

Learning on Country

Unsettling Lessons from Six Peaks

'unsettling': the effect of upsetting, disturbing, or discomposing.

Keynote Presentation to Ballarat OctoberVET
15 November 2023
SMB, Federation University.

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State Library Victoria Fellow, 2023

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- 
- ***Acknowledgement of Wadawurrung Country.***
 - *Dja Dja Wurrung Country where I live & work.*

Thanks:

- From RAVE for the invitation to share at OctoberVET.
- State Library Victoria for their support with my 'Creative Fellowship' in 2023.
- Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation for their invaluable support.
- Clive Willman as second book author.



My intention to:

- share insights about ‘Learning on Country’ during my *Six Peaks Speak* project, focused on just two peaks.
- tease out why ‘unsettling’ has been used as an appropriate organizing principle.
- Highlight the relevance of ‘ground up’ learning to local environmental, first ‘contact’ & First Nations history.
- identify some emerging unsettling themes & *legacies*.
- highlight unsettled ecosystems.
- identify new strategies for learning about reconciliation.

My Journey



- Mapped oven mounds in Donald Shire as a teenager (1960's **Map left**).
- formal education in geology, environmental science, arts & education.
- interest in the 'layered' ground up nature of history, ecology & place.
- lived on Dja Dja Wurrung Country most of my life.
- current Honorary Professor, Federation University.
- *Ongoing academic research into older adult learning & community Men's Sheds internationally.*
- **State Library Victoria Creative Regional Fellow, 2023.**



Learning

■ in Community

- existing data
- interviews
- surveys
- field work
- literature

Via

- *First Nations organisations & individuals*
- *SLV & PROV*
- *government Crown Reserve files*
- *online, particularly via Trove*

■ on Country

- rocks & landforms
- First Nations knowledge
- local knowledge
- ecosystems
- place-based maps & histories
- legacies in landscape

Via

- *walking*
- *bike riding*
- *remote sensing (LiDAR & DEM)*



The founding document of Australia – *terra nullius* – set the stage for Aboriginal invisibility & untruths about ‘settlement’

- This country was comprehensively settled, named and cultured by 300+ Nations over thousands of generations.
- There has been no First Nations treaty, and a recent national rejection of ‘Voice’ by the unsettlers.
- Most of the ‘explorers’ were guided by settled First Peoples.
- There was no ‘pioneering’ to do.
- Unsettling First people by ‘dispersal’ (massacre) spanned 150 years; early resistance led to murder in order to ‘civilize’.
- Their roads became our roads.
- *Australia Felix* grasslands were created & maintained by systematic burning, violently seized by ‘squatters’.
- ‘Celebrations of Discovery’ perpetuate myths.
- Some of the recent truth telling has been by unsettled descendants of the unsettlers (David Marr (Uhr: *Killing for Country*); Craig Horne (Alfred Howitt: *Line of Blood*), David Denborough (Samuel Griffith: *Unsettling Australian Histories*).
- **There is a lot of unsettling learning to do on Country.**



‘on Country’

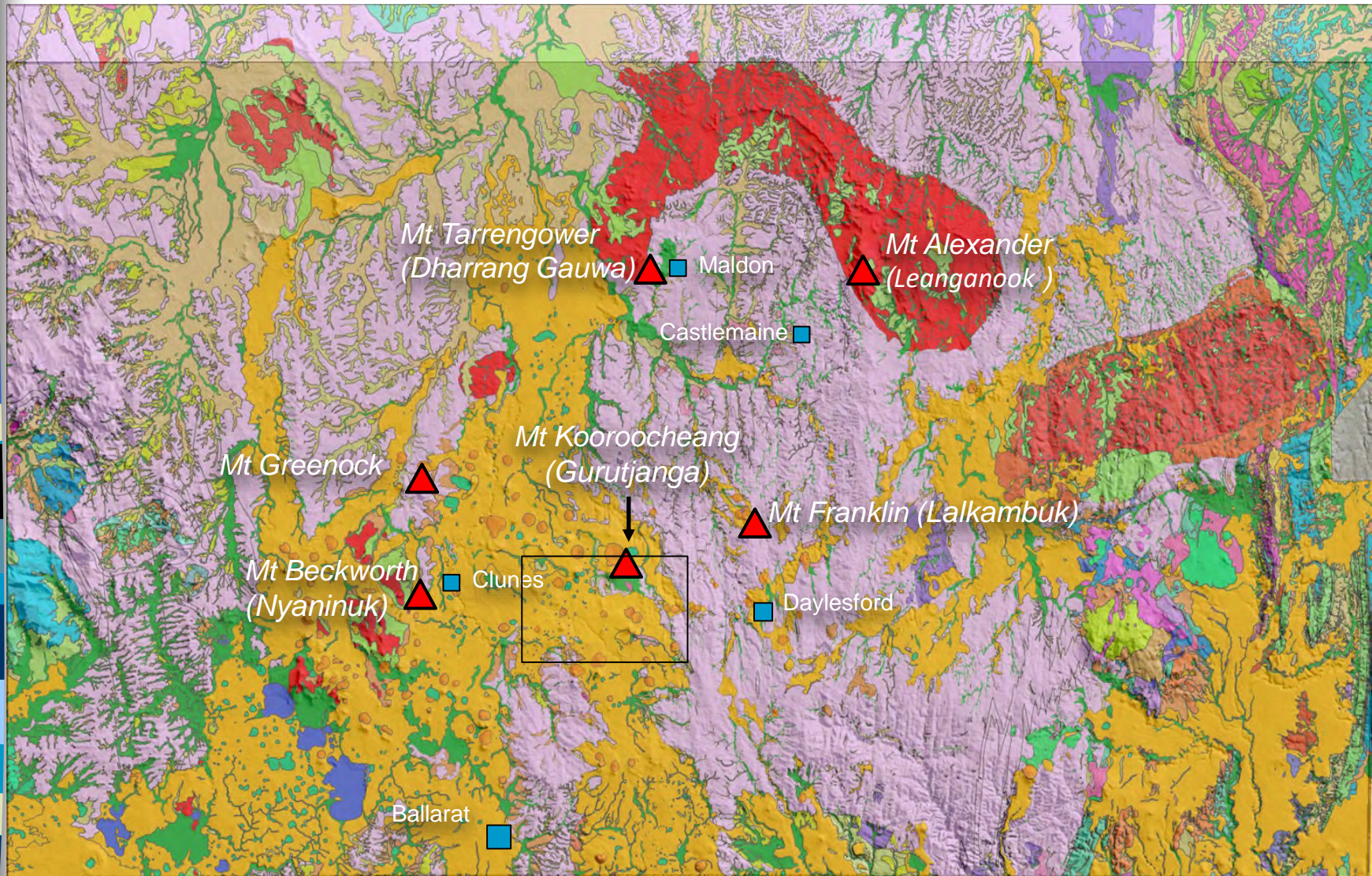
‘... is a belief system and a worldview. For First Nations people, your identity is totally related to Country, your own Country where your particular Clan comes from. We spell it with a capital ‘C’ because it is not country as with [Australia or the UK], it is not a surface thing, it is not cartographic’.

