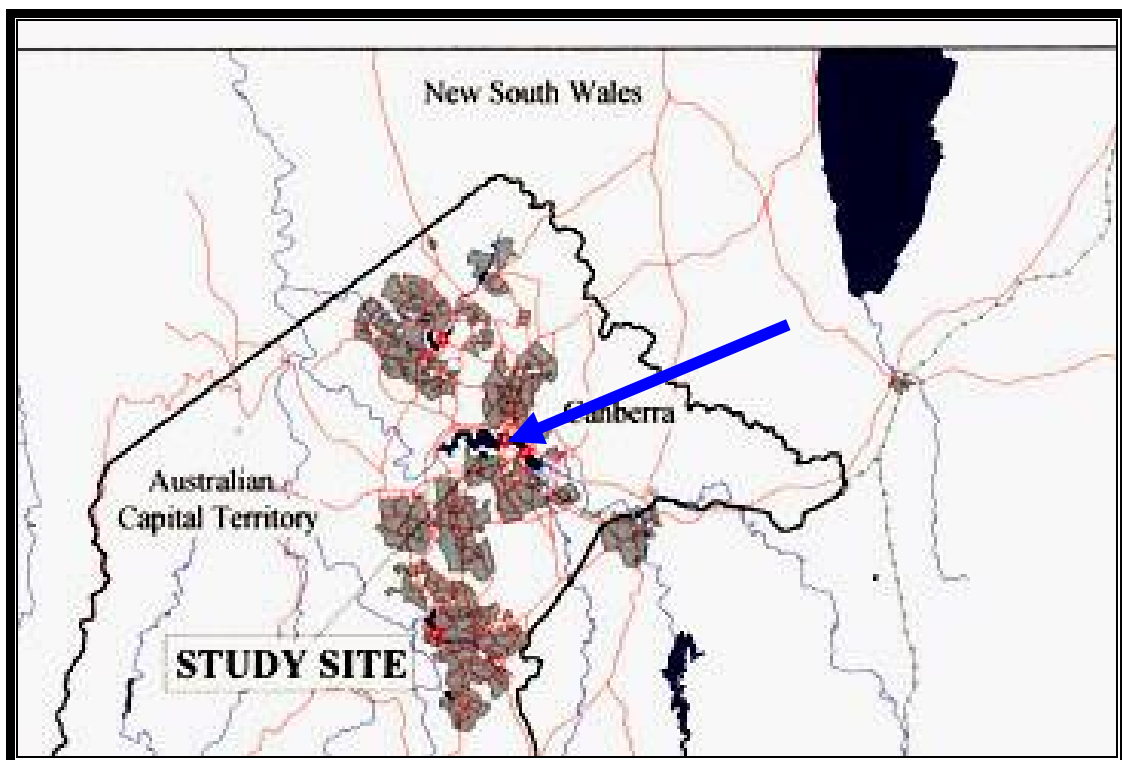


Stirling Park ACT  
Ngunawal & Colonial Sites,  
Temporary Camps & Settlements  
1922-1965  
What they left behind

Stirling Park - The Land

Stirling Park, Yarralumla, Australian Capital Territory, is land within close walking distance of the nation's two Parliament Houses - the Provisional (9.5.1927-9.5.1988) and the permanent (9.5.1988-). With the exception of a few farm buildings this land has not had permanent structures erected on it. It is Ngunawal land and was granted in 1839 to William Klensendorff. This land was leased to several known tenant farmers and in the 1920s it was used to accommodate construction workers employed on the building of the Provisional Parliament House, Hotel Canberra (politician's hotel) and the main intercepting sewer. The last dwelling was removed in 1965. Both Parliament Houses and other federal buildings were built on Klensendorff's grant.



Above map showing the site of Stirling Park - marked **STUDY SITE**. It is on the southern bank of Lake Burley Griffin. The blue arrow points to the area. The land now defined as Stirling Park was known to the Ngunawal as Gura Bung Dhaura (stony ground) and a part of the small range of hills that rose above the Canberra plain. One of the hills, known in Colonial times as Kurrajong Hill, was chosen by Walter Burley Griffin to become the centre of the federal city and it was renamed, Capital. During the 1920s the land was

known as Westlake and was part of the suburb of Acton. Around 1963 the area became part of Yarralumla.

