

# BLUE MOUNTAINS HISTORY JOURNAL

Blue Mountains Association of Cultural Heritage Organisations



Issue 3

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# **Blue Mountains History Journal**

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# BLUE MOUNTAINS HISTORY JOURNAL

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## EDITORIAL

Issue 3 of **The Blue Mountains History Journal** differs from its predecessors in that it has three papers rather than four. But the total number of pages is actually almost the same as Issue 2 because the authors of the first and last papers required greater than usual space to fully develop their topics.

The longest, and first, paper is by Andy Macqueen, a well-known Blue Mountains author who has contributed a most thoughtful paper on the meaning of the term 'Blue Mountains'. Aided by a generous collection of maps he demonstrates that the term means different things to different people. Thus to some the Blue Mountains extend north-south from the Hunter Valley to Picton and east-west from Emu Plains to Jenolan and that latter parameter raises the issue of whether the Blue Mountains should include rocks older than Permian and whether part of the Great Dividing Range should be accepted as being within the area. Andy makes it quite clear that there is no unique definition that is acceptable to all. This scholarly work will for many years undoubtedly be the definitive account of the topic.

Our pre-eminent historian in the Blue Mountains, John Low, has written a captivating paper about a gravestone that is located at Linden. It all revolves about the occupation of the person whose remains were interred - was he a soldier, a mounted policeman or a convict? The topic has been thoroughly researched and I suggest that you read John's lucid story to find out.

The final paper has been written by this Editor but it has undergone the same peer reviewing as the other contributions, and as a result underwent considerable reorganisation and expansion. It relates to a now controversial historic event that took place almost half a century ago, the death of Professor Gordon Childe, a world renowned archaeologist who died close to Govetts Leap waterfall at Blackheath. Inconsistencies in various reports and inquest statements make for intrigue - where did it occur? - was it an accident or was it a suicide? - how believable are the 'facts' presented by the last person to see him? Re-examination of all available reports of the incident have brought to the fore many conflicting aspects and demonstrates the lack of reliability of contemporary accounts, which should be a warning to historians who rely on a small number of old writings.

BMACHO is grateful to the Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Heritage for funding, through the RAHS and GVEHO Grants Programmes, which has assisted in the publication of this issue of **The Blue Mountains History Journal**.

Dr Peter C. Rickwood,  
Editor

## THE BLUE MOUNTAINS: WHERE ARE THEY?

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### Abstract

When the name 'Blue Mountains' was first applied in New South Wales in 1789 it referred to the extensive ranges that were visible from, and bounded, the colony. It was widely considered in the nineteenth century that the Blue Mountains extended from the Goulburn area in the south to the Hunter Valley in the north. Today the name is applied in various ways, but usually in a very local sense. This evolution reflects the cultural history of the region. Today's official definition validates the evolved narrative that Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson completely crossed the Blue Mountains in 1813.

**Key Words:** Blue Mountains, definition, Greater, National Park, maps, explorers.

### Introduction

If people standing at Echo Point or Mount Tomah are asked where they think the Blue Mountains extend to in the landscape before them, a very diverse response is obtained.

Few people today have a clear idea of the coverage of the Blue Mountains ([Figure 1](#)), and that has been the case since the colony began.

It is not a trivial question. For over two centuries the name 'Blue Mountains' has been entwined with the story of the region, and indeed of New South Wales. But if the name has had different meanings at different times or in different contexts, it is necessary to understand those meanings if history is to be properly interpreted.

### Origin of the name

In the earliest weeks of the colony European names were assigned to particular portions of the ranges visible to the west. Having observed the most prominent eminences to the west-north-west, which included Mounts Hay, Banks and Tomah, Phillip wrote in May 1788:

"The most northern of them he named Carmarthen Hills, the most southern Lansdown Hills; one which lay between these was called Richmond Hill." (Phillip 1789, p.99).

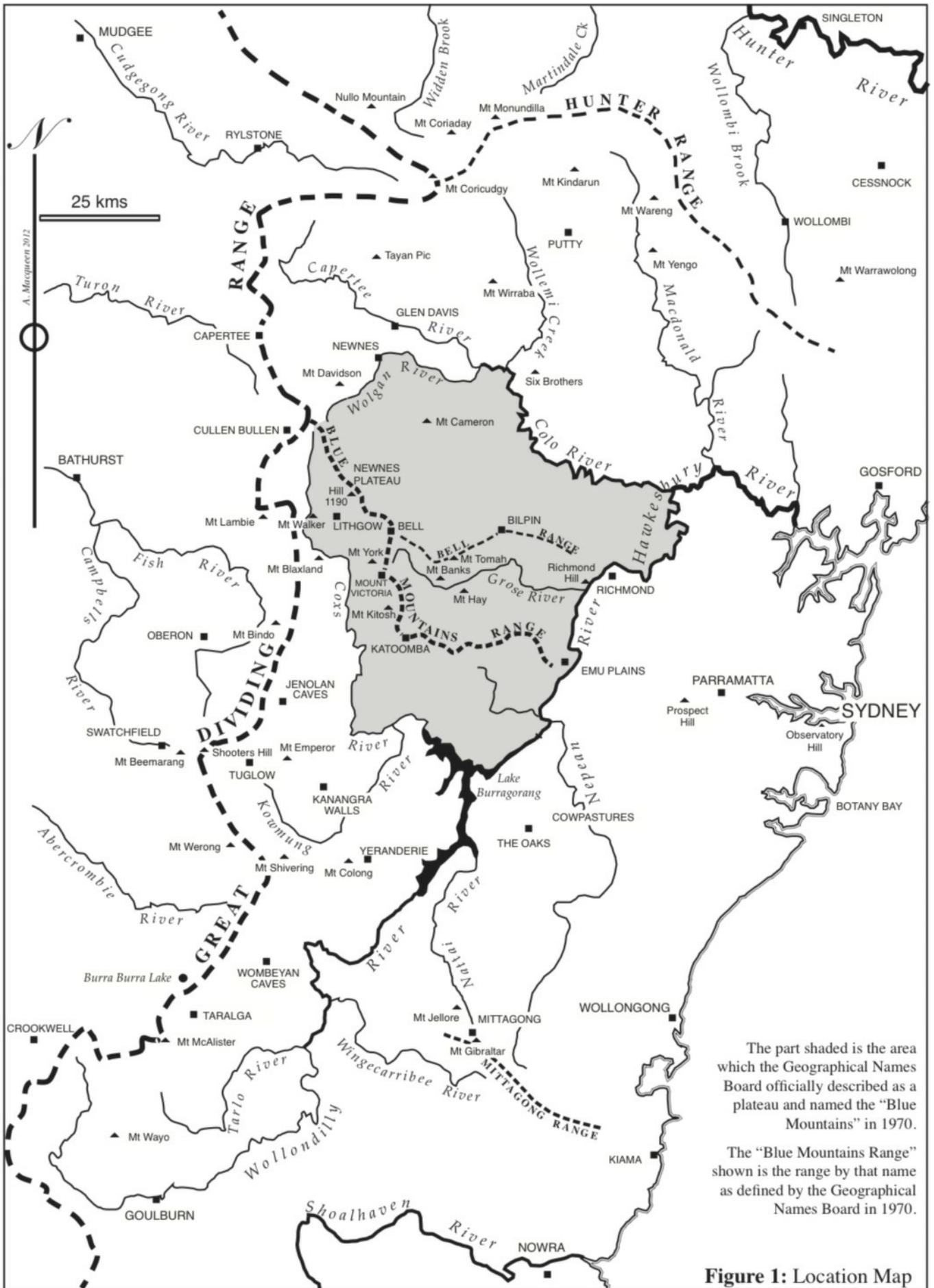
He had probably first named these 'Hills' when he was standing on Prospect Hill on 26 April 1788 (Andrews 1999, p.160). Surgeon John White then wrote:

"From the top of this hill we saw a chain of hills or mountains, which appeared to be *about* thirty or forty miles distant, running in a north and south direction. The northernmost being conspicuously higher than the rest, the governor *Governor* called it Richmond Hill; the next, or those in the centre, Lansdown Hills; and those to the southward, which are by much the lowest, Carmarthen Hills." (White 1790, p.130; Andrews 1999, p.160 italics entries).

White's version of the names was different from Phillip's. This need not concern us, except to say that the then Richmond Hill could not have been the lowly hill next to the Hawkesbury River which Phillip visited a year later and assigned the same name.

It was during that trip up the Hawkesbury that one of Phillip's entourage, Captain John Hunter (later Governor Hunter), noted,

"We frequently, in some of the reaches which we passed through this day, saw very near us the hills, which we suppose as seen from Port Jackson, and called by the governor the Blue Mountains." (Hunter 1793, p.150).



The part shaded is the area which the Geographical Names Board officially described as a plateau and named the "Blue Mountains" in 1970.

The "Blue Mountains Range" shown is the range by that name as defined by the Geographical Names Board in 1970.

**Figure 1: Location Map**

Hunter's remark is contained in observations of about 5 July 1789 (his dates are confused), and is the earliest known documentation of the name Blue Mountains. The *reason* for the name is clear, and was expressed in 1793 by Judge Advocate Collins:

"... , the western mountains, (commonly known in the colony by the name of the Blue Mountains, from the appearance which land so high and distant generally wears,) ..." (Collins 1798, p.312; Chapter XXI, pp.225-226 in 2nd Edition).

It is conjectural whether Phillip thought of the name during the 1789 expedition or beforehand, and indeed whether he thought it up himself or took it from his officers or the common populace. However, the view of one historian that it originated from "the seductive power of the vulgar." and came "to the written record, as early as 1793-96," is respectively unfounded and incorrect (Atkinson 1997, p.191).

Regardless of who first uttered the name, it has been very plausibly suggested that it was prompted by familiarity with the sight of the Blue Mountains of Jamaica, which would have been known to Phillip and other naval officers in the colony who had visited the West Indies (Dunphy 1969, pp.10-11).

A day or two after Hunter's first reference to the name, Phillip and his party stood on Richmond Hill and Hunter observed

"... we were not more than five or six miles from a long range of mountains ... This range of mountains we supposed to be those which are seen from Port Jackson, and called the Blue Mountains: they limit the sight to the west-north-west. In that range of high land there is a remarkable gully, or chasm, which is seen distinctly at a distance, and from which we appeared to be distant about five miles. The hills on each side of this gap were named by Governor Phillip; on one side the Carmarthen, on the other, the Lansdown hills; and that on which we stood was called Richmond-hill." (Hunter 1793, p.151).

It is clear that while the Carmarthen and Lansdown Hills were specific parts of the mountains, the name Blue Mountains referred to the whole range as "seen from Port Jackson".

What could they see from Port Jackson? As one can verify today, a person standing on Observatory Hill would have seen what appeared to be one blue hazy range extending far to the south. In fact, a multiplicity of ranges is involved. The most southern visible point in the ranges west of the Wollondilly River was the summit of Mount Colong (near Yerranderie). Further south, those ranges were obscured by the ranges around the Nattai River (and the Earth's curvature). Even further southward, in the Mittagong direction, the view was obscured by close high ground around Leichhardt. To the north, the view terminated at about Mount Tomah, owing to the interruption of high ground on the North Shore.

Phillip had had more expansive views from Prospect Hill, west of Parramatta. In the Mittagong direction the view was not interrupted by close hills, but by the high country around Mittagong itself (featuring Mounts Gibraltar and Jellore). The Nattai country again obscured the view of the ranges west of the Wollondilly, the most southerly visible point in those ranges still being Mount Colong. This time the view to the northward extended to ranges north of the Colo River, though the more remote heights such as Mounts Coricudgy and Yengo were obscured thanks to the curvature of the earth.

Today, a person armed with binoculars, compass and map can pick out many of the features and interpret the views (though most of Prospect Hill has regrettably been removed for its blue metal and we can no longer obtain the exact historic view from there). The early observers could only discern that the mountain country extended an indefinite distance. The illusion that they faded in height further south or north did not fool them, however. Watkin Tench was no doubt fully aware of the tricks played by perspective and the curvature of the Earth when he visited Prospect Hill in 1789 and observed

"... a view of the great chain of mountains, called Carmarthen hills extending from north to south farther than the eye can reach." (Tench 1789, p.111).

While the names Carmarthen and Lansdown gradually disappeared, the notion of an extensive but somewhat indefinite Blue Mountains persisted through the early decades of the colony. The name was synonymous with the ill-defined barrier that was perceived as constraining the colony.

Some specific references, taken out of context, might suggest that the Blue Mountains consisted only of the parts closest to Sydney. For instance, when Colonel Paterson planned to take boats up the Grose River in 1793 he referred to his “journey to the Blue Mountains” (Paterson 1793). However, that does not imply that the Blue Mountains were limited to that vicinity. Some nine years later Ensign Barrallier understood the Nattai, Yerranderie and Kanangra country to be part of the “Montagnes Blues”, according to his journal (Barrallier c1805, Entry of 25 November 1802, p.796). Further correspondence by Barrallier and Governor King suggests that their Blue Mountains were considered to be the whole range that was thought to terminate as far south as the latitude of Jervis Bay (Macqueen 1993, p.87).

Perhaps the earliest attempt to properly describe the extent of the Blue Mountains was by another explorer, George Bass. During the famous expedition down the coast to Bass Strait, at Kiama on 7 December he wrote

“The Blue Mountains, in short, appear to be nothing more than a body of mountains that, getting up somewhere to the northward – where, we cannot tell, but not very far, I am well convinced, on the north side of Port Stephens, perhaps at Cape Hawke – run southerly in about a S.b.W. or S.S.W. direction as far as the Cow Pastures, and then turn away eastward and come to the sea 18 or 20 miles to the southward of Botany Bay. Their breadth where they come to the sea is about 25 or 30 miles, but I suspect that as they advance northward their breadth decreases.” (Bass 1797-1798, p.315).

In stating that the Mountains came “to the sea” Bass was referring to the Illawarra escarpment. His idea of a considerable northern extent to the Blue Mountains is consistent with that of Lieutenant Grant, who while standing on Mount Hunter in the Hunter Valley (between Maitland and Singleton) in 1801, wrote that he could see

“... the Blue Mountains, which we saw until lost to the eye, stretching in a northerly direction into the interior.” (Grant 1801, p.408).

Colonel Paterson — formerly Captain Paterson — was present with Grant, as was Ensign Barrallier, and presumably both concurred with Grant’s use of the name (Macqueen 1993, p.60).

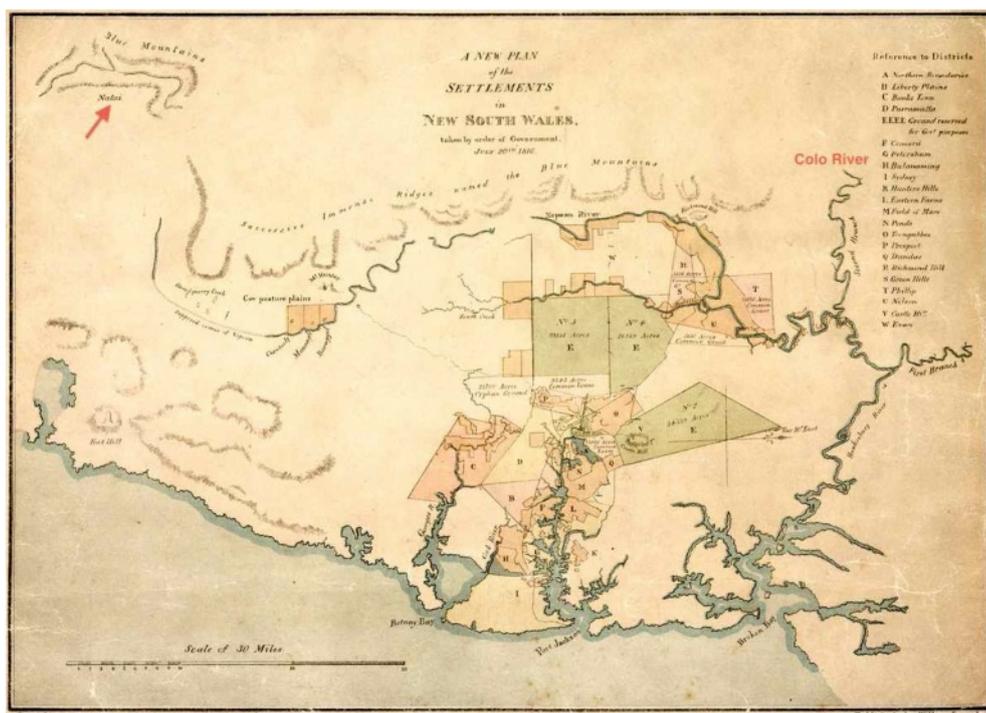
According to the visiting Frenchman François Peron, the Blue Mountains

“envelopes the whole county [of Cumberland] in a sort of semicircle” (Peron 1809, p.285.).

