I've answered my own question.

The full story is that Java needs a bit of coaxing to handle large
data sets. I actually interrogate the JVM and start to use memory
mapped files when I'm nearing the JVMs memory limit. While it is a
neat solution I would be better to stipulate that I use memory mapped
files for anything greater than 10Mb. This would allow me to just read
the files directly from IDL rather than using the bridge.

Robbie