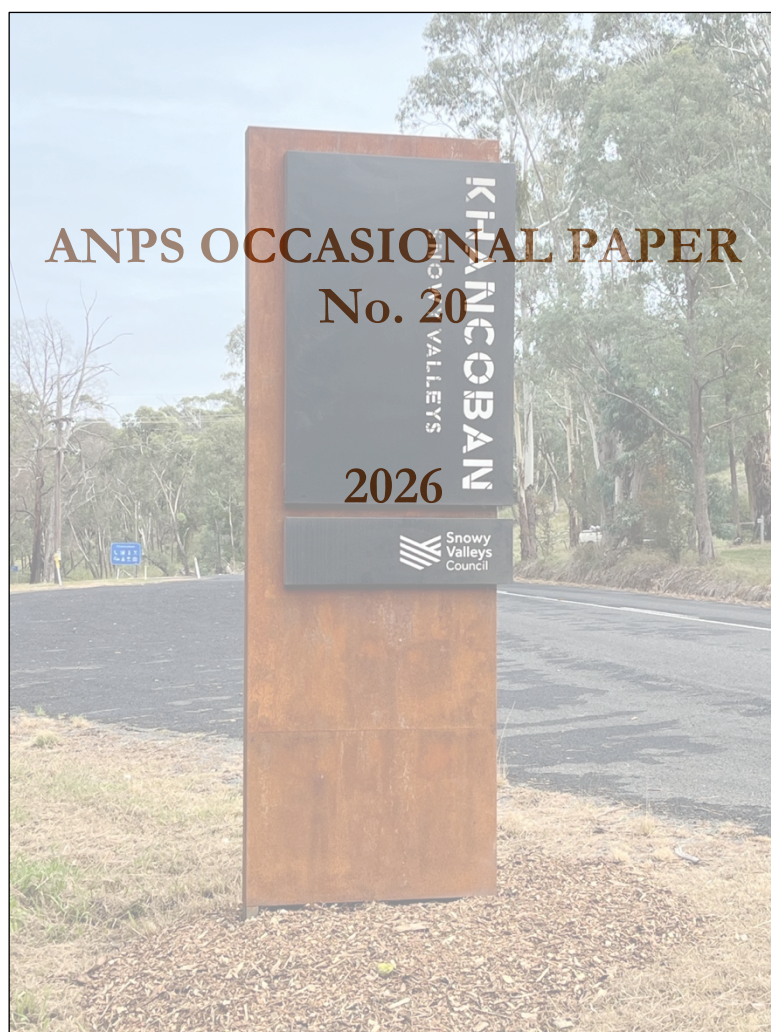


Khancoban: Reanalysed



KHANCOBAN: **REANALYSED**

Jan Tent

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‘The argument about how [Khancoban] earned its name will never be settled to everyone’s satisfaction.’
 Paul Daley, *Canberra* (2020, p. 15)

1 Introduction

In the beginning, the Khancoban district was the dominion of the Walgalu (aka ‘Wolgal’) people (Tindale 1974, p. 199) (see **Figure 1**). In the 1830s Europeans occupied the region for grazing. Later, a very small rural community, consisting of a school, a creamery, and a post office, sprouted among the local pastoral runs. The two main pastoral runs in the district were ‘Khancoban’ and ‘Bringenbrong’. Then from the late-1950s to the early-1960s, a township adjacent to the ‘Khancoban’ run was established by the Snowy Mountains Authority to house hydroelectric scheme construction workers and their families (see **Figures 2 & 3**). In its heyday the township accommodated some 7,000 people. Today, Khancoban largely functions as a maintenance and service hub for Snowy Hydro, supporting a population of approximately 250.¹



Figure 1

Detail of Tindale (1974), *Australia S.E. Sheet, Tribal Boundaries Map*.

(Source: <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/items/b71d03b1-4a53-447f-a1ec-d876fafd43a5>)

The township has experienced somewhat of a renaissance since the early-2020s, with new houses being built on blocks that were cleared in the late-1960s and early-1970s. In addition, Snowy Hydro is building 84 new units/dwellings for the Snowy 2.0 project ‘temporary workers accommodation’ [*sic*] at the south-western end of the town (opposite the Lakeside Caravan Park). These are due to be completed in 2026/27.

¹ ABS, <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/UCL122072>



Figure 2

Khancoban township in 1960 with the Swampy Plain and Khancoban Station in the distance to the right of the Swampy Plain River (centre). (Source: National Archives of Australia. Item ID 6849035)



Figure 3

Khancoban township in its heyday (c.a. 1966) with the completed Khancoban Pondage in the background. (Source: Unknown)

The township is situated at the south-western perimeter of the Kosciuszko National Park near the NSW-Victoria border, some 50 km south of Tumbarumba, and 40 km (great circle distance) nor-nor-west of Thredbo (Figure 4).²



Figure 4

Khancoban, location circled

(Source: Area tourism map, Tumbarumba Shire Council <https://livingdaylights.com.au/maps/#jp-carousel-130>)

The question of the origin of the toponym *Khancoban* (pronounced [kæn'koubən]/kan-KOH-buhn) has been a matter of debate since at least 1930. The vast majority of authors who have deliberated upon it claim it has an 'Indian' origin.

Like many of Australia's rural towns, Khancoban derives its name from a local pastoral run. How this run obtained its name is an enigma which will be examined in this Occasional Paper.

The ANPS Newsletter *Placenames Australia* has previously published three articles on the topic: Oldrey (2009), Murphy (2012b) and Koch (2013). It has only recently been argued that it is an Indigenous-derived name (see Murphy, and Koch). The issue has certainly not

² *Khancoban* is also the name of a New England (NSW) grazing property 45 km south-east of Glen Innes. The current owners do not know the aetiology of the name. In all likelihood, it is a copy of the Snowy Mountains *Khancoban*. There is also a *Khancoban Drive Park* in Buderim, near Maroochydore (QLD), and is surrounded by street names copied from names of nearby townships in the Khancoban district of NSW.

been resolved; and being a resident of the township and a linguist/toponymist, it only seemed natural for me to pull on a few threads and see if I could unravel the mystery once and for all, or at least shed some further light on the puzzle which may ultimately aid further research to find a definitive answer.

2 Early recordings & forms of the toponym

The first official mention of the name, albeit in the form *Cencobine*, appears to be in the 1845 *Depasturing Licenses Index 1837-1851*, showing that Licence No. 870 was given to Grant and Trevelyan on 4 October (see **Figure 5**).³ However, depasturing licence No. 147 shows that they were granted a previous one on 16 August, 1844 (**Figure 6**). Although this licence does not identify the name of the run, only the region in which it is situated, it in all likelihood refers to the same property as Licence No. 870. If this assumption is correct, it would appear the run did not have an official name before 4 October, 1845 (apart from it being initially unofficially known as *Swampy Plain*).

License to Depasture Crown Lands beyond the Limits of Location.

No 870

Date 4th October / 45

Name Grant & Trevelyan

Residence Cencobine

Station ~~Swampy Plain~~ Murrumbidgee

District ~~Swampy Plain~~ Murrumbidgee

Period, viz.....From..... 1st July / 45

To 30th June 1846

AMOUNT.....£ 10

Figure 5

Grant and Trevelyan's Depasturing Licence for *Cencobine* [*Khancoban*], 4 October, 1845.

³ I shall comment further on this spelling below in section 3.2.1(C).

License to Depasture Crown Lands beyond the Limits of Location.

No. 147

Date 16 August 1844

Name..... *Wm. Grant & Trevelyan*

Residence *Upper Hume*

Situation..... *W*

District *Murrumbidgee*

Period, viz..... From *July 1844*
To 30th June *1845*

AMOUNT £ *10*

Figure 6

Grant and Trevelyan’s Depasturing Licence for *Hume (Upper)*, 16 August, 1844.
Depasturing Licenses Index 1837-1851 (Series: NRS 14363 | Item No: [4/103] | Copy: 5077 |
 District/Locality: Murrumbidgee | Licence: 147).

A month later, in the *New South Wales Government Gazette* of Tuesday 8 November, 1845 (No. 94), page 1294 (**Figure 7**), the same spelling *Cencobine*, appears in a listing of depasturing licences from the Revenue Branch of the Colonial Treasury:

**Revenue Branch, Colonial Treasury,
 Sydney, 8th November, 1845.**

PASTURAGE LICENSES.

LIST of persons who have obtained Licenses to
 Depasture Stock beyond the limits of location,
 for the year ending, 30th June, 1846.

**Hugh, Tutzoon ; Garland James, Jooma ; Grant
 and Trevellyu, Cencobine ; Galvin George, Obard ;**

Figure 7

Detail of depasturing licences notice
 (Source: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/230690220?searchTerm=%22Cencobine%22>)

Three years later the *NSW Government Gazette* of Saturday 30 September, 1848 (**Figure 8**) shows the current spelling, and establishes that Grant and Trevelyan also obtained the lease for the run in that year:⁴

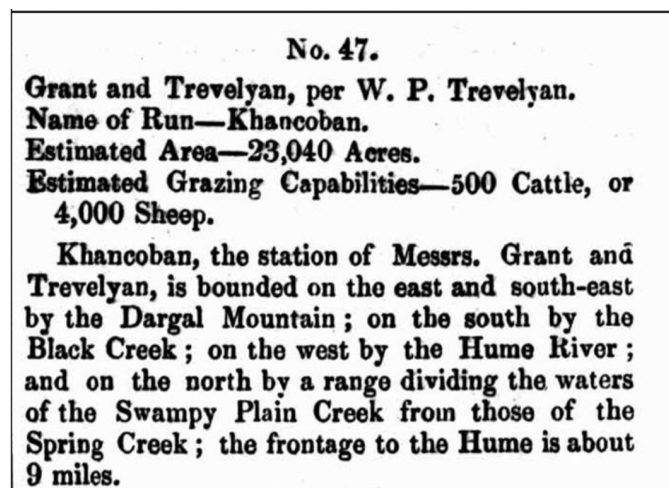


Figure 8

Detail of: Colonial Secretary's Office, 30th September, 1848. 'Claims to leases of beyond the settled districts. Murrumbidgee district'

In the same year, the surveyor William Henry Wells published *A geographical dictionary; or gazetteer of the Australian colonies*, in which he has the entry (notice the spelling):

KHANCOBIN. The station of Messrs. Grant and Trevallyn [*sic*], in the district of Murrumbidgee, N.S.W.

