




the
Wiradjuri
people



Ngadhu gawambanna
ngindhugir Wiradjuri garai,
ma ingu Dulin totem

I welcome you all to Wiradjuri land,
people of the goanna totem





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The Wiradjuri People

The Wiradjuri people are the people of the three rivers – the Wambool (Macquarie), the Calare (Lachlan) and the Murrumbidgee. They have lived in these lands and along these rivers for more than 40,000 years. The Wiradjuri are identified as a coherent group as they maintained a cycle of ceremonies that moved in a ring around the whole tribal area. This cycle led to tribal coherence despite the large occupied area. It is estimated that 12,000 people spoke the Wiradjuri language prior to white settlement. Differences in dialect existed in some areas, including around Bathurst and near Albury. The Bathurst Wiradjuri were the most easterly grouping of the Wiradjuri nation. Their totem is the goanna.

Words which have been borrowed from Wiradjuri include: boggi 'a lizard' (1911); corella 'a cockatoo' (1859); gang-gang 'a cockatoo' (1833); kookaburra (1834); belah 'a casuarina' (1862); mugga 'a eucalypt' (1834); quandong 'shrub with an edible fruit' (1836); billabong (1853); bondi 'a club' (1844); boorie 'an Aborigine' (1943).

The Wiradjuri lived in extended family groupings of around thirty men, women and children, moving between different camp sites across their traditional lands, which covered an area of approximately 40 miles (or 64 kilometres) square. They made periodic journeys throughout this well-watered country around the Wambool River. The Wiradjuri fished from canoes and hunted with spears and nets for duck, kangaroo, goannas, snakes, lizards, emus, possums, wallabies and waterfowl. Their food supply also included various plants, roots and vegetables. They travelled for trade and to perform ceremonies to honour their ancestors, their dreaming and their relationship with the land.

The creator spirit Baiame was central to Wiradjuri spiritual life. Another important dreaming story for the Bathurst Wiradjuri is the origin of the platypus near Flat Rock on the Fish River (upper Wambool).



Culture

The Wiradjuri lands were signposted with carved trees which marked burial grounds. Carved trees have been found at the junction of the Macquarie and Campbell Rivers at O'Connell. (This tree can be seen on display in the Bathurst Historical Museum).

Bora rings were located on key sites like Wahlu (Mount Panorama) where initiations and other important ceremonies were held. The caretakers cottage in McPhillamy Park is believed to be constructed from the stones of three bora rings where, for thousands of years, the Wiradjuri held initiations and corroborees. Stone monuments associated with men's business have also been found on Bald Hill and Mount Pleasant.

Handcrafts included woven baskets and delicately stitched and engraved possum skin cloaks, worn for protection against the colder weather. Women also stretched out possum skins on their laps to beat out rhythms during ceremonies and dances. Traditional dances portrayed battles, hunting and the animals which were both prey and totems for the Wiradjuri. Men decorated their bodies with white paint for these dances.

The Wiradjuri shaped their landscape through controlled burning to encourage animals into cleared grassland for better hunting. Spears were crafted from sharpened quartz spearheads fastened with kangaroo sinews. Stone axe heads crafted from stone on the edge of the Oberon plateau were traded widely.



White Settlement

The first encounters between the Wiradjuri and the British colonialists were recorded in the journals of Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson's first white expedition across the Blue Mountains. On 31 May, 1813 near the Cox's River, Blaxland wrote:

"Traces of the natives presented themselves in the fires they had left the day before, and in the flowers of the honeysuckle tree scattered around, which had supplied them with food... From the shavings and pieces of sharp stones which they had left it was evident that they had been busily employed in sharpening their spears."

In November 1813 Assistant Surveyor George Evans and five others surveyed a road across the mountains to access the open plains to grow food for the Port Jackson colony. They followed the Wambool (Macquarie River) westward into Wiradjuri country reaching as far as Killongbutta (approx 40 kilometres from Bathurst). Evans' route across the mountains followed a long established route used by the Dharug and Gandangara people to trade with the Wiradjuri.

