

An aerial photograph of a dense forest with a mix of green and brown trees. A large, dark shadow of a person is cast across the forest floor, appearing to be walking or standing. The shadow is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the image.

CALLAGHAN
The University of Newcastle

**WHOSE TRADITIONAL
LAND?**

Research conducted by John Maynard

Table of Contents

1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	Geological and Archaeological Understanding	10
2.1	The local boundaries and affiliations	13
2.2	Life living with the land	19
2.3	Industry	22
2.4	The Pambalong or Big Swamp people Barahineban	27
2.5	The Savagery of the Civilized	38
2.6	The contemporary story (Dreaming never ends)	42
2.7	Summary	49
3.0	Recommendations	50
4.0	Bibliography	51

* Please note there is no right or wrong way to spell an Aboriginal word. There was no European form of written expression of Aboriginal language prior to 1788. Aboriginal language was oral; therefore interpretation of Aboriginal words can result in differing ways of spelling. Throughout this study words describing Aboriginal groups, places or words in some instances differ.

INTRODUCTION

This study was undertaken as a result of a joint idea expressed by the Department of Aboriginal Studies and the University of Newcastle. The directive wishing to ascertain the clear identity of the traditional owners of the land now occupied by the Callaghan Campus of the University of Newcastle. The general consensus indicated that findings would assist the University recognising and symbolically acknowledging the traditional custodian's prior occupation of the University site. It was the Universities directive that some acknowledgement could be established to recognise the traditional custodians within the University grounds during 'Reconciliation Week 2000'. The study explored archival material at the Mitchell Library, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Newcastle Regional Library and material housed at the Auchmuty Library at the University of Newcastle. The study was certainly enhanced through the availability of high quality material housed within the Universities own archives at the Auchmuty library, most notably the Haslam Collection, Canon Carlos Stretch and Mrs Rita Smith materials. Further enhancement of the study was initiated through the generosity of Dr. Niel Gunson. Dr. Gunson of course was the author of the definitive two-volume study of Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld. Dr. Gunson most generously extended the use of his private files and materials on the Awabakal and Newcastle area at the Australian National University to the research.

The concept of understanding Aboriginal land tenure and boundaries has plagued European occupation of the Australian continent from the initial instant of contact to the present. However, it is little appreciated how early European observation and recording of those observations has left an indelible imprint. Most significantly the early European

explorers, settlers and missionaries were looking for tangible physical or mental interpretations of land boundaries. In a European sense land ownership at its most basic level was indicated by physical presence as represented by housing and fences. On the Australian continent the Europeans found no expression of physical boundaries as represented by the European mode of fencing. However, there was an interpretation of mental imaging of boundaries as expressed through geographical boundaries. These boundaries were strongly represented through mountains, rivers, rocks, lakes and other geographical features. Norman Tindale reinforced this concept during the course of decades of studies. He evidenced “the close correspondence between many tribal boundaries and physiographic, geographic and ecological observances. They are inherent not only in the locations of different peoples but are also often reflected in the nomenclatures that they apply to themselves and others” (Tindale, 1976:12). The expression of boundary in Aboriginal cosmology and land tenure expressed sacred, spiritual affiliation with the land and country as given by the Creative Ancestors. Stanner related that at “the level of land ownership the tribe is the sum of its constituent clan estates. The boundary to the tribe is thus made up of those sections of constituent clan estates that border other tribes” (Peterson, 1976:7). Tindale directed that “when one has to establish bounds as at a given moment of time, as in drawing a map, a finite line has to be drawn. It is sometimes inferred that all such lines are therefore artificial. We do have some instances of tribal shifts in the immediate past and can infer from other data that such changes have been taking place in more distant times, but there is also evidence for relative stability of many such limits over periods of time measurable in terms of many generations (Tindale, 1976:13,14). Canon Carlos Stretch emphasised the knowledge

Aboriginal people had over their land as directed in geographical recognition: “The Aboriginal has a name for every locality in his tribal area. These he names not after someone or somewhere else, but on account of some peculiarity of the physical feature, or some incident that took place there; and in many cases the name remains. He had a name for every bend in the creek or river in his locality and for every geographical entity. He also gave a name to each place where he found abundance of food be it animal or vegetable, where he found good supplies of water, or where special wood was to be found and procured for special weapons and so on” (Canon Carlos Stretch Collection, archives-Auchmuty Library, University of Newcastle). In 1861 J.D.Lang stressed, “Aborigines were universally divided into district and independent tribes, each occupying as their hunting grounds a certain portion of territory, of which the limits are generally well defined by permanent features in the natural scenery of the country, and well known to all the neighbouring tribes’. He came to the further conclusion that the divisions into tribes was old and that there was no part of the country to which some tribe or other did not lay claim, and he learned that the ‘territory of each tribe is subdivided... among the different families of which it consists’ and that there was exclusive rights to direct when such a territory should be hunted over, the grass burned for the obtaining of its animals for food... “ (Tindale, 1974:76-77).

Certainly the Newcastle district in the early decades of settlement was extremely fortunate in that a number of the European settlers, missionaries and military personnel recorded not only their observations and interpretations but importantly those as expressed directly by Aboriginal elders and men of high degree. There was an impressive

array of Awabakal leaders in the Newcastle district in the early days of settlement – Biraban of the Awaba clan, Gorman (Bo-win-bah), Coleman (Kua-mun) and Boatman of the Pambalong, Wallungull and Cobbawn Wogi of the Ash Island clan, Ben of the Kurnurngbong, Cobbera of the Tumpoeahba or Sugarloaf clan and Desmond of the Newcastle clan. In the local area we have much to be thankful. Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld, Reverend Middleton, William Scott, Robert Dawson, Edward Parry, Lieutenant Coke and many others had years of association with the local Aboriginal clans and recorded their words and descriptions. I take this opportunity to stress that most areas in early settlement were sadly deficient in recognising the status of Aboriginal women. This is as a direct result of European thinking of the time. The European view of the world had a distinct slant that men naturally held the positions of authority, as such they interpreted it the same elsewhere. The information they gleaned was naturally from the perspective of Aboriginal men. These Aboriginal men were not advancing their own status to these Europeans but as a direct result of traditional Aboriginal life and Law. Aboriginal men simply would not and could not comment on aspects of Aboriginal women's roles in their society. They did not have access or right to that knowledge. Sadly this practice continued into the 20th century and many anthropological studies during the first four to five decades of the 20th century were deficient on that count. They completely failed to recognise Aboriginal women's role in traditional society both spiritually and economically. However, in Newcastle this was not altogether the case and certainly with regards to the Awabakal we have insight and recognition of the important status that women held.

In traditional Aboriginal society there was no concept of conquest or that land could be bought or sold. People were and remain spiritually attached to their own spiritual and sacred country. There was no need or desire to attain someone else's country within which there was no spiritual association. In 1878, Charles Gray "after questioning the natives of the Nareeb district in Victoria, made the observation that the Aborigines to whom he spoke could only describe positively the boundaries of lands occupied by their own tribe, since opportunities for learning the limits of the lands of others did not occur" (Tindale, 1974:77). Some in the contemporary setting may question the authenticity of the recorded views of the non-Aboriginal observers but it must be remembered that they were speaking to and gained their knowledge from direct contact and conversation with the Aboriginal leaders of the day. It is widely acknowledged that of the tribes in the Hunter region only the Awabakal language was fully translated in full tribal state (Department of NSW Education, 1985:64). The material gained of Awabakal life, culture and most importantly language is regarded as one of the greatest reservoirs of knowledge of traditional Aboriginal East Coast culture. Most knowledge of Aboriginal language and culture on the eastern seaboard was not deemed worthy of consideration and with the traditional people was decimated in the wake of settlement. In the local area Reverend Threlkeld was quick to recognise the importance and rich nature of Aboriginal cultural life. Fortunately, Threlkeld had developed a great interest in linguistics. In this capacity he was painstakingly accurate and he translated in a period when his Awabakal tutors were still in full tribal state. (Department of NSW Education, 1985:64). Threlkeld does deserve recognition for his efforts but he had Biraban to help him. Today Biraban is recognised as the greatest English speaking Aboriginal scholar of the 19th century.

Biraban as recognised headman of the Awaba clan of the Awabakal had an ability to speak English, which was praised by highly educated white people of the day. (Department of NSW Education, 1985:64) In 1839 Mr James Agate visited Threlkeld's mission and made comment on Biraban – English name M'Gill. "He was about the middle size, of a dark chocolate colour, with fine glossy black hair and whiskers, a good forehead, eyes not deeply set, a nose that might be described as aquiline, although depressed and broad at the base. It was very evident that M'Gill was accustomed to teach his native language, for when he was asked the name of anything, he pronounced the word very distinctly, syllable by syllable, so that it was impossible to mistake it. Though acquainted with the doctrines of Christianity, and all the comforts and advantages of civilisation, it was impossible for him to overcome his attachment to the customs of his people, and he is always a prominent leader in corrobories and other assemblies". (Gunson, 1974:157)

Incredibly, despite, all of the early evidence highlighting traditional tribal boundaries there was a move in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to denigrate any concept of Aboriginal tribal boundary. This period was influenced by social Darwinism and a depreciating influence of Aboriginal society that ignored and dismissed any notion of Aboriginal groups being aligned to particular pieces of country. The so called civilised and educated ignored the observations of early settlers and people who had witnessed and recorded Aboriginal tribal structure and land boundaries. The ramifications of this period are readily ascertained, in 1921 Norman Tindale described his first meeting with Marodunei a Ngandi tribal elder and songmaker from the interior of Arnhem Land. It was

Marodunei “who introduced Tindale to the idea of the existence of tribal boundaries, limits beyond which it was dangerous to move without adequate recognition. His account of the tribes people he had visited and his guidance in the matter of vocabulary changes enabled the writing of a paper containing data and a map of Southern Arnhem Land tribes (Tindale, 1925). The editor to whom it was submitted refused to accept a map with boundaries, making the assertion, then popularly believed, that Aborigines roamed at will over the whole country – free wanderers” (Tindale, 1974:3).

