

Place Name SUMMARY (PNS) 4.4.1/04

'WITAWALI' (Sellicks Beach)

(last edited: 13/12/2014)

See also PNS 7.1/01 'Witawalang' ('near Cape Jervis').

Abstract

'Witawali' was *possibly* a Kurna name originally, but we know it only from Tindale's informant in the 1930s, the Ramindjeri man Reuben Walker, who gave it as the name of a site on Sellick's Beach near The Washpool.

Its meaning is unknown.

Tindale's spelling suggests a plausible Kurna original: *wita* 'peppermint gumtree' + *wodli* or *warli* 'hut, dwelling' > *Wita-wodli* 'peppermint gumtree dwelling'; and this was his unpublished interpretation.

But there is no evidence from early settlement times that the Kurna used this name here or elsewhere, nor was any other name recorded then;

no evidence that any informant quoted this meaning for it;

no evidence that peppermint gums ever grew in this place or immediately inland from it;

and no currently available evidence of any informant telling any researcher that Tjilbruki turned inland here into peppermint gum country (as Tindale's writings claim).

Versions of the same name were also given by other Ngarrindjeri-speaking informants in the 1930s for two other places on Fleurieu Peninsula (see PNS 7.1/01 'Witawalang').

However, when Tindale published his composite version 'Wanderings of Tjirbuki' in 1987, he suppressed most of these details, opting only for Walker's 'Witawali'. He equated it with a known beach spring site at the Washpool's original outlet channel,¹ which in 1935 had been identified (but not named) by another of his Ngarrindjeri informants, Karlowan, as one of the places where Tjirbuki wept. This location is probably correct for the spring, if not for the name.

<i>Coordinates</i>	The spring was probably at the old mouth of The Washpool: -35.322406° Latitude, 138.448232° Longitude.
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¹ This outlet has been closed off since the Washpool was drained. It is about 300 metres south of the current artificial outlet at the end of Button Rd.



Language Information

<i>Meaning</i>	Unknown
<i>Etymology</i>	<i>wita</i> [meaning uncertain] + <i>wali</i> [meaning uncertain]
<i>Notes</i>	Tindale speculated that it is Kurna <i>wita</i> 'peppermint gum' + <i>wodli</i> 'house'. While this gloss is theoretically possible, it is rendered quite uncertain by the non-Kurna sources of the name, and because it makes no ecological sense at this location.
<i>Language Family</i>	uncertain: possibly Thura-Yura: 'Kurna', or a Kurna-Ngarrindjeri hybrid.
<i>KWP Former Spelling</i>	possibly Witawali
<i>KWP New Spelling 2010</i>	possibly Witawali
<i>Phonemic Spelling</i>	Uncertain
<i>Pronunciation</i>	probably "Wita-wali":
<i>Pronunciation tips</i>	Stress the 1 st syllable; secondary stress on the 3 rd ; 'i' as in 'pin'; 'a' as in Maori 'haka'.

Main source evidence

<i>Date</i>	1934
<i>Original source text</i>	"...Tjelbruke saw his emu tracks of escaping [male?] emu. Didn't trouble catching fish, got several hauls then followed emu tracks to Sellicks Hill. Track across to Victor Harbour as thought emu was going right round coast... He (Tjel.) started from there [<i>Kingston Park</i>] walked... got round past Sellicks Hill 1 st hill point past there place called Warabari ..."
<i>Reference</i>	Tindale 'SE of SA' journal Vol.2, AA 338/1/33/2: 44-5, 48.
<i>Informants credited</i>	Milerum 15/2/1934.
<i>Informants uncredited</i>	

<i>Date</i>	1935-6
<i>Original source text</i>	"The old man then carried his nephew's body to the beach at Sellick's Hill, where he noticed a fine bay, suitable for catching sea salmon at night-time. His tears brought a spring into being there. From Sellick's Hill he went along the coast, passing ['Maitpa`nja] (Myponga) on his left..."
<i>Reference</i>	Tindale 1936, 'Story of [Tji:rbuki]', Tindale and Mountford, 'Results of the Excavation of Kongarati Cave', <i>Records of SA Museum</i> 5(4): 501.
<i>Informants credited</i>	Albert Karlowan
<i>Informants uncredited</i>	



<i>Date</i>	1930s
<i>Original source text</i>	<p>“Witawali” [<i>ink circle just south of The Washpool</i>].</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “track of Tjilbruke to Brighton t. Karlowan”. - “native track (short)”. - “Data from Milerum Tangane / Karlowan Jaralde / Reuben Walker 1/2caste [Ramindjeri]”.
<i>Reference</i>	Tindale annotated map n.d. [1930s], ‘Summary of Kurna area’, AA 338/16/8.
<i>Informants credited</i>	Milerum (Clarence Long), Reuben Walker.
<i>Informants uncredited</i>	

<i>Date</i>	c.1940
<i>Original source text</i>	<p>[<i>from ‘Ruwuru (near Aldinga)’</i>] “He picked up his sister’s son again and went on walking to a cave (<i>peki</i>) near Sellicks Beach. Then he walked with his burden to a swamp of <i>nguri</i> reeds near Karikalingga (Carrickalinga Hill)...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “big spring” [<i>at Sellick’s Beach</i>]. - “<i>nguri</i> reed swamp” [<i>just inland at Sellick’s Beach</i>].
<i>Reference</i>	Berndt and Berndt 1993, <i>A World That Was</i> : 234, 330-1.
<i>Informants credited</i>	Albert Karlowan
<i>Informants uncredited</i>	

<i>Date</i>	n.d. (?1980s)
<i>Original source text</i>	<p>“Warabari</p> <p>Highest part of hill close to Cape Jervis where Tjirbruke found a cave for the body of his nephew. In Ephraim Tripp’s version the place is named Witawali and is attributed to Ngurunduri and not Tjirbruke.</p> <p>Tindale ms SESA J 2:50 / Tindale from E.Tripp Sept 1940.”</p>
<i>Reference</i>	Tindale Kurna place-name card 633.
<i>Informants credited</i>	
<i>Informants uncredited</i>	

<i>Date</i>	1987
<i>Original source text</i>	<p>“Then Tjirbruki left [<i>Kingston Park</i>], following the track of his <i>kari</i> [<i>emu</i>] along the coast... to [Witawali] where the tracks turned inland. There, near Sellicks Hill, the old name of which has been forgotten, the tracks were lost... The old man then carried the body to [Witawali] on the beach north of Sellick’s Hill. He noticed that there was a fine bay which would serve at night as a good netting place for sea salmon. His tears were still flowing and brought a spring into being there (vicinity of Section 639, Hundred of Willunga)... Instead of continuing along the beach he turned inland and climbed over Sellick’s Hill. He kept Maitpanga on his left and climbed another high hill...”</p>
<i>Reference</i>	Tindale 1987, ‘Wanderings of Tjirbruki’, <i>Records of SA Museum</i> 20: 7a, 8b, 9a.
<i>Informants credited</i>	
<i>Informants uncredited</i>	

Date	n.d. (1987 or after)
Original source text	“ Witawali - Sellicks Beach near Salt Lake Section 639 H of Willunga. In the Kurna story of Tjirbruki, a coastal track or pathway here turned inland and entered peppermint gum tree country hence [ˈwita]. Informant (R. Walker) left off the suffix (at) which would appear in full as Witawalingga. Tindale ms from Reuben Walker. Tindale 1987 Rec SAust Mus 20:8 Witawalingga.”
Reference	Tindale Kurna place-name card 651.
Informants credited	Reuben Walker
Informants uncredited	

Discussion: HERO AND SPRING AT SELICKS BEACH:

TINDALE’S ‘WITAWALI’ IN 1987:

‘Witawali’ on Sellick’s Beach is well-known from Tindale’s 1987 publication ‘The Wanderings of Tjirbruki: a tale of the Kurna people of Adelaide’. In his essay it is a place for turning inland, near the mouth of The Washpool:

Then Tjirbruki left [Kingston Park], following the track of his kari [emu] along the coast... to [ˈWitawali] where the tracks turned inland. There, near Sellicks Hill, the old name of which has been forgotten, the tracks were lost.²

Much later in the story, another southward journey of Tjirbruki along the coast identifies this place with the site of a spring:

The old man then carried the body [of his murdered nephew] to [ˈWitawali] on the beach north of Sellick’s Hill. He noticed that there was a fine bay which would serve at night as a good netting place for sea salmon. His tears were still flowing and brought a spring into being there (vicinity of Section 639, Hundred of Willunga)... Instead of continuing along the beach he turned inland and climbed over Sellick’s Hill.³

Tindale’s various sources fifty years earlier gave him various pieces of his version above – but not necessarily with the same context.

² Tindale 1987, ‘Wanderings of Tjirbruki’, *Rec. SA Museum* 20: 7A.

³ Tindale 1987: 8B.

'WITAWALI' FROM WALKER IN 1934-5:

According to Tindale, the Ramindjeri man Reuben Walker told him that "*Witawali*" was the name of

*Sellicks Beach near Salt Lake Section 639 H of Willunga.*⁴

This lake is The Washpool near Silver Sands south of Aldinga Beach.

The card is a very late record, obviously written in or after 1987 since it also cites Tindale's published 'Wanderings'. It gives as its primary source a "Tindale ms from Reuben Walker", which is probably the annotated smaller-scale map 'Summary of Kurna area' on which the name "*Witawali*" is noted. It is attached to an ink circle (i.e. water site) marked just south of The Washpool on section 639 here and on other versions of the same map.⁵ A note on the '*Witawali*' map says that "This sheet is a summary of data on Hundred maps NBT" (i.e. his larger-scale maps on which the data are more likely to be original records); but the name is not found on the relevant Hundred of Willunga map. Another general note says "Data from Milerum Tangane / Karlowan Jaralde / Reuben Walker 1/2caste [Ramindjeri]". This map is as near as we can get to a primary record. It probably dates from 1934-5 when Tindale was interviewing Walker in the last year of his life.

The above-mentioned card continues:

*In the Kurna story of Tjirbruki, a coastal track or pathway here turned inland and entered peppermint gum tree country hence [*wita*]. Informant (R. Walker) left off the suffix (at) which would appear in full as *Witawalingga*.*

Certainly a full version of the place-name in Kurna would be *Witawalingga*, adding the normal locative suffix to the given four-syllable root. But was it a Kurna name?

SELLICK'S BEACH ACCORDING TO KARLOWAN IN 1935:

Tindale's most prolific informant was Clarence Long (Milerum), who gave him a long account of one version of the 'story of Tjelbruke' in 1934;⁶ but this remained unpublished for several decades.

⁴ Kurna place-name card 651, n.d.

⁵ Tindale annotated map AA338/16/8; cp. maps 16/6 and 16/7.

⁶ Milerum 1934, 'The Story of Tjelbruke', Tindale SE of SA journal 2, AA 338/1/33/2: 44-50.

What Tindale did publish very promptly after his fieldwork was a different and much shorter account of Tjirbuki by Albert Karlowan. This was given some time in 1935, and the earliest source for it that I have been able to find is an almost finished write-up entitled 'The story of Tji:rbuki (Tjilbruke, Tjelbruke, Tj'erbruke) from Karlowan and notes from Milerum, published in 1936'.⁷ The text is substantially the same as that published as 'Story of [Tji:rbuki], a legend of the people of Rapid Bay'.⁸

Karlowan did not tell the early part about the tracking of the emu, but focussed on the grief-stricken journey southward along the coast with the dead and smoked body. After Tjirbuki's tears had created another life-giving beach spring at Port Willunga,

The old man then carried his nephew's body to the beach at Sellick's Hill, where he noticed a fine bay, suitable for catching sea salmon at night-time. His tears brought a spring into being there. From Sellick's Hill he went along the coast, passing [Maitpa`ŋa] (Myponga) on his left, and came to [Karika:liŋ`ga]...

