



## **The Journey**

*The conception, ideas and  
development of the Kooparoona  
Niara Cultural Trail*

### **CONCEPTION:**

The initial idea for a "Bush Tucker Trail" was first proposed by Greg Murray when he was an employee with Colony 47 in 2014/15.

Greg grew up in Deloraine, and has a deep passion for Aboriginal Heritage and Culture and his idea was to identify under-utilized areas along the riverbank in Deloraine to develop into 'Bush Tucker' garden sites. He envisioned a visitor experience with interpretive signage, website and Ochre hand-stencil art to accompany the garden sites.

### **SEEDS OF PROGRESS:**

In September 2015, Martin Hay was employed by Colony 47 in the Aboriginal Community Pathways program, part of his role was to explore the possibilities of developing Greg's idea further.

Due to program funding, Greg was no longer an employee at Colony 47, but as a fellow worker in the Aboriginal Community sector, and a professional network colleague of Martin, he provided valuable insight into the role of Community Pathway Planner.

Greg generously availed himself to take Martin on a tour of the proposed site for the Bush Tucker Trail along the banks of the beautiful Meander River in Deloraine.

This tour which was conducted prior to the start of Martin's employment was instrumental in ensuring that Greg's passion for the Bush Tucker Trail was imparted, and so began the process of taking the idea from concept to actualization, building on Greg's initial work, which included preliminary consultation with stakeholders including the Meander Valley Council, HABITAT PLANTS and others, as well as the development of the 'Bridge to Bridge' /Bush Tucker Trail project poster.

The initial tour helped to formulate the evolving outline for the project:

*'The 'Trail', which is approximately 700 metres in length (round-trip), is ideal for such a venture, running alongside the gentle-flowing, picturesque waters of the Meander River in Deloraine.*

*The path is all weather and gentle, meaning that it can be navigated by all people, with special consideration for the elderly and disabled.*

*It is ideally located, being in an area which has much public infrastructure already in place which dove-tails harmoniously with the forecasted utilization of the trail.'*

Shortly after the commencement of Martin's employment, funding was identified to employ Greg for one day a week so that he could continue to progress the development of the project with Martin. Greg remained in this position till June 2016, but remained a strong advocate, supporter and soundboard for all aspects of the project as a steering committee member and cultural advisor. Greg also volunteered his time and efforts to ensure the success in many aspects of the Aboriginal Community Pathways program and is a key organizer and emcee of the annual NAIDOC Week celebratory day in Deloraine.

### **CULTURAL PROTOCOLS, ADVICE AND SENSITIVITIES:**

The utmost importance for the implementation of this project was to adhere to and respect cultural protocols and sensitivities.

For these reasons, a meeting was arranged in September 2015, with respected members of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community to advise in these areas.

Aunty Patsy Cameron, Aunty Lola Greeno and Vicki West met with Martin at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG) to hear about the proposal.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Aunty Patsy and Aunty Lola agreed to be cultural advisors for the project and have been consulted throughout the implementation of the trail. Their advice and assistance covered many aspects including funding applications, project component advice and recommendations and signage formatting.

Vicki West has also offered advice regarding signage for the project.

### **GETTING STARTED:**

Ideas without funding remain ideas.

It was fortuitous that Colony 47 offices were below Natural Resource Management North (NRM North). Martin met with Program Manager, Scott Schilg to outline the proposal and to investigate funding potential for the project.

Scott was very supportive of the concept and advised on funding opportunities through NRM North for the garden sites, plants and materials, yarning circle and signage. It was also indicated that architectural plans for the project could also be applied for and this could be a separate application and be applied for initially to get the ball rolling.

In October 2015, Greg and Martin met with Meander Valley Council (MVC) staff, Natasha Szczyglowska (Technical Officer) and Stuart Brownlea (NRM Officer/Facilitator) on-site, to walk the length of the trail and to discuss Meander Valley Council (MVC) requirements.

Another meeting was set up with Natasha and Stuart in mid-October, where Herbert Staubmann from nearby HABITAT Plant nursery, volunteered his time to look at the various proposed garden sites and identify appropriate plantings depending on the different micro climates experienced at each site. Local architect, Gayle Plunkett, also attended to survey architect drawings for the project.

Each site had a different aspect ranging from full sun, to partial and full shade.