GEOGRAPHICAL and ARCHEOLOGICAL PREVIEW

A geological understanding of the Newcastle surrounds can be ascertained by study of the rock formations within our local area and that story has its beginning in the late Permian, at least 250 million years ago. Land that ran north of present days, “Raymond Terrace and west of Barrington Tops drained into a vast lowland of freshwater swamps, lagoons and open water”. (Munro, 1977:1) This wetland area was protected from the ocean to the east by a land barrier. This barrier was subsequently breached at least twice and allowed a marine takeover of the freshwater environment. (Munro, 1977:1) Densely populated and rich forests of seed ferns took hold their decay and falling foliage was gradually buried and formed the rich coal deposits within the local vicinity. (Munro, 1977:1) It has been estimated that in some places at least 15m of plant matter went into some of the coal seams that lay beneath the Awabakal land. During the transitional stage between the Pleistocene and Holocene periods the environment changed quickly and dramatically, this due to a rapidly changing climate. Global warming on a massive scale saw the end of the 'Ice Age' this occurred 8-10,000 years ago, the results of which saw many great environmental alterations. Sea levels rose, there were great floods, rising temperatures dried up the lakes of inland Australia and a great deal of fertile coastal land was lost to the sea. Australia became isolated, the continent prior to this major event had been much bigger, New Guinea and Tasmania had been attached and was part of the mainland. Importantly human culture during this period adapted quickly to these rapid changes. This was the edge that humans had over other species. Palaeo-environments and environmental change in the area of Newcastle during this period would have been significant. Prior to this point “Lake Macquarie was a dry valley. The small tributaries of

Dora Creek, Cockle Creek and Mannering Creek all ran into a major watercourse, which flowed through and out of this valley. (Munro, 1977:1) Freshwater Creek would have run on into the sea many, many miles to the east and far from our present coastline. Rising sea levels as a result of the end of the last ice age inundated the original coastal sites. (Turner, 1995:10) In many areas of Australia Aboriginal Dreaming stories reflect these cataclysmic events. Mulvanney, commenting on Northern Australia suggested that the loss of large areas of land evident within some human generations required adaptive efforts and a conciliatory philosophy. The rapidly rising sea may have caused the inception of the Rainbow Snake belief, because in the majority of the northern myths, this being is associated with rain and floods, and in the coastal variations of this myth, it emerges from the sea and swallows and/or drowns people (Chaloupka, 1985:276). Flood (1995) graphically illustrated the dramatic and massive scale of the land loss to the sea, by revealing that it was equivalent to the entire present day Western Australia. The rising seas did submerge vast areas of land but Flood identified there were benefits. The stabilising of the sea level was instrumental in extending the estuaries and reefs and made the shoreline areas, which produced the most productive abundance of fish and shellfish made them far more accessible (Flood, 1995:218-219). The end of the Pleistocene and beginning of the Holocene was a dramatic period with a rapid changing weather and environment The changing landscape and weather patterns altered human behavior. The Awabakal as with other Aboriginal groups had to adapt to these dramatic changes to their landscape. The Awabakal, were great exponents in the use of fire management and as a result they also played a significant part in altering their environment and landscape.

“Firestick farming, as it has often been called, offered short and long term benefits. Firstly, fires made the nests and holes of prey more obvious and animals could be caught in the fire or driven towards the spears and nets of waiting hunters. In the long term, fires provided breaks in the forest cover, which would attract herbivorous animals to the grass, and early indications depicted the area as being abundant with kangaroo’s” (Burnham-Burnham, 1988:58). Professor Len Dyal who conducted a number of archaeological studies within the Newcastle area during the 1970's revealed the use of fire by the local Awabakal people “in view of the dense and often prickly scrub which covers the sandy slopes from the sea cliff westwards to the margins of Jewels Swamp, one marvels that naked hunters were ever able to move through this area. The answer of course is fire; early navigators from Captain Cook onwards noted large fires along our coasts. Some large fires were deliberate, such as those lit on the coastal heaths around Brisbane Waters (NSW) in winter, while others might have started through smoking possums from trees or game from scrub. After each fire, it would be possible to hunt across these heaths for a month or so, and no doubt tracks were developed and kept passable” (Dyall, 1972:171). It has to be stressed that any archeological or geological understanding of timed Aboriginal occupation is in direct conflict with traditional Aboriginal cultural beliefs. Some years ago an Aboriginal elder in Arnhem Land was told that scientists had estimated that Aboriginal people had occupied the Australian continent for over 60,000 years. “They say we have been here for 60,000 years, but it is much longer. We have been here since the time before time began. We have come directly out of the Dreamtime of the Creative Ancestors. We have lived and kept the earth as it was on the first day” (Lawlor, 1994).

THE LOCAL BOUNDARIES AND AFFILIATIONS

The local Aboriginal group identified by early settlers was the Awabakal. Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld in a number of correspondences drew attention to their tribal boundaries. In a letter to S.Bannister in 1825 he stated "...the natives here are connected in a kind of circle extending to the Hawksbury and Port Stephens" (Gunson, 1974:186). He went on to clearly define "the boundaries of the main Awabakal 'tribe' or clan in 1828 as follows. The land bounded by S Reids Mistake the entrance to Lake Macquarie. N by Newcastle and Hunter River W by the Five Islands at the head of Lake Macquarie 10 miles W of our station. This boundary about 14 miles N and S by 13 E and W is considered their own land" (Gunson, 1974:186). The entire land estate encompassed by the Awabakal has been estimated to cover 700sq.m (1,800 sq. km.) (Tindale, 1976:191). This territory has been defined in greater detail as: The Awabakal tribe, whose territory covered Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Central Coast to Wyong, and the coalfields area, Watagan Mountains to Wollombi, was an eaglehawk tribe. The eaglehawk (biraban – bee-rar-ban) was said to have created in the sky stones of great ceremonial significance and dropped them in a circular fashion on the tops of mountains around Lake Macquarie. (Threlkeld, 1834, 1892; Mueller, 1882; Fraser, 1892; Matthews, 1897; Farmer, 1899; Enright, 1901; Howitt, 1904; Wurm, 1963; Haslam Collection - University of Newcastle archives).

The existence of mysterious stone structures in the hills surrounding Lake Macquarie was noted and remarked upon by Threlkeld. "The only thing I have ever noticed, as rather puzzling to account for on a hill, or rather range of hills, was a circular erection of stones,

of about 5 or 6 feet diameter, and two or three feet high; evidently built, but not cemented with anything. At first I thought it was a burial place, and searching a little distance on, say a quarter of a mile, another mound, and afterwards several more were discovered. I took two or three heaps to pieces and dug expecting to find remains of a human body, but there was nothing of the kind. On enquiry of my black tutor, M'Gill, he informed me that tradition was, that the eagle-hawks brought these stones and placed them together in the form in which they were found. But no reason could be given why or wherefore the eagles took so much pains" (Gunson, 1974:65-66). There was further discussion on the mysterious stones by W.A.Miles, "The Rev.L.Threlkeld informs me that he has seen them on the very summits of the mountains of Lake Macquarie; and the legend is that they were brought there by the eagle-hawk, a bird of mysterious omen, and much revered by the blacks, Mr Alfred Densison informed me that these circles are in the Patterson district, confirmed also by Mr. Commissioner Fry who has seen them, and considers them aerolites, no similar stone being known in the district. The circles are not about twenty feet in diameter; the stones are seldom more than a foot above the ground, and in the centre is an upright stone about three feet high. The natives are very tenacious of any of these stones being moved, especially the centre one". (Gunson, 1974:65-66)

The Awabakal like many coastal tribes held the eagle-hawk in the highest esteem. There was "particular veneration and pride of place given to the eagle or eagle-hawk in legend, astronomy and social structure. Most of the sky heroes had a metamorphic relationship with the eagle-hawk; the totem of the dominant class in the tribal structure of most of these tribes was eagle or eagle-hawk; and the principle constellations in the Aboriginal

celestial cosmogony were identified with the eagle. There was a distinct difference between the celestial sky being beliefs of the inland groups and that of some coastal groups including the Awabakal. The Kamillaroi and Wonnarua for instance had a pronounced and prominent sky cult hero, Baime (Gunson, 1974:3). This was in complete contrast to the Awabakal who held Koun (pronounced cone) as their celestial entity. Koun it seems resembled Baime in many ways, he had the “characteristics of an all father god. In appearance for instance like Baime and Punjil, he looked like an Aboriginal though in flight through the air he more closely resembled an eagle-hawk” (Gunson, 1974:3). One old elder of the Awabakal commenting on Koun said, “no one had ever seen Koun, although he could always see them; that he was more swift than a horse, and glided like the rainbow, that he made everything, that he was a man; that he was a spirit. (Gunson, 1974:3) Threlkeld himself commented and referred to Koun numerous throughout his study. “They are not left without some instinctive feeling of dependence on the great ‘Unknown Being’ on whom they call when in danger. This I ascertained, by accident, one day when crossing the Lake in a gale of a wind and the sea was running very high so that we made little progress in our boat, and a canoe could not have lived in the storm. Speaking to M’Gill (Biraban), the Aborigine who was with me in the boat, on the subject, and supposing that he were in a canoe overtaken with such a gale of wind as was then blowing, and if he was sinking, on enquiring of him was there a being to whom he would cry? He said ‘yes there was Koun’. On asking him what he would say, his reply was koun-tia, literally ‘Koun’, the name of the being, tia ‘to me’, look to me, or save me”. (Gunson, 1974:3)

