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## Place Name SUMMARY (PNS) 5.02.02/01

### 'WIRRINA'

(last edited: 3.6.2019)

#### SEE ALSO:

PNS 5.02.02/04 Yarnauwingga, 5.02.02/02 Anacotilla, 5.02.02.03 Congeratinga (Second Valley).

#### 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*This essay has not been peer-reviewed or culturally endorsed in detail.*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 Kurna, 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 Kurna 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, [29/5/19].*

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### Abstract

‘Wirrina’, the name of a holiday resort between Little Gorge and Second Valley, is not a Kurna word, nor does it belong to any other local language. It is an Aboriginal word adopted in 1972 by the resort developers Holiday Village Co-operative Ltd, who almost certainly took it from HM Cooper’s publication *Australian Aboriginal Words and their meanings* (1949, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1952), where it was listed as “Wirrina – Somewhere to go”. This word probably comes from an interstate language group, possibly around the Gwydir and Barwon rivers.

Other ‘meanings’ given for this place-name in the literature – ‘forest place’ and ‘place of rest’ – have no historical or linguistic credibility.

No spelling ‘wirrina’ (or possible variants) is known in South Australian literature before 1972, except as a misprint for ‘Warrina’ (the name of a hamlet on the old Great Northern Railway line to Oodnadatta).

The genuine old Aboriginal place-names known in this area are *Yarnauwingga*, ‘Congeratinga’ and ‘Anacotilla’. They and their significances are examined in the essays listed ‘See Also’ (above).

<b>Coordinates</b>	Lat. -35.504270, Long. 138.258670 [gazetted location of Wirrina Resort Homestead]
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### Language Information

<i>Meaning</i>	Said to mean ‘somewhere to go’
<i>Etymology</i>	Unknown
<i>Notes</i>	
<i>Language Family</i>	Unknown
<i>KWP Former Spelling</i>	
<i>KWP New Spelling 2010</i>	Unknown
<i>Phonemic Spelling</i>	Unknown
<i>Syllabification</i>	
<i>Pronunciation tips</i>	



## Main source evidence

<i>Date</i>	1908
<i>Original source text</i>	“ <b>Warrina</b> Railway Station was christened by Mr Mann, engineer in charge of the construction of the line, who said that the name was applied by natives to the railway depot and camp near there. In the vocabulary of the Cooper’s Creek tribe <b>Warrina</b> is stated to mean ‘ <b>giving</b> ’.”
<i>Reference</i>	Rodney Cockburn 1908, <i>Nomenclature of South Australia</i> , Adelaide, WK Thomas & Co: 141.
<i>Informants credited</i>	
<i>Informants uncredited</i>	For ‘Warrina – giving’: a Coopers Creek wordlist by Holden, in Taplin 1879, <i>Folklore, Manners, Customs and Languages of the South Australian Aborigines</i> : 20.

<i>Date</i>	1933
<i>Original source text</i>	“ <b>WARRINA</b> – Giving. SA. <b>WARRINA</b> – Place of rest. NSW. WEEROONA – Resting-place. NSW.”
<i>Reference</i>	James R Tyrrell 1933 (reprinted 1944), <i>Australian Aboriginal Place-names and their Meanings</i> , Sydney, Simmons Ltd: 47.
<i>Informants credited</i>	
<i>Informants uncredited</i>	

<i>Date</i>	n.d. [1940s?]
<i>Original source text</i>	“ <b>Warrina</b> - Place of rest.”
<i>Reference</i>	Joah Sugden n.d. [1940s?], <i>Aboriginal Words and their meanings</i> , Sydney: [53].
<i>Informants credited</i>	
<i>Informants uncredited</i>	

<i>Date</i>	1949
<i>Original source text</i>	“ <b>Wirrina</b> – Somewhere to go”
<i>Reference</i>	HM Cooper 1949, <i>Australian Aboriginal Words and their meanings</i> , Adelaide, SA Museum: 27.
<i>Informants credited</i>	No source given.
<i>Informants uncredited</i>	Unknown wordlist



Date	1967
Original source text	- " <b>Warrina</b> (S): a place of rest. However it has also been stated that this is not an Aboriginal name, but was derived from Thomas Warriner who was in Babbage's journey of exploration in 1858." [S = South Australia] - "Wirrinya (N): sleep." [N = New South Wales]
Reference	AW Reed 1967, <i>Aboriginal Place Names and their meanings</i> , Artarmon, Reed Books Pty Ltd: 86, 89.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Reed probably merged the two different 'Warrina' items from Tyrrell 1933.

