

# Boundaries of the Hunter Valley Aboriginal people.

The Wonnaura  
Koori's

---



## Introduction:

### Wonnarua Aboriginal Tribe

Before European Settlement in Australia the Wonnarua Koori People occupied most of the Hunter Valley Region.

The Wonnarua people define their Country into known Tribal and Clan Territories, Where particular groups of Wonnarua are connected to certain areas of land by Totem Ancestors, Tribal Ceremonies, Language and Law.

Some aspects of these are shared by neighbouring Aboriginal people such as the Darkinjung, Worimi, Kamilaroi and the Wiradjuri Tribes.

The Tribal group I belong to are known as the Gringai Clan and are a part of the Wonnarua people in general.

My clan group concentrated along the Allen and Paterson Rivers and stretched over towards St Clair and the Singleton District.

My Descendant Group was responsible to maintain the country on the South to South Eastern side of the Barrington Tops and associated Rivers and Valleys, which run into the Hunter Valley.



The other clan groups of the Wonnarua are the Gea-Wegal, Gundigal Tullong Murrawon and possibly the Awabakal on the coast around Newcastle.

Early explorers in the Region noted that there were many large camps of Aboriginal people in the Area.

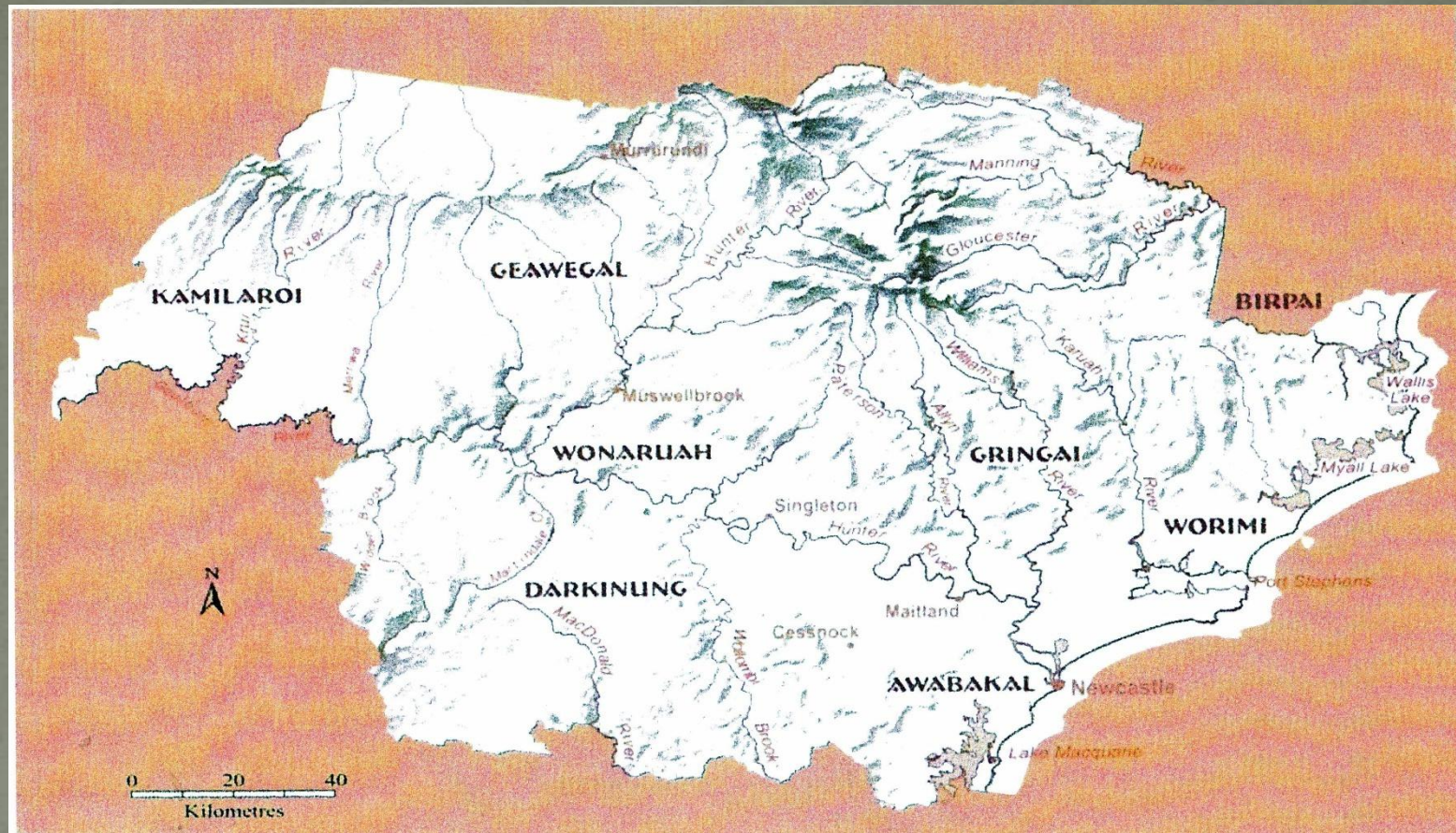
The same explorers numbered the population of Aboriginal people to be around 800 to 900 living in the District.

But in actual fact this number is a low estimate mainly because the local people usually hide themselves from being discovered by the early explorers.

A truer more accurate estimation would be more than 3 to 4 thousand people living within the Wonnarua Country.

This study is a first draft look at the tribal Boundaries based on historical research and consultation with other Tribal Groups and elders and known information regarding where the clans and tribes interacted with each other.





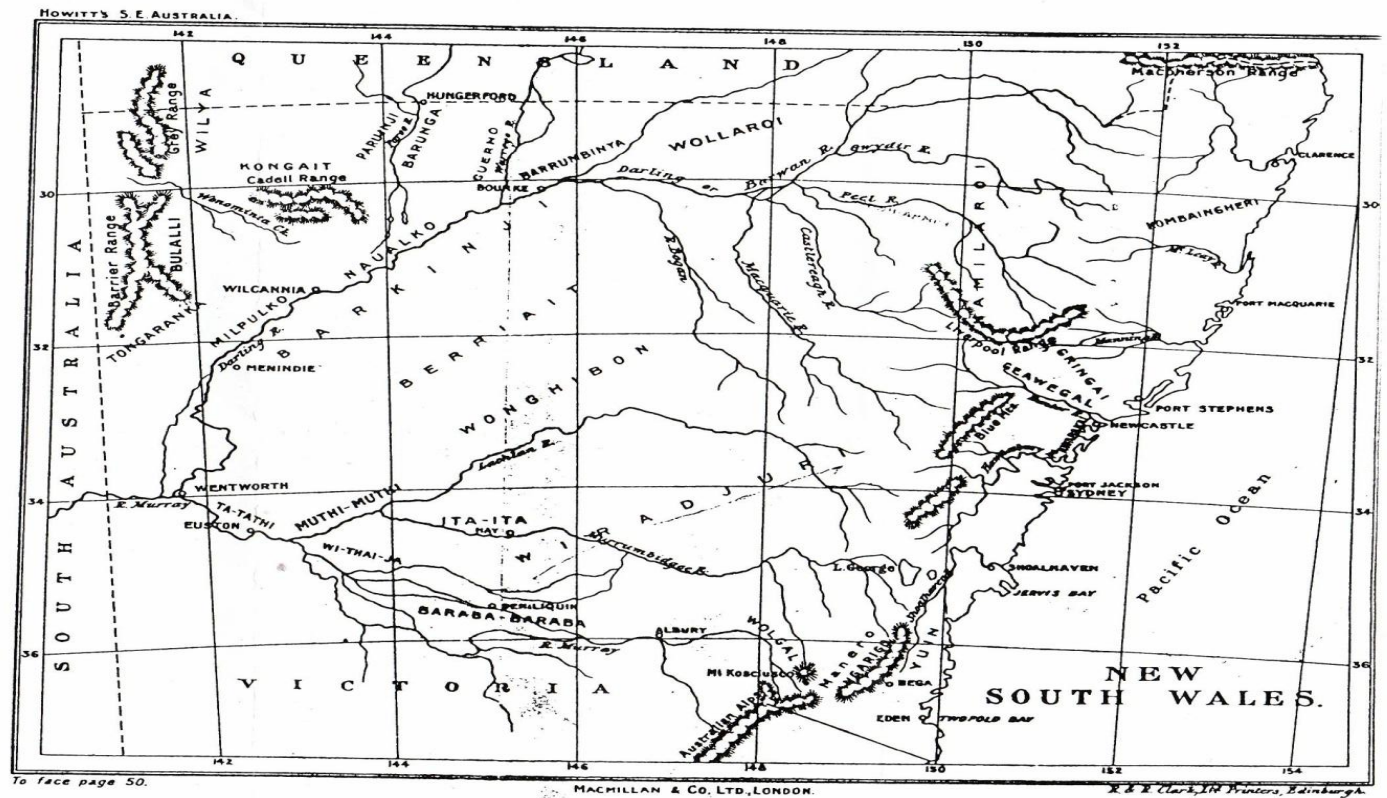
This is a map of the Hunter Region with the names of some of the Tribal groups that were recorded in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century, as you can see there are no boundaries on this map. Some of this information is not factual and is based upon non-Aboriginal accounts, written by early Settlers.





