

NOTES FOR ONE FIRE RECONCILIATION GROUP TALK by Ron Milligan: March 2016

Acknowledgment of being on Wathaurong Country

My name is Ron Milligan.

I am possibly best described as “Irish Australian”. The closer to St. Patrick’s Day the more Irish I get.

I am not an historian and have fallen into the trap of accepting things at face value only to find other sources contradicting them. So I try to be careful.

I have done a bit of amateur research particularly on Buckley for the school project ‘Footsteps in the Sand’ when I was involved with The friends of ‘William Buckley’ 2003/4 and later, on Willem Baa nip.

So this is my best effort.

I have tried to use primary sources for my information whenever possible but even then errors creep in. (Fyans got his dates wrong by 10 years)

I have lived in the Geelong and the Bellarine area for 10 years of my childhood when I lived near the Great Western hotel (and for the last 40 years.)

This was in reasonable reach of the Barwon River at Queen’s Park and Buckley’s Falls. I also visited Point Lonsdale (Buckley’s cave.) and the Portarlington Mill (Buckley’s camp) Breamlea (Buckleys well)

Who was Buckley ?

Stories of ‘The Wild White Man’ abounded.

However he only lived on Wathaurong land for 32 years. The story of the Wathaurong does not start with him.

So my enquiries about Buckley led to questions about the Aboriginal people.

Where are they?

There were none in my street or my school or in the city or the country around, that I could see. I might as well be in a European city.

What is their history and what became of them?

My father told me that they had all 'died out'. How? Because when they wore woolen blankets instead of possum skin cloaks they got soaked and died of pneumonia.

I was skeptical.

I have been on a journey of discovery. I have been trying to dig out the facts of the matter and make sense of them.

As a non- Aboriginal person what pathways are there to go on this journey?

Most references are written by Europeans, from a European point of view, but the Aboriginal people are generous enough to share, some, dreamtime stories with us from David Unaipon "Legendary Tales of the Aboriginal people", to William Barrak and to Glen Shae and David Tournier and other 'contemporary Story Tellers' and song-writers.

The Wathaurong have lived on this land for tens of thousands of years. Their culture has stood the test of time.

The dreamtime stories narrated by Barrak and Billi-Billeri tell of a time when the Yarra river flooded Port Phillip Bay destroying a fruitful hunting ground for the Wathaurong and Bunnarrung but creating one ... the Yarra valley ... for the Woiwurrung. Long memories !

How many stories have been lost?

This event actually happened 10's of thousands of years ago, but it was kept alive by oral history, by the story tellers.

There are some records of Aboriginal thoughts at contact. Tommy McRaes drawings, some cave paintings. And one story told to a man named Lloyd on the banks of the Barwon River.

“ The stranger white man came in his great swimming coorong(vessel) and landed at Corayiowith his dedabul boulganas (large animals) and his aniki boulganas (little animals). He came with his boom booms(double barrel guns)his white mia mias (tents) blankets and tomahawks; and the dedabul ummageet (great white stranger) took away the long-inherited hunting grounds of the poor Barrabool coolies and their children ... Coolie Coolie Where are our coolie now? Where are our fathers ,mothers, brothers and sisters? Dead! All gone! Dead!”

How did the Wathaurong lose their land?

I try to understand how Cook could have thought it was OK to claim the Eastern half of ‘New Holland’ for the British Crown, on the basis that its inhabitants were nomads. He had seen the smoke from their fires all the way up the coast and had made 17 landings (the longest at Cooktown) where he had considerable contact with the locals. How could he have been so ignorant?

Would the reverse be true? Aboriginal people landing in London, and claiming that country on the same basis? Probably not.

Of course Cook had gunpowder. By his own account he shot at the brave men who confronted him at Botany Bay.

At Cooktown he fired his musket at and chased away the people he refused to share turtle meat with.

Soon after this he raised the flag and fired the guns on Possession (dis-possession) Island on the tip of Cape York.

So in 1770 the land of the Wathaurong was claimed for the British Crown. Even though he had never set eyes on it.

The claim was reinforced by John Murray, Lt.Gov. Collins and others. Batman was the only one to acknowledge prior ownership although his treaty was probably a fraud.