There have been many maps undertaken on the boundaries of traditional Aboriginal groups and whilst it has to be stated that none have or will get it completely right they offer some general guidance. In the Newcastle area all maps with small differences noted have in general come to the same conclusion as put forth by people such as Threlkeld. Haslam highlighted that the Awabakal although not warlike were fierce resisters of uninvited intrusion into their territory. He draws attention to a site high in the Wattagans. This area was sited for defence and was a virtual armoury. The site itself was significantly and strategically placed because the ridges were the entry and exit for vital parts of Awabakal territory. The Wattagans have several sites of grooving as well as one location with stencils in red. These could have had some association with the Kamilaroi because similar red stencils have been found in their territory in the upper Hunter. What little is known of Kamilaroi intrusion as parts of the tribe moved southwards in the Hunter Valley indicate they were successfully resisted by the Awabakal and Darkinjung. Both tribes had rich coastal territory; the Awabakal particularly, had been in possession for thousands of years. Though normally peaceful in character, they were known as stout defenders rather than fierce fighters. They must have had a special quality of unity and strength” (Haslam Collection-Album 3:7755iii). Gunson highlighted that:

“Like the other tribes the Awabakal had carefully defined boundaries, its peculiar cicatrisation marks and its local ritual. In certain broad features it had much in common with the other coastal tribes stretching south from Moreton Bay to Andersons Inlet in Victoria, tribes separated from those of the interior by the natural barrier of mountain ranges. Howitt and other pioneer anthropologists suggested that the coastal tribes either had an anomalous class system or were without a class system, and observed male descent. There was also considerable similarity in the material culture of the coastal tribes; bark huts were generally more substantial than those inland and fishing and trading took on similar characteristics. Fishing was a particularly important factor in shaping coastal society, and shellfish were extremely important in the diet of the people.

Generally the coastal tribes were looked upon as a more robust people than those inland". (Gunson, 1974.3)

The Awabakal territory boundaries were boarded by three main tribal groups, "the Kattang speaking Worimi to the north, the inland Wonnarua or Hunter River tribe, and the Darkinjung" to the south. (Gunson, 1974.3) An article written in the '*Voice of the North*' in 1926 adds interesting insight to the locale of the Awabakal. A Mr. John Taaffe described, as an excellent historian was the informant for the article. Taaffe was born at Gosford in 1855 and moved to Swansea when he was seven years old. Taaffe directed that the correct Awabakal name for Swansea was Galgabba (Awabakal – Kalogkaba – meaning afar off) Taaffe gave indication that the Swansea group of Aboriginal people at an earlier date were a part of the Awabakal and a "portion of the community attached to the mission station where the township of Toronto is now located. The mission was established by the London Missionary Society in 1824, and continued until 1841, when it was abandoned owing to the number of Aborigines having dwindled considerably. Mr Taaffe has recollections of the blacks travelling in large parties generally working in a circular fashion from Gosford via Wollombi and Newcastle. The camp at Galgabba was of a permanent character, and was ruled by 'King' Ned, after whom 'Black Ned Bay' was named (*Voice of the North*, 1926:18). The Rita Smith Collection housed at the archive section of the Auchmuty Library also gives indication of the mobility and large numbers of the local Aboriginal groups. "The Awabakal and Darkinoong held an annual Corroboree (feasting, singing & dancing) at Kanangra (Nords Wharf) large numbers of natives could be seen making there way towards Nords Wharf, for days before the Corroboree" (Rita Smith Collection: Archives – University of Newcastle).

As already related Aboriginal tribal boundaries were evidenced and visible by some geographical feature of the landscape. It was the same in the local area, “most tribal boundaries in the Hunter region were defined by a waterway or mountain. This ensured little error to recognise where the area of one tribe ended and another began. Travelling ridges on mountain boundaries were recognised as neutral; the break occurred with descent into other territory. Coastal tribes with the eastern shoreline were considered fortunate ones, but in special circumstances this boundary could be shared. For most of the NSW seaboard coastal tribes allowed inland people to make at least yearly visits to the coast for fishing and to get salt. One special occasion would be the stranding of whales on a beach. All Aborigines within a reasonable travelling distance would be invited to this feast lasting several days. One such visit is depicted by a painting at Wollombi, when the Awabakal invited the Wonarua and Darkinoong people to partake of whale flesh high and dry at Redhead beach” (Department of NSW Education, 1984:62).

LIVING LIFE WITH THE LAND

It is not hard to imagine or draw the conclusion that Newcastle or Mulobinbah as the Awabakal called the area was a visual paradise of plenty before 1788. Certainly the records and accounts of early settlers testify to the rich and seemingly inexhaustible supply of food within the local area. The health and imposing physical attributes of the Awabakal and other local groups abound through written correspondence. “According to one English observer in 1827, the natives of the Coal River (Newcastle) area were: ‘in general taller than the Europeans. You seldom see a black under five feet eight or nine inches. I have seen them about six feet four in height’ (Newcastle Morning Herald Supplement, 1993:2). It was little wonder that the local Aboriginal groups were in such noted physical condition. The surrounding area was abundant with a rich and varied supply of foods. Scott highlighted “the waters of the bay teemed with fish of every description, easily taken at all times. The rocks were covered with oysters, which formed a staple part of their diet. The bush abounded with game in the form of kangaroos, wallabies, possums, emus, flying foxes, wild-ducks, swans, parrots... There were edible roots in the gullies, wild fruits in the bushes. It was really a land of plenty” (Scott, 1871-1828,18-20). The Awabakal were proficient marine farmers and shellfish was a significant part of the diet because of its abundance. “On the lower Hunter in 1801, Grant while aboard the Lady Nelson reported that ‘the fires of the natives and many individuals were seen opposite of Ash Island’...Near the mouth of the Hunter River Grant saw an abundance of fish which the Aborigines exploited ‘Fish was taken in great quantities and of various kinds, particularly mullets which were large and well favoured’ (Bonhomme, 1996:7). Scott revealed that Aboriginal women were heavily involved in the process of

marine harvesting. “The lobsters were caught by the women who, in the sea front dived down among the rocks for them” (Scott, 1929:18-19). Scott gave rich description in the art of fishing:

Women used lines, the men mostly fished with the spear - they were extraordinarily skilful. It was interesting to watch the onslaught in the sea mullet when they came into the harbour. By some unerring instinct the blacks knew to within a day when the first great shoals would appear through the heads. The women would be on the lookout for the shining, shimmering mass of fish to come around some wooded headland, and when their shrill outcries told of the approach... the men would rush to the shore. The fish traveled from west to east, and close inshore, on the northern side of the harbour, usually... about high water. At the given signal the men would dash into the water up to their middles and stand motionless, spear poised on woomera, ready to launch the fatal dart. The leader, scanning the water with eager eyes, would watch until the shoal came within striking distance. ‘Muk!’ (Now!) He would cry. Hissing into the water would hurtle the heavy spear, and next instant excited natives would be tossing great, gleaming fish to the beach”. (Scott, 1929:18-19)

The sheer abundance of the marine delicacies available can be gauged by words from the diary of Lieutenant William Sacheverell Coke who was stationed at Newcastle in 1828. Coke decreed “we catch here eight or nine large fish called schnapper in an hour - numbers of salmon, mullet - and we are obliged to kill four or five sharks there are so many here” (Newcastle Morning Herald Supplement, 1993:2). He also reported that “the blacks swam to the seabed returning with lobsters four times larger than those in England” (Newcastle Morning Herald Supplement, 1993:2). It has also been noted that Newcastle beaches frequently witnessed beached whales, this was looked upon as a great treat by the Awabakal “messengers traveled for miles inviting far off tribes and clans to come and enjoy the monstrous feast” (Newcastle Morning Herald Supplement, 1993:2). Haslam declared that the cry of ‘muckeroo barley marugey’ (let’s go fishing) would have often echoed around the camp (Haslam, 1978:4). Windross and Ralston in their account

of the Historical Records of Newcastle 1797/1897 illustrate the serenity, beauty and abundance of natural foods available to the Aboriginal population. This story illustrates the large numbers of Aboriginal people present, their generosity and friendly nature:

“A favourite pastime with the government officials at the settlement appears to have been that of making excursions with the Aboriginal tribes who roamed about the locality. The following account of an excursion of the kind was given by a participant, in 1821: - “ Our Parson, the Rev.F.A.Middleton, who was an especial favourite with the blacks, started with myself with the whole tribe of upwards of 100 on a walking trip to Lake Macquarie. Our necessary supplies, blankets, &c., they carried on their heads. On arrival, I was enchanted with its beautiful scenery, and can never forget it. The whole surrounding country and lake were serene and still; solitude reigned; no tree disturbed; and no trace of white man’s civilisation, but all in its natural state. We enjoyed all the wild sports of Australian bush life in its primitive state as the Aborigines of the day (before they were contaminated with our vices) were accustomed to enjoy them, shooting, fishing, kangarooing, and hunting, our game was ample for us all. They supplied us also (by diving) with the finest mud oysters for which the waters of the lake are noted. These we scalloped on our bush fires, and we spent five or six days of as much enjoyment as I ever had in any part of the world” (Windross, 1897:10).