In the dictionary's preface (p. vi), Wells declares:

The labor of the compiler has been of a very arduous description in collecting the requisite materials for this volume, having been engaged upon the work upwards of eight years, during which, he has consulted and extracted from every one of the subjoined list of works.

The significance of this statement lies in the dictionary's publication date—1848. It means Grant and Trevelyan may have actually taken possession of the run anywhere between 1841 (the date of Trevelyan's arrival in NSW) and 1845 (see **Figure 6**). This is corroborated by depasturing licences 870 and 147 (**Figures 5 & 6**). Prior to their occupation, the run was operated by John 'Swampy' Hay, Grant's cousin with whom he travelled to NSW in 1840. Hay may have simply managed the run for Grant and Trevelyan until 1848 (see **Figure 8**).⁵

⁴ The 1847 Orders in Council divided land into settled, intermediate and unsettled areas, with pastoral leases of one, eight and 14 years for each category respectively. From here on, squatters were able to purchase parts of their land, as opposed to just leasing it.

⁵ John 'Swampy' Hay evidently obtained this sobriquet from the run's original name, *Swampy Plain*. 'Swampy' was added to his name in order to distinguish him from Sir John Hay (1816–1892), who was also a pastoralist in the region at the time. 'Swampy' Hay was the third son of Grant's late uncle Captain James Hay, who also served in the 93rd Highlanders of Foot ('Old squatter's death', 1908; Burgoyne, 1883, pp. 25, 46, 388).

3 Origins

Leaving aside the minor issue of Grant and Trevelyan's period of tenure of 'Khancoban', of more relevance is the name's etymology and enigmatic aetiology.⁶

3.1 Aetiology

Andrews (1920, p. 164), who traces the history of European occupation of the Upper Murray region between 1835 and 1845, appears to be the first to chronicle the history of ownership of the run. However, he does not provide any information regarding its naming:

KHANCOBAN, or SWAMPY PLAIN (Co. Selwyn).

South-east of **Bringembrong** [*sic*], on the Swampy river. Believed to have been first formed by William Guise in 1838, or 1839, with **Bringembrong**, it very soon passed into the possession of John Hay, who from his ownership of this run became known as "Swampy Hay," to distinguish him from his namesake, the owner of **Welaregang**, for whom he managed that run, though in no way related to him. In 1848, the lease was held by Grant and Trevallyn [*sic*], and Townsend's Map, published shortly after, shows it as in the name of M. Hervey, late Grant and Trevallyn [*sic*]. [...]

From approximately 1848 on, *Khancoban* (or some other spelling thereof) was regularly listed in government gazettes and newspaper advertisements and articles. This includes the rather bizarre spelling *Kalucoban [River]*, (i.e. *Swampy Plain River*) in an article by the *Melbourne Argus* correspondent 'Telemachus'. No explanation is provided for this version of the name (see **Figure 9**). Murphy (2012a) claims (without any cited evidence or source) that the Findlay family, one of the first to settle in the Corryong-Khancoban region, and who acted as guides for sightseers and fisherman in the late-1800s, referred to the Swampy Plain River as the *Kalucoban River*. It seems Murphy inferred the latter from the *Melbourne Argus* article even though it does not make any reference to this, explicit or implicit.

⁶ The 'etymology' of a placename is the history of its meaning and linguistic forms as shown by tracing its development since its earliest recorded occurrence in the language, e.g. *Norfolk* 'name of a county on the east coast of England' < Old English *Norðfolc*, lit. 'the northern people', the northern part of East Anglia (in contradistinction to *Suffolk*, OE. *Sudfolc*). A placename's 'aetiology' is the story behind the place obtaining that name. All places bearing the name *Norfolk*, e.g. *Norfolk Island*, *Norfolk Creek*, *Mount Norfolk*, *Norfolk Point*, etc. have their own unique aetiologies. For a full exposition of the terms, see Koch (2009).

Thus we descended the hill from the homestead and rode away up the valley. We headed the Murray proper in half an hour; for two miles above Towong the Murray divides into two heads. One is the Inde, which flows away south and east, marking the boundary of Victoria. The other the Kalucoban, nearer to whose course and tributaries we followed. Again and again in an hour's riding did we cross the Kalucoban, always crystal clear, pebbles of innumerable tints shining on the bottom beneath two and three feet of water. Wild duck rose frequently, and flew from pool to pool with whistling wing. Any day, in an hour or two,

Figure 9

Extract from the article 'Kosciusko' by 'Telemachus'. *Melbourne Argus*. March 21, 1891.
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8485506?searchTerm=%22Kalucoban%22>

Sometimes, early references to the pastoral run include the name *Swampy Plain* which was, according to Smithwick (2003 [1936], pp. 34, 37), its precursor name. This name was entirely apt given the plain's propensity to flood and its abundance of reedy river flats. In a family history, local resident Peter Scammell (2024, p.53) explains that before the arrival of squatters, the annual snowmelt supplied the valleys and flat, low-lying plains with plenty of water which ensured an abundance of reedy creeks. In the years following the introduction of European livestock, the reeds were almost entirely consumed, especially during the drier periods with the landscape ultimately taking on the more usual pastoral appearance it has today. The region's swampy legacy is preserved in the names of its two life-giving streams—*Swampy Plain Creek* and *Swampy Plain River*.⁷



Figure 10a

⁷ Note: the official specific element of both toponyms is *Swampy Plain* not *Plains*, although the latter is erroneously shown on local road signs (Figures 10a and 10b, photos by the author).

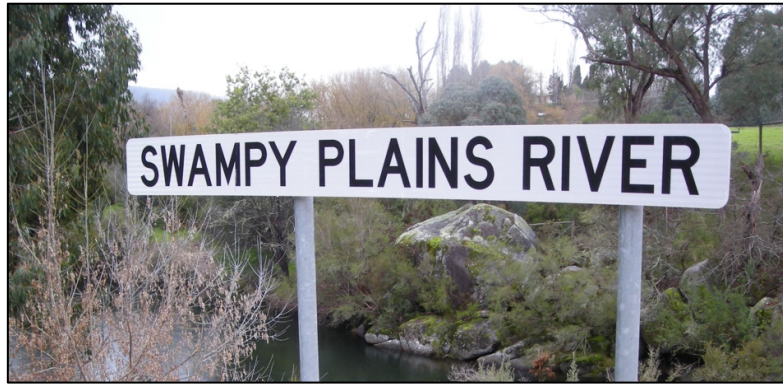


Figure 10b

Swampy Plain’s marshy hangover is also indicated on the 2022 New South Wales Spatial Services unit Topographic Map, *Swampy Plain* 8525-4S, which displays a large area (hatched in blue, designating ‘Swamp: wet, dry; Land subject to inundation’) surrounding the Swampy Plain River and Creek which run through Khancoban Station (Figure 11a). Nowadays, flooding is controlled through the management of waterflow by Snowy Hydro. In some areas, though, remnants of swamp still exist (Figure 11b).

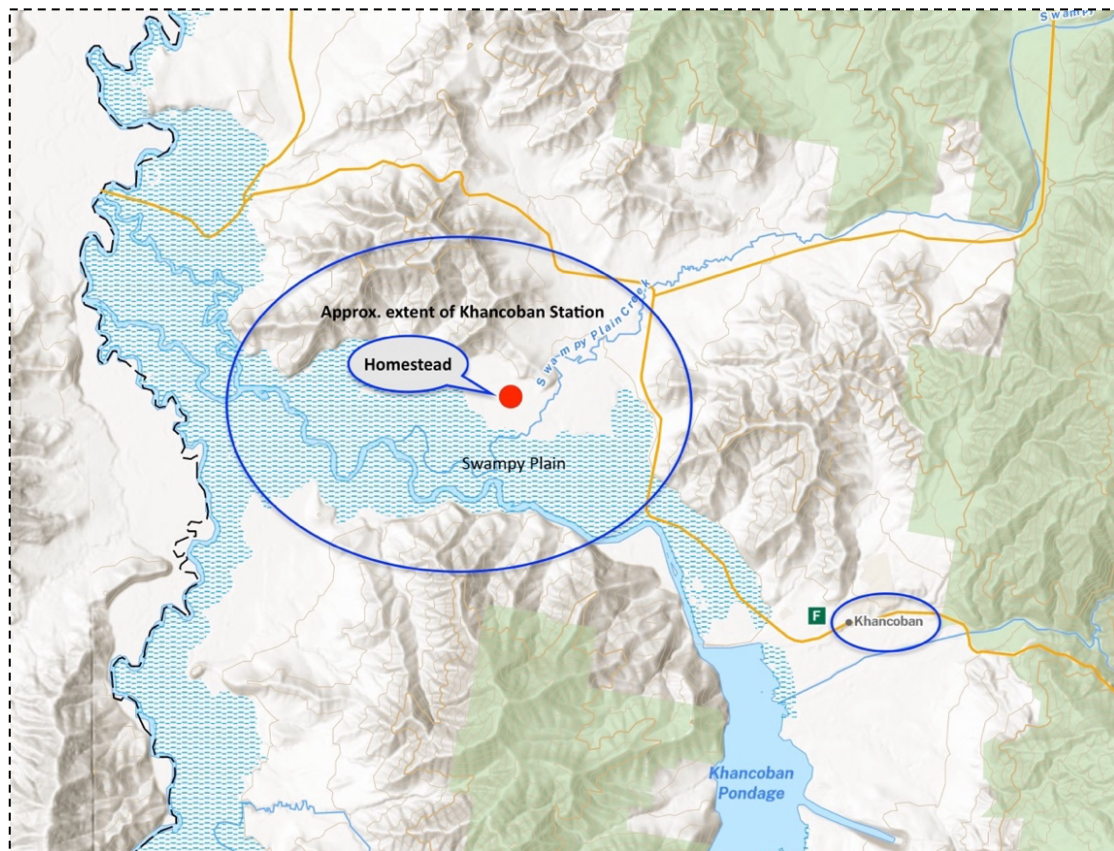


Figure 11a

Annotated detail of map ‘8525-4S SWAMPY PLAIN (Series 1, Second Edition) (July 2025), Scale 1:25,000’.

