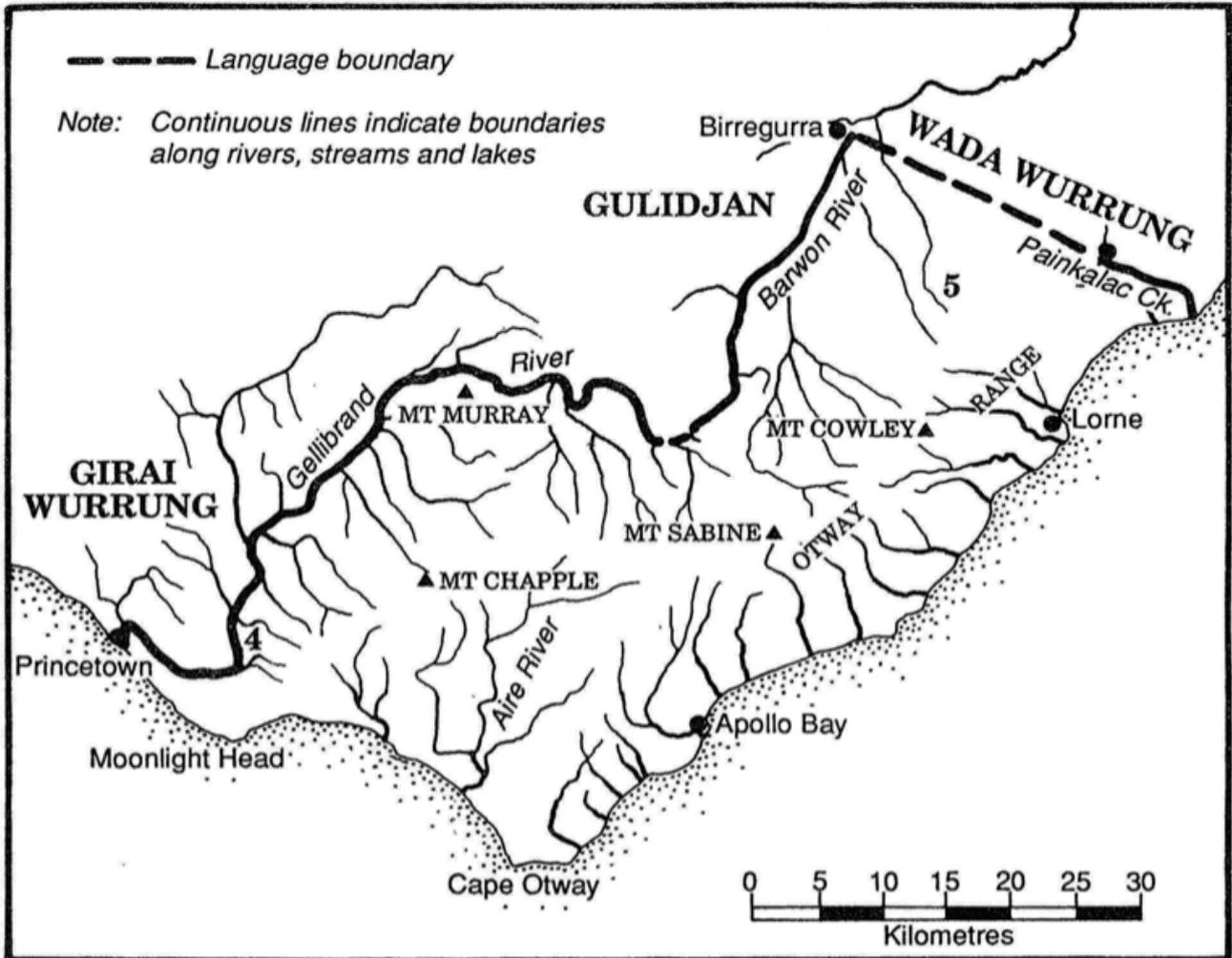


Before Loutitt Bay

Introduction



Gadubanud Clans

No.	Clan name	Approximate location
1.	Bangura gundidj	Cape Otway
2.	Guringid gundidj	Cape Otway
3.	Ngalla gundidj	Cape Otway
4.	Ngarowurd gundidj	North of Moonlight Head
5.	Yan Yan Gurt clan	'Yan Yan Gurt' station, east head of the Barwon River

It is hard in the twenty first century to agree on 'the facts' about life in

what is called the Otways before the arrival of Europeans, and during the period after 1835 when British sovereignty was introduced. Very little evidence today exists in the public arena to say precisely how life was for the Aboriginal people who have lived here for at least 60,000 years. One way of looking at our shared history is to understand that Aboriginal culture has existed here for at least 3000 generations; and new Australians have been here for eleven generations. [Based on Rachel Perkins, quoting Mulvaney, see p 81 of *Quarterly Essay 56*, Black in. 2014.]

