were carrying the skin of a crocodile but it became too heavy so they put it down and it changed into these rocks, Banbaya Garowa, subsequently crocodiles went in every direction. In the most southerly point of Gunavidji territory there is Moranji the mosquito totem. On the coast there is Gaba Mangal, whistling hawk and oyster dreamings reef. Between Mayiri, Bat Island, and the left bank there is a deep channel in which the angry emu woman sits and at low tide she runs across the sand bars between the Island and the bank.

In "middle water" i.e. deeper water north of the Island there are Jabiyena, the saw toothed shark, and Manbiyeye, the maggot.
Near Maningrida there are six sites associated with the young girls' dreaming. If a young woman goes bathing there she is sure to have a baby.

Then there is the Jowanja site series of big shell middens at the Gudjerama.

An analysis of these sites shows the following distribution:

Rock or stone ............ Eight.
Fresh water spring ...... Four.
Trench in sea ............ Four.
Tree ..................... Three.
Shell middens .......... One.