



Collaboration, Innovation and Resilience: Championing a Digital Generation

Brisbane, Australia 6-10 April

Mapping colonial massacre sites in NSW: *a spatial truth telling*

FIG & Locate 25 - April 2025

Brisbane

Tony Proust

Meritorious Surveyor

tonyproust123@icloud.com




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This Presentation

- Investigates spatial truth telling by highlighting the issue of the colonial massacres in NSW between 1800 and 1850.
- Using air photo interpretation to compare the University of Newcastle colonial massacre mapping with the NSW Spatial Information eXchange (SIX) mapping, one can identify many significant massacre sites in NSW and locate them on the cadastre.
- My objective is not to embarrass or identify those who might own or live near these sites (they are not to blame for past events) but to highlight the truth behind our colonial history. One site, in particular, is relevant to surveyors. In 1836 Surveyor General Mitchell killed a group of Aborigines at a site he called Mt Dispersion on the Murray River. A euphemism to downplay the tragedy. This set the pattern for the Great Colonial Cover-up.
- We need to acknowledge these sites as part of truth telling.
- Sadly only one massacre site in NSW is fully memorialised – as far as I know.
- In the longer term it should be possible to physically acknowledge these sites with an appropriate memorial on, or nearby, the massacre site – a necessary part of our reconciliation journey.

University of Newcastle massacre map



**Colonial Frontier Massacres
in Australia, 1788-1930**

THE CENTRE FOR
**21ST CENTURY
HUMANITIES**

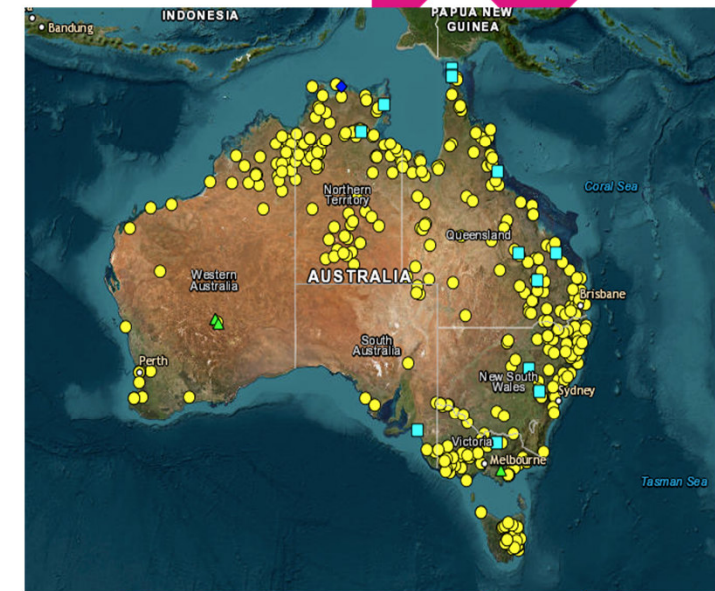
Home Introduction Statistics Map Site List Groups Representations Sources About Contact

Introduction

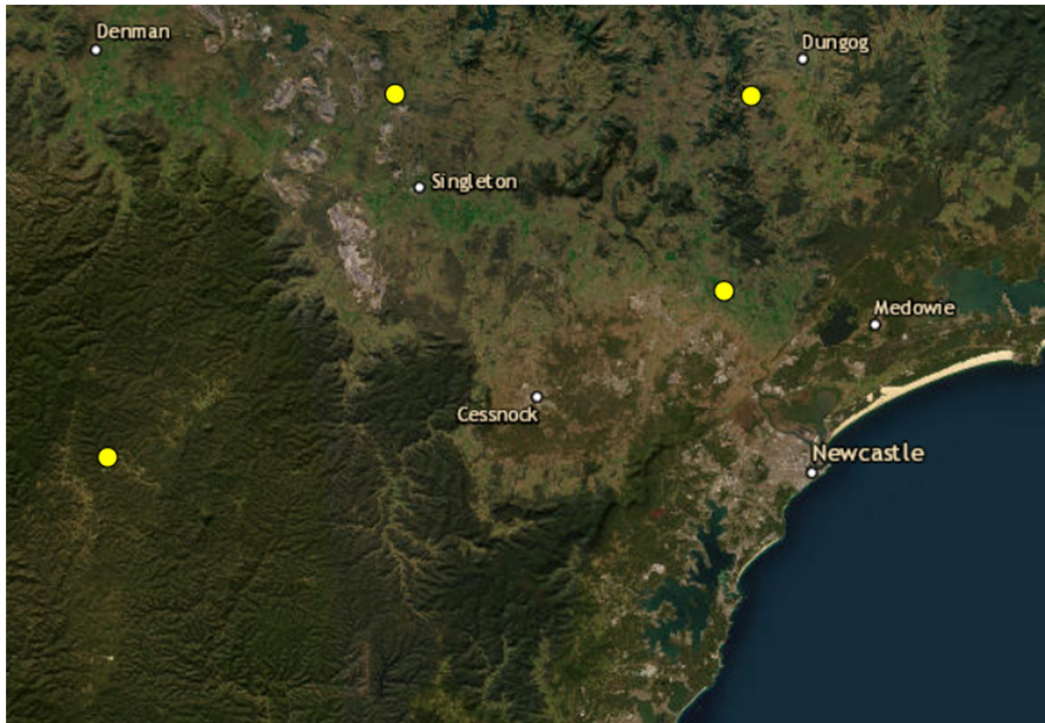
Colonial Frontier Massacres in Australia, 1788-1930

Introduction

The UoN massacre map website provides all the details of more than 400 massacre sites around Australia and their historical sources (approx.70 in NSW alone) - with a yellow dot - on an airphoto - to show the approximate location but with few geospatial details identifying the site.



