

Boats

Gatirri's canoes, mission luggers, and the barges that supply the islands

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This is a draft paper that will be continually updated with new information as it comes to hand.

Summary. This companion paper in the Planes, Roads, Automobiles set turns to the sea. It opens with the founding story of Mata Mata as it has been told to the author: Gatirri Burarrwaja, a legendary builder of dugout canoes, lent his canoes to the Warramirri people when they fled, and they allowed him to run Mata Mata. It traces the lipalipa (dugout canoe) that came with the annual Makassan trepang voyages, Matthew Flinders' meeting with the prau commander Pobassoo in the English Company's Islands in 1803, and replaced the bark canoe for sea travel; the tinnie that in turn replaced the lipalipa, and the sea journeys families still make when they can afford the fuel; Donald Thomson's 1935 walk towards Mata Mata in search of his boat; the Methodist mission luggers that supplied Milingimbi, Elcho Island and Yirrkala; and today's barge services from Darwin to Galiwin'ku, Milingimbi and Gove. It sets out what is publicly known about barge freight costs and landings, notes how much is not published, and proposes a subsidised coastal boat service from Galiwin'ku to the homelands and Nhulunbuy.

This paper is a companion to Planes, Roads, Automobiles: The Realities of Life on NE Arnhem Homelands (Botsman 2026). It links to the Mata Mata Transport feature on isx.org.au (<https://www.isx.org.au/features/planes-roads-automobiles-bush-taxis>).

1. Gatirri's canoes

The founding of Mata Mata, as it has been told to the author, is a story about boats. Gatirri Burarrwaja was, as it has been told to the author, a legendary builder of dugout canoes.¹ When the Warramirri clan were forced to flee, Gatirri lent them his canoes. In return the Warramirri allowed him to run Mata Mata.² This paper presents that account as the family's founding story, in the form in which it was told, and does not add to it.

Published accounts agree on its frame. Mata Mata was first a Warramirri place and was established as a Burarrwaja homeland “with Warramirri imprimatur”; the area was “entrusted to Mr. Burarrwaja after a catastrophic war raid by a rival clan group”, and a marine landing site and bush runway were cut by hand from the mangroves in the late 1940s or 1950s.³ Gatirri died at Elizabeth Bay in 1964, on a walk along the coast with his family; in 2016 his daughter Mrs Batumbil Burarrwaja and her sisters retraced that walk, with an outboard dinghy carrying their gear from beach to beach.⁴ The searches made for this paper found no published record of Gatirri’s canoe building; that part of the story rests on the account given to the author.

The story is a reminder that Mata Mata is a coastal homeland. It lies on the Arafura Sea, facing Inglis Island, the largest of the English Company’s Islands, across the Nalwarung Strait and about 64 km west of Gove Airport.⁵ It is not an inland settlement. Boats were part of how it was founded, and the question asked at the end of this paper, whether boats could again carry more of its freight, follows from that.

2. Bark canoes and the lipalipa

Before Makassan contact, Yolŋu travelled on water in stringybark canoes (derrka). These were suited to freshwater travel and crossing estuaries, but not to the open sea.⁶ From at least about 1700, and on Macknight’s account from about 1720, fleets of praus sailed each year from Makassar in South Sulawesi to the Arnhem Land coast, which they called Marege, to collect and process trepang for the Chinese market. The trade continued until 1907, when government action ended it.⁷

The visitors brought metal: blades, knives and axes. With them Yolŋu could make large dugout canoes. Macknight concluded that the Arnhem Land dugout was based on Makassarese prototypes.⁸ The lipalipa was carved from a single log, often of the soft-wooded bombax, and was rigged with a woven pandanus sail of Makassan design (dhomala). It could cross open water under sail, and it widened both marine hunting and contact between coastal families.⁶ Its stability as a harpooning platform made the hunting of dugong and turtle more productive, and some coastal economies turned further towards the sea.⁹ Within living memory, Yolŋu still travelled the coast in lipalipa.⁶



Figure 1. Herbert Basedow, "Boys in a dugout and two bark canoes, Apsley Strait, with Melville Island in the distance, Northern Territory", 1911. National Museum of Australia; public domain, via Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Boys_in_dugout.jpg). The photograph is from the Tiwi Islands, not north-east Arnhem Land, but shows the two kinds of canoe side by side.

