



## **Mosaics**

*The design process of the mosaic  
art work of the Kooparoona Niara  
Cultural Trail*

As the idea for the Cultural trail started to take shape, thought was given to enhance the two existing concrete retaining walls with Aboriginal themed inspired mosaics to enrich this infrastructure and to add colour and vibrancy along the trail which could be seen close-up, or from afar.

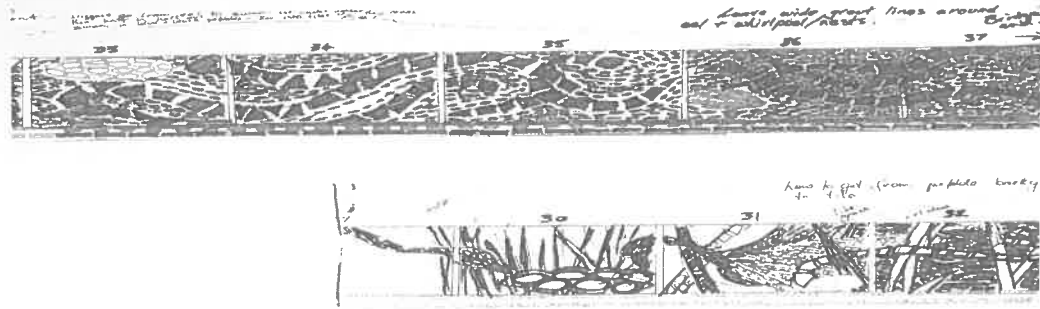
Extract from the initial project outline:

*'With collaboration between a local mosaic artist and an Aboriginal artist, it is proposed that the two, low concrete retaining walls along the trail be upgraded and enhanced to display Aboriginal artwork in the form of a mural consisting of small pieces of coloured tiles. When finished, these walls would add a welcome and distinctive dash of colour able to be viewed from both sides of the river and present Aboriginal culture in a distinctive way. They would be easy to maintain, sanitary and provide a great seated resting spot for many people who visit the trail and for path users in general.'*

Early in 2016, Aunty Dawn Blazeley agreed to become the chief Tasmanian Aboriginal artist for the project to provide designs for motifs on the handmade pavers, fire-bowl cover and to liaise with local mosaic artist and steering committee member Niecy Brown to collaborate on the mosaic component.

Aunty Dawn met with Niecy on-site and at Niecy's studio on many occasions over the next few months to discuss appropriate cultural design concepts for the mosaic walls. Aunty Dawn drew up some initial sketches which Niecy then redrew in a form suitable for interpretation into mosaic medium. And so the collaborative process continued with each artists communicating until both were pleased with the way forward.





Artists Sketch of the Mosaic design

The work then began in earnest. Panels of hardiflex board were cut on site to the precise size required and no two panels were the same so as to accommodate the varying height and slope of the walls. There were 52 panels for the retaining wall in front of the swimming pool and 37 for the wall near the road bridge - a total of 91 panels including 2 returns at the end of each wall. Dimensions ranged from approximately 90 centimetres long by 20 – 50 centimetres high.



Special consideration was given to all materials used for the mosaic components as the area is prone to annual flooding, freezing and full sun, all of which could detrimentally impact on the durability and appearance of the artworks over the long-term.

Niecy sought expert advice throughout the entire process, with only the best recommended products used to prime, seal, adhere and grout the works. The walls were pressure cleaned prior to the panels being affixed.

This, as well as the robust tiles and natural stones and pebbles utilized, meant that every possible effort was made to ensure the appearance of the mosaic walls look great well into the future and that ongoing maintenance is minimal. Consideration was given to the choice of materials and colour range to be utilised and the artists decided on earthy muted tones to reflect the themes to be represented.

Once the panels were cut, primed and sealed twice work began on the mosaic designs back at the mosaic artist's studio. The reasons for this were the practical considerations of applying the mosaic designs at bench height rather than working at levels 20-50 centimetres off ground level, as well as the intricacies of the designs with the artwork of one panel flowing into the next.



The community volunteers assisting with the many facets of this component were extremely grateful for this planning outcome as most were of an age to appreciate not working at low levels over many hours on a frosty concrete path!

Community members were invited to assist with aspects in creating the panels; including site and panel preparation, collecting and sorting pebbles (over thirty visits to a local beach), applying the mosaic designs according to Niecy's drawings for each individual panel of the swimming pool wall and grouting and the arduous task of cleaning the panels once the mosaics had set.

