

Interpretation for sustainable development

STORIES AND HISTORIES OF NON-INDIGENOUS GINNINDERRY PEOPLE AND PLACES

PART 3.1

DR MARY HUTCHISON

GINNINDERRY LOCAL HISTORY STUDY REPORT MAY 2024

PART 1 – Introduction

PART 2 – Ginninderry Local History Study (GLHS)

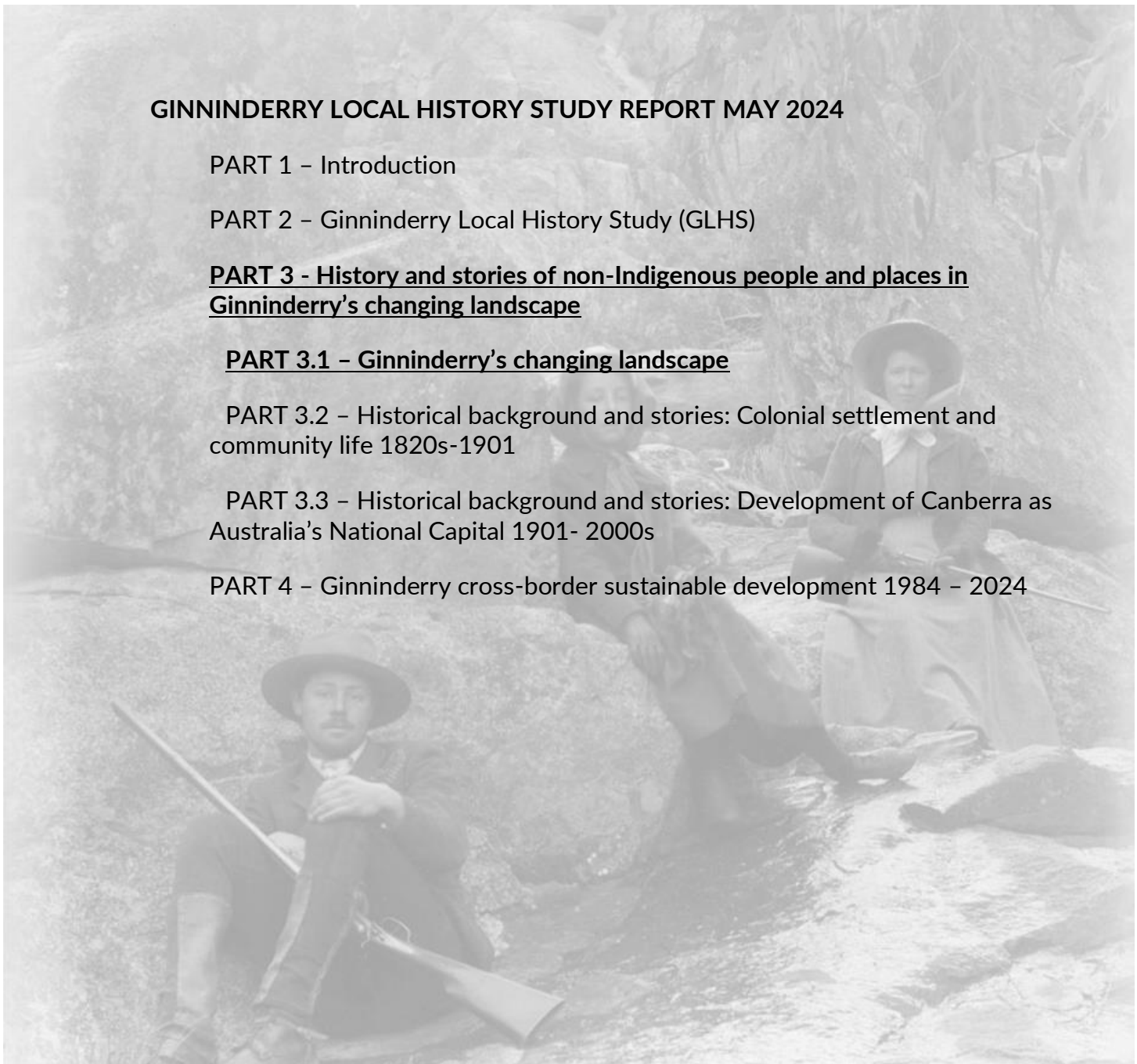
PART 3 - History and stories of non-Indigenous people and places in Ginninderry's changing landscape

PART 3.1 – Ginninderry's changing landscape

PART 3.2 – Historical background and stories: Colonial settlement and community life 1820s-1901

PART 3.3 – Historical background and stories: Development of Canberra as Australia's National Capital 1901- 2000s

PART 4 – Ginninderry cross-border sustainable development 1984 – 2024



Cover page image: Members of the de Salis family out for a day of recreational shooting at Ginninderra Falls c.1900. National Library of Australia nla.obj-151628974.

