What The Stones Tell Us?
Aboriginal Stone Sites, Indigenous Landscapes and Country’s in the Face of Urban Sprawl

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This paper considers the interconnection of Aboriginal stone sites in the Wadawurrung Country, as to their landscape relationships and land use planning contexts. With colonial pastoralism and land exploitation by Europeans, and more recently suburbanisation encroachment, a large portion of the pre-colonial tangible landscape has been erased, disfigured and or transformed. Despite this, there remains vestiges of Aboriginal designed landscapes composed of symbolic and or functional rock installations on these Country’s, with several possessing major intangible knowledge as to role, purpose and significance. Because Aboriginal landscapes are mostly intangible, consciously organised stone sites and site installations represent a direct representation of Indigenous culture and community and their Country. Because of their subtle, low-key nature and visual absorption within landscapes, these installations and sites are under threat from urban sprawl, despite land use planning registrations and risk assessment protocols that formally position Recognised Aboriginal Parties as the custodians (as well as conservers) of the physical and living heritage of these places. This paper considers Wurdi Youang, an Aboriginal stone arrangement site that is experiencing urban development risks and a new era in ownership. The paper considers the concepts of cultural significance, Traditional Owners, Aboriginal site legislation, planning regimes, and landscape re-invention due to farming and urban sprawl. It is through the understanding of the utilisation of ‘on-Country’ cultural relations and Indigenous landscape control techniques that are adaptive to the changes of environment, movement of seasons, population invasion and expansion, and cultural change one can lead towards an environmentally and culturally sensitive relationship with Aboriginal peoples.

Keywords — Cultural landscape; living space; Aboriginal stone arrangements; planning.

INTRODUCTION

The landscapes of the Aboriginal peoples of the Wadawurrung Country has places that involve archaeologically significant and Indigenous culturally-rich stone sites. The sites are directly interwoven to these peoples, their Country’s and their custodial relationships to their ancestors. Post-colonisation, each place has been subject to pastoralism and land exploitation by Europeans, and more recently suburbanisation encroachment resulting in a large portion of the pre-colonial tangible landscape being erased, disfigured and or transformed. Despite this, vestiges of Aboriginal tangible and intangible designed landscapes remain possessing Country-specific symbolic and or functional rock installations, with several possessing major intangible Wadawurrung cultural knowledge respectively. Because Aboriginal Country’s (four-dimensional landscapes) are mostly intangible, consciously organised stone sites and site installations represent a direct representation of Indigenous culture and community and their Country.

Aboriginal stone sites are subtle, low-key nature and are visual absorbed within landscapes. Thus, their subtly of physical manifestation and often intangibility of values offers considerable threat from urban sprawl, despite land use planning registrations and risk assessment protocols that formally position Recognised Aboriginal Parties, legal entities established under the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006, as the custodians (as well as conservers) of the physical and living heritage of these places.

The focus of stone site and landscape interpretation discussed in this paper is primarily focused upon the volcanic basalt plains of south-western Victoria that extends from the western suburbs of Melbourne (Hume City Council) to Warrnambool (Warrnambool City Council). The case study discussed in detail is Wurdi Youang on Wadawurrung Country (City of Greater Geelong).

Historically, the Victorian volcanic basalt plains have been colonial pastoral regions for settlement in early colonial Australia due to a natural ease of accessibility, rich soils and native grasslands that were ideal for clearing for farmlands and the introduction of sheep and cattle runs. Prior to colonial settlement from the 1830’s, the landscape seemed untouched and underutilised to the early Europeans, when in fact the land they were observing was an ancient landscape that had been manipulated consciously by over 2,000 generations of Aboriginal peoples. The land was inhabited, cared for and curated ensuring healthy human and wildlife population numbers, and most importantly resources were managed in accordance with Ancestral laws in order to live sustainably.

