

## **Pilbara Local History Studies Program**

### **Pastoral Resources**

#### **The Pastoral Industry in the Pilbara**

<http://www.liswa.wa.gov.au/wepon/land/html/pastoral.html>

Throughout the twentieth century the Western Australian pastoral industry was an integral part of the story of the land. The industry was an extremely influential sector in the local economy. Although a pastoral industry had been established in the colony's South West in the middle part of the nineteenth century, prior to the development of wheat and mixed farming in that region, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that cattle and sheep were introduced to Western Australia's north, northwest and eastern interior.

The story of that pastoral industry is told in three sections:

[Pastoral Stations 1901 - 1939](#)

[Pastoral Stations 1939 - 1970](#)

[Pastoral Stations 1970 - 2001](#)

### **Indigenous Land Corporation**

The Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) is a statutory authority set up under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005* to assist Indigenous people to acquire and manage land to achieve economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits.

<http://www.ilc.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=247>

### **Wattles of the Pilbara Project**

By [Bruce R. Maslin](#) and Stephen van Leeuwen

<http://www.worldwidewattle.com/infogallery/misc/pilbara.php>

#### **Background**

*Acacia* (Wattle) is the largest genus of woody plants in Australia (containing almost 1000 species) and is a conspicuous element of many landscapes, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions, which occupy about 75% of the country. The Pilbara represents a major centre of species richness for *Acacia* in Western Australia with around 100 taxa recorded for the region. These species dominate many Pilbara ecosystems; they are important in nature conservation programs and are obviously an important constituent in mine site and other land rehabilitation programs. Some species also provide an important source of fodder for the pastoral industry during drought times and many have ethno-botanical and cultural significance to Aboriginal people.

### **Pilbara History and Cultures - History**

Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre

[http://acl.arts.usyd.edu.au/projects/wangkamaya/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=194&Itemid=356](http://acl.arts.usyd.edu.au/projects/wangkamaya/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=194&Itemid=356)

Wanga Maya aims to be recognised as a leading Aboriginal language and resource centre in Australia. By working under the direction of Pilbara elders, we will use our expertise, knowledge and sensitivity to record and foster Aboriginal languages, culture and history. Thus, ensuring the young people remain strong.

### **Nor'westers of the Pilbara Breed**

The story of brave ancestors who pioneered the outback Pilbara in Western Australia  
Jenny Hardie

[http://www.hesperianpress.com/n\\_o\\_title/norwesters\\_pilbara\\_breed.html](http://www.hesperianpress.com/n_o_title/norwesters_pilbara_breed.html)

Jenny Hardie began writing of the changing pastoral history of the Pilbara for the West Australian newspaper. She collected photos, anecdotes, and historical data from the earliest days of the Pilbara to the late 20th century.

Before she died in 1982, the Port Hedland Council requested her to write a book of the settlement and massive changes that have taken place in the Pilbara during European settlement.

What resulted was Nor' Westers of the Pilbara Breed, a book that since its 1981 publication has become a classic of the North and one that is unlikely to be surpassed.

It includes 266 photos from the 1880s to the 1960s, grouped in chronological order.

ISBN 085905 296 6

2001 reprint of 1981 edition, Soft Cover, 280 pp plus 266 photos, 1030 grams, \$55.00 + POST

### **Government of Western Australia Department of Water**

<http://www.water.wa.gov.au/Water+regions/Pilbara/default.aspx>

Our role: The Pilbara Regional office is based in Karratha, covering the coastal plain of the Western region, the central Pilbara including the iron ore rich Hamersley and Chichester Ranges, and the Western Desert to the border of Northern Territory.

The region has 12 staff working across the region to ensure sustainable management of the regions water resources. Staff in the region work closely with the resource sector, pastoralists and Indigenous communities to manage groundwater and protect groundwater dependant ecosystems.

The expansion of the mining sector is placing a high demand on the regions water resources. Our staff work with the mining sector to facilitate the sustainable management of groundwater resources and minimise the impacts of development on surface and ground water resources across the region.