This notion is not consistent with the extensive northern extent described above, but it does fit Bass’s idea that the range came to the sea south of Botany Bay.

If we accept Bass and Peron’s versions, John Wilson and his companions certainly crossed the Blue Mountains, as then defined, in two expeditions in early 1798. The party negotiated the upper Nepean and Nattai country, at one time summiting Mount Jellore (834m), and crossed the Mittagong Range: having thus passed all barriers they proceeded almost to the site of Goulburn (Brownscombe 2004, pp.60-81). Unfortunately the party’s diarists did not mention the name Blue Mountains and we do not know what Wilson himself thought about it. He was an illiterate convict and was murdered soon afterwards, so he had no opportunity to trumpet his achievement.

Few maps produced in the first 30 years of the colony shed light on the definition of the Blue Mountains, which is not surprising given the limited understanding of the topography. Neither Barrallier nor Caley placed the name on their maps and sketches, though it is clear from his writings that Caley, like Barrallier, thought the Blue Mountains covered a broad area.



**Figure 2.** William Dymock's 1810 map of the settlements (Dymock 1810).

### Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson

Despite the entrenched narrative which holds that Blaxland and friends completely crossed the Blue Mountains, the men themselves did not *at the time* claim to have done so. While Blaxland's journal declares that the purpose was to

“effect a passage over the Blue Mountains” (Richards 1979, p.67), the outcome of the expedition, according to the same journal, was simply that

“... they had sufficiently accomplished the design of their undertaking, having surmounted all the difficulties ...” (Richards 1979, p75).

Wentworth admitted

“... we have not actually traversed the Mountains [though] we have at all events proved that they are traversable ...” (Richards 1979, p114).

Macquarie at first evaded the question, in the one document declaring that the trio had

“... effected a Passage over the Blue Mountains, ...” (Macquarie in Campbell 1814, col.2), and that he had sent George Evans

“... to discover a passage over the Blue Mountains, ” (Macquarie in Campbell 1814, col.1).

It was only while he himself was making the journey to Bathurst in 1815 that he decided to set the goalpost at Mount York, which, although being the point where he found himself descending from the sandstone plateau, is well short of the watershed of the Great Dividing Range to the west. He wrote in his journal:

“Here we halted for a little while to view this frightful tremendous pass, as well as to feast our eyes with the grand and pleasing prospect of the fine low country below us and now in view from this termination of the Blue Mountains” (Macquarie 1815, 29 April 1815).

This has come to be relied on as proof that the explorers completed the crossing of the Blue Mountains when they descended from Mount York. One prolific historian has cited it as evidence that Macquarie's divine service at Cocks River was the first held to the west of the Blue Mountains (Havard 1935, p.70).

A series of maps produced in 1810 ‘by order of the government’ variously by John Booth, Robert Rowe and William Dymock indicate that the Blue Mountains, described as “successive immense ridges”, lay along the parts from west of the Nattai River in the south, almost to the Colo River in the north. However, given that that was the extent of the maps, it is not to be assumed that the Blue Mountains were not considered more extensive (Dymock 1810). (Figure 2).

However, Macquarie seems to have had a change of heart. He never published his original journal. In the edited version published soon after his trip he refrained from defining the termination of the Blue Mountains, stating that Mount York represented

“... only the abrupt termination of a ridge.” (Macquarie in Campbell 1815, p.1, cols.2-3), and that the explorers had merely crossed

“... the most rugged and difficult part of the Blue Mountains.” (Macquarie in Campbell 1815, p.1, col.1).

Possibly Macquarie was not entirely objective in this moving of the goalposts. It may be that he decided the credit for the complete crossing should be given to Surveyor George Evans, whom Macquarie had despatched to further the explorers' finds, rather than credit the explorers themselves, who were private citizens who had acted on their own initiative (Lavelle 2002, p.47).

On the other hand, Macquarie may have changed his mind after reflecting on the broader topography. On descending from Mount York he was still in a coastal catchment. He found that he yet had to cross a series of “very lofty hills and narrow valleys” involving “numerous steep ascents and descents” before he was across the Great Dividing Range (Macquarie 1815, 1 May 1815).

Macquarie suggested that the Blue Mountains was a barrier that extended 80 miles (*129 km*) south and north of Port Jackson — virtually from Goulburn to the Hunter Valley (Macquarie in Campbell 1815). This is consistent with the concept mentioned by Wentworth eight years later, that the Blue Mountains was a

“chain of mountains” which “run from North to South, dividing the Eastern and well settled part of the Colony from the great Western Wilderness, ...” (Wentworth 1823, col.2 footnote).

Such concepts of considerable north-south extent do not sit well with the idea of a western terminus at Mount York, short of the Great Dividing Range, and Macquarie quite probably realised that.

In short, notwithstanding Macquarie's journal entry, the collective evidence does not support the idea that in 1813-1815 there was a definitive view that the Blue Mountains terminated at Mount York. That such a view developed later reflects the evolving mythology concerning the whole crossing event.

### **Nineteenth century maps**

One might think that as further exploration brought an improved understanding of the topography, a more precise definition of the Blue Mountains might have developed. On the contrary, the situation remained as hazy as the mountains themselves.

Perhaps the first informative map was “A map of New South Wales: from the best authorities and from the latest discoveries 1825” (Tyrer 1825). It shows the “Blue Mountains Range” essentially extending from the Mount Colong area in the south, almost to Scone in the Hunter Valley (Figure 3).

While examining hundreds of maps available on-line via the Australian National Library's Trove website, the author identified 41 maps, published by 17 different cartographers between 1825 and 1903, that seem to label the Blue Mountains in a meaningful way. Most are maps of the whole of New South Wales, and only one is specifically a map of the Blue Mountains. That map, an 1885 tourist map (Figure 4), takes in all the Coxs River and Kanangra country in the south, the Newnes Plateau in the north, Oberon and Tarana in the west, but only Lawson in the east (Cooper 1885). It does not attempt to show a boundary as such, and as with all tourist maps the coverage has obviously been selected on the basis of the area of tourist interest: the cartographer may well have accepted that the Blue Mountains covered a greater area than shown.

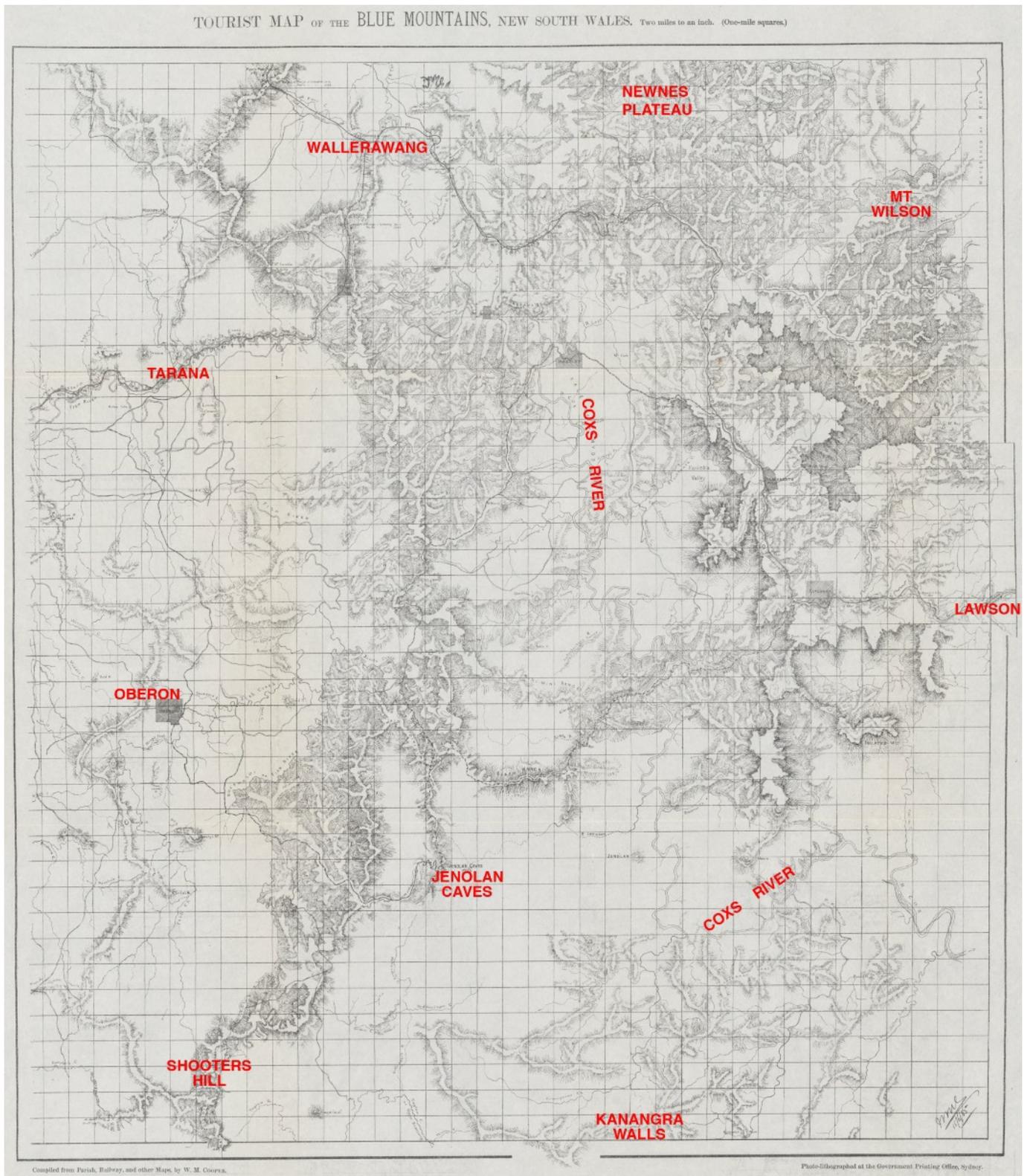
The southern extent of the Blue Mountains as indicated on the 41 maps varies from the Goulburn area to the Jenolan Caves-Coxs River area, while the northern extent is generally either the Capertee and Colo Rivers, or the Hunter Range or Hunter Valley. Tables 1 and 2 summarise the findings.



Figure 3. Portion of James Tyrer’s 1825 map of NSW (Tyrer 1825).

Table 1. Southern extent of the Blue Mountains.

| Location                              | Number of maps where this location is suggested as the approximate southern extent |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Goulburn or Wombeyan Caves or Taralga | 27   |
| Mount Werong-Mount Colong             | 11   |
| Jenolan Caves-Coxs River              | 3  |



**Figure 4.** William Cooper’s tourist map of the Blue Mountains (Cooper 1885).

**Table 2.** Northern extent of the Blue Mountains.

| Location                      | Number of maps where this location is suggested as the approximate northern extent |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Capertee River-Colo River     | 25   |
| Hunter Range or Hunter Valley | 12   |
| Other                         | 4  |



Figure 5 provides an example of a map depicting a Blue Mountains roughly from Taralga to the Hunter Range (Hughes 1870).

While this analysis was not rigorous, it can be seen that nineteenth century cartographers overwhelmingly considered the Mountains to extend at least as far as Mounts Werong and Colong in the south. To the north, nearly all cartographers considered the Mountains to extend at least as far as the Capertee and Colo Rivers. As to the eastern and western extent, in most cases the intent is obscure. An 1882 Bartholomew map of Australia depicts the Blue Mountains following the Great Dividing Range from west of Goulburn to around Capertee, as opposed to the more ‘mountainous’ terrain to the east of the divide which appears to be the target of most maps (Bartholomew 1882).

Figure 5. Portion of William Hughes’ 1870 map of NSW (Hughes 1870).

No temporal trend could be found in the extent of the Blue Mountains as indicated by the 41 maps. Fourteen of them were by John Bartholomew or his son John George Bartholomew, in the period 1850 to 1903, and there is no consistency or trend even within those.

The prevailing cartographic notion of an extensive Blue Mountains did not suddenly die out in 1903. For instance, maps in a 1920 atlas variously showed that the Blue Mountains extended from Crookwell to Rylstone, Tuglow to Newnes; and Tuena (northwest of Crookwell) to Mudgee (Philip 1920).

### Nineteenth century textual references

There are countless textual references to crossing the Blue Mountains, or places and events in the Blue Mountains, but very few provide a meaningful interpretation of the extent of the Mountains.

Some writers equated the Blue Mountains to the entire Great Dividing Range. An official party exploring the Brisbane River in 1825 reported

“... ; the Blue Mountains apparently distant about ten leagues.” (Gray 1825)

and an 1851 article first published in *The Times* about the gold discoveries in Australia mentioned that the Blue Mountains extended from

“... the 38th degree of south latitude to the Tropic of Capricorn, ...” (Anonymous 1851, col.1).

Another article had the Blue Mountains running from New Guinea down to Tasmania! (Anonymous 1847, col.4). A little less ambitious, *Wells' Gazetteer* of 1848 was content to limit it to the New South Wales portion of the Divide (Wells 1848, p.294). Such ideas did not persist into the second half of the century.

Consistent with the mapping evidence however, the concept of a Blue Mountains extending from the Goulburn area to the Hunter was quite common and enduring in textual material. It was a logical definition, for it is in the Goulburn area and the Hunter Valley that the Great Dividing Range is interrupted significantly and easy passage to the west is afforded. Alexander Berry took this view when he wrote about the regional geology in 1827 (Berry 1827, col.1) while an article of 1844, derived from the *Penny Cyclopaedia*, stated that the sandstone country in the area of the Goulburn River (a tributary of the Hunter)

“... is to be considered as a portion of the Blue Mountains, ...” (Anonymous 1844, col.1).

An 1855 article stated that Charles Throsby, when he reached Bathurst in 1819 by crossing the divide south of Taralga, had rounded “... the south-western termination, ...” of the Blue Mountains instead of crossing them (Anonymous 1855, col.5), while a later article by the botanist Rev William Woolls mentioned that the high country around Mittagong was

“... an easterly spur of the Blue Mountains” (Woolls 1865, col.1).

In contrast is the view apparently held by the visitor Paul Edmund Strzelecki, who travelled the region in 1839. An analysis of his subsequent writings suggests he considered the

“sandstone locality commonly called Blue Mountains” (Strzelecki 1845a, p.57)

to be limited to the vicinity of today's Great Western Highway and perhaps the Bell Range (Strzelecki 1845a, pp.41-42). However, his accompanying map carries a label suggesting the Blue Mountains extended at least to Kanangra Walls in the south and to the Wolgan and Colo Rivers in the north (Strzelecki 1845b). (The confusion may have arisen from the fact that the map was actually drawn by John Arrowsmith based on Strzelecki's detailed mapping: possibly Arrowsmith was imposing his own view.).

Surveyor General Mitchell unfortunately refrained from both placing the name on his maps and proposing a formal definition (Mitchell 1834). The same may be said of Surveyor Robert Dixon and his 1837 map (Dixon 1837). However, there are two pieces of text suggesting Mitchell considered the Blue Mountains extended in effect from Goulburn to the Hunter. One is contained in a published 1833 description of his trigonometrical survey, almost certainly written by Mitchell himself, which states:

“on the west to Mount Macalister (*sic*), Werong, Murruin [*Shivering*], Colong, Jenolan, Mount Hay, and Mount Tomah, which are the highest points of the Blue Mountains;” (Anonymous 1833, p.49).

The other is his description, in a field book, of the view from Mount Warralong, near Newcastle, in which he refers to

“Tomah and the Blue Mountains on the West with Yengo and Werong [*Wareng*]” (Mitchell 1828, Frame 0022, entry for Monday 14 July 1829).

He was looking past Mounts Yengo and Wareng towards the Wollemi country from the Colo River north to the Hunter Range.