This is an Ariel photograph of the Hunter Region outlining the Tribal groups surrounding the Wonnarua Homeland, these boundaries are rough estimates of the original homelands, the Tribal groups names are correct, not to sure about the boundaries and would recommend further discussion with the other tribal neighbours to firm up boundaries

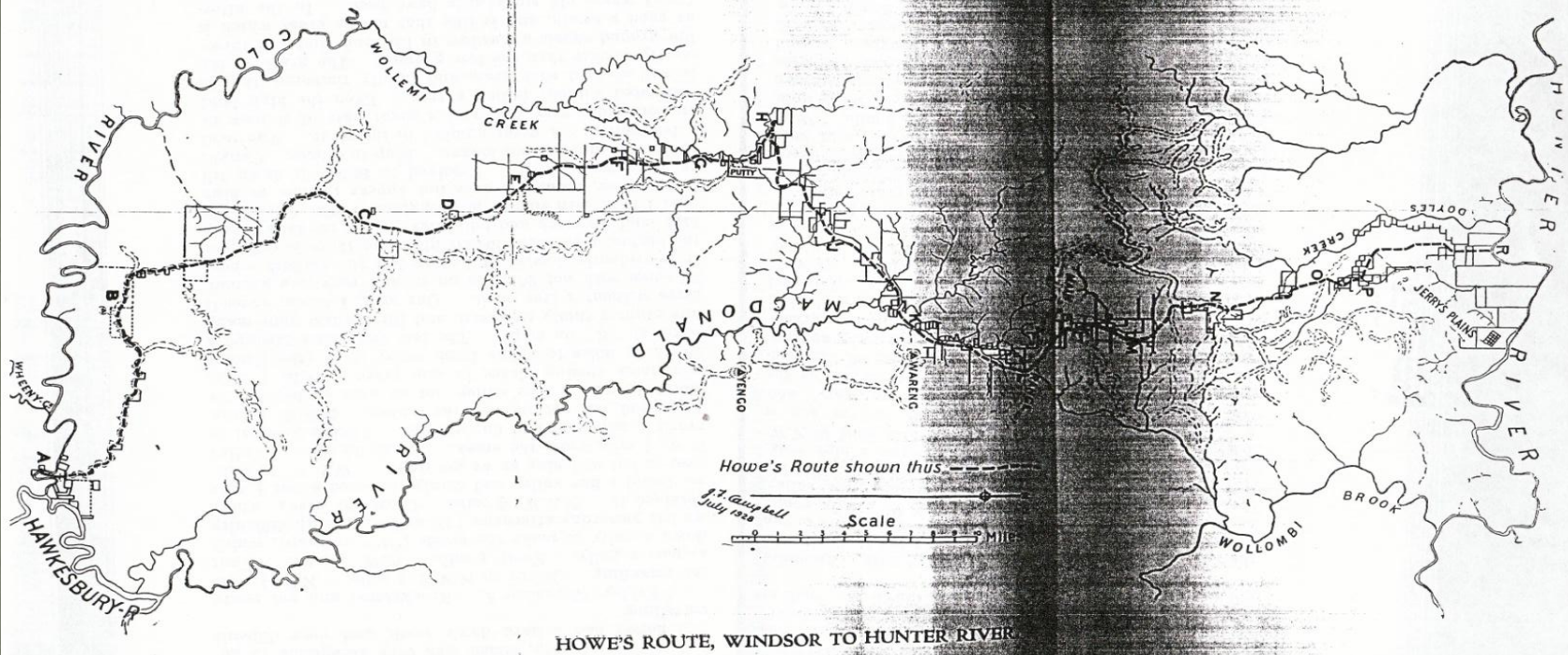




## Howitt's MAP S.E. Aust

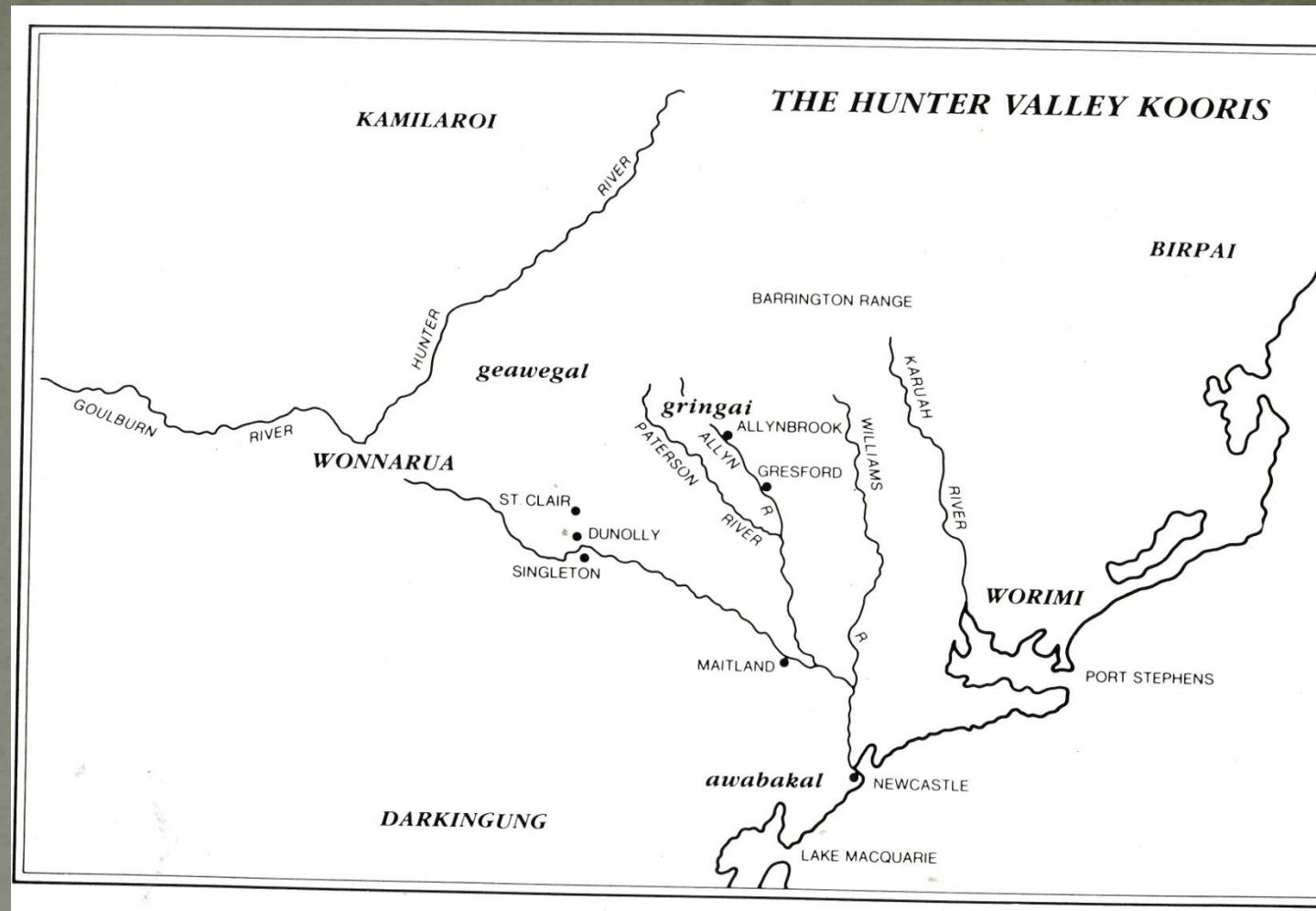
This is one of the older maps of NSW made by R.H. Matthews it shows the Hunter Region with one or two Tribal names for our Region, please note that there are a lot of other Tribal groups left off this map, this would not be the best resource to use regarding where Aboriginal tribes are located, Although you can assume that the mention of some Tribes maybe correct for each area.





The original is in the Mitchell Library, Sydney.

This map shows the route taken by the Howe exploration from the Hawkesbury to the Hunter river in 1820. Most of the country they travel through would have been the Darkinjung Tribal Lands. The Englishman were lead to Wonnarua Lands by a Darkinjung Tribesman who lead Howe and his party along the trade route between both areas. The Darkinjung man was later killed for showing Howe the trade route to the Hunter.



The Tribal Names in our language are as follows:

Kamilaroi- They who said No, Wiradjuri-The people of the Three Rivers  
 Worimi- the lightning people, Darkinjung-The greater carvers in Stone  
 Dharuk-The yam people, Wonnarua-The people of the hills and plains.