The earliest written account of the fleets on this coast is Matthew Flinders'. On 17 February 1803, having rounded Cape Wilberforce in the *Investigator*, Flinders saw a canoe full of men and, in a roadstead at the south end of a large island, six vessels "covered over like hulks". Taking them at first for pirates, he cleared for action; but they proved to be "prows from Macassar". Through his Malay cook he spoke with their chief, "a short, elderly man, named Pobassoo", who told him that there were sixty prowes on the coast in several divisions, under a commander-in-chief named Salloo.¹⁰ According to Pobassoo, the sixty prowes belonged to the Rajah of Boni and carried a thousand men, and had left Macassar with the north-west monsoon two months before. Each prow was of about twenty-five tons with twenty or twenty-five men, and their object was trepang, which they dried, carried to Timor and sold to the Chinese. Their food was "rice, cocoa nuts, and dried fish". Pobassoo had made six or seven voyages to this coast in the preceding twenty years, and said he had been one of the first to come.¹¹ Flinders gave him iron tools and an English jack, which Pobassoo flew at the head of his squadron, and a letter to show to Captain Baudin.

Flinders called the anchorage Malay Road. He named its two islands Pobassoo's Island and Cotton's Island, the latter "after captain Cotton of the India directory". The islands around it he named Wigram's, Truant, Inglis, Bosanquet and Astell, "mostly after gentlemen in the East-India directory", and he called the whole cluster the English Company's Islands "in compliment to that respectable body of men, whose liberal attention to this voyage was useful to us and honourable to them". From Cotton's Island he also saw distant land to the north-west, which he took to be the "Wessel's or Wezel's Eylandt" of the Dutch charts, now the Wessel Islands.¹² Inglis Island, the largest of the group, is the island Mata Mata faces across the Nalwarung Strait.⁵ Macknight's history of the trepang industry draws on this account, among others.⁸ Local knowledge at Gi'kal, near Mata Mata, holds that a rock near the homeland bears the initials MF, said to have been carved in 1803.¹³ The inscription is not documented in published sources. Flinders'

own account of the days in Malay Road, from 17 to 22 February, describes landings on the islands of the group.



Figure 2. William Westall (artist) and Samuel Middiman (engraver), "View of Malay Road, from Pobassoo's Island", plate in Flinders, *A Voyage to Terra Australis* (1814). Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Voyage_to_Terra_Australis_-_View_of_Malay_Road,_from_Pobassoo%27s_Island.png). A hand-coloured version of this view, with its coconut palms, illustrates the author's paper "Dhanu dhuka (Making the way)" (2024).

Cape Wilberforce, which Flinders rounded that morning, is Dholtji to the Warramiri. Ian McIntosh, drawing on the accounts of the Warramiri leader David Burrumarra, describes Dholtji as an entrepôt of the Macassan era. He traces the collapse and dispersal of the Warramiri clan at Dholtji in the 1800s as a consequence of the Macassan encounter, and the clan's later resurgence on Elcho Island.¹⁴ It was towards Elizabeth Bay and Cape Wilberforce that Gattirri walked with his family in 1964, and where he died.⁴

3. Lipalipa and tinnies

Within a generation the lipalipa gave way to the aluminium dinghy, or tinnie, with an outboard motor. In north central Arnhem Land the last canoe voyage between Maningrida and Waruwu, about 250 km of coastline, was made in 1982, and tinnies had begun replacing canoes well before then. A journey that took four to five days by canoe now takes four to five hours on calm water. Williams, working with Maningrida elders, notes the cost of that speed: people no longer camp along the way, and the slow travel in which elders taught the young about the coast has largely gone.¹⁵

