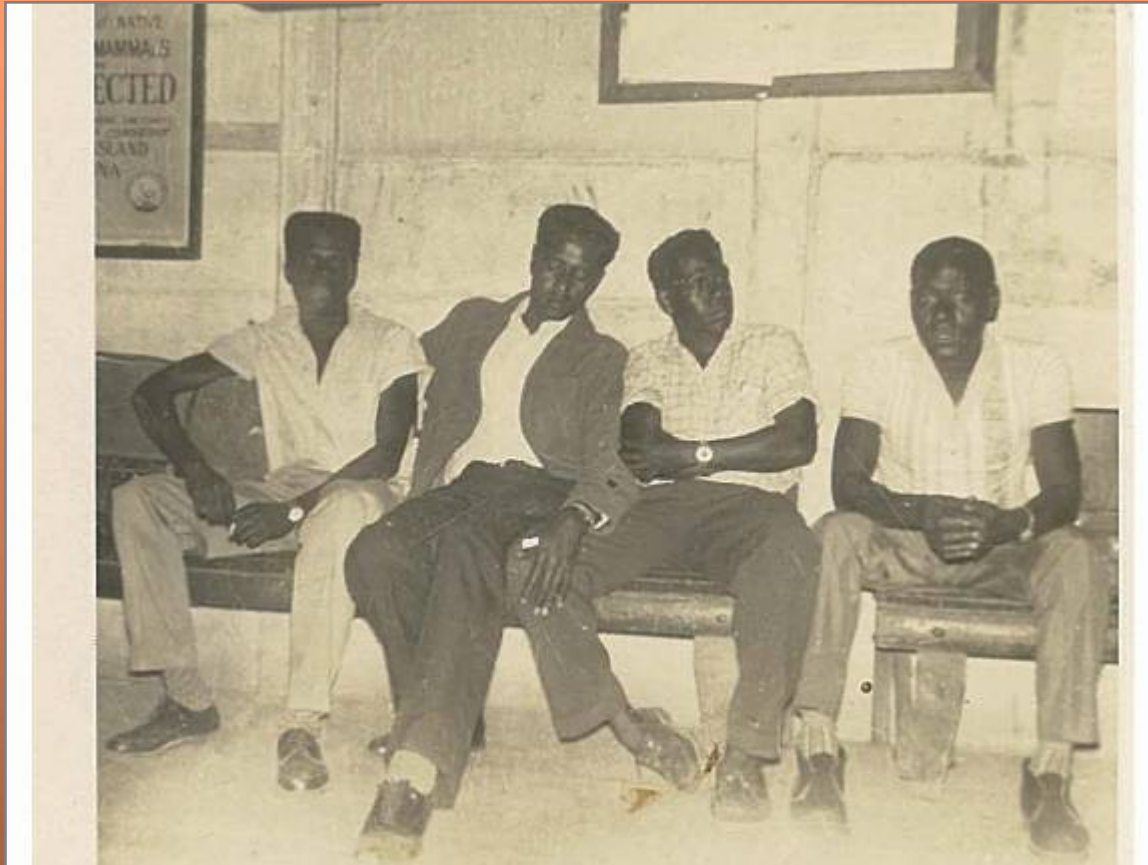


# **Writing the stories of Torres Strait Islander railway men**

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(University of Sydney)

# Torres Strait Islanders and the Northern Australia Railways





**Early 1960s. Young Torres Strait Islander men, Hughenden train station, Western Queensland, Courtesy of Milliana Davey.**

# **MEN WANTED**

## **HAMERSLEY RAILROAD CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

**Near Roebourne in North Western Australia  
requires**

### **THURSDAY ISLAND LABOUR**

Free air-conditioned modern accommodation and food.  
Return air fare paid after six months employment.  
Bonus paid to those who stay to project's completion.  
Based on a sixty hour week, it is possible to earn

**GROSS WAGES OF £78/3/8 PER FORTNIGHT**

Starting date: Approximately 25th October to 1st  
November.

