

CHAPTER 4

New insights into Gundungurra place naming¹

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Introduction

The Gundungurra (also spelled Gandangara) language group lived to the south-west of Sydney. Their country included the catchments of the Wollondilly and Cox Rivers and some adjacent areas west of the Great Dividing Range.² Their neighbours were Dharug, Darkinung, Wiradjuri, Ngunawal and Thurrawal speaking peoples.

The recently discovered papers of grazier Alfred Leonard Bennett (1877-1942) contain previously unpublished traditional Gundungurra stories and hundreds of Gundungurra words, placenames and placename meanings not known from other sources.³ Bennett's main informant was Werriberrie, also known as Billy Russell (c.1835-1914). Russell spent most of his life in the Burragorang Valley and nearby areas of the Southern Highlands. Bennett published a booklet of Russell's recollections (Russell 1914).

Russell said, in referring to his mother Wonduck, that she was "named after the place where she was born, near Richlands, which was the general custom in the tribe of my race" (Russell 1914: 9). Russell's uncles Myangarlie and Boyu were born at places with those names near O'Connell Plains and Tuglow Caves respectively. His cousin Dundowra (George Riley) was born at that place near Bullio (Russell 1914: 21; Bennett c.1908-1914 unpublished notes).⁴ Hundreds of Gundungurra personal names are recorded in 'blanket lists' and other sources. The majority of these names reflect Gundungurra placenames that, like Wonduck, Myangarlie, Boyu and Dundowra, will probably never be precisely located.

The placenames discussed in this paper lie along the Dreamtime journey of Gurangatch and Mirragan (Mathews 1908; Smith 1992). The Gundungurra used the term *gun-yung-ga-lung* or 'far past times' to refer to this period of landscape,

animal and plant and law creation during which placenames became established. The epic pursuit of the 'rainbow serpent' Gurangatch by the quoll Mirragan began in the upper Wollondilly River and ended at Joolundoo waterhole in the upper Fish River 170 kilometres away.⁵ The majority of placenames recorded by A. L. Bennett from Billy Russell occur in the lower Cox River, between Kedumba Creek and the Nepean River. It is possible that Russell had a special family or cultural link with this area. He was named after the creek in this landscape that was known for its *werriberri* or 'tree ferns'.

Interpretation of the placenames in Bennett's notes is made challenging by Russell's practice of locating them by naming the early twentieth century non-Aboriginal owners of the places referred to. A detailed knowledge of local history is required to map them accurately. In addition, many Aboriginal placenames have been moved from their original locations by non-Aboriginal people. An example of this is the non-Aboriginal usage of the locality name Joolundoo. This name was first published in a local newspaper in 1907 when it was announced that the name 'Jelleindore' had been selected for a new post office located some three and a half kilometres south-east of what is thought to be the location of the waterhole (Anon. 1907). Whatever had been the extent of the country referred to by Gundungurra people as Jelleindore/Joolundoo was ignored as the non-Aboriginal people served by the post office adopted their own definition of the Jelleindore locality. When the 'Blue Talisman' gold mine began operating in the early 1930s, three and a half kilometres from the waterhole, it was said to be located at Jelleindore (Anon. 1933). Other examples in this paper include the movement of the name 'Billagoola' eight kilometres to the south and the name 'Katoomba' 15 kilometres to the north-west of their Aboriginal locations.

Using the placename information recorded by Bennett, supplemented with that from Mathews and other sources, for the 50 kilometre stretch of the lower Cox River between the Kowmung and Nepean Rivers, it is possible to partially reconstruct the environmental, historical and mythological associations for Gundungurra people of this cultural landscape (see Figure 4.1).

Places in the Aboriginal cultural landscape of the lower Cox River

Meeoowun (location no. 1⁶)

Gurangatch travelled underground to this *boombi* ('spring') from the Cox River (Mathews 1908: 205, undated notebook 8006/3/10: 24). The fine dark red soil around this small chalybeate spring contrasts starkly with the surrounding sandy loam.⁷ It would have been an important landmark to travelling Gundungurra as well as a source of ochre. In 1833 surveyor William Govett reported to Thomas Mitchell: "The Native names of the three conical Hills ... which also you requested me to get is Mouin but they are not named separately" (Govett 1833). The "three conical Hills" are now called the Wild Dog Mountains but only the most northerly is officially known as Mt Mouin. The top of this Mt Mouin is two kilometres from the waterhole and the southern end of the Meeoowun range is another three and a half kilometres further away. The Meeoowun mountains appear to have derived their name from their proximity to the waterhole. Wallace gives similar examples from South Australia, saying "Even a prominent feature such as a Mountain is not named for itself, but is known by the name of a nearby water source" (Wallace 1988: 111). Bennett recorded 'Mouirwin' for 'Medlow Gap', which is the saddle between the Wild Dog Mountains and Narrowneck peninsula.

Black Dog Track (location no. 2)

The 'Black Dog' track was the name given by early settlers to the Aboriginal pathway between the Cox River and Megalong Valley, via the mineral spring and Meeoowun mountains (Barrett 1993: 84). The Dreamtime journey of Gurangatch and Mirragan proceeded down the Wollondilly River and upstream along the Cox with sidetrips to Reedy Creek and the Meeoowun waterhole.

Karrangatta (location no. 3)

In R. H. Mathews' version of the legend of Gurangatch and Mirragan, Gurangatch "formed the waterhole Karrangatta. In order to dodge his enemy he burrowed underground, coming out on Mee-oo-wun mountain now written Mou-in where he made a deep hole or spring" (Mathews 1908: 205). It is likely that Gurangatch's route, although he travelled underground, left the Cox at the same point as the only practicable route for Aborigines travelling on foot to Mouin, i.e. the 'Black Dog' track. Throughout the legend, Gurangatch's deviations from the Wollondilly and Cox indicated side tracks to important areas of Gundungurra country. At the base of the Black Dog track is a waterhole which persists through

droughts. Mathews recorded that “the water is always moving and turning”, perhaps showing the continuing presence of Gurangatch in the pool (Mathews undated notebook 8006/3/10:24). The waterhole lies beside a high dark coloured cliff, called by the early bushwalkers “Black Dog Rock” (Dunphy 1969). On the ridgetop above the Black Dog Rock cliff is a distinctive conical projection which would have been a prominent visual marker for the location of Karrangatta waterhole from far away. Bennett recorded *kurrang* for ‘cloud’.

