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DINGO BOLD

THE LIFE AND DEATH
OF K'GARI DINGOES

ROWENA LENNOX

Dingo Bold

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The Life and Death of K'gari Dingoes

Rowena Lennox



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For Mum and Zefa

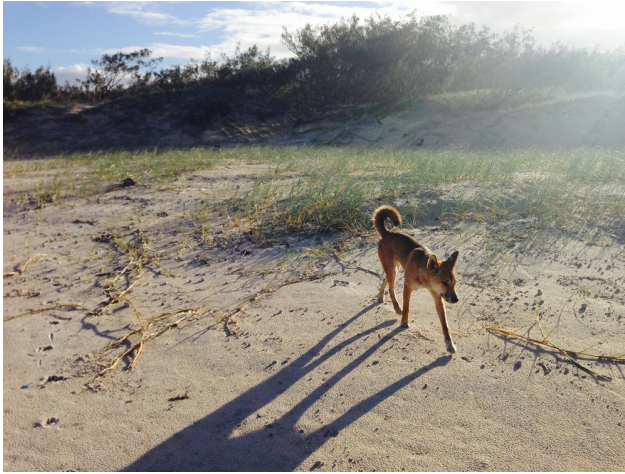
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Prelude



*... drums rolled off in my forehead
And the guns went off in my chest*
The Triffids, 'Wide Open Road', 1986

He has a multicoloured tag in his ear.

Blood throbs at the back of my head as he comes closer. My heart is beating so hard and loud I am sure he can hear it.

He looks up at me. He seems to be asking for something. The way his torso narrows to his rump looks skinny from where I stand. He

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flinches, almost imperceptibly, and I think, *He's as nervous as I am. I can scare him off if I need to.*

But I stay still.

He goes around behind me. I look straight ahead. He walks away.

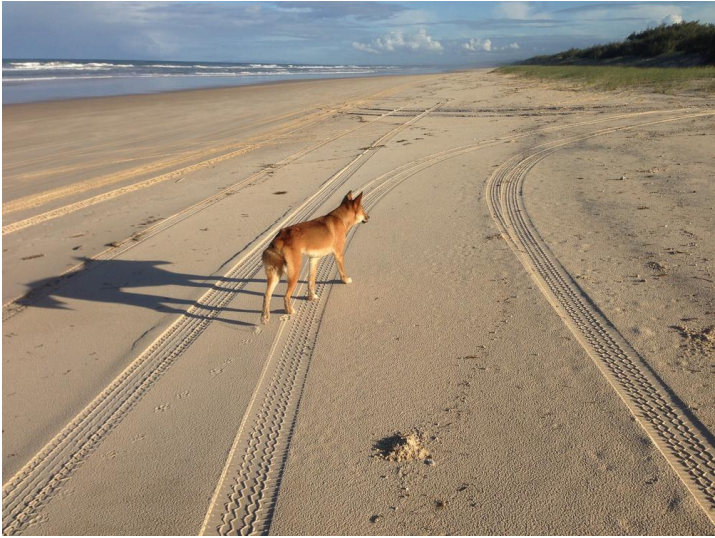
Later I find the photos I took on my phone. Initially I don't know why I took a picture with a foreground full of sand, tracked with light brown roots and wispy pale green strokes of dune grass; a middle ground of silhouetted casuarinas on the dune; and a cerulean sky washed by wave-like clouds. Only when I zoom in on the centre of the image do I notice, in the shade cast by the dune, a dingo heading straight for me. Another dingo, also hardly distinguishable in the shadow, is in the picture too, further away on the dune with his back toward me.

I took one more photograph as he approached.

I wish I had an image of his face when we conversed but photographing him would not have been conversing with him. I have no memory of taking two photos of him leaving, his shadow in the afternoon sun so much bigger than he is.



Prelude



1

Wildlife

when a dingo is hungry it will kill to eat and then it takes it

Barbara Tjikadu in Lindy Chamberlain, *Through My Eyes: An Autobiography*, 1990

There was never a time when dingoes didn't exert an illicit pull in my mind. In the 1970s when I was growing up in an outer suburb of Sydney, people were not allowed to keep them as pets. They had a reputation for being impervious to human control, a law unto themselves – qualities that appealed to me. Our family had blue cattle dogs, who counted dingoes among their ancestors. Our dog Beau could beat every other dog in the street in a fight and jump unbelievable heights. No enclosure could contain him. When my parents separated, he – not we – decided which household he would live in. His intelligence, prowess and independence might have come partly from his dingo genes.

Three of our dogs died like dingoes when five-year-old Possum and her two grown pups took a strychnine bait in the woodpile on the verge outside my father's house. A neighbour told us how Possum had watched her pups die before her.

I knew that, historically, dingoes were considered pests – I read *Dusty*, a novel written in the 1940s about an outlaw dingo–kelpie cross¹

1 Davison 1983

when I was a child – but until a few years ago when I started researching dingoes as part of an essay I was writing about my kelpie–cattle dog Zefa, I was unprepared for how vehement emotions around dingoes are. On the radio I listen to farmers from around Blackall in Queensland rail against the wild dogs that are driving them out of sheep production. I hear the rage and powerlessness people feel when they find their wounded animals after attacks. I see pictures of dingoes hanging from trees and strung up on fences by their back legs, their muzzles stretched toward the earth. On the internet are reports produced by state governments and organisations such as WoolProducers Australia and the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Council that describe wild dogs and dingoes in well-researched detail and indicate more effective ways to ‘manage’ them. ‘Manage’ is a euphemism for eradicate. This violence is part of the shadow story of my country.

Here’s trouble, I think. I’m in.

In moments of lesser bravado I wonder why we go around killing other living beings on this scale.

I start searching for dingoes. My husband, children and I take a few days to drive from Sydney to the Western Plains Zoo in Dubbo. On the way we go for bushwalks and I look for dingo scats and tracks in the Blue Mountains and at Mount Canobolas in the central west of New South Wales. I picture dingo habitat on the scrubby undulating edges of the Great Dividing Range.