Supervisor: Ronnie Monteferrante.

Representatives will be on hand at the Commonwealth  
Employment Services Office in the locations listed below  
to receive applications and interview on the following  
dates :

18th October—Mackay

20th October—Townsville

21st October—Charters Towers

23rd October—Cairns

**MORRISON—KNUDSEN—MANNIX—McDONALD**

**G.P.O. Box X 2283, PERTH, W.A.**

*The Cairns Post,*  
October 16, 1965



**Mid 1960s. These men were recruited on Thursday Island before being flown to the Pilbara to work on the Hammersley Railroad project.**

Image: courtesy Roebourne Public Library, WA

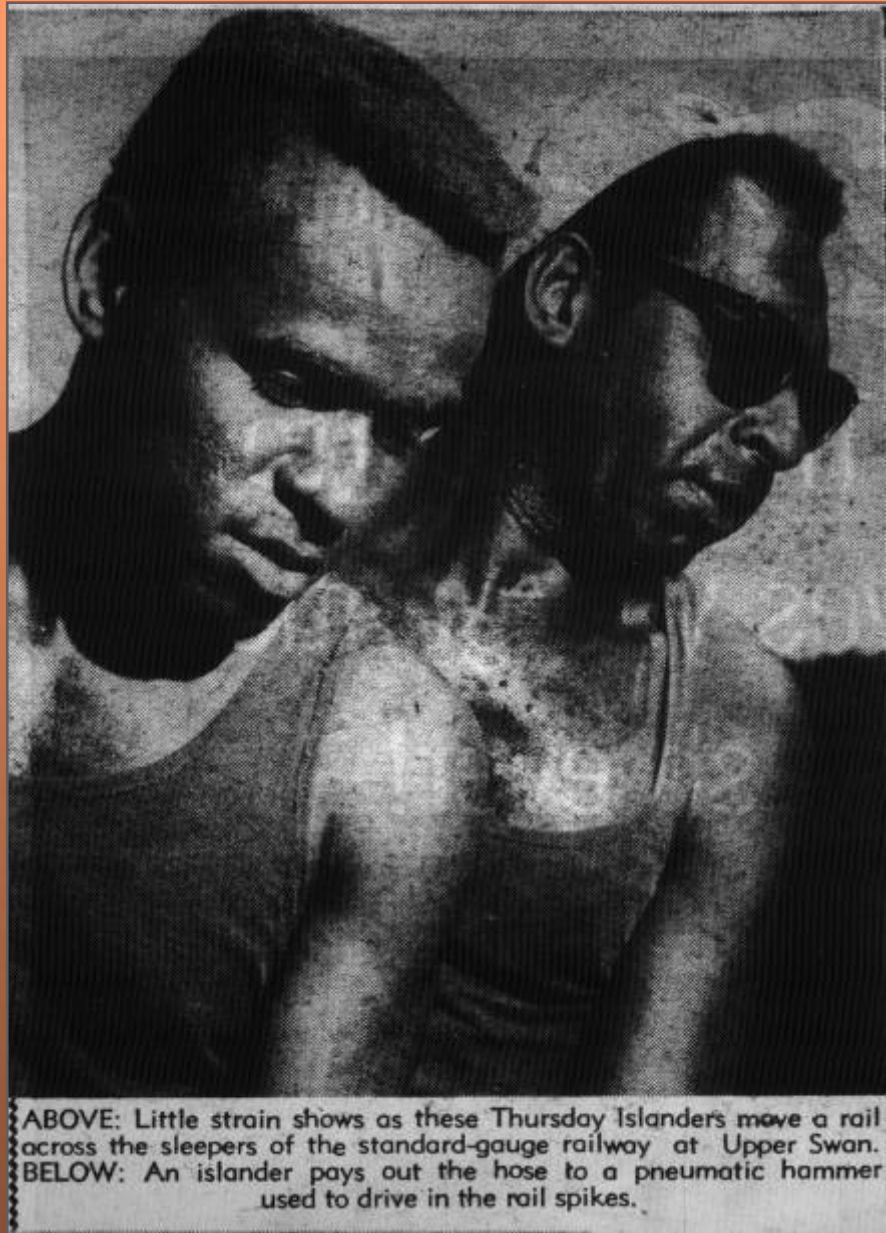


***The West Australian, January 30, 1965.***

Torres Strait Islanders were among those recruited to work on the Standard Gauge project in the south-west of WA in 1965.

