

Alfred Howitt's "Last Great Battle of the Clans" (1)

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1855 in Gippsland was the year in which the chain of events which Howitt called the 'last great battle of the clans' occurred. These events started late in 1854 when between one and four Jaitmathang (Omeo Aboriginals) were killed at an unknown location somewhere between Sale and Dargo, by members of the Braiakaulung Kurnai. There followed a series of bold raids and 'payback', or revenge killings which culminated in a number of face to face confrontations of the two groups. These groups represented virtually all the surviving Aboriginals in Gippsland as well as a number from other tribes including those of Omeo and Mt Buffalo. These occurrences involved unusual alliances and were an example of the continuing decline and breakdown of tribal custom and organisation. To help understand this process of decline and before examining the events themselves, which have been called 'tribal warfare' by some, it is necessary to examine the various authorities on tribal sources and the main sources of the affairs.

Tribal Organisation and the Alliances

For many years I had a preference for Howitt's classification of Gippsland tribal organisation before changing to the more modern categorisation of Tindale the reasons for which it is not necessary to enter into here. (2) The main difference between Howitt and Tindale on Gippsland tribal organisation was that Howitt considered the Kurnai as a single tribal unit whereas Tindale considers each of Howitt's 'clans' as tribal units. Readers can examine the two maps below to see how closely the boundaries of Tindale correspond with those drawn by Howitt. (3) It is important to remember that Howitt's "clans" and Tindale's "tribes" were equivalent and all references to the Kurnai are referring to Tindale's five tribes. To further complicate matters one of the main sources - Phillip Pepper - uses the classification and spelling of Gippsland missionary John Bulmer. Finally English names, usually indicating the location where the various groups were found, were also used by various sources and given to the various tribal groups. Often several names were used to describe the same tribal remnants e.g. 'Port Albert' or 'Tarra' tribe for the Brataulung. In some instances the use of the European names has led more recent accounts, including those of Pepper, into elementary errors. I propose to continue using Tindale in this essay, but readers may need to refer to the table as all the various spellings of a name, and the classification, of the tribal group will reflect that of the source that is being quoted.

Tribal / Clan Names & Spelling (based mainly on Pepper p.288)

Location	English Names	Bulmer	Howitt	Tindale	Other
SW Gipps	Western Port	Boonoorong	Bunurong	Bunurong	
Mitchell R / Tambo	Bruthen Mitchell River Dargo	Brabuwoolung	Brabralung Brabrolung	Brabiralung	Howitt's sources often abbreviated
South Gipps	Port Albert Tarra	Bratawoloong	Brataualung	Brataulung	
Latrobe Avon Macalister	Sale, Bushy Park, Lakes	Brayakoloong	Brayakaulung	Braiakaulung	Place name Briagolong
Gipps Lakes	Lakes	Tatungoloong	Tatungalung	Tatungalung	
East Gipps fr. Lakes Entr.	Snowy River	Krowathunkoolung	Krauatalung	Krauatalung	Old shire name Croajingalong
Melb.	Melbourne		Wurunjeri	Wurundjeri	
Ovens R	Mt. Buffalo		Mogollumbitch	Minjambuta	
Vic. Alps	Omeo		Yaitmathang Theddora	Jaitmathang	
Monaro	Monaro	Ngarigo	Ngarigo	Ngarigo	

The events of 1855 split the previously allied Kurnai tribes of Gippsland into two roughly equal groups. Those congregating around Sale and Bushy Park included all the remaining

Braiakaulung and Bratauolung, a minority of the Brabiralung and possibly at times some 'brajerak' from Melbourne, formed a body which, for want of a better title, I will call the 'Sale' group. The second group comprised most of the Brabiralung, the surviving Tatungalung, and the brajerak Jaitmathang, with at times the Krauatungalung, the brajerak Minjambuta (Mt. Buffalo) and the brajerak Ngarigo (Monaro) which I designate the 'Tambo' group.(4) Hopefully, with the benefit of the accompanying table, readers will readily be able to discern one tribe and group from another.