Kowmung (location no. 4)

The name ‘Kowmung’ for this major tributary of the Cox was first recorded by surveyor H. C. White in 1833 (Barrett 1994a: 26-27). Jim Barrett, in his history of the Cox River, raises the question of why White was given a different name to that apparently given to the same river (Barnalay) by the Gundungurra people met by Thomas Jones in 1818. Barrett (1993: 27) suggests that White, who spent most of his time in the upper Kowmung may have recorded the name used for the upper reaches of the river and Jones the name for the lower portion.⁸

A correspondent to *Science of Man* said that Kowmung meant ‘scum on the eyes’ (Anon. 1899). Bennett recorded this condition as *gummung*. Father Richard Coughlan spent considerable time in the Burragorang Valley from the 1940s and had close contacts with some of the early families in the district. He recorded the meaning of Kowmung as ‘sore eyes’ (Coughlan 1973: 54). This is almost certainly independent confirmation of the *Science of Man* record. Why the Kowmung River should be associated with a trachoma type of eye malady is unknown. Perhaps there was a Dreamtime character who contracted this condition at the Kowmung River. Alternatively there may have been a resource in, or beside part of, the Kowmung River which was a cure for sore eyes. A possible candidate would be the plant *Centipeda cunninghamii* which was widely used by Aboriginal people to cure eye infections. Maiden (1898: 1127) described it as growing “on the banks of rivers and creeks and in moist places”.

Kiaramba pathways (location no. 5)

Three likely Gundungurra travel routes between the Cox River and Kiaramba Range are shown.⁹ The westerly route takes a steep line directly up to Mt Cookem; the easterly route follows the ridge later taken by the Cedar Road. Between these is the route taken by the early settlers’ bridle trail called ‘Moody’s track’. There were several other possible routes, e.g. from ‘Apple Tree Flat’ near Karrangatta waterhole, and the Policeman Range from Kedumba waterhole.

Kedumba/Godoomba/Katoomba (location nos. 6, 7)

The first record located using the word ‘Kedumba’ is a Crown Survey plan by Robert Dixon dated 1828. It shows ‘Kedumba Creek’, draining what we now call the Jamison Valley, at its junction with the Cox River (Dixon 1828). A survey dated 14 November 1859 was made by Thomas Evans in response to applications for grants of land upstream of the Kedumba Creek/Cox River junction (Evans 1859). Evans referred to these portions as being located “at Kedumba”, indicating that the name then referred to a locality, rather than just the Kedumba Creek. The Parish including this land was later named Kedumba. These Parish maps showed the dual Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal names “Kedumba or Jamieson’s Valley Creek”. (The misspelling of ‘Jamison’ as ‘Jamieson’ began to appear at this time.)

The word ‘Godoomba’ appeared in a letter from surveyor William Govett to Surveyor General Thomas Mitchell in November 1833. Govett said “that part of the country where the Cascade Creek from the Weatherboard Inn joins the Cox is called Gōdōombă” (Govett 1833). ‘Cascade Creek’ is now called ‘Jamison Creek’, which is a tributary of the river now known as ‘Kedumba River’. Govett’s description includes a note of uncertainty about the extent of the country described as ‘Godoomba’. Which ‘part of the country’ around the creek junction is being referred to? The actual junction of the Kedumba and Cox Rivers is a fairly minor geographical feature. Govett may have been referring to the broad flat area that opens up beside the Cox River just downstream of the Kedumba River junction or to the lower part of the Kedumba River catchment (i.e. what we call the Kedumba Valley).

Mitchell did not use ‘Godoomba’ as a placename on his 1834 map of New South Wales (Mitchell 1834). The compiler of the *Australian Atlas* of 1843 showed ‘Godumba’ signifying country to the north-east of the Jamison Valley Creek (or Kedumba Creek) junction with the Cox River (Baker 1843).

Recognition of the word ‘Katoomba’ as an official placename came about through the efforts of James Henry Neale (1828-1890). Neale was the MLA for the Hartley electorate between 1869 and 1872 (Connolly 1983: 245). He became an enthusiast for the tourism promotion of the natural beauties of the Blue Mountains. He is said to have ‘discovered’ Katoomba Falls by following the creek down to the cliff edge (Anon. 1942). On 2 February 1874 the railway station closest to the falls had been named ‘The Crushers’. Neale was said to have felt that “such an outstanding place deserved a name in keeping with itself” (Anon 1932). He was also described as “an industrious collector of native names” (‘E. D. H.’ 1896: 1250). Neale arranged a picnic near the top of the Katoomba Falls in about 1876, to which he invited an Aboriginal woman. She was known as ‘Bet’ or ‘Princess Betsy’ and was described as a member of the ‘Kanimbla Tribe’, then living at Hartley (Anon. 1919). This picnic has become an important part of

local folklore and is still regularly described in current tourist brochures for the area. No description of the picnic's events by Neale has been located. However, Harry Peckman, who was present, told the story in interviews during the rest of his life. Peckman (1846-1934) was a local coachman and bush poet (Low and Smith 1993). The earliest account by Peckman of the role of Bet, that has been located, is from 1896, some 20 years after the event. Peckman said that Bet told Neale:

that the region of the falling waters which tumble over the cliff all around Katoomba was known by that name and that the river to which they all flowed in the valley was Katumba and so the upper lands were called Katoomba as the old natives had called them. ('E. D. H.' 1896: 1250)

Neale lobbied the railway authorities to change the name of the local railway station from 'The Crushers' to 'Katoomba'. The earliest written record of the word that has been located is in a letter from surveyor John Deering to the Surveyor General, dated 20 July 1876 (Deering 1876). The railway station name was changed to 'Katoomba' on 9 July 1877 (Forsyth 1982: 114). The earliest published map located showing Katoomba is by Eccleston du Faur issued in 1877 (du Faur 1877).

The first published meaning of the word 'Katoomba' appeared in May 1880. At that time there was considerable local agitation about the fact that the area around the top of Katoomba Falls appeared to have been alienated. A petition was being circulated urging the government to resume this land and gazette it as a public reserve. It was in this context that it was published in the *Town and Country Journal* that "the name is Aboriginal and in that tongue signifies 'falling together of many waters'" (Anon. 1880b: 840). The truthful and graphic character of the name the visitor will readily acknowledge". No Aboriginal informant was named. Thus, the alleged meaning of an Aboriginal word was called into service to support a tourism promotion of the area. Neale was one of the group agitating for the government to declare the area around the falls a reserve and had helped to prepare the petition (Citizens and Sydney and others 1880). On 2 November 1889 'Katoomba' was gazetted as a municipality with a legally defined area.

When Harry Peckman's account of the origin of Katoomba's name was published by a journalist from the *Sydney Mail*, Billy Lynch (c.1839-1913), a local Gundungurra man, was also interviewed. He said that 'Katumba' was the name for "the waters below Katoomba" ('E. D. H.' 1896: 1250-1251).

