Fatal Frontier: Temporal and Spatial Considerations of the Native Mounted Police and Colonial Violence across Queensland

Lynley Wallis, Heather Burke, Bryce Barker, and Noelene Cole

The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Indigenous Australia and New Guinea

Edited by Ian J. McNiven and Bruno David

Abstract and Keywords

Over the past two decades, archaeologists have explored aspects of Indigenous agency to better encompass experiences of cross-cultural contact in colonial Australia. Yet the area of frontier conflict has largely remained the purview of historians, in part because of challenges in identifying such events archaeologically. One alternative means through which to consider frontier conflict is to investigate the material remains of colonial policing forces. This article focuses on the camps of the Native Mounted Police, a paramilitary government force that operated in Queensland from 1849 (before the state was officially established) until the early decades of the twentieth century. During this period, this force variously occupied 174 camp sites across Queensland, spread unevenly across pastoral and biogeographic districts. By mapping known events of frontier conflict (whether they be attacks on Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal people, stock, and/or property) across the state, we demonstrate that the extent and nature of frontier conflict was highly variable spatially and temporally, and was tied into a largely negative feedback loop with the deployment of the Native Mounted Police. Although Native Mounted Police camps did not form a defensive cordon of structures akin to a ‘frontier line’ across Queensland, they demarcated a frontier ‘zone’ that was contested, precarious, and violent. The fact that so many camps were required for such a long period provides clear evidence of the persistent and determined resistance of Aboriginal peoples to the theft of their land and the bloodshed that resulted.

Keywords: frontier conflict, historical archaeology, cross-cultural, Queensland, Aboriginal peoples

Introduction

Archaeological research on Indigenous-European ‘contact’ in Australia initially focused on the European experience (e.g., Allen 1973; Birmingham 1992), reflecting a disciplinary
divide between what was then known as prehistoric (Aboriginal) and historical (Euro-
pean) archaeology. Recent scholarship on the archaeology of rock art, missions, pastoral
stations, and fringe camps has considered Indigenous agency so as to better encompass a
more holistic view of contact cultural interaction (e.g., Brown, Avery, & Goulding 2002;
Byrne 2003; Cole 2010; David, McNiven, Attenbrow, Flood, & Collins 1994; Griffin 2010;
Harrison 2004, 2007; Lydon 2009a, 2009b, 2009b; McNiven 2018; McNiven & Russell
2002; Paterson 2006; Smith 2000; Wesley 2013). Even so, archaeological studies rarely
explore the conflict that often underpinned cross-cultural encounters. Instead, the exami-
nation of frontier conflict in Australia has largely remained the domain of historians (e.g.,
Allbrook & Jubb 2009; Bottoms 2013; Connors 2015; Critchett 1990; Evans, Saunders, &
Reynolds 1981; Richards 2008; Ryan 2008, 2010, 2013). Historians have shown conclu-
sively that frontier violence was ubiquitous and enacted by ‘colonists’, the military, and
various forms of policing forces reliant on Aboriginal labour (‘Native Police’). Despite this
close attention, the silence of the documentary record has confounded such studies, with
Finnane and Richards (2004: 85) lamenting that ‘the reality of settlement at the bound-
aries of colonial rule challenges reconstruction’.

