

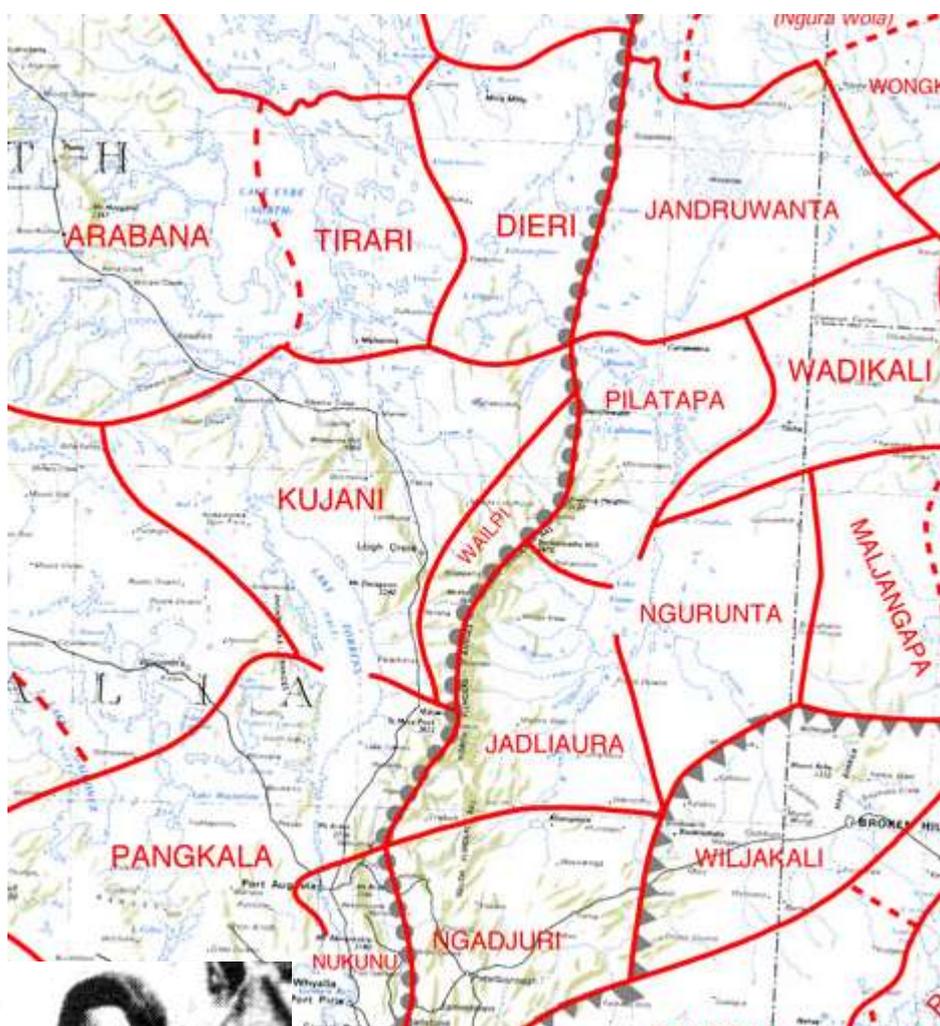
Claude Demell, Adnyamathanha man

Two interviews follow, the first by Adele Pring at Port Germein and the second by Adele Pring and Barry Sweet at Quorn, in 1987

Interview one

Claude is the last fully initiated Adnyamathanha man and was born at Angepena in the Flinders Ranges on 26 December 1908.

Claude's mother was Yadliaura, while his father's father was Wailpi, and his father's mother was Kujani. His moiety group is Arraru and he is the youngest of six children and the only one still alive (at the time of interview). Claude's wife Ethel passed away in the 1980s.



The map, *Trial Boundaries of Aboriginal Australia*, above is by Norman Tindale. Wailpi country includes rocky hills. Kujani, Wailpi, Jadliaura and Pilatapa peoples now make up the people now known as Adnyamathanha http://archives.samuseum.sa.gov.au/tribalmap/html/map_L3_C4_D4.html

The photo at left was taken in about 1910 at Mt Serle Station. It shows Emily Demell (top left), her daughter Sissy James (right) and youngest child Claude Demell. It is copied from the cover of *Adnyamathanha Genealogy*, by Christine Davis and Pearl McKenzie, published by the Aboriginal Heritage Branch, South Australian Department of Environment and Planning

The photo at right is of Claude Demell in his backyard at Quorn, late 1980s



Claude's family lived at Mount Serle Station all their early lives and shifted to Minerawuta (Ram Paddock Gate) on Mt Serle Station when he was a man.

