Mapping Attachment
A spatial approach to Aboriginal post-contact heritage
Denis Byrne & Maria Nugent
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Denis Byrne & Maria Nugent
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Foreword

Mapping Attachment encapsulates two vital features of Aboriginal cultural heritage conservation and management in New South Wales. Attachment epitomises what cultural heritage means to Aboriginal people. For them, the places that comprise their heritage are not museum objects: they are a living part of Aboriginal culture. They are, in a very real sense, a lifeline between living generations and the country they belong to. This is strikingly clear in the voices of the Biripi and Worimi people who speak from the pages of this book. Their memories, stories, histories and emotions are, and always will be, intimately associated with the places they describe. Indeed, this is what connects them to their part of the state.

In order to acknowledge, respect and thus ‘conserve’ Aboriginal people’s attachment to country we need to find ways to map it. Mapping helps make attachment to country visible. We are now adept at mapping the natural environment in ways that assist conservation. We have also successfully mapped Aboriginal ‘sites’ in NSW, mainly recording what is visible on the ground: the stone artefacts, the shell middens, the rock art. The mapping of attachment, however, presents a unique challenge because it is subtle and personal. Uppermost in my mind, in commending this book to you is the methodology presented for mapping attachment.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Aboriginal people who have contributed to this book and especially for their efforts in making the idea of attachment so accessible.

JASON ARDLER
Executive Director
Cultural Heritage Division
Department of Environment & Conservation (NSW)
Our primary debt of gratitude is to the many Aboriginal people of the Manning Valley and the Forster area who shared their stories with us and gave us permission to use them. They are Madge Bolt, Betty Bungie, Lawrence Bungie, Lance Bungie, the late Robert Bungie, the late Tom Craddock, Ira Davies, Patricia Davis-Hurst, Gillian Donovan, Mick Leon, Bert Marr, Sean Maslin, Vienna Maslin, Fay Pattison, Joe Ridgeway, Faith Saunders, Horace Saunders, Ray Saunders, Russell Saunders, Warner Saunders, Mae Simon and Robert Yettica. We hope this book will help ensure their stories are not forgotten.

Betty Bungie and Fay Pattison generously allowed us to view their wonderful personal collections of photographs and to reproduce some of them for this book. Patricia Davis-Hurst kindly gave us permission to use images from her own book, Sunrise Station, and drew upon her deep knowledge of local history to correct some errors of fact in earlier drafts. Faith Saunders kindly gave us permission to quote from Ella Simon’s autobiography, Through My Eyes.

We thank the Greater Taree Council and the Wingham Historical Society for allowing us access to their archives and historical libraries.

Several staff members of the Cultural Heritage Division of the Department of Environment and Conservation, NSW (formerly the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service) assisted with this project. Chimin Chan carried out the GIS mapping, with John Beattie and Aling Hsu providing technical advice and support. Rodney Harrison, while Historical Archaeologist at NPWS, provided valuable advice and comment regarding Aboriginal post-contact archaeology and particularly post-contact artefacts. Paul Houston provided data from the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) register. The Department’s Executive Director of Cultural Heritage, Jason Ardler, supported and encouraged the research for this book over a number of years.

During several periods of fieldwork on the lower North Coast of NSW, Vienna Maslin (Purfleet-Taree Local Aboriginal Land Council) and Robert Yettica (Forster Local Aboriginal Land Council) made an invaluable contribution to the project. Without their local knowledge, tactical support, and enthusiasm the project would not have been possible; without their companionship it would have been much less enjoyable. We also thank the two LALCs for allowing Vienna and Robert to spend so much time with us. In the early days of the project Gillian Donovan (Purfleet) and Mick Leon (Forster) provided valuable assistance.

Johanna Kijas and Gabrielle Werksman carried out research on documentary history sources. Johanna also read a complete draft of the book and provided insightful comments on it. Vienna Maslin, Martin Thomas, and Robert Yettica assisted with the oral history recording. Heather Pearce skillfully transcribed the oral history interviews. We thank them for their input, along with Peter Johnson who prepared most of the maps for publication.

Research for this book was aided by a grant from the NSW Heritage Council. Maria Nugent received support from the School of Historical Studies at Monash University in the book’s final stages. The Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, kindly allowed Denis Byrne to work on the book during the first half of 2004 while he was Guest Scholar there. Sabine Partl helped see the book through its production stages and Sharon Veale kindly took management responsibility for it over the final six months.
Cultural mapping

In October 1999 a group of people gathered around a big laminated enlargement of an aerial photograph that was laid out on the grass above the sand at Pebbly Beach, Forster, on the lower North Coast of NSW. Two of them, Mick Leon and Robert Yettica, Aboriginal heritage officers with the Local Aboriginal Land Council, were speaking into a tape recorder, telling about how, when they were kids, they would walk down to ‘Pebbly’ from the ‘mission’ and spend their day swimming, fishing, and sitting in the shade of the trees. Those trees are gone now but they marked them on the aerial photo with a felt-tipped pen. They also drew a dotted line showing the pathway they had followed along the creek behind the mission, through the scrub that later became part of the golf course, and down past the school to the beach.

In the two years that followed, similar aerial photos would be unrolled on beaches, riverbanks, and kitchen tables elsewhere in the study area. Onto these maps Aboriginal people would mark pathways, houses, favourite old fishing spots, places where they had jumped fences to swim in a farmer’s dam, places they had hunted in the bush. It became clear that Aboriginal people had their own map of this landscape that was different from the ‘official’ maps that you could buy at local newsagents and petrol stations. Their map was one they kept in their heads. It did not exist on paper but it was accurate, it was continually updated, and it was passed on from one generation to the next. In the course of our project, people chose to put parts of this map on paper in order to demonstrate to the larger world that the landscape in which they lived was full of places that meant something special to them.

The project

The project began in mid-1999 when the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (now the Department of Environment and Conservation, NSW), with funding assistance from the NSW Heritage Council, began working with the cultural heritage staff of the Purfleet-Taree and the Forster Local Aboriginal Land Councils to record the post-contact heritage of their communities (see Figure 7 showing LALC boundaries). The project arose out of concern at the relatively very small number of Aboriginal post-contact (post-1788) period heritage places recorded in NSW and a desire to provide an exemplar case study showing how such places can be documented. For their part, the two Land Councils were keen to have places from this period recorded to supplement the several hundred pre-contact heritage places already on record for their area.

The two Land Councils have adjoining territories on the lower North Coast of NSW that stretch back from the coast up into the Great Dividing Range, some 150 kilometres inland. The Land Councils are based at the two largest Aboriginal settlements in the area, at Purfleet and Forster. These settlements are situated on former Aboriginal Reserves that passed into Aboriginal ownership after the NSW Land Rights Act was passed in 1983. There are strong kinship ties between the Aboriginal communities in the two areas and a long history of interaction. In the present day, they work closely in the conservation of cultural heritage.
The study area
The two dominant landscape features of the area are Wallis Lake in the south and the Manning Valley in the north. The two are separated by low, mostly bush covered hills. In the north, the study area is bounded by the Bulga and Comboyne plateaus and in the west by the high ranges of the Eastern Highlands. The climate is sub-tropical and these days the area has a rapidly expanding tourism industry as well as a fast increasing coastal population. The inland town of Taree (population 16,000) is the area’s oldest but it has been overtaken in size in the last few decades by Forster-Tuncurry (population 20,000).

Place-based oral histories
The work of the project proceeded on two fronts. The first consisted of recording the oral histories of a small number of people in each of the two areas. The intention was never to attempt a comprehensive coverage of the two Aboriginal communities – this would have meant recording oral histories from hundreds of people. Instead, working with a small number of people, we focused on developing a place-based approach to oral history recording that was able to map people’s histories across the landscapes in which they have lived. Our aim was to bring oral history recording into the mainstream of Aboriginal heritage work as a source of knowledge about places that have been significant in Aboriginal history, and to Aboriginal people, over the last hundred years or so. We present this place-based approach in Parts 2 and 3 of Mapping Attachment. We do not believe that the seven people whose oral histories are presented in Part 3 would consider their lives to have been more significant or interesting than those of other Aboriginal people in the two areas. Nor would they necessarily see their lives as “typical” – we assume they would share our view that everybody’s life story is unique and different. Having said that, we expect that many of the Aboriginal people of the study area will be able to relate to the events and the places described in these stories, though we have no doubt their own stories would add new dimensions to these places and include additional places not covered by our book. We thus urge the reader to approach the book not as a “total” post-contact history of the area but as set of windows onto that history.

The written record
While the oral history recording was progressing, a search was begun for documentary historical records. This involved working with local archives in the study area, such as those of the Wingham Historical Society, and with library and archival collections in Sydney and Canberra. The results of this work are set out in Part 1. The written historical record has been especially important in the quest to find where Aboriginal people were in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century landscape of the study area. Since this period lies beyond the range of the oral histories we were heavily dependent on the written record. We have put this historical material into the first chapters of the book (Part 1) because it sets the scene for the oral histories (Part 3) and for...
our reconstruction of the landscape of the mid and late twentieth century (Part 2).

**Ella Simon and Patricia Davis-Hurst**

Two Aboriginal authors have produced local histories for the northern half of the study area and we recommend these to readers interested in obtaining an inside view of Aboriginal life there. Ella Simon’s book, *Through My Eyes*, was published in 1978 and tells the story of her life from the time of her birth in Taree in 1902 (see Chapter 16).³ The book provides a wonderful insight into Aboriginal life lived ‘under the Board’ (the NSW Aborigines’ Protection Board) in and around Taree in the early and mid-twentieth century. Patricia Davis-Hurst’s book, *Sunrise Station*, published in 1996, provides additional insights into this period as well as taking up the story for the 1960, 70s, and 80s.⁴ The many old photographs included in *Sunrise Station* give the reader a wonderfully graphic and intimate impression of Aboriginal life in this later period. In October 2003 Patricia Davis-Hurst was awarded an honorary doctorate from Newcastle University in recognition of her work for her people.

**Vienna Maslin and Robert Yettica**

Over the four years of our study, two local Aboriginal people have taken a leading role at the local level. Vienna Maslin (Purfleet-Taree) and Robert Yettica (Forster) are each Heritage Officers for their Local Aboriginal Land Councils. They introduced us to their communities and to their local landscapes, conducted oral history interviews, and provided ongoing liaison between local Aboriginal participants in the project and ourselves. In the first year of the project, Gillian Donovan (Purfleet-Taree) and Mick Leon (Forster) also had a close involvement in the project.

**Denis Byrne and Maria Nugent**

Denis Byrne is Manager of the Research Unit in the Cultural Heritage Division of the Department of Environment and Conservation, NSW (formerly the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service). His background is in archaeology but in recent years he has had a strong interest in the social significance of heritage places and in the history and development of cultural heritage management in Australia. Maria Nugent is an historian who worked for several months on this project, carrying out most of the oral history research, before taking up a position in the School of Historical Studies at Monash University. Her previous major research in Aboriginal history consisted of her doctoral project on ‘history making’ in the Aboriginal community at La Perouse on Botany Bay.

Denis and Maria are not Aboriginal. It has been clear to us, during the writing of this book, that we are not writing our own history in the sense of being able to provide an insider’s view of the Aboriginal post-contact experience. Such a perspective would have resulted in a different book. The perspective we have brought to the research and writing reflects our disciplinary backgrounds, our involvement and particular interests in Aboriginal history and heritage, and also, we trust, our commitment to enhancing the recognition of the importance of Aboriginal post-contact history in the field of heritage conservation.

There are many books still to be written about Aboriginal history and heritage in NSW; this book, with its limitations, is our contribution.
Aboriginal historic heritage

Since there are no written records for Aboriginal history before the time of European contact, we can only record and study Aboriginal heritage places for that time through archaeological means or by studying Aboriginal traditions that have been passed down about some of these places. When people refer to the ‘historical period’ in Australia, they mean the period since writing was introduced. The term ‘historic heritage’ covers the cultural heritage of both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people during the historic period.

Our aim in this book is to promote the recording of those Aboriginal heritage places and landscapes that belong to the historic period. In our study area, this means the period since the first white explorers passed through in 1818. Since that point in time, a documentary historical record has existed for the area and this written record sheds light on the lives of the Aboriginal people whose country the writers invaded. While the information written about Aboriginal people, beginning in 1818, is specific to the study area, the style of writing and its characteristic biases – the things it focuses on and the things it leaves out – share a lot in common with the documentary history of other parts of NSW and Australia in general.

Heritage divided

In the early decades of cultural heritage management in NSW (1970s-1990s), a division of heritage into ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘historic’ was institutionalised, with different people working in each area, and, for the most part, different legislation applying to each. One of the problems with such a division is that it implies the two are mutually exclusive. It implies that Aboriginal heritage has no place in the historic (post-contact) period. It implies, in other words, that Aboriginal heritage properly belongs to the time before 1788, as if Aboriginal culture and history after that date are no longer authentic or ‘real’.

Unfortunately, there has been a self-fulfilling aspect to this. Almost all the work of those involved in the cultural heritage field was directed either to recording and managing pre-contact (‘prehistoric’) Aboriginal heritage and non-Indigenous historic heritage. There came to exist a ‘heritage landscape’ that was populated by thousands of pre-contact Aboriginal heritage sites (e.g., shell middens and rock art) and thousands of non-Indigenous heritage sites (e.g., homesteads and courthouses). While it can be argued that many of the non-Indigenous heritage sites had Aboriginal associations – that they constitute a shared heritage – the point here is that these associations, and this sharing, were almost never acknowledged in heritage work. The artificial division of heritage into ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘historic’ fields brought into being a heritage landscape in which Aboriginal people, far from sharing the post-1788 landscape with white people, seem to have permanently departed the scene.

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Left page: Fig. 7: The distribution of pre-contact Aboriginal sites in the study area. Note that only recorded sites are shown – many sites remain unrecorded.

This page: Fig. 8: Maria Nugent, 2004

Fig. 9: Denis Byrne, 2004
Aboriginal heritage of pre-contact times

The setting
People of the Biripi and Worimi language groups in the study area led a lifestyle which took them at different times of year into every part of their country. This included the rugged foothills of what we now call the Great Dividing Range, the lower bush covered hills, and the open woodland of the Gloucester Valley. It also included the bands of rainforest (or ‘brush’) on the alluvial soils along the Manning River, its major creeks and the large flat islands in the estuary. The luxuriant rainforests contained huge fig, tamarind and cedar trees with vines, ferns and shrubs. There were also the great and small swamps near the river and coast, and the long sandy beaches with their dunes and rocky headlands.

The sites of the pre-contact
The distribution of sites where archaeological traces of pre-contact people have been discovered and recorded (see Figure 7) gives us some insight into Aboriginal lifestyle and pattern of occupation although we appreciate that the blank areas on the map are more likely to be a reflection of the lack of recording work in these areas than of any lack of Aboriginal presence there in the past.

Most of the sites shown in Figure 7 have been recorded by consultant archaeologists, who, working with local Aboriginal people, have carried out surveys of land on which developments have been proposed (e.g., motorway construction, housing subdivision, sewerage infrastructure). Copies of reports on these environmental impact assessment (EIA) studies are held by the Department of Environment and Conservation, NSW.

Almost all the ‘sites’ shown in Figure 7 consist of locations where archaeological remains have been found. The great majority consist of scatters of flaked stone artefacts (whose uses included the shaping of wooden artefacts, such as spears and boomerangs, and the butchering and skinning animals) and shell middens (containing shellfish remains, fish bones, and other remains). It is important to remember that these sites were merely points in a network of movement, often places where people stayed for only a few hours or a few days. Sadly, very few sites representing the social or spiritual life of the Biripi and Worimi of pre-contact times are known to have survived. This part of their lives – what to them may have been the most important part – remains mostly invisible to us.

Continuity and change
Even after the white invasion, Biripi and Worimi people continued to use many of the same ‘sites’ (e.g., camps) they had used in pre-invasion days. Some of these places would have been visited regularly for thousands of years. Some places, including the camp at Saltwater (south of Old Bar – see Figure 62) continue to be used to the present day. Many other post-invasion Aboriginal places, however, represented a new way of living or surviving in the landscape. These ‘sites’, like the camps of Aboriginal people working on white settlers’ farms, the fringe camps on the edges of Taree and Wingham, and the reserves at Purfleet and Forster, represent a very different lifestyle from that in pre-contact times. The geographic location...
of these sites reflects the exclusion of Aboriginal people from most parts of their former country (now privately held by non-Aboriginal people).

The book’s structure

The book is divided into three main parts: Archives, Landscapes, and Lives. Each of them represents a different way of approaching, or researching, the Aboriginal post-contact heritage of the same geographical area.

Part 1: Archives

This first part reviews the documentary evidence available for the history of Aboriginal people in the area from 1818 when the first white explorer, John Oxley, travelled through it. The emphasis is on what the historical records can tell us about where Aboriginal people were in the landscape of the area at different times: where their settlements were, what their settlements were like, and how they managed to move through and find a place for themselves in a landscape—their own traditional country—that increasingly took the form of a grid of white-owned properties. In other words, the focus is on those aspects of history that are of most importance to those engaged in heritage work. Part 1 confines itself to the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The reason for this is that this is the period that is back beyond the range of oral history. Parts 2 and 3 continue the story, picking it up in the twentieth century. While they draw on documentary history sources they mainly tell the story through the memories and the words of Aboriginal people themselves.

Part 2: Landscapes

During the period after the white invasion of the study area in the 1820s, there were four core areas of Aboriginal settlement. Part 2 describes each of these in turn. A key theme is that the Aboriginal presence in these core areas was not confined to the ‘sites’ of the camps, huts, and houses where they lived. Radiating out from these sites, and integral to them, was a complex web of Aboriginal movement and activity. Using a ‘cultural landscape’ approach, Part 2 encourages heritage workers to conceptualise Aboriginal post-contact heritage at a landscape scale.

Part 3: Lives

Part 3 is concerned with oral histories and oral history recording. The oral histories of seven Aboriginal people are presented, each of them accompanied by a map showing many of the places and pathways mentioned in their oral history recording sessions. We make the point that since no two lives are the same, everyone will have their own individual map of the landscape. Part 3 shares with the other two parts an over-riding concern with spatiality. While hundreds of Aboriginal oral histories have been recorded in NSW over recent decades very few of these include sufficient spatial detail for them to be directly useable for recording heritage places and landscapes.

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1 ‘Mission’ was the term many Aboriginal people in our study area used to refer to the Aboriginal settlements on the former Aboriginal Reserves at Forster and Purfleet. While there had been a Christian missionary presence at the Reserves at various points in their history, neither place had been a religious mission in any institutional sense.


4 Patricia Davis-Hurst, Sunrise Station, Sunbird Publications, Taree, 1996.

5 Denis Byrne, The ethos of return: erasure and reinstatement of Aboriginal visibility in the Australian historical landscape, *Historical Archaeology*, 37, 1, 2003, pp.73-86.

6 The term ‘heritage landscape’ here refers not to the real landscape of the past but to the presentation of that landscape in heritage work and heritage discourse.

Fig. 12: Robert Yeltica sketching a plan of the Forster Aboriginal Reserve as it was in the 1950s.
PART 1 Archives
Five years ago for the
present occupied by the
hiring lining purpose. Other aboriginal
men were on the yellow
tribe.
Here are two huts on this
which were erected by the A.F. Board.
In Part 1 we focus on the contribution of documentary history sources, as distinct from oral history sources, to the work of mapping attachment.

**What records exist?**

Beginning in 1818, when the first white explorers moved through the study area, a documentary record was created. Some written records have survived into the present. They include explorers’ accounts, government papers, maps and plans, newspaper articles, and printed reminiscences. In drawing on these records to map an Aboriginal presence in the landscape, we make no claim to have exhausted the archives. There are certain to be written reminiscences of nineteenth-century life in the area which we have not found just as we know there are government records and other archival collections that we have either not examined or have delved into only superficially.

**Gaps in the records**

At least one commentator on heritage practice in Australia has voiced concerns about the disproportionate attention given to the listing and conservation of nineteenth-century non-Indigenous heritage places compared to those of the twentieth century. In the case of Aboriginal post-contact heritage the problem might be said to be the opposite: very little is known or ‘mapped’ for the nineteenth century (or the years 1788-1900), attention having focussed mostly on the twentieth century.

A factor contributing to this unbalanced coverage is the comparative scarcity of historical documentary records bearing upon Aboriginal life in the nineteenth-century landscape. Most government records were about documenting such matters as agricultural production, the buying and selling of land, and the exploitation of timber resources. The position of Aboriginal people in the local colonial economy was a marginal one: they worked as farm labourers and timber cutters but were not land owners or timber exporters. Consequently, they have little or no visibility in these records.

Written reminiscences of people who lived through the nineteenth century are a significant historical source. While there are several of these for our area, they are all by settlers and not Aboriginal people. The reasons Aboriginal life stories were not written down in the nineteenth century include Aboriginal people’s lack of access to schooling, and thus literacy, until the 1880s, and the cultural factors inclining them to tell their life stories orally rather than in written English. While a few of the nineteenth-century settler reminiscences do dwell in some detail on the lifestyle of local Aboriginal people, others are silent about them. This silence becomes the norm for local histories in the twentieth century.

While lack of access to the major archival sources pertaining to Aboriginal people, such as the records of the NSW Aborigines’ Protection Board (which only begin in the late nineteenth century), might have contributed to this, it is also certainly the case that Aboriginal people were not seen as having great relevance to local histories, histories which essentially are narratives about the ‘progress’ of white occupation of the area.

**Partial and fragmentary accounts**

The result is that the written records pertaining to Aboriginal people in the Forster-Taree area in the nineteenth century are extremely partial and fragmentary. There is little exaggeration in saying that Aboriginal people are virtually invisible in the local post-contact landscape as described in archival records, in settler reminiscences, and in local histories. An illusion is created that they had vacated this landscape, leaving it as an open field for intensifying white occupation. This is an illusion that heritage practitioners should be careful not to perpetuate.
Heritage practitioners, confronted by the silence about nineteenth-century Aboriginal lives in published local histories, may assume there is no available historical documentation about Aboriginal people, or perhaps more seriously, that Aboriginal people were not present in the nineteenth-century local landscape. It is not difficult to see how this then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. It can lead to the following circularity. By not examining the documentation that does in fact exist for this nineteenth-century Aboriginal presence, an archaeologist would not be alerted to the locations where Aboriginal people are known to have been present (i.e., fringe camps, farm camps). In the absence of this knowledge, the chances of such places being recorded on the ground as heritage places would be slight. So the danger is that heritage practitioners may not merely fall under the illusion of an Aboriginal historical absence in the landscape but actually assist in perpetuating that illusion.

People and place

Our focus in the following pages is on the information that historical documents can give us on heritage places and the context of these places in Aboriginal post-contact life. For our study area there are references to Aboriginal post-contact camps, ceremonial sites, burials, and work places, but the references tend not to contain precise locational details (for advice on locating Aboriginal heritage sites from documentary information see pp. 55-60). They can still be extremely valuable, however, especially for the period of the nineteenth century. This is beyond the range of Aboriginal oral history and it is often the case that these references – fragmentary and vague as they mostly are – provide our best chance of knowing where Aboriginal people were in the landscape.

It must be stressed that Part 1 is not a history of Aboriginal life, or of race relations, in the study area in the nineteenth century. Instead, using the Manning Valley and Forster area as a case study, it attempts to show the way that documentary history can be used as an aid in recording Aboriginal post-contact heritage places and landscapes. We are thus concerned with the spatiality of history or, one might say, with the potential for historical documents to provide spatial evidence.

Waves of change

There is sometimes a tendency on the part of heritage practitioners to treat the post-contact period as almost a single moment in time. Heritage places are often simply categorised as “post-contact” without any effort to place them even approximately within the specific context of the time to which they belong. In the following pages we try to point out some of the major phases in the Aboriginal post-1818 history of our study area. Aboriginal life there underwent a period of radical change after 1826. In the Manning Valley the impact of this change accelerated through the 1830s, 50s and 60s until almost every aspect of Biripi culture had been altered, in many cases quite dramatically. Change was slower in the Forster area but in both places by about the 1880s Aboriginal people had lost access to many of the more productive parts of their environment and had become dependent on the settler economy. It is important to remember, though, that major waves of change continued to wash through the area after the 1880s and into recent times. These included the institutionalisation of segregation which began in the 1880s with the establishment of the major Reserves at Forster and Purfleet, the economic changes of the 1930s and the Second World War years, the changes that came with the assimilation policy in the 1960s, and the era of self-determination beginning in the 1970s.

A note about interpreting the records

The non-Indigenous early writers (whether of histories, records, or documents) had a vested interest in creating an impression of contrast between themselves as advanced and the Aboriginals as primitive or degenerate – this helped give a semblance of legitimacy to the seizure of Aboriginal land and to violence against Aboriginal persons. The written record is further distorted by the gaps and silences in it.

The main point to bear in mind is that the observers and writers were understanding Aboriginal life in terms of their own culture, filtering what they saw through the concepts and theories available in Western culture at the time for thinking about the people of the “other” world (the non-West). However, it was not simply a matter of a cultural filter. In terms of nineteenth-century cultural-evolutionist thought, Northern European society was believed to stand at the top of an evolutionary ladder on the lower rungs of which were societies believed to be less developed culturally, intellectually, and even physiologically. Aboriginal people were seen as occupying the most
‘primitive’, least evolved end of this spectrum.6 The early writers of histories and other accounts were deeply disinclined to see Aboriginal people as capable of innovation or creative adaptation.7 Many of them took an interest in ‘traditional’ Aboriginal ceremonies and artefacts but saw the changing Aboriginal lifestyle as simply a degenerate culture which was neither truly Aboriginal nor truly white. They were typically uninterested in describing the way Aboriginal people were modifying elements of European material culture (e.g. bottle glass, sheets of iron, nails, wire) to make new and original hunting and fishing implements, or new forms of shelter.

There are plenty of descriptions of Aboriginal drunkenness and ‘rude’ behaviour but few if any references to the rape of Aboriginal women, forced or coercive sexual liaisons, or indeed to the murder of Aboriginal people during the frontier phase of the invasion. Similarly, our study area is typical of other areas in that, though there are several references to killings and massacres of Aboriginal people, they are hedged by vagueness to the point that it is impossible to identify the sites of these events or to locate the graves or remains of those murdered. A further examination of these issues is provided in Chapter 2.

The scope of Part 1

Part 1 is for the most part confined in its coverage to the nineteenth century. It also mostly confines itself to the Aboriginal side of post-contact life and heritage in the study area. We recognise that Aboriginal lives were in many ways entangled with the lives of white people. We also realise that Aboriginal people were associated with many of the places in the area which are now thought of as ‘white’ or non-Indigenous heritage places. We only concern ourselves with these places, however, when we find explicit historic evidence for such associations (as, for instance, in the case of certain schools, hospitals, and shops).

As noted earlier, we have not attempted an exhaustive coverage of documentary records. The aim of this book is to show the potential that history has to be a resource for heritage rather than to produce a comprehensive history as such. The focus in the following pages is on the northern end of our study area. The fact that white invasion of the Manning Valley was earlier and on a much larger scale than it was in the Forster-Willis Lake area means there is a much greater body of historical information for the former, more northern area. This has meant we are able to say much less about the Aboriginal nineteenth-century presence in the Forster-Willis Lake area.
This chapter presents what we know of the first white presence in the study area for the period up to 1830 and what implications this had for the area’s Aboriginal population.

The Biripi and the Worimi

The Aboriginal people whose country the first Europeans entered were the Biripi, in the north of the study area, and the Worimi, in the south. There is some variation of opinion among Aboriginal people and others as to exactly where the boundary between the two tribal groups lay. But as noted by Gay, ‘today, there is general consensus in the local Aboriginal communities of Purfleet, Taree and Forster that both Worimi and Biripi descendents have attachment to the land along the coast between Cape Hawke and Wallaby Point (Saltwater Reserve).’

Visitors

Though Captain James Cook never landed on this part of the coast in 1770 his voyage along the coast of the study area can be thought of as a visitation. It was a visitation both in the sense that he and his officers made detailed observations of the coastal part of the country (and saw smoke from Aboriginal fires) and in the sense that some Biripi and Worimi almost certainly observed the *Endeavour* as it sailed past.

The first visit to the actual surface of the country itself was by the surveyor-explorer John Oxley and his party as they moved south along the coast in October 1818. In some ways they were as distant from the country’s Indigenous occupants as Cook had been. They did not speak to the Aboriginal owners of the country. They did, however, see two sets of footprints along the bank of the Manning River and when they reached Wallis Lake one of their party, in the act of cutting down a cabbage tree palm, was speared by an unseen assailant.

The same evening, on the Forster side of the Lake’s entrance, they observed from a distance Aboriginal people around several camp fires. The distance Aboriginal people kept from the explorers meant the explorers learnt almost nothing about them.

Mapping productivity

The British government granted a huge block of land (1,000,000 acres) to the Australian Agricultural Company (AA Co) in 1824. The grant extended from Port Stephens northward to the south bank of the Manning River (see Figure 18) and was primarily intended for the grazing of sheep, despite Oxley’s caution that the humid climate there might be unsuitable for that purpose. The first of the Company’s surveyors to explore the northern reaches of the AA Co grant was Henry Dangar who passed along part of the upper Manning River in 1825. He returned in 1826 and traced the course of the river to the sea. But it was not until the following years that the river was actually mapped. Dangar, along with the surveyor John Armstrong and others made a more comprehensive assessment of the AA Co grant in 1826. Their observations on the potential of the
land for farming were included in Armstrong's 1829 map (the map classified land into three types depending on its assumed potential to carry sheep). Similar assessments of agricultural productivity were carried out by surveyors and explorers across NSW, a mapping project that had immense importance for the reshaping of the cultural landscapes of the colony. The Biripi and Worimi had already (for thousands of years) mapped the country's productivity in terms of their own hunter-gatherer economy. They 'mapped' it in the sense of accumulating detailed knowledge of the spatial distribution of wild food resources. To some extent these two maps – the hunter-gatherer and the agricultural – coincided. The alluvial land along the Manning River, for instance, was fertile agricultural land as well as being highly productive in the Aboriginal economy because of the game and plant foods it supported.

**Foreshadowings**

But elsewhere the maps diverged. A number of categories of land that had little value to white settlers were highly productive in the Aboriginal economy. These included the mountain forests, the sandy and rocky shores, the estuarine areas, the swamps and the coastal lakes. They were rich in fish, shellfish, water birds, reptiles, and amphibians as well as offering many types of plant food. Most of these areas remained accessible to the post-invasion Aboriginal population and they no doubt were critical to the latter's survival in the middle and late nineteenth century. Many of them remained accessible through the twentieth century, during the first half of which they provided an essential supplement to government rations and the mission diet.

We return now to the white explorers and their assessment of the productivity of the land for agriculture. There is no question that these assessments foreshadowed the map of white occupation – they identified the areas where farms would be located and where the villages and towns would spring up. But they also, of course, foreshadowed the map of the protected area system that would come into being in the latter part of the twentieth century. They did this by 'mapping' those parts of the landscape that would be marginal to agriculture and urban development. And here there are two factors that are often overlooked. The first is that the protected area system (i.e. national parks and other conservation reserves) would include many of the environments of highest productivity in the 'traditional' Aboriginal economy. The second is that these same environments continued to be critical to Aboriginal people during the post-contact period and into the present day. In the present day, these places are valued by Aboriginal people not only for the wild foods they continue to supply but because they represent most of the only remaining parts of their country that are in an uncleared and, in a sense, 'uncolonised' condition.

The maps produced by surveyors like John Armstrong are thus highly significant heritage items in terms of both Aboriginal and settler history. They are a perfect example of those heritage objects and places whose Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal significance is inseparable. They represent a shared heritage.
Early exchanges

These early visitors brought with them new technologies which Aboriginal people appear to have readily borrowed. One of the first European objects acquired were steel fish hooks which appear to have been adopted ‘wholesale’ by Aboriginal people in our area immediately they became available. The Aboriginal preference for steel fish hooks as objects of presentation and exchange is evidenced in the (apparently) large numbers of them distributed by John Armstrong during his survey of the lower Manning in 1827. His diary records a visit to his camp by a group of Aboriginals he had previously given tobacco and fish hooks to: ‘this renewal of acquaintance cost me some more hooks etc.’ This illustrates what should be obvious: cross-cultural borrowing was commonplace, but it was always selective and culturally mediated.

The first planting

Accompanying the AA Company’s survey party was John Guilding, a 29-year-old free English immigrant who, when the party discovered two grassy plains on either side of what is now Dickenson’s Creek, decided to return there to settle. These plains, of 4,000 and 5,000 acres apiece, more or less surrounded by gallery rainforest growing on the levees of the river and creeks, were very likely a product of regular burning by the Biripi. Before he left, and presumably unbeknown to the Biripi, Guilding named this place Jamaica Plains in memory of the West Indies where he had previously settled (Figure 15). He also, on the 28th of October, ‘planted many sugar canes, put in several holes of maize and sowed a few garden seeds and tobacco seeds’ on this grassy plain. This was the first planting of exotic species in the country of the Biripi. We do not know whether these few plants survived and grew but it seems quite likely the Biripi would have discovered and examined them. Despite the fact that the exact spot of the first planting cannot be identified, the symbolic importance of the event makes the location of Jamaica Plains a significant place in the shared heritage of the Manning Valley.

Jamaica Plains no longer exists as a place name. It was located in the vicinity of the present-day settlement of Ghinni Ghinni. This first planting had implications which would change the map of Biripi country; the cultivation and harvesting of crops on any one piece of Biripi land would produce a quantity of food greatly exceeding the wild food products the Biripi were themselves able to draw from the same land. Whether it would be able to do so sustainably, though, is another question – a question that farmers across NSW would be pondering into the early twenty-first century as they witnessed the impact of salination and soil erosion in the farming landscape.

The immediate effect of the introduction of agriculture, however, was a greatly increased population in the study area. The geographer, W. K. Birrell, suggests the pre-contact population of Aboriginal people in the Manning Valley was in the range of 800 to 1,000 people, a figure that was surpassed by the white population of the valley within about fifteen years of 1827.

The first trickle of white settlers

John Guilding was permitted to select 2,560 acres on Dickenson’s Creek. When reports of his discovery of good farmland on the lower Manning began circulating in Sydney a small number of other pioneer farmers, in the years 1827-30, followed him there. The census of 1828 records Guilding as having cleared 500 acres, cultivated forty acres, and...
as grazing 400 cattle on his land. Figure 18 shows the location of the first farms in the valley.

By-passing the Forster area

On October 29, 1818, John Oxley was in the vicinity of Wallis Lake. In his account of his explorations he recorded the following:

The natives are extremely numerous along this part of the coast; these extensive lakes, which abound with fish, being extremely favourable to their easy subsistence; large troops of them appear on the beaches, whilst their canoes on the lakes are equally numerous. In the morning their fires are to be observed in every direction; they evidently appear to shun us and we have no wish for a further acquaintance.

There would, in fact, be little acquaintance between the Worimi and Europeans in the area of Forster and Wallis Lake until about the 1850s.

The pre-conditions for an agricultural economy in this part of the colony were the presence of rivers with arable land along them and coastal access for shipping out export produce. These were a focus of Oxley’s explorations and their absence in the Forster-Wallis Lake area explains why it was initially by-passed by the white invasion. It was an area that remained one of the backwaters of white settlement on the North Coast until the mid-twentieth century. With its mostly sandy soils but good stands of timber, the area did, however, attract early logging and ship building activity.
The period up to about 1850 represents the frontier phase of white occupation. It was a period when although the impact of white settlement on Aboriginal life was great the impact on the physical landscape of the study area remained relatively minor.

In this section we look at the patterns of settler occupation in the study area and the effect this had on Aboriginal use of the landscape. In particular, we examine Aboriginal responses to these incursions. While white incursion and occupation intensified and expanded through the thirty years after 1830, it did not cause total disruption of the Aboriginal lifestyle. It can be described as a time of ‘dual occupation’. The historian, Heather Goodall, elaborates the ‘dual occupation’ concept in her book, Invasion to Embassy, a key text for any study of Aboriginal post-contact heritage in NSW.

As elsewhere in NSW, race relations on the lower North Coast frontier spanned the spectrum from friendliness and cooperation to open violence. Aboriginal people’s responses ranged from resistance and violence, to curiosity, accommodation and active participation in the settler economy.

First settlers

In the late 1820s four white migrants acquired land on the lower Manning River and were growing crops and grazing cattle there. The grants totalled some 22,040 acres but only a small fraction of this would have been cleared and, in fact, only one of the settlers remained in residence by 1830. The selected land mainly comprised alluvial flatlands on the north side of the Manning. On the ground, this represented only a very small amount of activity, with only a minor impact on the natural environment and presumably a relatively minor impact on the lives of the Biripi.

Cedar getting

The major European presence in the area at this time took the form not of farming but of cedar getting. The cedar-getters arrived on the Manning in 1833 and within ‘a short time cedar getters’ camps were located along both sides of the Manning upstream from the entrance for some thirty-two to forty-eight kilometres. The great cedar trees (Toona australis) which were avidly sought by the early building and furniture industries in Sydney grew on the deep alluvial soils bordering rivers like the Manning. The cedar-getters cut the trees and used bullocks to haul them out of the forest to the river or to the edges of streams where, when the floods came, the logs would wash down to the river. But, even minus the cedar, the forests still covered the alluvium as much as two or three kilometres back from the river.

The cedar-getters were themselves something of a ‘nomadic tribe’. Most of those on the Manning were freed convicts and were treated as being of a class well below that of the farmers. They lived in camps ‘of about eight or ten huts or tents’ in small forest clearings, surviving partly on fish, kangaroo, and birds. It is possible the Biripi did not regard this ‘tribe’ of people as being all that different from themselves.

In the Manning in the 1830s the cedar-getters ‘cut their way steadily along the banks of the main waterways and larger tributaries, shifting their camps when it became necessary’. There is no question that the rainforests of the Manning remained a major potential source of wild foods for Aboriginal people during the twenty or so years the cedar-getters operated on the Manning and after they had moved on to the Macleay and the rivers further north. We know that some Biripi people worked with the white cedar-getters in exchange for tea, flour, rum and tobacco. The cedar-getters ‘frequently had to depend upon aborigines to lead them to these trees’. The latter was especially true of cedar stands in the more inaccessible locations.
The documentary evidence for Biripi engagement with the cedar-getters is, however, scant and to date there is no archaeological evidence relating to it. It is an aspect of Aboriginal-white heritage which has virtually no visibility either on the Manning or the other rivers where the cedar-getters operated on the NSW North Coast. This is unfortunate because it represents a phase in the history of race relations where there seems to have been a significant degree of cultural borrowing on both sides, a phase in which the intruders were not there to appropriate Aboriginal land. It was a phase in which Aboriginal people seem to have been prepared to allow white access to at least some of the resources of their country and were able to do so without their whole existence being placed under threat.

White migrant farmers

In 1830 the ‘limits of location’ set by the colonial government were extended to the north of the Hastings River. From this time, white migrant settlers could legally buy or lease land throughout the area covered by our study. The first sales of land in the Manning Valley were made in 1837. The farmers arrived either overland via Gloucester with bullock teams or by a boat trip of some thirty-six hours from Sydney. The pattern at this time was for a settler to take out a lease for grazing stock and to purchase, separately, a small farm for agriculture. The leased land was left mainly uncleared and the stock was grazed on grass clearings in the forests. By 1841 some 300 white people were resident in the Manning (237 men, 63 women) and twenty-three houses were in existence.

The Australian Agricultural Co in 1830 surrendered most of the coastal part of its land holding, including most of the south side of the Manning River, acknowledging that the country was too humid and thickly vegetated to be useful for grazing sheep. Further inland in NSW, where open woodland country required no clearing, pastoralism spread extremely rapidly across millions of hectares. Near the coast the progress of pastoralism was slow, though it remained the mainstay of farming on the Manning till the 1850s when, with the arrival of the first real wave of farmers, it was overtaken by agriculture.

Although in the first couple of decades after 1830 great stretches of land along the river were surveyed and appropriated by settlers, the only manifestations of this on the ground were the appearance of a few dozen clearings in the forests along the river where the first huts were sited. Additional huts appeared on the pre-existing bladedy grass clearings that some settlers had acquired. On paper the surveyors had begun to produce plans showing the distribution of the settlers’ selections along the river, but on the ground the property boundaries were marked mainly by pegs and marks on trees – wooden fences were few and far between.

The clearings steadily grew but for a considerable time a large proportion of the rainforest with its rich plant and animal food resources would have remained available to the Biripi and indeed to white migrants emulating Biripi bush skills. The settlers might well have appeared to be more like a throng of swidden agriculturists who had strayed into the valley than the advance guard of an agricultural industry destined to remake the valley as lush and productive farmland.

We should avoid polarizing white migrant settlers and the Biripi in a way that presents the former as purely settled agriculturalists and the latter as constantly mobile hunter-gathers. Again, as in the case of cedar-getting, it is unfortunate that this historical situation has so little visibility as heritage, given that it represents a period of much greater racial ‘equality’ than existed later on.

Bungay and Chatham

In the 1840s Bungay Bungay (later known simply as Bungay) was the first village-like settlement on the Manning (see Figure 18). It was located...
adjacent to the river, south of the present town of Wingham. As well as the few buildings associated with the ‘Bungay’ farm, the settlement contained a constable’s hut which served as a ‘courthouse’ for the Port Macquarie police magistrate.  

The site of the new village of Wingham had been surveyed in 1843, but in 1850 Chatham (near present-day Taree) was still the only village on the Manning ‘to have at least both a general store and an inn’.  

In this period almost the whole of the modest white population of the Valley was located on the small farms being cleared at intervals along the river.

Communications

With the arrival of the cedar-getters, trading vessels began to visit the Manning regularly. In 1827 the first seeds of maize had been planted in Biripi country. In the 1830s and 40s not only were exotic plants such as maize and wheat successfully grown to support the white settlers but surplus was available for export by sea to Sydney. The river was the key to communication between settlers in the Valley who were ‘Separated from each other by dense forests and isolated by an almost complete lack of effective land communication’.  

Massacres

Though not officially documented, there are persistent references in local history sources for the Manning Valley to at least two massacres of Biripi by settlers in the 1830s. One of these occurred in 1835 at Belbora, on the Australian Agricultural Company land grant on the upper Wallamba (Figure 18). Damper, laced with dingo poison, was given to a stockman said to have been besieged in a hut. One account mentions ‘several’ deaths occurring as a result, another has it that ‘In every creek and in every gully lay dead blacks’, with the death toll amounting to ‘hundreds’.  

Geoffrey Blomfield, citing a 1964 source and ‘oral tradition’, describes how in 1835 a large group of Aboriginal people were driven to their deaths off a cliff at Mt McKenzie in present day Barrington Tops National Park near the headwaters of the Gloucestor River (Figure 18). This massacre is reputed to have followed the spearing of five shepherds, after which a mounted posse of settlers pursued a band of Aboriginal people into the mountains.  

Perhaps the killing that is best documented is that of an Aboriginal man who Europeans called ‘Mickey Ugly’ (frequently the names white people gave to Aboriginal people were belittling or derogatory). He was murdered in the bush at Mt George (Figure 18) on the middle Manning River by the migrant settler, John Chapman, and three of his men on the first day of January 1843.  

Despite eye-witness evidence of the murder and an investigation by a local magistrate that resulted in the four men being arrested and committed to trial, the four were later discharged without trial by the colonial government. There are several other extremely sketchy references to white settlers killing Aboriginal people. F.W. Connors, for instance, refers in his reminiscences to an incident at Kundle Kundle, six kilometres northeast of Taree: ‘In 1838 one of these family groups was massacred close to the south eastern corner of Brimbin’.  

This single sentence is the only reference to this incident known to us in the literature. The paucity of information on massacres and the difficulty of locating the sites where they occurred will be discussed later (see Chapter 7).  

We have no documentary information relating to possible European violence against the Worimi people in the Wallis Lake section of the study area. This may reflect the fact that settler incursions into this area were much less than in the Manning Valley, with a correspondingly lower potential for conflict. On the other hand, the sparsity of white intruders there may mean that violence simply went unreported.

Armed resistance and harassment

An incident in the late 1840s, reported in the Maitland Mercury, provides a unique insight, for our area, into the extent to which Aboriginal people resisted settler encroachment. Three brothers of one settler family, the Fenwicks, were running cattle on a property on the banks of the upper Manning. The report states that a group of Biripi twice attacked their cattle, on the second occasion leaving ‘cattle laying dead on all parts of the run, and others running about much cut and wounded. Losing heart at last, the Messrs. Fenwick abandoned the station, taking with them what cattle they could collect.’  

The article continues:  

Prior to this, about 30 blacks had encamped at the station of William Johnston, esq., having with them 20 stands of arms, and five canisters of ammunition, they did not show any hostile intentions, but seemed rather prepared for the mounted police. They, however, visited another station, where they knocked down a hut, killed some pigs, and cut up a great many hurdles (section of a type of fence), taking away every nail
that was in them, which they cut into shot with their tomahawks.

The exact location of the Fenwick property is not provided in this account.

Other references support the impression that at least some of the Biripi carried guns in the mid-nineteenth century. An 1849 account describes a group of Biripi men threatening to shoot a white settler who had ‘come upon them’ after they had killed one of his cattle. The writer continues: ‘The system of giving fire-arms to the blacks is greatly to be deprecated; scarcely a black is to be met in the bush who is not provided with a musket and plenty of ammunition’.42 A year earlier, a correspondent reported on an enquiry into the killing of an old Biripi man by the police on the Manning River. Two settlers, giving evidence against the police, noted that the old man was ‘perfectly helpless and imbecile’; that he posed no threat to anyone: ‘neither of them had seen him carrying a gun for some time’.43

A reminiscence by Robert Hewkes, who came to the Manning aged fourteen in 1842, is suggestive of a ‘balance of power’ that oscillated situationally. He was returning from Bungay (on the Manning near Wingham) to Dingo Creek when, as he states:

[...] came suddenly upon two blacks roasting a calf. I pulled up my horse some little distance from them, and as soon as their attention was attracted to me they gave me orders, in their own way, to clear out. I hesitated for a while – but not for long. One of the blacks poised a spear and sent it whizzing through the air towards me. It went too high. I made myself scarce, however.44

This account suggests that Aboriginal people in the Manning Valley in the 1840s (and perhaps later), even if not in a position to drive the newcomers out of their country, were by no means passive in the face of this presence.

**Introduced diseases**

So far, no documentary records have been found for the study area giving evidence of epidemic diseases which are known to have swept through the Aboriginal population of NSW, beginning in the Port Jackson area in 1789. It is likely, though, that introduced diseases such as smallpox reached the lower NSW North Coast in advance of the arrival of the first settlers there. Even if the resulting death toll was lower there than in the Sydney area, it would still imply that the Aboriginal population of our study area in the 1820s and 1830s would have been reduced from what it had been forty or fifty years earlier.

**Accommodating the new arrivals**

While some Biripi resisted the incursions of whites through armed resistance, we also know, from reminiscences written by early white migrants, that some of them were assisting new settlers to open up clearings in the rainforest and the bush for the cultivation of crops. William Wynter, for instance, employed Biripi people on the ‘Tarree’ estate, in the area of present-day Taree, in the 1830s.45 It is reasonable to think that, as elsewhere in the early colony, some of these people would have camped on the white farms they worked on. At this stage they still had access to most of their country and its resources and however much they were interested in white foodstuffs and products they were not yet dependent upon them.

If Aboriginal people entered the company of white farmers as labourers, some individuals among the settler population entered Aboriginal company for adventure and friendship. There is the case of William Wynter who was seven years old when his family came to settle on the Manning: ‘The natives took the boy with them on their hunting expeditions along the valley’.46 Wynter is said to have learnt their language and maintained a lifelong association with the Biripi.

Perhaps the most decisive change would have been a break in the previous Aboriginal pattern of movement. By no means would this pattern have been shattered. But equally, the time spent working for settlers would have cut across the seasonal round of hunting and food gathering and would have cut into their ritual and ceremonial life.

**The position of the Biripi**

The diagram shown here (Figure 20) depicts the position of Aboriginal people in relation to the early white settlers. In this model, Aboriginal people still had the freedom of movement that allowed them...
to access much of the river frontage as well as the higher country behind it. There was contact between them and the white farmers who were opening up agricultural clearings in the riverside gallery rainforest (dark shading in the diagram). In the following chapter a comparative diagram depicts the situation thirty years later, in the 1860s (Figure 25).

White enemies and allies

In May 1848 a police magistrate held an inquiry at Bungay Bungay into the killing of an eighty-year-old Biripi man during a police raid on an Aboriginal camp (probably somewhere near the south bank of the Manning). According to a newspaper report, during the raid ‘a little girl was also wounded by a shot, and...the police amused themselves by destroying the camp, burning the clothes left behind, and killing the puppies’.47 The inquiry was instigated by a complaint by William Wynter who, along with George Tilney, gave evidence at the inquiry that the dead man (Tombai) had been ‘well known to them’ and that he was ‘perfectly helpless and imbecile’.48 After the raid, Tilney had discovered Tombai lying wounded in the bush near the camp and had tried to aid him.

This incident illustrates the way in which white people, in their relations with the Biripi, ranged from those who were extremely hostile to those who were ‘neutral’ and those who were actively friendly and could be treated as allies in times of need. Since most white people were owners or occupiers of farms, this spectrum of ‘attitudes’ could be mapped as a mosaic that was likely to affect the way Aboriginal people moved through the landscape. It is likely that they maintained an extensive knowledge of the disposition of white people, in terms of both location and temperament, and that this knowledge became one of the necessary skills for survival.49

The concept of land ownership

At this early stage, however, the Aboriginal people of the Manning may not have seen white settlers as a threat to their own lifestyle and culture. They are likely to have still outnumbered the settlers and in the early stage of white occupation the Biripi may have thought of the white presence as a passing thing and not a threat to their whole lifestyle.

In these first years of settlement, even when they were camping on white farms, we should not assume they understood or conceded that these areas were ‘owned’ by the settlers, the European legal construct of exclusive ownership or ‘title’ not being one they shared. Aboriginal people never relinquished any of this land, in any legal sense at all, and they were never paid for any of it when it was taken from them.

The cadastral survey grid of property boundaries was a template for the settlers’ progressive appropriation of Aboriginal country (see the following chapter for a more detailed account of the cadastral grid). The mapping of the grid by surveyors happened in advance of the land being sold, taken up, and cleared. In this sense it represented the ‘writing on the wall’ for the total loss of Aboriginal country. The writing, in fact, was on the face of the country, taking the form of survey lines, survey pegs and surveyor’s marks on trees. But the whole idea of individual private ownership of land may have seemed so preposterous to Aboriginal people that the reality of their own dispossession may have taken some time to grasp. It is uncertain whether any of them were even shown the cadastral survey maps in these early years.

