Darkinung Recognition
An Analysis of the Historiography for the Aborigines
from the Hawkesbury-Hunter Ranges to the Northwest of Sydney
[commonly written with English characters as ‘Darkinung’, Darkinyung or Darkinjung]

Geoffrey Eric (‘Geoff’) Ford
[Ph.D., ANU]
2010

A thesis submitted to the
University of Sydney
School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry
Department of History

for the degree of
Master of Arts (Research)

[Short cover title: IDENTIFYING THE ABORIGINES TO THE WEST AND NORTH OF SYDNEY]

Short Summary from front pages 9-12:
This publication is the result of
a research study at the University of Sydney
2007-2010.
It is a resource for reference material showing
connections which have escaped earlier explanation.
Its page numbers as shown here should be given when citing aspects,
attributed as given in page header.
(Any other extracts shared for comment - before this final digital and printed
copy as deposited with Sydney University Library
- should be discarded.)
Short Summary

The historiographic studies presented in this thesis are analyses of the historical sources from which the indigenous, traditional Aboriginal, people of the Hawkesbury-Hunter Ranges are recognised.

People
In 1789, a boat expedition led by Governor Arthur Phillip ‘inland’ into the ranges first encountered these Aborigines on the Branches of the Hawkesbury River northwest of Sydney, and on returning there by land in 1791 he confirmed that they were a different people to those Aborigines whom they knew on the coast. They were friendly to white explorers. After settlement there, ‘The Branch’ natives were pacified in 1805 by a massacre led by Andrew Thompson towards Springwood. Subsequently, surviving Aborigines with their kinsmen assisted some settlers' crossings of the ranges, without distinguishing territory between the interleaved Hawkesbury and Hunter River catchments. The term Wollombi with a variation in English spelling was given as a reference to their country, and appears to have included both Hawkesbury and Hunter drainage. Convicts and convicts' sons played a part in the Aborigines surviving the rapid changes wrought by settlement, by taking in Aboriginal women and becoming fathers for their Aboriginal children - who are the progenitors of present day Aboriginal descendants. They were known as ‘The Branch’ natives and ‘Wollombi tribe’ before any term was recorded to identify them from their language.

Language
A language for these Aboriginal people of the Hawkesbury-Hunter Ranges was recorded near Sackville by native-born Robert Mathews at the Hawkesbury River from Aborigines who spoke that language throughout the ranges. Mathews recorded this language as Darkińung, which is the identification since applied to these people. A wordlist from the same people native to the Hawkesbury was also recorded by local native-born James Tuckerman at Sackville. This language has been identified as the language of Gomebeere and Yellomundy who were met by Governor Phillip a hundred years earlier at the same location on the Hawkesbury River.

The language mistakenly purported by the Blacktown and District Historical Society to have been spoken at the Hawkesbury (north of the floodplain) was only known to have been used by Aboriginal people from Georges River. Some people with convict fathers, and who were familiar with the language, moved from Liverpool to the Black Town on the south side of the Hawkesbury floodplain, and it is guessed that it also was the local language there among the Aborigines of South Creek and Eastern Creek (south of the floodplain). In 1984 James Kohen of the society confirmed this as the Georges River language recorded by native-born John Rowley. Although Robert Mathews found no identifying name when he recorded this language, people at Camden (apparently descended from the neighbouring Gundungurra tribe) identified the people as Dharrook, present day Dharug. Although this term could be applied to the Black Town, it was a mistake to have applied it to the Darkińung of the Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains. (The new term ‘Darug’, from a vegetable root in Western Victoria, was applied by Kohen for Blacktown descendants.)
Country

Popular beliefs that the southern part of the Hawkesbury-Hunter Ranges was occupied by Dharug Aborigines, the northern part by ‘Wonnarua’, the eastern part by ‘Awabakal’ and the western part by Wiradjuri, are all found to be wrong when the historical source records are examined.

From the analyses carried out for this thesis, the traditional country of the Darkiñung-language people occupied by them at the time of settlement may be defined with borders to meet modern requirements. Theirs was the country of the ranges bounded by the Hawkesbury River floodplain to the south and the Hunter River floodplain to the north.

To the southeast the Hawkesbury River catchment-based Darkiñung bordered the Georges River catchment-based Dharug. The Darkiñung country included the Hawkesbury catchment in the foothills of the ranges on the right hand side of the river downstream of the floodplain - the flow of the Hawkesbury River itself in those foothills did not impose a boundary.

To the southwest the Darkiñung of the Grose River Branch bordered the people in the Cox River valley of the Wollondilly River catchment-based Gundungurra (or Burra'gorang) people.

To the northwest the Darkiñung of the upper Colo River Branch bordered the Macquarie River catchment-based Wiradjuri across the Great Dividing Range of the Central Tablelands, south of Coolah Tops. To the north of Coolah Tops the Kamilaroi based in the Namoi River catchment had penetrated over the Liverpool Range down the upper Hunter River valley and bordered the Darkiñung on the mid Hunter River floodplain at the time of settlement.