The author has found no official government document that offers a clear definition. It is however interesting that an 1829 government notice stated that a particular area of land at the confluence of the Hunter and Goulburn Rivers (that is, near Denman) was

“bounded ... on the South by the Blue Mountains; ...” (NSW Government 1829, col.3).

A most detailed description of the geography of New South Wales was published by *The Sydney Morning Herald* in 1870. It portioned the Great Dividing Range in New South Wales into the New England, the Liverpool, the Blue Mountain, the Cullarin, the Gourock, the Monaro and the Muniong Ranges, thereby clearly defining the Blue Mountains as the Goulburn to Hunter portion. It further stated

“(3) *The Blue Mountain Range* is subdivided into the three Chief Lateral Branches of - 1. Hunter Range; 2. Mittagong Range; and 3. Macquarie Range.” (Anonymous 1870, col.2.).

*Bailliere's 1866 New South Wales Gazetteer* proposed an expansive view of the Blue Mountains, while acknowledging — significantly — that a much more limited definition was in common use. It stated:

“The portion of the great dividing chain, generally known by this name, is very limited in extent, but in these pages will include all the mountainous tract stretching from the Liverpool range to Lake Burrah Burrah [near Taralga], south of the 34<sup>th</sup> parallel.” (Whitworth 1866, p.53).

This is the only nineteenth century reference that the author has encountered that mentions a tension between a broad and a localised definition. Perhaps with this tension in mind, the gazetteer's cartographer did not label the Blue Mountains at all on its accompanying map.

The fact that this acknowledgement of a commonly-used limited definition appeared in 1866 contradicts an assertion by bushwalking conservationist Myles Dunphy that the localised definition first emerged in the tourism era in the 1870s after the railway crossed the mountains (Dunphy 1969, p.34). Nevertheless, nineteenth century textual references proposing a limited Blue Mountains are rare. Strzelecki's view poses one example. Another possible example is the following from 1843:

“The Blue Mountains to the west of the Nepean, form a series of mural precipices from the Cowpastures to the Colo, traversed by those transverse fissures, through which the rivers in question flow.” (Anonymous 1843, col.3).

### **The rise of the limited view**

Notwithstanding the dominance of maps and texts reflecting an expansive extent, it is clear that by the middle of the nineteenth century there existed a more localised Blue Mountains. It was apparently a colloquial viewpoint, not properly reflected in texts, and it may have irritated many of the educated as it gained acceptance.

How might this colloquial view have arisen? The author proposes six factors:

1. People attached the name to the part of the mountains they were familiar with, either because they had visited or crossed the mountains themselves or because they had heard of places or events on them. The wild parts of the mountains remote from the Western Road were, to most people, a useless and nameless *terra nullius*. As Eleanor Dark suggested, through the thoughts of her character Johnny Prentice, early travellers over the mountains were so affected by the grim reputation of the place that  
“All their thoughts would be fixed upon the kind, fertile plains beyond, and they would see nothing in the wild hills and gorges which might tempt them to turn aside” (Dark 2002, p.481).
2. No other name arose to denote the country in the vicinity of the Western Road and Bells Line of Road.
3. The above roads lie across a sandstone plateau famously bounded by huge cliffs. The name became attached to that particular landscape.
4. While tourist maps of the mountains, commencing with Du Faur's 1878 map, naturally covered only the parts most accessible to tourists, people were conditioned to thinking that they showed the whole of the Blue Mountains. In fact, the maps did not purport to do so (Du Faur 1878).
5. Settled parts of the Blue Mountains came to be defined as administrative areas for various purposes. At least as early as 1832 the “Blue Mountain District” was defined, for the purposes of furnishing government supplies, as

“The Bathurst road from Emu Ford to one mile East of Mount Vittoria (*sic*); and all parties between it and the Upper Branch of the Hawkesbury.” (NSW Government 1832, col.2.).

The Blue Mountains Shire was established in 1907. While the boundaries of such areas were based on administrative considerations, people were gradually conditioned to think of them as representing the whole of the Blue Mountains.

6. Finally, the evolving mythology surrounding the expedition by Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth held that the trio had completed the crossing of the Blue Mountains when they descended from Mount York, thereby defining the western extent of the Mountains.

Although the localisation process may have commenced soon after the 1813 crossing, arguably it accelerated rapidly with the tourism era that began to flourish after the railway crossed the mountains in the 1870s.

The corollary to all this is that had the original main route to the west proceeded, say, in the area of Barrallier's explorations, today's 'Blue Mountains' would be very much attached to the likes of Mount

Colong and the rugged Kanangra area, and the sandstone plateau to the north might well have acquired a quite different name, or even become nameless except for its outstanding features — the converse of today's situation. Further, it is conceivable that, had the opening of the interior followed John Wilson's 1798 footsteps to Goulburn, the Blue Mountains might today be the distinctive high points of the Mittagong area.

If Blaxland and friends had taken the Bell Range, and Coxs Road had followed by that route, today's concept of the Blue Mountains would probably be centred at Mount Tomah or Bilpin instead of Katoomba.

### **The Blue Mountains Plateau**

The term "Blue Mountain plateau" was first applied to the localised area by the geologist Reverend William Clarke in the 1860s. The extent of his plateau is not clear, nor is it clear whether he considered the plateau to be the entirety of the Blue Mountains, or simply one part (Clarke 1865, col.1). Three decades later the geologist T.W. Edgeworth David referred to "the plateau of the Blue Mountains proper" and placed it within the following boundaries:

"The southern boundary line is usually fixed at the valley of Cox's River and that of the Warragamba River; and the northern boundary at the Capertee valley and Colo valley." (David 1896, p.41).

Perhaps unaware of the history involving a more expansive definition, David seemed disappointed that the Blue Mountains were so locally defined, pointing out that, geologically, the boundaries were "co-terminus" with those of the extensive sandstones which we would now describe as the Triassic series. As he noted, these sandstones range from the Nowra area to the Liverpool Ranges (David 1896, p.41).

Now, while it seems admirable of David to recognise that the name had become unduly localised, his attempt to tie it to the sandstone has little basis in history. Previous concepts were based on concepts of general topography and appearance, not geology. Phillip named the range before anyone had checked the rocks.

In any event, David confirmed what many had come to believe: that the Blue Mountains were simply the sandstone plateau in the area of the Western Road and Bell Range. The possibility of re-expanding the Blue Mountains into the Lachlan Fold Belt metamorphic rocks to the south became nigh impossible.

David's view was reinforced by other academics, most notably his protégé Professor T. Griffith Taylor. He was so taken with the idea that the Plateau of the Blue Mountains was not mountainous in the classical sense, that he proposed dropping the term "mountains". He wrote

"One would like to see the term "Blue Plateau" introduced into our literature, if that were possible." (Taylor 1922, col.5).

This was ironic. In the process of localising the Blue Mountains, some of the areas most worthy of the name 'mountains' — areas to the north and south which are more dissected or of different geology altogether — had been removed. Deletion of the word 'mountains' would have confirmed the localised definition forever.

Nevertheless, Taylor's Blue Plateau was more extensive than David's plateau. It extended to cover all the elevated sandstone from around the Nattai in the south to the Hunter in the north. In 1958 he claimed that for many years he had

“... endeavoured to get the public to use the term Blue Plateau for this wide extent of Hawkesbury Sandstone.” (Taylor 1958, p.99).

The fact that some still argued for a relatively expansive Blue Mountains upset the writers of the first *Australian Encyclopaedia*, who stated:

“The name ‘Blue Mountains’ is often used in a vague and erroneous way to denote the whole main range region west of Sydney; thus the Jenolan caves (*q.v.*) are said to lie ‘in the heart of the Blue Mountains,’ though they are at least 25 miles from their nearest edge. The name is properly applied only to the sandstone plateau bounded on the north by the Capertee and Colo rivers, and on the south and west by the Cox; the Kurrajong Ridge, though a part of this plateau, is usually considered a separate area.” (Jose & Carter 1925, p.177).

This was to rile Myles Dunphy, with justification. The broader definition may well have been vague, but not erroneous. It could certainly be claimed that Jenolan Caves lies within the Blue Mountains (Dunphy 1969, p.23).

Other publications took a similar view to the *Encyclopaedia*. For instance, from 1897 “*The Mountaineer*” newspaper published the “*Illustrated Tourists’ Guide to the Blue Mountains and Jenolan Caves*” implying that Jenolan Caves was outside the Blue Mountains (Mountaineer 1897-8).

The second *Australian Encyclopaedia*, which appeared in 1958, was less dogmatic than the first, but nonetheless stuck to the localised definition:

“... an ill-defined region which may be taken to embrace the country bounded by the Cox River on the west and south and the lower Nepean and Hawkesbury on the east, and extending north roughly to the latitude of Lithgow.” (Chisholm 1958, p.37, col.2.).

### **The Greater Blue Mountains?**

Myles Dunphy drew many bushwalking maps, especially of what he called the Southern Blue Mountains — the country generally between Katoomba, Jenolan Caves and Yerranderie. The Lands Department's *Blue Mountains and Burragorang Tourist Map*, which ran to many editions from 1932, was prepared at Dunphy's persuasion and with much of his input. It covers from Lidsdale and Mount Tootie in the north, down to Taralga and Moss Vale in the south, thereby implying that the mountains were more extensive than many would have supposed, though no actual boundaries of the Blue Mountains were supplied (NSW Department of Lands 1932).

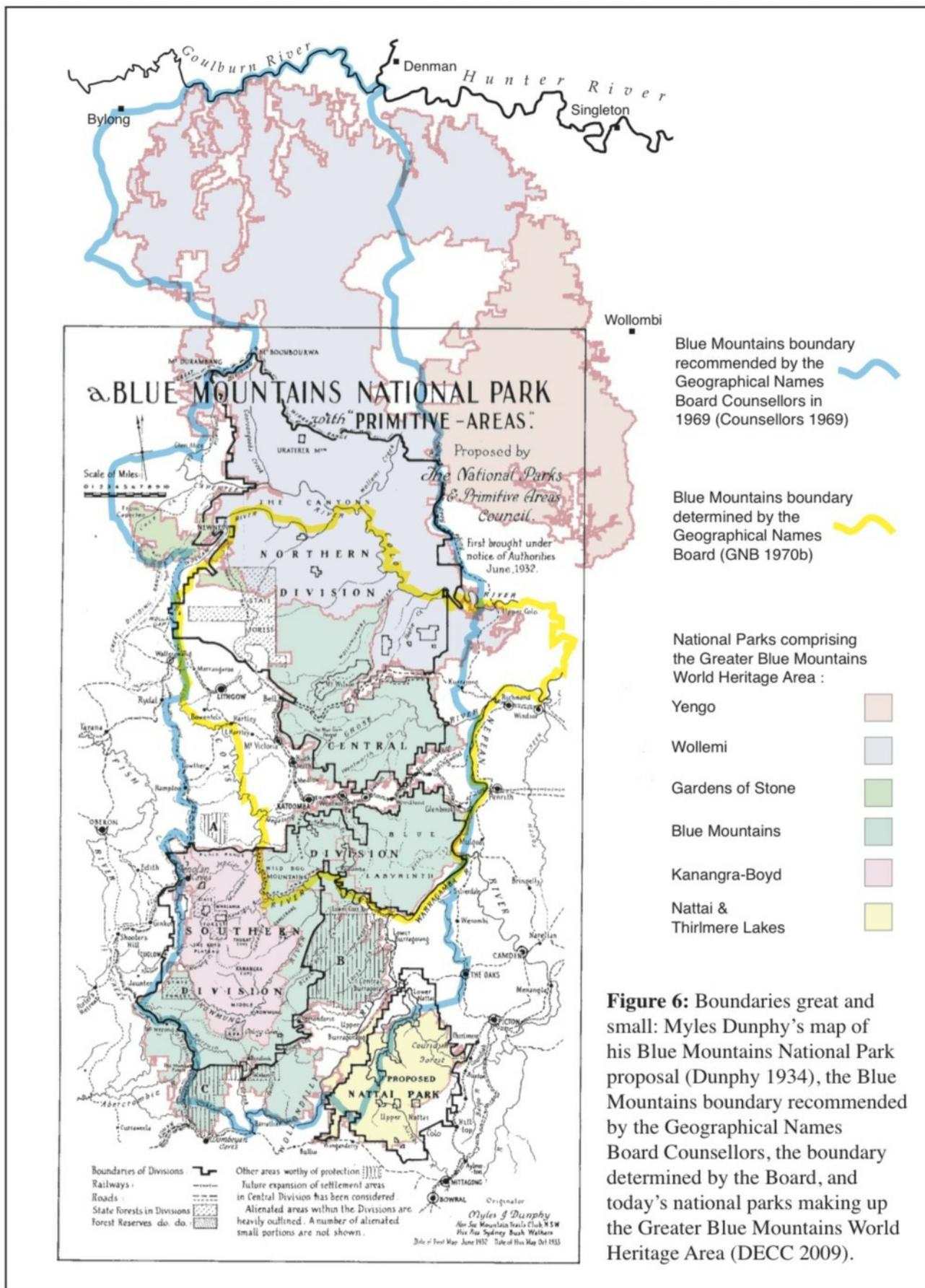
Dunphy was well aware of the early history of the name and believed it should be applied in the expansive sense. Accordingly, when in 1932 he and his National Parks and Primitive Areas Council formally proposed a huge national park covering almost to the Hunter Range in the north, and almost to Wombeyan Caves road in the south, he simply called it a “Blue Mountains National Park” (Dunphy 1934). (Figure 6).

However, he was also aware of the contradictory definitions that had taken hold, believing the name had been hijacked by parochial tourism interests. He came to realise that if his vision was to be realised he would need

“... to by-pass the political, local government and mountain tourist interests and so avoid an argument ... as to the limits of the Blue Mountains.” (Dunphy 1969, p.39).

Accordingly, he gradually introduced the word ‘Greater’. In an 1934 item titled *Blue Mountains National Park Scheme*, he stated:

"The Blue Mountains National Park proposal is that all the unalienated, inferior Crown lands of the Greater Blue Mountains region, be set apart and dedicated as the Blue Mountains National Park." (Dunphy 1934,col.6).



**Figure 6:** Boundaries great and small: Myles Dunphy's map of his Blue Mountains National Park proposal (Dunphy 1934), the Blue Mountains boundary recommended by the Geographical Names Board Counsellors, the boundary determined by the Board, and today's national parks making up the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (DECC 2009).

Three years later, in an article titled *Blue Mountains National Park*, he stated, misleadingly, that the “Greater Blue Mountains National Park” had been proposed in 1932, though at other places in the article the park was named without the word ‘Greater’ (Dunphy 1937, p.49).

It was not until 1959 that the Blue Mountains National Park was created. Initially it was confined mainly to the Grose River catchment, a fact much lamented by Dunphy, though in time areas were added almost as far south as Wombeyan Caves — albeit subjected to a massive intrusion by Kanangra-Boyd National Park. The Park only covered a little of the country north of the Bell Range: when, in the 1970s, there was a campaign to reserve most of the crown land between that range and the Hunter, the result was a huge new park named after Wollemi Creek, a central feature of the area.

In keeping with his original vision, Dunphy would have liked Kanangra-Boyd and Wollemi National Parks, and also Nattai and Gardens of Stone National Parks, to be part of Blue Mountains National Park. That they were not, reflects the reality that new parks earn more credos for politicians than park additions, rather than any meaningful departure from Dunphy’s vision.

In a way Dunphy’s wish came true with bonuses, when in 2000 all the area covered by those parks, as well as Yengo National Park and other areas, became the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. In advancing that name, the proponents, as Dunphy had done, included the word ‘Greater’ to facilitate acceptance in the public eye, making the wishful claim that the area had

“for decades been identified by the public as the Greater Blue Mountains” (NPWS 1998, p.14.; Jones, 2011).

In fact, according to the view of history and geography propounded by Dunphy himself, the word ‘Greater’ was redundant: it was not part of his original proposal and arguably need not have been included in the name of the World Heritage Area.

### **The Geographical Names Board**

In 1968 the fledging NSW Geographical Names Board, under the chairmanship of Surveyor General Noel Fletcher, decided it needed a formal definition of the Blue Mountains. It referred the matter to its Counsellors — an advisory group representing various interests. Dunphy was one of the Counsellors, as were archivist Peter Orlovich, historians Alec Chisholm and Bernard Dowd, and bushwalker Wilf Hilder (CGNB 1969-1970).

