

Feed Back. Aust Heritage Commission Dec. 1978. Vol 6. No 2

Great work pays off



IN the beautiful Great Lakes region in northern New South Wales, a small group of people are working to ensure their area's Aboriginal history, heritage and culture is safe forever.

The people – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – belong to the Miangal Aboriginal Heritage Society, an organisation formed in January last year to protect local Aboriginal cultural heritage as well as the environment and flora and fauna.

So far their efforts have been fantastic, with scores of Aboriginal sites identified and protected for time to come.

It's an effort which warms the heart of society founder and chairwoman Carol Ridgeway-Bissett, an Aboriginal woman with a deep and abiding love for her heritage and culture.

Her message is simple: "Aboriginal people should be proud of their culture and who they are and they should work to protect that culture, because once it's gone, it's gone forever."

That's a message she hopes all Indigenous people will hear and act on.

In the meantime, Ms Ridgeway-Bissett and her group are continuing their work, in close co-operation with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.

A major feature of the work has been identifying and mapping Indigenous sites in the Port Stephens-Great Lakes region.

Expertise

"We have located a huge range of sites, and we're in the process of getting them mapped," Ms Ridgeway-Bissett said.

"Our society has a special advisory committee whose members lend us their expertise in a range of areas.

"We're also working on protecting the local environment as well as our local species which, as far as I'm concerned, all comes under Aboriginal culture and heritage.

"We have received really good local support and we have an excellent relationship with the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

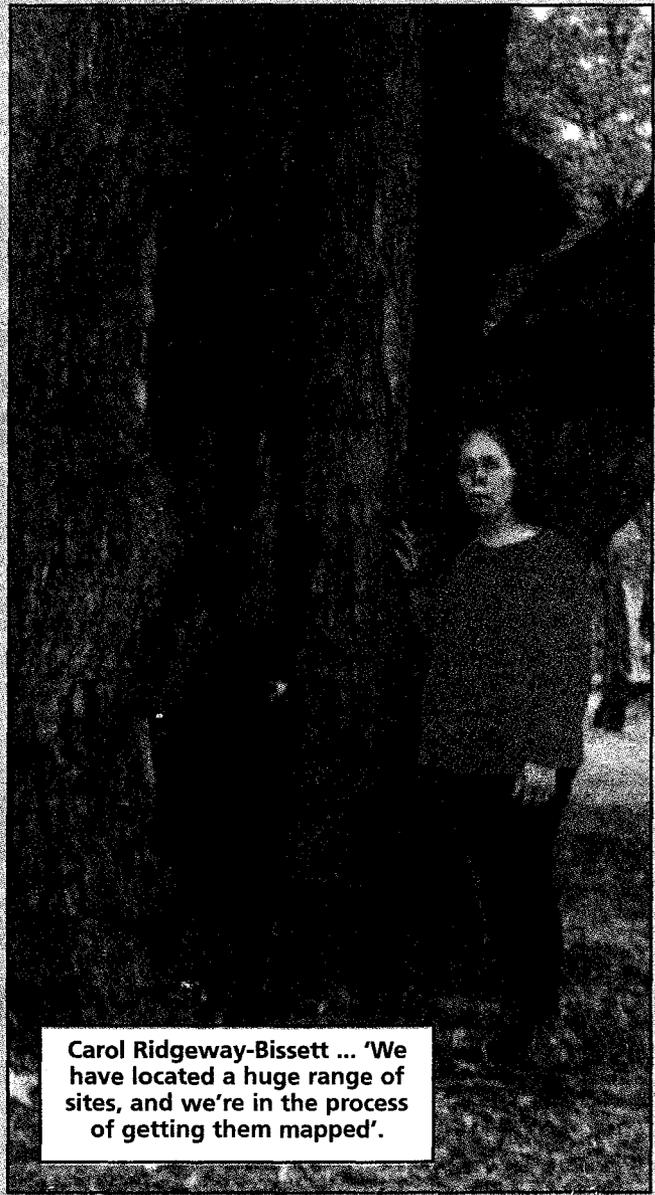
"We've found the more we look, the more we find. We've got years of work left ahead of us yet, and the group members are as keen as ever.

"I'd really love to see other such groups all around Australia, working to ensure our culture and heritage, as well as our environment and plants and animals, are safe."

The name Miangal is the regional name of the local Aboriginal people who were part of the wider Worimi group from the Hunter Valley region.

"We're actually recording Worimi history through our work," Ms Ridgeway-Bissett said.

For more information about the work of the Miangal Aboriginal Heritage Society, call Carol Ridgeway-Bissett on (02) 4984 3113.



Carol Ridgeway-Bissett ... 'We have located a huge range of sites, and we're in the process of getting them mapped'.

