

# BLACKGIN'S LEAP: A WINDOW INTO ABORIGINAL-EUROPEAN RELATIONS IN THE PIONEER VALLEY, QUEENSLAND IN THE 1860s

Clive Moore

## Introduction

On the road twenty kilometres north of Mackay the traveller skirts Mt Mandurana, once known as Mt Johansburgh, a brooding impressive mountain dominated by a rocky precipice several hundred metres high. Nestling at its foot is the rambling verandahed Leap Hotel where locals will readily tell you how the hotel, and the mountain, more commonly known as The Leap or Blackgin's Leap, got their name. The story is that in the 1860s, the first decade of European settlement in the Pioneer Valley, an Aboriginal woman pursued by the Native Police chose to leap off the precipice rather than face her tormentors; and that her baby survived, caught on a bush in a shawl, rescued and brought up by some early settlers. The traveller might then ask how many Aborigines still lived in the district and be told, without hint of embarrassment, none; but that there were lots of local Blacks, the descendants of the Kanakas brought out from the Pacific islands to work on sugar plantations last century.<sup>1</sup>

The story encapsulates Aboriginal-European relations around Mackay in the Pioneer Valley, and the wider South Kennedy Land District of Queensland in the 1860s, with its combination of destruction and kindness. Thea Astley used the legend as the basis for her novel *A kindness cup*,<sup>2</sup> and Nicola Tareha's thorough literary-historical analysis *The legend of the leap* provides valuable background information.<sup>3</sup> The Leap legend is worthy of further detailed historical investigation as a window into the era and the Queensland frontier.

Stages can be discerned in the relationship between Aborigines and Europeans in the South Kennedy district: first contact and initial resistance (1859-1864); evenly matched warfare (1864-1868); Native Police ascendancy (after 1868); and 'letting in' (1864-1870s). But there was not an even transition from initial puzzlement and overtures of friendship to anger and warfare, leading to a subduing of the Aborigines. Some were 'let in' to a limited extent as early as 1864 and 1867, but 1867-68 were also difficult years for Whites when Aborigines seemed to be winning on the pastoral stations and had thoroughly demoralised the settlers. There is an interesting difference between the cooption of Aboriginal labour by agriculturalists in the Pioneer Valley and the continued antagonism they faced from pastoralists. The role of the average settler has been obscured deliberately, as there can be little doubt that they killed as many Aborigines as did the Native Police. But it suited them better to leave a record for posterity stressing Aborigines (the troopers) killing Aborigines (the locals).

Aborigines died in large numbers by means similar to those used in other frontier

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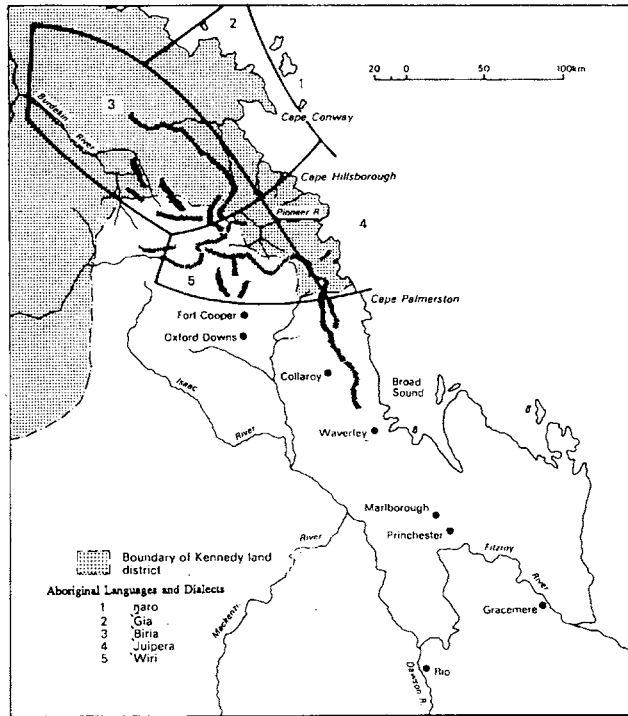
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1 Moore 1985.

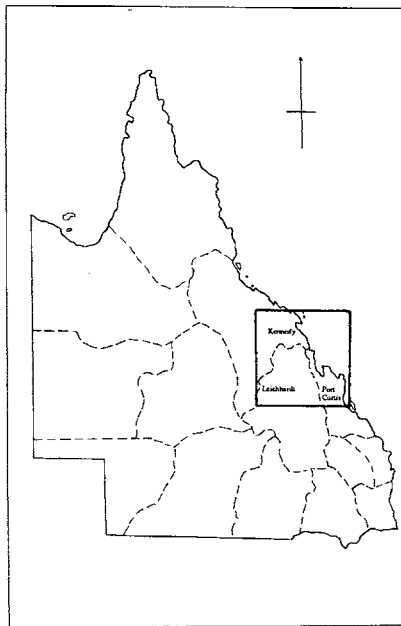
2 Astley 1974.

3 Tareha 1986.

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Map 1: Area map, Queensland. C. Moore.



Map 2: Aboriginal languages and dialects, Kennedy district. C. Moore.

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districts: deliberately shot by settlers and the Native Police, probably also poisoned by settlers, and inadvertently killed by introduced diseases and environmental changes. The major difference was two men, George Bridgman and Pierre Bucas. Bridgman attempted to preserve Aboriginal lives and harness their labour. Years before similar reserves were begun in other regions of Queensland, Bridgman created a safe haven on his pastoral properties from the mid-1860s and took on the role of protector on a government-sponsored reserve at Homebush from 1870.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately his and the government's interest waned from the mid-1870s and altering circumstances made Aboriginal labour less attractive to cane growers. Father Bucas was appointed as Catholic priest for the Mackay district in 1869. A colourful character, he had been involved with Maoris in New Zealand before coming to Australia. At Mackay Bucas involved himself with the Aborigines and in 1874 purchased land in a coastal area now known as Bucasia, where with the help of the Sisters of Saint Joseph and later the Sisters of Mercy Bucas established Marara orphanage for Aboriginal children. The orphanage provided a home for large numbers of Aboriginal children, its population varying between forty-five and ninety-three, and also provided a focal point for Aborigines on the north side of the Pioneer Valley, many of whom camped in its vicinity. Bucas left the district in 1880, returning in 1887. Unfortunately the children suffered ill health and in 1885 they were transferred to Neerkol, near Rockhampton.<sup>5</sup>