The two craft differ on every count that matters for a homeland budget. A dugout was made from a tree with hand tools; it needed no fuel, only paddles or a pandanus sail and the wind, and its range was set by the weather and the endurance of its crew. It also

demanded great skill and labour to make, which is why a builder such as Gatirri was so valued. A tinnie must be bought, and its outboard needs fuel, servicing and spare parts. Studies of dugong hunting in the Gulf of Carpentaria found that outboards widened the range and frequency of hunting by removing the labour of paddling, but required “a large initial outlay” and continuing money for fuel and repairs.¹⁶ Fuel is the heaviest recurring cost: in March 2022 petrol in Arnhem Land passed \$3 a litre.¹⁷ At Mata Mata, Mervyn Garawirritja put local figures on this. A tinnie with a 30 hp outboard costs about \$5,000. He paid \$22,000 for a bigger boat with a bigger engine, and now plans to sell it and buy a tinnie, because of what the larger engine costs to run in fuel.¹⁸ Beyond his figures, no published data were found on the price of boats landed in East Arnhem, the working life of either craft, or fuel use on typical homeland routes, so a full comparison cannot be made here.

Sea travel remains a living part of homeland transport. Gaypalani and Mervyn Garawirritja today think nothing of long sea journeys along this coast; what stops them making more of them is the price of petrol.¹⁹ Planes, roads and vehicles are usually treated as the whole of homeland transport. The sea is another dimension of it, and one that families already use and could use more if its running costs were lower.

The sea is also dangerous. W. Lloyd Warner, the American anthropologist who worked from Milingimbi in 1927–29 and whose *A Black Civilization* (1937) is the first full ethnography of the region, recounts how he and his friend and principal informant Mahkarolla nearly perished at sea. That account is given here as Peter Botsman has read it; the passage could not be consulted directly for this paper, and no details are added to it.²⁰ Warner’s book also records Yolŋu canoes and their sails, paddles and anchors, and the Makassan influence on them.²¹

The author’s own journeys to Mata Mata have crossed the same country. In April 2015, weeks after Cyclone Lam had crossed the coast between Milingimbi and Elcho Island on 19 February and Cyclone Nathan had swept across north-east Arnhem Land from 18 March, he drove in from Darwin with three visitors and found the last 50 km of road to Mata Mata blocked by thousands of fallen trees. With a chainsaw, and with Ian and James Gurruwiwi, who joined them on the second night, the party cleared about seven kilometres of road over three nights on the track.²² Lying awake in his swag among the damage, he was thinking of the journals of Donald Thomson.

Thomson, a Melbourne anthropologist, went to eastern Arnhem Land for the Commonwealth in 1935 after the Caledon Bay killings, stayed until September 1937 apart from a break in 1936, and secured the release of three of Wonggu’s sons from prison in Darwin.²³ In July 1935, after meeting Wonggu, he walked from Port Bradshaw (Bawaka) across the Gove Peninsula towards the country around Mata Mata and Gi’kal, starving and searching for his boat, the *St Nicholas*. Weak with dysentery, his leg stiff and swollen and the food gone, he feared his companions might slip away in the night: “I decided to push on while my strength lasted. I believed the boat could not be far away.”²⁴ At one river crossing his Yolŋu companions lashed driftwood together with green bark, laid sheets of tea-tree bark on top and swam him across on the raft while he paddled with his hands.²⁵ An online transcription identifies this as the Peter John River. A mineral prospect

of that name lies about 32 km south-east of Mata Mata. The author's 2015 article says Thomson named the river after his sons. Thomson did have two sons by his first marriage, but the sources consulted for this paper give neither their names nor the origin of the river's name.²⁶ A month earlier, in June 1935, an attempt to reach people at Bennet Bay from Edward Island, in which his companions swam with log rafts because no canoe was to hand, had, in Thomson's words, "very nearly cost two of us our lives".²⁷ The July walk was not Thomson's better-known crossing to Blue Mud Bay, which ran south from the Crocodile Islands.²⁸ Both episodes show how much travel on this coast once depended on canoes and boats, and how dangerous it was to be without one.

