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# History of Newcastle

AND THE

Northern District.

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## CONTEST WITH THE UPPER HUNTER BLACKS IN 1804.

In June, 1804, Commandant Menzies was shocked to learn that there had been an affray between the crew of the vessel *George*, then loading timber in the river, and the natives of the Upper Hunter, about 70 miles distant from Newcastle. The seamen had travelled up the river in one of the ship's boats to procure a cargo of 40 logs of the best cedar. The Upper Hunter natives were not used to visits from Europeans, except runaway convicts who corrupted their minds. However, a formidable body of natives opposed the landing of the seamen who began to parley with them and treat them with extreme caution and reserved civility. A peaceful landing was effected and the natives showed signs of amity. At length one of them

seized hold of a musket and tried to wrest it from the seaman, who, after a long struggle got clear with his weapon. Unfortunately a musket was fired at the natives, and this was the signal for a contest. Spears were thrown without doing any damage, and guns were fired with fatal results. Some of the natives were wounded, and one (a chieftain) was seen to fall dead. The natives suddenly disappeared, but only to recruit their ranks to a prodigious number. Re-appearing suddenly, the natives rushed forward in a mass, and the seamen gave them a volley, and precipitously retreated towards the boat. The noise of the musketry appeared to stun the natives, who stood in a heap. The seamen reached the boat safely, and pulled down the river.

#### TENS OF THOUSANDS OF BLACKS HAVE VISITED THE VALLEY OF THE HUNTER.

During many contests with the natives of the Upper Hunter in the early days it was noticed that the men and boys carried a large number of megos, or stone axes, which they procured from large gritty rocks to be found in the valley of the Hunter which was one of the few axe-rubbing places in the colony. The blacks had not advanced beyond the stone age and for hundreds of miles they resorted to the river where they procured the proper stone for axes and ground the flat pieces of stone to an obuse cutting edge, thus forming their axes by rubbing, and not by fracture like the axes found in European caves and drift. The ground axe has been pronounced much more serviceable than the early European axe made by cleavage. In sinking wells and excavations in the valley of the Hunter, acres of flat rocks deeply striated or seamed with thousands of hollows formed by the blacks when forming or sharpening their axes have been discovered at a depth of 50 feet or more, covered with alluvium or drift, which must have taken thousands of years to accumulate. Acres of rocks on the banks and in the deep bed of the river display the rub-marks of

numerous generations of blacks. Hundreds, if not thousands, of tribes have visited the locality, as the axes have been found hundreds of miles from where the stone of which they are formed could only be found, in such places as the Hunter River. How many tens of thousands of blacks have encamped on the river no one can tell, but the rocks indisputably testify why the blacks came there, and how laboriously they had toiled. The axe rubbing places were visited by various tribes of this and the adjoining colonies, as universal brotherhood prevailed at the rubbing places. There are great rubbing places on Lepstone Hill, from which place some of the Port Jackson tribes obtained their axes. Near Yaggabi, on the Gwydir, there is a rock of over two acres in extent, covered with innumerable hollows from axe-rubbing. Stone axes of the past form one of the early developments of civilisation, and belong to the pre-metallic age. The coal formations of Newcastle are tens of thousands of years old, and so are the rub-marks of the primitive blacks.

#### EARTHQUAKE SHOCK IN 1804.

According to official accounts, the district of Newcastle was visited by a shock of an earthquake on the 7th May, 1804, but the shock was not so sensibly felt as the two smart shocks of 17th of January and 12th of February, 1801. The shock of 1804 was felt at Parramatta, Prospect Hill, and the Hawkesbury, as well as on the Hunter. It occurred between 9 and 10 p.m. on 7th May, 1804, lasted about six seconds, and the motion was an undulation of the earth from north-east to south-west. There had been heavy rains in April but few electrical disturbances; therefore, the mildness of the season excited the surprise of the oldest colonists. The harvest of the year 1804 was so abundant in the colony that there was no sale for half the crop, so extensive had been the surplus grain. In fact, wheat sold at prices scarcely sufficient to cover the expense of reaping, threshing, and sending it to market; the consequence was it was wasted in a most shocking manner.