The park is divided into two main areas – land between the lake and Alexandrina Drive and a larger area surrounded by embassies, houses in Yarralumla and a number of Federal Buildings that include Parliament House. The grass in the area between lake and Alexandrina Drive is cut and has a cycle path and numerous barbecue areas. The larger area of the park surrounded by buildings and roads has been left to regenerate. It is home to native flora, fauna, native birds, reptiles etc along with the odd fox and large hares. In this area are the reminders of the people who lived on this land – Ngunawal, settlers and construction workers.

This *untamed* section of the park may be divided into three sections. West to east - Stirling Ridge, *The Gap* - which as the name suggests is a gap between the hills - used as an old pathway, and an unnamed hill part of which faces modern Lotus Bay. This hill continues on – dips – and meets Capital Hill. Through *The Gap* flows what used to be a deep watercourse now is choked with the rubbish of years. From the 1940s this creek was known as *HAINES CREEK*.

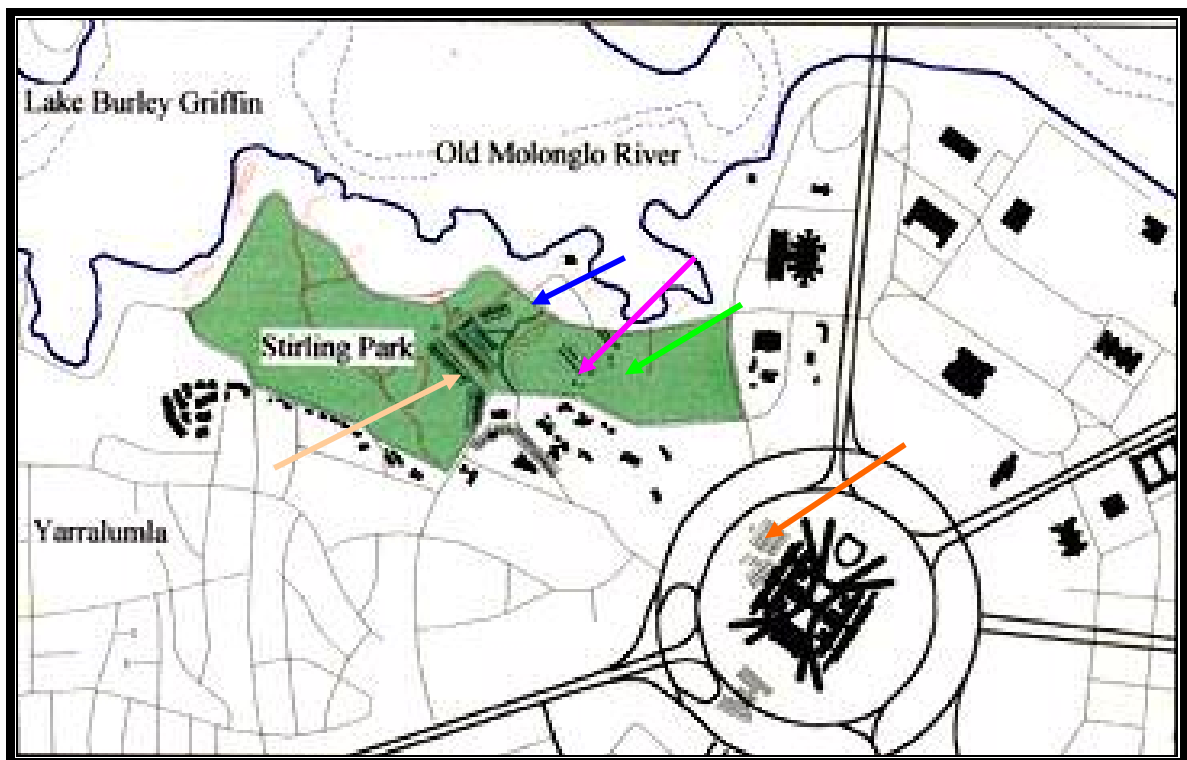
During the colonial period the hills of Stirling Park were not cleared. So at first glance - particularly since the land has been left to regenerate - they look relatively untouched. However closer examination shows that nearly every old tree has the mark of man. Many have been used by Ngunawal people and have scars. Most trees have branches missing (firewood) and many have metal bolts and other man-made objects forced into their trunks.

Rocks were used by all who lived on this land. Several Ngunawal stone arrangements have survived on Stirling Ridge and on the hillside opposite Lotus Bay there are numerous stone arrangements (Ngunawal and European). Some rocks patterns were used as part of drainage systems. The hillside opposite Lotus Bay in particular provides us with information about the drainage systems used during the period of the camps and Howie's Settlement. The dwellings on this hill were not connected to storm water systems. [However, recent work using a metal detector has found a number of the old water pipes still in situ.]