B. Sources

The main sources used are as follows: the accounts of Alfred Howitt in his two major published works which, of course, use his own tribal classification and variable spelling; those of surveyor William Dawson, as quoted in Charles Daley, which uses English locations for the tribes; that of Phillip Pepper in his two publications which is part Aboriginal folk history and part Dawson account and uses the tribal spelling of the Reverend Bulmer.(5) There is also a brief note by Mrs Montgomery of the Heart on one of the raids which I quote below in full. All accounts are reliable in their own way, and all have errors, though in the case of Howitt these are minor. Howitt's main source was Bobby Bundawal, a Tatungalung tribal member, also known as King Bobby, who was a participant in many, though not all, of the events. This unfortunately left a number of 'blanks' in the Howitt accounts. The sources for William Dawson's letter books must have been Dawson himself, though he uses at least one other highly coloured European account for the first raid on Sale and for another he must have used an Aboriginal source. When Phillip Pepper uses Aboriginal folk history he is at his most insightful. When he extrapolates from Dawson he lapses into a number of errors some of which I will outline below or in the notes. (6)

C. Population

A close scrutiny of the tribal population numbers helps provide answers to a number of the problems surrounding these events. The actual size of the Kurnai population (and to a much lesser extent the other tribes) in 1855 is extremely important. It clearly indicates that seemingly separate events described by the various sources must actually be differing accounts of the same event. The total tribal population for Gippsland, and the other participating tribes, was already far too small to allow what appear at first to have been different events to have happened at approximately the same time and in the same locality. Thus, even though the variation in sources would seem to indicate otherwise, it was most unlikely for them to be separate events. The total population of the Kurnai tribes in 1855 is crucial in determining this theory of these events and the estimates of their casualties.

C.J. Tyers at his blanket handouts in 1854 counted 126 individuals to the exclusion of the Krauatungalung. Allowing for those missed in the blanket handout at about the same number gives a total for the Kurnai tribes at the end of 1854 at about 250. In 1860 William Thomas in a far more thorough census counted just 222 Kurnai. (7) The numbers of the other tribes were also considered to be very low, in the case of both the Jaitmathang and Minjambuta, estimates being from a handful left to claims of them being extinct. (8) I estimate the total number of Kurnai at this time at between 252 to 329 men, women and children, with a most likely figure of around 300. (9) My total estimate of the maximum population of all the tribes involved is 400 men women and children comprised approximately of ninety brajerak and three hundred and ten Kurnai (10). Of these the maximum numbers of the two groups would have been approximately as follows: Sale group one hundred and thirty and the Tambo two hundred and seventy (11). If twenty percent of these figures are allowed for non-combatants then the Sale group had one hundred and five men and women warriors and the Tambo group up to two hundred and twenty. These maximum figures indicate that the count of 'two hundred' given to the Tambo group on one occasion must have included women. The outcome of each of the events, along with the presence of firearms, seems to be a fairly reliable indicator of the numbers involved. Except for one example the raids were conducted by much smaller, heavily armed parties - probably up to a maximum of about fifty warriors. The confrontations probably involved up to about one hundred on each side.

These relatively small numbers help explain some of the riddles surrounding these events. They explain, for instance, why the Jaitmathang had to have other allies - they had insufficient warriors of their own to mount a successful raid. And at least this is a part explanation of the unusual alliances showing why they were necessary but not how they actually occurred. The number of 'similar' events described by the different accounts must actually have been the same one. Howitt, for instance, appears to have described the event initiating the 'battle of the clans' on two separate occasions, being apparently unaware that they were descriptions of possibly the same event.(12) This event is also described by Pepper. Secondly the Pepper account of the tribal 'battle' at Swan Reach of the Brabiralung with the 'Port Albert' tribe is almost certainly the same event that Dawson describes as the raid on the Snowy River tribe where up to six were killed. I will expand this thesis in more detail below including some of the problems it involves.

D. Tribal Warfare and the Tribal Alliances

I have examined the question of tribal warfare elsewhere and argued that the European contact irrevocably altered these events so that they could no longer be considered 'tribal war.' The 1855 'battles' were definitely part of this altered system. I have also argued that the casualties in these affairs tend to have been exaggerated, especially by Europeans and the descriptions offered by at least one of these observers was colourful and exaggerated. Smyth wrote:

"To a stranger - one new to the country - a great fight amongst the natives is calculated to create alarm. The decorations of the warriors...their loud cries as they advance, the shaking of their spears, the rattling of the clubs and other weapons as they strike the shields or the trees, the wailing of the women, and the general aspect of the assembled tribes, all - even including the groupings of the dogs - showing a state of unusual excitement and turmoil, are likely enough to raise the feelings of terror." (13)

The account given to Dawson of the Sale raid and recorded by him is of this nature.