‘We see Country as a personage, as a living being. It holds the wisdom and knowledge and all the features are the result of the ancestral beings who have travelled Country and created it. All the stories you need to know in order to survive on Country come from Country, so we say, "Country is knowledge therefore it is Clever Country". If you stay connected, you will stay knowledgeable’. Margo Ngawa Neale, National Museum of Australia

My take as a non-Indigenous person:

Present day landscapes & ecosystems embody legacies we need to learn about, in order to reconcile and live sustainably.

The Six Peaks



Landscape & Land Use: It all starts with the rocks



Rocky Sandstone Hills



Granitic and metamorphic hills



Volcanic landscapes – scoria cones & lava plains



Learning about the Geology

- **Rocky hills**; forested, north-south strata, '*Broken Forest country unavailable for stations*' of Parker: later became 'gold country', now largely 'reserved'; Messmate & Box Ironbark.
- **Granite peaks** with metamorphosed margins; recovering forests, affected by St John's Wort & Wheel Cactus.
- **Fertile, recent volcanic plains**: very high Dja Dja Wurrung population densities, managed as grasslands & woodlands, *Themeda, Murnong, Banksia, Casuarina*, oven mound clusters: today's Canola.
- **Alluvium in river valleys & Colluvial Fans on slopes**: grazed, then as now.

Learning from Crown Reserve Files

these ones from the 120 ha Mount Greenock reserve, 1860 to 2010



Learning about Absences: locally extinct or endangered species in southern Dja Dja Wurrung Country

- Spotted Quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*)
- Emu (*Dromaius novaehollandi*)
- Macquarie Perch (*Macquaria australasica*)
- Murray Cod (*Maccullochella peelii*)
- Tangled Shrub Violet (*Melicytus augustifolia*, subsp. *divaricatus*)



Learning from vegetation remnants:

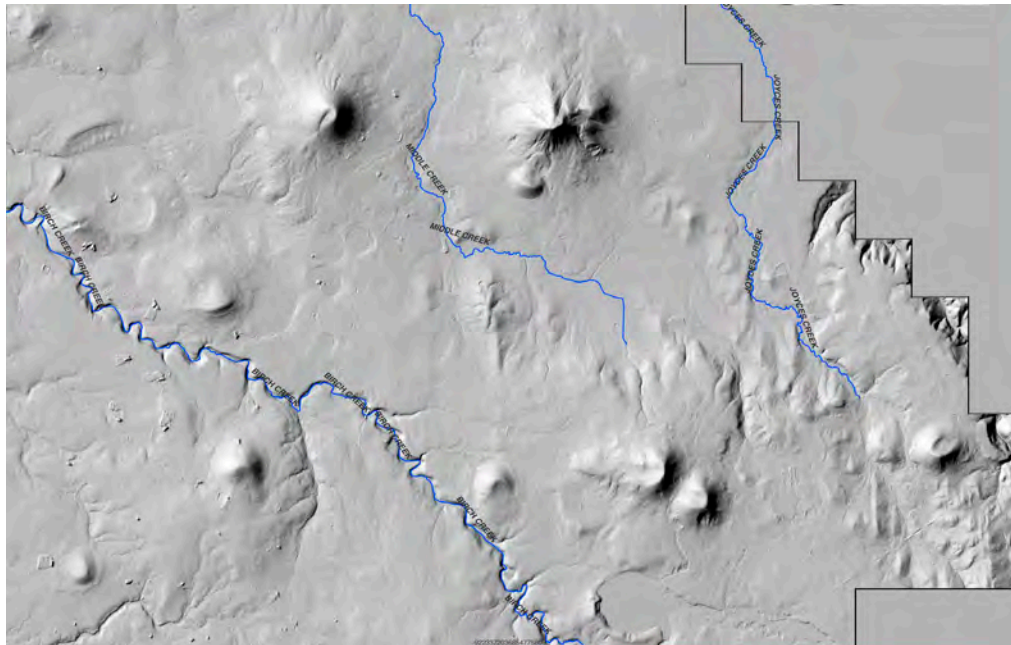
Wallaby Grass, Blue Devil & Murnong: Stockyard Hill volcanic grasslands offset.
50km west of Ballarat



