

# Kiewa Valley Environmental History



A project of:



Funded by:



# Indigenous Heritage

## Question:

*Are you aware of any stories relating to the Aboriginal History of the Kiewa Valley?*



*“King Billy and his two wives would travel between the Kiewa Valley and the Upper Murray.*

*Early settlers recall that King Billy would carry his wives up the hills one at a time”*

John Murphy 2015

## King Billy & Queen Emily at Tangam

Excerpt from letter –

“Grandfather (Joseph Coulston) came to Tangambalanga 61 years ago there was only one house on Tangam then and no fences or roads.

Some black fellows, old King Billy and Queen Emily and a few more lived in a tent near where our church is now and when they went away they all carried swags on their backs and about a dozen dogs followed them”

Letter written by mother of Nellie Barton (nee Coulston) in 1933 referring to 1870's

Source: Nellie Barton

was of an hour & 1/2 which was about 1870, 43 years ago King's have changed every much in that time we had a church on the site of the church at Tangam  
Grandfather came to Tangam  
balanga 61 years ago there was  
only one house on Tangam then  
& no fences or roads Mr. Mitchell  
lived there & had cattle all over  
here then some black fellows old  
King Billy & Queen Emily & a few  
more lived in a tent near <sup>where</sup> our  
church & when they went away they  
all carried swags on their backs and  
about a dozen dogs followed them  
Grandfather pegged out 320 acres of ground  
here & fenced it in & lived here ever  
since he also fenced Mr. Beatty's paddock  
with a chock & log fence Mr. Thomas  
got ground where Ballars live now &  
Mr. Dunstons got some where Uncle  
Maud lives Mr. Dave Lee had a public  
house where Mr. Lee lives now they  
all fenced their paddocks & got a few  
cows the Butter Factory was then built  
& he all carried milk to the factory got  
it separated there brought the skim  
milk home for calves & pigs it was after  
11 when the milk got home for the poor  
little paddocks in hot weather it



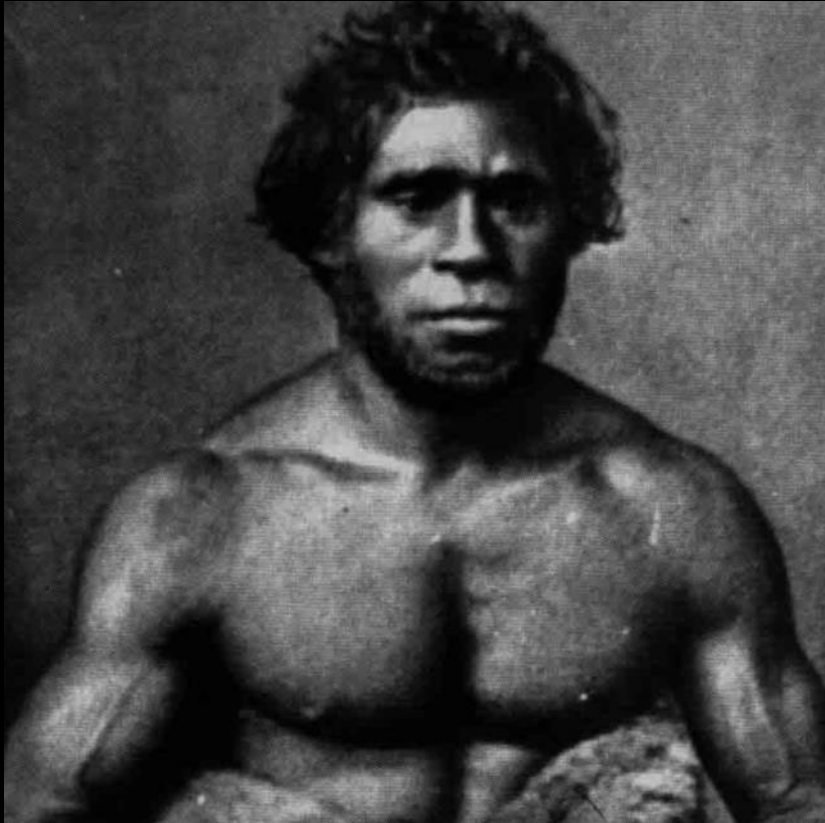


Esther Temple (1971) records that the aboriginal “Merriman” was buried at Kiewa, however research by John Murphy, suggests this was King Billy.

John Murphy believes King Billy died at the Lagoon hotel after trying to remove the large lump from his forehead.

