

THE LOCALS PART TWO - NGUNAWAL – THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS

It is only in the latter part of the twentieth century that many of the people living in the ACT have become aware that Canberra is Ngunawal country. Many of the early stories told in family histories about the local Aboriginal people have not used the clan name, but have named the groups after the areas in which they have been seen to congregate for purposes such as ceremonies, corroborees and the occasional fight. Karen Williams and Rebecca Lamb are two local historians who have and are researching Ngunawal history and culture. Both have worked with Ngunawal elders, Don and Ruth Bell as well as archival and other documents relating to Ngunawal culture. I have quoted with their permission from both published and unpublished research.

Rebecca Lamb in her research came across an early description of a corroboree at Tuggeranong. She commented - *William Edward Riley, source ML MS A109, mfm CY 738, 1817-1856 page 61 ... it [reference to the Corroboree] was found by me in my research for the biography of Thomas Macquoid. The Corroboree manuscript was submitted for publication in the 'New Monthly Magazine', London, then news was received by Riley in January 1828 that it had been rejected. This suggests that the rejection note could have been mailed back from London to Riley in NSW taking about 3 months, taking into account its long voyage to England in the first place (another 3 months?) so that takes the date of the corroboree back to at least mid 1827 making it the earliest known account of a gathering of its kind in our district... Contact had already occurred (in our district? [Tuggeranong]) because one of the women was wearing a man's shirt and of course the dreadful rum is mentioned...*

The following account of an Aboriginal corobberie is included because of its historical significance to the communities of the Canberra region. It was witnessed by the author of the article William Edward Riley at Tuggeranong, Isabella Plains, not far from the huts at Waniassa and the extant stone axe-grinding grooves on a nearby hillside.¹ Riley submitted it for publication in the New Monthly Magazine but it was rejected in January 1828 suggesting that Riley would have witnessed the corobberie in 1827 or earlier. The account is valuable for its detailed insight into Aboriginal cultural heritage at the time of European contact. Riley, born in 1807, at Sydney, was a son of merchant Alexander Riley who owned properties, Raby near Sydney and later Cavan, near Yass. In 1833 W.E. Riley married Honoria Rose Brooks, daughter of Cpt. Richard Brooks whose family was associated with the properties of Turalla and Ashby near Bungendore NSW. Turalla is still in the Brooks's family hands.² Riley's firm undertook a contract to build the Sydney Hospital on condition of Government permitting them the free importation of a quantity

¹ W.E. Riley ML MSS A 109, mfm CY 738, Documents 1817-1856, 61.

² Information courtesy of Christine Maher 8/11/2005.

of rum, hence the term 'The Rum Hospital' by which it is sometimes described. W.E. Riley died in 1836 in a riding accident. In 1854 his daughter Christiana Sarah Riley married William Essington King whose family owned Gidleigh near Bungendore.

'Corobberie at Tuggranon Isabella Plains' (article dated 5 November 1831)

'A Corobberie or a Dance of a Tribe of Natives in the Southern Interior of New South Wales, from the journal of an Anglo-Australian on his return to the Territory of his birth in 1830.

The Namitch tribe of natives was assembled here, forming rude huts of boughs of trees and bark open on the north-east side and arranged in the form of a crescent; they had made these "gunyahs", as they term them, more substantially than any I had yet seen—only erecting them when in expectation of a continuance of cold and rainy weather, and generally close to some cattle or sheep station where they remain nearly all the winter assisting the stockman in grinding and eating his wheat or maize, and living principally on the skim milk and bran which they beg; men, women, children, and dogs/ of which latter they generally have a number/ drinking indiscriminately out of the same trough;- The men of this tribe were mostly tall and well made, the women graceful and good looking/ by comparison/ and either much cleaner or of a lighter colour than usual, being somewhat darker than a bright copper colour; they were clothed in large Opossum Skin cloaks loosely fastened with careless elegance around the neck exposing the left arm and shoulder and descending to the knee which with the foot, ankle, arm, wrist and hand are of exquisite workmanship and might rival those of their fairer sisters in Europe,-

Their eyes have not less of brilliancy or vivacity, neither are they less tender to their offspring or less faithful and obedient to their husbands, and to their aged parents their affection and care is not to be surpassed.- Their language is far from inharmonious the number of liquids and vowels giving it an air of peculiar softness.

