

8. 'Many were killed from falling over the cliffs':¹ The naming of Mount Wheeler, Central Queensland

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1. Placenames

Many placenames in Queensland and Australia date from the frontier period. Names may arise from quite mundane circumstances, such as 'Dry Creek', 'Bullock Creek', etc. Some are ubiquitous, referring to relatively benign events and ideas – for example, the many Muddy, Rocky, Sandy and Stoney creeks – while other placenames are more suggestive of much more sinister affairs. The latter category includes places with frightening names: the various Murdering Creeks and Skull Holes, named after events that some people would apparently rather forget, or even better still, deny ever happened. A third group of names commemorate pioneers, some of whom are connected with episodes of genocidal violence on the Australian frontier. This paper concerns one of the latter.

Many people, especially Aboriginal Australians, are distressed by the continuing use of 'killing' placenames, terms and words which may remind them of the extensive violence that First Australians still experience today. Although European placenames replaced existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander landmarks throughout Australia, not all the new names commemorate violence. However, many non-Indigenous Australians remain unaware of the connections and connotations of those that do. While some may claim ignorance of history as an excuse, Indigenous people could hardly be expected to casually ignore the frontier violence that gave us so many gruesome reminders of our past. However, their experiences are often ignored and their consultation is rarely sought in the persistent use of offensive placenames.

In Queensland, violence was perpetrated by two main groups: civilian 'vigilante' or 'black-hunting' parties, and an armed formation of Aboriginal men, the

¹ The quote in the title is from a report held in the Queensland State Archives (QSA), Governor's Despatches, 16 December 1861, GOV/23, number 74 of 1861.

Native Police, led by Europeans and recruited at gunpoint, whose sole purpose was the elimination of Aboriginal resistance: police who were soldiers (Richards 2008a, 2008b, 2007).

The corps operated from 1848 to the beginning of the First World War as a regular branch of government, and was renowned for extreme violence and brutal sadism. Officially sanctioned frontier killings by the Native Police occurred throughout Queensland, including adjacent waters and offshore islands.

Further details on the history, impact and reputation of the Native Police can be found in the author's doctoral thesis "'A Question of Necessity': The Native Police in Queensland", and in *The Secret War: A True History of Queensland's Native Police*, or in several articles available in scholarly journals (see references). Offshore massacres are recorded on Fraser Island during the early 1850s, in the Whitsunday Islands (1878, see Richards 2008a: 147), as well as on islands off Cape York Peninsula and on a number of Torres Strait islands.

Placenames that commemorate violent episodes raise special questions. Should we, as a nation, continue to blithely use placenames known to be connected with frontier violence without showing consideration for the sensitivities of Indigenous people, particularly the direct descendants of massacre victims and survivors? While non-Indigenous Australians may claim ignorance as an excuse, if the names suggest violence and the places connected with them are associated with frontier killing, Aboriginal people will relate to them quite differently from others in the community.

Australia has a proud record of acknowledging those who died in the name of country, king or empire. If we are to take a different approach to historic names in the landscape, we could begin by commemorating Aboriginal deaths in defence of country and kin. Archival records show where many, but not all, of the inter-racial killings occurred in frontier Queensland. These sacrifices for 'country' should be proudly and publicly acknowledged in the same way we honour other Australian war dead. Ignoring these deaths, and continuing to use offensive placenames, divides Australians into two discrete communities.

2. Landmarks of genocide in Queensland

Several Queensland placenames record the sites of police camps or barracks, while others incorporate the word 'trooper'. We can assume that these usually refer to the Native Police because European police were nearly always located as 'police stations', and the term 'trooper' – in Queensland – refers exclusively to the Aboriginal members of the Native Police. Frontier explorers, pastoralists and police officers bestowed names on many features they 'discovered'. Others are

overtly racist, such as Nigger Creek, near Herberton on the Atherton Tableland. Indigenous requests have finally caused the use of this particular placename ('Nigger Creek') to be abandoned, but others persist.² Nine more 'Nigger Creeks' are still used, while other placenames feature derogatory terms such as 'Black Boy' and 'Black Gin'.³

The issue of racially contentious names continues to divide other Australian states and other settler societies, as well as Queensland.⁴ Some may record the names of patrons, or of trivial episodes and family members, but others are not so benign. Placenames that commemorate and honour violence are not uncommon. For example, Murdering Point, near Innisfail, was named to record the killing of a small number of survivors from the *Maria* shipwreck by Aboriginal people in 1872. Despite the fact that many survivors were saved by Indigenous groups, the reprisals by Native Police, Royal Navy sailors and other Europeans were savage and widespread.

