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## **HEALING DJANDAK, HEALING DJAARA**

## Djandak Wi (Country fire) season is starting

With the coming of autumn, **Djandak Wi** (cultural burning) will soon begin.

We've been busy preparing for another busy season, following our largest and most successful season to date in 2023.



**Djandak W**i, which literally means 'Country fire' in our language, remains an important cultural practice for **Djaara** (Dja Dja Wurrung People).

When our Ancestors were forcibly removed from Country by colonisers, they were prevented from using **Wi** (fire) to keep Country healthy, and Country became sick. We have been reviving the practice over the past decade and we are increasingly applying Wi to Country to heal Country. This is also healing for **Djaara**.

much more than simply a fuel reduction or hazard reduction burn.



**Djandak Wi** holds great importance to Dja Dja Wurrung People for its spiritual, social, ceremonial and landscape management purposes.

Often described as cool, slow, and patchy fire, **Djandak Wi** is smaller, lighter, and cooler than a fuel-reduction burn. It is slow and cool enough for animals and insects to escape, and return to habitat once fire has passed.

While hotter hazard-reduction burns favour plants that reproduce by fire, **Djandak Wi** favours both plants that need fire or smoke to reproduce, as well as those that might be killed by a hotter fire.

It therefore maintains a less-flammable forest structure. It increases biodiversity and creates a more diverse landscape with a mosaic of different-aged vegetation.

**Djandak Wi** is applied to Country according to Country's need: after walking on Country and assessing where and when Wi is needed.

DJAARA notifies neighbouring properties prior to conducting **Djandak Wi**.

Learn more about Djandak Wi

## Balak Kalik Manya: bringing Country back to health

It's well established that connecting with nature – or connecting with Country – is important for our wellbeing. Indigenous cultures have known for millennia that it's vital: not only for

**Past Issues** 

RSS 3

but in modern society, there's a disconnect between people and Country, which is contributing to environmental destruction and ill health – particularly mental ill health.

DJAARA's enterprise DJANDAK is exploring ways to help people reconnect with Country through the Balak Kalik Manya (Walking together) project.

As part of the project, a degraded area of land near Prouses Road in Bendigo is set to be rejuvenated and brought back to health with the input of DJAARA Members and other stakeholders, including the community.





A degraded area of land near Prouses Road in Bendigo is set to be rejuvenated and brought back to health with input from DJAARA Members through the Balak Kalik Manya (Walking together) project.

One of the project's aims is to improve and protect natural areas of public land near urban centres, to encourage local residents to get out and access nature.

But it's about more than just rehabilitating and accessing Country: it's about fostering connection with Country to tap into the benefits this provides.

importance of connecting with nature, there's not enough understanding in modern society about how to do it.

Balak Kalik Manya is an opportunity for Dja Dja Wurrung People to lead and share knowledge and insights about how to improve the wider community's connection with Country.

The collaborative project is funded by Agnico Eagle.

### IN BRIEF

## **Cultural Tourism & Creative Hub opens**

DJAARA and its creative enterprise DUMAWUL celebrated the official opening of the new Dja Dja Wurrung Cultural Tourism and Creative Arts Hub in the Hargreaves Mall on 29 February.

DJAARA Board Chair Bec Phillips described the Hub as a culturally safe space for Djaara People following with ceremony and dance.

We look forward to this high-profile hub being a focus for cultural creative arts workshops, gallery viewings, artists in residence, and cultural tourism product development and delivery.

Wulumbarra Dancers performed at the opening ceremony (above).

Below: Jason Kerr speaks alongside DDWCAC Board Chair Bec Phillips and Co-chair Mick Bourke; Inside the Hub.







Learn more

# Maryborough Indigenous Interpretive Garden



ground ceremony at the site of Maryborough's new Indigenous Interpretive Garden, together with the Central Goldfields Shire Council and funding partners.

The Garden, which has been designed collaboratively with a wartaka will sit alongside the Central Goldfields Art Gallery in the open space on the corner of Neill and Campbell Streets.

Through this collaboration, Dja Dja Wurrung People are sharing culture with the broader community: weaving their story and reflecting the natural elements of Dja Dja Wurrung Country.

DDWCAC Board Chair Bec Phillips performed a welcome, smoking and song at the ceremony.

#### Learn more

# Dja Dja Wurrung Country in Metro tunnel artwork



Animal tracks and scar trees from Djandak will feature in in artworks at the new Parkville underground station as part of the Linewide Artwork project for in Melbourne's Metro tunnel.

Library, Town Hall and Anzac).

Yorta Yorta / Wamba Wamba / Mutti Mutti / Boon Wurrung artist and designer Maree Clarke is working with all five Kulin Clans close to Melbourne: the Wadawurrung, Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, and Bunurong / Boonwurrung, to design elements reflecting Country and Culture.