But the distortions of tradition that occurred in the 1855 clashes were numerous. Howitt wrote that: "The alliance of the clans with the alien Brajerak was an innovation brought about by intercourse with the whites." (14) Of the two groups formed during 1855 the "Sale" group possibly had the assistance of 'brajerak' from either Melbourne or Westernport on one or more occasions and the 'Tambo' group - the eastern tribes - were allied with the Jaitmathang from Omeo plus at least on one occasion a number of other 'outside' tribes including those from Mt. Buffalo and the Monaro. After fifteen years of the occupation of Gippsland by the Europeans, the former tribal enmity, that of united Kurnai tribes against the brajerak, had disappeared. With the passing of this enmity it was possible for intermarriage to occur between the various groups and it was trouble in one of these 'mixed' marriages that initiated the 1855 chain of raids and clashes. The claim by Phillip Pepper that the Minjambuta were 'traditional allies' of the Brabiralung is an error. Prior to the advent of the Europeans the Minjambuta and the Jaitmathang were the 'traditional allies' and spoke the same language. But they were then very definitely the traditional enemies of the Brabiralung who spoke the completely different Kurnai language. These were the same groups who were on opposing sides 13 years earlier that were involved in the slaughter at Tambo Crossing. (15)

E. The Sequence of Events

1. The series of events appears to have begun when a small group, of mainly Jaitmathang, moved into Gippsland and camped with a group of Braiakaulung. Howitt wrote:

"about twenty years ago" (ie c.1854) "two Brajerak families came into Gippsland in company with some Brabrolung from the Dargo River. The Kurnai (Braiakaulung), among whom these visitors were encamped, did not molest them because 'they were brought in by the Dargo men who were Brabrolung and our brothers.' It was only when the Brajerak families quarrelled with their hosts, and separated, that the Briaka men attacked and killed them." (16)

It appears that Howitt did not associate this clash with the one he later described in which Billy Blew was killed. But as stated previously it is unlikely that there were two completely separate and unrelated events of this kind in the same area and at about the same time. This clash was not in Dargo but somewhere towards Bushy Park. Howitt describes the event again when: "...one of the Theddora (ie Omeo) men named Billy Blew obtained a Brayaka woman for his wife. When on a visit to his wife's people, he ill-used her, and in consequence her father Kaiung, fought with him and speared him so that he died." (17) In the first description "two brajerak families" of Jaitmathang are killed and in the second only the Jaitmathang Billy Blew is killed by his father-in-law. In both accounts a small group of Jaitmathang comes into Gippsland and camped with a group of Brayakaulung, at about the same time. There is a fight and one or more is slain. The Pepper account which is based on Dawson noted: "During the spring of 1854 a small group of Tatungaloong left the lakes and were hunting along the Avon when they saw a camp of Jaitmathang tribesmen from Omeo. They 'rushed' the camp and killed four men."(18) Pepper is in error here probably because Dawson called the people in Sale 'Lakes blacks' and he appears to have assumed that they were therefore members of the Tatungalung tribe. However this is most unlikely as the Tatungalung population was already severely depleted and they were, as we will see below, on the same side as the Jaitmathang. The number killed in this event was between one and four of which they were all, or mostly, Jaitmathang. Howitt's accounts are more detailed and appear more accurate. Although Pepper's estimate of the number of deaths may be correct other aspects of his story are unlikely. I would argue that these are three disparate accounts of the same event.

2. For the killing of Billy Blew there followed a reprisal raid by the Jaitmathang and others, including Johnny, a Tatungalung, who killed Kaiung and a Kurnai named Lohnni in Sale early in the morning of the 27 January 1855.(19) Dawson, recorded in Daley, noted:

"on January 27, 1855, the Omeo blacks attacked the blacks at Sale, and several were killed or wounded. Although the blacks' camp was close to the police station, and some of the local natives sought shelter in the settler's homes, the raiders showed extreme boldness. Mr D. Manson, who was camped in the vicinity, wrote an eye-witness account:"The Omeo blacks came in as far as they could under cover of night, and when daylight broke they attacked the Tarra blacks with spears and boomerangs. The Tarra blacks had little chance in the fight, and many of them were killed. It was awful to see some of them with jagged spears right through the body."" (20)

It appears most likely that only two were killed and a number of others wounded during this raid. The attackers must have been comprised of all the Omeo tribesmen, up to twenty in number, with allies from the Brabiralung, Tatungalung and perhaps some Minjambuta to form a raiding party of up to a maximum of fifty warriors. The alliances between the Kurnai and the brajerak came about possibly because of intermarriage, but also through the necessity of having sufficient warriors for an enterprise of this kind to have any chance of success. Possibly Tatungalung Johnny was travelling with, or related to, Billy Blew or one of the other Jaitmathang victims of the first clash. It is of note that on at least two of these occasions when the 'Sale' group were on the defensive, or at a perceived disadvantage, they sought the protection of Europeans - some gaining entrance to their houses and outbuildings.