The potential for archaeology to address this silence and to contribute new perspectives
to the discourse was recognized nearly two decades ago (Attwood & Foster 2003: 23), but
until recently it remained largely untapped, despite long-established interests in conflict
archaeology internationally (e.g., Fox & Scott 1991; Zimmerman 2009). Hitherto, most
published studies of frontier conflict sites in Australia by archaeologists have been re-
stricted to heritage assessments or historical treatments, with little or no detailed archae-
ological investigation (e.g., Godwin & L'Este Brown 2002; Murray & Williamson 2003; but
for an exception see Rowland 2004). In part, this limitation may stem from the peculiar
difficulties surrounding the identification of conflict events in the Australian archaeologi-
cal record, made more challenging by the furtive manner in which many killings were
carried out. The first systematic steps toward understanding such material signatures
were by Barker (2007) and Litster and Wallis (2011), who argued that perpetrators often
targetted small numbers of people in short-lived punitive expeditions highly dispersed
across sometimes large distances, leaving a very light ‘footprint’. The archaeological sig-
nature of such events has also been strongly affected by the treatment of victims after
death, which regularly involved leaving the bodies on the surface and/or burning rather
than interment. As a consequence, large-scale massacres resulting in concentrations of
bodies buried in a single location, such as are recorded elsewhere in the New World from
conflict encounters (e.g., Greene & Scott 2004; National Parks Service 2000a, 2000b;
Nicklisch, Ramsthaler, Meller, Friederich, & Alt 2017; Zimmerman 2009; Zimmerman &
Whitten 1980), are unlikely to occur in the Australian context. Combined with the effects
of natural transformation processes, this light footprint has sometimes led to inconclusive
archaeological results (e.g., Smith, Raven, Walshe, Fitzpatrick, & Pate 2017; Wallis,
Wright, Moffat, Domett, & Woolgar Valley Aboriginal Corporation 2005; but see Genever,
Duncan, Derksen, & Tranter 1996).
Given the establishment of various Native Police forces utilizing Aboriginal labour in all colonies across Australia from the 1830s onward (e.g., Fels 1988; Nettlebeck & Ryan 2018; O’Connor 2002), an alternative lens through which to examine frontier conflict is the more obvious and abundant material signatures evidenced by the camps of such forces. In particular, the paramilitary Queensland Native Mounted Police force—the longest-lasting and most brutal of all Australian Native Police forces—offers a window into the form, nature, and spatial location of frontier violence across more than fifty years of colonial settlement in the northeast quarter of the continent (e.g., Burke & Wallis 2019; Burke et al. 2018; Cole 2004; Cole, Musgrave, George, George, & Banjo 2002; Lowe et al. 2018; Wallis et al. 2017, 2018). Formed in 1848 in what was then the northern districts of New South Wales and before the separation of Queensland as a self-governing colony in 1859, the Queensland Native Mounted Police comprised detachments of usually four to eight Aboriginal men (‘troopers’) drawn from distant areas and led by a white officer. Their role was to protect European populations on the extreme limits of colonial settlement by ostensibly establishing and promoting the rule of British law (Nettelbeck & Ryan 2018; Richards 2008; Skinner 1975). In practice, this meant carrying out extrajudicial killings, destroying property, and forcibly removing Aboriginal people from their traditional lands. Such was the level of Aboriginal resistance that the Queensland authorities found it necessary to deploy their force from approximately 174 different camps across the state. As bases for detachments whose preemptive and/or retaliatory attacks systematically devastated local Aboriginal communities, the camps serve as a proxy for frontier violence. Using an archaeological landscape approach, Queensland-wide material associated with the remains of Native Mounted Police bases provide rich potential for shedding fresh light on Australia’s ‘dark’ colonial past (cf. Lennon & Continuum 2002; Sharpley 2005).

### Contextualizing the Camps

Following a short stint as a penal convict depot, ‘free’ European settlement in Queensland commenced in 1842 with the opening of the Moreton district in the southeast, though what the new arrivals thought of as virgin country was, of course, already occupied and had been for tens of thousands of years (Figure 1). In the southeast, pastoralism (initially involving sheep and later cattle) quickly emerged as the main industry, with the first shipment of wool departing Moreton Bay in 1851 (State Government of Queensland 2019). Through to the declaration of the pastoral districts of Gregory North and Gregory South in 1873, the opening of successive regions provided further impetus for influxes of land-hungry settlers, effectively completing assertion of colonial control over the entire state. As the European presence in distant locales increased, other potential industries ripe for development were identified. Although not as large as those elsewhere in Australia, the discovery of several important minerals (predominantly gold, but also tin and copper) led to intense, though relatively short-lived, mining rushes in Queensland. Commencing with Canoona in 1858, the fields of Gympie (est. 1867), Cape River (est. 1867), Ravenswood (est. 1868), Gilbert River (est. 1869), the Etheridge (est. 1870), Charters Towers (est. 1871), the Palmer River (est. 1873), Herberton (est. 1875), and Hodgkinson
(est. 1876) were proclaimed, encouraging colonists to settle in regions that had hitherto been of limited European interest (Bolton 1972). In the northeast of the state, colonial expansion was also connected to the development of sugar plantations replete with imported cheap labour from the South Pacific Islands after 1863 (Griggs 2011) and commercial timber-getting in the rainforests after the 1870s (Frawley 1991). Beche-de-mer and pearl-shell fishing industries along the north Queensland coastline in the latter decades of the nineteenth century opened further opportunities for exploitation and violence (e.g., Gantter 1994; Loos 1974, 1982; Mullins 1995).