***The West Australian,*  
February 11, 1965.**

The media took a great interest in the Islander workers. Here they apparently show “little strain” moving railway sleepers.



**Ron Passi and  
Danny Maza**

**Hedland Times, May  
1968.**

Torres Strait Islander gangs  
broke a world record in track  
laying.

## NEW WORLD RECORD AT MT. NEWMAN

More than four miles of track was laid in one day on the Mt. Newman iron ore railroad in the north-west of Western Australia last week, establishing a new world line-laying record.

The Mt. Newman railroad contractor, Morrison-Knudsen - Mannix - Oman, an American - Canadian joint venture, laid, spiked and anchored 4.35 miles of track in 11 hours, 40 minutes.

The previous line-laying record was 2.85 miles laid in 11 hours in the United States on the Atcheson, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad in 1962.

In achieving the new record, MKMO combined the talents of its engineers in developing new machines and techniques with the best skills of its experienced rail-laying crews, composed largely of Thursday Islanders.

### FIRST IN AUSTRALIA

MKMO engineers developed and built at Port Hedland, Australia's first semi-automatic sleeper-laying machine which with a 15-man crew does the work of 60 men.

They also built the special crane gear which can load 16 strings of welded rail, each a quarter of a mile long, at the one time onto a rail-laying train — a feat never before attempted. Each string of rail weighs more than 28 tons.

As a result the rail-laying crews were able to lay 32 string of the heavy duty welded rail or 896 tons in all or over 13,050 sleepers, drive home 52,200 spikes

into the sleepers then clamp the rail to the sleepers with 26,200 exit anchors within 12 hours.

MKMO has to maintain an average of almost one mile a day to complete the line on schedule.

The rail-laying crews began the record-shattering run at 6.10 am on May 8 and had 23,000 feet of track finished by 5.50 pm. Their effort took the rail laid-to-date down to the 64 mile peg south of Port Hedland, on the 265-mile railroad route to Mt. Newman.

## Visit of aerodental clinic

Perth dental clinic aerodental itinerary in the month is as follows:

June 1, arrive Carnarvon 10.30, arrive Gascoyne Junction 12.30; June 2, arrive Yinnietharra 4.30; June 3, arrive Minnie Creek 4.30; June 4, arrive Ashburton Downs 4.30; June 5, arrive Wyloo 11.20, arrive Yarraloola 4.30; June 7, arrive Onslow 9; June 11, arrive Minderoo 9.20; June 12, arrive Gerialia 8.55; June 13, arrive Marilla 8.20; June 14, arrive Carnarvon 9.





**Mt Newman Rail Project, 1969**  
**Courtesy John Kennell Snr**



**Mt Newman Railway Project 1969**  
**courtesy John Kennell Snr**



**Townsville-Mt Isa Project, 1960**  
**Courtesy John Kennell Snr**



**Western Queensland, c. 1970s.**  
**Courtesy of Alfred Pitt.**



**The Savage Brothers; Stephen, Edward, Sam and Thomas. Their combined service to Queensland Rail amounts to over 100 years. Townsville, 2008**



**John Cullear Kennell Snr,  
Mackay 2008**



**Charles Coleman  
Moa Island, 2008**

# Laying the Tracks: Torres Strait Islanders in the Northern Railways



**This project celebrates the Torres Strait Islanders who migrated to North Queensland and Western Australia in the 1960s and 70s to build the railways, and contributed so greatly to the development of northern Australia.**