4. Mission boats

The Methodist missions on the north-east coast depended on boats. In 1922 the Methodist Missionary Society bought the Thursday Island pearling lugger *Picton* and renamed it the *J.M. McBride* to supply Goulburn Island and Milingimbi. Harold and Ella Shepherdson reached Milingimbi on it in 1928, and it was wrecked in Rolling Bay in 1929 or 1930.²⁹ Dugout canoe races at Milingimbi in those years were run around the *McBride*, moored opposite the site of today's barge landing.³⁰ The *McBride* was followed by the *Marree*, a power boat named the *George Urquhart*, and the 56-foot *Larrpan* built by Norman Wright. After the war the mission acquired the Army vessel *Aroetta*, and later the *Larrpan II* and the *Warrawi*, by which time five missions needed regular supply.²⁹ In August 1942 the *Larrpan* moved people and equipment from Milingimbi to found the second Elcho Island mission.³¹ In 1950 the government medical officer Cecil Cook recorded Elcho Island as the headquarters of the "auxiliary luggers" serving the Methodist stations, and noted that Yirrkala shared an auxiliary lugger with the other stations.³² The mission boats were later sold as commercial barges took over the supply routes.²⁹



*Figure 3. Pearling luggers at Thursday Island, about 1920. Photographer unidentified. State Library of Queensland; no known copyright restrictions, via Wikimedia Commons ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pearling_luggers_at_Thursday_Island_\(24739940817\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pearling_luggers_at_Thursday_Island_(24739940817).jpg)). The mission's first supply vessel, the *J.M. McBride*, was a former Thursday Island pearling lugger.*

5. The barges today

Scheduled sea freight to the Arnhem coast is now provided by a small number of commercial operators out of Darwin. Sea Swift has run a scheduled service in the Territory since 2014, when it acquired Tiwi Barge. In 2017 it was using four landing craft in the NT. It suspended some routes in 2014 and resumed a weekly service to Elcho Island, Ramingining and Milingimbi in December 2015 to support cyclone recovery.³³ In 2016 the ACCC reviewed Sea Swift's proposed acquisition of Toll Marine Logistics' northern assets. It noted that a new entrant might serve only the major ports such as Gove and Groote Eylandt, leaving smaller Arnhem Land destinations reliant on Sea Swift, and the parties offered undertakings on minimum service frequency and a price cap indexed to CPI, with fuel and port charges passed through.³⁴

Sea Swift's published schedule for September and October 2026 shows weekly voyages from Darwin to East Arnhem, calling at Milingimbi about four days after departure, and a separate Darwin–Gove voyage taking about three days, with chilled and frozen freight received in Darwin up to the morning of sailing. Galiwin'ku has a Sea Swift agency depot receiving barges twice a week.³⁵ Auriga Marine also runs landing barges to Arnhem Land communities including Milingimbi, Ramingining and Galiwin'ku.³⁶ The services are fragile. The industry evidence put to the ACCC in 2017 was that no operator had been able to make a full scheduled service to the remote NT communities profitable, and that only the larger routes, among them Darwin–Gove, were reliably profitable.³³ When the Auriga barge to Wadeye ended in September 2025, the alternative quotes were reported to be more than 70 per cent higher.³⁷

Sea Swift's schedules are public; its freight rates are not. No published tariff for any Arnhem Land destination was found for this paper. The best public evidence comes from the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA), which runs the community stores at Galiwin'ku and Milingimbi, among others, and which in 2016 described its coastal and island stores as using sea freight "for everything", mostly with a single barge delivery a week.³⁸



Figure 4. A landing barge loading vehicles at the barge landing on South Goulburn Island (Warruwi), western Arnhem Land, August 2017. Photograph by Lance Cpl. Damion Hatch, US Marine Corps; public domain as a work of the US federal government, via Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:G-Wagon_ambulance_guided_onto_barge_at_South_Goulburn_Island_in_2017.jpg).

6. What sea freight costs

ALPA told the ACCC's supermarkets inquiry that freight is about 9 per cent of costs for its stores reached by road but can be as high as 39 per cent for stores supplied by barge. It gave a worked example: a base pallet rate of \$400 becomes \$524 with a 31 per cent fuel levy. The levy is reviewed monthly; it ranged between 5 and 10 per cent in 2021, reached 57 per cent in 2022, and was between 27 and 31 per cent at the time of the submission.³⁹ ALPA told a parliamentary inquiry that freight for barge stores is three to four times that for road stores, and that barge-dependent stores must also buy and run their own trucks to move goods from the landing to the store.⁴⁰ Air freight is a different order of cost: when floods cut the Lajamanu road in March 2023, ALPA paid more than \$19,000 per flight carrying at most 1,000 kg of goods.³⁹

Landings are public infrastructure. NT contract records show a \$259,625 cyclone-recovery upgrade of the Galiwin'ku barge landing in 2015 and a further \$16,711 for its concrete barrier in 2016, and a design contract for a new barge landing at Gapuwiyak on the Buckingham River to replace a riverbank beach landing.⁴¹ No published record of a barge landing or scheduled sea-freight service for Mata Mata was found. Nor was any breakdown found of how much of the NT's marine infrastructure spending is funded by the Commonwealth rather than the Territory.