Each of the primary industries placed different demands on land and water resources, with concomitantly varying expressions in terms of settlement, infrastructure development, and ensuing conflict with local Indigenous communities (Loos 1982). Pastoralism involved relatively small numbers of people but large numbers of stock spread over extensive areas of country. Once settled, pastoralists were heavily invested in staying on the ‘runs’ they had secured. In contrast, mining involved large numbers of people in relatively concentrated locations for shorter, more intense periods of time, who soon decamped once the easily secured resources had been depleted. The mining fields were often situated in rugged country that pastoralists had largely avoided and that had otherwise afforded Aboriginal people refuge. In contrast, while involving smaller numbers of people than mining, both timber-getting and agriculture required extensive land clearing across large tracts of land, causing massive ecological impacts. Like pastoralists, the farmers and plantation owners were heavily invested in remaining in place rather than decamping after the desired resources had been exploited. In the tropical northeast, the seemingly impenetrable rainforests that were the focus of both timber-getting and agriculture had af-

Figure 1 (a) Frontier conflict ‘events’ and pastoral districts; (b) NMP camps and pastoral districts; and (c) NMP camps and biogeographic regions (based on data in Burke & Wallis 2019 as at 8 October 2019).
forded Aboriginal people some means of respite from colonial impact, as well as a context for resistance and continued conflict. Fishing industries, though restricted to coastal regions and/or offshore islands, also involved relatively small numbers of entrepreneurs (far fewer than mining but probably many more than pastoralism in the adjacent inland areas). Many colonial fishers developed a violent and abusive relationship with their cheap Aboriginal labour force.

Invariably, regardless of the specific industry involved, initial European incursions were tied to reliable water sources, thus placing invaders in immediate conflict with Aboriginal landholders who both directly and indirectly relied on such resources. Once it was clear to Aboriginal people that the newcomers, with their impacts on resources and sacred cultural places, were determined to take up long-term residency, concerted resistance against the invaders was inevitable. This took the shape of attacks on people—usually more isolated and vulnerable individuals—and the running off, spearing, and maiming of stock, with occasional attacks on property or theft of unguarded supplies, equipment, and/or crops. Such resistance led to increased calls by colonists for police protection, which in many cases provoked further confrontation. Typically, this conflict resulted in an increasingly vicious spiral until Aboriginal opposition was either defeated or, as happened in rare cases, the colonists moved on.

Although mapping such conflict is challenging, increasingly sophisticated geospatial interfaces are allowing spatial representations of such events beyond static dots on maps. For example, Ryan (2019) recently released an online interactive ‘map, timelines, and information about massacres in Central and Eastern Australia from 1794 ... until 1930’. With stringent criteria regarding the number of victims (six or more) and the level of confidence in whether the alleged incident actually took place, Ryan’s map (as of early 2020) shows approximately sixty-five massacre events across Queensland. While valuable, the limited scope of the events depicted in this map belies the complexity of the frontier, where larger-scale killings were rare and were usually the culmination of weeks or months of smaller-scale events.

Adopting a more holistic approach to include all frontier conflict ‘events’, regardless of whether these resulted in large (or any) numbers of deaths, provided Burke and Wallis (2019) with a more nuanced view of the ebb and flow of violence on the Queensland frontier (cf Barker 2007). Attacks were categorized as against either (1) Aboriginal people, (2) Europeans/others, (3) property and/or stock, or (4) Native Mounted Police detachments. Sourced primarily from historical documents, over 1800 such events have been plotted to at least an approximate location across Queensland (Burke & Wallis 2019) (Figure 1a and Table 1). This dataset has several limitations, principally its documentary bias that privileges accounts of European deaths over those of Aboriginal people and the fact that many accounts (both oral and written) provide insufficient locational or temporal information to allow mapping with any degree of confidence. Further complications are the limited number of literate Europeans and the often sporadic reporting of frontier conflict in newspapers, letters, and diaries, as a result of which some areas or time periods appear to have few or no events. As such, areas with few events are more likely to reflect a lack of writ-
ten sources relating to that region rather than an absence of conflict per se. Despite its shortcomings, the data provide a damning visualization of the extent of conflict across colonial Queensland. Adjusting figures to account for the differences in size of each pastoral district, Table 1 reveals that, relatively speaking, the southeast pastoral districts of Wide Bay and Moreton were by far the most ‘violent’ based on the number of conflict events, followed closely by Cook, Port Curtis, and North Kennedy. It is in light of the extent and nature of frontier conflict events that the establishment of Native Mounted Police camps can be better contextualized.
Table 1. Summary of frontier conflict events across Queensland (based on data in Burke & Wallis 2019 as at 8 October 2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pastoral District</th>
<th>Size of District (ha)</th>
<th>Attacks against Aboriginal People</th>
<th>Attacks against Europeans/Others</th>
<th>Attacks against NMP</th>
<th>Attacks against Property/Stock</th>
<th>Total Attacks</th>
<th>Km² per Attack</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burke</td>
<td>30,169,230</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>2987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>28,590,338</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory North</td>
<td>25,858,835</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrego</td>
<td>18,494,334</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>16,646,136</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory South</td>
<td>16,118,345</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leichhardt</td>
<td>14,941,282</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maranoa</td>
<td>12,690,413</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Fatal Frontier: Temporal and Spatial Considerations of the Native Mounted Police and Colonial Violence across Queensland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Critical Incidents</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>Wounds</th>
<th>Total Injuries</th>
<th>Total Deaths</th>
<th>Total Injuries</th>
<th>Total Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Kennedy</td>
<td>9,659,535</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>575</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Kennedy</td>
<td>9,351,043</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>1214</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darling Downs</td>
<td>8,031,241</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1339</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Curtis</td>
<td>4,515,403</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>544</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnett</td>
<td>3,950,967</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1097</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wide Bay</td>
<td>2,827,047</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>230</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moreton</td>
<td>2,666,229</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>231</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>116</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>359</td>
<td>849</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>1786</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*) These are events that fall outside the pastoral district polygons, predominantly occurring on vessels or offshore islands.
The Geographic and Temporal Distribution of Camps