The Pioneer Valley had a more secure economy in the 1860s than most areas of the Queensland frontier, because its young sugar industry bolstered the flagging pastoral industry. Noel Loos concludes for North Queensland as a whole that between 1861 and 1897 on the pastoral, mining and rainforest frontiers the primary aim was to dispossess the Aborigines of their land to exploit its resources. The major force used came from the paramilitary Native Police, aided unofficially by the settlers. Generally in North Queensland extermination was preferred to 'letting in'; but Loos concludes that on the rainforest frontier settlers found the battle too slow and costly and entered into a treaty with the resisting Aborigines, and that on the sea frontier, where fisherman needed Aboriginal labour, they were coopted by force or meagre economic incentives.<sup>6</sup> However Loos' schema has no place for an enlarging agriculture frontier as found in the Pioneer Valley.

The South Kennedy district and neighbouring North Leichhardt district in the 1860s conform to the general pattern throughout North Queensland and Australia; but there are differences. North Leichhardt, over the ranges to the west, can be equated with North Kennedy: settler response was not surprising, given the depressed circumstances in the pastoral industry and the number of stock and settlers killed.<sup>7</sup> But in South Kennedy, particularly in the Pioneer Valley, agriculture was of equal importance to pastoralism. There was not the same sense of economic insecurity, and although there were stock losses, few European lives were lost. Settlers in the Pioneer Valley had less direct motivation to kill Aborigines, and by the end of the 1860s had a strong economic incentive to employ them as agricultural labourers. The early 'letting in' around Fort Cooper (Nebo) in North Leichhardt and in the Pioneer Valley relates to the policies of Bridgman and Bucas, and to the labour requirements of a nascent agricultural settlement, before the supply of Melanesian labour was steady and secure.

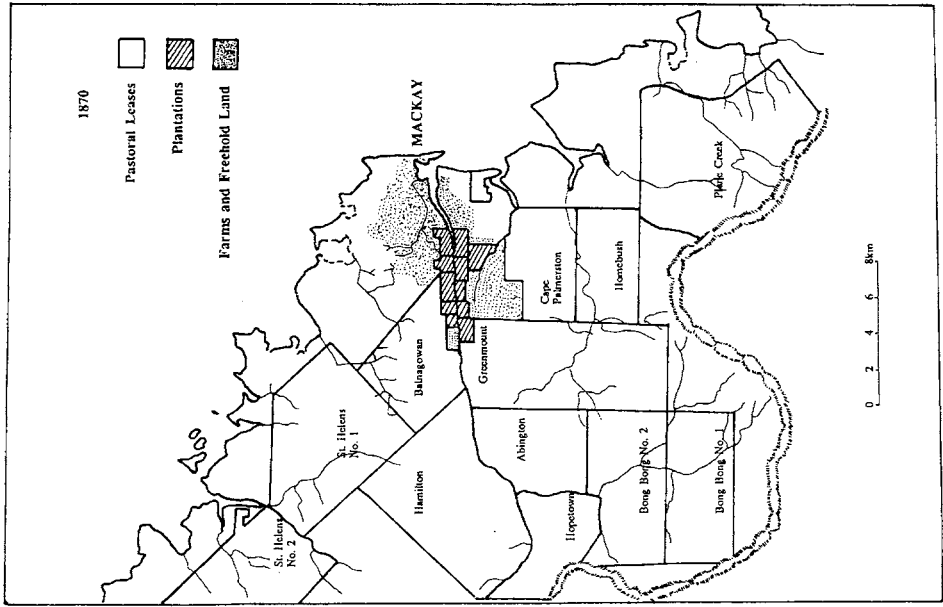
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4 Detailed correspondence on the Mackay Reserve is contained in Queensland State Archives (QSA), LAN/A1 94, No. 19; see also Evans 1971; Hoskin 1967, Chs. 1 and 2.

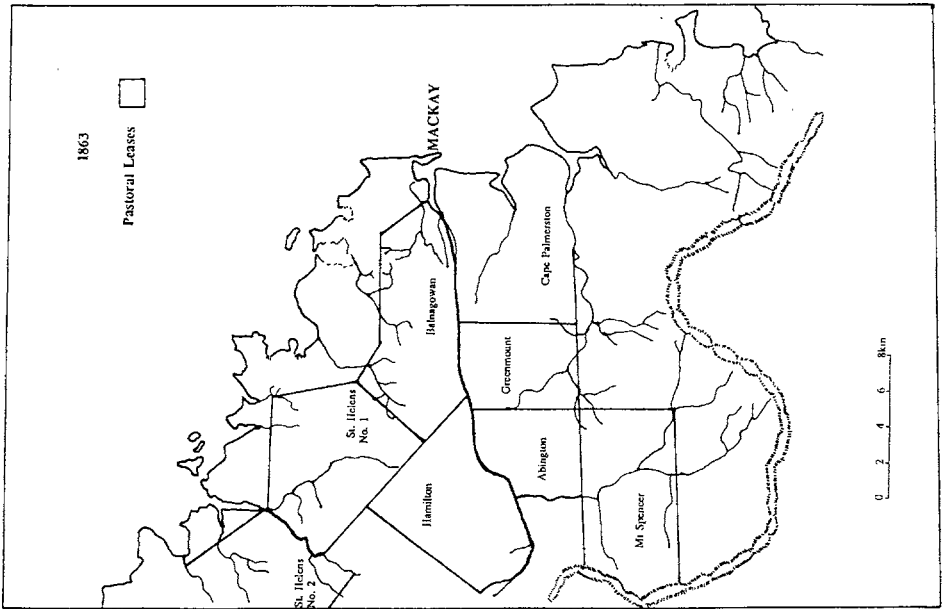
5 St Patrick's Parish 1958; Tareha 1986:15.

