Becoming “Brave and Gallant”: decolonising the myths of Burke and Wills

Cross-cultural exchanges and the co-production of knowledge during the Victorian Exploring Expedition and the subsequent Relief Expeditions
Peta Jeffries BA (Visual Arts) Honours, Grad Dip (Environment and Planning)

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Federation University
PO Box 663
University Drive, Mount Helen
Ballarat, Victoria 3353
Australia

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ABSTRACT

The history of the Victorian Exploring Expedition (VEE), also known as ‘Burke and Wills’, has commonly been told as a story of ‘brave and gallant men’ who ventured into an unfamiliar landscape and became victims of the ‘ghastly blank’ interior of Australia. Visual artists and historians have memorialised these men as solo-hero explorers who sacrificed their youth and life potential for the sake of Australian nation. The myth of Burke and Wills is a constructed narrative and symbol of glory and achievement that denies the involvement of significant others in exploration and geographical knowledge creation.

The path the VEE created through the centre of Australia opened up the broader continent for rapid colonisation and imperial expansion. The tragic legacy of the deaths of Burke and Wills is part of the Australian identity, however, some major aspects of the VEE successes and failures have been sidelined, silenced and even completely ignored in many historical accounts. The historical and visual art accounts that contributed to the memorialisation of Burke and Wills often denied the involvement of other exploration team members, the relief expeditions who went in search of the missing explorers, various intermediaries, guides, go-betweens and significantly Aboriginal peoples’ close involvement and or resistance to interior exploration.

Yandruwandha people have been remembered as a friendly and accommodating community who assisted the explorers in their last days and who cared for John King. Within the archives and social memories are examples of agency, power, resistance, and varied perspectives of Burke and Wills. This ethnographic history asks why relations between the explorers, Aboriginal peoples and landscape have been told the way they have and provides examples of encounter and exchange, mutual adaptation and the co-production of knowledge as a way to decolonise the myths of Burke and Wills.
STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

Except where explicit reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person’s work has been relied upon or used without due acknowledgement in the main text and bibliography of the thesis.

Signed: ___________________________  Signed: ___________________________
Dated: 30-06-2015  Dated: 30-06-2015

Peta Jeffries  Professor Ian Clark
Candidate  Principal Supervisor
I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners past and present of those whose Country the VEE and each of the subsequent Relief Expeditions travelled through. These expeditions covered a large expanse of eastern Australia and the implications of these expeditions are tremendous. In particular I would like to acknowledge Muthi Muthi (Madi Madi/Madhi Madhi) and Wemba Wemba people and their Country, specifically Mary Pappin and Verna Eade who welcomed me into their homes and shared personal details about their lives. My conversations with Mary have guided this thesis. It is an absolute privilege and honour to be given such responsibility and I hope that this work improves some people’s experiences of ‘whitefella’ history. I thank Yvonne and Bruce Mitchell for all their kindness and support. I would also like to acknowledge Yandruwandha and Yawarrawarrka and thank Barbara Allen (nee Kerwin) and Faye Nicholls who also warmly welcomed me into their homes. These two women generously shared some of their memories and many wonderful stories of being on Country. Meeting each of these women has taught me a great deal about how to approach the historical past in the present. I wish that I could have met more people throughout this respectively short project to hear and learn about their experiences of colonial histories. For some people these exploration and scientific

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1 Country (as opposed to country) refers to a popular definition of Aboriginal Country developed by Deborah Bird Rose – country is a ‘nourishing terrain’, ‘a place that gives and receives life’ (Rose, 1996, p. 7).
expeditions do not represent a peaceful and friendly encounter or experience and I hope that this thesis begins to reconcile some of the previous injustices of how this history has been memorialised, remembered and commemorated.

I would also like to acknowledge Federation University; my supervisors Professor Ian Clark and Associate Professor Fred Cahir; the Royal Society of Victoria; Dave Phoenix the president of the Burke and Wills Historical Society and the creator of the very helpful Burke and Wills website; and the Australian Research Council for making this project possible.

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On Monday 20 August 1860 the Victorian Exploring Expedition (VEE) set off from Port Phillip in Victoria, with the aim of travelling through the centre of Australia to the Gulf of Carpentaria. The centre of Australia was uncharted, unmapped and as yet unknown to the colonists and settlers\(^2\) who hoped to find abundant water and lands of plenty (Cathcart, 2010, 2013). Since the 1860s many conflicting reasons, purposes and objectives of the VEE were created and documented by the colonists, historians and scientists (Joyce & McCann, 2011a, pp. 1–22). It has been claimed that, despite the many deaths associated with the expedition, the expedition achieved the objective set by the Royal Society of Victoria (RSV) – that of increasing scientific understanding of the interior of Australia (Joyce & McCann, 2011b).

The objectives of scientific exploration during the Victorian Era was that of increasing knowledge of the earth (Driver and Martins, 2005) and to support the colonial and proceeding imperial task of increasing the British Empire (Kennedy, 2013). The VEE opened up the heart of the Australian nation and allowed communication between ‘settled regions’ and the northern shores for the benefit of ‘the

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\(^2\) This thesis uses the term ‘settler’ with complete understanding and respect that it is an offensive term to some people. The term ‘settler’ represents the colonial process of imperial expansion through the invasion and subsequent dispossession of Aboriginal peoples from their Countries, the disruption to traditional cultures and Law, and the separation of families.
merchant, the squatter and the miner, and no less than the man of science’ – to implement a strategy that was perceived to ‘abridge the distance which separates’ the ‘old’ and new worlds (Joyce & McCann, 2011a, pp.14–15). The distance between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ is a space where the relations between the original inhabitants, colonial and settler, and the landscape led to the co-production of knowledges – a liminal space within which explorers, guides, intermediaries and assistants created geographical knowledge.

Colonial exploration is often remembered throughout historical accounts as a solo-hero enterprise where the one, often male, ‘explorer’ is accredited with fame and glory of discovery (Kennedy, 2013) and those of the peripheral were often denied. It is commonly understood that ‘knowledge creation’ of unknown lands was part of the broader task of the solo “explorer”, a coin termed in the early nineteenth century (Kennedy, 2014), and is most often evidenced through their contributions to the colonial map-making process (Carter, 1987). Prior to 1860’s the centre of Australia was one of ‘the last blank spaces’ in the world to be “explored” and mapped (Kennedy, 2013). In Figure 1 (below) it is possible to see the unmapped region of the centre of Australia through which the VEE was to travel and although this map is titled 1862 (after the expedition) it clearly reveals the colonial borders as known prior to the VEE.

The VEE was to set up a Depot on the Cooper Creek, make arrangements to keep communication between the rear party at Menindee to Melbourne, and while traveling to the Cooper gather
information of the country west and east of the Darling River (Macadam, 18 August, 1860). Part of the process of gathering information required the explorers find and meet specific points of previous explorations. For example, the VEE was set up the Depot at a location identified by Sturt on the Cooper in 1845, meet the exploration in 1848 of Leichhardt’s track south of the Gulf of Carpentaria, and avoid Gregory’s 1858 and 1859 route on the west and Gregory’s down the Victoria River on the east (possible due to Aboriginal resistance to colonial expansion in these regions). The purpose of these instructions was to fill in missing information on the map of Australia. As the author of an article published in The Argus in 1858 stated:

…A ghastly blank will no longer stare us in the face when we bend our eyes upon the map of this continent, and the track of the explorers, winding over that white plain, may become one of highways of commerce, dotted with centres of population, and vital with the ebb and flow of a periodical tide of travellers.
The aim was for the explorers to fill the ghastly blank with their observations and experiences to create maps that highlighted areas for further settlement and support imperial expansion. It is understood that exploration was a ‘knowledge enterprise’ that was ‘undertaken for a range of reasons – to seek resources, to conquer territory, to promote trade, to convert heathens, to gain fame, and much more’ (Kennedy, 2013, p. 1). A major priority in the collection of information by the VEE, and other expeditions throughout the world, was to collect highly important and valuable geographical knowledges that would enable movement through the landscape and later settlement (Carter, 1987; Driver and Yeoh, 2000; Driver, 2004;
Kennedy, 2007) which would then influence future political choices and policy development (Kennedy, 2014). Evidence of the Eurocentric perception of the geographical knowledge gap, ‘the blank space’, can been witnessed in Figure 2 (below) where the colonial boundaries of Queensland are demonstrated to be undecided.

The knowledge gained of these geographical regions was a shared achievement of many contributors. Following the disappearance of Burke and his party the subsequent relief parties sent out by the various colonial governments also mapped the uncharted regions by contributing to the production of knowledge process. These relief expedition explorers were also responsible for the knowledge creation that created the new colonial boundaries. Looking at Figure 3 (below) it is possible to distinguish the route taken by Burke and Wills, some earlier explorers, and significantly the routes taken by William Landsborough of the Queensland Relief expedition
In 1861 Landsborough was chosen by the Victorian and Queensland governments to search for the missing explorers and was sent from Brisbane in the brig the *Firefly*, escorted by H.M.S. *Victoria*, to the Gulf of Carpentaria. Setting out from a Depot located on the Albert River, Landsborough’s party travelled west, the furthest point reached became the new Queensland boundary (see Figure 3 - below). In January of 1862 searching for Burke and Wills, Landsborough then travelled back to the Gulf and onwards in a southeasterly direction for a short distance before travelling in a southerly direction towards the centre of Australia.
Landsborough and his exploration party, which consisted of eight people – four of who were Aboriginal – and twenty-five horses carrying adequate supplies from the *Victoria*, travelled from the Gulf of Carpentaria all the way to Melbourne. After experiencing resistance from local Aboriginal people on the Barcoo, in the same location as the Gregory expedition encountered Aboriginal resistance a few years earlier, Landsborough and his party survived and continued on travelling towards the Warrego River. On the 27 May, whilst at the Williams’s station near the Warrego River, the explorers learned that Burke and Wills had perished. Continuing their travels the explorers arrived in Melbourne in October 1862.

*Figure 3 The new Queensland boundary following Landsborough’s expedition*

*Image removed at author’s request*
Although there were seven other members, and many other
guides and many intermediaries along the way, Landsborough alone
was ‘fêted as the first explorer to cross the continent from north to
south’ (Trundle, 1974, n.p.). Landsborough reported on the quality of
land to the Royal Society of Victoria (see for example ‘Plains of
Promise’ in the Gulf country identified as ‘Burkes Land’ in Figure 3)
and at a reception in the Expedition Building he was presented with an
inscribed plate that was valued at £500 (Trundle, 1974, n.p.).
Landsborough alone was celebrated as being the solo-hero explorer
who achieved the objectives put forward by the Victorian and
Queensland governments.

However, Landsborough was criticised in the Brisbane press
for prioritising a land-grab rather than searching for the missing
explorers Burke and Wills. It was claimed that Landsborough was
commissioned by graziers to find good land to further expand
settlement (Trundle, 1974). Many Aboriginal nations, Countries, and
borders were crossed however the colonial officials were determined
to lay down their own ideas of state and territory boundaries. The
colonial officials acted quickly and although the missing explorers
were of concern all over Australia, not just in the colony of Victoria,
the political and policy advancements to support imperial expansion
and economic development where also a high priority. While
Landsborough and his party were still exploring throughout
Queensland and searching for Burke and Wills, and after they had
reached the most western point of their exploration transect, the
information provided in Landsborough’s dispatches sent from the
Albert River to Brisbane may have helped to resolve the debate
surrounding the disputed boundaries between the recently separated
Queensland from New South Wales.

The colonial officials, denying Aboriginal borders, lay down
their own understandings and intentions. On the 13 March 1862 (three
months after the commission of enquiry into the deaths of Burke and
Wills and one month after the remains of Burke and Wills were
brought back to Melbourne) Queen Victoria authorised the Letters
Patent altering the western boundary of Queensland. In the
Queensland Government Gazette, it stated:

_We do hereby annex to Our said Colony of Queensland so much of
Our Colony of New South Wales as lies to the northward of the twenty
sixth parallel of South Latitude and between the one hundred and forty
first and one hundred and thirty eighth Meridians of East Longitude
together with all and every the adjacent Islands their members and
appoints in the Gulf of Carpentaria._

The map in Figure 3 (above) shows the borders that the Letters
Patent established on the western boundary of Queensland. This
annexation added 302,600 square kilometres to the Colony’s territory
and it would be another 25 years before the region was fully surveyed
(Queensland Government, 2012). The expeditions funded by the South
Australian, Victorian and Queensland governments to rescue Burke
and Wills led to the exploration of an enormous expanse of land which
further stimulated colonial and settler interest in these previously
‘unknown’ regions.

The VEE and subsequent relief expeditions passed through lands and set up depots and camps in regions ‘that had resident Aboriginal populations’ in ‘territories that were already mapped and named’ (Allen, 2011, p. 245). The process of European mapmaking through colonisation has been understood as involving the explorers, scientist and newcomers laying their own experiences and observations over an already socially and culturally rich landscape (Carter, 1987; Allen, 2011) often denying the influences of significant others in their knowledge creation enterprises in their diaries and journals and later publications.

The journals and diaries, visual images, and pamphlets produced from such explorations increased interest in the newly explored areas and promoted further settlement by non-Indigenous newcomers and shaped relationships between peoples and places (Kennedy, 2013; Burton, & Kennedy, 2016). Additionally the assistance of others, such as Aboriginal guides or intermediaries were often ignored during the process of creating national myths of exploration as a solo hero endeavour (Kennedy, 2014). Within Australian and international understanding of historical events ‘exploration and explorers became emblematic of state power and national prestige’ (Kennedy, 2014). The creation and promotion of emblematic figures worked towards denying the involvement of significant others in exploration. In particular the myth of colonial exploration often denied Aboriginal assistance, guidance and agency and often their presence within the
landscape through which the explorers’ travelled.

The narratives of hero explorers often deny the exploration strategies and approaches of careful observation of where and how Aboriginal communities existed. These careful observations enabled the exploration parties to identify and appropriate ideal sites to camp, potential directions to travel and where to find supplementary food sources. The choice of location for the exploration Depots or long-term base camps were typically in areas which already supported people and could carry additional stock – these places were often abundant with water and feed and situated on a major water-way.

Figure 4 Depot Junction: The Bamamoro Cr. with the Darling, 7 miles from Menindie

Image removed at author's request


In the image above (Figure 4 above), it is possible to see an Aboriginal woman and child walking beside the river. The banks of the river are protected with large trees displaying what could be evidence of scarring and burning practices. These scars signify long-
term Aboriginal presence and deep knowledge of the land and water. The name given to this location by the artist Ludwig Becker is an Aboriginal word, the *Bamamoro* Creek. It was in this location that the expedition set up a major Depot in New South Wales (See image 4 above). Becker and the other exploration members spent majority of their time at this location named by others as the *Darling Depot*. Occasionally the explorers took small trips to visit nearby locations and make observations and or go about the business of supporting the VEE objectives.

The scientific objectives and instructions from the Exploration Committee of the Royal Society in Melbourne (who planned and organised the VEE) were, however, denied to the scientists. This meant that Becker was unable to travel the entire distance to the Gulf of Carpentaria and instead was forced to stay at the Darling Depot and limit his scientific data collection to this geographical region.

The exploration instructions given to each of the scientists involved in the VEE were to keep a diary and respective records of their relevant observations. Ludwig Becker’s instructions were for the position of ‘Geological, Mineralogical and Natural History Observer’ who was responsible for recording geological features, mineralogy and fossils, maps, sketches, and zoology (Exploration Committee, 1860). Ludwig Becker is however commonly known as the ‘sensitive’ ‘artist and naturalist’ of the Burke and Wills expedition (Tipping, 1979) who created many drawings, wrote letters, and kept a diary that all contribute to the history of the VEE and provide rich insight into
Aboriginal agency in and around Darling. Many of the historical accounts of the VEE or Burke and Wills myth has focussed solely on the hero explorers narrative of tragic misfortune on the Cooper and ignored the scientific objectives and outcomes of the expedition which led to the co-production of knowledge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

Recent scholarship, however, has begun to reconsider and prioritise the purpose of the expedition, as being that of scientific exploration (Joyce & McCann, 2011b) and Aboriginal stories (Clark & Cahir, 2013), and a great body of literature supports the understanding that the overall purpose of exploration throughout the world was to generate geographical knowledge (see the work of Driver and Kennedy in particular). The commemorations and memorialisation of Burke and Wills contributed to the creation of a national ‘myth’ (Bonyhady, 1991) where the solo-heroic explorer achieved celebrity status (Kennedy, 2013). This led to a longstanding focus on the causes of Burke and Wills death, the memorialisation of these men as national heroes and martyrs, and a grand narrative, which supported the myth of friendly and peaceful settlement of Aboriginal lands. To begin decolonising the myth of Burke and Wills this thesis adopts an approach that examines the brave and gallant heroes of exploration to gain some deeper understanding into why some aspects of the Victorian Exploring Expedition commemorations and memorialisation’s have neglected important encounters and exchanges that transpired in locations beyond Coopers Creek.
There is growing scholarship and understanding that exploration was not a solo-hero endeavour and successful exploration within the centre of Australia required the support of many diverse people within the geographical regions through which explorers were camped or were travelling. The people who supported exploration in recent national and international scholarship are known as guides, porters, translators, go-betweens, and intermediaries and are integral to successful exploration through Aboriginal Country (see Driver and Jones, 2009: for the hidden histories of exploration; Kennedy, 2013 and Maddison, 2014: for discussions on the use of guides, interpreters, brokers, porters and other labourers; Thomas, 2014: for discussion the diverse labour force involved in exploration; and recently Konishi, Nugent and Shellam, 2015: for discussion on indigenous intermediaries and ways of approaching history writing). Examples of the diverse perspectives and the use of Aboriginal intermediaries and their knowledges can be witnessed in the scientific observations in Barkindji or Paarkinji Country near present day Menindee.
In Menindee on October 1860 Robert O’Hara Burke (1821-1861) after dividing the exploration party, departed to set up a Depot on the Cooper Creek on 19 October 1860. According to a letter written by Ludwig Becker on the 30 October 1860, Burke and the party consisted of ‘Wills, Brahe, Patton, Charley, M’Donough, King, one of the native Indians and two Blacks from here’ and William Wright who ‘volunteered’ because he was a ‘gentleman’ who had ‘once before [travelled] in the direction & near Coopers Creek and will be therefore of good service to Mr. Burke’ (in Tipping, 1979, p. 188). Becker
explains, ‘Our leader also took with him 19 horses 16 camels, leaving behind 9 camels & 3 horses with the stores in charge of Dr. Beckler’ (in Tipping, 1979, p. 188). The smaller party then moved camp 10 miles from Menindee to the junction of the Bamamoro Creek and the Darling River to establish the Darling Depot (see Figure 4 above).

On Monday 11 February 1861, Robert O’Hara Burke and William John Wills reached the mangroves, which they believed to be the coast in the Gulf of Carpentaria, and in early March they turned to head back to meet the remainder of the Victorian Exploring Expedition at pre-designated depots within central Australia (Joyce & McCann, 2011, p.293). However, in regard to this objective, the VEE, or rather Burke, was memorialised in the newspapers as a failure (Sunday Mail, 1935). The Depot (Camp LXV) was located on the Cooper River and William Brahe was instructed to wait three months for Burke and Wills to return (Phoenix, 2012).

In Melbourne, on the 28 September 1860, the Royal Society of Victoria and the Exploration Committee heard news of John McDouall Stuart’s return to Adelaide (Morris, 1976). The South Australian and Victorian governments were competing to reach the unmapped regions and the unclaimed area in the Gulf of Carpentaria first so it was decided on the 13 October 1860 that news of Stuarts return (and potential further exploration north) should be forwarded to Burke. On the 18 October 1860 dispatches were ready and sent to Superintendent Foster in Swan Hill who sent Constable Lyons with the news to Menindee. Constable Myles Archibald Lyons (1825-1899)
was a Mounted Police Trooper stationed at Swan Hill and had already guided the VEE from Trogowell (Camp XI) to Swan Hill (Camp XV) between 4-6 September 1860.

Leaving Swan Hill on the 25 October Constable Lyons arrived in Menindee on the 5 November to find that Burke had already left and was two weeks ahead of him. On the 10 November Constable Lyons left Menindee with the saddler Alexander (Sandy) McPherson (1835-1896) and Dick – also known as Mountain, who has been identified as a local Barkindji Aboriginal guide – to catch up to Burke and his party to pass on the news of Stuarts arrival in Adelaide (Tipping, p. 206) (see Figure 6 below). Unfortunately Burke and his party had pushed on so fast that these men failed to catch up and instead on the 18 December, over one month later, Dick arrived back at the Darling Depot extremely exhausted carrying a letter signed by Lyons and McPherson containing the unfortunate news that they required immediate assistance to rescue them from imminent starvation (Wright, 1860).
According to the letter written by Wright to the Exploration Committee in Melbourne dated 19 December 1860, he sent out a small party to relieve them, which he stated was guided by Dick who had delivered the news (see Figure 6 above). Conflicting information supplied by Becker is that the small party consisted of ‘Dr, Beckler with Beludge, the native from Hindostan, with Peter the black guide and with 3 camels & one horse set out to assist & bring back the 2 confined men now living among friendly natives in a well watered country about 200 miles to the north’ (my emphasis, in Tipping, 1979, p. 191). Becker explains that ‘as the brave and gallant native guide Dick was still unable to walk & under treatment here in the camp another fellow was engaged’ – which was Peter (my emphasis, in Tipping, 1979, p. 191). The skills and excellent capabilities of Dick was not just his extreme fitness to walk such long distances and survive, but also, like Peter, the powerful ability to guide.
Guides were often required to act as ‘intermediaries’ between explorers and local Aboriginal people to help guide the expeditions through Aboriginal country (Kennedy, 2013). These ‘go-betweens’ often acted as interpreters, emissaries, agents, ‘and, above all, cultural brokers’ (Kennedy, 2013, p. 163). Presuming Dick spoke Barkindji/Paarkinji he could also speak the language of Milpulu people to the north and ‘obviously knew the country well’ (Tipping, 1979, p. 206), making him a powerful and indispensable member of the exploration party.

Aboriginal guides exhibit their great power in their specialised ‘bush’ skills, knowledge of Country and the people inhabiting it, making them remarkable cultural brokers. However, the European imagination, as Dane Kennedy observes, perceived the ‘intermediary’ as a ‘submissive native informant’ (2013, p. 162). In an attempt to gain deeper understanding of the strategies and practices of Aboriginal guides and how they related to those who they assisted, Don Baker identified four main categories which he called ‘hired help; passers on; camp followers; and, professionals’ (1998, p. 36). The attention historians and other scholars have placed on attempting to understand the motivations, loyalties, agendas, agency, and power of guides has increased in recent years (Kennedy, 2013, p. 163). However, the colonial archives, public statements and production produced by explorers and their sponsors seldom surfaced (Kennedy, 2013, p. 163). These guides and intermediaries are elusive figures who hold the power in shaping the production and circulation of knowledge.
The evidence provided in the archives associated with Burke and Wills and the role of Aboriginal guides in the overall expedition has its limitations. The most notable limitation is ‘the absence of any direct testimony by the guides themselves’ (Kennedy, 2013, p. 163), although throughout the material there are traces of significant moments of encounters and exchange. Writing Australian history, re-storying the myths of national identity, is very difficult when the archives are typically written from non-Aboriginal perspectives. This thesis brings attention to some of these archival encounters and exchanges however much more research is required to reinterpret the common narrative to decolonise the Burke and Wills myth and further reveal powerful moments of Aboriginal agency and resistance.

Australia’s understanding of Burke and Wills is mostly centred on events that transpired at the Dig Tree on Cooper Creek. At the Cooper Creek Depot Brahe waited four months but as Burke, Wills, King and Gray had not yet returned, on the morning of 21 April 1861 he left. In astonishing irony, later that day, Burke and Wills arrived at the Depot only to find it deserted (Phoenix, 2012). In Melbourne, concern was raised at the lack of news regarding the expedition and the Exploration Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria (those who organised the VEE) were requested to take action to provide relief for the explorers with whom they had lost contact (Phoenix, 2011b, p.xx). On 26 June 1861, a contingent party led by Alfred William Howitt left Melbourne in search of the missing explorers; two days later he met Brahe who
was on his way to Melbourne to report that Burke had failed to return to the Cooper (McCann, 2011, p.293; Phoenix, 2011b, p.xx). Howitt returned to Melbourne with Brahe to plan a larger rescue party and set out again, on 4 July 1861, with a party that became known as Howitt’s Victorian Relief Expedition; Brahe was appointed to guide them (McCann, 2011, p.293).

Around the same time, additional funds were sought by the Exploration Committee to send more relief, which was led by Frederick Walker and known as the Victorian Relief Expedition, to travel to the Gulf from Rockhampton, and three maritime expeditions in the SS Orkney, HCMSS Victoria, and SS Firefly (Phoenix, 2011b, p.xx). Overland expeditions were also organised by the Queensland government, under the leadership of William Landsborough to travel by boat to the Gulf of Carpentaria and then south to Victoria via land; and by the South Australian government, under John McKinlay’s leadership, to travel from Adelaide (Phoenix, 2011b, p.xx). A lot weighed on finding the men and relief expeditions came from the edges of the continent to search the centre of Australia.

Utilising the skills of Aboriginal guides, these Relief Expeditions were sent out from many parts of the various “interested” colonies to find the missing explorers. As is demonstrated by the incident with Lyons and McPherson, who were rescued due to the ‘brave and gallant’ actions of Barkindji man Dick (Tipping, 1979, p.190) the success of transcontinental expedition depended upon the
invaluable assistance of Aboriginal people. The Royal Society rewarded Dick with a medal and five guineas however it is unlikely, according to Tipping, that he received them ‘because he rejoined his tribe’ (Tipping, 1979, p. 206). With only a ‘handful’ of intermediaries leaving us with ‘firsthand accounts of their experiences’ the explorers often had a great deal to say about the guides and go-betweens (Kennedy, 2013, p. 163). Kennedy explains much ‘of that information is, to be sure, selective, self-serving, and coded in racial categories and cultural biases’ and the assistants ‘who received the greatest praise were those whose conduct could be construed as demonstrating a selfless loyalty to their “masters” under difficult and dangerous circumstances’ (Kennedy, 2013, p. 163). These points not only highlight how important it is to consider the stories beyond the solo-hero narrative, but also those structural matters contained within the archives that demonstrate how Aboriginal agency has been disguised through the construction of a narrative that supports and legitimates colonial and imperial culture.

The extended focus on the deaths of Burke and Wills as being the fault of Burke’s inadequacy or the negligence of others has become a symbol of Australia’s sense of belonging to the landscape. However, it is too simplistic to blame Burke or other members of the exploration parties. Between the dates 18 November and 30

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3 Dane Kennedy explains that almost all of these firsthand accounts come from African intermediaries and that he has found only one Aboriginal intermediary testimony from Jackey Jackey, published in John MacGillivary, *Narrative of the Voyage of the H.M.S. Rattlesnake* (London, 1853). (In Kennedy 2013, p. 299)
December 1861 a Commission of Enquiry into the deaths of Burke and Wills was held in Melbourne. The Report, addressed to Sir Henry Barkly the Governor of Victoria and President of the Royal Society of Australia, explains that the Exploration Committee, ‘in overlooking the importance of the contents of Mr Burke’s dispatch from Torowotto, and in not urging Mr Wright’s departure from the Darling, committed errors of a serious nature’ (Commission of Enquiry, 1861-2). Further the Report outlines that Burke ‘evinced a far greater amount of zeal than prudence in finally departing from Cooper’s Creek before the depot party had arrived from Menindee, and without having secured, communication with the settled districts as he had been instructed to do; and, in undertaking so extended a journey with an insufficient supply of provisions, Mr Burke was forced into the necessity of overtaxing the powers of his party, whose continuous and unremitting exertions resulted in the destruction of his animals, the prostration of himself and his companions from fatigue and severe privation’ (Commission of Enquiry, 1861-2). Further, ‘it does not appear that Mr Burke kept any regular journal, or that he gave written instructions to his officers’ which if he had performed these essential duties of a leader ‘the calamities’ may have been averted (Commission of Enquiry, 1861-2). The Report claims that Mr Wright failed to give any satisfactory explanation of the causes of his delay and the knowledge received from Becker and Beckler in the form of letters from Menindee did not “awaken” the ‘Committee to a sense of the vital importance of Mr Burke’s request in that he should “be soon followed
“up,” (Commission of Enquiry, 1861-2). The letters from Becker and Beckler, according to the Enquiry, did not consider the disastrous consequence which would likely result from inactivity and idleness.

However, these letters by Becker and Wright, and the paintings created by Becker do not demonstrate inactivity and idleness. Marjorie Tipping explains this is an ‘illuminating’ letter written by Becker to the Exploration Committee ‘…which does indicate much concern for Burke and his party and explains (without the knowledge of hindsight as produced later in the Commission of Enquiry) the problems contributing to the Wrights delay in following up the expedition’ (Tipping, 1979, p. 206). In many respects this may have been one of a few incidents, including the horses being used for the relief party to rescue Lyons and McPherson, the camels too few to carry enough stores (because Burke had taken most of the camels with him up to the Cooper) and the lack of word from the Exploration Committee in Melbourne, which contributed to the delay in Wright sending supplies up to the Cooper depot (Wright, 1860) which had later implications in for Burke, Wills, King and Gray. All this information is expressed in the letters written by Becker and Wright and sent from Menindee to Melbourne.

In the final paragraph of the Report the Commission of Enquiry clearly direct blame and responsibility away from the Exploration Committee and onto Burke. It states:

We cannot too deeply deplore the lamentable result of an expedition, undertaken at so great a cost to the colony; but while we regret the absence of a systematic plan of operations on the part of
the leader, we desire to express our admiration of his gallantry and
daring as well as of the fidelity of his brave coadjutor, Mr Wills and
their more fortunate and enduring associate Mr King; and we would
record our feelings of deep sympathy with the deplorable sufferings
and untimely deaths of Mr Burke and his fallen comrades. (My
emphasis) (Commission of Enquiry Report, 1861-2)

Two months after the Commission of Enquiry, on the 18
February 1862, Alfred Howitt returns to the Cooper Creek ‘to collect
the remains of Burke and Wills’ (McCann, 2011, p. 293). Burke and
Wills remains were placed in state at the Royal Society of Victoria,
‘where nearly 120,000 residents reportedly paid their respects’
(Kennedy, 2013, p. 242). What followed was the first state funeral in
Australia’s history, ‘an elaborate procession that attracted an estimated
40,000-100,000 mourners, making it “one of the great spectacles of
colonial Australia”’ (Bonyhady, 1991, in Kennedy, 2013, p. 242) (See
Figures 7 & 8 below). Kennedy (2013, p. 242) explains:

The explorer’s hair and other relics of the expedition were put on
public display and assumed a status similar to saints’ reliquaries.
Artists painted posthumous portraits of the two men and canvases
portraying important incidents from the expedition.
Entrepreneurs produced waxworks and dioramas that dramatized
Burke and Wills’s dying days. A monumental bronze statue of the
two men was commissioned at a cost of £4,000 and unveiled in
central Melbourne with great fanfare in 1865. Nothing did more to
demonstrate how much meaning Australia’s colonists attached to
explorers as symbols of their identity as a pioneering people than the apotheosis of Burke and Wills.

Perhaps the *Brave and Gallant* memory of Dick was sidelined to redirect away from the Exploration Committee (and their responsibilities) and focus instead towards the elevation of Burke and Wills to divine and mythical status (rather than framing Burke and as a failed and incompetent explorer) as strategy to support colonial occupation and non-Aboriginal sense of belonging in another peoples country.

*Figure 7 Burke and Wills funeral car*

Image removed at authors request

Writing Australian history that is inclusive of oral histories, social memories and examples of Aboriginal agency challenges the national sense of identity. Australian history that denies Aboriginal histories of involvement or resistance, or rather the separation of Australian and Aboriginal history, works to support concepts of *terra nullius* and non-Aboriginal sense of belonging. For the last eighteen years Barkindji people have been fighting for Native Title. This has involved a massive outpouring of historical and ongoing traumas being discussed and critically analysed to obviously distinguish whether or not people of these regions are the traditional custodians. Many people expressed to
me that they wished I had visited them sooner. It felt that I was too late and people did not want to share deeply personal and traumatic histories with me at that particular time of constant Native Title hearings. Within the Menindee area during the early 1850s Barkindji/Paarkindji people resisted colonial invasion and fighters forced squatters to abandon their runs (Hardy, 1969, p.69). However, with the assistance of Aboriginal Mounted Police the pastoralists “reclaimed” Darling River regions (Norton, 1907, pp.68-69). I assumed that discussing this particular colonial and exploration history, which included the use of ‘Native Police’ Corps, was not something that many of these people wanted to do at this particular time. Native Title was “won” in June 2015.
Background

Firstly, this section provides the background to how my personal experiences and education have shaped and informed this thesis. This reflective approach demonstrates the importance of acknowledging the way in which my own experiences have contributed to how I view, interpret and analyse the data related to this project. This section offers a contextual grounding of the study within the broader Australian Research Council funded project to highlight where and how this thesis has built upon new knowledge. This ARC Linkage Project partnership was formed between the Royal Society of Victoria and Federation University to investigate interactions between Aboriginal people and the Burke and Wills expedition – of which I was assigned the role of Project Officer and PhD Candidate. This section then provides a statement of the problem or concern and the purposes that the thesis addresses, followed by a section on its significance and scope and notes on terminology. A passage dedicated to an explanation of the archives associated with the VEE follows and, finally, the thesis outline and the main points covered in each chapter are presented.

Personal background and influences

In 2010, when I applied for the position of PhD candidate within this ARC Linkage Project, I was studying a Masters of Social Science (Environment and Planning) at RMIT in Victoria which focussed on strategies for achieving sustainable development within a human-
rights based approach. At the time, I was developing a sustainability research project in environmental history and ‘social ecology’ situated within the geographical regions through which the Victorian Exploring Expedition travelled in 1860 – in particular in Barkindji Country, and specifically in western New South Wales (Mulligan, 2015). With interest in the ways in which people relate to the arid and semi-arid zones, the rangelands of Australia, I had a particular interest in the scientific and farming practices of these regions and how, or if, Aboriginal knowledges ⁴ influenced these worldviews. Scientific relations with the land and how the understandings obtained from them influence land management and farming practice were my main interest. These approaches to understanding or researching people’s relationship with the environment are influenced by the work of social anthropologists (Ingold, 1987, p.90), eco critical theorists, environmental and social historians, and social ecologists (Adams & Mulligan 2003; Merchant, 1990, 1992, 1998, 2007; Rigby, 2015; Rose 2004, 2011) and eco-feminist theorists and theories (Merchant, 1990, 1992; Mies & Shiva, 2014; Plumwood, 2005; Rose, 2004; Warren, 1997). These scholars provide a theoretical background on which a framework that is inclusive of diverse perspectives of relating to nature and scientific knowledge systems can be developed.

Social or human ecology brings ethical and justice considerations to the approach used to develop an understanding of the many systems of which we are a part and how we frame and understand the problems

⁴ Knowledge is plural because Aboriginal knowledge is vast and extensive – it is social and cultural. See Muir, Rose & Sullivan (2010) for further explanation.
we face – problems such as those requiring the promotion of sustainability (Dyball & Newell, 2014) and community development. My research interest was to investigate the influence of scientific and cultural relations between people and place during colonisation and first settlement, where terms such as ‘cultural adaptation’ and ‘sustainability’ can be analysed within a historical framework or context that has implications in the present (Dyball & Newell, 2014). Additionally I was interested in the ‘co-production of knowledge’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples within Australia (Driver, 2012). Since 2001, I had been visiting the semi-arid regions of western New South Wales - Barkindji Country – for research associated with my art practice. This ‘art practice as research’ (Sullivan, 2010) also consisted of ecological research field assistance at the Federation University-owned station/reserve known as Nanya. In 2010, at the time of applying for the position of PhD candidate, I was already aware of some oral history from this area, however I was most perplexed by the lack of Aboriginal or traditional ecological knowledge that was written down and/or openly discussed within land management practices, and/or applied to research into and policy development of this geographical region (Sveiby & Skulthorpe, 2006). There appeared to be a division or distinction between land management, heritage values, pastoral and scientific research and artistic representations, with little evidence of interest in the land management practices or land-use prior to colonial settlement – the exception being found within strict archaeological research (Pardoe,
A great deal of what was openly discussed in regard to the people who lived in this geographical region prior to European settlement concentrated on mythical perceptions and ‘feelings’ that people experienced ‘in the bush’ and ‘arid’ regions (Shiell, 2003) or, in contrast, the ‘archaeological evidence’ of and traces of a since ‘vanished people and knowledge’ (Hardy, 1969, 1976; Hope, 1981, 1985, 1995, 2006; Hope & Lindsay, 2010). The Aboriginal presence and authority over the land was completely silenced within the scientific and art practice as research that I was witnessing. With an understanding that good policy and planning includes understanding and knowledge of the historical past (Dovers, 2000), I believed that if good land management practices and research projects (including ‘art practice as research’) were to continue to be put into action, a greater understanding of local history, and Indigenous ecological knowledge needed to be documented.

The pastoral history has been avidly explored and documented throughout the history of colonisation and settlement in these regions and considered within research objectives and land management practices (Westbrooke, 2007, 2012; Hope, 1981, 1985, 1995, 2006; Hope & Lindsay, 2010). At the time of application for this PhD position I hypothesised that the silencing of Aboriginal involvement, or perspectives of colonial history, impacted upon Aboriginal participation or inclusion within current land and cultural management practices, planning and policy; and associated scientific research. Not
only does this silencing contribute to Aboriginal exclusion from scientific research it also plays a part in the ongoing sense of separation between non-Aboriginal people and the environment. It could be argued that this separation between non-Indigenous people and the environment contributes to a national and individual sense of ‘belonging’ – which has been a continual point of interest in all my research (Read, 2000). A common understanding within the Burke and Wills story is that these explorers may have survived if they had listened to the advice of Aboriginal people (Bonyhady, 1991) and as such this thesis has begun to investigate moments of interaction for evidence of Aboriginal presence, agency, authority and knowledge exchange, and the ‘co-production’ of knowledge (Driver, 2012).

My understanding of the implications of denying Aboriginal presence and authority was influenced by the work of historians, anthropologists (Adams & Mulligan, 2003; Plumwood & Shannon, 2012; Rose 2004; Rose & Davis, 2005a,b) and cultural theorists (Muecke, 1992, 1999a, 1999b, 2004, 2005a, 2011). Within Mungo National Park or the Willandra Lake system of western New South Wales co-stewardship practices are already applied and recent research from the University of Ballarat (now Federation University) has considered the incorporation of Indigenous values (Aboriginal knowledge) into Western land management practices (Lynch, Fell, & McIntyre-Tamwoy, 2010). Research reveals that Aboriginal and Indigenous ecological knowledge is becoming more acceptable and better supported within Australia (Baker, 1992) and overseas (Sveiby
This practice is influenced and supported by significant anthropological work from these particular regions of western New South Wales (Allen, 1972, 1974, 1990, 2011, 2013; Finkel, 1997; Hope, 1985, 1995, 2006; Hope & Lindsay, 2010; Pardoe, 1988, 1989, 2003, McCarthy & Macintosh, 1961). There is however significant contrast between the research at Nanya that stems from knowledge of pioneer or grazier settlement history and identifies as ‘western land management practices’ (Graz, Westbrooke, & Florentine, 2012; Westbrooke, 2007, 2012) and the ‘environmental, social and personal’ relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and the land (Mulligan, 2015). However, Aboriginal occupation and land use was not limited to the major waterways of the Murray and Darling Rivers and the major lakes connected to the Murray Darling Basin system (Allen, 1972). I wanted to understand more about the occupation and land use of the arid and semi-arid rangelands by Aboriginal people prior to Anglo-European settlement and how and/or if the first encounters influenced Western land management practices and scientific understandings. The VEE was a highly significant scientific exploration party to pass through this area during the first settlement and colonisation of this region.

The various histories of the VEE provide substantial background to and broader understanding of the scientific and cultural relations with the land. The mid-to-late nineteenth century writings of these areas, such as the explorers’ journals and diaries and early written
accounts of this region (to be discussed within the literature review section and critically analysed throughout the thesis) provide evidence of interactions between Aboriginal peoples and the first settlers and colonisers (these two terms are used with the understanding and respect that they represent invasion to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples). Nineteenth-century writings and later archaeological research both ‘show the Darling River as the single most important human resource in the Darling Basin’ for the local Aboriginal people (Allen, 1972, p.322) and subsequently for the colonisers and settlers too, yet the land beyond the river was classed as wilderness and untamed (Hardy, 1969). The Darling River was not the only watercourse that the various expeditions travelled along.

The expeditions made use of waterholes and sections of the rivers where Aboriginal settlement existed throughout what is today known as Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. The Murray-Darling begins in Queensland, flows through New South Wales and Victoria to its mouth in South Australia and, after the Nile and Amazon, is the third longest navigable river in the world (Wells, 2013). The records from the mid-to-late nineteenth century provide some evidence that the Barkindji people, who were associated with part of the Murray-Darling basin, actually ‘moved from the narrow river margin into the drier hinterland and back again’ (Allen, 1972, p. 322). However, the various expeditions through and settlement of these regions disrupted traditional land management and cultural practices.

The Darling River is a major tributary of the Murray-Darling
Basin System, which is geographically situated southeast of the Lake Eyre Basin – a region through which the VEE also passed. The various expeditions associated with the VEE travelled through areas defined today as the catchment areas of South-East Coast, Murray-Darling Basin, Lake Eyre Basin and the Gulf of Carpentaria (sometimes referred to as the Wild Rivers) (Wells, 2015). (See Figure 9 and 10 below for overlay of catchments and Indigenous boundaries)

Figure 9: Australian Drainage Divisions and River Basin boundaries, 

Image removed at author's request

Acknowledgement of the magnitude of the impact from colonial settlement on Aboriginal land and Indigenous peoples is brought into perspective when considering this catchment management map in relation to the Indigenous Language Map (See Figure 10 above). The geographic expanse of Aboriginal land that the VEE and subsequent Relief Expeditions moved through, consisting the eastern half of the Australian continent, disrupted the lives of many of those from these language groups or nations.

The invasion of Aboriginal land and the social, political and cultural implications of this expedition for Indigenous people has received minimal focus within many academic disciplines. Yet the common or popular representations of the VEE have been shaped into the national ‘myth’ known as Burke and Wills which had major social
and cultural impacts within broader Australia (Bonyhady, 1991). Tim Bonyhady explains that the purpose of his narrative of *Burke and Wills – From Melbourne to Myth* is to provide an example of how ‘we might approach the men and women who have become legend, … to unravel the facts from the folklore’ (1991, p.9). Further he states:

> Another is to explain the emergence of the myth of legend and how and why it has changed over time. … to determine the facts, address how they were perceived from the outset, and then examine how or why they have been transformed. (Bonyhady, 1991, p.9)

Bonyhady explains that this ‘remarkable event … can tell us a great deal about the workings of Australian society’ and it is worth making a strong note that although he has given ‘precedent to the story by writing a narrative with little overt social, cultural or political analysis’ (1991, p.9) there is a need for focussed study asking why the story has become a national myth of heroic defeat. Bonyhady dedicated over ten years of research and writing which resulted in a comprehensive narrative of Burke and Wills that is ‘rich in illustrations of colonial attitudes to the land and Aborigines, art and science, and class and nationality’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.8-9). Covering the whole expedition from Melbourne to the Gulf and back to the Cooper, and also the social and cultural responses to the events that transpired, Bonyhady also provides a thorough overview of the archival materials held in the State Library of Victoria and numerous artworks associated with the commemorations of the events.

This great work by Bonyhady is invaluable to anyone wanting to understand the complex story of Burke and Wills. However, this
work, while focussing on the overall grand story of Burke and Wills, cannot draw attention to the micro details which reveal moments of close interaction between people and the landscape. Within western historiography of exploration it is understood that focussing on the heroic and grand narrative is a fundamental part of the colonial and imperial task that typically denies Aboriginal presence and agency (Kennedy, 2005, 2007; Driver, 2000, 2001, 2005a,b, 2012). Decolonising the myths of Burke and Wills entails examination of micro-narratives: a close reading of individual objects and events in relation with or to the surrounds. The purpose of examining these ‘micro-narratives’ is to provide opportunities for new interpretations of the Burke and Wills story that is inclusive of the multiple Aboriginal actors involved in this historic event (Clendinnen, 2006; Shellam, 2009). The story of Burke and Wills has become a myth of colonisation, which denied Aboriginal agency, resistance, the co-production of knowledge, actual becoming and belonging, and the mutual adaptation that occurred between explorers, settlers, Aboriginal people and the landscape.

In order to understand the denial of Aboriginal involvement it is important to understand the cultural meaning and relevance of myth and myth creation. In the publication *Mythologies* Roland Barthes defines myth as a certain kind of speech – not just a genre of traditional tales – they are a way of something (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, 1993). The Burke and Wills myth focuses on the explorers’ choice of not listening to Aboriginal advice and their ‘friendly’
relations with the Yandruwandha who, although sometimes frustrated with the explorers stupidity, took care of these of these strangers. This is one aspect of the Burke and Wills myth, a story told by many historians who have made select events involving Aboriginal people only partially visible, and who have also denied many other Aboriginal actors, encounters, and moments of exchange. The ‘partial visibility’ of Aboriginal actors involved to the Burke and Wills myth creation has supported a colonial narrative of peaceful settlement (Driver and Martins, 2005; Kennedy, 2005, 2007; Baker, 1988, 1995; Carter, 1987). To analyse the traditional linear narrative of Burke and Wills the words of Barthes and Sontag provide a framework to consider other, or peripheral aspects. They advise to not ‘merely follow the unfolding of the story’ but to also:

… recognize its construction in “stories,” to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative “thread” onto an implicitly vertical axis; to read (to listen to) a narrative is not merely to move from one word to the next, it is also to move from one level to the next (Barthes & Sontag, 1993, p.259).

The popular narrative of Burke and Wills includes Aboriginal involvement throughout the region of Cooper Creek, yet neglects other geographical regions. Many publications have focussed solely on the events that transpired in and around Cooper Creek and the Dig Tree, the latest being Starvation in a land of plenty by Michael Cathcart (2013) who incorporates Yandruwandha perspectives and attempts to draw Aboriginal interactions from the archival memory. By moving beyond the popular narrative and tracing threads of encounter in other
geographical regions, it is possible to see that there are many stories which move beyond the myth of heroic endeavour or tragic failure to another level: stories exist, not only of cross-cultural exchange, mutual adaptation, co-production of knowledge, and Aboriginal agency but also of a great deal of controversy over how the story was told and subsequently remembered. It has been acknowledged that the narrative of this colonial achievement and disaster created a myth and ‘from the beginning it was controversial’ (Hadwen, 2012, p.537). The material upon which any history of Burke and Wills can be written must be carefully analysed.

Recently published scholarship, which began to consider alternative versions of the Burke and Wills popular narrative, provide the foundation for this thesis – firstly a publication exploring the unacknowledged scientific achievements of the expedition (Joyce & McCann, 2011b) and a second publication which explores the unacknowledged *Aboriginal story of Burke and Wills – the ‘Forgotten Narratives’* – two chapters of which are included within this thesis (Clark & Cahir, 2013). Although both of these publications, and the work of Bonyhady have considered the social memory of this scientific expedition, little research has involved deeper analysis of the interactions between Western and Indigenous values of relating to the land during the years of 1860–62, the years of the Victorian Exploring Expedition. To begin to fill this gap this thesis examines ‘place-based’ (Rose, 2004) ‘micro-narratives’ (Shellam, 2009) to re-consider relations between people and the landscape. The rigorous work of Tim
Bonyhady provides an excellent overview of the Burke and Wills story, however focus on this grand narrative, or story of Burke and Wills, overshadows the significant others who contributed to the various successes and achievements of interior exploration and the creation of a national identity.

**Statement of problem or concern**

The ongoing celebration and commemoration of colonial and settler history that denies the social, cultural and political impacts on relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and the land contributes to social, ecological, cultural and educational disadvantage. This disadvantage impacts both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. If the colonial construction, the cultural representations of people and the landscape, and the events that transpired within the interior of this country have been shaped by how we understand and interpret relationships with and between each other and with nature then the subsequent histories of exploration, which signify a sense of ‘belonging’ and *becoming* of individuals, groups and a nation, need to be critically examined (Read, 2000; Mulligan and Cameron, 2003). This relationship with nature has been constructed around Western scientific understandings that have traditionally denied Aboriginal people and their knowledges. The social-ecological, political and cultural implications of this telling and *becoming* need to be critically examined.

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5 This idea of becoming is adapted from the works of Martin Mulligan and John Cameron (2003, p. 284–5) wherein they discuss the ‘deepening into’ place with ‘attentiveness and empathy’ and the promotion of relations with the land.
examined and reflected upon so as to not perpetuate worldviews which reinforce binary disconnections between people and places. History does not simply belong in the past. How we talk about the past today is creating the history of tomorrow. Without reflection on the actions of the past ‘people will be left behind’ (UNEP, 2015). Telling the stories of people and places that have been perceived as peripheral to the Burke and Wills myth works towards decolonising colonial narratives of relationships with the landscape – which subsequently works towards social and ecological justice through an appreciation of Indigenous knowledges (Neumeier & Schaffer, 2014). Creating a foundation on which to begin telling ‘new’ stories is one of the goals of this thesis.

Whilst completely respecting and appreciating Western scientific worldviews, when considering many land management practices, it could be argued that this approach has dominated relationships with nature since colonisation. Development of this land management approach has subsequently led to the denial, erasure and forgetting of some practices. Greater and or improved understandings of Aboriginal worldviews, relationships and knowledges of the land and its resources are becoming more common⁶. The Western worldviews of relationships with the landscape have been reinforced through the literary and artistic representations of the historical past that often contribute to the silencing or erasure of Aboriginal histories

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⁶This ‘Aboriginal worldview’ of relationships and knowledge with the land refers to the acknowledgement of a non-western ontology and epistemology that is commonly understood today as Traditional Indigenous Ecological Knowledge systems that prioritises the maintenance of ecosystems to be more sustainable for future generations.
and knowledges. To analyse these relationships a sociological framework of analysis needs to be implemented that is inclusive of literature, art, and various forms of knowledge creation and transmission (Barthes & Sontag, 1993). Felix Driver also discusses ‘hidden histories’ and provides sound argument for the inclusion of various sources, such as anonymous fragments, maps, artworks, and photography to make visible alternative views of history and exploration narratives (2012). Developing an interdisciplinary approach, that is considerate of how the typically binary Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews can be incorporated into the telling and teaching of the historical past, will assist in the process of reconciliation. It is hoped that this approach will also contribute to the discussions around ‘social-ecological’ relations between people and with the land (Muir, Rose and Sullivan, 2010).

**Purposes**

This PhD thesis is an integral part of the ARC Linkage Project and as such has been redeveloped throughout the project’s lifespan to take into consideration the multiple publications that have emerged since 2010 when this project began. Telling the Aboriginal stories of Burke and Wills became the main objective of the overall ARC Linkage Project. In response to these publications that have begun to consider alternative aspects of the VEE, this thesis examines ‘how’ and ‘why’ the stories have been told and what the implications of this telling are and then provides examples of other stories that have been
overshadowed by the grand narrative of the Burke and Wills myth. This thesis focuses on moments of cross-cultural exchange and how these moments have the potential to reshape the well-known perspective of Burke and Wills to be more inclusive of Aboriginal involvement, perspectives and agency. The purpose of examining how the stories have been told is to consider ways in which episodes of Aboriginal involvement can be perceived as more than being mere props or aids in the enlightenment of rational Westernisation. It is also hoped that rather than being a silent witness of the colonial narrative, Aboriginal involvement can be brought to centre stage by listening to and prioritising as much as possible the Aboriginal voice. The purpose is to also contribute to the discussion on how to shape or frame the environment as being more than just a background to the human tragedy and the drama of exploration.

Significance and Scope

The significance of this thesis is built on the understanding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a long history of relationships with the land, waterways and oceans in and around Australia and since the colonisation of Australia in 1788 these relationships have been rapidly transformed. The changes – colonisation, industrialisation, adaptation, globalisation – that have occurred especially since the eighteenth century within Australia have impacted upon Anglo-European ways of managing and relating to the land and have created rapid social and environmental change (Crutzen, 2006; Smith & Zeder, 2013; Steffen, Crutzen, & McNeill, 2007;
Aboriginal influences on the exploration and subsequent land management practices of settler Australians have typically been denied in exploration historiography (Kennedy, 2007). History has been recorded as individuals who moved through these major ecological changes using processes of adaptation, exchange, cultural creation, and with an ontology that is typically influenced and subsequently analysed within an epistemological framework stemming from the eighteenth century – the ‘Age of Reason’ (Worster, 1994). Many authors have identified that the epistemology of exploration has stemmed from a similar understanding that is inherently imperial in nature (Carter, 1987; Pratt, 1992; Kennedy, 2007). Some understand these Enlightenment and Age of Reason ideals as the nature/culture divide, as a separation of humans from nature, arts from science, and ‘places western science at the top of an epistemological ladder’ (Rose & Robin, 2004). Many recent commentators have identified that the historiography of exploration has supported the western science epistemology of exploration through the perpetuation of the myth of solo heroic endeavour (Kennedy, 2007; Driver, 2012) which subsequently denied Aboriginal agency (Curthoys and Docker, 2012). The significance of this research is that it brings to light forgotten narratives of exploration by focussing on aspects of Aboriginal agency and involvement in the Victorian Exploring Expedition to highlight how Aboriginal people contributed to scientific understandings.
Due to the recent publications and substantial documentation of the colonial narratives associated with Burke and Wills the scope of this thesis includes key objectives and approaches. Firstly, this research involved investigating the reasons for the silencing of Aboriginal voice and agency; secondly, a methodology and historiography is used that works towards incorporating multiple perspectives; and thirdly, by drawing upon key place-based encounters, it has analysed relevant texts (including oral history and artwork) to compare the archival memory with the social memory to tell new stories of relations between people and place. Due to the richness of material the research has focussed on four key themes which cross the disciplines of my personal experiences and knowledge and which hitherto have not been the focus of mainstream interpretations of the Victorian Exploring Expedition and subsequent Relief Expeditions. These four themes are loosely identified as the human/nature/culture divide and where or how relations to the landscape are shaped/created/influenced. Concepts (or themes) of belonging and becoming, and home and alienation, have also influenced this research, as has the relation between the social sciences and ecological sciences.

Within this thesis select interactions and encounters between Indigenous people, the colonisers and place are traced to analyse the epistemological and ontological frameworks that shape relationships with the environment – with nature. Additionally these historical encounters are critically and reflexively examined. Moments of resistance, collaboration and mutual adaptation are drawn upon to
analyse the cultural constructions of the various historical interpretations and to bring to light perspectives and interpretations of the historical past that have typically been denied, ignored or silenced.

Notes on Terminology

The terms ‘Aboriginal’, ‘Indigenous’, ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’, ‘Native’, ‘Indian’, ‘White’, ‘Anglo-Australian’, ‘Settler’, ‘Settler Australian’, ‘pioneer’, ‘pioneer settler’, ‘Black Fellow’, ‘Black Fella’, ‘White Fellow’, ‘White Fella’, ‘Coloniser’, ‘Bushman’, ‘Bushmen’, ‘Bushy’, ‘the blacks’, and ‘the whites’ are all used in this thesis. The use and diversity of these terms is a reflection of the complexity associated with appropriate terminology and the diversity of historical understandings, interpretations and contexts in which these terms are applied. Simply not using these terms does not deny or take away the fact that these terms were commonly used, are still used, and/or that each has its own significance and meaning throughout the history of European, Australian, and Aboriginal history.

