



June 2014  
Issue 2

## Mabo Day

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June the 3rd is Mabo Day and commemorates the courageous efforts of Eddie Koiki Mabo to overturn the fiction of terra nullius (land belonging to no-one), the legal concept that Australia and the Torres Strait Islands were not owned by Indigenous people because they did not 'use' the land in ways Europeans believed constituted some kind of legal possession. This idea was used to give 'legitimacy' for the British and later colonial and Australia governments to allow the dispossession of all Indigenous people of their land and access to it. Whether an Aboriginal group lost its land to colonial settlement/invasion in 1788, 1880 or 1970, the argument was that they never owned it, never had internationally recognisable legal entitlement to it and therefore could be considered trespassers on Crown land and would not be able to claim any compensation for its loss.

Koiki Mabo and his legal team fought hard to demonstrate that he and his people had traditional land ownership systems on Mer. The case went to the High Court. Unfortunately Eddie Mabo died 5 months before the historic decision came on 3 June 1992 that 'native title' did exist and it was up to the people of Mer to determine who owned the land.

In 2002 Bonita Mabo, Eddie's wife, called for a national public holiday. Eddie and Bonita's son, Eddie Mabo Jr, said:

"We believe that a public holiday would be fitting to honour and recognise the contribution to the High Court decision of not only my father and his co-plaintiffs, James Rice, Father Dave Passi, Sam Passi and Celuia Salee, but also to acknowledge all Indigenous Australians who have empowered and inspired each other.

To date we have not had a public holiday that acknowledges Indigenous

people and which recognises our contribution, achievements and survival in Australia.

A public holiday would be a celebration all Australians can share in with pride – a celebration of truth that unites Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and a celebration of justice that overturned the legal myth of terra nullius – Mabo symbolises truth and justice and is a cornerstone of Reconciliation."



# Mademoiselle Lorie

My name is Lorie, I am completing an internship at the Aboriginal Heritage Office for 3 months. I am studying Management Assistance in Belgium and I speak French. I have chosen this course because the work suits my personality: organization, rigour and reliability.

For my studies, I need to complete a final internship. I have chosen to live abroad to learn English and learn about a different culture, different ways to work and gain self-sufficiency.

I have chosen to work at the Aboriginal Heritage Office because it seems to be a good place to learn about Australian culture. I am happy with my choice because it is a very nice office! The staff are very kind to me, they take time to explain things again and again because of my bad English!

What I am doing at the office?

Firstly, I accompany Karen on her presentations. I have learned a lot about Aboriginal people and culture. These presentations were good for my English and to meet Australian children was very nice. A little story: A child asked me, "Do you eat frogs in Belgium?". Others talked to me in French, "Bonjour", "Au revoir"... It was very funny!

Secondly, I made some brochures with Publisher including the museum handouts, the website brochures and promotional posters. I learned to do this at school 3 months ago, so it is very good for me to put my learning into practice.

Also, I had the good fortune of celebrating the Aboriginal Heritage Office's 14<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a delicious breakfast with the team.

This internship is a very good opportunity for me so I thank David, Phil, Karen and Gareth for their kindness, understanding and patience.

By Lorie Bosser



## Son of Mine by Kath Walker

My son, your troubled eyes search mine,  
Puzzled and hurt by colour line.  
Your black skin soft as velvet shine;  
What can I tell you, son of mine?  
I could tell you of heartbreak, hatred blind,  
I could tell of crimes that shame mankind,

Of brutal wrong and deeds malign,  
Of rape and murder, son of mine;  
But I'll tell instead of brave and fine  
When lives of black and white entwine,  
And men in brotherhood combine—  
This would I tell you, son of mine...From *We Are Going*.

Recently a photographic exhibition of possum skin cloaks was displayed at the Lane Cove Gallery. The exhibition is part of what seems to be somewhat of a resurgence in possum skin cloak making that is happening in the South Coast region of NSW and in Victoria.

Possum fur is extremely warm and, as I was told by one very young school boy, has a hollow hair structure that traps warmth – just like polar bears and other cold weather animals. This hollow structure does not allow possum fur to freeze, even under extremely cold conditions.

Due to the very warm thermal characteristics of these possum skin cloaks they were only worn in cold areas of Australia. In the Sydney region, accounts were made of them being worn in the Penrith area. Closer to the coast it is probable that lighter cloaks were worn. There are also historical notes of the pelt of the Kangaroo being seen around the shoulders of an older man in Sydney. Pelts of the Wallaby and Platypus were also used in other colder areas of NSW.