Evans remarked:

"I saw no men, but I have reason to think from the many distant columns of smoke I occasionally observed, the inhabitants are numerous, besides I frequently came upon their deserted camp grounds."

The first recorded contact was near Mount Pleasant when a small group of two women and four children were surprised to find the white men fishing at dusk in 1813.

"The poor creatures trembled and fell down with fright."

The Wiradjuri language gives some clue as to what they must have made of these strange pale clad creatures and their horses. The Wiradjuri words for white man and ghost are similar.



The Macquarie Years

A small settlement was established near the junction of the Macquarie River and Queen Charlotte's Vale Creek. Governor Lachlan Macquarie and his wife visited the site in May 1815 to mark the completion of the road and the inauguration of the town. The Governor recorded his first meeting with the Wiradjuri upon his arrival.

"We found here also three male natives and four boys. . . They are all clothed with Mantles made of the skins of o'possums which were very neatly sewn together and the outside of the skins were carved in a remarkably neat manner. They appear to be very inoffensive and cleanly in their persons."

Under Governor Macquarie white settlement west of the mountains proceeded slowly. Land grants were restricted to east of the Macquarie River and Government controlled grazing and farming to the west. This expansion was too slow for critics of Macquarie's emancipist sympathies and Macquarie was replaced by Governor Sir Thomas Brisbane. The white population doubled from 114 in 1820 to 287 by 1821. Wiradjuri hunting grounds, food sources and sacred sites were usurped by white settlers.



Windradyne

The Wiradjuri began to strike back and conflict escalated as stations were attacked and cattle speared. Lives were lost on both sides. White settler reports in the Sydney Gazette record over 13 stock keepers killed by mid 1824. There are no records of the Wiradjuri men, women and children killed in reported retaliatory attacks and poisoning. Wiradjuri resistance to white settlement also intensified with the strength and stature of one leader Windradyne (Saturday) becoming legendary.

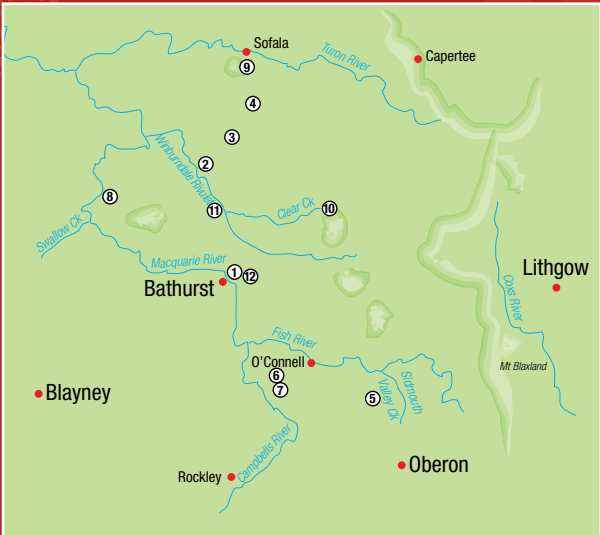
In December 1823 Windradyne was put in irons for a month by the commandant of Bathurst, Major Morisset, for killing two Government bullocks.

“One of the chiefs, (named Saturday) of a desperate tribe, took six men to secure him and they had actually to break a musket over his body before he yielded, which he did at length with broken ribs.”

Major Morisset had Windradyne put in irons for a month on this occasion. As conflict came closer to the fledgling town another report describes the shooting of Windradyne’s family by a farmer on the potato fields on the banks of the Macquarie, across from the early settlement. Windradyne survived this encounter and in May 1824 mounted a campaign of guerilla warfare, with attacks on several stations in the Bathurst area.

Early settler, William Henry Suttor, described his narrow escape from the inflamed warriors, thanks to the lasting friendship he had established with the Wiradjuri. When they arrived at his hut he was able to speak with Windradyne in Wiradjuri and saved himself and his family. Attacks were recorded at Millah Murrah, The Mill Post and Warren Gunyah.

The killing of a Wiradjuri woman and two girls at Raineville near O’Connell in May 1824 led to the arrest of five stockmen. Prosecution of the case drew consternation from settlers who called for military intervention against the Wiradjuri. The accused were not convicted.