In 1899 William Littleton Gaudry (1839-1903) of 'Colong' station in the Burratorang Valley wrote to the *Mountaineer* newspaper about the meaning of

'Katoomba'. His source was "Two old full bloods, George Riley and William Russell, the last of the Burraborang Tribe" (Gaudry 1899a: 1899b). Riley (c.1832-1906) and Russell said that the name 'Good-doom-bah' applied to the junction of Katoomba (i.e. Kedumba) Creek and the Cox River. They said that the meaning was "the roots of a particular fern used as food". Gaudry also argued against other alleged meanings of 'Katoomba', i.e. 'falling water', 'running water' and 'beautiful view' by quoting Riley and Russell who said that the Gundungurra words were *walway* for 'falling water', *gungnun* for 'running water' and *mulli* for 'beautiful' (Gaudry 1899b). Bennett independently confirmed that *wolway* (his spelling) was the Gundungurra word for 'waterfall'. Despite Gaudry's authoritative Gundungurra sources, the 'falling water' meaning had become too well established in the public's mind to be replaced by a new meaning of little romantic appeal for tourists.

In the early 1900s R. H. Mathews visited Aboriginal Reserve number 26 in the Burraborang Valley, collecting Gundungurra legends and language information (Mathews 2003). The community then included the Gundungurra families of the Rileys and Sherritts and Billy Russell. Mathews, while recording the legend of Gurangatch and Mirragan, was told of one of the landmarks in the story: "[Gurangatch] resumed his course up the Cox to the junction of Ked-oom-bar Creek now called Katoomba by the Europeans" (Mathews 1908: 205). This is an unambiguous reference to Kedumba Creek, which was often referred to as Katoomba Creek.

Between 1908 and 1914, A. L. Bennett recorded this meaning for 'Kedumba' from Russell:

a place where the Kadoomb fern grew. Kadoomb a large fern growing in the sandy banks of the creek in quantity the young fronds of which baked in native fashion and used as cabbage also a kind of mucilaginous food or starch like food was made from the roots. (Bennett, unpublished notes, 1908-1914)

Katoomba as a placename can perhaps best be understood by comparing it with two other placenames a short distance downstream of the Kedumba Creek/Cox River intersection. There is evidence from Gundungurra informants that the placenames 'Billagoola' (location no. 13) and 'Gudgabung' (location no. 18) each referred to a locality comprising a waterhole, a nearby tributary and the area around the junction of the tributary. In similar proximity there is another large waterhole, a nearby upstream tributary called 'Kedumba Creek' and a locality around the tributary and its junction with the Cox which Billy Russell and George Riley said was named 'Good-doom-bah'. Their identification of this restricted locality as 'Katoomba' agrees with both William Govett's unnamed informant of the 1830s, who said that 'Godoomba' was the area round this

junction, and the compiler of the 1843 *Australian Atlas* who showed 'Godumba' in this area. Russell and Riley appeared to regard 'Kedumba' as a 'microtoponym' of similar significance to Billagoola and Gudgabung.

Did Gundungurra people use the word 'Kedumba'/'Good-dom-bah' for the whole 16 kilometres of Kedumba Creek including the area above the cliffs later occupied by the town of Katoomba? When Billy Lynch said that 'Katumba' was the name for "the waters below Katoomba" ('E. D. H.' 1896: 1250-1251) he used the, by then, well established name for the white man's township of Katoomba as a reference point to locate the true 'Katumba' in the valley below the town. Lynch's view, reported immediately after his interview, is probably more accurate than Harry Peckman's memory of what Betsy said 20 years earlier. Part of Betsy's statement agrees closely with Lynch's: "the river to which they [the falling waters] all flowed in the valley was Katumba". However, Peckman said that Betsy also included in the locality name of Katoomba "the region of falling waters which tumble over the cliff all around Katoomba" as well as the "upper lands", i.e. the area above the cliffs. No other known Gundungurra informant confirmed this. It should be borne in mind that Lynch and Betsy belonged to the Therabulat or middle Cox River band of the Gundungurra and may have had a different understanding of the placename 'Katoomba' to that of the Burraborang band men Russell and Riley.

Russell's description of how the Katoomb fern was used as food agrees closely with the documented use of the common Bracken Fern (*Pteridium esculentum*) (Cherikoff 2000: 121-124). However, Russell gave Bennett a different name, *gud-dawa*, for the Bracken Fern.

Was there another edible fern species that was found in abundance around the creek junction? An obvious candidate would be one of the *Blechnum* or 'water fern' species. One species from this genus of ferns was reported as a staple Aboriginal plant food. This was *Blechnum indicum*, the 'Bungwall' of south-eastern Queensland (Bancroft 1895: 25-26). There are four common species of *Blechnum* in Gundungurra country. It appears that only one species, *B. cartilagineum* has been recorded as being eaten by Aboriginal people (Backhouse 1843: 371). Russell said that the Katoomb was a 'large' fern and *B. cartilagineum* is the largest of the local species, growing to 1.5 metres high. Unfortunately, it is not possible to know what species of ferns originally grew around the Cox/Kedumba junction as the area has been submerged, as part of Lake Burraborang, for over four decades. No survey of the flora there appears to have been done before the construction of Warragamba Dam. However, Cambage found *B. cartilagineum* to be common in the Burraborang Valley during his early twentieth century surveys there (Cambage 1912: 565, 576).

This species is widely distributed throughout Gundungurra territory. It is difficult to believe that, in the vast expanse of Gundungurra land, there were no other areas of high abundance of this species. This suggests the possibility that the placename ‘Katoomba’ could have been a ‘generic’ one that could have been applied to any area where the Katoomb fern was found in profusion. Billy Russell said that Katoomba was “a place where the Katoomb fern grew” not the place where it grew [author’s underlining]. There may have been other places called ‘Katoomba’.

Reedy Creek (location no. 8)

Adjacent to the present road crossing of Reedy Creek is a large permanent waterhole, fed by the hanging swamps of Muggadah (Kings Tableland). Gurangatch rested in this hole on his journey (Mathews 1908: 205). Mathews’ notes describe it as “a deep waterhole with reeds around the edges” and recorded *birrigooroo* for ‘reeds growing along creeks’. (Mathews undated notebook 8006/3/10: 23). The locality name ‘Muggadah’ was not recorded by early settlers but it is the name used by the Gundungurra Tribal Council for Kings Tableland (Gundungurra Tribal Council 2002). By following the Kedumba River upstream, Gundungurra people entered what we call the Jamison valley, characterised by its geographically distinctive concentration of waterfalls (*wolway*) over 100 metres high. The Gundungurra name of the prominent peak in the middle of the Jamison Valley, now called Mt Solitary, was recorded by Govett (1833) as ‘Munmie’. Bennett wrote it as ‘Munmee’.¹⁰

Muggadah pathways (location no. 9)

From the lower Kedumba River there were four passes, utilising breaks in the cliffline, that allowed Aboriginal people access to Muggadah. The most northerly of these was called by the earliest settlers the “Goat Track” (Smith 2003).