Another reminder of those who lived in the area of the park are the numerous old tracks, roads and paths that criss-cross the park land. Many lead to buildings no longer there and includes one that connected the old road opposite Lotus Bay to a turning area where the pans from the Tradesmen's Camp Ablution Block were probably loaded on to a dray. The old roads provided ready made access between dwellings and work place.

Two sections of the parkland have few native trees. *The Gap* where the 61 Westlake cottages were erected is one and the other is the flat land opposite Lotus Bay. When one looks at an old map showing the site of Briar Farm (tenant farm now the site of Southern Cross Yacht Club) one notes that the fenceline of this property extended up to

the base of hill opposite Lotus Bay. The flat land was cleared. A road from the cottage went around the exterior of this fence above the tree line before making its way east to the area of modern Hotel Canberra to meet another old road. This road was built by 1890 and is probably the one used when stone was transported in the early 1860s from the quarry to carry stone for the rebuilding of St John the Baptist Church now in the Canberra suburb of Reid. This old road was used in the 1920s as an access road to Contractor Howie's settlement and the Tradesmen's Camp.



The above map shows in green the area of Stirling Park with superimposed the 1920s settlements of Howies Cottages & Hostel Camp (purple arrow) and Westlake cottages (blue arrow) in *The Gap*. The yellow arrow on left points to the last ten cottages built at Westlake on the site of No 3 Sewer Camp. The hill on the left is Stirling Ridge and on the right is an un-named hillside opposite Lotus Bay. The green arrow points to area of the Tradesmen's Camp. Parliament House is in the circle bottom right and other modern buildings are marked in black. No 1 Labourers' Camp (red arrow) was erected on the western side of Capital Hill which was in the 1920s part of Westlake. The area of the park between Alexandrina Drive is also part of Stirling Park. Details of the map have been enlarged and reproduced in other sections of this work.



Above: Hawke family photograph 1924 on Stirling Ridge men working on the main intercepting sewer. In the background are the tents of No 3 Sewer Camp and Westlake cottages in the row between 29 and 39. Note the trees. Below is a NAA photograph of the Cooks' Tents No 1 Labourers Camp 1924.





Above are aerial photographs of Stirling Park. On the left is a photograph taken in 1942 and on the right a photograph taken around 2000 following the flooding of the Molonglo to form Lake Burley Griffin (commenced 1963 – opened in 1964). Lotus Bay is the first bay that has the small dots (yachts) on it (black arrow points to the bay). Above it is the Southern Cross Yacht Club and the former site of Briar Farm (blue arrow). The next bulge in the landform is Attunga Point - the old Quarry. The circle in the earlier photograph on the left side is State Circle and below to the mid bottom section of the photographs is the Provisional Parliament House and gardens. The road that cuts across the photograph is Commonwealth Avenue and the building above it is Hotel Canberra (now Hyatt Hotel Canberra). The Westlake cottages in *The Gap* are shown as dots. Many of the tracks used in the twentieth century are clearly shown on the flat land.

### The land

As the dwellings were removed from the land of Stirling Park it was left to regenerate. Trees were planted on the sites of cottages 53-62 and 29-32 – the latter were removed in the 1990s. The area that still has clearly defined the gardens and yards of the cottages is in the Gap where the Westlake cottages sat for just over forty years. Here still survives the hedges that mark the boundaries of old yards and numerous concrete paths, laundry floors, drainage systems and between the meeting of the creek and the drain/creek below cottages 43-47 the one remaining temporary septic system used in the camps.

The Westlake camps and Howie's settlement that were in situ for less than a decade have left their marks on the land. However, in many cases the areas are now covered with leaf litter that hides and softens their impact on the landscape. Still in situ are the many dumps where rubbish was burnt or just thrown under a nearby tree.<sup>1</sup> One significant site in the area opposite Lotus Bay that should be thoroughly documented at some time is the area of the Ablution Blocks of the Old Tradesmen's Camp. From NAA documents that describe the new Ablution Block and required drainage to the quagmire the sites of the buildings and what was on the site can be clearly seen.