(Source: New South Wales Spatial Services Unit.

https://portal.spatial.nsw.gov.au/download/NSWTopographicMaps/DTDB_GeoReferenced_Raster_CollectionOn_161070/2025/25k/8525-4S+SWAMPY+PLAIN.pdf



Figure 11b
Remnants of swamp on Swamy Plain.
(Photo: the author)

Various theories as to the origin of the name *Khancoban* have been (and still are) espoused; some of the more pertinent ones are discussed below.

3.2 Etymologies

3.2.1 Purported 'Indian' etymology

The most pervasive of the origin theories share the essential supposition that the name was bestowed by two former Indian Army officers, Captains James Macpherson Grant (1811–1847) and William Pitt Trevelyan,⁸ (see Oldrey, who briefly outlines four previous versions of this aetiology).

One of the early publications speculating on *Khancoban*'s origin is found in the 1930 article 'Among the yearlings' in *The Australian* of Saturday, 22 March, by 'Chiron':

TOWONG AND KHANCOBAN. The Guise brothers took up Khancoban either 1838 or the following year. They soon afterwards sold it to John Hay, who was generally known as "Swampy" Hay, to distinguish him from another Hay who owned Welaregang lower down the river. They were in no way related. The name of "Swampy" Hay is perpetuated by the Swampy Creek, which runs through Khancoban. He stayed there until 1848, when he sold out to Grant and Trevellyn [*sic*], two retired Indian Army officers, and they were probably responsible for the name of Khancoban. They remained there for some years, and then the inevitable Matthew Hervey appeared on the scene again and relieved them of the lease, but sold it again in 1860 to Mair, who in turn disposed of it to How, Walker and Co. In 1869 the place was occupied by Menzies, Nicoll, and Douglas, but a little later it passed on to C. and H. Douglas, who sold it to Thomas Mitchell, in 1875. [...] When Thomas Mitchell died John [Mitchell] inherited Khancoban, Peter and Walter shared Bringenbrong and Towong. John held Khancoban until his death a few years ago, and its present owner, Captain Colin [John] Chisholm, a nephew, inherited it from him. In 1917 Peter and Walter Mitchell ended their partnership, Peter taking Bringenbrong and Walter Towong. A year or two ago Bringenbrong was subdivided and the old homestead is now occupied by Mr. Rogers, who for some years represented the electorate of Wannon in the House of Representatives. [...] 'Chiron' (1930, p. 24)

⁸ Not to be confused with James Macpherson Grant (1822–1885) Victorian lawyer, politician, and Minister for Lands. And not to be confused with the Rev. William Pitt Trevelyan (1812–1905). Captain William Pitt Trevelyan's name is spelled in various ways in a variety of documents and texts. He himself spells it 'Trevelyan' (Figure 12):

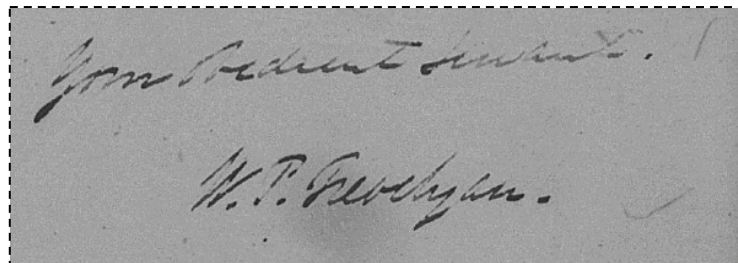


Figure 12

Trevelyan's own signature in a letter to the Colonial Secretary.
(Source: NSW State Archives, Colonial Secretary's Letters relating to Land 1826-56)

Peck (1972 [1942], p. 312) adds more information by providing a partial etymology for the name:

[...] The [Khancoban] run was first taken up with Bringenbrong by William Guise in 1838, or the following year, but was early sold to John (“Swampy”) Hay. In ’48 Khancoban was held by Captain Grant and Captain Trevallyon [*sic*], both Indian army officers, and Colonel Colin Chisholm, the present owner, says that beyond doubt the station was named Khancoban by them. But though he has made extensive inquiries in India and elsewhere, and “Khan” stands for “Royal” or “an inn,” no explanation of “coban” can be found, and it is still a mystery. [...]

Local historian Jean Carmody (1981, p. 121) largely echoes Peck’s rendition, whilst adding an intriguing uncorroborated version of the name:⁹

[...] In 1848 two former officers of the Indian Army, Captain Grant and Captain Trevallyon, [*sic*] leased the run and it seems likely that the name *Khancoban* originated during their occupation. The name Khan means an inn in Iran, but is a title of respect in Pakistan and adjoining countries; no trace can be found with any certainty of the meaning of ‘coban’, although an interesting version claims that the name was originally ‘Khancobra’.

In a booklet (based on Peck’s book) that deals with the history of the locally famous Waterfall Farm Fly Fishers’ Club, Fitts et al. (c. 1988, pp. 54–56) repeat much of what previous sources have claimed:

[...] It is widely assumed that the station was named by the Indian Army Officers (Grant and Trevallyon [*sic*]) and that the name was of Indian origin. In a series of interesting articles on Khancoban Valley and the early settlers, in the Corryong Courier beginning 25th January 1978, Herb Barlee states that search failed to identify any place of that name in India. On 1st February, 1978, Tom Mitchell wrote from Towong Hill confirming this. He added that Colin Chisholm had made quite extensive enquiries and that no such place as *Khancoban* existed. It was suggested by an ex-Indian Army officer that as ‘khan’ in India can mean a home, all that had to be done was to find someone named Coban. “It was then found that an old man called Cobban had lived in a derelict hut on site at the time the Indian Army officers took over. It is a pleasing solution to a conundrum and perhaps it could be true. Perhaps the officers had intended to breed horses for the Indian Army but nothing seems to be known of them during the two years they stayed.”

In her booklet about placenames in the Tumbarumba district, Anne Rooks follows the general ‘Indian’ origin line, noting *khan* ‘home’ + *coban* ‘a person’s name’. She, however, adds some further intriguing, uncorroborated, erroneous and thus apocryphal details:

[...] A number of people in the Upper Murray area supplemented their income by breeding and selling their horses to the Indian Army. [...] When the horses arrived

⁹ Carmody provides no evidence or reference to substantiate this version of the name, nor does there appear to be any evidence of this form. Murphy (2012a) suggests it could translate to mean ‘King Cobra’.

in India they were sent to the Government Depot and Indian stable boys would quieten them down. Mr Chisholm, who was responsible for the naming of Khancoban Station, was horse training in India for the British Army, and ‘Coban’ was his Indian trainer’s name. [...]

Rooks (1998, p. 32)

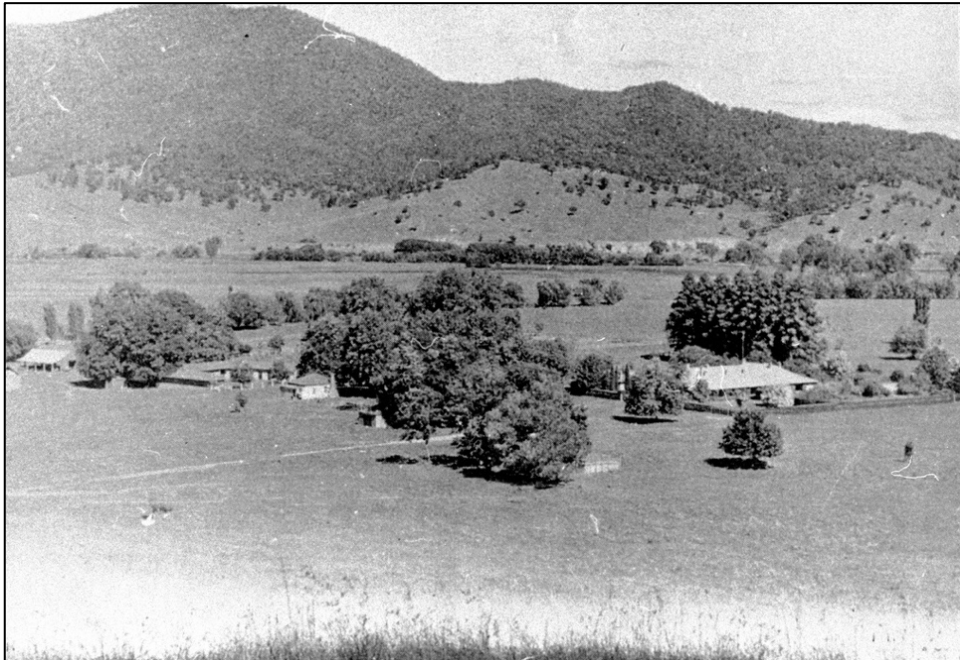


Figure 13

Khancoban Station in the 1930s.

