

# OUTSTANDING TRACKERS

*By R. M. Tompkins*

An article in the West Australian several decades ago was devoted to some of the outstanding native trackers in the service of the police during the convict period (1850-1868). Among those useful aborigines were Chum-Chom Harry, Geordie and Winnie all of whom could, with unerring exactness give the time of day or night that a track was made by a person for whom they were searching.

The force also had some daring officials in the ranks who knew how to place the skill of the trackers to the best advantage. Prominent among these was Sergeant (afterwards inspector) Finlay, whose arrest of the notorious bushranger Graham gave him well deserved promotion (it being one of the cleverest captures with which the police force was associated during those troubled times).

After making his escape, by scaling the walls of Fremantle prison, Graham was outlawed for attempting to shoot Mr Quartermaine of the Williams River. At that time Sergeant Finlay was in charge of Albany Station and by his demonstration of strategy and knowledge of bush lore, he managed to capture the escapee about 120 miles north-east of the southern township.

Sergeant Finlay left Albany in search of Graham, having with him two mounted constables and two native assistants. They laid in a three-weeks' stock of provisions and the whole party started for the farthest sheep station to the east-ward. On arrival there Finlay learned from the wife of a shepherd that a man answering to the description of Graham, with a double barrelled gun, was there on the

previous day and had lent his gun to a native to kill a kangaroo, afterwards engaging another native to guide him to Dempster's cart track, made by those pastoralists when they were en route to Esperance Bay.

The native returned while Finlay was there and he immediately engaged him to guide his party on the same track.

On the following day Graham's tracks were so fresh that Finlay halted and, making the two native assistants assume the dress and appearance of bush natives, sent them on with the guide, instructing him to get into Graham's company, if possible and to get his gun from him on pretence of shooting a kangaroo. If successful in doing so, they were to get within hearing of Finlay and his party, and discharge the gun as a signal; or if unsuccessful in that, they were to continue with Graham till an opportunity offered of seizing the gun and discharge it. The natives soon got up with the desperado, and with him, stopped in the bed of the Fitzgerald River, near Bremer Bay, to cook some food; and while doing so an emu made its appearance on a hill nearby, which was pointed out to Graham who was induced to lend his gun to one of the native police and the guide, leaving the other native with Graham.

The two succeeded in driving the emu in the direction in which Finlay was and then shot it, which gave the agreed signal, and the native with Graham, hearing the party close at hand, suddenly threw himself upon the outlaw, to prevent him using a revolver, and before he could shake his burden off, Finlay and his party got up and handcuffed the runaway.

For the smart capture of one of Western Australia's most daring criminals, Sergeant Finlay was highly complimented by Major Crampton who was at the head of the police in those days. He was shortly afterwards raised to the position of sub-inspector, and retired from the force with the rank of Chief inspector.

(Finlay was son of William Finlay EPG  
(Scindian 1850)  
(No date and source)