

# *“Forest imagery & how people respond”*

*Contemporary views of Colonial art, its accuracy, traditional owner use and whether artwork can it be used to inform management”*

*Forestry Australia Ballarat 30 October 2024*

*Michael F. Ryan*



Eugene von Guerard 1811-1901 Warrenheip Hills near Ballarat 1854  
Unofficial

# *Outline*

**Depiction and  
accuracy of art:**

**Structure of the  
forests:**

**How is Fire  
depicted:**

**How are these  
forests being used  
over time**

**Can art inform  
Management**

Does early Colonial Art provide an accurate guide to the nature  
and structure of the pre-European forests and woodlands of  
South-Eastern Australia?

A study focusing on Victoria and Tasmania

By

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of:

Master of Forestry

Australian National University

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# *When did the landscape change?*

Varied across Australia but likely to be similar to the pre European landscape up until:

1. Vegetation changes from stopping indigenous burning.
2. European clearing, grazing, timber cutting
3. Australian fauna change/feral animal/plant introduction

Tasmania: 1820-1830's?

Victoria: from 1835 (Central and West) from 1850s (East)?

New South Wales: from 1788 to early 1800s



# *Artist accurate depiction of landscape*

Artists all have their own particular “style” and for this reason it has at times been discounted as an account of the “landscape”

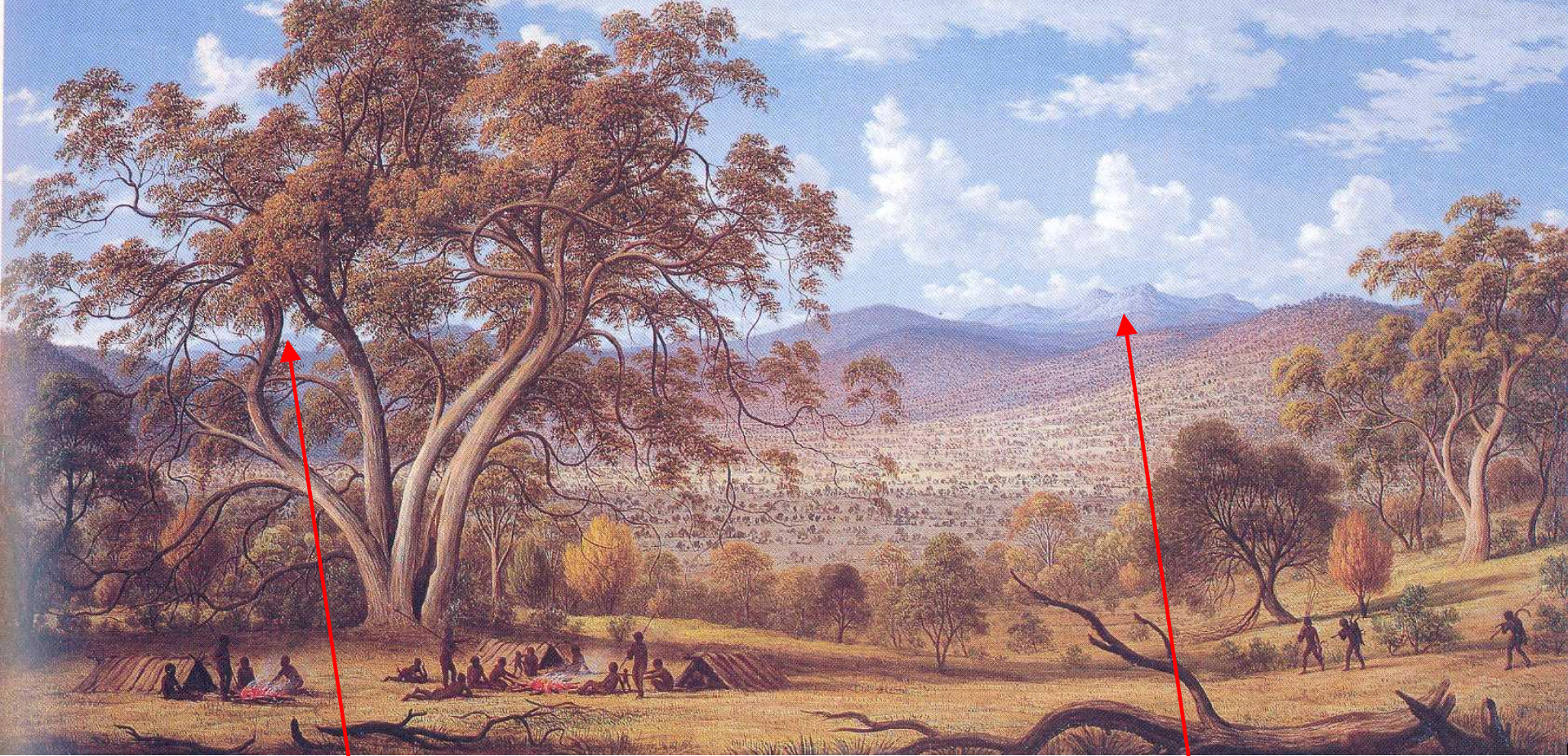
i.e John Glover’s “serpentine trees” (from Mills Plains)



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Do they still outline some important structural attributes of the landscape?