At the zoo in Dubbo I stand at the dingo enclosure for two days and watch Bunjil and Mojin go about their business and doze in the sun.² One of their keepers tells me Bunjil, the male, is named for the eagle ancestor and creation spirit of the Kulin Aboriginal people from central Victoria. Mojin, so the Ngulugwongga Aboriginal story from Daly River in the Northern Territory goes, was a male dingo who had collected some yams to eat. He couldn’t make fire to cook the yams so he tried to steal a firestick from some women camped nearby. But they hunted him away. So then his friend Little Chicken Hawk (Djungarabaja) went to the women’s camp. He was small and the women didn’t see him. As he stole a glowing ember he cried out ‘Diid

2 Lennox 2014

... Diid!' before he flew back to his own camp to start a fire. But Mojin couldn't wait. He had already eaten his yams. Now, unlike Chicken Hawk, Mojin cannot talk. And he eats his food raw.³

My family and I visit a wildlife park at Helensburgh on the southern outskirts of Sydney. I go to the dingo enclosure to watch the dingoes and talk to the keeper who comes to feed them. My children are impatient. I visit a dingo breeder in Victoria. The pups undo my shoelaces and climb up my legs. Their fur is soft and they smell of ammonia. At a conference I touch noses with a rescue dingo. She licks my mouth.

I start to interpret our dog Zefa's behaviour in the light of what I am learning about dingoes' ecological relationships. At night when Zefa chases a possum down the driveway and urinates at the base of the tree it has climbed I deduce that she is communicating with the possum: *I'm here. Come down and face the consequences*. When she eats all of the food in our friends' cat's bowl, perhaps she's not just being a glutton, perhaps she is performing an instinctive duty, showing the cat, a mesopredator, that she is the apex predator, top of the food chain: *What's yours is mine*. My daughter tells me that in every conversation I talk about dingoes. Sometimes my children tolerate my obsession; sometimes they are bored with it, frustrated by it.

We go to Uluru. The only dingoes we see are on signs at the campground warning campers to keep their shoes in their tents. There's what might be a canid-sized scat and an indistinct paw print near the boardwalk on a lookout between Kata Tjuta and Uluru. But, for me, it's all about dingoes. Kurpany – the giant shape-shifting *mamu* (ghost or evil spirit) dingo, who came from the west, attacked and killed the Mala men and left his footprints on the Rock as he chased the surviving Mala people hundreds of kilometres to the south and east – could be anywhere. Or everywhere.⁴ Is that warm westerly rippling the rapiers of yellow spinifex after sunrise Kurpany? Is the crest of that dune – rising like a red sand wave and echoing the shape the Rock – the one he stands on, watching, salivating and grinning in anticipation before he careers across the plain to his kill?

3 Berndt and Berndt 1977, 395–6

4 Director of National Parks 2012, 111; Layton 1989, 5–7

We cycle around the Rock. Obliviously we pass a place of rocks and sandy patches at the south-west corner, between Mutijulu waterhole and the Mala car park (formerly the starting point of the climb), where, below a lichen stain on the rock face, tourists found the clothing of baby Azaria Chamberlain a week after she went missing from her tent in the campground four kilometres away on 17 August 1980. Aboriginal trackers found dingo and puppy tracks near a den about thirty metres west of where the clothes were found, and adult dingo tracks ten metres east of the clothes.

Unlike Kurpany, who left the splattered remains of the Mala men that he killed on the north face of the Rock, the dingoes who took Azaria were not so wasteful. Her body was never found.

Her white stretch towelling jumpsuit was sitting on its back,⁵ concertinaed,⁶ and soiled around the neck with blood. Whether Azaria's Bonds ribbed singlet was inside the jumpsuit or protruding from it was a matter of dispute because neither the family who found the clothes nor Senior Constable Frank Morris – the police officer in charge at the Rock, whom they alerted – photographed them before Constable Morris moved them. Nearby was Azaria's disposable nappy, torn, with the insides exposed. Her tiny white booties, knitted by her grandmother with special hand-twisted ties and ribbed up the leg with moss stitch at the top of the toe, were still inside the jumpsuit, fleshing out the spot where her feet would have been. The ground around had been disturbed and a patch of flattened undergrowth indicated an animal had lain down.⁷

Ayers Rock Chief National Parks Ranger Derek Roff and his colleague Ranger Ian Cawood had not known about the den with its recent litter near where the clothes were found. The nearest one they were aware of was one kilometre east.⁸ Morris shot a lactating female in the vicinity a week later.⁹ Other dingoes from the den were shot and the contents of their stomachs examined, revealing no sign of human

5 Chamberlain 1990, 81

6 Young 1989, 240

7 Morling 1987, 240

8 Morling 1987, 239

9 Young 1989, 247

bone or protein.¹⁰ Off-the-record reports claimed rangers shot over sixty dingoes after Azaria was taken but the official tally was only 'half a dozen or so'.¹¹ In 1986 Barbara Tjikadu, an Indigenous custodian of Uluru, told the Morling Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Chamberlain Convictions that there 'used to be a lot of dingoes there'.¹²

There was much debate in the courtrooms about whether dingoes would leave clothes the way Azaria's had been found. Then as now, dingo experts did not agree. Ranger Derek Roff believed 'different dingoes might leave the clothes differently arranged'. He said, 'it could be scattered, and sure, it could be exactly like this'. He 'was not prepared to hazard a guess as to how a dingo might have left the clothes'.¹³

In 1986, a search for the body of a tourist who had fallen from the Rock uncovered Azaria's famous white knitted matinee jacket – which her mother, Lindy, insisted she had been wearing on the night of her disappearance – about 150 metres away from where her jumpsuit was found. This finding precipitated Lindy's release from Berrimah Prison in Darwin where she was serving a life sentence for the murder of Azaria.