Photo: King Billy wearing “King Plate” ~1870

Source: State Library of Victoria



## Neddy Wheeler – A Local Identity

*“Aboriginal people from the Mitta Mitta and Little River (Kiewa) districts, to the east of the Ovens goldfield, paid regular visits with possum rugs for sale. “Neddy Wheeler”, an aboriginal man from the Yackandandah region in the 1850’s was widely known to trade extensively in “valuable” possum skins and lyre bird tails for the millinery industry”*

Source: *“Black Gold”* (2012) Fred Cahir

*“Neddy was of average height with a chest measurement of 42 inches. As a matter of local history – not mere legend, he was 50 years ago an invincible runner , could box skilfully, could ride even the fierce unhandled “brumbies” and was at much at home in the water as a Murray cod”*

Source: *Wodonga & Towong Sentinel* May 1908



When Mr J F Austen was head teacher at Kiewa State school, 1878 – 1886, Neddy and his wife Charlotte had their children, Harry, Tommy, Georgie, Katie and Beccy attend the school.

Esther Temple 1971

Photo: Neddy Wheeler



Early settlers have found stone axes, grinding stones and other artefacts that reflect indigenous use of the area.

*“Long ago there were signs of aboriginals camps, but these are now all ploughed up”*

Sandy Wallace 2015

Photos:

Above: Grinding stone found on alluvial terrace at Middle Creek Baranduda

Right: Location where grinding stone was found

Source: Leneva-Baranduda Precinct Structure Plan, Baranduda, Victoria: Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment







Matt Ley with canoe scar tree at his property at Kiewa – 2015

Originally there were a group of five scar trees in close proximity to the Kiewa River

The scar measures in excess of two metres



*"The property at Upper Gundowring where I grew up was called "Goorabonga" – which was an aboriginal word for heath or heather, which was once abundant in the area"*

Jean Barton (nee Seymour)  
2015





*“My grandmother said that the aboriginal meaning of Kergunyah meant King’s camp - not just camp”*

Sandy Wallace 2015

# Our Waterways

## Question:

*What memories do you have about the waterways in the Kiewa Valley, the river, creeks, wetlands and bogs?*

*Have you noticed any changes over time?*



Early accounts describe extensive reed beds as a predominant feature of the river flats. Paths were cut through the reeds to reach the river.

Newspaper settler reports indicate that much time and effort went into clearing, draining and ploughing the land.



*"In the early days as the water in the lagoons dried up in summer, cattle fed on the mossy beds that grew in depressions amongst the reeds.*

*It was good herbage for cattle.*

*There was no irrigation in the early days. The springs ran all year "*

Mervyn Barton 2015

*“At Kiewa my father used to burn the reeds every year. There were such a lot of reeds and there are none there now. Bird catchers would put nets over the reeds and at night they would catch hundreds of starlings”*

Nellie Barton (nee Coulston) 2015



Photo: Kiewa River in flood at Springvale 1920's

Source: Noelene Goyen





Canoeing on the Kiewa River in the 1930's – note the extensive reed beds in the background

Source: Sandy Wallace



Photo: Looking down from Mt Murramurrangbong - 1930's

Source: Nolene Goyen

## Jarvis Property at Kergunyah

*"My grandfather drained an alluvial fan at the foot of Mt Murramurrangbong so he could use the land for farming. The creek was diverted into the creek that runs down through Quirk's. It would have previously gone down Gap Creek. This drained the swampy area.*

*This caused the creek to erode. There was big erosion in the 1950's and in 2014 another big land slip where millions of tons of dirt have shifted. All gone down the Kiewa River"*

Lindsay Jarvis 2015





*"My father told me that where Hellhole Creek is today was originally all swamp and reed beds. His uncle, Arthur Wallace used 30 bullocks to cut a deep channel in order to drain the land for farming."*

Rowan Wallace 2016



Remnant Tea Tree and Hakea in wetlands near Hellhole Creek at Kergunyah South 2016



Photo : View from Mount Murra

Source: Nolene Goyen

*“The water table has changed. There was much more permanent water when we were young. A lot of little creeks flowed from the hills, which no longer flow ”*

Mervyn & Nellie Barton 2015

*“Flow patterns of creeks have changed. Prior to 1906, the Chinese diverted Gap Creek at the headwaters for irrigating market gardens. You can’t irrigate now from the creek as the spring fed creeks dry up in the summer*

*The creeks used to run in shallow channels. Now they have cut down 20 to 30 feet with faster flows after the rains”*

Lindsay Jarvis 2015





*“Subdivision of large holdings led to increased erosion on river banks, given that stock were now confined to fenced areas”* Sandy Wallace 2015

On the Banks of Kiewa River - Postcard around 1909

Source: State Library of Victoria <http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/pcards/gid/slv-pic-aab11116>



*"In my childhood the river flowed much slower and meandered through the valley. The banks were less steep and in places the river was quite shallow and broad. You could easily ride your horse across"*

Jean Barton (nee Seymour) 2015

Photo: Kiewa Valley and River 1920's? Donald Friend Photographer  
Source: State Library of Victoria <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/62847>