Date	1972
Original source text	"\$2 MILLION HOLIDAY RESORT A new holiday complex is being developed on the South Coast near Yankalilla. The resort will be called ' <b>Wirrina</b> ' (aboriginal meaning " <b>a place to go</b> ")..."
Reference	<i>Victor Harbor Times</i> 1/12/1972: 1, <a href="https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/187372701/21132907">https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/187372701/21132907</a> .
Informants credited	Resort developers.
Informants uncredited	Probably an HM Cooper edition (1949 or 1952).

Date	1978
Original source text	" <b>Wirina [sic]</b> Holiday Resort <b>Wirrina</b> is an aboriginal word, the meaning of which is ' <b>a place to go</b> ' and ' <b>a place to stay.</b> ' ..."
Reference	<i>Victor Harbor Times</i> 8/11/1978: 20, <a href="https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/186913614/21137783">https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/186913614/21137783</a> .
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	

Date	1979
Original source text	"One of our advertising lines – " <b>A place to stay and play</b> ", is very appropriate..."
Reference	Reinschmidt, L. J. (compiler) and Holiday Village Co-operative Ltd., n.d. [?1979], <i>The Wirrina Story</i> , Adelaide, S. Aust.: Holiday Village Co-operative: 3.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	

Date	1990
Original source text	" <b>Wirrina</b> - A holiday village near Yankalilla. Aboriginal for 'place of rest'."
Reference	GH Manning 1990, <i>Manning's Place Names of SA</i> : 339.
Informants credited	No source cited.
Informants uncredited	For 'place of rest', probably Tyrrell and Reed (in error).

Date	1992
Original source text	- “Wirrina Cove - forest place” - “Wirrina is an Aboriginal woman’s place.”
Reference	Shirley Mulcahy 1992, <i>Southern Fleurieu Historic Walks: Tjirbruke Country</i> , self-published: 45, 54.
Informants credited	No source cited.
Informants uncredited	For ‘forest place’, probably p.c. Tindale or other consultant. For ‘woman’s place’, probably Noel Webb as recycled by RF Williams and others.

### Discussion: WIRRINA, ‘A PLACE TO GO’ 1972:

Three genuine local place-names are known in the rather small area known since the 1970s as ‘Wirrina’ (which is *not* a local word). They are ‘Yarnouwinga’, ‘Congeratinga’ and ‘Anacotilla’. Two of them have very uncertain etymologies. All three have uncertainties about their location, so that it is not entirely clear which parts of the Wirrina area they belong to, or whether they overlap.

In Kurna language the word *wirri* (with a rolled *rr*) means ‘a short mallee-root throwing club or waddy’; *wiri* (with an English-style glide *r*) means ‘shoulder-blade’. *Wirrinna* (New Spelling *wirrina*) means ‘clubs’; *wirinna* (NSp. *wirina*) means ‘shoulder-blades’. Colonial listeners might easily have spelled either of these plurals as ‘wirrina’. But though the spelling is familiar now as a place-name, it was not recorded in SA at all until 1972.<sup>1</sup>

The spelling ‘Wirrina’ was recorded in 1871 as the name of a place in the Gwydir district of northeastern NSW near Moree.<sup>2</sup> This might be a variant spelling or misprint for ‘Werrina’,<sup>3</sup> the name of the squatting station which was selling sheep by 1847 and featured in many newspaper advertisements in the 1860s as ‘Werrina, Barwon River’.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For this reason, I do not pursue other less obvious originals for the spelling ‘wirrina’ in local languages, even though there are a few which might have been conceivable if we had any reason to suppose that the spelling originated locally.