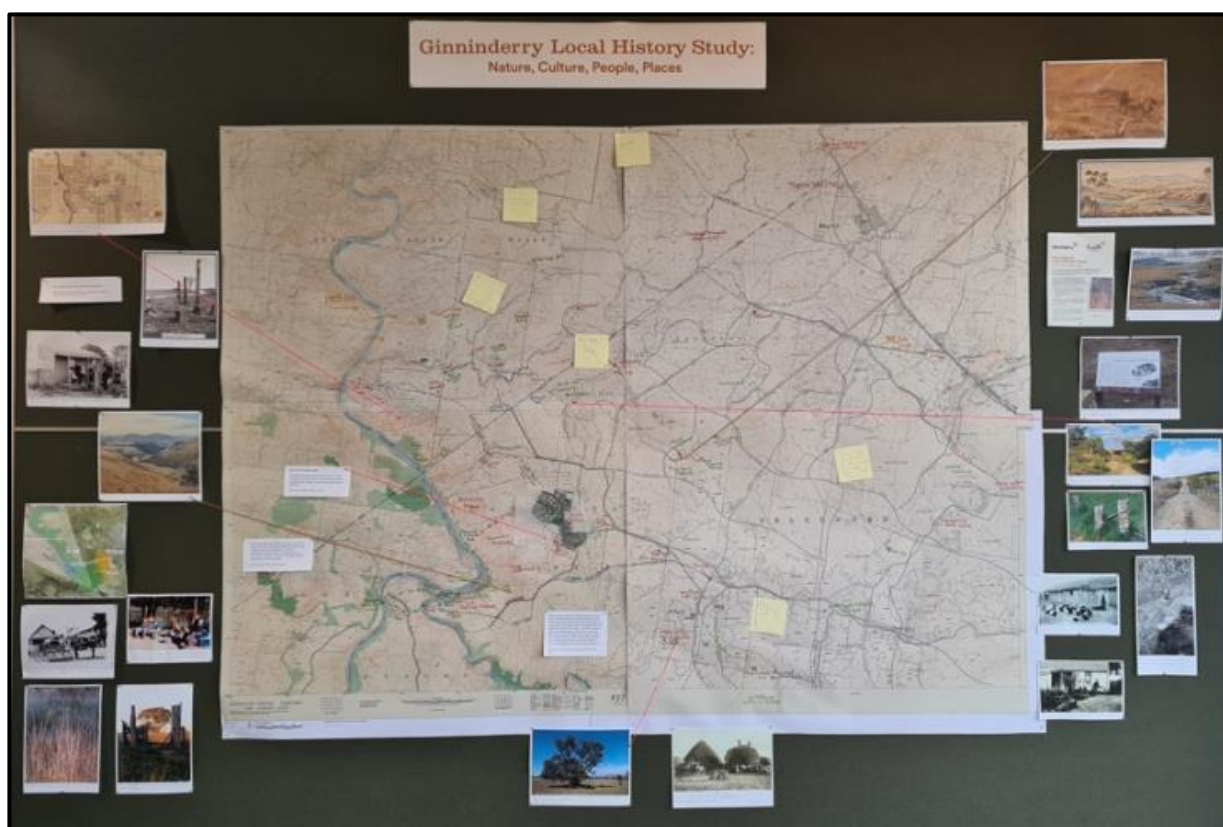
Following page, Acknowledgement of Country image: Murrumbidgee River and landscape from Shepherds lookout. Photo: Ginninderry

Acknowledgement of Country

Ginninderry proudly acknowledges Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we rely.

We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to Australian life and how this enriches us. We embrace the spirit of reconciliation, working towards the equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice.





Ginninderry Local History Study, GLHS Story Map, The Link, June 2020. Photo: Tulitha King.

Research and content development

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Dr Mary Hutchison is an honorary associate professor at the Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies, ANU. She is a public historian and writer whose research and professional interests include museum and heritage site interpretation, oral history, community collaboration and cultural diversity. She has a particular interest in interpreting changing times and places through the lens of personal experience.

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Recommended non-Indigenous interpretation location index

The historical information in this report provides context and stories relevant to the GLHS 'blueprint' report, *Stories of Ginninderry Places: Recommended non-Indigenous interpretation locations* (Hutchison & Skitmore, 2021). An index to information concerning these locations is provided in the preliminary pages of each Part. The locations are mapped in Figure 3-1. Most are referred to in Parts 3.2 and 3-3.

Recommended Interpretation Hubs:

Straithnairn Homestead Interpretation Hub, 2

Belconnen Farm heritage Interpretation Hub, 2

Ginninderra Falls Interpretation Hub, 2, 8

Cusack's Crossing Track Active Travel Hub, 2

Recommended Interpretation Locations

Pine Ridge Corner School bus stop, 2

Elioth Gruner's easel, 2

The Junction Fords, 2

Balconnel gold mine, 2

Lower Molonglo Water Quality Control Centre, 2

Cusack's Crossing, 2

The Falls Homestead, Courting Ford and Sturt-Campbell Boundary, 2

Picnic Paddock, 2

Federal Corner, ACT Border and Sturt-Campbell Boundary, 2

Old Weetangera Road, 2

Old Parkwood Road, 2

Possible Interpretation Locations

Possible shepherd's hut, 2

1945 stockyard, 2

Part 3 History and stories of non-Indigenous people and places in Ginninderry's changing landscape

Overview

Part 3 concerns the history of non-Indigenous people and places in and around Ginninderry from the arrival of British colonists to ACT suburban development. In the context of wider NSW history, it documents changes in social life and uses of the land in the Ginninderry locality through the experiences of people connected with it in various ways.