Ben Nevis

Ben Lomond

John Glover, 1767-1849 *"Mills Plains"* 1832-1834

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John Glover, 1767-1849 *"Mills Plains from sketchbook"* 1832-1834



Ben Nevis

Ben Lomond

Michael F. Ryan *"Mills Plains, Patterdale"* 2004  
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George Tobin, 1768-1838 *"in Adventure Bay, Van Dieman's land"* 1792

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Adventure Bay Coastal Reserve  
Vehicles prohibited on beach except  
for launching and retrieving boats  
Day use only area  
Toilets 600 m →

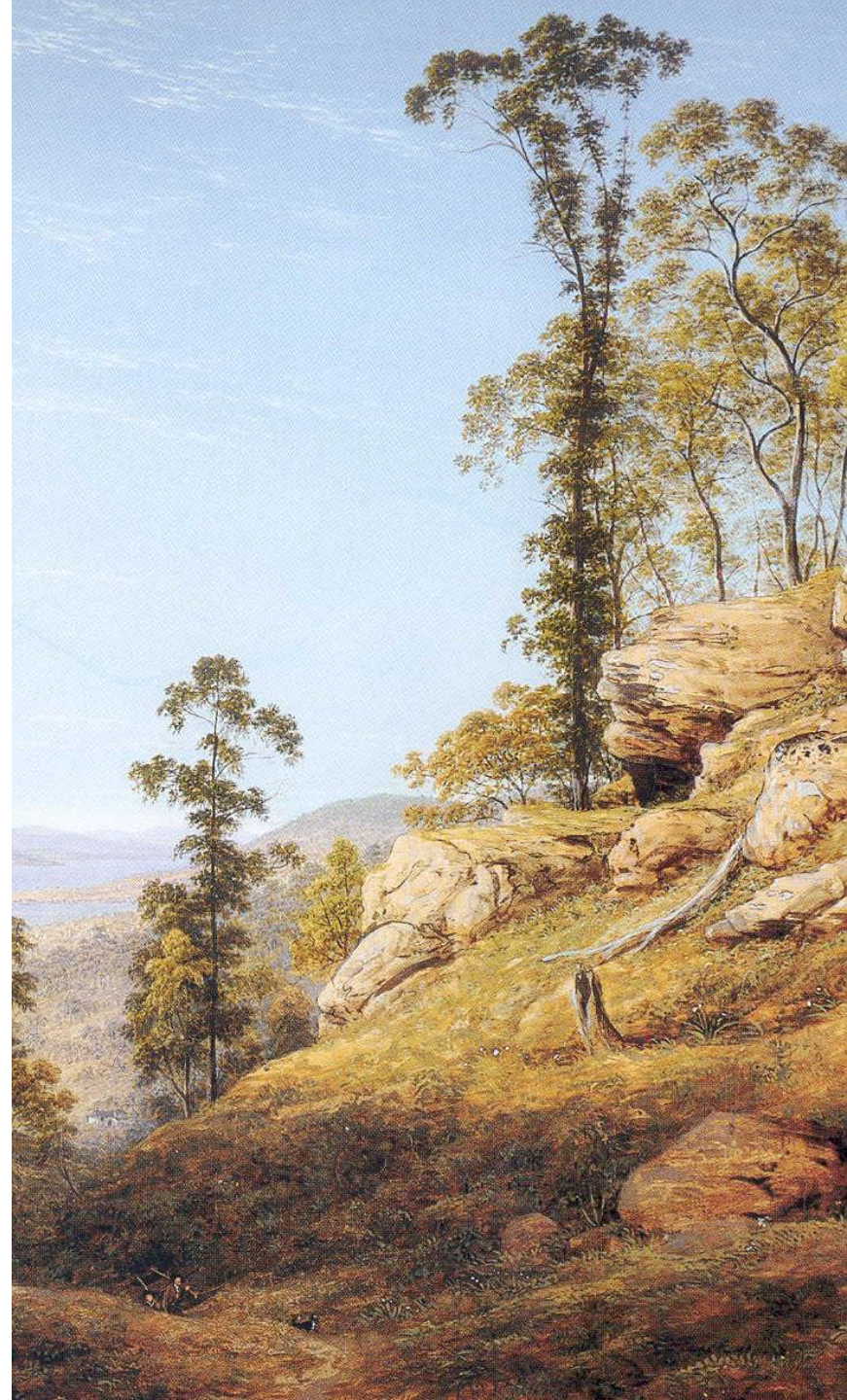
Michael F. Ryan, *“Adventure Bay, Bruny Island, Tasmania” 2004*  
Unofficial



# *Depiction of Fire*

- Rarely depicted in early colonial painting
- But often in background of sketches
- Commercially unappealing?
- Difficulty of observing?
- Some show managed fire

John Glover, 1767-1849 portion of "*the river Derwent and Hobart town*" 1835 Unofficial







Joseph Lycett 1774-1828 “*Aborigines using fire to hunt kangaroos*” 1817 National Library of Australia

Unofficial





Duncan Cooper 1813-1904 *“A bushfire, Mount Elephant, Victoria”* 1845

Unofficial





Williams Strutt 1825-1915 *"Race for life, Black Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> February 1851"* 1863 State Library of Victoria



William Strutt 1825-1915 *"Race for life, Black Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> February 1851"* 1863 University of Melbourne  
Unofficial





Eugene von Guérard *"Bushfire, between Mount Elephant and Timboon,"* 1859  
*Can be seen at the Ballarat Art Gallery* Unofficial





Glenn Rudolf “Back-burn Mullen Little Desert, Western Vic” 2005 (reversed)