Biogeography, hydrology, and geology are key factors in understanding the nature of Aboriginal occupation of a region and the interests that Europeans subsequently developed in such areas. These factors also influenced the conflict that occurred between people and, in turn, the establishment of Native Mounted Police camps. Although initially squatters\textsuperscript{4} seemed to have dealt with Aboriginal resistance themselves, many took good note of the lessons learned from the Myall Creek case, when eleven Europeans were tried and seven hanged for the murder of at least twenty-eight Aboriginal people in New South Wales in the late 1830s. The trials and punishment of the perpetrators set a judicial precedent and led to a more clandestine culture surrounding the killing of Aboriginal people (see papers in Lydon & Ryan 2018). Queensland squatters whose stock, staff, and property were targeted appealed consistently and loudly to the Colonial Secretary to establish a Native Police force, and then for detachments to regularly patrol their ‘runs’ to ‘disperse’\textsuperscript{5} Aboriginal people. As such, the timing of the establishment of Native Mounted Police camps followed in a general sense the establishment of pastoral districts (Figure 1b and Table 2).
## Fatal Frontier: Temporal and Spatial Considerations of the Native Mounted Police and Colonial Violence across Queensland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Gazetral Date</th>
<th>Size of District (ha)</th>
<th>Total Number of NMP Camps</th>
<th>Area (ha) per Camp</th>
<th>Density Ranking*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burke</td>
<td>1865</td>
<td>30,169,230</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1,676,068</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>28,590,338</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>529,451</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory North</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>25,858,835</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4,309,806</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrego</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>18,494,334</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3,698,867</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>1859</td>
<td>16,646,136</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2,774,356</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory South</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>16,118,345</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4,029,586</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leichhardt</td>
<td>1854</td>
<td>14,941,282</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>622,553</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maranoa</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>12,690,413</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2,538,083</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Kennedy</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>9,659,535</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>439,070</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Kennedy</td>
<td>1858</td>
<td>9,351,043</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,335,863</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darling Downs</td>
<td>1843</td>
<td>8,031,241</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2,677,080</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fatal Frontier: Temporal and Spatial Considerations of the Native Mounted Police and Colonial Violence across Queensland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Number of Camps</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Highest Camp Density</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Port Curtis</td>
<td>1854</td>
<td>4,515,403</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>564,425</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnett</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>3,950,967</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,316,989</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wide Bay</td>
<td>1847</td>
<td>2,827,047</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>471,175</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moreton</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td>2,666,229</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>888,743</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>174</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*) 1 is the district with the highest number of camps per unit area and 15 is the lowest.
In the first decade of European colonization in Queensland, Native Mounted Police detachments had few permanent bases, being regularly on the move as they responded to written and verbal requests for assistance. In 1850, the first ‘permanent’ camp was established at Callandoon (Goondiwindi), followed by another on Tchanning Creek (Wandai Gumbal) in 1853 (Burke & Wallis 2019). Both camps were built on pastoral properties, with Wandai Gumbal constructed specifically by squatters to enable a police presence. This heralded what became a common practice of squatters making pastoral outbuildings temporarily available for police use and even erecting bespoke temporary barracks to entice Native Mounted Police detachments to visit certain runs. Other Native Mounted Police camps established in the early 1850s were less permanent but no less connected to the patronage of squatters. In all, some 43% of camps across the lifetime of the Native Mounted Police were associated with either current or former pastoral runs.

