

YARNUPINGS

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE OFFICE ISSUE #3 SEPTEMBER 2021



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council





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YARNUPINGS

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE OFFICE NEWSLETTER

ISSUE #3 SEPTEMBER 2021

Welcome to the third issue of Yarnupings for 2021

This issue celebrates our volunteers and the valuable work they do. We've included some tips that will help our volunteers take photos whilst out on site. We also highlight the gorgeous wildflowers that are in bloom at the moment.

Phil discusses the ethics of revealing site locations and asks the question—who really owns the past?

We have some Sydney Language to learn and a mask to colour in for the kids (big kids too!).

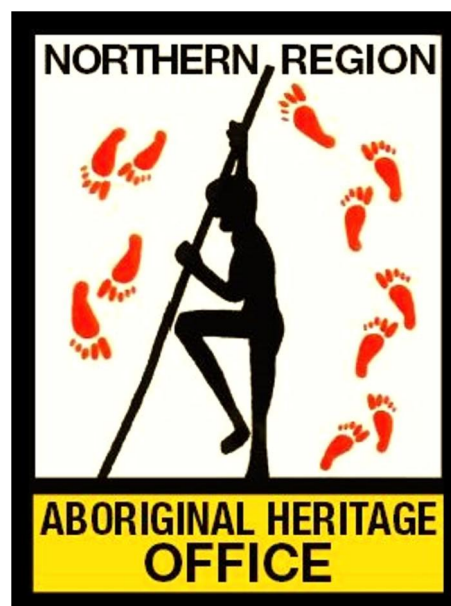
And Karen has shared her delicious banana bread recipe for you to make and enjoy at home.

Please enjoy the third issue of Yarnupings for 2021.

The AHO Team— Dave, Karen, Phil and Susan.

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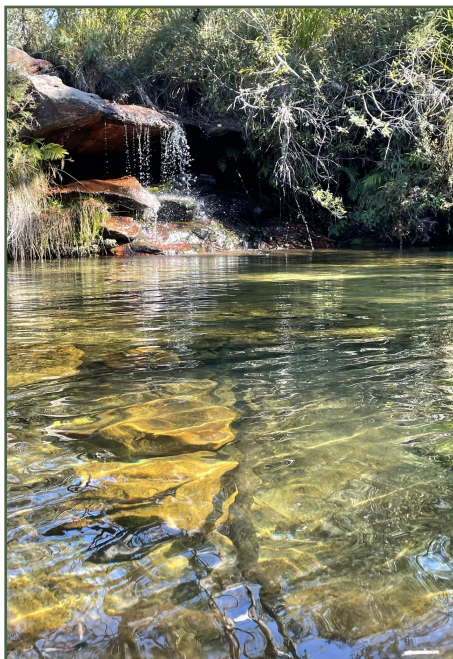




Wildflowers

The Wildflowers are out! Such a magical time of year. Our Council Reserves and natural spaces become illuminated with bright yellows, pinks and reds. If you are fortunate enough to be able to enjoy these places, complying with restrictions, then please make sure you treat yourself to the visual delights. If you are unable to get outside, then we will bring their beauty to you.

Please enjoy the images taken by the AHO team.



Breathe and relax

This lovely photo was taken in Ku-ring-gai National Park.

Scientific studies show that simply looking upon a lovely serene image of nature will help to lower stress. So, in these strange Covid times, where you may not feel like you are able to get outside as much as you may like, take a moment or two to breathe deeply and enjoy the image. It's good for you.

Full image for you to enjoy on the next page.

**Do you
have a
photo you
would like
to share?**

We would love to share your amazing photos of the incredible places we live. There are so many beautiful locations across the Northern Beaches, North Sydney, Lane Cove, Willoughby, Ku-ring-gai and Strathfield.

You never know, you just might inspire someone to take a walk in their local neighbourhood, go adventuring to a new area or to simply remember the great Aboriginal land upon which we live. Email your photos to:

susan.whitby@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au.



Meet Our Volunteers

This issue we chat with Rosemary Taylor, a volunteering legend. Rosemary has been volunteering with the Aboriginal Heritage Office for almost as long as we have been in operation. She began volunteering in 2001, making 2021 her 20th anniversary of volunteering. Amazing Rosemary!

