

ERNABELLA

White man's home for the Pitjantjatjara

Management of a vast S.A. sheep station by a once-wild aboriginal tribe is proving a unique and successful experiment.

Ten white men and women are bringing civilisation to a primitive tribe of aborigines hundreds of miles away in Australia's Never Never Land.

The tribe is the Pitjantjatjara, a nomad band of aborigines which for centuries wandered aimlessly through South Australia's bush.

The white expedition has turned a vast sheep station covering 1,500 square miles into the tribe's home and has taught the natives to work it themselves.

Without changing centuries-old native laws and customs, they are bringing a better life to the tribes 600 aborigines.

The station, which is unique in Australia, is Ernabella, nearly 300 miles west of Oodnadatta in South Australia.

The Pitjantjatjara today shepherd the station's 4,000 sheep, sink wells, build troughs and windmills . . . between them the tribe has the technical and native skills to do almost anything.

On once barren land, the aborigines have built a church, store and a school under the watchful eyes of the whites.

Even the women have their part in the station's life. They spin and dye the wool and weave it into rugs and scarves which find a ready market in the big cities.

And all the profits are ploughed back into the station to improve still further the life of the aborigines.

All this has been accomplished since 1937, when the Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions took over Ernabella.

It was something of an experiment then, converting this sprawling property into the Pitjantjatjara's home.

Some were curious, others distrustful. But by kindness, Christianity and sheer hard work the expedition soon won the trust and confidence of the blacks.

Even when Ernabella was established as an aboriginal home, the missionaries never tried to alter the basic life of the natives. It was rather the natives themselves who came to adopt more and more western ways at their own wish.

The natives still live in their brush wiltjas today, some may suddenly go bush and may not be seen again for a year.

If a native gets a spear wound he gets medical attention — but no one demands a report on how he



Young girls of the tribe discuss school life. Mission teachers have found native youngsters brighter than white children in some subjects.

got it in order to punish the aborigine who threw the spear. The tribe itself settles such matters.

But by training native skills, the missionaries have shown the surprising talent of the aborigines in their own surroundings.

The Pitjantjatjara was as primitive as any aboriginal tribe in Australia in 1937, but today many can read and write, others are skilled craftsmen, and most who have been trained by the whites are deeply religious.

The men are familiar with farming machinery, the women wear dresses and are taking more and more interest in their personal appearance.

Young men like Eric Apinya are bringing blushes to the faces of those who dubbed aborigines as the weakest of all natives and quite beyond help.