

Comprehension and Discussion Activities for the Movie

RABBIT-PROOF FENCE

This module has been designed to accompany the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002).

Rabbit-Proof Fence tells the true story of three Aboriginal Australian girls – Molly, her sister Daisy and their cousin, Gracie. It is based on the book *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* by Doris Pilkington Garimara, Molly's daughter. When Molly was 14, Gracie 10 and Daisy 8, the Australian government took them from their home to train them as servants for the white settlers. The girls decided to escape and walk home, following the "rabbit-proof fence".

This film follows the girls' 1,500 mile walk home, avoiding capture and surviving in the wild. It also tells the larger story of Australia's 'Stolen Generations' – thousands of Aboriginal children who were taken from their homes by the government. Many of these children never saw their parents again.

This module consists of teacher's notes and handouts to copy and give to your students. If you don't have access to a copier, write the exercises on the board. You might like to do some of these activities in students' first language. It is important that they understand the ideas behind the story, and this is easier in their own language.



1. Before You Watch

1.1: Australia past and present

Give copies of **Worksheet 1: Background Information** to your students, or put the worksheets where all students can see them.

Exercise A: Look at the map of Australia and the images of modern Australia.

1. Students match the pictures with the captions.
2. Brainstorm about Australia. Who lives there? What is the environment like? Write students' ideas on the board.

Exercise B: Look at the images of historical Australia.

1. Students match the pictures with the captions.
2. What do they think life was like for Aboriginal people? Write students' ideas on the board.

Exercise C: Useful vocabulary.

1. *Students read through the vocabulary and definitions, and answer the questions. Discuss the words that they don't understand.*

Answers to Exercise C:

1. F - 'Half-caste' was the name used for someone who was of mixed Aboriginal and European heritage. This term is no longer acceptable in Australia and most Aboriginal Australians would be offended by its use.
2. T
3. T
4. F - Indigenous people are the first, or original, people living in a given place.
5. F - A racist believes that his/her race is better than others.

2. While You Watch

2.1: Home in Jigalong and the Aborigines Act 00.00 – 07.00

Give copies of **Worksheet 2: While You Watch** to your students, or write the questions on the board. Play the film to 07:00.

Answers to 2.1

Exercise A:

1. Molly and Daisy are sisters and Gracie is their cousin.
2. The Jigalong tribe is a desert people.
3. The Australian government gives the Jigalong tribe rations including flour, tobacco and tea.
4. Molly's mother tells her that the spirit bird will always look after her.
5. A.O. Neville is the legal guardian of all Aboriginals in Western Australia and he has the power to remove any Aboriginal child from their home. His office is in Perth.

Exercise B:

1. They are following the tracks of a giant lizard until Molly catches it. This shows the community's lifestyle of hunting and gathering, and of interacting closely with each other and the earth. It also shows the girls' skill in the outdoors, particularly Molly's.
2. The girls' fathers are all white men who used to work on the fence. They have 'moved on'.
3. Because the policemen are looking for 'half-caste' children so they can take them away.
4. To marry, visit their children at Moore River, and buy shoes.

2.2: Capture and Moore River Native Settlement 07:00 – 27:50

Play the film to 27:50. If the students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board.

Answers to 2.2

Exercise A:

1. T
2. T
3. F - The girls go to Moore River by train, inside a large cage/holding cell and then in the back of a truck.
4. F - They were trained to be house help and/or farm labour for white Australians.
5. F - There are very young babies who have been separated from their birth mothers at Moore River.
6. F - Children with the lightest skin were separated and sent to a "proper school".

Exercise B:

1. Some of the rules include: standing and sitting when told to, eating with Western utensils (forks, spoons and knives), not speaking while eating, saying Christian prayers and only speaking English/not speaking their native languages.
2. Modoo is the tracker and he is Aboriginal. It is his responsibility to find any child who runs away from Moore River. His daughter, Olive, lives at Moore River.

Exercise C:

3. Neville's plan was to take all light-skinned Aboriginal children (those believed to have a European parent or grandparent) and forcibly assimilate them into white society, either through adoption or by training them to work as house servants and farm labour. Neville said he wanted to give these "half-caste" children the "benefits" of white society.
4. Neville believed that his plan would allow "half-caste" children to become white so that there was no longer an unwanted "third race". Neville believed that in three generations the black colour would not exist anymore.
5. In his opinion, the Aboriginal people were not wise enough to know what was best for them and that he and other Europeans knew better. He felt responsible for saving mixed-race children by giving them the "benefits" of white culture and society.

2.3: Escape 27:50 – 47:00

Play the film to 47:00. If students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board.

Answers to 2.3

Exercise A:

1. Daisy
2. Neville
3. the woman from the house
4. Gracie
5. the hunter
6. Molly

Exercise B:

1. The girls have an opportunity to escape when it is Molly's turn to empty the toilet bucket and everyone else has gone to church. Molly tells her sister and cousin to run.
2. Molly, Gracie and Daisy stay hidden from the tracker by doing things such as:
 - Taking off their shoes while running
 - Using the rain to cover their tracks
 - Putting Daisy's bag in the river
 - Staying silent and always listening
 - Hiding in the bush

2.4: Following the Rabbit Proof Fence 47:00 – 1.10:21

Play the film to 1.10.21. If students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board.

Answers to 2.4

Exercise A:

1. Modoo
2. Gracie
3. Mavis
4. Daisy
5. Neville

Exercise B:

1. Neville sets a trap for the girls in two ways. First, he stations the men along the fence to wait for the girls, believing they will walk into the area where the men are waiting. Second, he tells everyone to spread the word that Gracie's mother is waiting for her in Wiluna and that the girls can take a train there. Neville wants the girls to hear this and come to Wiluna, where it will be easier to catch them.
2. Gracie turns around to run away from Molly and Daisy so that they will not get caught. The film does not tell us what happens to her after she gets caught. Ask students for suggestions. From the book, we know that she was sent back to Moore River and then worked on farms and in the city as domestic help.
3. Perhaps Modoo works at Moore River so that he can see his daughter, Olive. Maybe being a tracker is a good job. He might not have a choice, and maybe he thinks he can help the children in small ways by staying there. Modoo seems sympathetic to Molly, Gracie and Daisy. He respects them for not getting caught and he smiles when the policeman he is with gives up and stops waiting for the girls. It is not clear if Modoo could have caught the girls if he had wanted to - what do your students think?
4. Mavis is another Stolen Generations girl who is working as domestic help for a white family. She helps the girls by giving them food and a place to stay. Her life is difficult because she has to do what the white family tells her to do. She is also abused by the man of the house.

2.5: Return 1.10:21 – end

Play the film to the end. If students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board.

Answers to 2.5

Exercise A:

1. *They see the spirit bird. This is important because it symbolises home and is meant to always lead them where they need to go. Molly says "home", and then calls out to the bird.*
2. *They are sitting together chanting, singing and waiting for the girls to return. This shows their deep connection to the girls. Perhaps the women are doing this to send the girls strength and guide them home.*
3. *Molly says "I lost one. I lost one" in reference to Gracie.*
4. *They hid in the desert so that they would not be captured again. Molly eventually married and had two daughters. She and her daughters were captured again and taken back to Moore River. Molly escaped for a second time and walked all the way back to Jigalong, carrying the smaller daughter, Annabelle. When Annabelle was three, she was recaptured and Molly never saw her again.*
5. *Gracie never returned to Jigalong. She never got to see Molly, Daisy or her family again. In the book (not the film), Molly's daughter writes that Gracie got married and had six children, but she died in 1983.*

Exercise B:

Answers to these questions will vary. Encourage students to openly debate and discuss.

1.
 - Neville thinks he is protecting the Aboriginal people, but he is also protecting the white Europeans and the idea of colonialism itself. The Aboriginal people are seen as a threat to colonialism. The title 'Chief Protector' is a contradiction because in reality he is not protecting the Aboriginals, but hurting them by taking away the children. This is why the children call him Devil (and it rhymes with his name).
2.
 - many white Europeans were racist. They believed they were more intelligent, superior and knew better than the Aboriginal Australians
 - they did not understand indigenous society and customs. Consequently, they thought Aboriginal Australians were uncivilised and uneducated.
 - they felt threatened by indigenous populations and wanted to control them. They especially wanted to control the 'half-caste' children because these children were 'half white' and could, with the right training, be taught to 'become fully white'. This would eventually lead to the 'breeding out' of black Aboriginals.
 - they believed that their culture, customs and religion (Christianity) were superior and that these children, who were half white, needed to be saved. They believed they were doing the right thing.

3. After You Watch

3.1: The 'Stolen Generations'

The end of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* states:

Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families throughout Australia until 1970. Today many of these Aboriginal people continue to suffer from this destruction of identity, family life and culture. We call them the Stolen Generations.

The concept of the *Stolen Generations* is still controversial in Australia. Some Australians deny the idea, while others recognise it and agree that these children and their families suffered greatly. In 2008, the Australian government publicly acknowledged and apologised for the policies, which caused the *Stolen Generations*.

In groups, students discuss the following questions.

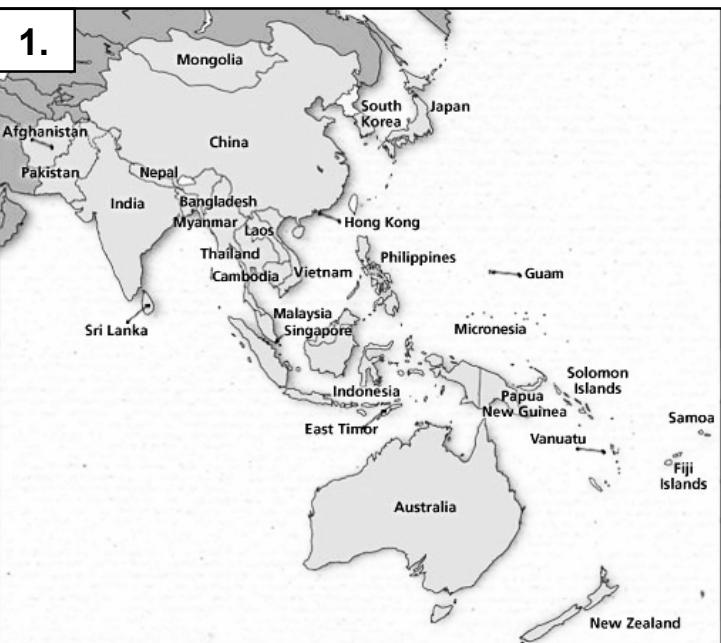
- What is their opinion on the *Stolen Generations*?
- Why do they think some Australians deny the idea of the *Stolen Generations*?
- What do they think the impact of the *Stolen Generations* has been on the Australian Aboriginal community? Encourage them to think about the effects on the children, as well as on the communities in general.
- How do they think the Australian Aboriginals' situation is in Australia today? What problems might there be between them and the government?
- Do they think the government has a responsibility to help them? Why/why not?
- Can they think of examples from their own society/country that may have a similar history?

This information is not part of the film, so students will have to use their imaginations.

Your students can do extra research about lifestyles, traditions, history or achievements of Aboriginal Australian people as a follow up assignment, if the internet or other sources are available.

Worksheet 1: Background Information

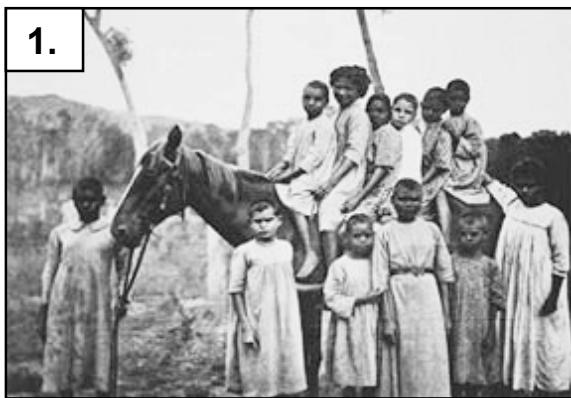
Exercise A: Images of modern Australia



- a. a kangaroo
- b. the Sydney Opera House and Sydney Harbour Bridge
- c. a koala
- d. a family at Australia Day celebrations
- e. the Australian flag
- f. Australia and Southeast Asia

Exercise B: Images of historical Australia

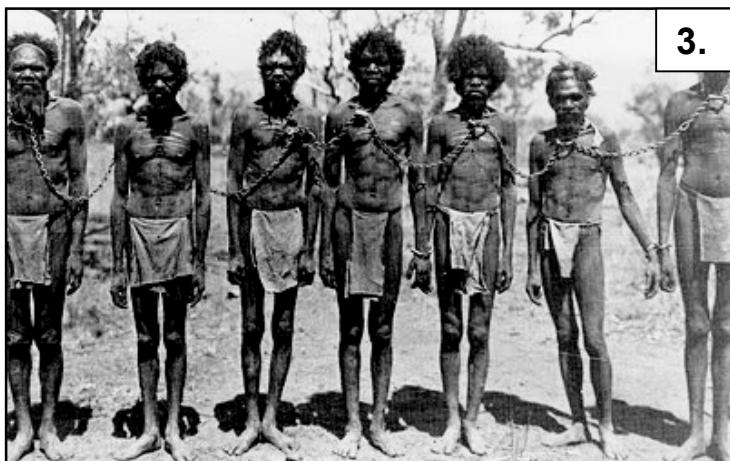
1.



2.



3.



- a. traditional temporary home
- b. prisoners
- c. Aboriginal girls in a 'Native Settlement'
- d. traditional dance
- e. an advertisement for homes for Aboriginal girls

4.

Homes Are Sought For These Children



A GROUP OF TINY HALF-CASTE AND QUADRONE CHILDREN at the Darwin half-caste home. The Minister for the Interior (Mr. Perkins) recently appealed to charitable organisations in Melbourne and Sydney to find homes for the children and rescue them from becoming outcasts.

5.



A Brief History of Australia

Aboriginal (indigenous) Australians were the first people on the Australian continent. They arrived in Australia from Asia more than 40,000 years ago. Although there are many Aboriginal groups, with their own languages, customs and cultures, they have some practices in common, including a close relationship with the earth and a rich tradition of oral story telling. Aboriginal Australians were traditionally hunter-gatherers.

The British set up their first official camp in Eastern Australia in 1788. Soon after, British colonial officers travelled to Western Australia (WA) and began to claim Aboriginal lands as their own. Fighting broke out as Aboriginal Australians resisted European control. This resistance was violently repressed and many Aboriginal Australians were imprisoned or exploited for their labour.

The first European government of Western Australia saw the Aboriginal Australians as a problem that needed to be controlled. Colonial officials introduced policies that oppressed and harmed Aboriginal communities for many years. One of these policies - the 1905 Aborigines Act - granted the government legal control of all Aboriginal people living in its territory. The colonial government appointed a 'chief protector' to oversee all Aboriginal affairs.

In 1911, the WA Chief Protector, A.O. Neville, introduced a policy to remove all part Aboriginal children from their families. Neville was worried about the creation of a 'third race' - people of mixed Aboriginal and European descent. Under his policy, mixed descent Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to government or church-run institutions such as missions, orphanages and reserves. Some were also adopted or housed temporarily with foster families. They were taught to forget their culture so that they could, in time, be assimilated into the white population. Many of these children never saw their birth parents again. While Aboriginal Australians were formally recognized as citizens of Australia in 1967, it was not until 2008 that the Australian government officially apologized for the policies that created the *Stolen Generations*.

While Aboriginal Australians continue to struggle with the impacts of colonisation on their society and culture, many have achieved success in different areas, and Aboriginal Australian art and music is now celebrated all over the world.

Useful Vocabulary

Aboriginal Australian: a person belonging to the native/indigenous communities of Australia who lived there before Europeans arrived

colonisation: when one country sends a group of people to take political control of another place

constable: a police officer

(cultural) assimilation: when a minority group adapts to the culture of the majority group and loses parts of its own culture in the process

desert: a large, sandy area of land with little rainfall, extreme temperatures and not much vegetation

discrimination: treating people differently because of their membership of categories, such as sex, religion, nationality, skin colour or age

indigenous people: the first or earliest people living in a place

mixed-race: a name for a person of mixed racial background. In Australia, it meant someone who was part Aboriginal and part European ('half-caste' and 'mixed-blood' mean the same thing but are impolite and should not be used)

racism: the belief that some races are better than others

tracker: someone who knows how to read the land well and who can help other people to find missing persons, food, water or animals

Exercise C: True or false? If false, write the correct sentence.