Why did you start volunteering with the AHO?

In 1996, whilst doing a Bush Regeneration course at TAFE, I also enrolled in an Aboriginal Awareness course.

As a result I wanted to expand my knowledge and joined the AHO monitoring 2 sites in the Lane Cove area.

I then enrolled in the Associate diploma of Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Knowledge through Charles Darwin University. During the 3 years of this course and to get some practical experience of the Aboriginal culture, I spent 2 weeks with Aboriginal women on Homelands in Arnhem land. I also attended a festival in Laura North Queensland.

You volunteer at a number of different councils and organisations. What other volunteering do you do?

I volunteer for Ku-ring-gai Council in Bushcare and also am a trainer for them in Bushcare.

I volunteer with NPWS Bushcare in Lane Cove National Park and also near Oberon clearing a rock area which had been given back to the community. This is under the guidance of Tracey from NPWS.

I also volunteer in the Snowy Mountains, eradicating hawkweed from the Jagungal Wilderness Area in Kosciuszko National Park. The photo is from 2019 taken in Broken Hill when we won the state award.

I am also a member of Reconciliation NSW and with the Lane Cove branch. I also volunteer with the Heritage Fleet and the Harbour Trust. Not much time for house

work!!! I also volunteer with the floating landcare programme on the Hawkesbury river which we have just won a national award for.

What do you enjoy about volunteering?

I love being in the great Australian bush, meeting with other like minded people, learning all the time and sharing our experiences. No paid work could match this.



If you would like to become a Volunteer Site Monitor, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator, Susan Whitby on 0435 643 205 or email

Susan.Whitby@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au

Valuable Volunteers

As you know, the Aboriginal Heritage Office has a Volunteer Site Monitoring Program. This program has been running since 2008. For many years the volunteer program was put on hold due to funding issues. However, in 2018 a full-time Volunteer Co-ordinator role was created. As a result, there has been a real growth in the Volunteer program. We now have around 130 volunteers. And we are so delighted to have every single volunteer contributing their time and energy.

The work our volunteers do is so important and recently we have received reports that have alerted us to issues at sites. Graffiti, vandalism and rubbish are the main issues we have at sites. The AHO and partner councils have worked together to rectify these issues. We regularly monitor sites but it takes months, even years to revisit them and having our volunteer's consistent monitoring is a huge help.

There are many sites that are in great condition year in, year out and never need any action from the AHO. And this is great. But there are other sites that require action. Whatever the site condition, the information we receive from the volunteers is invaluable.



