

# Placenames Australia

Newsletter of the Australian National Placenames Survey

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## Ram Head ~ Cook's first Australian toponym

An article by Chris Richards regarding Ram(e) Head (Cook's headland on the coast of East Gippsland, Victoria) first appeared in *Placenames Australia* in June 2002. It considered both its correct location and the origins of the name and its spelling. A later article in September 2013 presented further information on the name's origins, with evidence that Cook meant it to be at today's Little Rame Head and not at Rame Head as popularly supposed. More recent research, presented here, has yielded further evidence that Little Rame Head is Cook's Ram Head, and throws more light on the spelling issue. Unfortunately, despite the opportunity in 2020 afforded by the 250th anniversary of Cook's arrival, today there is little interest by public authorities in Victoria in correcting errors in the placement of Cook toponyms on this coast.

morning of 19 April 1770 Cook's *Endeavour* became the first European vessel to reach the eastern coast of mainland Australia. At 8 a.m. Cook had named Point Hicks further to the west, but this sighting later proved



*Figure 1. Ram(e) Head UK from the sea, as seen coming out of Plymouth Sound  
(Photo: Mark Murphy at English Wikipedia)*

### 'A remarkable Point...'

Today's Little Rame Head, 16km south west of Mallacoota on the eastern coast of Victoria, is one of those places that is enormously important in Australia's history, but which goes completely unrecognised. Its importance stems from the fact that it is the first real land feature that Lt James Cook named on the Australian coast. In the early

to be of a cloudbank out to sea which resembled land, an illusion common in these waters and well known to navigators to this day.<sup>1</sup> Matthew Flinders, having himself had a similar experience, recognised Cook's error and left Point Hicks off his chart. Cook's Point Hicks does not exist as a land feature.

*continued page 3*

## From the Editor



Our main article this time is the second of a series: Trevor Lipscombe's recap of the **Ram Head** naming controversy. (In our June issue Trevor will look again at James Cook's involvement in the naming of *Cape Dromedary*.) This is an important

series this year as we celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Cook's arrival.

We're pleased also to have two contributions from Historical Society researchers this time: for the NSW placenames **Gerringong** and **Bong Bong**, see pages 12 and 13 below.

David Blair  
<editor@anps.org.au>

## Our readers say...

### Australia's shortest-lived placename?

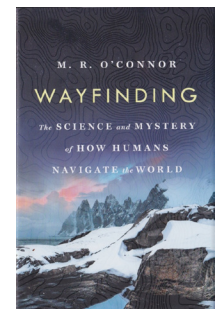
Chris Woods has a contender for our shortest-lived placename. On 29 April 1815, Governor Lachlan Macquarie, on his tour to Bathurst along William Cox's new road, named a flattish, heathy place in the upper Blue Mountains *Hounslow*.

Sixteen days later on the way back he renamed it *Blackheath*. Chris admits that the name might not have been 'gazetted', but of course the Governor's word was sufficient and final. And Chris warns people who might want to get picky to first check exactly when the name of *New South Wales* was officially assigned!

## We recommend...

### Wayfinding

Readers may find a recent publication interesting for its content of toponymy and cartography. The journalist M.R. O'Connor travels to the Arctic, Australia and the South Pacific to talk to master navigators about how they find their way using environmental cues rather than GPS. What did scientists tell her about our species' navigational faculties? This hardback was published in 2019 by St Martin's Press, New York.



## Placenames in the media

Media interest in placenames is alive and well, at least in South Australia. Readers will be aware of **Joshua Nash**'s research on the placenames of Kangaroo Island: Josh was recently interviewed on ABC Radio Adelaide on the subject. (Sorry to say, though, that the audio of the broadcast is no longer available.)

**Jan Tent** has tipped us off about a YouTube video he found on the American Name Society webpage. It's a British view of US placenames: 'Placenames I've Been Saying All Wrong'. Ten amusing minutes guaranteed if you click on

<https://youtu.be/WkEtObuXlG8>

### Puzzle answers - (from page 18)

- |                  |                  |                      |                       |
|------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Python Cliffs | 6. Monitor Mount | 11. Black Adder      | 16. Alligator River   |
| 2. Lizard Island | 7. Skink Island  | 12. Crocodile Head   | 17. Tortoise Head     |
| 3. Snake Reef    | 8. Krait Bay     | 13. Goanna Bay       | 18. Death Adder Creek |
| 4. Gecko Cave    | 9. Turtle Bay    | 14. Copperhead Creek | 19. Dinosaur Creek    |
| 5. The Dragon    | 10. Taipan Walls | 15. Perentie Creek   | 20. Anaconda Well     |

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The real coast was sighted before 10 a.m. and *Endeavour*, sailing well off shore, followed it north east. Then Cook's journal records:

*At Noon... a remarkable Point bore N 20 degrees East distant 4 leagues. This point rises to a round hillick very much like Ram head going into Plymouth Sound on which account I called it by the same name. Latd 37 degrees 39', Longitude 210 degrees 22'W.<sup>2</sup>*

Course	Wind	Distance
1		
2	NW	
3		
4		
5		
6	NW	
7		
8		
9	WSW	NW
10	WSW	NW
11	WSW	NW
12	WSW	NW
13	WSW	NW
14	WSW	NW
15	WSW	NW
16	WSW	NW
17	WSW	NW
18	WSW	NW
19	WSW	NW
20	WSW	NW
21	WSW	NW
22	WSW	NW
23	WSW	NW
24	WSW	NW

*head as a signal for the point*  
*The Topazite*  
*From Plymouth towards Madeis*  
*Fresh gales and fair weather*  
*weight of best boat and lay too. head to W. at 1/2 past the Gent. came on board*  
*made sail out of y<sup>e</sup> sound*  
*the Ramhead NNE 4 m. The Edystone NW*  
*5.00 NNE unbent y<sup>e</sup> sheet cable and fow'd both Boat anchors*  
*The Dodman NW 1/2 W 4 or 5 leagues*  
*Light breeze and clear*  
*The Lizard point NW 1/2 W 5 or 6 leagues*  
*Calm. Sounded 50 fath. grey sand with small stones and broken shells*  
*Bearings and Distance at Noon*

Figure 2. Endeavour Log, 25 August 1768, recording the departure from Plymouth UK and passing Ram Head. Note the bearing of 'the Ram head NNE 4 miles' at 5.00 p.m. National Library of Australia, Log of HMS Endeavour 1768-70, nla obj - 558521253

By an amazing topographical coincidence, Cook's place of departure from England is neatly linked with his place of arrival in Australia. England's Ram Head was on the western shore of Plymouth Sound and Cook records sighting it on his starboard side as he left Plymouth on 25 August 1768 at the beginning of his First Voyage. Not only is Australia's Ram Head the first land feature that Cook named on the Australian coast, and identical in shape to the land feature familiar to all English sailors who had left from Plymouth UK, but it was also the first place in Australia to be named after a place in Britain. As Cook observed, it is 'a remarkable Point', and one whose history deserves to be better known.

## Matthew Flinders' enduring error

Confusion still surrounds both the exact site and correct spelling of Cook's Ram Head, Australia. Today, Rame

Head, about 40km south of the small town of Cann River, and near Wingan Inlet, East Gippsland, Victoria, is popularly believed to be Cook's Ram Head. But this is not the Ram Head that Cook named.

The notion that today's Rame Head is Cook's Ram Head has its roots in a spell of stormy weather back in December 1797. On his whaleboat voyage from Sydney

to Western Port, George Bass and his crew, hindered by bad weather, camped just to the east of today's Rame Head. Bass assumed, not unsurprisingly from its distinctive shape, that it was Cook's Ram Head. But the feature that Cook named, coincidentally a similarly-shaped but smaller version of today's Rame Head, lies further to the east and is currently named Little Rame Head.

