

Ancient structures, valued assets: the fish traps of Brewarrina

By Jim Holdsworth, President DSWAA



Clem, a proud local guide, who uses the fish traps at Brewarrina

Indigenous peoples have lived along the Darling and Barwon Rivers in northern New South Wales for millennia. Their lifestyle was complex, settled and in harmony with the land.

The arrival of Europeans – first the ‘explorers’ and then the settlers and pastoralists – changed both the country and the culture of its inhabitants forever.

It is therefore rare to see stunning evidence of the original culture, which is still actively used by the current indigenous people of the area. It is equally exciting that this evidence is the extensive network of dry-stone walls that occupy the bed of the river and which form a clever and effective means of trapping fish.

The small town of Brewarrina, 100 kilometres east of Bourke, is on the banks of the Barwon River, some distance upstream of the point where it merges with the Bogan and the Culgoa rivers to form the Darling.

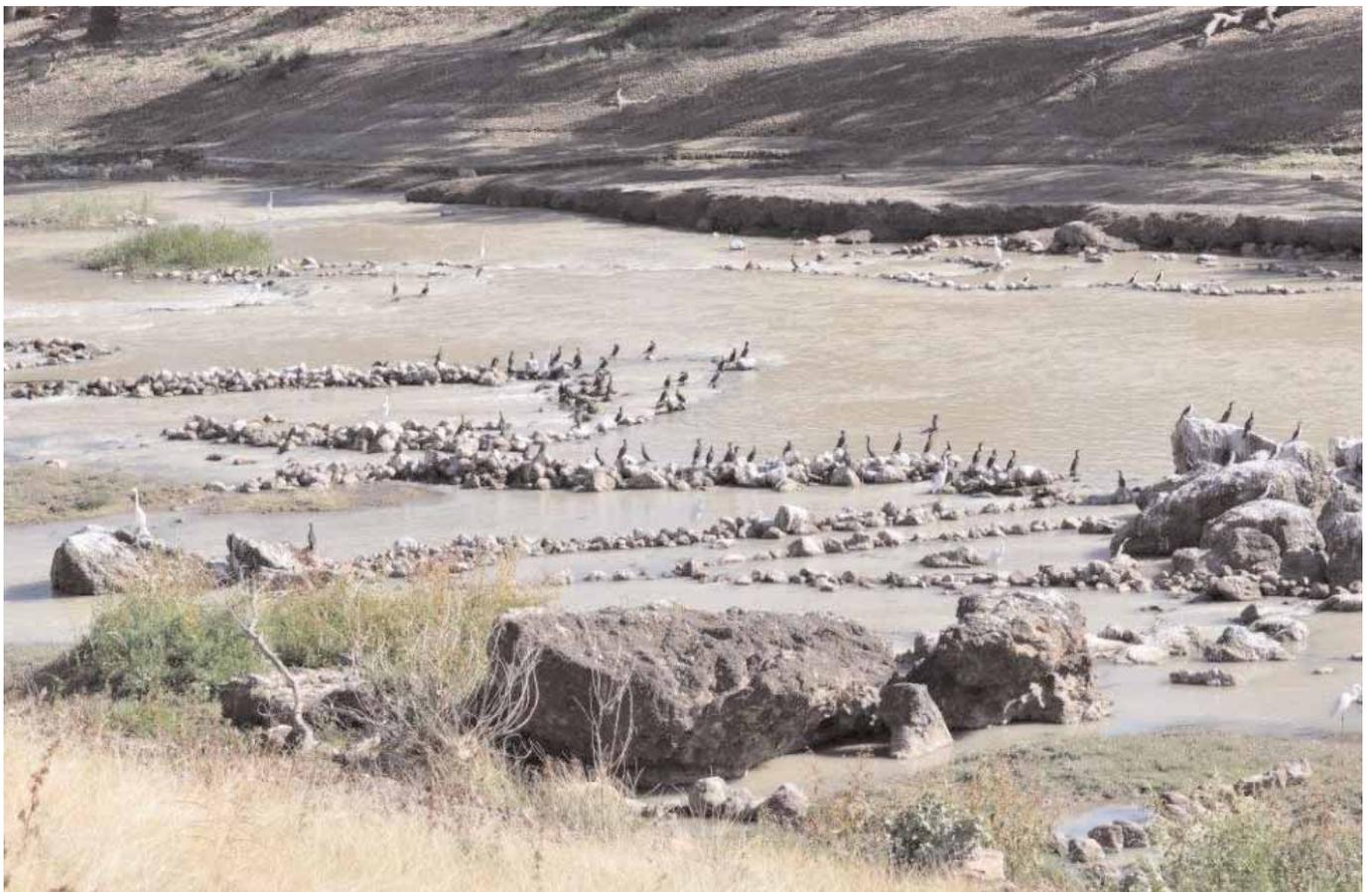
A decision to join a number of friends on a camping trip to the annual race meeting at Louth, south-west of Bourke, in early August was the catalyst for a detour to Brewarrina. The fish traps are Brewarrina’s main tourist attraction, and the local visitor information centre runs guided tours of the fish traps, which are just downstream of the town’s weir.

A small group of tourists joined local identity Clem for the short walk to the top of the slope overlooking the river. While the river level was not as low as it can get, and hence the fish traps were not as exposed as at other times, the river can rise significantly. Back in the 1850s, steamers had penetrated these northern rivers as far as Brewarrina and settlement by Europeans along the banks soon followed.

