

NSW police investigating desecration of Indigenous Myall Creek massacre memorial

Thousands of dollars of damage was done to facilities at the site of one of the most infamous mass killings in Australia's colonial history



New South Wales police are investigating vandalism at the Myall Creek massacre memorial site.

Lorena Allam *Indigenous affairs editor*

Sat 2 Oct 2021

New South Wales police are investigating after the Myall Creek massacre memorial was damaged with a racist slogan written into the ground.

Descendants of the survivors of the infamous 1838 massacre say they are shocked by the damage.

“We are just saddened by what was done at the memorial,” said Aunty Sue Blacklock, a direct descendant of the survivors of the massacre, and a founding member of the Friends of Myall Creek committee which looks after the site.

The Myall Creek memorial is at one of the most infamous massacre sites in Australia.

At least 28 Wirrayaraay men, women and children were slaughtered by 12 colonists on 10 June 1838. Seven of the perpetrators were tried and found guilty. It is the only known case in Australia where white settlers were convicted and hanged for such crimes.

Every June, hundreds of people gather at the site for a memorial service where descendants of victims and perpetrators come together to mourn and acknowledge their shared history.



Damage to Myall Creek massacre memorial in NSW.

There was damage to buildings, sandstone steps and railings. A memorial plaque was also vandalised – but the committee is unsure if this was done by the same perpetrators.

Co-chair of the national committee, Keith Munro, confirmed a racist slogan was also scratched into the ground.

Founding and current committee member Marilyn Isaacs said the plaques along the memorial walk had been damaged before. With new additions to the memorial unveiled seven months ago, more security was needed at the site, she said.

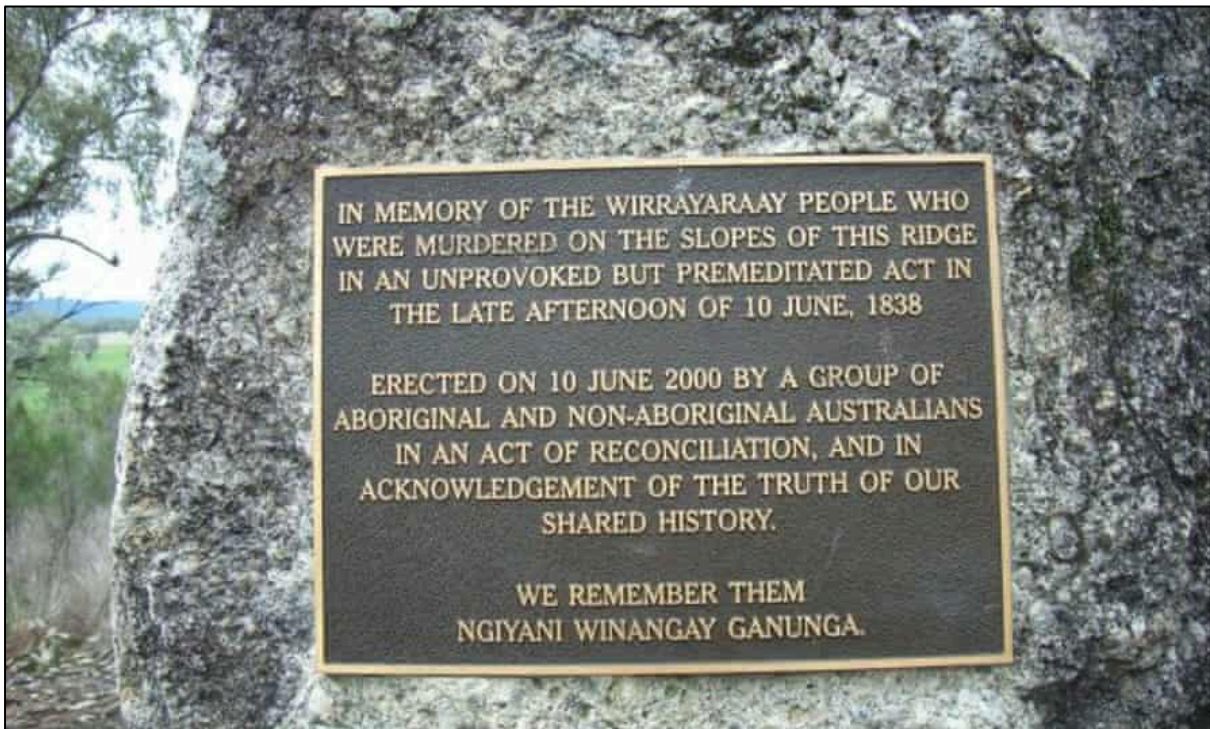
“This place is about reconciliation. I just feel sorry for these people,” Isaacs said.

The Friends of Myall Creek committee formed in 1998 to raise awareness of the massacre. In a statement released on Friday, the committee called on members of the public to “do the right and honourable thing and report any suspicious activity they may have observed at the site”.

“Any fair-minded human being would not defend the actions of those responsible,” the committee said.

The NSW minister and local Nationals MP Adam Marshall condemned the vandalism.

“More than 20 years of hard work has gone into transforming the Myall Creek memorial site into a place of cultural healing and reflection,” Marshall said.



A bronze plaque commemorating the Myall Creek massacre.

“Unnecessary acts like this do little to support the message of reconciliation the site was established to achieve. I hope those who caused damage take a good hard look at themselves and do the right thing by handing themselves in to NSW police.”

Police said the damage occurred sometime in the past few months. Covid lockdowns have made it difficult to regularly visit the site.

“On Friday 24 September 2021, officers ... received reports the Myall Creek memorial had been damaged,” NSW police said in a statement.

“A plaque has been scratched and an access handrail at the site has been removed and stolen. Due to the remote location of the memorial, it is believed the damage occurred between July and September 2021.

“Local police have commenced an investigation into the incident and are appealing for anyone with information that may assist to come forward.”

The memorial site was placed on the Australian national heritage list in 2008 and the NSW heritage register in 2010.

In June 1838, 28 Wirrayaraay people were tied up in daylight, forced to walk out of sight of the Myall Creek station huts, fired at with pistols and shotguns and then hacked and bludgeoned to death with swords and cutlasses. The bodies were burned the following day.

The massacre was carried out by a colonist, John Henry Fleming, and 11 stockmen.

The massacre was reported to the colonial secretary in Sydney who ordered an investigation by a magistrate. Fleming disappeared before the magistrate arrived at Gwydir River. The 11 stockmen were arrested and charged with murder and taken to Sydney for trial in the supreme court.

Seven of the 12 were found guilty of murder and hanged – the only time colonists were punished for their part in a mass killing on the frontier.