

2 Early encounters southwest of Weereewaa

The first European explorers in the country of the Kamberri

A couple of weeks after Governor Lachlan Macquarie returned to Sydney following his trip to Weereewaa in October 1820, he issued a declaration in the *Sydney Gazette*.¹ This declaration opened up officially the 'newly discovered country' from the Cowpastures (Camden) to the Cookbundoon Range (a few kilometres northeast of Goulburn) for pasture to graziers 'at their own Risk', but squatters were in that area, even as far as Bungonia and Marulan, long before then.² Similarly, before it was even declared open for European settlers, the country of the Kamberri to the southwest of Weereewaa was about to undergo rapid change.

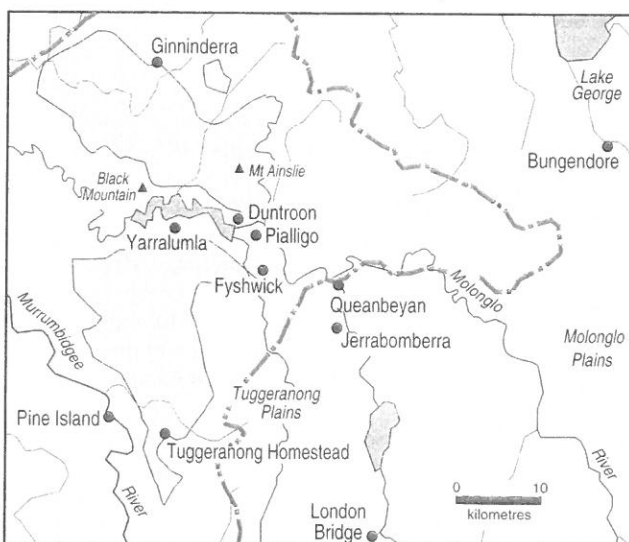
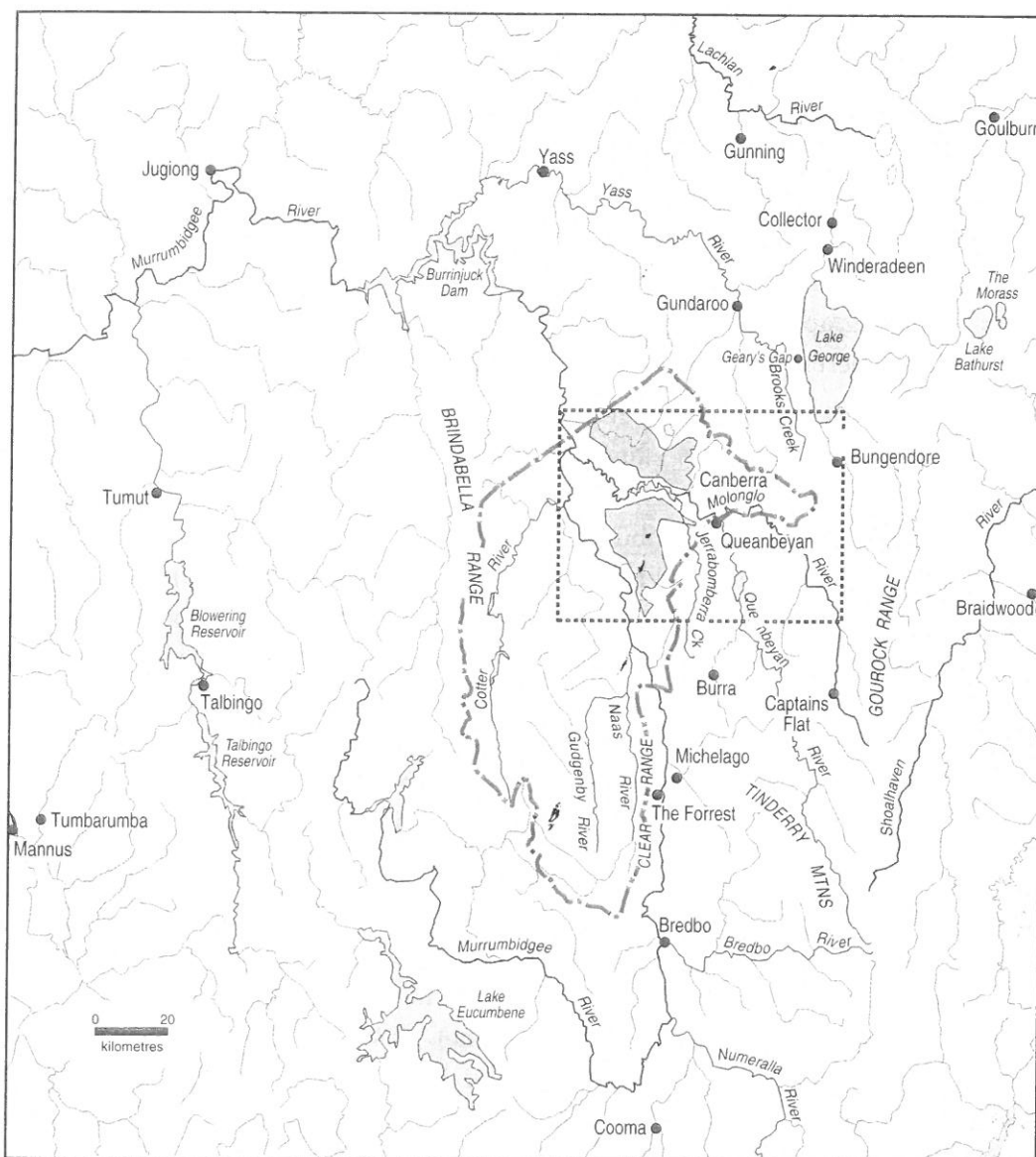
As we have seen, Dr Charles Throsby, Joseph Wild and James Vaughan were the first Europeans to pass beyond Weereewaa along the ancient river bed (Geary's Gap) and enter the country of the Kamberri to look for the Murrumbidgee River. Their 'guides' were Cookoogong and Taree, who were unfamiliar with the area as it was not their country and their communities were not necessarily on good terms with the Weereewaa communities at that time (see Chapter 1). They found the Boongaroon (Yass River) near the lake, but not the Murrumbidgee.

In the next few months, Throsby, Wild, Vaughan and Throsby's nephew, Charles Throsby Smith, accompanied by Aboriginal 'guides' from other areas, appeared at various times to continue the search for the elusive river, which Throsby and Wild found eventually near Tharwa in April 1821³ (see Map 5). Throsby was not only the first European to venture into the country southwest of Weereewaa but, ironically for a medical man, was also the first European to be directly responsible for Kamberri deaths. A few months after Throsby's visit, Wild found a small, shivering,

1. *Sydney Gazette*, 25 November 1820.

2. See MacAlister, Charles, 1907. According to MacAlister, James Styles had settled in Bungonia in 1819.

3. Letter from Dr Charles Throsby to Governor Lachlan Macquarie, 10 May 1821, *HRA*, series 1 vol X.



Map 5: Areas mentioned during exploratory visits to the country southwest of Weereewaa, 1820–1825, superimposed on a modern map

Map reproduced courtesy of the Cartography Unit, RSPAS, Australian National University.

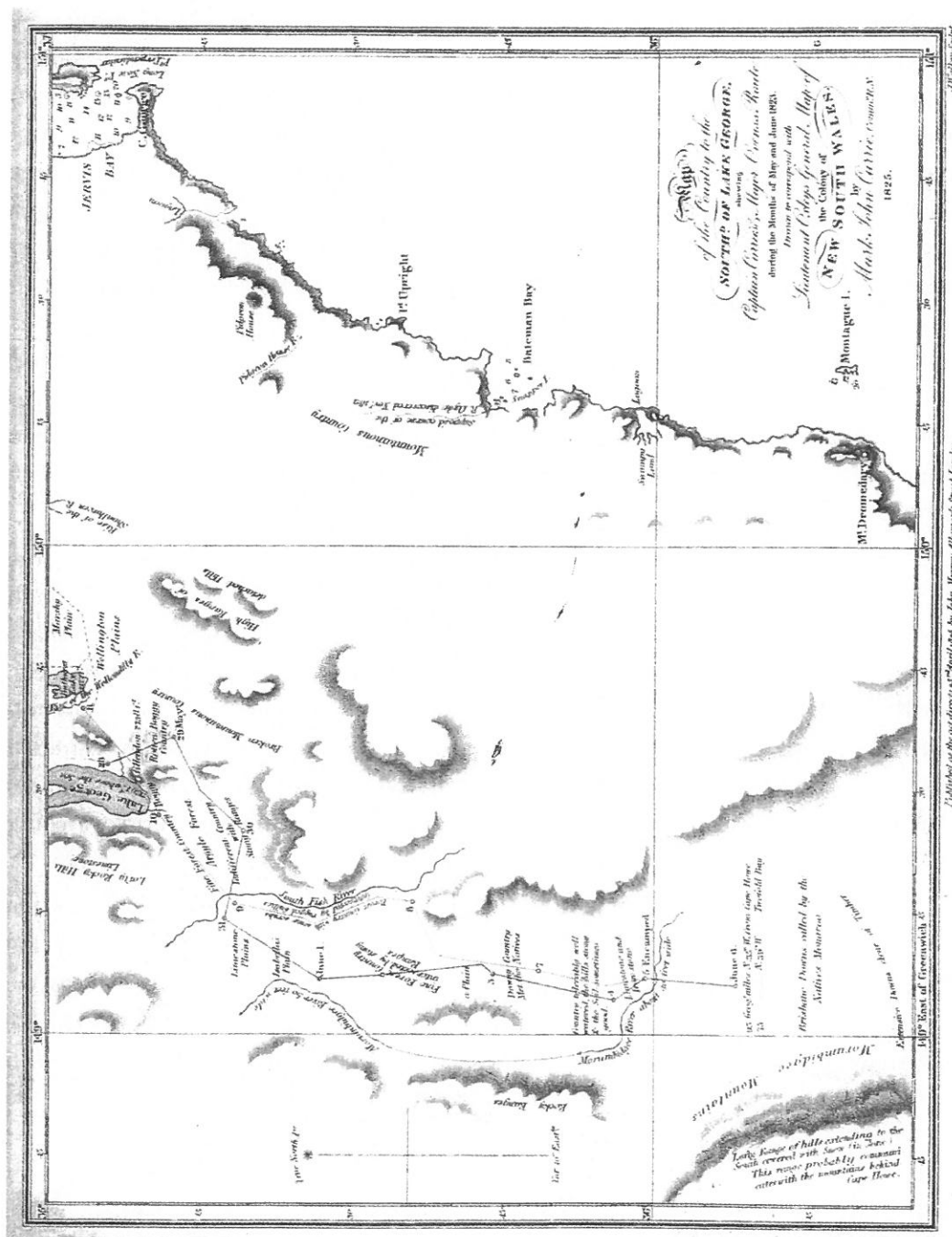
crying boy aged about four years old whose parents and other family members, who were lying nearby, had passed away from 'catarrh' (influenza), from which Dr Throsby had been suffering during his earlier visit.⁴