Herbert developed a spreadsheet for each site that considered the variety of conditions and recommended suitable plants and quantities for the areas available.



Over the coming months before Xmas, Martin and Greg met with community members and organisations to outline the proposal. Meetings were held with Meander Valley Councillors, local Public Art and Townscape, Reserve and Parks committees, community workers and historians of Tasmanian Aboriginal history.

The most important consultation was with the local Aboriginal community members. Informal discussions regarding the proposal were held at the Deloraine Community garden where Colony 47 assisted local community members with the community garden.

A cultural Christmas BBQ was held in December at the community garden where many community members celebrated a meal together and to hear of progress with the proposal.

Official letters of support were requested and received from NRM North and the Meander Valley Council. Other letters of support received later included:

- Aunty Patsy Cameron
- Deloraine House
- Deloraine Arts
- Deloraine High School and Trade Training Centre
- Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School

During community consultations conducted in the three months prior to the Christmas break, steering committee members were identified and approached to lead the project.

A very talented and enthusiastic steering committee was brought together which comprised of:

- Neicy Brown: Local artist
- Councillor Deb White: Meander Valley Council
- Natasha Szczyglowska: Technical Officer-Meander Valley Council
- Martin Hay: Community Pathway Planner/Colony 47- Bush Tucker Trail Coordinator
- Greg Murray: Community Pathway Planner/Colony 47- Bush Tucker Trail Consultant
- Amanda Flanigan: proprietor of The Empire Hotel – Deloraine
- Gayle Plunkett: Deloraine architect
- Keith Lane: local artist

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2016, the first Steering Committee meeting at the Meander Valley Council with guest Elizabeth Daly – Colony 47 Manager.

In the new year, Greg and Martin participated in the Deloraine Development Outline Plan, coordinated by the Council and held discussions with local signage suppliers, Deloraine House.

Elizabeth Daly, through her long-term associations in the Tasmanian Education Department, met with the principals of the three local schools to discuss the project and to invite each school to participate.

Further funding avenues were investigated and Council assistance with estimated costs were received from the Works department.

The most important and fortuitous meeting so far occurred in February 2016, when Aunty Dawn Blazeley and former Colony 47 volunteer Nanette Shaw met with Elizabeth and Martin.

Upon learning more about the proposal, Aunty Dawn indicated that she was also an Aboriginal artist as well as an Aboriginal Elder. With approaches made to several Tasmanian Aboriginal artists being met with apologies of full schedules, Martin was very keen to invite Aunty Dawn to be the artistic inspiration for the project. Aunty Dawn became the cultural artist for the project and has conducted presentations in the local schools to design and create the symbols for the themed pavers, as well as the artwork for the two mosaic walls and the lid of the fire-pit at the yarning circle. She has also submitted drawings and wording for the signage and was a great soundboard, consultant, cultural advisor and the project would be much poorer without her involvement and creative artworks.

In fact, the trail would not have the same inspirational cultural elements as were developed over time, which became integral to the cultural connection with the project.

Later in February, the application was submitted to NRM North for the architect drawings, which meant that Martin's initial amateur 'mud' maps could be eliminated from subsequent correspondence and applications.

In February, leading sculptural artist, John Parish and mosaic wall Aboriginal artwork designer, Aunty Dawn Blazeley, met with local artist and project steering committee member, Niecy Brown, on-site, and at the community garden to discuss and develop art concepts for the project.



Further funding applications to NRM North, Tasmania Regional Arts and the Meander Valley Council Community Grants program were lodged in March, with further community consultation and presentations conducted including Arts Deloraine and the Deloraine branch of the Bendigo Bank. An application to the Deloraine and Districts Community Grants program, administered by the Bendigo Bank was then compiled ready for submission.

The second steering committee meeting was held at the end of the month.

In April, there was fine weather for a Community Pathway's Cultural excursion and BBQ at the Deloraine Train Park where local and Aboriginal community members from the Launceston region met at the park facilities for a community event involving a cultural talk by local 'keeper of culture', Hank Horton and a tour of the trail by Martin and Greg for all attendees to outline and gauge support for the project. All attendees were very enthusiastic and thought it was a great idea, eager to sign a petition for Aboriginal support for the project.