## Department of Meteorology

[http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/wa/cyclone/about/inland\\_pilbara/index.shtml](http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/wa/cyclone/about/inland_pilbara/index.shtml)

Tropical Cyclones Affecting Inland Pilbara towns  
Flooding | Notable TCs | TC *Olivia*

It may be thought that tropical cyclones only affect coastal areas of the state. While cyclones certainly weaken as they move inland, the stronger ones remain capable of causing damaging winds for some time before being downgraded below cyclone intensity. A cyclone at category five intensity near the coast capable of causing wind gusts to 300 km/h can still be rated at category three or higher producing wind gusts of over 170 km/h hundreds of kilometres inland. It is quite rare that an inland town experiences the maximum winds of a severe cyclone. The risk of damaging winds also decreases with distance from the coast. Pannawonica, for example, being just 75 kilometres from the coast is much more likely to experience damaging winds than Paraburdoo and Newman which are 300 and 350 kilometres inland respectively. Additionally cyclones weaken at a faster rate when moving over hills and mountains such as the Hamersley and Chichester Ranges compared to those moving over flatter terrain over the eastern Pilbara and Great Sandy Desert areas.

Typically the greatest impact of most cyclones inland is flooding from heavy rainfall. This can cause damage to buildings and fences near watercourses in addition to road and rail networks. The added cost of transport delays can cause significant economic costs particularly to the mining industry. Some of the more remote communities may be isolated for extended periods before water levels fall and roads and bridges repaired. While most towns and communities are located away from flood-susceptible areas, some such as Nullagine often experience flooding in the town.

The tracks of cyclones affecting inland Pilbara are similar to those affecting coastal communities of Port Hedland, Karratha/Dampier, and Onslow. These cyclones typically form over warm ocean waters to the north of the state and intensify before crossing the coast, by which stage they are moving in a general southerly track. The further south cyclones move the more likely they will take a southeasterly track across inland parts of the State.

Tropical cyclone Olivia is one example of a severe cyclone that crosses the Pilbara coast and, while weakening, can still cause damage to inland parts.

## Pilbara Development Commission

<http://www.pdc.wa.gov.au/regional-information.aspx>

### Regional Information

Situated in the north west of Western Australia, the Pilbara is a mineral rich region of spectacular scenery thought to be around 2.8 billion years old. Often described as the engine room of the nation because of its immense reserves of natural resources, the Pilbara is also

blessed with stunning natural beauty boasting striking landscapes and a rich and diverse cultural heritage.

The Pilbara covers a total area of 507,896 square kilometres extending from the Indian Ocean to the Northern Territory border (including offshore islands). The region comprises four local government authorities - the Shires of Ashburton, East Pilbara, Roebourne and the Town of Port Hedland.

More than 39,000 people live in the Pilbara enjoying the relaxed community lifestyle, the magnificent climate and unique environment it provides. While most residents live in the region's towns, many choose the rugged lifestyle of the pastoral stations.

The region can be separated into three distinct geographical formations, a vast coastal plain, breathtaking inland ranges and an arid desert region extending into Australia's dry centre. The Pilbara is a semi arid region characterised by high temperatures, low and variable rainfall and high evaporation. Temperature ranges are generally greater in inland districts away from the moderating effects of onshore winds common to the coastal districts.

## **Department of Indigenous Affairs Region - Pilbara**

<http://www.dia.wa.gov.au/Our-Business/Around-The-Regions/Region-Pilbara/>

DIA's Pilbara region, which is based in Port Hedland, had an Aboriginal population of about 7100 people in 2006, living in towns and 37 scattered communities. This represents the third highest proportion of Aboriginal people in the State.

Employment of Aboriginal people has traditionally been in the pastoral industry, particularly on one of about 22 Aboriginal pastoral leases in State's north. Efforts are being made to increase Aboriginal employment in the mining industry, particularly through contract work such as earthmoving, road works, gardening and catering.

The Pilbara covers an area of 507,896 square kilometres, extending from the Indian Ocean to the Northern Territory and includes several islands. Major towns in the region include Exmouth, Karratha, Port Hedland, South Hedland, Tom Price, Newman, Marble Bar and Nullagine. Communities extend to Jigalong in the south and Kunawarritji to the east.