To the northeast the Darkiñung bordered the coastal Aborigines along the watershed of the coastal range. The coastal people occupied the catchments between the Hawkesbury River estuarine Arms of Broken Bay and the estuarine areas of the lower Hunter River. (John Fraser, an immigrant teacher who thought they were extinct created the terms adopted in the present day for these coastal people, ‘Guringai’ and ‘Awabakal’.) These were the real Wannerawa people whose name had been misapplied (as ‘Wonnarua’) to the Kamilaroi in the upper Hunter Valley. The alternative name also recorded by Robert Mathews, now preferred, is Wannungine. It was this group, sharing the two rivers, who were closely allied with the Darkiñung.
More Insights from Historic Records

Watkin Tench, Lieutenant-Captain of the marines in the First Fleet, wrote a novel account of his memoirs on his voyage back to England in which he included some specific data copied from the official records. His story telling was written to entice an English public to buy his book. Analysis of the records has shown that it is not a reliable history source.

Many published reminiscences as have been used cannot be trusted as a historical record without verification from other sources. They should be subject to the same scrutiny as the historic novels attributed to ‘Barrington’ or by Tench (or even by Willmot or by Grenville).

The small pox, which devastated many Aborigines from an outbreak at Sydney in 1791, then spreading up the coast and into the Hawkesbury-Hunter Ranges, was carried to the colony as Shingles, a latent form of Chicken Pox, a small pox other than Smallpox.

The ‘enmity’ and ‘battles’ which drew the settlers' comments were most often intra-tribal sporting challenges between acquaintances (usually members of the same language group), rather than inter-tribal ‘wars’ as white authors have imagined.

As the Aborigines' food resources and way of life were destroyed by settlement, women survived by becoming de facto ‘wives’ of convicts (so there are many cryptic Aboriginal descendants at present unknown). Enigmatically, men attempting to live traditional lives disappeared.

The Aborigines' terms recorded on Governor Phillip's 1791 expedition, bidji’gal and booroo-beron’gal, were used as descriptions of people, both given in the ‘Coastal’ language. They do not apply to Phillip's ‘Inland’ at the Hawkesbury River, where a different language applied. Neither indicates a specific locality and they are not Clan names.

The recently contrived ‘Clan’ called ‘Oryang-ora’ at Springwood in the Blue Mountains did not exist. The Springwood forest of the Grose River catchment was part of the home range occupied by people from the lower Nepean River. Other non-existent ‘Clans’ such as a new ‘Mara Mara’ [aka Marra Marra] for the lower Hawkesbury have also been manufactured recently.

A ‘chief’ or ‘king’ did not establish the presence of a ‘Clan’ or ‘Tribe’. Some settlers designated lone ‘domesticated’ Aboriginal men at their farm as ‘King’, i.e. a ‘king’ of nobody. The English term ‘chief’ tended to have been used in colonisation for indigenous men who conducted diplomatic relationships with the authorities. (Royal families with princes or princesses were concoctions of an English dreamworld.)

The name of an Aborigine ‘Yarramundi’ of Richmond Hill district is a Furphy, the term perhaps developed from Yaramandy printed in 1804. However, that person is now considered to have been Yellomundy, the ‘chief’ at Portland Head Rock district (present day Ebenezer / Sackville area). The ‘chief’ at Richmond Hill district then was Yaragowhy (of lower Nepean River area).
Although the term ‘Guringai’ from Fraser’s ‘kuringgai’ has been adopted by descendants of Bungaree’s Broken Bay people, John Fraser meant it to apply to all those who used the common noun ‘kuri’ for man. Fraser’s term Awabakal [or Awaba'gal] applied specifically to the local Clan where the Rev. Lancelot Threlkeld was based on northern Lake Macquarie, and is taken to be a calm (flat surface) cove in the lake.

Threlkeld's Aboriginal language informant, Johnny (boy of [M’] military Captain John Mander Gill) who was reared in the Sydney barracks, was one of Bungaree's mob who had moved to Port Jackson. On reaching adulthood, when at Port Macquarie Johnny M’Gill took his adult name from Birrugan, the mythical young man who rose to the heavens, whom Threlkeld imagined as representing an eagle and introduced as ‘Biraban’ [a term which he may have taken from emu chick, which made the sound ‘bira’].

The yams along the banks of the Hawkesbury River Branches described from Governor Phillip's 1789 boat expedition were not a woodland species as proposed by modern authors, but a riverside sedge, the marsh club-rush Bolboschoenus fluviatilis. (Tubers of marsh club-rushes were food resources across Australia.)

The recent term ‘Darug’ for the Western Sydney Aborigines, as contrived by J.L. Kohen for Blacktown and District Historical Society to apply to local people and publicised in his untested 1993 book, does not represent either the Hawkesbury River Darkiñung or the Georges River Dharug people. It is derived from the meaning of a vegetable root (‘darook’) at Tandarook in Western Victoria.

Under NSW state legislation modern Local Aboriginal Land Councils are not based on traditional Aboriginal land and most are named after a local town. That on the Central Coast, Darkinjung LALC, took its name from the Wollombi Darkiñung people of the neighbouring Hawkesbury-Hunter Ranges.