The only known portrait of Mokaré, drawn in July 1826 by Louis de Sainson, when Mokaré was in his late twenties. Dumont D'Urville, Voyage de la corvette L'Astrolabe, Atlas historique, *Paris 1833.*

CHAPTER 6

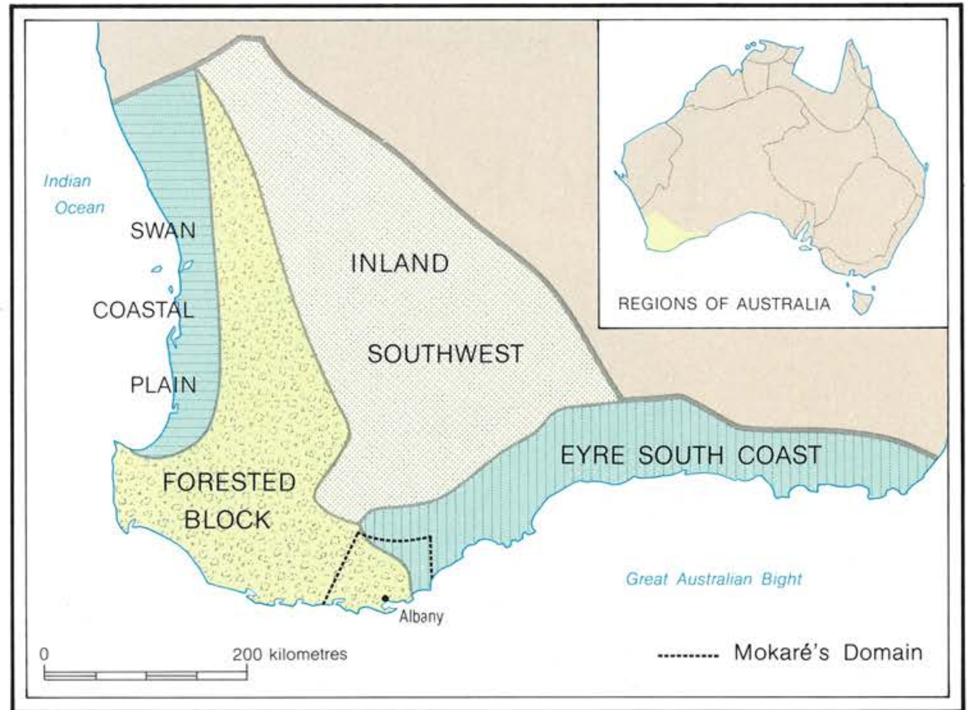
MOKARÉ'S DOMAIN

W. C. FERGUSON

MOKARÉ'S FATHER must have torn down the pile of stones that the Europeans erected on his land at King George Sound in 1791, because it was not there ten years later when Matthew Flinders looked for it. Inside the cairn was a bottle that contained a note declaring that Captain George Vancouver claimed this land for the King of Great Britain. Neither of these objects would have made much sense to Mokaré's father, but once he broke the bottle he would have found that the sharp bits of glass made good knife blades. They were almost identical to the pieces of crystal quartz that he most often used. The note probably just blew away and, even if he could have understood it, he would have considered the message ridiculous. This piece of land was his. He owned it as a legal inheritance from his father, and all his neighbours acknowledged his rights to it.

In spite of Vancouver's note, life for Mokaré's family continued much as it always had, and when the old man died a few years later, the land passed to Mokaré and his brothers in the usual manner. The ships of European explorers occasionally anchored in the fine harbour which their land surrounded. They provided a slight diversion, but they never stayed for more than a few days. Mokaré was probably born in a maternity hut at the edge of the camp about the time his people watched Flinders' marines drill on the beach. The Aborigines thought the drill was a corroboree, and tried to learn the steps.

Mokaré's older brother, Nakina, and a good friend, Coolbun, once went on board one of the ships. As an adolescent prank, they traded some artefacts to Captain Phillip Parker King for ship's biscuits in 1821. When they found that King wanted examples of their tools, they hurriedly put together a few sticks and stones that looked like hatchets and offered him those. The fake hatchets would not chop anything, but he did not know the difference. King tried to impress them by firing a cannon, but was himself impressed when Coolbun discovered how the thing worked and told the others. Coolbun was very clever. He grew up to be one of the band's *mulgarradocks* or doctors as the English called them.



The Australian southwest is a distinctive natural and cultural region, which is defined here using the cultural and environmental boundaries shown in the maps overleaf. It was the home of the Nyungar people. Each major environmental subdivision affected their way of life differently. The Swan coastal plain is a rich woodland area that supported the highest densities of population, while the thick karri and jarrah forests of the forested block were less hospitable. In the inland southwest and the Eyre south coast, zones of transition to the desert regions, most people concentrated in the woodland areas around the forest margins. Mokaré's range lies within the dotted line surrounding Albany.
J. GOODRUM

In July 1826, Mokaré, too, broke off his regular routine of fishing and hunting to visit some of the Europeans. The exploration ship *L'Astrolabe* was in the harbour. He fell in with a group of young French officers, and one of them managed to make him sit still long enough to draw his portrait. They, as others after them, were taken by his joyous, outgoing personality. They commented that he seemed 'quite young with an open face and a more lively manner than any of his companions'.

They sat up half the night around a campfire trying to talk to each other, and Mokaré undoubtedly found it an amusing diversion. He could not know that this brief encounter would set off a chain of events that would change his life forever. The brief appearance of the Frenchmen prompted the English to reassert Vancouver's claim. In December of that year, a party of soldiers and convicts from New South Wales arrived to establish a garrison at the sound, and they built a tiny settlement, which eventually they called Albany, on the land belonging to Mokaré's family.

For the rest of his life, Mokaré spent many nights sitting up talking to Europeans, but it was as often in front of a fireplace as around a campfire. He eventually discarded his kangaroo skins for European clothes and became an excellent shot with a rifle. His family remained in place and adjusted to the new situation, but they never relinquished their claim to the land. They always considered themselves as hosts to the settlement and many of the newcomers appeared to concur. The Europeans were very polite; they had to be. Usually there were only a couple of dozen of them, over 2500 kilometres from reinforcements. Throughout Mokaré's lifetime, more Aborigines than Europeans normally lived in Albany, and in many ways life continued as before. There was never any fighting between the groups.

Mokaré is given credit by most of the writers of the time for maintaining this uniquely harmonious situation. His position as landlord gave him status with the Aborigines and his affable nature and quick mind made him a favourite with the Europeans. He formed close friendships with a series of military and medical officers who were assigned to the garrison, and when he was in the settlement he

normally shared a house with one or another of these men. He and his brother Nakina led them on all their early explorations inland, and they came to rely upon him as their instructor in things Australian.

Mokaré tried to teach his new friends the ways of his people and his land. The Europeans often wrote down what they learned, mentioning Mokaré's name in many journals and articles. These records of the contact between two cultures include a surprising amount of detail about the Aboriginal system of land tenure. The landholdings of Mokaré's family provide evidence about Aboriginal concepts of land ownership in the Australian southwest, about the extent of a single family's property and its management, and about the social institutions that allowed each group to forage widely across the landscape without serious conflict with their neighbours.

THE PIDGIN LANGUAGE OF KING GEORGE SOUND

Mokaré and the Europeans who wrote about him communicated in a language they developed between them. It was based on English with some Nyungar words and had a structure all of its own. This extract is from George Fletcher Moore's *Diary*, written in February 1833. The Nyungar presumably found the ceremony described as ludicrous as Moore did.

> *24th.* On this day (Sunday) many of the natives came into the barrack during divine service, of whom some remained all the time, and conducted themselves with great decorum. On Monday they were drawn up in line, and addressed in the following speech by Mr. Morley, the storekeeper, while we all looked most ludicrously grave.

