

Four hours later, after a journey of 131 miles, we reached Dashwood Creek, shaded by river-gums, and there we got bogged in the deep sand. Along came Albert with his tribe and their truck, and towed me out. They were camped on the creek, because there was plenty of game, such as kangaroos, emus and a small marsupial called the Euro.

Night fell over Dashwood Creek, as I grilled fresh chops and steak for Albert and his family, with plenty of onions and billy tea.

It was a pleasant sight, with the flickering fires of the camps along the creek, and twinkling stars high overhead.

In appreciation of my cooking, the artist presented me with a fighting boomerang, which he had carved from mulga-wood. On the boomerang he had burned totem-signs with a hot wire.

Snug in my sleeping-bag on a stretcher I had a pleasant night, but rose at dawn to boil the billy and brew some tea.

More steak, then Albert and I hit the track in his blitz-wagon, and we drove ten miles westward across the desert, until Haast Bluff came into sight.

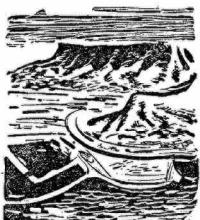
We drove around the valley. Then suddenly Albert saw the view he wanted to paint, so we dismounted and climbed a steep, broken granite hillside, weathered by the wind-blasts, and there he squatted, under the shade of a bloodwood tree.

Ten miles away, across a level plain, thickly covered with grass, spinifex, mulga and gum trees, the Bluff stood out in all its glory.

There are three peaks, the central one, and highest, being called Alumbaura by the Arunta people, who have a legend that the ancestors of the Native Cat, the Emu, and the Honey Ant created this enormous outcrop.

As the artist arranged his paper and paints, he told me that he often wanted to paint the Bluff in the early morning light, flushed with the blue haze on the hillsides, but he always "slept in".

Soon he was working steadily, rubbing a lead pencil on a rock, then deftly delineated the outline of a Ghost Gum in the foreground, and the huge Bluff the full length of the skyline.



Ants irritated me, but the artist ignored them, puffing away at his pipe, or biting a chunk out of an apple with a beautiful set of natural teeth.

With nimble fingers, and deft dabs of colour, while ants crawled across the drawing, he delineated the contours of the jagged ranges.

Eloquently, he outlined the flinty mountain massifs, blending them into soft images, pleasing to the eye. Then he turned the picture around and filled in a deep blue Centralian Sky. Amazing the vari-coloured contrast!

The sun rose higher as the artist toiled away, regardless of ants and flies, while I boiled the billy and we lunched on bully beef, as we'd run out of fresh meat.

At last, as the sun was setting, Albert completed his masterpiece in blues and reds, and we returned to Dashwood Creek, for another pleasant evening around the camp fire.

We sat in my car, and I switched on the wireless to hear the seven o'clock session. It was Coronation night. The announcer, after giving the world news, read a list of celebrities who had been awarded the Queen's Medal.

One was Albert Namatjira. He was handed the decoration, later, at Alice Springs.

While Albert puffed his pipe, he told me of his various exhibitions in the capital cities. The first was in Melbourne, where prices averaged six guineas. A couple of years later, in Sydney, the agents sold 44 of his works for £1,000, which worked out at over twenty guineas a picture.

His next success was at Adelaide in 1946, where some of his pictures were sold for forty guineas. A year later, in Perth, one or two creations brought fifty guineas.

His top sale was in 1948, when 46 landscapes netted the artist £1,519—an average of 33 guineas. Prices are even higher now.

For the next few days, I wandered the hillside of Dashwood Valley with Albert and his three sons, returning to Sydney in triumph with four water-colours of the Namatjira clan, all painted from the same position—and all looking different.

And so I came back to civilisation, pondering over the problem of these sensitive Stone Age artists. They are too advanced to live in the bush, and not enough advanced to stand the strain of living in cities.

Namatjira's paintings are not "primitive", like the Aboriginal Art of cave-paintings, or on bark, in the days before white men lived in Australia. He has the great advantage of using a full range of colours and brushes, on good paper, using the art-implements of the white man.

Instead of imitating other artists, Namatjira just "paints what he sees".

The result gives us an impression of Central Australia's scenery, as it appears to an Aborigine who was born there, and has lived there all his life.

His pictures are easy on the eyes, and a delightful decoration on the walls of any living-room. They are "different" from other pictures, partly because the scenery of Central Australia is "different" from any other scenery in the world—but also because Albert Namatjira is different from any other artist in the world.