This monograph presents a new and refreshing interpretation on the European discovery of our Alpine districts.

For the first time the role played by Aborigines in the opening up of the difficult terrain of the Victorian Alps is closely scrutinised.

Here also the history of exploration, occupation and economic exploitation is subjected to a careful analysis.

A new limited edition publication by well known and controversial local historian P.D. Gardner.

EUROPEAN OCCUPATION AND EXPLORATION OF THE VICTORIAN ALPS

A BRIEF HISTORY

1835 - 1865

BY

P.D. GARDNER
EUROPEAN OCCUPATION AND EXPLORATION OF THE VICTORIAN ALPS

A BRIEF HISTORY

1835 - 1865

BY

P.D. GARDNER
Contents

Introduction
Part 1
Part 2
End Notes
Index

Introduction
This booklet is based on the second part of a paper prepared for Historic Places branch of the Department of Conservation, Forests & Lands in 1988 entitled "Aboriginal Contact and European Occupation of the Victorian Alps," A monograph based on the first part of this paper will hopefully be published some time in the future as "A brief History of the Aborigines of the Victorian Alps. There is a small, but unavoidable, amount of duplication between these booklets. Also since the paper was written with the express purpose of examining the Aboriginal occupants of the Victorian alpine regions both before and after the advent of Europeans readers will certainly notice that their role is emphasized in this regard. Thanks to Rhoda Miller, Marion Le Cheminant, Margaret Gardiner and Janice Murphet for reading the manuscript.

P.D.G. Sept. 1996

Part 1

Pre-1835

Aboriginal Occupation
It is a generally believed misconception that the alpine regions were unoccupied at the advent of Europeans 150 years ago. In fact the foothills and alpine regions were occupied by some 2,500 individuals from 8 tribes. This figure probably expanded to over 3,000 individuals in the summer months. Archaeologist Josephine Flood has suggested that the elevated regions of the Alps have only been recently occupied in the last 5000 years. (1) However evidence in the foothills at Buchan on the Shire River suggests an Aboriginal presence of close to 20,000 years tends to contradict this and indicates a general persistence in the region, if not in the high country camps, of some antiquity. That they were there in numbers immediately prior to the advent of Europeans is not questioned and in particular the newcomers made abundant use of Aboriginal tracks, routes and guides.

Aboriginal Tracks and Routes
Voyaging historian John Murphy noted that "many of the local roads and tracks follow the same paths that had been used by the aborigines for thousands of years and it is surprising how often you can still find discarded stone axes and other implements along these routes. (2) It seems more than a coincidence that the major tracks to be used both into and out of the Omeo district were tracks most certainly known of, or used by, the Jaminthang. There are no tracks other than the Omeo - Munnau and Omeo - Gippsland tracks as well as tracks to the Bright and Tawanga districts by way of Mt. Hotham and Bogong High Plains and Mt. Fauster. The tracks seldom climbed to the mountain tops but made efficient use of valleys, long spurs and ridges and low passes. Aboriginal historian Phillip Pepper noted C.J. Tyers' description of a mountain route from Gippsland to Melbourne. Pepper stated:

As the occupation of Gippsland continued, the white people made use of the Aborigines knowledge of the country. Tyers suggested that someone should explore a route to Melbourne which was "infinitely superior to the one now in use." He said that the Kumai had told him two years earlier that this was their route to Melbourne and
some of the Warmunjur came to the rails along the same track. Leaving Sale by way of Glimmaggio the Aborigi-
nes ascend to the Dividing Range, where it is gradual,
cross the large plains, with running streams on either
side, and reach Rivers station on the Yarra Yarra in four
days. The route is well grassed all the way without
any scrub and is a good way for draughts.(3)

As with the routes between districts so too were the tracks from the
low to high country well defined. Alfred Howitt when ascending Kus-
cinjaka in 1860 from the upper Murray followed an Aboriginal track
for part of the way.(4) Likewise more than twenty years earlier in
the first European ascent of the highest mountain on the continent Strze-
lecki and his companions also used similar tracks. R.M.E. Henry's In
a Dark Glass uses James MacArthur's diary to describe the ascent.
Before midday they stopped above the tree line "in the place where
every year the local natives gathered to eat the bogong moth grubs
which collected there, and round the party were the abundant signs of
the Aboriginal encampments".(5) Almost certainly another example of
European use of Aboriginal tracks includes that by Coburgo stock-
man Jim Brown and Jack Wells in their route from the Bunderah River
to the Bogong High Plains. As a final example the Rev. W.B. Clarke
left an account of a party of Aborigines who had been caught in a
snowstorm whilst crossing the Alps from the upper Murray to the
'Manoor' with the result that two of them were smoothed in a snow
drift and one was severely frost bitten.(6)