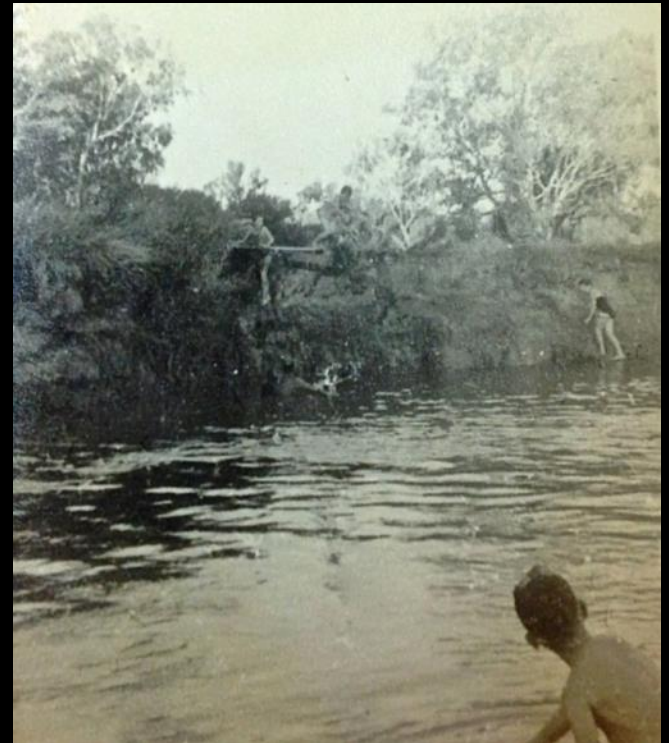


Diving in at Redbank

Source: <http://www.whiteburys.com/swimming-holes.html>

*"When I was a boy there were deep holes in the Kiewa River. You could dive down, and still not touch the bottom"*