INDUSTRY

The area today known as Newcastle was an industrial and trading centre long before white intrusion. “The Awabakal manufactured canoes from river gum or Kurrajong bark, which they removed with hatchets and secured at each end with vines. Struts were inserted at each end for strength and a vine cord, tied across the middle of the canoe, held it together. Heavy stones, tied to vines, were used as anchors. These simple canoes could carry up to 8 people” (Burnham-Burnham, 1988:58). The use of these canoes, which were roughly made of bark, had fires in them for the preparation of the catch. The Aborigines of the area utilised “three types of canoes (coo-eyung). The first was a strong strip of bark from a gum that was scraped and then hardened by fire. The second was made from a specially selected bark, closed and pointed at both ends, and sometimes kept taut by wedges. The third (mooten) was mainly found in the mountain areas affected by bush fires. Aborigines would find alight an old log, and they would control the fire to shape a canoe. Trimming was done by stone axes. All canoes used for fishing had a small clay hearth for a fire used to cook the fish as caught. This was probably the forerunner of the fish and chip industry” (Haslam.1978: 4). Observations from the period illuminate a scene of serenity and proliferation. ”It was a pleasing sight on a calm summer’s evening to see a number of the native canoes on the glass-like surface of the Lake, sending up their straight columns of smoke from the centre of the barques, shewing an appearance of a fleet of small steamers at anchor” (Brayshaw, 1986:76-77). “Men speared fish from the shore and from canoes and hand nets and weirs were used. Scrapers of shell were used to sharpen spears and oyster shells were ground and shaped into fish hooks” (Bonhomme, 1996:7). Grant observed that “the shore was covered to a great depth with oyster shells”

(Bonhomme, 1996:7). It is well worth noting that “before the establishment of heavy industry in Newcastle, shell middens extended along the Hunter River from Port Waratah to Sandgate” (Thorpe, 1928:241). Dyall expressed that the sheer size of some middens in the Newcastle area suggests a native population of some thousands (Dyall, 1971:156).

The recent discovery of a large Aboriginal midden site at Moonee Beach near Lake Macquarie has identified the presence of a large Aboriginal population and that they had established trade networks with other Aboriginal language groups. The National Parks and Wildlife team responsible for excavating the site reported that:

“The find identifies Moonee Beach near Lake Macquarie, as one of the East Coast’s most popular hunting grounds, yielding fresh and saltwater fish and a variety of bird life. There are freshwater springs, a billabong and a hanging swamp in the dune area near the sea ... The midden sites tell us the area would have periodically sustained populations of significant size. They have provided invaluable information on the Aboriginal occupation of the area... Some of the implements discovered have been made of stone not found in the Moonee Beach and Catherine Hill Bay area. These could well have been the result of trading with other tribes outside the area” (The Sun Herald, 1998:4).

In the vicinity of the lower Hunter River, Patterson noted “a new hibiscus which the natives used as flax for making their nets and other purposes. The nets described in use in and around Newcastle were worn by women around their foreheads and hanging down their backs. They were used like work bags for carrying fish hooks, prepared bark for string, glue for gluing spears and items for food” (Bonhomme, 1996:7). McBryde also described these netted bags, stating that they were made from cord of fur and bark fibres, the bags were used to carry utensils. The method was also utilised to manufacture nets of bark fibre cord used extensively in fishing and hunting:

“These nets are the handiwork of the ‘gins’, as the native women are called, and are generally made of the fibres of the ‘corryong’ tree, or of the bullrush and ‘wongul’ roots. These fibres are separated by maceration, and afterwards twisted together. The netting needle they use is a piece of hard smooth wood, and the string is wound around it. They work without a mesh, yet the regularity of the loops is quite astonishing” (McBryde, 1974:13).

Sokoloff (1977) highlighted that ethno-historic evidence for the Awabakal conflicts with archaeological evidence:

“In the ethno-historic period the Aborigines made greater use of organic materials in their material culture: weapons, implements and utensils were made of wood, bark, bones, shells, skins, fur and the sinews of animals. The reference to the use of stone are generalised and vague, with the exception of the stone axe: ...they used stone hatchets, which were sharpened by other stones to a pretty fine edge. These had a groove worked near the head, around which they twisted a stock to use as a handle...” (Sokoloff, 1977:21).

The high proliferation of axe grinding grooves within the Newcastle and Hunter Valley region confirm the presence of a large scale stone implement manufacturing industry. Another early settler remarked “the large axes were beautifully ground and polished and an amount of trouble was taken in fixing handles to them. Years were often spent in grinding them and otherwise preparing them for use”. (Sokoloff, 1977:21) The manufacturing of these tools and weapons was indeed an industrial process. The use of fire and heat in the manufacturing process has been well documented. “Heat was required in the construction of these composite weapons and implements: spear, spear-thrower, and stone axe... The point of the spear was fire hardened; the bent stem used for the shaft was straightened with the assistance of heat”. (Sokoloff, 1978:8) The heating element was also utilised in other areas of the manufacturing process. “Heat was used with grass-tree gum for binding the upright end of the spear-thrower and for making secure the stone head to the with of the hafted stone axe... The construction of bark canoes also involved

the use of a heating technique. (Sokoloff, 1978:8) “A fire is then made upon the bark and being heated the steam of the sap softens it so as they can crumble up each end like a folded fan...” (Gunson, 1974:54).

There were many working quarries used for tool and weapon construction within the Newcastle area. “Stone implements have a short working life, so that quarries of suitable stone had to be visited regularly” (Dyall, 1971:155). An article in the local Newcastle Morning Herald in the early 1960’s drew attention to the lack of contemporary understanding and recognition of the depth and scale of the Awabakal manufacturing industry within the local area:

“Probably few people in Newcastle know that at one time, not so very long ago, there was a ‘munitions factory’ at Glenrock Lagoon. I didn’t know till the Warden of Newcastle University College (Mr. Basden) told me a few days ago. The ‘factory’ was run by Aborigines on a strip of sand between the sea and the lagoon. From hard stone found in strata running from Nobbys almost to Redhead, the Aborigines made axes and weapons many of which they traded to inland Aborigines who had no stone suitable for manufacturing purposes. Mr. Basden said chips of stone were all that remained of the factory now but at least two complete stone axes had been found in Murdering Gully, near the lagoon. One was in the possession of the Headmaster of Junction school. Probably more axes were in the area but they had not been recognised. Talking as though of yesterday Roger and Ian told me that 200 million years ago a great bay extended over what is now the Hunter Valley and south to Port Kembla sweeping far inland. In time sandbars formed to make a lake of the bay. The lake sank an inch each 100 years and became a marsh and eventually dry land rich in fossils (Carlos Cannon Stretch Collection, Archives University of Newcastle).

The local Aborigines preferred multi-purpose tools, such as their edge ground axes which doubled up as hammers and anvils, or those which could be quickly fashioned when the need arose” (Dyall, 1971:155). The Awabakal indeed possessed a varied tool-kit “most of the large stone tools can be recognized as the chisels, scrapers, gravers, rasps, and

spokeshavers needed to make the wooden implements (boomerangs, clubs, spear-throwers, shields, food vessels, canoes, paddles, etc) which were so widely used in daily life. Many of these stone tools must have been mounted in a wooden haft to acquire the battered edges seen on some specimens”. (Dyall, 1971:155) A report in the Newcastle newspaper ‘The Voice of the North’ in 1926 highlights the level and skills of Aboriginal manufacturing technique and re-enforces that the Awabakal did indeed possess the knowledge and skills to construct tools of many types.

“Newcastle district is noted for its ancient factory sites. The toolmakers of the Stone Age evidently traded implements with the tribes of the interior and factories were situated on the banks of the Hunter and along the coast to Lake Macquarie. Mr. Cooksey has collected more than five thousand excellent specimens in a few years, and his knowledge of the subject has been availed of by the authorities at the British Museum in London, and by the Sydney Museum. The similarity of the ancient stone tools and their modern steel prototypes is most remarkable. Saws, planes, chisels, knives, axes, hammers and lances were all known to the ancient inhabitants of Australia, and their manufacture is evidence of a very high degree of skill and monuments of their industry and patience” (Voice of the North, 1926:18).

Stone quarries were not the only element of industrial development in the area. Perc Haslam directed that areas within close proximity to Newcastle, “were best described as ‘wood workshops’ - a place where men of the tribe cut from trees pieces of bark in varying sizes and shapes to meet their need, whether for canoe, shield, crude shelter and bowls to hold food and water” (Haslam, 1979:7). Haslam also pointed out that the “natives of NSW more than anywhere else were great carvers in wood” (Haslam, 1980:6).

THE PAMBALONG – BIG SWAMP PEOPLE OF BARAHINEBAN

The Pambalong like all the clans comprising the Awabakal people lived in a virtual paradise of plenty. They had the added rich resources of the swamp and wetland areas within their clan territory. Their already rich diet of the marine and marsupial variety was supplemented with mud-crabs, wild duck, waterfowl and an endless variety of other bird life. As already emphasised the Newcastle area is extremely fortunate with its written records and accounts of Awabakal cultural lifestyle. This is also significant with the Pambalong. Threlkeld gave written account of the Pambalong highlighting their numbers, various leaders and lifestyle. Other early settlers including Lieutenant Coke have supported his account especially with regards to the abundant natural resources available to the local Aboriginal population. In the contemporary setting understanding of the Pambalong has been further enhanced by the extensive and life long work of Percy Haslam, Mrs. Rita Smith, local historian Dulcie Hartley and a number of archeological and environmental studies conducted in the area. One of the most significant accounts of the Pambalong is through several articles published in a local newspaper the Wallsend and Plattsburg Sun of 1890-1891. This run of articles concentrated on the Pambalong or the 'Big Swamp' people, as they were alternately known. The series was through the eyes of early settlers within the Wallsend to Hexham area, who were able to look back over sixty and seventy years and comment on many aspects of Pambalong lifestyle.

