Some Notes on
Victorian Alpine
Aborigines

by
P.D. Gardner
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P.D. Gardner
by the author:
Gippsland Massacres
Through Foreign Eyes
Our Founding Murdering Father
Names on the Omeo Highway
Names around the Gippsland Lakes
Names of the Victorian Alpine district
Names of East Gippsland
Names of South Gippsland
Names of the Latrobe Valley and West Gippsland
The Scab Train
Too Old to Rat
European Occupation and Exploration of the Victorian Alps
Names of Bass Strait

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Introduction

Most of the following essays and notes have been previously published elsewhere in Inhabit, Pioneer and Gippsland Heritage Journal. The 'Alpine tribes and their boundaries' is part of an unpublished paper written for the Department of Conservation and Environment. The 'Pre-European population' is an excerpt from my paper "Victorian Alpine Aboriginal History" delivered to the Jindabyne Conference in 1991 and published in B. Scougall (ed) Cultural Heritage of the Australian Alps, Australian Alps Liaison Committee, Canberra, 1992.

Originally I had intended to publish a small booklet on the history of Alpine Aborigines as a companion volume to my European Occupation and Exploration of the Victorian Alps. However for a number of reasons I have decided not to publish this brief history of Victorian Alpine Aborigines in a single volume but in the more flexible collection of short essays that follows. I apologise to any readers awaiting the promised booklet and hope that this small volume will suffice. I also apologise for any repetition that this form of publication often involves. My thanks to the Corryong Historical Society for permission to use the cover photo and Rhonda Miller, Janice Morphett and Margaret Gardner for reading the manuscript.

PDG Jan 1997
Some notes on the Jaitmathang tribe - boundaries

The Jaitmathang tribe, also known as the Kandangoramittung and the Omoo tribe, occupied a region in the Australian Alps [now in the state of Victoria] for many hundreds of years. As far as I am aware no studies have been made to determine accurately the age of occupation of this region but Josephine Flood's studies of high country shelters in the ACT give estimates of about 3000 years compared with the lower altitude, Victorian sites at Buchan and New Guinea cave on the Snowy River with estimates of about 18000 years. Future discoveries will probably push Flood's estimates back, and thus also the period of Aboriginal occupation and exploitation of the high country. This question of occupation of the alpine/sub-alpine region is further complicated by major climatic changes within the time scale considered.

According to the boundaries outlined by Tindale the Jaitmathang tribe, along with the neighboring Minjambuta (Mt. Buffalo), almost solely occupied alpine/sub-alpine country. The Omoo tribe have been most commonly thought of as representing the mountain Aborigines of Victoria. It should be noted that although the Jaitmathang and Minjambuta can basically be considered mountain tribes there were a further eight tribes who claimed mountain territory and had access to both high plains and peaks.

The Jaitmathang country included the high country of Cobungra, Mt. Hotham and the Bogong High Plains to Mt. Stawell and Tongio on the Tambo river in the south, across to Mt. Tambo and Limestone Creek in the east and Tom Groggin on the Indi in the north-east and included the present day towns of Tawanga and Mitta Mitta on its northern extremities. The Jaitmathang country adjoined the Duduroa and Djalma-tang tribes to the north, the Ngarigo to the east, the Brabiralung to the south and the Minjambuta to the west.

The notion of fixed and rigid geographic boundaries appears to be a European conception that is probably not so easily applied to the pre-European era. In eastern Victoria it seems that the boundaries often overlapped, and there is also one possible instance of the opposite - a 'no-mans land' which was basically unoccupied and unclaimed. The boundaries between allied and related tribes (language and cultural
links as well as agreed common ancestry) appear to have been the more clearly defined and approximate the European idea. However, the political boundaries between allies and relations often did not apply to the movements of small groups and individuals. This rather fluid definition of a boundary was often of little relevance when laws granted special access and rights to neighboring tribes. This seems to be especially so with regards food laws. Howitt gives a good example of this in Gippsland when he described the Brabirulung tribal members [whose claimed territory went from Mt. Hotham to the Gippsland Lakes] as having sole rights to the swans' eggs on Raymond Island, even though the island itself was part of the Tatungulung tribe's territory. The salient point being that the two tribes were closely related culturally, ancestrally and linguistically. Such types of food laws that transgressed political boundaries probably originated out of a climate of abundance. Almost certainly similar rights of access after particular foods existed within the Jaitmathang territory, although as far as I am aware none has been recorded. Almost certainly the Duduroa and possibly other Upper Murray tribes had access to Bogong moths in specific parts of Jaitmathang territory as well as probably harvesting the moths co-operatively with them.