Cross-cultural exchanges

Aboriginal people gave their assistance to settlers in exchange for tobacco, tea, rum, steel hatchets, fish hooks and other goods they judged to be desirable. They gave advice on the uses and whereabouts of indigenous plants and animals, perhaps out of friendliness or in the context of cross-cultural ‘gifting’.50 As noted above, these early settlers had a very tenuous hold on an environment that was strange and sometimes hostile. It was a time of discovery and rapid learning on both sides: the Biripi were picking up the English language and experimenting with new products; the settlers were learning a legion of things about the new environment and at least some of them were learning about the culture of the Biripi.51 None of this is to suggest that these exchanges always or normally occurred in an environment of mutual courtesy and friendliness. It is instructive to bear in mind that they occurred through the same period as the frontier violence (described above). Yet it is important to acknowledge that such exchanges did take place.52
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cedar-getters’ mobility – shifting camps</td>
<td>settler agriculture demanded settled rather than mobile existence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cedar-getters and settlers living partly off wild foods</td>
<td>settler system of individual, ‘private’ land ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>both whites and Biripi travel up and down the river by boat/canoe</td>
<td>settlers use the river also to export produce to Sydney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White migrant settlement is concentrated on agricultural land where the Biripi also begin to concentrate</td>
<td>Aboriginal settlement comes to be focussed on agricultural land but coastal and mountainous areas still used for hunting and gathering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An aspect of cross-cultural exchange or learning often overlooked is the extent to which many white homesteads, villages and other key sites were superimposed on old Aboriginal camp sites. To some extent this came about because both populations were responding to the same environmental constraints and opportunities (i.e., the presence of well-drained land and proximity to water). It would be naïve, though, to think it did not also reflect the close attention paid by settlers to Aboriginal environmental knowledge in the ‘frontier’ phase of white settlement.

The position in the Wallis Lake area

In this period white settlement of the Forster-Wallis Lake area had not yet begun. The Aboriginal people there may have had dealings with escaped convicts and certainly with boats touching on their shores but their country was not considered to have potential for either pastoralism or cropping. By 1850 only seven pastoral leases existed on the Wallamba and Wang Wauk rivers (both of which fed into Wallis Lake). No farms had been purchased in the area by this time.

White coastal settlement in NSW in the nineteenth century was almost completely focussed on rivers. Until the construction of the railway network, coastal shipping remained fundamental to the movement of goods and was essential to the coastal economy. The Forster-Wallis Lake area remained one of those ‘gaps’ between the major rivers and ports where white people were thin on the ground.

Summary

In this chapter we have been concerned with the Aboriginal cultural landscape in the period 1830-1850. To reiterate a point made earlier, heritage practitioners should not think of the post-contact period as constituting a fixed cultural landscape. Rather, it comprises a cultural landscape that was being constantly reconfigured through time. The entry of white settlers into the northern half of our study area unquestionably had a radical effect on Aboriginal culture there. In the twenty years after 1830 the impact on Aboriginal people in terms of their ‘persons’ was also great and even catastrophic: people died of disease and were killed, sometimes in large numbers, by white settlers. The enormity of these changes was not, however, reflected in great changes in the physical landscape of the area – it remained substantially unchanged. It was in the fifty years that followed that one sees the physical landscape dramatically transformed, with all the implications this had for Aboriginal lifestyle and, indeed, Aboriginal survival.
This period might be described as that in which Aboriginal people’s country was truly taken over. The first major ‘wave’ of white settlers enter the Manning Valley and while white incursions in the Forster area were still on a very small scale, on the Manning a decisive line had been crossed. White settlers there were now behaving as if they owned the place.

In the 1860s there was a quantum leap in white settlement in the Manning Valley. By the early 1860s in the lower Manning alone the settler population had reached around 3,000 people. The Biripi, far outnumbered by settlers, in practical terms had lost control of their country. There is no question that this was a time of great loss for the Biripi, a situation slightly tempered by some new opportunities.

Expansion of agriculture

In the period 1850-70 the number of surveyed portions of land appropriated by settlers in the Manning increased to an average of over fifty per year (compared to less than ten per year for the period 1825-50). Agriculture took over from pastoralism in the lower Manning as the basis of the local white economy.

The bands of ‘jungle-like’ rainforest along the river, from which most of the cedar had already been removed, were broken by areas of open forest, much easier to clear than the rainforest. They were also broken by clearings of bladey grass. Both the open forests and bladey grass clearings are likely to have been created by the firing of the natural vegetation by Aboriginal people over thousands of years. This firing, or ‘fire-stick farming’, was carried out as a hunting tactic in which fire was used to drive medium sized marsupials into nets. But over time this firing also had the effect of increasing the areas where hunting would be most profitable. It was these more open areas which were ‘eagerly sought’ by this first wave of white farmers. By the end of the 1850s most of the ‘favourable agriculture land’ had been appropriated by settlers. As John Ramsland observes,

On arrival at their selected farm portion the settlers erected rough slab or bark huts to provide shelter for their families and then began the arduous task of clearing the thick tangle of brush and large trees before cultivating a small area of soil to provide their immediate food needs.

Yet, however strong the settlers’ desire to clear the land, their actual ability to do so was limited by the primitive technology at their disposal. They had little more than axes and hoes with which to turn a mostly heavily wooded valley into productive farmland.

The heritage of clearing

By the end of the 1850s most properties in the Manning Valley were still small freeholds only partly ‘improved’ (cleared or cultivated). The project of clearing that part of the valley with farming potential still had a long way to go. By the early 1860s cultivated areas on the farms of the lower Manning rarely exceeded ten to fifteen acres. But land clearance accelerated steadily and Aboriginal people assisted in the process, providing much of the necessary labour.

An Aboriginal man known to white settlers as ‘Bony’ is reported to have ‘felled about 30 acres for the late Mr. Joseph Andrews for 2s 6d and rations and a pair of moleskin trousers’. In his reminiscences, John Allan recalled that an Aboriginal man named Jailbah, or Paddy, ‘felled about 29 acres for us [at Kimbriki] for 2s 6d, and used to go out splitting with me’. At the ‘Dunvegan’ farm, two kilometres north...
of Tinonee, a farmer called McLeod employed Aboriginal axemen in felling trees as he cleared the land he had acquired (Figures 23 & 24). The engagement of Aboriginal men in land clearing also occurred in many other parts of NSW. It was, in fact, a normal part of the European colonial pattern to enlist colonised peoples in converting their country for the benefit of the new economy. But there is scant acknowledgement in local white histories of the role Aboriginal labour played in this process. The impression created is that the ‘taming’ of the bush was the work of whites only. This is part of a wider tendency to exclude Aboriginal people from the ‘progress narratives’ which have been written for local areas. Local development is presented in these narratives as being the achievement of the white pioneers and later settlers – Aboriginal achievements, where they are acknowledged, are confined to pre-contact times and to the realm of traditional culture. The net effect is to create an artificial separation between Aboriginal and white history, as if the two belonged to different times and different landscapes.
The impact of ring-barking

The technique of killing trees by stripping a circle of bark from around the trunk was widely practised in the valley from the 1860s. In the Bowman and Gloucester Valleys it was first carried out in 1845 by the AA Co. and by 1872 it was a ‘general practice’ on pastoral properties in the region. Parts of the study area by then featured flats and hillsides with thousands of dead trees stretching to the horizon (see Figure 29). Over large parts of it— as elsewhere in the east of the continent—the native tree cover was wiped off the map, producing a clean slate for the lines that would be drawn by the wire fences introduced from the 1870s. The fertile ground in the valley was all taken up by the 1880s, by which time a continuous mosaic of white farms (most smaller than 2000 acres) extended along the bottom of the valley and over the lower foothills of the eucalypt-forested ranges aligned east-west on either side.

Ring-barking, and bush-clearing in general, meant that Aboriginal people were not merely dispossessed of their land, they also became visible in it in a new and presumably quite disturbing way. The term ‘bush cover’ is normally used in Australia to refer to the way trees and shrubs clothe parts of the terrain, but for Aboriginal people exposed in the post-contact landscape it took on an added meaning of providing refuge from the white gaze. The progressive reduction of bush cover reduced the opportunities for escaping this surveillance.

Upper Manning pastoralism

In the upper Manning in this period— including the upper Manning Valley itself plus the valleys of the Gloucester, Avon, Barnard and Nowendoc rivers— there were widely spaced pastoral stations based in the valley bottoms. Apart from the homesteads and stock yards the only noticeable change which pastoralism made to the environment of this region was caused by the grazing of cattle and sheep in the pre-existing grasslands and woodlands. The country was unfenced and the stock grazed more or less freely.

Early villages

As larger numbers of settlers began arriving on the Manning, tiny villages and towns took shape along the river. In 1854 a portion of the ‘Tarree Estate’ was sub-divided as the basis of a private town which by 1866 had a white population of 150 people. By 1859 the village of Wingham had a courthouse and lockup and by 1866, when its population numbered ninety people, the town had a separate police lockup, a number of churches, a post office and a bank branch. The ‘townspeople’ who occupied these villages were in the shipbuilding and coastal shipping industries, and they were store owners, blacksmiths, timber millers, and shoemakers. The fact that by the end of the 1860s there were fifteen public schools in the valley is indicative of the extent to which it was, by then, a colonised landscape.

Communications

Exports of cedar were beginning to be replaced by exports of hardwood and there was a steep increase in the export of maize. For white people, sea transport was still the main method of travel to Sydney and other coastal destinations (in 1866 a regular weekly steamship service to Sydney began operating). There were wharves on the river at Taree, Wingham, Tinonee and Cundletown. Aboriginal people worked on these wharves, ‘unloading and loading the endless cargo and freight going to and from Sydney’. Aboriginal people themselves may have begun to travel these coastal maritime routes on a very occasional basis. For them the major implication
Working for the white man

From the earliest days of white settlement a large proportion of Aboriginal people in our study area appear to have lived and/or worked on farms. This aspect of the Aboriginal post-contact experience is mentioned only fleetingly in white local history. In John Allan’s reminiscences, for instance, his brother William and ‘Bony’ (presumably a Biripi man) are described as having worked together: ‘William and Bony had felled a strip through the brush on the bank of the river’. Elsewhere he notes that Bony ‘was a good worker, and did a lot of work for us’. Later in his narrative (of the late 1850s or 1860s) John Allan and ‘Black Paddy’ go together to look at some land on the Cooplacurripa River (a tributary of the Manning). He also refers to Jimmy, a ‘blackfellow my mother employed’ at Mt George (1850s) who ‘used to collect firewood and carry water for us’. Another Biripi man, Johnny Martin, on one occasion was given a gun to go out and shoot pigeons for the Allan family. In the same passage he makes mention of ‘one of the No.2 blacks’, presumably Biripi people attached to the pastoral property of that name on the Cooplacurripa River.

A number of Aboriginal people formed close relationships with white farming families and lived on their farms. Jacky Davis and his wife Mary, for instance, were part of the group camped at Lansdowne in the lower Manning Valley (see Figure 22). ‘When all of his tribe was gone this old leader…had built a shack on Ben Saville’s farm and lived out his life there with his last wife…Mary. They were buried on the Saville farm, beside the bank of the Lansdowne River’. The relationship between Davis and Saville went back to the late 1830s when they both worked on the Brimbin property near where Saville eventually had his own farm.

These details help form a picture of where Aboriginal people were in the landscape during the period from the 1850s to the 1870s. As mentioned earlier, while colonisation of the country of the Biripi and the Worimi entailed a reclasification or re-mapping of that country, a re-mapping based on its agricultural productivity. In order to survive in the colonised landscape, Aboriginal people had no choice but to recognise the existence of this new ‘map’. The fact that many or them began to work and even live on white farms reflects an incorporation of Aboriginal people into the agricultural economy and into the core agricultural terrain of the area. This was, for them, a matter of survival, but it also represented a way of retaining contact with their traditional country. Unfortunately, none of the historical sources have provided us with enough information to locate any of the sites of the Aboriginal camps or huts located on white farms in this period.

Aboriginal funerals and graves

It is clear that in this period Aboriginal funerary practices combined a reworking of ‘traditional’ practices with a reworking of European ones. From the mid-1860s we have the following account of an Aboriginal man buried at Cundletown (five kilometres downriver from Taree), apparently in the village cemetery: ‘In conveying the body to a place called a burying ground, in Cundle Town, a large procession of boats was formed, in which were the deceased gentleman’s relations and friends. A pile of saplings was placed on the grave a month after burial. The “procession of boats” may have been a normal feature of Aboriginal funerals in earlier and pre-contact times on the lower Manning. There is also a reference to heaps of burning or smoldering funguses being used to smoke the grave at Aboriginal funerals in the Manning Valley and of men carrying ‘large pans of burning funguses’ as the body was taken to the grave.

In this area, as elsewhere in Australia, white settlers and amateur scientists ‘obtained’ Aboriginal skeletons for private and public collections, often by robbing graves. In his reminiscences, John Allan refers to ‘Crammering Mickey’ who he believed was killed by other Aboriginal people near Bo Bo Creek. ‘We got Mickey’s skull and last time I was in Sydney I saw it in the Museum’. The appropriation of Aboriginal remains as specimens has been an enduring source of outrage and grief to Aboriginal people.

The cadastral grid

The importance of the cadastral grid of property boundaries was mentioned in relation to the previous period (1830-1850). From 1825 the colony of NSW was divided into parishes of twenty-five square miles each. Between 1822 and 1855 a rectangular survey grid was laid down over the settled parts of NSW. Within this grid surveyors divided up land into ‘portions’ for the purposes of sale. In 1854, for instance, 191 portions were
surveyed and sold on the deltaic plains of the lower Manning. Over subsequent years, these portions were themselves often subdivided into smaller rectangular units.

From the mid-1800s there were several government and private surveyors operating in our study area mapping the boundaries of properties. They can be seen as an essential part of the machinery of colonisation, facilitating the intensification of white settlement in the sense that land could not be sold, cleared, and farmed (particularly in this relatively lush and closely settled part of the country) until the property boundaries were established.

It is likely to have been some time, however, before Aboriginal people realised that this largely invisible rectangular survey grid had been laid down over their traditional country. And even when they did become aware of it, they may have regarded it simple as a fancy image or notion in some white person’s head, or just a complicated drawing on a sheet of paper. And yet soon these rectangular lines on paper would be manifest on the ground as fences, representing boundaries not to be crossed except at the risk of being chased or shot at. So the survey grid quickly came to have as many implications for Aboriginal people as it had for settlers and it is a key aspect of the heritage of both.

Gridlocked or ‘in-betweeness’?

The diagram shown here (Figure 25) depicts the intensification of white settlement on the Manning in the mid-nineteenth century. It shows the disappearance of the gallery rainforests (the ‘brush’) along the lower Manning; it shows the ‘filling in’ of the landscape as the rectangular surveyed portions were appropriated and as they began to form a continuous grid of farmland along either side of the river.

Large swathes of Aboriginal country now became difficult or impossible for them to access. Many of the old camp sites, resource places, Dreaming and ceremonial sites were now inside blocks of white owned ‘private property’. The grid of privately owned properties was never, however, completely continuous across the landscape. There were always those blocks and corridors of land that had been set aside as town commons, water reserves, road reserves, travelling stock reserves, or other categories of Crown Reserve. These acted as ‘openings’ or gaps which Aboriginal people used to move through the grid and get access to the river and other places of importance to them (the dotted line in Figure 25 indicates Aboriginal access to the river via such ‘openings’). Aboriginal people were not, then, entirely ‘gridlocked’.

A category of camps came into existence which were situated in these ‘openings’ in the grid (see the list of camp types in Chapter 7 where they are referred to as ‘pocket camps’). In some cases these particular ‘openings’ may have been chosen because they were surrounded by farms where Aboriginal residents of the camps could obtain casual work.

Those who kept their distance

As a general statement, the pattern of Aboriginal settlement in the area by the 1860s was one in which people were concentrated in the white farming terrain and on the fringes of the towns. But they were also still regularly accessing bush country for food and other resources as well, perhaps, as for the escape that the bush offered from the increasingly pervasive presence of white people in the valley. There appear to have been some exceptions to this, however, in the form of a (probably small) minority of Aboriginal people who declined in ‘come in’ to the areas of white settlement. There was an incident reported in 1863 in which a ‘wild blackfellow’ was brought to court at Wingham on a charge of spearing cattle on Dingo Creek. He was reported to have been living alone in the hills and ‘he had not even an iron tomahawk or blanket, his hatchet consisting of pieces of hard stone fastened in a cleft stick’. It was said that at Wingham ‘even the blacks are unable to identify him’. He was acquitted for lack of evidence. Apparently in reference to the same incident, John Allan states that the man had been building a stockyard in the bush for the cattle he had acquired. Allan, who settled at Kimbriki in 1851, also refers to a ‘Long Jacky’ who ‘seldom came near any house, but kept to the bush and the camp, living on what he could get by hunting’. Given that wild foods would have been increasingly depleted in a
zone along either side of the river, those who wished to ‘keep their distance’ would have had more scope to do so in the higher country back from the river. 101

Ceremonial life

An impression is given in the historical literature that ‘traditional’ ceremonial life disappeared from the landscape around this time. This impression was partly created by a deliberate policy on the part of older Aboriginal people of not talking about this aspect of their life to white settlers. The ethnologist, W.J. Enright cites a reference to Aboriginal people in the Paterson area being ‘loath to speak’ on the subject of ceremonial sites.102

Allan refers to ‘bull roarsers’ and ‘cabra stones’, both associated with male initiation rites, still being used in the mid-late nineteenth century in the Manning Valley.103 The first cabra (male initiation) ceremony that he witnessed took place in the 1850s or 1860s and was attended by Aboriginal people from Port Macquarie to Forster.104 The cabra ground consisted of two rings and was surrounding carved trees. Allan also mentions coming across trees in the mountains at Cooplacurripa (see Figure 18) whose bark had been fairly recently carved for such ceremonies.

It is clear, though, that ceremonial life was in the process of rapid change. It appears the practice of scarification had virtually ceased by this time. The location of ceremonial venues must have undergone changes as large parts of Aboriginal country became impossible to access. Also, the fact that many young men were engaged in farm work is likely to have placed a constraint on the formerly elaborate and time-intensive nature of ceremonial life.
There is evidence, however, of Aboriginal people’s frustration at the way curious white settlers tried to ‘gatecrash’ initiation ceremonies, cutting across the protocols of secrecy surrounding these rites. Such exclusiveness did not apply to occasions such as corroborees. Ella Simon describes the friendship between the white settler, Thomas Trotter, and Aboriginal families who lived in the Purfleet area prior to the establishment of the Aboriginal Reserve settlement there in 1900.

Old T.D. Trotter, who lived to be nearly a hundred, told me of the big corroborees they had there when he was a boy. He used to help them build up their fires and think it was a great privilege. They were very fond of this little white boy and he was very fond of them. He wanted so much to see them dance, but they always started well after he had been called home.109

Impact and agency

It is probable that there were Aboriginal people who modified their lifestyle radically to accommodate the constraints and possibilities that came with white settlement, but there were also those who chose to remain closer to the old lifestyle. Yet by this period there can have been few Biripi who had not sampled and adopted elements of the material culture of the white settlers, be it steel axes, guns and horses or tea, tobacco or rum. While we have stressed that both cultures – the Aboriginal and the European – learnt from each other, this is not to suggest that cross-cultural exchanges and dealngs took place in a climate of equality. No matter how the Biripi responded, the presence of white settlers in their country was always something imposed rather than invited. Effectively it was a case of invasion.

By the 1850s the pressure on the whole way of life of the Biripi was intense on all fronts. They were having to make huge and rapid changes to their diet and their pattern of seasonal movement. Their bodies were being assaulted by introduced diseases and in some cases by European weapons; they were having to revise many of their deepest beliefs about the nature of the world.

Cultural change, however, is never driven purely by external pressure. In Marshall Sahlins’ words, it is a process that is ‘externally induced, yet internally orchestrated’.124 Even where external influence is massive, uninvited and unwelcome, people still have agency in how they respond to it.125 We use the term ‘agency’ instead of, say, ‘choice’, because it stresses that even under great external pressure there is always a strategic dimension to people’s response to pressure. Their actions are always ‘wilful’.126 While individual Aboriginal people must surely at times have felt despair at what was happening there is no reason to think that at other times they did not respond with imagination and humour to the changes. It is important, also, to remember that cultures are made up of individuals and that while some individual Aboriginal people may have resisted change it is likely that others were stimulated by it. What is critical to keep in mind here is that people are always conscious of themselves as individuals as well as members of a culture. As individuals, they ‘invent’ or build their lives and their futures, moving forward from day-to-day according to the opportunities that open up, the setbacks, the bits of wisdom acquired, the risks taken. On the nineteenth-century NSW lower North Coast, this applied as much, say, to an eighteen-year-old Aboriginal boy as it did to an eighteen-year-old white settler’s son.

What is culture?

It has often suited the purposes of colonists to describe the colonised as having unchanging and unchangeable cultures which can only collapse or erode upon contact with the so-called ‘progressive’ cultures of the West. Aboriginal culture in the nineteenth century, like all cultures, was not a structure or ‘thing’: it was a way of life, a way of understanding the world, and a way of dealing with change. Aboriginal culture did not collapse upon contact with settler society. It underwent radical change, just as settler culture in the colony was also undergoing rapid change, by which process it became increasingly distanced from nineteenth-century metropolitan English and Irish ways of life.

Cross-cultural exchanges

The mid-nineteenth century was a period of rapid learning for both the Biripi and the white settlers. The Biripi were learning to relate to a foreign culture and society, the settlers were learning to relate to a foreign environment. The following table indicates some of the things the two cultures borrowed and learned from each other.

We should remember that in this period, as in the previous one, many of the white settlers experienced a hard and frugal existence and although they may have imagined their lives as utterly different from their Aboriginal neighbours, in fact (on the surface at least) they were not. The first shelters built by pioneer families in Taree township we know to have been temporary huts made of ‘locally collected bark or tents made of calico… soon replaced by split slab
### Borrowings by Blacks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td>Some settlers learn to speak Biripi language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biripi language</td>
<td>Aboriginal place names and other words (e.g., early settlers in Manning call their huts gunyahs).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses, guns, steel fish hooks</td>
<td>Aboriginal artefacts collected, heritage sites appropriated into the national heritage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming know-how and use of domesticates</td>
<td>Knowledge of wild foods, use of bark for building huts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumables (tea, flour, sugar, tobacco, alcohol)</td>
<td>Borrowing of Aboriginal objects as emblems (e.g., the Boomerang Theatre in Taree).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rites and celebrations (e.g., Christmas, agricultural shows)</td>
<td>Using of Aboriginal objects as emblems (e.g., the Boomerang Theatre in Taree).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Changing material culture

Aboriginal use of their ‘own’ artefacts continued, variably, well into the post-contact period. Speaking of the 1850s and 60s in the Manning Valley, John Allan recalls that he ‘never saw a blackfellow… unarmed. They always had a tomahawk in their belts, no matter what they were doing, and mostly had a nulla nulla also’. They were still using hunting, fighting, and fishing spears as well as shields and boomerangs. Allan also notes that in the nineteenth century the coastal Biripi used ‘flint’ and quartz flakes to fashion ironbark points for their fishing spears. It is probable that at least some of the stone artefact scatters recorded by archaeologists in our study area date from the mid- and even late-nineteenth century and that they represent activities of this type.

For some new settlers to the area, the process of cross-cultural exchange began from the moment they arrived. Allan records that when, as a boy, he set foot on the beach at Harrington in 1851: ‘I had my first experience of the blacks there as I gave one a waterproof coat for two big mullet that he had speared. I was about half starved and they did go down well after I roasted them on the coals as I saw them doing’. Such exchanges of objects and ideas did not stop at the beach. They continued across many aspects of Aboriginal and settler life, making the subsequent history and heritage of each culture inseparable.
From an Aboriginal standpoint, and in terms of race relations, perhaps the most important trend in the period 1870-1900 was the increasing separation of black and white people in the landscape. This was partly to do with the simple fact that an increasingly large part of the landscape came to be privately owned (i.e. white owned) and thus inaccessible to Aboriginal people. It is also the case that this separation underlined the nature of race relations in rural NSW in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The increasing separation of black and white populations that resulted is discussed in the following pages as well as the ways by which Aboriginal people were able, at least to some extent, to counteract this.

Separation and segregation

Separation and segregation, along with dispossession, accommodation and resistance, are unquestionably key post-contact heritage themes. But what do we mean by separation and segregation? In general terms they refer to efforts to keep Aboriginal people at a distance from white society. However, there is an important distinction to be made between ‘separation’ and ‘segregation’.

5 Separation & co-existence 1870-1900

Explicitly segregationist policies and practices, both formal and informal, were not implemented in a significant way on the NSW lower North Coast until the end of the nineteenth century (they are examined in greater detail in the following chapter). Yet there were efforts to separate Aboriginal people from the mainstream of society in the period immediately prior to this, and these were underwritten by humanitarianism. This humanitarian concern about Aborigines emerged in the context of growing concerns about contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and the perceived threat of degeneration and contamination as a result of such contact. We note here, in relation to the treatment of Aboriginal people, that nineteenth-century humanitarianism incorporated the belief that Aboriginal people were vulnerable partly because they were believed to be more ‘primitive’ than white people. Many people today regard this as fundamentally racist. However, the difference between humanitarians and others in defining the ‘Aboriginal problem’ in this period was that the former believed that Aboriginal people could be improved and uplifted through education and evangelism, while the others believed they could not.

Separation and segregation are unquestionably key post-contact heritage themes. It is hoped that what follows will stimulate further and more detailed work in NSW drawing on historical records to map these themes at a landscape level.

Humanitarian separation

So the last decades of the nineteenth century were marked by a greater separation of Aboriginal people, both spatially and socially, from the mainstream of life in our study area. The beginning of Christian missionary activity on the lower North Coast in this period promoted or reinforced the idea among the area’s white population that Aboriginal people should be kept at a distance from white society ‘for their own good’. The missionaries were particularly concerned...
at what they saw as the corruption and exploitation of Aboriginal people. In particular, the ‘evils’ of alcohol and sexual liaisons with whites were key missionary concerns. Humanitarian concerns about contact between blacks and whites, and the perceived threat that ‘white’ vices posed to the survival of Aboriginal people, developed in tandem with changes in the nature of Aboriginal settlement. As Aboriginal people were increasingly dispossessed of their land, with the intensification of white settlement in certain areas, the former mostly came to be occupying camps on the fringes of white townships.

This humanitarian strand in white society provided the background to the establishment of the NSW Aborigines’ Protection Board (APB) in 1883. The APB was involved in establishing separate Reserves for Aboriginal people, many of which included Aboriginal-only schools. For instance, a school for Aboriginal children at Barrington was opened in 1890 and another at Forster in the same year. These were significant steps in the process of separating the Aboriginal population from the non-Aboriginal population.

**Intensification of white settlement**

By 1872 ‘an almost continuous line of settlements occupied the alluvial soils along some 290 kilometres of river frontage along the Manning River and approximately 153 kilometres along the frontages of the Dingo, Bow Bow, Burrell, and Cedar Party Creeks’. ‘Free selection’ of land in NSW began in 1861 with the passage of the Robertson Land Acts but did not really take off until 1871. In our area in the 1870s and 80s four times as many portions of land were appropriated for white settlement than in the previous two decades. The effects of this can be seen by comparing Figure 27 with the equivalent map for 1861 (Figure 22).

Virtually all the bottom land of the Manning valley and its tributaries was taken up in the course of this expansion of white settlement. The population of the lower Manning almost doubled between 1872 and 1896.

**White settlement in the Forster area**

Earlier it was noted that the Forster-Wallis Lake area represented one of those ‘backwaters’ on the NSW coast which attracted very little white settlement, this settlement being concentrated along the valleys of the major coastal rivers. The area of present-day Forster remained a backwater, as far as white settlement went, until the 1870s.

The first white migrant to the area did not take up land at Forster until 1859 (until 1869 the village was named Minimbah). Two or three others acquired land between Forster and Cape Hawke over the next five years and a plan for the village of Forster was drawn up by a government surveyor in 1869. This plan shows two settler landholdings of forty acres each abutting Wallis Lake in the area of the present town. The first saw mill began operating in 1870, the same year that work at the first shipbuilding yard began. Timber production, shipbuilding, fishing and shellfishing were to be the mainstay of the local economy for the next several decades—in fact, until tourism began to become significant around the 1920s. While we have found no documentary evidence for Aboriginal employment in any of these industries in the nineteenth century it is highly likely that their labour was sought in a situation where white labour was scarce and Aboriginal people had existing skills in wood-working and bushcraft.

**White Population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>5170 (Manning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>5500 (Manning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>10,000+ (lower Manning)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first public school opened at Forster in 1872 with a roll of only twenty-seven students. Even by the 1890s, while settlers in the area numbered only in the hundreds rather than the thousands, the population of the northernmost drainage system feeding into Wallis Lake, ‘Wollombi’ in Figure 28, by 1896 the river valley was almost completely settled.
and farming along the Wang Wauk valley was also extensive. There was no permanent white presence on the Tuncurry side of Wallis Lake until 1875, some fifty years after the beginning of white settlement in the Manning Valley. By 1877 there was a timber mill there and a general store. Tuncurry had developed a village centre by 1892.

There is scant documentary historical information on the Biripi people of the Forster area for the last decades of the nineteenth century (see Chapter 13).

**Wire fencing and ring-barking**

As mentioned early, the technique of ring-barking was introduced to the area in 1845 (see page 29). In association with the intensification of white settlement in the decades after 1870, ring-barking and another new ‘technology’, wire fencing, had a major impact on the appearance of the landscape in this period.

In the early years of white farming, fences were built from the timber cleared from the land. Needless to say these mostly post-and-rail fences were extremely labour intensive to build and consequently were normally confined to the boundaries of cultivated fields, stockyards and home paddocks. Fencing wire became available in Australia in the 1870s and barbed wire ‘came into common use’ in the 1890s. The introduction and spread of wire fences through the study area allowed greater management of stock, especially in the more densely settled areas such as the lower Manning. In the pastoral country of the upper Manning, wire fencing was in general use by the 1880s, the fencing of paddocks becoming particularly important when sheep were reintroduced and shepherds were found to be unavailable.

The cadastral grid of property boundaries which formerly was only visible in map form (e.g. on parish plans which showed the grid of ‘portions’ and town blocks) now became visible across the landscape as a grid of fenced boundaries. For many Aboriginal people the truth may only now have sunk in that the ‘autonomous’ post-contact camps have a special significance (see page 57). A case in point is the ‘autonomous’ post-contact camps have a special significance (see page 57). A case in point is the ‘autonomous’ post-contact camps have a special significance (see page 57). A case in point is the ‘autonomous’ post-contact camps have a special significance (see page 57). A case in point is the ‘autonomous’ post-contact camps have a special significance (see page 57). A case in point is the ‘autonomous’ post-contact camps have a special significance (see page 57). A case in point is the ‘autonomous’ post-contact camps have a special significance (see page 57). A case in point is the ‘autonomous’ post-contact camps have a special significance (see page 57).

Open space and ‘privacy’

From the earliest days of white settlement Aboriginal people were able to use the bush as a place to withdraw from the white presence and even, on occasion, to flee from it. As the bush disappeared from a great expanse of the landscape, however, the ability of the bush to shelter people from the white gaze diminished (see also page 29). Aboriginal people moving across hillsides that had been ring-barked would be exposed to the often hostile gaze of white landowners in a way that they had not been previously. These cleared areas now became ‘open space’ in the sense of being a space where there was no privacy. Aboriginal people who sought the cover which the bush offered would have to find it further away from the centres of white settlement. In our area and in most of eastern NSW this meant away from the flatter country and into the surrounding hills.

It is in this context that some of what we have termed the ‘autonomous’ post-contact camps have a special significance (see page 57). A case in point is the coastal camp at Saltwater (see Figure 62). When local Aboriginal people speak of the Saltwater camp they frequently cite its seclusion from white people as one of its key attractions and values. Until the bush there was ‘cleaned up’ (thinned out) by the local council in the 1970s the area of the camp was thickly vegetated with large trees, vines and shrubs. People cite the loss of this bush ‘cover’ as a major blow to their enjoyment of the place (see Chapter 10 for oral history records of Saltwater).

Despite the intensification of white settlement during the period 1870-1900 there were still a number of
zones or categories of land with little or no white presence – places that Aboriginal people, if they chose, could withdraw to. These were the bush covered hilly or mountainous lands between the creeks, the swampy areas of the lower valley and the sandy country backing the beaches as well as those beach areas relatively unfrequented by whites.\footnote{This was the country that was mapped as unproductive in terms of the agricultural economy but which remained productive in terms of hunting and gathering (see Chapter 2).} The hilly bushland part of this terrain did, however, shrink during these last decades of the nineteenth century as farmers acquired areas of hill-slope bushland behind their farms (which fronted the rivers and creeks) in order to run stock on it. White settlement was thus expanding sideways from the settled strips along the valley bottoms.

Separation in the landscape

We have argued that increasingly intensive occupation of the landscape by white settlers had the effect of marginalising and excluding Aboriginal people from progressively extensive expanses of the same landscape. An increasingly large fraction of the landscape came under the category of private property, a category of land that became a hard reality on the ground as it was cleared of bush-cover and fenced. Progressively, the white population lived in that part of the landscape that was private property and Aboriginal people lived in that part that remained in the form of various categories of Crown Land reserve – e.g. town commons, forest reserves, stock reserves, road reserves, Aboriginal reserves.

This expansionist history is generally seen exclusively as a theme of non-Indigenous heritage. There is a strong case to be made, however, that it is equally a key theme for Aboriginal heritage – in other words, for the heritage of those who were on the receiving end of the process. It is a theme, moreover, that is well documented in government land administration archives, historical Parish Plans, and in other readily accessible forms. Unlike many other post-contact heritage themes (e.g. frontier violence), it is eminently mappable on the ground.

The pattern of movement

The impression one often receives from books and articles on local history in NSW is that from the late nineteenth century Aboriginal people lived on ‘missions’ (mostly Aboriginal Reserves) and were more-or-less absent from the rest of the landscape. This impression is reinforced by the tendency of historic heritage inventories to consist almost
entirely of non-Indigenous heritage places. The larger landscape is ‘filled up’ with the history and heritage of white society and Aboriginal people rendered largely invisible in it. Throughout this book we have presented evidence showing that Aboriginal people, in various capacities, were present across the landscape even after the establishment of Aboriginal Reserves. However, it was not a case of them simply being present at a multitude of points rather than at a single point. Movement through the landscape, between these points, is a key element of the post-contact story. In what follows, we list some of the types of Aboriginal movement through the landscape of our study area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

**Long distance visiting**

Frequent visiting took place between Aboriginal people from Forster and those in the Manning Valley. An insight into the larger scale pattern of Aboriginal movement in the study area is provided by an 1893 reference to Aboriginal people from Forster having made it ‘a practice to visit Taree during show time’. (The Taree Show was inaugurated in 1878.) The teacher at the Forster Aboriginal school wrote on January 31, 1893: ‘During the last week I went to the Trouble to try and bring them back from the Manning River; I could only get two to come; the others have no intention of coming back. An 1876 report mentions an Aboriginal group from Cooplacurripa (on the upper Manning) being on a visit to their “sable brethren” at Wingham. These are suggestive of a pattern of comparatively long-distance visiting that may have operated on a quite regular basis, underwritten by an obviously long-established Aboriginal custom of long-distance walking. Changes in this pattern of movement would have been brought about, among other things, by the possession of horses (and sometimes buggies) by a significant number of Aboriginal people. The introduction of the pneumatic tyred bicycle in Australia in the 1890s is of Aboriginal people. The introduction of the pneumatic tyred bicycle in Australia in the 1890s is also likely to have had an effect. The life of Percy Mumbler, on the lower NSW South Coast, is illustrative of this mobile lifestyle as a persistent theme in the lives of some Aboriginal people through into the late twentieth century.

**Shifting residence by family groups**

A 1905 report on the situation at the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve noted that while three families were present there at the time of the inspection, over the previous twenty years or so the number of families camped there fluctuated from five or six to only one or two. In 1911 the Wingham police reported that though two huts had been erected on the Dingo Creek reserve they “had trouble keeping them occupied, as they (the Aboriginals) are continually moving about o’possum trapping and shooting”. The Wingham police in 1911 claimed the Killawarra Reserve was “used principally as a camping ground for the Aborigines when travelling up and down the river”. A police report on the situation at this Reserve in 1915 states: “There is nearly always one or two families on the Reserve, and when there are not it is handy to them when they are travelling about which they frequently do from the lower to the Upper Part of the Manning.” What this suggests is that, in the late nineteenth century, Aboriginal family groups may have continued to move fairly extensively between several camps and reserves even though they may have maintained a ‘base’ at one of these locations.

**Constant itineraries?**

A 1906 inspection report on the Killawarra Aboriginal Reserve states that apart from William Rush, “very few other aboriginals use any part of this area with the exception of spending a day or two with Rush when passing”. However, an inspection report on the same Reserve, dated 1911, records “there were some 30 or 40 individuals including 14 children up to the age of 16 years who were quite without any fixed abode... They say they are hunted about like beasts when they camp on the roads...” What this hints at is the possibility that a portion of the Aboriginal population at this time may have lived an almost completely itinerant existence. The life of Percy Mumbler, on the lower NSW South Coast, is illustrative of this mobile lifestyle as a persistent theme in the lives of some Aboriginal people through into the late twentieth century.

**Localised movements**

Aboriginal residents of the Purfleet Reserve used boats for fishing and are likely to have ranged in their movements along the lower reaches of the river and along the nearby coastline in a pattern of day trips and overnight trips. Pertinent here is the 1912 response from the Wingham police to the Wingham police in 1911 claiming the Killawarra Reserve was ‘used principally as a camping ground for the Aborigines when travelling up and down the river’. A police report on the situation at this Reserve in 1915 states: ‘There is nearly always one or two families on the Reserve, and when there are not it is handy to them when they are travelling about which they frequently do from the lower to the Upper Part of the Manning.’ What this suggests is that, in the late nineteenth century, Aboriginal family groups may have continued to move fairly extensively between several camps and reserves even though they may have maintained a ‘base’ at one of these locations.

**Mutual visits between kin on the different Reserves**

During an inspection of the Forster Aboriginal Reserve in 1911, Robert McDonald, a member of the Aborigines’ Protection Board said he met ‘several of the aboriginal residents of the Sawyers’ Point Reserve (Kanah) at the Forster Reserve [they were visiting their relations at the latter place...]’. This pattern of inter-community visiting persists into the present day (see below). The Manning River Times reported in 1901 that an Aboriginal woman, Mrs Bugg, had died at the Wingham fringe camp: ‘The deceased lived for many years on the outskirts of Taree, and only recently went to Wingham to stay with her sons’.

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suggestion that Purfleet Reserve be closed and the Aboriginal residents be moved to Dingo Creek: ‘No doubt some trouble would be experienced removing the Aborigines from near Taree, it being their home in most cases from birth, also they are within a few miles of the ocean and it is said they visit it frequently’. Oral histories of Aboriginal people recorded for our project indicate that a day-to-day pattern of walking over the landscapes surrounding the ‘missions’ (Reserves) at Forster and Purfleet was a normal part of life up until the 1970s. Aboriginal car ownership has increased sharply since about the 1970s but it is arguable that Aboriginal people even today still move on foot through the local landscape to a much greater extent than their white counterparts.

Travelling for seasonal and other work

From the mid-nineteenth century seasonal farm work was an important part of the Aboriginal economy on the lower North Coast. This included fruit and vegetable picking both on farms that were within walking distance of Aboriginal settlements and those that were further away and where people camped for the duration of the picking. In the 1950s and 60s Aboriginal people (individuals and families) from the area took part in the long-distance picking ‘cycles’ in NSW which saw people from Forster Reserve, for instance, travel to and from the picking camps around Nowra on the NSW South Coast. The participation of Aboriginal men in the shearing industry was another aspect of this pattern of movement.

Moving through the grid

The oral histories collected for this project (see Part 3) show an often detailed knowledge by Aboriginal people of the ‘map’ of white properties in the areas around the Purfleet and Forster ‘missions’. This knowledge is most often articulated in terms of whether the landowners were friendly, neutral or hostile to Aboriginal people. In practical terms, it was this knowledge that largely dictated the paths that Aboriginal people took through the agricultural part of the colonised landscape.

Change in the Aboriginal economy

The changing landscape of the study area meant changes in the way Aboriginal people made a living. By this period, for instance, the logging and milling of hardwood timber had become a major industry on the Manning. By 1872 some one and a half million feet of sawn timber was exported.
Even before the arrival of chain saws and tracked vehicles, this logging obviously changed the nature of the forests, diminishing their potential to sustain Aboriginal people who wanted to live off the bush. Hunting and gathering native animals and plants by this period had inevitably become a marginal, though valued, part of Aboriginal life.

At the same time, the introduction and spread of exotic animals provided new possibilities. It is clear from both the documentary and oral history for the lower North Coast that rabbits were hunted on a widespread basis by Aboriginal people both for sale (of skins) and for food. Some Aboriginal people on the lower Manning and at Forster were able to make a living by fishing and there is no question that fish and shellfish continued to be a mainstay of Aboriginal diet. A few Aboriginal people also took up farming.

It would certainly be a mistake to think that Aboriginal people during this period were totally dependent on government rations or handouts. As Goodall notes, in 1880 in NSW eighty-one percent of the Aboriginal population was economically independent.

In the following pages we look at some aspects of the new economy.

Aboriginal farming

By the early 1890s virtually all the alluvial soils of the lower Manning Valley had been cleared and ninety-one percent of the agriculture land was sown with maize.

For this period we have the first documentary evidence of Aboriginal farming in the area. The evidence gives only glimpses of this aspect of life but it allows us to guess at the wider picture. Billy Johnson, born at Curricabakh, who worked as a tracker on the Clarence before returning to the Manning began farming at Killawarra (see Chapter 12) in the early 1880s.

According to Ramsland:

"On an unused Reserve for Aborigines at Killawarra about six miles from Wingham he set up a family residence in the early 1880’s and attempted to grow maize, potatoes, and tobacco which he surrounded with a sapling fence. He put about two acres under cultivation. He was still there in 1895 with three other adults and seven children."

From a note in the minutes of the Aborigines’ Protection Board for 1911 we know that Aboriginal people were still using the Reserve at that time: ‘request by Aboriginal for material to add to his house’. Most of the land had been leased by the Board to white farmers by 1918 and in 1921 the APB minutes record that the land was handed over to the Lands Department for disposal ‘in view of the fact that this land is never used by Aborigines’.

Until the work of the historian Heather Goodall few white people in NSW knew that Aboriginal people in the State had a long history of farming and that in many areas they had lobbied and harassed the authorities in order to acquire land to farm. Much of the despair and demoralisation in Aboriginal communities by the mid-twentieth century appears to have stemmed from losing the struggle to keep land they had cleared and farmed. They had to watch as Aboriginal Reserves were revoked and either sold or leased to white farmers.

We know that an Aboriginal settlement existed in the Barrington valley, in the upper Manning, by the late nineteenth century. The Aboriginal people of Barrington were farmers in their own right as well as doing stock work and providing agricultural labour for white pastoralists and farmers in the area. It is known that ‘a few agriculturalists’ had selected portions of land on the narrow strip of alluvial soil along the Barrington river in the 1880s. It is likely that it was at this time that the Barrington Aboriginals gained access to the land that subsequently became Aboriginal Reserve 35673 (see Figure 32). The Cook family (Aboriginal) were ultimately forced off this land when the Reserve was revoked in 1957. As often occurred, the loss came in increments. The ABP minutes for 1928 record that the twenty-five acre ‘back half’ of the Reserve was leased a Mr Higgins (presumably a white farmer).

When the rest of the Reserve was disposed of, members of the Cook family moved to Armidale, Kempsey, and elsewhere. They preserve memories of life on the Barrington farm as part of their family history and have on occasion gone back to visit the old farm. The graves of three family members are present, outlined with stones, below a tree on the
back half of the old farm (see Figure 32). Down the hill towards the Barrington River a crepe laurel and an old orange tree mark the site of the old Cook homestead. The old house was demolished decades ago and a new house stands on the same site. When Cook family members return to look at the farm, the crepe laurel and the orange tree trigger memories of the old farm life (interviews conducted with members of the Cook family in 1998).

In both the Killawarra and Barrington cases it has been an easy matter to locate the former Aboriginal Reserves from cadastral information in published lists of Aboriginal Reserves114 or in the Aboriginals’ Protection Board archives. No search has been made for physical (archaeological) traces of Aboriginal farming at either Barrington or Killawarra.

Aboriginal people in the fishing industry

There are enough references to Aboriginal people fishing from bark canoes on the Manning River to indicate that this was a major part of the Biripi food economy and that it continued to be so during the first decades of white settlement. There are numerous references in white settler reminiscences to the skill of Aboriginal people in spearing fish from bark canoes on the Manning.151 Fishing boats operated by white people were present on the lower Manning by 1882 and in Wallis Lake and the Wallamba River by 1889.152 It is evident that Aboriginal people both on the lower Manning and at Forster wanted a part of this industry, presumably using the fishing skills they already possessed and drawing upon a vast accumulated knowledge of the coastal and estuarine fisheries.

In the table below, a summary of references to Aboriginal fishing boats in the Aborigines’ Protection Board archives is provided. No search has been made for physical (archaeological) traces of Aboriginal fishing boats at either Barrington or Killawarra.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Reference Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Taree</td>
<td>‘Oars needed for the Aborigines’ boat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Taree</td>
<td>‘Repairs to the boat used by the Manning River Aborigines’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Taree</td>
<td>‘Replacing the Aborigines’ boat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Taree</td>
<td>‘Repairs to the Aborigines’ boat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Forster</td>
<td>‘Repair and repaint the Aborigines’ boat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>R.A. Price</td>
<td>MP recommends that Aborigines at Taree be supplied with a boat &amp; gear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>Forster</td>
<td>Forster police: ‘Boat needs repair, cannot be used’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The white settler practice of dredging oysters from the river channels along the lower Manning rapidly expanded from the beginning of the 1860s until by 1882 some fifty to sixty boats were engaged in this enterprise.153 It was an inherently short-lived approach to oyster harvesting, however, as the beds were rapidly exhausted. It was soon replaced by oyster farming. In 1882, the first lease for oyster racks was issued on the Wallamba River. As white oyster farmers ‘staked out’ the productive estuarine and lake environments we can assume that Aboriginal shellfish gathering was increasingly pushed into those oyster habitats that were not commercially attractive or viable.

The founder of the fishing industry at Tuncurry was Philip Sciacca who arrived there from Italy in 1889-18. The following year he was joined by his countryman, Vincenzo Fazio, whose family regularly bought fish from Aboriginal fishermen both at Purfleet and Forster. The focus of Aboriginal fishing at Tuncurry-Forster was Wallis Lake rather than the open sea.

The Aboriginal fishermen of Forster operated from boats built for the conditions of the lake and not the conditions of the sea. Documentary material relating to the history of Aboriginal post-contact fishing mostly relates to the provision by the government of boats or funds for boat construction and for the provision of boat and fishing gear. A rich oral history exists for Aboriginal fishing (both subsistence and commercial) for our study area. Some indication of this richness is provided in Chapters 10 & 19.

Freedom on the waterways

In a period in which Aboriginal people were increasingly restricted in their movements on land, and increasingly subject to white surveillance there, the waterways of the coast, the rivers, and lakes provided greater scope for freedom of movement. The waterways of the lower Manning had been the highways for white settler movements in the mid-nineteenth century, but as the area’s road network expanded these same waterways receded into the background of settler existence. Frequent main by commercial fishermen and oyster farmers, to a certain extent they became a refuge for Aboriginal people.

The waterways around the deltaic islands of the lower Manning and the islands and margins of Wallis Lake are an important ‘landscape of reference’ in Aboriginal oral history (see Chapters 13 & 19). Even today, the margins of many of these waterways are densely vegetated and provide a myriad secluded spots for resting, picnicking, camping, and carrying out the various chores associated with fishing. Crown water reserves (100 feet wide) along the edges of some parts of the river provided sufficient access to the river bank for Aboriginal people to moor their fishing boats and dry their nets on the wooden racks they constructed (see Figure 35).

Boat building

Aboriginal fishing and boat-building went hand-in-hand on the NSW lower North Coast. The table above testifies to the role of the Aborigines’ Protection Board in supplying fishing boats and...
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Aboriginal funerals and graves

In the 1870s, when the Aboriginal man “Tommy” died at Krambach, his body was carried on a sheet of bark to a grave where he was buried with his knees tied to his chest. Placed in the grave with him were a new blanket ‘and various weapons common to the race’. Krambach, on the upper Wallamba River, was a small white farming enclave fairly remote from the main hub of settlement on the lower Manning. In such areas ‘traditional’ burial practices may have endured longer than elsewhere in the region. By the late nineteenth century Aboriginal people were establishing their own cemeteries on the fringes of white towns such as Taree.

By the early decades of the twentieth century Aboriginal people were burying their dead in coffins in European-style graves. A special Aboriginal cemetery was established a few kilometres south of the Purfleet Reserve in the early twentieth century (see Figure 56). The transition to European-style burial practices had been partly forced by government health regulations and, from the 1930s, by the supervisory role of the white manager at Purfleet.

An Aboriginal burial ground was established in the late nineteenth century in what is now suburban Wingham, most likely by residents of the fringe camp on the Wingham town common. A local white author recorded that, ‘Aboriginal warriors and elders were buried in a sitting position with the chin resting on the knees. These graves can be identified years later by the short sunken indentation in the earth’.

He continued: ‘A good example can be seen behind the saw mill in Lambert Street, Wingham. This plot next to a small gully among a few gum trees should be fenced and reserved for posterity.’

The above two cases indicate the sort of spatial detail present in the available documentary sources. In the former case, the only detail we have is the place name ‘Krambach’ – the grave in question might lie anywhere within the area of about ten square kilometres known by that name. In the Wingham case, by contrast, the reference takes us almost directly to the site. Here we are fortunate in that an early Parish Plan for Wingham (pre-1900) shows a small rectangular reserve (approx. ten by twenty metres) gazetted in 1908 ‘for preservation of graves’. The reserve is situated on Lambert Street on the western edge of this small town (see Figure 36).