6 Loos 1982:160.

7 Allingham 1977:178; Loos 1982:189-247.



Map 4. Land use, Mackay district, 1870. C. Moore.



Map 3: Pastoral leases, Mackay district, 1863. C. Moore.

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This paper will place the incident at Blackgin's Leap into the context of European settlement during the 1860s and confrontation with the Aboriginal people. Detailed examination will be made of the weaponry available in the 1860s and the role of the Native Police on the frontier. The conclusion attempts to estimate the pre-1860 size of the Aboriginal population in the Pioneer Valley.

### The incident at Blackgin's Leap

The Leap is near the 1860s northern boundary of *Balnagowan* pastoral run, on the north side of the Pioneer River. Originally named *Shamrock Vale* it was marked out by John Mackay but initially applied for by John McCrossin, both members of the first European expedition to enter the valley in 1860. McCrossin was later allowed to substitute *Abington* run further down the valley for *Shamrock Vale*. John Mackay applied for *Shamrock Vale* but never stocked it. He claimed to have verbally sold *Shamrock Vale* to Louis Gerald Ross in 1862, when the latter was driving cattle north from John Cook's station east of Armidale. The original 1863 licence was issued to Ross, though John Cook seems to have been the major partner from the beginning. The station was renamed *Balnagowan*, the eastern half resumed in 1869 to make way for agricultural settlement. Ross was drowned in 1870, leaving Cook sole owner.<sup>8</sup>

The incident that led to the 'Leap' story can be pinpointed to 1867, when Aborigines were hunting and spearing cattle on *Balnagowan* station. In February, John Cook found one cow dead from spear wounds and one speared and hamstrung but alive. He telegraphed for the Native Police who did not arrive until April, led by Acting Sub-Inspector Johnstone, a local man from Landsdowne in the valley.<sup>9</sup> They patrolled for several days along the north side of the river, coming across several Aboriginal camps, one inhabited by upwards of 200 Aborigines. The *Mackay Mercury* reported that:

They were dealt with in the usual and only effectual mode of restraining their savage propensities by the officer and party, so that we may now hope that life and property will be safe for a time on the other side of the river.<sup>10</sup>

The oldest written version of the 'Leap' story seems to be that by G.M. Hess, recounted when he was seventy-three, remembering his twenty-eighth year:

One Sunday morning Jim Muggleton and Mr Hess were fishing on the town side of the river, when they saw blacks running up towards where Barnes was on the opposite bank, and they gave the alarm. He was speared through the arm and was left for dead. Hess and Muggleton pulled across the river in an open boat, and rendered assistance. A lieutenant in the Native Police named Johnston [*sic*] went in pursuit, and the male and female blacks separated. Some of the latter climbed on to the summit of The Leap, and one of them, rather than be captured, jumped from the top of the mountain and was smashed to pieces - hence the name.<sup>11</sup>

Hess does not mention an Aboriginal child surviving, and Nicola Tareha's analysis casts some doubt on the possibility. Mackay local historian John Williams, who knew the children of the pioneer European families, said that they had knowledge of the Leap

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<sup>8</sup> QSA TRE/17, No. 335; Kerr 1980:10-11.

<sup>9</sup> *Port Denison Times*, 27 March 1867, 13 April 1867; *Mackay Mercury*, 24 April 1867.

<sup>10</sup> *Mackay Mercury*, 24 April 1867.

<sup>11</sup> *Jubilee of Mackay* 1912:14.

incident, but not of a child surviving.<sup>12</sup> But an Aboriginal baby was rescued at about that time and brought up by James and Mary Ready who were among the earliest settlers in 1862.<sup>13</sup>

Another, extremely colourful, version comes from Bryan Scott, a great-grandson of the Readys, who suggests that the Aborigines were being pursued after the massacre of a Price family, and that the baby, wrapped in a shawl which had belonged to the family, was rescued by James Ready junior.

Jimmy Ready rode, after cornering the tribe under police supervision, unarmed bar a bullwhip and mounted on a black thoroughbred stallion, up the side of what was known as Mt Johansburgh, and now the Leap, after the gin jumped with her child clad in the shawl of the Price family, and was picked from the scrub bushes at full gallop and riding life and death under a hail of spears.

The child was reared with the Readys and was educated and became later a talented singer, and married a white man, and shared equal cut to properties, cattle and monies. Her son, a half caste, received a distinguished medal from the Queen, in rescuing a man who lost a leg when he fought off a shark with a pocket knife.<sup>14</sup>

John Williams has suggested another variation: that the events took place in 1865 and that during the 'dispersal' that took place after the attack on John Barnes, the Aborigines split into two groups, one climbing The Leap with the Native Police in pursuit, the other heading off to Crow Hill near Walkerston. The Native Police massacred the Aborigines at The Leap then moved on to Crow Hill where a child was found by Mr Johnson (*sic*) of *Greenmount* after the 'dispersal'. This version is based on the fact that the first baptism performed by the newly arrived Church of England minister at Mackay in April 1867 was of a five-year-old Aboriginal girl Lucy Landsdown 'taken after a displacement of natives by native police' at Crow Hill.<sup>15</sup> The 1865 date may be wrong as the evidence for the attacks on Barnes indicates 1866 or 1867, not 1865.<sup>16</sup> It seems more likely that the Crow Hill child was the survivor of an earlier massacre.

To further complicate matters, Henry Ling Roth, who lived in the district from the 1870s and wrote the first history of Mackay, is most emphatic that it was an Aboriginal man who jumped over the cliff, not a woman.<sup>17</sup> There is also a story that The Leap child was a boy named Billy Howard, later placed in the care of Father Bucas, but this may have been the son of the child rescued at The Leap. Ken Manning, a local Mackay historian, was told by an Aboriginal family that the Aboriginal woman in the incident had been living nearby with a European man and that the child was theirs. After a domestic quarrel she is supposed to have climbed the mountain and suicided. The Leap mountain may have been named by Mrs Turner of The Ridges and later of Mandurana near The Leap, after a

12 Tareha 1986:18, 66-67.

13 Manning 1983:4-5; *Jubilee of Mackay* 1912:14.

14 *Mackay Mercury*, 27 January 1977.

