Wreck Bay to Gulaga Report

July 2014
Monte’s program with the Wreck Bay Aboriginal community took place from **Sunday 6 to Saturday 12 July 2014.** Our Wreck Bay Mob trained to support child care, arts and land care activities and also involved learning of the Whale Dreaming and a Whale dance, which our group performed at the Wreck Bay and Nowra NAIDOC Ceremonies. These connections with the land, the sea and traditional culture were enhanced by whale watching and witnessing a humpback swim under our boat and breach twice with in our vicinity. Monte is very appreciative of the welcome we received from the community as well as the guidance we received during the trip from Uncle Max Dulumunmun Harrison and Auntie Rayma Johnson. As part of our South Coast journey we visited the Yuin Sacred Sites of Gulaga and Biamunga and our whole group benefited and were deeply moved by the teachings and ceremony shared by Uncle Max.

**Respect**

Our sincere thanks must go to those who have guided us and mentored our program and given permission for us to be on country. To Wendy Brown and Ruben Ardler of the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Corporation, for our program with Sarah Ketelhohn and staff at Gudjahgahmiamia Early Learning Centre and to staff at Booderee National Park and the Botanical Gardens. To Auntie Julie for her program planning, to Uncle Max and his son, Max II and his family, to Auntie Rayma for all the ways they guided our connections with the land, the ocean, with culture and for getting in touch with ourselves. To Kerry Johnson for teaching the Whale dance with her sister, Rayma. We respect your generosity and your commitment to the Biamunga program.

The following statement by Auntie Julie Smith, Kalkadoon woman and Monte’s Indigenous Curriculum Consultant explains the philosophy of our program at Monte Sant’ Angelo Mercy College.

“**The way forward for the program at Monte we call Biamunga¹ is for students to be comfortable in their own skins, whilst learning to engage with particular Indigenous communities. This engagement needs to be at a pace that the Indigenous community is able to direct.**

Biamunga aims to strengthen the leadership skills within the Monte community, whereby both staff and students can engage with Indigenous communities in other parts of the world in a manner that builds on the ways Aboriginal people have partnering our understanding of the complexities of cultural issues.”

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¹ Yuin word given to Monte to use by Uncle Max Dulumunmun Harrison in our Indigenous programs that represent our ‘journey to the mountain and our journey to understanding’
Preparation
To enhance our capacity to work with community our group undertook weekly training sessions for 9 weeks before departure. These sessions included:

- An introduction to Wreck Bay community from Auntie Wendy Brown, Rachel McLeod and Sharaya Dane
- The Learning Circle, to explore an Aboriginal connection to the land
- Protocols for visiting community
- Ceremony and Whale Dreaming teachings with Uncle Max Harrison at whale site in Waverton, which included the parents of Monte Wreck Bay Mob
- Whale Dreaming Dance with Rayma and Kerry Johnson
- Planning and contributing to the Monte Naidoc Assembly
- Hosting guests from the Central Desert visiting Monte.

The group attending were: Alisha Culverson of Year 10, Sophia Charlton, Eva Contos, Eliza Cook, Madeleine Elliott, Mikaela Farhart, Sarah Hancock, Meg Jones, Samala Norman, Madeleine O’Hehir, Phoebe Pugh, Ella Ryan, Annabel Schweikert, Mia Sturt, Bella Urquhart and Mia Wilcox of Year 11. Our staff were Uncle Max Dulumunmun Harrison, Auntie Rayma Johnson, Ms Emma Cornish, Ms Rachel O’Shea and Mr Marshall Leaver.

The following quotes are excerpts from the reflections written by our group in response to key questions on our shared experiences.
Connecting with the Land and the Water

The most significant thing I learnt about thankfulness and connection to the land was taken from a teaching on a sacred site of Gulaga. This teaching recounted the first male and female created being gifted with only a tree and a rock from their creator. This story taught that everything they could ever need could be sourced from that tree and rock, emphasizing the reliance we have on land, but also reiterates how significant it is for us to care for the land.

Sophia Charlton

Learning multiple dreaming stories from Max II, an Aboriginal person who has been passed on the knowledge from their Elders, really helped me understand just the depth of the connection with the land that Aboriginal people hold and have held for so many years. This being backed up by actual rock formations that connected so fundamentally to the story furthered this even more - it reiterated so strongly and prompted thought regarding the connection to the land.

Mia Wilcox

The greatest thrill is to watch the students shake off their urban stress and distraction and become transformed by nature and the sunrise every morning as we greet Grandfather Sun. I see first hand the importance of this communion with nature and Aboriginal culture and teachings in the faces of those kids that come though the program- it is such a privilege.

Emma Cornish

In particular, I felt a deep spiritual connection with the sacred Gulaga Mountain of the Yuin people, the sacred rock formations that were attached deep rooted ancient stories of the dreamtime. The three rocks on top of each other especially connected with me, I felt a deep connection with this rock and a sense of cleansing from the negative energy that had been built up.

Mikela Farhart

Another connection I was able to make with the land and the water was through learning the Whale Dance from Auntie Rayma. I came to understand the spiritual importance of the Whale Dance to Uncle Max and the Yuin people. This made it incredibly special and sacred to us.

Sarah Hancock

After viewing the land in the way Aboriginal people view it, as our mother, as the one thing in life that always cares for us, I feel as if my connection and respect for the land has grown greatly. In similar ways, the ocean provides for us and is home to some of our most magnificent creatures.

Meg Jones
Some of the important words that I learnt were significant and used in ceremony. The words *gurruwul, bindi, munyip*, which mean whale, pregnant, go, are used to sing up whales to the surface of the ocean. Other words: *malimo, watagaden, natcha* and *dulaga* translate to strong woman, young female, young male, strong male and are used during a smoking ceremony conducted on the sacred site at Biamanga Mountain and helped restore energy back into the land. I also learnt the meaning of “Biamunga” meant ‘place of learning’.