Now now twonk, Gubbernor wonka me wonka black fellow,
Now attend, the Governor desires me to tell the black man

black fellow pear white man white men
if the the black man spear the white man the white men

poot. Black fellow queeple no good. Black
will shoot them. If a black man steal it is not good. If a black

fellow peer black fellow no good. Black fellow
man spear a black man it is not good. If the black man

plenty shake hand black fellow, no black fellow no queeple,
be friendly with the black man, if the black man do not steal,

black fellow give him white man wallabees, wood come here,
if the black man give the white man wallabees, bring wood,

water come here, white man plenty shake hand black man,
and bring water, white man will befriend the black man,

plenty give it him bikket, plenty ehtah, plenty
and give him plenty of biscuits, plenty to eat, and give him

blanket, arrack, tomahawk. Now now Gubbernor wonka me
blankets, rice, tomahawk. Now the Governor desires me

give it him one guy black fellow one guy knaif.
to give each black man one knife.

G.F. Moore, *Diary of ten years' eventful life of an early settler in Western Australia*, London 1884, 164.

KEY:
- Southwest Coast drainage division
- Southwest Coast botanical province
- Botanical districts

The internal subdivisions represent botanical districts and subdistricts.
J. GOODRUM

KEY:
- Circumcision / subincision
- Nyungar language
- Dialect

DIALECTS:
1. Juat
2. Whadjuck
3. Pinjarup
4. Wardandi
5. Dibelman
6. Minang
7. Kaneang
8. Wiilman
9. Balardong
10. Njakinjaki
11. Koreng
12. Wudjari
13. Njunga

The internal subdivisions represent dialectical divisions of the Nyungar language.
J. GOODRUM

The anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner used terms that help explain the system of ownership. He explained that

> each [Aboriginal] territorial group was associated with both an *estate* and a *range* ... The estate was the traditionally recognized locus ('country', 'home', 'ground', 'dreaming place') ... of the territorial group ... The range was the tract or orbit over which the group ... ordinarily hunted and foraged to maintain life ... Estate and range together may be said to have constituted a *domain* ...

This system of land tenure prevailed across Australia, but details of its application varied considerably from place to place. Each region of the continent had a distinctive environment and required specialised adjustments from the people who lived there.

The Nyungar Of The Australian Southwest

Mokaré and his family were members of a large Aboriginal population grouping that included all the people living in the well-watered region at the extreme southwest corner of the continent. They are called the Nyungar because of the 'family' of language dialects they speak. Their religious and ritual practices differed from those of their neighbours, and because of the unique environment in which they lived, they developed a way of life and material culture differing in important ways from other examples of Aboriginal society.

The southwest is one of the continent's most distinct geographical regions, an oasis in the corner of a five-million-square-kilometre expanse of arid and semi-arid country. It has a high and reliable winter rainfall. It is laced with permanent rivers and dotted with thousands of lakes and swamps. The vegetation is dominated by tall, thick eucalypt forests and lush woodlands, in striking contrast to the unrelieved low bush and scrub of adjacent areas. The region is so isolated that over 75 per cent of the plant species that grow here are found nowhere else in the world and a comparison between the vegetation types from southeastern and southwestern Australia suggests that this isolation existed as early as seven million years ago.

The change from the dense forest of the southwest to the low bush of the desert is a gradual one, but botanists use a line that follows the extent of the 175-millimetre winter (May to October) rainfall as a boundary dividing what they call 'the southwest botanical province' from the arid regions to the east and north. Significantly, the major cultural boundary that marks the extent of the Nyungar religious and ritual practices follows this winter rainfall boundary for over 1200 kilometres. Although some Nyungar language dialects were spoken east of this line, the desert Nyungar adhered to the law followed by other western desert Aborigines and practised the twin initiation rites of circumcision and subincision. For Mokaré's people male initiation rites chiefly involved placing a bone through the initiate's nose, and ritual scarification.

A contrast between the Nyungar and their neighbours in the desert is to be expected. More surprisingly, however, the Nyungar differed from Aborigines living in other wet, coastal parts of Australia. They were almost totally land-orientated in their lifestyle. Unlike the people of the north and east coasts, they virtually ignored most of the aquatic resources available to them. Although they were blessed with thousands of kilometres of rich coastline, broad estuaries and countless rivers, they had no water craft. They fished in the shallows with spears and built fish traps, but they used neither nets nor fish hooks. They might kill and eat a young seal that washed ashore, but they made no attempt to gain access to the large seal colonies thriving on islands just off the coast. Most surprising of all was their general abhorrence of any type of shellfish, an item that formed one of the

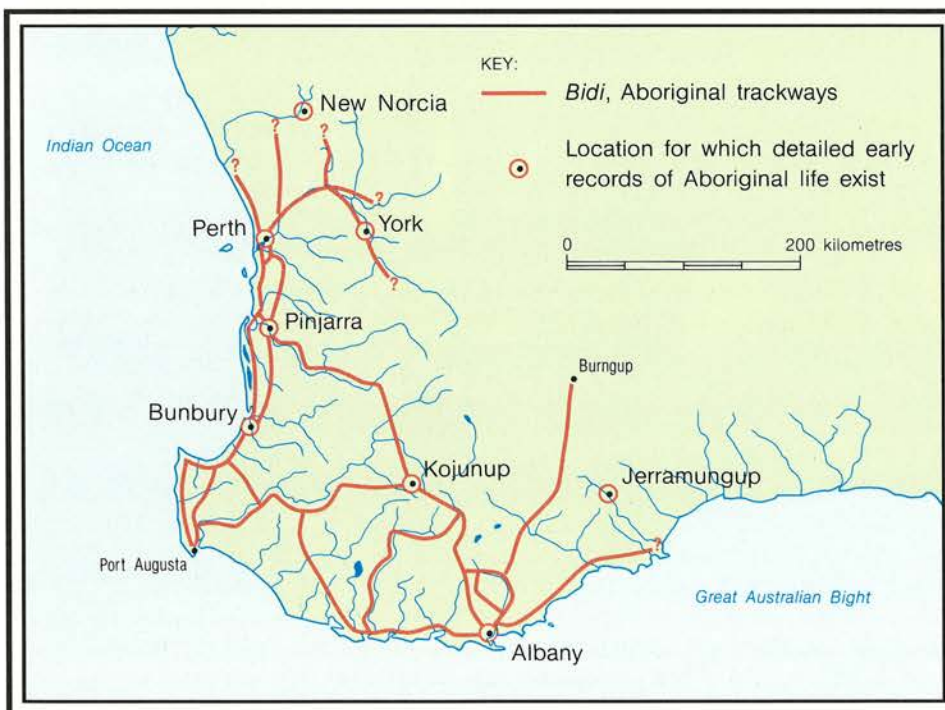
main dietary staples for other coastal Aborigines. The rich and easily accessible oyster beds of King George Sound were untouched until the Europeans arrived.

Mokaré could not swim, even though his family estate bordered the shores of a quiet harbour. He did not like to walk in the water above his knees, thinking it both undignified and uncomfortable to do so. Once, at the height of summer, a group of soldiers struggling to haul an overloaded seine called to him to help. 'Come in, Mokaré,' they said, 'There's plenty of fish.' He refused, observing, 'Plenty fish, plenty cold.'

