

## CONISTON HISTORY PROJECT – BAXTERS WELL

*Athimpelengkwe* pronounced *a thimp a loongk* is the Kaytetye name for Baxters Well

An Interview with Tommy Thompson Kngwarraye commissioned by the CLC for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Coniston massacre in 2003.

Tennant Creek

31st July 2003, Thursday

Recorded by Jenny Green

Also present Cookie (Hilda) Pwerle

Interview mainly in Kaytetye language

Kaytetye translated and transcribed by Alison Ross and Myfany Turpin on Monday 4th August. Also present Blanche Ross. English and part Kaytetye transcribed by Jenny Green. Comments in square brackets inserted by Turpin and Green.

JG: You had heard that story – somebody told you?

TT: My father and his older brothers lived at *Arnke* [Barrow Creek] at that time [when Brookes was killed]. They [my fathers] were told that a white man had been killed at *Rrkwer* [Brookes soak]. The police went after the Aboriginal men that killed him, but the Aboriginal men left the area. They got away. They followed the creek north, the *Alarmentye* Creek [Hansen River] They went through *Arrwek* [Coniston]. Then they went through *Wirliyajarrai* [Wilowra]. They went back frightened. They went through *Enape* [??] in the west and through *Yankarrikurlangu*<sup>1</sup> and right up to *Jurnkkurakurr* [Tennant Creek]. They were really frightened. They settled at *Jurnkkurakurr* [Tennant Creek]. Then they moved to *Jaye* creek [??]. Then they stayed at Phillip Creek, near where the

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<sup>1</sup> See Warlpiri Kaytetye land claim.

mission is. My relatives told me this, those old men. This was before Phillip Creek mission was built. Then they left Phillip Creek.

Meanwhile the police were looking around at *Rrkwer* with guns to shoot them. The police started shooting other Aboriginal men from that area. People from *Rrkwer*, *Arnke* [Barrow Creek], *Arlpatyante* [Coniston/ Pine Hill area] *Patelerre* [Patirlirri]<sup>2</sup> were shot. The police went on horseback along the side of the creek, following the people's tracks. They travelled and shot people as they went along. There were two Aboriginal trackers who knew the country. They showed the police where the people were. The two men were Major and Kip or Skipper [Kemarres]<sup>3</sup>.

JG: Where were they from?

TT: They were two brothers, two Kemarres from *Wimparrke* [Blanche Tower – south-east of Mount Leibig]. They were uncles to me. They were the two police trackers. They showed the police around because they knew the places where the Aboriginal people were. They followed the peoples' tracks and kept shooting as they went along. They went up the hill at *Enape* and saw tracks on the other side [north side]. The tracks lead to a sandhill, a sandhill where a devil called *Arrkilpangkwerle* [?] was. The devil frightened the policemen's horses and the horses scattered. The packhorses were bucking, the devil frightened them. The devil lived in a hollow tree.

After that the police turned back. The Kemarres said 'We'll go east now'. They took a shortcut to Barrow Creek. (Halfway) there were a big group of old Kaytetye men. They were from *Arnke* [Barrow Creek], *Jarra-Jarra*, *Alapanpe*, *Ertwerrpe*, *Ngkwarnte*, *Warlekerlange*, *Errene*, *Apewempe*, *Arnerre*, *Ileyarne*. They had gathered for an *ltharte* ceremony. Poor things, they were unaware of what was going on. They were dancing an *ltharte* ceremony there at *Athimpelengkwe*. The two Kemarres brought the police to where the old men were. The police saw them. 'Oh here the killers are, those people

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<sup>2</sup> On Wakulpu estate. See Warlpiri Kaytetye land claim.

<sup>3</sup> According to Blanche Ross

escaping punishment', the police thought. The police told the Kemas to tell the Aboriginal people to make a big fire. 'You two tell them in language, in Warlpiri or Anmatyerr perhaps, to make a fire. And tell them that we're going to get some meat for them, a killer. When they make the fire we will be able to see them dance properly in the light'. They got lots of fire and made a big bonfire near the ceremony ground. They made a fire on each side of the *tyayengarre* [the place in the middle of the ceremony ground where the men paint up]. The poor old men got painted up with down [feathers] and everything, unaware [of their intentions]. Then they started dancing. The police had the guns ready to shoot. 'Lets watch the *mwenganpe*' [the last two dancers in an *ltharte* and *angkwerre* ceremony] the [Kemas??] said. 'We'll watch them more when the sun comes up.'