This paper discusses the concept of three layers of landscape in the vicinity focused upon the Wurdi Youang case study: ancient, Aboriginal-manipulated and European-manipulated. The connection between the three layers of landscape identifies ‘living spaces’ – places of settlement in accordance with utilisation of natural resources as seasonal fluctuations occur, for use of intensive ‘farming’ and manipulation of waterways. Aboriginal ‘living spaces’ are less obvious than European settlements. Stone remnants of house foundations, arrangements and structures for agriculture and aquaculture, and culturally-designed stone installations identify crucial cultural aspects and narratives to Aboriginal Country’s directing the need for understanding and the conservation of these sites as well as respecting the significance of how these sites were utilised (and continue to be utilised) in the wider landscape. These ‘living spaces’ and layers of landscape have shaped the lands we now observe on the fringes of metropolitan and regional cities. This paper reviews the notion of incorporating principles of prior manipulations, settlements and adaptation to current and future urban sprawl planning.

**Note: the use of Wadawurrung words are applied in replacement for Latin derived names of flora and fauna within their Country out of respect for the guardianship of their land and its inhabitants.

ABORIGINAL LANDSCAPES AND ‘LIVING SPACES’.

One of the authors recently had a discussion with an Indian born taxi driver about this research and the driver remarked that ‘there seemed to be no evidence of Aboriginal people at all here in Victoria’. This was a sobering thought, as we see so much evidence of what was once thriving Aboriginal inhabity but it is subtle and often obscure in its place, nomenclature and presence. If you look through a different lens you can see stone sites littered throughout the state of Victoria, manipulated waterways, what was once Kawirr (Emu) feeding grounds and scarred trees indicating Aboriginal borders and implement making alongside roadsides everywhere you drive. This is not the experience, nor understanding of the lay person. The appreciation of Victorian Aboriginal place, particularly in association with how and where Aboriginal people lived has been largely non-existent in our Westernised education system, and visible identification of Aboriginal sites lie hidden mainly in paperwork often obscured from inclusion in planning scheme overlays and cultural heritage
to significant changes in an ecological environment is part of responsibility of Aboriginal people to the land and their entire ethos.

Particular advantages of the volcanic plains region for settlement are created by environmental factors including higher rainfall levels, continuous access to fresh water via lake and river systems, aquifers and wetlands, providing access to clean drinking water for people and animals and birds, rich fertile soils affording a rich biodiversity of flora and fauna to harvest, hunting grounds, shade, and pathways to and from clan borders. The availability of basalt rock in the Western District contributes to effective long-term structures, homes and engineering.

‘Living spaces’ (a term coined by the authors), or as Porter (2010) describes as ‘lived’ spaces of Indigenous peoples, are spaces of living in terms of settlement, whether transient, semi-permanent or permanent and are naturally adapted into sheltered spaces that are formed by dips and ridges shaped within this undulated landscape. Lake beds and lunettes provide for ovens and summer camps. Close vantage points allow for protection with the ability to watch for approaching friends or foes. Fresh water is essential and close proximity of game or water life, along with plant resources provides for reliable clan foods. ‘Living spaces’ extend beyond the basic supplies in order to survive. Natural materials for tool making, basketry and bag fabrications, possum skin cloaks, weapons and netting all originate from certain areas that provide the ideal resources, and customary obligations including initiation, trade and marriage negotiations take place in specific locations.

The concept of ‘living spaces’ identifies with ‘Intensification’, a term ‘Harry Lourandos is synonymous with’ (Barker et al., 2006, p.107) that encapsulates his argument that with a concentration of natural resources, enabled farming as an economic activity aiding the viability of sustaining Aboriginal population growth from the Holocene period around 11,700 years ago, ‘with the most marked increase accelerating throughout the last 4000-3000 years’ (Barker et al., 2006, p.56) during a dry glacial period when megafauna was becoming scarce. Lourandos’ concept shifted the scholarly perception of Aboriginal people from being hunter-gatherers to ‘farmers’, participating in complex agriculture and aquaculture systems, that recognised their application of fire knowledge in conjunction with human and animal feeding grounds and harvest technologies that could sustain Aboriginal groups on the volcanic plains region. This argument is also supported by Pascoe (2014) in his Dark Emu Black Seeds: agriculture or accident? Stone house remnants and fish traps in the Tae’rak / Lake Condah region, examples of settlement and aquaculture ‘farming’ have been dated as being around 6000 years old, corroborating Lourandos’ theory.

