

Daisy Bates Papers

MSS 572.994 B32t

Series 5: 'Notes not for legends or included in Aborigines: Odd notes only'

V, 9 (13 scraps of envelopes and marginal notes on 1 torn page of text), transcribed J. Walkley

Weld range about 80 miles from Cue has hills of iron ore. When I visited that area in 1909 via Cue and Mindoolah (the latter held some miners working at gold mining) I went with the last native owner of these iron hills Barlo wuri, Wilga maia etc so that he should show me and make over to me those hills whose haematite (ochre) made the group owners a very wealthy little mob. They bartered their wilgi with neighbouring groups - who rebartered it - with others until the Barlowuri Wilgi was known and valued many hundreds of miles from its hill. It was a greasy ochre and there is a technical term for this but I have forgotten it. We reached the sites by dray. Wilgimaia was the further hill and Barloweeri was the Guardian of the whole range. Its scoriated slope was supposed to be the effigy of an ancestor. A crude gigantic outline of a black man covered the slope and during the unknown ages of aboriginal settlement in that area, the figure acted as Guardian. If a friendly group or individual came to barter for the precious wilgi the road passing Barloweeri was the only road he could traverse Wilgimaia - if he took another road he was killed on sight. As we approached Barloweeri, the old native sitting by my side began to tremble. Would the Guardian let us pass and remain recumbent or would he rise and send his killing magic into us? I turned my eyes on this wonderful thing in full curiosity as to its human resemblance. Its last poor survivor clutched my arm in excessive fear and I said quietly, You see, Bingumaru - he knows me and lies quietly on his hill as we pass him. The tension ceased, the fear vanished and as we went on to Wilgamaia where I was to go with him into the juni (stomach) of the ochre hill, to see the one native mine. All the legend, fatalities, battles, all the magic happenings within the old man's memory were told to me and all the traditions and legends that came down to him were related as far as memory went.

We reached the spot, and leaving dray and driver on the flat, we went up the hill. Presently we came to a smaller opening and in through this we crawled, my friend taking the lead. Round and about within its juni we crawled. My torch showed me the tiny ash heaps of the generations who picked their wilgi - each little pocket had its ash heap. Some passages were so narrow that I had to crawl through the opening on my stomach but my native went on and on thro' large and small cuttings where the wilgi pockets were. I picked little bits here and there. We could not see each other in one passage and I was careful to send the torch gleam upon the openings and not on my guide. Only the light of the tiny fires had ever illuminated those recesses and evidently no burnt stick had been left at any ash heap. We must have come into daylight through another portion of the mine, tho' no 'pocket' was large enough for either of us to stand up. Our outlet was on the other side of the wilgi hill. I sat down by the opening and saw myself by daylight covered with ochre from hat to heel. My native looked pleased and happy. Kabbarli, everybody who took wilgi from juni - all our long magic ago ancestors - and covered you with it and me too and so I give you Wilgimaia and Barloweeri and all the hills between where our wilgi sits down and bymy when I finish, all the wilgi hills are yours. The stone guardian will lie down now for ever. You have his magic now.

We seemed to be going into the very bowels (juni) of the hill. How far we went I shall never know. The situation would be clarified by thorough investigation conducted as from the beginning of this century but especially from about 1926.

Marginal MSS on scrap of text torn from book about W.A. minerals[?] with heading *Weld Range*

This Weld Range "Wilga-maia", a valuable hill, was given me by its last owner, all the group members having died. Another "legacy" was the area where the Wiluna Gold Mine was found and developed. I had known it as gold-bearing and had given a small specimen to the W.A. Minister but would not give him the locality as it was sacred (native) ground, until the death of its last owner 'Jaal'. The mine was found by white people thro' my having given the native name to the Minister.