Only the areas where the Westlake cottages gardens were grown over a number of years has lush growth.<sup>2</sup> The hillsides are rocky. Some of the softer rocks were used by Westlake children as chalk to draw on roads and on tin fire places. The colours ranged from white, through apricot to darker red. The Quarry provided white shale used in the Canberra bricks to make the *CANBERRA CREAM*. It is possible that this area also provided Aboriginal people with material used for ceremonial purposes.

Running through the parkland are several fault lines, one of which is on the *Register of National Estate Database Place Report*. The date is 25 March, 1986. It states in part that the location is *Approximately 40ha and comprising all that area of Block 3, Section 22, Yarralumla, west of a line drawn from the eastern intersection of Alexandrina Drive and Mariner Place and the intersection of Forster Crescent and Empire Circuit...*

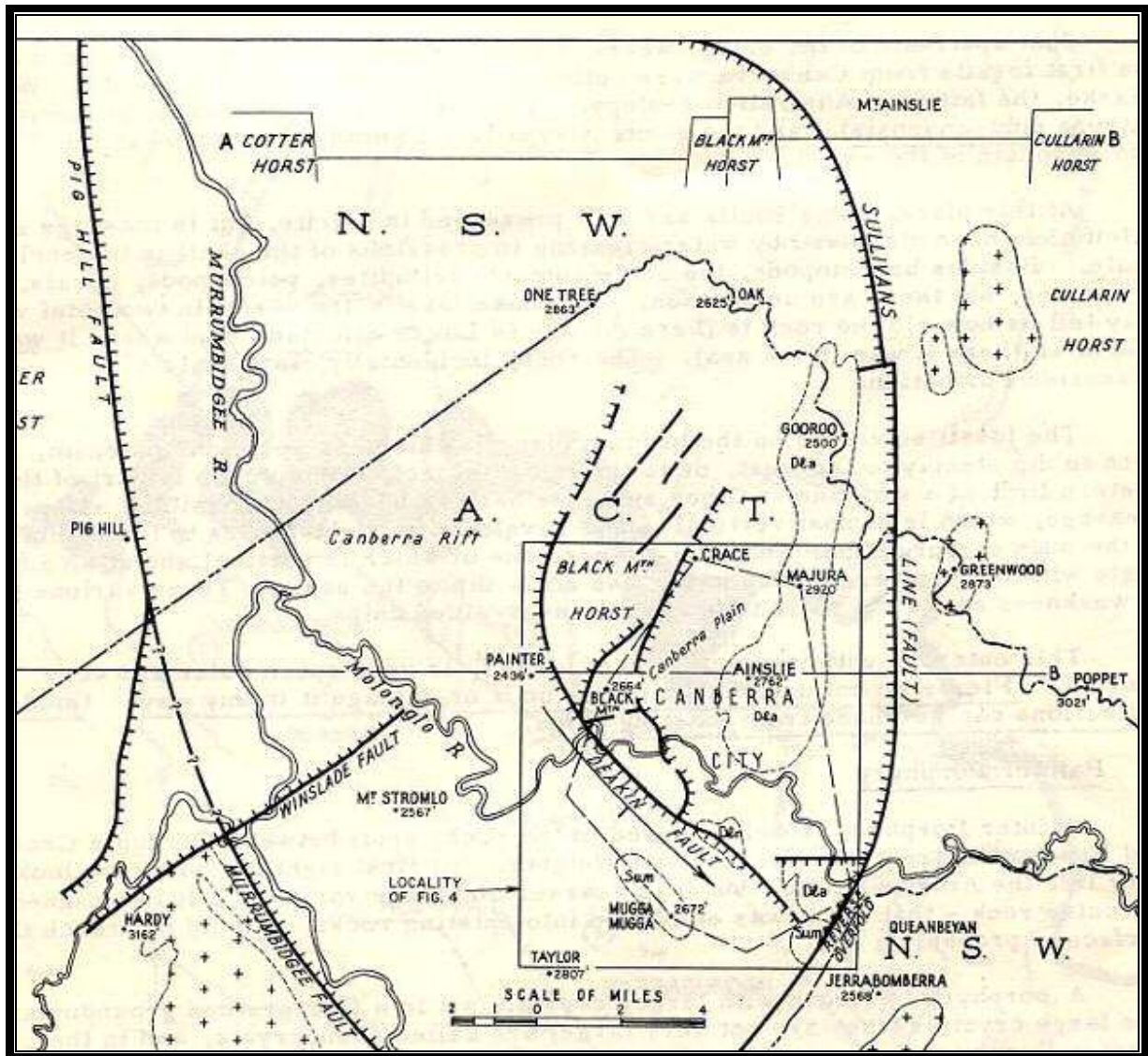
*Description: A low ridge on the Deakin Fault, extending in a north-west-east direction consisting of Ordovician and Silurian shales and sandstones of the Acton, pittman and Canberra groups, in altitude from the shore of Lake Burley Griffin (c 556 m) to the summit of the ridge (c600m). The vegetation on the main part of the ridge consists of an ecotone between EUCALYPTUS MACRORHYNCHAA/EUCALYPTUS ROSSII dry sclerophyll forest and EUCALYPTUS MELLIODORA/EUCALYPTUS BLAKELYI woodland.*