Clem told stories of how the fish traps were created below a rock bar which lay across the river, so long ago that no-one knows how old they are. Some say 40,000 years ago. The



*Above: a water race and a trapping pond. The town weir is in the background
Below: part of the fish traps in the Barwon River*



pattern of stones to form races and enclosures was such that they were effective at different water levels. Stones were removed or replaced as the river flowed through the walls, trapping fish. Although less extensive than previously, the fish

traps are still used by the local Aborigines. In fact, they are shared by five tribes; each with their own part of the network.

In 1901, R. H. Mathews, a researcher into Aboriginal languages, visited Brewarrina and wrote:



Tyrone uses the modern technique of 'tree-guarding' to catch a carp

The river floor at this point consists of an immense number of loose stones, ranging from twenty pounds to a hundredweight, with others of greater dimensions. The Aboriginal builders collected large quantities of these stones and erected walls, in the way many of our farmers about Kiama used to build stone dykes or fences around their farms. These walls were erected in a substantial manner, being wider at the base, where also the larger stones were used, and tapering upward to the top. The stones were merely laid in position, without mortar or dressing of any kind, forming a structure sufficiently strong to resist the force of the current. Areas were enclosed in this manner, varying in dimensions from a small pond almost down to the size of a plunge bath. These enclosures were continued right across the channel from bank to bank, and occupied all the suitable portions of the river floor for about a quarter of a mile along its course.

It is both remarkable and fortunate that, over a century later, this description remains accurate. However, while the traps are still used, more recent means of fishing have taken over. Clem told how spearing fish is no longer possible due to the muddiness of the water. Netting, although a traditional method, is no longer effective due to the frequent low river flows and underwater snags that tear the nets. Today, the locals have shown commendable inventiveness and the preferred method of catching yellowbelly, carp or Murray cod is 'tree-guarding'.

Clem's younger brother Tyrone appeared, as if on cue, carrying a cylindrical mesh frame, curiously bearing a remarkable resemblance to the wire guards around the young trees in Brewarrina's main street. With this, and standing in the knee-deep shallows, he plunged the tree-guard into the water, rummaged around inside the guard and, about once every four goes, pulled up a carp for us to admire. Not a welcomed species and not good eating, so flung onto the bank to gasp its last.

It's unlikely that 'tree-guarding' as a method of fishing at Brewarrina will gain the same heritage recognition as the ancient fish traps. The Brewarrina fish traps are Heritage-listed and are a unique legacy of an ancient use of the dry-stone method.

Are the oldest dry stone structures in the world right here in outback New South Wales?

References

www.breshire.nsw.gov.au

Aboriginal Fisheries of the Darling-Barwon Rivers, by Peter Dargin. First published in 1976 by Development & Advisory Publications of NSW, Dubbo. Available at the Visitor Information Centre, Brewarrina.

October Field Trip

The DSWAA is preparing arrangements for a field trip on the weekend of 29–30 October.

'Indigenous Dry Stone Heritage of Western Victoria'

It is proposed that the focus of the field trip be on the morning of Sunday, 30 October, however, people may wish to stay the Saturday night in the region (Macarthur, Heywood and Portland are in reasonably close proximity to the Mt Eccles National Park).

You can express interest in this field trip now by emailing aksmiller@bigpond.com By registering your interest, we can keep you updated with arrangements for the weekend as they develop.

Right: Lake Condah



Camperdown Field Day: a great success

BY Charmian Brent, DSWAA Committee member

On a rainy winter's Saturday in June, the DSWAA faithful gathered for the AGM at the Killara Centre, Manifold Street in Camperdown, Victoria. Surprisingly, for such a dreary day, there was a pretty good turnout of more than 20 members, who came from as far as Holbrook in New South Wales, Burra and Penola in South Australia and from Ballarat and Melbourne in Victoria. The business of the day was soon cheerfully dealt with by DSWAA President Jim Holdsworth and DSWAA Secretary Andrew Miller as people were anxious to catch up with old friends over a warming cup of tea and some delicious cake before venturing out to brave the elements on our field trip to view Camperdown's 'New Walls and Old Walls and Dry Stone Sculptures'.

Initially, we headed off along Depot Road to Craighburn, an old stone homestead still standing on the site of what was once Old Timboon, where originally Camperdown was intended to be built until the land was declared too marshy for a settlement. New Committee Member Allan Willingham, who wrote the definitive Camperdown Heritage Study, gave us a spirited and enlightening talk on the district's early days (see pp. 7-8) and drew our attention to surrounding dry stone walls of the era.

Next we drove to 'Sunnyside', a care home for the elderly in the centre of Camperdown. Here the impressive entrance features a wall built by master waller Alistair Tune, one of his earliest commissions, he told us, where the afternoon light glowed on stones of pinkish hues ranged in beautiful rows with stunning wall ends – the certain touch of a master craftsman at work. In describing some of the intricacies of his craft, Alistair revealed that the stones were sourced locally especially for their colour – they purvey an amazing sense of warmth around the building.

From Sunnyside, we headed off down Wiridgil Road to 'Meekri' the home of Robert and Louise Manifold, where the extent and variety of walls around the property takes one's breath away. The walls, constructed by both Alistair Tune and Mark Savage at different times, range from the purely decorative to the entirely functional and serve to enhance even further what is already a stunningly beautiful landscape, with views that seem to go on for ever across the Western District of Victoria.



