

**TAKE
ME
TO
THE
RIVER**

**TAKE
ME
TO
THE** THE STORY
OF PERTH'S
FORESHORE
RIVER

JULIAN
BOLLETER

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*For my wife, Dr Sally Appleton
and my daughter, Rose Appleton Bolleter,
Rose of our hearts*

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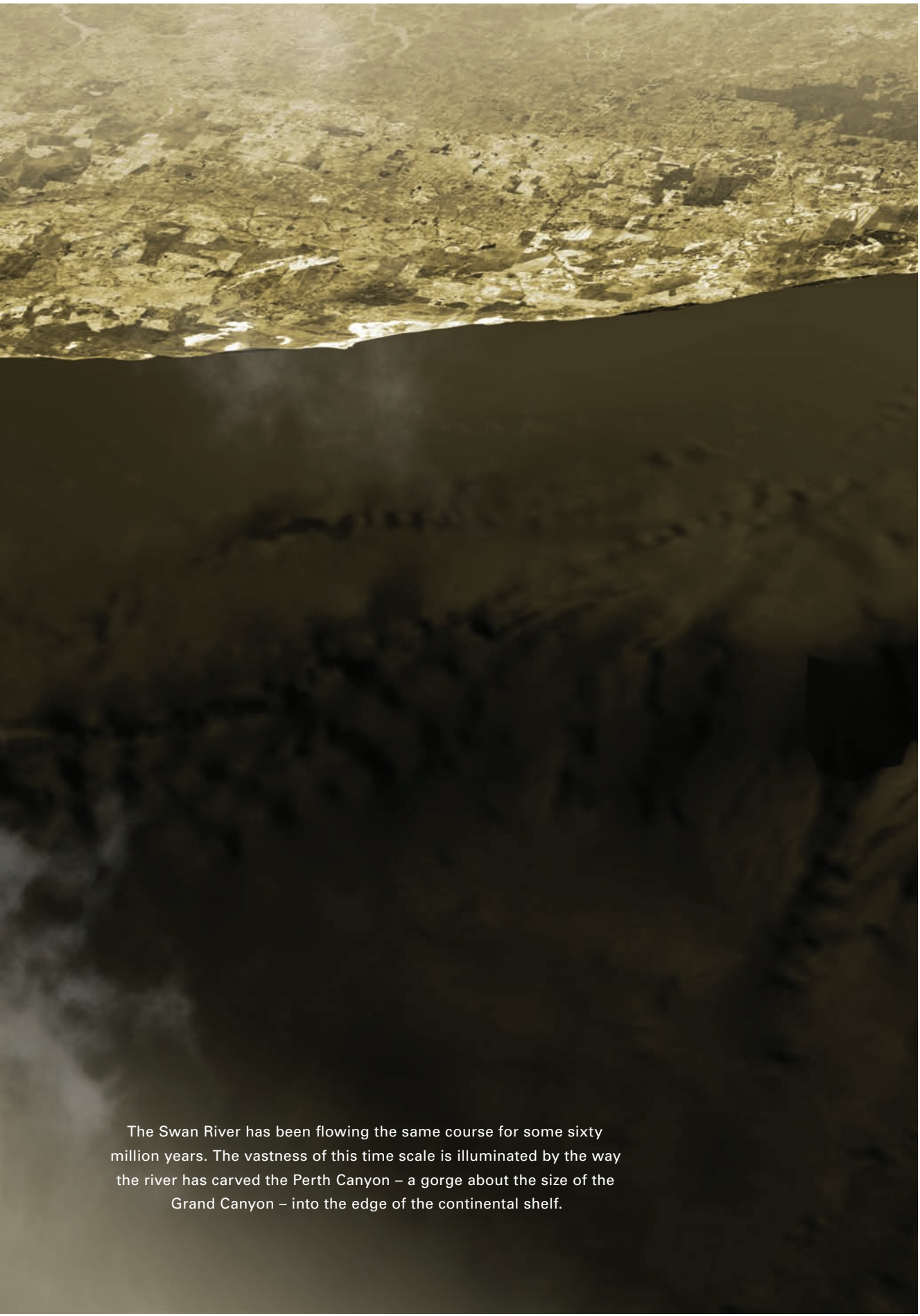
Preface

The Swan River has been flowing the same course for some sixty million years. The vastness of this time scale is illuminated by the way the river has carved the Perth Canyon – a gorge about the size of the Grand Canyon¹ – into the edge of the continental shelf.² This book is concerned with the relationship of European Australian culture to this ancient river system. This historical narrative is viewed through the lens of schemes proposed for Perth's foreshore, the city's symbolic front garden.

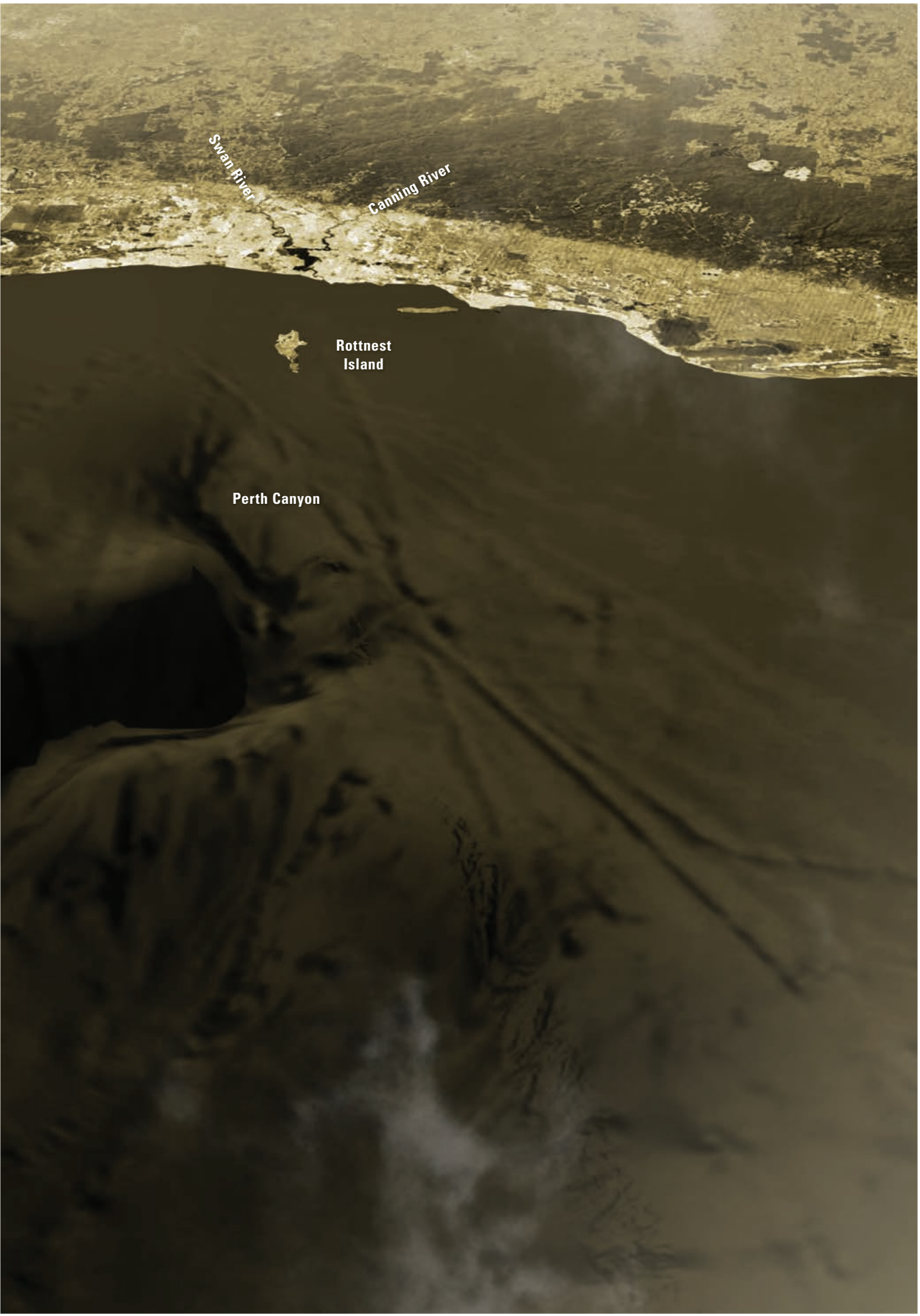
The foreshore has been contentious since the first plan for Perth was drawn up, and has subsequently acted as a veritable sinkhole for proposals. Indeed, as a result of collating material for this book, I estimate that more than 200 proposals have been made for the Perth foreshore since the first identified plan in 1833.