Mokaré and his people lived primarily on the products of the rich woodland areas that surrounded and wound through the dense forests. Like the sea, the forest was only marginal to Nyungar life. It was thick with undergrowth, which impeded movement and blocked visibility, so that game was difficult to hunt. Nor was it as rich in plant resources as might be thought. The southwest is noted for a high diversity of plant types, but much of the forest is almost completely dominated by karri or jarrah trees with as few as one hundred other species. The great variety of species is concentrated at the forest edge, in the woodlands and along the banks of the rivers, lakes and swamps. The Nyungar focused their activities primarily in these areas. They made some use of the forest and by repeated burning they kept open corridors of woodland through it; but there still remained vast stretches of wilderness which they called *tdurtin*, meaning literally: 'place without a path'.

The unique environment and the Nyungar's singular adaptation to it created a distinctive material culture. The rain and cold necessitated clothing, and both men and women wore cloaks stitched together from several kangaroo skins. On the south coast these were worn all year round, and during the winter Mokaré's people carried smouldering banksia cones underneath their cloaks for added warmth. The men also wore a belt or girdle spun by their wives from possum fur, and when travelling they stuck their hatchet, knives and throwing stick into it. The hatchet (*kodja*) and the knife (*taap*) were unlike their counterparts in any other Australian society.

The kodja *or hatchet, one of the tools peculiar to Nyungar culture. It consisted of two carefully selected and prepared stones of tough basalt or dolerite, cemented onto a sturdy handle with a resin produced from 'blackboy'* (Xanthorrhoea). *One stone was chipped to a robust, sharp cutting edge, and the other was usually flat so the tool could also be used as a hammer. Museums have few genuine* kodja, *since the Aborigines quickly learned that they could cement any two stones onto a stick and trade the object to Europeans who were none the wiser. This one is genuine.*
MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA



This map originally drawn by Surgeon Collie shows some of the main tracks through the forest and woodlands. They have been described as looking 'like cattle pads and just as plain'. Those on the map are the bidi, *a Nyungar word meaning 'the main path or track, pursued by the natives in passing from one part of the country to the other, and which leads by the best watering places'. The* bidi *followed the lines of easiest movement, along the banks of rivers and through mountain passes. Thousands of smaller pathways linked these main routes. The Nyungar had many words to describe them, and distinguished several different grades of track, just as lanes are distinguished from avenues and streets from highways. Explorers often recorded these routes. The locations shown are those for which good descriptions of early Aboriginal life are available.*
J. GOODRUM

Nyungar couple around 1860. The photograph shows the standard dress for both sexes, the buka, *a cloak of kangaroo skin. The man's* nulburn, *the spun possum fur girdle, is obscured by the piece of cloth tucked into the front of it to appease European sensibilities; his headband is made from strands of the same cloth. The cloak was normally worn with the fur against the skin, but in rainy weather it was reversed for added dryness.*

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM

Five examples of the taap, *a composite knife, another implement unique to the Nyungar. Carefully selected sharpened bits of stone were evenly cemented with resin along one side of a sturdy stick. As with the* kodja *many of these were made only for the European 'tourist' trade. Compare the three genuine pieces on the left with the two unusable copies on the right.*

MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA

Scene near river (blackboy), *pencil and watercolour by the convict artist James Walsh, c1860s. A Nyungar family near the Swan River, Perth. Infants are carried in a kangaroo-skin bag slung over their mother's shoulder. The man carries his spears and the woman her digging-stick.*

ART GALLERY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The women carried their smaller items in a kangaroo-skin bag slung over their shoulder by a strap. If a woman had an infant, it rode in another, similar bag. A number of items were used to adorn the hair and decorate necklaces or armbands. These included feathers of many kinds, dog tails, flowers, shells, clay balls and reed and grass beads. Men carried their spearthrowers and several spears and women carried digging-sticks. Thus arrayed, they could survive in their region. Heavier items such as large grindstones were kept at each regular camping spot and huts of a form unique to the southwest were built each time they stopped for a night.

MOKARÉ'S FAMILY AND THEIR ESTATE

The basic unit of social organisation among the Nyungar was the landholding family. Families were loosely grouped into bands on the basis of extended kinship networks, but there was no higher political organisation. Each family was self-sufficient, able to manufacture all the items it needed. The only division of labour was between men and women. Women gathered plants and small animals. They prepared these foods for the family, looked after the children, made the clothing and built the huts. Men defended the family. They fished, hunted large animals and manufactured implements.

Nyungar hut drawn by de Sainson 1826. The family slept in a hut about 1m to 1.3m high and 2m across. Women constructed huts in less than half an hour, with flexible branches set in a semicircle, bent and tied with vines at the top, then support branches were woven or tied horizontally. Over the basketwork frame, paperbark or Xanthorrhoea *leaves provided a roof. The opening and the hearth faced away from prevailing winds. D'Urville,* Voyage de la corvette L'Astrolabe, *Atlas historique.*

It was the custom for Nyungar men not to marry until they were at least thirty, so Mokaré had no wife. The women, on the other hand, married as soon as they reached puberty and were usually pledged to their future husbands from birth. Mokaré was 'engaged' to a girl in this fashion when she was a small child still living with her family. A man might eventually have up to four wives, and Mokaré's father had taken at least two. Mokaré had a married sister, Mullet, and four brothers: Nakina, Waiter, Tarapan and Mollian (Yallopi). Nakina, as the eldest brother, was head of the family. He was described by Scott Nind, a surgeon who arrived with the first party and who shared his house with Mokaré for two years, as 'one of the finest-looking and best-limbed men amongst them', and on his own land, at least, he was accorded a great deal of respect by the other Aborigines.

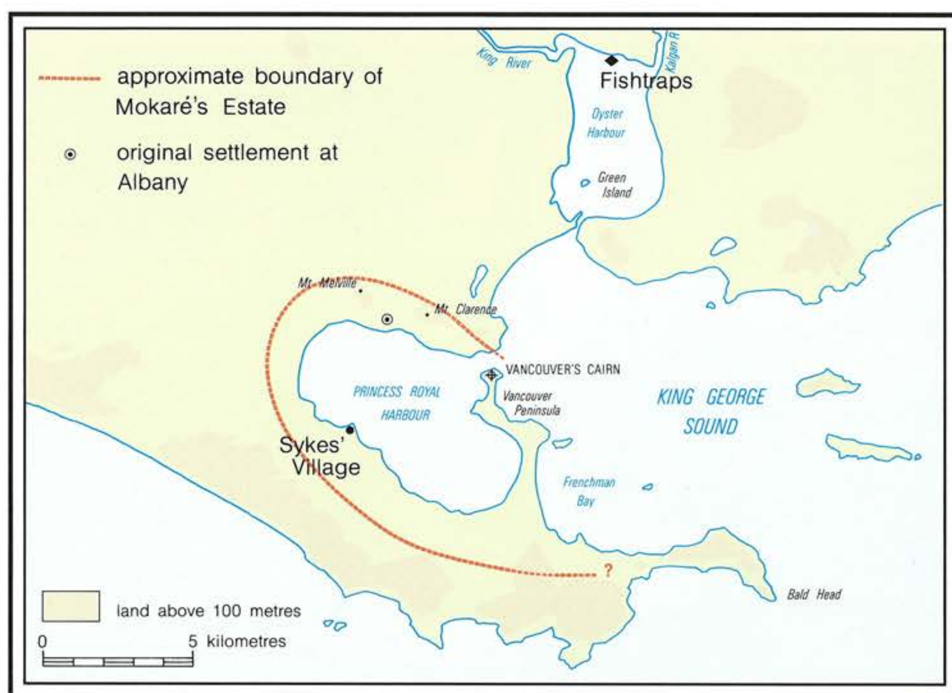
After the Europeans arrived, the lives of Nakina's family changed considerably, but by living in the settlement they were not breaking with established Aboriginal tradition in any significant way. They always lived on the spot where Albany was built; it was at the heart of their estate. Nor was it out of keeping with tradition for them to let the Europeans use the resources of their land. Provided permission was obtained from the owners and certain rules were followed, it was common pratice for Aborigines to allow others to forage over their estates.