Possum pelts could be used for many different reasons. When worn as a cloak for warmth they also allowed rain to just simply slide off. Government and Missionary Policies made it a crime to transmit culture, and as a way of forcing assimilation on Aboriginal people, an emphasis on clothing Aboriginal people and removing cultural affiliations was seen as crucial to the colonisation of Australia. Blankets were handed out at this time and caused much sickness as they absorbed water and did not retain warmth as possum skin did. Babies could be wrapped in fur, and an early photo of Nahraminyeri and her baby, who came from South Australia, shows a possum skin pocket sewn into the cloak to house the baby warmly on the mother's shoulders. Cloaks could be used as blankets, and were also used for Ceremonial purposes. The construction of new possum skin cloaks has allowed Aboriginal people to wear these cloaks as they take official office. Elders wore possum skin cloaks as part of the 2006 Commonwealth Games opening ceremony and the cloaks were later seen on Elders the day the federal government apologised to members of the 'Stolen Generations' in Canberra.

A possum skin cloak would be created when a child was born and would be added to, pelt by pelt, as the child grew older. The process to make cloaks was time consuming and a full cloak could hold many pelts taking over a year to collect. The skins were scrapped clean using sharp stones or shells and were tanned by stretching and hanging near a fire. Skins would then be rubbed with fat to keep them pliable. The pelts were attached by making a series of holes and were sewn together with kangaroo sinew and a pointed bone needle.

Cloaks were engraved by scraping with shell and could show a child's totem, moiety, clan and nation affiliations so, as the child grew, each newly added piece would record their life journey. So no two cloaks were the same and it is recorded that Aboriginal people were buried in their possum skin cloak.

There are very few traditional skin cloaks left. Seized as objects of anthropological significance after European settlement, they are located in museums within Australia as well as overseas. In Australia there are skin cloaks held in the Western Australian Museum, Gloucester Lodge Museum, the South Australian Museum and the Museum of Victoria. Overseas, cloaks are held in the Smithsonian Institution - Washington DC, The British Museum - London, Museum of Ethnology –Berlin and the Pigorini Museum in Italy.

During the International exhibitions of the 1800s there were two skin cloaks that were displayed. The Sydney International exhibition held in 1879 displayed a possum rug from Tasmania, which was awarded an honourable mention. In the Centennial International Exhibition held in Melbourne during 1889, platypus and possum rugs from NSW were displayed under the category of travelling apparatus and camp equipment. By Karen.

**Images courtesy of The Smithsonian Institute.**



# The AHO Has a Run In With the Law!

You can simplify the causes of damage to Aboriginal heritage sites into two types. There's the, "Uh oh, I had no idea that was there," type of damage. Then there's damage that is caused maliciously by an individual determined to harm a site. While the later is much harder to counter, education is a crucial means of reducing both. It is important to teach our younger generations from an early age exactly what an Aboriginal site is and to appreciate them as part of the longest continuing culture in the world. In countering damage to sites caused by one's ignorance, adequate training, strong policy and practical guidelines are paramount. The AHO has provided training and education programs to address both these causes from the 'get-go'.

The AHO recently held a particularly significant education session for the NSW Judicial Commission. Education is also a key role of the Judicial Commission as it provides training and assistance in sentencing, legal writing and cultural awareness for judges and magistrates within NSW as well as Federal and High Court jurisdictions. Last year the AHO was approached by Joanne Selfe, a Project Officer from the Ngarra Yura Program which, as part of the Judicial Commission, aims to improve understandings of the complex nature of Aboriginal cultural issues amongst the state's judiciary. It was Joanne's aim to organise a training day to provide the judiciary with an insight into the significance of Sydney's Aboriginal heritage sites and the difficulties in their management. It was clear that Joanne had high hopes for the AHO visit and by the time she was done 'rounding up the troops' there were to be over 30 of the country's judiciary attending the training session including Supreme, Federal and High Court judges as well as judges from the Land and Environment Court.