Bass's friend Matthew Flinders appears not to have checked Cook's data which places Ram Head further east, so that Bass's error was perpetuated on Flinders'



Figure 3. Rame Head, Cornwall, UK, from the north showing the 'round hillick'. (Photo: Trevor Lipscombe)

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charts from 1801<sup>3</sup>, and Rame Head is still generally believed to be Cook's Ram Head.

In *A Voyage to Terra Australis* Flinders says: 'The furthest land seen by captain Cook, is marked at fifteen leagues [45nm] from the Ram Head, and called Point Hicks [i.e. the point that Cook records out to sea at 38.00 S, not today's Point Hicks at the former Cape Everard]'.<sup>4</sup> But Flinders' statement is not consistent with his placement of Ram Head on his chart at today's Rame Head. As surveyor Thomas Walker Fowler (1910)<sup>5</sup> observed, Little Rame Head is 42nm from Cook's Point Hicks whereas Rame Head is only 32nm, so Cook was apparently referring to today's Little Rame Head when he named Ram Head. While Flinders was aware of the distance Cook had recorded, he seems not to have checked this when he placed Ram Head on his chart.

## Ram Head...

### Ram Head restored to its rightful place—but not for long

More than 80 years after Cook's voyage, explorer and chart maker John Lort Stokes was the first to recognise and record that Cook had named today's Little Rame Head as Ram Head. Following his 1851 survey of the area he placed it on his chart in this location. (Figure 4, below.)

However, later Admiralty charts revert to Flinders' placement at today's Rame Head. It seems likely that by then Flinders' fame was far greater than Stokes' and the Admiralty Hydrographer at that time decided to accept Flinders' location as more reliable. This was not the first time that Stokes had recognised and corrected an error that Flinders had made in placing Cook's land features. Stokes had sailed as ship's mate in *Beagle*, and shared a cabin with the young Charles Darwin in the



Figure 4. Admiralty chart of Part of Australia East Coast, Sheet 1, Cape Howe to Barriga Point, charted by John Lort Stokes 1851, showing Ram Head at today's Little Rame Head. National Library of Australia nla.obj-232531174



## ...Ram Head

1830s, and gone on to command *Beagle* from 1841, circumnavigate Australia twice, and chart unknown parts of the coastline. He was vastly more experienced as a hydrographer by 1851 than Flinders had been in the last years of the 1700s.

Flinders' biographer Geoffrey Ingleton records how thin was Flinders' knowledge and experience of hydrography on this appointment to command the prestigious *Investigator* voyage in 1801: 'Whether Flinders' limited experience of one year in hydrography and the doubtful standard of his pioneer surveys justified the appointment is open to question.'<sup>6</sup> Flinders' errors with regard to Cook features include, as well as Ram Head, Cape Dromedary,<sup>7</sup> Long Nose,<sup>8</sup> and Black Head,<sup>9</sup> an unimpressive record for someone who was tasked by the Governor of New South Wales with checking the placement of Cook's land features on this coast.

In the summer months of 1852 and 1853 George Douglas Smythe, a Victorian Department of Crown Lands and Survey surveyor, made the first land based survey of the coast from Sydenham Inlet to Cape Howe. His maps of this coast, on a scale of 2 inches to one mile, reached Surveyor General Robert Hoddle on 4 February 1853 and were published as part of John Arrowsmith's *Map of the Province of Victoria* on 4 July 1853. This remarkable map shows a number of additional placenames on a coast where, since the time of Cook, maps had shown only

*Ram Head* (latterly where Bass and Flinders had placed it) and *Cape Howe*. The new names include *Cape Everard* and *Little Ram Head*, both names apparently bestowed by Smythe. Cape Everard was later to be erroneously renamed as *Point Hicks*. According to Fowler (1910),<sup>10</sup> Smythe, on his original plan, wrote against Little Ram Head ‘(Query? Ram Head of Stokes)’, so it appears that he was familiar with the latest Admiralty Chart published in 1852, and it seems likely that it was the reason he gave Little Ram Head that name. ‘Little’ reflected its size when compared with Flinders’ Ram Head which Smythe had passed and mapped only a few days earlier. (See Figure 5, below.)

## Twentieth century hydrographers review the evidence

Since the publication of Stokes' chart, a number of surveyors/hydrographers, using Cook's data, have also concluded that today's Little Rame Head was what Cook saw and named (Fowler (1907<sup>11</sup> and 1910), Barker (1933),<sup>12</sup> Hilder (1970),<sup>13</sup> Fitzgerald (1971)<sup>14</sup>). However there is no evidence to suggest that any of these men were aware of Stokes' survey or the resulting Admiralty chart, or indeed the work of each other. It seems that all of them had arrived independently at the same conclusion by applying their knowledge and experience to an analysis of Cook's data.

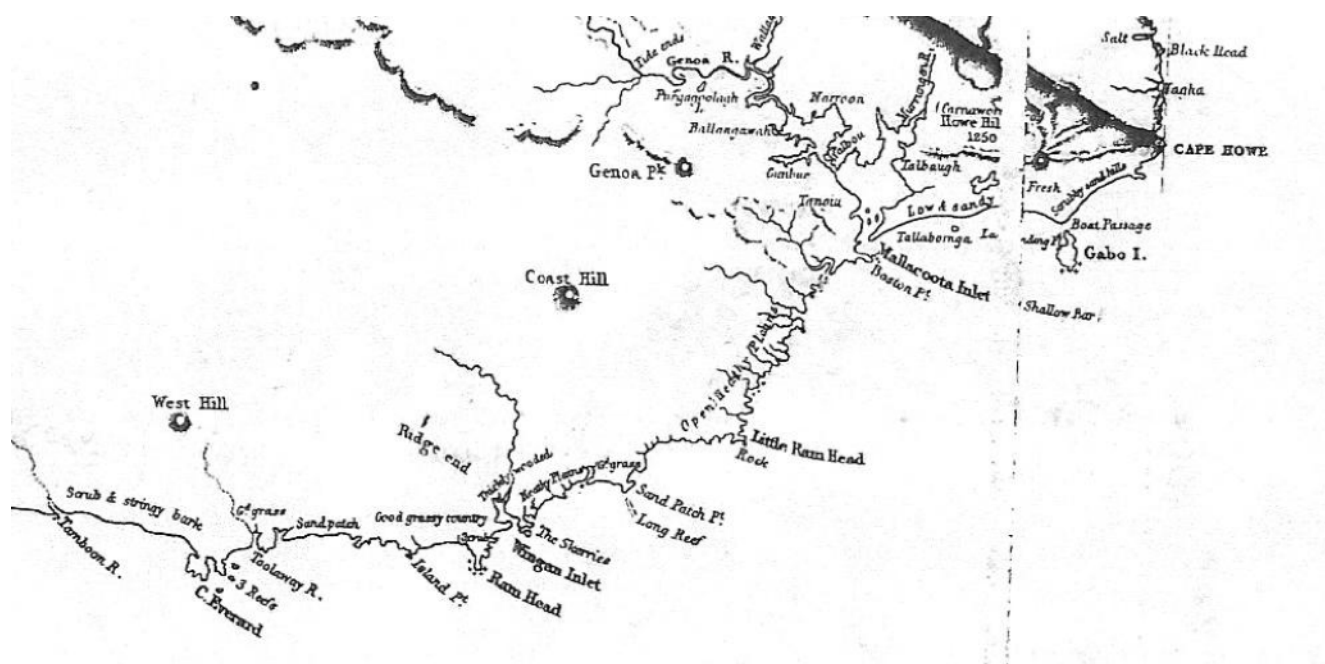


Figure 5. Part of J. Arrowsmith's Map of the Province of Victoria, 1853. State Library of Victoria, Libraries of Australia ID 14505336