Aboriginal Guides and Blacktrackers
As with the use of Aboriginal tracks so too the encroaching Europeans
used Aboriginal guides and trackers to advantage. There are few
examples of frontier squatters that did not have Aboriginal guides to
assist them. One noted example was the attempt by Angus McMillan
to cross through the rugged hill country from Eassy to the Bruthen dis-
trict in late 1839 which was a singular failure.(7) With the addition of
two Jaintamuth guides the next effort to get to the clearer country
around Bruthen was successful. As well as using the guides Coburn,
Johnny and Friday to obvious advantage this venture also travelled,
at least partly, on Aboriginal paths. While many of the Aborigines
employed were local, either from the Ngarigo or Jaintamuth, many
squatters brought Aborigines from outside the district. Strzelecki and

Macarthur in their journey through the south-east used Charlie Tarra,
an Aboriginal from the Ngarrawal tribe in the Goulburn district. On
their ascent of Kosciusko they employed an extra local guide named
Jackie, most probably of the Djalmaing tribe. It seems likely that
Jackie then directed Charlie Tarra and Strzelecki on the best route
over the Gibbo Range to Omeo. Other squatters to employ Aborigines
as guides from outside the mountain district included P.C. Buckley's
George Gilbee from the Liverpool tribe and the tracker for the Hunt-
er brothers called Ferguson. Jeremy Gibber from the Ngarigo has
achieved notoriety through McMillan's account of his supposed at-
tempted murder of him. Prior to McMillan, Jeremy Gibier acted as a
guide for E.W. Bayliss.

While some accounts mention keen efforts to find new squatting coun-
try it must be remembered that these accounts are referring to Euro-
peans only and take no account of Aboriginal guides. Also a number of
accounts mention that Aboriginal guides were used but make no at-
tempt at identifying them. Of the local guides it is assumed that Ma-
tooka or Matoka guided Walter Mitchell to Bruthen and showed him
the pass in the dividing range known as the Gap. It is also quite possi-
ble that Matooka took Edmund Buckley down to Tangip in the Tam-
bo River. Since Walter Mitchell used guides it is fairly certain that his
uncle, the secretive James MacFarlane, also used them. Also since the
use of Aborigines as guides and trackers was an essential ingredient in
the success of a squatting venture it can be inferred that those success-
ful ones used them wherever, and whenever, they were required and
that in the absence of information to the contrary it should be assumed
that many squatting parties used Aboriginal co-operation to help them
achieve their goals.

Part 2
EUROPEAN OCCUPATION

S.H. Roberts in his The Squatting Age in Australia 1835-47 noted:

Perhaps the most fascinating story of Australia is the way
in which stockmen, absolutely unaided by the Govern-
ment, and often in defiance of it, pushed into newer and
ever newer country and gradually spread over the face of
the continent. (8)

More specifically regarding the Victorian Alpine area and for the
years 1835-40 John Wilson wrote:

From the Mono stock were on the move everywhere,
and hastening, the process was the fact that by the begin-
ing of 1839 the pastoralists were being ground between the
upper and lower still stone of prolonged drought and a fast developing
financial crisis in the colony. (9)

Whilst squatting parties secretly vied for the gateway to what was later
to be called Gippsland, north of the mountains they began quemning
to take up all the suitable pastoral country along what was known as the
Major's Line. By 1840 there were 20,000 cattle on the line between
Yarr and Melbourne. (10) With no physical barriers to access to graz-
ing lands the occupation from this quarter was a process of acting in
turn and taking over country not occupied previously by other squat-
ters.