A 'deserted village' at King George Sound sketched in 1791 by John Sykes, artist on Vancouver's voyage. It was located on Mokaré's family estate, on the south side of Princess Royal harbour. This is an unusually large hut group, as the normal camp contained up to six huts. Once a hut was abandoned it was not reoccupied, so these may include old huts. Usually each nuclear family used a hut. Large families with several wives kept the basic design, but joined huts together, as here in the middle distance.

ART GALLERY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

In the beginning the Europeans did not understand how the system worked. During those first days of settlement, Surgeon Nind was puzzled that in a society without chiefs so much deference was given to Nakina. Nakina, for his part, was indignant. People had come to camp on his land and, although under certain conditions this probably would have been acceptable, he did not know them and they had failed to seek his permission. He remained aloof from the Europeans. He did not go to meet them as many others did, thinking, presumably, that they should come to him. He would have been within his traditional rights to begin hostilities, which the other Aborigines were anxious to avoid. Nind's writings show that they were trying desperately to explain the proper procedure to the Europeans, and eventually some who had already become friendly with the newcomers persuaded Nakina to come forward. In describing this meeting, Nind says that Nakina was 'formally introduced' to the officers of the settlement. From the Aborigines' point of view, the officers were being formally introduced to Nakina.

The extent of the estate was precisely defined, using trees and other objects as boundary markers. These were well known to the local Aborigines, and although details of Mokaré's domain are not recorded in any of the early writings, his area certainly included the European settlement on the northern shore of Princess



King George Sound and the area believed to have been included within Mokaré's family estate. Mt Clarence was a lookout from which Mokaré kept watch over the country of the 'Will' people to the north, noting the movement of groups far away by the smoke rising from their campfires. The estate of Coolbun's family (including his brother, Uredale, and his nephew, Talywin) lay immediately north and east of Mt Clarence on the shores of the sound.
J. GOODRUM

Royal harbour. Dr Wilson, a colonial surgeon who travelled extensively in the bush with Mokaré during 1829, wrote that 'the land about the settlement belongs to Mokaré and his brethren'. Captain Barker, who kept an almost daily record of Mokaré's activities while he commanded the garrison in 1830–31, explained in his journal that he continued to supply Nakina with food which the settlement could ill afford, because Nakina was 'the head of the family whose ground we occupy'.

Another colonial surgeon, Dr Collie, is the only author who indicated how far the estate extended. Collie became the first civilian Resident Magistrate in 1831 and formed a close friendship with Mokaré. The family's 'natal ground', he wrote, 'has always been understood to be on the shores of Princess Royal Harbour and towards Bald Head'. It therefore appears to have included the entire west and south shores, as well as the north shore of the harbour, all of the Vancouver Peninsula, and the shores of King George Sound for some distance east of Frenchman's Bay. This area is today mostly built over by the town of Albany. Its appearance in the 1830s, shortly after the settlement was established, is shown on the magnificent panorama drawn by Lieutenant Richard Dale (see gatefold).

Surgeon Nind observed that the quantity of land owned by each individual was 'considerable', and this combined family holding encompassed at least thirty kilometres of shoreline and the bush behind it for some distance. Other Aborigines may have owned portions, but an estate usually occupied one continuous stretch of ground.

The vegetation within this area is extremely diverse. There are small patches of karri forest, larger zones of jarrah forest, jarrah and she-oak low forest, peppermint low woodland, extensive stretches of scrub heath on sand dunes and several areas of swamp. With numerous sources of permanent fresh water, the environment was very rich and varied for hunters and gatherers. In addition to the food plants and small animals associated with the various ecological niches, the beaches provided an occasional seal, and the extensive shallows of the harbour yielded an abundance of fish. In the early days of settlement, before the presence of the Europeans began

to attract great numbers of Aborigines to the area, over sixty men and their attendant women and children were seen fishing with spears at the west end of the harbour. The area behind the foreshores was renowned for wallaby, and Mokaré and his brothers were often troubled by poachers.

Not that hunting wallaby was generally considered a violation of the owners' rights. Other Aborigines, close neighbours and those linked by kinship, had some acknowledged rights on the estate, one of which was hunting wallaby. Problems arose, however, because wallaby hid in the dense thickets. This made them difficult to spear unless fire was used to drive them towards the hunters, and it was strictly forbidden to set fire to the bush without the participation or the express permission of the owner. When exuberant groups of hunters overlooked this restriction, heated exchanges of words or blows could follow. The family was very precise about what portion of the estate it wanted burned, and when. Other acceptable activities for those with usage rights on the estate were the breaking down of *Xanthorrhoea* (blackboy) trees for grubs and the digging of roots. Items reserved only for the family included nuts of the cycad *Macrozamia* and bird nests with eggs.

Fire was the primary tool used in the management of the estate. Mokaré's family did most of their burning in the summer, after the eggs of the ground-nesting birds had hatched, but some areas were fired whenever it was dry enough and the wind conditions were suitable. Regular burning was necessary to keep back the encroaching forests, but the Aborigines left patches of the estate temporarily unburned to provide a refuge for wallabies. This created valuable hunting grounds. Sometimes they would organise and direct a wallaby drive. With participants separated by about arms length, they surrounded a patch of bush. Once it was set alight, wallabies were clubbed as they fled. These were great social occasions and, as owners, Mokaré's people received the largest share of the proceeds. No wonder they shook their spears and threatened vengeance whenever unauthorised smoke was seen in one of these areas.

Violators of estates were dealt with according to the offence and their relationship to the offended party. Good friends of kin escaped with a severe scolding or even more lightly, as in one incident reported in Captain Barker's journal. This time Mokaré was the culprit, guilty of illegal burning on Coolbun's wallaby ground at Narringup. Coolbun was in the settlement at the time, talking to Barker. When the smoke began to rise he became agitated, but as soon as Barker told him that it must be made by Mokaré, since he had gone that way with the express purpose of getting wallaby, Coolbun shrugged it off. These men were close friends and their families held neighbouring estates.

Those whose ties were less close might receive a token spear wound in the leg or harsher retribution. In one episode in 1827, shortly after the garrison arrived, the family and their friends speared two Aborigines who had each stolen an axe from the settlement. One of these felons was killed and the other severely wounded; the survivor was forgiven only after he returned the missing implement.

This incident also indicates that the family regarded the resources brought on to their land by the Europeans as their own, like those that had always been there. This did not always work in the Europeans' favour. When a group of Aborigines raided the settlement's potato patch—an action that infuriated the Europeans as much or more than the theft of axes—Mokaré and Nakina took no action because they held that such a traditional activity as digging roots on another's estate was legitimate. The Europeans pressed this case, so Nakina lied about the identity of the culprits. When their names were eventually revealed, he first led the search party in the wrong direction and later ran on ahead, shouting to those with the potatoes to take to the bush.

Overleaf.
The entrance to King George's Sound, *watercolour by Isaac Scott Nind, 1828.*
ART GALLERY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The karri forests of the Australian southwest provide the largest hardwood trees in the world. They are densest west of Mokaré's domain near Pemberton, but they extend east into the region, and there are outlying formations in the Porongurrups and near Mt Manypeaks.
N. GREEN

The eastern half of Mokaré's domain is a relatively flat sand plain dotted with many lakes and swamps. In the middle distance is Lake Pleasant View, where Edward John Eyre and Wylie, a Nyungar from King George Sound, camped on 4 July 1841. This was only two days before they completed their epic journey and became the first men known to have crossed the Australian continent overland from east to west. Wylie knew this camping place, and had told Eyre that they were nearing home a few days earlier, when he first saw the Stirling Range in the distance.
M. BENNETT

MOVEMENT AND SURVIVAL ON THE RANGE

Although each Nyungar family had land of its own to which it always returned, the family members' concern for a highly varied and freshly collected diet required them to be mobile. They traversed a wide area during the course of a year, exploiting seasonal resources not available in the family estate and avoiding the rubbish and insect pests that built up in places where they camped for any length of time. Even on their own estates they often shifted their camp. They might move only a short distance, occasionally not more than a few hundred metres, but they rarely stayed longer than two or three days in one place, almost never more than a week and usually only a day.

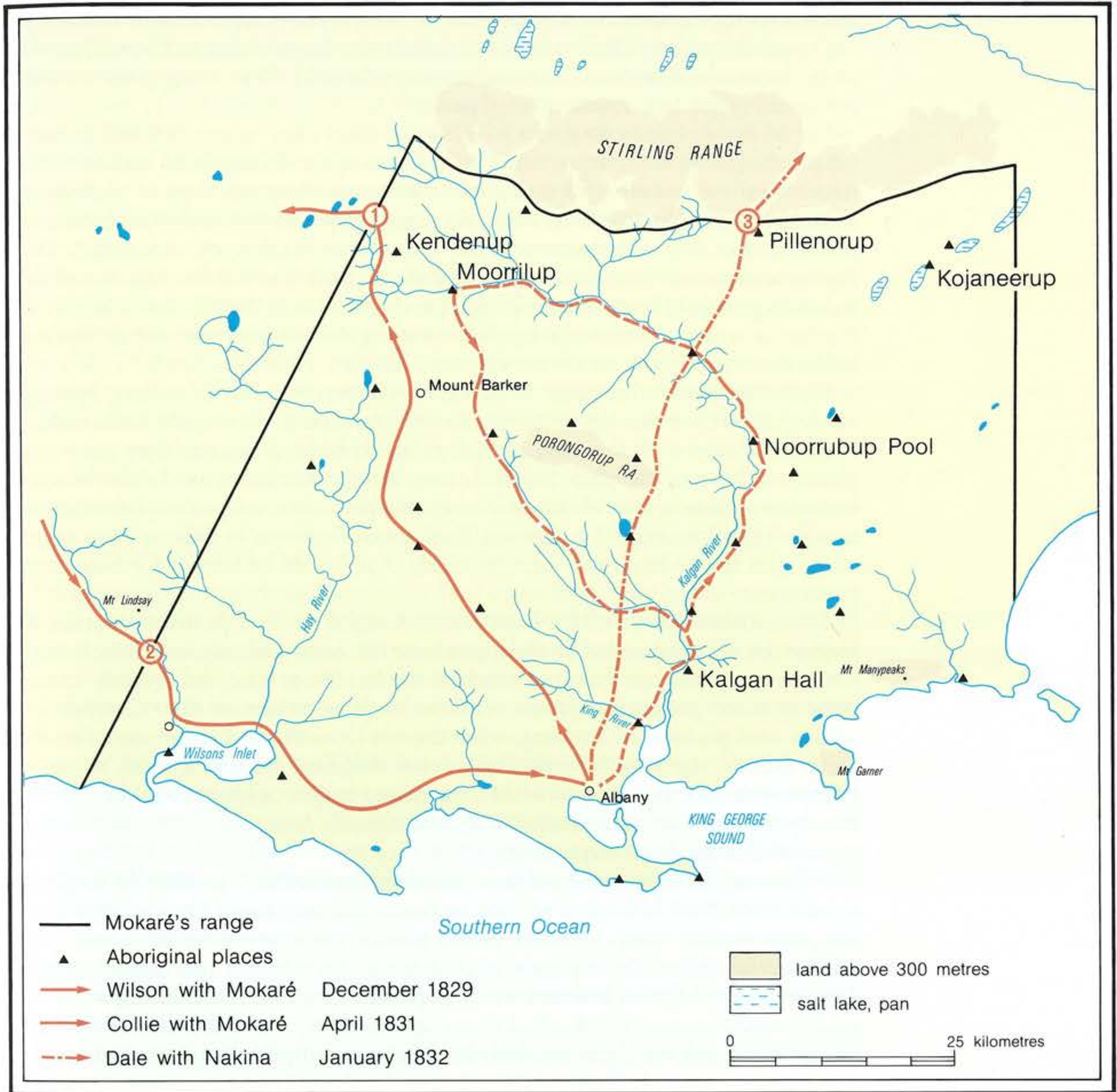
Several early European writers inferred that there was a rigid seasonal pattern to these movements, the Nyungar spending their winters inland and their summers on the coast. This does not seem to have been the case. There was, perhaps, a drift towards the coast as a result of local water shortages during the summer, but throughout the region in which Mokaré moved, individuals and groups could be encountered almost anywhere during any season. In this rich environment many common resources were available all year long and most areas always provided at least some foods.

Mokaré maintained this habit of regular movement all his life. He probably travelled less after the settlement was established, but even then he was often gone, off among the 'Will' people or elsewhere, sometimes for a month or more. Such movement was important to Nyungar social life. The population was small and thinly spread. In order to maintain relationships with kin and friends who lived elsewhere, it was necessary to visit them or have them visit. Sometimes large formal meetings were arranged, but most visits were accomplished with a minimum of planning. As they foraged across their overlapping ranges, small groups would simply come together, camp with or near each other for a few days, and then once more go their separate ways.

Mokaré's range covered about six thousand square kilometres. It extended inland for about seventy kilometres north of Albany, and along the coast for over one hundred and twenty kilometres. The area has been determined by plotting all the named places the family was known to frequent, but the boundaries are only approximate. In only three cases (when European observers were present when a member of the family came to the limits of the country known to him) is it possible to fix the boundaries with any degree of precision.

However, the northern border probably ran along the southern base of the Stirling Mountains. The family was known to frequent places such as Pillenorup at the foot of the mountains, but events that occurred when Nakina led Lieutenant Dale to the north in January 1832 suggest that they did not usually venture further. All the way from Albany the party travelled along established tracks. Nakina knew the countryside and was familiar with all the people they met until they reached the base of the mountains. But before they entered the Stirlings, he had to use the diplomatic efforts of mutual acquaintances to gain a local guide and escort.

Two other incidents suggest that the western boundary ran approximately southwest from the base of the Stirling Mountains to the coast of Wilson's Inlet. These were recorded in December 1829 when Mokaré led Dr Wilson on a journey north and west of the settlement. Again they followed established tracks and Mokaré knew the country well. But when they reached a place approximately ten kilometres southwest of the mountains he said that he had come to the limit of the country he knew and wanted to turn back. They pressed on at Wilson's insistence, going first west, then south towards the coast. Only when they reached



Mokaré's range, that is, the area over which he and his family ordinarily travelled to maintain their livelihood. The numbers refer to the three instances where European observers noted the boundary. Mokaré and Collie camped at Kalgan Hall on 28 April 1831, and recent archaeological research shows that this was but one of many Aboriginal visits.
J. GOODRUM

a point just south of Mount Lindsay did Mokaré, greatly relieved, say that he was once again in country he knew.

The eastern boundary of the range cannot be fixed accurately, since none of the early explorers seems to have accompanied a member of the family far in that direction. But it certainly included the lakes at the southeastern foot of the Stirlings and the coastal area around Mount Manypeaks, because Mokaré and his family frequented these two regions.