Unofficial



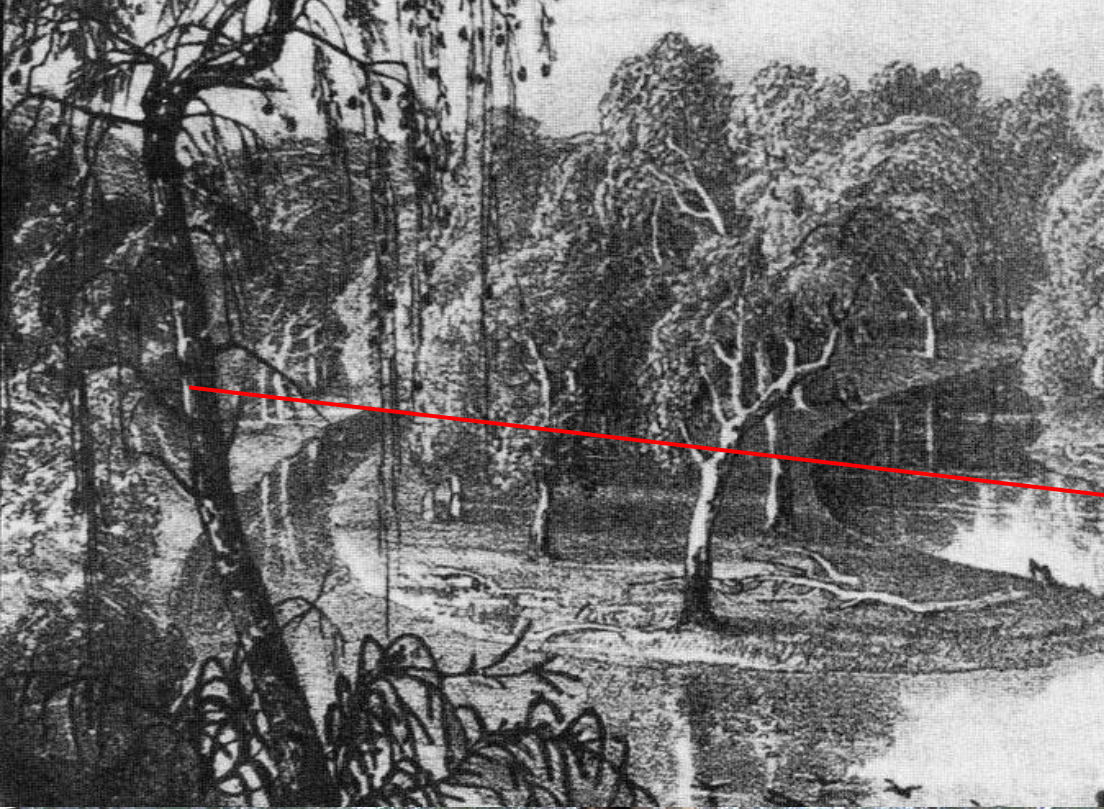
# Riparian forests and woodlands

- Pre-European structure based on traditional owner fire frequency, native animal grazing and flooding
- Post-European change due to: grazing, changed fire, changed flooding, timber cutting and especially clearing for agriculture



Major Thomas Mitchell “*View of backwater of the Murray River*” EVC 106 Grassy Riverine Forest









Eugene von Guérard “*Mr Lewin’s Homestead 1855*” EVC 55 Floodplain Riparian  
woodland, EVC 175 Grassy Woodland, EVC 132 Plains grassland

Unofficial





Eugene von Guérard “Mr Lewin’s Homestead 1855”

Michael Ryan “ the River Barwon 2007” Unofficial





Eugene von Guérard "Mr Lewin's Hut 1855" Largely cleared floodplain EVC 132  
Plains grassland

Unofficial





Ludwig Becker (1808-1861) Depot Junction: The Bamamoro Cr. with the Darling, 7 miles from Minindie [http://www.burkeandwills.net.au/Despatches/Becker/Beckers\\_Letter\\_04.htm#thumb](http://www.burkeandwills.net.au/Despatches/Becker/Beckers_Letter_04.htm#thumb)  
Unofficial



# The Wet Sclerophyll Forests

- Main disturbance pre-European settlement is fire
- Less evidence of Traditional Owner use
- Post settlement impact from clearing, timber production and fire



Isaac Whitehead  
1819-1881  
*"Sassafras  
Valley, Victoria"*  
1875 - EVC 30  
Wet Forest





Isaac Whitehead 1819-1881 portion of "*Sassafras Valley, Victoria 1875*"

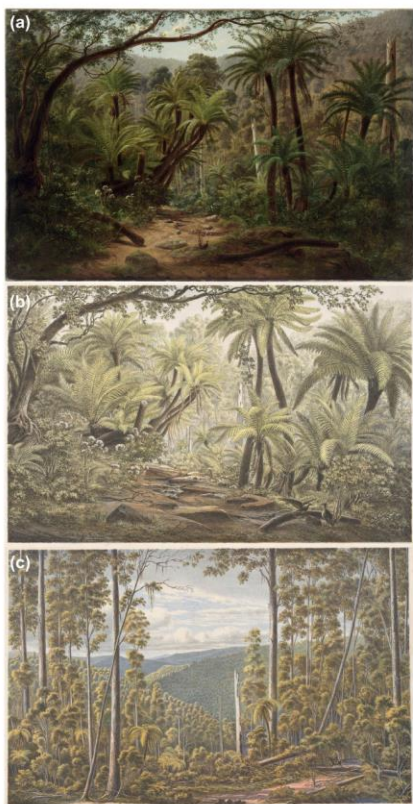


Michael F. Ryan "*Sassafras Valley, Victoria*" Unofficial 2007





**FIGURE 7** Mountain Ash forests in Isaac Whitehead's painting *A spring morning near Fernshaw* 1880 (Source: National Gallery of Victoria).



**FIGURE 8** Eugene Von Guerard paintings of forest: (a) Ferntree Gully in the Dandenong Ranges 1857 (top), (b) Dobson's Gully Dandenong Ranges 1859–1863 (middle), and (c) Cape Otway Ranges 1859–1862 (bottom).