Elsewhere the pastoral expansion through the mountains was highly
dependent on the knowledge of the Aborigines and the advantage of a
few months was all that was needed for squatters to secure substantial
financial benefit by the occupation of large tracts of ungrazed lands.
(11) Thus whilst the squating process continued in a similar manner
as that which was occurring further north - one squatter 'napro凭借着'
or passing another and taking country 'hurter out' - the hallmark
of squating through the Alps was the secrecy in which it was en-
shrouded in the search for a route to Gippsland and other suitable runs.

Peter Cawson noted:

Graziers like McFarlane were secretive about newly discovred pastures so reports of new discoveries were
sometimes slow to spread; as they were spending time and
effort and money searching for pastures the pioneer
graziers expected to be able to capitalize on the initia-
tives; the fewer hustlers with complottors the better.(12)

Thus whilst the squatting occupation north of the mountains was the
equivalent of a flood, that through Omeo and the Alps was a trickle.
It was not until May 1840 that Strzelecki's tales of vast tracts of land and
naming of 'Gipps Land' were publicised in the Melbourne press. And
it was only when the port of Port Albert was established and McMillan
cut a track linking Omeo to the port in 1841 that the rush of land grab-
bbers descended on this newly named province.

Amongst this general movement a few individuals, notably Strzelecki
followed by McMillan, made conflicting claims for priority and dis-
covey. However this 'priority' approach to history is a distortion, and
the malady of what occurred is much more mundane: a story of squat-
ters motivated by greed and obsessed with secrecy; but also a story of
being thwarted by drought and bankruptcy and above all by the resis-
tance of Aborigines whose lands they were unceremoniously taking.

1835-45

(i) The Far East

In 1834 Dr John Lhotsky travelled into what was later to become
known as the Tabbut area of far eastern Victoria and was almost cer-
tainly the first European in the mountains in this state. According to
Norman Wakefield, who made a study of Lhotsky's two journeys in the
Monaro district in this year, Lhotsky was accompanied by an Abo-
riginal guide. Wakefield wrote:

What is most interesting to us in Victoria is the story of the
second excursion, for it mentions names which, until, and high up in
little differently, can be recognized at Mount Tintaring, Delatulca,
Jugjallla and Mount Jeremain. Lhotsky must have obtained these names from
Aborigines, or perhaps his party was led through the
country by an Aboriginal guide.(13)
On the second excursion, Lhota's party must have included an Aborigine. This is demonstrated by the direct route taken—particularly the short-cut across the mountains from Delikkon to the Ambayone Crossing area and by the abundant use of native place names (14).

An examination of Lhota's map shows Lake Osimo and the Osimo Plains. The information on Osimo and in a letter to the Sydney Gazette Lhota stated that he had obtained this information from the only man of the Monsoro tribe who had been once at this place (15). About the time that this letter was being published James Macfarlane had established a Station for his Currawong Station at what became known as Macfarlane's Plt. By an accident—a stroke of a line drawn on a map—Macfarlane became the first squatter in the Alps in Victoria. It is on the strength of this same accident that Lhota's claims to priority also reside.

Other squatters who took up country in the far east of the study area include the O'Keeffe family who took up Wulgitmerang in 1838 and Black Mountain in 1840; (6) Thomas Moore who took up Titch Ditton in 1839; (7) and John Melville who took up Delikkon Station 16 miles south-east of Delegate in 1838; (8) William Bradley at Karkooon (Creegajangolong) in 1841; Ben Boyd who took up Dedick at Saggan Buggan in 1842; Charles Lawson at Gushing (Gilgallita River) in 1845; and J.J. Heiligk at 245 in 1845. (17) It is interesting to note that Billis and Kenyon are not always accurate as to when runs were taken up and who took them up, as runs were often held for some years before being registered, or taken up and abandoned without ever being registered. An example of this is the Goolongong run taken up by Huggins and McIntyre in 1842 which E.W. Bayliss claimed to have taken up in 1839. Bayliss also claims to have reached the Buchan district before Angus McMillan in 1838 and that he also took his Aborigonese guide, Jimmy Gibber of the Ngrijawo. Another interesting possibility is the note that the Scotts of Delbine Park supposedly took up the Monsoro into Gippsland in the early 1840s. This route was east of the Snowy and passed Sandford Creek. There appears to be no evidence to support this other than in Providence Ponds Porter's fictional account of early Gippsland. (18)

10

temps were organized by James McFarlane in concert with Lachlan Macarthur, and that it was intended that the subsequent 'discoveries' would be equally exploited by the two men. Caesar said that they 'were brethren, not partners, but their collective interests were nevertheless represented by one person, named Angus McMillan, who eventually registered Port Albert from his Elly in 1840.* (21)

The letter took however, was completed on the fourth attempt and only after an unexplained publicity necessitated a hasty occupation of the choice lands (22).

