

The carvings at the Basin have now faded badly, largely as a result of heavy traffic over the years.



... especially where the creeks widen and open to the river, were much frequented by the coast natives, for the wooded sides of the ranges in this neighbourhood abounded in animals of various kinds, which supply their food, and the waters below afford a plentiful supply of oysters and other shellfish.

Govett noted that the Berowra Aborigines had discarded their stone axes for metal ones, which they sharpened in the traditional manner. He observed many piles of shells, twenty or thirty feet high. These were middens that occupied the limeburners who provided mortar for early Sydney buildings. Govett recalled that, on the local creeks, a native:-

... might formerly have been seen paddling alone in his canoe to some favourite haunt where he might fish and spear the mullet undisturbed, while the smoke curling upwards from a distant point would indicate where he had left the companions of his tribe.

Govett's description suggests that the life-style of the Aboriginal people had been severely disrupted by 1829. While there had been no permanent settlement by Europeans in the vicinity, there had certainly been exploitation of the local environment by them.

The carvings left in Muogamurra and other parts of the district serve as a silent memorial to Aboriginal people who must have regarded the area as a paradise.



MARVELLOUS MUOCAMURRA



INTRODUCTORY NOTES BY
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EARLY EXPLORATION
THE ABORIGINAL PRESENCE

EARLY EXPLORATION

Europeans first explored the Lower Hawkesbury from the sea. By June, 1789, Governor Phillip and his sailors had established the existence of the Hawkesbury. There followed more detailed explorations and, with the establishment of a settlement at the Green Hills (Windsor), the River became the major "highway" of the young Colony of New South Wales. Accounts abound of the experiences of River sailors and it appears evident that people camped in the area, gathering timber and burning lime.

While the water connection between the Lower Hawkesbury and Sydney was much frequented during the first fifty years of European settlement, there was little interest in the land connection. Gradually, timber-getters had extended their activities northward, logging the majestic bluegums from the high forest that covered the shale soil belts. By 1829, the timber-getting had extended to the site of modern Hornsby. Timber-getters' tracks had linked to provide the early roads and the Hornsby area could be reached from Parramatta, or Lane Cove, along the Pennant Hills Road.

Obviously, the timber-getters had considerable local knowledge of the landforms of the district, but that knowledge was not shared by the administration. William Romaine Govett, a Government Surveyor, set out to rectify this situation in 1829. Govett sought to trace the watercourses and to define the watersheds between Cowan Creek, Berowra Creek and the Lane Cove River. His journey took him through the timber country and, eventually, off the shale soils and onto the sandstone ridge that separates Cowan Creek from Berowra Creek.

He wrote of this ridge:-

This ridge, which the blacks call "Carracyanya", is the whole way covered with an intolerable scrub, and is bedded with the common sand and ironstone. It runs much upon a level until you draw nigh to the river, where it rises to exceeding high rocky points, and is joined by very low connections.

Govett proceeded along the ridge from Hornsby to the Hawkesbury. As he neared the River, he arrived at an identifiable landmark:-

Near the extremity of the ridge which divides the Cowan and Berowra Creeks, from a point overlooking the waters of the Hawkesbury, and commanding a prospect of the most romantic scenery in that part of the country, the summit is formed of a wide mass of flat rock, on the surface of which figures of various descriptions, as hands, arms, legs, men and animals, were indicated in a variety of curious fashions, and near at hand stood by itself a stone, circular basin, resting on a made pedestal nearly four feet high, which contained water from which we drank. The appearance of this basin (which indeed very much resembled the Baptismal Font seen in some of our old churches) would incline one to suppose that it was actually built, if the fantastical nature of the rocky scenery around did not in some measure account for it.

Govett had discovered The Basin, which was to become a familiar landmark to all those who used the first road along the *Carracyanya Ridge*. Obviously, it was already a familiar landmark to the Aboriginal people, who had been the original inhabitants of the vicinity.

THE ABORIGINAL PRESENCE

On the hilltop overlooking the Hawkesbury, there are some spectacular collections of Aboriginal rock engravings. The best known of these is the extended gallery of figures near the Basin. The first European to have mentioned these artworks was Surveyor Govett.

The hilltops around the Lower Hawkesbury were evidently used for ceremonial purposes and the carvings on this ridge are not the only gallery areas. Assumptions have frequently been made about the tribal organisations of the



This postcard was taken from a location that would now be in Muogamurra Sanctuary. It is believed to date from the 1890s. Note the "fresh" appearance of the railway cuttings on the hillside.

early Aboriginal people, but there appears to be little evidence to identify the occupants of this district. Govett refers to them as "coast natives", and mentions

... caves overhung by huge and massive canopies, which may almost be taken for the workmanship of man. These caves or hollows are called by the natives Gibba Gunyas, or houses of rock, under which they may occasionally pass a night, but they are found generally very damp.

Govett noted that the bottoms of the ravines,