Wild made a number of exploratory trips to the country of the Kamberri as a guide for various parties. He was illiterate, but although his encounters with the Kamberri have not been recorded, it is clear he came to know the locals in the region southwest of Weereewaa. From them he learned the 'native' names for the various areas and geographical features around the 'Limestone Plains' (which stretched across the Canberra-Queanbeyan districts) (see Map 9).

In December 1820, Wild returned to Weereewaa with Charles Throsby Smith, Throsby's nephew, and James Vaughan. They set off from the south of the lake across a plain the 'natives' called 'Gaurock'.⁵ They followed the headwaters of 'a fine stream' from here, 'Boongaroon' (this tributary of the Yass River is now called Brooks Creek). From Boongaroon they headed north towards 'Candiro' (Gundaroo) and Gunning and reached the 'Fish River' (the headwaters of the Lachlan). They backtracked and crossed the Boongaroon, heading due south, and reached the 'Yeal-am-bidgie' (the general 'native' name of the Molonglo in this area). The next day they found the junction of the Yeal-am-bidgie with the Jullergung (Queanbeyan) River, which Wild always referred to as the South Fish River⁶ (see Map 5).

A few weeks later, Wild returned with Charles Throsby and followed a southerly route from the Molonglo. They finally caught sight of the Murrumbidgee to the southwest of Tuggeranong, probably somewhere near the place now called Pine Island. As mentioned previously, Wild returned with Brigade-Major Ovens and Captain Mark John Currie, in May and June 1823. The party crossed 'Isabelle's Plains'⁷ (named for the daughter of Governor Brisbane), and sighted the 'Brisbane Downs' (northern 'Maneroo') and the 'Murrumbidgee Mountains'⁸ (see Map 6). 'Brisbane Downs', named by Currie for Governor Brisbane, who succeeded Macquarie, was not retained. It was during this trip they encountered members of the upper Molonglo group, as noted in Chapter 1 (see the section on the Moolinggoolah).

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4. Orr, John Charles, 1978. *The Australian Almanack*, 1834, p 245, also records Throsby's 1820 visit and its fatal effect. This was regarded as the first occurrence of influenza in New South Wales and was responsible for a number of Aboriginal deaths, according to Cambage, RH, 1921.
 5. Some researchers have erroneously inferred that this was the 'native' name of the 'Limestone Plains'. In fact, this was the name of the area south of the lake in the upper Molonglo district now known as Captain's Flat. The name 'Gaurock' refers to the hills and mountains of the Great Dividing Range south and southeast of the lake. It is not clear why Wild and his party took this route.
 6. Smith, Charles Throsby, extracts from diary, NLA Manuscripts MS 689.
 7. Tuggeranong. Currie's account of his journey and his map are included in Currie, in Field, Barron, 1825.
 8. Now the Monaro Range, not to be confused with the ranges the locals today refer to as the Murrumbidgee Ranges, which extend south of the Clear Range on the left bank of the Murrumbidgee River and run parallel to the modern Monaro Highway from south of Michelago and Bredbo towards Cooma (see Map 5).



Map 6: Currie's map
Reproduced courtesy of the
National Library of
Australia.

From Currie's descriptions and his map, most of Currie's and Wild's encounters with Aboriginal people were in the Michelago district. On their return trip, they headed northeast from Michelago and picked up the Queanbeyan (or South Fish) River, which they crossed south of Bungendore, then headed around the south of Weereewaa to Bundang (Lake Bathurst) and home (see Maps 5 and 6). There are three major rivers in this district: the Murrumbidgee, the Queanbeyan and the Molonglo Rivers, plus Jerrabomberra Creek. Across the Tinderry Mountains there is another major river: the Shoalhaven. The sources of the Queanbeyan, Molonglo and Shoalhaven rivers are not too far distant from each other (see Map 5) and the general area may have been shared at this time by groups from the Monaro, Murrumbidgee, Molonglo, Weereewaa, Braidwood and Shoalhaven districts.⁹ The 'Gaurock' ranges were certainly a frontier shared by Kamberri, Moolinggoolah (Molonglo) and Warego (from the Braidwood district, referred to later as the Wig Wigly) groups at the time of early European settlement.¹⁰

Members of the 'Molongler tribe', as the Chief Protector of Aborigines, George Augustus Robinson, called the group (see Chapter 3), may have been linked through kinship networks to the Kamberri as well as to the various Braidwood and Monaro groups. To a large extent, the history of all these peoples is a shared one; conversely, they had their individual community histories. I must remind readers that in this volume I am focusing on the community history of the Kamberri group. In this context I ask for the patience and forbearance of modern descendants of surrounding groups who might otherwise think their historical connections to the Kamberri are being ignored.

The Moolinggoolah group had rights to the southern part of Weereewaa in the Bungendore and Molonglo Plains districts (see Chapter 1), perhaps as far west as the Queanbeyan River (see Map 3). Following the arrival of Europeans, which, as we have learned from Currie's journals, absolutely terrified them, members of the Moolinggoolah group may have scattered and headed for the surrounding regions with which they had closest individual connections. A few joined the Kamberri as the numbers of their own group diminished, as we shall see in subsequent chapters.

The first friendships forged between the Europeans and the Kamberri

Joseph 'Josh' Wild may have been instrumental in recommending the area that was possibly the first land claim southwest of Weereewaa. In 1821, Lieutenant Joshua John Moore and five others were given permission by the NSW Governor to pass through the Cowpastures and the Goulburn Plains with Josh Wild as their guide.¹¹ Perhaps it was Wild who, in 1823, selected for Moore the first foreign land claim southwest of

9. The early blanket distribution lists for these areas include individuals from all of these groups as periodic visitors. See the various blanket distribution lists at AONSW.

10. Blanket distribution lists, AONSW 4/6666B.3, 34/4178.

11. Wyatt, Ransome, 1941. Wyatt does not name the source.

Weereewaa. It may also have been on Wild's advice that Moore named his property 'Canberry Station'. This was the English phonetic rendition of the name of the place in which the station was located and also the name of the group who took their name from the place that was the core of their traditional country (see Map 2). Moore did not apply for a lease to this land until three years later. Moore described the land he wished to purchase as:

situated at Canberry, on the Bank of the River, which waters Limestone Plains, above its junction with the Murrumbidgee, adjoining the Grant of Mr Robert Campbell Esquire. My having had possession of that Land upwards of three years.¹²

At that time Robert Campbell, to whom Moore refers, had yet to see the vast extent of Kamberri land that his superintendent, James Ainslie (also spelled Ainsley in contemporary records) had selected on his behalf.

James Ainslie

Ainslie was one of the first white men to establish himself, on behalf of his employer, in the country of the Kamberri and, according to legend, fathered the first Kamberri child of mixed European and Aboriginal heritage.

Ainslie lived in the Kamberri district for about ten years so he would have known the Kamberri well. It is a shame we have neither Ainslie's account of his arrival there nor of those lonely years when some of his closest friends were among the local Kamberri. It seems, however, that he told many stories to his fellow workers and even to his employer when he was 'in his cups', which was frequently. Maybe, like most oral accounts, each story changed with the telling, but however embellished, the basic facts of his arrival in the country have been recorded for posterity by his more literate contemporaries.

