

Buckingbong to Birrego:
walking into country

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Above: The walking party, support crew and audience celebrating around the camp fire on the final night of the walk, Sunday 14 September. Photography: Linda Elliot
Opposite: Buckingham Camping Reserve at sunset, Friday 12 September



In 2014 The Cad Factory launched its [Regional Partnership Program](#) which delivers a suite of projects over 18 months with three national organisations including the National Museum of Australia, The National Association for Visual Arts and Performance Space.

Buckingbong to Birrego is the first major project delivered as part of this program.

Partnerships are at the heart of The Cad Factory's future. We are excited to not only be working with national organisations in order to extend the scope of what we do, but also to allow local artists and communities the opportunity to engage with national institutions and for those institutions to have an understanding of the way that we work.

Vic McEwan, Artistic Director, The Cad Factory



George at the Meridian Circle performance, Sunday 14 September

The Project

Buckingbong to Birrego involved a three-day walk in September 2014 of almost 50 kilometres from the Murrumbidgee River near Narrandera to a property in the Birrego district owned by the Strong family. The project explored contemporary arts practice through an engagement with land and its cultural, social and environmental histories, and was a partnership between the National Museum of Australia, The Cad Factory, Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation and farmer Graham Strong.

The walk aimed:

- To acknowledge and understand the history of the Narrandera region;
- To honour the capacities of land and people to produce food and fibre; and
- To build strength and wellbeing in places and communities.

On the first day of the walk, people gathered at Buckingbong Camping Reserve. The reserve takes its name from one of the great Murrumbidgee pastoral stations. Buckingbong, established by the Jenkins family in the 1830s and 1840s, stretched from the Murrumbidgee River south to an area now called Birrego, where the Strong family reside.

Just upstream from Buckingbong camping reserve, around the river bend, is a place officially named 'Massacre Island', and often referred to as 'Murdering Island'. On this narrow island in the early 1840s, conflict between squatters and the local

Wiradjuri people culminated in a horrific massacre of possibly hundreds of Wiradjuri men, women and children.

Camping at Buckingbong State Forest along the way, the walk ended at the Meridian Circle, a vast land artwork created in 2009 and framed by wide belts of saplings and shrubs. Since the early 1990s, the Strong family have planted hundreds of thousands of trees and shrubs and developed innovative methods of ecological farming that have brought their farmlands back to life. The Meridian Circle is a place of creativity, connection and regeneration, a fitting destination for a walk that began near a site of atrocity and immense loss.

Along the route of the walk, artists presented artworks, installations and performances made for each place. Local elders, farmers and community members gave talks and fostered discussion about history, possible futures, and the inextricable ties between our bodies and the nourishing, productive terrains through which we walked.

George Main, Curator, People and the Environment, National Museum of Australia



Uncle Jimmy Ingram during the smoking ceremony he conducted at Buckingbong Camping Reserve to ensure a safe journey for the walkers, Friday 12 September



Walking through a wheat paddock, Saturday 13 September





The opening special event, *What Lies Around the Bend*, a night of community celebration, storytelling and projection, Friday 12 September

Campsite One



Buckingbong Camping Reserve, Murrumbidgee River

The Buckingbong Camping Reserve lies on the Murrumbidgee River, downstream from Buckingbong homestead. A short distance upstream, around a river bend, is Massacre Island, where in the early 1840s local squatters brutally murdered possibly hundreds of Wiradjuri men, women and children. The massacre represented the culmination of a violent struggle between Wiradjuri and squatters that began in the late 1830s.

Walkers arrived in the late afternoon and set up camp before members of the public gathered to enjoy conversation, projections, weaving demonstrations and johnny cakes. Roland Williams from the Narrandera Local Aboriginal Land Council welcomed everybody to the event. Uncle Jimmy Ingram talked about the history and significance of the local area to Wiradjuri people and led a smoking ceremony assisted by his grandson Peter.



Day 1 *Walking*





The second special event, a site specific installation by Lorraine Connolly Northey and Jonathan Jones with Auntie Gail Clark, Saturday 13 September

Campsite Two



Buckingbong State Forest, Strontian Road

After squatters and their workers used ruthless methods to win control over Wiradjuri country in the early 1840s, dramatic changes came to the land. Ancient methods of tending the land with fire and digging sticks came to an end. In response, a great forest of cypress pine and eucalypts emerged throughout the Riverina. Later in the nineteenth century, colonial officials reserved a large patch of the Buckingbong pastoral run as a timber reserve. Today, Buckingbong State Forest is surrounded by modern farmland.

Walkers arrived after dark at the campsite and were greeted with cheers from the audience and support crew after a long 30 kilometre walk. After hot chai and dinner we enjoyed thought provoking conversations led by Waradgerie artist Lorraine Connelly Northey and Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi artist Jonathan Jones. The artists discussed their site-specific artwork made with Wiradjuri elder Aunty Gail Clark and broader and deeper issues of country and place.



Day 2 Walking





The final special event, *The Meridian Circle Performance*, Sunday 14 September

Campsite *Three*



The Kurrajong Tree, Arcadia

A venerable kurrajong tree - perhaps already an elderly plant in the early 1840s when the horrific event unfolded on Murdering Island - stands amid thriving saplings and shrubs planted by the Strong family in 2000. In the paddock adjacent to this sheltered campsite lies the Meridian Circle, a vast land artwork created in 2009.

The walkers arrived at dusk and began setting up camp. The final day's walk wasn't as long, about 20 kilometres, and everyone was in good spirits. Just as the final light was falling, the walkers and audience were led to the Meridian Circle to enjoy an ethereal performance created by Graham Strong, Vic McEwan and Steve Harradine, during which they used a fence line as a musical instrument.

After the performance, around the campfire, we reflected on the walk, enjoyed an improvised performance from Allis Hamilton and Jason Hendrickson and shared dinner.



Installation by Lorraine Connelly Northey and Jonathan Jones with Aunty Gail Clark the morning after special event two, Sunday 14 September

