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# 2

## Luise Hercus' research in the Lake Eyre Basin, 1965-2005

Tom Gara

### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This paper provides details of Luise Hercus' early life and academic career, and documents her research in the Lake Eyre Basin from 1965 to 2005. It is based largely on information provided by Luise during oral history interviews, and supplemented by documentary sources where possible.

Early in 2003 I was engaged by the Native Title Section of the South Australian Crown Solicitor's Office to prepare a report on the cultural history of the people of the Lake Eyre Basin (LEB) region, based upon oral history from Luise who has worked with Aboriginal people in the region since 1965, recording linguistic, historical, anthropological, and mythological data. She was also engaged as a consultant for this project by the Crown Solicitor's Office. Between 2003 and 2005 I visited Canberra on seven occasions (a total of 29 days) to interview Luise, staying at her home at Gundaroo (NSW). Luise did not wish these interviews to be taped, so instead, information she provided was typed directly into my laptop computer. We commenced by documenting her field trips in chronological order from the first trip in 1965 up to the most recent trips, listing the Aboriginal consultants who participated in each trip and the major sites visited, with the aid of Luise's field note-books, photographs, reports and other documentation. We also discussed her early life in Germany

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<sup>1</sup> This is an edited version of the first part of Gara & Hercus (2005) which contains two further parts: Part 2 documents Luise's views on aspects of Aboriginal culture in the Lake Eyre Basin, and Part 3 provides comments on the language groups within the Lake Eyre Basin, and other groups on the periphery of the study area. The appendices include a bibliography of Luise's published and major unpublished works relating to the Lake Eyre Basin, and brief biographies of her major consultants. The draft of Gara and Hercus (2005) was provided electronically to Luise, who made some changes and provided additional data, anecdotes and other comments.

and England, her move to Australia, and her language work with Aboriginal people in Victoria and New South Wales in the early 1960s, which led to her travelling to Port Augusta in 1965 to begin research there.

## 2. Luise Hercus – early life

Luise Anna Schwarzschild was born on 16 January 1926 in Munich, Germany.<sup>2</sup> Her father was an artist of Jewish ancestry from a family of bankers and stockbrokers who worked at the Frankfurt Stock Exchange. Her father's elder brother was the astro-physicist and mathematician Karl Schwarzschild, best known for his work on Einstein's theory of General Relativity and his pioneering theoretical research on Black Holes. Another uncle was the Swiss astro-physicist Robert Emden. Her mother was Theodora Luttner, who came from a Catholic family originating from the German-Czech border around Passau on the Danube. Luise was the eldest of three daughters.

After the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany, the Schwarzschilds were listed as Jewish and suffered discrimination and repression: the family lived in Munich, known as 'the capital of the (Nazi) Movement'. Luise's father went to England early in 1938 and when the Czech crisis loomed Luise's mother and the three girls attempted to stay in Switzerland with the Emdens but were sent back to Germany; luckily, the very next day Chamberlain signed the Munich agreement and war was averted, but things got rapidly worse. In November 1938 the Gestapo came to collect her father, who was fortunately still in England. The family, through a sheer stroke of luck, was able to escape to England via The Netherlands in December 1938. Other Jewish people were taken off the train at Aachen, and Luise, who was then aged 12, still remembers them standing crying on the platform as the train pulled out. The only close family member to be left behind was her non-Jewish grandfather Hermann Luttner, who was executed at Dachau concentration camp in 1941 for his persistently expressed anti-Nazi views.

Luise began attending Tollington High School in London in early 1939, not knowing a word of English. Twin girls, who are still her friends, took her on as 'a Lent penance' (they were daughters of a Christian minister) and were successful in teaching her the basics of English. The school was evacuated at the beginning of the Second World War, and Luise became a 'friendly enemy alien', an unenviable state; her father was temporarily interned. Things at the school went well and the headmistress who taught classics selected Luise as her only student of Greek. By this stage Luise realised that she was even more interested in languages than in science. The school however became fragmented, so she returned in 1941 to her parents in London to study at the Dame Henrietta Barnett School in Hampstead. In 1943 she gained entrance to the oldest Oxford women's college, the Society of Home Students, which later became St Anne's College. She enrolled in language studies and was soon awarded a scholarship. Three years later she graduated with

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<sup>2</sup> Early biographical data comes mainly from White (1990), supplemented by information from interviews in 2003-2004.

a BA with first class honours in Modern Languages. She was appointed to a teaching position at the College even before she had taken her final exams. She was appointed University Lecturer in French Philology at Oxford in 1948 and Fellow of St Anne's College; she is now the only surviving Foundation Fellow of the College. She also studied Sanskrit and Prakrit with Thomas Burrow, an expert in Comparative Indo-Aryan and Dravidian Linguistics. In 1947 she became the first female Boden Scholar of Sanskrit, a scholarship normally attached to Balliol College and originally meant for future officers of the British Raj. She was awarded first-class honours in Oriental Studies in 1948; during this time she was also teaching Medieval French.

In 1952 Luise met her future husband, Graham Hercus, an Australian physicist whose family had originally come via New Zealand from Orkney. He specialised in Low Temperature Physics, and was on leave from the CSIRO, studying for a PhD at Oxford. After he completed his doctorate and returned to Australia, she resigned from her position at Oxford and joined him in Melbourne in late 1954.

### 3. Beginning of work on Aboriginal Languages

In the early 1960s Luise became interested in Australian Aboriginal languages. It was widely believed then that Victorian Aboriginal languages were entirely extinct but, after becoming involved with a project that provided holidays in the city for Aboriginal children from the countryside, Luise became aware of several Aboriginal elders who had some knowledge of their traditional languages (Hercus 1986, 2008). After consulting Arthur Capell, University of Sydney, Luise began visiting various Aboriginal reserves and communities in Victoria and neighbouring parts of NSW, recording surviving fragments of language from Aboriginal elders. She received valuable assistance from Alan West, a Government welfare officer, who was able to put her in touch with the most knowledgeable people in the various communities.