The area, which encompassed the land of the Pambalong stretched from Newcastle West, extended along the southern bank of the Hunter River, west through Hexham (Tarro) to Buttai and across to the foothills of Keeba-Keeba (Mount Sugarloaf) to the northern tip of

Lake Macquarie and back to Newcastle West. The country of the Pambalong was known as Barrahineban. Haslam commented that although not possible to fully translate the name the terminal 'bin' suggested it was a 'bright place' where to live". (Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Co-op Ltd., 1981:5) This was an extremely rich land holding laden with all the resources necessary for an abundant and richly rewarding lifestyle. It was noted that in tribal times all "Aboriginal groups in the Hunter region had large populations when in full tribal state, as was the case with most New South Wales coastal tribes. Those in the Newcastle – Lake Macquarie area had no problem of survival by natural means. Food was plentiful and variable throughout the year; the seasonal productivity ensured a balanced diet, which was also controlled by a totemic system of food selection at various stages of life" (Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Co-op Ltd., 1981:5). Hale on his visit to the region with the United States expedition in 1838-1842 was unaware of totem taboo with certain foods. Nonetheless he commented on the restrictions of diet for uninitiated young men:

"A third regulation restricts the youth to certain articles of diet. They are not allowed to eat fish, or eggs, or the emu, or any of the finer kinds of opossum and kangaroo. In short their fare is required to be of the coarsest and most meagre description. As they grow older, the restrictions are removed, one after another; but it is not till they have passed the period of middle age that they are entirely un-restrained in the choice of food. Whether one purpose of this law may be to accustom the young men to a hardy and simple style of living may be doubted; but its prime objective and its result certainly are to prevent the young men from possessing themselves, by their superior strength and agility, of all the more desirable articles of food, and leaving only the refuse to the elders". (Hale, 1846:114)

Hale observed that "although there was no order of rank amongst them it was quite apparent that strict rules were in force and the young men gave undivided obedience to their elders" (Hale, 1846:114) He reflected "it is evident that some authority of this kind

is required to preserve the order and harmony of social intercourse” (Hale, 1846:114) A study conducted for the R.W.Miller & Co Pty Ltd. mine proposal in 1981 directed to past evidence of Aboriginal occupation of the Ironbark Creek area. The study indicated that the Pambalong “in full tribal state to have had headquarters at Buttai – (down-from-hill-shade-place)” (Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Co-op Ltd., 1981:5). Further evidence highlighted that:

“Ample rock and cave shelter was available from Newcastle Beach to the Watagan Mountains and its many spurs. The ridges provided military outposts and the starting point of trade routes. The spreading bushland area served by Ironbark Creek (Toohrnbnng), with many water-courses and streamlets... was used for countless years as a hunting and food gathering area, and for temporary camp sites. There was a good variety of large game and waterfowl for the men to hunt and smaller animals and tubers for the women to gather. Women were also expert climbers of tall trees; they often collected the honey while the men sought the possum, which thrived in the surrounds”. (Ibid.)

Horatio Hale though distorted with Eurocentric views sort to comment on aspects of cultural life. He did not elaborate as to whether the group he was relating to was of the Hunter River. But seeing as that is where the American expedition ventured there is a reasonable chance that this was the case. He indicated that Aboriginal people had:

“A social system of their own, regulated by customs of whose origin they can give no account, and to which they conform apparently because they have no idea of any other mode of life, or because a different course would be followed by the universal reprobation of their fellows. Of these customs, which partake of the singularity that distinguishes everything relating to this people, the following are the most remarkable.

The ceremony of initiation. When the boys arrive at the age of puberty (or about fourteen), the elders of a tribe prepare to initiate them into the duties and privileges of manhood. Suddenly at night, a dismal cry is heard in the woods, which the boys are told is the *bubu* calling for them. Thereupon all the men of the tribe (or rather of the neighborhood) set off for some secluded spot previously fixed upon, taking with them the youths who are to undergo the ceremony. The exact nature of this is not known, except that it consists of superstitious rites, of dances representing the various pursuits in which men are engaged, of sham fights, and trials designed to prove the self-possession, courage and endurance of

the neophytes. It is certain, however, that there is some variation in the details of the ceremony, in different places; for among the coast tribes, one of these is the knocking out of an upper front tooth, which is not done, at Wellington, and further in the interior. But the nature and object of the institution appear to be everywhere the same. Its design unquestionably is, to imprint upon the mind of the young man the rules by which his future life is to be regulated; and some of these are so striking, and, under the circumstances, so admirable, that one is inclined to ascribe them to some higher state of mental cultivation than now prevails among the natives. Thus, the young men, from the time they are initiated till they are married, are forbidden to approach or speak to a female. They must encamp at a distance from them at night, and if they see one in the way, must make a long detour to avoid her. Mr. Watson told me that he had often been put to great inconvenience in travelling through the woods with a young man for his guide, as such a one could never be induced to approach an encampment where there were any women. The moral intent of this regulation is evident. (Hale, 1846:112)

One of the articles on the Pambalong in the Wallsend Plattsburg Sun highlighted the importance of ensuring the land was allowed to rejuvenate. This necessitated periodic calculated movement of the clan. This movement was not some haphazard undisciplined action but well co-ordinated procedure with proper prior knowledge to all surrounding groups. The writer highlighted the frequent movement of the Pambalong and raised the question as to what precipitated such large-scale movement for these Aboriginal groups:

“The fact is they are regulating the food supply. Directly on the coastline, a camp could exist for many months without shifting, but inland, on the creeks and rivers it was different thing. A few weeks played the accessible game in the vicinity out, and a shift had to be made. But all tribal movements were made with the knowledge of neighboring tribes, and in this matter the laws were very definite and religiously followed. The line of march was generally in a semi-circle by the Big Swamp blacks. This plan when examined was strategical as well as necessary. For instance, we’ll suppose that a body of blacks in the Old House paddock (a favourite camp) were about to strike camp, they would signal to the Tarro tribe by means of fire and smoke of their intention to move. The signal would be well understood, the Big Swamp (now called Hexham) lying between the parties. The camps move the next day – one to the right the other to the left – and when the day’s march is over it will be found that the tribes stand no nearer to one another than before the camp was struck! This movement in opposite directions is essentially necessary, for if one tribe followed another the last must starve. This arrangement also allows the animal inhabitants of the hills and trees to recuperate. (Wallsend & Plattsburg Sun, 1890 –17/12)

The article went on to explore the importance and techniques in the use of fire. “The signal fire was generally built on a prominent headland. Straight young sapling was selected for the purpose, around the base of which was gathered dry wood and leaves and built up to near the top; the top dressing is of green boughs. The fire is then lit, and the green boughs cause a dense smoke, shooting up in a straight column several hundred feet high, which can be seen for miles around. A still, calm afternoon, or just before sunset, is selected for the signal fire” (Wallsend & Plattsburg Sun, 1890 –17/12). Food and its procurement were of vital importance to the Pambalong. The Big Swamp people were proficient skilled hunters and gatherers in tune with their environment and the flora, fauna and marine delicacies it contained. The Wallsend & Plattsburg Sun of 1890 gives vivid description of both the food sought and hunting and gathering techniques as employed by the Pambalong:

The principle animal food of the Aboriginal was the possum, wallaby, and Kangaroo rat. The kangaroo, emu, and the hundred and one other animals that ranged the hills and scrub were also acceptable, but the possum was really the animal he relied most upon. The possum was always abundant and easily procured... By studying the habit of the animal (and he whose food depends upon the result is sure to make no mistake) various kinds of snares and traps were set at the foot of a tree in which a family of possums live, and generally one or two were caught in this manner. About sundown the possum descends from his hole to drink and to browse upon the tender herbage on the ground, and it is while descending that he invariably gets entangled in the snares made of fibre, the sinew of kangaroo, or spun hair. By setting dozens of these snares a breakfast was generally obtained... Besides snares, fire was employed in getting at possums and other animals, and the natives were very clever in smoking their victim out and capturing it when about to make its escape. Different tactics were adopted in the capture of different animals. The kangaroo, wallaby, and larger animals were generally hunted with spears. The hunter always tried to get as near his game as possible; if he could come within 40 or 50 yards of a kangaroo he stood an excellent chance of throwing his spear into the body of the animal. The barbed spear was generally employed in fighting. The Hunter River blacks never poisoned the tips in warfare. To give an idea of the force of a spear thrown by a powerful black we have seen a spear nearly 8 inches deep in a horse – the result

of a quarrel with Europeans and native mode of taking revenge. If such a spear struck a naked man in a vital part of the body it would mean certain death. We have seen a spear sticking 3 inches in a gum tree – through 2 inches of bark and 1 inch of wood. The velocity of the spear depends upon the arm that throws it. If a kangaroo is hit in the right place it falls on the spot (Wallsend & Plattsburg Sun, 1890 –17/12).

