Kirrenderri

HEART OF THE CHANNEL COUNTRY

The University of Queensland Anthropology Museum

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This project was developed in partnership between The University of Queensland Anthropology Museum, MAC, and researchers from The University of Queensland.

PUBLICATION EDITORS

Michael C. Westaway
Mandana Mapar
Tracey Hough
Shawnee Gorringe
Geoff Ginn

EXHIBITION CURATED BY

Mandana Mapar
Tracey Hough
Shawnee Gorringe

Queries regarding the republication of any material should be addressed to:

The University of Queensland Anthropology Museum
Level 1, Michie Building
The University of Queensland
St Lucia, Qld 4072

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FOREWORD

MICHAEL AIRD

DIRECTOR UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND ANTHROPOLOGY MUSEUM

***Kirrenderri: Heart of the Channel Country* has brought together many different stories with the aim of passing on knowledge of the past to future generations. These stories are of the European settlement in the Channel Country and the strong bond that these families forged with both the traditional owners and the land.**

This publication explores the pre-colonial history of the Channel Country, to the early years of European settlement and through to the more recent history, now being shaped by the academic researchers that have come to study the distant past of the land and the people who have always been part of this story. But this is not just about the past – it continues into the present. Central to this story is the involvement of the Aboriginal people who have never ceased their connection to the Channel Country.

Alice Duncan-Kemp's important writings helped initiate this exhibition and the dialogue that brought much of this story together. It was not only her books, but the fact that she donated artefacts to the collection of the Anthropology Museum in the early 1950s which frame her contribution to the story, and why she is featured prominently in this exhibition. Contemporary researchers have re-visited her work and the Aboriginal community are well-aware of the connections she had to their families.

The *Kirrenderri* exhibition demonstrates that stories of Aboriginal people's connection to Country can be told in a way that incorporates European settler history alongside scientific research. This was a significant collaborative initiative that involved cultural heritage professionals working with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members to deliver significant outcomes.

The initial exhibition was commissioned by the Anthropology Museum and launched in March 2022. This would not have been possible without the generosity of many contributors to this ongoing research project. Acknowledgement must go to Michael Westaway who first proposed the idea for this exhibition. Most importantly it was the coming together of the curatorial team, with Mandana Mapar as the lead curator, partnering with co-curators Shawnee Gorringe and Tracey Hough.

Together with strong support from General Manager Joshua Gorringe and many other members of MAC, stories reflecting on important cultural and familial objects have been loaned for the exhibition. We could not have found better story tellers who were happy to share their knowledge so generously.

Now the exhibition is being prepared to travel to regional centres where it will reach many people that will relate directly to these stories. It has been a pleasure to be involved in this project and witness the enthusiasm of all involved in telling such an important story.

Mooraberie Station, collection artefacts, portrait of Alice Duncan-Kemp, her books and personal typewriter (installation view) 2022. Photo: C. Warner

RESEARCH IN THE FIELD

PETER HISCOCK

Mithaka people have lived in landscapes both vast and remarkably diverse.

Rocky hills and cliff-faced mesas are separated by rocky scree slopes and undulating stony plains; expansive lakes are fed by small creeks or even large rivers, and sometimes bordered by extensive flood plains; isolated sand dunes, and large dunefields with occasional claypans or broad interdunal corridors; treeless stony gibbers, grass covered silt plains, bare earth with patches of tussocky grass and shady open woodlands.

Such environmental diversity shapes economic opportunities and costs, and has always done so. Humans have made choices between possible land-use strategies in light of varied factors, including the population that must be supported, the predictability of and abundance of resources, the market demand for resources, the social view of exploiting those resources, as well as the costs and benefits of alternate economic activities. Over time those factors alter, responding to changing climates, landscape evolution and reconfigured human activities, and consequently human land-use and associated life experiences alter.

The environmental diversity we see today has contributed to repeated reorganisation of economy and social life over time as people responded to changing environments with changed behaviour. That dynamism and adaptability of Mithaka peoples is seen in the changing archaeological record as well as in the historical texts and oral histories that describe transformations in their lifestyles and circumstances.

An example of the interaction between landscape and its inhabitants is the use of sandstone. Once merely sand on an ancient seabed, sandstone is now visible as resistant rock at high points in a number of parts of this eroded Country. Archaeologists have often discussed the possibility that at earlier times grindstones were manufactured in low numbers and for local use, at rates needed to replace exhausted ones. They have suggested that grass seed processing was not then the economic focus that was recorded in later 'historical' times. In that earlier context occasional, short-term and low-level exploitation of sandstone slabs sitting on the ground surface may be all that people needed.

If that was the original situation, some archaeologists have suggested the use of sandstone altered when two changes occurred. One was a shift towards the more regular use of low-ranked resources such as grass seeds, the other was the establishment of large-scale trade between groups. If these changes happened, in combination they would have created a demand for grinding stones amongst neighbouring groups and given Mithaka people a significant incentive to spend time and effort in the mining and flaking of sandstone to supply the new market for such objects.

In turn that would have meant spending time in the vicinity of sandstone outcrops, rather than in other places where foraging had previously been carried out. It would also have meant supplying people labouring at the quarries, perhaps building food surpluses to enable the work. It is likely that social life adjusted to these efforts, with ceremonies and rites being timed to coincide with the assembly of people at quarries. If all this happened, it might have contributed to a restructuring of Mithaka economy.

And later in time, when the Europeans seized land to establish pastoral economies, both the demand for sandstone grinders and the need to process local grass seed diminished, shifting local landscape use away from outcrops of sandstone to a focus on different resources and opportunities, in a vastly new political economy. That kind of story may or may not be true in all details, and indeed it being tested in the field by current research. But it illustrates one mechanism by which cultural systems and their relationship to landscape change over time.

Those periodic changes in environment and in the livelihood and lifeways of Mithaka people is evidenced in the physical records that archaeologists and earth scientists study, as different residues of activities date to different times in the past. Period change is also recorded in the oral histories of Mithaka people and in historical texts. Where cultural material, recollections, and evidence of past environments from multiple periods are found on or refer to the one location, they represent layers where younger material may be piled on top of older material.

Those layers, or strata, indicate the sequence of different events, and many researchers often think of the history of people in a landscape as a sequence of historical layers. This idea encourages us to look at each historical layer as a distinct puzzle, and to recognise that each has its own qualities and might be effectively explored with particular kinds of evidence.

Success in this endeavour may come from mirroring the vast and diverse landscape, by having a varied group of researchers exploring different periods and different strands of evidence. *Kirrenderri* brings together diverse evidence that is examined in diverse ways: family stories, historical texts, material objects are all used, sometimes with a focus on one time or kind of evidence and sometimes with multiple sources woven together, to produce sophisticated stories of past lives and the worlds people inhabited.

Those stories reflect the strength of ngali wanthi, of searching together with disparate insights and skills, to create understandings that none could create individually.

MITHAKA: DIGGING UP THE PAST, TELLING OUR STORY OUR WAY

TRACEY HOUGH, SHAWNEE GORRINGE AND JOSHUA GORRINGE

This is a tale of the power, strength and resilience of the Mithaka people of far southwest Queensland.

For over two centuries Aboriginal people have been fighting for their right to walk freely on their own Country; to care for it and experience it in their own way. They have seen the loss of species from the failed sheep industry and successive cattle industries. During the Maralinga nuclear testing in the 1950s, Uncles, Aunties and Grandparents tell of seeing a large mushroom cloud and then a cold wind appeared days later layering everything with dust. These events have made a lasting impact on the lives of our people.

Mithaka Country is a 55,425 square kilometre area of beautiful red sand dunes and rocky gibber plains west of Windorah and east of Birdsville, in the heart of the Channel Country. Since Native Title determination on 27 October 2015, thirteen years after the claim was lodged, the Traditional Owners voted in their first directors who undertook a steep learning curve establishing a representative body, the Mithaka Aboriginal Corporation (MAC).

The corporation has three core values which underpin every decision made: Care for Country, Care for Culture and Care for Our People. This strong commitment to the land was evidenced in 1995, when cotton growers threatened the Channel Country's pristine, largely untouched free-flowing rivers: Cooper's Creek, and the Georgina and Diamantina Rivers. Traditional Owners banded together with Windorah locals and pastoralists to form the Cooper Creek Protection Group, which later became the Western Rivers Alliance. Together they stood against the Queensland Government and the New South Wales cotton industry to halt cotton production at Currareva Station near Windorah.

PARTNERS IN CUSTODIANSHIP

Shared with pastoralists, mining companies and tourism, MAC's desire is to work in partnership with all interested parties to make the Channel Country vital and sustainable well into the future. Since Native Title determination we have actively worked to reconnect with

Max Gorringe weed spraying 2020. Photo: MAC

our past to move forward and create a better future for the generations to follow, one filled with knowledge, pride, and resilience. Mithaka people want to play a vital and active role in the care and custodianship of the Channel Country's diverse and unique ecosystem by eradicating pest species of flora and fauna, re-wilding, and land and water management.

MAC is working collaboratively with several scientists of varying disciplines such as archaeologists, anthropologists, engineers, palaeontologists, geochronologists, and ethnobotanists to create an accurate scientific model of our historical occupation of the Channel Country. To support this the team has secured prestigious funding from the Australian Research Council. MAC also applies for grants to focus on land management and protection and has secured a significant government grant which has allowed Mithaka to establish a ranger program. This includes funding for four staff but excludes the cost of vehicles and other set up costs. This shortfall does not stop MAC carrying out land management and protection functions as we persevere and find a way forward.

Home is where your mob are from, where you have an ancestral connection to the land.

Part of the ranger program includes cultural heritage training, which provides the rangers with the skills and knowledge to identify sites of significance and the protocols of dealing with artefacts, such as recording grid references, photographing, reporting and preservation. Cultural heritage training has been a significant part of training for all of our members and other key stakeholders including pastoralists, mining companies, road crews, and so on. MAC provides this important but undervalued training to encourage everyone to be active and informed in the care and protection of our Country. All sites of material and cultural significance need careful and collaborative protection as they are significant connections for all Australians.

As part of our 'Care for Country' ethos, our operational arm has sought out weed spraying jobs with Desert Channels Queensland and successfully obtained a three-year contract servicing the Channel Country, servicing from Boulia, across to Emerald and down into South Australia.

We also provide contract mustering, fencing teams and drivers for plant equipment to do jobs such as dam building and road repairs for pastoralists and government organisations in the Channel Country. We work tirelessly to maintain strong, friendly relationships with the Channel Country communities.

CONNECTING WITH HOME

The friendly relationships within the area provide a real sense of 'homecoming' for many of us. A key comment heard among our mob is that "it is so good to come back home." The word 'home' is subjective, but for many First Nations people, home is where your mob are from, where you have an ancestral connection to the land.

Few of us actually live on or near our Native Title determined area. Some of our family members were forcibly removed to Palm Island and Cherbourg, and we are told stories from Elders that they had to keep on the move away from the 'government men' who would take the children. Many Indigenous families lived in fear of their children being stolen, especially the light-skinned ones. Working far away from towns and droving kept many of our young ones safe.

> *I remember Mum and Gran used to sweep the droving campground with leaves to brush away our footprints if we were camped near a town in case the government men came.*
>
> *Patsy Kum Sing, recalling stories from her childhood.*

Many individuals and families moved away for school and or work and only return now for Mithaka gatherings.

REVITALISATION AND REPATRIATION

For us, the Mithaka people of the present, our knowledge and memory of our ceremonies and traditions was greatly impacted by colonisation and subsequent persistent discriminatory legislation leaving few records of our past. Through research supported by science and ethnographic records we are reclaiming our stories that tie us to the land; the evidence of which is dotted all over the Channel Country to remind us of our responsibilities to our beautiful lands.

The books and diaries written by Alice Duncan-Kemp, and more recently Dawn Duncan-Kemp, have proved to be great ethnographic resources linking us to our ancestors and traditions.

Arrabury stockmen c.1930s. Jack Moore (second from left), William H. Gorringe (centre), Harry Gorringe (first right), and others. Photo: Gorringe Family Archives

The Duncan-Kemp family have generously worked with us and our scientists in sharing information and artefacts, and the Mithaka mob are grateful for the relationship we have all nurtured. Through Alice Duncan-Kemp's books and Gavan Breen's anthropological work in the 1970s we are working on revitalising the Mithaka language, another piece of the puzzle to place alongside artefacts found on Country or returned to us through various means.

The repatriation of our artefacts means so much to us. To be able to place your hand on a tool that your ancestors held elicits a powerful feeling deep inside the heart and the mind. We have been lucky to be able to reconnect with some artefacts from our Country; some items have literally jumped out at us, seemingly waiting to be rediscovered. We truly believe that the time is right for their rediscovery and for our mob to be able to share what is not only our history, but Australia's history. The research we have undertaken is vital to uncovering and preserving our past. We believe it is equally important in the chronicles of Australian history.

"I think, how many people used this tool, or was it a community stone, like a hammer stone we found right in the middle of the quarry. That's what I think when we find something significant. European people who have no connection to this Country may think of it as just a rock or a stick, an inanimate object, but we think about how much work has gone into making the tools, and how they were used and by whom and for what reason. For us, for many Indigenous people, these objects have a much greater significance." Rodney McKellar, Mithaka Cultural Advisor (personal communication, 2021).

Grinding stone set, Morney Plains Quarry, 2021. MAC. These artefacts were found together and represent a unique working assemblage. A large silcrete cleaver was used to wedge sandstone slabs out of the bedrock and was located next to a sandstone blank that was being dressed with the associated silcrete hammerstone.
Photo: C. Warner

YOUTH CAMPS ON COUNTRY

Since determination, many members have become very involved in establishing MAC. This process has been a steep learning curve for all. However, working together, we have supported each other, learning to work to our strengths to create strategies to help us reconnect with our families from all over Queensland and beyond. One successful strategy so far has been developing the Kirrawallie Youth Group and implementing the youth camps.

Mithaka Youth Camp, 2020. Photo: H. McKellar

Since inception we have run two youth camps on Country. The youth camp involves Elders, parents or guardians, and children. Mainly targeted at Mithaka kids, we also include local Windorah and Channel Country kids or any friends of our children. We camp on Country, cooking over an open fire, sleeping under the stars, and walking around the Country looking and learning about our waterways, land and native foods. Creating sustainable job and educational opportunities for our people and all youth is a main focus for MAC. To achieve this, we strengthen our family ties and sense of belonging during the camps which are facilitated by all members.

We find that we not only learn from our Elders, but we learn from our youth as well. Our young ones are tech savvy and seem to be a hell of a lot smarter than some of us were at their age. If the scientists have work on Country at the same time, we take the kids out to show them what is being done and explain why this work is so important. The scientists take the time to answer questions and get the kids involved. These experiences are priceless for young minds. The balance of young and old and the in-between, of Mithaka members and our friends, brings good energy to our camps. Hopefully some budding scientists emerge and take over the work.

"Personally, reconnecting with my Aunties and Uncles as an adult has been a wonderful experience. Especially with those I was a bit scared of as a kid because I thought they were grumpy! I feel finding my position in the family a new experience, especially at the youth camp when there are kids ranging from ages six through to their late teens. Taking my son out on his Country with his family fills me with pride and hope." Tracey Hough, Mithaka Director.

Mithaka Youth Camp, 2020. Photo: H. McKellar

The first youth camp was held in 2020, delivered in two components. The first section was the kids' camp on Country. We took them to quarry sites, Narradunnah Hill, the gunyah sites, and foraging for bush tucker and searching for scar trees. The kids also went fishing and created artwork with the Aunties and Uncles. We went to Mooraberrie, the home of the Duncan-Kemp family, key Indigenous figures featured in Alice Duncan-Kemp's works – Moses Yoolpee and Mary-Ann Coomindah – and where many of our family worked. This component was geared toward teaching and showing the young ones and those who had not been on Country about their heritage and the research that is ongoing.

The second component was held in Windorah and was open to the community. The team leaders, Shawnee Gorringe and Samantha Gorringe, organised a number of specialist presenters, including an astronomer from the Charleville Cosmos Centre and an Indigenous artist from North Queensland. At the end of the camp, we had a damper cooking competition. Overall, the experience was a success, with knowledge shared and experiences enriched. The Windorah community and our mob had a great time. Everyone benefited from the expertise of the invited presenters, and more so from the knowledge and experiences of our Elders and members. It was a reciprocal learning experience.