Probably one of the most alarming toponymic names in Queensland is 'The Leap', north of Mackay. This site is named for the plunge of an Aboriginal woman with a child, who chose suicide to avoid capture or killing by European vigilantes and Native Police. Several articles have been written about The Leap (Tareha 1986; Moore 1990).

The Mackay district, one of the most violent parts of the Queensland frontier, is conspicuous by an absence of records relating to frontier violence, yet this event is proudly acknowledged by a large sign outside the local hotel.

The earliest newspaper reference found thus far dates from 1894: 'Probably it derived its name from some tragic event in aboriginal history, or perhaps some incident of more modern date in which the white invader was concerned'.⁵ According to historian Clive Moore, the story of The Leap's naming 'encapsulates Aboriginal-European relations around Mackay in the 1860s' (Moore 1990).

Noting the place's incorporation in work by author Thea Astley (1974) and literary historian Nicola Tareha (1986), Moore concludes '[t]here seems no doubt that a massacre occurred at The Leap in 1867' and 'the woman and probably others from her tribe were forced to jump' (Moore 1990: 68).

'Battle Hole', on the Barcoo River in western Queensland, records the killing of 'many Blacks' by local settlers and Acting Sub Inspector Thomas Williams' detachment of Native Police in the early 1870s. In 1872, Williams' activities

2 'Bid to change creek names', *Cairns Post*, 1 June 2002: 2.

3 'Placenames in the News', *Placenames Australia* (September 2003): 10.

4 See, for example, several articles on the renaming of the Grampian Mountains in Victoria – Davidson 1991; Birch 1996; Anonymous 1999–2000: 67–68.

5 'The Gin's Leap', *The Queenslander*, 10 November 1894: 888.

became the subject of a parliamentary inquiry.⁶ He was suspended and later dismissed. A nearby site on the same watercourse records more violence, but the story of the Mailman's Gorge massacre remained largely unknown until Jane Black's *North Queensland Pioneers* was published in 1932. She stated:

The blacks were very bad in the ranges around Aramac in the early days and the murder of a travelling jeweller and his wife and child caused reprisals. Harried by the police, the offending tribe took refuge in the country of a hostile tribe, and this precipitated wholesale tribal warfare. To this day it is said the mountain caves yield skeletons, the result of this tribal war. (Black 1932)

Although no records confirm this story, one 1865 account said the death of a shepherd or a government employee at Stainburn Downs station, north-west of Aramac, led to a revenge attack by squatters. Three Europeans are supposed to have tracked 30 Aborigines to a cave at Mailman's Gorge and shot them. Unfortunately further details of this particular clash have not been located to date.

According to one source, a site known as 'Skull Hole' or 'NP Hole' near Cloncurry, in Northwest Queensland, was a Native Police watering hole. Citing explorer JV Mulligan, this writer says 'these NP waterholes were called Skull Lagoons on account of the number of skulls and other human bones lying about' (de Havelland 1989: 169). The name of another watercourse, 'Skull Hole Creek' near Croydon, probably has similar origins. 'Skull Pocket', near Cairns, is reputed to be the site of a large-scale massacre, and the place where 'a whole case of skulls' was supposedly collected (Bottoms 2002: 149). One writer said he personally saw 16 skulls placed here on stumps and trees ('Coyyan' 1926).

There are eight Skeleton Creeks in Queensland, and it can be assumed that some if not all of these refer to the discovery of Aboriginal remains. One is situated close to Skull Pocket, and this particular 'Skeleton Creek' commemorates the discovery of human remains chained to a tree. Troopers led by Senior Constable Edmond Whelan, in command of the Mulgrave River Native Police camp from 1885 to 1889, are thought to have caused this 'lawful' death. Skull Creek near Nebo, in the Mackay area, was the site of a frontier killing in 1873. Although the name appears to be used from this time, there is little doubt that the killing of storekeeper Henry Maxwell, allegedly by Aboriginal people, resulted in revenge attacks by the Native Police and fellow colonists.