Recent debate surrounds the period of intensification, in particular the question of Aboriginal exploitation. Gammage (2011) touches on the popular belief of exploitation in his book, The Biggest Estate on Earth, with an emphasis upon firing and clearing of land. Whilst Gammage (2011) explores the Aboriginal connectivity between fire and Caring for Country, the complexities of Aboriginal manipulation to landscape on a practical level involving the utilization use of natural spaces is vastly more complex than the idealism and romanticism that Gammage (2011) portrays from a European context. His argument of exploitation fails to appreciate the broader context of appreciating Aboriginal cultural relationship to Country / landscape and ‘living spaces’ that also incorporates their respective social intricacies. Additionally, ‘farming’ is a European word and concept, and not resident in Aboriginal vocabularies. Exploitation is not part of Aboriginal culture. Langton (Barker et. al., 2006 p.139) explains that every living and natural aspect to land and water and air and fire is sacred, ‘in the cosmologies of Australian Aboriginal peoples, water is a sacred and elemental source and symbol of life’. Trees and their uses are monitored. Nineteenth century observer of Gulidjan people in the Western District James Dawson (1881, p.21), recorded that ‘each man has an exclusive right to a certain number of trees for the use of himself and family’. Dawson (1881, p.21) also documented ‘the aborigines exercise in a wise economy in killing animals. It is considered illegal and a waste of food to take the life of any edible creature for pleasure alone’, and thus animals are totemic attachments to individuals and clan identities, and are sacred and protected by relevant Aboriginal guardians.

The following case study of the Wurdi Youang Stone arrangement provides an example of how we can understand the concept of Aboriginal ‘living spaces’ and the utilisation of all aspects of natural resources from evidence of stone sites within the landscape.

**Wurdi Youang**

The stone arrangement

A significant Wadawurrung stone arrangement lies on plains of the newer basalt plains ‘in the county of Grant, Parish of Wurdi Youang, north of the YouYangs and south of Bald Hill and Spring Hill’ (Lane 1970, p.1). The arrangement is known as Wurdi Youang, the Wadawurrung name for the highest peak of the You Yang ranges (historically known as Flinders Peak / Station Peak / Mount Collicott). The stone arrangement has adopted the name since the archaeological recording of the site by L. Lane in the 1970’s as a member of the Victorian Archaeological Survey (VAS). The arrangement has largely remained untouched on a little disturbed pastoral allotment. Lane (1970, p.3) recorded the arrangement, or circle as such:

The STONE CIRCLE is one hundred and fifty metres & seventy centimetres (150.7 metres) in circumference consisting of ninety (90) blocks of basalt in obvious alignment arranged neatly on their bases so that, where groups still exist, each stone is directly contiguous to the next. The tallest megalith rises seventy five (75) centimetres above ground level.

The basalt stones configuring the arrangement consist of various shapes and forms as Lane (1970, pp.16-17) records: perpendicular, block, hexagonal stone, boulder, horizontal slab, stone in situ, megaliths, markers and an Apiced stone (Lane’s term for an apices stone due to its deliberately shaped apex tip) (see Fig. 2). The stones are either in situ or dug into ground and propped up by smaller stone (see Fig. 3). The largest of the stones weighed ‘up to 500kgs’ (Lane 1980, p.135) and may have been transferred from nearby Brisbane Ranges quarry as suggested by Lane (1970).

The shape of the arrangement is important in deciphering the understanding of place and space. Lane (1970, p.26) describes the shape and meaning of Wurdi Youang:

As most stone arrangements represent some known object, it is speculated that this one may have represented a Plain-wanderer’s egg – Pedionomus torquatus – for this small bird used to be numerous on the Werribee Plain. Its eggs would have been a seasonal food – resource.

Morison (1994, p. 10) describes Wurdi Youang as representing an “Emu egg ‘Gnowee’ or that ‘Wurding’ means ‘eagleone’ and “Wawong” means “mere” according to his Woiwurrung resources. The Plain – wanderer (see fig. 5) described by Lane (1970), no longer roams the plains of the Wurdi Youang site, nor do the Kawirr (Emu), yet when they did, both birds were numerous and provided food resources in vast numbers for meat and eggs and feathers of the Kawirr (Emu) used in ceremony attire. Both birds’ peak breeding and nesting season fall between the months of November to January. Shellfish (see Fig. 6 for the freshwater mussel) and marine life is available at this time of year. The idea of a summer camp and meeting place/ harvest gathering arises from this data.