7. Could boats carry homeland freight?

On 7 October 2026 David, visiting Mata Mata from Galiwin'ku for a funeral, told the author that he had bought about \$600 of groceries at the ALPA store in Galiwin'ku and would pay a further \$200 to have them flown to Mata Mata.⁴² The freight added a third to

the cost of the food. The ALPA figures suggest the scale of the gap: a barge store pays freight of up to 39 per cent of costs, and a full pallet costs a few hundred dollars to ship from Darwin. But the weight of David's groceries was not recorded, and no published rate exists for a small boat between Galiwin'ku and Mata Mata, so a like-for-like comparison cannot yet be made.

What can be said is this. Galiwin'ku already has a twice-weekly barge, a depot and a funded landing, and Mata Mata lies on the same coast. Families travel that coast by dinghy now,⁴ limited mainly by the price of petrol.¹⁹ A regular boat run from Galiwin'ku to the homelands, scheduled around the barge and the store, could in principle carry groceries, fuel and building materials more cheaply per kilogram than a chartered aircraft. Whether it would depends on matters this paper has not been able to establish: the cost of a suitable vessel and crew, the safety of the passage in the wet season, landing conditions at Mata Mata, and who would run and fund the service. The Planes paper concluded that boats should be considered alongside planes and vehicles.⁴³ This paper adds that the evidence needed to do so, above all published freight rates, is not yet public.

The author proposes such a service: a government-subsidised coastal boat running from Galiwin'ku along the coast to the homelands.⁴⁴ The route he describes runs east from Galiwin'ku past the Wessel and English Company's Islands to Mata Mata on the Nalwarung Strait. It would turn into Arnhem Bay for Rorruwuy, the Dätiwuy homeland on the bay's eastern shore, and Nyinyikay, also on Arnhem Bay,⁴⁵ then run along the coast to the pearl farm at Elizabeth Bay, about 40 km north-west of Nhulunbuy, and around to Nhulunbuy itself.⁴⁶ The idea has precedent. Rorruwuy has been described as "traditionally serviced by sea and air from Elcho rather than Yirrkala".⁴⁷ The mission luggers once ran this coast on a similar pattern, out of Elcho Island. A scheduled boat could carry groceries, fuel and building materials from the Galiwin'ku store and barge landing, and passengers too. It would be an alternative to the charter flight that cost David \$200 to move his groceries a short distance along the same coast.⁴² Boats would be especially valuable in the wet season. The bush tracks from the Central Arnhem Road into the homelands are often badly damaged each wet, some homelands are cut off, and even the main road has been closed for long periods; before the Goyder River bridges were built, the road was closed at the Goyder for about four months a year.⁴⁸ When the roads are cut, the only alternative now is air freight, which ALPA's Lajamanu example shows can cost more than \$19,000 for a load of at most 1,000 kg.³⁹ A coastal boat would keep groceries and fuel moving to the homelands in the months when trucks cannot.

The proposal needs finessing, and this paper does not cost it. The cost of a suitable vessel, its crew and its fuel is not established here. Nor are the frequency the homelands would need, the landing conditions at each stop, safe operation in the wet season and through cyclones, the permits required, or who would own and run the service. A Yolngu-owned operator, or the homeland resource organisations, could be among the candidates. What can be said is that the homelands along this coast pay air-charter prices for freight that, on the evidence of ALPA's barge costs, is far cheaper to move by sea. A subsidised coastal service could therefore improve living conditions on the homelands dramatically, for families' food and fuel and for travel to funerals, clinics and family. It deserves to be

designed and costed with the homeland communities and assessed against the subsidies already paid for air services.