Graffiti at a rock shelter

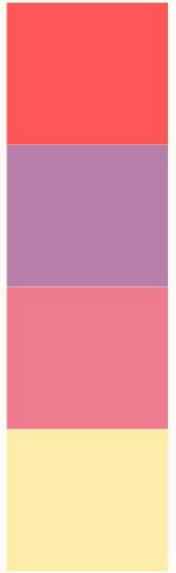


Relocated engraving



Rubbish outside an overhang

WILDFLOWERS



Site Monitoring and Photography

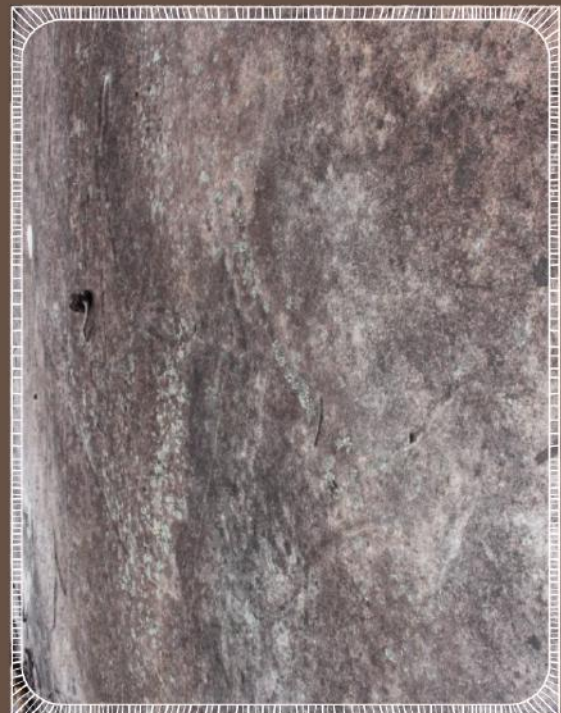
Words by Susan Whitby

They say a picture speaks a thousand words, which is why photographs taken during site monitoring sessions are so important. We talk about taking photos during our monitoring inductions, and for many of you, this will be familiar information. But for others it may have been a year or ten since your induction so these tips might be a helpful (and hopefully welcome) refresher.

There are a few things to keep in mind when taking a photo out on site; the object you're photographing, the time of day, the weather, and the scale.

Sandstone

Let's begin with the raw materials you're likely to be photographing. Most of you will have sandstone somewhere at your site. Sandstone can be difficult to photograph. Its texture and structure is grainy and can be quite affected by differing conditions – the time of day, the time of year and the weather. Photographing sandstone is best at either end of the day, morning or evening, or on a day that has low light. If you have an engraving at your moni-

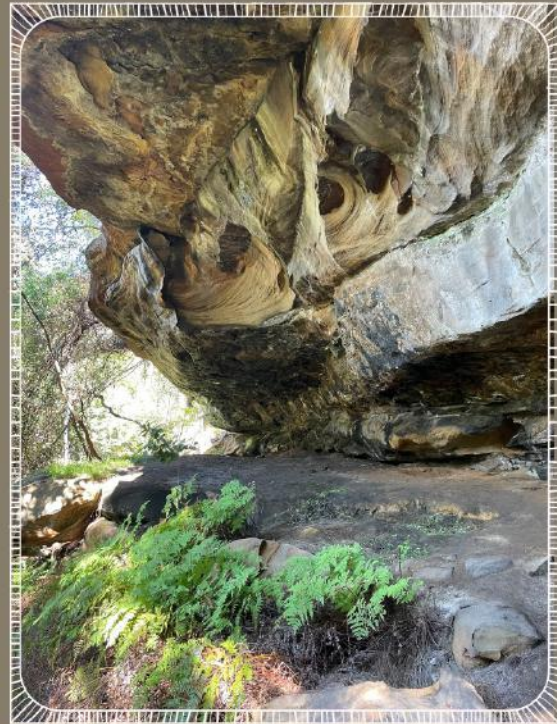


The image on the left is taken in Autumn and the light is low, creating good shadow and highlighting the engraving. The image on the right is taken in December and light is high and diffuse, making the engraving difficult to see.

Site Monitoring and Photography cont...



Feature photo



Context photo

toring site the low light creates the best shadow, which will result in a better photo. For WHS reasons, we don't want you traipsing around in the dark, so during the day is going to be your only opportunity.

Subject

This is simply, what you are taking a photo of. The photo doesn't need to be complicated, in fact, we are happy if you focus on one subject each photo. But we would like you to give us two different subject photos if possible – a feature photo and a context photo.

A feature photo focuses on one object. That object might be a hand stencil, an engraving, a

midden, some graffiti or erosion. When you're taking a photo up close, remember to keep the feature in focus.

A context photo creates a frame of reference for the feature photo. For site monitoring, this is usually a location shot. A photo of the whole overhang, the midden lens, or the waterway where the grinding groove is found.

Move around. Try a few different angles to find the best shot or if that doesn't feel right, simply copy the angle of the photo that was taken before in a previous monitor.

Scale

Scale gives the person looking at your photograph a

frame of reference. You don't need to use a professional photo scale, just anything that can provide the frame of reference eg a pen or a coin, even your hat. With shelters, make sure you don't put anything on the walls. Even if you can't see any rock art, there may still be something there.

In the photo, the scale should be straight, this makes viewing the photo much easier.

You may be unsure about which photo is best - photos close up or standing further back. The easy solution is to take two or more photos of your site.

Stability

Most people shoot with their phone these days.