The first version is Frederick Campbell's, the grandson of Robert, who heard the story from his father, who may have heard it from Ainslie himself:

My father frequently related the story of Ainslie's discovery of 'Limestone Plains', as it was usually called. He said:- 'Ainslie had orders to take delivery of those ewes¹³ at Bathurst (where there was a Government farm or depot) and to then choose country on which to run them. All country to the west of Bathurst was then taken up, so he started with the ewes and made for Goulburn, with the same result, and then pushed on south-west to where Yass now is. The Yass Plains were then occupied, but he there heard from the blacks of 'Pialligo'¹⁴, and induced a black gin to guide him there over the last 40 miles of hill and dale.¹⁵

The second version is by John Blundell, as told to William Bluett. Blundell's father worked for Campbell and the Blundell family lived on the Campbell estate.¹⁶

12. Moore, JJ, 1826, copy of letter held in NLA Manuscripts MS657.

13. Additionally, Campbell was compensated with a herd of sheep.

14. According to Stewart Mowle, who knew the Kamberri well and spoke their language, the correct rendition of Pialligo into English was 'Byalegee'. See Stewart Marjoribanks Mowle papers, NLA Manuscripts MS 565/6/10.

15. Frederick Campbell, Letter to the Editor on Canberra, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 April 1924.

16. In 2001, Blundell's farmhouse is still standing by the side of Lake Burley Griffin in the modern suburb of Campbell.

John Blundell arrived in Canberra as a toddler in 1838 and grew up with Kamberri children as playmates. All 12 Blundell children were still alive when the Provisional Parliament House was opened in 1927 (John was then 91 years old).

According to Blundell, via Bluett, Ainslie did not arrive alone in the district with the sheep but had a number of convicts with him. He fell in with a 'camp of blacks' between Gunning and Yass and they directed him to Ginnin-Ginnin-Derra (Ginninderra), where he grazed his flock for several weeks while searching for better land. 'An Aboriginal girl guided him to her people's camp at Pialligo'.¹⁷ Ainslie then went back to Ginnin-Ginnin-Derra for his sheep and squatted at the foot of Mount Pleasant. 'He was very friendly with Abo [*sic*] neighbours'.¹⁸

A third version of this story has been handed down by the Shumacks, who also worked for Campbell. Two members of the Shumack family were first employed on the Campbell property at least ten years after Ainslie had returned to Scotland, so their story would be hearsay. Their nephew, Samuel Shumack, is not always accurate with his information, but since he is the only comparatively early settler who speaks openly about Ainslie's possible paternity of Nanny, his version is included here.

There was a half-caste lubra named Nanny who had eleven children, all of whom were three parts white.¹⁹ When Ainslie took possession of the Duntroon plains his guide was a young lubra, and Nanny was believed to be their daughter. Many years ago a tale appeared in the *Queanbeyan Age* under the title 'Silverwater Bend', some of the characters [of] which were believed to be drawn from Ainslie and his lubra.²⁰

Henry Selkirk,²¹ who claims to have obtained his account from Frederick Campbell, has another version again, even more substantial than Fred's own version as related above. According to Selkirk:

During the Napoleonic wars there served in the famous Scots Greys a trooper named Ainslie. At the Battle of Waterloo, following up the French defeat, Ainslie found himself single-handed in pursuit of a detached party of French cavalry. The latter, recovering from their first panic, and finding that their pursuer was unsupported, suddenly wheeled round and attacking Ainslie left him *horse-de-combat* [*sic*] as the result of a sabre cut across his head. In spite of his damaged skull, Ainslie ultimately recovered, but was ever afterwards subject, under severe excitement, to violent fits of frenzy.

17. Since Bluett, via Blundell, closely connects 'Honyong' with the Pialligo group, this suggests that the woman was from the Kamberri group.

18. Bluett, WP, 1954.

19. Plate 2 features a photograph that includes the family of Nanny's second youngest daughter, Sarah, who married Dick Lowe. Certainly, Shumack's insensitive description of Nanny's children does not apply to Sarah. Shumack's assertion that Nanny had eleven children is not yet confirmed. Sarah certainly had eleven children, some of whom appear in the photo of her mentioned above. To date, I can only find about five of Nanny's children. Some of her children were registered by local priests but others might not have been. Those who were, can be found. Those who were not registered are a little harder to trace.

20. Shumack, Samuel, 1977, chapter XI.

21. Selkirk, Henry, 1923.

Some few years later, probably about 1822,²² Ainslie came to Sydney, bringing with him good references from one of the lairds of the Scottish Border to Mr Campbell,²³ from whom he obtained employment.

About the year 1823, no doubt shortly after the return of Captain Currie's expedition,²⁴ Ainslie received instructions from Mr Campbell to proceed to Bathurst, there to take delivery of 6,000 ewes due to Mr Campbell from the government flocks. These were to be driven across the country to the vicinity of Goulburn Plains, with a view to securing suitable grazing country. Ainslie carried out his instructions, but not finding what he wanted, drove his flock on towards Yass.

Here²⁵ he fell in with a tribe of aborigines from whom he ascertained that some thirty miles southerly there was a large extent of good open grazing country. Guided by one of the gins, he ultimately reached the Molonglo River, at a spot known by the natives as 'Pialligo', where he established a sheep station in Mr Campbell's interest.

It seems unusual, to say the least, that this Aboriginal group would have been able to communicate with Ainslie unless he brought with him a guide to interpret. Given the anger that resulted from stockkeepers taking Aboriginal women on the eastern side of Weereewaa in previous years, it seems unlikely that, if this were a Kamberri group, they would have gladly sent one of their women with this strange man and his workers without some pressure being exerted. The evidence suggests that Ainslie had encountered either a Pajong or Wallabalooa group on the right bank of the Yass River near Yass. The Wallabalooa and the Kamberri were enemies and, as we shall see later, the so-called 'Yass Blacks' also periodically invaded Kamberri country to 'steal gins'.²⁶ Perhaps the Wallabalooa deliberately sent Ainslie towards Pialligo, the main corroboree ground of their enemies, the Kamberri, using a stolen Kamberri woman to guide him there. Campbell used the word 'induced' to describe how Ainslie persuaded her to be his guide. How terrified she must have been.

We know that Ainslie became very friendly with the Kamberri and that one woman from within the Kamberri group certainly did give birth to the first multicultural Kamberri child, who was called Nanny, circa 1826, about nine months after Ainslie's arrival in the district. We will learn more of Nanny's life in later chapters.

At the age of about fifteen, in 1841, Nanny was recorded on a blanket distribution list²⁷ as the consort of Onyong, who was by then being described as the 'chief'²⁸ of the Kamberri. This was about six years after Ainslie had left Australia. Onyong had

22. Ainslie arrived in the colony in 1824 according to the Census of New South Wales, 1828.

23. Sir Robert Campbell was a trader of note whose office was at Wharf House, Darling Harbour.

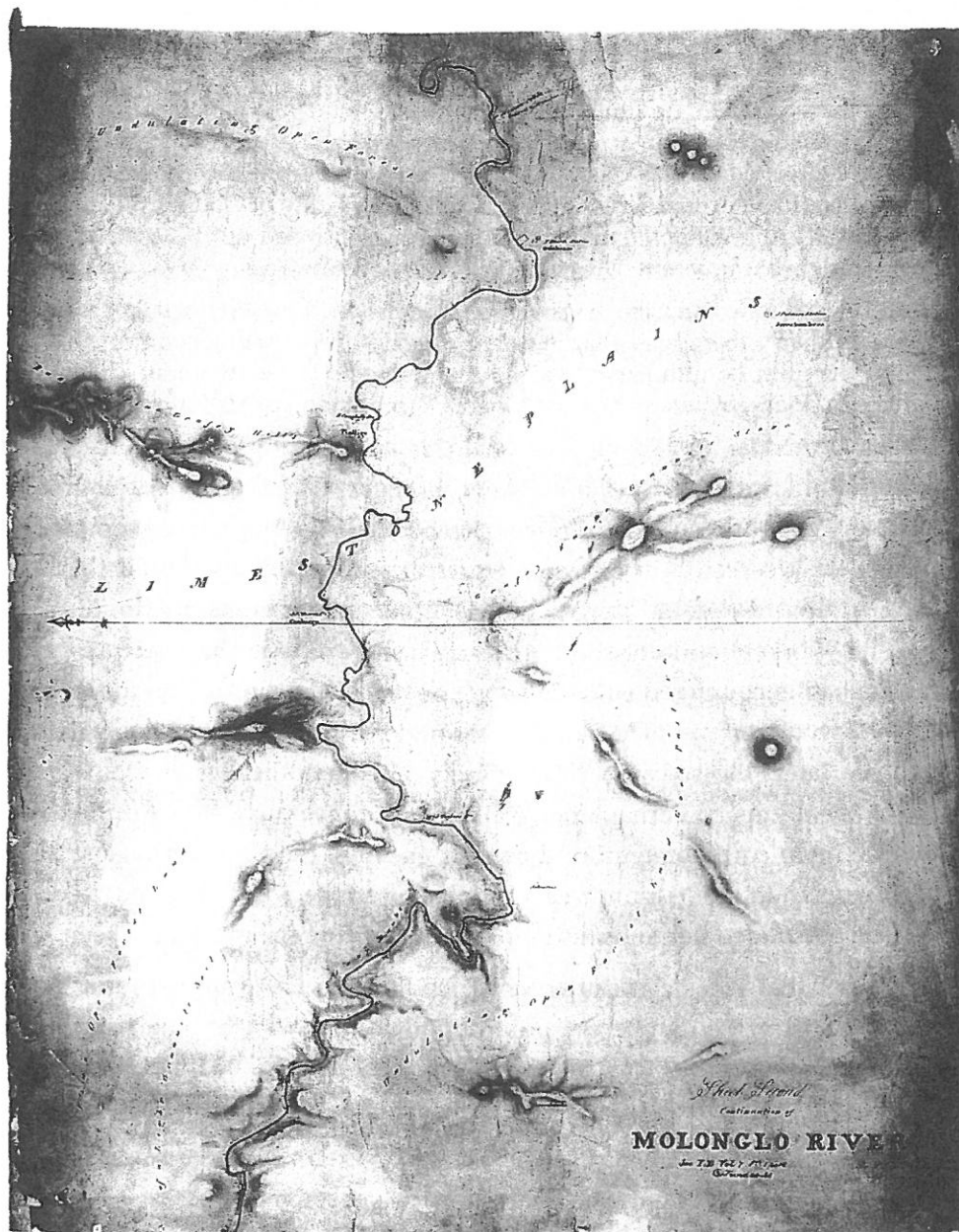
24. Ainslie was not in the colony until 1824. It is possible, but not confirmed, that Campbell heard about the area from Currie.