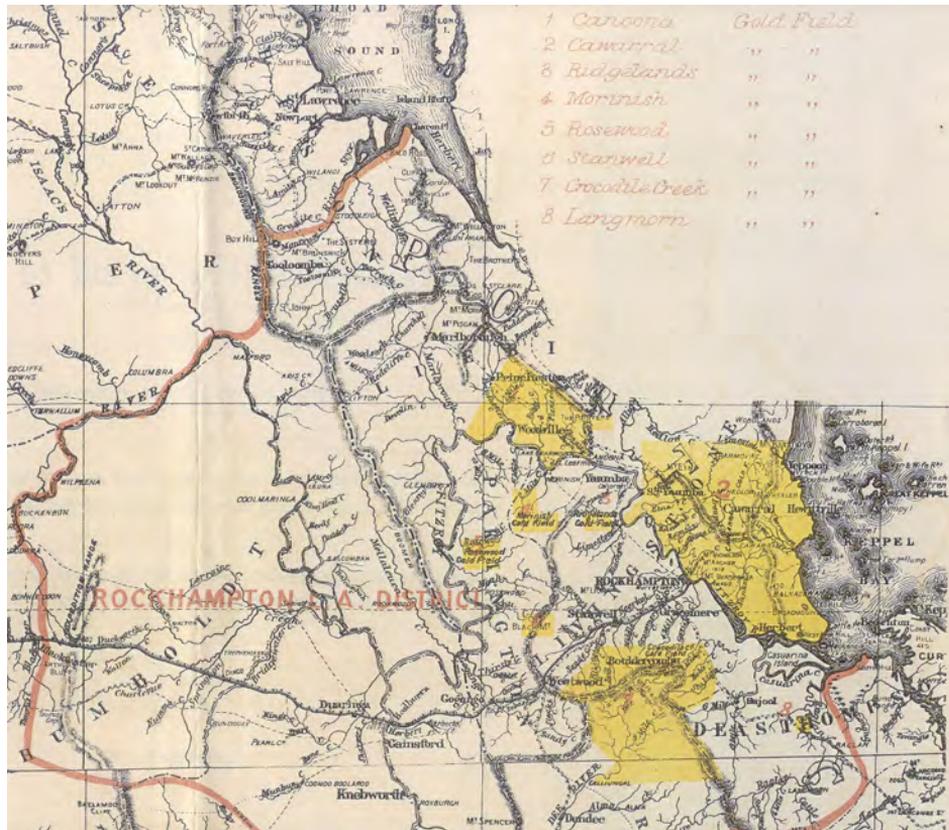
6 QSA, JUS/N36, inquest 64a of 1873; QSA, COL/A407, letter 8140 of 1884; *Queensland Police Gazette*, 1872: 108; *Queensland Parliamentary Votes and Proceedings*, 1884: 243, 269, 691–695.

3. Mount Wheeler

There are several problems in identifying massacre sites, besides official denial. Sometimes it is difficult to know where the killings occurred because the connections between a place and frontier violence are hidden, or obtuse. Some places throughout Queensland are named, apparently not after specific colonial events, but after individual pioneers with important connections to the local area. Yet, sometimes, in the case of 'settler' names, the individual involved is difficult to determine. One such example, the subject of this paper, is the naming of Mount Wheeler, a steep-sided volcanic plug located between Rockhampton and the coastal towns of Emu Park and Yeppoon in Central Queensland. Other similar peaks, including Mount Jim Crow and Pine Mountain, dot the surrounding flat landscape.

According to local historians, Mount Wheeler was first named 'Mount Cock's Comb' by Captain Cook in 1770 (Anonymous 1991: ix). The maritime inlet 'Broadsound' was one of Cook's names, as was the nearby Keppel Islands. However, Cook's *Endeavour* journal does not corroborate the peak's naming and nor do any other sources. The same writers claimed the mountain was allegedly renamed as 'Mount Wheeler' after 'an Inspector of Native Police who caught up with runaway Aborigines in the mountain foothills'. Who was this individual, and why should the use of his name for a landmark be significant? More importantly, what happened when Inspector Wheeler of the Native Police caught up with these 'runaway Aborigines'?