15 Holy Trinity Church of England Baptismal Register, Mackay, 20 April 1967; Williams 1967:7; *Mackay Mercury*, 27 January 1977.

16 G.M. Hess, who claimed to have witnessed the attack on Barnes which related to the Leap incident, was not in the district before 1867. There seem to have been several attacks on Barnes's gardens, which culminated in 1867. See *Mackay Mercury*, 24 October 1866, 4 March 1905; *Queenslander*, 23 March 1867; *Port Denison Times*, 27 March 1867.

17 Roth 1908:106.

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small waterfall on the mountain which reminded her of a similar place near her home in England.<sup>18</sup>

The Ready family version has some flaws: James Ready junior was born in 1864, so presumably it was his father who did the rescuing;<sup>19</sup> the Native Police usually tried not to let their activities be observed by settlers; and the scrub was too thick to allow riding at full gallop, so the infant would have had to find her way through about three kilometres of bush to get down to the nearest road to be picked up. It also seems unlikely that a small child could survive a fall of several hundred feet. The references to the shawl belonging to the Price family remain mysterious. Some locals say that the shawl was found close to the baby but that the child was not wrapped in it. Others suggest what seems too precise a memory, that the shawl was caught in a tree and broke the baby's fall.

There is no inquest file on the deaths of the Price family nor has any contemporary government or newspaper report been found, but oral testimony collected by Ken Manning in the 1940s and 1950s suggests that a Price family did disappear while travelling overland in the early 1860s. Price seems to have worked cattle for J.A. Macartney on *Waverley* station at Broadsound in about 1861 and was so taken with the country that in the early 1860s he set off to overland his wife and child northwards, presumably heading for *St Helens* station. When J.A. and W.G. Macartney and R.W. Graham established *St Helens* in 1863 J.C. Binney was employed to drive the first mob of cattle north. In about 1959 his daughter told Ken Manning that a man named Price had arranged to pick up some overlanding gear at Rockhampton on behalf of her father but had subsequently gone missing.<sup>20</sup>

The most substantial evidence for the survival of a child after a 1867 massacre at The Leap comes from baptismal and marriage certificates. Readys were staunch Catholics and the baptismal register at St Patrick's church shows Johanna, an Aboriginal child christened on 22 July 1867, with James and Mary Ready as the Godparents. Their daughter Mary, christened the same day and reared with the Aboriginal girl, said that she was christened Johanna Hazeldine (*sic*), but called Judy. Her account may be partly tainted by family memory of the massacre of the Fraser family at *Hornet Bank* station on the upper Dawson River in 1857, or the larger massacre of nineteen on *Cullin-la-Ringo* station on the Nonga River in October 1861.<sup>21</sup> The Readys would have known William Fraser, a son who was away from *Hornet Bank* at the time of the massacre, as he was later manager of *Grosvenor Downs* station on the upper Isaacs River when the Readys were based at Fort Cooper (Nebo) and *The Retreat (Mt Spencer)* in the early 1860s.<sup>22</sup> In 1931 Mary Coughlin (nee Ready) said that after the Fraser massacre the surviving son told the police the tale of horror:

...so the white people made war on the Aborigines and attempted to kill every black they came across. One gin in particular, carrying a little piccaninny ran mad and jumped from a tremendous height to the ground below and was killed instantly, but the baby was unhurt. From that day this place was called 'The Leap'. My father with another man, Mr Allen took the baby, but no one would keep it as they were all afraid of the blacks threats, but my parents took

18 Tareha 1986:21-22.

19 *Jubilee of Mackay* 1912:10.

20 Letter from Mr Ken Manning, 1 June 1989.

21 Fitzgerald 1982:141-2; Reid 1982; QSA COL/A23/3038, A22/2790.

22 *Jubilee of Mackay* 1912:12.

the responsibility and brought her up and got her educated. She was christened Johanna Hazeldine, and I am sure many of the older residents of Mackay know her as Judy. In later years she married a white man named George Howes. She is now dead, but leaves a grown-up son who is living in Hampden and a daughter in Sydney.<sup>23</sup>

Mrs Coughlin identified the children as Bill, who saved a man from shark attack at Eimeo near Mackay, and Esme who became a Sister of Mercy; although Nicola Tareha suggests that Esme may have been a domestic servant for the Sisters.

There seems no doubt that a massacre occurred at The Leap in 1867 and that the survivor was a female Aborigine, probably about two or three years old. The incident opens a convenient window into the 1860s frontier. One question that immediately comes to mind is whether the woman jumped or was forced over? The answer seems fairly clear: the woman and probably others from her tribe were forced to jump. There are caves at the top of the mountain that the Aborigines used, presumably for temporary shelters while out hunting in pre-1862 years, and also as hiding places when under attack post-1862. They may not have expected the Native Police to pursue them to the top of the mountain, then found themselves with no option but to face the troopers' carbines or go over the precipice. Conjecture perhaps, but a similar incident occurred in 1861 on *Albina Downs* station near Comet while Native Police were chasing Aborigines in retaliation for the Wills massacre at *Cullin-la-Ringo*. Second Lieutenant W. Carr reported that his force pursued a large group of Aborigines to the top of a perpendicular cliff:

when finding themselves surprised and nearly surrounded, they made no stand - their loss was heavy - and I consider that many were killed from falling over the cliffs.<sup>24</sup>

Carr does not bother to state how many were shot at close range and how many were forced to jump. The circumstances are similar at The Leap, and the policies and previous actions of the Native Police well known. Johnstone's oblique report on having employed the 'usual and only effective mode of restraining their savage propensities' does not allow us the luxury of presuming other than that the woman and a number of other Aborigines were deliberately massacred. The remainder of this article will examine the role of the Native Police on the Queensland frontier, assess the efficiency of European weapons in the 1860s and attempt to estimate the size of the pre-1860 population of the Pioneer Valley.

