WARANGA DREAMING

STORIES OF THE NGURAI-ILLUM WURRUNG PEOPLE & THEIR COUNTRY

TONY FORD

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this publication contains images of deceased persons. Users are warned that there may be words and descriptions that may be culturally sensitive, and which might not normally be used in certain public or community contexts.

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the Ngurai-illum Wurrung People.

I acknowledge the Ngurai-illum Wurrung People as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and its waterways as outlined in the following stories. I recognise the living cultures and ongoing connection to Country of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung People and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. In particular, I pay my respects to Uncle Vin Peters, a friend and tireless worker who always has the maintenance of the living culture of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people at the forefront of his endeavours.

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BACKGROUND

Waranga Dreaming began as a local history research project in 2017, inspired by a very short but captivating story found in a copy of the Rushworth Chronicle from one hundred years before (see page 4).

As is often the case in country areas, little was known of the history prior to colonisation, which began in the Waranga area in the 1830s, then went on steroids with the local discovery of gold in 1853. So, one of the main goals of the project was to find and document as much Aboriginal history of the area as possible.

It was also personal. I was of the generation who was taught little or nothing about Aboriginal history during my formal education. I had been involved in local history projects for most of my life but had largely ignored the rich history that preceded colonisation. It was about time that something was done to rectify that, so I began collecting information from a whole range of primary and secondary sources. Immediately, I found that there was plenty of information available and that I was learning a great deal in the process.

In 2018, the theme for the annual Reconciliation Week was "Don't keep history a mystery – Learn. Share. Grow." It was time to think about sharing what I was finding out. After discussions with a wide range of people, including Ngurai-illum Wurrung Elder Vin Peters, I started writing stories for the local community newspaper, the Waranga News. These started to be published fortnightly from the start of 2019, continuing through until the end of 2022.

My theory was that lots of people would not necessarily buy and read a history book. However, it was quite likely that they would regularly buy the local paper and read it from cover to cover, thus learning about some local history that they possibly knew little about.

The stories were not meant to be a complete, chronological history of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people and their Country, which would be an impossible task. Rather, this would simply be a collection of stories providing insights into life before, during and after colonisation through to around 1880.

Much of the history of the people that was handed down orally over thousands of years was lost because of the impact of colonisation. As a result, the facts about local Aboriginal history are contentious and probably always will be. I have tried to steer clear of the current day politics, which I find disturbingly confrontational. At the time of writing, there has been continuous court action over many years as various Aboriginal groups try to stake their claims to being the traditional owners of the Waranga area. My considered view is that we will never know the full history, so compromise is necessary.

Hopefully the information contained within this compilation of all the Waranga Dreaming stories will be of interest to all parties and help lead to such a compromise.

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NOTES FOR READERS

Sadly, there are very few, if any, Ngurai-illum Wurrung people living on Country at the time of writing. Colonisation led to disconnection from Country. People were killed, died from introduced diseases and malnutrition and were "dispersed". The loss of connection to Country after the squatters moved in from the late 1830s was traumatic for the survivors, as Country meant everything to the people. This trauma has become inter-generational for many people, highlighting the need for reconnection to Country as part of the wider process of reconciliation.

I have purposely not tried to cover the history of the Goulburn River Aboriginal Protectorate station at Murchison, even though it operated within the geographic area and era outlined in this book. Ian Clark has already published a book about the station - Clark, Ian D, *Goulburn River Aboriginal Protectorate – A History of the Goulburn River Aboriginal Protectorate Station at Murchison, Victoria 1840-1853* (Ballarat Heritage Services, 2013).

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Yenbena marrinbidja

1 INTRODUCTION

This series of stories examines aspects of the lives of the Aboriginal people who formerly lived in the Waranga area. The kernel of the idea for the series comes from a brief article which appeared in the "Rushworth Chronicle" and "Murchison Advertiser" in 1917, viz -

"King Billy, an old aboriginal who was born in the main street of Rushworth 62 years ago, paid a visit to his native place during the week. The old fellow is suffering from double cataract of the eyes, and is almost blind. He claims to be the last of the Rushworth tribe of aborigines."[1] No further information was proffered in subsequent papers.

The article raises all sorts of questions about this man, and the lives of the Aboriginal people of the area, both before and after European colonisation. Waranga Dreaming tries to answer some of those questions, hopefully in a largely non-political way that builds general knowledge, understanding and an increased capacity for reconciliation.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The title for these articles was deliberately chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, Waranga refers to the geographic area that will be the focus of much of the content – the former Shire of Waranga. It will centre around Rushworth, which is fairly central to the country of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people.

Secondly, Waranga (or "warranga") is reputedly an aboriginal word meaning "sing". Aboriginal 'songlines' are an important concept in oral history. David Wroth defines songlines as *"one of the many aspects of Aboriginal culture that artists draw on for inspiration. They are the long Creation story lines that cross the country and put all geographical and sacred sites into place in Aboriginal culture. For Aboriginal contemporary artists they are both inspiration and important cultural knowledge."*[2]

Finally, 'The Dreaming' is a concept that most people understand. It is a time when stories of Creation emerged, linked to places, flora, fauna and people. The stories were then passed on in an oral tradition. And, this series of stories will require some dreaming, to imagine the Waranga area before and during colonisation.

LAST OF THE RUSHWORTH TRIBE?

The article in the local papers in 1917 needs some clarification. There was no such thing as a "Rushworth tribe". What the author of the article was referring to was Aboriginal people who frequented what later became known as the Rushworth area i.e. the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people. Much more about them will appear in later stories.

King Billy would not have been the old gentleman's birth name, but one bestowed by the European inhabitants. Aboriginal people do not, and did not, have kings, but Elders. If he was indeed 62 in 1917, that places his year of birth around 1855. Imagine Rushworth at the time, radically changed by the influx of thousands of gold seekers from 1853. There are recorded stories of Aboriginal people camping at what is now the centre of town, at the north end of High Street. The European centre of town was then up the hill, south of Murchison and Nine Mile Roads.

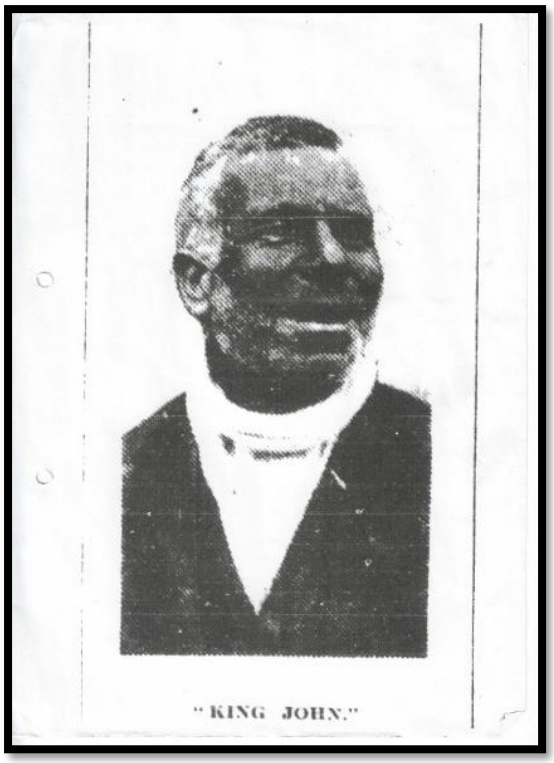
The quoted claim suggests that he was "the last" of the Aboriginal people from his "tribe". Attending a recent seminar on history writing, it was suggested that one should be wary of stating absolutes e.g. the biggest, the oldest, the first, the last. Nevertheless, what a story this man would have been able to tell.

References: 1 Murchison Advertiser 13.7.1917; 2 Wroth, David, Article in Japingka Aboriginal Art, "Why Songlines are Important in Aboriginal Art" 2015

2 BORN ON THE GOLDFIELDS

The man who was the inspiration for these stories was apparently born in High Street

Rushworth in 1855-6. There are contemporary reports of groups of Aboriginal people camping at the bottom end of High Street, and at least one reference to a corroboree being held there.



To put his birth into context, this would make the man, later known as "King John", one of the first children to have been born in the new town. The overwhelming majority of Rushworth residents at the time were single men, intent on pursuing their dream of striking it rich on the goldfields. Families, and the birth of children, would have been quite rare at the time.

Many Aboriginal people had been displaced since squatting began in the 1830s, and by 1855-6, the Aboriginal Protectorate at Murchison had already been disbanded. Moving to the vicinity of a new mining settlement provided a range of economic opportunities for the Aboriginal people who remained in the area.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND THE GOLD RUSH

In the histories written about the Victorian goldfields, Aboriginal people are generally given scant recognition. Fred Cahir rectified this to some degree with his 2012 publication, *Black Gold – Aboriginal People on the Goldfields 1850-1870*.

The book shows that one of many roles that Aboriginal people fulfilled was to provide a reliable labour force for the by-then well-established pastoral industry, when many of the existing workers had gone off to the gold rushes. Our King John "spent some strenuous years in the Avenel district, breaking in horses and shearing." Perhaps this line of work was what some of his forebears had done in the 1850s and beyond.

ROLES IN GOLD MINING

Apart from working in the pastoral industry, Fred Cahir cites many examples of Aboriginal people seizing the opportunities provided by the gold rushes to make a living. Certainly, there is evidence to suggest that Aboriginal men engaged in mining. The value of the precious metal to the new arrivals was recognised, even though it was not necessarily valued by the original custodians of the country.

The story that is usually told about the start of the Rushworth gold rush revolves around an Aboriginal woman showing travellers where gold could be found in what became Main Gully, just south of the town. These travellers were camping, while on their way from Bendigo to Beechworth goldfields, when they noticed the countryside looked similar to that around Bendigo i.e. ironbark forest, gravelly hills. After showing the local Aboriginal people some gold, the party was directed to places where alluvial gold could be found nearby.

OTHER ROLES

Aboriginal people around Rushworth in the 1850s were also able to compensate to some extent for the loss of access to country by providing goods and services to the new arrivals. Fred Cahir concludes in his study that "many Aboriginal people sought to find their

niche in the new society, via predominantly economic channels, through trading in their manufactured goods, farming and cultural performances, or in employment roles such as bark cutting, tracking, guiding and police work, which did not inordinately compromise their cultural integrity and took advantage of their superior traditional work skills".

Later in life, our "King John" certainly followed in this tradition, making a living by manufacturing and selling boomerangs, and giving exhibitions of boomerang throwing.

An article in the Melbourne "Herald", which resulted from an interview with King John in 1913, states that he was a member of the "Woorung" tribe. Perhaps this was an abbreviation of the name of the Aboriginal people who for millennia had frequented what became the Rushworth area – the Ngurai-illum Wurrung.

References: Melbourne Herald 3.10.1913; Cahir, Fred, *Black Gold – Aboriginal People on the Goldfields of Victoria 1850-1870* (ANU E Press 2012)

3 AN EXPERT WITH THE BOOMERANG

During his life "King John", the Aboriginal man born in the new town of Rushworth in 1855-6, developed his skills in boomerang manufacture and throwing to help provide him with an income. When he was interviewed for a front-page article in the Melbourne "Herald" in 1913, he explained that the "tribe's weapon of war and defence was much larger and longer, and did not return to the thrower like the one known nowadays."

He considered the returning boomerang was "merely a toy with the young bloods of the tribe", rather than a weapon that was useful for hunting or fighting. Nevertheless, he perfected the art of constructing returning boomerangs, which were sold and used in public displays.

DISPLAYING TRADITIONAL SKILLS

Around the start of the 20th century, when King John was in his 40s, it was not uncommon for Aboriginal people to display some of their traditional skills in public. These skills often included spear and boomerang throwing and fire lighting, and would be performed as a novelty at agricultural shows, sports carnivals, football matches and so on.

Healesville Athletic Club, which ran sports carnivals on Boxing Day and at Easter, even included such events in their regular program, largely because of the close proximity to the Coranderrk Aboriginal settlement. Some of the people from Coranderrk (which began in 1863) had their origins in the Goulburn Valley and Waranga areas.

King John was prominent in participating in displays of traditional skills, which supplemented his income. He had given numerous exhibitions at city and bush events, and "his exhibitions always draw a crowd."

A MISCALCULATION

On one occasion, King John was giving a boomerang throwing exhibition at half-time at a city football match. It is not hard to imagine the scene at one of the old suburban VFL grounds. As a special new trick to impress the crowd, King John thought he would attempt to catch the returning boomerang in his mouth.

However, he miscalculated the speed of the returning boomerang, which struck him across the nose and mouth, led to a few days in hospital and left some prominent scars as a permanent reminder.

FOOTBALL MATCHES

Around the same time, social footy games between Aboriginal teams and local teams were not uncommon and drew large crowds. For instance, a 1900 game at Coburg pitted an Aboriginal team from Healesville/Coranderrk against a local team drawn from Coburg and Moreland. A staggering 2000 people attended

the game, in which the Aboriginal team was captained by E McDougall, also known as "King Billy". It is no surprise that the crowd were thrilled by the speed and skills displayed the Aboriginal men, as we are today.

That "King Billy" (not directly connected to the one from the Rushworth area) was reputed to be the oldest Aboriginal man in Victoria at the time, although his age was not reported. He and W Abbott put on a boomerang throwing display at half-time.

Another match, between the men from the Aboriginal reserve at Cummeragunja, near present-day Barmah, and South Bendigo, took place in Bendigo in 1901, with the Cummergunja men playing barefoot. Again, there was a boomerang throwing exhibition at half time. So, our "King John" seems to have been part of a group of men who kept their culture alive by putting on these displays.

THE TITLE "KING BILLY"

In the "Herald" article, King John did not want his European name used, perhaps out of modesty. However, he did say that he could be referred to as "King John" because that was his grandfather's name. He also indicated that he was entitled to be referred to as "King Billy" because he was "the last of the tribe". The name "King Billy" comes up regularly in Aboriginal history post European colonisation. Maybe it was a generic term which was applied to the men who fell into that category.

Reference: Melbourne "Herald" 3.10.1913; Healesville and Yarra Glen Guardian 15.7.1900

4 OUT OF AFRICA

Let's go back in time a little, and briefly reflect on when Homo Sapiens (i.e. the modern human family) first appeared in the Waranga area. A whole range of scientists, from archaeologists to molecular biologists, have been pondering this question for a long time. Recent developments in the study of our DNA have come up with new information that confirms results previously suggested by other branches of science.

There is now little doubt that Homo Sapiens had their origins in East Africa. We all can be traced back "from a single genetic line in Africa within the last 200,000 years." Expansion to other parts of the world tended to follow coastlines. Initial forays into Arabia and India happened 50-60,000 years ago, with their descendants reaching the north of Australia and New Guinea around 50,000 years ago. There are some fairly recent claims that the arrival date was some 15,000 years before this, but the present consensus still considers around 50,000 years ago as the most likely.

THE FIRST EXPLORERS

When we think about explorers of the Waranga area, we usually tend to look no further back than Major Mitchell coming through "Australia Felix" in 1836, followed in quick succession by overlanders and squatters.

However, on the basis of what we now know, the true first explorers spread relatively quickly around the coasts of Australia, in both clockwise and anti-clockwise directions. In the process, some people moved inland, with the vanguard of this movement reaching our area around 45,000 years ago. Others crossed the land bridge onto country that is now Tasmania, with at least one archaeological site in the south of that state dated at 40,000 years old.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE?

In the period when the first explorers were coming to this area, it was a time of extreme glaciation in the world. Because so much of the earth's water was in a frozen state, ocean levels were much lower. Consequently, there were land bridges between what is now Australia and the islands around us e.g. Kangaroo Island, Tasmania, Papua New Guinea.

Despite this, there is general agreement that the first arrivals still had to make a substantial part of the journey by crossing the sea, probably by "island-hopping", then a sea

journey of at least 80 kilometres. They didn't just walk here. Imagine setting off on a small, flimsy craft, without knowing if you would ever reach land.

Australia, and perhaps our area, was then inhabited by so-called "mega-fauna", who shared the terrain with the first human arrivals. Many scientists believe that humans played a role in the extinction of mega-fauna, through hunting and the use of fire. The climate was much cooler and drier than we experience now.

GLOBAL WARMING

After a period of peak glaciation 15-18,000 years ago, there was global warming which melted ice and caused sea levels to rise substantially. Tasmania and New Guinea became islands as sea levels rose by as much as 100 metres. You can appreciate why people in low-lying Pacific islands, for instance, are concerned about further global warming now.

Over the past 5000 years or so, climate has become more temperate in our area, with warmer temperatures and higher rainfall. These conditions helped to make the area more suitable for human habitation, contributing to a growth in population.

It was also a period of technical and cultural innovation, as indicated by the use of advanced stone tools, collection and use of ochre, the development of trading patterns and land use. The social structure of communities became more complex, as did their spiritual beliefs and practices.

OUR STORY

So our story, the story of human habitation of the Waranga area, goes back a very long way. It did not just begin in the 1830s. It is useful to quote a native American who said "What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night…" (Crowfoot). We are insignificant in the overall scheme of things, but should all be proud of being part of an ancient human history of our area which goes back longer than most of us can imagine.

Reference: Meredith, Martin, *Born in Africa – The Quest for the Origins of Human Life* (Simon & Schuster, 2011); Website - the conversation.com (7.8.18) - *When did Aboriginal people first arrive in Australia?*

5 ANCIENT HISTORY

Much of the history that has been written about the Aboriginal people of the local Waranga area relates to the last 180 years. This is understandable, in that academic historians are always concerned with written documentation and verification. However, that is all but impossible when a culture has relied on an oral tradition, as Aboriginal people had done before European colonisation.

Although we might think of it as a long time, the last 180 years represents a drop in the ocean (<1%) of time during which the local area has been in the custodianship of human beings. Without getting into a debate about exactly how long we are talking about, we can say with certainty that it is tens of thousands of years.

Of necessity, what follows requires some dreaming of what might have been in the millennia that preceded European colonisation of the area. It is not supposed to represent a documented history of the lives of the Aboriginal people who inhabited the Waranga area, or to do so in any chronological way. Instead, it will try to provide some understanding of what Aboriginal lives may have been like in the years before European colonisation.

CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

One of the most obvious themes in the history of Aboriginal people has been their connection to Country. Taking land selection in the late nineteenth century as a starting point, present day farming families in the area can point to perhaps 150 years of continuous connection to a parcel of land. Those people no doubt feel a

very strong family affinity with that land. Imagine how strong that connection would be if your ancestors had been on that land up to three hundred times longer than that.

Central to the idea of connection to Country is the special significance that certain places within that Country have to long-term inhabitants and custodians. This could apply equally to Aboriginal people and more recent arrivals. From an Aboriginal point of view, these special places are linked by song lines. As defined in the first article in this series *"They are the long Creation story lines that cross the country and put all geographical and sacred sites into place in Aboriginal culture."*

This begs the question – what were the sites that were important to the Ngurai-illum Wurrung and what were the stories about them that were handed down from generation to generation?

DREAMING SITES

These days we can really only speculate about where those special places were for the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people. They could include communal meeting places, areas where separate men's and women's business was carried out, places where historic events occurred e.g. a famous battle, the birth or death place of a significant individual, geographically significant features e.g. swamps, creeks and rivers, hills, water-holes, the Mt Camel range and much more.

Sadly, we seem to have very little in the way of information about significant sites in our area and the stories that are attached to them. This is probably unsurprising in view of the speed with which the culture virtually disappeared in the tiny window of time between 1840 and 1850. The Aboriginal population went into rapid decline, people were spread far and wide, and connection to Country was dramatically severed, particularly by the expansion of the pastoral industry and then the gold rush.

6 THE NGURAI-ILLUM WURRUNG PEOPLE

The Aboriginal people whose country included the Waranga area were known as the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people. Over the years since European colonisation, nearly 50 variations of this name have been used, such as Ngooraialum, Orilim, Woralim and Noorilim. However, Ngurai-illum Wurrung is the name generally accepted by descendants at this point in time and the one that will be used in these stories.

Wurrung means language (or lip, tongue, speech), so Ngurai-illum Wurrung means the language spoken by the Ngurai-illum people. Elements of the language were recorded over the years, or European interpretations of what those parts of the language meant. Language will be the subject of later stories in this series.

LINKS TO THE KULIN NATION

The Ngurai-illum Wurrung people were closely linked to what is termed the Kulin Nation. The term "nation" refers to the fact that all the Aboriginal people in the nation shared many similarities in language and culture, with regional variations. For instance, the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people shared much of their language with the Taungurung to their south, and it has been estimated that 75% of their vocabulary was shared with the Dja Dja Wurrung people to their south-west.

There are five or six language groups generally recognised within the Kulin Nation, which apart from sharing common language, also shared kinship ties, religious beliefs and rituals for some of the main events in people's lives such as initiation and burial practices.

The specific groups in the Kulin Nation included the Boonwurrung, the Dja Dja Wurrung, the Wathaurong, the Taungurung and the Woiwurrung people. Together, the lands for which they were the custodians for covered roughly a third of Victoria – south to Port Phillip and Western Port Bays and to the west, well

beyond the Loddon River.

CLANS OF THE NGURAI-ILLUM WURRUNG

Within the Ngurai-illum language group, it is generally recognised that there were three specific groups that we will refer to as clans. Put simply, a clan is a group of people linked by kinship and descent. Think successive generations on the family tree.

Although each of the three clans of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people tended to be associated with a particular area, movement in response to seasonal food supplies, and for cultural reasons, would have meant that all three travelled widely.

In briefly introducing the clans, it needs to be noted that, like the name for the overall group (Ngurai-illum Wurrung), a host of different names have been used over the last 180+ years. This story will just refer to the name used in Ian Clark's 1990 work on languages and clans.[1] In that work, he also lists all the variations in name that he came across in his research.

The three clans, and what Ian designates as their "approximate location", are the Benbedora balug (Elmore), Gunung willam (Campaspe River) and Ngurai-illum balug (Murchison). "Balug" means people, and "gunung willam" means "creek dwellers".

At the same time as stating an approximate location, Ian cites all the locations where the clans were seen and mentioned in contemporary accounts. The clans obviously covered vast distances in their travels.

References: 1 Clark, Ian D, *Aboriginal Languages and Clans: An Historical Atlas of Western and Central Victoria 1800-1900* (Monash Uni, 1990); Ecology and Heritage Partners, *Wallan Structure Plan and Infrastructure Co-ordination Plan* (2014)

7 COUNTRY OF THE NGURAI-ILLUM WURRUNG

By the early 1800s, prior to colonisation, the "borders" of the lands for which different groups of Aboriginal people in Victoria were custodians were quite clearly defined and

respected. This was a process that had been going on for thousands of years.

Victoria was divided up into lands of nearly 40 Aboriginal language groups. Within those areas, there were smaller areas mainly frequented by the individual clans belonging to each group.

While there is ongoing debate about the specific boundaries of the land cared for by various groups, the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people had clearly defined territory, as evidenced by many studies. The northern boundary abutted what is now known as Bangerang and Yorta Yorta land; to the south – Taungurung; to the west, beyond the Campaspe River – Baraba Baraba.

The area extended in a wedge roughly from the Campaspe River in the west, to the creeks between present-day Murchison and Violet Town to the east. The southern limit ran through present-day Mitchellstown on an east-west axis, while the northern limits extended from near Echuca in the north-west, on a south-easterly axis, crossing the Goulburn near Toolamba. So it was a massive area (500 square kilometres in round figures), with a relatively small population.

CLAN BASES

As previously noted, there were three clans of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung which spoke the same language and shared common culture and customs. Most contemporary maps of aboriginal groups have the Gunung willam clan based along the Campaspe River around Elmore and Barnadown. "King Charles" Tattambo, who is buried in the Murchison cemetery, was a member of this clan and a ngurungaeta (elder, head man). The Benbedora people also frequented the northern reaches of the Campaspe, and across the plains south-east of Echuca. Ngurai-illum balug people were more often found along the Goulburn River and the creeks to the east.

Later stories will focus on movement of the clans within the broader Ngurai-illum Wurrung lands, although there is a dearth of published information about this. Of necessity, much of the published information that is available is speculative, and often contradictory, so it is very hard to get a clear picture.

Suffice it to say at this stage that water was vitally important, so rivers, creeks, swamps, lakes (e.g. Reedy Lake) and other wetlands were central to the Aboriginal way of life in this area.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEIGHBOURS

Most present-day writing suggests that the Ngurai-illum Wurrung occupied land south of more aggressive northern neighbours – the Bangerang and Yorta Yorta. There is some evidence to suggest that the Ngurai-illum were not as warlike as their neighbours, and indeed feared them.

However, this is not to suggest that contact was always avoided. There was regular contact for trade, cultural events and to allow for inter-marriage between members of different clans and language groups.

What it does seem to suggest though, is that territorial boundaries were known and generally respected. Invasion with the intention of taking over land, in the sense that we know it, did not occur between Aboriginal groups. This may be partly because boundaries had been established since time immemorial, and particular clans were inextricably linked to their own Country where they spent most of their time.

8 CUSTODIANSHIP OF THE LAND TODAY

In the previous story, we looked at the traditional lands of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people. It was noted that much of their country became the old Shire of Waranga after European settlement and included the sites of the present-day towns of Colbinabbin,

Rushworth, Stanhope, Corop and Murchison. That raises some questions when you are moving around Ngurai-illum Wurrung today.

For instance, if you drive along the Midland Highway between Corop and Stanhope, a sign welcomes you to Yorta Yorta country. If you look at the signs at various sites around the area, like Stockyard Plain near Waranga Basin and the Police Paddocks at Murchison, they refer to the fact that you are on Yorta Yorta land. A similar situation exists to the south, where there are signs indicating that you are on Taungurung land. So where do our Ngurai-illum Wurrung people fit into all this?

REGISTERED ABORIGINAL PARTIES

Much of Victoria is covered by agreements between the State government and what are known as Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs). Broadly, what the RAPs do is involve Aboriginal people in managing and protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria, as well as providing a range of services to the wider community. They administer the Aboriginal Heritage Act of 2006.

You can find out more about RAPs by using the following link –

https://w.www.vic.gov.au/aboriginalvictoria/heritage/registered-aboriginal-parties.html

The RAPs are incorporated bodies that are each responsible for a specific geographic area. In the absence of such a body representing the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people, the lands for which they were the original custodians came under the care of two RAPs – the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation and the Taungurung Land and Waters Council Aboriginal Corporation.

This explains the apparently contradictory signage mentioned above. The places were once on Ngurai-illum Wurrung land, but they are currently cared for by the descendants of people who were originally neighbours of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung.

A FLUID SITUATION

Currently there are 12 declared RAPs in Victoria which cover much of the state's geographic area. This number is not restrictive in that other organisations can apply to become a RAP. Eventually, the whole of Victoria might be under the custodianship of RAPs. The main areas not covered at present are in the semi-desert country in the north-west of the state around and parts of the Victorian Alps and East Gippsland.

It is possible for a certain geographic area to have two RAPs responsible for it. In future it could be conceivable that if the descendants of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung became a RAP, they could share responsibility for our area with the two groups mentioned above.

A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

If an issue were to arise in relation to, say, the Aboriginal rock well at Whroo, the relevant RAP (currently Taungurung L&WCAC) would be consulted as the "primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of Aboriginal cultural heritage." One example might be a situation where DELWP was thinking about improving the very inadequate infrastructure and total lack of interpretive data at the site of the rock well. They would need to liaise with the RAP first, even though they are a government department with responsibility for the area.

In the future, if there was a Ngurai-illum Wurrung group which went through the process to become a RAP, with responsibility for the former lands of the Ngurai-illum, then they would also need to be consulted. Reference: Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council website

9 HOW MANY PEOPLE?

Over the years since colonisation, there has been endless speculation about what the Victorian Aboriginal population would have been pre-1830. Starting from what we know with some certainty, the last census (2016) indicated that there were nearly 50,000 people

in Victoria who identified as having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origins.

This is a remarkable comeback from the mid-1800s, when the population was critically low. Then, many pundits suggested it was just a matter of time before the Aboriginal people "died out". In 1845, there was a census of sorts, which probably had severe limitations. However, the surviving people in the local Ngurai-illum Wurrung clans were enumerated as follows – Benbedora (27), Gunung-illum (27) and Ngurai-illum (53). So, a recorded total of only 107 individuals across an extensive area. Ten years earlier, there may have been several hundred, but we are certainly not talking about thousands.

POPULATION DECLINE

Estimates of the numbers of Aboriginal people in Australia pre-colonisation range from about 300,000 to one million. There is evidence to suggest that these numbers had already been drastically reduced by disease, particularly smallpox.

Smallpox may have been introduced to the country by Macassan seamen, who traded with Aboriginal people along the northern Australian coastline, and through the Torres Strait. A second smallpox epidemic is thought to have spread via European colonisation of what are now the eastern states of Australia. Smallpox and other introduced diseases took a huge toll on the Aboriginal people, who had little or no immunity.

A whole range of factors contributed to further dramatic population decline in this area in the ten years after Major Mitchell passed through in 1836. In his wake came the first squatters, who took up land at an astonishing rate, displacing the original inhabitants. There was, at the same time, a significant drop in the birth rate within Aboriginal communities.

Violence by squatters and their men, according to eminent historian A G L Shaw, may have contributed to at least 10% of deaths at this time. Again, estimates vary, but there is no doubt that this was a factor in the Waranga area.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES

The radical changes in lifestyle which followed colonisation meant that traditional food supplies were diminished, quickly making it hard for Aboriginal people to live comfortably using the available local resources, as they had done for thousands of years. Diminished diet and poor health followed, further increasing susceptibility to disease.

There was intense competition for resources as the early squatters established large flocks of sheep across the northern plains of Victoria. Ironically, grasslands which were particularly attractive to the squatters (because no clearing was required), was the result, in no small part, of firestick farming by Aboriginal people over millennia.

Native fauna, which had been readily available as a food source, started to become scarcer. The sheep also had a tendency to eat or trample other traditional food sources such as murnong (yam daisies, native dandelion). When Aboriginal people started to see sheep as a new source of food, the potential for conflict was obvious.

Water resources, vital for any human habitation of a region, came under increased pressure as the squatters sought reliable water supplies for their flocks. The Ngurai-illum Wurrung spent plenty of time where there was water e.g. creeks, rivers and wetlands which had not only provided water but an extensive range of flora and fauna forming part of their varied diet.

References: Barwick, D, Aboriginal History (1984); The Latrobe Journal (No 61, Autumn 1988);

10 MOVING AROUND COUNTRY

During the centenary celebrations of the establishment of Rushworth and Whroo, which

took place in 1953, Nagambie resident Harry S Parris wrote a substantial article about what he considered would be the movements of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung around the local area.[1] If Mr Parris was correct in some of his assumptions, some of the places he mentioned may well have been dreaming sites of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung.

Mr Parris entitled his story "Waranga District Abos. Their Customs and Perambulations". The word "Abos" is not one we would use these days because of its perceived derogatory connotations, although in the 1950s it was common parlance. Today the respectful generic term is "Aboriginal people", or the name of the specific clan or language group e.g. Ngurai-illum balug (clan) or Ngurai-illum wurrung (language group).

CLAN COUNTRY

Mr Parris is referring to the Ngurai-illum balug clan in his story, listing their numbers as about 200 (no date given) and cites their territory as extending from "the Old Crossing Place (Mitchellstown) to Toolamba, and including Whroo and Rushworth to as far as Mt Scobie (south of Kyabram) on the west, and as far as Violet Town to the east". As cited in an earlier story, along with the Ngurai-illum balug, two other clans to the west of this country made up the Ngurai-illum Wurrung language group.

It is easy to imagine Mt Scobie being a place of significance, being the only eminence over a wide area of plains. Perhaps it was a meeting place for the three Ngurai-illum Wurrung clans to get together on a regular basis. A study first published in 1878[2] cites the Aboriginal name of Mt Scobie as "Porpanda", meaning "a large sandhill" or "high mountain". Compared to the surrounding seemingly featureless plain, you could appreciate how the latter might apply, even though it is only a little over 100 m high.

WINTER CAMP

Harry Parris believed that the Ngurai-illum balug had their winter camps at Reedy Lake, near Bailieston. He cites the existence of large middens as evidence of long-term use of the wetland, stating that "the size of these ovens indicate that this must have been a favoured camping spot and was probably used by the natives for hundreds of years."

Whether there was enough food in the Reedy Lake area to sustain the clan during the winter is open to discussion. However, it is clear that wetlands were important areas providing food such as fish, mussels, yabbies, water birds and their eggs, marsupials, reptiles and plant materials.

MASSACRE ON THE GOULBURN

Just east of Reedy Lake, on the banks of the Goulburn River between what is now Kirwan's Bridge and the Goulburn Weir, there was a massacre in November 1837 in which at least six Aboriginal people were killed, including women and children. Others were wounded.

There is some conjecture as to which clan the people were from. One of the possibilities is the Ngurai-illum balug people, given the proximity to Reedy Lake, and the likelihood that the river would have been a good place to seek food in the late spring.

The perpetrators were an overlander called Fitzherbert Mundy and some of his men. Mundy later openly bragged to a fellow squatter (Dredge) that he wouldn't have trouble with the Aboriginal people because "he had given them such a punishing as they would not likely forget."[3] Given the remoteness from colonised areas in 1837, it seems that the actions of Mundy and his men went unpunished. About ten years after the massacre Mundy, who was by then squatting at Westernport, died from extreme alcohol abuse. Did he have recriminations? Or was his alcoholism related to the death of his wife the year before?

References: 1 Rushworth Chronicle – 1953 articles on the centenary of the town's establishment; 2 Smyth, Robert Brough, The

Aborigines of Victoria (1878); 3 Broome, Richard, Aboriginal Victorians – A History Since 1800 (2005)

11 SPRING ON THE PLAINS

In some previous stories, we looked at an article written by Harry Parris, of Nagambie, in 1953. From what we now call the Rushworth forest, he surmised the Ngurai-illum balug people may have moved to Waranga swamp (now covered by Waranga Basin) and then on towards what is now the Tatura/Toolamba area, where more wetlands abounded with food sources. An alternative suggestion was the lakes complex around the Colbinabbin-Corop area.

Wetlands would have been excellent areas to take advantage of a range of food sources in the springtime, so these are reasonable propositions. As water holes dried up, fish could be caught more easily and plenty of water birds would be nesting. While crossing the plains, reptiles and marsupials would be on the move; new growth would be occurring in many of the food plants, while harvest time for grain crops would be approaching.

BURIALS AT SAPLING POINT

Aboriginal burials are an indicator of places frequented by the local clans. Waranga swamp could have been one such spot. In 1938, some local fisherman found a skull and some bones in the vicinity of what is now called Sapling Point. Waranga Basin was at a 12-year low at the time, with the bones being found about 30 metres from the high-water mark. Reminiscent of the lines in the well-known Paul Kelly song, "Jindabyne", the fisherman "stayed up there fishing…reported it when they came back down". The bones weren't going anywhere in the meantime.

Things moved pretty quickly after that. Senior Constable Ashe and a witness went back out to the Basin later that day with one of the fishermen, who had found a portion of a human skull and some bones. They unearthed more bones, and "what appeared to be a portion of another skull." The bones were around 10-20 cm under the ground, apart from the section of skull that had probably been unearthed by wave action. Constable Ashe said "mixed with the soil were what appeared to be pieces of burnt charcoal. I could not find any traces of clothing or buttons."

MEDICAL REPORT

Homicide detectives arrived from Melbourne the next day, taking the bones back with them for medical examination at the City Morgue. Dr Mollison conducted a full examination of the remains and concluded that the bones were of a young adult female and an older male who had been dead for many years (possibly over 100) "and had been those of Australian aboriginals…there was nothing to show that the deaths were due to any violence."

The Coroner agreed with the Detective Davis that "there are no suspicious circumstances." It is unclear what happened to the remains after the Coroner had completed his work.

SOME OBSERVATIONS

Perhaps the remains were those of a husband and wife. It was not uncommon for older Aboriginal men to have wives younger than themselves – sometimes much younger. If the deaths were not the result of violence, then perhaps the pair died around the same time as a result of illness or disease. Dr Mollison's conclusion about the age of the remains could mean that the deaths pre-dated European colonisation of the Waranga area. As noted in an earlier story, diseases such as smallpox had by then spread south from northern Australia, decimating Aboriginal populations well before Major Mitchell traversed the area.

Pre-Waranga Basin days, the location would probably have been well above the level of water in the swamp. Aboriginal burials had all sorts of variations, but some common themes were the likelihood of one or two people being

buried there, the presence of ochre and charcoal in the grave, close proximity to water and/or where the people happened to be living at the time.

Reference: Report of Coroner's Inquest held on 3.5.1938; Aboriginal Burials, Victorian State Government fact sheet (2008)

12 SUMMER ON THE RIVER

Logically, you would expect that Aboriginal people would have retreated to the vicinity of the Campaspe and Goulburn Rivers during the summer. Access to a reliable supply of water and food resources would have been vital. This was the conclusion reached by Harry Parris when he was thinking about seasonal movements of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people of the local area.

Parris thought that in summer, the Ngurai-illum Wurrung frequented the river around Dhurringile (an Aboriginal word meaning "crouching emu") and North Murchison, but not much further north on the river because of their enmity with the Bangerang.

FISHING METHODS

The Ngurai-illum Wurrung were experts at fishing. Fish formed an important part of the diet at this time of year. Beautifully clean, unpolluted water in the Goulburn River enabled the men to go into "the water with short, barbed spears in their hands, with which they dived and speared the fish in its own element."[1] Implied in this is the fact that Aboriginal people were excellent swimmers, both on the surface and underwater. This also gave them access to a wide range of foodstuffs other than fish, including crustaceans, mussels, tortoises and water birds.

Other fishing methods included the use of sophisticated hand-made nets, weirs and fish-traps. In billabongs and waterholes that had been isolated by receding waters, fish could be caught by "throwing into it (the water) a quantity of fresh gum boughs, as a result of which, in a few hours, the fish died and came up to the surface."[1]

MAKING NETS

Fishing nets were skilfully made from natural fibres – either from rushes, bark or possibly tougher grasses. Parris claims that "This tribe did not use fish hooks, although they were particularly skilful in the manufacture of string…The string was made by twisting the roots of bulrushes by rubbing them between the hands and on the thighs". Another observer suggests the rushes were first chewed and softened before being rubbed to make the string, which was also used to make nets to trap low-flying water birds.

OTHER ELEMENTS OF DIET

As well as the bounty from the rivers, Aboriginal women supplemented family diets from a wide range of sources. They would harvest edible root crops, herbs, seeds, fruits and vegetables as well as searching for honey, small animals, reptiles, grubs and insects.

In this way, the Ngurai-illum Wurrung could relatively easily provide enough food and a varied diet, which in turn meant that the people remained in good health. Unfortunately, this later ceased to be the case as access to food resources dramatically diminished from the 1840s. Relying on "rations" that led to a much narrower diet, including processed foods like sugar and white flour, meant poorer health and greater susceptibility to disease.

GENERATIONS OF LEARNING

The relative ease of the life on the riverbanks was the result of learnings over millennia, as food collection techniques continually advanced. The comprehensive skills passed from generation to generation meant that there was adequate time for other pursuits. This may have included attention to things of a spiritual and ceremonial nature.

It may also have meant that it was a time when people from other clans gathered with the Ngurai-illum Wurrung. If Harry Parris' proposition is correct, and they were camping on the Goulburn north of Murchison in summer, then this would represent the time of year when they were in the closest proximity to the Yorta Yorta clans. Although they were generally regarded as hostile, there were occasions when the two language groups got together for the purpose of ceremony and inter-marriage.

References: 1 Numurkah Leader 5.1.1943 p 3

13 MURNONG - A STAPLE FOOD

One of the staple foods collected by Aboriginal women of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung was the roots or tubers of murnong (Microseris lanceolata), commonly known as the yam daisy. Prior to colonisation, murnong was widespread on the northern plains between the Goulburn and Campaspe Rivers. Within a short space of time in the 1840s, with the influx of sheep and cattle, it became quite scarce. Squatter Edward Curr wrote later that "several thousand sheep not only learnt to root up these vegetables with their noses, but for the most part lived on them for the first year, after which the root gradually began to get scarce".