Six Peak characteristics (2 Mountains in this presentation)

Ordered by height, with number of '*visible peaks*' & geology

- Alexander 744 m (267)
- Kooroocheang 669 m (189) LiDAR
- Beckwith 629 m (180)
- Franklin 627 m (173)
- Tarrengower 571 m (193)
- Greenock 385 m (105)
- Granite
- Volcanic cone
- Granite
- Volcanic cone
- Hornfels: E & Granite: W
- Volcanic cone



Gurutjanga / Mount Kooroocheang

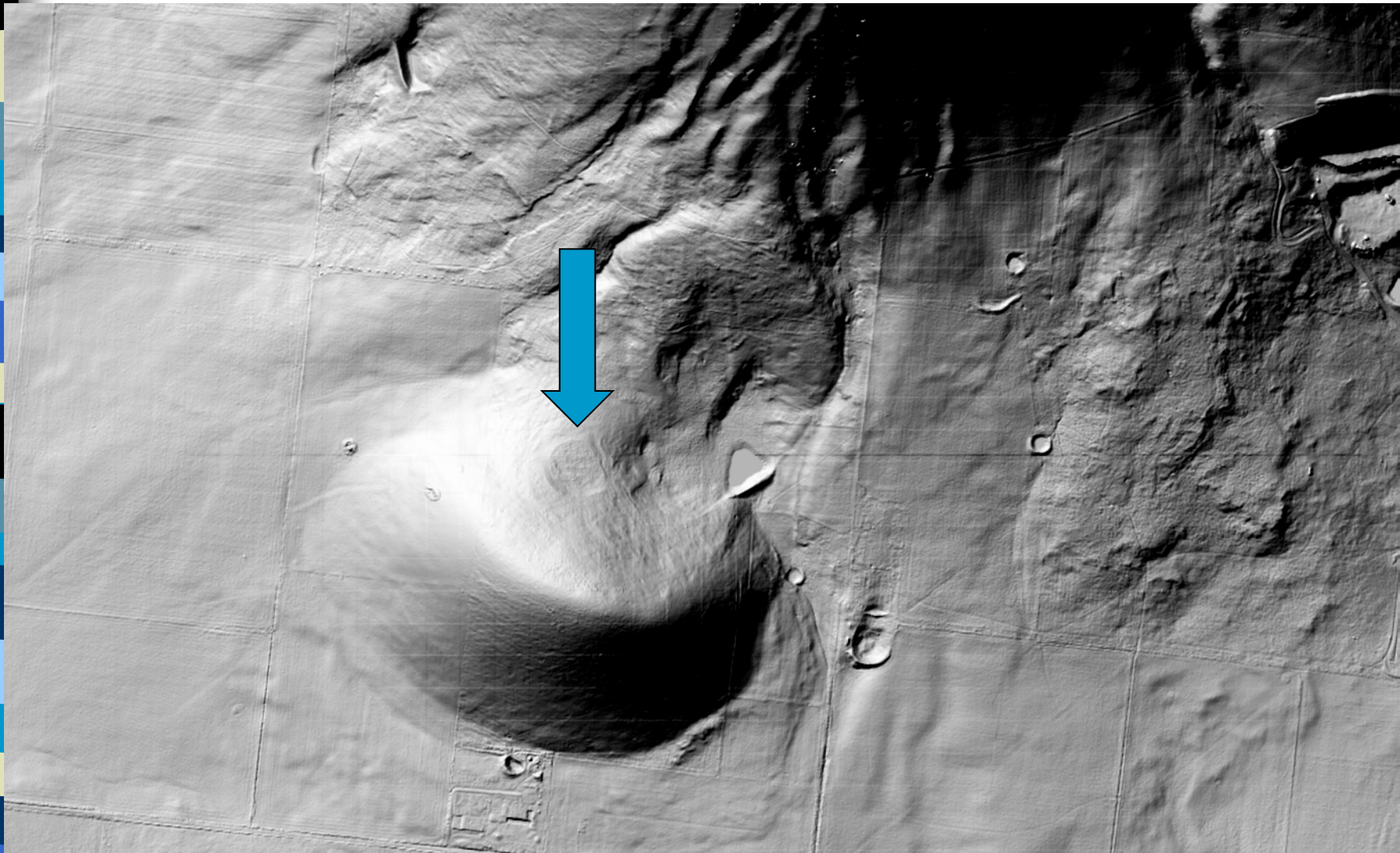
- *Tureet Balug Clan*
- Privately owned scoria cone
- A remarkable ecotone