Since then the reminiscences of William Thompson have been published in the Gippsland Heritage Journal (23). These brief memoirs are the chief sources I made use of. Mitchell's journal was in April 1839 and he returned to Osimo on the 3 May. McMillan left Currawong on 20 May and it is now most likely that he was aware of Mitchells's successful trip before his departure. However the memoirs basically confirm the general thrust of my argument. In particular they confirm that Mitchell travelled to the Gippsland Lakes in April 1839 and that the Thompson's reminiscences were probably John Wilson's source; that there definitely was an agreement (a partnership in deed if not in name) between Macarthur and Macfarlane to locate the grazing country of Gippsland and equally exploit it; that McMillan and Mitchell were both employed of these squatters and equally minor figures although McMillan preserved and reaped many rewards; that the men acted in concert and that McMillan already knew about Mitchell's journey to the Gippsland Lakes when he set off towards Buchan. This latter fact leaves itself of only two explanations—either the Macfarlane / Macarthur organization had heard of Bayliss's trip to the Gippsland Lakes via the Buchan district and had sent McMillan in an attempt to verify and or, pre-empt this, or else the explorer was hopelessly lost. If the former it suggests that at least Macfarlane and Macarthur believed that Bayliss had made his way to the Gippsland Lakes the previous October (24).

In early April 1840 Paulo de Strzelecki, James MacArthur, James Riley and Charles Tarr called at the Macarthur-constable's at Essay set up by McMillan. Just previously Strzelecki and party had climbed and named Australia's highest mountain. They had then followed an Aborigine route from Nairmel to Osimo (25). After leaving Essay and suf-
assumed control of his run in March 1863 and Eaglevale appears to have been abandoned at this stage.

Further east, pastoralists of dubious credentials, were using the Numinoo River for the first time. James Milton claimed to have located this country with the assistance of Aborigines. Cauble wrote that "Milton is known to have been friendly with the aborigines" and that cattle farmer James Bentley was one of the first occupants of this country. He records that the following development of gold fields was often in short supply and a market in stolen stock quickly developed. The most legendary of the many shadowy figures that exploited this situation was called Bogong Jack. Bogong Jack is reputed to have developed a network of tracks through the mountains to convey stolen stock from one district to another. Like Milton, Tom Toke and many others, it is most likely that this work was done with Aboriginal assistance.

There is little in the literature about government surveyors. For the early part of the nineteenth century, the history they appear more concerned with surveying towns, roads and establishing stations boundaries. Unfortunately most of the surveyors' work remains unpublished. An example of this unpublished material is the report of John William who surveyed the Mitchell River in 1859. It appears from this report that Willettson was probably the first European in the Murrumbidgee Gorge and the Worringutta Valley. It is also likely that a number of these government employees made first assesses of peaks in the pursuit of their occupation and some examinations should be made of the work of Townsville, and perhaps C.J. Tyers. In regard to Townsville is supposed to have used Charlie Tarr as an assistant and surveyors Pettit and Dawson's work in the Oxley district was accompanied by an inter- est in local Aborigines. Dawson later provided A.W. Howitt with a valuable of the Jalmainga tribe.

Two other government parties are, by contrast, well known. The first group was the Prospecting Parties of 1860. Where Alfred Howitt led a party to search for gold in the Mitchell watershed and Nicholson led a party further east into the Tambo and Snowy River area. The second was the Alpine Track cutting expedition led by Angus McMillan in 1864 to link the isolated gold districts of Omeo, Crooked River and

On the contrary, Müller, motivated by scientific curiosity and in the pursuit of knowledge, was more interested in those that preceded in the profession and less interested in the one that came after him. In this he had priority and was, thus, in every sense an explorer.