To manage the large amount of material that Part 3 includes, it is further divided into Parts 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3. Part 3.1 is a brief overview of Ginninderry's wider geographical, geological and changing cultural landscape. Parts 3.2 and 3.3 respectively concern the Ginninderry locality's 19th century NSW colonial and 20th century ACT history. In these two parts, material is presented under headings and subheadings. Historical maps with overlays showing the land's changing uses and management over time, provide a graphic history of the landscape. Present-day landmarks on the maps include the Ginninderry boundary, key locations within the project area, and other relevant present-day elements. Where stories of families and individuals cross the two centuries, they appear chronologically across Parts 3.2 and 3.3. Some continue in Part 4. As well as maps, sources include oral history and other personal accounts, government and local archives, databases, and secondary sources such as local histories. It is inevitable, particularly in the colonial period, that there are gaps in information about lived experience and that what evidence can be found is often inconclusive. These may be seen as points of interest and discussion for audiences as well as opportunities for further research.

Recommended interpretation locations

The historical background, stories and images in Part 3 provide material for interpretation of recommended non-Indigenous Ginninderry places (Hutchison and Skitmore, 2021). These can be found through the index to recommended locations in the preliminary pages of each Part. In the map below, Figure 3-1, they are shown as numbered yellow circles. Roman numerals denote 'possible locations'. Four locations are identified as potential interpretation hubs. These are Cusack's Crossing Track Active Travel Hub, and three locations represented by stars which are also key landmarks within Ginninderry.

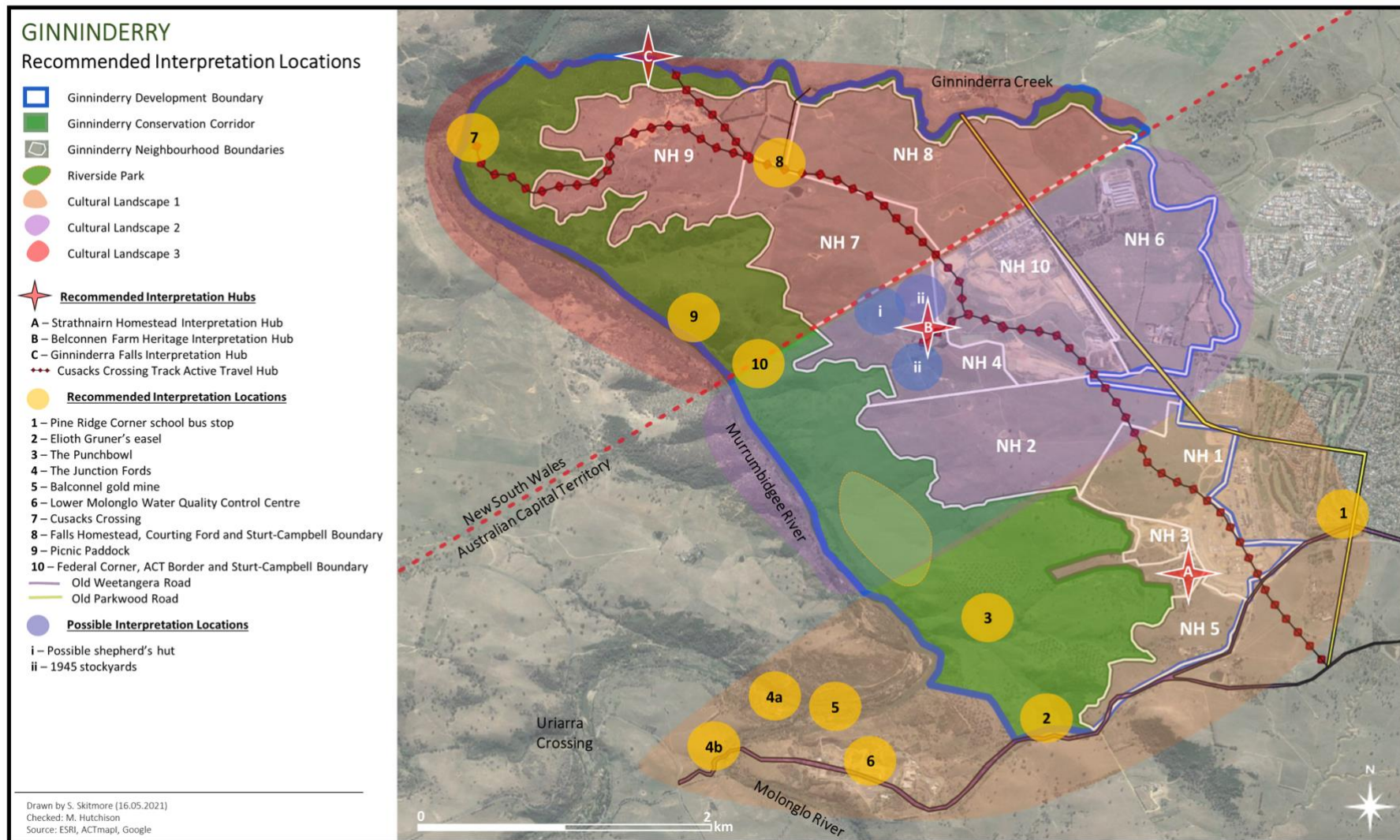


Figure 3-1 Ginninderry Local History Study 'blue print' overview of non-Indigenous interpretation locations

Part 3.1 Ginninderry's changing landscape

This section provides a brief overview of the changing physical and cultural landscape of Ginninderry as background to the historical and cultural detail in the following sections.

