

Place Name SUMMARY (PNS) 4.03.02/05

MULGALI

(last edited: 15.3.2016)

Abstract

Mulgali or *mulkali* is a common noun in Ngarrindjeri language, not a place-name. According to most sources, it and its variants mean 'red ochre'.

The Ngarrindjeri Elder Albert Karlowan may have used *Mulgali* as a generic place-name in his Yaraldi dialect, applying it to Ochre Cove south of Moana; but this is doubtful and is most likely a misunderstanding by ethnologist Ronald Berndt. A genuine place-name would always have a suffix, e.g. the Locative as in *Mulgal-angk*.

Coordinates	[Sensitive]
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Language Information

Meaning	'red ochre' [according to Berndt]; 'yellow ochre' [according to Tindale]
Etymology	
Notes	<i>Mulgali</i> (= <i>mulkali</i>) is the form in Yaraldi dialect as recorded by Berndt from Karlowan, and in Tangani dialect as recorded by Tindale from Milerum. The standard Ngarrindjeri form today is <i>milkurli</i> , from the Ramindjeri as recorded by Meyer.
Language Family	Yaraldic: 'Ngarrindjeri'.
KWP Former Spelling	
KWP New Spelling 2010	
Phonemic Spelling	
Syllables	"Mulgali":
Pronunciation tips	Stress the first syllable. 'u' as in 'full' (not as in 'moon'). 'a' as in Maori 'haka'.

Main source evidence

Date	1843
Original source text	" <i>milkurle</i> 'red substance with which the Ngarrindjeri paint themselves; red ochre'." " <i>tau:we</i> 'red substance, red ochre used for painting bodies'."
Reference	HAE Meyer 1843, <i>A Vocabulary of the Language spoken by the Aborigines of the southern and eastern portions of the settled districts of South Australia...</i> , Adelaide, James Allen.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Ramindjeri people of Encounter Bay 1840-3

Date	1879
Original source text	“Red ochre – Milkurli. ”
Reference	G Taplin 1879, ‘Vocabulary of the “Narrinyeri” Language’, in Taplin (ed) 1879, <i>The folklore, manners, customs, and languages of the South Australian aborigines</i> : 136.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Ngarrindjeri people of Raukkan

Date	[1930s] / 1987
Original source text	“... (Mt Hayfield)... Going down to the foot of the hill he shook his body and dust came off him. This became the [mulkali] (yellow paint or ochre)...”
Reference	NB Tindale 1987, ‘The Wanderings of Tjirbuki’, <i>Records of SA Museum</i> , No. 20: 9b.
Informants credited	(in general) Milerum and Karlowan.
Informants uncredited	

Date	[c.1940] / 1993
Original source text	- “ Red Ochre Cove (Mulgali or Putatang, both names meaning red ochre) ”. - “Tainbarang { <i>clan</i> }, Noarlunga River: people came down to Mulgali Cove for red ochre. <i>Ngatji: mulgali</i> (red ochre)”.
Reference	Berndt & Berndt 1993, <i>A World That Was</i> : 20, 312.
Informants credited	Karlowan
Informants uncredited	

Date	n.d. [1980s]
Original source text	“ mulkali Kaurna Tr. Rapid Bay S.Aust. ochre, yellow Tindale ms from Karlowan.”
Reference	Tindale Kaurna vocabulary card in AA 338 7/1/12, SA Museum.
Informants credited	Karlowan [an error]
Informants uncredited	Milerum

MULGALI and MILKURLI: common nouns vs. place-names: Discussion:

For the early part of Tjilbruki’s grieving journey southward – carrying the corpse of his beloved nephew along the coast from Kingston Park to Port Willunga – the coastal place-names almost certainly came only from Albert Karlowan. He gave versions of his account separately to Tindale and Berndt.

Tindale published two accounts, 1936 and 1987,¹ which in this part of the story are almost word-for-word most of the way from Kingston Park down to Sellicks Beach. Karlowan was credited as the informant for most of the 1936 essay; while the much-quoted 1987 essay is a hybrid based on Milerum with Karlowan's version added in, along with much independent material from Tindale's other research. Berndt's version is taken only from Karlowan, an independent record dating from around 1940.

Of the Ngarrindjeri place-names attributed to this stretch of landscape, Karlowan gave "*Ka`reildung*" to Tindale; "*Lukar*" and "*Mulgali*" to Berndt; and "*Potartang*" to both. Each of these is considered under its own file.²

The version *mulkali* was published in Tindale's essay of 1987, where Tindale says the word means 'yellow ochre', and associates it not with Ochre Cove but with the high ranges of Southern Fleureu Peninsula. After leaving the body far behind at Yanarwing cave, Tjirbruki emerges near Mt Hayfield:

Going down to the foot of the hill he shook his body and dust came off him. This became the [mulkali] (yellow paint or ochre)... 'Gold has been found there; it may be from off him'.³

One of Tindale's Kurna vocabulary cards credits this spelling and meaning to Karlowan.⁴ Here the language group is given as "Kurna Tr. Rapid Bay", which is clearly wrong, as the word occurs only in Ngarrindjeri sources and there is no Kurna word with a related meaning which resembles it at all.⁵ And it may have actually come from Milerum, who in 1934 told Tindale the long version of "Tjelbruke"⁶ which made up the larger part of the 1987 essay, including the incident above.