(Source: Godson Collection [PRG 1258/3/2] State Library South Australia.
<https://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/PRG+1258/3/2>)

Firstly, although the early Upper Murray pastoralists were renowned horse breeders, there is no evidence that they sold horses to the Indian Army, at least not during the middle of the nineteenth century. Colin Chisholm joined the Army in 1911 as Trooper in the 1st King Edwards Horse, serving in France before being wounded twice (Kingedwardshorse.net, 2025). However, there is no evidence for his being in India training horses for the British Army, and certainly none that he had an Indian trainer named ‘Coban’. Secondly, Chisholm could not, and did not, name Khancoban Station. He only took possession of the property in 1922 after inheriting it from his uncle J.F. Mitchell, some 75 years after the first recorded reference to the run’s name.

A more recent reference, the 2011 post entitled ‘Australian Geographical Name Derivations’ in the former online ski forum ‘wikiski.com’ (now www.ski.com.au), lists the purported origins of various Snowy Mountains toponyms. The one for *Khancoban* claims:¹⁰

The area was know [*sic*] as Khancoban because the first settlers’ huts were stone shelters built by convicts under the control of soldiers brought to Australia from

¹⁰ The 2013 entry for *Khancoban* on the now-defunct *New South Wales For Everyone* website made the exact same claim.

England. “Khan” meant “place” or “hut” in India, and as the convict overseers were named “Coban” then the area became known as “Coban’s Khan”, and later the soldiers changed this to “Khancoban”.



Figure 14
Current entrance to *Khancoban Station*.
(Photo: the author)

With the exception of the details and actions of the protagonists, this aetiology and etymology are basically the same as the those mentioned above. It is unclear who the ‘soldiers’ were—are Grant and Trevelyan being referred to here or is it a different group of individuals? If the latter, no reference can be found that reports soldiers were brought from England to be overseers of convicts in the region. It is also interesting that there is no explanation for the ‘Indian’ etymology, and it seems to be the first (and only) mention to be found of the ‘Coban’s Khan’ form of the name, also without any evidence adduced.

Scammell (2024, p. 53), continues the Grant-Trevelyan origin story. However, he states they were ‘ex-British Army’ officers who had served in the ‘South Asian sub continent [*sic*]’ where they became familiar with the terms *khan* and *coban* joining them to create the name of their run. On page 167, Scammell makes it explicit that the name ‘[...] does not have any connection to British or Aboriginal cultures.’

Bruce Elder’s website *Aussie Towns* (www.aussietowns.com.au/town/khancoban-nsw) hosts an interesting discussion on the name’s origin:¹¹

The area was originally known as Swampy Plain. In 1876 a post office was opened in the tiny settlement and it was known as Khancoban. There has been much debate over

¹¹ It should be noted that Elder’s account has been cobbled together from various sources. The reference in the web article to Colonel Colin Chisholm being the current owner of Khancoban Station is now grossly out of date. The Chisholm family sold the run in 1994.

the name which seems to mix the Middle Eastern-Indian subcontinent word “khan” with the unknown “cobin”. The most plausible explanation is that “the run, Khancoban, was first taken up by William Guise in 1838. In 1848 it was held by Captain Grant and Captain Trevallyon [*sic*], both Indian army officers. Colonel Colin Chisholm, the present owner, says that beyond doubt the station was named Khancoban by them. But though he made extensive inquiries in India and elsewhere, and ‘khan’ stands for ‘Royal’ or ‘an inn’, no explanation of coban can be found, and it is still a mystery.” To this can be added ‘khan’ can also mean ‘home’ and that there was once an “old man called Cobban who lived in a derelict hut on site at the time the Indian Army officers took over.” That is as close as we will get.

The website then provides the following case:

Khan means royalty in many countries but originally comes from the Turkic language as most leaders had the words kagan or khan written after their name. The word *çoban* in Turkish means shepherd so it literally translates as ‘royal shepherd’. And to add to this: The phrasal word Khan coban, is an Azerbaijani word. [...]. Coban in Azerbaijani means Shepherd. Khan Coban means the top Shepherd as in those areas there are multiple shepherds but there is a master of them named Khancoban. A Coban had to earn the title Khan Coban through years of experience and only if people felt like calling them the Khancoban after years. Cobans and Khancobans live in high altitude areas and herd sheep there most seasons of the year as the high altitude vegetation as a food for sheep, brings better tasting and less watery milk.

No source is provided for this purported origin; however, it does endorse the Asian titular meaning of *Khan*. Apart from Grant and Trevelyan’s leasing of the ‘Khancoban’ run, as well as the meaning of *khan*, much of what these authors relate is not backed up by primary evidence.

After this post, two commentators on the website provide further ideas on the etymology of our toponym:

Hi, I just did a search as I was very fascinated with the name of this town Khancoban and thought I would highlight something that I know. Khan means royalty in many countries but originally comes from the Turkic language as most leaders had the words kagan or khan written after their name. The word *çoban* in Turkish means shepherd so its [*sic*] literally translates to royal shepherd. Im [*sic*] not sure if this info helps but thought I would let you know.

Andre

I am from Azerbaijan and can confirm that the origin of this place name – “Khanchoban” is most likely of Azerbaijani-Turkic. “Khan” means the leader, top, royalty and “choban” means the shepherd. Since Turkic tribes used to have nomadic lifestyle, their leaders would have the title of “khanchoban” or the head of the herds. This name is especially commonplace amongst Azerbaijani Turkic tribes and there are songs, place names and other cultural features with this word in Azerbaijan. It is

such pleasure and also surprise to see my country's heritage in a fascinating part of beautiful Australia.

Orkhan Azizli

In support of Orkhan Azizli's remarks, the website which outlines the history of the Zardab district of Azerbaijan (<https://zardab.wordpress.com/xanchoban/>), states that the *Xançobanı mahalı* (Khanchoban district) was part of the *Şamaxı Xanlığı* (Shamakhi Khanate) (see **Figure 15a**), and included part of the central districts of modern Agsu, Kurdamir, Shamakhi, Ismayilli, Ujar, and Zardab (see **Figure 15b**), and was inhabited by the Khanchoban tribe (*Xançobanı tayfasının*). The name was formed through the combination of the words *xan* (an ancient Turkic word) used in the sense of 'ruler', 'chief' and *çoban* (a word that entered the Turkic language from Persian) which referred to shepherding because the district's people were mainly engaged in cattle breeding (Bayramova, 2009). This makes it particularly tempting to link *Xançobanı mahalı* with the Khanchoban region given the latter's main source of income is cattle. However, this is most likely a coincidence; apart from which, establishing such a link is very tenuous, the reasons for which are dealt with below.

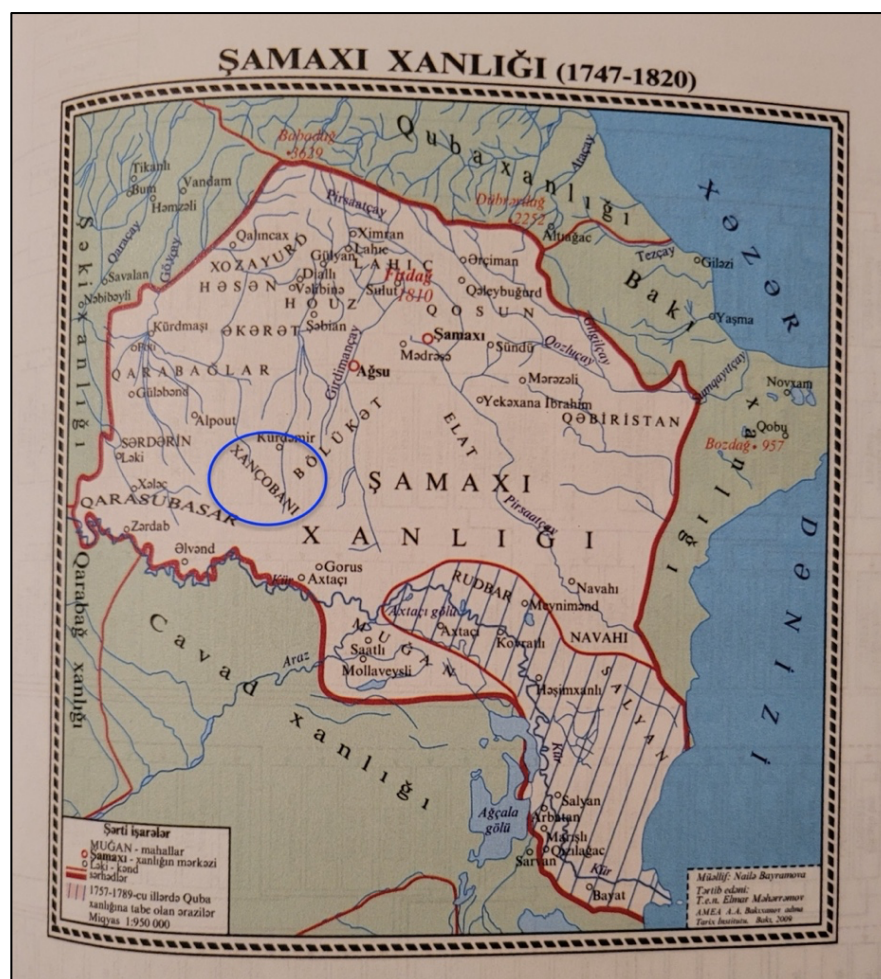


Figure 15a

The *Şamaxı Xanlığı* [Shamakhi Khanate] (1747–1820) and its districts. *Xançobanı* district circled.
(Source: Bayramova, 2009, p. 351.)