REVIEW ARTICLE | Open Access |

## What did it used to look like? A case study from tall, wet mainland Mountain Ash forests prior to British invasion

David Lindenmayer Chris Taylor, Elle Bowd, Philip Zylstra

First published: 20 April 2024 | <https://doi.org/10.1111/aec.13520>



Michael F. Ryan "*Fern tree Gully, Dandenong Ranges*" 2006  
EVC 23 Herb Rich Foothill forest





Isaac Whitehead 1819-1881- A Spring morning near Fernshaw 1880



Right: Giant  
Manna Gum at  
Fernshaw and  
Left: 1939  
Manna Gum  
and Mountain  
Ash burnt in  
2009 M F  
Ryan

Unofficial





# Dry Sclerophyll forests and woodlands

- Structure a function of cultural burning, native animal grazing, firewood collection, digging for foods
- Post-European change due to: sheep/cattle grazing, changed fire, timber cutting and clearing for agriculture



Robert Hoddle  
1794-1881 “*View of  
Melbourne from  
Batman’s Hill*”  
1840





Eugene von Guerard *"Mt Elephant from Mr Curries Station"* 1857



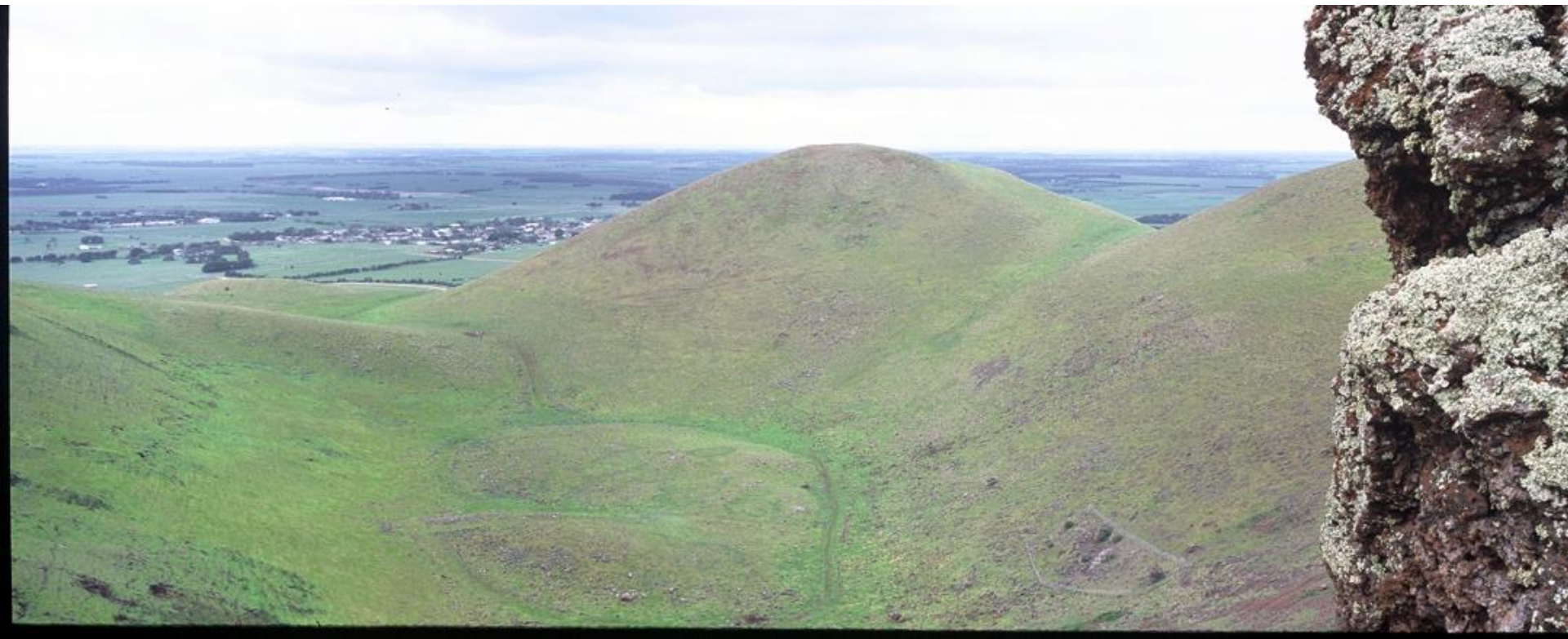
Michael Ryan *"Mt Elephant"* 2007

Unofficial



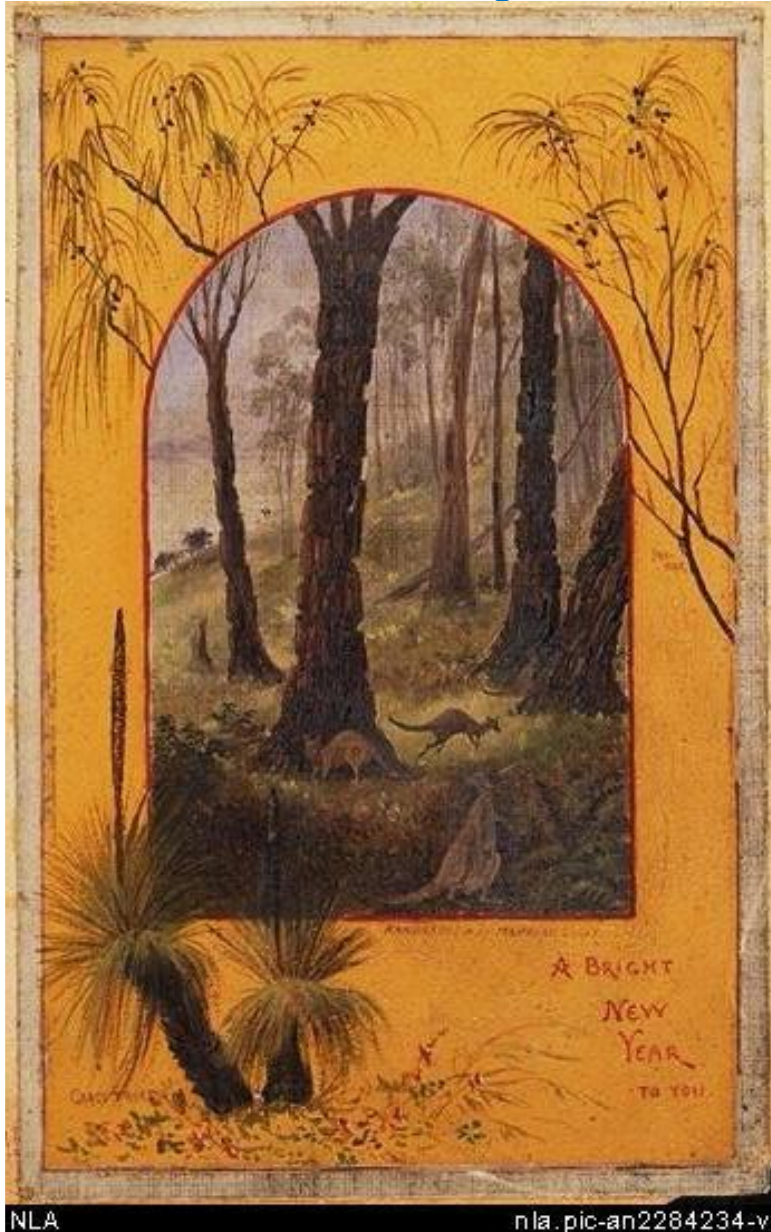


Eugene von Guerard "Crater Mt Elephant" 1857 and Contemporary view 2008



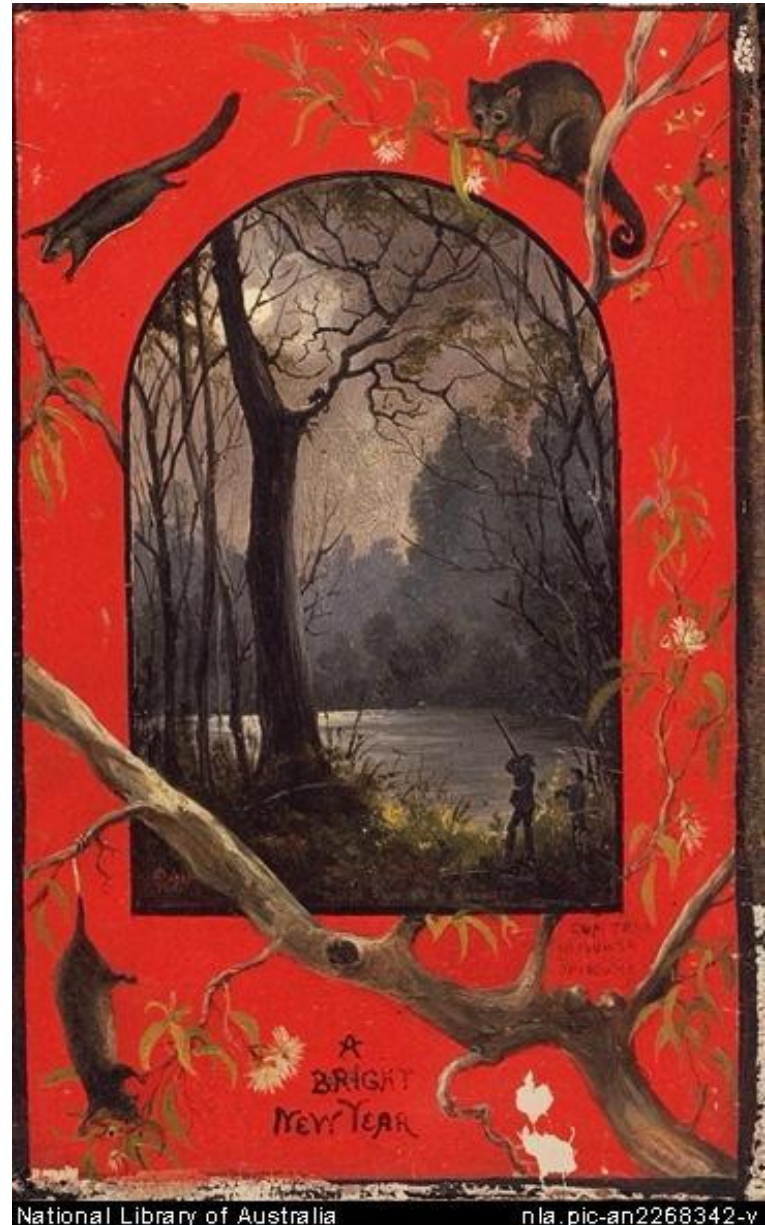


# *How forests are perceived*



NLA

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National Library of Australia

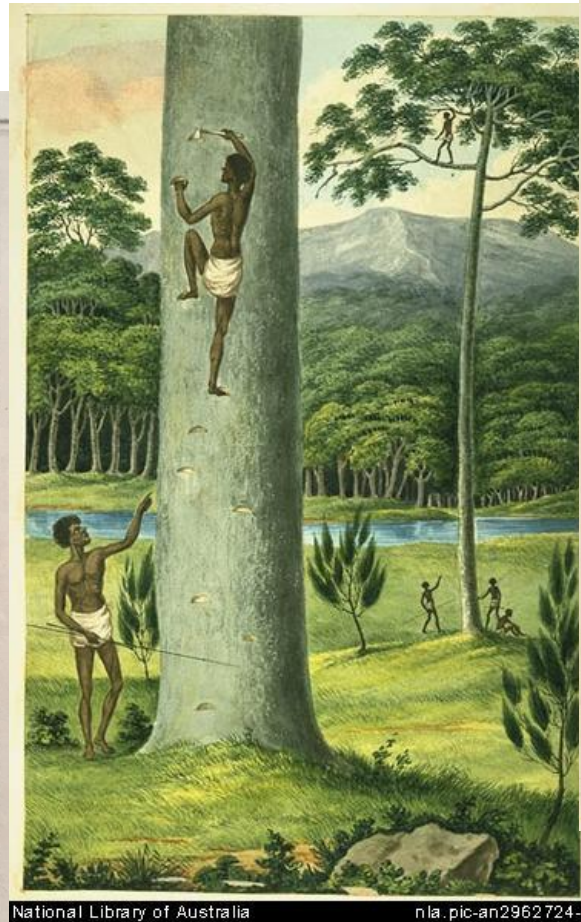
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Edward Roper (1830-1909) "Kangaroos in an ironbark Gully" "Shooting possums by moonlight"