They at my request good humorously prepared to exhibit the native dance or "Corobberie":- adorning themselves with narrow streaks of white clay across the chest, down the front of their legs and arms, and in circles around their eyes:- Unbinding their long black hair and spreading it out, they first smeared it with fat and then plentifully besprinkled it with the snow white down of some water fowl, which the "gins" /or women/ generally carry about with them in small nets together with other ball materials.- Rouge they have not, but nature has supplied them with a valuable substitute in red ochre, and with this they impart a warmth of expression to the manly foreheads and war-like faces of the men and heighten the colour of their own soft cheeks,- thus arrayed they kindle a large fire on a grassy rise at a short distance from their huts.- The

females as is usual in all their domestic operations and arrangements, taking the most active part;- in a few moments the fire was blazing and several large heaps of dry wood well collected and sufficient to enlighten the scene for the remainder of the ceremony for it was dark. The effect of the white stripes on their bodies was now singular in the extreme and as their elegant figures moved around the fire the warm and war-like tint of their ochred cheeks became still more expressive and without the civilized aid of wine or spirits they seemed wound up to a pitch of excitement and merriment that I could scarcely have credited, and I could not but compare these happy "savages" with their less happy brethren cursed with the necessity of mixing more frequently with the Christians "white fellow" in the vicinity of the towns- poor emaciated half-civilized creatures! Those no longer found pleasure in the pleasures of their fathers! These were only now to be excited or made merry by that worst of all liquid fires- The Work of Rum! But I turn with disgust from the contemplation of the miseries the civilized white fellow had entailed on the savage "black fellow", to the enjoyment of the romantic scene before me. The women were, now, dear creatures, squatting together, with the pickaninnies to the left and in front of the fire, each happily curling a cloud of smoke from a pipe scarcely two inches in length and of a greasy darkened hue, harmonising admirably with the complexion of their own skins,- To the right, and somewhat in advance of the fire, were sitting cross-legged four venerable looking old men with long gray beards, and two of the fair sex³ [see footnote below] on either side of the men, equally antique, one of these women I most notice was simply clad in a shirt that some white fellow had given her, the effect to say the least was peculiar and I could not but feel that there was indeed some truth in the words, " beauty unadorned adorns the most". The aged eight were each furnished with a "waddie" (a kind of club) in the left hand, and a short hard pin of polished wood about the size and shape of a common round ruler in the right, these were the musicians or "fiddlers" as they termed themselves (not however being able to pronounce the letter "f" they substituted a "p")⁴ [see footnote below], and as they sang the various airs of their tribe possessing much genuine melody they were joined by the group of fair ones on the left;- occasionally raising and lowering the voice an octave and altering the time and air as the dance changed, they accompanied themselves by striking with the small stick on the "waddie" or "fiddle" unlike our fiddle it has but two notes and is without a string,- these notes are produced by blows on the upper and thicker end of the waddie and on the lower part,

³ I must here be permitted to except their countenance from claim to any portion of their character- for most and ---- in these higher casts of my sable Antipodean brethren can "give humbly? of a ghostly smile" having as has been said by a describer of their beauties "a remarkable open countenance" i.e. a mouth from ear to ear.

⁴ For instance instead of a "fence" they say a "pence" and if desirous of a "fig" they would ask for a "pig."

administered with more or less energy as the nature of the air or ardour of the dance may require.

To return to the men or dancers who had supplied themselves with small green boughs which they bore in either hand, some were leaping in the air with ecstatic shouts for the purpose I imagine of suppling their limbs preparatory to the dance some extending their hands or raising theirs in the air and placing themselves in extravagant attitudes were sounding the soft reiterations, “wah wah! – allah! wha allah, allah – wha! – gha – ghoo! – ghoo! – gha – ghoo! ah – allah, allah! wha wha.”