Albert Seymour 2014



Kergunyah reserve ~1960's

Source: Noelene Goyen



Croquet and picnic by the Kiewa River – around 1915



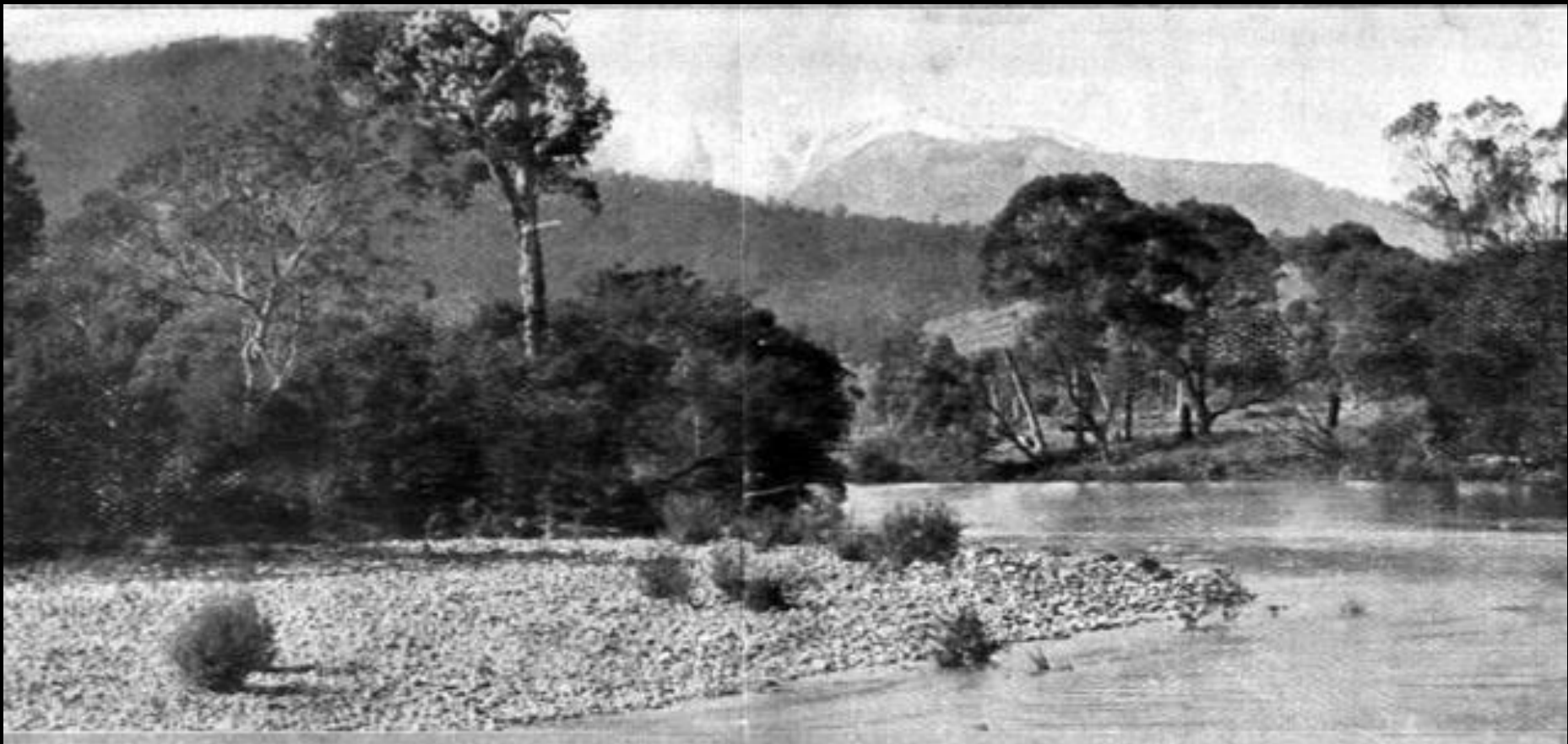


*"The biggest erosion happened after the war when the hydro scheme went in and the water levels went up and the banks collapsed in. The biggest thing that has altered the river is dams"*

Sandy Wallace 2015

Photo: Junction Dam around 1960's.

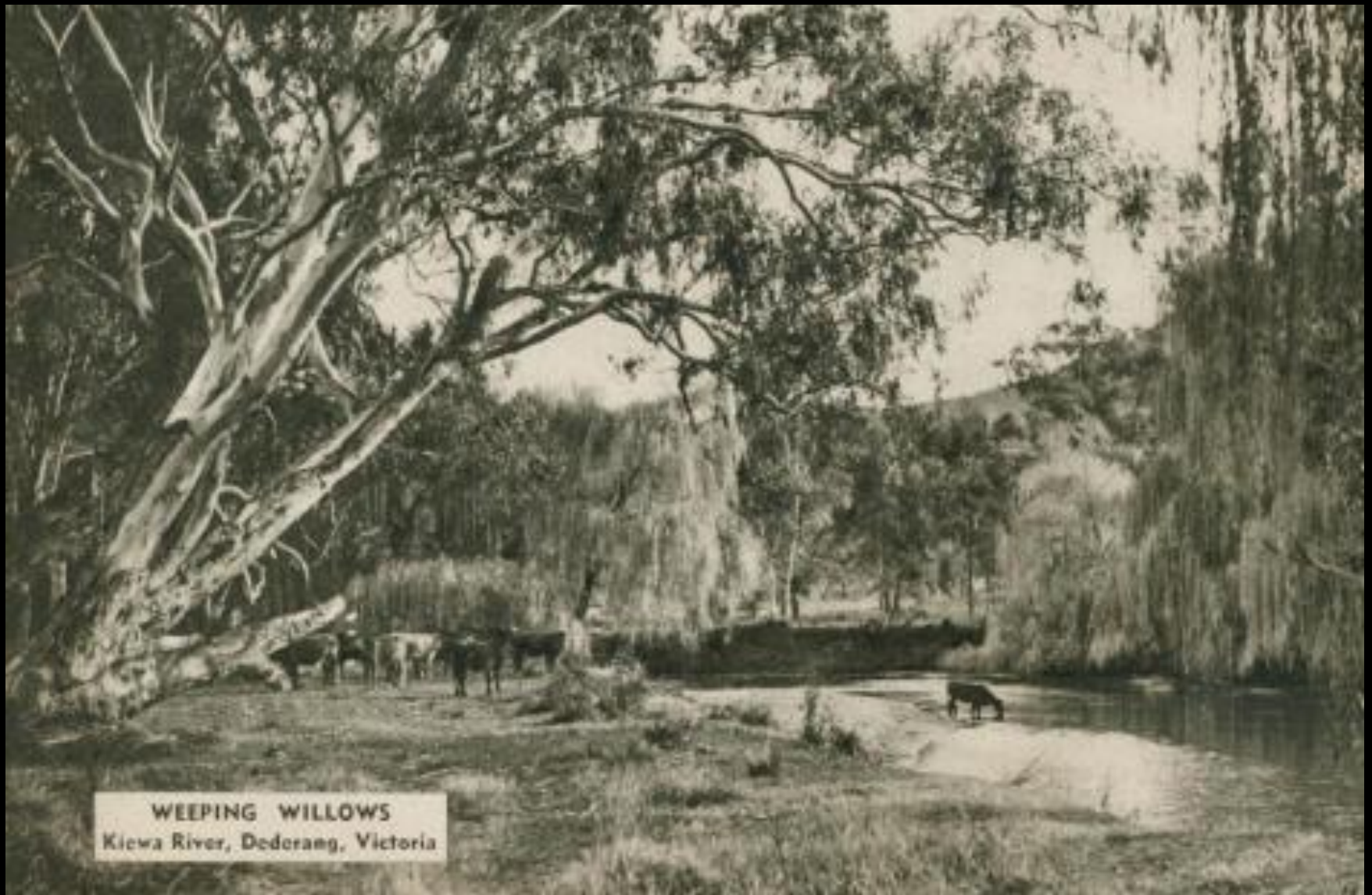
The Kiewa Hydro Electric scheme was constructed between 1938 and 1961