The Bogong moths were seasonally abundant and harvested from the crevices of granite boulders in the high country. Early European observers were obviously intrigued by this unusual example of insectivorous man and some made written references to the various aspects of gathering and cooking. As the Omeo Plains appears to have been one of the main congregating points both prior to, and during, the moth season the practice has consequently been closely associated with the Jaitmathang. Flood and others have noted that a number of other tribes in Victoria had access to the high country requisite for moth harvesting and probably also were moth hunters. But perhaps the most interesting aspect of the moth season was the large numbers of Aboriginals observed on the Omeo Plains, with estimates as high as one thousand along the upper reaches of the Mitta Mitta River. These figures indicate a seasonal movement of associated tribes and allies into Jaitmathang territory. They also suggest co-operation in moth gathering and common camping places. Whilst the moth season tends to show that borders, as we understand them, were almost non-existent between friendly and related tribes, all group and individual activities were probably closely governed and directed by custom.
To the south the Jaitmathang were in complete enmity with the Brabiralung tribe. Common sense seems to suggest that the borders in the Upper Tambo Valley were overlapping and that each tribe may have had as many as three different boundaries - historic, geographic and actual. Assuming that in 1835 the Brabiralung were at the end of a period of expansion, the Tongio boundary may have been both their historical as well as actual one. Their geographic boundary would have included the headwaters of the Tambo and all the country south of the Great Dividing range. The Jaitmathang boundaries were the actual at Tongio, a geographic boundary which topography would suggest ran along the Angora and Fainting Ranges to the south and a historical one of no known location but just possibly beyond the geographic one to include the Tambo Crossing country. It is clear that some boundaries defined by Tindale are wrong. When all the additional complications above are taken into account and the fact that even the definition and usage of the word tribe is very loose both in its historical and contemporary contexts, then it can be seen that the boundaries drawn by academics and others are useful as guides only, rather than being definitive or the "correct" or "last" word.

Some notes on the Jaitmathang - European Contact

The total population figure of the Jaitmathang tribe, which occupied the Omeo district at the advent of Europeans was probably somewhere between 400 and 600. The very approximate estimate of 500 often given by anthropologists, archaeologists and others is probably a fairly reliable guide. In 1835 the first Europeans arrived in the Omeo district. Macfarlane, Livingstone and McKillop were attempting to find a route into the country later known as Gippsland and though unsuccessful this time, two of these men returned to take up outstations in the district. It was not until Easter 1839 that a route was found into Gippsland proper and 1841 when stock was moved through Omeo into Gippsland on a large scale.
By 1840 the Jaitmathang appear to have been pacified. There are a number of folk reports of them being shot and being in conflict with the Europeans in the early period. At Innisfail, on the Cobungra River the whole valley is known as "Valley of the Dead" and sometimes "Death Valley". A more specific location within "Death Valley" is known locally as "Slaughterhouse" gully. During the last century at this place large deposits of human bones were found. The folk history, bone deposits and macabre place names all indicate that this was the site of a massacre of the Jaitmathang. Some other folk sources suggest that Aborigines may have been involved with Europeans on the attacking side. If so these individuals were almost certainly outside Aborigines, brought in by squatters, such as Buckley's George Gilbert of the 'Liverpool' tribe. There are virtually no references to "Death Valley" other than that an Omeo chemist collected a number of skulls from the site and displayed them in his shop. Another possible site of a massacre is above Bindi, possibly at Blackfellows Flat [this site may have earned its name from Aboriginal stockman Charley Hammond who worked on adjoining Tongio Station in the 1880s]. These clashes, and probably others at unknown locations, occurred early in the European occupation - between 1836-9. Possibly as many as 100 died as a result of gunshot wounds.

About 1842 another massacre of a different kind occurred at Tambo Crossing. For a long time I had thought of this event as a tribal clash and at a different location, but it is now almost certain that Europeans directed and participated in the event. As this location was on the newly opened stock route to Gippsland, the parties travelling through were probably angered by the Aborigines spearing stock [It was here McMillan reported that they set fire to the scrub as they fled]. As a result, a large party of Jaitmathang were organized and along with some of their allies, the Minjambuta [Mt. Buffalo tribe], they proceeded to Tambo Crossing where they wiped out a group of the Brabiralung tribe - from a group upwards of seventy, only two escaped. Such a devastating kill rate, along with no mentioned casualties on the attacking side, indicates that guns were probably widely employed. I have tentatively suggested in the local press that the site be given the name 'Massacre Flat'. [See Another Gippsland Massacre?]

The source for this "wholesale slaughter by Christians" was George Augustus Robinson, the Protector of Aboriginals in the Port Phillip
district of NSW. In the winter of 1844 Robinson travelled through Gippsland and after being badly lost arrived at Omeo during a storm. Although deep snow covered the ground there was a substantial camp of the Jaitmang people there [Robinson called them the Yatemittongs; the camp numbered upwards of 100] from whom Robinson gathered names and details in a census [the census is lost in Robinson’s notes awaiting rediscovery]. After noting the inroads made on their numbers by venereal disease and one false start aborted by heavy snowfalls, Robinson continued on his journey.

The 1840s saw the continued rapid decline of the Jaitmang. After the initial impetus of population loss through conflict, the effect of disease must have taken a heavy toll. Whilst venereal disease may not have directly caused the deaths of individuals it probably severely weakened individual immune systems. As well there appears to have been a dispersal of the people who worked on stations throughout Gippsland and elsewhere. There is a possibility that one, or more, was employed in the Native Police force during this period. There are also reports of Jaitmang being involved in the hunts for the captured ‘white woman’ in 1846/7. As these hunts were used by Aboriginals of Western Port and Melbourne for an open season on the Kurnai people in Gippsland it is quite likely that the Jaitmang were also involved along similar lines and for similar reasons.

