

**TEN LIVES IN ONE—**

CONTINUING THE REMARKABLE ADVENTURES  
OF WILLIAM L. DAWE, OF BIRMINGHAM

# How I met some pre-Stone Age tribesmen

I SHOULD have known we were heading for trouble, of course, when "Snowey" White and I decided on that gold-prospecting trip to the Petermann Ranges. But then, we were both of us born to trouble—although neither of us bargained for hoodoo and all that that means in the primitive wastes of Central Australia. But more on this subject later.

Across the shimmering, sandy wasteland we plodded to the accompaniment of the shuff-shuff of the camels' pads. We eked out our water to two ounces each morning and night, but soon the dreaded day came when we had none left and the expected water hole seemed as far away as ever.

"Snowey" and I knew that the camels were safe for another two days at least, but we realised how bad our position was. Our tongues began to swell and speech became difficult.

## "Boney's" smell

Our walking dropped to a shuffling drag and each step was torture. Although the black "fellas" made no complaint, like us they knew that we could not last more than another 24 hours without water.

At sundown we made camp. We could not eat, for our throats were too sore and our tongues were so swollen and turning brown. By midnight an icy wind blew up and we lay there shivering in our blankets.

Suddenly "Boney" one of our boys, staggered to his feet, his eyes bloodshot and glazed. Pointing to the direction from which the wind was blowing, he croaked: "By golly, boss, me smellum water." We all got to our feet and stared eagerly into the night as a sudden surge of hope revitalised us.

"How far water?" I asked Boney.

"Him water, two, three miles," he answered.

Leaving our gear on the ground, we took the camels and followed Boney. The camels shuffled along as if reluctant to be moved from camp, and then, after an hour's trekking, they suddenly quickened their pace, and gave several loud coughs and grunts. We knew then that water was near.

With hand raised and sniffing all the time like a bloodhound, Boney led the way. He suddenly gave a great cry and threw himself forward among a cluster of rocks.

We dive down beside him and sucked at the water of the gamma hole like horses, but restraining an urge to drink too liberally to make up for the privation of the previous days. The camels had their fill, and we left them with their noses roped, dangling, knowing full well that they could not stray far. We lay where we had flung ourselves and were soon asleep.

By daybreak we were awake with the pangs of hunger. Catching the camels, we backtracked to the spot where we had left our gear and while "Snowey" was attending to the tucker the boys and I went on to the gamma hole to fill our water-bags.

We rested all that day, because our throats were still sore, although our tongues had



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returned to normal. The next morning we set off again on the gold-hike.

We now entered a sea of grey-green, impenetrable mulga. Not an opening in that heavily-timbered country through which the camels could pass. For days we toiled with axes to cut a lane through the mass of dense forestry.

At night, utterly worn out by the efforts of the day, we lay awake smoking, gazing up at the stars, and talking about the gold find we felt certain lay beyond.

## Dingo howl

Gradually we passed through the heavy mulga and entered spinifex and salt-bush country. By now the camels' pads were in bad shape, the ground of the last few days having played havoc with them, and so when we approached a soak holding plenty of water we decided to rest for a few days.

That night we lay in a silence made more intense by the occasional crackling of a leaf as if some nocturnal animal were prowling around. As we lay listening with our eyes turned to that band of blue sky studded with diamonds, we heard the long-drawn howl of a dingo answered by its mate from far away.

Micky and the other boys huddled close together, grasping their spears tightly and muttering fearfully to themselves.

"What's the matter?" I called out in their lingo.

"Him dingo howl, him fright me," answered Micky. "Me smellum bad time. Me tink we no all go back."

"Micky," ordered Snowey, "you go longa that hill look-about. Maybe you see black-fella track down longa 'nother side."

But Micky stood aghast. "What the hell!" rasped

'Snowey.' "Have you seen a ghost?"

Micky stared appealingly in the light of the fire. "Sadka," he whispered.

"Snowey" and I knew that "Sadka" is a word denoting terror to some Central Australian aboriginal tribes and realised that nothing would induce Micky and his colleagues to reconnoitre the hills. To the black fellas Sadka means a spirit force which, in certain circumstances, influences their lives for ill from birth to death, and even into the afterlife.

So we did the reconnoitre ourselves, but we felt uneasy and decided it would be best to move on.

We trekked for days on end. The spinifex gave way to sand dunes and the sand dunes to lightly-scattered mulga country. Then we hit upon a particularly good gamma-hole and decided to make camp here for a few days to rest and replenish our supplies of food and water.

## Like camels

Here I first came across black fellas who had not yet entered the Stone Age! They approached timidly, yet with an almost defiant mien as if they had the right of possession and we were the intruders.

Each man had a tooth missing. Chest and shoulders were marked with warrior's scars and their naked bodies gressed with goanna fat.

By degrees women came towards us, mostly in pairs. They were shy and big-eyed, wild as desert rats, yet drawn to us by an insatiable curiosity.

"Snowey" and I had many a smile at the dress of these women. Although the vast majority was completely naked, some had picked up cast-off clothing from a previous white expedition and these clothes, torn to shreds in the fight for the "wonder material," were now worn proudly but—in the wrong places!

These natives filled up with water like camels and I learned that even the women were capable of trekking five days without water.

Naked piccaninies spied the camp from the cover of bushes. They were wild-eyed kids who had never known a wash in their lives. Their hair was tangled with grass seeds and thick with the ashes of camp fires. Their bellies protruded like pumpkins.

## I was afraid

We came on other tribes not so friendly. One day when

"Snowey" and Micky were out prospecting, a nomadic tribe wandered into our camp. Their leader walked forward, making signs of peace, of "water," "food" and "sit down." Then he spread his arm towards his tribesmen who buried their weapons in the sand.

I welcomed them, but inwardly I was afraid of them and their strength. We had intended to vacate the camp, but I knew that to do so while they were there would invite attack.

I cursed "Snowey" for being away, but I dare not send the black fellas after him, for that would have created suspicion in their minds. All I could do was to wait and keep within reach of my rifle. I was resolved to sell my life dearly.

[To be continued next week]

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