8. Conclusion

Mata Mata's founding story begins with canoes, and the coast has carried Yolŋu, Makassans, missionaries and their supplies for centuries. Families still travel the coast by tinny when they can afford the petrol. The plane carries people, and the dead, home; the road carries what it can when it is open; and the barge carries most of the food and fuel to the island and coastal towns. These are not rival modes but one transport system, and homeland families pay for its gaps. A system that published its freight rates, scheduled boats, planes and vehicles to meet one another, and funded landings and airstrips as part of the same plan would serve the homelands better and more affordably. A subsidised coastal boat service from Galiwin'ku along the homeland coast to Nhulunbuy, carrying freight and passengers, should be designed and costed as part of that plan. It would be of most value in the wet season, when roads are cut and the only alternative is air freight, and it is the most promising way of bringing sea transport back to the homelands that boats helped to found.

Notes

1. Peter Botsman, personal communication, October 2026. No published source describing Gatiirri Burarrwanga as a canoe builder was found in searches under the spellings Gatiirri, Gartiirri, Gatjirri and Gathirri.
2. Peter Botsman, personal communication, October 2026, recounting the founding story of Mata Mata as told to him. The story is given here as told; it has not been checked against other accounts.
3. Botsman, Peter (2019), Mata Mata Creative Trust (prospectus), Working Papers: Mata Mata "created by Gatiirri Burarrwanga and his family in the late 1940s/1950s", with "a marine landing site and bush runway ... cut by hand from the mangroves close to a former Warramirri settlement that was entrusted to Mr. Burarrwanga after a catastrophic war raid by a rival clan group". Mata Mata Homelands, "About Mata Mata", matamatahomelands.com, seen 7 October 2026: established by the Warramirri people "and then with Warramirri imprimatur, the Burarrwanga family".
4. Botsman, Peter (2024), "Dhangu dhuka (Making the way)", Working Papers, 1 July 2024, on the 1964 walk and Gatiirri's death at Elizabeth Bay, and on the 2016 re-walk with an outboard dinghy "ferrying tents and belongings from beach to beach".
5. Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, "Gumatj", yirrkala.com, seen 7 October 2026 (Matamata "facing towards Inglis Island across the Nalwarung Straits"). Mata Mata Homelands, "About Mata Mata" (on the Arafura Sea near Inglis Island). ExplorOz, "Mata Mata NT", place 26359 (12°04'36"S, 136°16'14"E; 63.6 km from Gove Airport).
6. Garland Magazine, "Treasures from Marege: Yolŋu-Makassan trade today" (on the Yolŋu/Makassan project), seen 7 October 2026: lipalipa carved from bombax with Makassan metal tools and rigged with dhomala sails; stringybark canoes (derrka) restricted to freshwater

travel and estuary crossings; Makassan contact ended by South Australian government action in 1906. Moon, Diane, "Djirrit: A Macassan sail dhawu", Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, collection.qagoma.qld.gov.au, seen 7 October 2026.

