CHAPTER I

The Hunter Valley contains a river system, which includes the three catchment areas of Goulburn, Upper Hunter, and Wollombi, draining an area of some 8,500 square miles. It is one of the outstanding geographical features of eastern New South Wales, being a tongue of comparatively low land penetrating deeply from the coast through the rugged eastern highlands to the main Dividing Range.

The upper portions of the region have an essentially hilly to mountainous terrain, flat land being restricted to a minimum in the valley floors of both the Hunter and Goulburn Rivers and their tributaries. However only a low pass has to be crossed near Cassilis in order to reach the valleys of the westward flowing Talbragar and Coolah Rivers, and the narrow Liverpool Range near Murrurundi to reach the headwaters of the Mooki and Peel Rivers and Quirindi Creek. Not until below Singleton does the valley merge into its wide open plain; with this exception all of the streams of the upper portion of the basin are in their juvenile or middle valley stage. The land surface is elevated to a considerable extent - over 5,000 feet in the north-east corner - the rivers occupy only narrow valleys separated by hilly to rugged watersheds.
Geological formations in the region are varied. The dissected uplands of the north-east are Carboniferous, while the Hunter valley plain and the lower slopes and valley floors of the main streams are of the Permian period. The southern flood plains are Pleistocene, while the area between Newcastle and Port Stephens is of the Quaternary period and swampy, and the southern plateau is of Triassic sandstone. The soils fall into four main types. The upper reaches of the valleys consist primarily of cracking clays, succeeded on the slopes by solonetzic soils. Podsolics are to be found on either side of the alluvial flood-plain soils in the lower half of the valley.

Except for the alluvial soils of the flood plain, the Hunter Valley is not particularly fertile. Nevertheless it did support a relatively luxuriant native flora. The natural vegetation ranges from an association of *Poa australis* and *Eucalyptus pauciflora* typical of the high areas of the eastern mountains which are subject to sporadic snowfalls, through areas of dry sclerophyll on the lower heights, to savannah woodland in the drier areas of the valley and the *Leptospermum-Banksia* association of the coastal section. On the coastal plain, adjacent to but not within the Hunter Valley, Blackbutt associations occur, and there are pockets of Casuarina and Pine associations on soils of low fertility.
In the Upper Hunter region the annual rainfall averages between 21 and 30 inches up to 60 inches, being highest, in the Mount Royal area to the north east, where it is fairly regular. In the main valley, however, above Singleton, periods from five to six months of each year frequently have less than 2 inches a month. About one third of the annual fall is in summer, but the other two thirds are spread fairly evenly over the rest of the year. The southern section of the region, towards Newcastle, has a mild, humid coastal climate. The rainfall is distributed fairly evenly through the year, though it reaches a maximum in the summer-autumn period. The average annual rainfall decreases from 52 inches at Nelson's Head on the far north east coastal section, to 26½ at Cessnock, in the west.

Maitland, some sixteen miles from the coast at Newcastle, has an average daily mean temperature in January of 75.5°F, and in July of 53.2°F, while its average annual rainfall is 33.35 inches. Same, in the Upper Hunter, has average daily mean temperatures in January and July of 76.3°F and 49.3°F respectively, with an average rainfall of 24.03 inches.

This brief geographic description (1) will indicate

(1) Most of this information comes from the Report on the Possibility Future Development of the Upper Hunter Region of New South Wales by the Upper Hunter Regional Development Committee 1954; and the Report of the Newcastle Regional Development Committee on the Proposed Future Development of the Newcastle Region, 1955.
the varied conditions in the Hunter Valley area. Although the uplands and slopes are not particularly fertile, the lower alluvial plain is markedly more so.

Early observers noted the varying degrees of fertility. Their descriptions are valuable as they give an idea of the country as it was before white settlement, at the time of unmolested native occupation. Thus Henry Danger, who surveyed much of the area prior to 1828, recorded his impressions of the land about Segenhoe on the Upper Hunter.

'From the north-west extremity of the lands of Mr. Macqueen on this river, the country assumes a mountainous character, being in many places rocky, with inaccessible ridges, extending (at alternate sides) to the margin of the water.' (2)

Then, as he moved on,

'The next stream to the westward of the Hunter is the Pages river, although the valley through which it runs is bounded on the east and west by elevated ranges, the vale affords much good country.' (3)

Further west, on the tributaries of the Goulburn,

'The character of this division of country is a quick succession of fertile valleys, all taking their commencement near the dividing range... As the valleys approach the Goulburn, the country becomes broken and barren, excepting a small extent near the margin of the streams.' (4)

(2) H. Danger. Index and Directory to Map of the County Bordering upon the Hunter River; Joseph Cross, Holdern, London, 1828; p34.
(3) Ibid.
(4) Ibid; p66.
In the valley of the Goulburn itself,

'The uplands are generally barren and rugged, and the low or alluvial lands (of which there is a continued chain on the river, at alternate sides) are of a light sandy loam, wanting in stamina and fertility.' (5)

Below Singleton the improvement in fertility was seen to be reflected in the natural vegetation. Paterson was the first white men to traverse this tract of country.