Legacies

- *Site of John Hepburn's unsettling legacies*
- *Ceremonial earth rings & fumarole*
- *Surrounding oven mound cluster*
- *'Celebration of Discovery' 1936*



Ceremonial earth rings on Kooroocheang's flanks LiDAR



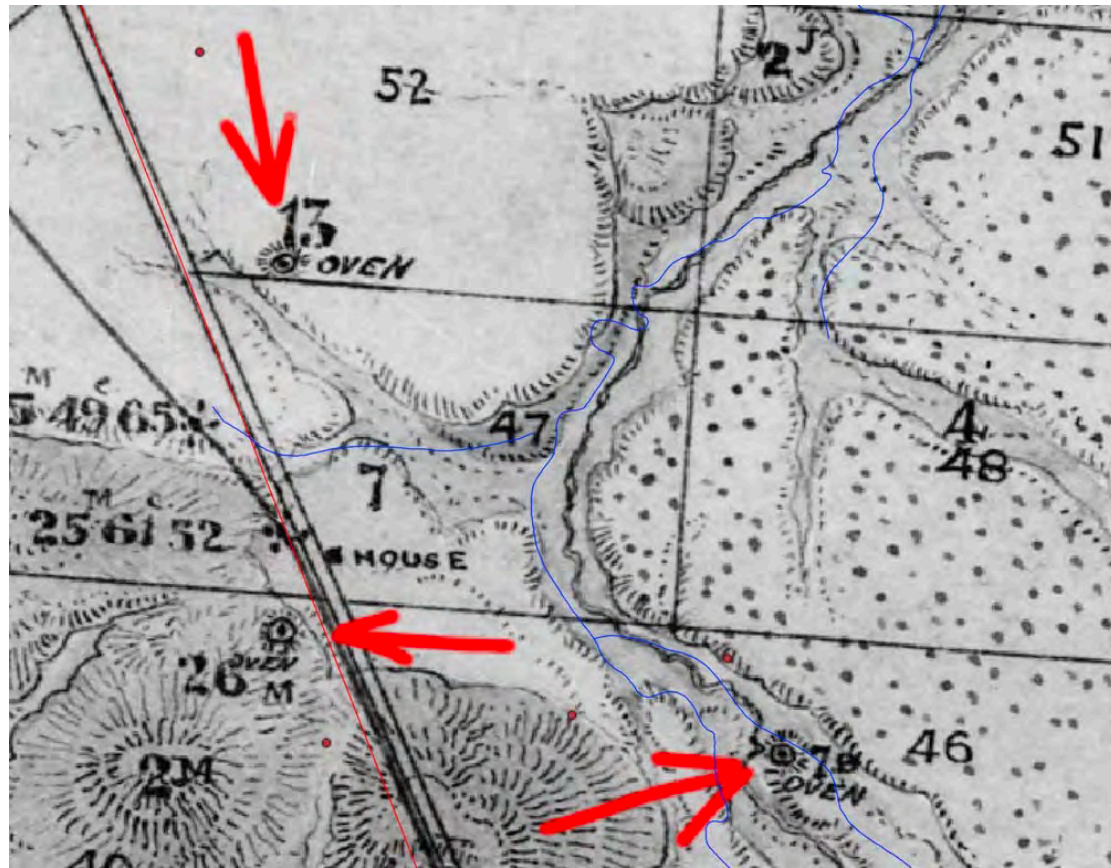
Ceremonial earth rings on Kooroocheang's flanks