The Artworks

Projections



Installation



Performance

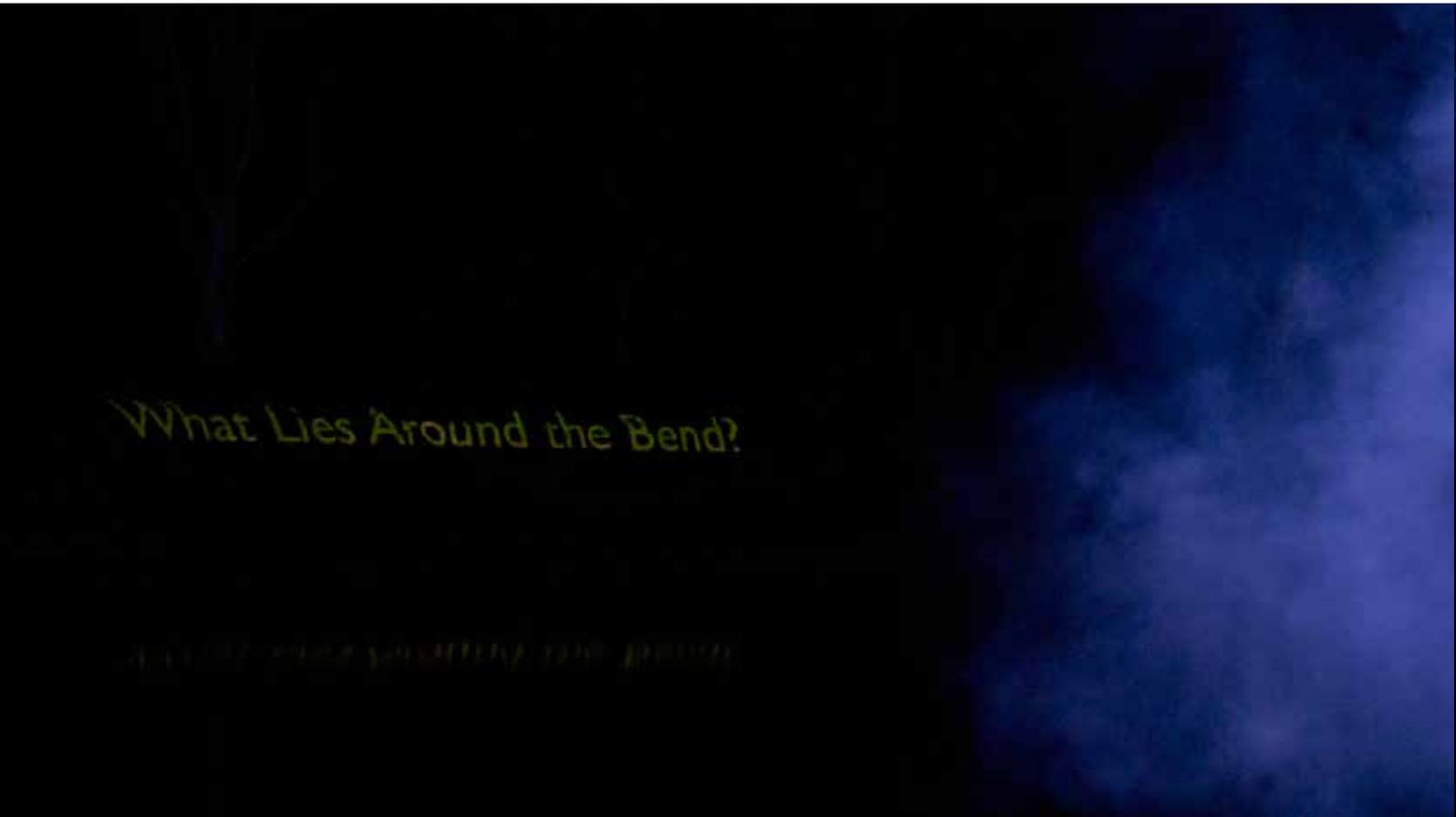


A Travelling Painting



Two Travelling Baskets

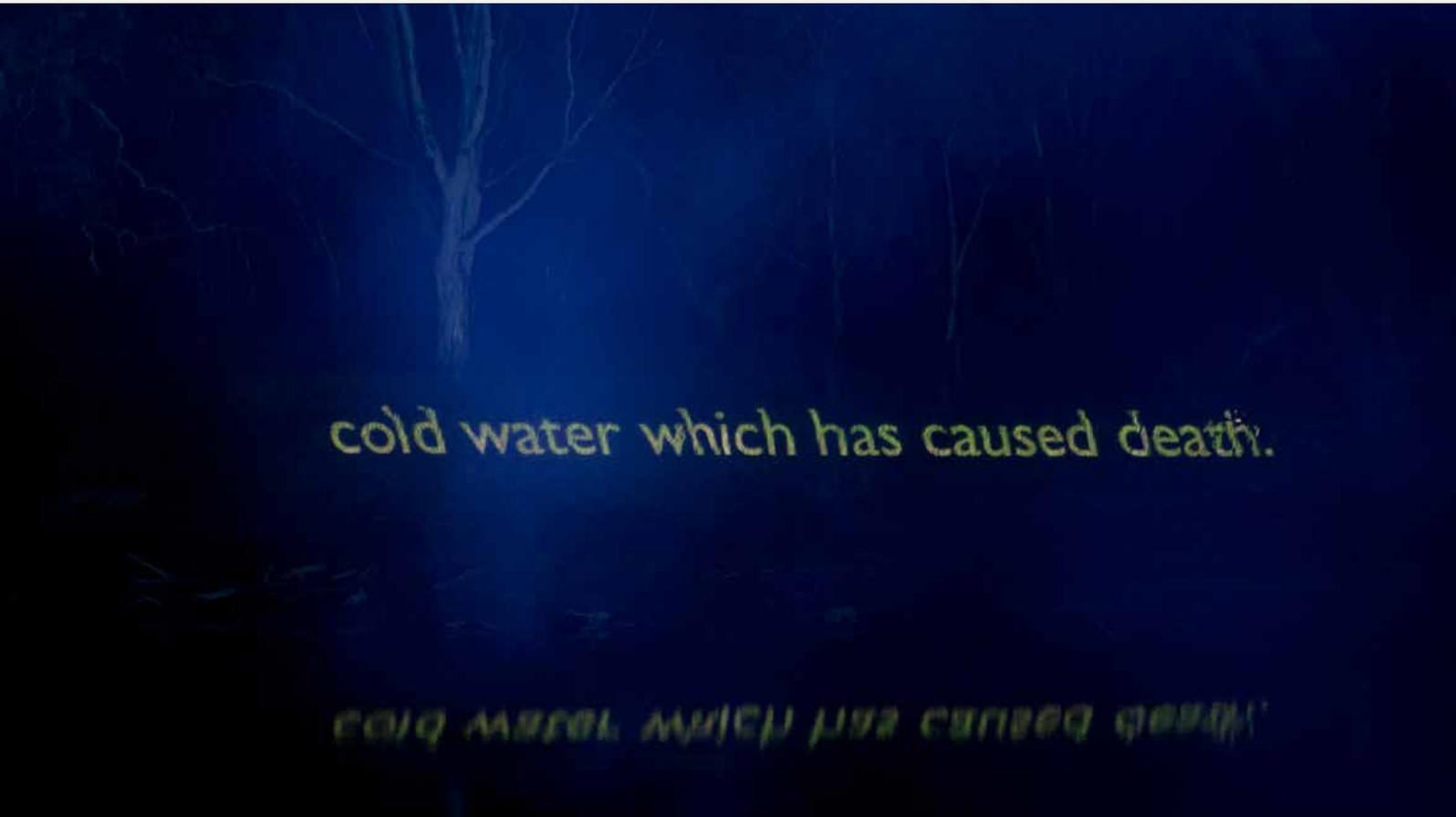




What Lies Around the Bend?

Projections onto the Murrumbidgee River, Friday 12 September

Projections onto the Murrumbidgee River, Friday 12 September



cold water which has caused death.

cold water which has caused death.

Projections on the Murrumbidgee River

Vic McEwan and George Main

On the first night of the walk, at Buckingbong Camping Reserve, visitors watched a series of landscape projections created by Vic McEwan and George Main. These projections appeared on the opposite river bank and in the trees, and were reflected in the water. Snippets of text drawn from local history books, oral history transcriptions and old newspapers were projected onto the river bank, over 40 meters wide. Authors and speakers included Bill Gammage, Ossie Ingram, Mary Gilmore and Kevin Gilbert. By projecting powerful historical words onto the very landscape itself, we provided an opportunity to embed their meaning within the landscape, to reactivate memory within the land and the river. Live didgeridoo was played throughout the projections by Callum James.

A short animation was also projected which told the story of local elder Uncle Cedric Briggs. Using the riverbed trees as a canvas, Cedric's story was animated by Aboriginal students at Narrandera High school and told of Cedric's connection to the river system throughout his life.