The AGM had a good attendance of more than 20 members



New Committee member, historian Allan Willingham (above) told us some of the history of 'Craighburn' (left) and its remnant walls (below)

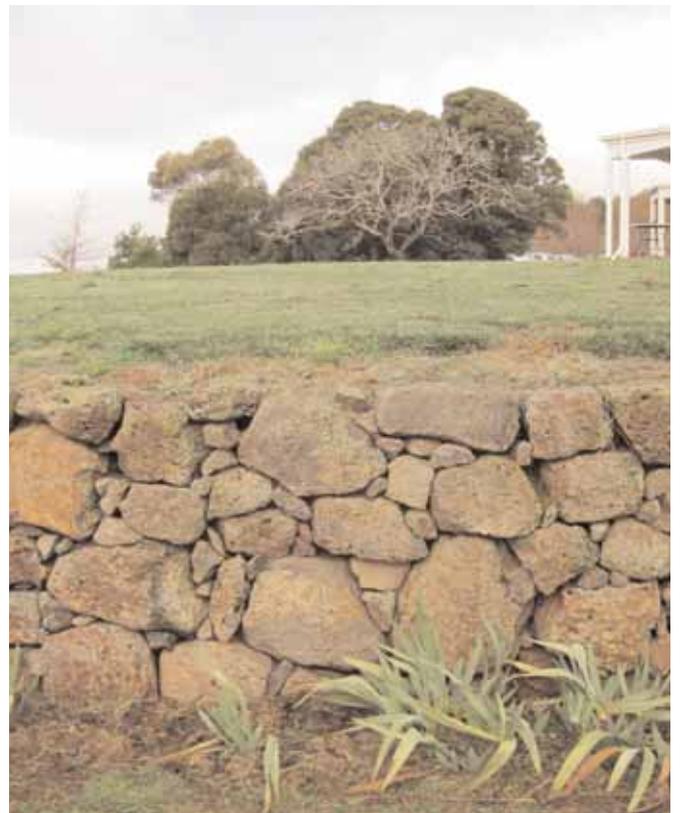


Finally, we returned to Camperdown to admire the fantastic 'Trispheres' water feature at 'Caringal', the home of Tony Brown and Ruth Stewart. This example of dry stone 'art' was created by Alistair Tune and took him almost a year to complete. He explained that guided by formwork, he painstakingly slotted hundreds and hundreds of triangular pieces of stone together until he achieved perfect spheres – sometimes having to almost start again when the 'orb' didn't quite come together properly. The plumbing was also very tricky indeed but the end result is a remarkable achievement, truly a work of art to be marvelled at and admired for decades to come.

Thrilled by all that we had seen during the afternoon and anxious to talk about it, the evening came to a perfect ending when we gathered at 'Wuorong' the home of John and Carolyn Menzies where, in front of a blazing fire, we were treated to scrumptious food and wine. A very successful day indeed and many, many thanks to all those involved in making it such a memorable occasion.



Above left and top right: Alistair Tune talks about his first commission – building the wall at 'Sunnyside', a care home for elderly people. The wall ends are definitely a work of art, but so too are the stunning 'Trispheres' (bottom right) at 'Caringal', the home of Tony Brown and Ruth Stewart



At Meekri there are many types of wall, from the triple 'dinosaur' humps in the orchard (top) through low garden walls (centre left) to the wonderful folly (below)

Alistair Tune built the dinosaur humps, the low garden wall (centre left) and the higher garden wall (below right), whereas Mark Savage built the folly (bottom left) and retaining wall (centre right)

Early European settlement at Lake Timboon, Camperdown: a brief cultural history

By Allan Willingham, DSWAA Committee member



Charles Maplestone, 'Timboon Hotel' and 'Mount Leura', pencil sketch dated 14 December 1859

State Library of Victoria Picture Collection H2001.166/45

The site of first European settlement at Lake Timboon in Western Victoria is located some two kilometres north-west of Mount Leura and the present site of the picturesque township of Camperdown.

In their journey of circumnavigation and discovery of Lake Corangamite in August 1837, Thomas and Somerville Learmonth's exploration party effectively became the first Europeans to traverse the fertile foothills of Mount Leura and the future site of Camperdown. Reports of this springtime expedition across the western plains soon spread amongst the settlers along the Barwon River and its tributaries and in November 1837, Thomas, John and Peter Manifold set out to examine for themselves the same country. Their initial reconnaissance of the 'wished-for-land' on Lake Purrumbete was cut short with the ominous discovery of a shod hoof print in the heavy Mount Leura terrain. By the end of January 1839, the Manifold brothers had hastily settled on their Purrumbete run.

In the ensuing months, waves of settlers washed between the shores of the countless shallow lakes on the western plains in search of grazing runs. The Manifolds had been in occupation of their new run for less than three months when, near the end of April 1839, a Scots-born shepherd Henry Gibb arrived at Mount Leura and camped with his flock on the southern shores of Lake Timboon (now Lake Colongulac). The Manifold brothers were quick to defend their Arcadian run and Gibb agreed to 'remove his sheep after they were shorn and to give up the land to the Messrs Manifold'. The first hut at Gibb's temporary camp was built with walls of turf and an earthen floor and situated on the eastern bank of the Mederanook Creek and near the southern shores of Lake Colongulac.