Essentially there were two goals for the day - to stress the significance of Sydney's Aboriginal heritage sites and to discuss some of the difficulties in managing them. Determining the significance of a site is a difficult and fairly subjective task. However the sites of Sydney are of considerable archaeological significance and even more importantly, they are of great cultural value. The cultural significance of these sites has begun to extend beyond the Aboriginal community as appreciation for Indigenous culture is embraced more broadly. There has been a tragic loss of cultural knowledge in Sydney due to the catastrophic impact that European settlement had on the local Aboriginal population. This loss of knowledge means that the sites that have managed to survive up to this point are an even more important source of information about Sydney's Aboriginal past. They serve as a poignant reminder of not only how things were, but also how things have changed. The walk-and-talk that the Judicial Commission visitors were taken on around Balls Head provided a clear example of Sydney's stunning rock art, middens and engraving sites existing in the heart of the country's largest city.

While the visitors were probably left with more questions than answers by the end of the day, we hope that the significance of these sites and the difficulty in managing them was made clear. A big thank you goes out to the NSW Judicial Commission and Joanne Selfe for taking this proactive approach and for the attendees who helped make it such an enjoyable day. By Gareth.



The Coal Loader engravings.



Balls Head walk.

## Ingredients:

- 1 cup plain flour;
- 1 beaten egg;
- Milk;
- Nutella;
- 1 punnet of strawberries;
- Brown or icing sugar;
- Plain yoghurt.

This rich, tasty little morsel was prepared for the lucky staff at the AHO by our wonderful intern Lorie (with due credit also being paid to her loyal boyfriend Yourih).

The first step is to snip off the tops of the strawberries, place them in a bowl and dust them with a bit of either one of the types of sugars. Cover with cling wrap and leave them to 'tastify' in the fridge for at least half an hour. Strawberries prepared in this way are delicious all on their lonesome or on top of some vanilla ice cream.

While the berries are chilling in the fridge, sift your flour in a large mixing bowl, add the egg and mix with a whisk while slowly pouring in some milk until you have a light batter that just coats the back of a wooden spoon.

Warm a large, non-stick fry pan over a medium heat, melt a small knob of butter, pour in some of your batter and tilt the pan around until you have a nice thin layer of batter. When you've got a little bit of colour on the underside of your crape you can flip it (extra 'style' points go to those brave enough to do the 'old pan toss/mid air crape flip'). Slide your crapes onto a warm plate and cover with a tea towel or alfoil while you cook off the mix one at a time. Sit down at a table with friends, loved ones or any other sweet-toothed glutton you can find, spread a little nutella, a few juicy strawberries and a teaspoon or two of yoghurt onto your crape and savour.

## Moving...

Well, the AHO has moved...we have moved people to tears, moved social barriers, moved public opinion and now we have moved our office. It all seemed to have come about quite suddenly, as is the way around here. As we all know, moving can be a stressful time. It can also be a time of change. Depending on your mood, moving can evoke either one of the following attitudes. Which one do you relate to...

Or perhaps...

Oh god! Why are we doing this to ourselves? Oh the upheaval, the bother. What's wrong with our little nest here? Perhaps we have been allured by the greenness of the grass on the other side. How are we expected to take all of this, in those few boxes, and move it into that tiny space? Change is a scary thing, a disruptive force agitating this long-held calm and catapulting us into an unfamiliar realm of uncertainty.

To move is to change and change is the only certainty in life. It is the rolling stone that grows no moss and as such, it is time for this ephemeral organism to loosen its roots and continue its journey along its path. To dig through the archives and take only what is needed gives one the feeling of shedding a burdensome load and gaining a new spring in one's step. The fresh canvas of our new space will be awaiting the words of this next chapter.

We know what you're thinking-"Has the AHO changed for good? Been 'restructured'? Abandoned us?" No. Have we moved our office space to Manly from where we'll continue to conduct business as usual? Yes.



Packing!!!



The fruits of our labour.



# Passing Time

## Track of the Month

### The Warada Track, Field of Mars Reserve, East Ryde.

Warada, the Aboriginal name for Waratah, is the NSW state floral emblem. The track was named Warada in recognition of the rich Aboriginal heritage of the reserve.

You may get the chance to meet mammals (Brush-tail, Ring-tail Possums and Grey-headed Flying Foxes), reptiles (lizards, snakes and turtles) and birds (Yellow Robins or Fairy Wrens).

These animals have important roles in the pollination and seeds dispersal for the many plants found in the reserve.

The Field of Mars Reserve has existed since the division and sale of the Common in 1850. The reserve was then used as a rubbish tip for nearly half a century. When the Council wanted to develop the tip, local residents resisted successfully and the area was re-reserved for public recreation in 1969. In 1975, the reserve received the name of Field of Mars Wildlife Refuge No 339.