Ceremonial life

The most detailed account of a Biripi male initiation ceremony is that by the ethnologist R.H. Mathews for the 1889 event held on Stony Creek about two and a half kilometres upstream from Kimbriki on the mid reaches of the Manning River. Situated in ‘thickly wooded country’, two raised-earth circles were constructed for this ceremony. Around these circles were twenty-one trees carved with ritual designs. Mathews provided a detailed description of the ceremonies and the venue and included drawings of the designs on the carved trees. He describes the location as being ‘about three-quarters of a mile up Stony Creek from the crossing-place over that creek of the public road from Tinonee to George Town’ (on the south side of the Manning River, about twelve kilometres southeast of Wingham). He does not say on which side of the creek the ceremonial ground lay, nor how far distant it was from the creek. This site has not been recorded on the ground.

These initiation ceremonies appear to have been modified versions of pre-contact ceremonies. Certain ritual acts, such as body scarification and the knocking out of a (boy’s) front tooth, appear to have ceased very early in the contact period.

In his 1905 reminiscences, John Allan refers in passing to a male initiation ceremony held ‘at the back of Purfleet’. At what he refers to as ‘the last ceremony at Kimbriki’ (likely to be the 1889 ceremony described by Mathews), he relates trying to take a photograph of the ‘grand finale’ but being stopped from doing so by one of the men. His locational descriptions are too vague to provide a basis for an on-ground search to relocate the
ceremonial sites (‘back of Purfleet’, for instance, presumably means somewhere on the forested hill slopes in Kiwarrak State Forest south of Purfleet). He is even less specific in regard to dates. The events he describes are left to ‘float’, as it were, in the span of the second half of the nineteenth century. This is typical of a certain type or genre of local historical writing, often in the form of reminiscences, which refer to ‘the old days’ as an undifferentiated bloc of time.

It is clear that corroborees continued to be held well into the post-contact period. These were ceremonial dance events which were comparatively frequent and unrestricted (i.e. not surrounded by the secrecy of initiation rites). Ella Simon mentions a corroboree ground at Gillawarra, near Purfleet, which she was told about by a 100-year-old white landowner who remembered it being in use when he was a boy.  

Obviously, by this time, many Aboriginal Dreaming sites were no longer accessible to Aboriginal people; with the breakdown of the initiation process the transmission of precise knowledge about these places was curtailed. This did not mean, though, that the places ceased to be a living part of the Aboriginal cultural landscape. In Through My Eyes, for instance, Ella Simon describes a Dreaming story which relates to a rock in Wallis Lake, the rock being the embodiment of a clever woman. It was known to contemporary Aboriginal people as ‘Granny Rock’.  

She also mentions a lone mangrove tree on the beach near Blackhead (south of Saltwater): ‘We were told not to touch this tree. If we did it would bring very heavy rain’. Totemic beliefs and practices continued into the twentieth century on the North Coast and in other parts of NSW. Recent research commissioned by the Cultural Heritage Division of the Department of Environment and Conservation, has demonstrated that totemism continues to be a living force in Aboriginal NSW.
in another locality. Instructions to this effect were issued on the 25th instant.

I have the honor, etc.,

A. C. PETTITT, Secretary, A.P. Board.

________

Railway Sleepers.

that it is proposed to remove the Aborigines, who are now living in the vicinity of Wingham to reserves another locality, instructions to

who had significant understandings, were un

An apology absence of Mr.
The Chairman, a copy of the listing the advertising.

He was told

The Chairman object of the meeting said to try and srs. J. Skinner, Garardson, D. St. Donell, and W.

Other Three
As we move into the twentieth century we take account of the policy and practice of racial segregation as an increasingly important factor in shaping the cultural landscape as it was experienced by Aboriginal people.

White settlement consolidated

During the early 1900s pastoralists extended their leaseholds into the rugged forest country between the creeks and rivers of the Manning Valley. Birrell describes the situation in the valley in 1896: “Thus, in the lower valleys a patchwork of cleared, cultivated, cropped and temporarily grassed fields extended over the alluvial soils adjacent to the major streams; small discontinuous patches of cultivation and cleared land, interspersed with forests, extended into the upper reaches of the small tributary creeks; and on the lower slopes of the valleys the hardwood forests had been ringbarked or cleared to form a rough pasture of native grasses.”

Figure 27 shows the extent of white settlement by 1896. By this time appropriation of land for farming and other purposes associated with white settlement approximated the situation in the present day. It was remarked for the previous period (1870-1900) that Aboriginal people occupied and utilised gaps and openings in the cadastral grid. Having been dispossessed of their country, they had to live around and in-between the privately owned properties of white settlers. This remained true for the present period, though what changes is that the grid of privately owned land extends further into those areas previously considered marginal or completely unfit for white landuse. A comparison of the map in Figure 22 (1861) with that in Figure 27 (1896) shows an expansion of land appropriation in coastal areas. Despite this, there remained substantial tracts of coastline which remained unsettled and hence more-or-less available to Aboriginal people as places to camp and visit, places to obtain seafood and enjoy the coastal lifestyle. Along with the bush covered hill country, these were places where white surveillance could largely be avoided. They were areas that were marginal to the settler agricultural economy and they remained unsegregated insofar as they were freely available to both Aboriginal and white people, both of whose activities there remained largely uncontrolled by white authorities. This category of coastal terrain included the coastal swamplands north of Harrington, the Nine Mile Beach strip north of Tuncurry and the tract of coastal and forest land north of Saltwater.

The consolidation of white settlement in our study area in the period 1900-1940 is reflected in the growth of Taree’s population which doubled from 871 in 1901 to 1,539 in 1911.

Race and space

In our coverage of the nineteenth century, the focus of our attention has been on “spatialising” historical records of the post-contact period, using them to build up a picture of where Aboriginal people were in the landscape both in terms of their activities and their patterns of movement. With the onset of the twentieth century it becomes increasingly important to acknowledge the role of racial segregation in shaping the cultural landscape. We note that racism always has a spatial dimension and that racial segregation specifically concerns itself with the issue of how close people of different races are permitted to be to each other.

The period 1890-1940 has been described as that which witnessed ‘the flowering of racial consciousness’ in Australia. The separation of Aboriginal people from the white mainstream which earlier had been driven by ‘humanitarianism’ (see above) was now driven by explicitly racist thinking. Intensification of white settlement meant increased white control and administration of space. This, in
Reynolds, situation elsewhere in NSW. According to Henry The situation on the lower North Coast mirrored the
Commonwealth law in 1908.

age and invalid pensions that were established by
instance, were disqualified from receiving the old
pensions. When these pensions were ended, the old
people, formed in the course of working on the
land. By the turn of the century these settlers were
old and dying as were the Aboriginal people they
grew up with. The landscape of their old age was
an increasingly segregated one, very different from
that of earlier years. A newspaper description of
the Aboriginal woman, Mrs Bugg, at the time of her
death in 1901, as ‘a well-known identity’, is
suggestive of a level of familiarity (which is not to
say equality) between older black and white people
which was becoming a thing of the past.176

Pressure for removal

The new stridency in local race relations which
underpinned government segregation policies is
exemplified in our study area by the intensity of
white pressure on Aboriginal people to move on
from wherever it was they happened to be living
at any particular time. In the first years of the new
century, Aboriginal fringe camp dwellers in the
Manning Valley were under intense pressure to
move to Purfleet Reserve, gazetted in 1900. The
Wingham Chronicle in June 1901 editorialised:
‘We consider it high time that some steps were
taken to have the blacks removed to the reserve at
Purfleet where the Government have built houses
for them’.174 The fact that a large part of the town’s
white population was, in 1915, after several years
effort, still trying to have the people living in the
fringe camp on Wingham Common moved out
was testament to the tenacity of the fringedwellers’
will to stay put. It also underlines the fact that the
dispersed nature of the Aboriginal population in the
Manning at this time was a product of an Aboriginal
will to occupy diverse ‘sites’ rather than some
accident of history. The pressure on the Wingham
and Taree fringe-camp residents represented a
white movement to concentrate what remained a
dispersed Aboriginal population into fewer locations.
To this extent reserves like Purfleet were like
‘concentration camps’ or gulags.

But even those Aboriginal people who had already
moved onto Aboriginal Reserves could not live
in peace; they were subject to the harassment of
local whites who wanted the Reserves moved
somewhere else. In a letter received in May 1895
by the Aborigines’ Protection Board, a resident of
Forster urged that the Aboriginal people on the Forster
Reserve be removed to an island in Wallis Lake. In
1906 the Board received an application by the Forster
Progress Association for removal of Aboriginals to
Taree. Between 1906 and 1919 an Italian neighbour
of the Aboriginal Reserve at Killawarra made repeated
requests to the APB to be permitted to lease part of
the Reserve. There was also pressure in the 1910s
from some white residents in the Purfleet vicinity
to have Purfleet mission removed to Dingo Creek;
there was a counter-petition from Wingham Council
and ‘certain residents’ who opposed this shift to their

turn, enabled segregation, because you could not
separate people spatially in the landscape until
you had administrative control of it. The police,
health and education officials, land surveyors
and administrators, all had a role in this and the
documentary records they left behind help us to
‘map’ how racial segregation operated at a local level.

This control of space enabled segregation but
what motivated it was a complex of specific
anxieties and prejudices among white settlers in
relation to Aboriginal people. This drew upon a
long established tendency by Western society to
associate the dark skinned people of the world
with dirt, moral degeneracy, and disease.175 In
Australia in the decades after 1850 the ‘problem’
of what to do with Aboriginal people who had
survived the process of dispossession coincided
with a ‘refinement’ of racial thought in the
Western world generally.176 The most marked
element of this refinement was in the form of the
‘scientific’ arguments that emerged to justify racial
discrimination. The result was that in the last
decades of the nineteenth century there came to
be greater pressure, at a local level, to separate
Aboriginal people from the mainstream of white
settler life. This culminated in the establishment
of the Aboriginal Reserve at Purfleet in 1900.

At a broader level, governments increasingly
controlled the movement of Aboriginal people from
the mainstream of white settler life. This was
demonstrated in the 1850s when they were still
young, often had close associations with Aboriginal
people, formed in the course of working on the
land. By the turn of the century these settlers were
old and dying as were the Aboriginal people they
grew up with. The landscape of their old age was
an increasingly segregated one, very different from

Segregated landscapes

The settlers of John Allan’s generation, who came
to the Manning in the 1850s when they were still
young, often had close associations with Aboriginal
people, formed in the course of working on the
land. By the turn of the century these settlers were
old and dying as were the Aboriginal people they
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an increasingly segregated one, very different from

area. It should be noted that, at least at first, the APB resisted most of this pressure.

The pressure to concentrate the Aboriginal population in the Manning Valley onto the Purfleet Reserve was accompanied by the revocation of two of the smaller Reserves that had existed in the Valley: the six acre Reserve at Tinonee (AR13011) was sold in 1910 and the Killawarra Reserve (AR19861) was disposed of by the Protection Board in 1921 (see Chapter 12).

A people who only eighty years previously had enjoyed sovereignty over their own country could now find virtually no foothold in the same landscape where they could exist free from harassment.

White allies against exclusion

Even in the darkest days of segregation Aboriginal people were not without their allies or supporters in the local white population. George Hill of ‘Bungay’, near Wingham wrote to the Aborigines’ Protection Board in 1911 to ‘strongly protest’ that ‘another attempt is being made to deprive the aboriginals of their reserve in the Parish of Killawarra’. The police on a number of occasions recommended against disposing of Reserve lands to white farmers when the APB was pressured to do so. In Through My Eyes, Ella Simon wrote that the McOwens, a white family in the Purfleet area, invited her family to move from the Browns Hill fringe camp in Taree (Figure 43) to ‘a little corner of their own land’ in 1902. Three or four Aboriginal families moved there.

Segregation and the reality of entanglement

One of the ironies of the segregation period is that by the early twentieth century Aboriginal and white people in the area were more closely related by ‘blood’ than ever before. A growing number of people in the area were descendants of cross-cultural unions and, even despite segregation, there continued to be men and women on both sides of the racial divide entering into casual or, often, long-lasting or permanent relationships. Those of mixed descent whose skin was sufficiently light in colour might choose to identify and live as white. Given the level of prejudice against Aboriginal people, it is not difficult to understand why many chose to ‘pass’ as whites. The politics of colour often resulted in families being split, the darker children going on to lead quite separate lives from their lighter brothers or sisters. Often the authorities specifically targeted lighter skinned children for forced separation from their parents and families. As the Bringing Them Home report shows, many of the ‘stolen’, as a result of institutionalisation and of fostering or adoption by white people, completely lost contact with their Aboriginal kin. Some, later in life, were able to trace their kin and be reunited with them. Ella Simon, whose father was a white man from Wingham, chose not name him in her book because of his relatives and because I loved my father’. As a girl she used to go from Purfleet to visit him in Wingham and he came to live with her when he was old. Despite the obviously close emotional bond between them, his family prevented her from attending his funeral.

One of the greatest trials of my life was to try to forgive these people for that. They had nothing to do with my father when he was living. And there I was, so much in his life over the last few years, and yet I wasn’t deemed good enough to be able to go to his funeral. I had looked after him as best I could. I had told the authorities where to find these people so that they could be notified of his death. I had shown the place where he wanted to be buried. And more than all that, I had loved him; he was my father. It didn’t make the slightest difference to them. I couldn’t even stand by and just watch. I was still a secret that had to be kept from the world.

Segregation of learning

The old public school at Glenorrhoe, on the Purfleet side of the Manning River, opposite Taree, was closed in 1917. In the previous year, Mr Black, the local school inspector, had written: ‘I visited Glenthalorne public school for inspection purposes to-day, and found an extraordinary state of affairs, owing to the attendance of the aboriginal children from the Purfleet Mission Station all the white children have been withdrawn. The effective enrolment at present is 13, all Aboriginal’. He recommended that the school be closed. The parents of the white students had, indeed, earlier in the year petitioned the Minister of Education, threatening to take their children out of the school unless the Aboriginal children were immediately withdrawn. ‘It is well known’, they claimed (in reference to Purfleet Reserve), ‘that these children come from a camp that is not healthy’.

Goodall notes that Aboriginal parents had been keen to enrol their children in the public schools of NSW which, under the terms of Henry Parkes’s education system, were to be open to all. She continues: In later years, when white parents were forced to explain just exactly what sort of a threat they
believed Aboriginal children posed, they would usually refer to the threat of infectious diseases. Whenever investigations were held, however, Aboriginal children were shown to suffer only from the same diseases of poverty as most of the white children at the school. The real anxieties of white parents were usually revealed to be fears that their children would grow up to form social or sexual relationships with Aboriginal people, which in the rigidly stratified world of country towns represented a major threat to social status.

Segregation as heritage

In summary, segregation is nominated here as a major theme of post-contact Aboriginal heritage, firstly because it was a major feature of Aboriginal life experience in the post-contact period and, secondly, because it relates so closely to place and landscape. The policy and practice of segregation is often the key to explaining why Aboriginal people were present in one part of the landscape and not in another. At a micro-geographic level, it often explains why Aboriginal people were present in one part of a building or built complex and not in another. Why, for instance, they sat only in the front rows of the Boomerang picture theatre in the 1950s and 1960s (see Chapter 11 and Figures 64 & 68) or why Aboriginal patients were to be found on the verandah of the Taree Hospital and not in the interior wards (see Chapter 11 and Figure 64).

Aboriginal people in the larger economy

The mainstay of Aboriginal involvement in the cash economy remained the work they did for white farmers, including the picking of fruit and vegetables, stockwork, and shearing. In addition to this, the timber industry was beginning to be a significant employer of Aboriginal labour, a situation which would endure through the twentieth century. There were eight steam timber mills operating in the lower Manning by 1896. Aboriginal men worked in the mills as well as in logging teams in the forests. Sleeker cutting for the new North Coast railway supplemented the cutting of mine props and fence posts. Along with ceramic tiles, corrugated iron roofing had come into general use by this period, replacing bark and shingles, much of which in earlier days had been supplied by Aboriginal people.

The arrival of rail

The North Coast rail line was significant to local Aboriginal people both in terms of their role in its construction and in the way the new line facilitated a change in their pattern of movement within the study area and the wider world outside it. The railways helped bring into being the extensive networks of far-flung kin that characterise Aboriginal Australia in the present day. The tender for the Gloucester-Taree section of the line was let in 1909 and soon over 2,000 men were employed in its construction. Temporary canvas townships grew up along the route. The line was completed to Taree in 1913. The railways would continue to employ Aboriginal people in various capacities in the following decades.

Aboriginal funerals and graves

By this period it appears that most Aboriginal people were being buried more-or-less according to the European conventions. In November 1918, in one of her regular bulletins to her Sydney headquarters, the missionary stationed at the Purfleet Reserve reported that “Little Vera has been “called Home”… all the relations of Vera were present, and heard the message. The church was decorated with white flowers”.

In October 1926 the missionary wrote that two burials had taken place within the Purfleet Aboriginal cemetery (Figure 56). “One was a child, which died two days after birth. The other was Mr. John Cook, of Barrington, who died in Taree Public Hospital. To the mourning friends we extend our sincere sympathy”.

These quotations come from one of the newsletters circulated by Christian missionary organisations working among Aboriginal people in NSW. Each issue contained a ‘roundup’ of brief reports by individual missionaries working at various Aboriginal Reserves across the state; they are a valuable supplement to the information contained in the Aborigines’ Protection Board archives. While funerals, especially those conducted by the missionaries, were in the European style, the decoration of the graves themselves is likely to have
followed a distinct and continuing Aboriginal pattern in which stones and seashells were used. Traces of such commemorative decorations are present at the old Purfleet cemetery (no longer in use); stones and shells continue to be used to decorate Aboriginal graves at Redbank, the cemetery used by most Aboriginal families in the Manning Valley in the present day (Figure 57). Segregationist practices excluded Aboriginal people from burial in the public cemeteries of the lower North Coast in the first half of the twentieth century. Even in the 1970s, when lack of space at the Purfleet Aboriginal cemetery led to a proposal that Aboriginal people be buried at the municipal cemetery at Redbank, one white citizen protested that this was inappropriate owing to the presence in the cemetery of the graves of white pioneers. Personal ties of friendship between certain white families and certain Aboriginal people could cut across segregationist conventions, however. When the Aboriginal man, Bungay Billy, died in the early twentieth century he was buried in the company of early settlers in the private cemetery on the Bungay property near Wingham.

There were individuals in the white community who expressed concern for Aboriginal graves. The author of a letter to the Wingham Chronicle in 1902, for instance, had been shown the Aboriginal graves at Wingham, situated ‘in a cleared spot in the bush’. He questioned whether it was fair that the last resting place of the people whose land had been taken by white settlers ‘should be left without the least care’. This, in his opinion, was ‘a standing disgrace to us’. These comments may relate to the Aboriginal graves at Lambert Street, Wingham (Figure 36).

Participation in white cultural life

By 1891 the Salvation Army in the Manning Valley had its own Aboriginal contingent whose members played cornets and made regular visits to Wingham on Wednesday nights. Sport provided a significant contact zone between Aboriginal and white society in the first half of the twentieth century, as it continues to do in the present day. Cricket was the most popular sport among Aboriginal people in the early twentieth century but football was a growing interest. In 1926 the ‘Sunrise footballers’ performed a concert at the Majestic Theatre in Taree which featured a gum leaf band, singers and a ‘corroboree’. The APB Purfleet mission manager ‘amused the audience with his announcement of each item’. These performances tended to caricature Aboriginal culture and hence reassure white society of its superiority at the same time as providing it with entertainment.

The distribution of people

The minutes of the NSW Aborigines’ Protection Board contain brief notes that shed light on the distribution of the Aboriginal population in our study area at various points in time from the late nineteenth century till the mid-twentieth century. The coverage is patchy and the notes are mostly fragmentary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taree</td>
<td>1900  clothing for 28 adults and 24 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purfleet</td>
<td>1901  material for erecting 10 dwellings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1943  Aboriginal population ‘Taree’ 141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wingham</td>
<td>1891  blankets to ‘3 old Aborigines at present camped at “Wingham”’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1890s Billy Johnson and his family cultivated 2 acres of maize, tobacco, potatoes. Still there in 1895 with 3 other adults and 7 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killawarra</td>
<td>1894 (Nov) clothing, iron (roofing?), rations for ‘Aboriginal family at Killawarra’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1894 (Dec) ‘but occupied by Aboriginal family’; clothing for 2 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimbriki</td>
<td>1890 clothing to ‘seven old Aborigines’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1891 clothing ‘to 8 adults and the 23 children attending school at Barrington’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1892 clothing to 4 men, 6 women and 26 children at Barrington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1893 clothing to ‘the Aborigines drawing rations at Barrington (6 adults, 18 children)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1894 (April) clothing for 6 adults and 18 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1894 (Sept) clothing for 6 adults and 22 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forster</td>
<td>1891 20 children attending the Aboriginal school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1943 Aboriginal population 68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Left page  Fig. 37: The late John Saunders visiting a grave in the old Purfleet Aboriginal cemetery, 1998
What is the quality of spatial information provided by documentary historical sources? Here we address this question with particular reference to Aboriginal post-contact camp sites.

The heritage of frontier violence

Frontier violence poses a uniquely difficult problem for heritage practitioners. The Aboriginal spokesperson, Lois O’Donoghue, has recently called for memorials to be erected at massacre sites; but of the hundreds or thousands of places where killings took place across Australia only a mere handful are recorded with any exactitude on maps. The location of some others are known in a very general way, for instance, as having occurred somewhere along a certain river or creek. A haze has descended over the specifics of these events and this might simply be put down to ‘memory decay’ except that we know the perpetrators normally took care to burn or otherwise dispose of the bodies. And, as Henry Reynolds points out, the killers often boasted of their deeds in private conversation there was a code of silence in frontier settler communities which kept information from circulating to outsiders. The massacres may, at a local or personal level, have been committed to memory by individual people, apparently to the extent that the perpetrators were often haunted by their deeds later in life. But the same people took measures to prevent specific and detailed knowledge of individual events becoming a subject of public memory and to prevent them being available for commemoration.

This is reflected in the quality of spatial information on massacres in our study area. With the exception of Mt McKenzie (to the west of our area), it is not possible to fix the on-ground location of any of the killings that took place there. At Mt McKenzie, the NPWS has erected an interpretive sign in the vicinity of the place on the cliff top from which the Aboriginal victims are believed to have been driven off to their death.

In the last few years the historical evidence attesting to frontier violence against Aboriginal people has been subject to an increasingly critical scrutiny (see recent books by Keith Windschuttle and his critics).

References to place

Documentary historical references to Aboriginal post-contact camps, ceremonial sites, burials, and work places tend not to contain precise locational details. Locational descriptions are commonly made by reference to a named white landowner or a named property. Here are two examples:

- ‘300 or more’ Biripi people seen ‘camped on a flat near the brush, close to Parkhaugh’. The ‘Parkhaugh’ property was on the edge of the Manning opposite Wingham.
- ‘A few shacks of aboriginals were at The Bend, in the 1930s where a deep dip and bend in the road near Campbell’s farm was at the entrance to Mt George’.

In each of these cases it is possible, by reference to early parish plans and other sources to obtain the portion numbers for the farms in question. The tendency for local history writers to give directions by reference to landowners rather than geographical features reflects, of course, the nature of daily conversation in a local rural setting where people reference the cultural or social landscape as much, or more, than the physical landscape.

In previous chapters it has been argued that most of the areas of land in ‘settled’ landscapes that Aboriginal people had reasonably easy access to were Crown reserves of various kinds. The knowledge that a Crown reserve exists, or has existed, in a particular vicinity may thus help to narrow down the actual location of an Aboriginal camp or other post-contact site mentioned in the literature. The following reference may serve as an example: ‘Tommy Boomer lived on the banks of..."
Aboriginal post-contact camps

A summary of historical references to Aboriginal post-contact camps in our area may help to illustrate the nature and limitations of the historical record in relation to place. Before proceeding to this list, we have classified the camps into four broad types (below). While this typology may turn out to be applicable to post-contact sites in NSW generally we caution that it was developed only from information for our own study area. Having said that, we hope it may stimulate further interest in Aboriginal post-contact camps and their place in the landscape.

1 **Autonomous camps**
Locations chosen mainly in relation to the needs and desires of Aboriginal people. Many such camps may have been in occasional or cyclical use for thousands of years. They may be remote from white settlement and chosen partly in order to get away from white interference and surveillance. These are likely to have been more common in the nineteenth century and to have been located on land not yet surveyed or ‘taken up’ by whites. Some autonomous camps were established in the twentieth century by Aboriginal people. They were sometimes located centrally to a number of white farms which required occasional Aboriginal labour. These were common in the nineteenth century; some existed in the first half of the twentieth century.

2 **Farm camps**
These are Aboriginal camps located either on or adjacent to white farms and pastoral stations. They reflect interdependence between Aboriginal and white people. Aboriginal people were attracted by the availability of European foods and other products, white settlers were dependent on Aboriginal labour. In the more settled parts of NSW, such as our study area, these camps were common in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Often they were occupied on a seasonal or occasional basis. The farm camps in eastern NSW were smaller than the camps on pastoral stations in the west of the state. These later times these camps were replaced by houses (often former homesteads) made available for single Aboriginal families engaged in full-time work on particular farms.

3 **Pocket camps**
These were independent of any specific white farm or station, their locations determined by the availability of those ‘pockets’ of vacant land existing within the mosaic of white settlement (e.g. water reserves, town/village commons, travelling stock routes, reserves for roads not yet constructed or in use). Many of these camps came into existence in the 1850s-70s after Aboriginal people found the most productive parts of their country had been taken up by white settlers. They were often places where Aboriginal people themselves decided to try their hand at farming. In the late nineteenth century some of these were designated as Aboriginal Reserves in acknowledgment of their existing use by Aboriginal people. They were sometimes located centrally to a number of white farms which required occasional Aboriginal labour. These were common in the nineteenth century; some existed in the first half of the twentieth century.

4 **Fringe camps**
The term is used here in relation to camps specifically located on the edges of and sometimes ‘inside’ villages and towns. As with ‘pocket camps’, they were normally situated on land reserved for various purposes (e.g. water reserves, town commons) which interfinger with the alluvial plains. She points to the tendency for many pre-contact Aboriginal sites to also be located on such well-drained high ground close to water sources. The implication is that these ‘autonomous’ camps were located in the sort of places Aboriginal people had always favoured rather than being located in relation to white settlement.
commons). Frequently the women and girls in these camps were employed as domestics by white townspeople. In many parts of NSW, including Sydney, fringe camps were established from the very moment that towns and villages came into being. Some of them existed into the 1950s and 60s at which point Aboriginal housing cooperatives and the State Housing Commission began providing houses for Aboriginal people in towns (the latter as part of the assimilation policy).

The following list brings together, under these four headings, documentary references to Aboriginal camps in our area. Locations are indicated in Figure 39.

**Autonomous camps**

**Kundle Kundle**

A camp called ‘Goonal Goonal’ that was ‘used periodically by the tribe being central to good hunting grounds’. A massacre is reported to have taken place at this camp in 1838.

**Stony Creek c.1850s-1860s**

‘I went up Stony Creek one day. There were a lot of blacks camping there’. [210]

**Parkhaugh c. 1850s**

‘300 or more’ Biripi people seen ‘camped on a flat near the brush, close to Parkhaugh, and they made the night hideous with their yells’. ‘Parkhaugh’ was the name of the property developed by Alex Lobban on Portions 10 and 147, Parish of Tinonee, in the 1840s and 50s on the south bank of the Manning opposite Wingham.

**Kimbriki**

A camp located ‘in the Kimbriki Brush’. This implies a location on alluvial soils along the margin of the river.

**Krambach**

Earlier known as Larry’s Flat. ‘the black’s camp there’. [213]

**Jones Island**

1890s. Aboriginal elder, Horace Saunders, was told by long-time white residents of Jones Island that Aboriginal groups coming from Crowdy Head would visit their farmhouse ‘to exchange ducks and other native foods for salt and tobacco. They would then travel northeast across Jones Island, camping overnight beneath a Moreton Bay fig tree before crossing the Lansdowne River near its confluence with the Manning’ [214]

**Oxley Island**

The 1827 map of Oxley Island produced by the surveyor John Armstrong shows a ‘natives camp’ on the southern shore (see Figures 14 and 16).
There is no subsequent mention of this camp in the documentary or oral history. The location of the camp had been appropriated for white farming by 1856 and it may be assumed the camp ceased to be used sometime in the thirty years prior to that.

Strike-a-Light camp
A nineteenth century camp located on flats adjacent to Rowleys River in deeply dissected forest country. No details available. The classification of this site as ‘autonomous’ is tenuous – it may have been situated to provide access to white farms.

Farm camps

Bungay
‘I remember a lot of blacks being camped at Bungay on one occasion’.215 This reminiscence by John Allan probably applies to the 1850s or 60s. There appears to have been a long association between the Biripi and the owners of Bungay Bungay farm on the north side of the Manning, about four kilometres upstream of Wingham. (The land was ‘selected’ in the 1820s.)

Lansdowne
‘When Ben Saville moved onto his selection at Lansdowne [c.1848] the family group known as the Wallaby tribe made camp immediately south of the crossing and remained there’.216

Coolplacurripa
Allan mentions a Biripi camp associated with his family’s pastoral property here (c. 1860s).217

Burrell Creek
Allan refers to Aboriginal men who ‘always worked’ for the brothers George and Robert Easton, each of whom had farms on or near Burrell Creek in the 1860s (this may imply the presence of farm camps on these properties).

Pocket camps

The Bend
‘A few shacks of aboriginals were at The Bend, in the 1930s where a deep dip and bend in the road near Campbell’s farm was at the entrance to Mt George’.218

Old Bar
‘Tommy Boomer lived on the banks of Racecourse Creek, Old Bar’.219 This camp may have been located on a Crown Reserve (see Figure 41).

Dingoe Creek
Prior to gazettal as an Aboriginal Reserve in 1906, a water reserve at Dingo Creek (Ashlea) appears to have been used by Aboriginal people as a camp – i.e. in the 1890s and possibly earlier (see Chapter 12).

Purfleet
An area of Crown Land at Purfleet which had been designated a Camping Reserve in 1880 was gazetted as an Aboriginal Reserve in 1900. There are indications that Aboriginal people were camping on the Camping Reserve (see Chapter 10).

Fringe camps

Wingham from c.1860s
‘About a mile along the road from Wingham was a very large camp of blacks’.220 An 1882 local newspaper refers to white residents of Wingham ‘suffering annoyance from noise emanating from an Aboriginal camp’.221 Police were supplying clothing to thirteen Aboriginal people at Wingham in 1893.

A 1915 newspaper report states: ‘The blacks made last night hideous near the Presbyterian Church. The Council, as Trustees of the Common, [should] Right page: Fig. 42: The location of the former Wingham Common (mostly now residential sub-division).
Fig. 43: The approximate location of the Aboriginal fringe camp at South Hill, Taree.
This page: Fig. 40: The location of the Bungay property, near Wingham.
Fig. 41: The likely location of Tommy Boomer’s camp at Old Bar.
© Department of Lands have a meeting to consider what should be done in the matter’.

Fig. 40-43 © Department of Lands
In the same year the Mayor reported that, ‘He had done all he could do to shift them, and had taken the police out several times’. It is likely this camp ceased to exist soon after 1915. However, in 1924 the records of the Aborigines’ Protection Board note that the Wingham police were recommending the ‘removal of undesirable Aborigines from vicinity of town’.

Richardson St, Wingham
In 1920 a hut and two tents ‘on Richardson Street’ were erected by an Aboriginal family, possibly from the Dingo Creek Reserve (approx. 7 kilometres away on the northeast side of town) in order that an old man could be near a doctor. The urging of one of the aldermen ‘that every effort should be made to prevent them settling near the town’ suggests the Council may have been successful in getting the camp on the Wingham Common closed by this time.

Taree showgrounds
Aboriginal people had a fringe camp on the site of the present-day showgrounds.

Mills Creek, Taree
When the present day showgrounds were constructed (1900-05) the Aboriginal fringe-dwellers relocated their camp to the vicinity of a ‘large waterhole on Mill Creek just below the intersection of Flett and Albert Street’. This was an area where, earlier, a Chinese market garden has occupied an area of three acres.

Browns Hill (Browns Creek), Taree
In 1899 there were thirty-four adults and twenty-six children residing at this camp in ‘small bark humpies’. In 1900 there were seventy Aboriginal residents there, occupying approximately eleven ‘huts’.

Patricia Davis-Hurst records her mother’s (Margaret Marr’s) memory of the camp around 1900: ‘Mum packed our things and we all went to Browns Hill. It was all tea tree scrub and swamp. There was about 15-20 families living there at the time’. There were humpies and tin shacks all through the scrub, a great playground for the kids. The late Margaret Marr’s family had a vegetable and flower garden when they lived at Browns Hill in the early twentieth century. Aboriginal people were removed from the Browns Hill camp to Purfleet over a period of several years in the early 1900s. In the 1970s Aboriginal people returned to reside in the area when Housing Commission homes were built there. After Purfleet, the area presently represents the largest residential enclave of Aboriginal people in the Manning Valley.

Taree House, Taree
Connors states that the Mill Creek people later relocated to the area of Taree House, on the eastern side of the town.

Happy Valley, Taree
During the Depression of the 1930s a camp of Aboriginal and white people sprang up beside the Taree-Wingham road (see Figure 101). Poor families both black and white lived here in shacks.

Tinonee, 1871
‘The blacks are now encamped about a mile from the township, and those who pass along after nightfall cannot but be struck with the picturesque effect of the great number of camp fires scattered through the bush.’

Crown reserves as indicators
Earlier we discussed the importance of Crown reserves as constituting ‘gaps’ in the cadastral grid of settler landholding that Aboriginal people could
use in order to both live in and move through the colonised landscape. To a considerable extent, the maps that show the location of these Crown reserves (particularly Parish Plans) are also indicative maps of where Aboriginal post-contact camp sites are likely to have been located in any particular landscape.

In areas like the NSW lower North Coast the Parish Plan for any one parish will have gone through a series of several editions beginning in the late nineteenth century. Each edition shows the categorisation and distribution of Crown reserves at the time the map was published together with hand-drawn modifications during the period through which the edition was in use. These modifications include the gazettal of new reserves and the revocation (for lease or sale) of pre-existing reserves.

In NSW the hard copies of these maps are held at the Land Titles Office in Sydney. Recently, though, scanned versions of most of the maps have become available on-line by courtesy of the NSW Land and Property Information (LPI) office's Parish Map Preservation Project (http://www.lpi.nsw.gov.au/maps/parish.html). As indicative maps, the Parish Plans are an essential resource for anyone wishing to locate and record post-contact Aboriginal settlements in NSW.

Discussion

Fringe camps and other ‘off reserve’ enclaves of Aboriginal residency represent, to a certain extent, an Aboriginal desire for self-determination. As the anthropologist, Barry Morris, has observed, ‘The “fringe camps” were one attempt to create “free space” away from institutional control and to defy the local authorities.’

Elsewhere in this book we have pointed to the mistaken perception by non-Aboriginal people in NSW that, during the post-contact period, most Aboriginal people in the state lived on Aboriginal Reserves. What is not widely appreciated is that, firstly, the Reserves only became major centres of Aboriginal population from about the 1890s. Secondly, even after the 1890s, a surprising number of Aboriginal people continued to live in off-Reserve camps. One of the surprises that our research in the Forster-Taree area held for us was the discovery of the extent to which Aboriginal people continued to be dispersed across the landscape right through the post-contact period.

The sites of many of the off-Reserve camps will, however, be difficult to identify and record on the ground. The documentary references, as can be seen from the above listing, are often too vague or approximate to allow the locations to be pin-pointed. The value of these references will often lie in their ability to indicate the general vicinity of a site to a sufficient extent for an archaeological survey to take over the job of pin-pointing the location.
Here we look briefly at the archaeological ‘footprint’ of Aboriginal post-contact sites and consider some of the issues involved in the finding and recording of these sites in the field.

Introduction
This book is primarily about using documentary and oral history records in order that the Aboriginal post-contact experience may be mappable as heritage. It is not a book about how the places on such a map (e.g., fringe camps) can be identified and recorded archaeologically. We have not, ourselves, attempted to record archaeology traces – such as artefacts and remains of built structures – of the places mentioned in the book.

Our message for archaeologists is that unless they do their historical ‘homework’ there is relatively little chance of them being able to identify and record the majority of Aboriginal post-contact heritage places in the course of their fieldwork. Most of these places will slip through the net of archaeological field survey either because there are no archaeological traces present at them or because, where archaeological traces are present, they will not readily be distinguishable as Aboriginal (i.e. as representing Aboriginal presence). It seems important to make at least some preliminary observations here about this key problem of detectability and how historical sources (documentary and oral) may aid in resolving it.

The problem of detectability
A shared material culture
What makes Aboriginal post-contact sites, such as fringe camps and old Aboriginal Reserves, so difficult to detect using purely archaeological means is the fact that most of the material culture of Aboriginal people during the historic period was shared with white people. The remains left on an abandoned early twentieth-century Aboriginal fringe camp are likely to be almost identical to those left at a camp used by itinerant white people. The remains left at a Depression era (1930s) Aboriginal fringe camp will look very much like those at one of the camps of unemployed white people which appeared on the edges of many towns at this time. A glance at the list of items on pages 62-63 shows the extent of this sharing of material culture.

Diagnostic flaked glass
An exception to the above rule comes in the form of flaked glass. Aboriginal people in the first decades of contact with white settlers used at least some of their pre-contact artefact types (e.g., flaked and ground-edge stone artefacts, wooden spears and coolamons) alongside items such as ceramic dishes and glass bottles ‘borrowed’ from white settler material culture. This mixing of the old and new in itself made for a distinctive ‘tool kit’ but it would be difficult to identify it archaeologically owing to the fact that Aboriginal post-contact camps were often located on the same spot as pre-contact camps. Except where there is stratigraphic separation of pre- and post-contact occupation the more recent artefact assemblage will be mixed with the older one. What is needed in such a situation is one or more diagnostic artefact type – an artefact that was used exclusively by Aboriginal people. Probably the only artefacts which are diagnostic in this way are those cutting and scraping implements (as well as spear points etc) made by Aboriginal people by flaking (knapping) European bottle glass.

Aboriginal flaked glass is receiving increasing attention in Australian archaeology and there is now enough published on the identification and analysis of glass artefacts to enable archaeologists in NSW to recognise and record it in the field.²²³

Characteristic features of post-contact camps
The presence of flaked glass almost certainly indicates Aboriginal post-contact presence at a site. There are a number of other characteristic
features of Aboriginal post-contact sites that – while not unique to Aboriginal post-contact lifestyle (e.g. poor or itinerate white people also lived in bark or tin huts) – are useful as approximate indicators of an Aboriginal presence (glass artefacts being definitive or absolute indicators). These characteristics include the following:

- The high incidence of pieces of fencing wire attesting to its extensive use in the building of huts, the making of domestic implements and children’s toys, the staking out of animal skins, and in carrying out various repairs.
- Remains attesting to a high incidence of recycling – e.g., kerosene tins used as ‘fire-tins’ and meat safes or (flattened out) as roofing and cladding for huts; bottles and bottle glass used as commemorative decorations on graves.
- Remains of musical instruments such as mouth organs and the remains of wind-up gramophones and gramophone records.

Structures and artefacts

The following Table is drawn from lists of artefacts and structures recorded by Peter Kabaila at the sites of former Aboriginal fringe camps at Oak Hill (Yass) and Narrandera sandhills and at the sites of Aboriginal Reserves at Brungle and Grong Grong. These places were recorded by him in the course of a survey of Aboriginal post-contact places in the Murrumbidgee Basin. Kabaila’s work in the Wiradjuri country of central western NSW comprises the most detailed and comprehensive survey of Aboriginal Reserve and fringe camp sites available for NSW. We have provided this table in order to give readers an appreciation of the range of artefacts and other traces typically found at Aboriginal post-contact sites in NSW.

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description of remains</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shelter</td>
<td>Hut cladding (fragments and whole sheets); flattened kerosene tins with nail holes, ripple-iron with nail holes, ripple iron with window cut-out, flattened tin (e.g. Vacuum Oil Co); fencing wire; shredded Kerosene tin with nail holes, ripple iron with window cut-out, flattened tin (e.g. Vacuum Oil Co)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Terrace</td>
<td>Cut into hillside (overgrown with brambles etc)</td>
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<td>Rock</td>
<td>Used as seat next to house (granite)</td>
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<td>Fibro sheet</td>
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<td>Nails - ‘Bullet head’</td>
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<td>Nails - steel spike</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Storage</td>
<td>Tea can (Robur brand); Glass fragment, poss. from preserving jar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food consumption</td>
<td>Pick-Me-Up sauce bottle; Mug (ceramic or metal); Plate (ceramic or metal); Mixing bowl; Tea straining spoon; Kettle (cast iron)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heating and food</td>
<td>Camp oven lid (iron); Wood stove front (enameled); Chimney flue (tin sheet and fencing wire); Clay brick (from hearth?); Composite fireplace (circle of stones); Pot-hanging hook (fencing wire)</td>
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<td>Liquid refreshment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>Ointment bottle; Cylindrical pill jar; Hair dye bottle; Kruschen Salts jar</td>
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<td>Wire mattress (woven wire)</td>
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Other detailed inventories and analyses of artefact assemblages at Aboriginal post-contact camps in NSW include that by Harrison for the Dennawan pastoral camp on the Culgoa River in the northwest of the state.\textsuperscript{235}

**Triggering memory**

We have suggested that the total number of Aboriginal post-contact heritage places recorded in NSW would be greatly increased if archaeologists were to review the historical records for an area before carrying out a field survey there. Things may also work the other way around: documentary and oral histories can be turned to for corroborating evidence where there is uncertainty as to whether artefacts or other traces, located during field surveys, have an Aboriginal or a non-Indigenous provenance (i.e. whether they were produced and/or used by Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal people). In the case of oral history, it is possible that Aboriginal people may fail to mention a particular place in the course of an oral history recording session either because they assume it would be without interest to the interviewer (e.g. it may seem to be too ordinary to mention) or because the significance of a place has been forgotten.

Such ‘forgetting’ is however often situational and reversible. Archaeological remains often act as a powerful trigger to memory. When returning to old places they may have lived in or visited earlier in life, people often find that the objects they see lying on the ground there spark detailed recollections of activities, individuals, and events. It may be years since they have spoken about or even thought about these things but the sight of the old object – be it a broken toy, an old oil lamp, the remains of a car, or a piece of crockery – can sometimes suddenly bring it all back.

**The combination of history and archaeology**

**Post-contact heritage and EIA**

By far the majority of known Aboriginal heritage places in NSW have been identified and recorded in the course of environmental impact assessment (EIA) surveys. Since this work began in the 1970s, accelerating sharply with the passage of the NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act in 1979, it has been carried out almost entirely by archaeologists.\textsuperscript{237}

The EIA surveys have focused mainly on Aboriginal pre-contact heritage. This has been due partly to a heritage agency focus on Aboriginal pre-contact heritage and partly to the fact that the professional training of most archaeologists working in the EIA field has been in prehistory and pre-contact archaeology.\textsuperscript{237} From about 1999 the NPWS (now the Department of Environment and Conservation, NSW), the lead agency for Aboriginal heritage in NSW, began promoting a more balanced approach that gives equal attention to pre- and post-contact Aboriginal heritage and culture. This book is just one outcome of the new approach. It remains the case, though, that Aboriginal post-contact sites are radically under-represented in our heritage inventories in NSW.\textsuperscript{238}

**A better balance**

The problem is compounded in that, while there are an increasing number of local Aboriginal people involved in EIA work, there appears to be a widespread belief among them that their own post-contact places do not qualify as heritage. This misapprehension is entirely understandable when the archaeologists coordinating the EIA projects have seemed only to be interested in pre-contact heritage (e.g. stone artefacts and shell middens).

One way of re-balancing EIA heritage work would be to integrate oral history recording as a standard component of the EIA process. This would enable local Aboriginal people to contribute their knowledge of landscape use for the period of their own lives (and that of their parents and grandparents lives, where this knowledge has been handed on to them).

It is almost certain, for instance, that Aboriginal people alive in NSW today know the location and significance of hundreds of post-contact camps that have never been recorded for heritage conservation purposes.

Another way of ameliorating the neglect of post-contact heritage in EIA work would be to attract more historians to participate in this work. More specifically, though, what is needed is a type of historical work which is able to make the connection between documentary (and/or oral) historical sources and places on the ground. A great deal of work has been done in the field of Aboriginal history in the last three decades or so but it has resulted in very little recording of Aboriginal heritage places for the period researched. Often, while numerous places are mentioned in this history writing, and while the historical associations of the places are made clear, insufficient spatial detail is provided to enable the places to be pin-pointed on the ground or on topographic maps.

**Background research in EIA**

It has long been standard practice for archaeologists
working on EIA projects to consult the literature before going into the field. Typically this means reading the reports of archaeologists who have previously carried out EIA projects in the vicinity, reading other archaeological literature relevant to the vicinity, and reading "ethnohistorical" sources. The latter include the observations made of Aboriginal people in the contact period by white explorers and settlers – these are mostly used as a way of making guesses about what Aboriginal people were doing in the landscape prior to white contact. In most cases, all this background research is aimed at helping to identify and interpret pre-contact heritage places in the EIA survey area.

Little or no background research, however, tends to be done to assist in the identification and interpretation of post-contact places. Our aim in this book is to convince EIA archaeologists and others of the value of documentary and oral history for this purpose. One could go further and suggest that – as far as recording post-contact sites is concerned – there is little point in even carrying out archaeological field surveys unless the historical record has been consulted in advance. How often, one might ask, have archaeologists walked across paddocks in NSW and ignored pieces of rusting roof iron and old bottle glass on the presumption that they represent rubbish dumped by white farmers? In such a scenario, a basic amount of background research might alert the archaeologist to the existence, in the 1930s, of an Aboriginal fringe camp in the same vicinity. Without this sort of background research, Aboriginal post-contact heritage will continue to be under-recorded in NSW.
The present case, Bloomfield’s source is Fitzpatrick, Blomfield, ibid, p. 119; a verbal reminiscence cited in Fitzpatrick, Peeps into the Past: Pioneering Days on the Manning, p. 121.  

Fitzpatrick cited in (Bloomfield), ibid, p. 121; a verbal reminiscence cited in Fitzpatrick, Peeps into the Past: Pioneering Days on the Manning, p. 27.

For reference to the esteem that horses were held in by Aboriginal people elsewhere in NSW see Heather Goodall, ‘Land in our own country: the Aboriginal land rights movement in south-eastern Australia, 1860-1914’, Aboriginal History, 14, 1, 1990, pp. 1-14.

In the present case, Blomfield’s source is Fitzpatrick, ibid, p. 119; a verbal reminiscence cited in Fitzpatrick, Peeps into the Past: Pioneering Days on the Manning, p. 27.

The standard reference for settler killings of Aboriginal people in the region of our study area is Geoffrey Bloomfield, Baal Belbora, Sydney, 1981. In the present case, Bloomfield’s source is Fitzpatrick, ibid, p. xiv.  

For reference to the esteem that horses were held in by Aboriginal people elsewhere in NSW see Heather Goodall, ‘Land in our own country: the Aboriginal land rights movement in south-eastern Australia, 1860-1914’, Aboriginal History, 14, 1, 1990, pp. 1-14.  

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Alan, *Pioneering on the Manning*, p. 188.


Ibid, p. 41.


Jeans, *An Historical Geography of New South Wales* in 1801, p. 209.


Jeans, *An Historical Geography of New South Wales* in 1802, pp. 204-205.


Ibid, p. 177.

Ibid, p. 179.

It is not suggested that an Aboriginal society completely independent of white settlers was possible in these areas which, after all, consisted of intact tracts of land separated from each other by areas of white settlement. Rather, that Aboriginal people could withdraw into such country for periods of time, that they could go hunting and gathering there, or camp there, all with little chance of encountering whites. For some Aboriginal people it may have been part of an ‘in-between’ existence where they were half in and half out of the colonised landscape.

Denis Byrne, *The ethos of return: exuae and reinstatement of Aboriginal visibility in the Australian historical landscape*, *Historical Archaeology*, 37, 1, 2003, pp. 73-86.


Ibid.


See John Lines, *Australia: On Paper, Fortune, Box Hill, Victoria*, 1992, p. 31, who estimates that round 200,000 hectares were purchased in Australia in the 1890s.

Papers re Aboriginal reserves in the vicinity of Taree, notes of a visit of inspection to the Aboriginal Reserves at Forster, Purfleet, Killawarra and Ashlea by Mr. Robert McDonald, J.P., Nov 23, 1911, Land Board Office, Maitland, NSW State Records, Kingswood, 30/42/22.

Manning River Times, Sept 7, 1901.

Papers re Aboriginal reserves in the vicinity of Taree, surveyor Frank N. Harris to the District Surveyor Maitland, December 28, 1906.
Fig. 44: Aerial view of the Manning River near Taree, Dumaresq Island in the right foreground
© Department of Lands
Fig. 44: Aerial view of the Manning River near Taree. Dumaresq Island in the right foreground.

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PART 2 Landscapes
In Part 2 we present detailed studies of four parts of the study area. These landscapes were the focus of Aboriginal settlement from the late nineteenth century until the present.

Four detailed landscape studies

In the study area, Aboriginal settlement and/or activity has been concentrated in specific localities. We have identified four main centres, which we are calling Aboriginal heritage landscapes (see Figure 45). They are:
- Purfleet & Saltwater
- Taree
- Killawarra & Dingo Creek
- Forster & Wallis Lake

While Aboriginal people have resided in specific places, such as on the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve, they made (and continue to make) considerable use of the landscape that surrounds their settlement. These surrounds are not simply the immediate perimeter of settlement, but often extend a substantial distance outwards from it. This phenomenon is discussed in detail in chapter 14. The term we coined to describe the landscape used by Aboriginal people surrounding a residential settlement is ‘backyard’ zone. The types of activities that take place in a settlement’s backyard zone, and which we describe in the following landscape studies, include fishing, swimming, hunting, playing, camping, walking, visiting, gathering bush tucker, horse riding, socialising and working, among others.

Figure 45 shows the location and approximate extent of the four areas listed above, and their relationship to each other. While we have identified four separate and seemingly discrete landscapes, it would be wrong to assume that they exist completely independently of each other. As our discussion in the following pages shows, there was (and continues to be) considerable interaction between them. They are all linked through kinship relationships, and these familial and other relationships are sustained through regular visits. There is also some degree of migration from one area to another.

