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Braided channels :
documentary voice from an
interdisciplinary,
cross-media, and
practitioners's perspective

***Braided Channels: Documentary Voice from an Inter-
disciplinary, Cross-media, Cross-cultural and Practitioner's
Perspective***

Studio Practice submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Creative Arts in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of
Technology, Sydney



Photo courtesy of Guy Fitzhardinge

Volume 2: Studio Practice

Trish FitzSimons BA (Hons) U Syd, BA, AFTRS

March 2008

070.18
FITZ
1-21

Chaos of History

This is part of a set
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a social history exhibition



070.18
FITZ
[1-2]

an exhibition highlighting remarkable women and their
connection to Queensland's Channel Country

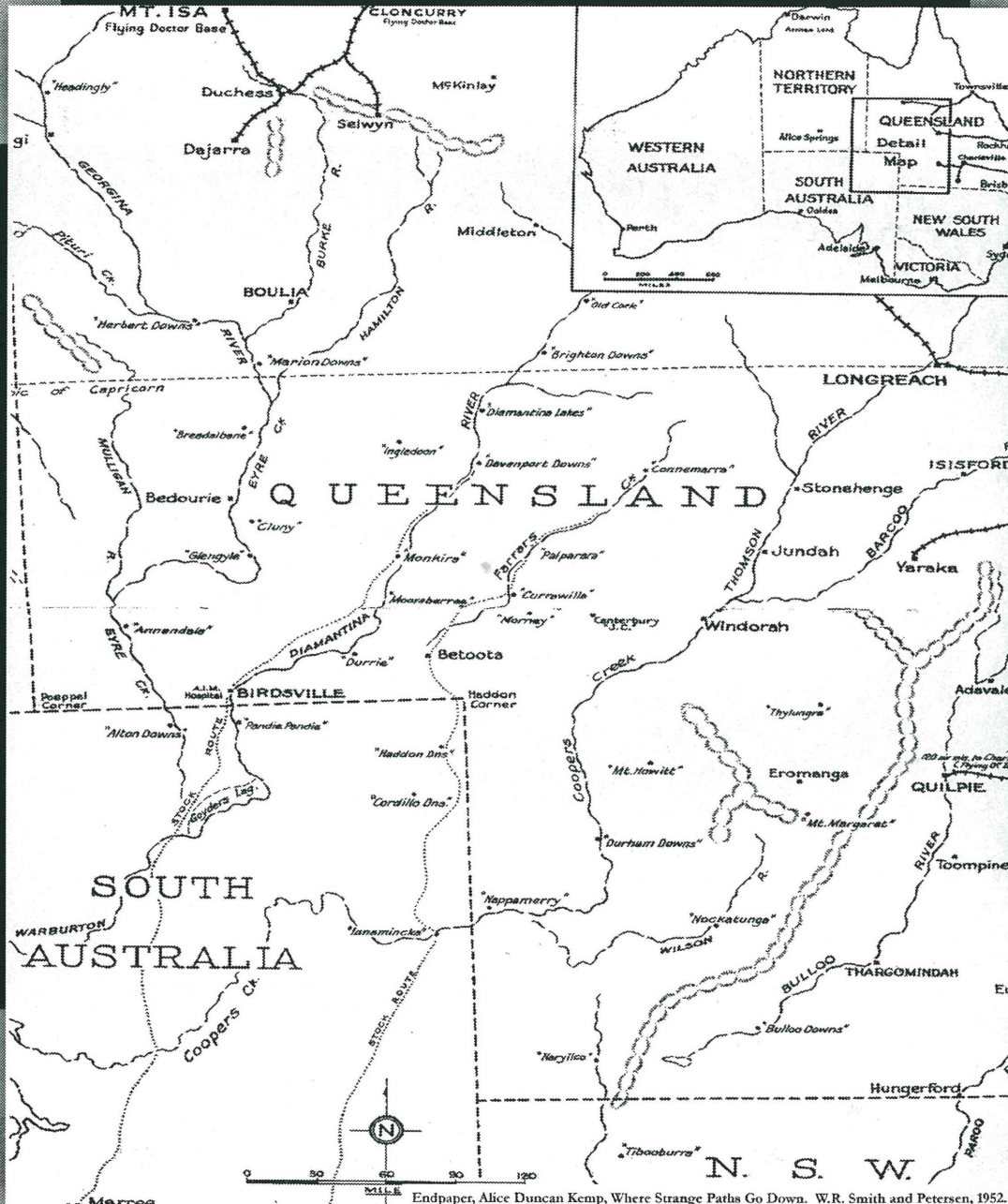
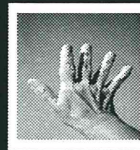
PINE RIVERS SHIRE COUNCIL

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Channels of History

This exhibition explores the lived experience of women in the Channel Country, both now and in the past, and the ways that this history is represented.