While others extending their long muscular legs and bending forwards, surveyed themselves with much apparent satisfaction, appealing to me with a happy mixture of vanity and good humour whether they were not “Budgerry fellows” (handsome fellows). All now arranged themselves to the number of 23 in a small circle, crossing their arms and leaning forward they gave three deep and loud intonations of the voice, remaining silent a few moments between each, the effect was striking and the tone so deep and hollow that I almost fancied the earth they were bending over received and returned the sound, and as it died away on the ear the senses were sleeping with astonishment and only awakened to be again surprised by this supernatural tone! The ball was then opened by an interesting girl, of perhaps eighteen, and modestly attired as she came into the world, she advanced a few yards in front of the fire, led this song and dance by throwing herself in elegant and fantastic positions; this she repeated at the commencement of each set of “quadrilles” or “Corobberies” and occasionally during their intermissions while the men ranged in two lines with the Chief, a fine tall young fellow about a yard in advance, having a spear in one hand and a tomahawk in the other, all moving slowly from side to side with their legs and arms extended keeping time with the song then following each other round a circle imitating the odd gait of the emu or the still more singular hop of the kangaroo; the Chief most extravagant in his attitudes and gestures would at times appear to be encouraging them to battle throwing his arms out aloft and flourishing his slender spear leaping at the same time sideways, with one leg extended, from one side the dance to the other, as if in defiance of the supposed enemy,- exhibiting an extraordinary combination of personal grace, strength and agility scarcely to be equalled; as the dance continued the music became louder and quicker and the “lights fantastic too” became more light and more fantastic; till at length they seemed worked into a kind of phrenzy all joining with much musical taste in the song and then in an instant they had stopped, and the music ceased. Lasting about five minutes and taking such refreshment as a neighbouring run of water afforded with a few whiffs of the soothing weed from the pipes of their “gins”, they commenced the next

“Corobberie” in imitation of a fight, each was armed with a fire brand with which they appeared to cudgel each other in admirable style while dancing to the war song.

Altho’ the many excellent hints might be taken from these dancing savages, yet I cannot but have my doubts whether this kind of dance will ever be introduced within more civilized assemblies of the “white fellow” however these “black fellows” being perfectly naked, I found there was not the slightest chance of their setting fire to each other during these heating evolutions. The interest of the scene is really far beyond my powers of description, the dance was continued with many variations for three or four hours; one of the corobberies was in imitation of the “white fellow” milking his cows, churning and making up pats of butter, really the most ludicrous comic exhibition. I was witness of so much of genuine humour and caricature with all whole; indeed they are excellent mimics portraying the idea itself I thought was not bad in savages who have been described as “the lowest and most degraded in the scale of humanity”!

The amusements of the evening concluded with what appeared to me to be the most singular part of this “Corobberie” the Chief taking a large handful of the prepared bark of the Curryjong tree (having the appearance of course yarn), and retiring with an air of mystery, to a distance spread it out, once after placing a small live coal on it rolled it up in the shape and size of a melon, this he held in both hands leaping forward a little he placed it to his mouth and returning in haste he was immediately surrounded by the dancers, linking their arms together in as confined a circle as possible, they danced around him while singing, the Chief remaining in the centre at times bending down and turning around to the time to the song appeared to be blowing on the ball of “curryjong” then suddenly shouting he would raise it rapidly in the air over his head until a quantity of smoke escaped from it and the song became more boisterous and the dance more vehement- dancing and turning with increased rapidity- in the circle he whirled the smoke in the faces of the dancers, occasionally taking care that he had his own due share of their peculiar enjoyment by whisking it to and fro’ near his face- presently the whole party of dancers appeared in a state of intoxication continuing the quickened time of the song and the dance, and their ecstasy was at its highest pitch when the Curryjong blazed forth and was thrown in the air by the Chief followed with a deafening shout from the whole tribe- The whole of this latter part of the dance if I may so term it, appeared to impress the party with and intensity of interest bordering on superstitious awe; what may be the meaning of it I could not learn; but this I know that the fumes of the bark appeared to have the effect of intoxicating them; this effect however had evanesced in a few moments and the Chief with an air of confident superiority then advanced to us and

enquired in his way, half English and half in his own Mother tongue, “whether we were not highly delighted with the budgerry corobborie?”

It was late so we retired from this very amusing party, leaving the happy creatures still more happy by presenting each with a small piece of tobacco!’

‘London, 16 Dec. 1831’

‘Wm. E.R.’

Rebecca Lamb also commented that William Edward Riley was probably a guest of his friend Thomas Macquoid who was at the time unofficially occupying John McLaren’s Janevale (Tuggeranong) and goes on to mention that Macquoid purchased McLaren’s and Murdoch’s adjoining land grants renaming the estate – Waniassa. Macquoid’s Wanissa became the Tuggeranong Homestead after 1858. During her research Rebecca found that the name – Waniassa – given to the property is the name of a village in the former British Preanger Region of Java and not an Aboriginal word.

Josephine Flood in her work, *Moth Hunters of the Australian Capital Territory* also refers to Corroborees and Music. She states: *The area now occupied by the Australian National University in Canberra at the foot of Black Mountain close to Sullivan’s Creek was the scene of large gatherings and corroborees. Local traditions (recorded by WP Bluett) tell how the night sky would be lit up with the cooking fires of a hundred or more mia mias... [refers then to dancing and the music that included skins stretched over women’s crossed legs and beaten like drums and continues} Similar skin drums were used in the Monaro in the 1830s and 1840s according to GH Dawson who witnessed the women sitting on their haunches with ‘drums made out of a piece of skin or hide stitched tight across a piece of bark curled before the fire and and sticks put inside it to keep it from closing right up... they would beat with their yam sticks or nulla nullas and chant a native tune...some played the reeds with the fingers and played them very well, their tunes being mainly of the plaintive kind...*

Following is an excerpt from Karen William’s unpublished research for her Phd thesis (2008) – it refers to the confusion of names used for the local Ngunawal.

Tribe tribal

I use the term ‘tribal’ hesitantly. Here I mean neighbouring tribes in the sense as in Ngunawal, Ngarigo, and other tribes from outside Ngunawal country that visited the region. On the other hand, I am also aware of the liberal use of the word ‘tribe’ by early colonial settlers to mean different family groups or clans that may have been part of the Ngunawal peoples. These groups or clans seemed to move separately about Ngunawal lands but came together from time to time for various reasons. For example, Bluett (1954: page) refers to three groups that appear to have co-existed in Ngunawal country as Tindale describes its parameters. The three groups seem to coincide with three of the geographical meeting places I have described – the Yass, Lake George, Canberra/Queanbeyan regions. These groups appear to have based themselves in the

various localities but came together for common interests. In Bluett's example, the Yass and Lake George groups combined to attack the Canberra group that he calls the Canberry. After hostilities were sorted, the three groups returned to harmonious relations with no bitterness shown afterwards. It should be noted that Bluett (1954:1) reflects on his recollections of the various groups in relation to their proximity to Canberra and its city limits. Hence he places the Canberra-Pialligo group as central to his area of interest. The names that Bluett applies to the different family groups within the Canberra-Pialligo 'tribe' were applied by early European settlers of the region reflecting the geographical location of their camps. He qualifies this point by saying that the various groups were constantly on the move hunting food but came together for corroborees. The larger of these corroborees were held at Canbury Creek (now Sullivan's Creek) at the base of Black Mountain.

Names

I am aware that the present day names of landscape features is a contentious issue concerning reconciling colonial displacement of Aboriginal Australian people and recognition of their ongoing cultural connection to the land. However, for the purpose of locating the reader in the current landscape I have used current names in everyday use. There is currently work being done by Ann Jackson-Nakano for the ACT Government to find evidence confirming appropriate Aboriginal Australian language place names for the ACT region. (see Ngambri Ancestral Names) However, such a project is a very difficult one with discrepancy in the meaning of even the early colonial names of features and locations. To then try to link the appropriate Aboriginal Australian language and nomenclature to those places is fraught with contention. For example, Ann Jackson-Nakano has argued (page 28) that where the Molonglo River flows through the Limestone Plains and today's central Canberra was actually called the Kembery River by local Aboriginal Australians. However this is debatable as there appears to be some confusion as to whether Kembery applies to the Molonglo River or to a tributary creek. Nakano-Jackson refers to evidence in the journal of John Lhotsky of 1834 and Robert Hoddle's survey map of district of 1832 to show that Molonglo River was indeed the Kembery River. The same evidence, on the other hand, is used by Gwendoline Wilson in her book Murray of Yarralumla (page 61) to argue that 'Kembery' was in fact 'Canberry' and did not apply to the Molonglo River. Rather it applied to the tributary creek which she said flowed through one of the Limestone plains between Black Mountain and Mount Ainslie called the Canberry Plain.

Similarly there are many European theories about the name Canberra that is accepted by many authorities to be a derivation or just a different way of pronouncing, Kembery that refers to the plain around the two mountains, Black and Ainslie. Mr Don Bell, Ngunawal elder has produced a dictionary of Ngunawal language and published a children's book in language states that the name means woman's breasts.

From Don Bell I also learnt that the hills of Gura Bung Dhaura (including Capital Hill) are part of the old south pathway between Black Mountain via Red Hill and Mugga Mugga to Tuggeranong.

There are many European references to Black Mountain and the Ngunawal. It was known to the early settlers as Black's Hill because of the large numbers of Ngunawal people camping on the area of Black Mountain Peninsula, was an important male initiation area and ceremonial mountain.

On this hill are many stone arrangements as well as scarred trees. Black Mountain Peninsula was the area where a major battle between the Wiradjuri and Ngunawal people took place. On the plain below the area of Black Mountain Peninsula where the Canberra Race Course was established on Kaye's property of Springbank was the site of a Bora Ground. Don Bell told me a dream time story about the Acton land where the National Museum now stands. He told of a young couple who could not marry who ran away together. The couple were not destined to a happy life together – were caught and died. Several camping grounds around the mountain have been recorded by Europeans and include Black Mountain Peninsula, Coppins Crossing and Hall.

Insight into the Ngunawal connection with country is found in an article on-line⁵ by Karen Williams. An except follows:

The local Aboriginal tribe, the Ngunawal peoples, consists of a number of different clans bounded by the broad language groups of Wiradjuri, Ngrijo (Ngarigo), Gundungurra and Yuin. The Tuggeranong plain of Canberra is at the southern extremity of Ngunawal country. The Canberra region is generally understood to have been a meeting place, suggesting that there was a reliable food and water supply and that the pathways were significant as people moved from place to place through transitional country boundaries. Following river and creek corridors and the ridges and spurs of hills and mountains. Pathways may be the means of access across the region and, in the case of the main ranges visible from the highpoints of the Tuggeranong area, a physical and visual link to major spiritual centres and gathering places in the Snowy Mountains.

For Aboriginal culture there are inextricable links between sacred and secular landscape values. Aboriginal people always did things with a witness, whether it is the spirits of a mountain, the water, the flowers. Therefore, open sites such as the stone artefact scatters around Tuggeranong homestead will be related to other landscape features by story and association with significant rock outcrop yet equally suitable rock is not used in other places. Put into the local context, Ngunawal dreaming refers to people emerging from their origins beneath the rocks.

⁵ <http://www.tuggeranonghomestead.com.au/history.default.htm>

Rebecca Lamb came across a reference about a battle in Lyall Gillespie's collection, Card Index, extract from the *Queanbeyan Age* 21.3.1919. She also commented that the battle didn't take place at Waniassa or Tuggeranong but it does mention Macquoid and Wright who obviously witnessed it. She continued *As it was 'early thirties it could have been witnessed by either Sheriff Macquoid or Hya Macquoid, the latter who had arrived in NSW in 1836.*

Lyall Gillespie's card contains the following information:

"An old-time Tribal Battle, An esteemed correspondent one of the old identities of this district whose knowledge of the district extends to the thirties of the last century [1830s] furnishes us of the following instance of a tribal battle between the Aboriginal tribes on Monaro and this district. In the early thirties of last century [1830s] men of the times when the black tribes engaged in their tribal fights. On one occasion I well remember the King of the Monaro came with his forces to wage war against the Canberra blacks then known as the Pialago tribes. The plains lying between Duntroon and Queanbeyan on the east side of the river not so long back were known as the Pialago Plains. They presented a picturesque sight their almost nude bodies grotesquely marked in blue and white war paint with feathers in their hair each one furnished with spear boomerang and shield. They were lithe and active fellows standing over six feet in height a contrast to the poor creatures that used to hang about the settlements in after years. The blackfellow of those days was a savage in all his glory but if he was any savager that the white man of his day records do not tell us. The opposing forces drew up in fighting attitude but on the open plain Monaro and Pialago braves prepared for a determined contest. The Canberra forces drew a line across the plain and defied the Monaro foe to cross it. Poor simple wildmen of the bush ready enough to engage in a struggle with each other, tribe against tribe, to their own weakening. It never struck them how much better it would have been to combine against the white usurper whose foot was already on their soil and before whose encasing tide ere long they would pass away to be a dark shadow over the face of the sun. There is a tradition that the Canberra blacks were camped on the Gundaroo river in the vicinity of the present village of Sutton when at daybreak the Yass tribe rushed their camp but to their own sorrow for the Canberra warriors were too strong for them and made short work of their discomfiture. But to return to the fight between the Monaro and the Canberra tribes. According to Mr Macquoid of Tuggeranong and Mr Wright of Lanyon it was a grand stand-up affair and lasted throughout the day. Spears were flying and boomerangs whistling through the air amid the whoopings and yells of the combatants and the incessant rattling of their shields. But towards the evening the King of the Monaro's army drew off his forces. Next morning the Monaro-ites marched up in front of the Pialago-ites with a loud shout and with much stamping of their feet on the ground seemingly to frighten the Canberra warriors. But there had been a heavy fall of rain and the ground hung soft and slushy their blue and white paint became presently obliterated with the mud they had stirred up. Their ludicrous state elicited roars of laughter from the Pialago warriors and this seemed to so enrage the Monaro braves that they rushed with blind fury on their grinning foes only to spend their strength in vain-seeing this the King of Monaro hurriedly withdrew his men from the field and began a

long and disastrous retreat while ever on their rear hung like an avenging nemesis the harassing foe. On and on for a full 15 miles past Cuppacumbalong the territory of King Bongong [Hongyong?] eight more miles to Naas another 18 miles up to Booth's Creek (as it is now called but the blacks named Durrandimmey) and so retreated to their own territory defeated and disgraced. In after years there was found the skeleton of a blackfellow in a small cave out that way at a place called Bobeyyong. [Bobeyan?] It was of great stature. The writer was shown a cleft between two rocks out that way where some of the bones of the wounded in that battle who had died were packed. It was somewhere about eight or nine miles up Alummy Creek. In another cave in the same neighbourhood some years later were found a few skeletons and some broken spears.'
Source: *Queanbeyan Age (An Old Battle) 21.3.1919.*

Another description of the Ngunawal people is found in a history of the Goulburn area on the internet. It in part states:

The Ngunawal lived around the Murrumbidgee south of Canberra and along the Molonglo near Queanbeyan and around Lake George...Because these tribes [Gandangara and Ngunawal] came into contact with white settlers from the 1820s onwards much of their language and culture disappeared before anyone alert to their significance could document them. Most of the meager and fragmented information that is available concerns the Ngunawal; very little is known about the art, customs of the Gandangara tribe...The Ngunawal were said to be a very gentle people. Sir Terence Aubrey Murray, and enlightened landowner-magistrate whose influence was felt around Collector from the 1830s was noted for his humane and just treatment of Aborigines. For their part the Ngunawal were helpful to the settlers and peaceful. Violence was rare and when it did occur was invariably the result of Europeans, usually bushrangers and convicts taking and abusing Ngunawal women...

As far as the territory is concerned the official story from around 1927 was that no Aboriginal people lived in the Territory. This statement is not correct – it is that most of the local Aboriginal people in the territory were not noticed. One lady, who lived at Westlake with her husband and family was a Cootamundra girl, came to the territory with her husband in 1913 and remained her for the rest of her long life. Don Bell mentioned to me that when he was an adult if seen in the territory by the police he was taken to the border and told to move on.⁶

Certainly the arrival of settlers in Ngunawal country and the many deaths that resulted from the diseases brought by them and the taking of land has done great damage to the Ngunawal people. However, the Ngunawal culture has survived. Don Bell and other Ngunawal people have kept their connection with country and that is clearly evidenced in Don's story that is quoted in the Introduction. Another published example of concern

⁶ Don later became the first Aboriginal JP in the Yass District.

about country is found in an article published in **Canberra Times Monday 23rd February** (2004 or 5?) quotes from an interview with elder Don Bell in relation to his concerns regarding a proposed dam at Naas :

Elder gives Libs' dam plan thumbs-up. Fears a proposed new dam for the Naas Valley would destroy Aboriginal heritage were dismissed by one of the community's leading indigenous elders yesterday. Don Bell said that traditional custom could cope with the dam. He gave it his blessing and called for a speedy start to construction...Aboriginal custom allowed for significant sites in the dam area to be moved or protected and they would not be an impediment to its going ahead. "Traditional culture has a history of covering cultural secrets and the covering of the Naas River Valley with water is no different." He said the rituals for moving sites were well established and could be used for any found on the dam floor. "For sites having a problem being buried, their dreamings can be re-established only after cleansing of the new dreaming site has been performed. Part of the cleansing ceremony is fire so last year's fires tell us that it's OK to move those sites because mother nature has already cleansed the area for the rebirthing of the new dreaming places."

Don Bell shared with me information about country that included the name of the spiritual place Lake George – Ngungara – flat water and that this lake is the home of a very important spirit – Nadyund Bouruage (pronounced Ngunja Booya). He also told of burials but requested that this information not be spoken about.

A myth that is gradually being dispelled is that evidence of Ngunawal use of the land is only found somewhere out on the outskirts of Canberra in area such as Namadgi National Park. This assumption is wrong. Where ever there has been little disturbance in places such as Stirling Park, Mt Ainslie, Black Mountain, paddocks there are stone arrangements, scarred trees, grinding stones, remains of tool making and evidence of Ngunawal use.



Above: Stone core and chippings (taba) picked up near the caretaker's cottage at Western Creek in May 2008. Terry Horan (deceased) drew a mud map of the nearby area that marked an Aboriginal camping site. This area is to the west of the Gura Bung Dhaura range and near Western Creek. Evidence of the Ngunawal people is found throughout the Canberra area. Terry during one of our conversations mentioned that his father had shown him some Aboriginal paintings in the caves under Civic.

SPELLING - NGUNAWAL versus NGUNNAWAL

The ACT when naming one of the new suburbs after the traditional owners chose to use the spelling Ngunnawal instead of the most common spelling, Ngunawal. This spelling has been and is of concern for a number of Ngunawal people.

Karen Williams' research indicates that the most common use for the clan name is Ngunawal. She also came across another spelling - 'Onerwal' used by George Mackness in a pamphlet called "George Augustus Robinson's Journey into Southeastern Australia, 1844. Royal Australian Historical Society - Journal and Proceedings V.27 pt 5. 1941. pg.26 refers to Yass natives as "Onerwal".

Following is a list of writings on the Ngunawal people prepared by Karen Williams dated March 2005. The majority use the spelling Ngunawal and provides a number of European sources for people interested in continuing research on the Ngunawal.

"I have done a brief search of the AIATSIS library and come up with the following information. I think the important thing to understand with this issue is that the spelling of "Ngunawal" is from some of the early research by historians and Anthropologists that identifies that language group. The work of Matthews and Tindale are very highly respected sources for professionals in the field, and as such the spelling that they used was adopted as it was written. Remember that we are dealing with a European attempt to record an Aboriginal word and that there are many variations that can be found in other sources. As far as usage by historians and Anthropologists, and other researchers, "Ngunawal" version of spelling, appears to have been the most commonly accepted until

it became a political issue of identity. You should note that Watson a local historian who published in 1927 did use two “n”s in Ngunawal. But that is the only example that I found.

