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DESCRIPTION OF TWO BORA GROUNDS OF THE
KAMILAROI TRIBE.

By R. H. MATHEWS, L.S.,
Assoc. étran. Soc. d'Anthrop. de Paris.

Read before the Royal Society of N.S. Wales, November 7, 1917.

Introduction.

The large territory originally occupied by the various tribelets of the Kamilaroi community may be briefly indicated as extending from Jerry's Plains on the Hunter River, northerly as far as Walgett, Mungindi and Boggabilla on the Barwon River, taking in the basins of the Namoi and Gwydir Rivers, and also reaching a short distance beyond the Queensland boundary. Among the Kamilaroi the Bora was a great educational system for the initiation of the youths to the privileges and obligations of manhood; and at the same time to inculcate the civil and moral laws of the community. The proceedings involved were carried out at a suitable place in the bush, where the necessary clearing and marking had been done.

For some previous papers by me on subjects relating to the aborigines, see the following:—"Bora held at Gundabloui," Vol. xxviii of this Journal (1894), pages 98 to 129. "Bora of the Kamilaroi Tribe at Tallwood," Vol. ix, N.S., (1896), Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria, pages 137 to 173. "Grammar and Vocabulary of the Kamilaroi Language," in the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, London, Vol. xxxiii, pages 259 to 283 (1903).

The Bora Ground at Terry-hie-hie.

There is a very old Bora ground of the Kamilaroi tribes on Terry-hie-hie Station, in the Parish of the same name, County of Courallie, New South Wales, respecting which

I have gained considerable information by personal inspection. I was told by station owners and other old white men, who have resided in that district for many years, that the Bora ground referred to had been used on several different occasions by the Kamilaroi tribes throughout an extensive area of surrounding country during a long period. This is the ground referred to by Dr. John Fraser in his prize essay, "The Aborigines of New South Wales," published in this Journal in 1882, Vol. XVI, p. 216. He says, "The great ancestral Bora ground of the Kamilaroi tribe is at Terry-hie-hie." Dr. Fraser repeats this statement in another article under the same title, published by the Government Printer in 1892, p. 19.

In 1901 I made a special journey from Moree to Terry-hie-hie Station for the purpose of inspecting and reporting upon the old Bora ground above referred to. At the station I secured the services of two old Kamilaroi blackfellows, who had been present at the last bora held at this place, and who were able and willing to tell me everything I wanted to know in regard to it. As near as I could gather by enquiries, this ground had not been used for about fifteen or twenty years previously.

The main camp of the aborigines assembled on that occasion was on Terry-hie-hie Creek about three-quarters of a mile down the creek from the Terry-hie-hie Homestead. The *boora* or large ring was situated about eight chains back from the left bank of the creek mentioned, and was hidden from the view of the women and uninitiated by the intervening timber. This ring was still in a good state of preservation, and the mean of several measurements gave a diameter of 103 feet, being practically a circle. The boundary of the ring was defined by a raised bank of earth, the average height of which was 12 or 15 inches, but had probably been several inches higher when it was built and

in use. An opening about 5 feet wide was left in the western boundary of the circle, from which a path led away westerly up a gentle slope through a forest of pine trees for about eleven chains. Then a turn to left bearing W. 10° N. was made in the track, for the purpose of skirting the end of a rocky ridge, for about four chains. Another turn to the left was then made bearing W. 20° S. for about nine and a half chains, to the *goonaba* or smaller ring. At the time of my visit, there was not a vestige of the boundary of the *goonaba*. For several acres around that place the surface consisted of loose sand, and any marks made upon it would have been levelled down by the trampling of sheep and cattle for so many years.

My guides pointed out from memory the approximate position of the *goonaba*, which would have given a diameter of the circle about 50 or 60 feet. In digging into a slightly raised place on the floor of the circle, I found the remains of one of the *warrengally* or inverted stumps used in connexion with the ceremonies. It was the lower or butt part of a pine sapling, about 7 feet long, with portions of the usual spreading roots still upon it. My native guides said that at the last bora held there, the two *warrengally* which had been erected were pulled up and buried in the loose sandy soil, which was easily scooped out for the purpose. My guides said that the other buried stump had evidently been exposed by the trampling of stock passing over the place, and was then consumed by bush fires, which occasionally sweep through that district in dry seasons. It may be stated here that stumps of this character are mostly pulled out of their positions and burnt, as the ground is generally too hard for digging with the rude tools possessed by the aborigines. At the place in question, however, the sand was deep and afforded an easy way of disposing of the stumps, after some of the projecting roots had been broken

off. It was owing to this burying in the dry sand that the stump found by me was preserved from rotting away in so long a time.