In 1851 gold was discovered in the Livingstone Creek at Omeo and a rush soon ensued. It can be assumed that the experience of the Jaitmang was similar to other Aboriginals who had gold rushes in their territory and that the remnants survived in a degraded state by begging, stealing and prostitution. In the early 1850s surveyors Pettit and Dawson took some brief notes of Jaitmang place names and language. By 1855 there were only five/six Aborigines left at Omeo, according to some accounts. In 1857 a Jaitmang named Tommy tracked and assisted in the apprehension of the murderers Armstrong and Chamberlaine. In 1860 Assistant Protector William Thomas pronounced the Omeo and Mt. Buffalo tribes ‘extinct’. Twenty years later Aldo Massola has Black Mag, dying of exposure at Corryong, as the last of the Omeo tribe, although I have seen no evidence to indicate her tribal affiliations.

As late as 1877 there was a group of Aboriginals at the Kiandra gold-
fields. Quite possibly a number were from Alpine tribes and just possibly one or more Jaitmathang. What is certain is that at least one survivor from the Minjambuta or Mt. Buffalo tribe went to Lake Tyers and has many living descendants. Equally the fact that the missionary John Bulmer contributed an Omeo language vocabulary to E. Curr’s Australian Race (1887) would indicate that there was also one survivor of the Jaitmathang, who resided, at least for a short time, at Lake Tyers.

A brief history of the Minjambuta or Mt. Buffalo tribe

The Minjambuta Tribe, also known as the Mogullumbitch, Mokealumbets, Mt. Buffalo tribe and Buffalo River tribe occupied the upper reaches of the Ovens, King, Buffalo and Broken Rivers south to the dividing range and like the Jaitmathang tribe of the Omeo district was basically a mountain tribe. The high country occupied by the Minjambuta included Mt. Buffalo and Wabonga Plateau. Little is known about these people. The approximate boundaries for the tribe were drawn by Tindale ‘by exclusion of surrounding known tribal areas.’ (Tindale, N. 1974 Aboriginal tribes of Australia, ANU, Canberra) Adjoining the Minjambuta were the Duduroa and Jaitmathang tribes to the east, the Brabiralong to the south, the Taungurong to the west and the Pangerang to the north.

They spoke the same language as the Jaitmathang - generally termed the Upper Murray language. The Minjambuta were closely allied to the Jaitmathang culturally and militarily as well as linguistically. The close association with the Jaitmathang meant that there were probably many routes and tracks between the two territories including access to the Bogong High Plains from the west, a route over Mt. St. Bernard to the Dargo High plains and over Hotham. The close association also indicates that the Minjambuta participated in the Bogong moth harvest and that they had access routes to Mt. Buffalo and that large numbers camped there during the summer months. This is supported by a number of artifacts collected on the plateau by S.R. Mitchell and other Vic-
torian Naturalists in 1940. Almost as certainly, they harvested moths from the western side of the Bogong High plains.

Their military alliance with the Jaithmathang also indicates that they were enemies of the Brabiralung tribe to the south. They were probably in regular skirmishing and conflict with this tribe in the Dargo High plains area. This enmity is also evident in that a group of Minjambuta participated with the Jaithmathang and others at a European led massacre of the Brabiralung deep inside their territory in 1842 (at Tambo Crossing).

But the major conflict of the Minjambuta appears to have been with Europeans. There seems little doubt that they probably suffered the brunt of the wrath of the Europeans after the Faithfull massacre in 1838 when up to eleven shepherds were speared near Broken River, present day Benalla. There is no evidence whatsoever that they were the perpetrators, or even participants in, this battle with the Europeans.

Following the Faithfull massacre in 1837, after the shepherds had been speared by unidentified Aborigines, it appears that a wholesale slaughter of the Minjambuta occurred. The Faithfull massacre took place near the northern boundary of Minjambuta territory and may have occurred on their territory. But wherever the exact location was it seems most likely that the Minjambuta and the Pangerang absorbed the shock of the immediate reprisals.

Following the deaths of up to eleven shepherds near present day Benalla in 1838, known as the Faithfull massacre, it appears that the Minjambuta tribe bore the brunt of the European reprisals. Wangaratta Local historian D.M. Whittaker noted

What happened next is obscure. Colonel White wrote that George Faithfull went down and stumbled across the massacre, whilst another suggestion is that the Faithfull's took down a punitive party. Uren states that Colonel White took down a well-armed party the next day - found the aboriginals feasting on roast mutton on the site of the Botanical gardens in Benalla, shot up as many as he could, and burnt the bodies to conceal the evidence. At the time it was illegal to shoot the aborigines...Another suggestion is that Peter Snodgrass may have met up with the aborigines and punished them. (D.M. Whittaker, 1963 Wangaratta, Wangaratta City Council, Wangaratta, p.20.)
It is clear from George Faithfull's account that the major cause of the destruction of the Minjambuta, and other mountain tribes, was gunshot wounds. He closely described one instance of conflict, which was almost certainly in the mountains, as his party were trapped in a narrow valley. He stated that

