

Aboriginal People of Monaro



Mosaic Tile Picture from Cooma Monaro Time Walk, Centennial Park, Cooma

Archaeologists believe that Aboriginal people had been living on Monaro for as long as 20,000 years before Europeans arrived.

Although it was originally thought, by Europeans, that the Monaro Aboriginal people only resided in the high country during the warmer months (heading to the south coast district during winter), it is now understood that some groups lived on Monaro year-round. Other groups, such as the Brinja, Wallendgar and Walbunja, from the far south coast, travelled through this region to the high country for Bogong moth season.

The groups from the south coast, travelling to the Bogong, journeyed back to the coast (for prawn season) via the now Wadbilliga National Park (East of Cooma). Just above the Tuross Falls, on the Tuross River, the swimming holes were healing pools.

In this region there were various groups, such as the Ngarigo, Gundawahl, Djillamtong, Berrengobugge, Yaimatong, Croatingalong and Yuin (the Yuin was actually three different groups). The two main groups on Monaro were the Ngarigo people of the tablelands and the Wogul or Wolgalu group in the high country.

Major Ovens and Captain Currie wrote that they had been assisted by some Aboriginal people to find their way south. One was thought to be 28-year-old Prongar, of Ngarigo, leader of the Bullangamang group. Currie kept detailed notes: "...passed through a chain of clear downs to some very extensive ones, where we met a tribe of natives. From these natives we learned that the country before us was called Monaroo which they described as very extensive".

The Monaro people did not 'die out', as was once thought by Europeans, but many did die from diseases introduced by white people such as Small Pox, Syphilis, Influenza, Measles and Tuberculosis. The fact of the European occupation meant that some Aboriginal people were forced away from their traditional lands.

'Boona, Queen of Cooma' was the recipient of a heavy silver plate (the custom being to present prominent Aboriginal people with 'King Plates' in recognition of services they rendered to white people), who was alive around 1900. Boona Street in Cooma is named after her.

Input to this site by descendants of our original Monaro residents will be most welcome.

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