University of Newcastle Colonial Frontier Massacres mapping



Here is part of the map around Newcastle.

The UoN map includes little geospatial information.

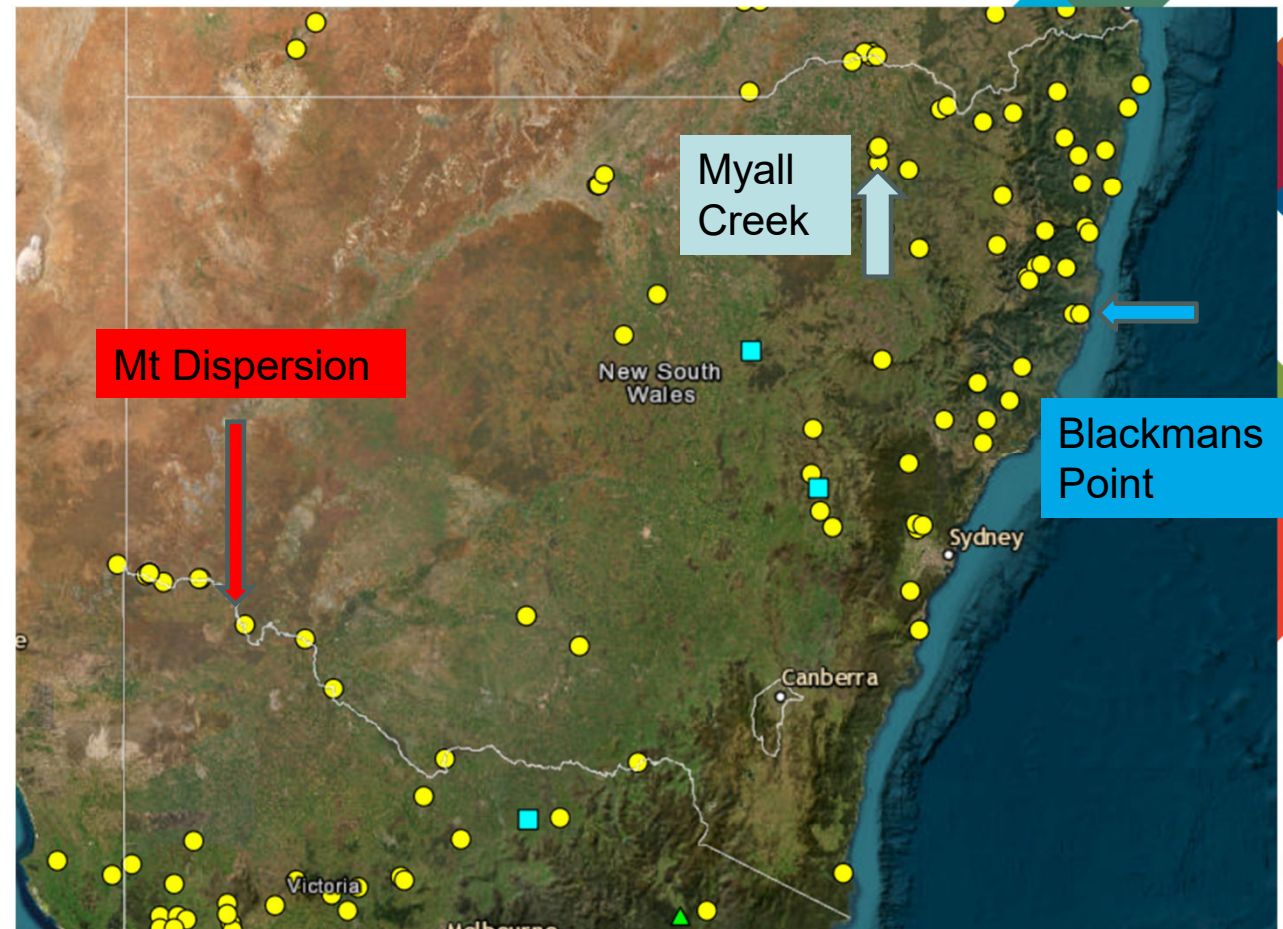
My objective is to better identify these sites so we know where they are approximately on the cadastre – and possibly one day place a memorial or plaque on, or close to, each site to record the tragedy for all Australians as a truth telling : a step to reconciliation.

The UoN colonial massacre map recognises about 70 massacre sites in New South Wales alone, with over 400 nationwide.

I will discuss 3 sites in particular

Important to understand that due to the secrecy - and the coverup - surrounding these massacres the locations are approximate only.

Some massacres happened over a wide area and over a period of time.





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Zoom to

Myall Creek ([details...](#))



Site Name	Myall Creek
Victims	28 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander People killed.
Attackers	0 Colonists killed.
Date range	Between 1838-06-10 and 1838-06-10
Language Group	Wirayaraay (Gamilaraay)