Lorraine Connelly Northey (Waradgerie) and Jonathan Jones (Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi) with Aunty Gail Clark (Wiradjuri), *gunya*, 2014, wood, corrugated iron, rusted iron, fencing wire, gum leaves and pipe clay; dimensions variable; installation view Buckingbong State Forest, New South Wales; courtesy the artists



gunya

Lorraine Connelly Northey and Jonathan Jones with Aunty Gail Clark

Working with local materials and stories Lorraine Connelly Northey and Jonathan Jones reconstructed notions of gunya or home. This new work speaks to issues of Wiradjuri traditions and knowledge to recall a lived landscape while challenging Western ideas of nature.

Aunty Gail Clark is a Wiradjuri elder in residence at Charles Sturt University, Lorraine Connelly Northey is a Waradgerie artist based in Albury and Jonathan Jones is a Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi artist based in Sydney. Both Lorraine Connelly Northey and Jonathan Jones have exhibited extensively nationally and internationally.



Steve Harradine leading the audience to the Meridian Circle Performance
Audience during the performance, Sunday 14 September



The Meridian Circle Performance

Graham Strong, Vic McEwan and Steve Harradine

Just as the final light was falling on Sunday, the walkers and audience were led to the Meridian Circle, a huge land art site constructed by Graham Strong and Steve Harradine in 2009. On the walk to the site, Steve Harradine chatted about the Meridian; its purpose and the construction process. He showed us aerial images on an iPad. We were led into the small, inner circle of the Meridian. Once we had all arrived, Graham Strong and Vic McEwan began an improvised set on fence and electric guitar, over 500 metres away. The haunting sounds resonated, and we lay in the paddock and listened in the darkness.



Peter Ingram painting at Arcadia after a day of walking, Sunday 14 September
Peter Ingram (Wiradjuri), *Yanhanha Murruway*, 2014, acrylic paint on board; 2.4m x 1.2m; image courtesy of the artist



A Travelling Painting *Yanhanha Murruway: walking path*

Peter Ingram

Emerging artist and young Wiradjuri leader Peter Ingram had a large sheet of plywood, 2.4 metres x 1.2 metres, transported to each campsite. The artwork that he gradually created told the story of the walk as each day unfolded. He named the artwork *Yanhanha Murruway*, which means 'walking path' in Wiradjuri. Audience members and walkers participated in the making of the work, both young and old, by adding textured hand prints throughout the artwork. The painting was a central focus on the opening special event beside the Murrumbidgee River. Children, in particular, were fascinated by the painting process. They intently watched Peter's every move, and were thrilled to participate in the making by adding their own hand prints.



Weaving with the Hands on Weavers (HOW Group) is an intimate exchange of knowledge. It entails sitting side by side over time looking, listening and learning. The HOW Group is a collective of women, men and their families and is inclusive of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people interested in coming together to share fibre based art making and cultural practices. These baskets were created over the three days of the walk



Two Travelling Baskets

Yalbalinya Ngurra: learning side by side

Hands on Weavers, the walking party and various audience members

Buckingbong to Birrego slowed down the act of travelling through Country. The HOW Group was invited to create a weaving circle at the special event which launched the walk. Two baskets were started that night and along with a bag, material and needles they too journeyed through the country.

Throughout the walk members attended the special event nights, often in a circle around the fire, and continued to sit and share in the stories begun and woven around those who walked. As they did, the baskets took shape and evolved into signifiers of the healing power of the walk. Fittingly the final stitches were made by the hand of Peter Ingram, a proud Wiradjuri man and walk participant.



The Paddock Report #3
George Main



Not Walking
Graham Strong



Walk Until You Arrive
Gina Yardley



Some thoughts from the edge of the fire-pit
Julie Montgarrett



Feel the Earth Beneath Your Feet: A Journey in Images
Chloe Beevers



The Walkers *Respond*

Lost Toenail
Greg Pritchard

The walk
Allis Hamilton

A few thoughts
Anna Jaaniste

Walking - Opening to Strange Landscapes
Bernadette Flynn

Interview
with Peter Ingram

The walk
Allis Maun



George talking with fellow walkers in 'North Taylors' paddock, Sunday 14 September

The Paddock Report

George Main

A research and writing project developed by George Main, a curator and environmental historian at the National Museum of Australia

Plans to undertake a walk from Buckingbong on the Murrumbidgee River to Birrego began to take shape in the middle of 2013, when I suggested the idea to Birrego farmer Graham Strong. The walk would contribute towards the development of [The Paddock Report](#), a Museum project that explores the meanings and significance of global climate change by looking closely at a single paddock on one of the Strong family's farms.

I first met Graham Strong and his family in 2001, when embarking on a major research project to document and understand the environmental history of the southwest slopes of New South Wales (see my book [Heartland: The Regeneration of Rural Place](#)). In 2010, I walked from Lake Cowal to Combaning, a research and writing adventure inspired by the 'healing walks' led by singer and poet Neil Murray in western Victoria, and by the 'pilgrimage' along the Merri Creek undertaken by environmental philosopher Freya Mathews (see her book [Journey to the Source of the Merri](#)). As did Neil Murray and Freya Mathews, I discovered that walking through country is a useful way to generate understandings about land and how we might nurture the productive, life-giving terrains upon which we all depend.

Graham and I started talking with Vic McEwan, Artistic Director at The Cad Factory, about the walk project. Vic saw how the involvement of artists and writers in the walk could enable understanding about the deep links between the past, present and future of the Narrandera and Birrego districts. We all consulted with Wiradjuri elders in Narrandera, Wagga Wagga and Leeton. The elders approved of the project, and they provided valuable input and guidance.

Each year for The Paddock Report I visit a paddock called 'North Taylors' on Oakvale, one of the Birrego district farms owned by the Strong family. After visiting the paddock and talking with Graham and his family, I write a report that links global issues of climate change to the local, present day reality of the paddock, its history and possible futures. The report on the following pages describes the visit to North Taylors with walkers participating in the Buckingbong to Birrego project, and is the third paddock report. To see the first two reports, visit [The Paddock Report](#) website.

The Paddock Report #3

14 September 2014

We walk into North Taylors through the gate in the northeast corner, 15 people. We've camped two nights together, and walked since yesterday morning, from the camping reserve at Buckingbong, on the Murrumbidgee River, through farmland. Late this afternoon we will reach our third and final campsite, beside an especially graceful and elderly kurrajong tree, once lonely in a wheat paddock, now embraced by wide, flourishing bands of acacia shrubs and yellow box trees, planted 14 years ago by the Strong family. In the warm sunshine, we begin walking down the gentle hillside towards the dam, towards the dense shade of another, smaller kurrajong.

When was the last time, I wonder, that so many people strolled down this slope? From the top of the rise, I realise one meaning of the sight before me. Camping, listening, walking, conversing, we have sunk, a little, into the country. The ecological reality of our material ties to productive terrains like North Taylors, its tussocks and trees, ewes and their lambs — to country that warms and nourishes our bodies — is now drawn by our physical presences, by our immersion in this paddock, up into our minds, and maybe also into our hearts.

Tonight, Gina will talk beside the fire about the influence of our experiences, of the long distances walked, of the shared meals and laughter, of the hard conversations about past and present tragedies, about economic and

cultural dynamics that continue to wound land and people. Such experiences, over days and nights, through country, have revealed physical and emotional vulnerabilities, uncovered differences and forged links. We walk down the grassy slope as a group, apart yet coherent, comfortable, knowing something of each other, and the terrain.

Four days ago, the night before I took the bus to Narrandera, Graham had texted a dark question: 'Do the events of the last 48 hours on neighbouring Brookong station make the walk more poignant or just disturbing?' Beyond the wire fences of North Taylors are two sites, each marked by intense pain, by anguish that resonates across the farmland that joins them. South, towards the nearby town of Lockhart, on land that was once part of the vast Brookong pastoral run, not far from the venerable kurrajong tree where we will camp tonight, stands an empty farmhouse, its walls and surrounding paddocks witness to fresh horror, to the incomprehensible torment and wounding of murder and suicide. And behind us, Murdering Island, just around the river bend from our first campsite at Buckingbong, where the resistance of Wiradjuri fighters to the pastoral invasion ended in massacre, 173 years ago. Graham's message was disturbing, implying that places of historical atrocity might hold active dimensions of past violence and horror, powers that inhabit and shape the present.¹

Maria Tumarkin writes of 'traumascaping', like the one we walk today, as 'central characters of our times'. In places transformed by suffering,



Photography: George Main

the very 'ground beneath our feet' can 'possess extraordinary power and could in fact be capable of great haunting and defiance'.² On the bus, heading west, I'd seen a news photograph on Facebook, heavy clouds above a long rural driveway, utes, a police car, a bright sweep of blossoming canola. Below the journalist's report, comments by readers reeled with grief and bewilderment. 'Heart goes out to family, community and the land. Much healing needed.' And, 'This land was not made for the industrial production line, and nor are people.' Tumarkin's writings offer the valuable insight that within the paddocks we walk through today, inside this particular traumascape, lies a key for survival, for the drawing of meaning from the two tragedies and their legacies.

We reach the welcome shade of the kurrajong at the foot of the slope, near the tree line and dam. Pete and I walk into the dry depression of the empty dam, looking for the jagged leaves and spherical flowers of old man weed, then return to the group. Sprouting from Gina's bag is a leafy sprig of bimble box. Two nights ago, while preparing a smoking ceremony on the riverbank, Pete's grandfather had explained how the rounded, grey leaves of the local eucalypt are ideal. They make dense, soft smoke, gentle on the eyes and throat. The sprig travels with us, carrying Uncle Jimmy's generosity, the concern he'd expressed quietly in the darkness, by the river, for our safe passage through country haunted by atrocity.

On Friday, Vic had mentioned a farmer at Yenda, on the other side of the Murrumbidgee. Floods had devastated his farm two years ago, and this winter, heavy frosts had destroyed his crops. He

keeps calling Vic and Sarah, needing to talk about the Lockhart tragedy, about the impacts of drought and other extreme weather events on people. North Taylors seems dryer than the land we walked through yesterday, greens fading into browns. Only eight millimetres have fallen in the last two months, Graham explains, and the country is even dryer further south. Throughout the Narrandera region, the cropping season had started well, with good rainfall in autumn. Mild temperatures encouraged cereals and canola to mature and flower early. Then, in midwinter, a series of unusually cold, frosty nights had killed plants, frozen heads of grain, and drawn moisture from the earth.

East of where we sit, ewes with newborn lambs graze the tussocks of North Taylors. I ask Graham about the dryness, how it has shaped his recent decisions about the management of this paddock. Only ewes with single lambs, not twins or triplets, are in North Taylors, he tells the group. With only two mouths to feed, mothers of single lambs eat less pasture. Earlier in the year, a contractor had scanned every belly, allowing Graham to draft the ewe flock according to the number of lambs carried.

In the dense shade, we talk about [The Paddock Report](#) and our walk, of attempts to draw useful meanings from the past and the present by paying close attention to the particular patterns encountered within places. Pete shares his hopes and plans to bring Wiradjuri kids back onto their country. 'If you just stop and listen', he says, 'you might hear an answer, you know?'

Yesterday, after lunch, we'd traversed a high ridge through a farm called Currajong. Our feet aching,



Photography: George Main



Allis and Anna had sung the first verse of Amazing Grace, while the afternoon sunlight carried [Pete's song](#), 'yaman-dhu ma-rang, yaman-dhu ma-rang, ngawa baladhu ma-rang', that he'd learned in Wiradjuri language classes. At the end of the ridge, beside a planted line of saplings and young shrubs, we'd met Robert, the owner of Currajong. In the shade of a grey box, we'd gazed down to saltbush paddocks below, east to the blue rise of Galore Hill, south to the dark swathe of Buckingbong State Forest, where we camped last night. Robert had talked about the history of Currajong, the paddocks and hillsides where he'd grown up, and his affection for them.

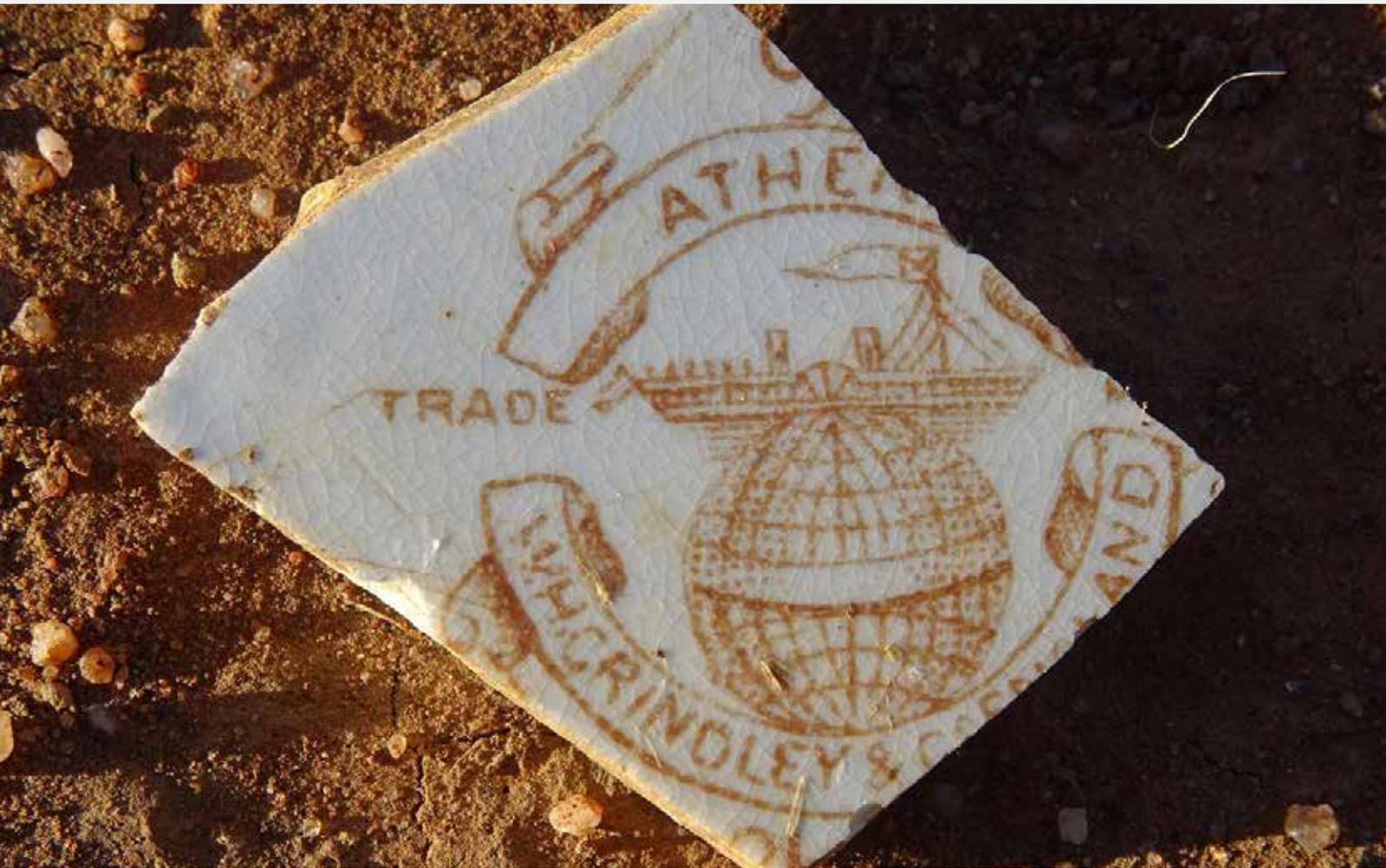
The fence lines of Currajong stretch across the highest arable country between Wagga and Hay. Elevation had helped save Robert's cereal and canola crops from the damage inflicted by frost elsewhere in the region. Robert had told us that he prefers not to grow canola. To produce a bulky, profitable harvest, the oilseed crop needs heavy applications of various chemicals. Robert worries about fungicide and pesticide residues in canola seed, soils and waterways. Profitability today, he'd explained, was an elusive goal. Wheat prices had remained stable for twenty years, while costs had soared. In the 1990s, governments and industry had recommended bigger machines, larger farms, and more debt. Keeping a beloved farm can depend on keeping a bank on side, on following the advice of a manager who identifies canola as the crop most likely to turn a dollar.

