

2.3.4.2 European exploration, pastoralism and gold mining

With colonization many changes to Warlpiri ownership and management of country occurred. The first known European exploration of the Tanami Desert was the expedition led by A.C. Gregory in 1855 which passed near present day Lajamanu (Meggitt 1962). Other expeditions by J.M. Stuart in 1860 and both W.C. Gosse and Colonel P.E. Warburton in 1873 only reached the edges of the Tanami (Meggitt 1962). It was not until 1896 that the first known crossing of the Tanami Desert by a European occurred. Nat Buchannan, who previously in the 1880s had moved cattle into and established Wave Hill Station, crossed between Tennant Creek and the Victoria River in the hope of finding a suitable stock route between the Barkly Tablelands and the Western Australian goldfields (Gibson 1986).

At this time areas around the Hanson and Lander Creeks were under claim for pastoralism, but by the end of a drought in 1905, most small holdings were no longer operating (Gibson 1986). The bigger pastoral leases of Mt Doreen, Mt Denison, Stirling, Mt Barkly, Coniston and Willowra were established in the south and the west of the Tanami region between 1917 and 1951. It was not until the 1960s that pastoral interest in the region increased again. This followed a survey by the Lands and Survey Branch and the Animal Industry Branch of the Northern Territory Administration looking for suitable pastoral areas (Gibson 1986). Supplejack, Chilla Well and Tanami Downs pastoral stations were established not long after. Today, a number of these pastoral stations are under Aboriginal management as a result of successful land claims under the *ALRA* (see Appendix 13. Key pastoral stations within the Tanami Desert, p.375).

One of the most extensive explorations of the Tanami region was carried out by Allan Davidson, a geologist looking for gold in 1900 (Meggitt 1962). With reports of gold in the south west of the Tanami Desert, prospectors moved into the area with good seasons at the Tanami goldfields in 1908 and 1909 (Gibson 1986). This increased public and government interest in the area. However, little gold was found and most prospectors soon left. In 1932 interest in the Granites goldfield created another rush (Gibson 1986). Today, Newmont Mine, Australia's third largest gold producer, holds the exploration and mining leases for the Granites and Tanami