The two cultures that came to share Australia were and remain diametrically opposed in their fundamental concepts and principles. British culture is Christian and capitalist, based on individual achievement and a personal relationship with God. Indigenous culture is based on the collective and on the vital spiritual dimension, ever present in people's lives, which integrates the people actively with the land in a way which can best be described as custodianship, not a personal 'ownership' or 'exclusive possession' as we understand those ideas today.

Australian Indigenous people were and are categorically NOT 'nomadic' as in 'wandering aimlessly'. Each tribe or clan had respect for their land, and for the neighbouring estates over which they generally moved seasonally and which they tended carefully, using fire strategically, and practicing horticulture and husbandry to ensure particular plants and animals prospered. The custodianship of land was rooted in complex beliefs, which in turn reinforced responsibilities to the land, to plants and animals, and to the group. These beliefs could be celebrated and reinforced daily, for example in dance and story telling, teachings and direct actions.

Far from being 'the wretched primitives' some British described, the Australians were healthier, had on average much longer lives, and spent more time devoted to leisure and cultural matters than the average

European person in 1788, as the historian Geoffrey Blainey acknowledges in *Triumph of the Nomads*. [1974]

While the newly-arrived British were under instruction from the British government to foster good relations with the Australian people, in fact such good intentions were impossible to reconcile with general settler behaviour. The British had arrived to occupy the land: to own it exclusively, and to sell it in a way totally antithetical to Indigenous culture. Their very arrival and intention to settle put the British on a destructive collision course with the Australian people. There was little common ground between the new and original Australians; 'land' meant totally different things to each of them. This fact is even now largely unacknowledged by contemporary Australian society.

Given these realities, what is agreed about first contacts between the Australian people and the British settlers throughout Australia, and in this region, is inevitably highly contested. In this region, there is some memoir by white settlers who arrived in the first decades of the 19th century, some early newspaper reportage, some relatively recent archaeological investigation, some oral history and some informed analysis and interpretation by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars. Some of what is known is summarized here in order to demonstrate the complex mosaic of truth and belief that constitutes current understanding, and suggestions for further reading are provided at the end of this section.

The Gadubanud

The Gadubanud refers to the people who traditionally had responsibility for the land that makes up most of what is called the Otway Ranges. These Otway peoples occupied the rainforest plateau, plains and rugged coastal areas and stretches from approximately Painkalac Creek at Airey's Inlet to Princetown on the coast, and inland from Princetown to

the confluence of the Barwon and Gellibrand Rivers, and then north and east to where the Barwon River meets Deans Marsh Creek. Neighbouring clans were the Wadawurrung to the east, and the Gulidjan and Kirrae Whurrung peoples, from Colac in the north and Warrnambool in the west respectively.

In the 1960s Australia's most respected 20th century archaeologist, Professor D J Mulvaney of the Australian National University acknowledged that 'The Otway Peninsula is probably the least known Victorian tribal area, as 19th century records are virtually silent concerning its aboriginal inhabitants.' Mulvaney conducted an archaeological survey of a cave area at the mouth of the Aire River in 1961, and for many years that was the only contemporary academic reference to the Gadubanud. In 2009, Lawrence Niewojt conducted a more complete and detailed survey of the Gadubanud. [His work can be read at <http://press.anu.edu.au/apps/bookworm/view/Aboriginal+History+Volume+33/9921/ch08.html>]. [downloaded December 2014]

Despite this work, even today little about Aboriginal life in Otways and about 'first contacts' between the Gadubanud and the European arrivals can be 'proved'. There are however other sources which can contribute to our understanding of Aboriginal life. These include the often unpublished but long-held oral traditions of Aboriginal clans of the district. In addition, there are the memoirs of the early settlers, both published and private, which often reveal startlingly different pictures of relations between new settlers and the locals. As well, there is now informed and detailed analysis by recent scholars.

In particular the work of Bill Gammage demonstrates the highly sophisticated land custodianship and management of their environment by Indigenous people all over Australia. Using all these approaches, as well as the limited and contested published sources from the 19th

century, enable a more detailed picture to emerge.

The Gadubanud lands have five documented clan groups: Bangurra, Guringid, Ngalla, Ngarowurd and a fifth known as Yan Yan Gurt. 'Yan Yan Gurt' means 'everflowing spring' and the name was applied by an early settler George Armytage to the clan group whose estate included that spring, in what is now the Deans Marsh area. Armytage was himself involved in conflicts with the Gadubanud [Pascoe p.7], although his entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* written in 1966 makes no mention of them. [<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/armytage-george-1715>]

During much of the 1830s it was said the Gadubanud 'so successfully avoided interactions with most European settlers that some early squatters apparently thought the area was uninhabited.' However it is clear that very early sources such as Henry Allan, who spoke local languages, was intimate with the local families in the area. Allan moved through the area around Cape Otway regularly up until the early 1840s, and established strong relationships with the Aboriginal people there. Descendants today can still relate how Henry Allan had an understanding that people living in what was known as "the big bush" should be allowed to preserve their autonomy.

When authorities enquired about the goings on of traditional people east of the Hopkins and through to Wadawurrung country [Barrabool hills area], Allan provided demographic information to Port Phillip officials with the understanding that people were surviving autonomously, and should be allowed to remain so. However, in nearly all cases, the push for land by settlers not only reduced significantly the sizes of land parcels protected for Aboriginal people, but also left unprotected from further settler incursions, land where Aboriginal people were then living autonomously.

While it is impossible to produce a precise figure for the historical population of the area, a survey of the potential food supply and

archaeological evidence suggests that combined clan numbers is estimated variously at 'several hundred people' and 'perhaps 1000' before the arrival of European settlers to the region in the early 19th century. Archaeological survey documents not only suggest the Otways displays one of the highest food and artifact dispersals, including sites of cultural and spiritual significance, and remnants of stone dwellings, but also supports oral traditions telling of movement through the Otways. (*AAV Occasional Report No.49*)

Niewojt describes the Gadubanud diet as rich and varied: 'The many middens along the coast show fragments of turban shells, abalone, periwinkle, elephant fish, chiton, beaked mussel and limpets. It is known that seals, Cape Barren Geese, eels and ducks were also eaten, along with local spinach, tubers and berries. With over 100 kilometres of coastline yielding shellfish, the presence of several wetlands and productive estuaries, and the plant foods available both in open land and potentially acquired through trade with neighbouring groups and evidence from the archaeological record, historic coastal survey maps and an assessment of regional food resources indicate the existence of a sophisticated resource management regime and movement corridors that were maintained through the selective deployment of fire to generate a specific type of landscape mosaic.'

The work of Niewojt, especially when understood in the context of Gammage's *The Biggest Estate on Earth* [2011] demonstrates that the Gadubanud people, residing seasonally at various settlement areas throughout the Otway region, adapted the land and ecology to best serve their needs using a sophisticated system of land management. This careful, knowledgeable land custodianship is further evidence of the idea that 'much Aboriginal history is environmental history.' [Robin and Griffiths 2004]

William Buckley who lived with the Aboriginal tribes in and around the

Otways for more than 30 years and played an important role as an initial intermediary between the Port Phillip clans and the first settlers arriving from Van Diemen's Land, had contact with the Gadubanud. Niewojt recounts contact between William Buckley and the Otway clans:

William Buckley's memoirs provide a detailed set of observations on the use of some Otway wetlands. On one of their wanderings in southwestern Victoria, Buckley's mob [believed to be Wadawurrung] was invited to take part in an exchange of tuber roots for eels. The groups were to meet at a place called Bermongo [we now believe the correct name was Barramunga which means 'birth of the great rivers the Barwon and Gellibrand']. Located at the headwaters of the Barwon River, the marsh was teeming with eels.

When they arrived for the exchange, prepared with woven baskets full of starchy tubers, they found a large congregation of about 80 men, women and children. Though Buckley does not name the group involved in the exchange, it is very likely that they were dealing with the Yan Yan Gurt clan, the clan of the Gadubanud people known to live on the north side of the range. The exchange emphasizes the long-distance character of trade connections in the Aboriginal economy and the strong desire for dietary variety.

There are various accounts of Buckley's story, including a fictional version, and one that purports to be his 'autobiography'. The original 'editor' of that version, John Morgan, was a British tabloid journalist who had spent time in the United States among warring settlers and Native Americans. He introduced aspects of those experiences into Buckley's story, seeking to maximize his profit by telling his readership what it wanted to hear: that 'the blacks' were wild, primitive, and often dangerous. This was of course often consistent with the prevailing belief

of many early settlers, who were in the process of occupying, that is usurping, Aboriginal land.

Settler Contact

The Gadubanud were recorded by Chief Protector George Augustus Robinson in 1842 when he met three Gadubanud people and received details of four clans that resided on the western edge of the Otway Ranges; three lived at the Cape Otway peninsula and one was said to reside north of Moonlight Head. One of these clans was said to belong to Bangura, [Bangurrer] which was noted as the local place-name referring to Cape Otway. Their meeting with Robinson – which took place at Allan's over 50 kilometres beyond the western boundary of their traditional territory – is one of the only confirmed records of the Gadubanud people beyond their homeland.