### Later Activities 1855-1865

(0) Geology - Official and Unofficial

The exploitation of much of the unexplored land was completed during this period. Among others, Millers took up the vast Eaglevale Run which included the Dargo High Plains, the Stony Plains and the Wimmera Valley about 1857. Much of this country was explored, or even explored by McMillan is not known and the boundaries of the run are ill-defined. Richard Bennett was stocking the Benzena High Plains in 1860 and had taken up the Eaglevale Run, on the boundary of Eaglevale, in 1861.(39) McMillan's creditors Woods Point. Howitt took the opportunity to have his official "prospect" combined with exploration.(42) As well as eventually locating gold in payable quantities on Good Luck Creek, Crooked River, Howitt managed to make a number of early assessments of mountains including Mt Bransgrove and Mt. Howitt. His party was the first group of Europeans to thoroughly 'explore the Mitchell watershed. McMillan's later work was, by comparison, more pedestrian, though still a singular achievement. He and his party, including his Aboriginal guide and companion James Raymond, completed the blasting and clearing of the track over 200 miles in three months and made the major discovery of gold bearing quartz, called the Pioneer reef, which later became the Great goldfield. Aside from his one attempt in 1839 to travel from Eas-

(39) Howitt and von Mueller

Von Mueller was again active in this period making a first ascent of Barn Bluff in 1860 and visiting McWellington on another trip about this time when he was caught in a snowstorm. However for this period and a long time afterwards, Alfred Howitt was the main European "pioneer" of Gippsland and the remnant, as well as being a pioneer in botany and geology in a national context, and anthropologist in an international one. After his amazing recovery of King and the bodies of Burke and Wills from Cooper's Creek, Howitt was rewarded with the position of Police Magistrate and Warden of the Goldfields at Omeo. This involved an enormous amount of travelling through the bush by horseback and there is no doubt that Howitt used this travelling to his advantage in pursuing his scientific interests in botany, geology and later anthropometry. In 1866, before moving from Omeo to Baranduda, Howitt climbed Kosciusko. M.H. Walker in Come Wind, Come Weather described one of his later excursions:

In January 1872 Howitt was enthusiastically mapping the valley of the Mitchell River, and to study it further he had made a canoe trip with two Ikarrbugy Aborigines through the gorge between Tablelands and Girralda where the river had carved its way through high cliffs. Having sent Charlie Roy, Long Harry (Tharbus) and the horses up in charge of a reliable man, Howitt met them by arrangement at Tabernebela Station at the head
of the gorge, and found that they had already made two back canoes for the journey (44).

Howitt was also involved in several attempts at getting to Lake Tadkarn but was not the first European to reach there. Howitt probably learnt of the lake from one of his many Aboriginal informants and an Aboriginal stockman, Jim Snowdon, credited with the discovery of the lake (45) taken overall, both within and outside Gippsland and the mountain region, Howitt’s career is amusing and it is fitting that Neil Brennan should describe him as “one of Australia’s greatest explorers” (46).

Summary

Of all the European claiming priority only Howitt, Mueller, Lhotsky and perhaps Stirling need be considered seriously. And even then the importance of Aboriginal assistance to their achievements should be closely considered. As Aboriginal historian Philip Pepper stated.

But the explorers would never have succeeded if their Aboriginal guides, Jimmy of the Maunnoo, Tarm, and Cobb and Friday from Omeoo, had not provided them with food, water and shelter, (and directed them through dangerous country...) (47)

Thus a more balanced account of the history of this period shows an invading force of squatters, occupying the lands of the Alpine Aboriginals, and displacing, and in most instances, completely destroying them. The self-provided bandies, so readily adopted and promoted by most local historians, were primarily motivated by greed and self-advancement, and did not hesitate to exploit or murder to achieve their ends. After this, perhaps inevitable, frontier conflict, these ruthless men were succeeded by a small group of men concerned with detailed scientific inquiry, of whom Howitt and Mueller are representative, and to whom the titles ‘explorer’ and ‘pioneer’ can justly be applied. But we can only wonder at how many adventurers Aboriginals there have been during their almost ageless occupation of their lands, and can offer only as a poor substitute a brief list that includes Larrie, Maunnoo, Jimmy Giller and others, as amongst those whose�ous warrant as equal amount of esteem by historians, to that now accorded mainly to the early invaders.