<https://shamakhi-encyclopedia.az/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/samaxi-xanligi.pdf>



Figure 15b
 Azerbaijan’s regions. The region where *Khancoban* district existed circled.
 (Source: <https://www.mapsland.com/asia/azerbaijan>)

The veracity of *Khancoban*’s so-called ‘Indian’ origin is called into serious question by a number of factors. In addition to the incongruity in the claimed activities of Grant and Trevelyan, there are issues with the various purported meanings of the name’s elements, in addition to its spelling and pronunciation, which we now turn to. The great diversity of the accompanying anecdotal elements of the aetiology and etymology of the name not only call for caution before taking any of them at face value, but signal the likely apocryphal veneer of the etymology and accompanying aetiology.

The fundamental problems with the ‘ex-Indian Army’ officers’ connection to the name fall under three categories. The first is the chronology of events (A); the second, the semantics of the name (B); and the third relates to its spelling and pronunciation (C).

(A) The Grant & Trevelyan ‘Indian’ chronological enigma

Before Grant and Trevelyan became the lessees of the ‘Khancoban’ run, they had been contemporaries in the 93rd Highlanders of Foot. Burgoyne’s history of that regiment (1883, p. 73) shows they were aboard the same ship, the *Pique*, which transported them to the Canadian Rebellion of 1837–38. Grant retired from the regiment in 1838 after serving for 10 years, thus making him 27 years of age (Burgoyne, 1883, p. 385). He then migrated to NSW in 1840, accompanied by his cousin John Hay.

Trevelyan retired from the 93rd Highlanders in 1841 after serving for eight years (Burgoyne, 1883, p. 414) and migrated to NSW in the same year to join Grant where they formed a business partnership. As we saw in **Figures 5** and **6**, they were leaseholders of the *Cencobine*

(*Khancoban*) run in 1844–1845. In addition, articles (a) (below) on the history of Brisbane Airport (Brisbane Airport Corporation, 2018) and (b), a notice of land purchase (*NSW Government Gazette*, 1853), reveal that Trevelyan also bought property in Queensland (then still NSW, until 1859) in 1842:

- (a) In 1842, following free settlement, Eagle Farm was among the first places to be subdivided into lots for agriculture. An 1842 map shows that William Pitt Trevelyan, a former captain in the 93rd Highlanders bought land that contained the former female compound [Eagle Farm Women's Prison and Factory] and stockyards. Another section was renamed *Hollinorth Farm*.
- (b) THE LANDS advertised in the Government Gazette, dated 7th October and 7th November, 1842, have, (with the exception of Lots 1 to 4, 9 to 12, 15 to 27, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34 37 to 40, 42, 44, 45, and 47 to 51 inclusive,) been sold by Auction, on 7th December, 1842, to the undermentioned Parties, and the price affixed to each respectively has been received.
Purchaser W.P. Trevelyan (3)
Lot 13 County Stanley 105 acres
Sold for £168 12s. 8d. £150 allowed as a late Captain in the 93rd Highlanders.

The significance of these two references lies not only in their acknowledgment of Trevelyan's link with the 93rd Highland regiment, but also his presence in NSW in 1842, a year after his retirement.

The claim that Grant and Trevelyan were ex-Indian Army officers naturally entails that they served in India or neighbouring regions, whence they ostensibly obtained the *Khancoban* name, or at least elements of it. However, there is an incongruity between the dates that they retired and arrived in NSW, and when they could have served in India. Burgoyne shows the 93rd Highlanders were not engaged in India until the Indian Mutiny of 1857–58. Moreover, the Indian Army was formed in 1859; before that, the East India Company maintained its own private army in the colony. All in all then, Grant and Trevelyan could not have been ex-Indian Army officers and the 'Indian' source of the name seems altogether improbable.

The only other possible source for the name could have been the Crimean War (1853–56) in which the 93rd Highland regiment was engaged. The term *khan* (and variants thereof) is used right across Central, South, West and East Asia (see **Figure 16**). However once again, Grant and Trevelyan had retired from the regiment between ten and seven years earlier.

If *Khancoban* derives from some alleged 'Indian' source, Grant and Trevelyan were altogether unlikely to have been the vectors.

To summarise and clarify the chronology of events:

Table 1.
Chronology of Grant-Trevelyan association with Khancoban

Date	Event
1828–38	James Macpherson Grant in 93 rd Highlanders
1833–41	William Pitt Trevelyan in 93 rd Highlanders
1838/39	William & Richard Guise leaseholders of the run
1840	Grant & his cousin John ‘Swampy’ Hay arrive in NSW
1841	Trevelyan arrives in NSW
1842	Trevelyan buys 104 acres of land at Eagle Farm
1840–45/48	John ‘Swampy’ Hay leaseholder of ‘Swampy Plain’/‘Khancoban’ run
1845	Grant & Trevelyan given depasturing licence for ‘Cencobine’
1848–51	Grant & Trevelyan leaseholders for ‘Khancoban’ run ¹²
1853–56	Crimean War
1857–58	Indian Mutiny

(B) Semantics

One of the requisites of the ‘Indian’ origin of *Khancoban* is that the name is bimorphemic (consisting of two meaningful elements: *khan* + *coban*), and thus we are obliged to look at the etymologies of both professed elements. There are two senses of the term *khan* [xa:n]–[ka:n] / khahn–kahn,¹³ both of which have been ascribed as a possible meaning of the toponym.

- *Khan* (1)

As some of the above etymologies-cum-aetiologies attest, the *khan*- element may refer to a house or hut. The term ultimately derives from Arabic and Persian خان (*xân*) meaning a type of ‘inn, hostel’, or ‘caravanserai’ built around a central courtyard once found in the Middle East, parts of North Africa, and Central Asia. The *OED* defines it as ‘a building (unfurnished) [found in the East] for the accommodation of travellers; a caravanserai’ (OUP, 2025). It may also refer to a ‘spring’. Depending on the era, language and region it may have any of the following forms: *xân*, *kān*, *qān*, or *hān* (Garthwaite, 2017; de la Vaissière, 2017).

- *Khan* (2)

Khan is also a Turkic title referring to a ‘lord’ or ‘prince’, and is a contraction of *khaqan* ‘ruler, sovereign’. The term was used throughout the Mongol, Moghul, Turkic, Persian and Ottoman Empires. Its meaning and designation depend upon the place where and time period when it was used, ranging in designation from the holder of the highest ruling position, to tribal leaders and chiefs, and individuals in authority.

¹² The ‘Khancoban’ run was sold to Matthew McKenney in 1851 (‘Transfer of runs’. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 July 1, p. 3).

¹³ [x] is a voiceless velar fricative, as in the Scottish *loch*. [ː] signifies a long vowel.

The meaning of the term eventually extended downward along the socioeconomic scale until it became an affix to the name of any property owner, particularly in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, where it is now often used as a surname (Garthwaite, 2017; de la Vaissière, 2017).

Khan, with this sense, became known in European languages through the Mongol invasions in the first half of the thirteenth century (appearing in medieval Latin as *chanis* or *canis* Greek *κάνης, κάνις*, Old French *chan, cham*, etc.), but more especially through the European missions to the Mongol court in the same century and by the narrative of Marco Polo (1298). However, the usual forms in European languages are based on *Khān*.

The second element of the toponym, *coban*, has proven to be more enigmatic, with Australian authors either confessing to not knowing its meaning or speculating it was the name of a man who lived in a hut on the property, or was a horse trainer in India. However, no primary evidence exists to corroborate any of these. This aetiology is likely to be the result of misinformation or post hoc reasoning (i.e. grammatical reanalysis).¹⁴

- *Coban*

As seen in the entry for *Khancoban* in the *Aussie Towns* website, plus two of its accompanying comments, another possible meaning for the alleged element, is espoused, *viz.* ‘shepherd’. This is corroborated by Digard (2011 [1993]), who provides a comprehensive explanation of the extremely important role a *čūpān-čōbān-čoban* [tʃoban] / ‘CHOH-bahn’ fulfills in Central, Western and Southern Asia, in shepherding not only sheep and goats, but also horses and cattle.¹⁵ The term can be traced back to Proto-Turkic. Given the primary purpose of the ‘Khancoban’ pastoral run, ‘chief/head shepherd’ appears to be a rather attractive etymology for the name.

Further to this, Melville (2011 [1992]) explains that *Čobān* was the name of the founder of the Chobanid dynasty, a family of Mongol origin, who ruled over Azerbaijan, Arrān, and parts of Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, and west central Persia.

Before we complete our enquiries about semantic possibilities, we must ask whether there are any contenders for an onomastic origin. There is, perhaps, one that should be looked at.

- *Xan Çoban*

Turkic nomadic tribes had leaders with the title ‘khanchoban’ which was commonplace in Azerbaijan appearing in songs, cultural features, and placenames. This is partly substantiated by Garibova (1998) and the Wikipedia entry *Apardi sellar Sarani*: ‘The floods took Sara’, an Azerbaijani folkloric tale about the life of a girl named Sara.¹⁶ Many versions of songs, poems, plays and films have been written and performed

¹⁴ In other words, a fabricated meaning based on the words’ structures or sounds that lacks historical basis yet has been accepted through common practice.

¹⁵ It is worth noting here that the name of the yoghurt brand *Chobani*, established by US based Hamdi Ulukaya, was inspired by the Turkish word for ‘shepherd’, which for Hamdi symbolises hard work, care, and craftsmanship.