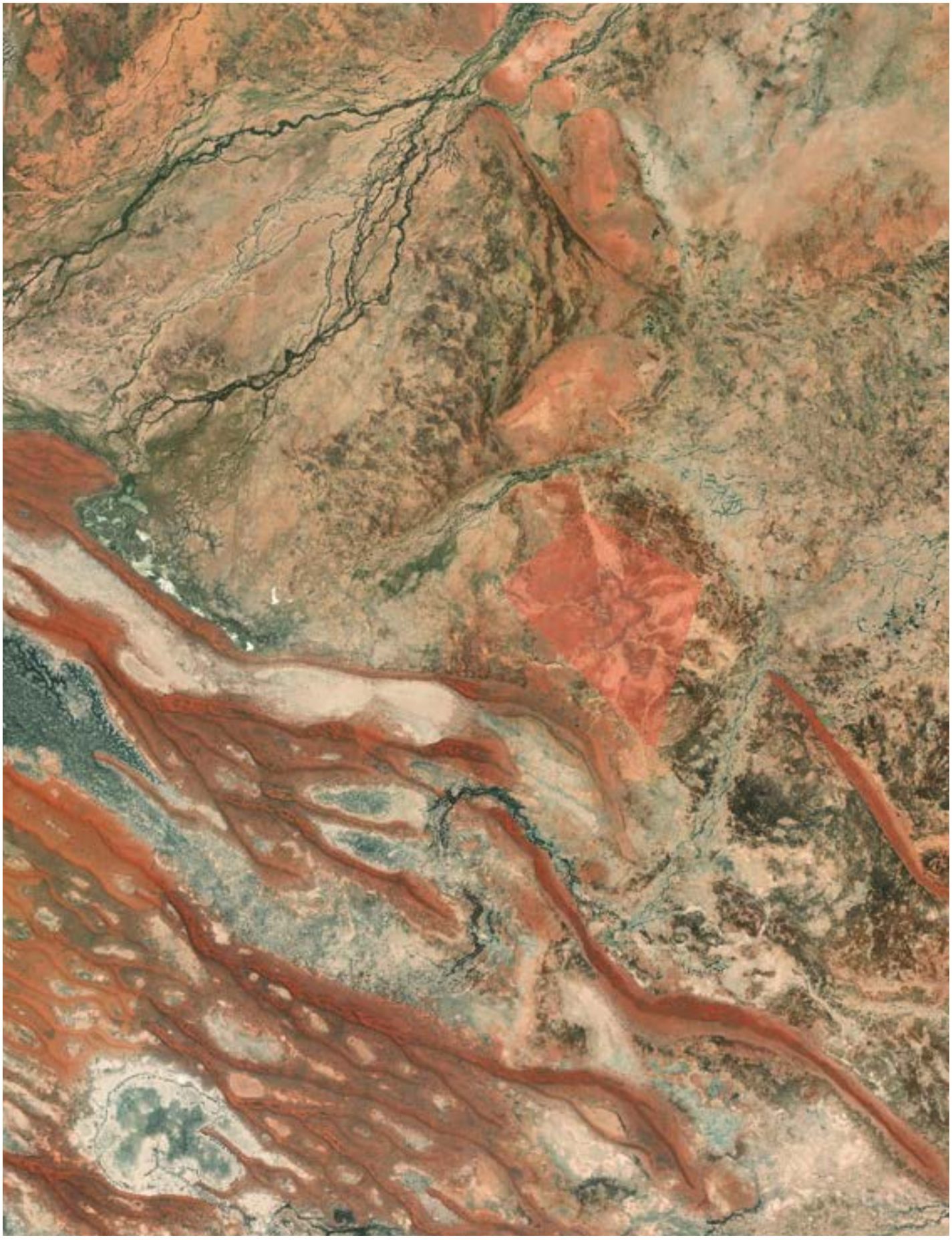
The ongoing success of the youth camps create a space for healing, learning and nurturing family relationships with our mobs who live scattered across Australia. We believe that through these camps we are providing our children with the knowledge and skills to become our future leaders.

By building onto what we have already achieved, with the backing of the scientific and rural communities, we are well on the way to creating a diverse and interesting hub for future generations of Australians, led by strong Mithaka people.

Looking towards the future for MAC and, by extension, our land, culture and people, Joshua Gorringe sums it up best:

> *"Probably the biggest thing we are pushing for Mithaka is to achieve best practice. What we would love to see is a lot more of our input into better land management, better grazing practices, better waterway protection which in turn protects our culture longer.*
>
> *If we've got healthy rivers, if we've got healthy land, we've got longevity. If our land gets damaged and destroyed a lot of our culture dies with it. We would love to be more hands-on with the land management and especially the cultural heritage side of things in the future for the next one hundred years, if not the rest of my kids and their kids' lives.*

Active involvement in caring for our Country, culture, and our people allows us to move towards self-determination of our community, allowing us to prosper in the generations to come.



Nurradunnah waterhole, ARCgis image, 2022. Photo: M. Alexander

Kirrenderri
HEART OF THE CHANNEL COUNTRY

ARCHAEOLOGY PLAYS ITS MOST IMPORTANT ROLE WHEN IT HELPS SUPPORT SOCIETY. IT IS, HOWEVER, REASONABLE TO ASK 'HOW COULD A STUDY OF THE PAST POSSIBLY HELP PEOPLE TODAY?'

MICHAEL C. WESTAWAY

NGALI WANTHI (WE SEARCH TOGETHER)

A NEW ERA OF COLLABORATIVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

MICHAEL C. WESTAWAY

When archaeological research reveals new stories from ancient landscapes, and reconnects people with their past, it can play an important role in restoring a new connection to a landscape or a place.

Certainly, the connection to Mithaka country by the Mithaka people has already been demonstrated through the declaration of their Native Title rights, but archaeological research aims to fill out the detail of what the past may have looked like. Importantly, archaeology can reveal patterns of trade, signs of past belief systems, or reveal insights into the scale of past industries that may have been entirely missed if we relied on ethnohistoric accounts alone.

When undertaken in partnership with traditional owners, archaeology also has the potential to reconnect people with aspects of their past that may have thought lost. It has the capacity to change the perceptions that people may hold toward the past. Such research, if well executed, can help to drive social change and meaningful reconciliation by generating greater respect for the Aboriginal past.

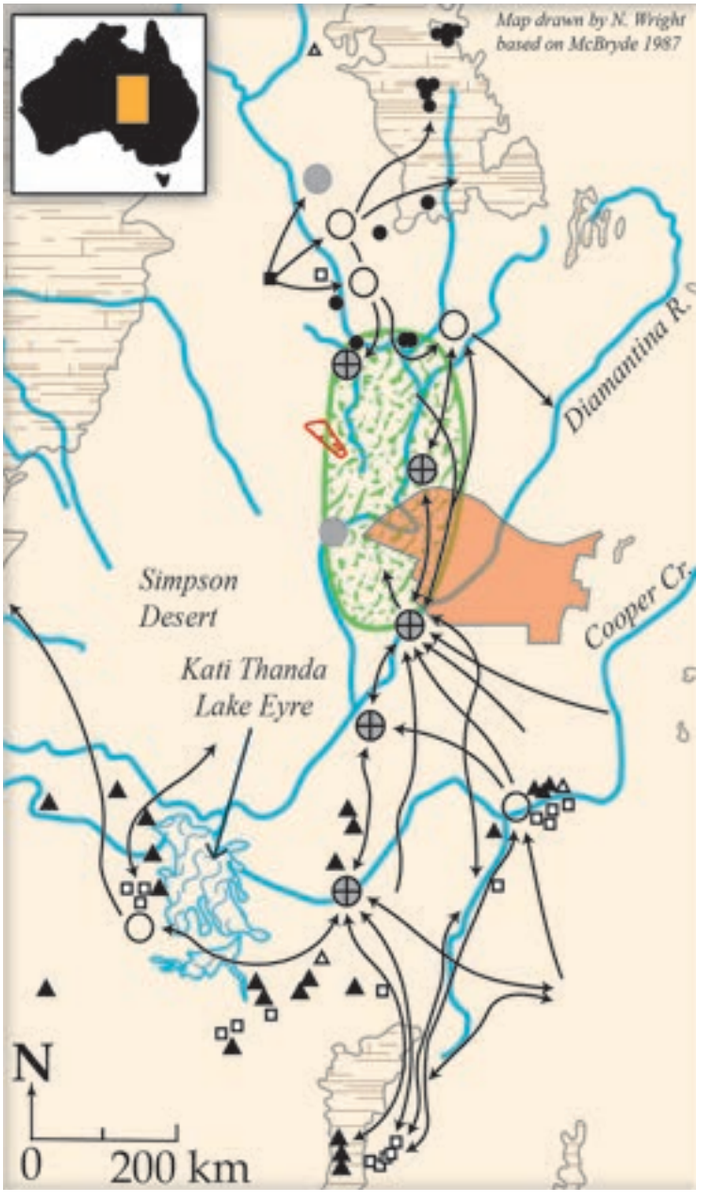
Mithaka country has revealed a largely unexpected archaeological record. In some cases, it is represented by sites of monumental proportions, including the massive quarries at Glengyle and Morney stations. It would appear that these are the largest quarry sites in Australia. In other ways the evidence is very subtle, such as the seeds recovered by careful archaeobotanic excavations of gunyah sites, or the analysis of tiny molars of a marsupial mouse never considered to have existed in this environment. When combined, the diverse material records from the past reveal the complex nature of past Mithaka society.

The research effort on Mithaka country emerged following an initial survey in the summer of 2017, led by Mithaka Elder George Gorringe. The expedition was fortuitously diverted from visiting sites in the north to the south due to monsoonal flood waters. As a result of this shift in the archaeological program, we investigated a series of complex archaeological sites that are revising our understanding of the past of Mithaka people.

Impressive social networks were known to have existed in the Channel Country, but the archaeology of Mithaka country, quite astounding in its scale, has not previously been investigated in any great detail due in large part to its remoteness. The absence of remote sensing technologies such as accessible satellite imagery and fixed wind drones was also a factor.

The Mithaka people once played an integral role in a trans-continental trading system that extended from the Flinders Rangers in the south to the Gulf of Carpentaria. This story is largely known through ethnohistoric accounts and the limited archaeological traces that can survive the harsh environmental conditions of the desert. Basalt axes from around Mount Isa and Cloncurry provide an insight into desert trade, as do the silcrete or chalcedony blades known as Leilira that are very rarely found in archaeological deposits. It is probable that the trade network was far complex than these previous lines of inquiry reveal, with potential to gain new insights from such signatures by the recovery of wooden objects that are known to be preserved in the wetland contexts, or indeed through the investigation of rock art sites that may provide insights into past links in the chain of connection.

Wooden tools and weapons were a prominent part of trade, and Alice Duncan-Kemp describes a scene in Mithaka country where people manufacturing such items late into the night. These objects were highly valued and traded further afield. A stunning pair of rainforest timber swords recovered from Kings Creek south of Bedourie provides a tantalising new link in the chain of connection. If these artefacts do in fact date to the pre-European contact period, they suggest new links with people from the east coast. These intriguing objects are currently being dated by the Australian National University carbon dating laboratory and provide rare insights into perishable items of Mithaka material culture.



Mithaka Country

Rivers and creeks

Mulligan pituri area after McBryde

Distribution of Mulligan pituri

Lake Eyre

Land above 300 metres

Movement of goods

Exchange & pituri distribution centre

Exchange centre

Pituri distribution centre

Grinding stones

Pigments

Chisels, knives

Hatchet heads

The extent of the trade and exchange network that operated across the desert channels crossed much of Australia. Illustration: N. Wright

Rainforest swords recovered from Kings Creek south of Bedourie indicate that the trade network may have had a link to the east coast. Courtesy Robert Dare. Photo: L. Mechielsen

All day long, with just a pause for dinner or tea, the sound of chip-chop could be heard as blacks cut and laboriously chipped their weapons into shape and perfection

AM Duncan-Kemp, 1933

One important element to emerge out of the ethnohistoric accounts of Channel County is the presence of settlement sites. Multiple accounts exist, including one of a village of 103 huts on Durrie Station. These timber huts were probably recycled for firewood, used for other purposes, or destroyed by natural fires. Some of these gunyah structures are still standing in Mithaka country and have been the subject of recent investigations. We do not know if village sites were seasonal or permanent, and research into this question is ongoing.

The nature of the food production system is another dimension that warrants further investigation. A combined approach using historic records associated with Aboriginal plant use, excavation of house sites and fireplaces to recover ancient seeds, and the genetic study of plants to establish if traits associated with domestication can be identified is currently underway.

Another inquiry relates to how the Mithaka managed water resources. We know that fish traps were important for gathering aquatic resources, and these sites are known across Channel Country. But a further important question is are there other modifications to the landscape that we may detect in the archaeological or palaeoenvironmental record? Certainly, there is evidence in the ethnohistory that indicates a range of different approaches to managing water based resources were developed.

It seems a diversity of food production and economic systems operated across Mithaka country, and at some stages of the year these systems may have required a dramatic intensification of labour demands. Ritual likely played an important role in this social system, and we are provided with many insights from the writings of Alice Duncan-Kemp into the important role the Dreaming played in all aspects of society. We see hundreds of stone arrangements and other potential iconic stone structures located within quarry sites. Is it possible that some of these are totemic structures that played some function in encouraging the growth of favoured species, or the acquisition of other important resources? Investigations into the religious landscapes of the Mithaka is research well worth pursuing.

Mithaka country holds great potential to provide a revised framework for investigating Aboriginal social evolution. It is likely that the evolving social and economic system have promoted the incremental growth of populations. We do not have a clear handle on the age of when these shifts occurred; current dating work is underway and so far indicates that these site complexes extend back to a few thousand years. Future research could dramatically overturn this emerging hypothesis.

This complex and diverse economic system, deeply ingrained within ritual landscapes and concepts of the Dreaming, sustained long-range commerce which was perhaps more about the exchange of knowledge than the acquisition of material goods. Understanding the archaeology of Mithaka country is a prescient opportunity to reconsider our conversations around social evolution in the past which have raised to prominence across Australia through the work of Bruce Pascoe and Bill Gammage. Our narratives about the past are refreshed by the recovery of new empirical evidence, and on every new archaeological expedition fresh insights into the extraordinary Mithaka past emerge. It is a rich cultural landscape that still has many secrets to reveal.

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THE 2020 EXCAVATION OF THE GUNYAHS ON MITHAKA COUNTRY GAVE US THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE WHAT WAS PRESERVED IN AND AROUND THE HOUSES

ANDREW FAIRBAIRN AND NATHAN WRIGHT

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE FRONTIER

TOM GRIFFITHS

The south-west Queensland frontier was a place of trauma, violence and disruption for Aboriginal peoples from the 1860s.

The sheep and cattle of the invading pastoralists destroyed the native grasses and waterholes, and conflict increasingly erupted between Indigenous owners and the newcomers. By 1875 most of the Diamantina channels were leased to pastoralists and by the early 1880s almost all the Channel Country had been parcelled and claimed for stock. The 1870s and 80s were harrowing decades of war. There was a long, tense, violent struggle for possession and control of the land and its resources. First Nations people speared cattle and sheep and occasionally killed settlers; the newcomers massacred whole clans in revenge. Mary Durack, whose forebears colonised the Channel Country, wrote that by the mid-1870s 'many settlers now openly declared that Western Queensland could only be habitable for whites when the last of the blacks had been killed out – "by bullet or by bait"'.

A Native Mounted Police force operated in Queensland for over 60 years (as part of NSW from 1848 to 1859 and then as separate colony up to 1910), more lethally than in any other colony. The strategy of the Native Police detachments was to surround Aboriginal camps and fire into them at dawn, killing men, women and children; then they burnt the evidence of the bodies. Details of killings were hidden, but the state of war was common knowledge. The waterholes – the precious jewels of the arid Country – were transformed into a grim rollcall of places of death.

Local agreements between sympathetic pastoralists and First Nations people could sometimes keep wholesale slaughter at bay. On Mithaka Country in May 1889, a significant peace ceremony called Mulka-mukana was organised to achieve this goal.

It became known by settlers as the Debney Peace, named after a white pastoralist who helped to organise it: George Debney (1843-1908), manager of Monkira station. It was a negotiated end to frontier war in the region, an accord solemnised in ritual and ceremony. The Peace took two years to organise.

It was orchestrated by Mithaka people as part of a five-day initiation ceremony that brought together selected white pastoralists and 500 First Nations people who gathered from across the Channel Country and further east. They assembled at a waterhole near a flattened sandstone knoll on the 'Common Ground' or 'neutral territory' of the Pharmaleechie Channel, an area on Farrar's Creek that was reserved since ancient times for negotiations between tribes. The place of ceremony became remembered by stockmen as 'Debney's rock'.

There was a long, tense, violent struggle for possession and control of the land and its resources.

'The Debney Peace' was a formal agreement between pastoralists and First Nations people but it was also designed to keep at bay that third murderous force, the Native Mounted Police. The district leader of the Native Police, Senior Inspector Robert Kyle Little (1841-1889), approved Debney's consultations with Indigenous leaders in the region, although he died of sunstroke in Birdsville four months before the ceremony took place. However his assent to the negotiation was important. It is unlikely that the Inspector wrote down any details of the peace negotiations, for they could have constituted recognition of a state of war. Nor was it in the interests of pastoralists to advertise their willingness to negotiate with the original owners for that could have signalled weakness. To be effective, the Debney Peace needed to be known among First Nations people, a select group of local pastoralists and the leadership of the Native Mounted Police. But otherwise it was not for public report. This is why knowledge of the event survives only in the early oral history written down by Alice Duncan-Kemp.

As Mithaka survivors dealt with long-term British pastoralism on their lands, they made themselves indispensable to the newcomers. Most Channel Country pastoralists could not have stayed on their land without the cheap labour of the locals.

In November 2019 Disaster Relief Australia partnered with MAC and archaeologists from The University of Queensland to survey thousands of hectares of ancient cultural sites. Fixed wing drone photograph of Debney's rock. Photo: R. Adams

The invading pastoralists, although very strange in many of their customs, had characteristics that were recognisable to the original inhabitants. The whites were nomadic, prized waterholes, had ties of kinship with their white neighbours and ran an economy centred on the management of animals over wide territories.

First Nations people often advised where homesteads should be built, counselled on signs of drought and flood and knew where to find water. Work on the stations, both pastoral and domestic, relied on them heavily. But they were paid little or nothing and generally received scant rations of food and clothing instead of wages. They suffered from introduced diseases and the effects of alcohol and opium, and on some stations black women were coerced into sexual relations with white workers.

Alice Duncan-Kemp's father, William Duncan (1858-1907), arrived on Mooraberrie in the late 1880s around the time of the Debney Peace, which may have encouraged him to take on the run. Open conflict in the region diminished from this time. The Duncan family's management of Mooraberrie was notable for its sympathetic acknowledgement of the rights of the Mithaka 'landlords', as they called them, and the station became a refuge for Aboriginal people displaced by the frontier wars. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the number of Channel Country landholders halved due to severe drought, stock numbers declined and many Mithaka people were forcibly removed from their Country to newly created reserves. In 1919-20, influenza (known by the Mithaka as 'White Man') swept through Aboriginal populations, killing a large proportion of those remaining. A second wave of removals to coastal reserves took place in 1932.

It is an extraordinary testament to the cultural vigour of Mithaka people that even during these terrible decades they maintained a strong, creative, even joyful cultural life on Country. Mooraberrie became a place of cross-cultural teaching and learning, a respectful process richly recorded by Alice Duncan-Kemp and continued by Mithaka people today.

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Mooraberrie homestead and outbuildings viewed from the southern side south west Queensland c. 1935, published in Our Sandhill Country, by Alice Duncan-Kemp 1933. Photo: courtesy Alice Duncan-Kemp Archives

THE MITHAKA TEACHERS OF ALICE DUNCAN-KEMP

TOM GRIFFITHS

In the late nineteenth century Mithaka people on Farrar's Creek cultivated a relationship with a sympathetic pastoralist from Scotland named William Duncan. Duncan worked in the Channel Country from the late 1880s, becoming manager of Mooraberrie station and eventually the leaseholder.