<sup>2</sup> A Trove online newspaper search turned up a settler living at a station or locality called “Wirrina” in the Gwydir district of NSW in 1871 (‘List of runs and rents for the year 1871’, *Empire* (Sydney) 12/1/1871: 4 <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/63114846/5665472>).

<sup>3</sup> The first vowels in ‘Wirrina’ and ‘Werrina’ could be different attempts to represent a similar or identical sound in the original pronunciation (whereas *a* or *u* would have been easily differentiated).

<sup>4</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald* 30/12/1847: 3d, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/12889348/1515526>; *Sydney Morning Herald* 17/7/1849: 2a, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/13166675/1465287>; *The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General advertiser* 11/7/1855, Supplement: 2a, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/703278/129102>.

The spelling does occur twice in early South Australian records, as a place-name; but in both cases it is certainly a mis-transcription or misprint for 'Warrina'.<sup>5</sup>

Since the 1890s Australia has had a popular literature of miscellaneous collections of Aboriginal words aimed at naming houses, properties, boats, racehorses, etc. These publications very rarely specify the place or language of origin for any of the words in their long lists. The most popular of them in SA has been *Australian Aboriginal Words and their meanings* by HM Cooper, Assistant Ethnologist and colleague of Tindale at the SA Museum in the 1940s-50s. With that very authoritative endorsement the booklet was published by the Museum in 1949, and in several more editions until 1969. The first two editions (1949 and 1952) contained the following entry: "**Wirrina – Somewhere to go**". I have not been able to find Cooper's source, but presumably it was an Australian wordlist, probably interstate.<sup>6</sup> In the light of 'Werrina' (above), perhaps the place and language of the Aboriginal 'Wirrina: somewhere to go' may eventually be traced to the Gwydir or Barwon region.

In SA,<sup>7</sup> I do not know any other record of the word 'wirrina' from colonization until 1972, when the Holiday Village Co-operative Ltd embarked on a very large new resort development. It covered the areas once called 'Third Valley' (Section 1595), 'Poole's Flat' (Sections 1579, 1580, 1587), and 'Cutter Flat' (Sections 1579-1588: the cove at the joint mouth of Congeratinga and Anacotilla Creeks); and adjacent hills and cliffs (Sections 1589 and 1596).<sup>8</sup> By the end of 1977 it had added

<sup>5</sup> In two records of people living at **Warrina**, the name was published in the spelling '**Wirrina**':

(1) In 1889 "Alice Gertrude, the dearly beloved child of William G. and Catherine McKay aged 3 years and 2 months" died "of sunstroke and brain fever" at "**Wirrina Creek**" (*SA Advertiser* 22/3/1889: 4,

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/30786495/2711764>). According to the Death Index, her Death Place was **Warrina**; her death was registered at "Frome South Australia", and her Residence was at "Davenport" (Alice Gertrude McKay, Australia Death Index, 1787-1985, from ancestry.com.au (found by Liz Schultz 24/4/19).

(2) In 1891 "Willie Mahomed" was one of 28 men granted a "Pack License", and his operating base was "**Wirrina**" (*SA Government Gazette* No.31, 9 July 1891: 49, [http://www7.austlii.edu.au/au/other/sa\\_gazette/1891/31/49.pdf](http://www7.austlii.edu.au/au/other/sa_gazette/1891/31/49.pdf)).

There were no cameleers working near Second Valley in 1891. **Warrina** was a ration station and railway siding, built on the Great Northern Railway in January 1890; the line was extended further north to Oodnadatta by Jan 1891; "About 50 Afghans were working some 400 camels to provide the town and surrounding stations with supplies"

(<https://www.southaustralianhistory.com.au/oodnadattatown.htm> [24/4/19]). One industrious family went by the name "Mahomet" (<https://www.southaustralianhistory.com.au/afghans.htm> [24/4/19];

<https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/history-culture/2011/07/australias-afghan-cameleers/> [24/4/19]).