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The only dissenting opinion in regard to the location of Cook's Ram Head at today's Little Rame Head appears to be that of Geoffrey Ingleton, an eminent twentieth century Australian maritime historian and biographer of

Head is from the sea just another green hump along the coast, Little Rame Head when viewed from Cook's point of observation is a distinctive point with a 'round hillick' at the furthest extent of the visible coast. A photograph

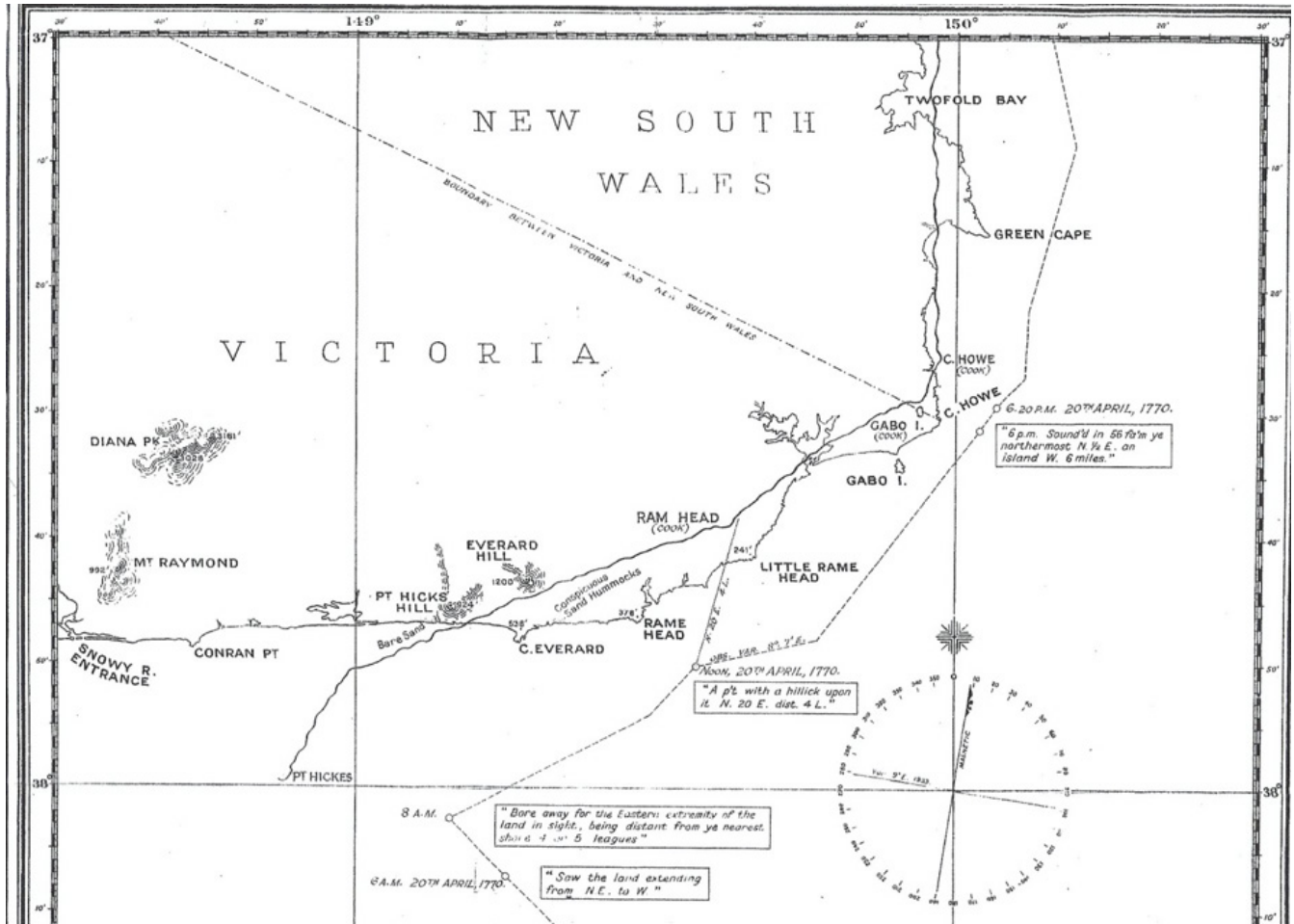


Figure 6. Admiralty Chart 3169 with Lt Cook's Coastline and Track of H.M. Bark Endeavour, L. Barker (1933) (Courtesy: National Archives of Australia). Cook's placement of Ram Head is about 3 nautical miles north west of its actual position. Cook's position for Point Hicks is shown, lower left, far from the actual coast. Maps in Fowler's (1907) and Hilder's (1970) articles show similar positions for the key features.

Flinders. Ingleton claims: "The only feature on this coast SW of Cape Howe which meets exactly that [Cook's] description is the present Rame Head".<sup>15</sup> This statement is demonstrably incorrect since Little Rame Head, 20km further east, also meets exactly that description, and that is why it was given its current and descriptive name.

Rame Head may be bigger than Little Rame Head but the latter is a more distinctive feature on this coast (or, as Cook says, 'remarkable', i.e. worthy of remark), a true landmark for mariners. This is because, while Rame

in FitzGerald's article, taken from Cook's position out at sea, demonstrates this well.

Another characteristic which makes this point 'remarkable' is that, sailing eastward, beyond Little Rame Head the coast trends further northward, as is apparent from the charts which form part of this article. Indeed, given an understanding of Cook's purpose in naming land features (as navigation aids to later mariners they should be distinctive and easily recognised), it will be apparent that today's Little Rame Head better fits his



## ...Ram Head



*Figure 7. Little Rame Head (Cook's Ram Head) from the north east from the headland behind Shipwreck Creek campground. Approaching from the west, as Cook did, the 'round hillock' is a more distinctive feature, rising directly out of the sea and marking the point where the coastline trends north. (Photo: Trevor Lipscombe)*

naming criteria. It is also the reason that today Little Rame Head has a navigation light on it while Rame Head does not.

### Ram or Rame?

Not only is Cook's Ram Head in the wrong place on today's map, but its spelling is incorrect. Cook, in his journal and on his chart, spelled it *Ram*, but today the English Ram Head is spelled *Rame* and pronounced to rhyme with 'same'. Cook's version reflected the spelling of the English Ram Head at that time.

The English Ram Head appears on maps from the 1700s as *Ram*, but by the 1800s the spelling had changed to *Rame*.<sup>16</sup>

Arrowsmith's series of regularly updated maps of Australia, published in London from 1838 to 1850, show the spelling as *Ram*. His 1853 map shows *Rame*, reflecting the change of the spelling of the English feature. Admiralty charts, also published in London, changed the spelling of the Australian feature from *Ram* to *Rame* in 1852, and that spelling remains today. John Lort Stokes' 1851 survey resulted in two charts published in 1852, one showing

*Ram* and the other *Rame*.<sup>17</sup> In Australia, locally produced maps, especially those published in Victoria, continued to show the spelling as *Ram* well into the 1980s.<sup>18</sup> The Government of Victoria, compounding its error in renaming Cape Everard as Point Hicks, changed the spelling from *Ram* to *Rame* in the Victoria Government Gazette of 10 May 1972. The change was instigated by the Hydrographer, Royal Australian Navy, who, in a letter to the Place Names Committee, claimed:

*Rame Head and Little Rame Head. Since 1814 Admiralty Charts have used this form, which is correct. It will be noted that Cook named Rame Head after the prominent headland on the western side of Plymouth Sound, which was always, and still is, called Rame Head... This office proposes to continue to use this correct form on its charts, and it is requested that the proper spelling be also adopted by your Committee.*



*Figure 8. Today's Little Rame Head (Cook's Ram Head) from the air and from Cook's direction of approach. Note the trending of the coast beyond the Head; the white dot is the navigation light. (Photo: Trevor Lipscombe)*

The Hydrographer's reference to 1814 Admiralty Charts seems to relate to the English Rame Head since the change on Admiralty Charts of Australia show it as *Ram* until 1852. It may have been the spelling in use in 1814, but it was not that in use when Cook sailed out of Plymouth Sound in 1768.

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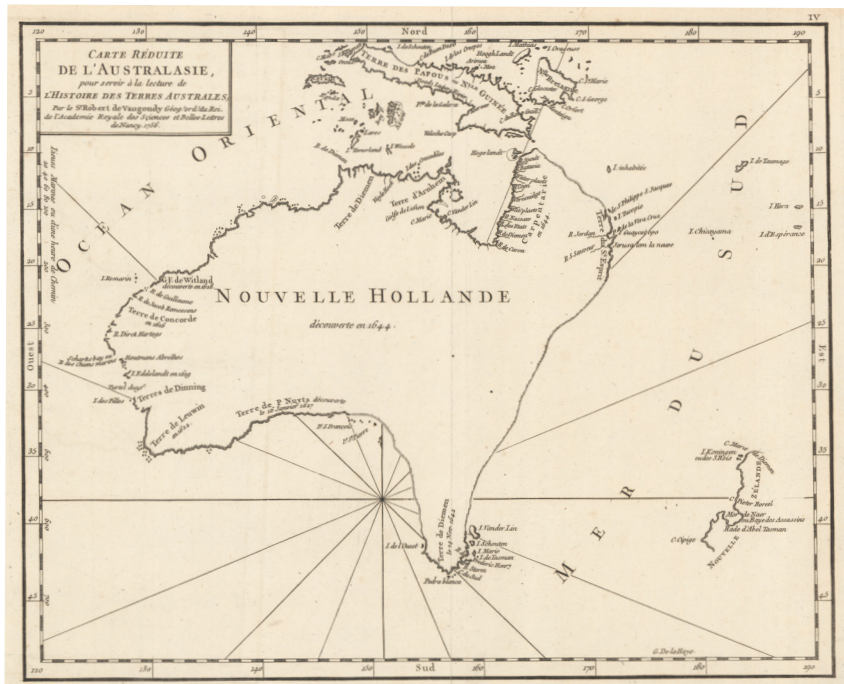


# Cook and Point Hicks ~ a deliberate ‘mistake’?

## Keeping the curtain drawn across Bass Strait

*In our previous issue Trevor Lipscombe put the case that James Cook’s identification of Point Hicks was an error—that in fact he had instead seen a cloudbank. Margaret Cameron-Ash replies that, while she is ‘in furious agreement’ with Trevor that the identified location was indeed a mistake, she maintains that the error was deliberate on Cook’s part...*

Ever since Abel Tasman’s discovery of Van Diemen’s Land in 1642, the big question for mapmakers was whether or not it was joined to New Holland. By the following century, the fashionable French maps showed it as joined, as seen in this 1756 map of Robert de Vaugondy.



Before leaving England in 1768, James Cook did his homework and was convinced that Tasman had found a strait and not a bay. If so, it presented a problem. Cook’s experience in Newfoundland with the French had taught him that offshore islands were dangerous: they could be used by your enemy to make trouble. So, if there was a strait separating New Holland from Van Diemen’s Land, Cook intended to conceal it by drawing the island as a peninsula. In short, he would not correct that section of Vaugondy’s chart. Cook had already used this ploy a month earlier in New Zealand, when he concealed Foveaux Strait by joining Stewart Island to the South Island.

The *Endeavour* sailed across the Tasman Sea, and Zachary Hicks sighted land at six o’clock in the morning in April 1770. Hicks had seen some unspecified hill

in the hinterland behind Victoria’s south coast. In due course, he would receive his spotter’s prize of a gallon of rum, plus the honour of having some other important landmark named after him.

Meanwhile, Cook thought he was in a channel, but he had to be sure and so he continued sailing west for another two hours, with the wind in his teeth. By 8 am he was certain. He was not in a bay. He was in a strait, sailing against the Roaring Forties.

So he quickly turned the ship around and headed back to Cape Howe at the corner of the continent. He didn’t want to advertise Bass Strait to the crew for any longer than was absolutely necessary. Sailors were poorly paid in those days and were known to sell information to foreigners.

Cook had resolved the question of the insularity of Van Diemen’s Land, and he would report this to the Admiralty

immediately on his return to London.

But in the meantime, he had to conceal it in his documents. So in his Journal he dodged the issue by writing some waffle that was very out-of-character for the plain-speaking Yorkshireman.

But with his chart, he was far more creative. He invented a fictitious promontory which he named Point Hicks and used it to curtain off Bass Strait at the bottom edge of his map. It was an ingenious ploy and it worked. It kept Tasmania safe from the French for 30 years.

Trevor Lipscombe [*Placenames Australia*, Dec. 2019, 1-8] is correct in saying that Cook’s Point Hicks does not exist; and that Cook made an error when he included the promontory on his chart. But was Cook’s error accidental or deliberate?

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What did Cook see that morning as he stood on the *Endeavour* and scanned the south-western horizon? Something or nothing? Lipscombe believes he saw something, namely a cloudbank, and thus Cook's error was accidental. I believe Cook saw nothing and his error was deliberate.

Later, when Cook came to draw his chart of the east coast, he was not thinking about cloudbanks. He was thinking about how to conceal the insularity of Van Diemen's Land and the strategically valuable shipping lane of Bass Strait. The Admiralty did not want Tasmania's insularity publicised until Britain could occupy and garrison the place. By presenting Van Diemen's Land as a peninsula, Cook was buying time.

As the Dutch had already mapped most of Australia's south coast, the elimination of Bass Strait would be difficult, but Cook rose to the challenge. He invented Point Hicks to provide a landmark positioned on the bottom frame of his truncated map, which would also serve as the starting point of his coastal survey. In this way, Cook could draw a curtain across any hint of a strait. He chose parallel 38°S for this dual purpose because it was the closest to the *Endeavour*'s position (37°58'S) when Hicks first sighted the land.



*Sketch map of Bass Strait and parallel 38 South, showing the waters and context that Cook omits from his truncated chart of the East Coast, graphic by D. Fraser, @CartoDavid. Reprinted from Cameron-Ash (2018)*

## Cook and Point Hicks...

Lipscombe says that Cook's placing of the phantom Point Hicks (in Victoria) so far distant from Eddystone Point (in Tasmania) was unlikely to disguise Bass Strait.

This is true, if you're looking at a modern atlas. But when King Louis XVI (acceded 1774) and his ministers read the authorised version of the *Endeavour* voyage, they couldn't see Eddystone Point on the chart. This is because the Admiralty, following Cook's lead, had chopped it off. In fact, everything below 38°S was chopped off, because that parallel of latitude formed the bottom edge of the page. The neat addition of Cook's fake coastline from Ram Head to Point Hicks (positioned with mysterious exactitude on coordinate 38°0'0") rendered the *trompe l'oeil* complete. Like everyone else, the French cabinet assumed that New Holland's east coast continued south to Van Diemen's Land, just as it did on Vaugondy's map. Cook's brilliant ploy worked to keep out the French for 30 years. As soon as news of the 'official' discovery of Bass Strait reached Europe, the French were over here in a nanosecond.

Cook's chart of Australia's east coast is a masterly survey (see opposite), but the composition is strangely unbalanced and truncated. At the top of the map, he includes all the geographical context of the earlier Dutch discoveries. But this context is deliberately omitted at the bottom of his map.

The documentary evidence of Cook's methods is contained in his chart and journal. They include Cook's truncated map; Cook's uncharacteristic waffle in answer to the important question of 'whether they are one land or no'; Cook's failure to verify his supposed 'isthmus' when he visited Tasmania during his Third Voyage in 1777; and Cook's previous form—he was repeating the strategy he'd used a month earlier to conceal Foveaux Strait. These and other clues are illustrated in my book (Cameron-Ash 2018).

**Margaret Cameron-Ash**  
Sydney

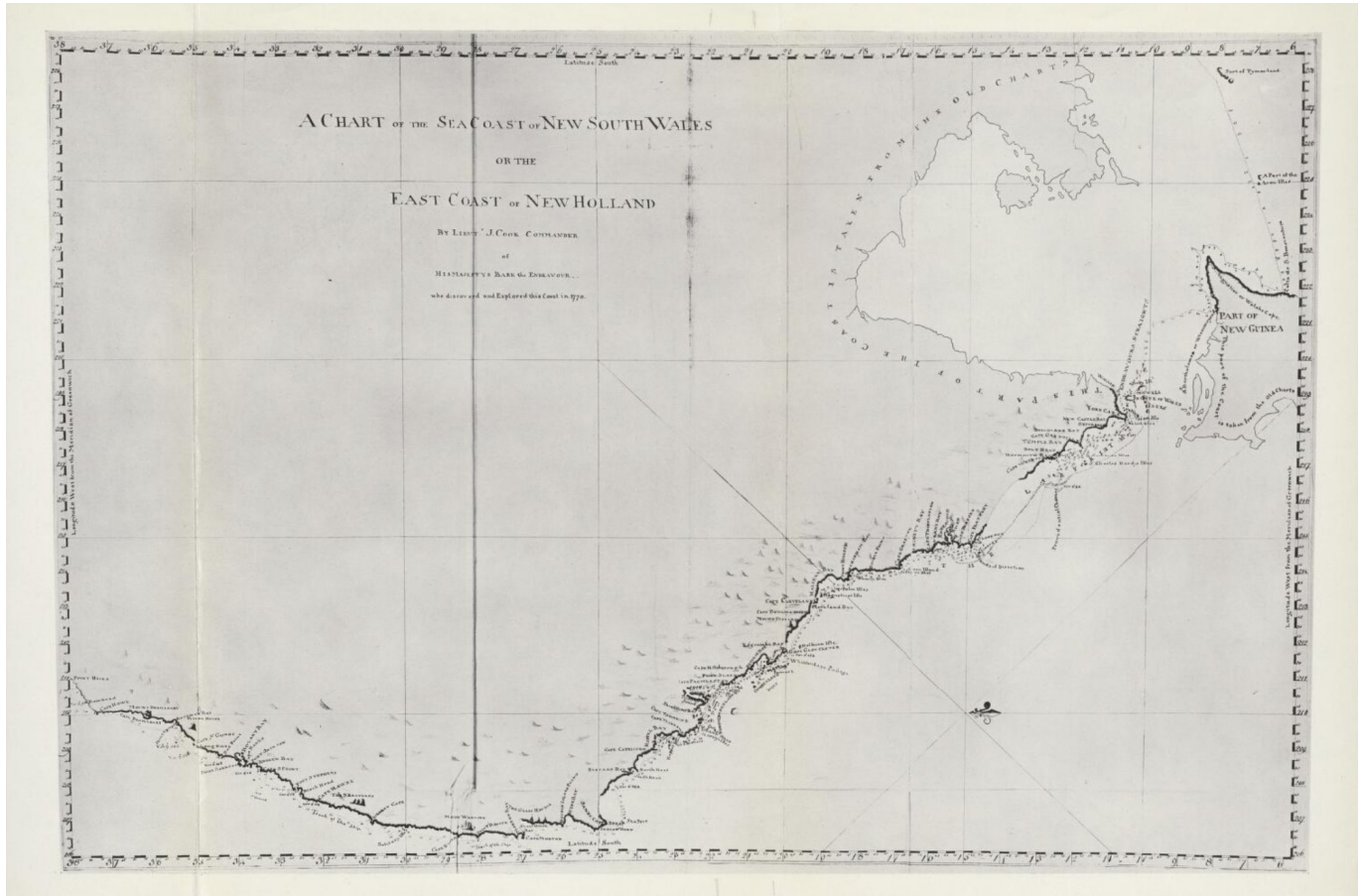
### Reference

Cameron-Ash, M. (2018). *Lying for the Admiralty: Captain Cook's Endeavour voyage*. Sydney: Rosenberg Publishing.

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## ...a deliberate mistake?



*Cook's manuscript chart of the Sea Coast of New South Wales is cut short to conceal Bass Strait*  
*James Cook, A chart of the Sea Coast of New South Wales or the East Coast of New Holland, 1770 [ms.]*  
*National Library of Australia, nla.obj-588080489*

## Asbestos we can tell...

A recent item in one of our favourite journals immediately attracted our attention. *New Scientist* reported thus:

A small Canadian town with the unfortunate name of Asbestos is looking to refresh its identity. According to a Facebook post by the municipal government, 'the word *asbestos* unfortunately doesn't have a good connotation'.

Asbestos, Quebec, is an old mining town named for its most important export. This leads to a lot of unattractive finger-pointing that would be far more restrained if the same principle were employed elsewhere. Residents of Colonialism, UK, for instance, might sympathise with Asbestos's plight while boarding flights to Chlorinated Chicken, US.

The heartbreaking detail is that Asbestos is an overwhelmingly Francophone town, which means that

its residents are being punished for a name that they themselves find unobjectionable. As the town's mayor told Bloomberg, potential investors even refused to take a business card with the fateful name written on it.

A new name is on the cards—or will be—sometime next year.

*New Scientist*, 14 December 2019



# Reports from the trenches

## Gerringong & District Historical Society

For half a century I have been intrigued by the pre-history and early history of the Gerringong area on the south coast of NSW. Some of what I have discovered about the place and its name is the subject of what follows; it is not definitive, but is a progress record of current research.

It is commonly known that *Gerringong* is an Aboriginal name for this area, but there is no certainty about what the name means. We also know that the spelling has undergone various changes over the decades, and this is part of the naming problem.

Originally just part of the District of Five Islands (or Illawarra), the first land grant (to William Smith) was made by Governor Sir Thomas Brisbane on 19 April 1825. It was in an area called Jaron Gong, supposedly with *-gong* being a Dharawal suffix for a 'swamp', which would seem appropriate, given the area was known as Miller's Flats (or Swamp), Smith's Swamp and the marshy Ooaree Creek. But what does *Jaron* refer to? There is some suggestion that the Dharawal word for the Illawarra Black Apple (or Black Plum)—*Podocarpus elatus* or *Planchonella australis*—was 'jaron'. If this is the case, then Jaron Gong may well have meant 'a swampy place for black plum fruit'. Since many Aboriginal placenames (and not just those in Dharawal) refer to a food source, this is a strong contender for the meaning of *Gerringong*. One problem, however, is that the suffix *-gong* can also mean 'hill' or can even indicate a personal name.

Other suggestions have been: a dolphin; a small walker; and a place of fear. 'Dolphin' is an unlikely possibility, because *gerringong* is nothing like *baruwaluwu*, the Dharawal word for 'dolphin'. A 'small walker' doesn't seem likely as there is no obvious reason for it. That suggestion came from Queen Rosie (Rosannah Russell who lived in a camp at Minnamurra) in 1857, but she spoke a mix of languages, and may or may not have been using Dharawal as a basis for this suggestion. Also, she appears to have called it *Gerronong* (without a hard *g* in the middle). A 'place of fear' is highly unlikely, for three reasons. First, it was allegedly a reference to the first sighting of Cook's *Endeavour* in 1770; but Cook didn't land there or have any encounter with Indigenous people there, so there is no connection with that event. Second, the place would have had a name before



European arrival, and if that was *Gerringong*, or *Jaron Gong*, then it wasn't about fearing white people. Third, A.W. Reed's *Aboriginal Place Names* (a most unreliable source) says *Jerrungarugh* was what *Gerringong* used to be called; but the *Jerrungarugh* were a clan living around Shell Cove and their name did indeed refer to fear (it was said to mean 'fearful noises on the beach'), because it was an area (today Killalea) where Aboriginal groups often fought each other, with many deaths and serious injuries occurring. It seems likely that this meaning was accidentally misattributed to *Gerringong*.

On 1st June 1829, the Jaron Gong area was officially gazetted, for the first time as *Geringong*; but by 1846 it was *Jeringong* in Government Notices; and, by 1850, *Jerringong*. Other spellings, in various printed notices, were: *Gerronogong*, *Gerrigong*, *Gerongong*, *Gerringong*, *Jerrangong*, *Jarregong*, *Jerregong* and *Jerrygong*. A Town Plan for the Village of *Geringong* was drawn up in 1853 and submitted to Governor Fitz Roy on 9th January 1854. It was not until a Post Office was gazetted for the town, on 30th March 1857, that the current spelling (and pronunciation) became official in the post mark of *Gerringong* Post Office. The spelling was now fixed, but the meaning was still uncertain. To complicate matters further, there was also an Aborigine by the name of *Jerregong* (identified in the 1834 blanket records) who belonged to the Dharawal-speaking Wodi Wodi clan and may have lent his name to the locality.

The most likely conclusion? I suspect the name **Gerringong** was originally pronounced as /jar-un-goong/ and probably referred to a swampy area where the Wodi Wodi group could get the Illawarra plum.

**Tony Butz**

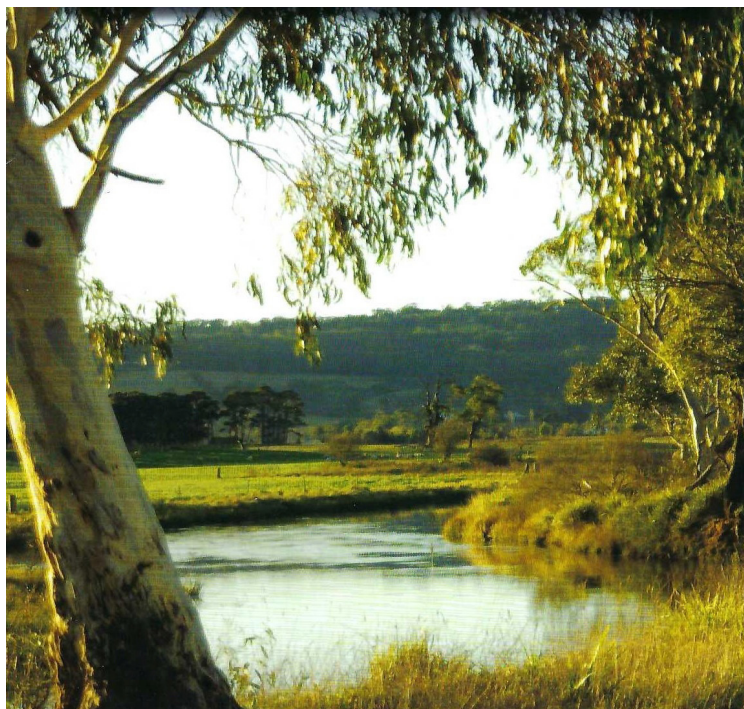
*Gerringong & District Historical Society*



# Bong Bong~~what did it mean?

Bong Bong is a rural place in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. It is perhaps best known as the location of the delightfully-named Bong Bong Picnic Races, but the history of its name is long and intriguing.

In March 1818, former naval surgeon Charles Throsby and Surveyor-General James Meehan, with an exploration party, set out to the country south of Sydney. They recorded their descent into ‘a country called by the natives Toombong’. An added note referred to ‘Riley’s establishment’, later recorded as Portion 32, Parish of Mittagong, about two miles upstream from the present Bong Bong bridge, in the region of the Wingecarribee Swamp. Meehan’s Field Book, No 143, stated: ‘... our present station is called Toombong...’<sup>1</sup>



*The Wingecarribee River at Bong Bong. (photo courtesy of the Bong Bong Common Management Committee)*

After crossing the Wingecarribee River, the party proceeded through what is now the eastern portion of Moss Vale.<sup>2</sup> The party then ‘set out through a bushy country to a forest hill called by the natives Boombong’. Throsby’s account mentions that the waters ran to the Shoalhaven, so they were on the eastern side of the ridge which runs from Moss Vale towards Exeter. The ‘forest hill’ was probably Mount Broughton on Portion 8, Parish of Sutton Forest. Meehan spells the name ‘Boombuong’ and, on 19 April 1820, ‘Boombong’. The added notes

to Throsby’s account mention ‘Mr Throsby’s present establishment’.<sup>1</sup>

A letter to Charles Throsby from the Colonial Secretary on 13 February 1823 authorised him to occupy land at ‘the junction of the Wollondilly and Toombung Rivers’. It seems then that the name *Toombong* was applied to the Wingecarribee River.

In the 1820s, the name *Bong Bong* came to be applied to the village at the great bend of the Wingecarribee River and then, in the 1860s, for a railway platform on the railway line some distance from the original location. Today, *Bong Bong* refers to the area either side of the Wingecarribee River where it crosses the Moss Vale-Bowral road.

Two different meanings have been recorded for *Bong Bong*: ‘buttocks, or posteriors’, and ‘many swamps, or river that loses itself in a swamp’. Both of these are Dharawal expressions, derived from early Sydney languages.

## Buttocks

‘Bong Bong’ meaning ‘posteriors’ or ‘buttocks’ was first recorded by Daniel Southwell, a naval officer on the ship *Sirius*.<sup>3</sup> The language was Biyal Biyal, the classical Sydney language of the First Fleet days.<sup>4</sup>

Between 1788 and 1791, William Dawes (an astronomer with the First Fleet) collected in two small notebooks a set of field data on what he called ‘The language of New South Wales, in the neighbourhood of Sydney’. The entry reads: ‘Posterior, backside: Boong, Bong’.<sup>5</sup>

Watkin Tench (1791), on a trip to the Hawkesbury wrote:<sup>6</sup>

English	Name on the sea coast	Name at the Hawkesbury
The Buttocks	Boong	Baylee

P.H. Morton quoted Southwell when he wrote: ‘On the top of the southern branch of the Illawarra coastal range, up behind Jamberoo, there are two hills, through which the early pass to the highlands went. These were, by the

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## ...Bong Bong

natives, called Bong Bong, because of their likeness to the shape of another part of the human body which the doubled word meant in 1788.<sup>7</sup> These two hills, with a height of about 665m, were called *Bong Bong Mountain* (now officially *Noorinan Mountain*).

An article in the *Southern Mail*<sup>8</sup> tells of the occasion when Sir Austin Chapman was showing the sights to a vice-regal lady who took keen interest in the Aboriginal nomenclature. The newspaper reported:

An Aboriginal man named 'Marbellous' was only too pleased to exhibit his knowledge and answered question after question relating to names of prominent features in the local landscape. All went well until the lady enquired the name of a well-known mountain [Mt Bong Bong]. The name has a pretty sound, but, like many pretty native names its meaning cannot be printed. 'Marbellous' accompanied the obscene meaning with action—and, for once in his life, the ever ready Austin found himself without a word to say. Forever after he was most careful when questioning Aborigines in the presence of ladies, vice-regal or other.