This is great as most people have one, they are convenient and can take a photo easily. They can pose a problem when zooming however, as images can become pixelated. Stability can also be an issue with a phone. Holding the phone still enough to take a photo can be difficult at times and taking extra equipment out in the bush (like a tripod), not an option. A simple solution is to rest your phone on something as you take the photo. To protect your phone, place something underneath it – a scarf, a t-shirt, whatever. (Just make sure it doesn't get in the photo!)

Light

If you have an overhang to monitor, then you might find the inside quite dark and difficult to



Midden shell—what's the type of shell—with scale.



Midden shell—what's the type of shell—without scale.

photograph. Try taking a photo with and without the flash. If that still doesn't work, simply send your photos in with your report and let us know that it was dark at the overhang. Also note the time of day, and the time of year. Perhaps your site will be easier to photograph at a different time of year.

The photos collected during volunteer site monitoring are invaluable and they add to the continuing knowledge of the site which is used to preserve and protect the Aboriginal cultural heritage across the partner council boundaries. And remember, we want you to enjoy yourselves, so we are happy with

whatever photos or updates that you can manage. That means during lockdown, make sure you follow the rules. Thank you everyone for your help.

References:

<http://stanwagon.com/public/SandstonePhotographyBelvinsWagon.pdf>

Warning: This is a 64MB download

<https://photographyicon.com/scale/>

<https://expertphotography.com/sense-of-scale-photography/>

<http://www.bair.org/BAJRGuides/12.%20A%20Short%20Guide%20to%20Digital%20Photography%20in%20Archaeology/DigitalPhotography.pdf>



Overhang photos. Images taken on an iphone. On the left the image was taken with the automatic flash on. The image on the right was taken with no flash.

WHO OWNS THE PAST?

By Phil Hunt

You seek to say that as scientists you have a right to obtain and study information of our culture. You seek to say that because you are Australian you have a right to study and explore our heritage because it is a heritage to be shared by all Australians, white and black. From our point of view we say you have come as invaders, you have tried to destroy our culture, you have built your fortunes upon the land and bodies of our people and now, having said sorry, want a share in picking out the bones of what you regard as a dead past. We say that it is our past, our culture and heritage and forms part of our present life. As such it is ours to control and it is ours to share on our own terms. That is the Central issue in this debate.

Rosalind Langford¹

These are just some of the powerful words expressed in 1983 during an ongoing argument raging between the Aboriginal and archaeological communities. Things have progressed a lot since then. However, there are still battlegrounds. The following example shows that new technology can bring new challenges and old attitudes can persist.

Not so many years ago an Aboriginal site was rediscovered in Victoria. The custodians and researchers were very excited. It made the news. A page was created on Wikipedia. At some point the exact coordinates were added. Anyone with Google or a GPS could plug in the numbers and see the location and work out how to get there. People started trespassing on the privately

owned land. An archaeologist working with the traditional owners requested that the coordinates be taken down. Here is the response from one editor.

While I understand your concern, the location is of encyclopaedic value and I'm not aware of any Wikipedia policy that would prevent its inclusion here.

A debate ensued that grew and grew. There are paragraphs of argument. The main thrust of the Wiki purists is that the coordinates were put up earlier in an international heritage forum document and, having thus been exposed to the light, should remain evermore. When pushed on ethical or management perspectives, they retreated to Wiki's policies and said they can't find one that says the coordinates should be removed. Why are they allowed to have them? Because someone did it before and it's OK under their policies.

On the other side, traditional owners, archaeologists and heritage managers were pleading with the group of editors to remove the coordinates, citing the confidentiality of the site, the importance of protecting it from malicious attack or over visitation, and also in terms of respect. Surely if the Indigenous custodians wish to have their own heritage kept confidential, this should be possible? The landowner also didn't want more trespassers. All rational argu-

WHO OWNS THE PAST? CONTINUED...

ment based on cultural and intellectual property, common codes of ethics across different international jurisdictions, and management concerns were knocked back because the Wiki policies did not support them and the 'encyclopaedic value' is considered sacrosanct. Here is a Wiki policy oft referred to:

Some organizations' rules or traditions call for secrecy with regard to certain information about them. Such restrictions do not apply to Wikipedia, because Wikipedia is not a member of those organizations; thus Wikipedia will not remove such information from articles if it is otherwise encyclopedic. (Wiki²)