### The Native Mounted Police Force

Henry Reynolds correctly describes the Queensland Native Police as 'the most violent organisation in Australian history'.<sup>25</sup> It operated more like a unit of a defence force than a police force, patrolling recently settled areas 'pacifying' and 'dispersing' Aborigines, euphemisms for exterminating whole tribes. The Leap massacre was one of many. The Kennedy division of the Native Mounted Police was formed in 1862 but was not an

23 *Mackay Mercury*, 1 September 1931. Her husband is sometimes identified as George Howard, not Howes, but their 17 October 1887 marriage certificate shows him as George Howes, a labourer and widower aged thirty, born in Oxfordshire, England. Johanna Hazeldean had no parents listed, but was recorded as a twenty-three-year-old domestic servant born at Hazeldean near Mackay. This would make her three years old in 1867. Tareha 1986:6; Manning 1983:5.

24 Enclosure with letter No. 3038, Second Lt W. Carr to Capt J. O'C. Bligh, 7 November 1861, QSA COL/A23.

25 H. Reynolds in the *Weekend Australian*, 11-12 March 1989.



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effective force before about 1866, assisted particularly by the introduction of telegraph stations which speeded communications. The Native Police were back in the valley by October the same year,<sup>26</sup> although they did not return to *Balnagowan* until December, much to John Cook's disgust, as Aboriginal resistance still troubled him, with Aborigines hunting his cattle, stampeding them, killing a few and generally making the cattle wild and uncontrollable. When he pursued them they disappeared into the impenetrable scrub. In February 1868 Cook telegraphed the Nebo Native Police, the closest permanent unit to Mackay, but finding them unavailable contacted another patrol at Bloomsbury.<sup>27</sup> The frequency of Aboriginal attacks in the district led twenty-eight leading citizens, including the owners of all pastoral properties as well as the major planters and town businessmen, to petition the Colonial Secretary in March 1868 for the immediate establishment of a Native Police base at Bloomsbury, eighty kilometres north of Mackay.<sup>28</sup> Although initially refused in May 1868, the request was agreed to by the Colonial Secretary a short time later as necessary even in a time of economic recession, probably influenced by a June report by the Commissioner of Police after a tour of inspection, which supported the petition.

A Native Police barracks was established at Bloomsbury by the middle of the year. The North Kennedy Native Police were also reorganised with two 'flying detachments' equipped with double supplies of horses, one group to patrol constantly from Townsville to Bowen, the other from Bowen to Mackay.<sup>29</sup> This redeployment altered the balance in favour of the settlers, although as Noel Loos points out, prolonged and often determined resistance continued until the 1880s. The Native Police at Bloomsbury could be sent for one day and arrive the next. During the late 1860s and early 1870s the Bloomsbury Native Police patrolled the Pioneer Valley and the surrounding coast, forcing the remaining Aborigines off stations and away from settled areas. Some fled to the coastal islands while others moved west into the foothills of the ranges, their last strongholds. The terrain was very suitable for Aboriginal resistance and conflict continued for many years. The Nebo Native Police detachment was not removed until 1878, and that at Bloomsbury continued to operate until 1880, when the last two troopers stationed there were reassigned to the ordinary police, one to Mackay and one to Bowen.<sup>30</sup>

### European weaponry

Social historians have not dealt in detail with European weaponry and attacks on Aborigines in Queensland during the 1860s, too often generalising on the period from scraps of information. There is need for more detailed studies of the Aboriginal-European relations in the first decade after Queensland separated from New South Wales, a transition period in the development of firearms, and a decade crucial to the expansion of the frontier to the north and west.<sup>31</sup>

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26 Diary of J.E. Davidson, 17-18 October 1867, JCUNQ Library.

27 *Mackay Mercury*, 7 March 1868.

28 In Letter 1271, Memorial from settlers at Mackay, 18 March 1868, with T.H. Fitzgerald to the Colonial Secretary 17 April 1868, QSA COL/A105.

29 *Mackay Mercury*, 8 July 1868; *Port Denison Times*, 5 September 1868.

30 Loos 1982:58.

31 The only substantial book on the Queensland Native Police is L.E. Skinner's *Police of the pastoral frontier* (1975). Gordon Reid's *A nest of hornets* (1982) also deals with the late 1850s. Noel Loos's *Invasion and resistance* and Dawn May's *From bush to station* (1983)

Frontier conflict in the 1860s revolved around the use of guns of an almost outmoded design, mostly muzzle loading. Within the decade European military technology developed so that weapons could be multiple-loaded with cartridges, the forerunners of modern repeating rifles. Although individuals may have owned more sophisticated weapons, most of the frontier conflict of the 1860s depended on the use of smooth bore cavalry carbines, usually Enfield style, and muzzle loading shotguns, muzzle-loading pistols and the occasional revolver.

The 'Enfield'<sup>32</sup> carbines were muzzle loading 20-bore guns, ignited by percussion cap, generally charged by a paper cartridge, and often equipped with a captive ramrod system for reloading on horseback. The carbine was a shorter evolution of longer barrelled guns, very useful for use while mounted or in a confined space. The paper cartridges containing gunpowder and shot had to be loaded straight down the barrel: the cartridge was ripped open, the powder exposed and poured down the barrel right to the base, then the rest of the paper was added as a wad, followed by either round ball or shot which was rammed home with the captive ramrod. Loading took around ten to twenty seconds from a standing position, or longer on horseback, and required using both hands. Double barrelled carbines worked on the same principle. Depending on the charge used (and the larger the charge the larger the kickback and the less the accuracy) a smooth bore carbine loaded with a lead ball could kill a human, if hit in the torso or head, at about thirty to forty metres. The lead ball, five-eighths of an inch across, spread on impact, making a small entry and a large exit. If loaded with shot the range was a little longer, and chances of killing were still good as the 10-ball Swan Drops in use could easily lodge in two or three victims. The guns were more difficult to load from horseback, and shooting a moving target from a moving horse was also difficult. Muzzle-loading guns were subject to misfiring, through faulty manufacture of the paper cartridges and because powder soon became damp and would not ignite in the tropical conditions. It was never possible to load up one's carbine or pistol in the morning with perfect certainty that it would fire later in the day.

