

NHUNTA KARRA KARA GOONOOWIGALL BUSH TUCKER AND CULTURAL PROJECT

overview of the project

This project was inspired by the reminiscences of Aboriginal people from the Inverell Reconciliation Group. Although a time of racial segregation, many had fond memories of life on the outskirts of Inverell between the 1940s and '60s, and felt it would be worthwhile capturing the richness of this history. The Reconciliation Group rehabilitated the old settlement area of the Goonowigall Bushland Reserve and created an educational walking track incorporating bush tucker stories and cultural information. The area had been degraded by neglect and rubbish dumping, and 56 truckloads of rubbish were removed from the site, a significant step towards environmental improvement. The group documented the bush tucker and medicinal plants occurring on the site and created a memorial for the Aboriginal people who had lived in or travelled through the area in the past. This project has enabled the recording of a wealth of information about early life and the environment in the reserve, ensuring that a piece of valuable Aboriginal history will be preserved.

how the project was carried out

The team planned the best route for the trail by walking over the area with Aboriginal members. Video was taken of Aboriginal group members as they remembered and shared their stories. Many of the recollections involved plants as food, medicine or a source of materials for daily life. As well as contributing their stories, Aboriginal families lent photographs of early life in the settlement, and were consulted at every step to ensure that the project was meeting their expectations.



Installing the interpretive signs

The first major task was to remove a huge accumulation of dumped rubbish and to clear a path for the track. Later, signs were constructed to explain natural or cultural features, and a register of bush tucker plants was established. Much of the work was done by Aboriginal men on the Work for the Dole scheme, supervised by a member of the Inverell Shire Council. The Council not only supervised the

work but provided the large equipment needed for the clearing and removal of rubbish. Other local groups became involved, including the Bruderhof religious community, who created a large and impressive information board for placement at the entrance to the track.

outcomes now and in the future

The walking track was launched in a ceremony attended by over 120 supporters, including Elders and extended family members of the original inhabitants. The track links the old residential sites and identifies bush tucker plants and other natural features. Thirty information boards explain past uses

for the plants. During the site clearing process 56 truckloads of rubbish were removed, including the accumulation of decades of broken glass and car bodies. This clean-up has vastly improved the natural value of the reserve as an educational resource and tourist attraction, and Aboriginal families are starting to use the site as a pleasant meeting place for family reunions and gatherings.



A sign providing information about grass trees

The Reconciliation Council is committed to ongoing care for the reserve, and every six months carries out a maintenance visit, clearing any rubbish, weeding and making small repairs to the signage. Since the project completion other work in the area has commenced. Stories of the elders and their use of the region are being collected and documented.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

The project created a structure for interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups, resulting in enormous social gains as well as benefits for tourism and employment.

A few challenges were overcome during the project. The Steering Committee was a small group and most members were elderly, so it was difficult to complete some tasks within deadlines. The local community, however, proved sympathetic and generous in providing assistance when needed. There were also challenges working with different interest groups, and trust-building was a vital part of the project.