Unofficial

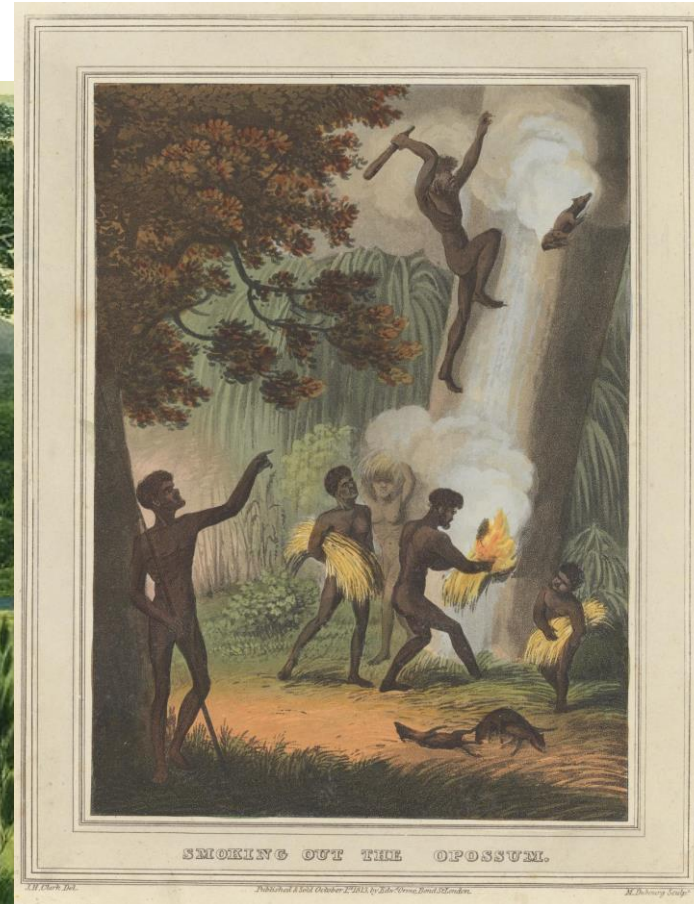


# Traditional owner use of forests



National Library of Australia nla.pic-an2962724-v

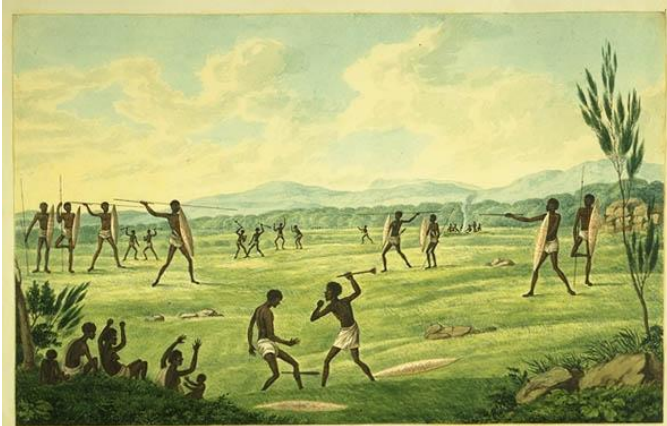
Joseph Lycett 1774-1828 from "Drawings of Aborigines and scenery, New South Wales, ca. 1820. National Library of Australia



John Heaviside Clark 1771-1863 (draughtsman) Matthew Dubourg 1786-1838 (engraver) 1813 Smoking out the Opossum National Gallery of Victoria Gurnett-Smith Bequest



