

Richard Wallace Braithwaite, 6 July 1947 to 1 October 2016

Richard (Dick) Braithwaite gave a lifetime of service to Australia, as a teacher, biologist, professor of tourism research and historian. He was born in Newcastle, NSW on 6 July 1947 to James Richard (Dick Snr) and Joyce (Joy) (née Lusted) Braithwaite. His parents were both victims of the World War II prisoner-of-war atrocity now known as the Sandakan Death Marches. Between 1942 and 1945, members of the Imperial Japanese Army killed 2428 Australian and British soldiers captured during the fall of Singapore, the majority of whom were killed in 1945 when they were forced to march from Sandakan across Borneo to Ranau. Just before the war his mother married Wallace Blatch, who was killed during the second Sandakan Death March. Dick's father was one of only six survivors. Returning to Australia after the war, Dick Snr visited his friend Wallace's widow, and they subsequently married. Named after both his father and his mother's first husband, Dick was a 'walking war memorial', and the shadow his parents' war experiences cast over the family had a major impact on him, and his approach to life. His father categorized people into 'givers' and 'takers', and instilled into his children the need to be givers. Dick fitted clearly into his father's category of giver (Fig. 1).

Dick attended Ipswich Grammar School, qualified as a teacher in 1966, and taught in Queensland from 1967–70. While teaching, he studied part-time at the University of Queensland, graduating at the end of 1970 with a BSc, majoring in zoology and botany. In 1971 he began his research career, studying full-time for a MSc, graduating in 1973 with a thesis titled *An ecological study of Antechinus stuartii (Marsupialia: Dasyuridae)*. He married Robyn (Robbie) Lang in Brisbane in December 1973. He completed his PhD at Monash University in 1977 with a thesis titled *The ecology and evolution of Rattus lutreolus* (Fig. 2). In December 1977 he and Robbie went to Canada where Dick took up a post-doctoral fellowship at the Department of Biology, University of Calgary. Dick's first daughter Alyssa was born in Canada in 1979.



Fig. 1. Dick Braithwaite after retirement from Southern Cross University (photograph Robbie Braithwaite).

Dick and his family moved back to Melbourne where he took up a position as a Scientific Officer at the National Museum of Victoria in August 1979. Early in 1980 he was offered a position as a research scientist in the Darwin Laboratories of CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research. His younger daughter Cleo was born in Darwin in 1982.

Dick's move to Darwin began a 21-year career in CSIRO. CSIRO Darwin in the 1980s was an exciting base from which to explore the biological frontier that was the Top End of Australia, and Dick was a spearhead of this exploration. During his 17 years there, he carried out research on conservation issues in tropical areas. He led the major study of the wildlife of Kakadu National Park, the Kakadu Fauna Survey (1985), coordinating a scientifically and logistically complex survey across the length and breadth of this huge park, increasing our knowledge of the biological riches of this hitherto little-known



Fig. 2. Dick Braithwaite conducting fieldwork during his PhD in 1975 (photograph Robbie Braithwaite).

region. This study of the biological significance of the region contributed to the expansion of Kakadu National Park by the Federal Government, pitting him as an advocate of biodiversity against the Northern Territory Government, and the mining industry in conflicts such as Coronation Hill. He also collaborated on ground-breaking research into the way invasive plants can profoundly modify habitats for native species. He read widely, and well outside the normal range of scientific literature, for example scrutinizing the diaries of early explorers in the north in order to explore traditional Aboriginal burning regimes. He made significant attempts to gain scientific insights from traditional Aboriginal knowledge, such as the six seasons of the wet-dry tropics, and was lead author of the book *Australian Names for Australian Rodents*, which proposed using indigenous names for Australian species as a way of benefiting reconciliation as well as conservation.

In 1994, Dick became interested in the environmental impacts of tourism and persuaded CSIRO to establish a tourism research program which he led until 2001, the last four years of which he operated from Canberra. After leaving CSIRO he became Professor of Sustainable Tourism in the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Southern Cross University in Lismore, NSW. Retiring in July 2010, he continued his association with Southern Cross University as an Adjunct Professor at the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management. On moving to Lismore, he and Robbie bought a small former macadamia farm which they landscaped together, creating not only wildlife habitat, but also a living record of their friendships, by planting a tree in honour of each friend who stayed with them. Friends would be encouraged to review progress on subsequent visits.

Dick was an intellectually forceful and dauntless character, and would always aim to speak the truth as he saw it; respectfully, but with the authority of deep scholarship, and the courage of one who believed that scientists have a responsibility to contribute their expertise to public policy. This made him sought after as a scientific member of committees, including: Kakadu National Park Board of Management; WWF Australia's Scientific Advisory Committee; editorial advisory boards of international journals; research and development advisory committees; 2/15th Field Regiment AIF Association committee; IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas; Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves (later Gondwana Rainforests) of Australia World Heritage Community Consultative Committee; and Sandakan Tourism Committee.

He published over 140 scientific papers and reports on topics ranging from rodent behaviour and ecology, the impacts of fire in northern Australia, to the development of tourism based on places associated with prisoners-of-war of the Japanese in WWII.

Dick's father died of cancer in late 1986. Several years after he died, Dick made the decision that he had to write his father's story, and so he turned his attention to the tragedy of Sandakan Death Marches to try to understand why they happened, and how he could work with individuals and organisations to assist in the healing and recovery of those affected by the events and their aftermath. He conducted extensive and exhaustive research on the events of that period. As a result of his research he found in the library of the Japanese Diet a privately published book written in Japanese by Itsuyoshi Ueno, a former private in the Imperial Japanese Army. Dick had a great capacity for empathy, and for seeking to understand the experience of others, even those with whom he disagreed. He realised that although Ueno's book was in Japanese, it provided the only known first-hand account from the Japanese perspective of these terrible marches during the course of which thousands of Japanese soldiers and civilians also died. The only other accounts were from the six Australian survivors. With the permission of Ueno's family, he had the book translated into English, and arranged for it to be published as *An End to a War: A Japanese Soldier's Experience of the 1945 Death Marches of North Borneo* in both Japanese and English. He visited Japan several times, and stayed with Ueno's family and met the son of General Baba Masao who was tried for war crimes associated with the Death Marches and hanged. He worked extensively with members of the Sandakan community in Sabah, and with survivors of the Borneo POW camps and their descendants to try to work towards understanding and reconciliation, while never compromising his views on the gravity of the crimes committed.

Dick was diagnosed with an unusual and aggressive cancer in 2014, while trying to complete his book. Using information he obtained from former POWs, people in Borneo affected by the Japanese invasion and their descendants, Javanese labourers conscripted by the Japanese, and his upbringing, he continued to work on the book through his final illness. In fact he became driven to complete the book before his death. It was published as *Fighting Monsters: An Intimate History of the Sandakan Tragedy*, by Australian Scholarly Publishing in September 2016, and launched by Dr Brendan Nelson, Director of the Australian War Memorial, three days before Dick died. It is an extraordinary and thought-provoking analysis of those events, the effect on those who took part and their following generations, and suggestions for reconciliation and peace. It is a fitting legacy of Dick's scholarship.

Dick is survived by his wife Robbie, daughters Alyssa and Cleo and two grandsons.

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