In 1898 he married Laura Davis from Parramatta, the daughter of a Sydney solicitor whose sister had married a neighbouring pastoralist, Allen Alexander of Daroo station. The Duncans had four children before William died from a severe fall from his horse in 1907.

William had been an amateur ethnologist and was fascinated by the history of human migration. His daughter Alice remembered that he believed it to be 'an uncontestable fact that Aborigines are the rightful owners' and it was his habit to refer to Mithaka elders as 'the landlords'. They were the best riders and horse-breakers, proficient at mustering and knew where to seek straying cattle. They built the Mooraberrie homestead, established the gardens, cleaned the house and lived nearby in a camp by the creek. At grace before dinner the Duncan family gave thanks to 'white pioneers, black saviours'.

Alice Duncan, born in 1901, had an older brother, David ('Poppy'), who died of diphtheria aged four, and two little sisters, Laura and Beatrice. Known in childhood as 'Susan' or 'Susie', Alice was nursed, cared for and tutored by Mithaka people. She was made welcome at the 'kindergartens' of her young Mithaka playmates and absorbed everything they were taught. Soon she was writing it down, for she picked up pen and paper from an early age and always carried a notebook. Young Alice was a gatherer of facts and asked questions endlessly to clarify matters.

As an older child she joined mustering journeys for weeks and spent days in the saddle and nights by the campfire listening to the yarning of elders black and white.

Alice's Mithaka teachers regarded her as 'twice-born'. At the age of two, she survived an accident while her father and two Mithaka stockmen were crossing the flooded Bulloo River. The stockmen, Wooragai (Chookie) and Bogie, struggled to get the buggy and horses (one of which was badly injured) onto dry land, and then immediately lit a small fire and began a sacred chant. The Mithaka believed that the accident revealed that Alice was a reincarnation of a powerful spirit, the appearance of whom they had been awaiting. When Alice was a little older, Mary Ann took her to a flat-topped hill named Kulkia where her Mithaka teachers were gathered at a small fire within a circle of white stones.

They inscribed Alice's forehead with ochre and touched her with the heated stone tip of a naming spear, giving her the name Pinningarra (the Leaf Spirit). She was presented with a small thin spear made of acacia, pointed at both ends, which Alice treasured. It remains in the Duncan-Kemp family today, a beautiful object. For the rest of her life, Alice bore a faint burn scar from the naming ceremony on her left breast.

At grace before dinner the Duncan family gave thanks to 'white pioneers, black saviours'.

Alice grew up with a feeling of deep gratitude, respect and love for her Mithaka teachers. These years of cross-cultural learning were the most important experience of her life and she spent the next sixty years remembering and celebrating her unusual education. As well as becoming a farmer, wife and mother, Alice (who married Fred Kemp and became Alice Duncan-Kemp) was a writer – and her subject was the Mithaka people she knew and loved as a child and young woman.

Mary Ann Coomindah or Maghroolara was one of several teachers who guided Alice's entry into aspects of the Mithaka world. She was the head domestic servant on Mooraberrie and joined the Duncan family in 1899, a few months before the first child, David, was born. Following William Duncan's death in 1906 and Laura's increased workload in managing the property, Mary Ann became even more important to the domestic routines. She nursed and probably breast-fed the Duncan children, becoming a second mother to them.

Glengyle workers c.1920s. Moses Yoolpee is thought to be the central figure in the group. Photo: courtesy L. McKellar

Alice recalls herself as 'a mere babe straddling Mary Ann's hip or toddling with little black mates after the billy cart'. Mary Ann, together with her husband Bogie, her tribal brother Moses and his wife Maggie, Mahlbibi (Judy Woody) and Wooragai, recognised Alice's strong interest in learning Mithaka culture. Mary Ann taught the Duncan girls 'the lore of her tribe and the whispered language of nature' and became their 'chief companion and instructor on walkabouts and fishing expeditions'. Each day, after lessons, she took the children on barefoot rambles in the sand hills. The Mithaka camp by the homestead creek was full of activity in good seasons and walking parties were out early and late, seed-gathering, digging up yams, harvesting sweet gum, looking for green frogs after rain or gathering truffles, honey ants and wild oranges. For Mary Ann, every flowering plant or shrub was a date in a vast calendar.

When the waters were running high, they would go digging for worms and cook their freshly-caught fish wrapped in clay or green bauhinia bark in the coals of a small fire. In 1931 Alice described in detail for The Pastoral Review how Mary Ann took the Duncan children duck hunting, first camouflaging them with mud, grass, leaves and lignum and then entering the water up to their necks where they stalked stealthily for hours until close enough to drag the ducks swiftly under by their legs. 'About four o'clock that evening three wet and dirty children came home to horrified mother with three semi-conscious ducks.'

Gentle and with a keen sense of humour, Mary Ann lived in both the black and white worlds – in household service during most of the day and yet always active in Mithaka affairs, especially as confidante and guide to young women and as a skilled herbalist.

She expected the white children to keep up with their black playmates and grumbled at Alice's clumsy efforts to make a bird-trap or fish-hook or to plait a goanna snare of horsehair. She taught not just detailed knowledge of the plants and animals, the rhythms of nature and the meanings of signs and ceremonies, but also Mithaka social etiquette and the skills and virtues of courage, patience and endurance in bush living. She subjected the young Mithaka girls and boys – and the Duncan girls as well – to severe physical training in the sand hills, creeks and dry stony ranges. 'Mary Ann's counsel was not something I outgrew', Alice recalled.

Alice told a story to illustrate her friend's care and sacrifice. One day Mary Ann took the children on a long ramble and by early afternoon they were 16 kilometres south-west of the homestead when a wind sprang up and a heavy haze obscured the sun. Mary Ann smelled the air and knew that there was a fire to the north; she quickly turned the children towards Teeta Lake, about 2 kilometres away.

They were overtaken by animals scurrying towards safety and were soon joined by anxious Mithaka families hurrying to the same sanctuary. Running through the reed-beds, they arrived at the lake just ahead of the fire front. Mary Ann shepherded the children into the deeper part of the lake so that only their heads were above water, and she shielded them from radiant heat and falling ash with pieces of wet bark and sacking – and when that was not enough, with her own body.

When the fire had swept past and the wind dropped, she tested the heat of the ground before leading the children home through the burnt Country. Mary Ann was in considerable pain from second-degree burns through shielding her girls from the flames, but the children were soon safely returned to their mother.

'This is our Country, missee', whispered Mary Ann. On long, hard walks she would encourage the children by singing small songs, 'songs that told the history of the ancient Aboriginal tribes during the Dreamtime.' Sometimes Alice would see her sitting alone, smoking an old battered pipe with eyes half closed and pale lips moving, holding communion with the land and her ancestors, 'an ecstasy upon her'. Mary Ann died in January 1929 at Betoota. Her husband Bogie, who was an esteemed rainmaker and champion hunter and tracker, died seven months later.

Mary Ann's tribal brother, Moses Yoolpee, who was also known as Moses Mack and Balyah Budgeree, was born on Farrar's Creek in the mid- to late-1860s, though possibly earlier. In the late-1870s, amid the violence and disruption of the frontier wars, Moses, then aged around ten years or older, was taken by a white pastoralist south to Victoria, where he worked on a western district pastoral property and attended school (probably Scotch College). Moses acquired impressive proficiency in English, speaking it (when he chose) with a carefully clipped drawing-room accent. He was an expert linguist and brilliant mimic, enjoyed quoting scripture, knew some Latin, sang hymns and relished conversational play. He was more literate in British learning than many whites in outback Queensland.

Alice Duncan-Kemp with her Remington Rand typewriter ca 1967. Photo: courtesy H. Spring

Probably during the 1890s, Moses decided to return on foot to his traditional Country and did so over months or years, eventually taking work as a stockman and gardener at Morney Plains and Mooraberrie stations. By moving south for two decades, he had avoided the most violent phase of frontier conflict in south-west Queensland. By the time of his return, white pastoral ascendancy had been enforced and Aboriginal peoples were being removed by government to coastal missions. Mooraberrie had become a place of sanctuary for refugees in a landscape of revolution.

We do not want your civilisation, we have a very ancient culture of our own.

Moses spent the majority of the next four decades living and working on Channel Country cattle stations, especially Mooraberrie, Morney Plains and Mt Leonard. He also worked for the Birdsville police out of the Betoota station, probably as a tracker or translator between 1923 and 1930 or even longer. Alongside these jobs, he maintained his traditional responsibilities in Mithaka culture and law. 'My Country, miss' he declared to Alice (as Mary Ann had done), sweeping his arm across the horizon: 'mine'.

Moses was a key figure in Mithaka politics and ceremonial life and mediated relations between First Nations people and local whites. When out on his Country, mustering or looking after the children, Moses would check fish and game traps and attend to ritual responsibilities, 'paying our respect to our Dreamtime people'. He spoke practically every dialect from Farrar's Creek to the Mulligan River, could lip-read at a distance, and was a popular campfire storyteller who possessed what Alice called 'an ingrained finesse'. He was a leader of trading parties to distant places, including to Bunya festivals a thousand kilometres to the east (a role inherited from his grandfather, Moogie Wahn), and he shepherded the Mooraberrie homestead through the dangerous politics of 'the Kooroongoora', a cultural revival and resistance movement that swept through Aboriginal communities of the region in 1912-18.

Moses' education in both European and Aboriginal knowledge systems made him a unique bridge between the two worlds, although also occasionally an object of suspicion among his own people. For example, he had to be careful when visiting the Georgina and Mulligan River areas where his closeness with white people was fiercely resented. Moses took on the education of the Duncan girls as a sacred charge, especially after the death of their father. He became the devoted guide, teacher and protector of the white children of the homestead, sometimes accompanying them for weeks on mustering trips, where they camped under the stars and learned the mythology of 'the Sky Country'. He taught them bush lore and bushcraft, and on different occasions admonished them to behave properly according to both European and Mithaka conventions. 'A word to the wise, Miss' was his code to the children to watch their step.

A mustering plant, frontispiece image used by Alice Duncan-Kemp in her first book Our Sandhill Country, 1933. Photo: courtesy H. Spring

By the age of eight or nine, the Duncan girls were expected to hit a fast-running rat-kangaroo or pig-bandicoot with a short throwing-stick or to stun an old-man fighting goanna with a tuleeba at first throw. Moses was a stickler for etiquette and courtesy and met childish tantrums or impatience with a stony silence. He taught the young women to ride, fish, shoot and muster with expertise but expected them to be 'ladylike' about it. When they offended his standards, he would mischievously chide them with the words, 'It is not done at Uppingham, miss' – referring to the influential English public school, a saying he picked up from Uppingham old boys 'out west' or in Victoria. Although he was a devoted teacher of the white children, he did not always answer their questions and occasionally reminded them it was only rarely that he could 'spare his valuable time'. A Windorah policeman who encountered Moses in 1939 described him as 'one of the most remarkable Aboriginals I have met'.

Moses possessed a golden voice and his work around the homestead 'was threaded with song'. His smile was good-humoured and to Alice he 'seemed ageless, bright of eye and quick of tongue, gentle to children and the sick, he was tireless.' In 1925 Moses was described by a traveller as being as thin 'as a broomstick'. He was a skilled worker in wood and stone and carried his tools of bone, stone, wood, gum, sinew and string in 'a neat cigar-shaped wallet called a bahn-bu tucked in his hair belt'. Also tucked in his belt was a stout throwing stick, and he wore another bark wallet under his armpit. He lived with his people in a gunyah by the creek near the Mooraberrie homestead.

Moses never relinquished his authority or pride in his own world and was sometimes guarded when it came to discussing ritual and belief with the Duncan children. Toward the end of his life he declined to speak English, perhaps as a silent protest against the tragedy that had overwhelmed his people in his lifetime. He explicitly rejected the supposed superiority of European civilisation and education, telling one stockman courteously, 'we do not want your civilisation, we have a very ancient culture of our own.'

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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“TEEMING WITH ATMOSPHERE”

ALICE DUNCAN-KEMP COLLECTION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND ANTHROPOLOGY MUSEUM

JANE WILLCOCK

By 1948, Alice Duncan-Kemp had already published her first book, Our Sandhill Country (1933), and was managing station life and raising her children while continuing to write about her early years on Mooraberrie.

In the same year, Lindsey Page Winterbotham became the founding curator of The University of Queensland Anthropology Museum. Trained as a medical doctor, his belief in the preservation of Indigenous heritage manifested variously in the co-founding of a museum, as well as the Anthropological Society of Queensland. His endeavours elicited thousands of letters with correspondents across the Country, including Alice Duncan-Kemp. From 1948, they would go on exchanging letters for another nine years.

> *Do you realise that the different letters that you have written to me in past times have contained the fullest and most scientific knowledge that I have received from any correspondent?*
>
> *L. P. Winterbotham to A. M. Duncan-Kemp, 15 November 1952*

Winterbotham was also a keen distributor of her writing. Aside from sending long lists of questions about the history, beliefs, and ritual life in Channel Country, he shared her responses at public meetings of the Anthropological Society of Queensland and sent them on to scientific journals. There is a mirrored aspect of urgency between them to preserve what they had collected: she honoured what she had been taught by writing her books, while he built a museum. Each noted the limitations of their craft.

“It is difficult to give a clear picture of these things because they are not definite or detached”, Alice wrote in 1948:

> *but nearly all linked with one ceremony and another, either through degrees possessed by one of the old men or by the state of the seasons, or by the influence of a seasonal constellation wrapped around with legend… inner life is not a few straight lines and association with tribal totems, but is a vast network, crossing and recrossed with fine tracings of myriad strands invisible to the naked eye, but strong and vibrant as fine steel – a living thing that throbs through the heart and being…*
>
> *A. M. Duncan-Kemp to L. P. Winterbotham, 20 December 1948*

In January 1953, Duncan-Kemp wrote that she would send a collection to the museum from Winton as her son was preparing to drive to Brisbane. The items had been with her since 1934, and estimated that some were sixty years old when they came into her care.

Describing them as “relics”, Duncan-Kemp’s annotations give some explanation and language names, but do not name any makers or owners. From this gap in detail, we look to the artefacts themselves. The handles of the clubs, shields and spear throwers are smoothed and shiny from use long ago. The presence of their makers is in these works that have long outlived them.

Maker not recorded. Spear thrower 1874-1934, Mooraberrie. The University of Queensland Anthropology Museum. Photo: C. Warner

Makers not recorded. Worree (spear shield) 1874-1934, Mooraberrie. The University of Queensland Anthropology Museum. Photo: C. Warner

Taken as a set, these items are typically associated with male makers and owners. The kookera (throwing clubs) thrown mostly by children as a game or as training for hunting are an exception, and are less specifically gendered, but Duncan-Kemp's note is "The old men make these… great importance [is attached] to child training and the remains of playgrounds can still be seen". They are made of gidgee wood, hard and durable; a chip out of the handle end of one of the pair is testament to their life and use. Even with careful museum handling, the bulbous end is so expertly weighted that it still wants to flip in your hands.

The mor-ro (club shield, taken from the word for club) is the only item in the set that does not show signs of use. The only marks on the flat front of the shield are two fine diagonal lines inked in parallel on the lower half. The more distinct feature is the way the shield has been carved in a single piece to accentuate the contrast between the heartwood face of the shield and the golden sapwood handle.

The spear thrower is cut from a section of coolabah (Eucalyptus coolabah) less than half a centimetre thick. Remnant ochre and charcoal highlight a pattern engraved in a mass of parallel lines. Duncan-Kemp records that a father would place his baby on the spear-thrower, or pass it over the infant to acknowledge their kinship and the responsibility that entailed. Both spear throwers and the spear shield have an engraved wave design that Duncan-Kemp described as denoting a snake kudgera (totemic affiliation).

At first look at this collection, these features and Duncan-Kemp's notes seemed to be clues: ways to find out their makers, or the relationships between Duncan-Kemp and the families and workers at Mooraberrie. They may suggest division of labour and access to materials at a time of frontier violence and extraordinary social disruption.

Seen another way, they are embedded and enduring artefacts of presence and responsibility. Duncan-Kemp described this presence as "teeming with atmosphere of long gone corroborrees" (19 January 1953). While this phrasing emphasises a haunted aspect, it does not overwhelm her other descriptions of the learning and care imparted to her through these objects. The obligation to hold and share knowledge is formed and pressed into the surface and substance of each item.

SOURCES

All correspondence cited is from The University of Queensland Anthropology Museum archives, the originals are held at John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland. OMFR/1a/5-12, OMFR/2/1-28

I omitted three words from Duncan-Kemp's December 1948 letter that reflect common use of the time, but detract from her point for contemporary readers

Makers not recorded. Items from Mooraberrie donated by Alice Duncan-Kemp. From top to bottom: two boomerangs, kookera (two throwing clubs). Photo: C. Warner

Makers not recorded. Shield and boomerangs, 1874-1934, Mooraberrie. The University of Queensland Anthropology Museum (installation view) 2022. Photo: C. Warner

Kirrenderri
HEART OF THE CHANNEL COUNTRY

DUNCAN-KEMP DESCRIBES WHAT OCCURRED ON MOORABERRIE DURING HER OWN LIFETIME… SHE DESCRIBES HOW QUICKLY EVIDENCE OF ABORIGINAL CULTURE WAS OBLITERATED AS THE STONE CAIRNS WERE SCATTERED BY WANDERING STOCK AND PLACES OF ANCESTRAL WORSHIP BECAME 'ORPHANED SITES'

Y. STEINHAUER
2001

FAMILY LEGACIES

MANDANA MAPAR

The profound cultural and ecological changes that have occurred since Alice Duncan-Kemp's time at Mooraberrie station, are explored here from within the Mithaka-led research framework. The historic accounts and scientific discoveries presented in Kirrenderri are of national significance, brought together here for the first time.

The Duncan-Kemp, Debney and Aboriginal families of Mooraberrie, Monkira, and Arrabury stations share insightful, poignantly interlinked stories. They speak of survival through tough living conditions, including droughts, epidemics, floods, and government heavy handedness. Their lived experiences are presented as published words, hand drawn sketches and oral history interviews. Stories passed down with intent and a deep purpose from one generation to another, bringing to life the contributions of the many generations of Channel Country people.