Mokaré's range included a great variety of environments. The annual rainfall decreases steadily from over 1250 millimetres in the far southwest to less than 500 millimetres in the extreme northeast. As a result there is a gradual change in the dominant vegetation from tall, dense karri forest around Wilson's Inlet, through jarrah forest and mixed open woodlands in the central areas to scrubby mallee heath around the lakes near Kojaneerup. This pattern is complicated, however, by

numerous topographical features, each of which provides a distinct and unique micro-environment. There are, for instance, two large rivers and several smaller ones, hundreds of streams, lakes and swamps, broad valleys, steep gorges, a small mountain range and several isolated peaks.

For Mokaré's family to gain a livelihood within their range, they had to know what resources each place provided, when these resources might be available, what tracks led there and what they might encounter on the way. Most of all, they had to know the people who lived there, for this was a populated landscape. About two hundred and fifty Aborigines lived within the borders of the range when Europeans first arrived. They had family estates dotted across the region and they jealously guarded their ownership rights in the same way that Mokaré's family did. If a family was to move freely across its range, good relations with the groups who held estates within the area were essential.

Education about the range began almost from birth as the young Nyungar accompanied their parents on their journeys. As soon as they could walk, children began to forage with the women and girls; and boys, as soon as they grew large enough to keep up the pace, began accompanying their fathers and older brothers. Formal instruction was minimal during this pre-initiation period. Learning was usually by imitation, and it was not until about fourteen or fifteen years of age, when girls left to live with their husbands, that formal education for boys began in earnest.

The initiation program for boys was prolonged. One of its main purposes was to give the youths detailed knowledge about the range and its inhabitants. It began with an important ceremony at which all the local boys who had recently attained puberty were gathered together with the male members of their families. This usually took place in the evening, when the boys stood facing a large campfire with their fathers standing behind them, each holding his son's head. A senior *mulgarradock* ('doctor') then worked a sharpened length of kangaroo bone through the septum of each initiate's nose. This undoubtedly hurt, but European observers reported that the boys were stoical.

Following this ceremony, the boys left their families for a period that might last several years. Each was taken by one or two older men from his own group, and left with another family in some distant part of the range. Here he would spend up to a year under the supervision of a senior member of that family, gaining detailed knowledge of the surrounding physical and social environment. These supervisors (Surgeon Nind called them 'god-fathers') were often strict disciplinarians. The youth would be set difficult tasks to accomplish and often be forced to undergo tests that involved extreme physical hardship. He was, however, generally treated as a member of the family with whom he was staying and he often formed very close bonds with his supervisor and the young males of the host group.

Sometimes he might be promised a newly born infant girl as a future wife, for he would be reaching the marriageable age of 30 at about the time she attained puberty. This was important to his future mobility because it would give him access rights by marriage to her family's estate.

If he managed to make a good friend of a local male near his own age, he could also assure his future safety within this part of the range by formalising a 'blood brother' relationship. This was done at a ceremony held just before he left. A *mulgarradock* made a series of small cuts on the upper arm, breast or back of each of the young men. The exact location was different for each local group. The blood from both was then mixed together with ashes from the fire and the resulting paste rubbed into the wounds so they would heal as a series of raised, welted scars or cicatrices. The scars declared that the two men were pledged forever to help one

another, no matter what. Even if hostilities were to occur between their families, each was bound to assist the other, and that made such hostilities less likely.

When his sojourn with his foster-family was over, the youth was taken to another part of the range, given to yet another supervisor and the process was repeated. This program might have continued for as long as four years or more, and he might have stayed with as many as eight or ten different groups. An outstanding or especially popular youth might eventually return home with the promises of several wives and the upper parts of his body covered with ritual scars.

All this time, he kept the bone through his nose, symbolising his initiate status. It was not removed until after he finally returned home and was close to marriageable age. Then, at a ceremony which the entire local group attended, it was removed by the *mulgarradock*. He was finally proclaimed a man.

In spite of these and other cultural mechanisms designed to prevent conflict between families, feuding was common. Violent disputes arose over property violations and women. Conflicts over young women were rife in a society where they were regularly pledged without their consent to men much older than themselves and where many young men had no legitimate access to female companionship. Another source of conflict was the Nyungar assumption that sorcery was the cause of any death or injury. This made retributive killings between groups a dominant fact of life.

There were many methods by which a feud could have been ended satisfactorily to both parties: blood brothers might have represented their respective families in peace negotiations, those accused of violations might have consented to a ritualised and non-fatal spearing, a woman could have been returned and damages paid, or a natural death could have been accepted as repayment for a murder. Yet large tracts of their range were frequently, if temporarily closed to Mokaré and his family because of the fear that their neighbours might ambush them.

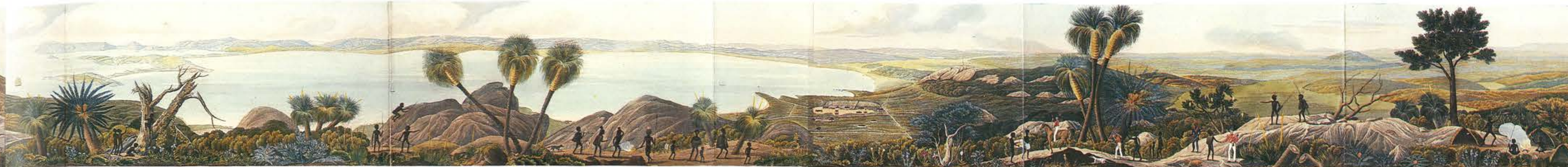
Even if they were close to home and knew of no current enemies, they usually moved with extreme caution. They feared ghosts and spirits, and assumed that all strangers were hostile. There must have been few complete strangers; there is no record of Mokaré or Nakina ever meeting an Aborigine on their range whom they did not already know, but they always reacted strongly to unidentified sounds in the bush around them. They usually knew where all their close friends and relatives were at any time, and if they heard the sounds of someone unexpectedly approaching, the camp immediately fell silent; men would grab their weapons and women their children.

They were especially fearful of attacks when on the trail. If they travelled any distance, the men went in front with their weapons while the women followed some distance behind. The sounds of an unidentified person ahead provoked panic. Surgeon Nind and Dr Collie both report instances of Mokaré's attempting to wrest the gun from their hand when this happened.

In all of the cases reported, the newcomer turned out to be peaceful and well known. Even so, meetings of people who had not seen each other for some time required an elaborate greeting ceremony, including much shaking of hands, hugging and kissing intended to assure each party that the other came in peace.

MOKARÉ OF ALBANY

When the Nyungar met each other in peace, they shook hands. They learned from the first European explorers that 'white fellahs' coming in peace also shook hands, although rather differently. In the pidgin language used by the two races to communicate, 'shake hands plenty' meant friendship. Mokaré was a naturally friendly person. He 'shook hands plenty' with almost everyone. He was a



SECTION A
(See detail below right)

SECTION B
(See detail below far right)

SECTION C
(See detail overpage, centre)

SECTION D
(See detail overpage, centre)

SECTION E
(See detail overpage, right)

'PANORAMIC VIEW OF KING GEORGE'S SOUND, PART OF THE COLONY OF SWAN RIVER'.
Etching and aquatint after Robert Dale, 1834. NATIONAL LIBRARY

PANORAMAS were a popular form of topographic landscape in the 1820s and 1830s. They provided for European viewers detailed pictures of life in distant places and attempted to convey something of the experience of being there.

Lieutenant Robert Dale, a surveyor with the 63rd Regiment, painted this panorama for the London market. Its total length is 274 centimetres. Dale's subject is King George Sound, where a tiny British settlement was established in 1826, and named Albany by 1832. Dale tried to reproduce faithfully what he saw, but sometimes his plants appear more European than Australian and bear little resemblance to native flora.