*Condition: The native vegetation on the upper part of the ridge, where the main population of RUTIDOSSI [Button Wrinklewort] are to be found, has suffered some disturbance in the past [mining], but is now regenerating...*

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the Westlake Cottages in *The Gap* including my home – 27 Westlake – had in the backyard or in another part of the area air raid shelters. Trenches were also dug in the area opposite my house in the reserve and I think up near the hall. These were probably used as rubbish dumps too.

<sup>2</sup> The soils of the gardens were enriched and turned over.

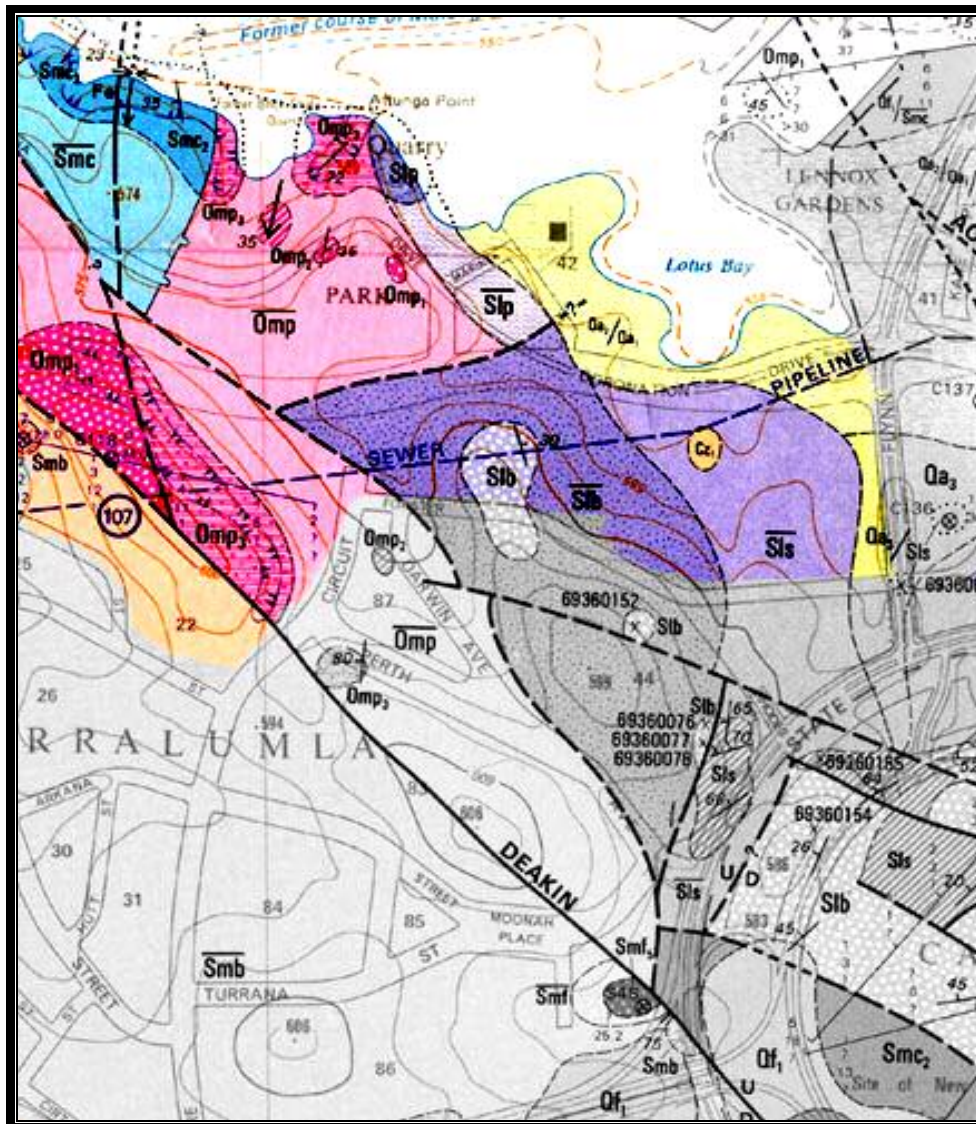


Above is a map printed in *Rocks and Fossils Around Canberra* KA Townley & JJ Veevers 1966 that shows the major fault lines that pass through the Stirling Park area (south side of the Molonglo River opposite Black Mountain.) This information provided by geologists links with information provided by a Ngarigo lady who visited the area with me. She informed me that a long line of rocks placed across Stirling Ridge are part of a ley line. They lie roughly in an area of this fault line. Note that the plain is named **CANBERRA**.



Above views of the larger rocks on Stirling Ridge that form part of the ley line identified by the Ngarigo lady.

The fault lines were known to the sewer miners who worked on the main intercepting sewer that runs underground through the area of the park. The son of one, Haven Thompson of 37 Westlake, recalled in a conversation that his father mentioned the fault line that commenced in the Turner area and went on through Westlake. He said it was very sandy. He also spoke about the limestone caves that abound in the area. One in the Yarralumla area caused the sewer tunnel to be diverted from its original course.



The information and map are from Bureau of Mineral Resources, Geology and Geophysics - Report 267, Commentary on the Central Canberra 1:10,000 Engineering Geology Sheet, Australian Capital Territory. I have taken the liberty of leaving coloured only the area of the park. Stirling Ridge is on the right hand side of the Deakin fault in the area near the 107 mark. Twenty of the 61 Westlake cottages are not in the parkland - they were erected in the area bounded by Empire Circuit, Forster Crescent, Darwin and Perth Avenues.

The corner of Empire Circuit and Forster Crescent marks the site (on left) of 27 Westlake and (on right) 29 Westlake. The red areas are Middle and Late Ordovician and the purple - Early Silurian.

Slb = Black Mountain Sandstone - Sandstone & quartzite...;Sis - shale laminated, green-grey where fresh, buff brown with red joint staining where weathered ...;Omp -

undivided sedimentary rocks; Omp3 - interbedded sandstone, siltstone, shale and mudstone.

