

## Marking the Route

*Peter Harper*

In Albury's riverside park is the well-known Hovell Tree, inscribed by the explorer Hovell with "Hovell, NOVr 17/24". The tree has been preserved for 200 years.

Although this marking is no longer visible on the trunk of the tree, there are plaques nearby that confirm the marking.



The Hovell Tree circa 1900. Inset: William Hovell's inscription before it was destroyed by growth of the tree.

Hume is said to have marked a tree nearby which, by several descriptions, would place the tree on the river bank close to the actual crossing place. Dr Andrews mentions that Hume marked his tree "Hume River" to distinguish the spot where they first met the river.

Townsend's town plan dated 12 January 1839 shows the position of the tree as three chains (60 metres) west of the Hovell Tree, a little nearer to Hume Street. Sadly, the tree was burnt by the careless actions of passing drovers and fell into the river.

These tree markings record the explorers' presence at Bungambrawartha. Earlier in their journey, there is a reference to marking the trees to show their trail for the return journey. However, when Hovell requested the men continue the action, Hume replied that it was a useless exercise, such was Hume's confidence in finding the return trail. Did they continue to mark the trees? They may have for there is mention of meeting their outbound course at Bulla and again near Hurdle Creek.

In modern times there are several ways of marking trails using paint, carvings, affixing markers, posts, flagging, cairns, and crosses. The Hume and Hovell Walking track is marked

by a series of posts showing a directional arrow and the cute two-walkers logo. A line of monuments, built in 1924 by the communities of towns across Victoria, mark their route. This line follows their SW course from Albury to Werribee.

Markers in the form of Ring Trees were used by the Aborigines to designate a boundary, a place or a direction. This form of tree marking is only a recent discovery and probably not known to the explorers. Their way was determined mostly by compass bearings from high point to high point. There are references, though, to their following of aboriginal tracks or pads.

An 1859 *Border Post* letter by “an Australian and lover of his country,” reported that a stock-keeper for Charles Barber of Gundowringa Station between Yackandandah and Little River (Kiewa) on the highest point of the range, saw a dead tree standing, marked with HUME cut deeply into the wood. It would be interesting to locate this tree and should it remain standing it would be another true artifact to the memory of Hume and Hovell.