The first wayside inn at Lake Timboon, strategically located on the Geelong to Belfast track, was also built on the east bank of

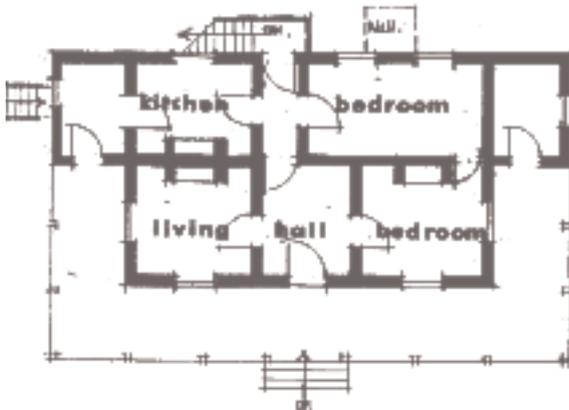
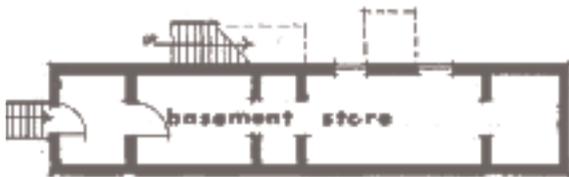
the Mederanook Creek for Arthur Lloyd before 1843 and perhaps as early as 1841. The first publican was Arthur Murray. Late in 1845, Thomas Storey, the son of a Somersetshire farmer, acquired 'Murray's Inn' and at the same time advertised 'a sheep station with 500–700 ewes for sale at Lake Timboon'. Storey sold the Lake Inn to the Geelong publican Martin Priest after February 1850, and Priest occupied the premises for a short time before applying to have the property granted to him under pre-emptive right. This application was refused and he subsequently purchased the land at the Geelong land sales in June 1853. Some time afterwards, Priest sold the property to Samuel Cozens.

The second Lake Inn at Timboon, a substantial two-storey bluestone structure with flanking single storey wings, was erected in 1855–56 for Samuel Cozens, the resident innkeeper. The Colonial Georgian-style inn apparently continued operations following the death of the publican Samuel Cozens in December 1859, but the Timboon Hotel had by that time been eclipsed by the Leura Hotel in the nearby burgeoning township of Camperdown and Cozens had died leaving his widow with the responsibility for massive accumulated debts. Cozens' Timboon Hotel was sketched to great effect by Colonial architect/surveyor Charles Maplestone during a Western District sojourn in December 1859.

The former Lake Inn or Timboon Hotel is one of the oldest and certainly the most intact of the small number of bluestone inns erected throughout the Western District in the first years of settlement. The notable Colonial Georgian-style building remains, together with the adjacent McNicol homestead 'Craigburn' and the isolated Sievwright grave, as the only tangible links with the historic early settlement known as Lake Timboon.

Scottish born pioneer settler Duncan McNicol arrived at Williamstown in the Port Phillip Colony in October 1839 and soon after was employed by the pastoralists Niel Black and Company at Glenormiston near Mount Noorat. McNicol and his brother Donald worked for Black for a number of years before deciding to purchase from Arthur Lloyd the licence for the pastoral run 'Dunoon' on the Mederanook Creek at Lake Timboon.

Donald and Duncan McNicol, in partnership with John McKinnon, established crude timber huts, station buildings and enclosures on their run near the Lake Inn after 1847 and in August 1852 were granted 320 acres of their run licence under pre-emptive rights. This land was not developed and McNicol determined to build his new homestead opposite the original establishment and on the east side of the creek, after 1851 and before 7 June 1854, when McNicol is recorded as having purchased, at the Geelong land sales, the site on which Craighburn now stands with 'improvements to the value of £500' already erected. The squared basalt rubble house of six rooms, with a large cellar, steep pitched shingle roof and five inch (125 mm) pitch iron cladding to the perimeter verandah, replaced an earlier timber hut of 1847.