Frederick Wheeler, of Native Police fame, was a notorious character and more has been written about him than any other officer in the Native Police force. He has been described as 'cruel and merciless', 'the most callous and brutal officer', and called a 'sadist' (Rosser 1990: 93; MacMaster 1999: 68; Reid 2001: 7–8). His police staff file has not survived, but we can reconstruct his career through reports in the archives. There is no doubt, from this correspondence, that Wheeler was personally involved in the killing of Aboriginal people in southern and central Queensland, and probably also in parts of northern New South Wales.



Map 1: Rockhampton district goldfields, showing Mt Wheeler between Cawarral and Yeppoon.

Source: Queensland Parliamentary Votes & Proceedings.

First appointed to the Native Police force in 1857 at the age of 27, Frederick Wheeler led a detachment known to have killed Aboriginal people near Brisbane during the early 1860s. Senior colonial officials exonerated Wheeler as a 'valuable and zealous officer', despite clear evidence of his part in the massacres, and promoted him.⁷

Mistakes about Wheeler's service in the Native Police have been incorporated into popular historical accounts. In 1941, an article, 'The Inspector Disappears', by 'Beachcomber' was published in Brisbane's *Sunday Mail Magazine*. Wheeler, claimed the writer, had 'been committing mass murder for almost twenty years' ('Beachcomber' 1941). According to the unnamed author of this piece, his flight from justice was probably assisted by his connections: 'Wheeler had many influential

⁷ QSA, JUS/N1, inquest 8 of 1860, JUS/N2, inquest 71 of 1860 and JUS/N3, inquest 1 of 1861.

friends, having married into a prominent squatter family'. 'Beachcomber' may have been a pen name for Brisbane journalist and historian Clem Lack, who devoted a chapter to Wheeler (titled 'Killer in Uniform') in his book *The Rifle and the Spear*. Wheeler's 'evil reputation', he said, became a 'byword among the colony's blacks and whites alike' (Lack and Stafford 1965: 124–136).

Recent work is no less blemish-free. For example, Ross Gibson's 2002 work *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* describes Wheeler as 'a ghostly figure in the official records of Queensland', claiming 'there is little written evidence concerning him'. Gibson claims politicians 'worried that knowledge of his actions might spread beyond the frontier' if Wheeler was placed on trial and concludes he 'developed an ambiguous reputation in government circles' (Gibson 2002: 64).

Over the years, Wheeler's fate had been the subject of some speculation. As noted, his career ended at Clermont in 1876 when he was charged with the wilful murder of an Aboriginal prisoner.⁸ Dismissed and released on bail, Wheeler absconded from the colony. Although his movements during the next six years remain a mystery, it is now known he died at Java, probably from disease, during 1882.⁹

4. Genocidal moments

The naming of Mount Wheeler therefore becomes an important marker of colonial genocide if the site is named after a particular individual known to have been connected with sanctioned frontier violence. This name becomes even more inappropriate if the individual being commemorated had successfully avoided trial for violence against Indigenous people. The mountain's naming could be seen, by some, as celebrating the illustrious career of a 'uniformed mass-murderer'.

The confusion over the origins of the name prompted a reader to ask Brisbane's *Courier Mail* whether the mountain was named after a miner, a gold commissioner or a police officer.¹⁰ The newspaper asked several government departments for assistance, but no clear answer to the reader's query was found. My research on the Native Police has led to a greater knowledge and understanding about this force in Queensland history, and I was asked, specifically, does the name 'Mount Wheeler' commemorate a frontier police officer, a massacre, or something quite benign, such as an unsuccessful mining rush?

8 QSA, Supreme Court records, SCT/CG7/372.

9 Wheeler descendants, pers. comm.'

10 'Know your district', *Courier Mail*, 29 October 2005: 36.

The question of Mount Wheeler's name raises some important issues because placenames vividly recalling frontier violence continue to re-impose pain and suffering on Indigenous people. Furthermore, if the site is connected with frontier killing, the violence, or 'lawful force', used by the Native Police force, and the force's place in the history of Queensland, becomes an important part of this investigation. Other questions soon emerge. How have local historians and writers spoken about this violence, and which versions of local history have they transmitted? How did different versions emerge?