# Traditional owner use of forests

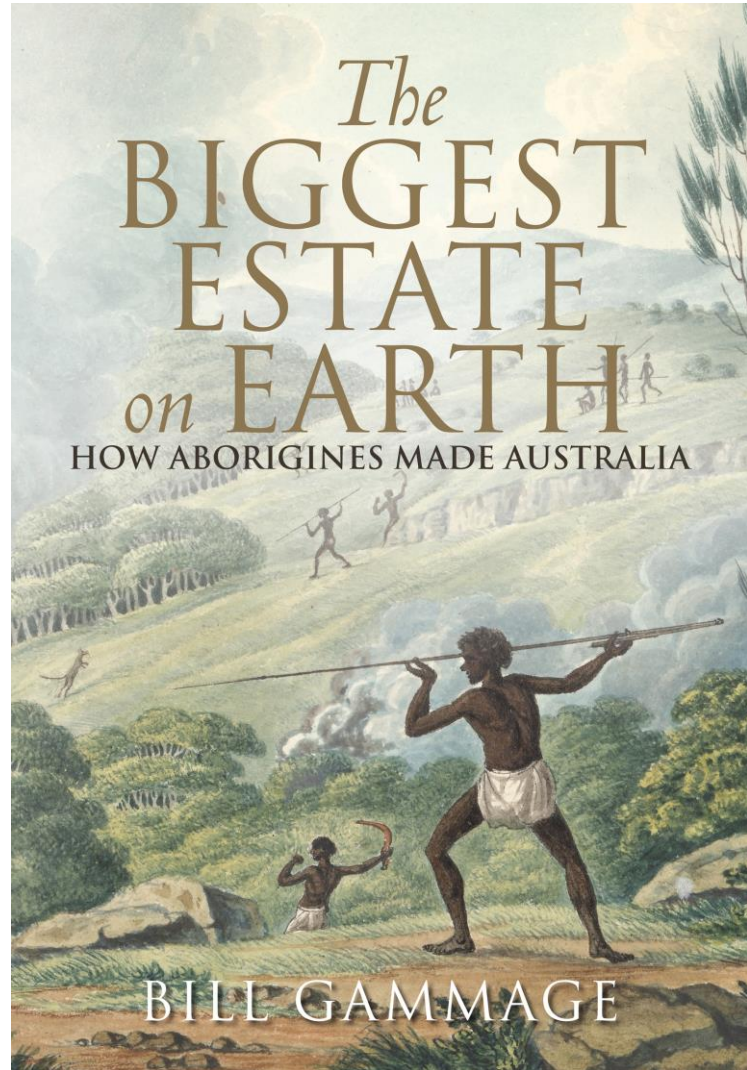


National Library of Australia nla.pic-an2962811-v

Joseph Lycett 1774-1828 “Practice Hunting”  
1817 National Library of Australia



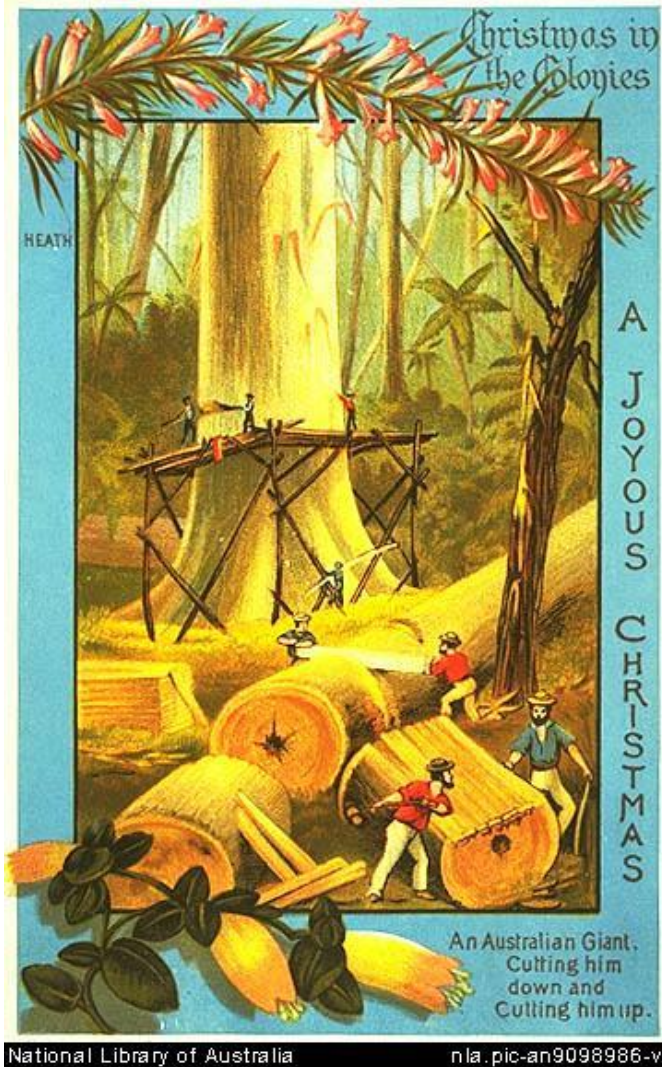
J.H Wedge “Native women getting yams 27 Aug 1835”



Joseph Lycett 1774-1828 “Aborigines using fire to hunt kangaroos” 1817  
National Library of Australia



# The new Australian's use of forests



Edward Roper 1830-1904 "An Australian Giant Cutting him up and cutting him down" 1855 National Library of Australia