Sites of Conflicts between Aboriginals and Settlers in Bathurst District, 1824

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| ① Kelso (Potato field) | ⑧ Billywillinga |
| ② Millah-Murrah | ⑨ Bell's Falls Gorge |
| ③ The Mill Post | ⑩ Clear Creek |
| ④ Warren-Gunyah | ⑪ Windradyne's Memorial – Brucedale |
| ⑤ Raineville | ⑫ Morisset's Grave – Holy Trinity Church, Kelso |
| ⑥ ⑦ W. Lawson's holdings | |

Martial Law

Governor Brisbane proclaimed Martial Law on 14 August, 1824 and dispatched 75 soldiers to Bathurst with magistrates permitted to administer summary justice.

A reward of 500 acres (202.3 ha) was offered in reward for the capture of Windradyne. Official records of engagement and losses were scant but W.H. Suttor one of the few settler advocates for the Wiradjuri described their suffering at the hands of the forces assembled under Major Morisset.



"...When martial law had run its course extermination is the word that most aptly describes the result. As the old Roman said, 'they made a solitude and called it peace'."

Soldiers, mounted police, settlers and stockmen carried out numerous attacks on Aboriginal people. The attacks continued for two months but no record of casualties was kept. By October groups of Wiradjuri were being reported coming into Bathurst to surrender. Martial Law was repealed on 11 December, 1824. Seventeen days later Windradyne led a group of Wiradjuri to Parramatta where, with a dignity acknowledged by white observers, he made an entreaty for peace at the Governor's Annual Feast. On the same day the Colonial Secretary, Earl Bathurst, sent a dispatch from England rebuking Governor Brisbane for providing insufficient justification for his declaration of martial law. Brisbane was later recalled to England.

Windradyne was reported to have been mortally wounded in a tribal fight on the Macquarie River, and to have died a few hours later on 21 March, 1829 at Bathurst hospital on the corner of Bentinck and Howick Streets. The Suttor family disputed earlier accounts of Windradyne's death and burial, claiming that he had in fact departed from Bathurst hospital to join his people at nearby Brucedale, and that he died on the property in 1835. In 1954 the Bathurst District Historical Society erected a monument beside a Wiradjuri burial mound at *Brucedale*, attaching a bronze plaque commemorating

'The resting place of Windradene, alias "Saturday", last chief of the Aborigines: first a terror, but later a friend to the settlers... A true patriot'.

Windradyne has become a character of national importance as a resistance hero. A suburb at Bathurst and a student accommodation village at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, are named after him. Windradyne's grave is listed on the State Heritage Register and is protected through a voluntary conservation order.



Dispersal and Resettlement

From the mid 19th century gold mining and free selection brought thousands of new settlers into Wiradjuri country. In the mines and on the small holdings there was little requirement for Aboriginal labour. The Wiradjuri did play an important role in the goldrush and the major finds of Kerr's nugget and the Tambaroora gold field are attributed to individual Wiradjuri. Local Wiradjuri were also among the first entrepreneurs on the Ophir gold fields, selling bark for huts, looking after horses and guiding and providing other services.

With the loss of their hunting ground the Wiradjuri were no longer able to live independently of the white population. Extended family groups moved between settlements along the key rivers, typically living in fringe camps outside of towns like Mudgee, Wellington and Cowra. They did however manage to retain their ceremonial life despite being closed out of their traditional bora grounds. Some of the Wiradjuri's social patterns also survived: such as seasonally moving family groupings, child rearing by relatives rather than parents, decision-making by consensus and the resolution of conflict without reference to outside forces such as the police.

From 1883 onwards 'protection' policies aimed to segregate Aboriginal people across New South Wales. The Protector of Aborigines, had the power to create reserves and to force Aboriginal people to live on them. This brought pressure on local Aboriginal people to leave farming properties and fringe camps. On the Aborigines Protection Board Reserves movement, paid income, property ownership, access to education and even marriage were controlled by administrators. Wiradjuri families were relocated to Missions such as Erambie at Cowra, Nanima at Wellington and Mudgee or Reserves like the Wellington Common; others were scattered across New South Wales. In both Aboriginal missions (which were supervised by a manager) and reserves (unsupervised) housing and health conditions were well below white standards; there was little or no transport to town and children could be refused access to local schools and public facilities, like municipal pools. Until 1972 Wiradjuri families were also subject to government policies for the removal of children and many children were raised in orphanages like Cootamundra Girls Home and Kinchela at Kempspey.



