

Holidays and travel

KEN KNOX reports on a little-known spirit from a little-known town in the far west of Queensland, and comes off second best.

RJK

A tangle with the mystic Min Min

BOULIA. — "The Min Min," said one of the gents at the bar, "is a friendly spirit — but one not to be scoffed at."

We just HAD to ask about the Min Min, and the Min Min Light — as everyone who comes to Boulia probably does. After all, we had just read Boulia's three-page roneoed newspaper called 'The Min Min', and bought our ice at the Min Min Store.

And in the middle of the main street was a sign which read: "For the next 120 kilometres you are in the land of the Min Min Light. This unsolved mystery is a light that at times follows travellers for long distances. It has been approached but never identified."

The sign hardly sent chills down our spine, for the round-Australia traveller sometimes gets a bit weary of local mysteries, and the inevitable Haunted Hills, Skeleton Creeks, or Dead Man's Gullies.

"I've been here 30 years," went on the bloke at the bar, "and I've seen it three times."

There was grave silence from his fellow locals — and the hint of a smile playing round our faces.

Another Boulian took up the story: "I remember one night when we were camped out with some cattle and black stockmen. We were sitting round a camp fire, and everything was quiet and peaceful bar the snorting of an occasional horse or beast.

"And then it appeared. Maybe 20 or 30 yards away. It moved around our camp slowly, three or four times.

"Everyone saw it. Everyone. We had plenty of time to look at it.

"The blacks, who usually sleep out on the ground round the fire, wouldn't that night. They all came inside the tents."

There was silence — indeed, a sort of reverent awe — as the speaker ended his story.

Another began: "It followed me once for 20 or 30 miles. I could see it out of the back window of the car, as clear as could be.

"I speeded up — and it speeded up. I slowed down — and it slowed down.



Drawing: JEAN KNOX

"And I could take you to a dozen people who have had it in front of their cars, too. But it doesn't matter what you do, you can never get really close to it. It just moves on ahead, at exactly the same pace that you're going."

Heads were nodded in agreement all round.

There was the story, of long ago, of the traveller who had become hopelessly lost and who saw the light and followed it to safety.

And there were the stories, too, of those who had laughed at the Min Min Light, who had said it was just moonlight on the dust, or reflections on the trunks of gums, or white birds like pelicans going for a midnight flit.

And stories, too, of those who

said there was probably a fair bit of alcohol mixed with the tales of the Min Min Light.

"Never scoff at it," warned the bloke at the bar again. "Some strange things have happened to those who have."

An hour later, we worked our way into our sleeping bags on the banks of the Burke River at the south end of Boulia.

"Ever hear such nonsense?" asked yours truly. But no one heard. The Navigator was already asleep.

But did no one REALLY hear? That's a bit uncertain.

All I know is that next morning, I woke up with a violent fever, vicious pains in the stomach — and spent the day in extreme pain.

"They sat by the campfire and the Min Min Light circled the camp."