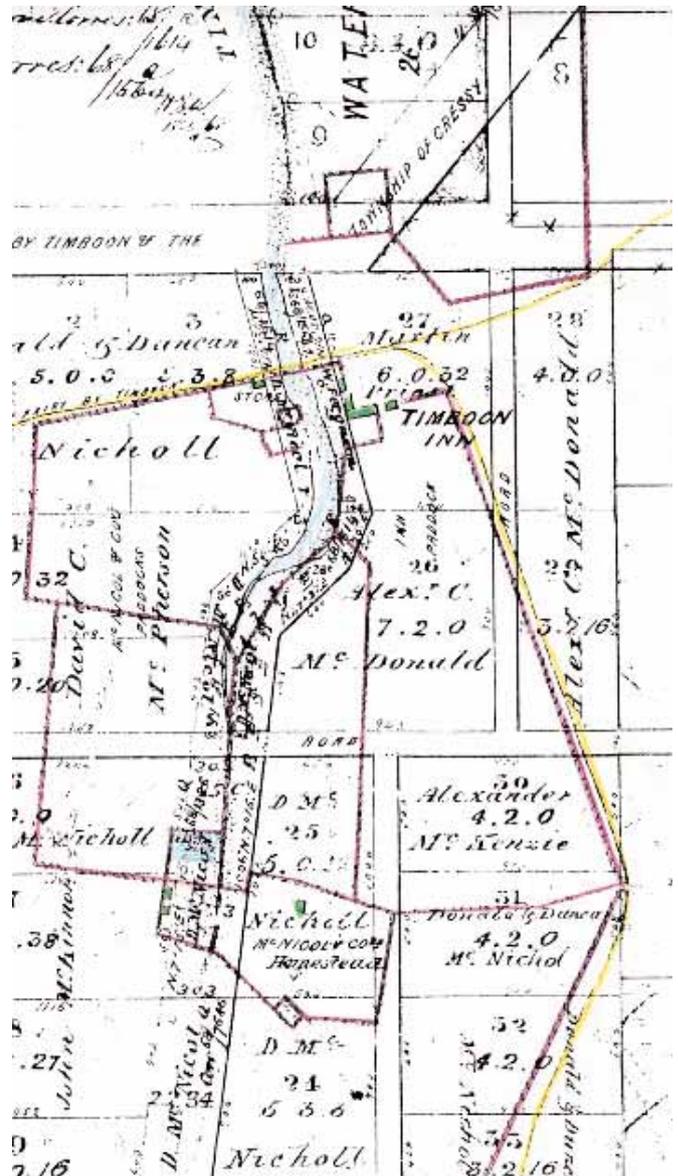
CRAIGHBURN : THE RESIDENCE OF DUNCAN MCNICOL

Willingham, 'The Old Timboon District and Camperdown to 1860',

'Craighburn': the residence of Duncan McNicol

Craighburn is a distinctive and rare intact example of the Colonial Georgian house in Victoria. Part of the original or very early basalt dry stone walling, which formed an early homestead paddock enclosure, also remains intact. This wall, the subject of inspection during the DSWAA visit to Camperdown, does not correspond with any of the fences shown on R. D. Scott's survey plan of the Timboon settlement prepared in 1852, and must therefore be of a later date.

The Burial Place at Lake Timboon was established around 1848 on ground forming part of Donald and Duncan McNicol's pastoral run 'Dunoon'. Early survey plans record the exact layout of this simple reserve and one relatively modern gravestone, which records (erroneously) that 'Charles Wightman Sievwright' died at Mount Leura on 25 February 1851, survives in a paddock close to Craighburn. In fact, it was the remains of twenty-one-year-old Charles Sievwright, the second son of Charles Wightman Sievwright, the former Assistant Protector of Aborigines for the Geelong District at Port Phillip, that were interred in this grave two days after he was killed in a riding accident at Manifold's Dairy Station at Mount Leura.



Assistant Surveyor R. D. Scott, 'Sketch of the Proposed Agricultural Reserve at Mount Leura', 1852, Lands Department Map Collection C 162, as reproduced in Allan Willingham, *Camperdown: A Heritage Study*, Volume 1, December 1995].

New South Wales steams ahead

By Jim Vandore, Convenor NSW, DSWAA

Hullo Everyone,

In trying to establish the DSWAA in NSW, I have amassed a list of members, friends, people who have contacted me and people who have attended Geoff Duggan's course at Mount Annan.

The NSW group had a successful outing on 23 July to inspect the stone walls and arches in the Abbotsleigh School grounds, Wahroonga, followed by a visit to the heritage walls at Lisgar Gardens, Hornsby. Details in the next issue of the *Flag Stone*

Next we are holding a workshop at Wingello in the Southern Highlands on Saturday, 24 September (maybe extending to Sunday, 25 September). This is shaping to be an interesting and, hopefully, fun event as the attendance looks to be around 30 plus. The workshop will be in the capable hands of skilled waller Wayne Fox.

Workshops are hands-on events where we are trying to give as many people as possible practical experience of wall building under the guiding hands of an experienced wall

builder. At the same time, we want to build attractive walls which enhance the environment. Obviously, numbers are limited, so it's first in best dressed. I am charging \$10 per head for workshops, which will be a contribution to the DSWAA. Members are free.

Finally for 2011, we are planning a visit to the historic dry stone walls at Kiama in early November and there will probably be a mini workshop involved (repairing a damaged wall).

We are, of course, planning for 2012 and would like to reach out to other parts of the State of NSW. Your ideas about where we might visit existing historic walls would be welcome, and also where we might visit existing walls and do a wee bit of workshopping at the same time.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Jim Vandore, Convenor NSW, DSWAA
Mobile: 0403 807 200.

DSWAA participates in Ballarat International Foto Biennale

By Andrew Miller, Secretary, DSWAA

The Biennale is a world-class arts event that has brought an impressive array of photography by Australian and international artists to Ballarat.

Of particular note in the program this year has been the fringe program. Local cafes, restaurants, commercial galleries, businesses and community spaces are hosting an amazing variety of works.

The DSWAA Committee saw the Biennale as an opportunity to raise awareness of the DSWAA and what it stands for.

Since the formation of the DSWAA in Ballarat in 2002, there have been many wonderful images of dry stone wall structures taken by members during our field trips and on private travel. One hundred and twenty of these images have been assembled by Charmian Brent, Editor of the DSWAA newsletter, into a rolling presentation on a 42" screen in the main venue of the Biennale (Thanks Charmian, for a great job!).

The DSWAA presentation has created much interest over the month-long Biennale. On Sunday, 28 August, a small group of DSWAA members gathered for lunch in Ballarat prior to viewing the DSWAA entry, along with some of the other exhibits in the Foto Biennale. The following text was available in pamphlet format to those who viewed the DSWAA presentation at the Biennale.

'DRY STONE - A CLOSER FOCUS ON AN ANCIENT CRAFT'

Constructing walls without the use of mortar is an ancient technique practised throughout the world and over several millennia. While there are many methods of dry stone walling, the unique feature is that the strength of the wall is



DSWAA members and members of the public view the slide show at the Foto Biennale

gained through careful selection of stones, their skilled placement in the wall and the robustness that comes from through-stones, copestones and smaller wedge stones. Whether in a landscape setting or domestic garden, walls built using the dry stone method are a highly photogenic product of a craft based on the functional use of a natural material.

The DSWAA was founded in Ballarat in 2002. Its purpose is to acknowledge, promote and celebrate the historical and contemporary contribution of the construction of dry stone walls in the shaping of Australia's physical and cultural landscape.

The images presented at the Ballarat International Foto Biennale Fringe Program have been drawn from the extensive collection of the DSWAA library of images. The images are of dry stone structures photographed by members in Australia and overseas. Details on the role and activities of the DSWAA can be found at www.dswaa.org.au

President's Message



Jim Holdsworth

Greetings!

