

# australian ARCHAEOLOGY

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# australian ARCHAEOLOGY

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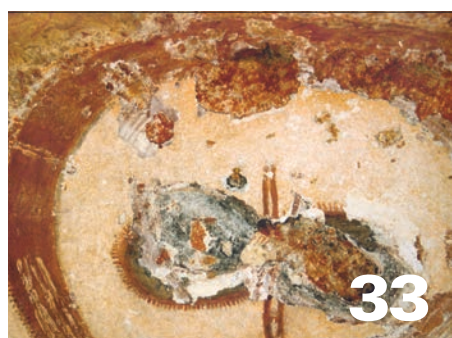
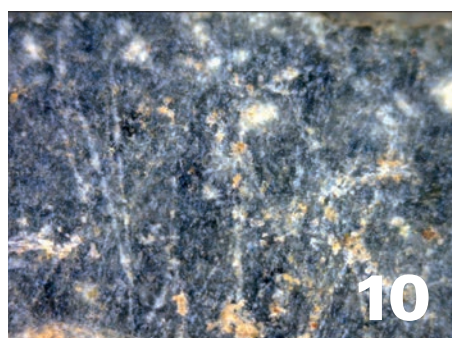
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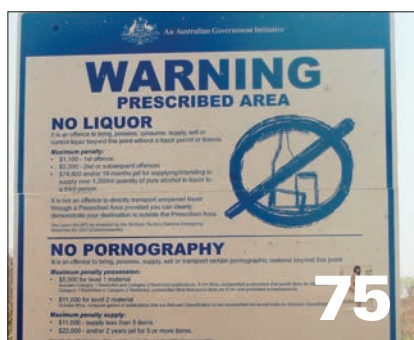
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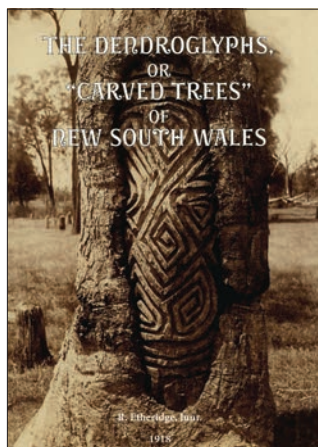


## ***The Dendroglyphs or 'Carved Trees' of New South Wales*** by R. Etheridge

2011 [1918]. Memoirs of the Geological Survey of New South Wales, Ethnological Series 3, Sydney University Press, vii+104 pp. ISBN 978-1-92089-976-9 (hbk).

*Reviewed by Jeannette Hope*

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In central-western New South Wales (NSW), traditionally the graves of important Aboriginal men were marked with trees whose trunks were incised with complex geometrical patterns. Perhaps the best known of these is Yuranigh's Grave, near Molong, now an historic site managed by the National Parks Service, Office of Environment and Planning. Yuranigh was

guide and adviser to explorer Thomas Mitchell on his last expedition into the tropical interior of Australia in 1846. When Yuranigh was buried in about 1850, with four carved trees marking his grave, Mitchell arranged for a European headstone to be added in 1852 honouring his life and work.

Carved grave marker trees of NSW, often associated with earthen mounds, ridges and paths, were first recorded by explorers John Oxley and Charles Sturt, and caught the attention of later 19<sup>th</sup> century 'gentlemen ethnographers', who drew and photographed, but also removed them. The most assiduous recorder and remover was Edmund Milne, Deputy Commissioner for Railways and Tramways of NSW, a collector of Aboriginal artefacts for over 40 years. Upon his death in 1914, he left his collection to the first national museum to be built in Canberra; after languishing for many years in the Canberra Institute of Anatomy it formed the basis of the Aboriginal collection in the National Museum of Australia (NMA) (Kaus 2003).

This beautiful book—a large format hardback with a stunning sharp photograph of a carved tree on the cover—was based on Milne's work, using his extensive notes and photographs. It was originally produced and dedicated to Milne in 1918 by Robert Etheridge Jnr, the then Director and Curator at the Australian Museum. The back cover of this facsimile edition has two inset photos, both showing Milne posed next to a carved tree, holding a steel axe.

Etheridge was in fact a geologist with a long career in the NSW Department of Mines, which may explain why the original publication appeared in the Memoir Series of the Geological Survey of NSW. It was the final of only three publications in the 'Ethnological Series', the other two titles being *Aboriginal Carvings of Port Jackson and Botany Bay* (Campbell 1899) and *The Cylindro-Conical and Cornute Stone Implements of Western New South Wales:*

*The Warrigal, or 'Dingo', Introduced or Indigenous?* (Etheridge 1916).

Etheridge, perhaps following Milne, distinguished between taphloglyphs (also known as 'carved trees' or grave indicators), and teleteglyphs (also known as 'bora trees'). The volume lists and illustrates both forms in an extensive catalogue, including 37 plates which are mainly photographic but also include reproductions of earlier etchings and drawings. There are two maps of the state of NSW with coded locations of both taphloglyphs and teleteglyphs illustrating the localised distribution of both forms.

Etheridge was apparently not immune to massaging data to fit a theory. He concluded that 'the distribution of teleteglyphs culture coincides, on the whole, with that of taphloglyphs' (p.89), whereas the catalogue and the map show that they differ considerably: taphloglyphs occur in a tight cluster centred on Dubbo, while teleteglyphs are more widely distributed east of the mountains and on the Darling River headwaters (with only one in the Dubbo area). Recent widespread archaeological survey seems to confirm that carved trees were restricted to central and eastern NSW, with the only other known cluster occurring in a small area around Cairns (Grimwade et al. 1995).