Similarly, another regional newspaper reported that a local child had written to columnist Bill Beatty asking the meaning of Bong Bong in New South Wales. He felt diffident in telling her it meant 'posterior'.<sup>9</sup>

### Swamp

'Bong Bong' meaning 'a river that loses itself in a swamp' was recorded by J.F. Mann between 1884-1907 from information he obtained from Boio, nicknamed 'Long Dick'. Boio was born between 1814 and 1818; he was an influential native of the Cammeray tribe and a son of Bungaree and Queen Gooseberry.

Mann wrote:

In my journeys through this country I have remarked that the languages used by the aborigines differed in the several localities in a manner somewhat similar to that prevailing in the various counties of England: Also that place names were given in accordance with the natural formation or product of the locality; whether the items which originated the name were geological animal or vegetable. Some few words were in common use throughout this territory and extended into Queensland. For instance 'Budgery' - good, satisfactory, pretty. 'Bell or Bail' a negative- 'Murrum or Murry' plenty, many, great, large etc. 'Bong Bong' out of sight and others. The word 'Budgery' in connection with 'Gar' gives a name for the beautiful miniature parakeet now so frequently seen in cages. Gar Gai Galie Galla or alla refer to pleasant camping places as

'Kuringa Gai' - 'Bong Bong' is suitably applied to the locality, as the River Wingecarribee here loses itself in a swamp.<sup>10</sup>

In 1914, the Rev. James Steele wrote: 'In August 1814, the Hume brothers went south through the Bargo Brush, and discovered the rich grazing lands about Bong Bong, a native name meaning blind, or a watercourse lost in a swamp'.<sup>11</sup>

Other meanings given for 'Bong Bong' include 'big/much swamp',<sup>12</sup> 'many springs of water',<sup>13</sup> 'plenty water about',<sup>14</sup> 'something dead, lacking vitality'.<sup>15</sup>

### Which is correct - 'buttocks' or 'swamp'?

A clue to what may be the correct meaning comes from Andrew Badgery<sup>16</sup>, who wrote that the original name was 'Bung Bung'—*bung* meaning 'swamp' (and *bung bung* meaning 'much swamp'). The name appeared in newspapers as 'Bung Bung', especially between 1826 and 1836, and at one time an unsuccessful attempt was made to rename Bong Bong as 'Bung Bung'.

In a letter to the *Robertson Advocate*, Charles Nicholson wrote:<sup>17</sup>

Sir,— If not too late I should like to enter my protest against naming this shire 'Wingecarribee'. I think there are few in the land who can look back so far as myself. This shire should be called 'Bung Bung' (not 'Bong Bong') and Nattai 'Wingecarribee'. For why? All lands on the south side of the Bung Bung River as far as the Medway Rivulet and for about half a mile on the north came under the name of Bung Bung, and I think it will be found that all the old grants are in the 'parish of Bung Bung'...

### Conclusion

All things considered, it seems very likely that the site of the first village in the Southern Highlands—after which that section of the Wingecarribee River is named—was called 'Bung Bung' by the Aboriginal people, and the name meant 'swamp', 'many swamps' or 'river that loses itself in a swamp'. The name 'Bong Bong' was then given to the little village, and has stuck—perhaps it sounded better than 'Bung Bung' or perhaps Charles Throsby misheard it, who knows?

It is very likely that Bong Bong Mountain, near Jamberoo, was appropriately named after its shape, i.e. from the meaning 'buttocks'.

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# Koro resolved ~ ~ Placenames of Fiji (15)

In my previous contribution to *Placenames Australia*, I began looking at the name of the sixth biggest island in Fiji, **Koro**. After giving a brief description of the size and shape of the island, I mentioned some of its claims to fame, including that it is one of the few islands in Fiji where surfing, known locally as *totokai*, was traditionally practised; and that it is home to many varieties of jungle fowl (*Gallus gallus*), hence one of the few Fiji islands where cock-fighting is practised; and has a tree with leaves that make a delicious green vegetable, *Gnetum gnemon*, known locally as *sukau*. I could have also alluded to the tradition of turtle-calling in the village of Nacamaki on the eastern end of the northern coast, or the fact that Koro produces some of the finest composers and singers of Fijian popular music, but space, alas, did not permit!

I also reminded readers that I had pointed out in these columns that the placenames *Tavua* and *Tavuaga*, both found on the island, originally meant ‘burning place’, suggesting that Koro may have been volcanically active at some point during the past three thousand or so years of human occupation.

Turning to the name *Koro*, I showed that it has been recorded by that name for at least two hundred years, so there is no reason to suppose that it is a new name. But what about its meaning? The current meaning of *koro* in all of eastern Fiji is simply ‘village’; so is that what the word meant when the island was named? It seems inherently unlikely that such a large island—now

containing fifteen villages—would be named ‘village’ (even granted that it could be the plural ‘villages’, since plural nouns are identical to their singular counterparts). By that reasoning, any occupied island could be called ‘Koro’, whereas such names are typically derived from a feature that is distinctive.

I further argued that, in any case, ‘village, town’ (though the dominant meaning in the early nineteenth century) is relatively new, and there is abundant evidence indicating that up until that time, the usual meaning of *koro* was ‘hill-top fortification’ or simply ‘fort’. This evidence includes the fact that the word was borrowed into nearby Polynesian languages such as Tongan and Samoan with exactly that meaning—one of many Fijian words relating to warfare that were so borrowed. As Fijians ceased practising warfare in the nineteenth century, they moved from hill-forts to villages by the sea and on river-banks, but retained the name *koro* for these new settlements.

The argument I now want to present is that even ‘hill-fort’ was a relatively new meaning of the word. It was only introduced when Fijians began building them when warfare became endemic around the thirteenth century, subsequently exporting the idea and the name to their Polynesian neighbours. Prior to that, *koro* meant simply ‘hill-top, mountain-top, summit, peak’. Prime evidence for this is simply the large number of mountains and mountain ranges in Fiji whose names begin with *koro*—to cite only a few examples:

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## ...Bong Bong

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> James Jervis, *Southern Mail*, 28 September 1937, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> RH Cabbage, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*. 26 July 1921

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Southwell, In *Extract of a copy of a letter from D. Southwell to the Rev. W Butler*, 12 July 1788.

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Steele, personal communication.

<sup>5</sup> William Dawes (1790-91). *Notebooks on the Aboriginal language of Sydney*.

<sup>6</sup> Watkin Tench. (1791). *A complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson*.

<sup>7</sup> PH Morton. (1926). Aboriginal Place Names. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 16 February, p.16.

<sup>8</sup> *Southern Mail*, 8 June 1928, p.2.

<sup>9</sup> Bill Beatty on Aboriginal names. *Riverine Herald*. 7 July 1942, p.4.

<sup>10</sup> *Mann's Aboriginal Names*. Mitchell Library. Recorded between 1884 and 1907.

<sup>11</sup> Rev. James Steele. (1914). *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*. 1(8), 157.

<sup>12</sup> Hayes-Williams. (1900). *Science of Man*, 22 January, 226.

<sup>13</sup> *Science of Man*, 21 June 1900.

<sup>14</sup> *Science of Man*, 21 August 1901.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Bong’ meaning, ‘dead’ is from a Moreton Bay language. According to L. A. Meston “it meant dead in their language and no other” (*Brisbane Courier*, 8 November 1928, p.10)

<sup>16</sup> *Science of Man*, 21 November 1899, p.194.

<sup>17</sup> *Robertson Advocate*, 5 February 1907, p.2.

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## ...Koro resolved

**Koroyanitu** (devil's peak), **Korobā** and **Koroimavua** in western Vitilevu, **Korobasabasaga** (branching peak), **Korokalou** (devil's peak) and **Korobābā** in eastern Vitilevu, **Korobasaga** (branched peak) in Vanualevu, **Korotūraga** on Taveuni, and countless mountains throughout the group called **Korolevu** (large peak). This means, incidentally, that talking of *Korolevu Mountain* or *Korobābā Peak*, as often seen on maps, is in a sense tautological, since the first part of the name, *Koro*, already means 'mountain' or 'peak'.