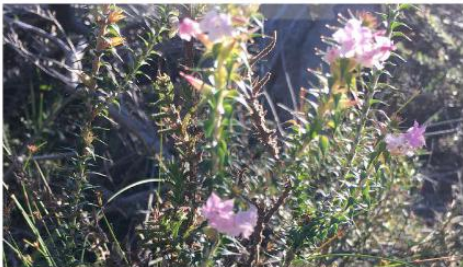
If you go to Wiki and try to find someone who might be able to override the decision, you can't. There is no hierarchical structure, just collections of editors who act according to policies that seem to suit whichever people know them best. The debate went round and round.

Please take them down. No, we don't have to. There are good reasons. We don't agree. You don't need the coordinates. It's of encyclopaedic value. Everyone else has removed them. But they once were up, therefore it would be wrong to take them down. Lots of people are asking you. But they're not Wiki editors. Some have become editors. But not all the editors agree and Wiki policy supports it. Why not change the policy? What's wrong with the policy? We told you. But we don't agree. Who are you anyway? We are Wiki editors, didn't you read

our policies, and we've debated enough. Are you going to take the coordinates off? No, because there is no unanimous agreement so the last decision will stand. That's crazy! No, it's our policy, didn't you read our policy? It's impossible, we give up! So, it can't have been that important then.

Some of the questions put to the editors may be apt for anyone providing information in public about the location and content of Indigenous cultural sites – just swap Wiki for whoever you think is doing the wrong thing:

Do you have permission to publish this information? Why is Wiki and its policies more important than normal codes of conduct? How are your editors elected, selected or authorised to speak on this matter? Why is Wiki more important than those who have cultural ties, custodial responsibilities, land owner/manager responsibilities and/or site managerial responsibilities (and how is Wiki in a place to judge that based on a literature review or internal editorial discussions)? Why do custodians have to prove who they are and why they have an interest while Wiki editors can simply put whatever information they like without justifying it (other than according to policies most people in the world haven't read, reviewed or endorsed)? Do Wiki editors do due diligence, risk assessments, consultation? Are they liable for any damage done that could be linked to their words like site managers and own-



MANLY DAM WILDFLOWERS



WHO OWNS THE PAST? CONTINUED...

ers are for any impacts to sites? How many Indigenous communities know that their sites are in the public domain? Are Wiki editors prepared to put their views at an Aboriginal community meeting, not just online? Shouldn't the onus be on those wishing to make a site public to provide the evidence that it is safe to do so, and be prepared to debate it with the communities most affected, rather than expect everyone else to meet an evidence threshold that appears to be made up? What is the demographic of Wiki editors who make these decisions? How many Indigenous people were and are involved in Wiki's policy development?

And so the question remains, who owns the past?

1 R. Langford (1983) *Our Heritage - Your Playground*, *Australian Archaeology*

2 From <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:What_Wikipedia_is_not>#Wikipedia is not censored>

AHO and Heritage NSW specialists responding to impacts.



MUSEUM NEWS

Even in the varying stages of social distancing and lockdowns that COVID-19 has brought, the AHO is still engaged in many and varied tasks.

For example, Karen was interviewed for a documentary with History Hit being made in the UK, so the interviewer was online, the cameraman was at the museum and Karen was ... in two worlds?

<https://access.historyhit.com/videos/an-indigenous-history-of-australia>



Confidentiality Blues

By Phil Hunt

Continuing with the theme of *who owns the past*, we thought we should delve down a bit more. Over the years the AHO also has had debates about the release of site information. When it comes to the location of Aboriginal sites, the constant theme from Aboriginal communities and heritage organisations is that site data is confidential and the location of sites should not be made public, except where there is support from Aboriginal custodians and there are management mechanisms in place to ensure their short and long term protection. The AHO's policy has been and still is not to reveal in public documents the exact location of any site. This may appear to go against the ideas of education and awareness that the AHO promotes, and the question of why not share information if it is already in the public domain is a legitimate one. To answer that, let's have a look at some key points.