Direct quotes have been included from the archival and textual memory. These direct quotes contain language and detailed events that may be offensive and cause distress to some readers. There are two main reasons for the inclusion of these potentially offensive quotes and distressing information. Firstly, I believe it is important for people to see (witness) the historical tone, context, understanding and interpretations. Secondly, although I have placed some filters on the material I located, I believe it is important for those who are reading these direct quotes to have their own judgment, interpretation, and
response to these quotations. It is not my intention to enforce my interpretation as the truth or as actions and perspectives that I personally believe in. It is my intention to create a document that is dialogical – I see this work as a series of stepping-stones by bringing together pieces of the historical past and present as a bricolage to provide a perspective that may not have been shown before. I hope that these stepping-stones can be built around or used to move onto something else. I welcome further discussion around these topics. Some Aboriginal people with whom I have spoken with throughout this research have thanked me for ‘going through’ the archives because for many people it is too traumatic to read past events without some form of filter. This thesis attempts to provide some filtering by placing the actions of people (individuals and groups) into a sociological and anthropological context.

In some instances the geographical regions through which the expedition travelled may be incorrectly identified due to challenges in matching explorers accounts to the Aboriginal languages map (Horton, 1996). This is a reflection of inaccurate or insufficient records and also the changing boundaries that have occurred throughout the last 200 years of scholarly inquiry into the language, clan, tribal, family, Country, moiety, and Aboriginal peoples more broadly.

The names of Aboriginal people associated with the expedition have been identified and mentioned. The names have been used as a proclamation of respect towards those who contributed to the expedition and have received little or no acknowledgement within the
popular myth of Burke and Wills, the historical narrative of the Victorian Exploring Expedition and the documentation of the subsequent Relief Expeditions.

Throughout this thesis the expedition is discussed with seemingly interchangeable identifying titles, however, there is reason for these multiple titles. Firstly, when I am discussing the myth or constructed history of the Burke and Wills story I refer to the expedition as ‘Burke and Wills’, which is what the overall expedition is commonly or most popularly remembered as. When I am discussing the overall expedition including the subsequent relief expeditions I use the identifying title of the ‘Victorian Exploring Expedition’ (or VEE). Further, the identifying titles of ‘VEE’ or ‘archival memory’ is also used when I am discussing the original aims of the expedition and the primary manuscripts. The identifying titles of ‘Burke and Wills’ and ‘myth’ are used when I am discussing the constructed narratives, as told by various historians and cultural commentators.

Throughout the thesis I refer to nature, landscape, country and Country. To some these may seem to be one and the same however there exists clear distinction between each of these terms. Firstly, Country with a capital C refers to common understandings of Aboriginal Country as outlined in the work of Deborah Bird Rose (1996). Then, country refers to areas beyond the metropolitan areas or ‘country’ in a national and international sense. Nature is discussed in binary discussions on the nature and culture divide and represents a more-than-human or non-human other (Abram, 1996). The difference
between nature and landscape is that nature is the creator and landscape is the created - landscape is culture. Australian historian Rhys Isaac defines landscape as a metaphor to understand human relations with their surroundings. Rather than simply making observation of people, Isaac explains that he ‘came to view that the most revealing document of itself that any society creates is its built environment – its total organization of terrain to create the settings for the forms of action by which it both lives and understands itself’ (2009, p. 20). Further he succinctly explains that ‘[l]andscape in this paradigm is not mere terrain; it is terrain shaped and reshaped by changing culturally specific uses’ (Isaac, 2009, p. 20). The reference to ‘landscape’ throughout this thesis is the culturally and socially constructed interpretation of nature.

**Literature of Burke and Wills and the missing archives**

A great deal of the archival material related to the Victorian Exploring Expedition has been digitised and is located on the website: http://www.burkeandwills.net.au/. This website was created by Dave Phoenix, the President of the Burke and Wills Historical Society. Many of the original documents are located at the State Library of Victoria. In 1863, the Honorary Secretary of the Exploration Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria, John Macadam, compiled the papers relating to the Burke & Wills Expedition. He wrote:

To: The Hon. James McCulloch, Chief Secretary of Victoria

Melbourne, 20th August 1863.
...I may add that all papers, note books, sketches, maps and records [of the Expedition] are carefully preserved and it is earnestly hoped that the Government will liberally support the [Exploration] Committee in giving to the world this accumulated mass of valuable geographical and other information in a suitable and permanent form.

John Macadam, MD. Honorary Secretary to the Exploration Committee.

Another aspect of the archival memory is that some papers are missing and or potentially falsely attributed as authentic manuscripts. For example, the Burke and Wills website notes that John King may not have kept a diary because there is no record of him ever claiming to have done so. However, the National Library of Australia has in its possession a manuscript indexed as *Portion of the Diary of John King, Burke and Wills Expedition*. Additionally, on the Burke and Wills website it is noted:

Wills’ astronomical records of the journey from Cooper’s Creek to the Gulf of Carpentaria went missing before they could be transcribed and have never been found. Wills’ map, prepared from these records also went missing after being lithographed by the Office of Land and Survey in Melbourne and has never been found. Wills’ field-books of the journey from Cooper’s Creek to the gulf and the return to the Cooper went missing after being transcribed by Ferdinand von Mueller and/or James Smith of the Exploration Fund Raising Committee and have never been found. Burke’s notebook
and Wills’ field-book of the journey from Cooper’s Creek to Mount Hopeless went missing after being transcribed by William Henry Archer. Archer’s daughter sold both the notebook and field-book to the National Library of Australia in 1909. Wills’ notebook of astronomical observations on the return journey were donated to the Public Library of Victoria in 1932 by Dr Baldwin of the Melbourne Observatory. (www.burkeandwills.net.au last accessed June 2015)

Gerard Hayes of the Australian Manuscripts Collection at the State Library of Victoria claimed: ‘[p]erhaps it is best to start with two blunt facts about these records. They are incomplete and to some extent they are unreliable’ (Hayes, 1996, p.14). However, a large volume of material does exist, which offers a wealth of information. Hayes notes that ‘[t]he [archive] is often visited by prospective outback travellers … [w]ho are confronted by a mass of material which is reluctant to yield its secrets to all but the most determined researchers’ (Hayes, 1996 p.14). From the outset the archival memory of Burke and Wills has obvious flaws and inaccuracies, which, contribute to the contested versions of this myth (Hadwen, 2012; Phoenix, 2010). Presently, Internet access to the surviving records has been made possible by Dave Phoenix, President of the Burke and Wills Historical Society, who created a website dedicated to the Burke and Wills Papers. Additionally the State Library of Victoria has digitised the majority of the Papers and made them searchable on their website.

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Chapter Two: Research Design
Methodology

Ethnographic History

This project has chosen the approaches taken by ethnographic historians with an environmental history framework because it enables the researcher analyse the stories that have been told in the past, to apply anthropological methods to interpreting the past, to be reflexive, and to also base interpretations on an understanding of various worldviews and cosmologies. The process of history writing using ethnographic methods and methodology was developed by historians Inga Clendinnen, Rhys Isaac and Greg Dening who trained as an anthropologist with the influence of cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (Isaac, 2009). Each of these scholars base their research and histories on the stories told within the manuscripts contained in the archives (Isaac, 2009, p. 23). Rhys Isaac acknowledges ‘that historians see nothing for themselves. They make their stories from the stories (told or implied) that they find in the archives’ (2009, p. 23). Thus, Isaac warns, ethnographic historians ‘need to be very attentive to the versions of the world that organized the stories in the past, and to the corresponding versions organizing the historians’ recycling of those stories in their own present time’ (2009, p. 23). Hence, the methodology of ethnographic history adopts methods that enable the researcher to ‘closely attend to the numerous stories’ found within the manuscripts (Isaac, 2009, p. 23) for as Inga Clendinnen states, ‘in human affairs there is never a single narrative’ (2006, p. 3).
To closely consider the multiple narratives within this history of the VEE, this thesis involves a multi- or interdisciplinary approach and analysis of the literature, including primary and secondary texts, and oral histories relating to the Burke and Wills Expedition. Included in these texts are explorers’ journals and diaries and archaeological and linguistic research undertaken within some of the geographical locations that the Burke and Wills expedition traversed and historical novels, poems, and visual artwork both from the expedition and in response to the expedition. Complementing these sources are traces of oral history and social memory including what are perceived to be folklore stories of Aboriginal associations with the Burke and Wills Expedition located in specific regions through which the expedition travelled. Including each of these narrative and visual responses to the VEE enables a democratic view of history (Clendinnen, 2006, p. 3). Providing a history that is inclusive of various perspectives, those documented in the manuscripts contained within the archives and further told or implied within the various histories/stories, offers a broader picture of the world and how or why the various stories were told.

Because this approach involves a close engagement with micro-narratives and or stories contained within the manuscripts only key aspects of the overall VEE can be focussed on in this thesis. This research has involved undertaking extensive archival and textual analysis of historical documents and an exploration of the ‘social memory’ (Bal, Crewe, & Spitzer, 1999), and the ‘cultural history’
(Burke, 2008; During, 2005) of these events within some of the communities along and near the various expedition routes. Due to time constraints and the extensive geographical distances that the expeditions travelled these focal points are a small sample of what can be done and this study should be expanded upon. Preliminary reviews of the relevant ‘texts’ and ‘textual spaces’ (Muecke, 1992) have revealed that within these communities there exists evidence of significant ‘traces’ (Muecke, 2004) of Aboriginal stories associated with the expeditions. An oral history component of the research has involved meeting with the current community members whose country the expeditions traversed. Some of the traces of associations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Aboriginal stories associated with the VEE have been explored and respectively aligned, restructured and included as an integral part of the cultural material and historical documents: the archival memory of the event.

Debates about the representations of Australia’s past call for an approach to history that focuses not only on the well-established Western traditions of historical interpretation, but also an approach that interrogates this dominant tradition through a multi-perspective epistemology and ontology to reveal an inclusive or shared history (Isaac, 2009; Clendinnen, 2006). This research framework offers a way to reveal, understand and interpret the shared history and the associations and cross-cultural exchanges and encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous.
This cross-cultural history research investigated the associations between Aboriginal people and the Victorian Exploring Expedition and the subsequent Relief Parties by utilising some of the oral history and public memory to interrogate the archival record of the events. Although this research is firmly grounded in the discipline of history, the method and ways of thinking about history and past worlds will be influenced by other disciplines, most obviously sociology, anthropology, cultural studies and art history. This methodology has drawn upon the work of a number of prominent historians working in the field of cross-cultural historical encounters and ethnographic history (Rose, 1991, 2000, 2004, 2011; Dening, 1998; Clendinnen, 2003; Shellam, 2009). Tiffany Shellam explains that this approach of contemporary ethnographic history ‘provides useful conceptual tools for grasping something of the ways in which past people made sense of their worlds: that is, their cosmology and its pragmatic enactment in actions and behaviours’ (2009, p.22). For example: the ways people make sense of their worlds is revealed through culture, through text, and through map-making (Muecke, 2005, p.2; Carter, 1987; Driver, 2013). This project utilises ethnographic methods to draw out the cultural meanings, different worldviews, and values of the nineteenth-century expedition members and their associations with the Aboriginal people and Country.

In order to study the complexity of multiple cultures and the differing epistemological and ontological constructions, it is necessary to synthesise research strategies from the arts, humanities and social
sciences, in what has been called *bricolage* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, Kincheloe, 2001, p. 679). The ethnographic history process has involved deconstructing and recuperating the central elements of the traditional Burke and Wills story to incorporate another perspective beyond the dominant tradition. Within this study, utilising the bricolage strategy has allowed a greater understanding of the different historical and contemporary epistemological perspectives (for example scientific, empirical, religious and/or spiritual) and historical and contemporary textual responses (for example visual artwork, expedition art work, short stories, fiction, oral tradition, myth) to the Burke and Wills Expedition. In other words, this bricolage created a structure for an ethnographic, culturally sensitive analysis and interpretation of diverse historical textual forms.

**The role of culture: Past & Present, Strange & Familiar**

This research is based upon a deep awareness of the role of culture. Typically culture is studied through the lens of ethnographic strategies and methods in an attempt to understand differing mentalities. Paul Ricoeur of the French *Annales* School was one of the first to write about the history of mentalities (Ricoeur, 2004, pp.88–200 mentioned in Shellam 2009, p.224). As Greg Dening has written ‘it is hard, painstaking work to see what others saw in different times and circumstances (Dening, 1998, p.78). It requires an ecumenicity of disciplines to see it – geology, botany, anthropology, linguistics to name just a few’ (In Shellam 2009, p.21–22). Shellam writes that
people in the past – British and Aboriginal – had different mentalities, different cultural systems, different motivations and therefore different behaviours – different from each other and different from present-day Australians, whether Indigenous or not’ (Shellam 2009, p.21–22). The process of understanding different mentalities always begins with feelings of distance, uncertainty, unfamiliarity and strangeness. Shellam describes her own experience:

Nineteenth-century Englishmen and Aborigines are both foreign to me though not equally so, given that I share a degree of linguistic familiarity with the British. My goal is to understand both British and Aboriginal behaviour as far as possible in terms of their own past contexts rather than impose an unthinking presentist framework. Both the British and the Aboriginal worlds need to be made strange before they can be rendered familiar. (Shellam, 2009, p.22)

In Tensions, Past and Present – Reflections on Practicing History Tiffany Shellam reveals what Greg Dening writes on the practice of history as ‘being a constant dialogue between the past and the present’ (Shellam, 2010, pp.96–7). To this Shellam adds yet another supporting statement – that ‘when we write history there is always a tension between the familiar and the strange’, and furthermore argues that tensions are at the ‘heart of the challenge that is the practice of history’ (Shellam, 2010, pp.96-7). Regarding historical methods, her advice is that ‘we should not attempt to ignore them [the tensions] in a bid to make historical narratives easier for readers to grasp and absorb, but embrace the tensions as elements that define our discipline and make
narratives *histories*’ (Shellam, 2010, p.97). For Shellam these two themes: ‘past and present’ and ‘familiar and strange’, are particularly important in her support of cross-cultural history (Shellam, 2009). Ethnographic history enables the researcher to be sensitive to the context of the time under investigation and ask *why*?

This project required the ability to work closely with sources to realise the potential, the significance and the innovation of the research. Bonyhady has clearly demonstrated how the Burke and Wills expedition occupies a very prominent place in the Australian historical imagination (1997). The research approach of ethnographic history allows the researcher to work closely with the manuscripts (including art works) and the various historical interpretations since the expedition to increase understanding of the different epistemological and ontological approaches to the histories and memories of the VEE. This approach enables aspects of this history that are typically of the peripheral to be made central.

Inclusion of the various stories of Burke and Wills are important in both Aboriginal and Australian history writing because they provide a ‘democratic’ view of this historical event (Clendinnen, 2006). However it is important to acknowledge the importance of ‘stories’ for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and how they contribute to a sense of ‘belonging’ and ‘becoming’ with the landscape. Indigenous scholar Karen Martin, a Noonuccal woman from North Stradbroke Island, has developed an ‘Indigenous research paradigm based on Aboriginal worldview, knowledge and realities’
that ‘provides fascinating insight into the importance and complexity of stories’ (Henderson, 2008, p.10). According to Martin ‘Aboriginal knowledges emanate from a notion of relatedness that is expressed through Stories’ (Martin, 2007 in Henderson, 2008, p.10). As Henderson explains further, ‘when capitalised’ the term ‘represents deep knowledge rather than narrative representations of information’. Further it is argued that Stories in Aboriginal culture ‘are highly significant and represent not only what is told but the way of telling, and are influential in shaping cultural identity’ (In Henderson, 2008, p.10). Martin explains that for Aboriginal people ‘knowledge occurs in knowing your Stories of relatedness (Ways of Knowing) and respecting these Stories (Ways of Being) and the ways this relatedness is then expressed (Ways of Doing)’ (Martin, 2007, p.63 in Henderson, 2008, p.10). This concept of Stories highlights the multi-dimensionality of Indigenous systems of relating to and within the world and how integral the maintenance of these Stories are for protecting cultural identity and sense of belonging. This research is based on the Stories that have been shared with me, the information that I have been allowed access to and the archival evidence of cultural exchange. The evidence presented to me and found within the archives was then analysed within a greater sociological and anthropological context to make links between how people relate to each other and with the landscape or Country. In some instances it was suggested that ‘only the right person can tell some Stories’, it was insinuated (and sometimes directly requested) that I was not to tell
another person’s Story. I have respected these wishes and as such have not included some Stories that were shared with me.

**Ethics and Limitations**

Formal ethics approval has been obtained for this research, however further discussion on the issues considered is included here. The ethical issue of this current research has implications that stem from historical scientific research associated with the initial exploration and expedition and also ethical issues related to the contemporary research associated with the methodologies and methods used to enable inclusion of the previously silenced voice of the ‘Other’ in this cross-cultural encounter narrative. Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her publication *Decolonizing Methodologies – Research and Indigenous peoples* offers a ‘counter-story to the Western ideas about the benefits of the pursuit of knowledge’. Briefly, the thesis of this book situates the vantage point with the ‘colonized’ from where the term ‘research’ is ‘inextricably linked with European colonialism; the way in which scientific research has been implicated in the worse excesses of imperialism’ and which still ‘remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world’s colonised peoples’ (Smith, 1999). This qualitative approach aims to decolonise the historical myths that have silenced Aboriginal agency, resistance, perspectives and overall involvement in exploration.
Ethical approach, methodology & methods

Sensitivity to these ethical issues is of high importance hence the choice of ethnographic history within a bricolage paradigm that enables examination into how and why the explorers made the choices they made and how and why the various stories of the VEE have been told the way they have. This paradigm can accommodate multiple frameworks of analysis such as critical and feminist evaluations of positivism, where Aboriginal philosophies and Western epistemologies can work together to disrupt the dominating research practices. Although Smith’s book is designed primarily ‘to develop Indigenous peoples as researchers’ it is extremely useful in gaining an understanding of both the ethical issues associated with undertaking this kind of research and the historical roots of science that has led to and maintains the oppression of Indigenous people and the environment all over the world (Smith, 1999).

Through the chosen theoretical perspectives and methodologies this research project aims to be sensitive to the issues associated with research. As Smith reminds us, decolonisation involves listening and seeing and shifting away from the framework that has maintained institutional power because research cannot be simply limited to deconstructing the dominant story to reveal a hidden narrative (1999). Therefore, working directly with and learning from the communities that these histories affected, those of the place-based locations where these historical events transpired and continue to be commemorated and memorialised, is an important aspect of the
decolonising Burke and Wills. Reflecting upon my own personal experiences and learning throughout this project also assists in the decolonising project. Ethnographic history within a bricolage paradigm offers interpretive theories and philosophies, methodologies and methods that explore the possibility of decolonisation by facing these major ethical issues of knowledge formation with multi-perspective research strategies.

This chapter has provided an explanation for the research design and approach that is considerate of Aboriginal knowledges and stories. The stories contained within this thesis are a performance of history writing – an encounter with the memories from both the past and the present. The tension between the past and present is evident when considering the social, cultural and political implications of the VEE and relations between people and the landscape. This ethnographic history comes from a subjectivist epistemology and a relativist ontology that has been influenced and shaped by personal relations with place – with nature and the landscape. This interdisciplinary analysis moves beyond the colonial, imperial, patriarchal framework of solo-hero narrative to focus on significant others from the so-called peripheral of the mainstream myths of Burke and Wills.
Chapter Three: Literature Review
Introduction

This literature review is structured around the two main reasons for the approach of how this thesis moves beyond the typical linear narrative. Firstly, the ARC Linkage project claimed, if the application was successful, that it would be the first systematic study of the history of Aboriginal peoples and the Burke and Wills Expedition and subsequent Relief Expeditions with a major focus on oral histories and the social memories. Secondly, the history of Burke and Wills is intricately connected with the ‘myth’ of colonial endeavour and tragic failure: a grand narrative or myth that has overshadowed significant others who contributed to the overall Victorian Exploring Expedition and Relief Expeditions.

Exploration history, in particular the histories of Burke and Wills, often emphasise the brave and gallant feats of the solo-hero explorer. Aboriginal perspectives and inclusion in colonial histories of exploration have been ‘hidden’ and some scholars have attempted to uncover the diverse labour force, intermediaries, guides, brokers, porters and others who contributed to the success of exploration (Driver and Jones, 2009; Thomas, 2014; Kennedy, 2013; Maddison, 2014; Konishi, Nugent, & Shellam, 2015). Inclusion of Aboriginal people in exploration of central Australia and or their broader involvement in colonial and exploration history has been argued to be integral when considered in the context of reconciliation, land
entitlement and the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives within the educational curriculum (Attwood & Doyle, 2009; Nakata, 2012). Popular understanding of Australia’s colonial history has been developed upon the method of ongoing re-telling of stories associated with these white heroic narratives (Attwood & Doyle, 2009). These stories are known as the foundation histories and identified as holding mythical status within the social and cultural understandings of colonial settlement (Attwood & Doyle, 2009). These ‘white heroic narratives’ are made famous by ‘monumental’ histories, history’s that deny Aboriginal oppression, possession and dispossession (Attwood & Doyle, 2009, p. 320). It has been argued that the perpetuation of some colonial narratives works towards maintaining and re-inflicting the violence of colonial times – in particular invasion and dispossession of land and culture which ultimately contributes to the breakdown of social cohesion (Rose, 2004). Bain Attwood argues that a critical approach to history is needed, one that attempts to ‘understand the colonial past’ (Attwood & Doyle, 2009, p. 294). For example, Marie Fels pointed out that ‘recent work on the history of the Port Phillip District historians tended to see the past in terms of white baddies and Aboriginal goodies, rather than grasp the complexity’ (Attwood & Doyle 2009, p.294). This is a key point to consider when researching the histories associated with Burke and Wills and the ‘matter of history’ (Attwood & Doyle, 2009); the history of Burke and Wills has become a national ‘myth’ of heroic defeat set in a harsh and intractable environment.
The matter of history that Attwood and Doyle are concerned with is how to write history that challenges the foundation stories and monumental histories that contribute to the creation of national myths (Attwood & Doyle, 2009). A number of scholars have identified that writing a more representative history of exploration requires an approach that is democratic, inclusive of diverse perspectives, and inclusive of more multivocal accounts on the practices and policies of European exploration (Clendinnen, 2006; Attwood, 2009; Konishi, Nugent, Shellam, 2015). The publication of *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills: Forgotten Narratives* in 2013, excluding the project objective of recording oral histories, fulfilled most of the ARC Linkage Project Aims by recuperating from the archives the stories of Aboriginal involvement in the VEE. Many of the approaches or methods adopted by the contributing scholars involved scanning the archival memories for traces or snippets of Aboriginal perspectives or involvement – by other contributors, these traces or snippets were broadly termed accounts of oral histories related to the Burke and Wills story. Tracing Indigenous agency was not a focus of this publication. More work is needed to place Aboriginal people back into the narrative of Burke and Wills, by building upon this publication, which focussed significantly on the silencing and erasure of Aboriginal involvement. In a review of this publication, Tiffany Shellam significantly states:

Tracing the ‘Australian silence’ though, is important, as Leigh Boucher points out: ‘to consider the political implications these
different remembering’s’ and forgetting’s ‘might have for notions of territorial entitlement’. (Shellam, 2014)

Investigating or revealing ‘Indigenous agency’ requires careful and close readings of the archival memory and I would argue analysis of the archival memory and social memory needs to be made. Another aspect of revealing Indigenous agency involves tracing moments of erasure and questioning why or how this has occurred. Shellam (2014) referring to the words of Boucher explains that the acknowledgment of Indigenous involvement may well have hindered the creation of national myths, and different remembering’s may well have ‘political implications’ (Boucher, 2013). As such, reasons for erasure and silencing need to be carefully considered. This involves developing an understanding of the complexity of the cultural, historical and geographical landscapes of the various eras by telling stories of people and place in the context of the Victorian Exploring Expedition, the Relief Expeditions and Aboriginal people and the landscape.

The thesis’ research aims are achieved by attempting to prioritise the Aboriginal voice and perspective and by tracing moments of agency, co-production of knowledge and understanding, and the broader historiography of Aboriginal history within Australia. The telling, or the popular social and cultural understanding, of the Burke and Wills narrative follows the pattern of imperialism and colonisation within Australia – which led to the creation of the ‘myth’ of heroic solo-endeavour and human tragedy within a ‘harsh’ and unforgiving environment. The myth of Burke and Wills created a a
challenging and unforgiving landscape, in which only the bravest and boldest could survive. Within this myth the Aboriginal voice, perspective, involvement and agency was commonly denied, erased or ‘silenced’ (Boucher, 2013).

However, the uniqueness of the Burke and Wills myth is the focus on Burke denying Aboriginal assistance from the Yandruwandha peoples of the Cooper Creek region, the constructed understanding of the inadequacy of Nardoo as a sufficient nourishment, and the cultural and social creation of the landscape as ‘desert and uncultivated’. The created image of a landscape as desert and uncultivated operates politically on two levels. Firstly, landscape as ‘desert and uncultivated’ denies Aboriginal management of the land (which is a contradiction when considering their use of Nardoo), and ultimately their presence in the landscape, and secondly, it asserts the ‘doctrine of terra nullius’ (Attwood & Doyle, 2009, p. 296). It is commonly accepted and understood that Burke refused Yandruwandha help, subsequently some men perished in what is commonly perceived as the ‘uninhabitable’ centre of Australia. King, however, survived because he was cared for by these locals, for without their help surely he too would have died (King, 1861a,b). King states: ‘[a]t first they were very kind to me, and gave plenty to eat; after that they tried to drive me away, but I stuck to them, and the women gave me some nardoo every day, and sometimes one of the men would give me some fish’ (1861b). The archival memory of the Victorian Exploring Expedition and Relief Expeditions is filled with
moments of such encounter and interaction, yet the historians have mostly focussed on the story of Kings survival being due to the friendly and accommodating Yandruwandha.

This erasure and denial of Aboriginal involvement, and also the construction of the landscape as barren and hostile, supported the concepts of a solo-hero endeavour and a capable Australian Bushman. This ‘hyper-separation’ between Aboriginal involvement and solo-hero explorer, and ‘backgrounding’ of the landscape is perfectly understood through the theoretical work of Val Plumwood (Plumwood, 1993, 1995, 2002a,b, 2005, 2008; Plumwood & Shannon, 2012; Rose, 2013; Driver, 2013). Many of the historians have constructed the story of Burke and Wills as a monumental history of tragic solo-hero endeavour where the landscape, and all that belongs in the landscape, needed to be controlled and dominated by capable bushmen.

This review outlines the narrative construction that was based on the understanding that men needed to be capable bushmen, who possessed the skills needed to survive in a perceivably hostile environment. Additionally, focus is placed on the mythmakers who placed blame on the environment as being a major reason for, or a contributing factor to, the explorers’ deaths or, more specifically, held Burke responsible as he was identified for his inability to listen to the advice of the locals and or to develop familiar relationships that would assist his learning of how to live in this landscape.

It is commonly perceived that the explorers’ lack of knowledge in the correct preparation of nardoo contributed to their deaths
(Hendlass, 2012; Clarke, 2008, p. 134). Nardoo [*Marsilea*] is a ‘low-growing water fern that produces edible sporecases’ (Clarke, 2008, p. 121). Following this narrative of blame being focussed on the incorrect preparation of nardoo subsequently places the responsibility for the outcome back onto the explorers, rather than perpetuating the perception that they were solely the victims of the ‘hostile’ environment. This highlights that there is evidence throughout the literature that focuses on the reasons for the explorers’ deaths that ultimately centres on discussions pertaining to the explorers’ lack of local knowledge or lack of education in the ways of ‘being’ in this environment.

The review is divided into four sections. Firstly, an analysis of the literature associated with the construction of the Burke and Wills story shapes the social, cultural and political implications of how the narrative is told. This first section highlights the point brought forward by Tim Bonyhady: that the deaths (and the perceived failure) of Burke and Wills have come to represent European unwillingness to learn from Aboriginal Australia. This point is a key foundation on which this thesis is situated.

Secondly, the relationship between the myth and erasure of Aboriginal involvement is analysed. This section traces the key publications that have begun to examine the erasure of Aboriginal involvement and how the telling of the story of Burke and Wills mirrors Aboriginal historiography more broadly. Significantly, this section begins to identify which narratives have incorporated
Aboriginal associations and how the public or social memory has been shaped by the deaths of Burke and Wills.

Thirdly, the review discusses how the myth of Burke and Wills has shaped relationships with the environment and how the environment or landscape has been portrayed and constructed. This aspect focuses on the scholars who have considered the social and cultural relations with the environment through which the explorers passed.
Burke and Wills: heroes or failures? – The creation of the myth

Within Australian history the narrative or story of Burke and Wills has become a myth. Tim Bonyhady has most clearly argued this in his 1991 publication titled *Burke and Wills - From Melbourne to Myth* (Bonyhady, 1991). Bonyhady identified the progression of the cultural and social construction of the story to suit the purposes of the colonial endeavour. Discussing the drama circulating throughout the whole affair, the extraordinary storyline, the wealth of information created in response to the event – including literature and artistic representations – the extensive documentation of the expedition from members of the party, Bonyhady has specifically identified the key points that have been persistently remembered and retold (1991).

From the time of the expedition it was commonly believed that Burke was anyone but a bushman and subsequently not suitable for the task. The work of Bonyhady is the most comprehensive account of the Burke and Wills ‘story’ that has been published to date. Within this publication is a whole chapter dedicated to the point that ‘almost anyone but a bushman’ was employed as a member of the VEE (Bonyhady, 1991, pp.43-60). From an academic perspective, the work of Bonyhady is the foundation of any further research into the narrative construction of Burke and Wills.

Bonyhady was coming from a background and interest in ‘art, science and exploration in colonial Australia’ and became interested in the Burke and Wills expedition with the aim of ‘recharacterizing’ the ‘archetypal example of Irish-English Australia as German’ (Bonyhady,
The German influence and focus however was overpowered by the realisation that ‘no one writing about Burke and Wills had worked their way through the 14 boxes of manuscripts’ held within the State Library of Victoria, and that ‘(e)qually, no one had made more than a cursory dip into the contemporary press - a rich storehouse of both information and opinion about the expedition’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.8). This is an important point to remember whilst reading the various histories and artistic interpretations of the Burke and Wills story.

Bonyhady identified that when ‘things went wrong’ with the expedition ‘the Germans were blamed’ and after immersing himself in the manuscripts he found himself writing a very different book from what he had originally set out to write because he ‘discovered how little was known about the expedition despite its fame’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.8). Rather than ‘simply documenting the German involvement in the expedition’, Bonyhady ‘wanted to explain it, which proved inseparable from explaining many other aspects of the expedition’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.9). This led to his focus on the German contribution shrinking to a ‘small part of a much larger undertaking’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.9). The aim for Bonyhady was to retain the ‘story’ of Burke and Wills.

Bonyhady focuses on the creation of the myth rather than creating the myth itself. Many of the histories, as mentioned above, were written without working with or referring to the manuscripts held within the State Library of Victoria – from a historiographical
perspective it could be assumed that these published histories are not based on fact and are subsequently hearsay or folklore. These histories of Burke and Wills constructed a national narrative of lone solo-explorers who struggled against a harsh and intractable environment. Felix Driver, whose work on how exploration history has long been considered a solo task, argues for the exploration of the hidden labour and knowledge within the archives of exploration (Driver, 2012).

There are many publications situated within what Bonyhady identifies as the documents that contributed to the creation, fame and popularity of the Burke and Wills story, such as those of Clune, 1944, 1951; Moorehead, 1963 and Southall, 1961. It could be argued that these stories do not actually know about the expedition from an archival sense but instead have been informed by local knowledge and the oral tradition – these stories are part social memory and part of the cultural construction of nation building. A strong social understanding or memory of Burke and Wills is that they lacked the bush skills needed to survive.

Broadly speaking the literature relating to Burke and Wills created images of a colonial story, where tragic failure, incompetence and scene setting created a landscape that demanded capable bush skills. An example of this scene setting includes the 1877 perspective of Marcus Clarke, who took the view that the expedition was part of ‘a most glorious era in [the] history of Australian discovery’ (Clarke, 1877, p.201f). Another example is Ernest Favenc who, in 1908, considered the Burke and Wills expedition was ‘of greater notoriety
than that of any similar enterprise in the annals of Australia’ (Favenc 1908, p.186). Then, in 1928, Ernest Scott noted that the Burke and Wills story is one of the most famous of Australian inland exploratory enterprises and that the ‘éclat with which it started and the tragedy of its ending have invested it with an atmosphere of romance’ (Scott, 1928, p.231). Further Clarke claimed, ‘It is sad to think that a few forgotten fishhooks would have preserved their lives’ (1877, p.201f.). Disproving this claim, Bonyhady reveals that the expedition did not forget their fishhooks and instead suggests that although the explorers ‘knew that Cooper’s Creek was stocked with fish and they still had some of the 200 assorted fish hooks with which the expedition had started, they were either unable or made no attempt to catch any’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.138). These statements reveal a significant point about the social, cultural and political significance of Burke and Wills: the saga of Burke and Wills has been built upon information, which is either false or misleading, and these stories have shaped the retelling of the national narratives to symbolise incompetence.

Perpetuating the story of incompetence, in particular Burke’s incompetence, many authors have focussed on his lack of bush skills. Clarke, in 1877, observes ‘[I]t is lamentable to read of the blunders of some, the gross neglect of others, and of the series of appalling disasters, which followed from inexperience, incapacity, and rashness’ (Clarke, 1877, p.201f.). In 1865 Tennison-Woods:

considered the appointment of Burke was an unfortunate one, and but that the committee was composed of men who (with one exception) knew little or nothing about exploration, it would have
been inexcusable. Burke was not a bushman, knew nothing of the practical duties of a surveyor, had not been many years in the colony, and, as far as can be gathered, had not had his attention directed to Australian geography or exploration. (1863, p.349 in Clark, 2013, p.51)

Tennison-Woods was not the only commentator who directed the lack of Bushmen skills to Burke’s demise. Wildey, in 1876, ‘observed that Burke was ‘totally ignorant of bush life’ (emphasis placed); Allen, in 1882, agreed that Burke ‘had no bush experience, but was a man of great daring and indomitable courage’. Scott, in 1910, concurred that Burke’s:

lack of qualifications for the position was only too clearly proved by the uninterrupted sequence of blunder and disaster which make up the story of the expedition … He was no bushman; knew nothing of surveying’. (Scott, 1910, p.309. In Clark 2013, p.51)

In 1862 Jackson, who was a close friend of Burke, defensively purported that Burke ‘diligently prepared’ himself for exploration by reading previous explorers’ records as a way to acquaint himself with the knowledge of the interior (Jackson, 1862, p.8f.). Then, in 1897, Rusden ‘considered Burke lacked the kindly patriarchal control needed to win the affection of the native races, and lamented that the expedition was “unaccompanied by an Australian native whose skill as a hunter would have spared the carried food for emergencies”’ (Rusden, 1897, p.112 in Clark 2013, p.51). Many writers and historians in the decades immediately following the VEE conveyed the sentiment that the lack of bush knowledge, and the lack of
Aboriginal involvement in the expedition, appeared to be a common understanding during the initial years following the expedition.

Supporting the point made by Bonyhady that these stories were informed by those who made little or no reference to the manuscripts located within the State Library of Victoria, it could be argued that instead they were based on social memory, oral history and local knowledge and that they were fuelled by a sense of colonial competitiveness or desire to belong (and to prove this belonging) within the Australian landscape with the appropriate bush skills. Ian Clark identified the lack of bush skills and the social perception of Burke during the expedition and shortly after (2013, pp.47-60). Significantly, Clark identifies the ‘exaggeration’ of these historical accounts. Charles Ferguson, the expeditions foreman, in his published reminiscences 30 years after the expedition claimed that most members of the VEE were brought up as gentlemen and completely unfit for exploration (Ferguson, 1888, p. 385). Clark points out that Robert Fletcher was the only ‘gentleman’ on the expedition (2013, p. 57). However, the point made by Ferguson is still strong – he believed the explorers lacked the bush skills needed to survive.

It is worth considering where the perspectives of Burke having insufficient bush skills originated and also what contributed to this seemingly common belief that Burke may have been ‘successful’ if he had been an experienced bush person, surveyor and/or explorer. The common myth of Burke was that he was either a hero or a failure, and the Burke and Wills expedition was either a success or tragically
unsuccessful. Jan Fullerton, the Director-General of the National Library of Australia, in writing the foreword in a catalogue for an exhibition organised by Bonyhady in 2001, considered that the Burke and Wills transcontinental expedition was ‘one of Australia’s great stories. The deaths of seven members [not including the deaths of Aboriginal people who encountered the expedition] of the exploration party, despite the expedition achieving its goal of reaching the Gulf of Carpentaria, have been transformed in the past 150 years into a national myth of heroic endeavour’ (emphasis placed) (Bonyhady, 2002, p.iii). 10 years after the publication of From Melbourne to Myth, Tim Bonyhady expressed that, other than the bushranger Ned Kelly, no other colonial figures have loomed as large in Australian culture. Further, he exclaims that ‘[w]hile successive generations have focused on very different aspects of the expedition and assessed it very differently, they have never lost interest in it. The very complexity of the expedition, always the stuff of conflicting accounts, has made it ripe for interpretation and reinterpretation’ (Bonyhady 2002, p.6–7).

However, the amount of information associated with Burke and Wills is overwhelming, and as Bonyhady alludes above, it is difficult to tell ‘other versions’ without getting drawn into the grand narrative of Burke and Wills as hero or failure.

The indecision about whether or not Burke was a hero or a failure continues, although some see Burke’s failure as the overall success of the whole endeavour. In 1913, 50 years after the Expedition, the perceived causes of the explorers’ deaths were still a popular topic.
Many still believed and were perpetuating the story that the chief and most fatal blunder was the choice of its leader: historian and educator W.H. Fitchett describes Burke as a man ‘in the prime of his life, a man of courage and energy; but he knew absolutely nothing of the Australian bush, and, as events proved, had none of the qualities of a leader’ (Fitchett, 1913, p.368). A key point that Fitchett makes is:

It is not quite true to say that the Burke and Wills expedition did not add a new chapter to Australian geography, but it was its failure, not its success, which yielded this result. Burke and his companions had disappeared from human knowledge, and a wave of alarmed pity swept over all Australia as a result. Expeditions started from almost every point of the compass to search for the lost men, and in this way much useful work in exploration was done. But it is in harmony with the whole story of the Burke and Wills expedition that, not its success – such as it was – but its tragical (sic) failure, enlarged the area of knowledge about Australia. (Fitchett, 1913, p.367)

These points made by Fitchett support what Bonyhady articulated many years later. Enlarging the area of knowledge about Australia was ultimately the main objective of exploration and this expedition. (This theme will be discussed further in sections to follow.) Burke and Wills are typically discussed in isolation from the rest of the expedition party, and the whole expedition is usually analysed without consideration of the subsequent relief expeditions (which Fitchett acknowledged ‘enlarged the area of knowledge about Australia’). By focussing on or maintaining the ‘story’ or the grand narrative of Burke and Wills – as failure or hero/success or
unsuccessful – the intricacies of all those significant others involved is lost and overshadowed. As mentioned above, Bonyhady ‘wanted to explain’ German involvement, ‘which proved inseparable from explaining many other aspects of the expedition’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.9). The creation of the Burke and Wills myth has sidelined German involvement, the cameleers involvement and, of significance to this thesis, the Aboriginal involvement.

The texts discussed within this literature review focus primarily on the histories that have been written about Burke and Wills as strategy to understand the development of the myth. Understanding the development of the myth provides insight into the cultural and social motivations of the various times within Australian exploration historiography and provides interesting contrast to the social memory and oral histories. Internationally there is a growing body of literature on the culture of exploration (Driver, Kennedy), the hidden histories of exploration (Driver, 2012), Indigenous go-betweens (Metcalf, 2005), intermediaries and brokers in exploration (Kennedy, 2013; Konishi, Nugent, & Shellam, 2015) and literature of the archives of exploration (Carter, 1987), oral histories (Thomson, 2006; Perkins & Thomson, 2006) and Aboriginal guides (Baker, 1998). The work of Bonyhady, although placing substantial focus on the manuscripts, has provided a rather broad cultural and social view of the Burke and Wills story.

The historiography of Burke and Wills reveals that each history has provided various interpretations and presented social and
cultural messages to suit each political era. Firstly, the story of Burke and Wills represents a grand narrative of colonial occupation and imperial expansion; secondly, in contrast to the popular stories of death in an uncultivated desert the environment was actually abundant and flourishing with potentially enough resources to support the expedition party; and thirdly, it is commonly believed that Burke and Wills were incompetent as explorers, colonisers and ultimately lacking in the necessary bush skills. These key points, from which to base academic research of interactions between the expedition and Aboriginal people and the environment, have not been critically analysed or examined in any of these stories about Burke and Wills. Assuming that the social, cultural and political implications of the Burke and Wills story are based on the understanding that Burke was a poor choice as leader; that Burke was a failure; that Burke was a hero; that the expedition was a success; or that Burke and Wills were unsuccessful and in their failure the greatest knowledge of inland Australia was created, it is possible to consider the ways in which these myths have created and informed relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and relations also with the environment and the construction of landscape.

The first significant point from Bonyhady is that he has not written – as many others have done – an ‘account of exploration dominated by the trudge of the journey, the physical business of a small group of men making their way into new terrain, what water they found and whether the pasture was good. Nor does he ‘look on
exploration as simply an epistemological strategy, or explorers’
dispatches and journals as nothing more than the stuff of literary
criticism’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.9). In order to consider the interactions
between explorers, Aboriginal people and the environment a non-
conventional account of the journey needs to be carefully examined:
the physical business needs to be analysed from an alternative
standpoint to that of the colonial endeavour; the idea of new terrain
must be equated to the fact that the landscape was old terrain to the
Aboriginal people whose Countries the expedition traversed; and, by
drawing on archival evidence or traces of finding water and good
pasture, the presence of Aboriginal communities demonstrated whose
resources were being stripped by the expedition party and subsequent
settlement by the squatters.

The second significant point made by Bonyhady is that two
aspects of the expedition exist: the extraordinary story and the ‘social,
cultural and political significance’ that are ‘not always easy to
combine’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.9). Further, Bonyhady acknowledges
that ‘[g]iving precedence to the story may mean that one does not
draw out the broader significance of certain events; too much analysis
may mean that the story gets lost’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.9). So because
the ‘drama of the expedition has been integral to its fame’ Bonyhady
has ‘opted to give precedence to the story by writing a narrative with
little overt social, cultural or political analysis’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.9).
The power of the ‘extraordinary story’ and the ‘social, cultural and
political significance’ of the story, and the myth, must be considered
from the perspective of Aboriginal involvement and the relationship with the environment. Although Bonyhady (1991, p. 9) has created a story that is ‘rich in illustrations of colonial attitudes to the land and Aborigines, art and science, and class and nationality’ he has not considered the social, cultural and political implications of this expedition, or focussed on micro-narratives of cross-cultural encounter, or traced evidence of Aboriginal agency – an approach that can challenge the monumental history of solo-hero endeavour. Burke and Wills, the Relief Expeditions, bushmen, Aboriginal people – their knowledge, their Country – together with the social, cultural and political significance and implications of the expedition, the myth, and the various stories, are all themes that have not been considered in relation to each other in any other writings or responses to the Victorian Exploring Expedition and the ‘co-production of geographical knowledge’ (Driver, 2012).

The legacies of the Victorian Exploring Expedition and the subsequent relief expeditions create a solid foundation from which to incorporate the themes of social memory, cultural knowledge, ecological knowledge, ‘co-production of knowledge’, mutual adaptation and intercultural or cross-cultural exchange (Driver, 2012). Driver explains that exploration parties gained geographical knowledge with the assistance of local people and that the solo-explorer narrative is not entirely true (Driver, 2012). Others argue that exploration success depended upon the knowledge of local people, known as intermediaries (Kennedy, 2013) and guides (Baker, 1998).
Within the Burke and Wills grand narrative the assistance and knowledges of all those involved in the VEE has been erased through the historians accounts. However, it has commonly been known that Burke openly denied Aboriginal assistance on the Cooper Creek, which leads to the final significant point made by Bonyhady that: ‘[m]ore than any other event in nineteenth-century Australia, the deaths of Burke and Wills at Cooper’s Creek have come to represent both the unwillingness of Europeans to learn from the Aborigines and their more general inability to understand the land’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.311). If the deaths of Burke and Wills represent the European unwillingness to learn from Aboriginal Australia it is worth analysing what the Relief Expeditions represent in regards to their understanding of the land and their learning from Aboriginal peoples and their landscapes.

Within the literature associated with Burke and Wills there exists conflicting views between those of the bush and those of the city; those who are of the Royal Society of Victoria and those who are not; the social memory and the cultural memory; and, significantly, the collective colonial memory and the Aboriginal memory.
Myth and ‘erasure’

With the understanding put forward by Bonyhady as deaths of the leaders of the expedition representing the European unwillingness to learn from Aboriginal Australia this section of the literature review traces the myth of Burke and Wills for evidence of this cultural and social awareness throughout the last 150 years. There is one key academic publication related to the Aboriginal involvement in the expedition that this review will draw upon. Whilst Clark and Cahir’s (2013) publication was a seminal moment in discussion about interactions between Aboriginal peoples’ roles and the VEE – there were other publications that began to consider Aboriginal people involved with the expedition (Tipping, 1978a; Tipping, 1978b; Tipping, 1979; Taylor, 1983; Slattery, 2004; Lewis, 2007). Within the Burke and Wills narratives there exists evidence of Aboriginal involvement and contribution that could have been included, however, due to the social and cultural perceptions and attitudes towards Aboriginal people throughout time these involvements and contributions have been silenced, ignored, dismissed and erased.

To support the argument that Aboriginal history has been silenced, ignored, dismissed and erased the broader field of Australian Aboriginal history will also be drawn upon. Drawing upon the phrase by W.E.H. Stanner (2009), that it is a ‘structural matter’ that Aboriginal perspective has been left out of this story, this section analyses that barrier, which more modern responses to both Stanner and Henry Reynolds have provided (Rolls, 2010). Building upon the
observation made by Stanner, Henry Reynolds published *Why Weren’t We Told* in 1999 as a personal reflection on how Australian historiography of the mid-twentieth-century neglected to include Aboriginal people in the national story. Reynolds notes that many people who were taught Australian history were not told of Aboriginal presence, least of all Aboriginal agency. Mitchell Rolls turns this perception around to argue that people did not want know of the Aboriginal-settler conflict and that ‘people *now* want to know’ (2010). Stanner, in his 1968 ABC Boyer Lectures on ‘The Great Australian Silence’, was drawing attention to the more generalist Australian historiography, rather than the academic research into Aboriginal-settler relations (Rolls, 2010). The generalist Australian histories of the Burke and Wills story and myth have overshadowed Aboriginal involvement in the VEE by focussing on the deaths of Burke and Wills.

The generalist stories or myths of Burke and Wills have involved discussions on what caused the deaths of Burke and Wills on the Cooper Creek and have revolved around issues of poor management on the part of the Royal Society of Victoria (RSV) and the Exploration Committee, poor leadership on Burke’s account, William Wright and the Supply Party, the German Brahe and, significantly, an overall lack of bush skills. The Royal Commission (Victorian Parliament, 1862), which enquired into the deaths of Burke and Wills, focussed on only two of the seven members of the expedition party who died (Fitzpatrick, 1963, p.471). It was believed
that ‘Burke and Wills died of starvation’, ‘Gray probably died of scurvy, aggravated by under-nourishment’, ‘Stone, Purcell and Patton died of scurvy and so too, probably, did Dr. Ludwig Becker…’ (Fitzpatrick, 1963, p.471). The inability to listen to the advice of Aboriginal people cannot just be directed to Burke, however the blame directed towards Burke has been a focus in this foundation history. The RSV, during the centenary commemorations, identified specific reasons for the expedition failure, in particular those arising from the work of Fitzpatrick (1963). It was the deaths of the leaders of the exploration party that ‘struck the public imagination’ and it was mentioned during the RSV centenary celebrations that ‘[n]o member of the expedition should have died had proper use been made of the food so lavishly provided by the Exploration Committee’ (Fitzpatrick, 1963, p.471; and see Kennedy, 2013, Chapter 8). However, the public seemed acutely aware of other reasons for the explorers’ deaths.

In response to the deaths being caused by scurvy, Fitzpatrick argued that in the 1860s ‘people were less aware of its [scurvy] causes and cure then they are now [1963]. But Captain Cook knew more about it in the eighteenth century than members of the Burke and Wills expedition in the nineteenth’ (Fitzpatrick, 1963, p.471). Further, she adds ‘Other Australian explorers, such as Eyre and Leichhardt, avoided it by watching and imitating the aborigines’ (Fitzpatrick, 1963, p.471; see also Clarke, 2008, in particular pp. 120-136 for contrast between Burke and Wills and other explorers). Throughout different periods there have been various methods of remembrance or
forgetfulness that relate to the Aboriginal role in exploration, in particular Fitzpatrick’s centenary publication did not list ‘adopt Aboriginal knowledge’ as a cause of failure for the VEE.

In order to create a picture of what happened on the various expeditions, the explorers’ involvement with Aboriginal people and the nature of these interactions, the diaries and journals associated with the expeditions will be utilised as they offer first-hand accounts. These include the various documents of: William John Wills (1853a,b, 1856, 1860, and 1863); Herman Beckler, the physician and botanist, published in 1993; the foreman, Charles Ferguson, published in 1888; the expedition assistant William Brahe (1862, the Argus, 1910); Alfred William Howitt, who led the Victorian relief expedition and which includes personal reminiscences and ethnographical publications (1837-1930, 1878, 1904, 1907, and 2007); Georg Neumayer, who accompanied the expedition as far as the Darling River (1869), and leaders and members of various relief expeditions including McKinlay (1863); Landsborough’s diaries, journals, papers, and letters (1856-1908, 1862a,b, 1863, 1865, 1868); George Bourne (1862) and Frederick Walker (1861, 1863); Brahe’s reports (1862); and Robert Gow (1860-1871) who followed behind the expedition meeting them in Menindee. There are also official reports, dispatches and letters prepared by various members of the expedition and other significant people involved, such as Robert O’Hara Burke (1860-61, 1861a,b); William John Wills (1853a,b, 1856, 1860, 1863); Ludwig Becker’s letters (1979); John Macadam (1860); Sir George Bowen
(1862a,b); Sir Henry Barkly (1861; 1862a,b,c,d); and journals and diaries kept by other expedition members such as William Wright (1861) and artworks and maps by William Oswald Hodgkinson (1861); transcriptions of John King’s narratives and story (1861a,b) and newspaper publications of King’s stories in *The Australasian* (1870a,b,c). Additionally there are some journals and diaries from other explorers who travelled through these regions; specifically Gregory and Gregory (1884). Settlers such as Edward Curr (1886; 1968) and Peter Beveridge (1869) within these regions also provide significant insight.

Contemporary newspaper articles and pamphlets create some picture of the political, cultural and social atmosphere surrounding the expedition – for example a series of pictures drawn by Cuthbert Clark and lithographed by De Grunchy & Leigh (1861–62) accompanied the explorers’ diaries when newspapers published them provide insight into perceived relations with Aboriginal people and their landscape. Other significant sources include a history by Jackson (1862). One insightful example of the broader public perception of Burke and Wills and their relations with Aboriginal people and the landscape is a contemporary article from the *Mount Alexander Mail* of the Castlemaine region in Victoria (where Burke was previously employed as the police officer). W.L. Morton quoted in Bonyhady states:

Whatever had gone wrong previously, Wills and he [Burke] should have been able to survive at Cooper’s Creek, since ‘where untutored Aborigines were able to pick up a living’ with their spears and stone
tomahawks, ‘a white man should not starve with this rifle and iron one’. (Mount Alexander Mail, 2 December, p.2, col 2. In Bonyhady 1991:218)

Although this statement denigrates Aboriginal technology it does demonstrate two cultural perceptions of the era. Firstly, an attitude of ignorance towards and about Aboriginal people and their knowledge and secondly, a belief that a white man is superior in his knowledge of survival and technology and that he who ventures with a rifle and axe should be able to use them – they should be competent in bush skills.

Bonyhady exclaims ‘[f]or all their firearms, they had little or no success shooting game. Despite realizing that he should make traps for the birds and rats, Wills did not do so. Instead, the three men placed their trust in nardoo – to Wills, ‘the staff of life”’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.138). Although these statements pinpoint fault and blame they neglect the emotional, physical and psychological state in which the explorers may have been suffering.

Public consideration of the potential emotional and psychological states of these men is more clearly revealed in the material related to the cultural construction of the myth of Burke and Wills. For example, the artwork and or visual images associated with and created in response to the outpouring of social grief around the expedition offers the opportunity to gain insight into how society viewed the emotional and psychological toll of exploration and settlement on the explorers and settlers (see also Kennedy, 2012). As Bonyhady states ‘all the different media illuminate how Burke and Wills have been perceived’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.9). Also, the inclusion
or exclusion of Aboriginal people, the portrayal of the landscape as a
drop or as an integral influence on the psychological state of the
explorers can all be examined as a way of assessing Aboriginal
involvement.

The social and cultural perception of Burke and Wills is
extremely relevant when we consider the arguments that the explorers
may have survived if they had better bush skills or if they had listened
to the advice of the local Aboriginal people. Although there exists the
Commission of Inquiry (Victoria 1862) and more general histories of
Australia and Victoria by people such as Wildey (1876), Clarke
(1877), Allen (1882), Rusden (1897), and Turner (1904) these do not
examine the political atmosphere or the relations between Indigenous
and non-Indigenous people within Australia during the nineteenth
century. Furthermore the general exploration histories, some of which
were mentioned in the earlier sections, for example Tennison-Woods
(1865), Favenc (1888, 1908). Clark explains that many of these earlier
histories ‘presented descriptive accounts of the expedition and did not
discuss in any detail what may have prevented the deaths of so many
men’ (Clark 2013, p.49). Exact examples of such preventative
methods are too numerous to list and discussing each avenue or option
is beyond the scope of this review and the overall thesis, however it is
clear that Aboriginal advice and bushcraft were and still are perceived
as being critical to successful exploration in colonial Australia.

Within the nineteenth-century writings on the failures of Burke
and Wills, William Lockhart Morton maintained a stern perspective.
Morton, a member of the Royal Society of Victoria and an unsuccessful applicant for the position of expedition leader, is one such colonist who took the view that blame should be directed towards the Exploration Committee for its choice of Burke as a leader, the lack of bushmen in the exploration party and even for ‘equipment so cumbersome [it] would have ruined any party’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.218). Further, Morton, a reasonably experienced explorer with notable self-proclaimed authority as an ‘old bushman’ (Morton, 1966) was knowledgeable in the necessary skills to survive. Clark argues that Morton claimed ‘(e)xploring is a killing game only to those who do not know anything about it’ (Clark, 2013b, p. 47-59). Further Ian Clark points out: ‘[t]he consensus of historians who wrote during the expedition’s golden jubilee years was that the most significant failings of the various members of the expedition were their inexperience with exploration, their lack of bush craft and their ignorance of the best ways to interact with Indigenous people’ (Clark, 2013b, p.47). It has been observed that although ‘Morton’s judgement may be biased based on his rejection from the Exploration Committee as their choice as leader of the Expedition’ the points made in reference to bush skills, bush knowledge and Aboriginal people are significant (Bonyhady, 1991, p.74; Clark, 2013b, p.52).