An investigation of this archaeological stratum of foreshore drawings offers a lens through which we can examine and analyse changing notions of what Perth was, what it could have been, and indeed what it can be. As Kim Dovey explains: 'The waterfront is a face or mask of the city that constructs urban character and identity.'³ This book will examine the various masks as representations of how European Australia relates, and has related, to an ancient riverine landscape, and by extension indigenous culture. In this process, proposals for the development of the foreshore will be interpreted in much the same way as a psychotherapist interprets dreams. These proposals are 'symbolic pointers'⁴ to what is taking place in Perth's collective psyche.

With this in mind, a number of chapters in this book relate to particular historical periods which reveal aspects of this psyche. 'Hesperia' concerns Admiral James Stirling's enduring depiction of the landscape of the upper reaches of the Swan River as an Arcadia, while 'Reclamation' traces how requirements for recreational space and aspirations to become a world-class capital city led to the infilling of vast areas of unsanitary, marshy foreshore areas. 'Naturalization' focuses on late-twentieth-century efforts to reconcile the resulting generic greenbelt with Perth's endemic landscape and symbolically with indigenous culture, while 'Urbanity' reveals an early-twenty-first-century society stepping onto the global stage via an iconic urban waterfront project. Finally, 'Looking up river, looking down river' reflects



The Swan River has been flowing the same course for some sixty million years. The vastness of this time scale is illuminated by the way the river has carved the Perth Canyon – a gorge about the size of the Grand Canyon – into the edge of the continental shelf.



Swan River

Canning River

Rottneest
Island

Perth Canyon

Preface

on those twin forces – sea level rise and population growth – that will shape Perth Water and the adjacent city in the twenty-first century.

Perth's foreshore has been the subject of much, often vehement, debate since its founding. In the first section of this book I aim to place the many and various conceptions of the foreshore within their historical and ideological context. I believe that much of the debate about the foreshore has tended to focus on what schemes look like, at the expense of the purpose they embody. The opening five chapters of this book provide this deeper understanding. Chapter 6 entitled '200 years of ideas' sets out all the key schemes for the foreshore as a visualised timeline.

The second section of the book includes essays by a number of the key figures in relation to the Elizabeth Quay project, now under construction. In 'The Case for Elizabeth Quay' Sean Morrison, Chairperson of 'Future Perth' a local advocacy group of young planners, explains the group's gung-ho support for the urbanisation of the Esplanade. In 'City Vision and the City Foreshore' Chairperson of the local advocacy group City Vision, Ken Adam, details the group's long standing involvement in the foreshore and explains their criticism of the two recent urban proposals for the Esplanade. In 'Postcard from Perth' Richard Weller reflects on his experience of forming the two most recent proposals for Elizabeth Quay. Geoffrey London, in 'Watershed', details his experience as Government Architect in commissioning the design team who are now delivering Elizabeth Quay. Finally in 'Ngatj baranginy Ngulluckiny koorliny Derbal Yirigan bilya: Take Me to the Place the Estuary that Place on the River that Rises and Falls' Clint Bracknell, Len Collard, Dave Palmer and Grant Revell articulate a Noongar perspective of 200 years of foreshore planning by European Australia.

By 2022 Elizabeth Quay is projected to be completed, purportedly 'reconnecting the river and the city.'⁵ In this site – once called 'Gumap'⁶ – Noongar people would light fires at night on the beach, making it possible to see and catch the plentiful fish living in those waters.⁷ In 2022 and beyond, at night the lights of restaurants and bars will reflect in the recently dug inlet – perhaps illuminating the odd fish that survives in the moribund Swan River. This book will chart the story of this dramatic transition.

Preface

Notes

1. G. Seddon, *Sense of Place*, The University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1972, p. 72.
2. D. Whish-Wilson, *Perth*, New South Publishing, Sydney, 2013, p. 60.
3. K. Dovey, *Fluid City: Transforming Melbourne's Urban Waterfront*, Routledge, London, New York, 2005, p. 24.
4. D. Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred: Jung, Psyche, Earth*, Daimon Verlag, Einsiedeln, Switzerland, 2009, p. 77.
5. Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority, 'Quaynote', Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority, http://media.mra.wa.gov.au/Documents/Elizabeth-Quay/Quaynote/20419_57145_Quaynote---Volume-1---July-2013.pdf.
6. D. Hughes-Hallett, 'Indigenous History of the Swan and Canning Rivers', Swan River Trust, Perth, 2010, p. 42.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 11.



Wadjemup/
Rottnest Island

Swan
Estuary

Walyalup/
Fremantle

Buneenboro/
Perth Water

Canning River

Upper Swan
River

Guildford

Hesperia

The Swan River existed as a figment of the English imagination before its reality was well understood. The romantic accounts of the upper Swan River landscape by Captain James Stirling and the Colonial Botanist Charles Fraser, from an 1827 voyage, triggered a severe bout of ‘Swan River mania’ in England. In this fevered state the desires of the ‘aspirational class’¹ were projected onto the apparent arcadia of the Swan River landscape: a situation which would in time lead to despair and disillusionment as the early settlers struggled with its often harsh reality. The severe disjunction between the mental image of the Swan River landscape and its reality created what Veronica Brady describes as ‘a country of the mind’: a landscape where ‘physical realities are moulded by psychic factors’.² This chapter will explore how these early depictions of the Swan River landscape were influential in drawing settlers to the Swan River Colony.³ Subsequent chapters will explore this ‘country of the mind’: in particular how the chasm between the psychic image of the Swan River landscape and the reality, ultimately also influenced the ensuing transformation of the river.⁴

Derbal Yaragan

At the time of European settlement, the area in which Perth’s city centre is situated, Boorloo, was part of the tribal lands of Yellagonga, a Noongar elder, whose group was also one of a number collectively referred to as the Whadjuk. The Whadjuk lived around the Derbal Yaragan (Figure 1.1), the indigenous name for the Swan River,⁵ for at least 40,000 years.⁶ For the Noongar, the Waugal, a snakelike Dreamtime creature, was responsible for the creation of the Swan River and the Canning River, as well as other waterways and landforms throughout the South West. Conceptualised in serpent form the

Figure 1.1: The Derbal Yaragan/Swan River.