'The country became higher and very beautiful, mostly forest ground, but very thinly interspersed with lofty trees, and sometimes, indeed acres, without a tree; the soil in general good, and the grass luxuriant.' (6)

Lower down he had noticed the wildlife,

'From the number of black swans and wild ducks we saw here, we had no doubt of killing many... The country... is tolerable soil, and certainly affords food for the natives.' (7)

In the Lake Macquarie area it was the same,

'Here are kangaroos, ducks, swans, pidgeons, quails, as well as fish, particularly oysters, which are of a very superior quality, and caught in great abundance.' (8)

Breton alone was unimpressed by the country. At one stage he was on the Hunter River, near Maitland

'Go where you will on this stream, the distance will be but short, excepting in a few instances, before ironstone and sand, with the usual concomitants of ugly gum trees, are met with.' (9)

---

(6) W. Paterson loc.cit: p176.
(7) Ibid.
(8) H. Bangar on.cit: p95.
Conditions in the Hunter Valley were generally favourable for native settlement, although in smaller numbers in the upper reaches of the Hunter and its tributaries. Europeans also found the area conducive to settlement. As early as 9 May, 1827, it was reported in the *Australian* that

"Every acre of ground on the Banks of the Hunter is now located, from Newcastle to the fountain head. The Goulburn branch alone remains undisposed of."

The Hunter River was discovered by Lieutenant John Shortland in 1797. Many traders immediately sailed to the newly discovered port of Newcastle and returned with loads of coal and also cedar, which grew in abundance on the river banks. In 1801 the country about Newcastle and the lower Hunter was explored by an expedition under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Paterson. Even at this early stage the natives had been exposed to white influence, and had learned to appreciate their superior implements.

"From what I observed of trees cut down by the natives, which must have been with a much sharper edged tool than what their stone mats (sic) is; and from their skillness, I have little reason to doubt but that some of the European deserters are among them." (10)

As he progressed past Maitland, and "Shanks Forest Pleins", Paterson noted that cedar was still plentiful.

---

(10) W. Paterson *loc.cit.* p95.
The country now became higher, with good soil, and the banks of the river covered with cedar, ash, and what is called box.' (11)

He speaks of the area about the junction of the Paterson and Hunter Rivers as having

'Many parts... covered with a new hibiscus, which the natives use as flex for making their nets and for other purposes.' (12)

No evidence has been discovered of relations between the cedar cutters and the aborigines. As cedar-cutting would not have disturbed the natives' way of life it is probable that relations were peaceful, as in other areas. (13)

By 1821 settlement had spread as far as the Singleton district, and before 1830 it had spread into the farthest reaches of the Upper Hunter, but was moving more slowly in the Goulburn area. The squatters were constantly in contact with the aborigines, and must have seriously disturbed the native population by their incursion into tribal territory, by clearing the land (which was going on extensively up to 1840), and by running stock.

The Robertson Land Acts of 1861 resulted in much closer settlement, particularly of the rich river valleys.
which had been the traditional home of the native inhabitants. The natural resources of the aborigines, which had for many years been progressively undermined, became inadequate.

The result was often bloody conflict

"An exceptionally ugly story which was related to me by the late Dr. John Carter was of a small tribe of aborigines originally living in the Gloucester area. These aborigines had earned the ill-will of the landholders in that district by spearing cattle. At last the cattlemen combined, and drove the tribe away, to take refuge on the Barrington Tops. After a time they began spearing cattle again and this time the cattlemen decided to put an end to the annoyance once and for all. A large party of horsemen managed to surround the aborigines' camp, and then set to work systematically to exterminate the whole tribe, men, women and children. To save ammunition, stirrup irons were used to brain the small children." (14)

Other incidents reported by Threlkeld (15) and Nancarrow (16), together with the Myall Creek massacre of 1838, indicate that this was a period when trouble between the whites and the aborigines was prevalent.

Many aborigines abandoned their traditional way of life and came in groups to settle on the stations, where they became dependent on the white men.

(14) Mr. W.C. Green.
(15) L.E. Threlkeld "Memoranda selected from 20 yrs. of Missionary engagements in the South Sea Islands and Australia". MSS. 1838: 24 (10). In the Mitchell Library.
'This dependence upon the usurpers of their ancient hunting grounds was evident in the deterioration of the aborigines' appearance, where once their clothing, if any, consisted at the most of skin aprons or cloaks, they began to wear the cast-off garments of the whites, in which their former dignity was sadly eclipsed. From sturdy hunters and warriors they became cunning mendicants. As they came to substitute the white man's food for their own they tended to neglect their hunting and lose some of their skills.' (17)

Contact with civilization resulted in a great diminution of their numbers. An early settler at Raymond Terrace noted the change which had taken place in eleven years.

'As the White people increase so the blacks seem to decrease when we first came all round the Beech (sic) we saw nothing but their camps and canoes but now there are not more than a dozen left of our Tribe.' (18)

Charles Wilkes was informed of the same thing at Lake Macquarie.

'Mr. Threlkold mentioned that a tribe which occasionally visited the lake, and consisted at the time of his arrival of sixty, is now reduced, after a lapse of fifteen years, to twenty, only five of whom are females.' (19)

As a result there are few aborigines who have any clear recollection of tribal life. Although this renders

(17) Mr. W.C. Green - letter to C. Jackson 19 October, 1841
Original MS. in the Mitchell Library.
Also E. Layne "Report on Aboriginal Natives in the District of Liverpool Plains, Colony of New South Wales" In Gipps Despatch 1842 July 3 vol II: 40. MS. In the Mitchell Library.
a reconstruction of tribal life extremely difficult, it
does at the same time make it seem more important that
such a reconstruction should be attempted.

There are no definite records of the number of
aboriginal inhabitants of the Hunter Valley at the time
of first white settlement. There are but few reports
and from these it is possible to gain only an approximate
idea of the total population.

It was extremely difficult to arrive at a reliable
estimate of native population. As has been mentioned,
the aborigines were often very shy of whites, and
remained out of sight. The only times the aborigines
congregated together were for tribal gatherings, fights,
and similar occasions. The incursion of white men so
soon disrupted tribal life and affected the native
population that figures of these are of low reliability,
particularly since it is so difficult to ascertain the
areas from which the natives had gathered.

The nomadic habits of the aborigines hindered
assessments of population. W. Bridges says

'The Berthwood tribe appears to have shifted away
fairly frequently, and at times moved to
Aberdeen and Segenhoe.'(20)

It would be simple to gain the impression that this was
three tribes, and not just one.

(20) W. Bridges "The Hunter River Blacks" Journal of the
Scone and Upper Hunter Historical Society, Vol 2,
1959: p130.
The only estimate covering a large area is that provided by Robert Miller. He writes of the Wonnarua tribe as it was in 1841.

'When he first knew them they occupied the Hunter and all its tributaries from within ten miles of Meitland to the apex of the Liverpool Ranges, an area which he sets down at two thousand square miles... At that time, he says the tribe numbered about five hundred individuals.' (21)

This figure of course does not include the lower Hunter region, nor Port Stephens. Howitt has an estimate for those aborigines whose territory 'extended up the valley of the Williams and its tributaries to their sources, and southwardly for about eight miles below Dungog... In 1840 the blacks in this tract of country numbered about 250 all told.' (22)

For the coastal region no early figure has been discovered. In 1848

'Upon a muster of the names of those now residing in the district, which includes the tribes of Lake Macquarie, Newcastle and Ash Island, I find their number to amount to about thirty-eight of both sexes and different ages.' (23)

This, however, is over forty years after the first white settlement in the area, and gives no real indication of the population as it was prior to the advent of the whites.

(22) A.V. Howitt The Native Tribes of South-East Australia. Macmillan & Co., London, 1904-1907. He does not quote his source, unfortunately.
Environment to a large degree controlled the size of the aboriginal population. The resources available to the natives were of strictly finite proportions and their numbers could only vary according to the food obtainable in the worst season. Moreover, their groups had to be of a size and nature convenient for moving about, that is they were limited by the number who could consistently obtain food as a group.

There are several references to infanticide being practised with this in mind.

'Infanticide was practised in the tribe, and there were recognized baby-killers amongst the old women. On these occasions, as soon as the child was born, it was placed in the hands of one of these old women who took it away and suffocated it, generally by cramming its mouth full of mud. The reason which they ascribed to the practice of infanticide was that food was scarce and an additional mouth meant a less supply to others, or that they had long journeys to make, and it was impossible for a woman to carry more than one young child in her wanderings. Female infants were oftener destroyed than male ones.' (24)

By controlling the size of the population, the aborigines were able to maintain a balance with the environment and so lived quite well in the more fertile areas of the valley. This was reflected in their persons. The natives of the Hunter Valley were almost unanimously acclaimed as being of fine physique, superior, indeed, to

Also R. Miller loc.cit. p.353.

"King Billy", a former well-known identity of the Upper Hunter. Photo: S.U.H.H.S.
those of most other areas.

The first description of the physical appearance of the aborigines of the area came from John Shortland, who visited Port Stephens in 1797.

'The natives were so very unfriendly, that he made few observations on them, other than that they were somewhat taller and a stouter race of people than those about Sydney.' (25)

This impression is confirmed by Robert Miller, describing the Wonnarua tribe.

'The average height of the men Mr. Miller estimates at five feet six inches, though some of them were upwards of six feet, and the women at five feet.' (26)

W. Cleveland found that the Hunter River natives compared favourably with others he had seen in South Australia.

'I think these are a superior race to the South Australians, the women are decidedly better looking and better shaped.' (27)

In this respect the Hunter Valley natives appear to have differed from those of Port Jackson, of whom David Collins wrote

'Very few men or women among them could be said to be tall, and still fewer were well made... In general, indeed almost universally, the limbs of these people were small; of most of them the arms, legs, and thighs were very thin.' (28)

---

(26) R. Miller *loc. cit.: 354*
(28) David Collins *op. cit.: 303.*
W.J. Emright agreed on the appearance of the natives, but did not think they differed greatly from those of Port Jackson:

"The natives that inhabited the vicinity of the Hunter River did not differ from those of the Port Jackson district. They were straight-haired, well-proportioned, broad-nosed and thick-lipped. The males averaged about 5 feet 7 inches in height." (29)

It would appear that in general the aborigines of the Hunter Valley region shared the fine physique of those of the north coast (30) and were better equipped physically than the Port Jackson natives. Their appearance becomes more striking when compared with that of the aborigines of other areas, such as the New England Tableland (31) and in Central Australia.

Peter Cunningham was impressed by the natives of Newcastle:

"certainly a superior race to those of the interior, and very superior to those about Port Jackson." (32)

Reverend Threlkeld made additional observations of interest:

"Generally the natives are well-proportioned; in fact none but robust children could survive the hardships which they have to endure even in childhood: from the moment of their birth they are exposed to night-dews, hot sun, rain, cold weather, and frost in winter with no other covering than a few possum-skins now and then thrown over them."

---

(29) W.J. Emright "Aborigines of North Eastern New South Wales" in Pan Pacific Science Congress 1923 vol II:75.
For these reasons they are also a short-lived race; attaining manhood at 15 or 17 years of age, and old age at 40: their old age being much accelerated by rum drinking.' (33)

This obviously a result of white contact.

Environment is particularly important in determining the size of the tribal unit.

Generally, the tribe

'whose territory is situated within specified geographic limits,' (34)

can also be identified by the fact that all members speak the same language and share social customs. It is usually fairly numerous, numbering from two to six hundred. The tribe consists of an aggregate of groups, or hordes, which in turn are a collection of families.

On the Hunter, it is probable that the basic unit was the horde, but there is practically no evidence as to the size of these groups. Several factors contributed to this deficiency, which is one of the most notable instances of the lack of precision typical of so many of the 10th century sources. However, the settlers' attitude was only part of the reason, for the nature of the subject matter itself often rendered an accurate estimation impossible.

(33) L.W. Threlkeld ob. cit: 24: p85.
That the aborigines were frequently very shy has been mentioned; moreover, if they chose, for that or other reasons, not to be seen by the whites, they were quite able to achieve this. One immediately thinks of the hunt in Tasmania during the 1820s which resulted in the capture of one woman and her child, of the hundreds who were still there at the time.

Sometimes the number of those attending a corroboree is given, but aborigines from a large area attended these, and it was difficult not only to know whence they came, but also to distinguish between the hordes. In other areas(35) figures have come from the local Crown Lands Commissioner, but for the Hunter region no estimate ... made prior to the disintegration of tribal society as a result of contact with white men has been found.

It is possible to deduce an approximate size for the coastal groups from several sources. For example, Dawson, while travelling in the Port Stephens district

'...met with a native encampment consisting of eight or ten "guyers".' (36)

Similar guyers, or rough huts, used by the Port Jackson natives, were observed to

(35) For example, the Liverpool Plains, where figures are provided by E. Hayne ob. cit. pp5-9.
Also A.W. Howitt ob. cit: p35. The Gringai tribe was divided into groups, of "Murras", of which there were may about Dungog, 'at convenient distances apart, each of which consisted of six to nine huts, or families.'
'commonly hold a family.' (37)

Assuming that the typical family consisted of five or six members, it would appear that the horde may have numbered about forty or fifty. Obviously, this is highly speculative. A quotation from Scott suggests that this might be too low a figure.