¹⁶ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apardi_sellar_Sarani

depicting the legend, but they all basically revolve around a young woman named Sara who lived by the river Apra, and who either married or was betrothed to a shepherd named *Xan Çoban*, or a man from the *Xan Çoban* clan. Due to unfortunate happenstance Sara drowns in the river.

Indeed, *Xan Çoban* is not an uncommon personal name in Azerbaijan. However, I have not discovered any places that bear this name in the wide region of interest (with the exception of the former district of *Xançobanı* in central Azerbaijan; see above). Although there are toponyms that contain *Xan* (*Khan*) (**Figure 16**), and a smattering of toponyms comprising *Çoban*, there are none that combine the two elements.

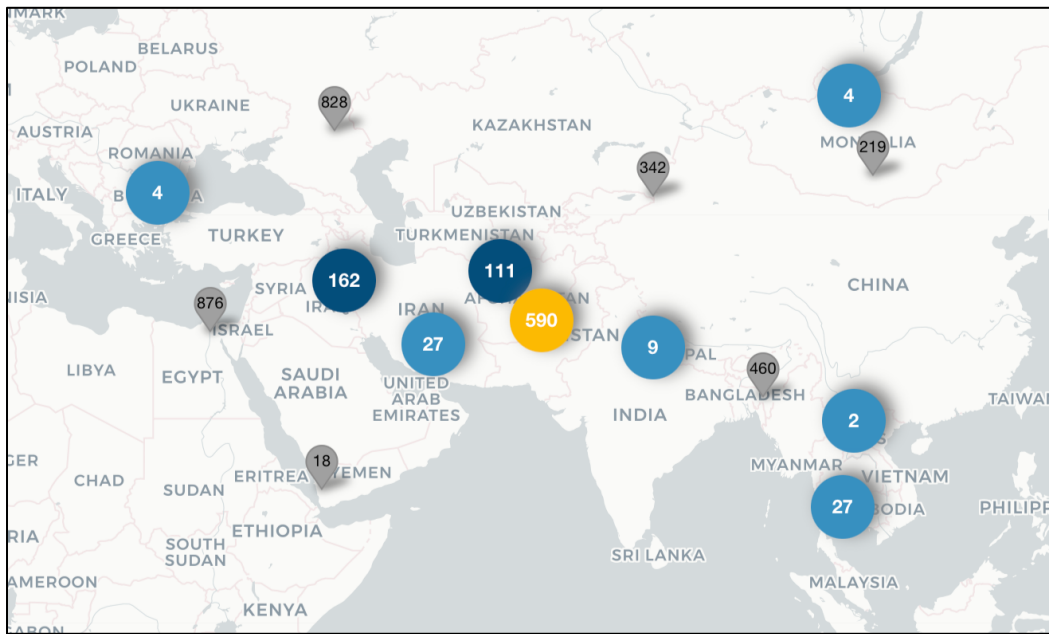


Figure 16
 Number of toponyms (circled) containing *Khan* (*Xan*) within each region.
 (Source: Screenshot from <https://gazetteers.net/app/#/>)

So if the remaining possibility for an onomastic origin is an Azerbaijani personal name, then the *Xan Çoban* in the legend of *Apardi sellar Sarani* is the only obvious candidate. It seems highly unlikely that such an Azerbaijani legend would have been the direct inspiration for a pastoral run name in Australia, and there is no evidence that it might be so.

(C) *Spelling & pronunciation*

Khancoban has been variously spelled with an initial <C>, <K>, <Kh> viz. ‘Cencobine’, ‘Cancobin’, ‘Kancobin’, or as two distinct elements, as in ‘Khan Coban’. All of the spellings, and others, regularly appeared in periodicals, advertisements, as well as official maps (see **Figures 17a, 17b & 17c**).



Figure 17a

Detail of: John Sands (Firm). (1886). *Map of the counties of Goulburn, Selwyn, Wallace, Beresford, Dampier, Auckland, Wellesley*. John Sands. NLA, MAP RAa 30 Plate 10 (NSW). <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-231052749>

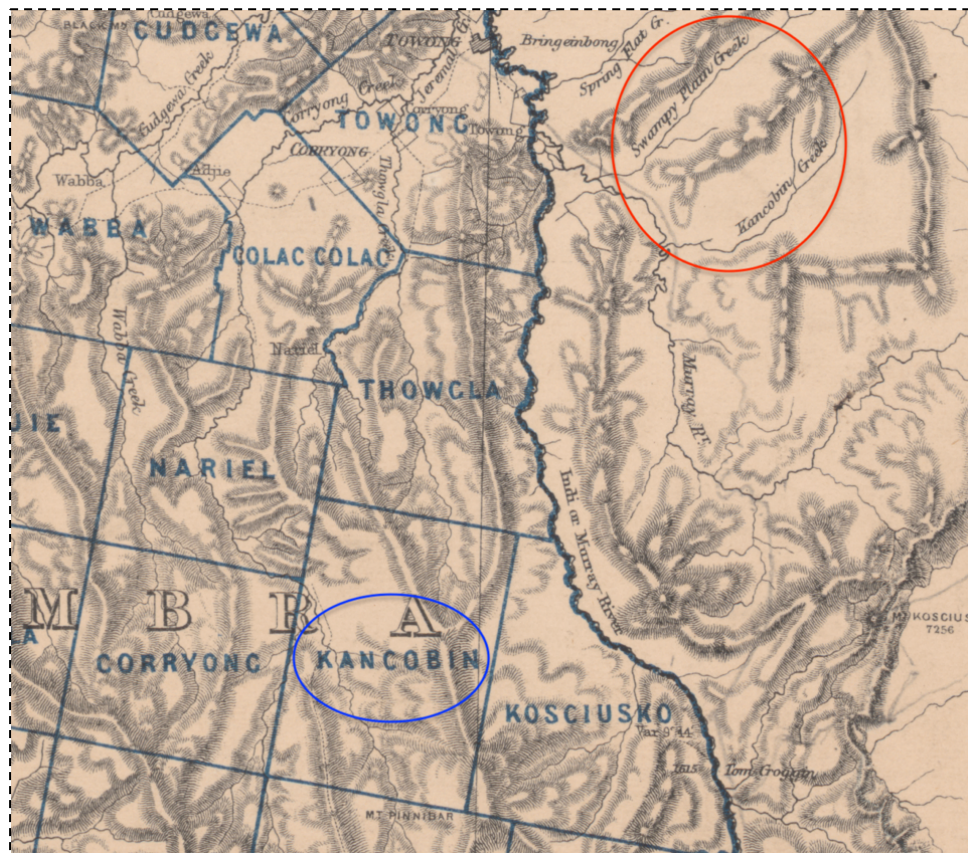


Figure 17b

Detail of *Victoria. Division of Survey and Mapping*. (1863). *Geebi Ck, Back Ck, Murray R, Indi R. Roll 3A, Kancobin—Kosciusko*. [Map]. Series: Historical plan (Victoria. Dept. of Crown Lands and Survey). Part of: Historical maps and plans. Roll plans, ROLL. Record ID: 9925740953607636. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-231400607/view>

on the way back. (*BrownBot Blog*, February 27, 2007.

(<https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20080720111542/http://brownbot.com/wblog/?m=200702>)

- A post by Heath on the *Adelaide University Gliding Club* website, entitled: ‘Khancobin Sunday 30 October 2011’. (www.augc.org.au/khancobin-sunday-30-october-2011/)
- Snowy Hydro celebrates 50 years since the Blowering Dam was built, but it’s not a happy memory for everyone Mr Hubner first worked in Khancobin and Jindabyne before moving to Tumut to work on Blowering Dam. Mr Hubner first worked in Khancobin and Jindabyne before moving to Tumut to work on Blowering Dam. Snowy Hydro celebrates 50 years since the Blowering Dam was built, but it’s not a happy memory for everyone. (Rosie King, *ABC News*, Thu 6 Sep 2018. (www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-06/blowering-dam-celebrates-50-years/10198684)
- Nice to catch up with members at the Wild Brumby Distillery near Crackenback on Sunday. A couple of Wagga mates rode up with me. Wagga to Holbrook. Corryong. Tintalra. Kancobin. Thredbo then onto Crackenback and the Distillery. (Bruce Barter, *BMW Motorcycle Club Canberra* Facebook page, 16 January 2023. (www.facebook.com/groups/bmwmc/posts/2406197039545193/)

The three spellings of the initial consonants suggest some confusion existed as to how the first syllable ought to be pronounced. The <K/C> spelling points to a probable [æ] pronunciation, as in *can* [kæn]. If the name had been directly introduced from a Turkic/Iranic language, the initial syllable would have likely been spelled with an initial <Kh> and pronounced with [a:] ‘ah’, as in the title/name *Khan*—the standard Turkic/Iranic pronunciation. However, it is not known whether our toponym was ever pronounced with [a], and if it ever was, when or how it morphed to [æ]. Nonetheless, a change from [a] to [æ] could just be an Australian English rendering of the name.¹⁷ In addition, as stated above, the *OED* supports both pronunciations.

As for the articulation of the initial consonant of the original Turkic/Iranic خان *khan* [xa:n] / ‘khan’ and چوبان *çoban* [tʃoba:n] / ‘CHOH-bahn’, their spelling in Roman script has traditionally been <kh> and <c> respectively. Accordingly, they are both pronounced in Australian English with a [k].

The various spellings of the final syllable, *viz.* <-ban>, <-bin>, <-bine>, and <-bon> also suggest uncertainty in how it should be pronounced—but see also 3.3.2 (C) below.

¹⁷ The Wellington (NZ) suburb of Khandallah also has a purported Hindi etymology. It is named after a local homestead that belonged to a Captain James Andrews, who had been in the Indian army. The name is said to mean ‘Resting place of God’. Many of the suburb’s street names also come from India (Kenneally & Kenneally, 1979). Its first syllable is like Khancoban’s: [kænˈdalə]/‘kan-DAH-luh’.