The Counsellors recognised the difficulties associated with the different historical, geological and physical viewpoints. In fact, they debated the matter for six of their monthly meetings, a debate that was complicated when two new counsellors, geographers Dennis Jeans and Maurice Daly, were appointed midway. There was majority support for a relatively expansive Blue Mountains, with at least one Counsellor, Jeans, in favour of the whole range from Goulburn in the south to the Hunter Valley in the north. However, the detail was difficult. It is all very well to tie the definition to a portion of the Great Dividing Range, but the reality is that much of the mountain country under consideration—including most of the part now most commonly associated with the Blue Mountains — lies on spurs off that Range. The country of the Nattai is not attached to the Range at all, so there was particular vexation concerning the south-eastern boundary.

At the fifth meeting, in August 1969, the Counsellors resolved to send a map prepared by Dunphy and Jeans — which no one agreed on — with amendments proposed by each individual. This was rescinded at the September meeting, when majority agreement was reached on a description written by Jeans and Hilder. That was provided to the Board, along with a dissenting view by Dunphy and Dowd.

The 400-word majority description involved an area more or less bounded by the Goulburn and Hunter Rivers in the north; the Wombeyan Caves Road in the South; the Great Dividing Range and Bylong Valley in the west; and the Nattai country, the Nepean River, the Putty Road and Martindale Creek in the east (CGNB 1969). Dunphy and Dowd’s version was also extensive but they proposed to limit the

northern boundary at the Hunter Range; moreover, perhaps anticipating that the Board would take a restricted view, Dunphy and Dowd proposed the title Greater Blue Mountains for their area (Dunphy and Dowd 1969). Both proposals involved complex descriptions involving watercourses, roads and ridges.

The Board considered the matter at its meeting of 3 December 1969; only four of the seven members were present. The problem they faced was that the material before them (which included a treatise by Dunphy) was lengthy, complex and confused (Dunphy 1969). In agonising over the detail the Counsellors had been eluded by a simple, broad-brush vision. Unsurprisingly, the Board ignored their views and recommendations and embarked on a discussion based on their own conceptions — as they were entitled to do (GNB 1969). As a result they came up with relatively localised boundaries.

When the Counsellors later asked the reasons for its decision, the Board acknowledged the Counsellors' case for a broader definition but said that it had decided to

“restrict boundaries to coincide to a large extent with the popular concept of the region as at the present time” (Millar 1970).

The Board's minutes provide more insight. For instance, with regard to the northern boundary the Board considered

“few inhabitants of the area north of the Colo and Capertee Rivers would consider themselves in the Blue Mountains” (GNB 1969).

Believing that a sound definition of the mountains should involve river boundaries, they selected the Wolgan and Colo Rivers for the northern boundary and the Coxs River in the south.

As to the western boundary, the Board stated

“History records that Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson made the first known crossing of the Blue Mountains”,

and therefore settled on Coxs River as part of the western boundary in order to ensure that the explorers' terminus, Mount Blaxland, lay beyond the Mountains .

As we have seen, it cannot be claimed that the explorers *completely* crossed the Blue Mountains according to the concept of the Blue Mountains of their time. The 'history' the Board relied on was based on the mythology that grew around the whole crossing narrative. In making its determination the Board gave official credence not only to an unimaginatively localised view, but to an entrenched mythology.

Further, to the extent that they chose an area which is quite separate from the watershed of the Great Dividing Range, they departed completely from the concept that the Blue Mountains constituted a portion of that range. On the other hand, they gave no credence to any geological perspective, for the sandstone country extends far beyond the Board's boundaries, even crossing the Dividing Range in the Cullen Bullen area.

The determination, entered in the Geographical Names Register on 24 April 1970, was that the Blue Mountains was

“A series of dissected plateaus, ranges and escarpments bounded on the N by the Wolgan and Colo Rivers, on the W and S by Coxs River and Lake Burragorang and on the E by the Nepean and Hawkesbury River.” (GNB 1970a).

Confusingly, the next month the Board also defined a “Blue Mountains Range”, described as a

“A range of mountains, plateau and escarpments extending off the Great Dividing Range about 4.8 km N.W. of Wolgan Gap in a generally S.E. direction for about 96 km, terminating at Emu Plains. For about 2/3 of its length it is traversed by the Great Western Highway and the Main Western Railway. Several established towns are situated on its heights, including Katoomba, Blackheath, Mt. Victoria,

and Springwood. It forms the watershed between Coxs River to the S and the Grose and Wolgan Rivers to the N.” (GNB 1970b).

Again, the range so-described does not represent any part of the Great Dividing Range, but constitutes an east-trending branch of that Range.

These definitions remain current. They are quite different from the boundaries of a plethora of other ‘Blue Mountains’ entities — the City Council, the State Electorate and the National Park, to name just three. Because they involve matters of land management, administration and law, precise boundaries are needed for such entities. However, the whole idea of defining an intricate boundary for the purposes of recognising the Blue Mountains in the Geographical Names Register was perhaps misguided. As we have seen, the ‘colonial’ Blue Mountains was extensive but indefinite. An appropriate modern definition might well retain those characteristics, and also acknowledge that it has evolved through history.

### **The highest mountain?**

It’s a simple question: what is the highest mountain in the Blue Mountains? Unfortunately the answer is almost as vexed as the name Blue Mountains, though certain geographers of the nineteenth century were in little doubt about it. Robert Whitworth, author of *Bailliere’s NSW Gazetteer* of 1866, proclaimed

“Beemarang, Mount (*Co. Cook*) is the loftiest peak of the Blue mountain range. It is 4100 feet [c.1250m] in height. Sandstone.” (Whitworth 1866, p.34).

The assertion appears in other publications at least as late as 1892, though without mentioning the elevation, the county or the sandstone (Levey 1892 p.33). However, no mention of **Mount Beemarang** can be found on any early parish or county map, or other official record.

Before addressing the identity of Mount Beemarang, it is interesting to examine the highest points\* according to today’s nomenclature and data (LPI 2011). [Most of the summits named in this section are shown on [Figure 1](#)].

If we take the nineteenth century idea of an expansive Blue Mountains, extending from Goulburn to the Hunter, then the highest point is **Mount Bindo**, located on the western side of the Great Dividing Range in State Forest near Hampton, in the County of Westmoreland. Its surface elevation is 1,362.4m (4,470 feet). It features not Sydney Basin Triassic sandstone but Lachlan Fold Belt metamorphic rocks. Only a few metres lower than Bindo is **Shooters Hill** (1353.9m). Located 21 km south of Oberon, also in State Forest, and also in Westmoreland, it is built from fold belt metamorphics, and is the highest point in an expansive Blue Mountains that is situated on the watershed of the Great Dividing Range (Raymond, Pogson, et al. 1998).

If we consider only the Blue Mountains as defined by the Geographical Names Board, the highest *named* feature is **Mount Walker**, about four km west of Lithgow. Its elevation is 1186.8m. It is in the County of Cook and the Lithgow Local Government Area and, like Mount Bindo and Shooters Hill, it features fold belt metamorphics, not sandstone.

However, Mount Walker is not the highest point. Research for this paper using a Differential GPS has located a hill with elevation approximately 1189.4m, some 2.6m higher than Walker. Built on Sydney Basin Triassic sandstone, it is located at grid reference GDA 56H 239496 6297634, 6.8 km NNE of Lithgow Railway Station, on the Newnes Plateau. As well as being situated in the Geographical Names Board’s Blue Mountains, the hill happens to lie on the Board’s Blue Mountains Range. The author has dubbed the hill “**Mount Ben**” after the young lad who accompanied the survey team.

Several other mountains come into the picture when we choose other defined areas. For instance, the highest in the Blue Mountains National Park is **Mount Werong** (1215m), on the western side of the

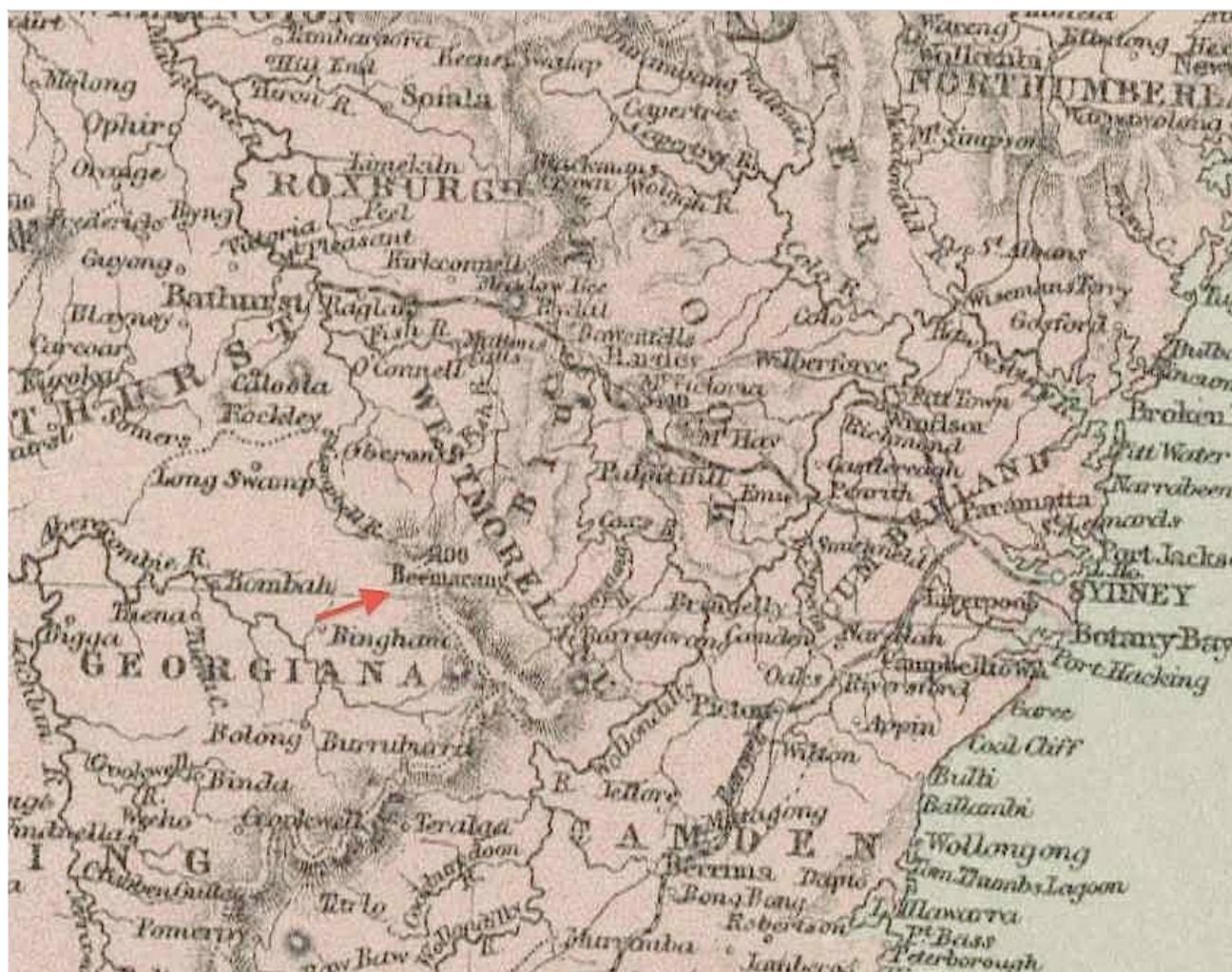
\* Note that all mountain elevations provided have been reduced to approximate ground-level.

Great Dividing Range. The highest in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area is **Mount Emperor** on the Boyd Plateau (about 1334m). The highest in the Blue Mountains Local Government Area is usually thought to be **One Tree Hill** (1111m), though **Mount Kitosh** on Shipley Plateau may be a few metres higher.

Let's return to Mount Beemarang. *Bailliere's Gazetteer* mentioned in a separate entry that Mount Beemarang (*sic*) was located "at the head of Campbell's River, a little to the north of the 34<sup>th</sup> parallel". It also admitted that it was only "probably" the highest mountain (Whitworth 1866, p.54).

The *Gazetteer's* map does not show it anywhere, but maps published in 1870 and 1880 by John Bartholomew indeed show "Beemarang 4100" near the head of Campbells River and just north of the 34<sup>th</sup>.

It seems to be located just west of the position where Shooters Hill would be depicted on the Great Dividing Range, if it were depicted. The 1880 map also indicates that Mount Beemarang lies on or near a track which followed the Great Dividing Range from the south before cutting down into the head of Campbells River (Bartholomew 1870, 1880). (Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Portion of John Bartholomew's 1880 map showing "Beemarang 4100" at the head of Campbells River (Bartholomew, 1880).

Certainly the name "Beemarang" is well-connected to the head of Campbells River. On 7 May 1819, while on his expedition to Bathurst via Taralga, Charles Throsby stopped at Campbells River at a place he recorded as "Burnmaring", apparently an Aboriginal name (Brownscombe 2004, p.308). This was at or near the spot where in 1834 Assistant Surveyor James Larmer surveyed the location of a hut and named it on his plan as "Beemarang or Swatchfield". He repeated the names in his field book, noting that the place was owned by "Davis" (Larmer 1834a,b).

Larmer's "Beemarang", which is most likely another interpretation of Throsby's "Burnmaring", is clearly the origin of the name of the Parish of Beemarang, which is centred there. The 1885 map of the parish names the property Swatchfield and indicates that it was held by William Davis (NSW Department of Lands 1885). Larmer connected his surveys with prior work by Assistant Surveyor William Govett, who traced the Great Dividing Range in the area in 1832. Neither Larmer nor Govett named any high points in the area (Govett 1832).

It is possible that Mount Beemarang is actually Shooters Hill, which has a surface elevation of 1354m. However, Shooters Hill was shown, and named as such, on an 1872 map of the County of Westmoreland (Basch 1872, map 7). Further, it is not strictly at the head of Campbells River, and it cannot be seen from



**Figure 8.** The probable Mount Beemarang, as seen from the tower on Shooters Hill.

the river valley due to several hills which *are* at its head. The most prominent of these, when viewed from Swatchfield (Figure 8), is in the Vulcan State Forest 4.8 km west of Shooters Hill, at grid reference GDA 55H 758708 6245362. It is unnamed, but it has an elevation of approximately 1336m — 18m lower than Shooters Hill (LPMA 2010).

William Davis and his fellow settlers could well have formed the idea that this was the highest mountain, and promoted it accordingly. While they undoubtedly would have climbed it, even if the forest of the day did not obscure the view from the summit it would have been impossible without a suitable instrument to determine that Shooters Hill was higher. As to the claimed height of 4,100 feet (1,250m), in those days most surveyors were using compass and chain, not levels and theodolites. The figure was either a guess, or was obtained erroneously.

In summary, Mount Beemarang may have been an alternative name for Shooters Hill or, more likely, it was the local name of the now-unnamed hill 4.8 km to the west of it. We must ignore the claims that Mount Beemarang was in the County of Cook, that it was 4,100 feet high and that it was made of sandstone.

Whatever the truth, the ghost of Beemarang is intent on haunting us. An Internet search readily turns up a number of websites claiming that Mount Beemarang or Beemerang is the highest in the Blue Mountains, and has an elevation of 1,247m. In a classic example of the pitfalls of Internet research, this information seems to have been absurdly derived from digitised versions of *Bailliere's Gazetteer* or other obscure nineteenth century publications, to the extent of a precise metric conversion of the original "4100 feet" — an elevation that applies to no candidate for Mount Beemarang, nor any other relevant "highest mountain in the Blue Mountains".

One website (Osaka University 2011) goes further, claiming "Mount Beemerang" is "now called Birds Rock, about 15 km north of Lithgow", and attributing the claim to *Hutchinson's Australasian Encyclopaedia* (Levey 1892, p.33). However, that Encyclopaedia does not mention Birds Rock, which is in the Newnes Plateau area and was named after R.E.B. "Bert" Bird (1891-1961) in the 1940s — and incidentally was the probable terminus of an 1823 expedition by Robert Hoddle (Macqueen 2001). It appears that someone in more recent years was under the impression that Birds Rock was the true highest point of the Blue Mountains and therefore assumed it was Mount Beemarang. They were wrong on both counts. At about 1180m, Birds Rock Trig is lower than several other points in the "official" Blue Mountains, and it was never called Mount Beemarang.