Before we'd risen and started walking downhill into the few remaining hours of the afternoon, Robert had gestured north, towards the Murrumbidgee

River and beyond to Lake Midgeon, an expansive grazing property once owned by the Austin family. The native grasses and forbs of Midgeon had grown a lot of wool, he'd explained, and in 1910 enabled an extravagant family holiday by steamer to Europe.³ From the hilltop, Robert had directed us downslope towards a teetering stone chimney, the fragile remains of a selector's home. There I'd found a small piece of a broken ceramic plate, its underside carrying the trademark of its English manufacturer, a coal-powered steamship atop the globe, an assertion of industrial and commercial triumph over distance and time.

Now, shaded by a kurrajong tree inside North Taylors, as the afternoon deepens, we stand up and prepare to walk the last few kilometres to our campsite. Together we walk through the tree belt and bend to step through the wire fence. Before reaching the camp beside the old kurrajong, its long and sinuous limbs reaching down to the ground, we will pass a paddock golden with drying grasses, peppered with the dark mounds of cottonbush, neighbouring land bought by the Strong family two decades ago. Then, it was an overworked wheat paddock, a westward sloping patch of earth repeatedly turned and bared, its indigenous biological community erased by industrial descendants of the steamship depicted on the ceramic shard, by the deliberate, regular imposition of catastrophe upon the land (see [Report number 2](#)). Broad and blossoming sweeps of wattles sown with a hefty mechanical crop seeder, and eucalypt saplings planted by hand, now border and shelter the paddock. In recent years, cottonbush has returned itself to the grassy rise, perhaps the progeny of plants that remain along the roadside

nearby. Our tired bodies will drift by the regenerating community of cottonbush, sheep and grasses, and we will see the potential for renewal inside the ground beneath our feet.



Photography: George Main

1 Maria Tumarkin, *Traumascaples: the power and fate of places transformed by tragedy*, Melbourne University Press, 2005, p. 12 and p. 235.

2 Maria Tumarkin, 'Traumascaples: Places transformed by tragedy', *Guilt & Pleasure*, 2005, http://www.guiltandpleasure.com/index.php?site=rebootgp&page=gp_article&id=250, accessed 23 September 2014.

3 Joan Austin Palmer, *Memories of a Riverina Childhood*, New South Wales University Press, Sydney, 1993, p. 68.

Not Walking

Graham Strong

Much of our modern history has been devoted to the advancement of the 'avoidance of walking'. Practical reasons become blurred with the social. In the era of Buckingham Station, maintaining and improving ways of not walking enabled more efficient economic and cultural participation with distant port cities and the tyrannically distant Britain. It also would've granted a sense of security and status by the number of horses and carts one had at disposal. Despite the apparent absolute necessity of not walking to early pastoral survival, a rich local culture had been surviving and thriving for 50,000 years without need or want of the principle.

The torch flame for walking culture is proudly held to this day. In a modern day reference, Peter Ingram mentioned getting around by the 'Foot Falcon' on the last night of the walk at camp. It drew a few giggles from those who may not have heard this turn of phrase before. Perhaps testament to the dominance of the not walking culture today or at least the conformance to a not walking culture.

A walking friend of mine who likes to be culturally controversial, sometimes signs off emails with a slogan, 'Escalators are Making This Nation Fat'. Some new housing estates don't even have footpaths despite the shops being A LOT closer than they were in 1860. The tyrannical distance argument is a bit rich today. For those who want to do the odd bit of walking as a lifestyle choice, there are however generous civic facilities available such as the pedestrian crossing to get from the car to Harvey Norman.

So when I first talked with George about this walk, I said I considered this would be a counter-cultural act; the negotiations and permissions needed to simply move in a certain way that is not the normal way of moving. The gathering of a group...to walk! I'd be highly suspicious too. Who walks across farmers paddocks these days? Even the farmers themselves are looking to drone technology so they can avoid walking.

But I have always questioned, speaking as a farmer as well as just a normal person, how do we distinguish between what we truly want and what we are told we need? I gained insights over the course of the walk which helped refine this distinction, and gave me cause to wonder whether unrestricted walking really is a threat to the economy and social order?

Most farmers were happy to have us walk across their paddocks, several joined the walk enthusiastically. I witnessed the deep human need for walking in all its forms. Its interpretations and outward expression. One walker expressed this quite emotionally at the final night camp and even did most of the walk barefoot! Another walker, shared her journey by facebooking friends not on the walk, to tell them about the walk that is being walked.

The excitement that a simple walk can generate.



Walking along Boundary Rd on the final day, Sunday 14 September

Walk Until You Arrive

Gina Yardley

Walking is simple. One step, two steps, repeat. There's something about the simplicity of walking that aids rumination, the clearing of the busy mind, the dropping away of anything and everything else other than the task at hand. The effort of a long walk seems to allow focus to become quite singular.

Over the weekend, I walked and camped for two days and three nights with a group of people from Buckinbong to Birrego, near Narrandera, NSW. The event was organised by The Cad Factory in collaboration with George Main (curator for the National Museum of Australia) and local farmers, the Strong family.

It brought together artists, Wiradjuri elders and people, local residents, local farmers, researchers, and people like myself simply going along for the ride. On the way, we got to hear the stories and devastating historical accounts from the indigenous people, see artworks made for the project, hear farmers talk of their history and use of the land, participate in weaving baskets, be involved in the Paddock Report research project and bear witness to members of a community grieving tragic recent events.

With so much to reflect upon, so much material and many perspectives to absorb, I found myself seeing a common seed in everyone that shared or spoke. Everyone's stories were heart felt, held deeply and were spoken with a sense of hope.

I felt that my role was to witness this, to hold it with openness and to walk it across the country as I travelled. As we covered the varied terrain, I sensed my fellow walkers and myself exploring our own personal landscapes. The differentiation of my inner world, the country I was traveling, and the relationship to those I walked with started to blur. I started to see the interconnectedness of all and that how we relate to land is how we relate to each other and ourselves.