I ordered my men to take deliberate aim, and to fire only with the certainty of destruction to the individual aimed at. Unfortunately the first shot from one of my men's carbines did not take effect; in a moment we were surrounded on all sides by the savages coming boldly to us. It was my time now to endeavour to repel them. I fired my double-barrel right and left, and two of the most forward fell; this stopped the impetuosity of their career. I had time to reload, and the war thus begun continued from about ten o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon. We were slow to fire, which prolonged the battle, and 60 rounds were fired, and I trust and believe many of the savage warriors bit the dust. (T.S. Bride. 1898 *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, Govt.Printer, Melb. p.152)

One can speculate that there are a number of locations in the Mt. Buffalo - Bright district of the Minjambuta where either folk or written history indicates massacre sites, and where macabre local place names such as Butcher's Creek, Death Valley, Skull Creek and Slaughterhouse gully indicate the same. Perhaps one day such sites shall be identified and other information collected about them.

In 1860 William Thomas, assistant protector of Aborigines during the Aboriginal Protectorate [1839-1850] and afterwards guardian of the Aborigines, pronounced the Mt. Buffalo tribe extinct. Likewise did a number of other commentators including Richard Helms. However, the tribe was certainly not extinct. At least one unnamed woman survived. She later married at the Lake Tyers Aboriginal settlement and had many children. Their family name was Cooper. Thus it would appear that many of the local kooris with the Lake Tyers 'Coopers' in their family tree are directly descended from the Minjambuta tribe of the Victorian Alps.
Some trackers & guides of the Omeo District

The guide Matooka appears in the reminiscences of Edward Thompson (Gippsland Heritage Journal No.8) Thompson spelled the guide's name 'Matuka' and the Mitchell party, of which he was part, started from 'Currawan' (Currawong). Thompson does not say whether the Aboriginal started from this location or not. However as the party stopped at the Omeo Station for 3 days it is most likely that Matooka was a local guide of the Jaitmathang or Omeo tribe.* Walter Mitchell, the nephew of James Macfarlane reported on his way back from Jenny's Point on the Gippsland Lakes that "We had several narrow escapes from the blacks who were warlike and never saw a white man before."

Angus McMillan employed two Jaitmathang guides in early 1840 after first trying unsuccessfully to breach the ranges south of present day Ensay without Aboriginal assistance. They were Cobbone Johnny, spelt variously and whom McMillan described as "a fine, stalwart, noble looking man" and Friday, a boy whom McMillan named, probably as an allusion to the character of the same name in Defoe's Robinson Crusoe.

When Aboriginal Protector G.A. Robinson travelled through the district in July 1844 he used local guides both in and out of Omeo. During the journey up the Tambo valley his local guide was named Charley. Charley showed Robinson either a massacre or tribal warfare site at Tambo Crossing. Somewhere above the gap Robinson separated from his party and got lost. He returned to Tongi(o) and slowly made his way back towards Omeo where he was met by those searching for him. Whilst in Omeo [note near Lake Omeo or present day Benambra] snow fell heavily and Robinson's party departed on the 25th of June 1844 for the Limestone and the Cobberas with the aid of local guide Bittoloit alias Billy Blue. Stuck on Limestone Creek in 15 inches of snow the party returned to Omeo and finally left on the 30th.

The Jaitmathang Larrie was used in about 1850 as a guide to the Cobungra Station. Stella Carr reported

*Gray and his stockmen left the Pelican Station near Wangaratta in March 1851 seeking new pastures to replace those lost by fire. They travelled up the
Mitta Mitta River and over the Gibbo Range to Hinnomunjie Station. Along the way they fell in with a Jaitmathang named Larnie who directed them through the Bingomunjie Gap to unclaimed grazing lands at Cobungra.*

Two blacktrackers, one of whom was probably named Tommy, were used in 1857 to track down and help apprehend Chamberlain and Armstrong, the murderers of the gold buyer Cornelius Green. The fleeing party were tracked to Tokes on the Gibbo River and over the Gibbo Range. L. Pearson in his *Echoes from the Mountains* described the successful manhunt:

The blacktrackers were soon on the trail and, on reaching Wheeler's Creek on the fall to the Murray, they came on the highwaymen's horses, having been so hard-ridden they were completely knocked up. A few miles lower down the creek one of the trackers kept making signs to draw the attention of the volunteer party. He kept pointing his thumb upwards. Looking up one of the troopers saw the two outlaws in the branches of a tree.* (p.72)

In her *Memories of An Australian Childhood* (1980 p.25), Amie Livingstone Stirling recalls a time when, as a very small child, she ran away from her home in Omeo with her older brother Victor and spent the night in the bush. She recalled "As no one in Omeo had seen us, a black tracker (an Australian Aboriginal) was given the task of finding us". Although Amie does not give the date of her escape it is most likely to have occurred in the early 1880s. If this surmise is correct the black tracker in question was almost certainly Charlie Hammond who was then living at Tongio. Hammond is the only individual in this article who was definitely not from the 'Omeo' tribe. He was a member of the Krauatungalung tribe of the Kurnai or Gippsland Aborigines, although he had been brought up by Europeans. A less likely individual for the role was Charlie Newkong, about whom little is known beyond the fact that he was also a Kurnai.

