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Place Name SUMMARY (PNS) 8/39

MITIWARTI

(last edited: 26.3.2020)

NOTE AND DISCLAIMER:

This essay has not been peer-reviewed or culturally endorsed in detail.

The spellings and interpretations contained in it (linguistic, historical and geographical) are my own, and do not necessarily represent the views of KWP/KWK or its members or any other group.

I have studied history at tertiary level. Though not a linguist, for 30 years I have learned much about the Kaurna, Ramindjeri-Ngarrindjeri and Narungga languages while working with KWP, Rob Amery, and other local culture-reclamation groups; and from primary documents I have learned much about the Aboriginal history of the Adelaide-Fleurieu region.

My explorations of 'language on the land' through the Southern Kaurna Place Names Project are part of an ongoing effort to correct the record about Aboriginal place-names in this region (which has abounded in confusions and errors), and to add reliable new material into the public domain.

I hope upcoming generations will continue this work and improve it. My interpretations should be amplified, re-considered and if necessary modified by KWP or other linguists, and by others engaged in cultural mapping: Aboriginal people, archaeologists, geographers, ecologists and historians.

Chester Schultz, [date].

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PREFACE:

My analysis of this and other names north of Adelaide is incomplete, and may be clarified or modified by others later from better knowledge of this part of the land, and from sources not yet consulted. In particular, I did not cover these areas when I searched the records left by the first surveyors (i.e. Field Books and maps held in the SA Geographical Names Unit). The Southern Kurna Place Names Project was originally confined to the region from Adelaide southward.

Abstract

Mitiwarti (in KWP's New Spelling 2010) is the Kurna name for a place on the Gawler River, or perhaps the South Para, in the vicinity of the junction with the North Para; i.e. somewhere on Sections 1, 2, 3 or 24, Hundred of Mudla Wirra.

It was recorded as "Mete Watte River" by Colonel Light in December 1837, as he began to explore the Gawler and South Para Rivers, beginning a short distance downstream from the junction.

Miti means 'hip, thigh, upper leg', and is used also to refer to 'someone who climbs'. 'Watte' could represent either of two separate words which may be homophones, both spelled *warti* (KWP New Spelling): (1) *watte* OR *warte*, 'middle, cause, origin' and 'reason'; or (2) *worti*, 'tail or penis'.

Mitiwarti could therefore have any of a large range of possible meanings: 'the climber's tail or penis', 'between the thighs', 'hips in the middle', 'thigh penis', 'hip tail', 'the climber in the middle', 'the middle of the climber'. But we cannot be sure which of them applied, if any; nor what any of them refers to.

Guesses could include that it might refer to the shape of the main watercourses in the immediate area; or to an unrecorded Dreaming story (possibly related to a conjectural Dingo Dreaming at 'Dingo tooth' (*Kadlitiya*) nearby;¹ or to the main river junction itself; or to the 'climb through the middle' from the plains into the higher lands immediately eastward. We don't know.

Coordinates	Lat. -34.598039°, Long. 138.737084° [junction of Gawler, North Para & South Para Rivers]
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¹ See PNS 8/18 Kadlitiya.



Language Information

<i>Meaning</i>	1. POSSIBLY 'the climber's tail or penis', OR 'hips in the middle', OR 'between the thighs/legs' OR 'climber [in the] middle'; OR 2. POSSIBLY 'thigh penis', 'hip tail', 'middle tail/penis' OR 'climber's tail/penis'
<i>Etymology</i>	<i>Miti</i> 'hip, thigh, upper leg' OR 'climber' + 1. <i>warti</i> 'middle, cause, origin' OR 2. <i>wVrti</i> 'tail, penis'
<i>Notes</i>	Teichelmann & Schürmann distinguished between <i>watte/warti</i> 'middle' and <i>worti</i> 'tail, penis'. These two different words might both be pronounced <i>warti</i> , i.e. homophones: same sound but different meaning, like '[cricket] bat' and '[animal] bat'. There is no way to be sure which of the possible meanings (if any) was the one intended by the place-name.
<i>Language Family</i>	Thura-Yura: 'Kaurna'
<i>KWP Former Spelling</i>	1. Mittiwatte, Mittiwarti; OR 2. Mitteworti
<i>KWP New Spelling 2010</i>	1. Mitiwarti; 2. Mitiwarti
<i>Phonemic Spelling</i>	1. /mitiwarti/; OR 2. /mitiwVrti/
<i>Syllabification</i>	1. "Miti – warti"; OR 2. "Miti – wVrti":
<i>Pronunciation tips</i>	Stress the first and third syllables. <i>i</i> as in 'pin'. <i>rt</i> is a Retroflex <i>t</i> (with tongue curled back). 1. <i>a</i> as in Maori 'haka'. 2. The 3 rd vowel (V) is uncertain (perhaps either <i>a</i> or <i>u</i>).