The Channel Country

Landprints are the marks on the surface of the earth, many of them made by our species.

George Seddon, *Landprints*, Cambridge, 1997, xv.



South Australian Museum

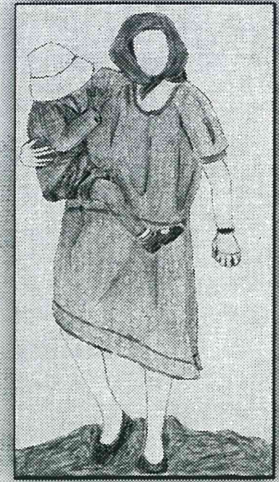
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Channels of History



Topsy Hansen and Mrs Brown
Photo courtesy: Isabel Tarrago,
Pitjaranda Trust.

Isabel Tarrago: *'Granny Brown' actually took over and reared Mum up as a young girl ...she just said "Well, Topsy, you're one of ours" But the connection went both ways. One of the biggest roles that Aboriginal women have played in the pastoral industry, and it's not often talked about, is caring for the children.*

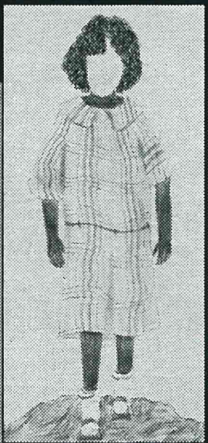


The Channel Country is part of the Lake Eyre Basin. It is an area where very little rain falls, but which is fed by the water from three key rivers - the Georgina, the Diamantina, and Cooper Creek. Because the land is extremely flat, when water comes the rivers break their banks and form a network of 'braided channels'. In flood time a single river can come to be up to seventy miles across. This area has been vital to humans for thousands of years. It was:

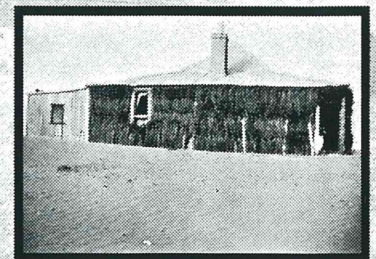
- A key trade route and land of plenty for Aboriginal people, especially associated with the pituri trade.
- In the path of explorers such as Burke and Wills, McKinlay and Hodgkinson.
- The foundation of huge squatting fortunes such as the Durack family's - who used the Georgina River as a road through to the Kimberley.

Today it is:

- An area the size of Victoria with a population of approximately 1500
- A key pastoral region, often described as the 'richest cattle fattening country in the world', at least when the channels are running.



Beth Staer: *The Art School in South Australia closed down so in 1935 I ended up taking this job - as a governess - tutor to Clifton Hill. I pictured Clifton Hill as a lovely cattle station, with sheep and cattle and beautiful everything else, but Clifton Hill was built up of galvanised iron on the top of shifting sand*



Clifton Hill, 1930's, Royal Historical Society of Queensland.

South Australian Museum



Channels of History

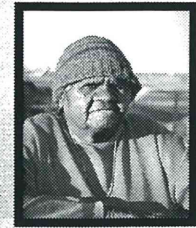


Flood 1922, Durham Downs.
Photo courtesy of Edith New.
Aust. Stockman's Hall of Fame

Anne Kidd: *Channel Country to me is where a lot of the country is inundated by slow, shallow water. It can make the difference between a good season and a bad season. If you don't get a flood...you're going to have a bad time. If you do get a flood, you're home and bosed.*



Linda Crombie, 1934.
Photog. - Norman B. Tindale.
S.A. Museum



Linda Crombie, 2000.
Photog. - Julie Hornsey.

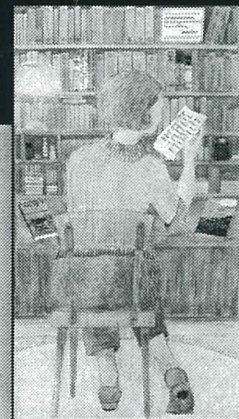
Linda Crombie: *We from the desert, my family from the desert, when we see people we run away and hide. One time we stayed out there with no clothes. So Daddy had to skin the rabbit, made a shirt out of it. Then we had no tucker so we went to Mt Gason and government sent that ration out. Biggest mob, grandmother, grandfather, aunty and uncle, we all moved back into Pandie Station, stayed there then.*

Channels of History brings together both contemporary and historical stories about the range of ways that women have participated in the Channel Country: as traditional owners, landholders, brides, drovers, cooks, mothers, publicans, post office proprietors, governesses, teachers and writers. It is about patterns of land and land use and the patterns of women's lives; about tall tales and hidden histories and the functions these various stories fulfil.

Channels of History is also about history. Many women have written about their life in the Channel Country. Who makes particular histories and what is the connection between a historian and the stories they choose to tell? How do race and gender and personal circumstances influence the perspective from which a history is seen? Why does it matter which histories we know and which are forgotten?

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE:

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Drawn artwork by
Georgina Greenhill

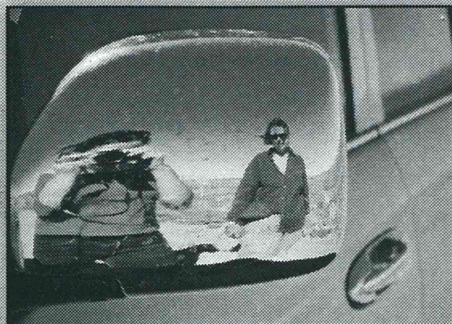
South Australian Museum



Channels of History



Photo Courtesy: Courier Mail



Curator's Statement

This exhibition and its underlying stories in some way began with my mother, a woman who made her adult life in a rural area and whose feeling for the land left a deep impression on me, and a desire to remember - her life and the lives of other rural women. But my mother never to my knowledge went to the Channel Country. It was Pam Watson's wonderful book, *Frontier Lands and Pioneer Legends: How the Karuwalli Lost their Land* (Hale and Iremonger, 1998) that brought me to this place, its physical contours and its women's stories.

I found no definitive history of the Channel Country, but lots of accounts of life there, very many of them by women. The oral histories underlying this project add to that chorus of voices. These stories confirm and contradict and intersect with each other, and reminded me of the braided channels of the Channel Country landscape. In turn, each woman's hands were marked by her relationship to the land. We used these ideas in developing the 'look' of both this overall exhibition and the touch screen interactive documentary that is at its heart.

This project has fed my intellect, spirit and imagination for several years now. It would never have happened without colleagues and sponsors: please see the exhibition itself for the full list of thank-yous and credits. My key collaborators were: Georgina Greenhill - exhibition designer and component artist; Julie Hornsey & Erika Addis - camera and photography; David Huggett - documentary editing; Jonathan Richards and Andrew Walker - archival and pictorial research; Toadshow - interactive authoring and panel production and. Gary Reilly - life support. And of course none of it would have been possible without the generosity of all the women who agreed to have fragments of their life stories shared with you, the public. Enjoy!

Trish FitzSimons, t.fitzsimons@griffith.edu.au



Arts Queensland
Queensland Government



The exhibition is based on an underlying audio visual oral history archive produced with funding from the Queensland Centenary of Federation and housed in the State Library of Queensland. The Queensland Heritage Trails Network, Arts Qld., is the primary sponsor of this exhibition. It has also been supported by Griffith University and the State Library of Queensland.

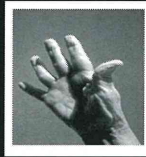
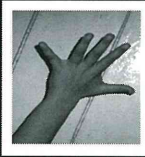
Pamphlet Design: Tani Budini

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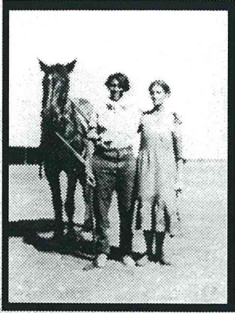
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Institute of Advanced Studies, The University of Western Australia

Channels of History



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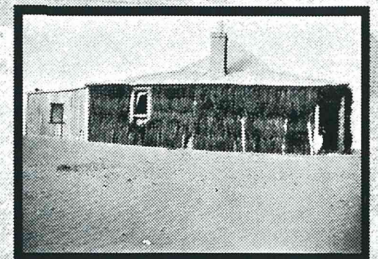
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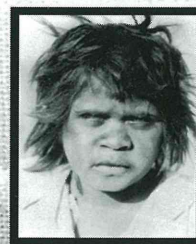


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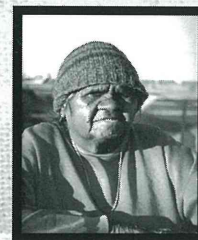


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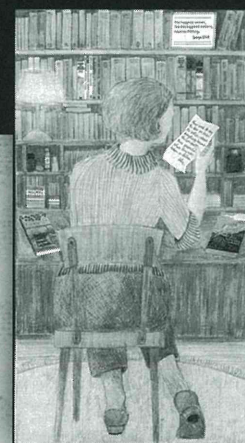
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Pamphlet Design: Tani B



Institute of Advanced Studies, The University of Western Australia