The loss of Aboriginal methods of cropping, because of their exclusion from country, was also a factor. Prior to the 1840s, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Aboriginal people deliberately promoted the growth of murnong, partly through a burning regime which "cleared away any dead vegetation, leaving open ground, fertilised by ash, eminently suited for growth. Plants sprouting from underground organs are able to regenerate very rapidly after fire…"

HARVESTING MURNONG

The process of systematically collecting murnong also had the effect of promoting the growth of a crop for future collection on a sustainable basis. Women used pointed digging sticks to collect the roots, and "the continual digging over of the soils for roots was one of the important factors in maintaining a loose, well-aerated soil." This in turn provided better conditions for the remaining plants to thrive.

There are currently attempts being made by Bruce Pascoe (author of *Dark Emu*) and friends to grow murnong on a commercial basis. It has the potential to at least supplement potato in our diets and is apparently infinitely more nutritious than potato.

EATING THE TUBERS

"The tubers can be eaten raw and have a radish-like texture with a sweet and unique coconutty and grassy flavour. Roasting or frying murnong renders the taste similar to a potato, but with a naturally saltier flavour. Traditionally, they've been cooked in fire pits." (SBS website – Shane Delia's Recipe for Life, June 2018)

Storage is similar to other root crops that we use today. Aboriginal people would have harvested only what they needed on a regular basis, so the need for storage was minimal. However, there are records of roots being carried on a journey of 14 days and then used for trading. It is quite conceivable that in areas

where there was plenty of murnong, it might have been harvested and then traded to areas where it was less common, in exchange for goods that Ngurai-illum Wurrung Country lacked.

TRADE ROUTES

"Today we might understand a 'trade route' to be a particular route or passage of travel from one location to another in order to buy and sell commercial goods for monetary profit. For Australian Aborigines a trade route was an ancient and pre-designated passage through the landscape, often 'mapped' out in song, for the purpose of meeting at particular locations of great cultural and mythical-historical importance, and ceremonially exchanging, renewing and reinforcing friendship rites with other Aboriginal tribal groups, clans or nations. At these locations, goods, objects or Dreaming songs considered valuable for their spiritual, religious, cultural and artistic worth were exchanged or passed from one group to another." (National Film and Sound Archive website)

It would be interesting to know where these routes were in the Ngurai-illum Wurrung country and what range of goods were traded across them. Murnong could well have been one.

Reference: Gott, Beth, *Murnong…a study of a staple food of Victorian Aborigines* (in Australian Aboriginal Studies, 1983 No 2)

14 KANGAROO AS A STAPLE FOOD

Like the yam daisy (or murnong) which was mentioned in the previous story, kangaroo meat was a staple food for the local Aboriginal people in the millennia prior to the 1840s. While the women were principally engaged in the collection of murnong, the men took responsibility for hunting kangaroos. There were similarities with the way their American counterparts hunted buffalo. They only killed what they needed, and nearly all parts of the animal were utilised – meat certainly, but also skins, bones, sinews and so on.

During the 1830s and 1840s, land in the Waranga area was rapidly taken up by squatters. The squatters brought thousands of sheep with them, along with some cattle, which were grazed on land formerly the primary habitat of kangaroos. The squatters had no hesitation in using guns and dogs to kill off the kangaroos, which were seen to be competing for the available pasture and water resources.

CREATION OF GRAZING LAND

Ironically, a regular burning regime by Aboriginal people, on suitable land, had created ideal conditions for sheep and cattle grazing. Stations could be established for minimal cost, with no time being lost by having to do extensive clearing.

In his seminal 2011 book, *The Biggest Estate on Earth – How Aborigines Made Australia* (Allen and Unwin), respected historian Bill Gammage documents in great detail how these burning regimes worked. Bill based his book on some clear facts. Firstly, 70% of Australian plants need or tolerate fire. Secondly, over millennia Aboriginal people had developed an incredible knowledge of those plants and their particular relationship to fire. Finally, they understood the basic needs of the kangaroos that they were hunting.

This allowed them to do burning, or not do burning as the case may be, in such a way that it would cause grazing animals to move in a predictable way to specific locations where they could find the best food and shelter. The predictability of movement was aided by the fact that the kangaroos had no predators (other than humans) prior to European colonisation.

HUNTER-GATHERERS BUT ALSO FARMERS

In another important recent book, *Dark Emu*, (Magabala Books, 2014) Bruce Pascoe seeks a reconsideration of the role of Aboriginal

people as simply hunter-gatherers. And incidentally, if you ever get a chance to hear Bruce speak, seize the opportunity. You will not be disappointed.

The previous story about murnong has already indicated that, as a form of farming, Aboriginal people took very specific steps to maintain a sustainable crop of murnong. Bruce takes that a step further, by documenting numerous examples of Aboriginal people growing grain crops. Major Mitchell, one of the first European men through the area, noted that "the grass is pulled…and piled in hayricks, so that the aspect of the desert (sic) was softened into the agreeable semblance of a hayfield…we found the ricks or haycocks extending for miles."

Evidence of the "selection of seed, preparation of the soil, harvesting of the crop, (and the) storage of surpluses" by Aboriginal people quickly disappeared with the arrival of the squatters and their flocks. However, they are all activities that we normally associate with farming, and which the custodians of the land prior to the 1840s engaged in.

INEVITABLE CLASHES

As early as 1839, a Ngurai-illum Wurrung man, called "Moonin Moonin, complained that Jumbuck and Bulgana (sheep and cattle) were destroying Aboriginal game pastures and staples like yams and mirr-n'yong roots."

With the loss of access to all these resources, it was inevitable that there were going to be clashes between the previous custodians of the land and the new ones. This was especially the case when Aboriginal people killed or stole livestock or destroyed property. Retribution tended to be excessive, swift and violent, and on a virtually lawless frontier, usually went unpunished.

One clash near the Goulburn River was briefly recounted in an earlier story. Many other clashes took place along the Campaspe River, particularly south of the areas for which clans of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people had been the custodians. In many cases, attacks on Aboriginal people went unreported. The perpetrators were often men who worked on stations, many of whom were ex-convicts with violent backgrounds.

Reference: Kiernan, Ben, *Blood and Soil: Modern Genocide 1500-2000* (Melb Uni Press, 2008)

15 TERRA NULLIUS & EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT

We tend to have a romantic vision of hard-working European colonists coming in to the "unpopulated" arable parts of Australia to establish productive rural properties. At the time there was genuine belief in the concept of "terra nullius" or "nobody's land". That is, the land was deemed to be unoccupied with no owner, and therefore open to settlement by the new arrivals, with the imprimatur of the colonial government of the day.

As we have seen in earlier stories, this was a long way from the truth. The Aboriginal people of the Waranga area had indeed had a very long tenure of the land, where they were easily able to produce more than enough food to meet their needs. When this history was ignored by the new arrivals, it was inevitable that conflict would occur.

CLASH OF CULTURES

One such serious clash of cultures took place on the Campaspe River south of Heathcote in 1838. The Campaspe, from Rochester south to Kyneton, has a history of extreme frontier violence. Part of the explanation for this is that the men employed by the squatters in the late 1830s and 1840s were often hard cases, ex-convicts with a predilection for extreme violence. In a male-dominated society, they targeted Aboriginal women as partners, which was also a source of conflict.

Additionally, Aboriginal people quickly came to the realisation that the newcomers were there

to stay, and as a consequence, the resources they were used to harvesting were quickly depleted. Sheep and cattle were a potential alternative new resource, but if they were utilised by Aboriginal people, those people quickly became the targets of retribution.

A BEAUTIFUL STRETCH OF RIVER

If you take a little time out when you drive the back way to from Colbinabbin to Bendigo via Barnadown, by going into any access point on the Campaspe you will see that it is a truly beautiful little river in this area. It is hardly surprising that it was revered by the Gunung Willam, the clan of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people who called the river and the country to its east home for millennia. As you sit by the river, you wonder where this place fitted into the Songlines of those people, and what significance it had as part of their Dreaming.

Unfortunately, many of the things that made the river so attractive to the Ngurai-illum Wurrung (and further south to the Taungurung and Dja Dja Wurrung) were also the things that were coveted by the European settlers. In particular, it represented a reliable place to water sheep and cattle, in country that could be very dry.

16 A BATTLE ON THE CAMPASPE

In June 1838, a group of Aboriginal people killed two shepherds and took some sheep from a station to the south, moving them north to a bend on the river, where they secured them with a brush fence. A group of around eight European men on horses followed the clearly marked trail along the river until they caught up with the offenders.

A pitched, but ultimately one-sided battle then took place. Men on foot armed with spears and clubs were no match for men on horseback with muskets. The latter could remain out of effective spear-throwing distance while shooting down their opponents. Between 20 and 30 Aboriginal people were killed on the spot; others probably later died as a result of their wounds. The overseer and stockmen from the station were unharmed and retrieved most of their sheep.

It is uncertain which group of Aboriginal people were involved in this incident. They could have included Ngurai-illum Wurrung and/or their southern neighbours, the Taungurung. The Dja Dja Wurrung may also have been there. Regardless of which group(s) were involved, this was just one of hundreds of similar stories from around Australia that fly in the face of our vision of peaceful European settlement of the land.

HERO OR VILLAIN?

The man who allegedly oversaw the killing of Aboriginal people on the Campaspe River in 1838 was John Coppock. He was in charge of a station further south on the Campaspe which was leased by the squatter Henry Yaldwin (or Yaldwyn). Coppock had arrived in the area hot on the heels of the Major Mitchell expedition. He had over 20 men to assist him with overlanding 4000 sheep in lamb from Goulburn, New South Wales, before setting up a station at Barfold in the first part of 1837. The men were all “assigned men” i.e. convicts and hard cases.

Writing about his then deceased uncle in the 1880s, Coppock’s nephew John Coppock White describes him as “our hero”. Later in life, Coppock became a squatter in the West Wimmera at Lake Albacutya, where he was regarded as a respected pioneer of the district. It is unlikely that the Aboriginal people who had lived along the Campaspe would have regarded him with any respect.

MAKING EXCUSES

John White says that Coppock became aware of the fact that his men were shooting down Aboriginal people on sight – “they did not confine themselves to the men, but destroyed the lubras and piccaninnies as well.” White claims Coppock urged his men to “leave their arms at home and to try to make friends of the

blacks." In the light of subsequent events, one wonders whether White was just trying to protect his uncle's name from culpability for these deaths.

In 1838, a group of Aboriginal people raided an outstation of the Barfold run, spearing and clubbing a watchman and a shepherd, and stealing the flock of sheep. White claims that Coppock's justification for what followed went like this – "I have always tried to treat the natives with justice; they have been a great annoyance, and have killed a large number of my sheep, wounded three men, and have now murdered two. I have applied to the Government for protection, and received as an answer that I would have to protect myself; these things being so, I must protect myself, and will give them a proper lesson whilst I am about it." In other words, action deemed justifiable on the basis of self-defence.

WATERLOO PLAINS

Coppock and his men quickly caught up with the Aboriginal people and the sheep and wreaked a terrible vengeance. White claims Coppock reported 23 Aboriginal deaths, while many others were wounded, at what became known as Waterloo Plains. "One or two of the attacking party received slight wounds", indicating the word massacre was more appropriate that the word battle.

After Waterloo Plains, John Coppock apparently wrote a brief account of the events that took place there and submitted it to the head of police in Melbourne, who subsequently reported it to his superiors in Sydney. At this point, the State of Victoria had not been designated. Eventually, Coppock and his men were summonsed to appear in Sydney – a rare occurrence for perpetrators of violence against Aboriginal people. The "Sarah", the ship that was to take them to Sydney disappeared without a trace on that trip. However, Coppock, who had been visiting a friend in Williamstown the night before, conveniently missed the early morning departure.

EVADING JUSTICE

Coppock's absence had gone unnoticed, and he took the opportunity to let friends and relatives believe that he had died or disappeared with the "Sarah". He went underground in rural Victoria until the heat had gone out of the Waterloo Plains massacre, only resurfacing at remote Lake Albacutya run some 10 years later. A guilty conscience perhaps, but ultimately, he did not have to face justice.

It was rare for men like Coppock to be found guilty of a crime. More often than not, such crimes went unreported. In his case, even though it was reported by him, there was a strong likelihood that he would have been exonerated even if he had made it to Sydney. Despite the excessive nature of the response, self-defence would have been claimed, and there were no eyewitnesses apart from him and his men.

Reference: The Australasian (a Melbourne newspaper) 31.10.1885

17 MORE BLOODSHED ON THE CAMPASPE

In 1839, more violent incidents occurred along the Campaspe River, this time in the country of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people. The squatter Charles Hutton, a former officer in the British army in India, had a run on Wild Duck Creek, south of present-day Heathcote. In dry conditions, he was looking for more feed for his flocks when he set up an outstation at what is now Barnadown. There were two flocks of sheep there, each under the oversight of a shepherd, as well as a hut maintained by a third man, James Neill. On 22 May, the outstation was attacked by Aboriginal men. Neill and one of the shepherds were killed and one of the flocks of sheep was stolen.

As soon as Hutton and his men became aware of what they referred to as "the outrage", they set off in pursuit. They caught up with the offenders at an area known as Restdown Plains

(current day Rochester). In official reports, they simply said that they had retrieved most of the missing 700 sheep. Nothing was reported about what happened to the offenders, although Hutton said they were "from a tribe from the Goulburn River". Hutton and his men returned with the sheep, but the outstation at Barnadown was abandoned.

RETRIBUTION

As noted in the previous Waranga Dreaming story, there was little in the way of law enforcement in areas that were then remote from the main settlements of Port Phillip. However, on this occasion, Hutton was able to secure a detachment of mounted police. As soon as they arrived at his station, he and his overseer James Cosgrove set off with the troopers on a punitive expedition along the Campaspe to the north.

Because the reprisals were carried out by government officials, official depositions were later taken from some of the troopers, as well as Hutton and Cosgrove. According to one historian, "the depositions are unsatisfactory and tend to contradict one another on several important aspects". No depositions were taken from any Aboriginal people.

The reports indicated that the troopers attacked an Aboriginal encampment near Restdown Plains, a few km north of the place where the sheep had earlier been retrieved, without establishing whether the perpetrators of the attack on the Barnadown station were there. Sergeant Dennis Leary, of the Mounted Police, advised that "I charged the camp to apprehend them if possible". As soon as a couple of spears were thrown, the shooting started. Leary said "to the best of my belief five or six were killed".

COVERING HIS BACKSIDE

Hutton's deposition appears to be deliberately vague, claiming that he had ridden north to cut off any escape by the Aboriginal people and had not really seen what happened. He reckoned he was not directly engaged in the shooting and only saw one dead body, even though he deposed that he and Cosgrove and the troopers had stayed on the site for an hour after the shooting stopped. There was a later uncorroborated story in which Hutton had privately stated that many more people were killed than Leary had deposed.

Some months later, in early 1840, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, George A Robinson, and his Assistant, Edward S Parker, visited Hutton at his station. In a purportedly fiery exchange, Robinson said "Hutton told him that they (the Aboriginal people) must be exterminated or else terrified so that they respected the settlers' property."

REPUTATION MAINTAINED

Like John Coppock in the previous story, Hutton was on the way to becoming very wealthy as a result of his pastoral enterprises, and in his case, subsequent land dealings in Melbourne. He was considered to be the epitome of an English gentleman when he died at Brighton, Victoria, in 1879, leaving an extensive estate.

There was no formal inquiry, and no-one was ever charged over the deaths of the Aboriginal people. With "only" five or six deaths reported by the perpetrators, it seems to have been deemed by the authorities to be unworthy of further investigation.

Reference: Randell, J O, *Pastoral Settlement in Northern Victoria Vol 2 – The Campaspe District*

18 THE LEGACY OF FRONTIER WARS

The incidents described in recent stories in this series were not isolated: they happened all around Australia. Although they are part of Australian history, they were not something that was ever taught in schools, until perhaps recently. No serious study of incidents involving the violent deaths of Aboriginal people in colonial times took place until the

1980s, when Bruce Elder wrote a book called *Blood on the Wattle* (New Holland Publishers). Many other books and studies have followed.

There is also a website that is in the process of being developed by a group at the University of Newcastle. An interactive map is included, which makes sobering viewing.

Now that we are aware of the true extent of the carnage, we have to re-think that part of our history. The spread of European colonisation through Australia was accompanied by what amounted to a war on the previous custodians of the land. Accepting this unpalatable fact is one step that needs to be taken on the long road to reconciliation.

HOW MANY PEOPLE DIED?

There has always been plenty of speculation about how many Aboriginal people lived in Australia prior to European colonisation. In an earlier story, after a review of the literature about the subject, it was suggested that the most likely figure would have been in the range of 300,000 to a million.

Another Waranga Dreaming story noted that respected historian A G L Shaw thought around 10% of the Aboriginal population may have died as the result of frontier violence. Apply that to the most conservative population estimate above, and we are talking about a minimum of 30,000 men, women and children killed in the violence. The real figure will never be known, because more often than not, the killing went unreported or under-reported.

On the colonists' side of the equation, there were also deaths. Often these were shepherds or other farm hands who were working in vulnerable, isolated situations. Again, various estimates have been made over time, and these tend to be more accurate than those for Aboriginal people because they were more likely to be reported. The number of deaths is in the order of 2000. This means the ratio of Aboriginal to colonist deaths from violence is at least 15 to 1 – perhaps much more.

A ONE-SIDED WAR

More often than not, the conflict was in relation to access to resources e.g. land, water, plants and animals, minerals. Access to horses and modern firearms gave the colonists a significant advantage when conflict arose, which partly accounts for the huge disparity in the number of deaths. Also, when retribution was being meted out, it was often excessive in relation to the original crime, if there had been one.

To put the frontier wars in context, more Australians died in them than in all other wars that Australians have subsequently been engaged in, excluding World War 1. However, they have not received anything like the historical scrutiny of our involvement in overseas wars.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Some people don't want to discuss the deaths that occurred during the European colonisation of our area and Australia in general. They refer to it as a "black armband view of history" and reckon we don't have anything to gain by bringing up an unsavoury part of our history.

However, most Aboriginal people see a conversation around this part of our history as an essential part of the truth telling that is a necessary step on the road to reconciliation. You can't just bury the history and then expect people to move on as if nothing had happened. Certainly, the true history is being uncovered and is slowly being introduced into schools. One step that older members of the community could take would be to make a conscious effort to re-educate themselves about the true history of European colonisation. Acknowledging that history is a good starting point for the process of reconciliation.

19 VISITING THE BOX IRONBARK FOREST

In one of our earlier stories, Harry Parris, an old Nagambie resident writing in the 1950s had surmised that the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people wintered at Reedy Lake. He proposed that with the onset of spring, they would be on the move, heading through the ancient red gum forest that existed in the district now known as Angustown. Parris felt they would have then travelled into the box-ironbark forest and on to what we now know as Whroo.

Cryptically, Mr Parris stated that he thought that "at Whroo the Balaclava Hill seemed to possess some special significance for the natives" without saying why, other than "possibly because it gives an excellent view of the country to the west, and smoke signals from enemy tribes could be observed." Balaclava Hill could indeed have been used as a vantage point (as well as being culturally significant), although we now know that areas to the west were also part of Ngurai-illum Wurrung territory. They would have been looking for signs of friends from other clans, rather than enemies.

RE-DISCOVERING ROCK WELLS

With his keen interest in Aboriginal history, Mr Parris "re-discovered" the rock well at Whroo in 1949. He already knew that the name Whroo was a variation of a local Aboriginal word (woorro) meaning lips/mouth, and in searching the area with Mr A H Perry of Bailieston, he was working on the assumption that there must be a location in that vicinity where Aboriginal people went to get a drink.

In 1956, he took Aldo Massola (then Curator of Anthropology at the oddly-named National Museum of Victoria) to see the well. Earlier that year, Massola had already written a paper about similar wells in the Maryborough area. His theory was that there would be a series of reliable watering places on well-trodden paths through country – especially where things could become very dry, like our box-ironbark forests.

Massola wrote an article for "The Victorian Naturalist" in which he described the well on Spring Hill, pretty much as we know it today. "At this point an outcrop of micaceous sandstone approximately 12 x 8 feet (3.7 x 2.4 metres) emerges from the soil. On this outcrop an oval hole about 15 inches long and 10 inches (38 x 24 cm) wide has been sunk to a depth of about 3 feet (0.98 m)."

WHOSE WELL?

The Ngurai-illum Wurrung people have been linked to the well since time immemorial. It is most likely that it was on a songline that was traversed between Reedy Lake and the Goulburn River in the east, to areas further west including the Corop lakes and wetlands and the Mount Camel range.

By the time of the gold rush, the Ngurai-illum Wurrung's link with the well was probably already broken. It was Massola who observed that it was most likely increased in size by the miners so they could get a billy of water by immersion. It is hard to imagine that it would have been a very reliable source of water to service the thousands of diggers who were briefly in the area, but it had formerly comfortably satisfied the needs of the original custodians.

To further support the theory that it was miners who increased the size of the well, Massola noted that "native water-holes almost always have a small aperture so that they could protect them from pollution by animals and debris, and also against loss of water by evaporation."

References: Massola, Aldo, *The Native Water Well at Whroo, Goulburn Valley* (The Victorian Naturalist, July 1957); Rushworth Chronicle 1953.

20 CORROBOREES AT RUSHWORTH

Aboriginal spirituality could be expressed in many ways, including musically and through ceremony. Corroborees were one very obvious way of doing this. There are tantalising snippets of information about corroborees being held in the area that is now the south end of High Street, Rushworth, close to Moora Road. The accounts relate to the time after the start of the gold rush, so it is possible that the Aboriginal people camped on the fringes of the new settlement of Rushworth may have conducted the corroborees as an entertainment for the miners. This often happened on the goldfields, providing a way for the Aboriginal people to earn some income, or get "rations" such as sugar, flour and tobacco.

There are no clues in the reports about who the Aboriginal people involved may have been. Perhaps they were the local Ngurai-illum Wurrung people, or they could have been another group displaced because of European colonisation in the preceding 15 years or so. No other details were provided in the reports, other than the fact that corroborees had taken place.

WITNESSING A CORROBOREE

About ten years before the corroborees mentioned above (i.e. in the early 1840s), the squatter Edward Curr witnessed a corroboree on his run north of present-day Tongala. This was probably a more realistic version of a traditional corroboree than the ones that might have taken place at Rushworth for the benefit of the miners. The corroboree took place on Bangerang land, but Curr explains that the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people participated, despite their language differences.

He mentions the attendees as including "Ngooraialum" (probably the Ngurai-illum balug clan) and "Pimpandoor…a tribe from the Campaspe, their immediate neighbours" (i.e. the clan we have referred to as the Benbedora balug, and part of the broader Ngurai-illum Wurrung people), who spoke the same language, as well as the Bangerang. The purpose of the meeting, which included the corroboree, was ostensibly for trade and the exchange of prospective wives.

PREPARATION

After dark, the men retired to an area away from the main camp, lit a couple of large fires, then prepared themselves. This involved painting their bodies with ochre ("a groundwork of rouge made from a sort of clay which is burnt for the purpose") then overlaying that with designs in "pipe clay" (i.e. white clay). The source of the clay used for the bodily decoration is not mentioned by Curr, but it was a valuable commodity which was sometimes used for trading between different groups of Aboriginal people.

The men wore either a net over their hair, or a "narrow band of twisted opossum skin, which was tied behind, the ends of the strings hanging down between the shoulders; a plume of emu or cockatoo feathers being frequently inserted in it". Performers also wore a waist band with possum skin thongs hanging down to their knees, green leaves bound around the ankles and rolls of fur around their biceps.

MUSIC AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN

The women's role in proceedings included being spectators, but also the provision of most of the music. This came in the form of singing, but also drumming by hitting their rolled-up possum skin cloaks with open hands. The singing must have seemed quite alien to Curr, who described it as "wild and peculiar airs sung in chorus".

Another accompaniment to the music provided by the women was the use of what we now call clapsticks. On this occasion, it was also provided by a man who Curr regarded as the master of ceremonies. He "struck together the two short sticks with which he marked the time" in a way that we are most familiar with these days.

Just before the corroboree was to begin, light fuel was thrown on the fires on each side of the "stage" to illuminate the area, the clapsticks started beating, and the women "burst into song" with their "shrill voices". The stage was set for the performance to begin.

Reference: Curr, Edward M, Recollections of Squatting in Victoria pp 134-9

21 MEETING OF CLANS

The corroboree witnessed by squatter Edward Curr in the early 1840s, that was mentioned in the previous story, occurred at a meeting between clans of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people and the Bangerang people.

One of the main reasons for the gathering "was the delivery of the betrothed girls to their husbands". On this occasion, two or three women from each group were in this category. Women were betrothed to a man from another clan, and were then expected to go and live with their husbands as part of his clan, even though the Ngurai-illum Wurrung and Bangerang people spoke different languages. One outcome of inter-clan marital relationships was that most Aboriginal people in the Waranga area would have been multi-lingual, in order to communicate in their new clans and be able to maintain kinship relations.

A DRAMATIC START

The dancing at the corroboree was performed by the Bangerang men, accompanied by music (singing and percussion) provided by the women. "Preparations being in this advanced stage, the occasional clash of shield and boomerang, snatches of song in female voices, or the wild yell of delight of some warrior…warned the Ngooraialum (sic), who had begun to gather around the point of attraction, and seat themselves on the ground, about ten yards from where the performance was to take place, that all was ready."

When the spectators were seated, dry eucalypt leaves were thrown on the fires on either side of the area where the performance was to take place. The "fire shot up into a blaze; the master of ceremonies struck together the two short sticks with which he marked the time, and the shrill voices of the … (women) burst into song." The men performing, "until now unseen, (were) one by one issuing from the outside gloom" and "took up their position in a row between the fires; each man, as he came into line, extending his arms and legs into that peculiar attitude which makes one of the marked singularities of the corroboree."

A STARTLING PERFORMANCE

Curr and his brother found the dramatic effects to be quite "startling" and were "strongly impressed with the scene". "The extraordinary energy displayed by the dancers; their singular attitude; the quivering thigh; the poised spear, the whitened shield borne in the left hand; the peculiar thur! thur! thur! which their lips emitted in unison with the measured tramp of their feet; their ghastly countenances; the sinister manner in which the apparition had noiselessly stolen from the surrounding darkness into the flaming foreground, and executed – now in order, now in a compact body, to the sound of the wild voices, and the clash of savage arms…made up a picture thrilling from its novelty, its threatening character, and in its entire strangeness."

STORY TELLING

In the Aboriginal tradition, the corroboree was synonymous with storytelling. Although it is impossible to determine what story this particular corroboree was telling, there was a point where "their savage eyes fixed on my brother and myself, suddenly as one man (they) threw back their right arms and brought their right shoulders forward, as if to plant in our breasts their spears which now converged on us – the display seemed to have passed from the theatrical to the real."

Perhaps the performers were indicating how they really felt towards their usurpers i.e. two of the men who had been responsible for introducing massive changes to their country

in the preceding few years. To the relief of the Currs, moments later "the climax had been reached, and the performers, dropping their spear-points to the ground, burst into a simultaneous yell, which made the old woods ring again, and then hurried at once out of sight, a laughing mob, into the forest's gloom."

Reference: Curr, Edward, Recollections of Squatting in Victoria pp 136-9

22 POSSUM SKIN CLOAKS

Squatter Edward Curr's description of a corroboree on his run in the 1840s, near present-day Tongala, makes two references to the use of possum skin cloaks. In one, he talks about the women rolling up their cloaks, leather-side out, and bashing on them to make a bass percussion accompaniment to the corroboree. In the other, when each man started to prepare himself for the corroboree by painting his body and appending various parts of his costume, "his opossum-rug (was) discarded for the occasion."

So, it is clear that possum skin cloaks were widely used by the Aboriginal people in the area. They were multi-purpose items – they could be worn, used as a blanket or groundsheet, as a baby carrier or as a burial shroud. They were worn with the fur on the inside or the outside, depending on the circumstances. In the colder months, they were warm and waterproof.

PLENTY OF POSSUMS

The widespread use of possum skin cloaks in the local area implies that there were plenty of possums available. Numbers probably dropped rapidly as land was cleared and habitat reduced. The lack of suitable hollows would have become significant. Also, the provision of the more inferior blankets by government officials and lack of access to country meant that the use of possum skin cloaks quickly diminished from the 1840s.

It was often the men who did the possum hunting. The standard method was to climb a tree to a likely looking hollow, then whack the tree trunk around the hollow with a club or axe. If a possum ran out, it would be quickly despatched by the hunter or finished off by other hunters waiting below. The possum meat would be cooked and eaten after the skin was removed, so nothing was wasted.

MAKING THE CLOAKS

The skin would be scraped, perhaps with a mussel shell or stone scraper. It would then be pegged out to dry on a piece of bark using wooden or bone pins. When it had dried out, animal fat would be rubbed into the skin to make it supple. Holes would then be made around the edge of the skin with a sharp-pointed bone. Skins were sewn together using sinews from kangaroos, yet another example of using all available resources.

A possum skin cloak was a prized possession, taken through life. It might begin as a small cloak made of just a few skins, being used to carry a baby around, and for the baby to sleep in. As the child grew, their cloak was added to until, as an adult, it might comprise 40-50 possum skins.

SIGNIFICANT DECORATION

As with many aspects of Aboriginal life, possum skin cloaks are inextricably linked with story-telling. Designs were incised into the leather with mussel shells or sharp bone awls, then painted with ochre. Each cloak tells a story, "mapping the identity of the owner with stories of clan and country." As the cloak increased in size over time, so too did the number of stories that were represented. It was a means by which important cultural information could be communicated from one generation to the next.

RECENT REVIVAL

In the 1980s and 1990s, there were only a handful of 19th century possum skin cloaks remaining in Australia, two of which are held by Museums Victoria. One of these came from our local area, collected in 1853 at Maiden's

Punt, Echuca. Then there was a resurgence of cloak making, largely initiated by two indigenous women artists, Vicki Couzens and Lee Darroch. One of the outcomes of this resurgence was the production of 35 cloaks that were proudly worn by Aboriginal Elders at the opening ceremony of the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne.

Since then, the skills have been well and truly revived. Bendigo library is amongst the local institutions that have examples which are often on display, and are well worth a look.

REFERENCES: Gibbins, Helen, "Possum Skin Cloaks: tradition, continuity and change" in The Latrobe Journal No 85 (May 2010)

23 POSSUM HUNTING

As noted in the previous story, perhaps the most prized possessions of local Aboriginal people were their possum skin cloaks. Over time, a person's possum skin cloak would grow in size, and as well as being a practical item, was an important cultural object. The decoration on the leather side of the cloak would tell important stories of both the person who owned it, and the people to which that person belonged.

It seems that possum hunting was more often part of the role of the men, but women were also documented in colonial history climbing trees to source possums. When possums were hunted, both the meat and the skins were important. Nothing was wasted.

CURRENT SITUATION

These days, possums (both brush-tailed and ring-tailed) are protected species in Victoria and most other states, although there is still an annual season in Tasmania (with bag limits). As a result, if you are wanting to make a possum skin cloak these days, you can't just go out and hunt enough possums to do so. However, there can be exemptions for traditional owners.

There is an enormous amount of legislation that currently relates to traditional owners, protecting their rights and interests. Under the Victorian Traditional Owners Settlement Act 2010, the government can "authorise the members of a traditional group owner entity that has a natural resource agreement" to hunt certain wildlife. This has to be for traditional purposes, rather than commercial. As a result, an entity could come to an agreement with the State government which allows its members to hunt possums with a view to making a possum skin cloak.

WARANGA AREA

There are a couple of problems with this in the Waranga area. Firstly, possum habitat, and therefore numbers of possums, has been vastly reduced since European colonisation. Possums like tree hollows, and many of the older trees with hollows have simply disappeared with clearing.

In addition, at the moment there is no Aboriginal entity in the local area that has negotiated a natural resource agreement with the Victorian government. Unfortunately, descendants of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people, who were the traditional owners of this area, did not at the time of writing have an "entity" with which to negotiate an agreement. The neighbouring Yorta Yorta and Taungurung corporations are the nominal custodians of the area at the moment and could potentially make an agreement with government.

The Dja Dja Wurrung people around Bendigo are the nearest group to have gained a "natural resources hunting authorisation" as part of a natural resources agreement. It specifies that, in total, up to 50 possums (and 250 Eastern Grey Kangaroos) can be taken by members of the Dja Dja Wurrung each year for traditional purposes.

PRESENT DAY SOURCE OF SKINS

Australia was a big exporter of skins over 100 years ago. For example, around four million pelts went to world markets in 1906. Tasmania is the only state that still exports possum fur and meat, with around 20,000 possums harvested in 2014-15. Most of these go to China and Taiwan.

Possums were introduced to New Zealand from Australia about the time that European colonisation was expanding into the Waranga area in the wake of Major Mitchell's 1836 expedition. Sadly for the New Zealanders, the possums bred like rabbits. They were ideally suited to their new environment, with no natural predators, and numbers burgeoned. The population is now estimated in the tens of millions, and hundreds of thousands of pelts are exported each year. Obviously New Zealand has no restrictions on hunting what is a major environmental pest.

As noted in the previous story, there has been a resurgence in the making of possum skin cloaks in Australia in the last 25 years or so. It seems as though you can access enough skins for a decent sized cloak from New Zealand for between $500 and $1000, and at the same time help our neighbours across the ditch get rid of a few of these unwanted pests.

References: Australian Geographic, Atlas of Living Australia, Victorian Government websites

24 USE OF OCHRE

In recent stories about corroborees and possum-skin cloaks, mention was made of the use of ochre. Ochre is a natural clay earth pigment containing iron oxide that the local Aboriginal people used to produce paint. The paint was then used for all sorts of artistic decoration and for cultural purposes. It was, and still is, used for art works on many mediums, such as rock art, body painting and on objects such as baskets and possum-skin cloaks. The squatter Curr noted the men using ochre to paint their bodies prior to the corroboree that he witnessed in the 1840s.

Certain colours were harder to source than others, so became highly valued. Ochre was one of many items that were traded along clearly defined (to Aboriginal eyes) trade routes that criss-crossed the country. Traded ochre was often kept moist, in a ball, for ease of carrying to points at which trading occurred.

COLOURS

There is a wide range of colours of ochre available – most commonly reds, yellows, browns, oranges, blacks and whites but also purple, pink, green and turquoise. Blue is one colour that traditional Aboriginal peoples rarely used, perhaps largely due to lack of ready availability.

"Colour may often be associated with a particular usage and meaning. In many cultures across the continent white is a colour used to represent mourning and loss. Yellow in many situations is associated with women's ceremonies. Whereas red may in some cultures represent an association with war…it may also be seen as the colour of celebration or ceremony."[1]

SOURCES IN THE LOCAL AREA

One can only imagine where the good sources of ochre might have been in the Waranga area, especially in the areas where mining, farming and industrial pursuits have since totally changed the landscape. A site close to Rushworth that seems to contain all sorts of different colours of clay is the spot that locals just refer to as "the clay dams", south west of Growler's Hill and below the wildflower reserve.

The white clay there is virtually a pure white, and is generically referred to as "pipe clay". This name was probably brought to the area via European colonisation. White clay was often used on the continent to fashion pipes, which were then fired.

MAKING OCHRE

As with many Aboriginal cultural activities, there has been something of a resurgence in people producing ochre paint and using it in a variety of ways. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is encouraging this resurgence, and a visit to its website reveals some interesting short videos about making ochre to apply to a possum skin cloak.[2]

The ingredients usually include the powdered clay, water and some type of binding agent. Often the latter would be the gum from an acacia (wattle), which you often see oozing out of the trunk when a tree or shrub has been damaged. After the flow of sap stops it hardens into globules of gum. One of the most ubiquitous wattles in our area is the Golden Wattle (acacia pycnantha) which produces a beautiful honey-coloured gum. Perhaps this is what the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people used as a binding agent for their ochre?

The clay was ground into a fine powder using stone tools – the Aboriginal equivalent of a mortar and pestle. Then, appropriate amounts of water and gum were added and the ochre was ready for immediate use. Alternatively, with less water added, it could be squeezing into a ball for later use or for transporting as a trading item.

IN THE BUSH

When you are in the bush sourcing materials to make ochre, you see everything in a completely different light. Just looking for wattle gum, for instance, you start to see not only all the different gums exuded by different plants, but by looking closely at those plants, you begin to see all the insects and other small critters that rely on those plants. You get the faintest inkling of the way that Aboriginal people see their country and how everything is connected.

References –
Kooriehistory.com/earth-pigments-ochre/
aiatsis.gov.au/exhibitions/possum-skin-cloak

25 FRESHWATER MUSSELS

Another local resource that has been mentioned in relation to the making of possum skin cloaks are the shells of freshwater mussels. Apparently, the shells were used to scrape excess animal fat from the inside of the possum skins before they were dried. They were also used to incise patterns into the cloaks before they were painted with ochre.

In an early Waranga Dreaming story, former Nagambie resident Harry Parris was cited as mentioning Aboriginal middens at Reedy Lake. A midden is an “accumulation of shell produced by Aboriginal people collecting, cooking and eating freshwater shellfish.” As well as occurring at lakes and swamps, middens can be found along rivers and creeks.

COLLECTION AND COOKING

Eating muddy flavoured mussels collected from local waterways these days is a doubtful privilege, but they were much more palatable when our rivers and creeks ran clear, prior to the days of intensive agriculture and deforestation. It was most often the role of the women and children to collect the mussels. “Depending on the season, one person could collect up to 200 shellfish per hour.” It is no wonder that vast accumulations of shells have been found in middens, often mixed with fish bones, the bones of other animals and charcoal from the fires on which they were cooked.

Mussels can survive in damp ground for up to two years. This meant that in time of drought, the people could dig down, say in a dry creek bed, and find a source of food when other sources were scarce.

Mussels were usually lightly roasted on an open fire, which eventually caused the shells to pop open as the mussels expanded with the heat. The flesh of the mussels would supplement other animal and plant foods, although “the relatively low energy value of

the meat" would mean that, by itself, the flesh of mussels would not constitute an adequate diet.

STORAGE OF MUSSELS

Some people still have the misconception that Aboriginal people were simply hunter-gatherers i.e. they just collected or hunted what they needed for the next meal. However, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that they engaged in all sorts of pursuits that belie that notion. One was the storage of food for use in the future, and freshwater mussels were an example of this.

There have been examples of caches of shells found which were certainly not random piles of shells that would constitute middens. Instead, they were collections of carefully stacked mussels, buried down about a metre. Presumably, this allowed the people to come back to that spot at some point in the future and have a supply of mussels readily available for use.

USE OF SHELLS AS TOOLS

As stated at the outset, mussel shells were often used as tools in different stages of the production of possum-skin cloaks. With their sharp edges, they were probably handy for plenty of other things. If that is the case, it begs the question as to whether the women always carried some shells with them on country. Perhaps they were in such profusion around the Waranga area there was no need to, as you could always find one if you needed it.

If the shells were indeed carried around as tools, perhaps there were some other small items that the women regularly carried with them. An awl, which is a small pointed tool made of bone, would have been useful for piercing leather e.g. when sewing together possum skins, as well as for many other uses. This contrasts with heavier items, such as grinding stones, which were often left in situ at regularly frequented campsites.

PROTECTION OF MIDDENS

Like all places of cultural significance to Aboriginal people in Victoria, shell middens are protected, so you cannot disturb or destroy them. No artefacts, including the shells themselves, should be removed from such a site. Instead, you should report the presence of such sites to the Heritage Registrar at the Office of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria.