'The Leap' is not the only place connected with the killing of First Australians by forcing them over precipices. Another story about Wheeler forcing Aboriginal people to jump from a cliff survives west of Rockhampton, not far from Mount Wheeler. According to local historian Marie Reid, the local settlers 'decided to organise all the force obtainable in the neighbourhood and declare war on the Aborigines' after resistance increased during the mid-1860s.¹¹ Inspector Wheeler and his Native Police, she says, 'headed the white force, which numbered almost one hundred'. At dawn, the vigilantes attacked a camp. The Aboriginal people retreated, but 'the Native Police led the pursuit and mercilessly cut down men, women and children'. Many 'jumped into the lake at the base of the cliff'. Reid notes 'no confirmation' of this event has been found in records she searched but 'the oral tradition was strong enough to carry the story on to the end of the twentieth century'. According to Reid, a large number, possibly 300, were killed that day and 'the bones of the dead were still visible for at least thirty years'. Archival records of this event have not been found to date.

5. Frontier violence and Wheeler's career in Central Queensland

Comparing the recorded history of the mountain with the known details of Frederick Wheeler's police career is one way to investigate whether the mountain was actually named after him. He was stationed in Central Queensland twice. The first time, briefly in 1858, as a junior officer at 'The Fitzroy' (as Rockhampton was known in early years); and a second time when he returned to the area in 1866, taking charge of the Native Police operations in the Broadsound district, between St Lawrence and Marlborough.

There are graphic records of frontier violence in the district. Graziers had apparently been killing Aboriginal people in this area in retaliation for cattle spearing. An 1867 inspection report noted: 'The Blacks in the Broadsound district are still very troublesome on the cattle stations. They are continually

¹¹ Reid 2001: 7 quoting *Rockhampton Bulletin*, 2 August 1899.

killing cattle and rushing large mobs from one run to another'.¹² One Broadsound station diary entry includes a chilling entry: 'Blacks been amongst the cattle – head for head', meaning one Aboriginal person had been shot for every head of cattle killed (McDonald 1988: 89).

Between 1866 and 1875, Frederick Wheeler's troopers patrolled from barracks at Marlborough, Stoodleigh and Waverley, all in the Broadsound area, north of Mount Wheeler. His 'district', centred on 'Barracks Creek' near Marlborough, covered all of Central Queensland, from the sea coast inland to the Mackenzie River.

Wheeler 'quietened' the 'Blacks' of his patrol district quickly and efficiently. In 1870, he was still stationed at Stoodleigh.¹³ Records give us some idea of his tactics, and an insight into his personality. In January 1871, the *Rockhampton Bulletin* published a letter from 'A Lover of Justice', stating 'The blacks only stayed in Rockhampton to save their lives' because they were 'hunted back' by the Native Police if they went 50 miles from town. 'A Lover of Justice' claimed that 'an officer of the Native Police had recently boasted that he could shoot as many as he liked without interference'.¹⁴ This was most likely Frederick Wheeler. According to one writer, his name 'inspired the aborigines with such a wholesome dread, that it was only necessary, when on any of their marauding expeditions, to say "Wheeler's coming" or "Here's Wheeler" and they would go yelling pell-mell into the bush'.¹⁵

There were further complaints from settlers about Wheeler's conduct towards Aboriginal people. In 1872, he was mildly 'censured' by the Commissioner of Police after an incident near Yaamba, north of Rockhampton, in which an Aboriginal prisoner allegedly 'threw himself from a horse, heavily chained and handcuffed as he was, into the river, with the intention of swimming to the other side and escaping'. 'Then', Wheeler wrote, 'after a few ineffectual struggles, he sank and was drowned'.¹⁶

In March 1876, while based at Mistake Creek near Clermont (inland from St Lawrence) he was reported to have whipped a young Aboriginal man to death. An inquest was held and credible European witnesses, including other police, gave evidence against him.¹⁷ Charged with murder, he was committed for trial and dismissed from the Native Police in April. After a brief period in Rockhampton Gaol, two prominent graziers offered to provide him with sureties. Bail was granted in May by one of the colony's senior legal officers, Justice Lutwyche

12 Chief Inspector George Murray to the Commissioner of Police, 10 August 1867, QSA, A/36335, letter 123 of 1867.

13 *Queensland Blue Book*, 1870: 14–18.

14 *Rockhampton Bulletin*, 17 January 1871.

15 *The Queenslander*, 13 February 1875.