Main source evidence

<i>Date</i>	Dec 1837
<i>Original source text</i>	<p>"Monday, 11 December, 1837– At 11.45 a.m. left Adelaide with Fisher, Jas. Fisher, Morphett, Berkeley, S. Stephens, Mr Hancock, Jones and Hill...</p> <p>Tuesday 12 December... We started this morning at 6 and came along a very extensive flat a great part of it boggy from the late rains. I rode some way up the hills to the right... After much trouble we arrived at 10.30 a.m. at the Mete Watte River* when we lunched and remained till 3 p.m. then followed the banks of the river upwards for about three miles to bivouac, our bullocks not being able to go any further...</p> <p>* (This is the most tortuous river I ever saw, called Mette Watte.)</p> <p>Wednesday, 13 December – Left our camp at 6 a.m. and travelled nearly in a N.E. direction over high undulating ground of rich soil for about 6 miles when we came to some parts rather boggy. On descending into a beautiful little plain we met with plenty of fresh water. Stopped about 9.30 a.m. at a small river running in a tortuous form from the eastward, and where it can empty itself is to me rather puzzling [?] except into the stream we had just</p>

	left... At length, about 5 p.m., we came to a beautiful valley which I named Lynedoch Vale after my much esteemed friend, Lord Lynedoch..."
Reference	William Light, 'Diary of a Journey to Lynedoch Valley, December 1837', in David Elder (ed) 1984, <i>William Light's Brief Journal and Australian Diaries</i> , Adelaide, Wakefield Press: 132.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Kurna guide hired in Adelaide? or local Kurna person(s) at Gawler River?

'THE METE WATTE RIVER': Discussion:

OBTAINING THE PLACE-NAME:

On 11 December 1837, only 12 months into the colonial invasion, Colonel Light joined a number of other high-level colonists in an expedition from Adelaide to the northwest. His companions included Resident Commissioner James Hurtle Fisher, land agent John Morphett, the enthusiastic explorer Samuel Stephens, and a bullock wagon.² They wanted to "see the country to the north of the Torrens, and, if possible, to get to the Murray".³

were looking for the elusive 'easy route from the Gulf to the River Murray' which had been a big feature of propaganda by the South Australian Company, eager to establish a river trade with the eastern colonies.

Only Light made any substantial record of this trip.⁴ His diary records that on the first night they camped "by the side of the first river, a distance of about 18 miles from Adelaide."⁵ On the following morning, the 12th, they started off at 6 am. Light took a detour into the hills to the east in order to get a good view of the whole plain. "After much trouble" – no doubt with the bullocks and wagon, since they were on "a very extensive flat a great part of it boggy from the late rains" – "we arrived at 10.30 a.m. at the Mete Watte River"; Light's footnote adds, "This is the most tortuous river I ever saw, called Mette Watte."⁶ There can be no doubt that this was what soon became known as the Gawler River.

² Light listed five others in his diary; but, as Elder says, "There is evidence from the diaries that on this trip (and on other trips) there were more persons than those whom Light listed. It appears that 'officers' of the party were named, while 'other ranks' were not. There is nothing unusual about this; other explorers, notably Sturt, did much the same thing" (David Elder (ed) 1984, *William Light's Brief Journal and Australian Diaries*, Adelaide, Wakefield Press:55 n29). The bullock team is mentioned several times.

³ Morphett letter 17/12/1837, in GC Morphett 1936, *The Life and Letters of Sir John Morphett*, Hassell Press, Adelaide: 74.

⁴ Light, 'Diary of a Journey to Lynedoch Valley, December 1837', in Elder (ed.) 1984: 131-4.

⁵ This can only be the Little Para River, although the distance is overestimated.

⁶ Elder/Light 1984: 132.

They could not keep up a strenuous pace for long; Light was already ill with the tuberculosis which would kill him less than two years later. They lunched and rested till 3 p.m., “then followed the banks of the river upwards for about three miles to bivouac, our bullocks not being able to go any further.” It is beyond reasonable doubt that they had passed the junction of the North Para River without noting it,⁷ followed the South Para, and finally ‘bivouacked’, almost certainly at the place which soon became known as ‘Para Pass’, ‘Murray Pass’ or ‘Deadman’s Pass’. It had flat ground next to a large waterhole, sheltered by high banks in the foothills, and it was the only place in the whole area where a bullock wagon could cross the river in order to go further north.⁸

Who told Light about this name? Although there is no record that the expedition took an Aboriginal guide with them, probably they hired one in Adelaide, since they were heading at such an early date into northwestern territory (now called the Barossa), to them so far from Adelaide and unexplored.⁹ Theoretically they might have met Aboriginal people onsite, some of whom may have been able by now to communicate in Pidgin English if they came from further south; but such a meeting would have been likely to result in a diary note about it.¹⁰

THE WORD:

Mitiwarti is clearly a compound of two Kurna words.

Miti means ‘hip, thigh, upper leg’, and is used also to refer to ‘a climber’ or ‘someone who climbs well’.

⁷ To them the junction may have looked like just another minor side gully, not negotiable by the bullock wagon. No colonist knew yet that it was the mouth of a long river.

⁸ Light’s camp was probably on the flat ground in ‘Para Pass’ (Deadman’s Pass Reserve), about 500 metres upstream from the Murray St ford. Adrian Shackley has researched a waterhole next to this patch (see sign #8 ‘Waterholes are Homes’ on the website of the Tapa Pariara Walking Trail, <http://georama.com.au/gawler/> [15/1/16]). This waterhole is a likely focus for the site name *Kadlitiya* (see PNS 8.18). Light painted it during a second trip to the Barossa in 1839 (See Elder/Light 1984: 137).

Light’s journey next day confirms that this was probably where he had camped. His diary of the 13th: “*Left our camp at 6 a.m. and travelled nearly in a N.E. direction*” – [he must have crossed the South Para at Dead Man’s Pass] – “*over high undulating ground of rich soil for about 6 miles [9.6 km] when we came to some parts rather boggy. On descending into a beautiful little plain we met with plenty of fresh water. Stopped about 9.30 a.m. at a small river running in a tortuous form from the eastward [North Para], and where it can empty itself is to me rather puzzling [?] except into the stream we had just left. We rested there till 2 p.m. then started in a direction E. by S. and came to some rather bad ground in the hills with some boggy parts and very hard tugging for the bullocks. At length, about 5 p.m., we came to a beautiful valley which I named Lynedoch Vale after my much esteemed friend, Lord Lynedoch*” (Elder/Light 1984: 132). See Map 2, which shows a rough approximation of his likely route; contour lines show the ‘hills’ near Lyndoch Valley which caused problems for the bullocks.

⁹ Explorers often omitted from their diary lists anyone who was not an ‘officer’ (as noted above). Likewise, most of them mentioned their Aboriginal guides only if some particular reason arose. However, it is also true that by December 1837 some Adelaide explorers were travelling without any Aboriginal guide as far afield as Mount Barker (JB Hack, Morphett and Stephens; see GC Morphett 1936: 69-71), and almost to the Murray River (Cock and Finlayson; see *SA Gazette and Colonial Register* 20/1/1838: 51b-d).

¹⁰ Light had been instructed by the Commissioners to ‘conciliate the natives’. However, by this date the process was largely out of his hands.