This journey has made me connect with the land and water in ways that I didn’t think were possible. I am far more appreciative of the land on which I live on and feel that I should be more respectful of it. Greeting the sun every morning emphasized the importance of the sun and how we would not be able to survive without it. The whole journey has made me realise that I am not here to abuse the resources that the earth gives us and that I should be more mindful of how I walk on the land and be more appreciative of everything it provides us with. Walking up Gulaga really emphasised my connection with the land as I physically gained strength and spiritual energy from the rocks and trees around me.  

**Sophia Charlton**

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**Connecting with Community**

This trip gave me the opportunity to open my eyes up to the true culture and deep history of the Aboriginal people, which I cherish and uphold with the greatest respect.  

Annabel Schweikert

...oral history is such a gradual process, taking not only years, but generations. These are stories that pass down sacred knowledge, which in turn preserves culture. I watched with joy as Uncle Max’s young granddaughter listened intently to his every word; Yuin stories safely reside in her heart and mind.  

Rachel O’Shea

Uncle Max’s family was extremely welcoming; we had meals together and shared words for the last two nights. What stood out for me was the stories told by Uncle Max, Uncle Max II, Auntie Rayma, and Uncle Max’s two daughters about racism in modern-day Australia.  

Ella Ryan

The strong wind made our experience at the Biamunga site a challenge, but it a difficult space to do ceremony. That place saw such destruction but amazingly one where we could aim with Uncle Max to positively energise. What a powerful allegory
of black/white relations in this nation: amidst the loss and the discrimination stands the desire to connect and to try to understand.

Marshall Leaver

We were able to paint Uncle Max’s totem and a butterfly for Rayma. It was good that we could involve people in the mural and to give something to the community that the children would love.

Madeleine Elliot

After spending time playing with five young boys and one girl, we were fortunate enough to have a ‘tour’ of the community with them. They showed us (Ella, Mia S and I) down to Wreck Bay beach and I was amazed with the confidence these young boys showed. Whilst walking around they were able to tell us many dreaming stories. For example; the sky was a bright blue and the sun was shining as a big black bird flew overhead Jeffery told us it was going to start raining, in disbelief we continued, but sure it happened an hour later it started raining. The respect that these young boys had for their culture was inspiring and a strong connection was felt especially when departing with the kids.

Madeleine O’Hehir

‘Giving It Away to Keep It’

My first stage in giving away to keep it was sharing my experience with my family and close friends. My family and friends did not know what we had experienced and so they were incredibly interested and inspired when I shared with them some of the things I personally experienced. I feel that when I told them some of my stories, they were very open minded and gained a strong respect for the Aboriginal culture.

Eva Contos

Whenever I hear something false about Aboriginal culture I want to share with people what I have learnt. I am willing to stand up especially if it is offensive as I have heard stories from Auntie Rayma and Uncle Max about the racism they have experience. I know personally I would never want to be put in that kind of position and inequality is a horrible thing to be proud of.

Eliza Cook
While keeping it I could also give it away by having silent moments when walking with friends in a sacred place. I feel as though this experience will stay with me forever, as it was very over-whelming in a positive way.

Alisha Culverson

Something that I can take back from my experience in the Wreck Bay Program is that one doesn’t have to be surrounded by natural beauty to appreciate the land. This was demonstrated when Uncle Max proposed the idea of greeting the Sun back home, even in the city. I think this is really important because I was unaware of the absence of my connection with the land I call home, but am immeasurably grateful for re-establishing it.

Madeleine Elliot

I just hope to fight for the equality I believe in. That does not mean protesting or starting chaos but instead helping out where I can. This could be volunteering helping out in my Redfern community and just telling others how I feel if they have the ears to listen.

Samala Norman

I think by telling people in other years to get involved in this amazing program is the best way of teaching others, because the experiences I had are ones that you will never achieve in the classroom. They are experiences that are purely first hand and no number of stories can teach you and make you understand this much about Aboriginal culture and life.

Phoebe Pugh

The notion of ‘give it away to keep it’ initially sounded strange to me, because Western culture focuses very much on personal ownership. This journey allowed me to see how giving it away could result in a stronger cultural identity. Uncle Max’s legacy of sharing Indigenous culture with anyone who was interested is inspiring, and I am amazed at his ability to live one day at a time and to forgive those who have done him wrong.

Mia Sturt

I will grow my connectedness with the Aboriginal culture in the future by really just raising awareness of the issues in community that are unknown to most Australians and to encourage those to immerse themselves in the Aboriginal culture just as much as I did. Although I only dipped my toe in the ocean of Aboriginal culture, I feel like it has already really impacted on my life and the way I see things.

Isabella Urquhart
I was able to acknowledge a new connection I had found to the land and water in Narooma. Performing the Whale dance on the beach that morning brought out a great presence inside of me. I recall the experience as being surreal, the sand in my toes, sunrise, washing of the waves and the sound of the clapping sticks for me in the moment felt normal, as if I had been doing it everyday of my life. Though the experience felt extremely special and sacred. It left me with a feeling inside like butterflies in the stomach and currents of electricity sparking through my whole body, a feeling I had only experienced a few times before on the trip when hugging Uncle Max at the greeting of Grandfather every morning. I thought that this energy transfer I had received had come from the ocean as we had represented the whales swimming north. This same experience then occurred again when I had my back against a rock climbing Gulaga. This surreal energy I picked up, I feel represents my developed connection to the land and water. I cannot explain in words how I feel or what I feel I have spiritually experienced but my personal connection to the land and water around me has opened my eyes to the rest of the world and to Aboriginal people.

Samala Norman