Reference to the importance of the land is found in a number of reports. For example, in his book, *The Ecological Resources of the ACT*, David Shorthouse (1984) stated that Stirling Park was the only remaining area of savannah woodland close to Lake Burley Griffin. Dr Robert Boden in his report to the NCA and quoted in the National Trust ACT citation for Stirling Park wrote the following: *This [Section A] and adjacent areas of Stirling Park are the only remaining areas of savannah woodland close to Lake Burley Griffin (Frawley 1991). They also contain the major remaining population of the nationally endangered button wrinklewort...The continued survival of the button wrinklewort in the wild depends upon conservation viable self perpetuating populations on national land in Stirling Park. This may be the only example in temperate Australia of a plant species whose survival is the direct responsibility of the Australian rather than a state or territory government. This places a significant responsibility on the National Capital Planning Authority as the land management agency responsible for most of Stirling Park...*

*Leeton & Fripp, found morphological differences between the Victorian and NSW/ACT populations and Benson and Wyse-Jackson (1994), believe it is imperative that viable populations in both states (sic) are protected so that the generic variability of the species is maintained.*

Before European Settlement - Signs of use by the Traditional Owners of the Land - Ngunawal People.

This land was known to the traditional owners - the Ngunawal people - as **GURA BUNG DHAURA** (stony ground). It was a major pathway used by the Ngunawal on their way from Black Mountain of Tuggeranong. Through it in the area known as *The Gap* runs a *deep water course* known from the 1940s as *HAINES CREEK*. The hills on either side of *The Gap* (Stirling Ridge and the area of hill that joins Capital Hill) has many old trees scarred by the Ngunawal people. The majority today grow on Stirling Ridge and are over two to three hundred years of age.

Evidence of the Aboriginal use of this land remains on all the hillsides in Stirling Park - the majority of scarred trees and surviving rock arrangements are on Stirling Ridge (western side of the Park) in the area between the sewer vent and lake end of the hill. This, according to a number of Ngunawal elders, is Women's land and has been identified by Ngunawal elders as a significant site. Haines' Creek that runs through *The Gap* is marked on the old maps as *Deep Watercourse*. Today is shallow and filled with the rubbish of years. A photograph taken by me some ten years ago shows some of the rocks in the creek. These now are covered. It is possible that evidence of Aboriginal use of the creek is hidden below the rubbish.