Kiewa River in the 1920's? with snow-capped mountain in the background

Source: *Peaks and Plateaus of Victoria (booklet)*– The Betterment & Publicity Board





Kiewa River at Dederang 1954

Source: <http://www.victorianplaces.com.au/taxonomy/term/888>

Kiewa River and Surveyor's Camp 25/8/38

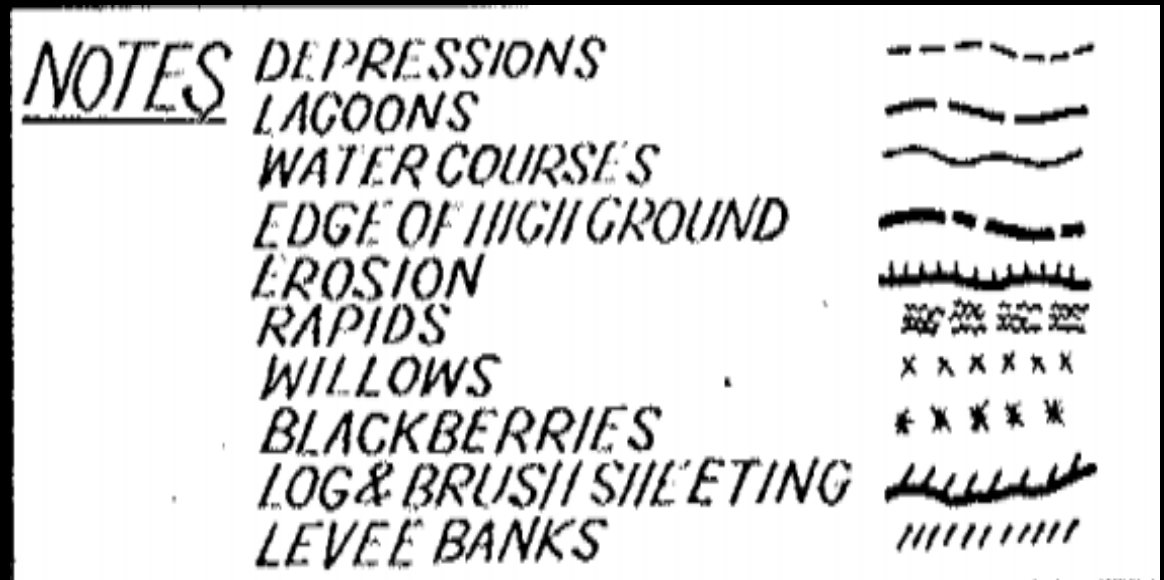


Kiewa River and Surveyor's Camp 25<sup>th</sup> August 1938

Source: <https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/5265f9362162ef1b0472b05d>



Completed 1939 by State Rivers and  
Water Supply Commission



10 detailed maps of Kiewa River showing depressions, lagoons, water courses, high ground, erosion, rapids, willows, blackberries, log & brush sheeting & levee banks

View online at:

<http://northeast.landcarevic.net.au/kiewa/projects/recording-the-environmental-history-of-the-kiewa-valley/kiewa-catchment-old-maps>



*“The Kiewa is a very perched river. The banks are higher than the land. Early settlers planted weeping willows back from the banks. As the river changed course they finished up in the river and caused problems once they got into the stream.*

*You could walk across the river on the willows”*

Sandy Wallace 2015



Section of 1939 Kiewa River Survey map which points to “willows forming islands”

*“DDT from the tobacco sprays killed fish in the river in about the 1950’s. At that time the Kiewa River was classified as a heavily polluted river.”*

*The DDT killed the red-logged earth mites, but it also killed everything else, like frogs and snakes. Luckily it was banned very quickly”*

Sandy Wallace 2015



Kiewa River – date unknown

Source: Ewan Wallace

Above the junction of the Yackandandah creek with the Kiewa river, the water was fit to drink, while lower down it was undrinkable, even by stock. We had often been compelled to sink a hole a foot or two away from the muddy stream in order to get a drink of water.