'At Port Stephens... the tribe numbered in the vicinity of a hundred persons.' (38)

The explorer E.J. Eyre's description of a corroboree he witnessed during the 1830s provides a good illustration of the inadequacies of the sources.

'We often had a good many Blacks encamped in the neighbourhood and occasionally on the meeting of several tribes they indulged in their favourite "corrobory" - on such occasions the tribes not dancing would sit in a semicircular form fronting the stage... There were 40 men and 16 women - the latter did not dance amongst or with the men but formed two parties of eight each one party dancing at either extremity of the lines of men and at proper times they crossed over behind the men and changed places with each other... Then one party had exhibited another tribe would sometimes retire to paint and decorate and thus they kept up their (dance) thru' great part of the night.' (39)

The suggestion is that one tribe performed at a time, and that the 40 men and 16 women are those actually performing.

(37) A.Y. Hewett ed. On: 374C.
and therefore of the one tribe or horde. But it seems unlikely that these would be the normal proportions of males and females in a tribe; rather are they the requirements of that particular dance? If so, how many members of that tribe are not performing, and how many members of the tribes in the audience are present? If the 40 men were taken to represent all the initiated men of one tribe, the total for that tribe could be between eighty and ninety, and this would suggest that it was not a whole tribe, but sub-tribe, or horde. However, from this description one cannot say more than that participating in one particular dance were fifty-six people who probably represent the minimum possible number of a tribe or horde. (40)

That these hordes or groups varied in size—perhaps only seasonally—is indicated by the Crown Lands Commissioners' report on the natives of the Liverpool Plains. "The number of Aboriginal natives inhabiting it in tribes consisting of from ten to one hundred and fifty persons each, is about four thousand." (41)

It is well-known that the whole Liverpool Plains area belonged to one tribe, namely the Kamilaroi, and so the

---

(40) Dawson describes a corroboree performed in the Port Stephens area by one tribal group: "At this time I had about thirty men, women, and children, about me." on cit. p62.

(41) E. Hayne on cit. p6.
'Tribes' in this report are really groups of that tribe. (42)

The size of these groups and their territories was
governed by the nature of the environment, so that in fact
they formed ecological units.
To quote Mathews,

'The area of a tribe's domain varies with the
character of district they inhabit as well as
with the numerical strength of the people... end whether the country is flat and open or
hilly and thickly wooded. In the latter they
are usually few in number, with a small area.' (43)

Although reports on tribal boundaries tend to conflict as
often as they concur, it would seem that the coastal
region was more closely subdivided than the central area
of the valley. However, although the coastal region was
closely subdivided into tribal areas, it would be wrong
to suggest that it was not populous. Enright's
implication is to the contrary:

'Food being so very abundant in those districts,
the area over which the aboriginal was compelled
to search for sustenance was necessarily limited.' (44)

'From pioneer reports it is impossible to gain a clear
idea of the distribution of tribes and subtribes; the
early settlers tended to regard every native group as a
tribe, and rarely understood or were even aware of tribal

(42) R.H. Mathews "Languages of the Kamilaroi and other
Aboriginal Tribes of New South Wales", J.A.I., Vol
XXXIII July-Dec. 1903: p259, A.W. Howitt 02: p59.
(43) R.H. Mathews "Australian Tribes - Their Formation and
(44) W.J. Enright "Aboriginal Districts and Notes",
Science of Man, June 1901, No. 4, Vol 1: p90.
subdivisions. Thus when an aboriginal by the name of "Davey" had put about his neck a brass plate with words to the effect of 'king of the Dartbrook tribe' endorsed thereon, (45) insofar as it referred to any tribal organization, the word 'tribe' referred to a horde.

The most widely accepted view on the distribution of the tribes of the Hunter Valley region is that of N.E. Tindale, (46) and for the purpose of this study it has been regarded as the best source. Settlers' information, which inevitably suffers from their lack of understanding of tribal subdivisions, is treated accordingly.

Tindale gives six tribes for the Hunter region. Of these, the Worimi occupied the area encompassed by Maitland, Newcastle, Port Stephens and Dungog, including the Karuah, Williams, Paterson and lower-Hunter river valleys. The Awabakal occupied the area about Lake Macquarie (47). The Darkinung were to be found south of the Hunter to Gosford and the Hawkesbury, including the Colo, Macdonald and other Wollombi Rivers (48). To the north was the Wonariu tribe.