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Camps and meeting places are well recorded, and this is not a conclusion of Wurdi Youang. There are intangible intricacies within the shapes and arrangement of the stones. When observed, one of the authors immediately noted that the stones line up with immediate and surrounding Wadawurrung Country landmarks, indicating a teaching point for familiarising with Country. Other researchers concentrate on the scientific approach of the arrangement as a stone tool for astronomy and a seasonal guide for harvest.

Lane (1970) suggests that the centre of the arrangement may have been covered with some softer ground cover that has washed away in rains over time. Ceremonial grounds are known to be structured in this form.

_Wurdi Youang_ is not the only known stone arrangement along the volcanic basalt plains within Victoria (and beyond).
Recordings by the VAS highlight several major stone arrangements that are identified with camp spaces, aquaculture and significant meeting places. Such sites include Carrisbrook, Lake Bolac and Lake Wogan of which may also take shape as a food resource or storytelling representation. Since recordings have been made and prior generational knowledge of the sites as Aboriginal, meant that landowners (mainly farmers) have consciously protected the sites allowing an exchange of knowledge between Traditional Owners, landowners and researchers.

Speculations can be made about the meaning of stone arrangements and in the case of Wurdi Youang, the Wadawurrung people contain their story telling knowledge that holds the key to such sites and this is respectively their knowledge.

The evidence of a ‘living space’ becomes more obvious when understanding the geographical positioning of the stone arrangement in relation to the immediate, surrounding and broader landscape. The site is in the shadow of the You Yangs ranges, where there is archaeological evidence of short and long term Wadawurrung encampments ranges and provides 360 degree views of the landscape. Additionally, the site borders Wadawurrung and Warranderi clan boundaries providing an ideal accessible meeting ground for numerous clans. The site’s natural resources would have supplied food for many people. Here, Kowirr (Eimu), kangaroo, Warrarm (bush rats) and other small marsupials were plentiful and tubers such as Murnong were cultivated and grasses for grains, as well as marine life, Buniya (eels), and fish and nearby Barnewarrabir (mussel) deposits.

Wurdi Youang lies strategically nearby plentiful waterways. Just to the north of the stone arrangement the converging branches of the Balliang Creek and Little River, swamps and tributaries and waterholes are plentiful and extend throughout the landscape leading to Corio Bay to the south. When in the midst of drought the Wadawurrung had ingenious methods of preserving water holes and this included developing natural water recesses in the granite rocky outcrops of the You Yangs as freshwater wells. Alongside Little River regular camp sites existed. Massola (1969, p.13) describes that these camps:

*Are all small in area, being limited by the sand and silt deposited along the banks by flood waters. However, many implements can be gathered by them, chiefly in the nature of microliths, cores, and hammer-stones. One such camp is situated on the high ground close to the school in the Little River Township; another is located about a mile upstream, on the left bank, at a noticeable bend in the river: a third is at the point where the Balliang Creek joins the river. What is possibly the largest of the river camps was at the mouth of the Little River. It is, however, really part of the extensive coastal middens skirting the edges of the marshy ground extending from the Sewerage Farm to Long Reef.*

Dawson (1881) describes the arrangements and co-ordinations of hosting a camp for a large number of people in his chapter ‘Great Meetings’. The meetings are held nearby prominent water resources and are continual meeting places known for their location both within the landscape and Country association. The camp complexities are managed by nominated clan members and both men and women have roles in the hosting and executing the program consisting of food preparation, rituals and ceremony, camp quarters, games and entertainment and delegations for barter, marriage and clan matters over many days. Thousands of people can occupy an area of meeting at the one time and the care in management of place and space is utilised as maintained in Aboriginal consistencies when caring for Country in the context of living within landscape spaces both long term and short term.