*A mangrove lobster; and (right) its mud mound, ikorokoro*

More evidence can be gleaned from other meanings of the word, as well as compounds and other derivatives. The word *koro* can also mean 'one thousand coconuts', an allusion to the way they are piled up like a mountain when being presented at ceremonies. The extremity of certain parts of the human body, like the breast and the buttocks, is also called its *koro*, as indeed is the parson's nose of a chicken and the corresponding part of other birds, the full form being *koronilawe* 'hill of the tail-feathers'.

There are a number of compounds that indicate that the original meaning of *koro* was 'mountain, etc.', but I will mention only one. A kind of freshwater eel (*Anguilla* sp) that can travel over land is called—among other names—*balebalekoro*. The verb *bale* means 'to cross', so this compound means 'mountain crosser', and it would make little sense if *koro* referred to any human habitation, which eels would studiously avoid if they wanted to stay alive.

A common word-building process in Fijian and other Oceanic languages is reduplication. This means doubling (wholly or partially) a word to form a new word with a slightly different meaning—in Fijian it is often a diminutive. For example, from the word *vale* (meaning 'house') the word *valevale* meaning 'shed' is derived. So the fact that *i-korokoro* means a mound of mud created by a burrowing *manā* (mangrove lobster, *Thalassina anomala*) suggests that the word from which it derives, *koro*, meant something similar to, but larger than, such a mound.

So, while I risk being accused of romanticising a bit, my proposal is that the earliest settlers of Vitilevu, some three thousand years ago, having arrived in the west, soon moved on to the eastern part of Vitilevu and from there, or maybe nearby Ovalau, they saw two almost equally large, but contrasting, islands. The one to the south, **Gau**, was so named after the noun *gau*, a term meaning something like 'trunk', since the shape of the island from that perspective is bulky and relatively featureless, rather like the trunk of a tree or a human body. The one to the north was conspicuously mountainous and rugged, so was given the name **Koro** meaning 'mountain-tops'.

As to whether any of the mountain-tops was erupting at the time, I will leave it to the vulcanologists to sort that one out!



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# Oh what a difference a vowel makes!

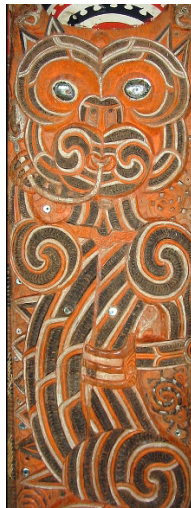
**Tanawha** (local pronunciation /'tæn-uh-wuh/) is a suburb of Queensland's Sunshine Coast. The Regional Council's Heritage website claims that the name is of a 'Legendary New Zealand monster'. This is echoed by the Queensland placenames search website of the Department of Natural Resources & Mines,<sup>1</sup> which states in the comments section:

District named and bounded by Governor in Council 27 July 1991 and revised by Governor in Council 12 August 1994. Reportedly??? Maori language word indicating Legendary New Zealand monster. [...]

An earlier record in the card file merely states,

Reportedly??? Maori language word indicating 'special'.

This earlier record lists Tanawha as a 'Telephone Office' named by the PMG's Department on 20 September 1950. Various newspaper articles provide evidence that the name may have first been used as early as 1921, and that it applied to land adjacent to and about two miles from Buderim. The articles also provide details about land being sold by Mr. R. Sly, in particular to his selling land prior to his returning to New Zealand, his native land (*The Daily Mail*, Tuesday 18 October 1921, p. 9, and *Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, Friday 16 December 1921, p. 7). The latter article also states that Mr. Sly's 'pioneering was mainly instrumental in opening up Tanawha for banana growing, [...]', a further hint at the placename's origin.



The spelling and structure of the word could indeed be of Māori origin, but I have not been able to discover any reference in New Zealand literature or websites to the *Tanawha*. However, the Taniwha (pronounced /'tahn-i-fah/) is a mythological Māori being. *Tē Ara—The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, states:

In Māori mythology, taniwha are beings that live in deep pools in rivers, dark caves, or in the sea, especially in places with dangerous currents or deceptive breakers (giant waves). They may be considered highly respected kaitiaki (protective guardians) of people and places, or in some traditions as dangerous, predatory beings, which for example would kidnap women to have as wives.

The *Tē Aka Māori-English, English-Māori Dictionary* states that a taniwha is a:

water spirit, monster, dangerous water creature, powerful creature, chief, powerful leader, something or someone

awesome - taniwha take many forms from logs to reptiles and whales and often live in lakes, rivers or the sea. They are often regarded as guardians by the people who live in their territory, but may also have a malign influence on human beings.

The reference to 'something or someone awesome' in this definition is reasonably close to the meaning of the name as provided by Queensland's 1950 early record.

The Māori origin claimed by the Sunshine Coast Regional Council seems to have permeated well into the psyche of the region. There is, for example, a ten-hectare gated estate named *Kia Ora* in Tanawha.

So, where does the *Tanawha* form come from?

Either it's a misspelling of the Māori *Taniwha*, or the name derives from the Cherokee name *Tanawha* (meaning 'a fabled hawk or eagle') for the mountain now better known as *Grandfather Mountain* on the Blue Ridge Range in North Carolina. It was named *Grandfather Mountain* by pioneers who supposedly recognised the face of an old man in one of the cliffs (Powell 1968). The State Park there boasts a well-known walking and hiking trail known as the Tanawha Trail.

There is still no documentation that might reveal how and why a Cherokee name could have been given to this Sunshine Coast suburb. If that were ever discovered, the official records of the suburb's name might require some revisiting!

**Jan Tent**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Graham Taylor for doing a lot of research on my behalf and supplying the valuable information contained in the early paragraphs of this report.

<sup>2</sup> *Kia Ora* meaning 'welcome; be well' in Māori.

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# Placenames Puzzle Number 73

## Reptilian toponyms

*The placenames this time refer to reptiles (not all of which are found in Australia). Example—(VIC, bend in the Yarra) a large skink with cerulean tongue: **Blue Tongue Bend***

1. (WA, rock face) large non-venomous snake
2. (QLD, isle north of Cooktown) squamous reptile with feet and external ears
3. (QLD, shoal north of #2) serpent
4. (WA, cave) chirping reptile endemic to the tropics, which has no eyelids
5. (TAS, mountain) mythical reptile
6. (NSW, mountain west of Nowra) observant large lizard with long neck and legs, powerful tail and claws
7. (WA, isle) smooth-scaled lizard with no pronounced neck and small or absent legs
8. (WA, deep cove in the Kimberly) snake with polished scales, generally black or bluish black in colour, with thin white bands
9. (WA, cove at Dirk Hartog Island) marine reptile characterised by cartilaginous covering
10. (VIC, cliff in Grampians) large, fast-moving, highly venomous snake
11. (QLD, stream north-west of Ingham) a dark-coloured reptilian calculator
12. (NSW, headland east of Jervis Bay) a large semiaquatic reptile that's an apex predator
13. (VIC, cove in Wallagarough River) a large, fast lizard that can climb trees
14. (VIC, stream east of Howqua) a snake with a brownish-coloured head
15. (SA, stream) a lizard with spotted skin, that's reputed to be the 4th largest on earth
16. (NT, stream) a large predator reptile not native to Australia
17. (VIC, headland on French Island) a land-dwelling reptile with a carapace
18. (WA, stream west of Fremantle) fatal reptilian mathematician
19. (VIC, bay west of Cape Otway) an extinct reptile
20. (WA, bore at North West Cape) very large South American legless reptile

[Compiled by **Jan Tent**  
Answers on page 2]

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