The troopers in the Native Police were issued with 'Enfield' single-barrelled carbines until 1870, when these were replaced by Sniders. Occasionally they also had double-barrelled carbines or even muzzle-loading single shot pistols, and also sabres, particularly after 1865 when the Queensland Volunteer Force was disbanded and their weapons were passed on to the police and Native Police.<sup>33</sup>

Officers in the Native Police, pastoralists and other settlers used single- and double-barrelled carbines and rifles, muzzle-loading single- and double-barrelled shotguns and muzzleloading single- and multiple-shot pistols, as well as the occasional five or six-shot revolver. The shotguns, known as fowling pieces, were a standard weapon used on pastoral

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cover the whole 1861-1897 period, while Anne Allingham's *Taming the wilderness* (1977) concentrates on the 1860s in North Kennedy.

32 Authentic Enfield cavalry carbines had a 21-inch barrel and a .577-calibre 25 bore. All arms issued to the Queensland Native Police were 20 bore. The New South Wales Police in the Northern District pre-separation were armed with 'yeomanry' pattern carbines, smooth 20 bore, circa 1844. After 1855 supplies of 'cape' pattern double-barrel smooth bore carbines became available and were issued in pre-separation Queensland. A further supply was of 'Native Foot Police' pattern carbines of 20 bore, with single 31.5-inch barrels. Letter from Mr J.S. Robinson, 21 March 1989.

33 I am indebted to Messrs Brian Rough, Ian Skennerton and Stan Robinson of Brisbane for sharing with me their knowledge of the weapons used in Queensland by settlers and government officers such as the Native Police, and for practical instruction in the use of the guns described here; Skennerton 1975, 1978; Johnson 1975:46-50.

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properties in the 1860s. Like the carbines they were slow to load. A solid lead ball was almost impossible to use because of the kick from the large charge needed to move it and most shot-guns used one and a half ounces of shot. An 1860s shotgun could kill at twenty-five to thirty-five metres, but beyond that distance only peppering could be achieved. Single-shot pistols were as primitive as the carbines. The revolvers were mainly five- and six-shot weapons, ignited by percussion cap and loaded through the cylinder. The user could either reload using a captive device, pouring powder and shot down each chamber, or could carry spare cylinders or paper cartridges. Revolvers were accurate to about fifteen to twenty metres, depending on whether the target was still or moving.<sup>34</sup>

Towards the middle of the nineteenth century European military technology developed repeating weapons that could be loaded once but fired often, and improved the accuracy and range of breech-loading weapons. The American Civil War (1861-65) and European wars helped stimulate these improvements.<sup>35</sup> Single-barrelled revolvers and rifles were available in Australia in the 1860s, but one difficulty with the latter was the escape of gas and flame from the breech, a problem that was never satisfactorily solved until the invention of the Snider breech-block.<sup>36</sup> Sniders could kill at fifty to sixty metres and were cleaner, more efficient weapons with a faster rate of fire.<sup>37</sup> Enfield and Snider style carbines and rifles used the same five-eighth inch lead balls, which at close range simply tore the victim apart. In the space of ten years the efficiency of weapons increased dramatically. Although private individuals may have imported sophisticated revolvers and advanced breech loading weapons during the 1860s, the Queensland government did not buy Sniders for the Native Police until 1870. The extermination of several hundred Aborigines in the Mackay district in the 1860s was accomplished almost entirely with muzzle-loading weapons. Bridgman and Bucas estimated that the majority of the deaths were caused deliberately by the Native Police, the remainder dying from introduced diseases and at the hands of individual settlers. There is no evidence that the Native Police patrolled the area more than about twice or three times a year before 1866; there was no easy way to call them before the telegraph was installed in mid-1866, and patrols were spasmodic until the Bloomsbury base opened in mid-1868. But even given the limited size of the patrols and the type of weaponry available during the 1860s, the Native Police could easily have killed several hundred Aborigines between 1862 and 1870, most in three years 1868-70. The Native Police patrolled in small groups and seldom had time to fire more than two volleys in an attack; although they often pursued Aboriginal groups for several days, killing some each time they were encountered. There is every likelihood that four- to six-man patrols could kill fifteen to thirty Aborigines at one time, and there is a record of the Native Police killing 59 Aborigines

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<sup>34</sup> See also McGuffie 1957; Blackmore 1965:58-71; Garavaglia and Worman 1984:167-70.

<sup>35</sup> Watrouse 1975:9-10.

<sup>36</sup> Jacob Snider of New York introduced a system to convert Enfield muzzle-loading rifles and carbines. The barrel was shortened by five centimetres at the breech and a slightly wider new breech fitted to accept Boxer's brass cartridges, pushed in with the thumb. The space behind the cartridge was fitted with a breech block hinged on the right and held in place by a spring-loaded pin situated near the base.

<sup>37</sup> There is discrepancy between the level of accuracy often claimed for Enfield style carbines and Sniders and that attested to by present-day users of the same guns. For instance Richard Broome suggests that Snider carbines were accurate to 500 metres but users of identical guns in Brisbane today make no such claims. Broome 1988:105.

during one reprisal on the Burdekin.<sup>38</sup> They certainly could have killed several hundred Aborigines over a few years. The picture that emerges is of attacks on Aboriginal camps on foot by stealth. The possibility of troopers following orders to call on their quarry to 'Stand in the Queen's name' and fire warning blank charges is so remote as to be laughable. The number of deaths presumed here does not exceed the destructive capabilities of the Native Police, but there is also no doubt that settlers mounted their own posses and went out hunting Aborigines, and although there is no proof from the Mackay district, poison may also have been used. The number of deaths purposefully inflicted may have been much higher. It is far easier to estimate the number of local Aborigines killed by regular-sized Native Police patrols, than to hazard a guess at the number of deaths inflicted by individual settlers. European settlement in the South Kennedy region began in 1862, increasing rapidly to 111 males and 45 females by 1864. Separate statistics are available for Mackay and the Pioneer Valley from 1868: 208 males and 132 females in the town; and another 235 males and 83 females in the district. The European population continued to rise, and alongside it the Melanesian population, with a total district population of 1,400 by 1871.<sup>39</sup>