Maree Clarke has worked with DJAARA's Cultural Heritage and creative enterprise DUMAWUL.

#### Learn more

## On the job with Ron (Thunda) Kerr



Ron Kerr Jr: Project Coordinator, Cultural Heritage

Ron (Thunda) Kerr, a proud Dja Dja Wurrung man, started doing Cultural Heritage surveys years ago as a casual in 2008, after 18 years in the motor industry.

"Me father was a mechanic and I followed in his footsteps from a young age. Me brother was pestering me to join the Cultural Heritage crew. It took me three or four years to come down, and I think it's the best move I ever made," Ron said.

He then joined the DJANDAK casual pool, eventually becoming a full-time ranger. After five years he came back to his old team, landing his current role: project coordinator, Cultural Heritage.

"It's a good job – I wouldn't change it for the world," he said.

RSS 3

"There's no better feeling than finding a greenstone axe in the field. The first thing I do when I find a greenstone axe, I look for a scar tree and I think that could have been used to make that scar tree. And you get to thinking, that might have been my Apical Ancestor."

Ron also described finding a hearth (fireplace) with coals dating back 16,000 years during Cultural Heritage surveys.

But, despite working in the field for 16 years, he doesn't describe himself as an expert. "No one's an expert. What we're doing is locating Cultural Heritage and finding out more – you're learning about your Ancestors, your bloodline."



Ron with daughter Chelsea at the Welcome Baby to Country ceremony, NAIDOC Week 2022. Ron helped welcome babies and give cultural gifts during the ceremony.



Ron performs the ceremonial lighting of a Djandak Wi burn in September 2015.

Ron has also helped younger Dja Dja Wurrung People find work with DJAARA and its enterprises.

"There's a lot of opportunities," he said.

"I've heard some say, 'I wouldn't be able to do that'. But it's just the way the job description is written. I will sometimes say 'can you tell me that in Blackfella's language?'

"Having people say, 'nah mate you can do this' gave me confidence to have a go. People like Rodney Carter and others have been a great inspiration and help along my journey.

"And they train you. When I came in 2008, I didn't know how to turn a computer on."

Since being at DJAARA, Ron has completed his Certificate IV in Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management and Certificate IV in Government Investigations. He is presently a member of the Dhelkunya Dja Land Management Board.

"You've just got to have a focus point: think about your goals and where you want your life to be in the next 10 years," he said.

"Don't be frightened about things you don't understand – just ask the questions. It might be a life changing experience, which it was for me."

Djaara and Yorta Yorta Elder Uncle Dennis Baksh has been making art for around 45 years. It all started after he saw a coffee table a friend had made.

"I liked it and I thought to myself, if my friend can do it, I might give it a go. So, I went and bought a coffee table for about 30 bucks and I just painted on it. It was nice and relaxing for me," Uncle Dennis said.

The self-taught artist works in different mediums, including painting and carving.



Uncle Dennis Baksh with his painting, *Spirits*. This piece represents two spirits in the Campaspe and the red dots travelling through the land as the hands reach out for the guidance from the Ancestors.

"Over the years, I got sick of doing the one thing, so I jumped around a bit. I done paintings for years and I went and carved didgeridoos. I do big boardroom tables now. The more experience you have, the better you get."

Uncle Dennis said, years ago, he had contracts with shops in Melbourne and used to pump out work for quick money.

"A friend said to me, 'Take your time Dennis, money isn't everything. Get the quality and people will come looking for you.'

"I learned from him for about six to 12 months. He said put in the effort and make it better. And I did the same with my painting. If you look at my work from back then and now, it's completely different.

"I'm doing big boardroom tables now. I just sold a 12-seater. I carve the legs and this one had a big picture in the centre, 8ft by 5ft with glass on the top.



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He has done a fair few exhibitions, including in Sydney and Melbourne, as well as his home town Shepparton, where some years ago he won the Shepparton Festival's Koori Art Award. He also exhibited some of his paintings, carving and didgeridoos in DJAARA's YAPENYA Art Exhibition last November.

#### See more of Uncle Dennis' work

### **SHARING DJA DJA WURRUNG LANGUAGE**

Our language connects us to water, land, animals, and People. It calls us to ceremony and strengthens our identity.

We are making sure our language, Dja Dja Wurrung language, is increasingly spoken; we share it in song and ensure it is placed lovingly back to Djandak, where it belongs, by us. Those that live and visit here in Central Victoria more and more want to support Dja Dja Wurrung reclamation of our rights and support our continued presence here. We hope that those who travel across, visit and reside on Djandak recognise our unique language and distinct culture.

Djaara I Dja Dja Wurrung People
Djali I Language
Djandak I Country, Dja Dja Wurrung Country
Djandak Wi I Country fire
Wartaka I come with purpose
Wi I fire

## Let us know what you think!

Do you like this newsletter?
What would you like to see more of?

We'd love to hear your feedback.

Get in touch

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