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MORE BURIALS IN THE LAKE VICTORIA AREA

A report prepared for the
Dareton Aboriginal Community

Judith Littleton and Harvey Johnston
NSW NPWS
Buronga

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CATALOGUE COPY

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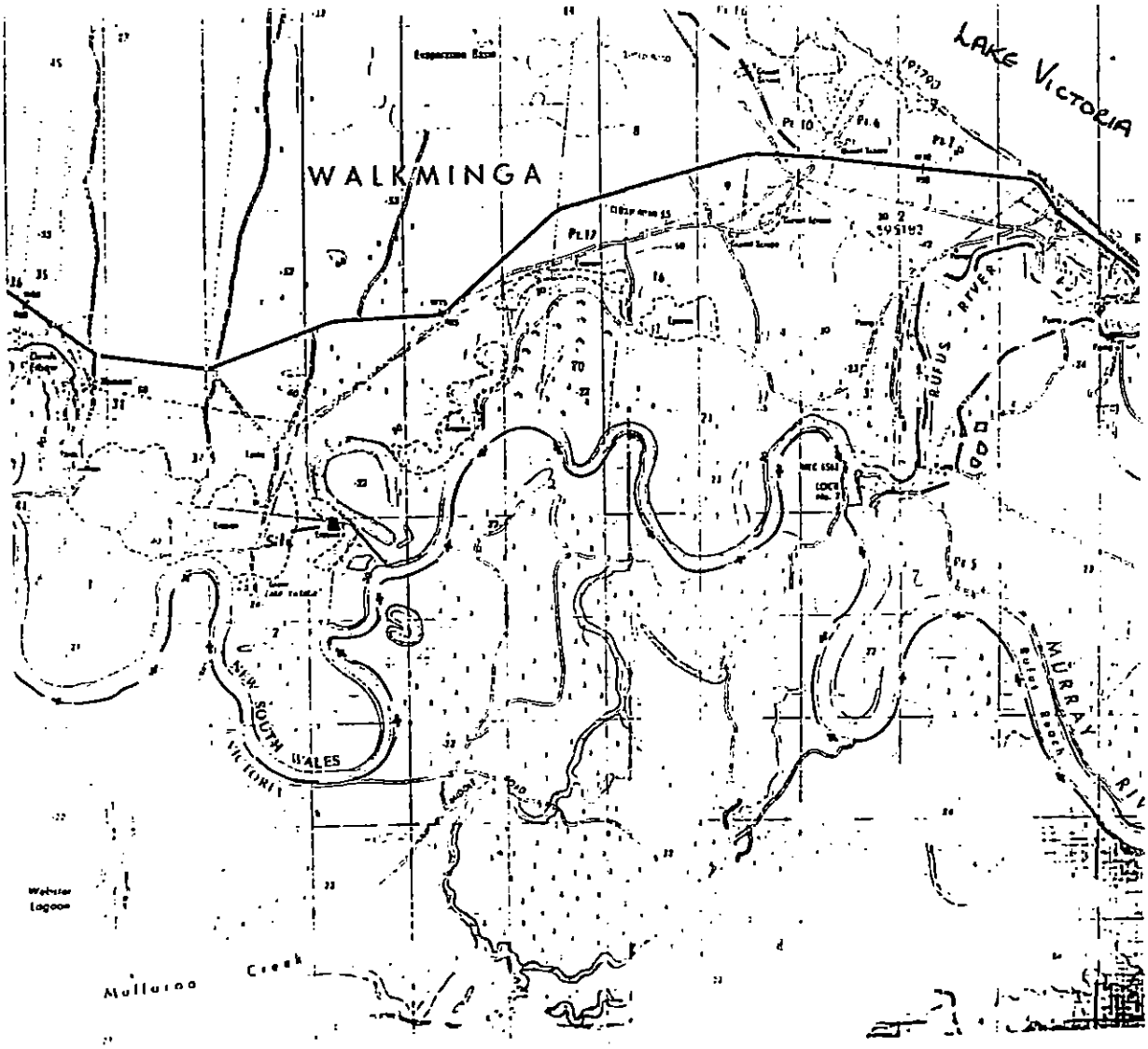
WHO FOUND THEM?

Darren Kelly was out fishing in late October when he found a skull in a gully just above the Murray River at Lake Victoria. He told Rex Smith and Des Jones who passed it onto National Parks.

Darren and I (Judith) went out in early November to record the burial. Then in late November Harvey Johnston, Roddy Smith, Darren and I went out to work out what should be done about it.