References of Historical use of the spelling “Ngunawal”

The following list of references is based on works cited in the Museum of South Australia Ngunawal Website and other books found in the AIATSIS library. This was by no means an exhaustive search of the AIATSIS library, but it is enough to identify a wide spread influence of the work of R. H. Matthews and N.B. Tindale.

Ref: Matthews, R.H., in Royal Society of NSW – Journal and Proceedings, Vol42, 1908; 335-342, and Vol34, 1904, 284-305.

Matthews, R.H. *The Wiradyuri and other languages of NSW*, 1904, Page 284, “A cursory outline is also given of the language of the Ngunawal tribe, which bounds the Wiradyuri on a portion of the east.”

Matthews, R.H. *Vocabulary of Ngarrugu tribe, NSW*, 1908, Page 335: “Adjoining the Ngarrugu on the north from Queanbeyan to Yass, Booroowa and Goulburn, was the Ngunawal tribe.”

Matthews’ work is highly respected by historians as an early source particularly as it is original work based on his own observations made over his lifetime (1841-1918). The spelling of “Ngunawal” that he used would influence those who cited his work.

Ref: N.B. Tindale’s *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*; 1974 (1940).

The spelling of the word “Ngunawal” seems to depend on the source that the particular historian has used as a reference. Tindale’s map defining regions of languages is a major source for the work of most historians who were publishing from 1970s onwards and were citing Tindale’s map. This includes the Museum of South Australia who is still using the spelling on their Website. Aldo Massola, author of the school text book *The Aborigines of South-Eastern Australia*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1971, uses the spelling “Ngunawal” in the key to a map of N.B. Tindale’s *Aboriginal Territories in the South East* adapted from Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia Vol. 64, 1940.

Ref: Tindale Tribes Ngunawal (South Australian Museum website).

<http://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au/tindale/HDMS/tindaletribes/ngunawal.htm> accessed 4/02/05. Uses “Ngunawal” spelling in general text reflecting Tindale’s depiction of Aboriginal tribes. Note: this site page lists alternative names: Ngunuwal, Ngoonawal, Wonnawal, Nungawal, Yarr, Yass tribe, Lake George, Five Islands tribe, Molonglo tribe, [‘gur: agang = no], Gurangada.

Ref: Flood, J. 1996, *Moth Hunters of the Australian Capital Territory*, Flood, Canberra.
“Ngunawal” spelling in *Map of language groups of south-eastern Australia (After N B Tindale 1974)* page 2; also “Ngunawal” spelling used throughout general text. Note: Aboriginal organizations referred on page 44 all use “Ngunawal” spelling.

Ref: Jackson-Nakano, A, 2001, *Aboriginal History Monograph 8, The Kamberri*, Aboriginal History Inc.,
Map 1: “Ngunawal” spelling used in Tindale’s linguistic map of south eastern Australia page xx (note: map and spelling based on Tindale’s 1974 *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*; “Ngunawal” spelling used in text page xxi.

Ref: Lea-Scarlett, E. 1993 (1968), *Queanbeyan District and People*, Queanbeyan Publishing Company, Queanbeyan.
“Ngunawal” spelling used in general text (page 20) cites endnote 30 F. Watson, *A Brief History of Canberra* (Canberra 1927), p.13.

Note: I checked Watson, F, 1927, and found that the spelling used by Watson was actually “Ngunnawal” (see page 14). However, Watson does not cite his source.

Ref: Gillespie, L., 1991, *Canberra 1820-1913*, AGPS Press, Canberra.
“Ngunawal” spelling used in general text page 44.

Ref: Gillespie, Lyall, L., *Aborigines of Canberra and nearby areas*, Canberra Historical Journal, 1979 ns4.
Page 20: “The Ngunawal tribe which frequented the Canberra district ...” cites N.B. Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*, 1974.

Ref: Orr, J.C., 1978, *Trooper Ainslie: The Setting of the Limestone Plains (Canberra) And Its Hero*, KOA Productions, Sydney.
Orr does not directly site a reference.
Page 13: “The country of the Ngunawal people was plentiful in supply of food, ...”,
Page 14: “... under the long cold ... the Ngunawal walked to other land, ...”