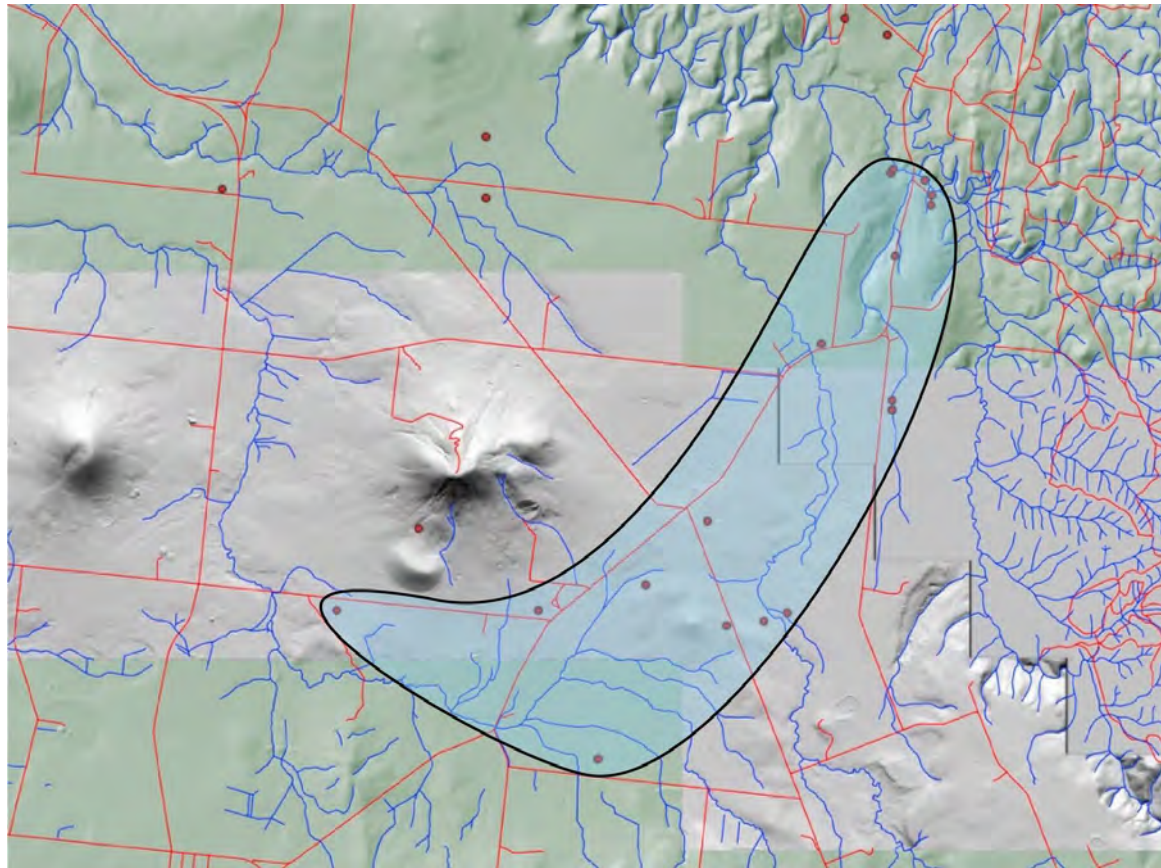
Aboriginal Oven Mound, Red Gum wetland, Kooroocheang



*Combining online mapping tools including LiDAR with 1890 geological maps to locate oven mounds, Kooroocheang area.



Part of Kooroocheang Oven Mound Cluster





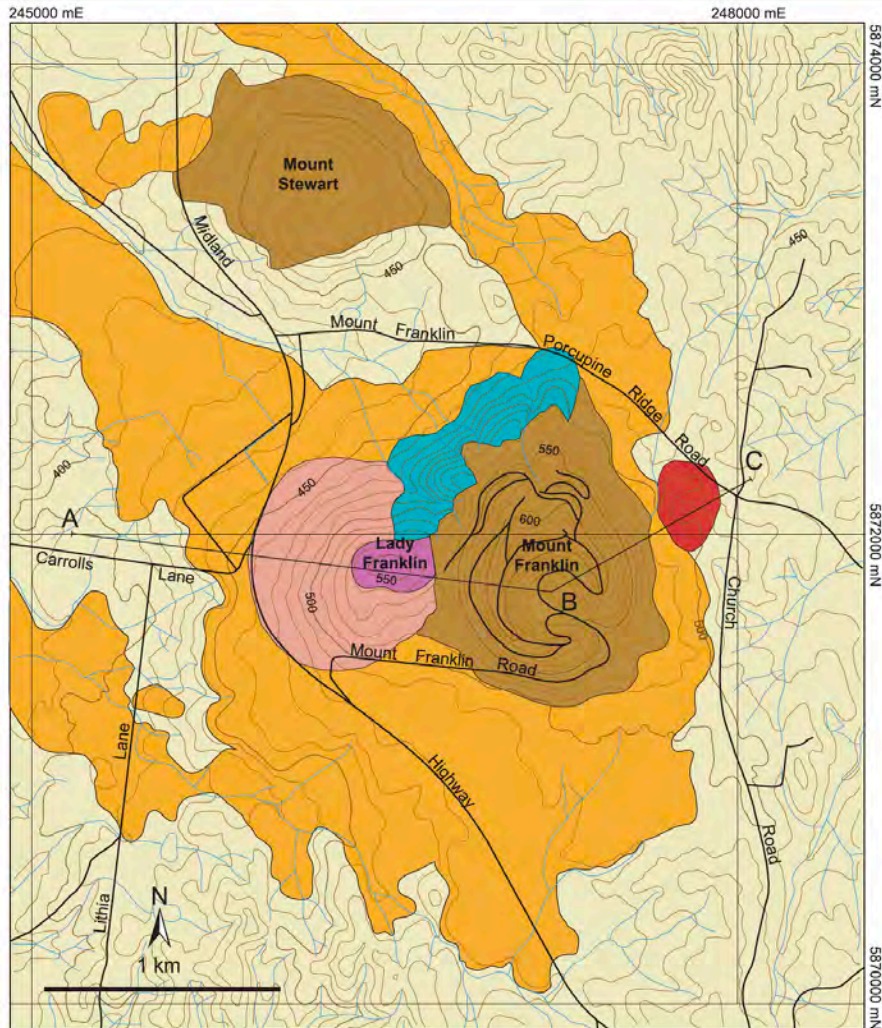
Lalkambuk ('split head') / Mt Franklin

- *Gunangara balug* Clan
- Remarkable, recent volcanic crater
- Battles to protect the crater & the panoramic views.
- FCV pines planted from the 1940s.
- Current DJAARA & Parks joint management.