3.3.2 *An Indigenous origin?*

Only four authors seem to have thus far advocated an Indigenous etymology for *Khancoban*: Day (n.d.), Blake (1977, p. 138), Murphy (2012b, pp. 9–10) and Koch (2013, p.10)—the most credible of which is the last.

The entry for *Khancoban* in Day (n.d., p. 229) provides scant detail as to its origin, apart from it being Indigenous-derived. He provides no intelligence as to its possible meaning, or from which language it derives. He does, however, hint that William Guise bestowed the name:

KHANCOBAN NS44 Aboriginal Used 1838
 Small town near Mount Kosciusko, some 25km. E. Corryong. By William Guise when run taken up. Hereabouts the Upper Murray tribes would gather and camp for the annual feasts of Bogong moths. (UM3, 119).

As with the alleged ‘Indian’ etymologies of *khan* and *coban*, a purported Indigenous origin also has linguistic issues that need investigation and justification (see **below**). Apart from the pastoral run having been known as *Swampy Plain* in its early years, Day’s suggestion that Guise named it is not without merit, given the chronology of the early occupants of the run. The proposition certainly invites further historical research.

(A) *Linguistic issues*

If the toponym has an Indigenous origin, it would be helpful to know from which language it is derived. The copying or transference of Indigenous words and placenames into English, often from distant regions, is a common practice in Australia, making it difficult to identify their precise linguistic origins. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume the name derives from Walgalu, the language of the traditional owners of the Khancoban region. However, this should not immediately exclude other languages of south-eastern Australia (e.g. Djilamatang/Jaitmatang, Ngarigo, or Dhudhuroa—see Mathews, 1909; Blake & Reid, 2002; Clark, 2009 [2010]), given Blake and Reid, (p. 184) claim that the phonemes in those languages were similar.

(B) *Semantics*

Both NSW and Victoria have parishes with very similar name-forms, *Khancoban* and *Kancobin* respectively. The township of Khancoban lies within its namesake’s parish, whereas the Victorian parish lies directly across the border, diagonally south-west of the NSW parish. Blake (1977, p. 138) has an entry for the Victorian parish in his dictionary of Victorian placenames. Although his entry has the form *Kancoban*, it is officially registered by VIC Names as *Kancobin*.¹⁸ He does not supply a language of origin other than the unhelpful ‘Abor.’:

Kancoban: Parish, Co[unty] of Benambra; of Khancoban, NSW; Abor[iginal] possibly f[rom] *kaain* stone, and *cabon*, great.

¹⁸ More on its designation and spelling below.

Murphy (2012b) has a similar etymology *qua* the ‘coban’ element. He ‘cautiously assumes’ that the name derives from the Monaro and Omeo languages in which *cobone*, *cobbon*, *kabon*, *coban*, or *cobban* evidently refer to something ‘large, tall, vast’ or the ‘head’. He then suggests the initial element may derive from the first element of *Canberra*, or *Canberry*, which some sources suggest derives from the Ngunnawal/Ngarigo word *kambarra*, purportedly meaning ‘meeting place’ (e.g. Watson 1927, p. 14). Other sources record that it derives from *nganbirra* meaning a ‘camping ground’ (e.g. Gillespie, 1984). Murphy concludes that *Khancoban* could therefore mean ‘big camping ground’.¹⁹ ANU linguist Harold Koch argues that from a diachronic perspective, Murphy’s contention is not viable.

Koch (2013) concurs with Murphy that *coban* (or more accurately *kabun* or *kabon*) means ‘big’, but only in the Pidgin (English) derived from a Sydney language word, *gabun*. This is corroborated by Troy (1994, p. 737), who also provides the glosses: ‘very, much’, ‘great’, ‘main’ and ‘fine’. Koch continues: the *-coban* element does not very well match the form *kabun* ‘big’, and given the history of European settlement in the Upper Murray it is unlikely the name includes the Pidgin term. In addition, ‘if the Pidgin term were to be used with a name, one would expect it to precede the name it modifies. In early days namesakes were distinguished by modified names such as *Cabon Jemmy* ‘Big Jemmy’ or *Narrang Jenny* ‘Little Jenny’ (Harold Koch, pers. comm. 05/12/2025).

With regard to the etymology of *Canberra*, Koch declares there is no evidence that the original form was a compound name/word with two meaningful elements, or that part or the whole meant either ‘camping ground’ or ‘meeting place’. The name probably had a designatory function simply indicating that the place was named *Nganbirra*, the site of an encampment of Indigenous people. This is evidenced by accounts of nineteenth century life in the area.²⁰ In summary, Koch concludes that it is not necessarily to postulate that *Khancoban* is a compound of two words; rather, it could simply be a designatory word of three syllables.²¹

(C) *Spelling & Pronunciation*

Koch also argues that the first element, <Khan>, cannot be equated with the <Can> of *Canberra*, since the latter most likely began with <ngan>, and (as stated above) was possibly *nganbirra*.²² He concludes that there is currently no evidence that *Khancoban* also began

¹⁹ For more explicit details of his contention see: https://placenames.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Dec_2012.pdf

²⁰ For a detailed discussion on the origin of *Canberra* see Koch (2009).

²¹ For more explicit details see: https://placenames.org.au/wp-content/uploads/March_2013.pdf

²² The Snowy Mountains explorer, John Lhotsky renders the name in his *A journey from Sydney to the Australian Alps* (1835) as *Kembery*:

Limestone Plains are at least 7 miles long, but there are several other branches here, separated from each other only by some slight ranges or undulations of land. So are *Molonglo* Plains, 15 miles S.E. from the dairy; they are 7 miles in length, and four or five broad. *Kembery* Plain lies to the N.N.W., 3 miles from this place. (p. 55)

A locality which occupied me very much was the banks of Limestone-, or as it was originally called by the natives (they are now no more!) *Kembery* River, the source of which is the *Molonglo* Plains. It receives afterwards the *Quinbien* [Queanbeyan] Creek 5 miles from hence, in a place bearing S. E. by E. (p. 61)

with <ng>.²³ He adds that it most likely represents a word of the form *kankuban* (possibly *kankubayn*, given the early variants ‘Cancobin or ‘Kancobin’). He also notes that the vowels of *Khancoban* do not fit well in Murphy’s etymology (Harold Koch, pers. comms. 05/12/2025).

The ‘Cencobine’ spelling noted above appears to be the only instance of this unusual spelling. It could be a mistranscription of the vowel in the initial syllable of the name, i.e. <ca-> to <ce->; all the more so because an initial <ce-> spelling of a word in English hints at an implausible [sɛ-] pronunciation, thus making it [sɛn'koʊbaɪn] / ‘sen-KOH-bighn’, clearly very different from later spellings and pronunciations. Koch (pers. comm. 05/12/2025) also argues that colonists would not have used an initial <ce-> spelling representing a [sɛ-] pronunciation because Indigenous languages lack fricatives, and the <e> vowel may, like Lhotsky’s (1835) rendition of *nganbirra* (viz. *Canberra*) as *Kembery* reflect some speakers’ perception of the usual English [æ].²⁴

Moreover, regarding the variation in the spelling of the final syllable, Koch (213, p. 10) has in my opinion correctly argued that if the name were Indigenous, then it would have had the form *kankuban*, or possibly *kankubayn*, given the spelling variant with <-in>. This makes linguistic sense, and possibly helps explain the <-ine> spelling of ‘Cencobine’.²⁵

Conversely, there may also be another explanation, equally sound linguistically, for the variant spellings of the final syllable. This syllable, in its English pronunciation, is normally unstressed, implying the vowel would be pronounced as a schwa [ə] / ‘uh’. We see such pronunciations in the final syllable of, for instance, the following Australian toponyms:

- <-bin> *Moorabbin* [mə'ræbən]~[.mɔ'ræbən], *Bobbin Head* [bɒbən ...], *Currumbin* [kə'rʌmbən]
- <-ban> *Mount Throakban* [... 'θroʊkbən], *Tarban Creek* [tabən ...]
- <-ben> *Doomben* [dʊmbən], *Mount Reuben* [... rubən]
- <-bon> *Bourbon Creek* [bɜbən ...], *Point Gibbon* [ɡɪbən ...]
- In addition, we see an unstressed final syllable in *Brisbane* > [brɪzbən] and *Melbourne* > [mɛlbən].

²³ I concur with this observation.

²⁴ Similar recorded disparities in the early spellings of the vowels of *Monaro* are seen in: *Menero* (as first recorded by Lhotsky), *Maneroo*, *Monera*, *Manerro*, *Meneiro*, *Meneru*, *Miniera*, *Monera*, *Monaroo*, and *Manaro*.

²⁵ The initial <kh> spelling of *Khancoban* should not be seen as a definitive clue to its origins. Although the Turkic/Arabic خان [xa:n] is normally rendered as <kh> in a Romanised orthography, it can also be employed for Australian Indigenous-derived toponyms. This can be seen in the toponym *Khanterin*, a coastal hill in Newcastle (NSW). It was first recorded in 1847 (Clarke 1847). Ostensibly it is an Awabakal name referring to the coastal hill otherwise known as *Shepherds Hill* or simply *The Hill*. The NSW Geographical Names Board (GNB) declares it to be an Indigenous name and provides an audio recording of its pronunciation, viz. [ˈkʰandʲəːrɪn].²⁵ Another is provided by Eastwood (2023) in an application by the Guraki Committee to the GNB for a dual naming proposal, which reads: “ka[a]NTiriN”. Arposio’s *Introduction to the Awabakal Language* (2008), confirms the likelihood of such a pronunciation. Other such Indigenous-derived Australian toponyms include: *Little Khorri Hill* (NSW), *Khoribakh Creek* (NSW), *Kholwa Creek* (NSW), *Khappinghat Creek & Khappinghat National Park* (NSW), *Khatambuhl Creek* (NSW), *Kholo Creek* (QLD) and *Mount Kharrk* (NT).