Without fail the Aboriginal guides of the Omeo district assisted, guided and helped the European newcomers in many ways. All of them disappear from the history books after their brief moment of recognition.

* a recent examination of G.A. Robinson's notes indicates that this individual was a Jaitmathang of some standing whom Robinson called Motogo. I hope to write on Robinson's sojourn in Omeo in more detail in a companion booklet.
Another Gippsland Massacre?
Some Notes on Tribal Warfare and an Event at Tambo Crossing.

My interest in tribal warfare was revived by the recent Gippsland Heritage Journal article by Ian D. Clark on Robinson’s Journals. (1) Having read the microfilm copy of the journals many times I have noted that they are 'often illegible, lapse into strange abbreviations, poor English, incorrect spelling and are correspondingly difficult to transcribe.' (2) With this difficulty of transcription in mind I realised that a tribal warfare event I had previously located at Tongio had actually occurred at Tambo Crossing about 25 miles to the south. (3) A recent attempt to unravel this problem using the microfilm was no more successful and I am grateful for the transcripts supplied by Ian D. Clark which has helped clarify much of the information on this event.

The transcripts show clearly that the tribal clash that Robinson referred to was located at Tambo Crossing and not at Tongio. Robinson briefly referred to the event in the report of his trip in 1844:

A deadly animosity exists between them and the natives of the coast; a whole tribe having been destroyed by the Yatemittongs and their allies a short time previous. Blanched human bones strewed the surface and marked the spot where the slaughter happened. (4)

In his journals there is much more detail. The entry for the 15. 6. 1844 stated

Two miles above the crossing place up the stream is the spot where a great slaughter of gipps land blacks by the Omeo and the Mokeallumbeets and Tin-nermittum their allies took place; was shown the spot by [blank] alias Charley who was present. Saw the human bones strewed about bleached white. Strange idea occurred to me whilst viewing the scene of the slaughter. I thought it appalling best forget the whole sale slaughter by Christians. Charley spoke of it with zest went through the whole scene shewed the camp of wild blacks upwards of 70 camped besides fire. Canal of water in bed of tanbo 30 feet wide 500 feet long. Shew how the black found in line, then gave yell; the point of the attack; spoke of it with zest; five young women spared but I believe killed some time after. All the old women and children killed. Two young men escaped. (5)
The location of this event is almost certainly the flat immediately to the north of where Lock Up Creek enters the Tambo River at Tambo Crossing. The event occurred sometime during the four years previous to Robinson’s journey in 1844. The victims were members of the Bruben group of the Brabiralung tribe. The instigators were according to Robinson’s notes the Jaitimthang [Omeo tribe - Yatemittongs] and their allies the “Mokeullumbeets and Tinnermit- tum”. The latter was possibly a division of the Jaitimthang located in the north of their tribal area or else from the Duduroa tribe - an allied tribe to the north. The former group was almost certainly part of the Minjambuta or Mt. Buffalo tribe called by Howitt the Buffalo River tribe or the ‘Mogullumbitch’. But the most intriguing part of Robinson’s journals is the sentence “I thought it appalling best forget the whole sale slaughter by Christians.” Nowhere in his notes or journals does he claim that any of these Aboriginals were Christians. In fact this one sentence throws the whole scenario of the Tambo Crossing affair as an event of tribal warfare into considerable doubt. Other most unusual aspects of this event include the obvious one-sided nature of it - that there were seventy casualties on one side and none mentioned on the other, that there appears to have been considerable organisation involved and that a substantial group of attackers moved rapidly deep into enemy tribal territory and yet maintained the element of surprise.

At the Jindabyne Symposium I noted that:

I have stated elsewhere my objections to the use of tribal warfare as a major factor in population decline. It should be noted that the tribal conflict was not a new element, and that certain tribes such as the Jaitimthang and Brabira- lung were traditional enemies. This lends some credence to the Tongio [ie. Tambo Crossing] site as it was on the border of the two tribes. However the fact that a whole tribe, or almost certainly a large number of individuals, could be destroyed within the few years prior to Robinson’s visit, and after European occupation, when this enmity had almost certainly existed for many, probably hundreds, of generations seems suspicious. An equally likely explanation for the bones is that they were the remains of a massacre. Attributing the find to an inter-tribal clash was then the easiest way for squatters to explain such obvious remains to the Chief Protector of Aborigines. In his journal whilst travelling up the Tambo River Robinson noted that "this country belong(s) to the Kanegaller or Wild Blacks Poor fellows all form(?) driven away".

