



# STICKY BEAK

An irregular column of profiles

Working in remote areas offers unique opportunities and experiences to professionals such as lawyers and anthropologists that are not available to those working in cities. Alt.LJ talked to two Alice Springs women, Ruth Morley and Julia Munster, whose legal training has taken them on quite a unique journey into remote Australia.

### What is your job?

**Ruth:** I'm a solicitor for the Pitjantjatjara Council. I have worked there for two years. The legal department is like a civil community legal centre. We also conduct legal research and present submissions to peak bodies and government on a range of issues. I work on the Pitjantjatjara lands in South Australia.

**Julia:** I'm an anthropologist doing native title work for the Central Land Council. I am based in Alice Springs but work throughout the southern half of the Northern Territory.



Julia Munster

### What are you running away from?

**Ruth:** Pass. Nothing really. It was more like I was running to something. Life is much freer here than Sydney. Camping is a way of life! Bush walking is great. And I cannot ever see myself working in the city again (famous last words).

**Julia:** Not sure — I'll need therapy to answer that. I wanted to explore anthropology in a practical setting and at the time, the Central Land Council in the NT offered professional development and adventure for a new graduate.

### Did you work in the big smoke before running away? What do you think of work in a small town and travelling out bush?

**Ruth:** No — I was a law student and then my first job three years ago was with a small private firm in Alice Springs as an articled clerk. I love working out bush, although it is demanding. Most meetings are held in creek beds with a BBQ lunch. Tough life??

**Julia:** Yes, but not as an anthropologist or a paid lawyer. There is an intensity and preciousness to our work and lives here which is both positive and negative. Professional isolation is less of an issue than I expected — there are probably more anthropologists (and lawyers) per capita in Alice Springs than anywhere else in Australia. However, outside professional and personal support is important, particularly given the nature of our work.

### Describe a typical bush trip

**Ruth:** I am currently travelling to Whyalla in a convoy of three troop carriers with 15 senior women and their grandchildren. We are on our way to a sacred site inspection — the site is between two iron ore mines and is to do with the Seven Sisters Dreaming. As I write, two vehicles have veered off the road chasing emu to take to family in Port Augusta on the way, and for lunch. Last night we camped and the women sang and danced the stories of where we are going all night. They sing and dance in the cars too. We will be at Whyalla two days, and then return to Alice Springs, which is two days driving.

**Julia:** Bush trips are never typical, but they generally share the same essential characteristics:

- they are never boring (in my experience), and



Ruth Morley (2nd from left)

they require vast amounts of energy, and doses of good humour, flexibility and careful organisation and an appreciation of the privilege of the job, even in trying conditions.

A typical trip to conduct research might involve 1-10 vehicles travelling across a stretch of country, visiting and recording details of sites and of Aboriginal people's connection to that country and to each other. We carry food and water, and camp out for up to 10 days at a time. We are often at least a day's drive from a town. We frequently get bogged or blow a tyre and the driver is always at fault. We spent time searching for bush tucker, lamenting missed opportunities and feasting on successful missions. In between, a lot of work is done and we return home physically and mentally exhausted.

### What is your preferred vehicle?

- (a) Toyota Troop Carrier
- (b) Toyota Troop Carrier Trayback
- (c) Toyota Land Cruiser

**Ruth:** Toyota Land Cruiser — very comfy and luxurious.

**Julia:** Land Rover.

### What is your preferred lip balm?

- (a) Poppy 'Anger'
- (b) Poppy 'Courage'
- (c) Vaseline

**Ruth:** Right now I'm wearing 'Red Earth' Sweet Mandarin lip balm.

**Julia:** Vaseline — a little goes a long way.

### What do you like most about your job?

**Ruth:** Times like these. Long culture trips with the Ngaanyatjarra, Yankunytjatjara, Pitjantjatjara Women's Council.

I think it's important to live and work in Central Australia as the emphasis is not on my culture, but on Aboriginal culture and you learn a lot. Australian culture extends beyond the coast. I also love dancing with the women.

**Julia:** Bush trips. When I began three and a half years ago I couldn't believe that I was being paid to drive a truck through some of the most spectacular landscapes in the world, listening to old ladies bring the country to life with their songs, stories and dances. A 'Girls' Own adventure!!' Working with and for them, to record aspects of their law and culture is personally and professionally rewarding. Learning to master the inadequacies, intricacies and requirements of native title law and process is intellectually challenging, though demoralising and frustrating.