During Lindy Chamberlain's murder trial Crown prosecutor Ian Barker appealed to the jury's common-sense knowledge of dingoes who were not, he said, 'notorious man-eaters'.¹⁴ He capitalised on the dingo jokes that had been circulating since Azaria's disappearance, describing the 'eccentric snow dropping dingoes' of Uluru as they ran about 'resting from time to time with their suitcases and portmanteaus, washing and assorted articles of underwear, stolen from tourists'. He presented Lindy's account of the dingo taking Azaria as far-fetched, unbelievable, 'a transparent lie' that 'would be laughed out of court'.¹⁵

But those who lived at Uluru – Aboriginal people, rangers, police – and the tourists camping nearby on the night Azaria disappeared accepted Lindy's account. There had been many dingo attacks at the campground and around the Rock in the months and days before

10 Bryson 1986, 95

11 Chamberlain 1990, 166

12 Chamberlain, 637 (Barbara Tjikadu quoted)

13 Morling 1987, 241 (Derek Roff quoted)

14 Young 1989, 27 (Ian Barker quoted)

15 Young 1989, 28

Azaria disappeared. On 23 June a dingo grabbed a three-year-old girl, Amanda Cranwell, by the neck and dragged her from a car. Her parents found her lying on the ground with a dingo standing over her, bite marks at the back of her neck, across her left shoulder and on the left side of her face.¹⁶ Ranger Ian Cawood shot Ding, the dingo believed to be responsible for the attack.¹⁷ In July other children had been knocked down and attacked by dingoes, one of whom ran off with a boy's soccer ball in its mouth.¹⁸ Rangers had shot nine dingoes in the two months before Azaria's disappearance because they had become too familiar with people and too daring.¹⁹

For two years Roff had been writing to the government warning about the dangers of dingoes. About forty lived in dens around the base of the Rock. About twelve or fifteen of them acted as though the campground and buildings in it were part of their territory and their behaviour was becoming increasing bold.²⁰ Four of them, according to Cawood, or twenty of them, according to Roff, would have the temerity to enter a tent.²¹

On Saturday 16 August a dingo snapped at a hiker and grabbed the cardigan of his fourteen-year-old daughter and the trousers of his ten-year-old son as they walked around the Rock.²² Late that afternoon a 'sleek, healthy looking dingo'²³ latched onto and shook the elbow of twelve-year-old Catherine West as she sat in a deckchair outside her family's tent to write in her diary. She screamed for her mother. At first the dingo was undeterred, retreating only slowly when Judy, Catherine's mother, advanced angrily.²⁴ Later Judy West scared off a dingo 'snow-dropping', ripping clothes off a camp clothesline.²⁵ After dusk in the camping area a dingo bit a nine-year-old boy and stood over

16 Dawson 2002, 66

17 Young 1989, 226

18 Bryson 1986, 26

19 Young 1989, 230

20 Bryson 1986, 25

21 Young 1989, 232

22 Morling 1987, 281

23 Chamberlain 1990, 23

24 Bryson 1986, 20-1

25 Bryson 1986, 21

him on the ground. As in some of the other instances, the dingo was slow to move off.²⁶

The next night a dingo peered inside a Kombi van as its occupants cooked dinner and stayed while they took two flash photos; one followed a woman as she walked back from the bins; just before 8 p.m. a dingo passed through the edge of a campsite as a mother and daughter washed up their dinner dishes.²⁷

Just after 8 p.m. Lindy Chamberlain saw a dingo coming out of the tent where she had put Azaria to bed. She saw the animal's shoulder. Bushes and the shadows of a low post-and-rail fence blocked her view of the lower part of the tent. The dingo looked as though it was having trouble getting through the tent flaps. It swung its head. She thought it had one of her husband Michael's shoes but she couldn't see what was in its mouth. She yelled and it ran in front of their car in the shadow of the fence. Lindy 'dived' straight into the tent, to see what had made Azaria cry.²⁸ The rugs were scattered. Azaria's four-year-old brother, Reagan, was still asleep, completely enveloped in his sleeping bag. Azaria's bassinet was still warm but empty.

Lindy backed out of the tent, feeling around with her hands in case Azaria was there. She called her husband, Michael: 'My God. My God. The dingo's got my baby',²⁹ and ran in the direction she'd seen the dingo go. There was a dingo with its back to her, its head turned slightly, in the shadow of their Torana, which was parked alongside the tent. But as she told fellow campers and Senior Constable Frank Morris that night, and as she repeated to Inspector Gilroy the next day, and again to Detective Sergeant Graeme Charlwood six weeks later: 'I couldn't tell you whether it had anything in its mouth or not. My mind refused to accept the thought that it had her in its mouth, although I knew that must be it'.³⁰

All the campers searched. Among the many meandering animal tracks on the dune just west of the Chamberlains' tent Murray Haby, a schoolteacher from Tasmania, found fresh-looking tracks that appeared

26 Morling 1987, 281

27 Bryson 1986, 36-7

28 Bryson 1986, 75

29 Bryson 1986, 40 (Lindy Chamberlain quoted)

30 Bryson 1986, 156 (Lindy Chamberlain quoted)

to belong to a big canid. Between them was a furrow, as though it was dragging something. He followed the paw prints higher and found an oval-shaped depression in the sand about the length of a hand and textured, as though by the imprint of a knitted or woven fabric. Haby didn't know if the drop of moisture beside the indentation was blood or saliva. The prints continued over the top of the hill, but petered out as the sand became more compacted. He retraced the tracks back toward the camping ground and emerged near the Chamberlains' tent.³¹

Before the waxing crescent moon set around 11.15 p.m. that night, Haby and Roff followed Nuwe Minyintiri, an Aboriginal tracker, up the dune. Minyintiri lit his way with a firestick made of spinifex. He found two more depressions in the sand, where the 'big feller', as he described the dingo, had rested its bundle. The impression came from something heavier than the usual fauna in the area and, like Haby, Roff thought it had been patterned by some sort of human-made fabric, crêpe or a knit. Touching the perimeter of one of the imprints Minyintiri said, 'Not move anymore'.³² It was too dark to continue.