1) Myall Creek Massacre – 10th June 1838

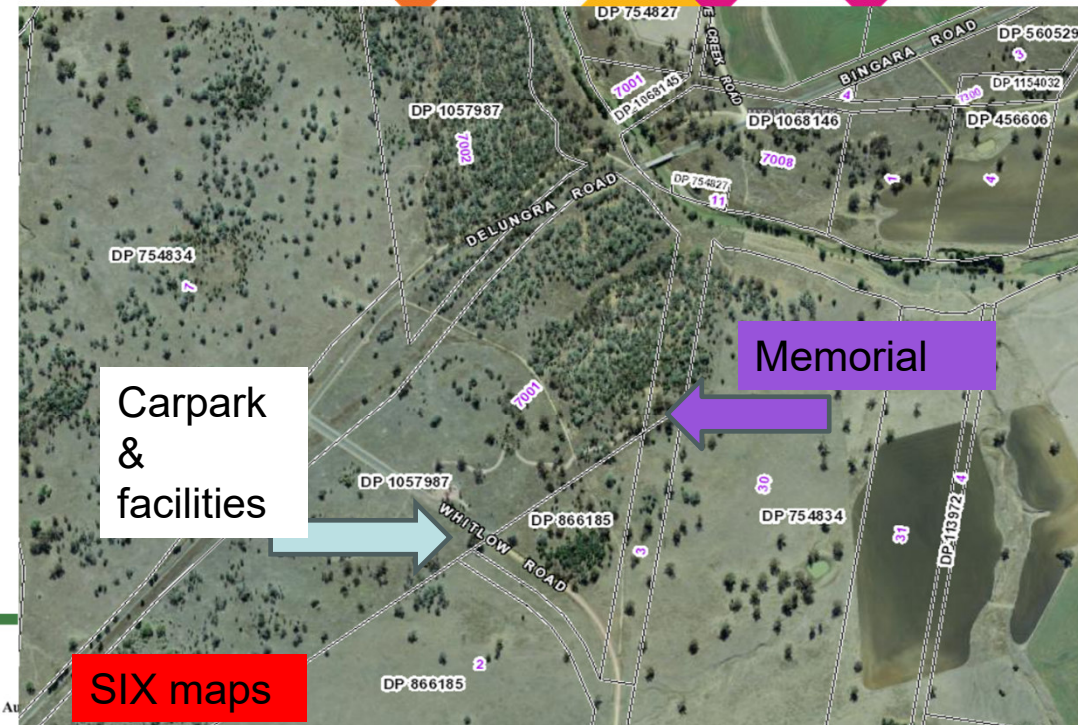
40 kms south west of Inverell, 350kms from Newcastle

One of the few sites which has been fully memorialised.

28 Aboriginal people killed by 8 colonialists

After two trials 7 of 12 accused colonials were found guilty and executed.

The first time the perpetrators were brought to account.



Myall Creek – Our Shared History

This path overlooks a place that made Australian history. On the 10th June, 1838 at least 28 Wirrayaraay and neighbouring Aboriginal people were brutally massacred here by a group of 12 stockmen. This horrific event became known as the infamous Myall Creek Massacre.

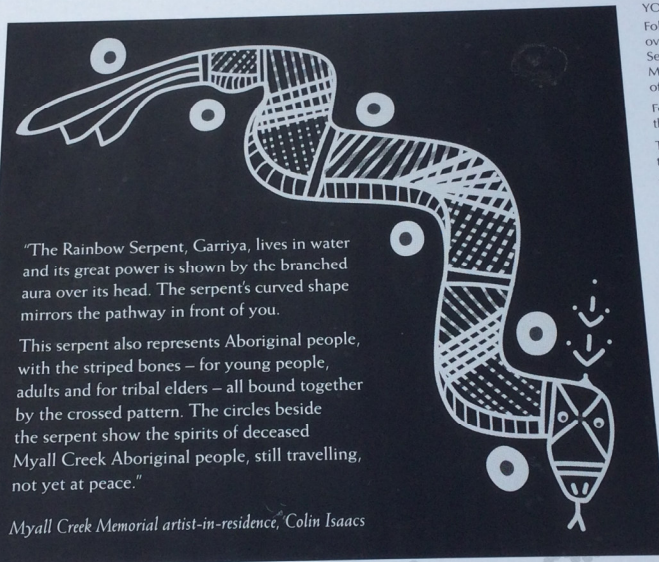
At this time in history, most massacres went unreported and unpunished.

Just this once in Australian history there was a linking of honourable people of integrity from all levels of society. For the first time in the colony, seven of the people who committed this crime were brought to justice and hanged.

The conscience of our nation rested with the courageous evidence of convict hut keeper George Anderson and station overseer William Hobbs; landowner Frederick Foot who brought the case to Sydney; police magistrate Edward Denny Day; and the persistent determination of Attorney General John Plunkett and Governor George Gipps to make the grisly events of Myall Creek a turning point in our shared history.

On the 10th June, 2000 – after 162 years – descendants of both the murdered and surviving Aboriginal people and white perpetrators joined hands here in an act of reconciliation. As you walk the path, please think of the men, women and children who died here in brutal circumstances and how you can support a more tolerant future for all Australians.

Dhiirranhi ngiyani ganunga.
We remember them.



YOU ARE WALKING ON SACRED GROUND
Follow this easy 500 metre path to a ridge that overlooks the site of the Myall Creek Massacre. Seven plaques along the way give details of the Massacre. There's also a visitors book at the end of the path, where your comments are welcome.
For Aboriginal people this winding path symbolises the creative spirit of the Rainbow Serpent.

The path's red gravel reminds us of all the blood that was shed here, on what is now sacred ground. The walk ends at the Memorial Rock, which is surrounded by crushed white stones, symbolic of the coloured ochre used for mourning.

The Memorial Rock was inspired by Bingara resident Len Payne. Aunt Sue Blacklock and Uncle Lyall Munro Snr, direct descendants of the victims and survivors, worked with Reverend John Brown, artist Paulette Hayes, artist Uncle Colin Isaacs, architect Tim Shellshear and many others, to create the Memorial Rock as an act of reconciliation and truth-telling.

ANNUAL MEMORIAL CEREMONY

Hundreds of people gather here each year on the Sunday of the June long weekend for a memorial ceremony. You are invited to attend, to consider our shared and true history and show your support for truth-telling.

LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

For an immersive audio walk of the Memorial pathway, download *The Myall Creek Soundtrail* at www.soundtrails.com.au

To get more details of this history, site management, student activities, the Memorial Ceremony or how to join the 'Friends of Myall Creek Memorial', please go to our website.

www.myallcreek.org

BINGARA NSW
myall creek
our shared history



The plaques along the Memorial pathway were proudly funded by the NSW Government.
This sign was originally funded by Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Management Authority (CMA).

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The Myall Ck site includes lots of information about Aboriginal culture, beliefs and practices

Well worth a visit

Leica
Geosystems



Surveyors
Australia



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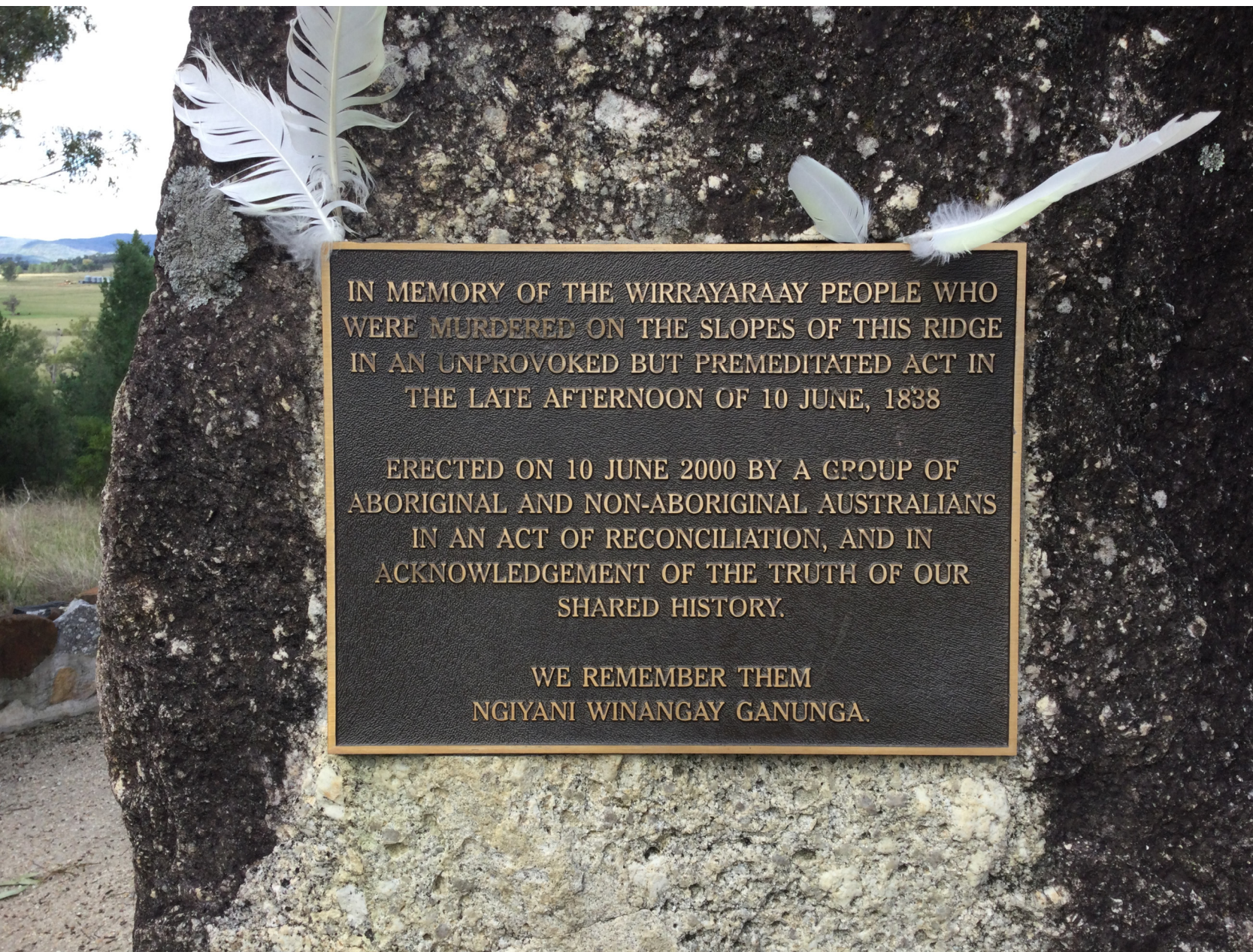
**And an
impressive
and moving
memorial**

**Now with
an annual
ceremony**

Leica
Geosystems

**HD
Meter**

Surveyors
Australia



IN MEMORY OF THE WIRRAYARAAY PEOPLE WHO
WERE MURDERED ON THE SLOPES OF THIS RIDGE
IN AN UNPROVOKED BUT PREMEDITATED ACT IN
THE LATE AFTERNOON OF 10 JUNE, 1838

ERECTED ON 10 JUNE 2000 BY A GROUP OF
ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS
IN AN ACT OF RECONCILIATION, AND IN
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE TRUTH OF OUR
SHARED HISTORY.

WE REMEMBER THEM
NGIYANI WINANGAY GANUNGA.