Waugal was 'all-powerful in creating and maintaining both the natural and the cultural law and order.'⁷

Gumap – the foreshore area where the Elizabeth Quay project is now under construction⁸ – was originally a fishing area in amongst rush beds and salt marshes and it is recorded that there were Noongar camps on the site at the time of colonisation.⁹ The adjacent Perth Water, or 'Buneenboro' to the Noongar people, was also home to numerous black swans which swam in Buneenboro and rested on exposed sand bars.¹⁰ (Figure 1.2)

In 1829 the established pattern of life for Yellagonga's tribe came to an abrupt halt when Captain Irwin sailed up the Swan River with a small battalion of soldiers.¹¹ With a view to claiming possession of the land, they pitched their tent at Yellagonga's camp, possibly at Goonininup.¹² Goonininup was the area beneath Mount Eliza, where countless generations of Aboriginal inhabitants came to drink at a freshwater spring, and fish and swim in the shallow waters of the river. On meeting Captain Irwin, Yellagonga is said to have made a gesture with his hand towards his camp and the spring, which the British interpreted as indicating that he was gifting the camp, the spring, and the surrounding territory to them. Yellagonga then withdrew to another of his camps on Lake Monger, some eight kilometres to the west.¹³ Only four years after this event Yellagonga, at Goonininup, reputedly 'held out his hand to beg a crust of bread',¹⁴ as an observer noted of this event: 'The transition from 'king' to 'beggar' had taken four short years to complete'.¹⁵

Stirling and Fraser's accounts of the Swan River landscape depicted a park-like arcadia, rather than the untamed wilderness which the European explorers had expected. This characterisation of the landscape resulted from the fact that English parks had emerged from the 'grassed, sparsely treed grounds' established by the nobility for deer to feed in so that they could be hunted with great efficiency.¹⁶ In a not entirely dissimilar way Aborigines had 'fired' the land for millennia creating the 'open grassy spaces' favoured by the kangaroos and emus they killed.¹⁷ As Bill Gammage explains:

*They first managed country for plants. They knew which grew where, and which they must tend or transplant. Then they managed for animals. Knowing which plants animals prefer let them burn to associate the sweetest feed, the best shelter, the safest scrub. They established a circuit of such places, activating the next as the last was exhausted or its animals fled. In this way they could predict where animals would be. They travelled to known resources, and made them not merely sustainable, but abundant, convenient and predictable.*¹⁸

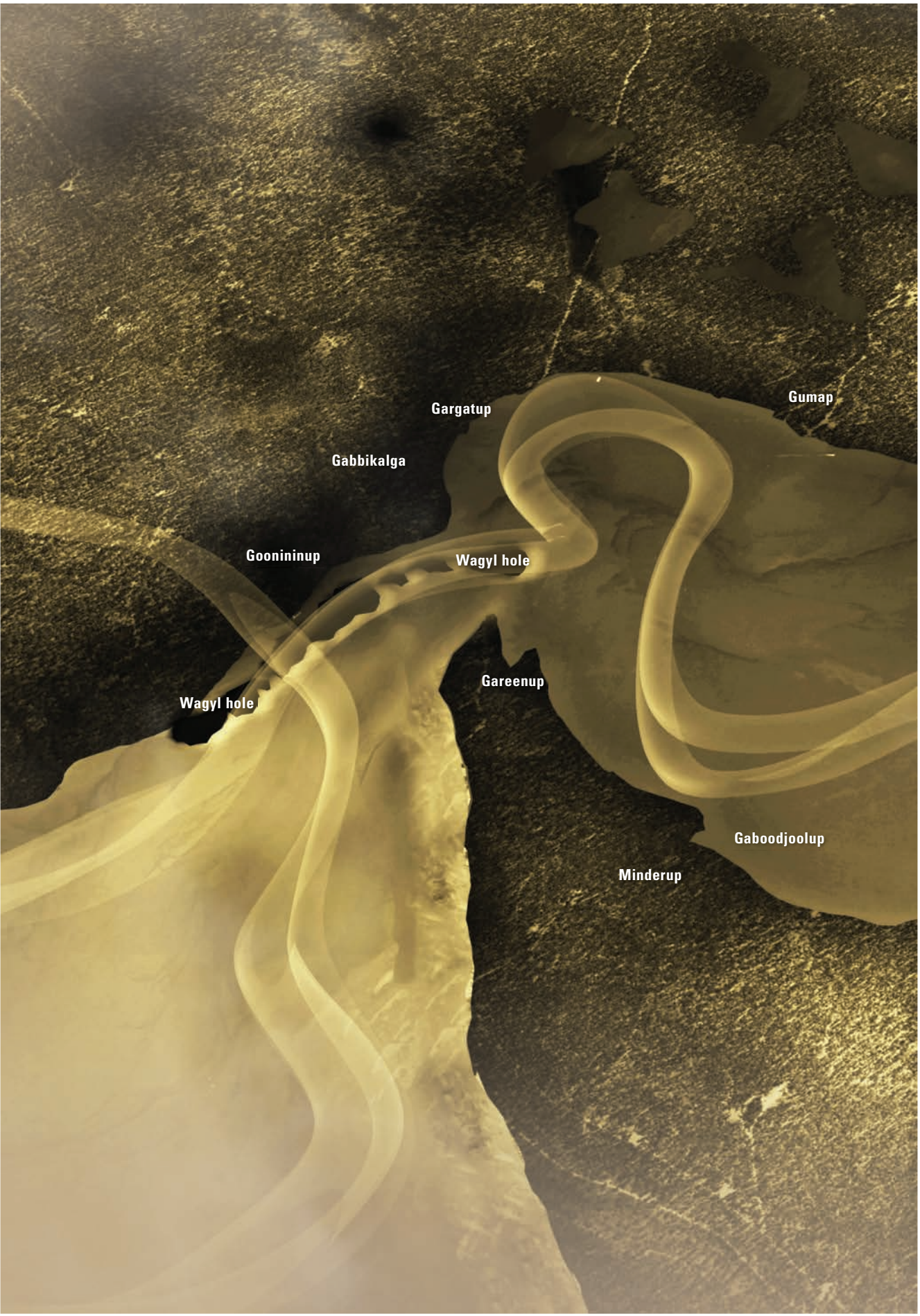
The result of these land management practices carried out by a significant Noongar population¹⁹ was the ‘park-like’ effect commented on by European explorers entering the Swan River landscape.²⁰ In this way Noongar land management practices can be seen to have inadvertently ‘prepared the ground’ for European settlement (Figures 1.3, 1.4).²¹