3. After the raid on Sale 'Dargo Jimmy', a nephew of Kaiung, but a Brabiralung, killed Johnny in revenge for his (Kaiung's) death at an unknown location named Aitkens Straits, probably in the vicinity of the Mosquito Point Run between Lakes Victoria and Reeves. (21) The date of this payback killing is also unknown but must have been either in late February or early March 1855. The skin of Johnny was found in a tree at Aitkens Straits. The skin of a slain brajerak enemy was traditionally consumed. It is not known why Johnny was skinned as both victor and victim were Kurnai and any form of cannibalism within the group was forbidden. Possibly some part of the victim was eaten and this may have either been another example of the breakdown of tribal law or Johnny may have been killed by brajerak associated with the Sale group. But the latter is most unlikely as the perpetrator, 'Dargo Jimmy', was almost certainly tracked to Merriman's Creek. Thus the identifying of 'Dargo Jimmy' was most likely correct in this case

especially as the 'intelligence' of both groups appears to have been remarkably accurate. In each clash the identities of the individuals targeted by the opposing groups appears to have been known.

4. In response to the murder of Johnny the core of the 'Tambo' group, a large group made up of Tatungalung, Brabiralung and Jaitmathang including Flanner and Bundawal [but only male] who were both close relations of Johnny, killed 'Dargo Jimmy' at Merrimans Creek Station, in March 1855. Howitt recorded the narrative of Bundawal:

"I had two wives, both from Brt-britta. One of these had been married to the man who killed my brother Johnny at Aitken's Straits. I then collected all the men from Bruthen, Wy-Yung and Binnajerra, for all my own men had died or been killed, so that there were only boys left. But these others were like my own people. We all sneaked around to Merriman's Creek, where we found a Dargo man and Flanner speared him. We let him lie there and did not eat his skin. As he was a Brayaka, we went to the Heart to look for them." (22)

The Tambo group then went further into South Gippsland before returning to the Heart where possibly the first major confrontation - a formal and agreed facing off of the groups and appearing to adhere to tribal rules - occurred. Alternatively this may have been a failed raid as Mrs Montgomery alludes to below.

5. The composition of the two groups at this clash at the Heart was as follows: the Sale group was made up of Briakaulung, Brataualung and some Brabiralung, whilst the Tambo group was comprised of Tatungalung, Brabiraling, and Jaitmathang. The confrontation or raid at the Heart occurred in March after which the Tambo group retreated to Lakes Entrance and there were no casualties. The Sale group appears to have had assistance of local Police. Dawson recorded: "Later in the year there was another incursion of northern blacks. One Sale black was speared and others attacked at The Heart. Some of the invaders had guns, and nearly all the male population of the district was sworn in as special constabulary." (23) The same event was described by Mrs Montgomery:

"The quietness of our ordinary life was broken one morning by the news that the Omeo blacks were contemplating a descent on the Sale blacks, and the news that there was to be a 'big Pfella fight' spread rapidly. The tribes were at the time very unfriendly, and our tribe was terrified at the prospect of an encounter with a tribe of superior numbers, so they asked permission to come in closer to the homestead, where they would feel safer. They were allowed to do so, and they took their blankets into the stables, sheds and lofts. My husband was anxious to prevent bloodshed at such close quarters, so he rode into Sale and asked for police protection for the homestead for a day or two. Three troopers came, and everyone kept watch that night. Towards daylight, our blacks gave the word that the enemy was stealing round the fences and making for the huts, so the police rushed out, fired a couple of volleys in the direction of the intruders (but over their heads) which had the effect of dispersing them in a most magical fashion they fled to the Lakes Entrance..." (24)

Bundawal noted that at The Heart: "We found a number of Dargo, Brayaka and Bratua there, and we fought them: but we were beaten because they had guns as well as spears, and they were helped by two of the black police, and one police trooper. We ran away and left everything behind us, only taking our spears."(25)

6. The next intrusion by the Tambo group was a large scale affair involving all the different tribal groups. Dawson noted: "between one and two hundred blacks from the Tambo River came near Sale to avenge the attack. They named five natives they intended to kill, and induced four of McMillan's blacks to join them. The threatened blacks got away to Tarraville with police protection." (26) Bundawal described how the group was put together and what eventuated:

"By this time the white men had brought so many Brajerak from Manero and Omeo with them into Gippsland that we and they had become friendly. So we got the Manero men to promise to help us, and we went round the mountains to Omeo with them. There we got Nukong, their Headman, also to help us, and he sent a messenger to the men at the Ovens River and Mount

Buffalo to send help, and it was arranged that we should meet them at Bushy Park Station. When we got back we went to the meeting-place, where the men from the Ovens River and Mt Buffalo met us. We had gone there to get some food, and to see some of the Brabralung and Dargo men. There could be no fewer than two hundred of us: at least the white men there counted us, and told us so...We went all over the place, even down to the Tarra River, but could not meet our enemies." (27)