Claude's father Nick Demell (see photo at right from same source at photo on page 1), born at Aroona Dam, worked on stations living all the time in a widlya (traditional shelter) doing various jobs including fencing, stock work, roadwork, wool classing and bar work and sometimes tracking. His father worked for Arthur Kipling when doing station work. When doing roadwork for the government the work included pick and shovel work, loading the stone onto a tip dray with draft horses and carting the stone away, the work now done by graders and other heavy machinery.

The pay was four shillings a day. Claude's father, Nick Demell could not read or write but was acting foreman and he said many men in those days worked just for tobacco. Nick worked as a wool classer so when the old man Ferguson at North Moolooloo could get shearers but no wool classer. They taught Nick to class the wool and one year he topped wool price. Nick sometimes did tracking work for the

police when people got lost and much later on was a barman at Copley. The police work was at Beltana. Claude remembers in 1919 when he was working at Burr Well, Depot Springs, that some Aboriginal men from up north, probably from around Oodnadatta, were handcuffed and railed south on the 'Marree Mixed', the name of the train that carried passengers, goods and cattle. The men had been arrested for killing bullocks. He doesn't know what happened to them afterwards.

He also remembers a massacre near Paralana Hot Springs in the Gammon Ranges when a lot of Aboriginal people were shot for killing sheep. He remembers them being shot at Arcoona Station and one having got away to warn others at their camp at Wirappa but when he got there he found they were already shot and the camp burnt up. Other Aboriginal bones with bullet holes through the skulls have been seen at Lake Callabonna, just north of the Flinders Ranges. Claude's friend Lynch Ryan has seen these bones. The Marree history book tells of a massacre by a station owner called Wylie south of Innaminka and Claude said that was a different massacre again even though it was near the border of New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. He know that from talking to people at Tibooburra just over the New South Wales border.

After talking about the massacres and about the fact that men were killed for killing sheep to eat, Claude said, 'We're still fighting for our land. We can't get it. They (the government) sell it to anyone yet they took our land from us. It makes us mad. You'd think they'd give some back.'

Claude's children went to school mostly at Beltana while Gloria went to school at Blinman and later at Quorn. His oldest is Brian born in 1937, and works as a driving contractor for the Highways Department in Quorn. Next is Ian (1940) and lives at Port Germein, then Lily (1942), and Gloria (1947) works as an Aboriginal Education Worker at Hendon Primary School in Adelaide and the youngest is Julie (1965).



Nicholas Demell taken at Arkaroola.

When younger, Claude worked at Mt Serle Station for one Pound (\$2.00) a week. He was married to his wife Ethel in 1936 by the missionary, Fred Eaton. Ethel was his promised wife and they were married in the Yura's (Adnyamathanha) way.

In 1930, Claude was working at Balcanoona Station owned successively by Roy Thomas, Hurtle Lord and then MacLaughlin. While there he did yard building, stock work, shearing and other station work. The famous boot maker, RM Williams (Reg), original worked as a missionary and then as a boot maker and well sinker in Nepabunna. He had an Aboriginal man by the name of Dollar Mick (Smith) working for him when he moved to Italowie Gorge from Nepabunna but while in Nepabunna he taught Claude the boot making skills. He wanted Claude to work for him but Claude said he would have missed his horse-riding. Claude helped Reg Williams at weekends. Claude was around the same age as Reg and he remembers Reg's wife as being older and a nice person.

Claude remembers the Afghan people who passed through with their camel trains. They mixed well with his people and didn't marry into his tribe like they did in some other areas.

One character Claude remembers well was JJ Burton who used to ride emus. He said he used to do anything – ran like an emu too. JJ was an Adnyamathanha man. His father is buried at Angepena at the netting gate.

Claude's happiest times were when he was a stockman. It was good fun in camps, knocking the bullocks over, sticking the brands on, riding calves. There used to be fifteen or sixteen men when they were mustering. There weren't ever any fights, just fun. Claude hardly went to school at all – just learnt a bit at Copley.

A missionary called Jim Page started the mission work at Ram Paddock Gate. Another called Fred Eaton came after. Claude remembers them as good people. In 1931 Jim Page suicided because he had to leave and he didn't want to. He is buried on the south eastern side of Nepabunna. Claude was working in Balcanoona at the time.

In the late 1940s, the initiation ceremonies were stopped because the Aboriginal people were Christian and attended church regularly. Claude said there's not much difference between marriage in his traditional way and that in the church. He said a couple can marry as long as they are in the right moiety groups.

Three Aboriginal men from around that area went off to fight in World War II. They were Bobby Amos, Akbar Khan and Steve Coulthard. The first two came back but Steve got pneumonia and died in Adelaide.

When Claude left Balcanoona Station in 1944 he went to Beltana and in 1958 to Blinman and in 1961 moved to Quorn so that Gloria could go to high school.

Claude's people first thought that Udneyus (Adnyamathanha word for Europeans) were ghosts because they were white and this is the literal meaning of the word.

Claude's wife recently died and he has moved to Port Germein to live with his son Ian and one of his grandsons, Jim Neville.

Interview two

My father (Nick Demell) used to track at Beltana for a while then he gave the tracking away and went on to the station work. When people got lost the police would call him up and he'd go and track them – white people, drunk people. (They) might have missed the road and hid in the hills – that's the end of it. He used to track them around and he always found them. (There was) a bit of a mess there. He quit then. I was about ten then I suppose but this first lot's before my time see. That's what he told me. He worked by himself with the police. Only two of them used to go out. Pay them very little, very small (laughter) because se them days wages was very low. He left and went on station work.

He went on Mt Lyndhurst Station, butchering there, doing yard work and that. Then got married at Lyndhurst. He never used to talk about when Udney (white people) first came to the Flinders – don't know why. See when he got mixed up with the policemen he just forget about his ways see to help the police. Went Udney (white fella's) way then. He worked there (at Mt Lyndhurst station) and he worked on a mine at Depot Springs. He was a copper miner then, used to do a lot of copper mining. I should go and show you his mine too one day. That'd be good to see. Mum used to sew 'em when they used to bag the coppers up. Little bag about that (40-50cm) high and that (30cm) wide. She'd be sewing them with a needle and twine.

Claude Demell in his backyard at Quorn, aged about 80

First baby she got my older sister, Sissy James, and the second one went on Stubbs way. I don't know why. Stubbs died when he was ninety-eight or ninety-nine. That's my brother see – we're from the same mother. I got a different name. And there was another brother after Bill, Ernie and there was a sister and another brother (who) died in Port Augusta. Hughie Demell and myself, Six of us in the family see.

When he (father) got it together (us) four lads went to Moolooloo station then. Moolooloo – they kept us around there with the bullock team, used to drive bullock team, fencing see and four kids used to always hand around with him. Ten bullocks in the wagon.

We used to wear ordinary clothes. Mother wore long dresses. Mother died when I was two years old. Just us boys (and) two girls was home then. Older sister growed us up for a while. When we was good enough to look after ourselves, Dad took us, took care of us then. Growed us up, four of us there. If the other station want the work, well they lend him to go over there. That was the trouble see, lend it. He'll go there for a few months and back on his own station. He used to do a lot of that wool work. That's how he learned to wool class. Wool classing when he was driving the bullock teams, fencing, four of us. The boss came along one day (and said) 'You like to do the classing this time? Wool classer never turns up.' He get top price for that year.

My father's parents, one's Kuyani and one's Wailpi but they was good old people. Old bloke I know him, grandfather, but grandmother died before. Might have been around but didn't know nothing about it see, put it that way.

When he finished wool-classing, he'd go back on his job again and in the meantime he's taking off from the station then (and) he got on the roadwork. Copley to Balcanoona Road (with) horse and dray. He used to do that himself. The foreman used a 'gang' they used to call it in those days at Blinman. He said to the old bloke 'No, you got to carry on yourself'. He said 'Okay, that'll be right.' I used to help him (when) he used to go around on his drays.

We had a step-mother at that time then. I had her photo here. She grewed me up then. She had another daughter – there was two, a girl and a boy. Mum we used to call her all the same in the early days see. I had her photo but I don't know what happened to her.

We used to go out, camp nearby, do the gutters, pick and shovel work, load the dray up, tip dray. Tip it in the hollow there and spread it out with the shovel, stack the stones. Finish up at Italowie.