1. A 'half-caste' was the name for someone who had 100% Aboriginal Australian blood.
2. When people adopt another culture and lose part of their own, we say they have 'assimilated'.
3. Discrimination is when people treat other people unfairly based on their age, sex, skin colour or nationality.
4. Indigenous people are people who move to a country to take control of it
5. A racist believes that all races are equal.

Worksheet 2: While You Watch

2.1: Home in Jigalong and the Aborigines Act 00.00 – 07.00

Exercise A: Complete the following sentences with words from the box.

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|------------|---------------|---------------|
| <i>spirit bird</i> | <i>A.O. Neville</i> | <i>Perth</i> | <i>tea</i> | <i>Gracie</i> | <i>desert</i> |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|------------|---------------|---------------|

1. Molly and Daisy are sisters and _____ is their cousin.
2. The Jigalong tribe is a _____ people.
3. The Australian government gives the Jigalong tribe rations including flour, tobacco and _____.
4. Molly's mother tells her that the _____ will always look after her.
5. _____ is the legal guardian of all Aboriginals in Western Australia. He has the power to remove any Aboriginal child from their home. His office is in _____.

Exercise B: Answer the questions below.

1. What are the girls doing at the beginning of the film? What does this tell us about their culture and way of life?
2. Who are the fathers of Molly, Gracie and Daisy? Where have they gone?
3. Why does Molly's mother tell the children to hide when she sees the policemen?
4. What three things do Aboriginal people need to ask Mr. Neville's permission to do?

2.2: Capture and Moore River Native Settlement 07:00 – 27:50

Exercise A: True or false? If false, write the correct sentence.

1. The rabbit-proof fence is the longest fence in the world and goes all the way to the sea.
2. Constable Riggs threatens that if Gracie moves from the car, he will lock her mother up.
3. The girls go to Moore River in a car.
4. The Moore River Native Settlement was established to train Aboriginal children to go to university.
5. The children at Moore River are all six years old and older.
6. Children with the lightest skin are removed from Moore River and sent back to their families.

Exercise B: Answer the questions below.

1. What are some of the rules at Moore River that the children must follow?
2. Who is Moodoo?

Exercise C: Discuss the following statement as a class.

"For if we are to fit and train such children for the future, they cannot be left as they are, and in spite of himself, the native must be helped." - A.O. Neville

1. What was Neville's plan to 'help' Aboriginal children?
2. What did Neville believe would happen to 'mixed blood' and 'full blood' Aboriginal people once his plan was implemented?
3. What did he mean by "*in spite of himself, the native must be helped*"?

2.3: Escape 27:50 – 47:00

Exercise A: Match the quote with the person who said it.

| | | | | | |
|--------|------------|---------|-------|-------|--------------------------|
| Gracie | the hunter | Neville | Molly | Daisy | the woman from the house |
|--------|------------|---------|-------|-------|--------------------------|

1. "We don't know this place. How we gonna eat?"
2. "Those three girls. They've run off. Maybe the older one, I wondered when I saw her, too much of their mind. Unfathomable. The tracker's onto it. In the meantime, it must be kept out of the papers."
3. "And watch out for those boys further along, they go hunting rabbits along the fence... Yes, the rabbit-proof fence."
4. "We like it here."
5. "You know what you're doing? That tracker from Moore River, he pretty good. I heard he get them runaways all the time. Gotta be good to beat him. He'll take you back to that place."
6. "Make me sick, these people. Sick."

Exercise B: Discuss the following questions in groups or as a class.

1. How do Molly, Gracie and Daisy escape from Moore River?
2. What are some of the things the girls do to stay hidden from the tracker?

2.4: Following the Rabbit-Proof Fence 47:00 – 1.10:21

Exercise A: Match the quote with the person who said it.

| | | | | |
|---------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| Neville | Mavis | Modoo | Gracie | Daisy |
|---------|-------|-------|--------|-------|

1. "She pretty clever, that girl. She wants to go home."
2. "We on the wrong fence."
3. "Don't go Molly. Please don't go. He come back if you go."
4. "She gone, Molly. She not coming back."
5. "People fail to understand that the problem of the half-caste is not simply going to go away. If it is not dealt with now, it will fester for years to come. These children are that problem."

Exercise B: Discuss the following questions in groups or as a class.

1. What is the trap that Neville sets for the girls?
2. At the train station, why does Gracie turn around and run away from Molly and Daisy? What do you think will happen to Gracie now?
3. Why do you think Modoo works as a tracker? What does he think about Molly, Gracie and Daisy? Is he really unable to catch them?
4. Who is Mavis? What evidence is there to suggest that life is difficult for Mavis?

2.5: Return 1.10:21 – end

Exercise A: Answer the questions below.

1. What do Molly and Daisy see when they wake up in the desert? Why is it important? What does Molly say and do?
2. What are Molly and Daisy's mother and other women from their community doing before the girls arrive? Why?
3. What does Molly say when she sees her mother?
4. What do Molly and Daisy do when they reach Jigalong? What happens to them into the future?
5. What happened to Gracie?

Exercise B: Discuss the following questions in groups or as a class.

At the end of the film, A.O. Neville states:

"We face an uphill battle with these people, especially the bush natives, who have to be protected against themselves. If they would only understand what we are trying to do for them."

1. Neville's official title is 'Chief Protector' yet the children at Moore River call him 'Devil'. Who is Neville protecting? Why do the children call him 'Devil'? How would you describe him? Why?
2. Why do you think the Aborigines Act and related policies were accepted and promoted in Western Australia.

Plot Summary

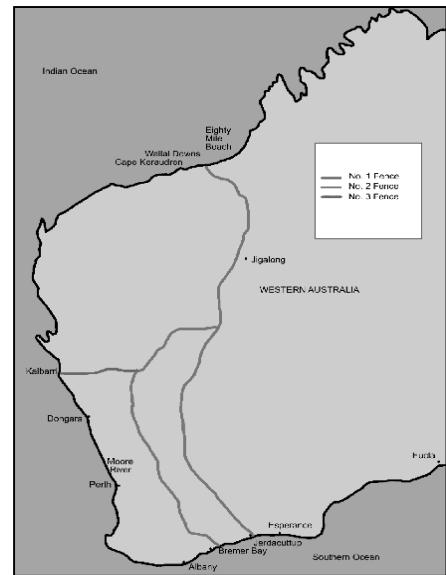
Rabbit-Proof Fence tells the story of three Australian Aboriginal girls – Molly Craig, Gracie Fields and Daisy Karnpill Craig – and their dramatic escape and walk home from the Moore River Native Settlement in the year 1931.

At the start of the film, we see Molly, Gracie and Daisy hunting with their mothers in Jigalong, the remote area in which they live. We then see A.O Neville, the Chief Protector of the Aboriginals in Western Australia. He believes that removing children of mixed European/Aboriginal heritage from their families is good for them.

A.O. Neville orders the local policeman, Constable Riggs, to capture Molly, Gracie and Daisy, who have European fathers. Riggs captures the girls one afternoon and sends them to the Moore River Native Settlement. At Moore River, the girls are trained to talk and act like white Australians. Children at Moore River are not allowed to speak their language or practice their customs and culture. Instead they must speak English, learn Christianity and other European practices. Molly, Gracie and Daisy enter a scary new world. They are unsure of how to behave and face severe punishment for breaking the rules.

Molly, the oldest of the three girls, organises to escape from Moore River with her sister and cousin. The girls head north and, after getting some information from a woman who feeds them, are able to find the rabbit-proof fence which Molly knows will lead them home. The girls must walk 1,500 miles (2414km) through difficult conditions. The girls are chased by Modoo, an Aboriginal Australian tracker, and by Constable Riggs. The girls meet a collection of strangers along the way who provide food as well as advice – both good and bad. Some of this advice convinces Gracie to stop walking and results in her re-capture.

As Molly and Daisy near home, the rabbit-proof fence stops and they find themselves in the extreme desert and they collapse from exhaustion. At the same time, women in their community in Jigalong are chanting and sending them strength. When the girls wake up in the desert, the spirit bird appears, and they find the strength to walk the rest of the way home. When they arrive, they must immediately hide so that they are not recaptured. The film ends with images of the real-life Molly and Daisy walking in Jigalong. They say they will never go back to 'that place' – Moore River.



Map of the Rabbit-Proof Fence