It is worth considering the common thread that connects many of the contemporary recollections by the Duncan-Kemp and Debney family members. We see the importance of the watchful care and generosity of the Aboriginal people who lived and worked with their families on the cattle stations dotted across the plains between Windorah and Birdsville.

The Debney's describe looking for bush onions with Aboriginal caregivers; Bill Pepper and Galena Debney describe in detail their grandparents' passing of gifted artefacts.

These have been handed down through the generations, and in Galena Debney's case, given to her by her grandmother Alice Debney, of Monkira Station, soon to be handed back to Mithaka Aboriginal Corporation on their homeward journey to Windorah at the completion of the exhibition tour.

It is a great sadness that Dawn Duncan-Kemp could not see the fruits of her many years of labour in the culmination of the exhibition, which attempts to introduce a new generation of Australians to the extraordinary works of Alice Duncan-Kemp.

Ongoing analysis at Mithaka sites, coupled with further research into Alice's published manuscripts and extensive correspondences, will undoubtedly continue to add to this important cultural record.

The wealth of historic accounts captured through the many interviews of Alice Bates (Gorringe), David and Dawn Duncan-Kemp over twenty years ago by Trish FitzSimons through the Channels of History project, have assisted greatly in the first- hand narration of the exhibition. The curatorial team is indebted to the many researchers, photographers and artists who have helped to preserve the oral and photographic records of these important figures in Queensland history.

The exhibition presented in this publication was brought together during the depths of a global pandemic. Throughout 2021 interviews with many of the family members were held over the phone and via Zoom. From September to November 2021, numerous field-trips and intrastate visits were made to the homes of generous exhibition lenders. Without their contributions, the exhibition would not have been possible and for this I am grateful, for their generosity of spirit, memories, and hospitality.

That Duncan-Kemp persisted in writing her histories, despite the obstacles faced by women writers, suggests she was a woman of uncompromising determination...

Yvette Steinhauer 2001

HEATHER SPRING, IN CONVERSATION WITH MANDANA MAPAR, 2021

I am Alice Duncan-Kemp's granddaughter. I was born in Oakey, in Queensland where my parents and my grandmother lived. I have very fond memories of my grandmother always reading, always writing and she was a little demon on her typewriter. That is how I see her, my favourite picture of her is her at her desk with her typewriter, at least that's how I remember her (see portrait of Alice with her Remington Rand typewriter, page 28).

Plan of Mooraberrie Holding, featuring Monkira, Mooraberrie and Morney Plains stations. Jundah Land Office, Queensland State Archives. Photo: I. Andrews

We always got a book for Christmas and for our birthdays from my grandmother. Always an interesting book and one that I would never have heard of. Quite often they were indigenous children's books from other countries as she was a great believer in fostering the love of reading, we all have inherited that from her.

About Mooraberrie, I spent a lot of my childhood out on the property, not with my grandmother but with my father and my family. We often spent school holidays out there when we were young. In those days the gunyahs were still upright, we used to go out on the horse paddock and search for them and I have very fond memories of being there. There are lots of indications of the culture out there and I think when I was a child, I didn't realise the significance of these sites. The advantage is that the country has not been developed in any major sense and with the technology that's available today it is great to know the researchers can find out what's there at those sites.

My father was a mechanic and worked out there for a while and he worked closely with my aunt Laura. If they needed anything done or needed to buy a new car, he was involved in those kinds of transactions. My father who had the copyright on my grandmother's books willed to me the copyright for her books after her death. I am privileged to be the caretaker of these important books.

My grandmother was a very quiet woman but very thoughtful and smart. She had such an interest in Indigenous cultures, Australian but also African and South American. She was very interested in looking at cultures from several points of view including the archaeology.

She had a great passion for looking at similarities and differences and was keen to know what was going on. She made a lot of friendships through it too. She may never have met the person, but she was an avid letter writer and had lots of correspondence with people, with common interests.

She's a very descriptive writer and I found her descriptions of the plants and the animals in the area quite fascinating. The images she used in her books are also remarkable. There are some images which I think are valuable in their own right, the fact that she used such carefully selected images in her books is important.

She had a love for the Channel Country and the people that came from there and she obviously got that from her dad, Will Duncan. He was a great believer, and he told his children that they were just custodians of the land, and I think that philosophy came through very strongly in her books and in her writings. He came out from Scotland to live out in the desert country, but there was definitely that undertone that they were there as custodians of the country and that the first Australians really held the knowledge of the opportunities and the wealth of the country that was theirs. I think that's what she really believed.

I remember my grandmother as a prolific reader and a prolific writer. She had so many bits of unpublished paperwork and stories she had written, and it is lovely that she took the time to write these things down because they would be gone otherwise, wouldn't be here anymore.

SOURCES

Considerations for Kirrenderri have been shaped and informed by the insight and guidance of my co-curators Shawnee Gorringe and Tracey Hough, and of course in the works of Alice Duncan-Kemp, Yvette Steinhauer and Pamela Lukin Watson. I am indebted for the time, advocacy and consideration afforded to me by documentary film maker Trish FitzSimons, and the many truly gracious Duncan-Kemp, Debney and Mithaka family members.

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Harry Gorringe's children Caroline, Bill, Helen, and Alice. Toowoomba, 2021. Photo: M. Mapar

Makers not recorded. Shield, club 1880-1900, Arrabury. Private Collection Bill and Linda Pepper

Makers not recorded. Boomerangs and digging stick 1880-1900, Monkira. Private Collection Galena Debney

Installation view, 2022. Photo: C. Warner

Lorraine McKellar and Will Kemp viewing Alice Duncan-Kemp photographs. Toowoomba, 2021. Photo: M. Mapar

I have very fond memories of my grandmother always reading, always writing and she was a little demon on her typewriter.

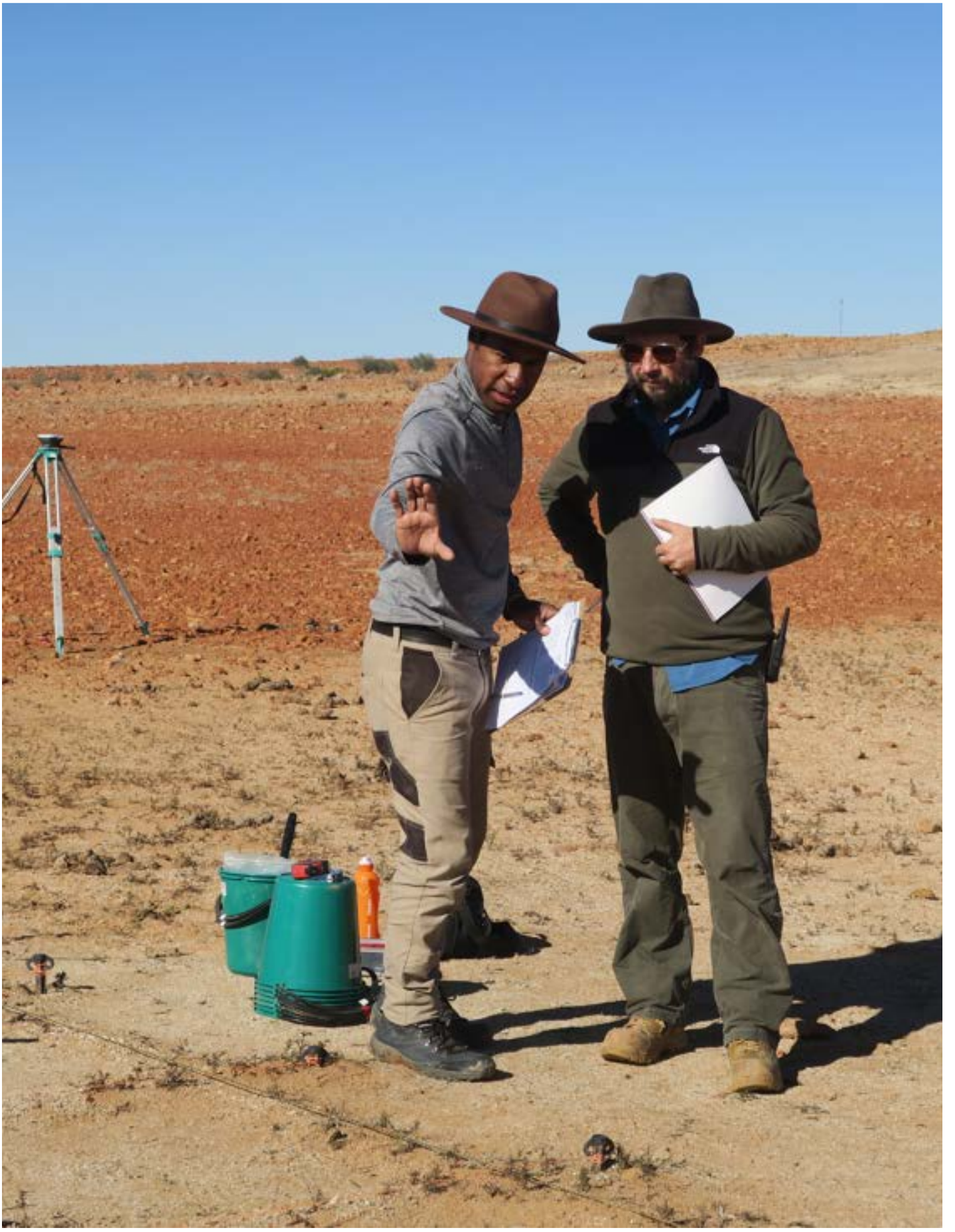
Heather Spring

Mithaka photographs, 1930s – 2020s. Courtesy Mithaka Families Windorah, Toowoomba, and Townsville

Max Gorringe's hat, and Alice Bates hat, on loan for the exhibition courtesy Tracey Hough

Installation view, 2022. Photo: C. Warner

Makers not recorded. Shield, club 1880-1900, Arrabury. Private Collection Bill and Linda Pepper
Makers not recorded. Boomerangs and digging stick 1880-1900, Monkira. Private Collection Galena Debney (installation view) 2022. Photo: C. Warner



Archaeologist Jason Kariwiga and archaeobotanist Nathan Wright discuss the excavation of the gunyah site. Photo: C. Ustunkaya

‘WE ARE ALL STILL HERE’

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURAL CHANGE

RICHARD MARTIN AND GEOFF GINN

Historical and anthropological perspectives offer insights into Indigenous people’s lives on the land prior to colonisation, as well as the impacts of cultural change associated with the arrival of Europeans.

Early records about the Indigenous cultures of the region include the publications of the explorer and ethnologist Alfred W. Howitt (1830-1908), who wrote about the Aboriginal peoples he encountered during his search for the lost explorers Burke and Wills in the early 1860s. While reflecting outmoded evolutionist ideas, Howitt’s publications of the 1870s-1900s document detailed information about kinship and inter-group relations between Aboriginal peoples, as well as other aspects of Aboriginal people’s traditional culture (see, for example, Howitt 1891).

Across the twentieth century, as the new ‘science’ of anthropology developed, many of the flawed assumptions of Howitt and his contemporaries were dispelled. Later researchers of the region include A. P. Elkin, a professor at the University of Sydney, who interviewed Aboriginal people from the region about their traditional kinship system in the early 1930s and published a number of articles. Norman Tindale, an ethnographer from the South Australian Museum, also visited the region and published maps of ‘tribal’ territories in 1940 and 1974. Linguistic studies were also undertaken across the region after the Second World War, as researchers hurried to record words, stories, and songs in the original languages of the region (see, for example, Breen 1971; Hercus 1987).

Further research has been undertaken in the decades since then, particularly around the Simpson Desert to the west of the Channel Country.

Intensive research for native land claims has also focused attention on the region, with anthropologists, historians, linguists and archaeologists working with Indigenous claimants to achieve recognition of surviving Indigenous spiritual connections to Country.

While it is not possible using these limited data to present a comprehensive account of Aboriginal culture prior to colonisation, or the changes that took place after Europeans arrived, some tentative conclusions may be drawn.

Since colonisation, these language names have gained increasing significance as political groupings and formed the basis for modern Aboriginal corporations.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLES OF THE FAR SOUTHWEST

At colonisation, the region was occupied by distinct Aboriginal peoples speaking different languages and observing a variety of different laws and customs. Some groups across the region understood society as separated into two halves, or ‘moieties’, whereas others did not. Groups in the region also differed in how they understood rights to be inherited from forebears. While groups were typically patrilineal (that is, people inherited rights from their male forebears), some peoples understood ‘totems’ to be inherited from the mother’s line.

At colonisation, Aboriginal people lived on Country in smaller family groupings associated with what are known as clan ‘estates’, with the title in these estates bestowed via the Dreaming. Today, clan groupings have become less significant, and Aboriginal peoples of the region tend to be known by the names for languages spoken at colonisation such as the Mithaka. Since colonisation, these language names have gained increasing significance as political groupings and formed the basis for modern Aboriginal corporations.

CULTURAL CHANGE, RESILIENCE AND LOSS

Aboriginal peoples of the southwest suffered greatly as a result of dispossession and government policies of assimilation. These included policies which forcibly removed families from the region, as well as taking children from their parents for incarceration in missions and government reserves. During this time, the Aboriginal population of the area declined drastically, and much traditional knowledge was lost. As Mithaka elder George Gorringe recalls, "It was pretty rough stuff those old people had to put up with" (all direct quotations sourced to Martin 2021).

The Gorringe family were lucky to remain in the region. Josh Gorringe recalls how his grandfather, Bill Gorringe, protected the family from being removed:

> *Over the years a lot of people have moved away from their homes … or been moved off Country back in the Stolen Generation days…. My family basically stayed out of the Stolen Generations [because] they were always working, so all the properties that Grandad [Bill Gorringe] went to, he was widely respected amongst non-Indigenous people, so they always said the kids were working as cleaners or cooks or something and working in the stock-camps, so we were relatively unscathed as a family for the Stolen Generation. There were some parts of the family that did go to places like Palm Island [a reserve on Queensland's east coast], but the majority of Grandad's kids stayed with him, or in the Channel Country.*

Staying on Country enabled Bill Gorringe to pass down knowledge of his people's culture and remain connected to the Channel Country. In the Mithaka native title claim, the traditional knowledge passed down by Bill and others was tested in legal proceedings.

NATIVE TITLE RESEARCH AND DETERMINATIONS

Under the Native Title Act 1993 (Cth), Aboriginal people are required to demonstrate 'substantial continuity' of the traditional laws and customs which connect them to claimed areas, notwithstanding the disruptions caused by colonisation.

In the Mithaka native title claim, the Mithaka people drew on knowledge passed down by Bill Gorringe. As George Gorringe recalls, 'Dad [Bill Gorringe] would come up with stuff' as he worked alongside his children. George recalls that his father 'knew a lot', and spoke 'at least' four languages, knowledge of which he sought to pass on. His descendants proudly recall how Bill was born on Country, under a Coolabah tree at Glengyle Station on Eyre Creek. As Josh Gorringe puts it, 'we've got a strong connection through that path of Grandad'.

Researchers Paul Gorecki and Kevin Murphy worked with Mithaka people to research the native title claim, and after 13 years, the claim was eventually determined 'by consent' (meaning the parties agreed on the outcome without going to court). David Trigger, an anthropologist at The University of Queensland, also assisted the parties, and the Mithaka native title claim (Gorringe on behalf of the Mithaka People v State of Queensland QUD6022/2002) was determined on 27 October 2015 in a hearing of the Federal Court at Windorah.

As a result of this decision, Mithaka people's traditional rights and interests were recognised over 55,425 square kilometres. This means that Mithaka people, by right, can access and move about the area, camp and live temporarily there, take and use resources, conduct ceremonies, and maintain places of importance and areas of significance.

Tracey Hough, Shawnee Gorringe, Josh Gorringe and children beneath a Coolabah tree at Glengyle Station, birthplace of Bill Gorringe, September 2021. Photo: R. Martin

Researchers at part of the unique Aboriginal stone arrangement, far south west Queensland, September 2021. Photo: G. Ginn

This 'native title' translates Mithaka people's traditional spiritual relationship with the Channel Country into a form capable of being understood by the Australian legal system, and Australian society. While imperfect, it offers the MAC (who hold the native title), a significant opportunity to re-establish a fairer relationship with other rights holders across the region, such as pastoralists and mining companies, who have historically been inimical to Aboriginal rights.

Every piece is part of that puzzle, everything we've found is important.

THE CULTURAL RENAISSANCE

Aboriginal people articulate the triumph of their native title claim, and their continuing presence on Country, as evidence of cultural survival. The co-curator of the *Kirrenderri* exhibition, Mithaka woman Tracey Hough, says 'Things got lost, but we're all still here.... We're all warriors because we're all still here.' Co-curator Shawnee Gorringe further states: 'We were here and we still are here as well', 'even though it's been bruised, it's still there [on Country], our spirits'. Members of the McCarthy family, who likewise hold native title in Mithaka Country, express a related sense of survival. For example, Rose Turnbull (a member of the McCarthy family) states: 'We have been removed but we are still genealogically connected to this area as Mithaka'.

In recent years, Mithaka people have worked closely with researchers to understand more of the Channel Country's Aboriginal past. Josh Gorringe explains:

> *Through the research that we've been doing, we've found large scale, pretty well industrial sized mining that's happened over thousands of years on Mithaka Country. There's over 22,000 individual pits on just one property alone, in our determined Country, in one nine kilometre square area that was for the manufacture and production of grindstones. There's a lot of silcrete quarrying going on in the Country for stone tools, as in knives, spearheads, stuff like that.*

As well as generating new knowledge in archaeology, this work is helping to re-connect current generations of Aboriginal people with their past. Tracey Hough explains: 'To us it's mind-blowing, [knowing] our people were here, touching these rocks ... [and] as we dig up more [material culture] we get more questions.... Every piece is part of that puzzle, everything we've found is important', 'it's an empowering thing, we can teach our young people about it'.