**The Myall Creek
memorial sets a
high standard for
the memorialising
of massacre sites
and is an
excellent example
of truth telling.**

**Sadly it is the
only example I
know of.**

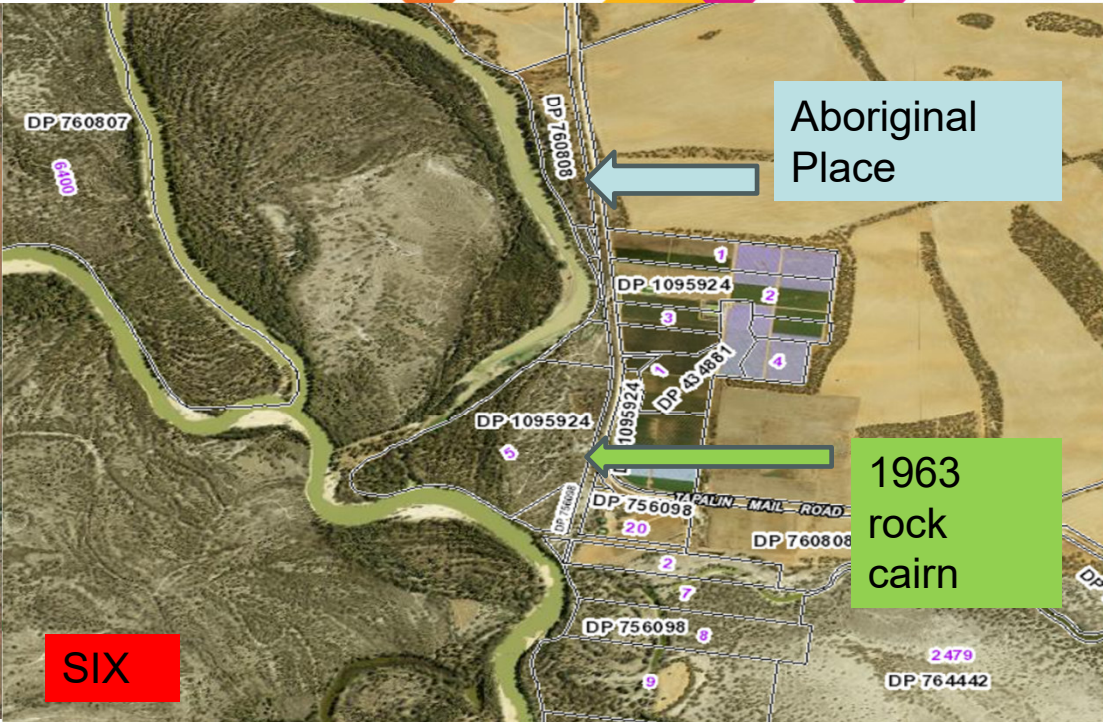
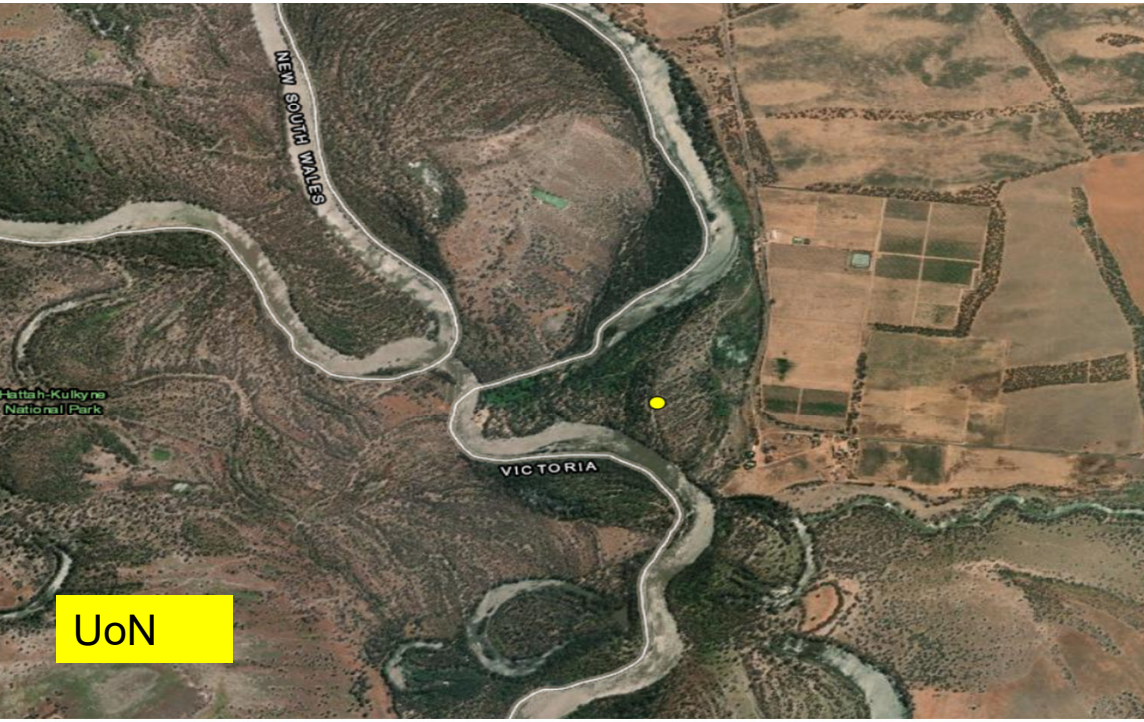
2) Mount Dispersion massacre site – 27th May 1836

30kms west of Euston on the Murray Rv, in south west NSW
A number of Aborigines (at least 7 – possibly up to 30) were killed by Major Mitchell, Surveyor General of NSW in May 1836.
Mitchell called it Mt Dispersion as a euphemism to down play the event.
Mitchell received only a minor reprimand for his actions.
He was later knighted by the Queen.
In 2020 the site was declared an ‘**Aboriginal Place**’
The Mt Dispersion site needs informative signage to explain the events of the tragedy and facilities for visitors.
There is a memorial rock cairn nearby but no details of the tragedy.

Mt Dispersion, Murray River (details...)

Site Name	Mt Dispersion, Murray River
Victims	30 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander People killed.
Attackers	0 Colonists killed.
Date range	Between 1836-05-27 and 1836-05-27
Language Group	Kureinji or Dadi Dadi

Zoom to





Note the euphemism on the plaque – refers to an “encounter” – but no mention of the massacre

Rock memorial is about 2kms south of declared Aboriginal Place

There is compelling evidence that the massacre site is close to the declared Aboriginal Place



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The site was declared an **Aboriginal Place** in 2020

The 2ha site is part of lot 192 in DP 760808

There is compelling evidence that the actual massacre site is adjacent to the declared **Aboriginal Place** about 2kms north of the memorial placed in 1963.