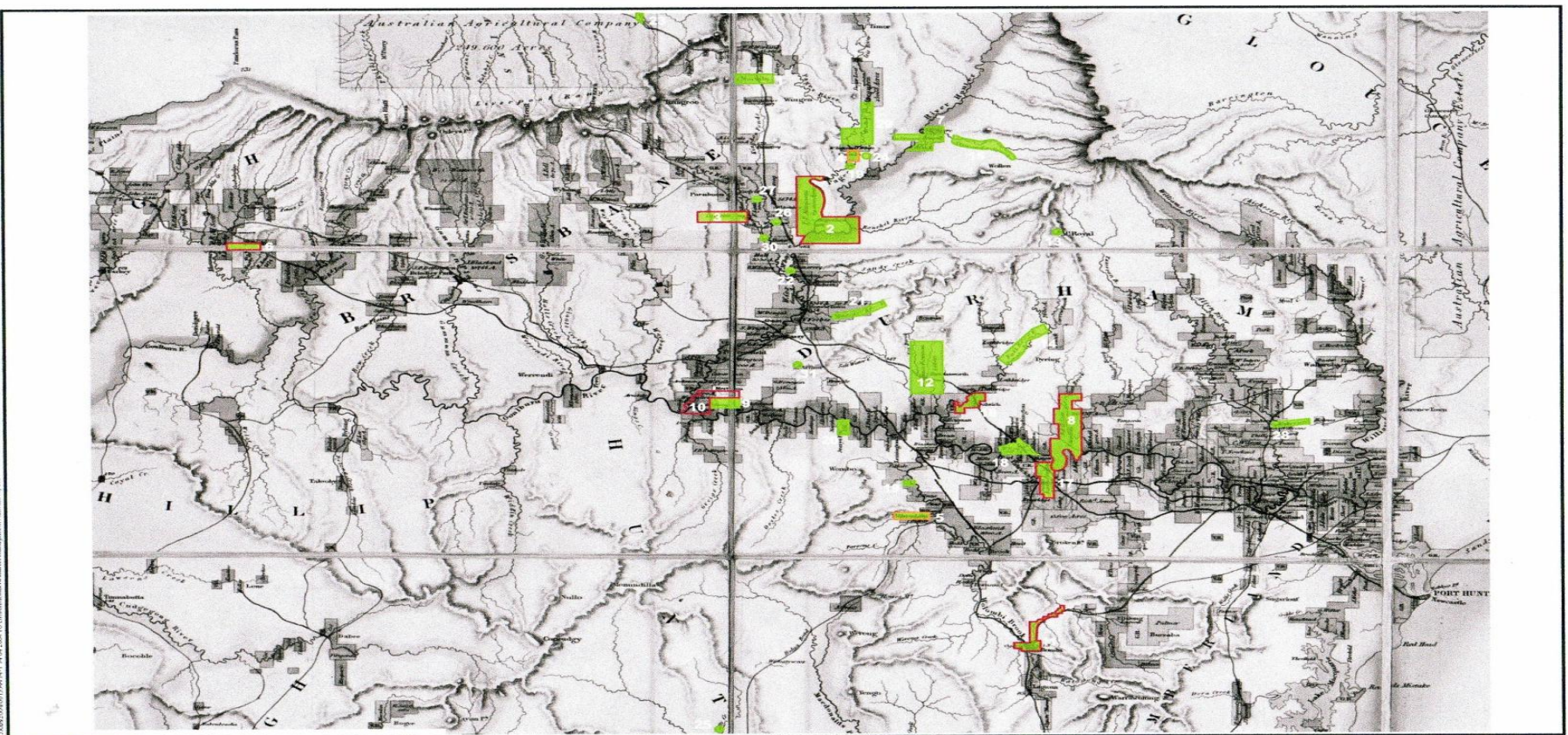
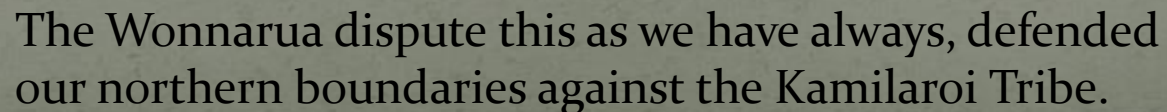


Figure 4.1 Aboriginal Places Identified from Historical Documents

As you can see, settlement in the Hunter Valley happened very quickly with all of the river frontage granted away to wealthy people in Sydney. The river systems are now defined and are well known to the Government for future development. The Wonnarua people by this stage have been locked out of access to the river by these's land grants. The Hunter region was one of the first area outside of Sydney to be settled by the English.

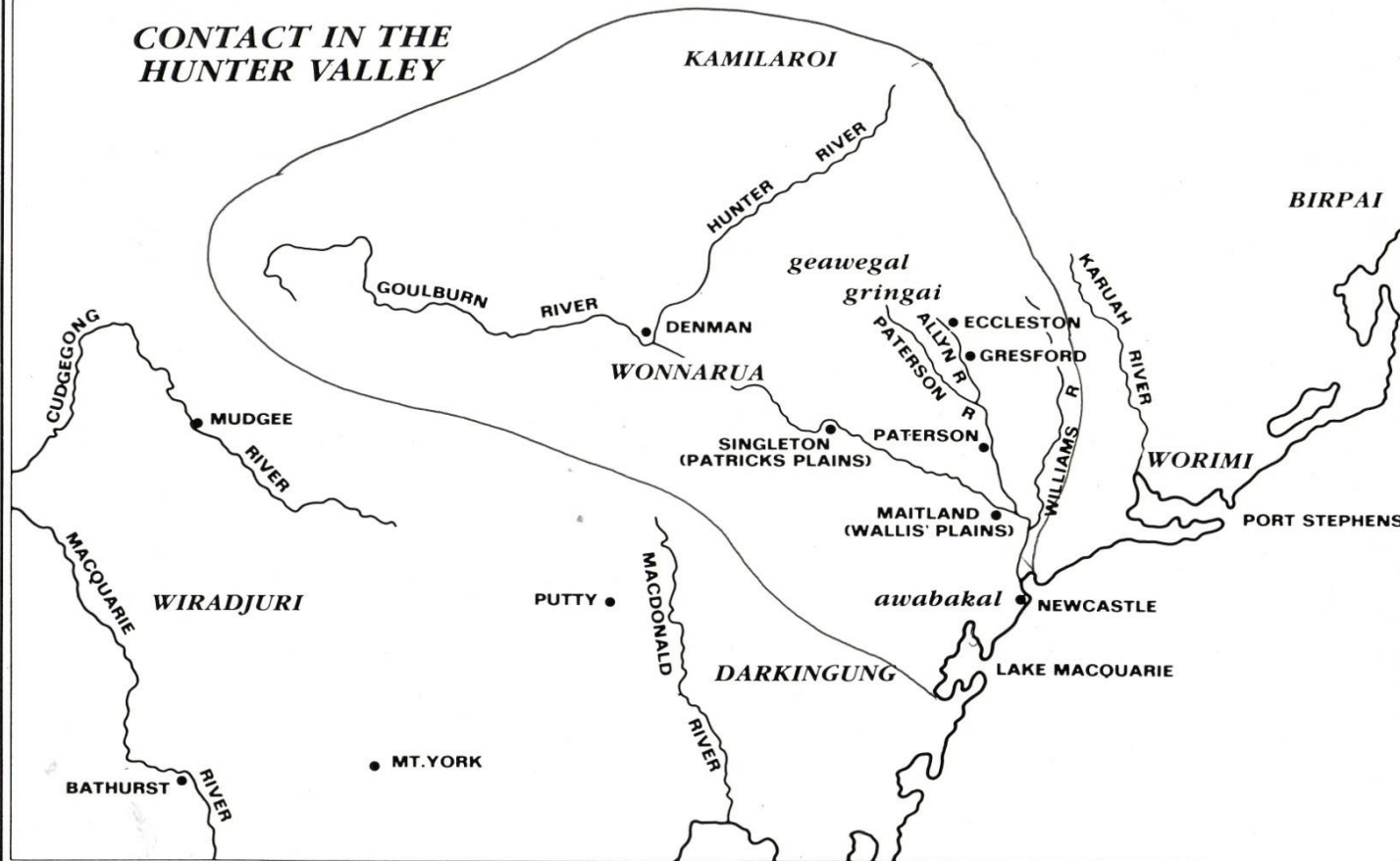


This map also indicates that the Kamilaroi had land connections in the Upper Hunter.