**The Changing Layers Of Landscape And Colonial ‘Living Spaces’**

Recordings of early European memories of the region of Wurdi Youang helps understand the landscape that existed during Wadawurrung time, along with the admiration for the ideal landscape and the possibilities for the future in terms of farming and settlement. William Todd (Brown 1989, pp. 28-29), John Batman’s recorder, describes a trip from Indented Heads to the You Yangs:

*I walked to day over 15 miles [24km] out of nothing but Plain and very good Grass well adapted for sheep: the plains is most extensive; I should think what I have seen to be 20 miles square [528km]. I came under a sugar Loaf Hill rather high but grass to the top – this I named Mount Collicott…… I never saw or could [have] supposed there could be so extensive Plains as I saw to day – 5,000 sheep would be almost losted upon them – but the only thing I see at present is the want of water, but am sure it could be obtained by digging in almost any place [sic].*
In a similar description, Westgarth (1888, p.37) travelled from Melbourne to the Western District around 1840:

I met further variety of early squatting life in a trip to the Werribee Plains…. on those vast plains, extending westwards 30 to 40 miles [48-64km] from Melbourne to the Anakies, or Station Peak, the slight and scattered squatting invasion had hardly disturbed anywhere the indigenous features. Thus over a vast solitude we revelled in much of sparsely Australian scenery, particularly that of tortuous and deeply excavated “creeks”, with their chains of pond or wetlands, the running stream mostly dried up – indeed sometimes for whole years together – but all characterized, more or less, by unsensible rushes after heavy rains [sic].

Once colonists stepped ashore in Port Phillip Bay, the notion of ‘living spaces’ took a different turn and the landscape was rapidly manipulated to support an influx of people, sheep and cattle. The initial settlement of Melbourne is retrospectively described in the memoirs of William Westgarth (1888, pp.19-20):

I have a striking contrast in store when I revisit those plains, which now regard to hectic of road and railway, and to the busy hum of many towns and villages and of farming and gardening. (Westgarth 1888, p.37)

When Faulkner, in August, 1835, following Batman’s example of the previous May, organised and set forth his party from Launceston to explore and colonise Port Phillip, his instruction was that they should squat down for a home only where there was adequate fresh water. When, in their cruising about to that end, the party entered the Yarra at the Bay’s head, ascended its roundabout course, and found ample water to drink about “the Falls”, they at once disembarked there, and there in consequence arose Melbourne.

Melbourne would be the major port enabling access to the ‘interiors’ over-riding the rival site of Geelong, the landscape was transformed and shaped to suit the British expectations of the comforts of their colonial world. Colonial Land Commissioner Foster Fyans (1886, p.204) recalls that:

About this time, or early in 1838, several land sales took place in the lines of streets laid out by surveyors. These lines were struck by marking the trees with an axe, for the ground on which Melbourne stands was a forest of gum trees.

At the same time, in 1838, surveyors were sent into the interiors of Victoria for the land “to be subdivided into counties, hundreds and parishes” (Scurfied 1995, p.42), with the objective:

To control the occupation, lease and sale of the land in the southern part of New South Wales (designated Australia Felix in 1836) known as the ‘Dutigalla purchase’ – the claim by John Batman, acting for the fifteen-member Port Phillip Association, to have bought 600,000 acres [242,811 ha] from local Aboriginal tribes in the neighbourhood of Port Phillip on 6 June 1835.

Detailed maps were drawn by surveyors on their return trips based upon their draft surveys, diaries with extensive notations about biological resources, natural landscapes, waterways and Aboriginal borders and trails, and occasionally Aboriginal nomenclature. Many places retained the Aboriginal names interpreted to surveyors as expressed by Aboriginal people, albeit phonetically and grammatically erroneous. Robert Hoddle surveyed the area of Wurdi Youang, breaking up the Wadawurrung land into parishes using the existing Aboriginal tribe and clan borders and significant waterways. The once borders of the Wadawurrung, Wui Wurrung, Bun Wurrung – Wadawurrung clans Jaara and Warrinyaleke balag, Neer balag became the parishes of Grant and Bourke.

The Wardi Youang ‘living space’ became farmland for sheep and cattle by early settlers, the Chirnside family, who brought with them vermin that would wipe out native species; foxes, hares, pheasants and red deer. L. Lane spent time with Chirnside descendant, Mr Rally Chirnside who grew up on the Mt Rothwell property (built 1873 by Robert Chirnside) where Wurdi Youang lies. Lane (1970, p.18) recorded that:

When approached in 1971 for permission to study the stone circle, Mr Rally Chirnside of Mt Rothwell stated that he was aware of the ARRANGEMENT OF STONES, but had no knowledge of its origin nor any recollection of having heard any explanations for it being there.