The next day Constable Morris, with Inspector Michael Gilroy and Sergeant John Lincoln who had just flown in from Alice Springs, inspected the paw prints that ran alongside the Chamberlains' tent. Morris had found a couple of sets of tracks – he was not sure whether they were dingoes' or dogs' – leading south from the entrance to the tent; turning left, eastwards, at the corner; and travelling between the tent and the Chamberlains' Torana. The police officers saw sprays of blood and what they deemed to be saliva on the tent.³³ Near the corner where Azaria had slept was a heavy, static paw print.

An Aboriginal elder, Nipper Winmarti, spoke to the police on behalf of the group of trackers who had gathered at the campsite at dawn. The group – Winmarti; his wife, Barbara Tjikadu; Daisy Walkabout; Kitty Collins and Nuwe Minyintiri – had followed the prints of a big dingo who was dragging something along the dune and down onto the plain. The dingo ran in the direction of Mutitjulu, the waterhole at the Rock. Like

31 Bryson 1986, 53–5

32 Bryson 1986, 57

33 Chamberlain 1990, 58

other dingoes in the area, he used the road, moving into the scrub when vehicles approached.³⁴ They lost his trail on the road.

When Inspector Gilroy interviewed Lindy that day she told him the dingo 'looked to me a youngish dog.'³⁵ It didn't look like the mangy dingo that had appeared at their campfire earlier, which Lindy had reprimanded her husband Michael for trying to feed.

When Detective Sergeant Charlwood interviewed Lindy, he thought her story about a dingo staring at her the afternoon before Azaria disappeared was too convenient. Witnesses corroborated her account. She was carrying Azaria, who was awake, unwrapped and looking around, over the rough ground near a site then called the Fertility Cave, about a kilometre west of where Azaria's clothes were eventually found, when she noticed a fit, healthy, reasonably young dingo quietly and intently watching them from a vantage point on top of a boulder a few paces away. The dingo stared at them for at least four minutes.³⁶ Lindy found it creepy.³⁷

In the six weeks between Azaria's disappearance and Charlwood's thirteen-hour interview, recorded without Lindy's knowledge, her impression of the dingo's gender had changed. Originally she thought it was a male but she told Charlwood, 'To my mind, it was a female. Of course, you know, it's supposition. Of course, you probably know more about that than me, by now.'

He responded, 'No. I don't know a great deal about the dingo,' before he asked her to describe again what Azaria was wearing.³⁸

In the early 1980s people in the cities and towns of mainstream Australia knew of no precedent for the way Azaria had purportedly died. Like Charlwood, many people knew little about dingoes. At the first inquest into Azaria's disappearance, dingo researcher Alan Newsome, who worked at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) Wildlife Research Division in Canberra, reported that, contrary to what experts had previously

34 Bryson 1986, 71

35 Bryson 1986, 76 (Lindy Chamberlain quoted)

36 Bryson 1986, 150

37 Chamberlain 1990, 29

38 Bryson 1986, 159

believed, they had been surprised to discover that dingoes are not loners; they belong to groups.³⁹

Minutes before Lindy raised the alert that Azaria was gone, Judy West, camped at the site next to the Chamberlains', heard a growl. It reminded her of the way their farm dogs at home near Esperance in Western Australia growled menacingly to warn each other off when her husband killed a sheep and they were vying for bits of offal.⁴⁰ Newsome interpreted the growl Judy West heard as an interaction between two dingoes. He considered that the dingo Lindy saw standing still 'was not the animal which came out of the tent.'⁴¹ The Aboriginal trackers told Lindy there were two dingoes at the tent.⁴² Roff thought so too.⁴³

Newsome thought that the act of predation of a dingo on a baby was improbable, but possible.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, he and Laurie Corbett, his colleague at the CSIRO Wildlife Research Division, thought that the dingoes at Uluru, who were neither tame and biddable nor wild and kept themselves scarce, should be killed and replaced with another generation of dingoes, who could be kept wild.⁴⁵

At the first inquest Nipper Winmarti spoke through a Luritja interpreter, Pamela Harmer, when he told Coroner Denis Barritt about tracking a hungry, thirsty dingo with a distinctive paw print from the dune toward Mutijulu. John Bryson, author of the influential 'true crime' book *Evil Angels*, recounts how Barritt pushed Winmarti and Harmer for responses on the taboo subject of the dingo spirit dreaming. Although Harmer clearly did not want to ask or answer the questions, Barritt persisted. During court recess Harmer went in a rage to the coroner's chambers to tell him the dingo spirit dreaming was a forbidden subject and now Winmarti and his clan had been shamed. According to Bryson, Barritt pursued this line of questioning because, although – at that time – the coroner did not know of any Aboriginal children or babies being taken by dingoes, he thought such an event

39 Bryson 1986, 226

40 Bryson 1986, 39

41 Bryson 1986, 227 (Alan Newsome quoted)

42 Bryson 1986, 461

43 Chamberlain 1990, 158

44 Bryson 1986, 228–9

45 Bryson 1986, 230

may be recorded in mythology. Unlike the rangers, police and Aboriginal people at the Rock, who believed that a dingo was capable of abducting an infant, Barritt thought that urban Australians needed convincing.⁴⁶ But the coroner extracted the evidence he needed without respecting Indigenous protocols. As novelist and essayist Alexis Wright puts it, the law courts ‘want to hear and argue the Aboriginal story from the professional point of view ... in the language of the court’.⁴⁷

Later, at the royal commission into the case, Lionel Perron, father of the then NT attorney-general, Marshall Perron, told Justice Trevor Morling that in 1961, when he was working as an engineer surveying in the Great Sandy Desert, his party camped near some Aboriginal people who speared a semi-domesticated dingo because it had taken and consumed a twelve-month-old infant. Perron’s party found the child’s partly eaten remains – a mutilated skull and a few bones.⁴⁸

Lindy knew of the pups at the den where Azaria’s clothing was found and later acknowledged that ‘the dingo was probably returning home with its kill to feed them’.⁴⁹ In early 1981, after the first inquest had found death by dingo, the Chamberlains visited Uluru with a film crew to make a television documentary. They filmed the place where the tourists had stumbled upon Azaria’s jumpsuit, and the track that led from there to a dingo den, which was still occupied with fresh paw prints around it. The rocks beside the narrow openings on the track were shiny, polished with the oil from dingoes’ coats. One of the entrances to the den could only be approached through thick scrub and boulders but a side entrance opened, without hindrance, onto the track leading to the site where Azaria’s jumpsuit was discovered.