GOVERNMENT NOTICES

Planning and Environment Notices

NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE ACT 1974

Mount Dispersion Massacre Site Aboriginal Place

Pursuant to section 84 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, I, the Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, Vice-President of the Executive Council, being of the **opinion** that the place known as Mount Dispersion Massacre Site is, and was, of special significance to Aboriginal culture, declare the lands described in schedule "A" as an Aboriginal Place.

The values for which Mount Dispersion Massacre Site Aboriginal Place has been assessed as being significant to Aboriginal culture include, but are not limited to, the site of a colonial massacre during which at least seven Aboriginal people were killed by Major Thomas Mitchell and his men on 27th May 1836, and the sacred association with the Great Warrior (or Hunter) and the Cod creation story concerning the creation of the Murray River.

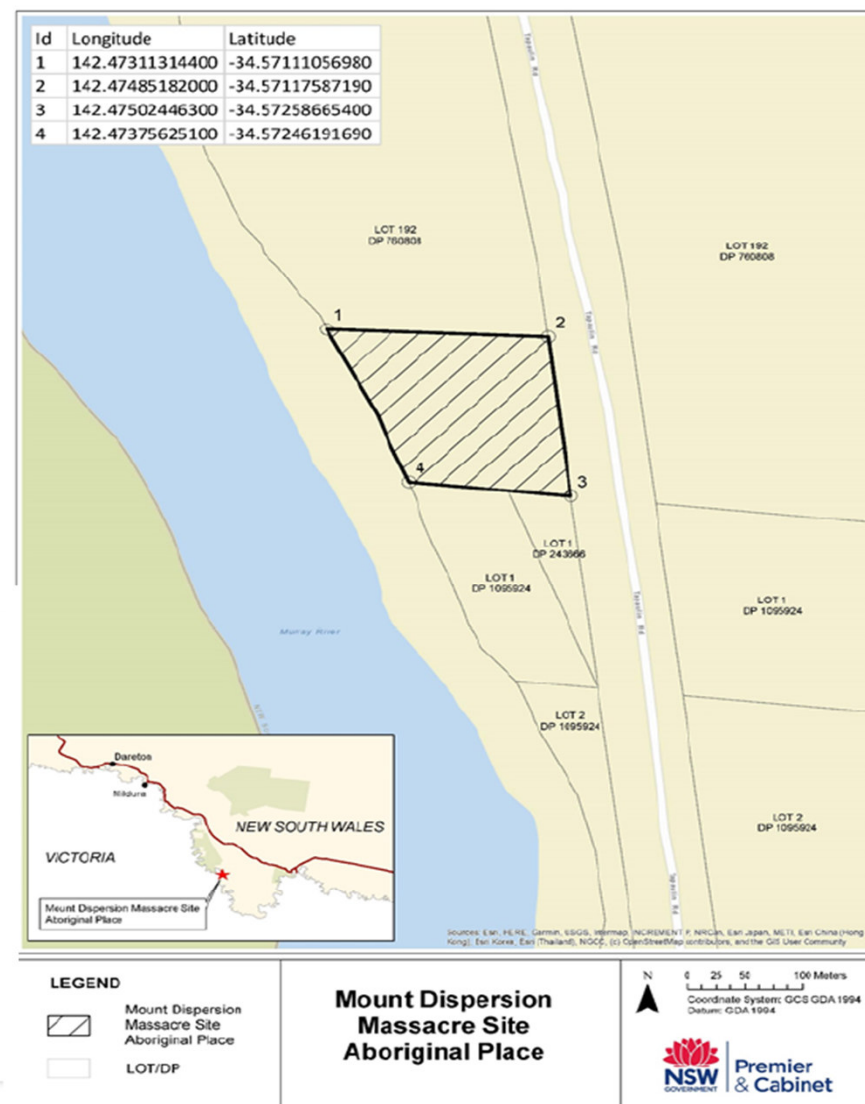
The Hon. Don Harwin MLC
Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council
Special Minister of State
Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations,
Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts
Vice-President of the Executive Council

Signed at Sydney this 12th day of March 2020

SCHEDULE "A"

SCHEDULE "A"

Part of Lot 192 DP 760808, County of Taila, Parish of Matalong, Shire of Wentworth, being the hatched area shown in the following diagram of approximately 2.05 hectares.



Reference number:(n2020-1063)



The Mount Dispersion site needs informative signage and facilities for visitors - just like the Myall Ck massacre site in northern NSW



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150th anniversary of the Mt Dispersion massacre

In 1986 on the 150th anniversary of the slaughter of the Aborigines at Mt Dispersion the *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote ‘*Mitchell had organised the killings*’ and ‘*while many Australians knew about Major Mitchell’s journey most would be surprised to hear about the massacre*’

The article goes on to say ‘*Against orders from the NSW Government that he was to avoid using firearms against Aboriginal inhabitants, Major Mitchell had armed and organised his men like a military force prepared to conquer*’. Mitchell never expressed regret about the massacre writing years later “*I still look back years later on that eventful day with entire satisfaction*”.

(Mitchell set up an ambush to attack and kill the group of Aborigines who had been following his party)

The SMH wrote ‘*Australian folklore has been generous to Sir Thomas Mitchell remembering his discoveries but forgetting the Mt Dispersion killings*’

Explorer's slaughter of Aborigines recalled

By DAVID PORTER

MELBOURNE: Australians should note the 150th anniversary tomorrow of the slaughter of Aborigines by one of Australia's most celebrated explorers, Sir Thomas Mitchell, the State Historian of Victoria, Dr Bernard Barrett, said yesterday.

the massacre which occurred 150 years ago tomorrow, Dr Barrett said.

