

# Connecting to Country

“Connecting to Country”, a Cultural Experience Day for young Aboriginal girls in senior-primary and secondary schools in Geelong, was organised by the Geelong female Koorie Engagement Support Officers, together with Kerrie Black, Community Engagement Worker at Wathaurong Cooperative and supported by Narana Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Parks Victoria and the Local Indigenous Network (LIN). “Connecting to Country” was held on Wednesday 21st October, Geelong Cup Day. As “Connecting to Country” was held on the Geelong Cup Day public holiday, the girls involved didn’t miss school, and instead, opted to spend their public holiday participating in this cultural experience day, with activities such as visits to significant sites, cultural heritage presentations, and culturally-appropriate activities for Aboriginal females.

The 14 students involved came from eight different primary and secondary schools- Grovedale College, Northern Bay College- Goldsworthy and Wexford campuses, Surf Coast Secondary College, Oberon High School, East Geelong and Highton primary schools, as well as two girls from alternative education programs, YES- Youth Education Space and MacKillop Education Services, and ranged from Grade 5 through to Year 11.



The girls arrived at the You Yangs National Park, and were met by David Flagg- Indigenous Park Ranger with Parks Victoria. David gave a brief explanation of the significance of the sites in and around the You Yangs, to the Wathaurong people, as well as the impact and devastation of the natural environment and sites, prior to the area becoming a National Park. David pointed out bush-tucker and bush-medicine plants, and their specific uses. Most of the girls had a taste of the bush-tucker.



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Lisa Couzens, our presenter for the day, brought along the possum-Skin Cloak created by her sister Vicki Couzens and the Gunditjmara Community for the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games opening ceremony. Lisa explained the significance and uses of possum-skin cloak, and the different symbols and illustrations which decorated the cloak. The girls were invited to wear the cloak.



We then travelled to Flinders' Peak walking track, spotted "Nova" the koala on the way, and most of the students made the return-walk to the summit, where Bunjil was seen hovering above.

Next, at the Wurdi Youang Indigenous Protected Area, Reg Abrahams, Cultural Heritage Officer with Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-Op provided girls with knowledge around the significance and pre- and post- contact history of the Wurdi Youang site. After a BBQ lunch, provided by Shane Bell from the LIN, the girls guided by Lisa Couzens, created their own possum-skin arm bands, jewellery and painted-rocks, using traditional Aboriginal symbols, as well as their individual designs, to symbolise their journey as young Aboriginal women.



Lead by Reg the participants explored the Wurdi Youang stone arrangement, and listened as Reg explained the placement of the stones in regards to the You Yangs, the Three Sisters, the Winter and Summer Solstice and the Equinox. This stone arrangement was created by the Wathaurong people anywhere between 25000 BC to about 1835 AD. (For more information on this highly significant cultural site please follow this link <http://www2.astronomicalheritage.net/index.php/show-entity?identity=15&idsubentity=1>). At the Wurdi Youang site the girls searched for and found many Aboriginal artefacts, such as stone flakes, that were identified through the tool-markings and shape of the stones. Kerrie Black was able to relate the Dreamtime story of the Three Sisters to the girls- for most, it was the first time they had heard the story. Feedback from the girls suggested that this was one of the highlights of the day.

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Overall, 'Connecting to Country' was a successful day that allowed the girls involved to connect with Country, Culture and each-other. The feedback from the girls shows they enjoyed the day, and found value in the opportunity to connect with other Koorie girls and participate in cultural activities and learning, outside of the school environment. The KESOs are currently having discussions around the next "Connecting to Country" for the girls as many expressed interest in this becoming a regular program.

*"It was awesome! And educational! 10/10! 100%!!"*

*"Overall, was a good day. Would do it again."*

*"It was great!"*

*"It was awesome learning more stuff about our culture."*

*"This was an amazing experience and I learnt a lot!"*

If you have any questions or suggestions, or wish to be involved in the next "Connecting to Country" day (planning for Term 4), please contact Geelong KESOs:

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SWW LOCAL INDIGENOUS NETWORK



Narana  
Aboriginal Cultural Centre