Geographical context

The Ginninderry Development area of 1600 hectares straddles the NSW-ACT border in the broader area of the Southern Tablelands - an undulating terrain of well-watered plains and valleys unfolding from the highlands of Great Dividing Range. Figure 3-2 and Figure 3-3 respectively show the location and boundaries of Ginninderry in its regional and local environments.

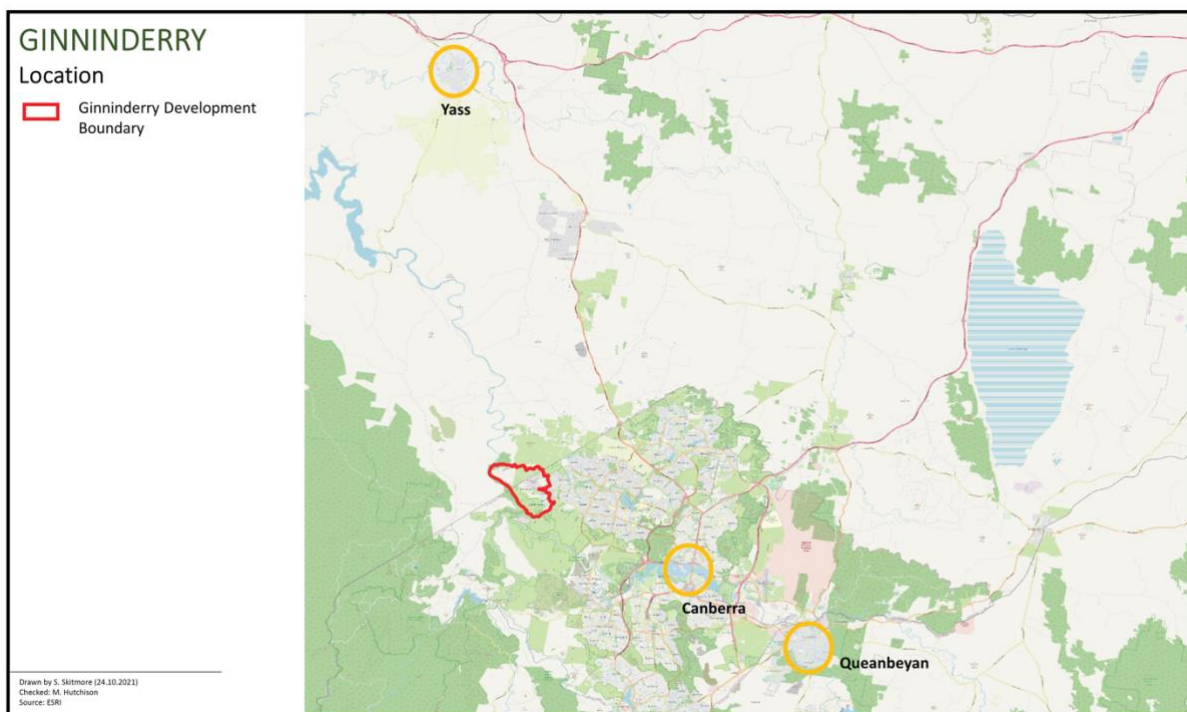


Figure 3-2 Ginninderry in the region of the Southern Tablelands.

The Murrumbidgee River, on its course from the highlands, forms the Development's western boundary. Across it the Brindabella Mountains and Bogong Peaks of the high country are visible in the distance (Waters Consultancy, 2017, p. 16). The local Ginninderra Creek, flowing from the north-east near Hall, joins the Murrumbidgee at the north-western corner of the development and forms the northern boundary. The Creek's descent to the Murrumbidgee through the waterfalls of a rocky gorge, is the most dramatic form of steep descents from north to south along the Murrumbidgee boundary. Near the southern boundary these include Shepherds Lookout and The Punchbowl. Not far from Ginninderry's

south-western boundary, another waterway originating in the Highlands and significant to Canberra, the Molonglo River, joins the Murrumbidgee.

The south-west and south-east land boundaries separate Ginninderry from remaining ACT rural leases and run close to the road (Stockdill Drive) leading to the Molonglo River and the Molonglo Water Treatment Plant. The eastern boundary is alongside the established ACT suburbs of Holt and Macgregor (Figure 3-3).

