



**Kurra Kurrin
Petrified Forest
Community
Resource**



Local Elders watching the return of the *Kurra Kurrin* from ashore

Acknowledgments

Lake Macquarie City Council would like to thank the following people who formed the Stakeholder Advisory Group for their commitment to delivering this project:

Ashley Hudson - Indigenous Learning

Brad Welsh - Office of Environment and Heritage

Gerald Edwards, Jim Ridgeway, Joe Hampton, Ken Goodwin, Louisa Goodwin and Zelma Moran - Westlakes Aboriginal Elders

Jason Edwards - Community member/National Parks and Wildlife Aboriginal Co-Management Committee

Kerrie Brauer and Amanda Hawken - Awabakal Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation

Michael Green, Noel Dates, Andrew McGrady and Toby Whaleboat - Bahtabah Local Aboriginal Land Council

Shane Frost - Awabakal Descendents Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation

Doug Archibald, John Hughson, Maree Edwards, Ray Peak, Sarah Neal, Stephen McAlister, Symon Walpole and Tony Gibbs - Lake Macquarie City Council Staff

Image (front page): Douglas Archibald and Mervyn Bishop

Kurra-kuran (men turned into rock) – petrified forest 1 (detail) (from the series "Passage") 2004
type C photograph, 76 x 50.5cm

Commissioned by Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery for the exhibition *Passage*, curated by Brook Andrew, donated by the artists, 2008, collection Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, image courtesy the artists.



Members of the stakeholder advisory group including: (L to R) Uncle Ken Goodwin, Kerrie Brauer, Michael Green, Uncle Gerald Edwards, Toby Whaleboat and Symon Walpole.

About this resource

The purpose of this Community Resource is to provide an opportunity for community members to learn more about the cultural significance of the *Kurra Kurrin* Petrified Forest. The land on which the *Kurra Kurrin* stands is that of the Awabakal people, the traditional custodians of the land.

Aboriginal people have lived on the land for thousands of years, living off the country, and using it as a source of food, water, shelter and providing stability for culture.



Members of the stakeholder advisory group and individuals that assisted with the repatriation of the artefacts



The artefacts being catalogued and recorded for the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System register

Background of the Kurra Kurrin

The *Kurra Kurrin* petrified forest is a site at Blackalls Park NSW that holds high cultural significance to the traditional custodians of the area.

Kurru Kurrin is a significant Aboriginal cultural heritage site located in Fennell Bay, Blackalls Park NSW. A local missionary Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld documented a traditional story relating to the site in 1834.

The story relates that people had angered ‘an immense iguana’ by roasting lice in the fire and the people were speared ‘by a long reed from heaven’.

The ‘iguana’ then commanded a gathering of people at *Kurra Kurrin*.

A large stone fell from the sky, killing the people and the fossil forest formed. When the ‘iguana’ saw all the men were killed by the fall of the stone, he ascended up into heaven, where he remains. This is just one dreamtime story relating to the Petrified Forest, with other stories having been passed down by generations.

Kurra Kurrin is also geologically significant, the site of an ancient pine forest, it is thought to have been fossilised by a blast of volcanic ash from an off shore volcano 250 million years ago. The tree stumps have been converted into chalcedony, many with clearly visible and well preserved growth rings and wood structure. In 1845 geologist WB Clarke estimated that there were at least 500 tree stumps, both in the water and along the banks. Some of the stumps were up to 1.2 metres tall, one large stump rose over a metre above the water and was nearly two metres in diameter.



Members of the stakeholder advisory group and Council staff assisting with the return of the artefacts

The trees were *Glossopteris*, a species allied to the modern *Araucaria*, which includes the Norfolk Island Pine.

While there are other fossil sites in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, this was once the site of the greatest profusion of fossilised trees preserved in situ.

The geological significance of the site was recognised in 1904 when *Kurra Kurrin* was declared a reserve, the first site of geological significance to be declared in New South Wales. However, no action was taken at the time to ensure the physical preservation of the area and despite its cultural and geological significance, *Kurra Kurrin* has failed to be protected. The site has been heavily degraded through theft, sedimentation and rubbish deposition, and there are now only twenty to thirty fossil stumps remaining.

Sections of the fossil forest were allegedly used as a building material for the Fassfern Railway Station, and many pieces were taken for garden ornaments and sold to people in Sydney by locals looking to supplement their incomes.

In 1982 the site was nominated and accepted for listing on the Australian Register of National Estate, a nationwide list of places with heritage significance compiled by the Australian Heritage Commission.

Repatriation of the Kurra Kurrin Petrified Forest

Part of the Petrified Forest was used as a fence in a garden at a residential property at Blackalls Park, which has since been dismantled.

Lake Macquarie City Council became aware of the project and in consultation with the previous Aboriginal Consultative Committee arranged for the pieces to be stored until a decision was made about the future of the *Kurra Kurrin*.

In January 2012, Council staff brought together a range of community stakeholders to who over a period of six months provided advice and direction in regards to the culturally appropriate practice for the artefacts to be returned to their original place.

In July 2012 the repatriation of the items took place, with the items being recorded on the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS register), which will ensure protection of the items. In total, 328 artefacts were recorded and returned.

Protection of Culture and Heritage in NSW

Aboriginal Culture and Heritage in NSW is protected under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 and is administered by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage.

In 2011, Lake Macquarie City Council adopted the Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management Strategy, which aims to achieve sustainable management of Aboriginal cultural and heritage values across the City.

The strategy defines Aboriginal cultural heritage values as a combination of physical objects, places and other elements of the landscape that are associated with, or explained by, traditional lifestyles or community stories and oral history.



Council staff on the day of the repatriation (L to R) Doug Archibald, Ray Peak and Tony Gibbs.

Additional Information

If you would like any additional information, please contact:.

Aboriginal Community Development Officer

Lake Macquarie City Council

Phone (02) 4921 0333 or email council@lakemac.nsw.gov.au

Please note this information contained in this resource is correct a time of printing, August 2012.