We had to go to Wooltana then. He had to sign off and that. Blokes went to Blinman and got the horse and dray back 'cos they finished that bit and got to go shearing. Every year shearing forty thousand sheep. Only dark people shearing (with) machine shears, old times machines. They used to have eighteen shears there. One big station at Wooltana. McTaggart owned that then. He's got a station over the other side there, his son anyway, grandson. He was a good bloke. I know him well, poor old fella. He was fair with both sides, black and white. Treat 'em same in the early days. Old McTaggart did anyhow. He was an old man, crippled He used a walking stick when I was a kid. McTaggart sold the station then in 1920. McBride took it over. Old Mick they used to call him. He wants him (my father Nick) to stop on the station see because he knows all about it see. McTaggart told him about what he could do. Stop on the station. He went outside and looked for tank building. Concrete tanks they built then. Could show you some now (Claude laughs).

Old man, you're been here a fair while now, done a good job, boundary riding, just watch the borders out there about eighteen mile out from Wooltana. He was boundary riding then for a while. Then when that slackened off he came to Copley after that finished. He always stop until everything's settling out. He was a man wouldn't leave straight way. He told him well getting too dry. Well we came to Copley.

He did a bit of mining at this side of Angepena, Camel Gap copper mine there. He done a bit around there. His own job there getting copper together. He said now we'll go to Copley. Dump-picking around Copley. They used to get a lot of copper from the dumps too see. Screen it through the screen. Chuck the stone and just bag the copper.

That's slacking off and the publican (said) 'Oh we'll give you a job.' 'Yeah, take it I suppose'. Doing yard work, clean the bar and that. He worked there a long time then in the finish. 'Oh old man, you'll have to do the barman'. (He) used to go back of the bar then (doing) barman work. Them days used to get a drink anyway. He was a full blood but they classed him (got him an exemption certificate probably), found out what he could do see. He'd have a drink, wouldn't notice it on him. Take a couple of drinks and loosen up. I must have been about twelve then.

When we were out on the road we had plenty tucker. We could get food on the stations anytime. He was well known see. Vegies used to come, hardly used to get vegies. Used to get a lot at Mt Serle and Angepena stations. Used to give us a lot of things. Potato and onion used to go on the mail run from Blinman. Go down to Para (Parachilna) on the mail and then on the train. It was a real good time. Plenty to eat them days.

After the hotel finish I was starting fourteen then so I got to go to work. Fourteen you got to be on the horse. I went to Depot Springs then for a while and worked there for Col White, owners there. I worked there a long time. 1925 I think I started there, 1926 or 1925 anyway and I worked there for three years. Worked there until 1928. End of 1929 then I went to Wertaloona. Worked for Alec Wilson and we didn't do too bad there – mustering, stock work every day – cattle and sheep. Drought time too it was. Moving the cattles around, very hard Wertaloona. Wilson slackened us off there and I came back to Mt Serle then. Worked for Smiler Greenwood 'cos I knew him long time.

My father and Smiler's father used to work together in the mines see, long time ago. Used to be always together, copper cadging. My father and Smiler Greenwood's father, old man Greenwood. They was mates. Used to get copper.

We used to move around when the other stations short of men, they say 'Well you better go and help out for two or three weeks.' Like that see, backward and forward. Go over there for three weeks at Balcanoona, go back to Mt Serle. Help them when they need men. That's how we used to do it. 'Alright, well go over there and help 'em' Last time I went to Wertaloona and Balcanoona wanted me. Tried to go back to Balcanoona then, all horses them days, no motor bike. Very few cars around. Wasn't married then.

I got married in 1936. Promised wife, that's right, we know from when we're young. She was fifteen I suppose. That was a real good time then. We came to Beltana then. I was fourteen years with Beltana Pastoral Company. All my kids went to school at Beltana then. Beltana Pastoral Company, used to go to Lyndhurst, Murnpeowie, Beltana. That had all that, all the stock work I used to do. Spare time I used to do a bit of yard work. Keep me going all the time. My wife looked after the kids.

I went to school and went straight out to work. That was the trouble see. Went to school in Copley and when he (my father) was working at the pub then. Only me and my sister and one of the Coulthards I think was there for a while. School's not bad but I'd sooner work. More fun in working, riding horses.