Fires, lit by lightning or deliberately by the Aborigines, have left their mark on the vegetation, and four are burning in the panorama. An Aborigine carries a firestick.

The family estate of Mokaré stretched around the shores of Princess Royal Harbour, in the centre of the panorama. Mokaré's eldest brother, Nakina, is pictured in European clothes, spears in right hand, sword in left. Colburn's family estate included the foreshore to the left. Around lakes at the right lived several other families who formed a different but closely related band.

In his *Descriptive account of the panoramic view,* a twenty-page pamphlet that accompanies the panorama, Dale writes (3-5):

'A high range of granite hills, terminating towards the sea, in bold promontories, runs each way along the coast from King George's Sound: of these two are remarkable; one, a narrow neck of land, (seen in the panoramic view on the right of the entrance to the Sound), is a large mass of granite stretching upwards of two miles into the sea, from which it rises almost perpendicularly to a height of five hundred feet; the other, although not so high, is still very bold; and between these is the entrance to the Sound . . . The southern basin and the Sound are deep and capacious, and, together, form a magnificent harbour . . . The range running along in a succession of high peaks and precipitous rocks, averages only five miles in breadth, while it extends longitudinally upwards of forty. Beyond this no European has at present penetrated; and, in fact, if the reports of the natives are true, there is little inducement for exploring; water, they say, in those districts, is so scarce, that the tribes who inhabit them are obliged to quench their thirst by making an incision with their hatchets into the bark of the white gum-tree.'

Trees in the foreground include *Kingia,* which the newcomers also called black gin, tall and tufted (far left); the *Xanthorrhoea,* also known as grass tree and blackboy, 'small-tufted . . . with the spear springing from the centre', its trunk yielding resin and fuel for fires (to the left of the European settlement); *Melaleuca,* 'or, as it is termed in the colony, the tea tree' (to the right of the settlement); *Banksia* (one left, with Aborigine aloft, one centre, to right of dead tree, and one right, behind Aborigine and soldier shaking hands), from which 'The natives gather the flowers' and 'extract a sweet juice resembling honey'; and *Nuytsia* (behind the Aboriginal shelters, with yellow flowers, far right), 'by far the most ornamental tree in the Australian forests'. The tall tree left of the *Nuytsia* might be a *Casuarina*. The *Macrozamia riedlei,* a tree with yellow fruit, appears just left of the dead tree. The seed is poisonous when raw but after processing was a staple Aboriginal food.

Among flowering herbs in the foreground are *Anigozantho humilis* with red flowers, and *Patersonia,* with purple flowers. The vine climbing the dead tree is *Kennedia*.

SECTION A

'The fires, which are periodically spread over vast tracts of the country for the purpose of driving objects of chase from their fastnesses, must be very destructive at the time that birds and animals are rearing their young.' (*Descriptive account,* 13.)

SECTION B

'The group of natives in the foreground, represent a fishing party returning with their sport from the coast. Roots and herbs form also a portion of food; frogs, too, and other reptiles, exempted from any preparatory process of cookery, are by no means disdained, and a large grub found in the grass-tree, is reckoned a delicacy.' (*Descriptive account,* 8.)

'The dress of the native consists of the kangaroo cloak, fastened at the right shoulder by a bone or rush, a head-dress of emu feathers, or the brush of wild dog, and a fur band around the waist, head, and arm.' (*Descriptive account,* 7.)

'PANORAMIC VIEW OF KING GEORGE'S SOUND, PART OF THE COLONY OF SWAN RIVER'.
Etching and aquatint after Robert Dale, 1834. NATIONAL LIBRARY

SECTION C

'The small town on the shores of the inner harbour has been named Albany, and contains about one hundred inhabitants: the houses are low, and built of brick, mud, and wood, and thatched with rushes. The *public buildings* consist of a barrack, store, and wooden gaol. The soil in the neighbourhood is, with a few exceptions, sandy, but the climate gives a great luxuriance to the vegetable productions of the gardens and surrounding country.' (*Descriptive account,* 11.)

SECTION D

'The group of soldiers and natives make up a party returning from a kangaroo hunt: two or more large dogs of strength and speed are employed by the Colonists in the chase . . . The kangaroo is not so innocent an animal as might be supposed, and the dogs do not always return without a wound; when brought to bay he not unfrequently tears the throat, or rips open the body of his assailant with the strong claw which arms his powerful hind leg; or, when driven into the water, he will often deliberately put his paw upon the head of the assailant, and give him a good ducking. The tail makes excellent soup, and the meat is a good substitute for a beef-steak, which it resembles in flavour.

Nakinna – the native standing amongst the party returning from the kangaroo hunt – was chief of the King George tribe, and had been so far reclaimed from his former mode of life, as to live almost entirely at the settlement; but his wandering propensities at last prevailed, and he rejoined his companions in the woods, where he shortly afterwards died.' (*Descriptive account,* 6-7.)

SECTION E

'The country between the coast and the Porrongurup Range . . . consists of a succession of low hills, covered with dense forests of mahoganies (eucalypts), banksias, and other trees peculiar to Australian scenery . . . The most distant mountains, the Toolbrunnup, rise abruptly from an immense plain; the highest is estimated at three thousand feet, and the view from its summit is extensive and singular.'

peacemaker and all Australians of the southwest, both white and black, owe him a debt. Without him, their history would have been a great deal bloodier.

The presence of the garrison at King George Sound was the result of a remote government's reaction to developments in European politics. If the soldiers stationed there were uninvited, they were not there by choice. The two groups learned to live with each other in relative peace and harmony. Nyungar customs allowed friends to camp on their land as long as they shook hands, kept away from their women and were careful with fires. The soldiers learned to follow these rules.

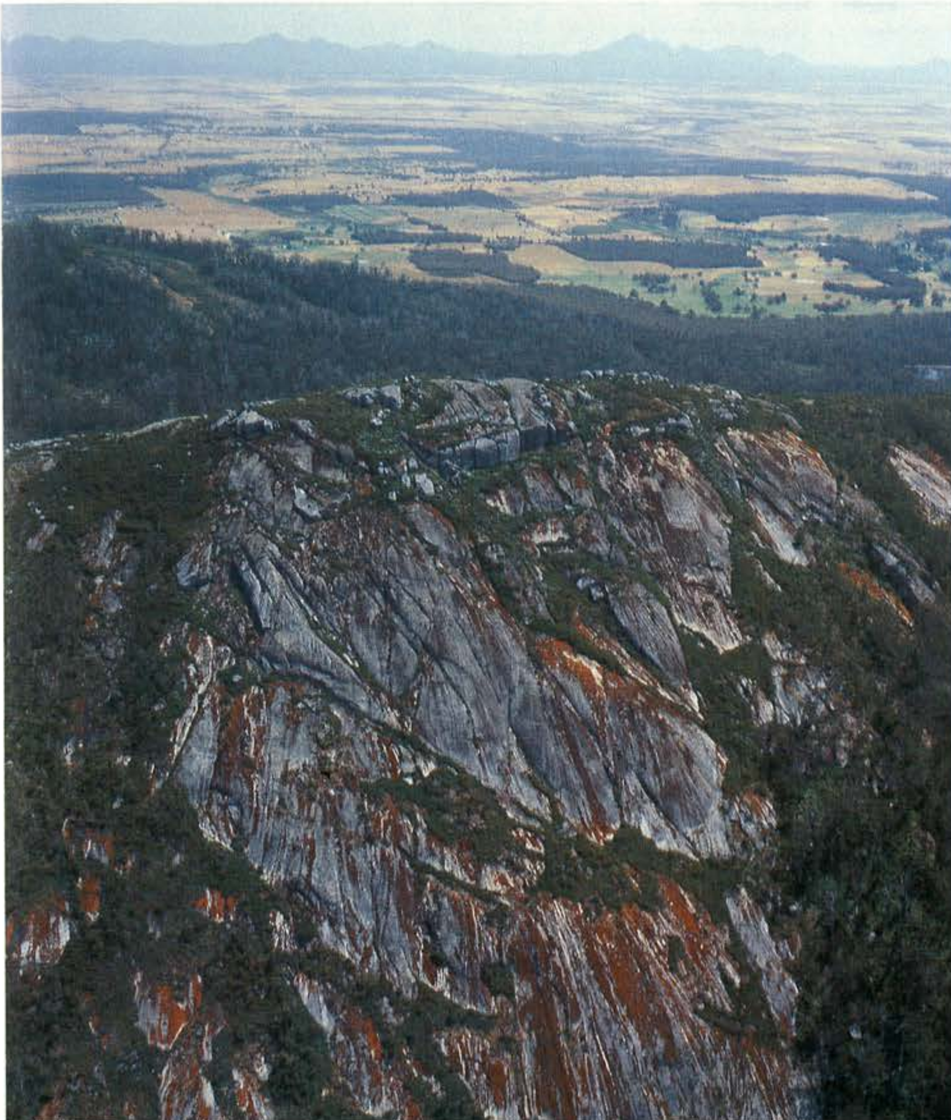
Trouble for the family was inevitable, however, because even though most of their new friends meant well, they had brought with them strange diseases that nobody understood. The Aborigines were already worried about them in 1830. One evening in January, as a prelude to what Barker described as a very frustrating discussion of comparative religion, Mokaré asked him whether white fellahs died in England. 'Black fellah die plenty,' he said.