<sup>6</sup> HM Cooper 1949, *Australian Aboriginal Words and their meanings*, Adelaide, SA Museum: 27; cp. Second Edition 1952 p.29. Cooper's source for 'wirrina' might be findable by a thorough search of his papers (SA Museum Series AA 64/05), where his voluminous notes for the publication sometimes name his source for a word. A combination of the spelling 'wirrina' with the translation 'somewhere to go' occurs in only two other wordlists that I know of, both of which name Cooper as one of their sources ('Aboriginal House Names and their meaning', *Australian Women's Weekly* 20/12/1961: 28, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/4830881>, which names its sources on p.2, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/51392813/4830855>; and a second version from the same magazine, using the same title and similar material 27/4/1966: 35, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/43200674/4939793>, sources at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/4939791>.

<sup>7</sup> The word did find its way to Western Australia. The 'Wirrina Drive-in' cinema near Perth opened in 1959; the name was "said to be an aboriginal word meaning 'somewhere to go'"; it closed in 1980 (<http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/49266> [30/5/19]).

<sup>8</sup> See Certificate of Title 3239/66. All Sections mentioned in this essay are in the Hundred of Yankalilla. For 'Poole's Flat' and 'Cutter Flat' see PNS 5.02.02/04 Yarnawingga; 5.02.02/03 Kunggaratingga; and 5.02.02/02 Anacotilla.

most of the immediately surrounding land as well, on the coast from the eastern slope of Boat-harbour Hill and north halfway to Little Gorge, inland around 'Anacotilla Farm' and almost to Baker's Nob in the range.<sup>9</sup>

**For its name they chose 'Wirrina', and told the newspapers that it meant "a place to go".**<sup>10</sup> Almost certainly they found this spelling in Cooper and paraphrased his gloss. To this 'meaning' they duly added some marketing spin: "Wirina [*sic*] Holiday Resort: Wirrina is an aboriginal word, the meaning of which is 'a place to go' and a 'place to stay'".<sup>11</sup> They then abandoned the origin of the 'meaning' and allowed it to take independent flight as "One of our advertising lines – 'A place to stay and play'".<sup>12</sup>

As usual, the place-names literature has a cluster of spurious etymologies and 'meanings' for 'Wirrina' – casual uninformed guesses or careless mistakes, presented as facts:

1. Somebody told local historian Shirley Mulcahy that "Wirrina" meant (or "Wirrina Cove" was) a **"forest place"**.<sup>13</sup> This etymology may have come from an unknown local chronicler who knew some words from Teichelmann and Schürmann's 1840 wordlist of Kaurna language; or perhaps from Tindale, with whom Mulcahy seems to have had personal contact.<sup>14</sup> Apart from being an extremely unlikely descriptor for this 'bald' place,<sup>15</sup> the etymology does not work; in Kaurna language 'forest' is *wirra* with an *a*, and 'forest place' is *wirrangga*.<sup>16</sup>

2. According to GH Manning, scholar of South Australian place-names, the Resort's name 'Wirrina' is "Aboriginal for **'place of rest'**".<sup>17</sup> Though he gives no source for this claim, it is fairly certain that he carelessly used another word 'Warrina' from the place-names literature. Manning knew a Warrina locality in SA's north and listed it separately; and he had certainly read and used Rodney Cockburn's 1908 book on nomenclature,<sup>18</sup> which in its entry on 'Warrina' quoted a Cooper's Creek

<sup>9</sup> Sections 1452, 1577, 1578, 1585, 1586, 1592, 1593, 1594, 1597 (see CTs 4004/229, 4004/230 and 4050/234).

<sup>10</sup> *Victor Harbor Times* 1/12/1972: 1, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/187372701/21132907>.

<sup>11</sup> *Victor Harbor Times* 8/11/1978: 20, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/186913614/21137783>.

<sup>12</sup> LJ Reinschmidt (compiler) and Holiday Village Co-operative Ltd., n.d. [?1979], *The Wirrina Story*, Adelaide, Holiday Village Co-operative: 3.

<sup>13</sup> Shirley Mulcahy 1992, *Southern Fleurieu Historic Walks: Tjirbruke Country*, Somerton Park, the author: 45.

<sup>14</sup> Mulcahy's book has about 9 other items of language and place-names (in addition to this one) which (1) sound like Tindale but do not occur in any of the three Tindale publications in her reference list, nor have I found them so far in Tindale's papers; (2) do *not* sound like RF Williams or Schmaal in the archives of the Yankalilla & District Historical Society, nor have I found them there so far.