European Incursions

Dutch seafarer William de Vlaming who named the Swan River in 1696,²² was its earliest European explorer. Vlaming was not inspired by the Swan River landscape and, perhaps as a result, his voyage did not lead to European settlement or annexation. Indeed Vlaming already correctly believed the coast to be desolate and closer inspection did not alter his initial impression.²³ This assessment was compounded by a variety of factors. Arriving in the middle of summer, Vlaming discovered that the Swan was very salty and that fresh water was in limited supply.²⁴ Furthermore, Vlaming did not continue far enough up the Swan River to experience the rich alluvial flats of the Upper Swan River around Guildford. Indeed he only ventured as far as Perth Water, which is the area where the broad estuarine reaches transition into the typically fresh upper Swan. So bleak was Vlaming’s descriptions of the estuarine sections of the Swan River, and its surrounding country, that it was not reappraised until 1801 when the French explorer François-Antoine Boniface Heirisson discovered that the soils and plants changed beyond Perth Water. That said, he didn’t penetrate sufficiently far to ‘appreciate the full extent of change’ in the upper Swan.²⁵

Exploration of the fertile upper Swan ultimately fell to Captain Stirling and Charles Fraser, the Colonial Botanist of New South Wales, on H.M.S *Success* in 1827.²⁶ Stirling and Fraser both gave detailed accounts of the Swan River landscape, and were obviously inspired by it, with the ratio of positive to negative adjectives in each of the descriptions of the land being greater than ‘ten to one’.²⁷ In his journal, Stirling evoked the Swan River and its landscape in glowing terms:

*The richness of the soil, the bright foliage of the shrubs, the majesty of the surrounding trees, the abrupt and red colour banks of the river occasionally seen, and the view of the blue mountains, from which we were not far distant, made the scenery of this spot as beautiful (sic) as anything of the kind I have ever witnessed.*²⁸



Gargatup

Gumap

Gabbikalga

Goonininup

Wagyl hole

Wagyl hole

Gareenup

Gaboodjoolup

Minderup

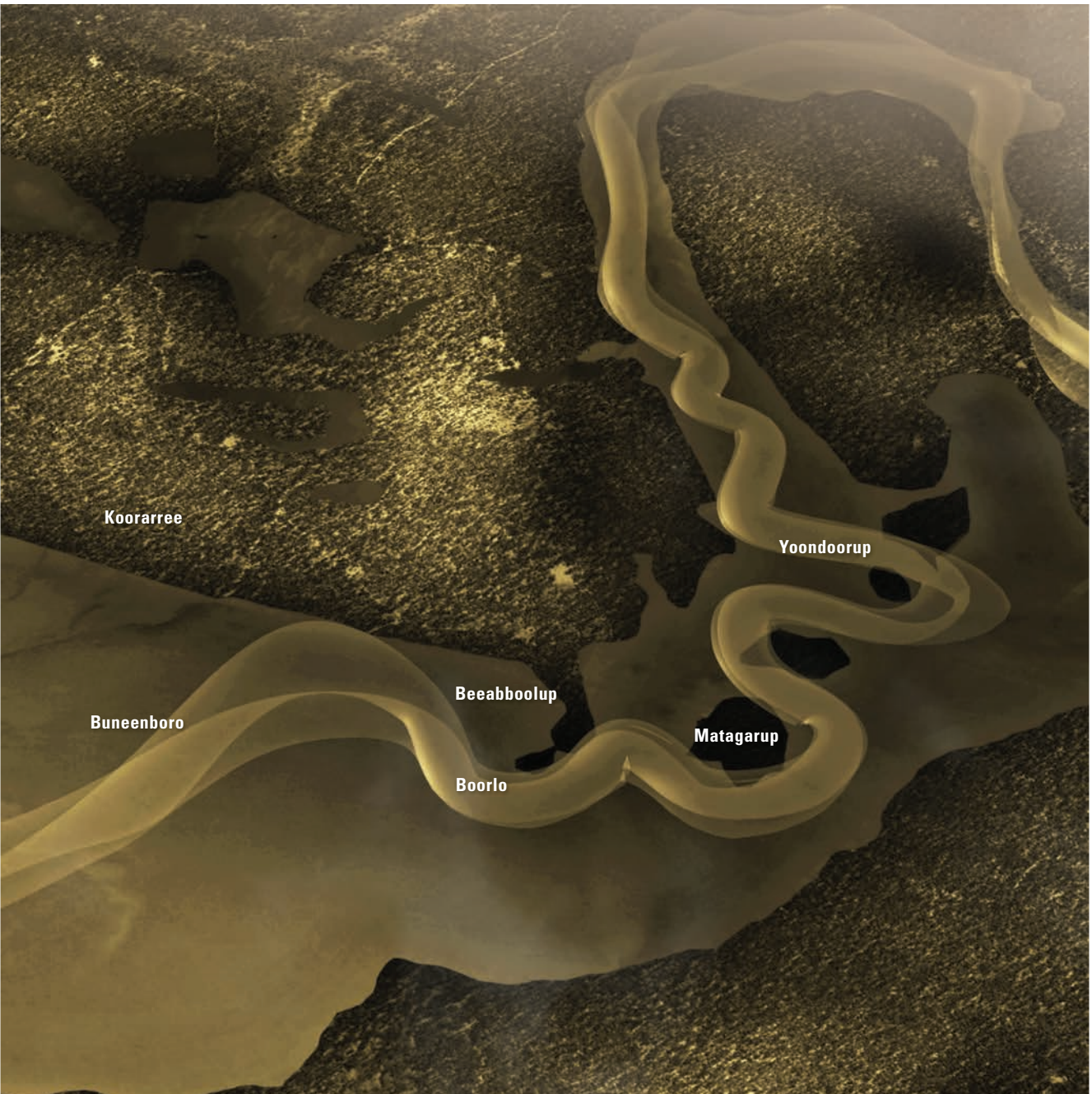


Figure 1.2: Buneenboro (Perth Water)

As Ken Colbung explained: 'the Waugal eased and coiled his way down the Swan River, creating the bends in the river at Belmont and Maylands as he went. Before he reached the islands at the Causeway, he rattled his skin, shaking all the scales off in the mud as he wrestled to gain access to Perth Water. When he finally emerged through the arrows, he made another big coil to create the open expanse of water downstream of the Narrows. The Waugal then ascended Mount Eliza through a gap in the limestone cliffs by the way of the small valley or stormwater gully situated behind where the Swan Brewery stables were built.' In Patricia Vinnicombe, *Goonininup: A Site Complex on the Southern Side of Mount Eliza*, Western Australian Museum, Perth, 1989, p. 12.

Take Me to the River



Figure 1.3: Frederick Garling, *Mount Eliza, 15 miles from the entrance of Swan River, Western Australia*, 1827, ink, pencil and watercolour, 21.7 x 33.0 cm. State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia, purchased with funds from the Geoffrey William Robinson Bequest Fund, 1990.