In recent years, Mithaka people have also drawn on records produced by Alice Duncan-Kemp to learn more about their history. For Shawnee Gorringe, finding the works of Duncan-Kemp 'was just a starting point' in her own journey back to Country, when she set out to find out more about her family and their history. Tracey Hough further explains that: 'Without Alice's books we would have lost a lot'. Other records, such as those produced by Howitt, Elkin, Tindale, Breen, and Hercus, offer related potential to contribute to the cultural renaissance taking place in the Channel Country, and elsewhere around Australia, as Aboriginal people re-examine resources about the past, and their own oral traditions, to create something new.

Older generations hope that 'culture' will help to ground young Aboriginal people in a new world, radically different to their own. For younger generations visiting the Channel Country on 'culture camps' organised by the Mithaka corporation during school holidays, this means long days 'lick[ing] rocks and eat[ing] flies', as one young person stated sarcastically. Being on Country, means losing mobile phone reception, and lacking updates from Facebook. But, as George Gorringe put it, while 'young people are not really listening, they might be seeing', and it is young people, after all, who will re-create the culture of their forebears, and determine what it means tomorrow.

CULTURE, LANDSCAPE AND THE *QUEENSLAND ATLAS OF RELIGION*

As George Seddon has noted, any environment 'becomes a landscape only when it is so regarded by people, and especially when they begin to shape it in accord with their taste and needs.' This idea reminds us that people generate meanings in places, and that these meanings change.

But this is not simply a matter of ideas and perception, as Seddon emphasises with his choice of the word 'shape'. A mutual relationship develops when people inhabit – and thereby co-create – a landscape; shaping the land, as they in turn are shaped. In Kirrenderri, we see this connection between people and Country in the deep time explored by archaeology, as well as the more recent past researched by history and anthropology.

People generate meanings in places, and these meanings change.

Research continues with a state-wide survey to develop a new online Queensland Atlas of Religion. Supported by the Australian Research Council, this work began as a partnership between The University of Queensland and the State Library of Queensland. Researchers are interested in the places where people experience a diverse range of spiritual and religious connections, which in turn foster stories, relationships and social actions. In this, 'religion' is understood broadly, not in terms of institutional traditions like Christianity, Hinduism, and so on, but in terms of peoples' practices and lives in places like the Channel Country.

Building on the cultural mapping commenced through the 'Looking after Country' grants program, this latest research aims to draw together and interpret the range of often unstated meanings that bind people to the landscape and configure their responses to it. While the first phase, completed in 2021, concentrated on the books and archival records of Alice Duncan-Kemp, ongoing study now extends that inquiry through interviews and discussions to capture the landscape's realities for people today.

The extraordinary stone arrangements that are now the focus of study evoke this inquiry well. Their complex shapes invite a range of interpretations drawn from historical accounts by Howitt, Duncan-Kemp, and others, but for non-Indigenous residents and visitors to the Channel Country they remain an enduring mystery.

For Aboriginal people and communities, like the Mithaka whose perspectives are now being documented, they illustrate complex aspects of their peoples' histories and lives on the land, and evoke connections to traditional mythology, ceremony, and trade. These perspectives can only enrich ongoing conversations in Australian society about the Channel Country and its significance.

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A MAGNETOMETER, DESIGNED TO DETECT MAGNETIC ANOMALIES BENEATH THE EARTH SURFACE, WAS USED TO SEARCH FOR SIGNS OF GUNYAHS. BY INVESTIGATING STANDING GUNYAHS, DATING BACK TO THE 19TH CENTURY, WE HAVE DETECTED DISTINCT MAGNETIC SIGNATURES FOR THESE DWELLINGS.

M. C. WESTAWAY

MAGNETIC VARIATIONS: ALLURING ANOMALIES

KELSEY LOWE

A magnetometer is a geophysical instrument that measures small variations in the Earth's magnetic field caused by the presence of iron minerals.

This includes large features such as metal associated with non-Indigenous sites and more subtle features associated with burning, which alters the mineralogy of the soil. This alteration is often seen in Indigenous campfires.

Since magnetometry measures material rich in iron, which makes up a major component of a campfire, it was anticipated that mapped features in two known gunyahs could be used to predict areas where other potential gunyahs might have existed based on the processed interpretation. Two natural earth mounds were also surveyed. Using the Bartington Instruments 601 Fluxgate Gradiometer which has two sensors, the data revealed numerous positive and negative response anomalies about 0.5-1m in diameter in and outside the gunyahs.

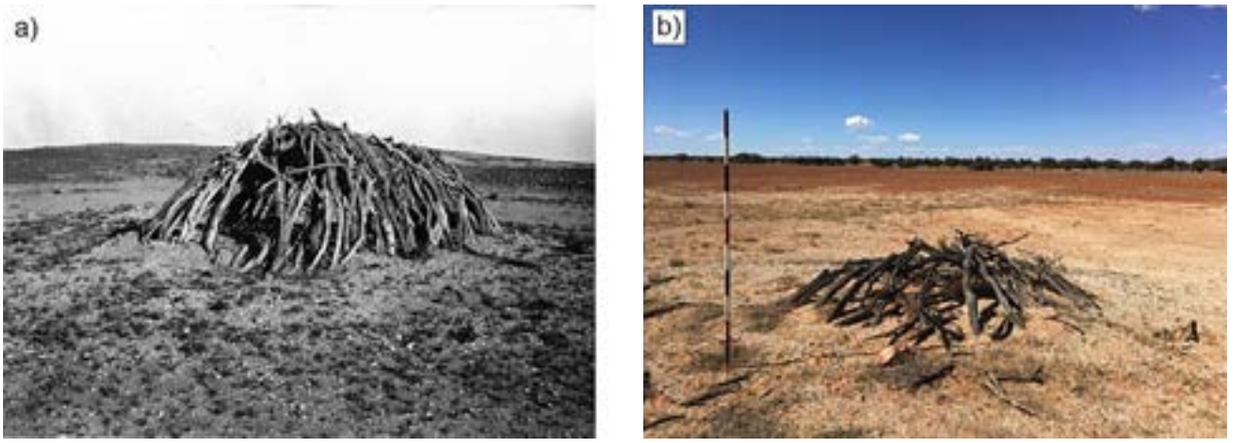
Gunyahs were the individual housing units used by Aboriginal people.

Magnetometers can be used for terrestrial or aquatic surveys and are the preferred method for archaeological investigations as they are fast and are good at mapping features directly below the surface.

A common use of magnetometry surveys is to map and define zones of former villages by detecting features rich in iron under the ground. This can include small-scale camps, high status or socially complex settlements, and historical villages. However, when it comes to the geophysical mapping of structures, magnetometry can be effectively used in relation to more recently occupied sites with robust architectural features such as a Roman village. Often individual houses or dwellings of earlier periods like Native American or Indigenous sites can be difficult to detect due to the small size of features such as postholes. Another challenge might include the inability of archaeologists to recognise buried cultural features relating to structures due to the nature of the soils themselves, including texture and colour.

In Mithaka Country, gunyahs were the individual housing units used by Aboriginal people. These are dome-shaped pit dwelling wooden structures about five metres in diameter, often containing numerous hearths inside and outside their dwellings, and situated on mounded earth.

The Bartington Instruments Fluxgate gradiometer used to map Mithaka stone arrangement, 2021. Photo: L. Mechielsen



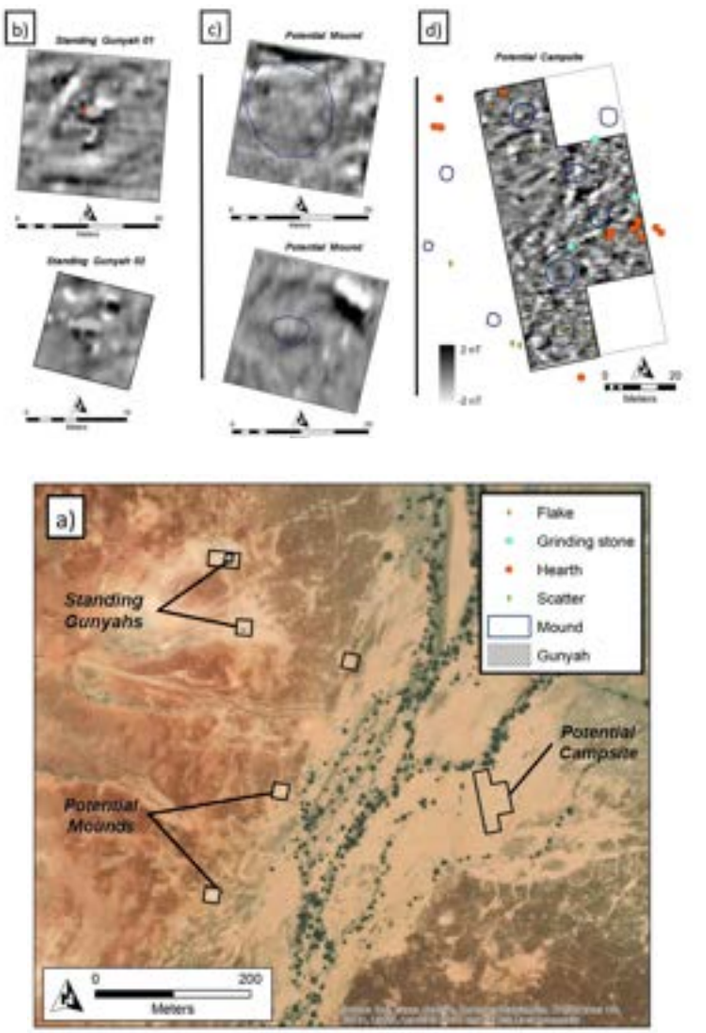
Gunyah two in 1937 (a), and the recently collapsed structure in 2018 (b). C14 dates of 168 ±20 were returned for this structure. Photo: I. Andrews

Additionally, small pieces of scrap metal were observed on both structure's surfaces; therefore it can be concluded that some anomalies represent metal. Archaeological excavations identified campfire features that matched some of the anomalies. No magnetic variations were detected in the natural mound.

Surveying the known standing gunyahs was important in providing information for investigating an area representing a series of possible gunyahs located 200m east. This area contained several campfires, stone tool scatters, scarred trees and at least eight earth mounds. Numerous positive and negative response anomalies were detected throughout the area, indicating that this may represent a settlement site. While the anomalies do not form any noticeable regular pattern, they contain similar magnetic values, sizes, and shapes observed at the two known gunyahs. Interpretation of the anomalies suggests that there might be a higher level of human activity in this area, including activities such as cooking, procurement, sweeping, and so on. This might also account for the absence of definable spatial patterning.

This study has significant implications for the Mithaka people and their connection to the past. Evidence for potential village-style settlements in this part of Australia's central desert may shed light on how people managed and adapted to the complex ecological landscape.

This study has significant implications for the Mithaka people and their connection to the past.



Location of the geophysical surveys (a), the results of the two known standing gunyahs (b), the results from the potential mounds (c) and the potential campsite (d). Note positive or high magnetic values are in black, negative anomalies or low magnetic values are in white.

COOMATHULLA MONUMENTS

SANDSTONE QUARRIES OF THE MITHAKA

DOUG WILLIAMS, MICHAEL C. WESTAWAY AND IAN ANDREWS

At times the vast floodplains of the Channel Country, crossed with innumerable braided channels and dotted with waterholes, see episodes of extraordinary plant growth.

When monsoon rains fall in the upper catchment in the Gulf, thousands of square kilometres are flooded as the water makes its way down to Kati-Thunda (Lake Eyre). This rich, fast growing vegetation includes multiple grasses that produce seeds which can be made into flour or paste. Grinding is the most effective method for people to access the nutrients of the naturally prolific seed grown in Channel Country. The acquisition of grinding stones was therefore important in order for people to access this important staple.

Exploiting the extensive Winton Sandstone formations, found on stony rises and mesas beside the floodplains, Mithaka people mined sandstone slabs and carefully shaped them into oval grindstones using hammerstones to dress the grinding slabs. These were then transported to use on local living sites or further afield to trade for other goods.

In this way Mithaka Country was at the centre of a vast Aboriginal trading network in an area known to be home to large groups of Aboriginal people despite being on the arid margins.

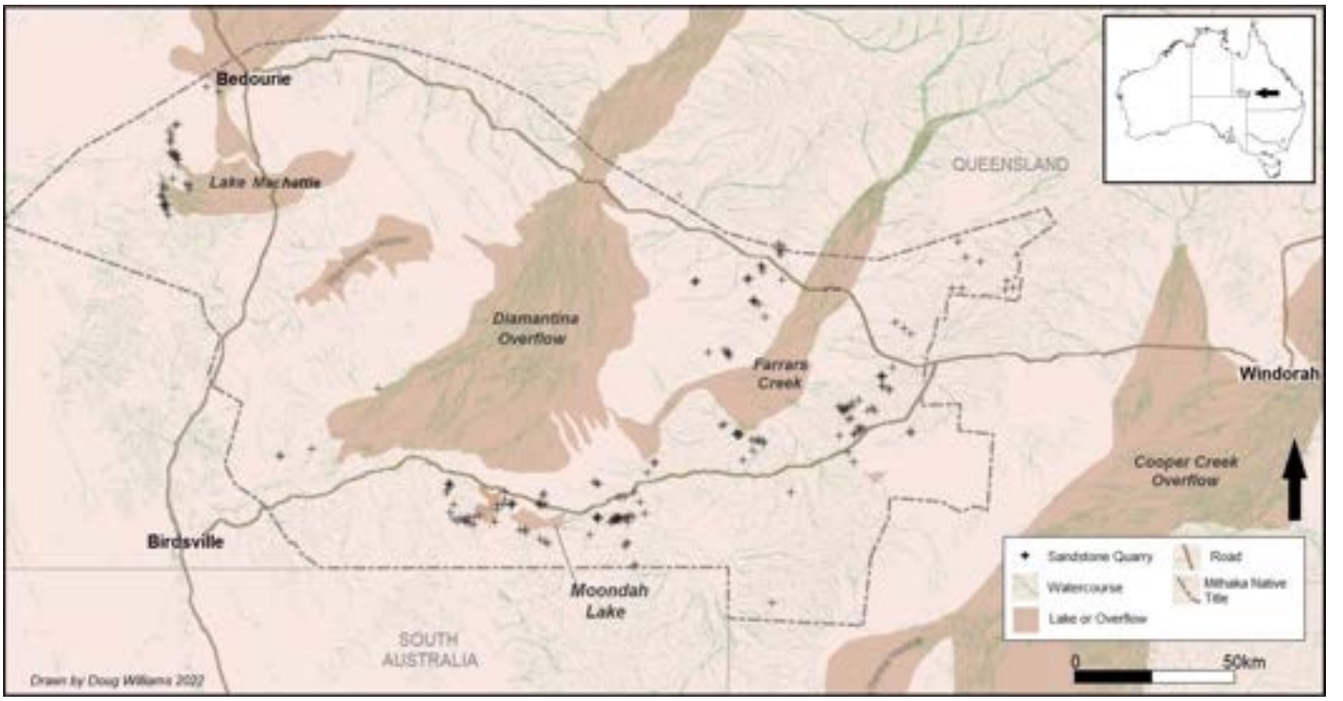
Grindstone and muller, Channel Country, 2019. Photo: D. Williams

An initial field trip in 2017 led by Mithaka Elder George Gorringe brought these magnificent, monumental quarries to the attention of archaeology.

As a result of the initial survey, the first archaeological assessment of any region of Australia using satellite imagery was undertaken by Doug Williams, Ian Andrews and Josh Gorringe which has thus far resulted in the discovery of some 226 stone quarries spread across Channel Country. The low vegetation cover has made this approach to survey very practical as the ground surface visibility is exceedingly good.

The scale of the sites indicated that mining was on an intensive, industrial scale, with preliminary results indicating the oldest quarries are probably only around two thousand years old, with most pits being used within the last millennium.

A calculation of the quarried surface area of the ten largest quarry sites found thus far is provided overleaf. With a quarried surface area of 54.57 hectares spread over some 4.75 square kilometres, the quarry at Morney Plains is the largest known Aboriginal quarry in Australia. In total researchers have observed approximately 300 hectares of quarried ground and with an average of 240 quarry pits per hectare there are around 73,000 quarry pits represented.



Sandstone Quarries in Mithaka Country, 2022. Illustration: D. Williams

Workshop area, Morney Plains quarry, 2020. Photo: D. Williams

Grindstone Preform, c. 25 cm in length, Morney Plains quarry, 2020. Photo: D. Williams

Grindstone Preform, c. 1m in length, Morney Plains quarry, 2020. Photo: D. Williams

Grindstone Preform, c. 1.3m in length, Morney Plains quarry, 2020. Photo: D. Williams

Name	Hectares
Morney Plains 1.	54.57
Brumby Yards B	27.04
Site 7147-18	11.38
Macaddie site 6748-2	7.90
Snake Gully	7.72
Ten Mile B	6.44
Brumby Yards D	6.27
Site 7146-31	6.21
Brumby Yards A	5.98
Site 7046-6	5.69

The average size of grindstones being produced is around 30cm to 50cm long, but much larger grindstones were being made, with some suggestion that the extreme examples may have been totemic rather than intended for use. The largest grindstone preform found thus far is in the order of 1.8m long, larger than any recorded grindstone in any museum collection.

Taken together, these sandstone quarries approach a seemingly industrial scale of production, incorporating thousands of quarry pits and representing the manufacture of many thousands of grindstones. The larger quarries have distinct areas of activity with quarries often distinct from 'workshop' or 'finishing' areas.

Larger quarries also exhibit standing stones erected in the stone rubble walls. Whether these have ceremonial or practical purposes is yet to be determined. The results of the research has been to reveal stone quarrying on a scale previously unrecorded in Australia, indicating a process that likely generated a significant excess for redistribution through an extensive trade network. Future research will aim to investigate our understanding of how far the grinding stones were distributed. The industrial scale of grindstone production in Mithaka Country bears witness to the thriving, industrious, organised and complex society that occupied Channel Country.

Example of standing stone, Morney Plains quarry, 2020. Photo: D. Williams

An initial field trip in 2017 led by Mithaka Elder George Gorringe brought these magnificent, monumental quarries to the attention of archaeology.