Aboriginal heritage managers and communities don't wish all sites to be made public

It is *Aboriginal* heritage. In the 1970s and 1980s as Aboriginal people struggled to gain improved human rights and land rights, they were also arguing for rights to control their own heritage (see previous article). It seems reasonable that Aboriginal people should have a greater say in how their heritage is promoted and accessed than the general community.

Heritage organisations and professionals recommend confidentiality for sites

While not every bureaucracy or specialist has all the right answers, we must respect the fact that they are looking at more data and evidence every day than most of the pub-

lic. They are also responding to the wishes of the Aboriginal community, even though the two groups have not always been quite on the same page.

Aboriginal heritage has not been a high priority by land managers

This is changing, however, most people working in or acquainted with Aboriginal heritage management would understand that more resourcing and attention has gone to other types of heritage by all levels of government and research institutions. In the mid-1990s Aboriginal staff took out a formal grievance against the organisation they worked for, the then National Parks & Wildlife Service, for systemic racism. Why? Largely for continually underfunding and diverting resources from Aboriginal heritage. If there are fewer resources, there are fewer protection measures.

Why shouldn't people be able to visit any place in a public reserve if they wish, if it is open to the public? The obvious answer is, they should! If the reserve is open and there are no restrictions in place, and the visitors follow all the rules and respect the place they go to, perfect. The general confidentiality of sites is not about preventing all visitation to a site, it is to reduce the risks of over visitation and disrespectful visitation. How do you control that? Perhaps the internet knows. It is the internet that has changed the game.

With the internet, anyone can create a website and then collect a huge amount of information,

Confidentiality Blues continued...

synthesise it and then broadcast it to the world. Not just a small group of today but to potentially millions of people for however long the internet and its archives remain. A backpacker from Finland can come across the information and then put it on their own blog. That can be picked up and shared and shared again. A single site that was once occasionally stumbled across or the location passed on within a family group is suddenly visited every other weekend, and perhaps during a pandemic lockdown, almost daily. More visitors means more wear and tear. Eventually someone writes their initials or brings a spray can.

Making the exact location of a site public, or even giving enough information by which more people will attempt to find a site, goes against common practice for this reason. If you are going to make something public and there is a likelihood that a reasonable amount of people will visit, then it is better to put in the infrastructure first and it has to be well-planned. This takes money, time and cooperation and we know resources are tight for Aboriginal heritage. What usually happens is a site is being degraded and authorities have no choice other than to try and control visitation through protection works. It is rarely 100% harm elimination.

At the AHO we ask people not to even post a photo of a site on their own social media unless they have permission from the local custodians. We try not to put any information in public that will make it easy for people to find a particular site. The AHO supports getting people into the bush so that they can learn from it and then be more enthusiastic in protecting it. The problem is the more who visit a particular location, the less able the bush is to recover. When harm is done, it is difficult to fix. Some is irreversible.

We have heard people say it is elitist to withhold information from the public domain. The public are robbed of the opportunity to access all these special places. But who are these elites and how often do they get to visit these places? If a place isn't visited by a human does it mean it has less value? And what of the rights of the people from future generations? Another question might be, if someone comes across something special, does it need to be shared with everyone on earth?

Threatened species, fragile ecosystems and certain infrastructure assets are kept confidential to help manage the risks. Many Aboriginal sites would have had cultural restrictions for who can visit. We don't



[Yarnupings November 2019](#)

Confidentiality Blues continued...

What about our personal freedoms? We are fortunate to have many, but there are also responsibilities. Those who are charged with managing land, including our own home, have responsibilities to look after it. Should the rights of internet users to have free access to information come at the expense of a site or the resources of land managers? More importantly, however, is the ethical consideration. Do the Indigenous custodians (traditional and/or managerial) want a particular site public?

A number of rock art sites have become popular for rock climbers. When those climbs are posted to rock climbing websites, this increases traffic and increases damage to the sites. The AHO and Councils have had luck getting some taken down but it is not easy and there is resistance. There are ongoing battles in other parts of Australia. Internationally, the same debates are going on, between Indigenous peoples, land managers and those who wish to publicise and to visit special places.