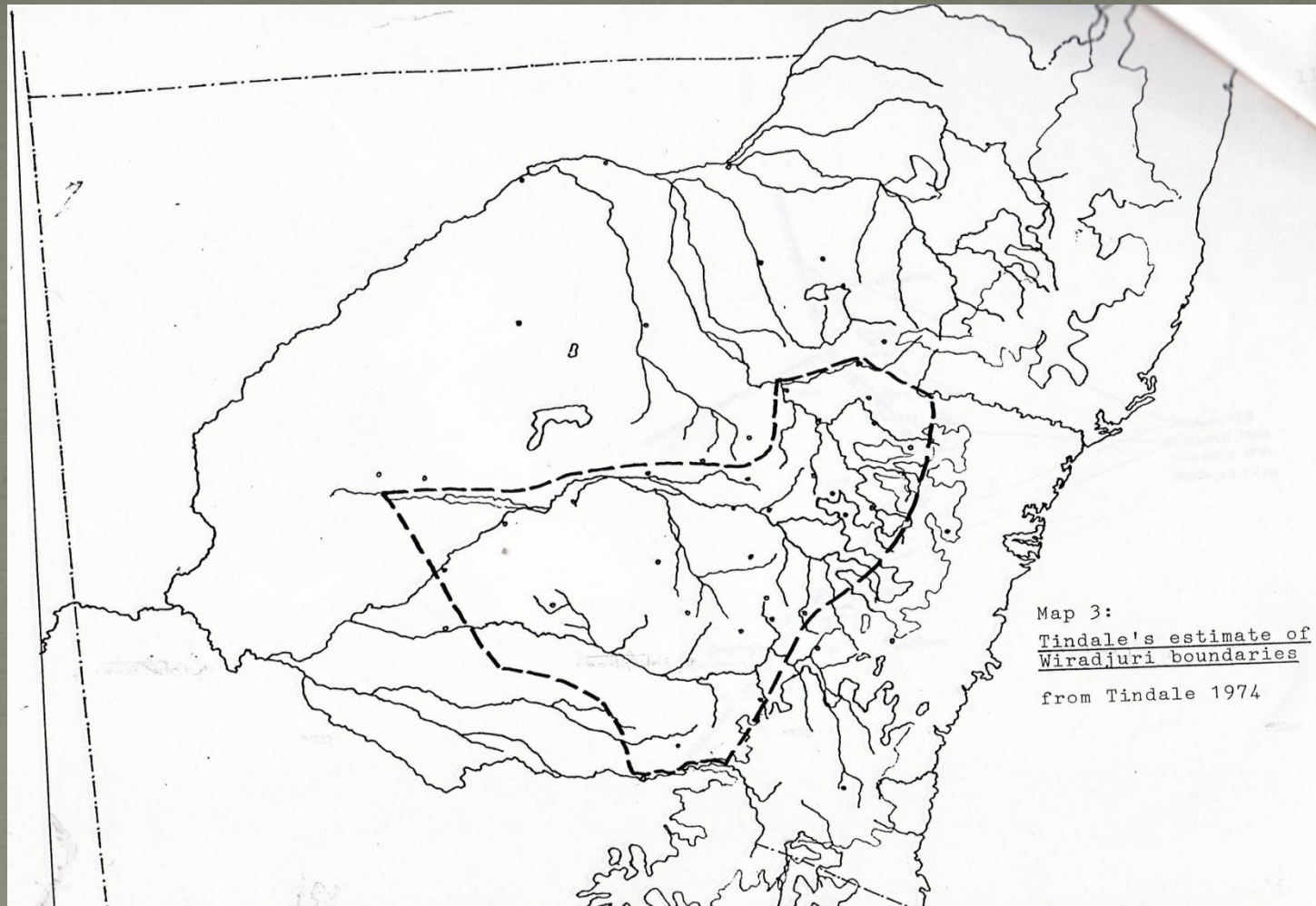


## CONTACT IN THE HUNTER VALLEY



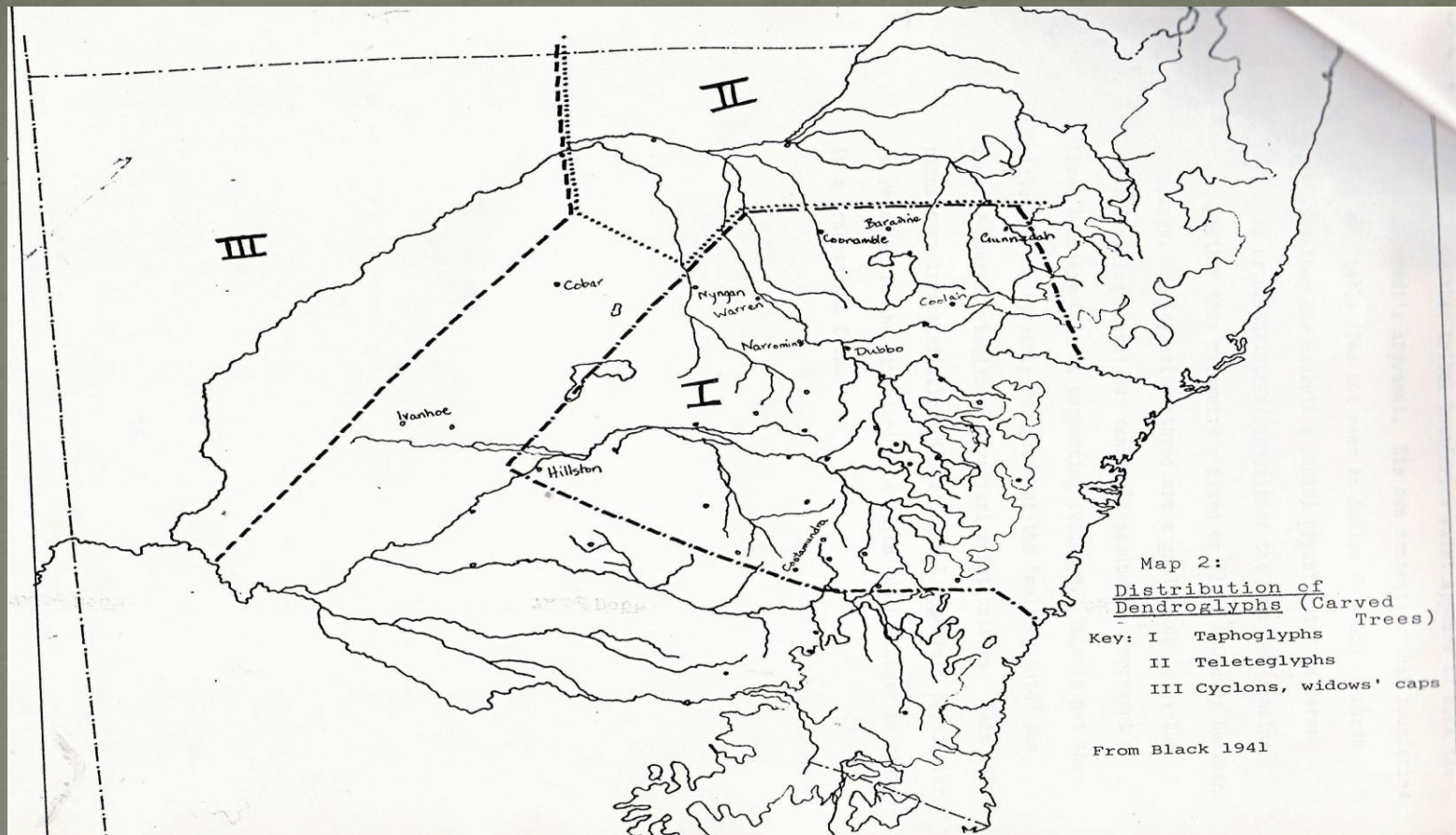
This map is narrowing in on the main river features town's and population centres being established in the region from the 1820's to the 1840's.

The main river system of the hunter can be seen with the word Wonnarua over the top. Other tribes can be seen as well roughly in their known area's. The main Aboriginal Tribes are in the larger font. There is one tribal group that is missing from the map and they are the Dungutti people who occupied the region between the Kamilaroi and the Birpai to the north of the hunter.



In the 1970's Norman Tindale produced a book on the research that he had completed regarding what Aboriginal Australia looked like before European Settlement of Australia. This map is looking at the Great Nation of the Wiradjuri people who share a common boundaries to our western area.





This map shows the location of the distribution of carved tree's across N.S.W in 1941 . You will note that there are no dot's recorded in the hunter region. Some carved trees could also be used as boundary markers according to some tribal customs. But not so much in the coastal regions because rainfall and climate dictated that boundary trees were not used as much but the Wonnarua Clans did use marked trees for Clan boundaries. In the hunter the natural landscape features were used as tribal boundaries.





This is a modern map with town's roads and national Highway's .

There are rough outlines of were the old tribal areas are located

This map is again only based on guess Work and is not set in stone.