It cannot be assumed that the current spellings and pronunciations of these so-called ‘Aboriginal’ placenames reflect their original forms. This is rarely the case, and is another reason for ANPS to use as its standard label ‘Indigenous-derived’ for placenames often simply referred to as ‘Aboriginal’.

The difficulty in orthographically representing Indigenous toponyms can be seen in the early renderings of some placenames surrounding Khancoban (Table 2).

Table 2

Current spelling	Published in <i>SMH</i> 1848 (E.D. Thomson)	Published elsewhere
<i>Tarcutta Creek</i>	Tar Cutter ~ Tarcuttah	
<i>Tooma Creek</i>	Toomah	
<i>Tumbarumba</i>	Tumberumbah	
<i>Greg Greg</i>	Gri Grik ~ Gregrek	Coroc Coroc ~ Grik Grik
<i>Bringenbrong</i>	Bingumbarong	Bringembrong
<i>Mannus Creek</i>	Mannas	
<i>Billabong Creek</i>	Billybong ~ Billy Bong ~ Billibong	Billabung
<i>Thule Creek</i>	Thorle	
<i>Adelong Creek</i>	Addilong	
<i>Welaregang</i>	Walaregong	
<i>Michelago</i>		Mikelego ~ Meccaligo ~ Micilago
<i>Cooma</i>		Kuma ~ Cuma

It is thus clear that current spellings do not represent original pronunciations. We are dealing with a diversity of Indigenous phonological systems which are represented through an imperfect Romanised script by phonetically untrained persons.²⁶ Barring possible misprints and misspellings, this perhaps helps to explain the various spellings of *Khancoban* (Table 3).

²⁶ John Lhotsky recognised this issue as far back as 1834. In a footnote on page 39 in his *A journey from Sydney to the Australian Alps* (1835) he notes:

It is a fact acknowledged by all unprejudiced Britons, (especially Scotchmen) that the English pronunciation of vowels, annihilates every regularity and system of other languages. However as I am not disposed to set about reforming the English language in New South Wales, I can only say on the present occasion, where I begin to write names and words of our Aborigines (“the Papuas”) that I am obliged to adopt for their language the Italian vowels: – a as *a* in *father*, e as *e* in *exercise*, i as *i* in *internal*, o as usual, u as *oo* in *wool*. I will remark here by the way, that the Rev. Mr. Threlkeld told me, that in his “*Papua Grammar*”, he will adopt the same orthography.

Table 3
The various spellings of *Khancoban* and their first recorded dates

Spelling	Earliest recorded date
<i>Cencobine</i>	1845
<i>Khancobin</i>	1847
<i>Khancoban</i>	1848
<i>Khan Coban</i>	1848
<i>Kancoban</i>	1851
<i>Kancobin</i>	1852
<i>Khangobon</i>	1868
<i>Khangobon & Kancobin Cr (on same map)</i>	1872
<i>Cancobin</i>	1887
<i>Kalucoban [River]</i>	1891
<i>Khancobra</i>	Unknown ²⁷

4 Conclusion

Having re-examined as much background as possible, it has only been possible to partially disentangle a few of the threads to uncover the four *Wh-* questions of *Khancoban* (i.e. *who* named it, *why* it was given this name, *when* was it named, and *what* does the name mean?). This is, after all, the ultimate aim of intensive toponymy (see Tent, 2015, 2024). Some fresh particulars have been identified though—ones that may hold the key to unlocking some of the unresolved questions. What we know is:

- Richard and William Guise squatted on the property, which they likely named *Swampy Plain* in 1838/39. John ‘Swampy’ Hay then ran the property from 1840 to 1845 or 1848, after which Grant and Trevelyan took over the lease for several years.
- The dates of issue of the Depasturing Licences given to Grant and Trevelyan offer a strong clue as to when (and perhaps by whom?) the name *Khancoban*, albeit in the form of *Cencobine*, was bestowed and first officially noted. It first appears on Depasturing Licence No. 870 (dated 4 October, 1845) awarded to Grant and Trevelyan for the period of 1 July, 1845 to 30 June, 1846 (see **Figures 5 & 7**). Given ‘Swampy’ Hay was running the property at the time, it is entirely possible that he is responsible for the name. The absence of a ‘situation’ name (i.e. property name) on Depasturing Licence No. 147 for the period 1 July, 1844 to 30 June, 1845 (issued on 16 August, 1844) (see **Figure 6**) shows the run did not have a designation until *after* August 1844.

²⁷ Cited by Carmody (1981, p. 121), who merely states this was the original name, perhaps confusing it with the snake ‘king cobra’.

To summarise and clarify:

Table 4
Chronology of Grant-Trevelyan

Date	Event
1838/39	William & Richard Guise leaseholders of the run
1840–45/48	John ‘Swampy’ Hay manages the run ostensibly known as <i>Swampy Plain</i>
1/7/1844	Grant & Trevelyan given Depasturing Licence No. 147 (dated 16 August, 1844) for the period 1 July, 1844 to 30 June, 1845 for a still unnamed property
1/7/1845	Depasturing Licence No. 870 (dated 4 October, 1845) awarded to Grant and Trevelyan for the period of 1 July, 1845 to 30 June, 1846 for the ‘situation’ <i>Cencobine</i>
1848–51	Grant & Trevelyan leaseholders of ‘Khancoban’ run ²⁸

- The Grant-Trevelyan ‘Indian’ origin is quite dubious. According to the records of the 93rd Highlander of Foot regiment (Burgoyne, 1883), Grant and Trevelyan were never in any Middle Eastern or Asian country where they could have picked up the name, or components thereof. They could not, therefore, have been ‘ex-Indian army officers’. This is, of course, not to deny they could have picked up the name from elsewhere. However, it is difficult to conceive of anyone naming a property after a place, person or other entity to which they seemingly have or had no connection. Clearly more research needs to be conducted to determine whether the Guise brothers, ‘Swampy’ Hay, or indeed Grant or Trevelyan had any definitive link with the Middle East or Asia. At this juncture, none exist.
- Based on these reservations, it seems more than likely that the spelling, *Khancoban*, has given rise to the grammatical or morphological reanalysis of the name to suggest it has an ‘Indian’ or Middle Eastern origin.²⁹ The fact that Grant and Trevelyan had served in the British army conveniently provided a link between the name’s form and a supposed ‘Indian’ origin. Nearly 100 years had passed before there was any

²⁸ The ‘Khancoban’ run was sold to Matthew McKenney in 1851 (‘Transfer of runs’. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 July 1, page 3).

²⁹ ‘Reanalysis’ refers to the process by which the structure of a word or phrase is reinterpreted or changed based on misunderstanding, leading to a shift in or reinterpretation of its meaning, grammatical function, word form, or phonology. This process often occurs over time as language evolves, where the original form is perceived differently, resulting in new forms and meanings being established in a language, e.g. ‘crayfish’ < French *écrevisse*; ‘an apron’ < ‘a napron’. ‘Reanalysis’ can also be referred to as ‘folk-etymologising’, or phono-semantic matching. This is the copying of a word into one language from another, often creating a neologism, where the word’s non-native quality is hidden by replacing it with phonologically and semantically similar words or roots from the adopting language. Hence, the approximate sound and meaning of the original expression in the source language are preserved, though the new expression (the phono-semantic match) in the target language may sound native (Zuckermann, 2003).

written record speculating on the name's origin. Naturally, this does not preclude prior hearsay speculation on the 'Indian' origin.

Given the evidence presented, or lack thereof, an 'Indian' origin for *Khancoban* seems quite improbable. An Indigenous derivation seems at this stage of our knowledge more reasonable. Whatever the original Indigenous name was, no doubt its reanalysis to the current form together with the military background of the Captains Grant and Trevelyan as well as 'Swampy' Hay, have contributed to the verisimilitude of the popularised origin story. Those favouring the 'Indian' origin may view the Indigenous etymology as controversial or polemical, but without authoritative evidence, the Indigenous derivation remains the more reasonable explanation.³⁰

All things considered, the enigma of *Khancoban*'s etymology and aetiology unfortunately remains. There remain wildly inaccurate and fanciful etymologies and aetiologies. Ultimately, it is, I believe, well worth calling attention to these many missteps, if not for the sake of establishing and maintaining the integrity of onomastic research. Some new verities have been revealed which ought to dispel some of the pervasive myths as to *Khancoban*'s origin. I conclude by asserting that, on the balance of all probabilities, an Indigenous origin seems the more likely.

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³⁰ An analogous case of an alleged 'Indian' etymology for *Khancoban* is seen with the north-eastern Victorian town of *Porepunkah*. It is claimed by some (O'Callaghan, 1918, p. 78; Martin, 1944, Robertson, 1973, p. 252; Reed, 1974; Billis & Kenyon, 1974; Blake, 1977; Lloyd & Nunn, 1987, p. 7; Gardner, 1991; and *Alpinelink*, www.alpinelink.com.au/explore-porepunkah/) that the name comes from Hindi and is said to mean *pore* 'wind' and *punkah* 'blower/fan'. Massola (1968), and Robertson (1973, p. 252) who has a bet each way, claims it is an 'Aboriginal name'. On the other hand, Clark (2014, p. 265) and Sonogan (2011, 2015) provide thorough reviews and critiques of both etymologies, and offer credible ratiocinations for Indigenous origins.

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