Of 174 known Native Mounted Police camps with secure locational data, 168 have relatively secure establishment and cessation dates (Burke & Wallis 2019). These dates range from a maximum of thirty-one years at Coen on Cape York Peninsula to less than a year at other locations, with an average duration of a little under eight and a half years overall. Such camp durations suggest that it took approximately a decade to quell Aboriginal resistance in any given region, transforming the myth of the ‘peaceful’ colonization of Queensland into an account of a long, drawn-out war in which the ‘battleground’ was expansive and ever shifting. It also expands the scope of Evans and Ørsted-Jensen’s (2014) calculation of frontier Aboriginal death rates, based as they were on an estimated seven-year average for each camp. Once the camp duration is extended to eight and a half years, their minimum and parsimonious estimate of a potential death rate of 41,040 Aboriginal people killed at the hands of the Native Mounted Police between 1859 and 1897 significantly advances in size to over 100,000.

The shift to state-funded camps, coupled with the separation of Queensland from the colony of New South Wales in 1859 and an ever-expanding European population, saw the number of camps double in the first half of the 1860s, remaining high for the following decade before slowing down after the mid-1870s (Table 3). The number of camps declined rapidly in the 1890s as the heart of Aboriginal resistance was largely broken and the then police commissioner, David Seymour, followed by his successor, William Parry-Okeden, deliberately wound down the Native Mounted Police and repositioned them within and behind the civilian police force. ‘Troopers’ became ‘trackers’, and many of the remaining officers were either transitioned to the regular force or let go.
Table 3. Dates of establishment of Native Mounted Police camps across Queensland (based on data in Burke and Wallis 2019 as at 8 October 2019; note that four camps whose establishment year is not known have been excluded).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period (typically in five-year increments)</th>
<th>Number of Native Mounted Police Camps Established</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pre-1855</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856-1860</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861-1865</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866-1870</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871-1875</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876-1880</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881-1885</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886-1890</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>1891-1895</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896-1904</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just as the timing of establishing Native Mounted Police camps was structured and systematic, so too was their geographic distribution, reflecting the sheer scale and ambition of the colonial project. The size of pastoral districts varied considerably, with the three largest located in the far west and north (Burke, Gregory North, and Cook) and the three smallest (Moreton, Wide Bay, and Burnett) in the southeast (Figure 2b and Table 2). Accordingly, the number of camps varied within each district, from just three in the three smallest districts to as many as fifty-four in Cook. While this relationship appears superficially to be a straightforward one, related directly to district size, the largest district—Gregory North—in fact had only six camps, suggesting that other forces were at play.
To understand this variability, a more useful measure is the number of Native Mounted Police camps adjusted to account for the different sizes of the districts. As shown in Table 2, this reveals that the ‘densest’ district in terms of the Native Mounted Police presence was North Kennedy (the ninth largest district), with an average of 1 camp/439,070 ha. This was followed by Wide Bay, the second smallest district (1 camp/471,175 ha), and Cook, the second largest district (1 camp/529,451 ha). In contrast, the least dense districts of Gregory South (1 camp/4,029,586 ha) and Gregory North (1 camp/4,309,806 ha) were the sixth and third largest districts, respectively. The high density of camps in the North Kennedy and Cook districts is likely due to a complex mix of factors, including the European industries in each, the density of Aboriginal populations, and the nature of the local terrain. Here, mountainous and/or heavily forested regions countermanded the advantages of coverage and speed belonging to a mounted force, while at the same time affording Aboriginal people safe havens. The high density of camps in Wide Bay, which opened within five years after free settlement began, is a particularly interesting case. Its denser Native Mounted Police presence was likely due to the expansion of wealthy pastoral interests, many of whom were members of the Queensland Parliament and so had greater influence over the decision-making processes regarding funding and resources allocated to the force. Further, the especially unchecked violence of the Native Mounted Police in its first decade or so of operation (culminating in a Select Committee enquiry in
1861; Queensland Legislative Assembly 1861) was arguably a prime factor in the heightened resistance and retaliation of Aboriginal peoples in the Wide Bay district.