Nearly always, as we look across a landscape, we see the hand of human habitation or activity as part of the vista. While we can visit places where we can see only tree-clad mountain ranges or flat sunburnt deserts, which show no sign of human intervention, this is not generally the case. It is much more common for our landscapes to include evidence of our taming of the land to make it productive or to make it habitable.

That evidence takes many forms, not all of which delight the eye. One topical and increasingly common feature of our rural environments is wind farms; those groups of three-bladed turbines on tall towers dotted across the horizon to capture wind energy and convert it to electricity. In Victoria, as elsewhere in Australia, wind farms have become highly controversial in recent years, with people living near turbines asserting that their health, as well as their rural environment, is adversely affected. The role of wind turbines in collecting energy from a free and renewable source is the other side of the argument.

Last month, the Victorian State Government placed restrictions on where wind farms can be located, aiming to protect areas of high landscape value and areas close to residences and regional towns from the claimed adverse effects.

Some people think wind turbines are attractive; others, that they are a visual blight. Wind farms are an accepted part of modern society and are common sights in the rural areas of many countries. They are just one more element among the roads, powerlines, signs, fences, communication towers and the houses and towns we live in, all of which have all altered the original environment.

Some types of infrastructure, particularly power pylons and their wires, are visually intrusive but are accepted because they serve a vital purpose. Roads, railways and bridges are prominent features, but because they allow us to move about, are happily accepted as essential.

Into this context we can place dry-stone walls. Fortunately, few people would not see some aesthetic appeal in this particular human imposition into our rural vistas. Whether a long wall disappearing over a hill, a stone stockyard or a finely crafted garden wall, dry-stone construction seems to have wide acceptance as a positive element in our landscapes. But, like roads or powerlines, dry-stone walls are functional, man-made structures that are there for a purpose.

Something sets dry-stone walls apart from those other parts of our distant vistas. Is it that dry-stone walls are made from the earth, using a natural material found nearby? Is it that

their functional role is matched by their visual appeal and the craftsmanship of their construction? Is it that they conjure impressions of making good out of necessity, of a fine-grained solution to a very local need, and of a natural solution to the task of making land productive?

In those places where dry-stone walls exist, they are almost universally appreciated. They set the mind running on topics such as why they are there, who built them and when, and about the geology, the type of farming, the skill of the builder, the durability of this material and how it is put together.

The articles from around the world that we read in the *Flag Stone* take us to places where these same questions arise.

'The Association's vision is that dry stone walls and dry stone structures are widely accepted for their unique place in the history, culture and economy of the nation and for the legacy they represent, that governments and the wider community recognise the importance of significant dry stone structures built by indigenous peoples, European explorers, early settlers and modern craftspeople as valued artifacts of our national identity, that this acceptance and recognition is manifested by appropriate statutory protection and landowner and community respect and celebration, and that the craft of dry stone walling grows as a modern reinforcement of the contribution that dry stone walls and structures have made to the culture of Australia.'

Some websites you may like to visit

www.budjbim.com/tours.html

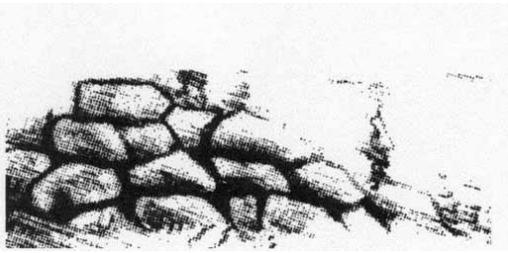
www.astoneuponastone.com

www.rbg Syd.gov.au

www.pierreseche.net

www.stonefoundation.org

www.dswac.ca



Gathering Stones...



Hadrian's Wall, Northumberland, UK, was a defensive fortification in Roman Britain. Begun in AD 122, during the rule of Emperor Hadrian, it was the first of two fortifications built across Great Britain. The wall was the most heavily fortified border in the entire Roman Empire

English Heritage Photo Library



Butchart Gardens, Victoria, Canada

Photo: Charles Evans



Kyoto, Japan. Janet O'Hehir, who took the photo, thinks this diamond-shaped stone arrangement maybe a distinct north-Asian style



Dry stone wall and decorative wall end in the Poet's Garden section of this year's Hampton Court Flower Festival in July in the UK

Photo: Liz Forsyth

Contributions for
The Flag Stone
invited
Pictures of unusual walls/damaged walls
Dry stone wall-related literature
Any item of interest to members of
DSWAA
News from overseas
Deadline for the February 2012 issue is
14 January 2012
All material to: chabrent@bigpond.net.au

Gateways

By Andrew Miller, DSWAA Secretary

A well designed gateway brings a feeling of welcome, timelessness and sense of place. Without doubt it also adds value, both monetary and aesthetic, to a property, and what better material to deliver such qualities than dry stone construction!

Here are some images from both Australia and France to whet the appetite. The use of stone from both volcanic and sedimentary origins brings a different charm to each entrance. The technique of terminating the wall at the gateway varies in interesting ways; in some cases timber posts support the dry stone wall and in others a vertical stone plinth has been installed. The gate 'furniture' has been fixed into the plinth, probably with lead plugging to hold the steel or cast iron tightly into the prepared recess.

And take a careful study of the image of the stone plinth atop one of the walls – the plinth has had a circular hole on its underside to accept the top of the stile of the gate. Some of these gateways in France appear to have been there for centuries.

One marvels at who or what may have passed through these wonderful openings – one may ask 'if only these gateways could talk!'