16 Wheeler to Colonial Secretary, 18 October 1872, QSA, COL/A170, number 1484 of 1872.

17 QSA, SCT/CG7/372.

of the Supreme Court, and approved by the colony's Attorney General, Samuel Griffith. The trial began at Rockhampton in October 1876, but Wheeler failed to appear, having absconded while on bail.¹⁸ The Secretary of State for the Colonies wrote from London to the Queensland Governor, stating 'I very much regret that Wheeler should have escaped trial'.¹⁹

No warrant was ever issued for Wheeler's arrest, and two years later the Supreme Court was advised that no further charges would be laid against him.²⁰ Although Frederick Wheeler was technically free to return to Queensland, there is no evidence about his movements during the years between 1876 and 1882. All that is known is that he died at Java, probably from disease, in 1882 (Richards 2008a).

For many years, historical accounts of frontier violence in Queensland were more heavily influenced by hearsay and rumours than by rigorous research. Colourful and highly selective versions survived. For example, J.T.S. Bird's *The Early History of Rockhampton* published in 1904 has become an important reference source for family, local and regional history in Central Queensland.

Although some violent events are described, Bird does not mention a massacre at Mount Wheeler, or the well-documented killing of Aboriginal people at nearby Morinish in 1867 (Bird 1904: 102–103). Apart from a few isolated studies, the subject of frontier violence in Central Queensland has not been closely examined.

6. The naming of Mount Wheeler

According to a brief history of the goldfield published in the 'Annual Report of the Department of Mines for 1887', gold was found 'in the hollows of the spurs' of Mount Wheeler during 1868. 'It was here that one of the largest nuggets ever found in Queensland was discovered'. At first, the lode was rich but the ore soon 'petered out'.²¹ The mountain became a popular lookout spot during the early twentieth century (Photograph 1921). As is often the case, sometimes an outsider can learn more about a district's myths than a local. Museum collector George Wilkins visited the Rockhampton district during the 1920s, writing afterwards about 'the sinister story in connection with the mountain and the man who named it' (Wilkins 1928: 111). According to Wilkins, the story of Mount Wheeler, 'as told to me', was 'probably an exaggeration':

18 QSA, CCT7/N32 and CCT7/N37; Alfred Davidson to Aborigines Protection Society, 9 October 1876, AJCP, M/2427.

19 QSA, GOV/11A, Despatch 310 of 1876.

20 QSA, CCT7/N34.

21 *Queensland Parliamentary Votes & Proceedings*, 1888.

Years ago, a sergeant of the police, enthusiastic in his duty of quelling aboriginal disturbances, developed a blood lust and sought to carry on a wholesale slaughter in support of the theory that no matter how a good a black fellow may be, he is better dead. (Wilkins 1928: 112)

Saying 'two or three hundred' were supposed to have driven up the mountain side and over the sides, 'to be dashed to pieces on the rocks below', Wilkins dryly noted 'it is curious to notice that a hundred or so does not seem to matter in the estimate of number of victims in a tragedy'.

The steep cliffs and overhanging ledges were, he said, 'ominous from below and treacherous in approach from the top'. Wilkins further states that casual visitors might find 'apparently corroborative evidence' of the massacre story in what looked like a row of headstones 'standing upright on the border of a smooth, grass-covered mound at the foot of the cliff'.

An active imagination might construct a scene where some black tracker or other sympathetic soul had crept to the scene of the slaughter to bury the dead and erect a rough headstone to their memory, but I am afraid that in the early days there was little sympathy with the natives, and that examples of Christian ethics in relation to them were rare. (Wilkins 1928: 112)

Rejecting the story of frontier killings, he said the 'headstones' were 'probably the side-posts on the claim of some itinerant prospector for gold' (Wilkins 1928: 112).

Was Wilkins' assessment of Mount Wheeler's naming correct? Although there is no evidence linking Frederick Wheeler with a cliff-top massacre of Aboriginal people in Central Queensland, one of his brother officers is connected with what may have been a very similar event. The path to this individual's record lies through an investigation of the other main candidate for Mount Wheeler's naming, frontier public servant John George Wheeler. According to the author of a 1950 article in the *Rockhampton Bulletin*, Mount Wheeler was really named after John Wheeler, Gold Commissioner at Peak Downs, and not Frederick.²²

The coach road from Rockhampton to Peak Downs passed through Marlborough and Apis Creek north of the Fitzroy River, and John Wheeler probably travelled along the road many times. First appointed as the Clerk of Petty Sessions at Peak Downs in 1862, he was also appointed Sub Commissioner of Goldfields in 1863 and Sub-Inspector of Police in 1864.²³ John Wheeler visited many parts of the district in the course of his work. He probably climbed the mountain, and

22 Central Queensland Cutting Book, John Oxley Library, OM 91-58/2.

23 *Queensland Government Gazette*, 1862: 749; 1863: 829; 1864: 571.

the earliest reference found thus far to the mountain's name comes from this time ('The Gold Discovery near Rockhampton', *The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*, 3 October 1863: 4).