‘Watte’ could represent either of two separate words which may be homophones, both spelled *warti* (KWP New Spelling).¹¹ These remain something of a puzzle. The most authoritative source, Teichelmann & Schürmann, used two different spellings (reproduced in KWP’s Old Spelling):

(1) *watte* OR *warte*, which has a range of meanings from ‘middle, centre, midst’ to ‘cause, origin’ and ‘reason’;

and (2) *worti*, meaning ‘tail’ or ‘penis’.¹²

Their distinction suggests that (1) and (2) were pronounced rather differently.¹³

‘Cause, origin’ and ‘reason’ seem unlikely in the context of place-names; ‘middle’ and ‘between’ are much more probable. Light’s spelling ‘watte’ perhaps favours T&S’s identical spelling for ‘middle’. But the ‘tail/penis’ word cannot be discounted, as Light would not have noticed subtleties of pronunciation.

We therefore have a range of possible interpretations of the name. In what I think might be a descending order of probability: (more likely) ‘the climber’s tail or penis’, ‘between the thighs’, ‘hips in the middle’, ‘thigh penis’, ‘hip tail’, ‘the climber in the middle’, ‘the middle of the climber’ (less likely), etc. But of course all this interpretation is a matter for debate.

WHERE WAS MITIWARTI?

Where exactly was the site *Mitiwarti*, and how extensive?

Light’s ‘Mete Watte river’ was “about three miles” below his next camp, almost certainly at the Dead Man’s Pass crossing. If we take those ‘three miles’ literally, measuring downstream from his campsite next to the waterhole, then he had met the river in the vicinity of Penrith Av and Para Para Close, Gawler West.¹⁴ Here the river is certainly ‘tortuous’, making two almost closed loops.

We don’t know more than this, apart from a negative: we should not take too literally Light’s assumption that it was the name of ‘the river’. So near to the junction of the three main watercourses, we might ask ‘which river?’ Light’s next three miles covered about 1.5 km of what we now call the Gawler up to the junction, and about 3.3 km of the South Para. For some years these were regarded by many colonial travellers as ‘the same river’.¹⁵ But Aboriginal naming

¹¹ – as assumed in KWP’s Morley & Amery *Kurna Language Dictionary* 2014 (:161). An example of a homophone is ‘bat (in cricket)’ and ‘bat (the animal)’; the two words have the same sound but different meanings.

¹² Teichelmann tentatively distinguished *warte* ‘middle’ from *watte* “cause, origin [sic], or something of that description”; but also wondered whether they were actually “one and the same word” (Teichelmann MS dictionary 1857, under ‘warte’ and ‘watte’). He did not include *worti* in this observation, but retained it as a separate word with that spelling.

¹³ However, we don’t have enough information – e.g. cognate equivalents in neighbouring languages – to be sure about this, or to be sure of the exact pronunciation of T&S’s “worti”. The possibility *wurti* is discouraged by the little that we know: In Ngarrindjeri to the south, *wati* means ‘tail’, but *warti* is ‘firestick’ and ‘the planet Venus’. In Narungga to the west, *wardi* may have been the word for ‘tail’. In Nukunu to the north, *wari* (with a retroflex glide *r*, KWP N.Sp.?) is ‘penis’, and *wari* (with a tapped *r*, KWP N.Sp. *wardi*) is ‘west wind’ (Luise Hercus 1992, *A Nukunu Dictionary*, AIAS: 8, <http://learning.mobilelanguageteam.com.au/quickref-nuk/Hercus1992-NukunuDictionary.pdf>).

¹⁴ See Map 1.

¹⁵ See PNS 8/20 ‘Para’.

practices give different names to many different sites on any long watercourse, never a single name to its whole length.¹⁶ Nor can we be sure that the name did in fact refer even to this stretch of to the stream itself; Light's informant could easily have misunderstood the question and accompanying body language, or Light could have misunderstood the answer.¹⁷

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

One clue to interpreting this puzzle might be the shape of the main watercourses in the immediate area, including Whitelaw Creek.¹⁸ Although the whole of this configuration is not obvious from ground level – nor even from the nearby hilltops, in my limited viewing – a crucial part of it around the junction was easily visible from the high ground of pioneer Reid's property in Willaston, and to some extent still is:

*... Gawler as I remember it. Looking from the hill I thought it park-like and beautiful, the fork being well marked by the splendid gum-trees along the banks of the rivers. The kangaroo grass was as high as corn.*¹⁹

And the Kurna Old People were well able to imagine what the whole pattern looked like from above. Their place-names might have interpreted the configuration in terms of body parts, as they often did elsewhere.²⁰

For example, 'hips-middle' or 'hips-source' might perhaps be a generic topographical metaphor with no further significance, referring to any junction of two major tributaries joining to feed a single river, making a shape which loosely resembles a human 'trunk' downstream and two 'legs' upstream.²¹

Alternatively, *Mitiwarti* might refer to an incident in an unrecorded Dreaming story which left a physical trace or landform somewhere in this short stretch of the river. If so, this might also be

¹⁶ Even before we give an English name like 'South Para', the concept of 'a [single long] watercourse' is already a European category, not an Aboriginal one.

