

AN ABORIGINAL HEALING

OUR YOUNG ARTISTS

CEREMONY



This fine sketch was sent in by Isabelle Johns, of Three Way Bridge, Griffith



Dawn Williams, of Woodenbong, is another young landscape artist



Jean Franks caught the rabbits at play beside the creek

By MICHAEL SAWTELL,
well-known author, traveller and
member of the Aborigines
Welfare Board.

Believe it or not, in 1904, at 21 years of age, I was probably the youngest pioneer in Australia, wandering through the wildest part of our country.

That was the wild Obagooma country ninety miles north of Derby, at the back of Yampi Sound, and I am perhaps the first white man to see Yampi Sound from the land side. There I was a "Poddy dodger", that is a fellow mustering wild cattle, surrounded by about two hundred tribal "munjongs" (bush tribal aborigines). There of course I learned a great deal about aboriginal customs and laws, not from books or lectures but from real, first-hand experience.

Our bush aborigines know a great deal about many forms of magic.

I once had a boy named Paddy, who was about thirteen years old. When he became very sick with malaria, I gave him all the fever mixture I had, but it did him no good, and I thought he would die. So I said to the old men, "Come on, we will sing him". On a beautiful moonlit night we spread Paddy out before the fire. Three old men all done up in ceremonial paint sat one side of the fire, placing their hands upon the boy, and I sat on the other.

When all was ready, I cried, "Call the Doctor man up". Then up came a filthy, dirty looking old black-fellow all dressed up in white ochre, and hair standing two feet above his head, and he had secreted in his mouth a small stone. We then all placed our hands on the boy's stomach, rubbing, and chanting "Ulla Um Boo Brighth Pel Aye". I have no idea what the words mean, I just repeated them after the old men.

After much chanting and rubbing, the old Doctor man put his mouth on the boy's navel and sucked, and at the same time took the small stone out of his mouth, saying to the boy, "Look what the Irrawally put in and I took it out of you". (The Irrawally is the evil spirit.) Then the boy asked "Ding arra?" Which means "true", and we all shouted out at the top of our voices "Ding arra. Ding arra". Which meant as true as possible can be true, and Paddy became well and grew up to manhood. This is a true story.

How did those wild bush aborigines know about the magic of healing?