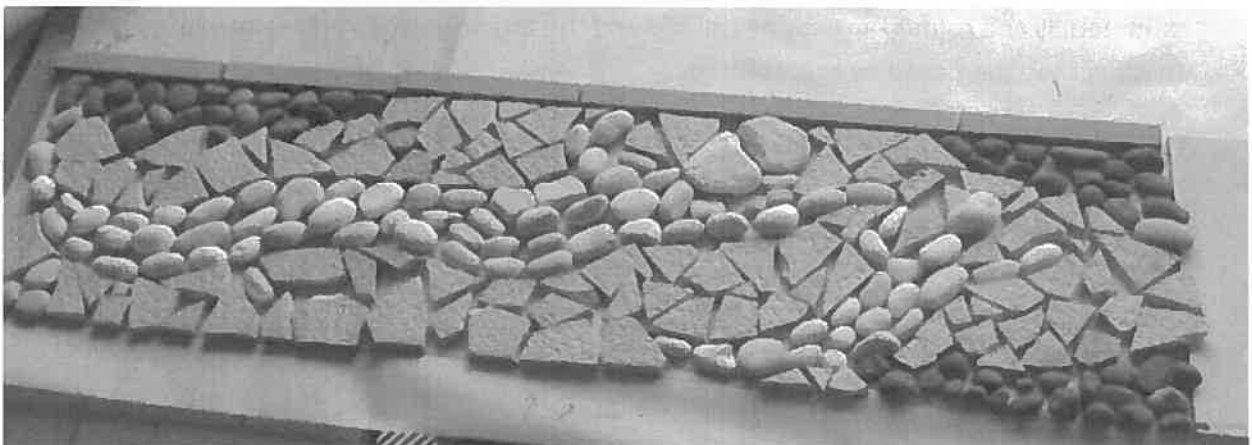
### **RETAINING WALL ONE: INFRONT OF THE SWIMMING POOL**

Aunty Dawn and Niecy met in the Deloraine studio on the 5<sup>th</sup> February 2017 to discuss the design, content and application of mosaics for the concrete retaining wall in front of the swimming pool along the 'Bush Tucker Trail'.

This wall, approximately 37 metres in length, located close to the local pool and the Meander river, was given a water theme of 'river spirits' by Aunty Dawn.

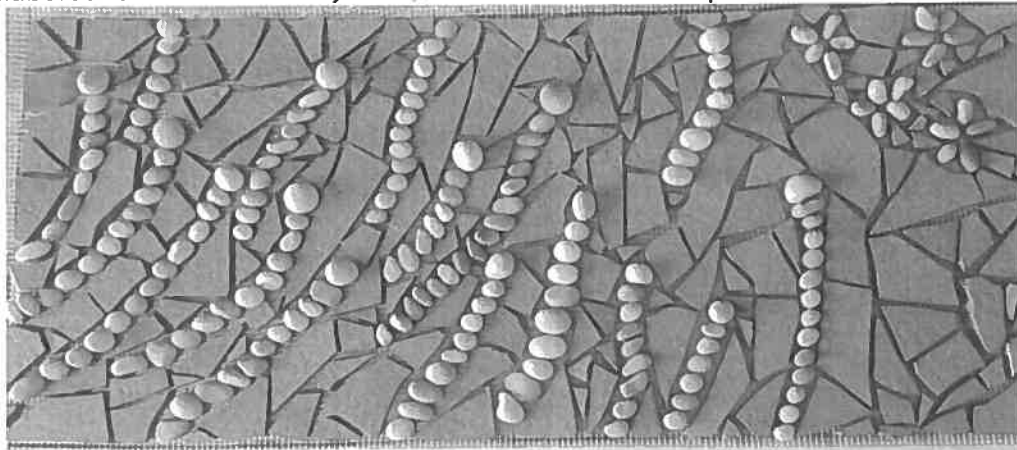
As with other components envisioned for the cultural trail, fate decreed that this theme was unintentionally woven into the name for the entire trail, Kooparooona Niara, which is the Aboriginal term for 'The Great Western Tiers', which means 'Mountains of the Spirits'. Dawn explained that "the spirits come down from the mountains and travel the river until they come to a special place from where they emerge".

Many instances of inadvertent complimentary facets between the different trail components were experienced in the projects planning and inception.