Morton believed that experienced bushmen did not perish from starvation. Again he sternly asserts:

There can be but one opinion amongst experienced and intelligent men as to the want of bush knowledge displayed by the various members of the late exploration party, and all such must own that
wherever there is water, no really good bushmen – who has always a thousand resources within himself – can die of starvation in any part of Australia. (Emphasis placed) (Argus, 1862, January 4 in Clark, 2013b, pp.47-60)

Morton strongly believed that ‘all the party should not have been new chums, but such thorough bushmen, that if everything else failed, they could live as well as the aboriginal inhabitants’ (Argus, 1862, January 4 in Clark, 2013b, pp. 47-60). It could be assumed that by the term ‘new chums’ Morton is referring to the fact that many of these men had been in the colony for a short time and knew nothing of the earlier years of settlement and the skills that may have been needed to succeed.

What is not openly admitted by these men of fame and name is that the skills and choices made by successful explorers typically include the use of Aboriginal guides or rather the inclusion of Aboriginal members in exploration parties. The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills publication (2013) has focussed on these themes; in particular the point has been made that although the explorers Hume and Hovell did not take guides they had been tutored in bush skills while growing up with Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills includes multiple contributions from academic scholars whose key points I will be drawing on throughout this review and building upon in the overall thesis. Firstly, in relation to the expeditions’ use of guides there is one chapter that focuses specifically on Landsborough’s relief expedition, which involved Aboriginal people as members of the exploration party and also used locals as
guides (Jeffries, 2013b, pp.279–300). This chapter forms an integral part of the thesis.

Other chapters within The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills do consider the use of guides, (also see and refer to Baker, 1988; Reynolds, 2000; and Cahir, 2010 for research on Aboriginal guides), however in this example, Cahir has given priority to the use of Aboriginal messengers and the traces of oral histories (to be discussed in greater detail in sections to follow) related to the expedition (Cahir, 2013a, pp.149–68 & 261–78). A recent review of these two chapters stated that Cahir has highlighted the utility of Aboriginal people, however little analysis has been directed towards how the stories were interpreted and manipulated by Aboriginal messengers for their own purposes (Shellam, 2014). Use of Aboriginal knowledge, and acknowledgement of Aboriginal people as friendly rather than treacherous, has been a theme focussed upon only briefly in regards to Burke and Wills, however this approach was in comparison to that of Alfred Howitt of the relief expedition (Flannery, 1999). The strategy of ‘making friends’ (Clendinnen, 2003; Shellam, 2009) and the incorporation or ‘co-production of knowledge’ (Driver, 2012) or appropriation of knowledge is touched upon in two chapters (Jeffries, 2013a,b) which are included in this thesis.

Secondly, there is a significant focus on the deaths of Burke and Wills with deeper analysis of the archival memory being interrogated. Clark sets the scene with his chapter on William Lockhart Morton and other ‘contemporary views of the Victorian
Exploring Expedition and its fate’ (Clark, 2013b, p.47). In the chapter about Lockhart Morton, Clark published a significant account of a nineteenth-century observation. On 10 July 1861 an article was published under the name of Sohoben, a *nom de plume*, which commented on the lack of Aboriginal guides involved with the Burke and Wills expedition. Sohoben exclaims:

…they (the exploration party) omitted one of their most essential requirements, and which men accustomed to their work never would have been guilty of – they neglected to take blacks with them. Such men as Leichhardt, Mitchell, Kennedy, and others, knew too well the worth of the natives, in bush travelling, to go without them. For the truth of what I state I refer you to history, for even the aboriginals are historical. …I am convinced of the valuable services of these men on such expeditions, that I would never think of starting without them; and had Mr. Burke taken these men with him, both himself and party would have been in a different position at this moment; we should not have to send relieving parties after him. Well known to every old colonist, who has travelled in Australia, is the inestimable value of blacks – their intuitive instinct in finding water, food, in tracking, and their knowledge of the habits of other tribes, and their faculty of obtaining information from them, which is perfectly out of the power of whites to do, unless half aboriginal …

As Clark points out, the use of the *nom de plume* may have possibly been concealing the identity of Lockhart Morton, however, Morton was ‘never afraid of controversy and had no need’ to conceal his identity. Further Clark adds that, it could not have been Howitt (of the Victorian Relief Expedition) for he was exploring in Gippsland at the
time of the expedition departing Melbourne. Acknowledging the importance of Aboriginal guides and the use of their knowledge Sohoben witnessed the lack of Aboriginal guides and was ‘critical of the fact that Aboriginal guides were not an essential part of the expedition from its beginning’ (Sohoben in Clark, 2013b, p.56). A second key point is that this observation had to be written under a *nom de plume* – acknowledging the importance of Aboriginal assistance was ‘hidden’. The primary focus on the causes of the explorers’ deaths contributes to the national myth that has overshadowed other aspects of collaboration, mutual adaptation, appropriation, cross-cultural exchange and co-production of knowledge.

Discussion has, however, included evidence of deliberate or conscious erasure of Aboriginal involvement. The work of Leigh Boucher traces the erasure of Aboriginal involvement in the work of Alfred William Howitt who was the leader of the expedition responsible for finding King alive with the Yandruwandha people and for locating and retrieving the bodies of the deceased Burke and Wills (Boucher, 2013, p.223–240). Boucher argues that the erasure of Aboriginal history from the Burke and Wills narrative is due to the manner in which Howitt constructed his career. This construction is evidence of the adaptation and the evolving process of colonisation and reflects various policies directed towards Aboriginal people and land acts (Curthoys, 2005).

Another history which focuses on the linear narrative and broader ‘story’ of Burke and Wills is the work of Sarah Murgatroyd
(2002) who, while travelling to undertake research for her publication, spoke with Aboriginal people to learn more about the Burke and Wills history and the perceived colonial expectations of the land. The influence of the Aboriginal perspectives is evident throughout her historical account. For example, while taking into consideration the colonial mentality when it was ‘common to regard Aboriginal people as “hostile savages” or “ignorant blacks”’, Murgatroyd reinforces the nineteenth-century interpretations that Burke and Wills lacked the bush skills necessary to survive but also distinctly identifies the explorers inability to use Aboriginal knowledge (2002, p.154). Further she states:

Burke and Wills did not have the wit to realise that, whatever their cultural differences, local people were the best judges of their land and its resources. Unlike explorers such as Gregory and Leichhardt, they lacked the vision to see beyond their prejudices. They were in too much of a hurry even to plunder the Cooper’s most precious resource – the wisdom of its indigenous people. (2002, p.154)

Unlike many other historical accounts, Murgatroyd makes reference to the tribal names, or the Aboriginal Country names, of the land through which the explorers travelled and where they spent time thus offering a more balanced perspective for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interactions. Murgatroyd also points out that Burke, Wills and King, ‘(w)ithout proper tools or traditional knowledge … prepared their nardoo incorrectly. They ground it without sluicing it with water and they also consumed it raw. The more they ate, the sicker they felt’ (2002, p. 261). This linking of information is something many other
histories have neglected to detail to such a degree until the recent publication of *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills* where Phillip Clarke mentions that the Burke and Wills ‘feasted well on the prepared nardoo given to them by local Aboriginal people, but had no knowledge of its early preparation stages and for some time did not know from which plant it came from’ (Clarke, 2013, p.72). Adding to this, Murgatroyd includes a story of a violent quarrel between Burke and Wills. Significantly she also notes that ‘[n]o official record of the incident was ever made but it is not hard to imagine it happening’ (Murgatroyd, 2002, p. 154). This ability to imagine conflict occurring between the explorers is also a concept that Darrell Lewis alludes to in his paper and chapter – which will be discussed in the section to follow (Lewis 2007, 2013). Although Murgatroyd includes these details, and shows consideration towards an analysis of how the explorers related to the landscape, she has not prioritized the Aboriginal perspectives or focussed specifically on relations between the explorers and Aboriginal people (or cultural, social and political analysis) as they are presented in the archival and or social memory. A great deal of Murgatroyd’s interpretation has rigorously analysed the planning of the expedition, colonial relations, and the linear narrative of the events that transpired throughout the expedition. However she does make observations that are relevant to this thesis – for example, she states:

> If Burke and Wills had shown even an ounce of friendliness, they might have begun to understand how to harvest the local food sources. If they had lingered long enough they could have realised
how to communicate using smoke signals and message sticks as the Aborigines did. Would they have learned lessons that changed the course of the expedition? (Murgatroyd, 2002, p.154)

Murgatroyd has identified the importance and potential of using Aboriginal knowledge through her linear story of Burke and Wills and highlighted the point that these two explorers neglected to make ‘friends’ with the local people. Moving beyond the format of following the linear narratives, recent academic scholarship has begun to focus on isolated or specific incidents – in particular some of this has prioritized the Aboriginal involvements with the expedition. Two of the most recent publications which have been discussed in The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills also discusses the incident of the quarrel between Burke and Wills and related or similar events, however, these accounts have not been recorded in the official RSV documents either. These are the works of Fred Cahir in 2013 and Darrell Lewis in 2007 and 2013, which discuss Aboriginal oral histories related to Burke and Wills. In 2007 Darrell Lewis published an account of Aboriginal social memory as it was documented in the Town and Country Journal in 1875. The paper by Lewis is titled ‘Death on the Cooper – King’s Secret’ and reveals a story passed on to a squatter from an Aboriginal woman who claimed to have been ‘an eyewitness to Burke’s death’ (Lewis, 2007, p.143). The woman claimed that Burke ‘had not died of starvation, but had been shot by “nother one white fellow”’ (Lewis, 2007, p.143). The squatter discussed the accuracy of her story and identified that it must have been King who shot Burke. Lewis also discusses the potential
accuracy of these events for they contrast greatly to the non-Indigenous social memory of the Burke and Wills saga. Burke’s diary (1860-1) and various notes (1861a,b) give very little insight into answering or resolving these issues – however, these archival records are either missing, incomplete and or inaccurate, as discussed from page 24 of this thesis.

In 2013, within The Aboriginal Story, Fred Cahir also discusses this event in light of other information and also with consideration of the accuracy of oral history accounts. Cahir discusses an article entitled ‘Who was to blame for the Tragedy of Burke and Wills?’ published in the Sunday Times in 1937. This article states, ‘it was also proven beyond doubt that Burke had assaulted Wills striking him several blows and knocking him down’ (Sunday Times, 1937, 25 April in Cahir, 2013, p.161). This story was passed down from Aboriginal people who had witnessed the incident and confirms the encounter that Murgatroyd discussed.

Frank Leahy has investigated another perspective of these events in The Aboriginal Story publication (2013, p.241). Leahy’s chapter Remembering Edwin J. Welch: Surveyor to Howitt’s Contingent Exploration Party analyses the diaries of Welch to reveal the expedition’s interactions with Aboriginal people. In ‘reaction to the report of King killing Burke’ Leahy writes:

[I]ike Welch, the author of this chapter believes that the idea that King murdered Burke is fanciful. And again like Welch, this author doubts that Burke’s disciplining of Gray, although ill-advised in the
circumstances, contributed to his death in any real way. (2013, p.258)

Further Leahy (2013, p.258) writes:

What remains is the nature of King’s secret. To this author, it was unrelated to the death of Gray – King was very vocal about that, both in his testimony before the Commission of Inquiry and, astoundingly, in what may have been his first reported public statement on his return to Victoria. … King steeled himself against his weakness, to say just one sentence – ‘Burke did not thrash Gray!’ … the author of this chapter believes that King’s secret is more likely to be related to his experiences living with the Aboriginal community and the possibility of him having a daughter, born after he left Cooper Creek – an event that, if revealed, would not have sat well with the heroisms ascribed to the expedition by Victorian Melbourne.

Each of these reported incidents are within the relatively close geographical range of each other and are deserving of closer reading and analysis to draw out the accuracies and most significantly to examine the reason some narratives are accepted while others are not.

A substantial amount of material exists for further research into the accuracies and importance of these documented events on Cooper Creek. These include newspaper articles, social memory and or oral history, ethnographic works and various local histories. Fred Cahir (2013) and Darrell Lewis (2007 and 2013) discuss many of these material documents in their chapters. Interestingly the majority of these documents began circulating after 1900. Fred Cahir highlights
that Aboriginal memories of the Burke and Wills expedition are highly probable given that ‘the events that took place on Aboriginal lands and Aboriginal peoples were pivotal in the death or survival of the white strangers on their lands’ (Cahir, 2013, p.160). Specifically, Cahir points out that this is a ‘truism not clearly acknowledged in many published accounts of the 20th Century e.g. McLaren (1959)’ (in Cahir, 2013, p. 160). This idea of truism, which is not clearly acknowledged, is significant to the Burke and Wills narrative on many levels.

Studies have appeared about particular members of the expedition, such as Ludwig Becker (Blanchen, 1978; Tipping, 1978a,b, 1979, 1991; Heckenberg, 2006; Edmond, 2009); Hermann Beckler (Voigt, 1991); John King (McKellar, 1944; Attwood, 2003) and William John Wills (McLaren, 1960b; Van der Kiste, 2011, and Cathcart, 2013). With the exception of Marjorie Tipping in 1979, who included a brief discussion on Aboriginal people as revealed in the artwork of Ludwig Becker, few of these publications have dedicated a thorough and inclusive attempt to include Aboriginal perspectives or discussed the cultural, social and political implications of the traditional narratives of how we relate to the land as both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Some scholarship has emerged around the contribution of the expeditions and their various members to Aboriginal studies: for example, Tipping’s studies of Becker’s artwork and observations of the Aboriginal people he met on the expedition; Voigt, Becker and Beckler’s publications on Aboriginal culture; and Bonyhady’s assessment of the contribution of Howitt’s
relief expedition to advancing our knowledge of Aboriginal culture (Bonyhady, 1991, 2002). The story of Burke and Wills truly lends itself to debate and breaking free of this perpetual cycle of discussion involves decolonizing the myths. Slattery has begun this process with her discussion, which focuses on the how and the why the historical ‘accounts of the expedition have been selective about the contrasting roles and modes of life of European and Indigenous people “in the bush”’ (Slattery, 2013, p.180). Slattery points out ‘that some recent authors who have revisited material about the expedition have opened up a more complex reality than that presented by colonial interpretations of the previous 100 years’ (Slattery, 2013, p.180). Further, she states that they have ‘been able to reveal neglected insights, overlooked encounters and relationships, missed opportunities and effaced commitments’ (Slattery, 2013, p.180). Slattery suggests that the ‘choice of and emphasis on some interpretations and elements of the story’ and ‘neglect of others’ are what is necessary in the process of myth making (Slattery, 2013, p.180). Lack of acknowledgement of the Aboriginal perspectives has a long history within Australian historiography. As Darrell Lewis points out in Death on the Cooper, the squatter had ‘many reasons for making’ the story public rather than simply ‘dismissing it as “just a blackfellow’s yarn”’ (Lewis, 2007, p.143). The dismissal of Aboriginal witness and testimony as ‘yarning’ has its systemic racist roots set in a typically western epistemological and ontological or Euro-centric framework.
Several authors have published accounts of their attempts to retrace the tracks of Burke and Wills, in particular, Thallon (1966), Judge and Scherschel (1979), and Bergin (1981, 1982), and more recently, Dave Phoenix (2011a) published a guidebook about travelling the route. In *Forgotten Narratives*, Clark and Cahir highlighted that the ‘Aboriginal story has been overshadowed by the tragedy and misfortune of the expedition in which seven men, including Burke and Wills, died. Yet, the exclusion of Aboriginal perspectives is a structural matter…’ (2013, p 1). Boucher’s’ chapter, ‘Alfred Howitt and the erasure of Aboriginal history’, critically analyses the social and cultural construction of the Burke and Wills myth and how this construction erased Aboriginal agency within the Burke and Wills expedition (Boucher, 2013, p.223-239). In the section titled ‘The great disappearing act’, Boucher attributes the erasure of Aboriginal involvement in the Burke and Wills narrative to an incremental whitewashing that began during the second half of the nineteenth century (Boucher, 2013, p.231-235). Drawing upon the work of Healy (1994), Boucher argues that the various artworks ‘seem to confirm that for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries white Australians experienced their history as a series of collective psychological monuments which would comfort through their familiarity’ (Boucher, 2013, p.235). These particular artworks have been integral to the mythologizing of Burke and Wills. Boucher explains even the artworks that did contain evidence of Aboriginal agency, actors and or involvement were soon erased from the memory.
of Burke and Wills. The most significant artworks that today psychologically memorialise the Burke and Wills myth of solo-hero endeavour are the *Burial of Burke* by William Strutt, and the various other works and monuments by Scott, Short, Strutt, Summers and Longstaff (Slattery, 2013, p.181; Boucher, 2013, p.231). The painting titled *Burial of Burke* by William Strutt, as a social and psychological memorial, denies Aboriginal involvement with the death and burial of Burke on the Cooper and also places Burke, as the brave and gallant central and solo-hero of the expedition who sacrificed his life for the nation. See Figure 11

*Figure 11 ‘Burial of Burke’. 1911. William Strutt.*

Image removed at author's request

As Clark and Cahir point out the ‘Aboriginal people and Aboriginal themes were more prominent in the early historiography compared with later twentieth century histories. This is particularly evident in the flourish of publications around the centenary years (Fitzpatrick, 1963; Hogg, 1961; McLaren, 1960a,b, 1962; Moorehead, 1963; Southall, 1961), which are remarkable for the fact that although
they are keen to discuss what went wrong with the expedition, they are relatively silent on Aboriginal people’ (Clark & Cahir, 2013, p.2). In contrast to the above image by Strutt, the visual interpretations around the time of the expedition included Aboriginal involvement in the finding of the lost explorers, their deaths, burial, and memory. (See Figure 12)

Figure 12 ‘The Blacks inform John King that the whitefellows are coming 15 Sept, 1861’.

Image removed at author’s request


This series produced by De Gruchy & Leigh each include Aboriginal actors in the Burke and Wills narrative around the time of their deaths. The contemporary visual depictions of the Burke and Wills story were inclusive of Aboriginal involvement. However, later artworks and written commentary erased Aboriginal involvement in exploration (Boucher, 2013). Clark and Cahir suggest that:

The basic truths about exploration that were evident to contemporary commentators such as William Lockhart Morton, Marcus Clarke,
George Rusden and Henry Turner, had been excised from the historiography that emerged at the time of the centenary celebrations. (Clark & Cahir, 2013, p.2)

An explanation of the silence of Aboriginal involvement is given by Leigh Boucher and builds upon the ideas and concepts of previous Indigenous studies’ scholars (most significantly Curthoys, 1999). Many years ago Ann Curthoys explained that ‘popular historical mythology stresses struggle, courage, and survival, amidst pain, tragedy, and loss’ (1999, p. 3) was part of the strategy to maintain legitimacy of occupation through telling stories of white Australians overcoming hardship and suffering and winning a battle against nature. Maintaining narrative focus on white explorer and settler suffering could explain why Howitt denied Aboriginal assistance and knowledge. Boucher traces the erasure of Aboriginal involvement in the writings of Alfred Howitt and compares this with the cultural responses to the Burke and Wills story. Providing examples of erasure in monuments and artwork, Boucher places value onto the cultural or artistic representations by analysing them as integral textual pieces of the Burke and Wills puzzle. This idea will be built upon throughout the thesis for as Bonyhady mentions, ‘all the different media illuminate how Burke and Wills have been perceived’ and also how we relate to the environment (Bonyhady, 1991, p.9). These sources also offer an entry point into analysing the structure that has silenced or erased Aboriginal involvement in exploration. As Clark and Cahir mention:
It follows that the barriers that have for so long kept Indigenous perspectives out of the Burke and Wills story were not based on lack of material, but rather perception and choice. A literary curtain has been drawn across Burke and Wills historiography since the early twentieth century in which Indigenous perspectives were seen as peripheral to the central task of the historical exposition. With this publication we are pleased to contribute to a historiographical re-emergence – Indigenous Australians who had been ‘out’ of the Burke and Wills story for over a century are now returning to a centre stage. It needs to be acknowledged that whilst much of this ‘new’ evidence is derived from non-Indigenous exploration records, it has nevertheless been possible to uncover Aboriginal perspectives in these records that complement Aboriginal oral histories. (Clark & Cahir, 2013, p.2)

A rough line can be drawn at the time when Aboriginal involvement or perspectives began to be silenced. This time was from 1900, or Federation, and the beginning of the White Australia policy, up until roughly the 1970s. W.E.H Stanner in his 1968 Boyer lecture ‘After the Dreaming, spoke of a ‘cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale’, and this became a beacon for historians within Australia, in particular Henry Reynolds (McKenna, 2009, p.87). In the 1960s, Australian historians were criticised for being the ‘high priests’ of a cult of forgetfulness for neglecting Aboriginal history and for excluding a whole section of the landscape from their research (Stanner, 2009). However the cult of forgetfulness that Stanner spoke about still has some life in it after this so-called veil was lifted
(Curthoys, 2008, p. 247 in Rolls, 2010, p. 14). The same criticisms may be directed at the historical study of the Burke and Wills Expedition, despite the obvious ‘richness’ of the Aboriginal involvement in this story (Clark & Cahir, 2013) the ability to ‘listen’ to Aboriginal perspectives is still a matter of the historians’ choice (Rolls, 2010). In 1991, the work *Hidden Histories* by Deborah Bird Rose, a historian and anthropologist who lived with the people of the Victoria River district in the NT, acknowledges the silencing of Aboriginal histories. In his publications *Nowhere People*, published in 2005, and *Black Pioneers*, published in 2000, Henry Reynolds discussed the excluded histories of Aboriginal stories. Both these authors, Rose and Reynolds, argue that ‘history has been partially obscured’ (McKenna, 2009, p.87). However, it is the historians and the non-Indigenous settlers who choose not to see or listen to Aboriginal stories in support of colonisation and various beliefs or policies associated with ideas around assimilation (Curthoys, 2008). This particular research has been guided by Deborah Bird Rose’s 2004 publication, *Reports from a Wild Country: ethics for decolonisation*, as a strategy to consider a shared history that takes into consideration the epistemological structures that have excluded some stories.
The portrayal of landscape

In the previous two sections of this review I have highlighted two of the main themes associated with the literature surrounding the Burke and Wills story. The first theme is the creation of the Burke and Wills ‘myth’, and the second theme is that of ‘erasure’, both of which are intrinsically linked by the social and political beliefs and policies of each era. These sections have demonstrated that an ongoing belief exists where Burke and Wills perished due to an inability to listen to Aboriginal advice, that Burke and Wills lacked the necessary bush skills to survive in exploration, and that successful exploration depended upon finely developed bush skills from either the inclusion of Aboriginal members or guides in their expeditions or explorers who were tutored in the appropriate bush skills by Aboriginal people. Further Burke and Wills were unique for their time, in that most expeditions included Aboriginal members and guides or intermediaries.

These ‘hidden histories’ of Aboriginal involvement in exploration is part of the colonial process and parallels western relations with the landscape, where the hero explorer, settler and artist place themselves against adversity. The relationship of colonial and imperial ‘struggling heroically against adversity’ (Curthoys, 1999, p. 3) is arguably grown out of enlightenment and industrialisation thoughts and processes where humans separated themselves from nature. This era of colonisation and the imperial process also fits into the ‘onset of the industrialisation, the central feature which was the
enormous expansion in the use of fossil fuels’ – the beginning of the era of Anthropocene (Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill 2007, although there is debate over beginnings of the Anthropocene, see Crutzen and Steffen 2003). The desire to understand the Aboriginal landscape was seemingly less important to Burke and Wills than finding more land for further expansion and settlement, which subsequently could explain the denial of Aboriginal presence and knowledges. Philip Clarke explains Aboriginal people ‘relied upon strategies to survive that were heavily built around their understanding of country, and in particular their detailed knowledge of ecological processes’ (2013, p.61) which was developed over thousands of years of careful observation and relationship. The explorers were arguably blind to Aboriginal knowledge. Michael Cathcart has also acknowledged that the explorers were in a land of plenty and their inability to listen to Aboriginal advice contributed to their deaths (2013). Further Clarke argues that the lack of ‘Aboriginal members in the small team that made the return trip from Cooper Creek to the Gulf of Carpentaria seriously jeopardised the outcome’ (2013, p.62). Deidre Slattery considers the ‘telling and retelling of national narratives’ are intricately linked to the relations between people and the environment and the practices of outdoor education continue to ‘reflect traditional practices and reinforce colonial expectations of the land’ (Slattery, 2013, p.179). Slattery argues that myths are ‘open to contest’ and she draws attention to other authors who have focussed on other ‘versions of achievement, relationship, heroism and competence’ (Attwood,
Slattery argues that the ‘prevailing myth [of Burke and Wills] depends for its strength on admiration of the value of conquest and discovery, not of slow careful observation and adaptation to a place and to another culture’ (2013, p.189). Overall, it could be concluded that Slattery (2013, p.189) is calling for decolonisation of the Burke and Wills myth as a strategy to reconsider and recreate relations with land – with particular benefit being in environmental education – where retelling the stories of national identity by focussing on ‘achievements that retain value in a non-imperial age, when (I)ndigenous Australian people and nature are acknowledged’ is needed.

Within the book Reports from a wild country – ethics for decolonisation, Rose links social and ecological justice to the theme of reconciliation with the aim of working within and building upon the broader task of ‘decolonisation’. The focus is on reconciliation between Indigenous and settler peoples, and with nature by providing non-Indigenous people with greater understanding of Aboriginal philosophies from the disciplines of anthropology and history (Rose 2004). The work of Rose (2004) enables non-Indigenous people gain greater understanding of the worldviews that have oppressed Indigenous people and also the strengths and values of Aboriginal philosophies and knowledges. Being sensitive the context of the time frame under investigation, it is important to ask why Aboriginal advice and knowledge was not used? Attention to the broader theme of how and why the landscape has been portrayed provides an
opportunity to draw out deeper understanding of relations between people and place.

When Burke and Wills set out from Melbourne with the aim of reaching the Gulf of Carpentaria there existed a strong desire to identify, through scientific investigation, what was located within the unknown centre of the continent. The recent collection of papers edited by Joyce and McCann (2011a,b,c) has shed light on one of the main purposes of the expedition – that of scientific understanding. This scientific understanding of Aboriginal associations with the Burke and Wills expedition has taken on an archaeological or material cultural, and quantitative perspective. Archaeologist Harry Allen has acknowledged that perceptions of Aboriginal people at the time of the expedition were archaic. He writes:

To a certain extent, the Aborigines were classified by the Europeans as part of nature rather than culture, as being located within a landscape which itself was conceived as being empty and primordial, where European exploration brought the land into existence and formed a starting point for Australian history. However, the explorers were passing through lands that had resident Aboriginal populations, territories that were already mapped and named. In considering the interior of Australia empty, the explorers were unaware of the fact that the land, its waterholes, animals and plants, were charged with cultural and mythological meaning, and that unseen boundaries were constantly being crossed. (Allen 2011, p.245. Also quoted in Clark and Cahir 2013, p.1)
The statement of ‘being a part of nature rather than culture’ and ‘located within a landscape which was conceived as being empty and primordial’ where ‘European exploration brought the land into existence and formed the starting point for Australian history’ is very significant when we consider how the narrative of Burke and Wills has been constructed.

Allen expresses that the ‘body of knowledge concerning Aboriginal people assembled by the Victorian Exploring Expedition and its supply parties, the South Australian Burke Relief Expedition (McKinlay), the Victorian Relief Expedition and the Victorian Exploring Party was considerable’ (Allen, 2011, p.271). For example he states that ‘(v)aluable information about Aboriginal populations, material culture and subsistence was collected, sufficient to provide an important picture of Aboriginal life on Cooper Creek and its surrounding districts’ (Allen, 2011, p.271). Further he claims:

Possibly more important was the information that might have flowed from a greater understanding of the interactions between the Aboriginal people and the explorers, interactions that revealed the Aborigines as going to great lengths to maintain peaceful communications with the Europeans. Their actions towards the distressed explorers were acknowledged at the time to be of great humanity. (Allen, 2011, p.271)

At the time these interactions were acknowledged – to some extent they were commemorated – however as time went by many aspects of encounter was hidden.
By the centenary of the expedition in 1961 any traces of Aboriginal agency was almost completely hidden, and when mentioned Aboriginal people were placed in a most unfavourable light, as we see in a number of historical revisions, including McLaren’s essay (1960), Alan Moorehead’s *Cooper’s Creek* (1963), Ivan Southall’s *Journey into Mystery* (1961), and Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s lecture ‘The Burke and Wills Expedition’ (1963). The classic example, of course, is Moorehead who considered the Australian interior as ‘absolutely untouched and unknown, and except for the blacks, the most retarded people on earth, there was no sign of any previous civilization whatever’ (1974, p.7). This statement expresses two very strong sentiments about the mid 1900s relations and perceptions of Aboriginal people and the landscape. Firstly, this statement denies Aboriginal management of the landscape, Aboriginal knowledge of land management practices and Aboriginal understandings and knowledges of the landscape that had developed over 40,000 years of intensive observation and experiment. And secondly, this statement demonstrates that the colonial myth creators – the historians – denied Aboriginal society as a civilisation.

The denial of Aboriginal agency and involvement in the Burke and Wills narrative during the 1900s, and the belief in Western knowledge being superior, was not entirely new as traces of this sentiment can be found around the time of the expedition. Clark and Cahir draw attention to Marcus Clarke who, in 1877, wrote that:
(w)ithin two years of the death of the leaders from starvation on Cooper’s Creek, tierces of beef were displayed in an intercolonial expedition at Melbourne, salted down from cattle pasturing on the spot where they perished! Settlement has followed their track right across the continent. (Clarke, 1877, pp.201f. In Clark & Cahir, 2013, p.3-4)

This narrative focuses on the concept of the settler ability in conquering the interior: in a landscape or aspect of nature where Burke and Wills had perished from a perceived lack of nutriment and human error, civilisation had overcome the barren and empty landscape to create European concepts and visions of farming practice and success. Often the myths surrounding Burke and Wills, and other stories of heroic defeat, were about ‘quarrels with nature’ (Curthoys, 1999, p. 9-10) being ‘told again and again: on monuments and memorial stones’ where the story perfectly expressed “‘the early settlers’ deeply-felt idea that life was not so much a struggle against other men as against the wilderness – that wilderness that made all men equal anyway. The quarrel, basically, was with nature’” (Moorehead in Curthoys, 1999, p. 10). The creation of these stories of colonial conquest associated with Burke and Wills contributed to the possession of the Australian continent and the dispossession of Aboriginal people. Steven Muecke has advised it is these stories of the ‘Australian colonizing myth’ that need to be decolonised (Muecke, 2005, p.144). Bain Attwood and Helen Doyle suggest that the historians role is to challenge these myths of nation building that were created and continue to exist in the as foundation stories, and the
memorialisation of solo-hero achievement, as a way to legitimise non-Indigenous belonging in Aboriginal land (2009).

Several authors have considered the effects that the Burke and Wills foundation myth has had on our relationships with the centre of Australia and also the relations between Aboriginal people and the settlers. Haynes (1998) and Curthoys (1999) and in particular Bonyhady (1991) have made an extensive study of the representation of the expedition in Australian high art and popular culture. Slattery has offered analysis of how the myth has shaped relations with the land and the implications that this has in shaping attitudes in outdoor education and associated outdoor activities and how the ongoing commemoration of heroic endeavour continues ‘to reflect traditional practices and reinforce colonial expectations of the land’ (2013, p.179).

Understanding the landscape has been the silent but key objective of the Victorian Exploring Expedition, the Burke and Wills story, and the many responses to this event and narrative.

Curthoys argues that the Indigenous invisibility is part of the power in these national myths due to the land and the Indigenous people becoming ‘merged, the former foregrounded, the latter denied a place in history at all’ (1999, p. 13). A great deal of content within the publication The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills – Forgotten Narratives is ‘concerned with the bushcraft of expedition members and their flawed use of Aboriginal ecological knowledge’ (Clark & Cahir, 2013, p.2). Further Clark and Cahir explain that overall a
history of Burke and Wills that is considerate of Aboriginal involvement will provide:

The story of the Aboriginal guide Dick who ensured that trooper Lyons and McPherson did not perish at Torowoto; it is the Yandruwandha adoption of John King and the colonial response in thanking these people with gifts that included breastplates and the establishment of a reserve for Moravian missionary activity on the Cooper; it is the contribution of various members of the original expedition and relief parties to knowledge of Aboriginal societies and the development of anthropology; and it is Yandruwandha and other Aboriginal oral histories of the expedition including one that concerned the death of Burke. (Clark & Cahir, 2013, p.2)

Each of these events occurred within a landscape, a landscape that has been portrayed negatively and most significantly or prominently as a backdrop to human drama. However, this history expressed by Clark and Cahir (2013, p.2) a collection of stories are yet to be written – which this thesis begins to address.

The ongoing telling of the Burke and Wills myth as the first history is a method used by the settlers to regard themselves as the original and first inhabitants. Franz Fanon wrote that the settler historian believed their experiences were the ‘beginning’: “This land was created by us”, by the stories that were told (Curthoys, 1999, p. 14). This belief in belonging here first is expressed in visual responses to the narrative/story of Burke and Wills which offer a unique portrayal of the landscape and human relationships with nature. The artworks following the deaths of Burke and Wills framed the
explorers as heroes who perished for the colonial and imperial task. Typically the artworks support the myth and neglect accurate representation of the landscape; consequently they neglect whole aspects of the story. Just as the literary responses to Burke and Wills have erased aspects of the narratives, the artistic responses have also. The landscape has been reduced to the backdrop of colonial narrative, in instances so too has the presence of Indigenous people been reduced to that of observers within this dramatic myth creation.

Many of the artworks produced immediately after the expedition, for example the historical paintings that visually relate the narrative of failure and/or success within an unforgiving landscape, are a response that the colonial figures of the time wanted to believe as a truth. In contrast to the argument put forward by Curthoys (1999, p. 3) where she states:

While historians often see themselves as the enemies of myth, the tellers of truth against the untruths of fiction, artists and writers have no such illusions, openly seeking out and reworking popular narratives to their own purpose.

Many of these images that were commissioned by significant colonial figures to create an image of colonisation that denied Aboriginal people both create and deny a boundary between what did happen and what might have happened, a boundary where ‘so much effort of national self-understanding lies’ (Curthoys, 1999, p. 3). Bonyhady (1991), Curthoys (1999), and Haynes (1998), in their sensitive analysis of the landscape, reveal a social, political and cultural attitude that has constructed nature as separate from humanity. This dualistic
attitude towards nature perpetuates the inability to understand Aboriginal worldviews and Indigenous relations with Country, thus creating a ‘contact zone’ between people and place (Pratt, 2008).

The encounters in and of this contact zone have typically been discussed in a manner that could be described as dualistic, where Aboriginal agency and voice has rarely been heard and acknowledged. This contact zone is where relations or encounters between self and other ‘articulates power such that “self” is constituted as the pole of activity and presence, while “other” is the pole of passivity and absence’ (Rose, 2004, p.20). Eco-feminists have characterised the phenomena of othering, as explained by Rose, by extending ‘the analysis to include “Nature”, and show that the same structure of domination controls women, Nature, and all other living beings and systems that are held to be “other”’ (Rose, 2004, p.19–20). Simply put, Rose explains a crucial feature of what can be parallel to the structure that silences where:

others never get to talk back on their own terms. Communication is all one way as the pole of power refuses to receive the feedback that would cause it to change itself, or to open itself to dialogue. Power lies in the ability not to hear what is being said, not experience the consequences of one’s actions, but rather to go on one’s own self-centric and insulated way. (Rose, 2004, p.20)

Val Plumwood describes the frameworks that deny agency and landscape or the environment as ‘monological creations of the landscape’ that are ‘ecologically irrational’ (Plumwood, 2006). It is this understanding that limits the ability to listen to Aboriginal advice.
The histories of Burke and Wills have denied interactions between Aboriginal people (with the exception of the Yandruwandha people who have been framed as accommodating and helping the explorers) or have framed the explorers in a format that supports the solo-hero narrative whilst denying the many ‘others’ such as the cameleers, guides, intermediaries, mediators ‘who contributed to exploration’ (see Driver and Jones, 2009; Kennedy, 2013; Konishi, Nugent and Shellam, 2015 for contribution to exploration). Acknowledgement was rarely given to those who contributed life-sustaining support and often the knowledge and skills that was passed on to these newcomers was claimed as the explorers and settlers own inherent bush skill and ability. As Val Plumwood notes in *Environmental Culture – the ecological crisis of reason:*

> [t]he self-made man is for the most part a hyper-separated autonomous self whose illusion of self-containment is built on denying or backgrounding the contributions of subordinated others and re-presenting the joint product in terms of a hyperbolized individualistic agency who is to be treated as the only or primary “achiever”. The other’s contributions are thus relied upon but at the same time disappeared or denied. The “misunderstanding” involved here is functional for the purposes of appropriation, but can be very dangerous in other contexts’. (Plumwood, 2002a, pp.27–8)

A consideration of these denied or silenced contributions needs to be made when reinterpreting history. This narrative of achievement and or the blunders of Burke and Wills has been remembered, told and retold in a way that is intricately
connected to how we relate and feel towards the arid and semi-arid regions of this country. Roslynn Haynes, in her 1998 book *Seeking the Centre: the Australian desert in literature, art and film*, explains that ‘each generation reinvents its myths in response to its particular needs’ (Haynes, 1998, p.226). Haynes explains that this has been ‘particularly evident in the recasting of the explorers’ where ‘the heroic figures of nineteenth-century literature and art who carried with them hopes of the colony for expansion were *constructs of desire* …’ (emphasis placed) (Haynes, 1998, p.226). The construct has ranged from the initial desire for land and resources, to the desire to portray or exhibit ‘inspiring models of valour and resourcefulness’ (Haynes, 1998, p. 226). Significantly Haynes identifies that ‘at first the new nation needed internationally acknowledged heroes to establish and adorn its identity’ (1998, p.226). Evidence of this is observed in the grand monuments and artworks produced immediately after the expedition, such as Scott, Short, Strutt and Summers and Longstaff where the ‘massive canvas depicting the scene of the return to the Dig tree, commissioned in 1902 by the National Gallery of Victoria, enshrined an enduring image of the explorers trapped in a wasteland, betrayed by lack of loyalty’ (Slattery, 2013, p.181).

However, as time progressed, Australia needed to establish its own identity. It has been argued that the explorers were subsequently demoted from these roles of national heroes and or victims of the landscape and poor timing because they were not Australian but
European (Haynes, 1998, p. 226). Focus then shifted onto the Australian war heroes and:

By the 1950s the notion of any kind of heroism was regarded with cynicism, and psychoanalysis of these figures, to unearth their unacknowledged motives and their existential despair, was intellectually respectable. (Haynes, 1998, p.226)

This is evidenced most pronouncedly in the artwork of Sydney Nolan, for example, which displayed Burke and Wills as awkward bodies in an unfriendly or unforgiving environment. Additionally the 1974 novel *Coopers Creek* by Alan Moorhead displays Nolan’s representation of Burke within the front cover. This novel and visual representation shaped the social memory of Burke and Wills as hopeless and lost explorers who do not belong within the Australian landscape. This image set the scene for the newcomers to see themselves as the ‘victims’ not the ‘oppressors’ (Curthoys, 1999, p. 2). Australia was searching for a way of belonging and these explorers captured the artistic imagination of alienation. Whilst drawing attention to ‘Foucault’s emphasis on the importance of history for racial discourse’ Curthoys argues that the ‘angry rejection of the idea that Australia has a racist past’ has its ‘basis in some deeply-held beliefs about white Australian historical experience’ (1999, p. 2). The myth based representation of Burke and Wills overshadowed alternative relations with the landscape; however it was at this time that the deaths of the explorers played perfectly into the imagination of the ‘mysterious red centre’. Later writers and artists began to search
for a new spirituality of the landscape and a sense of place. Haynes observes:

What they are now shown as seeking in the desert is not land or colonial power but spiritual enlightenment and wholeness, a purging of wrong priorities and the discovery of cosmic meaning. (1998, p 226)

The narrative of Burke and Wills as heroic and tragic, however, does not offer spiritual enlightenment and wholeness within the landscape. Slattery argues that the ‘enduring concentration on the Expedition’s heroic and tragic meaning has overshadowed other interpretations of the events, those that focus on relationships with the land and its indigenous people’ (Slattery, 2013, p.179). She further states that for ‘well over a 100 years, accounts of Burke and Wills have repeated the colonial values of conquest and control’ (Slattery, 2013, p.179). One point that Slattery makes is that ‘once accepted, mythical interpretations can become more powerful than fact in shaping values, identity and hence behaviour’ (Slattery, 2013, p.180). This is especially relevant in light of how the Burke and Wills myth has influenced and educated people about Aboriginal involvement and/or lack of involvement in the exploration of the centre of Australia and most significantly in how we relate to the landscape today.

Summary and Implications

The implications of exploring expeditions and settler societies within Australia are longstanding and have an ongoing influence upon both Indigenous and non-Indigenous senses of national identity and
belonging and the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and their connection to place: Country, landscape and nature (Rose, 2004, 2011, 2013). The history of the exploration and colonisation of this nation has created a social memory, or social history, which has been socially or culturally constructed from the dominant groups who ‘consciously or unconsciously act to shape the collective beliefs of the subordinate element, so that the subordinate elements will observe the world as the dominant want them to observe it’ (Fairburn, 1999, p.177). As French theorist and historian Michel Foucault argues, ‘this pattern of domination and subordination in society is not structured in any particular overarching fashion – in terms either of class, race, gender or whatever – but takes multiple forms and exists in every social relationship’ (Fairburn, 1999, p.178).

This project calls for an approach that is able to ‘interpret texts’ (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, 1993; Barthes & Sontag, 1982, 1993) with an appreciation of ‘differing worldviews’ (Plumwood, 2006; Rose, 2013; Rose & Robin, 2004). With an awareness of the ‘knowledge dichotomies’ and white Australian mythology (Curthoys, 1999, 2003, 2005, 2009; Muecke, 1992, 1999a,b, 2004, 2011; Peters-Little, Curthoys & Docker, 2010; Rose & Robin, 2004), this thesis takes into consideration how we write Australian history that is inclusive of Aboriginal history (Curthoys & McGrath, 2000, Curthoys, 2003, Curthoys & Docker, 2010) and the ‘historical origins of epistemological conflict’ that has typically silenced the voices of Aboriginal stories and relations with nature (place/landscape).

Reconsideration of this foundation myth contributes to the ongoing discussion of the shared Australian and Aboriginal histories (Attwood & Doyle, 2009) of national identity and non-Indigenous belonging (Read, 2000). Consideration of the hidden histories within the Burke and Wills myth will also contribute to the greater discussion of issues associated with frontier, race and nation, (Attwood & Griffths, 2009; Attwood & Foster, 2003b); to histories of frontier conflict (Finkel & Attwood, 2003); and intermediaries in national and international exploration (Driver and Jones, 2009; Kennedy, 2013; Thomas, 2014; Maddison, 2014; Konishi, Nugent, and Shellam, 2015). It will contribute to ‘the broad task of the decolonisation of Australian mythologies’ (Muecke, 1992, 1999a, b, 2004, 2011), which may have positive implications for education, the tourism industry, cultural heritage management, planning and policy, and ‘collaborative stewardship’ (Ross, Sherman, Snodgrass, Delcore, & Sherman, 2011). It has been argued that decolonisation and reconciliation involve rethinking and restructuring Australian culture and ‘relationship to land’ or ‘Country’ or ‘place’ (Muecke, 2004; Attwood & Doyle, 2009) through the adoption of an ethics for decolonisation (Rose, 2004) and an increased understanding of Aboriginal philosophies and knowledge (Muecke, 2004).
Chapter Four: Tracing Colonial Attitudes
By 1860, when Burke and Wills were beginning their exploration through the centre of Australia, it was believed that Aboriginal people were so devastated by the effects of modernization, civilization and the colonial process that they would not survive (Kenny, 2007). The Australian Government were developing policies to segregate and protect Aboriginal people from encroaching settlement (Kenny, 2007). The motivations of the Royal Society of Victoria leading up to the Victorian Exploring Expedition is witnessed in the voice and actions of Sir Henry Barkly – President of Royal Society of Victoria and Governor of Victoria. On 8 April 1861, Sir Henry Barkly announced in the anniversary address of the RSV, in respect of Indigenous peoples:

> [w]hole tribes of the original occupants of the soil are, under some mysterious dispensation, rapidly disappearing, and the links which their dialects and traditions might supply to the ethnologist, will, without some effort on our part, be lost for ever.' [Emphasis placed] (Barkly, 1865, p.xx–xxi)

It is apparent that Barkly was of the understanding that Indigenous peoples’ way of life was impacted greatly by the rapid change brought about by colonisation and subsequent settlement, however the ‘mysterious dispensation’ is not so difficult to understand if contrasted with accounts from more regional areas of the colony. In the 1840’s the Wimmera in western Victoria, for example, was classed as ‘lawless, at least without European law – and the settlers were not about to accept Wotjobalak laws’ (Kenny, 2007, p. 140). Robert Kenny explains that the settlers had:
moved in and built fortified huts, the windows gun portals. Their trigger fingers were ready for the Wotjobaluk. This was not a reaction to Wotjobaluk activities as much as anticipated; a shadow of the far more violent frontier of the Western District to the south, which many of these young men had experienced directly. In any case, they were not so naïve, however righteous they might have thought themselves, to believe the original occupants were simply going to leave. (Kenny, 2007, p. 140)

Aboriginal people throughout Australia resisted colonisation and also assisted settlers and explorers in the colonial process; as Marie Fels points out, Australia’s history has evidence of Aboriginal choice, agency, even ‘co-operation’ (1988, p. 2). Evidence of this agency is difficult to witness when the attitude most strongly held by the colonial officials and the Royal Society of Victoria at the time of Burke and Wills leaving the broader Port Phillip area, or Melbourne in particular, was that Aboriginal peoples were worthy objects and subjects of scientific study. This statement from Barkly suggest three things, firstly, that he may have believed that systematic scientific exploration offered mechanisms for preserving or protecting Indigenous people and their knowledges and/or secondly, that the ‘links which their dialects and traditions might supply’ to the scientist/coloniser in their development of mechanisms to survive in this new land may without some effort by the Royal Society of Victoria (and colonial Australia more broadly), ‘be lost forever’ and thirdly, that survival of Aboriginal people was seriously threatened by rapid colonisation of their land. Whether or not there existed a genuine
care for the well-being of Aboriginal people in colonial Melbourne it is evident by this statement that he believed Aboriginal knowledge was being lost.

Under the direction of the Queen, Sir Henry Barkly (1815–1898) as Governor of Victoria and as the president of the Royal Society of Victoria worked towards promoting and supporting the arts and sciences and was responsible for directing and managing the development of Melbourne and the broader colony. Trained in commerce, he began a business career as a British politician who represented Leominster in the House of Commons in 1845–48, then a colonial governor and commander-in-chief of British Guiana and, in 1853 commander-in-chief of Jamaica – where he would have gained experience of other indigenous peoples and cultures. It has been claimed that ‘constitutional, social and economic problems made his task most exacting in both colonies, but his success won him the approval of the Colonial Office’ and, in November 1856, Barkly was appointed governor of Victoria and served until 1863 (Knox, 1969, p.214). Arriving in Melbourne on Christmas Eve, Barkly was ‘displeased to find that the governor’s participation in policy-making was not welcome under the newly-granted responsible government’ (Knox, 1969). However, he was well qualified to lead the colonising project and his policy ambitions are evident in his public presentations. He was paid the highest salary in the empire because the Colonial Office considered the post to be ‘particularly difficult’ (Knox, 1969). It is understood that ‘[r]apid economic and constitutional changes in
the colony had stirred aggressive individuals to covet power and to conflict with authority and among themselves’ (Cook, 1979). With one of the major difficulties existing in this role being how to advance whilst also protecting the Indigenous population.

Barkly was the Governor of Victoria during the 1858 appointment of a Select Committee which was formed to investigate and discuss the ‘condition’ of the Aboriginal population of the Colony, ‘and the best means of alleviating their absolute wants’ (Select Committee Report, 1859, p. iii). The sentiment to protect, and also to create awareness of the threats to the Indigenous population is evident in the anniversary address and in the observations presented in the Select Committee Report. Earlier policies of segregation and protection of Aboriginal people, in the geographical expanse of what was New South Wales prior to the separation of Victoria, were perceived as failures due to the population decrease from six to seven thousand in first settlement of 1836 to no more than a few hundred by 1859 (Select Committee Report, 1859, p. ii). Although it was believed that Aboriginal people would have been in a ‘worse position’ than if the Protectorate had never been ‘called into existence’, offering protection and assistance when the Protectorate was abolished, Aboriginal people were ‘left to their own resources’ (Select Committee Report, 1859, p. iii). It was well understood at the time that the ‘great and almost unprecedented deduction in the number of’ Aboriginal people ‘is to be attributed to the general occupation of the country by the’ colonisers and settlers (Select Committee Report, 1859,
p. iii). On the advice of other authorities and eyewitnesses, such as Ludwig Becker, Barkly suggested missions be established to protect and convert Aboriginal populations within the colony (Select Committee Report, 1859; Kenny, 2007, p. 134). However the motivations of colonial Melbourne, the settlers, and the RSV was that of advancement, despite the exact methods and strategies for advancement and protection conflicting.

Methods and strategies needed to be devised to regulate the protection of Aboriginal people, their knowledges before they were lost forever, the systems and procedures of settling, squatting, and purchasing for private land ownership. Evidence of the conflicts and strategies can be found in the newspaper records and from the Select Committee Report. One strategy to ‘protect’ Aboriginal people from the devastating advancement of settlement and colonisation was recommended in the Select Committee Report as being the formation of ‘reserves for the various tribes, on their own hunting grounds’ (Select Committee Report, 1859, p. v). It was suggested that on these ‘reserves’, ‘every effort should be made to induce’ Aboriginal people ‘to take an interest in the occupations of civilized life and give their aid in carrying out the various branches of industry’ (Select Committee Report, 1859, p. v) – meaning the colonial officials wanted Aboriginal people to work in return for shelter and food whilst economically contributing to what they perceived as colonial improvement. Further, it was proposed that
…those establishments ought to be under the charge of missionaries, clerical or lay, whose duty it would be to endeavour to teach the Aborigines the great principals of Christianity, as well as the elemental branches of secular education; and it is the opinion of the Committee, that ample supplies of provisions and blankets should be provided for these establishments until they could be made self-supporting, which your Committee trust might ultimately be the case. (Select Committee Report, 1859, p. v)

However, this aim, although striving to protect Aboriginal people through ‘civilising’ strategies, also challenged the settler desire and motive to freely claim the land. Additionally this aim was motivated by assimilationist desire to eradicate Indigenous knowledge and culture to create a unified Australia and thus posed a significantly urgent opportunity for those interested in Aboriginal peoples (their traditions and their culture) to preserve this knowledge through scientific investigations. Protecting Aboriginal people, their culture, their traditions and their knowledge was a motive of the early ethnographic investigations made by a significant Melbourne figure, Ludwig Becker, whom had close affiliations with the Victorian Exploring Expedition, the Royal Society of Victoria and who, as an artist and naturalist provided insightful documentation of the settlement of the colony. Included in the Select Committee Report are some significant insights and drawings by Ludwig Becker that demonstrate the scientific desire of some to understand and preserve Indigenous knowledges, and cultures, and also to celebrate their ways of living (Select Committee Report, 1859, p. 98 & 95). The inclusion
of Ludwig Becker’s images in this Report also suggest the influence of and desire for developing scientific understanding as a way of assisting settlement in a new country and reveals the RSV attitudes to scientific knowledge creation.

Some members of the Royal Society of Victoria were originally from Germany and like many scientists of the 18th and 19th Century were influenced by the visionary German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) an intrepid explorer who believed in and studied the interconnections and relationships between all things. Humboldt, and his younger brother Wilhelm came from an intellectual circle in Berlin, which included Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller. Humboldt influenced many scientists and visionaries in natural world thought including Charles Darwin (who published On the Origin of Species after the death of Humboldt), William Wordsworth, two of America’s most influential naturalists Henry David Thoreau and John Muir (Wulf, 2015). Humboldt was a friend of politician Thomas Jefferson and the Venezuelan military leader and former President of Bolivia Simon Bolivar. Significantly, three of the scientists involved in the Victorian Exploring Expedition; Professor Georg Neumayer, Ludwig Becker and Hermann Beckler, were influenced by Humboldt with Beckler being a personal acquaintance who carried a letter of introduction from Humboldt on his arrival in Australia in 1856 (Dodd, 2013, p. 83). The significance of the Humboldtian influence is great due to how this science influenced early German scientific practice in Australia. The legacy of
the German influence is witnessed in how they responded to Aboriginal people, how they related with the natural landscape, and how they approached exploration with a greater appreciation of interconnection.

Melbourne in the 1860s was revelling in the glory and abundance of the gold rush and rapidly establishing exclusive clubs and societies promoting the arts and sciences that reflected the civilizing successes and hopes of the city. The city had already established a ‘university, a museum, a library, an observatory, botanic gardens, a philharmonic society’ and two societies known as the Victorian Institute for the Advancement of Science and the Philosophical Society (Thorne, 2011, p. iii). These two societies merged to become the Philosophical Institute, which in turn applied for Royal Charter and in 1859 to became the Royal Society of Victoria with its own purpose-built building, which is still used to this day. The German scientists of the Royal Society of Victoria were making great contributions to knowledge production in the new colonies (Allen, 2010) and the German missionaries, both with unique sensitivities to Aboriginal people and their land (Kenny, 2007).

The Ghastly Blank and the advancement of Science

During the 19th Century the ‘unknown’ centre or ‘ghastly blank’ was a colonial problem that needed to be solved. It was reported in the Argus newspaper in 1858 that scientific explorations of enquiry and knowledge creation, as opposed to a focus on simply the immediate
return of mercantile gain, was most beneficial for the long term prospects of understanding this unknown centre of Australia. It was believed that if scientific exploration was to occur throughout the centre of Australia a major gap in the knowledge of this massive continent could be filled and the country could be opened up for settlement and progress. Exploration, as Dane Kennedy explains, is a ‘knowledge-enterprise’ that ‘can be undertaken for a range of reasons – to seek resources, to conquer territory, to promote trades, to convert heathens, to gain fame, and much more’ (2013, p. N.P). As mentioned earlier, within an 1858 newspaper article, the anonymous author states that if systematic exploration of the centre of Australia was to be carried out:

a ghastly blank will no longer stare us in the face when we bend our eyes upon the map of this continent, and the track of the explorers, winding over that white plain, may become one of the highways of commerce, dotted with centres of population, and vital with the ebb and flow of periodical tide of travellers. (Undisclosed correspondent for the Argus, 1858, p.4)

Supporting the benefits of the advancement of science for each of the states the ‘undisclosed correspondent’ argues that ‘Sir Martin Frobisher, who knew something of the British character as well as of foreign travel and maritime enterprise’, complained in his day of the impediment offered to systematic exploration of the globe by ‘the

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9 In the Argus there is the statement: ‘TO CORRESPONDENTS. All communications intended for insertion must be authenticated by the name and address of the writer – not necessarily for publication, but as guarantee of good faith. We cannot undertake to return rejected communications.’ (Argus Wednesday 1 September 1858 p.4)
greedy desire our country hath to a present saviour and return of gain’ (Undisclosed correspondent for the Argus, 1858, p. 4). The correspondent continues:

There can be no question that whilst the bounds of geographical knowledge have been greatly extended by the active agencies of commerce, yet the spirit of inquiry derives very little aid or countenance from that source when no prospect is clearly visible of a “present saviour and return of gain.” Men of science, art, and letters, if they are true to the highest duties of their vocation, labor [sic] as much for the future – sometimes an exceedingly remote one – as for the present; so does the statesmen.