In 1864, John Wheeler was appointed as Clerk of Petty Sessions at Princhester, north of Rockhampton.²⁴ He swapped his position at Peak Downs with William Cave, a former-Native Police officer, at Princhester.²⁵ Significantly, Cave was one of the officers in command of official reprisals after the killing of Horatio Wills' party of 19 Europeans at Cullin-la-Ringo station on the Nogoia River in October 1861. 'About thirty of the tribe of murderers are said to have fallen in the deadly struggle which ensued when the eleven English avengers stormed their camp'.²⁶ Letters between members of the Wills family mentioned reprisals: in November, Mrs Wills wrote to her sons about their father's death, saying 'Tom and the settlers around have well avenged his death before now'.²⁷

Several Native Police detachments quickly converged on the district. One newspaper report claimed the troopers only stopped killing when they exhausted their ammunition.²⁸ According to official despatches from the Queensland Governor, Lieutenant William Cave and his troopers killed a number of Aboriginal people before the rest retreated to the top of a high hill. Towards sundown, the Native Police surprised them: 'Their loss was heavy and I consider that many were killed from falling over the cliffs'.²⁹ After two year's service in the Native Police, Cave left the Native Police and became the Clerk of Petty Sessions at Princhester in 1863, but was transferred to Peak Downs one year later.³⁰ It is possible that William Cave's exploits become confused in local memories with the careers of both Frederick and John Wheeler, which may explain the three versions of the peak's naming.

The archival evidence found thus far suggests that the mountain was most probably named after Gold Commissioner John Wheeler rather than after Police Inspector Frederick Wheeler. Since the Mount Wheeler gold rush took place in 1868, it would appear, therefore, that the mountain was named during the 1860s. Frederick Wheeler spent little time north of the Fitzroy River before 1866, so it is unlikely that the action of naming would have gone unrecorded

24 *Queensland Government Gazette*, 1864: 471.

25 *Queensland Government Gazette*, 1865: 1.

26 QSA, Governor's Despatches, GOV/23, number 74 of 1861.

27 Wills Manuscript, Central Queensland University, B9/1736.

28 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 December 1861.

29 QSA, Governor's Despatches, GOV/23, number 74 of 1861.

30 QSA, COL/A38, letter 506 of 1863; COL/A58, letters 2317 & 2443 of 1864.

by Bird and other local writers. On the other hand, John Wheeler worked in the area during the early 1860s and, as Gold Commissioner, inspected all newly found mining fields. His death in 1867 may have inspired the name.³¹

7. Conclusion

Placenames commemorating frontier times abound in settler-societies. Some are named after violent events that settlers would like to forget, but Indigenous people do not dismiss the past so easily. Furthermore, frontier violence is sometimes reiterated by the continuing use of 'racial' placenames. While some overtly contentious names have been dropped in recent years, others persist. Places and placenames known to be connected with frontier violence are, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, confronting and distressing. If the truth about racial killings in frontier Queensland is acknowledged, their sacrifice for 'country' could be publicly commemorated rather than denied.

Although there is evidence in the records proving that the Native Police on at least one occasion forced Aboriginal people over a cliff, there is no account connecting this site with such an event. In addition, although there is adequate proof that Frederick Wheeler and troopers under his control killed Aboriginal men, women and children on a number of different occasions, there are no records to support the claim that he forced them to jump from cliffs. It would appear, on balance, that Mount Wheeler in Central Queensland is named after Gold Commissioner John George Wheeler. Renaming the mountain 'Mount John Wheeler' or 'Mount J.G. Wheeler' would prevent confusion. Massacres did happen at other places, but not here. How many more sites need similar investigation?

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³¹ Queensland Births, Deaths & Marriages; QSA, COL/Q4, letter 607 of 1867; *Queensland Government Gazette*, 1866: 39.

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