## **Conclusion**

The name Blue Mountains has meant, and continues to mean, many things to many people. Initially it involved an extensive but indefinite barrier, but as time progressed its connotations have been influenced variously by the Blue Mountains crossing narrative and the outlooks of road and rail builders, settlers, tourists, tourism operators, geographers, geologists, recreationists, conservationists and countless administrators of various ilk.

In the mind of the individual, the concept of the Blue Mountains will depend very much on which of those narratives and themes is dominant in his or her world view. For instance, the region perceived to be covered by the Blue Mountains Association of Cultural Heritage Organisations would differ greatly depending on whether one's interest lay in the archaeology of Coxs Road, built heritage more generally, Aboriginal cultural sites, or exploration history — or whether one lived in Katoomba or Putty.

The Geographical Names Board was brave and perhaps misguided when it decided to define a precise boundary of the Blue Mountains, and would have been well advised to devise a definition reflecting the indefinite and evolving character. The definition it actually chose, while consistent with many people's notions today, is very limited compared with historical notions. Moreover, it unfortunately validates the evolved narrative that Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson completely crossed the Blue Mountains.

Many parts of the Great Dividing Range and its branches between Goulburn and the Hunter, that once would have carried the label Blue Mountains, have been left nameless. While the gaps are sometimes filled in part by referring to the 'Southern' or 'Northern' Blue Mountains, such names are unsatisfactory as it is not clear whether they are actually part of the Blue Mountains, or are located north or south of the actual Blue Mountains. There is similar ambiguity in the name Greater Blue Mountains: are the 'Greater' parts really in the Blue Mountains or not? Furthermore, some areas that have in the past been associated with the Blue Mountains remain beyond even those labels. For instance, Mount McAlister, an eminence near Taralga of similar altitude to Katoomba, has now to be content simply with being located on the Great Dividing Range.

An exception to the rule is Blue Mountains National Park, which extends almost to Wombeyan Caves, far to the south of the Names Board's boundary.

All these anomalies might be rectified if the name Blue Mountains was discarded and a new set of names, perhaps based on Aboriginal nomenclature, were adopted. Indeed, there has been a recent attempt to attach Aboriginal names to various 'sectors' of the World Heritage Area. It involves, for instance, the application of the name 'Kedumba' to the area most people would regard as the Blue Mountains. The suggested nomenclature has yet gained no currency: the existing names are so entrenched that such a move is not likely to succeed.

While the change in application of the name may seem regrettable, that change is simply a reflection of over 220 years of history. The important thing is to understand that history when talking of events at any given time. The Blue Mountains that one might cross today are a different Blue Mountains to those almost crossed in 1813 and almost crossed by Barrallier in 1802 and by Caley in 1804, and, arguably, those actually crossed by John Wilson in 1798.

Of course, whatever definition we might choose for the Blue Mountains, we can be sure that Aboriginal people have been crossing them for thousands of years.

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## Abbreviations

CGNB Counsellors of the Geographical Names Board

GNB NSW Geographical Names Board

LPI NSW Land and Property Information (2 June 2011- )

LPMA NSW Land & Property Management Authority (1 July 2009 - 4 April 2011)

NPWS NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service

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## THE MYSTERY OF LINDEN'S LONELY GRAVESTONE: WHO WAS JOHN DONOHUE?

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### Abstract

Engraved on a lone headstone at Linden is the name of John Donohoe who died in 1837. Since the early years of the twentieth century the headstone and a nearby over-hang cave, known as King's Cave, have been associated with the unsubstantiated story of a local bushranger (King) who shot and killed a constable (Donohoe) who pursued him. While some writers have questioned the historical accuracy of this legend, none have satisfactorily identified John Donohoe. In this paper I argue that Donohoe was a convict working in an iron gang at 17 Mile Hollow (Linden) under the supervision of the 4<sup>th</sup> King's Own Regiment.

**Key Words:** Donohoe, graves, convicts, Western Road, Linden, Blue Mountains.

### Introduction

In Burke Road, a short distance west of Linden Railway Station and close to the access track to King's Cave, is a gravestone (Figure 2) originally inscribed:

"Erected to the memory of John Donohoe who departed this life June 25<sup>th</sup> A.D. 1837 aged 58 years" (Figure 1).

While the actual grave now lies beneath the present railway embankment, the stone itself,

"... a small Georgian style semicircular topped sandstone headstone ..." (Blue Mountains City Council 2009),

has been moved a number of times. Disturbed first when the original single-track rail line was constructed in the late 1860s, it was moved a second time during the duplication of the line in 1902 when it was apparently damaged during the removal process and the shortened top section left "haphazard in the ground" (Loftus 1909). In the early 1950s it was shifted again and then remained undisturbed until the Linden Citizens' Association (LCA) took charge of it in 1970, re-engraved the badly weathered inscription on the reverse of the stone and resited it in its present position (Searle 1980, p.15). Inadvertently, the LCA engraver cut 'Donohue' instead of the original 'Donohoe' – a portent of the multiple spellings any curious researcher would encounter!



(Anonymous n.d. a; BMCL Local Studies Collection)

**Figure 1.** The grave as it looked c.1909.



(Photo – John Low 2009)

**Figure 2.** The grave as it is today.

## The Legend

An 1891 newspaper reference to Linden's "... lonely tombstone cut out of sandstone." states that it marks "the resting place of one of the soldiers who guarded the convicts when making the Bathurst road, ..." ('Eucalyptus' 1891)

and it seems that the identification of Donohoe as a soldier may date back a lot further. In 1909 Constable William Loftus of Springwood, in the course of preparing a report on the grave for his superiors in Sydney, interviewed Thomas Ellison, "the oldest resident in this district". Ellison's father (also Thomas Ellison) was apparently a carrier at the time of the military presence

"and used to convey Government Stores from Emu Plains Depot, to the Depot at 17 Mile Hollow" (Loftus 1909).

Ellison Sen. (1817-1903) later became the toll keeper at 17 Mile Hollow (1849) and moved his family into the new toll house there, acquiring about 5 acres (2.02 ha) of adjacent land and building an accommodation house, the Toll Bar Inn, in the mid-1850s (Cook & Halse 1988, pp.17 & 19). Ellison Jun. (1841-1929) remembered seeing the grave as a child and hearing

"his father refer to it as the Grave of John Donohoe, the Soldier, who died at the Barracks from natural causes" (Loftus 1909).

This suggestion that Donohoe was a soldier, however, took a somewhat different and more dramatic turn in the early years of the twentieth century when the historian Frank Walker became interested in the early history of the Western Road. During the course of his research, speaking to locals and listening to their reminiscences, he seems to have uncovered a variant story that convinced him that he had discovered the truth about the grave and its occupant. In a paper, "The Romance of the Western Road", read before the Australian Historical Society on 23 March 1909 (but not published until 1916) he said:

"... we find in the neighbourhood of Linden station one of those natural caverns, which in the early days offered such welcome shelter to the desperadoes of the bush. King's Cave perpetuates the memory of a noted bushranger who was the terror of the district. About a hundred yards from the Linden station at the very foot of the huge embankment over which the line passes, is a small headstone, marking the lonely grave of a soldier named Donaghue (*sic*), who was shot by King in 1837. The body is under the railway line, but the stone was removed to the position it now occupies." (Walker 1916, p.371).

The term 'soldier', used in the published version of his paper quoted above, may have been a later amendment, for it appears that during the original lecture Walker referred to Donohoe as a 'police constable' (Brennan 1909a) and when the Historical Society wrote subsequently to the Inspector General of Police requesting his assistance in having the grave restored, a debate of sorts ensued as to Donohoe's status as an officer of the law. The police argued, largely on the advice of Martin Brennan a historically knowledgeable retired member of the force who was present at Walker's lecture, that under the Police Act of 1833 no civil police constables were then operating beyond "the town and port of Sydney" (Brennan 1909a; Day 1909). They also questioned the existence of a bushranger named King (Brennan 1909b) and, on the basis of the report by Constable Loftus, preferred the suggestion that Donohoe had died of natural causes (Day 1909).

Frank Walker, however, would have none of it. He responded briefly and forcibly that the term "constable" in his paper referred to a "mounted trooper", a member of the corps of soldier-police established under the authority of the military in 1825 to control bushranging in the rural districts. This, he said,

"agrees with the statement of an old resident ... that it contained the body of a soldier, but he [the old resident] was in error in stating that the man died from natural causes" (Walker 1909).

As far as Walker was concerned that was the end of the debate. There was no further elaboration in support of his position and, to my knowledge, none was ever forthcoming. A soldier-policeman shot by a desperate bushranger was the interpretation of the grave at Linden that Walker stuck to and promoted. It re-appeared unchanged in his 1913 *Official History of the First Crossing of the Blue Mountains*:

“A small gravestone, at the foot of the railway embankment near Linden, records an old-time tragedy, the occupant of the grave meeting his death at the hands of the bushranger King, in the year 1837. The victim was a member of the soldier-police, named Donoghue (*sic*), who, in an attempt to apprehend the desperado, was shot dead. The huge cavern, a few rods to the north of the grave, is still known as ‘King’s Cave’, and was used as a place of retreat prior to his capture and execution.” (Walker 1913).

And again in 1923 when he led an excursion to Woodford and Linden on Saturday 16 June:

“King’s Cave, the onetime retreat of the notorious bushranger King, was visited, and the grave of one of his victims – Constable Donohoe – was pointed out at the foot of the railway embankment.” (Walker 1923, p.223) (Figure 3).



(Phillips 1928; BMCL Local Studies Collection)

**Figure 3.** Donohoe’s Grave and Kings Cave.

The Walker version became the accepted explanation of the headstone. In 1928 it was repeated word-for-word from the *Official History of the First Crossing* (though unacknowledged) by the photographer and Blue Mountains enthusiast Harry Phillips in his popular *Blue Mountains and Jenolan Caves Illustrated Tourist Guide* (Phillips 1928, p.25; Figure 3) and, with minor variation, was recounted by later historians such as Alfred E. Stephen of the Royal Australian Historical Society (Stephen 1945, p.256) and Andrew Mayne of the Blue Mountains Historical Society (Mayne 1948, p.6), the latter adding that King had an accomplice whose name was, curiously, O’Donoghue. Like Walker, none of these writers provides any corroborating evidence from official or other reputable sources for the validity of this account. It appears to have come solely from the ‘local legend’ as interpreted and publicised by Frank Walker.

In terms of folklore, it is interesting how the deceased constable’s name, ‘Donohoe’, and the introduction by Mayne of a second bushranger called ‘O’Donoghue’ evoke resonances of a real incident that occurred only seven years prior to 1837 and aroused considerable popular attention. In 1830 another John Donahoe, the convict bushranger and original ‘Wild

Colonial Boy’, was cornered in the bush at Bringelly by the mounted soldier police and shot dead by trooper John Muggleston (Low 2010). ‘Bold Jack’, like the supposed bushranger King, also maintained a number of cave hideouts and it is possible that the widely narrated (and sung) folk legend, that developed

around him after his death, fed into and got mixed up with other more local, less widely known, incidents and happenings. In this case with the outlaw's name becoming that of the policeman!

### Questioning the Myth

Though the account of what happened at 17 Mile Hollow (Linden) in 1837 as promoted by Frank Walker became the established story, it was nevertheless questioned by some, as we have seen with the police response in 1909. In 1921 the historian J.M. Forde, who wrote a popular column in the *Sydney Truth* tabloid under the pseudonym 'Old Chum', labelled the story of bushranger King as just "... another Mountain Myth", though he seemed prepared to accept that Donohoe could have been "a constable who died from natural causes" (Forde 1921). In his 1980 study *Historic Woodford and Linden*, the Springwood historian Allan Searle also questioned the authenticity of the traditional explanation and like Forde before him concluded that, considering the military presence at 17 and 18 Mile Hollows (Linden-Woodford) during the second half of the 1830s and the complete absence of any supporting evidence, the generally held story that Donohoe was a constable shot by a local bushranger named King was doubtful.

"... all that can be said is that he may have been a constable, ... [or] some unfortunate traveller who was buried, ... , beside the road where he died." (Searle 1980, p.15).

At the completion of Mitchells Pass up the Lapstone escarpment convict iron gangs under military control were moved into the 17 and 18 Mile Hollows area to improve this particularly difficult section of the Western Road (Low 2011). In 1835 the Quaker missionary, James Backhouse, noted in his journal the presence there of two large iron gangs, each made up of about 60 men and supervised by a contingent of soldiers under the authority of a "young military officer" (Backhouse 1843, p.200). The presence of 57 soldiers of the 4<sup>th</sup> King's Own Regiment commanded by Lt. F.M. Campbell is confirmed by the *NSW Calender & Post Office Directory* for 1836 (Searle 1980, pp.14-15). As both Forde and Searle argued, it is hard to believe that a bushranger could have operated and hid in this part of the Mountains at this time. Further, while Backhouse describes in detail the makeshift facilities provided to shelter the convict road workers, he makes no mention of troop accommodation. It would seem far more logical that, rather than a bushranger's lair, the large over-hang cave (Figures 4 & 5) located a short distance into the bush (and not visible to Backhouse) was used by the 4<sup>th</sup> Kings Own Regiment as a store and barracks during the several years they were stationed at 17 Mile Hollow (Searle 1980, p.15; Chinn 2006, p.24; Low 2011). The once well made access road, retained by substantial early stonework, along with the size of the cave



(Anonymous n.d. c; BMCL Local Studies Collection /Springwood Historical Society)

**Figure 4.** Kings Cave in the 1970s.



(Photo – Marika Low, 10 June 2011)

**Figure 5.** Kings Cave as it is today.

Though later writers have generally taken note of Searle's more measured and thoughtful account (Hungerford & Donald 1982, p.66; Chinn 2006, p.24), the story that Donohoe was a constable shot by a bushranger has proved persistent and is still being repeated in some tourist literature (Anonymous 2012,

pp.31-32). In the remainder of this paper I want to suggest that the John Donohoe buried at Linden was neither soldier, constable nor traveller but, rather, a convict who worked in one of the local iron gangs.

### Identifying John Donohoe

It is, I think, somewhat surprising that the possibility of Donohoe being a convict has not previously been explored. Had he been a soldier/constable his military affiliation would most likely have been included on the headstone, as it was in the case of Francis Smith, a Lance-Corporal in the 4<sup>th</sup> King's Own who was transferred from 17 Mile Hollow to the military depot at Springwood in early 1836 and died there later that same year. While his remains lie somewhere near the present Springwood Police Station, his gravestone is now in the Springwood Cemetery (Grady 1990; Pollard 2012, p.6). Similarly, Daniel Collins, a Private in the 28<sup>th</sup> North Gloucestershire Regiment, died at 20 Mile Hollow in October 1840 and his headstone with rank and regiment inscribed survives at the Woodford Academy (Medcalf 2005). It was, also, not unknown for convicts who died while working on the roads to have an inscribed stone marker placed above their graves. Edgar Church, a young convict buried at Pulpit Hill in 1822, was granted this mark of respect, the engraved headstone witnessed and transcribed by the French scientist and explorer Dumont d'Urville during his journey to Bathurst two years later (Duyker & Low 2009, p.35). In 1843, only six years after Donohoe's death, another Irish convict, George Conway, died and was buried at 20 Mile Hollow. Like that of Private Collins, broken pieces of Conway's headstone survive at the Woodford Academy (Medcalf 2005).