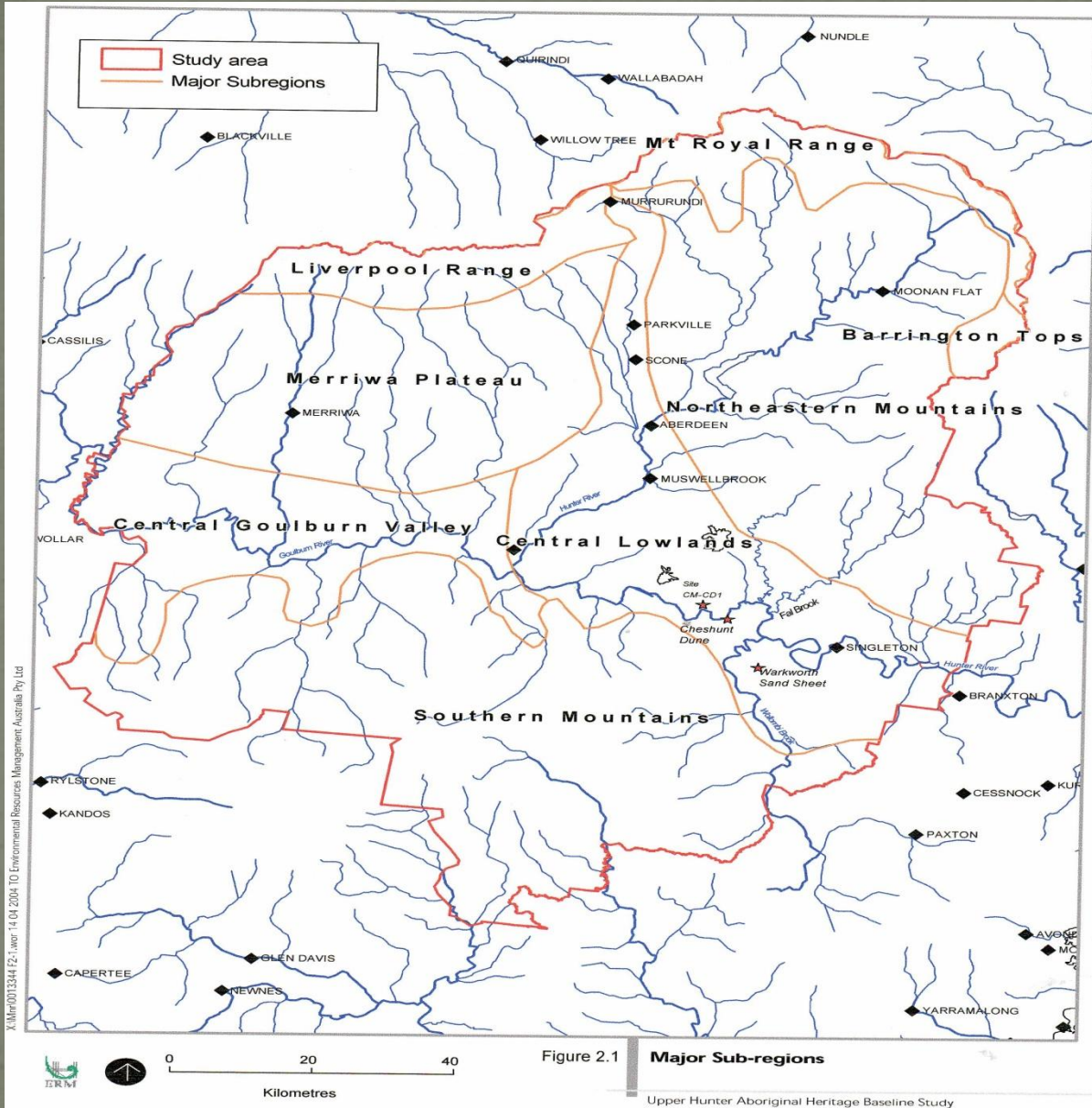




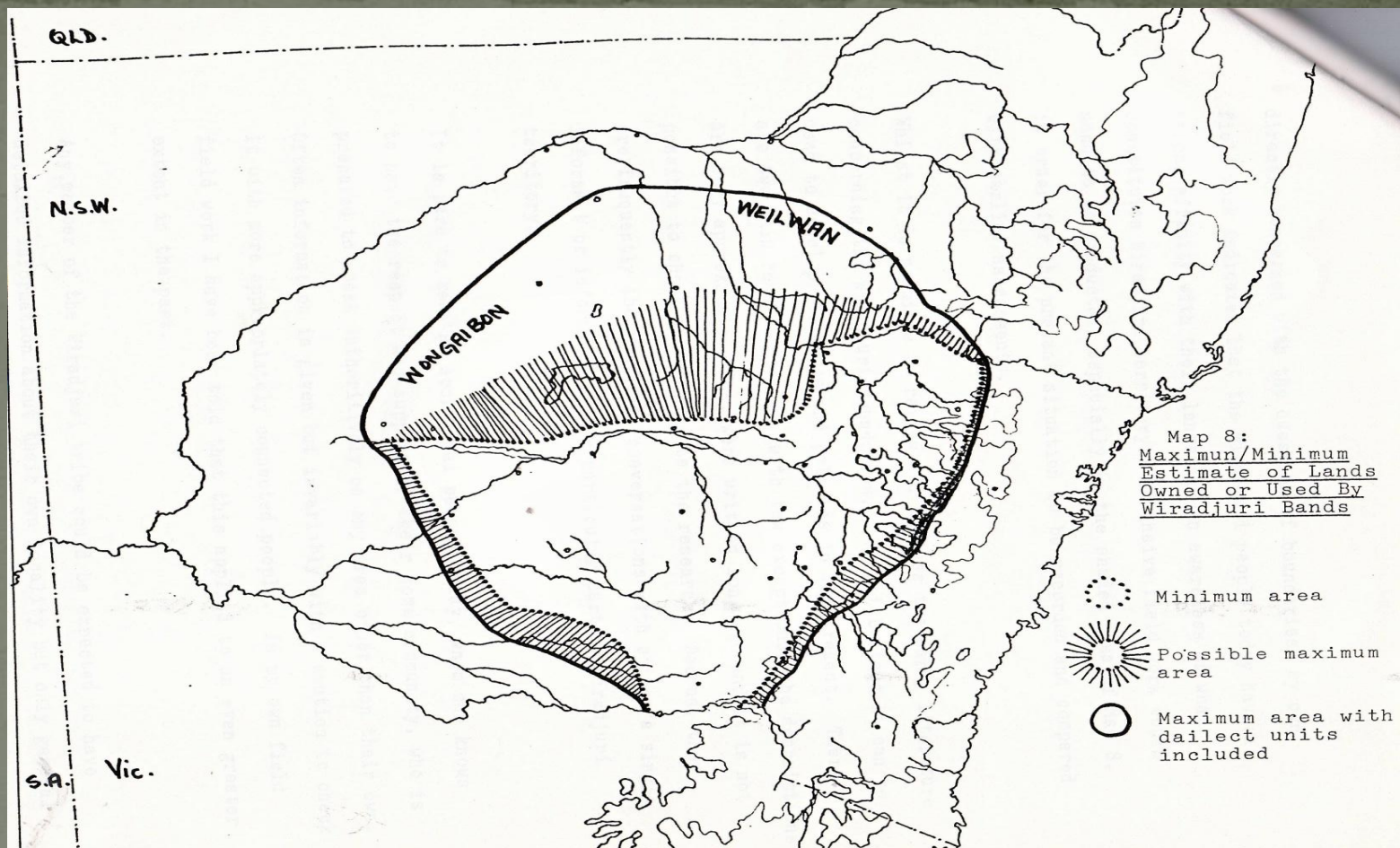
This is the area map of the Wanaruah LALC boundaries.

This show you were all of the river systems are and the mountain area's of the upper hunter valley.

Land classifications are also shown with all major population centres

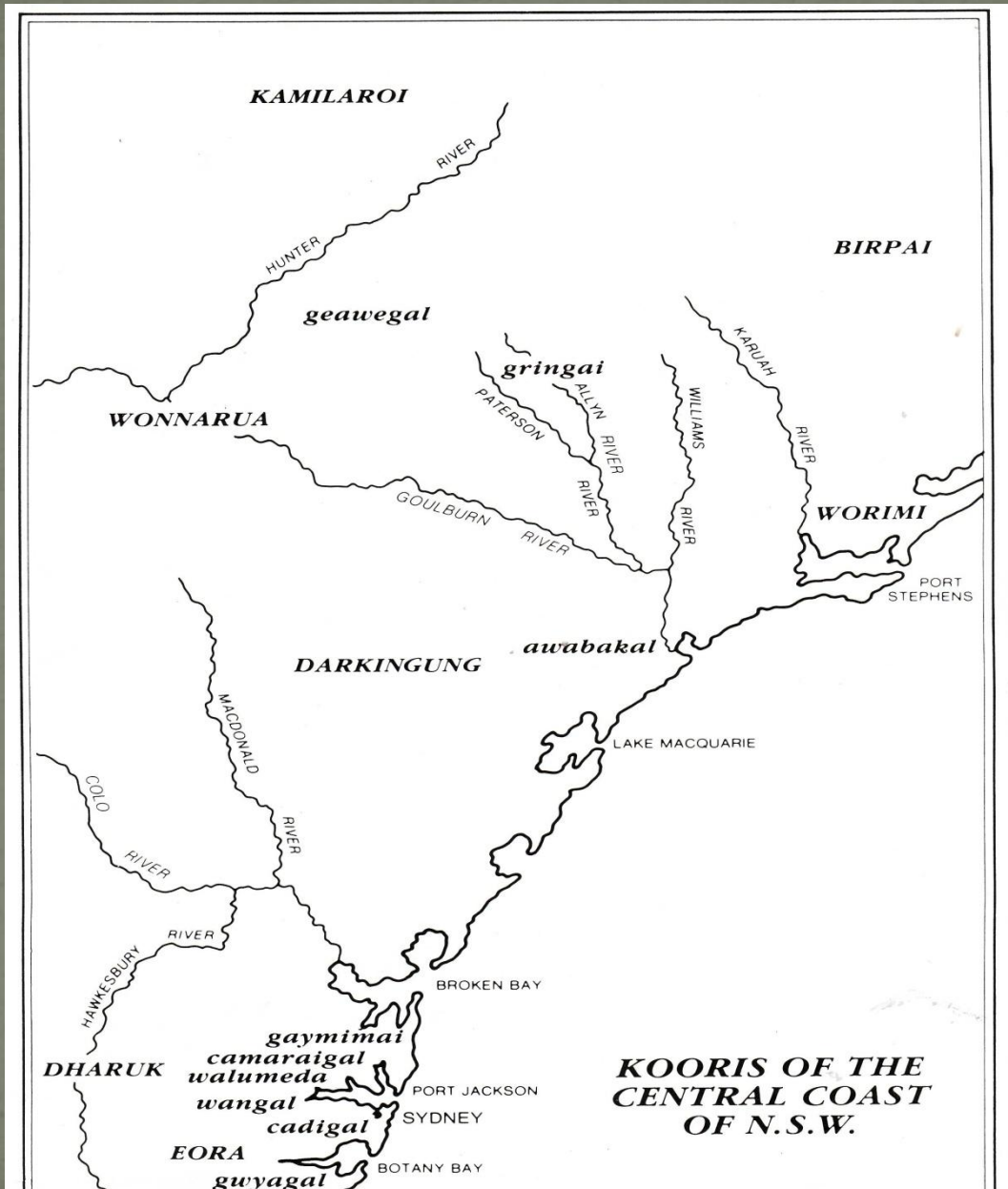






This map discusses possible boundaries and language groups that may have connection to the Wiradjuri people. The Wonnarua People should do the same and start looking at where our tribal lands start and finish. The boundaries must also be discussed with the other tribal groups in the region to agree on where our land ownership coming into conflict.