Billagoola (location nos. 10, 12, 13) – see also Figure 4.2

In 1828 Robert Dixon surveyed a land grant for John Farrell (Barrett 1995: 26). Farrell’s land, on the northern side of the Cox River, was described as ‘Black Gooler’. The word has been spelled in various ways including ‘Gula’, ‘Goola’, ‘Golnar’, ‘Coola’ and ‘Colar’. Thomas Mitchell did not use this name on his 1834 map (Mitchell 1834). He did, however, show the area on the other side of the Cox from Farrell’s land as “Black’s Hollow”. The later Parish Maps showed the creek which joins the Cox opposite Black Gooler called ‘Butcher’s’ or ‘Black Hollow Creek’. Butcher’s Creek commemorates a cattle duffer who frequented the area.

The name 'Gooler' was widely used by later settlers. Reg McMahon named his property near the junction of Popes Creek and the Cox 'Black Gooler' (Barrett 1990: 9). This was on the opposite side of the Cox to John Farrell's grant. Also on this side was the site for 'Black Colar' school purchased in 1895 (Parish of Bimlow Map 1938). Beside the school site was William Dennis' property which Billy Russell described as being at 'Black Goola' (Russell 1914: 15). About four kilometres south of this is Popes Mountain which was also known as 'Black Golnar' (Lee 1971: 9). Further away is Black Coola Mountain, eight kilometers to the south of the Cox. A trigonometrical station 'Black Coola' was gazetted near here in 1894 (Parish of Bimlow Map 1938). This process of placenames derived from Billagoola shifting southwards is probably a result of the typical process of non-Aboriginal people moving Aboriginal placenames away from the localities where they originally applied.

One of Bennett's Gundungurra informants, Richard Lord, said that *goola* was the word for 'diver, shag, cormorant'. It is important, when studying early vocabularies, to be aware of the vernacular names of animals and plants in use by the local non-Aboriginal community of the time. In this context, the 'diver' is the Australasian Grebe (Ben Esgate pers. comm.).¹¹ Western scientific taxonomy places the cormorants or shags into a different family to that of the Grebes. However, Lord appears to indicate that the word *goola* is a general one that covers the local birds that dive in water for food.

Bennett and R. H. Mathews recorded *billagoola* for the Gundungurra name of the 'black shag' (Mathews 1908: 206). Early twentieth century non-Aboriginal vernacular usage of 'black shag' referred to the bird now known as the Great Cormorant. The *billa* part of *billagoola* evidently specified which of the *goola* class of birds was referred to and is probably a reference to the *belar* or *Casuarina cunninghamii* tree in which it roosts (Dixon et.al. 1990: 131-132). Mathews (1908: 206) and Bennett recorded *goolagwan-gwan* and *guruguanguan* respectively for the Grebe. Here the qualifying part of the *Goola* bird's name is at the end, and appears to be a repetition of the word for excrement.¹²

References in the unpublished notebooks of Mathews and Bennett and in the version of the story of Gurangatch and Mirragan that Mathews published make it clear that 'Billagoola' was the name for both the waterhole on the bend of the Cox (opposite the Black Gooler flats surveyed by Dixon) and the nearby tributary of Black Hollow Creek (Mathews 1908 and undated notebook 8006/3/7: 72). Mathews' Gundungurra informants told him that the name of Billagoola Creek had been "corrupted to 'Black Hollow' on our maps". Versions of the word *Billagoola* recorded by Mathews and Bennett are *Blagola* and *Blagoola*. It does not appear too unlikely that Dixon, on hearing the placename as '*Blagoola*', interpreted it as 'Black Goola'. It seems more remarkable, however, that the

surveyor who heard the word as ‘*Blagola*’ interpreted it as ‘Black Hollow’. There are probably many other examples of non-Aboriginal people who thought that they were hearing English words when given Aboriginal placenames.

If Dixon’s record of ‘Gooler’ for the flats opposite the junction of Butcher’s Creek reflects actual Gundungurra usage, then this provides further evidence of the extent of locality referred to by the name.

Camping Cave (location no. 11)

This large cave beside the Cox River was known as the ‘Bushrangers Cave’ for its association with the cattle duffers known only as Butcher and Bullock who operated in the Burragorang from the 1820s (Barrett 1995: 37).

Warrumba (location no. 15)

Bennett gives: “Pearce’s Creek – Warrumba – a big Tortoise”. The species is the Eastern Long-necked Tortoise. Pearce’s Creek flows through a break in the cliffline on the northern side of the Cox. It provides a negotiable route to Kings Tableland.

Coober (location no. 17) – see also Figure 4.2

One of the earliest grants of land in the Burragorang Valley was made to Sarah Harrex in the late 1820s (Barrett 1995: 40). Harrex’s application has not been located but it is likely that, in common with many similar applications, she described the location of the land by what she understood to be the Aboriginal name for the area. When her 150 acre (60ha) lot was surveyed by Robert Dixon in 1828 it was described as ‘Coober’. When the first Parish map was compiled for the area it was called the ‘Parish of Cooba’.

A. L. Bennett obtained this information from Billy Russell: “Kooba – Big Stringy Bark – a tree with very thick bark, grows near R. O. R. Coxes River”. “R. O. R.” is ‘Robert O’Reilly’. His holdings were on both sides of the Cox and to the east of Harrex’s land (see Figure 4.2). Bennett sent a sample of the tree identified as *cooba* by Russell for identification by R. T. Baker of the Technological Museum. Baker identified it as “Cooba – Stringybark ‘Kedumba’ – *Eucalyptus wilkinsoniana*” (Baker 1911). Baker had described this as a species in 1900 but it is now recognised as a variety of *E. eugenioides* – the Thin-leaved Stringybark (Chippendale 1988: 151).

It is likely that the *coober* variety was common along the lower Cox River. It was important for Aboriginal people as a source of bark sheets for shelters. Any

area with good stands of *coober* could have possibly been described as *coober* country. The fact that Russell used Robert O'Reilly's land as the reference point is an indication that the area known to Gundungurra as 'Coober' on the lower Cox may have overlapped with the Gudgabung locality.¹³ In a letter of March 1828, John Farrell described the land he wanted (three kilometres to the north-west of Harrex's land, in the area later known as Black Gooler) as being located at Coober (Barrett 1995: 16). If there were Coober trees on the Black Gooler bend of the Cox then Mr Farrell may not have been mistaken in referring to this area as Coober. Coober and Billagoola country may have overlapped. There could have been some flexibility in Gundungurra placename usage. It is possible that one spot could have had several placenames depending on the context in which it was being talked about.

