

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE VALUE

Rrkwer/Yurrkuru (Brooks Soak)

Rrkwer/Yurrkuru (Brooks Soak) is on an area of land just over two square kilometres in area owned by the Yurrkuru Aboriginal Land Trust in the Lander River region, north-west of Alice Springs. It is a freshwater soakage or spring where Aboriginal people traditionally camped and obtained water, particularly during dry times.

Rrkwer/Yurrkuru (Brooks Soak) has strong cultural significance for Anmatyerr and Warlpiri peoples. There are three principal Dreamings associated with Yurrkuru and the surrounding area - bush honey (jurlarda), women (karnta) and bandicoot (walpajirri).

In more recent history, Rrkwer/Yurrkuru is the place where the violence that led to the last recorded massacre of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory began. On 7 August 1928 dingo trapper Frederick Brooks was killed by Aboriginal people in this location. This resulted in a series of punitive expeditions led by Constable George Murray, which involved Aboriginal people being tracked over several weeks across a large area. Official records state that 31 people were killed at six different sites during the reprisals. Later archival research and oral histories place the death toll at more than twice as high.

A 1929 Board of Enquiry found that the police acted in self-defence and that the killings were justified. The findings of the Board can be seen as a complete failure in the administration of the legal system of the day. However, the public outcry against the massacre and the enquiry resulted in sanctioned punitive expeditions no longer being considered an acceptable form of punishment.

The Coniston Massacre provoked a significant change in the way that Aboriginal people occupied their country in the short term, with many fleeing to other places after the violence. It represented a pivotal event in the experience of the impact of white settlement on Anmatyerr and Warlpiri peoples of the Lander River region, and has left a traumatic mark on the lives of many people in Central Australia.

A memorial established at Rrkwer/Yurrkuru acknowledges the lives lost, and provides a focus for memorial events. The memorial is also a reminder and symbol of the failure of the nation to formally apologise for frontier killings or to make any meaningful act of reparation.

Frederick Brooks' grave is located within the defined heritage area. It is a significant lone grave and tangible reminder of events which led to the Coniston Massacre.