These misgivings notwithstanding, the book is an historic goldmine—a remarkable compilation of historic records Australia-wide, including mentions of Melville and Bathurst Island burial poles and stone arrangements. Much of the information about specific trees was collected by Milne from named local informants, surveyors, pastoralists and a so-called 'forest-ranger', and the date of the information is provided.

Reading *The Dendroglyphs or 'Carved Trees' of New South Wales*, it would appear that none of Etheridge's informants were Aboriginal, though the names of some of the dead honoured by the trees are given. This may reflect the bias of Etheridge rather than Milne. In 1913 Milne and his associates relocated the site of the first European record of carved trees associated with a burial, illustrated by John Oxley, at Gooboothery Hill, Lachlan River, in 1817 (Plate 1 in Etheridge 2011[1918]). According to Kaus (2003), 'Billy Boyd, an Aboriginal man working on a nearby pastoral station informed Milne that the man buried in the grave was 'a great Lachlan chief' who had drowned while trying to cross the flooded Lachlan River'. The NMA holds an album, 'The Oxley-Lachlan Arbroglyph', relating to this rediscovery, containing newspaper cuttings, letters, photos and a 1939 'listing of Aboriginal relics and their locations' in the Hay District (No. 1992.0098.0001); thus Milne's original material holds more information than was included by Etheridge.

Many of the trees collected by Milne were placed in the Australian Museum. Should they have been removed? They were vulnerable to clearing, cutting and bushfire. In the 1980s, working for NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, I visited a collection in a station garden near Collareenabri. The Aboriginal elders with me were somewhat ambivalent; while they were disturbed that the trees were garden ornaments, they recognised that their survival was due to their removal to the garden. Otherwise, few of the trees recorded in 1918 are still extant (Bell 1982; Geering et al. 1991).

The re-publication of Etheridge's monograph in 2011 coincided with an exhibition by the State Library of NSW entitled 'Carved Trees: Aboriginal Cultures of Western

NSW'. This toured small community libraries in western NSW, bringing Milne's beautiful photographs back to their homeland. Some trees have returned home too: in 2010, Museum Victoria repatriated a carved tree to the Baradine community in northwest NSW. It had been removed 90 years earlier and acquired by the museum in 1921 through an exchange with the Australian Museum. The tree was carved in 1876 to mark the burial site of five Gamilaroi men (however, strangely, this tree does not seem to be listed in *The Dendroglyphs or 'Carved Trees' of New South Wales*).

Sydney University and the State Library are to be commended on reprinting this volume. It makes accessible an important and beautiful aspect of Aboriginal culture that has been mostly lost and, until now, largely forgotten.

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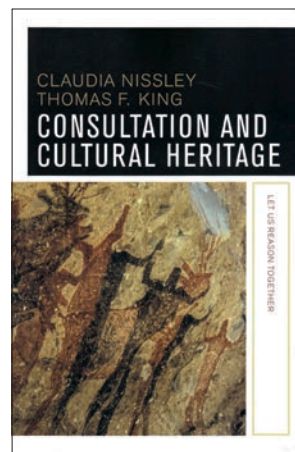
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## *Consultation and Cultural Heritage: Let us Reason Together* by Claudia Nissley and Thomas F. King

2014. Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, 173 pp. ISBN 978 -1-61132-399-3 (pbk).

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*Don't take your guns to town son, Leave your guns at home Bill, Don't take your guns to town.* (Johnny Cash)

*Consultation and Cultural Heritage: Let us Reason Together* is based on Claudia Nissley's and Thomas F. King's collective 70 years of experience in cultural heritage management, so I think it's safe to say they're well qualified to have written this latest offering from one of my

favourite academic publishing houses, Left Coast Press. Nissley's and King's experience is primarily North American and thus this book draws on many US examples, and cites American legislation; hence the need for them to reiterate the advice of Johnny Cash regarding the requirement to attend consultation meetings disarmed (seriously! see p.67). The occasional Americanism aside, there is much in this book that's directly applicable to an Australian context and I can thoroughly recommend it as a worthwhile addition to every archaeologist's bookshelf.

Nissley's and King's justification for writing the book was because they'd noticed that, in recent years and in many cases, consultation had regressed to a purely administrative, tick-the-box exercise, the outcomes of which were essentially predetermined (p.7). As they note, while ideally consultation should be undertaken with the intent of groups coming together to exchange their views, there must be a desire 'to accomplish something' from the process (p.11, their emphasis). Yet 'the intent and meaning of consultation seems to have been lost on a lot of those charged with doing it'; hence, their aim in this book is to help arrest this trend (p.11). Helpfully, early in the book the authors distinguish between 'public participation' and 'consultation', noting that, while the former might form a part of consultation, it does not constitute consultation in and of itself (p.20); this is a valuable distinction that a few proponents and regulators in certain Australian states perhaps need reminding of.

After the first couple of chapters that introduce the basic concepts and set out for readers the reasons why consultation is important—drawing on the wisdom of John Cleese in the role of Her Britannic Majesty Queen Elizabeth I from *'Decisions, Decisions'* and Jesus of Nazareth: