Now my speedo shows that I have travelled 16,822 Miles in the Holden in three months and eleven days, and she has carried me well and truly around the Land of Australia.\textsuperscript{1}

Frank Clune in 1953 articulated the continuing desire of Australian travellers and travel writers to appropriate the ‘Land of Australia’ as travelled space. This appropriation entailed a process of the land being traversed and that journey then constructed into a narrative. This paper considers how the construction of Australia as travelled space has changed over time. The focus for this investigation is a selection of narratives written by modern overland travellers. The term overlander sprung from nineteenth–century travellers such as explorers, itinerant workers and pastoralists. These overlanders formed the foundation of the pioneering legend in Australia. In contrast, modern overlanders were a community of leisure travellers who had, from the 1920s onwards, been travelling across, around and through Australia as a leisure and pleasure activity. Their intention was not to settle in places explored but to move through the vastness of Australia and return to their place of abode having gained an insight to the complexity of ‘home’. By exploring the narratives of these ‘tourists’, a neglected element of the history of travel and tourism in Australia can be illuminated.\textsuperscript{2} Peter Bishop, in his article \textit{Driving Around: The Unsettling of Australia}, engages with the way modern Australian overlanders negotiate travel and the interpretation of journeys in the wake of rising public concern in relation to land rights.\textsuperscript{3} The article provides a compact argument in establishing the road genre and illuminates some essential themes in the context of Australian travel and tourism. While focusing on some similar concepts in regard to overlanding, this paper deals with the change over time in how travellers were reconstructing their journey. This reinterpretation hinged on the reason for travel and the social and cultural baggage travellers took on their trip.\textsuperscript{4}

It is not a new argument that space is created through experience and discourse. In the Australian context, Ruth Barcan, Ian Buchanan\textsuperscript{5} and Paul Carter\textsuperscript{6} each consider the way that space can become place through the contextualisation of experience and the writing of landscape. In \textit{The Cartographic Eye, How Explorers saw Australia}, Simon Ryan argues that ‘writing of observations is, and must always be, intractably caught up in pre–existent tropes and

\textsuperscript{1} Frank Clune, \textit{Land of Australia, Roaming in a Holden} (Melbourne: Hawthorn Press, 1953).

\textsuperscript{2} There have been some important studies undertaken on the role of the car within modern Australian society. Peter Spearritt’s ‘Cars for the People’, in \textit{Australians from 1939}, eds. Ann Curthoys, A.W. Martin and Tim Rowe (Sydney: Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, 1987) and John William Knott’s illuminating research in ‘The Conquering Car, Technology, Symbolism and the Motorisation of Australia before World War Two’, \textit{Australian Historical Studies} 114, April 2000 are two examples. However the more general phenomenon of overland travel as a leisure activity utilising the technology of the car has not received due attention.

\textsuperscript{3} Peter Bishop, ‘Driving Around: The Unsettling of Australia’, \textit{Studies in Travel Writing}, vol 2, University of Nottingham, 1998, 144–163. Peter Bishop also presented a paper at the Travel and Tourism Workshop held at The University of Sydney in June 2000, which helped spark some of the ideas for my wider research.

\textsuperscript{4} This paper is part of a wider research project which will cover the period from 1920 to the 1990s in more detail and investigate a variety of themes such as the role of the car, roads, community and sense of home in the representation of Australia through overland narratives. For the purpose of this article the focus is three time frames within the broader period. The 1920s, 1950s and 1990s provide the possibility of an overview and also demarcate developments within technology and cultural outlook which affected the ways overlanding was undertaken.

\textsuperscript{5} Ruth Barcan and Ian Buchanan, \textit{Imagining Australian Space: Cultural Studies and Spatial Inquiry} (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1999).

\textsuperscript{6} Paul Carter, \textit{The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History} (London: Faber and Faber, 1987).
stereotypes’. While overland travel as a leisure activity is in time distant from Ryan’s explorers, in terms of spatial understanding and reinterpretation the narratives are an intriguing empirical example of the creation of a travelled space.

While white Australians had been traversing the island continent since invasion with the desire to understand and dominate through map and discourse it was from the 1920s with the greater availability of the motor car that more Australians began to travel overland for leisure. By 1927 four different groups had circumnavigated Australia by car and by the end of 1931 over one thousand crossings of the Nullarbor were being made annually. By the later twentieth century there were over 800,000 kms of roads and a myriad of ways to traverse Australia. While it is still an exception for the average Australian motorist to undertake an extended overland trip, the journey can be viewed as a ‘Grand Tour of Home’. This Grand Tour of Home as a leisure activity was from 1920 to the 1990s a means of appreciating and appropriating a landscape that was at once familiar and foreign. For the purpose of this article the focus is on three time frames within in the broader period. The 1920s, 1950s and 1990s provide the possibility of an overview and also demarcate developments in technology and cultural outlook which impacted on the ways overlanding was undertaken and written about.

1920s

The 1920s was a time when the Shell company was just embarking on mapping expeditions and when modern explorers such as Frances Birtles had only recently completed their adventures. Australia was still largely ‘unknown’ to the travelling community. Modern overlanders travelled for leisure but were constructed within a continuum of pioneers. Their journeys were proclaimed in the press as ‘pioneering the way’ or ‘making history’. They were for a great part of their journey travelling over land that only few white Australians had traversed, and had no real image bank of the landscape they would be encountering. This is an important point. The overlanders of the 1920s while undertaking a tour considered themselves foremost as motorists. Muriel Dorney the account of her Honeymoon tour describes how ‘Jack was a keen motorist, and I had the motoring fever very badly’. Although they were travelling to see more of Australia, they were not travelling with particular sights in mind. This was 1927 and the Dories were generally unfamiliar with the type of land to expect. With these attitudes as context it is understandable that a dominant theme of these early narratives was the conquering of space and land, using the new technology of the car. The focus was on the conditions of the track and the progress made. Dorney’s account is a telling example. On a day when she was thrown through the windscreen of

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8 ‘Touring Australia’, *The Australian Motorist*, 1 June 1932, 466.
9 Ian Richardson, *History of Australian Travel and Tourism* (Melbourne: Hospitality Press, 1999), 172. It is interesting to note that the construction of roads while making overland travel easier has in some senses restricted movement across the landscape of Australia and created a ‘beaten track’.
10 Peter Bishop, ‘Driving Around’, 144–163.
11 The Shell Company undertook numerous mapping expeditions during the 1920s. These provided route maps for tourists and also surveyed the ‘dumping’ of petrol stores. By 1932 *The Australian Motorist* included a summary and article of praise on the Shell Company’s work in opening the possibilities of overlanding to motorists, ‘Touring Australia, The entire Commonwealth Now Petrolised and Open to Tourists, Thousands of Miles Open to Motor Traffic’, *The Australian Motorist*, June 1 1932, 464 Shell was still conducting expeditions in 1939, and interesting addition being that the party filmed sections of the journey, ‘9650 Mile Tour of Outback,’ *The Australian Motorist*, 1 December 1939, 231.
12 Francis Birtles was well known in the 1920s for his explorations of central Australia by bicycle. He rode from Freemantle to Sydney in 1912 taking 28 days. With the arrival of the motor car he found a new means of exploration. Although by 1935 he was undertaking more leisurely tours, ‘Birtles Completes Caravan Tour’, *The Australian Motorist*, 1 November 1935, 817.
14 ‘Mrs Marion Bell Makes Some Car History,’ *The Australian Motorist*, 1 February 1926, 345.
the Overland Whippet due to a collision with a hidden tree stump, her assessment at the end of the chapter highlights the concentration on distance despite hardship.

We had driven seventy miles that day, and this we considered exceptionally good, seeing the conditions of the country over which we had travelled and the difficulties we had encountered, of course we had started at half past four in the morning and had been going at a fever pitch all day.  

The landscape is not a priority in the early narratives. While Dorney is surprised by the Northern Territory — ‘I had always pictured the Northern Territory as a kind of desert waste. How surprised I was to find such a beautiful country’ — she does not romanticise the journey. In reference to the Nullarbor she comments, ‘we had a good track again all the next day, but we still had to endure the same monotony of mile after mile of salt–bush plain’. Landscape description was generally included only if the land being covered impinged on the journey. Similarly place names were accumulated but not necessarily described. Dorney’s route map, included at the beginning of the narrative, is dotted with names of places even if many of them were sparsely populated homesteads or stopped at only briefly.

This accumulation is not only part of conquering the terrain, but a means of dealing with the vast open spaces being covered. To overlanders of the 1920s the travelled space of Australia is made up of a series of challenges between land and technology. Although there is an acknowledgement of having enjoyed the journey and seeing more of Australia the driving point throughout the narrative is the accumulation of distance and sense of triumph over space on the return home.

1950s

By the 1950s the last unknown elements of Australian landscape had diminished. There had been a general surge of interest in Australia as a land worth travelling within, encouraged by magazines such as *Walkabout*. World War Two initiated two major road building programs which covered the construction of the Stuart and Eyre Highways from Adelaide to Darwin and Perth to Adelaide respectively. In addition organised overland tourism, which had begun attracting

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16 Ibid., 143.
17 Ibid., 28.
18 Ibid., 190.
19 *Walkabout* was a journal published by the Australian National Travel Association and claimed, that ‘month by month, though the medium of pen and picture, this journal will take you on a great ‘walkabout’ though a new and fascinating world below the equator’. *Walkabout*, 1 October 1940, 9. It was published from 1934 until the mid 1970s.
20 The Stuart highway underwent rapid improvements during World War Two as a result of the need to transport troops quickly to the Northern Territory. The laying of the bitumen along the track and the affect it had on the way overlanding was conceived, received attention early. Both Kathleen Woodburns, ‘The Bitumen’, *Walkabout*, March 1947, 16–20 and ‘The Long Bitumen’, *Wheels*, 1953, 477, 483, 486 and
attention in Australia from the 1930s, was extending its client base and destinations. With improvements in cars and wider availability of petrol more people were able to undertake overland leisure tours in Australia.

These elements each influenced the way the journey and Australia as travelled space was conceived. It is interesting to note that at least two accounts of overland travel in the 1950s were written by well known and popular authors of the time. Both Frank Clune and Ion Idriess had spent much time travelling in Australia and were tapping into the growing interest regarding outback Australia and overland tours. Although conscious that their adventures were conducted in relative comfort, there was a self-conscious use of the discourse of discovery, in terms of what travelling by car revealed. Idriess claimed his overland journey provided a fresh perspective on Australia:

I knew the south, a delusion shared by most Australians. By sea and train, I knew from Sydney to Perth — was comparatively familiar with all the capitals. Taken all in all I reckoned I knew the south. How cocksure we had become. I was to learn I did not know the south. I was to learn of a wonderful New Australia though I had been working and wandering over this continent for more than half a lifetime.

Clune emphasised the desire to see Australia using the technology of the car:

At various times I have visited almost every part of Australia, but chiefly by air-travel, whizzing from point to point in a hopping hurry to get to a destination. This time I wanted the experience of the mile-by-mile continuity that only surface travel can give.

For these travellers the landscape of Australia was familiar, yet the possibility of travelling by car opened another way of viewing the space and discovering elements hitherto unknown. In highlighting their own discoveries Clune and Idriess, who promoted themselves as experts on Australia, encouraged their readers to experience the unfamiliar of home through travel.

While the early accounts were not so concerned with the landscape, by the 1950s there was an emphasis on the amount of interest that Australia held. In both Frank Clune’s and Ion Idriess’s accounts there was a focus on the varied nature of the land. This was part of the appeal of the journey. Clune claimed that ‘Australia is a vast and varied land. I have described my journey from Melbourne to Adelaide in some detail, but, if I keep on like this, I’ll fill ten volumes’. Idriess, in a similar vein but using a different method, included a route map at the beginning of his account which superimposed a map of Europe on one of Australia. While a conventional method of demonstrating the size of Australia it also hints at the variety of interest within the island continent.

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489 deal with the changes the type of road has affected in terms of adventure and tourism and the type of journey possible.

21 The Melbourne–based Pioneer Company was a major contributor to overland tourism. By 1936 it could claim to run the longest organised road tour in the world, The Australian Motorist, 2 November 1936, 123.

22 Ion Idriess, Across the Nullarbor: A Modern Argosy (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1951), 4.

23 Frank Clune, Land of Australia, 3.

24 Ibid., 131.
The emphasis on variety is bolstered by attempts to counter the old idea of monotony. The Nullarbor, the epitome of sameness, presented a particular challenge. Idriess claimed that ‘No doubt its lonely monotony would jar on many folk, though we found so much of interest in it that we longed to push in from the roadside and see what was “away in there”’. There was a growing sense that the ‘Land of Australia’ offered a unique element of identity through its landscape. The possibility of overland travel served to enhance this vision.

Developmentalism was also concentrated on in the narratives. For the two authors in the 1950s it was not enough to have travelled through the space, the space was then constructed in terms of possible productivity. Clune in particular situates Australia within the growing world economy, arguing that Australia had, ‘passed beyond the pioneering days, to attain maturity’. The emphasis is on productivity and industrial development. It is a pertinent point that Clune is conscious of using the Holden, the new Australian car, to undertake his journey as it links industry and travel directly. The focus on possibilities can be seen in Clune’s route map. He uses icons of the car, and also, wheat, cattle and coal, to pin point the possibilities of production.

He also sees tourism and motoring as an industry which by its very nature would physically fill up the open space. Clune claimed:

It is a conservative guess that more than a million Australians every year take a holiday on wheels. What this means for the motor-trade, the hotel-trade, and every other trade, in the districts that tourists visit, could be calculated only in many millions of pounds.

Idriess also made a direct reference to the possibility of utilising the space and land:

Surely we can do something with the Nullarbor — with thought and a plan, with careful and sympathetic organisation giving studied attention to climate vegetation and soil and the varying local conditions.

This fear of emptiness may be seen to carry on from Dorney’s desire to accumulate place names, but it was also an attitude encapsulated by the 1950s concentration on economic and population expansion.

26 Frank Clune, *Land of Australia*, 7. Peter Bishop also recognises this in Clune’s narrative and links this to a reassertion of Australian nationalism, in his *Driving Around*, 148.
27 Clune as master in gaining sponsorship for his travels actually dedicated his book, *Land of Australia, Roaming in a Holden*, to the Holden company. While it is a calculated dedication in terms of promotion and thanks it is also acknowledges the possibilities enhanced in terms of travel by the development of the motor car and demonstrates Clune’s fierce nationalism.
29 Ion Idriess, *Across the Nullarbor*, 84.
It seems that in the 1950s, the authors reveled in the possibilities the car allowed for a more thorough exploration of Australia and its varied spaces and landscapes. Balancing this was a desire to see the travelled space transformed into productive space.

1990s

By the 1990s there was little chance of experiencing anything unfamiliar when undertaking an overland tour. With the constant barrage of icons and images relating to travel, the immediacy of air transport and the sprawling hospitality industry, the question needs to be asked what the possibilities of overlanders engaging with space were. High adventure, the technology of the car and ‘productivity’ may not have been the focus, but there was an acute awareness of reconstructing the journey in terms of travelled space. The 1990s narratives were probably most aware of the clichés and preconceived ideas associated with travel, as well as the need to find something new to relate to the audience. The two narratives considered here demonstrate the differences in the way that Australian space was conceptualised. The first is Tim Bowden’s *Penelope Goes West, On the Road from Sydney to Margaret River and Back*30. The second is Sean Condon’s *Sean and David’s Long Drive*.31 These narratives were not about discovering something new, but challenging or confirming images of space and landscape which had developed through the available cultural frameworks. They link into a wider theory of late twentieth century travel in which the tourist can be represented as a post–tourist — a traveller aware of the cliches and boundaries of journeying and consciously playing with or pushing against these.32 Tim Bowden’s 1999 account of travelling across the Nullarbor is a combination of recognising the modern day mobile home culture and an exploration of colonial grand narratives. In particular, Bowden’s journey follows in a large degree the path taken by Edward John Eyre in his 1841 trek across the Nullarbor. In this account the route is very much at the forefront. The nothingness of the Nullarbor is a focus, but it is filled with nostalgia for the experience and discourse of earlier exploration. For Bowden, although there is an intense appreciation of the vastness, there is a desire to layer the space with narrative.

The consciousness of recreating a narrative for a wider audience is overtly stated in the introduction, ‘I kept a diary of our two–month odyssey to the west but had not considered writing a book — until we returned to Sydney…“Why don’t you write a book about it?” my friends kept saying. So I did’.33 This is a conventional claim for travel writers, but in the construction of the journey for a wider audience Bowden is consciously reworking the minutiae the 1990s mobile home ‘adventure’ with the hardships and arduous nature of nineteenth–century exploration.