The punitive expeditions in the early decades of settlement often degenerated into murderous hunts. In their published reminiscences and in interviews with Ken Manning and myself, oldtimers in the district were loath to recall details of hunts, except in situations where they seemed reasonable in the defence of lives and property.<sup>40</sup> Except in situations such as the aftermath of the *Hornet Bank* and *Cullin-la-Ringo* massacres, when Aboriginal hunts were implicitly sanctioned by the government, it is rare to find details of settlers making up vigilante groups. But mentions survive in reminiscences, such as G.M. Hess's admission that after some attacks on shepherds in the 1860s messages were sent out to stations to arm all hands.<sup>41</sup>

One hundred times more numerous and better armed, though perhaps more timorous, the European males of the district are likely to have killed as many Aborigines as the Native Police ever did. European women also wore pistols and revolvers and could handle shotguns, carbines and rifles. A conspiracy of silence covers their deeds. There is no record of more than about twenty Europeans, usually shepherds on outstations over the ranges to the west, dying at the hands of the Aborigines. Justification of the Aboriginal deaths is usually expressed in relation to the 1857 Fraser or 1861 Wills massacres well to the south, not because of any local deaths. Research for this paper has unearthed only one exact name (Roberts, presumed killed by Aborigines in 1862),<sup>42</sup> one reference to a shepherd, and oral testimony but no documentary evidence of the massacre of a family named Price, who could reasonably be said to have been killed by Aborigines in the Pioneer valley during the 1860s.<sup>43</sup>

38 Letter from Dr Noel Loos, 4 April 1989. There is only one piece of evidence from the Mackay district which indicates numbers killed. In 1874 Edward Denman was shown fourteen skulls perforated with bullet holes, on land which had formerly been part of *Balnagowan*. He was told that some years before the Native Police had 'dropped on niggers' at the spot. *Mackay Mercury*, 13 August 1975.

39 *Queensland Statistics*, 1864 Census:10; 1868 Census:4-5, 9; Moore 1985:128.

40 Manning 1983:4; see also Allingham 1977:18-79.

41 *Jubilee of Mackay* 1912:14.

42 Inquest 62/149, QSA JUS/N4.

43 Loos 1982:189-247, particularly 197-98; letter from Mr Ken Manning, 1 June 1898.

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Uncaptioned photograph taken by Richard Daintree at Mackay, c. 1869. It is part of a larger photograph which includes Europeans. C. Moore collection.



Uncaptioned photograph, by Boag and Mills, professional photographers, in 1872. It appears in H.L. Roth, *The discovery and settlement of Port Mackay*. Queensland, Halifax (UK), 1906:77. Courtesy Oxley Library.

### The Aboriginal Population

By the classification of George Bridgman and Father Bucas, based on languages and dialects, there were four distinct Aboriginal groups within one hundred kilometres or so of Mackay: the *Juipera*, who inhabited the coastal end of the Pioneer Valley; the *Kungalburra*, whose country was between Mackay and Broadsound to the south; the *Toolginburra*, in territory to the west of the *Kungalburra*, probably also including the area around *Fort Cooper*; and the *Googaburra*, on the islands off the coast.<sup>44</sup> Norman Tindale revised this division in his *Aboriginal tribes of Australia*. His description of the groups in the Pioneer Valley and surrounding region is as follows: the '*Juipera (Yuipera)* from *St Helens* to Cape Palmerston, including the area which became the Homebush reserve; the '*Koinjmal (Kungalburra)* on a narrow band along the coast from Cape Palmerston to and around Broadsound; '*Barada (Toolginburra)* inland from the '*Koinjmal* as far as Oxford Downs and Nebo; backed to the west by '*Bar:na*'; then the '*Wiri (Widi)* inland from the '*Juipera*'; with the '*Gia* and '*Biria* to the north, from the coast west; and the '*Njaro (Googaburra)* on the Whitsunday Islands and the coast at Cape Conway.<sup>45</sup> More recently the '*Juipera*, '*Wiri* and '*Biria* have been reclassified as dialects of the one language, which covered the whole Pioneer Valley, its hinterland and the headwaters of the Burdekin River.<sup>46</sup> It is wrong to think of any of the language groups as distinct tribes, as their relationships through territory, kinship, marriage, totemism, language and ceremony would have overlapped and intersected. Their territory boundaries focused on sacred sites and had indefinite merging boundaries marked by natural features.

There are no 1860s estimates of the original size of the Aboriginal population of the valley, but E.M. Curr, quoting Bridgman and Bucas in 1880 as his sources, suggests that:

During the eight or ten years which followed [1860], about one-half of the aboriginal population was either shot down by the Native Mounted Police and their officers, or perished from introduced loathsome diseases before unknown.

The Black troopers, however, are said to have been the chief destroyers.<sup>47</sup>

Considering their lack of immunity to common European diseases, Aborigines must have suffered substantially from introduced diseases. There is no way of knowing if introduced diseases killed large numbers of Aborigines in the region before 1860, but given quite substantial contacts between Aborigines and Europeans in the Whitsunday Islands during the 1850s there is the possibility that the 1860 population of the wider region had already been depleted by epidemics.<sup>48</sup> Based on Curr's paraphrase of Bridgman and Bucas' evidence, one could presume that twenty to twenty-five per cent of the 1860 Aboriginal population had died from introduced diseases by 1870.<sup>49</sup> Noel Loos suggests that the extent of deaths from introduced diseases can be compared with the effect of the Black Death in Europe during the Middle Ages. If this is correct then the pre-1860 Aboriginal population of the Pioneer Valley may have been larger than the 1,000 estimated here. The

44 Curr 1886-7, III:44-45.

45 Tindale 1974:165-66, 168-71, 176, 182, 190.

46 I am indebted to Professor R. Dixon of the Australian National University for his advice on the classification of these languages and dialects.

47 Curr 1886-87, III:44.

48 Rowland 1985, 1986, 1987.

49 If disease-caused deaths were large scale, even if only to a similar extent as for immigrant Melanesians in the district or migrant labourers in the Pacific, then this factor is important. Moore 1985:244-73; Shlomowitz 1989.