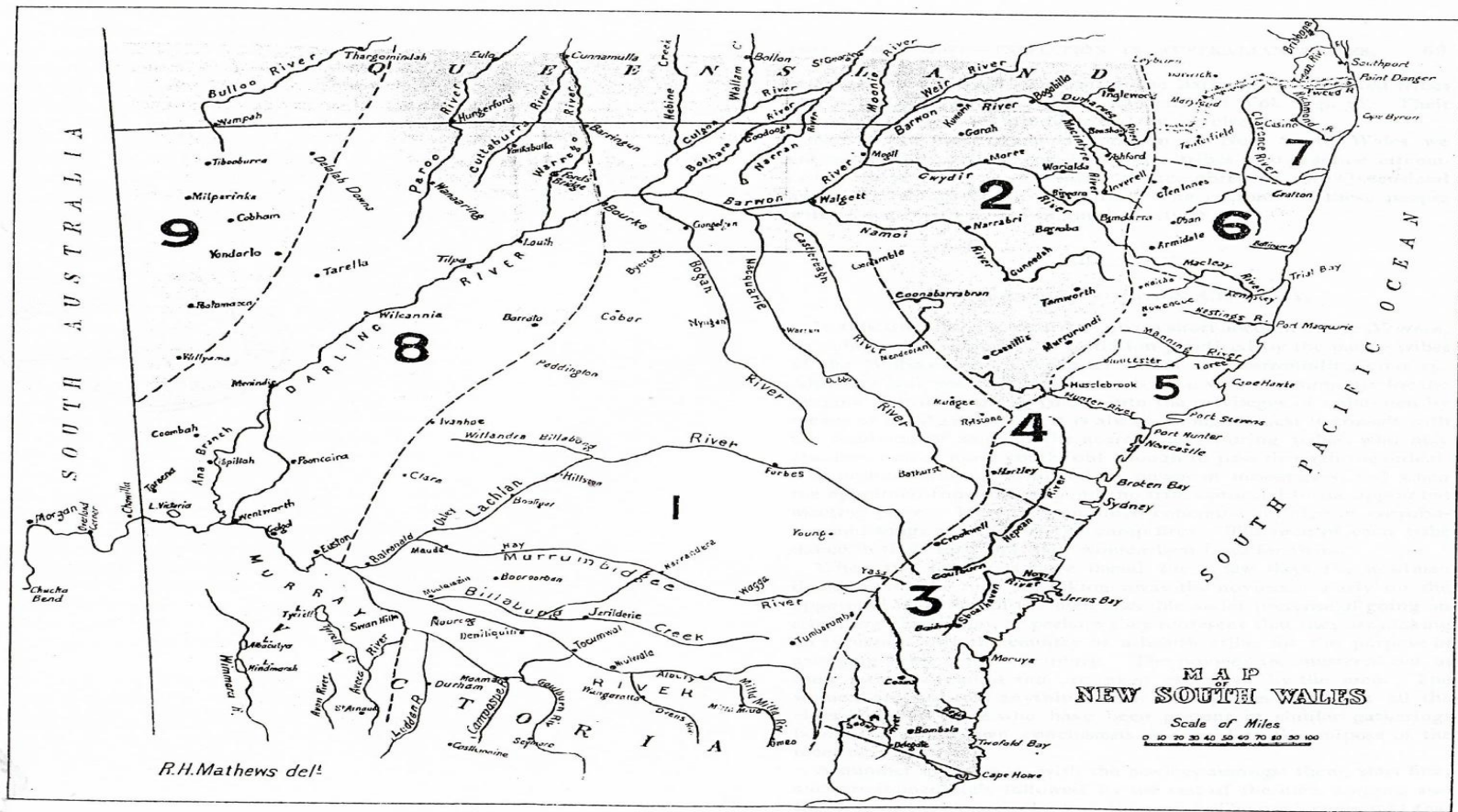


The Wonnarua people had many sub-groups and family knowledge holder's who's roll was two manage land inside the tribal group area.

The sub-group elder's had full control of the natural resources including all sacred objects inside the clan boundaries.

The Geawe-gal, Gringai and Awaba-gal were said to be a part of the Wonnarua language group and defended their clan areas against all other people. Aboriginal people are spiritually connected to their country and tribal wars were not fought to take peoples land.

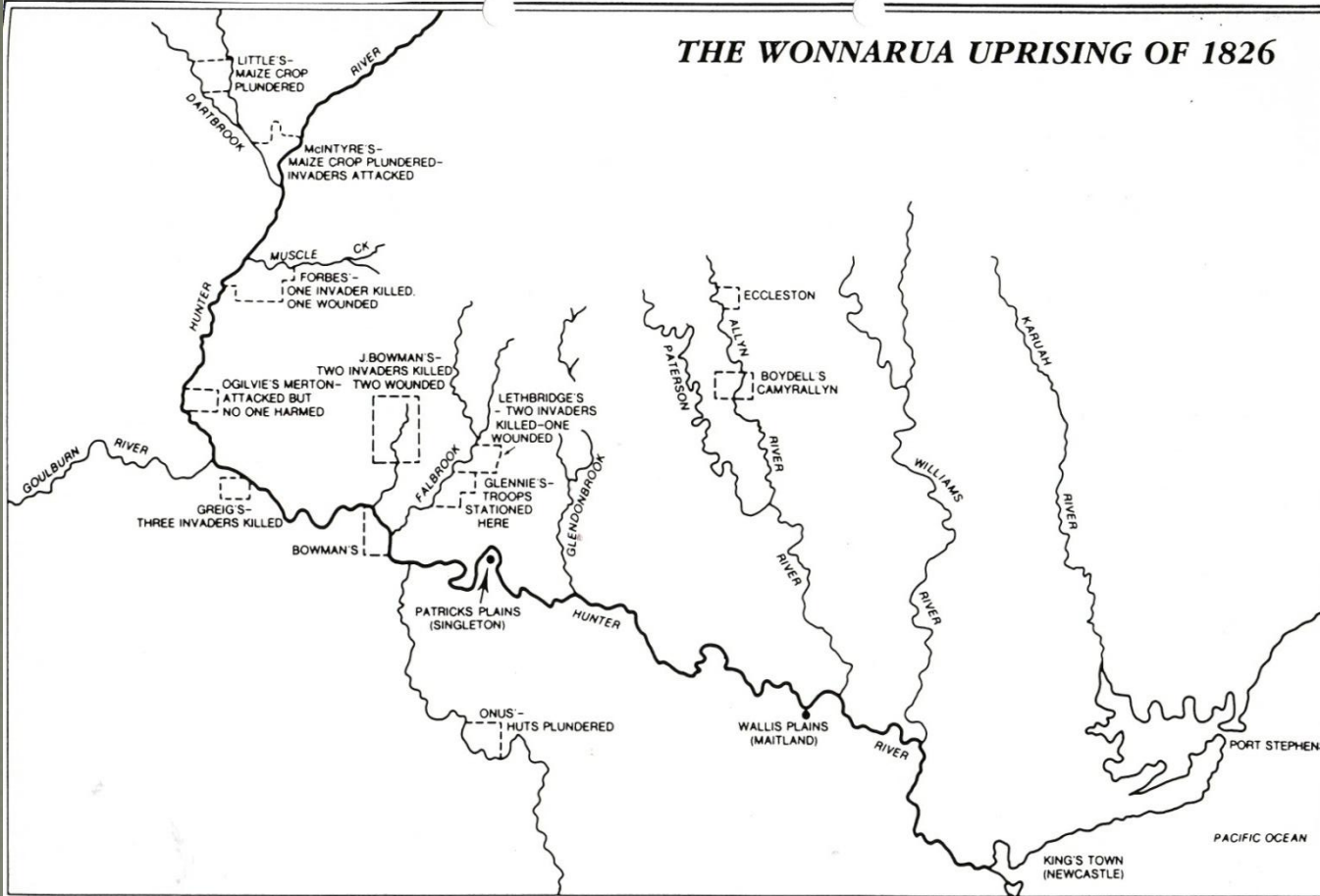




R.H. Matthews map of N.S.W looked at the river systems at the turn of the last century around 1900. This fellow recorded much about Aboriginal people in Australia and compiled research papers which have been published and can be read in the state library. Most of his accounts have come through second hand information passed on from the original sources, Matthews worked as the government surveyor during this period.