Fraser compiled a report which would have had significant influence with the Home Government, for he was widely respected for his skill and experience as a botanist.²⁹ In his report he wrote: 'The land on the banks of the Swan is superior to any I have seen in New South Wales east of the Blue Mountains'.³⁰ Fraser based this conclusion primarily on the apparently fertile soil, the ease of clearing trees, the presence of freshwater springs, and the river's potential use for transport.³¹

While Stirling's inaccurate assessments of the Swan River and its surrounding country may have been influenced by his long held desire to establish a colony there, they were also conditioned by a number of fortuitous circumstances. For example, by using the river as the route inland, Stirling and Fraser received an inflated impression of the landscape's fertility; the river was an obvious route but the high level of the river banks tended to hide the less suitable regions of sand dunes and swamps.³² Moreover, Stirling and Fraser arrived at the end of what was a untypically cool and wet summer.³³ The effect of the exceptionally mild and balmy weather, in conjunction with the 'sparkling river and inland water, the evergreen trees and bush scrub turned the whole venture into something of a picnic episode'.³⁴ Stirling's romantic musings were such that he persuaded himself that the 'cool easterly land breeze of these early autumn nights must originate from a range of snowy mountains'³⁵ (Figure 1.5). Again, Stirling's and Fraser's perceptions of soil quality of the Swan River landscape resulted largely from chance occurrence. Because of shallow water, the farthest point the boats could venture was an area of the Upper Swan River. As a result of this the only comprehensive soil tests took place in the most fertile area of the entire Swan River landscape.³⁶ Stirling and Fraser's assessment of the fertility of the land was also distorted by their European reading of the landscape. While in Europe, forests more than any other element, were the most reliable index of soil fertility. By contrast in the south-west of Western Australia, soil fertility is in inverse proportion to the height of a jarrah tree.³⁷ Due to the height of the jarrah trees and the quality of the soils adjacent to the river, Fraser was lulled into believing that the coastal plain would provide fertile farming and grazing land.³⁸

Perhaps because of these exceptional conditions Fraser wrote that 'such were the attractions of the country that we all felt sorry on leaving it'.³⁹

While both Aboriginal land management practices and chance conditions lulled Stirling and Fraser into imagining the Swan River landscape as a park-like arcadia, this latter conception can also be understood as a psychological reaction to a landscape which was a source of 'otherness' to the European mind. David Tacey notes that a defensive cultural consciousness, of the kind



Figure 1.4: Frederick Garling, *View of Swan River, taken at the commencement of fresh waters*, 1827, ink, watercolour and pencil, 22.5 x 32.8 cm. State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia, purchased 1957.

The richness of the soil, the bright foliage of the shrubs, the majesty of the surrounding trees, the abrupt and red colour banks of the river occasionally seen, and the view of the blue mountains, from which we were not far distant, made the scenery of this spot as beautiful (sic) as anything of the kind I have ever witnessed.

Captain James Stirling



Take Me to the River

required for colonial exploration, ‘can do remarkable things with landscape.’⁴⁰ In this tradition the landscape can be experienced as, ‘a field for negative projections, such as an “Outback Hell” against which the enfeebled ego must defend itself...’⁴¹ Or in the other tradition, landscape can be conceived from a completely different psychological perspective; one which is evident in Stirling and Fraser’s accounts. As Tacey writes:

*In this second tradition, the ego does not project the unconscious outward upon the land, but rather converts the land into an image of an ego ideal. A utopian construct is formed which serves the ego’s growth, meets its needs and reflects an image of peace and security.*⁴²



Figure 1.5: Stirling’s romantic musings were such that he persuaded himself that the ‘cool easterly land breeze of these early autumn nights must originate from a range of snowy mountains’.

Hesperia

In relation to Australia's European exploration, the mirage of 'the inland sea', fringed with fertile country, surely represented the zenith of this utopian tendency. Certainly Stirling's unsubstantiated belief that a mountain range existed to the east of Perth, a belief which rested solely on the presence of cool easterly winds would also seem to point to this tradition being in play. Indeed, if Stirling had been planning to create a colony on the Swan River even before he took command of HMS *Success* in 1826, 'it is possible that he saw what he wanted to see, rather than what was actually there'.⁴³ This apparent conversion of the Australian landscape into some European ideal is also reflected in many of the paintings of the Swan River landscape from this period in which trees are depicted in a European fashion, the typically subtle topographic features of the Swan Coastal Plain are dramatised and vertically exaggerated, and the Aboriginals assume a peaceful, distant stance (Figures 1.6, 1.7).

The division between the wildly diverging conceptions of the Australian landscape as a hell or as a paradise tended to split along geographical lines on the Swan Coastal Plain. Stirling correctly understood the first few kilometres of the river, not as river, but as an estuary as far as Point Fraser, near to where the Causeway is now. This understanding allowed him to ferry his expectations upriver, creating a 'transitional space' between the 'hell on earth' of the coast, and the supposed 'verdant paradise' of the upper Swan River.⁴⁴

Swan River Mania

Upon his return to England, Stirling started to lobby for a colonial settlement on the Swan River to be called 'Australian Hesperia', a name intended to suggest a 'land looking west'.⁴⁵ The proposed name for the colony was also regarded as a reference to the Greek 'Isles of the Blest' which was a 'mythical Utopia'.⁴⁶ Through the selection of such a name, Stirling was overtly placing the Swan River in the 'realm of (an) earthly paradise, and a productive and agricultural paradise at that'.⁴⁷

After a period in which Stirling failed to obtain government support for the colony, he was told that his argument for settlement by private charter company would be far more robust if he could show support and table names of investors.⁴⁸ To develop this support Stirling convinced the *Hampshire Telegraph* to print an extended account of Swan River, highlights of which were reprinted in *The Times*, *The Sun* and other London papers.⁴⁹ Straightaway the Colonial Office began to receive expressions of interest.⁵⁰ As would happen with any contemporary real estate endeavour, flyers were distributed and newspaper advertisements taken out.⁵¹

Take Me to the River



Figure 1.6: Frederick Garling, *View across the coastal plain*, 1827, watercolour and pencil, 13.2 × 37.5 cm. State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia, purchased 1978.



Figure 1.7: Frederick Garling, *Swan River – View from Fraser’s Point*, 1827, watercolour and pencil, 23.5 × 33.0 cm. State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia, purchased 1957.