**Are your legal skills and training relevant or helpful in your work as an anthropologist?**

**Julia:** They are certainly relevant and, on balance, helpful. Much of my work is framed and limited by legislation and the common law, and by legal process imperatives. Research is not conducted willy nilly, but in accordance with specific evidentiary requirements. It is helpful to have a foot in both legal and anthropological camps, given their inter-dependence in native title work and the historical mutual distrust and disrespect Land Council lawyers and anthropologists have had for each other. On

the other hand, there are times when too much emphasis on legal matters hinders anthropological analysis.

**Who do you get to help you when you get a flat tyre?**

(a) *your dog*

(b) *Royal Flying Doctor Service*

(c) *accept that no-one is anywhere near to help and grapple with the kangaroo jack*

**Ruth:** I am worried about the hunting that's going on — I hope I will not be called on to change a flat tyre.

**Julia:** (c), or if I'm not travelling alone, plead with my passenger to assist.

**What is your PB for hurling a swag onto the roof of your vehicle?**

(a) *10 m & one handed*

(b) *5 m & two handed*

(c) *!@#\*\$*

**Ruth:** (c).

**Julia:** (c).

**How do you keep yourself in shape out bush?**

**Ruth:** I am thinking when we get to Port Augusta I might have a swim while the women visit their families. Otherwise it's the roof rack stretches, bull bar crouches, swag hurling.

**Julia:** See last two answers.

**What is your preferred music when driving?**

**Ruth:** The ladies I am travelling with are demanding I produce Gospel and

Country/Western tapes. Michelle Shocked, Warumpi Band, Archie Roach, Techno (for those really long solo drives), Indigo Girls, are all my favs.

**Julia:** Variety is important, especially for long trips. I like to take Paul Kelly, Michelle Shocked, a bit of jazz or classical, Celtic music, daggy 70s (and 60s) for singalongs and loud rock/heavy metal to keep me awake at the end of a long day. However, I rarely travel alone and my passengers usually veto my music. They prefer country icons — Conway Twitty, Patsy Cline, Warren Williams, Frankie Yamma, The Hermannsburg Ladies Choir.

**Where do you see your career heading?**

**Ruth:** Next month I start a new job as Regional Development Officer with the Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs, NT. So I'm turning into an arts administrator! I never really intended to be a lawyer. Anyone out there with any great ideas for touring community arts projects, give me a call!

**Julia:** Not sure. I'm reaching the point where I need to choose between developing my skills as an anthropologist (more study perhaps?), touting for work as a baby solicitor or trying something completely different. No decisions just yet though — I'm enjoying this job too much.

*Grog War article continued from p.80.*

The Chairman of the Liquor Commission reminded Tenant Creek that it had been invited in 1994 to improve the quality of life in their community. The community should not assume what has been achieved is the best that can be achieved. Regulation alone is not the entire solution.

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Sitting back in his office, [Julalikari General Manager] Dave Curtis was still pondering the backlash he sensed was being planned by the licensees as soon as Maley had delivered his decision. He took note of the look on their faces as they huddled to complain outside of the court as the media swooped onto him. Everyone knew it was Dave Curtis who led the two-year crusade to convince the town that it could change the things it didn't like, simply by working together. Once, he was the only voice in the town council that backed the restrictions but now he was in the majority.

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One of the things that bothered Maley was the misinformation that was generated throughout the two years it took to get to this point. For instance, a lot of people kept pushing the need for tourists to be able to get a drink: 'No tourist wants to sit down at ten o'clock in the morning and drink a beer.'

He said he found it difficult for the publican to say on the one hand that 'I lived here all of my life etc. and brought up my family and created employment here etc. and you beaut community things' on the one hand, but between the hours of twelve in the day and nine o'clock at night do things that were deleterious to the community and which they knew were deleterious to the community. He thought it was a real double standard on their part. 'You can't separate yourself from the community for several hours a day while your bank balance swells. And go to church on Sunday morning and say I am part of this community: it is just too bad about the drinking problem.'

He knew he was home and hosed when the liquor trial started to have so many fathers. 'When the mayor started saying that they thought they were lucky they had started this whole process off. Well! It had so many fathers so really the town did it itself. It was an easy thing to do once everyone was sitting down and getting rid of a bit of prejudice.'

Dave Curtis, reflecting for a moment on the historic win, thought that even though the issue had been pretty divisive, in the end everything that happened throughout this process had actually brought the town together.