All the other sources disagree with Tindale's records about *mulkali* being yellow: including Berndt, who got his information from Karlowan, and also Tindale's own Tangani dialect vocabulary from Milerum, which has *kulalaki* as the word for 'yellow ochre' or 'gold stone, maybe pyrites', and *mulkali* for 'red ochre'.⁷ 'Yellow' appears to be simply Tindale's error.⁸

¹ Tindale 1936, 'Story of [Tji:rbuki], a legend of the people of Rapid Bay', in Tindale & Mountford, 'Results of the Excavation of Kongarati Cave', *Records of SA Museum* Vol. 5 (4) :500-1; Tindale 1987, 'The Wanderings Of Tjirbruki: a tale of the Kurna people of Adelaide', *Records of SA Museum*, No. 20, :5-13.

² See also PNS 3/10 Krildung; 4.03.02/06 Lukar; 4.03.02/01 Purditilla.

³ Tindale 1987: 9b.

⁴ Tindale Kurna vocabulary card in AA 338 7/1/12.

⁵ In Kurna language the relevant words are *karko* ('red ochre with which the natives paint their bodies'); *mitte* ('red ochre'); *yarnbanna* ('a species of red ochre brought from the far North' or 'purple coloured ochre'); *karrokarro* ('red'); *taltarni* ('red, yellow red, etc'); *wirrandi* ('to colour yellow or brown etc'); *wirranniranna* ('yellow colour, yellow brown'). None of these bears any resemblance to *mulgali*.

⁶ Milerum 1934, 'Story of Tjelbruke', Tindale Southeast of SA journal Vol. 2: 50, SA Museum AA 338/1/33/2.

⁷ Tindale, Tangani vocabulary cards from Milerum, as quoted in Gale 2009: 27, 52.

⁸ Colour words are notoriously difficult to interpret across different cultures and even different historical periods. Even if the word might also mean 'yellow', it could still apply to the general vicinity of Ochre Cove, where yellow ochre was

It was Karlowan who – according to Berndt – used *Mulgali* as a place-name, and believed that it meant ‘red ochre’. This version is in the Yaraldi dialect of Ngarrindjeri language. In the Ramindjeri dialect it is *milkurli* (still meaning ‘red ochre’), and this is today’s standard Ngarrindjeri spelling.⁹

But was *mulgali* really used as a place-name?

Linguistically the probabilities are strongly against it. In the early 1840s Meyer noted that in place-names “the simple nominatives appear not to be used”: i.e. the root *always* has a suffix appended to it (*-angk* and others meaning ‘at’; *-ungai* ‘to’; *-mant* ‘from’, etc).¹⁰ The place would have been referred to as *Mulgal-angk* or the like, not simply *Mulgali*.

All the extant versions are common nouns, and there is no other evidence of their use as a place-name. In the full text of his Tjirbuki narration given to Berndt in Ngarrindjeri language (pp.445-6) Karlowan does not mention *mulgali*; nor does Berndt himself in paraphrasing it (p.234). Berndt seems to have assumed or invented this usage himself. He made the same doubtful extrapolation from associated noun to place-name with *luki* or *lukar* (‘tears’);¹¹ and Tindale may have done something similar (from collective reference to specific site name) with “Ka`reildung”.¹²

All of these extrapolations occur in the context of Karlowan telling the story of Tjirbuki and his wailing places along this stretch of coastline. Perhaps they are not so much ‘errors’ as responses to some colloquial habit of Karlowan’s. When he spoke *in English* about Tjirbuki’s journey through these places, perhaps he often referred to any of them (or all of them collectively) by a common noun without a locative suffix: much as we might say ‘I went down to the tears and the ochre’, or in other story contexts, ‘to the Leap’ (Adam Lindsay Gordon’s horse leap at the Blue Lake) or ‘the flags’ (the War Memorial). Such references are not place-names as they stand, but could *become* place-names if enough people used these terms specifically enough for long enough. But the evidence in Berndt is too slight to carry this theory.

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End of Summary

available in the cliffs of Maslins Beach. For the colours, see e.g. the brochure Geological Society of SA 2011, ‘Maslin Bay and Port Willunga Geological Trail’, http://www.sa.gsa.org.au/Brochures/maslin_standard.pdf [15/3/16].

⁹ See Gale 2009, *Ngarrindjeri Dictionary*, Raukkan Community Council: 52.

¹⁰ Meyer 1843: 13.

¹¹ See PNS 4.03.02/06 ‘Lukar’. have

¹² See PNS 3/10 Kriildung.