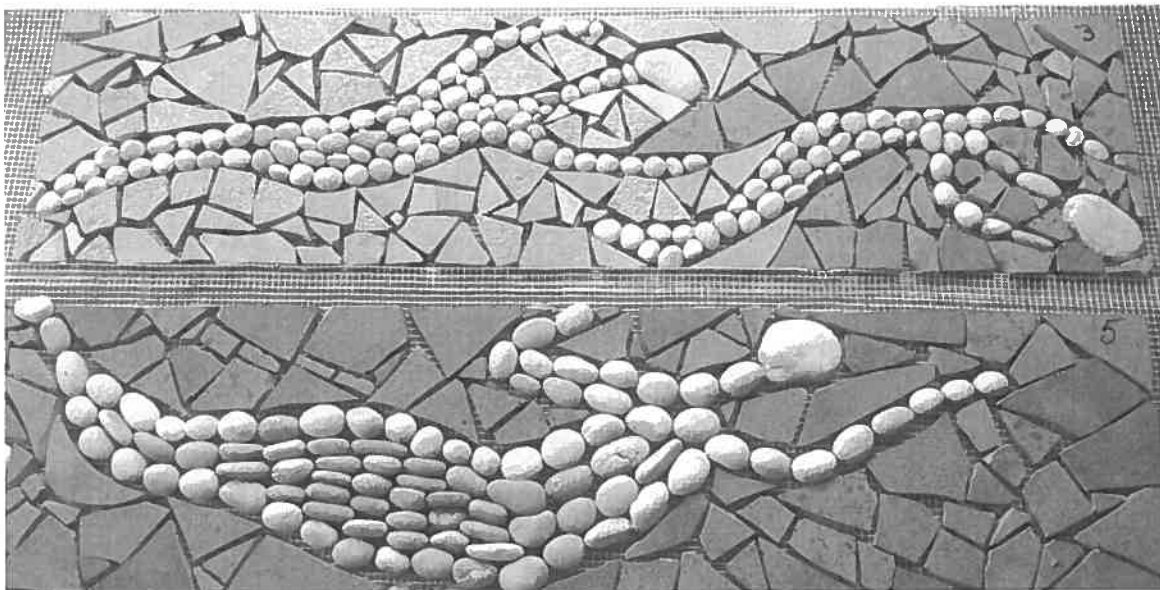


Mock-up – pre-application

Aunty Dawn and Niecy met again at the Riawunna Centre, part of the Mowbray campus the University of Tasmania on the 11<sup>th</sup> April 2017 to further discuss the mosaics for Wall 1. The collaborative discussion was around the details for the last panel.



Last panel – wall 1



Mosaics applied to mesh before affixing to panels

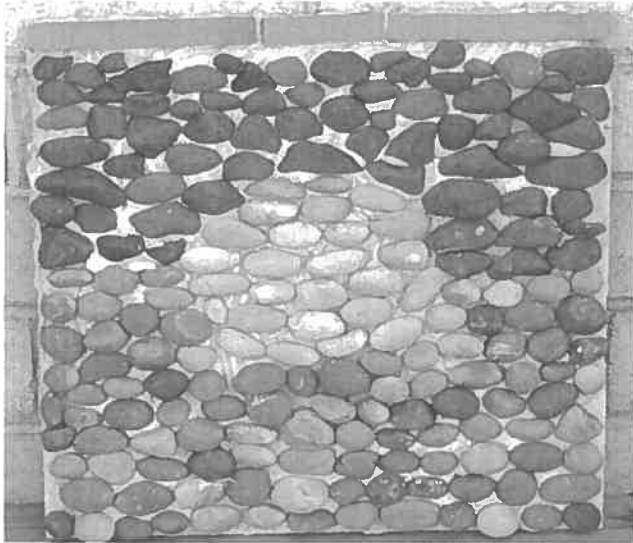
A 'whole of Community' focus was embraced when planning and implementing this project, and the three local schools were always very enthusiastic to be involved in the various components.

In August and September, children from the Deloraine Primary School and Our Lady of Mercy were invited to take part in creation of the mosaic panels.

For wall 1, teachers from the Primary school brought 8 groups of around 10 students to the artist's studio to hear a brief description of the trail from Martin Hay, and a talk on the mosaic process from mosaic artist, Niecy Brown.