. Let us go back to the *boora* or larger ring and again start westerly along the path. Owing to the soil on each hand being very sandy, there were no traces of the usual raised earthen figures, or of the *yowan* patterns cut in the surface of the ground, all of which had been erased by the constant depasturing of stock. On nearing the end of the rocky ridge already mentioned, my guides drew my attention to a number of gum trees which had been marked with a tomahawk, but the devices had grown completely off the bark of some, whilst others were so indefinite, that I did not think them worth copying. On the end of the ridge, the loose boulders and smaller stones had been carefully gathered off the pathway, and piled either in separate heaps or around the butt of adjacent trees or stumps. This was done to make the track smooth, so that it would not hurt the feet of the men when walking along it to and from the *goonaba*.

I noticed the boles or tall stumps of several large saplings of ironbark and gum, the tops of which had been cut off at heights varying from five to eight feet from the ground—some being on one side of the path and some on the other. One of these stumps was marked in a peculiar way. It was ironbark, about nine inches in diameter, and five feet high, standing on the left side of the path, about twelve chains from the larger ring. A mortise, two feet in length and two inches and a half wide, was cut right through the bole—the lower end of the mortise being about a foot and a half from the ground. The plane of this narrow cleft through the stump was parallel to the pathway. The natives said that one of the gum trees near the track had originally contained an imitation of an eaglehawk's nest,

and another had marks as if struck by lightning. The total distance between the two circles was twenty-four and a half chains, but the pathway was not straight, as is usually the case, owing to the slight detour to skirt the rough rocky ground on the end of the ridge.

The Bora Ground at Kunopia.

A Bora was held on Kunopia Run during the latter part of 1891, for the purpose of initiating a number of young men of the Kamilaroi tribe belonging to the surrounding district. An entirely new site was selected, and the necessary preparations made near Gnoura Gnoura Creek, about two or three miles from Kunopia Homestead, in the Parish of Bonanga, County of Benarba. I did not know of this gathering till it was all over, but I visited the place during the following year for the purpose of describing the Bora ground and establishing its position on the Government maps. At Kunopia Station I found "Billy Wightman" and "Jimmy Gular," two of the principal old Kamilaroi blacks who had charge of the ceremonies in 1891, and they were very willing to give me all the assistance they could.

The natives who had assembled to participate in the ceremonies had taken up their quarters near the left bank of Gnoura Gnoura Creek, from which they obtained water for camp use. Contingents of Kamilaroi blacks came from Willarie, Moogan, Gundabloui, Mungindi and other places. Each contingent brought some youths who were ready for initiation, making a total of between twenty and twenty-five graduates, as near as I could gather from my guides.

About a quarter of a mile in a south-westerly direction from the main camp, the necessary clearing and other preparations were carried out. The *boora* or larger ring was twenty-three yards in diameter, composed by heaping the loose earth to a height of fourteen inches, with an opening

four feet wide in the western circumference. Thence a straight narrow pathway, called *thunburnga*, was carefully cleared through the forest in a westerly direction for four hundred and sixty yards to the *goonaba* or smaller circle, made in the same manner as the other. Inside the *goonaba* there had originally been the usual inverted stumps, *war-rengallee*, one being box and the other sandalwood, but they had been pulled out and burnt at the conclusion of the Bora ceremonies. The path connecting the circles was formed by scraping the top surface smooth, and piling the loose soil along each side. During the ceremonies it was swept and water put on it at each end where it entered the circles—the soil being rather sandy. My native guides accompanied me all the time to explain details.

Starting along the pathway from the *boora*, at a distance of sixty yards was the imitation of an arbour or "play-house" of the bower-bird, called *weeta* in the Kamilaroi language. It was at the base of a low, small bush close to the right hand side. In the mythologic past, the *weeta* was an eminent "medicine man" among the Kamilaroi and neighbouring tribes,¹ and his bower was always represented.