So the men danced in the [early] daytime. The police came around on horseback with their guns. Then they started shooting everyone. They circled around the *ltharte* camp, all the people were in the middle. They were killed there at *Athimpelengkwe*. Even the little children were beaten over the head with the stirrup. Some of the little kids threw sticks at the police. The police smashed the children against the trees. All the mothers and fathers were shot, the young girls, the young people, the old men, the old ladies and middle aged people. They were totally shot up.

The two Kemas piled the bodies up on the fire, on the high flames. They were all burnt. My old *tyatye* [mother's father] called *Kwenyanpatye* was there, that's your father's father [to Cookie Pwerl], he was working as a scalper. All the workers had a ticket to prove it. He had a ticket around his neck like a dog. Everytime when Aboriginal people saw the police, they showed them their ticket so that the police would know they were workers. [At *Athimpelengkwe*] the people without the tickets got killed. The ones with the tickets were let go. My *tyatye*, *Kwenyanpatye* used to work with camels to collect dingo scalps. He had a contract from the police at Barrow Creek. My *tyatye* told me this story. They let him go because he had a ticket. At *Athimpelengkwe* there were Kaytetye, Warlpiri, Anmatyerr and Warumungu people. The skulls of their relatives are there, the skulls of our forefathers, our Kaytetye relatives are there.

We old people are thinking and talking about the history at *Athimpelengkwe* and we want to make it a public place. We want to make it a place where everyone can know what happened. We want to tell people about the place where the blood and bodies of our relatives lie.

TT: Because our blood person been all in there, all the bodies resting on that ground. That's why we putting up a big history on that place. That's why we talking like that. We want the Lands Council to work very well and we want a good road so that tourists can go through there, and learn.

The ground is all ?? people's spirit is still there, that's why we need that place. We can supply any mining, lettem mining mob come and look through. But we want that place all the time. And they can stay there and look round from there. That's the main special park be there. ... We got to put a big sign there, and a map, a big map showing where people got killed. We want to show on the sign how many tribes [got killed] so that they can read it.

JG: Just clarifying a few things. Who told you this story?

TT: Old man from *Errweltye*, my mother's father, old *Kwenyanpatye*

JG; *Errweltye* to the east?

TT: No *Errweltye* to the west. That place belongs to old Johnny Nelson. That place is close to *Jarra Jarra*. They call that station Ngamekwerlange station. That's that *Errweltye* now. Johnny Nelson is my *atyewatye* [age-mate] – he's my cousin.

TT: I think Dennis Marshall gave him [Kwenyanpatye] a contract job or Cameron (?), a whitefella policeman called Cameron (?). A policeman that used to be at Barrow Creek. That Murray, he wasn't working at Barrow creek, he was working at *Atnyeme Kwatye*

[Ryan's Well]. Well they summonsed him when they killed that whitefella at *Rrkwer*, well they took that dead body to *Atnyeme Kwatye*. And that policeman rang up to get other police then. Murray said they wanted more army, more soldiers, more bullets to shoot the blackfellas that did the wrong thing for one whitefella – they cut him up with an axe. That wasn't the man's fault – the white people always come around and muck around with the dark ladies. The whitefellas grabbed the [Aboriginal] women to have sex with them.

JG: So after that they went north?

TT: Some old people told me that the Alice Spring police – they told (?) that they were getting bullets to shoot killers [bullocks]. They didn't know, the government, that they were sending those bullets – they thought they were for killers or kangaroos or bullocks. But they got those bullets to shoot Aboriginal people. They [the police] were being sneaky. Then after they [the government] found out what had happened to the Aboriginal people. That Murray, he had big problems from Aboriginal people and from European people. That's why they pushed him onto the railway line and he got killed. He did the wrong thing for Aboriginal people. That's why they pushed Murray onto the railway line

JG: At *Athimpelengkwe* they got together for an *ltharte* ceremony?

TT; The *tyayengarre* is where they make a windbreak, and inside the men paint up.

JG: People from which countries got together at that time?