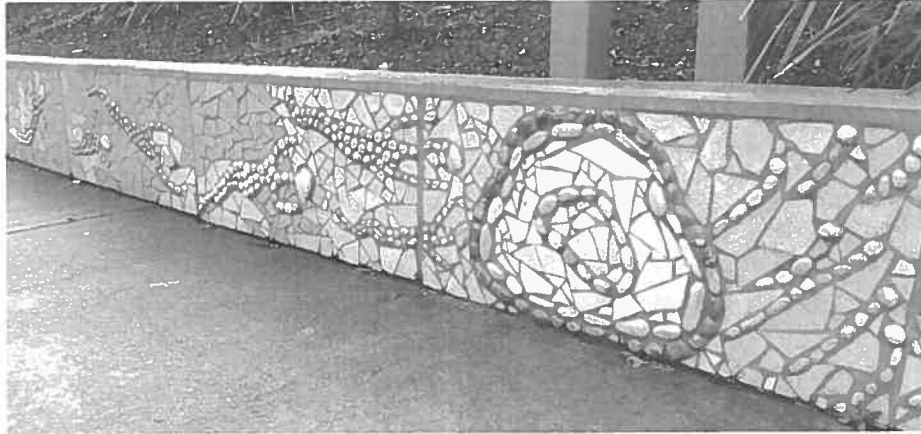
At the end of the talk, each group were invited to help create an Aboriginal flag made of pebbles, with the Aboriginal students of each group going first to cement a pebble in place.

Students and teachers were very pleased to know more about the trail and the mosaic process, with several students relaying stories of the trail and other components they had been part of.



Installation of mosaic wall 1 occurred in September 2017, with finishing touches added when installing wall 2.





“the spirits come down from the mountains and travel the river until they come to a special place from where they emerge” – Aunty Dawn Blazeley

#### **RETAINING WALL 2: NEAR THE EMU BAY RD BRIDGE:**

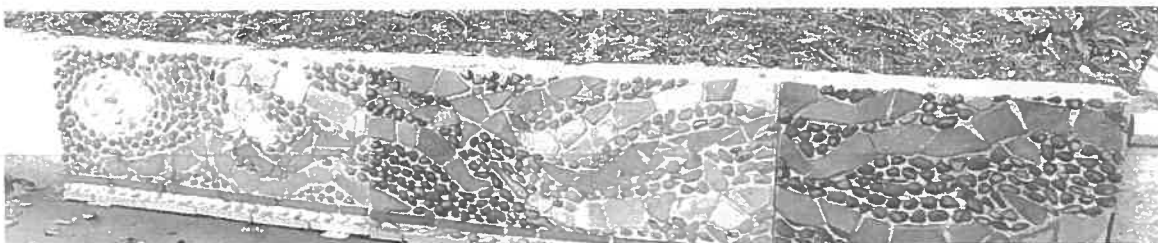
This wall, approximately 34 metres in length was quite different to the themes of the other wall. More colour and a different application process were utilized in this concept. This wall is more visible from the other side of the river, both for pedestrians walking the circular track around and across the river and also for motorists on the other side of the river descending from the road leading to the primary and high schools

The content for Wall 2 was discussed and agreement reached in May 2017 to include eels, swans, native hens and other endemic fauna and flora to the Meander River. Aunty Dawn provided a more detailed sketch for the first section of the second wall depicting a large river spirit so as to create a link between the two walls

This design compliments the Tasmanian native animal sculptures on display along the trail and reinforces the connection to Country felt by all Aboriginal people.

A test run was conducted to see how the panels looked in-situ prior to installation.

Note how parts of the panels had received some rain in transit. This would reveal how the mosaic would appear in the wet.





One panel of this wall depicts fish, and it was with the help of students from Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School, that this piece of the mosaic wall was created.



Between the making of wall one and two the mosaic artist travelled to Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria to study and absorb the age-old techniques of cobbling and mosaic work used in construction of stone walls, roads and pathways, public and religious art.

She incorporated this new knowledge and began to work in a very direct way to create the 'Flora and Fauna' wall. Tiles, pebbles and Lakes rocks were laid onto an exact drawing for a section. Then the matching panel was troweled and notched with special adhesive which meant that she had roughly one hour to transfer the materials into the 'goo'. This was an intensive period of work where visitors and guests were shunted away – "I can't stop and I can't talk, otherwise these jolly pebbles will mix themselves up." The best way to describe this innovative process is that it was like having a complex jig saw puzzle in front of you and



you move each piece, one by one to another location and hope that they still all make the initial picture and all fit back together.

The second wall was installed in November 2017 with assistance from a local stonemason Steve Shayler, who contribution was invaluable, only surpassed by project manager Martin Hay who worked tirelessly with clamps, shovel, water buckets and good cheer to ensure every detail was as good as it could possibly be or better.



Aunty Dawn and Niecy felt a real sense of pride in what they had achieved together. Both were so impressed with and grateful for all the volunteer help from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. *"It was a real coming together of the two communities with lots of learning and laughing taking place both ways as only happens when people make the time and effort to create together for the future".*