The day the waters came

By Raelene Marshall, DSWAA member, Victoria

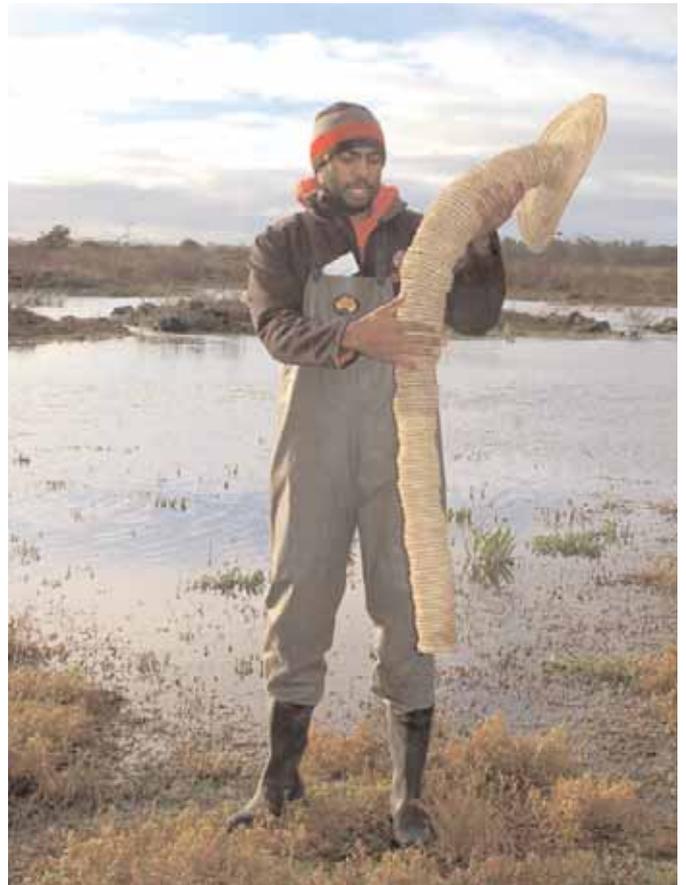


Remnants of an early Gunditjmara stone dwelling place



Above: woven sticks form part of a fish trap

Right: an eel trap made from woven reeds



In the previous issue of *The Flag Stone*, Jim Holdsworth introduced DSWAA members to the social and cultural significance of the fertile plains and fingers of lava that flowed from the volcanoes that remain as prominent features of the Budj Bim landscape as portrayed by Gib Wettenhall in his book, *The People of Budj Bim – engineers of aquaculture, builders of stonehouse settlements and warriors defending country*.

Over a period of four days in early June 2011, the Gunditjmirring peoples of the far south-west, their guests, landscape professionals and academics were invited to attend the Budj Bim World Heritage Symposium; a public program in which a series of presentations on the archeological, geological, hydrological, historical and cultural values of the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape (NHL) were discussed.

The Symposium's Public Program was held in the Heywood hall on Tuesday, 7 June. The gathering was an important component of the long-term aspiration to facilitate and advance the nomination

of the Budj Bim NHL for World Heritage listing by the United Nations Education Scientific Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The aim of the Symposium was to bring together those people who could contribute stories, knowledge and science of the landscape to enhance the support of the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments and for the subsequent

consideration of UNESCO through the World Heritage List assessment process.

As part of that program, facilitated by Damein Bell, DSWAA member and Executive Officer Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation; DSWAA member, Dr Timothy Hubbard and I presented a joint paper entitled 'Post Contact Heritage Values' to a hall full of people abuzz with the excitement of what was in store. For Tim, who had recently retired as the Heritage Advisor for the area, it was an opportunity to share and exchange his extensive knowledge with a broad range of academics and locals from all walks of life. For me, it was an opportunity to catch up with friends and colleagues who had contributed their local knowledge to the research for my dry stone wall exhibition *A Stone Upon A Stone*, which had been funded by the Federal Government some 10 years ago. However, more importantly, the gathering provided me with an opportunity to further share and explore 'the story yet to be told', about evidence of the early use of Aboriginal labour in the construction and maintenance of dry stone walls that was unearthed by Dr Carlotta Kellaway during her historical research for that same exhibition.

The four action-packed days were stimulating, enlightening, challenging and, above all, exciting. The hydrology of Lake Condah and the way indigenous people had exploited it by building stone fishing traps was explained in detail. Those DSWAA members who saw the Friday night Stateline presentation of the field trip to Lake Condah will also be aware that the weather and the light were pure magic! Those present were treated to a rare opportunity that enabled us to understand this unique landscape through the broad lens of various academic disciplines and the indigenous people, who generously shared their knowledge and experiences formally at the public forum and in informal chatter on the various field trips conducted as part of the program. The visit to Lake Condah was a true luxury. As water flowed gently through the traps, we were shown how eels were trapped by a member of the local clan, who went fishing as the sun set timelessly on the horizon.

As Jim, also mentioned in *The Flag Stone* of March 2007, under Tim Hubbard's guidance, the DSWAA held a weekend of field trips to the 'dry stone sites and structures in the area north of Port Fairy which included a visit to the wonderfully impressive Bessiebelle Sheep-wash, made of stones from the lava flow from nearby Mt Eccles.' However, up until now, on each visit from DSWAA members we have been unable to truly appreciate the majesty of this structure due to its degeneration over the years.