The events which led to the massacre had begun a few days earlier.

On May 24, 1836, while the explorers were on the northern side of the Murray River near Euston (in today's NSW) and opposite Belah...

In his report to the NSW Government, Major Mitchell later wrote: “The whole [of the Aborigines] betook themselves to the river, my men pursuing them and shooting as many as they could. Numbers were shot swimming across the Murray, and some even after they had reached the opposite...

an inquiry by the NSW Executive Council, which subsequently rebuked Major Mitchell for being aggressive and indifferent towards the Aborigines.

Dr Barrett said Mitchell had never expressed regret about the massacre and wrote years later: “I still look back

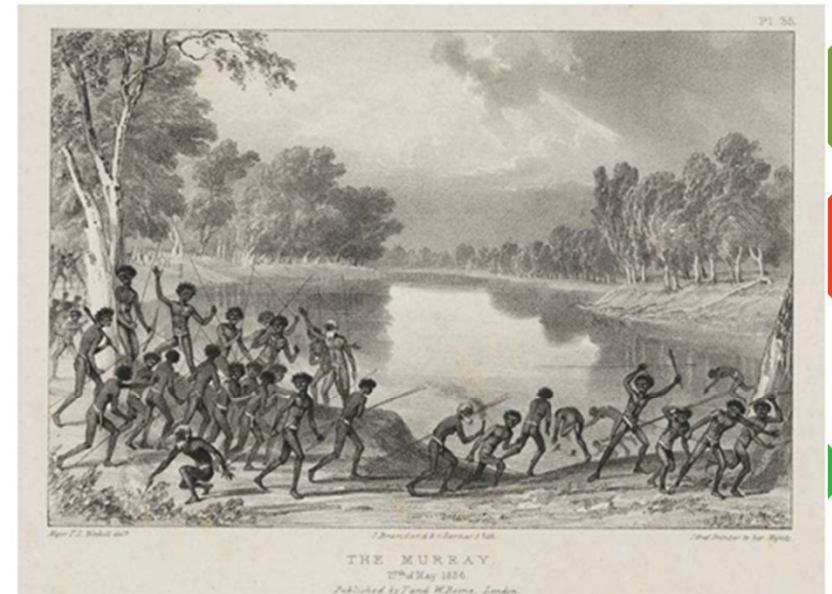
It is now time to find the funding to construct appropriate informative signage and facilities on the site to publicise the site and encourage visitors to visit the site for truth telling and reconciliation.

The existing rock memorial cairn, 2kms to the south of the Aboriginal Place, was erected in 1963 by the local historical society but it only refers to an 'encounter'. No details of massacre provided.

Mitchell named the site **Mt Dispersion** which was a deliberate euphemism to hide the truth. **This euphemism was widely copied by others during the tragic slaughter of Aboriginal people during the 'frontier wars' from the early 1800s to the early 20th century**



William Oswald Hodgkinson's painting Bulla, Queensland, 1861 shows armed fighting between the expedition and Aboriginal people. (Supplied: National Library of Australia)



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But we have yet to map all recorded massacre sites.

As good as the UoN Colonial massacres map is - no mapping system is perfect

3) Blackmans Point - 1826

One massacre site which has been missed by the UoN mapping is **Blackmans Point** - an ominous name - on the confluence of the Hastings and Maria Rivers near Port Macquarie on the coast of NSW.

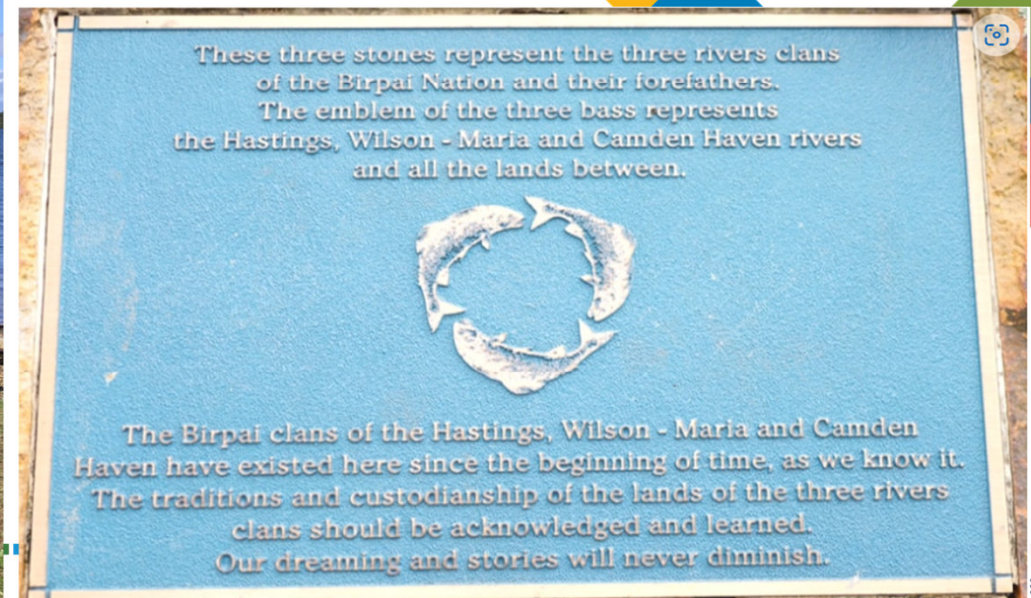
In 1967 Birpai community elders asked the local Council to acknowledge the massacre site.