Dropping my ideas and thoughts to allow this to occur took some time. Not until our final leg, as I ambled steadily down a gentle slope did the sense of stillness I had longed for since leaving the city arrive. The walkers and I had begun to walk separately, each in our own space, yet I felt a sudden affinity to them all and an expansion of myself to fill the vast landscape and take it all in. I watched as if I was an observer watching a dance that had been orchestrated without a plan and paused in space and time for me to personally witness. In this moment, I felt that I had finally arrived on this country, truly feeling the earth beneath my feet.

These few days of walking gave me much, but most of all, it gave me the clarity that we must honour our land. We must treat her and all those upon her with respect.

Thank you to all those who helped organise this event and all those that participated.



The home stretch, Sunday 14 September



Some thoughts from the edge of the fire-pit

Julie Montgarrett

It's tricky when you're asked to respond to an event that was only partly experienced; that was not what you had anticipated both eagerly and with some uncertainty for a long time – a full three days of walking country and evening shared with artists' on-site works. The Buckingham to Birrego walk was such an event. My experience limited to the rewards of the art-works, johnny-cakes and observations from the edge of the fire-pit at each night's gathering surrounded by those who had walked each day. Footsore and reflective there was plenty for them to contemplate and share. Much of what was acknowledged has remained in my thoughts since because this became a different kind of acknowledgement of country.

We gathered on the first night at Buckingham Reserve for a 'Welcome to Country' by Uncle Jimmy Ingram, Wiradjuri Elder followed by introductions by the Walk's creators, Vic McEwan and George Main and a smoking ceremony with Pete Ingram. Close to Murdering Island, this site was chosen as a reminder of many such sites 'just around the bend' across Australia, that saw the deliberate massacre of more than a hundred and fifty Wiradjuri families in 1840 at the hands of unscrupulous, ambitious settlers intent on making their own fortunes at any cost and by any means available. This kind of deadly violence was repeated 'on the Namoi, the Lachlan, the Murrumbidgee, the Murray and the Darling – across the entire Murray- Darling Basin, a sporadic and vicious war was fought', as Don Watson reminds us. (p273) For the non-

Aboriginal people present this place and its history is confronting and disturbing – a reminder of our complicity in this past that continues to be readily silenced and denied for over 200 years. A past many anxiously struggle to reconcile and acknowledging this history is one reason many of the walkers were there. Partly too because as Keating told us, 'Down the years, there has been no shortage of guilt, but it has not produced the responses we need. Guilt is not a very constructive emotion.' For the Wiradjuri community who generously formalised meaning for this event for us with a 'welcome to country' and a smoking ceremony, it must have been a profoundly different and painful confrontation with the past in the present at this site; another instance of a grief that has no arms, nor weapons for mourning, that refuses comfort and continues to devastate and demoralise too many First Australians. As ever, I am reminded there are many problematic dimensions to our task of addressing this history when we try to acknowledge country.

The walk aimed to recognize and understand the local history of the Narrandera region; to honour the capacities of land and people to produce abundant sustenance; and to build cultural and ecological resilience. Most resonant amongst the stories and words of many across the three days and nights, was Graham Strong's introduction on the first night. He challenged the idea that resilience and stoicism are required despite circumstance – acknowledging both the depth of local grief of the previous week that saw another rural family lost through despair

to murder-suicide; and the legacies of destruction and dispossession that casts a long and anguished shadow across this country and haunts our shared history. His idea that survival through sustainability must replace our dominant cultures' insistence on stoic endurance as a sign of moral integrity was clear for that way brings despair in inevitable rupture, breakdown and failure for all. Dark times', Hannah Arendt tells us, 'surround us when the past cannot guide us into the future.' Understanding this may offer us some momentum toward necessary change.

Listening around the fire-pit each night, the meaning of an 'acknowledgement of country' took on a different and deeper shapes over the three days amongst this group seeking new faith in culture for a different future for a fracturing world. They reminded me that walking country, brought the abundance, order and intricate beauty of open country up close. It slowed time into a rhythm of place honoured in the pace, sound and textures of footfalls measured by shifting complex natural relationships unseen at speed along the bitumen. A rise, a dip, a minor change in the contour of the land, a change of light and the country alters - colours, shapes plants shift, better placed for survival. The weariness at the end of a long days' walk is always genuine and well earned.



T-shirt design by Vernon Ah Kee - original member of the proppaNOW Collective, Queensland, worn proudly by systabb, Melbourne, 2013
Image supplied by Julie Montgarrett

Feel the Earth Beneath Your Feet: A Journey in Images

Chloe Beevers





Lost Toenail

Greg Pritchard

This morning after my shower I lost a toenail. It had been black for two months, since I had walked from the river to Birrego. That and my two big toe nails being half blackened was a small price to pay for the experience, particularly given that the shoes that caused this were the ones that made the walk possible. Two weeks before The Cad walk I had limped the second part of an 11km walk in pain. A doctor in Canberra suggested that old age was the reason, that I had done too much in life. Shit. Carpe Diem they say, and Facebook is full of such memes. They never add, 'oh but don't overdo it cos your body was not made to last'. In the end, with the exception of some blisters my ankles held up and I walked the entire distance.

A little discomfort was nothing compared to issues others were having, which it is not my place to go into. Perhaps the nature of the walk, given that we started near (or at for some) Massacre Island, and sat at Poison Waterholes while people read from original accounts of the events at these places, charged the walk with emotional energy. Perhaps the talks by local farmers about their attempts to ameliorate the Western farming legacy, and conversations walkers had about Climate Change, and the present ostrich like political situation made people more sensitive. Definitely, the legacy of the way in which White settlers brutally occupied the land on which we walked was on our minds.

I spent two years in the Riverina, not far from where we walked, and mostly when I went for a walk or a ride I was horrified by the amount of rubbish that

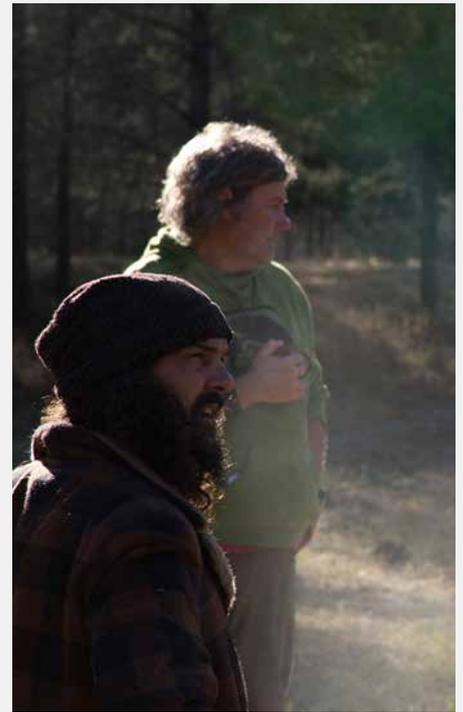
was strewn along roads, lanes and in irrigation ditches, to the point that I stopped walking. It was nice on this walk, because we were mostly on private land, where we did not have to deal with the detritus of our consumer society.

Since I've left the Riverina I have been nomadic, and in the last six months have driven over ten thousand kilometres around NSW and it was nice to slow down, and take some time out, to breathe.

It was nice to feel the earth under our feet (Whitman), to intimately notice the subtle changes in fields, on rocky hillsides, in old 'weed' forests. Walking shows you the landscape in a way that flashing past in a comfortable car never can. You experience the noises of the land, of the animals and birds and wind, and take in the smells of the paddocks. It was nice to have the leisurely conversations that walking beside someone allows, to be allowed to look through windows into other people's lives, to learn things.