References: "Aboriginal Freshwater Middens" information sheet (Victorian Government 2008)

26 CARRYING ESSENTIAL ITEMS

Although it is well established that Aboriginal people in the Waranga area were much more than just hunter-gatherers, there is plenty of evidence of seasonal migration around Ngurai-illum Wurrung country. Before times of travel, the women had to decide what items they would need to always carry with them. There would certainly be a number of small tools, such as a scraper (shell), an awl (bone), a cutting blade (stone) and a yam digging stick amongst the items that would be regularly used. These items could be carried in a bag or basket.

In addition, the women may have used a another carrying vessel (these days most often referred to as a "coolamon", although that is an anglicised NSW Aboriginal word), an oval U-shaped piece of bark or wood which could be used for transporting food collected on their travels. This would often be carried on the head. It could also be used under an arm to carry a small baby.

BAGS AND BASKETRY

To carry the smaller tools, while at the same time leaving the hands free for other tasks, the women would often use bags or baskets made from found materials. These vessels could be hung by a string or strap around the neck.

Stiff baskets could be made using various weaving techniques, or by a process known as

coiling. Because of the materials used, few if any of these baskets from the local area would remain in existence today. As a result, it is now a matter of conjecture as to what natural raw materials were used.

One of the common plants of the local box ironbark forests that has the right properties for basket making is the Black Anther Flax Lily (Dianella revoluta). The strappy leaves can be used for basketry as soon as they are harvested, giving the plant an advantage over other materials that have to be dried before use.

As well as the Flax Lily, another common plant that might have been used is the Lomandra. This plant is usually found in the gullies around the box-ironbark forests, where there is a bit more moisture. The common names – spiny or spiky head mat rush, or basket grass – indicate that the plant was definitely used for basket making, certainly in other areas, but probably also in the Waranga area.

DILLY BAGS

As well as making stiff baskets, local Aboriginal women were adept at making what is generally referred to these days as “dilly bags”. These are soft string bags, made from woven bush string. The word “dilly” is most likely an anglicised Queensland Aboriginal word that come into general use. Dilly bag making skills were apparently lost in Victoria after European colonisation, but are now making a resurgence.

One of the local forest items that might have been used by the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people to make string for dilly bags is the bark from the red stringybark tree (E.macrorhyncha). The bark that was used was not the fibrous outer bark that we are familiar with, but the layer of inner bark that is generally white, yellow and orange and resinous. To collect this bark, the outer layer of bark is removed by use of an axe. (Prior to European colonisation, the axes used were stone-headed.) The inner bark, once removed from the tree, was bashed with a stone or the flat side of an axe head.

The fibrous material resulting could then be used to make into string by twisting and weaving the strands. The resin helped to keep the string together. String could obviously be used for a whole range of purposes other than making dilly bags e.g. nets for fishing and catching birds.

MAKING STRING

When on country, in an environment where the desirable raw materials were available, string making would have been a regular activity for local Aboriginal people.

Like basket-making and dilly bag making, these skills would be passed down through the generations, with local variations.

References: Websites - Culture Victoria - cv.vic.gov.au; Yenbena marrinbidja

27 LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

The last story talked about the essential items that the Ngurai-illum Wurrung women would have carried around with them as they moved around country. Similarly, the men would need to select just a few easily-carried items e.g. spears and clubs. Heavy items, such as grinding stones, would be left at regularly used campsites.

It is an interesting contrast to our sedentary lifestyle these days. When people settle in a place, they start to accumulate “stuff”. The longer they stay there, the more they tend to accumulate. The result is that much of that stuff is of no real use to them. And many of us spend a disproportionate amount of their lives getting the wherewithal to purchase yet more stuff.

A lesson we can learn from Aboriginal people who frequented this area before European colonisation is that less is better: more assets won’t bring you greater happiness. Also, if you do have the good fortune to accumulate some wealth, then sharing it with others can

enhance your life as well as that of those around you.

PERIPATETIC LIFESTYLE

Another advantage of Aboriginal life in this area pre-1840, that we could all learn from, are the benefits provided by walking. Always being on foot allowed the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people to live in close harmony with nature. Their knowledge of the country over which they travelled was most detailed. It was the basis for many stories that could be shared.

In contrast, we tend to use motor vehicles for most journeys, missing out on so much along the way. "Motorised transport is nothing but destination after destination, slicing everything into disconnected episodes; back at this familiar (walking) pace, the world was integral again."[1] By walking from place to place, Aboriginal people were able to make the connections which allowed them make sense of the universe.

This is quite apart from the pollution now caused by cars, with more and more cars appearing on the world's roads. "In 2000, there were four million cars in China. By 2010 this had gone up twenty-fold to eighty million, with growth expected to continue for a long time to come."[2] Now there are 340 million. You have to question whether that constitutes a higher standard of living.

The health benefits of walking – both physical and mental – cannot be ignored. By walking more, we can be healthier as well as noticing and learning so much more about our country as we traverse it.

MAKING THINGS FROM SCRATCH

In 2019 the Rushworth Shire Hall committee ran a "Spirit of Making Do" event as part of the very successful 150th birthday celebrations of the hall. This timely reminder came at a point in time when we are less and less likely to make things from scratch for ourselves or others.

The Ngurai-illum people were highly skilled at making do with what resources that they had on country. Trade was only relied on to obtain the few items they could not make for themselves, or for which the resources were not available locally. The result was that they were adept at a whole range of skills that were passed down from generation to generation, and in a way that enhanced family and community relationships.

As well as coming up with a useful or aesthetically pleasing thing, the physical act of creating something from scratch can also be good for the soul. "When we use our hands effectively the heart is most at peace."

KINSHIP AND SPIRITUALITY

Another lesson that can be learnt from the original custodians of our country is the importance of family. Of course, this is much more difficult these days where families are often spread across the globe, having little day-to-day contact.

Aboriginal family connections are closely linked to concepts of spirituality in ways that we can only vaguely understand. This is worth exploring, considering that many people today lament the apparent loss of faith and spirituality in society. Again, there is much to learn.

References: 1 Hunt, Nick, *Walking the Woods and Water*; 2 Lilwall, Rob, *Walking Home from Mongolia* p 265

28 KINSHIP RELATIONSHIPS

Each member of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung Aboriginal people belonged to one of two moieties, Bunjil or Waa. Moiety means "half" in Latin, and in the local Aboriginal context means there are two social or ritual groups into which all people are divided.

"A person's affinity with either Bunjil or Waa defines their kinship relationships, marriage partners and social responsibilities". (museumsvictoria.com.au/bunjilaka) "People

who share the same moiety are considered siblings, meaning they are forbidden to marry. They also have a reciprocal responsibility to support each other".
(australianstogether.org.au)

BUNJIL AND WAA

Bunjil is represented by the "eaglehawk", or as we know it better, the Wedge-Tailed Eagle. In local Aboriginal mythology, Bunjil was the creator deity – similar to God for Christians or Allah for Moslems. Bunjil was also considered to be a cultural hero and an ancestral being.

Waa is represented by the Crow. Like Bunjil, Waa was a cultural hero and ancestral being. Waa was considered to be something of a trickster, but also a protector.

So, everyone in the local Ngurai-illum Wurrung people was in either the Bunjil or the Waa moiety. This was decided by the moiety of their Father, in a system known as patrilineal (patri = father). This was true of many of the neighbours of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung e.g. the Taungurung to their south, but through south-eastern Australia, the system was generally matrilineal i.e. people traced their identity from their Mother.

CLAN CONNECTIONS

As well as individuals being identified as being Bunjil or Waa, so too were clans. We have already talked about three Ngurai-illum clans, and each of those identified with Bunjil or Waa, viz – Ngurai-illum balug (Murchison) – Bunjil; Benbedora balug (Elmore and to the north) – Bunjil; Gunung willam (south of Elmore) – Waa.

Whenever a marriage occurred with the Kulin nation, it was always between one person identifying as Bunjil and one as Waa, and with someone from a clan with the opposite moiety. For example, if a Bunjil woman was to marry, it would be with a Waa man, and she would then go and live with the Waa clan. Any children of the relationship would identify as Waa. As a local example of this, Tooteerie, a woman from the Ngurai-illum balug clan (Bunjil) married a Wurundjeri man (from a Waa clan) and their son was the famous artist and Aboriginal activist William Barak (1824-1903).

Marriages could still occur between someone from the Kulin nation and someone from a different language group. For example, the so-called "Queen Mary" buried in the Murchison cemetery, who married "Charles" Tattambo, was from the Wemba Wemba Aboriginal people who lived on the Murray River. She spoke quite a different language and had different cultural beliefs.

TOTEMS AND SKIN NAMES

In addition to being from a specific language group, clan, and moiety, Aboriginal people could also be linked by having the same personal totem e.g. a specific animal, bird or reptile. Having a particular totem meant that it was incumbent on a person to protect and conserve that creature. It also gave them a link to anyone else with that particular totem, who would be treated as a sibling. Totems might also be plants, landscape features and types of weather.

Yet another personal link between people could be by a Skin Name. The system of using skin names was in the form of a sequential cycle, usually of 16-32 names. Again, you shared a special bond with anyone who had your skin name.

BELONGING

The upshot of all of the above is a level of connection between Aboriginal people that is difficult to grasp for most people of European origins. Although the extraordinary kinship relationships that existed before European colonisation have been compromised by disconnection from country, it is clear that very strong bonds continue to be an important feature of Aboriginal life. It must be reassuring to have so many people looking out for you.

"You will never be an only child. Here's all your other brothers and sisters…You've got all these

other mothers and fathers to support and teach you. That's the strength of the system…That extended family take it really seriously and want to be engaged in that life." Lynette Riley

Reference: australianstogether.org.au and Museums Victoria websites

29 ABORIGINAL SPIRITUALITY

Closely linked to the systems of kinship that were briefly discussed in the previous Waranga Dreaming story are the advanced notions of spirituality that were evident in the lives of Aboriginal people of this area prior to European colonisation. Compared to some of the major religions of today, Aboriginal spirituality had evolved over tens of thousands of years, with local variations.

"Aboriginal spirituality is defined at the core of Aboriginal being, their very identity. It gives meaning to all aspects of life including relationships with one another and the environment. All objects are living and share the same soul and spirit as Aboriginals. There is a kinship with the environment. Aboriginal spirituality can be expressed visually, musically and ceremonially." (Grant, 2004)

Sadly, we know very little about the highly developed spirituality of the Aboriginal people in this area, and the depth of its meaning to their lives. Along with many other things, there was massive disruption to this aspect of their lives from the late 1830s.

BASIC TENETS

It is possible, however, to generalise about some of the basic tenets of Aboriginal spirituality, and reflect on how they may have guided the lives of Aboriginal people in this area. One aspect of this spirituality that we can all relate to is the concept of animism i.e. "a world where everything is interconnected, people, plants and animals, landforms and celestial bodies are part of a larger reality…nothing is inanimate, everything is alive…all are energised by a spirit. As such, humans are on an equal footing with nature, are part of nature and are morally obligated to treat animals, plants and landforms with respect."

We are by now familiar with the Aboriginal view of the Dreaming – the time of creation – just as similar stories exist in most major religions of today. As noted in the previous story, Bunjil (the Wedge-tailed Eagle) was seen as the creator figure for the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people.

The role of totems, briefly described in the previous story, was also an important part of the whole concept of Aboriginal spirituality.

MORE THAN CREATION

In local Aboriginal communities, the creation ancestor (Bunjil) was also seen to have stipulated "what people had to do to maintain their part of this interdependence" i.e. the rules by which all things were to live harmoniously and sustainably. The laws ensure "that each person knows his or her connectedness and responsibilities for other people, for country….and (for) the ancestor spirits."

In practice, the basic laws had probably existed since time immemorial, subject to regular revision over time until the result was a very practical and workable set of rules. These rules were then handed down by elders in an oral tradition over hundreds of generations.

CLARITY

One of the things that emerges from this discussion is that Aboriginal people's lives were very clearly ordered by tens of thousands of years of a system that was handed down orally, and understood by successive generations. People knew where they stood, and what was expected of them. There was enormous comfort for people in having a very clear structure by which to live their lives.

Because of the inextricable link between Aboriginal people and their country, one can

only wonder at the devastation caused by the disconnection from country in the period from 1836 – especially the first couple of decades of European colonisation extending into the 1850s.

Part of the healing process that people can go through is to try to reconnect with country. There are plenty of encouraging examples in our local communities where this is happening.

Reference: australianstogether.org.au website

30 TATTAMBO – NGURUNGAETA

Possibly the best-known 19th century Aboriginal person from this area is the man usually referred to as "King Charles" Tattambo, who died in 1868 and is buried at the Murchison cemetery. He had lived right through the period of European colonisation and witnessed monumental changes. There are a number of photographs of him, which is rare for Aboriginal people of this area. Many of them were gone before photography became commonplace.

It was standard practice back then to give Aboriginal people a European moniker, and the generations that followed Tattambo went almost exclusively by non-Aboriginal names.

BREAST PLATES

Part of the reason that Tattambo's grave is so well-known is that there is a replica of his breast-plate on an iron fence surrounding the grave. The breast-plate was made of brass, featuring the words "Tattambo King – Property of Mr Fryer, Molka Station". Molka Station was east of the Goulburn River and south-east of Murchison – part of Ngurai-illum Wurrung county.

The wording on the breast-plate seems to be a fairly sad indictment on the way that European colonisers saw the local Aboriginal people. Surely "property of" is tantamount to considering someone to be a slave? The wording is even more demeaning when you realise that Tattambo was a head man of some importance to the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people.

The term "King" used on the breast-plate is inappropriate, as it was not a term used by Aboriginal people. "King" implies that someone has absolute power, and may be entitled to hold the position on a hereditary basis. That was not the case in the structure of local Aboriginal communities. These days, it could also be interpreted as being used in a condescending, mocking way by the squatters, rather than as a term of respect.

NGURUNGAETA (pronounced Na-Run-Getta)

In his later years, Tattambo was a Ngurungaeta, or head man/elder for the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people. "The clan heads…were important figures…However the clans were never dictatorships, and decisions that affected the clan were only ever made final after extensive consultation amongst members of the clan. This democratic method and lack of hierarchical structure was unusual to the early white settlers who documented the first contact with Aboriginals."[1] This view

adds further weight to the idea that “King” was inappropriate terminology.

Another discussion of Ngurungaetas says that “These individuals were men of distinguished achievement who had effective authority within their clans and 'were considered its rightful representative in external affairs'.”[2] Distinguished achievement” in large part related to the extensive cultural knowledge and history of the clan that was carried by the Ngurungaeta.

EARLY DAYS

Tattambo was born into the Gunung Willam clan, which was based on the Campaspe River. This was about as far away as you could get in Ngurai-illlum Wurrung country from Molka, so it is an inaccuracy to say that Tattambo was “of the Molka Tribe”. After the dispossession caused by European colonisation, clans lost their traditional country, which could account for Tattambo finishing up at Molka. Perhaps he worked on the station, which was a common role for Aboriginal people in colonial society.

The moiety of the Gunung Willam clan was Waa, the crow, which would have been an important totem for Tattambo, along with anyone else born into that clan. We don’t know exactly when Tattambo was born, other than that it was in the very late 18th or early 19th century, well prior to first contact with Europeans. One oral historical account from an old Murchison resident[3] suggests that the first white man seen by Tattambo’s young son (and Tattambo?) was when Major Mitchell’s expedition passed through the area in 1836.

So, although we know almost nothing of Tattambo’s early life, it is not hard to imagine him growing up in the safety and security of Ngurai-illum Wurrung clan life, gradually building the knowledge and skills that would prepare him for his later life as a Ngurungaeta.

References: 1 http://heritage.darebinlibraries.vic.gov.au/article/643; 2 https://www.vaclang.org.au/languages/woiwurrung.html; 3 Waranga Chronicle 29.10.1874 (Thanks Alan McLean)

31 LOCAL KINSHIP CONNECTIONS

Mentioned in the previous story, Tattambo (often referred to by Europeans as King Charles) was apparently born into a clan of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people called the Gunung Willam, whose home country was on the Campaspe River south of Elmore.[1] The names of his parents are unknown.

Like his father and any siblings, he was in the “Waa” or crow moiety. As such, one of his cultural duties was to conserve and protect the crow. His mother would have been from another clan, and if she was from one of the groups of Aboriginal people in the Kulin nation, she would have been from a “Bunjil”, or wedge-tailed eagle, clan and moiety.

FAMILY

We do not know much about Tattambo’s possible siblings, apart from a brief reference to a sister, who was called “Sarah” by the Europeans. In 1874, a Mr Green, superintendent of the Coranderrk Aboriginal reserve, near present-day Healesville, was trying to encourage any remaining Aboriginal people living around Murchison to transfer to the reserve. Noted as a sister of Tattambo, Sarah “could not be prevailed upon to quit the haunts of her life with all their associations. She alone remains, like an old tree in a clearing, gnarled somewhat, but sturdy and strong.”[2]

Tattambo married twice. The name of his first wife is unknown but they had a son, known by the Europeans as “Captain John”. His second wife was known as “Queen Mary”. These two people are buried with Tattambo in the Murchison cemetery. “Queen Mary” and Tattambo had one child, commonly known as “Jenny”. There will be stories about these members of Tattambo’s family in later Waranga Dreaming articles.

Descendants of this line of the family are proud and strong Ngurai-illum Wurrung people. In particular, the writer would like to acknowledge Ngurai-illum Wurrung Elder, Uncle Vincent Peters, a regular visitor to the Waranga area. Uncle Vin is an invaluable contributor to these stories.

MULTI-LINGUAL

Kinship connections meant that Tattambo would have been multi-lingual. His native tongue was the Ngurai-illum Wurrung language. Connections with the other people in the Kulin nation (which comprised at least five other similar languages), meant that he would have been able to communicate with people from all of those language groups.

The languages spoken by near neighbours, the Bangerang and Yorta Yorta (to their north) and the Barapa Barapa (west of the Campaspe River), were quite different to those spoken by members of the Kulin nation. There would have been a necessity to learn the basics of those languages to facilitate communication.

Thirty years of contact with Europeans before his death in 1868 would also have given Tattambo a good working knowledge of English.

INITIATION

When Tattambo was growing up, well before the impact of European colonisation, he would have been taken through his initiations by an Elder, known in some Kulin clans as a Caganguk. A Caganguk was a mentor, knowledgeable in the stories and culture of his people, who would work with a group of boys, imparting knowledge and preparing them for their initiations.

Photos of Tattambo indicate that he had cicatrices on his body (as did his second wife Mary), some of which he may have received at initiation. Cicatrices are scar tissue that forms from wounds. The cicatrices on Tattambo's body were from wounds deliberately inflicted on the upper body. The wounds were kept open until the scar tissue formed, resulting in the familiar raised scars. These scars were a form of decoration, also telling stories of their owner.[3]

BURIAL

When Tattambo was buried in Murchison cemetery, it was apparently at his own request. As a mark of respect from the local community, the grave was "fenced in by a beautiful piece of iron railing, the workmanship, we believe, of Mr Barratt. It is faced by the brass plate the old king wore round his neck…"[4] Estimates of his age at the time ranged between 70 and 80 years.

References: 1 Barwick, Diane, Mapping the Past: At Atlas of Victorian Clans 1835-1904; 2 Waranga Chronicle 12.11.1874; 3 Woiwod, Mick, The Last Cry (Tarcoola Press 1997); 4 Waranga Chronicle 29.10.1874

32 "QUEEN MARY"

When Tattambo died on 1.1.1868, it was reckoned that he was at least 70. If this was accurate, then he was born prior to 1800. This was well before any first contact with Europeans on Ngurai-illum Wurrung country in northern Victoria.

There was a short-lived European settlement at Sullivan's Cove (near present-day Sorrento), from which convict William Buckley escaped in 1803. He lived with the Wathaurong people on the Bellarine Peninsula for over 30 years. In his travels within the Kulin Nation, Tattambo may have encountered Buckley, as members of both the Ngurai-illum Wurrung and Wathaurong attended cultural gatherings near what is now Melbourne CBD.

Tattambo's second wife is only remembered by her allotted European name, "Queen Mary". Her birth name and clan are not known. As was a common occurrence with Aboriginal marriages, she was much younger than Tattambo. When she died in 1874, her age was estimated at 55-60, placing her date of birth before 1820. The report of her death said

"Mary's recollection dated back as far as the time of Buckley, 'the wild white man'…"[1] Perhaps Mary saw him at a Kulin gathering?

FAMILY BACKGROUND

When an Aboriginal woman was married to a Ngurai-illum Wurrung man, she had to leave her clan to live with her husband's clan. Mary was apparently from Wemba Wemba country, near present-day Murrabit. There is a record of Tattambo and Mary visiting her relatives there in 1866.[2] It is not known when Tattambo and Mary were married, but we do know that their daughter Jenny (aka Jeannie or "Jinny") was born around 1844. At this time, the family may have had connections with the Aboriginal Protectorate that was operating at Murchison.

It is also unclear whether Tattambo's first wife (name unknown) was deceased before he married Mary. Some Aboriginal men had more than one wife concurrently. There was a son from the earlier marriage who was known by the Europeans as Captain John. He died in 1874, just before his step-mother Mary, both being buried along with Tattambo at Murchison cemetery.

A MATRIARCH AND ELDER

Photographs of Mary showed that she had a considerable amount of decorative scarring on her upper abdomen and arms. It is unclear whether this was standard practice for local women. Perhaps she already had the scarring prior to leaving Wemba Wemba country.

After Tattambo died, Mary "unusually, assumed the role of Queen…Captain John preferred to keep a low profile."[4] It was reported that "for many years afterwards (i.e. after Tattambo's death) his widow, Queen Mary…and a tribe of 100 blacks roamed about the Waranga Shire and enjoyed the protection of an aboriginal compound, which was supervised for some time by William Phillips, on or near the site of the present Murchison Mechanics' Institute, the state school and the local churches."[5]

This second quote was written in 1930, so is probably inaccurate on some counts. In particular, it seems very unlikely than there were 100 Aboriginal people in the area in the 1860s. The Aboriginal Protectorate at Murchison had closed in 1853, and many of the former residents had moved to reserves such as Coranderrk, or had dispersed to other areas. However, it could well be that Mary and a much smaller group, which included her step-son Captain John and her sister-in-law Sarah, continued to follow Ngurai-illum Wurrung songlines into the early 1870s.

BEING ON COUNTRY

The press of the day generally used condescending language when writing about Mary and her perceived ownership of the land. "The Queen-dowager Mary…usurped without contradiction the regal title…Mary would spread her arms forth, and proclaim aloud that all the land was hers. Poor Mary!"[6]

Another story written over a year earlier in 1873 reported "The township (Murchison) has been honoured by a visit from royalty, Queen Mary, with her retinue, having lighted her camping-fire near the Farmers' Hotel on the Rushworth road."[7] This seems to indicate

some continuation of the seasonal movement of the remaining Aboriginal people around former Ngurai-illum Wurrung country.

References: 1 “Argus” newspaper 2.10.1874, p4; 2 Clark, Ian D, Goulburn River Aboriginal Protectorate (Ballarat Heritage Services 2013); 3 Waranga Chronicle 29.10.1874 per favour Alan McLean; 4 Notes by Uncle Vin Peters; 5 The Age, 24.7.1930, p7; 6 “Argus” 2.10.1874; 7 McIvor Times & Rodney Advertiser 3.7.1873

33 CAPTAIN JOHN

The Aboriginal man called “Captain John” by the Europeans was the son of Tattambo and his first wife. We do not know John’s Aboriginal birth name or where he was born. When he died in 1874, it was estimated at the time that he was in his late 40s. If true, that would place his birth date in the mid to late 1820s. “Mr William Phillips, the oldest resident in the town, remembers him as a boy of 12 or 13, when the Protectorate was first established under Mr Le Soeuf in 1839.”[1]

Being born prior to the European incursion into Ngurai-illum Wurrung country meant that as a boy, John would have had a very traditional upbringing. The clan of his parents was based on the Campaspe River south of Elmore, but travelled extensively to the east, beyond the Goulburn River. All children born in the Gunung Willam clan, like John, became members of the Waa, or crow moiety, so this bird would have been an important totem for John.

INITIATION

At about the time that John would have normally been going through his formal initiation, the world of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung was in total upheaval. European colonisers rapidly moved into their country in the wake of the 1836 Major Mitchell expedition. John could potentially have been a witness to some of the massacres that took place, particularly on the Campaspe in the late 1830s.

It is unclear whether John went through an initiation process in the usual way, because of these disruptions. Instruction was given to young teenage boys by a mentor, usually from within the clan. The mentor needed to have accumulated considerable knowledge to pass on, so was usually a respected older man. The initiation culminated in ceremony at a location regularly used for such events.

LATER YEARS

A writer for the Waranga Chronicle claimed that Captain John said the first white men that he had seen were in Major Mitchell’s party, as they passed through northern Victoria in 1836. When the Aboriginal Protectorate was established in 1839, it seems that Captain John frequented the station with other members of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung clans.

As he grew older, he was employed by the police as a tracker in Gippsland. There was generally no love lost between the people of the Kulin nation (of which John was member) and the Gippsland Aboriginal people known as the Kurnai. Apparently, John tended to be overenthusiastic in the performance of his duties, preferring to shoot first and ask questions later.

One such incident resulted in his own arrest. However, when he was handcuffed and being taken to a place of incarceration to answer the charges, he escaped by diving into a river and swimming away underwater. He “…appeared not again on the confines of civilised life till his offence was forgotten.”[1] His access to firearms during his time with the police meant that he became an excellent shot, and as a result probably abandoned his traditional weapons.

FAMILY LIFE

When he resurfaced along the Goulburn River, Captain John spent most of his time in the districts of Avenel, Seymour, Nagambie and Murchison, particularly the latter.[1] His wife was known as Biddy. They had a daughter

(Jeannie/Jenny) who was born around 1844, and a son, Johnny/Johnnie.

In winter 1874, while camping on the Goulburn at Murchison, Biddy's mia mia caught fire. She was the only occupant, and was quite severely burned. She was nursed back to health by Jeannie and an unnamed member of the Murchison community.[2] After John died in 1874, the remaining members of his immediate family went to live at Coranderrk station near Healesville.[3]

It seems that Captain John was quite a character. "There was a humorous twinkle about the Captain's eye that seems to intimate that he rather enjoys life."[4] When he died, it was reported that "The deceased had a great deal of native dignity in his composition, and he was a true gentleman on many points."[1]

References: 1 Waranga Chronicle 29.10.1874; 2 ibid 2.7.1874; 3 ibid 12.11.1874; 4 McIvor Times and Rodney Advertiser 3.7.1873. Waranga Chronicle articles courtesy of Alan McLean.

34 BURIAL RITES

Previous Waranga Dreaming stories have focussed on three Aboriginal people who are buried in the Murchison cemetery – King Charles Tattambo, his second wife "Queen Mary" and his son by his first marriage, known as "Captain John". All three were born before European colonisation of the Waranga area and were deeply imbued with Aboriginal spirituality and culture. In view of that, it is somewhat surprising they all chose to be buried according to European, rather than Aboriginal, customs.

The first of these to be buried was Tattambo, in January 1868. By that point, Tattambo had been influenced by over 30 years of contact with Europeans. Most reports of his death mention that he wanted to be buried like a European. "He had been gradually wasting away for a month, during which time he was quite aware of his approaching end. He viewed the matter quite calmly, expressing a very strong desire to be buried in the cemetery, and in a coffin."[1]

A FOOT IN EACH WORLD

People like Tattambo and his relatives lived with a foot in each of two worlds, which were poles apart. On one hand, they had lived at a time totally uninfluenced by European ideas and culture, living in traditional ways over many years. Then they had experienced a dramatic transformation in their lifestyles, over an extremely short period of time, during which time everything they knew was radically changed forever.

The fact that members of this family survived such an enormous change is a testament to their adaptability and courage to embrace change. It is understandable that they would adopt some of the customs of the European colonisers, while at the same retaining many aspects of their traditional way of life in the face of enormous pressure to change.

The generation that lived through European colonisation felt the pull of both cultures in a similar way that emigrants to a new country do. The difference for the local Aboriginal people was that they had not moved, but their world had changed so dramatically, it would seem to them as though they were in another country.

TRADITIONAL BURIALS

Had the lives of Tattambo, Mary and John not been impacted by European colonisation, their burial rites would have obviously been quite different. Like the situation in our community now, there was a whole range of options open to the families of the Aboriginal people of the local area when one of them died.

Generally, Aboriginal burial took place at, or close to, the place where the person died, rather than in a communal cemetery. For this reason, the remains of Aboriginal people have been located all over the Waranga area. An earlier Waranga Dreaming story mentioned

the two skeletons found near Sapling Point on Waranga Basin in the 1930s. A similar discovery took place on the Campaspe River near Rochester in 1886, when a farmer, Mr McHattie, "whilst digging up an Aboriginal "oven" unearthed the skeletons of two human beings." Dr Taffe "pronounced them to be Aboriginals" and concluded that the remains belonged to a man and a woman "of good age."[2]

A reporter in the Ovens and Murray Advertiser who had visited the Murchison district, and was talking about the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people, said that "From archaeological research of a very superficial character, we find frequent traces and mementoes of the Aboriginal occupation of the Goulburn. The blackfellow's tomahawk, their camp-fire and burying ground, are continually being met with…".[3]

FUNERAL SERVICE

William Thomas, who worked for a period as an Assistant Protector of Aborigines, and later as a "guardian" (after the protectorate system was abandoned) made the following observations – "Over the men, according to their importance, an oration is delivered…Over the women and children no ceremony is performed. After the body is interred, the encampment breaks up, leaving a fire at the east of the grave."[4]

What Thomas does not mention is that the time of death was often accompanied by intense keening by the Aboriginal women, and sometimes by self-harm. Grief was displayed openly and unashamedly.

References: 1 McIvor Times and Rodney Advertiser 10.1.1868; 2 Elmore Standard 19.2.1886; 3 Ovens and Murray Advertiser 15.7.1885, p 4; 4 Bride, Thomas F (ed) Letters from Victorian Pioneers p 400

35 DEATH AND GRIEVING

The previous Waranga Dreaming story cited William Thomas, a former Assistant Protector of Aborigines, providing details of what he thought were standard practices after the death of an Aboriginal person. It is worth noting that practices varied widely across Australia prior to European colonisation – perhaps even within Ngurai-illum Wurrung country - and included both burial and cremation.

What Thomas does not mention in his story is that the time of death and grieving was often accompanied by most intense keening by the Aboriginal women. Unlike many present-day funerals, grief was displayed openly and unashamedly and could also include mourners self-inflicting themselves with wounds.

KEENING

When we think of keening as a way of expressing grief, we tend to think of the Irish. In his book "My Father's Wake", Irish author Kevin Toolis writes – "In the narrow room the old man lay close to death….In the bare whitewashed room, no bigger than a prison cell, 10 watchers – the *mná caointe* – the wailing women, were calling out, keening, sharing the last moments of the life, and the death, of this man. My father. Sonny…In the tight, enclosed space, the sound of this chorus of voices boomed off the walls, the ceiling, louder and louder, reverberating, verse after verse, on and on, cradling Sonny into death. This death so open, so different from the denial of the Anglo-Saxon world would, too, be Sonny's last parental lesson. How to die."

Similarly, keening was an important part of Aboriginal burial practice. When "Captain John" died in 1874, the Waranga Chronicle reported "As a rosy-tipped morning dawns on Monday a wail is heard from the native camp on the banks of the Goulburn at Murchison…His lubra (sic) mourns, and two other women from a neighbouring camp join in the coronach".[1] (Coronach = part of a round

of keening, the traditional improvised singing at a death, wake or funeral).

We can only guess who the "two other women" would be, but most likely candidates would be his stepmother "Queen Mary" and his Auntie "Sarah". In the small Aboriginal community still living on the Goulburn River at the time, they were two of the few remaining older women who would be most familiar with the traditional songs and chants that had been passed down over many generations.

SORRY CUTS

Another way of displaying grief was through self-inflicted wounds, often cutting the arms with a sharp object. This is quite different from a practice where a person may self-harm as the result of negative feelings that they have about themselves or aspects of their life. Instead, it is part of "ceremony" or "sorry business", with an example being sorry cuts "practised as a sign of grief for the loss of a family member".[2]

There doesn't appear to be any documented evidence of Ngurai-illum Wurrung people engaging in "sorry cuts". The few photographs that we have of the people do not make it clear either, although a well-known photograph of "King Charles" Tattambo appears to indicate that his arms are highly scarred. These scars may have been decorative, as were those clearly featured on the shoulders and breasts of his second wife, "Queen Mary". "Sorry cuts" are quite different to this decorative scarring, instead being a way of demonstrating grief.

SORRY BUSINESS

The grieving process was (and still is) taken extremely seriously by Aboriginal people, so there is no reason to suggest that it would have been any different for the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people in centuries gone by. Extended kinship relationships meant that the deceased was very closely linked to a large number of people. It was important for those people to all get together at the time of the death and take their time to work through the early stages of the grieving process. This is generally referred to these days as "sorry business".

Like the Irish experience mentioned above, deaths were treated openly, and grief displayed publicly by Aboriginal people. Perhaps there is another lesson to be learned here, rather than the traditional reserve we tend to display in response to a death.

References: 1 Waranga Chronicle 29.10.1874; 2 https://healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/

36 MARRIAGE

After a couple of stories on the deaths of Ngurai-illum Wurrung Aboriginal people in pre-colonial times, the focus in this story will be on another important life event - marriage. Earlier stories in the series have established a few basic facts e.g. a couple who married had to be from different clans, and in the case of Ngurai-illum Wurrung people, from clans of the opposite moiety i.e. Bunjil (the eagle) or Waa (the crow); the woman had to go and live with the man's clan, although she would still have regular contact with her immediate family at clan gatherings; any children would be part of the father's moiety and clan. Girls would only leave that clan to marry, usually in their early to mid-teens.

Marriage did not have to occur within the same language group, or related language groups such as the Taungurung or Dja Dja Wurrung. A woman may marry into a group of people who had quite a different language, which she would have to learn. She might also marry into a group with whom her clan were not necessarily on good terms e.g. the Bangerang and Yorta Yorta .

BETROTHAL AND POLYGAMY

Marriages were often between an older man and a younger woman. The squatter Edward Curr observed that the men were often 20 years older than their bride.[1] In many cases, the woman had been betrothed to the man years before. And, she may not necessarily be

the first wife. It was common for older Aboriginal men to have more than one wife at the same time.

Curr recounted a story about a marriage that took place in the early 1840s. The Ngurai-illum Wurrung people (represented by at least two of their clans) went onto Bangerang country on the lower Goulburn River, preceded by their emissary, an old man. He arrived the day before. When the rest of his people arrived, there was a corroboree in the evening.

LIGHT ON CEREMONY

After the corroboree, it was time for the several betrothed young women to go the camps of their prospective husbands. There was little or no ceremony as such. Each young woman was simply expected to take her few possessions and go. If she showed reluctance, she could be encouraged, then cajoled, threatened and possibly even physically assaulted by her father until she complied.

It is easy to understand why she might be reluctant. She may already have been attracted to someone of her own age within her own people, having grown up with them. But here she was, going to live with a much older man she barely knew, and whose language she probably had little opportunity to practice. She could also potentially incur the wrath of any other wife or wives that the man might already have.

One of the young Bangerang women, who was betrothed to Wawgroot, a Ngurai-illum Wurrung man, apparently went through exactly these experiences. When he saw the family two years later, Curr noticed that the girl's "sulkiness had been replaced by her constitutional good humour…she had on quite a showy opossum-rug, elaborately scored with approved aboriginal designs, enveloped in which, peeping over her shoulder, was a little black thing, which seemed the delight of its mother. Even Mrs Wawgroot No 1 appeared to have got reconciled to her presence, and to be fond of the baby."[2]

BACHELOR CAMP

With most of the young women being married off to older men, there was inevitably a group of young bachelors in each clan's camp. Curr reckoned that very few men under 30-35 would have a wife, something confirmed by other observers. When a clan was in camp, they usually camped in small family groups – husband, wife or wives and their children. The bachelors camped separately as a group. It is not difficult to imagine that in these circumstances, there could be some prevailing jealousy and frustration.

With European colonisation of the Waranga area, the colonists were predominantly men. They were often attracted to Aboriginal women, creating another possible flashpoint between them and both single and married Aboriginal men.

References: 1 Curr, Edward M, Recollections of Squatting in Victoria, 2nd Edition, p 139; 2 ibid p 145

37 MORE ON MARRIAGE

William Thomas, one-time Assistant Protector of Aboriginal people in Victoria, had more to say about the marriage customs of the people.[1] He did not serve in that role in the Waranga area, but after the Protectorate system ended, he had contact with former residents of this area in his role as an "official visitor" to all the Aboriginal reserves and depots. This included the reserve at Coranderrk, where many members of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people finished up, so his observations are probably valid for these people.

His observations seem to make it clear that in pre-colonisation Victoria, Aboriginal women generally had no rights in marriage. Men had "the right of giving the women away; the women have neither choice or will in the matter; they are the property of the father; if he is dead, of the brother; if there is no brother, the uncle." While men could have more than one wife at a time, a woman would

only have one husband. Because a woman was usually much younger than her husband, she was likely to be widowed at some point. At that time, she could re-marry. This second marriage was often to a younger man.

PAYMENT FOR A WIFE

Thomas also observed payment to the parent(s) of a young woman when she was delivered to her prospective husband. This would be in the form of material goods, such as possum skin cloaks, food and other items of value. There may also have been an exchange of goods between families, rather than just a one-way payment, which ratified the marriage contract.

As explained in the previous story, marriage commenced with co-habitation, rather than after any sort of elaborate ceremony. Despite the lack of ceremony, the marriage had far greater implications than just being a union between a man and a woman. Dr D Bell explains -

"Perhaps the most important difference between Aboriginal marriage patterns and those of white Australia is that the marriage is not seen as a contract between individuals but rather as one which implicates both kin and countrymen of the parties involved. If we explore the web of relations which surround an arranged marriage entered into at the time of initiation of a young male, we find that at least three generations are implicated."[2]

SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

In a similar way that marriage began with co-habitation, the end of a marriage was evidenced by the parties living apart. "Divorce could occur by mutual consent or unilaterally, again, in most cases, without any particular formality: divorce involved, and was signified by the termination of cohabitation."[2] It may also have required the consent of parents.

If there was no mutual consent e.g. the wife left the marriage of her own volition, the man was empowered to force her to return, including by the use of violence. Alternatively, he might seek compensation for his loss.

If adultery was a factor in a marriage breakdown, Thomas observed that "the adulterer and adulteress are both punished – the latter awfully severe…" i.e. clan law approved of the meting out of physical violence to both parties, presumably by the aggrieved husband.

IMPACT OF COLONISATION

European colonisation rapidly and radically changed marriage rites for local Aboriginal people. There were many deaths from disease and violence, which negated long standing pre-nuptial arrangements and existing relationships. Local people were dispersed, with many going to reserves where they lost contact with kith and kin. And because colonial society was male dominated, there was a strong attraction displayed by some of those men towards Aboriginal women, regardless of their marital or pre-marital status.

The influx of gold miners in the early 1850s did not improve the situation, and PC Chauncy "reported two extremely violent sexual assaults by non-Indigenous miners upon Aboriginal women at Whroo and Rushworth diggings." In his report, Chauncy said "this is no uncommon case."[3] This knowledge taints our vision of the goldfields as a glorious period of our history.

References: 1 Bride, T F, *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, pp 400-01; 2 Australian Law Reform Commission, *Marriage in Traditional Aboriginal Society* (ALRC Report 31, 2010); 3 Cahir, Fred, Black Gold, *Aboriginal People on the Goldfields of Victoria 1850-1870,* p 109

38 ORIGINS OF FOOTY

In the previous story, mention was made of one of the Assistant Protectors of Aborigines who worked in the Port Phillip district (then

still part of NSW) in the 1830s and 1840s. William Thomas spent most of his time with the Wathaurong people, in the Port Phillip Bay area. The Wathaurong were part of what has come to be called the Kulin Nation, which included the local Ngurai-illum Wurrung people.