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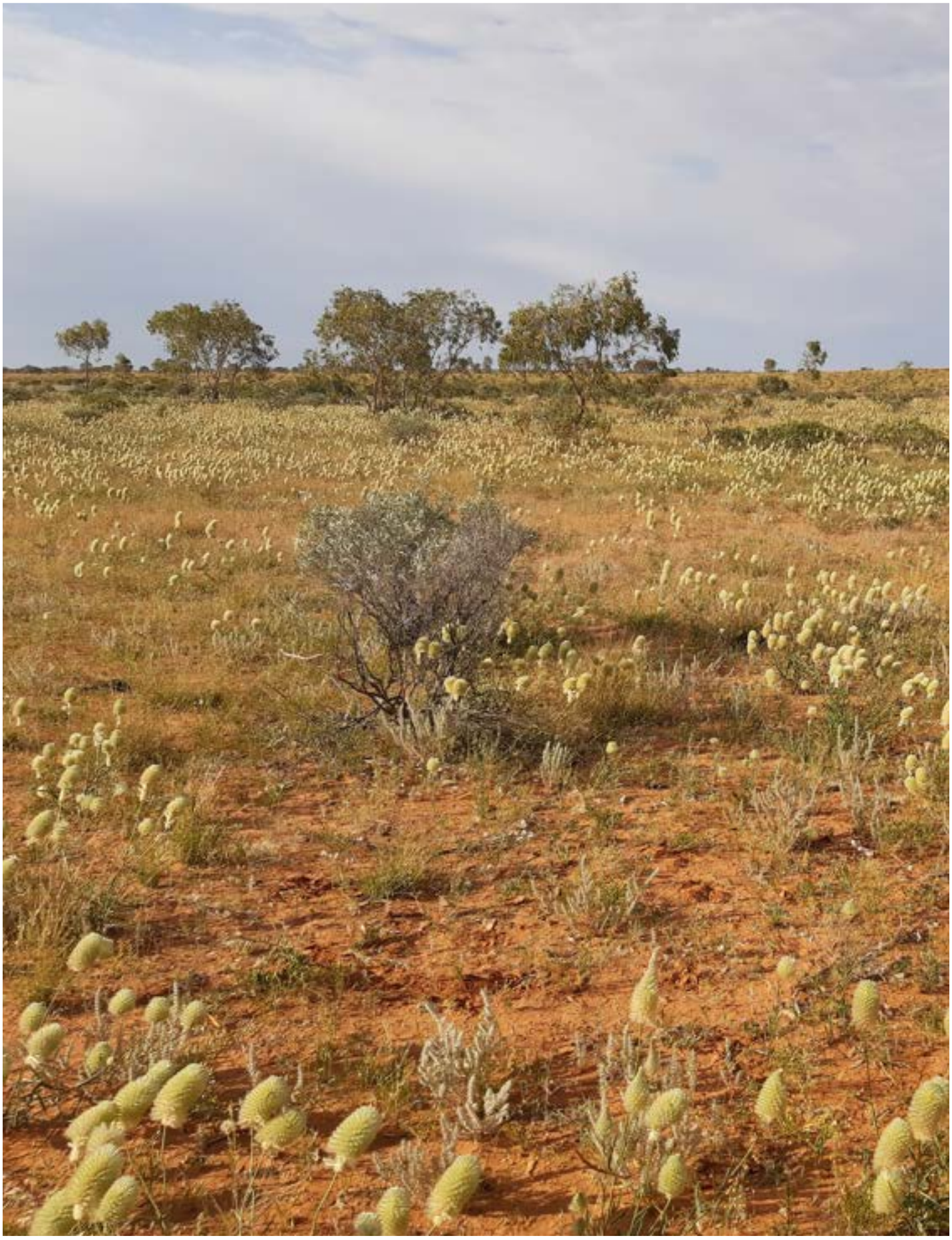
Part of the Morney Plains quarry complex. Aerial photo: P. Kermeen



Mooraberrie swale, clothed in verdant growth after winter rains, September 2021. Photo: J. Silcock

Kirrenderri
HEART OF THE CHANNEL COUNTRY

THE WHOLE COUNTRY AROUND WAS THEIR NATURAL GARDEN, AND THEY WERE SO FAMILIAR WITH THE CONTENTS THAT THEY KNEW EXACTLY…WHERE, WHEN AND AT WHAT TIME OF YEAR TO FIND VARIOUS FOODS

ALICE DUNCAN-KEMP,
PEOPLE OF THE GREY WIND

THE CULTURE OF PLANTS

JEN SILCOCK

> *The whole Country around was their natural garden, and they were so familiar with the contents that they knew exactly...where, when and at what time of year to find various foods. There was the 'moor-roo-bee' or Flower Calendar, always at hand with its message of good and bad times, and poor seasons...A glance at a flowering bush would tell the Aborigines that the fish were gathering in the creeks, fat and full of eggs... A blue flowering vine on the higher red ground would say 'snake eggs are here'. A small apricot flower opening at first dawn light whispered that Pelicans were gathering on nearby waters to nest and lay their eggs.*
>
> *Alice Duncan-Kemp, People of the Grey Wind, p.184*

Mithaka Country is renowned for its unpredictable cycles of lush flood-time bounty and long harsh droughts. People survived and prospered in this land through intimate knowledge and careful use and management of its resources and seasons. Every plant and place was known and named; cared for and celebrated. At least 200 of the 600 plant species known to occur on Mithaka Country were directly used for food, materials and medicine, as environmental signals and in ceremonies (and this is likely to be a substantial under-estimate).

Seeds from grasses, the nardoo fern, various herbaceous plants and, in very dry times, eucalypt trees were harvested and ground. This flour was cooked into dampers and patties and formed a staple food across the region. Caches were stored for the inevitable lean times, and packages were placed strategically along travelling routes. Seeds of some wattles were roasted and eaten whole.

Underground tubers of yams, lilies and sedges were dug up and roasted. Fruits and berries from a wide variety of trees, shrubs, vines and herbs were eaten fresh or processed, dried and stored. The flowers and gum of others made sweet drinks. The fleshy green leaves of various floodplain and sandhill herbs were eaten raw and cooked. The sandhills were a place of special medicinal bounty: leaves, roots and berries were gathered and eaten, decocted, infused or applied externally.

Plant materials were used in every aspect of life: to create shelter; weave mats, nets, bags and baskets; manufacture wooden tools, weapons and musical instruments; and for dyes, tanning, insecticides, and poisoning waterholes to catch fish and game. Infants were cradled in small wooden coolamons, and elaborate burial rites involved various plant materials.

The gidgee, mulga and minniritchie trees (all species of Acacia) were prized for their hardwood spears, carved message sticks and yam digging sticks. Coolamons and shields were carved from the larger trees including coolabah, gidgee and bauhinia, leaving the 'scar trees' that still stand in places today. Immense nets for fishing and trapping game, and bags and baskets of all shapes and sizes, were woven from native flax, grass and sedges. Sticky spinifex resin was used like glue for a variety of purposes, including hafting stone axes onto wooden handles. Hollow trees were used as water storages in dry Country.

The narcotic shrub pituri, Duboisia hopwoodii, occupied 'the place of honour among sacred plants' (Duncan-Kemp 1934:109). Restricted to the big sandhill Country to the west of the Mulligan River, it formed the basis of a massive trade network that spanned half the continent.

Much of this botanical lore, accumulated and honed over hundreds of generations, was lost within a couple of decades due to the upheavals and violence of the pastoral invasion.

Plant resources were respected, tended and managed to ensure supply and promote bountiful harvest. Some areas were burnt before rain, to attract game and renew the soil. No matter how scarce food plants became some were left to seed, while certain plants or groves were left to seed unharvested, and bans were placed on plants if they were noticed to be declining. Women left behind token 'presents' of seeds and tubers whenever they harvested plants, and sprinkled and watered seeds as part of 'increase' ceremonies. Spring-time harvest festivals were held at Nikik-kil-li (the green place) south-east of the Mooraberrie homestead.

Pituri in full flower on a high dune crest west of the Mulligan River, Ethabuka Station, July 2010. Photo: J. Silcock

Much of this botanical lore, accumulated and honed over hundreds of generations, was lost within a couple of decades due to the upheavals and violence of the pastoral invasion. Today, the Mithaka people along with botanists and archaeologists are reconstructing this complex and sophisticated ethnobotany from surviving traditional knowledge, the ethnographic record (primarily the writings of Alice Duncan-Kemp, but also early European explorers, pastoralists and travellers), Herbarium specimens, botanical monographs, and field work.

The same fragrant herbs and billowing grasses that were harvested and tended for millennia still flourish at Nikik-kil-li and on the floodplains of the Diamantina and Farrars Creek; the bauhinia trees that were used and revered are still standing along the creeks; and gidgee and coolabah scar trees remind us of ancient human-plant interactions.

Searching for Peta-buri which means digging for a variety of seed foods, roots, lily bulbs, mootchery (sweet yams) and mungaroo – the sweet roots of the nut grass. Every digging spot and all these occupations have their respective guardian spirites.... (and) a simple chant (beseeching them to allow us to take a little of their plant food) and leaving of an odd root or seed beside the fire. Plates between 286-287 in Duncan-Kemp's 'Where Strange Paths Go Down'

AMONG THE DIRT AND CHARCOAL

ANDREW FAIRBAIRN AND NATHAN WRIGHT

Archaeology is often considered a quest for objects, either those of great beauty or, in the world of fiction, treasure of great monetary value.

While objects are of interest to archaeologists, in reality archaeology studies anything and everything from the physical world that can give us an insight into the human past, from buildings to rubbish heaps, from whole landscapes to stone tools and ancient molecules and from aerial photographs covering thousands of hectares to microscopy photographs of a handful of starch grains somehow preserved on an ancient artefact.

Among the most widely found of all physical remains in archaeological sites – which are simply places where the physical remains of the past are found – is charcoal. Retaining its deep black colour, however long it has endured the elements, this unlikely material provides an otherwise inaccessible view of how people in the past used some of the most important resources required for human life: plants. Whether cut for roofing, burnt to provide warmth, ground-up and eaten or made into useful tools, plants provide much of the everyday resources without which human life would be impossible.

Fortunately, the ubiquitous act of burning, which consumes plant tissue to provide heat, does not result in the complete loss of those tissues. Some plant parts are incompletely combusted and remain as 'charcoal' in ancient fireplaces and other locations where fires burned. These collections of black fragments contain charcoal in the true sense of the word, that is the remains of burnt wood from tree branches, twigs and trunks, but also all manner of plant tissues from seeds and fruits to leaves, stems and even underground tubers.

The archaeological study of this material is called archaeobotany and we know that when such material is preserved and properly collected it can provide unique insights into how people lived in the past. Australia's oldest known occupation site, 65,000 year old Madjedbebe in the NT, preserved evidence for the use of many types of plant foods, including nuts, seeds and tubers, also allowing a study of changing climate.

The 2020 excavation of the gunyahs on Mithaka Country gave us the opportunity to see what was preserved in and around the houses, though recovering it was not easy. Usually water is used to wash away the soil and allow the charred plant remains to float (it's called flotation) so they can be easily collected and made visible. Flotation is known to damage plant remains, the water penetration into ancient plant tissues causes the structures to break up. Given the gunyahs were in arid Country, we though the use of water could be particularly damaging so decided to remove as much soil as possible by simply sieving it. As seeds can be as small as 0.25mm in diameter, we used a range of sieve sizes down to that size to remove unwanted soil and then picked over the material from the sieves under microscopes to recover any plant remains.

Australia's oldest known occupation site, 65,000 year old Madjedbebe in the NT, preserved evidence for the use of many types of plant foods, including nuts, seeds and tubers.

Our work has paid off, with a rich assemblage of wood charcoals and seeds recovered. The wood charcoal can be identified by microscopic analysis of the cell structure and at the gunyahs coolabah and gidgee were most commonly used, with other tree species present in small numbers.

Very few larger seeds and fruits were recovered, most being <2mm in diameter. They include a range of grasses, plants from the daisy family and those from the cabbage family. Identification of the species represented in the seed assemblage requires comparison of the ancient seeds to modern seeds from known plants. Our research is being aided, as with the wood charcoals, by modern collections of plants in association with the Queensland Herbarium by Dr Jen Silcock. What does the archaeobotanical record from the gunyahs tell us?

Excavation site of the standing gunyah at sunset, October 2020. Photo N. Wright

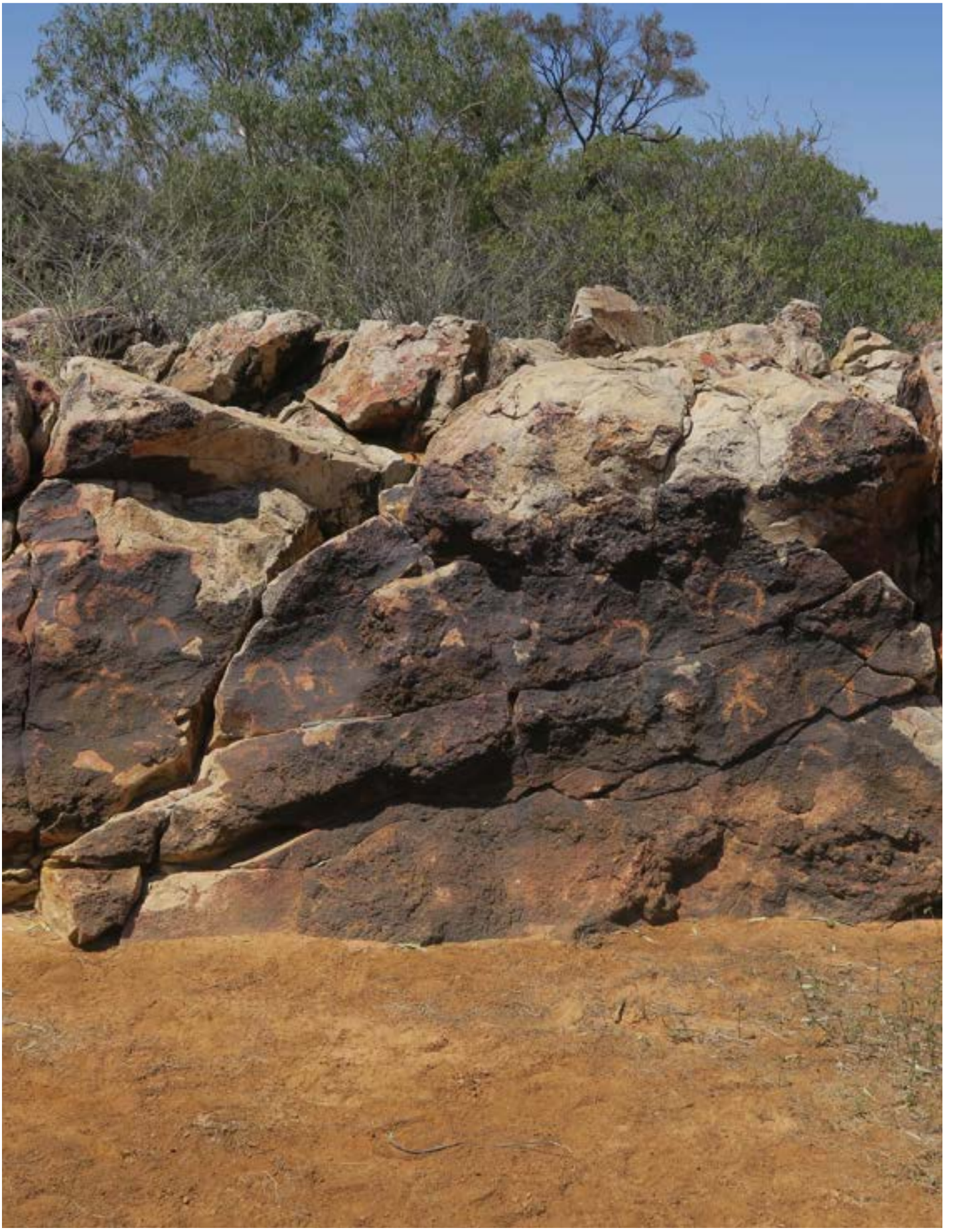
Researchers documenting excavation site, October 2020. Photo: N. Wright

Gunyah features under excavation, sieving in the field, microscopic images of seeds and wood charcoal. Photo: A. Fairbairn

The seeds and wood come from plants burnt 100-200 years ago. The wood charcoals are probably from a mix of fuel wood and offcuts of wood used for other purposes, such as making tools. The seeds could be from dry plants used as tinder to light the fires, but also may derive from food and other activities.

Analysis will show us, as the very least, some of the plants collected and used by Mithaka ancestors and perhaps allow us to understand further the environment they lived in and how it was changing with European colonisation.

Traditional knowledge from our Mithaka partners and the work of Alice Duncan-Kemp also provides us with a rich set of references to understand how the seeds and wood we find might have been used and what it tells us of culture and economy. Mithaka Country had large populations of people and it has been suggested that some form of agriculture might have supported them, as well as hunting and exploitation of wild plant stands. Our joint work will help us to provide direct material evidence to investigate these possibilities and we look forward to the new insights it promises.



The Gilparrka Almira rock outcrop viewed from a distance, looking east, 2021. Photo: N. Franklin

GILPARRKA ALMIRA

NATALIE FRANKLIN, PHILLIP HABGOOD AND NATHAN WRIGHT

Gilparrka Almira is the first rock art site to be recorded in Mithaka Country.

It consists of engravings on the western face of a steeply sloping, north-south oriented sandstone rock outcrop. The name is derived from “Gilparrka”, the name of the creek where the site is located, and “Almira”, meaning “paintings or etchings” in the Mithaka language (Franklin et al. 2021).

There is a single panel of engravings at the site, but images are clustered in different areas demarcated by natural cracks and fissures in the rock. The majority of the engravings are crescents or variations on crescent motifs, with a much smaller number of other non-figurative images. Most of the crescents constitute upside-down U-shapes.

The much smaller number of remaining motifs includes single or multiple straight lines, single rows of dots, a meandering line (a possible snake) and a bisected upside-down U-shape, which is possibly a bird track with ‘spur’. Gilparrka Almira has the highest percentage of crescent motifs and crescent designs (82%) compared to other documented rock art sites, which vary from 1% to 39% at most (Franklin et al. 2021).

The majority of engravings at the site have been pounded (direct percussion), merely bruising the rock surface. A small number of the engravings have been produced by pecking (indirect percussion). The patina of the rock, an uneven dark red hue, as well as a black deposit (possibly desert varnish) provides a striking background, highlighting the lighter coloured engravings. The engravings themselves do not appear to exhibit any significant evidence of re-patination (change of the surface through age and weathering).