It was good to learn of George's project, of the close inspection of a small relatively insignificant piece of land over a long time, and I am honoured to have been a part. I was also very pleased to share the walk with Pete Ingram and to learn from him. The culmination of the walk, standing inside the Meridian project in the dark listening to Graham and Vic play (the guitar and fence respectively) was a beautiful experience. I could have lain on the earth which I had walked on for two days and listened all night.

Was it a healing walk, as some called it? I think those of us who walked acknowledge the injustices to Aboriginal people through-out Australia. We can't feel those injustices as deeply as Aboriginal people. We can try to make sure they don't continue, though they clearly do. The people who need to come to these understandings were not on the walk, and the sad fact is that they would not be. But those of us who made the walk can take what we learnt into the world.



The walk

Allis Hamilton

Upon Wiradjuri country,
a ceremony
of smoke and welcome.

*

Slow slinking river,
a mirror hiding a world
of human-sized fish,
and mysteries
only water knows.

*

Tree shadows,
a sundial.

*

As a handful of strangers,
we walk
in a straggly line,
nattering knitting us together.

Our ears catching songs of birds,
eyes sowing stories
into deep red earth.

*

We walk
through canola paddocks
that taste of flood plains.

*

A peppercorn sapling
grows on an old yellow box,

sprouting from leaf litter
in the bough's great crook,

like foreign people
sprouting out from old,
old stories.

*

Wrapped about a scar tree,
wire rusts into bark:

we unleash the metal,
it springs off onto the soil,
the tree shaking itself free.

*

A tree grows horizontally
along the tufted earth,
its limbs reach out of its sideways self.

Fences could be trees like this.

*

Worming along a narrow path used by ants and
sheep,
we wiggle beneath the warming sun,
beside us, a once poisoned creek –

now a lush grassed field
revealing little of its deadly past.

*

We scrape our footprints
onto a dam's dry bed.
On the hilltop
kurrajongs shelter us
from sky's blue oven.

*
on feet's brave flesh.

Wheat fields
are swaying green oceans.

We bob like buoys
over the undulating ground.

*
Lunch on picnic blankets
spread on the anty dirt.

*
After a breath of a break,
we walk on –
hurdling grasses,
collecting seeds in shoelaces.

*
Climbing skyward,
we pass skeletons of trees
grown in the wet time,
only to die in the dry.

*
Wire so old it's powdery,
stretched out
when this land learnt
to barricade.

*
Aches unsure where to rest,
meander about the body like lost sheep:
tickling hips, niggling knees, burning thighs.

Blisters slowly form

Our songs take feet forward
when will is weak.

*
Within a cedar forest's whispering world,
a strong woman speaks of injustices kept silent too
long.
With a gentle man, they create an artistic home of
remembering.

*
Having slept on the silent soil,
we wake to a fire's breakfast and Old Man Weed
tea.

We walk on,
along rocky dirt roads,
the glare of some, like empty white beaches.

*
Cars come, spitting
dust up from spinning wheels.
Walking creates little dust.

*
The walk ends under
a mighty kurrajong,
so old her youth knew not
the sound of metal churning.

What conversations do her roots
hear along ancient waterways
within the deep dark earth.

A few thoughts

Anna Jaaniste

Science is myth-making, religion is myth-making, art is myth-making.

By enacting this gesture - of walking across the land - we create new myths... In each step something new unfolds and becomes part of the larger picture.

As I walked, I came across more and more people with different perspectives, and the sun wound its arc across the sky, spinning my shadow slowly around me.

I came across all sorts of plants - "natives", "weeds", huge old trees, groundcovers hard and crunchy, scorched, like ice, grasses, scratchy, attaching their seed heads to our shoes, or as part of a soft undulating field - Who knows how all these plants arrived, but here they are all equals.

The earth changed colour and texture, the breeze came and went, conversations came and went. Our bunch was like an elastic band, stretching this way and that.

Sometimes others would walk right behind me and their footsteps became inaudible - all I could hear were my own.

Always the sound of footsteps.

I arrived at a new place - I'd never been to this land before - and there was an awful violent history that was being spoken about. It made me think of my own cultural heritage. The violence that had been inflicted upon my own family members. There too,

the land had been a witness to those events, and became part of those events.

A myth forms reality, it keeps folding upon itself to create structure.

Lorraine told us how uncomfortable, how awkward, she felt, being part of this project, this walk of "healing and hope".

I listened to the clarity of private landholder Graham speaking about his work with the land, and I felt suddenly - a new understanding, the sense of a new beat in my core - what it meant to be a custodian of the land, the responsibility that came with that. Graham made his connection to that palpable.

The animals too. I heard the sheep being spoken of as "maggot-carrying scum". All are equal here now.

There is something about walking - like swinging a set of scales, like a heart pumping blood round its looped circuits, like the wind eroding layers off the earth - reflexive, cycling, unpredictable, self-perpetuating, with its own laws of balance, ever-changing.

Nothing to do but walk.

Just now I typed "Poison Creek" into Google to find the exact name used for a place we visited on Saturday. So many "Poison Creeks" from all around Australia came up on the screen that it took me some time to find the one I was looking for.



The morning walk, Saturday 13 September



Walking - Opening to Strange Landscapes

Bernadette Flynn

Some months later I'm reflecting on the walk from Buckingbong to Birrego. I recall fields of canola, brown paddocks, heat, wattle, companionable others in a different landscape.

It is an odd sensation. I realise I have never walked through farmland to understand this land. The walk is not in the 'bush', not the national park as wilderness, nor is it an encounter with intact local ecologies of flora and faunathis is different... a different spaciousness....a different knowing of self/other/landscape ...layered connections.

In walking, the land offers up overlays, shadows, presences – a set of clues to navigate present histories. In Rebecca Solnit's history of walking she draws attention to how 'the landscapes, urban and rural, gestate the stories, and the stories bring us back to the sites of this history'[1]. In undertaking this walk, I walk into responsibilities, Wiradjuri country, embodied resonances in conversation with local frequencies.

During the walk fragments of conversation, rise, drift, fall away, find their place and spread out to settle into togetherness in solitude. With the other walkers I move through a set of negotiations. Requests to move through the land; a brief touching; a pause; to the mother; the aunties; requests to enter; spaces carefully negotiated. Other negotiations involve fence lines; paddocks that open out; tracks that can or can't be walked; places for traversing or not.

I am leaving the Riverina finishing my time here as manager of Griffith Pioneer Park museum – the museum itself a microcosm of local stories refracted through objects, reconstructed buildings and historical interpretations. I take this walk over three days recognising this forms the last steps of an encounter with this area ... for now ... perhaps such a walk might have been at the beginning of my encounter with the country.

I join the walk on the second day as we walk into a dried creek bed known as Poison Waterhole Creek. We sit down and listen, stories are recounted about the massacre of local Aboriginal families in the 1830s, references to the historical record, extracts from Mary Gilmore letters (1938) [2] describing over two hundred dead, stories passed down by the survivors' family about the poisoning of the waterholes and mass shootings. The violent history of these encounters hovers in the air, no one seeks a resolution a final say on the meanings.

I experience the physicality of this mapping of place as heat, exhaustion, intensity of colour and horizon line. Walking returns the body to its original limits again, to something supple, sensitive and vulnerable, but walking also extends into the world (Solnit, p29). I walk into and with the contradiction of the Riverina as one of Australia's food bowls – yet around us, loss of tree cover and biodiversity, productivity fueled by the use of pesticides. As walkers we are in this conversation, we move through and eat from this matrix as our material selves are embedded in this productivity.