In an unpublished paper on Alpine Aborigines I wrote:
Unfortunately the whole question of tribal warfare is quite complicated. Flood remarked on the idea of a confederacy of the upper country tribes including the Minjambuta, Jaitmatang and Ngarigo but there is only minimal evidence of collaboration and co-operation and that is all in the post-European era. (12) As a general rule the antagonism between the high country and low country tribes as outlined by Robinson can be accepted and prior to the European intrusion conflict was probably a regular, if not common, occurrence. However this conflict was essentially small scale and primarily for the purpose of obtaining wives by theft. Such raids rarely involved death and never wholesale slaughter as women and children were taken by any victorious raiders. With the advent of the European a number of changes occurred which increased the likelihood of greater numbers of deaths caused by tribal conflict. These changes included the opening of access through roads, the use of firearms by Aborigines and the development of unusual alliances amongst the tribal groups. One instance that involved most of these ingredients occurred in Sale in 1855 and was observed by surveyor Dawson. A group of Jaitmatang and Dairgo warriors, formerly tribal enemies, raided the Sale Aborigine camp (probably made up mainly of Braiakolung and Tatungalung) during which a small number of people were killed and much hysteria was caused. Some of the raiders were armed with old guns. (13) It would seem that the effects of tribal warfare have been exaggerated and it is quite likely that many earlier supposed conflicts were actually massacres committed by Europeans and falsely attributed to tribal war. Whilst it is likely that a number of conflicts caused considerable deaths it would appear that tribal warfare as a culturally acceptable explanation of the Aborigines demise has been given more attention than it deserves. (14)

The event at Tambo Crossing had few, if any, of the usual features of a traditional tribal clash. Almost certainly it was organised and instigated by Europeans. At the very least it probably involved recruitment of allies from afar, rapid and undetected transit of a large group of warriors from Jaitmatang tribal lands through 25 miles of enemy territory along European roads and the use of European weapons. These facts barely explain the total annihilation of the group. However the allusion to 'Christians' in Robinson's journals indicates the involvement of one or more Europeans. Quite possibly a large group of them participated in this 'whole sale slaughter by Christians' making the event at Tambo Crossing another Gippsland massacre.

Notes
3. P.D. Gardner *Victorian Alpine Aboriginal History* in Cultural Heritage of
The Australian Alps, Australian Alps Liaison Committee, Canberra, 1992
5. Transcripts of G.A. Robinson's Journals for 1844 kindly supplied by Ian D. Clark, History Research Fellow AITSIS, Canberra.
7. N. Tindale Aboriginal Tribes of Australia, ANU, Canberra, 1974; Fison, L. & Howitt, A.W. Kamilaro and Kurnai, Robertson, Melbourne, 1880 pp. 227-8
8. A.W. Howitt Native Tribes of Southeast Australia, MacMillan, New York, 1904 p.77
12. J. Flood The Moth Hunters, AIAS, Canberra, 1980 p.72

The Alpine Tribes & their Boundaries

Previous outlines of tribes occupying the Alpine areas have been sketchy and regionalised. There has been a tendency for commentators to consider the Jaitmathang or Omeo tribe as the only Alpine tribe. This has probably been mainly due to a paper on the Jaitmathang as the Aborigines of the high plains by Massola (1) as well as a general lack of information. In fact it appears that at least three tribes in Victoria were predominantly alpine and sub-alpine and a further seven had tribal territory in the study area and thus access to the high country. The outline of tribes that follows is based on Tindale (2). This is primarily to overcome the huge variation in both spelling and tribal area and boundary determination by various commentators and it is generally accepted as the current standard work (3). The tribes were as follows:-

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- Ngarigo (Monaro) The areas occupied by this group include most of the country adjoining the southern boundary of the Kosciusko National Park including the Cobberas, Cowambat and MacFarlane's Flats. Only a small part of the area under examination was occupied by this tribe and it is considered a NSW tribe. The Ngarigo country adjoined the Djilamatang and Jaïtmathang to the west and the Krautunggalung and Bidawal to the south and was sometimes known as the Monaro tribe.

- Jaïtmathang (Omeo) This tribe, along with the Minjambuta, almost solely occupied alpine and sub-alpine country and was the tribe most thought of as representing the mountain Aborigines of Victoria. Their country included the high country of Cobungra, Hotham and the Bogong High Plains, to Mt. Stawell and Tongio in the south, across to Mt. Tambo and Limestone Creek in the east and Tom Groggin on the Indi and included present day towns of Tawanga and Mitta Mitta on its northern extremities. The Jaïtmathang country adjoined The Dudduroa and Djilamatang in the north, the Ngarigo in the east, the Brabiralung in the south and the Minjambuta in the west and was sometimes known as the Omeo tribe.

- Bidawal (Delegate) This group occupied the country in the far east around Delegate and the headwaters of the Cann and Bemm Rivers. Their name means 'bush dwellers' and Howitt considered them as descended from, and made up of, outcasts from the other tribal groups. Little is known about this tribe. The Bidawal appear to have had some coastal country and adjoined the Ngarigo on the north and the Krautunggalung on the south and west in the study area.

- Krautunggalung (Snowy River) This and the following two Gippsland tribes were part of the Kurnai or Gippsland group of tribes. The Krautunggalung occupied the Orbost-Buchan, Cann River country to Gelantipy and Black Mountain in the north. The name of the tribal group occupying the mountain districts of the Krautunggalung is not known. Their country adjoined the Bidawal to the east, the Ngarigo to north and the Brabiralung to the west. They were sometimes known as the Snowy River tribe.

