



Kimberley Society

Book Note

We won the victory: Aborigines and Outsiders on the North-West Coast of the Kimberley by Ian Crawford. Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 2001, 335 pages, illustrations, maps. Price \$24.95.

In the introduction to this book, Ian Crawford makes the point that, while Aborigines and whites often relate similar accounts of events, the two groups draw radically different conclusions about those events. The short title of the book, which reflects this phenomena, refers to conclusions about the abandonment of early pastoral settlement at Camden Harbour. Was that abandonment due, as the historical texts claim, to the settlement failing, or was it due, as the Aborigines claim, to the victory they won by using guerilla warfare to drive the intruders away?

Crawford presents Aboriginal oral history recorded during and since the 1960s to bring together stories about contacts between Aborigines and outsiders on the north-west coast of the Kimberley. The north-west coast is seen to comprise, more or less, the section between the entrances to King Sound and Cambridge Gulf. Places relevant to missionary activities included Kalumburu, Pago, Kunmunya, Wotjulum and Mowanjum. Most of the stories relate to events that occurred before the 1960s, and Crawford has combed historical texts to place them in context.

While much had already been published on the topic of missionary endeavours on the Kimberley coast, little had been written about Aboriginal perceptions of their presence and activities. Nor had much been written about the beachcombers and 'other strays' who briefly made their homes on the central Kimberley coast. Crawford does a lot to fill these gaps. Of particular interest to me were the narratives about the small settlements established by Bovril Estates at Bartons Plain Station on the Drysdale River (1914 to 1917); by Jim "Darkie" Deutchman and others on Sir Graham Moore Island (early 1920s); by Willie Reid at Kinganna (early 1920s until 1942/43); and by the Haldane family near Scotts Strait (late 1920s until about 1937).

[The book](#) will appeal to readers who have a general interest in Australian history and/or a particular interest in Kimberley people and localities. It will also help to preserve Aboriginal narratives about historical events and it should, as the author hopes, encourage non-Aboriginal people to think more broadly about the Aboriginal perspective of the events that form part of our shared history.

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