Batman’s claim was not recognised by Burke who still insisted the land belonged to the Crown and the squatters were trespassers.

I think Cook's action showed arrogance and ignorance.

Arrogance and Ignorance can be countered with Humility and Knowledge.

Humility will allow us to credit the Aboriginal people with maintaining a sustainable culture for tens of thousands of years. It will allow us to credit them with ability to live in a harsh land with a bare minimum of tools and resources where the likes of Buckley and later Burke and Wills, would starve.

I believe that **knowledge** of the history of Aboriginal people and their ancient culture, knowledge of the true history since the invasion of their land is essential if we are to achieve a lasting reconciliation.

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BUCKLEY

The fact that Buckley was able to give an account of the last 32 years of the traditional lifestyle of the Wathaurong people is of great value, but caution is still needed.

Buckley's childhood and early adulthood gives us an insight into the man he was to become. The things which drove him, the skills he acquired and his size and bearing helped him survive when he found himself alone and vulnerable in a strange land. He was a tall man ... between 6'6" and 6'8".

Buckley was born in Cheshire England. He was adopted by his mother's father and apprenticed to a bricklayer. He found the work tedious and the discipline overbearing and decided to become a soldier and seek glory. He joined the King's

Own Regiment of Foot and saw action against the French in Holland. The campaign was a disaster and the troops, including Buckley who was wounded in the right hand, were withdrawn to England and boredom. At the barracks one day he was handed some cloth by an unknown woman and asked to carry it to another woman in the barracks to make some clothes. He was apprehended, tried for receiving stolen goods and sentenced to transportation. So he arrived at Sullivan's Cove, (Sorrento) aboard the Calcutta as a convict on 9th October 1803.

At 9pm. on 27th Dec 1803 Buckley and four others made a dash for freedom. One was shot and badly wounded but the remaining four ran and walked around the Bay, crossing the Yarra and visiting the You Yangs on their way to Swan Island. Across the Bay they could see the Sullivan Cove camp. They had lost one of their number on the trip. They tried to signal but were ignored. The two remaining decided to return to the Sorrento camp. Only one of them, McAllender, made it back. Buckley was alone. He wandered between Barwon Heads and Mount Defiance for about a year eating shell-fish and various berries and plants. He became very weak and made his way back to Barwon Heads. On the way he picked up a broken spear to use as a walking stick. It was the spear from the grave of a recently killed Wathaurong man. When he was found, exhausted, by some Wathaurong women, they assumed he was the owner of the spear, Murrangurk, and that he was a 'jumped up' warrior. This saved him and allowed him to join the Wathaurong. He acquired the language and hunting and survival skills.

So where and how did the Wathaurong live?

Buckley's account helps us understand this. It tells of following food sources and combining with others to share in times of plenty. It is thought that during his time with them he lived with a number of the clans. He also spent years alone when he could feed himself and when he was sickened by the fighting and deaths of the people he had become close to but later noted that over 32 years there were long periods of peace and co-operation. For some time he had a wife and fathered a daughter but towards the end he made his base near Torquay. There is a native well at Breamlea called Buckley's Well. He trapped bream in Spring Creek. In the last years he moved around Wathaurong country, visiting various

clans but not becoming too attached to any one group.

The Wathaurong used their land very efficiently.

Buckley reckoned that he witnessed about 700 in the gatherings of Wathaurong within about 20 miles of Geelong. That's about 600,000 acres.

Smallpox had already reduced the population drastically before Buckley arrived so let's say 1,000 people on 600,000 acres. One person 600 acres.

Batman claimed to have bought 600,000 acres with his treaty. About the same area.

The Wathaurong hunted and gathered but the women also farmed. Their farm equipment was a digging stick. They farmed many plants for food and medicine.

Many soldier settlement blocks were 640 acres. One family 640 acres. Their farm equipment included horses or tractors , ploughs, harrows, seed drills harvesters etc. Many failed. Too small. Too much work.

Buckley survived for months on shellfish he picked off the rocks. The middens show that the Wathaurong had been collecting shells for thousands of years. There were still shellfish left on the rocks for Buckley.

When Europeans opened shellfish they knew that some of them contained pearls. They collected them all. Kept the pearls threw away the meat. Then they engaged Japanese girls to dive deep to get more, when they were all gone they got men in suits with lead boots and air hoses to reach the rest.