- Brabiralung - This tribe occupied that area of Gippsland from the plains immediately north of the Gippsland lakes to the Great Di-
viding Range. The watersheds of the Nicholson, Tambo and Timbarra
were occupied by the Bruthen clan of the tribe. The Brabirulung coun-
try on the Tambo met that of the Jaitmathang at Tongio or Mt. Staw-
ell, and thus the upper reaches of this river were not in the Brabirulung
tribal territory. The upper watershed of the Mitchell River including
the Dargo, Wentworth, Wonnangatta and Dargo High plains was oc-
cupied by the Dairgo clan or division of the Brabirulung. The Brabira-
lung country was adjoined by related Kurnai tribes, the Krauatunga-
lung on the east and the Braiakaulung on the west and the Jaitmathang
on the north.

- Braiakaulung - This tribe occupied most of the Latrobe valley
and the river systems north to the dividing range. The upper reaches of
the Avon, Thompson and Macalister Rivers were within their tribal
territory as well as Snowy Plains, Mt Wellington and possibly the Baw
Baws. This high country part of the Braiakaulung territory was occu-
pied by the Bunjil Dan division or clan. In this instance the translation
of the name, Dan = snow, implies that this group often frequented the
high country. Another clan, the Bunjil Kraura, (meaning west wind)
may have occupied high country to the west of the Bunjil Dan possi-
bly including Mt. Baw Baw.

- Minjambuta - This tribe occupied the upper reaches of the Ov-
ens, King, Buffalo and Broken Rivers to the dividing range and like
the Jaitmathang was basically a mountain tribe. The high country oc-
cupied included Mt. Buffalo and Wabonga Plateau. The Minjambuta
were sometimes known as the Mt Buffalo tribe and like the Bidawal
little is known of them. The approximate boundaries of this tribal
group were drawn by Tindale 'by exclusion of surrounding known tri-
bal areas'. Adjoining the Minjambuta were the Duduroa and Jaitma-
thang to the east, the Brabirulung to the south, the Taungurong to the
west and the Pangerang to the north.

- Taungurong - This tribe occupied the Goulbourn River above
Seymour. Upper reaches of this stream, including the Howqua, Delat-
te and Jamieson Rivers were occupied by the Warring Yellam clan.
Like the Bidawal and Ngari this tribe occupied a relatively small
part of the study area and was bordered on the south by the Wurundje-
ri and Braiakaulung and to the east by the Minjambuta.
Wurundjeri - This tribe occupied the Melbourne area east to Mt. Baw Baw and included the upper Yarra watershed. Like the Ngarigo and the Bidawal the Wurundjeri tribes were probably marginal to the Alpine area. They adjoined the Taungurong in the north and the Braia-kaulung in the east and possibly had access to the Baw Baw high country and the upper Latrobe.

Djilamatang - This tribe occupied the upper Murray region from Tintaldr to Tom Groggin. They occupied part of New South Wales to the Kosciusko divide and had access to that high country as well as the Pinnabar country west of the Indi. Adjoining tribes included the Ngarigo to the east and the Jaitmathang to the south and west. Their boundary with the Jaitmathang was only vaguely defined.

Notes
1. Aldo Massola 'Aborigines of the High Plains' in proceedings of the RSV Vol.75 Part 2
2. N. Tindale Aboriginal Tribes of Australia, ANU, Canberra,1974

Pre-European Population

I have constructed below a table to give an indication of the numbers of Aboriginals that inhabited the Alpine region. The table takes no account of seasonal movement and is meant as a rough guide only. It uses the conservative basis of 500 per tribe which until recently was generally accepted by anthropologists (1). The table applies only to Victoria and some early reports such as that of Magistrate Wills of about 500-600 people at Omeo in 1835 seem to indicate, that at least in seasonal terms, these figures are probably an underestimate (2).

A rough figure of 2000 people seems a reliable indicator of the minimum number continually occupying the Alpine region. Whilst some
of the above groups were not continually resident in Alpine areas they all had access to them and the summer seasonal population was probably more than 50% higher than these minimum figures indicate.

Table 1. Theoretical Pre-European Population Estimates + *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Est.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ngarigo</td>
<td>2 Fam.</td>
<td>Cobberas</td>
<td>50-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bidawal</td>
<td>Clan</td>
<td>Upper Camp/Bemm</td>
<td>170-180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krauatungalung</td>
<td>1 Div.</td>
<td>Nummiong/Snowy</td>
<td>50-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brabilalung</td>
<td>2 Div.</td>
<td>Tambo/Dargo</td>
<td>100-180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braiakaulung</td>
<td>1 Div.</td>
<td>Mt. Howitt</td>
<td>50-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wurundjeri</td>
<td>1 Clan</td>
<td>Baw Baw</td>
<td>170-180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taungarong</td>
<td>1 Clan</td>
<td>Upper Goulburn</td>
<td>170-180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minjambuta</td>
<td>1 Tribe</td>
<td>Mt. Buffalo</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaitmathang</td>
<td>1 Tribe</td>
<td>Omeo</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djilamatang</td>
<td>1-2 Clans</td>
<td>Upper Murray</td>
<td>170-360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ based on conservative theoretical population of 500 per tribe made up of :-
* Roughly corresponding with LCC alpine study area in Victoria.