(43) Mr. W.C. Green.
(45) See also J.E. Davidson "A Preliminary Register of Australian Tribes and Hordes", American Philosophical Society, 1938: p7.
(47) Mr. A.F. Elkin op. cit: p67.
Map showing the distribution of the Aboriginal tribes of the Hunter Valley - after Norman A. Tindale.
whose territory included Jerry's Plains, Sandy Hollow on the Goulburn, Huswellbrook and Glendon Brook, to the north east of Singleton. The territory of the Geawegal tribe was bounded by Ravensworth, Bunan, Kurramundi, the Mt. Royal Range, and Barrington Tops. The area to the west of Kers Springs and Kerriwa, including the upper reaches of the Goulburn and its tributaries, and the Liverpool Range, was occupied by the Kamilaroi, whose territory also included most of the Liverpool Plains. The area to the east of Barrington Tops, including Gloucester and Forster on the coast was, according to Tindale, occupied by a tribe called the Birpai.

The information provided by Enright conflicts with Tindale's on several points.

'The country between Singleton and Bendemeer was occupied by the "Kamilaroi", whose territory adjoined that of the "Kutthung", which extended from a little south of the Macleay River along the coast to Newcastle. South of the Hunter River was the tribe "Darkinung",' (49) whose 'territory extended to and down the valley of the Macdonald River.' (50)

Thus Enright would have the Kamilaroi extending over almost the entire Goulburn - Upper Hunter region. He

---

(50) W.J. Enright "Notes on the Aborigines of the North Coast of New South Wales", 
also mentions a number of smaller coastal tribes, most of which are not referred to by other observers.

'The adjoining tribes were the Guunginggal, inhabiting the territory on the north shore of Port Stephens and the Koorah; the Warringal, living between Telegharry and Pimpcleay Creeks; the Warrimee, living between Telegharry Creek; Port Stephens, the sea shore and the Hunter River; the Garawenal, between the Lyall River and the sea shore; the Yarrumgal, about the Nyali Lakes; the Birrimba, in the neighbourhood of Bungwall Flat; and the Birroonggal, on the Nyali River.' (51)

Of these, the Warrimee appear to correspond roughly with Tindale's Worimi, although according to the latter their area is larger than Enright would have it.

The Mnyowie, according to Enright, occupied the district lying on the southern shore of Port Hunter, and their neighbours about Brisbane Water were called the Kurringgal (52). The Warrangine lived in the Haltland area, and were

'probably in touch with the "Gringai", whose habitat was the district about Paterson.' (53)

Tindale does not mention the Gringai, but Hewitt does.

'The name Gringai... is given for those blacks who lived in that part of the country lying about Dungog... Their territory extended up the valley of the Williams and its tributaries to their sources, and southwards for about eight miles below Dungog.' (54)

(52) W.J. Enright "Aboriginal Districts and Notes" In Science of Man, No. 4, vol 4, June 1910: p30.
(53) Ibid.
(54) A.W. Hewitt op.cit., p85.

This variation may be accounted for by reference to normal tribal movements.
And Scott, who knew the people in his youth, wrote

'This was the Garingai tribe, a sub-branch of a numerous native people that once inhabited the lower portions of the Hunter and Karuah River valleys.' (55)

Enright suggests that most of these coastal tribes were in fact subtribes of one large tribe, the Kutthung.

'The Kutthung dialect is spoken amongst the Aborigines living along the southern bank of the Karuah River and the south shore of Port Stephens. It was at one time spoken amongst the tribes lying between Port Stephens, West Hailland and Paterson, but with the exception of the Kutthung they are now extinct.' (56)

An early settler in the Hunter district was Mr. Robert Miller, who took up residence there in 1841. His information also conflicts in part with that of Tindale:

'Concerning the Wannarua tribe... when he first knew them they occupied the Hunter and all its tributaries from within ten miles of Hailland to the apex of the Liverpool Ranges, an area which he sets down at two thousand square miles.' (57)

Miller was apparently unaware of the existence of the Geawegal tribe, whose country Howitt describes as being

'part of the valley of the Hunter River, extending to each lateral watershed, and from twenty to thirty miles along each side of Glendon.' (58)

(55) W. Scott loc. cit.: p5
(57) R. Miller loc. cit.: p352.
(58) A. W. Howitt loc. cit.: p54.
See also an article in Science of Man vol 3, No 1, June 21, 1900: p88.
Howitt says that the Geawegal tribe had the complete subclass system of the Kamilaroi (59), as if to suggest that the former may have been a sub-tribe or horde of the latter. There is a considerable body of evidence in support of the Wonnarua also being a horde of the Kamilaroi tribe, indicating that the Kamilaroi had penetrated further into the Hunter Valley than Tindale would allow.

It may be that there were at the most only three main tribes in the Hunter Valley at the time of first white settlement. The coastal groups, including the Gringai, the Awabakal, (60) the Yorimi, and others mentioned by Emright, possibly all belonged to a Kutthung speaking tribe. The Geawegal, the Wonnarua, and possibly the Darokinung, seem to have been sub-tribes of the Kamilaroi, although Dame Mary Gilmour was under the impression that the Darokinung were of the Waradjuri tribe (61). Despite it not being supported by any other evidence to hand, this is a possibility to be borne in mind.

The situation becomes complicated by suggestions such as Howitt’s that the Gringai and the Geawegal may have been of the one tribe (62). He also draws attention

(59) A.Y. Howitt op.cit. p105.
(62) A.Y. Howitt op.cit. p85.
to the fact that the Kamilaroi natives intermarried with those of Port Stephens and Port Macquarie (63). Since marriage was strictly exogamous (64), the fact that they were able to intermarry does not necessarily imply that they shared all tribal organization.

The evidence suggests that the Kamilaroi influence extended over a considerable portion of the Hunter Valley. According to Rev. W. Ridley the Kamilaroi language was spoken

'All down the Namoi, along the Barwon from the Nooniy to the junction of the Namoi, on the Bundarra northward and the Liverpool Plains and the Upper Hunter southward'. (67)

Mathews describes the Kamilaroi territory as extending as far south as Jerry's Plains (66). This is supported by a map prepared by Dr. Fraser, which indicates that it also included the whole of the Goulburn Valley. Howitt maintains that the smaller tribes feared the Kamilaroi, particularly the Geawagal.

'They were always in dread of war with the Kamilaroi, who followed down the heads of the Hunter across from the Talbragar to the Numurra waters, and even occasionally made raids as far as Jerry's Plains. A section of the Kamilaroi occupied the upper waters flowing into the Hunter River, and those which form the heads of the Goulburn River, for instance the Numurra Creek'. (67)

---

(64) R.W. Miller loc.cit: p553.
(66) R.H. Mathews "Languages of the Kamilaroi and other Aboriginal Tribes of New South Wales", p 259.
(67) A.W. Howitt loc.cit: p94.
Breton refers to an affray which took place on the Wollombi between two tribes, in which two women and four men of the "Comlaroy" were slain. It is reasonable to assume that this was in fact the Kamilaroi tribe, venturing as far down as Wollombi Creek. (68)

The nature of the environment facilitated the spread of the Kamilaroi into the Hunter Valley. The Dividing Range between the Narranra and the Talbragar is in places no higher than 1,750 feet, and this depression was no doubt frequently traversed by natives from either side; similarly with the depression in the Liverpool Range near Murrurundi. The explorer Mitchell noted that commuting between the Liverpool Plains and the Upper Hunter near Murrurundi was common, by natives of both areas (69). Allan Cunningham noticed trees which had been marked by iron hatchets near Wallabadah. He thought that the Quirindi Kamilaroi had become possessed of them in their communications with the natives of the Hunter River and regions to the south and east of the Dividing Range (70).

With the material available it is difficult to form a clear picture of the tribal districts and divisions, as the foregoing will demonstrate. They have been given, nevertheless, in the hope that, in spite of their uncertainty

(68) W.H. Breton op. cit: p303
   A.W. Howitt op. cit: p377. He interprets 'Comlaroy' as 'Kamilaroi'.
(70) A. Cunningham "Report to General Darling" (c 1827)
    In I (Lea) Harriott Early Explorers in Australia.
and lack of authority, they may assist in further research.

Although now it is hard to ascertain tribal divisions, at the time of undisturbed native occupation they were clearly defined.

'Each tribe had so much land allotted to it.' (71)

According to Mathews there was generally a narrow strip of "no man's land" between them, which was sometimes occupied by one people and sometimes by the other.

'The boundaries of smaller tracts of country with a lesser population, are not infrequently defined by hills, watercourses, belts of scrub, stretches of plain, or other remarkable features. But whatever the character of the line of demarcation between two tribes, it is rigorously respected by both parties ... The same remarks apply to the boundaries between any local divisions of a tribe or sub-tribe.' (72)

These tribal boundaries were not to be crossed except on special occasions, such as to attend initiation ceremonies or for the purpose of trading. (73) Transgressions on the hunting grounds of another tribe on any other occasion were a major cause of war. (74)

To the settler the "corroboree", often in conjunction with a tribal fight, was the most exciting tribal or inter-tribal gathering. These meetings were often

(71) Emily Caswell.
(72) R.H. Mathews "Aboriginal Tribes - Their Formation and Government:" p940.
     J.W. Pawson loc.cit: p100.
(74) W.H. Breton loc.cit: p240.
connected with some kind of ceremonial, such as initiation, or to avenge some wrong — perhaps the stealing of a woman (75) or a death which was believed to be the result of sorcery. (76)

Many natives came from far afield to attend these ceremonies.

