

## *On Track: Searching out the Bundian Way*

by John Blay

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The subject of this book is the geography and history of the south-eastern corner of New South Wales. It takes the form of an account of a bushwalking trip undertaken by the author from Mt Kosciuszko to Twofold Bay. It combines travelogue, observations on the natural environment and evidence of Aboriginal use of the land, discussion of what travel routes were used traditionally by Aboriginal people and, following them, by early pastoralists, as well as the reporting of earlier accounts of travel and study in the area.

The areas described in the most detail along the route travelled are Mt Kosciuszko, the Pilot Wilderness, the lower Snowy River around the New South Wales–Victoria border, the Byadbo Wilderness, Tingaringy, Delegate, Nungatta, and Twofold Bay. Much of this area is now included in the Kosciuszko National Park and the South East Forests National Park.

The main problem that is posed is the location of the ‘Bundian Pass’, described by W. B. Clarke in 1860 and reputed to have been the easiest route between the Monaro tablelands and the coast. After many pages of speculation and accounts of the author’s false leads, the reader is finally provided with a definitive answer.

The author has been guided in his search by discussions with members of the Aboriginal community of the Eden region, especially B. J. Cruse, as well as oral interviews with local long-time landholders. For written sources he has obviously used compilations such as Young (2005) and Andrews (1998). (Other secondary sources that might have been drawn on for the Alpine area are

Mitchell (1985) and Andrews (1991).) But he has also carefully studied a number of more out-of-the-mainstream sources, both published and archival, that have a bearing on the Aboriginal past and/or physical aspects of the region. These include the ethnographers A. W. Howitt and R. H. Mathews; surveyors Stewart Ryrie, Francis McCabe, and T. S. Townsend; the geologist W. B. Clarke; the land commissioner John Lambie; the Aboriginal protector G. A. Robinson; Ben Boyd's manager Oswald Brierley; and the early landholder Alexander Weatherhead.

Formally, this book is an attractive 328-page paperback. The text is divided into three parts – 'The higher country', 'The Monaro', and 'The coast' – preceded by an introduction and followed by an afterword and postscript. Illustrations include four maps – one of the general area and one at the beginning of each part – and 16 coloured photographs. The book is completed by endnotes, notes on terminology (including placenames), a bibliography, and an index. The maps provide the main landmarks – towns, roads, rivers, mountain peaks and ranges – as well as indicating the Bundian way and the author's walking route, including side trips. This reader, however, would have appreciated more detailed maps to support the text in several places.

One persistent theme is the search for Aboriginal landscapes and evidence for Aboriginal use of the land: 'I'm looking at how the country used to be before European settlement, and how it came to be the way it is today' (p. 19). Attention is given to placenames, both traditional Aboriginal names (and their variable spellings) and those introduced by settlers, and the way the traditional landscape was over-written by European occupation patterns and naming practices.

One chapter that may especially interest students of Aboriginal history is the one entitled 'Shifting "tribes"'. The relevant language groups are the Ngarigo on the Monaro, the Thawa in the Twofold Bay region, and the Bidawal in the NSW–Victoria border region between the other two and in Eastern Gippsland. Blay takes issue with Howitt's influential claim that the Bidawal (Howitt's Bidwelli) represented not a separate group but a motley collection of refugees from various tribes. The most comprehensive discussion of the Bidawal is now Clark (2011).

As for the group that G. A. Robinson refers to as Pundeang mittong, at Cathcart, and apparently also at Liscombe's Bondi station a bit further south, Blay infers that they are a subset of the Thawa-speaking group centred on Twofold Bay. Another possibility, which I have proposed earlier (Koch 2011: 133), is that they were a subdivision of the Ngarigu-speaking Monaro group; this is implied by Robinson's referring to various Pundeang people as being from the Monaro. Clark (2011) has a different solution: he suggests that the Cathcart-based Pundeang mittong were a separate group from the Bondi mittong (Bondi Blacks,

term from Howitt's papers) and that while the former were Ngarigo, the latter were Bidawal. This could perhaps be supported by the statement quoted from R. H. Mathews that Bidawal territory extended to the headwaters of the Bondi and Nungatta creeks.

Blay in the postscript (written in April 2015) reports on recent developments following from his researches. In January 2013, the Bundian Way was entered on the NSW Heritage List. A Bundian Way Aboriginal Art Gallery has been operating in Delegate since 2012. A modern, 380-kilometre walking track is being developed by the combined resources of the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council, government and volunteers. The project's website is [www.bundianway.com.au](http://www.bundianway.com.au). The Aboriginal community, we're told, has hopes to use the way as a means of fostering cultural learning and healing in connection with the land. In summary, Blay states (p. 294): 'The Bundian Way has come to be an innovative tourism, cultural and shared history project that promises international attention and benefits for the wider region'.

This very interesting book brings together a huge amount of knowledge about a little-known area of the country. As such it deserves a wide audience.

## References

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