A spatial analysis of camp distribution against biogeographic regions is even more revealing (Figure 1c and Table 4). By this measure, the four regions with the greatest densities of camps are the Wet Tropics and Einasleigh Uplands (both dominated by forestry and agriculture, and, in the north of the latter, mining), South East Queensland (dominated by early pastoralism), and Cape York Peninsula (dominated in the south by mining). The regions with arguably the lowest economic value and European population densities—the Mitchell Grass Downs, Mulga Lands, Desert Uplands, and Channel Country, all in the southwest of the state—are those with the lowest densities of camps and, by default, the greatest distances between camps. Generally speaking, these latter four regions are characterized by open and topographically featureless plains, which are ideal for pursuit on horseback and provide little in the way of physical refuge for Aboriginal people. Here the ease of mounted travel enabled detachments to patrol a far greater area than was possible in, for example, the rugged sandstone ranges of the Einasleigh Uplands and Cape York Peninsula. Furthermore, in the more arid areas of southwest Queensland, Aboriginal fisher-gatherer-hunters were particularly closely tethered to seasonal and permanent water sources, making their movements more predictable and therefore easier for detachments to track and thus quell any resistance they might have attempted. The Native Mounted Police camps at Cooper’s Creek (214 km), Boulia/Burke River (160 km), and Birdsville (160 km) in southwestern Queensland were the most isolated camps, whereas Glenroy, Palmerville, Puckley Creek, and East Normanby in Cape York Peninsula were all just 7 km from another camp (Burke & Wallis 2019). The average distance between camps across the state was 53 km (~32 mi), which was theoretically the average distance that could be travelled comfortably on horseback if the horses were well conditioned; it was a regular lament that Native Mounted Police horses were anything but well conditioned (e.g., Anon. 1866; Kellet, R 1865).
Table 4. Summary of information about the size of biogeographic regions and the number of camps per region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biogeographic Region</th>
<th>Size of Region (ha)</th>
<th>Number of Camps</th>
<th>Approximate Area (ha) per Camp within Region</th>
<th>Density Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brigalow Belt</td>
<td>36,528,110</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>745,472</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell Grass Downs</td>
<td>24,162,330</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2,196,575</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel Country</td>
<td>23,217,290</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3,869,548</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf Plains</td>
<td>21,910,940</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1,991,904</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulga Lands</td>
<td>18,605,810</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3,100,968</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape York Peninsula</td>
<td>12,305,220</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>585,963</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Einasleigh Uplands</td>
<td>11,625,730</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>375,024</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Highlands</td>
<td>7,343,640</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1,468,728</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desert Uplands</td>
<td>6,941,100</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3,470,550</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Fatal Frontier: Temporal and Spatial Considerations of the Native Mounted Police and Colonial Violence across Queensland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>Avg Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Queensland</td>
<td>6,248,420</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>520,702</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wet Tropics</td>
<td>1,992,900</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>104,889</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Queensland Coast</td>
<td>1,484,280</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,484,280</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England Tableland</td>
<td>774,800</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other interesting patterns emerge when the distribution of Native Mounted Police camps is plotted against Aboriginal language groups. This reveals the extent to which some groups bore the brunt of police brutality, suffering multiple camps in their territory, particularly so for the clans in southeast Cape York Peninsula. Of course, the absence of a Native Mounted Police camp in any clan group’s country did not protect them from violence, as detachments typically ranged widely, and reprisals at the hands of settlers operating outside the law were still possible. Nonetheless, groups with fewer camps, or without camps in their core territory, may have been slightly better insulated from violence than others.

**Archaeological Signatures of Native Mounted Police Camps**

The duration of a Native Mounted Police camp conditioned the extent of violent attacks and reprisals that were possible in its vicinity but could also be assumed to affect the potential archaeological signature of the force’s presence. Yet even at the longest occupied sites, field investigations have revealed that material evidence of occupation is often sparse (Barker et al. 2020). Since camps were never intended to be permanent and were always constructed and maintained with government parsimony uppermost in mind, they mostly consisted of timber slab and bark constructions with few permanent foundations. Only rarely and in the latest decades of the nineteenth century were sawn timber and corrugated iron used to build structures, and in all cases any reusable building materials were routinely moved to the next camp when the detachment received orders from headquarters to relocate. Surviving architectural features are therefore rare to nonexistent. Some features that do remain, such as ant bed flooring, are subsurface and only detectable through the use of archaeological geophysical survey or excavation (Lowe et al. 2018). Other remaining surface features include remnant house or yard posts, stone lines demarcating pathways, and stone fireplaces.

Some stone features visible at Native Mounted Police camps imply nonstructural and nondomestic activities of a localized nature. Camps at Burke River (western Queensland), Mistake Creek (central Queensland), and possibly Puckley Creek (Cape York Peninsula) all have stone features that were almost certainly constructed by Aboriginal people as part of an earlier ceremonial presence at these sites, given their form and the absence of associated nineteenth-century artefact assemblages. The siting of Native Mounted Police camps in such significant Aboriginal locations is unlikely to have been coincidental, although their need for reliable water would have caused geographic synchronicity with previous Aboriginal use regardless. Historical evidence bears out at least some element of deliberate placement vis-a-vis key Aboriginal places. A hand-drawn map of the police district of Cardwell, for example, shows the placement of the Native Mounted Police camp at Attie Creek not only in relation to the major European road, but also to Aboriginal travel routes and a bora (ceremonial) ground (Figure 2a). In this sense, the choice to locate camps in relation to established Aboriginal networks of communication and cere-
monial nodes was a classic technique of colonial discipline and surveillance (Hannah 1997: 175–176). The Native Mounted Police force as a technology of power (sensu Foucault 1979) functioned in this capacity at several levels.