This affair was thus bloodless. The Tambo group returned to the Mitchell River where the Minjambuta and the Ngarigo returned home, whilst a messenger was sent to the Snowy River people for help. There are two problems associated with this event - the large numbers of the Tambo group involved and the date Dawson ascribes to his occasion which does not seem to fit. If Dawson's date of September is correct then the following events occurred much later. Allowing for the fact that both the Minjambuta and Ngarigo had substantial journeys over high country usually covered with winter snow I am inclined to believe Dawson somehow either mixed his dates or his description or the number of two hundred may have been a substantial exaggeration. It is most likely that this incursion happened in May or early June at the latest and that the warriors from these mountain tribes necessarily returned to their own country before the first heavy snowfalls.

7. The first definite confrontation of the two groups appears to have been about halfway between current Stratford and Bairnsdale as they agreed to fight at Deighton and did so. (28) There was again no casualty on this occasion, and the Tambo group was much depleted with only some of the Jaitmathang, Krautungalung, Tatungalung, and Brabiralung present. The Tambo group retreated again and this event took place in June or July. Bundawaal noted: "It was decided by the Dargo old men that the fight should take place near Dighton. We went there, and fought, but no one was killed. They were too strong for us, and ran us back to the Mitchell River." (29)

8. There followed the next confrontation by the Sale group comprised most likely of all their able-bodied males. Dawson noted: "By way of reprisal the Sale blacks made a predatory excursion and killed six Snowy River natives and wounded others. This led to an active hostile raid in revenge." (30) By identifying 'Snowy River natives' Dawson implies that the raid was to the Snowy River country. If so he was mistaken in identifying the Snowy as the place of the raid or of the Krauatungalung as those killed. Such a raiding party would have had to pass almost the whole distance through the country of their current enemies and the event described by Pepper as occurring at the mouth of the Tambo River is the most likely place for this clash to have occurred. This party from the Sale group appears to have travelled to the mouth of the Tambo where they appear to have engaged in a set 'battle' with the Tambo group in about July or August. (31) The latter suffered up to six deaths and other casualties and the story is recounted in Phillip Pepper's *You Are What You Make Yourself To Be*. Pepper's grandfather's (Billy Thorpe) parents were both killed in this conflict. Pepper noted that "the tribes met at the mouth of the Tambo River and they had a terrible battle, a lot of them killed and wounded on both sides." Pepper's account suggests the clash to have been a traditional battle, rather than a surprise raid, with the two sides facing each other for most of day. However unlike a traditional battle at least two women appear to have been killed, as were a number of others. Pepper relates the special folk story of the two young boys (one his grandfather) following the adults towards the designated place of battle. But they were discovered and placed in a hollow log and therefore did not witness any of the battle, but the detail of their story rings true:

"The children were left in the camp with all the old people or anyone sick, they never went to the fights. Billy and George were only lads and after the warriors left they nicked off after 'em, following for miles without being caught. They got to part of the country where a fire had been through and they had a job hiding there, just burnt trees stumps and logs. They got spotted. Well, it was too far back to the old people, so their parents left them there, but well hidden in an old hollow log covered over with branches...My parents were both dead in the battle and so were George's. Kitty took us and reared us up." (32)

But other parts of Pepper's account could not possibly have been true. For instance, their opponents could not have solely been the 'Port Albert', or 'Tarra blacks', as Pepper suggests, as the numbers of this group - the remnants of the Bratauolung - were few at this time with only approximately twenty men, women and children remaining. Thus the Bratauolung alone were most unlikely to have participated in this tribal 'battle' or even been a major grouping in the participants, although a handful of their warriors were probably part of this confrontation. They were almost certainly just part of the full component of warriors that the Sale group could muster. It is likely that firearms carried by the Sale group were the reason for the relatively heavy list of casualties inflicted on their opponents.

The general gist of the Pepper account appears valid and therefore I conclude the clash occurred not on the Snowy River but at the mouth of the Tambo. The clash was not just Brabiralung versus 'Port Albert' as Pepper implies, but the same two groups with members of the same component tribes including the Krauatungalung. The importance of this event is not realised by Howitt, whose main source, Bundawal, cannot have been present. He does however note that two Krauatungalung had been killed or wounded, in a single sentence seemingly unrelated to the series of the events. Referring to the last clash Bundawal noted that "the Snowy River men would not come, for they were frightened, two of their men having been speared" and that the Sale group were "painted in red ochre because they had killed our men"(33)

A possible explanation for this is that the Krauatungalung and the Brabiralung of the Tambo group were both involved and opposed to most of Sale group at the Tambo mouth. The Krauatungalung would have been a substantial proportion if not the largest component of this group. Then the six reportedly killed by Dawson would be comprised of the four Brabiralung as reported by Pepper and two Krauatungalung as reported by Howitt. Again it is most unlikely that there were two similar but different events occurring about the same time. (34)