Coober country had other associations for Billy Russell. In his *Recollections* he said his stepfather was called 'Muroon', "which is the name of the wild cucumber vine bearing oblong berries, called *Moon-bir*, and which are of a brown colour when ripe, the vines are rather plentiful in stringy-bark country" (Russell 1914: 9). *Muroon* is *Billardiera scandens*. Bennett also recorded that the name of one of Russell's uncles was "mumbirr ... name of native cucumber". Thus both Billy Russell's stepfather and uncle were closely associated with the important food plant which is plentiful in Coober country.

Cooba is also a Wiradjuri word for a species of wattle, *Acacia salicina* (Dixon et al. 1990: 135). This word was adopted into Australian English and was used, even outside the normal dry-country range of *A. salicina*, to describe other wattles with 'willow-like' leaves. This is one of a number of examples where the same word appears in Gundungurra and a neighbouring language, but is used to describe two completely different plants.

Gudgabung (location no. 18)

Bennett's notes have the following references to this placename:

- a. "Gudgabung – the name of Peter O'Riellys [sic] and the Green Wattle of Billy Russell=the Parish Map".
- b. "Gudgabung – a lagoon near Peter O'Reilly's".
- c. "Kudgabung – green Wattle Creek".

In Russell's *Recollections* (1914: 19) he states: "A man named Tom Green[an] lived at Gudga-bung in Green Wattle creek."

The locations of Peter O'Reilly's and Tom Greenan's properties are shown on location no. 2. There is a widening of Green Wattle Creek beside Peter O'Reilly's property that may have been the Gudgabung lagoon. Greenan's property,

though which Green Wattle Creek flows, is only a few hundred metres from O'Reilly's. Peter O'Reilly's neighbour Robert O'Reilly gave his address in 1885 as 'Cudgebung' (Anon. 1885: 307).¹⁴ If all of these records reflect Gundungurra usage, then 'Gudgabung' was the name for 'Green Wattle Creek', a lagoon on the creek and the general vicinity of the area round the junction of Green Wattle Creek and the Cox. Gudgabung, like Kedumba and Billagoola, appears to be a locality name for the area around a waterhole by that name.

Wollondilly/Condongbarrow (location no. 19)

The lower reaches of the Wollondilly may have been called 'Condongbarrow' or 'Condonora' (Barrett 1993: 27). The name 'Wollondilly' was first recorded for the upper reaches of the river. Thomas Jones recorded 'Condongbarrow' and 'Condonora' for the lower Wollondilly in 1818. Condonora was an early name used for Gundungurra people.

Gunnadarel (location no. 20)

'Gunnadarel' appears to have been the Gundungurra name for Lacy's Creek, at least in its lower reaches (Russell 1914: 19).

Bulla Mullar (location no. 21)

Bennett records 'Bulla Mullar' ('A Devil Place') as the origin of the locality name 'Bimlow'. Another early recorded version of this placename is 'Bimmillo', the name used by John Lacey in an application for a grant in the area (Barrett 1995: 24-26, 43). The name may have been a 'generic' one that could be applied to other 'devil places'. In 1833 William Govett, while exploring the Kowmung River, was given the name 'Buhimmelah Rock' for a riverside feature (Barrett 1994b: 69). This is possibly the same word expressed in the renderings 'Bulla Mullar' and 'Bimmillo'. Buhimmelah Rock is 22 kilometres from Bimlow.

Gaung Gaung (location no. 22)

R. H. Mathews (undated notebook 8006/3/10: 23) recorded this name for one of Gurangatch's waterhole resting places "a little way above Pocket Creek junction". There may be a relationship between the name of this pool and the name of the Australasian Grebe. This was recorded by Mathews (1908: 206) as *goola gwan gwan*, where *gwan* is the word for excrement. This pool may have been named after the large amount of bird excrement around it.

Muggaroon (location no. 23)

Bennett recorded:

- a. “Muggaroon – Crawfish” and
- b. “Muggaroon (Crawfish) Pocket Creek, Blacks Camp, Coxes [sic] River”.

The common freshwater crayfish of Gundungurra country are the Australian Crayfish (*Euastacus australiensis*) and the Sydney Crayfish (*E. spinifer*) (Merrick 1993: 61-62, 76-77). They would be more likely to be found in small side streams, like Pocket Creek, than in larger rivers like the Cox, due to predation by large fish.

The traditional Aboriginal camping area around Pocket Creek was the site where the St Joseph’s Farm Aboriginal community became established in the 1870s (Smith 1991: 11-25).

Gogongali (location no. 24)

Bennett recorded: “googongali – small fern, growing by Peter Fitz’s”. In Russell’s *Recollections*, he said “Mr Jack Fitzpatrick of Burragorang is somewhere about my age. I can remember his father at his farm, Go-gon-gal-li on the other side of the Warragamba River. Old Mr Fitz senior was called Burrung-gullut by us” (Russell 1914: 19). “Mr Fitz Senior”, Peter Fitzpatrick, acquired land in 1850 on the western side of Gogongolly Gully Creek near its intersection with the Cox (Barrett 1995: 111). Gogongali Creek was also known as Shoebridge’s Creek after one of the area’s settlers (Pearce 1991: 22). A number of small fern species have edible rhizomes and/or frond tips. Cribb (1994: 159) records a fern with an edible rhizome, *Lygodium scandens*, from south-east Queensland with maidenhair-like leaves, but Bennett recorded *googah* for the local Maidenhair Fern. Alternatively the creek may have been known for an abundance of other small non-edible fern species.

Pathways (location nos. 15, 24, 25)

Pocket (Muggaroon), Pearces (Warrumba) (Map no. 15) and Gogongali creeks cut through the cliff line on the northern side of the Cox River sufficiently to create negotiable routes to Kings Tableland and the Central Blue Mountains via Erskine Creek. The routes shown are partly based on a map ‘Gundungurra Pathways’ published by Jim Barrett (1993: 105).

Kouroong (location no. 26)

Bennett interviewed some non-Aboriginal early residents of the Burratorang Valley and Southern Highlands in his search for local Aboriginal vocabulary. Occasionally he recorded historical material as well. One example came from William James Maxwell (1832-1914):

Mr W. Maxwell remembers that when he was about 12 years of age and living at gongoli creek (nortons flat) a fierce battle between the Burratorang and Coxes River Tribes took place between the Wild Blacks of the tops and was fought somewhere about the Warragamba River. (Bennett, unpublished notes, 1908-1914)

Billy Russell said “Kouroong – where a fight took place in gorge through which the Warragamba flows”. This battle occurred about 1844. Bennett recorded that *couroong* meant ‘old skeleton or bones, skulls’. If this place was named after the bones of Gundungurra enemies killed in 1844, it is an example of an Aboriginal placename established in the post-contact period.