25. Where? Was it on the northern or southern Yass Plains? Most sources from the 1860s onwards suggest it was close to old Gundaroo, which was west of the Yass River and northwest of Lake George. WP Bluett, 1954, citing as his source John Blundell, whose family once worked for the Campbells, says it was Ginnin-Ginnin-Derra (Ginninderra). Certainly Nanny, the product of the alleged relationship between Ainslie and a Kamberri woman, identified closely with Ginninderra all her life (see Part II).

26. Comment by Jack Cotter, descendent of Garrett, in a 1995 interview with the author.

27. This blanket distribution list is reproduced in Chapter 3.

28. 'Fighting man' is probably a more appropriate title.



Reproduced by the Institution of Surveyors Australia (Canberra Division) from the original in the Archives Office of New South Wales

CANBERRA

This is the earliest known map showing the Molonglo River from its junction with the Queanbeyan River to below Coppin's Crossing. Place names shown can be related to present day localities.

T. Beard's Station QUINBEAM — on the river near Queanbeyan; R. Campbell's Station PALLIGO — later known as the Duntroon Estate, now the Royal Military College; J. J. Moore's Station CANBERRA — on the Acton peninsula where the hospital now stands; J. Taylor's Station (a squatter's station) — near the Governor General's residence at Yarralumla; Johnson's (a squatter's station) — on Weston Creek; J. Palmer's Station JERRABOMBERRA — near the suburb of Hume.

Topographical features that can be identified from the map include Mt. Majura, Mt. Ainslie, Mt. Pleasant, Black Mountain, Mt. Painter (formerly known as Round Hill), Mt. Stromlo, Mt. Taylor, Red Hill, Mt. Mugga Mugga and Jerrabomberra Hill.

The area was surveyed by Assistant Surveyor Robert Dixon of the Surveyor General's Department, in May 1829.

PRESIDENT *Robert Dixon*
Institution of Surveyors Australia (Canberra Division)



22.425

Map 7: Surveyor Dixon's map of the Molonglo River, 1825
Reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Australia.

been friendly with Ainslie as well as with other early European workers who settled in his country.

Ainslie used the Kamberri name 'Pialligo' for the vast lands he claimed for his employer but the property was later renamed 'Duntroon' by Campbell. A much smaller area near the modern-day airport still bears the name of Pialligo.

James Taylor

Although many Sydney-based white men were claiming land to the southwest of Weereewaa in the 1820s, the area continued to be quite sparsely inhabited by Europeans throughout the 1820s and the few who did reside there were mostly convicts and workers who guarded their employers' stock. Some of these lonely men became friendly with the local Aboriginal families, some of whom, for one reason or another, adopted the names of the stockmen they befriended and bestowed them on their children.

James Taylor, also spelled Tailor, was a stockkeeper assigned to the Lake George-based Cooper & Co. He established himself near the site where the Yarralumla woolshed is now, close to the modern Governor-General's residence (see Map 7). The census for 1828 describes him as a 'hutkeeper' on the Monaro, Goulburn Plains, which was then classified as one broad area that included Yarralumla and the 'Limestone Plains'. One Kamberri child, Jimmy Taylor, was given the name of this European 'hutkeeper'. We will meet him in later chapters.

Garrett Cotter

Garrett Cotter arrived in the district as a convict assigned to Francis Kenny at Lake George but he also worked for Terence Aubrey Murray and James Cooper, who were also Lake George 'landowners'.²⁹

Garrett was found guilty of stealing a mare and exiled briefly to the west of the Murrumbidgee at a time when that area remained relatively unexplored. According to Cotter family legend and oral history, he would not have survived in that area without the assistance of 'Hong Yong' (Onyong), whom he befriended. 'Hong Yong' frequently stayed in the cottage Cotter later built at 'The Forest', according to a plaque erected by William (Bill) Cotter, Garrett's great-grandson (see Plates 5 and 6).

The oral history passed down from Garrett to his descendants suggests that, with Onyong, he explored the whole of the mountain area, including the high alpine plains that he had first visited with Kenny's cattle in 1828.³⁰ He later moved to the head of the river that now bears his name and established a hut there. Cotter assisted local settlers during the 1838–39 drought by passing on the knowledge he gained from his experiences in the mountains during his period of exile.³¹ Cotter's 'native

29. Cooper, James, journal (1831–32). My thanks to Judy Kenny for making her copy available.

30. Moore, Bruce, 1999. Moore's main informant on Cotter family history was William Cotter (a descendant of Garrett's), who is now deceased.

31. *Ibid.*



Plate 5: The Cotter family's tribute to 'Hong-Yong'

Monument erected by William Cotter, Garrett Cotter's great-grandson. Photo by Jay Arthur.

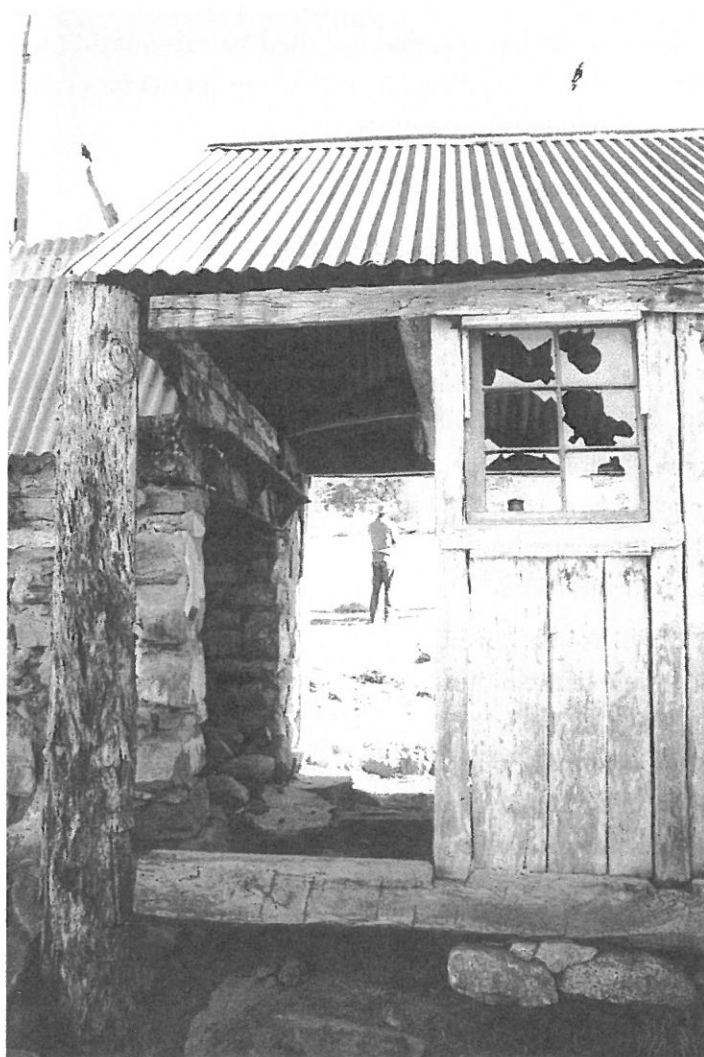


Plate 6: Garrett Cotter's hut at 'The Forest', Naas (with Liam Cotter, Garrett's great-great-grandson, in the background)

Photo by Jay Arthur.

friends' continued to visit him while on trips to the mountains for initiation ceremonies and the annual feasting of the bogong moths. Cotter family legend describes one occasion when he returned to his hut to find that it had been ransacked in his absence and certain articles stolen. The articles were later allegedly returned to him by 'Hong Yong' together with the hand of the thief.³² During this period, 'Cotter learnt much of the aboriginal ways and customs, probably more than anyone else in the district'.³³

The friendship forged between Cotter and Onyong in those early days was vital to the protection some of the Lake George 'landowners' subsequently enjoyed when they began running their stock along the Murrumbidgee River and, later, on the Monaro. Through Onyong, Cotter also discovered important routes through the 'Murrumbidgee Mountains' to good pasturage in the Tumbarumba districts and beyond — a quicker route than the one opened up by Hume and Hovell in 1824 from the Lake George district to Port Phillip. The stockmen saved a few days journey by using the mountain routes to drive their stock to Melbourne.

