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‘pretty trinkets’?

Jeremy Steele



OCCASIONAL PAPER

No. 1

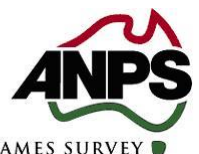
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One can only surmise what the euphonious NSW placename Trunketabella might mean. We yearn for a translation such as ‘pretty trinkets’, and for an account of the exchanging of beads and looking glasses with the local people by explorers. It is commonly said that Parramatta means ‘the place where eels lie down’, Berowra the ‘place of many winds’, and Wahroonga ‘our home’. Where did these endlessly repeated interpretations come from? The



reality is that place names can be hard to translate (What are the meanings of Paris, London, Berlin?), and that in Australia some might have arisen from misunderstandings between whitefella and Aboriginal informant. For example, the reputed name of Sydney Cove, *Warang*, might have been a comment about one **side** or of the bay or cove, rather than the informant providing the actual name of it—if it had one, even.

“Worrong-woóree”	warang-wuri =	“: On this side (the water) :”	side near:	Dawes (b) [b:22:3] [BB]
“{Wáráng}”	warang =	“{I then told her that a whiteman had been wounded some days ago in coming from Kadi to Wáráng & asked her why the black men did it.—}”	Sydney Cove :	Dawes (b) [b:33:4.2] [BB]

Table 1 Dawes’ records for *warang* for ‘side’ and ‘Sydney Cove’

Nevertheless it is likely that in many of the placename definitions provided in booklets suggesting names for houses by McCarthy, Tyrrell, Endacott and others there is an element of authenticity. For example, for Parramatta, *bara* is recorded as meaning ‘eel’ from around 1875. It is the ‘place where they lie down’ that is suspect.

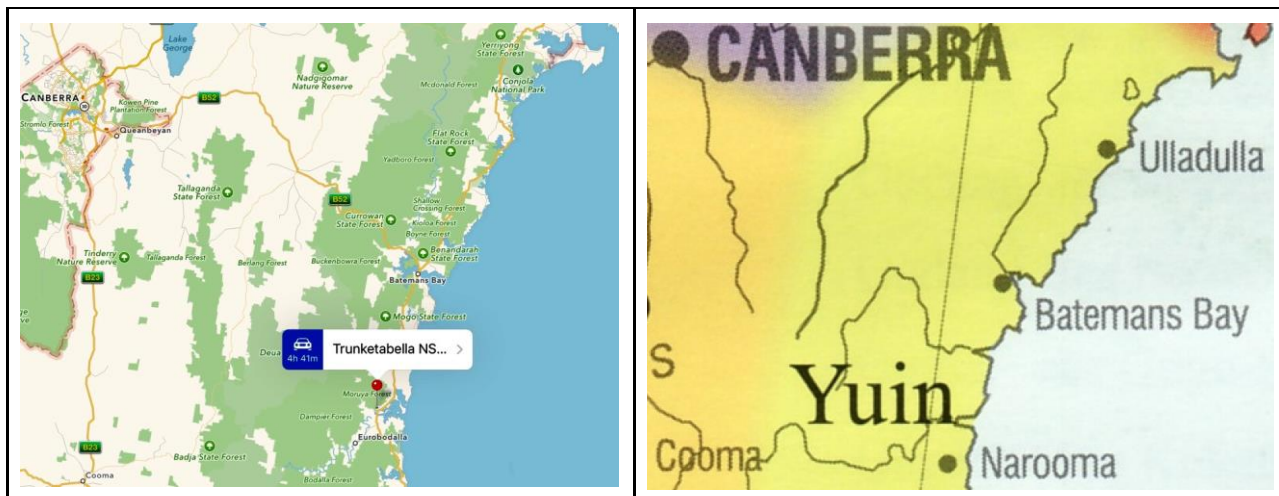
To make a suggestion as to meaning of a place name means a trail through the records. For Trunketabella, there are several strands to follow.

bila

First, start with the easier final portion. It has nothing to do with the Italian *bella* meaning ‘beautiful’. Almost certainly it means ‘stream’ in one of its guises: ‘creek’, ‘river’, ‘brook’ and so on.

Trunketabella is in south coast, Yuin, country, a little north of Narooma, round about the bottom of the right-hand leg of the ‘n’ in ‘Yuin’ in the map on the right below, extracted from the AIATSIS map ‘Aboriginal Australia’.

Trunketabella



The surveyor and language enthusiast R.H. Mathews recorded ‘forest oak’ for *bila* in the Dhurga language, possibly spoken in the area:

Australian	respelt	English	EngJSM	source
“Bil’-la”	bila =	“Forest oak”	oak forest:	Mathews DGA 1901 [:70.4:16] [DGA]

Table 2: *bila*: Forest Oak [Data derived from the Bayala Databases <bayaladatabases.blogspot.com>]

The present writer, Your Amateur Researcher, has few records for this region. However, among them are two other words collected by Mathews:

“bilulli”	bila-li =	“Wide “	wide :	Mathews KML/Dwl [:278.8:23] [Dwl]
“billai”	bila-yi =	“Smell”	smell :	Mathews NGWL [:305:46] [Gga/Ngw]

Table 3: *bila*: ‘wide’ and ‘smell’

If *bila* really means ‘stream’, then these two might conceivably have been obtained when a *wide stream* was being considered, or a *smelly* one.

In view of YAR’s paucity of appropriate South Coast data, the following *bila* references are some of many obtained from the Wiradhuri language, territorially the largest language group in New South Wales:

“Billa”	bila =	“a river”	stream :	Günther WIRA (Fraser) [:73:49] [Wira]
“Beelah”	bila =	“a creek”	stream :	SofM 18960912 [12.1: DDB-Dubbo] [:12.1:7] [Wira]
“Billugh”	bila =	“River”	stream :	SofM 18991021 [154.2: Kable/Coe-Cowra] [:154.2:2] [Wira]
“Billa”	bila =	“River”	stream :	SofM 19000521 [62 Tibbetts-Ulamogo PI] [:63:179] [Wira]

Table 4: *bila*: ‘stream’ — Wiradhuri

That this word *bila* might have extended from Wiradhuri country eastwards across the Great Dividing Range, to Trunketabella is not so surprising when the following are also considered, from the south-west corner of W.A. on the other side of the continent:

“be-lo”	bila =	“river, a; a stream”	stream:	[4] Grey 1840 [:362:5] [NYUNGAR]
“bi-lo”	bila =	“river, a”	stream:	[5] Symmons 1841 [:362:3] [Wajuk]
“Bilo”	bila =	“A stream; a river.”	stream:	Moore 1842 [:11:15] [NYUNGAR]
“bilo”	bila =	“river, a”	stream:	[6] Brady 1845 [:362:4] [NYUNGAR]

Table 5: *bila*: ‘stream’ — Nyungar, W.A.

Wiradhuri too provides support for the idea that *bila* also denoted the tree often found beside streams, the River Oak, comparable to the Dhurga Forest Oak in Table 2 above:

“Billar”	bila-r =	“a river swamp-oak”	oak forest:	Günther (Fraser) [:73:53] [Wira]
“Billahr”	bila-r =	“a tree of the Bogan oak kind”	oak :	SofM 18960912 [12.1: DDB-Dubbo] [12.1:8] [Wira]
“billar”	bila-r =	“Oak”	oak :	Mathews NYMBA 1904 [:229.3:14] [Nymba]

Table 6: *bila*: ‘oak’ — Wiradhuri

These are the trees that grew beside the creek, the same word seemingly being used for both concepts. Interestingly, Wiradhuri *bila* also forms part of *bilabang* (billabong):

“{Bil’ bong}”	la-	bila-bang =	“{A water course; the “milky way.”}”	water- course :	SofM 19020721 [98 Richards] [:100.2:21.1] [Wira]
“Billabang”		bila-bang =	“the Milky Way”	Milky Way :	Günther (Fraser) [:73:50] [Wira]
“Billabong”		bila-bang =	“a side creek”	ox-bow lake :	SofM 18960912 [12.2 JJB-Narrandera] [:12.2:41] [Wira]

Table 7: *bila-bang*: stream or stream-like feature — Wiradhuri

The component *-bang*, in the opinion of YAR, is formed of the stem-forming suffix *ba-* signifying ‘do’, combined with the nominalising or noun-forming ending *-ng*, together making *bila-bang* to mean ‘stream doing’.

When *bila* as ‘River Oak’ is further considered, perhaps it is no coincidence that *bila* in certain areas is the word used for a spear—made of wood, of course:

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“pīlar”	bila =	“spear”	spear :	KAOL Ridley [KML] [:25:32] [Kml]
“beelar”	bila-r =	“War-spear”	spear war:	Curr v. III Bk 14 §181 [310: Moseley Wee-waa] [:311.1:17] [Kml]
“Bill-lar-ra”	bila-ra =	“a Spear with a barb”	spear :	Anon (c) [c:27:17] [BB]

Table 8: *bila* ‘spear’ in Kamilaroi and in the Sydney Language

In summary then, the final portion of Trunketabella appears to denote ‘stream’, or possibly the tree type growing beside it. So what about the Trunketa... portion?