Werriberri (location no. 27)

Bennett recorded “Werriberri – Fern tree. Were-a fern”. His informant Billy Russell was born beside Werriberri creek a few kilometres north of The Oaks (Russell 1914: 10). There are four species of tree ferns found in Gundungurra territory: three species of *Cyathea* and *Dicksonia antarctica*. *Cyathea australis* is the commonest of these and was probably the species found along Werriberri Creek (Fairley and Moore 1989: 33). The inner edible starchy pith of this plant can only be accessed by killing the tree fern. The rolled up tips of the fronds were eaten (after cooking) in some areas also (Cribb 1975: 134-135).

Warragombie (location no. 28)

‘Warragombie’ was the name first recorded for the lower Cox River, and it was formalised by Governor Macquarie (Macquarie 1979: 21). The name later changed to ‘Warragamba’. It was almost certainly the Dharug name for the river. If the Gundungurra had their own name for this stretch of the river, it does not seem to have been recorded.

Gulguer (location no. 29)

Billy Russell said that ‘Gulguer’ (“meaning a falling or shooting down or swilling round, which causes the water to make a large round hole”) was the name of Bent’s Basin (Russell 1914: 22-23). He said it was one of the lurking places of Gurangatch.

Deerubbin (location no. 30)

Deerubbin/Dee-rab-bun may have been a Dharug word for part of the Hawkesbury River (Collins 1975: 357). Alternatively, it may have been their word for rivers in general (Keith Smith pers. comm. 2006). The Gundungurra used the same word (*dyirraban*) for one of the yam species found in riverside habitats (Mathews 2003: 29). The Dharug and Gundungurra may have used other names for this section of the Hawkesbury/Nepean.

Werriberri’s birthplace (location no. 31)

Billy Russell was born about here, on the upper reaches of Werriberri Creek close to the later township of The Oaks.¹⁵ This creek had an early dual name, being known also as ‘Monkey Creek’ for its koala population.

Gurrabulla (location no. 32) and Boonbal (location no. 33)

Gurrabulla waterhole was the last resting place of Gurangatch on the lower Wollondilly before it joined the Cox. Bennett recorded *gurradhulla* for ‘a junction of watercourses’. ‘Boonbal’ is the next named waterhole upstream (Mathews, undated notebook 8006/3/10: 23). Boonbal is just downstream of the Brimstone Gully Creek junction.

Murro-lung-gulung (location no. 34) and Mullindi waterhole (location no. 35)

In his *Recollections*, Billy Russell said “Luke Gorman ... lived at Upper Burragorang, at a place called ‘Murro-lung-gulung’ which means that a hand was stamped on a rock cave at this place” (Russell 1914: 20). He appears to use ‘Murro-lung-gulung’ as a locality name rather than just for the hand cave itself. This would seem to follow the Gundungurra place-naming principle that localities take their name from a prominent environmental or cultural feature of the area. *Marrola* was recorded as the Gundungurra word for ‘hand’ and *ngununggula* for ‘belonging to here’ (Kohen 1993a: 138-139), so ‘Murro-lung-gulung’ may convey the meaning of ‘place of the hands’.

Another Murro-lung-gulung place was near the property of James Pippin. The Pippins were early settlers in the valley and appear to have established good relationships with the Gundungurra people. Their descendants claimed that James Pippin (1818-1917) “was a blood brother to the local native tribe and was protector of the Red Hands Rock” (Barrett, 1994: 93). One source said that Pippin was “initiated into the Burragorang tribe” (Dunphy n.d.).¹⁶ A possible reason why Pippin could have been ‘adopted’ into the Gundungurra clan system is indicated by two quotations from R. H. Mathews:

There used to be a gurangaty in a waterhole called Mullandi, called the “deep water”, opposite the “Hands” – these hands are on a little creek which runs down into Mullandi.

Mullindee waterhole – before going on a Pirrimbir expedition the men used to go and swim in this hole, to make them strong and clever.¹⁷ (Mathews, undated notebook 8006/3/10: 19, 24)

It appears that a source of spiritual power for Gundungurra warriors existed in the connection between the Hands Cave and Mullindee waterhole. Gundungurra people may have reasoned that James Pippin, the landowner who controlled access to these powerful sites, needed to be incorporated into their social system in a relationship of mutual obligation so that he could appreciate the importance of the Mullindee waters to them.

‘Mullindi’ appears to have also been a general word for ‘deep water’ as well as the name of this particular waterhole. Mathews made a marginal note: “deep water is Mullindi” (Mathews 8006/3/10: 20). A. L. Bennett recorded “Mulundi Hayes School Burragorang now spelt by Education Department Malumbi, deep water, W. Russell.”

It was dangerous for Aboriginal people from other areas to go near Mullindi waterhole. Mathews recorded:

Mullindi=big hole in Wollondilly at Burragorang in which dwells the gurangaty – this monster draws under any strangers who may approach the margin of the pool. (Mathews 8006/4/Folio Box 1, folder 11)

Mathews also recorded a peculiarity of Gurangatch’s behaviour: “Gurangaty had a great down on left handed people. If they passed near his waterhole they had to carry the fire in their right hand” (Mathews 8006/3/10: 24).

Kweeoogang (location no. 36)

An article by the author (Smith 2006) explains how the name of this waterhole was moved by the prolific twentieth century nomenclaturist Myles Dunphy to

become the officially approved name for a peak 32 kilometres to the north-west of the waterhole, Mt Queahgong.¹⁸ Mathews does not give the exact location of Kweeoogang waterhole and it has been located on the map beside the land of Maurice Hayes who called his property 'Queahgong' (Etheridge 1893: 48). A collector of local folklore, William Albert Cuneo, claimed that the feature called 'The Bluff' on current maps was called 'Mt Queahgong' (Cuneo n.d.: 3). This Mt Queahgong is over three kilometres south south-west of the waterhole and at the top of a cliff some 150 metres high. This name appears never to have been used on any published map. There is a possibility that 'Kweeoogang'/'Qheahgong' was an Aboriginal locality name that covered both the waterhole and the clifftops three kilometres away. So this case may be similar to the naming relationship between the Meeoowun waterhole (location no. 1) and Meeoowun mountains and Kedumba waterhole (location no. 7) and the Kedumba/Katoomba clifftop area. Bennett recorded *que que gang* for the 'soldier bird' (noisy miner). This suggests a possible meaning for the Kweeoogang placename.

Junba (location no. 37)

Although Mathews' notebook (MSS 8006/3/10: 23) appears to locate Junba waterhole between Gaung Gaung (location no. 22) and Billagoola (location no. 13) he may have glossed over some of the complexity of Gurangatch's journey. John Fitzpatrick, when applying for a mail delivery contract in 1877, gave his address as 'Janba' on the Warragamba River (Barrett 1995: 82). He was then residing at Portion 6 Parish of Cooba.¹⁹ It is not likely that Fitzpatrick moved the name from its true location. His father Peter was a fluent speaker of Gundungurra and was highly respected by the local Gundungurra people (Russell 1914: 19). Peter Fitzpatrick was familiar with the Warragamba River area from the 1830s and he and his son purchased land in the area from the early 1850s (Barrett 1995: 41).

