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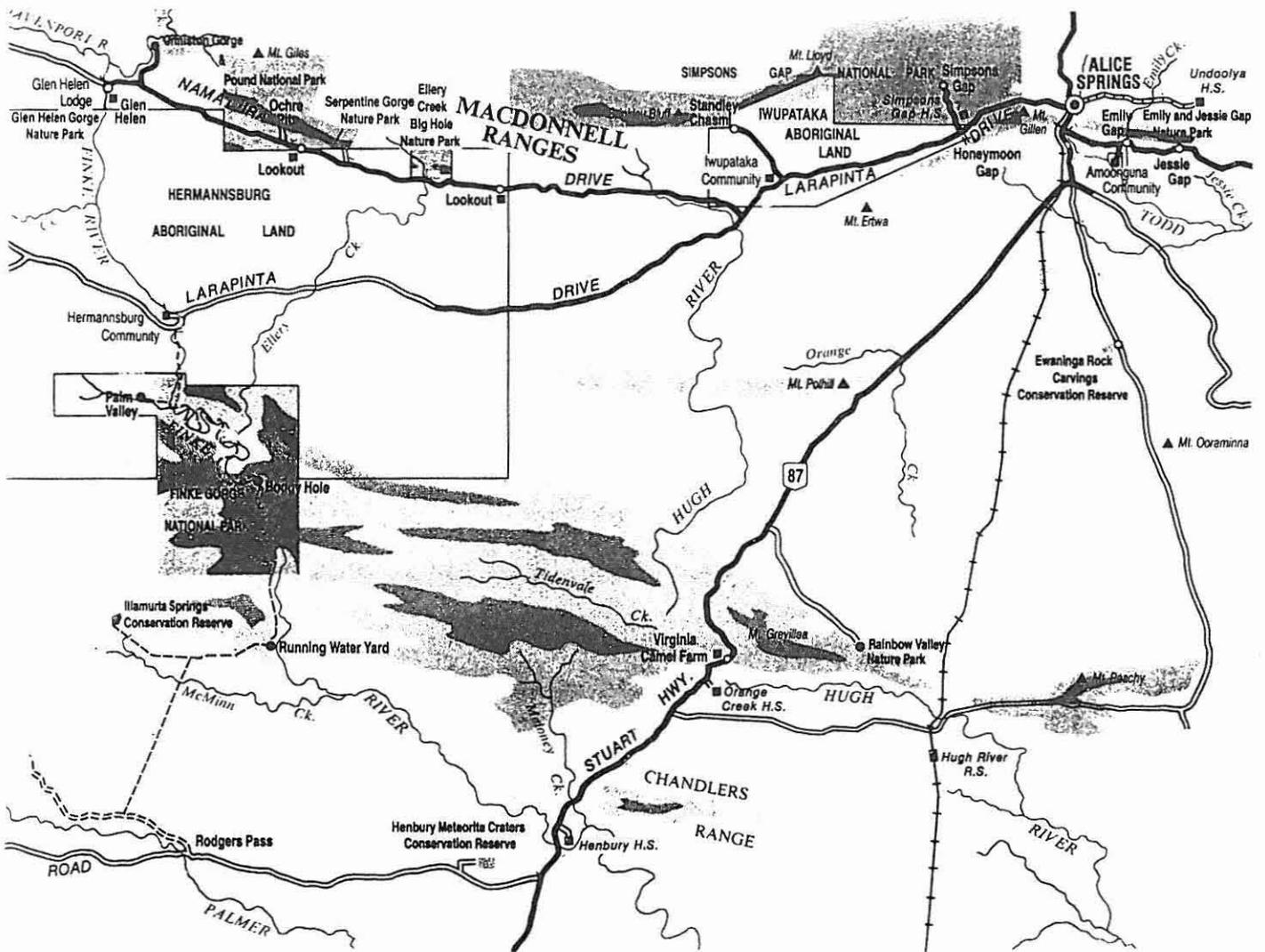
### Sydney University Central Australian Archaeological Project

During June-July 1992 a team from Sydney University's new Prehistory and Historical Archaeology department undertook a pilot season of archaeological survey and excavation in Central Australia. Primary research emphasis in this project is on archaeological sites reflecting the period of Aboriginal-European encounter and subsequent interaction, and the major objective of this and subsequent seasons is increased understanding of interactions between indigenous Australians and non-Aboriginal colonisers in the century following John McDonnell Stuart's explorations of the 1860s.