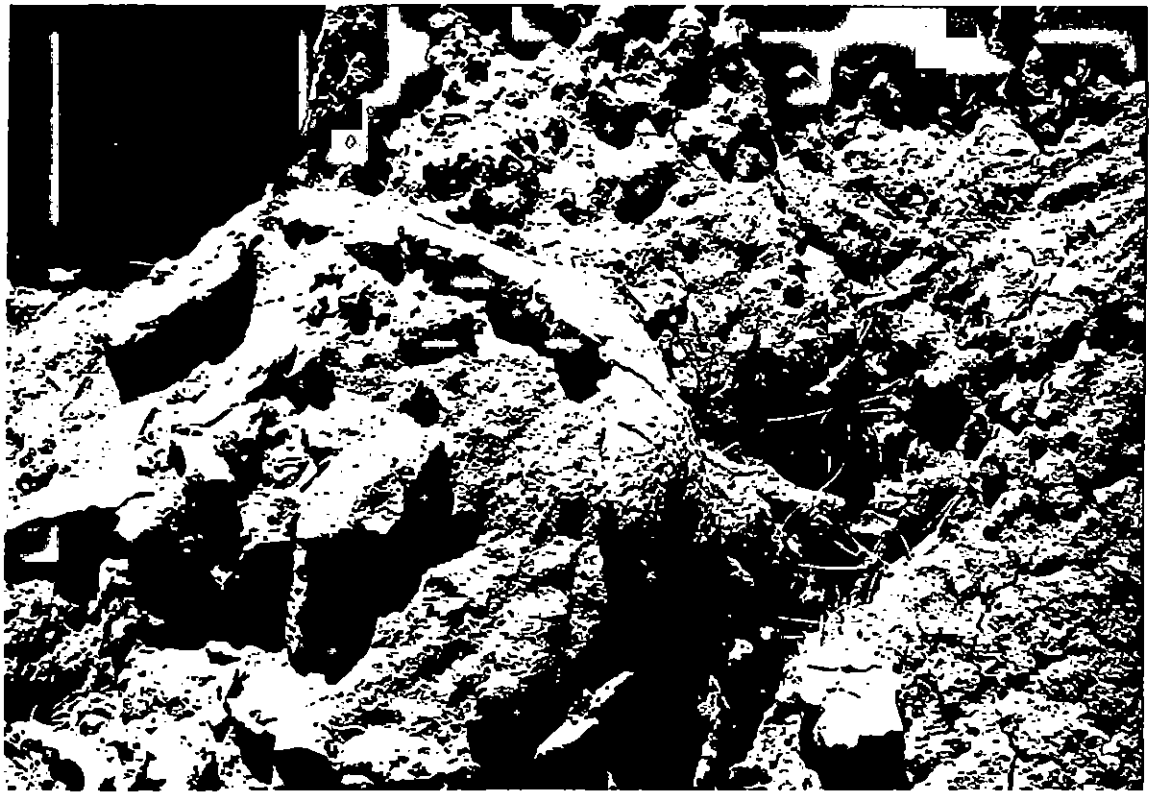
LOCATION

The burial lies in a big area of erosion on the river cliffs not far from Lake Victoria Station.



WHAT WAS THERE?

We actually found three burials. The first burial was the skull which was lying down the side of a gully. As far as we could tell, this was the burial of someone placed on their right side with their knees and arms bent. Their face was to the north-west. Only the skull and a few little feet bones were still in place - the rest of the bone had washed away down the gully.



The first burial found.

The size and shape of the skull, especially the jaw, showed that this burial was of a man.

Lying beside the skull were some large shell pieces and it looks like they were placed in the grave with him.