The order of waterholes in Mathews' notebook could still be correct if Gurangatch 'doubled back' from Gaung Gaung to Junba before proceeding to Billagoola. Similar reversals occurred on other parts of the journey. *Junba* appears to be one of the Gundungurra words for the Long-finned Eel. Bennett recorded both *yamba* and *yumba* for the 'big black eel'.

Conclusion

Although we have from Bennett and Mathews a fair amount of information about places along the lower Cox River, this would be only a small proportion of what would have been known to the original Gundungurra inhabitants. What we do know allows us a rare glimpse into the complexities of an Aboriginal cultural landscape which can now only be known through historical records

and the memories of the few survivors who once knew it. There would have been so many named landmarks along this 50 kilometre stretch of river that any Gundungurra person who shared the same mental map of this area with another person would have had no difficulty in describing exactly the location of any event or of arranging to meet at any place along the river.

Some general principles of Gundungurra place naming emerge from the study of this cultural landscape. The lower Cox River includes three localities where a waterhole, nearby tributary and the locality around the waterhole all apparently shared the same placename. Probably it was the waterholes, formed during the Dreamtime and places of continuing practical importance to Gundungurra people that were first named, with the nearby tributaries and general locality deriving their names from the waterhole. Most of the placenames are words in everyday use for trees, plants and animals. 'Joolundoo', 'Gurrabulla' and 'Mullindi' appear to be placenames that describe common topographic features: rivers, river confluences and deep water. That is, there is a 'generic' quality to Gundungurra placenames. In theory, any area with an abundance of a plant or animal or with some particular geographic feature could have been named with the word for that species or feature. It is possible that some placenames only had currency within individual clan areas. Where placenames originate in areas which experienced early and severely disruptive European settlement it can be almost impossible to define accurately the areas covered by Aboriginal locality names. A. L. Bennett's work with Billy Russell allows some insight into the multiple spiritual, environmental and ethnographic layers of meaning in the placenames of the Lower Cox River.

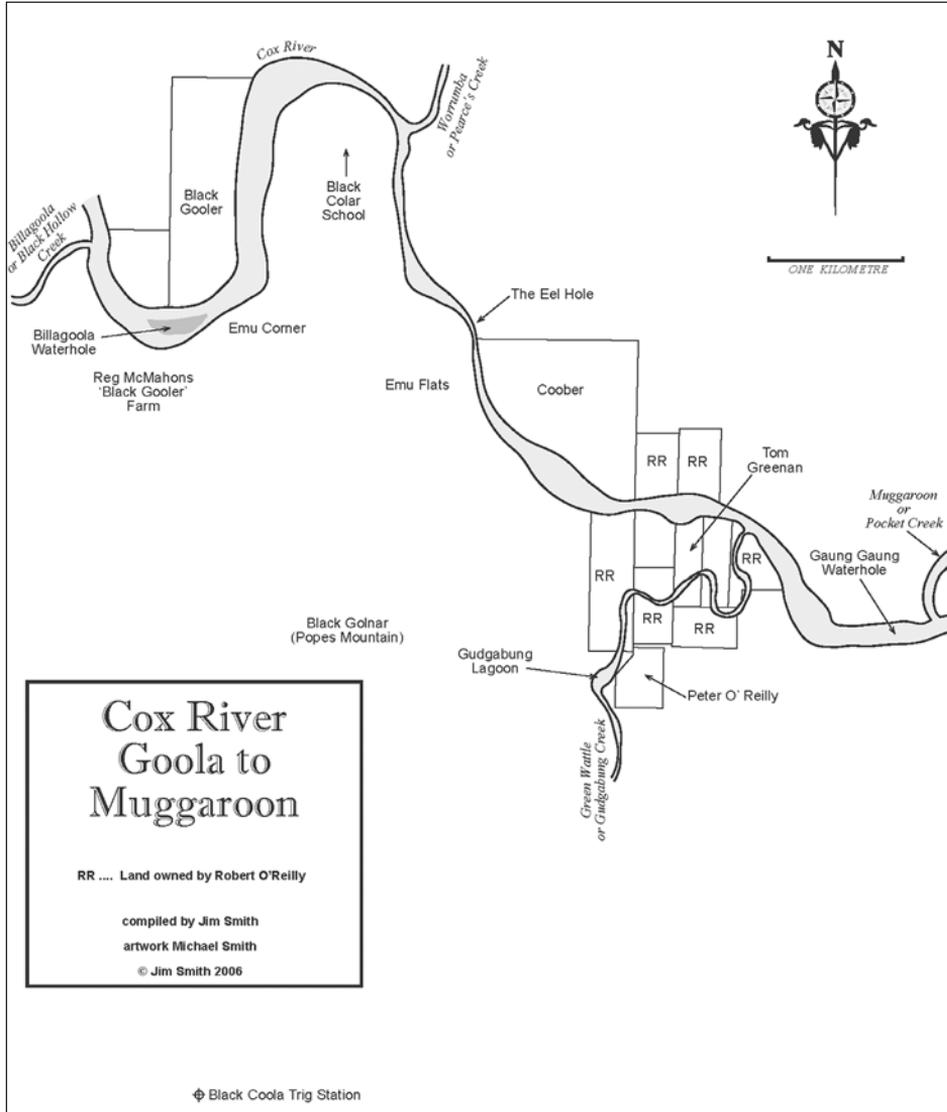
R. H. Mathews, in introducing the Gurangatch and Mirragan story, described its starting point: "the waterhole and the country around it being called Murrau-ral"²⁰ (Mathews 1908: 203). We rarely have enough information to be able to say how much of 'the country around' topographic features takes its name from the primary site of the name. There was probably some flexibility in the naming of localised areas of country rather than rigid boundaries. When going down the Cox, the changing locality names given by Russell are a fairly consistent average distance of about two kilometres apart. Whether this gives some idea of the extent of country covered by a Gundungurra 'microtoponym' is not clear. Russell does not explain why specific localities were identified with particular common species. *Warrumba* tortoises and *muggaroon* crayfish were found in all the tributaries, *gogongali* and *katoomb* ferns grew right along the river. *Cooba* trees were abundant throughout the area. These places may have had associations with Dreamtime stories about these species. Neither Russell nor any other Gundungurra informant gave any information as to whether what we call the Cox/Warragamba River changed its name as it passed through these various localities.