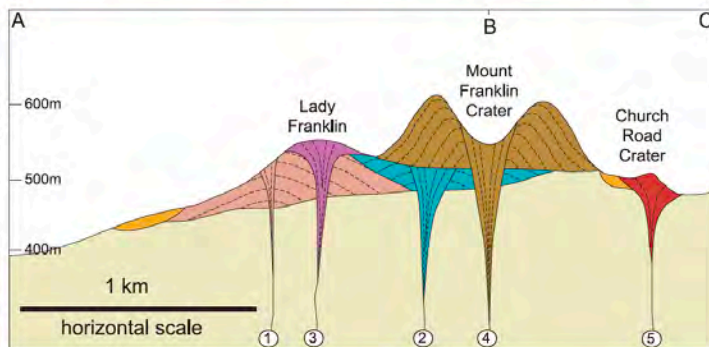
Legacies

- *Larni barramul* ('Emu nest') Crater, site of ceremony
- *Mount Franklin Aboriginal Protectorate*
- *The 'Mount Franklin' Mineral Spring & Lime Kilns*
- *The Mill Stream*

A



B



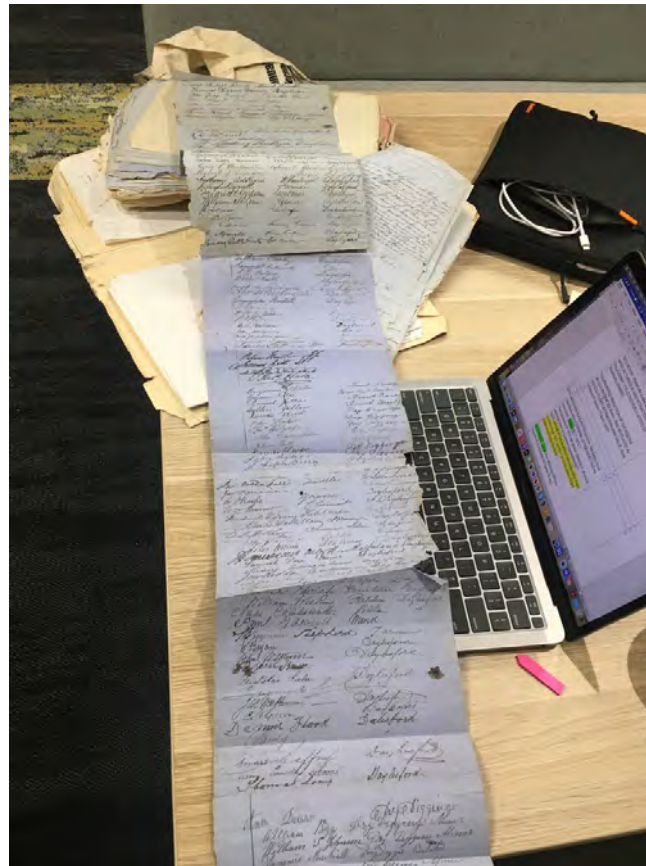
Mount Franklin Geology

- Early explosive breccias
- Two dates: 470,000 & 110,000yrs
- Several eruption points
- Lava flowed down streams to west



Lalgambook Breccia

Local 1872, 135 signature petition, requesting that government retain Mount Franklin crater and its panoramic views for future generations ...



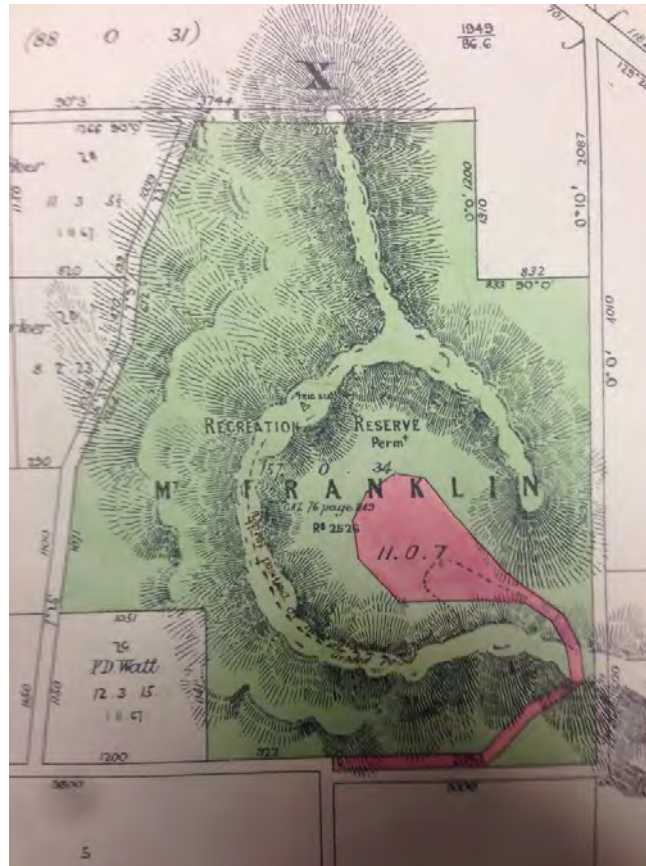
Mt Franklin Crater, 1876



INTERIOR OF THE CRATER AT MOUNT FRANKLIN.

