



The dream of Nathan Daams

In recent years, Rio Tinto surveyor Nathan Daams has been working at the West Angelas iron ore mine with dreams of fulfilling a special quest – nothing less than the renaming of the landscape in key mining areas. Here he tells the story of the start he has made.

The traditional owners of the West Angelas region in the Pilbara have always had a close relationship with Rio Tinto, but this relationship took on new dimensions two years ago when we decided to research the indigenous names for various landmarks around the mine.

Pioneers, surveyors and explorers had given English names to prominent features of the Pilbara but no one had considered recording the indigenous names for many other hills and ranges.

In April 2007, with the support of the surveying team, I embarked on a project to name some of the features in the West Angelas area.

To make a start we consulted Western Australia's Geographic Naming Committee which holds the guidelines for all nomenclature in the state. After studying the maps and liaising with the naming committee about procedures, our team organised a site visit for the Gobawarra Minduarra Yinhawanga traditional owners.

I briefed the group about the features that were unnamed and asked them to discuss and decide what Aboriginal names matched the features. Once I had an ethnographic report with the chosen names, it was a matter of formally lodging them.

A 60km stretch of mountains south of the West Angelas mine is now called the Gurinbiddy Range and one of its peaks, originally named Mount Ella (after Ella Lindop, the wife of the

geologist who discovered the Whaleback iron ore deposit), has been dual named Gujuwana.

A culturally significant peak to the south has been named Bibi Thaloo Hill – it remains a sacred site for local women. A smaller range to the north which contains many Aboriginal artefacts is now called Goondoo-wandoo Range.

Many mountains and ranges in the Pilbara were given European names in the 1960s during the initial surge in iron ore exploration. Landmarks were named after prospectors, geologists and their family members, such as mounts Tom Price, Robinson and Meharry.

Mount Meharry is the highest point in Western Australia and is owned by three different Aboriginal groups. I hope Mount Meharry will share an indigenous name one day.

In 2007 Mount Nameless near Tom Price became the first place in Western Australia to be officially dual named, with the Eastern Guruma name Jarndunmunha.

The preservation of Aboriginal history through tradition and stories is being increasingly valued by the Australian public. In recent times, dual naming has become an example of recognition and reconciliation. Aboriginal communities are a vital part of the mining industry as they provide companies with the use of their land and resources, and indigenous naming seems to me to be

an elegant way of rewarding this generosity in perpetuity.

One traditional owner, Roy Tommy, impressed by Rio Tinto allocating time and resources to an indigenous naming project, is now determined to see similar work continue across the Pilbara. He told me that having geographical features named was greatly appreciated because the names become a permanent record of indigenous culture.

Our goal now is to create awareness among all Rio Tinto employees and eventually the Australian mining community about the benefits and importance of feature naming. We believe that building strong relationships with the local community while recognising Australia's cultural history will greatly benefit the future of the mining industry.

For myself, I'm moving to Rio Tinto's newest iron ore mine Mesa A in 2010. The Robe River mine is some 350km from West Angelas. The geography and the ore deposit are different, the valley is made up of flat top hills containing rich pisolite deposits.

It will provide me with a new challenge as many rivers, valleys, mesas, creeks and plains require names. The traditional owners of this part of the Pilbara are a distinct group with a different language and culture, the Kuruma Marthudunera. I'm looking forward to working with them, and recording more indigenous names for parts of our beautiful and ancient country.