Aboriginal Rights Movement

In 1937, Aboriginal leaders in Dubbo, William Ferguson and Jack Patten re-launched the Aborigines Progressive Association (APA) to challenge the living conditions of Aboriginal people in NSW. Together, with William Cooper they organised and held the first Day of Mourning in Sydney on the 26 January, 1938. They also lobbied the government and churches for Aboriginal rights for citizenship, education and miscegenation.

A campaign was launched for a referendum for Aboriginal people to be included in the Australian census with Jesse Street's petition tabled in 1957 and the formation of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) in 1958. The Federal Council was the first political voice for the Wiradjuri and Aboriginal people across the nation. It included Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

In 1967 Charles Perkins led the Freedom Ride to country NSW to protest against discrimination against Aboriginals. The bus of Sydney University students passed through Bathurst on 12 February to Wellington, where the Freedom Riders got their first taste of conditions in Aboriginal Australia. Ann Curthoys noted the conditions...

"Houses of tin, mud floors, very overcrowded, kids had eye diseases, had to cart water (very unhealthy) from river. People fairly easy to talk to, kids quite friendly. General picture of extreme poverty but not a great deal of social discrimination. General picture of scarcity, of jobs. Mainly garden work, which is very seasonal. Average of three months for year out of work. Some working on a dam nearby. Some did shearing jobs. Did not encounter or hear of any women with jobs at all. Did not seem to know much about social services etc."



The Referendum was finally held in 1968 and 90.7% of Australian voted in favour of amending the constitution to give Aboriginal people citizenship. This enabled Aboriginal people including the Wiradjuri the right to move around freely, have a choice in governments and to have policy made by the Commonwealth Government, which would mean uniform laws, instead of varied and inconsistent state laws.

With the establishment of a Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the recognition of Native Title in NSW, former missions and reserves were broken up and many Wiradjuri families returned to Bathurst. A 1970s Federal Government resettlement program also encouraged families from numerous other tribal groups to move to Bathurst for improved housing, educational and employment opportunities.



Aboriginal Bathurst Today

Since the 1970's, the Bathurst Aboriginal population has grown significantly. Today, there are many clans / nations whom have relocated here and actively contribute to the economic, social, cultural and political life in the city. According to the previous ABS census, approximately 3% of the Bathurst Regional Council population identify themselves as Aboriginal.

Following the Federal Government inquiry into the Stolen Generations, the 1997 release of the *Bringing Them Home Report* led to the establishment of the Bathurst Aboriginal Reconciliation Group. National Sorry Day events were held in Bathurst on 26 May each year and hundreds of Bathurstians signed the Bathurst Sorry Book acknowledging past injustice and the forced removal of children. On 12 February 2008, the National Apology to the Stolen Generation was televised from Canberra. This historic event was commemorated before a large gathering in Bathurst Regional Council Chambers and the Reconciliation group presented the Sorry Book to local elders.

Topical issues such as health, housing and education services for Aboriginal people are being targeted as these concerns are ongoing disadvantages experienced in the Aboriginal community. In an attempt to 'Bridge the Gap' Bathurst Regional Council has an Aboriginal Employment Policy which aims to improve training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.

Key Aboriginal organisations in Bathurst that meet on a regular basis include; the Bathurst Local Aboriginal Land Council, Towri Aboriginal Corporation, North East Wiradjuri Native Title Claimant Group, Bathurst Aboriginal Working Party and the Bathurst Local Aboriginal Consultative Committee meets regularly to consult on issues of concern to Aboriginal people.

A major celebration on the civic calendar is the National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee celebrations, held annually on Peace Park in September including a civic flag raising ceremony at Bathurst Regional Council Chambers.

For Further Information

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