## THE WONNARUA UPRISING OF 1826

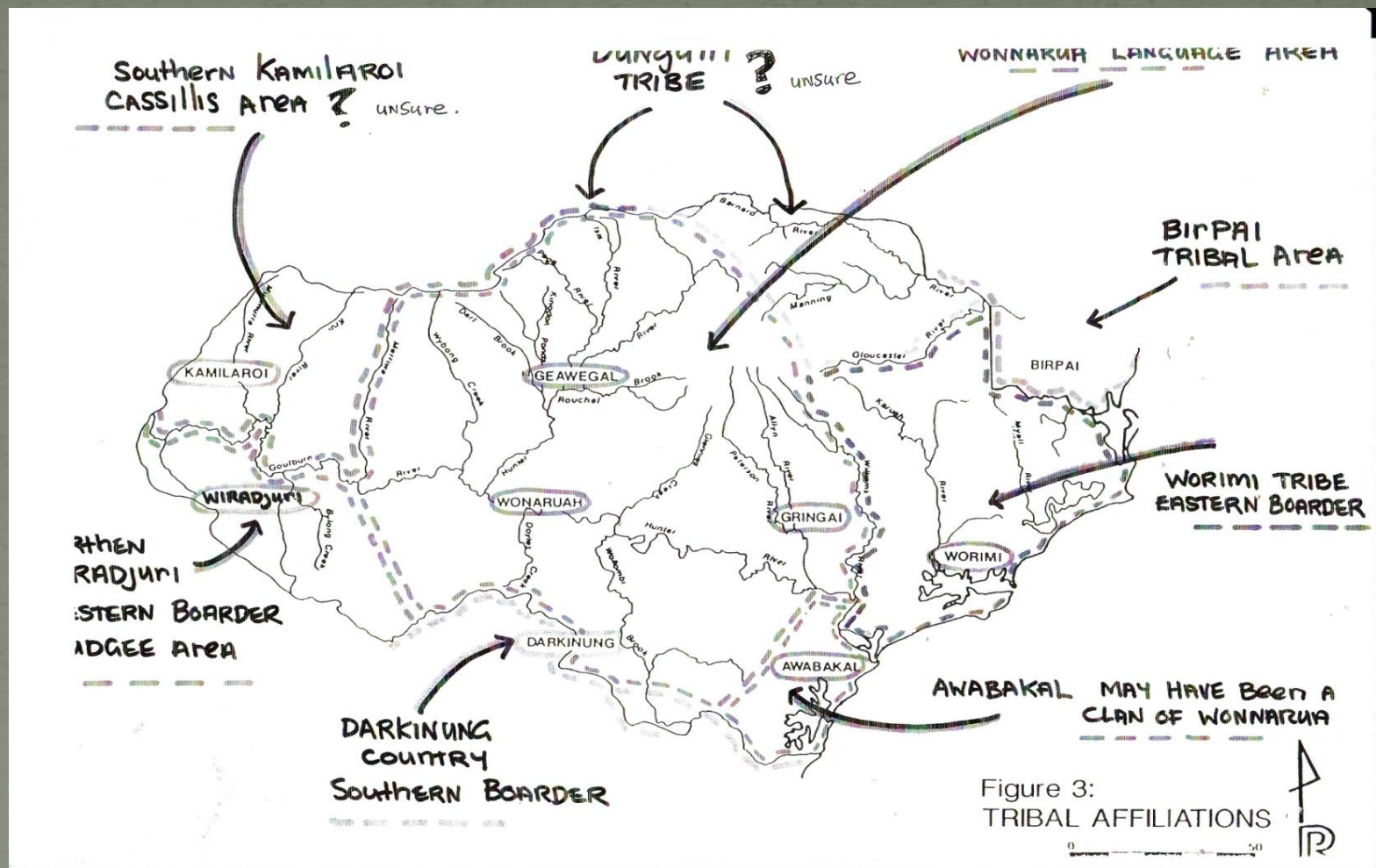


This map shows the areas where the Tribal Wonnarua people lead a general attack upon the English settler's in 1825-1826

The settlers attacked were known to the Wonnarua for their harsh treatment and acts of cruelty towards our people.

A state of open warfare existed in the hunter region for a number of years and the full story has been hid from the record book's and not included in the settlers history of the story of Australia.





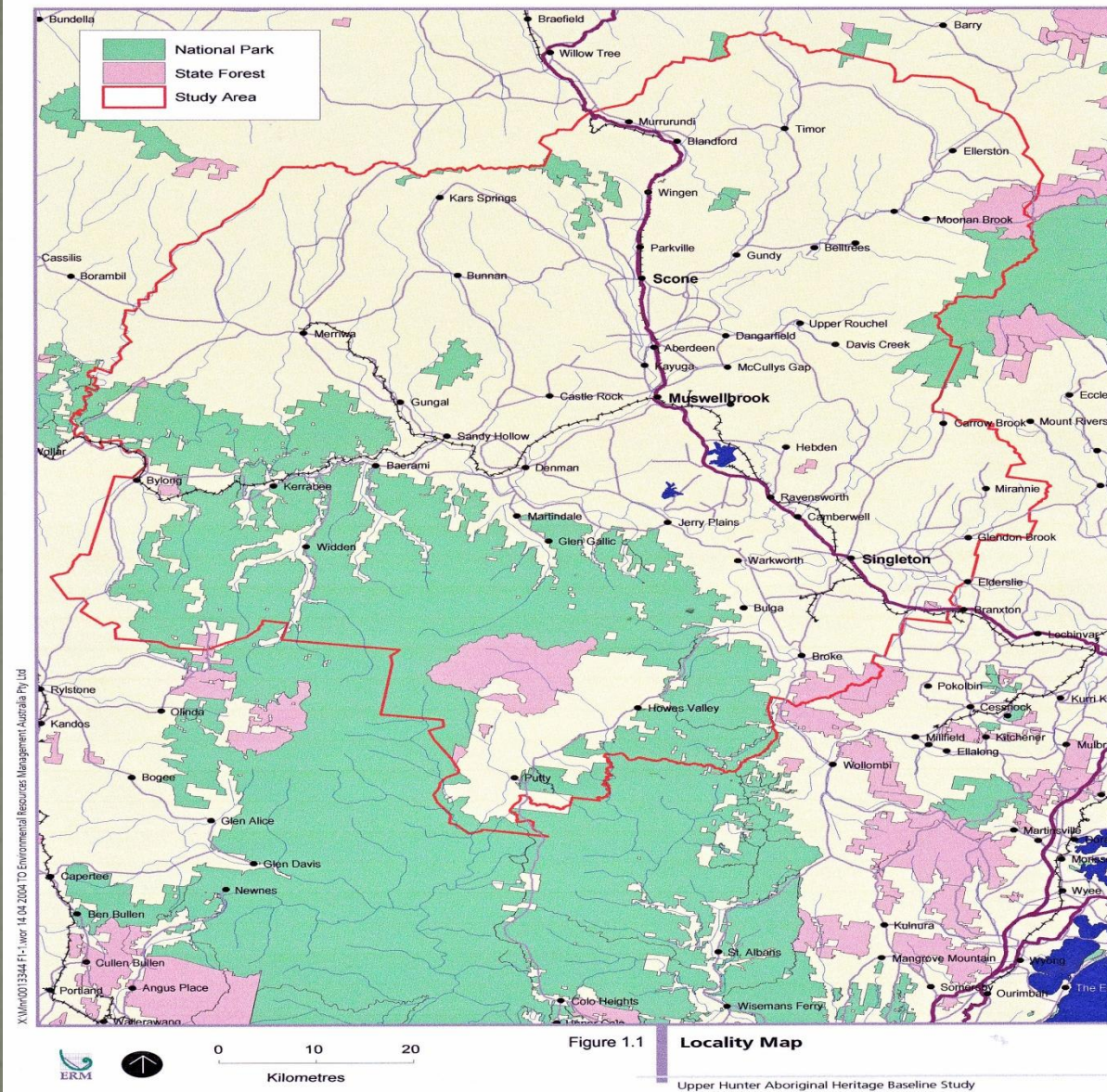
The tribal map above is now starting to get close two were we could say our Tribal boundaries are ... it shows tribal names and some locations of the other tribes already looked at...the Kamilaroi are wrongly placed and did not control this part of the region. but this map is somewhere near to were the Wonnarua had control.



This modern map is a good example of the region in it's current state.

The WLALC boundaries' outline is in red

National Parks and State Forests as well as major dams and highways can be seen.







This is another map which displays most of the modern day Wonnarua region that we live in. As you can see Singleton is almost in the middle of the region.