The rock engravings from Gilparrka Almira are similar to rock art common to Australia’s deserts, a body of art with a limited range of tracks and mostly non-figurative (geometric) images, including crescents/arcs. Crescent motifs may carry a range of possible meanings, including boomerangs, crescent moons, rainbows, caves, huts, people sitting or standing, or tally marks.

The use of non-figurative motifs with a range of possible meanings is particularly suited to societies where certain information is restricted to people of a particular status, such as level of initiation. The non-figurative component of art cannot be understood until a person is instructed in its meaning. The visual ambiguity of non-figurative motifs enables different interpretations to be given to different individuals depending upon their status and level of initiation (Morphy, 1981).

The range of meanings varies according to the different contexts in which the motifs are used.

Drawing of the rock art at Gilparrka Almira, 2021. Illustration: E. Pease

CULTURAL CONNECTIONS: DREAMING TRACKS AND TRADE ROUTES

The nature of Gilparrka Almira may reflect cultural connections with other sites from across the continent through the social relationships formed by trade and exchange networks and Dreaming tracks. The trade in pituri, stone artefacts and ochre was often accompanied by the exchange of what might be termed more "symbolic" behavioural traits, such as songs and dances, as well as the manufacture, display, and barter of ceremonial paraphernalia.

Dreaming tracks are the routes taken by Dreamtime Ancestral Beings as they emerged from the earth during the creative era and travelled across the Country, creating the current landscape features, animals, plants and people, and establishing Aboriginal law and languages before re-entering the earth or ascending into the sky. They frequently extended across group boundaries, providing "chains of connection" (in John Mulvaney's words) between people and places, linking Aboriginal groups across vast distances.

Dreaming tracks facilitated meetings between local and travelling groups of Aboriginal people for gift exchange and the rituals associated with the myths relevant to the tracks. Dreaming tracks therefore frequently correlated with the trade routes, suggesting that both the tracks and the trade routes formed a means for the interaction of people across the landscape.

Rock art motifs were linked with Dreaming tracks, and with the custodianship of particular parcels of land. These mechanisms also allowed for the diffusion of similar rock art motifs over extensive distances. Dale Kerwin, for example, detailed overlaps between Dreaming tracks and recent trade routes, including the Two Dog Dreaming and the pituri trade route. Such routes could be the mechanisms for the movement/diffusion of engraved crescent and crescent-type motifs in northerly and southerly directions.

If crescent motifs or variations on crescent designs carried a range of meanings in artistic systems according to the contexts of their use, it is likely these motifs were suitable for diffusion along the trade route/Dreaming track as they could be easily incorporated into the existing social systems of the different Aboriginal groups along the way. In this scenario, the meanings of the motifs may change as the motifs diffused along the trade route, but the morphology of the motifs could remain unchanged.

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Detail view of Gilparrka Almira, Southern end of panel, 2021. Photo: M. Giorgi

Detail, Southern end of panel, 2021. Photo: M. Giorgi

DREAMING TRACKS ARE THE ROUTES TAKEN BY DREAMTIME ANCESTRAL BEINGS AS THEY EMERGED FROM THE EARTH DURING THE CREATIVE ERA AND TRAVELED ACROSS THE COUNTRY...

MANAGING THE WATERWAYS

RAY KERKHOVE AND DUNCAN KEENAN-JONES

Our present understanding of how the Mithaka managed resources from the Channels and adjacent floodplains comes largely from the ethnohistoric record, principally observations by various Europeans.

Of these, there are quite early accounts from explorers such as Alfred Howitt, John McKinlay and Charles Sturt. However, the largest repository of data on early Mithaka culture comes from long-time resident Alice Duncan-Kemp. Her extensive observations were utilized by several early anthropologists, most notably Dr Lindsey Winterbotham at The University of Queensland.

CYCLES OF 'BOOM' AND 'BUST'

Water flow in the Channel Country is almost entirely reliant on periodic monsoonal rain from the north. This falls upon upper catchments mostly between December and March. The monsoonal downpour creates widespread flooding on account of the Kirrennderri's flat and braided nature.

Such flooding was a positive factor, as it nourished sudden and widespread plant growth and an influx of waterfowl and other game. For the Mithaka, this was a 'boom' time of 'harvest festivals' (nar-ri-muni-ta), when large gatherings and trade fairs were held. There were surpluses of seeding grasses, fish, waterfowl and their eggs from large-scale nesting. During these periods harvesting and processing of this abundance were major activities.

For the rest of the year, and sometimes for several years after that, there would be no water at all flowing for long periods. This constituted the 'bust' period. The land would gradually dry, leaving only a few areas of permanent water.

ABUNDANCE IN AN ARID WORLD

A feature of Mithaka society was its capacity to support a population of considerable density despite the region's aridity. As early as 1879, an observer noted that "with regards to the blacks, it cannot be denied that they are very numerous – forming as they do occasionally into mobs of 400 to 900."

Alice Duncan-Kemp relayed reports that the Kirrenderri once held even more inhabitants, with three thousand people living on Dangeri, a Farrars Creek waterhole, in the early 1860s. Mithaka skills in resource management, especially around water, seem to have enabled people to live in these relatively large, sustainable populations.

The Mithaka developed many techniques to cope with the inevitable reduction of food and water supplies during 'bust' phases. One method was to create a range of dried produce, like 'fish flour' and ground grains. These were preserved in dillies, huts, coolamons and other caches both for later consumption and for trade.

The Cooper Basin is a unique environment in Australia. It is a land of both abundance and desolation. The genius of Indigenous groups across this vast region was their ability to manage water supplies in a sustainable manner, enabling relatively large populations to survive here for many thousands of years.

SETTLEMENT LIFE BESIDE THE WATERHOLE

Another means of coping involved land use. The region is characterised by large permanent and semi-permanent water holes scattered along the length of Diamantina River and Eyre, Farrars and Morney Creeks – the largest unregulated inland channel system in Australia, flowing entirely in semi-arid and arid environments with exceptionally wide floodplains. Some of their waterholes attain the size and depth of small lakes. Staples such as nardoo, seeding grasses, fish and waterfowl mostly occur either near these permanent waterholes or on adjacent floodplains. In drier seasons, such sites become vital for the survival of all life, resulting in a clustering of wildlife nearby.

To capitalize on this, the Mithaka resided much of their time in semi-permanent settlements close to waterholes. These were mostly sheltered behind dunes, away from the waterhole's edge, to avoid frightening off game. Waterholes were surrounded by large alleyways (yelka-yelka), traps, nets and fish traps in order to snare birds, mammals and fish.

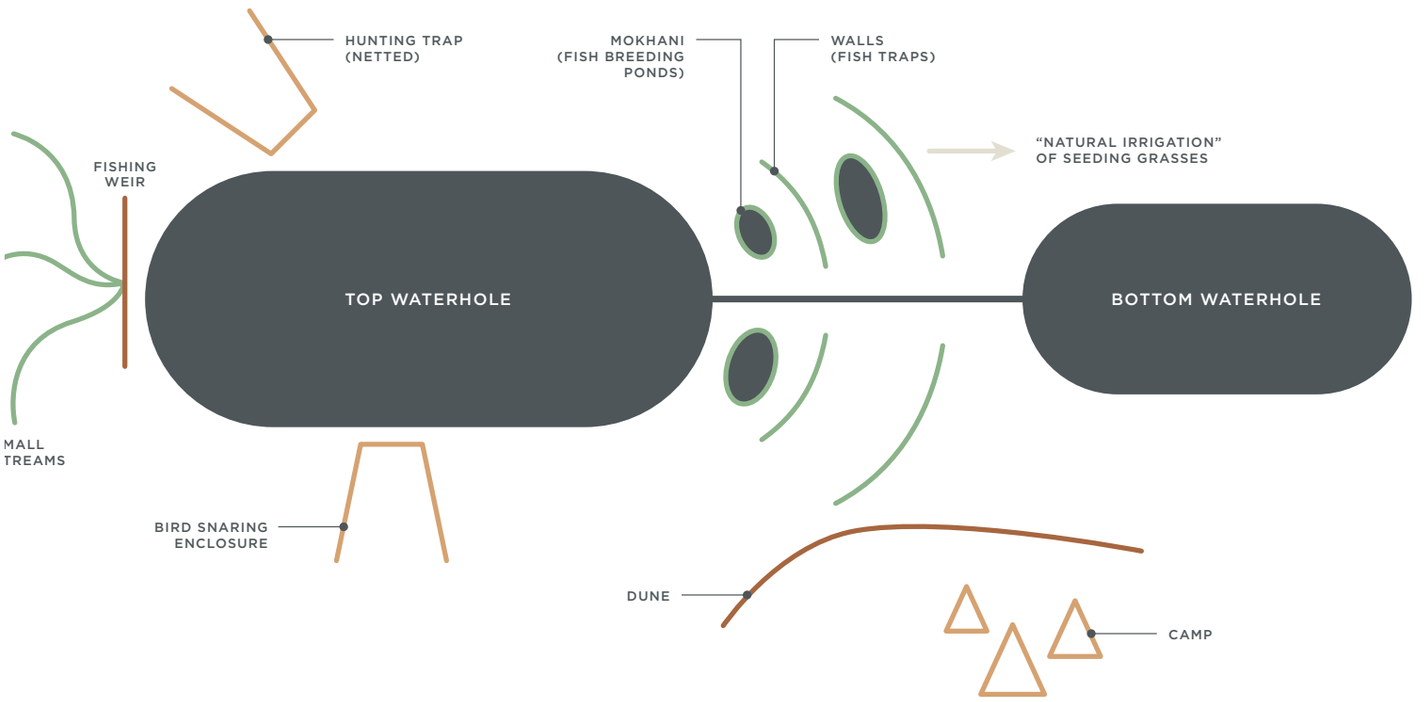
The rich harvest from these complexes of nets and traps enabled the Mithaka to live for very long periods at specific waterholes.

Mithaka settlements comprised of many – sometimes up to a hundred – distinctive 'earth domes', which were partially dug into the ground. These were deep and thickly walled to decrease heat during the day and maintain warmth at night.

AQUATIC STAPLES

Most early written accounts agree that the people of the Kirrenderri relied very heavily on freshwater fish such as bream and perch, and other aquatic life like river mussels, crayfish, and crabs. They developed no less than nine different modes of procuring these food items: trapping, ponding, netting, spearing, line fishing, scooping, stranding, stupefying with narcotic bark, and 'robbing' pelicans.

In particular, the Mithaka and their neighbours created what Walter Roth regarded as the largest nets known in Aboriginal Australia. These required the coordination of scores to hundreds of people to manufacture and operate, and yielded catches of thousands of fish and waterfowl.



Representation of typical elements in fish trap waterholes. Illustration by R. Kerkhove, adapted by J. Smit

TRADITIONAL WATER MANAGEMENT: PROTECTION AND CREATION

The maintenance, replenishment and redistribution of water supplies was naturally vital to survival during inevitable dry times. From childhood, Mithaka people memorised sophisticated 'sand maps' of their water systems. Hereditary rights to the knowledge of specific water sources were passed down along matrilineal lines. This enabled usage to be controlled and protected. These natural water sources included hollow trees filled by rains or floods, natural water traps (nuppamurra), soaks in rock outcrops (nurrawadgeree and djulwaigiri), and soaks in claypans and creek beds (mickerie).

Additionally, the Mithaka created and maintained various artificial water stores including clay-walled dams or weirs – which could be very large – nilpoonyah (water tanks, which were covered with a thick slab), stepped wells, carved rock holes (gnamma), clay-bottomed log stores (karaninoomba), wooden flasks (kerdunja), kangaroo skin waterbags (nil-pas) and water troughs (pirras) that were like very large coolamons. Some Mithaka water tanks were three metres wide and nine metres deep, and could hold up to 570 litres.

The Mithaka would trudge many miles to fill water stores, using skin bags and coolamons, or to clean and enlarge them. They also applied charcoal, stones, gravel, ash, and fungi from termite mounds to purify stale water.

FISH TRAPS AND WATER MANAGEMENT

Complexes of fish traps, weirs and ponds were part of a system of water management and integral to the 'production line' of food processing, as they provided the means of capturing and processing greater quantities of fish. Ponds within these complexes provided additional water storage and were used to keep or spawn fish for later use.

Additionally, although natural flooding usually sufficed to 'irrigate' seeding grasses and tubers, the Mithaka seem to have placed their weirs and traps strategically above and below braided channels. This enhanced the spread of flood waters and possibly directed water towards known seeding beds, which were sometimes prepared before the floods by selective burning and the thrashing of seeding bushes.

The Cooper Basin is a unique environment in Australia. It is a land of both abundance and desolation. The genius of Indigenous groups across this vast region was their ability to manage water supplies in a sustainable manner, enabling relatively large populations to survive here for many thousands of years.

Makers not recorded. Two incised boomerangs, before 1934. Mooraberrie Station. The University of Queensland Anthropology Museum. Photo: Carl Warner

Buffalo Waterhole, Farrars Creek 2019. Photo J. Gorringe

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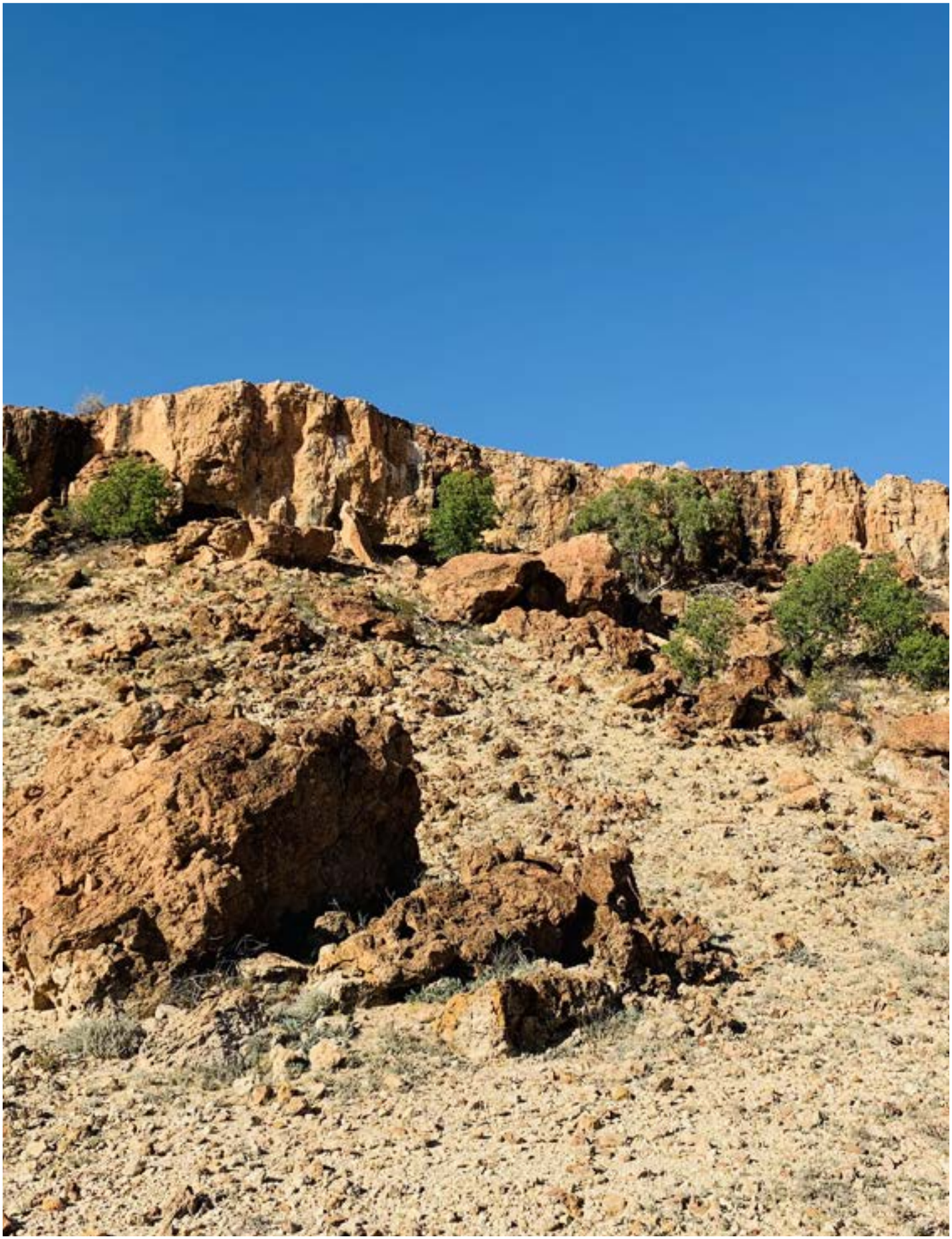

Looking up at the ridgeline and the entrance to Brokehimarm Cave, September 2020. Photo: T. Manne

Kirrenderri
HEART OF THE CHANNEL COUNTRY

OUR WORK SHOWS THE IMPORTANCE OF IDENTIFYING ANIMAL BONES FROM SITES... THEY OPEN RICH WINDOWS INTO THE PAST, PROVIDING US WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE IN THE PAST AND HOW IT HAS BEEN IMPACTED SINCE THE INTRODUCTION OF FERAL ANIMALS

TIINA MANNE

INVESTIGATING ANCIENT ANIMALS IN MITHAKA COUNTRY

TIINA MANNE AND JULIEN LOUYS

The Channel Country is one of the largest examples of an internal draining river system in the world. When rain falls in northern Australia it flows inland along large, shallow rivers and creeks. As the water moves southward, it spills over the river channels onto the floodplains, creating vast inland seas.

Local rainfall is very low, at only 120-140mm per year, and so these flood-waters are incredibly important to the plants and animals of the region. However, because rainfall in the north can be unpredictable, the rivers may stay dry for up to 3-5 years. This unpredictability creates "boom and bust" cycles. As flood-waters recede, nutrients are left behind in the soil and an explosion of green can be seen as plants flourish. With all this new vegetation, the land can now support many more animals and one of the most visible "boom" animals today is the native long-haired rat, Rattus villosissimus. The increased availability in food and water results in huge numbers of these rats, that can build complex burrows with passageways up to 20m in length.

