



# Kimberley Society

## Book Note

*Return to Majaddin : A Kimberley Homecoming* by Eddie Bear and Robert Hoskin. [Hesperian Press](#), Carlisle, 2017, 181 pages, A4, illustrated, ISBN 978-0-85905-674-8, RRP \$40.

In the introduction, Robert Hoskin describes this book as Eddie Bear's story in which he (Robert) is co-author, narrator and translator. Linguistics come to mind here but they are not relevant. Instead, Robert seeks to translate Eddie's story to a wider readership by 'transporting his words and context into another culture and understanding'.

While *Return to Majaddin* grew out of the work that Robert did for his doctoral thesis, '[Beyond collaboration: trans-cultural journeys in the Kimberley](#)', it is not a recasting of his thesis. Reading both works gives a much broader understanding of the subject matter than just reading one or the other. I was pleasantly surprised to find the thesis easier to read than the book, having thought that Robert's exploration of 'a way of research with and relating to Kimberley Aboriginal people that acknowledges their relationship with the land and each other' might be weighty, dry, or both. It is neither, and its appeal is further enhanced by images of art and sculpture that Robert created on his Kimberley journeys.

A key difference between the two works is that, whereas the thesis is written in a consistent narrative style, the book has a mixture of styles. In the thesis, short pieces of conversation are presented to show how Ngarinyin and Worrorra people shared their culture, country and knowledge with Robert and others. Those pieces, often with indentation and no font change, are an integral part of smooth flowing text. In the book, many of the pages have bands of indented, italicised conversation. I found that layout disconcerting, and only partly because I had to adjust my rapidly aging eyes to each font change. Other readers, of course, might appreciate the visual distinction between Robert's words and those of others.

A determination to make that distinction clear underpins the production of the book. Robert is scrupulous in giving the people who contributed information to the book full credit for their input. But, in doing that, he frequently dons his narrator's hat to explain when, how, or in what context individual comments were made. I found that approach distracting and was glad to see the smooth flow of the thesis reproduced in other parts of the book.

Two other recent works – *Barunga* and *Barddabardda Wodjenangorddee : We're Telling All Of You* – complement *Return to Majaddin*. Taken together, and read in conjunction with other books about Ngarinyin, Worrorra and Wunambal people, some of whom helped to create the old and the new Mowanjum, these books offer an amazing amount of information. *Return to Majaddin* is more than just Eddie Bear's story. It is the story of his family, their relationship with their country, and their involvement with Mowanjum, pastoralists, missionaries, anthropologists, lawyers, townspeople, native title and Munja (a ration station for Aboriginal people). The book's overview of pastoral settlement and life on Munja is bleak, reflecting Mary Anne Jebb's take in her book *Blood, Sweat and Welfare*. Robert notes (page 3) that the history told by Eddie and his family perhaps 'suffers from failing to be critical of what has been experienced, particularly when it comes to the impact of colonialism'. I disagree. Their 'focus on the positive side of their early experience with white pastoralists' is refreshing and very much part of the resilience they show in dealing with life's ups and downs. That, and a great selection of photos, offsets the heavier material presented in other sections of the book.

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