Graham was Luise's driver and moral support on these fieldtrips, which were conducted on weekends and during Graham's vacations. Their son, Iain, accompanied them on these trips. Luise worked on languages such as Wemba Wemba, Ngarigu, Mathi Mathi, Ganai and Werkaia during the 1960s and published the results of her research in Hercus (1969). By the mid 1960s she was also working with Paakantyi people in Dareton, Wilcannia and Bourke, and with members of other language groups along the Murray and Darling Rivers.

In January 1965 Luise met Catherine Ellis, an ethnomusicologist at the University of Adelaide, who had for several years been travelling widely across South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales recording traditional Aboriginal songs. Ellis advised Luise that there were a number of Aboriginal languages in South Australia, in particular, Kuyani, Barngarla and Nukunu, that were on the verge of extinction and that salvage work on these languages was urgently required (Ellis 1963-5).

Luise consulted a number of people who had carried out research in northern South Australia, including T. G. H. Strehlow at the Department of Australian

Linguistics at the University of Adelaide. Capell also agreed that there was an urgent requirement for language salvage work on Kuyani, Nukunu, Barngarla and other languages while there were still some speakers alive. Fred McCarthy, Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS), was also very supportive. On her way through Adelaide on her first trip to the north, in August 1965, she consulted Norman Tindale at the South Australian Museum. Despite being at a very unhappy stage of his life – his wife had recently died, and he was about to have to retire from his much loved Museum – Tindale was most encouraging and helpful. He mentioned in particular that she should look out for a Wangkangurru man with a Scottish-sounding name, who had unique knowledge of Aboriginal language and culture.

### 3.1 What is ‘Salvage Linguistics’?

Luise believes that throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the notion was prevalent that languages are totally lost the moment that the last first-language speaker has died and that after that one is ‘simply too late’. It was almost like the dark ages as far as the study of remnant Aboriginal languages was concerned, though this age was drawing to a close. In that first half-century some important work on Aboriginal languages had been done in areas where traditional culture and language were still strong. This early phase of research is described in detail by Capell (1971). By the late 1950s there was a change, but nevertheless the idea still prevailed in most university language departments (there was at that time no department of Linguistics in Australia) that when there were no monolingual speakers, whatever is left is ‘corrupted’ and not worthy of study. Moreover if a language did not have an established literature it was not worthy of study. The revival of interest in Aboriginal languages in the late 1950s and 1960s led linguists to realise that even speakers with lesser knowledge can contribute to the understanding of language, and that language loss and decline in itself is worthy of study. Luise Hercus’ salvage work on remnant languages was part of this newer view.

### 3.2 Songs

When Luise started working with Aboriginal people in the mid-1960s it soon became obvious to her that the ‘last speakers’ were usually also the last singers in a language. This is what particularly worried these older people: they hoped to pass on something of the language to their descendants, but there was no way they could pass on their songs to the next generation who were devoted to country and western music, and still less to grandchildren who were listening to the latest hits on the radio. To the older generation the songs and oral traditions were what mattered most.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Luise Hercus had from the beginning wanted to let speakers talk as they wished - in rebellion against a great work well known from her Sanskrit studies, Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey of India*, where the text for every language is a translation of the parable of The Prodigal Son.

Some people were so anxious to record songs that it was hard for Luise to get them to do language work. The most difficult was Barney Coffin, a Yardliyawarra speaker who Luise worked with on numerous occasions between 1968 and his death in 1974, who used to begin sessions with: 'I first want to sing the Train Song' – this was his favorite and his version of it was endlessly repetitive, moreover it was in Adnyamathanha, a language which still had a number of good speakers. He was definitely the 'last and final speaker' of Yardliyawarra from the east of the Flinders Ranges, but he lived away from his country in Broken Hill and had no family there, and the language disappeared with his death. But it was still those songs – in his case mainly non-traditional – he especially wanted to have recorded.

Because of the emphasis placed on this by the 'last speakers', Luise came to concentrate on songs and oral literature as much as on language, recording and making the linguistic analysis of long song cycles in Arabana and Wangkangurru in particular (Hercus 2008). The songs of the 'final last speakers' are most moving: they represent the most cherished part of the voice of the past.

#### 4. Hercus starts work in South Australia

With the help of a grant from the AIAS to cover the costs of fuel and other expenses, Luise travelled to Port Augusta in August 1965, hoping to find some people who could still speak Kuyani, Barngarla or Nukunu.

In Port Augusta, and later in Copley, Marree and Andamooka, Luise located several people who had some knowledge of the Kuyani, Barngarla or Nukunu languages, but that knowledge was largely restricted to vocabulary items and fragments of songs. In Andamooka, however, she met Tim Strangways, who was sharing a hut with Gilbert Bramfield (a Nukunu man). Tim was a fluent speaker of Arabana, and Luise decided almost immediately to concentrate on that language (Hercus 1994:2):

Tim was just sitting there, nobody was recording his language. So that he should not feel left out, I asked him a few words. It was obvious at once that here was not only a fluent speaker, but a brilliant teacher. In a flash I saw the sheer folly of pursuing only that which was not there, and rejecting a language that was still alive, namely Arabana. So I began a long association with Arabana people, and soon came to meet Tim's nephew by marriage Mick McLean *Irinjili*, the Wangkangurru man with the Scottish name mentioned by Tindale. He made me aware of the importance of traditions and we went on expeditions twice and even three times a year gradually covering most of the north-east of South Australia. Over a long period of time he recited all the vast store of oral literature that he held.

During the 1960s and early 1970s Luise and her family were living in Melbourne. Maps at that time were very poor – some important 1:250 000 maps existed only as dye-line sheets. Graham was happy to continue in his role as driver and support in all aspects of fieldwork in northern South Australia, just as he had done during Luise's earlier trips throughout Victoria and western New South Wales. Their son Iain Hercus came along

on all their trips to northern South Australia (see his contribution in this volume). These trips had to be restricted, however, to university vacations, and coordinated with school holidays, so that Iain did not miss classes. It generally worked out that Luise and Iain would go to Port Augusta and Marree in January to work with people there, and Graham would save all his leave for trips in May and August-September to travel to remote sites further north. To save money on Luise's limited fieldwork grants, the family usually camped out when on these fieldtrips and only rarely stayed in motels or hotels; in the far outback in those days there was no choice anyway.

In 1967, at Ted Strehlow's suggestion, Luise was appointed to a part-time research fellowship in his Department of Australian Linguistics at the University of Adelaide, but she continued to live in Melbourne. She held this position until the beginning of 1969 when she was appointed Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Asian Studies at the Australian National University, teaching Sanskrit (she became Reader in 1973). For the next five years she commuted back and forth to Canberra each week during the academic year, and spent most of her university vacations engaged in fieldwork in South Australia. After 1969, Luise was able to concentrate on Arabana and other Lake Eyre languages.

Her principal consultants were Mick McLean, Arthur McLean, Tim Strangways and Edie Strangways, Jimmy and Leslie Russell, Alice Oldfield, Maudie Naylor and Maudie Lennie. From these people, and others, Luise recorded a vast amount of linguistic data, traditional songs and mythology, history and other aspects of Aboriginal culture. She has published an extensive Arabana-Wangkangurru grammar (Hercus 1994), and numerous articles and papers about Arabana-Wangkangurru language, history and culture (e.g. Hercus 1972, 1979; Austin, Ellis & Hercus 1976). During the first decade of her work in South Australia, other researchers accompanied the Hercuses on some of their trips to northern South Australia, such as Peter Austin, then a student in linguistics at ANU (1974-1977), and Bob Ellis, then the head of the South Australian Aboriginal and Historic Relics Unit. Harold Scheffler, a social anthropologist from Yale University, accompanied them on a trip in 1972 and made some studies of Aboriginal kinship in Port Augusta and Marree before travelling on his own through the Northern Territory.

Between 1966 and 1968 Luise made three trips with a groups of other female researchers – Catherine Ellis (ethnomusicologist), Isobel 'Sally' White (anthropologist, Monash University) and Rhonda Buckley (photographer) – to study and record Antikirinya women's songs, languages and traditions in northern South Australia, in what became known as the *Group Project on Andagirinja Women*. The project was funded by the AIAS and the University of Adelaide, and resulted in the acquisition of much valuable data, including sound recordings, movies, photographs and other linguistic and anthropological data. During those three trips, Luise visited Coober Pedy, Oodnadatta, Indulkana and other Aboriginal communities in the north-west of South Australia and worked with many Antikirinya women, and also talked to some men, notably Wintinna Mick, who was Antikirinya but had lived around Wintinna for much of his life. Another person she got to know then was Yumpie Jack, who was the first Antikirinya person to be born at Oodnadatta (in 1900). She also had one very brief opportunity to record Tim Allen, 'Nilpina Tim', who sang verses from the *Kumpira-Pirri-Pirri* ('The Dead One') history.

## 5. Methodology

Luise writes:

My methodology may seem haphazard and my recordings are unsystematic: I do however have a clear methodology, and this is essentially opportunistic. I realised during my language salvage work in Victoria that there is nothing people hate more than being asked mechanical questions, as happens when a linguist goes through a set list of body parts, natural features, animals, verbs etc. This applies particularly to those Aboriginal people who have only fragmentary knowledge of the language or haven't spoken it for a long time. They feel harassed if they can't think of something straight off, particularly if the linguist then goes on to the next item on the list and then the next. The same applies to the elicitation of repetitive sentences showing singular dual and plural forms, or different tense forms. Typical of such elicitations are: 'I have one dog/two dogs/three dogs, you have one dog etc, he has one dog etc, we two have one dog etc.' I became acutely aware of this when, in 1968 in Wilcannia NSW, I tried to ask George Dutton some linguistic questions for Malyangapa, which was one of his main languages. He was most reluctant. In the end he did however volunteer some sentences describing a day in the life of a drover. I tried to get him to continue and said 'and then he whistles up his dog'. George was furious: 'I haven't got a bloody dog', he said. 'I know all the stories from Western New South Wales and all that people ask me about is dogs'. I realised that Steven Wurm, who had briefly worked with George in 1958, had presumably asked some of those 'one dog, two dogs' questions. George died at the end of 1968. It was not till years later, in 1996, that Tom Gara, cataloguing the Tindale papers at the South Australian Museum, found a special notebook, compiled by Tindale in June 1938, and consisting entirely of Wanyiwalku (a dialect of Paakantyi) language elicitation with George Dutton. George was already then the most knowledgeable speaker in Western New South Wales: Tindale was clearly aware of this and had devoted a whole notebook to him. And then I saw it: 'I have one dog, two dogs, three dogs'. There was more: 'One dog, two dogs, three dogs several dogs, many dogs bit my leg...' So the brilliant George Dutton had been asked the same questions in 1938 and 1958 and no wonder he got angry when a dog was mentioned in 1968. In justice to Tindale, it must be said that he wrote down two major texts from George Dutton, relating to the Mootwingee area, with incredible accuracy – so accurately that they can be analysed morpheme-by-morpheme. This is illustrated by the Paakantyi CD, which contains the Moon story in his transcription, with my morpheme-by-morpheme analysis (Hercus & Nathan 2002).

In language salvage situations it was obvious that in order to make things interesting to speakers of differing linguistic capacities and inclinations, methods had to be entirely flexible. Where only remnant knowledge of vocabulary was involved it was usually best not to go through a systematic list but to let people slowly think about words that they *did* remember. Quite often speakers were themselves quite systematic and tried to think for instance of all the names of birds they could remember, or how you talked about eating and drinking etc. Even when there was relatively little knowledge one could try to elicit phrases by asking things like: ‘so what did your grandmother say when you kids were playing up?’

By gradually trying to let people think about the past one could in the end learn much more than by having a neat list. When I left, people would often say – ‘I couldn’t think of a whole lot of words just now, but they will come to me and I will tell you next time’ – and almost invariably they did tell me next time.

With a language that was better preserved, the main problem was to elicit grammar painlessly and not to have the ‘one dog, two dogs’ situation. It was important to be able to dream up numerous scenarios, e.g. two women having a fight in order to elicit reciprocals: yelling at one another, swearing at one another, scratching/biting/hitting one another, pulling one another’s hair etc; or in order to elicit ‘lest’ constructions, a situation about telling a child not to go near the creek: you might fall in, you might get stuck in the mud, your mother might growl at you etc.

