

The Durack

There's a river that runs
And flows through my mind
In an ancient land
Of my modern time

Broken ribbon of blue
Slicing spinifex and hills
Wild rugged country
Where time's standing still

Where I struggled and I sweated
As I lumped my old pack
And scrambled on rocks
On the mighty Durack

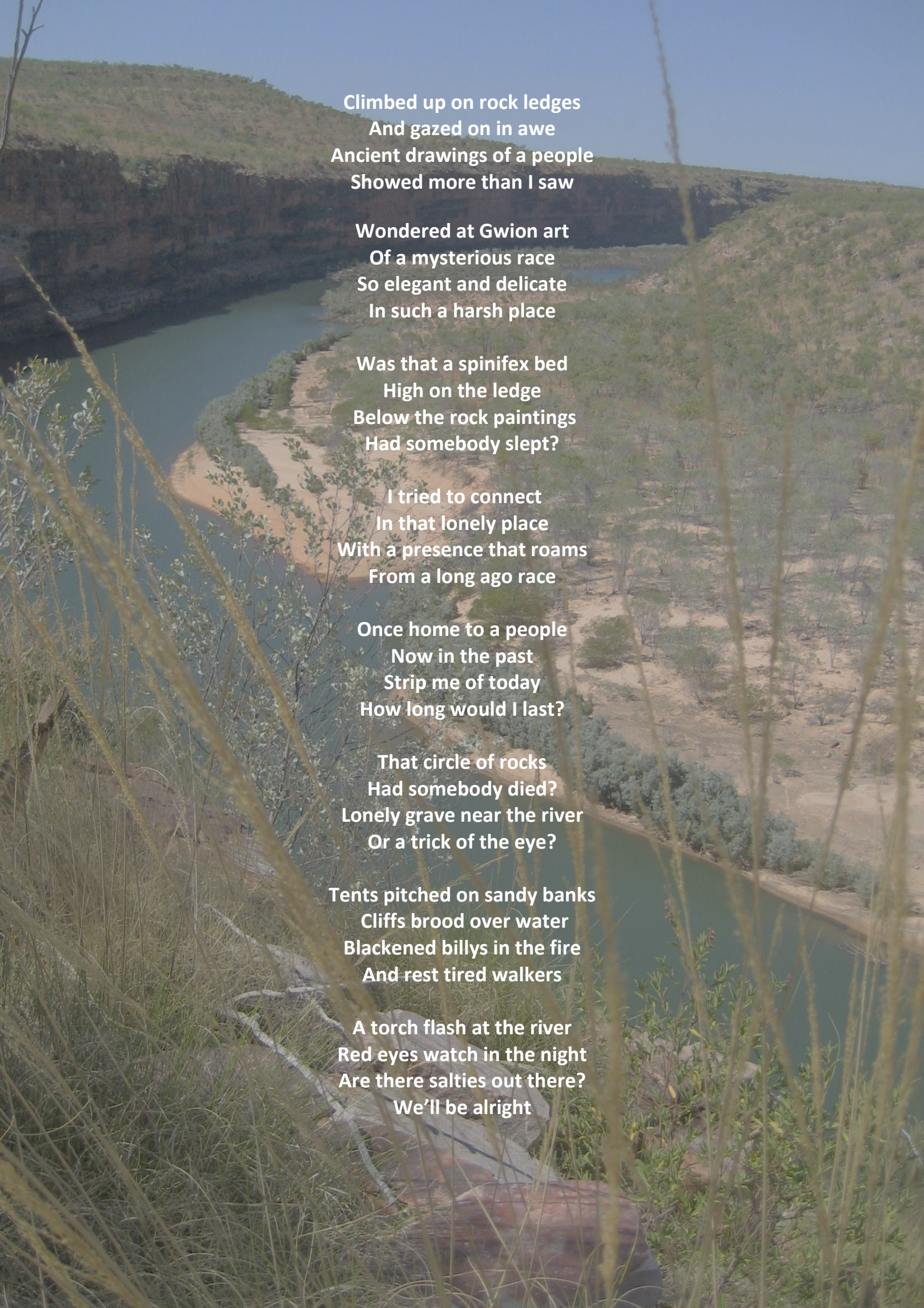
14 days – hard kilometres
12 of us alone
A trek in the wilderness
A long way from home

Cane grass and hot sun
Rocks and more rock
Test yourself on that river
We all learnt a lot

I felt the heat
And shed blood on the grass
Did I feel the land?
Did a spirit pass?

Dreamtime country
So old to understand
The pulse of that river
The breath of that land

Giant stone cathedral
Crystal water at its base
A hush in my voice
Respect for this place



Climbed up on rock ledges
And gazed on in awe
Ancient drawings of a people
Showed more than I saw

Wondered at Gwion art
Of a mysterious race
So elegant and delicate
In such a harsh place

Was that a spinifex bed
High on the ledge
Below the rock paintings
Had somebody slept?