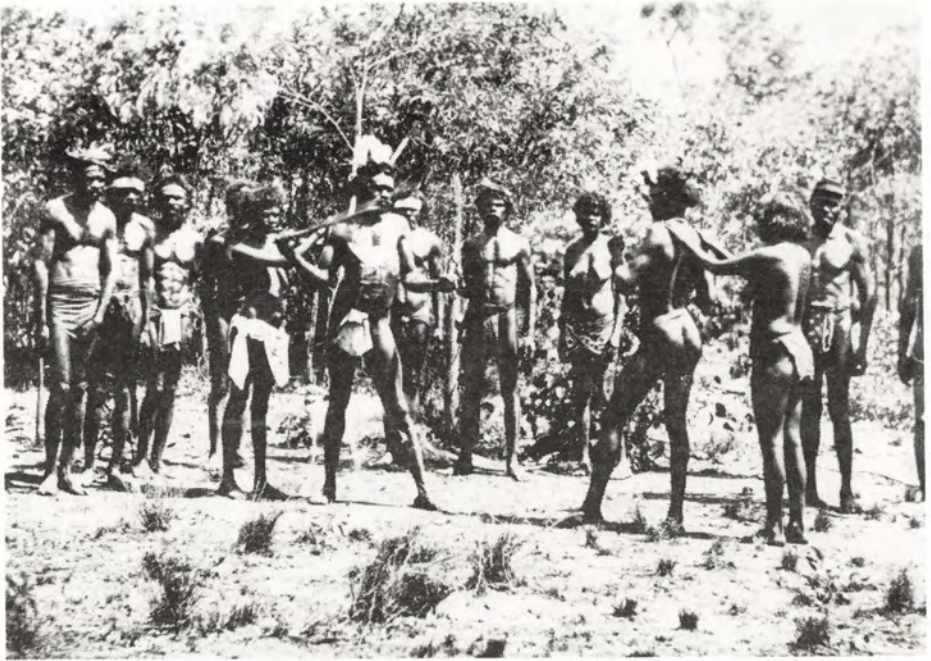
## BLACKGIN'S LEAP



Clive Moore notes: 'This photo must be from around the mid 1880s as it is in a book of photos held in the Sugar Research Institute library at Mackay. Other photos in the book would date it at 1883-1885.'



'Village Settlement, Bed of Pioneer River, Mackay, Queensland', Postcard, 1890s, photographer unknown. C. Moore collection.



'Mackay Aborigines', c. 1880. Courtesy Oxley Library.



'Mackay Aborigines', c. 1872. Courtesy Oxley Library.



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problem is why Bridgman, who spoke the 'Juipera-'Wiri-'Biria language and was in contact with the Aborigines, showed no sign of being aware of larger numbers of deaths from disease.

We know that 100 Aboriginal males and presumably similar numbers of women and children from the 'Juipera group existed in 1863.<sup>50</sup> Then there is Acting Sub-Inspector Johnstone's April 1867 report of one camp on the north side of the river of more than 200 Aborigines, although these could have been the same people who visited the settlement in 1863. Edward Denman of *Etowrie* estate remembered a corroboree on *Inverness* plantation in 1874 in which 400 Aborigines took part.<sup>51</sup> In 1875 Bridgman said that he had about 300 under his charge: 100 of all ages and sexes resided on or near the reserve; another 100 were working for planters; and the balance lived by hunting, with no fixed abode. A similar report in 1876 gave the reserve population as floating between 100 and 200, which is after a measles epidemic which killed large numbers of Aborigines and immigrant Melanesian labourers.<sup>52</sup> One of E.M. Curr's correspondents numbered the 'Barada (*Toolginburra*) tribe at forty men, forty women and twenty children in 1880.<sup>53</sup> And a mid-1880s photo of Pioneer Valley Aborigines shows thirty-eight: thirteen men, thirteen women and twelve children, all of who appear to be in good health.<sup>54</sup> Given that enough Aborigines lived around Bloomsbury to warrant keeping a Native Police barracks operating there until 1880, with Bridgman's 300 and others living in the western end of the valley and on the islands off the coast away from European settlement, it seems fair to estimate the lower bound of the pre-contact population of the Pioneer Valley at about 1,000, which fell to 500 in the ten years 1860-1870.

Deliberate extermination seems to have ended about 1880 but loss of territory and their original way of life, disease, malnutrition, lack of hygiene exacerbating problems caused by congregation for long periods in one place and the adoption of clothing, all caused the Aboriginal population of the district to decline steadily during the remainder of the century. Many of the small number remaining in the early twentieth century died in the 1919 influenza epidemic. In December 1920 Jimmy Porter and Andrew, said to be the last two Aborigines in the Mackay city area, were removed to Palm Island Reserve off Townsville. To close the epoch the city Health Inspector visited their camp on the bank of the river, destroyed their dogs and burnt their gunyahs.<sup>55</sup> Johanna Hazeldine, the child from the tragedy at Blackgin's Leap in 1867, was one of the few survivors, although others still lived in rural areas outside Mackay, some married to immigrant Melanesians. Most of the pre-contact Aboriginal population had been destroyed.

In 1978 Rose Mooney, a South Sea Islander married to one of their descendants, called for a memorial to be placed at The Leap to commemorate her people. Her cry was supported by the oldest descendant of the Ready family but there was no community response.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps it is time it was built.

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<sup>50</sup> Diary of Abijou Good, 24 September to 4 October 1863, JCUNQ Library.

<sup>51</sup> *Mackay Mercury*, 13 August 1975.

<sup>52</sup> Report to the Board appointed to establish a settlement for Aborigines near Port Mackay, for the quarter ending June 1875; and, Report of the Reserve Trustees to Secretary for Lands, 4 May 1876 QSA LAN/A1 94, No. 19; *Mackay Mercury*, 13 November 1875.

<sup>53</sup> Curr 1886-87, III:45.

<sup>54</sup> Photo held by the library, Sugar Research Institute, Mackay.

<sup>55</sup> *Mackay Mercury*, 27 December 1920.

<sup>56</sup> *Mackay Mercury*, 13, 16 January 1978.

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