Whereas the Nullarbor trip had been a definite plan for the Bowdens, the second 1990s account relates to a spur of the moment trip where the lack of certainty is apparent from the outset:

Are you sure you want to do this, Sean?
No
Then why are we doing it?
I really don’t know.34

What follows in *Sean and David’s Long Drive* is an anti–road trip narrative where the mundane elements take pride of place. Condon is not a motorist, his friend Dave is the driver, he has no real interest in the destinations, but prefers getting to a place than having to travel through the

30 Tim Bowden, *Penelope Goes West, On the Road from Sydney to Margaret River and Back* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999).
33 The self conscious nature of travel in the late twentieth century is particularly relevant in terms of travel writing where a central motivation in rewriting the journey is to detail something new.
34 Tim Bowden, *Penelope Goes West*, xiii. The success of *Penelope Goes West* must have been significant enough for Bowden to feel confident of producing a narrative of their next trip. *Penelope Bungles to Broome*, was published by Allen and Unwin in 2001.
35 Sean Condon, *Sean and David’s*, 12.
space. He relishes the fact that places are just as he expected and embodies the post–tourist notion of cliché and unattainable authenticity:

   I enjoyed the Great Barrier Reef experience but couldn’t help wishing that I’d just been blithely paddling around and discovered the reef by accident. Having seen the thing hundreds of times in books and on TV kind of over prepared me for it. Reality somehow always looks better on TV. Plus you don’t get wet.35

This expectation and confirmation of icon and cliché is also apparent in the route map, where caricature depicts the impression of stops along the way. Whale watching at Byron Bay, dope smoking hippies in Nimbin and churches in Adelaide are all familiar elements of each destination. Yet there is also a personal touch to the route map with some drawings depicting events or moments of the overland trip itself. Bats in Mataranka, a teddy bear in Makay and the road trains present along the route are also included and help appropriate and personalise the space.

Reproduced with permission from Sean and David’s Long Drive, Lonely Planet Publications, 1996 (map by David O’Brien)

The growing familiarity and rise of icons along particular routes had not halted the desire to travel overland in the 1990s. However there appears in the narratives a greater consciousness of construction. The specific recounting of the travel itself is not enough when recreating the journey. The travelled space is layered, with previous narratives, self–awareness and the confrontation of expectations and images.

**Conclusion**

Having concentrated on the differences apparent in the dominant modes of re–conceptualising Australia as travelled space throughout the 1920s, 1950s and 1990s, one trope does permeate the narratives. This is the moment when the space and vastness of the land becomes all encompassing. To travel by road is to be constantly confronted by distance, from your point of departure, to the next destination, all that lies in between and finally the return home. Ultimately distance and memories are the only measure of the trip. The journey on the road, and isolation often apparent when overlanding, serves to emphasise this ‘emptiness’ so often associated with the vastness of Australia. Idriess describes this enormity by focusing on the road itself:

Then we carried along the red, red, road. Mile after mile the endless red road stretching far ahead between the grey of the bushes and the dull grey green of the mulgas and mallee. Just distance leading on to the never fading horizon.36

Over forty years later, amongst his accounts of getting drunk at various towns and the monotony of driving, Sean Condon is still impressed by the vastness of the land. Reminiscent of Idriess, he describes the overwhelming nature of the space:

The sky is cloudless blue. Up ahead the road rises slightly, shimmers with heat and slips into disappearance, the same watery non–colour as the horizon...Nothing much exists out here, except you in the car crashing through endless time and distance.  

The boundless space and idea of never–ending horizon forms a focus point in the narratives which jostles with the attempt to create something new of Australia as ‘travelled space’.

Chris Rojek claims that ‘travel experience involves mobility through an internal landscape which is sculpted by personal experience and cultural influences, as well as a journey through space’. The narratives of overland travel presented here, while not presenting the undulations of an internal journey in the sense of a picaresque search for self, do represent a developing understanding of ‘home’ through the reconstruction of Australia as travelled space. Influenced by time, context and motivation, how the travellers viewed themselves when undertaking the journey impacted on the presentation of space to the wider audience. In 1920, on her honeymoon tour, Muriel Dorney saw herself foremost as a motorist and the tone of conquering distance and accumulating space is borne out in her narrative. In the 1950s Idriess and Clune were aware of the potential that travelling by car provided for exploring all parts of Australia and also their role of authority in presenting this. Viewing the car as the epitome of progress, their construction of Australia focused on its possibilities and potential. For Bowden, in the 1990s, his interest in history lead to a presentation of layered narratives across the space travelled. For Sean Condon, the spontaneity of escape, lead to the focus on the iconic in an attempt to deal with the great difference of the land of home. The motivation and cultural context of travel frame the narratives of overland journeys and in turn impact on the way that the traveller retells their trip. The ‘Land of Australia,’ is for those overlanders no longer an unknown entity, but a space created through their experience and discourse. Australia becomes a travelled space — negotiated and then retold.

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