The most important thing was always *to learn as much as possible oneself*, so that one could keep up with the information and not ask the same things over and over again. It was essential to discover and learn the structure of the language – even if it had to be done in an unstructured way. If one was really lucky one could find a speaker who had himself or herself thought about language structure, but one could only do this effectively if one had already done a lot of analysis. Arthur McLean (Arabana) was such a speaker. One could, for instance, ask him: ‘What is the difference between when I say *antha nhanirnda thikarnda* and *antha nhanhi-thikarnda*? He would say *antha nhanirnda thikarnda* means that you are just going to have a quick look (at somebody or something) and come straight back, but *antha nhanhi-thikarnda* means you are going to see somebody (or something) and then come back. A less sensitive person would have said ‘they just about mean the same thing’, and in that way one would have missed subtleties of the grammatical structure.

Mick McLean’s methodology was impeccable: he would plan each field trip and say ‘this time we will go along the Woodmurra Creek, we will go to Manarrinna and I will show you all the places along the way and then we will go to Woorana and go back a different way ...’ The only disadvantage of these neat plans was that he – and we – would be most disappointed if rain or some trouble with the car stopped us from following the plan. Every evening he would sing, following particular

song cycles. This was all thought out beforehand, e.g. 'I will sing the Two Boys all the way this trip. Tonight I will take them as far as Parraparra'.

One of the main problems with this methodology was – and is – that I could not always keep up with my consultants. In the case of basic language elicitation the 'flexible' method is most exhausting. If one can't use a list one has to listen and yet constantly think ahead about the next question – what might the speaker remember? In the case of grammar the situation is even more complicated, e.g. I want to find out about the use of interrogative pronouns and adverbs, so which of the various scenarios that I use for this sort of investigation is most appropriate for the topics that this speaker now wants to talk about? If one has the good luck to have several speakers and have two or three different sessions a day, one does not have time or energy to analyse and learn one's work as one goes along, and one falls further and further behind, as I have done.

On field trips I made notes on sites, and in the evening – after cooking and cleaning up – I had the unique pleasure of hearing and recording song cycles. If I asked too many questions 'what did this verse mean?' or 'what did this particular word mean?' I risked irritating the singer or throwing him off course. In the case of Binge Lowe I even had to promise not to ask *any* questions between verses, or else he would stop. And he meant it. I was allowed to ask just a few questions afterwards. The result is that I got further and further behind. I am still way behind and have still not listened to all of Mick McLean's tapes. He wanted the songs to be understood and so he was happy to answer questions 'later', so as not to interrupt the songs too much. This means of course that these explanations are scattered over various tapes. I now have an Australian Research Council grant, which pays for digitising the tapes of Simpson Desert songs and for Grace Koch from AIATSIS to spend one afternoon a week doing musical analysis. But I am falling behind here too: the music is more repetitive than the song text, and less scattered among tapes.

Despite all this I am still convinced that this flexible methodology was and is best suited to keeping to the wishes of speakers, and making them happy to contribute more. It is therefore more productive in the long run than a systematic but repetitive approach.

Luise has recorded more than 1,000 hours of audio tapes with her consultants. Copies of all these tapes, except the most recent ones, have been lodged with AIATSIS (see Koch & Obata, this volume). As well, she has her own extensive collection of fieldwork photographs, movies and videos, and also has additional collections from Colin and Pam Macdonald, Vlad Potezny, Howard Creamer, Bill Jeffery and other colleagues and friends who have accompanied her on her field-trips.

Since 1976 Luise has been assisting in the compilation of Aboriginal site cards for most of the important sites she has visited in the Lake Eyre Basin for inclusion on the Register of Aboriginal Sites. The Register, currently maintained by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation (DAARE), includes more

than 1,500 sites recorded by Hercus and Potezny, including major mythological and ceremonial sites and other sites of traditional, historical or archaeological significance.<sup>4</sup>

Most of Luise's research work in the Lake Eyre Basin has been funded by grants from the Australian Research Council, AIAS/AIATSIS, and the Australian Heritage Commission.

## 6. Mick McLean

As mentioned above, Luise Hercus met Mick McLean *Irinylili* on her first trip to the north of South Australia in 1965 and began a long and important collaboration. Mick McLean had an encyclopaedic knowledge of the songs, stories and totemic landscape of the Wangkangurru, Arabana and Lower Southern Arrernte people and he was the last clever man (*minbaru*) from the desert (McCaul, this volume; Hercus 1977, 1985, 1994b). He was only too conscious of the fragile state of all this knowledge and often described to Luise how he had to pester his father and other older people to teach him: 'You are not getting old yet, wait till you get old! [they said]. Look at me, wait till you have white hair like me [they said]'.

In the decade after her first meeting with Mick, Luise made over 20 trips with him north from Port Augusta, to Finke and Charlotte Waters in the Northern Territory, Mt Dare, Innamincka, the Simpson Desert and Birdsville, and all points in between. In 1975 Mick McLean was diagnosed as having prostate cancer and soon became too ill to attempt any more field trips. He died in Port Augusta in 1977.

In 1967 Luise had alerted T. G. H. Strehlow to the fact that Mick McLean had a wealth of knowledge about the Lower Southern Arrernte. Strehlow subsequently recorded some information on Wangkangurru mythology and customs from him, as well as several song-cycles (Strehlow 1970).<sup>5</sup> From Mick McLean, Luise recorded information on the myths given in Appendix 1. Hercus (1989a: 105) discusses the reasons why Mick McLean decided to pass traditional knowledge on to her, a woman: Mick was a strongly conservative and traditional-minded person (he was only too conscious of the concept of *thamuna* 'secret-sacred' *malyka uljurlaru ngawinhanga* 'not to be heard by women') and only passed on traditional knowledge to Luise because she was an 'old woman', because there was no interested male research worker, because the traditions were in dire straits, and because the other senior Wangkangurru men, particularly his cousin George Kemp, constantly urged him to do this, and even then it was only after years of apprenticeship of learning the languages involved.

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<sup>4</sup> Vlad Potezny submitted site forms for these sites. He advises (pers comm.) that probably only about 500 – the sites recorded prior to about 1992 – are registered; the others remain unregistered.