7. National Museum of Australia, "Trade with the Makasar", Defining Moments, seen 7 October 2026 (trade from at least 1700 to 1907; metal tools used for "making large dugout canoes"). Wikipedia, "Makassan contact with Australia", seen 7 October 2026, summarising Macknight (1976) on the start of the industry about 1720 and on dugout canoes based on Makassarese prototypes.
8. Macknight, C.C. (1976), *The Voyage to Marege: Macassan Trepangers in Northern Australia*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, as summarised in the Wikipedia article cited above.
9. Wikipedia, "Aboriginal dugout canoe", seen 7 October 2026, citing Mitchell, Scott, "Dugongs and Dugouts, Sharptacks and Shellbacks: Macassan Contact and Aboriginal Marine Hunting on the Cobourg Peninsula", *Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association Bulletin*, pp. 181-191.
10. Flinders, Matthew (1814), *A Voyage to Terra Australis*, London: G. and W. Nicol, vol. 2, pp. 228-229 (17 February 1803). Transcription at Wikisource, "A Voyage to Terra Australis/Volume 2/Book 2/Chapter 9", seen 8 October 2026.
11. Flinders (1814), vol. 2, pp. 230-233.
12. Flinders (1814), vol. 2, pp. 233-234.
13. Peter Botsman, personal communication, October 2026, recounting local knowledge at Gi'kal. No published record of the inscription was found in searches made for this paper.
14. McIntosh, Ian S. (2006), "A Treaty with the Macassans? Burrumarra and the Dholtji Ideal," *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 7(2): 153-172, abstract and AIATSIS catalogue summary (a381017); AIATSIS place record 106561, "Dholtji / Cape Wilberforce".
15. Williams, Sam (2024), "Of canoes, tinnies and helicopters: contemporary maritime mobility and place relations in north central Arnhem Land," *Maritime Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40152-024-00391-z>; Charles Darwin University, "Transport study reveals why journey is as important as the destination" (2024); SBS NITV, "Connection to Country a journey from canoe to dinghy" (2024).
16. Memmott (1979), p. 308, and Memmott and Trigger (1998), p. 121, as cited in a study of dugong hunting on Mornington Island, southern Gulf of Carpentaria; Marsh et al. (1980), p. 258, on 4-5 m aluminium dinghies with 9-40 hp outboards.
17. ABC News, "Fuel price cracks \$3 per litre in Arnhem Land, putting pressure on remote communities," 10 March 2022.
18. Peter Botsman, personal communication with Mervyn Garawirritja, Mata Mata, October 2026.
19. Peter Botsman, personal communication, October 2026.
20. Peter Botsman, personal communication, October 2026, from his reading of Warner, W. Lloyd (1937), *A Black Civilization: A Social Study of an Australian Tribe*, New York: Harper (rev. edn 1958). The passage itself could not be consulted for this paper: the digitised copies on archive.org are lending-only and their text could not be searched. The 1958 edition's sketch "Mahkarolla & Murngin Society" is at pp. 467-490 (AIATSIS, Aboriginal Biographical Index, B

- U515.15/A1). Warner's fieldwork, based at Milingimbi, was in 1927–29: Australian Dictionary of Biography, "Warner, William Lloyd".
21. AIATSIS catalogue record M0053945, summary of A Black Civilization, including "canoes and tools for sailing (use of sails and paddles, anchors)" and "Malay influences on social and material culture".
 22. Botsman, Peter (2015), "When the World Turns Upside Down: A Glimpse of the Impact of Cyclones Lam and Nathan on Remote Aboriginal Homelands," Working Papers, 5 May 2015, <https://www.workingpapers.com.au/papers/when-world-turns-upside-down> (PDF, pp. 3–9 and addendum).
 23. Australian Dictionary of Biography, "Thomson, Donald Finlay Fergusson (1901–1970)", adb.anu.edu.au, seen 8 October 2026.
 24. Botsman (2015), "When the World Turns Upside Down", pp. 6–9, quoting Thomson, Donald, Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land, compiled and introduced by Nicolas Peterson, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2003, p. 90.
 25. Thomson, Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land (Peterson ed.), p. 91, as transcribed at surfresearch.com.au, "1930 Thompson Arnhem Land", seen 8 October 2026; the transcriber annotates the passage "Peter John River, Cato River".
 26. Peter John River prospect, 136.49° E, 12.27° S: NT Geological Survey, metadata form, Combined Annual Report on the East Arnhem Land Project 2009–2010 (GR148_2010), geoscience.nt.gov.au. Distance from Mata Mata (ExplorOz, 12.077° S, 136.271° E) worked out here, about 32 km. On Thomson's two sons from his first marriage: Australian Dictionary of Biography, as above. The NT Place Names Register search could not be completed for this paper, and no source consulted gives the sons' names or the origin of the river's name.
 27. Thomson, Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land (Peterson ed.), pp. 49–50, as transcribed at surfresearch.com.au; Botsman (2015), p. 9 ("a journey from Edward Island to Bennet Bay").
 28. Thomson, Donald (1948–49), "Arnhem Land: Explorations among an Unknown People," Geographical Journal 112: 146–164; 113: 1–8; 114, as summarised in AIATSIS catalogue record RP02801 ("crossing of eastern Arnhem Land from Crocodile Islands to Blue Mud Bay").
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