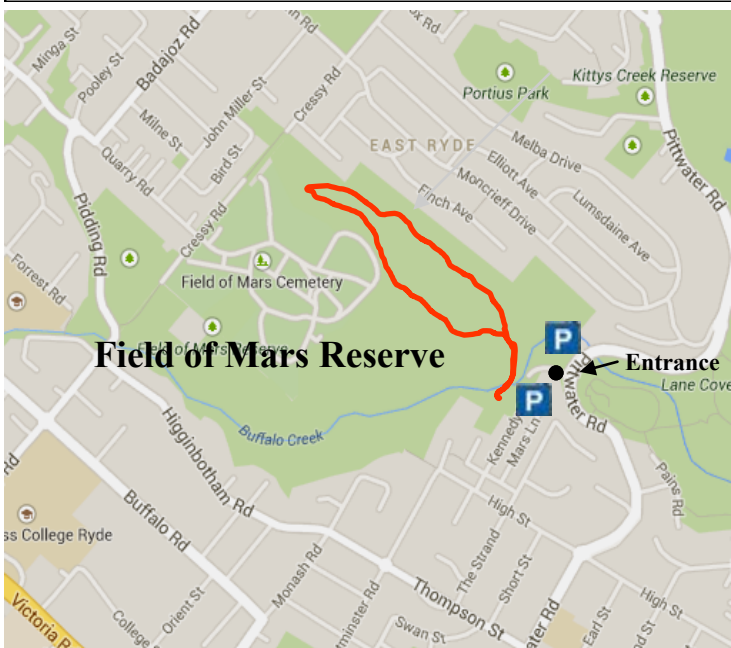
The reserve offers about 54 hectares of bush making it the largest vestige of bush in Ryde, containing irreplaceable heritage sites and significant habitat for local fauna and flora.

If you still want to explore the reserve after this walk, you can discover an additional four circuits: Doyle Loop (1.2 km), Kunzea Track (5.2 km), Sand Track (1.9 km) and Boardwalk Loop (0.6 km). By Lorie Bosser.

**Main entrance and parking via Pittwater road**

**Easy walk, 1.9 km return, 1 hour.**

**Always take water, hat, and sun screen.**



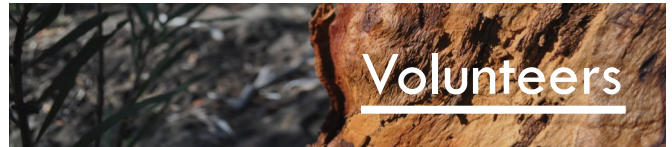
## Field of Mars Reserve

Entrance  
Lane Cove

## Movie Review

### Utopia (2013)

Utopia is the latest documentary made by well-known journalist John Pilger. It provides a critical insight into a broad range of issues affecting Aboriginal Australia from the deplorable state of housing and basic infrastructure in remote Aboriginal communities, to the unabated rate of deaths in custody and the impact of the NT Intervention. Now it must be said that the message presented by this film says nothing new...and that's the point. Pilger himself admits to being utterly shocked to find that conditions in many of the communities that he visited are still the same, or worse, than when he visited them over twenty years ago. Utopia points a critical finger at not only the Government's lack of effective action, but also to the very social discourses held against Aboriginal people that perpetuate such ongoing inequality. It may not tell you anything you don't already know, but it will fire you up and get you talking, and for that it has to get 4 stars.



# Volunteers

The NRL competition is in full swing, as is the Rugby Super 15, the National Netball Competition and the Football World Cup in Brazil is fast approaching. With this in mind we felt it fitting to encourage a bit of competition ourselves. Let the Council Cup begin! Which Council has the hardest working volunteers? Who's been putting in the training hours? Who's looking sharp this year and which team's struggling for form? Well, we can say that last year's winner North Sydney are still at the top of the leader board for monitoring reports. Willoughby looks to be the dark horse for 2014. Coming in equal last place in 2013, they've hit the ground running in 2014 and are biting at the heels of NSC in second place. The race for third is looking to be a scintillating battle between Lane Cove and Ryde. Past seasons have seen these two competitors towards the bottom of the table, however strong performances by several players has these two sides in threatening form coming in at equal third position. The race is far from over for 2014 and the title could come down to a single site report!!!



# Stuck In the Riddle with You

**Question:** A man was driving his truck. His lights were not on. The moon was not out. Up ahead, a woman was crossing the street. How did he see her?

!yad ynnus dna thgirb a saw tl :rewnA