It is important to note that the limits we have imposed on the extent of each landscape are only indicative. Many Aboriginal people who resided in any one of them regularly extended their range of movement beyond the boundaries suggested in the descriptions and the maps that we have provided. Equally, we make no claim to have been absolutely comprehensive in covering all aspects of Aboriginal life within the four landscapes.

Landscapes, not sites

The four detailed landscape studies illustrate and reiterate a key theme in the book: that the concept of ‘sites’ is not sufficient for representing, reflecting and recording Aboriginal post-contact cultural heritage. In our view a landscape approach is more apt. We hope that by describing in considerable detail four core areas in the study area used and occupied by Aboriginal people, readers will appreciate that it is the landscapes themselves that ought to be considered heritage, rather than discrete and dispersed ‘sites’ within them. We demonstrate this most clearly by identifying how Aboriginal people moved across country. For instance, we trace how people walked, rode or drove from their homes to the creeks where they left their boats, or to their favourite spot on the riverbank where they fished, or to the end of the beach where they gathered shells and cooked dampers for the kids. Each of the four landscapes presented in this part of the book are cultural landscapes, not in the sense of being ‘built’ (like industrial estates) or ‘designed’ and/or ‘cultivated’ (like public gardens) but rather because they are thick with the significance inscribed by
those who have lived in them and claimed them as their own.

The bigger picture
While there are broad similarities between them all, the four landscapes were chosen for the way in which each possesses certain distinctive features, both geographical and historical. For instance, the Purfleet and Saltwater study presented in Chapter 10 is typical of an Aboriginal post-contact landscape in New South Wales constituted by a relatively large and quite permanent government-controlled settlement (surrounded by farms, bush and open country intensively visited by residents of the settlement) as well as its associated ‘Christmas camp’ at Saltwater, used for holidays. In contrast, Taree is an archetypal NSW country town, functioning on an unspoken but understood system of racial segregation that determines where and where it is not permissible for Aboriginal people to be. The Dingo Creek and Killawarra (Chapter 12) and the Forster and Wallis Lakes (Chapter 13) landscapes are different yet again.

By presenting four different Aboriginal cultural landscapes, we hope that heritage practitioners will recognise characteristics comparable to the contexts within which they work. To facilitate this, at the end of each landscape study we have provided a short discussion about how it corresponds with other parts of New South Wales.

A note on sources
The four landscape studies presented in the following chapters are based on both archival (documentary) and oral sources. In terms of archival sources, the records of the NSW Aborigines’ Protection Board (APB), which cover the period from about 1890 to 1939, and the NSW Aborigines’ Welfare Board (AWB), which begin in 1940 and end in 1969, are the most detailed concerning the Reserves under their respective control. We have made considerable use of these records for information about the Aboriginal Reserves in the study area, which include Purfleet (first gazetted 1900), Forster (first gazetted 1891), Dingo Creek (first gazetted 1906) and Killawarra (first gazetted 1894). In addition we have accessed NSW Lands Department records, particularly correspondence which spells out the effort of some white landowners to gain control of Aboriginal Reserves. These Lands Department records include Parish Plans, subdivision maps and other cadastral information, which we have included in the text where appropriate. Other documentary sources drawn upon are local histories (both published and unpublished), tourist guides (especially for Forster) and local newspapers.

In addition to archival material, we have made considerable use of oral sources. During the research we recorded about thirty oral history interviews with Aboriginal people across the study area. We also draw on two excellent published accounts written by Aboriginal people, both of which rely greatly on memories: Elia Simon’s *Through My Eyes* and Patricia Davis-Hurst’s *Sunrise Station*. In addition to archival and oral sources (that is, primary sources), we draw upon some exemplary scholarly historical studies, most notably Heather Goodall’s *Invasion to Embassy*.

A note on interpreting sources
An issue that all historians of the Aboriginal past face, especially those concerned with the period covered by living memory (i.e. the twentieth century), is how to combine archival and oral sources in their analysis, especially when there are obvious points of disagreement between the two. (For a detailed discussion of this dilemma, see Heather Goodall’s article, “Aboriginal History and the Politics of Information Control”.1) In the following chapters, where there is discord between oral and documentary sources, we have sought to present the different accounts, or interpretations, side by side, providing some comment on how they vary and why. Overall, though, we have used archival and oral sources for distinct and complementary purposes. For example, we have used archival material to reconstruct the history of how Aboriginal people ended up on particular pockets of land in the late nineteenth century, after dispossession from their traditional country was almost complete. These specific historical details are generally not the stuff of Aboriginal people’s memories. In turn, we have used Aboriginal people’s memories to ‘map’ terrain not included in official records. For instance, we draw heavily on oral testimony to establish how Aboriginal people used the landscape beyond the purview of the government manager, that is, outside the mission fence and at the local Christmas camp. In this respect, we use archival records and oral testimony in a similar way: as a reliable source of information about what happened in the past. We acknowledge that such an approach will not satisfy all historians, especially those who argue that documentary and memory sources differ from each other in significant respects and provide radically different types of historical ‘truth’.
The scope of Part 2

While Part 2 does make passing reference to the mid-nineteenth century, its main focus is on the hundred or so years from the closing decades of the nineteenth century until the present. The closing decades of the nineteenth century was a period in which government responses to Aboriginal people became more systematic and formalised (see Chapter 6). As already noted in Part 1, it was in this period that the APB was established. As part of this process, Aboriginal people became concentrated in particular areas, often on reserves that were considered to be an acceptable distance from the loci of white residence. During this period, some Aboriginal settlements became quite fixed in the landscape. Many of these late nineteenth-century Aboriginal settlements are known about today through the work of historians such as Heather Goodall, who has painstakingly documented them in her book, *Invasion to Embassy*. Some have endured to the present, often as a result of the tenacity of Aboriginal people themselves to hold onto these small pockets of reserved land. One of our aims in this part of the book is to broaden our understanding and appreciation of these Aboriginal settlements, especially in heritage terms. We are at pains to illustrate the relationship between these reserve settlements and the larger landscape.

We seek to unsettle the notion that Aboriginal people in the twentieth century could only be found in easily identified ‘Aboriginal spaces’, and to suggest that they also had a presence in the landscape claimed by whites. This has important implications for mapping post-contact Aboriginal heritage in New South Wales, highlighting the concept of shared history/shared heritage.

Historical themes

The key historical themes that shape Aboriginal people’s experiences after the 1940s are assimilation, which was accompanied by a process of de-segregation and the gradual dismantling of discriminatory legislation, followed by a policy agenda of self-management (or ‘self-determination’) after the NSW Aborigines’ Welfare Board was disbanded in 1969.

Another important historical theme is identity: what it meant to be Aboriginal in this part of Australia where Aboriginal people had experienced colonisation over a long time. Of most relevance to our purposes is that during the twentieth century Aboriginal Reserve settlements were sites where Aboriginal identity, now commonly referred to as ‘Aboriginality’, was nurtured, strengthened and made anew. A sense of shared identity among Aboriginal people in South-Eastern Australia was grounded in shared historical experiences (as colonised people) as well as in the continuation of cultural traditions from pre-contact times. To acknowledge the vital role that Aboriginal Reserves played in this process is to add a significant new layer of meaning to them as ‘heritage places’.

In contrast to Part 1, where key historical themes (e.g., accommodation and resistance) provided the frame (or window) through which we examined how Aboriginal people occupied and used the post-contact landscape in the study area, here our window is the landscape itself. This means that key historical themes associated with the twentieth century (e.g., assimilation and self-management) are embedded within our discussion of specific cultural landscapes. Our approach to twentieth-century Aboriginal history is, therefore, explicitly ‘spatial’. This is an original approach. Although numerous and impressive historical studies about Aboriginal people living in various parts of NSW during the twentieth century have been produced over the last thirty or so years, this body of scholarship has been insufficiently spatial in its focus, making it only minimally useful to heritage practitioners. Our aim in the following pages is to demonstrate how twentieth-century Aboriginal history can be spatialised.
This chapter describes a landscape in which the main Aboriginal settlement is the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve, a settlement surrounded by farms, bush and creeks that Aboriginal people used extensively. Along with Purfleet, the cherished Christmas camp at Saltwater on the coast is a key node in this cultural landscape.

What's in a name?

Purfleet is a place associated, and indeed synonymous, with Aboriginal people in the Manning Valley at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, the name Purfleet referred to the southern side of the Manning River opposite the township of Taree but over time it was used only to denote the area occupied by the Aboriginal Reserve situated a few kilometres back from the river. The strip of land along the southern bank, once known as Purfleet, became Glenthorne, the name of the original estate surveyed in 1841. Using the name Purfleet exclusively for the area occupied by the Aboriginal Reserve reinforced a popular meaning it had gradually acquired. Ella Simon, an Aboriginal woman who was born in 1902 and spent most of her life on the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve, noted in her autobiography published in 1978: ‘Oh, there was such a down on Purfleet in those days [c. 1930s/1940s]. If anyone came from Purfleet, they were “black” and that was it. Even the white missionaries who came there to live used to be called “black”’.

Purfleet had become intimately associated with the ‘blacks’ around the turn of the century when a small Aboriginal settlement was established there. There are two accounts about the origins of the Purfleet Aboriginal, one contained in government records and the other told by Aboriginal people. The accounts have some details in common, but also differ in significant ways.

An Aboriginal Reserve at Purfleet

According to documentary sources, in October 1900 the NSW Aborigines Protection Board (APB) organised for an area of eighteen acres to be gazetted at Purfleet as a Reserve for Aborigines (see Figure 46). The Reserve was situated ‘at the intersection of the roads from Taree to Forster and from Tinonee to the Old Bar’. This was one of a series of Aboriginal Reserves that the NSW Aborigines Protection Board was creating at the time.

In her autobiography, Ella Simon provides her own account of the establishment of the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve. In her version, greater emphasis is given to Aboriginal people’s own initiative in moving...
away from the camp they occupied at Browns Hill on the edge of Taree, and to the support they received from sympathetic whites. She explains:

Way back, my mother’s people were starting to overcrowd that camp of theirs on the fringe of the town (Browns Hill). The problem was that the more they increased in numbers, the more the white people wanted them to keep out of town. In those days, my grandfather worked a lot for the local farmers. One day he talked about the terrible conditions that they had to put up with in that camp to a Scottish couple, the McClennans. They were so sympathetic that they offered him a little corner of their own land. It was only a little square that had two entrances because different families owned the paddocks on either side of it, but it was enough for Grandfather. He returned to the camp and managed to get three or four families to move out there with him. The rest just stayed where they were. That was the year I was born, 1902.

Ella’s version gives precedence to her grandfather’s role in the establishment of the Aboriginal settlement at Purfleet, as well as to the goodwill of some local white farmers, providing a different perspective from that gained from an exclusive reliance on government records. In her account, the APB is somewhat invisible. Reiterating that the origin of the Purfleet settlement was the result of Aboriginal people’s own actions, Ella concluded: “That bit of land my grandfather built on was the beginning of the settlement that came to be called Purfleet [Aboriginal Reserve].”

This version of events concurs with Heather Goodall’s argument that the Aboriginal Reserves established in the first two decades or so of the APB’s existence reflect intense pressure from Aboriginal people for land. Her research over many years has been important for highlighting Aboriginal people’s determination in responding to the situation in which they found themselves, post-dispossession.
Not wanted in town

The creation of the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve, on the southern side of the Manning River, was also a product of the growing intolerance of whites to Aboriginal people living in towns. By the late nineteenth century, there was a large settlement of Aboriginal people living at Browns Hill, behind the Taree Estate (the original town settlement) on the northern side of the Manning River. There was concern among the white community that this Aboriginal settlement was growing. Indeed, throughout this period in NSW there was general anxiety about the increasing “half caste” population, many of whom were identifying as Aboriginal. One solution to this perceived problem was to remove Aboriginal people from townships, and segregate them on reserves where they would not be interacting on a daily basis with white people and where they would be out of sight. It is in this context that the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve was established.

Browns Hill camp endures

Even after the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve was formally gazetted in 1900, and some Aboriginal families had taken up residence on it, fringe camps of Aboriginal people remained around Taree. It was not simply the case that the entire Aboriginal population living about Taree came to be contained on the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve upon its gazettal. Ella Simon noted that some families remained at Browns Hill even after her grandfather and other families relocated to Purfleet. Margaret Marr remembered that after spending a short while living on the government reserve at Purfleet in the early 1900s, she moved back to Browns Hill with her family.
It was all tea tree scrub and swamp. There was about 15-20 families living there at the time. Here we were happy. We did not need much, everyone lived off the land, plenty of kangaroos, rabbits, yams and wild honey. All we needed was flour to make bread and plenty of water. There were humpies and tin shacks all through the scrub, a great playground for kids.

Eventually, though, the Browns Hill camp was completely shut down, and its remaining residents forcibly removed to the government reserve at Purfleet. Margaret Marr recalled:

I don’t know how long we stayed there [at Browns Hill]. It seemed a long time to kids. One day some men came with trucks, they said they had orders to take everyone to the reserve at Sunrise Station [Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve]. The men fought them off, then the police arrived. This time they gave in peacefully because they knew they could not win against the law. To fight the law meant going to jail for a long time. Finally everyone was transported to Sunrise Station and resettled.

It was, it seems, only after a struggle that the Browns Hill camp was permanently closed down. At least for a time, the ‘authorised’ government settlement at Purfleet and the ‘unauthorised’ fringe camp at Browns Hill coexisted, with some movement back and forward between the two places.

Purfleet becomes a visible site of Aboriginal dwelling

And so it was that by the early twentieth century, Purfleet, on the opposite side of the Manning River from Taree, had become one of the main Aboriginal settlements in the Manning Valley. While Ella Simon’s account (discussed above) suggests that the land under question was the corner of a farm, early maps show that prior to being gazetted as an Aboriginal Reserve, the eighteen acres under question was Camping Reserve 89, first gazetted in 1880. It is true, however, that it was bordered on two sides by paddocks (see Figure 50).

The Reserve was, in some respects, well situated, surrounded as it was by bush, where Aboriginal men continued to hunt for kangaroos and wallabies, and by farms, where they did a bit of casual work, although it was not well supplied with water. The ABP had initially favoured Tinonee as the site for the reserve, but according to its records, Aboriginal people would not agree to occupy the reserve set aside for them near that place, and the ABP conceded there was less possibility of gaining work there. Again this suggests that Aboriginal people had some say in the establishment of Reserves in this period.

From camping reserve to settlement

Over time the former Camping Reserve-turned-Aboriginal Reserve was transformed into a small and fairly permanent settlement. Its transformation is evident in various ways, such as by the erection of huts, other buildings and fences and the planting of some crops. Ella Simon explains that her grandfather helped [other Aboriginal families] to build their own houses from the timber around there. He even cut shingles for the roofs. APB records indicate that material for ten bark shacks was provided. By 1903, missionaries had taken up residence on the Reserve and soon set about building a mission house and school. The latter opened in 1907 (See Figure 51).

The land around the ‘mission’ becomes increasingly occupied

By 1916, the large portion of land between the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve and the Manning River had been subdivided into wedge-shaped portions.
with 100 feet river frontage each (see Figure 52). With this new subdivision, Aboriginal people’s access to and along the Manning River presumably became more restricted, as they were required to navigate their way around a sea of farms. There was however a rough road from the reserve to the punt jetty at the river, which Aboriginal people used regularly.  

On their way along the road to the wharf, Aboriginal people passed a farm owned by the McLennan (or McClennan) family, the same family that Ella Simon referred to in her description about the foundation of the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve.  

This farm, and the family who owned it, feature strongly in Aboriginal people’s oral histories about the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.

**McLennan’s – a friendly farm**

The McLennans are mostly remembered for a vegetable patch they grew especially for Aboriginal people from the ‘mish’. Describing the farm in the 1940s, Warner Saunders, an Aboriginal man from Purfleet, explained: ‘Old Rory McLennan had this one big paddock, all vegetables just for this place here [Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve]. We used to go down to the river fishing after school, and then on our way home we’d go into that big yard and get vegetables to go with our fish. He grew that for this place’.

Patricia Davis-Hurst, who is Margaret Marr’s daughter and who lived most of her life on the Purfleet Reserve, recalled it in a similar way: ‘We had one farmer – Reggie McLennan – just across the bridge there. The road used to go straight past his house. Every time he ploughed up his paddocks, he’d plough one up for the Kooris. “I’ll put a patch in there for the blackfellas because I don’t want them pinching my good stuff”. Patricia Davis-Hurst interprets the McLennan’s gesture of growing vegetables for the Purfleet people as a practical response to the problem of Aboriginal people pinching fruit and vegetables from local farms. According to Davis-Hurst: ‘Well … they used to knock off the corn or melons or whatever. … If the white farmers saw them [at the creek] they kept an eye on them because they knew they was goin’ to knick a melon or somethin’. And most of the times the boys did’.

The practice of knicking fruit and vegetables might be explained in at least two ways. It was certainly the case that Aboriginal people did not have sufficient land themselves to grow enough crops to support the settlement, and so fruit and vegetables from local farms provided an essential supplement to the rations they received from the government. Alternatively (or additionally), taking fruit and vegetables might be interpreted as an act of defiance, a demonstration that, as the original owners, Aboriginal people believed they had pre-existing rights to the fruits of the land.

**Hostile farmers**

While the McLennans seemed to have been allies (or ‘friends’) of the Aborigines, other local farmers were not. Many local farmers actively discouraged Aboriginal people from walking across their properties. Firing a shot above the “trespassers” heads, or chasing them on horses and later motorcycles, were commonly used deterrents. This did not necessarily stop Aboriginal people from going onto farm land, it just meant that when they did so they would have an escape route worked out in advance, one that often involved darting into bush, usually along the creeks. Russell Saunders, who grew up on the Purfleet Reserve in the 1950s and 1960s, explained what was involved in general terms:
All the time you’d be looking over your shoulder, always alert. Because nine out of ten times you’d hear this bang – a shotgun going off. ‘Ah you blackfellas, get out of there’. They’d come flying down on a horse, or a car would come flying through. … We’d tear up through the bush.27

For Aboriginal boys especially, but also girls, the farms surrounding the Purfleet ‘mission’ were their playground.28 A common pastime for those growing up in the 1950s through to the 1980s was to sneak onto a nearby farm owned by the Stitts family, situated on the Pacific Highway north of the Purfleet Mission, in order to swim in the dam and to raid the orchard.29 They’d commonly get chased off if seen, but part of the fun was to try to enter that land without being detected.

Spirits in the landscape

Unwelcoming farmers were not the only hostile presence that Aboriginal people took into account as they moved across the landscape. Bad spirits, such as the ‘tusk woman’ and the ‘hairy man’, who dwelt in the land, influenced the routes that children, especially, would take. In the oral histories we recorded, most people made reference to encounters, or near encounters, with ghosts. These spirits were both everywhere (i.e. omnipresent) and associated with specific places. For example, a ‘tusk woman’ was believed to live at a particular spot along the Pacific Highway between the Manning River and the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve. This was the spirit of a woman who had been killed there. While spirits are by nature invisible, and are therefore intangible, they nonetheless give the landscape meaning, either through their dwelling places or through sites of ‘encounter’ between the living and the dead. For instance, Ray Saunders remembers being spooked as a child at the old scout hall along the Pacific Highway when he and his friends got stuck there one night in the rain:

We got out there [on to the highway] and … it started rainin’. So we got into the Scout Hall. There was no windows, they just lifted the flaps up. And we just climbed in. We got in there out of the rain. Darkness started to come on and we said, “Oh boy, we’ve got to get home before dark because we had to go past the gate (laughs) where the wild woman … (laughter) where this woman was supposed to have been
killed in an accident, and they said she was a tusk woman and “she was gonna get ya!” on the way home.

So we stayed out there and it started to get that dark, in the afternoon, that we started to panic. And one of the older boys, he looked through the crack in the wall and he said: “There’s a hairy man. He’s climbed up that tree and he’s lookin’ around to see where we are.”

Of course, we went racin’ over and we looked through the crack and it was one of those ants nests. (laughter) But with our eyes and what we were told, we turned it into a ‘hairy man’. (laughter) So some of the younger kids started cryin’. (laughter) “Boy, we’ve got to get out of here! If we don’t move fast we’re goin’ home in the dark, and the tusk woman will get us anyway.” (laughter)

So we start movin’ out of this building and we were all bunched up in a heap headin’ towards the creek, and in the creek there were supposed to be hairy men and wild women there that were going to get us. So, off we go! Start runnin’.

The belief that at night the landscape was home to spirits clearly influenced the way that young Aboriginal boys and girls moved across it. Faith Saunders (Ray and Russell’s mother) suggests that the stories told by parents to their children about the ‘tusk woman’ or the ‘hairy man’ were one way of impressing upon them the need to be home before dark.

The hairy man. He said you’re not to go into the bush late in the afternoon. You got to be careful. The old hairy man will get ya out there and he’ll put ya down a hole, and he’ll put frogs in your ears, and when he hears us comin’ lookin’ for ya, coming to get ya, he’ll run the other way. But there was a moral to the story. The frogs were, you know, what the [molester would] offer you, you know, to get you away. And the hairy man was the molester. Today, we still tell the stories to the little kids at school. That they’re not to get into any cars and they’re not to take lollies from men, old men.

Hiding places

The fear of harassment from whites was real for many Aboriginal children growing up around Purfleet (and elsewhere in rural New South Wales) in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, just as it can be today. The 1930s, especially, were a particularly low period in race relations in rural towns. Some white townsfolk took it upon themselves to keep Aboriginal people out of town and off the streets, using direct confrontation or the threat of it. This was also a period in which many Aboriginal children, now known as the ‘stolen generations’, were forcibly taken by the APB from their parents and placed in institutions.

Accounts about children being lured into the cars of government officials are common in Aboriginal oral histories. Reiterating the way that white men’s vehicles represented a potential threat to Aboriginal children, Faith Saunders recalled of the period:

When we were walkin’ along the road, if a car came – and very few cars came in those days – we’d run into the bush! Frightened of cars, and frightened of cars stopping.

Running into the bush was a common response to threats of violence from white people, including the police. It was often an effective escape. Russell Saunders told us that he remembered ‘this [white] fellow saying, “Once them blackfellows hit the bush, you may as well give up! Forget it! You won’t catch ’em”’.
Bush havens – The Kills, for instance

While Aboriginal people might have ‘jumped into the bush’ along the highway, or along the creek, as they needed to in the face of danger, there were also remnants of bushland that Aboriginal people used regularly for socialising together. The advantage of these bush places was that they were out of sight of whites. Sometimes these places were used for drinking alcohol, which was illegal for Aboriginal people until 1963. The forest reserve behind the Purfleet mission was a popular place for this type of activity.27 (see Figure 53)

While the land to the north of the Aboriginal Reserve was a patchwork of farms, most land behind it was bush.28 A Forest Reserve had been proclaimed in 1898, another in 1902, and finally the extensive Kurrak State Forest was established in 1917. Aboriginal people know this part of the landscape extremely well.

Generations have collected mushrooms and wild fruit, hunted kangaroos, wallabies and rabbits, and tracked and rode horses through there.

At least from the 1940s onwards, but possibly earlier, a well-known hangout was The Kills, a small picnic area within Kurrak State Forest (see Figure 54). Aboriginal families from Purfleet would spend the day there, swimming in the creek, having a barbecue, and sitting around yarning, laughing and maybe drinking.29 Closer to the mission, but in the same part of the bush, was another place known as The Pines. This was a place with good fruit trees, and blackberry and mushroom patches. In the 1940s, Patricia Davis-Hurst and her friends spent their afternoons after school tracking their horses through this bush, and then riding them up to the Pines, along the old Forster Road or the forestry tracks.

We had horses. … When school was finished for the day, we’d go tracking our horses. Everyone had a horse. They used to go down the blue well and feed around there. Or out the Kills way … Go out to the Kills … There’s plenty of fruit trees growing there wild. Beautiful creeks where’d we swim. Go for blackberries, pears, peaches, guavas. Bring them home.30

Water places

Patricia Davis-Hurst refers to the blue well, a natural spring used for drinking water. It was “beautiful clear drinking water.”31 Horrie Saunders, Faith Saunders’ husband, recalled that “there was no tanks in those
days. . . . When we wanted real good drinking water we used to walk down to the blue well, down a back bush track to a place where they’d sunk a shaft for clay to make bricks. Pure clean water there.”

According to Faith Saunders, ‘to keep the kids away, they’d say that blue light would be there. So they wasn’t game to swim in it’. ‘Blue light’ indicated the presence of bad spirits, or the devil. The supply of fresh water was a constant issue at the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve. Aboriginal people depended on wells like this one and nearby creeks. Ella Simon recalled that they’d walk a mile or so to Carles Creek to collect water.

The supply of fresh water was a constant issue at the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve. Aboriginal people depended on wells like this one and nearby creeks. Ella Simon recalled that they’d walk a mile or so to Carles Creek to collect water.

The route to Taree

While explicitly and not so explicitly excluded from Taree in the first half of the twentieth century, nonetheless Aboriginal people had many reasons to go there, not the least of which was the demand for their labour (see also Chapter 11). This was certainly the case for Aboriginal women, many of whom worked as domestics for local white families. Aboriginal people went to town to shop, to buy grog on the sly, and for recreation, such as going to the picture theatre. So the road between the Aboriginal Reserve and where the punt crossed the Manning River to Taree was well traversed, and perhaps more importantly, layered with stories. The route taken to get to town was the old Forster road that came right past the mission and then on to the punt wharf. Like everybody else, Aboriginal people took the punt across the river to get to Taree, at least until the bridge was built.

Aboriginal cemetery

As part of general practices of exclusion operating in rural Australian country towns in the first half of the twentieth century, Aboriginal people were rarely permitted to bury their dead in town cemeteries. Under these circumstances, they set aside a corner of land on their own Reserve, or a piece of unoccupied and usually public land nearby, as a cemetery. These little burial grounds were not usually gazetted as cemeteries in any official way. The location of various Aboriginal cemeteries, in NSW is known either through scant documentary sources, through people’s memories, or through Aboriginal people continuing to maintain those cemeteries despite, very often, having moved away from the missions where they were located.

At the Purfleet Aboriginal settlement, the cemetery was situated in the bush at the back of the Reserve. Ella Simon described how, before cars, Aboriginal men used a handcart to transport a body from the Taree Hospital to the Purfleet cemetery, a distance of two miles. The ‘mission’ cemetery was used until 1965, by which time it was full. From then onwards, Aboriginal people were buried at the Redbank Cemetery along the Old Bar Road, despite some initial opposition from local whites.

The arrival of the mission manager

The Depression in the late 1920s and 1930s forced many Aboriginal people who had hitherto been living independently of government assistance onto Aboriginal Reserves which were under the control of the APB. At Purfleet, this movement of Aboriginal people onto the Reserve coincided with the appointment of the first resident manager in 1932. The arrival of the manager signalled a new era in the history of the Reserve, transforming it from an unsupervised settlement, where Aboriginal people enjoyed some degree of freedom, to a place where
Aboriginal people’s lives were more constrained and controlled. This was a period in which, as Barry Morris argues in relation to Bellbrook, Aboriginal Reserves became ‘total institutions’. The appointment of the manager was symptomatic of the APB’s shifting policy from segregation-protection to assimilation.

In the 1930s, the APB became increasingly intent upon ‘training’ Aboriginal people for eventual assimilation into white society. Aboriginal Reserves were seen as sites where such training would take place. This process stalled with the Second World War, although was resumed immediately afterwards. In addition to the appointment of a resident manager, the tangible, material signs that the bureaucratic meaning of the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve (which, with the appointment of a resident manager, was re-classified as an Aboriginal Station) was changing included the erection of a large gate at the entrance and a manager’s house nearby. The location of the manager’s residence near the entrance to the settlement allowed him to monitor residents’ comings and goings. By this stage, the mission had been renamed Sunrise Station, perhaps to symbolise a ‘new era’, and so the new gate boasted a rising sun (see Figure 55). During the Second World War the symbol was considered too ‘Japanese’, and the sign was taken down. The settlement reverted to its previous name, Purfleet.

Living beyond the mission fence

While most Aboriginal families lived on the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve, a few managed to live just beyond its fence. For instance, the Bungie family (also sometimes spelt Bungay) had a house on the western perimeter of the Aboriginal Reserve, fronting the road to Tinonee. According to oral testimony, the family was able to buy the land and build the house after winning the lottery. ‘George’ Bungie (nee Yarnold), who owned the place with her husband Pat Bungie, was related to the Dingo Creek mob, a group of families who lived on a small reserve on the Dingo Creek near Wingham. George’s relations from Dingo Creek would regularly visit her at the Tinonee road house, often gathering there for dances and sing-alongs. For her grandchildren who later grew up in the house, the bush immediately around it was their playground. They and other kids from the mission would spend hours after school and on the weekends playing in this bush. Directly opposite the house was a place they called Rum Jungle, a popular place for playing; and directly behind the house were the sale yards. On the weekends, local kids would sneak in there to swim in the dam. The Bungie’s house was sold in the 1960s, and the family living there then moved onto the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve.
The local Christmas camp
A description of the Purfleet Aboriginal heritage landscape is incomplete without reference to Saltwater. Saltwater is located on the coast, south-east of Purfleet (see Figure 62). It was the holiday destination of families from the Purfleet Reserve, and indeed from other pocket and fringe settlements in the Manning Valley. It was what is commonly called a ‘Christmas camp’, although it was frequently used at Easter time as well.

During the school holidays, families would pack up and de-camp to the coast. This was an opportunity to get away from the mission, and to have some time together without constant interference from the resident manager and his wife, the ‘matron’. Aboriginal people’s keenest memories of the daily indignities they experienced under the manager and the matron were of being required to report their comings and goings, and of the inspections of their houses without notice. Given these conditions, it is not surprising that the Christmas holidays at Saltwater were eagerly anticipated.

The set-up at Saltwater was organised around family groupings (see Figure 62). Each family had its own camping place, and different kin groups camped close to each other. For instance, the Russell, Marr and Dumas families camped on the point, the Saunders a little further back, while the Bungies camped up near the beach. Even further along the beach from the Bungies was the Happy Valley mob, a group of families who lived just outside Taree at a place known popularly as Happy Valley. They were related to families at Dingo Creek, and thus also to the Bungies.54

Saltwater – our place
In their oral testimonies, Aboriginal people describe Saltwater in ways quite different from how they talk about the ‘mission’. Saltwater is commonly described as a place where people “returned” to old (i.e. more ‘traditional’) ways of doing things and where they experienced a freedom usually absent in their daily lives on the mission and around Purfleet and Taree. This was one place in the local landscape that Aboriginal people felt belonged to them in a very deep sense. Russell Saunders explained: “Yeah, well you knew that that was your place down there. You just knew every little nook and cranny”.55

Before the time when they owned cars (from about the 1960s and 1970s), Aboriginal people would walk down to Saltwater from the Purfleet Mission. Or else...
they would take a horse and sulky, or sometimes they'd hire a local bus or truck. The route was just a dirt track in those days, going through the bush rather than following the Old Bar road as it does today.

**Saltwater becomes a reserve**

Up until the late 1960s and 1970s, very few white people ever went to Saltwater, but it gradually became popular among surfers. In the 1970s, this place, which had once almost exclusively been used by Aboriginal people, was turned into a public reserve under the management of the local Taree Council. In the process, Aboriginal people were prohibited from using it the way they had for generations. This, combined with other changes, such as the dismantling of the NSW Aborigines’ Welfare Board (which had replaced the APB in 1939) and the departure of the resident manager in the late 1960s, meant that the tradition of camping at Saltwater each Christmas lapsed. It is, however, currently being revived.

**Fishing places**

Many Aboriginal men from Purfleet who worked as fishermen in the 1940s and 1950s, and probably earlier, went to Saltwater and other nearby coastal fishing places throughout the year. For example, Ken Saunders (Warner Saunders’ father) had a fishing spot he called Greempoint, which was a little way up the lagoon from Saltwater. He would walk across country to this spot from the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve, where he lived, through the forest reserves at the back of the Reserve. Ken Saunders and other Aboriginal fishermen left their boats and nets on creeks around Purfleet, such as at Trotters Creek and at Woolards Creek, east of the mission. (See also Chapter 19.) Later on, in the 1960s and 1970s, when he was making a living as a professional fisherman, Warner Saunders kept his own fishing gear at Glens Creek along the Glenthorne Road, near the Manning River. Horace Saunders and his sons still anchor their boats in the Manning River, just a little further north from Warner’s spot.

These were places associated with professional fishermen, those who sought to make a living from fishing and who sold their catch through the local fish co-op. Many other Aboriginal people from Purfleet fished for pleasure and to feed their families. Betty Bungie, who moved to Purfleet from Nambucca in about 1950, loved fishing, and would go out every weekend with her husband and children. Her favourite places were Saltwater, Redhead, Blackhead, Old Bar and Forster. She told us that she'd “stay all day fishin'”. Her husband, Johnny (Bungie), usually had an old truck or car, and so they'd drive to their fishing places. If they didn’t go to the coast, they’d go along the Manning River to the bridges at Coopernook and Cundletown and around Pampoolah.

**Local workplaces**

As already noted, many Aboriginal men worked casually on local farms, especially around Glenthorne, particularly from the turn of the century until about the 1940s. The farms they worked on included those owned by the Trotters, Muscios and McLennans. Later on, in the 1950s and 1960s, Aboriginal men, women and children engaged in pea and bean picking. Patricia Davis-Hurst remembers picking at Lambert’s farm up around Burrell Creek. Betty Bungie recalls picking on Dyball’s farm at the Taree Estate and on Oscar Watson’s farm. The farmers would normally collect the pickers early in the morning, dropping them back later in the day. Unlike many other North Coast Aboriginal groups who travelled widely for pea picking, only a few people from Purfleet seemed to have ventured further afield, some going to Port Macquarie for the picking season.

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*Fig. 61: Betty Bungie fishing at Saltwater with her daughter Isabell, c. 1960. Courtesy Betty Bungie*

*Fig. 62: Aerial photograph with overlay of the Christmas camp at Saltwater, showing the approximate location of the various family campsites. We have not indicated which camp belongs to which family, although local Aboriginal people could no doubt identify to whom they belonged. The overlay indicates fishing and swimming places, freshwater wells and fig and black apple trees. © Department of Lands*
By the 1960s and 1970s, the collecting of corkwood became a lucrative activity for Aboriginal people, many of whom owned trucks by then. They would drive out into the bush to collect corkwood, which was used in the manufacture of pharmaceuticals. They’d sell it to a factory on Mitchell Island (see Fig. 63). The trade declined suddenly in the 1970s.

Travelling for work
Aboriginal men were often forced to leave the Aboriginal settlement at Purfleet to participate in paid employment. Some worked on the railways. Ella Simon recalled the tent cities along the Dawson River where men, including some of her uncles, lived while building the new North Coast line in about 1911 and 1912. She’d visit them with her grandmother and aunts. Later on, in the 1930s and 1940s, Aboriginal men worked as gangers or drivers for the railway. This usually involved being away from home for a week or so at a time, only coming back to Purfleet on weekends. Ken Saunders worked for some years as a train driver.

In the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, many young men left Purfleet to try to make some money on the boxing circuit. They remembered this as a big adventure.

In the 1950s and 1960s some Aboriginal men from Purfleet were working on large construction projects around Newcastle and Sydney. For instance, when he was sixteen years old in the early 1950s, Warner Saunders and his slightly older brother worked on the construction of the Warragamba Dam.

Forced removal from Purfleet
In a reversal of earlier segregationist policies, by the 1960s the AWB was intent on removing Aboriginal people from government reserves and relocating them in the wider community. This was part of its policy of assimilation, and was therefore the situation faced by Aboriginal people living on Aboriginal Reserves throughout New South Wales. The AWB, in pursuit of its assimilastionist agenda, had introduced rents on houses on the Reserves under its control, including at Purfleet. This was an insult to Aboriginal people who believed that they
were living on ‘Aboriginal land’. That Aboriginal Reserves first gazetted in the late nineteenth century had been given to their Aboriginal residents in perpetuity was a strongly held belief in most Aboriginal communities across NSW.

At the same time as it introduced rents the AWB stopped maintaining the housing stock, which many Aboriginal people believed was part of its strategy to eventually close down Aboriginal Reserve settlements. As a result, by the 1960s, living conditions on the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve had declined considerably. Many Aboriginal people resisted the AWB’s new regime and protested against it. One common form of protest used across NSW to highlight the terrible conditions under which they were forced to live was to refuse to pay rent. At Purfleet, Horrie Saunders was one who, by refusing to pay rent, made a stand against the appalling treatment that he and his family experienced daily at the hands of the AWB. He was supported in his action by the Newcastle Trades and Labor Council, but he was eventually forced off the reserve. He told Aboriginal author and poet, Kevin Gilbert, in the late 1970s:

The Aborigines Welfare Board kicked me off the place. Because I was a stirrer. There was no footpaths. If you wanted a footpath around your house you had to put it in yourself, at your own expense. Same with a bath. You had to go to the manager to get approval for it, then. Anything you done, you had to get his approval, even a nail in the wall. Fences, sinks, you had to do it all. They never had a sink in the house. They never had a bath in the house. All they had is a hand pump for a shower. And you had to supply your own roofing to boot. And they charged you rent for that.

After being evicted, Horrie and his family relocated to a condemned house in Tinonee. Later he moved back to the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve for a short time, living with his wife and children on the verandah of a house. Finally they were able to buy their own house in Taree, and were one of the first Aboriginal families to do so.

Moving off the ‘mission’

By 1969 the AWB had been dismantled and a committee of residents assumed management of the Reserve, in a period in which Aboriginal self-management was a key aim in Aboriginal affairs. In this period, some Aboriginal families moved into Taree. The movement away from the old mission was partly the result of the government’s efforts to
force Aboriginal people off government reserves and partly the result of Aboriginal people’s desire to make their own way off the Reserves (see also Chapter 11). Many moved back to the Browns Hill area, which by this time had been developed into suburban housing. Nonetheless, the Purfleet Reserve remained an important site of Aboriginal residence in the Manning Valley.

The representativeness of Purfleet

In many ways the significance of the landscape around the Purfleet Aboriginal settlement, in terms of its post-contact heritage, will be similar to the landscapes around other major Aboriginal reserve settlements elsewhere in NSW. The Purfleet Reserve was home to one of the larger Aboriginal communities in the days of the NSW Aborigines’ Protection Board (1883-1939) and the NSW Aborigines’ Welfare Board (1940-1969). There were at least twenty such major reserve settlements in NSW, at various times all under APB-appointed managers. They include Angedool, Brewarrina, Brungle, Burra Bee Dee, Cabbage Tree Island, Cowra, Moonaculla, Roseby Park, Warangesda, Wallaga Lake, and Woodenbong. Some of these reserves were revoked by the APB, and the Aboriginal residents were forced to move elsewhere. Purfleet is an example of those reserves where the community remains in continuous occupation and where they were able to gain ownership of the land after the passage of the NSW Land Rights Act in 1983 (with the land vested in the relevant Local Aboriginal Land Council).
Here we ‘map’ Taree as a ‘segregated’ landscape as well as a site of Aboriginal employment.

The heritage of segregation

Taree features strongly in the oral histories that we recorded with Aboriginal people from Purfleet (even though, in contrast, Aboriginal people do not feature strongly in most local histories of Taree). This prominence of Taree in Aboriginal people’s stories is somewhat surprising, especially given that they were actively prevented from residing in the township from the late nineteenth century until the 1960s. Throughout that period, the township was organised around formal and informal patterns of spatial segregation based on race. This is not unique to Taree, but rather is the case in many NSW country towns, as the ‘freedom ride’ in 1965 so clearly exposed.

It is precisely because Taree has been an unwelcoming place that it is deeply etched on Aboriginal people’s memories, particularly of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.

To operate effectively in any landscape from which one is excluded, or within which one’s movement is circumscribed, requires an intimate knowledge of the entire landscape. It was vital to know where one would be welcome and where not, which places to avoid and, if necessary, where to hide. In such a landscape, one must also know how to move about undetected, or with such focused purpose that the possibility of humiliation is minimised. Paradoxically, exclusion and segregation – or absence – is what makes Taree especially significant in terms of Aboriginal post-contact cultural heritage. It ought also to be a significant element in non-Aboriginal heritage terms given that racial segregation was a central element in the way in which many rural townships in NSW, like Taree, functioned. To ignore this is to present a false image of the past.

The river as border

As noted in Chapter 10, the Browns Hill camp, one of the last Aboriginal fringe camps in the immediate Taree area, was gradually closed down over the final years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. In the process many Aboriginal people relocated (or were relocated) to...
the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve on the southern side of the Manning River. The closure of the Browns Hill camp, and the dispersal of Aboriginal people from it, was symptomatic of the increasing imposition of a racial divide between black and white, one that was realised spatially. This was, as we have already noted, the period in which the exclusion of Aboriginal people from Taree became most explicit and most entrenched.

In this process, the Manning River became a type of dividing line between black and white, functioning as a border between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal living spaces. A new layer of meaning had been added to it. And so, when Aboriginal people talk about their exclusion from Taree, they often do so through reference to the Manning River. For instance, when Warner Saunders explained that he rarely went into Taree as a child in the 1940s he described that as ‘sticking to this side of the river’.

Mapping chronologically Aboriginal people’s use of the Manning River in the immediate vicinity of Taree provides an index to how their relationship to the local township changed over time. For example, through the oral histories we recorded, as well as those recorded by other people, it is evident that between about 1900 and 1950 Aboriginal people’s activity was concentrated upon the river’s southern shore, especially in the area immediately around the punt wharf. This was at the end of the old road leading to the river from the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve. Along this part of the river, Aboriginal people, adults and children alike, would go fishing, catch cobra (wood worm) and swim.

From about the mid-1950s onwards, a change is discernible. Aboriginal children and teenagers began to claim as their own parts of the northern riverbank, not far from the town centre. This coincided with Aboriginal children attending school in Taree, after de-segregation of public schools in the early 1950s. Hanging out at the river, after school and sometimes instead of attending school, became a common pastime for Aboriginal children from Purfleet. By this time, Martin’s Bridge over the Manning River had been built, increasing access from Purfleet to Taree and making the punt redundant. The section of the northern bank of the river from the old punt wharf to the bridge became the focus of Aboriginal children’s activities from the 1950s onwards, for swimming, jumping, diving and general skylarking. This part of the river, used extensively in the post-1950s period, is directly opposite that part of the river that earlier generations had used. (see Figure 65)

A witness to tragedy

Overlaying these everyday uses of the Manning River is its association with exceptional events, including tragic ones that encapsulate the enduring problem of race relations in the Manning Valley. For instance, when talking about the river many Aboriginal people from Purfleet refer to the drowning death of Cecil Bungie (which occurred in the 1950s). Cecil drowned in the river after being chased out of Taree by police. Let Ella Simon tell the story:

I remember young Cecil Bungie. He was a good little worker who was liked by everybody. His work-mates and the people who employed him, especially one of the fishermen with whom Cecil used to go out fishing. He was a very nice boy.

Well, I don’t know how but in some way young Cecil got introduced to the drink. One night he went into town and asked somebody to buy a bottle for him. He got it and started walking down this street with it tucked under his arm and covered over with his coat. Just as he got into the lane, the police turned into it at the other end and started walking down it from the other direction. It was just a coincidence, but Cecil thought they were onto him. He knew that if they caught him with that bottle they’d throw him in gaol, and he’d lose his job and all that. So he panicked and turned around and made a dash for it. Of course, they started to chase him. He ran down to the river and jumped into the water. He had his overcoat on; he had his boots on; and he couldn’t swim.

That boy was drowned. I will never forget that.

This incident captures poignantly and painfully the effects of constant surveillance of Aboriginal people by police, and the extreme consequences of the racially defined prohibitions Aboriginal people experienced on a daily basis during the twentieth century. The story of Cecil Bungie is so compelling because it signifies a much larger and messier history of race relations in Taree/Purfleet. The Manning River bears witness to him and, through him, to the bigger history his tragic death symbolises.

Out by sundown

Up until the 1960s, Aboriginal people were expected to be out of Taree by nightfall, and it was generally the police who ensured that (informal) curfews were kept. As Patricia Davis-Hurst...
recalled: ‘But the police always told the Aboriginals to get out of town by sundown’. Warner Saunders told us the same thing: ‘We used to have to be out of Taree before dark. We used to have to be home here before dark. Wasn’t allowed on the other side of the bridge after dark’.73

Going into Taree

When Aboriginal people went to Taree it was usually for a very specific purpose. They would not hang around unnecessarily because, especially in the 1940s and 1950s, they did not feel they were welcome there. In Russell Saunders’ words: ‘No. You got out of there then. … Only the day Mum’d go to town and she’d go and buy her food, and then come straight home again. Yeah, you’d be in and out. Buy the necessary things that you needed’.

When we asked if she went to town often when growing up at Purfleet in the 1940s, Patricia Davis-Hurst told us:

Well, not into Taree. Not that much really when I think of it. We came into the matinee every Saturday. Yeah, on the milk truck that used to come out and pick up the old cans from the manager’s house. And we’d catch the truck back, but we’d walk home too. We walked home quite often.

Friendly and unfriendly shops

Aboriginal people went to some shops in Taree, but avoided others, depending upon the reception from the proprietors. According to Warner Saunders: ‘There was only a couple of shops in Taree that you could go into’. Patricia Davis-Hurst remembers a fish and chip shop ‘down from the old Boomerang Theatre’ where you’d have to stand at the back waiting to get served, after all the white customers had been. ‘Buying clothes was especially difficult because there was an unspoken rule that Aboriginal people could not try them on before buying: “You couldn’t try clothes on. Couldn’t try clothes on at all. … Hope it fitted, just had to hope it fits’’.76

While Patricia Davis-Hurst remembers the shops that Aboriginal people studiously avoided, she also remembers the ones that were ‘friendly’ to Aboriginal people, and she explained this friendliness in terms of shared experiences of racism:

There was the Dahdahs … They were great friends to my mum and to the Aboriginals, yeah. Because they had to put up with a lot of discrimination themselves (because they were Lebanese). … They often said they know what it’s like to be discriminated against, yeah. And Rex Solomon, he owns the big fruit store near the bridge. He was always called a “digo”’.77

This suggests that one theme in heritage (and history) that has not been sufficiently examined is the nature of the relationship between Aboriginal people and ‘migrants’ (non-colonial). Ann Curthoys, in a recent article titled ‘Immigration and Colonisation: New Histories’, draws attention to this gap.78 Separating Aboriginal and migrant histories from each other, and from the histories of ‘whites’, represents yet another type of segregation.

Segregated at the cinema

While the exclusion from certain shops within Taree appears to have operated on a fairly ad hoc, informal basis, in other local establishments segregation was much more explicit. For instance, everyone knew where he or she stood (or sat) at the local cinema. The Boomerang Theatre features in most Aboriginal people’s memories from the 1930s until about the 1950s. At the Boomerang, the first few rows were ‘reserved’ for Aboriginal people, forcing them to watch the movie with their necks craned. They were also required to enter the building via a side door, rather than through the main entrance. Russell Saunders evocatively explained the experience:

The picture theatre was another case where you paid for the ticket, give them your money at the front office, then you walked around the side. And there was a doorway on either side and the first three or four rows, and there was a chain blocked across the corridor or hallway these. You sat in the first four rows with your head like this [demonstrates craned neck], and you watched the pictures. You looked behind you and there was people right up the back.
up in other seats, and also the top balconies, that had a better view. Our view was like this (demonstrates again), looking up at the screen, and when it was finished you went out the side door. Not out the door where everybody else walked. And that was it. And there was a bus, a big red bus waiting for ya, the Forster bus, and (you) jumped on that and come home. That was your pictures. Your money was good enough, but your bodily presence wasn't. In this respect, while Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people occupied the same place, even if only temporarily, they did so in ways aimed at minimising contact. The fact that whites and blacks shared the space of the cinema in the dark seems to have contributed to the management’s efforts to keep black and white patrons apart (see Figure 68).

Other sites of segregation

The pattern of racial segregation that characterised the local cinema is found repeated in other public spaces. For example, at the local Taree swimming pool strict rules aimed at making sure that Aboriginal children did not get too close to white people were regularly imposed (see also Chapter 21). Likewise, Aboriginal women’s accounts about giving birth at the local Taree hospital usually include reference to being placed in a ward away from white mothers. As noted in Chapter 10, the local cemeteries were closed to Aboriginal people, forcing them to bury their kin in a cemetery at the back of the mission. Through legislation, Aboriginal people were excluded from drinking in local hotels. Although some Aboriginal women worked in them they were kept out of sight of the white patrons. As already noted, local schools were no-go areas for Aboriginal children. They were ‘educated’ in the Aboriginal-only school on the ‘mission’, and this remained the case until 1952. This pattern of physical separation even occurred in private homes where local Aboriginal women worked. For instance, Ella Simon recalled that: ‘I even came up against discrimination in homes that I was actually working in, if you can believe that. Some of those people would make me have my meals outside on a special old plate, and sterilise my knife and fork afterwards!"

Workplaces

Ella Simon makes the observation that Aboriginal people were generally barred from holding ‘public’ positions, but not from cleaning up after white people. Throughout the twentieth century, Taree was a place of employment for many Aboriginal people,
particularly for Aboriginal women, but most of this work was menial. Their labour was by definition ‘hidden’, often carried out in private homes or ‘out the back’ of public establishments such as hotels, away from the public eye. They also often worked very early in the morning before the day began or after normal business hours. Ella Simon explained: ‘I wasn’t allowed to take a government job. I couldn’t be a nurse. There was even a law against us working for the Post Office, so it wasn’t only the law in New South Wales. But oh, I could be a house cleaner all right. I could do other people’s washing. I could be trusted with the keys to the house or flat when the owners were away, but actually doing what I wanted to do was out. I was like all other Aborigines. I had black skin, and so was only good for menial kinds of jobs. Ella Simon worked in Taree at different times during the 1920s, although she doesn’t provide enough information to allow us to precisely locate her various workplaces. She tells her readers that she worked for a family who owned the local music shop, and for some teachers. Ella’s mother had also worked for a white family in Taree. It was while she was working there that she became pregnant with Ella to the man for whom she worked. As Ella explained in her autobiography: ‘My father told me later that it was a party at his place that led to me being born. As I said, my mother was actually working for him at the time. He was always very sorry that I had come into life that way’. As I said, my mother was actually working for him at the time. He was always very sorry that I had come into life that way. This would have been about 1901 or 1902. It is impossible to know which family her mother worked for because Ella withholds her father’s identity from her readers (see Chapter 16).