Lindy wriggled into the hole near the ‘main’ entrance to the den to take some long-exposure photographs. There she found a cavity in the rock, like ‘a very deep baby’s bath’,⁵⁰ full of small bones and skulls of animals, and droppings – she assumed the puppies used it as a toilet area. She knew that Azaria’s teeth, formed in her gums,

46 Bryson 1986, 217–8

47 Wright 2016, 12

48 Morling 1987, 280–1; Simper 2010; Young 1989, 229

49 Dawson 2002, 74

50 Chamberlain 1990, 175

were harder than her bones and if anything was left of her it would have been her teeth in dingo scats.⁵¹ Her description of this scene in her autobiography focuses on practicalities: the difficulty of accessing the den and balancing the camera; how they might have used a remote-control arm to dig in the area to try to find Azaria's matinee jacket, which at that stage had still not been found. She makes no allusion to how emotionally harrowing this exploration was, how symbolic this strange opposite of rebirth must have been.

The TV documentary was eventually sold to the ABC's *Four Corners*, and police saw the rough footage even though the Chamberlains wanted the footage to be given to their lawyers first. Lindy feared that the puppies' scats, possibly important evidence, would be tampered with and, she writes, her fears were confirmed when they returned to the Rock: the den was no longer occupied, its inhabitants had been killed or moved on; the refuse area was as 'clean as a whistle'.⁵²

On 23 July 1983, after Lindy Chamberlain had been jailed, Barbara Tjikadu told (by then) Inspector Graeme Charlwood that the tracks near Azaria's clothes were made by the same dingo whose tracks they had seen at the tent and on the dune the night she disappeared. Constable Morris said that he had not been told of this connection at the time, but it was the first time anyone had taken a statement from Barbara Tjikadu.⁵³

In 1986 when Barbara Tjikadu gave evidence to the Morling Royal Commission, Michael Adams, counsel assisting the Crown, asked her how she knew the dingo was carrying a child, not some other prey.

'Because I know if it kills a joey, it will take off with it, carry it,' she answered.⁵⁴

Adams and Commissioner Morling repeatedly asked Tjikadu whether the dingo could have been carrying a joey.⁵⁵

'Was a kangaroo living in the tent?' she answered.⁵⁶

51 Chamberlain 1990, 162–3

52 Chamberlain 1990, 175

53 Morling 1987, 247

54 Chamberlain 1990, 635 (Barbara Tjikadu quoted)

55 Chamberlain 1990, 636

56 Chamberlain 1990, 636 (Barbara Tjikadu quoted)

After the attempt to cast doubt on her knowledge of dingoes, Adams tried to discredit Tjikadu's tracking expertise. He asked whether the tracks at the tent could have belonged to a different dingo from the tracks near the clothes.

'If I come to a spot where there's three or four different dingo tracks there,' Tjikadu said, 'they might all be big. I know which is the mother, which is young and so on, and which is old and which is so and so.'⁵⁷

Adams pressed her again to tell him what enabled her to tell the difference between one dingo track and another before Tjikadu's interpreter, Marlene Cousens, intervened.

'I would like to tell you something first before you ask questions like that. When Aboriginal people see tracks, they know who it belongs to, what person went there, because they know the tracks, whereas if all these people got out of the courtroom now and walked barefoot, you can't tell, can you?'

'No,' exclaimed Adams.

The interpreter said, 'Aboriginal people can.'⁵⁸

Tjikadu's ability to read tracks sounds as natural to her as reading a sentence is to someone who has been taught to read letters and words. The court had trouble acknowledging this form of literacy, just as Australian institutions do not recognise Indigenous knowledge of dingoes.

There were two inquests, a murder trial, a royal commission, a pardon, a quashing of convictions and an acquittal. The Chamberlains divorced, each remarried, received a compensation payment and were dissatisfied by the findings of a third inquest in 1995, which left the cause of Azaria's death as open. It was not until 2012 that the Chamberlains' original and consistent claim that their daughter had been taken by a dingo was upheld by the Australian legal system.

The fourth inquest opened in Darwin in February. The Chamberlains' lawyers presented the Northern Territory coroner with evidence of twelve significant dingo attacks that had taken place since 1995, including a fatal attack in 2001 on a child on Fraser Island, known to its Butchulla Aboriginal custodians as K'gari.

57 Chamberlain 1990, 637 (Barbara Tjikadu quoted)

58 Chamberlain 1990, 637–8

Nine-year-old Clinton Gage was camping with his family at Waddy Point, on the east coast in the north of the island. Before breakfast on 30 April he and a seven-year-old friend set off up the Binngih track to the Waddy sand blow, a twenty-minute circuit. The boys were not aware that two dingoes were stalking them. According to the seven-year-old's statement in the Queensland Police Service report, the dingoes came from behind. Clinton ran in front of his friend and fell. The friend kept walking with the dingoes following. At some stage a dingo licked his hand. When Clinton's friend stopped briefly, the dingoes returned to where Clinton was lying on the ground and looked as though they began to sniff him.⁵⁹ From the footprints left in the sand, a tracker called Brian Little ascertained that one of the dingoes lunged at Clinton from the scrub. He struggled to get up and free himself, walking backwards. When he fell, the dingo struck again and mauled him. Clinton's friend walked with his eyes straight ahead over the big sand dunes and back to camp by another route.⁶⁰

When the two boys had not returned from their walk Clinton's father, Ross, went out with his younger son, six-year-old Dylan, to look for them. One hundred and fifty metres away from camp he found Clinton's body on the track with the dingoes still there. While Ross Gage retrieved Clinton's body a dingo harassed Dylan. Ross Gage kicked the dingo away.⁶¹