I can just read little bit and sign my name. That's about all. Got on alright with white kids, good friends. Copley was good, all mixed up. Played together but these days – bit one sided now. I don't know why but olden times all together. I used to play cricket and tennis. Barefoot. All the boys was the same. Never used to wear shoes. White kids up there (used to) take their shoes off to play tennis.

Used to go to church now and again when we'd get to it. I don't know what do you call that church. Travelling minister go around one in two years I suppose, that's all (laughter).

When I was very young we used to spend most time in the hills chasing rabbits. Lot of us young lads. No traps, knocking them with a waddy. Rifles were there but waddies was the best chief way of killing them. We never used to bother about kangaroo, always used to bother about rabbits and rabbits was just moving them days. Used to kill them out. Cooked them in the ashes, burn their fur off, stick 'em up (green stock through to hold the belly closed to keep ashes out), cook them in ashes (hot coals) then. We used to have plenty bush tucker there but I can't explain things to you until I get the stuff. When I got it I'll tell you. It's hard to explain.

Lizards, that's the thing I never had. We'd eat wallaby, was good in ashes. Father used to shoot the wallabies with his shotgun he had then. Single barrel, was a real good time.

I was the youngest, I'm the baby boy. I'm the baby now. I'm only seventy eight now (laughter).

My father used to sing the old songs but it was no interest to us, tell you the truth, all songs. Them days we was mixed up with the white people too much. He used to tell us the stories a bit but I don't know. Them days we didn't think about stories. He learned us a bit but when the old people finish off it was no use to us. I don't know why. It'd be good now if we did (listen). We would have still had the history.

I believe church because the old people used to tell us about it in their ways. They said 'Don't you fellas do anything wrong – bloke up there looking down on you.' My cousins and that we used to play around, kill birds. 'You can kill rabbits, that's your meat, but don't be cruel with any animals.' That's all they used to teach us, Aboriginal way that is. Before church came out they told us that. They told us 'Jesus up there looking down on you. Don't do any wrong.' So we didn't. We was good all the time. Never used to steal, 'cos he's looking up there see. I believed that. (laughter) But these days, lot doesn't believe it. 'He's not looking, we'll do this, we'll do that'. (laughter)

There was a lot of people shot in the old days. Paralana Hot Springs. Some of our old people told us about that. That happened. Them days a lot used to be frightened. Mustn't talk about it because the white fella will come and shoot you. Trying to bluff us out of it so we didn't talk about it see. Only kill your kangaroo, wallaby, emu and rabbits but never touch sheep, which we didn't, we used to handle sheep when we start working, looking after stock for ten bob (one dollar) a week.

They (Aboriginal people) were killed at Arcoona too and one got away and when he got to Wirrappa they been all killed already. On the west, just down from woomera. The old people who told us might have been young fellas in those days.

McTaggart was good, the others was alright in my time, but McTaggart was number one man. Old Alec Wilson was good, he treated you well, old Alec did but McTaggart was a good man with all the kids and all. Old McTaggart used to take us up to the shop, stores come in, buy us lollies, packet each. We used to help him yarding up when he was drafting. We said we'll push the sheep up for you. Well we was happy. Kids get a lot of lollies. Good lollies too, don't see 'em now though, all mixed.

Illness, tell you the truth we used to lose very few young peoples and the old people used to go until they was old age. Only one we lost, my sister, my step-sister, she died. I was older than her. She was only about twelve. She had some sort of dropsy they called it, swelling up legs and that but no doctor was there. Never used to worry about doctor. Only since we started on this other food, that's cause of it. I remember the measles not long back though at Beltana there, when I was working there. I missed the first lot, got the second one, when I was too old then. All the family got it that time, no problems left at all. The old people as far as I can remember, they was walking around with walking sticks when I was just about a grown up man.