WHICH TREE?

It is inherently unlikely that any of Tindale's Ngarrindjeri-speaking informants knew the meaning of Kaurna words like wita 'peppermint gum' and witu 'reed', and there is no evidence to show it.⁹ The glosses are almost always Tindale's; as he admitted in this case, "presumably Milerum did not dissect the name".¹⁰ Accordingly, the application to "peppermint gum tree country" is probably Tindale's own deduction. Likewise the connection with Tjirbruki, whom Walker never mentioned in any interview.

In fact Tindale made more than one guess about all this. Another card says with equal conviction and better geographical evidence that Tjilbruke turned inland into *stringybark* country:

`Jultiwir:a - lit. Stringybark forest...

(and on the reverse of the card):

*Based on Tjirbruke going inland at Sellicks Hill and camping – presumption is that the permanent spring on 737 is his camping place in the julti forest. NBT.*¹¹

⁷ MS in 'Notes on the Kaurna', AA 338/1/35: 78-85.

⁸ in Tindale and Mountford, 'Results of the Excavation of Kongarati Cave', *Records of SA Museum* Vol. 5 (4): 500-1.

⁹ See the discussion of derivations in PNS 2/21 Witawattingga and 2/22 Wituwattingga, and my document 'Wita and Witu'.

¹⁰ Ramindjeri vocab card 'wita', in AA338/7/1/17.

¹¹ Kaurna place-name card 507.

As a visit to the mouth of the Washpool will soon suggest, a beach or dune spring like this is not a place where either peppermint gums or stringybarks grow. It is not likely that a beach site would be named after a scrub destination several miles inland; but even if it were, the peppermints are very doubtful. Large tracts of “Stringy Bark Forest” did exist behind the range there, as surveyor Henry Ide and several early sources recorded,¹² but I am not aware of any record of peppermint gums in the area.¹³

TURNING INLAND: SELICK’S BEACH ACCORDING TO TINDALE:

In 1987 Tindale published ‘Witawali’ as one place only: Walker’s ‘Witawali’ near The Washpool. He equated this with three other unnamed sites near Sellick’s Hill which had been mentioned by his informants. Only one of them was originally specified as the *Beach*: this was from Karlowan, for whom “the beach at Sellick’s Hill” was not a ‘turning’ spot but a place for catching salmon, where Tjirbuki created a spring. In fact there is very good reason to believe that in Karlowan’s version of the story Tjirbuki did not ‘turn’ as far as the forest behind the range, but carried the body south from Sellick’s Beach along the cliff coast.¹⁴

It is probably justifiable to regard Karlowan’s site as an equivalent of Walker’s, but probably not the other two unnamed Sellicks sites which occur in Milerum’s original account of ‘Tjelbruke’ in 1934. Here Sellick’s *Beach* is not mentioned at all.

Firstly, early in the tale Tjelbruke was hunting an emu, and

*followed emu tracks to Sellicks Hill. Track across to Victor Harbour as thought emu was going right round coast.*¹⁵

the only occasion in the primary sources when the hero ‘turned inland’ in the vicinity of Sellick’s Hill. Probably the route on this occasion was the old track via *Kurtandilla* or Mt Terrible, the Myponga Valley and Hindmarsh Tiers.¹⁶

Secondly, much later in the same account, he was carrying his nephew’s body and

started from [Kingston Park] walked... got round past Sellicks Hill”

¹² Ide 1840, Field Book 9, GNU: 46[a], 53.