Away from the main rivers and creeks, the Channel Country contains grassy downs, stony plains, open shrublands, woodlands and what are called ephemeral 'forblands' – land that is covered in herbaceous, flowering plants. Before the introduction of feral predators like cats and foxes, this ecologically diverse region supported over fifty species of mammal. In Alice Duncan-Kemp's accounts, she notes the presence of mammals that are not found there today, including rock wallabies (Petrogale sp.), hare wallabies (Lagorchestes sp.) and the now extinct lesser bilby (Macrotis leucura).

In 2020, we excavated the site of Brokehimarm Cave, near Moondah Lake and recovered bone from recent and historic owl pellets. At that time palaeontologist Jonathan Cramb identified seven different species of small mammal, including the presence of Gould's mouse (Pseudomys gouldii). Gould's mouse has not been located this far north in Australia. While it was known only historically from two locations in New South Wales and Victoria, recent genetic research suggests that Gould's mouse is in fact the same species as the Shark Bay Mouse (Pseudomys fieldii).

Historically the Shark Bay mouse was found on the mainland, but today only lives on Bernier and Faure islands in Western Australia, where there are no feral cats or foxes. The authors of this recent genomic research argue that Gould's mouse had a large range over much of central and southern Australia but became extinct very quickly following the introduction of the cat. The Brokehimarm Cave specimen provides us with further information about where Gould's mouse was found in the past.

Our work also shows the importance of identifying recent, historical, and more ancient animal bones from sites such as Brokehimarm Cave. They open rich windows into the past and present, providing us with an understanding of what life was like in the more distant past and how it has been impacted since the introduction of feral animals.

Significantly, work like this can also inform future projects, such as initiatives to protect existing native fauna (like the bilby, Macrotis lagotis) or to re-introduce fauna that was historically lost from the region. A re-wilding project of this nature could hold enormous potential for restoring some of the past habitats of Mithaka Country and would undoubtedly have a series of positive environmental knock-on effects.

Significantly, work like this can also inform future projects, such as initiatives to protect existing native fauna (like the bilby).

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In addition to field research and the published writings of Alice Duncan-Kemp, this paper has drawn on work by

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The entrance to Brokehimarm Cave.

The University of Queensland archaeology students walking along the ridegeline where Brokehimarm Cave is located.

Brokehimarm Cave, excavation of owl roost assemblage by The University of Queensland archaeology students, 2020.
Photos: T. Manne

CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Aird is the Director of The University of Queensland Anthropology Museum and ARC Research Fellow. He has worked in the area of Aboriginal arts and cultural heritage since 1985 maintaining an interest in documenting aspects of urban Aboriginal history and culture. He has curated over 30 exhibitions and has been involved in numerous projects in the area of art, history and research. In 1996 he established Keeaira Press an independent publishing house, producing over 35 books.

Ian Andrews is a retired surveyor and has been undertaking research into early Colonial history in Channel Country for the past 25 years. He has played a key role in identifying and documenting large numbers of unrecorded Mithaka country sites and continues to support the field based research through his professional training as a surveyor and via practical support to the researchers and Mithaka people.

Andrew Fairbairn is an archaeobotanist and archaeologist interested in ancient agriculture, foraging practice and past anthropogenic landscape change. Andy studied at the UCL Institute of Archaeology in London before working at The Museum of London, Cambridge University, The Australian National University and, since 2006, at The University of Queensland where he is Professor of Archaeology. He has worked extensively in Turkey, where he is co-director of the Boncuklu Project, and has published research on ancient plant use in the UK, central Europe, Jordan, Papua New Guinea and Australia.

Natalie Franklin is an archaeologist and rock art specialist who has published widely in national and international journals and edited or authored a number of books. Natalie has extensive research and fieldwork experience in Australia, Jordan, Turkey and Spain. She has considerable experience within the cultural heritage field, including in government and as a cultural heritage management consultant. Her research interests have more recently extended to rock art sites in Mithaka Country. Natalie is also an Honorary Senior Research Fellow in the School of Social Science, The University of Queensland.

Geoff Ginn teaches history at The University of Queensland and has been a public historian involved in historical archaeology, cultural heritage, and museums since 1997. A board member at QM and SLQ, he is a member of the Australian Dictionary of Biography editorial board and editor of the *Australian Journal of Politics & History.* His research focusses on themes in urban history and heritage, welfare activism in nineteenth-century Britain, and the history of religious practice in the Queensland context.

Joshua Gorringe is General Manager, MAC. Reporting to the Board, Josh has overall strategic and operational responsibility for staff, projects, stakeholder engagement, member services as well as execution of the MAC strategic plan and yearly action plans. A proud Mithaka man, Josh has been instrumental in helping his Indigenous community to deliver large scale projects that involve caring for the land.

Shawnee Gorringe is an emerging cultural heritage practitioner, with an ongoing interest in Australian history, particularly her Mithaka ancestors, and material culture scattered throughout the Channel Country landscape. An on-Country research trip in 2018 led to her enrolling in a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Indigenous Studies and Archaeology at James Cook University. As co-curator of *Kirrenderri*, Shawnee has gained insight into Cultural Heritage conservation, contributing to and protecting first nations knowledge with accuracy.

Tom Griffiths is a historian whose books and essays have won prizes in literature, history, science, politics and journalism. His books include *Hunters and Collectors, Forests of Ash, Slicing the Silence, Living with Fire* and *The Art of Time Travel*. He was invited by the MAC to contribute to their cultural mapping project because of his research into the life and writings of Alice Duncan-Kemp. He is Emeritus Professor of History at the Australian National University.

Phillip Habgood is a paleoanthropologist and archaeologist with extensive research and fieldwork experience in Australia, the Middle East and Europe, especially Spain. He has an ongoing research interest in the Neanderthals and the origin of modern humans, and the appearance of modern human behaviour within the archaeological record. He works as a cultural heritage consultant and has been the Technical Advisor for Aboriginal Traditional Owner groups across Queensland providing advice and assistance to them on cultural heritage issues relating to developments occurring on country. He is an Honorary Senior Fellow in the School of Social Science, The University of Queensland.

Tracey Hough is a Director of MAC and co-curator of the *Kirrenderri* exhibition. Tracey is currently studying a Bachelor of Arts with a double major in English Literature and Indigenous Studies at James Cook University, Townsville. Providing input and discretionary authority for the inclusion or exclusion of information is important to the Mithaka people. Tracey acted as the conduit for cultural knowledge to ensure her people have autonomy regarding the exhibition and its educational components.

Peter Hiscock completed his PhD at The University of Queensland and obtained a DSc from the ANU. He has taught archaeology at The University of Queensland, Charles Darwin University, the Australian National University, and University of Sydney. He is interested in the emergence and global dispersal of modern humans and long-term changes in their technology and social lives. His research specialty is Australian prehistory and Palaeolithic technology, and he has played a key role in developing a more scientific approach to the study of archaeology in Australia. He has undertaken archaeological research in Australia, France, Sri Lanka and Africa and has written the key textbook on the Archaeology of Ancient Australia. Peter is currently an Honorary Professorial Fellow at The University of Queensland and the University of Wollongong, and an adjunct Research Fellow at Griffith University.

Ray Kerkhove is a historian and cultural researcher, specialising in Indigenous site histories (including frontier war sites) and reconstructing Indigenous lifeways from early source documents. He was the principal researcher for Gubbi Gubbi Gun'doo Yang'ga'man (reviving traditional SE Queensland canoes), 'Women's hands' (reconstructing Kabi Kabi basketry), the 'Maroochy Gunyah' exhibition and 'Julara' (reconstructing tow-row fishnets). His books include *The Great Bunya Gathering, Aboriginal Campsites of Brisbane,* and *The Battle of One Tree Hill*. Ray has been assisting the research team with analysis of ethnohistorical sources pertaining to the Mithaka and their neighbours. He is an Adjunct Associate Professor with the University of Southern Queensland.

Duncan Keenan-Jones is Lecturer in Ancient History at The University of Queensland. His research focuses on the relationship between environment, technology and society in the past, especially in the ancient Mediterranean and in Australia. He has current projects on the climate, flooding and water management in ancient Italy and Indigenous floodplain management in the Channel Country. Before taking up the position at The University of Queensland, he held postdoctoral positions at the Collegium de Lyon (2017-2018), University of Glasgow (2014 - 2017) and the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (2011-2014).

Kelsey Lowe is a Research Fellow and Archaeological Heritage Consultant at The University of Queensland Culture and Heritage Unit. She is also an Associate Investigator of the Centre of Excellence for Australian Biodiversity and Heritage. Her research focuses on developing techniques that assist in understandings of past human behaviour, cultural landscapes, and the spread of modern humans through archaeological, geophysical and geoarchaeological applications.

Julien Louys is a vertebrate palaeontologist and palaeoecologist at the Australian Research Centre for Human Evolution at Griffith University. He researches Australian marsupials, the community ecology of fossil mammals, and human and large mammal fossils, with a focus on the last two million years. Julien has conducted fieldwork around the world, including Kenya, Indonesia, Mongolia, Saudi Arabia, and Australia. His current research includes the megafauna of Sumatra and the underwater cave deposits of South Australia.

Tiina Manne studies animal remains from archaeological sites to understand people's relationships with animals in the past as well as how they responded to large-scale climate and environmental changes. Her research focuses on Australia and New Guinea and encompasses sites from 100 years ago through to +50, 000 years ago. She is an Associate Professor at The University of Queensland.

Mandana Mapar is Curator at The University of Queensland Anthropology Museum. She has curated exhibitions for the visual arts, cultural heritage and education sectors since 2003, delivering over 75 exhibitions nationally and internationally. With a particular focus on developing and presenting exhibitions and public programs, her research projects have culminated in the development and publication of touring exhibitions ey! Iran, Contemporary Iranian Photography, and Meston's Wild Australia Show 1892 - 1893. Her practice is centered on advocating for photographic and social history, in particular throughout Queensland.

Richard Martin is an anthropologist at The University of Queensland. He has worked with Aboriginal people around Queensland, and elsewhere in Australia, on native title claims and cultural heritage protection. He is the author of *The Gulf Country: The story of people and place in outback Queensland* (Allen & Unwin, 2019), plus a number of scholarly articles about Indigenous culture and history.

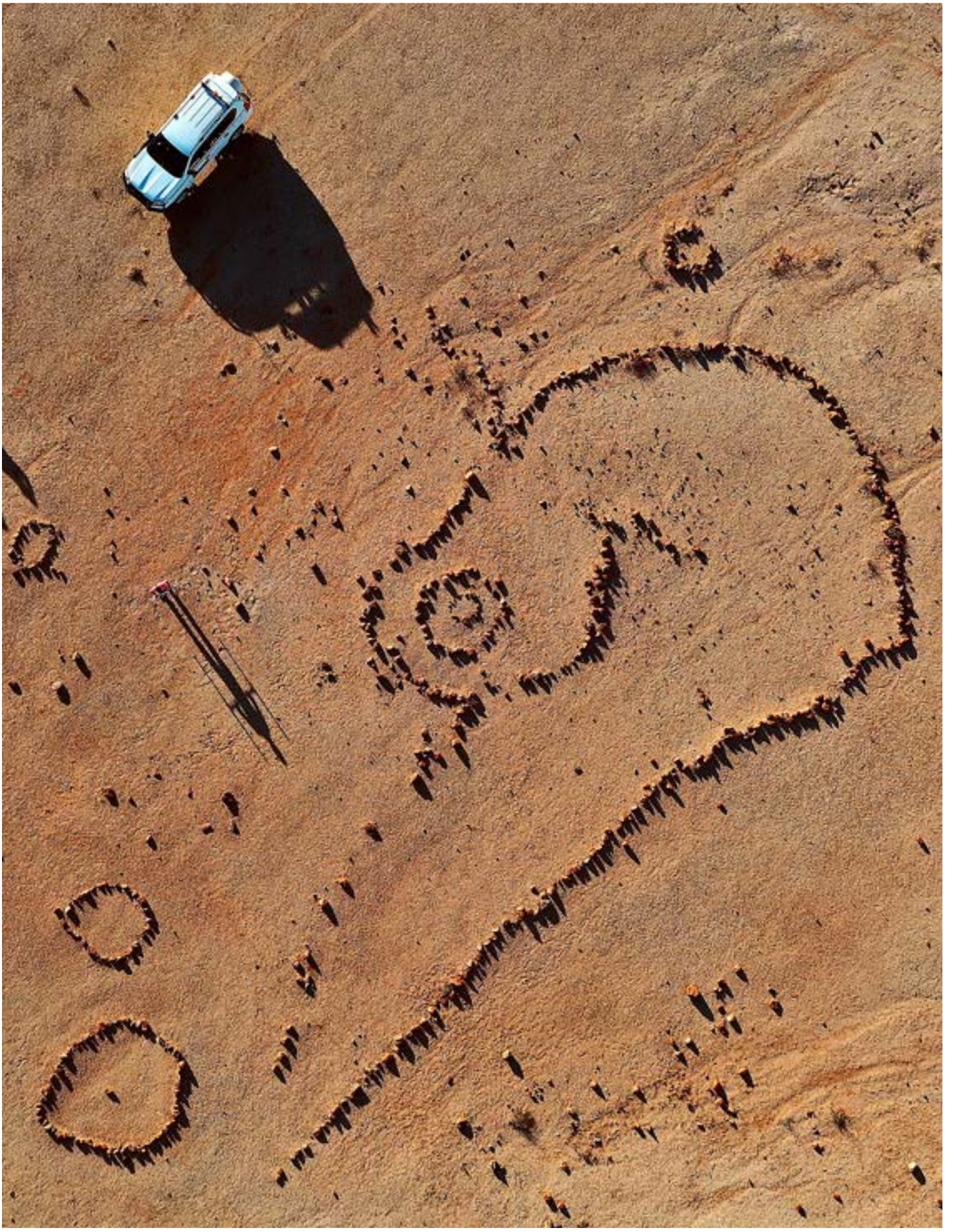
Jen Silcock has spent most of her life in regional Queensland, including the past twenty years working as an ecologist. She completed a PhD through The University of Queensland in 2014, investigating landscape change in western Queensland since pastoral settlement using explorer records, long-term grazing exclosures and surveys for rare and threatened plants. Her work has focused on rare and threatened species, Great Artesian Basin spring wetlands and their endemic biota, wetland mapping and surveys, rangeland vegetation dynamics, grazing land and fire management, and ethnobotany.

Michael Westaway is the Chief Investigator for the Mithaka Archaeological Project which was initiated in 2017. He has worked as a state archaeologist and museum curator and after completing his PhD at the ANU on the origins of the First Australians became a university-based archaeologist and biological anthropologist. Having worked at Flinders and Griffith universities he is now an Australian Research Council Future Fellow at The University of Queensland funded to investigate the emergence of complex social and economic systems in Aboriginal Australia and Papua New Guinea. The research collaboration with the Mithaka people represents a key highlight of his 25-year archaeological career.

Jane Willcock is Senior Registrar & Museum Operations Coordinator at The University of Queensland Anthropology Museum. Her current role is focused on daily operations and developing community and education access to the museum's extensive collection. In her time at The University of Queensland she has managed local, national and international loans, exhibition logistics and delivered hundreds of classes for university students.

Doug Williams is a PhD candidate at Griffith University. Since 2018 researching the distribution, technology and age of sandstone quarries in Mithaka Country. He has particular interests in stone artefact technology, pre-industrial quarrying and GIS applications in archaeology. He has been an archaeologist and heritage manager since 1992, working across most Australian states and territories and has spent an extended period working in World Heritage management. Doug has had ministerial appointments to ACT and NSW State heritage advisory boards and received the Laila Haglund Award for Excellence in Consulting Archaeology from the Australian Association of Consulting Archaeologists in 2012.

Nathan Wright is currently Lecturer in Archaeology, Department of Archaeology, Classics and History at the University of New England, Armidale NSW. Nathan's research interests include palaeo-environmental history especially in the Near East and Mediterranean. Within this broad scope, he is primarily interested in the history of woodland management, the archaeology of human-environment interactions, the analysis of climate change and human impact, development of techniques and methodologies related to palaeo-environment reconstruction, the archaeology of landscape trade and exchange and socio-political and socio-economic development.



Mithaka stone arrangement, Kelsey M. Lowe in silhouette, 2021. Photo: L. Mechielsen

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Alice Duncan-Kemp collection,
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George L. Debney collection, courtesy Bill and Linda Pepper, and Galena Debney.

CREDITS

PROJECT ASSISTANCE

Mandana Mapar

DESIGN

Natalie van der Rijt
Jamie Smit
Paul Thomas

IMAGE CREDITS FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND ANTHROPOLOGY MUSEUM

Carl Warner

FRONT COVER IMAGE

Lyndon Mechielsen

LOGO BRANDING

Rae Cooper

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EXHIBITION LOANS

Alice Duncan-Kemp collection,
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George L. Debney collection, courtesy Bill and Linda Pepper, and Galena Debney.

FURTHER RESOURCES

In addition to the published works by Alice Duncan-Kemp and other researchers noted in the essays earlier in this publication, interested readers should consult the following:

Franklin, N.R., Giorgi, M., Habgood, P.J., Wright, N., Gorringe, J., Gorringe, B., Gorringe, B. and Westaway, M.C. (2021), Gilparrka Almira, a rock art site in Mithaka Country, southwest Queensland: cultural connections, dreaming tracks and trade routes. Archaeology in Oceania, 56: 284-303. https://doi.org/10.1002/arco.5244

FitzSimons, T (2002), Channels of History oral histories, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland. Oral history project telling women's stories of the Australian Channel Country. This collection consists of 25 oral history videos, 7 edited documentaries utilising the interview footage, and raw footage recorded and used in the making of the documentaries. The exhibition component of Channels of History was launched at the State Library of Queensland in November 2002. The footage can be viewed as part of the State Library of Queensland's online collections here https://vimeo.com/showcase/8375667

Westaway, M.C, Williams, D., Lowe, K., Wright, N., Kerkhove, R., Silcock, J., ... Collard, M. (2021). Hidden in plain sight: The archaeological landscape of Mithaka Country, south-west Queensland. Antiquity, 95(382), 1043-1060

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