<sup>5</sup> Hercus points out that Strehlow's paper contains numerous inaccuracies, many of them due to Strehlow's imperfect knowledge of the landscape; Strehlow believed that *mikiri*, the deep wells excavated by Wangkangurru people to reach subterranean sources of water, were large freshwater lakes.

Mick McLean was aware that there were a number of major myths that had disappeared before he had the opportunity to learn them, and many local myths to which he would not have had access. This includes the Bilby History from the Nilpinna area and a number of myths from Dalhousie in Lower Southern Arrernte country. Mick pointed out that Tom Bagot, and to a lesser extent Binge Lowe, had knowledge of the latter myths and he deferred to them. He told Luise that he always regretted not having accepted an offer from Harry Carriage, when he was at Murnpeowie in the 1920s, to learn the Yawarrawarrka myth about the Emus' travels through the lakes of the Cooper country.

In 1975 members of the SA Aboriginal and Historical Relics Unit (AHRU) and Luise enlisted the help of Howard Creamer, an anthropologist and experienced light-aircraft pilot, to make a number of reconnaissance flights over the Simpson Desert to locate some of the more remote sites known to Mick McLean. Mick accompanied Bill Jeffery and Bob Ellis, from the AHRU, Luise, Creamer and Peter Austin on these flights in May and August 1975 and identified several sites that Luise was later able to visit by vehicle.

A major part of Luise's work in the eastern Lake Eyre Basin has been the identification of Aboriginal sites listed by Johann Georg Reuther, a missionary at Killalpaninna from 1889 until 1906, in his extensive manuscript collection on the Diyari (Reuther 1981), and shown on the map subsequently produced by Henry Hillier. As Hercus & Potezny (1991) point out, there are numerous practical difficulties in locating the 2,500 sites shown on the map, due to inconsistencies between Reuther's site listing and those shown on Hillier's map, as well as inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the map itself. With the help of Mick McLean and his knowledge of the mythology and landscape, Hercus commenced the project of identifying and locating the sites shown on the map, a project that has continued to the present day. The sites on the western side of Lake Eyre do not figure much in the Reuther-Hillier map, and for these areas Mick McLean's knowledge, supplemented by several other senior people, remains unique.

## 7. Research on other South Australian languages

Luise gathered data on other languages in the north-eastern part of the state. Several of her Arabana and Wangkangurru consultants, including Mick McLean, Tim and Edie Strangways, George Macumba and Archie Allen, were also fluent in Lower Southern Arrernte and Luise recorded some mythological and linguistic data relating to that language.

She visited Barney Coffin, a Yardliyawara speaker, on numerous occasions between 1968 and his death in 1974 and recorded some linguistic data on Yardliyawara on each occasion (see 3.2). During the same period Luise occasionally recorded information on Adnyamathanha customs, kinship and language from Angus and Eileen McKenzie, May Wilton and other Adnyamathanha people. This work was mainly done in conjunction with her close friend Sally White: between them they supplemented the complex data collected by Bernhard Schebeck on the kinship pronoun system of Adnyamathanha (Hercus & White 1973).

Luise remained committed to obtaining any information she could on the southern Lake Eyre Basin languages. On most of her early trips to outback South Australia she stopped at Port Germein to talk to Gilbert Bramfield, a Nukunu man, who knew some Nukunu vocabulary (Hercus 1992a). Luise obtained some Kuyani language and songs from the Patterson brothers in Copley during several visits in the late 1960s. In 1972, Alice Oldfield, one of her Arabana teachers, who had professed to have forgotten her own first language (Kuyani) when she first met Luise in 1965, suddenly announced that the language had come back to her and that she was willing to teach it (Hercus 1973). Luise was able to obtain a significant amount of data on Kuyani before Alice died in 1978, aged about 95. At various times in the 1960s and early 1970s while in Port Augusta Luise recorded some Barngarla vocabulary from Moonie Davis and Percy Kidman, and some Kokatha from Scotty Higgins (aka Egan), Andrew Davis and Maudie Duck. She even obtained some Mirning from Charlie Traveller, a Mirning man from the Nullarbor Plain, who was at the Old Folk's Home in Port Augusta during one of her early visits there.

Luise recorded Diyari language and songs from Leslie Russell, Alec Edwards, Ben Murray and Mary Dixon (all of which she later passed on to Peter Austin), and some information on Yandruwandha from George Dutton, Murtee Johnny, Willy Harris and his brother Hector Harrison who was living on Naryilco Station and later at Tibooburra. She also gathered some data on Yawarrawarrka from Jessie Moore in 1968 and Willie Harris in 1971 and 1975, and on Yarluyadi from Dora Parker in 1965 and 1966 and Clara Reece in 1971. In 1969 Luise started working with Maudie Naylor, an accomplished Yarluyadi speaker, and this work continued until Maudie's death in 1980. She also worked over the years with Wangkumara speakers from just over the border from Innamincka, particularly George McDermott, Laura Dixon, Cecil Ebsworth and Jack O'Lantern.

Dora Parker, one of Luise's early Yarluyadi consultants, died in late December 1967. During a visit to Marree the following May, Luise found one of Dora's children, a 12 year old son, Johnny, virtually abandoned there. With the permission of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs welfare officer in Marree (Casper Scheppers), the Hercuses took Johnny back to Melbourne. They subsequently made a formal application to the SA authorities to foster him and approval was given by the Department of Community Welfare. Johnny was enrolled in the local primary school in Melbourne and later went to high school. He joined the other members of the Hercus family on their regular field-trips back to his country.

The period 1973-1975 was particularly difficult for Luise. She was appointed a Reader in Asian Studies at ANU in 1973, and commuted between Melbourne and Canberra, taking leave to look after her husband Graham who died in 1974 of colon cancer. Later that year Luise purchased a property at Gundaroo, north of Canberra, and moved there in June 1975. She organised a trip north from Port Augusta in May with Bob Ellis and Peter Austin (who had commenced his detailed study of the Diyari language) as well as Mick McLean and Arthur McLean, an elderly Arabana man and close friend of Mick's. Near Dulkaninna the car in which Arthur was travelling rolled; Arthur was injured in the crash and was evacuated by the Royal Flying Doctor

Service to Port Augusta and then to Adelaide. He died several weeks later in hospital in Adelaide after suffering a heart attack. It was about that time that Mick McLean became ill from prostate cancer. On what turned out to be Luise's last bush trip with Mick, a visit to the Simpson Desert in September 1975, Mick declared that he wanted to stay and die there in the desert, and it took a great effort by Jimmy Russell, one of the other Aboriginal consultants along on that trip, to convince Mick to leave. Mick was too ill for any more trips after that, although Luise continued to talk to him whenever she passed through Port Augusta. He died in July 1977.