¹³ However, Steve Kingdon, Director of Botanic Gardens Records, says that it is not completely impossible that *Eucalyptus porosa* (one of the species known as ‘Peppermint gum’: see PNS 2/21 Wita-wartingga) might find a survivable pocket behind the dunes or behind the scarp (p.c. 6/5/11). The question would still remain: Why name a site ‘Peppermint gum house’ in an area where the tree was untypical? If it should ever be shown that there was once a substantial forest in the area featuring Porosa gums, we might have to upgrade our estimate of the credibility of the name ‘Witawali’ here.

¹⁴ See also Geographical Postscript in PNS 5.1/6 ‘Warabari’.

¹⁵ Milerum 1934, ‘Story of Tjelbruke’, in Tindale ‘SE of SA’ Vol.2, AA 338/1/33/2: 45.

¹⁶ See C Schultz 1999 in *Kaurna Paltinna: a Kaurna Song Book*: 103-4.

to 'Warabari', a site just southwest of Sellick's Hill.¹⁷ No mention of whether he did this by turning inland or not.

But Tindale's writings lift the detail from the first incident to colour the second as well, assuming (perhaps without having formulated it consciously) that Tjirbruki "climbed over Sellick's Hill" eastward and into Myponga valley, rather than around the spurs and gullies south of Mt Terrible Gully (Cactus Canyon). But this would have put the Myponga Valley in front of him or on his *right*, contrary to Karlowan's clear detail that he passed Myponga valley on his *left*.

It is fairly certain that route south from Sellicks Beach which Karlowan had in mind was coastal, and involved no more of a detour inland than was necessary in order to avoid having to climb the cliffs, probably crossing Mt Terrible Gully at the standard site below today's main road¹⁸ and then turning back along the flats and gullies above the coastal cliffs, with Myponga valley behind the hills on his left.¹⁹ On this route he would barely have reached the edge of the forest as it was then a little further up the scarp (whether attested stringybarks or unattested peppermints) before turning back west.²⁰

In the absence of 'tree' information from his primary sources, we may conclude that Tindale got most of these details from linguistic and ecological speculation at his desk. He did not mention either peppermints or stringybarks in connection with Sellick's Hill in 'Wanderings' 1987: perhaps because he recognized then that he did not know any of this with enough certainty. But he still went on to record the peppermints as fact on the later place-name card 651.

OTHER 'WITAWALIs':

The situation is complicated by other records which show that in 1940 Tindale was given a quite different location for a 'Witawali' by another Ramindjeri man, Ephraim Tripp. This site was "attributed to Ngurunduri and not Tjirbruke", somewhere "close to Cape Jervis" at a high hill: the same place or places which Milerum in 1934 had named 'Warabari', where Tjilbruki both entered and emerged from a cave. Milerum also gave another 'Warabari' at an alternative location near Myponga Beach in the same story, and (elsewhere) a place-name 'Witawalang' as the cave exit. Tindale ignored these alternative versions in almost all of his secondary records. They are discussed in other files.²¹

¹⁷ AA 338/1/33/2: 48. For 'Warabari' see PNS 5.1/06.

¹⁸ See my discussion of this crossing in PNS 4.4.3/03 Kurtandilla.

¹⁹ See PNS 5.1/06 'Warabari'.

²⁰ For the forest on the Sellicks scarp in 1839 see Diagram Book Hundred of Willunga, p.4(2), GNU. See also my discussion of 'baldness' in this area in PNS 1/01 Yarna.

²¹ See PNS 7.1/1 'Witawalang' (Cape Jervis); 5.3/4 'Wataraparringga'; and 5.1/6 'Warabari' (Myponga area).

THE WORD:

Considered in itself, 'Witawali' might be a Kurna word, even though there is no evidence or likelihood that Walker, Tripp or Milerum knew the meaning of any of the morphemes.

In Kurna *wita* is 'peppermint gum'. The morpheme (if not the meaning) is perhaps more likely to have some connection here because there is no known *wita* in the Ramindjeri-Ngarrindjeri language spoken by the three informants.

In Kurna, 'wali' could easily be a variant pronunciation of *wodli* or *worli* 'house, wurlie'; but there is also *wadli* 'disliked', useable as a suffix.

