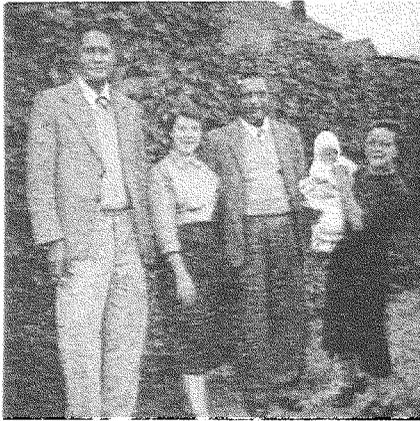


A VISIT TO PINDAN CAMPS

by Jessie M. G. Street

On Tuesday, 4th of June, I went to visit Port Hedland. I went from Perth in the same plane as Ernie Mitchell and Peter Coffin, two aboriginal members of the Pindan Pty. Group. When we arrived at Port Hedland, Dr. Clayton Willington was at the airport. He had heard of my plans to visit the camps and kindly offered to arrange for me to meet some of the Port Hedland people who had dealings with the Pindan aborigines after my return from my visit of inspection. E. Mitchell and P. Coffin were also to be invited and a date was fixed for the evening of Friday the 7th.



Mr. Coffin and party.

Later, I went with Ernie Mitchell to see over the Two Mile Camp and meet the aborigines residing there. The Camp is opposite the native hospital. They all turned out to meet us. I should say there were forty to fifty men, women and children in the Camp.

The Two Mile Camp is the main depot for stores which come by ship from Perth. From here they are distributed to all seven camps where the Pindan people live. They are taken out weekly by truck by E. Mitchell or P. Coffin. It also serves as a camp at which any of their people can stay if they come to Hedland to attend the hospital or for any other business.

The buildings are properly constructed of corrugated iron or wooden planks. The canteen has tables and benches and two fuel stoves, one of which is quite new. One hut is set aside for the store room and there are a number of other huts scattered about for living quarters. There are lavatories for men and for women and wash rooms for men and for women, and a laundry with tubs and a copper. The dogs were tied up at some distance from the camp with little shelters provided.

There were some fowls in a yard and a pig. All the huts were constructed out of old material but were solidly built. The whole place was clean and tidy, as were all the people living at the camp. They were friendly and well behaved. Every one gathered round and, after talking for a while with them, I and Ernie Mitchell, Peter Coffin and some others proceeded to Kadyereenya Camp, about twenty miles away.

This Camp is where women with babies and most of the children of the Group, as well as the old people, live. Here we were to spend the night. It was quite dark when we arrived. A tent had been rigged for me, with a bed. They had thoughtfully arranged to bring sheets and a pillow case, also crockery and cutlery. A number of people and children crowded around to watch the unloading, the light being provided by a camp fire and the lantern in my tent.

We had a meal, and afterwards we sat round the camp fire. They asked me if I would like to see some dancing, so the women sang and the older boys danced in the firelight. The surrounding darkness made an effective curtain into which the boys retired between the dances.

After a comfortable night, we had breakfast and we then went round the camp. There were three separate groups of huts equipped with a store room and structures for lavatories, washhouses and laundry. The dogs were chained at some distance away with bush shelters for each dog. The camps were clean and tidy with a sandy surface which had been swept with bushes. The lavatories at this camp and all the others I visited, all had deep pits with wooden box-like seats with tin covers over the holes and were scrupulously clean.

At Kadyereenya Camp they had some horses, two young camels not yet broken in, and about fifty goats and kids. They had also located good water and erected a windmill, but were waiting for a part to arrive before attaching the fan. The soil was fairly good and they hoped to grow some vegetables and melons.

Living conditions

There were about twenty children of school age and many younger ones. All of them were clean and tidy and had clean faces, not a running nose among them. Unfortunately, they were not receiving any schooling. A number of children of school age had gone to other camps with their parents, pending the opening of a school.