

NHIL3004 Report

Project 12: Mapping the Land

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On the 4th of August 2017, the NHIL3004 class from the University of Newcastle attended a field trip to the Finchley Trig Lookout and Aboriginal rock art platform on the Yengo Track, Yengo National Park, NSW 2330. The purpose of the trip was to collect reference material for our infographic poster projects. This report is involved with the Mapping the Land project and the research and construction of a map, showing pathways to Wollombi and the Hunter Valley. Mount Yengo and the engravings in Finchley Aboriginal Area are the focus for the map, along with surroundings and tribal localities.

The target audience is the general public, the aim is to bring awareness and create further interest in the Aboriginal culture within the Yengo National Park. The purpose, as a visual tool, is to educate and promote the conservation of ancient Aboriginal cultural treasures. The report begins with a brief description of the excursion, followed by historical and topographical research with a mention of infographic posters and maps through the ages.

The field trip commenced at the Finchley Trig Lookout, with spectacular 360-degree views of wilderness with Mount Yengo and Mount Werong (Little Yengo) to the north, across Wollemi National Park and beyond to the basalt peaks of The Great Dividing Range. Dr. Greg Blyton, our Aboriginal guide, senior lecturer from Wollotuka at the University of Newcastle, performed a smoking ceremony at the camping ground. A fire was lit from collected eucalyptus leaves and we individually walked through the smoke to cleanse and show respect prior to our visit to the rock platform.

On the short walk between the camping ground and engraving site, the unsealed road had recently been graded and vivid streaks of red oxide, ochre and occasionally white could be seen in the crushed sandstone. I collected some pieces of rock with visible veins of ochre and oxide, inspiration for the tone of the map, to reflect the Aboriginal use of these colours.

We walked around the platform bare-footed, for reverence and protection. There are two zones of engraving close by, and it is thought that the largest is the men's area with the smaller being the women's. The latter has engravings of what looks like families of emus and brush turkeys and is quite different to the larger site with more figure-based images.

The Finchley Aboriginal Area, 4 hectares, was created in 1976 for the protection of the rock art engravings, thought to be around 20,000 years old. In 1988 Yengo National Park was one of the last to be added to the World Heritage Area. Yengo and the greater Blue Mountains have numerous Aboriginal rock and cave art sites, created by the Darkinjung, Dharug and Wanarua people. The Aboriginal cave paintings and engravings are so numerous that there are likely to be

undiscovered sites and the Finchley rock platform is one of the most extensive and accessible. The engravings on the Finchley Lookout rock platform, also known as the Northern Map Site or Flat Rock, are thought to be an 'amalgum of teachings' and a mapping site guiding Aboriginal visitors, perhaps to caves, food, water and birthing areas.

Mount Yengo, 668 metres, and Mount Werong are the flat-topped remains of a 17 million year old basalt lava flow in a landscape dominated by the Hawksbury sandstone ridge. Mount Yengo is considered to be the 'Uluru of the East' and deeply significant in Aboriginal culture. Biamie, the Dreamtime being, is said to have stepped off the mountain's flat top after creating the world. The basalt-capped mountain is an imposing sight particularly during storms when it is often struck by lightning, adding to the mystique.

The name of the nearby town Wollombi, settled in the 1820s, is thought to originate from the Aboriginal word 'meeting place' or 'meeting of the waters.' It was a former corroboree ground and pathways used by coastal Aborigines and other traditional areas converge here. According to RH Goddard, in the Burragurra document of 1937, many groups were known to travel to Wollombi and Howe's Valley for certain ceremonies.

The early convict roads were built after the local Aborigines guided the first European surveyors to The Hunter Valley, avoiding the sacred sites. For example, the Old Great North Road circumnavigates particular cultural areas, which suggests the local Darkinjung people deliberately diverted the newcomers. The lie of the present road system from the coast to the Hunter Valley, to a certain extent, follows these pioneer routes; they are thought to be close to the traditional trading tracks between the different Aboriginal groups, the Darkinjung, Awabakal, Gurringai, Dharug, Wonnarua, Eora, Gundungurra, Wiradjuri and the Gamilaroi.

Landmarks in the area still bear the names of the early pioneers. The MacDonald River is named after John MacDonald, a bushman and ex-convict, who travelled in the early 1820's with some friendly Darkinjung people. John Howe was also assisted by local Aboriginal people in 1817 to trek from Windsor to the Hunter Valley, along what is now approximately the Putty Road; Howe's Valley now bears his name. More settlers followed these pioneers, some travelled the Great North Road and others took the shorter route via Peat's Ridge.

Viewing the different styles of cartography, the book 'Great Maps, the world's masterpieces explored and explained' provided inspiration for my artwork. In particular the thematic and medieval maps, an example being Dante's map of Milan, showing more geographical detail than the city. The study of infographic posters was informative and I particularly liked the work of Fernando Baptista. Also, John Elmslie, in the 1850s, in conjunction with James Reynolds produced interesting geographical posters.

In conclusion, the research, study of maps and posters influenced my decision to keep the artwork hand-drawn using ochre, red oxide, white and graphite,

representing charcoal, to reflect the Aboriginal use of these colours; the exception being the blue of the waterways. Yengo is an area of abundant creeks and the map concentrates on the main rivers. Dr. Greg Blyton said they were very practical people, so I have kept the poster streamlined, excluding a scale, as many maps have a disclaimer regarding accuracy. The map is an informative organic idea of the country to bring awareness to the Finchley Aboriginal Area.