In our last newsletter ([Yarnupings June 2021](#)) we talked about how we managed to clean up some graffiti and how rewarding, yet difficult it is. How disheartening it has been for one of our volunteers and everyone else when we learned another site, cleaned up several years ago, had been reattacked worse than ever. The list of sites that need urgent site conservation grows. Many would say that there are structural problems with the way Aboriginal heritage is protected in NSW, with most time and energy going to the development assessment process and the least to site maintenance. The proposed new legislation that may improve this has flaws and it continues to be delayed. Perhaps it is just a priority thing? And if 'the authorities' should do more to protect sites, who persuades them to prioritise the funding?

Will there be a time when anyone can visit any site whenever they like? Has there ever been such a time? Reserves and areas get closed for varying reasons. There have always been restrictions on information and knowledge, to protect things, places, the environment and people. If we truly value something, then we should help those who are most able to help and who carry the burden of responsibility. The task of trying to protect just the 900+ recorded sites in the AHO Council partnership area is immense. That is why these Councils deserve credit for their years of dedication. We are also very grateful to our volunteers and others in the community who are making an invaluable contribution.



[Yarnupings June 2021](#)

Sydney Language

Compiled by Karen Smith



Birrung-Stars



Badagarang-Kangaroo



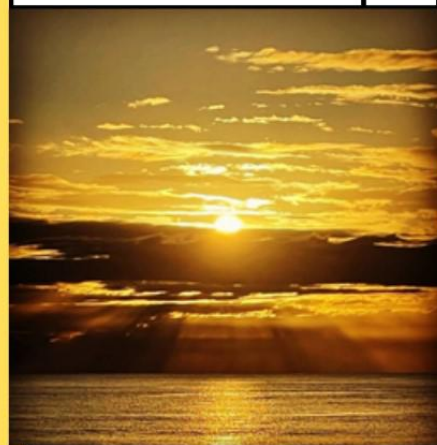
Walumil-Port Jackson Shark



Muraong-Emu



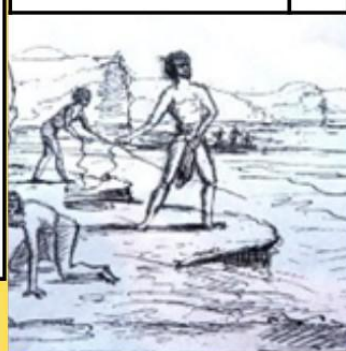
Guwing-Sun

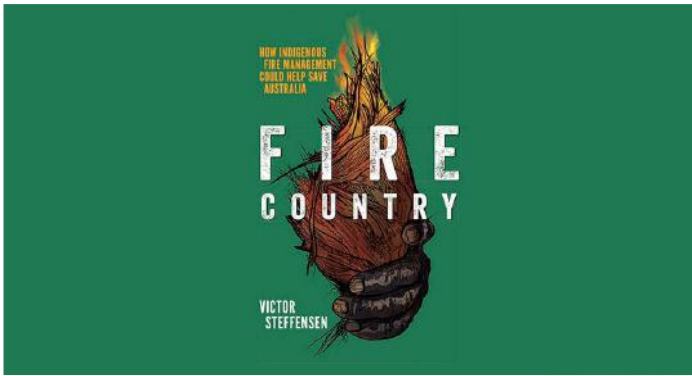


Yanada-Moon



Garigarrang-Ocean





Words by Phil Hunt

I know there was a great review by Paul Griffiths of this book in Yarnupings (June 2020) but I only just got hold of a copy and it has blown my socks off! This book is like rain after a long dry spell. It is so refreshing. Its significance will be best measured from far in the future when people are well placed to see what was before and what came after. Yes, it is that good.

This book is not another non-Indigenous perspective of what might have been, it is a manual of how to re-read the land from someone who has been fully trained in the old ways, is fully practiced and totally committed to helping us all reconnect. Victor in parts sums up saying:

"This book has been a contribution to give the old people a voice and for the land to be heard...The most important thing goes back to the younger generations. I hope that they pick up this story and carry on the responsibility."