<sup>15</sup> See PNS 5.02.02/04 Yarnauwingga.

<sup>16</sup> The second vowels are different, and the suffixes are different.

<sup>17</sup> GH Manning 1990, *Manning's Place Names of SA*, Adelaide, The Author: 339.

<sup>18</sup> Manning often quotes or cites Cockburn 1908 in his other entries, and wrote critical essays about his work.



vocabulary source with the gloss 'giving'.<sup>19</sup> Manning was also using James Tyrrell's old place-name book (1933) and AW Reed's very popular compilation *Aboriginal Words and Place Names* (1977) among his major sources.<sup>20</sup> Tyrrell had listed two different words with the same recorded spelling from two different states: "WARRINA – **Giving. SA**" and "WARRINA – **Place of rest. NSW**";<sup>21</sup> Reed, probably relying on Tyrrell when listing the South Australian place, used the NSW gloss but labelled the name as South Australian: "Warrina (S): a place of rest".<sup>22</sup> Between all these inputs, when Manning wrote his entry for 'Wirrina' after the foundation of the Resort, it seems he must have confused its name with 'Warrina', then opted for Reed's incorrect version with the NSW gloss – giving no evidence at all which could relate these to the name and place under consideration, and presumably not having read the quite different 'meaning' cited in the Resort's own propaganda.<sup>23</sup> The result, recycled in all his publications, is "Wirrina - A holiday village near Yankalilla. Aboriginal for 'place of rest'".

As novelist Kurt Vonnegut would say, 'So it goes!'<sup>24</sup>

Despite its apparent similarity to the Kurna word *wirri*, the meaning(s) cited by the developers show that the *name* is not local in origin and has nothing to do with clubs. It must have been taken from a wordlist of some unrelated language, probably interstate.

### POSTSCRIPT:

Mulcahy's book in 1992 asserted that "Wirrina is an Aboriginal woman's place".<sup>25</sup>

She did not cite any source, but the paragraph context shows that she was extrapolating from some old and inaccurate speculations by Noel Webb about the name "Njengalilla" (allegedly a version of 'Yankalilla'),<sup>26</sup> in combination with "the Kongarati woman in the cave" not far away.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Rodney Cockburn 1908, *Nomenclature of South Australia*, Adelaide, WK Thomas & Co: 141. Cooper listed this name and gloss in his books, in the 1969 edition adding an abridgement of Cockburn's explanation of its place of origin (p.35; on p.36 he includes "**Werrina** – A favourite place", from an unknown source – possibly around the Gwydir or Barwon?).

<sup>20</sup> On his major sources see Manning 1990: 371.

<sup>21</sup> James Tyrrell 1933, *Australian Aboriginal Place-names and their Meanings*, Sydney, Simmons Ltd: 47.

<sup>22</sup> The original publication was AW Reed 1967, *Aboriginal Place Names*, Artarmon, Reed Books Pty Ltd: 86. This book was later combined with an earlier work *Aboriginal Words of Australia* (1965) to produce the reprint which Manning used, *Aboriginal Words and Place Names*, Adelaide, Rigby 1977.

<sup>23</sup> See above.

<sup>24</sup> e.g. Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse Five*.

<sup>25</sup> Mulcahy 1992: 54.

<sup>26</sup> See PNS 5.02.01/02 Yarnkalyilla.

<sup>27</sup> See PNS 5.02.02/03 Kunggaratingga (Second Valley).



These old items had recently been publicized in the Introduction of the standard history of Yankalilla.<sup>28</sup>

I will examine this Webbism in more detail, along with what little else I have been able to find out, under the head of one of the genuine local Kurna names, 'Congeratinga'.<sup>29</sup> In the meantime, the true Aboriginal history of the area, from oral and documentary sources, remains to be written.

.....  
*End of Summary*

<sup>28</sup> RF Williams 1986/1991, *To Find the Way: Yankalilla and District 1836-1986*, Yankalilla & District Historical Society: 7.  
<sup>29</sup> See PNS 5.02.02/03 Kunggaratingga (Second Valley).