As opposed to the:

…mercantile mind busies itself with “the ignorant present.” Its horizon is not vast in its circumference, and all that it includes is visible to the eye. When commerce sows, it is in the expectation of reaping an immediate harvest. It has no mind to plant acorns and wait for the growth of oaks, and hence the question of exploration has never been taken up with any degree of eagerness by the commercial community of this city. Matter-of-fact men fail to appreciate the importance to science of the investigations which have yet to be made of the interior of the Australian continent. They seem to be unaware of the axiomatic truth, that every discovery of science possesses an economic value, and, sooner or later, adds something to the list of human enjoyments, or the sum of human wealth; and, lacking foresight and imagination, these matter-of-fact men very often relinquish the chances of obtaining splendid prizes in the future, by concentrating their attention only upon such schemes.
as promise an immediate “return of gain”. (Undisclosed correspondent for the Argus, 1858, p.4)

The correspondent acknowledges that:

[w]hether there shall be found a habitable tract of country in the heart of what now appears to be a desert, or whether there shall be discovered a chain of oases adapted to serve as halting-places for a caravan, the result of an exploration of that hitherto impenetrable land of mystery – an exploration which will be rendered practicable by the employment of the camel – cannot fail to be of the highest value, both in a scientific and economic point of view. The interior of Australia will soon be the only terra incognita on the face of the globe. (Undisclosed correspondent for the Argus, 1858, p.4)

The distinction or separation between mercantile interest and scientific advancement caused the rift or conflict around the time of planning and preparation for the VEE. This rift was most evident in the attempt to promote public awareness and acceptance of the worth of scientific exploration – in particular, in the avenues taken to raise awareness in the value of scientific knowledge of the interior of Australia.

In 1857, the Philosophical Institute formed the Exploration Committee to consider sending a Victorian expedition north across the centre of Australia. It has recently been identified that the ‘expedition was to serve several purposes: to seek grazing land, and to pre-empt similar endeavours, particularly those of John McDouall Stuart (1865), sponsored by the rival, neighbouring, colony of South Australia’ (Thorne, 2011, p.iii). However the histories of Burke and Wills have
neglected a few important aspects of the expedition which recent scholarship has since attempted to address. As Thorne highlights, ‘historians seem to have largely overlooked another purpose of the expedition – this was to be a scientific expedition’ (Thorne, 2011, p.iii). Thorne points out that the ‘Exploration Committee included leading scientists of the colony: Government Paleontologist Professor Frederick McCoy, Government Botanist Ferdinand Mueller, zoologist William Blandowski, geophysicist and meteorologist Professor Georg [George] Neumayer, and chemist and assayer John Macadam’ (Thorne, 2011, p.iii). This group was responsible for setting the scientific goals of the expedition. However, firstly, support was required for such scientific endeavour and in a colonising nation, where expansion and growth was so rapid, it was seemingly difficult to convince settlers of the value of scientific knowledge when they are so busy setting a life and future for themselves. As the correspondent for the Argus points out:

[t]he sum required to be raised by public subscription is so insignificant in comparison with the wealth of this colony and the magnitude of the object proposed to be accomplished, that we should imagine it will be speedily raised; while the limitation of the number of the [Exploration] Committee will have the effect of increasing sense of responsibility felt by individual constituents, and of impelling them to exercise the utmost caution and discretion in the expenditure of the funds entrusted to them. (Undisclosed correspondent for the Argus, 1858, p.4)
The correspondent anticipated that the other colonies would equally participate in ‘something like a federal movement for the attainment of a really national end’, in a combined effort to increase this scientific understanding and also to:

- extend the basis of operations, and multiply the chances of success.

The honor [sic] of removing the veil of mystery which envelopes the centre of this continent, and of opening up an overland communication between its southern and its northern shores, is one in which New South Wales, South Australia, and Victoria may equally participate, while the material advantages to be ultimately derived from the geographical discoveries made by the explorers would chiefly accrue to the adjoining colonies. (Emphasis placed)

(Undisclosed correspondent for the Argus, 1858, p.4)

Earlier international exploration, and contemporary expeditions within Australia (Allen, 2010), was about knowledge creation (Driver, 2013). The process of removing the veil of mystery from the centre of Australia was to be a slow which some settlers and explorers seemingly did not have time for. In expressed frustration at the delays in undertaking this scientific research the correspondent exclaims:

In all probability the time is not far distant when we shall wonder at the timidity or the apathy, the ignorance displayed in the selection of means or the shocking indifference exhibited in reference to the importance of results, by which we were actuated prior to our solution of the problem which has so long perplexed us.

(Undisclosed correspondent for the Argus, 1858, p.4)
This conflict between the RSV, the scientists, the colonists and the settlers as to the aims and objectives of the VEE was not the only discord. Part of the conflict is evidenced by the choice of leader; with Burke representing the courage and disinterest required to cross the continent for mercantile gain, the scientific objectives appeared to be less important.

**Men of science and the race to the Gulf**

By 1859, selections for the exploration party members were beginning to be made and when Neumayer ‘broached the subject of the expedition’ to Wills, he did not hesitate (Bonyhady, 1991, p.50). By this time Wills saw himself as a ‘servant of science and was eager to be tested’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.50). Burke was appointed and Neumayer immediately began preparing scientific instructions for Wills (Bonyhady, 1991, p.50). By July 1860, there were no rivals for Wills so when Burke recommended him the Exploration Committee agreed and immediately made Wills third in command; this however caused dissent. The dispute was in regard to Wills’s responsibilities, because Neumayer ‘thought that Wills would not have time both to pursue pure science and to plot the party’s route’ he ‘pressed Burke to take someone else as a surveyor’ (Bonyhady, 1991, p.50). Burke chose to ‘rely solely on Wills’, who was appointed as ‘Surveyor and Astronomical Observer’ whose ‘principal function was’ to ‘be the practical one of identifying the party’s route; systematic registration of meteorology was something he should carry out at their permanent
camps; magnetic observations were simply something he should make whenever he could do so “without interfering with the main object of the expedition” (In Bonyhady, 1991, p.50). Thus it appears that the main object of the expedition was to reach the Gulf of Carpentaria and second was the object of scientific investigation. This is further justified by Barkly in 1861, when in regard to the choice of Burke as leader he claims:

When I delivered my last inaugural address the arrangements connected with the proposed expedition, including the most important of all – the appointment of a leader – remained to be made. With a single exception, the aspirants to this post of difficulty and danger could boast little personal acquaintance with Australian exploration. They still had their spurs to win. The choice of the committee fell on a gentleman of whom I will only on this occasion say, that he has as yet done nothing to discredit the confidence reposed in him, and that if courage, disinterestedness, and a firm determination to succeed in crossing the desert despite all obstacles, were amongst the foremost qualifications for the leadership, no better selection could have been made. (Emphasis placed) (Barkly, 1865, pp.xxvii–viii)

Barkly, who already knew of Stuart’s exploration party that was setting out from near Adelaide to travel towards the Victoria River or Arnhem Land, explains:

Before Mr Burke was well out of the settled districts, rumours reached us of that extraordinary journey of Mr Stuart’s, from the adjacent colony, which if it has not altogether solved the problem of Australian geography, has at any rate obliged the most learned
geographers of the day to confess themselves mistaken in assuming the whole interior of the continent to be either an arid and inhospitable desert or a vast central lake. (Barkly, 1865, pp. xxvii – viii)

Barkly makes it clear that he believed Stuart was ‘bent on still claiming the honour of being the first to cross the continent’ (Barkly, 1865, pp. xxvii–viii). Stuart, a veteran South Australian explorer, was yet to complete an expedition route from ‘Chamber’s Creek to the westward of Lake Torren’s to Skoke’s Victoria River on the north coast, or to Arnhem’s Land’ (Barkly, 1865, pp. xxvii–viii). The Royal Society was aware that Stuart started ‘from that spot on the first day of the present year with a larger party and ampler equipment’ (Barkly, 1865, pp. xxvii–viii). However in this presentation Barkly makes no mention of who the members of his party were – in particular whether or not Stuart’s party consisted of Aboriginal members – but continues to discuss Burke as a choice of leader of the Victorian Exploring Expedition, and makes reference to this exploration being a race to the Gulf rather than a scientific expedition, stating:

As regards his Victorian competitor – I will not call him rival – in this glorious race, Mr Burke, we might long since have looked to hear of his arrival at the preconcerted depot on Cooper’s Creek, and of his departure thence to skirt the eastern border of the desert, as the shortest route to the Gulf of Carpentaria, but for the delay which occurred in the transmission of the second portions of the stores from the Darling, which probably deterred him from sending back a
messenger with the news of his movements. (Barkly, 1865, pp. xxvii –viii)

It is evident that Barkly was not aware of the happenings on the Cooper at this particular time, in particular the events surrounding Dick and the rescuing of Lyons and MacPherson. This lack of communication into the party’s movements was not due simply to the delay in the delivery of stores but was in fact due to a lack of communication between Melbourne and the Cooper, lack of effectively establishing a Depot on the Cooper and most significantly the lack of arrival of Burke and Wills at the designated meeting location (Cahir, 2013; Dodd, 2013). It could be surmised that Barkly, with this understanding that Burke would push through ‘with firm determination’ against all odds, had realised that the gathering of scientific information about Aboriginal people and the country would not be Burke’s priority. The expedition had conflicting priorities, however, it has been argued that the RSV was interested in the knowledge and science of Aboriginal peoples, which has subsequently been rewritten into the history of the VEE (McCann & Joyce, 2011a,b). However, it has been claimed that the failure to meet, what could be argued as the scientific aims of collecting Aboriginal knowledge was significant – this is most evident when contrasted with the German journals and notebooks and those of the relief expeditions (in particular see Clarke and his discussion on Nardoo and the use of other native foods). The German understanding of the landscape
during colonial exploration and settlement is quite significant to understanding Indigenous knowledges today.

Three men of science were chosen to be members of the exploration party: medical doctor and botanist Hermann Beckler, artist and naturalist Ludwig Becker and surveyor and astronomer William John Wills. Beckler and Becker, like Neumayer and Mueller (of the Exploration Committee), were members of a group of educated German immigrants who ‘played a large part in the cultural and scientific life of the new colony’ (Thorne, 2011, p. iii). Other German scientists also contributed to the scientific understandings of the new colony; these include, for example, William Blandowski and Johann and Friedrich Carl Wilhelmi. Each of these German scientists, strongly influenced by Humboldtian methods and practices, including Neumayer who accompanied the expedition as far as the Darling River, offer significant insight into what life was like for the Indigenous people at this time and have provided a wealth of scientific knowledge.

Scientific exploration offered the colonisers and settlers a way of learning how to be in this alien country. The process began with surveying and navigational astronomy – the ‘explorers needed to know their geographical position as closely as possible at all times, and to chart their progress, filling in the blanks on [their] map’ (Thorne, 2011, p. iii). Paul Carter thoroughly considers and explains how exploration and map-making contributed to the understanding of and relations to country today (1987). This enabled the newly documented knowledge to be shared with other settlers, scientists and
colonisers. The explorers’ journals were shared with other explorers: they used each other’s work to guide them through new country and when these records were not shared it was considered poor etiquette (Landsborough, 1862, p.41). The explorers’ journals were also published in newspapers around the newly-establishing colonies, which enabled settlers to move beyond the settled regions to newer pastures to feed their stock. Explorers’ journals, although requiring careful reading (Carter, 1987), provide the evidence of how scientific knowledge was created. Water sources were identified, places to feed and rest stock were located, and quality land was claimed thus forcing the Aboriginal inhabitants to change their lifestyles and often to relocate from their ancestral lands. This knowledge was shared in the format of presentations at the RSV where Barkly claimed that the RSV could make considerable effort in the preservation of the Aboriginal dialects and traditions. Drawing upon the scientific work of botanist Carl Wilhelmi in the 1861 Anniversary Address of the President, Barkly proposed:

a paper by Mr Wilhelmi, ‘On Manners and Customs of the Natives of the Port Lincoln District,’ containing much valuable information on a subject which I would take the opportunity of impressing on the attention of the Royal Society, with a view to the institution of immediate and systematic inquiries of a similar nature within our own territory. Whole tribes of the original occupants of the soil are, under some mysterious dispensation, rapidly disappearing, and the links which their dialects and traditions might supply to the
The Port Lincoln district consists of what is today known as the Nawu and is closely related to the nearby Barngarla and Wirangu languages (Hercus & Simpson, 2001). The botanical journeys of Wilhelmi brought him into contact with Aboriginal people whom he proudly took interest in learning from. His ethnographic observations were recorded and were read before the Royal Society on 29 October 1861. Wilhelmi claims that he found the customs and traditions of Aboriginal people most interesting ‘… as these people, at that time, had as yet been so little interfered with by civilization’ (Wilhelmi, 1862, p.3). However, a great deal of the information contained within this particular paper was not personally witnessed or observed by Wilhelmi, it was passed to him from the Reverend Mr Schurmann who in 1840 was appointed Protector of Aborigines of Port Lincoln, a position he held for nearly six years. He then moved to Adelaide and Encounter Bay as a missionary and returned a few years later to the Protector position in Port Lincoln. Schurmann was ‘fully conversant with their [the Aboriginal people of the Port Lincoln region] language’ (Wilhelmi, 1862, p.4). Wilhelmi remarks that ‘the population and general condition of the Aboriginal people of Australia ‘greatly depend on the nature of the locality they occupy; where the country is sterile and unproductive, the natives are found to congregate in small numbers, and to be in a miserable condition; while, on the contrary, in fertile districts they are comparatively numerous, robust, and well
made’ (Wilhelmi, 1862, p.4). When considering this comment in the context of what is recorded within the explorers’ journals and diaries it could be assumed that any mention of numbers and physical appearance of Aboriginal people refers to the condition of the country and its appropriateness for further settlement. This information and a close reading of Barkly’s Anniversary Address reveals a little of the attitudes of the RSV towards Aboriginal people and their knowledge of the land and how or if this ethnographic knowledge was considered to be a valuable contribution to scientific understanding. Barkly may have been considering these kinds of observations when he mentioned the importance of more ethnographic studies being carried out.

**Aboriginal skill surpassing European ability**

However Wilhelmi offered more insight into the value of Aboriginal knowledge than only Aboriginal presence (or lack of it) within certain and specific regions; Wilhelmi believed that Aboriginal skills surpassed European ability of being in country. Not only does Wilhelmi offer insight into the customs and beliefs, he also claims that the men:

… possess a great deal of natural grace in the carriage of their body, their gait is easy and erect, their gestures are natural under all circumstances in their dances, their fights, and while speaking, and they certainly surpass the European in ease and rapidity of their movements (Wilhelmi, 1862, p.5).

Wilhelmi expresses with fascination the space where the newcomers meet each other, by observing another difference between Aboriginal
people and the settlers and colonisers. He explains that it has been asserted that Aboriginal people:

… eat anything without any distinction whatsoever; this statement, probably, is owing to the fact that they certainly eat many things which to Europeans are disgusting, as, for instances, maggots of various kinds, rotten eggs, the entrails of animals; but, on the other hand, the white people eat many things which to the natives are equally disgusting, such as certain kinds of fish, oysters, shellfish, mussels of all kinds, the common mushroom, the other description of which latter however they are very fond of themselves. (Wilhelmi, 1862, p.5)

Wilhelmi makes a great deal of reference to ‘bushfoods’ – the growing conditions of various flora species, the seasons in which they fruit – and also to various native fauna and their habits. Specifically Wilhelmi relates the Aboriginal names of these species to what is known of their scientific names. Further, he explains what various foods taste like and how they are prepared and or sourced (including how animals are hunted and killed). Fire-burning practices are also mentioned along with the use of weapons. Clothing, housing and some artefacts, such as ornaments, are described and the way each of them is manufactured is detailed. Ritual practices, songs and the Indigenous cosmology are briefly described and a simplistic understanding of how they relate to management-type practices is also discussed. Of most importance to exploration is the description of water and how or where it is stored.
Without mentioning a deep understanding of Aboriginal movement and or sedentary choices Wilhelmi attempts to articulate why people live where they live, and why they visit particular places. In particular with regard to the people of Port Lincoln districts of South Australia, Wilhelmi states:

The habit of constantly changing their places of rest is so great that they cannot overcome it, even if staying where all their wants can be abundantly supplied. A certain longing to revisit this or that spot, for which they have taken a particular fancy, seizes them, and neither promises nor persuasion can induce them to resist it for any time; only in time and by degrees is this feeling likely to give way. As they travel greater distances during the summer months than during the winter, they then also more frequently change their places of rest. … Each family has it distinct place, where they live together; all the unmarried men have to sleep by themselves. (Wilhelmi, 1862, p.18)

Ethnography in Australia was establishing itself as a discipline where the newcomers could learn more about this new and unfamiliar landscape. The desire for this knowledge was arguably not just about developing knowledge and understanding of the original inhabitants – it was about learning how to be. In this era however environmental conservation was not a priority and the aim was more directed at mercantile gain. Appropriation of Aboriginal knowledges was mechanism developed to support the colonisation of these regions. Although historians, in particular Heather Goodall (2008), have identified that Aboriginal people have been depicted as exotic ‘noble environmentalists’ living ‘in harmony’ with the non-human
environment’ which came out of the environmental movements that emerged in the 1960s, the first settlers must have surely been impressed by the skill of Indigenous peoples to survive in this environment. Ecological knowledge research runs the risk of constructing ‘Indigenous knowledge as a “static repository of pre-colonial knowledge”’ (Muir, Rose, & Sullivan, 2010, p.260) and focussing on social interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people throughout history begins to grapple with the ontological challenge of Indigenous knowledge and Western science successful partnership (Muir, Rose, & Sullivan, 2010, p. 259-60).

The binary distinctions between the disciplines of Western science; between science and culture; humans and nature, run the risk of limiting understandings of how to belong and be within the Australian landscape. The perpetuation of this binary thinking maintains the mystical thinking so commonly attached to the centre of Australia. The search for meaning and connection with the centre of Australia, the ‘Ghastly Blank’, has shaped or created the nation and the deaths of Burke and Wills played a fundamental role in this identity formation. At the time of Burke and Wills, not only did Barkly believe that Aboriginal people were ‘mysteriously dispensed’ but also the unknown centre of Australia held a mesmerizing power to get rid of (or hide, or absorb) not just Aboriginal people but also explorers – It could be argued that this narrative of erasure and disappearance added to the idea of terra nullius. Aboriginal knowledge could be gained through ethnographic means for the
benefit of colonial occupation yet this method also contributed to the silencing of Aboriginal agency and appropriation of ways of being in the centre of Australia.

There was great concern amongst the early non-Aboriginal settlers of Australia that the centre of Australia held some great and often-feared mystery. This fascination with mystery was perpetuated by the stories of colonial exploration through and within the centre of Australia. Seventeen years after the disappearance of Leichhardt and his exploration party, and a few years after the deaths of Burke and Wills, social questioning persisted. A contributor to the Collingwood Observer requested a search party for Leichhardt, which could include camels:

In March, 1848, Leichhardt – a gallant man, a splendid explorer — — — away into the interior New Holland, intending to push through to Swan River, leading a noble band, and driving fifty oxen, as baggage-bearers and living rations. The last words written by Leichhardt were: — ‘Do not fear me; whatever happens, I shall not perish by starvation.’ And then he disappeared. Rumors [sic] of disaster led to a few men being sent after his traces in 1852; and, travelling a very short distance, they turned back, hearing from some natives that the lost party had been destroyed. … (Collingwood Observer, 1865, p.2)

Explaining the other explorers who set out in search, such as Gregory’s party who ‘trotted comfortably down the Cooper’s Creek to Adelaide’, the Collingwood Observer article continues:
Burke and Wills used the camels, which had been primarily procured in order that an effectual effort might be determined on to rescue Leichhardt, if possible. McKinlay, Walker, and others, went after Burke; but Leichhardt never entered their heads, and oblivion covered us with a mantle of his memory and his proposed course of travel. … and thus, at present, the sad mystery remains. … Many causes might be assigned for the destruction of all, or the detention by some inland tribe of survivors of the party in captivity. The fatal leguminous gastrolobium may have killed all the cattle, this plant being unknown to Leichhardt, but is now well-known, and which plant, unfortunately, grows right in his track through the interior to Swan River. Rumours have been reported of white men and horses being seen by natives journeying toward the western shores, but hundreds of miles inland, a locality where the party would travel, but where their greatest difficulty would commence. But everything is blank as to certainty. … Leichhardt shall be left to his terrible oblivion. Other men have lived seventeen years and thirty-three years, and even women for shorter periods, among native races, and this we can affirm, that Leichhardt was, of all other, par excellence, the man to save his party from massacre, and to win the native peoples to his aid for life, if not for his furthermore toward civilization. …The native man is not a mere savage. King is a living testimony to his kindness of heart (my emphasis) (Collingwood Observer, 1865, p.2)

The missing explorers created a fear of the unknown centre of Australia, however, this correspondent is of the belief that to be successful in interior exploration you must befriend the Indigenous
inhabitants. Making comparison between the ease with which Gregory’s party travelled along the Cooper, the newspaper correspondent is aware of the importance of seeking the assistance of local Aboriginal people – even if it is for them to guide the lost explorers back to civilisation. Barkly believed that Aboriginal people were mysteriously disappearing\(^\text{10}\), and with that their knowledge was also being lost forever; others believed that without the assistance of Aboriginal people, without their knowledge, the explorers would also vanish without a trace. In 1861 it was already evident that a willingness to listen to Aboriginal advice – to make use of their communication systems and knowledge – was imperative to survival in this unknown centre of Australia (Cahir, 2013). The ethnographic understanding of Aboriginal Australia was arguably already highly valued within the scientific community however improvement, advancement and the construction of a civilised nation and Aboriginal knowledge provided strategies for achieving this.

For some the scientific advancement was the heart of the desire to explore the centre of Australia, however there existed a major internal challenge in the minds and understandings of the colonisers and settlers. This is evidenced in the letters from William John Wills to his family.

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\(^\text{10}\) See Robert Kenny, *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming – Pepper and the Ruptured World* for further discussion on the disruption caused to Aboriginal life and ways due to colonisation.
William Wills in Baraba Baraba country

Prior to the Victorian Exploring Expedition, William John Wills’s time in Baraba Baraba country, near Deniliquin, reveals some of his perspectives and feelings towards the Aboriginal people and land. From a collection of letters (Wills, 1853b) are two to his mother, in which Wills explains that he perceived Aboriginal people as being ‘lazy’ and that he did ‘not like them at all’ (Wills, 1853a). In another letter (1856), Wills writes:

The Blacks as I told you before are lazy beggars but very expert in the use of their spears and in diving. They will dive under ducks in a pond and catch them by the legs. They will also dive into a pond with a spear and turn on their backs so as to see the fish above them and then spear them. (Wills, 1856, p.2–3)

Wills acknowledges the skill of Aboriginal people however he does not mention attending any corroborees or being more intimately involved with the local Aboriginal people and their deeper philosophies and Law. Throughout the letters, Wills portrays his relationships with Aboriginal people as distant, as a kind of ‘seeing-man’, who passively looks at the land as being virtually unoccupied by Aboriginal people and soon to be under his possession (Pratt, 1992, p.7). This position of ‘seeing man’ denies subjectivities. As he expressed in 1853, seven years prior to the expedition, in reference to Aboriginal people ‘… they will soon be extinct’ (Wills, 1853a). Additionally, Barkly claimed:
When at Omeo, two years since, the last survivor of the numerous warlike tribe which had disputed possession with early settlers only a quarter of a century before, was presented to me, and I fear, from official reports which have come under my notice, that in other districts, despite all the efforts ... this unfortunate race is fast becoming extinct. (Barkly, 1865, p.xx–xxi)

These statements suggest that both these men have little close interaction with Aboriginal people, although through his minor encounters in Baraba Baraba Wills has witnessed skill and resilience. This belief in extinction created a psychological space for the colonisers to believe that they were stronger and more powerful than Aboriginal people; that European culture was more solid and valid than Aboriginal culture; and ultimately this conviction created and reinforced the concept that Australia was an ‘empty and primordial’ space where ‘European exploration’ could bring ‘the land into existence’ (Allen, 2011, p.245–74). It could be assumed that Wills (and presumably others) had little understanding of Aboriginal resistance, resilience, intelligence, or their deep knowledge of place, and their ecological agency – their active engagement with and shaping of the landscape – their subjectivities. Further, and most significantly, this understanding or concept of extinction perpetuated the dualistic and hyper-separated relationship between the European explorer and Aboriginal people and the natural environment. This contributed to the denial of the European use of Aboriginal knowledge and promoted the concept of Terra Nullius.
With closer or more critical reading of these documents, traces of seeing the value or significance of Aboriginal ecological knowledge and agency can be revealed; as can the conflicting denial of Aboriginal influence on Wills’ understanding and learning of this new environment. For example:

The bark of the Gum tree is very thick, the Blacks make canoes of it by cutting off a long piece half around the tree and [——] a bit of string across the middle to keep the sides up. The gum is of a beautiful red colour and some trees yield so much, that sometimes at first sight you would think a bullock had been killed under it. Manna is a product of this tree, it grows out of the leaves, generally about the size of caraway comfits but often much larger it tastes like very good sweet meats, I have seen as much as half a pint under one tree … (Wills, 1853, p.4–5)

However in the following sentence he dismisses the deep knowledge needed to live and survive with this land, and simplistically states, ‘the only good they (Aboriginal people) are is to catch fish & ducks and cut wood’ (Wills, 1853a, p.6). This comment reveals the utilitarian relationship Wills has with, or his attitude towards, Aboriginal people. It supports the idea that the newcomers perceived themselves, as superior enlightened rational minds that believed knowledge must come from a rational and detached perspective, which promoted mercantile or utilitarian gain. However, in contrast, evidence of Wills’ inquisitive (and arguably true scientific) nature is revealed in another letter to both his parents where he explained that Aboriginal people do not believe in a God. To quote: ‘I
do not think [they] have any idea of a deity whatever’ (Wills, 1853, p.11). Perhaps Wills was questioning who the Aboriginals believed created the land, the earth. Was it nature, or was it God?

In another letter to his mother, he encourages others to develop a ‘taste for science’ and for his parents to encourage the children to learn perspective drawing and mathematics. He exclaims ‘there is another thing that would do them a deal of good … Mathematics generally … Algebra in particular are the best things young people can learn for they are the only thing we can depend on as true. There is no disputing them’ (Wills, 1856). Adding to this he claims, ‘[i]n nothing else do all men agree, in nothing else can there be perfect truth. Of course I have the Bible out of the question [emphasis placed]. But I suppose I must tell you some things about your undutiful son. I am now learning surveying …’ (Wills, 1856). Wills’ belief in the Bible and mathematics offering a system or framework of ‘perfect truth’ contrasts greatly with understandings of Aboriginal knowledge systems of the era and it could be argued that Aboriginal people prior to European settlement and the introduction of their land management practices did not perceive the Bible or the Christian foundations of scientific methods as offering ‘perfect truth’ in providing the appropriate knowledge and Law that enables survival in the Australian environment.\(^{11}\)

\(^{11}\) See Robert Kenny, The Lamb Enters the Dreaming Nathanial Pepper & The Ruptured World for an excellent of how Indigenous people and European were challenged by each other worldviews. This book considers the influences of Christianity, science, slavery, and the moral order of imperialism.
Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment

Finding the perfect truth that enabled survival within the Australian environment challenged the explorers and settlers. The 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century colonisers of Australia were conditioned by ‘the successes of the Scientific Revolution and the mentality of the Enlightenment’ and believed in the ‘possibility of progress, science and improvement … as natural allies’ (Gascoigne, 2002, p.99). John Gascoigne and Patricia Curthoys in their work *The Enlightenment and the Origins of European Australia* argue that ‘[f]rom 1788 to 1850, when European Australia was largely formed, the goals which gave shape and direction to the conduct of life drew heavily on the worldview of the Enlightenment’ (Gascoigne, 2002, p.169). Enlightenment mentality separates humans from nature, typically situating humans as superior to nature and all that is, comes from or represents nature. From an ecological perspective Val Plumwood argues that the Scientific Revolution and the mentality of the Enlightenment were shaped on a dualistic understanding that created a ‘cult of reason that elevates to extreme supremacy a particular narrow form of reason and correspondingly devalues the contrasted and reduced sphere of nature and embodiment’ (Plumwood, 2002, p.4). This is the belief that humans can control nature and that this control is directed and informed by a narrow form of reasoning or arguably a form of hyper-rationalism where the environment or nature is pushed to the limits, beyond the threshold of resilience. Further, Plumwood explains that ‘most of all, the Enlightenment model, despite its orientation to
external nature, makes the knowledge relationship monological and strongly anthropocentric, appropriating not only knowledge itself but its fruits and ends exclusively for the human’ (Plumwood, 2002, p.49). This belief that all that nature provides is for the purpose of human want and desire denies dependency on the health of the land, the ecosystem of which humans are integrally connected. In greater detail it is understood that:

Rationalism and human/nature dualism have helped create ideals of culture and human identity that promote human distance from, control of and ruthlessness towards the sphere of nature as the Other, while minimising non-human claims to the earth and to elements of mind, reason and ethical consideration. Its monological logic leads to denials of dependency on the Other in the name of an hyperbolised autonomy, and to relationships that cannot be sustained in real world contexts of radical dependency on the Other. (Plumwood, 2002, p.4–5)

The period of the Enlightenment saw the secularization of Western culture, and also the development of a modified way of interpreting and responding to the environment and ‘Others’. Anthropologist and historian Deborah Bird Rose explains that through the process of Enlightenment ‘many Christian concepts, values, and root metaphors were taken across from religious thought to sociocultural thought, or abstracted into vague notions such as “spirit”’ (Rose, 2004, p.16). Further, she supports the analysis initiated by Certeau and pursued by Boer and Conrad that ‘Christian discourse not only “dissipated into society at large” but also that Christian theology
transformed itself into the secular academic disciplines that took shape after the Enlightenment’ (in Rose, 2004, p.16). It is often through these academic disciplines of scientific understanding, formed out of Christian concepts following the Enlightenment, that we understand and reinterpret our colonial history in the present. Rose explains that this understanding offers good ground for further examination of the ‘continuities across religious and secular time concepts’ (Rose, 2004, p.16). Christian concepts and the early scientific understandings, which typically denied dependency on the ‘Other’, had devastating effects on the Aboriginal people, their culture, their knowledge, the waterways, the landscape and all other species. The Enlightenment view was the belief that progress (civilisation) was only possible by moving beyond the belief in God, magic or spirit (which also denies the religious foundations of some scientific understandings through hyper-rationalist and or binary thinking). This understanding separated Aboriginal knowledge of the land from that of the scientific understanding of the era – Aboriginal knowledge was appropriated for the utilitarian aspects of Western colonisation. The social and ecological aspects of how to be and survive on the land – in Country – were separated by simplistic rationalism.

Making way through Aboriginal Country

It was believed that moving beyond religious or spiritual belief and into scientific understandings enabled people to travel the world, draw maps and discover new knowledge – to make their way through
unknown country. However there is a persistent denial that explorers within Australia relied or depended upon anything or anyone other than their scientific knowledge of navigational objects. There is also a level of criticism directed at those who do get lost or go missing or make mistakes in the bush, that they are lacking in the true ‘bushmanship’ of an explorer (Cameron, McLaren, & Cooper, 1999). For example, some of the social responses to Burke and his perceived failure were that he lacked the skills needed to survive – there appears to be a clear distinction between bushmanship, men of science, and intrepid hero explorer and it could be argued Burke failed to meet any of these. The denial of the explorers’ use of Aboriginal knowledge to move through Country was created by their desire to promote themselves as rational men of science and it could be assumed that to listen to the advice of Aboriginal people was to believe in some form of mysticism or spirituality.

At the time of Burke and Wills Aboriginal people noticed the incompetence of some and skill of others. It has been argued that the Aboriginal perspectives of explorers reveals an attitude of disrespect towards those who cannot make their way through Country, and those who cannot survive in Country (Cahir, 2013b). Recent discussion by Fred Cahir reveals traces of Aboriginal perspectives that suggest a ‘disdainful sting’ that ‘may have been directed at Burke and Wills and their ilk’ (Cahir, 2013b, p.152). As Fred Cahir points out, ‘[o]ccasionally it is necessary to read between the lines in order to discern Aboriginal people’s disdain and amazement at white people’s
incompetence in the bush’ (Cahir, 2013b, p.150). Cahir draws upon an Aboriginal account, recorded by George Hayden while exploring in the Gippsland region of Victoria in 1844. Cahir explains that this ‘is striking for its incredulity of the white man’s ineptitude’ (Cahir, 2013b, p.150).

Hayden, trekking in uncharted country was shown white tracks and a white campsite by his unidentified Boonwurrung guide that Hayden had not discerned. Hayden recorded the disdainful comments of his guide: ‘Now white man berry clever, no mistake make him house, and flour, and tea, and sugar, and tobacco, and clothes, but white fellow no find out when another white man walk along a road – I believe sometimes white man berry stupid. (Cahir, 2013b, p.150)

Within this quote there is obvious respect revealed towards each other: that the explorer appreciates the Aboriginal knowledge and bushman abilities is revealed in his choice to record his guide’s interpretation, to admit his own inabilities and to highlight the Aboriginal mans knowledge and skills. Cahir demonstrates further the ineptitude of some explorers as perceived by various Aboriginal people. Drawing on an example during George Neumayer’s magnetic survey undertaken in 1862, shortly after his time as a member of the Burke and Wills expedition, he records the words of Tommy – an Aboriginal guide (possibly Daungwurrung) (Cahir, 2013b, p.151). Neumayer’s journal records the scenario:

We returned very much fatigued, and found that Edward had not got tea ready, being afraid to leave the camp, lest he should get lost in the bush. Sent one of the blacks with him. Tommy thought it very
stupid of white fellows to venture into the bush at all as they were so much afraid. ‘Why don’t you take a Bible with you’, he asked the servant suddenly; and on my inquiring of him what he meant, he replied with a sly expression on his face, that ‘supposing Mr G --- was going into the bush, he being big one frightened, he took a bible, and supposing he lost his way, he would get’m Bible and pray to that “Big-one” and he tells him’ but added ‘I have to go and get him out’.

(Neumayer, 1869 in Cahir, 2013b, p.151)

Tommy’s comments and ‘sly expression’ could be interpreted in numerous ways. However the overall message is that when the ‘white fellow’ ventures into the bush, and gets lost, it is Tommy (or Aboriginal people) who will ‘have to go and get him out’. The Bible or the ‘Big-one’ God will not save him. It could be assumed that the Boonwurrung guide, although appreciating the material objects that the newcomers can create (houses, flour, etc), view the inability to read the landscape as a fundamental skill to survival and to be lacking in these skills is a sign of stupidity. Tommy also, it could be assumed by his comments, is aware of the superfluous nature of the Bible in assisting people to be within the landscape. These two interpretations of the newcomers and the observation of their inability to make their way through Country link knowledges that are typically perceived as being binary – the social and the ecological.

The ontological separation of various knowledges disables exchanges between people and threatens healthy relations with place – with the landscape or nature. With the acceptance that academic disciplines of scientific understandings have been built upon
foundations of Christianity, and Tommy identifying that this Western system is inadequate, it is important to begin to consider how this system can ‘accommodate the longer established and more situated Aboriginal system’ (Muir, Rose, & Sullivan, 2010, p. 263). Since Burke and Wills died at Cooper Creek, even before their deaths, some were ignorant of Aboriginal knowledges and worldviews. This ignorance is evident in the colonial images depicting how Aboriginal people in the their Country related to the events that transpired on the Cooper in 1861. (See Figure 13)

Figure 13: ‘Natives discovering the Body of William John Wills, the Explorer, at Coopers Creek, June 1861’

Image removed at author's request


In the painting by Eugene Montagu Scott (see figure 13) we see the dying Wills sheltered by an Aboriginal built shelter and surrounded by Aboriginal men looking on in fascination. One man
however is in the background. He is looking up to the sky and pointing his finger in what appears to be an angry, questioning, gesture towards heaven or God. Just as Tommy did not believe in the ‘Big-one’ saving lost explorers it is easily assumed that Aboriginal men of the Cooper would have not blamed God for the death of William Wills. The ‘quasi-religious manner in which the Australian bush is depicted as hell’ (Slattery, 2013, p.181) within this painting also creates a narrative of Aboriginal people – in this case the Yandruwandha – as needing to be civilised and rescued from the living hell that was the Ghastly Blank of interior Australia. These narratives, even with the subtlety of painterly depictions, promote the colonial desire to improve, develop and progress as a nation.

This desire for improvement, development and progress moved through the landscape at different times and affected Aboriginal people to varying degrees since colonisation. Heather Goodall (2001) makes a strong argument that Aboriginal people of the Rangelands in New South Wales (NSW) (in particular the Western Division in western NSW where the VEE passed through) were not dispossessed but actually invaded by the colonisation process and many maintained their connection to Country. Goodall states:

Aboriginal people continued to live in close association with their own country, although they were certainly forced to move around their lands to the safer places, more sheltered by terrain or by developing new relationships with those newcomers who could more readily use Aboriginal labour. The assumption that Aboriginal people felt dispossessed underestimates their intense sense of
affiliation with country and their abilities to develop ways to sustain relationships to country even in the rapidly changed circumstances of colonialism. (2001, p.101)

However, the acceptance of Aboriginal knowledges and contributions to the survival of the colonisers and settlers is underappreciated. Historian Libby Robin in How a Continent Created a Nation (2007) describes Australia as being so ‘obsessed with improvement and development that it “was seldom able to acknowledge or learn from failure or accommodate new dimensions” and this’ argues Muir, Rose and Sullivan, ‘has been particularly the case with Indigenous knowledge’ (2010, p.264). Further Muir, Rose and Sullivan (2010, p.264) argue:

Part of the missed opportunity to develop a distinctive Australian science includes the historical failure to acknowledge the important role Aboriginal people could play in developing knowledge for good social and ecological relationships in Australia. The future of our social-ecological systems depends on a change in this culture. Creative exchanges between diverse knowledge systems are an important part of challenging this approach that has dominated Australia’s history.

Some creative exchanges have been occurring since these moments of colonial encounter where both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people mutually adapted to the changing and foreign environment. Cahir explains that during the period when Burke and Wills travelled through Victoria some Aboriginal people were ‘proficient in English’ and able to read and write and would have
discussed the news of Burke and Wills being lost and perishing. If Tommy’s comment was a ‘disdainful sting … directed at Burke and Wills and his ilk’ (Cahir, 2013, p.151) then Tommy’s comment reveals confidence in Aboriginal skills and abilities as well as distinguishing an understanding of difference between Aboriginal peoples bush skills and those of the explorers.

Tommy, and other guides of the colonial era, did not simply just know their way through Country, they followed a strict Law that was developed over tens of thousands of years where each person and group or unit was responsible for their own land and to respect the lands and Laws of others or risk punishment (Berndt & Berndt, 1999, p.142, p.343-344). The newcomer’s belief in progress, improvement and scientific knowledge, which placed the undeveloped scientific methods and methodologies of reason (and subsequently the religious dismissal of other forms of knowledge) as the authority, these explorers and bushmen may have dismissed the seemingly superstitious nature of Aboriginal knowledge which was governed by of the anthropomorphic entities from and of the Dreaming (Berndt & Berndt, 1999). A dismissal, or misunderstanding of Aboriginal knowledge, may have stemmed from the Enlightenment ideals of rationality, a belief system which ‘hyperseparates’ our ‘own species’ as ‘outside nature’, as ‘essentially intellectual beings, “rational choosers” within a system that is ‘reductive and human-centred’ (Plumwood, 2004, p. 27). In contrast however, Aboriginal knowledge reveals a deep awareness of the connections and interdependence of
humans and nature. The Aboriginal concept of the ‘Dreaming’ ‘enforces hard-learnt ecological practices’ and the archival memory of these colonial encounters reveal proof of how Aborigine people managed the land within a framework of strict laws, how Aboriginal people ‘made Australia’ (Gammage, 2011, p. 134). Although it is important to acknowledge the ‘relationship between indigenous peoples and ‘nature’ has a long been subject to distortion and is the focus of … heated debate … about the reality and mythology of the ‘Ecological Indian’ (Berkhoffer, 1979, Krech, 1999) and some have tried ‘to avoid unhelpful romanticisation of an imaginary ‘Ecological Aborigine’ (Goodall, 2001, p.101) it is worth considering the historical accounts of social and ecological relations and exchanges.

‘Black fellow make grass grow’

An example of Aboriginal conviction in their ecological agency can be found in the words of William John Wills himself. In 1853 Wills, as mentioned above, questioned Aboriginal belief in a deity. Was he questioning whether or not God or nature created the natural environment? In the same passage of this letter Wills refers to Aboriginal people who explained to him that ‘Black fellow make grass grow, black fellow make water come down …’ (Wills, 1853a, p. 10). Arguably this statement is acknowledgement that Aboriginal people (humans) are integral aspects of a functioning ecosystem and this particular man is stating that Aboriginal people manage the land. Ian Clark suggested that this Aboriginal man is making the grass grow and
the water come down ‘presumably through what are called increase rituals and ceremonies to bring rain’ (Personal communication, 12 June 2015). This statement articulates the understanding that Aboriginal people managed and cultivated the land with methods and methodologies that were sustainable for Aboriginal people for thousands of years. Bill Gammage supports this paradigm although many scientists who study landscapes in disciplines from anthropology to zoology have opposed his perspective. Scientists have written to him summarizing this mindset as ‘[i]f there is natural explanation, prefer it’, and another ‘[y]ou must assume that natural features have natural causes assuming that they were natural’ (Gammage, 2011, p.325). Anthropology does however offer methods and methodologies to analyse and develop understandings of colonial encounters and how scientists relate to the landscape (Asad, 1992). Ethnographic history enables the researcher to analyse the opinions, or views of many involved in cross-cultural encounters in the colonial setting, in particular it provides a way to examine various forms of agency and the implications of historical actors on modern understandings.

Belief in ecological agency, interconnection and interdependence is still strong amongst some Aboriginal people along the Murray. In July 2004, Agnes Rigney, a Ngrrindjeri Elder of South Australia, explained her connectivity to the Murray River as a merging of the river with her own body, ‘… we are all part of the food chain, … we are all part of the food chain, and that is why I say I feel a part of it – well I am … The river gave us
life, the river fed us’ (Weir, 2009, p.51). The comment, ‘Black fellow make grass grow, black fellow make water come down …’ (Wills, 1853a, p. 10), expressed to Wills acknowledges that Aboriginal people managed and nurtured this country – a shared connectivity ‘which goes beyond food-web dependencies to include stories, histories, feelings, shared responsibilities and respect’ (Weir, 2009, p.50). The concept of caring for Country as a kind of increase ritual, according to some, represents this shared connectivity and responsibility. Anthropologist John Morton defines increase ritual as ‘a general enlivening of the country in all its aspects. It is, as Aranda people say, to “look after” the country (and thereby trust it to look after them)’ (1987, p.456). This concept of shared connectivity and responsibility has been sustained via the oral traditions, songs, stories, the Law and the Dreaming (Strehlow, 1964, p.728). It may well have been these stories of the Dreaming, that the newcomers may have heard fragments of, which frightened them to the point of dismissing or denying Aboriginal knowledge as superstition or magic – or mere subjective story-telling or yarning.

**Story-telling, yarning and Corroboree**

However, there are those who listened to this so-called story-telling and yarning and acknowledged that this was a source of knowledge and way of learning about the new environment and how to move through and also to be in this foreign place. Additionally those who learnt about the purpose and meaning of Corroborees were
offered significant insight into Aboriginal ways of knowing, doing and being (Berndt & Berndt, 1999). Edward Curr settled in Yorta Yorta country and in his book titled *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria – then called the Port Phillip District, from 1841 – 1851*; he explains how he learnt from the local Aboriginal people. Curr explains ‘Corroborees, which were very frequent at one or other of our stations, were another resource, though eventually we became rather blasé as regards to that amusement, and only sat out the choice morceaux’ [emphasis placed]. ‘After all’, he continues, ‘yarning with the Bangerang, swimming, climbing tress in the native fashion, throwing spears and hunting principally occupied our leisure hours …’ (Curr, 1968, p.347). This statement suggests that although Curr believed that Aboriginal Corroborees were a ‘source’ of knowledge he ultimately believed, or rather perceived and expressed them to be, simply, ‘amusement’: completely misleading the reader of recollections in the depth and importance of these social events which he may or may not have known himself. 12 Further Curr reveals that he eventually dismissed this form of learning and preferred to focus on direct bush skills. Berndt & Berndt explain that [m]any early depictions of dancing and dramatic performances (ceremonies and rituals) were marred by misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and prejudices deriving from the writers’ cultural background at that particular time’ (1999, p.381). Paul Carter also describes how early colonial observers failed to understand the significance of Aboriginal language, song and

12 Cahir & Clark (2010) discuss the history of tourist corroborees
performance (Carter, 1992; Bracknell, 2013, p.3). Although Curr classifies these activities as ‘leisure hours’ he was ultimately learning the information and knowledge that greatly assisted his personal settlement and comfort within this Aboriginal land. Curr, although being a rare case of acknowledging his acceptance (and use) of Aboriginal knowledge, is not an isolated example of one who backgrounds Aboriginal knowledge while also appropriating their skills to become what is known as a good “Bushman”.

Acknowledgment of bushman skills being developed through the close relations and interactions with Aboriginal people is explained by Curr who believed squatters were in fact more suitable to exploration. After the deaths of Burke and Wills ‘debate raged in the pages of the Argus and Curr was a key contributor’ who ‘supported the common view that previous explorers had been poorly qualified for the task allocated them’ (Furphy, 2013, p.94). Curr also identifies the difference between those of Port Phillip districts, the colonial administrators, to those on the frontier of the growing settlement. Curr believed the ‘lack of bush experience was a hindrance to most expeditions: “Mitchell, Sturt, Burke and Grey, were soldiers and Government officers, Leichardt a foreign savant, and Gregory no bushman”’ arguing that the ‘men best suited to exploration were the squatters, particularly those (like himself) with experience in remote areas’ (Furphy, 2013, p.94). Compared to the colonial administrators who ‘were inclined to appoint government officials to the task’ Curr recalled his own experiences as a squatter to argue his point:
If I recollect the days of my boyhood right, I think I used to now and then to sally out for three or four week on a hunting spree into the unoccupied country. Perhaps I took five pounds of flour with me, and with my rifle, horse, and tomahawk wandered off 150 or 200 miles. Somehow I always got back fat and well … and yet the blacks were fierce and numerous. For the life of me I can not see what should prevent two bushmen ‘to the manner born,’ with two horses each, or at most three, and what they could well carry, riding to Carpentaria and back again, if they met such country as Burke passed through. (noted in Furphy, 2013, p.94)

Curr believed that the ‘outside squatters’ were more capable and knowledgeable of surviving and understanding the bush than the officials appointed to the positions of exploration however the squatters were not interested in abandoning their business pursuits (Furphy, 2013, p.94). These stories of Curr’s experiences as a squatter do not however openly acknowledge his appropriation of Aboriginal knowledges however it is evident that his experiences have been shaped by interactions with local Aboriginal people throughout his life.

The stories of places shape how people relate to each other and the land or nature and European settlers carried a sense of the old and the new. The merging of Indigenous understandings of relating to the landscape with those of the settler and coloniser are subtle and often overlooked or historically denied. It has been argued that this denial was because settlement was based upon illegal dispossession and to admit Aboriginal belonging, relation to the land – ‘ontological belonging’ – continues to unsettle non-Indigenous Australians
(Moreton-Robinson, 2003, p.24). Greater conflict occurs however in the ongoing separation of humans from nature – as happened during the Enlightenment. Recent social and ecological understandings have begun to consider the vital interconnection between humans and non-humans. Just as this connection is made so too is the developing understanding of the integral links between the social and so-called hard sciences. The means by which people express their relations with place (with landscape or nature), whether that is through scientific, artistic, creative or even religious interpretation, is a way of demonstrating connection with and or understanding of place. It is understood today that these ‘stories’ of place demonstrate relations between people and place and subsequently offer people the knowledge to feel a sense of belonging in place and a connection to the non-human world.

During the time of Burke and Wills stories of places were shared and used as mechanisms for being in this new environment, where strategies were developed – often appropriated from Aboriginal people. Tim Bonyhady discusses some of those who applied for positions as members of the Victorian Exploring Expedition party. Quoting Arthur Alexander Addis who describes himself as a capable bushman, who was ‘strong, vigorous, & willing’ … ‘he could ride, drive, groom, & feed Horses - … use a Fowling piece or Rifle- …’ and specifically ‘climb a Gum Tree a la Aboriginee & drag or cut out an opossum’ (emphasis placed). Adding to this, Arthurs skills as a bushman included, ‘in the case of need, “catering propensities &
ingenuity” which “could secure him such food as was attainable, viz.,
the yam Root, Warrigal Cabbage, beside various Fruits indigenous to
the Colonies” (Bonyhady, 1991, pp.57-7). In these regions, the so-
called edges of the settled districts, men developed the skills and
knowledge of Aboriginal people and were thus typically viewed as
being very good bushmen. Consequently, in these areas that the
expedition party travelled through, there was obvious competition for
resources, however little acknowledgment was given to the Aboriginal
people whom these explorers and settlers were learning and taking
from.

Colonisation and settlement within Aboriginal land was
already well underway along certain parts of the Victorian Exploring
Expedition route. Just as exploration and settlement was rapid, so also
was expansion and so-called improvement. Gascoigne explains,
‘(e)xploration led to expansion which, to the colonial mind, meant
improvement’ (2002, p.97). Gascoigne explains that ‘Charles Sturt
looked back with pride on the way in which his 1830 expedition along
the Murray had led within “six short years” to the banks of that river
being inhabited (a comment which denies Aboriginal occupation and
ontological belonging) and the foundation of the new colony of South
Australia as ‘a British Provence’ (Charles Sturt, MS Fragment,
Gascoigne explains that ‘such colonial expansion was sanctioned by
the way in which it was associated with the spread of scientific
rationality which exploration had helped to promote’ and quoting
Mitchell, he explains that this work had helped to ‘spread the light of civilization over a portion of the globe yet unknown … where science might accomplish new and unthought-of discoveries’ (Mitchell, Three Expeditions 1, p. 4 cited in Gregory, Popular Religion, p. 197. Cited in Gascoigne, 2002, p.98. In Gascoigne, 2002, p.97). However, as Sir Henry Barkly proclaimed in his speech, this expansion was having detrimental impact upon the Indigenous inhabitants and the environment.

Evidence of this impact was recorded by one of the scientists from the VEE, Ludwig Becker, the artist and naturalist who listened to the story told to him through a Corroboree song by an Aboriginal man of the lower Murray River region. Howitt says that the term Corroboree was ‘probably derived from “some ritual dialect in the early settled districts of New South Wales, and been carried by settlers all over Australia”’ (Howitt, 1904, p. 413. In Berndt & Berndt, 1999, p. 381). Becker acknowledges that this song is a Corroboree song but unfortunately the name of the man who sang the song is unknown, however we know that he explains the changes that are occurring in his life and to his Country and resources. He explains that he is ‘with the white people now’ and that his ‘tribe’ is in the ‘camp at home’. Further he explains that he is ‘living with the white people’ … ‘amongst other Blacks’ whom he does not understand their language. Also, he expresses that he covers himself with a blanket now, that he is ‘not covered with the opossum rug’ because ‘he can not make it’ … because he ‘can not get the opossum to make the rug’ (In Tipping,
1979, p.190). Ludwig Becker as a man of philosophy and science saved this Corroboree song arguably with the awareness that Aboriginal culture and ways of being and doing were changing due to the growth and expansion of the colonial empire.

Understanding the complexity of this song and the moment of transmission is challenging for the historian today. It is not my place to assume that Becker’s translation is correct for I do not speak the language that this song was performed in (see Bracknell, 2015). Clint Bracknell states that ‘some information inside the archives … is impenetrable to ‘outsiders’ by virtue of being written in’ language and having emerged from the oral tradition (2013, p.3). However, taking this archival evidence as one form of insight into Aboriginal perspectives of the ‘dispossession, colonisation and institutional cultural denigration’ (Haebich, 2000; Bracknell, 2013) occurring at the time, it is possible to engage with this translation as some form of insight into Becker’s sensitivity towards Aboriginal people and the environment.

This man’s song, although away from his family and his Country and unable to get the possum for his rug, is able to sing a song. This is highly significant because the act of performing a song is closely related to the increase rituals however this song does not immediately suggest that he is able to look after his Country. Morton explains that ‘[t]o possess songs is to have power to control not only animal or plant species, which constitute one element of the totemic complex, but also the general vitality of local areas’ (1987, p.456).
This man on the Darling is appealing to Becker’s awareness of loss of species, landscape and culture and demonstrates a moment of significant exchange between the subjectivities of these two men.

The acknowledgement of this song is not the only evidence of Becker’s awareness of the destruction caused by the mercantile mind. (See Figure 14)

Figure 14: Ludwig Becker, *The Notabilities of Bendigo*

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Within the drawing *The Notabilities of Bendigo* we see that Becker considers the impact of the Gold Rush mining on the landscape and Aboriginal people. (See Figure 14) The text below the drawing says:

“Grass does not grow upon a miner’s path.” Is a German proverb, very applicable to the Diggings. Here flourished once the noble forest. Children of nature here found shelter and a home. Then came the peaceful shepherds with their flocks creeping slowly through it. “Eureka!” Suddenly then come from the south a storm of human beings – the peace of untold centuries is broken – the very frame of
the earth is bared for hidden treasure – the ancient trees are felled for the service of invaders, the sapplings become supports of dwellings; sometimes yet a charred and sapless trunk is found still standing upright, like a shade of Hades, and the fancy of the miners clothe it in romance, as it seems to look down upon the busy, never-ceasing strife beneath, as one of a race of giants, long since passed away. – LUDWIG BECKER. {The view here depicted is taken from a point near New Chum Gully, Bendigo, looking north towards Golden and Sheep’s Head Gullies, in which the grotesque old stumps here grouped in the foreground were situated in 1854, -- L.B}

Below each of the charred sapless trunks is a title for each. The first being The Bishop of Bendigo; the second Monk; the third Lubra, and the fourth The Philosopher of Golden Gully. This image and accompanying text represent the conflict between various worldviews and the impact caused on the land and the people. Aboriginal people were present on the goldfields (see Cahir, 2010) and the conflict between religion, and Aboriginal peoples ways of being, doing and knowing, and mercantile gain is evident and expressed by Becker who portrays himself as the philosopher Golden Gully.