¹⁷ e.g. 1: Light (pointing north or northwest or northeast across the creek): "What do you call that?" (What else was visible in that direction?). OR 2: Informant (pointing across the river to a little outcrop near the opposite bank): "That's Mitiwarti". (Light assumes he means the river).

¹⁸ See Map 3. Whitelaw Creek runs from the east alongside the Lyndoch-Gawler road before entering the North Para at Willaston.

¹⁹ Eliza Sarah Mahony (nee Reid) 1898, quoted in [AA Lendon] 1927, 'The First Settlers At Gawler (February 1839)', *Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, SA Branch*, 28: 66.

²⁰ e.g. *Yurirdla* 'two ears' for Mt Lofty and Mt Bonython (see PNS 2/02 *Yurirdla*), and *Parntalilla* 'lumbar spine place' on the ridge at Seacliff Park (PNS 3/06). *Yalawalangga* at Delamere might be *Yarla-wadlangga* 'place of the wallaby leg-calf', perhaps named after the bent-leg shape of the watercourses at that location (see PNS 5.04.01/13 *Yalawalangga*).

²¹ Cp. the widespread Aboriginal use throughout Australia of the body metaphor 'nose' for a cape or peninsula; e.g. in Kurna territory, *Mudhangga* 'Lefevre Peninsula', literally 'nose place' (see PNS 8/06 *Mudhangga*).

related to another conjectural unrecorded Dingo Dreaming at the nearby place which we know was called 'Dingo tooth' (*Kadli-tiya*), somewhere at Gawler town.²²

Could the Gawler River be the 'tail' of an animal (*kadli* 'dingo'?) which is facing east, its legs or body represented by the two Paras?²³ Or could the Paras be 'thighs' and the Gawler the 'penis'?

Could the Gawler be the trunk of an upright man with his head to the west, the Paras being his hips and legs? and did this Dreaming ancestor perhaps '*climb* [through] the middle' here, travelling through this important junction of routes, from the plains into the higher lands immediately to the east? Or is this simple geographical fact itself the actual reference of the name: 'the middle place where you [begin to] climb'? Does *Mitiwarti* refer to both of these at once?²⁴

All of these are only possibilities, guesses. Unless more information turns up, we don't know for sure which of them are correct, if any.

References to background documents

For other Aboriginal place-names around the Gawler River, and the context in which they were obtained in 1839, see PNS 8/20 'Para', 8/14 Muna, 8/18 Kadlitiya, and 8/17 Murlayaki, in that order. See also the password-protected document 'BACKGROUND5polic1839.pdf' on the KWP research webpage <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/kwp/placenames/research-publ/>.

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End of Summary

MAPS ON NEXT THREE PAGES, pp.9-11

p.9 MAP 1: Mete Watte to Light's probable camp: 3 miles.

Base map Source: NatureMaps, SA Government, Dept of Environment & Water [accessed March 2020].

p.10 MAP 2: Light's route in December 1837 (approx).

Base map Source: NatureMaps, SA Government, Dept of Environment & Water [accessed March 2020].

p.11 MAP 3: River shapes around the junction of the Gawler and Para Rivers.

Base map Source: South Australia Property & Planning Atlas (SAPPA) [accessed March 2020].

²² See PNS 8/18 Kadlitiya.

²³ But in this case the 'dingo-teeth' (*kadli-tiya*) – being on the same side of the hips as the legs, if my analysis of the location is correct (PNS 8/18 Kadlitiya) – might have to be those of a second animal or *kadli*.

²⁴ – in the same way that the travels of Tjirbuki established and commemorated some of the travel routes for traditional families around the Adelaide-Fleurieu area.