What was recalled about the immediate area of Wurdi Youang by Rally Chirnside and other generational farmers nearby was that there was a type of sheep holding pen in the area called “Bough yards” (Lane 1970, p.27). The adjacent river-side was unsuccessful as a sheep wash, instead the bough yards were erected and shepherds at times may have camped here to watch sheep. The bough yards (made entirely of timber) would have required the felling of nearby trees. Apart from this early structure, the immediate land of the stone arrangement site was reasonably untouched as it proved too steep for sheep grazing.

**The Manipulation Of Waterways For ‘Living Spaces’**

Waterways were the first natural resource to be devastated by European colonisation. Change and despoliation of this resource caused an immediate negative effect upon the grasslands and sensitive plant life. Forests were thereupon extensively felled or fired for land clearance and pasture creation as well as for protection and firewood harvesting, being often removed from sensitive ecosystems when machinery use became more prevalent.

Waterways were essential in terms of identifying Aboriginal stone sites, burial sites and layers of ‘living spaces’ because this is where you find remnants of settlements, both Aboriginal and European. Waterways for Aboriginal peoples determine patterns of rainfall and the relationships between birds and animals, agricultural and aqua cultural resources and movement within and to and from living spaces. As early Europeans observed these the waterways were quickly accessed and exploited, thus polluted. Pascoe (2014, p.41) writes that Aboriginal people used:

Large well systems, miles of stream diversion and systematic flooding to prepare the ground for sewing seed. However, as soon as such wells were discovered they were commandeered by sheep and their shepherds...
because they were situated close to the croplands to which the sheep gravitated with unerring accuracy. Melbourne was settled mainly on water, ‘in the centre of the town there is a natural basin about 360 feet wide [110m], and in depth about 20 feet [6m], into which flows fresh water’ (Colville 1964, p.179) and this water returns in the city centre when floods occur (See Fig.1 and Fig.2).

Pollution in the young city of Melbourne highlighted the devastating effects of disturbance to waterways to make way for European ‘living spaces’:

With wool production booming associated industries flourished, bringing pollution to the Maribyrnong River and local creeks, including Moonee Ponds Creek. Wool was washed in the river with soup, prior to shipping to the Yorkshire mills for processing. This pollution affected the ecology of the river and creeks and made the water undrinkable. The waterways became drainage systems. Tallow from sheep carcasses to be exported for the production of soap. In the early 1870s over 2000 tonnes (nearly 2.5million litres) of blood flowed into the Maribyrnong from these works. (City of Moonee Valley pp.13-14)

Rubbish in the city centre became unbearably toxic as ‘swamps and vacant land became convenient dumps and St Kilda tipped its refuse on the beach’ (Dingle 1985, p.163). There was a problem occurring as ‘conflicts also arose between the urban area as a centre of production and as a place to live.’ The filth of industry with as the ‘Fellmongers, wool washers, bone works, tanneries, boiling down establishments, glue manufacturers, soap and candle makers, and slaughterers usually chose a waterway location’ (Dingle 1985, p. 161).

As native wildlife began to disappear from their native habitats in the area, Westgarth (1888, p.13) recalls that ‘the gorgeous black cockatoos was another of our early company, now also long since departed. The platypus, also, was quite plentiful, especially in the merri creek.’ And as more and more of ‘the working of clearing, draining and stocking the land proceeded. Kangaroos, opossums, and other animals native to the soil left the domain taken up by the white man’ (Robertson, J 1913, p.3).

European manipulation to the land generated a destructive nature in creating spaces for living as a disconnection and lack of knowledge with the landscape meant that a lack of appreciation of the dynamics of how the land operated, a method that Aboriginal people utilised, destroyed a finely tuned environment. Despite the destruction, remnants of Aboriginal spaces still exist and Aboriginal memories and knowledge continues to prosper. A method that Aboriginal people utilised, destroyed a finely tuned environment. Despite the destruction, remnants of Aboriginal spaces still exist and Aboriginal memories and knowledge continues to prosper.

