

WHEN THE WODI WODI WALKED TO BARRACK POINT

A conquered people, particularly one subjected to a systemic campaign of genocide, usually has minimal influence on the cultural practices of the conquerors.

Only in the realm of place-names do a conquered people leave much impact on the life of those who steal their land.

And the meaning of the place names taken from the literally hundreds of lost Aboriginal languages continues to pose real-problems for white Australians - particularly those who are for some reason offended by the current dual-naming policy now in vogue: Ayers Rock/Uluru, Mount Olga/Katatjuta.

In the process of the white invasion of this country (and subsequently as well) so much faulty transliteration and plain inaccuracy in the recording of place names has occurred that both white Australian (and many Aboriginal people as well) have no idea what particular place-names might actually have originally meant.

In an effort to do something about this, and to affirm the status of Aboriginal names wherever possible, The National Place-Names Project, an academic undertaking at the University of New England at Armidale, aiming for Government and private funding, has been established.

I for one, however, have long supported the suggestion of my old English professor who always argues that all Aboriginal place-names mean the same thing.

Such a view certainly has logic on its side. For when some probably demented explorer or settler would wander up and ask an Aborigine (in English for God's sake), "What do you call this place, mate!", chances are the Aborigine would reply quickly tell him or her where to get off.

So all the Aboriginal place-names in Australia apparently mean either 'Go Away' (or something rather more offensive) as it was once rendered in the literally thousands of different Aboriginal Dialects and Languages to which this country was once heir.

Nevertheless, the policy of the various existing Names Boards in the various States has been to retain older names, particularly Aboriginal ones, no matter how inaccurately they may have originally been applied. For this reason alone, it seems unacceptable that BHP now wishes to change the name of Wongawilli Colliery to Shortlands - thereby unnecessarily disposing of a lively Aboriginal name for a very prosaic European one.

Unfortunately, there has been at least one recent embarrassing attempt to foist an inappropriate Aboriginal name on a local facility in the form of the 'Wodi Wodi Walking Track' at Stanwell Park.

Even if Wodi Wodi definitely is an inaccurate transliteration of the name of a local Aboriginal grouping (local Aboriginal identity Joan Wakeman suggests it should be pronounced 'Whardie Whardie') it is a name that is more closely associated with the southern rather than northern Illawarra.

And while on the subject of place names in the southern Illawarra, I note that the furphy about Wentworth's Convict Barracks has been revived in the notes to the 'Illawarra Trader's Heritage Calendar' as the source of the place name Barrack point. There is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that such Barracks ever existed. And the name Barrack Point is more likely to originate from the

Aborigine named Barrack listed frequently in the blanket returns recently indexed by Peter Doyle and published in Michael Organ's documentary collection *Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines*.

If any readers think they can identify any more local howlers when it comes to place names, we'd be only too happy to publish them. We may even run a competition to find who can come up with the most ridiculous explanation for a particular local place-name. I'll start the ball rolling with a serious piece on the origins of the place-name 'Thirroul' early in the new year.

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