Dr Paul Anderson, the Queensland government medical officer, initially thought Clinton had been attacked by a large number of dingoes because horrendous injuries covered the top of his head, the back of his neck, his chest, his abdomen, his thighs and his groin. He likened the wounds to a shark biting and rotating its head to tear the flesh of its victim. Clinton died from a massive haemorrhage some time after Timothy left and before Ross Gage arrived. The mauling had opened the femoral artery in his thigh, which supplies blood to the leg. According to Anderson, the dingoes were attacking Clinton as a food source.⁶²

59 Appleby 2015, 136

60 Channel 5, 2001

61 FIDO 2001; Martin 2001a, 2001b

62 Channel 5, 2001

I grew up with the Azaria Chamberlain case: the dingo jokes; the debates, which continue to this day, about whether Lindy murdered her daughter. As Lindy said, ‘No one sat on the fence.’⁶³ For all its prominence, for the huge amount of press and legal attention it garnered, some players and some aspects of the story are elusive. When my mother and I camped at the Rock on a bus tour in September 1980, a few weeks after Azaria disappeared, we saw no dingoes. Since then, the campground has been moved away from the base of the monolith to Yulara, a resort town fifteen kilometres away. Though the Rock itself is seen as timeless, ancient and unchanging, conditions for human traffic around it have changed. In 1980 tourists walked wherever they wanted to. In 2019 the climb was finally closed, in accordance with the wishes of the Rock’s traditional Anangu custodians. In 2014 when my family and I cycled unwittingly past the place where Azaria’s clothes were found, the track veered away from the base of the Rock around Pulari, a sacred women’s site that tourists are not permitted to enter, photograph, video or paint. There is much about the Rock, and dingoes, that is mysterious. To understand them we need other forms of literacy and different ways of seeing, as Aboriginal custodian Kunmanara explains:

The tourist comes here with the camera taking pictures all over. What has he got? Another photo to take home, keep part of Uluru. He should get another lens – see straight inside. Wouldn’t see big rock then. He would see that Kuniya [sand python] living right inside there as from the beginning. He might throw away his camera then.⁶⁴

In her report on the inquest into the death of Azaria Chamberlain, Northern Territory Coroner Elizabeth Morris cited some of the fatal attacks by dingoes and dingo crosses on children between 1986 and 2010, including the one on Clinton Gage.⁶⁵ On 12 June 2012 she handed down her finding that ‘The cause of [Azaria Chamberlain’s] death was as the result of being attacked and taken by a dingo’. She addressed Azaria’s

63 ACA 2012

64 Parker 2006, 265 (Kunmanara quoted)

65 Morris 2012, 3–4

relatives gathered in the courtroom: Lindy; Michael; one of her brothers, Aidan; and her extended family. ‘Please accept my sincere sympathy on the death of your special and loved daughter and sister Azaria.’ Her voice cracked on Azaria’s name. ‘I’m so sorry for your loss. Time does not remove the pain and sadness of the death of a child.’⁶⁶

* * *

Although the fatal attacks on Azaria Chamberlain at Uluru and Clinton Gage on K’gari colour people’s perceptions, the ostensible reason people are violent toward dingoes is because they prey on domestic animals used by humans. Legislation around dingoes varies from state to state, and within each state. In Victoria, for example, dingoes are protected but wild dogs are regarded as pests; nevertheless, in some areas, dingoes are not protected on public land within a three-kilometre buffer zone of private land. In New South Wales the term ‘wild dog’ covers all wild-living canids – dingoes and free-ranging domestic dogs, and their progeny. They are classified as pests under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* (NSW) and land managers are required to eradicate them. In most of Queensland dingoes are legally pests but on K’gari, a World Heritage-listed national park, they are protected.

The names are laden: the public perceives ‘dingoes’ as native to Australia but ‘wild dogs’ are regarded as pests, even though the designation ‘wild dog’ is not accurate. Contrary to earlier studies claiming that most wild-living canids in New South Wales are ‘hybrids’ or ‘feral dogs’,⁶⁷ (Newsome and Corbett 1985; Stephens et al. 2015) recent genetic research shows that feral dogs are less widespread in eastern New South Wales and dingoes are less affected by hybridisation than previously thought.⁶⁸ (Cairns et al. 2020) Scientific names, which attempt to trace dingoes’ prehistoric genealogy, also carry human preconceptions and affect how dingoes are treated. *Canis lupus dingo* describes the dingo as a subspecies of the wolf. Like wolves, dingoes live in family groups and breed once a year. *Canis familiaris dingo* denotes

66 ABC news 2012

67 Newsome and Corbett 1985; Stephens et al. 2015

68 Cairns et al. 2020

that the dingo is a subspecies of the domestic dog. Dingoes look like dogs and many, including the people I interviewed for this book, call them dogs.⁶⁹ But these names have life and death consequences: if dingoes are dogs, once domesticated, they are now feral. As Fiona Probyn-Rapsey points out, ‘feral’ animals are killable.⁷⁰ While the scientific names reflect a dichotomy between wild wolf and tame domestic dog, dingo behaviour does not always fit into European-Australian categories of what constitutes wild and tame. Poet Geoffrey Dutton expresses this paradox when he describes ‘two dingoes, so wild they are tame’ sniffing ‘curiously as puppies, circling closely’ in the Everard Ranges in northern South Australia.⁷¹

As Barbara Tjikadu explained to the Morling Royal Commission, ‘A dingo is a dingo.’⁷² Tjikadu’s statement, based on Aboriginal people’s long observation and deep knowledge of dingoes, accords with a third scientific name, which, like the other two, is not without its controversies. *Canis dingo* describes the dingo not as a dog or as a wolf, but as itself, a unique canid, though I do not want to use this term in the way that some conservation biologists and dingo geneticists might, as a designation of dingo genetic ‘purity’.