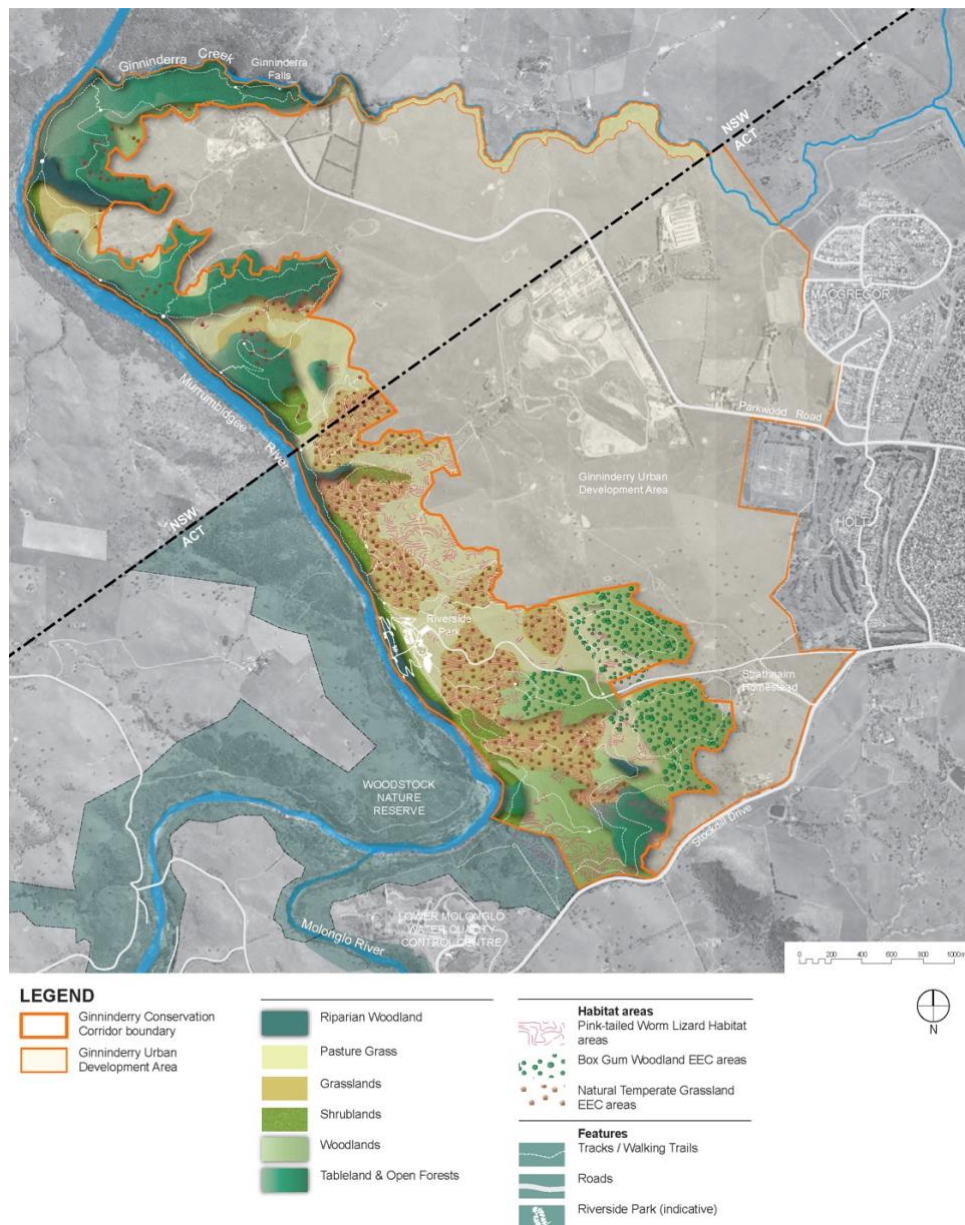


Figure 3-3 Current local Ginninderry landscape highlighting the conservation corridor and urban areas bounded by the Murrumbidgee River. Source: Interim Plan of Management, Ginninderry Conservation Corridor 2018)

Geological setting

The landscape of the Canberra Region began to form over 400 million years ago when intense volcanic activity pushed mountainous igneous land up above the existing ocean floor and expelled rock and ash into the air and across the landscape far to the south. Changes in temperature, movements in tectonic plates below the earth surface, and the impacts of water, ice and wind above the ground also contributed to the process. Today, the landscape is ringed by, and dotted with, mountains and hills that are surrounded by plains and intersected by creeks and steep gorged rivers. All are remnant of this dramatic period which, in combination with later changes, eventually produced ecosystems of flora and fauna and influenced the activities of people in the landscape (Butz, 2018; Finlayson, nd). Another characteristic of the early formation of the Canberra region is deposits of limestone. The once numerous limestone outcrops led British colonists to describe the area as the Limestone Plains. Urban development has had a significant impact on this local geological identity (Butz, 2018).

In the present-day, and most relevant to Ginninderry's landscape, the Murrumbidgee river runs along a fault line which divides the mountainous land to the west and the open, undulating plains to the east. Weathering on the mountains keeps the peaks rounded in shape and reduces the height of the continuing uplifting forces. The open plain area is shaped by alluvial deposits and weathering, and is very slowly subsiding (Peter Dowling, pers. comm. 2022)

The Indigenous cultural landscape

When people arrived in the Canberra region about 20,000 years ago, the Murrumbidgee River and Ginninderra Creek around Ginninderry had cut their courses similar to the present day through the lower side of a local uplift of land. The climate had warmed and ecosystems of flora and fauna were established (Cummings, Hutchison and Waters, 2019, p. 5).