The area can be separated into three distinct geographical formations – a vast coastal plain, breathtaking inland ranges and desert extending to the nation's arid center.

Among the Pilbara's most popular natural attractions are the Karijini and Millstream/Chichester national parks, while the broader area has become a cultural haven well known for its Aboriginal rock art. Karijini also boasts a small Aboriginal tourist operation.

Archaeological evidence shows that the Pilbara has been inhabited for at least 30,000 years.

The Pilbara region is also prone to cyclones during November to April, with communities in danger of being isolated for weeks at a time after heavy rain. Staff place considerable emphasis on raising the awareness of Aboriginal people on how to prepare for cyclones.

## **Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia (PGA).**

<http://www.pgaofwa.org.au/>

The PGA is a non-profit industry organisation in Western Australia which represents primary producers of wool, grain and meat & livestock.

[http://www.pgaofwa.org.au/press\\_releases/NATIVE+TITLE+SETTLEMENT+-+NORTHWEST+PILBARA+PASTORALISTS](http://www.pgaofwa.org.au/press_releases/NATIVE+TITLE+SETTLEMENT+-+NORTHWEST+PILBARA+PASTORALISTS)

Press Release

### **NATIVE TITLE SETTLEMENT - NORTHWEST PILBARA PASTORALISTS 2009-06-11**

On 11 June 2009, Justice North of the Federal Court of Australia made a consent determination over the Nyangumarta Part A native title claim area (being an area including but not limited to the areas of Wallal station and part of each of Anna Plains and Mandora stations).

Before the consent determination can be made, the Court must be satisfied that the State of Western Australia has identified that there is a credible basis to the claim. In this instance, it is clear that the State has thoroughly analysed the connection material provided by the Nyangumarta people and has established that there is a credible basis to the claim.

### **1946 Pilbara strike - Australia's longest strike**

On May 1, 1946, 800 Aboriginal pastoral workers from 27 stations in Western Australia walked off the job for better pay and conditions. This was the first industrial action by Indigenous Australians since colonisation in 1788 and predates the famous Wave Hill strike in the Northern Territory by 20 years. The Pilbara strike lasted until 1949, making it the longest strike in Australia's history.

#### **History leading to the 1946 Pilbara strike**

<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/1946-Pilbara-strike.html>

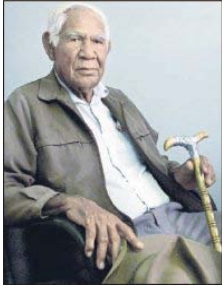
From the 1890s to the 1920s it was common for Aboriginal workers to be paid only in rations of food and clothing. During the 1920s some workers began to receive minimal wages. The 1936 Native Affairs Act legally compelled pastoralists to provide shelter and meet the medical needs of their workers, but this was never enforced by the government.

Aboriginal stockmen were housed in corrugated iron humpies, without floors, lighting, sanitation, furniture or cooking facilities. It was illegal for the Aboriginal people to leave their place of employment, and it was even illegal to pay them wages equal to the white people's.

In 1942, there was a secret Aboriginal law meeting to discuss a strike proposal, an idea first discussed by white labourer and prospector Don McLeod and Aboriginal people Clancy McKenna, Dooley Bin Bin and Nyamal Elder Peter "Kangushot" Coppin from the Pilbara community who were instrumental in calling together the 1942 meeting. 200 law men from 23

Aboriginal groups gathered, and after six weeks a consensus was reached to begin a strike on May 1, the international day of workers' struggle and the beginning of the shearing season, thereby putting maximum pressure on the squatters. However, the strike was postponed until after the Second World War had ended.

## Original Indigenous strike leader dies in Pilbara



**Peter 'Kangushot' Coppin**, one of the leaders of the 1946 Pilbara strike. Image: melbourne.indymedia.org

An Aboriginal elder, who was one of the leaders of the first strike by Aboriginal pastoral workers, has died in the Pilbara, in north-west Western Australia.

Peter Coppin, often known as Kangushot, was one of the leaders of the 1946 strike by Aboriginal workers to protest against the conditions they worked under.

It was the first time there had been such a strike.