Hesperia

The ensuing ‘Swan River Mania’ can be attributed to Stirling tapping into the desires of a motivated class of largely urban dwellers: both those with a spirit of adventure and those who might these days be described as the aspirational class.⁵² In short, people wealthy enough to be able to emigrate but not so wealthy that they were insulated from the dire economic conditions of the time.⁵³ What Stirling promoted to such people was an English river, ‘though one curiously inverted and exotic’.⁵⁴ Whereas many of England’s rivers had been disfigured through industrialisation by this time, there nonetheless lingered ‘imaginary watercourses of picturesque banks broad waters and gentle currents’ which greatly appealed to the public imagination.⁵⁵

The power and appeal of Stirling’s image of the Swan River landscape is demonstrated by the following extract, believed to have been penned by John Barrow, the Admiralty Secretary, and the actual person who was answerable for the government’s decision to form a colony in Western Australia⁵⁶ – and who in fact had never been to the Swan River:

It must be confessed that the character of the coast in the neighbourhood of Swan River is exceedingly different from that which the older navigators attributed to the whole western coast of New Holland. From latitude 31° to Cape Leeuwin, the soil has been found so fertile, the air so balmy and refreshing, and the scenery so fine, that it has been proposed to bestow the name of Australian Hesperia on this country... The ‘Australian Hesperia’ is estimated to contain from five to six million acres, of which the greater part is supposed to be fit for the plough. On this tract of land it is calculated that at least a million of souls might find a comfortable subsistence.⁵⁷

The Reality

Partly as a result of Stirling’s canny marketing of the Swan River landscape, Western Australia was the first British colony to be established solely for private settlement since prior to the American War of Independence.⁵⁸ The romantic imaginings of the Swan River landscape however were soon to collide with the reality of its wretchedly poor soils, its heat and its flies. By the end of 1830, almost 2000 settlers had shipped out to the Swan River colony, enticed by false promises, access to affordable land, and all the while urged on by dire economic conditions of England at the time.⁵⁹ Based on the picture of an agricultural paradise described by Stirling and Fraser, colonists often sought thousands of acres of farming land, despite the fact that few of them

had agricultural experience, particularly at such a 'grand scale'.⁶⁰ With the inevitable failures that ensued 'Swan River mania' soon shifted into reverse, and the flow of emigrants and capital stopped suddenly after 1830.⁶¹ This was primarily due to news trickling back to England of settlers despairing at the reality of the Swan River landscape. These accounts were again picked up by the newspapers of the time. As an editorial in *The Morning Journal* crowed: '... instead of the land about the coast being a sort of Paradise, it is, for the most part, little better than a barren waste. It seems indeed that the Paradise is yet to be discovered beyond the hills...'⁶²

Indeed, even Charles Darwin rejected the south-west of Western Australia as being unworthy of investigation on a visit with the ship HMS *Beagle* in 1838.⁶³ While John Barrow had proclaimed that the South West of Western Australia could support 'a million of souls',⁶⁴ *The Colonial Times* estimated that '...the whole of the good land upon the Swan River would not more than maintain five hundred persons without stock, and would afford no support to sheep...'⁶⁵ Despite the official reassurance to the contrary, through bad press the Swan River colony received a setback which was to prove catastrophic.⁶⁶ Even Stirling himself ruefully reflected: 'people come out here (that is, to the Swan River settlement) expecting to find the Garden of Eden'.⁶⁷ In line with pessimistic reports concerning agricultural productivity, in 1833 food was rationed, and the settlement was near starvation – a situation not relieved until the arrival of much awaited supply ships, and a fairly good harvest.⁶⁸

While conditions had improved marginally for the settlers, for local Noongar people conditions were dire. Within only a few years of European settlement, age-old campsites, water and food sources had been intruded upon to such a degree that a traditional hunter-gatherer existence was no longer feasible.⁶⁹ The authorities chose to create a Government feeding depot on the land on which the Swan Brewery now sits, in part to remedy this situation, but also to stop the stealing of food by Aborigines.⁷⁰ While the Europeans were typically disillusioned by the failure of a promised vision to materialise, for the Noongar, who had lived a generally plentiful existence in the Swan River landscape for more than 40,000 years⁷¹ the theft, destruction and desecration of their land must have been devastating beyond imagination.

In line with the general disillusionment of the settlers, almost immediately after settlement, the Swan River itself was also deemed problematic. The bar at the mouth of the Swan River and the mud flats at the site of what is now Heirisson Island⁷² made transport costly in terms of time, money, and lives lost.⁷³ Indeed, it was often said at the time 'that it was more expensive to transport something between a farm on the Swan and a ship in Gage Roads

than it was to transport the same item from London to Fremantle.⁷⁴ The foreshore of what was then the small settlement of Perth was also problematic. Because Perth Water was, and is, shallow, except where it has been dredged, Perth foreshore was unsuitable as a serious port.⁷⁵

The lakes, swamps and marshy river edges which constrained the Perth settlement to the north and south respectively were simultaneously the appeal and drawback of the settlement's location. On one hand they afforded fresh water sources for the European settlers.⁷⁶ The initial disadvantage was a plague of mosquitoes. In fact, Perth was described as 'swarming with fleas and mosquitoes' and that 'a more perfect purgatory could not be devised'.⁷⁷ Furthermore, given the deficient sanitary provisions of the age, disease was believed to emanate from vapours' that arose from such low-lying marshy land.⁷⁸

Superimposed on this problematic landscape was the first plan for Perth, the 'Arrowsmith Plan' of 1833 (Figure 1.8). This plan belongs to a long tradition of designs for colonial towns which go back at least as far as Roman camps.⁷⁹ As Seddon describes it, the basic characteristics of the Arrowsmith Plan were a bounded site with an orthogonal grid, including a central parade ground, and an adjoining administrative ceremonial-religious area.⁸⁰ The orthogonal street grid is a form that is simple to set out and the blocks are easily identified.⁸¹ As Paul Carter puts it, the grid was also a required precondition of capitalist colonies,⁸² it 'was a machine for producing private property and so private wealth'.⁸³ Beyond the pragmatics of the grid, it undoubtedly had a symbolic appeal. In a landscape in which the fear of the unknown and of the aboriginal people was pervasive, the relative clarity and bounded-ness of the grid would have helped to maintain European values in the face of an apparently malevolent environment.

John Septimus Roe, the first surveyor general of Perth, rotated the grid of the Perth settlement so that its lateral streets ran parallel with the river, a decision that some have regarded as a mistake. Indeed if the grid had run predominately perpendicular to the river, the city and river would have been better connected, due to the greater number of streets providing direct views and access to the foreshore (Figure 1.9). Nonetheless, at 'Front Street' he set out a generous terrace (St Georges Terrace) designed to front an open space adjoining the river which extended between what is now Plain and Barrack streets.⁸⁴ The decision to reserve a large open space between the river and the city reflected Stirling's intention that Fremantle was to be the colony's port city, and Perth the administrative centre, a situation which presumably freed up Perth's foreshore for recreational pursuits. Despite such thinking, during Stirling's absence in 1834, this open space was subdivided for sale, with Roe's

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consent (Figure 1.10).⁸⁵ This ultimately denied the public what would have become a magnificent, topographically interesting, public park on the river's edge (Figure 1.11). The symbolism of a potentially⁸⁶ generous swathe of Arcadian landscape – on both the river's edge and the front 'doorstep' of the city, so appropriate to Stirling's vision of an 'Australian Hesperia' – was sacrificed. Stirling on his return to the colony purchased, with his own money, land to create the site of what is now the Government House and its gardens.⁸⁷ But the larger symbolic and public gesture was lost.⁸⁸

Beyond the self-interest of adjacent landholders who stood to benefit, the decision to subdivide this area for development reflected a shortage of land due to the constrained nature of the township. This was caused by its siting between a chain of wetlands and the river. Development in Perth was also chaotic, for much of the best land was granted to speculators who had no plans to develop it.⁸⁹ In 1867 Karl Marx even went as far as to cite the Swan River colony as a prime example of 'the shortcomings of capitalism'.⁹⁰