Ginninderry's cultural landscape has been in the making since humans arrived in the southern tablelands around 20,000 years ago. An inseparable relationship between the cultural life of First Nations and the natural environment that sustained them physically, shaped their understanding, use and maintenance of their landscape as 'an interconnecting network of physical, social and spiritual meanings' (Waters Consultancy, p. 78).

Ginninderry is in the vicinity of pathways that connect resources and ceremonial places across the tableland into the Brindabella Mountains. Each summer when the migration of bogong moths from the western plains to the high country provided nutritious food, large groups of people from around the region gathered and travelled to harvest them. The journey was a significant occasion for trade, marriage arrangements, and ceremony, including initiation. Pathways along the Murrumbidgee and Ginninderra

Creek corridors to the Brindabellas are rich in camping and ceremonial sites (Waters Consultancy, 2017, pp. 78-85).

Other methods of resource management also shaped the Indigenous landscape. One was the use of fire. Fire was already part of the regeneration of plant species by the time First Nations people arrived in Australia. They developed methods of using it to facilitate productive environments across the continent. In the Southern Tablelands, as in other regions, they used fire to regenerate and manage the grassland species on the plains for themselves and the grazing animals they hunted. They also used it to create clear areas of land edged by open forest which provided both animal shelter and convenient hunting space (Gammage, 2011, pp. 275-280).

When the British colonists started investigating the land south-west of the Dividing Range in the early 1800s, they saw the abundant grasslands or 'meadows' as evidence of ideal pastoral land and rich soil. They likened the pattern of grassland, open forest and cleared areas to the parks that were part of the English countryside (Brown, 2014, p. 11).

The non-Indigenous cultural landscape

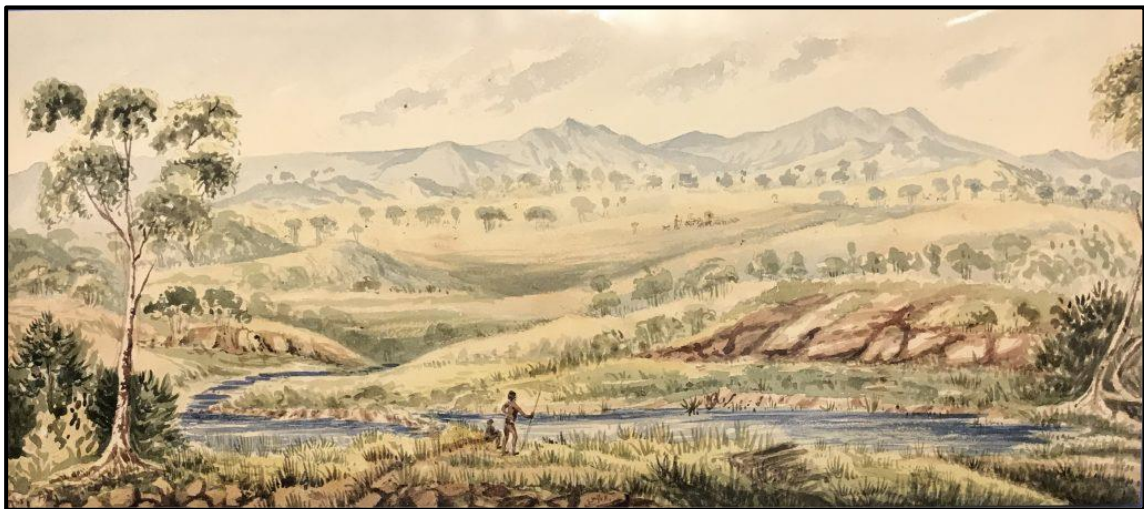


Figure 3-4 Robert Hoddle 'Ginninginderry Plains' 1832-35. National Library of Australia nla.gov.au/nla.obj-137038759

Ginninderry's non-Indigenous cultural landscape, as elsewhere in Australia, has taken shape in relation to its location, its geology, its ecosystems and its management over thousands of years of First Nations' custodianship. National and local historical developments since colonisation have also been part of the last two centuries of the Australian landscape's cultural reformation.

One of the first changes made by British colonists involved clearing Indigenous land for pastoral and agricultural use. The colonial surveyor, Robert Hoddle's painting (Figure 3-4), like many others of the

time, documents the changes taking place while Indigenous people were still managing to survive on their lands. It is a view of the land he was surveying along the Ginninderra Creek east of Ginninderry in the present day Umbagog Park in Latham. Farming activities can be seen in the middle distance¹.

Colonial New South Wales 1820s – 1901

Early European land use and management is also documented on colonial maps. Large areas of land were divided into counties, in turn divided into parishes and then, as purchased from the colonial government, into private properties. In this system, Ginninderry was in the region of the Limestone Plains, in the rural parish of Weetangera, within the County of Murray. Figure 3-5 shows Weetangera and its neighbouring parishes of Canberra to the east, and 'Yarrolumla', south-west between the Molonglo and Murrumbidgee Rivers. Wallaroo and Ginninderra parishes, whose names are not visible on the map, are respectively north-west and north-east across Ginninderra Creek. The neighbouring land west of the Murrumbidgee River was in the County of Cowley with Urayarra and Umbarra parishes Ginninderry's closest neighbours.