Henry Williams

Henry Williams was another of Cooper's workers, whom Cooper hired in May 1832 for 10 shillings per year. A man named Henry Williams, then 17 years old, was listed in the New South Wales census for 1828 as an assigned servant working for Terence Murray Senior at Erskine Park in Sydney.³⁴ Williams may have accompanied Murray's son, Terence Aubrey Murray, to help him establish a station on Murray Senior's land grant on the eastern side of Weereewaa in 1829. His name was inherited by a Kamberri child we will meet as an adult in later chapters.

Terence Aubrey Murray and Stewart Marjoribanks Mowle

Aubrey Murray, as Terence Aubrey Murray Junior preferred to be called, with Thomas Walker took possession of 'Yarralumley' (*Yarralumla*) station in 1836. Murray and his superintendent, Stewart Marjoribanks Mowle, who were respectively 19 and 16 years old when they arrived at Weereewaa, forged close friendships with the Kamberri and depended on their protection against attacks from 'wild blacks' from surrounding districts. The young Mowle, who was left solely in charge of more than 60 convicts when he was just 16, befriended a local Aboriginal boy his own age, Tommy, 'who slept on a carpet in my room'.³⁵

Both Murray and Mowle learned to speak the language local to the areas surrounding Murray's properties and outstations and, until each of them married, had very close and mutually dependent relationships with local Aboriginal groups.

32. *Ibid.*, p 25. Oral history tends to be embellished with each telling. It is unlikely this actually happened.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Census of New South Wales, 1828. See Historical records relating to NSW.

35. Mowle, Stewart Marjoribanks, 'A retrospective journal', Mowle family papers, NLA Manuscripts MS 1042.

Although some of the local European settlers and workers southwest of Weereewaa knew Kamberri individuals and families quite well from the 1830s onwards, visitors to the area appeared not to be interested in interviewing them about the local Aboriginal people. Modern historians have read the records of the trips of intelligent travellers such as Dr John Lhotsky and William Broadribb and assumed from their lack of information on Aboriginal groups in this district that they had already vanished from the landscape by the mid-1830s. In the next section, let us scrutinise the records of Lhotsky's and Broadribb's journeys and ask ourselves how such conclusions could have been reached.

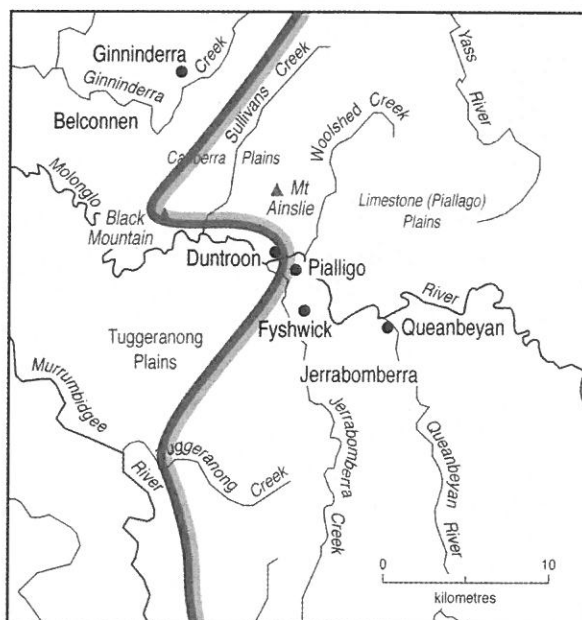
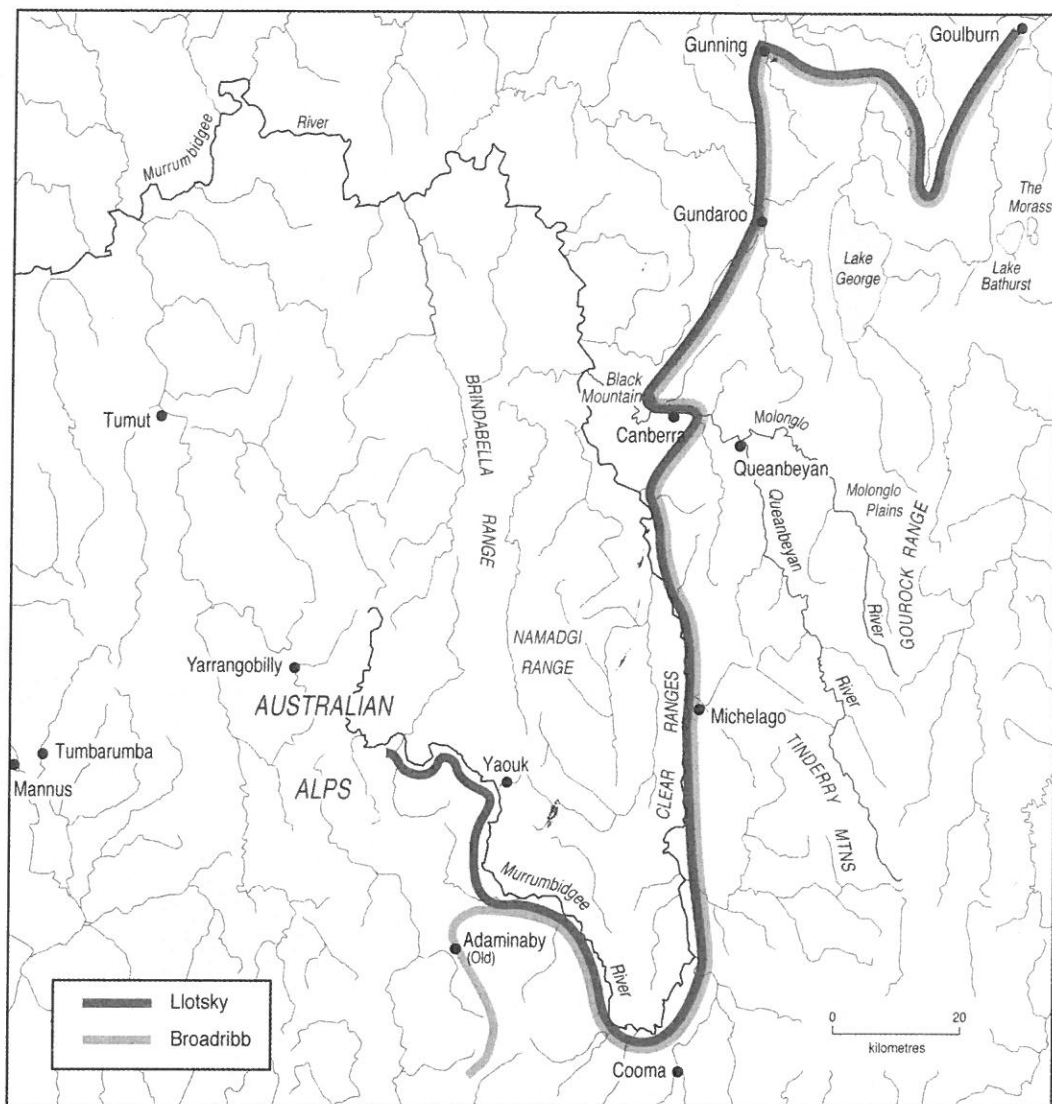
Early 'non-encounters' southwest of Weereewaa!

From the earliest era of European exploration and settlement, some contemporary writers and observers were claiming that the district southwest of Weereewaa was uninhabited. Worse were the 'extinction' theories,³⁶ which were not only an insult to the Aboriginal peoples of this area but also an indictment on the Europeans who explored and settled the district — for who else was responsible for their demise if they had, indeed, become extinct?

I present here two examples of contemporary writing that reflected both the 'extinction' and 'uninhabited land' theories. Dr John Lhotsky, who passed through the district briefly in January and February 1834, claimed of the 'Kembery River' Aboriginal people³⁶ 'they are now no more!' William Broadribb, who had close contact with Aboriginal people of the same district after he settled on the Monaro, left us with an idyllic but, nonetheless, misleading description of his first ride through the same area in 1835. In his writings he made no mention of any encounters with local Aboriginal people, so some modern writers have concluded from this that none were there. Yet Broadribb did not say the district was uninhabited. In fact, when he became manager of William Bradley's outstation near Yaouk and Adaminaby the local Kamberri became frequent visitors (see Chapter 3).