This chapter has focussed on the conflict between mercantile gain – the race to the Gulf of Carpentaria – versus the scientific objectives of the colonial era. Additionally this chapter discussed the influences of Enlightenment attitudes of relating to nature and Indigenous people. The most significant aspect of this chapter is the conflicting attitudes of the RSV, the Exploration Committee, Burke and Wills and others, and their challenge in how best to be in Country.
Further, this chapter has established an understanding that Aboriginal people remained on Country and have contributed to the ongoing developments in scientific, social, cultural and spiritual understandings – although Aboriginal people of these regions have not necessarily been included in land management decisions or historical depictions of events that have transpired – there is evidence of Aboriginal agency and mutual adaptation to the rapidly changing social and economic environment. This is especially evident in the work of Ludwig Becker who, through the documentation of the Corroboree song and the drawing of the Bendigo goldfields, demonstrates his ability to listen Aboriginal people and the land.
Chapter Five: The psychological frontier
Storied landscape

The previous sections began to discuss the storied landscape by showing how people demonstrate their perception of place through scientific, creative, religious, or other means. These various languages of understanding and knowledge creation form particular responses and relations to locations and are, in a sense, stories of place. The stories of the landscape, the knowledge production created through exploration, influence current relations between people and place. The Burke and Wills myth has shaped relations between people and the interior of Australia through stories that contribute, perhaps unknowingly or subconsciously, to the construction of a psychological frontier. The psychological frontier is the national desire for a sense of belonging, with conflicting emotions of possession and dispossession that are so strongly expressed in the social, cultural, and oral histories of Burke and Wills. It needs to be made clear that, in telling another story of the landscape, this chapter is not attempting to un-do the wrongs of the past or, as Environmental historians have been accused of, ‘suggesting that we need “new creation myths” to “repair the damage done by our recklessly mechanical abuse of nature”’ (Schama, 1995, p.13); it also ‘does not mean to “deny the seriousness of our ecological predicament” by suggesting that there are plenty of old nature myths in Western cultures that remain alive and well’ (Mulligan, 2003, p.271, see also Schama, 1996). Although Schama has provided impressive work which is a major contribution to the scholarly understanding of relations between people and landscape,
Mulligan points out that ‘Schama’s account of the role of landscapes in the development of diverse cultures around the world fails to acknowledge the damage that was done when attempts were made to impose the cultural myths forged in one part of the world on another’ (2003, p.271). The colonisation of the Australian landscape is commonly known as involving explorers and settlers imposing their own stories and ways doing onto a country that was already named and known (Carter, 1987). This is relevant to the Burke and Wills myth because this common grand narrative of the ‘solo-hero endeavour’ who became victims of a harsh and inhabitable landscape has overshadowed significant others (Thomas, 2014). These others include all the members of the various expeditions, the Aboriginal people whom the explorers met with, and the oral histories and social memories of those who are often excluded from the Burke and Wills myth. The histories of Burke and Wills that framed the landscape as harsh and inhabitable, or as Moorehead describes ‘untouched and unknown’ (1963, p. 1) denied Aboriginal peoples presence and made the colonial process a victory for the invaders.

The colonial process has maintained power by telling the myths of exploration as a solo-hero narrative and in the case of Burke and Wills one with tragic ending within the uncultivated and harsh environment. It has been suggested that Henry Reynolds argued that framing Australia as a ‘desert and uncultivated’ denied Aboriginal people’s rights to the land by turning dispossession of Aboriginal people into a legal event based on the doctrine of *terra nullius* (in
Attwood & Doyle, 2009, p. 296). Attwood and Doyle explain that although there was no such doctrine at this time, let alone in the British common law, ‘Reynolds formulated this causal connection between that legal act of classification and the historical fact of dispossession on what can be call lego-historical grounds, or, to be more specific, on the grounds that the law had posited this relationship in its own storytelling in New South Wales in the 1830s and 1840s’ (Attwood & Doyle, 2009, p. 296). Attwood and Doyle have called this process whereby Reynolds challenged the myth making by providing an alternative narrative (which led to Native Title) ‘the story of terra nullius’ (Attwood & Doyle, 2009, p. 296). Although Attwood and Doyle appear critical of the story of terra nullius tracing the histories that have supported the ‘free’ settlement of Australia is very pertinent to the memorialisation of Burke and Wills.

The famous Burke and Wills historian Alan Moorehead explains why the memorialisation of Burke and Wills and their death in the ‘ghastly blank’ of the Australian interior has remained so strong in the national psyche. Moorehead states:

Their story perfectly expresses the early settler’s deeply felt idea that life was not so much a struggle against other men as against the wilderness – that wilderness that made all men equal anyway. The quarrel, basically, was with nature, and to be ‘let down’ by a companion when one was out in the hard, implacable bush and absolutely exposed – this was the final treachery. (Moorehead, 1963, p. 200)
With acknowledgement that the concept of wilderness not only denies the historical presence of Aboriginal peoples and their knowledges of the country but also ecological sustainable land management practices in the present (Langton, 2012) this above passage from one of the best selling histories about Burke and Wills clearly states that there existed a battle with nature and that fellow soldiers in this war had let the explorers down. The battle with nature was fuelled by the desire to claim the centre of Australia as the invaders own.

Moorehead clearly states, that in the case of Burke and Wills in Yandruwandha, the battle for claiming this land was not with other people but with the unforgiving, barren and inhospitable landscape. The story told so often in the histories and memorials of Burke and Wills were often based on how accommodating and friendly the Yandruwandha people were to the lost explorers and subsequent relief expeditions. As Moorehead points out:

the last and perhaps the best gesture made by the Victorian government to commemorate the expedition was to grant 200 square miles of land on Cooper’s Creek to the blacks who had been so kind to King. It might perhaps have been argued that since Cooper’s Creek was not in Victoria at all they had no power to make this handsome gift, and that the land presumably belonged to the blacks anyway. However, the intention was good, and it was hoped that the tribesmen on the creek would enjoy this large hunting reserve in perpetuity. (1963, p. 201)
The patronising tone in these statements, that also lacks any consideration of Aboriginal perspectives, resistance, or agency support the view or belief that settlement of these regions was peaceful. These statements influence the reader to believe that exploration was simply a matter of moving through the unknown environs and mapping the land. These myths of Burke and Wills simplify the colonial and imperial task and the objectives of scientific exploration. The geographical knowledge creation and other objectives of the VEE was not only the goals of Victorian colony, but when the missing explorers was announced it provided a perfect opportunity to call forth other states and colonies to contribute to the rescue of these missing men, and ultimately contribute to the expansion of the colonies.

Exploration reaching beyond the coastal edges and into the interior of Australia created opportunity for rapid settlement based on the doctrine of *terra nullius*. As Henry Reynolds points out, although it was known at the time of the VEE that the Aboriginal peoples owned the land, the ‘British claim to the whole of New South Wales was as a consequence, weak international law, a point illustrated by the reaction to possible threats of rival colonies that sparked the extension of settlement in outlying [to the coastal regions] areas of the continent’ … a claim that ‘survived less because of its intrinsic strength, or as a result of a rapid spread of settlement, than because no European power was in a position, or had the inclination, to challenge it’ (Reynolds, 2003, p. 14). This entanglement of exploration, expansion, settlement and the cultural responses on behalf of the
invaders contributed to the creation of the myth of Burke and Wills. The failures of these explorers became a symbol of the settlers’ so-called successful battle with nature. Following the deaths of Burke and Wills, Moorehead claims:

Howitt made the first scientific study of these people when he went back for Burke’s and Wills’ bodies, and later on the Lutheran and Moravian missions on the creek got to know them very well. … But contact with civilization was too much for them: European diseases lad them low, the women – those women who had been so artlessly and spontaneously offered to the explorers – became barren, and somehow the will to survive died away. (Moorehead, 1963, p. 201-2)

Further Moorehead states, that by the time geologist J. W. Gregory ‘went up the Cooper’ (1963, p. 200) and ‘arrived at Kopperamanna on the lower Cooper in 1902 only five blacks remained where formerly there had been a thousand’ and ‘[a]round the depot LXV [The Dig Tree] the Yantruwanta tribe had vanished altogether’ … ‘so, in the end, there was no one to inherit the 200 square miles, and in a reshuffle of the state borders the Victorian government’s offer was conveniently forgotten’ (1963, p. 202). The remainder of Moorehead’s chapter in Cooper Creek continues to explain the ‘civilization’ of this region and the physical and psychological hardship the people who reside here have endured (obviously, according to Moorehead, this does not include Aboriginal people who he believed “disappeared”).

The chapter concludes with Moorehead claiming the expedition was ‘anti-climatic’ because Burke and Wills did not reach
the sea in the Gulf of Carpentaria but rather an estuary in a wet season of ‘tropical’ environs (see Driver, 2000, for discussion on ‘constructing the tropics’; and Arnold, 2006). The Burke and Wills narrative according to Moorehead:

…seems to have been a story of predestined anti-climax, and it is a little sad to reflect that had Burke and Wills succeeded in getting back to the depot in time [to meet Brahe] we would take much less interest in them than we do. Without the tragedy on the Cooper they would have remained rather minor figures, but with it they were lifted to another and a higher plane, one might even say a state of grace. And that perhaps was more important for them than the conquest of the ghastly blank. (Moorehead, 1963, p. 209)

However, it was not just the deaths of Burke and Wills, but also the departure and return of exploration parties that inspired the settlers and colonist to come together and celebrate. When the VEE left Melbourne in 1860, Barkly – the Governor of Victoria (also the president of the RSV) – and other dignitaries ‘visited the members of the expedition at their encampment in Melbourne’s Royal Park a few days before their departure’ (Kennedy, 2013, p. 238-9). This included the mayor, the chief justice, and some 10,000 – 15,000 residents gathered at Royal Park to see the expedition off, the men cheering and the women waving their handkerchiefs’ (Kennedy, 2013, p. 238-9). This excitement however was ‘paled by comparison to excitement generated by their [and many other explorers] return’, for example, when William Landsborough arrived ‘some 3000 people attended a public meeting in Melbourne to celebrate’ his achievements (Kennedy,
The funeral procession for Burke and Wills in Melbourne is another example of commemorating the return of the celebrity explorer and supports the observation made by Moorehead that, if they had succeeded in meeting Brahe their deaths would not have created such national sense of grief.

The national grief of these explorers’ deaths and what they may have represented to the colonial settlers sense of struggle and ultimate ‘belonging’ (Read, 2000) is of interest in recent international scholarship of scientific exploration, which explains how explorers were celebrities (Kennedy, 2013, see chapter 8 in particular). Kennedy explains ‘the memorialization of men who had died while exploring unknown territory proved a potent means of mobilizing the public’s sympathies and sense of allegiance to the colonial state and the imperial enterprise’ (2013, N.P.). The deaths of Burke and Wills provoked massive social and cultural responses that enacted the rapid expansion and promotion of the colonial and imperial task. It was also expected that these explorers, these celebrities, would comfort or meet the requirements of the public through their accounts of experiences. The diaries, journals, and public speeches all provided some understanding of the land these people wanted to colonise.

The diaries and journals created by the explorers throughout the various expeditions became sources of inspiration and guidance for others to follow in the footsteps and progress into the previously uncharted places. These hero celebrity figures provided not only examples of geographical directions but also knowledge to improve
social mobility to the waves of settlers that followed. Kennedy explains that achieving the status of ‘celebrity and its sponsors also placed demands and constraints on explorers, pressures that extended well beyond the relentless attention the public gave to poor King [the survivor] … Explorers had to speak and write about what they had seen and done and felt in ways that did not diverge too markedly from prevailing norms and popular representations’ (Kennedy, 2013, p. 236). Further Kennedy explains expeditions in Africa and Australia involved the creation of diaries and journals that provided an ‘appropriate’ introduction to the ‘new’ countries explored:

They [the explorers] had to assert intentions and express ideals that gave social validation to their actions, providing rhetorical endorsement to civilization, Christianity, commerce, and progress. They had to present the peoples and places they visited in terms of need and negation, using charged adjectives such as “primitive,” ‘savage,” “empty,” and “dark.” They had to edit their journals and massage their memories in ways that accentuated their drive, insight, and courage while minimizing their fears, doubts, and confusion. They had to avoid acknowledging how dependent they had been on the intermediaries and indigenous peoples. In short, they had to craft accounts of their adventures that conformed to the expectations of their sponsors and their public, requiring varying degrees of divergence from what they had actually experienced and observed in the course of their journeys through the interior of Africa and Australia. (Kennedy, 2013, p. 236)

The huge amount of documentation generated by the VEE was deposited in the Melbourne Public Library in March 1875 by the
expedition’s organisers, the Royal Society of Victoria (Phoenix, 2010). The Society had originally intended the manuscripts, maps, pictures and realia of some 12,000 plus pages in 13 boxes would be used to compile an official history of the expedition (Phoenix, 2010). Significantly, Dave Phoenix President of the Burke and Wills historical society, explains that many of the papers, ‘particularly those relating to the expedition’s return journey from Cooper Creek to the Gulf of Carpentaria, disappeared in the intervening period between the end of the expedition and their transfer to the library’ (Phoenix, 2010, p. 4). The records of the VEE are ‘unusual as the leader did not leave a comprehensive journal … During the first couple of months, Burke kept regular contact, with the first of a series of telegrams and despatches being sent to the Committee … communications were brief and restricted to the very basic details of the party’s progress: the health of the camels, the progress of the wagons, the state of the roads, the cost of fodder or the latest dismissals and resignations’ (Phoenix, 2010, p. 4). However, once ‘across the Murray and away from telegraph offices and regular mail service, Burke’s communications became increasingly infrequent and it was the scientific officers, Dr Hermann Beckler, Dr Ludwig Becker and William John Wills, who submitted most of the communications to the Committee (Phoenix, 2010, p.4-5). With inconsistent diary or journal entries and no personal documentations of his experiences, perspectives, feelings and observations; the public, social commentators, government officials and historians have had major gaps to fill in developing their
understanding of who Burke was and why he made the choices he made.

The social memory of Burke and Wills has portrayed Burke as neglectful of the scientific objectives of the VEE and the historical archives record him as being impatient with the delays caused by the scientific observations and collections. Beckler, for example, had little time to collect botanical specimens, and ‘only started to make collections after Burke left him with the rearguard after splitting the party at Menindee in October 1860’ (Phoenix, 2010, p. 5). Phoenix explains:

Beckler summarised the results of his botanical specimens. [Government Botanist Ferdinand von] Mueller categorised and commented on the collection, and the National Herbarium of Victoria now has over 800 specimens collected by Beckler, including over eighty type specimens. (Phoenix, 2010)

Ludwig Becker, the expedition’s artist and naturalist, was also limited in his opportunity to pursue his scientific obligations, with Burke insisting he work as one of the labourers rather than scientist. Nevertheless, in the evenings and in private Becker maintained his passion for art and science and ‘in addition to the six maps and sixty-four magnificent watercolours and sketches he completed under these difficult circumstances, Becker also submitted five reports and several letters describing native flora and fauna and also indigenous language and customs’ (Phoenix, 2010). However, it was not only Burke who hampered the scientific objectives of the VEE. In a letter to
Committee’s Honorary Secretary Dr John Macadam, Becker lamented:

I am extremely sorry not having received even a single line from you especially in regard to the few things so much wanted by an observer in nat. history … I fear I shall leave for the Interior with only an outfit consisting of a few colours & sketchbooks, and two small geological hammers. … Hard work in the camp, want of vegetable and of fresh meat, great heat with flies and moskitos [sic], are not apt to support one whose greatest desire is to try to unveil some of the mysteries of this country. (Becker, Report, Darling River, 22 Jan 1861, Box 2082/4g in Phoenix, 2010, p. 7-8)

Although Burke actively discouraged the scientific objectives these two German scientists were commended by the Government Meteorologist Professor Georg Neumayer for the “manner in which the journals have been kept under such trying circumstances” and he recommended the Committee have the meteorological results copied in a form suitable for future publication’ (Phoenix, 2010, p. 8). Additionally Burkes attitude towards the scientific investigations documented by William Wills as the party’s Surveyor, Meteorologist and Astronomical Observer was ‘markedly different’ (Phoenix, 2010, p. 8). Evidence of this is highlighted through Burke allowing William Wills’ to continue his observations.

The observations made by Wills were documented in the three surveyor’s reports. The reports were obviously made for surveying purposes, and delivered to the RSV in Melbourne almost immediately.
The first report was prepared by Wills at Bilbarka, a camp on the
Darling River 110 km south of Minindee, and presumably delivered
by Neumayer who had accompanied the expedition to this stage
(Leahy, 2011, p. 32). The second report was prepared at ‘Torowoto
Swamp and despatched with William Wright, whom Burke was
sending back to Menindee to bring up the support party. At Menindee,
Wright posted the report on to Melbourne’ (Leahy, 2011, p. 32). The
‘third report was prepared at Camp 65, the depot on the Cooper, on the
15 December 1860, just before Wills left with Burke, Kind and Gray
for the Gulf’ (Leahy, 2011, p. 32). Brahe delivered the third report,
which also included a map of the country traversed since the previous
correspondence, arriving ‘in Melbourne on 30 June 1861 with the
news that Burke had not returned to the depot as expected’ (Leahy,
2011, p. 32). Apparently ‘Melbourne was electrified at Brahe’s news’
and the newspapers worked overtime (Leahy, 2011, p. 32). It has also
been observed that the ‘Crown Lands Office must have followed suit,
as the published copy of the chart carries the note “Lithographed at the
Crown Lands Office July 2nd 1861”’ (2011, p. 32). This lithograph is
evidence that each of these documents was used to rapidly spread
geographical knowledge of the regions explored.

The significance of the ‘scientific’ documentations made by
Wills is evidenced in his acknowledgement of what could presumably
be Aboriginal placenames, or language, throughout the north west of
New South Wales. The smaller party consisting of Burke and Wills
(Wills being the only scientific officer attached to the party after the
division set by Burke whilst at Menindee) travelled further north under
the guidance of two Aboriginal guides – Peter and Dick who were
introduced in the Prologue of this thesis – and William Wright. With
the assistance of these Aboriginal guides the party was able to locate
suitable camps where there existed sufficient water and feed to support
the expedition. In the Surveyors Report No. 2 Wills identified the date
and name of each of the camps from Menindee to Camp XLV at
Torowoto Swamp as:

Oct 19 – Totoyna, a waterhole on the plains Camp 35
Oct 20 – Kokriega, well in the Scope Ranges Camp 36
Oct 21 – Bilpa Ck ditto Camp 37
Oct 22 – Botoja Clay pans Camp 38
Oct 23 – Langawirra Gully Mount Doubeny Range Camp 39
Oct 24 – Bengora Creek, Mount Doubeny Range Camp 40
Oct 25 – Naudtherungee Creek Camp 41
Oct 26 – Teltawongee Creek Camp 42
Oct 27 – Wonominta Creek Camp 43
Oct 28 – A clay pan on the plains Camp 44
Oct 29 – Torowoto Swamp Camp 45, Lat 30° 01’ 30” S Long 142° 27’ E

Will’s completed this report on 29 October at Camp XLV at
Torowoto and gave it to William Wright, third-in-command of the
expedition, who took it to Menindee where he posted it to Melbourne
on Wednesday 14 November 1860. The Exploration Committee of the
Royal Society of Victoria in Melbourne received this report on 3
December 1860. The third report also contains information related to
suitable campsites and information regarding the state of the country
through which the explorers passed. Comparing the second report to
the third report it is possible to distinguish a pattern in Wills choice of documented observations to be sent to the RSV in Melbourne. Each section provides focussed detail on the location and identification of various waterholes, feed for animals, Aboriginal placenames, observed flora and fauna, and if they met any local Aboriginal people brief explanation was given in regards to their reception. Overall, the information supplied in these reports was sufficient enough to provide anyone who followed in their footsteps enough geographical knowledge to find feed and water and a suitable camp. The inclusion of the list of Aboriginal placenames/language in the first report, it could easily be assumed, was to provide any newcomers with key words to ask the locals where to find water and feed.

It has been noted that Wills demonstrates an approach that acknowledges Indigenous knowledge systems by choosing Aboriginal words wherever possible rather than overwriting features with European names (Phoenix, 2010, p. 15). However, to claim that this is in ‘stark contrast to the stereotypical view of the heroic explorer bringing country into being by overwriting indigenous landscapes with European names’ is worthy of further close analysis (Phoenix, 2010, p. 15). Many new names existed alongside the Aboriginal language, especially in the second report for example where the Aboriginal identified ‘Balloo’ (or Bulloo) was known as ‘Wrights Creek’ by the explorers. In each of these reports little mention was made of the relations between the explorers and their Aboriginal guides and intermediaries or to the invaluable assistance obviously being
provided by these Aboriginal men throughout this section of the expedition. The explorers naming of the camps and various locations with Aboriginal languages do not appear to be an attempt to understand, celebrate or commemorate Aboriginal knowledges and traditions, instead they appear to be a method of navigating their way through an already named and storied landscape.

**Death of Burke and Wills on the Cooper**

The information supplied to the VEE in these three reports contributed to the non-Indigenous knowledge of the region and supported the rapid expansion and settlement. The speed with which these men travelled through the landscape, although they were presumably receiving incredible insight from the Aboriginal guides and intermediaries, who assisted them in this rapid and safe movement, did not allow any time for detailed and careful ‘scientific’ observations to be made. This may be an perfect example of where Australia perhaps missed the opportunity to develop specific or ‘distinctive sciences of Australian plants, animals and places’ (Robin, 2007 in Muir, Rose & Sullivan, 2010, p.264) however there still exists the opportunity to retrieve some understanding and acknowledgement of ‘the important role Aboriginal people’ played and continue to play ‘in developing knowledge for good social and ecological relations’ (Muir, Rose, & Sullivan, 2010, p. 264). The events that transpired on and around the Cooper, and the subsequent deaths of Burke and Wills, provide significant insight into the important relations that were or could have been developed. However, in order to retrieve and develop
understanding the social and ecological knowledge created during the expedition, the historian needs to look beyond the grand narrative which has traditionally focused primarily on Burke and Wills, who was to blame for deaths, who was at fault and consider the micro-narratives of close encounters.

Drawing upon evidence from the Commission of Enquiry of 1861–62 into the deaths of Burke, Wills and Gray, Ian Clark explains:

… that Burke had made an error of judgment in appointing Wright to an important command; that Burke’s decision to depart from Cooper Creek for Carpentaria before Wright’s depot party had arrived from Menindee was imprudent; that Wright’s conduct in remaining so long at Torowoto was reprehensible; that the Exploration Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria committed errors of a serious nature in overlooking the importance of a despatch from Burke at Torowoto, and in not urging Wright’s departure from the Darling; and that Brahe’s decision to abandon the depot at Cooper Creek was ‘most unfortunate’. It was also critical of Burke’s failure to possess a systematic plan of operations’ (Victoria (1861–62) in Clark, 2013b, p.51).

Further, Clark significantly points out that ‘the commission made no comment on the experience and qualifications of the men selected by the Exploration Committee, nor did it make any reference to the expedition’s failure to use Aboriginal guides in a systematic way’ (2013b, p.51). However, considering the incomplete and also non-existent records already mentioned above, it is impossible to
accurately claim whether or not Burke implemented the use of local knowledges and or judge the competencies of all the men involved.

Further, these arguments (or explanations for the tragic deaths) do not consider in greater detail the moments during this exploration where Burke (or other members of the exploration party) did employ (or request the assistance of) Aboriginal guides and intermediaries. Few histories of Burke and Wills have included adequate explanation of the various parties and their locations, which I believe is because of the complexity of all the events that unfolded and also because the histories of Burke and Wills have only focussed on what has commonly been perceived as the ‘principal events’ that revolved around the deaths of Burke and Wills on Cooper Creek.

According to Doug McCann, in his ‘Timeline of principal events’ the divided expedition parties on the 15 October 1860 consisted of Burke, Wills, Brahe, King, Gray, McDonough, Patten and Dost Mahomet who travelled from Menindee onto Cooper Creek (2011, p. 293). The party who remained behind at the Menindee depot consisted of Wright, Beckler, Becker, Hodgkinson, Smith, Purcell, Stone, and Belooch (McCann, 2011, p. 293). On the 19 October 1860 ‘Burkes party’ begins travelling towards Cooper Creek with Wright and Aboriginal people as guides – soon after Wright returns to Menindee (McCann, 2011, p. 293). On the 20 November – 5 December 1860 ‘Burke’s party at Camp 63 on Cooper Creek’ and on the 6 December 1860 ‘Burke’s party set up depot at Camp 65’ – today known as the Dig Tree (McCann, 2011, p. 293). On the 16 January
1861 Burke, Wills, Gray and King (Burke’s Gulf party) leave for the Gulf with provisions for three months, and Brahe, McDonough, Patten, and Dost Mahomet remain at Camp 65 (The Dig Tree) (McCann, 2011, p. 293).

On the 26 January 1861 ‘Wright leaves Menindee for Cooper Creek with supply party consisting of Beckler, Becker, Hodgkinson, Smith, Purcell, Stone, Belooch, and Dick. Dick returns to Menindee the next day (McCann, 2011, p. 293). Between the 1 – 8 February 1861 Burke’s Gulf party follows the Corella, Cloncurry, and Flinders rivers to the estuary on the Gulf of Carpentaria. They reach their most northerly point on the 11 February 1861 and on by the 13 February 1861 Burke and Wills re-join Gray and King and head south again. Having been gone for over three months their supplies were running very low.

On the 21 April 1861 Brahe buries five weeks of provisions with a note and his party leaves the Depot at Camp 65 in the morning to return south to Menindee. Burkes Gulf party, excluding Gray who died on the return trip from the Gulf, arrive that evening at the Depot of Camp 65 to find Brahe’s party had gone. They dig up the supplies and after resting for a few days they attempt to reach sanctuary at Mt Hopeless during the dates 24 April – 21 May 1861. On the 27 April 1861 McCann notes that ‘Wrights supply party survives attack by Aborigines at Kooliatto’ (McCann, 2011, p. 293) and on the 29 April 1861 the two parties of Brahe and Wright meet at Koorliatto in the early morning. That afternoon Becker dies and is buried at Koorliatto.
On the 8 May 1861 Wright and Brahe return to Cooper Creek and finding no sign of Burke and Wills they leave immediately to ‘rejoin the combined party for the journey south to Menindee’ (McCann, 2011, p. 293). Burke and Wills die on the Cooper Creek around the 30 June 1861. On the 15 September 1861 Welch of the Howitt contingent party finds King living with the Yandruwandha. From the dates 18 November – 30 December 1862 the Commission of Inquiry into the deaths of Burke and Wills is held and on the 18 February 1862 Howitt returns to Cooper Creek to collect the remains of Burke and Wills and the state funeral for Burke and Wills was held in Melbourne on the 21 January 1863.

Figure 15 Map of the VEE route.

The above list of principal events cannot explain who is at fault or who is to blame for the deaths of the explorers. To more fully understand the overall expedition takes time and close attention to the
details of each interaction by closely examining the micro-narratives of particular events that occurred in different places and at different times.

Whilst at Torowoto Swamp, prior to travelling to the Cooper and to the Gulf of Carpentaria, Wills had drafted the second report, which he gave to Wright on his return back to Menindee on 19 October 1860 (Phoenix, 2010, p. 15). Once in Menindee Wright posted the report and maps to the Committee and left two field books at the depot camp in Menindee which did not reach Melbourne until the following year (Phoenix, 2010, p. 15). (Please see the map outlining the route of the VEE. Figure 15) However, before departing Torowoto for Menindee on, Wright, Peter and Dick arranged for Bandjigali guides to take the party over what is today known as the Queensland border and up to the Bulloo River (Phoenix, 2010, p. 15).

Further Phoenix explains:

From Bulloo, additional guides, either Karengappa or Kullilla, were arranged to take the party to the Cooper. However, partly as a result of Wills not knowing the indigenous name for Cooper Creek, and partly due to the difficulty of their intended route over the Grey Range, their guide was reluctant to enter the waterless mountains and he returned to Bulloo, leaving the party to their own devices. For the first time since leaving Melbourne, Wills was called on to navigate. The only other European to have ventured anywhere near this area was Sturt in November 1845, and using Sturt’s map of the journey to the Macleay Plains, Wills led the party to the Wilson
River, striking it within thirty kilometres of Sturt’s furthest point.

(Phoenix, 2010, p. 15)

Wright was an experienced bushman and apparently knew the land well having been the manager/overseer or superintendent of the Kinchega Station before offering his services to the VEE (Hardy, 1976, p.123; Clark, 2013a). It was also noted by Beckler that Wright also held ‘great knowledge’ of Aboriginal people, (one could assume he was able to communicate and develop relations with people around the Menindee to Cooper Creek regions) (1993, p.165), which is perhaps most clearly evidenced through his close working relationship with Dick (Wright, 1861). The knowledge in the value of Aboriginal guides may have been well known especially with those, such as Wright, who had been working in the backcountry prior to the expedition. As has already been discussed, successful exploration through Australia required the superior knowledge and skills of Aboriginal guides and as such they were highly valued by explorers (Kennedy, 2013, p. 177-178). The knowledge and skills transferred between indigenous guides, intermediaries, go-betweens, explorers and indigenous locals contributed to the co-creation of knowledges (internationally this includes White, 1991; Merrell, 1999; Murphy, 2003; Metcalf, 2005; Schaffer, Roberts, Raj, Delbourgo, 2009; Ballantyne, 2013, McDonnell, 2009; Kennedy, 2013. In Australia, Reynolds, 1990; Baker, 1998; Kennedy, 2013). The particular interest and relevance of these scholarly works is that they provide a solid
foundation to begin understanding moments of cross-cultural encounter and knowledge exchange.

Tracing the moments of cross-cultural encounter and knowledge exchange requires a methodology that considers various sources and insights as ‘contributions in their own right’ (Kennedy, 2009). Understanding the complex and controversial relationships between explorers and Aboriginal peoples, as D.W.A Baker attempted in 1997, requires and ‘thorough and detailed analysis’ (Clark, 1991, p. 146). Baker’s analysis presents a view of relationships between the explorer Major Mitchell and his guides that moves beyond ‘the problematic that he [Major Mitchell] was a precursor of invasion and destruction [the view taken by Robinson and York, 1972] or the paradigm that he should be an object of veneration [the received dogma from the nineteenth century]’ (Clark, 1991, p. 146-7). Veneration of the explorers is most commonly found in contemporary newspaper articles. Jan Critchett draws upon newspaper evidence of the social memory of Mitchell, a form of oral tradition expressing cultural interpretations and understandings of popular beliefs, to demonstrate the power of Mitchell in educating the newcomers in travel through Aboriginal Country (1984, p. 12). Ian Clark highlights the value of settler diaries in providing different perspectives of exploration through Aboriginal Country (1999, p. 147) and the impact of ‘foreign’ Aboriginal people, and local Aboriginal reactions to the intrusion of exploration parties (Mitchells expedition) (1998, in 1999, p. 147). Retrieving perspectives beyond the colonial archival memory
requires a methodology that welcomes all such insights and perspectives, as mentioned above, as contributions to understanding the historical past.

**Oral histories and social memories**

Historians are concerned with understanding what actually happened in the past and why or how, as this thesis examines, certain processes or practices led to a co-production of social and ecological knowledges and how this knowledge or why certain aspects has been transmitted and remembered throughout time. Oral histories and social memories are excellent sources that provide insight and understanding of the historically situated processes and practices that contribute to the story of Burke and Wills as it is most strongly evidenced in the visual responses. These visual sources can be used as ‘ethnohistorical texts’ (Douglas, 1999a,b; 2003; 2006; 2007). Many oral histories, however, are perceived as controversial due to the status and value of testimonies especially where memories may be compromised by trauma (Kennedy, 2009). The biggest challenges facing the validity of oral histories associated with Burke and Wills is the length of time since the eyewitness accounts, and, the influences of the social and cultural ‘texts’ (in particular visual images) on individual and collective memories must also be taken into consideration.

As with all historical texts (especially those associated with Burke and Wills – because many original records are incomplete and or missing and any later responses are influence by political and or social pressures and or the authors own subjectivities) it is sometimes
difficult to decipher between the often blurred lines of objective and subjective responses without a thorough understanding of ‘who’ the person writing was and what was influencing them (Shellam, 2007). The historians’ role of reading all of these texts that contain multiple and often conflicting accounts and interpretations is also challenged for those who attempt to write a factually authoritative account that is considerate of Indigenous perspectives, motivations, strategies, actions, and agency when Aboriginal testimony was rarely recorded in the colonial archives.

Recovering examples of Indigenous agency within historical archives, often written by men who held their own strong and often rigid understandings of Aboriginal people, is near impossible (Douglas, 2009). However, as the extensive work of Bronwen Douglas demonstrates:

… there was – obviously – always a range of local strategies and motivations, conscious and unconscious, in play in every situation of encounter but also that what indigenous people wanted, meant and did – and how they looked – profoundly influenced European reactions, expectations and representations in the always fraught and vulnerable settings … (Douglas, 2009, p. 193; see also Douglas, 2003).

Reading visual responses as historical texts enables the historian to decentre European, or Euro-centric, authors and their preconceived views. Douglas explains that the approach of using ‘art as an ethnographic text’ is a strategy that ‘takes seriously the complex interplay of discourse, presupposition, personality, experience, action
and indigenous countersigns, which is encoded in voyagers’ representations of (...) people and particular encounters with them’ (Douglas, 2009, p. 193). The value of oral histories in relation to Burke and Wills is not only any eyewitness account that has been passed down through the generations but also the ‘contribution in their own right’ as being a witness to the myth creation of Burke and Wills (Kennedy, 2009). Valuing and honouring the oral histories associated with Burke and Wills contributes to the ‘declining status of academic history as the guardian of the “truth” of the past’ (Kennedy, 2009, p. 507). Inclusion of the oral histories associated with Burke and Wills raises a number of ‘significant issues, not only for history as an academic discipline, but for our understanding of the discourse of history in Australian public life’ (Kennedy, 2009, p. 507). Further, Kennedy points out that these issues ‘include how we conceive of history, who owns the past, and who can speak as an authority on the significance of past events’ (Kennedy, 2009, p. 507). Talking with Aboriginal peoples whose Country the expedition passed through provides significant insight into the countersigns visible within the visual artworks associate with Burke and Wills.

To demonstrate examples of social and ecological knowledge production this section now traces Aboriginal accounts and the social memory of Burke and Wills with the understanding that the myth of Burke and Wills has created a psychological frontier of the events that transpired on the Cooper Creek. This section draws upon oral history sourced from the archives, newspaper accounts, and from two
Yandruwandha and Yawarrawarrka women, Barbara Allen (nee Kerwin) and Faye Nicholls, who I met with in Broken Hill in 2014. To demonstrate the social and cultural construction some examples of visual interpretations of Burkes’ experiences in this place are also included. The influence of these social and cultural constructions of the Burke and Wills’ myth is considered alongside the oral and social memories that are not typically recorded in the histories of Burke and Wills.

In the latest publication, *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills – Forgotten Narratives*, each of the authors have focussed on particular aspects of the expedition that have been neglected in previous interpretations of the Burke and Wills myth. One significant paper and chapter by Darrell Lewis discusses the death of Burke as told by an Aboriginal woman to a squatter. This work was originally published in 2007 and, since the mock coronial enquiry, this interpretation has been re-examined and included in serious discussion around the cause of the deaths and also the reliability of certain historical sources (2013). The surfacing of this story in the 150th commemorations of the Burke and Wills expedition has been confronting for those who are challenged by oral history and for those who are, in particular, challenged by Aboriginal accounts of the past or accounts that are coming from non-traditional historical sources – their preference usually being the colonial archival accounts of explorers’ journals, diaries, and government records.
Oral histories and the colonial archival accounts can often be interpreted side by side, yet the Euro-centre view is that the challenge with oral history, as Cahir points out, is that without supporting evidence it may not be reliable (2013b, pp.161–2). As Lewis (2007, 2013) highlights, Aboriginal accounts of events were often relegated to the status of bush yarning. This relegation is contradictory when we consider the explorers dependence upon Aboriginal knowledges of the bush whilst moving through Aboriginal Country during the colonisation and settlement of Australia and as such it must be questioned why some stories have been supported, memorialised and others have not.

Meeting with the women of the Cooper in Broken Hill

In 2014 I met with two women in Broken Hill to discuss their memories of Burke and Wills in their Country on the Cooper Creek. Archaeologist and historian Jeannette Hope introduced me to archaeologist Sarah Martin who told me that about two women have a story that is different from the one told by Aaron Paterson and his family. Aaron Paterson can trace his family heritage back to John King. It is claimed that King, while on the Cooper, had a child with a Yandruwandha women – Aaron’s great great grandmother (Patterson, 2012, Personal communication; Patterson, 2013; Patterson, 2014). Darrell Lewis recorded a history of an Aboriginal woman who witnessed King shoot Burke in the back whilst he cooked a duck on the fire, and that King carried this secret to his grave (2007, 2013). It is claimed by Frank Leahy that the secret that King carried to his grave is
not that he shot Burke but that he had an Aboriginal child on the Cooper (2013).

Sarah and I arrived at the first house and I was introduced to Faye Nicholls. Sarah explained to Faye that I was doing research on Burke and Wills. Faye started to tell me how her uncles, who never learnt how to read or write, used to take her up to the Cooper – her Country. Her uncles would walk around telling her stories of the area. With absolute confidence and clarity Faye told me that her uncles “took her up to the top of a hill and pointed out where Burke was killed and where Wills was killed”. I asked her, for my own clarity, ‘were Burke and Wills killed?’ ‘Yes’ she replied. I asked her ‘how were they killed?’ ‘Shot’ she replied. I asked ‘who shot Burke and Wills?’ ‘The whitefellas!’ she exclaimed. Considering the story told by Darrell Lewis (2007, 2013), and other evidence which conflicts with the well-known narrative of Burke and Wills, I was obviously intrigued. I asked her about the explorers’ deaths three more times throughout our discussion and each time she gave the same explanation.

The next day I returned to Faye with the aim of recording this account of the explorers’ deaths. I knocked on the door and she opened it happy to see me but also very apologetic. The first thing she said was ‘I am so sorry Peta, I just got off the phone to my son and he thinks I am an idiot! He said, “Burke and Wills didn’t get shot Mum – they perished!!”’ She then explained to me that although her uncles knew the Stories of their Country they could not read or write so they, unlike her son, had never read the actual history books. She kindly suggested
that if I want to know what happened to Burke and Wills that I should ‘read the history books’. Disappointed I accepted her advice. However, I chatted with her more that day and asked her about other memories that she had of the Cooper Creek area. Around the walls of Faye’s house were pictures of her relatives, including what appeared to be grandchildren, even great grandchildren. She explained that Aboriginal people, her ancestors, were shot by ‘whitefellas’ from boats travelling along the Cooper. Some of the photos looked like they were taken on the Cooper. These stories are prominent in her mind because they are related to the Native Title case that she is currently involved in and may have been confused with the Burke and Wills interpretation she initially told me about. However, this story of her uncles’ account of Burke and Wills being shot by the ‘whitefellas’ parallels other accounts (Lewis, 2007; 2013). If this story is not factual however, another explanation for this account – and how it contrasts so greatly with the common or written memory – is that perhaps this understanding of Burke and Wills was passed on from generation to generation with a moral content and intention. It was also mentioned to me while I was in Broken Hill that many people had been expecting me to arrive sooner than I eventually did. It was explained to me that people were annoyed because no one had arrived to hear their version of the story. This sentiment was not just from Aboriginal people of the area. Non-Indigenous people also expressed their disappointment with their lack of inclusion in the Aboriginal stories.
'What for whitefellow not send horses and grub?'

Perspectives of how Burke and Wills died include attributing blame to the Exploration Committee for not sending assistance, claims of Brahe and Wright not fulfilling their roles, and accusations of overall incompetence directed at the management of the whole affair. However, it has also been suggested that ‘[a]round Coopers Creek they [Aboriginal people] have traditions, amongst them being the story of Burke and Wills’ (Argus, 25 December, 1915. In Cahir, 2013b, p. 160). Further evidence of these points of view has been found within the newspapers around the time of the expedition with one account from an Aboriginal man who was working in the backcountry. Printed in the Argus on 8 June 1865 from the Riverina Herald, and again republished in August 1939, the account recalls the events:

A correspondent, writing to us under a late date from the Darling, on the return from a back country trip says ‘after a fatiguating day’s ride, I had to camp without water in a clump of mulga in an open and very exposed piece of country. During the night the wind swept through the trees, making a horrible moaning sound. I slept very little, being very thirsty, and also anxious about the horses. The blackfellow slept uneasily, and kept muttering in his sleep. Towards morning he woke and seemed relieved, as one does who has been oppressed by nightmare. ‘Methink’, he said ‘Devil been walk about tonight – not devil belonging to blackfellow, but white man devil. Methink Burke and Wills cry out tonight “What for whitefellow not send horses and grub?” You hear wind? That come up from Cooper Creek. My word master, Mr Burke, Wills too, big one walk about on that creek.'
Never them leave Cooper Creek. Always, always, always, walk about there, and cry out 'long a Menindie “Where white man? Why another one white man no come?”’ ‘You know’, continues our correspondent, ‘that this fellow is aware of all the proceedings of the unfortunate Victorian expedition’. We may add, by way of explanation that the word ‘spirit’ is unknown to the blacks, and in this instance, no doubt, as in all others that we know of, the word ‘devil’ is made use of instead. (Cahir, 2013b, p.162)

This version of the Burke and Wills story claims that the reason the explorers perished was, in support of the evidence put forward at the Commission of Enquiry, on account of the fact that the ‘whitefellow not send horses and grub’. This Aboriginal account blames the Exploration Committee – the ‘whitefellows’ – for killing Burke and Wills. This is a similar story to that re-told by Lewis (2007, 2013) and also to the account put forward by Faye in Broken Hill. The newspaper article also offers a perspective of how this particular Aboriginal man understood the cultural and social implications of the events that transpired following the deaths of Burke and Wills. He believed the spirits of Burke and Wills will forever be around the Cooper – a theme that has persisted throughout many of the social and cultural interpretations.

Fred Cahir has pointed out that this is ‘possibly the best documentation of an Aboriginal perspective, rather than an account of the Burke and Wills expedition’ (2013b, p.162). Further he claims that ‘it arguably provides one of the clearest pieces of empirical evidence that the expedition’s story was as much an Aboriginal story as a non-
Aboriginal story’ (Cahir, 2013b, p.162). Cahir has contextualised this statement through ethnographic interpretations of Aboriginal beliefs and practices comparing their understanding of death with the customs of those originating from north-eastern and western South Australia. Cahir summarises that:

Aboriginal belief systems in this region stressed that death was usually caused by people who had performed some magic against them. Each individual was believed to have three souls. One was believed to linger around the grave, and could appear to a younger brother and teach him a new dance and song to be performed in the deceased’s honour. The second soul went away towards the south, and the personal spirit departed to the sky where it appeared as a falling star. Elkin described the elaborate mortuary procedures and the obligations (*kupura*) incurred by death, which included the ‘dying person tells his relations – members of his own matrilineal totem clan, or at least, of his own moiety – about his dreams (sic) or dreams. Thus they know who caused his death, and have a grievance against the person or clan indicated.’ (Elkin, 1932, p.195 In Cahir, 2013b, p.162)

The Burke and Wills myth has occupied Australian consciousness on many levels and, as the above quote highlights, the tragedy was not just a fascination of the settlers and colonists but the story of it also entered into Aboriginal consciousness and their construction of meaning. This perception, contextualised by Fred Cahir’s referral to the ethnographic interpretations, insinuates that the Aboriginal man who had been working in the backcountry could have
been saying that Burke and Wills also have three spirits. One spirit will always be on the Cooper even though the bodies were taken back to Melbourne. This spirit could represent the ongoing fascination, or obsession, with Burke and Wills within the broader social and cultural memory. The statement by Cahir also alludes to the idea that the spirit of the deceased spoke to the Aboriginal man informing him who was responsible for the deaths of the explorers. Perhaps this man was saying the spirit of Burke would remain in the psychological imagination of the nation for a very long time.

According to some anthropological understandings Aboriginal dreams symbolise the creation of the future. Within the dreams ancestral creativity objectifies mythic movements of subjective attribution:

Sometimes it is said that an ancestor actually: ‘dreams his objectifications while sleeping in camp. In effect, he visualises his travels – the country, the songs and everything he makes – inside his head before they are externalized. Objectifications are conceived as external projections of an interior vision: they come from the inner self of the ancestor into the outer world (Munn, 1970, p.145. In Morton, 1989, p.456).

This understanding makes it easier to believe that Burke and Wills entered Aboriginal consciousness however it also considers the possibility that this man predicted the ongoing fascination in Burke and Wills and the psychological frontier that is the myth. It is highly likely that the Aboriginal man read about the failings of the Burke and Wills expedition in the newspapers and – while sleeping in a camp
without water, and with the memory of Burke and Wills death so recent – was merely feeling anxious for the horses’ well-being, and perhaps his own. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, and supported in the work of Cahir, Aboriginal people were well aware of the progress of exploration parties and the colonial task: the local peoples whose Country the expedition passed through were spreading news of the explorers movements.

It could be argued that one aspect of the constant or ongoing interest in Burke and Wills’ deaths in the centre of Australia is related to a need to understand the interior of Australia, colonial occupation and a larger desire to belong. Lynette Russell recently argued that ‘there is a commonplace desire among many people to want to differentiate themselves from others’ and that this is related to the creation of an identity that ‘marks them out as unique and a group member at the same time’ (Russell, 2013, p.410). Further, she states that ‘through an intertwining of stories told and stories heard, of stories dreamed, imagined and desired [they] are able to participate in a collective …’ (Basu, 2005a, p.147 in Russell, 2013, p.411). That this story was recorded in the newspapers of 1865 and again in 1939 reveals the desire of the settler/colonists to share the Aboriginal interpretations of the Burke and Wills story. It also perhaps indicates a desire to understand or adopt the spiritual connections and understandings of the alien landscape as a way of forming an attachment and a sense of belonging. It also demonstrates that the seeds of Aboriginal perspectives of being in Country were already
planted within the non-Aboriginal bushmen mentality. Drawing on the work of Donna Haraway, Lynette Russell explains elsewhere that perceived differences between western and Aboriginal worldviews are ‘perhaps rather arbitrary, as Western knowledge and science in particular “is above all a story telling practice”’ (Haraway, 1989, p. 4 in Russell, 2005, p. 141). The above correspondent expresses his own anxiety of being in the backcountry and the effect of there being no water for the horses. These men, the Aboriginal guide and the correspondent, were working together and sharing perspectives of being in this landscape and this is an example of the co-production of socio-cultural knowledge.

Newcomers to this country were, like Burke and Wills, fumbling to find their own way of surviving. Survival was not simply a physical activity, it was also an emotional and intellectual struggle to reconcile dispossession from their homelands and from alienation of this new place – these people were learning how to perform their new ways of being in Country. Russell draws upon the ideas of prominent historian Manning Clark who has suggested, the settler-Australian sense of ‘dislocation’ is observed where:

we white people are condemned to live in a country where we have no ancestral spirits. The conqueror has become the eternal outsider, the eternal alien. We must either become assimilated or live the empty life of a people exiled from their source of spiritual strength (In Russell, 2013, p.411; originally cited in Basu, 2005, p.41).

Burke and Wills entering Aboriginal Country and perishing was significant not just because of the radical changes this brought
about for Aboriginal people, their traditional culture and their law but also for the non-Aboriginal settlers and colonisers in the construction of an Australian identity and relationships with the land. The deaths of Burke and Wills on the Cooper, as suggested by the above newspaper account, means that the spirits of the explorers will forever exist in this region – Burke and Wills are the creation of the ancestral spirits for non-Indigenous Australians that represent alienation through illegal possession of land already owned and storied. These ancestral spirits are remembered as being incompetent, clumsy, and mad and perhaps they are also a symbol of the consequences of not listening to Aboriginal advice and knowledge of Country.

**Captain Cook and the ‘wild people’**

Burke and Wills were not the first explorers or settlers to be observed by the Yandruwandha and other people of the Cooper Creek and surrounding regions. Beckler records details of images on the wall of a cave consisting of hand stencils, finger paintings: ‘mostly incomprehensible symbols and figures, one of which seemed to represent a rider on horseback’ (Beckler, 1993, p.52). See Figure 16 The rock art site includes Kokriega, also known as Burke’s Cave and Thaaklatjika (Wright’s Cave).
Becklers identification of a rider on horseback (see Figure 16) could be evidence that other explorers had travelled through these regions and may also indicate that Aboriginal people were discussing the movements of explorers through their Countries. Fred Cahir points out that there is ‘substantial evidence which demonstrates that parties of whites, probably drovers, had been in the Cooper Creek region prior to Burke and Wills in 1860–61, including Sturt in 1845’ (Tolcher, 1996. In Cahir, 2013b, p.152). Cahir claims that ‘[t]he Burke and Wills expedition was not the first time the Yandruwandha had seen white people’ (Cahir, 2013b, p.152). Further evidence of interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal is revealed in Sturt’s description of his party, which 15 years previously, had noted the
bravery and almost-familiarity with horses of Aboriginal people at Cooper Creek:

Several of them brought us large troughs of water, and when we had taken a little, held them up for our horses to drink; an instance of nerve that is very remarkable, for I am quite sure that no white man, (having never seen or heard of a horse before, and with the natural apprehension on the first sight of such an animal would create), would deliberately have walked up to what must have appeared to them most formidable brutes, and placing the troughs they carried across their breast, have allowed the horses to drink with their noses almost touching them. (Sturt & Brown, 1849, p.76 in Cahir, 2013b, p.153)

Other stories of encounter between explorers and Aboriginal people of the Cooper Creek regions have been recorded. For example, Charles Sturt when traveling in the region noted the Aboriginal people of the Cooper Creek as being the ‘the finest of any I seen on the Australian continent’ (in Carter, 1992, p.87). Contrasting starkly with the historian Alan Moorehead stated, in Cooper’s Creek, Aboriginal people as being ‘the most retarded people in the world’ (1963, p. 1).

Looking at the pictures painted onto the cave wall (See Figure 16) there is evidence of the recording of contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous in the region. On the left hand side of the wall we see what Beckler perhaps identified as a person on horseback. The white horizontal line of interconnected figure 8 shape (or multiple infinity symbol) shapes leading into what looks like an ark shape with a stick figure representation of person standing in a boat. The interconnected wave-like shapes could be water – the water of the Darling River or
Cooper Creek perhaps. To the right of this white figure on a boat we see an outline of the tomahawk and above this what appears to be an axe or pipe. Further to the right again we can see what appears to be an outline of either a horse, a cow or a camel. Becker painted this representation in 1861. We can also see Burke’s initial carved into the rock with date 1860. These pictures (mentioned above) were obviously made prior to 1861. Thus providing further evidence of Aboriginal awareness and acknowledgement of the newcomers.

Another particular and significant account of Aboriginal awareness of encroaching colonisation and settlement reveals the assistance that Aboriginal people offered explorers for safe passage through country.

Further north than the cave at Mutwanji is Cooper Creek where Lorna Dixon, in a recorded interview from 1971, explains the stories that have been passed down to her through five generations of her family – her great-great-grandmother was 103 years old when she died. Lorna learnt the songs of these women’s Country – of her Country. Lorna in singing about caring for and protecting her Country, explains that the valley (near Tibooburra) is a lovely site to see, beautiful, she says ‘That’s my country, lovely country of my heart’ (Dixon, 1977). Lorna explains how her family helped to keep explorers safe from harm:

you know when Captain Cook and them went out, exploring the Cooper’s Creek, she was only a young girl, and her and her old husband, they helped them away from the wild Aborigines, they worked on a station, and they were sort of tamed down and when they knew that the wild people was gonna kill em, kill the explorers
they helped them through. And they dug big holes in the ground along the Cooper’s Creek for the fellas, so the explorers could sleep in there and they would cover them over with sticks, with the bushes so that the wild people, … just hide them. (Dixon, 1977)

Captain Cook coming up the river represents a metaphor of colonisation to Lorna Dixon and the mention of her family working on the station as opposed the those who she describes as ‘wild people’ creates some distinction to the nature of relations between explorers, Aboriginal people and the country. Further, this metaphor of Captain Cook is common all over Australia (Nugent, 2009). Hobbles Danaiyarri told a story of Captain Cook in the Victoria River region in the Northern Territory. Danaiyarri was:

“a historian and political philosopher by inclination, and a Lawman and community leader by education, birth and community demand”. He told the history of the colonisation of his region of North Australia through the saga of Captain Cook, and is by now well known. (Rose, 2004, p.3)

Hobbles taught Deborah Bird Rose many lessons. She explains that Hobbles ‘enjoyed taking the words of the settlers and turning them back on themselves to make a political and moral point’ (Rose, 2004, p.3). For both Lorna and Hobbles the reference to, or rather the oral histories of, Captain Cook, may hold a political and moral point – Captain Cook coming up the river is a metaphor for colonisation and the coming of what Hobbles identified as the real ‘wild’ (Rose, 2004).

The significance of the Captain Cook metaphor is not its historical accuracy or inaccuracy but rather the moral content of what
this represents for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Deborah Bird Rose explains that ‘western historians are heirs to the proposition that historical truthfulness is a matter of reconstructing, as best we can, an event or series of events that happened in the past’ (Rose, 2003, p.123) and telling the truth about Aboriginal history has been heavily debated (Attwood, 2005). Further Rose questions:

> What are the criteria for accepting an oral history as a faithful account of what happened? In order to address this question, I need to distinguish between two aspects of oral histories: their content and their analysis of intention [emphasis placed]. One is a question of facts, the details of what happened. The other deals with the intention of the participants who propelled those events, the question of why these things happened. (Rose, 2003, p.123)

Hobbles described Captain Cook as ‘the emblematic figure of colonisation, running amok in country that is not his, and thinking that the original inhabitants are wild while failing to recognise his own wildness’ (Rose, 2003, p. 3). The term wild is also relevant to this discussion.

The term wild is the opposite of tame and in relation to people at this time in history there existed what was believed to be the wild and the civilised. Similarly, just as people were perceived or categorised as being wild or civilised, the country or landscape is also classified as such; many explorers were searching for an unknown other and the experience of wilderness. Lorna refers to protecting the explorers from the ‘wild’ people; however, Lorna’s wild people are Aboriginal people who are resisting colonisation and assimilation.
Faye in Broken Hill refers to the shootings of Burke and Wills by the ‘whitefellas’ and the shootings of her ancestors by people from boats on the Cooper. Each of these interpretations of Burke and Wills in their Country suggest the coming of ‘wild’ people: Captain Cook and his party in a boat on the Cooper Creek and the ‘wild’ people of the wilderness.

Considering the role of the historian, the purpose of history and the reason for remembering, is the process of documenting the past and constructing a sense of belonging. Deborah Bird Rose argues that the ‘perspective of the historian is central to any historical inquiry and is especially relevant to oral history’ (Rose, 2003, p.121). These micro-narratives align with other Aboriginal oral history accounts and with the archival memory of Burke and Wills in Yandruwandha and Yawarrawarrka country. These stories work together as a narrative of being in place and adapting to change so as to create a sense of belonging.