The article highlighted that there was no wastage amongst the Pambalong. Every part of the animal was consumed or used:

“Everything that came in the way of the blackfellow was eaten. There is hardly an animal, fish, reptile or insect that was not greedily devoured. Reptiles were particular delicacies. The carpet snake afforded a splendid evening meal; the iguana was another much sought after dish, while the lizards and various snakes always found a space in the stomachs of hungry natives. The flesh of the reptile is beautifully white, and those Europeans who have been compelled to eat with the natives declare that one could not tell the flesh from eel; the carpet snake and iguana being especially good. Nothing delights the blacks more than to have a well stocked camp and while cooking operations are going on it is something to remember the huge pile of possums, cats, snakes, lizards, &c, on the hot embers”. (Wallsend & Plattsburg Sun, 1890:)

Rites, ceremonies and initiation played an important and vital part of Aboriginal life. There were many intricate aspects of cultural behavior to observe and follow. Many Aboriginal groups had similar beliefs and practices, whilst others were completely different. In the traditional life of the Pambalong all of the cooking, for the group was performed by the men:

“It is one of the laws that no man shall eat food prepared by hands of women. It is for the man to judge what is good and what is not good. The cooking done is nearly always the same. There are no stews made, so everything is grilled or roasted... The possum was generally thrown on the fire just as killed. Sometimes the skin was desired for winter covering, or the hair for the purpose of spinning twine, in which case the animal was skinned with a sharp shell, but otherwise the carcass was put on whole” (Wallsend & Plattsburg Sun, 1890 –17/12).

The article that followed in the Wallsend & Plattsburg Sun sequence expanded and continued with description of the eating habits of the Pambalong and the necessity for observing the rites of law:

“The cooking, as remarked in the last paper, was always performed by men. It was recognised law; the man who ate food cooked by a woman was supposed to come to some terrible and speedy end – death from some dreadful disease, death by accident or from one hundred and one other causes. He was really believed to be a marked man, bewitched, and it can therefore be understood why the cooking was religiously done by the men. Women were, however allowed to assist in one way only in the cooking – to keep up the supply of wood, to hunt for roots and fruit, and various seeds. One particular reed (we forget the name this moment) was ground into a kind of flour by the women and so were certain roots. The grinding was done between flat stones. The roots of the fern were crushed. We have no knowledge if a cake was baked of the native flour; we are inclined to think it was eaten in a raw state. Whatever appeared after animal food was in the shape of desert. When the possum or rat was sufficiently roasted the carcass was taken off by the man. With the aid of a shell the cook would open the belly and take out the inside in a solid ball as clean as the proverbial whistle. Sometimes the inside was eaten, but as a rule it was given to the dogs (Wallsend & Plattsburg Sun, 1890 –17/12).

Horatio Hale made comment to dismiss the marriage laws of Aboriginal people:

“The ceremony of marriage, which among most nations, is considered so important and interesting, is with this people, one of the least regarded. The woman is looked upon as an article of property, and is sold or given away by her relatives without the slightest consideration of her own pleasure. In some cases, she is betrothed, or rather promised, to her future husband in the childhood of both, and in this case, as soon as they arrive at a proper age, the young man claims and receives her. Some of them have four or five wives, and in such a case, they will give one to a friend who may be destitute. Notwithstanding this apparent laxity, they are very jealous, and resent any freedom taken with their wives. Most of their quarrels relate to women. In some cases, the husband who suspects another native of seducing his wife, either kills or severely injures one or both of them. Sometimes the affair is taken up by the tribe, who inflict punishment after their own fashion. The manner of this is another of the singularities of their social system” (Hale, 1846:114).

A far more understanding and correct assessment of the importance of the marriage institution of the Pambalong was observed by early settlers of the district and their enlightening observations were printed in the Wallsend and Plattsburg Sun:

“Marriage laws. We are speaking only of the blacks in the lower Hunter basin, and especially those who were wont to corroboree in Plattsburg and vicinity. The wild man recognised very early that a ceremony of some kind was necessary to unite man and woman, and to make such agreement, contract, marriage, or whatever else it might be called binding. The marriage ceremony was different in

different tribes, but all tended to the one end – marriage. The marriage ceremony of the Big Swamp blacks was rather of a solemn character: it was equal to that of man – making. The black youth attained his majority at about 19 years – when he began to grow a beard was a sure sign of approaching manhood. For the present we are dealing with the marriage ceremony. The courtship was conducted on the most approved style, and until the advent of the white man young women were rarely known to ‘go wrong’. The punishment for such an offence was great; in aggravated cases death was awarded when the tribe was unanimous, but an occurrence of this kind has also split up a tribe into fragments by ending in a fight. The plan of courtship adopted was as follows: - The single men live in a camp by themselves: the married men, wives and children (including single women) in another camp. No single man is allowed to enter the married men’s camp, unless he is specially invited, or can show good ground for trespassing. If he is caught within the lines, more especially after nightfall, he stands a good chance of a spearing, or perhaps worse still a good beating with the nulla-nulla. If he is desirous of obtaining a wife, he makes his wants known. The news soon goes about, and if has not already fixed his eyes on a dark maiden he is soon introduced to several. He consults the parents on the matter. The daughter has really no voice in the contract. The young man before he takes a wife, has to prove himself a man – to show he can keep a wife. In the first place he is compelled to live on the outskirts of the camp for a week, fortnight, or three weeks, and during that time he must bring home to his intended an abundant supply of game won by his own spear or boomerang. Should he fail in this test, the marriage ceremony is postponed for a few more moons, or perhaps knocked on the head altogether. If he accomplishes the task set him successfully (and any fairly skilful hunter can accomplish it) he is examined in tribal law and things in general, while old women prepare him for the marriage state. Having proved to the whole tribe that he is able to maintain a wife, he has really won a wife, but before he lives with his wife he has to go through certain mysterious ceremonies which finally end with him coming back with a front tooth knocked out. These ceremonies of man making and marriage were generally performed at the Doghole (Bora). The Doghole is situate a couple of miles from Minmi and is the head of the Big (Hexham) Swamp. None but the initiated were allowed to visit the place, so it will be seen that Freemasonry was practiced among the Aborigines of Australia hundreds of years ago, or long before the modern Freemasons came into existence” (Wallsend and Plattsburg Sun, 1890:December).

The articles of the Wallsend & Plattsburg Sun give a fascinating and rich insight of the Pambalong lifestyle. The examination of the process of marriage was continued in January 1891:

“All marriage ceremonies were performed at the Doghole by the Big Swamp blacks. The place was held in sacred regard. The bride was not taken to Bora, but the bridegroom had to spend several days, with some old women. It seems the old

women exercised considerable influence over a tribe; they were very little inferior to the old men, who sat in judgement on all points of tribal law. The old women were the proper authorities to say if a man was fit for the marriage state” (Wallsend & Plattsburg Sun, 7/1/1891).

As related earlier this is an extremely important and rare observation for the time period. The role Aboriginal women held in traditional Aboriginal society has most often been overlooked by early accounts or perceived to be of unimportance. These misconceptions had their ramifications as they impacted into the 20th century. Most studies conducted well into the middle stages of the 20th century were completely deficient in their appreciation and understanding of the vital and shared responsibility of traditional life between men and women. The roles of Aboriginal men and women were clearly defined and they both held aspects of secret business which were of vital importance in keeping the social order of life in perspective and clear observance.

“ The young man had to be free of all diseases and had to pass inspection. The Doghole was therefore, the place for such inspection. Anxious indeed were the parents of both bride and bridegroom to know the result of such inspection. In a former paper we showed that the young black was first to show his ability to keep a wife by hunting her game for a fortnight or three weeks; secondly, he has to pass inspection of the old women; and when all is satisfactory one knocked out his front tooth with a stone – the seal and signature that everything is alright. The young man was next anointed with grease and a portion of his whiskers pulled out the latter given to the bride. After being absent for a week (during the absence he must live only on vegetable food, honey and suchlike, meat being disallowed), suffering all kind of hardships, he is conducted back to the camp. First the bridegroom is met by the warriors, who spring upon, as if to frighten him, and he withstands the charge (generally by taking no notice at all – indifference), he is regarded not only as married, but as a *man*. But should he flinch and show signs of fear, he will remain the butt of joke for many years in and out of the camp. When the old gins bring him into the camp they are supposed to let him into the secrets of all surprises to follow, thus it happens that the youth is generally prepared for the salute. The bridegroom is then escorted with pomp into the camp, where a large feast has been prepared. The old men and law givers meet him, and he must sit in there midst and take some advice on tribal matters before he tastes any food... The newly married sit with the married people. She is decorated with feathers on the head, and sometimes she is ornamented with a stick through the nose and shells in the ears. Perhaps a possum skin might act as a girdle, but in nine cases out of ten the bride is as naked when born. What did it matter when all were naked? The bridegroom is also feathered, and except the chief himself, is allowed to carry his arms at the festive fire as a mark of distinction. Feasting then takes place, and a glorious gorge it was, for everybody ate their fill. As a dessert honey water was passed round (honey and water mixed), yams and various sweet grasses, and then followed a grand corroboree at night. During the interval the bridegroom and bride meet to rub noses, and old women cried aloud. The first time we heard the wail we thought someone was dead. The fact is in this wail they

were expressing grief at the departure of the girl from her people, and the departure of the son from his parents. But their grief was loud and forcible not like the silent tears of the whites. If the bridegroom had brothers old enough they erect a gunnyah for the couple, if not the people of the bride does the work. Everything necessary for married life had been placed under the sheet of bark: some dry bushes and grass, a few skins; a couple of bags made of fibre, grass, or skin: and sometimes the breakfast – a kangaroo rat. Nothing more. After the corroboree the bride and bridegroom retire amidst the good wishes of all” (Wallsend & Plattsburg Sun, 7/1/1891)