The original purpose of Bessiebelle, to wash large numbers of sheep, is easier to visualise when there is water in the washes

But in June this year that same site was full of water, giving us a sneak peek into the mirror of its past when it played an important role in the lives of the early settlers and their sheep husbandry industry with thanks to a grant of \$90,000 to the Windamara Aboriginal Corporation from Heritage Victoria. The 2010–11 Place, Interpretation and Objects Works' grant enabled Damein Bell to employ Master Stone-waller Alistair Tune from Camperdown, who was ably assisted by local community member Brett Pevitt and others from the Budj Bim Ranger team. Although at the time of the research for the *A Stone Upon A Stone* exhibition, the Bessiebelle Sheep-wash and yards were considered important by only a select few of the local people, today it is registered as a Place of Significance by Heritage Victoria on their heritage database and there is now a growing interest in the structures, emphasised by the Symposium in June. As Tim noted on the day, we were visiting what has come to be called 'the Australian Parthenon of Sheep-washes'. Heritage Victoria's official Statement of Significance notes:

What is significant?

The Bessiebelle Sheepwash and Yards complex is located on the former 14,000 acre Ardonachie Run, established in 1848 by pastoralist Samuel Gorrie, then carrying 6,000 sheep. In 1864, this run was subdivided into smaller runs, and the sheepwashes were located within Mount Eccles and Lake Gorrie Run. The date of construction of the washes and walls is not known, although they were probably constructed within the period 1848–64.

The Bessiebelle landscape is on the southern edge of a rock-strewn lava flow punctured with large natural depressions. Until the region was drained in the 1880s, the water table was high enough for the depressions to be regularly filled with water. The two sheep washes, identified as north and south, both utilised the natural terrain, complemented by the construction of massive dry stone wall races, and a network of pre- and post-washing yards. The large and sophisticated network of races and yards are skillfully constructed of field stone. The races, which are highly intact, are in some places more than two metres thick. Dry stone wall sheepyards also existed south of the washes until the 1950s, when they were demolished for road metal. In the north-east corner of the site, a complex of impressive dry stone walls, with battered profiles up to two metres in height, also survive mostly intact. Their function is not known, but they were possibly folding yards.

The custom in Britain of washing wool on the sheep's back prior to shearing was centuries old and was brought to Australia. Many creeks, streams and crossing places in Victoria bear the name Sheepwash Creek or similar. It was the practice to wash the sheep in a pool of water or a river, in which men were placed, often in barrels or tubs, to rub and squeeze the wool in order to remove gritty materials, mud



Alistair Tune has restored and rebuilt some of the walls of the races

and droppings, which would not only deteriorate the quality of the wool, but would also blunt the edge of the shears. Additionally, by the 1820s London manufacturers were demanding growers wash their sheep to rid fleeces of their contaminants, and this prompted several developments, from the use of spouts to obtain a high pressure jet of water onto the sheep's back, to sophisticated hot water washes with boilers, of which a number of examples survive in Victoria. No evidence of hot water technology has been identified at Bessiebelle. Freight costs on greasy wool were also significantly higher than washed fleeces and so scourers also appeared on Victorian pastoral properties, circumventing some of the labour intensive washing process. Hot water was the only means of dissolving the grease, and this practice continued until the 1880s, when technological advances in dyeing processes meant that woollen manufacturers preferred to receive the wool in grease. Sheep washes were labour intensive. In the 1840s, up to 35 men were employed at Bontharambo washing and shearing, and a similar number were employed at the hot water wash at Glen Isla station in the 1880s.

Why is it significant?

The Bessiebelle Sheepwash and yards are probably the largest and most sophisticated surviving example of a traditional pastoral property sheepwash in Victoria. They clearly demonstrate the large network of races, yards and folds necessary for washing thousands of sheep over a short period of time. The Bessiebelle sheep washes apparently predate later technological changes and the necessity for hot water washing.

The Bessiebelle sheepwashes and yards are of landscape significance as a cultural landscape which has been both modified by, and cleverly adapted to, an annual process that was of critical importance within the pastoral calendar. The drystone walls and races appear to evolve from the rocky terrain, and have a strong organic affinity with the prevailing harsh landscape. The drystone walls demonstrate a high level of craftsmanship and skill in their construction, and reflect the extensive scale of pastoral operations across the landscape.

The Bessiebelle sheepwashes and yards are of archaeological, historical, landscape and significance to the State of Victoria. The site has not been fully surveyed but its complexity strongly suggests a potential to reveal more about the washing processes and associated pastoral occupation and activity in the area.

Much remains to be learned about the dry stone walls of the Western District. There are so many of them, built at such different times and for such diverse reasons, in such remote places. Their automatic identification and protection under local planning schemes (but notably not under all schemes) was a major advance. This resulted from the DSWAA's lobbying at the Ministerial Review into Heritage Overlays, largely led by Jim Holdsworth and Tim Hubbard. The Advisory Committee recommended to the Minister for Planning that municipalities should be able to identify and protect dry stone walls without mapping and describing them, a virtually impossible task.

Research into the Lake Condah fish traps, into the dry stone walls of Glenelg Shire, specifically the area around Mount Eccles otherwise known as Budj Bim, into the Bessiebelle Sheep-wash and for recent Symposium all indicate an Aboriginal connection. There is a cross cultural association between the land and the way country has been used and cared for by people across tens of thousands of years until the present.

Bessiebelle SHEEPWASHES AND YARDS. Location PYES ROAD BESSIEBELLE, Moyne Shire Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number H2033, Heritage Overlay Number HO38

Review of Heritage Provisions in Planning Schemes, The way forward for heritage, Advisory Committee Report to the Minister for Planning, 2.9 Dry Stone Walls, August 2007.

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Payment: monies can be deposited in the DSWAA's bank account 013 274 4997 47356 at any ANZ Bank **or** send a cheque payable to: The Dry Stone Walls Association of Australia Inc. at the above address.

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Area of interest, for example, farmer, heritage, etc.

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