Writing the stories of Torres Strait Islander railway men

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Torres Strait Islanders and the Northern Australia Railways
Early 1960s. Young Torres Strait Islander men, Hughenden train station, Western Queensland, Courtesy of Milliana Davey.
MEN WANTED
HAMERSLEY RAILROAD CONSTRUCTION
PROJECT
Near Roebourne in North Western Australia
requires
THURSDAY ISLAND LABOUR
Free air-conditioned modern accommodation and food.
Return air fare paid after six months employment.
Bonus paid to those who stay to project's completion.
Based on a sixty hour week, it is possible to earn
GROSS WAGES OF £78/3/8 PER FORTNIGHT
Starting date: Approximately 25th October to 1st
November.
Supervisor: Ronnie Monteferrante.
Representatives will be on hand at the Commonwealth
Employment Services Office in the locations listed below
to receive applications and interview on the following
dates:
18th October—Mackay
20th October—Townsville
21st October—Charters Towers
23rd October—Cairns
MORRISON—KNUDSEN—MANNIX—MCDONALD
G.P.O. Box X 2283, PERTH, W.A.
Mid 1960s. These men were recruited on Thursday Island before being flown to the Pilbara to work on the Hammersley Railroad project.

Image: courtesy Roebourne Public Library, WA
Torres Strait Islanders were among those recruited to work on the Standard Gauge project in the south-west of WA in 1965.

*The West Australian, January 30, 1965.*

The media took a great interest in the Islander workers. Here they apparently show “little strain” moving railway sleepers.

Ron Passi and Danny Maza
Torres Strait Islander gangs broke a world record in track laying.
Mt Newman Rail Project, 1969
Courtesy John Kennell Snr
Mt Newman Railway Project 1969
courtesy John Kennell Snr
Townsville-Mt Isa Project, 1960
Courtesy John Kennell Snr
Western Queensland, c. 1970s.
Courtesy of Alfred Pitt.
The Savage Brothers; Stephen, Edward, Sam and Thomas. Their combined service to Queensland Rail amounts to over 100 years. Townsville, 2008
John Cullear Kennell Snr, Mackay 2008

Charles Coleman, Moa Island, 2008
Laying the Tracks: Torres Strait Islanders in the Northern Railways

This project celebrates the Torres Strait Islanders who migrated to North Queensland and Western Australia in the 1960s and 70s to build the railways, and contributed so greatly to the development of northern Australia.

Courtesy of Alfred Pitt