Below left - view of the Creek in 2003 - centre area of creek behind the tree that was in the yard of 29 Westlake. On the right is a photograph of the creek near the bend in the photograph on the left. Andrew, my pet Border Collie is taking a welcome dip in the water. Note the rocks. These are no longer visible.

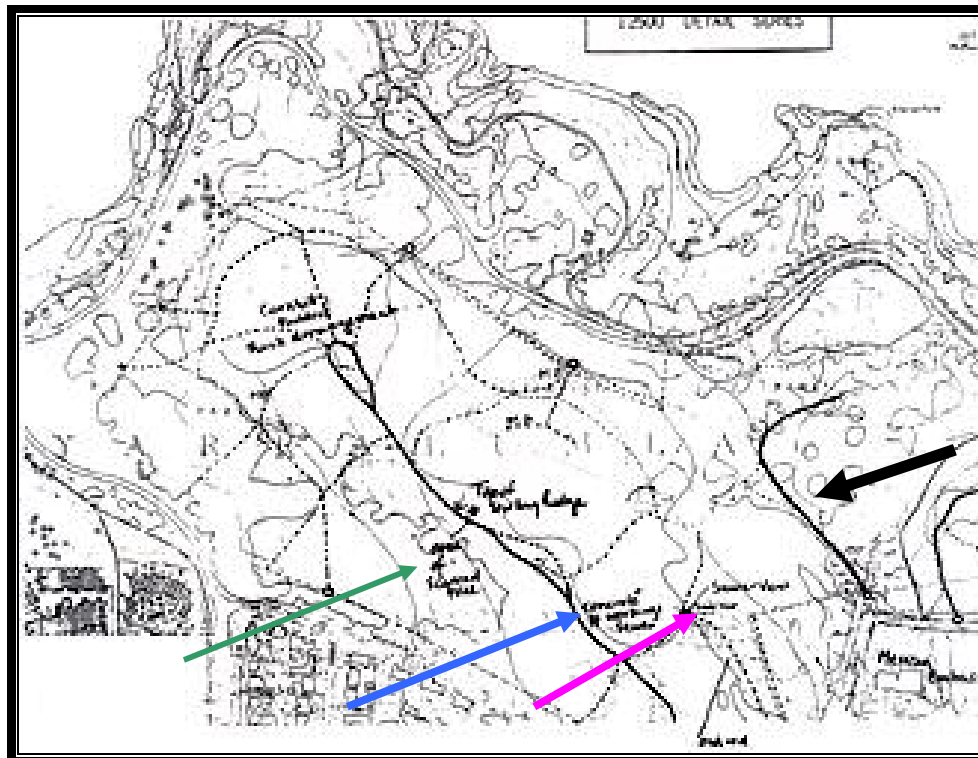


Other scarred trees grow on the hillside that runs down the eastern side of Haines Creek up to Kurrajong Hill - now called Capital Hill. On these hills and Capital Hill were and are a number of *Fire Place* trees. One that I recall was in the area of the modern Forster Crescent road on the hill. Nearby still grows a large scarred white gum (below right) There are also two kurrajong trees in the park. They are both growing on the hillside above Lotus Bay. One, shown below behind the gum tree, is ringed with rocks put there during the time of Howie's cottages. The middle tree below is another very old gum tree near Lord Casey's red brick house built in 1938 – now called Casey House.



Below is a photograph taken in 1920 by Harry Trevillian. The shiny sections are parts of the foundation stone that had in its centre an upright timber marker of the type used by surveyors laid on Capital Hill by the Prince of Wales in June 1920 to mark the centre of the city. In the background is one of the *Fire Place* trees. Another was on the hillside where Forster Crescent now cuts across it and yet another still remains on land in Perth Avenue ready for Embassy use. These may or may not have been used by Aboriginal people.





Above is a detail of a modern map of Stirling Ridge noting walking tracks. The road shown is Alexander Drive. The Ngunawal mourning tree is on the left side of the map. The dark line (marked by the black arrow) that turns to the right is the old road in *The Gap* that sat in front of Westlake cottages 29-39 and then 39-47. The purple arrow points to the sewer vent – blue is the modern walking track. Green to the scarred tree that is on the HOME PAGE of the web. There are many others on the hill.