Many Aboriginal languages do not distinguish between dingoes and dogs but they do distinguish between tame dingoes and dogs, and wild-living dingoes and dogs. The Jankuntjara of the Everard Ranges call tame dogs and tame dingoes *papa* and wild dogs and wild dingoes *papa inura*. For the Jankuntjara the distinction between domesticated and wild is also a distinction between inedible and edible. Animals

69 While I’m discussing names for dingoes, a note on the naming of people is apposite. Several chapters (‘Coolooloi’, ‘Eurong’, ‘Let’s dance’, ‘Brothers’, ‘What they’re capable of’, ‘Traces’ and ‘Wongari’) are based on in-depth interviews with people professionally and personally connected with K’gari’s dingoes. The people I interviewed for these chapters have all had the opportunity to read and review the chapters based on their interview. Names of interview participants who did not wish to be identified have been changed, which is indicated at the first mention of their pseudonym in the text. Other people whose identity is protected with a pseudonym include Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) staff, commercial tour operator rangers and others.

70 Probyn-Rapsey 2016

71 Dutton 1967

72 Chamberlain 1990, 635 (Barbara Tjikadu quoted)

that are termed *inura* can be killed but to kill a non-*inura* animal, even accidentally, is considered wrong.⁷³ Similarly the Anbarra people of Arnhem Land, who speak a dialect of Gu-jingarliya, use the same word, *kulakula* or *gulukula*, for dingoes and dogs, but dingoes and wild dogs are called *an-gugurkuja*, which is derived from a verb stem that means ‘to be frightened’ or ‘fearful one’ and refers to how dingoes and wild dogs run away from people. Another common Anbarra term for dingoes and wild dogs is *an-mugat*, derived from a noun stem that means ‘wild animal or beast’ and can refer to a dangerous or solitary man or outlaw, or an unruly woman.⁷⁴

Historic records from New South Wales indicate *mir* is the common root for the word for camp dingoes along the Darling, Murray, Murrumbidgee and Lachlan Rivers, immediately west of the Blue Mountains, on the northern tablelands and along the central coast. In the late 1800s and early 1900s in Wollongong and Botany Bay *mirrigung* and *mirigung* were the words recorded for tame canids; at Forbes and Condobolin *mirrie* and *mirree*; *mirrigan* at Narrandera and *mirree* and *meeree* at Moree. Place names such as Merri-Merrigal (Bourke), Mirrie (Dubbo), Merri Merri (Wellington), Merry (Lachlan River) and Mittagong (from the ‘Moneroo’ or Monaro) derive from this root.⁷⁵

The most prevalent root for wild canid in New South Wales is (*y*)*urig*, *-ag-*, which was recorded as *yuggi* at the Namoi and Barwon Rivers, *yukey* at the Macquarie and Castlereagh Rivers, *euchie* and *yukey* at Dubbo and *joogoong* at Botany Bay. From this root come place names such as Ureggin (Casino), Touragon (Ballina) and Youroogin (Murwillumbah). *Waregal*, another root for wild dingo, was recorded around Port Jackson.⁷⁶

In 1788, when the British arrived on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation at Warrane (the place that they named Sydney Cove), some dingoes were wild, living in their own cooperative, communicative social groups, and some were tame, living with Aboriginal people.⁷⁷

73 Hamilton 1972, 287, 290

74 Meehan et al. 1999, 91–2

75 Ryan 1964, 112–5

76 Ryan 1964, 117

77 Breckwoldt 1988, 56–78

Aboriginal people kept animals including birds, possums and young wallabies but dingoes are the only ones that have been found buried in the same manner as people.⁷⁸ After European settlement, Aboriginal people embraced European domestic dogs⁷⁹ and now camp dogs are a firm feature of some Indigenous communities. Some aspects of contemporary human–canid relationships may be similar to historical relationships between people and dingoes; some are no doubt different. Accounts by eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century European mariners, explorers, surveyors, geologists, missionaries, administrators and anthropologists record a variety of relationships between Aboriginal people and dingoes, which reflect the diversity of Indigenous societies: some people eat dingoes;⁸⁰ some prefer not to;⁸¹ some breastfeed them as they nurse their children;⁸² in some places dingoes help in the hunt;⁸³ in some communities dingoes and dogs accompany women and children on their foraging expeditions but are actively discouraged from accompanying men on their hunts;⁸⁴ dingoes smell and dig out water from the sand of stream beds, which helps people and birds;⁸⁵ canids provide warmth and companionship.⁸⁶ These companion canids are individuals with names: Yelabeli and Happy's dog;⁸⁷ Pinaltju (Listener), Panari (Digger), Tiyu (Sparks), Papi (Puppy), Lasi (Lassy), Nipa (Nipper) and Tjaputi (Dirty Mouth).⁸⁸

78 Kounoulos 2020

79 Jones 1970

80 Tindale 1974, 36, 109; Meggitt 1965, 14; Hamilton 1972, 288–90; Smyth 1972, 148; Giles 1986, 20; Breckwoldt 1988, 65

81 Meggitt 1965, 14; Gould 1969, 261; Meehan et al. 1999, 98; Mountford 1981, 184

82 Mitchell 1965, 347; Berndt and Berndt 1942, 162; Philip 2017b, 93; Dixon and Huxley 1985, 166

83 Meggitt 1965, 19; Chewings 1936, 32; Smyth 1972, 147, 190; Bates 1985, 247

84 Basedow 1925, 119; Gould 1969, 263; Hamilton 1972, 291; Kolig 1978, 91; Meehan et al. 1999, 102

85 Tindale 1974, 120

86 Meehan et al. 1999, 97; Meggitt 1965, 15; Hamilton 1972, 292–4; Tindale 1974, 109

87 Meehan et al. 1999, 97

88 Hamilton 1972, 294

Dingo Bold

The first printed use of the word 'dingo' in English is attributed to Watkin Tench, a marine who came to Sydney with the First Fleet and published an account of New South Wales: 'the only domestic animal they [Aboriginal people] have is the dog, which in their language is called Dingo, and a good deal resembles the fox dog of England.'⁸⁹ The word 'dingo' originated at Port Jackson and there has been speculation that Tench and other early settlers misunderstood *tingo*, a word for tame, which was corrupted into 'dingo'.⁹⁰