The close nature and special relationship of the local Awabakal clans in ceremony was observed and recorded by quite a number of early settlers. This was also reflected in accounts of day to day life. Lieutenant Coke noted in 1827 that Biraban (Awaba clan) and Boatman of the Pambalong were his hunting guides. In 1836 Boatman and Biraban guided the missionary James Backhouse to Threlkeld’s Mission. In 1842 Biraban and Bowin-bah (Gorman) headman of the Pambalong guided Ludwig Leichhardt on his excursions around Newcastle (Hartley, 1995:87). However, it was noted that they would not be persuaded under any temptation to step outside of their country and enter another tribal area. Those who witnessed incidents of Aboriginal people not trespassing onto another’s land without prior acknowledgment had little or no understanding of the principles or issues behind it. Horatio Hale the philologist of the United States exploring expedition of 1838-1842 demonstrated blatant ignorance on his visit to Newcastle and the lower Hunter River. “Though constantly wandering they are not great travelers, usually confining themselves to a radius of fifty miles from the place which they consider more peculiarly their residence. If ever they venture beyond this, as they sometimes do, in company with a party of whites, they always betray the greatest fear of falling in with any *maial*, or strange blacks, who, they take it for granted, would put them to death immediately (Hale, 1846:109). Hale reinforced the already evidenced reference to Koun

by the Awabakal. Hale directed that there were a number of supreme sky deities identified by different Aboriginal groups. He identified some difference in the accounts given of these as all powerful sky beings by Aboriginal groups. He highlighted some of these beings as per location, which included Baime, Burambin, Darariwirgal, Balumbal and Wandong (Hale, 1846:110-111). He directed that the sky being that related to the Hunter River was Koun. "Sometimes, when the blacks are asleep, he makes his appearance, seizes upon one of them and carries him off. The person seized endeavors in vain to cry out, being almost strangled; 'at daylight, however, Koun disappears and the man finds himself conveyed safely to his own fireside' (Hale, 1846:111)

THE SAVAGERY OF THE CIVILIZED

The Pambalong it was noted for a time survived the onslaught and ravages of settlement. Incidents of brutality against them and the other Awabakal clans are well recorded. There are numerous accounts of the horrific impact of European settlement on Aboriginal life. The European introduced diseases had a catastrophic affect on people who had no immunities to diseases like cholera, smallpox, influenza, measles and venereal disease. The Awabakal also suffered in the wake of this assault. Turner reflected that the impact of disease upon the local Awabakal population including “measles, hooping cough and the influenza have stretched the black victims in hundreds on the earth” (Turner, 1995:34).

Disease was not the only reason for the sharp decline in the Aboriginal population. Haslam stated that “in a relatively quick time many coastal tribes in New South Wales suffered extinction (one wonders whether the term ‘extermination’ would be more appropriate)” (Haslam 1979:2). Reverend Threlkeld from his Mission on the shores of Lake Macquarie wrote of the atrocities committed against the Aboriginal population, “A large number were driven into a swamp, and mounted police rode round and round and shot them off indiscriminately until they were all destroyed. When one of the police inquired to the officer if a return should be made of the killed, wounded there were none, all were destroyed - Men women and children, was the reply; there was no necessity for a return. But forty five heads were collected and boiled down for the sake of the skulls” (Elder, 1998:241). Reynolds outlined the terror of this period “old colonists were consulted by the savants when they returned home on holiday. Aboriginal skulls and

other skeletal remains became highly desirable prizes for ambitious museum curators” (Reynolds, 1995:203).

John Laurio Platt is recorded as the first free settler in the Lower Hunter River area. On August 21, 1821 he received a grant of some 2,000 acres, which was described as being on the Hunter River of Newcastle. Platt’s land covered an area, which includes the present day BHP site and also Callaghan – The University of Newcastle. Platt’s grant encompassed a large slice of prime Pambalong land and he had no concept or understanding that it was he who was the trespasser and violator of tribal territory taken without consent or consideration. Platt even went to lengths to mention how he punished local Aborigines for what he interpreted as wrongs against his property. Platt wrote in 1824 that “the two maize crops were with the exception of a few bushels entirely swept off by the blacks, notwithstanding the severe example I made of several of them” (Platt, 1824:1). Platt’s method of control was taken up by many of his contemporaries. The encroachment into Pambalong territory was well underway. In 1825 Edward Sparke Snr received a grant which covered much of present day Beresfeild and Tarro (Hartley, 1995:87). Land also acquired by his sons John and William gave them extensive holdings over Barraheban (Hartley, 1995:87). Henry and Catherine Styles established Styles Grove on the southern boundary of the swamp territory. Their property was noted as lying in a heavily timbered and remote locality. “With Henry absent one day, Catherine, on her way to get the cows, noticed a spear projecting from behind a tree. *‘She called to the black who was aiming it and, as she knew him by name, (Jacky), asked him to come and get some flour and other eatables. He followed her and on arrival at the homestead,*

she got a sword that was in the house and gave Jacky a taste of it. He didn't trouble her again' (Hartley, 1995:87). This gives clear indication of the ignorance and brutality at all levels that Aboriginal people suffered at the hands of early settlers. The story portrays the Aboriginal man as threatening. Mrs Styles indicates that she already knew the man and, he follows Catherine Styles without any attempt to attack her. For this he feels 'the taste of a sabre'. Threlkeld recorded horrific accounts including a story of an Aboriginal man who "was shot while attempting to steal some corn. The farmer, in an attempt to dissuade other Aboriginal people from theft, hung the body from a branch of a nearby tree with a corncob stuck in the lifeless mouth. It was a case of using a human scarecrow" (Elder, 1998:242). None of these settlers were taking into account that it was they who were in fact the trespassers and violating Aboriginal land tenure. Aboriginal lives were under extreme assault, their capacity to hunt and forage was being denied and the settlers were now competing for resources and denying Aborigines the opportunity to fend and feed themselves. The barbaric nature of the so-called civilised reads like an excerpt from a horror story. Threlkeld recorded hearing "the shrieks of girls, about 8 or 9 years of age, taken by force by the vile men of Newcastle. One man came to me with his head broken by the butt-end of a musket because he would not give up his wife. There are now two government stockmen, that are every night annoying the blacks by taking their little girls, and I am now waiting to be informed, when they are in the native camp to get them apprehended, but as was the case once before, the evidence of the black cannot be admitted" (Gunson, 1974:91). Brutality and violence even impacted on the Awabakal in death. Threlkeld noted that after attending an Aboriginal girl's funeral, he was approached by an Aboriginal woman who begged him not to reveal the location of the

grave. “Inquiring the reasons for this request, the natives replied that they were fearful that ‘white-fellow’ would come and take away her head. Threlkeld then went on to explain how the natives had known of this to happen at other gravesites in the area (Newcastle Sun, 1974:6). In this context one may well dwell upon a philosophical Herman Melville “what separates the enlightened man from the savage? Is civilisation a thing distinct, or is it an advanced stage of barbarism?” (Turner, 1974:13).

A Pambalong presence in the area managed to continue “in varying degrees of detribalized state until just after the turn of the century; indeed as was the case elsewhere in the region, small family pockets, to avoid compulsory segregation on mission stations or reserves, lived a nomadic (and often police hunted) life in bushland that afforded both sustenance and protection” (Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Co-op Ltd., 1981:6-7). “Brief accounts remain of trading in the area, even to just before the turn of the century; but from the 1840s to the 1870s certainly the remaining Aboriginal families showed that they had lost none of the skills of their ancestors to get fish, honey, which they either sold to settlers or traded for tea, sugar and tobacco. Until 70 or so years ago there would have been adequate natural food resources for small Aboriginal groups to survive without problems of diet and sufficiency” (Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Co-op Ltd., 1981:6-7).

THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE – DREAMING NEVER ENDS

Threlkeld lamented at the closure of his mission in 1841, “the termination of the mission has arisen solely from the Aborigines becoming extinct in these districts... The thousands of Aborigines... decreased to hundreds and have lessened to tens and the tens will dwindle to units before a very few years they will have passed away” (Threlkeld, 1841:1). The historical records of Newcastle (1797-1897) reveal that in 1857 ‘King Bully’, last King of the Newcastle tribes died and was buried close to the Aboriginal camp near the back of the gas-works an area covered in honeysuckle. By the end of the nineteenth century the complete disintegration and destruction of the Awabakal was erroneously depicted as complete. As has been commonplace throughout Australia, the Awabakal not unlike the Tasmanian Aborigines were thought to have completely died out. In 1871 a description alluded that ‘Old Ned’, his wife Margaret, their four or five children and his blind mother were the last of the Awabakal (Clouten, 1967:79). Ned died in 1873. Margaret and her children remained on their land despite dispute until her death in 1894. Just prior to her death Fraser recorded that “‘Old Margaret’ is the last of the Awabakal. She is now living in her slab-hut on a piece of land near Lake Macquarie Heads, and supports herself by her own industry” (Fraser, 1892:x). Fraser and many subsequent evaluations completely ignored the presence and identity of Ned and Margaret’s children as being Awabakal. Fraser also failed to acknowledge “other Goori families, who were still living in the Swansea area. In doing so, he purports a myth whose ramifications are being felt some 100 years later” (Heath, 1999:58).

Much of this gross neglect and mis-interpretation of historical presence can be identified as stemming from the malpractice of the period of who and how a 'real' Aborigine was defined. It is safe to conclude that the onset of Social Darwinism and the advent of anthropology and archaeology had serious ramifications for Aborigines on the East Coast. Aboriginal people in areas, who had absorbed the full brunt of initial contact and suffered terribly in the face of colonisation, were depicted and variously described as half-caste, quarter-caste, octoroon and quadroon. This practice and construct left many Aboriginal people in an entrapped void of not being accepted as white and also not worthy of respect or recognition as being Aboriginal.