Buckley encounter two Wathaurong men near Aireys Inlet. One threw off his possum skin cloak and dived into the ocean. He emerged with a cray in each hand.

The Wathaurong gathered fish and eels from the rivers with elaborate traps and nets. In Melbourne the Europeans removed the waterfall which used to cross the Yarra near Princes Bridge. This allowed the salt water to destroy the ecology upstream in the river. In Geelong Foster Fyans built a breakwater (at Breakwater) this stopped the salt water flowing upstream and destroyed the ecology upstream

in the river.

The crew of a small sailing ship, struggling in high seas in Bass Strait at night time was amazed to look over the side to see a bark canoe, tossing about, with a blazing torch stuck in the bow and Wathaurong women calmly fishing for squid.

The years 1770 to 1850 are the years of dispossession. It is also the lifespan of William Wordsworth; a Christian Englishman.

He wrote a poem:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

This is not the way of the Wathaurong. They saw all of nature. They knew every tree and rock on their land. They knew the passage of stars and seasons. They were in tune with nature.

They didn't care much for getting and spending. They tripped over gold nuggets for thousands of years. Not very useful stuff, gold.

Batman and his treaty.

The end of Buckleys time with the Wathaurong nearly coincides with the life of Willem baa ni ip and the arrival of John Batman.

Batman came from Van Diemen's Land.

He set up camp at St. Leonards in 1835. William Buckley arrived at Batmans camp 1835. Willem Ba Nip was born in 1836.

On the day wb was born his father was hunting at waurn ponds and saw a bunyip. He named his son Willem Baa ni ip.

The traditional way of life had not yet been destroyed. Willem ba Ni ip was near a lagoon near central Geelong. I believe the site was in market square which became the site of the exhibition building, later Cowies ? garage and later still incorporated into modern Market square.

Batman claimed to have made a treaty with the local Aborigines as well as the ones in the Melbourne area. He at least recognised that the Wathaurong had ownership of the land. The agreement allowed for payments of blankets tomahawks etc. Did he imagine he was paying rent ? Did he imagine that the two cultures and living styles could coexist without one destroying the other?

For some time there was co existence. David Fisher claimed the whole of the Bellarine Peninsula. He told his men to treat the Aborigines well. Later Anne Drysdale took up land and reported 60 Wathaurong moving through her property.

Batman's bid to have his treaty accepted by Burke failed. Burke proclaimed that it was all crown land and the squatters were in effect trespassers. Cooks Claim.

The government in London were not keen for a rapid land grab. One reason being concern for the protection of the Indigenous people but also the expense of providing infrastructure and protection for the squatters. Nevertheless the squatting went ahead at a rapid rate. Bourke visited the area and planned Melbourne. Later Geelong was drawn up.

In the 32 years after Collins moved the Sorrento camp to Hobart VDL had become overcrowded with sheep. The Tasmanian Aborigines had been reduced to a very few.

Men were looking for new land and crossed Bass Strait and followed Mitchell's track south from NSW. Some were also coming direct from England and Scotland and buying sheep.

By 1837 the squatters demand for protection was answered and Foster Fyans was appointed Police magistrate and Protector of the Aborigines.

With Buckley's help he mustered 297 within 20 miles of Geelong. How many had died or move is uncertain but it was well short of Buckley's earlier assessment of numbers. The squatters had expanded greatly between 1835 and 1837. There had been ransacking of stations and sheep.

By 1841-2 there had been a great decrease in numbers. Fanny Davenport was the daughter of protector Seivwright. She listed 116 names at this time. There had been an outbreak of influenza in 1839 which had taken over half the population, women and children being most affected.

By now the bush tucker was being destroyed. The sheep quickly ate out the staple Myrnyong or daisy yam. Kangaroos were shot in great numbers, possum skin cloaks were swapped for blankets. The painting 'the barter shows a cloak being traded. White diseases were causing havoc. Some were dying in the streets of hypothermia overnight.

There was a collapse in birthrates. Between 1837 and 1853 only 24 were born. In 1853 there were only 2 under 10 years old.

Compare this with 1835 when Batman's party met a group of 20 women with 24 children " ...the women were small and every woman had a child at her back except one who was young."