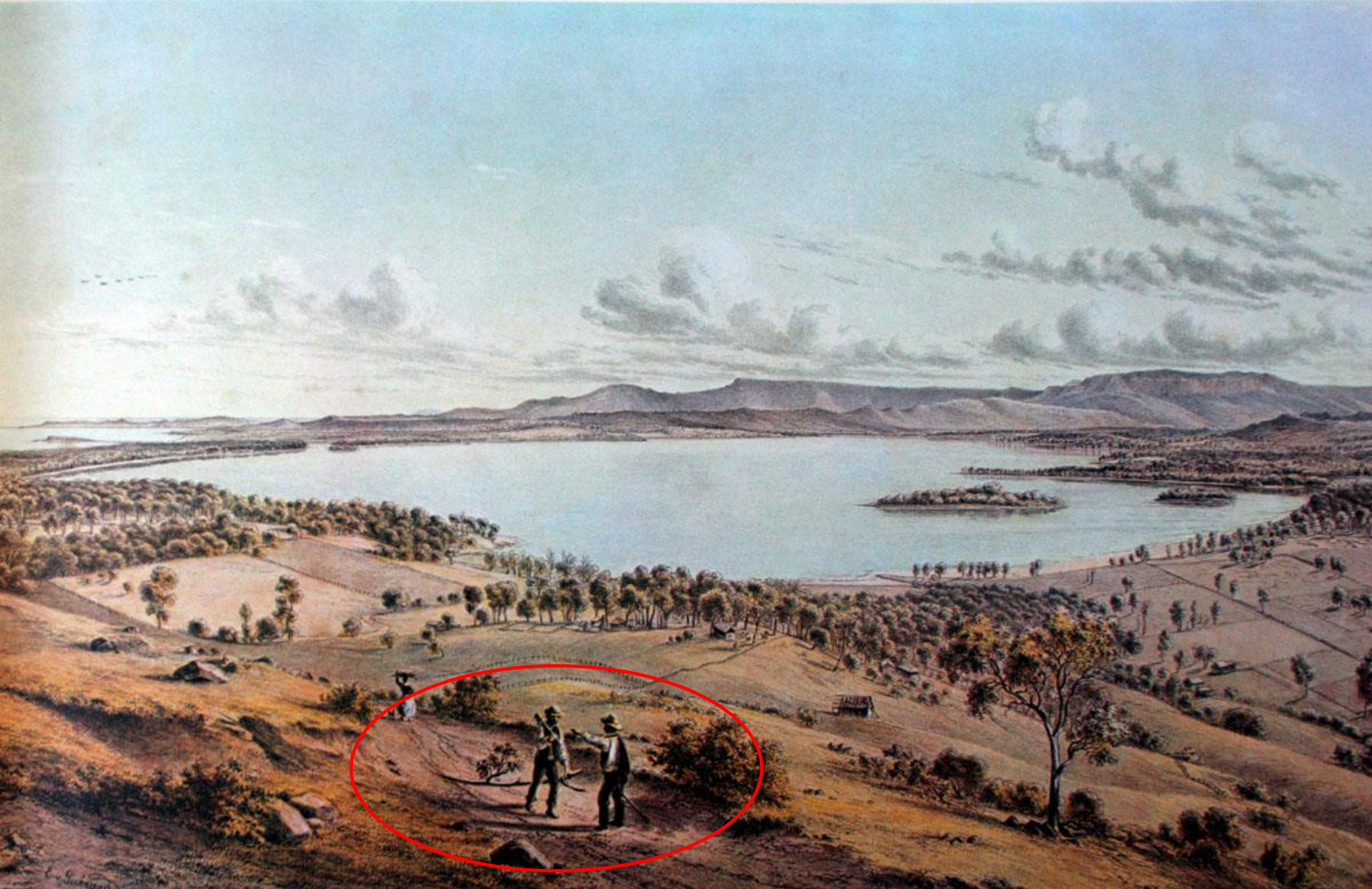




Eugene von Guérard “Mt Lofty Ranges” July 1855 – localised resource depletion?

Unofficial





Eugene von Guérard “*View of Lake Illawarra*” 1859 – localised resource depletion?



# Religious depiction of forests



Ludwig Becker (1808-1861)/ F. Grosse “*Remarkable trees, near Bendigo*” Ironbark forest

Source Trove: <https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/2269640>

Unofficial





View near Chum Gully Bendigo , looking north towards Golden - Sheeps Head Gullies in which the grotesque old stumps were grouped in the foreground were situated in 1853. <https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/6684d58216337b271b28f18c>  
This remarkable drawing depicts Camp Hill in the background with burnt trees where the Baby Health Centre is now. Note the religious significance of the fanciful burnt trunks and branches. Perhaps Dr. Backhaus was the Artist.'

Unofficial





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William Strutt "*Coroboree*" inspired by the Backhouse sketch Ironbark & Yellow gum





Eugene von Guerard “*View of Moroit or Tower Hill in Australia Felix 1855*”

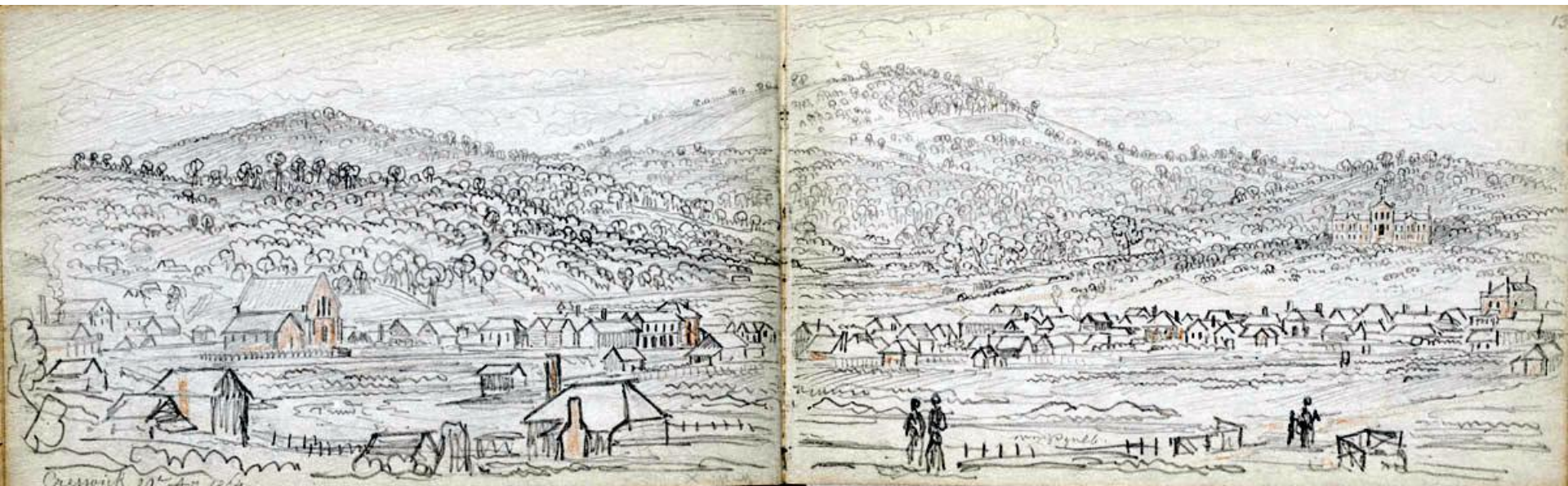


Michael Ryan “*View Tower Hill 2006*” mapped as EVC 894 Scoria Cone Woodland  
Unofficial



## Conclusions and other observations

- Not always photo realistic but still show structure and can often ID species
- Can find many of the locations but in many cases over-cleared
- Useful for guiding re-establishment of over-cleared parts of the landscape
- Drier forests more often shown as open understorey (but with more people)
- Wetter forests are shown as similar to what they are now but with bigger trees
- Shows the changing values and uses of forests over time



Eugene von Guérard “Creswick” 1864 Unofficial



# Acknowledgements

The traditional owners on which these artworks were recorded

Professor Peter Kanowski (ANU Forestry), the late Ron Hateley (Melbourne University Forestry), Pat Groenhout (PF Olsen), Professor Tim Bonyhady (ANU Law) and Professor Bill Gammage (ANU Humanities Research Centre)

## Art sources

State Library NSW, State Library  
VIC, Picture Library Australia,  
National Library of Australia,  
Bendigo Historic Society, Trove  
[Home - Trove \(nlg.gov.au\)](http://Home.Trove.gov.au)



Robert  
Huddle  
1794-  
1881 *“View  
of Melbourne  
from  
Batman’s  
Hill”* 1840