Newton Fowell, who in 1788 was a midshipman on the *Sirius*, reports in a letter home to his family in Devon that Aboriginal people around Sydney Cove 'have fish bones claws of Birds or a Dogs tail tied to their hair & gumed that it might not come off'⁹¹ and that:

They have a number of Dogs belonging to them which they call Tingo, they do not bark like our Dogs but howl, the Govonor has one of them that he intends Sending home in one of the Transports, they are the Wolf Dog – are the Colour of a fox & have a brush tail at first would eat nothing but fish that being his constant food.⁹²

Writing in the 1830s, after expeditions into the interior of eastern Australia, surveyor Thomas Mitchell describes how:

The Australian natives evince great humanity in their behaviour to these [native] dogs. In the interior, we saw few natives who were not followed by some of these animals, although they did not appear of much use to them. The women not unfrequently suckle the young pups, and so bring them up, but these are always miserably thin, so that we knew a native's dog from a wild one by the starved appearance of the follower of man.⁹³

89 Tench 1789, ch. 11

90 Breckwoldt 1988, 72

91 Fowell 1788, 21

92 Fowell 1788, 23

93 Mitchell 1965, 347

Anthropologists Roland and Catherine Berndt record Aboriginal women breastfeeding pups and other intimacies at Ooldea in western South Australia in the early 1940s: ‘Sometimes a pup may be suckled by a woman whose child has recently died, while they are often played with by all the camp. Idly while talking, a man may sooth a tired dog by fingering its penis.’⁹⁴ In 1916 on Mornington Island, John William Bleakley, Chief Protector of Aborigines, photographed a Lardil woman breastfeeding two week-old pups.⁹⁵ In the 1920s on the Edward River on the western side of the Cape York Peninsula, zoologist and anthropologist Donald Thomson records how a Koko Dai-yuri man, Tjamindjinyu (Tommy), told him

that when the puppies are captured very young they are fed on meat hammered to pulp, and if too young for that, are fed at the breast (’tjo ’tjo) by the women. His own wife, Chako, fed one of the dogs he still has in this fashion. When rearing it – as Tommy put it, the child had one side, the puppy the other.⁹⁶

The interspecies bonds created in part by such nurturing were profound and did not always make sense to European observers.

Thomas Mitchell could not see the use of dingoes to their Aboriginal companions or, for that matter, the use of people to their dingo companions but unwittingly he records other less tangible aspects of the relationship. On 1 May 1836, out along the Lachlan River in the vicinity of what is now Booligal, Mitchell’s party broke camp but:

[j]ust as the party was leaving the ground a noise was heard in the rear, and two shots were fired before I could hasten to the spot. These I found had been inconsiderately fired by Jones our shepherd at a native dog belonging to our new guide and which

94 Berndt and Berndt 1942, 162

95 Philip 2017b, 93. As Justine Philip (2017b) argues, interspecies ‘wet-nursing’ was the only way of keeping mammalian young alive before modern technology enabled humans to artificially feed human and animal infants, and probably played an important role in animal domestication.

96 Dixon and Huxley 1985, 166 (Donald Thomson quoted)

had attacked the sheep. This circumstance was rather unfortunate, for our guide soon after fell behind, alleging to the party that he was ill.⁹⁷

Mitchell was pragmatic, more concerned about how his party was going to find water that day without their guide than the demise of a dingo, but in two sentences, a tangential aside to his main task of exploration, he reveals an attachment that, baffling and perhaps unbelievable to the newcomers, can transmit itself across space with bodily ramifications: Mitchell's guide was not physically harmed but the European shepherd's killing of his dingo made him sick. If, as mining engineer and ethnologist Robert Brough Smyth writes, 'nothing more offends a black man than to speak harshly to his dogs, or to depreciate them: and if any one gave a black man's dog a blow, he would incur bitter enmity',⁹⁸ the magnitude of the offence of the shooting would have been beyond comprehension on the Europeans' part and the motivation for the shooting beyond comprehension on the Indigenous people's part.

The Butchulla language, like many other Aboriginal languages, does not distinguish dingoes from dogs, but does distinguish tame dingoes and dogs, which are called *wadja*,⁹⁹ or *wat'dha*¹⁰⁰ from wild-living dingoes and dogs, called *wangari*¹⁰¹ or *wongari*.¹⁰² The differences between these two canids are described from a Butchulla perspective in a few informative paragraphs in a 2017 QPWS dingo safety and information guide: 'Wat'dha were our companions – always part of us. They helped us hunt and track, and protected us from bad spirits and the Wongari. Wongari have been and always should be wild. They are a natural and important part of the ecosystem on K'gari'.¹⁰³ The guide explains the disappearance of the *wat'dha* companion dingoes as a consequence of colonial history and Aboriginal dispossession: 'When the last of our people were taken off the island, all of the dingoes

97 Mitchell 1965, 59

98 Smyth 1972, 147

99 Bell and Seed 1994, 135

100 QPWS 2017, 2

101 Bell and Seed 1994, 136

102 QPWS 2017, 2

103 QPWS 2017, 2

became wild, but we, the Butchulla, are still all strongly connected in our hearts, minds and spirits.' The guide asks visitors to 'respect Butchulla lore' because what's good for the land comes first. It continues, 'K'gari is Wongari Djaa (Country), and provides everything they need. They are curious, but need you to keep your distance. So please, don't feed Wongari.'¹⁰⁴

According to this brochure, the close canid-human bonds that have existed in Australia for at least a millennium – and probably much longer – have been broken on K'gari. If I am interpreting the brochure, such an ephemeral form for such devastating history, correctly, it is saying that a couple of hundred years of colonisation have erased K'gari's wa'dha. But what do contemporary dingoes make of these changes? How are they adapting? What happens if some of them seek a different sort of relationship with humans?

I was scared and thrilled when I met a dingo on the beach during my first research trip to K'gari. Our encounter lasted just over one relatively uneventful minute. Since, I have pored over that reverberating moment, trying to remember it accurately. Here is my story of the dingo I called Bold and how I came to know him.

104 QPWS 2017, 2