END NOTES

1. J. F.色调 in Pictom, N (eds) Tribes and Boundaries in Australia, AIAS, Canberra, 1975, p 50
2. J. Murphy - personal communication, Aug 89
4. E. Mitchell - Discoverers of the Snowy Mountains, McMillan, Melbourne, 1985, p 72
5. H. M. E. Henry - In a Dark Glass, Angus & Robertson, Melbourne, 1961, p 42
6. E. Mitchell op. cit., p 2
7. For a critical analysis of McMillan's claims see my Our Founding Murdering Father, Ngarak Press, Ensay, 1990
8. S. H. Roberts - The Squatting Age in Australia 1835-47, MUP, Melbourne, 1935, p 127
10. Ibid.
11. Of course they were named by native herbarists.
13. N. Wakefield 'Dr John Lhotsky's Two Excursions into the Australian Alps', in Victorian Naturalist, Vol. 92, No. 11, Nov. 75, p 229
14. Ibid p 243
16. H. Stephenson - Culture and the High Plains, The Author, Melbourne, 1980, pp 27-9; N. A. Wakefield, 'Aspects of Exploration and Settlement of East Gippsland' in East Gippsland Symposium, RSV Proceedings, 38 (1969). Wakefield has an in depth analysis of the occupation of Suggan Buggan and Wellingtona stations and concludes that the the O'Rourke claim for 1838 is erroneous. Whilst it is clear that they definitely did not reside there at this date it is quite possible that the area was used as an outstation, and without following proper licensing procedures.
17. All information on squatting dates and locations taken from Bills & Kenoys Pastoral Pioneers of the Port Phillip District, Stockland Press, Melbourne, 1974, unless otherwise indicated.
20. J. Wilson op. cit., A major problem with Wilson's material is his lack of verifiable information on sources. However it seems certain that his source for this information was Thompson's memoirs first published in the Geographe Times 6.6, 1890
21. P. Cabrera, op. cit., p 3
22. Gardiner, P.D. unpublished paper, 1890. Note that part of this paper forms the basis for this book.
23. The Recollections of Edward Thompson' and 'Notes on the recollections of Edward Thompson' (by P.D. Gardiner) in Geographe History Journal, No. 8 June 1990
24. N.A. Wakefield, 'Aspects of Exploration and Settlement of East Gippsland' op. cit. This conclusion is directly opposite to that reached by Wakefield which relied heavily on the veracity of the McMillan accounts.
25. Note that this route now roughly corresponds with the present Corryong - Benambra road.
26. P. Cabrera op. cit., p 15
27. E. Mitchell op. cit., p 8
29. Bills & Kenoys op. cit.
30. D. Johnson April at the Cataracts, VPMA, Melbourne, 1974, p 36
32. Ibid.
33. Rev. W.B. Clarke Researches in the Southern Goldfields of New South Wales Reading and Wellbank, Sydney, 1860
34. M.H.Walker Come Come Come Weather, MUP, Melbourne, 1971, p 110
35. P. Cabrera op. cit., p 15
36. There is no evidence that the Aborigines had any interest whatsoever in climbing peaks and as they usually took routes with the least resistance it is quite possible that some of the European ascents were the first ascent by man. On the other hand it is more likely that over thousands of years most of these peaks would have been trodden on at some time. It is the climbing of peaks, rather than naming them from a distance, that sets many of the early Europeans apart from those con-}

enced primarily with economic gain.
37. E. Mitchell op. cit., p 43
38. S. Carr op. cit., p 385
40. P. Cabrera op. cit., p 21
41. M.H.Walker op. cit., p 108
42. VPBS 4-3118 J FRO.Laverent
43. Those who definitely worked for McMillan in some capacity included Janmary Giller, Cobbly Johnny, Friday, Jacky Warren, Jimmy Raymond and William Logan.
44. M.H.Walker op. cit., p 198
45. Stephenson op. cit., p 193 Snowdon knew of the lake, or had seen it, but refused to go there. As Howitt's Aboriginal sources were also aware of its existence the question of discovery is, again, merely academic.
46. N. Brennan Tales of the Snowy Mountains, Rigby, Melb., 1979 p 47
47. P. Pepper op. cit., p 17