COPYRIGHT 1876.

Mount Franklin Recreation Reserve 170 acres



Pines on Lalkambuk ('split head') scoria cone
Larni barramul ('nest of the Emu') crater within



'I have not suggested native trees [on Mt Franklin] as I feel it may be more interesting and in better character to keep the plantation totally exotic.' Forests Commission 1948

The Secretary,
Forests Commission of Victoria,
Public Offices,
MELBOURNE, VICT.

Dear Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 6th December and further to my interview with Mr. Hone this year, I wish to thank you for your co-operation and to say that the area that the Council wishes to retain has now been pegged out and is ready for surveying.

The Council's original intention was to retain all but the outer slopes of the mount. This is the top of the mount and the inner slopes of the crater. The top to be used for a road.

On further consideration it is felt by the Council that as long as they retain the flat area in the crater as a picnic ground car park and playing ground that their purposes would be well served. Mr. Gibson has pointed out that the limiting of the planting to within 100' or so of the top of the mount (for the purpose of preserving the view from the road) would lessen the value of the plantation as there would be less area from which a return could be obtained. The further excision now of the inner slopes of the crater will more than compensate for this 100 ft loss on the outer slopes.

There is a road winding in to the crater. This road has not been pegged as it is sufficiently well defined and the surveyor need only run a traverse to agree with the road to meet the requirements of the Council. As regards the future road through the pines along the ridge around the top of the crater - it is felt that there is no need to retain this from the excision as all that would be necessary is an assurance from the Commission that they would wish to see the road go in when the Council or the Country Roads Board or the Public Works or whoever the constructing authority will finally be, commences operations. From a planting point of view the position of the road will be pegged out by the Shire Engineer as soon as he is able to locate the road which is anticipated to be this month. The planting then can conform to the road so located. It is suggested that the road-in, be defined as 99 feet wide - one and a half chains.

Mr. Gibson has suggested that it would be advisable to stop the pines on the inner slopes some distance from the recreation reserve and to plant the space so left with ornamental trees such as silver birches and white poplars. Oaks, planes and sycamores could also be used with shrubs on the outer edge - Spirea, burburis and rhododendrons do very well up here.

I have not suggested native trees as I feel it may be more interesting and in better character to keep the plantation totally exotic.



