



## **Enclosures**

Pulpit Hill Heritage Interpretive  
Project  
(enclosure 1)

Meeting: 11 November, 2019
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# Ngunna Gundungurra-nguu Ngurra-wuung

## This is Gundungurra Country

For the Gundungurra people, Ngurra (Country) is a complex, interconnected web of the land, all of the living things in it and on it (seen or unseen), water, sky, stars and planets, the air, spiritual beings, stories, songs and dance.

Since time immemorial, the Gundungurra people have lived in and cared for Ngurra, and have in turn, been cared for and nourished by it. Countless generations of Gundungurra people have lived and thrived in the timeless generosity and care of their Ngurra.

Today, the Gundungurra people retain this deep cultural and spiritual connection with Ngurra and Ngurra continues to care for and nourish them, but the world has changed.

The world of the Gundungurra, inhabited since the creation time, was suddenly, dramatically and irrevocably changed in 1813, with the arrival of European explorers.

At that time, a party led by the now famous early colonists Gregory Blaxland, William Wentworth and William Lawson, travelled into Gundungurra Ngurra, in their quest for new lands for the colony.

The Gundungurra, wary of the strangers, were cautious, keeping a safe distance, as two very different worlds slowly began to come together for the first time....



Aborigines using fire to hunt kangaroos.  
Joseph Lycett.  
Courtesy National Library of Australia

The art of kangaroo hunting using  
traditional cultural burning.

Travelling through Ngurra

[Tommy Mcrae Kwatkwat people Reproduced courtesy National Library of Australia]

Use the QR code link below to both explore these signs and discover more about the heritage of the Pulpit Hill precinct.







View in Bathurst Plains near Queen Charlotte's Valley. 1824. Joseph Lycett. Courtesy State Library of Victoria.

The rich Country west of the Mountains was sought after by British Colonists.



Campbells River John Lewin. Courtesy State Library of NSW.

The start of colonising Ngurra west of the divide.

Squatter with Aboriginal stockman. Tommy McRae. Courtesy National Library of Australia.

Strangers in Ngurra seeking new estates.



# Ngurra Muuraayarrgang

## Pathways in Country

By the early 1800s the small British colony at Sydney, in the rich Ngurra of the Dharug people, was rapidly expanding and more land was needed.

The colonisers were tantalised by the stories of the rich lands west of what came to be known as the Great Divide and the rumoured existence of ancient pathways through the mountains. The search was on for places with deep, rich soil, good timber, reliable rainfall and standing water, an abundance of game and a temperate climate.

These physical qualities of Ngurra were those also valued by the Dharug, Gundungurra and Wiradjuri.

Competition for good land between the original owners and the colonists, was inevitable.

Gundungurra and Dharug peoples had forever easily traversed what the colonists thought of as “the Divide”, using their ancient pathways... seasonally and ceremonially connecting them to important parts of Ngurra, to each other and to their neighbours the Wiradjuri.

It was through these pathways that the party of colonists fatefully found their way in 1813, heralding the European occupation of Central West NSW. It also marked the beginning of the violent dispossession of the original owners of the land, an impact still felt by Aboriginal people to this day.

The party of explorers are said to have carved a tree to mark their crossing and you have probably stopped here today to see that tree. Remember this part of the story when you ponder the tree. It does mark the beginning of the colonists’ expansion beyond the range, assuring the survival and success of the British colony, but it marks a starkly different beginning for the Dharug, the Gundungurra, and the Wiradjuri...

By the way, the tree is not quite what it seems, but that’s a different story...

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# The Tree, a powerful symbol

Over half a century following what is commonly believed to be the first successful European crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1813, a story emerged of a previously unnoticed tree, near the summit of Pulpit Hill, which adjoined the (by then) heavily used western road.

Over the next few decades, the tale of the tree grew, was told and retold, and the tree assumed monumental status for non-Aboriginal Australians as a symbol of crossing the Divide and opening up the west.

This period was also characterised by the almost complete dispossession of the Dharug, Gundungurra and Wirradjuri from their Ngurra, despite a fierce and heroic war of resistance.

Their languages silenced, their rich economy broken, they were forced onto missions or providing manual labour on rural properties to survive.

Their ancient, rich and vibrant culture was forced underground in the face of the rapidly expanding British colony.

By the 1870s, the colony of NSW wanted to assert its prominence and identity, spurred on by the success of the wool trade and the gold rush. The desire to celebrate these achievements was strong and the existence of a marked tree that, in the minds of the colonisers symbolised the march of progress and prosperity, grew in importance.

It is very likely that there was such a tree, marked in some way by the first colonial explorers. The process of marking, or blazing trees, is mentioned in several historical accounts, believed to be a way to mark a path for others to follow or to retrace steps in the dense bushland. It is likely that there were many marked trees in the area for this purpose.

However over the years, a story developed around the tree, to memorialise the expansion of the British colony into western NSW, with a physical landmark.



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**1** - An example from Queensland of a marked survey tree.

Survey Office shield tree BM3 - Brisbane, April 1973. Courtesy Queensland State Archives.

**2** - Detail from the Sydney Mail and NSW Advertiser feature on the Explorers Tree 22 Jul 1876.

**3** - The impacts of colonisation on Traditional Owners was devastating.

A native family of New South Wales sitting down on an English settlers farm c1826. Augustus Earle. Courtesy National Library of Australia. Augustus Earle.

**4** - Explorers Tree c. 1890. Courtesy Blue Mountains City Library.

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# A confronting and enduring legacy



Explorers Tree 1922. Courtesy State Library of NSW.



Gathering outside the Mission Church in The Gully, 1916.  
Courtesy Blue Mountains City Council Library.



**In the 1970s and 1980s, debate over the future of the remnant of the tree came into focus, particularly due to the upgrade of the increasingly busy Great Western Highway.**

**There was also increasing scrutiny about the authenticity of the tree. In turn, this raised questions about the need to protect and conserve the tree, which by then had largely rotted.**

**However, regardless of the condition and authenticity of the tree, it is a highly significant artefact and cultural symbol, which tells a powerful story.**

**It is a story of how the British colony at Sydney survived and thrived, and of the need for a fledgling colonial nation to celebrate the beginning of its story.**

**For the original owners of the land, Dharug, the Gundungurra, the Wiradjuri and the innumerable other Aboriginal peoples whose Ngurra was taken after the crossing, this tree symbolises something very different...**

Though painful for Gundungurra people, the myth of this tree is now part of their story, bonding them to the stories of their Dharug and Wiradjuri neighbours and others beyond them.

It is a story of heroic resistance, loss beyond measure, survival, reawakening and reclaiming, and of unbroken and timeless connection to Ngurra, which has never ceded nor surrendered.

Today, Australia has grown into a strong, prosperous and mature nation with a growing appetite to embrace its past and to move into the future with honesty and respect.

The story and symbolism of the tree can help us do that, to understand the price paid for the prosperity enjoyed today and the real and lasting impacts experienced by Aboriginal peoples, as a result of colonisation.

In recognition of this, in 2014 Blue Mountains City Council entered into an agreement with the Gundungurra people, the Gundungurra Indigenous Land Use Agreement. This recognises the Gundungurra's deep, abiding and unbroken connection to Ngurra and establishes a consultative, partnership approach with the Gundungurra to the management of land in the Blue Mountains.

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