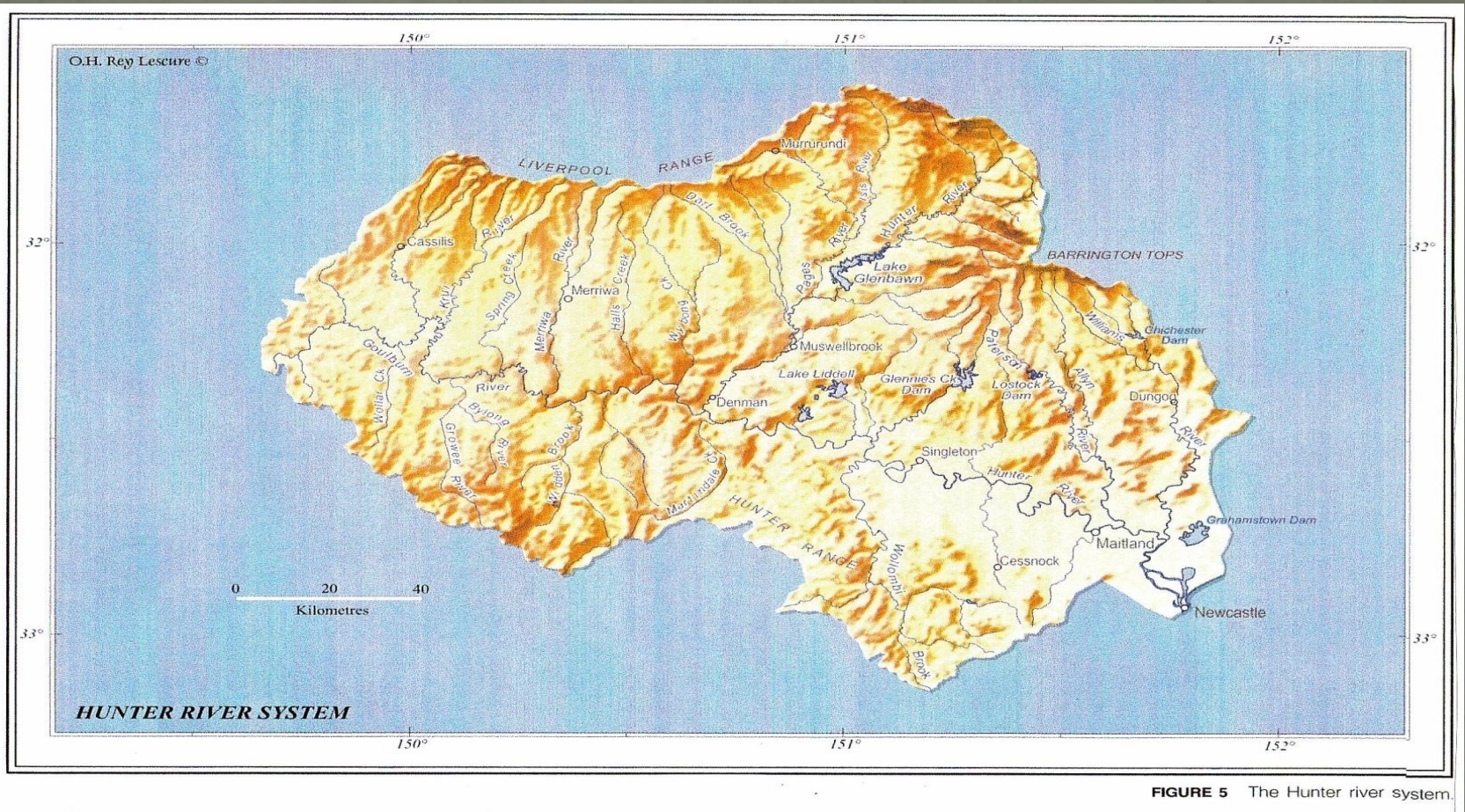
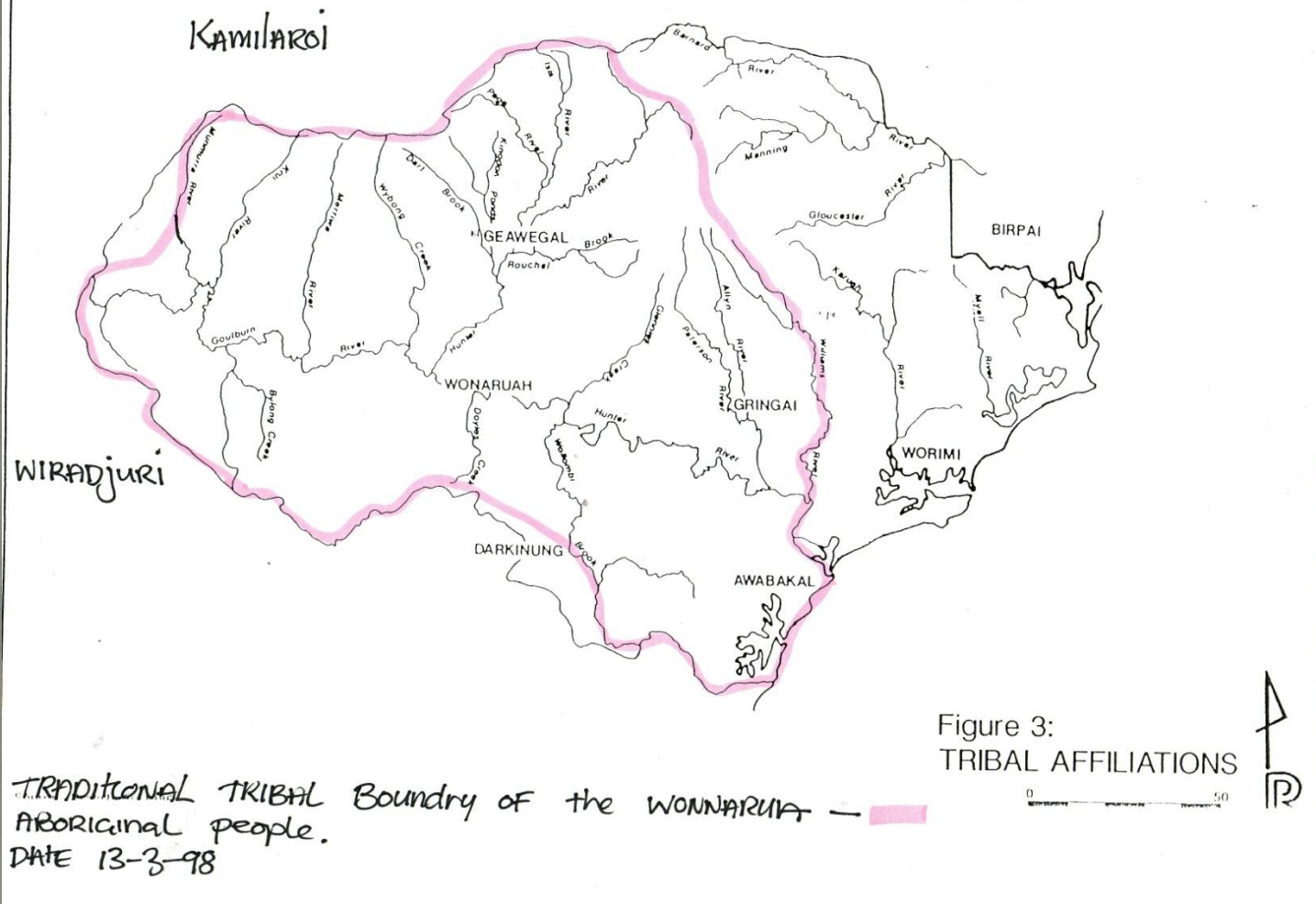


FIGURE 5 The Hunter river system.

This map is what I believe is about as close as we will get as a map of the Wonnarua Tribal area. It covers all of the river's and mountains associated with the greater Hunter Region and covers the natural features that make up the natural boundaries of the region.





Finally this is the last desktop map that we need to look at which is now very close to being Wonnarua country. This concludes the first look at the region as to discussing Aboriginal tribal boundaries. The following slides will cover pictures of the region and look at some of the boundaries in pictures.





This picture was taken south of the village of Wingen at the top of the Hunter Valley and shows a mythological natural feature with local story's attached to the mountain.



A closer picture shows the imagine of a woman sitting back and looking back down the valley .





This picture was taken on the Liverpool range next to the old highway looking east across the township of Murrurundi.





Another picture looking across and down the Hunter Valley from the Liverpool Range. Murrurundi is a Wonnarua word meaning [ five finger's] as there are five high mountain peak's that surround the township.





The Mountain in the back ground is called Mt Danger and is located in the sandy hollow region. This picture was taken from the middle of the Goulburn river facing west towards Wiradjuri country, there is also an initiation ground near this area. This mountain peak can be seen from Mt Arthur back above Muswellbrook.





this is a view of Wonnarua country , on the slopes of Mt Arthur facing north west. the township of Muswellbrook is located in the far right hand corner.



This picture is facing north east and is above the Bai-ame rock art site near Bulga via Singleton. This site would have been the first site of the Hunter region when you travelled up from Sydney as the old Putty Road passed by this view.





This picture shows the view of the hunter from Bulga to Singleton region facing to the north east.

The landscape is now changed as the area just below us has now been destroyed by the Mt Thorley open cut coal mine.







This view over looks the Mount Arthur North BHP owned Coal Mine, it is one of the highest points in the upper hunter region, it has been reported that this area was the scene of a massacre of 300 Wonnarua people in 1826. Most of what you can see has now been destroyed by the mine. Picture taken on top of Mt Arthur.



The next seven picture's were taken from the top of the Towwarri National Park looking back down the hunter region.

In the Wonnarua language the word Towwarri means Warrior therefore the name of the park means Warrior National Park.





This picture is facing south across the tops of the great dividing range.





What you are now looking at is an unknown natural feature that denotes what looks like a wall built sometime in the past, we are not sure but this stone arrangement could have been made pre-settlement to show the boundary between tribal nations. This stone arrangement is on top of the great dividing range.





The two people in the picture are National Parks staff and some of the first members of the public to have access to Towwarri National Park for over the last hundred or more years. This picture shows views of the upper hunter towards Scone, Wybong, Bunnan and in the distance Merriwa and Cassilis in the background.





This picture shows you another view from the top, but if you look at the centre of the picture you can see the Wingen Maiden from the right hand side of the mountain. The Wonnarua word for Wingen means Fire therefore the correct name is fire maiden.





This photo is facing north along the great dividing range.





This picture is looking across from the boundary between the Wonnarua and the Kamilaroi tribes from the top of the great dividing ranges.  
This picture shows the beginning of the Liverpool plains.





This area shows the eastern side of Mt Arthur mountain, the reason for this shot is to explain that this peak is located in the middle of the valley and can be seen very easily from Sugarloaf mountain in Newcastle.





This is one of the last examples of a canoe scared tree which is located in the middle of Wonnarua country not far from Singleton, the tree is on top of a hill and is a gentle walk to the river







The Scared Tree seen here in this shot is made from ironbark and comes from the Muswellbrook region.

The Scare was made by traditional methods using a stone axe to carve out the portion that was needed.

This tree shows the marking of a shield that was cut out sometime in the past by the local clan group in this area.

The tree has been treated for insects and tree mites to preserve it in as natural a state as possible.