So, *if* both the morphemes are Kurna, the name as recorded could conceivably represent either *Wita-wodli* 'peppermint gumtree house'; or *Wita-wadli* 'avoiding peppermint gums', though this word might be disqualified as a place-name because it is an adjective.

There are also a couple of obscure 'wal' and 'wald' suffixes in Ngarrindjeri.

Or Walker's tradition might have changed a consonant or an unstressed vowel, so that we have to consider *witte* 'large', *witti* 'be not, do not', *witya* (meaning uncertain), *wityo* 'bone needle', *witu* 'reed', *wodliwityo* 'region of the ribs', and *worliwitya* 'the hole under the arm'.

But we have only one record of the name at this location – from Walker via Tindale, and unsupported by any older evidence – and no certainty that it is a reliable inheritance from Kurna culture. Walker, Tripp and Milerum in the 1930s were separated from any original early Kurna-speaking source by two generations and a language barrier. Coupled with so much related but conflicting information, this makes it unwise to draw conclusions about any meaning for 'Witawali' here.

THE PLACE: SELLICK'S BEACH SPRING:

Karlowan's claim of a "big spring" on the beach at Sellicks²² is not well supported by independent records. However, this may be largely because it was in a place which was tucked away from any likelihood of development and consequently from any notice. The great gullies to the south and the Washpool 'salt water lagoon' to the north blocked it off from almost all through traffic; and it is surrounded by swampy land which could not be used for farming because it was sometimes inundated by seawater at high tides.

²² Berndt and Berndt 1993: 234, 330-1.

But Kaurna elder Lewis O'Brien has seen the spring. Settlers have told that the Washpool was usually fresh except when high seas broke over its sandbar during winter storms.²³ This is not surprising when one considers that it received the drainage of the entire Willunga Basin.²⁴ Its outlet on Section 639 (where the Witawali spring was, according to Tindale) therefore very likely had fresh water in the dunes at most times.

The Washpool system was drained and extinguished long ago, and is usually visible now only as a dark patch in the paddocks. Its current outlet is a drain (enlarged from an old arm of the lagoon) at the end of Button Road. Four hundred metres south of the drain, or a short walk north of Seascape View, Sellicks Beach, the original mouth is now blocked by a low dune build-up. Yet a small grassy depression remains in the dunes there: this was probably once Karlowan's 'big spring'.

This is supported by a brief report from early 20th-century anthropologists and archaeologists. One of them told a meeting that Tommy Walker (a Ngarrindjeri identity well-known in Adelaide in the 1890s) "once said that the North end of Sellicks Beach was the burial ground of the blacks". The 'north end' may certainly be taken to mean the beach immediately south of the Washpool outlet. The reporter added:

*There is a native well there in the form of a hole several yards like, like [sic] a stockhole but without an adjacent earth mound.*²⁵

It was no doubt a source of water for a campsite recorded less than a kilometre south at the mouth of Sellicks Creek, which Tindale marked with the annotation "20-8-15" (probably the date of an archaeological record).²⁶

For Karlowan this was the camp of "a fine bay which would serve at night as a good netting place for sea salmon". The tears of Tjirbuki made the spring to sustain the fishermen, and may continue to flow for the spoiling of his work.

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End of Summary

²³ Gardiner in E Wollaston (ed) 1978, *Aldinga-Sellicks Beach Scrub: a report*, Adelaide, Education Dept SA: 12; Betty Ross (ed.) 1981, *Aboriginal and Historic Sites around Metropolitan Adelaide*, Anthropological Society of SA, :17.

²⁴ For a discussion of The Washpool and the associated Blue Lagoon, see PNS 4.4.1/03 Wakundilla.

²⁵ RS Stapleton reporting to the Anthropological Society of SA in April 1929, small typescript in Tindale 'Notes on the Kaurna: Supplementary Papers', AA338/2/68.

²⁶ Tindale annotated map, Hundred of Willunga, AA 338/24/97.