The project was generating much interest, receiving great news of support from the Rotary Club of Deloraine with a generous donation towards the creation of the native animal sculptures, also initiating contact with the Meander Valley Gazette and inclusion in the next Meander Valley Council workshop to present the idea to Council for sign-off.

The first article relating to the project was submitted to the Meander Valley Gazette later in April for the May edition, which included information regarding two public consultation sessions. These sessions were also advertised in the Launceston paper, The Examiner.



Front page: May 2016

The project also received a boost this month with horticulturalist, Rosie Harris, working with HABITAT Plants, confirmed her availability to volunteer her services for plant schematics and soil testing, overseeing planting and advising on sustainable maintenance and replacement recommendations.

Ongoing Meander Valley Council requirements and paperwork were generated for Council sign-off and meetings held to discuss the Council's Gifted Assets Policy, with invaluable support and advice received from project steering committee member and Council Technical Officer, Natasha Szczyglowska.

Patrick Gambles, Meander Valley Community Development Manager, project soundboard and supporter, relayed that the Council had approved the Community Grant funding conditional on successful Council sign-off. Another vital piece of funding becoming available.

The first Community Consultation was held on-site on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May between 4-5 p.m. Greg Murray and Martin walked the proposed trail with three curious local community members.

The second public consultation was held the following week on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May between 11 a.m. and 12 noon. This session was conducted by Martin and C47 North Manager, Elizabeth Daly. This session attracted thirteen attendees.



At the end of May, a phone call was received from Lyn Hayward, from the Bendigo Community Grants Program, who happily conveyed that the application for part funding for the yarning circle, paver and sculpture components was successful. The momentum behind the project was growing by the day.

Once sections of funding for the project were confirmed and the project looked more likely to become a reality, further presentations of the project were made to Tasmanian Aboriginal community members and organizations.

During June, TasRail was contacted to ask to apply Aboriginal Hand stencils to the rail buttress walls at the start of the trail, with Brett Pyke approving TasRail's consent to apply these and for signage to be affixed.

On-site consultation with Council recommended contractors and project architect, Gayle Plunkett, met on-site to discuss all aspects of the trail to be constructed, including garden sites, pathways and the yarning circle. Tasmanian Community Fund application was compiled and submitted, along with a presentation of Bendigo funding attended by Elizabeth Daly and Martin Hay later in the month.



Almost nine months of planning, consultation, funding applications and generating community support for the project hinged on a power-point presentation to the full chamber of the Meander Valley Council for official council sign-off for the project.

This presentation included additional measures taken to mitigate flood water inundation as the site was well under water for a week prior to the meeting. These measures included advice and recommendations from Herbert, at HABITAT Plants, regarding the survivability of established plantings through a flooding event and the inclusion of garden site blockwork.

The project was warmly received by Council with Deputy Mayor, Mick Kelly, commenting that before the presentation he had concerns about the proposal, but after, he was very excited by it. Official Council approval was granted at the next Meander Valley Council meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July.

Martin was contacted by ABC radio and conducted a live interview with Belinda King in the early morning of the 5<sup>th</sup> of July, with a further live interview with both Greg and Martin on the afternoon program with Helen Shield on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

Soil testing with Rosie Harris was conducted for each planting site to determine appropriate soil quantities, costings received for plants, further planning and consultation with contractors and artists. The Council Works department identified plant sites for development and met to discuss possible amendments to some sites. Following positive consultation with Works Manager and Council and park staff, suggested changes were agreed to, which enhance the rail bridge garden site to include a pathway from the car park facilities and to enhance the swimming pool site with blockwork. This meant more work for Gayle Plunkett, who took all alterations and production of new plans in her stride throughout the project implementation.

The third steering committee meeting was held on the 27<sup>th</sup> hosted by The Empire Hotel.

Project steering committee member, local mosaic artist, funding application guru and all round project consultant, Neicy Brown, visited SIBELCO Limestone works IN Mole Creek with Martin, to select 12 limestone boulders, donated by the local company, 9 of which would become the seating around the fire-pit for the yarning circle.

In August, the sculpture component gained traction, with community participants meeting with leading sculptor, John Parish, at The Empire for an initial discussion and site-visit on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September.





Throughout August and September 2016, C47 management, the Aboriginal Elders Council, community members and organisations, Council, local schools including the Trade Training Centre, and funding bodies were updated on progress with the trail.