Oral traditions of the Kirrae Whurrung suggest that Henry Allan played a key role in helping resolve the mystery surrounding the disappearance of explorers Gellibrand and Hesse in 1837. Henry Allan showed the resting place of Gellibrand to Charles Latrobe nine years later in 1846. Latrobe noted this in his personal diaries after observation; 'Body positioning showed Gellibrand was buried respectfully by the local clan'. No 'official' written records of this version of events – either contemporary or modern – exist. While contemporaneous settler sources first suggested the two had been 'killed by blacks' [Le Griffon pp.72ff], today it is argued by some that 'It is probable that their horses were lost, or discarded by them, and died around the end of February 1837 in the heat of summer'. [Pascoe, 2012 pp. 69ff]

So what really happened to Gellibrand in those nine years? Is the truth a combination of both versions: Hesse died of exposure; and Gellibrand died years later and was buried by local people, and his remains were later returned to his family?

James Dawson was a squatter at Port Fairy, and later at Camperdown in the 1840s, who maintained good relationships with Aboriginal people. His correspondence can be read in the State Library of Victoria and while not definitive, has the rare benefit of being contemporaneous, and scholarly in its approach. In fact Dawson's daughter Isabella Dawson conducted much of the research attributed to him and spoke the local Aboriginal language fluently.

Although Dawson settled on Aboriginal land, he is and was regarded as a man who understood and respected Aboriginal people and their culture, and was ostracized by other settlers for that reason. Historian Jan Critchett, in an introduction to the Dawsons' work states 'Dawson stands out because he [sic] was ...strongly committed to speaking out about injustice to the Aborigines, and had respect for the Aborigines and their culture.

Indigenous author and historian Bruce Pascoe agrees that Dawson was 'an educated and tolerant man who recorded his observations meticulously' but also notes 'If Dawson, one of the few to understand the complicated system of clan boundaries and land obligations, saw no flaw in the imperial principle of forced land usurpation then what hope was there for justice to survive, or even arrive?' [Pascoe 2012]

A rare public reference to the Gadubanud, known by settlers as 'the Otway blacks', can be found in reports in the *Geelong Advertiser* and *Squatters' Advocate* and in the Melbourne Argus of August 1846. According to those reports, Government surveyor George Smyth, while seeking a route to Cape Otway in July 1846, had contact with a small band of Gadubanud, after which one of Smyth's party was killed. Mounting a second expedition to exact punishment, Smyth and his party reported that they killed seven individuals: two women one man and four children in August. [This report can be read on Trove, part of the National

Library of Australia at <http://trove.nla.gov.au> by searching for the *Geelong Advertiser and Squatters' Advocate*. (Vic: 1845 – 1847), Saturday 29 August 1846, page 2]

Different interpretations of these events suggest that, as other settlers had done in this early period, Smyth may have deliberately included in his raiding party Aboriginal people from other unrelated clans and lands, and deputized them to conduct the revenge attacks. Smyth names those accompanying him as 'the Barrabool blacks', probably referring to members of the Wadawurrung nation, who may have had no kinship connections to the Gadubanud.

By using unrelated kinship groups in this way, Smyth and his superiors, including the Port Phillip Administrator Charles La Trobe, could absolve themselves of any responsibility for their role in orchestrating any 'adverse outcomes' and the aftermath and repercussions. The need to create legal and moral distance from such murderous raids was important. The Port Phillip administrators were under strict instructions from Governor Gipps in New South Wales and the Colonial Office in London to protect the Indigenous people; the local officials thus had what we now call 'plausible deniability', as their conflicting official and private correspondence reveals. [Pascoe 2012]

In 1857 a survey or census provided by John Allan (brother of Henry Allan) shows that at least 18 people from the Cape area (called Heytesbury by the authorities at the time), had sought protection and were living at the Hopkins River (Critchett, p. 8).

While the group killed by Smyth's party in 1846 and in other attacks reported throughout the 1840s and 1850s would have constituted perhaps only one tenth of the Gadubanud population, it is likely that over the years, as white settlement spread throughout what is now Victoria, surviving Gadubanud joined the Bunting Dale Mission at Birregurra in the east, and others moved to live with other Gundidj in the west. Others

lived and worked on the newly established homesteads throughout the district, and under strict control, continued to conduct their cultural business. Aboriginal people had their preferred paths of movement, occasionally with the knowledge of authorities or sympathetic landowner support.

It is also important to differentiate between what are now official, bureaucratic governance structures such as local government districts, and those which existed before settlement: the estates of Aboriginal traditional Lore. Unsurprisingly the two may bear little resemblance to each other. The clearest and simplest way to understand is to focus on the different Aboriginal language areas that connect Aboriginal people in this region: the Maar and Kulin nations.

Conclusion

This brief outline shows how much more there is to learn about the Aboriginal people who live in the Otways and along this beautiful coast. What is already known can perhaps serve as starting points for discovering even more, and for promoting a better and broader understanding. Further listening and understanding of the long oral traditions of the first Australians and their stories about "first contacts", and important 'survival stories' are significant places to begin. We can then include those stories into the narrative of our settler history in order to add continuity, texture and great richness to the ongoing story of this region.

Further Reading

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