There is a few trees out in the bush we could use for medicine for cuts or a cold but I can't tell you about it because I got to show you that tree. Tribal doctor was finished. My old grandfather, he was a good old doctor. He used to cure us with cold and that. 'You fellas not going to get measles.' He was right too. We never got measles. We used certain smokes at the camp. 'That'll keep the measles away.' So I might show you that one day but I got to go out in the bush and show you that tree, burn them down see. 'You'll believe it?' The one for sores, that the best one, big sores there, only just got to burn it up (the bark of the *Eremophila longifolia* known by Adnyamathanha as Emu Bush, Plum Bush (*Varti Vaka*), mix it with fat, plaster on then couple days you can take that off, just a lark. Broken arms and legs, used to just strap them up in early days, put little splints each side, wrap him. Nearly got broken bones myself, on this left leg but a strapped him up, but I was still walking, still riding horse. (laughter)

We used to have good working boots, elastic sided boot from the stores at the stations. Used to have plenty clothes. Stations get it up from Adelaide straight through. Camels used to take supplies further up, from Eringa, Cordillo Downs, used to come in there but not this end (Adnyamathanha country) . All donkey teams, carting wool, all donkey teams.

I remember the bikes and the first car come out. They run the mail out to Beltana. Old man said 'We'll go for a ride.' We went for a ride, T-Ford, Chap called Con Burt , he used to be mail contractor see. Used to be good, first car, no horse pulling him along. We liked it. 1929 I drove one of them. I never been on a motor bike. Pushbike, I had plenty them. Cheap them days. Got brand new bike for about five pound (ten dollars). Sometime we'd get puncture but we used to get on the road. Bushman tyres they used to make. Thick ones but you don't see them now. Just plain tyres. They used to ride bikes going around with the shearers.

Bun carts! You knock an old car down, tip the top off and put a flat top on it, stick donkeys in it, that's a bun cart. Donkeys, camels, but we used to have donkeys. Had donkeys until 1958 when I went back on the motor cars then.

Ever since that time, I had a car all the time. There was a good few goats all through Blinman there. Used a few goat wagons to cart wood. I seen that, just like a wagon. Eight goats pulling it along. Cut mallee, make a wagon, take it in. Used to get five bob (50 cents) a load for that. When they give the goats up, that's the time they went out (going wild). Goats not bad meat. Cleanest meat you can get now. Goats haven't got no diseases, not like sheep. All sorts of (toxic) dip on sheep. But kangaroo's the cleanest out of the lot of them. They tested it over in America what I heard. Kangaroo meat they reckon is top notch. No disease among them.

We had four donkeys with a bun cart, had it a long time. Take the engine out, put a shaft on, put two donkey in that. You hook the main wheels to the shaft. Cheap transport. Used to buy tyres for it. It was cheap, about three pound a set. Four pounds a set for good tyre and tube. We used to do Beltana area the whole time. When I got the car I give the bun cart away. The first car was a straight A Buick, 1935 I think it was, 1958 I got it, big black car. It was a good car to ride in, four coil springs. When I got rid of him I got the Chevy, a '47 Chevy.

First time in Adelaide, no good to me. I don't like it. I like the bush country, open space. You can't walk around in Adelaide. Somebody might knock you on the head (laughter) I wasn't interested in it. All I wanted (was) to come back, not used to the city.

I'm all the time busy, make something, boomerangs, spears, snakes. I got a lot of big order for snakes but I can't get the timber to do it. I got to go to Wirrealpa, hundred mile out . We got the ute there. I couldn't get enough to get rid of them in Quorn. Quorn will take the lot. I sit by the fire in the back yard, use tommy hawk, rasp. I got a little saw there. Straighten (the wood) out a bit (by heating it over a fire), that's all I do now. Sometime I go to school when they want me to go. Might be next week. Old man (father) taught me to make the things. He used to use the waddy to knock the rabbit over. We used to hit the birds with shanghais (slingshots) but we got told off for it. That's cruel knocking the little birds over. Knocking off pigeon now. That's good meat. Have you ever tried it? They're good. Shoot 'em (with) .22. Mmm.

We're still fighting for our land rights but we can't get it. We'd like to get more. We've got Mt Serle. They keep chopping us off and if we do get it, others will scalp it off, so man night as well keep quiet. Pitjantjatjara have got their land but we didn't get ours. Something's wrong there. They reckon they sent a lot of money out for us but we never got it. I don't know who is using that money.

My grandkids will have to work it out and get their own work. (My grandson) is a driver. He's only driver got now, and his little cousins. I'll have to get them driving me around too. I always take 'em out there to our country. They like it too. I like that country up there, Angepena.

I tell them a bit about the country now and again. Some take interest and some no interest to them at all. Some like to learn, some doesn't. They want to go on the white fellas way.

That's the thing they got to learn, our history, they don't know see, before I die (laughter). OK!