Apart from the choice of location for their camps, the spatial mechanics of surveillance were enacted at a landscape scale by the Native Mounted Police through regular patrolling by detachments to create a visible colonial authority presence on Aboriginal lands. Within the camps themselves, elements of spatial discipline were created through daily practices and the hierarchy of the force. Although there is some variety in camp layouts, from linear to quadrangular, they nonetheless contained various mechanisms for ensuring disciplinary control, such as locating the camp sergeant in closer relation to the troopers, placing officers’ quarters separate from those of subordinates and at one end of a parade ground, or physically elevating the accommodation of the officer(s) above that of subordinates. This strategy is more visible at some camps than others (e.g., Waterview; Figure 2b).

Architectural forms of spatial confinement, such as lockups or palisades, were absent from the camps themselves; of course, when the unofficial policy was to ‘take no prisoners’, lockups were redundant. In this arrangement, the Native Mounted Police camps differed from military encampments in that observational hierarchies were generally minimal, and not reinforced by enclosing walls, watchtowers, or other devices for overtly exercising surveillance. Although permeable boundaries surrounded each camp, at least some degree of enclosure still operated in the sense that troopers were displaced from their own traditional country and thus automatically surrounded by an enemy’s territory. This was a deliberate tactic to reinforce troopers’ reliance on their own detachment, prevent collusion with local Aboriginal people, and inhibit desertion (Richards 2008: 10, 120–182). The fact that there were, nevertheless, many instances of resistance in the form of desertion and sometimes open rebellion against officers merely highlights the imperfect nature of the Queensland Native Mounted Police as a disciplinary institution.

At the most personal level, applicable to the individual troopers, the structure and nature of the force was designed to inculcate European notions of personal discipline, including dress, deportment, and hygiene, reinforced through hierarchy and punishment to create obedient, active troopers. Many camps featured neat rows of bark huts that served as the modest residences of troopers, their wives, and their children (Figure 2b). As women had often been captured from local Aboriginal groups and the men were often frontier conflict victims themselves (Burke et al. 2018), the huts cloak a very sinister installation with a thin veneer of European respectability and domesticity.

**Conclusion**

One repercussion of feminist and postcolonial archaeology (e.g., Gero & Conkey 1991; Lydon & Rizvi 2010; Silliman 2005; Spector 1993) has been the challenging of conventional (gendered and colonialist) narratives. It is in this context that frontier conflict associated with the British diaspora has proven fertile ground for such approaches, both domestical-
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ly and abroad. The Native Mounted Police camps from which government-sanctioned paramilitary forces led patrols to ‘disperse’ the Aboriginal peoples of Queensland are perhaps the most visible archaeological manifestations of the frontier wars in Australia. The use of such phrasing as ‘the other side of the frontier’ in Reynolds’s (1981) seminal book on the topic has in part contributed to the notion that there was in fact some particular line in the landscape, on one side of which lay safety but beyond which both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people were at extremely high risk. Following from this approach came the misconceived idea that the location of the ‘frontier’ was in some ways well known and thus allowed for specific places to be patrolled with relative ease and ultimately controlled. Various researchers have challenged this overly simplistic notion (e.g., Godwin 2001; Russell 2001; Wolski 2001), and studies of the Queensland Native Mounted Police add weight to these arguments.

Unlike frontier military camps in other contexts (e.g., the nineteenth-century gaucho ‘fortlets’ in Argentina [Romero 2002], the military camps on the U.S. frontier [Watson 1999], or those camps associated with the American War of Independence [Starbuck 1999]), Native Mounted Police camps in Queensland did not form a defensive cordon of structures akin to a ‘frontier line’. Nonetheless, the location of such camps undoubtedly demarcated a malleable frontier ‘zone’ that was contested, precarious, and violent. The frontier was a place of ever-shifting relationships, as invaders and defenders attempted to retain, gain, or maintain control over country and resources. Places that might have been ‘safe’ for several years could easily become the scene of new confrontations, as demands on resources shifted and tenuous accommodations and relationships that might previously have been reached were retested and found wanting. Accordingly, the establishment of Native Mounted Police camps fluctuated, moving generally outward from the southeastern corner of Queensland, but persisting longer in some areas than others, and requiring some camps to be reestablished in ‘once-pacified’ areas when it became apparent that Aboriginal people were still willing and able to actively defend their lands and communities.