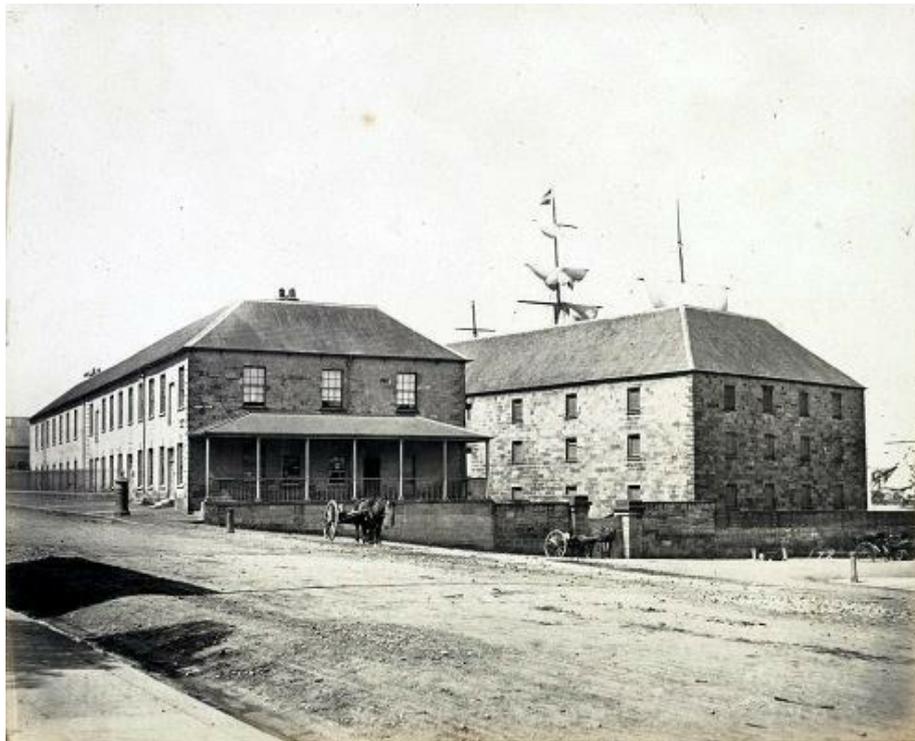


**Figure 6.** Cahir Castle, Tipperary (Valdoria 2006). A landmark with which Donohoe would have been familiar.

With far easier access to historical and genealogical information than was available to earlier historians, it didn't take long to confirm that there was, indeed, a convict named John Donohoe (*sic*) who died at 17 Mile Hollow in 1837 (State Records n.d. a, Fiche 749, p.57). He had arrived in NSW on the '*Earl St. Vincent*' just before Christmas 1818 (Baxter 1999, p.154), an Irish labourer, quarryman and well-sinker from Cahir, Tipperary (Figure 6). Sentenced to 'life' for an unspecified crime, he spent a short period as a 'servant' at Windsor before being moved into 'government employ' in Sydney where the 1828 Census records him residing at the Hyde Park Barracks (State Records n.d. b, Fiche 640, p.181; Sainty & Johnson 1985, p.126).

A further question, though, still remained. What had Donohoe done to find himself working in irons on the Blue Mountains Road nearly 20 years after his arrival? An ironed convict was generally a recidivist, one who had committed a further crime in NSW and received an additional sentence from a colonial court. Again, the answer was soon found with the help of the National Library of Australia's *Trove* and a search of its on-line digital newspaper collection.

In May 1834 John Donohoe, a messenger in the Commissariat Stores (Figure 7), and Adam Sproule (sometimes spelt 'Sprowle' or 'Sproul'), a sergeant of the 4<sup>th</sup> King's Own Regiment, were charged with "larceny in the King's warehouse" (Anonymous 1834b), their trial taking place in August the same year before Justice James Dowling and a jury of 'civil inhabitants'. The trial was conducted over the course of a full day with witness after witness building up the evidence against them. Senior officers and officials from the military and the Commissariat spoke on behalf of the prisoners but no amount of previous good character could defend them against having been 'caught in the act'.



(Pickering 1872; Mitchell Library, SLNSW)

**Figure 7.** The Commissariat Stores, George Street North, Sydney, 1872.

Private Robert Wetherell of the 4<sup>th</sup> King's Own Regiment repeated what he had already stated at the initial hearing in May, that he was on guard duty on the evening of the alleged incident and during his rounds "... observed on passing the spirit stores a light inside, which attracted his attention, knowing that no person could be on legal business at that time; on putting his eye to a crevice in the door, he observed the Sergeant of the Guard holding a light near a cask of spirits, and the prisoner Donaghoe (*sic*) pumping from one cask into another of smaller size ..." (Anonymous 1834a; and different wording in Anonymous

The jury quickly found the two men guilty and they were remanded until the following day when Judge Dowling declaimed upon the seriousness of their crime and his determination to make an example of them both. Adam Sproule was sentenced

"To transportation out of the colony for the term of his natural life"

while John Donohoe,

"...in consideration of his advanced stage of life and former good character, [was sentenced] to be Worked in irons on the public roads of the colony for seven years" (Anonymous 1834d).

Sproule was shipped off to Tasmania where, after several years, he got his ticket-of-leave (Anonymous 1837) and was, ironically, appointed a constable (Anonymous 1840). In 1845 he received an absolute pardon (Anonymous 1845) and went on to raise a large family with his wife Maria (née Orpen) whom he had married at the Presbyterian Scots Church in Sydney a few months before his arrest (NSW BD&M 1834). In his elder years as a respected resident of Snug River he even had a variety of apple named after Him, the "Sproule's Pearmain" (Anonymous 1883).

While Adam Sproule lived to a ripe old age, his partner in crime, John Donohoe, survived the harsh conditions of the road for only three years. A man considered old by the standards of his time, it was not only the hard daily round of manual labour in irons that he had to endure. James Backhouse wrote:

"The prisoners were lodged in huts, upon large open areas, by the roadside ... A few of the prisoners lodge in moveable caravans, which have doors, and iron-barred windows, on one side. Four or five men sleep in each end of them, on the floor, and as many more, on platforms. They are not less crowded than the huts, and are unwholesome dormitories. Many of the men sleeping in them, become Affected with the scurvy." (Backhouse 1843, p.201).

With unknowing prescience regarding Donohoe, Frank Walker wrote in an article about the Commissariat Stores published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1912 of

"... The stern justice meted out to the offender caught robbing the stores, and his punishment was of that Nature that he never had any opportunity of repeating the offence" (Walker 1912).

## Conclusion

When John Donohoe was buried at 17 Mile Hollow on 25 June 1837 he was either 60 years of age (according to the Convict Death Register) or 58 years of age (according to those who erected his headstone). Whatever was correct, he was a long way from his birthplace in Ireland and was fated to lose his identity to the obscure and powerful forces of local myth-making for almost the next two centuries. Perhaps now his story can begin to be told.

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## Abbreviations

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| BMCL     | Blue Mountains City Library                |
| LCA      | Linden Citizens' Association               |
| n.d.     | no date                                    |
| NSW BD&M | NSW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages |
| RAHS     | Royal Australian Historical Society        |
| SLNSW    | State Library of New South Wales           |

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## FORENSIC HISTORY: PROFESSOR CHILDE'S DEATH NEAR GOVETTS LEAP - REVISITED.

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### Abstract

The world-renowned, Australian born, archaeologist Professor V. Gordon Childe disappeared at Blackheath in 1957, the first year of his retirement. His body was found next day and other bones two years later. Many accounts of the death get some aspect of the event wrong, and they are inconsistent in detail, so this is a re-examination of the reports in an attempt to reveal what actually occurred. Most probably it was suicide but Childe was unsteady in balance, short-sighted and without spectacles at the time, and he was known to take risks at cliff edges, so an accidental fall is a distinct possibility.

**Key Words:** Childe, archaeologist, suicide, Govetts Leap, Blackheath, Blue Mountains.

### Introduction

Perhaps the most famous incident at Govetts Leap, ignoring the fictitious plunge of the supposed bushranger Govett (Rickwood 2005), occurred on Saturday 19 October 1957 when Professor Vere Gordon Childe failed to return from a walk south-eastwards along the Cliff Top Track at Blackheath. He fell over the cliff near to Govetts Leap and his body was found next day on a ledge but it was two years later that other bones were discovered on different ledges. Coroner John Ebenezer Tonkin gave his verdict on 6 December 1957 of death

“On the nineteenth day of October 1957 at Luchetti Look-out, Blackheath...”

as being

“... From the effects of injuries accidentally received, ...” (Thomas 2003, p.230) “... when he fell From a cliff top.” (State Records 1957a).

but it masks the curious set of circumstances and inconsistencies in the reports of this event.

### WHO WAS THIS MAN?



(Photo: Peter Rickwood March 2012)

**Figure 1.** The vandalised grave of Stephen & Harriet Childe, Wentworth Falls Cemetery.

Vere Gordon Childe, called Gordon by his family, was the son of the Reverend Stephen Henry Childe (Watson 1923, p.17) and Harriet Eliza Gordon the second of his three wives (Allen 1979) (or the third of his four wives according to Duvollet (1978) although that seems dubious), having been born on 14 April 1892 in North Sydney (Anonymous 1957d; Slade 1990, p.5). His main connection with the Blue Mountains is that his parents often took the family to their vacation house at 46, Wilson Street, Wentworth Falls (Duvollet 1978) when it was called *Chalet Fontenelle* (Dudman, 1991, pp.14-36); now it is *Whispering Pines*. But the connection goes further for his parents, Stephen (died 23 May 1928) and Harriet (died 26 July 1910 at *Chalet Fontenelle* (Dudman 1991, footnote 30)), are buried in the Church of England section of Wentworth Falls Cemetery, in WCE4 Plot 5 (Figure 1), which is adjacent to the Great Western Highway opposite the eastern boundary of Mountain High Pies.

### • Education & Employment

Gordon Childe attended Sydney Grammar School and in 1911 he entered Sydney University to study Latin, Greek and Philosophy; he graduated in 1914 with a University Medal (Mulvaney 1994, p.56). A classmate was H.V. Evatt, who was to become Leader of the Labor Party and President of the United Nations General Assembly; he “.. had been a close friend.” (Anonymous 1957a). Childe’s education continued when he went to Oxford University for 1914-1917 to learn about Archaeology (Mulvaney 1994, p.55) but he also became involved in politics.

As a pacifist, he was not well received when he returned to Australia in August 1917, nevertheless late that year he was appointed Senior Resident Tutor at St. Andrew’s College, University of Sydney. He made no secret of his political views, which proved so distasteful to the college authorities that, anticipating dismissal, he resigned in June 1918 (Mulvaney 1994, p.59). His frequently expressed beliefs brought him a lot of trouble in the repressive period between the World Wars, with job applications being blocked and his mail being censored (Mulvaney 1994). But he succeeded in getting an appointment to teach classics at Maryborough Grammar School, Queensland, where unruly students made his life so uncomfortable (Evans 1995, p.13) that he only stayed for a short time.

At the end of 1919 he returned to Sydney and became personal secretary to the Leader of the Opposition Labor Party. After the Labor Party won the election in 1920 he was transferred to the NSW Agent-General’s office in London but he did not depart until September 1921 (Green 1981, p.38; Harris 1994, p.viii). He held that position for almost a year until he was given a month’s notice on 20 April 1922 (Green 1981, p.39; Mulvaney 1994, p.55) by the incoming Liberal Party (Gathercole 1994, p.71), although formal dismissal was delayed until 4 June 1922 (Green 1981, p.40). As a result of his experiences he wrote a seminal volume ‘*How Labor Governs*’ which was published in 1923 (Trigger 1980, p.34; 1994, p.17; Mulvaney 1994, p.55).

That dismissal was a turning point in his career for he next became an archaeologist and in succeeding years he developed an internationally renowned reputation, being regarded as probably the leading authority of his era on prehistoric European archaeology. He was multi-lingual and travelled extensively to visit various archaeological digs, but he was also regarded as a great synthesiser of archaeological publications (Harris 1994, p.2) although his views were somewhat controversial. For several years he appears to have had only part-time employment (Green 1981, pp.45-46) until in 1925 he gained a job in the library of the Royal Anthropological Institute (Trigger 1980, p.36; Green 1981, p.49). His subsequent appointments were Abercromby Professor of Archaeology, University of Edinburgh (1927-1946) and Director & Professor of Prehistoric European Archaeology, University of London (1946-1956). [A most useful summary of his life and research has been published (Anonymous 1982).]

### • Eccentricities

“Childe was not an easy man to know, ...” (Anonymous 1957d) but one who was often very kindly (Harris 1994, p.viii). He had an unfortunate physical appearance which has been most cruelly portrayed in a caricature (Harris 1994, frontispiece; Thomas 2003, Plate 18).

Gordon Childe has been described as being an eccentric, workaholic, bachelor with Marxist leanings (Dutt 1957; Duvollet 1978; Higham 2011, p.56). One anecdote in relation to the first of these attributes is that while staying in Katoomba at the Carrington Hotel, just prior to his death, his dining companions noted that he behaved unusually, such as marking his wine glass when he temporarily left the table so as to be able to check whether anybody had drunk from his glass whilst it was unattended! Others of his eccentricities were verbally expressed by attendees at a conference held in 1992 (Harris 1994, p.viii) and some, who could not be present, wrote of a few instances (Harris 1994, pp.134-139) but they also mentioned his generosity.

## **DEATH AND FUNERAL**

In retirement, and at the age of 65, he arrived in Australia on his birthday 14 April 1957 to give lectures and attend conferences and

“He also spent much time hiking and studying rock formations in the Blue Mountains near Sydney, an area associated with happy memories of his youth.” (Trigger 1980, p.166).

He last went to Katoomba on 11 October 1957 (Thomas 2003, p.217) and

“On the three occasions he visited Katoomba in these last months he stayed at the Carrington, a hotel he thought greatly superior to most in Australia.” (Green 1981, p.151).

Early on Saturday 19 October 1957, he took a taxi to Govetts Leap Lookout, Blackheath, but did not return from a walk south-eastwards along the cliff edge.

On the day after Childe’s disappearance, his body was discovered by a 15-year-old Blackheath schoolboy, Malcolm Longton (Anonymous 1957a,b), supposedly

“... two-thirds of the way down a 1,500ft. cliff called Govett’s Leap ...” (Anonymous 1957c) and with some difficulty it was recovered on that Sunday.

The funeral was swiftly arranged for 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday 23 October 1957 at St. Thomas’ Church of England, North Sydney (Anonymous 1957f), the church at which Childe’s father had been rector from 1880-1913 (Anonymous 1957g).

“The cortege afterwards left for the Northern Suburbs Crematorium.” (Anonymous 1957g); and subsequently a memorial plaque (NT 451A) was placed in their gardens (Barton 2000). Probate was granted on 22 April 1958 with a Date of Death 19 October 1957 but with the curious annotation “(Death Assumed)” (State Records Probate Index 475138).

## **ANOMALIES**

There are many articles and books in which the death of Professor V. Gordon Childe (1892-1957) is mentioned, and most get some aspect of the event wrong. Even the contemporary accounts of this event contain contradictions so here the focus is on the inconsistencies in the various statements relating to this incident, for in the interest of historical truth these warrant reconsideration. Critical to this investigation are the inquest papers (State Records 1957a).

The coronial inquiry opened briefly on 20 November 1957 at the District Hospital, Katoomba, for Sergeant Asquith to confirm the identity of the body. The inquest adjourned until 22 November at the Court House, Katoomba, when Alexander Gordon (Childe's cousin), Senior Constable James Wally Morey, Francis Eric Hoyle Smith (Assistant Manager at the Carrington Hotel), and Dr Stephania Winifred Siedlecky (Government Medical Officer) gave sworn statements. It was adjourned for a second time until 6 December 1957 when taxi driver Henry Newstead was called (State Records 1957a). Many of these papers have been accurately, and fairly completely, transcribed and published by Martin Thomas (2003, pp.216-230) and as these are more easily accessible than the inquest papers themselves, they have been cited where possible.

### **• The date.**

There is no doubt that Gordon Childe fell to his death on 19 October 1957 yet David Morrison’s reports (1985, p.22; 1988, p.23) of this incident have the wrong year - 1956, and in his recent paper Professor Charles Higham (2011, p.57) gave the incorrect date of 17 October!

### **• The location**

The Death Certificate

“... states that V. Gordon Childe died from an accidental fall at Luchetti Lookout (Govett’s Leap), Blackheath, on 19 October 1957.” (Barton 2000) and the death was also reported to have been the “... result of an accident at Katoomba.” (Anonymous 1957e). Another contemporary report was that Childe

“ ... , who was 65, died when he fell 1,000 feet down Govett’s Leap at Blackheath on Saturday.”  
(Anonymous 1957g).