Patricia Davis-Hurst’s mother worked in Taree, along with some other Purfleet women, in the 1940s. According to Patricia: ‘There was about three [Aboriginal women from Purfleet that] worked at the Foggs (Fotheringham’s) Hotel. Making beds and cleaning rooms and that sort of thing. … My aunt, she was a domestic for quite a few well-to-do people’. In the same period, Patricia and some of her friends, who were about thirteen or fourteen at the time, worked at the Langley Private Hospital in Taree on Saturdays. ‘We used to scrub floors and do other menial things. We wanted to do it for pocket money for pictures, see. Our own money, yeah. All the girls used to do it. Every weekend. Every Saturday’. (See Figure 64).

De-segregation begins

The 1950s marks the beginning of the period in which explicit (and legalised) forms of racial segregation in, or exclusion from, public institutions begins to be dismantled, although the pattern clearly lingers on in more tacit ways. As already noted, in 1952 Aboriginal children from Purfleet were admitted to schools in Taree for the first time. However, it was not until 1963 that Section 9 of the Aborigines Protection Act, prohibiting Aboriginal people from drinking alcohol and excluding them from hotels, was finally repealed.

Resisting segregation

While memories of exclusion and segregation are common among Aboriginal people aged over about fifty, equally common are accounts about how those practices were resisted. Some Aboriginal people told us about specific incidents in which they refused to accept the status quo. Their memories encapsulate the dehumanising effects of segregation, while at the same time reasserting their own agency in challenging unjust treatment. For instance, Patricia Davis-Hurst gives this account in her book, *Sunrise Station*, of how her mother opposed segregation at the local cinema:

Mum changed the policy at the local picture theatre. Their policy was that all Aboriginals had to sit in the first five rows of the theatre, which was fenced off. She changed this one night by sitting in the back seats and refusing to move, thus making a stand for equality for all.

For the period from the late 1950s onwards, stories like this one about opposing, and transgressing, forms of spatial segregation become more common in Aboriginal people’s oral testimonies.

The most candid accounts about resisting segregation in Taree come from a group of Aboriginal men now aged in their fifties. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, when they were teenagers they began hanging around the streets of Taree with ‘white’ girls (for more detail, see Chapter 21). Today, they explain their actions as a type of rebellion against the forms of segregation that their parents and grandparents had endured. In fact, they began to call themselves the ‘ice-breakers’, a name highlighting their challenge to the unspoken rules that kept blacks and whites apart and their efforts to warm up relations between the two cultures (in the way that perhaps only adolescents can). Lawrence Bungie described how he and his mates in the 1960s ‘sort of changed’ the old forms of segregation that had hitherto existed, ‘cos we used...
to go around with the white sheilas, and we used to sit anywhere we wanted to sit [at the pictures]. They didn’t like it but there was nothing they could do because we paid our money. Apart from the cinema, their favourite haunts were the riverbank near the town centre and a local café that had a jukebox. Or, they also simply walked the streets with their white girlfriends and their white mates.

Border crossing

Going around the streets of Taree with ‘white sheilas’ was a visible and powerful act of ‘transgression’, or ‘border crossing’. At the very heart of the elaborate forms of spatial segregation that defined Taree for the first half of the twentieth century was an anxiety about miscegenation, and concomitantly about the perceived problem of a growing ‘half-caste’ population. Despite the fact that ‘mixed marriages’ have been an enduring feature of Australian colonial life, there is plenty of evidence that they were frowned upon in the period between the 1930s and 1960s, on both sides. Certainly, Aboriginal boys experienced hostility from the parents of white girls they went out with, and at the same time they were discouraged from doing so by their own parents and grandparents. Warner Saunders told us that when he was growing up at Purfleet in the 1940s and 1950s he was encouraged by the older people to marry an Aboriginal woman, but from somewhere beyond the Manning Valley. Our ancestors, our old people used to be very strict. They’d say ‘No, stay out of Taree. Don’t mix with them people in Taree. … I can’t blame my people for their strict laws because that’s as it always was. They had very strict law you know. You weren’t allowed to marry a white woman. You had to marry your own colour.’

However, by the 1960s at least, mixed unions were becoming more common and more acceptable.

Moving back to Browns Hill

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, some Aboriginal families began to move off the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve. During this period the AWB was actively pursuing an ‘assimilisationist’ agenda, which had at its core the expectation that Aboriginal people would behave and live like whites. Training Aboriginal people for citizenship became a key element in the government’s Aboriginal program. In this context, the AWB was pursuing a housing program in which it ‘encouraged’ Aboriginal families to move away from Aboriginal Reserves and to take up residence in predominantly ‘white’ suburbs. In Taree, Aboriginal families were resettled in Housing Commission homes concentrated in suburbs such as Chatham and Bushland. These suburbs, ironically, were situated around the old Browns Hill area from which Aboriginal people had been forcibly removed decades earlier. This meant that some Aboriginal families went back to the place where their ancestors had once lived. Previously excluded from this part of town, Aboriginal people were now expected to occupy it. But the resistance from white people to Aboriginal people living in this part of town had not completely abated over the intervening decades. Patricia Davis-Hurst recalled that the initial resettlement of Aboriginal people into Taree was met with considerable opposition, including protests at an official government event marking the relocation of one Aboriginal family from Purfleet into a new house. ‘Well a lot of people, they started moving into town. It must have been thirty years ago or more. I remember the first time the family moved in, they [local white residents] had a demonstration in the street because they didn’t want “blacks” moving next door’. This was in Bays Hill, which was, according to Patricia, a ‘posh’ part of Taree.

Following this, there were other waves of resettlement from Purfleet to Taree (and indeed vice versa). Later waves were not the direct result of the AWB’s housing scheme but a response to the period of self management of Aboriginal communities which followed the end of the AWB in 1969. For instance, Patricia Davis-Hurst moved into Taree in 1976, first to a house in Kanangra Drive, then to Cowper Street where she stayed for ten years, before moving into the house in Ronald Road that she and her husband presently occupy. She told us that the decision to move was hard, but that she was unhappy with the way things were going on the old ‘mish’. Yet, despite settling in town, she and the many other Aboriginal people who have made the same move still have strong ties with Purfleet.

Sites of racial violence

While during the 1960s and 1970s the spatial divide between black and white had ostensibly all but broken down, hostilities had not completely disappeared. There was still evidence of a certain amount of racial tension between some sections of the black and white communities. The situation came to a head in 1979 when some Aboriginal children from Purfleet were harassed by a group of white men after leaving a disco at the sailing club in town. This was the impetus for a night of violence, described as a race riot. According to Anthony Kelly, in his thesis on Purfleet: ‘On Friday, 17 August, 1979 a group of Aborigines from Purfleet
‘went on a rampage’, in the vicinity of the Vee Ess Sailing Club in Taree. This violence was attributed to an act of black recrimination for an incident on the bank of the Manning River involving Aboriginal children a week previously. Recalling it twenty years later, Lawrence Bungie described his participation in the so-called ‘riot’ as the worst thing that had ever happened to him.

Lawrence explained that as a response to the way their children and younger siblings and cousins had been treated they just ‘sort of took over the town … Got into the Wingham blokes, smashed the town, big riot’. Likewise, Patricia Davis-Hurst emphasises the retributive element involved. ‘So the next Friday night all the men of the village retaliated, with a lot of the younger women of course, young mothers. They all went into the disco, loaded up their cars up with all sorts of little home made boondies and sticks and there was a hell of a brawl. Hell of a brawl.’

In her book, Patricia Davis-Hurst explains the ‘riot’ through the spectre of a long history of colonisation. The fact that for almost 100 years Aborigines have been confined to missions on the fringe of the town, and most likely they were put near a cemetery or a sewerage dump, out of sight and mind. All the choice land where they used to live near water or a green forest was taken over by the white man either for himself, or to sell for his own profit. … Then in 1979, all the frustrations of those years and the latest incident involving their children came to a head, the town was sitting on a time bomb that was to explode in a race riot on a Friday night.

In this account, the incident is interpreted as the result of a hundred of years of frustration. The violence is explained as both a direct response to a racially motivated attack and a response to the enduring legacy of colonial violence. The ‘riots’ are a reminder of how the colonial past lingers and constantly impinges on the present.

Aboriginal people and the towns of NSW

Elements of the relationship of Aboriginal people to the town of Taree will be common to many other Aboriginal communities and towns in NSW. Many of the largest Aboriginal Reserves (with the largest populations of Aboriginal residents) were intentionally situated by the government close to country towns: close enough for the white townspeople to have access to the labour of Aboriginal women and men but far enough away to facilitate the segregation of Aboriginal people from the everyday life of the towns. Listed below is a selection of NSW Aboriginal Reserves (with large resident communities) in this category:

- Bellwood (3km from Nambucca Heads)
- Bowerville (1km from Bowraville)
- Brewarrina (16 km from Brewarrina town across the Barwon River)
- Burnt Bridge (3km from Kempsey)
- Erambie (3km from Cowra town across the Lachlan River)
- Forster (0.5km from Forster)
- Karuah (1.5km from Karuah)
- Moree (2.5km from Moree town)
- Walgett (11km from Walgett town across the Barwon River)
- Woodenbong (5km from Woodenbong town)

Some anthropologists and historians have closely examined the relationship of Aboriginal communities to rural towns and townspeople in NSW. For instance, in her book Black, White and Brindle, the anthropologist, Gillian Cowlishaw, gives a detailed account of the relationship of Aboriginal people to the town of Bourke. Peter Read has written about Aboriginal fringe camps on the edge of NSW country towns and the efforts of the authorities to disperse the communities who lived in them.
TRACING

Shewing area proposed to be allotted for Reserve for Aborigines
Parish of Killa warra County of Macquarie
Within W.R 136 Not 1st August 1881

Scale 20 chains to an inch.

Proposed area shown by redading.

Geo Broomfield

To accompany my letter No. 1078 dated 28th December 1883

Frank W. Warren
Surveyor
This chapter describes a landscape in which gazetted Aboriginal Reserves were used somewhat intermittently rather than permanently, or as the residential base for only one or two families rather than many.

The heritage of Aboriginal Reserves

Not all Aboriginal Reserves in New South Wales are the same, or have had the same history. Some (known officially as ‘stations’) were supervised by a resident manager; others were un-supervised, visited from time to time by the local policeman or an APB official. Some have been continuously occupied over many generations; others were settler’s for only one or two generations. If the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve corresponds to the former model, then the Reserves at Killawarra and Dingo Creek belong to the latter. For much of their existence, the Killawarra and Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserves were used predominantly as seasonal camps. By the mid-twentieth century both had been revoked. This landscape study allows us to examine how and why this occurred. As we show, the factors were complex: a combination of Aboriginal people’s own choices, changing governmental priorities and policies, ‘whitefella’ attitudes to local Aboriginal people and hunger for land. The revocation of the Reserves did not signal the end of an Aboriginal presence in the landscape. They could still be found living on local ‘white’ farms, or in ‘unofficial’ camps on the edge of towns.

Killawarra Aboriginal Reserve

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, at least two Aboriginal Reserves were gazetted and occupied by Aboriginal people west of Wingham (see Figure 71). One of these was at Killawarra. The first mention of this Reserve in the NSW Aborigines’ Protection Board (APB) minutes was in 1893, where it was noted that Aboriginal people occupying the land in question were keen to fence it, but were ‘unable to obtain any lines on which to erect (a fence), the land never having been surveyed’. The APB resolved to request the Department of Lands to ‘mark off’ a Reserve, which was formally gazetted in March 1894. The size of the Reserve was 112.75 acres (see Figure 70).

We have not located any documentary material concerning the Killawarra Aborigines’ Reserve (Reserve No. 19861) for the period from its gazettal in 1894 to 1906. However, by 1906 it is the subject of considerable correspondence between the APB and the Lands Department, when a local landowner, Peter Della (who owned a property adjacent to...
the Reserve) made application to lease it. This correspondence provides detailed description of the Killawarra Aboriginal Reserve, its use by Aboriginal people and its relationship to the wider landscape.

An Aboriginal farm
By 1906, according to a NSW Lands Department surveyor, part of the Reserve had been cleared and fenced. William Rush, an Aboriginal man, lived in a hut on it and had apparently been there for about twelve years, that is, since the time of its original gazettement. Rush had cultivated a portion of the Reserve, and grazed his horses over the remainder. Rush belongs to that little-known group of Aboriginal farmers, who Heather Goodall discusses in her research into Aboriginal land use in New South Wales. While himself a farmer, he nonetheless made his livelihood primarily by working for local white farmers, despite ‘becoming old’. He seems to have lived on the Killawarra Aboriginal Reserve with his immediate family, although other Aboriginal people came to stay with him when they were passing through. A Lands Department official noted: ‘It would appear that very few other aboriginals use any part of this with the exception of spending a day or two with Rush when passing’.102

Killawarra as a refuge
By 1910, however, more Aboriginal families had settled on the Killawarra Aboriginal Reserve. In one description from this time, the Reserve is depicted as a potential refuge for Aboriginal people who were reportedly ‘hunted about like beasts when they camp on the roads’.103 The surveyor who made this report had been told by those people living on the Killawarra Reserve that ‘there were some 30 or 40 individuals including 14 children up to the age of 16 years who were quite without any fixed abode and they did not seem to understand that they were entitled to go onto the Reserve No. 19681 Ph Killawarra and establish themselves there’.104

This evidence concerning an Aboriginal presence beyond the official reserves is noteworthy because it is a reminder that the entire post-contact landscape potentially is associated with Aboriginal people, although the exact location of these temporary and unofficial camps is far more difficult to pinpoint than these formally gazetted Reserves. It also underscores how, for some Aboriginal people, Killawarra Aboriginal Reserve was just one node in a wider itinerary of places that they used and occupied.

Killawarra as a stopover
Responding to the surveyor’s report, the local policeman, while rejecting the claim that Aboriginal people were ‘hunted about like beasts’, described the Killawarra Aboriginal Reserve as a regular stopping place for those moving up and down the Manning Valley. He reported: ‘It is used principally as a camping ground for the Aborigines … and is always occupied by one half cast and his wife named Yarnold’.105 A few years later this policeman repeated his observation: ‘There is nearly always one or two families on the Reserve, and when there are not it is handy to them when they are travelling about which they frequently do from the lower River to the Upper part of the Manning’. These reports make explicit the continuation of a type of seasonal movement by Aboriginal people around the landscape, one that may have had much in common with pre-contact patterns although it is impossible to tell. In fact, it is only with the increasing restrictions imposed upon Aboriginal people’s movement (some enshrined in the Aborigines Protection Act (1909)) that this type of seasonal and intermittent use of Aboriginal Reserves declined and they were incrementally turned into ‘settlements’ as opposed to ‘camps’.

Dispersal at Killawarra
By the 1920s, the Killawarra Aboriginal Reserve had apparently become disused. The local landowner, Peter Della, who had doggedly tried to secure it, reported in 1919 that ‘one of the aboriginals told me that they did not care about the reserve, and did not want it’.106 Whether or not this is true, in 1921 the APB did in fact make the Killawarra Aboriginal Reserve available for lease, noting that ‘in view of the fact that this reserve is never used by the Aborigines, same to be handed over to the Lands Department for disposal’.107 It is difficult to determine from this snippet whether the alleged disuse had been voluntary or (more likely) forced. Without the residents’ own testimony, it is hard to know exactly what led them to abandon the Reserve. But it is worth noting that the situation is by no means unique in NSW in this period: many Aboriginal people found themselves being pushed off land that they had occupied for some years. Heather Goodall argues that during the early part of the twentieth century, Aboriginal people in NSW experienced a second dispossession, ‘brought about by the increasing pressure of white land hunger and the APB dispersal policies’.108 In terms of the APB’s ‘dispersal policies’, there was a shift in practice in
this period whereby rather than support Aboriginal people living in reserve settlements, pressure was being applied for them to move into the broader community and to fend for themselves.  

Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve

It seems likely that some Aboriginal people who had been living on, or regularly camping at, the Killawarra Aboriginal Reserve subsequently moved to the Dingo Creek Reserve, a short distance away. Dingo Creek is the second of the two formally gazetted Aboriginal Reserves near Wingham. Like Killawarra, the Dingo Creek Reserve had functioned, initially at least, as a camping place used regularly but not permanently by Aboriginal people moving around the Manning Valley. But, when Killawarra was revoked in the 1920s, the size of the settlement on the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve grew and indeed became more permanent. These two developments — the decline of Killawarra and the rise of Dingo Creek — are not simply coincidental but clearly interrelated.

While the Dingo Creek Reserve was not formally gazetted until 1906, there is some evidence of Aboriginal people living on and around it before this. One entry in the APB minutes refers to a local pastor ‘recommending the issue of rations to a number of destitute Aborigines at Ashlea’. Ashlea is the name of the area immediately surrounding the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve, and indeed in much official correspondence the Reserve is referred to as Ashlea Flat.

The Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve, gazetted in 1906, was originally part of a Water Reserve, located on the edge of Dingo Creek, approximately five kilometres north-west of Wingham (see Figure 72). As a type of Crown Land reserve, the Water Reserve was probably where the ‘destitute Aborigines’, referred to above, had been living. The size of the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve was about ten acres, and it fronted the road to Nowendoc. Rather than a viable farm that could support a number of people, the relatively small Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve (compared with the 112 or so acres at Killawarra) seems to have been intended, and indeed functioned, as a residential base for Aboriginal families who survived as casual labourers on local farms, or through trapping and shooting animals for subsistence. According to one report in 1911, while the local constable at Wingham had arranged for two huts to be built on the Aboriginal Reserve, he had ‘trouble in keeping them occupied, as they [the Aboriginal people] are continually moving about o’possum trapping and shooting’.

Gazetting Dingo Creek

The extant correspondence between the local East Maitland Land Board Office and the APB provides some information about the history of the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve, including the factors contributing to its creation in 1906. In his appeal to the NSW Lands Department to turn part of a Water Reserve at Dingo Creek into an Aboriginal Reserve, an APB official noted that the five families currently occupying the Water Reserve had been camped ‘in the vicinity for the past twenty years’ (i.e., since the late 1880s). It was on the basis of this observed continual residence in the area, on public land, that the APB thought it proper to officially gazette an Aboriginal Reserve. As noted above, the report made clear that the Reserve would function as a base from which those occupying it could provide casual, and presumably cheap, labour to local farmers:

_There is already an Aborigines Reserve some miles distant, but it is not considered altogether suitable for the purpose, and the Aborigines find it too far away to obtain employment from the farmers._

But while these Aboriginal people were reportedly providing their labour to local farmers, not all neighbouring farmers were pleased with the proposed gazettal of the Aboriginal Reserve and, indeed, some opposed it. The proposed reserve was bordered on three sides by farms, and as a Lands Department surveyor noted in his report, two of the three neighbouring farmers did not want the Reserve:

_The reserve is surrounded by the holdings of three different owners, two of whom are strongly_
opposed to the aboriginals being allowed to camp thereon stating as their reasons that they are a constant source of annoyance to them in so far as cutting their fences and putting horses into their paddocks of a night, also numerous other petty annoyances. The other owner – Robert Broomfield – on the contrary has directly opposite views and has never found them any annoyance but at times useful for casual employment.

On this occasion, the opposition of the two farmers was disregarded, and the small reserve gazetted. That neighbouring farmers could have such different views about Aboriginal people — annoying versus useful — reminds us of the fine calibrations in the nature of relations between blacks and whites at any one time and place. Such evidence exposes how an overly simplistic analysis of the colonial past, for example one framed baldly in terms of ‘goodies’ and ‘baddies’ or ‘victors’ and ‘victims’, is poor history.

A base and a stopover

As had previously been the case with the Killawarra Aboriginal Reserve, the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve functioned not only as a base for some people who lived more or less permanently (or seasonally) on it, at least in between moving around the area for hunting and other purposes, but also as a stopover place for Aboriginal people who were just passing through. The NSW Lands Department surveyor noted: ‘other aborigines pay periodical visits to the reserve and occasionally camp there’. These other Aboriginal people who did not consider the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve a base might have had another ‘camp’ that served that function. Or else, they might have been continuously on the move, never considering any one place a primary base for their activities.

Hill country people

In 1911, an official of the APB suggested the transfer of the Aboriginal people living at the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve to the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve. But this was never feasible. The reports concerning the proposed scheme are illuminating nonetheless, particularly for the way they delineate differences between the people associated with the Dingo Creek Reserve and those on Purfleet. Most notably, the people living at the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve were consistently described as being oriented towards the sea, not the hill country. For example, in relation to the proposed transfer from Purfleet to Dingo Creek, the local surveyor stated: ‘I do not think it advisable to take these blacks inland farther from the sea’. Likewise a local policeman reported to the NSW APB that ‘no doubt some trouble would be experienced in removing the Aborigines from near Taree … [because] they are within a few miles of the ocean, and it is said they frequently visit it’.

These observations reflect pre-contact patterns of social organisation. For example, Collins and Morwood, referring to pre-contact times, claim that ‘“hill country” people operated within well-defined boundaries but also had access to the coastal … group’, and further that ‘movement of hinterland people into the territory of coastal groups appears to have been closely controlled and there are no ethno-historical references to coastal people moving inland. There is, however, information to suggest that people from the hinterland travelled to the tableland in summer’. This seems consistent with practices in the early part of the twentieth century. Oral histories recorded with Aboriginal people who had lived on the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve, and with Aboriginal people from Purfleet who were well acquainted with it, suggest that these patterns of movement and of spatial/social organisation endured during the twentieth century. By the 1930s, it is clear that the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve was predominantly occupied by people who originated from further up the mountain range, particularly from places such as Walcha.

Dingo Creek – a place of refuge

Certainly by the 1930s, during the Depression, the little Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve had become a place of refuge for Aboriginal families moving into the Manning Valley from the west. These diasporic
families presumably travelled down the ‘old Oxley highway’ and joined kin eking out a living around Wingham and Dingo Creek. While in straitened circumstances, these families at least were managing to live independently of the APB, on a Reserve without a resident manager, which was not the situation at Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve where the first manager was appointed in 1932.

Tom Craddock lived at Dingo Creek with his family for a short time in the late 1930s, after moving down there from Walcha (see Chapter 18). Although only a young boy at the time, when we spoke to him in 2000 he had clear memories of the place. On a visit to the site of the old Reserve, he was able to identify the exact place where his young brother, Jim, had been born and the precise location of his family’s little hut (see Figure 72).

While Tom Craddock only lived on the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve for a short time, it nevertheless remained a central spot in his childhood, which was lived in the landscape around Wingham. His family regularly visited people at Dingo Creek on weekends: ‘we still went backwards and forwards. Have a weekend out there fishing. Then we come back home again’. This pattern of visiting scattered Aboriginal settlements incorporated Purfleet as well. Tom told us: ‘You know where the old swimming pool is in Taree. Well when we lived out the back of Cedar Party [Road], we used to travel in there with our horse and buggies, and we used to tie our horses up there. We’d have our lunch there, and we’d get our groceries there. We used to go across to Purfleet on the other side [of the river]. We used to go by punt’. Similarly, the Purfleet people would sometimes visit the Dingo Creek community. Warner Saunders from Purfleet remembered that in the 1940s ‘I used to go up [to Dingo Creek] a lot when I was a young fella, [to] Dingo Creek, [to] them people’.

### Dingo Creek leased

In 1941 the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve was leased as a permissive occupancy for four years to W. H. Thorpe, and this lease was extended again in 1946. This change in tenure did not necessarily mark the end of Aboriginal people’s association with this pocket of land. As Warner Saunders indicates it remained a part of a local Aboriginal itinerary of places. And oral testimonies, but not documentary records, indicate that the Thorpe family, the leaseholders in the 1940s, were Aboriginal.

### Renewing ties with Dingo Creek

More recently, the site of the old Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve has been reoccupied by Aboriginal people. Today tenure over a portion of the original reserve is held by the Purfleet-Taree Local Aboriginal Land Council. Cliff Cooke, an Aboriginal man, lives there in a house he built himself, not far from where Tom Craddock’s family had its little shack decades earlier.

### Living on white farms

While the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve was a distinct Aboriginal community, it was also intimately connected with dispersed, often individual, family
settlements elsewhere around the Wingham area. Some of the families who had spent time on Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve in the 1930s moved off if in the 1940s, particularly as demand for labour increased during the Second World War. These Aboriginal families typically lived on ‘white farms’ in houses or in huts provided by the farmers. For example, after moving from Dingo Creek in the late 1930s, Tom Craddock’s family lived in a series of houses on private properties around Wingham, including one on Young’s Road and another off the Cedar Party Road. Throughout this period Tom’s grandfather worked for local farmers.

Similarly, the Morris family was connected with the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve for many years, with Edna Morris being one of the last people to leave it. Charlie Morris was well known around Wingham for his carved woodwork, some of which is now on display in the local museum. After leaving Dingo Creek, he lived for a time in a house at Wallaby Joe Flat on the road between Wingham and Dingo Creek. We learnt about these places when talking to local Aboriginal people. Without reference to living memory, it is, of course, difficult to predict where any of these individual sites of Aboriginal dwelling in the wider landscape might be. The important point, however, is that these places do exist in addition to, but intimately connected with, the settlements like the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve, or other Aboriginal communities in the larger landscape.

The Happy Valley settlement

The Happy Valley settlement between Wingham and Taree is another place associated with Aboriginal people from the Wingham/Dingo Creek area. The Aboriginal families associated with the Happy Valley camp were the Farrells, Craddocks and Browns. All of these families had previously lived at the Dingo Creek Aboriginal Reserve. This settlement is probably best described as a Depression-era shantytown, similar to those found throughout Australia in the same period. These places sprang up on unoccupied Crown land on the edges of towns, and some were occupied by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families who found themselves in the same economic boat because of worldwide recession. To date, an Aboriginal presence in these Depression-era camps has not been well documented; it is a matter deserving of research, especially given that these camps are exemplary sites of shared heritage/shared history. Happy Valley was not only home to Aboriginal families; it was also on the itinerary of places regularly visited by Aboriginal people from Purfleet.

For instance, Warner Saunders recalled that as a boy in the 1940s, ‘there used to be people out at Dingo Creek, and there used to be people at Happy Valley. We used to visit people at Happy Valley’. Similarly, the Happy Valley people regularly visited people at Purfleet. Tom Craddock remembers that his grandparents would visit Pat and George Bungie in their house just outside the Purfleet Mission on the Tinonee Road. They’d also sometimes go down there for dances. Likewise, the Happy Valley people would join the Purfleet people at Saltwater each Christmas, although their camp was on the perimeter.

Similar Aboriginal landscapes in NSW

The Dingo Creek and Killawarra settlements are representative of an important category of places in the Aboriginal history of NSW. They were situated on formally gazetted Aboriginal Reserves that were occupied by only one or a few families, with little or no supervision by the NSW APB. Such reserves were gazetted in quite large numbers in NSW in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, often as a result of individual Aboriginal people petitioning the government. Some of them were suitable for Aboriginal people to farm, as was the case at the Killawarra Aboriginal Reserve, though they were mostly too small, or the land too marginal, to be a sole basis of support. Generally, the Aboriginal people living at these places worked on a casual basis on surrounding farms, picked up odd bits of work in local villages and towns, hunted rabbits for food and to sell the skins, and went after bush-tucker. The Dingo Creek and Killawarra settlements are also important because they are examples of Aboriginal Reserves that were eventually revoked, no longer set apart for the exclusive use of Aboriginal people. They were, as we have already noted, victims of the ‘second dispossession’ that occurred in the early part of the twentieth century. The communities that had established themselves on the Reserves were forced to either move to other Aboriginal Reserves or to set up new settlements on vacant Crown land or to take up residence in the ‘white landscape’, such as on white-owned farms. For some families, the option was to move into ‘mixed’ temporary settlements that emerged during the Depression in the 1920s and 1930s, like Happy Valley, on the edge of Taree. Similar Depression-era camps, occupied by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families, can be found in other parts of NSW, including at Port Kembla (Hill 60), La Perouse (Hill 60 and Happy Valley) and around Newcastle.
The occupants of these various smaller settlements would normally have had kin living in the larger, more permanent Aboriginal settlements, like the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve. People kept in touch by mutual visiting and by way of information flowing along the ‘grapevine’. It was the existence of small settlements such as these, sometimes comprising only a single primary family camping or living more-or-less permanently on an Aboriginal Reserve or other piece of available land, which gives validity to the idea of a broadly dispersed Aboriginal post-contact pattern of settlement in many of the landscapes of NSW. These patterns of dispersion were nowhere near as fine-grained as those of the white population. But they do mean that there were these smaller dots on the map of Aboriginal post-contact settlement in between the larger dots represented by the large Reserve communities.
This chapter is a study of the Forster and Wallis Lake landscape. As in the previous chapters, the focus is on the relationship between the loci of Aboriginal residence and the landscape surrounding and fanning out from them. A key theme in this study is Aboriginal people’s use of local waterscapes, especially the sea coast and Wallis Lake.

Nineteenth-century Aboriginal camps

The Forster Aboriginal Reserve, like the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve, was first gazetted in the late nineteenth century. Prior to the first official gazettal of land for the exclusive use of local Aboriginal people, there was already in existence a series of Aboriginal camps in and around Forster, probably including on the site of the first official Aboriginal Reserve. It is almost impossible, though, to pinpoint the exact location of these earlier nineteenth-century camps. This difficulty, which is fundamentally due to the absence of archival sources, was particularly evident when we attempted to locate old Coomba George’s camp.

Coomba George’s camp

As an old man in the 1930s, Coomba George lived on the Forster Aboriginal Reserve in a shack behind his son Barney Simon’s house. He was apparently known as Coomba George because he was born at a place called Coomba. Ella Simon, who was married to another of his sons, Joe Simon, says that George was born at the head of the Wallamba River at a place called Coomba, so the people called him “Coomba George”. It is difficult to know exactly which place Ella is referring to. Present-day Coomba

is not, by any stretch of the imagination, at the head of the Wallamba River. Rather, it is situated on the southern shore of Wallis Lake. We do not know whether the Coomba that appears on today’s maps is the same place from which Coomba George is believed to have come. Unfortunately, no one else alive today is completely sure where this nineteenth-century Aboriginal camp was situated.

Despite the lack of geographical specificity, Ella Simon’s references to Coomba George in her autobiography Through My Eyes do indicate the known presence of Aboriginal camps around the Forster and Wallis Lake area prior to the formal gazettal of the Aboriginal Reserve in 1895 (discussed below). For instance, she explains that Coomba George grew up with her own grandfather and her grandfather’s brothers “at the Wallamba”.

Again, unfortunately the location is not specified, but clearly these were Aboriginal settlements that pre-dated the Forster Aboriginal Reserve.

The Forster Aboriginal Reserve

The land that is today vested in the Forster Local Aboriginal Land Council under the NSW Land Rights Act 1983 represents only a tiny portion of the land that had been gazetted as Aboriginal Reserves at Forster throughout the twentieth century. It constitutes the little piece which Aboriginal people managed to hold onto from about the 1920s onwards, after a series of revocations and re-gazettals. As is the case with many other NSW Aboriginal Reserves, we learn a lot about the Forster Aboriginal Reserve from official correspondence relating to the seemingly unrelenting competition over it.

The first gazettal

In 1891, an area of seven and a half acres close to the foreshore of Wallis Lake was gazetted as the Reserve for the Use of Aborigines. This gazettal consisted of two portions: Reserve 13439 (Portion 25) facing South Street west of MacIntosh Street and Reserve 13438 (Portion 24) immediately east of
MacIntosh Street (see Figure 75). Given this block (comprising the two portions) was gazetted in 1891, it is likely that it was already occupied by Aboriginal people because the APB was in the habit of turning Crown Land occupied by Aboriginal people into Aboriginal Reserves during this period. It is indeed possible that the land in question had been occupied by Aboriginal people for some years. Its location close to the lakeshore suggests that it was probably used either permanently or seasonally as a base for fishing.

A second gazettal
In 1895, another portion of land was added to the Aboriginal Reserve at Forster: Reserve 22946 (Portions 22 & 23) which covered two blocks further up South Street away from the lake and immediately east of Reserve 13498. With this additional portion, a strip of land beginning a short distance from the lakeshore and extending eastwards up South Street had been set aside for the exclusive use of Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal people occupying it managed to hold onto it until 1911, by which time it had become desirable to local white people.

The story about the original reserve, contained in the NSW APB and NSW Lands Department records, accords with oral testimony given in the 1970s by three, now deceased, Aboriginal women: Ella Simon, Daphne Ridgeway and Maude Cunningham. These three women claimed that ‘all [the] land from the lake in Little and [up] South Street over the hill’ had once belonged to Aboriginal people. Unlike the account provided by the APB, however, their understanding was that the land had been a grant in perpetuity from Queen Victoria to their ancestors. In her testimony, Daphne Ridgeway stated:

I arrived [in Forster] in 1925 and was married to Tom Ridgeway … I have seen the government map of the reserve land, it had a queen victoria badge or seal on it and it showed the land that was given to the aborigines.

This Aboriginal understanding of land gazetted as Aboriginal Reserves during Queen Victoria’s reign (ending in 1901) is common throughout New South Wales. The historian, Heather Goodall, has suggested that it is a reinterpretation of the principles underpinning the reservation of land by the colonial government for the exclusive use of Aboriginal people in the late nineteenth century. That land was Crown Land, and thus, symbolically at least, held by the reigning British monarch. Goodall speculates that the agents of the NSW Department of Lands and the NSW APB explained the creation of Aboriginal Reserves to the Aboriginal people occupying them as being a gift to them from the British Crown (then Queen Victoria).

First signs of competition
In 1895, presumably as a response to the proposed expansion of the Forster Aboriginal Reserve, a local white man, Thomas Miles, wrote to the Aborigines Protection Board suggesting that the Aboriginal settlement be removed from Forster to an island in Wallis Lake. The Miles family were prominent early settlers. Thomas Miles was born in 1855 and came with his family to Forster in 1869. By the late nineteenth century, with his brother Josiah, he owned a timber mill and by 1896 was also a partner in a tug building business.
It is impossible to tell from the existing records what Thomas Miles’s reasons were for wanting Aboriginal people removed from Forster. However, as noted in Chapter 10, throughout this period there was a general push towards isolating Aboriginal people from white society. The late nineteenth century was the protection-segregation era, and it coincided with a desire on the part of whites to develop the township of Forster. An Aboriginal settlement in Forster may have been perceived as a potential obstacle to its progress, but at the same time Thomas Miles might have thought his plan was in the Aboriginal people’s ‘best interest’, that they would be better served living apart from white people.

Opposing exclusion

However, this was not the view that local Aboriginal people held. They were vehemently opposed to the proposal that they be relocated to an island. Alick Russell, an Aboriginal man living on the Forster Aboriginal Reserve, appealed to the APB to not remove him and his people from that place. Fortunately, the APB was ‘strongly of the opinion that these Aborigines should not be disturbed in the occupation of their reserve’. Indeed, during this period the APB regularly decided these matters in favour of Aboriginal people, although as will be shown this was not the case in subsequent decades.

Miles’s attempt was to be only the first in a series of efforts to remove Aboriginal people from Forster. In the decade that followed, those living at Forster were forced again to organise against their possible displacement when some local whites mounted another campaign, one to which this time the APB acceded.

Making the reserve their own

When the Forster Aboriginal Reserve was first established in the 1890s, it residents actively ‘improved’ it in ways that mirrored non-Aboriginal modes of ‘place-making’. They built houses, cleared
the land, planted gardens and erected fences. We know this through a report made by a local policeman in 1906, who was advocating on behalf of the Forster Aboriginals when the local Forster Progress Association lobbied for their removal to the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve near Taree. The policeman reported to the NSW APB:

_The Land was then [when first gazetted in 1891] a dense Scrub, and now the whole reserve is cleared and securely fenced. The whole of the work of cleaning and fencing has been done by the Aborigines themselves. The Aborigines have built several very good cottages on this reserve, and fenced off nice gardens where they are now growing Lovely Potatoes, Cabbages, Etc._126

What this suggests is a new order. By the post-dispossession period, old (traditional) ways had been radically altered under the weight of colonisation and most Aboriginal people had ‘come in’ to colonial society. In the process they had adopted new ways of using the land (e.g. cultivating it) and of dwelling in it (e.g. living in cottages in small, sedentary settlements). They had not, however, become ‘white’ people in ‘black’ skins. They retained their own cultural practices and their own forms of sociality. These continuities are in fact evident in the new settlements that on the surface looked ‘white’. For instance, while the form of the cottages built by Aboriginal people mirrored colonial styles, the way in which they were positioned in relation to each other reflected kin relationships that had their basis in a different cultural milieu.

The layout of Aboriginal settlements reflected particular Aboriginal ‘life ways’. In this respect, Aboriginal Reserve communities are testament both to continuity and change, key themes in twentieth-century Aboriginal history.

Losing part of the Aboriginal Reserve

During the opening years of the twentieth century, competition for the Forster Aboriginal Reserve increased. By this time, Aboriginal people, it seemed, had found themselves in a no-win situation: they had to prove themselves worthy of occupying land granted for their exclusive use by ‘improving’ it which in turn only seemed to make it more desirable to local white people, thus increasing pressure on them to relinquish it.

In 1910, the NSW Department of Lands requested that the NSW APB agree to exchange a section of the Forster Aboriginal Reserve for an adjacent portion of land. While the documentary records relating to this exchange lack precision and detail, the final result was that a portion of the Reserve, highly valued by its residents because of a natural water spring located there, was alienated for a recreation ground.124 In the process a new Reserve for Aborigines was notified in May 1911, in which some of the original reserve was retained, other sections added, and other parts lost. Most seriously, Portion 22 was lost. This had been used as an Aboriginal burial ground.125

The reserve gazetted in 1911 was poorly located compared with the original one gazetted in 1891. The 1891 reserve had been oriented toward Walls Lake, where Aboriginal people fished, and collected shellfish and other natural resources. The new 1911 Reserve was back from the lake, on less desirable land. It bordered the local cemetery, a location that underscored its marginal position. This new portion had been previously gazetted as police paddocks. With this re-gazetalled in place, Aboriginal people were forced to re-establish their homes and gardens. That the APB agreed to the exchange of viable land for unproductive land is symptomatic of a broader shift in its policy direction, and concomitantly, a shift in the meaning of Aboriginal Reserves. Whereas initially there had been an intention that the land set aside for ‘Use by Aborigines’ ought to potentially enable a degree of self-sufficiency, either through cultivation or through access to natural resources (including the sea), over time Aboriginal Reserves were increasingly thought about in terms of isolation. The quality of the land, therefore, became less important than its position. In this context, the more peripheral it was to white settlement the better. And if naturally followed that the more peripheral its location, the more useless the land.

**Beyond the Reserve fence**

Like the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve discussed in Chapter 10, the Forster Aboriginal Reserve was (and is) a central node in a more expansive landscape traversed and known intimately by Aboriginal people. While by 1911 the Aboriginal Reserve no longer had either beach or lake frontage, Aboriginal people living there nonetheless appear to have spent most of their time in the littoral landscape. The land east of the Reserve was mostly unoccupied at this time, not becoming densely settled until the 1960s and 1970s. This meant Aboriginal people living on the Forster Reserve had relatively easy access to the seacoast. Before late twentieth-century suburban development in Forster, the land between the

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Aboriginal Reserve and the beaches to the east was home to only a few white families, most of whom local Aboriginal people seemed to have known quite well. There were also some farms south of the Reserve as well as large areas of Crown Land that were largely uncleared bush and swamps.

Beaches

Aboriginal men used the beaches around Forster mostly for fishing, diving for lobsters and collecting beach worms for bait, while women’s activities including taking children there to swim, to have picnics and to collect shells and shellfish. On Sundays, everyone — men, women and children — would go to the beach together for a day of relaxation ‘away from the mission’. The beaches closest to the Aboriginal Reserve, and thus most frequently used by Aboriginal people, were Pebble Beach (also known as Little Beach) and One Mile Beach. For most of the twentieth century, these beaches were hardly used by white people who tended to congregate at the town beach.

Walking

Aboriginal people walked to these beaches, using bush tracks or rough horse tracks. Women favoured some tracks over others, particularly if they were taking children to the beach in prams. For example, Mae Simon remembered going to One Mile Beach by heading straight up South Street because this was an easier route to take with the old cane prams that they used in the 1950s. Others, such as young boys, tended to take the route from the bottom end of the mission, across the sandier and swampier tracks where the Forster Golf course now is.

While rudimentary roads were sometimes followed, the tracks usually used were little more than animal tracks through the scrub and swamps. Joe Ridgeway, who walked these tracks from the ‘mission’ to the beaches regularly as a young boy in the 1950s, described them as ‘bush tracks, either made by animals or people, going towards the seaside’. He said, ‘well, they were sandy tracks, most of them. Actually, every one of them was sandy tracks. A bloke with a horse and cart used to put a bit of gravel in the worst of them, the vehicle ones’.

Being Aboriginal

Going to the beaches, especially on Sundays, was part of the process by which Aboriginal people were able to develop and maintain ‘their sense of themselves, part of what it meant to be “Aboriginal” and “kin”’. Intergenerational interactions were particularly important and highly valued. For example, older Aboriginal women are remembered as taking the young children from the mission to the beach for picnics. They would cook dampers in the sand and the children would swim or play around the rocks. Maude Cunningham is especially fondly remembered for this. In the same way, during the 1950s and 1960s, men in their thirties would take...
young teenage boys, usually their nephews, on fishing and diving excursions to Burgess Beach. The older generation men in their fifties and sixties, would regularly go along too. These were important occasions for passing on cultural knowledge from one generation to the next.

The beaches also provided a refuge from white people. Here Aboriginal people could congregate together, often to do things they were not permitted to do by white society. For instance, Mae Simon recalled that during the prohibition days some of the men would drink out there. ‘When I came here [about 1950] the men couldn’t go to the pubs and have a drink. So they used to get their drink and take it out to the beach’.

The Moors

Behind Seven Mile Beach, along the Lakes Way road, was a large swampy area known as ‘the Moors’. Here Aboriginal girls, especially, would pick wildflowers such as Christmas bells that they’d sell to people in town for their ‘picture fares’. Seven Mile Beach was also known as a good place for getting beach worms. Fay Pattison, who grew up on the Forster Reserve, recalled that her grandfather, Barney Simon, regularly went worming there: ‘My grandfather used to go and get worms. And we used to sell them for 40 cents a packet with a dozen worms in. They get them off the beach. They must have walked out. They never had a car’.

The route to Seven Mile Beach was out along the old Lakes Way, and across an old race-course. (see Figure 78)

A tourist landscape

The struggles over land occupied by Aboriginal people along the lakeshore between 1906 and 1911, described above, were a by-product of changes in land-use occurring in the early twentieth century as Forster developed into a tourist destination. The visible signs of Forster’s development as a tourist town included the construction of holiday cottages and guesthouses along Little Street and the enclosed ocean baths at the town beach. In the process, some of the existing homes of white people were turned into guesthouses. As further evidence of this development, from the late nineteenth century onwards, Forster was regularly publicised in tourist literature, promoted as an ‘anglers’ paradise’. While some of these developments date to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Forster’s tourist industry expanded mostly in the immediate post Second World War period. This was when mass tourism developed along Australia’s east coast, facilitated by increasing car ownership.

For Aboriginal people, tourism was both a positive and negative development. Throughout the twentieth century there was a constant tension between how the tourist industry was a source of employment or cash generation for Aboriginal people while at the same time it constantly jeopardised their continued relatively free use of the landscape and the natural resources upon which they had long depended.

Working for the tourists

Aboriginal people positioned themselves within, or were incorporated into, the local tourism industry in various ways. Aboriginal men acted as guides, taking visitors to prime fishing spots. For example, Barney Simon regularly took tourists out fishing, leaving from the wharves at the bottom of South Street and going up the lake to places such as Hells Gate, between Yahoo and Wallis Islands. According to his granddaughter, Fay Pattison:

My grandfather, and a lot of Aborigine men, the older men, used to take the tourists out fishing: … Oh all the top city businessmen come up [to Forster]. They’d take them out fishing.

They’d take local white people out too. Madge Bolt, who grew up at Forster in the 1920s and 1930s and still lives there today, remembered that her father, Nip Simon, used to take the Elliotts, who owned a local bakery, out fishing on the lakes. ‘[He’d] take them up around the lakes. We used to go to Wallis Island. And we used to have lunch there. We’d hire a launch and go up there for a day. Cook the fish on the coals up there’.

The tourism industry was a source of employment for local Aboriginal women. As was the case for women from Purfleet working in Taree (described in Chapter 11), Aboriginal women at Forster provided a (literally) hidden labour force, particularly as part of the local tourism industry, making possible visitors’ pleasure and recreation. Many worked in the kitchens of tourist establishments, usually in the early hours of the morning. Places of employment included the Lakes and Ocean Hotel on Little Street, Breeze’s Guest House on the corner of South and Little Streets, and Zornda’s café in the main street. According to Mae Simon, ‘Breeze’s Guest House used to be always filled up. Four or five Koori people used to work there’.

Right page  Fig. 79: Barney Simon taking a boatload of tourists out fishing on Wallis Lake. Courtesy Fay Pattison
Another was Haine’s Guest House, also on South Street. Mae Simon worked there when she first moved to Forster in 1950. When Sydney businessmen came to Forster for holidays, they sometimes hired Aboriginal women to cook for them. For instance, a woman known as Aunty Dude regularly cooked for the Gordon & Gotch publishing company when it stayed at holiday cottages in Bruce Street, not far from the Aboriginal mission.\(^{166}\) (see Figure 80)

Aboriginal boys and girls were the purveyors of commodities required by tourists. They sold mushrooms and blackberries, gathered from the bush between the ‘mission’ and the outer beaches, to the guest houses for the tourists’ breakfasts. Fay Pattison remembers, as a young girl in the 1940s, getting up at 4.00 am to collect mushrooms for the tourists’ breakfasts. She and the other children would also sell worms for bait, collected by themselves or their fathers, directly to the tourists.\(^{171}\)

I used to sell them [the worms] to the tourists because they used them for fishing. I had a bike. [I’d go] up the street, to the cottages on Little Street. They’d be waiting.

These activities link places frequented by Aboriginal people, such as the Moors (along Seven Mile Beach), or the fishing places on the lake around Yahoo Island, to the tourist landscape. Drawing attention to these little known contributions to the local tourism industry has the effect of making more visible an Aboriginal presence in that industry and hence in a ‘tourism landscape’ that was fashioned explicitly for white people’s recreation and pleasure and that is normally depicted as a purely white domain.\(^{168}\)

**Fishing for themselves**

Aboriginal men did not act only as guides for white anglers; they fished for their own subsistence. Many owned boats which they had built themselves and which they usually kept at the jetties near the end of South Street, close to the Little Baths. The Little Baths was a walled-off section of the lake\(^{169}\) and a favourite swimming place of Aboriginal kids from the ‘mission’ and a popular fishing place with Aboriginal men.\(^{172}\) (See Figure 81.)

You know the old swimming baths, when my grandfather was alive he used to be up real early and he’d be down there fishing and they’d be fishing for blackfish. They’d all be around them baths, bumper to bumper. He’d be home about half past six with six big blackfish. Just throw them on the coals.\(^{171}\)

Near the Little Baths were boatsheds, where Aboriginal people would sometimes hire boats. Fay Pattison recalls that boat hire was cheap in the 1940s and 1950s.

You know what we used to get boats for? When we was kids? Fifty cents and twenty-five cents! … Yeah, we used to run home from school and straight out fishing. Because we loved fishing. We’d row out. We’d get about a hundred and eighty six mullet. Now you’re lucky if you get twenty or forty now. Yeah, because they was thick then, you know.\(^{171}\)

This was also the location of one of the local ferry stops. Aboriginal people from Forster regularly took the ferry across to Tuncurry, where it would meet the Taree bus.\(^{173}\) Visits to Taree were for shopping, medical treatment or to visit relatives. Women from Forster usually went to Taree Hospital to have their babies. Mae Simon describes catching the ferry from the South Street wharf across to Tuncurry on her way to Taree to give birth:

In the night the ferry would be running across and if we didn’t go by ferry we’d go by boat. The boat that used to take the ferry. The ambulance would be on the other side waiting to take us to Taree. If it was low tide we’d have to go right around near the breakwater. There was no hospital there at the time.\(^{174}\)

This small section of the lakeshore around the Little Baths and wharves at the end of South Street was thus a main access point between land and lake.\(^{175}\) It was the portion of the lakeshore closest and most
accessible to the Aboriginal Reserve. The route from the Reserve was straight through swamp and bush, now the site of the Cape Hawke Hospital. ‘Opposite the hospital was all bush. We used to go straight through there on the way down to the baths’. This stretch of land was the site of the original Aboriginal Reserve, as described above.

Other fishing spots
In addition to the Little Baths, the breakwater at the lake’s entrance to the ocean was a popular fishing place. Aboriginal people used rods they made themselves and sometimes spears. The breakwater is associated with an old fishing tradition. Fay Pattison told us: ‘Gladys Simon used to tell me that down at the breakwater Aborigines years ago used to talk to the porpoise in the lingo and tell them to round the fish up and they’d bring the fish in’. The lake’s edge further south opposite Godwin Island, and around Tony’s Point and Hadley’s Island, was popular with Aboriginal boys for spearing, at least up until the 1960s. Robert Yettica explained that he and his friends would line up with their homemade spears around the little inlets where the tide was coming in, or going out, and spear fish as they were moved along by the current. The spear poles were made from tea-tree, and the points from old twelve-gauge fencing wire. They’d bind the barb to the pole with wire and seal it with tar.

Up the Lake
When Aboriginal people took boats out on the lake to go fishing, they would head out to the sandbars behind Wallis Island, or to the water between Yahoo and Wallis Islands. These were good fishing places. The edge of the islands, where there was a lot of cockle-weed, was good for bream. While sometimes people would simply go out on the lake fishing from boats, at other times one or more of the islands in the Lake was the destination. They’d go to the islands mostly to hunt, to trap rabbits, and to collect the natural materials (vines and cabbage tree palms) they needed to make cane chairs, which they produced for sale. As Fay Pattison recalled:

We used to go up there and they’d [the men] get rabbits. And then other times my grandfather used to build cane chairs and sell them. They used to get them palm trees [cabbage tree palms], and then they’d have vines … We used to go up [to the islands] – a heap of us. Some would be carrying palms, and some would be carrying vine, and others would have a wallaby over their shoulder. We used to just go up for the day to get that.