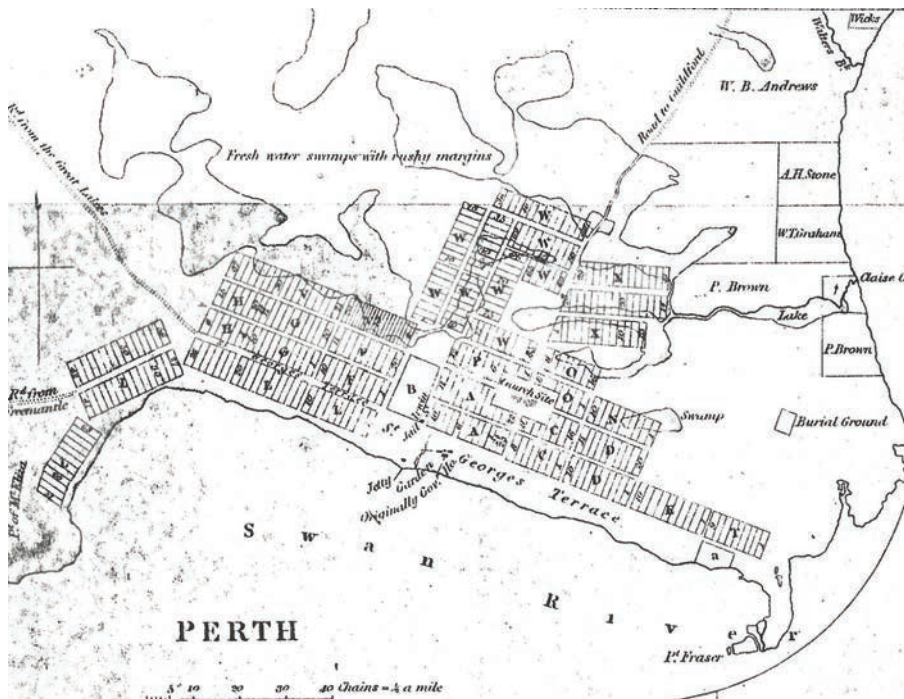


Figure 1.8: The 1833 'Arrowsmith Plan' with its generous foreshore park.
(Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.)

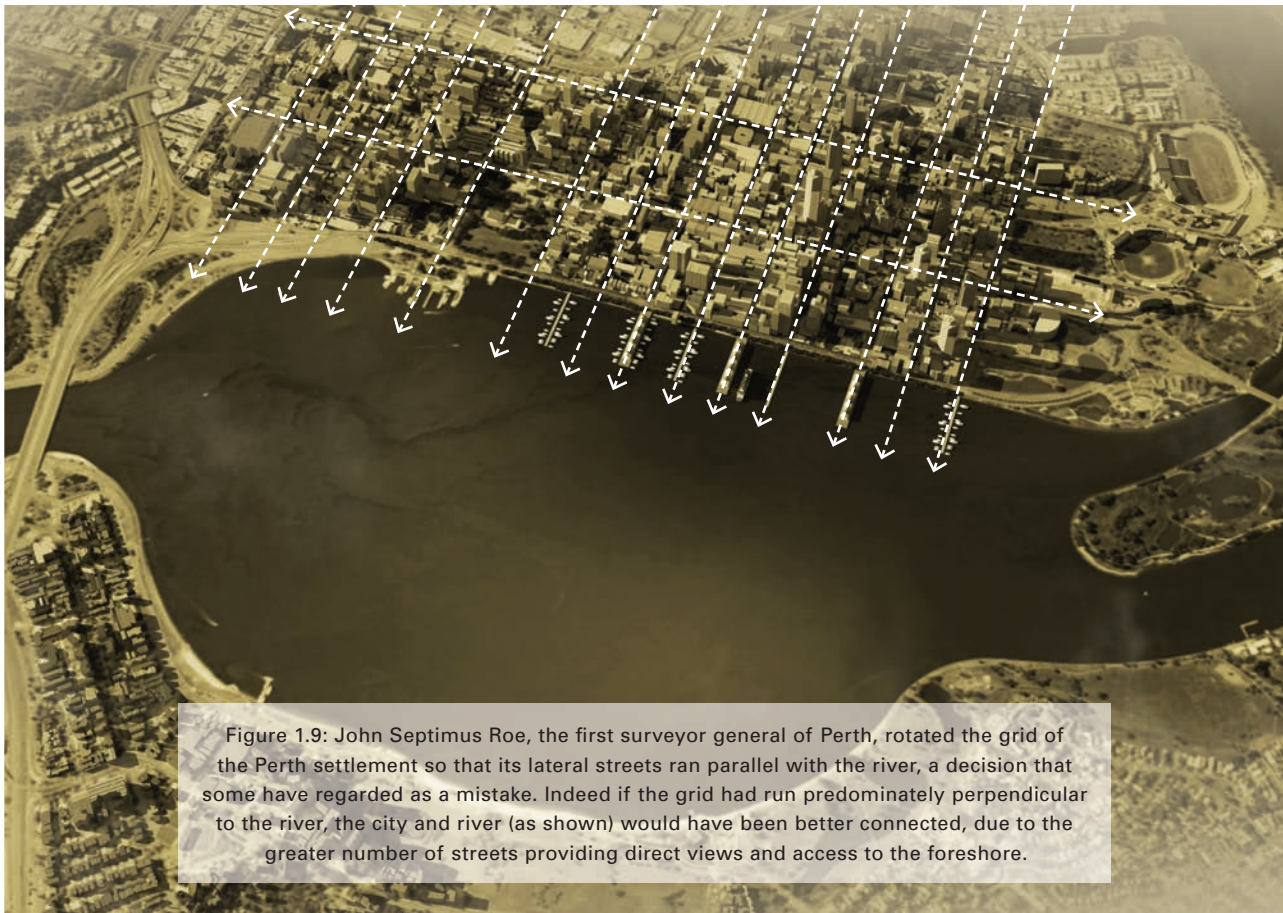


Figure 1.9: John Septimus Roe, the first surveyor general of Perth, rotated the grid of the Perth settlement so that its lateral streets ran parallel with the river, a decision that some have regarded as a mistake. Indeed if the grid had run predominately perpendicular to the river, the city and river (as shown) would have been better connected, due to the greater number of streets providing direct views and access to the foreshore.



Figure 1.10: The 1838 'Hillman Plan' which shows the foreshore largely subdivided for private development. (Image courtesy of the State Records Office. Item 288, cons 3868, WAS 235.)



Figure 1.11: During Stirling's absence in 1834, the foreshore open space shown in the 1833 'Arrowsmith Plan' was subdivided for sale, with Roe's consent. This ultimately denied the public what would have become a magnificent, topographically interesting, public park on the river's edge. This image shows what this park may have looked like today.



Foreshore park

St Georges Terrace

Plain St

Point Fraser

Take Me to the River

The contemporary story of Perth's relationship with the Swan River ensues from this early period of European imagining and settlement of Perth. In particular the enduring image of Perth city within an Arcadian riverine setting⁹¹ ostensibly stems from the glowing accounts of the Swan River penned by Stirling and Fraser. In the years of near starvation and chaos that followed, the fact that many of the early settlers who could leave either returned to England or headed east to Sydney, undoubtedly lies at the heart of Perth's insecurity about its own standing as a colony, and later city. The following chapter will explore how this insecurity sowed the seeds for a massive program of river reclamation for parkland, which aimed to position the fledgling settlement of Perth as a world-class capital city.