But Katoomba is definitely an incorrect location and Govetts Leap is only an approximate position. Moreover, the electronic version of a recent article (Higham 2011) has a misleading map on which the marker implying the site of Childe’s death has been placed on Darling Causeway at the head of the Grose River Gorge, whereas the stated location of Govetts Leap is c.21km distant along the river systems and on an entirely different water catchment. \*

Writing nearly half a century after the incident, Thomas (2003, pp.211, 220, 221, 230 & 270) also maintained that the death occurred below Luchetti Lookout. But some details do not fit the location of that seldom visited lookout (Figure 2) which is between Govetts Leap and Evans Lookout, and the Cliff Top Track between those sites is pretty rough and steep in places, particularly in the eastern part. But Luchetti Lookout was accessed by an even more rough side route, c.100 m long, which descended down a steep slope and then ascended a short distance to the cliff edge. For many years the side track to that location has been overgrown and now, because of the need to bush-bash to get to it, there are few people living who have been to Luchetti Lookout. It seems unlikely that a taxi driver in his normal work attire would have walked those rough tracks.



Map data ©2012 Google

**Figure 2.** Govetts Leap Lookout, Barrow Lookout and Luchetti Lookout.

Under oath, driver Newstead stated that the distance to the location where Childe’s coat was seen was 1.5 – 2 miles (2.4 - 3.2 km) from the end of Govetts Leap Road (Thomas 2003, p.224). That range is unbelievable for the distance from the car park at the end of Govetts Leap Road to Luchetti Lookout is c. 0.9 miles (1.46 km), and the distance all the way to Evans Lookout is only c.1.8 miles (2.9 km)!

\* Govetts Leap Brook flows over an escarpment to create the famous waterfall and then the Brook joins the western bank of Govetts Creek about midway along Govett Gorge; in turn, Govetts Creek flows northwards and joins to the Grose River well to the SE of its headwater.

Additionally, Senior Constable Morey stated (Thomas 2003, p.220) that Childe's initialled hat, spectacles and compass were found outside a safety fence and driver Newstead claimed that he had found them

"... on the ledge outside the safety fence and alongside it." (Thomas 2003, p.224)

yet there has never been a fence at Luchetti Lookout. Had the fall occurred at Luchetti Lookout then the recovery of the body would have taken a huge effort, and possibly it would not have been achievable in a single day (Thomas 2003, p.221), for there is no walking trail from the slope below that lookout to the Williams Track at the base of Govetts Leap to where the corpse was carried on a stretcher (Thomas 2003, p.235).

However the recovery site was also said to have been below where

"This Lookout is on a promontory that projects from the cliff line. The safety fence is three-sided." (Thomas 2003, p.220)

and that description fits Barrow Lookout (Figure 3).



(Photo: Peter Rickwood 2007)



(Photo: Peter Rickwood 2004)

**Figure 3.** Barrow Lookout. The safety fence has been renewed but is similar to that in 1957.

On Tuesday 24 February 1959 additional human remains described as "... the bones of a left arm..." (Anonymous 1959b) were discovered by Ernest (*always known as Ernie*) Constable (Low 1988, p.169 - photo) - a botanical collector for the Royal Botanic Gardens from 1946 until 1968. Constable's protégé, Colin Slade (1990, p.5), has written that the agile Constable

"... was a smallish built man which enabled him to crawl into many normally inaccessible places, ..."

and at the time he was seeking the rare plant *Isopogon fletcheri*

"not sighted for nearly sixty years." but "... which was thought to grow in the Govett's Leap area."

and where he subsequently relocated it (Low 1984; 1988, p.170). Confirmation of the proximity of this famous waterfall to the discovery site came in a recording for an Oral History Project (Low 1984; 1988, p.170), in which the botanist noted that the plant he was seeking was only known from

"... permanently wet places at Govetts Leap;" (Low 1984; 1988, p.170)

Initially, Ernie Constable retrieved "a heavy boot and a cap ... and various other things" (Low 1988,

p.170) that he handed to the Police and on Thursday 26 February 1959 (Anonymous 1959b) he guided Detective-Sergeant Cox and three other policemen to the discovery site

"... just to the south side of the Falls and under Luchetti Lookout. ... After we had collected everything we could see we boiled the billy under the falls, ..." (Low 1984; 1988, p.170).

Constable's friend, the late Lewis Hodgkinson, had the clear impression of being told that the recovery site was in the spray area of Govett's Leap and on the southern side beneath the first lookout south of Govetts Leap Brook which he thought was called Luchetti Lookout (pers. comm. the late Lewis Hodgkinson 3 January 2004) but actually is Barrow Lookout (Figures 3 & 4). This latter name was not known to the Blackheath community in the 1950s because it was only introduced by Brian Fox in March 1999 (Fox 1999, p.14, item 43). However, Luchetti Lookout had been opened on Monday 28 January 1946 (Shaw & King 1946) and its location should not have been in doubt for it is clearly marked on maps of that era e.g. Coleman (1946; reproduced by Fox 1999, p.88, item 616), some having been reprinted in



**Figure 4.** In this photograph the position of Barrow Lookout is at the end of the track seen vertically above the impact area of the water flowing over Govetts Leap.

The location of Barrow Lookout is in accord with all of those descriptions of the site from where Childe fell for it is adjacent to the famous Govetts Leap waterfall (Figure 4).

[Photograph BMHS 775]

#### **- Deduction**

Thus the oft-stated location of the death site of V. Gordon Childe as Luchetti Lookout is totally implausible. He has to have plunged from Barrow Lookout (Figure 3).

#### **• Height of the Fall**

In 1832, the height of Govetts Leap was estimated by Surveyor William Romaine Govett and later he reported:

“... , when I had no other means of ascertaining or forming an opinion of the perpendicular fall of these walls of rock, it was a practice with me to cause a chain (which is about 66 feet) to be dropped from the lowest edge of the precipice, if accessible, and having a piece of tin attached to the end of it, observe from an opposite, how many chains, from the distance of one, wd. (*sic*) likely reach the bottom of the rock. It has appeared to me therefore that in some places it would take 5 to 8 of these chains, which is a perpendicular fall of 528 feet – and I shd. (*sic*) say it was 1000 to 1500 feet from the bottom of these rocks to the bed of the river...” (Govett 1836).

To the best of my knowledge the height of the waterfall has never been accurately measured, but plausible values given in various articles range from 520 to 600 feet (*159 to 183 metres*) and other nearby locations have comparable vertical drops. It is a common human failing to overestimate the height of impressive cliffs and the location of this incident is no exception. Thus Senior Constable Morey stated (Thomas 2003, p.221) that Childe’s fall was 1,000 feet (*305 m*) to a ledge yet Govetts Leap is only half that height! In 1957 a journalist stated that the discovery of Childe’s body was

“... in dense scrub on a ledge 500 feet above the bottom of the falls.” (Anonymous 1957b)

but that would place the ledge implausibly close to the top of the falls. Another contemporary report was that

“It lay on a ledge 100 feet from the valley floor.” (Anonymous 1957a)

and Senior Constable Morey estimated that ledge to be higher viz:

“... lying on a ledge 1,000 feet below Luchetti Lookout and 200 feet from the floor of the valley at the bottom of Bridal Veil Falls.” \*\* (Thomas 2003, p.221).

But did they mean 100 feet (*30 m*) & 200 feet (*61 m*), respectively, above the base of the waterfall? Such positions would be plausible for it would be impossible for any object dropped from a lookout in this area to continue rolling down the talus slope far beyond the base of the cliff towards the actual valley bottom.

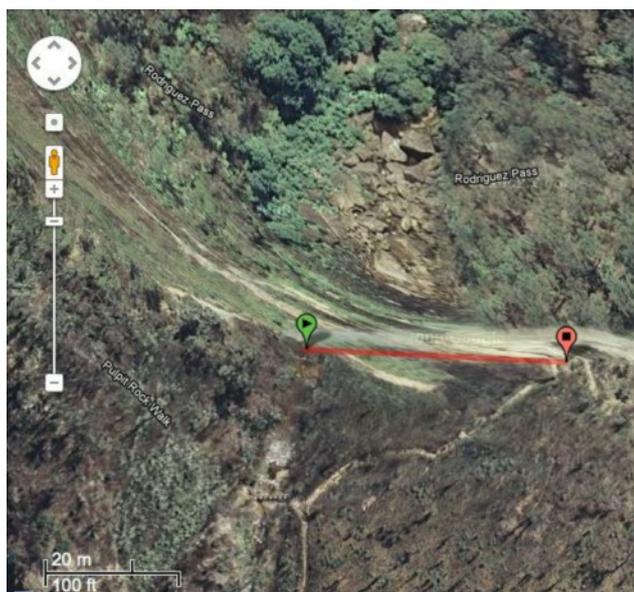
\*\* Bridal Veil Falls is the obsolete name for Govetts Leap.

One journalist gave the distance of the fall as 900 feet (274 m) (Anonymous 1957a), 1,000 feet (305 m) was reported by Trigger (1980, p.166), Green (1981, p.154) and Thomas (2003, p.221), 1,500 feet (457 m) by Green (1981, p.xxii) and even more outrageous is the height from which Childe said that he proposed to fall:

“I know a 2,000ft cliff in Australia. I intend to jump off it.” (Professor W.F. Grimes 14.viii.1979 in Daniel 1980, p.1; Higham 2011, p.57).

In 1957 the recovery team had to carry the corpse from the bottom of Govetts Leap (c.322 feet asl, 99 m) to the car park at Govetts Leap Lookout which is (980 feet asl, 299 m) (CMA 1980) a vertical ascent of c.658 feet (c.200 m) (Low 1984; 1988, p.170) and less than half the estimate of 1,500 feet (457 m) given in a contemporary report and repeated in subsequent accounts.

### - Deduction



Map data ©2012 Google

**Figure 5.** Barrow Lookout (Red Marker) is 60m east of the top of Govetts Leap (Green Marker).

The reality is that on 19 October 1957 Professor Childe jumped or fell from Barrow Lookout (910 feet; 277 metres asl) only 66 yards (60 metres) to the east of, and 60 feet (18 metres) above the top of, Govetts Leap waterfall (850 feet; 259 metres asl) (CMA 1980) (Figure 5). He died after falling for up to 580 feet (177 metres) and on an initial, or subsequent, impact “...the body was badly smashed and mutilated...” (Morey in Thomas 2003, p.221)

Over four decades later, Thomas wrote that the body “Was also incomplete” (Thomas 2003, p.235).

But how did he know for no such statement was made at the inquest?

In February 1959, botanist Ernie Constable was looking for rare plants in the spray area of the waterfall when he discovered some human remains and personal effects“..., Up on one of the ledges,...” (Low 1984; 1988, p.170) so seemingly above the base of the falls. Hence these came from a body that failed to reach the base of Govetts Leap, but quite where it ended up is unclear for the precise location of the ledge in question was not recorded. But were they remains of Gordon Childe as Constable inferred (Low 1984; 1988, p.170)?

#### • Who informed the Police in 1957?

Initially, driver Newstead was reported (Anonymous 1957a) to have informed the police that Childe had not returned to his taxi, and in his sworn statement Senior Constable Morey confirmed that indeed Newstead had reported the disappearance “At about 2pm ...” (Thomas 2003, pp.219-220). However one contemporary newspaper report included:

“Then a Sydney visitor to the leap, Mr. Brian Darragh, found the professor’s compass and personal Belongings at the top of the cliff and notified Blackheath police.” (Anonymous 1957b).  
so the latter part of that sentence must be a case of journalistic error!

- **Who found what belongings?**

- **Discoveries in 1957**

On 19 October 1957 Childe's belongings were found at two different locations.

"... about 12 o'clock. Some people came along ... I was near the cab and these people came and told me they had found a coat".

From his sworn statement it would appear that "these people" did not collect the coat for driver Newstead continued:

"I went to have a look and I found his coat before I came to the lookout." (Thomas 2003, p.224). and at the inquest, Senior Constable Morey stated that he had been informed by Newstead that he went looking for Childe.

"... a short way along the track leading to Evans Lookout he found a coat lying on a tree beside the track." (Thomas 2003, p.220).

The statement continues:

"I went with Newstead to Govetts Leap about half a mile along the track from Govetts Leap (*sic* i.e. Lookout) ... I took possession of the blue-green sports coat which was lying on a tree which had fallen across the track. ...in the pockets were a pipe and a tobacco pouch.." (Morey 1957)

On oath, Newstead stated that when Childe went to the taxi rank early on the fateful day

"He seemed to be smoking heavily on his pipe." (Thomas 2003, p.224).

Then

"About 200 yards further along the track at a point called Luchetti Lookout ..." (Morey 1957) other items were collected (Thomas 2003, p.220). Newstead claimed

"I found his hat and glasses and compass. They were on the ledge outside the safety fence and alongside it. I looked around to see if I could find him and then ... I went and reported it to Constable Morey." (Thomas 2003, p.224).

But Newstead must have left these items where they were as Senior Constable Morey confirmed that outside a safety fence were Childe's initialled hat, bifocal glasses and compass and

"The compass was open and sighted on a feature known as Pulpit Rock ..." (Morey 1957).

The amount of detail provided by Morey makes it likely that the policeman saw these items before they were moved and hence it was he who collected them. However a journalist (Anonymous 1957a) claimed that the Police found the compass but did he mean retrieved? Another contemporary newspaper report included the conflicting statement that

"Then a Sydney visitor to the leap, Mr. Brian Darragh, found the professor's compass and personal belongings at the top of the cliff ... ." (Anonymous 1957b; also see Green 1981, p.154).

As to the items, Green (1981, p.154) listed "... compass, mackintosh, pipe and spectacles ..." and fairly recently another secondary report specified

"... Childe's pipe and spectacles were found by the cliff edge." (Higham 2011, p.57).

- **Deduction**

Hence in 1957 one or more visitors found the coat and reported it to taxi driver Henry Newstead who then walked along the Cliff Top Track to see it. Newstead continued to walk further to Barrow Lookout where he also saw a hat, glasses and compass, but it would seem likely that the tourists may have been the first to discover those items. Uncharacteristically, it is almost certain that neither the tourists nor Newstead collected any of the belongings for Senior Constable Morey clearly stated that he retrieved the coat and he provided considerable detail about the other objects and their location.

- **Discoveries in 1959**

On 24 February 1959 Ernie Constable

"... came across, up on one of the ledges, a heavy boot and a cap like the American sailors used to wear and various other things." (Low 1984; 1988, p.170).

These belongings were handed to the Police and

“The next day I had to go to Orange for a special job and when I came back three days later (*did he mean 27 or 28 February?*) ... I went to see Constable Wotherspoon and he said ‘Oh yes they’ve been identified as the shin bone and various other bones of a human being.’ ” (Low 1984; 1988, p.170).

But a contemporary report (Anonymous 1959b) clearly states that the initial discovery was on the Tuesday, and it was on Thursday 26 February 1959 that Ernie Constable took Detective-Sergeant Cox and three other policemen to the site where they also found

“... the bones of a left arm, a plastic raincoat, boot, wrist-watch, spectacles in a case, and a torch.” (Anonymous 1959b).

[Note that Morrison (1985, p.22; 1988, p.23) gave an abbreviated list of this second discovery of “... a hat and a human arm with a watch.”]

Thus Ernie Constable’s recollection decades after the event was somewhat fallible in relation to dates so was the journalist correct in reporting the bones as those of “a left arm” (Anonymous 1959b) or was Constable correct in stating that he was told that they were “the shin bone and various other bones of a human being.” (Low 1984; 1988, p.170)? That is a big anatomical difference.

But were these bones (whatever they were) part of Gordon Childe’s body? Constable said so in an Oral History Recording (Low 1984; 1988, p.170) and both Anonymous (1959) and Slade (1990, p.5) were convinced, but the association was seemingly based on the location of the discovery for there were no DNA testing procedures at the time so the bones were not proven to be those of Childe. Moreover, there is no indication as to how long the bones might have been exposed prior to discovery, nor to the gender of the owner although for some bones that may be indeterminate. Most significantly, at the inquest (State Records 1957a) neither Dr Stephania Siedlecky, the examining medical practitioner, nor Senior Constable Morey made note of any parts missing from the body!

But in relation to these 1959 discoveries there are other worrying anomalies.

- Gordon Childe had discarded a blue-green sports coat along the track so it is unlikely that when he fell

he would have been carrying the ‘plastic raincoat’ that was recovered.