Cane chairs – a cottage industry
The Forster Aboriginal community was well known for the cane chairs that local Aboriginal men made (see Figure 83). As Fay Pattison’s recollections show, the main islands for the materials from which cane chairs were made were Wallis Island and Yahoo Island. Wallis was good for the palms that were used for the chairs’ structure, and Yahoo for the vines used in binding the structure together. Mae Simon, whose husband was one of the craftsmen in the 1950s, remembers that on excursions to the islands to collect raw materials for the chairs the women would stay in the boats fishing while the men went onto to Wallis to get the palms or Yahoo to get the vines. The vines grew in the middle of the island, not along the edges.

The manufacture of cane chairs is an example of a local Aboriginal cottage industry. The significance of these industries for Aboriginal post-contact heritage is that they entailed frequent excursions into the landscape surrounding an Aboriginal community to collect the raw materials from which the locally produced, handmade items were constructed. Similar cottage industries found in other NSW Aboriginal communities include the manufacture of souvenirs, such as boomerangs or other ‘traditional’ wooden implements modified for a tourist market.
These local Aboriginal ‘cottage’ industries were an important source of cash, one that was sometimes vital to the community.¹⁴⁶

As was the case with the cane chairs made at Forster, the objects produced in Aboriginal cottage industries elsewhere were invariably made from easily procurable natural resources. This meant that production costs were minimal. The only ‘cost’ was time and labour but this too was nominal, particularly given that Aboriginal people’s labour in the broader economy was not often in high demand. Nor did it usually command high wages. And given that these enterprises were organised collectively, the labour required was spread across a number of people anyway, as Figure 83 illustrates.

This collective mode of working, and a production schedule organised around other responsibilities or activities (such as fishing), suited Aboriginal people better than the constraints of the ‘white’ labour market. It reflects, to some degree, the preference for and the continuation of specifically Aboriginal forms of sociality. Moreover, in terms of structure, these industries tended to be sex segregated, mirroring pre-contact labour patterns. For instance, only men were engaged in the making of cane chairs. In other Aboriginal communities where souvenir production was a cottage industry, such as at La Perouse near Sydney, men and boys made boomerangs and other wooden implements while women and girls made tourist shellwork.¹⁴⁶

The function of these enterprises is not simply economic, but also social and cultural. The excursions to collect materials, and the production workshops, were occasions for yarning: talking about the old days, about the old people, about the old ways. It was in this context that skills, some (such as woodworking) grounded in traditional practices, were passed from one generation to the next. The excursions into the landscape to collect materials are commonly remembered, particularly

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¹⁴⁶: Right page

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Fig. 82: Aerial photograph with overlay showing the Wallis Lake landscape indicating fishing spots and boat routes.

Fig. 83: A workshop on the Forster Aboriginal Reserve where cane chairs were built, c. 1950s. Courtesy Fay Pattison
by the younger generation who had accompanied their parents and grandparents, as a learning experience, a time when they were told about the local environment and its meanings.

Rabbiting and hunting
During the 1930s and 1940s, rabbits were in plentiful supply on the islands and so Aboriginal people would go up there rabbiting. We had hundreds of rabbit traps and they used to set them in the night-time. And we'd sell the rabbits. They'd sell the traps around the islands. They'd sell the skins too. That's how they'd make their livings ... Sometimes shops'd buy them, guesthouses. Sometimes Aboriginal people would go as far as Coomba Park, particularly if they were hunting for kangaroo or wallaby. Again, Robert Yettica told us, that as boys in the 1950s and 60s he and his friends would hire a boat and go down the lake to go hunting, using guns. They'd usually go if a party was to be held on the 'mission', and a kangaroo was needed to feed the guests. Other times the boys would accompany the men hunting further down the lake, but on those occasions they'd rarely get 'a go of the gun'.

Spirits in the landscape
As is common in other Aboriginal landscapes (see Chapter 10), particular places around Forster and Wallis Lake are associated with ghosts and other spirits. For instance, Madge Bolt told us that while she didn't camp on the islands, her grandfather, Coomba George, used to. She remembers this because he had told her there was a ghost on Wallis Island: ‘He used to show us where the ghost scratched him. He had this mark down his back’. When we visited Wallis Island with Robert Yettica in 2001, he sensed spirits there, feeling a sensation in his knee. Some islands had been used as initiation grounds, with the last initiation apparently taking place in the late 1930s. There is believed to be a bora ring on Shark or Little Shark Island.
Workplaces

While the tourism industry provided a form of casual employment, as described above, some Aboriginal men had more permanent positions in the local economy. For instance, in the early part of the twentieth century some men, including Henry Cunningham and Nip Simon, worked at the Miles’s and at the Wright’s shipyards.

As was the case for Aboriginal men at Purfleet, some of the Forster Aboriginal men worked as professional fishermen, alongside non-Aboriginal fishermen. Along with other fishermen, they vied to have their catch transported to Sydney, or they sold it through the local co-op. They kept their boats at the Little Street wharves and mended their nets in sheds near their houses on the mission. At night they’d make nets in their home, often with the assistance of their grandchildren.

In the late 1940s, an aerodrome was built on the middle of Wallis Island. Robert Yettica’s father worked on the construction of it and later as a maintenance worker there. As a child, Robert remembers going there with his father by boat, and playing around the island while his father worked. (see Figure 84).

Some Aboriginal women worked as cleaners, or kitchen maids, in and around Forster. For example, Madge Bolt worked for many years in the laundry at the local Forster Hospital, and later as a cleaner at the Commonwealth Bank in the main street. She also did cleaning work in private homes.

Moving away for work

The seasonal nature of employment has meant that Aboriginal people, especially men, from Forster have often been required to move away for work, sometimes only returning to the Reserve on weekends or even less frequently. This was the case particularly for Aboriginal men working in the timber industry. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s some worked in timber camps behind Buladelah, sometimes taking their families with them.

Later on, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, Forster people became part of an itinerant Aboriginal labour force working on farms along the coast, picking beans and peas. Many joined their relatives travelling down the Pacific Highway to the bean and pea picking centres on the South Coast, such as those around Bodalla. As Robert Yettica explained, this pattern of movement in pursuit of work contributed to the creation of new kinship relationships and other ties between Aboriginal people all along the east coast. There were other farms, closer to home, out at Cape Hawke, that employed Aboriginal people from the Forster Aboriginal Reserve. Usually the farmers collected the Aboriginal workers each morning in trucks.

Going overseas

During the First and Second World Wars, many Aboriginal men from Forster served as soldiers overseas. Nip Simon, for instance, went to the First World War and Toki Simon, among others, went to the Second World War. These Aboriginal soldiers are commemorated on the town’s war memorial.

Living beyond the ‘mission’

As in the case of Purfleet, not all Aboriginal people in Forster during the twentieth century lived on the Aboriginal Reserve. For instance, Madge Bolt’s grandmother, Ginny Cunningham, had a house in the main street of Forster. Similarly, the Clarkes, who originally came from Gloucester, had a place in McIntosh Street, not far from the Forster Aboriginal Reserve. This was in the 1940s. And Keith Leon lived with his family in Walls Street. These sites of ‘independent’ (or autonomous) Aboriginal dwelling are much more difficult to trace than the government reserves, particularly because there are few documentary records about them. They are, however, places preserved in Aboriginal people’s memories. They are significant in Aboriginal heritage landscapes because they remind us that Aboriginal people’s presence was not completely confined to the local Reserve. (See Figure 85)

In addition to houses around the town, one well known Aboriginal family, the McClymonts, owned a farm on the north shore of Wallis Lake (see Figure 86). Very little is known about the history of this farm, although its location is known. It is another
example their own right and not merely labourers on the farms of white people. Blue Dick McClymont is believed to be buried in the old Aboriginal cemetery on the hill behind the Forster Aboriginal Reserve. This old cemetery is now part of Tobwabba Park.

The Forster Aboriginal Reserve today
As noted, the Forster Aboriginal Reserve is now vested in the Forster Local Aboriginal Land Council. While many Aboriginal people still live on the old Reserve on South Street, many others live beyond it. In addition, the Land Council owns some local businesses, including an art workshop and gallery called Tobwabba.

Similar landscapes in NSW
The story of the Aboriginal community at Forster resonates with the histories of other Aboriginal settlements along the NSW coast. Examples include the settlements at Cabbage Tree Island, Yamba, La Perouse, Orient Point, and Wallaga Lake. Brian Egloff’s small book, Wreck Bay: An Aboriginal Fishing Community, provides a window onto the history of one such community.

Fishing was always a major activity at these settlements and boats had an important role in everyday life. The history of the Forster community well illustrates how the water, and the ability to travel over water, gave people reasonably easy access to a much larger landscape (e.g., the extensive peripheral foreshores and islands of Wallis Lake) than would have been the case if the settlement had been entirely surrounded by land. There is also the fact that, apart from oyster leases, the lakes and estuaries were not privately owned (nor fenced) in the way that land was. There was, therefore, a freedom on the water that did not exist for Aboriginal people on the land. Bain Attwood, in his study of Aboriginal people in Victoria in the nineteenth century, observes that the activity of ‘line fishing’ in canoes provided an opportunity for Aboriginal women to escape the ‘missionary order and enter into a realm of space and time which mirrored their traditional past’. This observation can be extended to Aboriginal people more generally.

There are two further points of similarity between the Forster community and other Aboriginal settlements in NSW. The first is the practice of people from these settlements following seasonal picking routes, often far from home, a common practice for people at communities such as La Perouse, Wallaga Lake and Tweed Heads. Travelling with Percy is a book that includes Aboriginal people’s memories of following the seasonal picking routes along the south coast of NSW. The second is the existence of lively local cottage industries at many NSW Aboriginal settlements, focusing on the manufacture of souvenirs, which parallel the cane chair industry at Forster. Industries based on making shellwork souvenirs are confined to coastal communities such as Wreck Bay, Roseby Park and La Perouse. The production of boomerangs, clapping sticks, carved emu eggs and, of course, paintings, takes place in Aboriginal communities across the state.

Left page

Fig. 84: The aerodrome on Wallis Island, 2001
Fig. 85: Aerial photograph with overlay showing the location of houses occupied by Aboriginal families beyond Forster Aboriginal Reserve. © Department of Lands
Fig. 86: Blue Dick McClymont’s farm, 2001

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Fig. 84: The aerodrome on Wallis Island, 2001

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The documentary and oral history records show very clearly that the camps and settlements in which Aboriginal people lived were surrounded by ‘circles’ of country that can almost be regarded as extensions of the camps and settlements themselves. These are what might be called the ‘backyard’ zones of Aboriginal post-contact life. They were areas thick with significance, full of pathways (beaten paths and memorized routes from A to B), and populated with stories and memories.

Sites and lives

In the cultural heritage field there has been a strong tendency to record Aboriginal heritage places in isolation from the landscape around them. The ‘site’ tends to be thought of as being just that area covered by a stone artefact scatter, a shell midden, or other physical remains. There is no problem with defining sites in this way for management and conservation purposes providing we do not confuse the physical ‘site’ with the lives of people who occupied or used the site in the past. A shell midden, for instance, represents only one part of the activity involved in Aboriginal shellfishing and it is unlikely even to have been the focus of this activity, that focus being the shellfish beds or rock platforms. In the case of Aboriginal post-contact settlements, something similar applies – the lives and activities of the people living on the reserves or in the fringe camps flowed out into the surrounding landscape.

Heritage myths

There is also an important difference between Aboriginal pre-contact heritage and Aboriginal post-contact heritage. We refer below to the way that, as white settlement spread across the post-1788 Australian landscape, Aboriginal people were pushed into smaller and smaller fragments of that landscape. Something similar has occurred in the heritage field. As local white historians, heritage practitioners, and volunteers have recorded increasing numbers of non-Indigenous heritage places in the form of old homesteads, banks, courthouses, woolsheds, fences, and other structures and sites, the impression is created that the post-1788 landscape was populated only by white people. Because there have been so very few post-contact Aboriginal places recorded the impression is created that Aboriginal history ceased in 1788 as white history took over.

But it is not just that few Aboriginal post-contact settlements (and other sites) have been recorded. Our concern also is in regard to a perception that Aboriginal people’s lives were confined to the few places that have been recorded (or that are at least known, if not recorded). The perception seems to be that Aboriginal people stayed on the Reserves and fringe camps while the rest of the landscape was ‘filled up’ with white people’s lives. This perception is evident in local histories written by white authors for our study area, an area where most references to Aboriginal people are to those at Purfleet and the fringe camps at Taree and Wingham. There are very few references to Aboriginal people out in the wider landscape.

The four landscape studies presented in the previous chapters show how wrong this perception is. We are not suggesting here that non-Indigenous people have not also had close attachments to the areas surrounding their settlements. The difference is that in their case such attachment is assumed, since the surrounding landscape, after all, is white-owned, just as the towns and villages are. The ‘backyard’ is owned by people of the ‘same’ culture\(^{196}\). In the case of Aboriginal settlements, the ‘backyard’
has, for most of the last 200 years, been owned by the white colonisers. This seems to have led to a perception that Aboriginal people would have had little or no presence in it. The pages that follow are intended to show how the "backyard" concept can be incorporated into cultural heritage conservation practice.

How to find them
For the purposes of heritage recording, the first question has to be, how do you find these post-contact Aboriginal "backyards" zones? The obvious answer is that they can be found surrounding Aboriginal post-contact Reserves, fringe camps, and other settlements. But where are these Aboriginal Reserves and camps to be found? For any given area of NSW, local Aboriginal people will tend to know the location of many or most of them. This is particularly true of Aboriginal people of our study area. Beyond that time, however, and especially for the nineteenth-century Aboriginal settlements, contemporary Aboriginal people may not know the locations. The fact that so few Aboriginal post-contact places have been recorded on the heritage inventories (AHIMS, the NSW State Heritage Inventory, The Register of the National Estate) suggests that heritage practitioners in NSW have very little knowledge of these places. The reasons for this have been reviewed elsewhere. They include the fact that most Aboriginal heritage places recorded to date in NSW have been recorded by archaeologists whose training has been in prehistoric rather than historical archaeology.

Published lists of Aboriginal Reserves in NSW are available and these are an obvious first point of reference for anyone wanting to relocate and record these places. The Reserves were mostly created in the period from the 1860s and they were mostly situated in areas where the Aboriginal population had already come to be concentrated. The process of concentration
It is worth stepping back in time, to 1788 – the moment when British colonisation began – to ask what factors led to Aboriginal people being concentrated in these areas. The white invasion of Aboriginal country, beginning in NSW in 1788, naturally had a great influence on where Aboriginal settlements would be located during the subsequent 215 years. The Aboriginal hunter-gather economy was based on the use of wild foods from across all the environments of the group's country. As the invasion by white migrant farmers and pastoralists proceeded, they began grazing sheep and cattle on an increasing proportion of these environments, replacing kangaroos and other native animals with sheep and cattle that Aboriginal people could only kill and eat at the risk of deadly reprisals by armed settlers and the Native Police. It quickly became impossible for Aboriginal people to live by hunting and gathering alone. They had to begin drawing food from the white economy, either in the form of government rations or as payment in return for their labour, and this inevitably meant moving closer, or 'coming in', to where white people had located themselves.

Ironically, in view of their frequent antagonism towards the 'race' that took their land, Aboriginal people often ended up concentrated into those parts of the overall landscape most densely settled by white people. In our own study area, these were the agricultural lands along the bottom of the Manning Valley and the environs of the small towns which began appearing from the 1830s. For the same reason, in semi-arid parts of Western NSW, Aboriginal people concentrated near pastoral station homesteads because the only way they could still survive in their country was by working for the white pastoralists whose stock were now grazing where the kangaroos and emus had previously been most plentiful. If you looked at a map showing the distribution of the white population across NSW in, say, 1900, you could surmise that the Aboriginal population was concentrated in the same areas as white people. This does not mean that Aboriginal people stopped visiting the forests, wetlands and the dune-fields along the coast, but it does mean their major camps and settlements were likely to be located close to agricultural areas and coastal ports.

We may have given the impression that this process of concentration was inevitable and that the white invasion simply rolled over Aboriginal country unopposed. In fact it was opposed. The process was a highly conflicted one in which many Aboriginal people and a much smaller number of white people died. The history of this conflict in our study area was discussed in Part 1. What we are concerned with here is describing the trends in Aboriginal post-1788 settlement in a way that may assist heritage practitioners to understand where the key Aboriginal cultural landscapes of the last 215 years are to be found.
More specific factors
The process of concentration described above explains why Aboriginal settlement in our study area came to be concentrated in the Manning Valley and around the present day town of Forster. But these in themselves are large areas of several hundred square kilometres. What determined the specific locations of their settlements inside those areas?

In the first place, most of the land in those areas was quickly ‘taken up’ (i.e., bought or leased) by white farmers and townspeople (see the sequence of maps in Figures 18, 22, 27). Aboriginal people no longer had the option of wandering at will through their country because increasingly large parts of that country came to be owned by white people – fences went up, guns (sometimes) came out, and Aboriginal people were pushed into smaller and smaller spaces. The only land left over was that which was in the form of Crown reserves. As we suggest in Part 1, one way of narrowing down the possibilities of where the focal areas of Aboriginal post-contact life were located in the landscape is to look to the Crown reserves scattered across the country. These have existed in the form of towns commons, road reserves, travelling stock routes, water reserves, land reserved for future villages – to name just a few (see Figure 26). In our study area these reserves were mostly set aside by government surveyors in the second half of the nineteenth century. These lands had not been reserved for Aboriginal use (the Aboriginal Reserves were the only areas that were) but because they were reserved from sale and private ownership they were unoccupied by white people in any primary sense. In many cases it was thus possible for Aboriginal people to access this land. Many Aboriginal fringe camps were located on Crown reserve land in and around villages and towns. This included land set aside as town commons and police paddocks (but rarely used for these purposes). Further from the towns, travelling stock routes and travelling stock reserves were often used by Aboriginal people as camp sites.

Other factors determining where Aboriginal people had their camps and more permanent settlements included the availability of casual work. This included stock work on farms, seasonal fruit and vegetable picking, and construction work on railways and roads. Sometimes white employers made areas of their own land available for their Aboriginal employees and their families to camp on.

Concentrations inside concentrations
To summarise, Aboriginal people came to be concentrated in the same parts of the landscape where white people were concentrated. In eastern NSW this meant the fertile valleys, particularly those where navigable rivers allowed access to coastal shipping. But Aboriginal people did not camp or settle just anywhere in these areas. Their camps and settlements were focused on available Crown reserve lands that represented gaps and openings in the pattern of privately owned ‘white’ land. The process of concentration should not be taken to mean Aboriginal people had no choice in the matter of where they lived. They did make choices – for instance, to live in one fringe camp rather than another – but they made these choices within certain constraints. The major constraint, of course, was the fact that most parcels of land across the landscape were privately owned by white people. By understanding the constraints on Aboriginal settlement we are in a much better position to know where to look for the heritage of Aboriginal post-1788 settlement.

Historical documentation
The major Aboriginal post-1788 settlements in any one region are likely to be featured in published accounts of Aboriginal post-contact history in NSW. Even if searches of the heritage inventories are unproductive it will thus still be possible to identify such places, prior to field survey, by consulting readily available state-wide or regional texts, such as Heather Goodall’s (1996), Invasion to Embassy; or Peter Kabaila’s (1995), Wiradjuri Places. Also, for most parts of NSW there are at least a few published local history books which sketch in the basic story of Aboriginal existence in the local area after white settlement occurred. In other words, then, such major Aboriginal settlements will have left a paper trail relatively easily accessible to archaeologists and other heritage practitioners undertaking background research prior to carrying out field surveys. Heritage practitioners working in the non-Indigenous heritage field routinely survey the historical literature before they conduct field surveys – this should also be routine practice for those working with historic period Aboriginal heritage.

What happened there?
To repeat the point made earlier, Aboriginal people in the historical period (the post-1788 period) did not live their lives confined to the Reserves, fringe camps, and other settlements – much of their daily life was spent in areas surrounding these places.
These are what we have termed ‘backyard’ zones. The four ‘landscape’ studies that make up the four preceding chapters illustrate the sort of things that went on in these backyards – a spectrum of activities that range from mooring fishing boats to swimming in dams.

No two the same
No two Aboriginal settlements were the same and so the range of activities in and around them varied. The Purfleet Aboriginal settlement was surrounded on one side by forest and on the other by farms and creeks leading to the Manning River. People hunted in the forest, fished in the creeks and used the water reserves along some of the creeks to moor their fishing boats and dry their fishing nets. The people on the Forster Aboriginal Reserve, by contrast, had no easy access to forest but were within a couple of hundred metres of Wallis Lake with its swimming areas and its fishing grounds and islands.

In what follows we look at those past activities that can help heritage practitioners define or ‘map’ these ‘backyard’ zones in the course of their heritage surveys and studies.

Concentrations of heritage places
From a heritage point of view, the usefulness of being able to define or map these ‘backyard’ zones on the ground is that they are likely to contain a greater concentration of heritage places than other parts of the larger landscape. This is certainly not to say that significant post-contact places will not be found outside these backyard zones (massacre sites are one significant example of places that will be outside them more often than not).

Sedentary but still mobile
One of the most dramatic lifestyle changes forced on Aboriginal people by white invasion and colonisation was that of living in more-or-less permanent locations rather than in the frequently shifted camps of the hunter-gather. A nucleated settlement pattern thus came to replace a dispersed pattern. Another way of saying this is that people’s activities came to be organised around settled residences rather than the residences (hunter-gatherer camps) being organised around the activities (e.g., the seasonal hunter-gather ‘round’, the trade lines, or the ritual cycles). Even in the post-contact period, though, Aboriginal people seemed to be more mobile than most white people. As well as retaining a desire to move around their traditional country there were practical reasons for this mobility, including the need to supplement government rations with wild foods (from hunting, fishing, and plant gathering) and the tendency for Aboriginal people to seek casual farm work on properties surrounding their camps and reserves.

Movement
One of the strongest themes to come out of the landscape studies in Part 2 is that of movement. Movement is a constant theme in the documentary and especially the oral history sources for our study area. Any reading of Aboriginal histories elsewhere in NSW will show this to be true for the State as a whole. People walked and rode horses, used buggies, bicycles and, later, cars and trucks to move around their local landscapes. Up until the 1970s, walking remained the predominant mode of movement for Aboriginal people. Walking allowed them to go, legally or by ‘trespassing’, into most corners of the landscape surrounding their settlements. And walking, of course, meant pathways, both in the form of beaten tracks and pavements and in the form of peoples’ unmarked routes.

The emphasis placed on pathways and other routes in our landscape studies stems from a belief in their importance as cultural heritage. We know that the places we call ‘sites’ are often really just points on pathways (trajectories); they are ‘moments’ in a journey or trip across a landscape. However, because the heritage system is currently set up around the concept of the ‘site’, or heritage property, the points on the pathway have tended to dominate our thinking to the extent that the pathway itself is often lost sight of.

A heritage of walking
Until cars came into common use in Aboriginal communities in the 1960s and 70s, people walked extensively through the areas surrounding their settlements. This heritage of walking emerges as a striking theme in Aboriginal oral histories recorded across NSW.208 While most Aboriginal movement around the ‘backyard’ zones surrounding Aboriginal settlements will have been by foot, one should not discount the importance of horseback riding and buggies in Aboriginal communities in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.

Home and back in a day
A very approximate way of defining the ‘backyard’ zone around an Aboriginal settlement is in terms of how far people could walk away from home and back in one day.209 We suggest that a circle of radius five kilometres would encompass the great majority of daily movements by Aboriginal people around the settlements in our study area. People were certainly
capable of walking much longer distances than this for particular reasons (e.g., to play in a cricket match) but most movements are likely to have been for purposes which were time consuming in themselves, such as fishing, picnicking, or visiting kin. For longer trips people often used horses, bicycles, buses and trains, or they hitch-hiked. Obviously, the ‘home and back in a day’ definition is a gross measure of the extent of these focal areas and we do not suggest people adopt it as some kind of geohistorical reality. Rather, it is intended to draw attention to the historical importance of Aboriginal walking. We appreciate that white people also walked around the areas where they lived and that some white people probably walked more than some Aboriginal people (for instance, there is the whole history of the white swagman which has yet to be addressed in NSW in heritage terms). Equally, in a later period (though commencing around the time of the Great Depression) white people walked long distances recreationally – the bushwalking movement had it origins here. Our point, though, is that Aboriginal walking was culturally and historically specific and modulated.

Many variations

The actual shape of the ‘backyard’ zone around an Aboriginal settlement will vary from place to place. For instance, where settlements are located along rivers (e.g., Cabbage Tree Island on the lower Richmond River), people’s activities are likely to have been concentrated along the banks of the river more than inland. People would also be able to travel up and down river from the settlement by boat either to fish or to reach terrestrial destinations on either side. In this case the ideal ‘circle’ might be skewed or ‘stretched’ to resemble something more elliptical (i.e., more like a rugby ball than a soccer ball). Where settlements were close to towns this also affected the spatiality of Aboriginal activities. For instance, women and girls from an Aboriginal settlement (e.g., Purfleet) were likely to work as ‘domestics’ in white households in towns (e.g., Taree). A ‘backyard’ zone might thus ‘stretch out’ to encompass a town ten or so kilometres away.

The larger web of connection

While each of these ‘backyard’ zones was in many ways a world of its own, there were also many lines of connection between them and the larger world. In particular, there was often regular travel between Aboriginal settlements in any one region for the purposes of visiting kin, attending weddings, funerals, and other social events. There were also ‘circuits’ of Aboriginal movements based on fields of employment. There were shearing circuits followed by Aboriginal men which took them away from their home settlement to a ‘round’ of shearing sheds and eventually back home after the shearing season had finished. As we noted earlier, similar circuits existed for fruit and vegetable picking. This larger web of movement kept people on Aboriginal settlements remarkably well informed about events, kin, and friends over very extensive parts of NSW and beyond.

The spiritual ‘backyard’

The ‘backyard’ zones around Aboriginal settlements include the sites of encounters with ghosts and spirit beings as well as traditional sacred sites. Sometimes major sacred sites are located in the backyards of settlements – this is the case with the Wallaga Lake community on the South Coast who live in the very shadow of Gullaga, the sacred mountain on whose lower slopes the settlement stands. This community also has very strong links to Mumbulla Mountain (in Biamanga National Park), a sacred site which although it is situated some thirty kilometres southwest of the Wallaga Lake settlement is clearly considered by the community to be part of the settlement’s spiritual ‘backyard’. Although it is outside the range of daily movement, on foot, from Wallaga Lake settlement it is quite visible on clear days from the settlement (and thus it might be said to be ‘present’ in the settlement).

Regional studies

The syndrome of under-recording

Because Aboriginal post-contact heritage has not enjoyed the attention that Aboriginal pre-contact heritage has received over the past decades it is
quite common for heritage practitioners to begin working in an area of the State without any prior knowledge of what Aboriginal post-contact places exist, or might exist, there. The practitioner’s first step in such circumstances would probably be to search the heritage inventories (either AHIMS or the NSW State Heritage Inventory) for previously recorded places. So few of these places have been recorded, however, that inventory searches are unlikely, for most areas of the state, to provide the sort of background information the practitioner needs. The under-recording of post-contact heritage thus has a certain circularity about it: so little has been recorded that heritage workers are liable to go into the field with the expectation that very little post-contact heritage exists there. This expectation can only decrease the likelihood of them detecting post-contact heritage traces on the ground, an outcome that perpetuates the syndrome.

Regional studies
Regional heritage studies have a role to play in breaking this cycle. Regional studies provide an overview of what heritage places are known to exist and likely to exist in any given region (e.g., a local government area or a bioregion). They look at the different natural environments in the region and the tenure (i.e., ownership status) of the land that heritage places are located on and they report on their state of preservation and the threats they face from natural processes (e.g., erosion, salinity) and human processes (e.g., vandalism, farming practices, urban development). They have a particular role to play in conservation planning – for instance, by alerting planners to particular landforms (e.g., coastal dunes containing shell middens) or site types (e.g., historic Aboriginal ‘mission’ buildings) which may have suffered severe attrition and which require special conservation measures. A regional study also provides a valuable contextual background for any EIA heritage project being carried out within the region.

Regional studies have at least three important functions in relation to Aboriginal post-contact heritage:
1. By overviewing historical documents and literature, they can indicate where Aboriginal post-contact heritage places are likely to occur in the regional landscape.
2. They alert planners, heritage practitioners and others to the fact that key ‘places’ (e.g., reserves and fringe camps) are likely to be surrounded by constellations of associated places (e.g., pathways, fishing places). These constellations make up what we are here calling ‘backyard’ zones. By drawing attention to such ‘backyard’ zones, regional studies can go a long way towards mapping the areas in the regional landscape that are likely to be of greatest ‘sensitivity’ in relation to Aboriginal post-contact heritage. Such areas of ‘sensitivity’ will then be the focus of concern in relation to proposed land developments which may impact heritage sites.
3. They are able to identify and describe major themes in Aboriginal post-contact history for a particular region. Examples of such themes would include frontier violence, Aboriginal employment in the pastoral industry, hunting and gathering, and flaked glass technology. This type of thematic history can be drawn upon by those recording post-contact heritage places in order to reconstruct the historic and social context of the places recorded.

Spatial patterning
Each of the main types of prominent settlement (e.g., reserve, fringe camp, pastoral station camp) lies at the core of a distinctive pattern of movement and activity that ‘revolved’ around that settlement. This does not mean that Aboriginal activities revolving around one Aboriginal Reserve in NSW in the 1940s will be the same as those revolving around another. But it does mean we can expect that the general pattern of activity around Reserves in the 1940s is recognisably distinct from the pattern of activity around 1940s Aboriginal pastoral camps. The important thing here is that the existence of spatial patterning, and our ability to recognise it, opens the way for us to be proactive in the area of Aboriginal historic heritage conservation. It enables us to develop models for what the Aboriginal historic heritage record will look like in different parts of the NSW landscape. These models will of course always be subject to debate, modification, and fine-tuning as our knowledge improves.

Predictive value
The recognition of spatial patterning can have significant predictive value. It was partly in order to provide a basis for such predictive modelling, for one part of the State, that Part 2 of the present book was written. There is no reason to think that Aboriginal settlements elsewhere in the State would be different from our own area in respect of being surrounded by ‘backyard’ zones. If this is the case then it would be possible for heritage planners to predict the presence of such ‘backyard’ zones around all or most post-contact settlements in NSW.
In other words, planners could zone such areas as having high potential for Aboriginal heritage significance even before field surveys or other investigations (e.g., oral history recording) have taken place there. The fact that so many Aboriginal post-contact heritage places are ‘intangible’ (i.e., they have left no obvious physical traces on the ground) adds to the importance of such predictive mapping or zoning. There is an obvious role for this approach in the heritage studies that have been undertaken by many NSW local governments.

The ‘backyard’ model that we are proposing here does not state or imply that all Aboriginal post-contact heritage places in any given landscape will be situated within the ‘backyard’ focal areas. What it proposes is that these areas will contain a relatively higher density of such places as parts of other parts of the landscape. It would clearly be misguided for planners or others to assume that once the focal areas are identified they can forget about the rest of the landscape – for instance, by not taking account of post-contact heritage in the rest of the landscape when reviewing development applications.

Aboriginal people who participated in a recent regional Aboriginal heritage study at Coffs Harbour raised a similar issue.\(^\text{297}\)

\[\text{Predicting attachment}\]

Nor, it goes without saying, is predictive modelling a substitute for working with local Aboriginal knowledge holders. The reverse is in fact the case. Predictive modelling will alert planners and heritage practitioners to the likely existence of post-contact heritage places in areas where they are presently going unnoticed and unrecorded. The principle message in Mapping Attachment is that Aboriginal communities do have attachments to post-contact heritage places and, particularly for those places dating from the twentieth century, that they are the main sources of knowledge on these places. The sort of predictive modelling described here should logically create a heightened awareness of post-contact heritage in NSW. One of the key outcomes of this heightened awareness should be a more meaningful involvement of Aboriginal people in the recording and managing of their own heritage.

The ‘backyard’ zone is not simply an area with a high density of heritage places. It is also a part of the landscape that both present-day and former Aboriginal residents of a settlement are likely to have a particular attachment to. This attachment may partly be expressed in relation to particular places (e.g., old fishing spot or picnic spot) but it is also likely to relate to the general landscape of the ‘backyard’ zone. These landscapes have in a very real sense been the ‘site’ of people’s day-to-day lives.

3 See for example: Barry Morris, Regional Aboriginal Heritage Study at Coffs Harbour, December 1988.
4 Ella Simon, Notes that the first family was the Russells, which was Ella Simon's grandfather's surname. He writes that George Russell had to crawl through acres of lantana to a spot which he considered suitable to live and which he cleared.\(^\text{13}\)
5 This was after 1905. Margaret’s parents married in 1905, lived at Forster for a while, then moved to Purfleet, and then to Browns Hill.\(^\text{12}\) See Ann Curthoys, ‘Race and ethnicity: A study of the response of British Colonists to Aborigines and Chinese and non-British Europeans in New South Wales, 1856-1881’, PhD thesis, Macquarie University, 1973.
7 Gordon, Invasion to Embassy, argues that many of the Aboriginal reserves gazetted in the late nineteenth century were the direct result of Aboriginal people’s requests for land to which they had an abiding attachment. The unpublished history written by the NSW manager (NWSR B/2033) referred to in footnote 8 concludes with: ‘Many of the residents living today still maintain that the parcel of land where they first settled is rightfully theirs and not the property of the government. It was given to them by people by the name of McClements’. The McClements are presumably the McLennans referred to by Ella Simon.
10 Simon, Through My Eyes, p. 25. Margaret Marker (also spelt Marti), an Aboriginal woman from Purfleet, concurred with the view that the land had been given to Aboriginal people by a local white family. In an interview with Helen Hannah, she said: ‘One of the farmers gave us a block of land up behind the shop in Purfleet, in Helen Hannah, Helen: A Folk History of the Manning Valley, Elands, 1988, p. 170. Gordon, Invasion to Embassy.
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Aboriginal reserves, gazetted in the late nineteenth century had usually been unoccupied Crown land, such as camping, travelling stock or water reserves.

Simon, Through My Eyes, 32

NSW APB minutes, 3 May 1900.

Simon, Through My Eyes, p. 25.


Simon, Through My Eyes, Warner Saunders, oral history interview, P/T 14, 12/12/00. For an early reference to the McLennans, see W.F. Connors, Pioneering Days Around Taree: A Pictorial History of Exploration and Early Settlement of the Manning River Valley, Classic: Printers, Taree, 1985, p. 44, where he notes: "The first stock was purchased by other Scottish migrants, Donald and Murdoch McLearan. Donald was killed by a falling dint of a tree on the ridge at the back of the property a little west of the present highway, opposite Crescent Motors or the Hereford Motel. The early McLennans and several other family members were buried at the same ridge behind the present site of Edmunds. This is about a half mile west of Gillawarra Cemetery. See also Connors, 1985, p. 47, where he describes the McLearans as early settlers at Purcell in about the 1840s.

The 'riot' is an abbreviation of the 'mission'. Aboriginal people commonly referred to the government reserves they lived on as the 'mission', because many had received missionaries on them.

W. Saunders, P/T 4, 13/6/00. Note that Patricia Davis-Hurst refers to Roy McLearan, whereas Patricia Davis-Hurst refers to Fraggie. It is unclear whether or not they are referring to the same person. Today, Warner Saunders and Patricia Davis-Hurst claim the McLennans are an Aboriginal family.

Davis-Hurst, P/T 15, 19/4/01.

Davis-Hurst, P/T 15, 19/4/01.

Russell Saunders, oral history interview, P/T 11, 12/12/00. For information about Aboriginal boxing troupes, see Richard Gordon, Domesticating Resistance, Sydney, 2002.

Davis-Hurst, P/T 15, 19/4/01.

Russell Saunders, oral history interview, P/T 11, 12/12/00. Davis-Hurst, P/T 15, 19/4/01.

Russell Saunders, P/T 11, 12/12/00. In an oral history interview, Betty Bungie described them as 'silly old cars', because they were regularly breaking down. Unrecorded oral history interview with Vienna Makin.


Gibert, Living Black, p. 39.


Davis-Hurst, P/T 15, 19/4/01.

A local policeman in Taree provided a similar image of the Aboriginal kids' knowledge of them when they are scouting for places to steal from. He told the Sydney Morning Herald, May 2000: "They walk through in the day, take certain modes, get to know which garages and houses are unoccupied, where the escape routes are, and then come back at Lam to knock them off... For a comparison, see Dolores Hayden, The Power of Place, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 23, where she cites Loren Miller Jr.'s reminiscences: "As teen-agers, we knew not to drive into Compton. In Inglewood, not to drive into Glemisal...cause you would just be out, with your hands on top of the car... LAPD did the same thing. You too far south on Western, they would stop you.'

See Kendall Hill, Battles for over 10 years down the road to reconciliation, Sydney Morning Herald, 20 May 2000, p. 8. 'To this day, the Manning River remains a palpable dividing line between two cultures, only now the rival tribes are white and black.'

As more Aboriginal people move into Taree suburbs such as Chatham, the part of the river around the botanical gardens east of the bridge became a popular hang out. See Sean Maslin, P/T 14, 18/4/01.

Cecil Bungie was one of Pat and George Bungie's five sons. The others were Robert, John, David, and Neville.

Simon, Through My Eyes, p. 139.

It is unclear if such curfews had any legal basis. They may have
been enshrined in local council ordinances, as was the case with the exclusion of Aboriginal people from the Minne swimming pool. Perhaps this well-known curfew could be politicized; but equally likely it was an example of the iniquities of colonial power.

72 Davis-Hurst, P/T 15, 19/4/01.
73 Warner Saunders, P/T 4, 13/6/00.
74 Russell Saunders, P/T 11, 13/6/00.
75 Warner Saunders, P/T 4, 13/6/00.
76 Davis-Hurst, P/T 15, 19/4/01.
77 Davis-Hurst, P/T 15, 19/4/01.
79 Russell Saunders, P/T 11, 12/12/00.
80 Patricia Davis-Hurst, P/T 15, 19/4/01.
81 Some similar accounts were given for Forster. See, for example, Russell Saunders, P/T 11, 12/12/00.
82 ibid., p. 187.
83 See Madge Bolt, oral history interview, F10, 29/11/00, who recalls being a new platform for historiography’.
84 This other reserve might have been Killawarra, but was more likely the exclusion of Aboriginal people from the Moree swimming pool. For example, Tom Craddock’s step-grandfather was Chinese, and this may have made them ineligible to live on the reserves even if they had wanted to.
85 ibid., p. 33.
86 Davis-Hurst, P/T 15, 19/4/01 and P/T 16, 19/4/01. No one seems to remember which houses they worked in specifically. In heritage terms, Aboriginal women’s labour is largely invisible particularly because it was performed in private homes. See Maria Ragent, An A-Potential Overview of Women’s Professionalism and Employment: Themes and Places, Australian Heritage Commission, 2002.
87 Davis-Hurst, P/T 15, 19/4/01and P/T 16, 19/4/01. Langley Private Hospital was where Kmart is today.
88 Haylen, The Power of Place, p. 36, notes: ‘It’s possible to identify historic urban places that have special significance to certain populations by searching space segregation of different kinds’. These stories of resistance need to be tempered by some Aboriginal people’s reluctance in changing these ‘integrated’ patterns. For example, Simon, ‘Through My Eyes’, p. 187, recalling the man who ran the Fonder picture theatre, stated: ‘He told me that afterwards he had given instructions that Aboriginal people could sit where they liked and hang the regular customers. The odd thing was, he said, that they still seemed afraid that someone would say something and sue down the front anyway. Some of them still waited for the lights to go out before they went to their seats, in case something nasty was said to them. They had got used to being treated like that that they couldn’t get used to it at all!’
89 ibid., p. 33.
91 According to Tom Craddock, the Tomblads are also associated with Dingo Creek. A parish map shows Yamatoo’s having a permeate occupancy lease on the Dingo Creek reserve.
92 ibid., 19 December 1895.
93 ibid., 19 December 1895.
94 ibid., 19 December 1895.
95 ibid., 19 December 1895.
96 Papers re Aboriginal reserves in the vicinity of Taree.
97 ibid., 19 December 1895.
98 ibid., 19 December 1895.
99 ibid., 19 December 1895.
100 ibid., 19 December 1895.
101 ibid., 19 December 1895.
102 ibid., 19 December 1895.
103 ibid., 19 December 1895.
104 ibid., 19 December 1895.
105 ibid., 19 December 1895.
106 ibid., 19 December 1895.
107 ibid., 19 December 1895.
108 ibid., 19 December 1895.
109 ibid., 19 December 1895.
110 ibid., 19 December 1895.
111 ibid., 19 December 1895.
112 ibid., 19 December 1895.
113 ibid., 19 December 1895.
114 ibid., 19 December 1895.
115 ibid., 19 December 1895.
116 ibid., 19 December 1895.
117 ibid., 19 December 1895.
118 ibid., 19 December 1895.
119 ibid., 19 December 1895.
120 ibid., 19 December 1895.
121 ibid., 19 December 1895.
122 ibid., 19 December 1895.
123 ibid., 19 December 1895.
124 ibid., 19 December 1895.
125 ibid., 19 December 1895.
126 ibid., 19 December 1895.
127 ibid., 19 December 1895.
128 ibid., 19 December 1895.
129 ibid., 19 December 1895.
130 ibid., 19 December 1895.
131 ibid., 19 December 1895.
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128 Tom Craddock, W 4, 14/7/00.
129 Warner Saunders, P/4 & 4a, 13/6/00.
130 Tom Craddock, W 4, 14/7/00.
131 According to Warner Saunders, Reginald Morris was born in Wingham. The people that Warner identified as being from Wingham were the Morris, the Brown and the Thorpe families. See Warner Saunders, P/4 and 4a, 13/6/00.
132 Craddock, W 2, 10/6/00, W 3 14/7/00 and W 4, 14/7/00.
133 See Maria Nugent, ‘Revisiting La Perouse: A Postcolonial History’, PhD, UTS, Sydney, 2001, chapter 5, describing the Happy Valley unemployment camp at La Perouse in Sydney which was occupied by many Aboriginal families in the 1930s and 1940s.
134 Warner Saunders, P/4, 13/6/00.
135 See Goodall, Invasion to Embassy.
136 Fay Pattison, oral history interview, F 9, 28/11/00. See also Simon, Through My Eyes, pp. 131-133.
137 Simon, Through My Eyes, pp. 131-132.
138 Ibid, p. 133.
139 See for example, Police Report (CSIL, 5/6/990, 08.943) which noted that: ‘The Aborigines at Forster have been living on the reserve about 20 years and many of the tribe have lived about there for the last 50 years’, cited in Heather Goodall, ‘Land in our own country: The Aboriginal land rights movement in southeastern Australia, 1860-1914’, in Valerie Chapman and Peter Read (eds), Terrible Hard Biscuits: A Reader in Aboriginal History, Allen & Unwin in association with the Aboriginal History Journal, Sydney, 1996, p. 191.
140 Unpublished transcript held by the Forster Local Aboriginal Land Council.
141 E.J. Oxley, Aboriginal Heritage Officer Project, p. 73. This became the subject of some controversy when the 6.9 hectares on which Aboriginal people were living was handed over to the Aboriginal Land Trust in 1978. Some community people had thought they should have deeds to the land from the top of the hill (the burial site) to the lake. See Cabarita Aboriginal Corporation – Land Claim, photography held by the Forster Local Aboriginal Land Council.
142 See Goodall, Invasion to Embassy, esp. chapter 1.
144 The History of Forster, pp. 63-64.
145 See Atwood, The Making of the Aborigines, p. 118, where he says: ‘The level of tolerance in European society declined further as it underwent profound changes. By the 1880s it was no longer raw, rural and predominantly male as it had been in the 1850s and 1860s; instead a community of family-oriented men and women who were proud of their ‘pioneering achievements’ and insistent on respectable standards of behaviour had grown up’.
146 NSW APB minutes, 15 May 1895.
147 NSW APB minutes, 16 May 1895.
148 Senior Sergeant Hogan, Taree, to Sub-Inspector Edwards, Kempsey, 29 November 1908, NSW State Records Office, CSIL, Box 5/6/990, 08.943.
149 For descriptions of this portion, see Madge Bolt, F 8, 16/11/00 & F/10, 29/11/00; Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00.
150 This portion was not returned to Aboriginal people during the land claim made in the late 1970s, and this caused much grief. It is now Tiszabala Park. Blue Dick McIvor is believed to buried there.
151 See Joe Ridgeway, oral history interview, F 4, nd (interviewed by Robert Paulson). Robert Paulson, F 1 & 2, 21/7/99. See also Madge Bolt, F 7, 16/11/00, and F 10, 29/11/00. All give the names of local white people, and talk about visiting them. Robert Paulson (now McCartney) makes a distinction between ‘tours’ (tourist) and ‘local’.

152 Robert Paulson (now Yettica), F 1 & 2, 21/7/99. Atwood, The Making of the Aborigines, p. 79, referring to a different geographical region, observes: ‘The landscape ‘Tulaba’ had moved over to be known in quite different ways, those sites where he had once gathered food and performed tribal ceremony as a Brabiralung, and worked as a stockman called ‘Billy Macleod’, became for later generations places where they picked hops and holidayed together as ‘Aborigines’ from a particular mission. The meanings of these acts, performed more or less on the same land, had clearly changed, but for the later generation they were nonetheless integral to their sense of themselves, part of what it meant to be ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘kin’.

153 See Mae Simon, F 7, 21/11/00. ‘Everyone used to go to the beach at Pebbley and there was hardly any white people. It was always the Koori people from up here. They wouldn’t go and swim in the main beach’.

154 Joe Ridgeway, F 4, nd [interviewed by Robert Yettica].
155 Joe Ridgeway, F 4, nd [interviewed by Robert Yettica].
156 Joe Ridgeway, F 4, nd, (interviewed by Robert Yettica).
157 Atwood, The Making of the Aborigines, p. 79.
158 Mae Simon, F 7, 21/11/00.
159 Madge Bolt, F 8, 16/11/00.
160 Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00.
162 Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00.
163 Madge Bolt, F 8, 16/11/00.
164 For example, Madge Bolt’s mother worked for many years in the kitchen at the Lakes and Ocean Hotel. Many Aboriginal women worked in guesthouses. Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00.
165 Mae Simon, F 7, 21/11/00.
166 Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00.
167 Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00.
168 Goodall, Invasion to Embassy, p. 72 and pp. 92-93, notes that while Aboriginal settlements were beyond towns, they were close enough to ensure that Aboriginal people, especially women, could provide domestic and sexual services. W. E. Du Bois, outlining the spatial distribution of ‘blacks’ in Philadelphia noted: ‘Again, the occupations which the Negro follows, and which at present he is compelled to follow, are of a sort that makes it necessary for him to live near the best portions of the city: the mass of Negroes are, in the economic world, purveyors to the rich – working in private houses, in hotels, large stores, etc’, cited in David Sibley, Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West, Routledge, London & New York, 1995, p. 144. Sometimes, Aboriginal people themselves were the tourist spectacle. For instance, Madge Bolt, F 8, 16/11/00, recalls Aboriginal men playing the gum leaf busking in the main street of Forster in the 1930s during the peak holiday season. Similarly, Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00, recalls that white people who had been taken out fishing were sometimes invited onto the Aboriginal reserve for entertainment.
169 The wall around the Little Baths has been taken down recently. There are now some wooden posts and nets. According to Vic Bramble in Thoughts (unpublished m/s), the walls were sandstone ‘brought here from Taree, New South Wales’. The fish, the outside of the wall, ‘are as thick as the proverbial hairs on a cats (sic) back’. These were the places to cast a rod and greenweed bait, for blackfish’ (p. 6).
170 See Robert Yettica and Mick Leon, Forster 1 & 2, 21/7/99.
171 Robert Yettica says he learnt to swim there. See also Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00.
172 See Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00. She talks about how it was a wonder they did not get their lines tangled there were so many sitting along the wall. Barney Simon’s father, Coomba George, was known to swim down there each morning.
173 See Madge Bolt, F 8, 16/11/00 and F 10, 29/11/00; Mae Simon, F 7, 21/11/00.
174 See Mae Simon, F 7, 21/11/00.
175 It is important to remember that the original Aboriginal reserve was located around here. This reflects a continuing use of this part of the lake, despite the official relocation of the reserve away from the shore.
176 Robert Yettica, F 2, 21/7/99; Madge Bolt, F 8, 16/11/00.
177 See Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00.
178 Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00.
179 This part of the landscape is much less accessible than it used to be now that Mr Lani has built a big ‘compound’ there. Personal communication with Robert Yettica, 24 July 2001.
181 Madge Bolt, F 10, 29/11/00; Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00.
183 Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00.
184 Personal communication with Mae Simon, 25 July 2001. See also Mae Simon, F 7, 2/11/00.
185 An obvious comparison is the lively souvenir production at La Perouse, which involved men and boys making tourist boomerangs and women and girls making shellwork souvenirs. This cottage industry sustained some members of the community during the 1920s/1930s Depression. See Nugent, ‘Revisiting La Perouse’, chapter 4.
186 See for example Nugent, Revisiting La Perouse, chapter 4 and Individual Heritage Group, La Perouse: The Place, the People and the Sea, pp. 13, 39, 43 & 80.
187 Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00.
188 Fay Pattison believes that the boys were put through ‘the rules’ by Coomba George.
189 Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00: ‘My grandfather worked in the sawmills and that. They worked on shipbuilding over at Wrights. He used to be good with Miles and he used to give him a lot of timber because he liked my grandfather’.
190 All About the Lovely Lakes District, published in 1909, p. 16, noted that: ‘A number of aboriginals (sic) pursue line fishing, principally for flathead, which are eagerly purchased by local buyers for the Sydney market’. Wallamba, Manning, Camden Haven & Hastings Rivers, issued January 1919, noted that ‘50 men [were] employed [in fishing] working 2 steamers, 36 launchs, 39 boats and 15 punts, valued with gear at 5400 (pounds), for an output of 14,864 baskets fish, 1903 dozen crayfish and 8 baskets crabs’.
191 Fay Pattison, F 9, 28/11/00.
192 The aerodrome was constructed between 1947 and 1952. It was bought by the Department of Civil Aviation in 1953.
193 For accounts of pea and bean picking on the NSW south coast, see Travelling with Percy, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1997; ‘Nana Bella Sims’, in La Perouse: The Place, the People and the Sea, p. 49; Robert Yettica, F 6, 21/7/99.
194 See ‘Too Dark for the Lighthorse’ touring exhibition, Australian War Memorial, which includes a photograph of Nip Simon in uniform.
196 Our focus is on that part of the landscape of NSW, outside the major cities. This landscape has been heavily dominated by people of an Anglo-Celtic background. Minority non-Indigenous people, such as the Chinese, have also had a significant presence in the rural landscape of NSW – we assume their experience would be different from that of the Anglo-Celtic majority and from that of Aboriginal people.
197 The NSW Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System, which is maintained by the Cultural Heritage Division of the Department of Environment and Conservation, NSW.
198 Denis Byrne, ‘The ethos of return: erasure and reinstatement of Aboriginal visibility in the Australian historical landscape’, Historical Archaeology, 37, 1, 2003, pp. 73-86.
199 The expression ‘coming in’ has been widely used by white Australians, especially in frontier situations, to describe the phenomenon of Aboriginal people breaking the ‘traditional’ pattern of moving around their country in order to congregate near pastoral station homesteads, mission stations, and white settlements.
201 This approach borrows, somewhat loosely, from the methodology of ‘site catchment analysis’ developed by Claudio Vita-Finzi and Eric Higgs, ‘Prehistoric economy in the Mount Carmel area of Palestine: site catchment analysis’, Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society, 36, 1970, pp. 1-37. See also Eric Higgs (ed.), Papers in Economic Prehistory, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972. They surmised that most resources used by hunter-gathers at any particular site would be with a two hour walk of the site (c.10km); for settled agriculturists they surmised a one-hour walking range (c.5km).
202 For references to walking by white people in the Manning Valley see oral histories recorded by Helen Hannah in Voices: A Folk History of the Manning Valley, self published, 1988.
204 For an account of how modern-day Aboriginal people in Western NSW follow recognised ‘beats’ as they visit kin who have dispersed to settlements strung out along the region’s highways see Jeremy Beckett, ‘Kinship, mobility and community in rural New South Wales’, in Ian Keen (ed.), Being Black, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1988, pp. 117-137.
205 For a discussion of the way Aboriginal people in NSW converge from over wide distances to attend funerals of loved ones see Denis Byrne, ‘The ethos of return’, pp. 73-86.
Fig. 89: Forster Aboriginal Reserve, c. 1950s. The house in the background was built by Nip Simon. The woman pictured is his daughter. Courtesy Fay Pattison
PART 3 Lives

Fig. 89: Forster Aboriginal Reserve, c. 1950s. The house in the background was built by Nip Simon. The woman pictured is his daughter. Courtesy Fay Pattison.
In Part 3 we present the study area ‘through the eyes’ of seven Aboriginal people. These highly personalised landscape studies, which we call geo-biographies, are based exclusively on Aboriginal people’s own memories.