Further, just as Native Mounted Police camps in Queensland presented a less clear-cut ‘line’ of defense than that seen in other settler nations, neither were they routinely associated with battlefields of the type that lend themselves to the kinds of ‘battlefield archaeology’ increasingly common in the United States and United Kingdom (e.g., Freeman & Pollard 2001; Fernández-Götz & Roymans 2017; Scott & McFeaters 2011). While there certainly were some instances of large-scale physical confrontations in Queensland, the frontier and the nature of frontier conflict there were more nebulous and oftentimes clandestine, leaving a more challenging archaeological signature to be identified and interpreted.

The result is that the archaeology of the colonial frontier in Australia is not the usual ‘archaeology of war’. As yet, there are no mass graves with skeletal remains of victims showing evidence of violent death, and even if some were to be identified in the future, they would be the exception rather than the rule. However, the archaeological footprint of Native Mounted Police camps across Queensland provides unequivocal evidence of the scale
and enduring nature of the Native Mounted Police’s operations. The fact that so many camps were required at various locations for a period of fifty-five years provides clear evidence of the persistent and determined resistance of Aboriginal peoples to the theft of their land and the bloodshed that resulted. Such sites raise core questions about the paradox of ‘civilization’ achieved through violence (Atkinson 2003). How could a society that depended on a foundation of law and refined moral sensibilities to justify its colonial worth (Nettelbeck & Ryan 2018; Rowse & Waterton 2018)—achievements that are still celebrated today in various ways—also encompass a concept such as the deliberate extermination of Aboriginal people through a mechanism as brutally efficient and as routinely organized as the Native Mounted Police?

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by an Australian Research Council Grant (DP160100307). In a project of this extent, it is impossible to thank everyone individually, so we give our thanks to the many Aboriginal corporations, communities, and individuals who have assisted us over the years, and to the colleagues, students, and volunteers who have similarly offered their support. In particular, we thank Wayne Beck for his assistance with mapping, and Glen Maclaren, Troy Mallie, and Steve Wealands from Environmental Systems Solutions for their assistance with database development. Thanks also to Alistair Paterson, Lyndall Ryan, and Ian McNiven for reviewing this article, though the viewpoints presented remain those of the authors.

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Evans, R., & Ørsted-Jensen, R. (2014). ‘I cannot say the numbers that were killed’: Assessing violent mortality of the Queensland frontier. Unpublished paper presented at The Australian Historical Association 33rd Annual Conference, University of Queensland, St Lucia, Australia, 7–11 July 2014.


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Queensland Legislative Assembly. (1861). Report from the Select Committee on the Native Police Force and the condition of the Aborigines generally together with the proceedings of the Committee and minutes of evidence. Brisbane: Fairfax and Belbridge.


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Notes:

(1) Although we use the term European, we note that colonizers included peoples of varied cultural backgrounds, including large numbers of Chinese peoples who were particularly involved in the mining industry.

(2) Known variously as the Native Police, the Native Mounted Police, and the Black Police.

(3) While commonly known as ‘pastoral districts’, it is recognized that in some instances pastoralism was not the key European land-use industry, such as in Cook, where mining was more common, and North Kennedy, where timber-getting and agriculture dominated.

(4) A large-scale sheep or cattle farmer.

(5) A nineteenth-century colonial euphemism that is widely accepted as having meant to kill.

(6) Native Mounted Police camps were often referred to as ‘barracks’. Today this term implies a degree of permanence and substance, with a formal structure and layout that many of the camps did not in fact have—some ‘barracks’ were nothing more than a collection of canvas tents.

(7) The values in parentheses are distances to the next closest camp.
While recognizing the serious limitations of the linguistic mapping of Tindale (1974) and Horton (1994), it serves here as the basis for crudely demonstrating that the various clan groups of Queensland were likely unequally impacted by the Native Mounted Police presence, rather than necessarily accurately reflecting group territories. Readers are directed to Monaghan (2003), who provides a detailed critique of some of the flaws in Tindale’s mapping of linguistic groups in northwest South Australia, elements of which are equally applicable to Queensland, such as his boundaries being somewhat arbitrary determinations reflective of Western and colonial concepts rather than Indigenous world-views and based on very few knowledgeable informants.

Lynley Wallis
Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research, Griffith University; Nulungu Research Institute, University of Notre Dame, Australia

Heather Burke
Department of Archaeology, Flinders University

Bryce Barker
Institute of Resilient Regions, School of Arts and Communication, The University of Southern Queensland

Noelene Cole
College of Arts, Society, and Education, James Cook University