By the time Lhotsky and Broadribb were passing through the district in 1834 and 1835 the area was already quite well settled by Europeans (see Map 9). Neither Lhotsky nor Broadribb appeared to spend much time gaining information about local Aboriginal people from the Lake George settlers or from the settlers or their workers to the southwest. Those that Lhotsky did question either knew little about the local Aboriginal people or were not forthcoming about the knowledge they had. The local Aboriginal families themselves may have been absent from the area at that time for a variety of reasons. Since Lhotsky's and Broadribb's writings are based mostly on observations they made during their own fleeting visits to the area, we can only speculate on the reasons for the lack of information about local Aboriginal groups in their texts.

36. Lhotsky referred to Aborigines as 'Papuas'.



Map 8: Routes taken by Lhotsky and Broadribb from the Limestone Plains to the Monaro, 1834 and 1835

Compiled from the writings of Lhotsky and Broadribb by Ann Jackson-Nakano. Map reproduced courtesy of the Cartography Unit, RSPAS, Australian National University.

While Lhotsky spent some time visiting areas of local interest during his brief stay at 'Limestone Cottage' on the Pialligo (later *Duntroon*) estate of Robert Campbell, both he and Broadribb concentrated most of their observations on the corridor between the Clear and Tinderry Ranges. This was then the main route from Canberra to the Monaro through Michelago (see Map 8) and was a frontier shared by at least three Aboriginal groups. The modern Monaro Highway follows a similar route through Tuggeranong and Michelago to Cooma (see Map 5).

Dr John Lhotsky

Between January and March 1834, Dr John Lhotsky passed through the district to the southwest of Weereewaa on a journey to the Australian Alps to study the area's geography and nature.³⁷ He was accompanied by a small entourage of 'servants' who were familiar with the area Lhotsky was about to traverse, one of whom, a man named Walker, claimed he could communicate with Aboriginal people local to the Goulburn district.³⁸

We have seen previously that Lhotsky, like a number of other travellers and explorers before him, headed towards Gunning from the Goulburn district rather than follow the track around Lake George to enter the Gundaroo district through Geary's Gap. It was at the 'Fish River' (the headwaters of the Lachlan at Gunning) that his party met the Pajong group, who had communicated to Lhotsky that their country included Goulburn and the Yass Plains but not the Limestone³⁹ (see Chapter 1). It seems this was the last Aboriginal group Lhotsky encountered until he reached the Monaro.

While on the 'Limestone Plains' Lhotsky stayed in Limestone Cottage, on the property that was to become known as Duntroon, as a guest of the Campbell family, from whom he had a letter of introduction for the superintendent, James Ainslie, who was not then at home. The view from the dairy, built on the site of one of the Kambarri's ancient corroboree grounds,⁴⁰ obviously made quite an impression on Lhotsky:

Thursday, 30th January 1834:

I entered the dairy, which is surrounded by some lofty gum trees, through the fine foliage of which and a heavenly sky, the Italian-like scenery towards the S. — the colossus of the Alps were visible. Limestone Plains are at least 7 miles long, but there are several other branches here, separated from each other only by some slight ranges or undulations of land. So are *Molonglo* Plains, 15 miles S.E. from the dairy they are 7 miles in length, and four or five broad. *Kembery* Plain lies to the N.N.W., 3 miles from this place. Beyond the expanse of the plains it was that I now saw the outskirts of the Alps, beginning at the first only with detached hills, over which rises

37. Lhotsky, John, 1835, p 19.

38. Although the County of Murray was so declared by 1829 and the 'Limestone Plains' had become a distinct geographical area by this time, some European 'old timers' still considered the districts as far as the Murrumbidgee and the Monaro as part of the Goulburn district even in the mid-1830s.

39. Lhotsky, John, 1835, p 41.

40. It was destroyed by fire in 2000 and has since been restored.

a long chain of higher mountains, not however to be compared with the main ranges I afterwards ascended. From this place the people pointed out to me *Namadgi* range,⁴¹ being 18 miles distant S.W., which is covered with snow during a great part of the year⁴² ...

Saturday, 1 February 1834

A locality which occupied me very much was the banks of Limestone-, or as it was originally called by the natives (they are now no more!) *Kembery* River, the source of which is at *Molonglo* Plains. It receives afterwards the *Quinbien* Creek 5 miles from hence, in a place bearing S.E. by E. The source of the latter I was told, is to the S., right over the Twins or *Tindery* Mountain, at Mr Keef's place near *Mikelego* Plains.⁴³

Lhotsky's nomenclature is confusing at times. The Limestone Plains were those referred to by the Kamberri as 'Pialligo' — meaning the plains that can be seen from the top of Mt Ainslie to the east meandering from modern day Canberra to Majura and parts of Fyshwick and Queanbeyan. The 'Kembery' Plains retained the Kamberri name for a time. These are, as Lhotsky suggested, to the north-northwest of Duntroun, incorporating the area stretching from Acton through the present inner city suburbs towards Black Mountain, Belconnen and Ginninderra. They also stretched across the Molonglo to include the areas on which the old and the new Parliament Houses and associated buildings stand, and possibly at least as far as Woden. The Tuggeranong Plains are to the south of Woden, but Lhotsky does not mention them. As well as the 'Kembery River' there was a 'Kembery' Creek, now Sullivan's Creek, which flowed into the Molonglo before Lake Burley Griffin was constructed in 1964. *Quinbien* Creek was Lhotsky's name for the Queanbeyan River.

It is important to understand the contemporary geography of the area in the 1830s to ascertain the places traversed by Europeans, no matter how briefly, and thus the points at which they might and might not have encountered local Aboriginal people. At times, there is confusion among Europeans, including surveyors, about the actual locations of certain areas in the Canberra-Queanbeyan district: for example some contemporary writers thought the Molonglo Plains were in the Canberra district whereas, in fact, they are southeast of Bungendore in the upper Molonglo area around Captain's Flat. Since these two different areas were within the territories of two quite distinct Aboriginal groups, it is important, when writing a history of an Aboriginal group, to ascertain the exact areas about which contemporary observers are writing.

At the time Lhotsky visited in 1834, although much Kamberri land had already been appropriated by European 'landowners' (see Map 9), the district was still sparsely populated by Europeans. Lhotsky himself said that once he left the stations of McLeod, Packer and Styles near Gundaroo: 'these are the last places in that direction, where continuous habitations are to be found'.⁴⁴

41. He explains on p 63 that this is composed of several successions of ranges.

42. Lhotsky, John, 1835, pp 55-56.

43. Lhotsky, John, 1835, p 61.

44. Lhotsky, John, 1835, p 54. I'm presuming by 'that direction', he means south.

Lhotsky spent a total of six days inspecting the Limestone Plains and gathering information about the area and people from the residents, but not from James Ainslie as he was then visiting a friend at nearby Jerrabomberra station, and, apparently, not from the local Kamberri either, since they were 'no more!' Lhotsky met Ainslie briefly when he called in at 'Giribomberry', but did not make a point of talking to him because Ainslie was then quite drunk and Lhotsky was afraid of him in that state. It is a pity Lhotsky did not take the opportunity to ask Ainslie about the Kamberri and whether or not they were really no more. Ainslie's response would have been interesting, considering his alleged then nine year-old daughter, Nanny, and her mother were still living nearby with the Kamberri. Ainslie would have also been familiar with most Aboriginal groups as far as 'Dilighet' (Delegate), which was the Campbell's farthest outstation, located 'about 170 miles' to the south of 'Limestone Plains'. Thus, Lhotsky missed the chance of a lifetime by not interviewing Ainslie and asking him about his first decade in Kamberri country, and deprived future historians and Kamberri descendants of a wealth of historical evidence about the Kamberri and their relations with the Europeans during those early settlement days. Instead, we have to satisfy ourselves with mere historical fragments.

Lhotsky set off from Jerrabomberra via *Tagranong* (Tuggeranong) and Mikelego [*sic*] Plains, at which point his party entered an area beyond the limits of settlement⁴⁵ (see Maps 8 and 9):

I must here likewise observe, that after leaving Mikelago Plains, we saw no more white females, although we travelled upwards of a hundred miles on stations.⁴⁶

Lhotsky then visited Kuma (Cooma) and Yiyak (Yaouk) stations. The latter, he said, had been established only three months previously by J Slake. J Slake told Lhotsky that 60 to 70 natives at a time often visited him but he heard the Menero [*sic*] tribe was already very weak, consisting of 50 men⁴⁷ who were 'entirely tame (indeed, not civilised but corrupted), and wander as far as Yass and the Limestone Plains'.⁴⁸

Slake appears to be talking about two groups here, only one of which he describes as a Monaro group. Yaouk is in Kamberri country (see Map 2) and historical evidence presented in Parts II and III of this volume suggests that the Kamberri also had close ties with Cooma families. Certainly, the Kamberri 'wandered' as far as the (southern) Yass and Limestone Plains, both of which were in their country. The area between the Murrumbidgee and Snowy rivers and the Monaro Range⁴⁹ (see Map 2)

45. The extension of the settled territory from 16 to 19 counties commenced under Governor Darling in 1828. Major Thomas Mitchell was appointed to survey the settled parts of the colony and to conduct a trigonometrical survey. Following the death of John Oxley, Mitchell was appointed to the position of Surveyor-General. In 1829, the Counties of King (in the Yass and Boorowa district) and Murray (in the Canberra and Queanbeyan districts) marked the limits of settlement at Bowning and Michelago respectively, although by the time of Lhotsky's visit, Governor Bourke's administration was well aware of grazing outside the limits of settlement, for example on the Monaro. *HRA* vols XIV-XVII.