The site of Wurdi Youang stone arrangement and the extended remnants of the Wadawurrung ‘living space’ has been in ownership by the Aboriginal-owned Wadawurrung Aboriginal Co-Operative (WAC) since the 1990’s. Sheep grazing has ceased on the property and rehabilitation of the native grasslands has been funded by the state government for the past few years. Aboriginal rangers have been employed by the WAC to take care of the Country and recent Traditional fire methods have taken place on the land to aid in regeneration and to continue cultural practices. The space has provided a venue for On Country significance in repairing relationships and understanding culture via health and rehabilitation programs run by the WAC.

Wadawurrung Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP). The Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation (trading as Wadawurrung) are based in Ballarat and are the recognised Traditional Owners. The WAC are based in Geelong, and there is a contentious history between the two divided groups that has halted previous success in determining the future of the Wurdi Youang site. This is changing in the current time and both parties are vowing to protect the area as an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA). The Wurdi Youang Advisory Committee (established 5 years ago) has established a Wurdi Youang Advisory Business Plan that recommends future steps in ensuring the site is both protected, owned and managed by Traditional Owners and Aboriginal people. State and federal funding is currently being sought for the continuation for employment of Aboriginal rangers and introducing staff in establishing educational / tourism / On Country programs on site to enable connection to Country and re-establishing culture and to educate the wider community.

The Wadawurrung are recovering from the Stolen Generation of the 1950’s -60’s, and the current generations are determined to take back their courage and incorporate themselves in custodian status in all respects. Speaking to Wadawurrung people, and other Aboriginal peoples who live on and care for Wadawurrung land, there is a great sense of urgency in moving ahead and thinking of the future and that includes sharing of knowledge to restore the land and the peoples.

Before this can occur, there is a current and dire threat to the land. Current statutory planning scheme overlays include public acquisition. Fast moving urban sprawl encroaching from the east, as the western suburbs of Melbourne rapidly expand threaten the future of the site. Current Heritage recognition of the site only includes the stone arrangement. The ‘living space’ is not listed as a cultural heritage site and this is where the example of Wurdi Youang highlights the need for further recognition of Aboriginal land care complexities and long term ‘living spaces’.

Reflections and Future Planning Considerations

Not unlike the settlements of the past, the current and future changes in space for farming, living and recreation means ‘the closeness of urban living also creates tensions over differing but equally legitimate use of resources’ (Dingle 1984, p.161). By highlighting the subtle and long-term Aboriginal ‘living spaces’ made aware by the fact that there is tangible stone remnants that western people can identify with, the unravelling of a broader landscape system of complex agricultural, aquacultural, harvesting and hunting grounds and most importantly, ensuring the protection and utilisation of waterways, keeping them pure and understanding they are the fundamental aspect to all connections to the ‘living spaces’, and that of the colonial use of landscape as ‘living space’ without the prior knowledge of the land, and the damage to waterways, allows focus for an effective long term ‘living space’ for the future benefiting with a mutual exchange of knowledge from these histories.

We now face a new future with rising population and climate change and with the past histories of the layers of landscape, urban planning must consider long term use of natural waterways, grasslands, forest, and the acknowledgement of Aboriginal knowledge and harmonious relationship between the land and living that sacred stone sites represent in the
broader aspect of Aboriginal ‘living spaces’.

Whilst this paper only touches upon the intricacies of an Aboriginal ‘living space’, the most important concept of interpreting a site such as Wurdi Youang is that there are complexities on many levels of tangible and intangible level and although there is an exchange of knowledge between Aboriginal knowledge (and knowing that knowledge is also withheld due to cultural protection and sacred knowledge) and Western knowledge, the interpretation will always be incomplete. There must also be a focus upon ‘rediscovering’, rather than ‘discovering’ of remnant sites as part of complex Aboriginal Countries.

Working alongside Traditional Owners who are willing to share their knowledge, witnessing and incorporating traditional methods creates an appreciation and respect and understanding of Indigenous landscape. The stone sites cannot be fenced off as surviving remnants. Instead, protecting the landscape and utilising farming and planning methods efficiently creates a long term relationship between the prior three layers of landscape: ancient, Aboriginal - manipulated and European-manipulated for the future layer of land in urban design.

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