9. The fourth large scale confrontation of the two groups occurred somewhere in the vicinity of Bushy Park or Sale most likely on September 7 1855. This time the Tambo group was triumphant with several of the Sale group speared, one shot, and several women taken. The number of fatalities, if any, is not known. The Bundawal narrative continues:

"We must send a message to the Dargo men where to meet us, but we must be quick and get to Bushy Park. We had with us some Omeo men, with their headman, Nukong. Our Headman was Bruthen-munji. On the morning on which we were to fight, we were all ready and were painted with pipe-clay, because we were very angry at our men being killed, and also to frighten our enemies. They were painted with red ochre, because they had killed our men. We were seated in a long row with our spears on the ground. Our women were in front beating on the 'possum rugs'..."[35]

and

"Then a Brabralung man came to us; he was a messenger sent to us; we knew him and he was our friend, and the husband of 'Old Nanny'. He said, 'There are not many of you'. Bruthen-munji replied, 'Never mind, we will see.' He then ordered the women to go back out of danger and made a great speech. He told us that we should beat them. Then we fought, and a Kuntbuntaura man was speared and the others ran away. There was a running fight as they ran, leaving all their things behind them. By and by I shot one man, and others were speared. Several women were caught, and some of the Brabralung men ran down a Brt-brita woman, but could not keep her, as they were too nearly related..."(36)

Note that there were Brabiralung on both sides and that there appear also to have been Dargo men on both sides. The Tambo group was the smaller on this occasion and women were involved on both sides. Aside from the use of guns and the presence of the Jaitmathang this clash may be considered almost a traditional one. This appears to have been the last event of significance in the battle of the clans.

F. Conclusions

1. The 'Sale group' was the far more cohesive of the two being almost totally Kurnai whereas both the 'Tambo group' numbers and its constituent members were waxing and waning

continually. It would appear that a number of Brabiralung moved between the two sides. Also the Minjambuta and the Ngarigo probably only participated in one of the early incursions, which although wide ranging, was without incident. Without the Krauatungalung participating the size of the 'Tambo group' was approximately halved.

2. The use of guns – old muskets or shotguns - by both sides was prominent but not continuous. Where guns were used the side using them appears to have had the upper hand. It can thus be surmised that the Sale group had firearms in the clash at the mouth of the Tambo, because of the apparent one-sided nature of the affair. There does not appear to have been an occasion when the firearms held by each side were equal or of there being a stalemate, which must have often occurred in the pre-European era.

3. Besides the use of firearms the obvious distortions caused by Europeans to the traditional battle included the numbers killed and the alliances with former tribal enemies. It would seem that these raids were carried out in the usual traditional manner as when the Kurnai were against the brajerak. These raids were carried out by males only and were rapid and often involved a dawn or early morning attack on their enemies most commonly for the purpose of stealing women. The raid was never employed within the Kurnai tribes and was thus a distortion. The traditional confrontations which I believe were what Howitt thought of as 'intra tribal' and (ie between Kurnai clans or Tindale's tribes) involved both sexes with the two groups facing each other at a time and location agreed to between both parties. Since the confrontations excluded 'brajerak' this aspect of the events was also a distortion.

4. As remarked earlier the Sale group did not hesitate to use, or ask for, European assistance when they were at a perceived disadvantage - when they were outnumbered or less well armed than their opponents.

5. The numbers killed have been exaggerated but the mortality figure was probably still far higher than would ever have been killed in a traditional 'intra-tribal' dispute. Usually the latter would be completely settled with one of the combatants being wounded and certainly on the death of any single person involved. Over a period of about twelve months a maximum of eighteen Aborigines were probably killed, including between one and four Jaitmathang. But it is more likely that there were about 12 fatalities.

6. There still remain a number of discrepancies in the accounts and it is difficult to fit some of Dawson's dates and accompanying accounts with the general outline I have provided. I have assumed that the September 7 clash of Dawson's is the last in the series of events. Yet his description of the numbers of the Tambo group more readily fits an earlier intrusion. The maximum number of the Tambo group as reported by both Dawson and Howitt of up to 200 can only have occurred either during the intrusion that including all the 'brajerak' tribes or alternatively included females in the count as well.

7. It is also difficult to ascertain exactly when the raids finished and the confrontations began. The event described by Mrs. Montgomery was probably the last of the raids. That event at the mouth of the Tambo River - differently described by Pepper and Dawson - was almost certainly a confrontation and incidentally the event where most of the casualties occurred.