What this meant was that the Ngurai-illum not only shared some common language with the Wathaurong, but they would regularly meet with them and other peoples of the Kulin Nation. As well as taking the opportunity at those get togethers to trade and share cultural experiences, they could well have been a venue for various sporting activities. Thomas observed with regard to games that "they have many, all adapted to expand the corporeal (i.e. physical) powers, (such) as running, jumping and throwing…but the most manual is wrestling…and it is not until both are nearly exhausted that one is down."

MARN GROOK

Anyone who watches NITV, or is just a footy fan, will probably have come across the Marngrook Footy Show, a celebration of all good things Aboriginal football. William Thomas was an early observer of the game that he recorded as being called "Marn Grook". (Yokayi Footy on NITV is well worth a look as well)

At a gathering of Kulin peoples in 1841, he recorded his observations of a game – "The men and boys joyfully assemble when this game is to be played. One makes a ball of possum skin. It's somewhat elastic but firm and strong. The players of this game do not throw the ball, as a white man might do, but drops it and at the same time kicks it with his foot. The tallest men have the best chances in this game. Some of them leap as high as 5 feet or more from the ground to catch the ball. (ed. Is this the origin of the "speccy"?) The person who secures the ball kicks it. This continues for hours and the natives never seem to tire of the exercise."[1]

Another early observer said "Each side endeavours to keep possession of the ball, which is tossed a short distance by hand, then kicked in any direction. The side which kicks it oftenest and furthest gains the game. The person who sends it the highest is considered the best player, and has the honour of burying it in the ground till required the next day. The sport is concluded with a shout of applause, and the best player is complimented on his skill. The game, which is somewhat similar to the white man's game of football (i.e. rugby), is very rough..."[2]

CODIFICATION OF FOOTY

Do these observations sound familiar? Perhaps the Ngurai-illum Wurrung were present at the gathering in 1841, and it is interesting to ponder the possibility of them having their own Marn Grook team to compete against the other groups from the Kulin Nation. It was another 18 years after the game Thomas witnessed before Tom Wills and others sat down to provide the first codified set of rules for Aussie rules football. Although Wills was influenced by his experiences with rugby, he grew up on a station in western Victoria, regularly playing with Aboriginal kids, so this may also have been an influence.

Some historians refute this, but whatever the case, there is no doubt that the contribution of Aboriginal people to the excitement of Aussie rules football has always been a feature of the game. This has never been more evident than today, when there are nearly 200 listed players in the AFL with Aboriginal heritage. At 10% of listed players, this is far in excess of the 3% of the overall population who identify as Aboriginal.

References: 1 Stephens, Marguerita (ed), *The Journal of William Thomas: Assistant Protector of the Aborigines of Port Phillip and Guardian of the Aborigines of Victoria 1839-67*; 2 Dawson, James, *Australian Aborigines* (1881)

39 ABORIGINAL SPORTS AND RECREATION

The last story talked about some of the possible links between the Aboriginal game of Marn Grook and present-day Aussie Rules football. Marn Grook is one of many activities undertaken by Aboriginal people that we would now classify as sport or games.

These days we see sport as part of our recreation...something you do when you are not working. This concept was imported to Australia by European colonisers. For Aboriginal people, however, recreation and work were inextricably linked. Sport and games had practical applications, so that by practising these activities, it improved personal skills and strengths that assisted in other aspects of their lives such as hunting and fishing, fighting and tracking. The reference by William Thomas to men and boys gathering to play Marn Grook suggests that the activities were also a good way of skills being passed from generation to generation.

RIVER AND WETLAND DWELLERS

Frequenting the Goulburn and Campaspe Rivers, numerous lesser waterways and extensive wetlands such as the Waranga Swamp and the lakes complex between Corop and Colbinabbin, the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people were very adept in the water. Skills such as swimming, canoeing and fishing were natural parts of their day-to-day existence, connected to the collection of food. Children were in an out of water from an early age, becoming most comfortable in that environment.

As previously noted, the water was often very clean and clear, facilitating easier fishing and collection of other food items such as mussels. Children would be involved in these activities, learning from their peers and elders.

One of the few remaining signs of the Aboriginal occupation of our rivers and creeks are the scar trees, often in close proximity to the waterways. These are trees where the bark has been removed for a particular purpose, such as making a canoe. The tree shown in the picture is close to the Campaspe River, so may well have been used to construct a canoe. The primary purpose for the canoe would be practical, whereas we would view canoeing simply as a recreational activity.

FOREST AND PLAIN

All the skills associated with hunting and collecting of food, as groups of Ngurai-illum Wurrung people moved across country, probably started as a recreational activity for children e.g. climbing, running, jumping, throwing, tracking, fighting. Regular practice honed their skills as well as developing their physical prowess.

Obviously, tracking was a highly developed skill that would have taken years to learn. It is a skill often associated with Aboriginal people. The “Anzac Tales” series of stories (published in

Waranga News 2015-18) mentioned two Aboriginal men who were brought to the Rushworth area by police to assist in the tracking down of arsonists in 1917.

Like all sports and recreations that are engaged in these days, some players emerge as experts in particular fields. It seems that "Captain John", who we met in earlier stories, had exceptional tracking and navigational skills, which were utilized when he was employed as a member of the Native Police. Perhaps he learned these skills directly from Tattambo, his father?

CULTURAL PURSUITS

Similarly, many cultural pursuits had practical applications for Aboriginal people, rather than just being amusements. Singing, dancing, storytelling and acting were all integral to their overall way of life, as well as being a way of passing stories down from generation to generation.

Skills such as weaving, basket-making and sewing would be taught to girls from a very early age, not just as a hobby or fun activity, but as a way of producing practical items essential to the daily lives of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung. Similarly, boys and young men would be constantly learning how to make items such as spears, clubs, shields and stone axes, which required a range of raw materials and different skills. These items would be used by the young boys in their games, while they were learning skills that their clan would need to rely on as they grew into manhood.

40 STONE AXES

Perhaps the most important tool used by the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people prior to European colonisation was the stone axe. It had a wide variety of uses, including collecting bark to make canoes, as mentioned in the previous story. They were also used to "cut wood and bark from trees to fashion wooden tools, weapons and utensils, and to pound and grind food".[1]

The local area has a long history of being a source of highly prized raw materials used to make these axes. As well as being used for axe-heads, the stone was also used to make knives, as well as barbs and points for spears, all of which were vital to the survival of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung. Local stone was a valuable item traded over vast distances beyond the Waranga area.

Many axe-heads have been found in the local area. Writing to the children's Campfire Circle page in the Weekly Times in 1934, a young Ronald Black from Moora East* claimed that "We often find aboriginal stone axes around here."[2] In 1957, the Curator of Anthropology at the National Museum of Victoria wrote that Major W J Day "who owns a fine property adjoining the timber reserve (at Reedy Lake) possesses a number of stone artifacts collected at various times from sand dunes overlooking it. He has, amongst other implements, ground edged axes which came unmistakably from Mt William."[3]

MOUNT WILLIAM GREENSTONE

South of Ngurai-illum Wurrung country, Mt William (near Lancefield) is regarded as a hugely significant source of greenstone, which is well suited to the creation of stone axe-heads. The quarry was, and still is, known as Wil-im-ee Moor-ing. The custodians are members of the Wurundjeri clan of the Woiwurrung people. To put them in context, the Woiwurrung were part of the Kulin nation, along with the Waranga area's Ngurai-illum Wurrung people, so there is no doubt that the Ngurai-illum Wurrung were very aware of the significance of Mt William, and may have travelled there on occasions.

Greenstone is the common name for a sub-volcanic rock known as diabase or diorite. It is an igneous rock, a bit like basalt, although when the volcanic lava was cooling, it cooled a bit slower than basalt did. As a result, the crystals are slightly larger. The greenstone we are talking about here did not come from a volcanic eruption, but from an intrusion. This

happens when magma cools and solidifies within the crust of the planet.[4]

Greenstone intrusions can be exposed by subsequent erosion, which is what has happened with Mt William and at a handful of other sites in Victoria, including on the Mount Camel range in the Waranga area.

QUARRYING

Testing has revealed that quarrying at Mt William dates back about 1500 years. "Stone outcrops were fractured using fire alternated with cold water, and the stone was levered loose with fire-hardened poles. Using stone anvils as work benches, the stones would be fashioned into blanks. These were later sharpened into axe heads using abrasive sandstone to achieve a sharp edge."[5] There was no suitable sandstone at Mt William for this sort of sharpening, so the axe-heads were either traded as blanks, or taken to another site to be sharpened before use or trade.

"Researcher Isabel McBryde estimated there were 268 mining pits, eighteen of which were several metres deep surrounded by at least thirty four discrete flaking floors, with debris up to twenty metres in diameter including some featuring a central outcropping rock used as an anvil."[5] McBryde's research also related to the Mount Camel range, which we will come back to later.

(*Moora East is not where you imagine it might be. It was due north of Rushworth, on the eastern side of the old parish of Moora – nothing to do with the settlement of Moora, west of Rushworth. There was a school (No 1991) at Moora East and the Black farm was in the very north-eastern corner of the parish of Moora on the corner of McEwen and Two Tree Roads. Most of the Rushworth township is also in the parish. Thanks for the heads up, Alan McLean)

References: 1 www.aboriginalculture.com.au›stone tools; 2 Weekly Times 3.2.1934, p 30; 3 Massola, Aldo, in the Victorian Naturalist, July 1957, p 44; 4 geology.fandom.com; 5 aboriginalhistoryofyarra.com.au

41 GREENSTONE AXE-HEADS

Much of the research that has been done on greenstone axe-heads revolves around the quarry at Mt William near Lancefield. The quarry on the Mt Camel range near Toolleen is much smaller than the Mt William quarry, but displays some of the same characteristics, viz -

- The outcrop bears scars from flaking, crushing and battering
- Pits and trenches are found around the base of the outcrop
- Large amounts of broken stone, particularly flakes, are the same type of stone as the outcrop
- Identifiable stone artefacts, such as unfinished tools, hammerstones, anvils and grinding stones may be around the site[1]

The quality of the greenstone found on the Mt Camel range is equivalent to that from Mt William. Indeed, when researcher Isabel McBryde was researching and writing about the quarries in the 1970s, she found it was impossible to distinguish whether some of the stones had come from Mt William or the Mt Camel range.[2]

TRADING OF AXE HEADS

As previously stated, axe-heads and other items quarried on the Mt Camel range were traded over a huge area. For example, McBryde identified an axe-head found at Lake Mungo in NSW as having been quarried on the Mt Camel range. This is between 450-500 km from the Waranga area. It is easy to imagine the valuable items being traded from group to group of Aboriginal people over trade networks that had been in place for hundreds, if not thousands of years.

At a more local level, the early squatter Curr noted that "flints and tomahawks the Bangerang had…(been) obtained from the

Ngooraialum and Pimpandoor in exchange for beautiful light reed spears which were easy to carry and most effective in hunting"[3] The Bangerang are now seen by some as part of what is now generally referred to as the Yorta Yorta people, who lived on the northern plains and rivers. The "Ngooraialum and Pimpandoor" that Curr refers to are two clans of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people, based on the Goulburn and Campaspe Rivers respectively.

CONTROL OVER RESOURCES

This begs the question – who controlled the quarry site on the Mt Camel range? Today, there is some conjecture over this question as certain contemporary organisations try to spread their influence and power over places where they were not previously recognised as the traditional custodians. The vast majority of historical information available suggests that this quarry was under the control of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung.

With Mt William, the Wurundjeri clan were, and still are, considered the custodians. There is evidence to suggest that most of the quarrying was done by a ngurungaeta (elder, leader) with a small group of helpers. Interestingly, despite the value of the resource, there appear to have been no attempts by other clans to take over, by force or otherwise. Wurundjeri rights to the site are recognised and respected, as they have been for generations.

MORE THAN JUST A TOOL

Some researchers suggest that greenstone carried far great significance than one would first imagine. Rather than just being the raw material for axe-heads, at least one academic has postulated that Mt William (and hence Mt Camel range?) greenstone might be symbolic in a cultural sense and be linked to the cosmological beliefs of Aboriginal people.[4]

One of the reasons for this conclusion is the fact that greenstone axe heads have been found in areas where alternative stone is available for tool-making. This suggests the rather unique green colouring of the stone, which is only found in a handful of places in Victoria, imbued it with a special significance. Or, could it have been that the sites of the greenstone quarries were important dreaming sites? It is not hard to imagine the top of the Mt Camel range, with its spectacular panoramic views, being a very special place for Aboriginal people.

References: 1 vic.gov.au Aboriginal Victoria Fact Sheet: Aboriginal Quarries; 2 McBryde, I, Kulin greenstone quarries: the social contexts of production and distribution for the Mt William site. World Archaeology 16, 267–85 (1984); 3 Curr, Edward M, Recollections of Squatting in Victoria, p 267; 4 Brumm, A. R. (2010). 'The falling sky': symbolic and cosmological associations of the Mt William greenstone axe quarry, Central Victoria, Australia. Cambridge Archaeological Journal, 20 (2), 179-196.

42 MAKING A STONE AXE

The most important Aboriginal tools in pre-colonisation times were stone axes. Recent stories have talked about the use of greenstone in producing the axe heads. Locally, the stone was quarried on the Mt Camel range. Quarried axe-heads were then chipped on one side to make a sharp edge. They could then be traded as a blank or transported to a suitable outcrop of sandstone, where the blade could be honed to make it sharp enough to be a useful tool.

Sites where this grinding took place are sometimes identified by a series of grooves in sandstone outcrops, indicating that a site has been used again and again over many generations. As well as sharpening the blade, the abrasive stone was also sometimes used to notch parts of the axe-head to assist with the secure attachment of the handle.

OTHER ELEMENTS

Apart from the stone axe head, the other main element required was a handle. Clearly, there was no possibility for a hole to be drilled through the axe-head to accommodate the handle. Instead, the handle was often one that wrapped around the entire axe-head, secured with string and/or sinew and an adhesive. We can only guess at what raw materials were used for the non-stone elements of the finished axes, as these are the parts that would rot away over time. However, there have been recent projects that can give us some clues as to what materials were used.

The "Koorong" project, run by the Wurundjeri clan in 2012, included the process of making stone axes using greenstone for the axe heads. The wood used in the axe handles came from silver and black wattles.[1] There are plenty of species of wattle on Ngurai-illum Wurrung country that may have been suitable for the same purpose. Whatever material was used would have to be flexible enough to bend sharply without snapping, to facilitate the wrap around nature of the handle.

STRING AND ADHESIVES

An earlier Waranga Dreaming story mentioned that the inner bark of stringy bark trees was a possible source of raw material to make the string that was used to attach the axe-head to the handle. Also mentioned was the use of wattle gum as a fixative. Once the string had been tied around the handle and the axe head, the wattle gum could be heated and used in this way, sometimes in conjunction with other additives.

One very strong adhesive used by Aboriginal people was the gum that can be found under some grass trees (Xanthorrhoea). It was collected by the women and children as they passed through country. It often appears as rounded balls of deep maroon coloured, hard, shiny gum (pictured). In its dry form, this gum is light and would have been easy to carry. When required for toolmaking it could be heated on a fire in a mix with wattle gum, then

applied to the almost completed tool, giving it at extra level of strength for the hard work ahead.

With all the time-consuming work that went into the construction of one axe, making something that would survive rough use over a long period would be a high priority.

RAPID OBSOLESCENCE

Stone axes quickly outlived their usefulness after Europeans arrived with metal axe-heads and their fitted wooden handles. Axes were often one of the first items used by the settlers in their trade with local Aboriginal people, so it would be fair to say that use of stone axes in the local area all but disappeared in the 1840s.

It may well be that they maintained cultural significance, as suggested in the previous story, and that the primary place where the axe-heads came from continued to be an important part of local song lines. Sadly, these connections with place were quickly destroyed after European colonisation.

REFERENCES: 1 Griffin, Darren, et al, The Koorong Project: experimental archaeology and Wurundjeri continuation of cultural practices, in Excavations, Surveys and Heritage Management in Victoria, Vol 2, 2013, pp 59-66

43 A SALUTARY LESSON

Writing about Aboriginal history is fraught, for many reasons. Not least of these is the fact that much of this history has been passed down in an oral tradition, while academic historians generally rely on documented material to verify facts and tell their stories. It is much harder to access information from oral sources, especially where the impact of colonisation has fragmented this information and there are few remaining descendants to approach.

However, there is plenty of material still to be found. With any history-related subjects, it is incumbent on the author to totally immerse him or herself in the exercise, by reading, watching, listening, visiting, experiencing, experimenting, recording and collecting. By trying to do this with an open mind, new insights and knowledge can be gained. Such is the case when looking at Aboriginal history.

IGNORANCE AND NAIVETY

Quite often, this process can begin from a position of ignorance and naivety but can turn into a learning experience. For instance, one could begin by picking easy targets. You could decide that because the local area has a recognised former Aboriginal axe-head quarry, which has been studied quite a lot, you could go and have a look. Recent Waranga Dreaming stories have referred to the quarry on the Mt Camel range, where greenstone was mined for use in axe-heads, spearheads and blades. A well-intentioned (albeit ignorant) visitor might be excused for picking up a few pieces of greenstone to take home to study and experiment with. After all, there is plenty there.

To further one's interest in the subject, you might go on an excursion to Mt William, near Lancefield. Mt William is renowned as the most famous of several greenstone quarries in

Victoria, and stone from there has been traded over vast distances. A Wurundjeri Elder could show you around the Mt William site. They would no doubt make it clear that nothing should ever be removed from the site. Obviously, if every visitor did that, the cultural value of the site would be compromised. Gulp!

THE RETURN

No doubt someone who had removed something from such a site would then resolve to return the pieces of stone to where they had been collected. In hindsight, it was a foolish thing to do. Especially by someone who could recall being outraged at a person who had fossicked around at Gallipoli and collected a whole lot of items to take home and make a display. This was pretty much the same thing in a different setting.

Imagine this – our no-longer so naive culprit travels to the Mt Camel range to return the stones. It is a filthy day. Driving up the small country track around the base of the mountain, it is pouring rain. As the car comes to a stop at the base of the mountain, the rain suddenly stops.

A BRILLIANT RAINBOW

The top of the range is a fairly stiff half-hour climb from where the car is parked. Rain still threatens, but the mission is deemed to be important. Halfway into the ascent, the sky clears to a bright azure blue, and a brilliant rainbow appears over the plains to the east of the Mt Camel range. The end of the rainbow is in the middle of Ngurai-illum Wurrung country. It stays that way as the climb is completed. The stones are returned as close as possible to where they had been picked up and a whispered apology made.

On the descent, a mob of kangaroos move fluidly across the range. A bird of prey soars majestically and calls in the distance. At the same time as the car is reached the rain starts to bucket down again. In the safety of the car it is possible to sit quietly and reflect with some awe on what has just happened. There is a strong sense of goodwill for “doing the right thing”; a feeling that the earlier ignorance has been forgiven. And to quote a term that a Yorta Yorta man used at a recent funeral, a feeling of being “embraced”. Some people might even call this a spiritual experience.

44 THE PRIMARY WEAPON

One of the implements always carried by Ngurai-illum Wurrung men in the local area was the spear. When travelling across country, each man would usually carry a handful of spears. This was the principal weapon used for hunting larger marsupials, particularly kangaroos. It was also used in internecine conflict and to defend territory which was being invaded by European colonisers in the 19th century.

Earlier stories have made mention of Aboriginal men demonstrating their spear throwing prowess early in the 20th century. This was often done as a novelty at events such as agricultural shows and footy matches, but it was a skill that was already in rapid decline by then. The introduction of the gun by European colonisers quickly rendered the use of spears obsolete.

SPEAR MAKING

Like the making of stone axes, which was discussed in an earlier story, there were several elements involved in the construction of a spear. Preparation of the tip of the spear and the shaft were important steps. In some cases, the tip would just be a fire-hardened end of the shaft, while in others there was the

additional process of affixing a tip e.g. of bone, wood or stone to the shaft.

In the construction of spear shafts, it was important that they be light, strong and somewhat flexible. For accuracy in throwing, they also had to be relatively straight, which implies that when searching for basic raw materials, there was a preference for shafts that were already that way, requiring minimal adjustment. Preference would also be given to shafts with a reasonably consistent diameter over their length.

With timber shafts, fire was often used to heat the wood to make it pliable enough to straighten by bending over the knee. Just what sort of timber the Ngurai-illum Wurrung used from their own country for spear shafts is debateable because few, if any, examples have survived. There is evidence to suggest that acacia saplings and grass tree stems were used in some areas. Perhaps the Ngurai-illum also used these raw materials, which were common on their country.

The story about stone axes noted that the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people traded their highly prized axe blanks with the Bangerang and Yorta Yorta in exchange for a special type of reed which made for a quality shaft. This was perhaps the preferred raw material, but would not always be available, so local alternatives would be necessary.

SPEAR HEADS

Suitable stone for spear heads would be a by-product of the greenstone axe-head quarrying process. Bone would obviously come from animals killed in hunting, while a hardwood such as ironbark might be used to provide the tip for a shaft of lighter wood or reed.

The type of spear head produced would depend on the purpose of the spear. Generally, heavier spears would be used for fighting, lighter for hunting. Spears for fishing would be light and have several prongs to make it more difficult for prey to escape. Similarly, spear heads for land-based hunting included barbs or had microliths (small, jagged stones) attached, to maximise tissue damage on the target.

JOINING THE ELEMENTS TOGETHER

Spear heads would be attached using some of the raw materials discussed in the stories about axes. This would include some form of binding, which would be further strengthened by natural adhesives. Hand made string was one form of binding previously mentioned, but the sinew from animal carcasses, usually kangaroo, was another more commonly used raw material. Once a spear head was securely bound to the shaft, strong adhesive gum would be applied after it had been softened on a heated stone by a fire. This might include gum from a variety of plants including wattles and grass trees.

The lives of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people depended in large part on their ability to produce weapons of high quality, as the area's agile marsupials were a major source of protein in their diets. They could not afford to have substandard equipment which might fail at the critical moment, after a whole lot of effort had gone into a hunt.

Reference: Koorihistory.com/spears/

45 HUNTING LARGER ANIMALS

As explained in the last story, the spear was the principal weapon for hunting larger animals such as kangaroos and emus, which was primarily a male occupation. Prior to the hunt, a significant amount of work would have gone into spear production to try to ensure the best possible outcome.

From a young age, boys would have played at stalking prey and throwing spears, so by the time they had passed their initiation into manhood, they would already have had a significant amount of practice. They would be ready to participate in hunting forays with the men or on their own.

Earlier stories mentioned how by employing traditional patterns of burning, there was clear predictability about where there was likely to be a good supply of kangaroos at a particular time. Aboriginal clans would seasonally move back to these locations after it had rained and the kangaroos were attracted by the fresh new growth.

DAYTIME HUNTING

During the day, it would have been easy to predict where kangaroos would rest. These days in the bush, this is often towards the top of a rise where there is some tree and understorey cover with a bit of shade, as indicated by well-used "scrapes". These areas could be targeted by hunters in daylight hours.

Fire may also have been used to flush kangaroos out of an area into the path of hunters. If there were enough people on the hunt, beaters could be employed to funnel the animals towards the hunters, who would be downwind. Just the noise of the beaters moving through the bush could be enough to make the animals move. If more noise was needed raised voices and percussion items could be used.

In the summer when water was at a premium, there may have been particular places where the animals always went to drink. These would be prime places for hunters to wait in ambush.

STALKING

There are plenty of stories about the legendary stalking stills of Aboriginal people, with the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people being recorded as excelling in this talent. For a spear-throw to be effective, a hunter would need to get quite close to the prey before unleashing the spear. Too far away, and the throw was more likely to miss its target or strike the animal with a non-lethal blow.

The squatter Edward Curr recounts the story of his brother witnessing a Ngurai-illum Wurrung man stalking an emu[1], although on this occasion the hunter used a dog rather than a spear to bring his quarry down. The hunter "raised his left arm so as to look like the branch of a small burnt tree, of which his body represented the stump, bringing his head close to his left shoulder." While the bird was distracted by feeding, the man moved forward with "the whole of his person, with the exception of his legs, rigidly still." As soon as the emu looked up, he remained motionless, moving forward again as soon as it resumed feeding.

On this occasion, it was a chance sighting on a plain and there was no bush around, so the man improvised. More often, the hunter would get some small branches to make a screen to approach the target, again using the stop-start method described above. Any movement noticed by the animal would cause it to run (or hop) for cover, so the hunter would have to carefully watch his quarry right through the approach.

THE KILL

You can imagine the difficulty of quietly stalking an animal to get close enough to effectively throw a spear. Quite apart from not being seen, the hunter had to be careful not to be smelt or heard by the prey. Years of practice would be concentrated into the act of throwing the spear accurately, with the small target of the head or neck being preferred spot to aim for.

The Woi-wurrung people, who like the Ngurai-illum Wurrung were part of the Kulin Nation, called the lighter hunting spears *djirra* or *jerrar*.[2] Perhaps the Ngurai-illum used the same or a similar word? The prey would be finished off with the *gungerrun* (club in Woi-wurrung) and carried back to camp around the shoulders.

Reference: 1 Curr, Edward, Recollections of Squatting in Victoria p 223-4; 2 Woiwod, Mick, The Last Cry – Glossary pp 368-84

46 USING A SPEAR THROWER

Most Australians are very familiar with the word "woomera" through its generic use as a term for an Aboriginal implement used to throw spears. The term was also used to name the area in South Australia where the British Government imposed on Australia to detonate atomic bombs and fire rockets into the atmosphere with complete disregard for the traditional owners of the area.

The word *woomera* comes from the Dharug language which was in use in what is now the Sydney area of New South Wales. It is clear that the implement was in use throughout much of Australia at the time of European colonisation, including in Ngurai-illum Wurrung country. However, the name used by the local people for the spear thrower is not known. Two of the names used by the Dja Dja Wurrung, who were near neighbours and associated with the Ngurai-illum Wurrung through the Kulin Nation, were yerrick or thur-ruk.[1]

A SIMPLE IDEA

The spear thrower is sometimes claimed to be an Australian Aboriginal invention that was not replicated on other continents. However, there is evidence to suggest that spear throwers were also used in Europe and the Americas. It is likely that man started using spear throwers around 30,000 years ago with variations on the basic theme being developed on different continents. When the skeleton of "Mungo Man" was discovered at Lake Mungo in southern NSW and found to be 42,000 years BP (before the present) he had an arthritic right elbow. Was this the result of prolonged use of a spear thrower?[2]

The idea of a spear thrower is very simple. Its use serves to extend the length of the user's throwing arm, with three main outcomes – the spear can be thrown greater distances, at higher speed, and with greater precision – all of which gave a hunter or fighter significant advantages over hand thrown spears. Being able to throw a greater distance meant that the hunter did not have to stalk the prey as closely as before. The greater power and speed of a weapon released from a spear thrower would mean that, if accurate, it would be more likely to immobilise or kill the animal.

USE IN THE LOCAL AREA

An example of a spear thrower held in the Museums Victoria collection[1] came from the Avoca area, traditional country of the Dja Dja Wurrung. Their country also spread east from Bendigo to the Campaspe River, so it is certain that they would have had contact with the Ngurai-illum Wurrung in that region, or in other Kulin Nation gatherings. The two peoples shared a significant amount of language and culture and would also have shared knowledge about inventions such as the spear thrower.

Museums Victoria suggests that spear throwers in this area were often made from wood from the cherry ballart tree as well as the blackwood wattle, common in box-ironbark forests. They were often constructed in a U-shape so that the spear could sit in the groove. On the end held by the hand, there may have been a knob to allow a better grip. The other end would have a small hook, made of wood or bone, that would slot into the end of the spear. This hook would be attached using the same materials used in other constructed items – animal sinew or handmade string, secured with heated gum from plants such as the grass tree and/or wattle.

MULTIPLE USES

One of the characteristics that differentiates Australian spear throwers from those found on other continents is that they tended to be multi-purpose. Because of the groove, which often widened out in the middle of the implement, the spear thrower could be used to collect and carry small food items. Sometimes a stone cutting edge was inserted into the handle so it could be used for various purposes, including cutting up food.

Designs were often incised into, or painted onto spear throwers, as they were with many implements used by the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people.

47 INTER-GROUP RELATIONSHIPS

In earlier stories, the relationships between groups of Aboriginal people prior to European colonisation have been briefly discussed. The core unit was called a clan, which was usually an extended family group. A number of clans that spoke a particular language and lived in a fairly defined geographic area was the next level of relationship. Then several related language groups could be termed a "nation".

In the Waranga area, at least three clans have been identified, all of whom spoke Ngurai-illum Wurrung (wurrung = language). The home country of this language group spread from the Campaspe River in the west to beyond the Goulburn River to the east. Ngurai-illum Wurrung had similarities to the languages of five other groups located through central Victoria, and down to the country surrounding Port Phillip Bay. Nowadays, these groups are referred to as comprising the Kulin Nation.

GETTING TOGETHER

As well as sharing some common language, the groups within the Kulin Nation were also linked in many other ways e.g. by marriage, customs and laws, knowledge, cultural beliefs and practices. Members travelled vast distances on foot to get together with other groups. For instance, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Ngurai-illum Wurrung people travelled south of their own country to take advantage of seasonal food opportunities and engage in cultural and other pursuits. Imagine the adventure of leaving your country and walking down to, say, present-day Melbourne to do just that.

For some time post-European colonisation, these epic walks to gatherings continued. There is an account of a major gathering of the Kulin Nation written by William Thomas, an Assistant Protector of Aborigines[1] in 1844. This gathering was held about 2 miles (3.2 km) east-north-east of the fledgling settlement of Melbourne. Thomas notes that "I have often been struck with the exact position each tribe takes in the general encampment, precisely in the position from each other their country lies according to the compass (of which they have a perfect notion)." There were "upwards of 800" people at this gathering and Thomas noted the layout of their camp as follows, based on the approximate location they had come from –

1 Loddon
2 Campaspe 3 Goulburn
3 Mt Macedon 4 Yarra
6 Barrabool (Geelong)
7 Western Port

KULIN NATION

All of these groups represent the language groups that make up the Kulin Nation, although by using simple location names, Thomas has probably conflated some of the language groups. For instance, the "Goulburn Blacks" (sic) would include the Ngurai-illum Wurrung, whose country on the Goulburn extended roughly from present-day Toolamba south to Mitchellstown, and the Taungurung people from further south along the Goulburn and into the Great Dividing Range. Within the camp layout, there may have been subtle divisions that Thomas was not aware of, but which could have provided further insights into the relationships between the groups.

Similarly, along the Campaspe River, Ngurai-illum Wurrung country extended from up towards Echuca down to the area around Axedale. Further south, other groups such as the Dja Dja Wurrung (who Thomas seems to have classified as "Loddon") considered the Campaspe to be part of their country.

PURPOSE OF THE GATHERING

Thomas claims that the purpose of this gathering (held in early 1844[2]) was to "witness the judicial proceedings against Poleorong and

Warrador for killing the Warralim youth at Tooradin, Western Port…". The term "Warrilim" related to an Aboriginal from the Goulburn River. The reason that these proceedings attracted such a large crowd was the accused were apparently "two of the leading men and greatest warriors of the Western Port tribe." In the reference quoted, Thomas does not report the outcome. However, there were two sets of laws that Aboriginal people of the day had to contend with – their own and British laws. Both came into play in situations such as this.

References: 1 Bride, Thomas Francis, Letters From Victorian Pioneers – Being a Series of Papers on the Early Occupation of the Colony, the Aborigines etc (State Library, 1898) p 433; 2 Port Phillip Gazette 24.2.1844 p4

48 TWO LEGAL SYSTEMS

The previous story talked about a gathering of Kulin Nation people near Melbourne to administer justice in a murder case. In 1844, the new settlement of Melbourne was less than 10 years old. At the time, present-day Victoria was part of the colony of New South Wales (the Port Phillip District), and the administration of British justice was overseen from there.

Being a site that had for generations been used as a meeting place for Kulin Nation people meant that for a time after European colonisation, the banks of the Yarra continued to be used for that purpose.

Two Aboriginal men from the Westernport area were charged with having killed a man from the Goulburn River in 1843. At the time, an ancient legal system used by Aboriginal people since time immemorial was still in place, although it would be quickly fractured as they were hunted off their traditional country by the colonists.

By the 1840s the British legal system was starting to be superimposed over the top of this existing system. Clearly, there were going to be situations where the two systems were contradictory.

BATTLE LINES DRAWN

When the people from the Kulin Nation came together, it seems that the matter may have been contentious, as one of the first things that happened was that a "pitched battle between the Upper and Lower Goulburn blacks (sic) on the one side, and the Yarra Yarra and Barrabool blacks (sic) on the other, was fought on Thursday last, in Mr. Ryrie's suburban allotment on the outskirts of Collingwood."[1] The fight went on for several hours, resulting in some injuries but apparently no deaths.

The reporter surmised, perhaps incorrectly, that the fighting related to the earlier murder of the Aboriginal man from the Goulburn River. The fighting was followed by a harmonious corroboree in the evening, which would tend to indicate that it may have been unrelated, or that differences had been resolved. Perhaps it was a mock battle – a form of training for battles to come.

RETRIBUTION

A few days later, another paper[2] reported an event that seems far more likely to have been retribution resulting from judicial proceedings within the Aboriginal gathering. It was stated that "…two men were carting wood from the neighbourhood of Rirey's (sic) paddock, when they saw an Aborigine running towards them, followed by about twenty of the above (Goulburn) tribe, who were brandishing spears and yelling after the run away; the men were too much intimidated by the appearance of the natives to afford the required protection. The savages rushed among the teams and so frightened the bullocks that they bolted with the drays, which they seriously damaged. Two of the bullocks were so much injured as to be rendered useless for the future. The whole proceeding arose from the murder of one of

the Goulbourn (sic) tribe, who was butchered by the Yarra tribe…"[2]

It seems that what was deemed to be an appropriate punishment, i.e. spearing, may have been decided upon, and the guilty party either bolted of his own accord, or was given the opportunity to run and potentially escape. The paper also reported that "The Protectors are taking it easy." In other words, they were letting the Aboriginal gathering use its laws to deal with the situation.

ABORIGINAL LAW

The beauty of the Aboriginal system was that it was clearly defined and communicated, if not written down. Everyone understood what their rights and obligations were under the system. They knew what to expect if crimes were committed and the murderers in the above case would have expected retribution. Once the gathering had discussed the case democratically, and a final decision made, their fate was sealed.

Increasingly during the 1840s, British law was superimposed over Aboriginal law, especially in instances where it was perceived that an alleged crime had been committed by an Aboriginal person. It was far less likely to be applied where the victim of an alleged crime was Aboriginal, regardless of whether the perpetrator was black or white.

References: 1 Melbourne Weekly Courier, 10.2.1844; 2 Port Phillip Gazette, 14.2.1844

49 SEASONAL FOOD SURPLUS

One of the reasons for gatherings of vast numbers of Aboriginal people pre-European colonisation was to take advantage of seasonal surpluses of food, to be found in particular locations at certain times of the year. Across Australian, there are many well-known examples of this, such as travel to the Victorian high country to feast on Bogong moths, or to the coast to sites where Short-tailed Shearwaters (mutton birds) breed.

A recent story talked about Ngurai-illum Wurrung people travelling from the Waranga area to the banks of the Yarra River to participate in meetings of the language groups that made up the Kulin Nation. One of the reasons for the travel may have been to be part of the annual eel harvest that took place in the rivers and streams along the south coast.

MERRI CREEK FEASTING

In his historical novel, *The Last Cry*,[1] Mick Woiwod imagines a scene that had been taking place for millennia. A large number of Kulin Nation people were gathered together along the Merri Merri (Merri Creek) within sight of the point where it enters the Birr-arung (Yarra River) about 2.5 km from the present-day Melbourne CBD. As discussed in recent stories, some of the business of the gathering included sorting out legal issues that had arisen during the past year, and meting out appropriate punishment to the guilty parties.

Then the attention turned to the communal activity of the annual autumn eel harvest. Mick points out that "The protein it supplies is such that in the past it supplied with ease the needs of thousands that once gathered. It is the bond that binds the eastern Kulin together".[2] Attendances of up to 2500 people have been recorded at eel harvests and feasts post European colonisation[3]. Perhaps many more attended prior to the disruptions that were caused as a result of that intrusion.

SHORT-FINNED EELS

The eels most likely to have been harvested on the Merri Creek were short-finned eels (Anguilla australis). These eels have an incredible life cycle. They are thought to spawn in the Coral Sea off the coast of north-eastern Australia. Ocean currents bring them to the coast then on the long journey south, where they enter estuaries and move into waterways.

The eels spend most of their life of 10-20 years in fresh water or estuaries. Obviously, they can

survive in fresh or salt water. The females engage in a once in a lifetime ocean migration through Bass Strait and up the east coast of Australia back to their place of birth. They only reproduce once in their lifetime before dying.

HARVESTING

The method of harvest in the Merri Creek was probably different to the elaborate aquaculture systems operating in parts of western Victoria. There, stone was used in "sophisticated works and water management systems…to support the control, ranching and harvesting of eel populations."3 These works produced so much food that semi-permanent stone villages were established nearby. This flies in the face of the view that Aboriginal people were simply nomadic hunter gatherers.

In the Merri Creek, low river flows in late summer and early autumn, and the relatively narrow width of the creek meant that rocks could be rearranged to funnel migrating eels into the numerous *arribines* or eel traps. The traps were made by the women and were long, narrow tubes woven from plant material. In recent years, there has been an encouraging resurgence of people learning the art of making eel traps. The traps had a very practical purpose, but they were and are also works of art, demonstrating the beauty of coil basket making techniques.

The eels were roasted in traditional baking pits before being consumed in one of the biggest feasts on the annual calendar of Kulin peoples.

References: 1 Woiwod, Mick, *The Last Cry* (Tarcoola Press 1997); 2 ibid p 151; 3 environment.vic.gov.au – Victorian Eel Fishery – Management Plan

50 BATTLES AROUND MELBOURNE

During the 1840s, the Melbourne papers reported on a series of battles between groups which are now considered to be part of the Kulin Nation. The journalists sometimes speculated about the cause of the battles, but more often than not would have had little understanding of what was going on. Note that the papers referred to the protagonists as "blacks", a term viewed as inappropriate these days. "Aboriginal people" is a more appropriate term.

In April 1840, "a serious disturbance occurred in the encampment of the Aborigines"[1] near the settlement of Melbourne. "During the performance of a grand corrobera, to witness which many of the town had assembled, a party of blacks belonging to the Barrabul tribe suddenly sent a flight of spears into the centre of the party (blacks from the Goulburn) who were at the moment engaged in the performance of their mystic dance."

There was a tendency for white observers to label groups of Aboriginal people based on where their home country was deemed to be. "Barrabul" implies the Geelong area, whose people these days would be classified as Wathaurong. Similarly, the "Goulburn" people would be Taungurung and/or Ngurai-illum Wurrung.

In the above incident "a Goulburn black received a spear in his lungs" and subsequently died a few days later. The reporter expressed some surprise that this "was followed up by no other act of positive hostility." However, the fate of this man may already have been decided after deliberations between the people of the encampment, about a breach in Aboriginal law.

PITCHED BATTLE

A more extensive battle between Kulin Nation people took place several years later. The Port Phillip Patriot reported that the day before, "a pitched battle took place between a tribe of the Melbourne and the Goulburn blacks."[2] (i.e. Woiwurrung vs the Taungurung and/or Ngurai-illum Wurrung) This fight took place near Sydney road, about 11 km north of the town, which would place it near the site of present-day Fawkner cemetery.