Notes

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3. W. Taylor, 'Rivers Too Cross: River Beautification and Settlement in Perth, Western Australia', *National Identities*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2003, p. 25.
4. Ibid.
5. D. Hughes-Hallett, 'Indigenous History of the Swan and Canning Rivers', Swan River Trust, Perth, 2010, p. 10.
6. P. Vinnicombe, 'Goonininup: A Site Complex on the Southern Side of Mount Eliza', Western Australian Museum, Perth, 1989, p. 8.
7. D. Bates, 'Goonininup: A Site Complex on the Southern Side of Mount Eliza', Western Australian Museum, Perth, 1989, p. 9.
8. Hughes-Hallett, 'Indigenous History of the Swan and Canning Rivers', p. 42.
9. G. Seddon & D. Ravine, *A City and Its Setting: Images of Perth, Western Australia*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Perth, 1986, p. 76.
10. Ibid.
11. Vinnicombe, "Goonininup: A Site Complex on the Southern Side of Mount Eliza," p. 21.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. This was not documented in the official reports of the day. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Lise Summers, *From Wasteland to Parkland*, University of Melbourne, 2007, p. 49.
17. Ibid.
18. Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aboriginies Made Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2012, p. 3.
19. Population estimates vary greatly for Noongar country prior to European settlement, nonetheless due to the richness of Noongar country, it is not unreasonable to estimate

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- that the population was in the tens of thousands. South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, 'Noongar History and Culture', South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, Perth, 2006, p. 1.
20. G. Seddon, *Sense of Place*, The University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1972, p. 190.
 21. Ibid.
 22. P. Statham, 'Western Australia Becomes British', in P. Statham (ed), *The Origins of Australia's Capital Cities*, Macarthur Press, Sydney, 1990, p. 121.
 23. J. Cameron, 'Prelude to Colonization: James Stirling's Examination of Swan River, March 1827', *The Australian Geographer*, vol. XII, no. 4, 1973, p. 315.
 24. Ibid., p. 312.
 25. Ibid., p. 316.
 26. Seddon, *Sense of Place*, p. 177.
 27. Statham, 'Western Australia Becomes British', p. 126.
 28. Whish-Wilson, *Perth*, p. 26.
 29. John Stokes, *The Western State: Some of Its People and Ports* (3rd ed), University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1976, p. 32.
 30. Ibid.
 31. Ibid.
 32. Cameron, 'Prelude to Colonization: James Stirling's Examination of Swan River, March 1827', p. 322.
 33. G. Bolton, 'Perth: A Foundling City', in P. Statham (ed), *The Origins of Australia's Capital Cities*, Macarthur Press, Sydney, 1990, p. 142.
 34. P. Statham, 'Western Australia Becomes British', *ibid.*, p. 126.
 35. G. Bolton, 'Perth: A Foundling City', *ibid.*, p. 142.
 36. P. Statham, 'Western Australia Becomes British', *ibid.*, p. 126.
 37. Cameron, 'Prelude to Colonization: James Stirling's Examination of Swan River, March 1827', p. 312.
 38. Bolton, 'Perth: A Foundling City', p. 142.
 39. Seddon, *Sense of Place*, p. 182.
 40. D. Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred: Jung, Psyche, Earth*, Daimon Verlag, Einsiedeln, Switzerland, 2009, p. 93.
 41. Ibid.
 42. Ibid.
 43. Ian Berryman, *Swan River Letters* (vol. 1), Swan River Press, Perth, 2002, p. 34.
 44. Summers, 'From Wasteland to Parkland', p. 34.
 45. Cameron, 'Prelude to Colonization: James Stirling's Examination of Swan River, March 1827', p. 324.
 46. Ibid.
 47. Summers, 'From Wasteland to Parkland', p. 34.
 48. Cameron, 'Prelude to Colonization: James Stirling's Examination of Swan River, March 1827', p. 324.
 49. Ibid.
 50. Statham, 'Western Australia Becomes British', p. 131.
 51. Whish-Wilson, *Perth*, p. 26.
 52. Ibid.

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53. Ibid.
54. Taylor, 'Rivers Too Cross: River Beautification and Settlement in Perth, Western Australia', p. 25.
55. Ibid.
56. Berryman, *Swan River Letters*, p. 9.
57. Cameron, 'Prelude to Colonization: James Stirling's Examination of Swan River, March 1827', p. 324.
58. Ibid., p. 309.
59. Seddon & Ravine, *A City and Its Setting: Images of Perth, Western Australia*, p. 94.
60. Summers, 'From Wasteland to Parkland', p. 63.
61. Berryman, *Swan River Letters*, p. 1.
62. Ibid., p. 22.
63. Summers, 'From Wasteland to Parkland', p. 84.
64. Berryman, *Swan River Letters*, p. 9.
65. Ibid., p. 24.
66. Ibid., p. 23.
67. Cameron, 'Prelude to Colonization: James Stirling's Examination of Swan River, March 1827', p. 324.
68. Seddon & Ravine, *A City and Its Setting: Images of Perth, Western Australia*, p. 94.
69. Vinnicombe, 'Goonininup: A Site Complex on the Southern Side of Mount Eliza', p. 22.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid., p. 8.
72. The first works on the river were undertaken in 1831 when a channel was cut through these mud flats at Heirisson Island. City of Perth, 'Central Perth Foreshore Study: Interim Report', City of Perth, Perth, 1985, p. 18.
73. Berryman, *Swan River Letters*, p. 32.
74. Ibid.
75. S. Nevill, *Perth and Fremantle Past and Present*, Simon Nevill Publications, Perth, 2007, p. 56.
76. Seddon & Ravine, *A City and Its Setting: Images of Perth, Western Australia*, p. 102.
77. M. Uren, *Land Looking West: The Story of Governor James Stirling in Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1948, p. 139.
78. Seddon & Ravine, *A City and Its Setting: Images of Perth, Western Australia*, p. 69.
79. Ibid., p. 88.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. R. Giblett, *Postmodern Wetlands: Culture, History, Ecology*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1996, p. 72.
83. Ibid.
84. Bolton, 'Perth: A Foundling City', p. 144.
85. Seddon speculates that Roe had self-interest in mind when he supported the subdivision of this public site. Lieutenant Governor Irwin was talked into subdividing the foreshore open space south of St Georges Terrace by the allotment holders (of which Roe was one) on the north side, who were using this alluvial and spring-watered open space

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- for agriculture and gardens. Seddon & Ravine, *A City and Its Setting: Images of Perth, Western Australia*, p. 99.
86. To the author's knowledge no planning of this park was undertaken.
87. Bolton, 'Perth: A Foundling City', p. 145.
88. Ibid.
89. R. E. Davis, *A Concise History of Western Australia*, Woodslane Press, Warriewood, 2012, p. 20.
90. Ibid.
91. Taylor, 'Rivers Too Cross: River Beautification and Settlement in Perth, Western Australia', p. 34.