They also noted that every woman had a load of 60 to 70 lbs. 2 to 3 baskets, net bags tomahawks and wooden buckets.

Some moved to Corranderrk.

By 1853 Willem Ba nip was one of 9 women, 7 men and one child. (Toolinm beal)

By 1861 there were 7 (Gazephore Road)

Notes from Willem Ba ni ip pamphlet. Dick d. 62 Queen Eliza in 1863, Ellen in 1864, Timboo 1n 1866, Harry Gore in 1868. Dan dan nook in 1870 Willem Ba nip in 1885.

There was no one later than Willem Banip. The child must have died.

The Go-Between.

In 1835 Buckley discovered from some Wathaurong men that a camp had been set up at St. Leonards. With trepidation and excitement he walked from Torquay to meet them. It was 6th July 1835. He was dressed in a kangaroo skin, and carried his spears and weapons. He had lost his English and feared punishment. Todd's diary recounts his appearance. The party left by Batman consisted of three Europeans and six Sydney Aborigines from the Eora tribe.

After regaining his English and being dressed and shaved Buckley's time as a go-between began.

He thought that he could fill a useful role between the new arrivals and the people they were to displace. He was granted a pardon and given a job with the Port Phillip Association.

His name appears in many accounts of the new 'settlement'.

He probably saved the party from attack by the locals negotiating rations and keeping the peace. He warned of ferocious reprisals if there was any interference with the whites' property or person.

Never the less he acted as guide showing the country to its new 'owners'.

He had emotional meetings with his old 'family'.

He tried to protect the Aborigines from the onslaught of land-seekers from over Bass Strait.

He moved to the site of Melbourne with Batman.

He laughed at the funeral of Franks and his servant Flint (or Flinders) who had been found killed at their station near Werribee.

He took no part in the reprisal raid provisioned in part by John Fawkner and led by Henry Batman in which many of the Ya wangi clan were killed.

He could not take part in the search for Gellibrand and Hesse because his horse was maimed before he could go.

He did not warn of the planned attack on the 'settlers' in Melbourne. The Aboriginal boy Derrimut did that.

He is credited with laying the first brick in Melbourne .. the chimney of the Governor's or perhaps Batman's ? house.

He helped Foster Fyans muster Wathaurong from 20 miles around Geelong in 1837. They mustered 275 (or 297 in some sources.)

He helped Wesleyan minister Joseph Orton select a place for the Buntingdale mission.

He was torn apart in his efforts to reconcile the two cultures. Neither the Aborigines nor the Europeans had full trust in him. He fled to Hobart in 1836 ... a failure ?

He stayed in Hobart, was employed in various jobs. He married a friend's widow, Julia Eagers, and died in a cart accident in 1856.

BATMAN

Died 6th May 1839 bankrupt

special places for me: Queen's park, Port mill, Fairy Dell, Bremlea, McLeod's waterholes. They just have a feeling !!

roads fan out from Geelong, the pivot. (corner of Ryrie and Moorabool sts?): to the edges of Wathaurong country. Port, Q'cliff, Ocean Grove, Barwon Heads, Breamlea, Torquay, Anglesea, Colac, Hamilton h'way to Derrinullum. b'rat; through to Creswick, (Ballan, Bacchus Marsh, and Melbourne rds) to Werribee river

What is the history of these roads? Were they built on tracks? e.g. Ballarat road .. Mt Bunning is visible from near Geelong. Yuille was first European to go to Bunning yong (Pic from sketch from Todd's Diary.)

FLAG

The Aboriginal flag is a most beautiful flag.

Its design is simple, striking and eloquent.

It tells the story of the Aboriginal people living on their land, sustained by the power of the Sun.

It stands alone as it is, and should not be combined with any other flag.

The Aboriginal Flag achieves many things.

Although it is a relatively new flag it unites the hundreds of nations of the First Australians.

It reminds us all of those who have lived on this land for tens of thousands of years.

It reclaims a space in the present and the future of this country which may well have

been lost but which, with care and courage will become safe and fruitful.

TIME

Say 30,000 years one minute for each 1,000 years = 15 secs for 250 years eg comparable time for Aboriginal and European occupation of the land.