"About eighty blacks on either side placed themselves at a distance of about ten yards (9m) apart, two ropes placed at that distance, separating them from each other; the more courageous of each party occasionally advanced within the open space intervening, and were immediately selected as targets by their opponents. At a short distance from this scene, some forty or fifty women and children, belonging to the respective tribes were also engaged in a similar occupation."[2]

According to the reporter, about 20% of the belligerents were injured, some seriously. However, only one person had been speared through the chest. This tends to suggest that although willing, the fighting was ritualistic, and may have been the result of a decision made under Aboriginal law or a means of testing courage. It is interesting to note that the so-called Aboriginal Protector, George Robinson arrived at the scene, but his horse was speared. Was this because he was resented for trying to interfere in the internal affairs of the people?

GATHERING AT BATESFORD

Two and a half years later, the Geelong Advertiser reported that "upwards of two hundred blacks camped at Bates Ford", just west of Geelong, "the fires burning at each mya-mie seemed like the lights of a small town from their unusual number. There were three tribes assembled, namely – the Barrabool, the Melbourne and the Mt Macedon…" The reporter ascertained that the group had a dispute with, and "are said to be preparing for an encounter with the Goulburn blacks."[3]

If true, this begs the question about where such an encounter might take place. Perhaps, like the previous battle mentioned, they may have been gathering before heading for Melbourne.

END OF AN ERA

Some of these mass gatherings of Aboriginal people must have been amongst the last to occur in Victoria. By the late 1840s, many people were either already dead or had been forced off their country by the incredibly rapid taking of land by the squatters. The remnant populations were generally expected to just die out. In hindsight, nothing could be further from the truth.

References: 1 Port Phillip Gazette 25.4.1840; 2 Port Phillip Patriot 30.1.1846; 3 Geelong Advertiser 22.7.1848

51 A MASS ARREST

In October 1840, there was a mass arrest of around 200 Aboriginal men near Melbourne, including some men from Ngurai-illum Wurrung country. Melbourne was only five years old at that stage. Prior to European colonisation, the banks of the Yarra had been an ancient site for gatherings of Aboriginal people of the Kulin Nation. For some years after the settlement was established, Aboriginal people continued to gather there in numbers. Those numbers declined dramatically during the 1840s due to a range of factors including disease, illness, poison and guns.

On the occasion mentioned above, "Intelligence having been received that the Goulburn tribe had arrived within a few miles of the town, the Crown Commissioner, assisted by the Officers of the 28th regiment and the Mounted Police, proceeded…to the spot, and succeeded in capturing about two hundred of different tribes…and brought the whole body into town."[1]

By way of explanation, the "Crown Commissioner" was officially known as the Commissioner of Crown Lands and had some responsibility for law enforcement in the Port Phillip area. The 28th Regiment was a British army regiment that came out to Australia as the garrison on convict ships in 1835, staying until 1842 when they were sent to India. Some of its men were based at Melbourne. There was also a small number of police.

RESISTANCE

Naturally, there was some resistance to the mass arrest, and one Aboriginal man known as "Winberry" was shot dead after he allegedly attacked an officer. He was believed to be from the Goulburn River, so may have been Ngurai-illum Wurrung. Some of the Aboriginal men had guns, which were confiscated, and traditional weapons were collected and destroyed. Thirty-three of the men were somehow identified as having had potential involvement in raids on squatting runs. They suffered the ignominy of being chained together and thrown into gaol with no charges laid, while the others were released.

In identifying the possible culprits, the colonial authorities used one of the oldest tricks in the colonising book i.e. they encouraged members of particular groups of Aboriginal people to point out individuals from others by offering a reward. As a result, some old scores were probably settled. It also increased the likelihood of internecine feuds later on, meaning less chance of united action against the colonisers.

OUTRAGES AND DEPRADATIONS

When any Aboriginal raid took place on a squatting run, the colonial newspapers had a field day. Words like outrage, depredation, savages, marauders, murderous, heinous and diabolical flowed freely. When retribution was meted out, if it was reported at all, the language was quite different, even though the payback was usually grossly excessive compared to the initial action.

Apparently, the idea behind the mass arrest reported above was that squatters who had a grievance were supposed to come along to the gaol and personally identify the alleged culprits. By this time squatters were spread over much of central and northern Victoria. It would have been quite impractical for them to just come in and identify people, especially when many had not even seen the offenders.

A legal double standard operated in that rarely, if ever, would any Aboriginal person have been given the opportunity to identify a squatter or his men who had been involved in murders or a massacre…and the latter certainly would not have been incarcerated in chains in the meantime.

OUTCOME

Not surprisingly, a month after the arrests, "there have been many depositions taken before the Police Magistrate, relative to the depredations and offences committed by the blacks (sic) in gaol, but nothing has transpired in evidence to convict any of them as being concerned in any heinous matter…"[2] The 33 men still languished in gaol, in their chains, for a bit longer while the newspaper editor hoped that the "temporary imprisonment…would have the effect of striking that terror into the minds of the tribe as would lead to their more amenable and peaceable demeanour."[2]

He wasn't confident. It is easy to see that being locked up in chains for an unspecified period without any charges being laid might not have the desired effect.

References: 1 Port Phillip Gazette 12.10.1840; 2 Port Phillip Gazette 7.11.1840

52 DEALING WITH THE TRUE HISTORY

The previous story talked about a mass arrest of Aboriginal men near Melbourne in 1840. At this time, there was a war going on in the rural areas of Port Phillip District, as Victoria was then known. Squatters and their men were arriving en masse, with vast numbers of sheep and cattle, and settling wherever there were reasonable pastures and access to water. As the squatters pushed into new country, clashes with the traditional owners were inevitable. At the time of the above event, relatively unchecked squatter incursions into the rural areas of the colony had been going on since Major Mitchell's 1836 expedition.

Clashes continued through the 1840s, with the numbers of Aboriginal people dramatically declining as a result. Traditional weapons were no match for men on horses with guns. Any attack on a station by Aboriginal people was invariably met with highly excessive retaliation, on Aboriginal men, women and children.

This is part of Australian history that, until recently, has never been taught in schools. Earlier generations have been fed a much more benign history about brave explorers and settlers, respectively "discovering" the land and turning it into "productive" agricultural properties. It was as if the land was previously unexplored, empty and unused.

ACCEPTING THE TRUTH

One of the required steps on the long road to reconciliation between Aboriginal people and the rest of Australia is a process of truth telling. There are plenty of non-Aboriginal people who think that this is an unnecessary step, including at least one who was a Prime Minister. That is, the view that it happened a long time ago, it's better forgotten about and let's just move forward. However, if you ask Aboriginal people, many of them are keen to hear an acknowledgement of what happened during the process of colonisation, without apportioning blame to current generations.

Here is the view of a present-day Ngurai-illum Wurrung Elder -

"I am a descendant of the Ngurai-Illum Wurrung people, and the Dja Dja Wurrung people - 7 generations down from when this happened to our people. Each generation has had to deal in some way with the long-term effects that began in those times. It's wonderful to see that the devastations of those times are being learnt and recognised by people of today, especially from the younger non-Aboriginal Australians.

People like Hutton (Ed. an early squatter on the Campaspe)…(and others)…were murderers who profited from the massacres. They should not be remembered as heroes. A big thanks to all those who support telling the Truth of that era. I wish this would happen everywhere around Australia where massacres and other atrocities have occurred.

But please remember this important part of healing: No-one alive today is responsible for what happened in those times - it is not your fault. Live freely, live truthfully, and live with love and hope, just as we do, that Australia becomes the country that proudly lives in unity with all its people and its past." Uncle Vincent Peters

TREATY

At the moment in Australia, there is a fairly disjointed treaty process going on. It is disjointed partly because of the nature of government, with its three levels of local, state and federal. It would be excellent if all levels of government could agree on a path forward, but that does not seem all that likely any time soon. It is a pity that the whole discussion has been politicised in certain quarters.

Where the process is moving forward, truth telling is seen to be an important part of the journey. This has worked well in places like South Africa where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission gave aggrieved parties the opportunity to have their say. You can't just bury the sordid history and expect that everyone can move forward feeling warm and fuzzy towards each other.

As Uncle Vin says, truth telling is not about apportioning blame on current generations. It is more about acknowledging that bad things have happened, and celebrate the wonderful ancient and living culture of our Aboriginal people in a way that makes us proud to be Australian.

53 TRADITIONAL HEALTH PRACTICES

Prior to European colonisation, local Aboriginal people had developed a comprehensive set of health practices to deal with illnesses, wounds and injuries caused by accidents. Quite often, this would include the use of local plants to assist in the healing process. In the Waranga area, we can only really guess at the range of plants that were used in preparations for specific purposes.

In 1861, The Age newspaper reported on some observations on Aboriginal health in Victoria[1] by a Dr Thomas. Indigenous health was already in a parlous state, largely due to the impacts of twenty-five years of European colonisation. Prior to that, Aboriginal people were living in such a way that their health was much better. This was the result of good diet, a more active lifestyle and lack of access to European vices such as tobacco and alcohol.

Dr Thomas commenced his observations by noting that "Although the Aborigines of this colony are liable to the usual diseases of Europeans, I invariably found years back that they seldom had the common diseases, as rheumatism, &c, to the extent Europeans have." However, they were highly susceptible to any sort of lung disease after colonisation "which carries them off so speedily that the ablest medical treatment, when available, seldom saves them."

WOUND CARE

It was noted that even severe accidental wounds or those inflicted by weapons such as spears "(that would have kept Europeans for months invalids) were healed in an incredibly short time, to the astonishment of (European) medical men." This was achieved by first sucking the blood out of the wound, presumably to reduce the possibility of infection. If there was no blood coming out of the wound, a sharpened bone probe or lancet would be used "putting the patient to pain", or the body would be manipulated to stimulate blood flow.

When the wound was cleaned in this way, the practitioner would then cover it with "a lump of pridgerory (a kind of wax oozing from trees)." This coating would be removed from time to time to check the wound. If necessary, it would be replaced, in a similar way in which a medical professional now changes the dressing on a wound.

The article doesn't state the source plant of the "pridgerory". Earlier stories in this series have talked about the widespread use of wattle gum for a variety of purposes, so perhaps it was something like that. It could have simply been a protective coating, or may have had antiseptic qualities like, say, ti-tree oil is deemed to have these days.

RHEUMATISM

Treatment for aches and pains in the joints and connecting tissues seems to have been extreme. The practitioner would use massage, but with the hot ashes from a fire. The fire would be deliberately made of bark only, so it burned down into a very fine powder. It was applied when it was still hot. If parts of the legs were affected, then a mound of hot ashes could be put over the legs while they were massaged. At the end of the treatment "the invalid is wrapped up in his blanket".

Muscular aches and pains could be treated with a lotion made from a decoction (concentrated liquid resulting from boiling down) of wattle bark. For more severe cases, the common marshmellow plant was boiled down and used as a poultice on the affected area. There are recorded cases of early European settlers using this latter method, which they could well have learned from the local Aboriginal people.

Fire was an essential part of the daily lives of Aboriginal people, which meant that accidental burns were quite common. Animal fat was used as a salve before the application

of what was called “wheerup”, a fine powder of red ochre. A puff made of possum fur could be used to apply the wheerup in the same way that people might apply make-up these days.

References: 1 The Age 30.9.1861

54 MORE TRADITIONAL MEDICINES

It seems that there are plenty of healing qualities in wattle bark and gum, which Western medicine has largely ignored. The last story mentioned a couple of uses for a decoction of wattle bark (i.e. where the bark is boiled down) although the source[1] did not mention which specific type of wattle was used. There are many species of wattle in the box ironbark forests around Rushworth that may have been used by the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people.

When Aboriginal people were suffering from dysentery, they would drink large amounts of the decoction of wattle bark as well as eating wattle gum. The bark and gum were also used to make what resembled pills, which were taken morning and night.

In the case of venereal disease, a colonial surgeon examined three “Goulburn blacks” (sic) who were seriously afflicted by the disease. In his opinion “life could not be saved unless they entered the Hospital and (had) an operation performed, which they would not consent to.” The men returned to Melbourne eighteen months later, perfectly well. They claimed that all they had done was to regularly apply a very concentrated wattle bark lotion to the affected parts.

IN A FEVER

When one of the people was consumed with a fever, “no matter what kind of fever it might be”, the Aboriginal medical men would resort to treatment with cold water. Where possible, this would include regular immersion in cold water, presumably to bring the temperature down. Doctor Thomas, who had made this observation over many years, noted that he had observed the same behaviour with people from the “South Sea Islands”.

Dr Thomas observed that while various treatments were being given by Aboriginal medical men, they would be “incantating continually while operating.” No detail was provided about what the incantations were or meant, probably because of Thomas’ lack of knowledge of the language. However, it raises the question of whether the Aboriginal doctors employed techniques other than just looking at physical symptoms and providing medical treatment. These days, a positive mental approach is seen to have marked effects on the speed of recovery. Perhaps that was one of the reasons for the verbal accompaniment to the physical treatment. Or, it might have been that the doctor was invoking a spiritual element into the process.

PHYSICAL MANIPULATION

Thomas also observed some physical manipulation of patients with certain conditions. He was very sceptical about the impact of this treatment. He acknowledged that “the blacks (sic) study much the color of

the spittle in those affected in the lungs, and know well its stages." However, he was scathing about one of the methods of treatment, in which "the invalid is laid on his back and held firm…whilst the native doctor keeps continually pressing with his feet, or even jumping on his belly."

Another form of physical manipulation that was applied, when a patient had headaches, involved getting the patient to lie on his back. "The native doctor places his feet on the patient's ear and presses this organ until water literally gushes from the patient's eyes; however rough the treatment, I have known this operation to give relief, and the patient cured." Maybe don't try this one at home.

IMPACT OF COLONISATION

European colonisation brought diseases to Australia that the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people had never encountered before and so there had been no need to learn how to treat them. As a result, they were highly susceptible to the ravages of a whole range of new diseases. This was a factor in population decline which some commentators, such as squatter Charles Hutton, used as a convenient reason by which they could deflect attention away from the frontier violence which they instigated and often took part in.

There is no doubt that the introduction of alcohol and tobacco by Europeans also contributed substantially to a decline in the health of Aboriginal people after colonisation. By 1861, Dr Thomas witnessed a serious decline in resistance to disease, especially where individuals had become "slaves to intoxicating liquors."

References: 1 The Age 30.9.1861

55 DECOCTION OF WATTLE BARK

Recent stories have talked about the use of wattle bark in a range of Aboriginal medicines. Given that the efficacy of wattle bark products features so often in historical sources, it is surprising that Western medicine has not explored the possibilities in more depth. However, over the past 25 years, there does seem to have been a revival of interest in exploring traditional medicines.

In the absence of much published data, a recent experiment took place involving wattle bark. The bark we are talking about is not the outer, dryish bark of the wattle. It is the inner bark, the layer between that outer bark and the woody trunk of the tree. This layer of bark is high in tannin, with one historical source stating that it constituted 24-42% of the content of the bark.[1]

The literature often mentions Black Wattle, but in this experiment, the ubiquitous Cootamundra Wattle (which is pretty much a weed) was used. To get to the inner bark, you need to strip of the outer layer with a knife or tomahawk. You then collect the inner bark, which in this case is a whitish colour. This was then cut up into small pieces.

PREPARING THE DECOCTION

Preparing the decoction was a pretty simple process. The bark was put in an old pot, just covered with water then boiled for a period of time. Quickly, the water turns brown as the tannin in the bark leaches out. It is strained off and cooled, then is ready for use.

This begs the question – before Aboriginal people had access to metal pots and billies, how did they prepare the decoction i.e. boil up the bark and water? One possible explanation is that they heated stones by the fire (as was often done for cooking). The stones would need to have a concave depression that could hold some water. Stones that were used to grind flour usually had a depression – like a mortar and pestle. Perhaps these stones were valued because they had a dual purpose.

In some parts of Australia, Aboriginal people used large shells or bark trays to heat water.[2] The former is not likely in the Waranga area, but perhaps trays of fresh bark could do the job before the bark dried out and started to catch

alight. There are records of what are now generally referred to as 'coolamons' being used to heat food, so that is another possibility.

EFFICACY

It is hard to judge the efficacy of the decoction of wattle bark used in the experiment, as a variety of other treatments were simultaneously being applied to a persistent rash. Eventually the rash disappeared and the guinea pig survived. Further experimentation could produce more definitive information. Perhaps the CSIRO could take it on board and run some clinical trials? It seems a pity not to draw on thousands of years of learning, using a raw material that is readily available.

One of the other uses of the decoction is in the tanning process. Because of the high tannin component in wattle bark, it is regularly used for tanning leather. In the above experiment, the residue did a fine job of dyeing plain raffia baskets into a rich brown colour.

WATTLE GUM

Most wattles exude gum at different times of the year. In this area, Black Wattles seem to do so in late autumn. It is a simple matter of going around the tree with a knife and cutting off the globules of gum. No harm is done to the tree. Aboriginal people used to suck on the wattle gum as a cure for a number of ailments, including diarrhoea.

Alternatively, the gum can be mixed with some water and boiled. It finishes up with a slightly sticky consistency. The decoction can be used as an astringent gargle (sore throat, gums etc) or as a lotion (skin irritations).

Amongst other things, a mixture of wattle gum and water brewed up (until the gum melts) makes a useful varnish that can be applied to baskets, woodwork and anything else that would benefit from a protective coating.

References: 1 botanical.com; 2 sbs.com.au

56 COOKING METHODS

The last story speculated about how the local Ngurai-illum Wurrung people heated water to make up a decoction of wattle bark, which was used for various medicinal purposes. That begs the question about which methods were used for cooking food.

Campsites were often used on a regular basis, as the people moved through their country along well-established songlines. This meant that certain items, particularly those that were too heavy to continually carry, were left at those campsites for future use. Such items may have included stones that were used for food preparation (e.g. grinding stones) or cooking purposes. Over the centuries, accumulations of shells and bones would build up at these campsites, sometimes growing into extensive middens.

ROASTING ON HOT COALS

Most of us are familiar with the image of men returning from a hunt, then game such as a kangaroo or wallaby being put onto an open fire. This was intended to singe off most of the fur. "As the carcase started to swell, it would be removed from the flames, gutted and the remains of the fur scraped off with a sharp implement."[1] As we have seen in earlier stories, that implement was often a mussel shell which the women carried everywhere as a multi-purpose tool.

The carcase would then be returned to the fire. With larger animals, the outer meat would be "well done" while the inner meat would usually be rare when eaten; smaller animals like possums would cook through. Shellfish, which in the Waranga area would largely consist of freshwater mussels, would be placed in coals at the side of the fire. "As soon as the contents started to froth, they were removed from the heat. This method avoided the shellfish being overcooked and tough."[1]

BAKING

Various foods were baked in coals after being placed in a depression then covered over with a layer of coals. This would happen when the fire had burned down low. The type of wood used would depend on the location of the campsite, but the ubiquitous wattle was often used because it burned down to a very fine ash.

Loaves of damper could be baked in the coals of a fire in this way. In the Waranga area, a variety of grass seeds would have been used to make damper, including kangaroo grass seeds. Witchetty grubs would only be rolled briefly in the ashes, if cooked at all. Yams and other vegetables would be placed into a scooped-out hole then covered with ashes for a short time.

STEAMING

Where there was access to stones, baking could be done on stones heated by a fire, as outlined in a previous story. However, in many places, such as the riverine plains, there was a distinct shortage of rocks. In those situations, Aboriginal people often used clay ovens. Some of these ovens that have been measured were about 90 cm long and 60 cm deep. When they are dug out, any clay from the digging is retained and "usually fashioned into smooth lumps".[1]

A fire is then started in pit with the clay lumps put in on top. They dry out quickly and get very hot. The pit is quickly emptied, then the item(s) to be cooked are placed in the oven within a lining of green leaves. The hot clay lumps are returned to the top, with a layer of dirt placed over them to prevent loss of steam.

In Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, vegetables are often wrapped in moist paperbark then placed in a ground oven. Perhaps something similar was done in Ngurai-illum Wurrung country. Stringybark could have been used as a local alternative to paperbark.

CHANGE

With European colonisation came metal cookwear, which was rapidly adopted by Aboriginal people. "This probably led to the demise of the use of the ground oven and a change in nutrition"[1], often with negative consequences for the health of the people.

Reference: 1 Wright, Warwick, Aboriginal Cooking Techniques, Australian National Botanic Gardens website www.anbg.gov.au

57 ABORIGINAL PLACE NAMES

Ngurai-illum Wurrung country has a large number of Aboriginal place names, possibly a greater percentage than the Victorian average of 27% of all names listed in the Australian Gazetteer. The first thing to note is that some of these names may not even be from the Ngurai-illum Wurrung language. They may have been adapted from other places where the European colonisers had been, then applied to the local area.

For a name to be correctly applied to a place it would first need to spoken by an Aboriginal person to a European coloniser, who would try to interpret what he/she had said, then write it down as they thought they heard it.

There are all sorts of problems with this. For instance, the recorder may have misheard what was said. Imagine listening to someone speaking to you in a foreign language, then trying to write down what you thought you heard in English. It is an almost impossible task, given different pronunciations, sounds and inflections in the other language, not to mention regional variations. Victoria had nearly 40 identifiable Aboriginal languages at the time of the European incursion onto the lands.

Additionally, the person trying to record Aboriginal words may have had limited education themselves. Almost certainly, they would have had no formal "knowledge of or training in phonetics, and therefore did not

know how to properly transcribe these names."[1] They may also have been gullible enough to use names that were suggested as a joke or as a diversion. For instance, one of the meanings given for the name of the town of Goornong is "excrement". (…not that there is any suggestion here that Goornong is a s#*t town!)

DIFFERENT SYSTEMS OF NAMING

"There are numerous ways in which Aboriginal placenaming practices differ from European ones."[1] For instance, Aboriginal placenames do not usually include a descriptor like 'creek' or 'mount'. So, if you see a name like Wanalta Creek or Mount Burramboot you know it is part of an introduced system. Different groups of Aboriginal people may have had different names for the same feature or parts of the same feature. The Yorta Yorta could see Mt Burramboot from their country, but because they had a different language to the Ngurai-illum Wurrung, most likely had a different name for such a prominent feature in the landscape. Various parts of rivers often had different Aboriginal names, rather than their being just one name for the entire length of the waterway.

Aboriginal place names are 'owned' by a particular family or clan. Under Aboriginal law, that group might have the sole rights to pass on information about a specific place on their country. It might be a name that can only be passed on to certain people – not to anyone who might want to know.

European place names often refer to places of habitation – cities, towns, populated districts. These were not so relevant for Aboriginal people who would move regularly in response to seasonal food opportunities or to engage in ceremony and cultural pursuits. Aboriginal place names rarely have reference to an individual or family name, although this is common in British place naming. Street and road names around the Waranga area are often family names. Many European colonisers also used names of places that they had come from, to remind them of their 'old country'.

WARANGA SONGLINES

Aboriginal place names "form systems of…(Songlines) for identifying places, and are fundamental to a clan's knowledge of its history, culture, rights and responsibilities for their land. Put another way, place names strongly represent people's relationships with the land."[1]

In the light of this, it is interesting that the word "Waranga" is usually said to mean "sing". Perhaps one of the European colonisers grasped the significance of the word and its meaning to the local Ngurai-illum Wurrung people? Maybe the Ngurai-illum Wurrung emphasised the word over and over when people were asking them about their country. In either case, it seems that the outcome is very fortuitous for all concerned, provided that the meaning was correctly recorded and interpreted.

References: 1 Placenames Australia Newsletter, Indigenous Toponymy Parts 1 & 2 (September and December 2018)

58 NGURAI-ILLUM WURRUNG COUNTRY PLACE NAMES

There are at least 40 names on or near Ngurai-illum Wurrung country that appear to be of Aboriginal origin. Some of those names would have been derived from the Ngurai-illum Wurrung language. It would be good if we could identify which ones were, because it could give us a little insight into a language that all but disappeared within a short time of the arrival of European colonisers.

However, as stated in the previous story, there are all sorts of problems in determining whether an Aboriginal sounding name was genuinely local or imported from somewhere else. Even if it was derived from a Ngurai-illum Wurrung word, difficulties in oral communication and recording might mean

that a present-day place name is just an approximation of the original word.

Similarly, there can be plenty of conjecture over what an Aboriginal place name means, and whether it was used in the right context when it was applied as a place name.

MEANINGS OF PLACE NAMES

Most sources seem to agree on the meanings of the names of some our town, parish or district names and those of geographical features. For instance, Waranga = sing; Whroo = lips or mouth (presumably in relation to drinking from the waterhole); Corop = call of the brolga; Colbinabbin = meeting of red and black soils; Carag Carag = magpie; Nagambie = lagoon or still water; Tatura = place of small lagoons; Kyabram = thick forest. There is no clarity on whether these names are derived from Ngurai-illum words or from some other source.

With other names, the more references you look at, the more different suggestions that you come up with. As an example, Girgarre has been listed in various publications as meaning 'sour', 'red earth' and 'edible root'. Echuca is generally thought to mean 'meeting of the waters' (i.e. the confluence of the Murray and Campaspe Rivers) but in some publications it is said to relate to gravel beds in the river which are visible when flows are very low. Burramboot could be 'high hill' or 'muddy water', both of which are quite feasible given the location.

ABORIGINAL NAMES

There are plenty of geographical features and localities that currently have European names, but for which Aboriginal names have been recorded. The confluence of rivers would seem to be of great significance to Aboriginal people in that most of the major ones in and around Ngurai-illum Wurrung country seem to have a name. Perhaps they were meeting places and/or important locations along the local songlines.

The junction of the Campaspe and Coliban Rivers (now under Lake Eppalock) was known as yallemeeboon; Campaspe/Murray = yalka or echuca; Goulburn/Broken = marangan; Goulburn/Murray = koninner. Some of these names were probably from languages other than Ngurai-illum Wurrung, whose people were aware of them and may have had their own particular name for them. Rivers often had multiple names, depending on whose country they were passing through. Parts of rivers were also assigned particular names in some cases.

Mount Camel has great significance for the Ngurai-illum Wurrum people who, according to some sources, called it Yiberithoop. Below the Mount Camel Range, Lake Cooper was called Pawbeenbolock/Paboinboolok (where bulluk = lake), while some researchers say the name was Tangalum/Tongillum (where yillam = camp). It is easy to envision the people camping on the lake shores where there would be an abundance of food in most seasons.

Before it became Gunn's Swamp, then Waranga Basin, the wetlands that are now covered by the Basin are recorded as having been called Baangyoobine.

THE LINKS BETWEEN PLACES

The European colonial way is to regard places of habitation and their names as quite distinct and those distinctions are often reinforced to the nth degree by mindless parochialism. In Aboriginal culture, places and their names are inextricably linked as part of songlines. Places

are “entities in a network of meaning in a much stronger fashion”.[1]

References: 1 Placenames Australia Newsletter, Aboriginal Toponyny (Sept 2018)

59 PARISH NAMES

Aside from county, land district and local government boundaries, Victoria is also divided up into over 2000 parishes. To confuse matters somewhat, some parishes cross county boundaries and they may also be duplicated in town names. For example, Moora is a small settlement, but also a parish that includes much of the township of Rushworth. The eastern part of the Rushworth township is in the parish of Waranga, which was also the name for a former local government area. Colbinabbin is both a town and a parish name.

The boundaries of parishes were established by early surveyors and form part of the description of each piece of land in Victoria. Often, the names assigned to parishes were suggested by the surveyors. There are many parish names on and around Ngurai-illum Wurrung country that are of Aboriginal origin and may represent words from Ngurai-illum Wurrung language. However, with limited knowledge of the history of local areas they worked in, there would have been occasions when the surveyors used a name that was derived from another source or was inappropriate in some way.

LOST MEANINGS

There are plenty of these parish names whose original meaning has apparently been lost. For instance, does anyone know what Burnewang, Cornella, Dargile, Gobarup, Moora, Moormbool or Wanalta mean, if indeed they are Aboriginal names? Plenty of people have compiled lists of Aboriginal place names but these local names rarely, if ever, appear on any of them. The same applies to the names of some geographical features in the landscape e.g. Wallenjoe Swamp and Yallagalorrah Creek, the latter of which runs into Cornella Creek south of Colbinabbin.

On the other hand, there are parish names where a range of different meanings have been suggested. Noorilim, a parish south of Murchison, could mean either camp, knee or track, depending on which reference you look at, while Tabilk could mean country, frost or place of many waterholes. Goornong could be excrement, kangaroo, apple or an unpleasant smelling plant.

EUROPEAN SURVEYORS

Soon after the squatters moved their flocks onto Ngurai-illum Wurrung land from the late 1830s, the colonial administration in Sydney began to send surveyors onto the country. This process was intensified after the establishment of the colony of Victoria in 1851.

These men would travel on horseback, spending weeks in the field doing their work. They would often camp out as there were very few other Europeans in the area at the time – just a few squatters, their shepherds and hut keepers. There was potential for the surveyors to pick up some words that these men had heard and put them on the maps they were drawing. Perhaps there was also direct contact with the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people who were still moving around country, following their songlines.

EARLY MAPS

There are a large number of surveyors’ maps from this era available on government websites such as PROV and SLV (Public Records Office of Victoria and State Library of Victoria). They contain an amazing amount of detail. In places, some surveyors have written what appear to be Aboriginal words in pencil, almost as though they were trying to figure out how they might spell a word they have just heard spoken.

Surveyor Philip Chauncy (who later surveyed parts of Rushworth township and the Whroo Road) surveyed Cornella Creek in 1848. In

pencil, he has written in the name 'Yellamy-galeure' creek where it runs into Cornella Creek. The squatter Edward Curr, whose station was nearby, believed the Ngurai-illum word 'yellami' meant creek, while 'yellam' meant camp and bark. Today this creek is known as Yallagalorrah.

Chauncy also wrote (in pencil) 'Colbinabbin Creek', near where Cornella Creek ran past squatter Edward Curr's head station. It seems Curr called the creek Colbinabbin Creek rather than Cornella Creek preferred by Chauncy.

References: Many references were used during the compilation of these stories on place names. For a list of names, their possible meanings and the references used, refer to Appendix A. For old maps, go to the PROV website, search 'Map Warper' then enter a search for the name of the area you want to look at. Or on the SLV site, enter 'Parish Map' and the name of the parish you are interested in.

60 IMAGINING THE COUNTRY

It would be interesting to take a tour through the Waranga area prior to European colonisation, seeing it through the eyes of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people who had been the custodians for tens of thousands of years. In the early years of squatting, from the late 1830s, it is unlikely that there would have been dramatic changes. This was because in many areas, the Aboriginal firestick farming had created almost ideal conditions for grazing – open country with good feed, interspersed with shelter belts of woodland.

The squatter Edward Curr travelled north up Cornella Creek (which he called Colbinabbin Creek) in 1841 on his way to establishing a new station at present-day Tongala. For a squatter to take up an area of land under lease, it had to be unoccupied by other squatters. The fact that it was under the custodianship of Aboriginal people was deemed irrelevant by squatters setting up new runs. Although he was taken with the Colbinabbin area, Curr continued north because of a perceived lack of water there. Lake Cooper and the creeks feeding it were dry at the time.

Curr does provide a description of the country at the time. "Colbinabbin was a handsome piece of country, with its timber-dotted ranges, richly-grassed plains, and pleasant little creek embowered in gum trees."[1] He noted that the "bed of Paboinboolok (Lake Cooper), which seemed to have been long dry, was almost one field of myrnong". The tuber of Murnong (or Yam Daisy) was a staple food for the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people.

SURVEYING THE LAND

In 1848, a few years after Curr made these observations, a surveyor employed by the government surveyed Cornella Creek. The map he produced is interesting, in that he made notations about possible place names (as mentioned in the previous story). But he also provided some insight to the vegetation at the time, which could potentially be usefully drawn on in revegetation projects in degraded parts of the country.[2]

Along Cornella Creek, the surveyor noted both some species of vegetation he was seeing, as well as types of habitat in which they were growing. Tree species included "gum and box", "cherry box", "oak". This would appear to be referencing trees today that we would call

Yellow, White and Grey Box, Cherry Ballart and Buloke, of which you can still see remnant vegetation around Colbinabbin, although much reduced since those days.

A later surveyor also mentioned “banksias”. This would almost certainly be the Silver Banksia, once common throughout much of northern Victoria, but almost extinct locally. Various organisations are now running revegetation programs which encourage the replanting of this species. The same surveyor mentioned “swamp gums” (probably Red Gums) and “bastard” gums. Perhaps this was the Grey and White Box that were just seen to be in the way as closer settlement developed.

HABITAT

Habitat mentioned on early maps included “scrubby with patches of open grass”, “scrubby forest”, “open forest”, “scrubby low ranges”, “plain bare of trees”, “thickly timbered”, “forest”, “belt of trees”, “open plain”. Clearly, Ngurai-illum Wurrung people were responsible for some of the clearings, where a regular burning regime, followed by rain, would produce the new growth that was attractive to kangaroos. Instead of randomly hunting across a wide area, the people could go directly to a site where game was guaranteed to be present.

Along the ephemeral creeks that benefit from run-off from the Mt Camel range and hilly country to the south, there is plenty of evidence of Aboriginal occupation over the millennia. This includes ovens, stone artefacts and trees where bark has been harvested for a variety of purposes.

One some of the lesser used roads, the dominant grass species is kangaroo grass. This would have been regularly harvested by the Ngurai-illum Wurrung farmers, so it is a pleasure to see vast swathes of it surviving 180 years of colonisation. It has a relatively moderate nutrient value[3] but was still a staple crop for Aboriginal people. Seeds were ground to make flour and porridge. Kangaroo grass won’t stand constant grazing, which is why is has largely disappeared, but it is eminently suitable for helping to regenerate degraded woodland.

References: 1 Curr, Edward M, Recollections of Squatting in Victoria p 81-2; 2 Public Records Office of Victoria (PROV) website – search for Map Warper – enter GOULB41; 3 NSW Dept of Primary Industries website

61 SPEAKING THE NGURAI-ILLUM WURRUNG LANGUAGE

“Wurrung” means language, so the term Ngurai-illum Wurrung relates to the language of the Ngurai-illum people, who were custodians of the Waranga area for tens of thousands of years. Language groups were usually made up of a number of smaller clans, whose members all spoke that language, with some regional variations. Such was the case with the Ngurai-illum people.

A number of similar language groups could be linked together in a loose federation called a nation. This was the case with the Ngurai-illum Wurrung, who not only shared some common language but also moieties, trade, culture, music, stories and ceremony with the Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung, Wathaurong, Boonwurrung and Woiwurrung as part of the so-called Kulin Nation. For instance, it has been suggested that the Ngurai-illum Wurrung

and Dja Dja Wurrung share 70-80% of their language. Members of all six Kulin language groups met on a regular basis, and there was inter-marriage between them. This meant that most of the people were bi-lingual or multi-lingual.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

Language is one of the most important parts of any culture. It is the way by which people communicate with one another, build relationships, and create a sense of community.[1] It is one of the primary ways – either orally or in writing - by which culture, traditions and shared values are conserved and passed on to the next generations.

Imagine being in a situation where Australia was taken over by another country and you were actively discouraged from speaking English, because the new regime frowned upon the use of that language. Further, everyone you previously knew had their name changed to something different from their birth name. Also, your social groupings, lifestyle and culture were massively disrupted by death, sickness and dispersal. It is hard to imagine, but that is exactly what happened to the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people in the Waranga area over a very short space of time. Tens of thousands of years of learning were lost as the remaining Elders no longer had the most important means of passing their knowledge on.

RECOVERY

Very little work has been done in trying to recover the language of the Ngurai-illum people. This is partly because of the difficulties caused by the fact that there are a limited number of descendants, many of whom have not been able to maintain a connection with country. Present day Ngurai-illum Wurrung people currently lack the resources to engage in a major effort to recover any significant part of their language.

The Taungurung people were southern neighbours of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people and also part of the Kulin nations. In recent years, they have run a major project which has employed linguists to work with Taungurung descendants to recover as much of their language as possible. This has resulted in the publication of some excellent books and educational materials which are available via their website.[2]

This shows quite clearly that by using a range of resources, it is possible to resurrect at least part of a language that was almost gone. The same might be possible for the Ngurai-illum Wurrung and may result in enhancing our knowledge of the traditional custodians of the Waranga area.

VACL

Most sources suggest that there were around 250 identifiable Aboriginal languages in Australia before colonisation and around 40 in what is now the State of Victoria. There is an organisation operating in Victoria whose sole purpose is to build knowledge of Aboriginal languages from around Victoria. The charter of the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL) provides for it to be "focussed on retrieving, recording and researching Aboriginal languages and providing a central resource…with programs and educational tools to teach the indigenous and wider community about language."[3]

Of the 250 languages that did exist in Australia, about 75% have already been lost. Many of the others are barely surviving. It may be too late to retrieve all of Ngurai-illum Wurrung, but there is certainly scope to retrieve some of it.

References: 1 racismnoway.com.au website; 2 https://taungurung.com.au/; 3 VACL website

62 RETRIEVING THE LANGUAGE

It would be amazing to be able to retrieve the language that was developed and spoken in the Waranga area over tens of thousands of

years. By the time of European colonisation from the late 1830s, the Ngurai-illum Wurrung language was a separate language, one of around forty that existed in what is now the State of Victoria. In the years following colonisation, many Ngurai-illum Wurrung people died or were killed. The survivors were dispersed and no longer had access to the country that was so connected to their language. They were also "encouraged" to speak English.

Almost certainly, Ngurai-illum Wurrung (wurrung = language) rapidly declined through the first couple of decades after colonisation. The number of speakers declined as did opportunities to use the language. However, there are still remnants of the language to be found. Some earlier stories discussed place names, some of which may have been sourced from the local Aboriginal language.

COLLECTORS OF LANGUAGE

During the mid-nineteenth century there were plenty of would-be linguists around, who made up lists of Aboriginal words and their meanings because they were interested in various aspects of Aboriginal culture. One of the first squatters to come into the Waranga area was Edward M Curr. He came north with his flocks in 1841 to the Waranga area at a time when there would still have been a considerable number of Aboriginal people on country.

In later life, Curr wrote extensively about Aboriginal people, with language being one of the subjects in which he took an interest. He published a book in the late 1880s with the wordy title "The Australian race: its origin, languages, customs, place of landing in Australia, and the routes by which it spread itself over that continent". Curr stated at that time that he had not heard Ngurai-illum Wurrung spoken for over 30 years (i.e. since the early 1850s), which gives weight to the suggestion that the languages were quickly lost.

His book included lists of common words from Aboriginal languages from all over Australia. The word list for the local area[1] was compiled by Curr himself, while other lists were submitted for inclusion by people who had similar interests in other parts of the country. The words may not have been rendered accurately by Curr. They were simply what Curr thought he heard, then tried his best to write them down phonetically. However, they still give us some insight into the language.

LIVING THINGS

The lists Curr produced included everyday words in important categories. For instance, all living things were of interest to the Aboriginal people, so it is understandable that names would be attached to everything. They may have represented a food source, a personal totem or a moiety.

With regard to staple foods, there was maram (kangaroo), wollert (possum), baraimal (emu), tolom (black duck), packmoom (wood duck) and koonawarra (black swan). Eggs were 'dirandil'. Curr did not have a Ngurai-illum word for fish, but freshwater crays were known by the melodious name 'boonggangooloom'. The snake (kooloonoon) was the only reptile on the list, which is surprising, because many other reptiles were a regular source of food.

Another surprising omission from the list appears to be in the category of food plants, which were an important part of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung diet. This would particularly include murnong (yam daisy) which was a staple, as well as seeds from plants like kangaroo grass, which were ground up to make flour and a type of porridge.