Source: “Mining affecting water quality” 5<sup>th</sup> Sep 1902 Wodonga & Towong Sentinel

# Native animals

## Question:

*Have you noticed any changes to the wildlife in the valley over time? (Birds, fish, marsupials...)*





*“My father said in his boyhood, brolgas were regular migratory visitors to the valley”*

Rowan Wallace 2016



*"I have noticed Greater Egrets on the river flats at Kergunyah for the first time"*

Lindsay Jarvis 2015



*"Kingfishers have been nesting in the same spot at Gundowring for over 40 years"*

Jean Barton 2015





*“When I was a child, dollar birds with the unmistakable silver dollar markings under their wings were a regular summer visitor along the river. Now to see one is a rarity”*

Rowan Wallace 2015







*“When I was a young lad, there were lyre birds in the bush at the top of Byte Creek”*

Mervyn Barton 2015

*“I was at a place called Tawonga , and this is where I heard the bird, it was early in the morning when the bird began to give quite a concert; at first the noise resembled the sharpening of a saw, also the tuning of a violin”*

Kingsley Simon 1907 (Aged 9)

Source: Albury Banner & Wodonga Express



*“Ground dwelling birds have disappeared, without the rabbit numbers, foxes get them. We used to see bitterns. Now I never see one”*

Sandy Wallace 2015

The Australian Bittern also known as the Brown Bittern feeds on aquatic animals such as frogs, eels and crustaceans. It is a solitary nester on the ground in dense wetland vegetation on trampled reeds and other plants.

It is now listed as endangered.



*"I used to hear Curlews at night or early in the morning – but I never saw one"*

Jean Barton 2015



*“There has been a big increase in cockatoo and galah numbers with the dairy farmers feeding grain.*

*Also corellas and top-knot pigeons have now become common in the valley.”*

Sandy Wallace 2015





*“Bandicoots used to raid my dad’s vegetable garden on the river flats at Gundowring”*

Jean Barton 2015

*“Fifty years ago bandicoots, platypus and eastern water rats were common in the Glen Creek area”*

Jack Hicks 2015







*"You don't see as many brush tail possums as you used to. You could go spotlighting and see a possum in just about every hollow"*

Christine Hicks 2015





*“When I was growing up, if our mother wanted fish for tea, dad was able to catch a Murray Cod without any trouble at all”*

Jean Barton 2015

Photo: Frank Seymour with cod  
Source: Albury City Collection



*“As a boy, I was always able to find a goanna at the Glen Creek Reserve”*

Jack Hicks 2015

*“When we were out riding horses on the farm at Kergunyah, we would often see Goannas – they seemed to disappear with the introduction of 1080 baiting programs”*

Rowan Wallace 2016

Photo source: Baranduda Landcare





*"You don't see many tiger snakes now. I once saw 13 in a few metres"*

Sandy Wallace 2015

*"The snakes are very numerous on the river flats this year. Father has shot about 30 already , all being tigers. There is a big flood on the river at present"*

Elsie Connor Kiewa 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1904  
Reported in Weekly Times 5<sup>th</sup> November 1904



# Native Vegetation

## Question:

*Have you noticed any general changes in the native vegetation over time?*



Kangaroo grass was abundant on the hills. Native grasses were more common prior to the application of superphosphate

Photos: Riding through native grasses at Wallacedale ~ 1947

Source: Rowan Wallace





*"I believe the country was not extremely heavily timbered. The main trees were red gum, stringy bark, apple box and red box, with less timber on the flood plains and swampy areas.*

*The stringy bark and red gum were used for early building and construction, The Apple box was not even good for firewood"*

Sandy Wallace 2015

Photo: Remnant Apple Box on roadside (Hellhole Creek Road) Kergunyah





*“My grandfather was a very good judge of a tree. So all the good timber was cut down in his lifetime, and now we have only got the remnant trees left”*

*Red Box timber was more useful for fence posts, and a lot of them are gone”*

Lindsay Jarvis 2015

Photo: Warrawee Kergunyah : date unknown – note ring-barked trees in paddock and post and rail fence Source: Sandy Wallace

Early Paintings can provide us with an insight into the landscape's vegetation



*Painting of Kiewa River  
and hills at Warrawee  
Kergunyah*

*Painted in 1896 by  
Aunty Tot*

Right: Aunty Tot - born 31<sup>st</sup> July 1870

Source: Sandy Wallace





Painting of Kiewa River at Kergunyah by  
Edith Allan 1904

Source: Lindsay Jarvis

Note – early signs of erosion on river bank



Kiewa River at Kergunyah 2015





Kiewa River & Mt Bogong from “Round Hill” Camp - between 1928 & 1935  
Note heavily vegetated banks of river

Source: <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/135653>



Photo: Carting logs at Warrawee pre 1920's      Source: Ewan Wallace

*“Grandfather was very keen to get rid of undergrowth. Wattles were a nuisance . Get rid of them and bracken fern to get rid of rabbit harbour. Clearing equalled good farm management”*

Lindsay Jarvis 2015

*“Tussocks have increased in the paddocks.”*

Sandy Wallace 2015

*“Along the river there are still a couple of native bottle brush, wattles and tea tree. That land wasn’t cleared much there”*

Sandy Wallace 2015







*"As a child we would have competitions in Spring to see who could collect the most different kinds of wildflowers. We could easily find at least 11 or 12.*

*The low hill behind our house used to be covered with wildflowers"*

Jean Barton 2015



*“The roadside vegetation is in much better health as there is less road side grazing”*