A sense of belonging is important for both those who are and those who are not of this place. Recent consideration and contribution to the themes of ‘non-Aboriginal sense belonging in Aboriginal landscape’ and ongoing fascination with the deaths Burke and Wills on the Cooper, Paul Lambeth asks ‘[i]f I belong here … how did that come to be?’ (2013, p. 207). A sense of belonging is made difficult while there is a sense of guilt over past actions, some of which were perpetrated by our own ancestors. Understanding where we have come
from and how we belong is often derived from the perspective of the historian, as Rose argues:

It is said that to the victor belong the spoils, and one of the spoils of war is narrative. And if victors choose to eradicate stories other than their own, they often have the power to do so. History, however, is a scholarly practice that can oppose this power to do so. The social and political theorist Hannah Arendt credited Homer with writing the first impartial histories in the West. Today, our purposes in writing history differ in many respects but we still hold to this value. Arendt called this impartiality ‘the highest type of objectivity we know’. However, she also accorded Thucydides the honour of expressing another aspect of objectivity: Thucydides spoke of the multiplicity of viewpoints surrounding public events, and to articulate these varied, and often opposing, viewpoints. In sum, I wish to argue that these values, which developed in the West in antiquity, should continue to inform our practice today. (Rose, 2003, p.121)

Including oral histories, various texts, visual representations and newspaper accounts which are not typically accepted as the truth enables the articulation of the multiplicity of viewpoints, even those that are varied and or opposing, surrounding the public events associated with Burke and Wills. Thus multiperspectives and content are added to the narratives of Burke and Wills. By listening to the accounts from Aboriginal people we are offered another, equally significant perspective (more content). Through interpretation of this we can identify what ‘we might call a faithfulness to the moral content of events’ (Rose, 2003, p.123. Also mentioned by Cahir, 2013b,
What makes these perspectives even more significant is the fact that they have rarely been included in the documented historical memory – in particular that of Burke and Wills – as significant samples of evidence that contribute to the stories of the VEE and peoples’ relation to place.
Chapter Six: Mutual adaptation
This chapter begins with a discussion on the Native Police Force and the mutual adaptation of knowledges, cultures and styles to create a specific explorer persona. This chapter then focuses on place-based moments of interaction between the Landsborough relief expedition and the landscape. These moments of interaction take place within a landscape that was both familiar and also unknown to the exploration party. Familiarity exists for the Aboriginal members of the expedition party, some of whom speak the languages of the areas that it travelled through. The landscape was also familiar to the explorers from the stories they have heard from other explorers of the regions. Yet these stories are of colonial conflict and impress upon the explorers a sense of the unknown, and ultimately a form of alienation. This unknown and alienation creates feelings of fear and uneasiness that influence how the explorers move through the landscape and yet it also encourages a level of mutual adaptation between each of the members and those they meet on their travels. However, this mutual adaptation is not smooth; ‘tension’ exists between and within the individual explorers (Shellam, 2010). Overall, each member of the party displays a sense of comfort and ease as they move through the landscape, demonstrating excellent bush skills and sharing of knowledge. The physical and psychological landscape they travel through is a frontier between what was commonly understood as colonised and un-colonised as ‘civilised’ and ‘wild’. The chapter then provides the story of interaction where Landsborough believes that it was the choice of making ‘friends’ with the local Aboriginal people
that created or led to a violent encounter. Shellam says the use of the term ‘friends’ sheds light on the framing of an encounter within a narrative. She states, ‘Friends can betray and be betrayed, strangers cannot’ (Shellam, 2009, p.7). The relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are discussed, within the context of the key points and concepts introduced in the previous chapter, to create a picture of the colonial frontier – or another story of the landscape.

Burke and Wills Relief - Aboriginal Police Troopers and guides

In 1861, William Landsborough was recommended by A.C. Gregory and chosen by the Victorian and Queensland governments to lead a search for Burke and Wills that began at the Gulf of Carpentaria and travelled southwards towards Victoria (Trundle, 1974). The fate of Burke and Wills was unknown at the time of the relief expedition’s departure. Landsborough’s expedition was one of four sent to search for the missing Burke and Wills. The first was formed in Melbourne, with the Royal Society of Victoria appointing Alfred William Howitt to lead the Victorian Relief Expedition. The second was formed in Adelaide, and led by John McKinlay. The Exploration Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria appointed Frederick Walker to lead a third party of twelve men from Rockhampton along the Barcoo and Thomson rivers to the Norman River, then to the Gulf of Carpentaria to meet Commander Norman and H.C.M.S. steamship Victoria. The main focus of this chapter is Landsborough’s expedition, the fourth relief party. The party left Brisbane on the Firefly, escorted by the steamship Victoria dispatched by the Victorian government, which
was sent to the Gulf of Carpentaria to assist Walker and Landsborough from the Albert River (Burketown). The Landsborough expedition party successfully travelled all the way from the Gulf of Carpentaria to Victoria.

Figure 17: William Landsborough with two Aboriginal explorers, Jemmy and Jack Fisherman. c. 1862.

Image removed at author's request


Looking at this photo of Landsborough, Jemmy and Jack
Fisherman\textsuperscript{13}, all members of the Relief Expedition, we see similarities in their expressions. (See Figure 17) These men have already spent years out in the ‘bush’, they have bonded and shared many similar experiences where their lives depended upon creating and maintaining a committed and close relationship. The relationships formed during colonial exploration often consisted of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mutual adaption, working towards a common or united goal. The photo is dated 1862, which is the year that they set out in search of Burke and Wills. Their hair is combed in similar fashion and each of their beards is sculpted. There are multiple perspectives that we need to consider when reading this photo: that of the sitter(s), that of the photographer and that of the viewers’ perspective. It can easily be assumed that the photographer chose the backdrop in front of which the men are standing and combed their hair in the same fashion. Most likely influenced by what was Australian colonial photographic fashion that is commonly defined as the ‘white photographer’s view’, it is important to also consider the ‘ways that the camera was used in particular places and times to communicate Indigenous views’ (Lydon, 2014, p. 2) and evidence of Aboriginal countersigns (Douglas, 2009). The backdrop, which is typical studio photography style of the time, is of a rough ocean shore with what appears to be eucalypt trees on the edge. By 1860 Australia had been invaded by European settlers for over ninety years. They arrived by boat and landed on these shores, they were new-comers in a completely alien land – but they had

\textsuperscript{13}These two may have been brothers – further research is needed into the history and genealogy of these men.
survived the long and dangerous trip by sailing by boat, they had survived and landed on solid ground, and they had begun to create a new world for themselves. This backdrop symbolizes where the ‘settler’ men have come from and also what these men are leaving – these men, and this photo, symbolise the bravery and courage to move beyond the edges of the continent and into the unknown centre.

It could be assumed that Jack Fisherman is the central figure, with his arms crossed his body language is closed yet he appears strong and bold in the manner in which he directly faces the camera and stares straight at the viewer. These are determined men. Bushmen. Explorers. Colonisers. The literature suggests that Jemmy is a ‘Native Police Trooper’.14 We see that Landsborough, on the right, is dressed in a long coat, a gentleman’s coat with a gentleman’s fob watch and gloves. Jemmy and Jack are dressed in what appears to be matching clothes, perhaps a uniform or perhaps newly acquired attire for the expedition that these men are about to undertake. Either way these clothes would have been especially chosen for the occasion of having this photo taken. The shirt is similar in style to what we know or recognize today as being a bushman shirt, a ‘bluey’. These jumper-like shirts are tough and practical for outdoor activities. You can see that the buttons only reach half way down the torso, the collar is wide yet still able to be done up at the top. The men are both wearing a cravat.

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14 Within the Victorian Relief Expedition, which was led by Frederick Walker, three of the seven Native Mounted Police were also named Jemmy – Jemmy Coreau, Coreen Jemmy, and Jemmy Cargara. This party was involved in what Walker calls ‘unavoidable skirmish’ that claimed the lives of twelve Aboriginal men who spoke Yarrinaakoo on the Stawell River (Walker, 1861, October 30). (See also, Walker, 1863) It is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into the details of this violent encounter.
and pin and there is what appears to be a cuff link on Jemmy’s shirt. In Jemmy’s hand is what looks like a Native Police Trooper’s hat. If these two men are wearing a uniform one could assume that they are both members of the Native Police Force. However, when compared to another photo of Native Police Troopers (perhaps of the Victorian Relief Expedition led by Frederick, 1861) we see a similar hat yet the shirts are different. (See Figure 18)

Figure 18: Native Mounted Police, Rockhampton 1864

Image removed at author’s request

In 1853 William Wills described Australian life in a letter to his father. Wills was working with his brother as a shepherd on a sheep station near Deniliquin, perhaps where Jemmy is originally from. Nine years before this photo was taken of the explorers Wills was discussing life in the bush as compared to life in the city of Melbourne. Wills was a gentleman. Refined. Writing to his father he discusses how much people should carry into the bush and explains that even if too much is carried it can be turned into a positive by selling any

excess belongings. Of particular interest in the letter are the statements referring to the weather and the clothes that people in Australia wear:

every one who comes out there does a very foolish thing, that is, brings a lot of clothes that he never wants. All you want to wear even in Melbourne is a blue shirt, pair of duck trousers, straw hat or wide awake [?] and what they call a jumper here, it is a kind of shirt made of plaid or any thing you please reaching just below the hips and fastened round the waist with a belt, it would be a very nice summer dress for Charley, I should wear it myself if I was in England. It should be made with a good size collar and should lay open like a waistcoat only a button at the neck if required. (Wills, 1853b, p.14)

This ‘jumper’ is very similar to the visual image of the shirts that Jack and Jemmy are wearing. The attire that Jack and Jemmy are wearing appears to be what is the latest fashion of the successful bush persona: according to Wills’ assessment of the ‘jumper’, this is fashionable in the metropolitan areas, as well as in the bush. This is the new Australian image, beyond what was being worn in Europe. It is uniquely adapted clothing to suit the Australian lifestyle. Jack and Jemmy are modern men. The native police represent the ability to move between city life and bush life (Fels, 1988; Evans, 2010) yet also offers the colonial observer a sense of familiarity and comfort in the belief that the colonising and imperial task is succeeding – and supported by the original inhabitants.

Arguably, to the invader of Aboriginal Country, these images
of ‘civilised’ Aboriginal men, project a vision of peaceful and supported settlement. Further these images, to the coloniser, represent the explorer as the hero of civilisation for training these men to become police (Fels, 1988). As mentioned earlier in this thesis, Roslynn Haynes argues that the ‘heroic figures of nineteenth-century literature and art who carried with them the hopes of the colony for expansion were constructs of desire – desire not only for more pastoral land but for inspiring models of valour and resourcefulness’ (Haynes, 1998, p.226). The photographer portrays these men as able to stand on their own feet, as near equals. Landsborough is not seated, as gentlemen often are, but standing with his comrades. The Aboriginal men are not ‘boys’ who are placed on the floor at Landsborough’s feet; they stand taller than Landsborough. Note that the three men adopt similar stances. However, distinction is clear with the placement of Landsborough’s arms by his side. Jack’s crossed arms are not typical of nineteenth-century photographic styling and suggest that Jack purposefully chose his stance. The action of Jemmy’s hand placed in his shirt opening is a typical pose that photographers would direct their sitter to adopt. Jemmy does not make eye contact with the viewer. He is looking past the photographer – we cannot see his eyes. This photo moves beyond valour and resourcefulness towards an attitude, which Haynes identifies as significantly twentieth century. The pose and expression of both Jemmy and Jack could be viewed as their sense of pride and power for being part of the colonial powers (Fels, 1988).
Throughout the various histories written about Burke and Wills, evidence of societal and cultural needs and interests of the twentieth century were different from those of the nineteenth century. Haynes exclaims that: ‘At first the new nation needed internationally acknowledged heroes to establish and adorn its identity’ (Haynes, 1998, p.226). Burke and Wills were portrayed as gentlemen heading out into the wilderness, alone and unguided by Aboriginal people. In contrast, the Relief Expeditions included Aboriginal people as integral members of their parties, however these histories are not included in the Burke and Wills story. Perhaps this is because the histories – the stories – of Native Mounted Police and frontier war are often not easily digested by either Indigenous or non-Indigenous Australia (Evans, 2010). However, when taking into consideration the numbers of Aboriginal people who lost their Country, their ways of being and even their lives in this frontier war, especially in light of all the celebration and commemoration dedicated to World Wars I and II, it is important to memorialise those individuals who were involved in these moments of encounter (Fels, 1988; Evans, 2010; Pappin, 2013, pers. comm.). The mounted Native Police Force provided fundamental members of various exploration parties and without their knowledge of moving through Country the expeditions may not have survived (Fels, 1988). This Force, an integral part of the colonial mechanism, contained within it individual people who offer another side of the story associated with the Victorian Exploring Expedition.

Landsborough’s journal recorded events and experiences that
occurred between 4 February and 21 May 1862, during travel from the Albert River to the Warrego River (1862a,b; 1863). The chapter follows the linear storyline, through a place-based analysis of the landscape through which they travelled. John Cameron (2003, p.173) describes ‘place’ following Relph’s definition, ‘the word “place” is best applied to those fragments of human environments where meanings, activities and a specific landscape are implicated and enfolded by each other’ (Relph, 1992, p.37 in Cameron, 2003, p.173).

Earlier stories of specific place can be referred to add meaning and significance to expedition accounts of the places through which they travelled. This will draw out the ways in which Landsborough and other members of the party were influenced by these earlier stories, and reveal how these stories of past events remained in place, shaping explorers’ relationships to the environment and people they encountered. The main ‘place’ of focus is the Barcoo River and the interconnecting water systems including the Thomson River and Cooper Creek. The main part of this story is situated within the rectangular geographical location bounded by what is today known as Longreach on the Thomson River, Barcaldine on the Alice River (which feeds into the Barcoo River), the Warrego River further south and Cooper Creek to the west. Surrounding areas will also be mentioned, due to the great distances travelled and the relevance of the experiences that shaped the events.

The expedition journals reveal traces of moral and cultural seeing and recognition of vital Aboriginal involvement during
settlement. This is revealed not just in the various forms of generous hospitality shown to the explorers (for example, that of the Yandruwandha people towards Burke, Wills and King) but also in the attempts of individuals to find ways of being in country together, of mutual adaptation. Most of all, this chapter reveals the importance of Aboriginal knowledge, without which the newcomers may have perished in the unfamiliar environment. The Landsborough expedition consisted of six men: William Landsborough, commander; George Bourne, second-in-command; W. Gleeson (Or Leeson: Bourne 1862, p. 26), groom, cook and former sailor; Jemmy, Queensland Native Mounted Police trooper, originally from Deniliquin; Fisherman, Aboriginal guide from the Brisbane region; and Jackey, Aboriginal guide from the Wide Bay district. There were 20 or 21 horses (Bourne 1862, p. 26). Although many men were involved in the expedition this section prioritises the experiences of Jemmy – this is due to word limits and the research scope of this particular thesis and chapter.

**Jemmy, the Queensland Mounted Police Trooper from Deniliquin**

Jemmy’s life experiences prior to this expedition were important in shaping how he related to the people and places he encountered: he had been taken to Brisbane and placed in the police force after his mother and father had been shot by ‘whites’ (Bourne 1862, p. 26). It is difficult to understand what happened to Jemmy and his family, but this tragedy was not an isolated event. In the *Sydney
Morning Herald, an unknown author wrote about the abduction of Aboriginal children from the Queensland river regions, assumed to be between the Nagoa River and Barcoo River regions, and another case where a small Aboriginal child was told that his parents had been shot (Sydney Morning Herald 12 December 1861, p. 5). The article disclosed ‘a new phase of [A]boriginal treatment’ in the nineteenth century and raised many questions, especially in relation to Jemmy, the Native Police Force and its recruitment practices. In Jonathan Richards’ The Secret War: A True History of Queensland’s Native Police he stated that ‘Native Police troopers in the northern districts of New South Wales (present-day Queensland) were all recruited in the southern colonies before 1860, and until about 1870 many of the troopers came from Victoria and New South Wales’ (Richards 2008, p. 122).

Was Jemmy a willing recruit or was he misled by the authorities, taken far from home and told that his family was dead? These questions are difficult to answer, and raise more questions about relations between Aboriginal people and the colonisers. Richards held that ‘the issue of Aboriginal collaboration with the colonizers, and the implications of this for frontier violence, are important topics that need further careful research’ (Richards, 2008, p.125). The following sections will discuss collaboration between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and look at some of the violence that occurred on the Landsborough expedition.
In Brisbane on the 21 August 1861 Colonial Secretary R.G.W. Herbert issued Instructions to Landsborough. After outlining that Burke and his party had:

started from the Cooper’s Creek in December last with the intention of traversing the interior of the Continent to the Northern Coast, but of who no tidings have since been received it has been decided to dispatch an Expedition to the Gulf of Carpentaria in the hope that it may afford assistance in the even of Mr Burke party having reached its shores but have been unable to retrace their steps through the desert interior.

Under these circumstances H.E. the Governor confiding in your Experience and ability, has been please to appoint you to Command the land party which the Governments of Victoria and Queensland have conjointly organized for the above purpose.

As you will necessarily (sic) be responsible for the proper organisation of the Expedition under your Command, you will have the selection of the individuals to compose the party.

The salaries of the persons composing the expedition have been fixed at the following rates (------)

- Commander £ 1 , 1 ,, 0
- Assistant Commander ,, 15 ,, 0
- Assistants ,, 10 ,, 0
- Aboriginals ,, 2 ,, 6

The accompanying instructions which have been prepared for your Guidance by the Victorian Exploration Committee embody in detail the course to be pursued in carrying out the objects of the
Expedition.

It is therefore only necessary to request that you will embark with your party and equipment on board the “Firefly” which has been provided for your conveyance to the Gulf of Carpentaria, and will proceed under the convoy of HMCS Victoria to the Albert River, or the nearest convenient position in that locality for the disembarkation of the Horses etc.

You will there co-operate with Captain Norman of the Victoria in the establishment of an encampment in some spot conveniently accessible by boats and at the same time suitable for the refreshment of the Horses.

The head of the navigable portion of the Albert River is suggested as a suitable spot for this purpose especially as it is most probable that if Mr. Burke reached the Northern Coast he would make for this point and leave records of his visit it having been a general rendezvous [?] for previous Expeditions.

Having recruited the party it is desirable that the Country to the South and West should be first examined by following up the water course in that direction and the Albert River or southern tributaries of the Nicholson are recommended for this purpose, as in the event of any of the missing party having reached this part of the continent they would travel along the Creeks and Rivers, and that their traces would be most evident on their immediate banks.

The search having been extended as far to the West and South as circumstances will admit you will return to the camp previously established in the vicinity of the Albert R. and consult Capt. Norman of the Victoria as to the best course to be pursued either by continuing the search in a South and East direction and
then returning again to the Camp on the Albert, or by the same route
continued to the settled districts of Queensland as several other
parties are being dispatched from other points with the object of
searching for traces of the missing Explorers. Copies of the
instructions issued to the several leaders thereof are (------) herewith
for your information as it may facilitate co-operation.

In your intercourse with the aborigines you will endeavour
to promote amicable relations as information may possibly be
obtained with regard to Mr. Burkes party. But as the tribes on the
Gulf have hitherto shown hostility on the occasion of previous visits
of explorers it will be necessity to take every precaution to ensure
the safety of the party entrusted to your command.

The instructions were signed by the Colonial Secretary Herbert
and the three other significant historical documents which will be
drawn upon are the Journal of Landsborough’s Expedition from
Carpentaria, in Search of Burke and Wills (Landsborough, 1963), an
Extract of Despatch from Mr. Landsborough to the Hon. the
COLONIAL SECRETARY, Queensland, dated Bunnawaunah, Darling
River, June 1st, 1862 (Landsborough, 1862) and Bourne’s Journal of
Landsborough’s Expedition from Carpentaria in Search of Burke and
Wills (Bourne, 1862). These reveal the contrasting intentions,
outcomes and interpretations of the Landsborough expedition in
relation to the ‘Instructions’ given to the party and provide examples
of how exploration diaries and journals were written.

There is no denying that the expedition members experienced
life-altering events, which would have moved them from one phase of emotional and intellectual processing towards another; these life-and-death situations created mutual dependency (each person depended on each other for their safety, comfort, friendship and co-production of knowledge). For example, in a letter to the Royal Society of Victoria (Letter, Royal Society of Victoria, 2 June 1862), Landsborough (Landsborough, 1963, p.102) stated that the lives of his expedition party depended on the ‘vigilance’ of the watchmen, in this case Jemmy, the Aboriginal Police Trooper. He also recorded that an Aboriginal guide, Jackey, provided nourishment for the explorers when he ‘shot about a half-a-dozen of whistling ducks and a large grey crane’ which made ‘great quantities’ of ‘fresh food’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.6). We ‘had also as many nice little figs as we like to eat from a large shady clump of bushes near the camp’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.22). Marie Fels explains that police corps experienced a sense of power (amongst Aboriginal and settler communities) and enhanced political agency by working closely with the colonial powers (Fels, 1988) – this could be extended to those involved in exploration. These examples reveal that the Aboriginal members protected the lives of the whole party by offering ‘vigilance’, ‘great quantities’ of ‘fresh food’ and even ‘shady’ campsites. Although the expedition traversed a large area, from the Gulf country, further south to more arid regions, where food and water resources were potentially more limited, this discussion focuses on one particular ‘place’ – the Barcoo River. This region is of particular focus because of the interactions that occurred
which resulted in violent clashes between the explorers and the local Aboriginal people. This micro-narrative is focused on to bring to light the moments of knowledge co-production and mutual adaptation.

Landsborough (1862) documented the events that transpired on the Barcoo River, in the letter informing the Royal Society of Victoria of his party’s safe arrival at Bunnawaunah, on the Darling River, New South Wales. Describing the state of the country, he wrote that the ‘road we came was so easy, from the richness of the pasturage and the abundance of water, that a foal, named Flinders from his having been foaled on the Flinders River, followed his mother most bravely from the time he was a few hours old until he reached here’ (Landsborough, 1862, p.40). Further, the:

route from the Gulf of Carpentaria, Mr Gregory’s route to South Australia (down the Barcoo River and the Cooper Creek into South Australia) and the routes of other explorers, demonstrate the fact that sheep, cattle, and horses can be taken at a small cost and in the finest condition, from South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales, and the inland districts of Queensland, to stock the country near the Gulf of Carpentaria, or for exportation to India or elsewhere. (Landsborough, 1862, p.40)

The tone used to describe the country fits into the colonising structure where the land is reduced to ‘being a means to the colonizer’s ends’ (Plumwood, 2003, p.59). These statements reveal that the purposes of Landsborough’s expedition were colonisation and to search for Burke’s party, following ‘Gregory’s route from Queensland to South Australia, to a point marked first Depot on Burke’s route on the map
which shows the routes of different explorers’ (Landsborough, 1862, p.40). Meeting Aboriginal people along the way they ‘took many opportunities of asking the blacks respecting the explorers they had seen’, which was possible because ‘Jemmy the native police trooper could speak their language’ (Landsborough, 1862, p.40). The assistance of the Aboriginal guides and troopers was essential in overcoming the language barriers between the English speaking men and the Aboriginal peoples (Richards, 2008). The most successful exploration and settlement occurred though the use of Aboriginal knowledge and assistance and the locals peoples testimony. Recent scholarship examines the use of Aboriginal guides and their systems of knowledge by the Victorian Exploring Expedition and the subsequent relief expeditions, revealing the invaluable assistance of Aboriginal people to the exploration and colonisation of Australia (Carter, 1987, 1992; Baker, 1998; Reynolds, 1990, 2000; Cahir, 2013a; Kennedy, 2013). There is no denying that the Aboriginal troopers and guides assisted in decisions about the direction that the party should take. For example, a previous expedition searching for traces of Burke and Wills had travelled through rocky, barren and parched country, after which Fisherman said, ‘[s]uppose you leave him river, you won’t find other fellow water’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.23). Following this advice they changed course and eventually came across a river and Aboriginal camp.

The party’s decisions about where to explore and which
direction to take involved help from the journals and notes of previous explorations, in particular Landsborough referred to the journal of A.C. Gregory on his 1858 search for Ludwig Leichhardt (Gregory and Gregory, 1884). At the Albert River depot, where the Walker and Landsborough relief expeditions met the supplies being shipped in on the Victoria, Landsborough asked to read Walker’s ‘previous discoveries’. However, they were of ‘very little assistance’ as Walker ‘had left instructions that while his chart and journal were in Captain Norman’s charge, [Captain of the HMCS Victoria and Commander-in-chief of the northern expedition parties] no one should be allowed to take notes from them’ which meant that Landsborough and his exploration party could not gain information about where Walker had explored and experienced (Landsborough, 1862, p.41). Landsborough, guided by Jemmy and Fisherman, nevertheless attempted to follow Walker’s tracks to the Flinders River, ‘where he reported he had left the tracks of Burke’s party’, then managed to trace them ‘with considerable difficulty for four days’ to the Leichhardt River ‘where so much rain had fallen on the rich soil that it was impossible to trace them farther’ (Landsborough, 1862, p.41). Further, it is recorded:

From the Leichhardt River we traveled over well-watered country to the Flinders River; then traveled up that river, through fine rich pastoral country, to about latitude 20 degrees 40 minutes; from there we reached Bowen Downs in a few miles. The creeks and the river that water that country I knew previously to a certain point down the river, but beyond this point I did not know where the river flowed. On this expedition I followed it down to near its junction with the
Barcoo River (formerly known as the Victoria and as the Cooper) and discovered that it was the Thomson River. After leaving the well-watered country of Bowen Downs, with the assistance of one of the blacks of that locality, we came through a fine rich country to the Barcoo River; then without following the river further, or searching ahead for water, we went across to the Warrego River without the horses being at any time longer than a day and part of a night without water. (Landsborough, 1862, p.41)

This excerpt reveals the reliance on local Aboriginal guides through certain parts of the journey – in this example the practice of successful exploration parties, including the paid Aboriginal members, made use of a local Aboriginal as a guides is evidenced. Other examples of local Aboriginal involvement with exploration is discussed by Don Baker who observes that Mitchells expedition included some people who attached themselves to parties (Baker, 1998: p. 42). Of particular interest is how Landsborough was guided through Country, his relationship with the guides, how stories of place influenced both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the expedition party and how each person related to the country and the people they met. Each of these aspects will be analysed with reference to a particular encounter on the Barcoo River.

**Stories that influenced encounters with people and place**

With reference to previous explorers experiences, in particular those of Gregory through these regions, Landsborough may have been cautious and wary of what to expect. However, with the knowledge
that previous explorers had experienced Aboriginal resistance in particular regions Landsborough used this as justification of his party’s own retaliation. A violent encounter on the Barcoo River, was described in a letter to the Royal Society, as ‘regrettable but necessary’:

I am sorry to have to inform you that our familiarity at last led to our having a hostile collision with them on the Barcoo River, near where the blacks treacherously tried to take Mr Gregory’s party by surprise during the night. They tried to take us at night by surprise. If they had succeeded they would no doubt have overpowered us; but it was during Jemmy’s watch and, as he always kept his watch well, he awoke us when they were within a few yards of our fire, and we fortunately succeeded in driving them away. Next morning (very early) two of them came near our camp. At my request Jemmy warned them to leave us, for we had now a most hostile feeling towards them. Instead of their showing the least symptom of leaving us they got their companions (who were in ambush, heavily armed with clubs and throwing-sticks) to join them. Under these circumstances we fired on them. In doing so, and in following them up to where the horses were feeding, one was shot and another slightly wounded in the leg. (Landsborough, 1963, p.57)

It is important to note that Landsborough believed that it was his ‘familiarity’ with the Aboriginal people that led to this ‘hostile collision’, so in an attempt to understand his familiarity and the hostility we need to explore the events leading up to this encounter, and the stories that influenced it.
On 13 March 1861, the party was heading towards the Barcoo River area: from the ‘path along the rising ground we observed, in the distance, a number of blacks, near the river … also that birds chiefly consisting of pigeons, cockatoos, quail, and hawks, were seen in great abundance’ (Landsborough, 1862, pp.83–84). The following day Landsborough wrote:

When we had come seven miles, over rich well-grassed downs, we observed a great number of blacks on a level flat … Mr. Bourne and I approached them, and they all ran away, except some gins and children, who hid themselves in a waterhole. (Landsborough, 1862, pp.83–84)

Bourne gave a more detailed account of the encounter:

March 14 – Camp 26 – To-day we saw, on a large plain to our right, a lot of natives. Feeling anxious to get a nearer view of them, I started in pursuit, followed by Mr. Landsborough. They, seeing us approach, separated into two bodies, the men outrunning the gins, excepting one immense fat fellow who endeavoured for a short time to drive them before him. By urging our horses into a gallop, we soon overtook them, when, as if by magic, they all disappeared. We pulled up and found they had jumped into a waterhole, and were lying under every bush and log they could find, with just the nostril and mouth above water. Perfect silence prevailed, although there were some very young children, and an inexperienced person would have passed the spot, little thinking that thirty human beings were hiding like a lot of wounded wild ducks.

We could not induce them to answer us, so I determined to go in and drive them out. Their terror when I jumped into the water was
extreme; they must have thought me a fiend, to judge from the expression of their faces. After being driven from their hiding place, they attempted to propitiate us by offering us two of the best looking girls, which present of course was declined. We made them a few presents, gave them a little bread which they would not eat, and let them go. They were a very good sample of natives, far superior to those seen down south, living upon rats, mussels, fish, &c., which are plentiful here, and no doubt wallaby, emu, and kangaroo are also easily got in the neighbourhood of these mountains. While bathing, which we never omit, I was able to get a large supply of mussels, the boys getting many more; we have had a great feast for once. Myall and boree plentiful. (Bourne, 1862, p.34)

Bourne’s suggestion that the Aboriginal people must have thought him a fiend is an interesting point if considered in light of Alfred Howitt’s experience. He found a ‘belief among the Yantruwunter [Yandruwandha] natives that white men were once blacks’ and was himself asked by some old Aboriginal men ‘how long it was since’ he ‘was a blackfellow’ (Howitt, 1878, p.307). He was even told that he ‘had once been a Yantruwunter – one of the Mungalle family’ (Howitt, 1878, p.307). The Yandruwandha people believed in the ‘jumping-up of blackfellows as white men’ (Howitt, 1878, p.308). Although the area to which Bourne’s story related was not Yandruwandha country it could be assumed that its inhabitants held similar beliefs. Clark and Cahir wrote about the Kulin Aboriginal word Ngamadjidj as a term explaining how western Victorian Aboriginal groups reportedly ‘recognised Europeans as deceased clan
members who had returned to life’ (Clark & Cahir 2011, p.105) and
that ‘the arrival of Europeans caused many to conclude that these
newcomers must have belonged to the land, or at least knew of it, in a
previous life’ (Clark & Cahir 2011, p.106).

Howitt made a similar observation of the Yandruwandha
people who ‘cannot imagine how we can travel from place to place in
straight lines, or how we can speak any of their languages, without
having at one time been blacks in their country’ (Howitt, 1878, p.307).
Although reactions to explorers would have been diverse, and most
likely strongly anchored in fear and terror (Reynolds, 2006b, p.42), the
inclusion of non-Aboriginal into Aboriginal spirituality reveals the
overlap of two different cultures, creating a new way of belonging and
adapting to the changing environment. It seems that Aboriginal people
in many areas of Australia believed that the white men who travelled
through and settled in their country were once black and the placement
of non-Aboriginal people within Aboriginal cosmology was thus a
way of synthesizing the changes occurring in their society.

Not only was this useful for the Aboriginal people, but it must
also have given the newcomers a greater sense of belonging to country
and connection with the Indigenous people – or a sense of superiority
over the Aboriginal people. Howitt ‘only found one native guide who
could make a straight course’ and said that Aboriginal people ‘often
remarked’ on how he [and other non-Aboriginal explorers] ‘travelled
in straight lines across the sandhills, while the natives took the easiest
line through them’, as though travelling in a straight line was better
than following the easier path (Howitt, 1878, p.307). It appears that the placement of non-Aboriginal peoples into an Aboriginal spiritual belief system moved the explorers towards adopting a specific relationship to people and place. As mentioned above, Howitt believed the Aboriginal people thought that he was formerly an Aboriginal person because of his ability to travel from ‘place to place in straight lines’ (Howitt, 1878, p.307). Travelling in straight lines denied Aboriginal ‘dream songs or begere, relating the adventures of ancestral beings’ and stories of place (Berndt & Berndt, 1999, p.369).

Howitt did follow and assume Aboriginal beliefs and protocols of ways of being in country, but his use of brutal force in obtaining and keeping Aboriginal guides (Howitt, 1878, p.307) revealed his sense of colonial superiority over Aboriginal people. Landsborough notes that ‘we’ (assuming he is meaning Bourne and himself) ‘remained near them for a short time, and were joined by Jemmy and Jackey’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.83). Considering this quote alongside the earlier quote referring to the party approaching the Aboriginal people who upon seeing them approach, ‘separated into two bodies’, the men outrunning the women, ‘excepting one immense fat fellow who endeavoured for a short time to drive them before him’ (assumingly trying to protect the women) suggests, that Jemmy and Jacky continued to chase the Aboriginal men. Without any further statements referring to what exactly happened between the Aboriginal men and Jemmy and Jacky it is near impossible to say – but it is worth considering that these police troopers were hostile towards the men. It
is also evident that following Aboriginal protocols was not something that the Landsborough expedition appeared to consistently do, as revealed in another perspective of the interaction at the water hole on 14 March. Landsborough claims that the women and children ‘soon abandoned their hiding-place, and assembled on the bank, where they had their coolamans filled with rats’ (1963, p.83). Rather than acknowledging that Bourne forced these women and children out of their hiding place Landsborough implies that these people willingly met with the explorers. And further, that the Aboriginal men ran away from the explorers and most significantly he insinuates that these men abandoned the women and children. He states:

The old gins repeatedly offered the wives of the men who had run away from us. Amongst the females whom I observed, was a girl about ten years old, with a large bone stuck through the cartilage of her nose. We declined the offer, although I dare say Jackey would have taken one of the ratcatchers with him: but Jemmy said he would not, as he does not approve of wedded life. He has seen it, I presume, under disadvantageous circumstances.

The young gins had fine eyes, white teeth, and good expression. The children looked particularly lively and intelligent. Jemmy understood a few words of their language, but not sufficient to get information from them. Their word for water, ‘cammo,’ I caught while we were getting them to fill our pint pots with water. After bidding them farewell, Mr. Bourne and Jackey proceeded after the packhorses: Jemmy and I went up the flat to a place about three and a-half miles south of Bramston Range. (Landsborough, 1963, pp.83–84)
Not only did the white men frighten the Aboriginal people by playing up the role of ‘fiend’, they may have perceived the Aborigines’ behaviour as worship of the ‘powerful’ explorers. Through rejecting the propitiatory offering of ‘two of the best looking girls’ and ignoring the opportunity for reciprocation – the denial of ‘wife lending’ (Berndt & Berndt, 1999, p.189) – the expedition party separated itself from the local Aboriginal people, creating a sense of superiority and detachment from people and place.

Jemmy’s disapproval of wedded life can be interpreted several ways. He may have been homosexual: according to Berndt and Berndt marriage was ‘expected’ with a ‘stress on heterosexual relations’ and homosexuality was apparently traditionally ‘not encouraged’ (Berndt & Berndt 1999, pp.188–189,195). However, without knowing Jemmy’s sexual orientation, this discussion will continue on the assumption that after Jemmy’s parents were shot by the invaders, he believed that if he married and had children they might have suffered a similar fate, and thus he declined. Or it could be assumed that Jemmy, growing up without his family and outside his society, missed initiation into traditional cultures and ways of being. Berndt and Berndt held that childhood is ‘preparation for marriage’ and a ‘boy can be reasonably sure that he will follow in the steps of his father and grandfather’ (Berndt & Berndt, 1999, p.188). If Jemmy missed out on childhood because he was taken away from his family, it is easy to believe that he missed various rituals of initiation and thus may not have been regarded as a true adult. Jemmy’s removal from his Country
may have meant that no wife was selected for him (Berndt & Berndt, 1999). Was Jemmy denying his culture or did he not know his traditional culture? Or did he hope that he too would ‘jump-up a whitefella’ and was thus embracing the culture of colonisation as a way to belong? Or did he believe that he was already a ‘whitefella’? He was more committed to following in Landsborough’s footsteps and declined the offer of Aboriginal women.

It is difficult to distinguish if this encounter was a friendly encounter – as Landsborough insinuated and yet Bourne and his actions suggests otherwise. The fact that the explorers mounted on horses at a gallop chased these people and scared them is suggestive of the potential for violence. There is no denying that Bourne’s use of the word ‘terror’ in describing how the women and children responded to the explorers is a form of psychological and emotional violence upon these people.

A second series of encounters began on 2 April, over two weeks since the previous incident, which means that, the local Aboriginal people would have had plenty of time to spread the word of the invaders in their Country. Landsborough and Jemmy were travelling ahead of the remainder of the party ‘looking for a camping place’ when a number of Aboriginal people ‘ran out from the creek and followed’ them ‘for two or three miles’ (Bourne, 1862, p.38). The party claimed that they made it a rule not to let the Aborigines see where they camped – a sign that the party did not follow protocol and wait to be invited or accepted and then be shown where to camp.
Again Bourne reveals his terror-instilling manner:

It was getting late, I did not wait to speak to them, but they followed us so close that I was compelled to stop the horses, turn them about, and face them, upon one of the black boys telling me that one very powerful fellow was running behind me and shaking his boomerang, as if about to throw it. The other kept a more respectful distance, but this fellow seemed determined to do as he pleased.

Upon seeing him in the act of throwing his boomerang at me, I fired a bullet from my revolver so close to him that, although he laughed, he evidently thought it as well to keep a little further away. Jemmy, the trooper, who had asked me several times to allow him to fire, now fired his regulation pistol, the bullet of which made such a noise that he turned about and ran. Soon after, Mr. Landsborough and Jackey came up. As we were pitching camp, several more came up and took little notice of our motioning them away, until Mr. Landsborough fired a rifle at a tree, which alarmed them slightly. After a time they retired about half-a-mile and camped. (Bourne, 1862, p.38)

On the same day the party ‘travelled down the river till six in the evening, journeying later than usual to get out of the neighbourhood of some’ Aboriginal people that they had ‘passed about seven miles back’. Earlier that day Landsborough and Jackey had noticed some Aboriginal people nearby and perceived them to be a threat: they ‘galloped towards them to make them run away; but instead of doing so, they remained and received’ the explorers ‘in a friendly manner, and offered … spears and boomerangs’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.92). In an interesting example of cultural
exchange and overlap and consideration of Aboriginal protocols of ‘reciprocity’ (Berndt & Berndt 1999, p.1210), Landsborough let Jackey take a spear and two boomerangs: ‘the spear we wanted for making ramrods; in return for their presents I gave them a tomahawk’.

Landsborough and Jackey caught up with the rest of the expedition party and Bourne informed him ‘that the blacks had followed … for about three miles, and that one of them, a powerfully built man, about six feet high, had been so very bold, that he [Mr. Bourne] had repeatedly fired over his head without causing him any alarm; and that on one occasion, on looking around, he saw him apparently in the act of throwing his boomerang at him’ (Landsborough, 1963, pp.92–93).

It is interesting to note that Bourne claimed to have shot only one bullet over the Aboriginal person’s head but Landsborough said that Bourne fired repeatedly. Perhaps Bourne was trying to justify his actions – exaggerating the perceived danger to make the need for violent retaliation more credible. Or perhaps Landsborough was suggesting that Aboriginal people were more of a threat and more persistent than Bourne thought, and he was pre-empting more dangerous encounters.

However, Landsborough noted that his meeting with the locals earlier in the day was useful. They told Jemmy, who understood their language, ‘that they had seen nothing of any explorers with camels’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.93). After setting up their camp for the evening the party noticed that the Aboriginal people were near to the site that the party had chosen:
I was sorry to find that we had not got out of the neighbourhood of the blacks, as I observed some of them were watching us from behind some trees close at hand. Jemmy told them that I was angry at them for following us. In reply, they said I was mistaken, that they had not followed, they had never seen us before. Shortly afterwards, Jemmy had a long conversation with them, during which, they informed him they had seen a party of explorers to the eastward, but that they had never seen any with camels or drays. When they left they assured that they would not return until morning. (Landsborough, 1963, p.93)

The following morning, 3 April, four of the local Aboriginal people, made a second visit. Landsborough said that ‘they were very communicative’ about the direction of the rivers and the state of surrounding country (Landsborough, 1963, p.93). Bourne thought it was ‘strange’ that Jemmy and the visitors spoke the same language:

Fortunately, but strange to say, one of them spoke the same language as the trooper Jemmy, and we obtained considerable information from him about the country, &c.; and still more strange, none of them had ever seen any one of the parties, who must have passed in this neighbourhood. (Bourne, 1862, p.39)

This commonality of language raises a few questions, including whether Jemmy actually originated from this area rather than Deniliquin. Or was one of these Aboriginal people from Jemmy’s area? Alida Metcalfe discusses ‘go-betweens’ as those who act as an intermediary directing transactions, receiving gifts, interpreting, and translating (2005). Ian Clark suggests that there are ‘numerous explanations – most traditional men were polyglots – it is possible that
Jemmy’s language was a second or third language of the visitor – possibly through intermarriage or he may have been a messenger who were renowned for their ability to speak many languages’ (Personal communication, 22 June 2015). Further, why did Bourne think it even stranger that they had not seen Burke and Wills? Was Bourne sensing something that he did not include in his journal? Bourne wrote that:

They were anxious to examine our firearms, and so I fired my revolver close to one’s head, when they ran off much alarmed, but returned upon our assuring them we were not angry. We gave them an old rasp to make into a tomahawk, and some bread, with which they were much pleased. However, nothing can be clearer to anyone who knows them well, that they would overpower any party if possible, and hence the folly of allowing them to come too near in any numbers. (Bourne, 1862, p.39)

These interactions and exchanges with the local Aboriginal people reveal important moments of mutual dependency and significant overlap occurring between people and cultures. These ‘friendly’ encounters and discussions allowed the explorers to gain significant information. It also allowed the locals to gain information about these newcomers. It is evident from this statement that these Aboriginal people showed great interest in the firearms: ‘news of the danger and mysterious power of firearms was almost certainly passed on to the Aborigines before they came into physical contact with Europeans’ (Reynolds, 2006b, p.37). If we consider that one of these men was a messenger who could speak many languages he could have been moving through the landscape telling others of the invaders use
of firearms and how to relate with the newcomers. They were obviously cautious of the weapons and apparently afraid of the gunshot, but Bourne was still intimidated by the strength and power of these Aboriginal people even though they did not carry and use guns.

It took great strength, courage and determination for the people to approach each other for the purpose of learning their cultural practices.

Bourne giving the rasp to the Aboriginal people to make a tomahawk is another interesting example of adaptation, involving the useful term ‘entangled objects’ (Rowlands, 2011, p.183). The sharing of cultural objects was not one-way; for example, the explorers used Aboriginal spears as ramrods (Landsborough, 1963, p.92). The exchanges display the willingness of Aboriginal people to learn as much as possible from passing strangers and to use others’ cultural objects in a way that suited their needs and vice versa – many explorers and settlers relied upon the local knowledge, artifacts and objects, and the ability to read the landscape to find suitable places to camp (Jones, 2008). This ability to read the landscape was based upon following and observing Aboriginal people – If Aboriginal people were present (evidenced by their actual presence, or of their campsites, birds, fishing nets and traps) surely the explorers could also camp and find adequate resources for survival.

On 5 April, the party made camp at a ‘fine deep waterhole at least sixty yards wide, very deep, and a mile in length’, which Bourne believed to be the Thomson River proper (Bourne, 1862, p.39). The surrounding country was ‘wretchedly dry’ and seemingly had received
no ‘rain for twelve months, and certainly did look something like a desert’ (Bourne, 1862, p.39). After making camp, the party received a visit from the people local to the area. Landsborough recorded that ‘a middle-aged black fellow, two youths, and two little boys paid us a visit; they were very friendly, but we did not get any information from them’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.95). Bourne described them as ‘very quiet and friendly’; ‘one of them has an iron tomahawk which he must have had for years, as it was worn almost to the eye’ but Bourne could not ‘learn from him where he got it’ (Bourne, 1862, p.39). In Queensland, iron tomahawks were the most common tools offered to Indigenous people (Rowlands, 2011). Perhaps these Aboriginal people had visited the settled areas or had traded for the axe. Or perhaps it was a cultural exchange with a prior expedition, for example, the Gregory party, which in 1858, four years prior to the Landsborough party, had travelled near the Barcoo River in search of Ludwig Leichhardt. Major Sir Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor-General of New South Wales, accompanied by Edmund Kennedy, and Dr Stephenson, and twenty-six men who were mostly convicts on probation, was the first exploration party in this region in 1845 (Mills, Ahern, Purdie, & McDonald, 1990, p.1). The next expedition was Kennedy’s party in 1847 that followed Mitchell’s route and realized that the Barcoo turned into the Cooper (Mills, et.al. 1990, p.1). The exploration parties of Gregory and Landsborough were the next to explore this region. It was the favorable reports by both Kennedy and Landsborough that created a great rush for new land. In particular with the separation of
Queensland in 1859 a new Land Act was passed that required all runs to be stocked by 8 April 1863 – this Act was passed to prevent people from keeping land un-stocked thereby preventing others from taking it up and who ever failed in stocking the land by this date forfeited the land (Mills, et.al. 1990, p.1). The journals and diaries of these explorers provided settlers who were moving cattle through the country with knowledge of water holes, good feed for stock and also where they may meet with resistance from Aboriginal people. Also, the accounts provided by the explorers provided an idea of where travellers could stay and make friendly relations with those who lived in these regions.

Sunday 6 April was a day of rest. This decision was based upon the view that they ‘did not think the blacks numerous or dangerous in the neighbourhood’ so they rested themselves and the horses and maintained friendly relations with the locals:

The elderly blackfellow and one of the others we had seen yesterday paid us a visit, and in the course of the day he brought the others of his party, and a man about his own age, whom we had not seen before. He made me understand that his elderly friend wanted to see a gun, so I gratified his curiosity. The boys did not run away as they had done when they saw me fire a shot on a previous occasion. The blacks examined with great curiosity our equipment, and accepted greedily everything we gave them, but did not steal anything. Mr Bourne gave our newest acquaintance a shirt, which pleased him very much. They relished some food he gave them, and said, ‘Thank you, sir,’ upon Jackey making them understand it was proper to say
so. The presents which pleased them most were a broad file, a needle and thread, a broken glass bottle, and clothes. The file they could make a better tomahawk of than their stone ones; the broken glass bottle they would use for knives or wood scrapers. We did not give them many clothes, as cold weather had warned us we had none to spare. Jemmy, on further acquaintance with the blacks, found they could speak a language he understood. (Landsborough, 1963, p.95)

The party reached what is known as Bowen Downs on 7 April and the local Aboriginal people told Jemmy of a suitable path to follow: the party had to ‘cross on to the river mentioned by the natives, which must be the Victoria, or Cooper’s Creek, here called the Barcoo, and from the dry appearance of the country there is not likely to be much water between the rivers’ (Bourne, 1862, p.40). The path was apparently a ‘well-watered road leading to a river to the southward. On that river they said the blacks had clothes, and it was from them that they got their iron tomahawks’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.96). Landsborough told Bourne to let Jemmy lead in the direction indicated, while Landsborough and Jackey made an observation of the sun. Bourne and Jemmy saw smoke in the distance and changed direction towards that point, because ‘the country is very dry, the black boys, as well as myself, think there is water close to this fire which has not long been lighted by the natives’ (Bourne, 1862, p.40). Landsborough and Jackey followed the tracks and caught up with Jemmy and Bourne. After travelling further on together ‘they reached at dark a water channel with no water in it, so Landsborough told Fisherman and Jemmy to guide them back to the last camp’ (Landsborough, 1963,)
After travelling a considerable distance, and when I thought we ought to be near our camp, I ascertained our guides had not the slightest idea of our situation. As I had been misled by them, and had paid no attention to the route we had come, I was rather at a loss which way to go. I judged, however, that the horses would take us to the river, so let them go their own way. At 4 in the morning, when we had travelled for some time in a N.E. direction, we stopped and tied up the horses till 7.10.

The next day the party reached its previous camp, to find the Aboriginal people had left. Landsborough attempted to repair his damaged sextant, but was ‘so unsuccessful as to make it useless’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.96). Landsborough was nervous about the direction that his guides were taking him. Had Jemmy intentionally misled the party towards the distant smoke, or was it an honest mistake? Had the local Aboriginal people deliberately misled the whole party? Was Jemmy supporting the locals? This is not unheard of for during the Mitchell expedition guides led him in the wrong direction (Baker, 1998).

The next day, Jemmy and Landsborough left the camp in search of water. Following the directions that Jemmy had received a few days prior from the Aboriginal people the explorers expected to find well-watered river as explained to Jemmy by the locals to be a short distance below their camp. However, the party did not find the water so travelled on until they met once again the locals from up the
Upon telling them we had not found water back from the river, and that we now wanted them to show us the road to the next river, and would give them a tomahawk and a shirt for doing so, they promised if we would bring our party down the river they would do so. We saw here two old gins and a little girl, whom we had not seen before. … To please the blacks, we let one of the little boys ride a horse for a short distance. After asking them to remain in this neighbourhood we returned to camp. (Landsborough, 1963, p.97)

Upon returning to camp on 10 April, Landsborough ascertained that Gregory’s party had traced the Thompson River to its head and therefore the nearby river was unlikely to be the Thompson. He determined, ‘as we had used most of our stores, to leave the river, if possible, and start for the settled districts. It was very vexatious to come to this resolution, as the river was flowing almost in the direction of Burke’s starting point on Cooper’s Creek’. This decision suggests that Landsborough was increasingly concerned – water was hard to find, the stores had run low the party had lost their direction and were beginning to feel that they had possibly been misled by the local Aboriginal people. He may have thought that their lives were in danger and that without a functioning sextant it would be difficult to follow Gregory’s route. However in this situation their only hope of finding water and a safe passage back to the settled regions was with the help of local Aboriginal people.

It took five hours to reach the place where the party had arranged to meet the Aboriginal people upon whom their lives now
depended. Landsborough wrote that ‘the blacks were waiting for us, and conducted us about half a mile further down the river to a good place for our encampment’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.97). This appeared to be the first time that the exploration party accepted the assistance of locals in regard to campsite selection. In the past, as mentioned earlier, the Landsborough expedition and its guides did not appear to follow Aboriginal protocols for approaching groups while travelling. In his notes from Cooper Creek, Howitt explained protocol on approaching Aboriginal groups:

> on nearing any camp, when accompanied by a guide, we have had to halt while he went forward. He got on some high ground in sight of the camp, and began to bawl out something, holding a branch in his hand. The other blacks from the camp would bawl out in reply for some minutes; the women and children would be seen to scurry off in haste. Then several blacks would come forward, and a camping-ground shown to us. (Howitt 1878, p.307)

When Aboriginal guides offered this kind of introduction to people and Country the explorers were given a safer passage through other peoples’ territory. However, none of the Aboriginal guides on the Landsborough expedition displayed any sign of understanding or following that protocol, and it could be assumed that the lack of cultural awareness would have made the party unwelcome in some areas and with some of the locals. They did seem to always follow concepts of reciprocity or trade, which could make relationships between the groups comfortable and friendly, however when they did it appeared to be accidental or unintentional and was subsequently
identified as merely being ‘friendly’ with the locals. For example Bourne wrote that the local people:

went with us to Camp and remained until evening, when we sent them away to their own camp, giving them some rations, the trooper (Jemmy) showing them how to bake a damper, which astonished them very much. They were very suspicious of eating anything we gave them at first, but soon got over it. One young man among them was particularly amusing, imitating every gesture I made, and showing a great inclination to pilfer everything he could. He was very tall, with an immense protruding stomach, no doubt the effect of hard times and starvation in his earlier days. From his very peculiar formation I christened him with the rather vulgar cognomen of ‘Potgut,’ with which he was delighted, repeating it incessantly. He succeeded afterwards in stealing a paniken, notwithstanding our vigilance. (Bourne, 1862, pp.40–41)

The same evening, Landsborough gave a pound of flour to an Aboriginal man in payment, as the next day he would walk to see if there was water in the waterholes ‘on the road to Barcoo River’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.97). Landsborough also ‘gave the blacks a comb, and Jackey pleased them very much by combing their hair’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.97). Perhaps in exchange the Aboriginal men reported ‘that the waterholes they had gone to were empty. They told us of two practicable roads to the Barcoo River. One by Stark Creek from a place up the river, the other from a place down the river; the latter we determined to try’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.97). The next day the party left, with two of the local Aboriginal men as guides.
Wittin – guiding through his Country

After an evening of friendly exchanges the following day the local guides agreed to lead the party down the river, to show them the road to the Barcoo River. The explorers’ dependence upon Witten to guide them through this unknown and unfamiliar country is vital to their survival, however Bourne still demonstrates his sense of superiority over the locals with what could perhaps be read as cruel tones of mockery as he attempts of belittle and force vulnerability upon Witten. Bourne records:

This morning we mounted an old black named Witten [Wittin] on horseback, who promised, for a consideration, viz., tomahawk, blanket, &c., to show us over to the Barcoo. It required some persuasion to induce him to mount at first, and his essay at riding was very amusing. Perfectly naked, on an old very uneven saddle, with two straps for stirrups, and a piece of rope for a bridle, it was wonderful how he managed to keep his seat at all. He clung to the horse just as a baboon would, and when he did fall, which he could not avoid occasionally, he did so in such a way as to create roars of laughter, nor did he seem to think much of it after the first tumble.

(Bourne, 1862, p.41)

It is unclear if Bourne is impressed with Witten’s ability to ride a horse for the first time and also who is actually laughing. However, Witten still asserts authority by deciding when the day of travel should end. Dependent upon Witten’s guidance the explorers choose to stop for the evening:

We had made thirteen miles down the river S.S.W., when the old
black meeting some of his tribe declined going any further to-day, so
I camped, lest he should leave us, Mr. Landsborough, having
stopped behind to take the sun, not overtaking us until we had
camped. Country very dry, and natives quiet. (Bourne, 1862, p.41)

On 13 April the explorers were ‘glad to find that’ Wittin had decided
to continue with the explorers to show them the way. Landsborough
expresses it as that he had ‘determined to accompany us’ yet before
leaving the camp site Witten prioritized his own objectives of learning
and sharing more of the explorers knowledge with the locals:

He brought an intelligent looking whiteheaded old man to the camp,
and a fine tall well-proportioned young gin, with a little boy, the two
latter remaining some distance from our camp. Wittin showed his
friend our guns, water bottles, and other things, as if he were quite
familiar with them. Before starting we went to see the gin and the
little boy. She was very timid, and ran away when we approached
near to her. (Landsborough, 1963, p.98)

Witten was confident and knowledgeable in the ways of the explorers
and most of all of his Country. The explorers’ uncertainty with the
surrounds (and frustration with Witten delaying progression) is
revealed in the words of Bourne, who wrote:

Having lost so much time lately, we break through the rule and
travel to-day, making thirteen miles S.S.W. The country is still very
dry, and may at some periods well be called a desert, two dry
seasons being enough to make it so, while at other times it may be
flooded and look beautiful as a garden. The uncertainty of rainfall
will always be a great drawback to this part of the country, otherwise
very rich. But this is more or less the case in most parts of Australia.
Attempting to assert his authority and want of control over Witten Bourne again reveals his frightening personality and key objective. Two key points are revealed here. Firstly, Bourne was attempting to restrain Witten against his will and secondly, he is attempting to understand Aboriginal knowledge, customs and culture.

“... This morning an old black brought up to our Camp a gin, perfect enough in form for a Venus. He seemed very proud of her, but she did not much relish our admiring gaze. She had a fine fat little girl with her, but not her own. The old men always secure the young gins, persuading the younger men that they would disagree with them, and that the old ones are better for them. This is also the case with their food. A young man is only allowed to eat certain animals, most easily obtained, such as opossum, fish, &c., but should he be fortunate enough to get an emu, or kangaroo, &c., he must hand it over the old men, who tell him he would certainly get ill or die if he dared to eat it, and many of the young men believe it though, I dare say, there are a good many sceptics among them. (Bourne, 1862, pp.41–42)

That last passage referring to Aboriginal law signifies Bourne’s growing interest and or understanding of customs and traditions. Relations and communication between each of these men showed further signs of development. After travelling for some time ‘Wittin told Jemmy that he had seen to the eastward of here, about ten moons ago, a party of travellers, consisting of four white men and four
black men. He got a shirt from them, but they did not give him any bread’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.98). The following day they observed a range: ‘Witten called it Trimpie Yawbah. Afterwards we observed other hills to the westward of Trimpie Camp the highest of which I called Mount Pring’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.98). With what appears to be deeper insight into Aboriginal Law and custom Bourne noted that ‘[t]he old black is getting very uneasy, and wishes to return. He is getting too near the boundary of this hunting ground, and fears being killed by the blacks on the Barcoo, who, he says, are very numerous, and for whom he warned us to keep a sharp look out’. With some persuasion, Wittin ‘accompanied us another day’ (Bourne, 1862, p.42). This knowledge of the dangers in this surrounding region had an affect on the explorers.