Help needed for Worimi's history

Local Worimis are after help in compiling a history of the interaction between Aborigines and Europeans in Port Stephens.

The idea comes from Nelson Bay-based Worimi tribe member Carol Ridgeway-Bissett.

"There's not a lot of recorded information about how the two groups got on," she said this week.

"We're interested in hearing from anyone who might have details in family records.

"We've already taped some recollections from some of the early families to move here but want more."

Eventually the information could be published and perhaps

displayed in a local museum so future generations would be aware of what happened after the first white settlers moved in early last century.

People interested in helping can contact Ms Ridgeway-Bissett on 4984 3113 or Mrs Viola Brown at Raymond Terrace on 4987 6807.

History on Aborigines needs to be revised

SIR — It is comforting to see that Aboriginal awareness continues to increase in our community.

We hear the views of Pauline Hanson, the outcome of Mabo and Wik decisions, reconciliation and lost generation debates.

If today's schools are still teaching the sanitised version of history that was taught when I went to school, it is not surprising that most white people are well equipped to ignore our past because they have never had the opportunity to learn of it.

By example the Australian Agricultural Company which settled most of this are up to Taree instructed their employees that they must discontinue shooting the natives in retribution for their tortured response to their lands being devastated by sheep.

The shepherd's response to this was to develop a procedure they cynically called the "harmony".

The harmony was achieved by giving the starving natives flour or cakes laced with strychnine.

Hundreds of natives on the AA Co. properties died of the harmony.

British law demanded equal treatment for blacks and whites for the same crime.

So in 1838 when a dozen farm hands were convicted of killing dozens of native men, women and children, "to teach them a lesson".

The farm hands were all hanged. Official historic records after 1838 show that no further massacres took place.

True records show that massacres increased at a terrible pace, but by mutual agreement, officialdom and ordinary white people would never discuss it publicly, or speak of it in schools.

While we continue to permit this misinformation being taught to our children, we are accomplices to the original crimes.

If we are truly not to blame for these past events and if there is to be any genuine reconciliation, isn't it time our schools started teaching our children the truth?

George Paris
Grayson Avenue
Kotara

PORT STEPHENS EXAMINER WEDS 7 MAY 98
1997, P. 6

Traditional owner says Aboriginal middens destroyed



Dumped: Maingal Aboriginal Heritage Society member

Heritage 'dumped'

By SALLY CROXTON

ABORIGINAL middens on Port Stephens Council-owned land at Salamander Bay had been virtually destroyed by recent clearing work, according to a traditional owner.

Worimi owner Ms Carol Ridgeway-Bissett says the two middens were heritage registered with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.

She said that while some people dismissed middens as worthless campsite tips, the piled shell and stone remains offered important evidence of the way Aborigines lived and what they ate centuries ago.

The remains of one of the middens ended up in a pile

of earth tipped at the council's Salamander dump adding insult to the indignity Ms Ridgeway-Bissett already feels at the disrespect shown to the heritage sites.

The first of the two middens is understood to have been trashed and scattered by council workers clearing a drainage channel in the Mambo Creek wetland area near the waterfront at the intersection of Port Stephens and Foreshore drives.

Council engineering manager Mr Michael Skinn said yesterday that he was surprised at the allegations since all the workers did was to remove silt from an existing drain and then tip

the cleared material at the dump. He would inspect the area today, he said.

The other midden, at the Corlette end of the Mambo Creek wetlands, was scattered during recent investigation work undertaken in preparation for a new 38-lot housing subdivision off Worimi Drive.

The subdivision is on display for public comment until December 7 and is proposed as one of the final stages of the council's Salamander residential development managed by Salamander Projects.

Salamander Projects manager Mr Damien Harrigan said only limited clearing work had been done as part of investigations for

the subdivision. Consultants were monitoring groundwater and testing the previously sandmined site for radiation and acid sulphate soils. The council had asked for the test work.

Mr Harrigan said the midden had been scattered by sand-mining in the 1970s and he believed the National Parks service had given approval for its destruction. 'Carol knows that,' he asserted.

Council general manager Mr Peter Gesling said the council had agreed to the development application being lodged over its land but had not yet given consent. Council was now assessing whether the clearing work had gone beyond

what was needed.

Ms Ridgeway-Bissett said she was also concerned about the destruction of koala habitat during the investigations and the tagging of old growth trees in preparation for clearing for a separate 98-lot subdivision on council-owned land near the Salamander dump.

A National Parks and Wildlife Service spokesman said an officer had already been out to inspect the middens and investigations were continuing.

Mr Harrigan said the council had also agreed to a development application being lodged for the larger housing subdivision on its land near the tip.