At 265 yards from the *boora* was a huge male figure representing Baiamai, with his arms extended outwards, formed of loose earth heaped to the height of two feet. The length was 15 feet, and the measurement between the out-stretched hands 12 feet 3 inches. The image was lying on the back, parallel to the path, with the head towards the *goonaba*. On the other side of the path opposite to Baiamai, was his wife, Gunnanbeely, formed of loose earth heaped 1 foot 6 inches. The length of the body was 10 feet and the width between the extended hands 8 feet. She was also lying on the back, but instead of being parallel to the

¹ See my "Ethnological Notes on the Australian Aborigines," (Sydney, 1905), pp. 179–181.

path like her consort, her body was at right angles to it, with her feet towards the path. All the usual *yowan* patterns and other devices imprinted on the turf, had been obliterated by rain and dust storms. My guides said they commenced at the *weeta*'s arbour and extended close to the *goonaba*.

About 25 yards beyond the two human figures was the *goomee*, or heap of earth, on top of which Baiamai's fire was kept burning. Between Baiamai's fire and the *goonaba*, on the right hand side of the path, was a box tree, in which an imitation of an eagle-hawk's nest was built by the natives. Steps were cut in the bark up to the nest, to illustrate the Kamilaroi legend of climbing up to kill the eagles and their young ones.¹

At another place, on the left of the path, was a box tree about 50 feet high, with a spiral line cut in the bark round and round the bole from the ground up to a height of about 30 feet, to represent a tree struck by lightning. A pole 19 feet long was laid horizontally through a fork of this tree, with a small bark *koolamin* at each end to provide water for Baiamai's use during the ceremonies. This pole had a spiral line cut in its bark the same as the tree, and was supposed to have been carried there by the lightning. Sometimes only one end of the pole has a *koolamin* for water attached to it, while the other end is split as if shattered by the lightning when placing it there.

A box tree on the right of the path had a snake 4 feet 6 inches cut into the bark; and at another place on the left was a box tree with an iguana 6 feet long cut upon it.

I copied fourteen of the marked trees—eight growing on the right and six on the left of the pathway, but those

¹ See my "Folk-Lore of the Australian Aborigines," (Sydney, 1899), pp. 11–14.

above described are the most important. Trees showing an eagle's nest, marks of lightning, a snake, and an iguana are usually found on all Kamilaroi bora grounds.

From enquiries made at the Police Station at Kunopia I learnt that the total number of natives of both sexes and all ages, who had assembled at the camp on Gnoura Gnoura Creek was about 250.

In an article entitled "Ground and Tree Drawings," with plate, I illustrated a large number of drawings by the aborigines in different parts of New South Wales. In that plate, figs. 18 and 19 portray the colossal images of Baiamai and Gunnanbeely mentioned in the present paper; and figs. 7 to 16 show the markings on ten out of the fourteen trees referred to.¹

¹ American Anthropologist, Vol. ix, (1896), pp. 38, 41 and 45.

NOTE ON THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN ARTESIAN BASIN.

By E. F. PITTMAN, A.R.S.M.

[Read before the Royal Society of N. S. Wales, November 7, 1917.]

[See paper by Dr. A. L. DU TOIT, *supra* p. 135.]

I desire to briefly allude to several instances in which Dr. du Toit, in his paper on "The Problem of the Great Australian Artesian Basin,"¹ has quoted from my writings, and in which he has drawn misleading or inaccurate deductions therefrom.

1. In his introduction to his paper he makes the following remarks:—

"Against such views (Professor Gregory's views.—E.F.P.). Mr. Pittman, the most uncompromising protagonist of the meteoric theory, vigorously protested, claiming that all other geologists in Australia were at one with him in favour of a purely meteoric derivation of the water in the Great Basin. When in Australia in 1914 the author found that, so far from this being the case, quite a number of the local geologists were perfectly ready to admit that many aspects of the problem could better be explained by the rival hypothesis."

The actual statement made by me in reference to this matter was as follows:—

"The unanimous opinion of those geologists *who have had opportunities for a careful study of the Great Australian Artesian Basin* is that the water which comes from the flowing wells is of meteoric origin, and that hydraulic pressure is the primary cause of its rising above the surface in bores. Amongst those who hold these views are the Government Geologists of Queensland, New South

¹ This Journal, LI, p. 135 (1917).