TT: ...*Ngkwarnte* mob are bosses for the river, *Jarra jarra* mob are for the ranges and *Errweltye* mob for the floodout. *Ngarnekwerlange*.... [discussion about using emu feathers for the *ltharte*]

All the Warumungu were at *Athimpelengkwe* for the *ltharte*. People from *Jarra-jarra*, *Wileyatyarreye* [Wilowra], *Arnke* [Barrow Creek or Mt Leichardt?], *Alapanpe* [north of

Anningie], *Arrwek* [Coniston], *Paw* [Mount Barkly] *Arlpatyant*, and *Akartn*, old Kaperteye's [Mick Long?] place. And *Arwengkareny* [Adelaide Bore].

JG: Were they there too?

TT: Yeah.

TT: And *Karlwe-karlwe* [Devils Marbles], *Arlwekarr* [Stirling area], and *Ilkewartn* [Ti Tree, Mount Skinner]. *Ertwerrpe* [Neutral area], *Antarrengey* [Utopia/ Kaytetye freehold], *Intengele*, *Ilenye*, *Mangker* [Murray Downs], *Alekareng* [Ali Curing], Kaytetye people, *Ileyarne*, *Akwerlpe*, *Tyalyerrpe*, *Mwengkarte* [MacClaren Creek]. They got together at *Athimpelengkwe* for the *ltharte*.

JG: At that time?

TT: Yeah. They had a big ceremony you know. Well that was bad timing for them. That was a bad time that happened for them. They shot them there now. Murray was the leader. Two Kemarres were travelling with him. Major was working at the Bungalow as a tracker. And Skipper worked at Barrow creek. [Or at Atnyeme Kwatye].

We call people who do the wrong thing for Aboriginal people, '*aweyaw tyelerrng*'. That means 'devil killer'. Like a man called Ned Kelly (bushranger) who killed a lot of people.

JG: I want to check up about this Athimpelengkwe time – Kaytetye got killed there. Anyone else?

TT: That's really Kaytetye and Anmatyerr and everyone's big place. Kaytetye, Arlperre [Warlpiri], Aremwenge [Waramungu], Anmatyerr and some from *Ilewerr*, my family from Aileron area, *Ilewerr* country. Those people were all there at that ceremony...*Athimpelengkwe* is a 'joint venture' country. That's the place that used to join for every business. They had the ceremony but that was the wrong time – they didn't

know people coming behind with the gun. Some fellas got paint already get shot. Young girls – nothing been get away. Nothing.

Family from *Warlekwerlange* and *Arnerre* and *Wake*. *Jarra jarra*. They were holding an *atetherre* [green budgerigar] ceremony. [TT sings] That was the *lthart* they were holding at *Athimpelengkwe*. *Ltharte atetherre* from *Irretne*. That's the ceremony they were holding when they got shot.

JG; Talking about monuments. So they start at *Rrkwer*...

TT: When the policeman started off from there and after that old people got killed there. Everyone can have a meeting and put a monument on that *Rrkwer* [Brookes soak]. That's alright, because they know them people from *Coniston* and all that river coming from *Arlpatyant* and some living at *Yuendumu* and *Napperby*, *Ti Tree*, *Anningie*. *Coniston* country, that *Rrkwer*. That's why they got put a monument there, because that's where the policemen started shooting from – that's the end. Start off. And we got to put another monument at *Athimpelengkwe*.

Many people were in that ceremony – they were traditional owners, ceremony groups and language centre. We have to respect that place – anyone can respect it. Look through, what's been happen there. That's free.

JG: Can you think of some words that would be good to put on the sign, *Kaytetye* words?

TT: *Anwekantherr-artwey map akuny-arey warlpel atyerrekarl kwenh, anantherr akweteth iterlarerlanem. (Anmatyerr)*

Our ancestors, the poor things, that the whitefellas shot – we will always remember them.

'We'll always remember this' [Aynanthe etelarerrantye akwerrngele] or [Aynanthe akenge etelarerrantye]

We drink beer – we still remember. That memory, that old people been get shot there, that won't go away from the brain – we still gottem. We are not upset for that problem, but we are just worrying about our people who got shot just for cold blood, you know. The trouble makers got other people into trouble.

We're not upset (i.e. wanting retribution). We just want it to be remembered. We want people to remember. We want people to think why was it that innocent people (having a ceremony) were killed and not the trouble makers?

We remember that my mother's mother father and my mother's father's father also and my aunty's mothers father were killed there (at *Athimpelengkwe*). My father's father's father too.

My mother-in-law's *arrenceye*, from *Ngarnarlkwerre* [place on Warlekerlange] was killed at *Athimpelengkwe*.