Trunketa-

From the south coast there are numerous possibilities of which the following are a few:

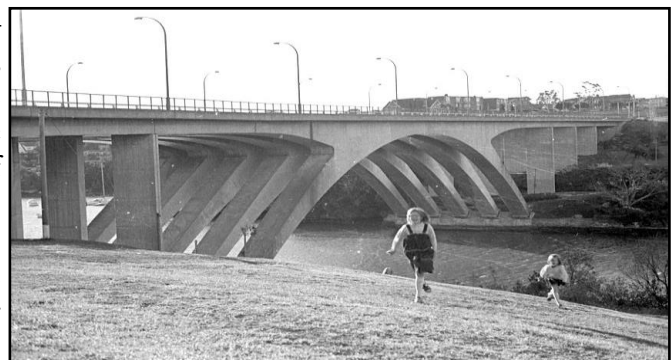
“Dhurrang”	Darang =	“a creek”	stream :	Mathews 8006/3/7/ - CRITERION [:71:17.3] [Gga]
“durrug”	darang =	“thigh”	thigh :	KAOL Ridley [WODI] [:124:6.7] [Wodi]
“dhurring”	Daring =	“Stand”	stand :	Mathews KML/Dwl [:279.3:6] [Dwl]
“Darreng”	daring =	“hair”	hair :	Mitchell, T.L.: SQ [:425.1:18] [Gga]
“dherrung”	dirang =	“Hair of head”	hair :	Mathews NGWL [:303:16] [Gga/Ngwl]
“Dir-rang”	dirang =	“little night owl”	owl :	Mathews GGA Myth [:33:10] [Gga]

Table 9: *d@r@ng* [where @ denotes any letter] — NSW south coast

Of these, *dara* is a common word for ‘thigh’ across numerous NSW languages.

Not quite so widespread are *durun/ dirin*-type words indicating ‘hair’.

Several Coastal—and Inland languages, too—have words for ‘stream’ beginning *dar-* or *dara-*, such as the commonly accepted word for the Hawkesbury River, ‘Deerubbin’, and even the Tarban Creek Bridge immediately northward of the Gladesville Bridge in Sydney.



Tarban Creek Bridge

Coastal languages from Sydney southwards have *dara-* words for ‘stand’, but not northwards, nor Inland.

There are as well quite numerous examples in Coastal and Inland languages of birds beginning *d-r-*, making the last example, ‘the little night owl’, not altogether out of place in the list.

In short the first part of *Trunketabella* could indicate any of the ideas in Table 9.

Perhaps the Wiradhuri or other Inland records offer other insights. The following tables present some of the many possibilities from that language area.

“Derangarbi”	diranGarbi =	“a high, steep, red bank”	bank :	SofM 18960912 [12.1: DDB- Dubbo] [:12.1:5] [Wira]
“Dirangal- bang”	diran-Gal- bang =	“high, exalted; entrusted with authority.”	exalted :	Günther (Fraser) [:80:70] [Wira]
“Dirraggal- bang”	dirang- Gal-bang =	“haughty”	haughty :	Günther (Fraser) [:81:6.1] [Wira]
“Dirrangal”	diran-Gal =	“one that is superior to work; a lazy gentleman”	haughty :	Günther (Fraser) [:81:15] [Wira]
“Wirry Derrong Derrong”	wiri dirang dirang =	“Red-back spider”	spider red-back:	SofM 19010321 [26 Thomas–Wiraiairi] [:26.4:45] [Wira]
“Dirrung”	dirang =	“Red”	red :	SofM 19010422 [44 Thomas–Wiraiairi] [:44.1:6] [Wira]

Table 10: diran-: ‘high’, or ‘red’

From Table 10 it would appear that perhaps *diran/dirang* might mean ‘high’ or ‘red’. The glosses ‘bank’ and ‘spider’ in the second-last column, derived from the original translation, are almost certainly incorrect.

“During”	during =	“a snake”	snake :	Günther (Fraser) [:82:56] [Wira]
“Dthoorr’ roong”	Durung =	“Worms.”	worm :	SofM 19021227 [180 Richards] [:181.1:10] [Wira]
“dhurung”	durung =	“[snake]”	snake :	Mathews 1904 [:286:33.5] [Wira]

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“Duronggar”	durang Gar gar =	“a glow-worm, a common worm”	worm spill akin [worm trail]:	Günther (Fraser) [:82:58] [Wira]
“Garr—garr”	gar gar =	“Like spilt, partly spilt (the slime left behind in trail of slugs and worms).”	spill akin :	SofM 19020826 [114 Richards] [:117.1:12] [Wira]

Table 11: durung: ‘snake’

Perhaps *durung* or similar means ‘snake’ of something long, thin and wriggly.

“Derangoomi”	diranGumi =	“currawan tree”	tree type :	SofM 18960912 [12.1: DDB-Dubbo] [:12.1:1] [Wira]
“goomi”	gumi =	“a seedling”	seedling :	SofM 18960912 [12.1: DDB-Dubbo] [:12.1:3] [Wira]
“Dúrang”	durang =	“the bark”	bark :	Günther WIRA (Fraser) [:82:44] [Wira]
“dhurang”	Durang =	“Bark of trees”	bark :	Mathews WIRA 1904 [:300:87] [Wira]
“dhurraṅ”	darang =	“bark”	bark :	KAOL Ridley [WIRA] [:126:14.2] [Wira]

Table 12: *d@r@ng*: something to do with trees

The Table 12 tree words return us to the realm of the River or Forest Oak concept for *bila*.

Such *d@r@ng*-word speculation could readily be extended, but the principal possibilities have probably been canvassed. The examples also ignore the suffixes following the stem not because they are considered irrelevant (far from it), but because of the possible unreliability of their precise recording, and because of YAR’s unfamiliarity with the languages of the region.

Assuming for a moment that *bila* should mean ‘stream’, then Trunketa– [darangada ?] might have meant something appropriate to a stream, otherwise why juxtapose the words? Of all the ideas presented above, perhaps the tree concept is the most likely: trees line creeks just about everywhere. Now wait a moment ... the very proposing in this paragraph of *darangada* as the possible re-spelling for Trunketa– brings to mind some words provided by the Sydney-based botanist George Caley in the early 1800s:

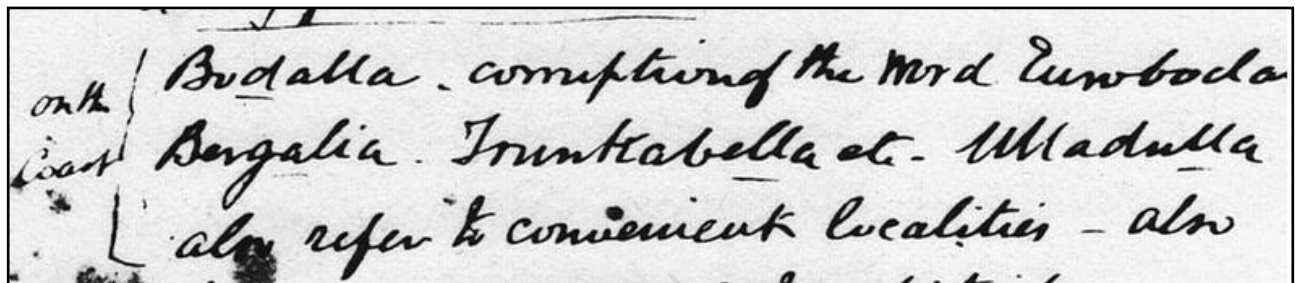
“Torrangora”	daranGura =	“Torrangora Ironbark”	ironbark :	Caley's Botanical Work [:225:13] [DG]
“{Torsun'ba} ”	dardyanba =	“{Forest Mahogany. ...}”	mahogany [forest]:	Webb: Caley [:176:23.1] [DG]
“Torumba”	daramba =	“Forest Mahogany”	mahogany [forest]:	Caley's Botanical Work [:225:21] [DG]

Table 13: George Caley's Dharug tree names collected southwards of Sydney

The first of these tree names, *daranGura*, looks much like the postulated *darangada* for Trunketa—. Could it be that the meaning sought is as follows:

Trunketabella
darangura bila
Ironbark creek

And just when that seems settled, this crops up:



Extract from Mann, John Frederick. c.1842. Australian Aborigines—A few notes on their language etc. Information obtained from Long Dick an influential native of the Cammeray Tribe a son of Bungaree and Queen Gooseberry. Sydney (Mitchell Library).

In the middle of concluding notes to a word-list provided by Long Dick, is a portion marked ‘on the Coast, together with a mention of the very place being looked. Appended is a reference to ‘convenient localities’. Perhaps Bodalla, Eurobodalla, Bergalia [?], ‘Trunkabella’ and Ulladulla were all regarded as convenient localities, this phrase not being an actual translation of anything, and thus the gloss for Trunketabella here tentatively arrived being allowable to stand.

Jeremy Steele

Wednesday 2 December 2015