Landsborough was nervous about staying much longer in this Country, and wanted Wittin to remain as guide despite his fear of leaving his Country. On 14 April, Landsborough ‘made free with the name of Sir George Bowen, Governor of Queensland, by telling him, that if he showed us the road that the Governor would send from Brisbane to the first station formed on Bowen Downs, a medal, a tomahawk, and a blanket’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.99). Presumably Landsborough wanted Witten to show them the roads towards the settled areas and not to meet with the other Aboriginal groups; Wittin could not guarantee their safe passage through this part of the country. However, that evening ‘Fisherman and Jackey showed Wittin corroboree dance. For the dance they painted themselves with white
streaks, and with the light of the fire they looked like skeletons’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.99). Fisherman and Jackey, having reached the boundary of Wittin’s country, may have been sharing a story about their Country, their Dreaming. Wittin needed to know the song of a country to be able to guide the expedition party into that neighbouring country. Wittin would have understood the song that Jackey and Fisherman performed for him. It would be interesting to know if Jemmy understood. It is sad that Jemmy possibly missed out on learning his songs.

The following day, 15 April, they steered for the eastern side of Trimpie Range. We can imagine that as they travelled Wittin may have been singing up the country, perhaps he was singing Trimpie Yawbah. It is worth noting that Landsborough adopted an Aboriginal name for this range although he still took a bearing from what he identified as Mt Pring (the highest point) – obviously the naming showed respect towards Wittin and his family. On 16 April Landsborough ‘tried very hard to persuade Wittin to show us all the way to Barcoo River. He promised to do so; but after Jackey and Jemmy went for the horses, he left the camp as if he were only going down the creek, but he did not make an appearance again’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.99): Bourne records:

This morning, before the horses came up, the black disappeared. I was standing by the Camp fire watching him, but he walked a short distance so boldly that I did not suspect his intention of bolting then; but not seeing him return, I went after him and found he had got into the bed of a dry creek and ran along the channel out of my sight. We
tried to find him without success. I am sorry he has gone without his blanket and tomahawk as he has behaved very well. (Bourne, 1862, p.42)

Witten’s departure must have been confronting for Landsborough, especially once he learnt from Jemmy that Wittin’s ‘reason for not going to Barcoo River was, that the blacks there would kill him if they found him in their country’ (Landsborough, 1963, p.99). This entry indicated that Landsborough had at least a slight understanding of different language groups and the Aboriginal sense of Country and strict Law. Landsborough must have become aware that he was travelling through many different Countries with this comprehension possibly a result of the corroboree and/or spending time with Wittin. According to an Indigenous language map (Horton, 1996), the Landsborough expedition travelled through at least six different countries before reaching the Barcoo, and through nearly twenty more from the Barcoo to Melbourne.

On 17 April Jemmy and Landsborough left the camp at Dunsmure Creek to go to the Barcoo River, where they would enter another Country. After riding four miles they reached the watershed of a creek on the Barcoo side of the range and, according to an Indigenous language map, were in either Iningai or Kuungkari Country (Horton, 1996). After another seven miles they reached the main branch of the creek, most likely Kuungkari Country. Landsborough noted that it:

… had extensive floodmarks, and heaps of mussel-shells on its banks, but the waterholes in its channels were empty. I named it the
Archer Creek. After following Archer’s Creek for thirteen miles, we reached its junction with the Barcoo River. I was glad to find that the channel of the river was full of water; and as there were fresh tracks of blacks near the river, I supposed them to be in the neighbourhood, so, to avoid them, I returned up Archer’s Creek for about four miles to some fine young grass and emcamped [sic]. (Landsborough, 1963, p.100)

On 22 April on the Barcoo River, Landsborough and Jemmy waited behind the main party and observed the sun to get a latitude reading. As Bourne travelled to the next campsite he encountered the local Aboriginal people:

Just at sundown, as I was making in to the river to camp (Mr. Landsborough having stayed behind to take the sun), a number of natives, alarmed by the screams of a gin who had seen us, ran out from the river, shouting, shaking their weapons, and wanting us to stop, but as it was very late I declined, until compelled to turn about and face them to keep off. They came quite within throwing distance of us, and Jackey assured me that one of them had thrown a stick at him, and begged of me to let him fire, but as I did not see it, and knowing their eagerness to shoot blacks, and wishing to use as much forbearance as possible, I just kept them off by presenting my gun whenever they came too near, until Mr. Landsborough came, as the boy with him speaks their language. When Mr. Landsborough came up they seemed friendly enough upon hearing themselves addressed in their own tongue. We gave them a few presents and told them to go to their own camp, and come to ours in the morning, but not during the night, or we would shoot them. We camped a mile or so
above them on the river. (Bourne, 1862, pp.43–44)

Again this entry shows that the expedition party was unaware of the protocol that should be observed upon approaching or entering into another Country or campsite. It appeared that the Aboriginal people were desperately trying to warn the exploration party not to go any further, or to announce themselves, or perhaps they were telling the party that they were not welcome. As Reynolds explained:

So much about the whites – their appearance, behaviour, possessions, accompanying animals – were radically new so if this were the first time the Aborigines had seen white people their fear, anxiety and curiosity must have been great. (Reynolds, 2006b, p.42)

Even if it was not the first expedition they had encountered, these strangers were breaking Aboriginal law. The tension eased after Jemmy arrived and spoke to them in their language, or a language to which they could relate. Landsborough recorded his perspective of the encounter:

We passed nets for catching emeu [sic], and nets for catching fish. We then passed an elderly gin and a little boy watching earnestly our main party, and immediately afterwards we came upon about a dozen blacks. Mr. Bourne informed me that they had followed him for several miles, and had persisted in approaching nearer than was desirable. Jemmy had a long conversation with them respecting the explorers they had seen, and also respecting the route towards the settled districts, which he learned some of them had visited. They said they did not remember any explorers who had larger animals than horses, and strange to say, none who had drays. We presented them with glass bottles, an empty powder flask, and some hair from
the horses’ tails. Jemmy told them we wanted to encamp, and that we did not wish to be too near them. They continued to follow us, and on Jemmy asking them why they did so, they replied they wanted a light. We gave them one, and they left; but after we had camped we found they had encamped very near us. (Landsborough, 1963, pp.101–102)

Considering the expedition party had travelled through so many different language groups, and assuming Jemmy was actually from Deniliquin, Wiradjuri country, it could be assumed that there were language barriers between Jemmy and the local Aboriginal people and that the local people did not understand the warnings or threats from the explorers. During that night:

Jemmy, the trooper, awoke us by saying the blacks were in the Camp. One had got close up to him as he sat by the fire, but ran back on seeing him rise. We rose at once, but as it was very dark we could only hear them among some trees quite close to our Camp, walking and talking slowly. I told Jemmy to ask them what they wanted, they replied, a fire-stick. Upon hearing the voice I fired in that direction (as did all but Mr. Landsborough), hoping to hit one by chance, as it was so dark we could not see them. They moved away, showing many firesticks in their retreat, proving the want of one a mere excuse and a specimen of their cunning. We then tried to send up a rocket, but they were so damaged they would not act, and only created some merriment amongst the niggers. (Bourne, 1862, pp.44–45)

Perhaps they repeatedly requested fire, as it was the only word or term they could share with Jemmy, or perhaps Jemmy had
misunderstood and they were not even requesting fire. Along the Barcoo River, what Thomas Mitchell called the Victoria River, were located large settlements. As evidenced in the earlier reference to extensive fishing nets there also existed, in this region, large huts with rafters and square pieces of bark laid like tiles (Kerwin, 2006, p.24). Citing Baker (1997, p.179) Kerwin highlights Mitchell’s observations: 

By 21 September the party was among the headwaters of what Mitchell called the Victoria, now known as the Barcoo. Here Mitchell remarked on some large huts, which were better planned and of a more substantial construction than those he had seen further south. A frame like a lean-to roof had first been erected; rafters had next been laid on that and thin, square pieces of bark like tiles had been fixed on these. (Baker, 1997, p.179. In Kerwin, 2006, p.24)

Evidently these broader regions were already well settled by Aboriginal people who maintained extensive housing and hunting practices. It is thus possible that these men had planned to burn hence the large supply of fire-sticks. Perhaps they were planning on ‘fire-stick farming’ in this Country on that evening. In this region and beyond fire-stick farming was practiced by the local people, who had been living in this area for at least 20,000 years, as a way to ‘produce new pasture growth and to attract game’ (Mills, Ahern, Purdie, & McDonald, 1990, p.1). A further entry in Bourne’s journal showed continuing miscommunication:

This morning, very early, two men made their appearance first, and sat down within ninety yards of our Camp. Mr. Landsborough told them, through Jemmy, to go away, as he was angry at their coming
up to the Camp at night; but they either did not understand Jemmy or took no notice, and were immediately joined by about twenty more, who squatted round their fire-sticks in two circles, the morning being very cold … We were now perfectly safe from these men, as they had no spears but only a few throwing sticks and boomerangs [another sign that they are preparing to hunt] which are comparatively harmless, nor did they show any disposition to attack us in any way, but Mr. Landsborough, finding they would not go away, gave the order to fire a volley on them, which we did as they sat, wounding one very severely; the rest took to their heels and disappeared in a moment. (Bourne, 1862, pp.44–45)

Bourne, the second-in-command, recognised that the Aboriginal people were virtually unarmed – they had no spears. Landsborough, however, was culturally blind or did not care. He acted upon his misunderstanding and fear, ordering his men to fire upon the harmless Aboriginal people who were sitting on the ground – which cannot be regarded as a threatening posture. Bourne explained more of the violent encounter:

They are very timid, and seldom or never stand for a second shot nor can any encounter with the unfortunate wretches be dignified by the name of a fight. The wounded man had by this time managed, with difficulty, to crawl about 150 yards away, but was overtaken by Mr. Landsborough, Jemmy, and Jackey, and despatched by two different shots, though begging hard for his life. (Bourne, 1862, pp.44–45)

‘Though begging hard for his life’, the unarmed Aboriginal man was shot. The more Bourne expresses his growing understanding of the people local to these regions the more empathy he appears to display.
Bourne’s journal did not always show implicit empathy, but rather a fear for his own life and as shown in the quote below, he was again not involved in a shooting incident but still insisted on justifying the actions by suggesting that ‘[i]t is more than probable that, had we all been asleep last night, we should have been killed’ (Bourne, 1862, pp.44–45). The varied interpretations of this incident are important when we consider concepts of cultural blindness, cultural seeing, mutual adaptation and sense of place and belonging. The expedition was dependent upon Jemmy, the Native Police Trooper, yet in some moments they all lacked connection with or understanding of the Aboriginal people they encountered. Landsborough’s documentation of the events reveals insecurities about the meanings or intentions of the locals’ actions:

The blacks came up, and probably would have overpowered us if they had found us all asleep; but Jemmy, the native trooper, who always keeps his watch well, awoke us, and all of our party except one discharged their guns in the direction from where we heard the blacks. I reserved my charge to shoot at them when I caught sight of them, which I did not succeed in doing until after daylight. We set off two sky-rockets, but they did not go up well, because they were bruised, or because the sticks we attached to them were unsuitable. When the first rocket exploded, it made the blacks laugh; at the explosion of the second we did not hear them do so as they had probably retired to some distance. (Landsborough, 1963, pp.102–103)

The men may have laughed because they thought the
expedition party was entertaining them; they may have asked for fire and might have thought this the fulfillment of the request. It is difficult to believe that the Aboriginal people would laugh at a failed skyrocket considering they had most likely never experienced one before and so had no idea that it had failed and that laughing at this would insult the explorers. What it does reveal is Landsborough’s fear of Aboriginal people and his attempt to dominate with brutal force. Landsborough justifies his actions as so-called retaliation or self-defense:

After the conduct of the blacks last night, and as they approached Gregory’s party in a similar way in the same neighbourhood, I fully intended to shoot at them if we had a chance; but this morning, although three approached to within one hundred yards of us while we were eating our breakfast, I did not fire at them until Jemmy had warned them of our hostile feeling towards them, and until they, instead of attending to the warning they had received to be off, got most of their companions, who were heavily loaded with clubs and throwing sticks, to approach within about the same distance of our position. I then gave the word and we fired at them. The discharge wounded one and made the rest retire. Some of us followed them up as far as the horses, and again fired, and shot the one who had been wounded previously. Afterwards Jackey slightly wounded another, when Jemmy and he went for the horses. Perhaps these blacks, as they said they had visited the settled country, may have had a part in the massacre of the Wills family. (Landsborough, 1963, pp.102–103)

The Gregory party, in 1858, while attempting to reach the Thompson River, came upon a ‘fine lagoon nearly a mile in length … surprised a party of natives, who decamped … leaving their net, fish,
etc.’ which Gregory ‘of course left untouched, and camped at a spot lower down the lagoon’ (Gregory & Gregory, 1884, p.250). The Gregory party made efforts to not disturb the Aboriginal people, however, Gregory did not follow protocol and announce the arrival of his party and or request permission to camp:

May 9. The next day being Sunday, we remained at our camp, and the party of natives consisting of seven or eight men, three or four women, and some children, approached us, and remained the greater part of the day near the tents. They were very anxious to enter the camp, but this was not permitted. By signs they expressed that they had observed we had not taken away any of their property the evening before, when they ran away and left their nets, and were therefore satisfied our intentions were friendly, but we could not procure any information relative to the objects of our journey or the character of the country before us. At 4 p.m. they informed us they were going to sleep at the most distant part of the lagoon, and would return next morning at sunrise, and then departed. After dark, however, the natives were detected attempting to crawl into the camp through the bushes, and though we called to them in an unmistakable tone to retire, they would not withdraw. As the position they had taken up was such as to command our camp, and render it unsafe in the event of an attack, it was necessary to dislodge them. I therefore fired a pistol over them, but was answered by a shout of derision, which no doubt would have been soon followed by a shower of spears had we not compelled them to retreat by a discharge of small shot directed into the scrub, after which we were not further molested. (Gregory & Gregory, 1884, p.250)
This urge to act before crisis eventuated, this fear of attack, must have come from a previous personal experience or from stories of conflict between explorers and Aboriginal people. Gregory clearly stated that he was afraid of a shower of spears, a fear that may have stemmed from the fate of Kennedy, who died after being speared within the vicinity of Cape York, an area where Gregory had previously travelled. He may have used Kennedy’s journal and records to assist with his exploration through these regions.

Landsborough’s assumption that the people of the Barcoo, who mentioned that they had visited the settled districts, might have been responsible for the Wills family (not related to Burke and Wills) massacre, was also used as justification for killing these people. Near the Nangoa River, 400 km west of the Fitzroy River in Queensland, the Wills family was massacred in October 1861 shortly after they reached their new home, Cullin-la-Ringo. This country is approximately 700 km east of the Barcoo. On 17 October, 18 of the settlers were killed and three escaped. News spread quickly to the settled districts and the Native Police Force was sent to find the people responsible for the massacre. A terrible revenge followed, in which at least 70 Aboriginal people were killed in ‘butchery … cruel, cold blooded, and [as] inexcusable as any to found in the annals of the race’ (Sydney Morning Herald, 1861, p.5). There is evidence that native police and settlers used the Wills family massacre as an excuse to kill Aboriginal people whether or not they were connected to the massacre and without allowing the Aboriginal people a fair trial. Richards stated
that ‘revenge parties operated in Central Queensland for months after the attack at Cullin-la-Ringo’ and the native police force was one of the ‘major causes of violent Indigenous deaths in colonial Queensland’ (Richards, 2008, p.207). Tom Wills, a survivor of the massacre, called for ‘good resolute men that will shoot every black they see’ in retribution for the loss of his family, but the Landsborough expedition did not shoot every Aboriginal they saw (Richards, 2008, p.66). Does this reveal empathy towards Aboriginal people, or moral judgment perhaps? There is evidence of early familiarity between the Landsborough expedition and people such as Witten and his family, which suggests that the Barcoo incident was brought about by cultural blindness or a moment of crisis. The apparent sense of familiarity appeared to subside when the party entered the Barcoo country where many stories from previous explorers influenced Landsborough’s sense of security and safety. With a greater understanding of Aboriginal law Landsborough may have safely passed through this country. Perhaps Landsborough misinterpreted Witten’s warning about the Barcoo people: it appears that Witten, who perhaps did not sing that country, was not allowed in that country or had perhaps earlier broken Aboriginal law there. There is no reason behind the assumption that the people of Barcoo were responsible for the Wills family massacre; it is far more probable that they were instead victims of colonial fear and cultural blindness.

There was also no reason to assume that the Barcoo people
would attack the Landsborough expedition without provocation. Bourne stated that the people of the Barcoo area were ‘comparatively harmless, nor did they show any disposition to attack us in any way’ (Bourne, 1862, pp.44–45). The stories that came out of the colonising structure silenced the Aboriginal voice, which had the effect of separation: denial of mutual dependency added to the magnification of cultural blindness. The explorers’ journals show traces of cultural seeing and mutual adaptation and co-production of knowledge – this is evidenced in the cultural overlaps that create a story of inclusivity and continuity. As this chapter has revealed, ‘analysis of colonial discourse has shown that no form of cultural dissemination is ever a one-way process’ (Young, 2005, p.164): the members of the expedition party travelled through landscapes where past experiences, stories of place and cultural practices were layered on top of each other to create an uncertain patchwork of identities and cultural entanglement.
Chapter Seven: Influence of Aboriginal Country
Introduction

Ludwig Becker was appointed as artist and naturalist of the Burke and Wills Victorian Exploring Expedition of 1860–61. The position encompassed the multiple roles of ‘Geological, Mineralogical, and Natural History Observer’, which included a ‘wider range of scientific activities in addition to that of expedition artist’ (Ninnis, 2011, p.315). On expeditions and explorations, before photography became more common, the main method of recording the scientific data of flora, fauna, landscape, Indigenous people and meteorological phenomena was by sketching and painting. The directions given to Becker were simply to follow the requests outlined by Professor Macadam, which requested that ‘all object of natural history and natives’ be recorded (Macadam, 1860). Becker was given detailed instructions, which focused on specific requirements for illustration and record-keeping, for example: ‘Sketches of all remarkable geological sections are desirable, also outline views of mountain ranges, remarkable hills, and other physical features on either side of the line of route; also of all objects of natural history and natives [Aboriginal people] (Macadam, 1860, in Ninnis, 2011, p.315). These illustrations provided views to assist others who are new to the environment to find their way.

However, there is difference between views and vision. Addressing the “history of exchanges of worlds” as “visualised by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European travellers, and the role of graphic images in the production and circulation of knowledges about
the tropical world” Driver identifies difference between view and vision. He explains:

In this context, we can understand the view as developing within a topographic aesthetic, through which landscapes are depicted at a distance, their surface features translated into a recognisable visual code. In this very general sense, the term belongs equally to landscape sketching, coastal survey and terrestrial mapping, referring as it does to the apprehension of (page 4) portions of the earth’s surface at a distance. The vision, in contrast, is something which in principle takes hold of the observer in a more transformative way: it engages the imagination, turning the spectator into an active participant in the scene. Where the view is the product of an enlightened rationality, the vision is the means of asserting a new sensibility: not just of an image of a discrete portion of space, but the realisation of a new sense of the whole, in which the eye of the observer is itself brought into the frame. In practice, of course, the distinction between “views” and “visions” is more about epistemology than practice or effect, or indeed affect. In particular, it is quite possible (as I shall argue below) to treat the charts and views of the surveyor as vestiges of experience – especially the experience of trial and error – rather than merely as inanimate data from which all traces of subjectivity have been erased (see also Carter, 1999; Burnett, 2000, p.67-117; Driver & Martins, 2005) in (Driver, 2004, p. 4-5)

By the time Becker painted Water reservoir at Mutwanji he may have been feeling disheartened by the lack of value placed in the scientific aspects of the expedition (as discussed earlier in this thesis).
This frustration and lack of opportunity led to the creation of a work that reveals the challenges faced by many Australian landscape artists – the desire to find and express the interconnection between people and place, self and other – that is, to understand Country. (See Figure 19) Mutawintji is located within the region of Paakantji/Barkindji; Malyangapa/Malyangaba, Wadigali, Wangkumara/Wanggumara language groups (Beckett, Hercus, Martin & Coyler, 2008). By tracing the theoretical, aesthetic and scientific influences upon Becker this chapter proposes that the subjective nature of the work, Water reservoir at Mutwanji, offers some understanding of Aboriginal connection to Country. Importantly, a copy of this painting was printed in the Burke & Wills – The Scientific Legacy of the Victorian Exploring Expedition in 2011. Although only briefly discussed in the Appendix section, Elizabeth Ninnis explains that this painting is a unusual approach among Becker’s landscapes and as such may not have been his work, however further research suggests that it is the work of Becker (Ninnis, 2011, p. 321).

Ludwig Becker, inspired by Romanticism and the Romantic Sublime, perceived the environment in a unique way, especially compared to other members of the expedition. Jeffries noted that Becker invoked the category of the sublime when referring to the landscapes of western New South Wales or New England (Jeffries, 1993, p.191). Haynes claimed that ‘had Becker lived to become familiar with Darwin’s Origin of Species [sic], he might well have produced a unique response to this proposed ordering of Nature and
transformed nineteenth century art in this country’ (Haynes, 1998, p.100). Haynes similarly linked Becker with both the Romantic Movement and scientific ideals. Becker’s approach was revealed through his artwork with its German romantic sensitivity ‘to elements that transcend physical and material explanation’, effects that are ‘more felt or imagined than visual or measurable’ (Haynes, 1998, p.100). Further, ‘it is this rare combination of insights from his two role models – the Romanticism of Friedrich and the scientific regimen of von Humboldt – that makes Becker’s desert landscapes unique’ (Haynes, 1998, p.100). Becker’s artworks, and those of other colonial artists, have influenced many modern Australian artists in their expression of relating to the Australian landscape, in particular the work of Mandy Martin and Sydney Nolan (Haynes, 1996, p.224-225) and more recently Paul Lambeth (2013). Mandy Martin is concerned with appropriating the texts of exploration to ‘comment on a multiplicity of concerns from art history to socio-political involvement, while consciously positioning herself in the tradition of the explorer/artist’ (Haynes, 1996, p.225). The work of Ludwig Becker transcends mere colonial art to offer ongoing insight and understanding of relations between people and the landscape. In particular this one painting, that is the focus of this chapter, is arguably influenced by Becker’s sensitivity towards Aboriginal people and their relationship to the land/nature.

This artwork moves beyond the colonial romantic representation of landscape as an act of imperial transformation and
back-grounding to colonial endeavor to verge instead on the Abstract Sublime, which challenges the viewer to consider his or her relationship with nature – the artist or human as a part of nature. Abstract Sublime sentiment informed the Abstract Expressionist movements, which gave non-Aboriginal people a way to understand the multi-dimensional sense of Country as portrayed in Aboriginal art – in particular the western desert art movement. This felt or imagined perception of landscape is particularly revealed in *Water reservoir at Mutwanji*, which, as this chapter argues is aligned with Aboriginal ways of relating to Country. This painting reveals the beginning of an alternative perspective to the naturalist way of perceiving the landscape. Understanding of Aboriginal relationships to Country has been made more possible or accessible since the emergence of contemporary modern Aboriginal western desert art and our current understanding of aesthetic theories and artistic movements. Therefore, this analysis of how Aboriginal people and place influenced Becker must take into consideration the synthesis of different art movements and other significant influences upon this artist and naturalist of the Victorian Exploring Expedition and current understandings of landscape art.
Becker’s sublime sentiment: a link between art and science

One aim for the naturalist artist was to record and document with rational scientific detachment. However, because subjectivity is inevitably revealed through art practice, art was eventually less popular under general scientific law from the mid to late twentieth century (Driver, 2004). This polarisation of art and science created many avenues of aesthetic response to the environment in the ongoing search for meaning and connection. Art provides a way to express connection and relation to nature that science could not. It has been suggested that:

Kant limits the sublime to nature, but as nature becomes more and more an object of scientific manipulation the attempt to reveal a non-sensuous truth not available to science often tends to be transferred
into art. This truth is no longer representable in any other medium … which therefore becomes an attempt to say the unsayable’ (Bowie, 2003, p.46).

The naturalist was intended to conform to a general scientific law but Becker, affected by varied influences, communicated a truth of the Australian landscape that general science alone could not communicate. Art had become a way, especially in the tradition of the Sublime, to express the unsayable. Ludwig Becker, born in Darmstadt, Germany and his friend Viennese-born Eugene von Guerard, of German parentage, belonged to a group called the Forty-Eighters whose renunciation of the old world led them to search for identity in the new – common reasons for many Europeans to emigrate to Australia after the 1848 revolutions. Becker and von Guerard stemmed from similar backgrounds with noble connections, and had travelled extensively in Europe (Tipping, 1991, p.83). Von Guerard received a more formal education than Becker and in Germany had viewed ‘the work of great artists in museums … admiring in particular the work of Casper David Friedrich’; not ‘only Kant but Goethe must have had some effect on Guerard’s intellectualism’ for he found that he could ‘relate to Kant’s dictum that “Nature adorns eternity with ever-changing appearances” and that the meanest and the noblest of her creatures were just as rich and as inexhaustible’ (Tipping, 1991, p.85). The two men, although practicing very different styles of art, both struggled with the repercussions of Enlightenment ideas and the rise of modernity, especially the impact upon the Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia and their environment. Their greatest concern was how to
represent this change. Von Guerard and Becker offered unique representations of colonisation, especially in regard to Aboriginal people and their relationship with the environment. They ‘gave little indication that they considered the natives inferior to Europeans. Nor did they romanticise the image of the noble savage’ (Tipping, 1991, p.82).

This is especially relevant in Becker’s artwork: with elements that transcended physical and material explanation, his work displayed effects that are ‘felt or imagined rather than visual or measurable’ (Haynes, 1998, p.100). As an admirer of Casper David Friedrich, ‘Becker was conscious of looking for the antipodean equivalent’ and ‘[u]nlike his English contemporaries, he was able to exult in the immensity of the Australian desert as sublime rather than threatening, and to interpret it visually in the romantic tradition’ (Haynes, 1998, p.100). This is an important point, because although in early colonial Australia there was hope of an inland sea and visions of grand settlement, much of the desert would later be perceived as useless and barren land. Becker’s greatest desire was to unveil some of the mysteries of this country, a desire shared by Humboldt, who believed that unveiling could be achieved by ‘patient study of Nature’s differences as part of an infinitely varied cosmos’ (Haynes, 1998, p.100). It is understood that Becker’s landscape paintings show a degree of experimentation in recording that is not apparent in the work of any other nineteenth-century artist and a desire to understand something greater than the ‘European vision’ that had dominated
many artistic responses to the landscape (Smith, 1998). Becker’s attempt to see through new eyes is especially obvious in the painting, *Water reservoir at Mutwanji.*

**Humboldtian influence**

While in Tasmania, then known as Van Dieman’s Land, from 10 March 1851 Ludwig Becker was influenced by Aboriginal people, their traditions and their experiences of colonisation. Lady Denison, whom he stayed with, described him as ‘a most amusing person, talks English badly, but very energetically – he is one of those universal geniuses who can do anything … a very good naturalist, geologist … draws and plays and sings, conjures and ventriloquises and imitates the notes of birds so accurately’ (Tipping, 1969). Significantly he met William Buckley, which must have provided him with incredible insight into the knowledge of Aboriginal people (Tipping, 1979, p.11). Within the *Scientific Legacy of Burke and Wills*, Joyce and McCann state that although the name Alexander von Humboldt was not specifically mentioned within a delivery made by Mueller the influence on the Exploration Committee and the scientists of Melbourne were in ‘essence thoroughly Humboldtian’ (2013, p.10, and also Dodd, 2013). Tipping also acknowledges that these ‘men of science had been inspired by Alexander von Humboldt’s revolutionary technique in the study of natural science and research’ (1979, p.20).

These men of science ‘who came to Australia were never entirely remote from the sources of their learning, for they were
prodigious correspondents with eminent scientists of Europe and America who were interested in the newest world’ (Tipping, 1979. P.20-21). With this understanding of Becker’s interests it can be argued that in areas related to ecological thought his artworks have significance in some early twenty-first-century discussions on environmental justice because it is possible to place them within a field of thought that was more able to recognise Aboriginal philosophies of land management or ecology.

Sachs shared a close reading of the writings of the explorer–scientist–abolitionist Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) (Sachs, 2003, p.111). With reference to current ecological issues, Sachs argued that Humboldt could have been the founder of a humane and socially conscious ecology. Sachs mediated the overlaps between environmentalism, post-colonial theory and the practice of history. He suggested that ‘Humboldt’s efforts to inspire communion with Nature while simultaneously recognizing Nature’s “otherness” can be seen as radical both in his day and in ours’ and that his ‘analysis of the link between the exploitation of natural resources and the exploitation of certain social groups anticipates the global environmental justice movement’ (Sachs, 2003, p.111). These were the issues addressed by the philosophies of the German Romantics and the Sublime artists, and they are especially pertinent in the work of Ludwig Becker with his interest in Aboriginal people, societies and the environment (Tipping, 1979).

These philosophies from the German Romantics offer a
contemporary and evolving way of relating to the environment that has been informed by theory developed over hundreds of years and which significantly mirrors Aboriginal law, Dreaming and Country. ‘A truly mature relationship between environmentalism and post-colonialism’ would likely result in ‘the embrace of something like the social ecology that Murray Bookchin has been developing over the last four decades’ and which can be traced back to Humboldt (Sachs, 2003, p.113). All over the world, but particularly in the USA, Humboldt became known as the founder of a new science, a grand theory which sought to link all the physical elements of the world, including every kind of human being, in a web of interdependence, ‘to recognize unity in the vast diversity of phenomena’ and to ‘study the great harmonies of Nature’ (Sachs, 2003, p.114).

Humboldt expresses ‘The most important result of a rational enquiry into nature is, therefore, to establish the unity and harmony of this stupendous mass of force and matter … and to analyse the individual parts of natural phenomena without succumbing to the weight of the whole …to comprehend nature, to lift the veil that shrouds her phenomena, and, as it were, submit the results of observations to the test of reason and intellect’ (Humboldt, 1849, vol. 1, p.p.2-3. In Joyce & McCann, 2011, p.10-11). This aspect of Humboldt’s theories can be related to Aboriginal philosophies and ecological knowledge of interconnectedness and interdependence, and awareness and understanding, which were gained through meticulous observation, a system that has existed for thousands of years prior to
white settlement.

This chapter builds upon Haynes’ suggestion that if Becker had read Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* he might well have produced a unique response to its proposed ordering of Nature and transformed nineteenth-century art in this country. Influenced by Humboldt, Becker did produce a unique response and if he had lived longer he may have developed it further. However, Humboldt’s reputation later diminished ‘in large to the ascension of Darwinian thought’ and the ‘supplanting of Humboldt’s vision of a unified, harmonious world by Darwin’s “struggle for existence”’ (Sachs, 2003, p.116). In this context, responsibility fell onto artistic aesthetic depictions of the environment; to express in a more pronounced way what science could not. Becker offered an understanding of the effect of colonisation, specifically the Burke and Wills expedition, on Aboriginal people and place – this painting reveals his search for an understanding of humanity in nature.

During colonisation, the artist as naturalist operated within the centric structure that objectifies the other; the artist as spectator was separated from nature. With the understanding that ‘[p]ost-colonialism, at its best, means recuperating the objects of the traveler’s gaze’ and ‘in a world so profoundly shaped – damaged [he would argue] – by colonialism and imperialism, it is imperative that scholars focus on celebrating the colonized, on hearing the voices of “others”’ (Sachs, 2003, p.117). Sachs’ close reading of Humboldt’s major writings revealed the extent to which he developed ‘a socially conscious
ecology, a positive vision of humanity in nature’ – Humboldt aimed ‘to depict the contemplation of natural objects, as a means of exciting a pure love of nature’ (Sachs, 2003, p.118). This pure love of nature and vision of humanity in nature is revealed in the work of the Romantic Sublime and Abstract Sublime movements, and most specifically by Abstract Expressionist artists to whom harmony with nature (both internal and external) is the key. Humboldt combined rational empiricism with a Romantic sense of harmony; he had ‘an almost postmodern awareness that nature and culture are inextricably linked; yet he also felt a profound respect for nature’s differentness’ (Sachs, 2003, p.119). Becker shared this understanding or appreciation, revealed in *Water reservoir*, as his experiment to understand and connect with the landscape.

**Embracing Indigenous knowledge**

Becker’s artwork has influenced many artistic depictions of the interior of Australia, a topic that is outside the scope of this chapter but that is relevant because it places Becker at the forefront of a non-Indigenous attempt to connect with the landscape in a manner that is more in tune with Aboriginal philosophies. As Gammage stated: ‘if we are to survive, let alone feel at home, we must begin to understand our country. If we succeed, one day we might become Australians’ (2012, p.323). This section reflects on ways in which non-Indigenous Australians have embraced elements of Indigenous Australian cosmology to develop a sense of belonging to and care for country.
These concepts have become better understood due to artistic representation of place, particularly from Aboriginal art and from rare glimpses that images such as Becker’s have offered. The inclusion of Indigenous peoples’ traditional understanding of nature benefits not only practical strategies in the conversation and practical groundwork of conservation and current environmental justice debates, it also offers settler Australians a way of connecting with the environment to create a deeper sense of belonging that is respectful of Aboriginal philosophies.

Becker’s artwork painted at Mutawintji, a place of great significance to Aboriginal people, revealed an interesting response to country. ‘Country’ is an Aboriginal English term that represents a place that is: ‘small enough to accommodate face- to- face groups of people, large enough to sustain their lives, politically autonomous in respect of other, structurally equivalent countries, and at the same time interdependent with other countries, each country is itself the focus and source of Indigenous law and life practice. To use the philosopher’s term, one’s country is a nourishing terrain, a place that gives and receives life’ (Rose, 1999, p.177). It is important to understand that country is:

- multidimensional: it consists of people, animals, plants, Dreamings; underground, earth, soils, minerals and waters, surface water, and air.
- It has a past and a future and exists both in and through time;
- humans were created for country and human groups hold the view that they are an extremely important part of the life of their country.
- It is not possible, however, to contend that a country, or indeed
regional system of countries, is human centered. To the extent that a country or region can be said to have a central focus, that focus is the system of interdependent responsibilities by which the continuity of life in the country and the region is ensured. (Rose, 1999, p. 178)

These ‘‘nourishing terrains’ require a consciousness and responsibility from all participants in living systems, their interdependence leading to a fundamental proposition of Aboriginal law: ‘those who destroy their country destroy themselves’’ (Rose, 1999, p.178). Country is the created world, ‘brought into being as a world of form, difference, connection and responsibility by the great creating beings, called Dreamings’ (Rose, 1999, p.178). These reciprocal and interconnected relationships ensure care for Country and each other. We should listen to the advice of Indigenous man Bill Neidjie:

You got to hang onto this story because the earth, this ground, earth where you brought up, this earth he grow you … This piece of ground he grow you.’ This piece of ground grows you in the same way as it grows a plant or a tree, or the cotton that forms our clothes. In this ‘we recognize self-interest in nurturing others so that for example others will be available to be hunted, fished or gathered’ (Rose, 1999, p.178).

With this brief understanding of Aboriginal relationships with their environment we can now look at Mutawintji as Ludwig Becker may have interpreted it, this is also supported and based upon discussions in previous chapters. Insights from Herman Beckler will also be considered.
Interpreting Mutawintji

Mutawintji is approximately 130 km northeast of Broken Hill in New South Wales. Another German scientist on the expedition, Hermann Beckler, described Mutawintji (or Mutanié) as ‘a small paradise’ (Beckler, 1993, p.107):

Nature, so sparing over large areas here, had lavishly thrown a wealth of varying beauty and grace over the Mutanié Ranges. Because of their diversity and because they were concentrated in such a small area, they are very difficult to describe in detail. There was a charming valley, about ten miles in length and half to one mile across, enclosed on either side by gentle hills which alternated with steep rock-faces and weathered stone. Contained within the eastern hills were five major gorges, each containing one or more rocky reservoirs. Every one of them was unique in its shape and formation. Thick scrub covered the row of hills and the rocky outcrops to the east right down to the valley floor, whereas on the left (westwards) the plant cover was thinner and consisted primarily of smaller plants. On the flat floor of the valley, the scene was so peaceful and inviting that one thinks of oneself as surrounded by cultivated land and wants to look for the homes of civilised people. This was Mutanié. (Beckler, 1993, p.105)

This description showed the uniqueness of Mutawintji geography in the surrounding semi-arid landscape. Beckler viewed the place as worthy of settlement and considered that it looked like it had already been ‘civilised’. This supports the thesis that the Country was ‘made by the Aborigines’ (Gammage, 2012). However, any
acknowledgement by Beckler of Aboriginal presence and agency was
only subtle. He continued:

It is highly probable that a settler has already set up his hut there as I
write these lines and is grazing his sheep. And to live there in peace,
far removed from the noise of the world in the modest,
uncomplicated way offered by the extreme isolation and the bush – I
do not hesitate to call Mutani a small paradise’. (Beckler, 1993,
p.106)

This colonising response to place reveals that Beckler ‘draws
on a principal rhetorical convention from the humanist tradition, the
locus amoenus (a pleasant place) in order to express his enthusiasm
for Mootwingee’ (Jeffries, 1993, p.191). Jeffries incorrectly suggested
that, unlike Ludwig Becker, Beckler never invoked the Sublime when
referring to the country through which they travelled (Jeffries, 1993,
p.191). Beckler did however express both the instrumentalist cause
and sublime sentiments of awe and great love towards nature:

Our camels stood chest deep in the best feed wherever the gravelly
beds of the creeks entered the valley. There was also plenty of grass
available so that the horses were equally well provided for. Large,
isolated eucalypts stood along the watercourses, and here and there
was a splendid grevillea (never found south of the Mutanié Ranges)
with rough, black, iron coloured bark, leaves in bundles and
numerous white clusters of flowers standing vertically upright (in the
manner of our wild chestnuts). As one travelled northwards the
valley acquired a curious appearance from the rows of low cassia
bushes whose natural growth was such that from a distance they
appeared to have been clipped, forming regular green lines or strips.
Once again one felt that a civilised hand must have been at work.

(Beckler, 1993, p.107)

Most obvious in this passage is the human-centric tradition, with Beckler describing the Country’s suitability for feeding stock, showing the utilitarian hopes for the Country but giving no apparent credit to the Indigenous inhabitants. Developing a sense of familiarity was a prerequisite for settlers to feel at home and comfortable in new environments; part of the process of colonising a place was creating an aesthetic image reminiscent of home. Visions or recognition of cultivation, of humanity within nature, were obviously comforting for Beckler. The cultivated appearance of Mutawintji was aesthetically beautiful to the colonial eye, and it also offered something more:

I had indeed intended to describe the individual gorges, but however readily my memory returns to them, the task seems more and more thankless. We will take leave now from Mutanié with a last visit to the second gorge from the south, the most magnificent of them all and the one which held the largest and loveliest reservoir. Even after repeatedly visiting this gorge, the traveller is overcome by a sense of reverent awe. Vertical rock-faces, dark grey to a height of 20 to 35 feet and above that a lively yellow clay colour to a height of 60 to 70 feet, enclosed a sheet of water of about 50 feet in diameter on three sides. The sun was close to setting and the night’s shadows had already crept on to this lonely spot, but the ruinlike, rocky spires still reflected the light of the fading sun – an astonishing effect of light and shade in such a closely confined space. Still darker rocks were mirrored on the dark, shadowy water surface. (Emphasis placed)

(Beckler, 1993, p.107)
Thus Beckler did refer to Mutawintji with ideas of the Sublime, denoting a ‘sense of reverent awe’ and using German romanticism to describe the ‘ruin-like, rocky spires’, an analogy that paralleled nature with the church. Perhaps the perceived loneliness of Mutawintji expressed a personal longing to connect. Beckler’s recollection of the gorge is a fitting description of Becker’s painting:

This scenery caused very great difficulty for our artist. The narrow picture rose in front of and around us to such heights that, viewed at close range, it could not be accommodated by the rules of perspective. (Beckler, 1993, p.107)

Becker may have had difficulty not only with the rules of perspective; he could have been struggling to convey the astonishing effect of light and shade and his response to this spiritually significant Aboriginal place (see Beckett, Hercus, Martin, Colyer, 2008, for Aboriginal significance). However, as can be seen in Figure 20 Becker resolved any issues about perspective. The empirical sketch is a detailed rational representation of the rock formations, the outline of the gorge and the rock pool but it fell short of addressing the artist’s relation or interdependence with nature. Only through the abstraction of this careful sketch can we begin to appreciate the complex diversity of this place.
Influence of art theory

Becker’s *Water reservoir at Mutwanji* overlaps the aesthetic boundaries of Northern and German Romanticism; the Sublime, and the Abstract Sublime; resulting in a semi-abstract interpretation of a highly spiritual Aboriginal place that expresses the sentiment of Aboriginal country. This overlap is important to consider, together with the understanding that each movement influenced Abstract Expressionism. In Madrid in 2008, there was an exhibition called *The Abstraction of Landscape: From Northern Romanticism to Abstract Expressionism*, which followed the ‘evolution of the Romantic landscape throughout modernism up to its ultimate abstraction in American Abstract Expressionism’ as conceived by art historian Robert Rosenblum (1975) of Oxford University. This synthesis began in an earlier publication, in which he ‘first proposed a connection between the Romantic tradition of Northern Europe and the movement
American Abstract Expressionism’ (Fundacion Juan March, 2008, p.7).

To inform this chapter, this section interrogates Becker’s painting alongside Rosenblum’s thesis that the nineteenth-century landscape and the northern romantic tradition was ‘the origin of modern abstraction … the birth of abstraction’ which came ‘out of the spirit of Romantic Landscape’. Linking Becker’s work to the Romantic, Romantic Sublime, Abstract Sublime and Abstract Expressionism offers a theoretical entry point into understanding the ‘truth’ that he was attempting to reveal with Water reservoir at Mutwanji. The following discussion looks at how Rosenblum’s thesis is supported by Becker’s interpretation of the Australian landscape and how this connects with our contemporary understanding of Aboriginal Country. The colonial structure led to many of the first Europeans exploring Australia with cultural blindness to Aboriginal Country. The most alarming prospect faced by the inland explorers, coming from heavily populated Britain and Europe, was the ‘Ghastly Blank’ (Moorehead, 1961, p.1). This was ‘particularly true of the desert with its repeated vistas of empty horizontal plane under a cloudless, overarching sky’; it seems paradoxical that this vast expanse of apparently empty space was so frequently described, in explorers’ accounts, ‘in the Gothic terms of enclosure and entrapment’ (Haynes, 1998, p.77). The arid regions challenged the European rules of perspective and picture composition, due to the low horizon and seemingly featureless vista.

Perhaps Mutawintji offered Becker an opportunity to depict the
arid regions through the aesthetics offered by the art movements evolving simultaneously in Europe and the USA. The desert (arid and semi-arid zones of Australia) seemed a place of few visual objects but with apparently limitless space charged with a sense of the infinite. Edmund Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) offered the most influential analysis of such feelings: ‘Greatness of dimension is a powerful cause of the sublime’ (Rosenblum, 1975, p.161). Quoting from Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (1790 1, Book 2, Åò23): ‘the Beautiful in nature is connected with the form of the object, which consists in having boundaries, the Sublime is to be found in a formless object, so far as in it, or by occasion of it, boundlessness is represented’. ‘Such a breathtaking confrontation with a boundlessness in which we also experience an equally powerful totality is a motif that continually links the painters of the Romantic Sublime’ (Fundacion Juan March 2008, p.163). Examples are Caspar David Friedrich’s *Monk by the Sea* (c. 1809), a great inspiration to Becker, and Turner’s *Evening Star* (c. 1830), a painting that has many similarities to Becker’s work. Another is Rothko’s *Light Earth over Blue* (1954), which reveals affinities of vision and feeling.

These artistic developments of Abstract Expressionism replace ‘the abrasive, ragged fissures of Ward’s and Still’s real and abstract gorges with a no less numbing phenomenon of light and void, Rothko, like Friedrich and Turner, places us on the threshold of those shapeless infinities discussed by the estheticians of the Sublime’ (Rosenblum
1961, cited in Fundacion Juan March 2008, p. 163). Becker’s work shows similar developments or treatment. Becker softened and abstracted the ragged fissures of the Mutawintji Gorge, offering a phenomenon of light and void. The painting offers a vision and feeling of something, which Becker found indescribable in words; the work was not mentioned in his journals or letters and he did not record its date of completion. The painting offers a sense of timelessness and wonder: it offers stillness that exists both in and through time. The painting offers no hint of time, and we could easily assume that it is modern instead of 19th Australian colonial Romantic art. Becker’s painting emanates an unseen force similar to that found in the blurring boundaries of Romantic Sublime and Abstract Sublime works.

During the Romantic era, ‘the sublimities of nature gave proof of the divine: today such supernatural experiences are conveyed through the abstract medium of paint alone’ (Rosenblum, 1961, p.166). Is what we see in Becker’s painting the beginning of a similar experience, where the only way to express the timelessness or spiritual unknown of the landscape is through abstract painting? Like Turner’s and Friedrich’s works in which ‘the mystic trinity of sky, water and earth … appears to emanate from an unseen force’, a similar description could be applied to Becker’s painting (Rosenblum, 1961, p.166). Rosenblum held that the line from ‘the Romantic Sublime to the Abstract Sublime is broken and devious, for its tradition is more one of erratic, private feeling than submission to objective disciplines’ (1961, p.166). This private feeling is expressed in Becker’s painting
with its sublime abstraction, especially if we compare it with the
pictorial work of von Guerard, who preferred the French tradition that
dominated landscape painting at the time.

Ludwig Becker maintained the continuity and overlaps of the
Romantic tradition and touched upon a sense of the Abstract Sublime,
which expresses the multi-dimensional quality of Country. Becker’s
artwork showed a void filled with a meditative stillness and reflective
response that revealed the limitless power of this landscape. It was an
attempt to unveil some of the mysteries of nature, to offer a true
response to the people and relationships with place. The painting
shows Becker’s resistance to the French and Dusseldorf influences
that inspired artists such as von Guerard to paint fanciful, finely
detailed, allegorical or religious stories where the landscape and
Aboriginal people were sometimes “backgrounded” (Rose, 1999,
p.176). The challenge of revealing the truth was shared by many
artists and scientists of the time and is still relevant today in forming
relationships with place and accepting the concepts associated with the
Aboriginal-defined multi-dimensional country.

Becker painted not solely what he saw at Mutawintji but also
what he saw within himself – what he felt. The central perspective was
where the water met the rocks, with the reflection of the sky in the
water, the contrast of light and shadow and the blurring of the jagged
rock face, Becker showed a subjective response, which draws the
viewer deep into another world. He offers a brief glimpse of the
visible world, and a sense of a sublimely immense unknown world.
Becker’s painting introduces the viewer to a world that can be more easily understood through Aboriginal concepts of the interconnectedness and multi-dimensionality of Country and/or the art theory of the Sublime, Abstract Sublime and Abstract Expressionism. The viewer’s eye is led below the horizon and deep into the earthen rock where the sky reflected in the water creates another space. This challenges the idea of a central perspective in art (which is what he may have struggled with), as does the lack of a horizon line in the work of central desert landscape painters.

**Modern art: Australia’s unique art movement**

The artwork of Ludwig Becker, if considered to be influenced by similar ideas explored within other Sublime, Abstract Sublime, and Abstract Expressionism painting and the science of Humboldt, can be perceived as being more closely aligned with Aboriginal conceptions of interconnection and interdependency. The lack of horizon line and flattened perspective of landscape art is reasonably well understood and it could be argued that Aboriginal philosophies of Country were at the forefront of this artistic development. Australian art historian Ian McLean (2011), a well-known commentator on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australian art, edited and introduced a book of writings on Aboriginal contemporary art, *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art*. As the previous sections have shown, Becker’s multiple influences offered an alternative way to relate to the people and places he encountered, which enabled him to explore the interconnectedness of nature and humanity revealed by Aboriginal
people and place. The influence of Aboriginal Country on Becker situates his work within a modern aesthetic. It could be argued that Aboriginal philosophy is most strongly portrayed and appropriated through art and is more easily understood through the framework of our modern understanding or appreciation of aesthetics – through art theory and historical identification of art movements.

Appropriation of Aboriginal philosophies as a way to develop connections and understanding of place has a long history within Australia, particularly within the art world. The Australian modernists, such as Margaret Preston and Len Lye, realised in the 1920s that the Aboriginal aesthetic had ‘relevance to their own practice’ (McLean, 2011, p.23). Later modernists were ‘enticed by the affinity they saw between Aboriginal art forms and avant-garde European art, especially cubism and expressionism’ (McLean, 2011, p.23) as McLean explains:

One newspaper reporter was onto it early, facetiously writing in 1929, in a report on the Melbourne exhibition Australian Aboriginal Art, that ‘many of these (bark paintings) are the works of the fierce Alligator River tribes, whose artists evidently included cubists and impressionists’. If the Kakadu barks looked cubist, most Aboriginal art would not begin to look like modernism until later in the century, when abstract expressionism and minimalism became the avant-gardist norm. Little wonder then that Aboriginal art did not properly seduce the artworld until the late twentieth century. (McLean, 2011, p.23)

Eurocentric eyes could not fully appreciate Aboriginal aesthetics without understanding the significance of Abstract
Expressionism and the connection between Romanticism, the Sublime, the landscape and the interconnectedness of humans with nature. Becker was influenced by Aboriginal people, appreciating their artwork at Mutawintji, and their philosophical and spiritual connections with Country, which were revealed to him through the educational influences of Romanticism and Humboldt. Becker may have been searching for the antipodean equivalent to the art and science popular in Europe and America in a manner that decentred the colonial structure. As McLean stated, ‘[the] Australian artworld’s blinkered Eurocentrism is the main reason for its extreme tardiness in recognising the aesthetic relevance of Aboriginal art’ (McLean, 2011, p.23). Although Johnson (1987) argued that ‘the triumph of Aboriginal contemporary art was the result of a deliberate move by Aboriginal artists on the art world, rather than an internal move in the self-fascinated games of the art world’, the art world had to ‘change its way of thinking before Aboriginal art could hope for a place at the table’ (in McLean, 2011, p.43). By 1989 the contemporary Australian art landscape had been ‘upturned so thoroughly and in ways completely unforeseen’ that ‘there was no going back’ (McLean, 2011, p.42). The critic Nicholas Baume wrote:

There is a kind of art now being produced in Australia … that isn’t stifled by influence. Ironically, it is often said to resemble the very styles whose influence on modern Australian art has been most stifling – Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism. Unlike the provincial versions of such movements, this art is not derivative, its resemblance being more a matter of coincidence than emulation.
Aboriginal art, in particular that made in Central Australia using non-traditional materials, has achieved a degree of international recognition accorded to few, if any, contemporary white Australian artists. It is a long time since Australia has boasted anything that could conceivably be called a ‘school of painting’. The very idea of a stylistically and ideologically coherent movement in art is all but unthinkable in the 1980s, a period marked by stylisation rather than any particular visual continuity, by ambiguity rather than ideology. Nevertheless, a movement is precisely what has been recognized (Baume 1989, p.110).

In no way is this chapter comparing Becker’s Water reservoir at Mutwanji to the reverence and power of Aboriginal art’s ability to express interconnectedness with nature. The intention of this chapter is to show that with post-modern understanding of western knowledge of Abstraction and Abstract Sublime it is possible to interpret the work of Becker as through it contains sensitivity to the sacred significance of Mutawintji. By highlighting how and at what points of reference this was possible, it is possible to show that Becker was attempting to unveil the secrets of place by experimenting with his painting techniques and styles. Today, this painting reveals a spiritual connection and acknowledgement of the earth centre as Mother, as home. In no way has he appropriated motifs or sacred stories; he has in a Romantic, Abstract-Sublime way portrayed the inexplicable – the unsayable. The horizon line is lifted and the central perspective leads into infinity, the core of the earth. The sky is reflected in the water,
connecting heaven to the earth to create a multi-dimensional sense of
place.

We could argue that although Becker was responding to place
and his relationship to Country, the painting can only be interpreted
through the Eurocentric understanding of modernist art and not
through Aboriginal philosophies. As Margo Neale stated in regard to
Emily Kame Kngwarreye’s work: ‘abstraction neither belongs to nor
owes anything to the lineage of mainly white male modernist artists
who preceded her. … The paintings refuse to be categorized as
However, the terminology of art theory and criticism does offer a way
to interpret and respond to a work in which the aura is so strong that
there is no denying the interconnectedness between artist and Country,
self and other, internal and external. With the appreciation that
Aboriginal art, and non-Aboriginal art such as the work of Ludwig
Becker, has meaning when understood in terms of subjects rather than
objects, we begin to see the similarities within the desire to express the
multi-dimensional sense of Country. Marcia Langton stated that
Aboriginal art is more than:

an important component of the contemporary artworld: it fulfills the
primary historical function of Australian art by showing “the settler
Australian audience, caught ambiguously between old and new lands”
a way to “belong to this place rather than another”. Thus Aboriginal
contemporary art is not just the most successful Australian art
movement; it is what Australian art has always aspired to be. (Cited
in McLean 2011, p. 63)
This chapter has demonstrated that this is exactly what particular artwork is able to do and be. Becker was a person of science and art; inspired by Humboldt and the Romantic and Sublime traditions, he was aware of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all species and he was obviously conscious of the destruction being caused to the landscape and people at the hands of colonisation (as demonstrated in previous sections of this thesis). He was aware of and thought about relationships between self and nature, the internal connections to the external world. In Water reservoir at Mootwintji the central perspective is slightly dislocated – the vanishing point is not towards and into the horizon but into the earth. The abstraction of form and colour creates a sensory connection to place, a mirror to immensity. In order to ‘begin to understand Aboriginal people’s perception of the desert we must appreciate the inseparable trinity that is fundamental to their culture and beliefs: the Ancestors – spiritual beings who created and continue to nurture the land in which they dwell; the biological species including humans, that the Ancestors created; and the living, sustaining the land’ (Haynes, 1998, p.12). Aboriginal philosophies and/or Creation stories locate creative power not in the heavens but deep within the land. This is reflected in Becker’s painting. Art offers a view of the world that science cannot. It involves subjective responses from both artist and viewer, each filtered through their separate influences and experiences.