Mokaré's own turn came in August 1831. He returned ill from a sojourn in the bush and neither Collie nor Coolbun could do anything for him. Collie and Nakina were with him when he died and Collie dug the grave according to Aboriginal tradition under Nakina's supervision.

Mokaré was by every account an exceptional individual. One white man, Collie, proved his respect by asking, as his last request, to have his own body interred beside Mokaré's. These two founding members of Albany, one black and one white, were buried side by side in a plot on which the Albany town hall now stands.

Thick jarrah forest covered the majority of the western half of Mokaré's domain. The Nyungar kept open pathways through these forests by repeated burning of the bush.
W. FERGUSON

The eastern half of Mokaré's domain is dominated by scrub country, sandy soil and mallee heath. Although preferred by Aborigines to the dense forested areas, this basically infertile region has only recently been taken up for farming.
W. FERGUSON



In the distance are the Stirling Mountains, which formed the northern boundary of Mokaré's domain. This aerial view was taken from over the Porongurup Mountains, which are visible in the foreground. Between the ranges is the Vale of Kalgan, an area that was rich woodland but is now cleared for pastoral purposes.
M. BENNETT

MOKARÉ'S DOMAIN: 20 000 YEARS OF OCCUPATION

The author of this chapter recently subjected the area of Mokaré's domain to intensive archaeological investigations. Over 180 archaeological sites have been identified and six have been excavated. The oldest evidence of occupation comes from the lowest ford on the Kalgan River, a spot where many of the main Aboriginal tracks came together. Here a large site was found on grounds now occupied by the Kalgan town hall (the red roof in the centre of illustration 1). Excavations (2) reached 2.5 m in depth, and showed continuous occupation of the region from Mokaré's time back to before the lowest radiocarbon date of 18 850 ± 370 years before the present.

This was an important spot to the Nyungar. As well as the ford, it is also the location of stone fish traps they built only 500 metres downstream (3 and 4). The ocean tides extend up the river to the ford, and the Nyungar relied on them to catch fish. When the tide was high, fish could swim freely among the rocks (3), but when the tide was low they would be trapped in the stone circles (4).

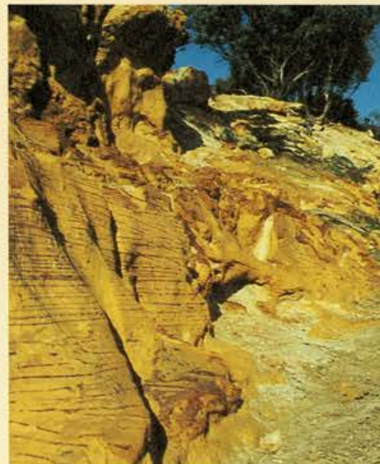
Another important location was the area around Morrillup Pool, the highest permanent water on the Kalgan. There is a large archaeological site, over a kilometre long, on both sides of the river. There is also much evidence of activity nearby, such as the ochre quarry (5), and several 'possum trees' (6). The Nyungar used the ochre to decorate their implements and their bodies. Possums nest in the hollow limbs and trunks of dead trees, which people climbed using their *kadja* to cut foot holds and to chop a hole so that they could get at the possums. Note the illustration in the foreground of Dale's panorama of King George Sound (see gatefold).

1. M. BENNETT

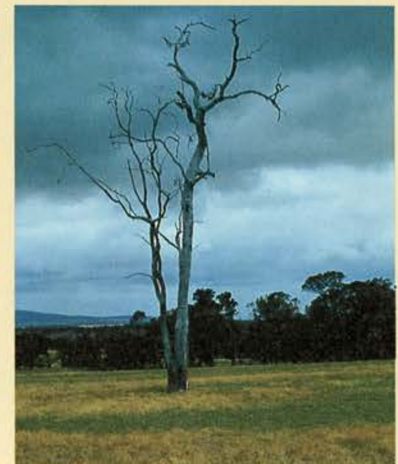
2. W.C. FERGUSON

3. W.C. FERGUSON

4. W.C. FERGUSON



5. W.C. FERGUSON



6. M. SMITH

THE DEATH OF MOKARÉ

This description by Dr Collie was published in the *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Advertiser*, 26 July 1834.

Soon after this Nakina (he was Mokkaré's eldest brother) came in, and both having spoken a few minutes in their usual tone, I heard Nakina earnestly calling 'Mokkaré,' 'Mokkaré,' and putting an emphasis on his words half entreating, half urging, which made me approach them from my bed-room. I saw Mokkaré sitting with his back against the wall and Nakina earnestly leaning down to his face. The latter raised himself as I advanced and directed my attention to Mokkaré's eye (or eye sight, in which there was the vacant roll of delirium). I took Nakina aside, warned him of the approaching fatal issue, and signified he should send for some others of the natives. He received the intelligence, which indeed he had evidently anticipated, with a settled sorrowful gloom, and made the few grown-up natives who were about the Settlement acquainted with the sad tidings. A few came and went in the forenoon and spoke sometimes affectionately at others without concern. Mokkaré seemed sensible the greater part of the time, being only occasionally delirious and but for a few seconds noisy. At 2 P.M., Nakina still watching him, he made a slight turn with his head and apparently looking adieu to all around, his large dim eyes rolled back under their swarthy lids to be for ever veiled in darkness. Nakina instantly replaced his head, inclining it forwards, for in the last movement of death it had been drawn a little back, passed his hand over his face, gently pressing down, perhaps, his eye lids, bent his arms with the elbows downwards so that his hands crossed under his chin, drew his knees forwards and upwards to his breast, whilst his legs were pressed, also bent, close to his thighs, and the whole body slightly moved so as to rest a little more on the right side, on which he was partly lying immediately before death; and the blanket that served as his covering was pressed quickly around and underneath him. Nakina raised himself to an erect position and instantly demanded, with the utmost earnestness, 'pear,' 'pear?' (give me spears, give me spears), to which, not immediately understanding, we replied, 'Yes; what for?' 'Me pear black fellow, plenty pear.'