

# Some Mythology of the Gundungurra Tribe, New South Wales

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First published in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, vol. 40, 1908, pp. 203-06.<sup>1</sup>

The territory of the Gundungurra tribe includes Burragorang, Katoomba, Picton, Berrima, Taralga and Goulburn, with the intervening country. The Bunan ceremony of initiation<sup>2</sup> described by me in 1896 applies to the Gundungurra, in common with the Thurrawal and Thoorga tribes. In 1901 I published an elementary grammar of the Gundungurra language.<sup>3</sup> In the present article I am submitting a legendary tale which I obtained personally from the remnants of the Gundungurra tribe now residing at Burragorang on the Wollondilly River.<sup>4</sup>

The natives of this tribe believe that in the far past times, which they call the *gun'-yung-ga'lung*, all the present animals were men, or at any rate had human attributes. These legendary personages are spoken of as the Burringilling, in contradistinction to the present race of people. It would appear, however, that the Burringilling folk were much cleverer than the people of the present time. They could make rivers and other geographical features, cleave rocks and perform many similar Herculean labours.

Gu-rang'-atch was one of the Burringilling, his form being partly fish and partly reptile. One of his camping places was a large, deep waterhole or lagoon at what is now the junction of the Wollondilly and Wingecaribbee rivers; the waterhole and the country around it being called *Mur-rau'-ral* in the Gundungurra tongue. Gurangatch used to lie in the shallow water near the bank in the middle of the day to sun himself. One day *Mir-ra'-gañ* the tiger cat, a renowned fisherman, who searched only for the largest kinds of fish, happened to catch a glimpse of Gurangatch's eye which shone like a star through the water. *Mirragañ* tried to spear him but he escaped into the centre of the waterhole, which was of great depth. *Mirragañ* then went into the bush a little way off, and cut a lot of hickory bark, *millewa* in the native language, and stacked it in heaps under the water at different places around the lagoon,<sup>5</sup> in the hope of making Gurangatch sick, so that he would come to the surface. The poisoned water made Gurangatch very uncomfortable, but the solution was not strong enough to overcome such a large fish as he.

Seething with disappointment, *Mirragañ* went into the bush again to cut more hickory bark to increase the nauseating power of the water, but as soon as Gurangatch saw him going away he suspected what he was after and

commenced tearing up the ground along the present valley of the Wollondilly, causing the water in the lagoon to flow after him and then he burrowed or tunneled under the ground for some distance at right angles, coming out again on a high rocky ridge on one side of the valley, where there is now a spring or water catchment, known to the white people as the 'Rocky Waterhole', but is called by the natives Bir'-rim-bun'-nung-a-lai, because it contains birrimbunnungs or sprats.<sup>6</sup> Gurangatch raised the head above this waterhole and shoved out his tongue which flashed like lightning. From this elevated point of observation he saw Mirragañ starting from Murraural along his trail.

Gurangatch then returned home along his burrow or tunnel to the Wollondilly where he had previously left off, and continued making a canal for himself. When he reached what is now the junction of the Guineacor river he turned to the left and made a few miles of the channel of that stream. Coming to a very rocky place which was hard to excavate, he changed his mind and turned back to the junction and resumed his former course. He had some difficulty in getting away from this spot and made a long, deep bend or loop in the Wollondilly which almost doubles back upon itself at that place. When Gurangatch got down to where Jock's Creek now embouchures with the Wollondilly, he turned up Jock's Creek excavating a watercourse for himself. Being a great magician he could make the water flow up hill as easily as downhill. On reaching the source of Jock's Creek, he burrowed under the range, coming up in the inside of Wam'-bee-ang caves, which are called Whambeyan by the white people, being a corruption of the aboriginal name.

We must now return to Mirragañ. When he came back to Murraural waterhole and saw how Gurangatch had escaped, he followed on down the river after him, going on and on till he overtook him at Wambeeang. Mirragañ did not care to go into any of the subterranean passages, therefore he went up on top of the rocks and dug a hole as deep as he could go and then prodded a long pole down as far as it would reach, for the purpose of frightening Gurangatch out of his retreat, much in the way we poke a kangaroo rat or other creature out of a hollow log. Not succeeding in his purpose with the first hole, he dug another and still another and shoved the long pole down each one as before. There are several weather worn 'pot holes' on top of the Whambeyan caves still, which are said to be those made by Mirragañ on that occasion.

When Gurangatch perceived that his enemy was continuing his relentless pursuit, he started off one morning at daylight through his tunnel or burrow and returned down Jock's Creek till he came out into the Wollondilly again. Some miles farther down was where Mirragañ's family resided. When they heard Gurangatch coming and the water roaring after him like a flood, they ran away up the side of the hill in great terror. By that time Mirragañ himself appeared on the scene and his wife began scolding him for having meddled with

Gurangatch and besought him to give up the pursuit, but he would not be dissuaded. He went on after Gurangatch and overtook him at what the white people call the 'Slippery Rock', but the native name is Wong'-ga-ree. There they fought for a long time, which made the rock smooth and slippery ever since.