MOIETIES AND TOTEMS

Every Ngurai-illum Wurrung person belonged to one of two moieties, usually referred to these days as Bunjil (the eaglehawk, or wedge-tailed eagle) or Waa (the crow). The terms that Curr used for these two all-important birds were 'poongil' for eagle and 'wong' for crow. At a glance, you can see that poongil/bunjil might be interchangeable, but there is a fair difference between 'wong' and 'waa'. Perhaps there was a variation in the local dialect, or Curr may have recorded the sound of the word incorrectly. A person's moiety determined

their kinship relationships, marriage partners and social responsibilities.

As well as being associated with a moiety, each person had personal totem, often a particular bird, animal or reptile. This provided a kinship link to anyone else who had the same totem, but also meant that the owner had a duty to care for that living thing.

Reference: 1 Curr, E M, The Australian Race pp 528-9

63 NGURAI-ILLUM WURRUNG WORDS

Continuing from the previous story, there were other categories of words that the squatter Edward Curr[1] sought out when compiling his lists of Aboriginal words. Body parts were things that all languages would assign words to. Starting at the top, the Ngurai-illum Wurrung word for head, according to Curr, was *kowong*, then followed other parts of the head – eye (*merin*), nose (*kaag*) and ear (*wirn*).

We are already familiar with the word for mouth, *woorro*, which most linguists suggest is the basis for the name of the former gold town of Whroo. It is a reference to the Aboriginal waterhole on Spring Hill, near the present-day cemetery, being a place where you would get down on your hands and knees and use your mouth (*woorro*) to sip from the spring.

Some of the other words for body parts seem to have a connection to words we already know, but this is mere speculation. For instance, the Ngurai-illum word for hand is *mirnong*, which looks like an alternative spelling of murnong, the indigenous name for the yam daisy, a staple food of the local people until grazing animals destroyed their crops. However, Curr claimed that the Ngurai-illum used the words *mo-i-yool* or *barum* for yams from the yam daisy plant. The word for fat is *marmbool*, which has some similarity to the district of Moormbool to the south of Rushworth, around Graytown. This is one of the district names that appears to be an Aboriginal word, but whose original meaning has proved elusive to find.

PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS

As has already been discussed, relationships between Aboriginal people form a complex web that is not often well understood by other Australians. It therefore stands to reason that there are many Ngurai-illum Wurrung words that relate to people and their relationships. As a group, the Aboriginal people were referred to as *koliinboolok* (those from outside the area – *bukkeen*); a man was *koliin* while a woman was *baadjur*. These terms were also used for “husband” and “wife” respectively. Boys were *kolinoro* and girls were *booboonark*.

Within the family, a father was *manmoornong*, while the mother was *bawain*; sisters were *paanbin* and brothers *burnumbi*. Today, there is a lot of emphasis placed on the terms Aunty and Uncle, but Curr did not have these terms as part of his standard list. Perhaps he did not understand the importance of those links, which were biological, but also related to moieties and totems.

An old man was a *thaingola*, while an old woman was *wirkoork*. Young men, perhaps those who had reached the age where they were going through the initiation rituals and knowledge transfer, were called *yen-yen-boolok*. A baby was a *pobop*.

CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

Aboriginal connection to country is an essential part of their culture. In his autobiography[2], Archie Roach tried to explain that connection - “In the bush, a thousand years ago, every sensation was part of a whole; part of an ecosystem. Every sound and smell was useful, a part of a story of rising and falling, life and death. We blackfellas were a part of that story, but just a part. A thousand years ago, everything was part of everything (else); everything was connected. You were in nature, and everything in nature was part of you.”

Obviously, a large part of language would have been developed to put names to things that were part of the ecosystem that Archie talks about. The cosmos – sun (*ngammai*), moon (*mirnan*) and stars (*toort*) – were of great

significance. Light/day (*karemin*) and Dark/night (*boroin* or *moolook-moolook*); heat (*narawing* or *ngammai*) and cold (*motoon*); wind (*gorin*) and rain (*yeul*) were all experienced regularly and named.

Around each camp (or *yellam*) terms like *wiin* (fire), *boort* (smoke), *biik* or *pik* (ground), *barrn* or *wolloon* (water), *kaalk* (wood) and *moegin* or *batto-batto* (stone) would have been in constant use.

It is important to point out that Curr produced this list of words from the Ngurai-illum Wurrung language thirty odd years after he had last heard it spoken. Unless he had recorded the words and their meanings at the time, as best he could, there is a good chance of inaccuracies. However, it does give us some insights into language that may otherwise not been possible to obtain.

References: 1 Curr, Edward M, The Australian Race, Volume 3 pp 523-9; 2 Roach, Archie, Tell Me Why

64 THE LANGUAGE OF TOOLS AND WEAPONS

When the squatter Edward Curr was recording Ngurai-illum Wurrung words, one of the obvious categories of words he chose was that of tools and weapons. These were important assets, on which life depended. Much time was spent preparing tools and weapons for use, then maintaining them in good condition. As people moved around their country, they were some of the few possessions that were always carried.

Curr's selection of English words for which he sought Aboriginal equivalents would these days be viewed as misogynistic – they largely related to tools and weapons used by men. However, he did partially correct this when he was writing his book[1] in the 1880s by including the term for a yam digging stick, an item primarily used by women. He remembered that the Ngurai-illum Wurrung name for the stick was *wolo-ain*.

All the women carried a yam digging stick, which was one of their main tools and which had multiple uses. Obviously, collecting the corms of the yam daisy (murnong) was the primary use. The sticks would be selected from hard wood, sharpened on one end by whittling and sanding, then hardened over a fire. On a patch of murnong, it would be thinned out, selecting the best corms but leaving plenty behind for collection another time. This type of harvesting aerated the soil and allowed the remaining corms room to grow larger.

HUNTING AND FIGHTING WEAPONS

Both men and women used stone axes (or *karagik*) for a range of purposes. It was mainly the men who used spears when hunting wildlife. They used reed spears (*djerar*) when they could get them. The reeds were acquired through trade with their northern neighbours, the Bangerang. Throwing sticks (*karek* or *marewun*) were also used to bring down prey like water birds. Surprisingly, Curr did not record a word for the boomerang, which might suggest that the Ngurai-illum Wurrung did not use them to the extent that other people did.

When fighting took place, the men's go-to weapons were a war spear (*ko-i-oon*) and a shield (*girah*). There was nothing on Curr's list for a club, which was used in fighting at close quarters. For this type of fighting, a leangle was often used. This was an L-shaped club which was designed to counter the use of a shield by an opponent, by getting around the side or top of the shield with a blow. Women would use clubs for killing smaller wildlife like goannas, snakes and lizards that they happened across as they moved through country.

DECORATION

Another word omitted from Curr's original standard word list was the word ochre. When he was writing *The Australian Race*, he corrected this to a degree by recalling that red ochre was known as *noro-noro.* Ochre was of great importance to all Aboriginal people, and

amongst other things would be used in decoration of bodies, tools and weapons.

As well as using ochre, the Ngurai-illum Wurrung would have decorated their tools and weapons by incising designs onto them. Unfortunately, very few of these items remain in personal or museum collections. Being able to examine them would provide a greater insight into the lives of the former custodians of the land.

STONE AND WOOD

As we have seen, stone was used by Aboriginal people in a number of ways. Curr documented the words *moegin* or *batto-batto* for stone. The two different names could have referred to different types of stone. Given the importance of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung to the greenstone sourced from quarries on the Mount Camel range, it could be expected that there would be a specific word to describe it.

The greenstone was used for axe-heads, spear heads and other blades, and was an item traded far beyond Ngurai-illum Wurrung country. It is likely that the people used these blades when they were incising designs onto their tools and weapons. There may have been specific names for different types of wood. Curr noted what was probably a generic term for wood as *kaalk*.

References: 1 Curr, Edward M, The Australian Race, Volume 3 pp 523-9

65 RYRIE'S PADDOCK

Earlier stories in Waranga Dreaming talked about the epic journeys taken by Ngurai-illum Wurrung people to attend gatherings in what is now Melbourne. One of the events that was attended on an annual basis was the eel harvest that took place on creeks leading into the Yarra River. It was an opportunity to capitalise on the seasonal bounty of an area, but there were many other reasons for meeting. Apart from the feasting and catching up with people you had not seen for a while, there was trade, sporting events, legal proceedings and ceremony.

When Ngurai-illum Wurrung people travelled down to the Melbourne area, they often camped at a place later known as Ryrie's Paddock. It is not known whether the Aboriginal people who camped there had a name for the place. If they did, it seems to have been lost over time.

Ryrie's Paddock was probably in the present-day suburb of Clifton Hill. This makes sense, because it was quite close to Merri Creek, one of the principal sites for the annual eel harvest and feasting. As noted in a previous story, the different people's positions in the large campsite were arranged in the same relative positions as the geographical location of their home country. This would have meant that the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people camped at the northern end of the site, closest to Merri Creek.

RYRIE BROTHERS

The Ryrie whose name was attached to the land may have been William Ryrie, a Scot who had migrated to Australia in 1825. He was an overlander who brought stock down to the Port Phillip District in 1837, settling in the Yarra Valley on what was called Yering Station. In 1840, there was a dispute between a nearby colonist (Anderson) and a group of Wurundjeri people, after which the Wurundjeri went to Ryrie's station. Perhaps Ryrie was sympathetic towards them and had offered them some shelter.

The Border Police under Captain Henry Gisborne followed and lured some of the Wurundjeri to the station homestead. An Aboriginal leader known as Jaga Jaga was then captured, prompting an attack which ultimately freed him. Ryrie's role in these proceedings is unknown.

Ryrie was active in Melbourne society, so Ryrie's Paddock at Clifton Hill may have been where he stayed when attending to his

business and in his role as a magistrate. His brother James owned land in Collingwood, so this may have been another possibility for the site of Ryrie's Paddock. However, this land was some distance from the Merri Creek. Most references point to an area near the creek along what is now Heidelberg Road.

THE ROUTE TO RYRIE'S

We can only speculate about the routes taken by Ngurai-illum Wurrung people to attend events near Merri Creek. It is possible that the clans from the Campaspe River (or western) side of Ngurai-illum Wurrung country may have simply travelled south along the Campaspe to the area around present-day Carlsruhe. This area is considered by some to be another meeting place of various peoples of the Kulin Nation. From there, they may have travelled around Mt Macedon then across the plains north of Melbourne, perhaps with members of the Wathaurong, Taungurung and Dja Dja Wurrung people who would be travelling in the same direction.

An alternate route for the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people who frequented the Goulburn River may have been to follow the Goulburn southwards, meeting up with the Taungurung people, with whom they were closely linked through language and kinship. The Taungurung would have been going to the same Kulin Nation get-togethers that the Ngurai-illum were attending.

Regardless of the route that was taken, it was an epic round trip of over 300 km on foot, carrying only the bare essentials. The last of the major Kulin Nation get togethers took place in 1844, when around 800 people gathered on the ground know by the colonists as "Ryrie's Paddock", "Ryrie's Hill" or "Mr Ryrie's". After this time, the number of people was dramatically reduced by disease, malnutrition and murder. The survivors had generally been dispersed from their country and a culture that was thousands of years in the making was dramatically compromised in under 10 years.

66 STONE HOUSES

When you think about Aboriginal structures in pre-colonial times, the first thought tends to be of what is commonly referred to as mia-mias – generally defined as "a temporary shelter of the Aborigines (sic), usually a simple frame of branches covered with bark, leaves, or grass".[1] These days, there is evidence to suggest that many structures made by Aboriginal people were much more substantial than this and included stone houses.

The previous story talked about the local Ngurai-illum Wurrung people following the Campaspe River south to the Carlsruhe area (near Kyneton) to meet up with other language groups (Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung, Woiwurrung) that were part of the loose federation now referred to as the Kulin Nation. A current landholder on the Campaspe at Carlsruhe cites significant evidence of a village of stone houses on his property in the form of stone foundations. It makes you wonder whether the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people ever stayed in these structures.

Unlike much of the northern plains, there is no shortage of rocks around Carlsruhe, which made rock an obvious choice of building material in the area. In other rocky parts of Victoria, such as the south-west, there is plenty of recorded evidence of stone houses being constructed. Stone was also used in construction of the world famous Gunditjmara eel traps in the Lake Condah area, which have been carbon-dated as being over 6500 years old.[2] Perhaps the Ngurai-illum Wurrung built stone houses at places like Whroo and the Mt Camel Range where there was plenty of stone.

COMPLEXITY OF BUILDINGS

One of the determinants of the type of housing adopted by Aboriginal people in an area, other than availability of raw materials, was the likelihood of a group of people staying in a particular spot for any length of time. Generally, the longer the people were likely to be in an area, the greater effort would be put

into construction of accommodation. That, in turn, would be determined to a large degree by the available food resources in the area. If there was plenty of food available in a locality, the people would be more inclined to stay longer and thus build more substantial shelters. In the Waranga area, wetlands were places where there was an abundance of food. Places like the Corop lakes may have seen semi-permanent settlements for extended parts of the year.

The season and prevailing weather would be another important factor. It has been postulated that at least one of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung clans wintered at Reedy Lake. If this was the case, more substantial and enclosed dwellings would be erected as protection against winter cold and rain. The dwellings would include fire pits inside or near the entrances. Alternatively, in summer, people would more regularly sleep under the stars, or under a simple lean-to. A smoky fire would have been maintained nearby as a deterrent to mosquitoes.

TERMINOLOGY

Although the word mia-mia is in common usage now, there were nearly forty different language groups in Victoria alone, so it follows that there were probably many different words for this type of shelter. There is some conjecture about whether the word mia-mia even originated in Victoria. With the word mia-mia, a whole range of spellings were recorded by people, including mai-mai, miam-miam, myam-myam, mya-mya or mimi.[3] People living around the Victorian village of Mia Mia, between Heathcote and Kyneton, tend to use the latter. William Buckley, the white fella who lived with the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip for over 30 years, used the word miam-miam, so it appears it was in use in Victoria before colonisation.

In his list of Aboriginal words, local squatter Edward Curr did not provide any word for home or shelter. The closest he gets is the word *yellam*, which he suggested was used interchangeably for bark and camp. Bark was a building material that the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people would have used regularly for mia-mias. The most likely source of bark used locally would have been from grey box trees. The skill of local people in stripping bark became important for the European colonists when they arrived. The first dwellings on many squatting runs were bark huts. Local Aboriginal people were often employed to supply the bark.

With their own shelters at regular campsites, Aboriginal people would use the bark again and again. In between visits to a particular site, it would be stacked so it was ready to quickly access on the next visit.

References: 1 Oxford English Dictionary; 2 Parks Victoria website – Budj Bim NP;
3 http://andc.anu.edu.au/ozwords/April2001/Mia-Mia.html;

67 CAMPSITE ARRANGEMENTS

As noted in the previous story, the complexity of structures at Ngurai-illum Wurrung campsites depended on a range of factors, including available resources, length of stay and prevailing weather conditions. Stone may have been used on occasions where it was available, but most shelters in this area were made from plant material – branches, leaves, bark and grass – and earth. They were used in a range of different structures, often with a framework of branches covered with waterproof sheets of bark and ranging from 1.2-1.5 metres high. In warmer weather, there might be just an unroofed windbreak or no shelter at all.

For most of us in today's Western society, this is inconceivable. However, simple, open structures provided a direct connection to Country. Campsites were often chosen for "comforts of surface, vegetation, sound, smell, warmth, security, spatial definition, customary domestic behaviours and connection to animals and plants in the habitat."[1] The

fulfilment of these prerequisites for a campsite meant that people were very much in touch with nature, rather than excluding nature by living in a completely enclosed house.

HOUSE AND HOME

There is a huge difference between contemporary ideas of house and home and the traditional Aboriginal concepts that relate to them. A house in Rushworth or Colbinabbin, for instance, is a structure, whereas in traditional Aboriginal communities, it was just a "domiciliary space with (a) hearth and artefacts"[2] (i.e. a few regularly used items like bags, utensils and weapons). That space might not even have a structure on it.

The home for most people today means "one's regularly used house", a structure that we tend to fill up with all sorts of "stuff", much of which we don't really need. In traditional Aboriginal communities, all of a group's Country was home, so home might include "multiple campsites, resource places and sacred sites".[2] It follows that the custodians would want to look after that home in the same way that we look after our own home.

CAMPSITE LAYOUT

Small camps might just include a family group – husband, wife or wives, children and other close relatives. In larger gatherings of people who spoke the same language (e.g. Ngurai-illum Wurrung) there might be a number of these groups, as well as separate provision for places for the unmarried men and also the single women. Amongst other things, this facilitated the conducting of men's and women's business. There were also much larger gatherings such as the meetings of the Kulin Nation people described in earlier stories.

The actual layout of campsites in traditional Aboriginal communities was usually predetermined by long-established sets of rules. In the case of very large meetings, it was noted in earlier stories that the general layout was based on the direction that each group had come from. For example, at meetings of the Kulin Nation in what is now the Melbourne area, the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people would be located on the northern end of the larger campsite, because their Country was the most northerly of the Kulin Nation peoples.

GATHERING ON COUNTRY

Ngurai-illum Wurrung people in the Waranga area would camp in places for an extended length of time when the available food supplies allowed. These gatherings might include one or more of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung clans, of which there were at least three. At times, all of those clans would come together. In this type of gathering, you would not just camp randomly. There was a specific, pre-determined layout that was consistently applied.

"…because of a consistent pattern of usage, each camp would likely be associated for each adult with a set of previous experiences there. This might include a wealth of memories, daydreams, nostalgia, imagery of people and events, and revelations at sacred sites, extending back in time through the many seasonal movement cycles."[3] All of these places on Country represented "home" and were the basis for connection to Country.

References: 1 Page, Alison & Memmott, Paul, Design – Building on Country (the 2nd of a six part series on First Knowledges, 2021) p 137; 2 op cit p 135; 3 op cit p 132

68 MEETING ON COUNTRY

On Ngurai-illum Wurrung country, there would have been various types of gatherings. Quite often, just a family group consisting of the father, mother(s) and children would camp together. On other occasions, a clan may get together, which consisted of a number of these family groupings, linked through kinship. Also attending would be groups of single men and older boys who had been initiated, as well as unmarried women.

Each clan would have a well-defined part of Country within the wider domain of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung language group. For instance, the Ngurai-illum balug clan's Country centred around the Goulburn River, Reedy Lake and areas to the east, while the Benbedora balug and Gunung willam clans spent more time near the Campaspe River. All clans travelled extensively along songlines between the two rivers, taking advantage of seasonal food opportunities. They would meet with the other clans at frequently used campsites along the way.

ARRIVING AT CAMP

The layout of these larger camps was pre-determined by a well-established set of rules. "Kinship was an all-pervasive medium in Aboriginal camps, generating both links and distancing between particular domiciliary groups (whether families, single men or single women). There were rules for the sharing of, and access to, food and other material items and resources."[1]

Logically, family groups with close kinship ties would camp close to each other. In some Aboriginal communities in Arnhem Land, all the people descended from a common male ancestor would camp together. Within that camping area, there may be smaller groups "based on separation of the lineages of the most senior brothers".[2] It is only conjecture, but something similar may have occurred with the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people, whose society was also patrilineal i.e. the father's moiety decided that of his children; girls married into another clan with a different moiety, while boys stayed within their father's clan.

However, there was also distancing required between certain individuals and groups. One example of distancing that applied in many groups was the requirement for avoidance of contact between a male and his mother-in-law, something that some blokes might appreciate these days! Also, groups of unmarried men and women would not normally camp alongside each other.

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Amongst the activities taking place at these larger gatherings, there was "feasting, trading, celebrations, ceremonies, initiation, arrangement of marriages, settlement of disputes and forms of emotional reconciliation."[3]

During the day, activity was largely carried out in distinct gender groups. Women, girls and small boys would be occupied for part of the day with collection of food – plant material, small animals, reptiles and other edible living things, honey, mussels, yabbies and so on. Hunting larger animals like kangaroos and emus was the preserve of the men.

Some camps were economically specialised locations. For example, camping in an area that had been burned, followed by rain which produced the new shoots preferred by kangaroos, would be part of a regular calendar of events along the songlines. In spring, wetlands would provide a range of foods which could be harvested relatively easily and where there were likely to be regularly visited campsites.

A larger camp also provided opportunities for socialising, storytelling and teaching, important in any community. Particular campsites would be the venue for men's business or women's business, where Elders would pass on secret knowledge to the next generation and perform ceremony. This would include initiations for young men who were ready to enter that next phase of their lives.

Because of the dramatic disruption to the Ngurai-illum Wurrung way of life when the squatters first arrived in the late 1830s, much of this knowledge was no longer passed on. It was inextricably linked to Country, which was the people's home. Lack of access to country and a significant drop in population, including deaths of Elders who had held that knowledge,

meant that the culture was quickly diminished through the 1840s and 1850s.

References: 1 Page, Alison & Memmott, Paul, Design – Building on Country (the 2nd of a six part series on First Knowledges, 2021) p111; 2 op cit p112-3; 3 op cit p40-1

69 LARGE CAMPS ON COUNTRY

A "large" meeting of Aboriginal people was reported near Elmore in 1865.[1] The meeting took place nearly 30 years after squatters began to move into this part of Victoria. By then, the vast majority of Aboriginal people who had been the original custodians of the Country had either been killed, died or dispersed. At the same time, there was only a small number of Aboriginal people frequenting the Murchison area. Most of them were gone by the mid-1870s.

That begs the question – who were these people who gathered at Elmore in 1865? Could it have been the remnants of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung clans, or was it simply a gathering of the survivors of a number of different language groups meeting at a central point?

Tattambo and his second wife, known only as "Mary" were both alive at this time. The Campaspe River at Elmore was part of the Country of the Gunung Willam clan of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people. Tattambo was born into that clan, so if he was in attendance, it was on his Country. There is evidence that Tattambo and Mary visited Mary's home Country around this time. Mary was a Wemba Wemba woman from Country near the Murray River south-east of Swan Hill, so perhaps they were en route to or from this Country at the time.

NUMBERS OF PEOPLE

Whoever supplied the report of the Elmore gathering used the term "large". By the 1860s, there were very small numbers of Aboriginal people in the area, so "large" may have been a relative term. They would not have seen a gathering of over say a hundred Aboriginal people for more than twenty years, so a get together of 30 or 40 might have been labelled large.

Prior to European colonisation of the Waranga area, the number of Ngurai-illum Wurrung people living there was probably in the hundreds, not thousands. When the various clans got together, there would still have been a sizeable encampment. It would need to have been in an area where there were adequate food resources to sustain the larger group. We can only speculate where that may have been, but you would reckon the extensive wetlands east of the Mt Camel range would be a strong possibility.

IMPACT OF SMALLPOX

As noted earlier, the number of Aboriginal people across Ngurai-illum Wurrung Country decreased dramatically from the late 1830s when the first squatters arrived. Some people were killed in massacres, others lost access to reliable and varied food sources. As a result, they experienced a deterioration in health due to poorer diet. Many were susceptible to diseases such as influenza and STDs that came with the first wave of colonisers. Mental health deteriorated because of lack of access to Country, which they considered to be their home, and the loss of loved ones, often in traumatic circumstances.

There is evidence to suggest that earlier smallpox pandemics had already reduced the population before the arrival of the colonisers. One researcher (Butlin) believes that smallpox, along with other issues, had reduced the population by as much as 90% in the first 60 years of colonisation after the landing of the First Fleet.[2]

SMALLPOX IN THE WARANGA AREA

Albert LeSouef spent some of his formative years around Murchison, when his father William was in charge of the Aboriginal Protectorate station there and also later had

property on the Goulburn further north. LeSouef believed that the local people had suffered from two pandemics, the first in the 1790s and the second from 1828-31, just before colonisation began in the late 1830s.

The source of the smallpox pandemics is a matter of conjecture. Smallpox arrived with the First Fleet in 1788 and spread rapidly through Aboriginal communities. Another explanation is that it came with Macassan seamen (from what is now Indonesia) who fished the waters to the north of Australia before that, and traded with the local Aboriginal people from around 1700.

References: 1 Shaw, M, Our Goodly Heritage – History of Huntly Shire (1966); 2 Taylor, Margaret, Courage and Compromise – An Examination of the Aboriginal Response to the European Colonisation of North-Eastern Victoria (1999) p 56

70 SMALLPOX IN THE WARANGA AREA

There is evidence to suggest that by the time European colonisers arrived in the Waranga area, the population of Ngurai-illum Wurrung people had already been dramatically impacted by smallpox epidemics. Around Sydney, where smallpox had a devastating effect on the local Aboriginal people in the first few years after the First Fleet landed, it has been recorded that the survivors took to the bush to try to escape the disease. However, this had the effect of spreading the disease even further as those people moved through the Country of other groups that were previously unaffected.

Smallpox in Australia may have pre-dated the arrival of the First Fleet. Macassan seamen fished the waters north of Australia, especially for trepang (or sea cucumbers) which were boiled, then dried, before being used as a food. The Macassans traded with the Aboriginal people along the northern coast of Australia, where trepang were plentiful. In doing so, they may have introduced smallpox, which then spread around the land.

EVIDENCE OF EPIDEMICS

Many colonisers in the first wave of Europeans noticed signs of smallpox in the remnant Aboriginal populations of the Waranga area. The telltale sign was pitting of the skin of the survivors. Albert LeSoeuf, who resided at the Aboriginal Protectorate at Murchison in the 1840s, observed "very old" people who "would have been young at the time of the first epidemic. He was told that when these people were young, they had survived an illness which he believed to be smallpox."[1] There were also mass graves found on the Murray River, which traditional owners said were from a major sickness many years before.

Charles Sturt, when travelling on the Murray-Darling River system in the late 1820s, observed a smallpox epidemic in progress. Ten years later he saw gatherings of Aboriginal people with pitted skin, who were the survivors of this outbreak. Because the rivers were a conduit for travel, the disease spread along tributaries like the Campaspe and Goulburn Rivers.

IMPACT OF EPIDEMICS

In her 1999 thesis[1], Margaret Taylor postulated on the impact of the epidemics. Obviously, there was a massive depopulation of the area. Albert LeSouef reckoned that the population in the local area had probably halved. You can imagine the impact that this would have had on society. Many Elders who carried important knowledge would have died before they had a chance to transfer that knowledge to the next generation. "The inheritance system worked to conserve the tribal stock of knowledge, while at the same time providing a way of facilitating an exchange of knowledge between groups."[2] If people died before their time, the system broke down.

There was also potential for tensions between different Aboriginal peoples to rise. The

people of north central Victoria believed that that there were no unexplained deaths. If people died, especially in large numbers as they did from smallpox, then those deaths were the result of "sorcery" perpetrated by an enemy.[3] The upshot of this was that someone had to pay: revenge would be sought in the form of injury or death. If the smallpox epidemic forced a group of people to move onto someone else's country in an effort to escape the source, then tensions could also arise there.

IMPACT OF COLONISATION

With European colonisation coming hot on the heels of the second epidemic, local Aboriginal communities were already in a parlous state. Unfortunately, colonisation brought with it a whole range of other diseases such as influenza and sexually transmitted diseases, which the people were highly susceptible to. Populations took another hit, as well as being impacted by murders and poor health related to poorer diet.

With many of the knowledge holders gone, there was a breakdown in traditional cultures. The trauma associated with that is something that is inter-generational and makes the partial revival of that culture all the more important.

References: 1 Taylor, Margaret, Courage and Compromise – An Examination of the Aboriginal Response to the European Colonisation of North-Eastern Victoria (1999) p 58-60; 2 ibid p 75; 3 ibid p 67

71 A BATTLE NEAR ROCHESTER

Earlier stories have talked about the effects of smallpox epidemics and colonisation on the local Aboriginal people. In her 1999 thesis[1], Margaret Taylor discussed the responses of Aboriginal people to these historical events. One of the possibilities was an increase in warfare between different groups. The sudden deaths of a large number of people resulting from smallpox could have been ascribed to another group, creating hostility. Movement outside home Country to escape disease may also have led to deteriorating relationships between different groups.

With colonisation, similar things happened. People were forced to move around or off their Country, as well as being highly susceptible to all the diseases that the intruders brought with them. Some of these factors may have been evident when there was a dramatic clash near present day Rochester in 1860.

RECORDED BY LOCAL PRIEST

Father Patrick Hickey OSA (Order of St Augustine) recorded some details of a fierce battle just to the east of Rochester.[2] He stated that the battle was between the "Murray and Campaspe" tribes. In those days, people tended to refer to groups of Aboriginal people based on where they spent most of their time. Their observations were generally ignorant with regard to language groups and other associations.

The most likely belligerents on one side of this battle were members of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung language groups, two of whose clans lived along the Campaspe. Their northern boundary extended almost up to Echuca. The opponents were most likely Bangerang and Yorta Yorta people. In earlier days, there was some enmity between these groups, but that did not preclude the possibility of meeting for purposes of trade, ceremony and exchange of women in marriage.

Language spoken by the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people was vastly different to that spoken by the Bangerang and Yorta Yorta. However, there was some common language (estimated at around 11%)[2] and many Aboriginal people were multilingual, so communication was possible.

FIERCE CLASH

Fr Hickey recorded that "It was a fierce encounter, and the yells of the combatants could be heard in Rochester East. The victors were members of the Campaspe tribe, the

enemy leaving five dead on the field."[3] While the reasons for the battle were not recorded, it is interesting that there were still enough Aboriginal people living in the area to supply warriors for the battle. By that time, populations had been dramatically reduced.

In almost the same spot, there had been at least one, and probably two massacres of Aboriginal people just over 20 years earlier, when colonists carried out savage reprisals against people who were trying to protect their Country and its resources. The combatants could ill-afford to lose more men in incidents of internecine conflict.

In another incident, "A group (of Aboriginal people) had gathered around a well which had been sunk by the track (just west of Rochester) and a shepherd fired a shot which killed one of the blacks (sic), who fell into the well."[3] Squatters and their men generally had scant regard for the local people and many similar atrocities went unreported for fear of prosecution.

TRAVELLING ETIQUETTE

Prior to colonisation, the Country of various Aboriginal groups was clearly defined. The rights and obligations attached to the land was generally recognised by neighbouring groups. If fighting between groups did take place, it was not over land and resources. When one group wanted to move through the Country of another, an emissary was normally sent first, to negotiate the passage through. The emissary might carry a wooden message stick, which was a device used to communicate with the custodians of the land.

It is possible that in the lead-up to the battle outlined above, this etiquette was not maintained. Alternatively, the group moving southwards into Ngurai-illum Wurrung country may have been under some compulsion to do so. As a result, they may not have had the time or the requisite cultural knowledge to adhere to past practices.

References: 1 Taylor, Margaret, Courage and Compromise – An Examination of the Aboriginal Response to the European Colonisation of North-Eastern Victoria (1999); 2 Blake, Barry, Notes on Ngurai-illum Wurrung language; 3 Rochester Centenary Committee (1954), Live & Prosper – Rochester 1854-1954

72 RESPONSES TO COLONISATION

Aboriginal communities in the Waranga area were massively impacted by colonisation. In the face of invasion of their Country, the traditional custodians had a number of options open to them.[1] As noted in the previous story, some bands may have been forced to retreat over traditional boundaries, effectively trespassing on another group's Country. This may have contributed to some violent clashes.

Even if they were welcomed to a degree on neighbouring Country, further from the ever-expanding settlement by colonisers, they did not know that Country very well, if at all. It would take time to familiarise themselves with the Country. During that time, difficulties could arise in procuring enough food to live comfortably. They would also be removed from their songlines and sites of significance, effectively being kicked out of home. It would have been a stressful time even if the concurrent violence was not occurring.

MAINTAINING CULTURE

Another response would be to try to accommodate the settlers while simultaneously trying to maintain as much of their traditional culture as possible. This would involve staying on Country, using old songlines and regular campsites where possible, carrying out ceremony and caring for the environment.

Inevitably, this would mean some competition for resources and increase the degree of difficulty of life. For instance, the squatters had no interest in maintaining kangaroo populations, as they competed for feed with their sheep and cattle. They would be shot in large numbers or used for sport. Kangaroo

meat had been a staple food for the Aboriginal people, and the rapid decline in population meant that they sometimes resorted to killing sheep, often with drastic consequences.

Other staples such as kangaroo grass and murnong (yam daisies) disappeared rapidly, which forced people who adopted this response to be, to a degree, dependent on supplies that might be available from the squatters, or the Aboriginal Protectorates while they existed. The lack of a balanced diet exacerbated other problems being faced.

ARMED RESISTANCE

Another path that Aboriginal groups could take was armed resistance. This was most evident on the Campaspe, as the squatters moved inexorably northwards. Around Barnadown, attacks were made on outstations when squatters moved onto land previously unoccupied by other squatters.

Ultimately, armed resistance proved futile because traditional weapons were no match for men on horses with guns. As has been seen, populations of Aboriginal people were already severely reduced. Armed resistance led to excessive reprisals by the colonists, often against people who had nothing to do with an attack, further devastating the population to unviable numbers.

THE NEW ECONOMY

Aboriginal people could also choose to adapt and embrace the new economy that was rapidly being developed in the area. There was a shortage of labour at the time. Many found work on the new stations although few, if any, were paid cash. Generally, payment would be in "rations" – flour, sugar, tea, tobacco and occasionally some meat. For instance, Tattambo and others worked at Molka station, south-east of Murchison.

When the gold rush started, some Aboriginal people became miners. Although they did not personally value gold, they could see that it had value in the new economy and could be used to acquire goods and services. Others lived on the fringes of gold rush towns like Rushworth, eking out a living by providing services to the miners which might include anything from performing corroborees to prostitution.

The fringe dwellers were often deemed to be "lazy" by the town dwellers. However, work as we know it had no intrinsic value to the Aboriginal people. Previously, they were content with what the colonisers would call a subsistence lifestyle. This lifestyle provided plenty of time to do the other things that the Aboriginal people valued more highly, such as maintaining kinship ties, connection to country and ceremony. There was no obsession with the accumulation of personal wealth that the colonisers had, and that our society still has. If there was plenty, it was shared.

References: 1 Taylor, Margaret, Courage and Compromise – An Examination of the Aboriginal Response to the European Colonisation of North-Eastern Victoria (1999) p 116 ff

73 WOMEN AND SOCIAL CHANGE

During the period of colonisation, Aboriginal people in the Waranga area went through profound social changes. This was caused by a combination of factors, including demographic changes (i.e. a severe decline in population), lack of access to Country/home and a rapidly changing economy. Many of the social changes impacted women.

Prior to colonisation, Aboriginal women lived somewhat independently from the men. There was no economic dependence on the men, because the women were more than capable of providing a balanced diet for themselves and their children. At times, this would be supplemented by meat coming from the men's hunting parties, but they were not dependent on this to survive.[1]

After colonisation, with lack of access to their Country, the women were less capable of

providing adequate food supplies, so had to rely on other ways of feeding their families. To a greater degree, they had to rely on the men's ability to work and earn "rations". European colonisers did not expect that their women had to go out and work. Rather, their women fulfilled largely domestic roles. They influenced Aboriginal women who formed part of family groups on stations to do the same. Rather than playing a very significant role in family life, women's roles after colonisation could be considerably diminished.

CHANGE FACTORS

With colonisation, there were many changes that impacted the social lives of Aboriginal women. The traditional marriage laws broke down, often because the man to whom a young woman was betrothed was already dead through disease, internecine fighting or murder. There was a drastic shortage of European women in the rural areas, so white men often took Aboriginal women as partners, either by mutual agreement or by force.

European colonisers introduced potentially addictive substances such as tobacco and alcohol. When addiction occurred in Aboriginal families, there was a consequent breakdown in family relations and more potential for physical and sexual violence against the women.[2]

This greater level of violence was also attributable to factors such as the increase in stress levels associated with colonisation in general, the shift in the relative power of men and women within the communities and the anger felt by some of the men when their women co-habited with colonists.

CHILDREN

Removal of children from Aboriginal women started early in Australia. The concept of Stolen Generations is not new. "In 1842, John Patterson, in a pamphlet on the condition of the Aboriginal people in the Goulburn River district, advocated the education and disciplining of children after the European fashion. He believed this to be the only possible way of preventing the complete destruction of these tribes. He acknowledged that this would involve separating the children from their parents and severing their tribal connections."[3]

As we have seen in Australia in recent times, this process of removal can have devastating long-term effects on all parties involved, including their descendants. There is often continuing trauma which is reflected in significantly poorer mental health.

INFANTICIDE

It is clear that prior to colonisation, Aboriginal families sometimes resorted to infanticide. This was often a response to prevailing conditions e.g. times of drought, when the group could not adequately provide for another child. After colonisation, the incidence may have increased[4]. Children from mixed relationships (virtually all involving European men and Aboriginal women) were resented by some of the men. Also, some Elders "in their despair over the loss of their land and culture, had taken the decision to allow their tribes to die out and not raise another generation of children."[5]

While in today's society, such actions would be deemed abhorrent, this needs to be viewed in its historical context. The women of the time had no access to contraception or termination. The well-being of the entire group was the major consideration, rather than the needs of an individual.

References: 1 Taylor, Margaret, Courage and Compromise – An Examination of the Aboriginal Response to the European Colonisation of North-Eastern Victoria (1999) p 113 ff; 2 ibid p 136 ff; 3 ibid p 138; 4 ibid p148; 5 ibid p 148.

74 FAMILY TIES

The best known Ngurai-illum Wurrung person from the colonial era was the man known as

"King Charles" Tattambo, who was buried in the Murchison cemetery in early 1868. At the time, Aboriginal people were forced to use European names, which accounts for the fact that Tattambo's son from his first marriage was only known as "Captain" John. We do not know John's birth name, or what happened to his mother, Tattambo's first wife.

Tattambo married a second time, this time to a Wemba Wemba woman from up on the Murray River near Swan Hill, who we only know as "Queen" Mary. As far as we know, they only had one child that survived. She was called Jenny (and variations such as Jeannie and Jinny) and was born in Murchison in 1844, possibly in the grounds of the Aboriginal Protectorate.

JENNY TATTAMBO

We do not know a great deal about Jenny's early life. At the time of her birth, squatters had moved into much of the area, limiting the movement of Aboriginal people along their traditional songlines. Jenny may have lived a more sedentary life with her parents than her forebears. Some of the time would have been spent on Molka station south-east of Murchison, where a number of Aboriginal people were employed.

We do know that Jenny had a child when she was quite young. It is not clear when or where this child was born, but she was given the name Elizabeth Charlotte Hylett. "Lizzie", as she was known, lived a remarkable life until she was a very great age. Her headstone states that she was 104 at the time of her death, although that does not align with other dates that are known. We know that "Lizzie's" father was a white man, as the records from Coranderrk Aboriginal Station, where she lived for some of her life, cited her as being "half-caste".

In those days, the authorities differentiated between what they termed "full blood" and "half caste" people, treating them differently. These, and similar terms, are no longer deemed appropriate to use. If a person identifies as Aboriginal, regardless of their DNA, they are considered to be Aboriginal provided they can demonstrate that they have at least one Aboriginal ancestor.

HYLETT SURNAME

Jenny was known in later life as Jenny Hylett. This begs the question of where and how she acquired that surname. For family historians, that particular surname is a nightmare. There are multiple spellings of the name, including Hylett, Hilett, Hilet, Eyelet, Eylett, Ilet and Eyler. In one Coroner's handwritten report dating from 1860, the surname is spelt three different ways just in the one document, and this from a man who would have been deemed to have been reasonably well educated for the time.

The man who died and was the subject of the Coroner's inquest was called John/Johnny Hilet. He was an Aboriginal man who lived on a property at Tabilk (near the present-day winery) owned by one James Hilet. At the time, the authorities were forcing Aboriginal people to take on European names. Apparently, in the absence of an alternative, it was normal practice to take the surname of the owner/leaseholder of the property where you lived. It seems that John/Johnny may have done this, as there was a camp of Aboriginal people on James Hilet's property where John was living at the time of his death.

It may well be that Jenny lived at the same property and took on Hilet's surname. There is even a possibility that James Hilet may have been the father of Lizzie. James had something of a reputation as a philanderer, and apart from the eight children born to him and his wife Anne (nee English), he had at least one other child with out of wedlock.