The next day the paddock features strongly – under a Kurragong tree singing, stories of regeneration, hopes for future generation and the passing on of knowledge. We move through paddocks, along roads and into the farming land of Graham Strong and family. Straight lines and exposure are replaced with a vista of massed acacia species, landscape of swales and emerging grass seedlings. We move with and through this narrative of place where wheat fields have been replaced by well-known wattles and locally endangered species. This particular narrative ends under another Kurrajong Tree, a campfire, weaving, songs, final sharings, billy tea.

The space to walk over the three days has been a space to consider. The journey of paying attention has followed the leanings of the somatic where fragments of conversation faded in the wind to be replaced by a spatial intensity. I remember this as a type of reconciliation or negotiation between the mind, body and world.

1. Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, Verso, London, 2001, p4.

2. Letter by Mary Gilmore, published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 1938, and read on site by George Main, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/17447715?searchTerm=mary%20gilmore%20poisoned%20narrandera&searchLimits>



Photography: Bernadette Flynn

1. The treeline of North Taylor's Paddock in the Birrego district – day three
2. Stepping into country
3. Avenues of Canola
4. The lizard tattoo on Graham Strong - local farmer and fellow walker
5. Grey Wattle (*acacia brachybotrya*) - one of the many local regeneration species of acacia at Graham Strong's farm.

A Walk of Healing and Hope

Peter Ingram interviewed by Vic McEwan

VIC: Peter, please introduce yourself.

PETER: I'm a Wiradjuri Man, travelling through the country, following my feet, hearing some new things, seeing some new things, hearing different points of view on how we can move forward to make Australia a better place, even the world a better place. What we need to do is come together as one. Sharing, and caring - there is too much greed and hatred. We are born to love but we are taught to hate.

VIC: Can you tell me what you've been doing over the last few days.

PETER: I've been going on a bit of walk of healing and hope, to make some new friends, see some new artists in a different light, different frame - reframing if you like.

I'm following the trails that my ancestors would have walked to go to ceremonial sites. I'm also revisiting some tragic parts of our history where some very bad things have happened. And that hurt is still in the people today. Hopefully we will heal, but we get scarred. It's still visible. When you look in a mirror you can still see the scar, and that reminds you of the hurt, so you do dwell on it. And we need to heal these things and live as a community, that's how it should be. Just love.

Hopefully it will heal, hopefully it will heal soon. But I think it will take a long time. The hurt is still there. Even when a scar doesn't hurt it is still there.

It's just lovely to walk through like my ancestors used to, no motor vehicles, just walk, hear the birds, smell the trees, the pollen too. It's been a very good

journey – following my feet – hopefully something around the bend will make a better place.

VIC: And where does this walk fit into your journey, your bigger journey?

PETER: I remember when I was a kid growing up. I was a bit troubled - to and fro from homes. I was into mischief, and we had little cultural workshops, we had little camps and did things. And now that I've come back as a man, back to Wagga, because I had to leave the centre of my universe, and go and learn different things from different people. I went to live with my Nanna. She was an aboriginal foster care lady and she did lots of good things, even though she had a tragic start in life too. There is still a bit of hate in the family, because of how things have happened with Nan's journey. She had different kinds of kids, and we used to go down the river and we used to love it. Do different things. And hopefully I can now bring some of those camps and workshops back so I can get these kids to connect with country.

We need to bring a bit more laughter into the bush. The bush is screaming for it. And it is where we are fully at ease, and where we feel at home too. It's in our blood - that this is what we love. And on my journey I'd like to give them culture, some responsibility and some hope. Some bad things happen in life - you look at a beautiful gum tree that's been scarred to make a nice canoe or a shield or a coolamon, and he'll be scarred, but he's still strong, but he'll show his scar and he'll have that scar for life, but it doesn't kill him, it makes him stronger.

VIC: Have you learned anything from the land on this journey?

PETER: Well another thing I'd like to do is bring traditional fire back. Traditional burning of country, because country is sick and it needs it. Come and have a look – we're just in Spring now and look at all this dry foliage, in winter at right time of year we would have burned that. Our burning was like our lawn mower you could say. We'd keep it lovely, we'd have lovely short grass, and we could walk softly across there with bare feet, no twigs sticking into us. We would have just softened it all up. And hopefully put some potash, some nutrients back in the ground, and germinate native seed, grasses and trees.

And I'm just walking through at the moment to understand the bush, understand my brothers and sisters in the wild, the trees - understand the perfect time for them to do things. When they seed when they drop nuts, what time the birds come to eat certain fruits and berries. Walking along learning about my brothers. Some things I don't learn from my brother or father, but I learn from people who specialise in that. That's a part of living in a community where you learn something from everyone. The good things and the bad things. But the bad things tell you that's not what you should be doing. But you have to take your own path. We do have temptations in this world and we might step on the other side of fence but we still walk straight.

VIC: We talked about the walk being a walk of healing and hope, but obviously that can't happen in a couple of days – it's a life time of work. What do you think about the future, in

terms of how we get there – or if we can get there?

PETER: The walk is just one step. One step in life. We can show people that we can live together, we can get rid of this racism and bigoted points of view out of Australia's mind. Not re-write history books, but let's get things right hey? Com'on I'm human, you are human, I bleed red, you bleed red, maybe there's a little bit of difference where maybe it's in our blood to stop, listen and hear, and we can feel it in our feet, the birds will scream at you when you're doing something wrong, or there are certain signs, your brothers will come and visit you. You've got to stop and listen, just listen and you'll hear what they have to say. Mother earth and father sky - what they have to say.



Special Thanks

The Wiradjuri Council of Elders

Uncle Stan Grant

Uncle Jimmy Ingram

Uncle Cedric Briggs

Roland Williams

Deb Evans

Peter Ingram

Cheyne Halloran

George Main

Graham and Amanda Strong

Vic and Sarah McEwan

Robert Bull

The Protheroe family

The Whitby family

Jan and Garth Strong

Clytie Smith

Grimm Culhane

Julie Briggs

Dexter Briggs

Des Edwards

The Hands On Weavers

Aunty Lorraine Connelly Northey

Jonathan Jones

Aunty Gail Clark

Steve Harradine

Callum James

Jarrold McDonald

Allis Hamilton

Jason Hendrickson

Shannon Young

Merrill Findlay

Anna Jaaniste

Chloe Beevers

Bernadette Flynn

Gina Yardley

Greg Pritchard

Jacob Raupach

Fiona Berry

James McCallum

Cliff and Gail Hamilton

Laura, Lila, Russell and Lenny Brown

Ro Burns

Narrandera Council

Jenny Clark

Julie Montgarrett

Linda Elliot

The audience who came along each evening to
the special events and helped create such a warm
atmosphere

Website Links

p.5 Regional Partnership Program - <http://youtu.be/kKALQm98sAg>

p. 35 The Paddock Report - http://www.nma.gov.au/online_features/the_paddock

p.35 Heartland: The Regeneration of Rural Place - <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-September-2006/tredinnick.html>

p. 35 Journey to the Source of the Merri - <http://www.freyamathews.net/books/journey-to-the-source-of-the-merri>

p.38 The Paddock Report - http://www.nma.gov.au/online_features/the_paddock

p.40 Pete's song - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjc3PzWaNXI>

p.40 Report number 2 - http://www.nma.gov.au/online_features/the_paddock/jul_2013



The afternoon walk, Sunday 14 September

Buckingbong to Birrego:
walking into country