The ‘authenticity of the artists’ spiritual practices must be taken seriously. ‘Far from being a repressed supplement in an
otherwise conceptualist or postmodern practice, as it is for many postmodern critics, Aboriginal spirituality is the “difference that makes the difference” (McLean, 2011, p.62). As outlined in this chapter, non-Indigenous spiritual connections to the land must also be taken seriously otherwise there will remain a sense of detachment from place, self and other. An artistic response to place may be the only way to articulate that that is ‘unsayable’. Australian artists have long aspired to develop a way to portray their connections to the landscape, and Becker’s synthesis of styles reveals his attempt to move beyond the traditions of European landscape painting towards an intersubjective story of place. *Water reservoir at Mootwanji* does not subdue the spiritual vibrancy of the landscape but enhances it to create a semi-abstract Romantic Sublime sense of harmony and balance. Becker’s work has strongly influenced contemporary interpretations of landscape in Australian art. It is worthy of further aesthetic analysis in relation to modern Australian landscape painting for it clearly reveals the attempts made by settler Australians, who were caught not only between old and new lands but between old and new ways of relating to the land, to search for a way to belong to this place – searching for a way to belong in Aboriginal Country. The painting reveals a visually creative form, a new aesthetic understanding of beauty in the nineteenth century, and a consideration and awareness of the relationship between self and nature. In this painting the narrative of colonial occupation has subsided, for Becker
did not need to represent familiarity; it offers instead a multi-dimensional relationship with place.
Chapter Eight: Telling Stories – writing history
Introduction

Throughout the research process of this thesis the question, ‘how do we speak for the other?’ and ‘who owns the past?’ has been a constant question driving my approach and learning. As the previous sections have already outlined, including the literature review and methodology sections, the approach is an ethnographic history (see Clendinnen, Shellam, and Dening). Ethnographic history is a performance that acknowledges the act of research is a process of history making, and that our performance is what is remembered as the story of our past (see Dening). This section prioritises the voice of Mary Pappin and draws directly upon the notes that I took in response to our meetings. As has already been mentioned throughout this thesis, the VEE, and the Burke and Wills myth, has, according to Tim Bonyhady ‘come to symbolize a deified sense of failure’ and ‘this failure represents an unwillingness of Europeans to learn from Aborigines and a more general inability to understand the land’ (1991, p.311). The traditional historical representation of the VEE story has been mythologized to such an extent that the ongoing celebrations of this understanding of colonial encounter known as Burke and Wills only serves to promote alienation from the Aboriginal, Country and landscape. This section compares the historical depictions of the Burke and Wills myth to the actual archival record of the explorers’ responses to Country to highlight how the myth misrepresents people and place, which challenges a non-Aboriginal sense of belonging. As previous chapters have demonstrated there are many moments of
encounter and mutual adaptation involved with the VEE (which includes the Relief Expeditions) which can be closely examined to reveal a history of multiple perspectives and light can be shed on those significant others who have contributed to our social and ecological understanding of relating to place.

The well-known historical depictions of the Burke and Wills expedition, have often neglected to mention Aboriginal presence, let alone acknowledge the appropriation of Aboriginal knowledges – ways of being, knowing and doing – especially throughout the geographical region that this chapter covers. The significance of the erasure of Aboriginal presence and denial of Aboriginal intermediaries within the VEE expedition has long standing implications. By drawing upon oral accounts, and prioritizing the voice of a contemporary Muthi Muthi woman, Mary Pappin, whose Country the VEE expedition passed through in 1860, this section demonstrates the practice of the ethnographic bricoleur, moving back and forth between the voice of the intermediary, the archive and my own observations and responses. The discussion follows the historiography of this 19th explorer encounter through a dialogical example of the chosen methodology – an ethnographic history.

Establishing a foundation for analysis and interpretation

In Balranald New South Wales, on 10 March 2013, I met with Mary Pappin, a Muthi-Muthi women whose Country the VEE travelled through in 1860. Luise Hercus identifies the Muthi-Muthi
language as belonging to a cluster of dialects linguists call the ‘Kulin Languages’ (Hercus, 1989). In 1860, when the VEE travelled through their land, the Muthi Muthi ‘had not been impacted to the same degree by European occupation as other Kulin nations throughout Victoria and the Murray River regions’ (Hercus, 2013). The geographical regions which will be the focus of this section are Muthi Muthi, Yitha Yitha and Paakantji/Barkindji of which Hercus identifies Muthi-Muthi as belonging to the north-western part of Kulin and explains that the ‘name of their language meant “No-No”’ (Hercus, 2013, p.116). The initial words that I heard from Mary Pappin that day resonated with a similar message.

*Figure 21 Near our camp at Speewa, Sept. 12. 60 Ludwig Becker*

*Image removed at author's request*


*In Balranald*

It was hot, around 36–40 degrees Celsius. The home stood prominently on the corner of a wide Balranald street with a view of
other houses and vacant land over the road. Tommy, Mary’s brother, was sitting on the veranda. I asked him if this was Bernadette’s house, if Mary was in, and if I was at the correct address. A young woman (Mary Jnr) then came out and explained to me that her mum (Mary) was inside. She invited me in the yard and called out to her mum, and Mary came out of the door. Mary was warm, friendly and very welcoming. Mary and I went straight to the kitchen to chat. I was thinking at the time that I should have perhaps taken some of the Burke and Wills literature, especially the Tipping book about Ludwig Becker containing his artwork. Initially, I thought that this was just an informal chat to see if Mary would be interested in sharing any stories with me. I had not planned on asking her any direct questions so I just told her a little of what I knew so far.

Acknowledging Aboriginal ownership

One of the first points Mary made very clear to me was that local non-Aboriginal people do not like to acknowledge Aboriginal ownership of the land, that they do not like to acknowledge the tens of thousands of years of Aboriginal histories prior to colonisation. Mary asked me what my project was, and I explained to her in greater detail that I am researching interactions between the VEE and Aboriginal people and the landscape. Abruptly and angrily she responded that she does not care for another ‘white-fella history’. I sat with Mary and her daughters for most of that day listening to their experiences of white-
fella history, school life, education, culture, Country, and the ongoing commemorations and memorialisation of colonisation.

‘Captain Cookism did a good job’

In this area, the local Aboriginal people would regularly meet at a place called the Dippo or the Depot, a Ceremonial Ground on the Murrumbidgee River near Balranald. This location is where these people were initially pushed to after the explorers came through. Then the colonial powers sent them to ‘the Island’, which is located a few kilometres from Balranald in the Murrumbidgee River, and around the 1940s they were again moved, this time onto the mission. Mary exclaimed that she missed out on mission life because she grew up on the Greendale sheep station on her Country with her parents. Station life had its own hardships for Aboriginal women. The details of these hardships are silenced – Mary asserts that this effect of silencing is where ‘Captain Cookism did a good job’. Mary began by explaining her family linage, the matrilineal connections of her mothers (the plural indicates grandmothers, great grandmothers, and onwards, each being called mother) to the Country and the sheep station where she grew up. Mary explained that Burke and Wills passed through her Country and that her own mother, Alice Kelly, would have been able to share memories of them passing through this land. Mary became understandably upset and angry about Burke and Wills; she expressed that she has no interest in the explorers and that it is they who are responsible for the trauma and hardship that Aboriginal people have
endured for the last 150–200 years. They were the ones who invaded their land, changed their ways of living, and implemented a system, which has had massive impacts on Aboriginal people and the land.

**Tin Tin Bidara Road name change to Burke and Wills Road**

The ongoing celebration and commemoration of these colonial endeavours and conquests is a constant reminder of the trauma that this invasion caused. The key point of importance for this chapter is a subtle yet powerful example of the re-infliction of colonial violence that occurred only within the last few years. Deborah Bird Rose explains that the denial of pain associated with the colonial and imperial task re-inflicts violence towards Aboriginal people and the land (2004). A road on the Lake Mungo tourist route in New South Wales was recently renamed from an Aboriginal name, Tin Tin Bidura Road, to the Burke and Wills Road (see Figures 22 and 23). Mary explained to me that this change was made without any consultation with the traditional owners – a denial of Aboriginal presence historically and today.\(^\text{15}\)

Rose identified similar acts as a doubling up, which refers to the amplification of pain through repetition and denial of Aboriginal presence both in the past and the present (Rose, 2004, p.7). The name change from Tin Tin Bidara Road to Burke and Wills Road is silencing the Aboriginal ‘eyewitness’ in the past and the ongoing

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\(^{15}\) I contacted the local council via telephone a few times, and was told that they would look into and call me back. I have not received any call back or explanation from the local council regarding this matter.
commemoration and celebration of Burke and Wills through the denial of Aboriginal historical involvement silences and erases Aboriginal ‘testimony’ in the present (Nugent, 2006). This denial amplifies the pain that was inflicted upon Aboriginal people from exploration parties travelling through their Countries. This name change has made Mary angry and bitter towards those who seemingly cannot pay a simple gesture of respect to those who were here first and to the stories that her family carries of these places.

Figure 22: Burke and Wills Road on the Mungo Tourist Loop 1. Photo taken 2013

Image removed at author's request
How do we teach this history? How do I tell these stories?

Another of Mary’s sisters then arrived, having returned from Melbourne, and she sat with us and had a cuppa and talked. This sister also expressed frustration with the road’s name change. The women discussed how explorers took Aboriginal people from this geographical region. The discussion evolved into memories of school and what kind of history was taught to school kids. Mary explained that the white teachers taught her what they had learnt from the explorers. That Aboriginal people were hopeless, useless, stupid and
unable to learn. Mary resents this attitude and recalls the teacher calling Aboriginal people ‘savages’ in a snide and bitter tone, and then the whole class turning to look at Mary because she was the ‘black’ kid in the room.

The younger women then came into the kitchen and the older women asked them what they had learnt about Burke and Wills in school. Both the young women expressed how they also hated school and didn’t care to learn the white history. They also did not care for Burke and Wills. It seemed obvious that each of these women were resentful of how that old history had been recorded and retold, how that history has influenced relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and how that history is harmful and ignorant of Aboriginal peoples’ ability, knowledge, and resilience.

After asking Mary how she would like these exploration stories to be told, so that her children and grandchildren would be interested in learning – in going and staying in school – she simply and directly stated that she would like to hear the truths of what happened to Aboriginal people and place: the names of those Aboriginal people involved, the Aboriginal names of places, the murders, and the Aboriginal involvement in exploration through her Country.

**Camping on the site of a Corroboree**

I asked the women if they knew anything about the corroboree that was held in Swan Hill and what they thought it may have
represented. I explained that it was recorded in the newspaper as occurring by the river, and that the officers (of the VEE) may not have attended which could explain why it hasn’t been included in the history books (Swan Hill Guardian and Lake Boga Advocate, 1918a,b,c,d). I explained part of the letter/article, and specifically that a woman had written it, and that she had explained that it was a war-song corroboree. Mary suggested that the ‘white’ woman would have been afraid of the corroboree and unable to understand it, thus perhaps misinterpreting its meaning. After I told Mary that I was camped near this location she expressed her annoyance at people taking over their special sites.

Specifically, Mary explained that these areas were where her people would have met, camped and educated the younger generations in significant Aboriginal knowledges. She is frustrated that today she cannot freely take her kids to these places and if she does she has to pay and do things under the control of the ‘white missionary way’. Mary is annoyed that the colonisers have taken all the nice spots, the good spots where Aboriginal people once lived, and have continually pushed her people aside. She is angry that Aboriginal people have not been fully acknowledged as the traditional owners, or recognition given to the fact that these numerous sites are highly significant to Aboriginal people. As Mary gets older she is facing up to and expressing her anger towards the dominating ‘white’ control over these areas, her Country, her knowledge and her ability to educate and share the traditions that she learnt from her mothers with the younger
generations. Mary and I then went outside to sit under a tree because
the air was thick and hot in the house.

**Missionary Management**

Mary sat facing away from me and looked out towards the vacant area across the road from the house. She was looking far away and obviously deep in thought. We sat quietly for a short while and then Mary explained that she is facing towards the cemetery. It is down the road from her family house and she explained that the old people are now there and that she often visits this spot to sit quietly with them. She explained to me that many who died with the coming of the explorers and the colonisation of this land were buried in one big pit at this location and that the Aboriginal people are buried separately from the non-Aboriginal people. Mary explained that even the large numbers of Chinese graves, located in a different part of Balranald, have been vandalised, hidden and made to appear as if they never existed. But Mary remembers them. In the past, before the explorers, her people were buried elsewhere and now today they are also buried with these old people. Looking behind her at the house she explained that her family had been renting this commission house for over 35 years and that they may never own it due to the manner in which the government controls Aboriginal people, and others living in Ministry of Housing schemes. Mary is understandably angry that Aboriginal people have not been allowed to ‘own’ anything under this new form of ‘missionary management’ system.
Mary told me about photos of her family and decided to take me to her sister’s house so I could see some of their family images. In the mid-day heat we walked down the road, and I was wishing I too had a broad-rimmed sun hat. I was happy when I realised that I had correctly guessed which house was hers. Out the front grew abundant tall native grasses, strategically placed as an ornamental garden, signifying that the residents obviously appreciated the beauty of these native plants. Mary’s sister, who I assume did not know that I was coming, had the most welcoming and beautiful smile, I instantly felt comfortable in her home. Her daughter was home with the grandchildren. In the heat of the day everyone was content to be sitting inside the air-conditioned house playing games and watching NITV. On the kitchen table was The Sapphires DVD movie. Covering the walls were photos of the family. A framed certificate from NSW National Parks and Wildlife Services acknowledging the Dippo Ceremonial Ground took pride of place alongside a photo of Mary’s mother sitting in her chair on the deck of her house. The certificate means a lot to these women.

Revisiting the archives and reflecting upon methodology

Since my initial meeting with these women I have reflected on my chosen methods of history research and writing. I have revisited the archive for traces of the explorers’ encounter with Muthi Muthi people and place in response to my conversations with Mary, her sister, and their daughters and grandchildren. After meeting with the women
I can now more clearly and obviously see the importance and relevance of specific places, including waterholes, rivers, wetlands, stations, tracks and also particular food, plants and animals that offer these women a sense of cultural and spiritual strength. With this awareness and in line with my chosen methodology I was able to ask place-based questions of the archives.

Methodology is important because it ‘frames the questions being asked, determines the set of instruments and methods to be employed and shapes analyses’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.143). Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith in Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People outlines twenty-five Indigenous projects. Some of these ‘approaches have arisen out of social science methodologies, which in turn have arisen out of methodological issues raised by research with various oppressed groups’ and some of these projects ‘invite multidisciplinary research approaches’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.143). Drawing upon the social sciences this project has considered and incorporated some of the approaches outlined by Tuhiwai Smith. The first approach, Storytelling, offers the perspectives of elders and of women through storytelling and/or oral histories (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.144-5). Tuhiwai Smith explains that, ‘as a research tool, storytelling is a useful and culturally appropriate way of representing the “diversities of truth” within which the story teller rather than the researcher retains control’ (Bishop, 1996, p.24; In Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.145). Importantly, as we sat there on that hot day listening to the stories being told, I noticed that the focus was on the ‘dialogue and
conversations’ between Mary and her sisters and her daughters – a dialogue not only for me as the researcher but intrinsically a dialogue or stories for her daughters – their history: their learning (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.145). Tuhiwai Smith explains the ‘story and the story teller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation to the other, the land with people and the people with the story’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.145). However, the stories were not all that I was listening to and witnessing.

Mary was remembering the stories that all the women – her mother, grandmothers, great grandmothers – had shared with her which related to the topics of my research. Remembering is another research approach outlined by Tuhiwai Smith:

The remembering of a people relates not so much to an idealized remembering of a golden past but more specifically to the remembering of a painful past and, importantly, people’s responses to that pain. While collectively indigenous communities can talk through the history of painful events, there are frequent silences and intervals in the stories about what happened after the event.

(Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.146)

As a witness to these oral histories and rememberings it became evident that the archival memory was not the only issue that needed to be addressed through the questions that arose from hearing this family’s stories. The researcher, as a witness, must gain a thorough understanding of the complex issues behind transmitting what they hear and applying it to what they learn. Slim and Thompson (1993) explain that good practice in oral history requires an excellent
ability to listen and hear what people are saying by using carefully thought out methods of collecting, interpreting and preserving the voice and experience of ordinary people. The complex political issues of the past and the present, the archival memory, the erasure of Aboriginal history, and also, the textual memory of the VEE calls for critical analysis of how interactions with Aboriginal people and place have or, typically, have not been included within the memory of colonial encounter (Kennedy, 2005; Clendinnen, 2006; Shellam, 2014).

Managing the land

I can only imagine the weight of pain that these women carry when they see, every day, the destruction that has occurred in their Country and to their traditional culture. These stories that Mary remembers and shared with her daughters and me have not been recorded as history and or have been erased from Australian history. In particular the written history of the geographical regions of Muthi Muthi and Yitha Yitha, which has been stripped of resources, is perceived as an inhospitable wasteland and is now, with the name change to Burke and Wills Road, simply promoted as a track which Burke and Wills travelled along to meet their fate. This renaming gives further weight to the impression of a ‘barren landscape’ – the title of Ghastly Blank has been embraced and subtly promoted. Leigh Boucher, in writing about the erasure of Aboriginal history, explains that ‘Australian stories about exploration have long evoked specific emotional landscapes’ (Boucher, 2013, p.225). It could be argued that
the ongoing commemoration of Burke and Wills fate, the name change to Burke and Wills Road, re-inflicts a trauma upon non-Indigenous Australians by promoting their ineptitude and alienation or vice versa. The name change ultimately denies the modern traveller the chance to listen to Aboriginal knowledge and subsequently connect to the land. Drawing upon the work of Ann Curthoys, Boucher explains that ‘settler narratives have long stressed “struggle, courage and survival, amidst pain, tragedy and loss” for the explorer and settler’ that ‘[t]hese remarkably persistent ideas about the origins of settler society imagine an “alienating … terrifying, hostile and dangerous … land” as the “obstacle … a settler hero must fight”’ (Curthoys, 1999, pp.22–25 in Boucher, 2013, p.225). Importantly, expeditions such as the VEE as Boucher argues, ‘are ideal examples of the ways in which the idea of “heroic defeat” at the face of this opponent creates a history and mythology of victimhood that, ironically, secures a settler claim to cultural legitimacy by marginalising the actual victims of colonisation – namely, Aboriginal people’ (Boucher, 2013, p.225) and as this chapter adds – the natural environment or landscape. The road name change to Burke and Wills Road secures the settler claim and marginalises the local Aboriginal people, which subsequently deny the opportunity to listen to Aboriginal Australia and the land.
Misrepresenting Landscape and Story

The majority of the literature or textual understanding and descriptions of these geographical regions – in particular Muthi Muthi and Yitha Yitha – have been overlooked and or misrepresented within historical memory. Haynes (1998) offers an analysis of how the centre of Australia has been represented in literature, art and film. However, Muthi Muthi and Yitha Yitha have been portrayed as simply the geographical region that people move through to arrive at another destination – hence the road name change from Tin Tin Bidara to Burke and Wills Road is a method to promote tourism through the region. Two of the most popular and highly read books about Burke and Wills: *Cooper Creek* by Alan Moorehead, first published in 1963 and *The Dig Tree* by Sarah Murgatroyd, in 2002 are examples of this. Moorehead (1963: 1) portrays the interior of Australia with descriptions such as: ‘the Ghastly Blank’, the earliest version of this oft-quoted phrase was found in the Argus, 2 September 1858. Apparently drawing upon the expeditions’ archival sources of the Muthi Muthi and Yitha Yitha regions, Moorehead barely dedicates one page to this particular region; he simply refers to one comment made by Becker as a strategy to perpetuate the ideology of an inhospitable barren waste land and to set the scene for the tragic failure of Burke and Wills. To quote Becker: ‘[t]he scenery was marked by great silence: scarcely a bird was seen or a note heard from them’ (Moorehead, 1963, p.50). Moorehead makes no mention of the numerous interactions with Aboriginal people in these areas and or the
use of the knowledge and precious resources of the local people and place – specifically guidance and water.

Another example of historical scene-setting is found in the work of Sarah Murgatroyd who, when discussing Burke’s failures as a leader, exclaims that ‘the plan was a disaster’ (2002, p.108). Specifically in reference to the Muthi Muthi and Yitha Yitha regions she states that ‘[a]gainst local advice, Burke decided that instead of following the recognised track from Balranald to the Darling River, he would cut across country’ (Murgatroyd, 2002, p.108). The Mallee Country that Burke crossed has been portrayed with contempt. For example, Murgatroyd states:

Burke’s route took his party across “mallee country”, a vast undulating tangle of rusty sandhills, anchored by thousands of distinctive multi-stemmed mallee trees. Locals commented that “no one knows who invented the mallee, but the devil is strongly suspected”. (Murgatroyd, 2002, p.109)

Although the mallee presented the expedition with challenges and extreme hardship a great deal of the Country was also described in terms of respect and admiration and even with an appreciation of its beauty. These descriptions have been left out of such histories and instead the focus has been on the creation of a tragic myth of heroic defeat or on the perpetuation of the solo-hero narrative, each of which contributes to the alienation for settler societies from nature and more specifically from this place. In 1991 Tim Bonyhady suggested that:

The way in which colonists nonetheless set up Burke and Wills as heroes has been seen as part of a larger process – usually cast as
distinctively Australian, occasionally recognized to be as much British – in which European Australians have allegedly deified failure. Without regard for the complexity of their story, Burke and Wills have been grouped with other ‘anti-heroes’, from convicts through Kelly to Gallipoli, to sustain the larger simplicity that Australians have only been able to make legends out of their defeats. (Bonyhady, 1991, p.311)

Though some have argued that although Burke died, he did achieve his objectives, and others have culturally constructed him to represent the anti-hero who failed, who perished within the environment due to a lack of Aboriginal knowledge. However, in contrast to this representation, whilst travelling throughout the geographical regions of Muthi Muthi and Yitha Yitha, there exist archival traces of the VEE listening to Aboriginal advice and local knowledge.

Aboriginal Guides and Intermediaries

The following section presents the names of some of the Aboriginal guides or intermediaries who greatly assisted the expedition party in their travel through these regions. The relevance and implications of the cultural construction of the Burke and Wills myth is the apparent erasure of Aboriginal involvement in exploration, movement through and also settlement of the land.

This section reveals evidence of the Aboriginal place named Tinn, after which the Tin Tin Bidura Road was named, and the explorers’ actual response to this place within the broader region. The
archival memory, in contrast to the historical mythical depictions of this Country, reveals another side to this historical encounter. Ludwig Becker (artist and naturalist) and Hermann Beckler (medical doctor) from the expedition party offer descriptions of the Tin Tin Bidura path on which the expedition travelled through Muthi Muthi and Yitha Yitha country. An expansion on the previous comment, Becker says: ‘[w]e went through extensive scrubs of Mallee, and then over a large plain studded with flowers of a white, yellow and violet color, offering a fine sight to the eye so much tired already by the monotonous mallee’ (Tipping, 1979, p.98) (Emphasis placed) while Beckler explains that: [d]espite the lack of variety and anything but straight lines, we found on the following day that this region, too, can charm the eye of the traveller when in its full beauty’. (Beckler, 1993, pp.31–32) (Emphasis placed)

Beckler and Neumayer describe the country around Tinn looking like the ocean. Neumayer says:

The country is perfectly level and our track lay for the miles over extensive plains, very much resembling the ocean, the view being limited by the horizon only. It was quite a relief after the monotony of the scenery when we, towards evening, came upon some scrubby country, the shrubs and trees¹⁶ … being now in full bloom so that we could fancy ourselves almost to be in a fine garden. (Neumayer, 1869, 18 September, 1860, Tjerikenkom) (Emphasis placed)

¹⁶ Hackea, Acacia, Pittosporum, Geranium etc.
The beauty of the plains and the Mallee in and around Tinn offered the explorers a strong sense of relief from the hardship of travel. Today, however, the landscape has been reshaped, the resources mined and much of the water diverted to such a degree that the viewer needs to use their imagination to develop a picture of what the landscape must have looked and felt like to these explorers. Mary and I drove through the back streets of Balranald across the flood plains that have been dry for too long because of the water diversions and construction of access roads. She pointed out the dying bush tucker, the mallee trees, that are highly significant to her and her community, which are also dying and the land divisions that have occurred without consideration of the traditional owners and their cultural ties to this Country. Mary looked at the picture of the expedition camp at Speewa (See Figure 21) painted by Ludwig Becker and said ‘they are my people’. In the painting by Becker we can see the once flooded plains that look seemingly abundant with life and home to the local Aboriginal people. Mary asked her daughters and me: ‘why do the white fellas need so much?’

We were on our way to meet the ‘Old People’ at the Aboriginal cemetery. Mary wanted to introduce me to her family members who have passed away. She pointed out the gravestones and told me of the unnecessary deaths of young Aboriginal children and teenagers. Mary wants to be buried with her people but the council has not increased the size of the cemetery to allow for further family generations to be buried there. Mary is obviously frustrated and angry.
She begins to talk about all the mining companies that have access to wherever and as much as they want. Quietly she exclaimed ‘they are digging up our Sorry Business!’ (See Figure 24)

Figure 24: Sketch 8. Women in mourning. By Ludwig Becker.

Image removed at author's request

In the recent publication Forgotten Narratives, linguist Luise Hercus explains that Marjorie Tipping was mistaken when she identified that Women in Mourning (See Figure 24) ‘belong to the Muthimuthi tribe’. Hercus identifies that there is no mention of ‘Muthimuthi (Mathi-Mathi) in the information from Becker, and that she believes it is ‘highly unlikely that the women were Mathi-Mathi’. She believes that the ‘identification appears to have been made purely from looking at Tindales (1974) map’. Tipping does acknowledge that these women are painted with Kopi which is white colour and substance on their faces which was worn as a sign of mourning (Tipping, 1979, p.58). The white substance is derived from what we know today as Gypsum. Which is what Mary refers to when she says ‘they are digging up our Sorry Business’. On the image painted by
Becker we can see that he has written ‘Gobai-gypsum’ which, as Tipping suggests, could be Kopi or ‘Kopai’ spelt differently (Tipping, 1979, p.58).

This following account is of Becker’s encounter with these women who may have been Muthi Muthi (which Mary seemed confident they were) or as Hercus claimed perhaps a neighbouring group. In the vicinity of Tinn, Becker noted:

Behind some bushes and looking at our doings several natives sat on the ground, among them was a couple of women whose faces were painted in such a manner as to give the head the appearance of a skull when seen from the distance: round the eyes was drawn with white paint, a circle, an inch broad, and the hair of one (sic) woman tied up closely and covered with a piece of cloth, while the other lubra had her hair painted or rather smeared over with the same white color giving the head a still more skull-like appearance. I found that this mode of painting the faces is a habit met with as far as the Darling; it is a sign of mourning for relations and that women as well as men show in the same way their respect for the departed friends. (Becker, 1860, Thursday 20 September. In Tipping, 1979, p.198)

Today throughout the geographical area and further afield are numerous gypsum mines. Within the explorers’ journals and diaries there is frequent reference to mineral deposits, soil types, water, and feed for stock, however Hermann Beckler makes clear that he sees the landscape in a manner that is different from the settler or colonizer.

Beckler describes his response to this country:
The sight of the arid land is often pleasing to the traveller’s eye, now and again he finds it charming. Whoever has learned to love nature finds her fascinating everywhere, whereas the squatter, thinking of profit, refers only uniformly good pastureland as beautiful country. Both the botanist and the zoologist look to find the most manifold and bizarre forms of creation in a land that is partly covered by almost impenetrable scrub. (Beckler, 1993, p.27)

Finding their way through Muthi Muthi and Yitha Yitha the exploration party, which was separated in some sections along the path that is today known as Tin Tin Bidura Road and Burke and Wills Road, made use of local knowledge and guidance as to which were the appropriate routes to take and where they could find water. Wills mentions that the party travelled towards a place identified by the local Aboriginal people as Bookoo. From Bookoo their Aboriginal guide, Martin, informed them that the ‘next waterpoint, was five or six miles away’ (Wills, 1860, 20 September). Wills notes, ‘[w]e had the choice of two tracks, with neither of them very direct. The one tending to the eastward and the other to the west; that latter is said to be 20 miles longer than the former, but having been reported to be the best road for the waggons was chosen by Mr Burke’ (Wills, 1860, 20 September). In contradiction to the dramatic scene setting made by Murgatroyd and Moorehead, Burke was not necessarily taking the most direct and or quickest route, let alone a straight line. He was being guided by local knowledge. This however was tough and challenging landscape for those who passed through and most of all for those who were keeping sheep. On 22 September, Wills records
that from this waterhole Simon, the Aboriginal guide, took the party ‘along an out station track till about 11 miles from Goowall’ (Wills, 1860, 22 September). The other half of the expedition party, which Becker and Beckler were a part of, was travelling with the wagons with a different guide.

In Yitha Yitha country, to quote Becker directly:

…about five miles from Wrankal we arrived at a place called Gilalba, marked by a black shepherds tent and a waterhole; here we stopped for the rest of the day, intending to give the over-worked and under-fed horses a spell of one day, and to start on Monday with fresh powers. (Tipping, 1979, p.199)

Beckler explains that ‘several shepherds had to leave their back-stations directly after our passing since our horses and camels drank all of the water that should have served them and their sheep for weeks’ (Beckler, 1993, p.33). Describing these back-stations Beckler further suggests that ‘as a rule, there was nothing to be found at these back-stations but a miserable hut, perhaps only a small tent, which hardly afforded the solitary shepherd the necessary protection from wind and weather during the night’ (Beckler, 1993, p.31). Later in the expedition Beckler again expresses amazement at how much the camels would drink from these precious waterholes (Beckler, 1993, p.121). The party made use of other people’s camps, waterholes, advice and guidance (Kennedy, 2007). From this information it appears that each of the separate parties of the expedition had guides and Aboriginal company and stayed with Aboriginal shepherds.
Haynes (1998, p. 49) briefly discusses negative reception explorers sometimes received due to the competition over limited water supplies. Cahir (2013, p.154) also briefly mentions the expeditions’ use of water. From this same geographical region, one of the most well-known Aboriginal guides of the Burke and Wills story has been memorialized through Becker’s artwork. (See Figure 25)

Figure 25: Watpipa the ‘Old Man’, our guide on Sep 24. By Ludwig Becker.

Image removed at author's request


Becker’s account of meeting Watpipa is on the 24 September, he reports:

A young native, acting as guide, sat on one of the waggons, while his uncle Whitepeeper [Watpipa] or the ‘old man’ as he, par excellence, was called by all the natives of the district, walked in front of us with a fire-stick in one hand and a yam-stick in the other, as I have shown in sketch No. 9. (Tipping, 1979, p.199)
Whitepeeper, or Watpipa as he is otherwise known, seems to have come from Yitha Yitha or Paakantji, however when I showed Mary the picture she responded to his name and image with a strong sense of familiarity. I am yet to talk with her more about each of these topics. However, Mary expressed her anger towards the lack of consideration of those who existed prior to exploration, the place-names being replaced with colonial names, the stories not told or when told not heard and the denial of Aboriginal involvement in exploration. The perpetual denial of Aboriginal involvement amplifies the pain that has been inflicted upon Aboriginal people and places. Mary is my guide, an intermediary for her Country, her family, and her history. Although the histories that Mary tells me are different from the mythic representation of colonial exploration her stories are still important and true, especially for her family in the present. Although Becker’s inclusion of Aboriginal peoples exists in his sketches, Mary is seemingly annoyed with how historians have portrayed the explorations that travelled through her Country. Mary explained to me that each of the explorers that travelled throughout her Country is today mostly remembered as one and the same, where exploration parties collectively represent colonisation and are thus referred to by Mary as being a part of the process of ‘Captain Cookism’.

Captain Cook is the symbolic figure of colonisation within Australia. Maria Nugent has illustrated that ‘Captain Cook’ became ‘a catch-all term for the entire history of dispossession across two hundred years’ (Nugent, 2009, p.123). Chris Healey, who works on
Indigenous people’s stories of Captain Cook, contrasts them with settler forms of memory and memorialisation, he explains:

These histories [of Captain Cook] are concerned with the place of history-making, with the ethical dilemmas bequeathed by the past. These histories seem closer to the spirit of social memory in caring about the importance of being able to live with, rather than simply accumulate knowledge about, the past in the present. (Healey, 1997, p.7)

This idea of ‘living with the past … in the present’ rather than simply accumulating knowledge reflects both the subtle and explicit messages within the stories that Mary shared with me. Mary is concerned with how we all relate to the environment and how history is told and strongly believes that if we are to survive in the ‘Anthropocene’ (Mary did not use this term but she did imply it) we need to start listening to the advice of Aboriginal people (Crutzen & Steffen, 2003). Hobbles Danaiyarri of Northern Australia and Daly Pulkara of the Humbert River region taught Deborah Bird Rose about the legacies of Captain Cook in those particular places (Rose, 2004, p.3-4). Following the saga and legacies of Captain Cook for Aboriginal people, Rose explains that these people have taught her about the ‘concept of the wild’ (Rose, 2004, pp.3–5). Rose explains that Captain Cook, or Captain Cookism as Mary expresses it, is ‘the emblematic figure of invasion, running amok in country that is not his, and thinking that the original inhabitants are wild while failing to recognise his own wildness’ (Rose, 2004, p.3). This concept of the wild exists within any place where the explorers and colonisers ‘failed
to recognise Law, destroyed people and country, lived by damage, and promoted by cruelty’ (Rose, 2004, p.4).

This research has revealed to me that the name change of Tin Tin Bidura Road to Burke and Wills Road denies not only Aboriginal presence in the past and in the present but also within the broader VEE story. It also denies the explorers’ dependence on Aboriginal people for their safe and successful travels through Muthi Muthi, Yitha Yitha and Barkindji/Paakantji Country. This chapter demonstrates that the landscape has been misrepresented, which has significant implications in regard to how Australians have related to the regions. The historical depictions, in contrast to the actual archival memory, have been sculpted to create the backdrop to the tragedy of Burke and Wills – perpetuating alienation from and fear of the arid and semi-arid zones, when in actual fact many of the explorers revealed a deep appreciation of the landscape. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, creating and maintaining a dialogue that prioritises the Aboriginal voice offers a way around our historical inability to listen to the advice of Aboriginal people and to connect with and care for Country.

Aboriginal people were integral intermediaries for the successful exploration of this region. The road name change from Tin Tin Bidura Road to Burke and Wills Road re-inflicts the colonial violence that originally silenced the Aboriginal voice and perpetuated the colonisers’ alienation from Country. This research has been guided by Mary’s interpretations of these historical events and by her hopes for her family and Country.
Discussion

This chapter has told a story of interaction between Mary, her daughters and myself, a social memory of explorers and colonisers, and examined the contrast between the myth of Burke and Wills and the actual archivial memory. Mary has guided this research, her knowledge, her memories, and her Country have informed my learning and educational journey. This section has highlighted the importance of being aware of how history has been told, how this telling impacts upon those whom this history has caused such a major clash of worldviews and ontological change. Specifically, this experience has shown me how important it is to create a reflective distance between the expectations and hope of field research. It is important to be present and able to listen. This section has also begun to acknowledge key moments throughout our historical past that have shaped the construction of the Burke and Wills myth. This experience has taught me to listen closely to those who offer a version of history that differs from the mainstream and this experience has also revealed the importance and value of closely reading the history that is written down and that which is stored within the archives. One such key moment or cultural construction from the past is the silencing of Aboriginal involvement through Muthi Muthi and Yitha Yitha Country and the subsequent shaping of how the landscape has been portrayed. Also highly significant is Mary’s use of the terms Captain Cookism and missionary management, and how these stories of exploration can be told in a way that differs from the typical and unwanted ‘whitefella’ history.
Chapter Nine: Discussion – closing analysis

Successful exploration made use of local knowledge, protocols, and Aboriginal laws by including Aboriginal people as expedition members and local people as intermediaries and or guides. However, in the past, the use of Aboriginal knowledge and Aboriginal guidance was often ‘overshadowed’ by historians and colonial officials with the desire to portray exploration as a solitary endeavour of heroic defeat. Aboriginal involvement in exploration appears to have been intentionally denied – erased – for the purpose of the individual explorer’s career and societal success (Boucher, 2013). There are however many examples of explorers’ acknowledging their guides as has been shown within this thesis. With the understanding that Aboriginal knowledge and guidance was integral to exploration success, and that the lack of this knowledge and guidance contributed to the deaths of Burke and Wills, it is important to understand the mechanisms that contributed to the silencing or denial of Aboriginal involvement in exploration and colonisation (Shellam, 2014). Additionally, it has been commonly believed that the relief expeditions are ultimately responsible for the so-called enlargement of knowledge about Australia (Fitchett, 1913) – expeditions and explorers achieved their goals by relying heavily upon Aboriginal guides, intermediaries and knowledges that subsequently increased the geographical knowledge of the interior of Australia (Driver & Jones, 2009; Kennedy, 2013; Maddison, 2014; Thomas, 2014; Konishi,
Nugent, & Shellam, 2015). The ‘opening-up’ of the interior may have been much more challenging without the assistance of some Aboriginal people and the use of their knowledge (Reynolds, 1990; Baker, 1998).

Although Burke may represent failure as a Bushman, his failure created a greater desire for those who followed in his footsteps to succeed and to attempt to understand the land – this includes the Relief Expeditions and also many others who travel to the Dig Tree retracing the explorers footsteps as a symbol of ‘outdoor skill’ and mastery or triumph over nature (Slattery, 2013). The failures of these explorers became a symbol of the settlers successful battle with nature. Those who follow in Burkes footsteps and succeed are symbolically closer in skill and ability to that of the Relief Expeditions: such as Howitt and Landsborough, who moved through the landscape with grace and ease.

The denial of Howitt’s dependence upon Aboriginal knowledge, (as his career developed), has however shaped an identity and narrative of a solo-hero endeavour – it has denied the fact that their positions could not have been achieved without their Brave and Gallant Aboriginal friends, as revealed in the story of Dick at the beginning of this thesis. The relief expeditions, with their Aboriginal members and friends, appropriated knowledge and together mutually adapted to the rapidly changing social, cultural and economic environment. The separation of humans from nature, and the erasure and or denial of Aboriginal knowledge, has led to the unsustainable
exploitation of natural resources and threatened relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Rose, 2004; Plumwood, 2002, 2005). The ongoing denial and erasure of Aboriginal involvement and presence in land exploration further promotes the alienation from the landscape by taking away the opportunity to ‘listen’ to Aboriginal advice and knowledge (Bonyhady, 1991). Additionally the denial by twentieth century historians, and twenty first century council members and tourist officials of Aboriginal involvement in colonial exploration, together with the commemoration of solo-hero inland exploration, continues to deny Aboriginal presence in the past, which has a significant impact in the present.

Learning from the myth

The history, myth, narrative and story of Burke and Wills arguably impacts upon how people relate to Country. The main foundation of this thesis is that Burke and Wills’ were framed as the Brave and Gallant solo-heroes whose most fatal error was that they did not make use of Aboriginal knowledge. This solo-hero story or myth Burke and Wills, which often denied the Brave and Gallant Aboriginal heroes, subsequently further alienates people from place – as revealed in the story told by Mary. However, the way the story or myth of Burke and Wills has been told does not neglect the ongoing understanding that these explorers whilst on the Cooper denied Aboriginal knowledges.
In an interview on ABC Radio, anthropologist and botanist Phillip Clarke and historical geographer Ian Clark discuss with the producer Belinda Tromp the main themes covered within the *Forgotten Narratives* publication, to which they both contributed chapters and of which Ian Clark was an editor (See Clarke & Clark, 2013; Clark & Cahir, 2013a,b,c). The interview states that ‘one of the enduring mysteries of Australian history is why Burke and Wills starved to death in the desert when they were surrounded by bush tucker’ and the question is asked ‘could the answer lie in Burke’s disdain for Aborigines?’ (Clarke & Clark, 2013, stated by Tromp). Ian Clark exclaims, ‘The Indigenous people were thriving and yet here were these Europeans perishing’ (Clarke & Cahir, 2013). The interview progresses to discuss how the third member of the expedition, John King (although the interview transcript incorrectly records this as Charlie King), ‘survived by joining a local Indigenous tribe and was later rescued by a search party and taken back to Melbourne’ (Clarke & Cahir, 2013). Phillip Clarke explains that King joined the local group and, although they were ‘intimating he should stay behind and not follow them’, he persisted and eventually ‘they adopted him into their clan and yes they ensured that he survived’ (Clarke & Cahir, 2013). Clarke explains that there were many food sources available to Burke and Wills at Cooper Creek ‘including yams, seeds, grubs, birds, and lagoons full of fish and tortoises’ (Clarke & Cahir, 2013). Further:
But probably the most important knowledge was what nardoo was. Burke and Wills and King knew what it looked like when it was given to them (by Aborigines) … but for a long while they’d assumed it was growing on trees and they were looking around and eventually King found some green looking ones on the nardoo fern which is a closely growing outback plant growing where the water stagnates after lots of rain. … Some of these foods like nardoo need to be collected once they’ve aged, certainly not green like Burke and Wills and King how they were eating it. But also it needs to be sluiced and ground up, a lot of the toxins washed and even after that it needs to be baked just to make sure. (Clarke & Cahir, 2013)

Adding to this lack of knowledge, they suggest that ‘Burke had little respect for Indigenous people and their knowledge’ (Clarke & Cahir, 2013). They note in contrast, ‘other explorers of the day including Ludwig Leichhardt, Major Mitchell, and John Forrest took advice from indigenous trackers’ and Clark points out that each of the Relief Expeditions included Aboriginal members (Clarke & Cahir, 2013). It is this reason that this thesis has focussed on one of the relief expeditions. Not only did Burke and Wills not make correct use of local foods, or include Aboriginal members in the party to the Gulf and back, they also did not make use of Aboriginal communication systems, as Fred Cahir discusses in the Forgotten Narratives publication (Clark & Cahir, 2013). This inability to make ‘friends’ with the local people is still very much open to further interpretation.

Although Dick was very much a valuable member of the expedition party there is little celebration of his achievements within
the histories written about Burke and Wills. Burkes inability to make friends could be perceived or interpreted as fear. Prior to Burke leaving for the Gulf, he ordered Brahe to deter Aboriginal people from coming too close to the Depot. Brahe, after burying a cache of food under a blazed tree, left the Depot after four months of waiting for Burke and Wills to return from the Gulf of Carpentaria (Brahe, 1862). The two parties missed each other by about seven hours, with Burke, Wills and King arriving in the evening and Brahe and his party having left in the morning. Clark says, ‘if Brahe had encouraged and got along well with local Indigenous people they would have advised him of the upcoming arrival of Burke and his party’ (Clarke & Clark, 2013). Likewise, ‘if Burke had maintained good relationships they would have been advised how close they were to the Dig Tree’ (Clarke & Clark, 2013; Clark & Cahir, 2013; Cahir, 2013). Philip Clark stated, ‘Burke had little experience with Aborigines, whereas … King spent time as a soldier in India and Afghanistan and was interested in other cultures’ (Clarke & Clark, 2013). The key points raised are that Burke and Wills died on the Cooper Creek because of their:

1. Lack of Aboriginal knowledge
2. Inability to maintain relations with the local Aboriginal groups
3. Little prior experience with Aboriginal people and other cultures.

In 1977 Tom Bergin, Paddy McHugh, a Pitjantjatjara elder Nugget Gnalkenga (nicknamed Chilbi) and his son Frankie retraced Burke and Wills’ steps with ten camels. In response to this radio interview Paddy
exclaims that the above-mentioned points are not new, he states ‘these comments are like re-finding old facts and theories’. Paddy suggests three more key points that contributed to the demise of Burke and Wills which are also not new. Firstly, ‘they had no idea about camels’; secondly, ‘they had no experience with the bush at all’ and thirdly, ‘Burke was the most ill-suited leader of the expedition’ (Clarke & Clark, 2013, see comments following the transcript). The overall significance of Paddy’s statement is that each of these understandings are not new: it had been well understood, since the expedition first departed Melbourne, that these factors were a major disadvantage and that they were the main reasons for the explorers’ deaths. However, adding to this, Paddy exclaims, ‘kind of weird that we as a nation have this fixation on the worst explorers this country has ever seen’ (In Clarke & Clark, 2013). The fixation on Burke and Wills is based on the cultural, social, and political implications of their experiences and how they represent our national discomfort with the landscape. Ian Clark suggests that it is ‘a preoccupation with the misfortune of timing’ (I. Clark, 2015, personal communication, June 12, 2015). The national discomfort with the landscape could be the fact that Aboriginal Country was invaded and to ease this disturbing fact the concept of terra nullius is perpetuated through the stories that some choose to remember, tell, and embrace over interpretations, data, and evidence that proves an alternative version. The ongoing desire to manipulate and control the historical past resembles the same action of mastery or triumph over nature for mercantile gain – both actions which deny
human/nature/culture interconnection and the importance of the social-ecological relations. The key lesson to learn from the myth of Burke and Wills is a moral one, Aboriginal knowledge and presence was key to the explorers survival and arguably it could be the key to ongoing survival within this landscape in the present and the future.

However, this is not new and Bonyhady especially made this key point obvious in 1992. One new key lesson from this research is the point that the colonial officials neglected to include Aboriginal involvement in exploration and many of the subsequent historians and cultural producers have constructed a myth of Burke and Wills as solo-hero explorers as martyrs for the nation. This myth has impacted upon relations between people and the environment. The is most obviously clear in the example of the road name change from Tin Tin Bidura Road to Burke and Wills Road and how the telling of Burke and Wills has impacted some Aboriginal people in a negative manner. These actions by tourism officials and local council, and the re-telling, commemoration, and memorialisation ‘double-up’ (Rose, 2004) the violence of our colonial heritage.

The narrative associated with Burke and Wills, which includes word and image, has contributed to a social, cultural and political mythologising that works towards perpetuating the created tension between people and place. This research is Australian and Aboriginal history, which is situated within place (on and in Country) and therefore must consider the environment (or nature). History is a performance, it is of the past, the present and the future. Greg Dening
explains that ‘History – the past transformed into words or paint or dance or play – is always a performance’ … ‘history is theatre, a place of thea (in the Greek, a place of seeing) where the complexities of living are seen in story’ (2002, p.1). Further Dening explains that, ‘[r]igidity, patter, and “spin” will always destroy the theatre in our history performances’ because we ‘are post-modern’ (2002, p.1). Further, the ‘novelists, the painters, the composers, the filmmakers give us the tropes of our day, alert us to the fictions in our non-fiction, and give us our freedoms’ (Dening, 2002, p.1). As Slattery explains, ‘the myth’, or the history of Burke and Wills, and the ongoing celebration and commemoration of heroic endeavour, continues to shape attitudes in outdoor education and other outdoor activities as it continues to ‘reflect and reinforce colonial expectations of the land’ (Slattery, 2013, p.179) just as the myths or stories we tell or perform continue to shape relations between people and nature. This acknowledgement that our history can ‘reflect and reinforce colonial expectations of the land’ can also be directed towards land management, stewardship practices, environmental policy and planning, and education.

Considering the expedition through an environmental history framework offers a practical way to develop understanding of the ‘historical relationships’ with the land and the holistic traditions of scientific knowledge that has been developed over many thousands of years. Dovers explains that ‘[e]nvironmental history tells fascinating stories of human engagement with the natural world, … [b]ut
engagement with sustainability problems requires a supplementary set of activities’ (Dovers, 2008, p. 03.5). Building upon the argument brought forward by Muir, Rose, & Sullivan (2010) that engagement with sustainability problems requires the ability to form social-ecological relations.

The denial of multiple and varied perspectives contributes to a system or unit of survival that is individualistic – a rationality ‘that is held to be primarily economic, egoist, and atomistic’ (Plumwood, 2002a, p.33; 2002b). With this understanding, from an ‘ecofeminist perspective’, there are multiple problems and concerns with how the history of Burke and Wills has been told (Merchant, 1990, 1992, 2007; Mies & Shiva, 2014; Plumwood, 1993, 1995, 2002a,b; Plumwood & Shannon, 2012; Rose, 2004, 2011; Warren & Wells-Howe, 1994; Warren, 1997) To summarise the problem or concern, noted below is an example of how these stories have been told:

Firstly, many of the commentators and historians of the VEE told it as a tale of heroic endeavour and a tragic narrative of men who perished within the arid centre of Australia;

Secondly, during the expedition Burke denied aspects of the scientific and anthropological research, most significantly during the advance party expedition from Cooper to the Gulf, leaving the scientists near Menindee;

Thirdly, the lack of written documents by Burke and his choice in leaving the artist and naturalist Ludwig Becker behind subsequently denied the practice of exploration art which led to socially and
culturally constructed visual images and interpretations which misrepresented events and the landscape;

And fourthly, the erasure of Aboriginal knowledge, advice, agency and resistance – the denial of the multiple world-views that informed the events – has perpetuated the narrative of heroic endeavour that continues to feed into and support these points.

Each of these key points led to and informed the creation of the Burke and Wills myth. This myth led to the silencing and erasure of aspects of colonial and exploration history that are typically perceived as belonging to the peripheral. As Attwood and Foster explain:

> Historians must also consider how the past has become the present and how the present relates to the past. Nations rest on such historical consciousness – on a chain of connection between ‘them’ and ‘us’ – and so we need histories that create a sense of moral engagement with the past in the present. (Foster & Attwood, 2003, p.33. In Rose, 2004, p.11)

The telling of the Burke and Wills myth which denies Aboriginal agency and presence is a contested version of history – the denial may have occurred because ‘the presence of Aboriginal people within, alongside, against and around the exploration parties might have made for uncertain mythological terrain’ (Shellam, 2014).

**Burke and Wills – death and belonging**

The deaths of Burke and Wills in the centre of Australia and the ongoing fascination with their stories is most easily understood within cultural and moral terms. It has been pointed out that many
early explorers were ‘conquered by the land’ and have been represented in Australian literature and art as being unconsciously or involuntarily sacrificed to the land (Tacey, 1995, p.102). The stories told within this thesis demonstrate that the myths of Burke and Wills have been remembered and told by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and hold a significant meaning in many imaginations. One memory of Burke and Wills, in particular Wills, is captured within the novel by John Van Der Kiste (2011, p.133) who claims that Wills has been memorialised by the Yandruwandha as ‘a good fellow’ who they knew as ‘Wiltja’. Also, Wills family have been told that John King has been remembered as ‘a decent man’, and ‘like a woman, because he was always seen to be doing things for the others, more or less waiting on them’ (Wills family personal correspondence with Van Der Kiste, 2011, p.134). This information was passed on from the ‘great grandson of one of the Yandruwandha people on Cooper Creek’ (Van Der Kiste, 2011, p.133). Wills acknowledged the Yandruwandha as his ‘friends’ (Wills, 1861, Wednesday 8 May) and during this time he was well aware of the need to maintain this friendship. During his final days of life Wills wrote in his diary and letters to family. He explained that ‘[s]tarvation on is by no means very unpleasant but for the weakness one feels and the utter inability to move oneself’ (Wills, 1863, p.337). Acknowledging their fate, and challenging the rational mind of science, in their final moments of life Burke and Wills both spoke of God and religion (Cathcart, 2013, p. 170-173). With clear evidence of desire to promote science and a rational mind, and to
completely dismiss different worldviews, Wills’ father tried to keep all mention of God and religion out of the published records (Cathcart, 2013, p.170). Michael Cathcart in the book *Starvation in a land of plenty* has made clear links between the need to listen to the advice of Aboriginal people for safe passage through Country and in doing so has hinted at the epistemology and ontological challenges for colonial Australia to relate to the land. However, during the Relief Expeditions the relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous were merged into an appropriated and cross-cultural entanglement to form a unique way of being in place – although sometimes violent and wild.

**Concluding remarks**

Each of the chapters, the case-study examples, has followed four key themes. The first theme was the separation of people from nature and how this relates to scientific exploration and modern understandings – the contemporaneous activities of colonial Australia and who in Melbourne had significant sway in the imperial task. The second theme reveals the importance of, and the challenges, in listening to a storied landscape that includes Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge. Rather than silencing Aboriginal involvement in this aspect of the expedition, this theme was addressed by including key moments of interaction and mutual adaptation. This demonstrated that settler/explorer adaptation involved the appropriation of Aboriginal knowledge and the merging of bushskills to create an identity of the capable Australian bushman and explorer – something that the myth of Burke and Wills together did not do or achieve.
The third theme was about creating a space within which the inclusion of multiple perspectives of the landscape and how people relate to nature can be considered and achieved. Through the analysis of art practices, theories and histories it is possible to see how past Aboriginal knowledge may have been appropriated and subsequently denied through the dismissal of human interconnection with nature. This is most obviously demonstrated within the sections that include oral histories, social memories and interpretations, and in the analysis of the artwork by Ludwig Becker. These aspects of the analysis have included evidence or data from the past and present – the linking of this evidence and data challenges knowledge systems that deny human/nature/culture interconnections. The human/nature/culture interconnection is particularly evident in abstract landscape artwork.

The fourth theme focused on the implications of this colonial mentality on relations between people and place (nature) in the present. This is most clearly demonstrated within the chapter where Mary taught me about the implications of the Tin Tin Bidura Road name change to Burke and Wills Road. The ignorance of not appreciating and prioritizing the scientific exploration, the ultimate denial of scientific understandings – most significantly the denial of German understandings – contributed to the rapid economic growth of these regions and the subsequent loss of Aboriginal traditional lifestyles, knowledge and ultimately to the denial of the landscape offering anything more than resources for colonial and imperial expansion. If Becker had been supported in his scientific and artistic pursuits we
would today have a great deal more knowledge of this early cross-cultural contact era. Becker and Barkly were aware of the rapidly changing environment for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The colonial conflict between scientific advancement and imperial economic occupation was great and the implications of this are most evident at places such as Balranald and Swan Hill, where the reliance on the traditional myth of Burke and Wills to draw people along the route which they travelled, continues to symbolically oppress some Aboriginal people and their Country. The commemoration and celebration of exploration history, which denies Aboriginal presence and agency, inflicts the violence of the colonial past in the present and perpetuates the stories of *terra nullius*. As this thesis demonstrates, decolonising the myth of Burke and Wills can begin by focus being redirected to those who were and are ‘becoming’ in the rapidly changing environment, those who were and are the *Brave* and *Gallant* intermediaries and co-producers of knowledge.
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Final Project Report
Human Research Ethics Committee

1) Project Details:
- **Project No:** A11-48
- **Project Name:** The Burke and Wills Scientific Expedition 1860-61 – the Aboriginal Story

2) Principal Researcher Details:
- **Full Name:** Professor Ian D. Clark
- **School/Section:** Business School
- **Phone:** Ext. 5436
- **Fax:** 5327/9136
- **Email:** i.clark@federation.edu.au

3) Project Status:
   - Please indicate the current status of the project:
     - [ ] Data collection complete
     - [ ] Abandoned
     - Completion date: 30/6/2015
     - Please give reason:

4) Special Conditions:
   - If this project was approved subject to conditions, were those met?
     - [ ] N/A
     - [ ] Yes
     - [ ] No
     - *NB: If 'no', please provide an explanation:

5) Changes to Project:
   - Were any amendments made to the originally approved project?
     - [ ] No
     - [ ] Yes
     - *NB: Please provide details: amendment for time extension due to periods of leave from studies.

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Page 5 of 5
6) Storage of Data:

Please indicate where the data collected during the course of this project is stored:

| Not applicable |

7) Research Participants:

Were there any events that had an adverse effect on the research participants?

| No | Yes | NB: Please provide details: |

8) Summary of Results:

8.1. Please provide a short summary of the results of the project (no attachments please):

This thesis examines micro-narrative case study examples of encounters between Aboriginal people, the Victorian Exploring Expedition (VEE) — popularly known as the Burke and Wills Expedition — the subsequent Relief Expeditions and relationships between people and place. The myth of Burke and Wills has overpowered significant others and integral aspects of the VEE. This thesis sheds light on aspects of the Burke and Wills narrative that have typically been silenced, or used as background to the colonizing story of inland exploration to create new stories of interactions between Aboriginal people, the VEE and place.

8.2. Were the aims of the project (as stated in the application for approval) achieved?

Yes — Aboriginal perspectives of the Burke and Wills and Relief Expeditions were established through micro-narrative case studies which have allowed for 'new' interpretations to come to the fore of analysis.

9) Feedback:

| | | |
The HREC welcomes any feedback on:
- Difficulties experienced with carrying out the research project;
- Appropriate suggestions which might lead to improvements in ethical clearance and monitoring of research.

N/A

10) Signature/s:

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Please return to the Ethics Officer, at either the Gippsland or Mt. Helen campus, as soon as possible.