'About July or August each year the Local Blacks were accustomed to make an excursion to meet the neighbouring tribes — those from the Manning River, Port Macquarie, Port Stephens; Gloucester, probably Vungog (Dungog?) and the surrounding districts; ostensibly for the purpose of having a fight... it is more than likely that this meeting was for the purpose of holding the Habbarah or initiation ceremonies of these tribes.' (77)

Bowtell speaks of a corroboree they attended in 1837 at Bathurst.

'There was a great gathering of strangers from distant tribes. I remember the Coal River (now Hunter) being mentioned, and also Goulburn and Kemaroo.' (78)

(75) J.V. Bowtell Loc. cit. p180.
(76) E. McKinnon "Some notes on the aborigines of the Lower Hunter River, N.S.W." Anthropos 6, 1911: 887.
(77) Marriage was not permitted among the local groups. Wives were obtained from the tribes at Port Stephens and Patterson River, either by elopement or capture. It frequently happened that the delinquent and his companions were overtaken on the return journey by the brute warriors of the women's tribe, and a fight took place between the parties.'

(77) E. McKinnon Loc. cit. p888.
(78) A.A. Bowtell Recollections of some Australian Blacks. 1890: p8.
According to Broughton the "Corroboree", or Kamilaroi, were present at a ceremony at Port Macquarie. (79)

The natives were traditionally suspicious of other tribes, and immediately after the cessation of festivities they returned to their own territories.

'While it lasts, all the blacks of the respective districts are on the most friendly terms; but as soon as it is concluded they become extremely shy of each other, and soon separate.' (80)

Nevertheless there was ample opportunity for cultural exchange, in the form of oral tradition, and trade in articles. The evidence suggests that there was considerable inter-tribal contact in connection with trade. (81)

Already the communication and exchange between the natives of the Hunter Valley and those over the Liverpool Range and beyond the Talbragar River has been mentioned. Dawson learned from the natives that exchanges of articles took place between the natives on the coast and those further inland.

'Iron tomahawks, sea-shells, with which they scrape and sharpen their spears, and pieces of glass which they use for that purpose whenever they can get them, were thus frequently exchanged for opossum skins, and sometimes for the belts of yarn ready manufactured, as well as a small opossum band of net-work, which they wear on their forehead when in full dress.' (82)


'The Kamilaroi always includes several tribes, some of whom come from a distance of eighty or a hundred miles, and probably much further.'


(81) E. W. Cowie, loc. cit.: p. 890.

(82) R. Dawson loc. cit.: p. 35.
Barrallier observed that the Hunter River natives were in possession of several iron hatchets, and concluded that it was 'not improbable they obtain them in their incursions having communication with the natives of Hawkesbury passing the mountains near Mount York - or with the natives of Broken Bay.' (83)

There is material evidence to suggest that trade induced considerable inter-tribal contact, even in these coastal areas which were not normally conducive to it. (84) Newcastle chert, for example, has been found at native workshops situated considerable distances both north and south of there. (85) Apparently, too, natives came to the Hunter Valley from places hundreds of miles distant to obtain the necessary stone for their axes, and to grind their axes to an edge. According to Mancerrow, these 'rubbing beds', where they sharpened their axes, covered many acres.

(83) F. Barrallier Account p261.
(84) W.J. Emrigh "Aboriginal Districts and Notes" p30. "The dialects of tribes in our coast districts living about 150 miles apart differs a good deal I find, and I think it is attributable to the fact that the deep estuaries that intersect our coast were a hindrance to communication between tribes, and food being so very abundant in those districts, the area over which the aboriginal was compelled to search for sustenance was necessarily limited."
'and the axes have been found in places far distant from the Hunter - evidence that they were either exchanged with the tribes north and west, or else the latter were allowed to come down and get axes for their own use... even the blacks from Queensland... were, if not welcome, at least unscolded when they came to procure axes or to engage in axe-rubbing.' (86)

There was also contact with the natives of the Hunter area, (87) and R.H. Goddard suggests that rock carvings at Yengo Mountain lay along a definite trade route once traversed by 'the natives of these and more distant parts of the east coast of Australia.' (88)

McCarthy says the Singleton natives visited Brisbane Water for marine foods, travelling along Cockfighter Creek and the MacDonald River to Mangrove Mountain, and that the Gosford natives probably returned the visits. (89)