During the month, Aunty Dawn Blazeley, steering committee members Amanda Flanagan and Keith Lane (a local artist commissioned to manufacture the pavers), conducted presentations regarding the Aboriginal motif paver component with the three local schools, Deloraine Primary and High and Our Lady of Mercy Catholic school.

A funding shortfall was identified in the sculpture component after the Tasmanian Regional Arts funding application was unsuccessful. A donation drive was launched, which was generously applied to by the public, so that all intended native animal sculptures could be produced.

Signage throughout the trail was initiated with assistance from Marianne MacDonald and Natasha Szczyglowska meeting with Martin to discuss formatting and content.

Following delays due to heavy rains, meetings with contractors to confirm start dates for on-site works were held with contingency plans for all plantings fast outgrowing their pots at a steering committee members' residence.

The project was nominated for the Community Group of the Year award and received a finalist notification to attend the presentation night in November. This night was attended by C47's Northern manager Elizabeth Daly, former C47 Operations, Business and Community Relations Manager, Di Carter, Tasmanian Aboriginal 'Keeper of Culture', project cultural advisor and signage contributor, Hank Horton. The project was shortlisted to four finalists, with the project being unsuccessful this time around. A further application has been lodged for the awards this year.



On-site works finally commenced in the week of the 24/10/16 – 2/11/16. Stage one development included development of the garden sites, laying most of the hand-made pavers and construction of the yarning circle, complete with central fire-pit, limestone boulders and pebble-work floor. Volunteers were inducted by the Council to assist with the pavers, garden bed preparation and planting.



After stage one was completed, happy steering committee members held a fourth informal steering committee meeting on-site at the newly created yarning circle. An item of discussion centred around the naming of the cultural trail.

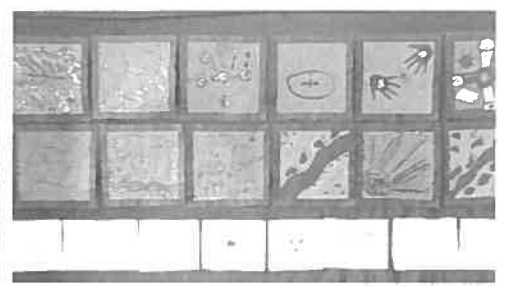
As the project had evolved from the initial 'bush tucker' concept to one that was more holistic, incorporating additional elements of Tasmanian Aboriginal art and culture, it seemed relevant to reflect this in the naming of the trail. Hank Horton and Greg Murray were consulted to recommend a more appropriate name than the 'Bush Tucker Trail'.

Hank came back with 'The kooparooka niara Cultural Trail', which was the Aboriginal term for The Great Western Tiers meaning 'Mountains of the Spirits'. Greg agreed, and from that day forward the project/trail took this name, which blended perfectly with the artwork for the mosaics and with existing publications from tourism bodies from the area.

The yarning circle was officially opened by the Aboriginal community at the end of year/Cultural Christmas gathering and BBQ which was held at the yarning circle site. The first flame was ignited by three Aboriginal Elders including local Elder Viv Beeton. Speeches by Aboriginal community members, Hank Horton and Greg Murray, expressed the emotion felt by having a cultural trail for the community with other community members saying that it was fantastic to have a place to bring the kids to pass on culture.

At the end of the BBQ, community members were invited to be the first to apply their own ochre hand-stencils to the railway buttress. Hank Horton had investigated the process and led the application process. The stencils now stand at the gateway for the trail, welcoming all to experience the delights of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture beyond.

The day ran in conjunction with a one week exhibition of the Aboriginal motif paver process which was held upstairs at The Empire Hotel. Original sketches and further artwork from the students of the three local schools was on display as well as a video explaining the manufacture process.



During NAIDOC Week, 2017, the kooparooka niara Cultural Trail played a major role as the cultural focus for the event which was the most successful and best attended of the three celebratory days held over the last three years. It is expected that the trail will become an Aboriginal focal point for community members to come together to celebrate and practice culture.

Stage two of the trail which will include completion and implementation of the two mosaic walls, the eight bronze native animal sculptures and trail signage will be installed prior to December 2017, with an official opening to be held before the end of the year.