Mervyn Barton 2015



*“The roadside trees have recovered from die back (in the 1980’s), probably due to birds coming back. Road side red gums are regenerating as there is less travelling stock.”*

Sandy Wallace 2015





View of Kergunyah Park swamp taken from Hellhole Gap – 1940's

Photo source: Rowan Wallace





Harry Case & Keith Woodstock carting loose hay at Kergunyah ~1920's

Source: Sandy Wallace

*My father ran cattle in the bush. He learnt to cold burn – it does not scorch the trees, there is no leaf scorch – grass in the bush becomes sour without grazing and burning. All the old cattleman knew that if you burnt a bit of bushland, you would have a green pick next year. It kept the bush open and clear. It didn't burn in the gullies.*



*If you burn in the Spring, it promotes scrub, not grass – so you get dogwoods and wattles. Autumn burning doesn't promote the shrubs and keeps the bush clear.*

*A cold burn doesn't kill tussocks or grass – you lose the grass with a burn that's too hot and get scrub growth – dense overgrown regrowth.*

*Fires must burn back down the hill. He used to light the ridge and let it burn down the hill in its own time.*

Jack Hicks 2015



*Until the hot fire of 1968, Mt Jack was clear. Now the forest is dense and congested.*

*Hot fires burn the hollows and habitats in old trees.*

*Cattlemen burns keep the hills green on the sides and stop the fires getting out of control.  
Timing and temperature of the fire ensure poas (grasses) grow and not the shrubs*

Jack Hicks 2015





# Pest Plant & Animals

## Question:

*What changes have you noticed (if any) in the composition of pest plant and animals?*



*A correspondent from the Kiewa Valley district expressed an opinion that the government was not adequately dealing with the menace of St John's wort*

*All crown lands in the district had been salted last year and upwards of 800 tons of salt had been obtained from the Mallee and used in the district. Salt could be obtained by settlers from the Shire Council*

*It was noted that St John's wort had been in the district for 40 years*

20<sup>th</sup> January 1926  
The Age



*“Blackberries are managed along the river now, but they are getting away in the high country. Where you could walk up under the tree ferns along the creek, now it is choked with blackberries”*

Sandy Wallace 2015

*“In 1960’s we had a school nature walk up Cherry Tree Creek to the waterfall , the bush was clear - there were no blackberries”*

Les Pearce 2016

*“Blackberries seemed to take possession in the valley in the 1930’s”*

Mervyn Barton 2015



*"While the floods were up father went out with the dogs hunting rabbits, because when the river is flooded the rabbits are closed in on islands, come up trees, and on logs and sitting on bunches of grass"*

Elsie Connor

22/9/1904 reported in Weekly Times

5/11/1904

Image:

Rabbit extermination in Victoria 1885

Captions:

*"Our Peasant Pie"*

*"Preparing Phosphor wheat"*

*"An inspector"*

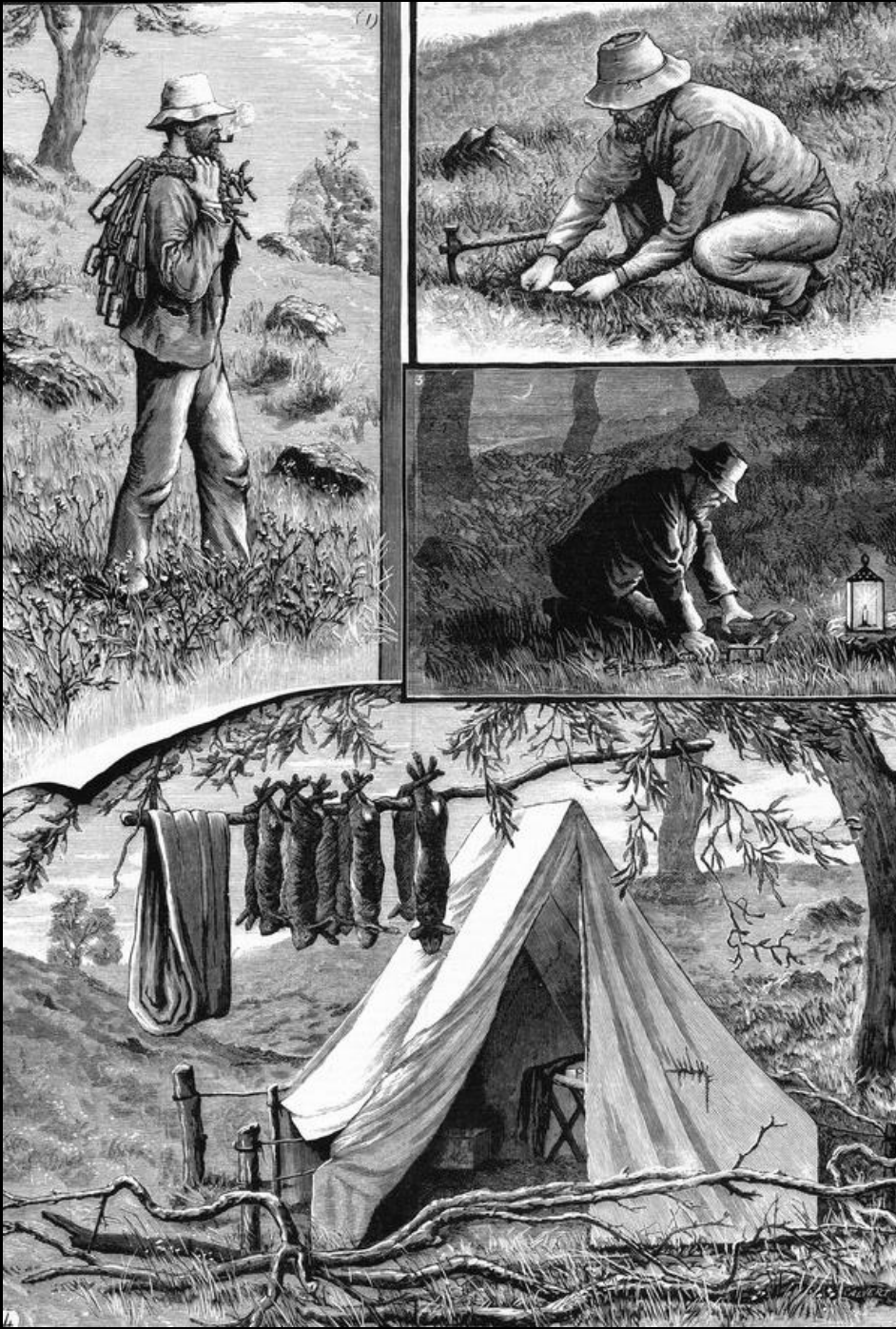
*"Solving Phosphorus"*

*"The deed of destruction"*

*"The carbon process"*

Source: State Library of Victoria





*"When I was young there were so many rabbits that the hills looked like they were moving"*

Albert Seymour 2015

*"Henry William's profession was a rabbit trapper. He caught over 1000 rabbits at a time in the 1930's and 1940's"*

Lindsay Jarvis 2015

Image: With the rabbit trappers 1884

Source: State Library of Victoria



Photo: Rabbits strung between trees 1920's  
Source: Albury Collection

*"My sister Bonnie and I sold rabbits. Bonnie handled the ferrets and I killed the rabbits. That's how we made our pocket money."*

Nellie Barton 2015

*"During the second world war we had rabbit musters at Gundowring. We used to get up to 300 rabbits in an afternoon. The skins were donated to the war effort to make army hats."*

Jean Barton 2015

*"The 1930's was the very worst for rabbits. They were very thick at Gundowring. We used to gas burrows, but it didn't last, so we dug out all the burrows. It was a lot of work but a more permanent way to get rid of them"*

Mervyn Barton 2015





Photo: Rabbiting at Bonegilla 1950's

Source: Albury Collection

*"Rabbit plagues were the most damaging to the land, there were still a lot about in the 1950's and 60's until the introduction of mixo and 1080"*

Mervyn Barton 2015

*"The biggest improvement to pastures was the control of rabbits with mixo and calici virus release. In the last 50 years I've only seen a couple of rabbits on the river flats. When I was young we used to kill snakes and rabbits in the flood waters"*

Sandy Wallace 2015

*"Rabbits were everywhere. We were very lucky migrants from the Bonegilla centre liked to come shooting for rabbits to eat"*

Lindsay Jarvis 2015



Photo: Foxes that have been shot on fence at Kergunyah 2016

*"Foxes have become a lot more prevalent since the bounty was removed"*

Lindsay Jarvis 2015





*“Over the past five years, I have shot 510 sambar deer on my property”*

Harry Ryder 2015  
Tawonga

*“Deer are doing a lot of damage in the hills now”*

Sandy Wallace 2015





*“European wasps have come and are increasing in a big way”*

Sandy Wallace 2015



*“Carp numbers appear to be increasing. When the flood waters recede, the carp get stranded in the lagoons and they die there”*

Sandy Wallace 2015



*“There were 23 pigs trapped in Dederang in the last 12 months”*

Christine Hicks 2015

Some of the people that we interviewed about their memories of the environment.



Mervyn  
Barton



Sandy Wallace



Lindsay Jarvis



Jack & Christine Hicks

Landcare members:  
Rhonda, Rowan &  
Peter interviewing  
Albert Seymour





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Noelene Goyen

Rowan Wallace

and in particular to our funding source:

THE GARDINER FOUNDATION

This is only the first stage of interviews.

We look forward to recording your memories of the Kiewa Valley

For more information and how to get involved contact:

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