The project was funded by a Sydney University research grant as a pilot season for a subsequent large-grant application. In this sense it was highly successful, in that both the sites investigated as well as others located proved to be extremely rich in surface remains, and particularly susceptible to the forms of spatial recording, collection and analysis proposed as the strategy of investigation.

The team comprised as project director Judy Birmingham, Senior Lecturer in the department of Prehistoric and Historic Archaeology, School of Archaeology, Classics and Ancient History, and associate director Andrew Wilson, Associate Lecturer in the same department, who supervised the EDM field survey. In all over thirty graduates, undergraduates and other volunteers made up the work force, arriving in two groups. Base camp was set up at a more or less permanent waterhole in the Finke River Gorge National Park, and the support and encouragement of the Northern Territory Conservation Commission throughout our stay, especially of its rangers at Palm Valley, is warmly acknowledged. The PHA landcruiser, together with its trailer, was an equally indispensable part of the camp's infrastructure.

The sites chosen for initial investigation were two early police camps, Boggy Hole P.S. (1889-91) and Illamurta P.S. (1894-1912), set up in the vicinity of the Finke River not far from Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission (1877-1982) to control the 'hostile' activities of local Aborigines. The construction of the Overland Telegraph, completed in 1872, had aroused new interest in the grazing possibilities of the Centre, and at first the Aranda and other desert people appeared friendly. The first clash of interests occurred when a group of Aborigines, concerned for their tribal lands and hunting grounds, were reported to have attacked the Barrow Creek Telegraph Station north of Alice Springs, an event which triggered a phase of increasing hostility and violence in European-Aboriginal relations. The Government, anxious to encourage pastoralism and the opening up of the interior, were



This map shows the location of the two sites investigated by Sydney University south west of Alice Springs. Boggy Hole P. S. is in the Finke Gorge National Park, Illamurta Springs P. S. in a small Conservation Reserve just beyond the Park boundary on the Henbury pastoral lease.

particularly susceptible to the complaints of the recently-arrived pastoralists that the Aborigines, in response to threats to both their economy and their sacred sites, were reacting by killing the invading cattle. A key figure in the savage events of the 1880s was the notorious Mounted Constable Willshire, involved in a number of Aboriginal atrocities to which the law appeared to turn a blind eye.

This phase culminated in Willshire's appointment, with four native constables, to the Boggy Hole police camp on the Finke River in August 1889: only with his arrest for the murder of two Aborigines in early 1891 did this face of brutal 'pacification' come to an end. The setting up of the next police camp in 1894 at Illamurta Springs, in the heart of the pastoral lands, marked the beginning of a new conciliatory and interactive phase in which food (flour, tea, sugar) was regularly given to the Aborigines. This was presumably successful, since Illamurta P. S. was sufficiently inactive to be abandoned in 1912 in favour of strengthening the police presence at the increasingly troublesome mining site of Arltunga, 120 km north east of Alice Springs.

This project by the Sydney University team follows the completion of seven years' research and excavation at the 1820s colonial mansion site of Regentville on the Nepean River. A primary factor in the choice of the new study area was the interest developed during work on material from the site of Wybalenna on Flinders Island, in which archaeological evidence provided a significantly different viewpoint to that in known texts. The excavation report, planned to be formally launched at the forthcoming ASHA

conference in early November, shows how archaeological information - in this instance of the Tasmanian Aborigines' dietary preferences and living styles- demonstrated a far more active persistence of cultural tradition in the face of European pressures to 'acculturate' than European sources would suggest, and indicates the potential of historical archaeology for investigating cultural processes involved in interaction between colonisers and indigenous peoples. Earlier work by the eminent Sydney University anthropologist A. P. Elkin, and further developed by Mervyn Hartwig, had already laid the foundation of an alternative view, that indigenous Australians, far from being passive recipients of imported culture, selected only such elements of European as they thought advantageous to themselves, ignoring the rest.

Sydney University's historical archaeologists already had a long-standing involvement with central Australia, through the postgraduate work of Kate Holmes, who researched the Arltunga Goldfield from 1977 through the 1980s. Her fieldwork included recording of and surface collection from major mining structures at Arltunga, as well as excavation and survey at the White Range settlement nearby, where the ruins of scattered dry-stone chimneys and walls marked the sites of the miners' houses from the late 1880s to World War II. Her work revealed for the first time the existence and some of the characteristics of this central Australian European-vernacular building tradition, more of which the CAAP identified in the Finke River area to the west. Of particular interest, however, was the identification by the 1978 Arltunga team of non-European structures within the settlement area, a research interest not at that time pursued further. Another important although indirect linkage was the work already under way by a contemporary Sydney University social anthropologist working with Aranda people in the context of the former



Recording the surviving structure known as Boggy Hole 'police station'. Its oddly-shaped 25 sq. m. flagged floor can be seen to the left of the stone chimney base in foreground, reconstructed when the Finke River (beyond the trees) flooded disastrously in 1988.

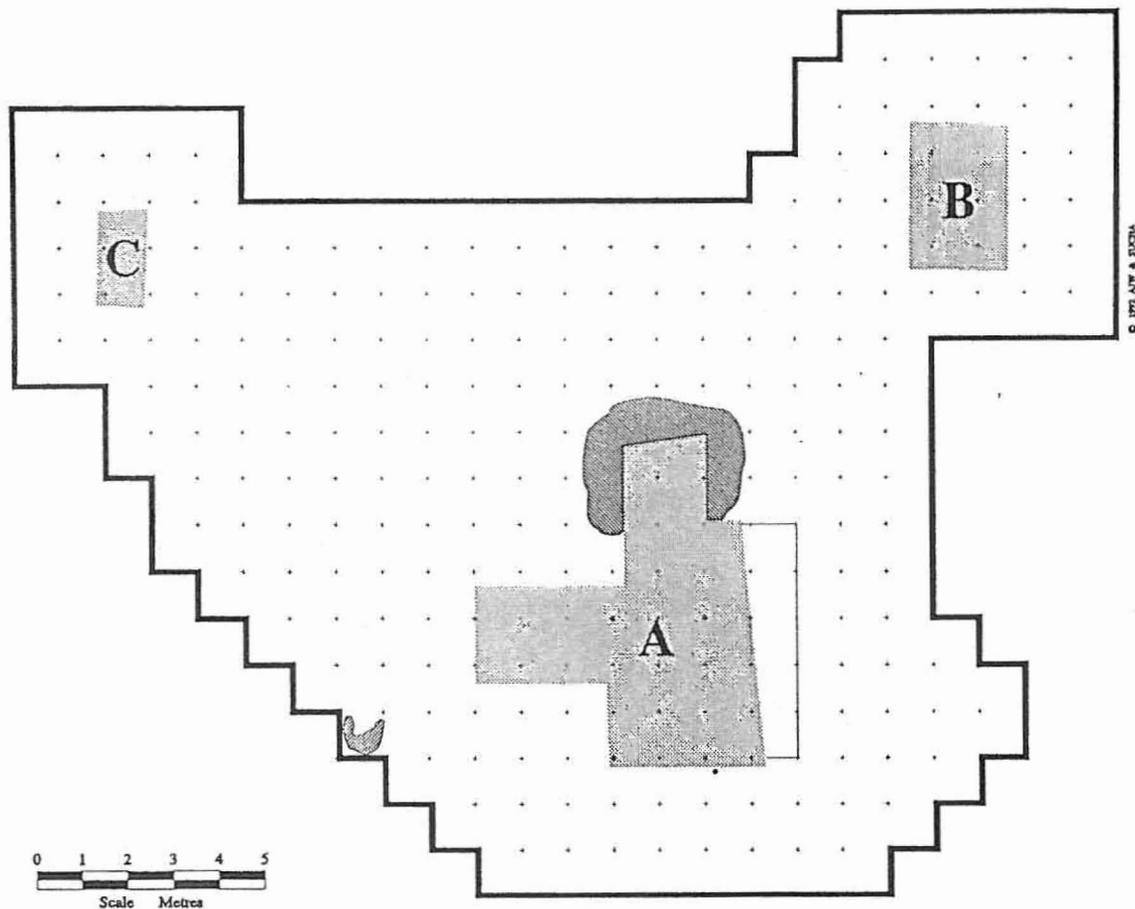


Excavating adjacent to the main structure (A) at Boggy Hole and its two outbuildings (C in foreground). This revealed abundant evidence of occupation in the sandy alluvium, both Aboriginal and European, and also established there were no other structural features below the surface.

Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission, Associate Professor Diane Austin Broos: the value of building on to existing bodies of international academic data, such as for example, Strehlow's monumental account of the Aranda, can be a significant factor in the choice of research locations.

Choice of precise sites - unseen, since there were no funds for a preliminary visit - was made on the basis of discussion with the Conservation Commission (NT), who had certain conservation priorities for historic sites on which they welcomed archaeological assistance. A mutually advantageous program was thus completed, and permission for archaeological work requested - and granted - in terms of the newly-declared NT Heritage Conservation Act (1991). The sites bracket the century following Stuart's first encounters of the 1860s, and concentrate on places where a European presence and activity is documented in an area inevitably of prior Aboriginal land use and presence.

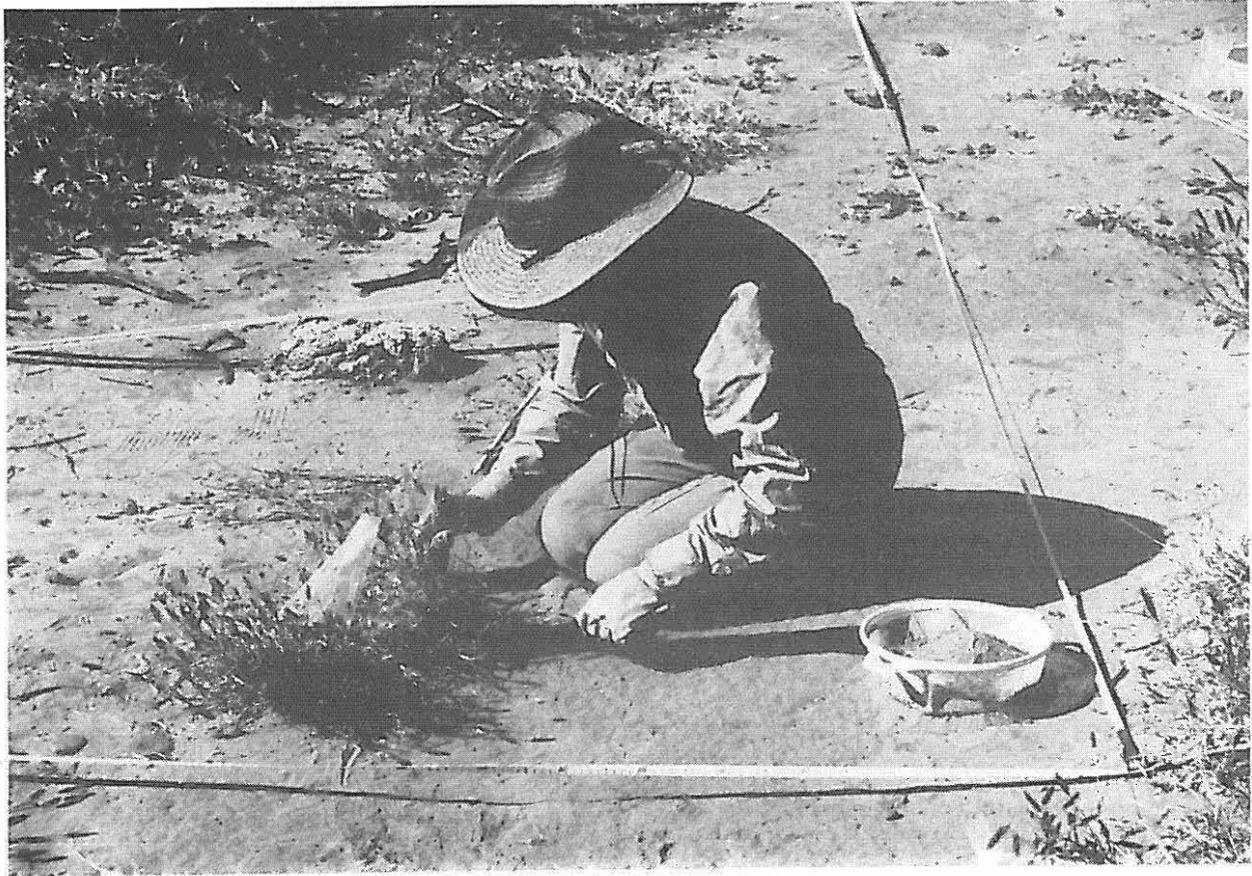
The Boggy Hole police camp, strategically placed at the junction of a major creek with the Finke, on a traditional Aboriginal camp site, had been badly scoured by the 1988 Finke River flood: the damaged structures were then extensively reconstructed. There had also been some vandalism of ground scatters, and in view of increasing tourist visitation it was decided to salvage as much archaeological information as possible from the site before further damage. The first task was the detailed recording of the existing structures to identify their original form and subsequent changes. After completion of this record by planning and photography, and following consultation with traditional custodians, the



This plan shows the standing structure known as the Boggy Hole police station (Structure A), and the two flagged areas (B) and (C) which appear to be the surviving flooring from outhouses. The outline indicates the excavated area (Site 1).



A complete 45 calibre bullet recovered during the excavation of the Boggy Hole Police Camp. This type of bullet would have been used in the famous Colt 45 and similar hand-guns. Such artefacts are a vivid reminder of the policy of violence and aggression towards Aborigines which was implemented from this Police Camp.



Intensive surface collection in Site 5, to the north of the historic site. The surface of each 1m quadrat was hand-brushed into a scoop, sieved through a 2mm mesh, bagged and taken to Sydney for processing. Large grinder pieces and anvil stones were photographed and left in situ.

decision was made to excavate around the main structure (A) for any non-visible evidence surviving of its original form and function. It was also necessary to establish whether any other buildings now vanished had once existed.

Excavation around and between the three structures comprising the historic site (Site 1) yielded a general light scatter of occupational material just on and below the surface, both European and Aboriginal, with concentrations in front of (south of) the main structure (A), and all around the western outbuilding (C). Analysis of this material is in progress, but it is already clear that while the European finds - cartridge cases, shot, bullet cases and whole bullets as well as bottle glass and personal items such as buttons - were found in the immediate vicinity of the structures, the Aboriginal material - primarily flaked stone - while equally present around the buildings also extended far beyond them. Particular interesting will be the distribution of a third category - items of European origin recycled by the Aborigines, which requires a more complex form of analysis.

Only one structural feature was in fact revealed by excavation, despite meticulous investigation, a substantial post hole just outside the middle of the south side of the flagging in Structure A, confirming the evidence of patterning in the flagging that here was the door. The negative evidence firmly established that the walls and roof were supported on horizontal base-plates, and not on vertical posts. It must be said that beyond this many questions remain to be answered about the original structure: its wayward plan and orientation are particularly striking, and a search for comparative material in the form of

descriptions and photographs of related vernacular structures around the Centre is now under way.

In order to extend the collection of material to areas beyond the immediate environs of Site 1, a survey was undertaken and a grid laid out over an area 500m x 200m east from the river bank as far as the creek bed, and extending back to the top of the range. This grid served as a basis for both the excavation of Site 1 and also for surface collection within transects extending to and beyond the limits of surface material. Within the transects were areas of intensive surface collection immediately to the north of the excavation (Sites 3, 4, 5, each 30m x 30m.). The areas were selected as far as possible where transects crossed surface material under most threat. Surface collection was carried out in 1m quadrats, brushing all surface material into a 2mm screen and bagging it. The transects, together with their areas of intensive collection, were selected to reflect a range of variables related to power, control and resistance - proximity to desired resources (water, lithic materials, hunting-collecting terrain, traditional and sacred places), favourable topographic features (shade, breezes, camp sites, soft ground, viewpoints). They extended from the river margins across the soft alluvial grassland - the original Aboriginal living site - into and up the rough, rock-strewn range, and radiating out from the European structures (sited firmly on the favoured areas for pre-European occupation). Analysis of the collected sample will be both spatial and technological.

At Illamurta P. S., a site south west of Boggy Hole on an old course of the Finke, and on the edge of the sandhill country, a number of ruins and other features were identified and mapped, and the major standing structures recorded in detail. No excavation was carried out there this season. Again the primary task was an overall survey as a basis for setting out sample collection areas and transects from the central European area to the limits of surface scatter finds. Intensive surface collection followed, sampling an area some 10m x



One of several vernacular stone structures at Illamurta Springs. Documentary evidence of 1911 describes the station building here as a lop-sided shanty of white-ant infested mulga sticks with a pitted earth floor. The stone building illustrated, however, with its thick walls, narrow opening and cell-like form remains the popular choice.