According to Birpai oral history about 300 men woman and children were massacred at Blackmans Point in 1826

“The evidence is there in Henry Wilsons journal, so there is written evidence of a massacre taking place on the site” an Elder said.

In 2007 the Council installed a memorial and plaque on the site - but with no mention of the massacre.
The cover up continues.



The plaque at Blackmans Point doesn't mention the massacre because, until now, there was a lack of evidence.

NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE ACT 1974

Blackmans Point Aboriginal Place, Port Macquarie

Pursuant to section 84 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, I, the Minister for Environment and Heritage, being of the opinion the place known as Blackmans Point is, and was, of special significance to Aboriginal culture, declare the lands described in schedule "A" as an Aboriginal Place.

The values for which the Blackmans Point Aboriginal Place has been assessed as being significant to Aboriginal culture include, but are not limited to, its importance to the Birpai People and all Aboriginal people of the Port Macquarie-Hastings area as the site of a massacre which occurred in 1826.

Descendants of those that survived the massacre have had the oral history of the massacre told to them over generations. They believe they are here because of their ancestors, and that their ancestors shaped their perspectives today. Many of the descendants feel a strong sense of sadness and unfinished business when they visit Blackmans Point.

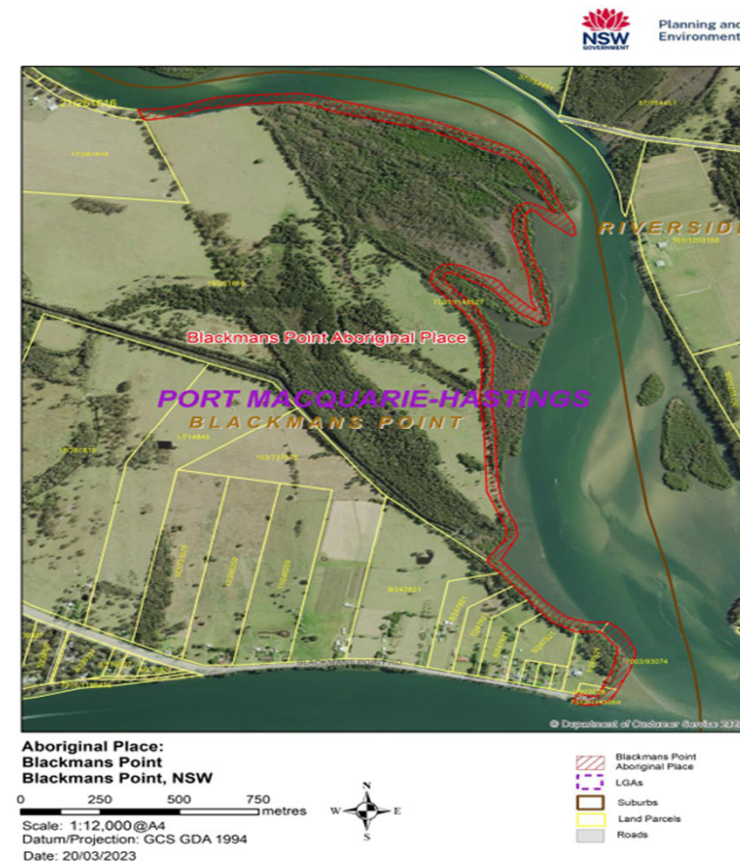
The site is representative of other massacre sites around NSW at which atrocities have been committed against the Aboriginal population since European occupation. Telling the truth about the colonial history and frontier violence that occurred in New South Wales helps address past injustices, allowing for healing and reconciliation. The telling of the events at the Blackmans Point Massacre Site contributes to the understanding of the shared history of New South Wales.

The Hon. James Griffin MP
Minister for Environment and Heritage

Sydney this 19th day of December 2022

The site was declared
an Aboriginal Place in
2022
Including 4kms of
river foreshore

It is understood the
local Council is
considering how to
acknowledge the
massacre – watch this
space





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The inconvenient truth is that:

Australia was settled by seizure and surveyors were an essential part of that process acquiring geographic knowledge and setting out towns and the basis for today's cadastre.

Surveyors cannot be blamed for the policy of terra nullius or the stealing of land but surveyors were a critical part of the process of dispossession.

We must acknowledge the truth if we are to achieve reconciliation.

We already have a couple of plaques/memorials in NSW but they avoid using the word 'Massacre' (except Myall Ck) – which is totally inadequate – we must tell the truth

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Conclusion

Most Australians are unaware of the colonial massacres - or the sites where the tragedies occurred.

We need a program of placing site plaques or memorials on a number of these prominent sites - telling the truth - either on or adjacent to the site, if possible, or nearby - particularly those easy to access.

The memorials would be on public land such as road reserves and local parks and reserves. Locating the memorials in a public park in the nearest urban area could be appropriate. Similar to the local war memorial. It is estimated there are about 10,000 war memorials in Australia but very few memorials of Colonial massacres.

The intention is not to embarrass or antagonise those who might own these sites or live in the vicinity (they are not responsible) but as a necessary form of truth telling.

We place such signs or plaques on heritage buildings and convict sites
– even noting prominent explorer/surveyors!

So why not mark some of these tragic colonial massacre sites to remind Australians our tragic colonial history
– as truth telling - and a step towards reconciliation?

thanks



The most relevant SDGs related to the presentation and theme of this session

1st relevant
SDG

4 **QUALITY
EDUCATION**



2nd relevant
SDG

16 **PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS**



3rd relevant
SDG

17 **PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS**



**SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

International Federation of Surveyors supports the
Sustainable Development Goals



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STEP 1: SELECT HERE THE THREE MOST RELEVANT SDGs
STEP 2: COPY THE SDG INTO PREVIOUS SLIDE



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