He was born under gum trees at the De Grey River in the Pilbara in 1920 and when he died yesterday, aged 86, he was the most senior lawman and Aboriginal leader in the Pilbara.

Former Western Australian premier Peter Dowding, who was a friend of the Indigenous leader, says the country has lost one of its heroes.

"Many people across the whole of Australia and indeed internationally will recognise the loss of such a great man," Mr Dowding said.

"He'll be remembered by the community at large for the great contribution he made over many, many years."

Mr Coppin's efforts eventually led to better conditions for Aboriginal workers and he was awarded the British Empire Medal in 1972 and was NAIDOC 2002 Elder of the Year.

### National Museum of Australia Canberra Collaborating for Indigenous rights Timeline Indigenous Rights

<http://www.indigenousrights.net.au/timeline.asp?startyear=1940>

#### 1930-39

- 1940-49
- 1950-59
- 1960-69
- 1970-79

## Pindan Group

<http://indigenoustrights.net.au/organisation.asp?oID=24>

Following the 1946-1949 pastoral strike by Aboriginal men in the Pilbara, the strikers formed a community which sought economic and social independence from the pastoralists. Don McLeod, in conversations with Dooley Bin Bin and Clancy McKenna, who had both worked in the pastoral industry, had seen the strike strategy as a way for the people to gain control of their lives. McLeod believed that a cooperative would be the structure most suitable to Aboriginal social organisation. The group was, however, illiterate and thus unable to give signed consent and, as a result, the Northern Development and Mining Company Pty Ltd was set up in 1951, the first Aboriginal-owned company in Western Australia. The company went into liquidation in 1953. In 1955, Pindan Pty Ltd was established, a company in which all the shareholders were Aboriginal people (Pindan is the name for the red earth of the Pilbara).

Throughout the 1950s, Don McLeod and Stanley Guise Middleton, Commissioner for Native Affairs, were locked in a bitter ideological battle when it came to models of Aboriginal industry. In 1958, more than two dozen Pindan men went to Perth to fight a defamation case against Middleton and the Australian Broadcasting Commission. They were partially successful.

### More info on Pindan group, 1958

Middleton played a part in the failure of the first venture, Northern Development and Mining, and continued to scrutinise the new venture. From 1955 to 1959, Pindan Company operated as a mining company drawing on traditional yandying skills (a yandy is a long shallow dish) in separating the minerals. A community of about 600 people was developing confidence in their ability to operate successfully in a white man's world without losing control of their own. Jacob Oberdoo, one of the Pindan shareholders, made the long journey to the Brisbane Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement conference in 1961 to tell people about the Pindan venture.

In 1959 the group split. Ernie Mitchell and Peter Coppin led one section of the community. They purchased Yandeyarra station and operated successfully for many years. The other section, led by Don McLeod, established Nomads Pty Ltd and purchased Strelley Station, Warralong and others. Today, some land in the Pilbara has been returned to traditional Aboriginal owners.

### Further reading

Various files from the State Records Office of Western Australia (4069, 3733, 3390, 5761, 993)

Kingsley Palmer and Clancy McKenna, *Somewhere Between Black and White: the story of an Aboriginal Australian*, Macmillan, 1978

Don W McLeod, *How the West Was Lost*, Port Hedland, 1984

Jolly Read and Peter Coppin, *Kangushot: the Life of a Nyamal Lawman*, Aboriginal Studies Press, 1999

How the West was Lost

<http://australianscreen.com.au/titles/how-west-was-lost/>

(1987) Documentary, Historical Length: 66 minutes 55 seconds  
Collection: National Film and Sound Archive

Availability of the complete title

### **Synopsis**

On May 1 1946 hundreds of Aboriginal pastoral station workers walked off sheep stations in the Pilbara region of north-west Western Australia. This was the beginning of an organised strike that officially lasted for three years but unofficially continued long after 1949. Over the next 30 years the strikers fought for recognition, fair wages and drew attention to the unfair treatment of Aboriginal people in the state. The story of the strike is told through re-enacted segments, oral testimony by some of the strikers and incorporates historical footage and official transcripts from the former Department of Native Affairs. It is narrated by a female voice-over.