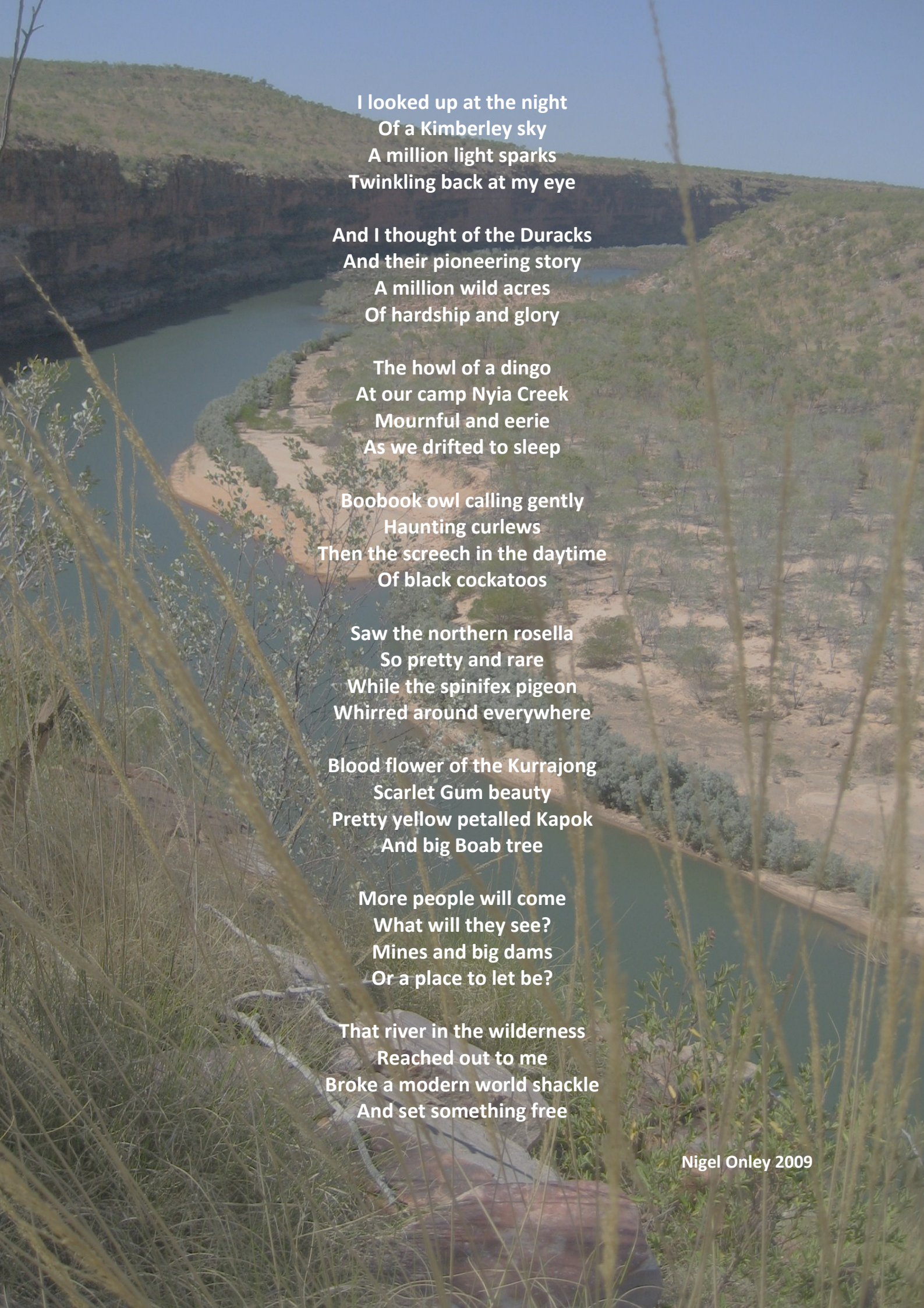
I tried to connect
In that lonely place
With a presence that roams
From a long ago race

Once home to a people
Now in the past
Strip me of today
How long would I last?

That circle of rocks
Had somebody died?
Lonely grave near the river
Or a trick of the eye?

Tents pitched on sandy banks
Cliffs brood over water
Blackened billys in the fire
And rest tired walkers

A torch flash at the river
Red eyes watch in the night
Are there salties out there?
We'll be alright



I looked up at the night
Of a Kimberley sky
A million light sparks
Twinkling back at my eye

And I thought of the Duracks
And their pioneering story
A million wild acres
Of hardship and glory

The howl of a dingo
At our camp Nyia Creek
Mournful and eerie
As we drifted to sleep

Boobook owl calling gently
Haunting curlews
Then the screech in the daytime
Of black cockatoos

Saw the northern rosella
So pretty and rare
While the spinifex pigeon
Whirred around everywhere

Blood flower of the Kurrajong
Scarlet Gum beauty
Pretty yellow petalled Kapok
And big Boab tree

More people will come
What will they see?
Mines and big dams
Or a place to let be?

That river in the wilderness
Reached out to me
Broke a modern world shackle
And set something free

Nigel Onley 2009