Gurangatch at last got away and went on downwards, making the water flow after him. Every time that Mirragañ overtook him, he hit him with his big club or *boondee*, and Gurangatch struck Mirragañ heavily with his tail. This continued down to what is now the junction of Cox's river, where Gurangatch turned off to the left, digging out the present channel. He went on till he came to Billa'-goo'-la Creek, corrupted to 'Black Hollow' on our maps, up which he travelled some distance, but turned back, and resumed his course up the Cox to the junction of Ked-oom'-bar Creek, now called Katoomba by the Europeans. He excavated Kedoombar Creek as far as where Reedy Creek comes into it and turned up the latter a little way, where he formed a deep waterhole in which he rested for a while.

Gurangatch then journeyed back to the Cox, up which he worked his way for some distance and formed the waterhole Karrangatta. In order to dodge his enemy he burrowed under ground, coming out on Mee'-oo-wuñ mountain, now written Mou-in, where he made a deep hole or spring, which is even now a menace to the white man's cattle on account of its narrowness and great depth. Returning to Karrangatta waterhole, he made his way up to the junction of Koo-nang'-goor-wa, corrupted to Konangaroo, where he and Mirragañ had another fierce encounter. Gurangatch journeyed on up the Cox to the present junction therewith of Harry's Creek. He then excavated the valley of Harry's Creek till he came to Bin-noo'-mur, the present Jenolan caves, where he had the good fortune to meet with some of his relations.

Gurangatch was weary from his hard work and sore from all the blows he had received during his journey. He suspected that his enemy would still be in pursuit of him and therefore besought his friends to escort him out of his reach. They accordingly took him out of the caves and conducted him over the main range into a deep waterhole, called by the natives Joo-lun-doo.

While this was going on, Mirragañ had arrived close to Binnoomur, but was very tired and lay down on a little hill to rest himself. When he revived he searched about the caves and found tracks of where Gurangatch had been staying, and also the tracks of how he had been taken away to Joolundoo by his friends. Mirragañ was quite worn out by his prolonged encounter, and when he saw that his quarry had got among his relations, he thought that he also would go and obtain assistance. He then considered that it would be prudent, before he left the spot, to adopt some means of preventing Gurangatch from escaping back to his old haunts during his absence. He consequently set to work and built a

precipitous wall of rock, Wan'-dak-ma-lai', corrupted by Europeans to Duckmulloy, along the side of the range between the caves and Joolundoo.<sup>7</sup>

Mirragañ then hurried away to his friends somewhere out westward. On reaching their camp they were eating roasted eels and offered him one. Although he was wary and hungry he answered, 'No, no, that is too small a thing for me to eat. I am chasing a great big fish and want you to come and help me.' He stated that this great fish was in an extremely deep waterhole and requested them to send the very best divers in the camp. They selected Billagoola the shag, Gool'-a-gwan-gwan the diver, Gundhareen the black duck and Goonarring the wood duck.

When Mirragañ returned to Joolundoo with this contingent, Gundhareen dived into the pool but returned after a while saying he was unable to get down to the bottom. Goonarring then made the attempt but without success. Goolagwangwan was the next to go down and after a considerable time brought a young or small Gurangatch to the surface, saying to Mirragañ, 'Is this what you have been after?' He replied contemptuously, 'No! that is too small; try again.' Goolagwangwan dived down the second time and brought up a larger fish, but Mirragañ would not look at it. Billagoola then took his turn at diving and when he got down a long way he observed several fish like those brought up by Goolagwangwan. They were trying to hide a very large fish by covering it with mud on the bottom of the pool. Billagoola tried to get hold of this monster, but its head was jammed into a crevice of the rock and its tail was fast in another crevice on the opposite side, so that he could not shift it. Being a very expert diver and a strong fellow withal, he pulled a huge piece of flesh off the back of Gurangatch and started up again. On reaching the surface, Mirragañ exclaimed with delight, 'That is a piece of the fish I was chasing.' When the meat was cooked Mirragañ and his friends had a great feast and returned to their respective homes.

Along the course of the Wollondilly, as well as along the Cox river, there are big waterholes here and there, which are said by the natives to be Gurangatch's resting places. The following are some of the holes in the Wollondilly:— Doogalool, Gungga'-look, Woonggaree, Goo-rit, Mullindee, Boonbaal, and Gurrabulla. In the Cox river there are:— Gaung-gaung, Junba, Billa'goola, Karrangatta, and several others. Many of the waterholes referred to are believed by the old natives to be inhabited to the present day by descendants of Gurangatch.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Presented at the session of 19 October 1907.

<sup>2</sup> R. H. Mathews, 'The Būn n Ceremony of New South Wales', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 9, 1896.

<sup>3</sup> R. H. Mathews, 'The Gundungurra Language', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 40, 1901.

<sup>4</sup> [Editor's note] Now under Warragamba Dam

<sup>5</sup> There are some long, thin slabs of stone still lying in layers on the banks of Murraural waterhole which are said by the natives to be the sheets of hickory bark put there by Mirragañ to poison the water.

<sup>6</sup> The natives maintain that there must be a subterraneous passage from Rocky Waterhole to the Wollondilly because sprats are found there as well as in the river.

<sup>7</sup> A precipitous sandstone escarpment, consisting of huge blocks of rock, layer upon layer, is still pointed out as the wall built by Mirragañ.