LATER LIFE

After she had Lizzie, Jenny moved around a bit. We know that she was living at Avenel for a period at the time James Hilet and his family

were there, later moving to the Aboriginal reserve at Coranderrk, near Healesville. After moving to Coranderrk, she married Johnny Phillips, a Wathaurong man in February 1876. Whoever recorded the details for their marriage certificate misspelt both surnames (as Eylett and Philipps).

References: Ancestry, Public Records Office of Victoria, Trove websites

75 THOMAS JESTON WASHBOURNE

There are very few photographs of Ngurai-illum Wurrung people taken during the colonial period. Of these, only a handful appear to have been taken on Ngurai-illum Wurrung country. Fortunately, there are some photos of Jenny and Lizzie Hylett (mentioned in the previous story) and Jenny's parents, "King Charles" Tattambo and "Queen" Mary. These were taken by a travelling photographer of the time, Thomas Jeston Washbourne.

Washbourne arrived in New South Wales around 1863 before travelling overland to Victoria. His son Harry was born in 1873, but it seems that he and Harry's mother Alice only married in 1897.

TRAVELS IN VICTORIA

After coming to Victoria, Washbourne set up his business in Wangaratta. In 1866 he made an application to the Wangaratta Borough Council requesting permission "to erect a tent for photographic purposes". This was granted. Wangaratta people had a chance to see his work when he was awarded a certificate at a local exhibition, with his entries "comprising views of the neighbourhood, and portraits of the aborigines."[1] He had moved his business up to Yackandandah by 1869. Washbourne later settled in Geelong. He travelled around many parts of Victoria taking photographs and selling them. Hopefully his photography was better than his business acumen, because he was declared an insolvent in 1883.

Clearly, Washbourne had a fascination with Aboriginal people, and took numerous photographs of them. Some of these photos of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people finished up in the British Museum, including the attached wonderful photograph of Jenny and Lizzie wrapped in possum skin cloaks. The British Museum has a date on the photo of 1870.[2] This could potentially be the year the photo was taken but is more likely the Museum's acquisition date.

LIZZIE'S BIRTH DATE

There is some conjecture about Lizzie's birth date. She died in 1957, with the headstone on her grave noting that she was 104. This would

place her birth date around 1853, which is unlikely. Jenny would only have been about 10 at the time. In official and unofficial records, Lizzie's birth date is usually given as 1858 or 1863, with the latter being more likely. Her place of birth is uncertain. Murchison, Avenel and Mangalore have all been cited as possibilities.

When you look at Washbourne's photo of the pair, Lizzie looks very young – perhaps 3 or 4 at the most. This could tie in with his arrival in Australia, travelling to Victoria and setting up his business in Wangaratta in 1866, then travelling in his covered wagon around country Victoria. Just where the photo was taken is also a matter of conjecture. Avenel is a possibility, given other oral history stories we have about Jenny and Lizzie. It is interesting to note that Jenny appears to be wearing a European shirt or dress, covered by a possum skin cloak. Lizzie's cloak seems to be small, and traditionally one that would have been added to as she grew older.

CORANDERRK

Aboriginal populations in the local area were decimated in the colonial era, through disease, murder and displacement. After the closure of the Goulburn River Aboriginal Protectorate at Murchison in 1853, there was really no place for people to congregate until the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station was set up 10 years later. At some point, Jenny and Lizzie were encouraged to move to Coranderrk. As noted in the previous story, Jenny married Johnny Phillips there in 1876 and died in 1888. She is buried in the cemetery at Coranderrk.

Johnny Phillips was a Wathaurong man from the Geelong area. Like Jenny, he would have been strongly encouraged to move to Coranderrk. When he died in 1901, it was reported that "he belonged to the "old school", the members of which are slowly but surely becoming extinct."[3] The myth of extinction still persisted in 1901. One hundred and twenty years later, Victoria still has a strong and proud Aboriginal population.

References: 1 Ovens & Murray Advertiser 20.9.1866; 2 www.britishmuseum.org; 3 Healesville and Yarra Glen Guardian 25.10.1901; Other: Trove, PROV, Victorian BD&M and Ancestry websites

76 REFUGE WITH THE KELLYS

Elizabeth Charlotte "Lizzie" Hylett, the granddaughter of Tattambo and "Mary" was living with her mother Jenny at Avenel when she sought refuge with the Kelly family, of Ned fame/infamy. Ned's father John "Red" Kelly died at Avenel in 1866 and is buried in the town cemetery. "Red" was an ex-convict, having been transported to Van Diemen's Land for seven years for stealing two pigs. He came to Victoria after serving his time. The Kelly family had moved to Avenel in 1864, then moved further north-east sometime after Red's death. There was thus a short window of a few years when the following events took place.

Troopers used to turn up to the Aboriginal camp at Avenel, get the men drunk, then try to have their way with the women. These events were often associated with a lot of noise and violence. Lizzie, being a young girl at the time, was frightened by all the carry on, and would get up and go over to the nearby Kelly household, seeking refuge. Apparently, she was friendly with Kate Kelly. At that stage, Red and Ellen Kelly (nee Quinn) had seven surviving children, including Ned who was about 9 when they arrived at Avenel.

The Kellys would probably not have been on good terms with the troopers at the time: Red did some time in 1865 for being in possession of a calf skin. He had managed to avoid the more serious charge of stealing the calf in the first place. So, the Kelly household was probably a safe place of refuge for Lizzie, with no love lost between the family and the troopers. It is not known whether she maintained her relationship with the family after the Kellys moved north.

MATRIARCH

Lizzie became the matriarch of the family that was directly descended from Tattambo and "Mary". She was a stunningly beautiful young woman, as shown by the attached photograph. She lived a large part of her life in the Healesville area, after moving to the

Coranderrk Aboriginal station. She died in 1957 at Healesville having lived a very long life – something quite unusual for Aboriginal women of that era.

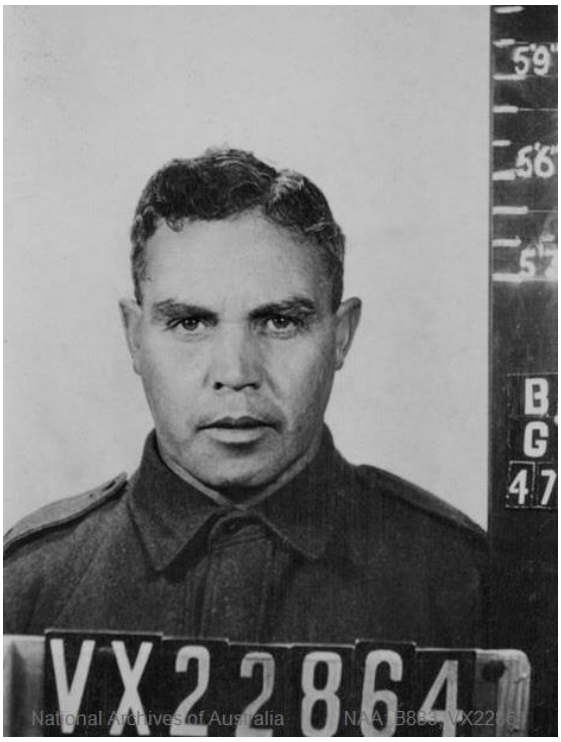
Lizzie had married Alfred Davis at Coranderrk on 26 October 1878. At the time, Coranderrk was being run as a reserve for Aboriginal people from a whole range of different backgrounds and language groups. Alfred was born near the Loddon River, so was a Dja Dja Wurrung man.

FAMILY

Lizzie and Alfred had a large number of children – thirteen in total – all born at Coranderrk between 1879 and 1907 and meaning that Lizzie's child-bearing extended over an astonishing 28 years in all. Tragically, they lost five children who died in infancy. Thankfully, many of the others lived long and fruitful lives.

Albert died in 1938 at Coranderrk, the same year as his youngest daughter Jeannie. It would be interesting to know whether Jeannie was named after her grandmother, Jenny/Jeannie, the daughter of Tattambo and "Mary".

Alfred and Lizzie's third son Alfred Jnr served in World War 1 (No 55596, 7th Battalion), giving his address as Barmah at the time of his enlistment in 1918. He did not get back to Australia until October 1919. Their son-in-law (VX22864 Vincent Peters) died in World War 2 on the Burma Railway, a prisoner of the Japanese. Like many other Aboriginal servicemen of the era, they were not even counted in the census, but were still prepared to go and fight for their country.



SPORTING CONNECTIONS

Many of Alfred and Lizzie's descendants were highly accomplished sportsmen and women. For instance, their grandsons Harry and Glen Peters were exceptional footballers, both being named in the Healesville FC Team of the Millenium as a wingman and first rover respectively. Glen Peters made the team despite his career being tragically cut short at 25, after he was killed in an accident at the Healesville sawmill in 1952. Harry and Glen were in illustrious company. Centre half-forward in the team was Gordon Collis, who played in that position for Carlton and won the 1964 Brownlow Medal.

No doubt achievements such as these would have been a great source of pride for Lizzie, the matriarch of a large family with many connections in the Koorie community. Lizzie is buried in the Healesville cemetery.

References: Ancestry, PROV, NAA and Trove websites

77 EARLIER ANCESTORS

We do not know very much about the early ancestors of the man known to the colonists as "King Charles" Tattambo. One of his probable relatives was a man called Chimbri, who died at the Goulburn River Aboriginal Protectorate station in 1842 from "bilious fever." He was one of sixteen deaths of Aboriginal people thought to have occurred while the station was operational.[1]

Chimbri was a ngurungaeta (senior man/important Elder) from the Gunung Willam clan of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people. The most frequented Country of the Gunung Willam was along the Campaspe River south of Elmore, although they travelled extensively across Ngurai-illum Wurrung Country to the east. The moiety of their clan was "Waa", the crow, an important aspect of their lives which was passed down from father to children.

The position of ngurungaeta was not hereditary but was acquired after many years of learning ancient knowledge, which was passed down by the Elders. It seems that Tattambo also fulfilled this role after the death of Chimbri. By that time, Tattambo was in his 40s, old enough to have accumulated all the requisite knowledge and wisdom the position demanded.

ROLE OF THE NGURUNGAETA

Dr W H Baylie, who was resident at the Protectorate station, provides us with some insight into the role of ngurungaeta. He reported that "I am greatly attached to an old man who was chief of the Orilim (sic) tribe, a subdivision of the Goulburn River blacks….(his) influence in his tribe was very great, and he was a man much respected by the neighbouring tribes; he was always at the head of every debate, and no matter how trivial the circumstance he was always consulted, and his advice generally taken."[2] Within the clan, the ngurungaeta did not make all the final decisions. These were the result of a

democratic decision making, assisted by advice given by the ngurungaeta.

In addition to playing that role, Chimbri showed leadership in other ways. "In leading his tribe forward in the corobery; being the first to arouse his companions to search out the kangaroo, the opossum, or go on a day's fishing; in these services he was most active."[2]

WIFE KILLED IN MASSACRE

When Baylie quizzed Chimbri about his deceased wife, the mother of their three sons, he was informed that she had been killed in a massacre. The "tribe to which he was attached went in pursuit of game in a distant part of the country about four years ago; a part of the tribe had annoyed the settlers in spearing bullocks…the effect of which was the loss of all dear to him."[2]

We do not know the location of this massacre, but presumably it took place around 1838. At the time, squatters were moving aggressively into new territory, particularly along the Goulburn and Campaspe Rivers. There were many instances of massacres around this time. Sometimes they were in retribution for theft or killing of livestock or station workers; sometimes they were part of a blatant process of eradication.

LOCAL MASSACRES

Records of local massacres are mostly sketchy. Unless troopers or mounted police were involved, and reports had to be written, they usually went unreported. This was even more likely to be the case after some of the perpetrators of the Myall Creek massacre in NSW were found guilty and hanged in December 1838. A code of silence prevailed amongst the squatters and their men.

One massacre on the Campaspe near present-day Rochester was reported in 1838, but it is unlikely to be the one in which Chimbri's wife and other family members were murdered. In that instance, a shepherd and a hutkeeper at Barnadown were killed and sheep were stolen, but there was no mention of bullocks in those reports.

However, there are plenty of "whispers" about other massacres on the Goulburn, at Mitchellstown, north of Nagambie, at Murchison and at Toolamba.[3] One of these may have been where Chimbri's wife died. Many massacres on the Campaspe are better documented, generally characterised by extreme violence which was sometimes perpetrated against people who had nothing to do with alleged crimes.

References: 1 Clark, Ian D, Goulburn River Aboriginal Protectorate (2013) p 43; 2 ibid p 83; 3 Attwood, Bain, My Country (1999) p 7-9

78 MOTHER OF A FAMOUS MAN

In the Kulin Nation, a loose confederation of half a dozen groups of Aboriginal people who spoke similar languages, it was standard practice for women to marry into a clan outside of their own. People in the Kulin Nation also belonged to one of two moieties – Bunjil (the wedge-tailed eagle) or Waa (the crow). As well as marrying someone in another clan, women married someone of the opposite moiety to themselves. Marriages were usually pre-arranged.

One of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung woman who married into another group in the Kulin Nation was Tooteerie. She married a man called Bebejan, who was an important figure in the Wurundjeri clan of the Woiwurrung people. Tooteerie was from the Ngurai-illum balug clan, whose moiety was Bunjil, so Bebejan would have been part of the Waa moiety. Their son Beruk Barak, later known as William Barak, was born at Brushy Creek (a tributary of the Yarra River) in 1824.

Tooteerie was probably betrothed to Bebejan when she was still a girl. The Ngurai-illum Wurrung and Wurundjeri would have had regular contact, as the former sometimes made the long journey down to Woiwurrung Country to meet with kinfolk, trade, engage in

ceremony and feast where there were seasonal events like the eel harvest.

LARGE SCALE COLONISATION

In his early life, Barak would have grown up along the Yarra River. He may even have travelled up to his mother's Country on the Goulburn River, to visit relatives and learn from his Elders. The first white man he saw was probably escaped convict William Buckley.

In 1835 colonists started arriving on the lower Yarra River from Tasmania. Apparently Barak himself, then aged about 10 or 11, was present when John Batman made his infamous agreement with Wurundjeri Elders to "purchase" half a million acres of land for a pittance. The signatories on the Wurundjeri side, including Barak's famous uncle Billibellary, clearly had no understanding of what they were signing. For Aboriginal people, the concept of land ownership was completely foreign. For them, land could not be bought or sold. The British Government soon declared Batman's so-called treaty void, but by then waves of colonists were landing in the Port Phillip district of the colony of New South Wales.

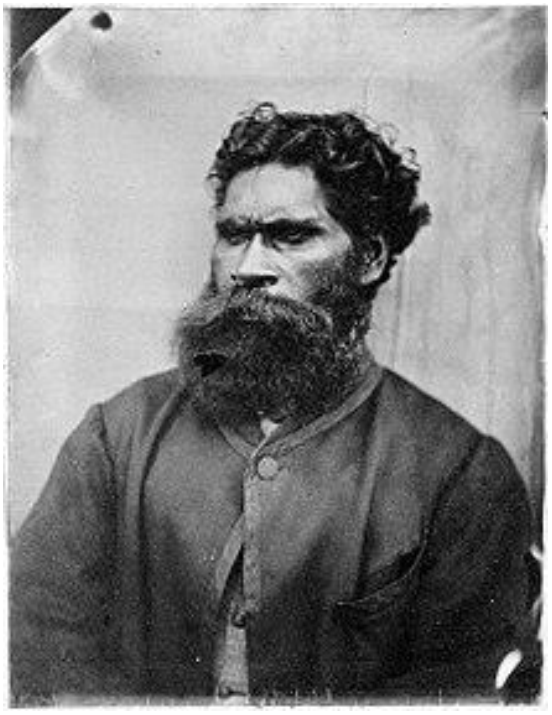
WILLIAM BARAK

Barak had a couple of years of formal education in the late 1830s, then in 1844 joined the Port Phillip Native Police Force. The force had a European officer, but the troopers were Aboriginal men. Barak adopted his European moniker at this time, continuing with the force until it was disbanded in 1853.

In the ensuing years, he became involved in attempts to have land set aside as an Aboriginal reserve. These moves had been initiated by his uncle Billibellary and others in the mid-1840s. After Billibellary died, his son (and cousin of Barak) Simon Wonga and Barak were instrumental in finally getting land allocated for a reserve in 1863.

The land was near present day Healesville, becoming known as the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station. It was run as a very successful farm, producing wheat and vegetables as well as becoming a centre well-known for its cultural artwork such as basketry, painting and wooden items.

Wonga and Barak led the way in successfully denying repeated attempts by colonists to take over the land that had been granted to their people. Like his father, Barak had become an important leader, not only of the Wurundjeri but of Koorie people in general. He also became an accomplished and now famous artist, painting many scenes of Aboriginal life.



LINKS TO NGURAI-ILLUM WURRUNG PEOPLE

By the time that Coranderrk was established, the numbers of Aboriginal people still living on Ngurai-illum Wurrung Country was severely depleted. Attempts were made to encourage the remnant population to move to Coranderrk, and many did. They included "Jenny", the daughter of Tattambo and "Queen Mary" and her daughter, Lizzie Hylett. As noted in a previous story, Lizzie went on to have a large family. Ngurai-illum Wurrung descendants have spread far and wide as a result.

Some Ngurai-illum Wurrung people refused to move, notably “Sarah”, who is the only known sibling of Tattambo. She lived out her final years along the banks of the Goulburn River near Murchison.

79 A FRIENDLY BLACK AT COROP

It seems that there were still Aboriginal people moving through the Waranga area just over a century ago. Whether they were descendants of the traditional Ngurai-illum Wurrung custodians following old songlines is not clear. Perhaps they were people just looking for itinerant work.

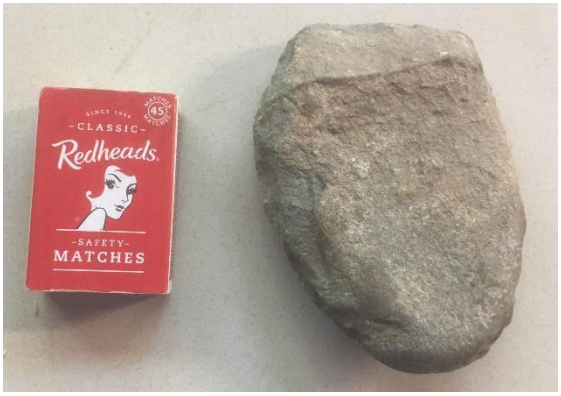
In 1912, seven-year-old Charlie Furphy of “Sand Hills”, Corop wrote a letter to the kids’ page at the Weekly Times, telling “Uncle Ben” about life around Corop. He mentioned that “we had a visit from a friendly black (sic) and two women blacks (sic). The man made a boomerang for us, and he was showing how to throw it. He was at our place for about a week, and he made a shield. I liked him very much.”[1]

This raises the obvious question of what the small group of people were doing in the area at the time. It is clear that the man had retained some traditional skills which were rapidly disappearing at the time. Early in the 20th century, skills such as boomerang and spear throwing were still performed publicly. There were men who would travel around performing at local agricultural shows, sporting events and other gatherings. Perhaps this man was one of them.

A FREE REIN

Children of the era obviously had a free rein, unencumbered by the concerns of helicopter parents. Spare time was filled with adventures, roaming the countryside around Corop. Lake Cooper was nearby, although Charlie noted that his “father used to fish there, but he does not now, because the fish are dying of some disease, and we don’t eat them.”

The Wallenjoe swamp was another area full of interest for children. “My brother picked up a blackfellow’s tomahawk in the Wallenjoe at a blackfellow’s oven”. As stated in earlier stories, wetlands such as the Wallenjoe were wonderful sources of food for the local Aboriginal people, which would mean longer than average stays in one location. A dedicated oven was a sure sign of lengthier habitation.



“The tomahawk that my brother picked up was quite smooth at the point, and where they had been holding it.” The stone looks like greenstone, which surely would have come from the ancient quarries further south on the Mt Camel range. Similar tools were sometimes hand-held, or it may have originally had a wattle handle, which would have rotted away over the years before its rediscovery.

SKULLS

Charlie also noted in his letter that “when we are rabbitting, we sometimes pick up the skull of a blackfellow.” This may have been something of an exaggeration, but there would certainly have been some shallow burials in this well-inhabited area. Bones would be uncovered occasionally as a result of farming activity, or from the various types of erosion which followed in the wake of European colonisation.

During Charlie's childhood, such things were a curiosity. These days, if similar finds are made, it is important that they are left in place and the relevant authority notified. Normally this would be the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) with responsibility for the area where an item is found.

CHARLIE FURPHY

Charles Robert Furphy was born in Rushworth in 1904, the son of Samuel and Isabella (nee Brown), and grandson of Samuel and Judith Furphy who selected "Sand Hills" in 1868. He was also an uncle of Clem, who now lives there with partner Cate. Apart from his service in World War II, he spent all his life in the Waranga area. He was a bachelor in his late 30s when he signed up for war service, during which he was a Private (No VX26822) in the 4th Reserve Motor Transport Company. The company was part of 8th Division, serving in Malaya and Singapore until the latter fell to the Japanese in February 1942.

Most of the men in the company remained as Japanese POWs for the duration of the war. During his time in Changi, Charlie kept a diary which has been preserved, and also wrote a book of children's stories and poems, "Changitales". It contains many stories full of nostalgia for life on the farm. It was designed to be given to the children in Changi Jail, but instead came home with him and is a treasured family possession.

It would be nice to think that thoughts of a free and easy childhood around Corop may have sustained Charlie through his traumatic war experience. Returning to civilian life after more than three years as a POW would have been a difficult transition. Charlie married Pat Lawrence on his 60th birthday, but she sadly died within two years. He later died in Colbo in 1988, aged 84.

Reference: 1 Weekly Times 20.4.1912 p 39; Other sources: Ancestry, NAA, AWM websites. With thanks to Clem and Cate Furphy

80 CORROBOREE AT COROP

Oral history brings us plenty of interesting material about the Aboriginal people who lived in the Waranga area prior to and just after the start of colonisation. One snippet that has been handed down in the Ryan family relates to a corroboree in the Corop lakes area, witnessed by Matthew Ryan (one of many Matthew Ryans in the family!). Although it cannot be confirmed with anyone now, it raises some interesting questions if it is correct.

The Ryan family had been living at Lauriston, near Kyneton, before moving north as land opened up for selection in the Waranga area in the early 1870s. This was a move made by many people from the central highlands area. At the time, Matthew was a young boy, having been born at Lauriston in 1865, the eldest of seven children of Matthew (another one) and Annie Ryan. The four oldest children made the trip north with their parents, probably in a dray with all their worldly possessions on board.

TIMING

As a young boy, the area would have been ripe for adventure and exploration by Matthew jnr, with little of the infrastructure that exists today. We do not know the circumstances in which Matthew saw the corroboree. However, we can put an approximate date on it, which would be the mid-1870s.

The timing is interesting because by that time, only remnants of the original custodians were living around Murchison, including "Sarah", the sister of Tattambo. Many others had died, been killed or dispersed. Some had moved down to the Aboriginal reserve at Coranderrk, near Healesville.

If that was the case, then you wonder who the people were who were engaged in the corroboree witnessed by young Matthew Ryan. We can only speculate, but perhaps they were Ngurai-illum ancestors travelling back to a significant site for what surely must have

been one of the last genuine ceremonies performed in the area, if not the last.

OTHER CORROBOREES WITNESSED

There are some other accounts of corroborees in the area, mostly notably the one witnessed by squatter Edward Curr and his brother and mentioned in an earlier story. Both Bangerang and Ngurai-illum Wurrung people were in attendance at that one, but that was over thirty years before the one mentioned above.

It seems that the Mt Camel range and Corop lakes were an area of great significance to the local Aboriginal people and definitely on the ancient songlines that criss-crossed the region. It could well be the reason that it was an area where ceremony, including music and dance, would occur when Aboriginal people gathered together.

There are also mentions of corroborees at what is now the south end of High St, Rushworth. However, these were more likely to have been staged as entertainments for the miners than as part of traditional ceremony. Providing entertainment was a way of earning some cash, gold or trades at a time when the hunter-gatherer-farmer economy of the people had broken down after the incursions by the squatters.

ARTEFACTS

The Ryan family have farmed for generations in the Wanalta and Cornella East areas. Like many farmers in the Waranga region, 150 years of attachment to the land means that they know it intimately. Over the passage of time, many signs of Aboriginal occupation have been noted.

Although there are no obvious signs of camps like Aboriginal ovens or middens on the farms, stones have often been picked up which have clearly come from somewhere else. They include stone axe heads, both broken and intact, small, sharp jasper stones and some other unusual stones.

The most likely source of the stone axe heads would be from the Mt Camel range, where outcrops of greenstone were the sites of Aboriginal quarries. Jasper is a type of opaque quartz, which comes in a variety of colours. It may have been used for tools or possibly ornamentation. Given the sharp edges on the pieces found, it was more likely for the former.

References: Ancestry and Trove websites, and with thanks to another Matt Ryan

81 CROSSING THE RIVERS

When European colonisation began in northern Victoria, hot on the hells of the Major Mitchell expedition, Aboriginal people quickly lost access to their ancestral Country. With that loss of access came an inability to harvest the land to produce the varied diet that had kept them healthy for millennia. They had to adapt, soon becoming aware of the value of trading for some of the things they needed.

There is plenty of evidence to show that many Aboriginal people worked on the stations that were being set up across the area. For instance, a group of Ngurai-illum people camped on Molka station, providing services to the squatter in return for “rations” including staples like flour, sugar and tea. The services provided included things like working with stock and supplying bark for use in construction of station buildings.

Another area where assistance could be provided was in crossing waterways. Again, there is evidence to show that Aboriginal people helped the colonisers to get across the larger rivers like the Goulburn and Campaspe. For example, Mr W Locke, a squatter at present-day Kotupna in the mid-1840s arranged for the local Aboriginal people to cut bark canoes to assist another intending squatter to get his sheep across the river.[1] Apparently, this type of assistance “happened frequently enough to suggest that some Aboriginal groups camped near the crossings with the express purpose of obtaining work on a reasonably regular basis.”[2]

COLLIVERS AND MITCHELLS

George Colliver was a well-known identity around Rushworth, living at the end of the Nine Mile Road for many years until his death in 2009. His ancestors, the Collivers and Mitchells, arrived in the colony of Victoria on 13.1.1849, landing in Port Phillip Bay on the "Lysander", 114 days out from Plymouth. After settling near Melbourne temporarily, they headed out towards Sunbury where they obtained farm employment.

When land was being opened up in northern Victoria in the early 1870s, they decided to take up their own land in the Goulburn Valley. The brothers, sisters, and spouses all travelled north, subsequently taking up land in the Tatura, Harston and Toolamba areas. As they travelled to what became their future farms and homes, they had to cross the Goulburn River near Murchison.

Family oral history, passed down through the generations, says that upon arrival at the river they paid some Aboriginal people to row them across the river. The people may have been the remnants of the traditional custodians, the Ngurai-illum Wurrung, although most of those people had been killed, died of disease or dispersed to other areas by that time in history. It could be that they were people from another group who were camping along the river, possibly with the express purpose of assisting people to cross.

PAYMENT IN TOBACCO

The story does not say what sort of boats were used, but it could well have been bark canoes which had been made by the people. Bark canoes were relatively small, so you can imagine the scene as members of the large extended family were rowed across the Goulburn. It would have been a memorable experience, especially for the children involved.

Payment was apparently made in tobacco. It sounded like this was a very amicable arrangement. Tobacco was a common form of payment at a time when just about everyone smoked. There was a punt on the river at Murchison from gold rush days, and the first wooden bridge from 1871. Travellers may have opted to use the Aboriginal people instead to reduce their costs.

ON THE NINE MILE

To the knowledge of a member of the Colliver family, there were no signs of aboriginal camps at the Nine Mile which would indicate that it was a regular camping area. It is more likely that it may have been on the songlines between the Goulburn River and areas to the west, travelling through Whroo, where there was a known waterhole. In the same area there is at least one substantial stand of grass trees, which may also have attracted the Aboriginal people passing through. They collected the resin/gum from the plants which was then used as a strong adhesive.

References: 1 The Argus 24.8.1866 p 3; 2 Taylor, Margaret, Courage and Compromise – An Examination of the Aboriginal Response to the European Colonisation of North-Eastern Victoria (1999) p 125; Other - Ancestry, PROV and Trove websites and with thanks to Marian Amery (nee Colliver)

82 EVIDENCE OF OCCUPATION

When a major new project is in the planning stages, one of the requirements may be to have a Cultural Heritage Management Report (CMHR) prepared. In the case of projects that might impact on Aboriginal cultural heritage, this would normally be done by suitably qualified experts e.g. an archaeologist, along with input from the relevant Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP). Such was the case with the solar farm being proposed on the Old Corop Road west of Rushworth.

The farm is planned to have over a million solar panels, covering an area in excess of 1000 hectares. Consequently, it has the potential to impact Aboriginal cultural heritage that might be present on the site. The idea behind the assessment is that it may identify areas of significance that are worthy of protection.

THREE STAGE PROCESS

The assessment has been carried out in a three-stage process. Initially, what is termed a desktop assessment takes place. This is "undertaken to provide background information on the activity and its impacts, other archaeological studies, previously recorded Aboriginal places, the environment and to develop a prediction model for the Activity Area."[1] This is followed by a what are termed standard and complex assessments.

The desktop assessment revealed that there were 32 sites in the geographic region which were already listed on the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register (VAHR); nine of these were within five kilometres of the site of the proposed solar farm. Items listed on the Register from the region include things like scarred trees, artefact scatters – both of high and low density - and earth features. Scarred trees and "low density artefact distribution" (LDAD) make up the vast majority (90%) of the list for the region.

The number of sites in the area gives an indication of the level of Aboriginal connection to the land in question. There were no registered sites on the solar farm land, but the report noted that the "absence is likely due to the limited archaeological survey of the region, rather that the absence of artefact scatters."[2]

STANDARD AND COMPLEX ASSESSMENTS

The standard assessment involved on-site inspection by an archaeologist, supported by staff from the RAP for the area. They did a surface assessment. The complex assessment involved digging a few trenches to see what might be below ground. The land has been farmed for 150 odd years, so the report noted that anything found was probably not going to be in the position it was in just prior to colonisation.

The surface assessment revealed a scatter of 96 stone artefacts, with a further 6 being unearthed in the digging. This scatter has now been added to the VAHR (Item No 7824-0180). The most exciting find was part of a greenstone axe-head (with stone probably sourced from Mt Camel range), while an intact basalt axe-head was also found.

A lot of the other smaller items found were silcrete flakes. Many of these were the by-product of tool making processes, having been chipped off larger stones. Silcrete, a hard and resistant stone, was widely used by Aboriginal people in stone tool manufacture, a skill they most likely brought with them to Australia. The ability of humans to alternately use heat (fire) then flint napping (using another tool to chip off stone flakes to produce a sharp edge) is thought to date back 160,000+ years.

NO SURPRISE

The results of the cultural heritage assessment are unsurprising, as we know there was a large amount of Aboriginal activity in the area east of the Mt Camel range prior to colonisation. Many local farmers have reported finding stone artefacts on their properties. Often, the stone itself is a giveaway, because it is of a type that does not occur naturally on that land.

There were no scarred trees found on the solar farm property, essentially because the vast majority of the trees had been removed by the colonisers, to their own detriment in the long run. Scarring on trees can be the result of bark and wood removal for things such as shelters, canoes and coolamons. However, it can sometimes be hard to tell whether scarring has resulted from another cause.

Reference: 1 Biosis, Corop Solar Farm – Cultural Heritage Management Plan 16587 (Amended 18.3.2021); 2 ibid p 35

83 CULTURAL HERITAGE

There are many Aboriginal cultural heritage sites throughout the Waranga area. Some of these are already recorded on a register, while many are not. Any new sites, or potential new sites should be brought to the attention of the relevant authority for possible inclusion.

Obviously, once a site is recorded, there are some protections in place to ensure that the cultural heritage remains intact e.g. a cultural heritage assessment of the proposed Corop solar farm resulted in one new site going on the register. If the solar farm is ultimately developed, there are protocols that need to be followed by the developers.

Sadly, there are ongoing rumours of some landholders in our area failing to report cultural heritage sites or, worse still, destroying sites so they do not have to comply with any legislation. It is hard to fathom that sort of thinking, especially if done in conjunction with clearance of remnant native vegetation that is done without a proper permit.

Another reason for not reporting sites might be that people wish to protect them from unwelcome visitors. You can understand that where the original custodians may not wish to pass on the knowledge of secret places that have special cultural significance. To a lesser extent, you can also understand why landholders might be reluctant to have people traipsing over their properties to look at a particular feature like a scar tree. However, with regard to the latter, the type of people who are interested enough to want to have a look are highly likely to be those who a) will be respectful enough to ask first, then b) take care of the property while they are on it.

IN OUR REGION

The report on the proposed Corop solar farm noted that "The majority of Aboriginal places recorded within the geographic region were located within 2 kilometres of waterbodies and prior waterways such as Greens Lake to the north-west of the Activity Area. Generally, areas in which Aboriginal places have been identified are situated in closer proximity to ephemeral or permanent water sources, and areas that provided adequate shelter from both the elements and rising floodwaters and easy access to food sources, for example, on rises overlooking swampland or other areas prone to inundation."

Ephemeral water sources are those that dry out periodically, often over the warmer months. Think places like Lake Cooper, Wallenjoe Swamp, One Tree and Two Tree Swamps. In the past, these places received much of their water from creeks running north into them. Those creeks in turn source their water from a fairly limited catchment area, so both creeks and wetlands are ephemeral. While there is water available, it and the life it brings were the factors that encouraged the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people to camp there for extended periods.

WHO WERE THESE PEOPLE?

The report into land for the proposed solar farm concluded that the people who used the area most were the Gunung Willam clan of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung. It said that "It was the Gunung willam, whose name means 'creek dweller' who occupied the land around Rushworth and Murchison."1 This statement immediately followed a quoted reference from a book which said the Ngurai-illum balug clan were the prominent clan around Murchison, and the Gunung willam on the Campaspe River. Both statements cannot be correct.

One possible, and more likely, scenario is that the two or three related clans, one from the Goulburn and one (or two) from the Campaspe could meet at a central point when the prevailing conditions were suitable i.e. water in those creeks (Moora, Wanalta, Yallogallorah, Cornella) and the wetland areas mentioned earlier and a consequent abundance of food resources.

The conglomeration of wetlands is roughly equidistant between the two rivers, so would require a similar amount of travel by the various Ngurai-illum Wurrung clans along well-developed songlines. A short distance to the north, there could be contact with the Bangerang people of the type described by

squatter Edward Curr for reasons including trade and the transfer of betrothed women.

The Laurie family, who were long-term occupiers of the proposed solar farm, have noted evidence on the site of longer term stays, like clay ovens and middens. These were not noted in the cultural heritage assessment.

Reference: 1 Biosis, Corop Solar Farm – Cultural Heritage Management Plan 16587 (Amended 18.3.2021)

84 STONE TOOLS

Many stone artefacts from pre-colonial days have been found all around the Waranga area. The cursory assessment done on the land where the proposed solar farm could be located on Old Corop Road revealed over 100 artefacts, 27 of which the archaeologists classified as "formal tools". This includes categories such as various types of scrapers, axe-heads and "geometric microliths". The latter are small stone artefacts generally thought to have "served as replaceable barbs or points of multifunctional composite tools"[1] such as spears and clubs.

Of the 79 remaining stone artefacts found, many were probably the result of tool construction. To create sharp edges, the process of knapping was used, in which a hard stone or the back of an axe-head was used like a hammer to flake off small pieces along the cutting edge, often after the edge had been heated up in hot coals. Knapping would have been a regular activity in camps as the people prepared new tools and weapons, and re-sharpened old ones.

HAFTING

Another important process was hafting, whereby axe-heads and microliths would be attached to another element of a tool, such as a handle or a spear shaft. This was done by various means. Sometimes, an adhesive such as wattle gum or grass tree resin would be used. The microlith might be further secured by wrapping and tying durable plant material (possibly made into string) or animal tendons around it.

Obviously, the vast majority of items to which the stone artefacts had once been hafted would have rotted away over the centuries, leaving just the stones to be found in the present day.

AXES

With the two axe-heads found on the solar farm site, one was a discarded broken greenstone axe-head, the other an intact basalt one. Along with scrapers, axes were one of the primary tools used by the local Ngurai-illum Wurrung people. They had multiple uses.

According to Smyth (1876), "A man never leaves his encampment without his hatchet. With its help he ascends trees almost as rapidly as the native bear can climb. He cuts a notch for his toes, and placing the hatchet between his teeth, so as to set free his arms, ascends one step, cuts another notch, and so on until the height he desires to reach is attained. The rapidity with which he climbs and his dexterity would surprise a stranger. With the stone axe he cuts open limbs of trees to get opossums out of the hollows; splits open trunks to take out honey or grubs or eggs of insects, cuts off sheets of bark for his maim (ed. mia mia) or for canoes; cuts down trees, and shapes the wood into shields or clubs or spears; cuts to pieces the larger animals of the chase, if necessary; and strikes off flakes of stone for inserting in the heads of spears and for skinning beasts and cleaning the skins. Its uses are so many and so various one cannot enumerate them."[2]

In the Waranga area, greenstone for axe-heads was sourced from outcrops on the higher reaches of the Mt Camel range. Axe "blanks" would be quarried on site, then taken to a place where they could be sharpened. Some knapping might be involved, to create a very sharp edge. Then "The abrading of the margin of an axe blank involved a significant investment of time and was often achieved by use of a sandstone outcrops within water ways

providing both abrasive and lubricating agents."[3] One such site is on the Campaspe River roughly 15 km from the quarry sites.

MORE THAN JUST A TOOL

"Ground edge axes are well known within archaeological record Australia, being objects of high social, aesthetic and functional value (Geneste, David, Delannoy, & Petchey, 2012, p. 12) . Greenstone axe blanks in Victoria were procured from Kulin controlled quarry sites, such Mt William and Mt Camel, being traded far north beyond the Murray River, and east into Gippsland (McBryde, 1984). These greenstone axes also had important symbolic and cosmological associations (Brumm, 2010)."[4]

"Surviving oral traditions suggest that Mt William quarry may have had an important role in Kulin mythology that was seen as imbuing its axes with great power. The quarry owner/managers, as song-makers, were responsible for receiving such knowledge from the Ancestral world and communicating it to their own and far-distant groups. Their role in creating and/or reinforcing the great power of Mt William in the form of myth, therefore, seems likely."[5]

Was something similar occurring on Mount Camel?

Reference: 1 Biosis, Corop Solar Farm – Cultural Heritage Management Plan 16587 (Amended 18.3.2021) p 103; 2 ibid p 105; 3 & 4 ibid p 104; 5 Brumm, A. R. (2010). 'The falling sky': symbolic and cosmological associations of the Mt William greenstone axe quarry, Central Victoria, Australia. Cambridge Archaeological Journal, 20 (2), 179-196.

85 MORE ON STONE TOOLS

Recent Waranga Dreaming stories have talked about Aboriginal artefacts in the form of stone tools – either stone chipped off (knapped) during the construction phase, the final product or part thereof. Many farmers in the area east of the Mount Camel range can attest to large numbers of artefacts being found on their properties in the past 150 years or so. Over that period, more intensive farming practices were employed as the selectors moved in and took over land formerly held by the squatters.

The other interesting observation by local farmers is that these stone artefacts are often found in areas where no stone occurs naturally i.e. riverine plains. Hundreds, if not thousands of items have been found. This indicates a long period of prior occupation by the original custodians of the land, the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people, which in turn indicates that the area east of the Mount Camel range was rich in food assets that could be harvested sustainably over millennia.