'Cooba' is a good example of the layers of meaning that can be conveyed by an Aboriginal placename. Bennett's action in having this tree identified by both a Gundungurra authority and an expert in western scientific taxonomy is exemplary. Because of this we know that *cooba* is a 'Stringybark' tree, a species that provided bark sheets for shelter. Cooba country could be located in space for Gundungurra people in a number of ways: by its location between Warrumba and Gudgabung Creeks, by its position in the Dreamtime journey of Gurangatch and Mirragan, and by its position in relation to various Gundungurra travel routes. In this latter respect, Cooba lies between the paths to Kiaramba ridge that leads to the Great Dividing Range and paths to Dharug country in the Central Blue Mountains and to the Wollondilly River route to the Mulwaree Plains. An example of the personal significance that placenames could have for individual Aboriginal people is the naming of two of Billy Russell's family members after the *Billardiera* vine which is common in Cooba country.

The waterhole names associated with the journey of Gurangatch and Mirragan provide an example of the survival rate of Aboriginal placenames. Of the 11 locality names in this article that describe resting places of Gurangatch, only two are in regular use today. However, very few of the bushwalkers who pass Mt Mouin or locals and visitors in Katoomba would be aware of the origin of these names in the Gundungurra Dreamtime.

Because of the friendship between A. L. Bennett and Billy Russell and the careful recording of the Gurangatch and Mirragan story by R. H. Mathews, the lower Cox River is one of the best documented Aboriginal cultural landscapes within 100 kilometres of an Australian capital city. Regrettably Arthur Phillip's choice of the site of Sydney as Australia's first settlement led to the submerging of most of this landscape 170 years later to create a reservoir for the city's water supply.

Figure 4.2: Part of the lower Cox River showing the Black Gooler and Coober land grants of the 1820s, the southwards 'migration' of Gooler-related names after settlement and the settlers around Gudgabung creek whose properties were used by Gundungurra informant Billy Russell to describe the Coober and Gudgabung localities.



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Endnotes

1. Jim Barrett's published histories of the Burratorang Valley have provided much of the historical framework for interpreting the often cryptic notes of Bennett and Mathews. He has read and commented on some sections of this article and provided copies of rare maps and unpublished material. The author is also grateful to the descendants of A. L. Bennett for allowing access to his research. Jim Kohen has encouraged the author's research on the Gundungurra for the last 15 years. Wilf Hilder was the author's companion on bushwalks along Gundungurra trails. Michael Jackson advised the author on some of the Aboriginal routes.
2. A more detailed discussion of Gundungurra associations with country appears in the author's Ph.D. thesis (Smith 2008). A map of the Gundungurra Tribal Council's Native Title Claim area can be obtained from the Tribal Council at 14 Oak Street Katoomba 2780. Documentation on Gundungurra boundaries is contained in Johnson (2004).
3. The unpublished Bennett papers are still held privately by his descendants. They were compiled mainly in the period 1908-1914. They are unpaginated. A description of the papers, and a biography of Bennett will appear in the forthcoming Gundungurra dictionary compiled by the author and Jeremy Steele.
4. All other material sourced from Bennett and Russell in this paper is from these unpublished notes, unless indicated otherwise.
5. A map of the journey is in Smith (1992). Bennett recorded *dulan* as the Gundungurra word for rivers in general. *Dya* is the Gundungurra first person singular possessive suffix. Joolundoo could be derived from *dulandy* and mean literally 'my river'.
6. Location numbers refer to locations marked on Figure 4.1.
7. In Smith (1992) this area is described as a volcanic vent, however, recent geological advice is that the red soil is Limonite or hydrated Iron Oxide. Chalybeate springs in the Southern Highlands were bathed in for therapeutic purposes by non-Aboriginal people but it is not known if they were used by Gundungurra people.
8. Jones travelled along the Cox River from Glenroy to the Nepean. He was given the Aboriginal names of three major tributaries of the Cox by Gundungurra people. These are thought to be the Jenolan River, Kowmung River and Wollondilly River. However, Jones' original report has not survived. His employer Sir John Jamison rewrote Jones' notes in an ambiguous manner making it difficult to be certain which Aboriginal names relate to these rivers. Barrett's interpretation is followed in this article.
9. The terrain of the area discussed in this article is extremely rugged and precipitous with many constraints on human movements such as vertical cliffs. The locations of Aboriginal travel routes are deduced from early settlers' accounts, the existence of early bridle trails and the locations of Aboriginal sites and resources. Most of the Aboriginal pathways shown on Fig. 4.1 have been traversed on foot by the author to assess their practicability and verify the locations of associated Aboriginal sites. Most of these routes were later used by bushwalkers and are shown on Dunphy's 1969 map of Gangarang.
10. Mt Solitary has also been referred to by the Aboriginal name of 'Corowal' or 'Korowall'. The earliest reference located for this usage is Anon. (1880a). From the early 1880s the dual Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal names e.g. as 'Corowal or Solitary Mount' appeared on maps.

Aboriginal placenames

11. Ben Esgate (1914-2003) spent his life exploring the Blue Mountains and became an acknowledged authority on its natural history. When shown the Gurangatch and Mirragan legend he unhesitatingly identified the 'diver' as the Grebe and said this was the local bushmen's name for this species in his youth. His identification is confirmed by Morris (1898: 122).
12. In a number of NSW languages, some names of waterbirds incorporate the word for excrement, a reference to the habit of these birds of leaving large deposits of droppings beside the pools they frequent (Ash et al. 2003: 95).
13. Robert O'Reilly's portions on the north side of the Cox later became known as 'Curramutta' property. Bennett recorded *Kurramutta* for the 'Honey Suckle (near swamps)', i.e. *Banksia paludosa* or *B. robur*. It is not known if 'Curramutta' was used as a locality name by the Gundungurra.
14. This reference contains many hundreds of Aboriginal placenames from New South Wales.
15. Russell said he was born "where Mrs Felix O'Hares' farmhouse now stands" (Russell 1914: 10). The location of the O'Hare property is shown in den Hertog (1987: 30).
16. This information was given to Dunphy by R. Doyle on 21 August 1932.
17. Mathews recorded the Pirrimbir revenge ritual from "Thoorga" [Dhurga] informants in the Narooma area (Mathews 1905: 239-252). This account does not include any mention of bathing as part of the ritual although his notes on Mullindee waterhole refer to Thurawal speakers bathing in a hole in Bomaderry Creek as part of these expeditions. Mathews may not have recorded the Gundungurra word for the revenge ritual. Amongst his Gundungurra notes (8006/3/10: 16) is the note "Gure is revenging party". However in his notebook (8006/3/4, Volume 2: 37) "gurre" is given as a Dhudhuroa word, from a Victorian language.
18. Ironically, Dunphy's name was approved in 1931 by Surveyor General Hamilton Mathews, the son of R. H. Mathews (Thompson 1986: 122).
19. Fitzpatrick applied for Conditional Purchase of this land in 1874.
20. The name for this waterhole, which was described as one of Gurangatch's camping places, includes the Gundungurra word for a camp, as recorded by Bennett, *mura*.