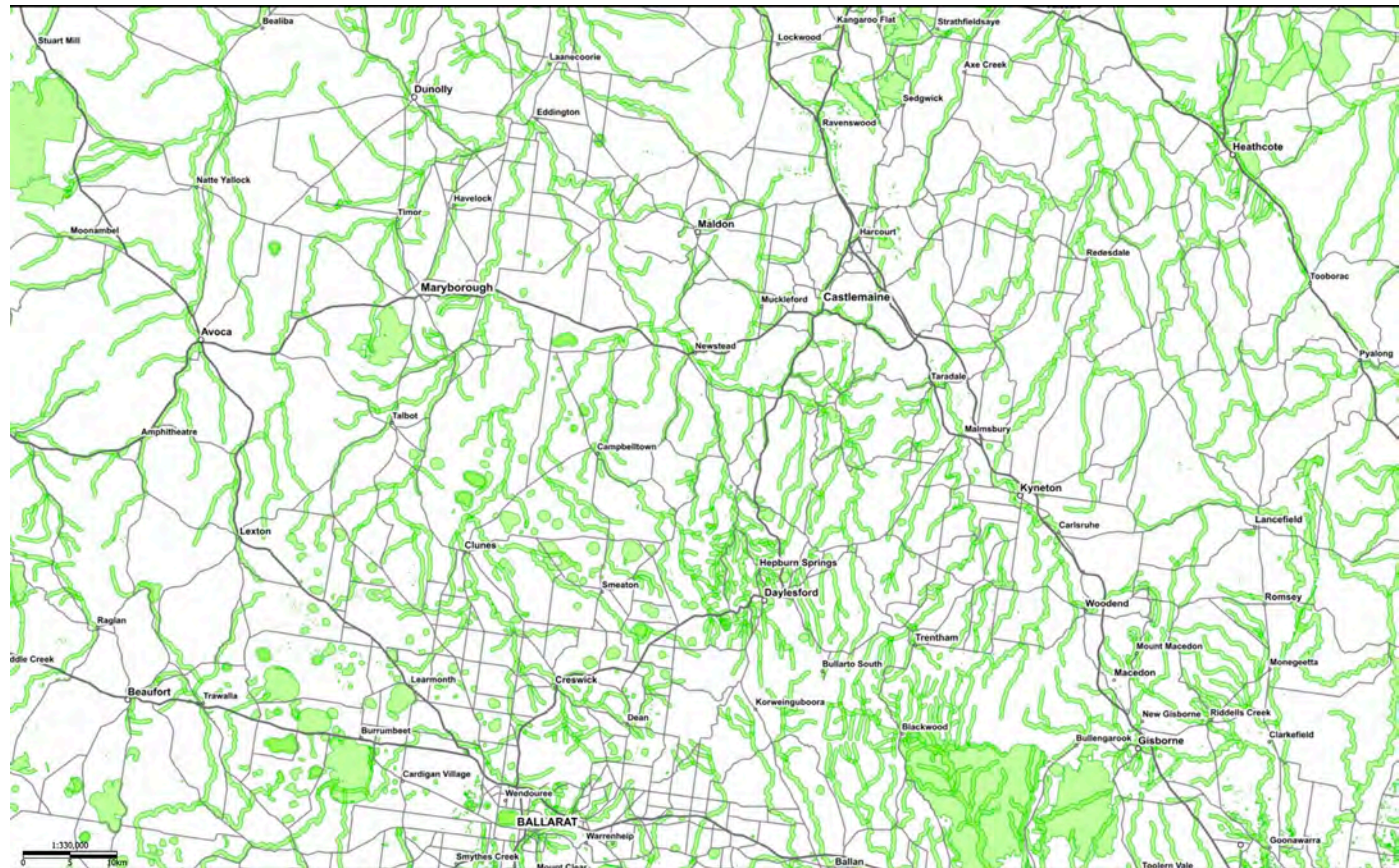
Lands Department Response, 1948

- *'... in the interests of tourists and the general public' [I suggest leaving] access to the crater rim and also carry out a planting program which will not restrict the view of the surrounding country from the rim'.*
- Forests Commission agreed to this in writing.

Mt Franklin's 'panoramic' summit today:
The Fire Tower & RF Transmitters



Aboriginal Cultural Sensitivity



Current, public view of Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register sites in Mount Franklin area



Mt Franklin Aboriginal Protectorate Site, 1841-49: later Central Station to 1864: Kooroocheang on left horizon; No interpretation or local signage since this sign was erected in the 1970s. Destroyed immediately after *Larni barramul* name was restored in August 2023 ...



[This] is one of the finest springs in all the colony, and should not be sold, but preserved in perpetuity forever in the public good. Such a spring is enough to supply all of Castlemaine with water.

Mt Alexander Mail, 1859

SALE OF LAND AT FRANKLINFORD.

SIR.—I beg that you will be so kind as to use your all-powerful pen in behalf of this district, to urge upon the government the injury the public will sustain in having auriferous land pass from the crown, just to satisfy one or two persons. Because one man has fenced in a part of two allotments he wants to get them sold, for fear he will lose his fence.

Now Sir, the facts are these; diggers are now and have been working on Allotment 15 of Sect. 5, parish of Franklin, nearly two years past—more than 18 months. They have cut a race to bring them water from Allotment 4 of Sect. 6, through Allotment 3 of Sect. 6, to their claims, a distance of near 2 miles, a great part of which is through solid rock. Now Sir, are these men to have the bread taken from their mouths and all their labor lost, or submit to such terms as the purchaser may impose upon them? For he tells us if sold he will purchase it, and then sell claims to the diggers.

Now, Sir, Allotment 4 of Sect. 6 is one of the finest springs in all the colony, and ought not to be sold but to be preserved in perpetuity, for ever, for the public good. Such a spring of itself is enough to supply all Castlemaine with water. Think Sir, for yourself, of a spring rising to the surface, running ten chains only, and then to drive a mill as this one has done, from whence it is named Mill Ruin Spring on Fraser's Survey, parish of Franklin, county of Talbot.

Trusting, Sir, that you will see the justice of this I remain, faithfully yours,

JUSTICIA.

Mt Alex Mail 1859 - 04.08

Mount Franklin Legacy: drink cabinet, 6th Floor Staff Room SLV:
named after the Limestone Spring was renamed 'Mount Franklin' in late 1970s



1840s Protectorate era Lime Kiln site at Limestone: also 1880s Gilmore's Spring site; from 1970s became Coca Cola's eponymous 'Mount Franklin Spring', abandoned after drilling. Not recorded or protected.





Learning legacies

- into Deep Time and First Nations people & landscapes.
- ‘Not all is as it seems’.
- ‘Settling’ is a euphemism for unsettling violent conquest.
- The best country was seized first. Some of the 16 southern Dja Dja Wurrung Clans were extinct by 1841.
- The six peaks are surrounded by numerous 1838-1842 massacre sites, some documented, most deliberately erased.
- A lot has been damaged. There is much to learn & repair.
- Management of public land has not always been in the public interest.
- *‘There is a need to preserve peaks to preserve ourselves’.*
- *‘There is a need to help future generations learn about and deal with the legacies in the landscape & community’.*

Questions

*Ancient strap grafted River Red Gum, Merin Merin Swamp 'in the space in between':
Mount Cameron on left horizon*