AN ASTONISHING ARRAY

One farm in the Wanalta area has turned up a considerable number of stone artefacts over the last 150 years. There is a surprising array of different shapes and sizes suggesting a range of different purposes.

The collection includes several different types of axes. The axes could have either been hand-held or have had a handle attached. The difference is often indicated where the stone is "waisted" i.e. it has a small furrow chipped around the axe-head. This means it is likely to have had a handle attached around the "waist", to reduce the risk of the stone being dislodged from the handle during use. The men always carried such an axe as they moved around Country. Along with spears, it was one of their most important possessions.

Some of the stones are greenstone axe heads, where the greenstone would have been sourced from quarries on the Mount Camel

range. Generally, an axe blank would have been quarried on site, then further work on the stone would have occurred elsewhere. This may have included flaking (or "knapping") the edge of the stone to produce the required shape, followed by grinding to produce a sharp edge, which was a time-consuming process. Greenstone axes would often have a handle attached and would be a most prized possession.

OTHER TYPES OF AXES

Generally, the sharper the axe, the shorter the life span with continual use. Also, a sharp "pecked" axe-head, with a serrated type of blade generally had a shorter life than a ground axe-head. Once an axe-head became blunt, the edge may have been reworked once or twice, but more often was discarded and replaced with a new one. That could be the reason why so many stone implements have been found throughout the area.

Although axes were usually multi-purpose, there were other types of axes for different purposes, ranging through from sharp to very blunt. For instance, what might be described as a broad axe was heavier and blunter than other axes. This was reserved for heavy work such as cutting down trees. A ground-edged, hand-held, plain axe might be used by the women for a variety of purposes. These axes were often had a medium to blunt edge and their use would complemented by a smaller, very sharp-edged implement.

OTHER STONES

Apart from axe-heads, there are many other types of stones in the Wanalta collection. Some stones would be used primarily for hammering, so had a flatter edge with no signs of edge grinding or flaking. Other stones would be used like a mortar and pestle, for crushing and grinding. Larger mortars were found at regularly used campsites because they were too heavy to carry around as the people moved along their songlines.

As noted in the story about the cultural heritage assessment done for the proposed solar farm, there are lots of smaller stones to be found. These might be the result of knapping, or they could have been used as points for spears and other implements or weapons. They would be less likely to have been picked up by farms over the years because they were unlikely to be such an impediment to farming operations.

Reference:
http://earthsci.org/aboriginal/geostone/Geostone.html

86 REASONS FOR SHEEP THEFTS

During the early days of colonisation in the Waranga area, there were instances where flocks of sheep were taken by Aboriginal people, particularly along the Campaspe River. There were some obvious reasons for this. Firstly, squatters valued the same resources as the traditional custodians – access to water in proximity to pasture for their sheep and cattle. When those resources were commandeered without any consultation with the local people, there was strong potential for retribution in the form of attacks on station headquarters, often in conjunction with stock theft.

Some of the areas that the squatters moved into appear to have been of great significance along the songlines of the local people. There was immediate resentment and fight back

where these taken over. Once such place may have been the area around Barnadown, where there was a quick response to the first squatter, Charles Hutton, setting up an outstation in 1838.

Another reason for the theft of sheep could have been to provide food. As the flocks moved onto the grazing areas of kangaroos, which were a staple food of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people, they displaced this traditional food source. The squatters and their men actively killed kangaroos with guns and dogs to ensure that their flocks had enough to eat.

NOT SEEN AS THEFT

It is quite conceivable that taking the sheep was not considered theft by the local people. The land had been theirs from time immemorial. This was just another resource that had become available on their land and anything on that land was fair game.

Needless to say, the squatters did not see things that way. Attacks on stations and theft of sheep met with swift retribution. Hutton led two parties north on the Campaspe with retribution in mind. The first included him and his men, in which they "retrieved" most of the sheep. Nothing was said about what happened to the alleged perpetrators of the thefts, but there is evidence to suggest that a significant massacre took place around the site of present-day Rochester.

Shortly thereafter, another punitive raid was led by Hutton. This time it included troopers, so there were some official reports written up. A number of Aboriginal people were slain, again in the vicinity of Rochester, even though it was never established whether they were the ones responsible for the original sheep thefts.

ANOTHER INTERPRETATION

In his book "The Lamb Enters the Dreaming"[1], Robert Kenny throws up an alternative reason why sheep may have been stolen. Aboriginal people each had a totem. Often that totem was an animal, bird or reptile. This gave each person a special link with anyone else who had the same totem, even though there may not have been a direct family link with that person. This meant that you would have a larger group of people looking out for you rather than just your blood relatives.

When a person was given a totem, they were not supposed to hunt or kill that totem. Instead, part of their role was to help conserve the species. When the squatters arrived on the scene in the 1830s, they were clearly enamoured with their sheep, which represented a path to building wealth very quickly. It would have been easy for the traditional custodians to see the effort the squatters put into caring for their sheep, then conclude that these animals were the totems of the squatters.

PUNISHING YOUR ENEMY

If you were in dispute with an individual, one way to punish that person was to injure or kill their totem. If the Aboriginal people thought that the sheep were the squatters' totems, then by maiming or killing them, they could punish the new arrivals on their land.

There were several hundred sheep stolen from Barnadown and driven north in the incident mentioned above. Certainly a few were eaten, but Aboriginal people were used to only taking what they needed for food. Over and above the deaths, several the sheep were maimed by having legs broken but were not killed. This gives some weight to the Kenny's proposition that the aim of the exercise was to harm the squatter's perceived totem, hence harming the squatter who had taken away their precious connection to their Country.

Reference: 1 Kenny, Robert, *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming – Nathanael Pepper and the Ruptured World* (Scribe Publications 2007)

87 KULIN NATION SEASONS

We recognise just four seasons – Summer, Autumn, Winter and Spring – a concept which

was probably brought to Australia by colonists from the northern hemisphere. Aboriginal people of the Kulin Nation recognised between six and eight seasons, depending on where they lived and who you listen to. The local Ngurai-illum Wurrung people were one of the northern-most language groups within the broader Kulin Nation. Most of the Victorian studies of Aboriginal seasons relate to country south of the Waranga area, so this research may not apply perfectly to the Waranga area. However, it gives us some insights into how local Aboriginal people viewed things differently prior to colonisation.

According to Museums Victoria, there are seven seasons of the Kulin calendar. These are biderap (the dry season in January-February), luk (the eel season in March), waring (wombat season from April-July), guling (orchid season in August), poorneet (tadpole season in September-October), buath guru (grass flowering season in November) and gunyang (kangaroo apple season in December. Kangaroo apple usually grows south of the Great Dividing Range. In our area, Cherry Ballart trees are fruiting at the same time).

FOOD GATHERING

There are variations to this outline of the seasons provided by different researchers, but what all they all have in common is that they identify times when particular foods will be in surplus. This in turn helped to determine the movement of local Aboriginal people around, and sometimes beyond their Country to take advantage of various food surpluses.

Earlier stories have mentioned the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people travelling to the tributaries of the Yarra River for the annual eel harvest. March is the time when the eels were fat, ready to harvest and on the move in predictable ways. Prior to colonisation, this harvest caused travel by thousands of people from the Kulin Nation, to gather on waterways like Merri Creek. As there was adequate food to feed the multitudes, it was a time for extended socialising, ceremony and trade.

Within the local area, yam daisies (murnong) were flowering in September and October – poorneet/tadpole season. Aboriginal women were primarily responsible for harvesting the tubers in a sustainable way. Sadly, this harvest was no longer available within a year or two after the introduction of sheep into the area in the 1830s and 1840s. The sheep dug up and ate the tubers to the point where they did not regenerate, so a staple food was quickly lost.

LINKS TO CLIMATE OBSERVATIONS

Obviously, local Aboriginal people were intimately aware of climatic conditions, living in the open most of the time. The biderap season of January-February was associated with hot and dry conditions and low rainfall. It was a time to stay close to reliable water like the Goulburn and Campaspe Rivers. December (gunyang) was separated from the other two months we consider as part of summer, because it was more often associated with changeable, thundery weather. Gunyang was also linked to goannas being most active at that time of year.

The availability of food in particular locations could be linked to season, so journeys along songlines were predicated in part by observations of the climate. For example, in the waring season (April-July) when nights were colder, wombats were more often seen out of their burrows during the day, seeking warmth from the sun. This made it a good time of the year to hunt wombats. (Apparently, wombat meat tastes like pork.) At the same time, moths and fungi could be found along the creeks where the wombats were being hunted.

LINKS TO ASTRAL OBSERVATIONS

Local Aboriginal people were also very much in tune with the night sky. They could use their extensive knowledge to confirm other signs of the seasons. For instance, the Southern Cross would be high in the south at sunrise during biderap (the dry season). Other astrological knowledge was used throughout the year to help identify the seasons.

Living in houses, we tend to shut out the night sky, only seeing it occasionally. These days most people only have very limited knowledge of astrology. Prior to colonisation, Aboriginal people lived out of doors for most of the year. Consequently, they were in the habit of

viewing the night sky on a regular basis, trying to learn about it and understand it better. They also had the advantage of thousands of years of knowledge being handed down.

References: Museums Victoria website

88 THE FIRST ASTRONOMERS

Aboriginal people saw connections between everything in their world, with the sky being seen as an integral part of what is regarded as Country. "Country includes land, seas, waters, rocks, animals, winds and all the beings that exist in and make up a place, including people. It also embraces the stars, Moon, Milky Way, solar winds and storms, and intergalactic plasma. Land, Sea and Sky Country are all connected, so there is no such thing as 'outer space' or 'outer Country' – no outside. What we do in one part of Country affects all others."[1]

One of the advantages of living outdoors most of the year was the fact that Aboriginal got to see much more of the night sky than we do, mostly locked away in our houses after dark. While the night sky is largely out of sight/out of mind for us, it was a constant source of wonder, and therefore study by Aboriginal people over millennia. The knowledge was shared and passed down from generation to generation.

The other thing about astronomy pre-colonisation was that the sky was much clearer. Today we have a heavily polluted atmosphere from both carbon emissions and light. Clearly, there is less to see in the night sky than there was 250 years ago, even if you get well away from larger cities.

ASTRO NAVIGATION

One of the obvious advantages of being familiar with the night sky was its capacity to provide Aboriginal people with the means of navigation. Everyone is aware of how mariners used the stars while sailing at night. Imagine how valuable they would be to a group of people whose ancestors had been studying the stars for millennia and had passed that knowledge down.

This probably did not apply so much to their home Country, which they would know intimately, but would aid them immeasurably when they travelled outside Country. For instance, when the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people travelled south to gather with other language groups in the Kulin Nation, the stars would have helped guide the way.

CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

Knowledge of the stars could also give an indication of when certain important events could be expected to happen on Country. This could be used in conjunction with a range of other knowledge to identify the best times to go to a particular place to collect food or other resources.

Phenology is the study of the time that natural phenomena occur each year. For instance, when murnong is flowering and the yams can be harvested; when kangaroos are likely to go to a specific location to look for fresh green shoots they prefer. Aboriginal people in the local area would have had a phenological calendar firmly established in their minds, which in part would be predicated on what was happening in the night sky at the time.

CEREMONY AND STORIES

The position of the stars at certain times of the year may also have indicated the appropriate time for ceremony to take place e.g. the initiation of young boys in the group. In addition, there were many stories which relate to the night sky.

Bruce Pascoe's book "Dark Emu"[2] takes its name from one of these observations. The Dark Emu, or celestial emu, is a dark sky constellation which is visible in the Milky Way. The shape of the Dark Emu is seen as a black shape surrounded by the stars of the Milky Way. In some Aboriginal cultures it is part of the Dreaming. "The Dreaming connects the

dhinawan's (emu's) breeding cycle and its movement across Country, mirroring the movements of Gawarrgay (the featherless ceremonial Celestial Emu) across the sky."[3]

A Kamilaroi man describes the positioning – "Just under the Southern Cross, you'll see a dark spot. That's the head of the emu. In front of him, of course, is his beak, and as you follow it down you can see his neck in the dark spots of the Milky Way. It comes right down to his body. You can see his legs and a couple of eggs underneath."[4]

Reference: 1 Noon, Karlie & De Napoli, Krystal, Sky Country, Book 4 in a series on First Knowledges (Thames and Hudson, 2022) quoting Bawaka Country group paper from 2020; 2 Pascoe, Bruce, Dark Emu (Magabala Books 2014); 3 Noon, et al, p40; 4 loc cit

89 RAIN AND THE NEW MOON

Just prior to World War 2, a farmer at Prairie, west of Rochester, recorded the rainfall on his property. At the same time, he sketched the position of the crescent new moon each month. He seems to have been testing a theory that there is a clear relationship between the position of the new moon and the amount of rainfall you could expect at that time of year.

The theory went something like this: if the new moon was in a near vertical position, you could expect that there would be more rain. If, however, the moon was on its back, looking like a saucer, there would be less rain. Based on the farmer's amateur observations, it seems that the theory was correct when applied to 1939. There was much more rain in the months of the year when the new moon was in, or tending towards, a vertical position.

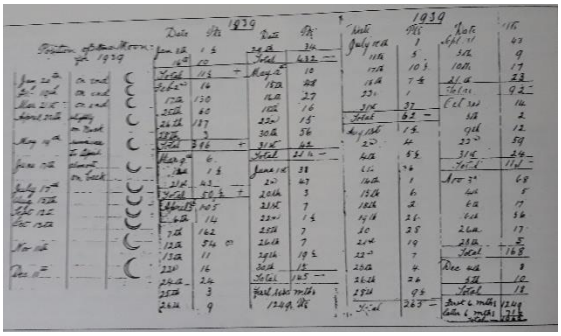
This raises the question of whether there is any scientific basis for what the farmer observed. It turns out that there is a sound basis for this in modern day science which had its origins in the ancient past.

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Perhaps the farmer had been talking to local Aboriginal people because the traditional custodians of the land were all over what was happening in their sky Country. It was very important for them to understand the seasons, climate and weather and a range of tools were employed to assist them in this task.

They paid particular attention to the phases and position of the moon, as viewed from their Country. This is probably unsurprising, given that the moon is the most obvious feature in the night sky, with its appearance changing constantly as it goes through its regular 29.5 day cycle. Everyone is familiar with the full moon. However, we tend to take less notice of the position of the moon as it is waxing and waning, and in crescent, quarter or gibbous phases of partial illumination.[1]

CRESCENT MOON



The Prairie farmer's depictions of the moon were recorded each month just after the new moon. At that time, the moon is at the start of its waxing phase (i.e. growing in size a little each night) and appears as a crescent – a depiction we are all very familiar with. The two pointy ends are called lunar cusps.

Torres Strait Islanders use "the orientation, or tilt, of the cusps…to signpost the seasonal arrival of the wet and dry seasons…The tilt is measured relative to the horizon."[2], which is exactly what the farmer was doing. When the cusps are pointing straight up, the crescent moon is like a saucer – it holds water and indicates the start of the dry season. The wet season is presaged when the cusps are

pointing to the right. In addition to this, the phases of the moon help the Meriam people to determine the best times for fishing, important in a culture where fish is the staple food.[3]

Indigenous people who live near the sea also have a good understanding of the effect of the phases of the moon on the tides, using that knowledge to their advantage.

SCIENCE BEHIND LINKS

The connection between moon phases and the climate is not just some fanciful speculation. There is solid modern science to back it up. Observations and recording over the last few hundred years confirm that information handed down over tens of thousands of years by the traditional custodians is accurate.

It makes you wonder what initiated the Prairie farmer's observations. Perhaps he had contact with remnants of the local indigenous people who passed the knowledge on to him. In the Waranga area, there would have also been a vast body of knowledge about sky Country that disappeared in a wisp of smoke in the 1830s and '40s with colonisation. That knowledge could have provided useful insights to present-day farmers and perhaps provided some forewarning of the growing issues related to climate change.

References: 1 Noon, Karlie & De Napoli, Krystal, Sky Country, Book 4 in a series on First Knowledges (Thames and Hudson, 2022) p 89-90; 2 op cit p 91; 3 op cit p 92

90 DARK SKY DREAMING

When we look at the night sky, we tend to look at the features that are illuminated e.g. stars, planets, meteors, satellites, the moon. We tend not to look at the dark spaces in between these features. With their comprehensive knowledge of the night skies, which were seen simply as an extension of Country, local Aboriginal people were very much aware of these dark spaces.

As an example, the story of the Celestial Emu (or Dark Emu) is one which is shared by different groups of Aboriginal people across Australia.[1] Almost certainly, the local Ngurai-illum Wurrung people would have been aware of a variation of the story. There is also reference to the phenomenon in the title of Bruce Pascoe's book "Dark Emu".

SEEING THE DARK EMU

Viewing the Dark Emu is enhanced in a dark sky when you are away from the effects of light pollution. From Rushworth, you can see the light pollution emitted from Shepparton, a relatively small regional centre. However, it is still probably dark enough for us to view the night sky clearly, unlike people in larger centres.

The Dark Emu appears as a dark sky constellation which is visible in the Milky Way, clearest in April-May. Its position was described in an earlier story, located just below the Southern Cross. It is a "uniquely shaped (i.e. like an emu) dark gap (that is) framed by a dazzling stellar spectacular."[2]

Movement of the dark emu across the skies, and changes in how it appears, connect with the breeding cycle of the emu and its movements across Country. Wherever emus were found, there was probably an awareness of this connection. The last ones seen by the writer in the Waranga area were nesting at Mt Black about 20 years ago. While there are few, if any, emus in the area now, it is likely that they were found throughout the area prior to colonisation.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Understanding the movement of this dark sky constellation allowed Aboriginal people to know the best time for eggs to be collected (July). When this happened, the people only took what they needed and left the rest so that the continuation of the resource was ensured. They did not disturb the male emu on the nest

when the embryos in the eggs were developing.

Later in the year (November), the appearance of the Dark Emu indicated that the emu population on Country was moving towards and spending more time around waterholes, as the Country dried up in the warmer weather. It was time for the people to follow this movement to be assured of having adequate emus to hunt without having to search too widely. They would appear where they were expected to appear.

"The sky knowledge connects to the food knowledge, which connects to the seasonal knowledge. It is relational, practical and cyclical. Through an indigenous lens, everything is connected."[3]

HUNTING THE EMU

In his book "Recollections of Squatting in Victoria", Edward Curr gives a classic account (pp 222-5) of a Ngurai-illum Wurrung man stalking an emu (or Baraimal in his language) on the northern plains while travelling towards Coragorag (Carag Carag). The man and his dog stalked the emu by moving closer each time the bird was feeding at ground level. As soon as the emu raised its head to survey its surroundings, the man stood stock still, resembling a tree stump. When the hunter had crept to within range, the dog was released and brought the emu down in boggy ground.

On this occasion during the autumn, it appears that the Aboriginal man was working with Curr's brother, and the sighting of the emu was just incidental and the hunt opportunistic. Still, it makes you wonder whether the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people understood the movements of the Baraimal prior to colonisation. Was the man was fully expecting to see one in that particular location as he moved northwards?

Reference: 1 Noon, Karlie & De Napoli, Krystal, Sky Country, Book 4 in a series on First Knowledges (Thames and Hudson, 2022) p 37; 2 loc cit p 38; 3 loc cit pp 41-2

91 - WHAT'S IN A NAME?

With the arrival of colonists, it was assumed that the local Aboriginal people would change their names to European sounding names. If you think about that for a while, it is an astonishingly arrogant expectation. The local Aboriginal people had lived in the Waranga area continuously for over 40,000 years. Over that time there would have been much evolution in the names that were current at the time of colonisation. However, that legacy was largely lost in a very short space of time.

There is only a handful of original names of Ngurai-illum Wurrung people of which we have much awareness. The most obvious man's name was Tattambo, who was buried in the Murchison cemetery. Despite retaining his tribal name, he was still labelled with the first name of Charles. We do not know his first wife's name and his second wife was only known by the European name of Mary. Similarly, the people of Murchison knew Tattambo's sister only as Sarah. We only know the children of Tattambo and Mary by the names assigned to them by the colonists.

Like Tattambo, William Barak, the famous Aboriginal activist, retained part of his original name but took on the first name of William. His mother, who was a Ngurai-illum Wurrung woman, appears to have only been known by her birth name, Tooteerie. She was from Tattambo's generation, which pre-dated colonisation.

LESS WELL-KNOWN NAMES

Other names appear in the literature from the colonial era. Some of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung names that are mentioned by squatter and writer Edward Curr include Wawgroot, Berrin-Berrin and Kolopka.[1] When Europeans wrote down names they had encountered, there were often problems with accuracy. The name may have been heard

incorrectly in the first place then recorded later. Many of the early colonists were poorly educated, if indeed they had received any education. As a result, you must take the names at face value, understanding that there may be inaccuracies in spelling and/or pronunciation. However, they do give us an inkling of what some of the names might have been.

Many of the birth names of Aboriginal could be described as "euphonious", a word little used these days. It means that the name sounds "agreeable, clear, harmonious, mellifluous, melodious, musical, rhythmic".[2] There are lots of great place names around our area that you could put into the euphonious category – Wanalta, Gobarup, Colbinabbin, Burramboot, Waranga, Paboinbalook (Lake Cooper) to name just a few. It is not much of a stretch to think that many of the old names could have had a similar quality.

EXTENDING THE LIST

Dunnolly researcher and historian John Tully has done a lot of work on the Aboriginal people of north central Victoria. Amongst many other things, he has tried to compile a list of names of people from various language groups, including the Ngurai-illum Wurrung.[3] Incidentally, John also has a different take on the Country of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people, suggesting that it extended west of the Campaspe River towards Bendigo. Most researchers consider the Campaspe to be the western boundary.

To collate his list of names, John has done considerable research at the Public Records Office of Victoria, reading firsthand accounts by colonists who encountered Aboriginal people in the very early days of the Port Phillip district settlement before the establishment of the State of Victoria. This included staff at the so-called Aboriginal Protectorate Stations, of which there was one at Murchison.

Where possible, the list shows the traditional name of the individual, but also the European name that they got lumbered with later. It also shows variations of spelling for the name. This was because the people doing the recording either heard the name differently or spelt it differently.

Some of the interesting names John lists for which he does not have a European equivalent include Chimbri, Dere-rer-cam, Poormaning, Karwitha, Tarparning, Turtool, Orgenangarook, Bucermul, Oneeny and Kolopka. We do not know if these are men or women or whether the names have any specific meaning. They do give us hints of a Ngurai-illum Wurrung language that is just hanging on in a much-reduced format.

References: 1 Curr, Edward, The Australian Race, p 527; 2 www.thesaurus.com; 3 Tully, John, Excel spreadsheet showing Ngurai-illum Wurrung names encountered in research

92 DOGS AND DINGOES

Despite the fact that there is not a lot of information in contemporary writing (i.e. mid 1800s), it is clear that the local Ngurai-illum Wurrung people kept dogs (pure-bred dingoes) at the time of colonisation. The dogs were important to them in all sorts of ways, as they are to us in the present day.

As academic and author Deborah Bird Rose observes "Dingoes provided a companionship that had never before existed in Australia. These creatures were the first non-humans who answered back, came when called, helped in the hunt, slept with people and learned to understand some of the vocabulary of human languages ... People gave them names, fitted them into the wider kinship structure and took care of dead dingoes in the same way they took care of dead people. Dingoes have been fitted into the sacred geography as extremely powerful Dreamings, and they now figure prominently in ritual, songlines and stories."[1]

Dingo burials discovered at archaeological sites speak of the length of this ongoing relationship between Indigenous communities and the

dingo. Dingoes are depicted in rock art at a number of sites around Australia.

ARRIVAL IN AUSTRALIA

In Deborah's quote above, she alludes to the fact that the arrival of dingoes in Australia post-dated the arrival of first Nations people by tens of thousands of years. Most researchers agree that dingoes came to Australia 5,000-10,000 years ago. This means they arrived after Australia was cut off from areas to the north of the continent by rising seawaters about 12,000 years ago. How they got here is a matter of contention, but they were probably brought here by seafarers who were trading with Aboriginal people along the northern coast.

Dingoes are descended from East Asian domestic dogs. They may have come via present-day PNG because there is a species of dog there that shares many genetic characteristics with the dingo. Present-day Indonesian islands of Borneo and Sulawesi are also possible sources.

TO THE WARANGA AREA

After a small number of animals were introduced to Australia, they gradually spread their territory across much of mainland Australia. They didn't make it to Tassie, which had already been cut off by rising seawaters.

Dingoes can adapt to a wide range of habitats, so there is every reason to suggest that they were quite at home in the Waranga area. Their food is mainly meat, so there were plenty of animals in this area that could have provided a reliable source of food. A good supply was important, because dingoes are a very communal animal, usually being in family groups of around 10 or more, including one alpha male. Younger single males tend to roam alone.

Obviously over time, dingoes have bred with the descendants of dogs brought to Australia by the colonists, so these days there are plenty of dogs around that look like dingoes but are not necessarily pure-bred. However, in Victoria now there is still a small pure-bred dingo population, albeit small. For example, some orphaned alpine dingo pups have recently (2021) been discovered in north-east Victoria which are pure-bred.[2]

LOCAL REFERENCES

As pointed out earlier, there are some references in colonial literature about dogs/dingoes belonging to local Aboriginal people. The squatter Edward Curr mentions a dog he saw at a recently deserted Aboriginal camp "evidently the lost property of some blackfellow, skulking noiselessly among the deserted mia-mias. He was of the breed indigenous to the continent…" and appeared to be suffering from mange, apparently a common affliction with such dogs. "After looking about him for some time, and giving utterance to a few plaintive whines, he raised his nose towards the sky and broke into a dreary howl common to his kind" whereupon Curr just shot the dog, unloading a second barrel at a nearby flock of crows.

Curr's observations appear to make it clear that there were dingoes in the area, domesticated by the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people, at the time of the arrival of colonists. As further evidence, most glossaries of Aboriginal words collected by colonists include a word for dog. There are also frequent references to Aboriginal camps having lots of dogs.

References: 1 https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/arrival-of-the-dingo; 2 abc.news.net.au 20.1.2021; 3 Curr, Edward M, Recollections of Squatting in Victoria p 147-8

93 COMMUNICATIONS

These days we take our various modes of communication for granted – radio, television, telephone, the internet and so on. Imagine living on the extensive Ngurai-illum Wurrung Country prior to colonisation where none of

these methods were available. For instance, how could people who were living for a large part of the year along the Goulburn River communicate with their kinfolk on the Campaspe River? And how did the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people communicate with other related language groups in the Kulin Nation, let alone groups who spoke quite a different language such as the Bangerang and Yorta Yorta?

There were several factors that contributed to the facilitation of this communication, such as the seasonal movements of people with a view to taking advantage of opportunities to hunt and gather certain foods. Regular meetings with neighbouring groups were organised where trade and ceremony took place. Sometimes, travel well outside Country was dictated by certain events taking place at specific times of the year at a pre-determined location.

LOCAL COMMUNICATIONS

Within a clan's Country, the people had followed particular Songlines since time immemorial. By doing so, they would reliably encounter other clans belonging to the same language group. It seems that this was true for the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people in the area to the east of the Mt Camel range, where people congregated from as far afield as present-day Violet Town in the east to the Campaspe River in the west.

Smoke from campfires, or other deliberately lit fires, gave a clear indication of where the other people were. From high points like Mt Black, Mt Scobie, Balaclava Hill and the Mt Camel Range, it would be easy to see the location of your kinfolk, then head in that direction. There is evidence to suggest that Aboriginal people used smoke signals to message in a similar way to the American First Nations people.

As people moved through Country, the legendary tracking skills of Aboriginal people would enable them to see signs left by others from their clan or from the wider language group, and home in on their position. At certain times of the year, very specific places would be visited e.g. for ceremony and your kin could be reliably expected to meet you there.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Just as with countries today, the lands of Aboriginal language groups such as the Ngurai-illum Wurrung had clearly defined boundaries. Strict protocols existed if a group of Aboriginal people were going to enter the Country of another language group such as the Bangerang. This would usually involve sending an envoy into that Country to make the initial contact.

Squatter Edward Curr observed this phenomenon once, where an old man from the Ngurai-illum Wurrung arrived at a camp of the Bangerang, who seemed to be expecting him.[1] Protocol determined that even though they were intensely interested in the visit, the people continued doing what they were doing without showing any immediate signs of curiosity about the recent arrival. The envoy also acted as though he was just stopping for a rest as though there was no-one else about. Eventually, an older woman took him some fire, which he gradually built up. Elderly men joined him one by one until "the ice was broken and complete cordiality ensued". The following night, the rest of the group of Ngurai-illum Wurrung people arrived for ceremony and exchange of women.

MESSENGERS

Curr stated that "like other tribes with which I have been acquainted, the Bangerang used to have messengers who went from one tribe to another to arrange the times and places of meetings and corroborees, and also to gather news."[2] In mentioning the "other tribes", he was almost certainly including the Ngurai-illum Wurrung, with whom he became very familiar.

Apparently, the local Aboriginal people loved a bit of gossip. Curr says that they were "more fond of gossip that any other people I have met

with…" The messengers thus fulfilled an important role, one that anyone who lives, or has lived in a small country town would be quite familiar with!

Sometimes the messenger would carry a message stick, carved with notches. Curr says they were called "yiletta", but that could just be an appropriation of the English word letter, whose function they were likened to.

References: 1 Curr, Edward M, Recollections of Squatting in Victoria p 129; 2 ibid p 275;

94 AN ENDANGERED CULTURE

It is quite remarkable that humans have occupied the Waranga area for more than 40,000 years. We do not know a lot about that history, instead tending to focus almost exclusively on the period from the commencement of the gold rush in 1853. The process of colonisation, which commenced in the area in earnest about 15 years before the gold rush, decimated the local Aboriginal population. By the later 1850s there was only a small remnant population, most of whom had been dispersed and mixed up with the remnants of other language groups. There are now few, if any, descendants of the traditional custodians of the land living on Country. The result is that much of the rich history of the area has been lost.

Aboriginal people in the area transferred knowledge from generation to generation orally, with stories often encoded in art, ceremony, dance, music and song. These provided a necessary adjunct to the day-to-day storytelling that people in small country towns are very familiar with and was a feature of Aboriginal life. Because things were not written down, when there was a sudden decline in population much of this rich oral history was lost. However, there is still plenty of information to study and marvel at.

There is currently an increasing focus on Aboriginal history throughout Australia, given that facts that it is the longest continuous living culture on the planet and that there is much greater interest as we move down the Treaty path.

CURRENT THREATS

One of the threats to the study of Aboriginal history and culture that you would not necessarily expect seems to be coming from within the broader Aboriginal community. When colonisation began in Victoria, there were nearly 40 identifiable languages i.e. groups of people who could be distinguished from each other by language and culture. Obviously, for neighbouring groups, there were some similarities in language and culture, but they nevertheless saw themselves as separate.

What has happened in recent years is that some of these groups have become very powerful politically, building organisations with vast resources and having the ear of government. This has been at the expense of other groups who are disadvantaged in several ways. For example, there might be few descendants living on country, as is the case with our local Ngurai-illum Wurrung people. The number of descendants may also be small and disconnected, making it difficult for their voices to be heard.

Across Victoria, there are many of these smaller groups that feel like their language and culture are under threat from a small group of powerful Aboriginal corporations. Sometimes, it seems to the smaller groups that their only recourse is to go through the courts. This is unfortunate at a time when consensus amongst Aboriginal people seems desirable to ensure a meaningful path to Treaty.

REGISTERED ABORIGINAL PARTIES (RAPs)

There are currently 11 declared RAPs in Victoria responsible for about 75% of the land area. Much of the remaining 25% is largely uninhabited semi-desert in the north-west and mountains in the east. A declared RAP has all the say in dealings with government in these

areas. They also tend to dominate formal state-wide organisations like the First People's Assembly of Victoria and the Yoorook Commission.

It begs the question – what of the other (nearly 30) groups that were here at the time of colonisation? The Victorian Government has somewhat hastily identified RAPs and the areas they control. This process needs to be revisited to ensure that everyone's voices can continue to be heard.

From a local perspective, it is important to keep learning about our remarkable Aboriginal history. That can be the basis to argue for the rights of the Ngurai-illum Wurrung people whose history, Country, culture and language are sadly in danger of disappearing.

We need to do all we can to protect the amazing Aboriginal heritage that the Waranga area has, spreading back over millennia.

ABORIGINAL NAMES ON/NEAR NGURAI-ILLUM WURRUNG COUNTRY

NAME	OTHER SPELLING(S)	POSSIBLE MEANING(S)	FEATURE
BALLENDELLA		Resting place; Name of Aboriginal boy whose father guided Major Mitchell	Parish NW of Rochester
BURNEWANG	Purniwong, Burneweng		Parish, former squatting run
BURRAMBOOT	Puramburt, Purrumbeet	A high hill, muddy water	Parish; hill on Mt Camel range
	Burrumboot, Burumboot		
	Burrumbutt		
CARAG CARAG	Koragorag, Caragorag	Magpie	Parish
	Carrak		
COLBINABBIN		Meeting of the red and black soils; dingo caught in a trap	Town and parish
CORNELLA	Conneilla, Corinella		Parish S of Colbinabbin, Creek
COROP	Korop	Call of the brolga	Town and parish
DARGALONG		Sub-group of Ngurai-illum Wurrung	Parish E of Murchison
DARGILE			Parish N of Heathcote
DHURRINGILE		Emu's back; crouching emu	District
ECHUCA		Meeting of the waters, gravel beds (visible when river low)	Town and parish
GIRGARRE	Gigarra, Gargarro	Sour, red earth, an edible root	Town
GOBARUP	Goberip, Gobearep		Parish S of Wanalta
GOORNONG	Gunang	Excrement; kangaroo, apple or unpleasant smelling plant	Town
KAROOK		Black	Former Station bet Stanhope & Rushworth
KYABRAM	Kiambram	Thick forest	Town and parish
MERRIGUM		A small plain	Town
MILLEWA		Murray River; part therof	Parish
MOLKA	Malgarr, Malka	Shield or widespread	Parish E of Murchison
MONEA		Probably Irish?	Parish
MOORA		A camp, earth or soil	Parish
MOORA WA		Well, grandparent or "good spirit"	Town in WA
MOORILIM	Moorillim	Camp	Former township east of Murchison

MOORMBOOL			Two parishes - W & E nr Graytown; forest
MOOROOPNA	Muru-gulpuga	Deep water(holes), ghost or spirit	Town and parish
MYOLA		Place of crabs	District
NAGAMBIE		Lagoon, still water	Town
NANNEELLA		Name for a local creek, sandy creek	Town and parish E of Rochester
NOORILIM	Parring	Camp; knee or track	Parish
TABILK	Tarbilk, Tahbilk, Tanbilk	Country, frost, place of many waterholes	Parish
TATURA	Tatchera	Small lagoon; lagoon with rushes; large plain	Town
TIMMERING	Taimuring, Tymering	Tymna - kangaroo, Mering - ground	Parish N of Carag Carag
	Tinara		
TONGALA		Murray River; part therof, big water	Town and parish
TOOLAMBA		Lagoon with paperbarks, small lagoon(s)	Town and parish
TOOLLEEN		Tongue	Town and parish
WAHRING	Waaring	Part of the Goulburn River; I don't know; Big/large water	Parish
WALLENJOE	Wollinjo		Wetland
WANALTA	Wongulta	A corruption of "one halter"?	Parish
WARANGA	Wahroonga, Woranga	Sing; Your home	Parish and lake (former wetland)
WHROO	Wurru	Lips, mouth	Parish and former town
WIRRATE		Afar, beneath, beyond	Parish S of Whroo
WORMANGAL			Parish, creek E of Nagambie Major Mitchell camped on Wormangal Ck 10.10.1836
YALLAGALORRAH			Creek running into Cornella Ck
YELLAMIGOLORO			Area 6-8 miles south of Colbo (Curr)

RECORDED ABORIGINAL NAMES FOR PLACES & FEATURES

EUROPEAN NAME	ABORIGINAL NAMES	
CAMPASPE RIVER	Yallkaw, Yalooka, Yallook, Boregam, Yerrin	
CAMPASPE PLAINS	Turrerburbillemoo	Area north of Eppalock (bet Axedale and Barnadown?)
CORNELLA CREEK	Konela, Bourneea, Conneilla	
GOULBURN RIVER*	Koriella, Gila, Bayyango, Gaiyila, Gungupna, Omio, Waaring	
	Major Mitchell called the river Bayungun	
LAKE COOPER	Pawbeenbolock/Paboinboolok/Pabeen boloc, Tangalum/Tongillum. Bulluk = lake; Yillam = camp	
	Tongalum - Curr says 'waterhole at the southern extremity of L Cooper'	
MT BURRAMBOOT	Purrumbeet	
MT CAMEL	Yiberithoop	
MT SCOBIE	Porpanda, Boobarndoo	
MURCHISON	Boolumbel, Mungalook	Yaluk = river
MURRAY RIVER*	Millewa, Mille, Kaiela, Tongala	
REEDY LAKE	Bingarumbirrt	??
RESTDOWN	Piavella	
ROCHESTER	Wattneel	
WARANGA BASIN	Baangyoobine	Before Basin construction known as Gunn's Swamp
* or parts thereof		
RIVER CONFLUENCES		
CAMPASPE/COLIBAN	Yallemeeboon	
CAMPASPE/MURRAY	Yalka	
GOULBURN/BROKEN	Marangan	
GOULBURN/MURRAY	Koninner	

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APPENDIX B

WALKING WITH ARCHIE

One way that you can learn to appreciate the culture of Aboriginal people is to make a point of listening to their music. Music was, and is, integral to the lives of the original custodians of the country we now call Australia. It is something we can all share and celebrate on the path to reconciliation.

There are many different genres of music out there and you will find Aboriginal artists performing across all the genres. There is something for everyone. At the more esoteric level, you might listen to the haunting voice of Gurrumul performing with a symphony orchestra, or Deborah Cheetham singing opera; on the other end of the scale, you might be excited by the rap of Adam Briggs or the hip-hop of his duo, A B Original.

My favourite performers are the singer-songwriters because there is often a strong message in the lyrics. Of the singer-songwriters, Archie Roach is the absolute standout for me. It was invariably a great privilege to go to an Archie concert. In his last couple of years, he was in very poor health, but kept on performing. At the last concert I went to, as Archie was wheeled out onto the stage with his oxygen bottle in tow, you wondered how he was going to perform. Then you sat there completely mesmerised for the length of the concert, going through a wide range of emotions as the words and music hit home.

Music by Aboriginal artists can bring some special moments to your life. Not long ago, I was on a reasonably tough bushwalk on the Lerdederg Track between Bacchus Marsh and Daylesford. I was carrying a little booklet of Archie Roach lyrics with me, singing along the way as I tried to learn the words of the songs from one of his albums. I was running out of water, carrying a big pack and was pretty stuffed. I came to the base of a massive hill. The unforgiving track went straight up. I stood leaning on my walking stick, having a bit of a sook and thinking “How am I ever going to get up that!!”

Before going on, I need to explain that the Wedge-tailed Eagle is like an inspirational creator spirit for the people of the Kulin Nation, some of whom were the traditional custodians of the Waranga area. Every person belonged to one of two moieties – Bunjil (the Wedgie) or Waa (the crow) - depending on the moiety of their father.

At my lowest point, without much motivation, I looked up through a gap in the trees. Just above the trees was a magnificent Wedge-tailed Eagle, effortlessly coasting on the breeze. As I watched, the eagle steadily rose in spirals on the currents of air, until it finally sailed out of view. I’m not saying that my subsequent climbing of the hill was effortless, but let’s say it was greatly inspired by what I had just seen. Then, a little later, I got lost, but that’s another story…

BIOGRAPHICAL INDEX (See also Story 91 What's in a Name?)

PRESENT DAY PLACE NAMES INDEX (See also Appendix A, Stories 57-9)

ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE GROUPS AND CLANS* INDEX