North Head fire aftermath



For those of us who are not so young, the least we can do is get informed and help make space for this revitalisation to occur. This book gives a taste of just how deep traditional science is and how it is conjoined with respect for all the animals, insects, plants, waterways, soils, Country and humans who are interconnected with it. It also gives us permission to be patient, to not rush headlong into 'fixing' things and making things worse. Not everyone needs to be a fire practitioner and indeed cultural burning must continue to be controlled by Indigenous people not usurped and modified by wider society. A question we have for this edition of Yarnupings is 'who owns the past?' Another question might be 'how can we work together respectfully to gift a good future to those who come after us?' After all, the greatest number of people to exist on this planet are not even born yet.

Grass fire—Kakadu



PHOTO COLLECTION

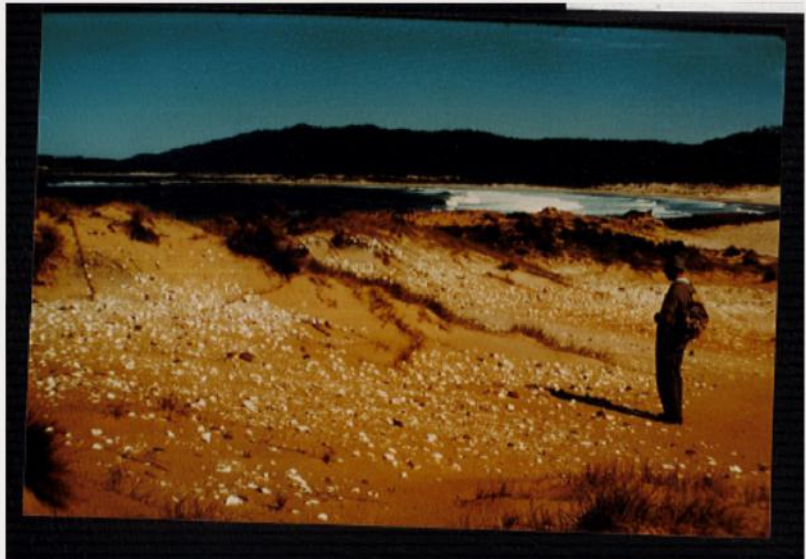
The AHO has delighted in images kindly donated by local beaches resident David Brown. The photos from a collection of his uncles give examples of many rock engraving sites many decades ago using old equipment and old ingenuity and are very helpful records to understand things now. The photos are from the 1960s to 1980s when his uncles "*pursued their joint interest in professional class photography (they developed their own photos) and the classifying of Aboriginal rock carving photos in the Hawksbury Sandstone basin*".

The AHO has come across quite a few sites in the

region that were originally recorded by one or other of the Power brothers and it was great to find such a connection across time and space!

"I'm glad that your visit to pick up the Aboriginal Rock Carving photo albums will assist your archaeological records. The compilers of the records were Charles & Bob Power. Bob was an orange orchardist close to the North Richmond Bridge all his life. Elder brother Charles retired as an industrial chemist at the Homebush Meat Works. He passed away aged 90 in 1995."

POWER BROS COLLECTION



A mask for you to colour in and wear.

Don't forgot to ask your mother or father to cut out the eyes and help you attach the elastic.



ABORIGINAL FLAG SYDNEY^{IN} LANGUAGE

Ngana
Black - The Aboriginal
People of Australia

Yarragul
Yellow
Represents the
Sun, the giver
of life and
protector

Mudjil
Red - Red Earth, Ochre & Spiritual
Relationship to the Land



250 gms Almond Meal
 1 or 2 teaspoons wattle seed
 3 or 4 Bananas (large/ small) Are best ripe and then frozen for at least overnight
 - easier to puree and have more flavour
 2 Teaspoons of Gluten Free Baking Powder
 3 Eggs
 80 mls Honey

Preheat Oven to 160
 Prepare Loaf Pan by lining with baking paper.

Puree Bananas with Honey and Baking Powder, beat in eggs
 Combine wattle seed with almond meal - beat into Banana mixture
 Place mixture in loaf tin
 Bake for 45mins - 1 hour - cooked when skewer comes out clean
 This is not a sweet loaf, top with jam if you like things sweeter.

A highly nutritious start to the day

BY KAREN SMITH

Gluten Free
 Wattle Seed
 Banana Cake

Australian Wildflowers