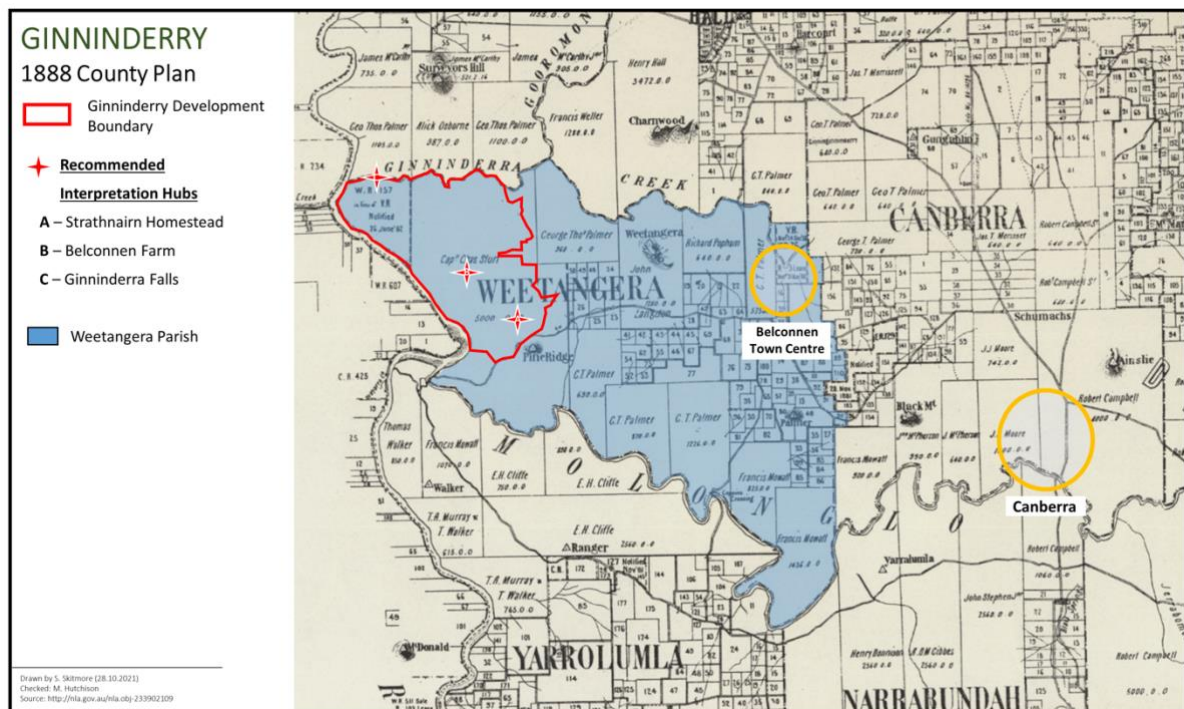


Figure 3-5 Weetangera parish in the County of Murray 1888. Map of the County of Murray: Eastern Division N.S.W. Sydney: Department of Lands N.S.W.

By 1888, both large pastoral properties and smaller farming blocks were part of the regional landscape.

¹ Research by GLHS with Professor Ken Taylor and Tim the Yowie Man identified the location of this painting as being on the Ginninderra Creek in Umbagog Park near Denny Street, Latham. The land was originally purchased by John Langdon but became part of George Thomas Palmer's Ginninderra Estate in 1833.

The physical changes to the landscape that came with the colonial order included clearing native vegetation for agriculture and habitation, the introduction of sheep, cattle, horses, rabbits and numerous other exotic species of both fauna and flora, and the creation of trackways made by wheeled transport and cloven hooves. They also included extensive cutting of timber for building, quarrying and mining and the permanent damming watercourses to manage water supplies. Recreational practices such as horse-riding, game shooting and visiting locations of natural interest also made their mark. Ginninderra Falls became a popular location for its spectacular landscape and its hunting opportunities, as indicated in Figure 3-6.



Figure 3-6 Members of the de Salis family out for a day of recreational shooting at Ginninderra Falls c.1900.
National Library of Australia nla.obj-151628974.

Australian Capital Territory 1901 – 2000s

The federation of the Australian colonies in 1901 brought another significant change to the Limestone Plains with the selection of the Molonglo Valley as the site for the national capital of the new nation of Australia. A much larger area around the site was carved out of NSW for the Australian Capital Territory

(ACT). In this process the boundaries of the County of Murray were revised to encompass NSW land only. Most of Weetangera parish, with the exception of what is now north-western Ginninderry, became part of the ACT. Under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth Government, all ACT lands were changed from freehold to leasehold, managed by the Government and resumed when necessary for the development of the city. Figure 3-7 shows the 1940 area of Canberra city and suburbs surrounded by rural leasehold blocks. It also includes a detail of the 1915 ACT Feature map showing the pastoral landscape of paddocks in and around south-eastern Ginninderry as it was in the early 1900s.