46. Lhotsky, John, 1835, p 88.

47. He does not mention women and children.

48. Lhotsky, John, 1835, p 105.

49. Referred to by Currie as the 'Morumbidgee Mountains'. See Map 6.

was then a frontier shared by neighbouring Walgalu- (including Kamberri) and

Ngarigo-speaking groups.⁵⁰ Although William Broadribb did not mention them when he first arrived in their country, by 1844 the Kamberri were regular visitors to William Bradley's station at Adaminaby, near Yaouk, which was managed by Broadribb. Slake would have almost certainly been referring to the Kamberri group in his conversation with Lhotsky, of whom '60 to 70 natives at a time visited'. His reference to the state of the 'Menero tribe' was hearsay. He or Lhotsky may have been confused about which group it was that 'wandered' as far as the Yass and Limestone Plains.

William Broadribb

William Broadribb covered much the same ground as Lhotsky had done the year before when he set off from Sydney to the Monaro to look for a good place 'to squat'. His description of the part of his trip when he crossed the Limestone Plains is worth reproducing here for its beautiful depiction of the country at that time:⁵¹

I was much pleased with the country I rode through; four days' ride brought me to the open beautiful plains called 'Limestone Plains', from the circumstance of that part of the colony being of limestone formation, well-grassed, and well-watered by a small tributary to the Murrumbidgee, named 'Molonglo River'. The plains are surrounded by high mountains, forming a kind of amphitheatre, and in the distance to the westward could be observed a long range of high mountain — spurs from the Australian Alps. During the winter months they are covered with snow, and at their base flows the Murrumbidgee River. The Limestone Plains formed a portion of the county of Murray,⁵² and most of the land was taken up either by grants to the old settlers, or purchased from the Government, and stocked with sheep, cattle and horses.

Throughout his journey (see Map 8), Broadribb appears not to have met one Aboriginal person he thought worthy of mentioning — although he covered quite a distance.

As he passed through 'Michalago', on the right were 'lofty ranges through which the Murrumbidgee ran', and on the left were the 'Tindaries towering into the sky'. He travelled all over the Monaro, from station to station, looking for a run. A stockman on the Monaro eventually pointed out to him an abandoned run.

Why didn't they mention the Kamberri?

William Broadribb did not mention any encounters with Aboriginal people while on his first trip to the Monaro through the Michelago corridor, but in his recollections of

50. I do not wish to try and reconstruct here the boundaries of all Aboriginal groups surrounding the country of the Kamberri. It is conceivable that a number of individuals from the surrounding groups had dual rights to Kamberri country and to the country their group identified with, due to kinship networks that crossed 'borders'. My focus in this study is on the Kamberri and members of this group who consistently identified with the areas I believe link them to Kamberri country.

51. Broadribb, WA, 1883, pp 5–6.

52. The County of Murray was declared in 1829.

his early years of working on the Monaro he does, in fact, describe his numerous encounters with Aboriginal people — some good, some bad. He employed Aboriginal workers on the 'Monaro' station near Yaouk, *Bullamanang*, which he managed for William Bradley from 1843⁵³ as well as at his own station at Mannus, which he must have purchased later from Terence Aubrey Murray. Both of these areas were within the country of Walgalu-speaking groups, which included the Kamberri (see Chapter 1). By 1844 'Hong Yong' and his group had become regular visitors to the station managed by Broadribb. With an introduction from Garrett Cotter, the Kamberri may have even guided Broadribb through the Yarrangobilly Gap, through which he often took stock in later years to Melbourne (see Map 11).

How could both Lhotsky and Brodribb have missed the Kamberri in 1834 and 1835? In 1834 the Kamberri group and their visitors all gathered at McLaren's station, *Janevale*, which Lhotsky referred to as '*Tagranong* or *Gin Bell*',⁵⁴ for their annual blanket distributions. The blanket distribution lists were recorded a couple of months or so after Lhotsky's visit to the district. They negate, therefore, Lhotsky's statement that the people of the area under study were 'now no more' by 1834. There is overwhelming evidence that individuals in the local group mentioned on the 1834 lists identified with the country that now incorporates the Australian Capital Territory and surrounds, both before and after Lhotsky's and Broadribb's visit. According to the early settlers who knew them well, this group referred to itself as the Kamberri⁵⁵ (see Chapter 4). The claim by Lhotsky that the 'natives' of this area were now 'no more' in 1834 is therefore erroneous. As for Broadribb, he did not say the district was uninhabited by Aboriginal groups. He just did not encounter any on this particular trip.

53. Broadribb, WA, 1883.

54. Lhotsky, John, 1835, p 72.

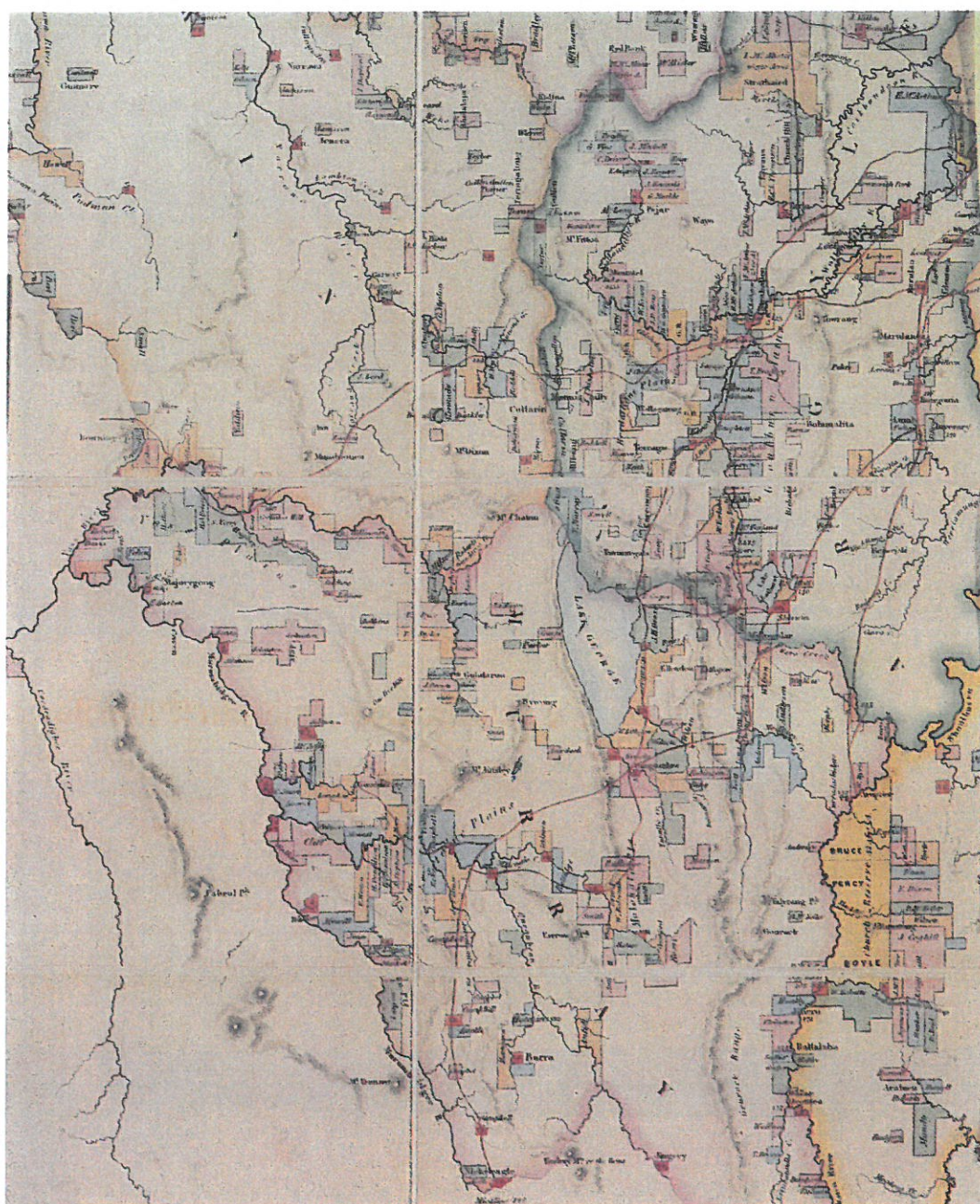
55. Also spelled Kgambery. There are numerous renditions of this group's name into English.



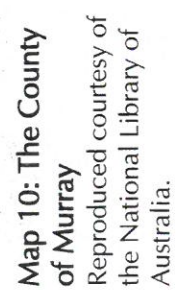
Plate 3: Weereewaa
Lake George, NSW, end of
the lake near Bungendore,
25 miles from Goulburn.
Painting by Louis Frank
(circa 1880), oil on
cardboard. From the Rex
Nan Kivell collection,
courtesy of the National
Library of Australia.



Plate 4: Stylised European depiction of 'Lake George' from the northeast by Joseph Lycett, c. 1825
 Lycett, Joseph, c. 1775–1828, View of Lake George, NSW, from the northeast, March 1, 1825, from Views in Australia (J Souter, London), Plate no. 19. Reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Australia.