Luise continued the research she had begun in the 1960s with the languages of south-western NSW. She worked with speakers of Paakantyi (Darling River) including Gladys Smith in Dareton and 'Grannie' Moisey, Jack Johnson and Kate Bugmy in Wilcannia. In the late 1960s she visited Wilcannia several times to work with George Dutton, a fluent speaker of Pantyikali (a northern Paakantyi dialect), as well as other languages of western New South Wales and neighbouring parts of South Australia, including Malyangapa, Wilyakali, Wangkumara, Yandruwandha and Karlali.<sup>6</sup> During the 1970s Luise made a number of trips to Wilcannia, Bourke and Dareton to interview Elsie Jones, Gertie Johnson and other Paakantyi speakers. She worked intensively on her Paakantyi notes and recordings in 1979 and 1980, and her detailed Paakantyi grammar was published in 1982, and a dictionary in 1992 (Hercus 1982, 1992b). At various times during the 1960s and 1970s Luise also continued work with Wemba Wemba speakers from the Swan Hill area, including Stan Day and his sister, Nancy Egan, at Echuca and Johnnie Taylor at Balranald.

Jack Long, the last speaker of Mathi Mathi, the language of the Balranald area, lived at Point Pearce on Yorke Peninsula South Australia, far from his own country. Catherine Ellis had 'discovered' him, and so Luise went to see him at Point Pearce on her way back to Melbourne from her first trip to northern South Australia in September 1965. On most of her subsequent trips (until Jack's death in 1977) Luise dropped in to see him and record any fragments of language he had remembered since their last meeting (Hercus & White 1971; Hercus 1986, 1989b).

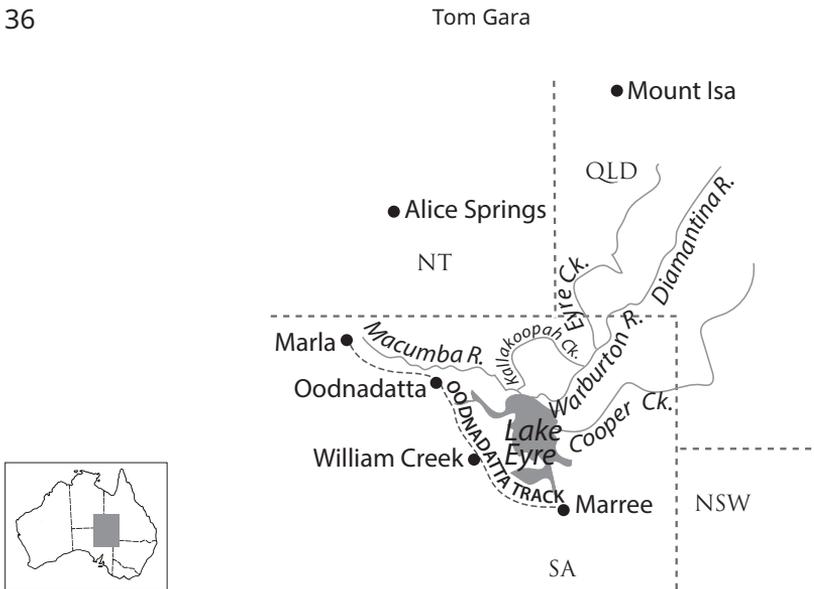
## 8. Work in the Lake Eyre Basin in the 1980s

During the late 1970s and early 1980s Luise made a number of site-recording trips to the Dalhousie area and along the Birdsville and Oodnadatta Tracks with Ben Murray, Sydney Stuart, Arthur Warren and George Macumba. Other colleagues and friends, including Bob Ellis, linguists Peter Austin and Tamsin Donaldson, and a prehistorian from ANU, Isabel McBryde, accompanied Luise on some of her trips during this period.

In 1981 Luise was engaged as a sub-consultant by Peter Sutton in relation to his anthropological baseline study for the Olympic Dam project. Luise

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<sup>6</sup> Norman Tindale obtained some information from George Dutton in 1938, and the anthropologist Jeremy Beckett worked with him for many years (Beckett 1978). George died in 1969.



*Map of Luise Hercus' fieldwork in the Lake Eyre Basin. Cartographer: Jenny Green.*

contributed relevant data from her own previous fieldwork while Sutton carried out extensive literature research (Sutton & Partners 1981). In October 1984 Luise worked again with Sutton on an assessment for the SA National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Aboriginal cultural significance of the mound-springs of north-eastern South Australia. They carried out fieldwork with Arabana consultants, Arthur Warren, Brian Marks and Glen Hull.<sup>7</sup> The report by Hercus and Sutton provided a detailed listing of the mound springs and discussion of their significance (Hercus & Sutton 1986).

In 1983 Luise met Bingee Lowe who was of Jingili descent and had been removed as a 12 year old in about 1938 from Banka Banka in the Northern Territory by Ted Lowe, who ran Mt Dare Station, in order to work on the station. He joined in with Lower Southern Arrernte people and was initiated with them. He gained excellent knowledge of the language, the country and the mythology, probably more so than the local young people: knowledge was to some extent being withheld from local young men by elders because of a murder and other disputes.

Luise made a number of trips with Bingee during the 1980s and 1990s and recorded numerous significant sites in the Dalhousie-Finke River-Macumba River area. Luise also obtained additional information on Lower Southern Arrernte language and mythology from Tom and Mary Brady. Mary Brady was Lower Southern Arrernte but also knew some Arabana and had detailed knowledge of the Macumba area, and her husband Tom was of Antikirinya background. Unfortunately, increasing political tensions between Aboriginal groups over seismic oil and gas exploration in the area made some of this work difficult.

Luise continued her language studies at Port Augusta, Marree and Birdsville with other Arabana and Wangkangurru speakers such as Mona Merrick, Johnny Reece, Maudie Lennie, Brian Marks and Frank and Linda Crombie.

<sup>7</sup> Glen Hull at that time was the Chairman of the Arabana People's Committee in Marree. He was a fluent speaker of Arabana, but died in 1987.

During the early 1980s Luise worked with Willie Harris at Innamincka recording data on the Yandruwandha and Yawarrawarrka languages. Luise's main Yarluyandi consultant, Maudie Nylon, had died in 1980. Luise then started working with Linda Crombie at Birdsville, who remembered some Yarluyandi. Luise made numerous trips with Linda and her husband Frank, a Wangkangurru man, recording sites and mythology in the Birdsville area, Simpson Desert National Park, and on the channels of the lower Georgina (Eyre's Creek). In September 1987, Frank Crombie was badly injured in a vehicle roll-over west of Birdsville while returning from a field trip to the Simpson Desert, and died before the Flying Doctor could reach the scene. After Frank's death, Luise continued to work with Linda Crombie, and undertook several field trips every year with her for a number of years.

Later in October 1984 and again in October 1985 Luise, accompanied by Arabana consultants Brian Marks and Glen Hull, carried out some site-clearance work for Getty Oil on their exploration leases in the Nilpinna area. This work gave her the opportunity to visit sites on the western side of the Oodnadatta Track which she had previously heard much about but had never been able to record, such as Giddi-Giddina Springs.

In July 1986 Vlad Potezny, a technical officer from the Aboriginal Heritage Branch, accompanied Luise on a field-trip to Dalhousie to assist in site-recording work. Potezny accompanied her on most of her subsequent trips over the next decade, including several trips with Binge Low recording sites and mythology in the Dalhousie-Macumba River area. Other friends and colleagues, including Philip Jones, Curator of History at the SA Museum, and archaeologists, Peter Clark and Giles Hamm, accompanied Luise on some trips in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In September 1987 Luise was able to obtain some funding to enable Peter Clark, a qualified pilot with his own light aircraft, to join them at Birdsville. They later made several reconnaissance flights over the Simpson Desert to locate and record several of the more remote *mikiri*.

From about 1986, Luise found that work with the Arabana community in Marree was becoming increasingly difficult. The community had become divided by disputes which had arisen in relation to Western Mining Corporation's activities at Olympic Dam, and by a struggle by different factions for control of the Finnis Springs property. This had sad consequences, such as the refusal to Luise to take Brian Marks on a site-recording trip, at a time when he was the acknowledged 'boss' of the area in question, and the only person who knew certain sites. Brian Marks died shortly after and so these particular sites in the Francis Swamp area and further to the west could never be recorded.

## 9. Hercus in 'retirement'

Luise retired in December 1991 and continued to work with Linda Crombie throughout the 1990s and the early years of this century, recording Wangkangurru and fragments of Yarluyandi, and making numerous site-recording trips with her along the Diamantina, Georgina, and Mulligan Rivers. Luise also

continued to work occasionally until 1998 with Binge Low, recording sites and mythology in Lower Southern Arrernte country.

Between 1993 and 1997 Luise made several trips with Laurie Stewart and his son, Rex, recording sites in Arabana and Lower Southern Arrernte country. Laurie was aged about 80 and was one of the few good speakers of Arabana still alive at that time. He also had some knowledge of songs and mythology, including the *Urumbula*. Rex Stuart had just received a grant to compile an Arabana dictionary. Laurie assisted Luise to locate some of the sites that Mick McLean had told her about many years before, and Laurie himself also had knowledge of traditional and historic sites.

Between 1991 and 2000 Colin and Pam Macdonald, friends of Luise's from Canberra, accompanied her on many of her trips and maintained detailed photographic and video records of their travels (see Macdonald, this volume). In 1994, Vlad Potezny, who had been transferred along with the rest of the staff of the former Aboriginal Heritage Branch to the new Department of State Aboriginal Affairs (DOSAA) in 1993, was barred from joining Hercus on further field-trips. This prohibition only remained in place for about a year however, and Vlad made several subsequent trips with Luise prior to his retirement from DOSAA in 2001.

Following a request to AIATSIS from an Aboriginal women's group in Ceduna, South Australia, for assistance in language revival in their area, Luise visited Ceduna in September 1993. During that visit and subsequent trips to the west coast, funded by the Australian Research Council, Luise worked on the Wirangu language, mainly with Doreen and Gladys Miller, and also with Molly Peel, Lexie Kent and Iris Burgoyne (see also Nathan, this volume). During 1997 and 1998 Luise worked on her Wirangu linguistic data producing a detailed grammar (Hercus 1999; see Monaghan, this volume).

Luise continued to work on land claims and native title claims, carrying out in 1992 some initial fieldwork for the Simpson Desert (Queensland) Land Claim with Philip Jones (SA Museum) and Sarah Holcombe (consultant anthropologist, Central Land Council). The mythology section of the claim is largely based on her earlier work. This also applies to the 1996 Wangkangurru (Northern Territory) land claim, which was conducted by Peter Sutton (Hercus, Jones, Holcombe & Sutton 1996).

In 1997 and 1998 Luise prepared several reports relating to native title claims in northern and western South Australia for the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement. Between 2000 and 2002 she carried out some work for the Wongkumara and Punthamarra native title claims in south-western Queensland, as a sub-consultant to Fiona Powell, the anthropologist engaged by the Wongkumara claimants. Luise visited Bourke, Tibooburra and Cunnamulla on several occasions with Fiona for meetings with claimants and lawyers and also prepared a number of reports relating to her own earlier research with Wongkumara and Punthamarra consultants.

In the late 1990s Luise made several trips to north-western NSW and south-western Queensland to record some of the sites associated with the Seven Sisters History, Kangaroo History and the Two Snakes History. Some details of these histories had been obtained earlier from George Dutton and Alf Barlow by Jeremy Beckett in the 1950s and 1960s. Barry Cundy and Allan Lance, archaeologists

based in Canberra, accompanied Luise on one such trip in May 1998 and investigated grindstone quarry sites near Innamincka and other archaeological sites near Durham Downs. On this trip Luise also recorded some sites relating to the Ghost Woman (Night Owl) History, details of which she had heard earlier from Cecil Ebsworth and George MacDermott, both Wangkumara speakers. The mining company Santos has partly funded some of the work that Luise has undertaken in the Cooper Creek area in the late 1990s.

In late 2000 Luise visited Mudloo Well, a *mikiri* in the north-east part of the Simpson Desert, with Barry Cundy, Peter Clark, the Macdonalds and the NPWS ranger from Birdsville, Donald Rowlands. In April 2005 she went to Birdsville with Philip Jones of the South Australian Museum to carry out detailed documentation of sites in the immediate vicinity of Birdsville and on Alton Downs, with help from Linda Crombie. Further language work on Yarluyandi with Linda proved difficult because of her hearing impairment.

Luise has maintained her interest in locating sites marked on the Hillier map. In June 2003 she visited Lake Gregory with John McEntee of Erudina Station, a documenter of Adnyamathanha language, placenames and the mythology of the eastern Flinders Ranges (see McEntee, this volume). Philip Jones, Vlad Potezny and Kim McCaul (Native Title Unit, SA Crown Solicitor's Office) also accompanied Luise on this trip. They visited a number of Swan History and Goanna History sites in the Lake Gregory area and some sites associated with the Two Pirlatapa Ancestors at Blanchewater. Kim McCaul later accompanied Hercus and Linda Crombie on a trip in November 2003 to the Georgina (Eyre Creek) area to record Swan History sites.

## 10. Recent language revival work

In 1997 Barry Riddeford, a distant relation of Linda Crombie, received a grant from the Queensland Education Department to produce a CD to teach Wangkangurru to children, particularly in Birdsville (*Wangkangurru Language Project* 1997). Linda Crombie was taken to James Cook University, where the project was based, for studio recording sessions; these recordings are much higher quality than any made by Luise in the field. Luise's transcribed and translated these recordings made by Linda, and some made with Ethel Butler (daughter of Maudie Naylon), another Wangkangurru speaker. The CD has never been used in the school in Birdsville, but it does make a major contribution to the study of Wangkangurru.

Luise has worked with Greg Wilson in developing language revival/maintenance programs for the South Australian Education Department with Arabana people (Wilson & Hercus 2004). She has also been involved in further language revival work with Paakantyi and Wemba Wemba people, including working with David Nathan to produce a Paakantyi CD-ROM which contains a talking dictionary, a brief grammar and some texts and songs, for AIATSIS on behalf of ATSIC. This work has been widely circulated in far western NSW but AIATSIS has not yet officially published it (Hercus & Nathan 2002).

## 11. Summary

Over the last four decades, Luise has made about 60 trips to the Lake Eyre region with Aboriginal elders, recording linguistic data, traditional and contemporary songs, mythology and history, as well as documenting sites of traditional and historical significance to Aboriginal people. Most of these trips have been up to four or six weeks in duration. During her fieldwork, Luise has travelled widely throughout north-eastern South Australia, from Marree and Coober Pedy in the south to Witjira, the Simpson Desert and the Diamantina River and Cooper Creek in the north. Her fieldtrips often extended into the southern part of the Northern Territory and the Channel Country of south-western Queensland and north-western New South Wales. Luise has also made numerous shorter trips by car or plane to Port Augusta, Marree, Birdsville and other towns and communities to work with her Aboriginal consultants. Since her first trip to Port Augusta in 1965 Luise estimates that she has spent a total of about five years travelling throughout the Lake Eyre Basin.

## Appendix

*Major interlinking mythological networks recorded by Hercus from Mick McLean:*

1. Rain Myths
  - a. Anintyola and the Arabana Rain Cycle
  - b. The Northern Rain Cycle
  - c. The Ngamini Rain Myth (he only had very fragmentary knowledge of this)
2. The Two Men and Initiation
  - a. Kalamurina
  - b. Great round journey of the Two Men
  - c. The Eastern Journey
  - d. Northern Journeys

*Major lines of myth and song:*

1. The *Urumbula*
2. The Two Snakes
  - a. The Two Snakes in the west
  - b. The Two Snakes in the east
3. Old Man *Thudnungkurla*
4. The Two Boys
5. The Dancing Women
6. The Dead Spirit History
7. The Pounding Dish from *Kadnyawi*
8. *Markinyangkurla*
9. Carpet Snake Histories and Rainbow Serpents
  - a. Western Carpet Snakes
  - b. The Diamantina Rainbow Snake
  - c. Other Rainbow Snake sites
10. Dog Myths

11. The Turkey History
  - a. The Turkey and his Grandson
  - b. The *Wilyaru*
  - c. The Turkey and the Initiands
12. The Grinding Stone Men
13. The Kangaroo
14. The Kestrel
15. *Kadni*, the frill-neck lizard
  - a. Mt Coppertop
  - b. The Female Lizard
16. The Swan and the Getting of Fire
17. Two young men steal a grindstone
18. Goanna Myths
  - a. The Printi and the Goanna Women.
  - b. The Goanna Ancestor *Watyalinha*
  - c. The Goanna and the Printi
  - d. The Goanna and the Ant-monster
19. Night-owls
20. Seven Sisters
21. The Fire
22. Fish Histories
  - a. Origin of the Sunny Creek Quarry
  - b. The Fish and Crane
23. Grubs
24. Emus
  - a. Northern Emus
  - b. The Simpson Desert Emus
  - c. The Emu at *Mierantana* waterhole
25. The Whirlwind
26. Frogs
27. *Kurrkari* and the Goannas
28. The Travels of the Swan
29. The Rainbow Brothers *Wampityi*
30. The Eaglehawk

*Minor or localised Ancestors:*

31. The Two Wicked Old Men
32. Mt Harvey
33. *Muku* Green-ant and *Kaltu* Bull-ant
34. Lice, Mosquitos, Flies and the Marchfly
35. The Moon
36. *Kadnungka*, the Hare Wallaby
37. The Boy who stole
38. The Vengeance Party against the Echidna Woman
39. The Two Pirlatapa Ancestors
40. Poolawani
41. Two Emu Men
42. *Kudnangampa*
43. The Possum

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