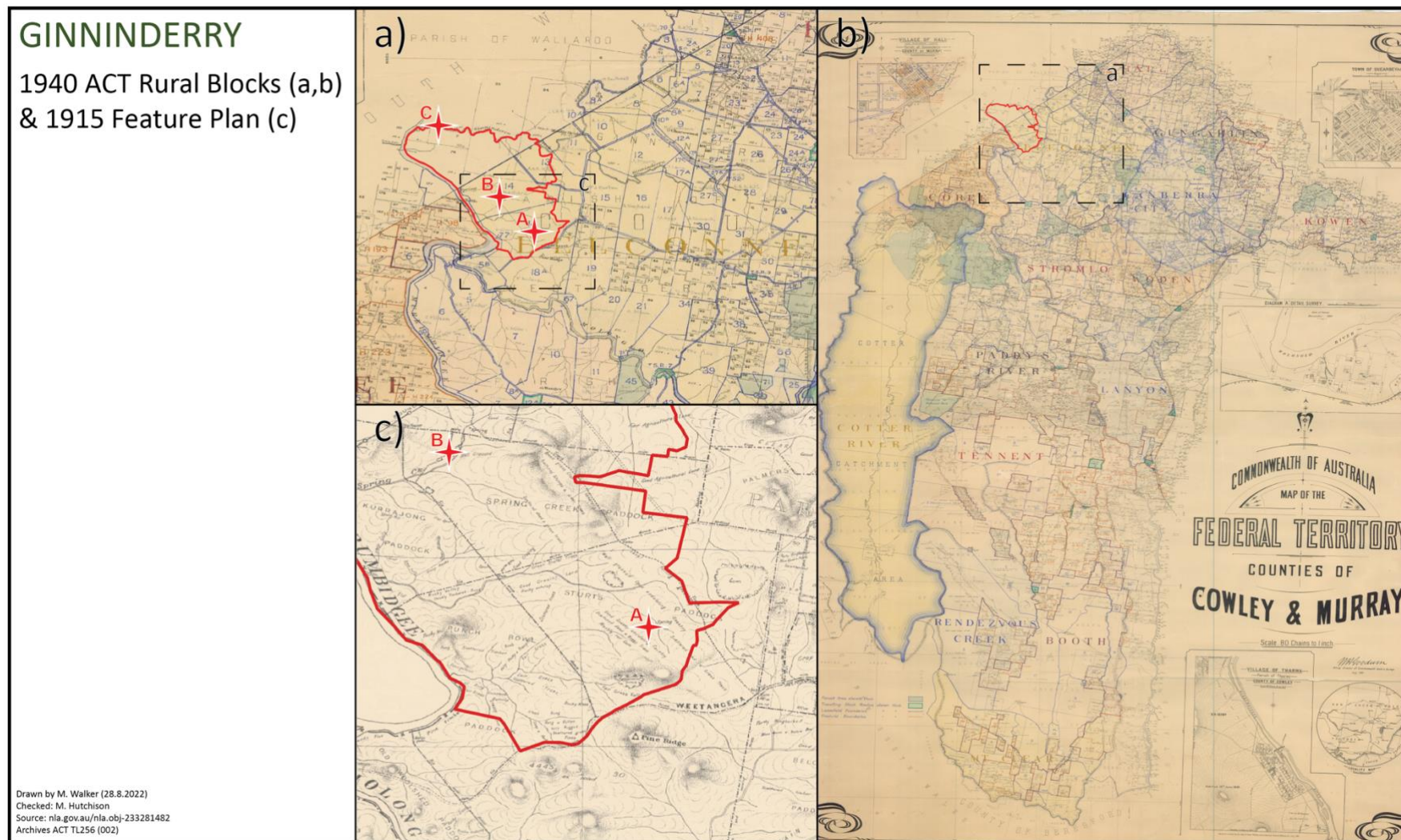


Figure 3-7 ACT Rural Blocks, 1940. Archives ACT TL256 (002) and Federal Territory Feature map, 1915. National Library of Australia MAP G8981.G46 s15 1915.

From the formalisation of the ACT, the cultural landscapes of ACT and neighbouring NSW evolved in the context of different land uses and were managed separately by their respective jurisdictions. As the 20th century urban and suburban development of Canberra progressed, the rural environment of pasture, homesteads and farm buildings became disparate features dotted between suburbs. In the 1970s, ACT Ginninderry became part of the rural edge of Canberra when the suburbs of Holt and Higgins were developed. Macgregor followed. New South Wales Ginninderry continued as rural landscape in which the main change was the division of larger properties into smaller rural blocks.

In the ACT a defining element of the development of Canberra was the focus on a 'city in the landscape' initiated by architect Walter Burley Griffin and his wife Marion Mahoney and extended with the National Capital Development Commission's National Capital Open Space System (Taylor, 2007). In the 1970s and '80s, environmental conservation values were incorporated into this idea of 'landscape'. As a result, open space planning included the conservation of ecosystems and wildlife corridors (Shorthouse, 2022).

In the 21st century the Ginninderry development includes a substantial conservation corridor as well as projects designed to give life and meaning to the area's Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural landscapes. As a cross border development, it has made a significant change to the NSW/ACT status quo by reuniting the two Ginninderry landscapes and thus putting the old Weetangera Parish back together.

References:

Abbreviations

ACTHL: ACT Heritage Library

CDHS: Canberra & District Historical Society

ms: manuscript

NAA: National Archives of Australia

NLA: National Library of Australia

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