Map 9: Surveyor Dixon's map of the colony of New South Wales (featuring the district around and southwest of Lake George), 1835
Reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Australia.



Map 10: The County of Murray
Reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Australia.



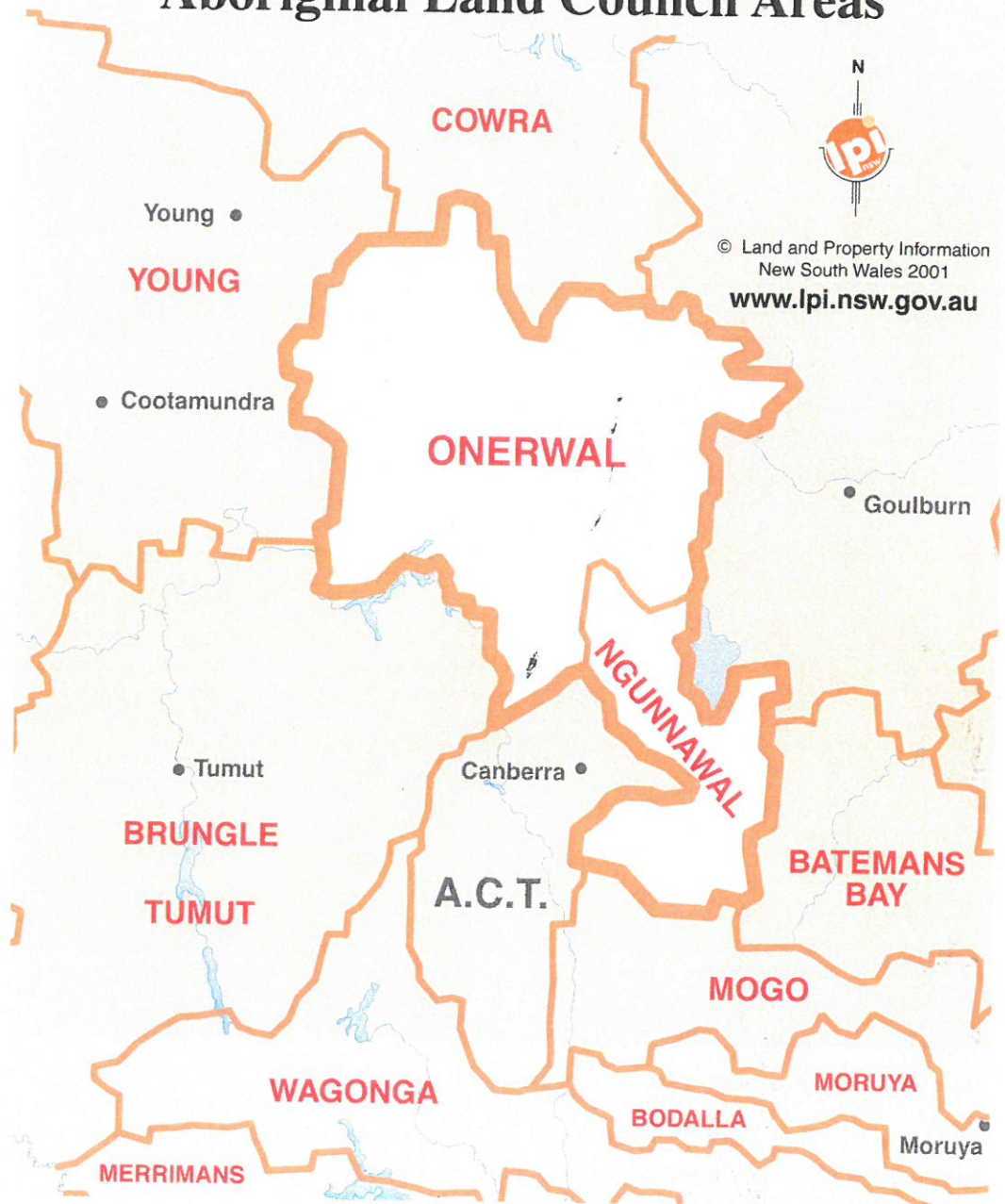
Plate 11: Murrumbidgee
Dooligah
By Matilda House, 1996,
lithograph, maniere JDS, ed.1/
6, 310 x 385 (irreg) image, 500
x 570 sheet. Printer Jan Hagon,
Theo Trembley Studio One
Inc., Canberra Museum and
Gallery.



Plate 22: Yankee Hat paintings

Reproduced courtesy of Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation.

Aboriginal Land Council Areas



Map 18: Aboriginal Land Council areas, section showing the Onerwal (Ngunawal) and Ngunnawal Local Aboriginal Land Council boundaries and surrounds, 1984
 Reproduced courtesy of the Land Information Centre, NSW Department of Information Technology and Management. © Land and Property Information, Panorama Ave, Bathurst NSW 2795.

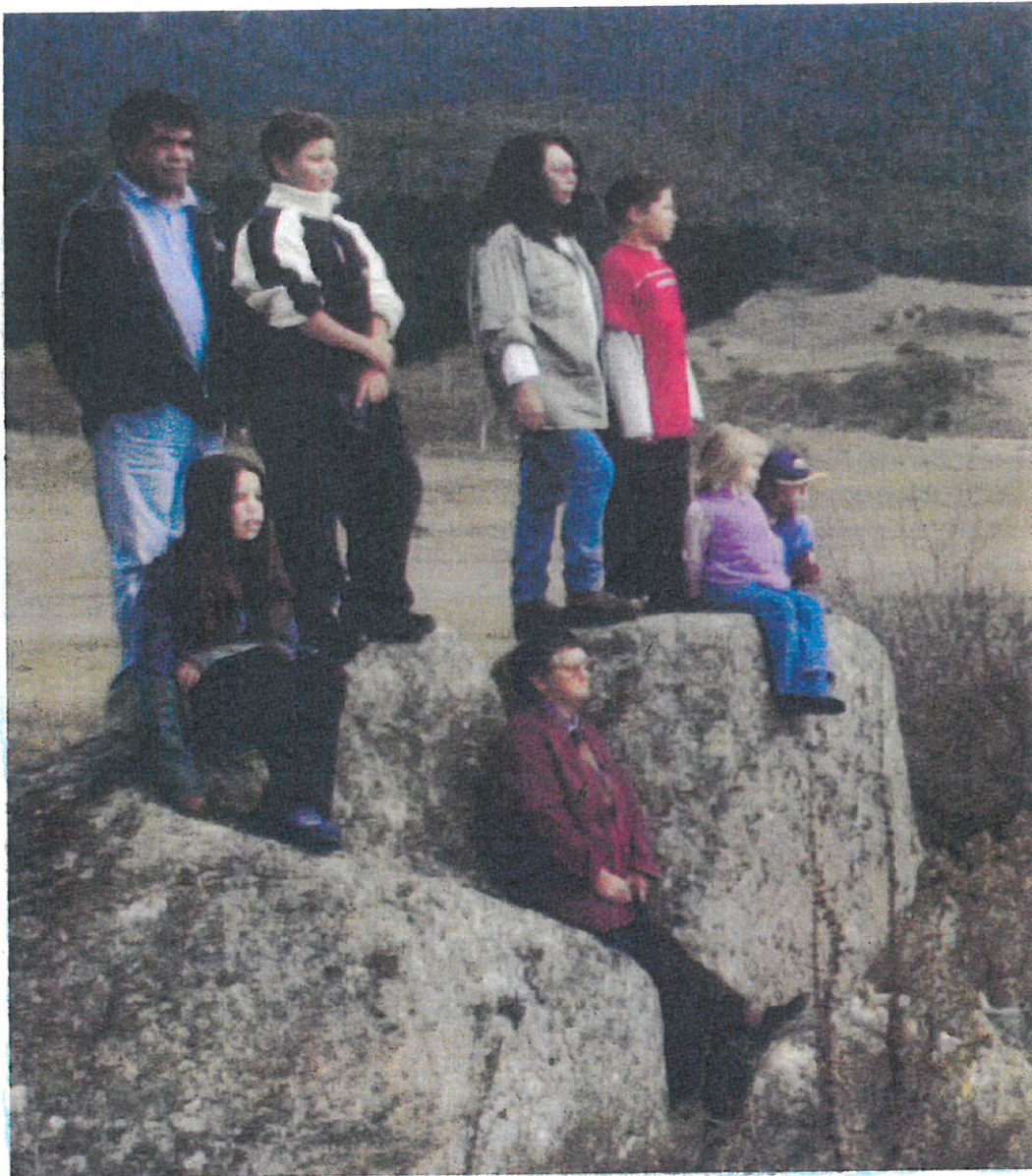


Plate 29: Kamberri descendants at Namadgi National Park

Arnold Williams (left), his son Robert and daughter Alinta, with Matilda House and her grandchildren Charlie, Ruby and Leah House, and Agnes Shea, sitting centre, look out over Namadgi National Park towards Mt Namadgi, given into their care through an historic joint management agreement with the ACT Government. Photo by Gary Schafer, Reproduced courtesy of the *Canberra Sunday Times*.