30m. Two transects were laid out, a long one extending south from the range parallel to the creek, west of the site, and the other running due north from the northernmost European structure. It was evident that the Illamurta site had suffered less damage and attrition than Boggy Hole (although visitation is also now increasing), and also that a European occupation of eighteen years, rather than two as at Boggy Hole, had left a more substantial archaeological presence.

Between them the two sites cover both the Willshire phase of racial hostility (1880s) when the Aborigines may be predicted to have kept a healthy distance from white men synonymous with aggression, musket or rifle shot, and massacre, and the subsequent reaction and conciliation phase, when Aboriginal interaction with Europeans may be predicted to have increased and changed in character. The historical record to date comprises British policy and counter-policy, missionary viewpoint and pastoral mythology: it will be interesting to see what archaeology has to add to an indisputably biased picture.

Judy Birmingham, University of Sydney.

Photographs and plans, Andrew Wilson.

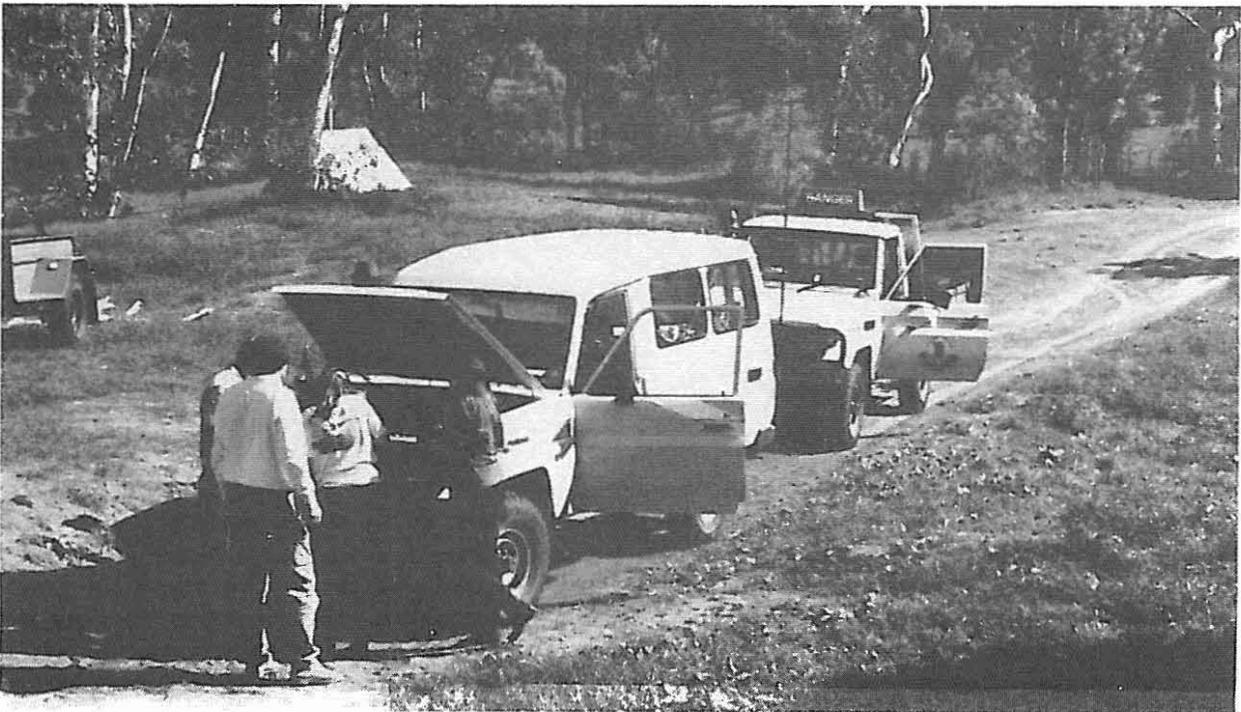
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Team members learning to use the short-wave radio, courtesy of the Conservation Commission. The team camped at the Boggy Hole waterhole an hour's four-wheel drive from Hermannsburg, and two and a quarter hours from Alice Springs. Contact was maintained by scheduled calls at 8.30 each morning