The late Percy Haslam a respected research academic and journalist also gave vivid account that the Awabakal did in fact survive on the other side of Lake Macquarie into the early decades of the 20th century. Haslam recorded memories of visits to his grandfather's home at Toronto and his introduction to the Awabakal people. These experiences as a child impacted and made a great impression on young Percy. It was on these visits to the Aboriginal camp that Haslam gained first hand instruction of the Awabakal language and cultural practice. Those experiences ensured that the language and culture of the Awabakal became his life's work. In later life Haslam was reputed to be the only person capable of speaking the language. These people had lived in virtual sanctuary in the mountains at Martinsville west of Corranbong. Haslam reflected that at about the age of thirteen the Awabakal people suddenly disappeared. He felt "they were forced to because of interference; the Forestry Commission was starting to get into their places for timber extraction because of big orders from New Zealand and South Africa to

make piles and Railway sleepers. The early families can substantiate all of this ” (Haslam: 1983:14). If Haslam’s account is correct and he can hardly be described as a man of sensational fantasy, the Awabakal were still maintaining contact with their land into the 20th century. One is still left with the mystery of where the people went? In all likelihood they were dispersed or moved, joined and absorbed by other Aboriginal groups.

As revealed and contrary to popular belief and mis-conception remnants of the Awabakal still survived into the 20th century. Firstly through the children of Ned and Margaret White and other families in the Swansea area, and secondly on the opposite side of lake Macquarie others had managed for at least the first two decades to remain in the mountain regions at the back of Corranbong, until they were moved off by the forestry commission. The movements and whereabouts of these people after that point remain a mystery. As the 20th century gained momentum the assault on the psyche of Aboriginal Australia reached new levels of brutality. Many of the people were rounded up and herded onto reserves, which were more akin to the concentration camps that gained infamy after the end of the Second World War. The policies of segregation were set in place, Aboriginal people placed into this environment lived a life where even the slightest decision on everyday life was denied. They were provided with an inadequate diet, which had serious repercussions for the health conditions of Aboriginal people for generations to come. They were deprived of their culture and use of their language, they lived in what can best be described as an enforced welfare dependant cycle of

meaningless existence. It was a cruel and calculated psychological attempt to completely break down the spirit and self-esteem of Aboriginal Australian's.

Some Aborigines survived outside of this web of control, they largely existed in fringe camps on the edge of towns and survived in the best way they could. Some of these people continued with the old ways of moving and travel in looking for means of subsistence. This meant that they looked for seasonal work and places of better opportunities for their families. In the early 1930's it was recorded that Aboriginal people had moved back into the Lake Macquarie district to work on the construction of railway lines. They lived in tents along the railway lines. From where these people had originally come, one can only speculate but Aboriginal people of this period were prone and able to move great distances in their attempts to make a living (Turner, 1995:62). The onset of the depression resulted in many shantytowns springing up in and around Newcastle. Probably for the first time white people hardest hit by the depression were forced to live alongside black people. They were able to experience and observe the hardship of existence that had become an everyday norm for Aboriginal people. In places like Newcastle this may have impacted on some people developing a greater appreciation and awareness and at least make an attempt to understand what Aboriginal people had been forced to endure. One area in particular at Waratah had a large Aboriginal population this area took on the name of its former owner and became known as Platt's estate. Dozens of Aboriginal families lived on Platt's estate and remained there for decades after the end of the depression.

Newcastle's identity in the 20th century became synonymous with industry. Although many were and still are unaware it had therefore re-established its link with that of its traditional Awabakal past. Certainly in the contemporary setting, Newcastle was and remains a working class environment and this may have also impacted on Aboriginal Australian's deciding to head to Newcastle and re-establish themselves in looking to gain better living and working conditions. This was a time period where in many areas of NSW Aboriginal people were largely denied working opportunities. They had to suffer further degrading indignities, they were roped off in country theatres, could not use the swimming pools, could not enter hotels, were unable to have their hair cut at the barbers and in most instances Aboriginal children could not get an education. The 1930's heralded a new direction in Aboriginal affairs the adopted policy was assimilation and was an attempt to absorb Aborigines into the wider community. The theory and practice of the policy was again a systematic process that imagined over time Aboriginal people would disappear completely from the landscape. The onset of the 1940's saw the introduction of the Aboriginal Re-settlement Program, Aboriginal people from many areas across the state were moved from the reserves, missions and fringe camps and promised better opportunities and living conditions in other centres. In the late 1960's and early 1970's Newcastle became one of the locations that Aboriginal people from towns such as Moree, Brewarrina, Walgett and Bourke were moved (Jonas, 1995:66). Incredibly Aboriginal people had occupied areas of the University of Newcastle site as late as the early 1960s. Who these people were? Where they came from? Their final destination etc would be worthy of investigation. Opus reported a story on the University site in 1962 'Mud, Mush and Mosquito's'. The story noted that the reporters were

surprised to find in the bushland people living on the creek. Wright noted “Two sets of illegal users had to be removed from the University land during 1963. In April, the Newcastle City Council ordered the removal of nineteen squatters, mainly Aborigines, occupying shacks unfit for human habitation close to the Waratah garbage dump where they scavenged for an income. They had been noticed first by the *Opus* editorial party, which had gone searching for the Shortland site eight months earlier. It took eighteen months of effort by the City Council, the University, the Department of Education, the Crown Solicitor and the Aborigines Welfare Board (which had to rehouse the settlers) to reach a solution” (Wright, 1992:84).

What of this location Mulobinba (Newcastle), Aboriginal people had returned and re-established links to the area. Newcastle was seen to be a working class town and environment, which may have impacted on Aboriginal people gaining greater acceptance and opportunities. Some statistical data collected back in 1982 reflects the fact that Newcastle was an area presenting Aboriginal people with above average opportunities. Gales study disclosed that for Aboriginal peoples in Newcastle “wages and certain training allowances were higher” (Fisk, 1985:46). Further analysis of figures as provided by Ball reveal that the average income for Aboriginal people in Newcastle was above the average for all large towns (Fisk, 1985:53). Similarly, Aboriginal people themselves were forthright in their opinions of the area. Back in 1974 Pastor Frank Roberts disclosed that Newcastle was one of the most pro-Aboriginal cities in Australia (Newcastle Morning Herald, 1974:4). The Aboriginal churchman declared that this was the reason “Newcastle was chosen for the great gathering of the tribes taking place here this weekend”

(Newcastle Morning Herald, 1974:4). Hayes related the perspective of Roberts “the cause of the Aborigines has struck a sympathetic chord... Their aspirations and objectives are better understood and better supported than in most other Australian communities. Here they are confident of finding the ‘atmosphere and climate necessary to press our claims’.

(Newcastle Morning Herald, 1974:4). Pastor Frank Roberts a man of great respect, knowledge and experience after “fighting the good fight on behalf of his people for 25 years”, was certainly a man well credentialed and able to give comment on the worth of Newcastle as a location for Aboriginal people. Turner highlighted the recollections of a number of Aboriginal people who had journeyed to Newcastle in search of better opportunities. One woman recalled leaving Karuah mission with her husband and his father. “He decided to take a chance and come to Newcastle and it turned out a good move because he was able to gain employment in the heavy industry (Turner, 1995:61). Another man recalled leaving Purfleet Mission at Taree as a young child his father gained work at Stuarts and Lloyds and worked there for years. “In Newcastle there was no colour bar... the black man and white-man were equal... I went to school there and never found any trouble with the colour of my skin with my white mates” (Turner, 1995:61). Turner indicated, “clearly, oral tradition is stating that Newcastle was an attractive alternative to mission life because racism was less overt” (Turner, 1995:61).

SUMMARY

This study was undertaken as a joint directive of the University of Newcastle and the Department of Aboriginal Studies. The results have ascertained that Callaghan the present site of the University of Newcastle and its surrounds was the domain of the Pambalong clan of the Awabakal. It is envisioned that the findings will assist the University in recognising and acknowledging the traditional custodians in a fitting and prominent manner. The study has endeavoured to highlight and explain the differences in land tenure and boundary as expressed through Western thought and Aboriginal cosmology. The study has explored Pambalong lifestyle and culture highlighting that the Pambalong along with the other Awabakal clans lived in a visually rich territory of plenty. Aboriginal people within the local area suffered greatly in the wake of settlement the wholesale destruction of the people, culture, environment and resources were swift and catastrophic. Yet this study has revealed that contrary to popular belief people did survive and descendants of the Awabakal are with us still. This adds to the fact that the spirits of those before us continue to range over the hills, valleys, rivers and lakes of the region. Their presence continues to guide and inspire those who are prepared to listen to the land and all within.

RECCOMENDATIONS

*Recognition and acknowledgement of prior Pambalong association with the University of Newcastle site - prominent sign-posting.

*Establish a walking trail from the new Indigenous Centre to be built later in 2000.

*Publication of findings.

*Knowledge of Pambalong made available to enrolling students.

*Haslam Collection - tools, utensils, weapons housed in archives is put on permanent secure display in the new Indigenous Centre. This would be a significant gesture to the local Aboriginal community and Aboriginal staff.

*Assistance in holding an annual cultural celebration. The first to coincide with the opening of the new Indigenous Centre at the University of Newcastle and then rotating to known Awabakal corroboree sites at Belmont Lagoon, Wickham, Wallsend, Nords Wharf etc.

*Research of the 'Awabakal' language. This study deemed a priority and joint partnership between the University of Newcastle and the Department of Aboriginal Studies. The end result the introduction of the study of the Awabakal language in the University environment.

*A joint partnership forged between the University of Newcastle, the local Aboriginal community and the Regional Museum. This undertaking to explore avenues and means to set in motion the return of the possum skin rug held by the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. This rug was taken from the Hunter River during the United States expedition in 1838-1842 led by Commander Wilkes.

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