Above: Photographs top left and centre show a front view of leaning tree and the tree itself. On the right is another tree that has scars on the inner side of each of the trunks and below the scars.



Above details of the scars on the inner sections of the tree shown on previous page.



Above another tree with a details of one of the scars on the right.



Tree with several scars. Above left the full tree and photographs above.



Above - details of scars shown in previous photographs



Above left detail of ant bed *ringed* with rocks on Stirling Ridge.

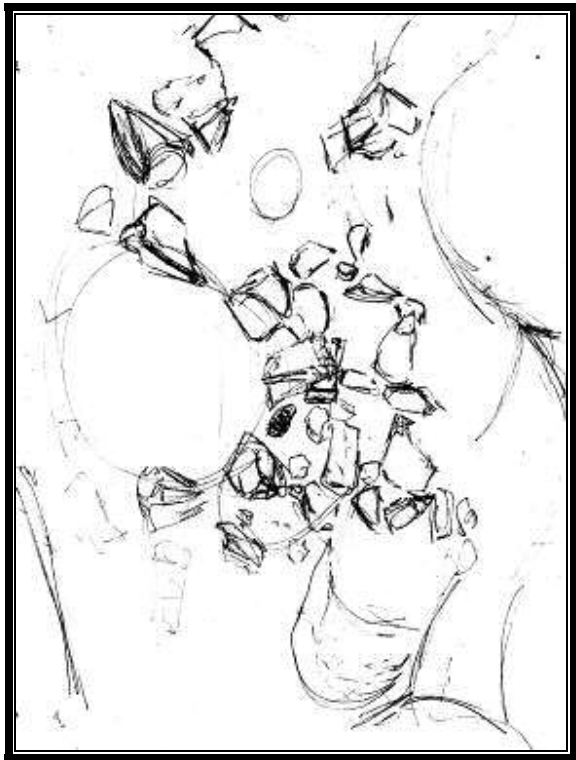


The kangaroo is one of the animals important to Ngunawal people and there are many in the park. The photograph above right was taken in June 2003 on the site of cottages 48 - 50. Behind the animals is the meeting point where the ditch below cottages 43-47 (left) meets Haines Creek (right). The land where the gardens grew is richer than the hillsides. Above left is a photograph of an old gum on Stirling Ridge. It has a number of rocks around the base that may define a circle. It may be linked with the mourning tree further down the ridge.



Above two of the old trees on Stirling Ridge. Below left: Mourning Tree on Stirling Ridge. Next to the white gum is a native wild cherry tree. There are a number of pairs such as this nearby. Nearby to this tree are a number of scarred trees. On the right is a grove of trees in the vicinity of the Mourning Tree that is off to the left in this photograph. Note the areas of green in the photographs - taken in a time of drought. The Ngarigo lad who walked this land with me suggested that there may be springs on this hillside. There are a number of springs recorded in the nearby Yarralumla area.





One of the scarred old gums on Stirling Ridge. [It has been noted by the ACT Heritage Department and is part of a citation.] Note the lean on the tree caused by winds from the west. This tree is now feeling it's age and a large branch fell off in recent years. The hollows in this tree like many others, is home to many of the birds that live here. Henry the fox terrior in the background. On the right is a diagram of one of the stone arrangements on the Ridge.



Above right is one of the many river rocks found on Stirling Ridge. Left - photocopy of a photograph taken by me of Dr Peter Dowling measuring the Ngunawal scarred tree in the grounds of the South African High Commission. In the grounds of the French Embassy is another large old scarred gum.



Above – view from Stirling Ridge. In the background on the right is Mt Ainslie and below to the right of the mountain is the water spout in Lake Burley Griffin.

Mr Don Bell and his wife Ruth have both visited Stirling Park and Capital Hill and identified them as significant areas. Mr Bell as a child visited annually and camped on Capital Hill in a gully below the Prime Minister's Lodge and American Embassy. His mother used to cook on a special stone which was carried with the family on their travels. Below is a photograph of that special stone and two marked by Mr Bell as stones used for sharpening - one for rough work and the other for finer.



In the following sections details of each of the periods of the history of human habitation of the area now known as Stirling Park are recorded. A recent book, *A Story of Capital Hill* Gugler 2009 has further details of the land of Gura Bung Dhaura – Westlake – Stirling Park & Capital Hill.