Recently N. Butlin expounded the theory that the conservative estimates used above were a gross underestimate of the original population by as much as a factor of six and that the common figure of 500 per tribe had been selected because no account had been made of the drastic depopulation that ran ahead of white occupation (3). Crucial to Butlin's thesis is the destruction by smallpox plagues in 1789 and 1830 and the effect of venereal disease, which I have examined elsewhere (4).

It can reliably be concluded that the minimum original pre-European population was somewhere between 1930 and 2410 people. Con
speratively, more than 2000 Aboriginal people probably occupied the large alpine and sub alpine region continuously and this number may have risen to 3000 or more with seasonal movements in the warmer months.

Notes
2. Wills, A.C. Evidence to Select Committee on Aborigines, Victorian Parliamentary (Legislative Council) Debates, 1858-9, Df,(V&P) 1859.
4. Gardner, P.D. "Victorian Alpine Aboriginal History" in B. Scoungall (ed) Cultural Heritage of the Australian Alps, Australian Alps Liaison Committee, Canberra, 1992. The above section is a brief excerpt from this paper.

Aboriginal Names in the Upper Tambo District

In the Howitt manuscripts in the State Library of Victoria is a 15 page typewritten manuscript which is of great interest. [Howitt MS 9356 Box 1054/C Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria] The document is a copy of vocabulary and place names of the Aboriginals from Gippsland and the Omeo district collected by surveyors Pettit and Dawson, whilst they were working in the 1850s on the Omeo highway. What follows is a small section of place names taken from this manuscript that examines the names on the upper Tambo River above Tambo Crossing, especially in the Tongio and Bindi areas. Only cursory attempts have been made with regards translating or placing meanings on these names and they appear to be mainly in the Kurnai or Gunnai language which would indicate that the informant or informants were members of the Brabiralung tribe. The authors themselves made no effort at translation of names of these places and often what follows is only a vague description of locality. These names represent probably only a small fraction of the original Aboriginal names and it appears that only a few of the names of the Yaitmathang are included. Since the boundary between the two tribes (and languages) is generally thought to have been at Tongio, much of the nomenclature that follows appears to be an example of the naming of features outside of the normal tribal territory. It should be noted that
the manuscript definitely included some Omeo language and Pidgin and I have indicated the language source only when I am fairly certain. My notes are in brackets.

Bradgerac = The Omeo Country [this definitely comes from the Gunnaí language with bra equals man and jerah meaning fear, literally the land of the men whom we fear, that is the tribal enemies of the Brabir- alung]

Bendi = a limestone plain, head of Tambo [possibly same as below]

Bindi = good grass country near Crooke’s Station [not to be confused with Crooke’s Station at Hinnomunjie on the Mitta River, held 1841-59. Crooke also held the Bindi Station from 1853-59]

Enno-mungie = a limestone plain, head of Tambo [possibly Omeo language and possibly location now known as Blackfellows Flat, or a corruption of Hinnomunjie see below]

Innio-mungee = Crooke’s Station [in the Tambo section of the P&D manuscript but definitely incorrect as this is almost certainly a corruption of Hinnomunjie or vice versa. Most likely from the Omeo language]

Tongio-mungie = Crooke’s Station [Crooke held the Tongio station from 1853 - 59 the southern boundary of which was approximately at present day Swifts Creek]

Tongio-mungie = a limestone plain, head of Tambo

Bahal-mungee = Tongio lambing station [exact location not known]

Gowa-mungee = Hill back of Tongio Inn. [almost certainly the impressive hill now known as Mt. Stawell]

Nalong = Head of Little River [see Naalong below]

Campoba-mungee = Hill back of Day’s farm [location unknown]

Worungalla = Bindi Range, near Sheep Bridge on Tambo, 4m. from
Tongio [possibly the range immediately to the north of Gap Creek now known as Splitters Ridge.]

Bitwal = Tongio Hill [almost certainly present day Mt. Tongio]

Tinnara = Mt. Bindi Range head of Junction Creek

Beeber-beeber = High Isolated hill much exposed to S.W. Winds [this Gunna word means very windy and is an equivalent of the oft used English 'blowhard'. Possibly Mt. Simson at Bindi.]

Nummi-alga = Bald Hill Creek

Tarra = Lock-Up Creek, Tongio East.

Naalong = Hill on left between Reedy Flat and Numblamunje

Mogoin = Gap Creek.

Burrak-book = part of Mt. Johnstone [either the place between Buchan and Essay or unknown location in Tongio Bindi area]

Bona-berrie = Hellhole Creek, above Tongio [located above Bindi towards Nunniong]

Gillum = Large Hill opposite Shady Creek, East side of river. [either south of Tambo Crossing or possibly a Tongio/Bindi location.]

Chirot-Ballan = Junction Creek

Tallowudgin = parts of the Tambo where there are no possum

Bongeroot = Fainting Range [south of Sandy Creek, present day Essay, formerly Numblamunje]

Nung-nung or Noye-yang = Tambo Crossing Place, McDougall's with a note from Howitt that the latter means Conger Eel. [Again definitely from the Gunna language]
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