Notes

1. from account by Howitt, A.W. & Fison, L. *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, George Robertson, Melbourne, 1880 p.217. This essay was originally written about 2005 and used as the basis for a lecture during Heritage Week 2013. Revised and published online in March 2015

2. Gardner, P.D. *Through Foreign Eyes*, Centre for Gippsland Studies, Churchill, 1987 p.90-1

3. Gardner, P.D. *Gippsland Massacres*, Ngarak Press, Ensay, 1993 rev. ed. pp.10-11. As an aside it is also interesting to note that Howitt's spelling of several of his Kurnai "clans" varies considerably.

4. The term 'brajerak' used by Howitt meant foreign black or enemy ie anyone other than a Kurnai. Literally translated it meant 'men whom we fear'.

5. Howitt, A.W. & Fison, L. *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*; Howitt, A.W. *Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, McMillan, New York, 1904; Pepper, P. *The Kurnai of Gippsland*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1986; Pepper, P. *You Are What You Make Yourself To Be*, Hyland House, 1980; Daley, Charles. *The Story of Gippsland*, Whitcomb & Tombs, Melbourne, 1960. I have read the Dawson letter books many years ago but have been unable to locate my notes I made from them. I am consequently relying on the Daley and the Pepper accounts of Dawson.

6. For instance Pepper's claim that the Krauatungalung were not involved at all in any of these clashes is clearly a mistake. If for no other reason than the number that could be mustered without them, or most of

the brajerak, was quite small. They were definitely involved in confrontations six and seven and quite likely fifth event (probably a raid) as well.

7. Gardner, P.D. *Through Foreign Eyes*, p.57

8. Gardner, P.D. *Some Notes on Victorian Alpine Aborigines*, Ngarak Press, Ensay, 1997 p.11

9. The maximum figure is calculated by working backwards from the accurate count of 222 in 1860 by William Thomas and assuming a 7% annual mortality rate - the estimate of C.J. Tyers. This gives the following population totals: 1859 = 237; 1858 =253; 1857 =270; 1856 =288; 1855 =308; 1854 =329. The minimum figure is taken by doubling Tyers blanket handout for 1854.

10. Comprised of approximately Ngarigo 30, Jaitmathang 30, Minjambuta 30 and 20 Bratauolung, 75 Briakaulung, 75 Brabiralung 15 Tatungalung, 125 Krauatungalung. Elsewhere Howitt in Howitt & Fison *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, pp.181-2 gives the numbers of the Tatungalung as having the second highest number of adults (25) in 1879 amongst the Kurnai. Since we have no idea of the age spread and because of the time lag it is possible that this is not a contradictory statistic.

11. The Sale group was approximately comprised of 20 Bratauolung, 75 Briakaulung, and 35 Brabiralung to total 130 and the Tambo group 40 Brabiralung, 15 Tatungalung, 125 Krauatungalung plus 90 brajerak for a maximum total of 270.

12. Howitt, A.W. *Native Tribes...* p.348; Howitt, A.W. & Fison, L. *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* p.222

13. Smyth, R.B. *The Aborigines of Victoria*, Vol 1 Govt. Printer, Melbourne, 1876 p.156

14. Howitt, A.W. & Fison, L. *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* p. 221

15. Pepper, P. *The Kurnai of Gippsland...* For an account of a clash of this sort go to

http://petergardner.info/publications/ghj-no-19_p-d-gardner-article/

16. Howitt, A.W. & Fison, L. *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* p. 222

17. Howitt, A.W. *Native Tribes...* p.348

18. Pepper, P. *The Kurnai of Gippsland* p.105 Pepper directly translates conflict number two as being between the Tatungalung, which was in fact almost certainly the 'Sale group' with no Tatungalung present, and the Omeo tribes, which is partially correct when including their allies. On p.108 for the same event he has the Brabiralung, at best possibly partially correct and at worst wrong, attacking the Braiakaulung, which is also partially correct.

19. Howitt, A.W. *Native Tribes...* p.348 Howitt writes that the raiders "killed Kaiung, together with another Brayaka man, called Lohni, the brother of Bundawal..." but he is in error here as Bundawal was a Tatungalung and claimed to be a brother to Johnny of the raiding party.

20. Daley, C. *The Story of Gippsland*, p.35

21. James Aitken held the Mosquito Point run between Lakes Victoria and Reeves for the period 1852-1868. See Billis & Kenyon, *Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip*, Stockyard Press, Melbourne 1974 p.13 & p.247

22. Howitt, A.W. *Native Tribes...* p.350 Bundawal was possibly in error here as 'Dargo Jimmy' if he was a Dargo man would have been a Brabiralung. The location of Binnajerra was the Boole Boole Peninsula or the country generally between the Lakes and the sea.