- Childe’s initialled brown felt hat was discovered at Barrow Lookout yet Ernie Constable was clear that he found “a cap like the American sailors used to wear” so of a style most unlikely to be favoured by an elderly academic and, in any case, Childe would not have been wearing two head covers!

- Childe was short sighted (Gordon 1957) and “without his spectacles he was almost blind” (Anonymous 1957a). His bifocal spectacles (Morey 1957) were found at Barrow Lookout and that multi-purpose prescription indicates that he would not have needed a separate pair for reading. So is it likely that he would be carrying a second pair of “spectacles in a case” (Anonymous 1959b) on such a trip?

- Also, it seems improbable that Childe would have taken a torch with him on that morning walk!
- Perhaps the most convincing evidence is the footwear. Thus the discoverer of Childe’s body is reported as having said

“While I was searching through rugged dense bush about 9 a.m., I noticed a boot protruding from a bush.” (Anonymous 1957b).

So although there was no mention of a second boot at least it is certain that Childe was not barefoot. Thus when on 24 February 1959 Ernie Constable found “a heavy boot” (Low 1984; 1988, p.170) and two days later the police found another boot (Anonymous 1959b), and even though there is no indication that they were a pair, one of these cannot have been from Childe whose body was already found with at least one boot!

### **- Deduction**

These are a sufficient number of inconsistencies to make it doubtful that the bones found in 1959 were those of Gordon Childe. This might have been resolved had there been a follow-up on the belongings that were discovered at that time.

- The spectacle lenses could have been checked against those that Childe was known to have been prescribed - but were they?
- Was the ‘heavy boot’ of the size of Childe’s foot? – and was it the same size and style as the second boot found two days later?

- Although the wrist watch and the spectacle case might have been engraved with initials - such identification marks were not mentioned in the reports so had a check been made?
- The plastic raincoat, boot and torch are common items that were unlikely to have personal identification marks.

Hence there has to be considerable uncertainty as to the identity of the owner of these things.

### **OTHER DEATHS IN THAT AREA.**

If the bones and belongings found in 1959 were not related to Gordon Childe whose were they? Barrow Lookout is a spot that intending suicide victims might be expected to search out yet records of deaths from that place are sparse. Records have been seen of only two other deaths in this area in the post WWII period prior to Childe's death in 1957; a male who was found soon after a fall in 1947 and a female who also died in 1947 but whose body was not discovered until 1949.

The male was discovered on Sunday 20 April 1947 (Anonymous 1947a) and reported thus:

“The battered body of William Skidmore (40), of Homebush, was found 800ft. below the lookout at Bridal Veil Falls, Blackheath, in the Blue Mountains...” (Anonymous 1947b).

He was a

“...taxi-cab proprietor, of Shortland Avenue, Homebush, ...” (Anonymous 1947c).

In their sworn statements, Dr Alexander Allan reported that “The body was greatly knocked about.” (Allan 1947) and Sergeant Taylor stated that “The body was fully clad except for shoes.” (Taylor 1947) but neither indicated that there had been dismemberment. From the location of a “hat, coat and walking stick” ...found “30 yards up stream”, and the position of “the body at the foot of the falls”, Taylor surmised that Skidmore had walked down the creek and slipped on the greasy rocks at the top of Govetts Leap. Although this is in the vicinity of where Childe fell, this accident was some metres to the west and within the waterfall. Moreover Skidmore was barefooted so the boot with the foot that was found in 1959 cannot have come from Skidmore! But he would have worn footwear to walk along the track to the top of the waterfall and when he took them off (as was his habit) surely he would have placed his footwear in a safe position. The second boot found in 1959 might have been his but why it came to be at the base of the cliff is inexplicable.

On 19 April 1949 a 13-year old boy discovered

“... the skeleton of an elderly woman in thick bush near the bottom of Govett's Leap in the Blue Mountains at Blackheath ... The woman is believed to have died about three years ago.” (Anonymous 1949a).

That date was later changed when

“Detectives investigating discovery of a skeleton at Govetts Leap are now of the opinion it is that of Miss Kathleen Maud Solomons (*sic*), 62, of Barunga Road, Northbridge, who has been missing, since January 17, 1947.” (Anonymous 1949b) – actually Kathleen Maud Solomon (1885-1947).

There was no indication that she had fallen over the cliff for her skeleton was behind a rock (Anonymous 1949c) but the exact site has not been re-established.

The bones found in 1959 by Ernie Constable seem unlikely to be those of either Skidmore or Solomon.

### **- Deduction**

There is no certainty as to what was discovered when, and by whom, in 1957, but most probably the visitors from Sydney first saw Childe's belongings. Nor is it certain as to who actually retrieved the items although the likelihood is that in 1957 the policeman collected the personal effects. In February 1959 botanist Ernie Constable made the first, and the police, the second of the retrievals but were they items belonging to Gordon Childe? - it seems unlikely. No other possible owner is known.

### **THE TIMING.**

Under oath at the inquest, driver Henry Newstead stated (Thomas 2003, p.224) that he and Childe had started from the taxi rank in Katoomba at 7.40 a.m. and that the taxi arrived at the end of Govetts Leap

Road, Blackheath, at about 8.00 a.m. (Anonymous 1957b; Green 1981, p.xxii). Note that Sally Green (1981, p.154) wrote that Harry (*sic*) Newstead was Childe's regular driver but, on oath, the latter clearly stated

"He had travelled in the cab before but not with me." (Thomas 2003, p.224)

and when questioned Newstead indicated that he had not been instructed by Childe to wait but before setting out another driver had told him to do that.

"I waited in the cab until about 12 o'clock." (Thomas 2003, p.224)

and that was the time that Senior Constable Morey (Thomas 2003, p.220) said he had been told by Newstead.

So the time that the search was supposed to have been initiated came solely from Newstead, but was it correct? Newstead continued that statement:

"Some people came along ... I was near the cab and these people came and told me they had found a coat." (Thomas 2003, p.224).

It must have been a clear day for it to have been inferred that Childe was taking compass bearings to distant locations (Thomas 2003, p.220). So it beggars belief that on a nice Saturday morning in November nobody came westward along the popular and highly frequented Cliff Top Track for what is supposed to have been four hours! Added to that concern is the report written by a journalist just one day after the death (Anonymous 1957a) stating that it was two hours before the taxi driver went looking for Childe. If that shorter waiting time is true then Newstead would have set out to search at about 10.00 a.m., so leaving at least another two hours to be accounted for! As Newstead did not report the incident to the police in Blackheath until 2.00 p.m. (Thomas 2003, pp.219-220) it is a puzzle as to why it took him so long to undertake the search and report the disappearance - possibly as much a four hours based on the journalist's estimate of the start of the search at 10.00 a.m. or two hours based on Newstead's claimed time of starting at 12.00 p.m. Even the latter duration seems excessive as the time taken to report to the police would have been trivial with the Police Station being only 3 km away at 119 Wentworth Street - barely a four minute drive in his taxi. Unfortunately, these timings cannot be clarified for Henry Newstead died on 27 January 1959 (Anonymous 1959a), just prior to Ernie Constable's discovery of the second set of bones.

### **- Deduction**

There are inconsistencies in the reported times of the stated activities of taxi driver Newstead. It is certain that he and Childe arrived at Govetts Leap Lookout at about 8.00 a.m. and that six hours later the disappearance of his passenger was reported to the Police by Newstead. But exactly what he did during that long interval is unclear.

## **CAUSE OF DEATH**

At the inquest, Childe's cousin, Alexander Gordon (1957, p.3), was recalled to add to his first statement and said:

"I know of no reason that the deceased had to fear violence from anybody..."

and there never has been a suggestion of foul play. So did he have an accident?

### **● Accident due to recklessness?**

"He was ... said to be prone to take risks when mountaineering." (Trigger 1980, p.166)

and in a letter dated 8 October 1957, Childe mentioned a:

"... youthful craving to understand the complicated arrangement of the pale blue ranges that bounded the wide valley on the precipitous edge of which we had a summer house. (*i.e. The Jamison Valley*).

Now I have reached most of the vantage points in taxis and climbed to some." (Case 1957).

This interest no doubt stemmed from the geological training at the University of Sydney where he had been instructed by Professor T.W. Edgeworth David (Gathercole et al. 1995, p.xiii-xv). Humphrey Case, who accompanied him on some of these 'expeditions', wrote of his bravado:

“... I well remember his habit of taking bearings with a pocket compass, his remarkable energy in climbing, his disregard of slopes when consideration of his age might have advised caution, and his zest and delight to be among the high peaks.” (Case 1957).

Latterly, these measurements were really in relation to his

“... stated intention of investigating the geology of the cliffs along the valley’s rim near Govetts Leap.” (Low 2010).

Immediately after Professor Childe disappeared, journalists wrote that he had mislaid his spectacles and had fallen while taking compass bearings (Anonymous 1957a,b), it being his habit to make such measurements. Senior Constable James Morey confirmed (Thomas 2003, p.220) that outside a safety fence were a few of Childe’s belongings and

“The compass was open and sighted on a feature known as Pulpit Rock ...”.

But there is no proof that Childe set that alignment of the compass for others had been to the site before Morey arrived. So it was a supposition by the Police (Thomas 2003, p.220), albeit a plausible one, that he was so engaged when he fell to his death from a precarious position.

- **Accident due to a health issue?**

His cousin noted:

“I know the deceased wore glasses ... and he was reasonably short sighted .. he always wore glasses.” (Gordon 1957, p.3)

so his penchant for cliff top walks is at odds with his

“... poor health, giddiness and failing eyesight ...” (Trigger 1980, p.166).

Of his balance, a former walking companion, Jack Lindsay (1958, p.136), recalled that he used to go to with him to Mt. Tambourine, Queensland, and

“I can still see Childe standing near the cliff-edge, staring with vague intentness, swaying a little with bent shoulders and sliding his glasses to the end of his nose.”

- **Suicide ?**

At various times, Childe had made clear to several people his intent to end his life at some stage (Low 1985, pp.20-21; Thomas 2003, pp.243, 246, 251 & 262; Higham 2011, p.57) and after the event a suicide note to Professor W.F. Grimes, his successor as Director at the Institute of Archaeology, was found with the instruction that it was not to be opened for ten years (Low 1985, pp.19-20) the actual wording being

“... be not opened till January 1968, ...” (Childe 20/10/57 in Daniel 1980, p.1; Thomas 2003, pp.247 & 263; also see Green 1981, p.152)

In that document Childe wrote that

“On my pension I certainly could not maintain the standard without which life would seem to me intolerable and which may be really necessary to prevent me becoming a worse burden on society as an invalid. I have always intended to cease living before that happens.” “An accident may easily and naturally befall me on a mountain cliff.” (Childe pp.2-3 in Daniel 1980; Green 1981, p.154; Thomas 2003, p.249)

Note that the date on Childe’s letter was the day after his death! (Daniel 1980, p.3). Apparently he had gained the impression that doctors were concealing from him the fact that he had cancer (Green 1981, p.143). Childe is reputed to have said:

“I know a 2,000ft cliff in Australia. I intend to jump off it.” (Professor W.F. Grimes 14.viii.1979 in Daniel 1980, p.1; Higham 2011, p.57).

There is also circumstantial evidence that he intended to end his life. In a telephone conversation in 2006, an unidentified lady related to the late Geoffrey Sadler (pers. comm., G. Sadler 12 January 2007) that in October 1957 at the Carrington Hotel, Katoomba, she had been one of several unaccompanied guests whom the staff had seated together at the dining table. One of the other people at this table was a gentleman who travelled with a portable typewriter, an object that then was greatly valued, and one day she overheard him insisting that the receptionist at the hotel accept it as a gift (see Low 1985, p.21 for a longer account). At the time she thought it an exceptionally generous gesture but shortly thereafter she

Geoffrey Sadler she agreed that this man was the deceased Professor Childe (pers. comm., G. Sadler 12 January 2007). So may be Childe was planning not to return for there is also the observation of a Mrs. C.,\*\*\* a receptionist at the Carrington Hotel, who noted about his last day

“... that it was quite out of character for him, ... not to have settled his account at the hotel.” (Low 1985, p.21; also see Low 2010).

His belongings must have been left in his hotel room yet there seems to be no record of what happened to them!

On the other hand his cousin told the coroner that on 11 October 1957 Childe

“... was in good health and an extremely active man ... his normal spirits were very cheerful ... to the best of my knowledge he was in comfortable circumstances financially ... all I know was that he had some thousands of pounds ...” (Gordon 1957).

[His estate in New South Wales was valued at £1046 (Laurence 1958) but he had greater assets in England so he had no financial worries.] Similarly favourable in relation to his health on the day of his death, was the sworn statement made to the coroner eight days later by the Assistant Manager of the Carrington Hotel, Francis Smith, that:

“... his manner and spirits that morning were just the same as usual ... he was a very cheerful type of gentleman ... and he was just the same as usual.” (Smith 1957).

Yet his cousin also stated to the coroner that Childe

“... was feeling the heat rather badly and he proposed to return to England earlier than his passage was booked ... he was proposing to cancel that and fly home ...” (Gordon 1957).

and Solicitor Atkins interjected that Childe also complained of the heat in a letter that he wrote on the day before he died. But it is hardly likely that the heat alone would have sufficed to trigger a suicide eight days after making that complaint and stating those intentions to his cousin.

However, several of his eminent peers were so convinced that Childe intentionally plunged over the cliff that they published their beliefs that he committed suicide (Harris 1994, p.vii; Trigger 1994, p.16; Gathercole 1994, p.72; Kilbride-Jones 1994, p.139).

### **- Deduction**

Childe was sometimes unsteady so might a medical problem have caused him to fall? And then there is the possibility that he tripped and had an accidental fall. The cause of his fall will remain unknown but suicide is the most likely.

### **IN SUMMARY**

The demise of this world famous archaeologist, Professor Vere Gordon Childe, on Saturday 19 October 1957, is one of the more puzzling events in the history of the Blue Mountains during the twentieth century. The circumstances of his death still remain a mystery.

Definite corrections to the accounts of Childe's death are

- the location of the incident was Barrow Lookout not Luchetti Lookout,
- the stated heights of the fall are wildly incorrect, it has to have been less than c.580 feet (177 metres),
- the claimed height up which that the corpse had to be carried is incorrect, it was c.700 feet (213 metres) at most.

Unknown are

- the exact location of the ledge from which Childe's body was recovered,
- the exact locations of the ledges from which other items were recovered in 1959.

\*\*\* identified (pers. comm. John Low 30 March 2011) as Mrs Vida Clift of Leura who would have been 43 at the time and died 10 August 2007 aged 93 (Anonymous 2007a,b,c) and who had been a 'Secretary/Telephonist' (Anonymous 2007d).

There is doubt about

- who discovered, and who retrieved, the personal belongings of Childe in 1957,
- exactly where taxi driver Newstead walked,
- that Newstead did, and when, between arriving at Govetts Leap Lookout at c.8.00 a.m. and reporting
- Childe's disappearance to the Blackheath police station at 2.00 p.m..

The remains found in 1957 are undoubtedly those of Gordon Childe but

- the owner of the bones and associated items found in 1959 is unknown, but almost certainly it was not Professor Childe.

## CONCLUSION - UNRELIABILITY OF WITNESSES

Re-examination of the documentation on this subject has brought home the need to avoid, or at least be cautious of, reliance on secondary accounts. Contemporary newspaper reports will at least usually get the dates correct, even if sometimes they are prone to journalistic changes to the truth on other matters. Inquest reports are only as good as the persons giving the sworn statements and, as has been shown, some of these may be of questionable value. Most confidence can be placed in eyewitness accounts given by impartial persons experienced in accurate reporting.

## Postscript

“Both as a scholar and as a man Gordon Childe was something of a wanderer..... it is some solace to know that he died contemplating his native land of Australia, a wanderer returned.” (Clark 1957). Childe's last book ‘*The Prehistory of European Society*’ was completed only a few months before he died and was published posthumously. It was most favourably reviewed thus: “As in previous books, Professor Childe astonishes by his mastery of so many fields of prehistory.” (Hainsworth 1958).

## Acknowledgements

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## Abbreviations.

asl = above sea level.

BMHS = Blue Mountains Historical Society Inc.

CMA = Central Mapping Authority of NSW, Bathurst.

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