Published life stories as a form of autobiographical memory

In 1978, Ella Simon, an Aboriginal woman who lived most of her life on the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve, published her autobiography entitled Through My Eyes. Her book was one of the first published life stories of an Aboriginal woman from New South Wales. It, along with others published around the same time, provided an insight into what life had been like for Aboriginal people living in New South Wales during the twentieth century. Since the 1970s many life stories of Aboriginal people from New South Wales and throughout Australia have been published. They have been a rich source for learning about Aboriginal people’s historical experiences. Yet, surprisingly, they have been little used in heritage work. Here we use Ella’s autobiography as the basis for constructing her geo-biography.

Oral histories as a form of autobiographical memory

Published life stories are only one form of autobiographical memory. Oral history interviews are another. Since the 1970s, historians and others have avidly recorded Aboriginal people’s oral testimonies, valuing them highly as a source of evidence about what happened in the past. Recording oral history interviews with Aboriginal people has been part of a broader project to expose ‘hidden’ histories, those pasts that have not left traces in the nineteenth and twentieth-century documentary archive. In New South Wales, historians such as Peter Read, Heather Goodall and Margaret Somerville were at the forefront of this work. Yet, like published Aboriginal life stories, oral history interviewing has not been a research method used extensively for Aboriginal cultural heritage work (although there are signs that this is changing).

Oral histories recorded for this project

For this project, given our explicit focus on Aboriginal post-contact heritage, recording oral history interviews was a key research method. We conducted over thirty interviews with Aboriginal people in the study area. This included interviews with men and women across a range of age groups, including people in their eighties as well as some in their late teens. The oral history interviews we conducted were a rich source for the landscape studies presented in Part 2. There we combined them with documentary sources to provide detailed studies of those parts of our study area occupied and used intensely by Aboriginal people.

Here our focus is a little different. Rather than combine the evidence gained from oral history interviews with documentary sources we present the recorded oral histories on their own, as stand alone accounts. Our aim is to allow the narrators to speak for themselves so that we (as readers) can view the landscape ‘through their eyes’. In the process, we hope to show that all lives have an accompanying geography. All lives are, so to speak, located or ‘em-placed’. They have a temporal as well as spatial dimension.

This idea is encapsulated in our term ‘geo-biography’: the geography belonging to one’s biography. The personalised landscape studies that follow illustrate the point that it is partly through remembering and telling stories about our lives that landscapes acquire
In Part 3 we present the study area ‘through the eyes’ of seven Aboriginal people. These highly personalised landscape studies, which we call geo-biographies, are based exclusively on Aboriginal people’s own memories.

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their cultural significance. Cultural landscapes do not have inherent meaning, their meaning is ascribed by the people who interact with them.⁴

Redressing gaps in the nineteenth-century archive

By focusing on individual life stories, or autobiographical memory, we are able to gain a strong sense of the people who have lived in the study area, and who have called it home. This provides an important antidote to the picture that can be gained from documentary sources about the nineteenth century (presented in Part 1). Given the nature of the archive, which consists almost exclusively of accounts produced by non-Aboriginal people, it is difficult (although not impossible) to build up a detailed profile of Aboriginal identities.⁵ While Aboriginal people are present in the nineteenth-century archive, they rarely speak for themselves. Or, when their own words are recorded in documentary form, they are represented in a way that does not allow one to gain a deep understanding of who they are: of how they felt, how they interpreted their experiences, and of what motivated them. To counter this, our aim in this section of the book is to introduce some of the Aboriginal people who know the study area best, who claim it as their own, and who have generously shared their memories of it with us.

The seven geo-biographies

In the following pages we present seven geo-biographies, beginning with Ella Simon who was born in 1902 and ending with Sean Martin who was born in 1982. It is worth stressing that this is only a small extract, or series of extracts, from a much larger narrative. In some cases we have taken extracts from more than one recorded interview with the same person. In choosing what to include our focus, not surprisingly, has been on spatial information. We have been keen to show the information that autobiographical memory can provide about the landscape and that can be used in identifying and recording Aboriginal post-contact heritage places. Thus we explicitly chose sections of the recorded oral history interviews that were rich in detail about particular places and about place-based activities.

Throughout the seven geo-biographies there are references to a broad range of places, including houses, schools, workplaces, hospitals, fishing spots, swimming holes and cemeteries. These types of place correspond with significant themes in people’s lives, which include their experience of childhood, growing up and leaving home, school and employment, births, marriages and deaths, and also the significance in their lives of ancestors, descendants, and religious beliefs. Movement is a significant theme in most of the geo-biographies (e.g. the experience of moving from one dwelling place to another). Memories about living in a particular house often encapsulate a specific phase, or period, in one’s life.⁶ Describing a move from one place to another thus often functions in an autobiographical narrative as a marker of time, a shift from one period in a person’s life to another. We have sought to reflect this theme of movement in both the text and in the maps and illustrations that accompany it.

We want to stress that the way in which we have presented autobiographical memory in the form of ‘geo-biographies’ is only one possible model. Other possibilities for using autobiographical memory to record heritage places are suggested in Chapter 23.

Geo-biography = life + landscape

Each geo-biography begins with a short opening paragraph introducing the narrator, explaining when their memories were recorded, and foreshadowing key themes covered in their account. Accompanying each narrative is a large aerial photograph onto which is mapped as many of the places and pathways referred to and described by the narrator as possible. Some portions of the landscape and places mentioned will be familiar to readers from Part 2.

For each geo-biography, the text presented is only a small extract, or series of extracts, from a much larger narrative. In some cases we have taken extracts from more than one recorded interview with the same person. In choosing what to include our focus, not surprisingly, has been on spatial information. We have been keen to show the information that autobiographical memory can provide about the landscape and that can be used in identifying and recording Aboriginal post-contact heritage places. Thus we explicitly chose sections of the recorded oral history interviews that were rich in detail about particular places and about place-based activities.

Throughout the seven geo-biographies there are references to a broad range of places, including houses, schools, workplaces, hospitals, fishing spots, swimming holes and cemeteries. These types of place correspond with significant themes in people’s lives, which include their experience of childhood, growing up and leaving home, school and employment, births, marriages and deaths, and also the significance in their lives of ancestors, descendants, and religious beliefs. Movement is a significant theme in most of the geo-biographies (e.g. the experience of moving from one dwelling place to another). Memories about living in a particular house often encapsulate a specific phase, or period, in one’s life.⁶ Describing a move from one place to another thus often functions in an autobiographical narrative as a marker of time, a shift from one period in a person’s life to another. We have sought to reflect this theme of movement in both the text and in the maps and illustrations that accompany it.

We want to stress that the way in which we have presented autobiographical memory in the form of ‘geo-biographies’ is only one possible model. Other possibilities for using autobiographical memory to record heritage places are suggested in Chapter 23.

A note about interpreting autobiographical memory

Over the last ten or more years, particularly as recording autobiographical memory has become increasingly popular as a historical research method, a large body of scholarship examining the nature and function of the stories that people tell about their past has been produced. This work cannot be adequately reviewed here,⁶ but it is worth pointing out that it tends to focus on questions about the accuracy or otherwise of autobiographical memory, and the nature of the relationship between individual memory and what is commonly referred to as collective, or social, memory. For instance, in terms of accuracy, some would want to argue that autobiographical memory is especially reliable as a historical source because it describes past events from the perspective of participants and/or eyewitnesses. It is, so to speak, history ‘from the horse’s mouth’. Others, however, argue that autobiographical memory is not at all trustworthy given that people consciously and unconsciously select what they will remember about their past as part of a process of composing a story about themselves that they can live with. Moreover, we all frequently ‘misremember’ and indeed forget, a tendency which some would argue automatically disqualifies memory as a source of historical evidence. In terms of the relationship between individual and collective memory, some argue that all memory is socially produced. By this they mean that we largely depend on significant others to confirm our memories for us. It is often difficult to know where to draw the line between one’s own memories and those of others and this may throw into doubt one’s capacity to accurately recall the past, or to recall it without ‘contamination’.⁷

Remembering place

While it is important to keep these debates in mind when using memory as a historical source, they have only little bearing on our purposes in this part of the book. Our aim in presenting extracts from recorded oral history interviews in textual form, without any historical interpretation (apart from some comments in the endnotes that clarify ambiguities or confusions) is simply to illustrate the type of spatial information that emerges when someone reminisces about their life. We want to show what descriptions of local landscapes one might expect to hear when one listens to people talk about their lives.

These geo-biographies are not histories

Given that this is our goal in Part 3, the ‘geo-biographies’ presented in the following pages ought not to be read as ‘histories’ per se. They do not include analysis about the factors, structural and otherwise, that might have influenced the choices that the narrators made at any one time in their lives. If nothing else, autobiographical memory is notoriously egocentric. When reminiscing, people tend to focus almost exclusively on the intimate, rather than on the larger context and/or the impersonal forces that might have shaped their lives.

We have not sought to address this issue, or compensate for it, by assuming the role of historian. Indeed, in presenting the ‘geo-biographies’ we have purposefully not made an attempt to explain the broader historical context within which the speakers lived.⁸ This, we hope, has been sufficiently covered in Parts 1 and 2.

A note on style

In the edited transcripts of oral history recordings that follow, we have sought to retain, as much as possible, the spoken quality of the narrative, including pronunciation and speech patterns and styles. Where there might be confusion, we have included clarification in square brackets in the text, or an endnote. Italics are used to indicate emphasis.

In Ella Simon’s geo-biography, which is an extract from her published biography, we have added some contextual detail, which appears in italics. The page numbers in her text refer to her book. The subheadings are ours.
their cultural significance. Cultural landscapes do not have inherent meaning, their meaning is ascribed by the people who interact with them.\textsuperscript{4}

Redressing gaps in the nineteenth-century archive

By focusing on individual life stories, or autobiographical memory, we are able to gain a strong sense of the people who have lived in the study area, and who have called it home. This provides an important antidote to the picture that can be gained from documentary sources about the nineteenth century (presented in Part 1). Given the nature of the archive, which consists almost exclusively of accounts produced by non-Aboriginal people, it is difficult (although not impossible) to build up a detailed profile of Aboriginal identities.\textsuperscript{5} While Aboriginal people are present in the nineteenth-century archive, they rarely speak for themselves. Or, when their own words are recorded in documentary form, they are represented in a way that does not allow one to gain a deep understanding of who they are: of how they felt, how they interpreted their experiences, and of what motivated them. To counter this, our aim in this section of the book is to introduce some of the Aboriginal people who know the study area best, who claim it as their own, and who have generously shared their memories of it with us.

The seven geo-biographies

In the following pages we present seven geo-biographies, beginning with Ella Simon who was born in 1902 and ending with Sean Maslin who was born in 1982. It is worth stressing that this is only a small sample of the people who participated in our study. The subheads from her published biography, we have added some numbers in her text refer to her book. The subheads from some comments in the endnotes that clarify ambiguities or confusions) is simply to illustrate the type of spatial information that emerges when someone reminisces about their life. We want to show what descriptions of local landscapes one might expect to hear when one listens to people talk about their lives.

Geo-biography = life + landscape

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In Ella Simon’s geo-biography, which is an extract from her published biography, we have added some contextual detail, which appears in italics. The page numbers in her text refer to her book. The subheadings are ours.
Ella Simon published her autobiography *Through My Eyes* in 1978. It tells the story of her life, beginning with growing up around Purfleet and Gloucester in the early 1900s, her time spent working in Sydney and Kempsey as a young woman, and then as a married woman back on the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve. Ella was born in 1902 to an Aboriginal mother and a white father, although she was raised by her grandparents. The extracts from *Through My Eyes* that we present here cover the period from her birth until she was about twelve years old. (Obviously, the details she provides about her birth derive from information passed on to her.) They describe her childhood on Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve, working on properties around Gloucester, and her travels up and down the newly built north coast railway line between Taree, Wingham and Gloucester.

On the fringe of town

I was born in a tent on the edge of Taree. My mother’s people were living there. On the fringe of town, that was as close as the white people wanted to come. Anyway, my mother used to go into town to work for my father’s well-to-do family. He was her employer. Yet, well-to-do or not, I was still born out there in that tent. (p. 22)

Way back, my mother’s people were starting to overcrowd that camp of theirs on the fringe of the town. The problem was that the more they increased in numbers, the more the white people wanted them to keep out of town. In those days, my grandfather worked for a lot of local farmers. One day he talked about the terrible conditions that they had to put up with in that camp to a Scottish couple, the McClennans. They were so sympathetic that they offered him a little corner of their own land. It was only a little square that had two entrances because different families owned the paddocks on either side of it, but it was enough for Grandfather. He returned to the camp and managed to get three or four families to move out there with him. The rest just stayed where they were. That was the year I was born, 1902. That bit of land my grandfather built on was the beginning of the settlement that came to be called Purfleet. (pp. 24-25)

Living at Purfleet

Just to get into town to see a doctor or go to hospital was a two mile walk. There were no buses then. And when someone died at the hospital, the men had to go and borrow a hand cart from Mr McClennan so that they could wheel the body back the three-mile journey to our cemetery. (p. 26)

Meeting and visiting my father

Ella did not know the identity of her father until after her grandfather died when she was about eleven years old, even though she was regularly taken to Wingham to see him. The following extract describes her memories of those visits.
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My father was a saddler by trade.15 He was very clever at it, too, and used to make some beautiful saddles. Oh yes, he often won prizes for them. I remember he worked for an old fellow who owned a shop in Taree and he’d do all the repairing of saddles and things. Then he owned his own shop up at Wingham. That was when I was only a tiny tot. One of my aunts used to take me up there to visit him and there I’d be, wondering why I had to go so far to see this old man who meant nothing to me then…

Yes, I often wondered why I had to go so much to see this old man, who I would never have thought could be my grandfather. He would always greet me with a, ‘How are you, my girl?’ and I would think, ‘Well, I’m not your girl’, but I never said anything. I used to watch him work. I remember when it was a bit cold, he’d give me a piece of that material he used to line the saddles with. It was high quality cloth just like the stuff they used for lining the dresses. It was very useful. We’d use it for springing the bubbles in the bottle. Then I’d use it to line up and waving as he went by. You know, at the old punt where there was a butter factory. We could go over there and buy a whole pat of butter for a shilling. They just used to scoop it out of an old vat. What a treat that was!

I remember a Mr McCauley ran that factory. There’s no sign of it left now. That’s awfully sad. I remember a Mr McCauley ran the factory. There’s no sign of it left now. That’s awfully sad. There was also a Mr Jim Carter who had the shop just up from the punt. We’d walk all the way there just to buy four lollies for a penny. (pp. 57-58)

My great uncle’s name was Cook, but they called him Mulakut meaning ‘lightning’ because he once climbed a tree that had been struck by lightning.16 Anyways, there was no argument; I had to go with him, first by train to Gloucester, and then, believe it or not, by a horse-drawn milk van that was the only thing that went regularly up into the mountains. They had three boys and a girl already living at home. I was put in with the daughter, Maggie, and her two children.

I wasn’t there for long before I was sent out to Coniee Station with another of the daughters to help her while she had a baby. That proved to be even lonelier, if that’s possible. There I was, still only twelve, yet I had to ride the horse to bring the cows up for milking. I had to feed the animals; and I had to do most of the hard work around the house. I was on the go from morning to night. I didn’t mind having to deal with the animals, I remember. At least with animals I used to be able to make believe that they were my own pets. I didn’t have anyone else to play with. (pp. 68-69)

From there I got a job with a Scottish family in Gloucester – the McKinnons. They proved to be really pleasant to me, and even treated me as one of their own. I earned six shillings a week, living in. I taught myself to sew my own clothes and I used to get the good makings of a frock for half a crown from the old Indian hawker who came around there with his wagon. I had determined that if I couldn’t have many clothes, I was at least going to have them nice.
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Yes, I often wondered why I had to go so much to Wingham. I didn’t have to go overnight, even if I wanted to return the same day. They would go up in a horse-drawn milk van that was the only thing that went regularly up into the mountains. They had three boys and a girl already living at home. I was put in with the daughter, Maggie, and her two children. …

I wasn’t there for long before I was sent out to Coneac Station with another of the daughters to help her while she had a baby. That proved to be even lonelier, if that’s possible. There I was, still only twelve, yet I had to ride the horse to bring the cows up for milking. I had to feed the animals, and I had to do most of the hard work around the house. I was on the go from morning to night. I didn’t mind having to deal with the animals, I remember. At least I didn’t have to keep my job cutting the sleepers. My youngest uncle went with him and my aunts were being married. That left me. What had to be done for me?

She sent for her brother who lived at Gloucester. I had to just stand there and listen while she told him that she was going to send me back with him to live; there was no other choice. He lived on the Barrington, in the mountains behind Gloucester, and what followed was one of the loneliest periods of my life.

You know I returned to the Barrington around there recently – sixty-two years after I had been taken there as a twelve-year-old who had suddenly lost the only home she had ever known. And I could still feel the loneliness; I could still remember lying there dreadfully homesick and listening to the cry of the curlews.

Moving up Gloucester way

When Ella was about eleven years old, her dearly loved grandfather died. She was subsequently sent away by her grandmother to work on properties around Gloucester. The following extract describes her memories of that period in her early life.

My grandmother finally couldn’t cope and it wasn’t surprising.16 My eldest uncle had to move to Kempsey to keep his job cutting the sleepers. My youngest uncle went with him and my aunts were being married. That left me. What had to be done for me?

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It had been all so different – the way they lived; the way they spoke. I had just wanted to go back home.

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by that time I had taken fate into my own hands and returned home whether Grandmother felt the time was ripe or not. But first I had a little trip that was to be my first experience of going out into the big wide world on my own.

Going to the Wingham Show

I suggested to Maggie that we ought to go down to the Wingham Show. We could get the train down in the morning and come back in the evening, and nobody would miss us. But how to get the money, even for the train fare? Well, by this time, I had started to write to my father, as I've said. So I wrote to him and asked if he could send some money to the Gloucester Post Office and not to Barrington, as my great uncle would come and take me back if he found out.

So, on the big day, Maggie and I hurried into town. One of my aunts had asked me to buy some flannelette while I was there. It was about sixpence a yard in those days, and she gave me a half-crown. Anyway, good old Dad didn't let me down. Sure enough, the money was waiting for us at the Gloucester Post Office, and off to the Show we went. The flannelette could wait for on the way back. I was too excited to be worrying about commonplace things like that!

Oh, we had a fine old time! The people we met at that Show and had fun with! We just had to stay over for the next day, as well. So I asked my father for his permission. He didn't mind at all. The only thing he was worried about was where I was going to stay. I clearly remember him saying, "The only thing I can do is to lend some of the saddle lining again for blankets."

Well, that was perfectly good enough for us, thank you. We went to a friend's place and made up beds for ourselves with our lovely, yellow, woollen blankets. What was good enough to cover horses was good enough to cover us!

Hundreds of people had gathered for the Show and stayed over. It took so long to get to places in those days, you see. Once you got there, it was more than likely you had to stay overnight and go back the next day. Anyway, early next morning, Maggie and I had a quick wash in the river and joined our friends for the second day. There wasn't a train out until that night, so we didn't need to feel guilty about enjoying ourselves the whole day. Somehow Gran heard that I was there and got word to me that she wanted to see me. But how could I? … we had no money left, not even for the flannelette that I was supposed to buy. I thought I was going to have to go to my father again, but some of the boys chipped in for our train fares at least. So after all that time I was on my way back to my real home.
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When I finally left the McKinnons, I didn’t want to leave. The wife had been kind to me. She had even taken me to some of their Scottish gatherings and taught me some Gaelic. But, yes, my moody aunt sent for me again, because she was having another baby and couldn’t cope alone … Her husband had come down to Gloucester especially to beg me to go back. So what could I do? I could hardly refuse; after all, it was one side of my own family. Besides, I thought, it might have been my own fault the first attempt at trying to get on together. So go I did.

It was just the same the second time. It certainly wasn’t through any fault of mine. She just wasn’t a happy person I’m afraid. She wouldn’t pay me. She would find fault with everything I did. She didn’t try to protect me when the stationhands got drunk and talked stupidly to me. She didn’t even bother to make sure I was safe from being molested at night. Oh, it was all hopeless. She was either out drinking with the men or she’d be looking after her own two babies. I’d just have to go to bed, and most of the time the doors weren’t even locked. At nights I was frightened all the time.

As soon as she had her new baby, I wrote to Maggie to send the horses up again! But what actually happened this time was that the sister of this woman, a Mrs Martin, worked a swap. She sent her girl, Jess, up to Coneac and I went down to work for her. That worked out very well, and for a time I was contented again. Not that I didn’t still want to go back home, though. I had been away three years and was still just as homesick as the day I had been taken away. I had written to tell Grandmother that I had wanted to return, but she got one of the missionaries to write back for her, saying that as things were I still had to stay where I was.

Mrs Martin’s husband insisted she have her baby at Gloucester, so we moved back closer to there, which suited me fine. Eventually she had twins, but...
Madge Bolt was born at Forster in 1922 and has lived there for most of her life. We recorded this interview with her in 2001 at her home on the old Forster Aboriginal Reserve. In her geo-biography she takes us to the beaches around Forster and up to Wallis Lake, revisiting these landscapes through her childhood memories. She also talks about the 1950s and 1960s when, as a young married woman with small children, she lived at a timber mill outside Buladelah where her husband worked. When Madge later moved back to Forster she began working herself, mostly cleaning in private homes and in local businesses.

All bush once

My mum, see, they used to live on the ground where the hospital is. Oh this used to be all bush once! It wasn’t like this then. It used to be all bush down there. And I tell you, that used to be swamp there. We used to play in the swamp there. One day I was walkin’ down there where the swamp used to be and I saw the little porcupine, sittin’ up in the swamp. I always thought they fed on the ground. But they don’t. They sit up like a rabbit you know, and feed. Yeah, we used to play all around in there. And all around this big swamp. There used to be all turtles, all around there.

We used to go to the One Mile Beach when I was young. Every Sunday we used to take dinner out there and have dinner on the beach. But they don’t do nothin’ like that now. As I said, it’s not like it used to be. It’s all too much drink and drugs and that. The lady [Maude Cunningham] who lived up there, on the hill there, she used to take all the children with her. I used to go there and cook the bread (laughs). Cook it in the pan in the ashes! Cook a big damper (laughs). All the children used to get their flour and take it and get her to mix up the dampers. Yeah, we used to have a really good time ’ere once but it’s not like it used to be.

We’d walk out that way

We used to walk out that way (to One Mile Beach). We’d walk out that way. But we used to walk to Little Beach too. Do you know where Little Beach is? It’s way out. Yeah, we used to walk out there and fish and have a picnic and that. But we used to have to walk. We never ‘ad no vehicles then to go there. We used to walk everywhere. And we used to walk to Seven Mile. It’s out near Elizabeth Beach. It’s way out. We used to walk out that way. Through the bush. Through the old race course. We used to pick a big bunch of flowers, wild flowers, and then bring them in and sell ’em for our picture fares and that. Christmas Bells we used to pick too, but they don’t allow you now to pick ’em. Oh the people used to buy them. Especially the Christmas Bells and that. It was all lovely out that way. It wasn’t like it is now, you know. All the trees used to grow around and all the palm trees used to grow up then. We used to dip our water there and everything. In amongst the palm trees there used to be a little well at One Mile Beach there. You know where the palms are grown now? That used to be all palms, and that. And my Grandmother she used to dig, oh it used to be like a big yam thing, and cook ’em. In the sand, yeah. That was all swampy. We used to go out there to pick blackberries. Yeah, it used to be all blackberry bushes there. They’ve cut that all down now. And one day we went out there pickin’ blackberries and a great big carpet snake was lyin’
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across the track. Great big carpet snake. Yeah. We used to all swim down that way. But when we used to go pickin' blackberries (laughs) some days when it used to be really hot, you know, we used to go swimmin', back around towards this other little beach, when we were gowin' pickin’ blackberries. That was all blackberries growin’ out down that way. We’d swim on the Little Beach. We used to walk around that way, you know, to the Tanks (see Figure 96). We used to swim in the nude there (laughs). We used to swim in the nude. Jump in and swim (laughs). We used to sell blackberries then. But now everything’s a big profit thing. And that used to be all geebung trees and that. We used to eat those geebungs. But now they’ve cut nearly all the bush down. And the puddin’s and everything we used to eat and that. Walk. We used to have to walk everywhere. But, you don’t ask ‘em to walk anywhere these days they nearly faint! (laughs).

My grandmother lived down the main street

I told you my grandmother lived down the main street? Yeah, they owned the big place down there. Well then there was only the shipyard, and then later on there used to be a little club house, and then there was always a Mr Tooley’s. They lived on the end of the street. Yeah. Right up in the corner opposite the Post Office way.

Going fishing

We used to go fishing. One day we went and we caught a lot of lovely bream. My sister still goes fishin’. She likes her fish. Both my sisters go fishin’. We’d go out on the lake. We used to get a pullin’ boat and go fishin’ over there. Go prawlin’. We used to go prawnin’ some nights. But we had a really good life. Now, it’s nothing now. Yeah, we used to hire a little pullin’ boat, and go fishing. Oh, it used to be good all around the lake. We used to get some nice big flatheads and that. And look ‘ow it is now!

Working in the timber mills

My husband used to work in the mills (the timber mills at Bulahdelah). So he went down to work, and when he got out o’ work, I came ‘ere (to Forster), and we lived ‘ere and then I started workin’ then. ‘Cause there wasn’t much work ‘ere then. He [my husband] worked for a little while on the roads, you know. But then he had a bad heart. He used to go fishin’. He really came from north. At Cabbage Tree Island (an Aboriginal Reserve on the lower Richmond River). Well my husband got out of work, up that way (at Cabbage Tree Island). We come back down this way, and that’s when we went to Bulahdelah. Yeah. And then he worked up there, in Bulahdelah, for about fourteen years. We lived in Bulahdelah. It wasn’t far from the mill. We had a little house. I used to just look after the children. The children loved it up there because they could run in the bush and hunt around for rabbits and things and that. We used to come down ‘ere (to Forster). My mum was alive then. We used to come down ‘ere and visit and go back ‘ome on the bus. The Bulahdelah bus used to run then. Sometimes we’d come down here on the milk truck. Yeah, and we’d go as far as Gloucester and then we’d get the bus from there down. We used to come down mostly on the weekends. Or sometimes we’d stay over, for a while. There was only a little school [near the mill at Bulahdelah]. They [my children] used to catch the bus to school, about two miles or something. And we used to always sit up and ‘ave a good laugh. (laughter) And at night time my husband used to say, “Madge, are you goin’ to sit up there and giggle and laugh all night long?” (laughs) Yeah. [Then we came back to Forster, and my husband] started workin’ on the roads ‘ere. And then he had a heart attack and so we stayed ‘ere then. But I started work. I worked for a long time and then I had a heart problem. And so I had to have a heart operation. That’s a bit over ten years since I had my heart operation.

Wherever I could get work

I used to work with the doctors, and solicitors, and wherever I could get work. Yeah, don’t cleaning. I used to work for a lady out at One Mile Beach, but she’s shifted from there now. She’s shifted to Lansdowne. I’d like to go and see her, you know, because she was really good to me that lady. Oh well, when she went to buy anything she used to say, “Madge, do you want me to buy anything for you, like linen, or things like that? I’ll pay for ‘em and then you can pay me back.” And she was really good to me, she was. And sometimes she used to get me to do a bit of sewin’ for her. “Oh Madge, will you finish those”— she had a daughter — “will you finish those pyjamas for my daughter?” She had a lovely big place. It’s still there now. I don’t know who lives there now. They came off the farm you know. This lady. Her husband. And when they came there, they used to do up cars, you know, and sell ‘em again. Yeah! Mrs Nicholls. Mrs Nicholls her name was. I worked for another lady at Burgess’s Beach. I can’t remember her name now. But she was a nice lady too, she was. I worked for some really nice people. And I worked for Dr Sanders. And Dr Renshaw. And Mr Borthwick, he was a solicitor. They lived out on the Bennett’s Head, and I worked there for them. Mr Borthwick’s dead now, but I don’t know whether his wife’s still alive or not. Wherever I could get work, I did.
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I used to always want to work at the Commonwealth Bank. (laughter) And when that lady left, I got the job then. I used to do it early in the mornin'. About five o'clock in the mornin' I used to go. Walk. I used to have a bike, anyway. Yeah. (laughter) Yeah, I used to ride a bike down there. I used to do three hours. Yeah. 'Cause they used to have to be out the bank by such and such a time. I used to work in the restaurant there. It was owned by Mr Kominos then, some Greek people. I used to work for them. I used to clean. I used to work down the Busy Bee. They used to cook fish and that and chickens and that. It was down opposite the TAB. And I used to work there. I used to go early in the morning. Used to have to clean up before, you know, early, because they used to cook fish and everything. And chickens. I worked at another restaurant, Zorndas's. They've got a restaurant in Taree now.

Going to the islands

We used to go up to that island. Wallis Island. And we used to have lunch up there. We used to always go up there. We used to hire a launch and go up there, for a day. Cook the fish on the coals, and everything, up there. We used to love it, but they don’t do much of that now. My Grandfather used to camp up there a long time ago. And he said there was a ghost up there (laughs). And he used to show us where the ghost grabbed him. He had this big hand mark right down his back. So I don’t know whatever scratched him, but he had this big mark on his back.

Busking in the street

They (Aboriginal people) used to always busk down the street and that, you know. Every Christmas time we used to go down there and sing! And you know, and busk and play the gum leaves. And my brother, one of my brothers, used to always tap dance down there (laughs). Yeah, in the street. One night I was standing there and I heard this fella say, “Oh, that fella shoulda been a comedian!” (laughs). He’s tap dancin’ in the street, you know. And they used to play the gum leaves and go around and play the gum leaves everywhere, and they used to give them some money and that. Yeah! Then they stopped them from doing that. They don’t allow them to do that no more. In the evening time, they used to go in the night time, yeah. Oh, I was only young then when they used to do that.22
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Tom Craddock was born in the 1930s. As a young boy, he lived at Dingo Creek with some other Aboriginal families on land that had been reserved for Aborigines in 1906. After living there for about twelve months, when he was about six years old, he moved with his family to live in a series of farmhouses on properties around Wingham before finally settling in Happy Valley just outside Taree.

We first interviewed Tom in June 2000 at his house in Wingham, and again a month later driving around the countryside visiting places he’d told us about. Sadly, he died in 2001. His geo-biography reflects little known histories of living beyond managed Aboriginal Reserves.

Dingo Creek

I haven’t been out to Dingo Creek for years. It’s all changed now. It’s not like when all the old people were alive, you know. It’s different. There’s little houses everywhere out there. We had little shacks and everyone lived happy, you know. I wouldn’t be about six when we left there. We moved into Wingham, in a house this side, a white one. Carey’s they call it. And we moved into there. Just out Young’s Road there, up on the other side there, up on the hill. Going out towards Tinonee, behind the brickworks. Yeah, that was horse and buggy days then. Mum got sick there, and Mum died and then my grandparents reared me, me and my brother, out there. We moved then back out to Cedar Party Road, way up the back, behind the hill. We lived there for a couple of years.
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The old people went back and forwards you know [between Wingham and Dingo Creek]. Some days we’d get the old train and then away we’d go. And stay a night, a couple of nights and do a bit of fishing and come back home again. They was the good old days. Used to travel back and forth to Purfleet then, over to see [Pat and George Bungie]. Sometimes there’d be a dance over there. The old people would go over to the dances. Stay a night or two with Pat and George down the old place.24 Stay a couple of nights and then go back home again. Hang around for a week or two then back up the [Dingo Creek] we’d go again, for a night out or day’s fishing. Sometimes they used to hold dances up there. The old time, yeah. Grandma on the concertina. They used to play all sorts of things. There was no such thing as grog in those times. It was all lemonade in those times. Oh, no grog, no grog mentioned. Everyone had a good time. And then we’d come back home again. And every Sunday we used to walk with the old people. Down to Dawson River we’d go. Just for a day out, go fishin’, walkin’ from there over to Kolodong. Go out for a day, a day’s fishin’. We’d love walkin’ all the time.

What was your first job, Uncle Tom, when you left school? [My first job] was on a dairy farm. Kolodong. I was fifteen when I left school. Straight onto a farm. I got ten bob a week, and my keep. That was seven days a week but. We lived at Happy Valley then. My grandparents was at Happy Valley.25 We lived there and of course there was only Jim.26 He was the only fella left goin’ to school then. He was the youngest. Then I went from farmin’ to timber.

At Happy Valley

[At Happy Valley] there was us, then Auntie Evelyn and her family, and there was Auntie Jean and her family. They all had a block each there. We had one just over the hill. It was a place with a big camphor laurel tree in front.27 That’s our block. That’s where we settled, see. We lived up the road a bit, up near Kolodong. Just before you get over the hill a bit there, down the paddock where they old stock yards are. There was an old house in that paddock there. We lived there. Just an old farm house, weatherboard, you know. And we walked from there to school. And Uncle Phillip Brown gave this house to me I think it was Uncle Tom. Uncle Tom Farrell. Mum’s brother. “Cause he used to work at Mt Cooper out in the bush. And he handed it down then to my grandparent, and they took over.

[The houses were] just what they built themselves. They just built places with a couple of bedrooms in them. Just homes you know. My two aunts had a block each on top of the hill. They built little places on them, you know, just somewhere to live. That’s where we finished. Yeah, that’s where we were reared up there. That’s with me grandparent. They got sick, passed on then. And we got out of there and I come up to Wingham on a farm up here. Then I went wanderin’ round. Workin’ in the bush cuttin’ sleepers and that. Yeah, I drifted about then. No matter where I went I always come back to Wingham. I used to work on a farm over here, what they called The Bight, for the Allan family.28 Yeah, we worked there, me and Jim. Sort of grew up with the people. We was sort of part of the family. Their family that are alive now, they poke in now and again and just see how I’m goin’, you know. Have a bit of a look at me and see if I’m still alive. Oh, the young bloke, he come in the other day, young Allan, Rodney Allan. Hadn’t seen him for forty years. Yeah. That property over there, they had a big farm there.

They were the good old days. They were horse and buggy days. I used to ride for miles on push bikes. Not now! (laughter) Go for miles. I used to ride from Wingham and to Wherroll Flat, out to Happy Valley. Just for a day out, just for a day’s ride.

Living on the Cedar Party Road

I started school when I was five and left Dingo Creek. When we lived over the back, Cedar Party Road. I started school from there.

[Cedar Party Road is] straight over the back here behind that big hill there. That’s the old Cedar Party Road. There’s still a lane going up through there called the Old Brimbin Road. And they still travel that I suppose. There’s a lot of houses on there now. You could only just walky travel when we lived there.

Our grandparents moved us around a bit. [My grandfather] reckoned [that house on Cedar Party Road] was haunted. (laughter) Oh, yeah which is true. Well me and Jim used to sleep on the verandah at night time you know. We was only young, and this thing [a spirit or ghost] used to come every night and used to keep pullin’ the blankets off us. You know, we were scared! We were screamin’ and yelpin’ and just run out with the lamp. This is true. Not a lie. And [Grandfather] said to Grandma, he said, “We’ll have to make the boys their bed in our room.” See. Walkin’, whatever it was. And it could have been our mum.29 “Cause I heard Grandma say, “It’s alright Jess, the boys are alright.” And the next day the old fella got up and said, “Well” he said, “we have to move.” See. “Where do you want to go Pop?” “Well we got to get out of this house.” We moved over here to this old Kolodong house. Moved out of there that night. And after that it never troubled us no more. Never seen no one, never come to us any more. We never seen nothing any more after that. Just the way the old fellow, my old Grandfather spoke, you know, he said, “Mum we have to get ’em off that verandah. Put ’em in our room and keep the light just turned down, you know.” And he said to her next mornin’, “Well” he said, “we have to move today”.

Have you always thought of Wingham as being your home? Yeah, always, always. I went away for years. I went away, when I was young and travelled around. I come back and got married. I married a Morris [a well known North Coast Aboriginal family]. You know the Morris’s? Oh, she was a Morris. She come from up Walcha, New England. Mabel Morris. I married her. After all me years of roaming. Yeah, I got sick of roamin’ around. I said, “Right, we’ll settle down”. Raised a family. She’s been dead now for twenty-five, twenty-six years. She was forty-three when she died.

The Morris’s originally come from Walcha I think. The Morris’s come from here too. Uncle Rexy Morris and his mum and dad, they all [from] New England. So my wife would be related to Rex and them. They all originated from up there. Yeah. That’s where we come from. I’m not a coaster. There’s only one coaster here and that’s Jim. He was born on the creek (Dingo Creek) out here. He was born after we come down here. We all come down through Nowendoc. That’s the first place we settled. The Dunhooes were here when we first landed here. That’s why we lived there.

After you were married, where did you live? Port Macquarie. OhPort. And I went up to Mt George. That’s a big timber mill up the highway this side of Walcha. And I worked up there for years. And then this side of town and then my wife died, and then I moved back into Nowendoc for three or four years. sawmillin’. And the kids all went up to Queensland. And I just roamed around then. I got crook and I couldn’t work no more and that’s why I ended up here [in Wingham]. I sort of settled down then. I tell ya, if I wasn’t sick I’d be gone again. Oh yeah, oh yeah, I’d be roamin’ . Anywhere. From town to town. I used to do it. I used to go from town to town. You drop here and you drop there. You see a bit of country. See a bit of country. Meet people. Oh yes, it’s a good life. Yeah, yeah, I could move around. Workin’ at bean pickin’, spuds. Anything! Yeah, anything, as long as it was work.

Would you live on the farms? No, we picked all the beans and peas from home. Oh, we lived pretty high. Didn’t pay no rent. We built down behind the hospital [in Port Macquarie], or
The old people went back and forwards you know [between Wingham and Dingo Creek]. Some days we’d get the old brain and then away we’d go. And stay a night, a couple of nights and do a bit of fishing’ and come back again. They was the good old days. Used to travel back and forth over to Purfleet then, or to see [Pat and George Bunje]. Sometimes there’d be a dance over there. The old people would go over to the dances. Stay a night or two with Pat and George down the old place.24 Stay a couple of nights and then go back home again. Hang around for a week or two then back up the [Dingo] Creek we’d go again, for a night out or day’s fishing’. Sometimes they used to hold dances up there. The old time, yeah. Grandma on the concertina.

We had a little swing along, amongst themselves. There was no such thing as grog in those times. It was all lemonade in those times. Oh, no gog, no gog mentioned. Everyone had a good time. And then we’d come back home again.

And every Sunday we used to walk with the old people. Down to Dawson River we’d go. Just for a day out, go fishin’, walkin’ from there over to Kolodong. Go out for a day, a day’s fishin’.’ We’d love walkin’ all the time.

What was your first job, Uncle Tom, when you left school? (My first job) was on a dairy farm. Kolodong. I was.

And every Sunday we used to walk with the old people. Down to Dawson River we’d go. Just for a day out, go fishin’, walkin’ from there over to Kolodong. Go out for a day, a day’s fishin’. ’We’d love walkin’ all the time.

I used to ride for miles on push bikes. They were the good old days. They were horse and buggy days. I used to ride for miles on push bikes. Not now (laugh). Go for miles. I used to ride from Wingham and to Wherroll Flat, out to Happy Valley. Just for a day out, just for a day’s ride.

Living on the Cedar Party Road

I started school when I up and left Dingo Creek. When we lived over the back, Cedar Party Road. I started school from there. [Cedar Party Road is] straight over the back here behind that big hill there. That’s the old Cedar Party Road. There’s still a lane going up through there called the Old Brimbin Road. And they still travel that I suppose. There’s a lot of houses on there now. You could only just walk up there when we lived there. Our grandparents moved us around a bit. [My grandfather] reckoned [that house on Cedar Party Road] was haunted. (laugh) Oh, yeah which is true. Well me and Jim used to sleep on the verandah at night time you know. We was only young and scared. We were screamin’ and yelpin’ and just run out with the lamp. This is true. Not a lie.

And [Grandfather] said to Grandma, he said, “We’ll have to make the boys their bed in our room.” See. Walkin’, whatever it was. And it could have been our mum.23 “Cause I heard Grandma say, “It’s alright Jess, the boys are alright.” And the next day the old fella got up and said, “Well” he said, “we have to move.” See. “Where do you want to go Popp?” “Well we got to get out of this house.” We moved over here to this old Kolodong house. Moved out of there that night. And after that it never troubled us no more. Never seen one no, never come to us any more. We never seen nothing any more after that. Just the way the old fellow, my old Grandfather spoke, you know, he said, “Mum we have to get ’em off that verandah. Put ’em in our room and keep the light just turned down, you know.” And he said to her next mornin’, “Well” he said, “we have to move today”.

Have you always thought of Wingham as being your home?

Yeah, always, yeah. I went away for years. I went away, when I was young and travelled around. I come back and got married. I married a Morris a well known North Coast Aboriginal family. You know the Morris’s? Oh, she was a Morris. She come from up Walcha, New England. Mabel Morris. I married her. After all me years of roamin’. Yeah, I got sick of roamin’ around. I said, “Right, we’ll settle down”. Raised a family. She’s been dead now for twenty-five, twenty-six years. She was forty-three when she died.

The Morris’s originally come from Walcha I think. The Morris’s come from here too. Uncle Rexy Morris and his mum and dad, they all [from] New England. So my wife would be related to Rex and them. They all originated from up there. Yeah. That’s where we come from. I’m not a coaster. There’s only one coaster here and that’s Jim. He was born on the creek (Dingo Creek) out here. He was born after we come down here. We all come down through Nowendoc. That’s the first place we settled. The Dunhoo’s were here when we first landed here. That’s why we lived there.

After you were married, where did you live?

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No, we picked all the beans and peas from home. Oh, we lived pretty high. Didn’t pay no rent. We built down behind the hospital [in Port Macquarie], or
where that is now. It’s all scrub. That was all bush, that was all scrub. And we just built a little humpy down there. We survived. There was heaps of it down there. Oh, pickin’ beans and peas. We built a little shack. No one interfered with us. Oh, I don’t know what year it was. I wouldn’t know, whether it was in the ’50s or the ’60s.

Was there any bean picking around here?
No. Burrell Creek way. Behind that there probably would have been a bit. There wasn’t that much around here. Not in that line of work, anyhow.

Mostly bush work. There was always a job up the river somewhere, ringbarkin’, or fencin’. Somethin’ like that, yeah. That was the only work around.

The abattoirs wasn’t goin’ very well then.

When you were doing that work [fencing, ringbarking] were you living on the property?
Oh, I’d live on the property, yeah. You could build a little tent, build a little shack and camp there. We camped on the property out at old Joe’s [Joe Anderson’s], didn’t we? With poor old Fred down on the creek. He give us some iron and built a little shanty or somethin’. We lived alright! Plenty of fish. You know, everyone was happy.
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Warner Saunders was born in 1937 at the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve. Warner’s father, Ken Saunders, was a fisherman who worked in the creeks around Purfleet and on the Manning River. Warner’s geo-biography describes the times as a young boy in the 1940s when he fished with his father. His memories traverse the landscape immediately east of Purfleet, over bush tracks and across farmland to the places where they’d leave their boats. We first interviewed Warner at Purfleet in June 2000, and a month later we drove around the landscape with him visiting the places he’d told us about.

We used to walk fishing

I started work at twelve years of age. I worked with my father. He was a fisherman. And we used to walk fishin’. We had an old horse and an old cart, but very seldom we’d use it. There was no such thing as roads ‘ere then. There was just one little track going up through ‘ere like. It used to go to Forster. A little narrow road, gravel road. This was all bush ‘ere then. All scrub ‘ere. It was all blackberries and lantana.

I used to walk fishin’. My dad used to keep his boat right down across the Old Bar Road. You walk through the bush. We used to walk down through the bush to a creek called Trotters Creek. And that’s where we used to leave our boat. At the age of twelve I used to fish until midnight with him. Twelve o’clock and he’d say, “You better head home now.” And I used to carry a bag of fish home with me. You used to head home an’ get some sleep so you can go to school (laughs). So I’d head home through the bush. All I could hear was wallabies and things jumpin’ around in the bush there, comin’ through the bush. Only a little track. I was twelve! I started workin’ at twelve. I was a big fellow. And yeah, I left school at fourteen to go into work. Worked all me life.

We used to walk straight through the bush to Trotters Creek. Straight through here. We had our racks right on that Woollards Creek. We used to come up Trotters Creek to get to it. We used to leave all our nets on [the racks]. You had to pull your nets off, you know, and put them on racks. Where we leave our boats, we call it ‘the racks’.

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My father used a plank boat. A plank built boat. And he used to make his own boats. Yeah, made his own boats. Used to have punts. No motors in them days! He made them down there in his work place, down in the creek down there. He used to make his own paddles, make his own axe handles, mattock handles, you name it. Yeah, I used to go in the bush with him and help him make things. He used to get a great big bloodwood tree, bloodwood gum tree on the side and he’d split that straight down the middle and he’d say, “You can go home now, you helped me do the hard part.” And he’d stay there all day and he’d come home and have his tea, go to bed. Next day he’d go down there all day again. Within three days, he’d have a beautiful pair of paddles, made in the bush with just a tommy hawk, a plane, chisel.

Fishing in the Manning

When we were young boys, fishing, we used to row from here right down to the entrance. Old Bar, right down to the mouth of the river. We’d fish down there for three or four days, get a lot of fish. We’d have a couple of boats. We’d trade with the farmers, like for bread, milk, vegetables. Yeah, we’d give them fish. We was never hungry. Always had a feed. And yeah, we used to come back home then and we’d ice the fish up in these great big wooden boxes.

They’re called fish crates. We’d ice them up in that and put them out on the road here for Fazio. Fazio, out at Forster, used to take the fish to the markets, to the Sydney markets. He’d pick them up on his way through.

Corn picking

Corn pickin’ was a big thing here them days. ‘Cause when I was a young fellow I used to go corn pickin’ too. We used to get ten bob a day when I first started. Ten shillings, for a day’s wages, yeah. Corn pickin’. Down here on the Glinthorne Road.

We had a farmer down here, old Rory McLennan. He had this one big paddock with all vegetables just for this place here.51 Every vegetable you could imagine. When I was going to school, we used to go down to the river, walk down the river for fishin’ after school.12 And then on our way home we’d go into that big garden and get our vegetables to go with the fish. He grew that, you know, for this place. It was grown especially for these people here. Because he was a Koori. The McLennans are Kooris. They’re Kooris yeah, and they had that great big farm down there. They owned it. They’d grow that one big vegetable garden and everyone on this reserve [Purfleet] was allowed to go and get a potato or a pumpkin or whatever was growing there. To get a feed of it, you know. This is going right back. I’d have only been thirteen. Back in the ’40s. It would’ve been in the ’40s. Oh I remember when I’d just left school, and I’d go out and it was still there. We used to still go down and get vegetables out of it. We used to go pickin’ the corn from them. If they’d see you, they’d say, “Oh, when you’re goin’ home, or when you’re goin’ down fishin’, grab a feed of corn if you want it”, you know. Oh yeah. And melons, we’d get our melons for nothing. You’d get everything for nothing in them days, you know. Well in them days there was no money! Was there? (laughs) Things wasn’t worth anything, you know. We never made any money fishin’! We only just made a livin’. You know, we just made a livin’. Yeah! It was trade. We’d trade. It was the same as my ancestors. When they used to walk down from the mountains when the early settlers was down here in the early days. They used to do the same thing. They’d trade with the farmers for whatever the farmer had. They’d trade something that they had to the farmer. It’s all the same. It just carried on from generation to generation. I still do it. I still do it with most of the people around here.

Following old tracks

Well we when was young and still goin’ to school and teenagers, we used to walk to Forster and back. Or we’d ride a horse out there and back (laughs). We used to ride out there then. It didn’t take us long to get there. Oh, yeah. I walked that road over and over, but it wasn’t tared road like that. No highways. There was ‘ardly any cars, you know. You could ride a horse out there and you wouldn’t see a car. ‘You see one or two cars or something comin’ along the road. There was no going through it at all. You had to go up the hill and down! (laughter) Yeah, there was no such thing as easy. It wasn’t easy. You had to walk up these big hills. And there was only a little narrow track. Just a horse and cart track (laughs). These days they go through the hills. Simple, you know.

We had relatives out there [Forster]. They’d come in here, you know. And they’d walk in here, or we’d walk out there. We used to ride the horses out there. There was no bridge out there then. There was only a punt, a great big punt, yeah, goin’ across the lake. Yeah, there was no bridge.