23. Daley, C. *The Story of Gippsland*, p. 35

24. Leslie, J.W. & Cowie, H.C. *The Wind Still Blows*, The Authors, Sale, 1973 pp.106-7

25. Howitt, A.W. *Native Tribes...* p.350

26. Daley, C. *The Story of Gippsland* p. 35 Dawson has this intrusion as occurring on September 7th, 1855. Either Dawson's date or description must be wrong or this is in fact a description of the last event, in which case the numbers involved have been greatly exaggerated.

27. Howitt, A.W. *Native Tribes...* pp.350-1 Note on numbers with Bundawal recalling the events after 25 years - most likely the 200 count involved women and children or was exaggerated.

28. The station of this name was on the north shore of Lake Victoria in the vicinity of Toms Creek. The exact location of the clash was place called Yowundeet. For further details go to Billis & Kenyon, *Pastoral Pioneers...* p.199

29. Howitt, A.W. *Native Tribes...* p.351

30. Daley, C. *The Story of Gippsland*, p.35

31. Pepper, P. *You Are What You Make Yourself To Be*, p.38. In *The Kurnai of Gippsland* p.108 Pepper incorrectly asserts that this clash was over a 'food shortage'.

32. *ibid.*

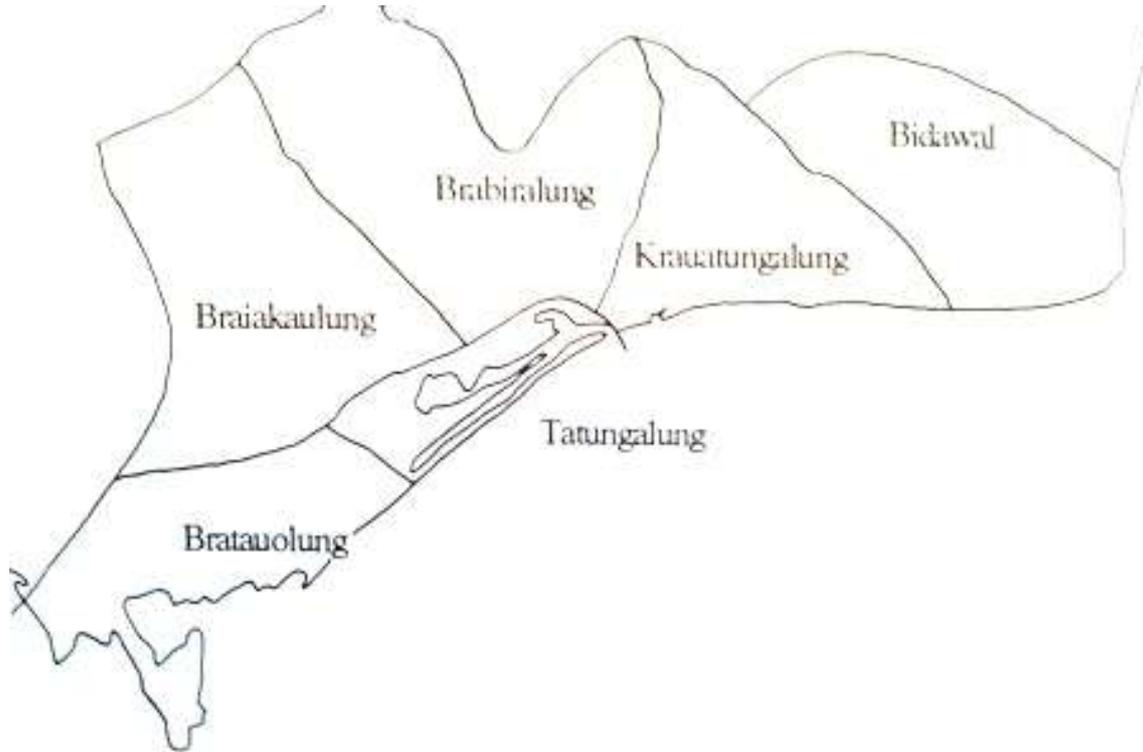
33. Howitt, A.W. *Native Tribes...* p.351-2

34. Note that Pepper dated this event as being a few years before the arrival of John Bulmer in 1860 - which fits neatly into the timeframe of these events.

35. Howitt, A.W. *Native Tribes...* p.351. I have used Dawson to date this event, but, like Howitt, he appears not have been aware of all the clashes and intrusions and so it is possible that this occurred as late as November

36. Howitt, A.W. *Native Tribes...* p.351-2

Map 1 Tribal boundaries and spelling after Tindale



Map 2 Howitt's Clans of Kurnai

