

# PRESS RELEASE

## Jack Dale A Kimberley History



**At around nearly ninety years of age, artist Jack Dale is the living embodiment of the meeting of two diverse cultures in the remote Kimberley region. As perhaps the last custodian of all the Wandjina Spirits residing in the Imanji region, Jack is fiercely proud and knowledgeable about the region's lore and history and this is self evident in his spare yet powerful paintings of the Wandjina Spirits and their country.**

However, as a child at the time, Jack was also an observer of the influx of "Kartiya" (whites) as well as many other cultures into the West Kimberley and Jack's paintings document these sometimes very violent and confusing times. Images of rifle toting police in dark uniforms and chain-gangs of Indigenous people feature in some of his striking artworks and are juxtaposed with wondrous paintings of Afghan Camelers praying and wagons being pulled by long trains of donkeys.

Jack Dale was born in the bush at Mt House Station in the West Kimberley around 1920. His early life was marked by the experience of conflict between different cultures. Jack's Aboriginal mother, a Ngarinyin woman, tried to keep her son from his violent white father. Jack Dale Senior was a wild Scotsman renowned for his harsh uncompromising character, who once shot his own son in the leg to stop him from running away.

On the death of his father, Jack returned to his maternal family and was brought into traditional Ngarinyin Law by his maternal grandfather. His traditional country is Imanji, located near Mt House Station. Jack went on to lead a remarkable life that bridged both cultures. He was a highly regarded head stockman and bushman, as well as a respected tribal Elder and Lawman.

Jack began painting in the 1990's, working with traditional ochre pigments. He has made large ceremonial boards used by traditional dancers to re-enact Dreaming stories. He has used his extensive cultural knowledge to record aspects of the Wandjina Dreaming sites of his people. He has also recorded his own memories from a long life lived at the frontier of Kimberley life, recalling the historical changes he had witnessed. These have included the arrival of Afghan camel drivers, the enforced captivity of Aboriginal workers, the conflicts between whites and blacks, the work of missionaries, and other sometimes humorous memories from life in the stock camps.

Jack Dale is assisted in his work by his wife, artist Bidy Dale, and other close members of his family including his daughter Edna Dale. Today Jack spends his time between the Kimberley town of Derby and the community at Imanji on his traditional lands.

Jack describes parts of his early life as follows:

*"My father worked for a man called Scotty Saddler, he came from Scotland. All my family worked for this man. My father Jack Dale and Scotty killed plenty of Aborigines 'cleared them out' for the cattle, when it was clear they claimed the land.*

*We saw plenty of men walking along the bush road to Derby; they were all chained up "poor bugga's". The boss man took them to Derby and then to Fremantle. I was just a kid hiding in the long grass watching. They were tied up outside and inside the prison tree, never took the chains off. Poor old blackfellow didn't know what he was being killed for.*

*My mother told me about my father shooting people, my father would not tell me. He shot me in the leg one time and always tied me up to a tree with a dog chain in the hot sun. I thought he was going to kill me, I was always frightened. I tried many times to run away to my mother and grandmother's country in the bush. He was always drunk. Him and his mates, grog and the hot sun made their minds crazy.*

*My father died at Mount House, killed himself on grog. After he died my Grandmother took me bush. They grew me up at Lady Forest Ranges, King Leopold. I was a real bushman, no clothes on, we had a hair belt cover. We ate kangaroo, yam, and goanna. We didn't leave the ranges, too frightened of the police. My grandfather saw plenty of shootings and we were all scared. I was there a long time.*

*That's why I know every Wandjina my grandfather showed me, you can only put your Wandjinias in paintings nobody else's that all. I have foot-walked this country (my Country) plenty of times. This is a proper dreaming place. I never get lost. Toyotas, they just make tracks."*

"Jack Dale – a Kimberley History" is an important exhibition that uniquely examines both the ancient, timeless spirituality of this remote region as well as documenting the impact of migration of foreign cultures and traditions into this landscape.

Health and energy permitting, Jack Dale will be attending the opening of his exhibition at 6.30pm on Friday, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2006.

**Opening 6.30pm Friday the 24th March, open seven days, until 30th April, 2006  
@ Japingka Gallery, 47 High Street, Fremantle**

**Gallery Hours: Mon - Fri: 10.00am-5.30pm Sat: 10.00am-5.00pm Sun: 12.am-5.00pm. FREE ENTRY.**

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