Rabbiting

We used to walk up to Krambach rabbitin’ when we were kids. Out Buckett’s Way. Buckett’s Way. Krambach, goin’ to Gloucester. Krambach. Oh! It’d take us hours to get up there. (laughter) Too many mountains! (laughs) We’d knock a few rabbits on the way and have a feed along the road. Take our time goin’ up. And the place at Hillview. We used to walk up there Fridays, when school was finished. All the boys’ pack up, and we’d walk up there, and stay up there until Sunday afternoon. Just rabbitin’. You only have to hit a little tussock and you got a rabbit. (laughter) There were hundreds of ‘em. And we used to camp up there, and come back Sunday afternoon, ready for school for Monday. Yeah. We’d bring the skins back. Sell the skins. My father, that’s what he used to do for a livin’. Too. A lot of the men around here used to do that for a livin’. Rabbitin’, yeah. I remember I used to go ferretin’ with him, and trappin’ with him. Yeah, sometimes they’d get two hundred rabbits in one night. Yeah, no trouble. On farmers’ land up there. They’re only too pleased to see ya. Get rid of the rabbits. Yeah. Used to get them for nothin’. Yeah. Camp on their land.

Out before dark

We used to have to be out of Taraee before dark. We used to have to be home ‘ere [at Purfleet] before dark. Yeah. Wasn’t allowed, wasn’t allowed on the other side of the bridge after dark. We used to go to Taraee a lot. I had a lot of friends in Taraee. You know, in the daytime. We weren’t allowed there in the night-time but we went there through the day. We used to go. But they were very strict in them days, you know. What they allow the kids to do today, you know, we weren’t allowed to do that you know. Yeah, so, we never used to worry about going to Taraee.

We’d just stick to this side of the river or if we went down there fishin’, we’d fish this side of the river. We wouldn’t go on the other side. More fish on this side of the river.
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marry your own colour. You weren’t allowed to marry anyone from ’ere. You had to go somewhere and get your wife from somewhere else, you know, because you’re all related see. So they were very strict. And so, you know, some of my best mates are white, you know, but I don’t know where this racism comes in but it’s still ‘ere! (laughs) It’s still here in Taree. Very much alive.

Yeah. They were very strict, too, them [picture] theatres (laughs). We had one little place up the front where all the Kooris used to sit. You weren’t allowed to sit down the back. You were roped off up the front. You got a sore neck lookin’ straight up (laughs). Yeah. The Boomerang Theatre. Yeah, up on the hill up there. There were a few shops in there that we weren’t allowed in either. We weren’t allowed in. Yeah, because we were black. If you were black you weren’t allowed in there, you know. Pubs, wasn’t allowed in pubs. Clubs. Yeah, very strict them days. But you know they say the white man’s prejudiced but I don’t know. Our ancestors, our old people used to be very strict. They’d say, “No. Stay out of Taree.” “Don’t mix with them people in Taree.” When we was kids, you know, we wasn’t allowed in Taree, wasn’t allowed over that bridge, you know. So, it goes both ways, you know. Prejudism both ways because I can’t blame my people for their strict laws because that’s as it always was. They had very strict law you know. You weren’t allowed to marry a white woman. You had to
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As a child in the 1950s Robert Paulson lived on Point Road at Tuncurry with his parents and siblings. Tuncurry is on the opposite side of Wallis Lake from Forster. His father, Napier Paulson, who was originally from the Tweed Heads area, worked at the government aerodrome on Wallis Island. Robert’s mother, Vera (nee Simon), had grown up on the Aboriginal Reserve at Forster. Her parents were Barney and Tilly Simon. We recorded this interview with Robert at Point Road in 1999. In his geo-biography, Robert describes his childhood home as well as regular visits across the lake to his mother’s people on the Forster Aboriginal Reserve. In 2001 Robert changed his surname from Paulson to Yettica. Given that this interview was recorded prior to his name change, we have retained Paulson in this text.

At Point Road
My name’s Robert Paulson. I’m at Point Road where I grew up as a child. What I’m lookin’ at now is a caravan park at the back of this same block. In those days that was all swamp. Leadin’ up to the old place where it used to be, there is a sealed road there now, but in that time when I’m talkin’ about, that used to be just a gravel road which was a single track comin’ through to the point.

The house, it was a weatherboard and had a three-quarter verandah around it at that time. It had a few fruit trees there. There was old figs, the old jam figs, I think at that time. There was about four or five big trees along the side of the fence there. And the grapevines, we had them there.

Water was a bit of a problem up here. If you didn’t have your tank full you had to get a truck to bring water in for you. Otherwise there used to be a house on the end of this road here at Point Tuncurry. We used to go up to the next house. There used to be just a vacant house owned by a doctor, which wasn’t used, so we used their water from that tank.

But, when that source run out, there used to be a well across the island [in Wallis Lake]. I’m pointin’ to the south and there’s a bit of a channel between us and the next island. We used to go across there to get water, even, you know. There used to be a dam; not a dam, a well over there that we used to bucket water out of. We’d walk across to it. Just to get washing water.

My father, he worked on Wallis Island at the time and he had a boat moored just across here, just in this next channel beside us. He used to go to work from here in his boat. Motor boat. Yeah, one of those old putt putts. Just the old wooden putt putt boats.

And we used to go from here to go to the local school, and we used to run along — we had a track goin’ from here over through to the school. Used to be just a dirt track. It was all scrub. It was really, really swampy in there. We just had a track we used to follow through the back there. And we used to...
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On the old block
This block that you’re lookin’ at now has been built up [the site of Robert’s childhood home]. It’s been built up. Well it used to flood here and it would come right up to our steps, and oh, we’d have snakes comin’ from the scrub everywhere, you know. And they’d just hang around outside near the steps and, wow! what an experience!

We still had to get wood, and the wood used to be in a pile. It’d be in the corner of the paddock here. We’d come out, walk out in the water and grab the wood, bring it in to dry and put it up and that was it.

What we can see here, that used to be a lot clearer than that now [referring to the south side of Point Road, adjacent to the lake]. What you’ve got now is all this rubbish that’s growin’ in there now. And there were about five oyster sheds along here. Actually just here, that was all clear and there was another little bit of an island. There was just a little bit of a strip of land. Maybe that’s just it there. That’s got to be the little strip of land that was there. And a guy had his fishin’ boat over there and, you know, his shed over there. And there was racks and that sort of thing.

Oh, we usually played out around the back in the bushes. At that time there was a hell of a lot of these she-oaks and we’d be playin’ in around them all the time. In the trees and that. Yeah, in the swampy areas around the back there. In places it was pretty dry. There was a few dry patches over in through there.

Do you have any sort of feeling about coming back and seeing it now?
Oh, there’s still some feelings in there, you know. You can still picture it. I can still picture the old house that used to be there. It had a three-quarter verandah around it. We used to run around all the time, you know. You’d go around it and through the front door and through the lounge room and back around through the double doors and back on the verandah again, sort of thing you know. (laughter) I can still see it today. Oh, very, very clearly.

boat there I can still remember. The families are still here. They’ve been here for a long time.14

Here by ourselves
It was only on weekends we’d go over [to the Forster Aboriginal Reserve]. We were sort o’ only here by ourselves. It seemed like we was segregated (laughter). But it wasn’t like that. My mother had her mother and father over there [at Forster]. Barney and Tilly Simon, they were over there. And she had her brothers. They were all over there. Over there [at the Forster Aboriginal Reserve] there was families in houses, you know, they was crowded. Maybe over here had been better. There was a house that was their own place. There was eight kids sort of thing, you know. So it’s a fair cal to get out by yourself in those days, I’d say [i.e. to live off the Reserve].

Was your father quite an independent sort of a man?
Oh yeah, he was, yeah, and he got to know a lot of people around here as well. He was well

P A R T  3      L I V E S

CHAPTER 20      ROBERT PAULSON (NOW YETTICA)

left page Fig. 110: Aerial photograph with overlay illustrating Robert Paulson’s remembered landscape, indicating route to Wallis Island and Forster Aboriginal Reserve. © Department of Lands.

right page Fig. 111: Italian fishing boats at end of Point Road, Tuncurry, 2000
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Russell Saunders was born in 1954. His parents are Horace (Horrie) and Faith Saunders. Russell spent the first nine years of his life on the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve, before his family moved into Taree. We interviewed Russell at his house and art gallery in Tinonee in late 2000. In his geo-biography he describes his life as a young boy at Purfleet in the late 1950s and early 1960s as well as his experiences as a teenager in Taree. When they were teenagers, Russell and his mates referred to themselves as ‘icebreakers’ because by hanging around Taree at night and with ‘white’ girls they challenged the entrenched forms of racial segregation that their parents and grandparents had experienced.

The bridge was a popular spot
I was born at Taree Hospital, but spent me first nine years on Purfleet Mission [the Aboriginal Reserve]. Brought up on the Mission. We knew we wasn’t welcome in town, but we didn’t want to go to town really because you just felt frowned on and stared at. So, the only reason we went to town was at this time of the year [summer] when it was hot. You’d go to the river. Swim all day at the river. Underneath the bridge there. The bridge was a popular spot because it was shady there. And when we’d get hungry we’d walk along the banks and look around for broken pieces of tangled up fishing line and untangle it, and scrounge around for hooks (laughter). See if we could find a hook, someone’s hook that they’d lost, and we’d get the hook. And then we’d turn over rocks, find crabs. There’s another bait we used to use too, it’s called yoongra [wood worm]. They call it cobra today, but it’s pronounced as yoongra and we’d go and get that. On the banks of the river here. If you were hungry you’d eat it first. You’d eat enough to be full and then you’d save a little bit for bait for the fish. So we’d use that. That was really good bait for bream. We’d catch fish and as soon as we’d catch a fish there’d be a little fire behind ya and it’d be straight on the fire (laughs). That’s how we’d go. We’d stay at the river all day. We wouldn’t go home, because it was too far to go home and back again.

At the back of Purfleet
And if we didn’t go to the river, our other favourite spot was down at the back of Purfleet there, where the sale yards are. They built this big dam. The big dam there where the cattle used to come and drink and that off it. But that was a swimming place for us. Vienna’s (Maslin) house [on the Tinonee road] was just down from there too. But from the dam there used to be a little creek that ran off it and just after the rain it was great because there was puddles of fresh water. After swimming in the...
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dam Mum'd say, “That dirty old dam. You've been swimming again out there!” ’Cause she’d smell us (laughter). Yeah, “That dirty water!” So the way we’d do it, we’d have a swim in the dam and then we’d jump in this fresh water, when it rained, and we’d do it, we’d have a swim in the dam and then (laughter). Yeah, “That dirty water!” So the way Mum'd say, “That dirty old dam.” (laughs) But that was our place. We’d go down there and have a swim, chuck water up on the banks and make a slippery slide and slide down. Ah, like I said I would’ve been eight/nine/ten. Around that age.

Looking over your shoulder
But the all the time you'd be looking over your shoulder and looking around. You know, like have you ever seen an animal in the bush looking for danger all the time? Well, that’s how we were. Always alert, and looking around. You know, like have you ever thought of that day falling that tree until we got that honey (laughter). And we’d get it. We’d get it. Then we’d look for other things too, like geebungs and what we’d call puddin’s (the root of a small flower plant) and bush lemons. We knew every bush lemon, all through there. We’d head into the directions where we knew that there was going to be something. We had an area, we had a destiny to go for. We knew every bush lemon, all through there. We’d head into the directions where we knew that there was going to be something. We had an area, we had a destiny to go for. We knew the waterholes and that. And, like I said, we’d leave in the morning and only come home just on sunset, coming out of the bush back home again.

Saltwater
But one of the other major things that I remember as a child, would have to be Saltwater. At a certain time of the year we all went down there and camped. When I say ‘camped’, not like we do now. As a child, would have to be Saltwater. At a certain time of the year we all went down there and camped. When I say ‘camped’, not like we do now.

Not welcome in Taree
It was just Taree itself, the atmosphere. See, in my time Koori children never walked with their head up straight. Never walked around Taree as though this is my town, this is my place. Even in my childhood at school, school was not my place. I never, ever adopted that as my place. Koori kids looked to the ground. Just wherever they walked, they looked down to the ground. They never looked up. Never looked while people in the eye. And I believe that is because of the depression that they put on us, the attitude they had towards us. I mean when you think of it and you look at history, we were classed as fauna. Not even classed as animal, or a person, right up until the 1970s/60s. That’s what we were classed as. We weren’t even classed as people. When you looked right into a lot of history and things that have happened over it, you can see why. Yeah. And Aboriginal people picked that up, see. We picked it up as children and grown-ups picked it up. There was curfew. You couldn’t drink in the front of a pub. Kooris in those old days drank in the back of pubs. My uncle who fought in the Second World War, came home and he was told: “Hey! You can’t go in there. You have to go in the back with the rest of them.”

Outside, around the back. Around the back. It wasn’t even in the pub. No, there were a lot of things.
and everything. To frighten you. Fellas with the whips. One particular bloke used to chase us on his horse, and he’d have a whip. I’ve got the scar in the middle of my back there. We were running across this paddock and he caught us in the middle. You could hear the horse thundering down upon you, and I just took this one dive toward this fence, and I had a football jumper on, and I hit the barbed wire fence and it just caught the jumper and me back there. I could hear this ssshhhh whip and these horses right on me, and I could hear the whip swinging around. And he cracked it, and as he cracked it I just went “BING!” straight through my jumper (laughs). I left the jumper on the fence but it scared me. I scratched me back there. On the barbed wire. I got up and took off! If you didn’t get chased by the end of the day, you were very lucky, in them days. You just got chased. People chased you from one place to another. So you were always, like I said, looking over your shoulder. But it was always a fun way to get home too because we’d go for miles out here, out the back of Purfleet, out through there. That was our playground. Never get lost. We’d go all the way up through the bush there, and someone’d be carrying an axe. Always carried an axe with us. And we’d be looking up in the trees and if we’d found an old tree and seen bees coming at it, that was it! We’d spend the rest of that day falling that tree until we got that honey (laughter). And we’d get it. We’d get it. Then we’d look for other things too, like geebungs and what we’d call puddin’s [the root of a small flower plant] and bush lemons. We knew every bush lemon, all through there. We’d head into the directions where we knew that there was going to be something. We had an area, we had a destiny to go for. We knew the waterholes and that. And, like I said, we’d leave in the morning and only come home just on sunset, coming out of the bush back home again.

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The picture theatre was another case where you paid for the ticket, give them your money at the front office, then you walked around the side. There was a doorway on either side. And on the first three or four rows there was a chain across the corridor, or hallway, there. You sat in the first four rows with your head like this, and you watched the pictures. You looked behind you and there was people right up the back in the other seats and on the top balconies that had a better view. Our view was like looking up at the screen. And when it was finished, you went out the side door. Not out the door where everybody else walked out. And that was it. And there was a bus, a big red bus, waiting for ya. The Forster bus, and you jumped on that, and come home. That was your pictures. Your money was good enough, but your bodily presence wasn’t.

‘Icebreakers’

In the teens, yeah, well that’s when things started to change. We were the first, like we called ourselves ‘The Icebreakers’. Me and Vienna’s brother who’s gone now, Willy [Bungie] – he’s passed away – and Lawrence, and a few other fellas. We were the first Aboriginals to walk around the streets of Taree with white girls. We broke the old rule.

You couldn’t help but be conscious [you were breaking the rules]. As soon as you walked past, you’d stop and look over your shoulder and people would walk past and look. Just stare at you. The parents of those girls, they followed us. Either on foot or by car. Everywhere we went. They shadowed us, yeah. Police never, ever came up to us and said, “Hey, no you can’t go with them girls. You can’t walk around with them.” They knew the parents followed us.

But we’d go to the swimming pool, or to the river. And there was other places. A jukebox place where we’d go and buy chips, and sit and play the jukebox. That was it. But every Friday night, and Saturday, we’d meet the girls in Taree somewhere and we’d just go around doing our thing. Walk around Taree or go to the park, the pool. But we called ourselves “Icebreakers”. Yeah. And Dad said to me one time, he says, “Eh! If I’d ever done that when I was a kid,” he said, “they’d have put me in gaol.” Yeah. He said it was taboo. You just couldn’t do that sort of stuff. So yeah, we started something and it’s pretty common now to see it today. White girls getting around with Koori fellas.
Yeah. And there were still certain restrictions about. Like the pool. When you went to the Taree Pool, Aboriginal kids had to shower. You had to look wet before you could walk down and jump in the pool. So we’d just chuck a bit of water in our face and pretend we was wet, and walk down past this bloke who’d be sitting up at the top with a loud speaker. And he’d say, “You Aboriginal kids, did you have a shower before you come down?” You know, you could hear this right across the loud speaker. There’d be hundreds of people in the pool. He’d watch you though, and then if you got too close to white people, “Come on you boys, back down.” Like this is all over the loud speaker. You swam around but you couldn’t get too close.
Sean Maslin was born in 1982. When he was a young boy, he lived for a short time with his mother (Vienna Maslin) at his grandmother’s (Betty Bungie’s) place on Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve. He subsequently spent much of his childhood living in Taree, mainly in the suburbs of Bushland and Chatham. He spent a lot of time at the river getting cobra, catching fish, and swimming. We recorded this interview with Sean at Purfleet in 2001.

My name is Sean Maslin and I was born in 1982 in Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. I lived there for my first year, and then moved to Sydney in Blacktown with my mother and father and my older sister, Kylie. We stayed there for about a year and a half, then my sister was born, Katie. Then Mum and Dad split up after that. Then I just moved up to Taree to my grandmother’s house [on the Purfleet Aboriginal settlement]. And, I’d been there for about two to three years. Then moved into town. Like, Mum got a place and we stayed there for about a year. In Muldoon Street. Over in Bushland. And then we moved in over to Chatham. Over in Wells Street with my Auntie – Auntie Dianne and Uncle Barry. And I stayed there for about four years. Then I moved out to Moorland [20 kilometres north-east of Taree] and I stayed there for, like, since I was twelve to fourteen. And moved from there back into Auntie Dianne’s house.

What was it like growing up around Chatham? Oh, pretty easy. You just go swimmin’ down at the wharf, like along the riverbank. There was a swing that used to come out of the trees to swing out and jump in the water. And we’d just go and get yoghurts at the yoghurt factory and milk at the milk factory. Like, that’s what they’d put out on the trays. Out on the crates. And we’d ask if we could have ‘em and they would say if there were some there that’s in-date you could have ‘em. That’s in Chatham. Up in Pitt Street. It’s a milk factory, a dairy factory. And we’d get the yoghurt over at the Peter’s factory over in … Oh, I’m not sure what street it is. It’s behind The Manning Hotel, anyway. Yeah, and we’d go behind Kentucky [Fried Chicken]. Like there’s a breakwall up further and we used to go up there and just make cubbies [cubby houses] and go fishin’ and just swim around up that area. We used to swim from the wharf over there. Over to the breakwall. There’s a boat ramp there. And they used to put a lot of sand there. We used to just go swimmin’ there. We used to swim from Peter’s [milk factory] wharf. You can walk along [the breakwall]. And there’s a lot of mud crabs in there, up along there. I used to make traps. And all along up there, I can get cobra out of cobra logs. Take it home and make soup out of it

How do you collect it? Oh, just get the water logs that are in the water – the ones that’ve got holes in it. And you just pull them out and break them up and these wood worms come out and just pull them out, slowly and put them in a bottle, or in your mouth (laughs). You can cook ‘em, or eat them as soon as you get ‘em out of the [log]. They’re nice.

Would you ever swim across the river? Yeah, I have swim across to Dumaresq Island. I’ve camped on there with one of my mates. They have a barbecue there. We just went campin’ there one day. Just decided. And we had no water and I had to go along by myself on the floatie, like little dinghy, little rubber dinghy. It was only for a little kid and I was too big for it (laughs). Still, I had to swim across by myself. And then grab my bike from my mate’s house and ride home and get some water and tea and coffee and butter. … And up around near Kentucky [Fried Chicken] we’d swim across.
Like we’d swim about half way out half way, when it’s low tide and like, we could stand up there. Yeah, swim around and wrestle around out there. At low tide it’s just all rock, rocky ground, rocky ground underneath the surface of the water.

Would you spend a lot of time down on the river? I used to go down there a lot when I was a kid. Mostly every afternoon after school. Yeah. Only during the summer. If it was wet I’d just stay home. Go home, watch videos or play the games. Oh, when I was in primary school sometimes I’d just head down there.

I remember when I was young a whale was in the river. Willy, the whale, he was in the river. We used to come over [to the end of Glenthorne Road] and have a look at him all the time. The Muscios is there [on the Glenthorne Road]. The Muscios are out here. Fruit trees used to be there. Like we used to come in there and get the fruit. There used to be a bull in [the paddock] so we just used to reach over the fence. We was too scared. Yeah, we used to get a lot of mandarins, oranges, lemons. Sometimes he’d have a passionfruit vine and we’d get hold of the passionfruit. We used to come up along the Glenthorne Road. There used to be macadamia nut trees. Banana, like up further there’s a big banana, like bunch, right along the side of the road. We used to go along there and get bananas when they was ripe.
Would you ask?
Oh, if it was out the front we’d ask. If we didn’t see anyone we’d just like, just go and take it. Mainly we’d ask. There were plenty of trees on their property so I guess they wouldn’t mind. We only took a few. We didn’t, like, raid the tree. I used to go fishin’ along here [Glenthorne Road area], as well. Just walk right along. Go fishin’ until we come to the bridge and whatever we’ve got from the bridge, we just go home from there. Go fishin’ in different spots. Like just keep movin’ down the river. Yeah, just go back along the highway, or used to be the highway (the road from Taree to Purfleet). Then just go home from there and whatever we’ve got in the bag, like fish, cobra. We usually walk, like, up along the highway and come up along this way and then go up there. Mainly just come up along here.

When we was young the whole family went to the beach. We mostly went to Old Bar or Saltwater. Mainly Saltwater. Mainly where we usually go. I used to go there a lot when I was a kid. One day we went out to Blackhead, and everyone and that was fishin’. They had a rod and lines and I had a spear, and I was the only one that caught a fish (laughter). I caught two. I just seen them there in the rocks. I just threw it straight down.

Who would go on those days?
Oh, there’d be like Mum, her brothers, her sisters, and grandmother. Just the whole family. Just depends which day like. Say if it was a birthday, sometimes we’d go down and have a barbie. Or Christmas or sometimes it would be Easter when we was younger. Say if it was a long weekend we’d go out the beach. Sometimes we’d go campin’, just stay out there for the one night. Just go fishin’ and that. Just love fishin’.

Do you still do that?
Not as much as I used to but I’d love to get out there.

Fig. 117: Aerial photograph with overlay illustrating Sean Maslin’s remembered landscape, indicating his fishing and swimming places. © Department of Lands
In this chapter we describe the methods we used to record autobiographical memories with Aboriginal people in the study area, and we discuss how autobiographical memories can be used to identify and record post-contact Aboriginal heritage landscapes.

Aboriginal geo-biographies

The seven Aboriginal geo-biographies presented in the preceding pages illustrate how autobiographical memory can be used to identify and record Aboriginal post-contact heritage. They show that biographies and geographies, lives and landscapes, are interconnected: that all lives have a landscape. As such, most, if not all, oral history interviews will have embedded in them a network of places significant to the narrator. This is what makes autobiographical memory such a rich resource for post-contact Aboriginal heritage work. It provides information about places that most likely have not been recorded in government and other archives, or in written form at all. Indeed, a person’s memory might be the only repository for information about some significant places, a fact which makes the project of recording autobiographical memories all the more urgent.

When the people who best know those places pass away, their knowledge goes with them.

Why autobiographical memory?

We want to emphasise our reasons for focusing specifically on autobiographical memory. One reason is in order to reflect the diversity of life experiences among individuals which might be lost if the focus was on the family or the community (rather than the individual).

Interviewing & mapping

Spatialising autobiographical memory

Throughout the project we experimented with and further developed approaches to oral history interviewing for the effective identification and recording of post-contact Aboriginal heritage landscapes. Maria Nugent had considerable previous experience in oral history interviewing with Aboriginal people in NSW, although not specifically for heritage work. Denis Byrne, on the other hand, while not an oral historian, is experienced in the heritage field and thus knows the type of spatial information required for it. Combining our experience and skills, we sought to develop workable and productive approaches. Here we outline the techniques and methods that worked.
best. In presenting our own experience, we are by no means proposing that this is the only way to collect and use autobiographical memories for cultural heritage work. However, we do offer this discussion as a starting point for those keen to make more extensive use of oral history in their practice.

Techniques for gathering spatial information from oral history interviews

1 Interviewing in teams
Conducting an oral history interview, as any interviewer will tell you, requires listening skills of the highest order. Conducting an oral history interview for heritage purposes raises the bar even higher because the interviewer needs simultaneously to follow the narrative and have his or her ‘ear to the ground’, so to speak. The challenge is to listen in stereo: to the story and to the geography embedded in it. This can be quite demanding, particularly when conducting an interview on your own. Our experience was that interviewing in teams helped because more than one set of ears was tuned in.

In other parts of the book, we have stressed how vital the two local Aboriginal cultural heritage workers, Robert Yettica and Vienna Maslin, were to the project. This was especially so when we were conducting oral history interviews. Robert and Vienna contributed to this component of the project in various ways.

Before an interview
Before an interview, Robert and Vienna helped to orient us to its most probable geographical and historical frame. For instance, before an interview, they would indicate the part of the study area that the interviewee was most likely to talk about as well as the topics and time frame he or she would be expected to cover. With this type of orientation we were able to more easily ‘get our bearings’ (e.g. to familiarise ourselves with the relevant parts of the larger landscape that might be covered). This helped us to follow the narrative thread as well as the lie of the land more closely during the interview.

During an interview
During an interview, Robert and Vienna sometimes gently interjected, asking the speaker to clarify spatial information for us, or helped us to locate the story in the landscape when they saw we had got lost.

After an interview
After the interview, they could immediately clarify spatial information for us, including the correct names of places and precise locational details.

2 Aerial photographs
During some oral history interviews, large, laminated aerial photographs of parts of the study area were available for both the interviewer and interviewee to draw on. They were used to mark pathways and other routes, fishing and other places, and to make ‘arrowed’ notes on particular places. Our impression was that the aerial photographs, once people became accustomed to them, helped make the interviews more spatial. Without an aerial photograph in front of them, an interviewee, for instance, might describe cutting through a farmer’s paddock to get to a fishing place. With the aerial photo present, they were more inclined to specify where they climbed a fence, which side of the paddock they walked over, and where the fishing spot was in relation to a tree on the river bank that was clearly visible in the photo. In some cases, in order to avoid breaking the narrative flow of the interview we referred to the aerial photo only after the taping had been completed. We found, though, that the aerial photographs would generate more discussion, and so more often than not we kept the tape recorder running.

For some parts of the landscape, instead of an aerial photograph we used 1:25 000 topographic maps, but our interviewees tended to find the aerial photos more ‘realistic’ and easier to read. People often took considerable pleasure in identifying familiar features (e.g. houses, roads, and bridges) on the photographs.

3 Visiting places
Another technique we used to gather spatial information in the oral history component of the project was to visit places that had been previously mentioned in an interview. These excursions provided an opportunity to conduct an additional, although somewhat less formal, interview often in the process of driving around the landscape with the tape recorder rolling.

Reversing our roles
Sometimes we would take reverse roles: Robert or Vienna would conduct the interview (or perhaps part of it) while we listened in. As eavesdroppers, we tuned our ears for spatial information specifically, often writing down the various places spoken about, or referred to, during the course of the interview. Once the interview was finished, we would discuss our list of places with the interviewee and with Robert or Vienna. Once again, they helped us immensely to locate various places precisely on maps and aerial photographs.
For many people, the landscape functions as an aide de memoire. An experience that Denis Byrne had quite early in the project encapsulates this. He had asked two local Aboriginal women from Purfleet if they would show him some fishing places. As they were driving down the narrow road from the mission to the river the women talked about how, when they were children in the 1960s, they would walk along this particular road, often with their parents and/or other relatives. As Denis drove the women across this familiar landscape, they recounted a specific incident about taking a short cut across a paddock belonging to a farmer known to be unfriendly towards local Aboriginal people and being chased into a pond by a big dog. They recalled how scared they were and they laughed about it. This remembered incident in turn triggered other memories of things that had happened on various other walks to the river. Having reached the river they walked down through the long grass to the riverbank where they talked about the variety of fish that had been caught there over the years. There was some friendly-disputation about the size of some of the fish. These reminiscences sparked talk about the other people involved in these excursions: where they are now or when they passed away, details about their lives and personalities.27 As this vignette illustrates, returning to places that people had once known intimately often did provoke rich memories and further details. Stories were piled upon stories.

In addition to gathering yet more remembered spatial detail, another advantage of visiting specific places with people who knew them well was that it helped us to record them. For instance, being in the place often made it easier to trace the tracks that joined one place with another. And it provided yet another opportunity to correct any errors we had made when previously marking up aerial photographs. However, it is worth noting that it is not absolutely necessary to be in a specific place in order to vividly remember it. Our memories of a landscape do not necessarily depend on the landscape itself. They can exist independently of it. Indeed, it is sometimes the case that the physical landscape gets in the way of our memories indicating that there is not always a neat fit between the landscape in the mind and the corresponding one that exists ‘out there’. During the course of the research, there were times when it seemed that the physical terrain was in fact an obstacle to recollection. For instance, on one or two occasions, some of our informants, eagerly anticipating a visit to places that they could see with clarity in their mind’s eye, had the unsettling experience of becoming totally disoriented upon arrival at some long cherished place. Some places had physically changed so much that they were no longer recognisable. Thus, rather than nourishing one’s memories, being ‘in place’ could sometimes have the reverse effect: unsettling one’s ability to recall or recount the past. In situations like this, it was preferable to have recorded an interview beforehand, perhaps at the interviewee’s house.

4 Follow up interviews

Given that our project relied on gathering quite detailed information about the landscape, it was often necessary after an initial interview to seek clarification about things said. It was usual in a follow-up interview to focus far more explicitly on spatial detail, specifically questioning interviewees about places they had spoken about in an earlier interview when we were more intent on simply getting the story down.

As suggested above, a follow up interview might be conducted as part of a supplementary activity. For instance, we sometimes recorded another interview when:
• visiting places that had been mentioned in an initial interview
• marking up aerial photographs with the interviewee
• looking at photographs that we had taken of places previously mentioned
• going through the transcript of the initial interview to make sure that it was correct
• poring over a draft GIS (Geographic Information System) overlay of an aerial photograph that had been produced based on the first interview.

Mapping the oral history interview

Following the interviews, the information that had been marked on aerial photos and maps was transferred to GIS. Prints of GIS maps were checked with the narrator, before being finalised. The advantage of GIS for this type of mapping project is that information about the landscape can be provided on an individualised basis as well as compositely. The layering of spatial information that GIS allows ensures that each person’s landscape remains discrete. Yet, at the same time, GIS has the capability to show a series of individualised layers simultaneously, revealing where in the landscape individual lives merge. This was most clearly illustrated in the landscape studies, in which we drew on many people’s memories.
Editing the oral history interview

An individual’s map (geo-) makes little sense without a story (-biography). The approach we took (in Chapters 16-22) was to present the accompanying story as extracts from a word-for-word transcription of an oral history interview, allowing the narrators to simply ‘tell it like it is’. However, in presenting extracts from an oral history interview some editing is necessary, mainly to ensure accessibility for a broad readership. This is because, as many oral historians have noted, we do not speak as we write or write as we speak. (There are many guides to editing an oral history interview for publication, some of which are included in the resource list on the opposite page.) For an excellent example of an Aboriginal person’s ‘oral history’ edited and published for a broader readership, see Myles Lalor’s Wherever I Go (introduced and edited by Jeremy Beckett). 38

Typically, editing a transcript of an oral history interview includes removing repetition, some reordering to help smooth the narrative flow, and sometimes removing the interviewers’ questions when they seem redundant or unnecessarily intrusive. Some oral historians would consider this latter emendation somewhat contentious, arguing that to remove the voice of the interviewer gives the mistaken impression that the narrator alone is responsible for the story, whereas in reality oral history interviews are conversations between at least two or more people.

Readers will notice that in some cases we removed the interviewer’s questions and in others have left them in, depending on whether the questions were necessary in order to follow the narrative thread. Sometimes a question was deleted where, in the context of the interview, it had simply been mistimed, the narrator proceeding with their story as though the question had not been asked. As a general principle, however, our aim was to edit only minimally, retaining the cadences and peculiarities in each person’s speech style.

Other researchers, mainly historians and anthropologists working with Aboriginal people’s oral histories, deal with the thorny issue of editing, and the related issue of interpreting, in slightly different ways. For instance, it is a common practice in the publication of the oral history of an individual person (or perhaps a collection of people) for the editor/historian to write a lengthy introduction providing necessary contextual detail to the narrative that follows. Some argue that this can detract from the narrative that follows, although as Jeremy Beckett notes in his introduction to Myles Lalor’s oral history, readers are free to bypass such a chapter altogether. Sometimes extensive interpretative commentary is also included within the text (typically indicated by the use of a different typeface).

Importantly, these approaches, which involve various layers of text existing side by side within a publication, highlight the way in which two people (at least) were involved in the production of the published life story. This dual authorship is often indicated by the use of the tag ‘as told to’ in the title of the book (such as in Over my Tracks by Evelyn Crawford as told to Chris Walsh). Others researchers choose to acknowledge that the oral history has been ‘authored’ by the narrator, but indicate that it has been edited and perhaps introduced by someone else. For example, in the case of Myles Lalor’s published oral history, the title page reads: Wherever I Go: Myles Lalor’s Oral History, edited with an introduction and afterword by Jeremy Beckett. The effort to make the role of...
written permission. Once we had completed drafting the interviewer absolutely clear is an advance on a previous, somewhat unacceptable practice in oral history interviewing, in which the role of editor, interviewer and/or interpreter was sometimes unacknowledged and hence invisible. This was a misrepresentation of the conditions under which the text was produced, and the collective nature of its authorship.

For other researchers, their role as interpreter/editor goes further: they write a biography, or life story, using their own voice but based on, or drawing extensively from, a series of interviews. In this approach the oral history is transformed and translated from spoken autobiography to written biography. While in these instances oral history interviews constitute a crucial source, they are not the only one used. Moreover the analysis of the interview is the responsibility and prerogative of the biographer, whose own interpretation of events prevails. An example of this type of Aboriginal life story is Peter Read's biography of Charles Perkins.61

Ethics and oral history interviewing

Whichever way one proceeds, agreement between the interviewee and interviewer about how the oral history interview(s) will be used and presented needs to be clearly established. It has been a common, if unfortunate, experience of some Aboriginal people to see their own stories, shared with a researcher, subsequently used in ways they do not like or for which they did not give permission. Not establishing these ground rules from the outset can sometimes result in serious disagreement. 40

To avoid this situation, and to ensure that research with Aboriginal people is ethical, it is now standard procedure to seek written permission from an interviewee for use of their oral history interview. The usual practice nowadays is to seek informed consent, explaining to the interviewee the conditions under which the interview will be used and the acknowledgement that will be public. The agreement between interviewee and interviewer is usually formalised by the former signing a letter, outlining the conditions for use of their recorded interview. (There are many readily available guides providing information about how to conduct an oral history project. These guides provide information on matters such as selecting recording equipment, preparing questions, transcribing interviews and following appropriate ethical protocols. In addition, there is a large body of scholarship that discusses many of the issues involved in doing oral history interviewing with Aboriginal people. The following is a sample of resources that we found useful for this project.

Oral history guides and resources

There are many readily available guides providing information about how to conduct an oral history project. These guides provide information on matters such as selecting recording equipment, preparing questions, transcribing interviews and following appropriate ethical protocols. In addition, there is a large body of scholarship that discusses many of the issues involved in doing oral history interviewing with Aboriginal people. The following is a sample of resources that we found useful for this project.

Oral history guides


Articles about Aboriginal oral history


Upon reading the seven geobiographies (Chapters 16-22), perhaps the first thing that would strike a seasoned heritage recorder is that much of the heritage contained in these reminiscences is in the intangible category. This is to say that many of the events described by our interviewees, no matter how important they were in their lives, will have left no observable physical traces on or in the ground. Sean Maslin, for instance, reminisces about his life as a teenager along the north banks of the Manning River. He describes walking, swimming, fishing and generally hanging out along the river. But while these activities can be mapped on the ground, with Sean’s aid, in terms of the locations where they occurred, they are unlikely to have left any detectable physical remains or any long-term imprint on the terrain. (The exception would be the cubby houses he and his friends made in the bush, though even these might leave no long-term detectable traces).

This same dearth of tangible traces applies in relation to the activities described in Russell Saunders’ reminiscences. The marginalised position of Aboriginal people in post-contact NSW is perhaps most apparent in the fact that in most cases they did not own land. This meant that virtually all their movements and activities in the landscape outside of Aboriginal Reserves such as Purfleet were either on private (white owned) property, where they were present either by invitation or by act of trespass, or on various categories of Crown land. This aspect of marginality is vividly exemplified in Russell’s description of being chased across paddocks by white farmers. The dam, located near the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve, where Russell and his friends spent many happy childhood hours swimming and mud sliding, exemplifies another aspect of marginality: many of the ‘sites’ that have significance in Aboriginal people’s memories are cultural creations that belong to somebody else and were created for something else (in the case of the dam, to provide water for stock). The fact that such a high proportion of Aboriginal post-contact heritage is in the intangible category is intrinsically related to Aboriginal people’s marginal status in the post-contact landscape. This in turn becomes an important reason for recording this intangible heritage since, if it is not recorded, the Aboriginal presence in the post-contact landscape is rendered largely invisible.

Recording intangible heritage
We have shown in this book that it is possible to map Aboriginal intangible heritage in considerable detail using a combination of documentary/archival and oral history sources. This relies on giving considerable care and attention to retrieving spatial detail in the course of archival research and oral history recording. Whether recording places on topographic survey maps or on aerial photographs, the importance of fine-grained detail and accuracy cannot be overestimated.

Conservation of intangible heritage
Unlike places where identifiable ‘Aboriginal objects’ (artefacts and other physical remains of Aboriginal origin) occur, Aboriginal intangible heritage is not protected by the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974, unless it is declared an Aboriginal Place under Section 84 of the Act.41 The Minister for the Environment can declare an area to be an Aboriginal Place if the Minister believes that the place is or was of special significance to Aboriginal culture (an area can have spiritual, natural resource usage, historical, social, educational, or other types of significance). It is assumed that only those intangible heritage places of considerable significance to a community would be considered for declaration as Aboriginal Places. The great majority of places identified during oral history recording sessions for the present project are not either ‘Aboriginal objects’ or Aboriginal Places under the NPW Act and so are not protected under the Act.

Why record it?
If the great majority of Aboriginal intangible heritage places are unlikely to receive legislative protection then the question arises: what is the point of identifying them? In the first place, by identifying these places we are providing a record of the Aboriginal presence in the post-contact landscape; without such a record, this presence will tend to be invisible to all except local Aboriginal people themselves (for whom memory provides ‘visibility’). It is worth mentioning that the Aboriginal people of our study area who helped us map the places presented in Parts 2 and 3 of this book mostly were not concerned that the places (e.g. walking routes, fishing and picnic spots) be legislatively protected. What concerned them was that the wider community should know that although they did not own the landscape, their lives had been lived all through it. There was concern that existing local history books gave the impression that Aboriginal people’s lives had been confined to a handful of
Aboriginal Reserves with the remainder of the landscape being the realm of white people’s history and heritage. This is in itself a powerful rationale for the kind of mapping that we are presenting in this book. Two other considerations also, however, warrant mention: the importance of intangible heritage in the ‘associative significance’ context and the cultural landscape context.

Associative significance

Many of the buildings or public facilities that feature in Aboriginal oral histories for our area may one day be listed on historic heritage inventories. These include school and hospital buildings, old guesthouses in Forster, the old public swimming pool and the former Boomerang Theatre in Taree. Although Aboriginal people have been associated with these places these associations are unlikely to have left any physical-tangible traces on the physical fabric of the buildings and facilities. It follows that the nature of the Aboriginal association with these places – the segregationist practices at the Boomerang Theatre for instance – will only gain recognition if it is documented in the course of heritage work.

Another reason for recording Aboriginal intangible heritage is thus that it constitutes part of the heritage significance of what are generally perceived to be non-indigenous heritage places (e.g., swimming pools and picture theatres).

Cultural landscapes

The cultural landscape approach to heritage is gaining ground in Australia as a way of giving recognition to the fact that people in the past lived not just in buildings but in landscapes. While on the one hand cultural heritage practitioners are recording cultural landscapes other land managers are increasingly interested in placing the landscape features or natural resources they manage in a cultural context. The management of rivers is a case in point. In order to properly conserve rivers for the various values they have, management bodies wish to know the historical and contemporary patterns of human interaction with rivers. In the case of the Manning River, in the vicinity of Taree and Portfall, the oral histories of people like Sean Maslin, Warner and Russell Saunders, allow us to map a pattern of Aboriginal association with the river that is continuous through time through continually shifting in its behavioural and spatial configuration.

1 Margaret Tucker’s autobiography, If Everyone Cared, was published in 1977; Shirley Smith’s autobiography, Mom, Mom, was published in 1981.
4 See for example: Keith Schilling, Aboriginal Women’s Heritage, Nambucca, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Sydney, 2003. It is, however, worth remembering that Harry Druver and Ray Kelly from the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service interviewed Aboriginal peoples as part of their effort to record sites of significance in the 1930s, including those belonging to the pre-contact period.
5 The original tapes and complete transcripts for some interviews are held in the Cultural Heritage Branch, NSW Department of Environment and Conservation, Hornsby, Sydney.
7 For an example of efforts to provide biographical studies of nineteenth-century Aborigines, see Jane Simpson & Lune Huncus (eds), History in Portraits: Biographies of Nineteenth Century South Australian Aboriginal people, Aboriginal History Monograph 6, 1998, Canberra. See also Bain Attwood, Taree Bishop, A Narrating Man, Aboriginal History, 11, 1987, pp. 41-57.
10 See Bain Attwood, The Making of the Aborigines, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989, where he argues that histories based almost exclusively on oral history sources run the risk of paying insufficient attention to the broader, structural influences on Aboriginal people’s lives.
11 This is the camp at Browns Hill in Taree.
12 The McLennans are also known as the McLennans. They feature strongly in Aboriginal oral histories referring to the 1940s and 1950s.
See for example, Warner Saunders, GIS P/T 4; Patricia Davis-Hurst, GIS P/T 15.

13 This is a little confusing. It is impossible to tell if Ella is referring to the Aboriginal reserve, or to Purfleet generally. If she is referring to the Aboriginal reserve at Purfleet then there is a discrepancy in the dates because, according to the records, the reserve was formally gazetted in 1900.

14 The cemetery was at the back of the mission. It was closed down in 1965, after which time Aboriginal people were buried at Redbank cemetery. See Maria Nugent, ‘A search of the archives of the Aborigines Protection Board and the Aborigines Welfare Board for material relating to burials and cemeteries’, NSW NPWS, 1998, pp. 34-35.

15 Ella does not reveal the identity of her father in her autobiography. She states that ‘I won’t disclose what [my father’s name] was, because of his relatives and because I loved my father’ (p. 32). She does, however, say a little bit about him. She said that he ‘came from a “good” white family’ (p. 21), and that his parents were early settlers (p. 28). Also, she notes that her father was married to a local (white) girl, and they had five children (p. 28).

16 The train was connected to Taree in 1912 when Ella was about ten years old.

17 Aboriginal people collected corkwood in the 1960s and 1970s to sell to a factory on Oxley Island known as Hammonds.

18 Ella’s grandfather had died and her grandmother was getting old.

19 The Cook’s from Barrington were a well known Aboriginal family.

20 They used to sell flowers, blackberries and mushrooms to local guest houses.

21 This was in the 1950s.

22 This was in the 1950s.

23 Tom Daddick’s mother’s maiden name was Farrell. When Tom talks about his grandparents he is referring to his mother’s mother and her second husband who was a Chinese man.

24 Tom is referring to the Bungie’s house on the Tinonee Road.

25 Happy Valley was a Depression-era camp on the edges of Taree. It was occupied by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families. Tom’s mother’s sisters lived there too.

26 Jim is Tom’s younger brother.

27 The camphor laurel tree is still there.

28 This is possibly the old Allan family. See John Allan, ‘Pioneering on the Manning’, Newcastle and Hunter District Historical Society Journal and Proceedings, 4 and 5, 1950.

29 Tom Daddick’s mother had died soon after they left Dingo Creek. In the interview, Tom conveyed his understanding that it was his mother’s ghost which appeared on the verandah of the house.

30 As already noted in Ella Simon’s story and in the Purfleet landscape study, this family is also known as McLennan.

31 ‘This place’ means the Aboriginal Reserve at Purfleet.

32 The school was on the Aboriginal Reserve at Purfleet. It was an Aboriginal-only school.

33 There were Italian fishermen in Forster from late nineteenth century onwards.


35 This is the house belonging to Pat and George Bungie on the road to Tinonee, referred to by Tom Daddick above. Pat and George’s son John and his wife Betty (nee Buchanan from Nambucca) lived there until about 1963 when the house was sold and they moved onto the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve.

36 Russell is speaking about Willy Bunge and Lawrence Bunge. Willy died in 2000. Lawrence lives on the old Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve.

37 Adapted from Byrne et al, Social Significance, 2001, pp. 53-54.


39 Peter Road, Charles Perkins, a Biography, Viking, Ringwood, 1990.


41 For further information on this Act see www.environment.nsw.gov.au
Attachment

How do people become attached to places? This is a question of fundamental importance in the field of cultural heritage. For us, the answer lies in two dimensions of life: the spiritual and the historical. In the spiritual dimension, landscapes and places have a ‘being’ or essence of their own and people can be said to be attached to landscapes and places because they are in spiritual dialogue with them. It is the historical dimension of attachment, however, we have addressed ourselves to in this book.

Twenty years ago the late writer and poet Kevin Gilbert, who himself counted our study area as his home, remarked that white people could not understand the attitude and situation of Aboriginal people in the present day because they were conditioned by a ‘whole psychological set of historical circumstances that they themselves have not experienced’. We would extend on Kevin’s observations to say that people’s historical experience in a landscape must be understood in order to understand their attachment to that landscape. To understand a people’s attachment is not, of course, to experience their attachment. But understanding, in itself, should be a prerequisite for those engaged in managing and conserving cultural heritage in a landscape.

Our book takes the view that the particular meaning that the heritage landscape of the study area has for local Aboriginal people is very much conditioned by the historical experience of these people, their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, and by the way this experience is remembered. Under the term ‘remembered’ we include not just personal memory but also the stories that have been passed on to people about past events and, in addition to this, the ‘social memory’ that the community as a whole has of events and experiences in the past.

The need to understand the nature of attachment to place has become pressing in recent years in line with the increasing emphasis, in the cultural heritage management field, on the social significance of heritage places. While since 1979 the Burra Charter has advocated the acknowledgment and assessment of the aesthetic, historical, scientific, and social significance of heritage places, in practice ‘the social’ has tended to be neglected. The present book, which is intended as a contribution to understanding the nature of ‘attachment’, demonstrates the extent to which social and historical significance are closely intertwined.

Mapping attachment

In the field of history, a new spatiality informs much recent work. Peter Read’s 2000 book, Belonging, illustrates this trend – it not only focuses on the places and spaces where events have occurred in the past but interrogates the whole historical relationship of people to place. At the level of local history, Pauline Curby’s, Seven Miles from Sydney: A History of Manly, illustrates a new attention to Aboriginal history in studies commissioned by local government in NSW, as does John Ramsland’s, Custodians of the Soil, commissioned by the Taree Council in our own study area.

One of the most exciting things about cultural heritage, as a field of practice, is its potential to bring history and landscape together. This is where mapping comes in. We have tried to show how it is possible to map documentary and oral histories in ways that highlight the linkages these histories have to buildings, neighbourhoods, pathways, and landscapes. Without this kind of mapping, Aboriginal post-contact history tends to be invisible in the landscape. You can read in the Taree public library, for instance, about what has happened to local Aboriginal people since the time of first white settlement in the 1830s. But when you look out over the farmland surrounding Taree you see no obvious evidence of an Aboriginal historical presence. What you see are farms, fences, farmhouses, roads, and bridges. These speak to you of the history of white settlement, but not of Aboriginal history, even though Aboriginal labour helped clear the farmland and build the fences, roads, and bridges.

Afterword
The relative invisibility of Aboriginal heritage in the general landscape gives a sense of urgency to the kind of mapping we describe in this book. The fact that such mapping has now occurred, at least on a partial scale, does not, of course, mean that people will now be able to look out across the landscape around Taree and see Aboriginal post-contact heritage. But it does mean, for instance, that school children in the area will be able to look at maps which show how extensive were the movements and activities of Aboriginal people in the local landscape they themselves are now growing up in. And they can read the stories – the life histories – that give personal depth to these maps.

The world of landuse planning is very much a world of maps. Unless historians and others are able to extract from the archives and the literature sufficient spatial detail to pinpoint the location of historical events then the historical significance of these locations will simply not be ‘managed for’ in the planning process (e.g., by local government planners). The same applies to those places that are held in people’s memories, rather than held (i.e., referred to) in the archives. As we observed earlier, many of the places associated with people’s life histories and memories are not marked on the ground by physical traces and thus only become visible and receive wider acknowledgment when someone is able to map and record them.

The title of our book, Mapping Attachment, expresses the sense we have that, in heritage work, mapping and attachment go together.

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Mapping Attachment
A spatial approach to Aboriginal post-contact heritage

How do you live in a landscape that no longer belongs to you? Denis Byrne and Maria Nugent show how Aboriginal people in NSW ‘possess’ their local landscapes by imprinting them with their life stories, histories, memories and emotions. In their minds and in their daily conversations they construct maps that are different from, but just as real as, the official maps produced by government and by tourism bodies.

The setting for the study is the lower north coast of NSW. Through research into the area’s Aboriginal post-contact history and by asking local Aboriginal people to describe the landscape setting of their own lives, the authors show how such maps have emerged. They argue that this type of cultural mapping is a powerful tool for the cultural heritage conservation field, and they offer a practical methodology for achieving it. Mapping Attachment is a key text for students and practitioners of cultural heritage conservation, and for those working in the fields of Aboriginal, cross-cultural and oral history. It is an important contribution to the effort to give greater visibility to the lives and histories of Indigenous people in the heritage landscape.

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