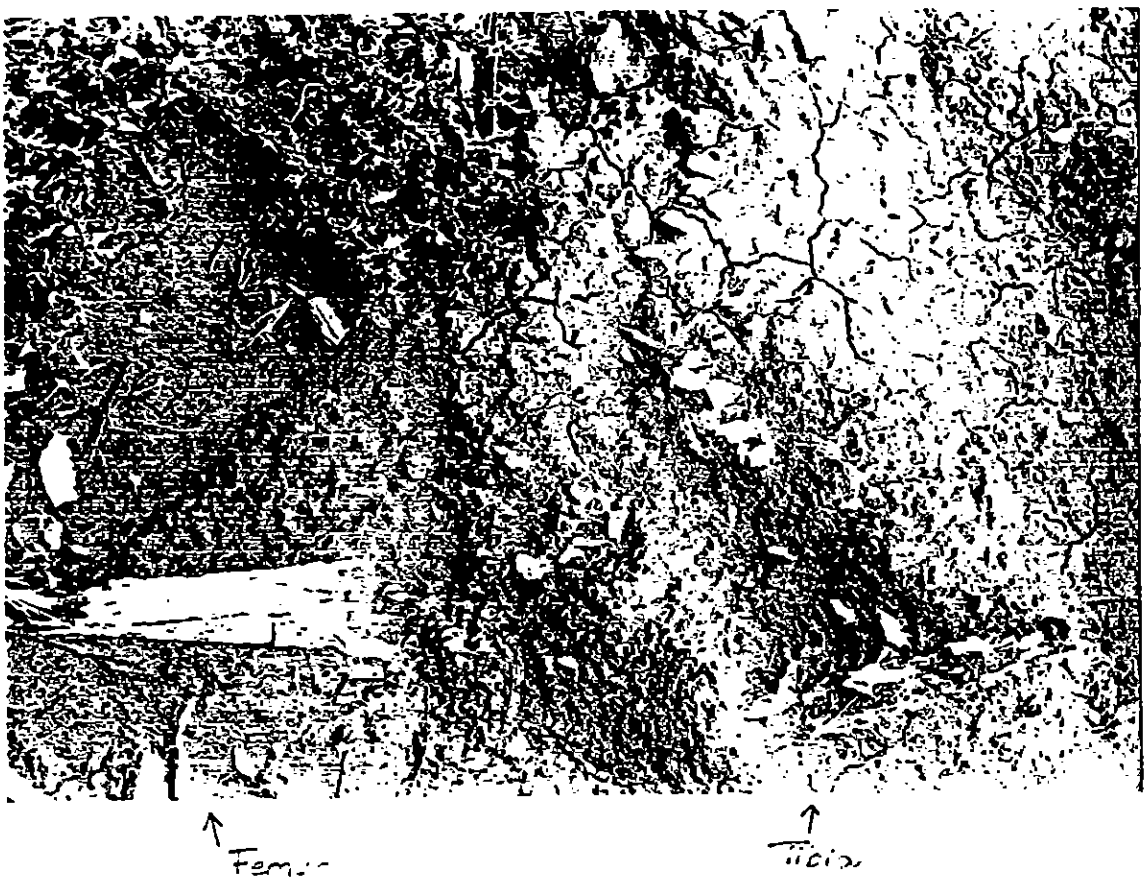
The last time we visited this burial we noticed that just at the back of his skull is a dent. It looks like he was hit over the head at one time.

Lots of Aboriginal skeletons have skull fractures. Generally they were caused by really heavy blows to the head - just bumping your head doesn't normally leave a dent. At the same time, its really hard to work out from the bone why someone died. In this case, the man had been hit over the head sometime in his life but it hadn't killed him because his bone had all healed before he died.

ANOTHER BURIAL

About 15 metres away from this burial and through the fence was another one.

Just the right leg was visible. The bones of the left leg had been washed away. Not enough bone was left to tell us a lot except that this person was an adult and they'd been buried lying on their back, head to the west - like most of the burials around Lake Victoria.



WHAT ELSE

Near to this burial but on the other side of the gully is a small scatter of human bone - just small bone fragments.

Around these burials is a scatter of shell on the surface and the occasional stone tool. So people were camping here.

Below the burial is a scarred red gum and a bit further away is a black box tree which Darren says is scarred and looks like a grave marker. But when we visited the site the water was up so we couldn't see.

The scarred red gum tree.

So there are three burials of adults just in this one place. There may be more but there are many remains of people camping in this area - it seems more likely that people were occasionally buried here rather than it being a big burial ground. Maybe there are as many as six burials but just at the moment it doesn't seem likely that there were many burials here at all (not like Snake Island).

WHAT WAS DONE?

Its nearly impossible to stop water erosion and a lot of the bones of the first man had already washed away so Roddy decided, after talking it over with us all, to leave the man's bones where they were and just cover them up with branches. So that's what we did.

The bones will eventually wash away but at least we all know that there was a burial here and a bit more about how people used this area.

Roddy, Harvey and Darren covering the burial.

A BURIAL AT GOL GOL

A man from Gol Gol told Harvey about some bones he had found down on the water's edge at Gol Gol. So we went down with Roddy to have a look at them. There's not a lot of bone to be seen. But it looks like there was a woman or maybe someone in their teens buried down here near a campsite.

She (or he) was buried on her back with her head to the west.

Less than a metre away is a small group of bones and it looks like they may be the hands or feet of another burial. We looked around very briefly and didn't fine anything else.

We'll record these burials properly and cover them back up and that should make them safe.