

# Culturescape: An Ecology of Bundanon

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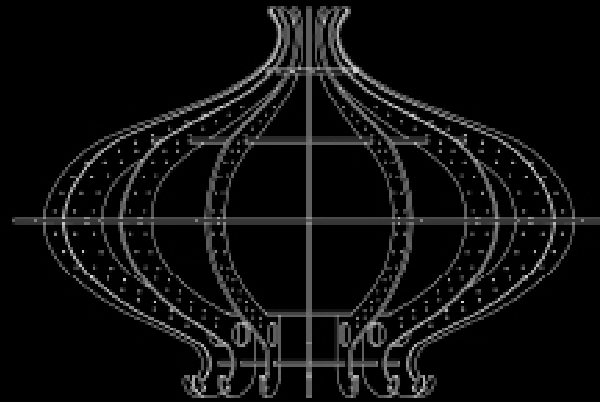
# Culturescape: An Ecology of Bundanon Nigel Helyer & John Potts

**BUNDANON**TRUST

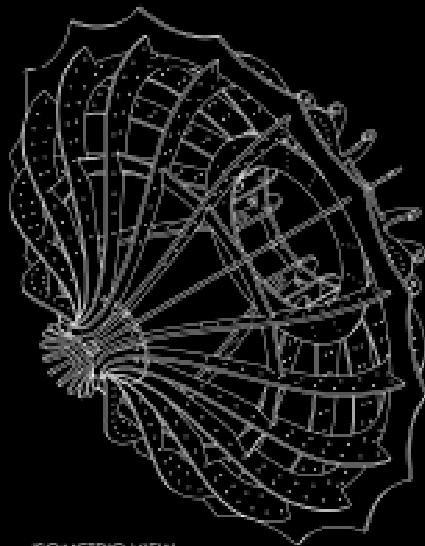


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Construction Drawings  
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Above: Arthur Boyd,  
*A Pond for Narcissus with Lilly-Pilly trees*, 1978.  
 Oil on board 296 x 200 mm  
 Bundanon Trust Collection  
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## One: Landscape /Culturescape

What is it to know a place, and how is it that we know? Do we slowly accumulate intimate details gathered during repeated visits to a familiar terrain, or are we perhaps transfixed and transformed by an encounter with a solitary natural phenomenon? As with most complex questions, the answer is almost certainly the interplay between approaches—resulting in the formation of a third way that hybridises the familiar with the exceptional.

Do we analyse the landscape, or experience it, perhaps through walking? Does our knowledge of the place's history colour our experience of that place in the present? Do we study the environment, including its history, or do we live inside that environment? Does imagination shape our perception of place? Can we appreciate a place through artworks created there, including paintings of the landscape?

The place in question is Bundanon, in the Shoalhaven River Valley, NSW: a vast property of 1100 hectares overseen by the Bundanon Trust since 1993. We have contributed to the Trust's annual Siteworks festival as a means of manifesting our reflections upon and relationships to the landscape. We hope to act not as distant and impartial observers but situated within the terrain, moving through it and working with it.

There are many paths to Bundanon, and we take them all in the process of making this book. We consider the history of Bundanon—its natural and cultural history—describing the many factors that have shaped the environment of this place. We conduct a scientific analysis of the soil in the Shoalhaven River Valley, analysing this environmental data to reveal the impact of decades of human habitation. We use the same technique of environmental science to examine the paint used in an unfinished Arthur Boyd painting, on display in the Artist's Studio at Bundanon. We survey the terrain of Bundanon with drone footage, tracing the Shoalhaven River and paths across the property. We walk across some of those paths, describing the landscape and some of its history. We glean differing perspectives on Bundanon through its depiction in the landscape paintings of Arthur Boyd, and through a series of artworks by Nigel Helyer, all initially exhibited at Bundanon.

We have set out to create a portrait of a landscape—a simple enough task, it may seem, but one that begs the question: how might a portrait be conceived, and what actually constitutes a landscape? Our





approach is to think about landscape as an amalgam of lives, cultures, histories, biologies and economies; never the one thing, always a jostling of the many; the different and incommensurate; some obvious voices, some which are quiet and hidden.

We have called our environmental portrait of Bundanon a ‘culturescape’ for a number of reasons. We describe the landscape of Bundanon: the Shoalhaven River flowing through the escarpment, the floodplains near the Bundanon homestead, the wildlife and eleven vegetation communities contained on the property. But Bundanon is also a cultural site: an artists’ retreat and education centre. Every year more than 300 artists from around the world take up residence at Bundanon, working on artworks in all forms and media. Bundanon was the home of Arthur Boyd, and the Bundanon Trust holds the Boyd archive and many of his paintings; his studio remains intact near the homestead.

*Culturescape* is a work of ecological aesthetics, as defined by David George Haskell in his recent book *The Songs of Trees*. For Haskell, ecological aesthetics describes ‘sustained, embodied relationship within a particular part of the community of life.’<sup>1</sup> This community or network is an intersection of natural and cultural elements. It comprises the natural forms of the environment, but also ‘humans in our various

modes of being within the biological network,’ including ‘watchers, hunters, loggers, farmers, eaters, story singers’. Ecological aesthetics represents ‘not a retreat into an imagined wilderness where humans have no place but a step toward belonging in all its dimensions.’<sup>2</sup> Our environmental portrait of Bundanon describes the natural landscape, but also the cultural shaping of the environment, through land-clearing, farming, mining and recent re-vegetation. Landscape itself is a cultural concept; the landscape of Bundanon is ultimately a culturescape.

## Science Meets Art, Strikes Up a Conversation

This book is part of the Australian Research Council project *When Science Meets Art: an Environmental Portrait of the Shoalhaven River Valley*. The book is one of a series of creative works that underpin the project—all of them hybrids of art and science, of *poiesis* and *techne*. Our primary aim is to produce a creative work which is compelling and affective but which simultaneously contains the possibility of scientific utility; tapping into both sides of the brain.

When Arthur Boyd donated Bundanon to the Australian Commonwealth in 1993, he envisaged it as ‘a place to be used as a forum where those from every facet of the arts and science could get together’. Collaboration and interaction were essential: ‘I like the idea of people talking to one another,’ he stated.<sup>3</sup> This book, with its collaboration between art and science, its focus on the landscape and environment of Bundanon, develops the spirit of creative inquiry advocated by Arthur Boyd.

In collaboration with environmental scientist Mark Patrick Taylor, our overall aim is to create a complete environmental portrait of the Bundanon region. In pursuing this aim, we have used techniques of environmental science, artistic practice, information technology, media technology and cultural history. Science meets art in the fusion of data—collected by environmental scientists—with the communication of this information through artworks and media technology. The artworks by Nigel Helyer documented in this book have been created as part of this process; each conveys part of the greater environmental portrait undertaken by the research project.

The research process involves the analysis of soil quality by a team led by Mark Patrick Taylor. The data representing environmental quality is digitally transformed into visual information and sound, and communicated on the *Culturescape* website devoted to the project: [culturescape.net.au](http://culturescape.net.au). Visitors to Bundanon can access the visual and aural displays of environmental data through GPS on their smartphones as they move around the property. The environmental portrait of Bun-

danon also incorporates the social and cultural history of the region, as it relates to its environmental condition. Social history is included as it embodies the environmental shaping of the region. The sights and sounds of nature, and of cultural history, are invoked within the multi-voiced environmental portrait of Bundanon.

## Place Has Difference of Opinion with Space

What is place; how does it differ from space? What do we mean when we speak of a place?

The distinction between place and space has been made in a number of disciplines, including architecture and human geography, since the 1970s. Place is understood as the subjective rendering of space, the personal appreciation of a section of space or territory. The architect and theorist Colin Ripley remarked that place emerged in architectural thought in the late 1960s as an ‘antidote’ to the modernist conception of space. The ‘homogeneous and abstract built world’ constructed by modernist architecture began to appear disenchanted and ‘devoid of poetry’ to many architects in the 1970s. A more sensitive architectural practice valued place over abstract space, enabling a ‘poetical dwelling’ as well as greater harmony with the environment.<sup>4</sup> Place was further emphasised in human geography in Yi-fu Tuan’s book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977): Tuan focused on the significance of human experience in constructing and defining places.

Recent writing on place has emphasised the complexity of the personal rendering of space, incorporating memory and history of place. Lucy Lippard’s book *The Lure of the Local* defined a city as ‘a layered location replete with human histories and memories.’<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Solnit’s *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas* proposed an infinite number of subjective maps of a city, comprising the personal experiences of all those who traverse the city’s space. For Solnit, ‘every place is if not infinite then practically inexhaustible.’<sup>6</sup> This complexity of time and space applies to rural environments as well as urban spaces: every place has a history that shapes our appreciation of the place in the present.

One of the most powerful ways of evoking place is by using sound. Theorists of sound art and acoustic ecology have been particularly attuned to the function of sound in recreating the experience of being in a specific place. Because sound fills space, it is strikingly effective in conjuring the experience of place or ‘soundscape’, as sound artist R. Murray Schafer wrote in his highly influential 1977 book *The Tuning of the World*. Generations of artists working with sound have evoked place using recording technology; this evocation may take the form of a recreation of sounds within a specific space, or a creative response to the sonic profile of a par-



ticular environment. As the sound artist Ros Bandt has observed: ‘place is constructed, remembered, embodied, restored and re-created through certain aural signatures that enable us to interact with that place in new ways.’<sup>7</sup> What we hear in works of acoustic ecology is localised sound, an acoustic environment. We are hearing place, and experiencing some part—the auditory part—of being in that place.

## The Sounds of Bundanon: BioPod\_V01

Readers can experience the sounds of Bundanon through listening to audio recordings of Nigel Helyer’s *BioPod\_V01* at <http://bit.ly/2GvzPgV>

*BioPod\_V01* (2014) was a site-specific, micro-architectural sculpture designed to facilitate active listening in the natural environment. Moored in the centre of the lake at Bundanon, a sonically significant site at the property, the BioPod was a single-person floating capsule. This capsule allowed for an overnight acoustic vigil while floating on the lake. *BioPod\_V01* combined sculptural, architectural and acoustic experiences that could create an extended narrative of aural experience.

Participants were invited to make digital recordings of their sonic surroundings as well as their own voice as contributions to the ongoing sound archive—a type of ship’s log. Imagine a meditation cell, an escape





pod, a re-entry capsule, an ark, in which an overnight acoustic reverie can be recorded on the pod's user-audio system.

For many, the combined sensations of camping alone in the (extremely vocal) Australian bush and floating in the middle of a lake in total darkness proved a major challenge. But the temporary withdrawal from the quotidienne permits an acuity in listening, experience and thought—a brief period of transformation and identification with the environment.

The *BioPod Survival Manual* offered this advice for users:

*Our species makes a lot of noise; we have created a world in which silence is a rare commodity. The BioPod invites you to spend an overnight acoustic vigil where you can maintain your silence and listen to the voices of other species.*

*During your overnight stay you are invited to make a series of short audio recordings of the soundscape and to also record a personal audio-log reflecting on your experience. Please also sign the visitors book and leave a short written commentary.*

Participants 'camped' overnight in the pod, equipped with high-quality sound technology to record the sounds of their environment as well as their thoughts.

One participant, Cecelia Cmielewski, has described her first sight of the BioPod on the Bundanon lake: *Just glimpsed, through rising mist, an improbable tent floats slowly around the edges of a lake. The tent is buffeted by breezes and moves gently on the lake, held just above the water's surface by a platform barge.*

She then recounts her experience of inhabiting the BioPod, and listening within it. A night listening on the lake invites a 'deeper consideration of the biology of the lake', opening up 'a sonic world that feels like prehistory': *Kangaroos thump loudly as they come to and from the lake to drink; frogs are abundantly loud and varied; egrets and kookaburras swoop close by, wings touching the water; the smallest of insects are out and about. It is not peaceful; it is a rowdy, hectic cacophony and one not heard during the day, but only at night in places where people don't often go.*

The BioPod presents, Ciemelewski adds, an apparently simple proposition—stay on a lake overnight—that 'slowly reveals a complex world that cannot be seen, only heard': *The result is a disarmingly humbling experience in which the human is completely disregarded and not required. For a moment, it is as if the Anthropocene had not begun.*<sup>8</sup>

The listener within the BioPod—and listeners to BioPod recordings—are witnesses to some of the natural sounds comprising the place of Bundanon.

Let us return to Haskell's ecological aesthetics and the community of life, in which we participate as 'watchers, hunters, loggers, farmers, eaters, story singers'. All of the creative works that we have contributed to this process of knowing the Culturescape of Bundanon involve listening—so to Haskell's list we propose to add: 'listeners'.

1 David George Haskell, *The Songs of Trees*, pp. 148-149

2 Ibid., p. 149.

3 *Siteworks: Field Guide to Bundanon*, Bundanon Trust, 2014, p. 236.

4 Colin Ripley, 'Hearing Places: Sound in Architectural Thought and Practice', p. 87. Ripley cites Christian Norberg-Schultz's *Intentions in Architecture* (1968) as an early and influential study of architecture and place.

5 Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentred Society*, p. 7.

6 Rebecca Solnit, *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas*, p. 2.

7 Ros Bandt, Michelle Duffy and Dolly MacKinnon, 'Introduction' in Bandt et. al. (eds) *Hearing Places*, p. 1.

8 Cecelia Cmielewski, 'Edges, Proximity and the Creative Leap', p. 3





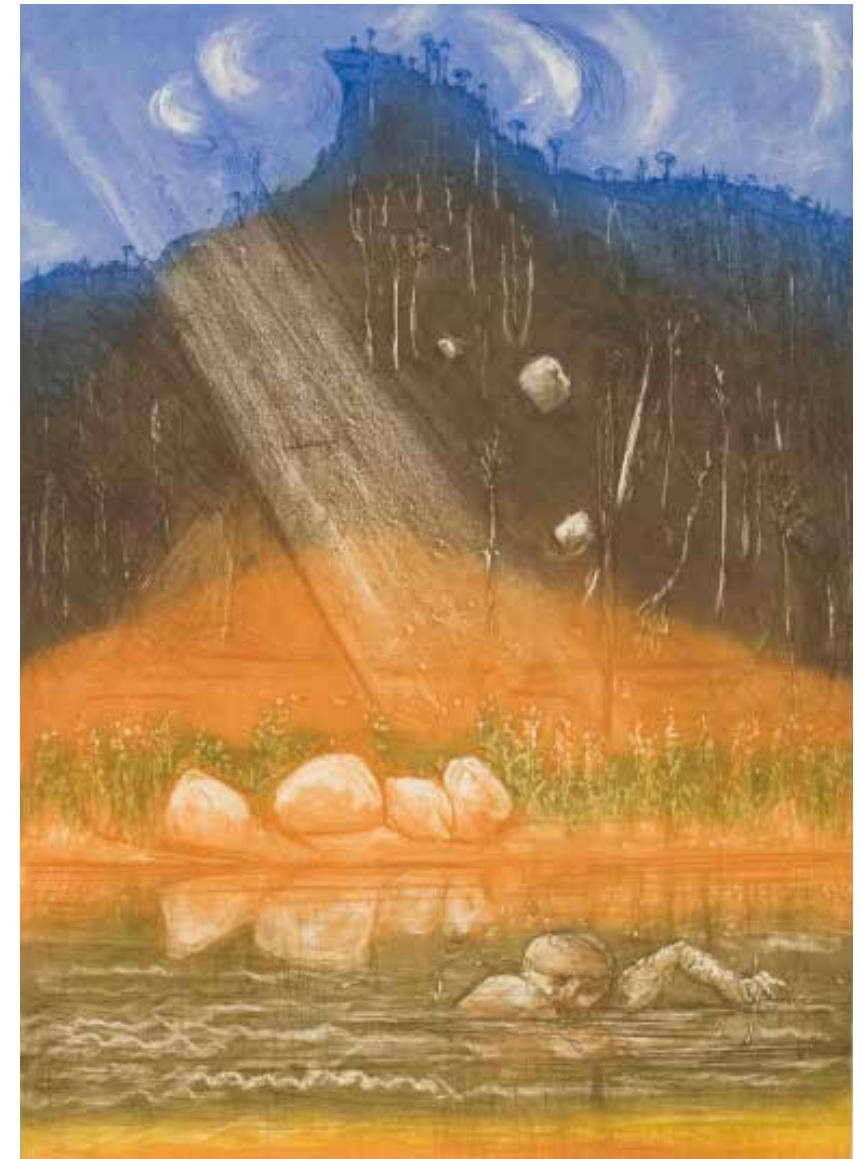
## Two: Land/Site

The Bundanon region is the site of our environmental portrait because of its distinctive natural and cultural character. The Bundanon properties, totalling 1100 hectares, have been overseen by the Bundanon Trust since 1993, when Arthur and Yvonne Boyd made a gift of Bundanon to the Australian people. The Boyds' gift to the Commonwealth included adjoining properties Riversdale, Earie Park and Beeweeree, as well as the Bundanon homestead, artist studio, and a significant collection of artworks and archive material. Bundanon is today an artists' retreat, accommodating over 300 artists annually in rustic isolation, and an education site visited by thousands of students every year.

The 1100 hectares, situated on a winding section of the Shoalhaven River, incorporate eleven different vegetation communities, an abundance of flora as well as native wildlife. The property has 91% healthy natural bushland with 9% cleared agricultural land. The Beeweeree and Earie Park properties were previously agricultural ones dating back to the mid 19th century. There are 40 hectares of cattle grazing pasture, and 11 hectares of built areas.

Bundanon is situated on the northern banks of the Shoalhaven River. The landscape includes coastal floodplains, visible on the interactive map. The topography also features escarpments, plateaus and slopes. The underlying rock formation dates to the Permian Age (270 million years before the present), encompassing sandstone and siltstone. Erosion of sandstone escarpments has resulted in large and spectacular rock formations, including Pulpit Rock, a feature of the landscape painted frequently by Arthur Boyd.

The landscape is central to the Trust's activities, which include replanting of native vegetation, and the removal of exotic weed species from the riverbanks. Some of the artworks completed by artists-in-residence at Bundanon have been based on, and within, the landscape. Janet Laurence's *Treelines Track* (2014—ongoing), for instance, is a walk that traces the history of plants and plantings at Bundanon. In *The Lantana Project* (2009), Gary Warner left an impression on the landscape by removing the weed lantana over a three-week period; he has revisited the project every year during the Siteworks festival weekend at Bundanon. The 'terrible scourge' of lantana, choking the Shoalhaven riverbank, had been noted with dismay by Arthur Boyd in 1982.



Arthur Boyd  
*Bather, pulpit rock and rainshower*  
(*The Bundanon Suite*), 1993  
etching and aquatint on paper  
Bundanon Trust Collection  
Previous page: Photograph of Bundanon  
Property on the Shoalhaven River, taken from Pulpit  
Rock. Date and Photographer Unknown.  
Bundanon Trust Archive.



Mark Patrick Taylor  
sampling soil at Bundanon

## The Soil as Sound and Image

There are many ways of knowing a landscape and each approach reveals a different aspect of our relationship to the land. The varied traditional forms of landscape painting that developed in parallel with cartographic and topographic representation supplied vital economic and strategic information to expanding European societies, and were a key component of all voyages of exploration.

The advent of photography and in particular aerial photography has transformed our view of the landscapes which we inhabit. Traditional cartographic practices are now subsumed to a large degree by views from the heavens anchored to the surface by digital survey points. Satellites probe the planetary surface in spectra beyond our own faculties, mapping such phenomena as oceanic flows, vegetation distribution and pollution plumes.

It is within this expanded context of landscape imaging that we decided to create a representation of the terrain surrounding the Bundanon homestead that employs soil sampling as its approach. Our study of the landscape focused directly on the stuff of the land: its soil. This technique is able to reveal natural environmental processes as well as the effects of human habitation and work sites. The interactive en-

vironmental map at <http://culturescape.net.au> concerns the forensic analysis of minerals in the soil at the Shoalhaven catchment, as a means to understand human occupation and modification of the landscape, including contamination.

The online map provides a representation of environmental data - soil analysis - at 37 points, displaying that data as sound and image. For both the sonification and visualisation of data we employed a cut-off threshold, so that elements measured at the lower limit of their normalised data are not displayed. This allows the audio and visual display to focus on the most evident elements at each particular site.

We used a statistical process of normalisation so that the subtle variations of less common elements can be distinguished from the overwhelming abundance of extremely common elements, which in fact form the majority of every sample site. Common elements such as silica and iron for example would by simple percentage overwhelm rarer elements in the display of soil components. In our normalisation process each element has been treated individually as a distribution across all sample sites, and is therefore not in competition with other elements. The full data-set, without normalisation, showing mineral composition of the 122 soil sample data points, is available at [culturescape.net.au](http://culturescape.net.au).

The elements present at a specific location are visualised using a circle of element labels. The size of the individual element label circles in the ring of elements represents the amount of the element present at that location, relative to normalised measurements made across the whole site. Colour is used to identify the element's grouping in the periodic table which is traditionally organised so that elements are grouped by similar physical or chemical characteristics.

To create the sonification we mapped element numbers from the periodic table to musical notes, using an equal tempered scale. In our mapping, elements with low atomic numbers become low frequencies, and elements with high atomic numbers become high frequencies. The sound for each element is signified by a pure sine tone. The tempo of the element note pulses and volume are determined by the amount of the element present at that location, relative to normalised measurements made across the whole site (represented by the circle size). This means that faster, louder pulses indicate a relative abundance of that element and slower, softer pulses indicate that less of that element is present.

The soil sample data collected on-site might normally be used to create a series of complicated graphs that rely upon statistical techniques to highlight changes in the environment. However we have chosen a more intimate and embodied use of the data which, on the mobile app, allows visitors to the Bundanon site to walk in the landscape.



Users of the app, installed on a mobile device, may listen to a sonification of the mineral composition of the soil underfoot.

Each GPS-located sample point provides an analysis of the mineral composition, which for instance might indicate the traces of upstream mining or the presence of compounds from an old forge long since demolished. The data has been used to generate a subtly changing soundscape which represents these changes, as well as an accompanying visual index based upon the periodic table, in which the prevalent elements form a visual pattern illustrating the subsoil composition; archival photographs of Bundanon are also displayed at relevant points. The app for use at Bundanon is downloaded from [culturescape.net.au](http://culturescape.net.au).

### Footprints & Fingerprints: an Environmental Portrait of Bundanon

The environmental scientist Mark Patrick Taylor, a member of our project team, has examined the soil data collected from Bundanon and provided an environmental analysis entitled 'Footprints and Fingerprints'. The aim was to examine the Bundanon site's catchment changes in land use via analysis of environmental materials in soils, sediments and even paints. This analysis uses geochemical and environmental data to understand and explain legacy footprints and fingerprints of anthropogenic activities, that are now overlain across the culturally important Bundanon site.

The analysis examined surface and surface soils across the footprint created by the Bundanon site on the Shoalhaven floodplain. The study sampled surface soils at 122 points along with deep soil samples as a measure of background or natural catchment geochemistry, i.e. before European anthropogenic influence; 37 of these points are displayed on the environmental map. Soil samples were tested for 53 trace elements via an acid digest for total metals using inductively coupled mass spectrometry.

The environmental portrait investigates the geochemical footprint created by European occupation. Taylor notes that this 'began in earnest after the 600-acre Bundanon property was granted to Richard Henry Browne in 1832'; it was then purchased by Dr Kenneth Mackenzie in 1838. Impacts on surface soils from agricultural use include:

*the construction of former buildings and various land uses including a piggery, an orchard and blacksmiths. Other possible sources of localised impacts to surface soil geochemistry include the use of lead-based paint on the old cottages that remain on the site, and ad hoc gold processing that may have been carried out by the employees of Bundanon's former estate.<sup>1</sup>*



While the environmental setting of Bundanon is surrounded by natural bushland, it is well known that the upper reaches of the catchment of the Shoalhaven River were subject to exploration and mining for gold, predominantly from the 1860s to 1930s. The most well-known goldfield of Yawal lies in the headwater of the Shoalhaven, upstream from Bundanon; the Yawal goldfield was abandoned in the 1930s. However, the impact from resource extraction on the natural soil geochemistry has never before been characterised.

Taylor remarks that the existing information indicates that mining resulted in 'a range of upstream environmental impacts including deforestation, damming and sluicing.' Downstream, the 'fingerprints' of mining activities on the landscape are even less well known. However, Taylor finds that this knowledge-gap 'provides a unique opportunity to understand how mining affected the floodplain environments through the dispersal and accumulation of contaminants over time.'<sup>2</sup>

Taylor analysed floodplain sediments for gold, silver, lead and zinc, which are common contamination markers of anthropogenic





activity. The application of lead isotopic compositions to the deposited materials allows determination of the sources in the sediments. Sampling of floodplain sediments effectively provides a temporal sequence, with sediments aging with depth. Shifts in geochemical profile can be linked to the European catchment history relating to the ebb and flow of mining activity. At Bundanon, elements and minerals lie buried in the landscape tracing diagrams of human activity. Specks of alluvial gold washed down to the floodplain from worked-out mountain mine shafts; the mineral auras reveal the long-vanished outlines of farm buildings and the tell-tale chemical fallout from workplaces.

Taylor's environmental analysis of the soil concludes that:

*overall, surface concentrations of soils at Bundanon were very similar to those recorded at depth, with the median enrichment of surface soils being < 1. This indicates that there has been limited impact in terms of geochemical alteration of the natural concentrations of surface soils from any European anthropogenic activity. However, the soils did contain a clear fingerprint from early mining: the most enriched trace element in the Bundanon surface soils was gold (Au). Surface soils had a mean concentration of 6237 ppt (part per trillion), some 6.5 times above background values.<sup>3</sup>*

The point D1\_S10 on the interactive map shows the presence of gold in the soil sample.<sup>4</sup>

## A Dissimulation of Birds

In Chapter Four, we shift our focus from the soil to the minerals and metals extracted from the soil, when we analyse the chemical components of the paints used by Arthur Boyd in his studio at Bundanon. To conclude this chapter, we divert our gaze upwards: from the soil to the tree-tops; from the land to the skies: we turn our attention to the birds at Bundanon.

At the close of our multi-year association with the landscape and cultural community of Bundanon, Nigel Helyer created a small environmental work that playfully interrogated the nature/culture axis. *A Dissimulation of Birds* (2017) suggested that our capacity to communicate, and more so, our ability to sing, is directly related to our intimate evolutionary relationship with the acoustic genius of birds. Our species has internalised and evolved the trills and warbles of birdsong to form language and music. *A Dissimulation of Birds* pays homage to the virtuosity of our feathered friends and playfully manipulates sonic mimicry, human-on-bird and bird-on-human.

Installed against the trunks of two stately trees in the mature eucalypt forests that fringe the Shoalhaven River, the work mixes the almost perverse virtuosity of the Lyre Bird, rendering construction noises and electronic games; chatty Parakeets and Myna Birds against eighteenth century musical automata; cuckoo clocks and snatches from Olivier Messian's brilliant *Le Catalogue des Oiseaux*.

We smile at the cleverness of birds that can mimic human voices and human sounds, holding up to us a mirror of acoustic vanity—while ironically we forget that it was the birds that prompted our distant ancestors to sing. Indeed the lighthearted touch of the work belies the deep undercurrents of human evolutionary pre-history entwined with and engendered by the even deeper evolutionary history of birdsong—a history which we now know, originated in Australia.

1 Mark Patrick Taylor, 'Geochemical Footprints and Fingerprints of European Occupation at Bundanon', p. 42.

2 Ibid., p. 42.

3 Mark Patrick Taylor, 'Footprints and Fingerprints' at <https://www.culturescape.net.au/about/footprints-and-fingerprints/>

4 For a more detailed environmental analysis, see Mark Patrick Taylor, 'Geochemical Footprints and Fingerprints of European Occupation at Bundanon', at <https://www.culturescape.net.au/resources/readings-2/#GeochemFootprints>.

Also: Nigel Helyer, John Potts and Mark Patrick Taylor, 'Heavy Metal: an Interactive Environmental Art Installation' in *Leonardo Music Journal* Vol. 28, 2018, pp. 8-12.



# Three: Environmental History of Bundanon

One of the fascinating aspects of Bundanon is that the region's social and cultural history has left an imprint on the landscape. We are able to trace an environmental history of the region, revealing the 'footprints and fingerprints' left by human activity over decades, even millennia.

## Indigenous

The Indigenous people whose traditional country encompassed the contemporary Bundanon Trust properties were part of the Yuin group, with close ties to the Wodi Wodi people to the north. An Indigenous Cultural Heritage Plan commissioned by Bundanon Trust in 2011 found only two sets of axe-grinding grooves and possible stone tools in the region. The scant traces of habitation suggest that the lower Shoalhaven was an area moved through rather than settled; the wetlands downstream and coastal zones were the likely centre of population pre-European contact. The river was an important means of travel by canoe, providing 'a transport corridor to food, resources, ceremony and ritual, rather than a place in which people settled'.<sup>1</sup> Extended family groups moved through their country responding to seasonal availability of resources, managing country by fire. These groups came together with others for ceremonies or activities such as kangaroo drives or burning country.<sup>2</sup>

Leah Gibbs, in her study of art-science collaborations exhibited at Siteworks, notes that the 'passing-through' aspect of Indigenous movement through country has remained a characteristic of occupancy of the Bundanon territory. With the exception of the MacKenzie family, which settled at Bundanon from 1838 to 1926, settler families and farmers did not stay on the land for many generations, especially in the twentieth century. Arthur Boyd and his family lived at Riversdale and Bundanon for only a short time, on and off for 25 years, and Boyd was frequently quoted as disavowing ownership of the place: 'you can't own a landscape.'<sup>3</sup> The 'passing-through' at Bundanon continues today with the short-term visits by artists, from around the world, on residencies.



Maids and farmhands outside the servants' quarters at Bundanon, c. 1890  
Bundanon Trust Archive  
Previous: Indigenous dancers at the opening of Nigel Helyer's *Heavy Metal* at Siteworks, Bundanon, 2016

## Farming

European occupation brought a radical transformation of the landscape, through tree-felling and then clearing for agriculture. Cedar-cutters felled valuable red cedar trees (cedar was reportedly Australia's first export) from 1811; in 1812 there were nine ships transporting cedar back to Sydney. The clearing of the forest removed the site of traditional Indigenous life, and opened the land for agriculture. 600 acres of land were sold to R. H. Browne in 1832, on the condition that '55 acres were to be cleared and cultivated and fences erected.'<sup>4</sup> This and other adjoining properties were bought by Dr Kenneth MacKenzie in 1838; the MacKenzie family endured severe periodic flooding of the Shoalhaven River to establish their farm and farm buildings. The destructive flood of 1860, which wiped away buildings along the river, prompted MacKenzie's building in 1866 of the two-storey homestead, built of sandstone and local cedar, along Georgian lines and on high ground: earlier floods dictated where the homestead





Bundanon house  
from the South East, 1918.  
Bundanon Trust Archive

should be located. This house, which took more than twenty years to build, is today open to the public as the former house of Arthur Boyd.

After Dr MacKenzie's death in 1879, the Bundanon property was inherited by his son Hugh. The MacKenzie agricultural estate of Bundanon focused on dairy farming and maize and lucerne crops. Up to 600 bags of corn were harvested yearly and stored in barns; access to Nowra was by river ferry. By the early twentieth century, the Bundanon homestead was the central building of a working farm that included stables, a curing shed, orchard, vegetable garden, pigpens, dairy, beehives, as well as a schoolhouse, a smithy, laundry and buggy shed.

A separate servants' quarters accommodated three or four domestic staff working in the homestead, which served as a social centre. Bundanon was home to up to thirty people, including the MacKenzie family and five to six labourers/servant families, accommodated in workers' cottages and the singleman's hut across the lagoon. Dances were frequently held in the main room of the homestead, attended by family, farm workers, and neighbours.

## Weather Writing

Other farmers cleared and cultivated land in adjoining areas, among them the Biddulph brothers, who owned Earie Park. The Biddulph diaries are used as a source by Nigel Helyer in his work *Milk and Honey* (2012); these diaries display a farmer's sensitivity to the weather, the productivity of the land, and a watchful eye on the river (there were disastrous floods in 1870, 1891 and 1898, and flooding of the Shoalhaven River remained a frequent problem until the completion of the Tallowa dam in 1976).

At the outset farming life was an amalgam of husbandry and living off the land, as the screed of European habits, beliefs and agricultural practices was overlaid upon a very different environment and climate. Northern hemisphere husbandry was never guaranteed to be successful and the ability to adapt crops and cropping techniques was vital, as was the augmentation of diet by hunting native animals - a constant feature in the farm diaries of the period.

Reading through the diaries by Thomas Tregenna Biddulph (for the years 1882, 1890 and 1892), the prominence and frequent dominance of the river is foremost. The river is a vital source of transport for farm goods and household necessities to and from the coastal settlement of Nowra, as well as a key to social intercourse within the scattered community: attending church and choir practice, cricket matches, rowing regattas and a conduit for the latest news, letters and fashions from England.

The river and the climate provided the primeval pull for this new life, so remote and fundamentally different from the farmers' origins. In some way these powerful natural forces must have provided a psychological foil to their understanding of the world. Here nature was writ large and untrammelled; here wooded parklands were replaced by impenetrable wilderness, and rolling green hills by fissured canyons of ancient rock. Here rivers roared and flooded plains and forests might vapourise in minutes: it was clear who—or what—was in charge.

In her book *Weatherland: Writers and Artists Under English Skies*, Alexandra Harris chronicles the changing ways in which the weather has been represented by English writers and artists. By focusing on the weather, Harris reveals a remarkable cultural history, full of unexpected shifts in attitudes to the weather as well as sensitivity to the environment. She finds, for example, that texts from the Anglo-Saxon period expressed 'incomparable subtlety' in their perception of cold and winter, but displayed no interest in warmth, the sun, spring or summer.<sup>5</sup> The Renaissance taste for weather, by contrast, was for extremes of meteorological drama, of 'heraldic suns and tempests': 'the spring is always sunny and winter always icy, and the small daily variations in atmosphere go largely unrecorded.'<sup>6</sup>





The punt approaching  
Bundanon, late 1920  
Bundanon Trust Archive

Harris notes a gradual increase in 'weather-consciousness', particularly as annotated in diaries, in the late seventeenth century and into the eighteenth. This heightened attention to the daily weather corresponds to the growth of empirical observation characterising the scientific method. John Evelyn's diaries in the late seventeenth century, containing detailed observations of the weather, were intended as examples of 'experimental learning', the collection and analysis of natural data. His letter summarising his findings was published in 1684 by the recently founded Royal Society, which favoured the scientific analysis of weather, achieved with the aid of newly developed instruments such as the barometer. In 1667 Robert Hooke proposed to the Society a 'Method for Making a History of the Weather', based on instruments measuring temperature, humidity, air pressure and wind direction. As these meteorological instruments became widely available in the eighteenth century, 'weather-watching and diary-keeping would...be almost inseparable.'<sup>7</sup>

The diary of Thomas Tregenna Biddulph, held by the Shoalhaven Historical Society, is certainly not literature. But it is a fascinating and detailed account of every day's activities in that year, by a farmer liv-

ing and working in the Shoalhaven River valley. Each daily entry begins with a description of the weather. Changes to the weather, including the wind direction, could presage impacts on farming and the productivity of the land: a dry westerly wind in summer brings the risk of bushfires; a southerly wind carries the prospect of rain and the possible swelling of the river. The Biddulph diary of 1882 maintains a keen attention to the weather, the land and the river across the changes wrought by the seasons during that year.

#### **Summer:**

Jan. 11. Wed.

*Fearfully hot. ---- Boys went for a swim, Tattie came back from Burrier after breakfast, everybody done up with the heat and everything burnt up...Them. in verandah was 112° in shade.*

Jan. 30. Mon.

*Hot wind, thunder showers in aft...*

*Tattie and I picked some streaky apples for the show.*

#### **Autumn:**

March 7. Tue.

*Dull, with spits of rain. Tattie and Mary made some peach jam in the morning.*

March 12. Sun.

*Fine and hot. We all walked up to hear Mr Elder preach except Bob who was too tired.*

April 6. Thurs.

*Cold rain all day. Boys looked after the pigs and the punt and puddled around in the rain. Everything heavily wet and dreary. River up very high in the afternoon.*

April 29. Sat.

*Fine...I turned corn and went over to fish. Ted took horse down to Nowra and came back with Tattie at tea time.*

May 8. Mon.

*Mod. W. wind. Boys and I bagged up 12 bags and threshed what we had husked.*

#### **Winter:**

June 8. Thurs.

*Morn. dull, rain after dinner. Ted, Reggie and I finished threshing corn on the floor of barn...Jerry Mull came over to go to Burrier but it was too wet.*

June 24. Sat.

*Sharp, white frost. Bob and Joe went on ploughing.*

Aug. 20. Sun.

*Raining nearly all day...Everything very cold and wet.*

#### **Spring:**

Sept. 21. Thurs.

*Fine and warm. Bob went on ploughing flat...Wisteria out beautifully.*

Sept. 22. Fri.

*Warm W. wind...Bush fires all round. Boys had their first swim.*

Oct. 3. Tue.

*Fine...Ted got a calf and put it in garden to hand feed it. Tattie and Archie went fishing. Tattie caught one large perch.*

Oct. 17. Tue.

*Warm W. wind, S. in aft. Boys began planting corn in little paddock though ground was very dry.*



Moving beehives, Pulpit Rock  
in the background, late 1920s  
Bundanon Trust Archive

Oct. 25. Wed.

*Cold winds with showers. Boys and I threshed corn...River was up...Killed brown snake in corn while we were threshing.*

Oct. 29. Sun.

*Rain all day. River rising very fast and everything under water. Had a fire all day.*

**Summer:**

Dec. 26. Tue.

*Fine...I husked and chipped ink weed out of corn. Bob, Ted and Reggie went over to a spree at the Kennedys' barn in the evening.<sup>8</sup>*

## Milk and Honey

*Milk and Honey* was a precursor project by Nigel Helyer, which established much of the subsequent creative approach of *Culturescape*. Created in 2012, *Milk and Honey* was an eight-channel sound-sculpture installed in the music room of the old Bundanon homestead. The work invoked the voices and atmospheres, the actions and beliefs of generations of Bundanon settler inhabitants as they struggled to eke out a living in these strange surroundings.

A *land flowing with milk and honey* is the phrase from Exodus that describes the agricultural plenty of the chosen land. Early colonial settlers to the Shoalhaven region forged their own path toward realising this met-

aphor, in a life that melded European practices and stereotypes with an unknown, even unknowable, landscape.

As if stranded by some ancient flood, two sonic punts 'float' in the Bundanon homestead, carrying cargoes of milk and honey, sounding out their riverine environment with fragmentary voices in a strange new world.

*For when I shall have brought them into the land  
which I swear unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey;  
and they shall have eaten and filled themselves,  
and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods,  
and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant.  
(Deuteronomy 31.20)*

Old Testament voices mingle with the prosaic, terse entries from the Biddulph farm diaries. These diary writings summon a life of constant physical action and interaction; a life in which the ebbs and flows of the river provide both a daily pulse and a lifeline to the outside world; a life where the constant routines of farming are interrupted and supplemented by the more ancient rhythm of hunting and foraging in the bush:

Shipped 22 bags of corn on punt  
Picked preserving dish full of grapes to make jam  
Got a small swarm of bees, mother practiced her hymns  
Mother had a yarn with Hugh at Cowtails  
Caught some fowls to send down by peddlers boat  
Drummed down a swarm of bees  
Mother cut up some quinces and hung them to dry  
Took some eggs to peddlers boat  
Boys went shooting and got four pigeons and a lot of parrots.<sup>9</sup>

Cecelia Cmielewski experienced *Milk and Honey* at Bundanon, and recorded her impressions in the 2017 catalogue for the exhibition *Nigel Helyer: Landscape/Portrait: An Exploration of the Shoalhaven River Valley*:

*The Steinway usually has pride of place in the music room of the Bundanon homestead but the sounds of the working life of the farm, its workers and the creatures of its environs have taken over for a while. In Milk and Honey, hand-painted flannel flowers from the local bush adorn the almost-heritage milk cans inside the punts, whose oars and seats emit segments of the diaries written by those who lived and worked on the Bundanon farm. The piano is alive: fragments rise from its belly giving way to the sounds of bees; the slapping of oars against the water as the punt transports people and all manner of things to and from the farm on the fast-flowing river; the squirt of fresh cow's milk onto the side of galvanised buckets; and segments of a concert played on the Steinway by a family member, who stays at the homestead from time to time.<sup>10</sup>*



Helyer recorded all the sounds described by Cmielewski; the soundtrack of *Milk and Honey* is available at [www.culturescape.net.au/](http://www.culturescape.net.au/). The recordings included a feral bee's nest; the sounds of water slapping on the oars of a skiff; a dawn hand-milking of a cow; and Alexander Boyd playing the Bundanon homestead Steinway. Cmielewski continues her observations:

*Milk and Honey crosses time. The work conjures the past, the ways in which time passed on a farm on the Shoalhaven River and inside its genteel homestead...Milk and Honey is also very much in the present. The bees, the beef cattle herds, the piano playing are of our time. The piece re-creates a sense of the arduous repetition of farm life back then, without mod cons; the isolation, both blissful and demanding. Working the punt required attention to the river and its conditions, but also provided timeout and a chance for reverie on the smooth-flowing system. Helyer asks us to compare food production then and issues of food security now; the pace and rhythm of life then and now; the close proximity and forms of mobility and markets then and the ease and environmental havoc of the transport and dispersal of produce now. Milk and Honey provides a space for contemplation that can lead to an enquiry into the ways in which land management shapes the environment and those who live in it and benefit from it.<sup>11</sup>*

## Mining

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the catchment of the Shoalhaven River was subject to exploration and mining for gold predominantly from the 1860s to 1900.<sup>12</sup> The most well-known goldfield was that of Yawal, situated in the headwater of the Shoalhaven, upstream from Bundanon. The mines were last reworked during the depression years of the 1930s and have since been abandoned; but traces of gold remain in the flood-plain soil at Bundanon as displayed in our online environmental map.

## Artists' Community

Kenneth MacKenzie Jr inherited the Bundanon property in 1917 following the death of his father Hugh. But Kenneth and his daughter Helen drowned in the Shoalhaven River in 1922; the MacKenzie family left Bundanon altogether in 1926. For half a century the property was leased to tenant farmers, who grew maize and lucerne while running dairy and beef cattle. The next major transformation of the Bundanon landscape occurred in 1968, when the property was sold to art historian Sandra McGrath, her husband art dealer Tony McGrath, and art dealer Frank McDonald. Most of the working farm buildings and the schoolhouse were removed, trees planted, and an English-style cottage garden installed. The homestead was renovated and servants' quarters upgraded. A magazine article in the 1970s, entitled 'The Happy Valley', commented



that 'a Sydney art dealer has built a mid-nineteenth century landscape on a grand scale'.<sup>13</sup> Bundanon was now less a working farm than artists' community; it was this environment that Arthur Boyd visited in 1971.

## The Boyds

Arthur Boyd was so captivated by the landscape that he bought the nearby property Riversdale in 1974, then Bundanon itself in 1979. Boyd built his studio at the rear of the homestead in 1981 (the studio was the initial site of Nigel Helyer's work *Heavy Metal* in 2016).

During his tenure at Bundanon, Boyd fought to preserve the environment from development and damaging activities such as sand-mining. He was quoted many times in his disavowal of any ownership of Bundanon, and believed it his duty to protect the Bundanon landscape from contamination and development. 'You can't really own a piece of the earth as beautiful as this, you're only its custodian,' he told journalist Janet Hawley in 1998.<sup>14</sup> 'There is something dramatically wrong with one man owning a landscape,' he earlier told journalist Paul McGeough. 'You cannot take it with you. And I cannot bear to think of Bundanon being chopped up and ruined.'<sup>15</sup>

In 1981 he publicly opposed the proposal to mine sand and gravel from the Shoalhaven River at Wogamia. 'The environment will be harmed and the Shoalhaven region disadvantaged if agreement is given to the proposal,' he wrote to newspapers in a bid to foster opposition to the mining project.<sup>16</sup> Boyd's opposition to the sand mining proposal was part of a concerted effort by environmentalists to prevent this development. Boyd commenced an action in the Land and Environment Court, and commissioned a hydrologist and environmental expert to contest the environmental impact statement made for the mining at Wogamia. These reviews detailed damage to the environment that would ensue from the mining, including contamination of air quality, noise pollution, riverine pollution, traffic and visual pollution on the river. While the Shoalhaven City Council voted in favour of the project, Boyd won the case in the Court, having fought against the sandmining proposal at his own expense.<sup>17</sup> In 1982 the court found that the site for the mining operation fell outside the council's jurisdiction, and the approval of the mining development was overturned.<sup>18</sup>

Boyd realised his vision of protecting the natural and cultural heritage of Bundanon in 1993. The Commonwealth accepted Bundanon (and neighbouring properties Riversdale, Earle Park and Beeweer-ee, purchased by Boyd between 1974 and 1981) as a gift, establishing the Bundanon Trust. 'I wanted Bundanon made safe and secure, so all



Yvonne and Arthur Boyd  
outside Riversdale, 1980s.  
Bundanon Trust Archive

Australians can share this marvellous spot forever,' he told the press in 1995.<sup>19</sup> Boyd saw Bundanon as 'a place for the community to enjoy the bush and the river'<sup>20</sup>. It would also be a natural setting for artists and scientists to be stimulated in their creativity and research. When he wrote to Prime Minister Paul Keating in 1992, formally offering to donate Bundanon and his artistic works to the Commonwealth, Boyd wrote:

*I want Bundanon to provide a base for, and to stimulate and encourage our developing artists...It can provide a base for research whose use can be enriched by the beauty, the history, the landscape, the environment and by the energy and stimulation from social interaction with Australian creative artists.*<sup>21</sup>

## Bundanon Trust

Since 1993, Bundanon Trust has overseen Bundanon as an artist retreat and educational centre. The Trust has also shaped the natural environment of Bundanon in significant ways, implementing several programs to ensure the restoration and maintenance of the environmental features. Central to the work of the Trust has been arresting and eradicating





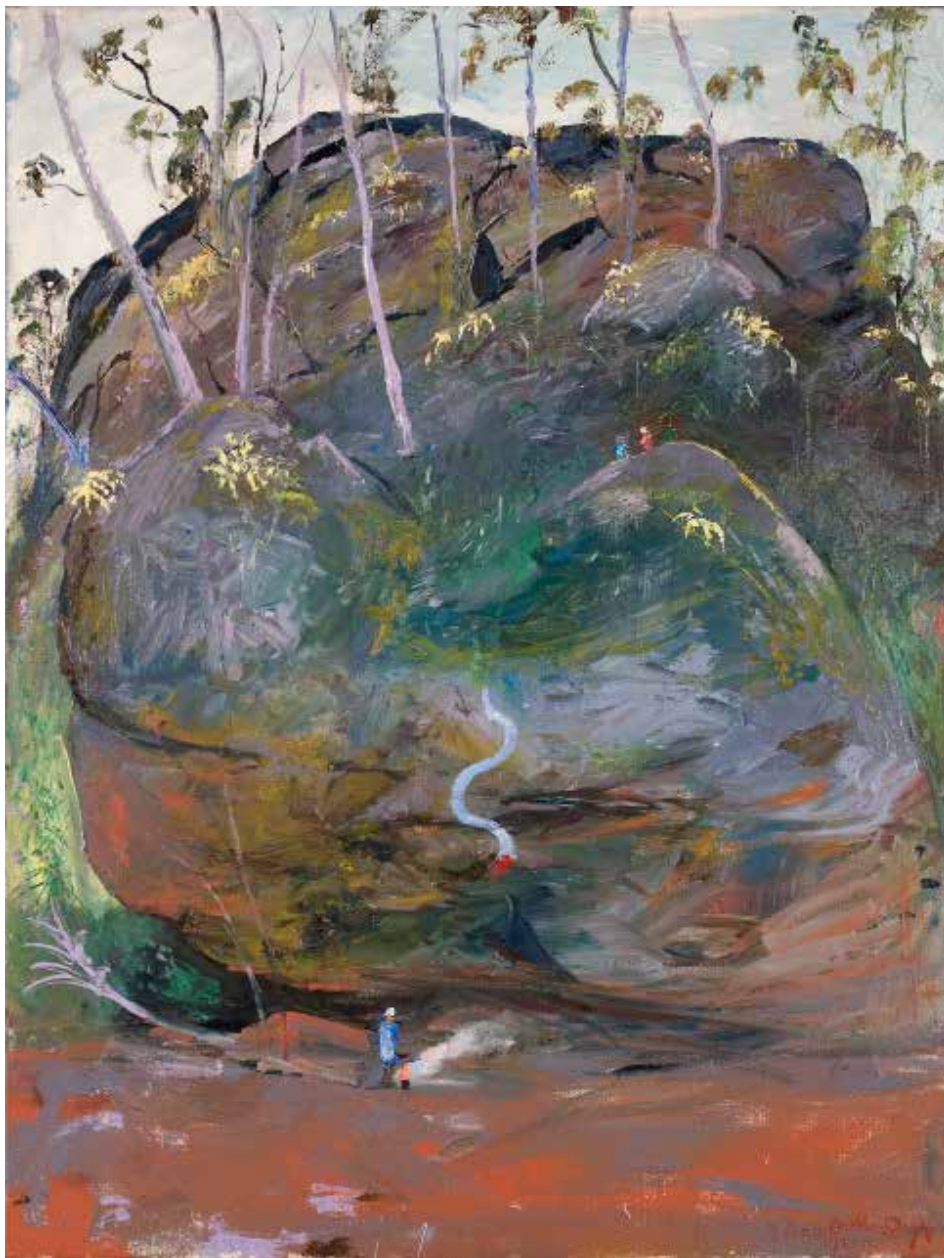
the invasion of weeds from the site while simultaneously increasing the level of bio-diversity. Bundanon Trust sees responsible stewardship of the environment as core to its mission and is committed to innovative, contemporary research in order to preserve the site. In 2010 a Land Management Plan was commissioned to help guide the environmental management for future years. It was completed in 2011 and has provided focus to the rehabilitation of the land.

Several initiatives across the properties have yielded significant results. Bundanon's Landcare Living Landscape project, a partnership with Landcare Australia, the Borland Bequest, Local Land Services and Greening Australia, commenced in 2012. This project mobilised teams of bush regenerators and Green Army teams to maintain gains made in restoring the landscape at Bundanon, Haunted Point, Earie Park and the Riversdale property. Over 84 hectares of land have been cleared of Lantana and other exotic weeds: extensive Lantana clearing has taken place near the Haunted Point Loop Walk and throughout the riparian zone at Bundanon. 70 hectares have been planted with native trees to bolster the banks of the Shoalhaven River, among other benefits. Former cattle grazing land at Earie Park has been transformed through the eradication of kikuyu grass and the planting of over 25,000 trees in the area.

All of the Trust's lands have been registered as a Wildlife Refuge since 1974; bushland areas are managed to protect the diversity of native species. Ecologists have recorded 1,297 species of native fauna and 1,146 native plants. Thirteen threatened species are known to occur on the property.<sup>22</sup> In 2017 the Bundanon Trust Landcare Group was re-formed to allow the community to assist with and learn from its work. In all, over 70,000 new plantings have been enacted across the properties, while native vegetation and wildlife have also returned to parts of the properties.

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- 1 Leah Gibbs, 'Art-science collaboration, embodied research methods, and the politics of belonging', p. 216.
  - 2 Sue Feary and Heather Moorcroft, *An Indigenous Cultural Heritage Plan for the Bundanon Trust Properties*, Bundanon Trust, 2011, pp 34-35.
  - 3 Leah Gibbs, 'Art-science collaboration', p. 216.
  - 4 *The Bundanon Trust Properties Heritage Management Plan*, Vol. 2, 2007, pp. 3-4.
  - 5 Alexandra Harris, *Weatherland*, p. 15.
  - 6 *Ibid.*, p. 87, p. 89.
  - 7 *Ibid.*, p. 166.
  - 8 Diary of Thomas Tregenna Biddulph, Burrier, 1882. Bundanon Trust Archive.
  - 9 Thomas Tregenna Biddulph extracts 1882, 1890 and 1892 diaries, Bundanon Trust Archive.
  - 10 Cecelia Cmielewski, 'Edges, Proximity and the Creative Leap', p. 30.
  - 11 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
  - 12 McGowan, B, 'Aspects of gold mining and mining communities in the Shoalhaven area of New South Wales: an archaeological and historical study', *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, 10, 1992, pp. 43-54.
  - 13 *The Bundanon Trust Properties Heritage Management Plan*, Vol. 2, 2007, p. 20.
  - 14 Janet Hawley, 'Leaving the Landscape', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 May 1998, p. 32.
  - 15 Paul McGeough, 'Portrait of the Artist as a Republican', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 January 1995, p. 8.
  - 16 Arthur Boyd letter, 22 August 1981, Bundanon Trust Archive.
  - 17 Darleen Bungey, *Arthur Boyd: a Life*, p. 518; Brenda Niall, *The Boyds: a Family Biography*, p. 377.
  - 18 *The Bundanon Trust Properties Heritage Management Plan* 2007 Vol. 1, p. 2: 4.
  - 19 Paul McGeough, 'Portrait of the Artist as a Republican', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 January 1995, p. 8.
  - 20 *Siteworks: Field Guide to Bundanon*, Bundanon Trust, 2014, p 236.
  - 21 Letter by Arthur Boyd to Paul Keating, 3 October 1992. Bundanon Trust Archive.
  - 22 Bundanon Achievement Document, 2018, Bundanon Trust.  
Mark Patrick Taylor, 'Geochemical Footprints and Fingerprints of European Occupation at Bundanon', p. 42.





Arthur Boyd  
*The Ampitheatre*, 1993, oil on canvas  
 1225 x 925 mm  
 Bundanon Trust Collection  
 Previous pages: Nigel Helyer's *BioPod\_V02*, 2015

## Four: Landscape Painter

Arthur Boyd disliked being called an artist: he found the word a 'phoney, romantic' description of his vocation. He told journalist Deborah Jones in 1993 that he preferred to be called a 'painter', or a 'tradesman'; and he added that the first step in pursuing that activity was a tradesmanlike 'getting off your backside and getting down to work.'<sup>1</sup> In his 1992 letter to Prime Minister Paul Keating, in which he offered the Bundanon property, along with his paintings, to the Australian Commonwealth, Boyd described himself as 'an Australian painter':

*I have always been proud to be recognised internationally as an Australian painter, because Australia, its landscape and her people, has continued to be my principal source of inspiration.*<sup>2</sup>

One particular part of the Australian landscape provided extraordinary inspiration for this Australian painter, who first encountered Bundanon on a ferociously hot day in December 1971.

Boyd had lived in England for twelve years when he accepted a Creative Arts Fellowship at the Australian National University, Canberra, in 1971. While in Canberra, he was invited by art dealer Frank McDonald to visit his property at Bundanon. Boyd told author Janet McKenzie in 1993 that 'it was absolutely searingly hot' on his Bundanon visit. 'I went painting down by the river and it was so hot that the paint ran into the sand.'<sup>3</sup>

'I went painting down by the river' is a typically modest account by Boyd of a renewed commitment to landscape painting undertaken by the artist at Bundanon. David Chalker, in his catalogue essay for an exhibition of Boyd landscapes at the University of Wollongong in 1994, saw a greater significance in Boyd's first painting down by the Shoalhaven River on that intensely hot summer day. Boyd's 'interest in landscape painting was re-awakened by the Shoalhaven,' Chalker maintains. 'Its moods and pictorial possibilities commenced their long seduction of Boyd'<sup>4</sup>:

*The heat and intense light, the landscape, including the river itself with its broad sweeping lines and sandy banks, and the rawness of the bush were redolent with challenges and new possibilities for Arthur Boyd. He seized the moment and painted plein air for the first time in more than a decade.*<sup>5</sup>

Boyd confirmed his love of the Bundanon landscape, and his love of painting within that landscape, in an interview with the *Illawarra Mercury* newspaper in 1995. Landscapes had always been his greatest



love, he said, and it was this love of painting landscapes that first drew him to the Shoalhaven. He had relished painting outside, ‘particularly around the Shoalhaven’:

*When I go out into the bush and sit down in front of rocks, trees or rivers, I get positive pleasure out of painting outside.*<sup>6</sup>

His Bundanon landscape paintings may have been finished in his studio, but they were generally begun outside, within the landscape itself.

After that first visit to Bundanon in 1971, Boyd—before returning to England—asked Frank McDonald to notify him if any property in the area similar to Bundanon became available. In July 1973 McDonald sent a letter to London with photographs of such a property:

*Apropos your remark ‘Do you know any others like’ the farm [Bundanon]: There is 140 acres with a derelict wooden cottage on the bend of the river a couple of miles downstream from us. The views are superb, you could build a little house there for not much money...*<sup>7</sup>

These photos delighted Arthur and Yvonne Boyd, prompting Arthur to send an urgent telegram to McDonald: ‘Thankyou for the wonderful photographs do not let it go we love it please try and secure it...’<sup>8</sup> McDonald acted quickly, sending a telegram back to London less than a month later with the news: ‘Today exchange contract on Riversdale for such has been its name all going as you wish and am delighted for us all Frank’.<sup>9</sup>

The Boyds returned to the Shoalhaven in October 1974, living at neighbouring Earle Park (then owned by Sandra and Tony McGrath) while Riversdale was renovated and a studio built. While waiting to move into Riversdale, there was severe flooding of the Shoalhaven River, as reported by the architect working on Riversdale, André Porebski:

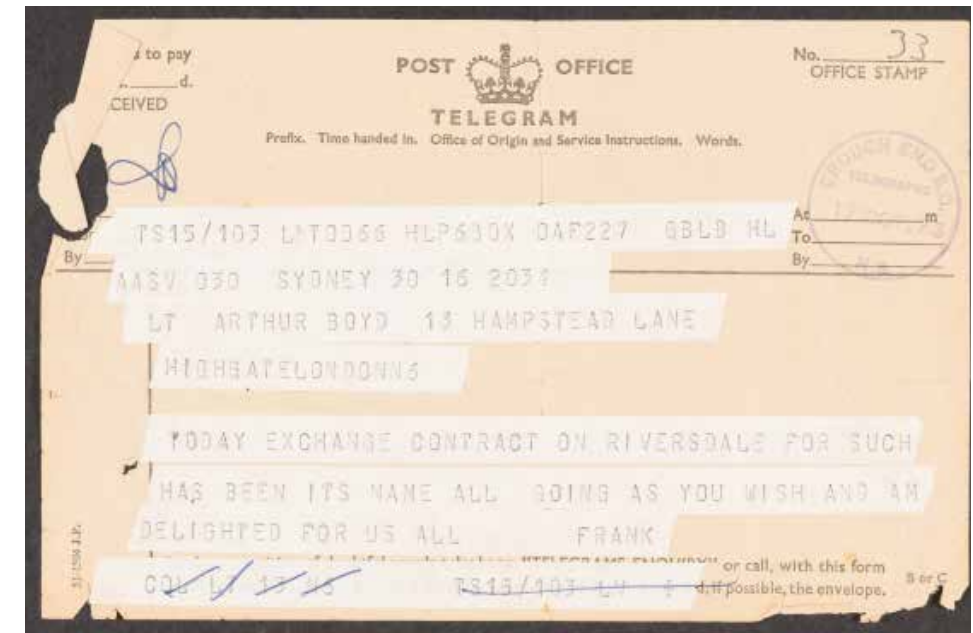
*On Sunday and the following days we had the biggest rains in the history of the area in the last hundred years. The Shoalhaven River has risen by some thirty feet and the valley and the areas around the house got completely flooded...the waters on Frank’s farm have come within ten feet of the house and its occupants had to be taken away by helicopter.*<sup>10</sup>

The extensive flooding delayed the Boyds’ move into Riversdale until May 1975. In 1989, Boyd described the effect of the flooding Shoalhaven River on him, evoking an elemental violence in the landscape:

*When the river floods, it rumbles, just like Wagner—it’s terrific, I put on Wagner when I’m painting it in my studio.*<sup>11</sup>

Part of Boyd’s record collection, including Wagner, remains today in the Arthur Boyd studio at Bundanon.

The rumbling of the river was part of a wildness in the landscape that appealed to Boyd, first at Riversdale, then at Bundanon, which he



bought from the McGraths and Frank McDonald in 1979. He described the Bundanon property as he saw it to Janet McKenzie:

*With Bundanon you get this small farming area turning in a horse-shoe shape with the river winding around for nine kilometres or more. The small farming area in the middle is surrounded by virgin bush...What appealed to me about this combination is that it fulfilled a desire to transport an English vision. It also preserved the original concept of a wild Australia or an Australia that was still untamed.*<sup>12</sup>

Boyd appreciated the balance—even the tension—between the colonial English transplantation evident in the farm and homestead, and the uncultivated wildness of the surrounding bushland. Having lived for many years in the ‘tamed extended garden of England’, Boyd responded to the scale and wild grandeur of the Bundanon landscape, noting that ‘the scale of the Shoalhaven was enormous’, with a fierce clarity to the light: ‘At times it was so intense the shadows became almost black.’<sup>13</sup> He became intoxicated by the ‘very rich’ qualities of the Shoalhaven landscape, ‘the extraordinary business of the trees growing so straight’, the curves of the river, the ‘marvellous colour’, and ‘terrific quality of the light’. While living within this landscape, he resolved to ‘know it’—and to paint it.<sup>14</sup>





## Nebuchadnezzar

Arthur Boyd's landscape paintings represented the beauty and vitality of the natural environment; they could also be used as a setting for human dramas, drawn from a range of classical and Biblical sources. The Bible was a daily presence in Arthur's childhood, growing up in the family home called Open Country, in the Melbourne suburb of Murrumbena. His grandmother Minnie conducted daily Bible readings at Murrumbena, which must have left a strong impression on the young Arthur; her Bible stories 'were enthralling—the more so because she read from a richly illustrated Bible.'<sup>15</sup> Boyd's father Merric was a potter, inspired by 'a religious zeal which imbued him with a heightened respect for nature and all natural things'<sup>16</sup>. Arthur Boyd inherited this pantheistic vision, a 'religiousness' in his painting conveyed as a reverence for nature.<sup>17</sup> Describing his appreciation of Bundanon in 1998, Boyd declared: 'I love the brilliance of the Australian landscape, I love being in touch with it.' Pulpit Rock and other features of the Bundanon landscape had for Boyd 'a spirit, an aura' that he attempted to capture in his paintings.<sup>18</sup>

Biblical imagery made its way into some of Boyd's paintings, including the Nebuchadnezzar series, painted over a long span of years from 1966: the series stretched into the 1990s and overall comprised over 70 works. The trigger for these paintings was Boyd's witnessing of a self-immolation protest against the Vietnam War at Hampstead Heath, near where he lived in 1966. He was also inspired by William Blake's coloured etching of Nebuchadnezzar in the Tate Gallery.<sup>19</sup> Boyd's Nebuchadnezzar series conveys intense feelings of anger and dismay, directed into the anti-Vietnam War protest movement of the time, as well as the artist's severe feeling of guilt at the suffering and injustice experienced in the world.

*BioPods\_Vo2: the Nebuchadnezzar suite* (2015) was Nigel Helyer's response to the 2015 Bundanon Siteworks thematic, *The Feral Amongst Us*. The orientation and motivation of the work was drawn from Boyd's series of paintings depicting Nebuchadnezzar, a Babylonian king of overarching military ambition, who, for a period of seven years, was outcast into the wilderness to live as an animal (or re-wilded) as a form of rehabilitation and redemption.

The suite of three biomorphic sculptures could be considered as biology turned feral as sculpture or, conversely, sculpture turned feral as biology. In either case, each structure contained a narrative of a feral or re-wilded being. Each of the works was designed to be inhabited in a single mode—standing, sitting and lying down—and each form was equipped with a solar-powered audio resonator system that spun the narratives of the outcast King Nebuchadnezzar II. Moreover, visitors were required to crawl on all fours to enter the works, emulating the posture of the savage king.

The Book of Daniel recounts how King Nebuchadnezzar was punished for his overbrimming, warlike ambitions by being exiled into the wilderness to live as a feral creature:

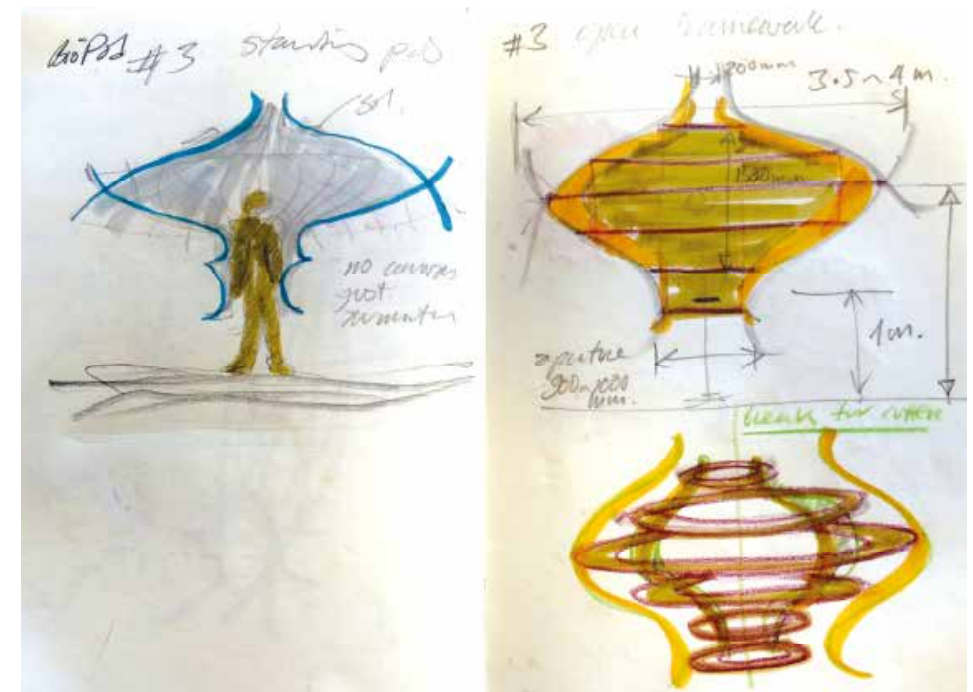
The same houre was the thing fulfilled vpon Nebuchad-nezzar, and he was driuen from men, and did eate grasse as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heauen, till his haire was growen like Eagles feathers, and his nailes like birds clawes. (Daniel 4.33)

Boyd painted Nebuchadnezzar in an almost obsessive manner over many years. He produced over seventy allegorical works featuring an outcast, tortured figure in a blazing Australian landscape: the human reduced to the subhuman, beyond society, alone. The following are narrative extracts from the three sound sculptures—haiku-like responses to Boyd's images; a repertoire for exile:

*The King stands in a burning desert weeping.*  
*The King stands for his portrait.*  
*The King stands and stares at the horizon.*  
*The King stands and bows his head in sorrow.*  
*The King stands but does not brush the flies from his face ...*  
*The King sits and birds peck at his head.*  
*The King sits under a tree with melancholic thoughts.*  
*The King sits in judgment of emptiness.*  
*The King sits on a throne of dried grass.*  
*The King sits in his own excrement and is foul ...*  
*The King lays staring at his claws.*  
*The King lays engulfed by his own stench.*  
*The King lays with aching bones.*  
*The King lays dreaming of a huge tree.*  
*The King lays dreaming of four monsters ...*

Cecelia Cmielewski describes the experience of engaging with the Nebuchadnezzar sculptures while they were installed at Riversdale:

*We crawl on the ground to push and pull, not unlike King Nebuchadnezzar II crawling like an animal in the wild...The suite of three huge elegant forms—the tube, the onion and the bulb—sit on the hill at Riversdale, having gone 'feral', claiming their presence must be felt and attended to. But the works are feral in the most appealing way, as immediately they become playful objects for all ages. For children, they are spaces in which to crawl, climb on and jump from, away from the usual tame playground. Children take to these objects and take them over completely as their own; they love them. Teenagers and younger adults—often too cool to get really enthusiastic—enjoy the feeling of being safely enclosed in the vessels*



and being able to either drift off or listen attentively. Older adults get absorbed by the meaning of the text and stand alongside, closely listening to the sound work. Visitors are transported into themselves and into another world by these unlikely elegant edifices sprawled over the hilltop.<sup>20</sup>

Nigel Helyer's sound sculptures in this instance inhabit the Shoalhaven landscape with ideas, sounds, structures and images inspired by Arthur Boyd's paintings drawn from biblical imagery and narrative.

## Painting the Landscape

Arthur Boyd painted hundreds of landscape works inspired by the Shoalhaven Valley. By the 1980s the Bundanon terrain had become so familiar, and so inspirational, for him that it stimulated a prolific output of paintings. In the *Bundanon* series of 1982, he produced 96 works in three months alone.<sup>21</sup> There is perhaps an ambivalence in Boyd's response to the Australian landscape at Bundanon: at times the violence of nature, represented by the ferocious summer sun and the unpredictable river, is featured in his painting. But there is no doubt that the natural land-



scape provided endless inspiration and stimulation for the artist, as he told Janet McKenzie:

*Quite apart from the marvellous things like the change of seasons and the marvellous birds...There is always something...the days are so different, the clouds, the brilliance of the blues and pinks.*<sup>22</sup>

The blueness of the sky, even at night, he found especially captivating. 'Van Gogh never had a bluer sky than the Australian sky at night,' he said of the night vista at Bundanon. 'There's nothing bluer.' In the daylight, particularly in the height of summer, Boyd marvelled at the 'deep, deep, deep...blinding...blue' of the sky and its lighting of the surrounding landscape, rendering the trees 'much whiter, much lighter.' This blue dominated several of the landscapes of Bundanon and Riversdale, as Boyd himself noted: 'There is blue in the whole thing...by doing the sky first you have this reservoir of blue.'<sup>23</sup>

*Shoalhaven Riverbank II*, painted in 1993, has the brilliant blue of the sky reflected in the river, establishing a framework of blue for the landscape. *Reflected Kangaroo* of 1976 constructs a similar twinning of blue sky and river, the palette of the painting reduced to two colours: the brilliant sky blue and the earth colour of land and kangaroo, the latter reflected in the river as it speeds through the landscape. *Trees on a Hillside, Riversdale*, a watercolour from 1975, presents a more muted colour palette, but highlights the light colours of eucalyptus trees, including the white tone of ghost gums, illuminated in the Riversdale sunshine.

Boyd's eye for the changing quality of the light at Bundanon, illuminating prominent aspects of the landscape, is evident in the series *The Four Times of Day, Pulpit Rock*, painted in 1982. These remarkable paintings were done by hand in the manner preferred by Boyd; he observed that the finger marks in these works convey a 'crispness' to the landscape, along with 'a great variation in the foliage'.<sup>24</sup> *The Four Times of Day* depict Pulpit Rock and its reflection in the Shoalhaven River at Early Morning, Before Sunrise; Morning; Midday; and Evening. The repeated representation, with variations, of the one natural landmark has drawn comparison with Cézanne's many depictions of Mont Sainte-Victoire outside Aix-en-Provence.<sup>25</sup>

In *Four Times of Day* Boyd allows no human presence, not even a trace of human activity. Pulpit Rock, the river, and the colours wrought by the changing light dominate the paintings, each structured with a dividing-line where the river meets the shore: this permits a doubling, through reflection on the water, of the rock. Ursula Hoff, in her study *The Art of Arthur Boyd*, found in these works the theme of 'the cyclic element in nature', set between 'sky and water in an ambience of luminous space':



Arthur Boyd  
*Shoalhaven Riverbank II*, 1993  
oil on canvas, 572 x 469 mm  
Bundanon Trust Collection





Arthur Boyd  
*Hanging Rocks with Bathers*  
 1985 oil on canvas. 2460 X 3110 mm  
 Bundanon Trust Collection

Subtle changes of position and emphatic contrasts of colour weld *Four Times of Day* into one continuous movement of rise and fall.<sup>26</sup>

Darleen Bungey feels a spiritual force emerging from the landscape in these paintings, reflecting Boyd's pantheistic embrace of nature, 'his sense of emanations from the rock and the power he felt flowing from the river.' Boyd himself affirmed in 1985 that 'I am a great believer in the life force'<sup>27</sup>; perhaps the closest he came to representing that life force in paint is in the *Four Times of Day*, *Pulpit Rock*.

Pulpit Rock appeared in many other landscape paintings by Boyd. In a series of works painted from 1981, including *Pulpit Rock*, *Kite and Skull*, the Shoalhaven River and Pulpit Rock are accompanied by flame trees near the riverbank and symbols of death: cow and horse skulls, in some instances wrapped in barbed wire. Boyd had witnessed the destructiveness of the flooding river while living at Riversdale: a horse died after being trapped by barbed wire torn from a fence by the

flood; a bull died trying to lead its herd across the swollen river. Boyd incorporated these images of mortality into his Bundanon landscape paintings, while preserving a sense of natural cycles and rejuvenation.

The destructiveness of the flooded river and searing sun were for Boyd only one part of a sweeping cycle of natural phenomena: 'After a flood and a carcass lying on a sandbank...the river will rejuvenate, the sun will come out, and then it will happen all over again.'<sup>28</sup> *Bather, Pulpit Rock and Rainshower*, a work of etching and aquatint from 1993, depicts the rock, river and sunshower as aspects of the restorative force of nature. This power of rejuvenation is given religious significance in another late painting by Boyd, *Peter's Fish and Crucifixion* (1993). Having seen fresh fish caught in the river, Boyd depicts the fish ascending from the water, framed by Pulpit Rock in the background. The shape of the rock is echoed by white cloud rising above its form. The effect is to suggest that Pulpit Rock, along with the fish pulled from the river, 'reaches towards infinite space'.<sup>29</sup>

If Boyd had faith in the restorative powers of nature, he was far more pessimistic about human degradation of the natural world. Boyd found the destructive tendency of 'the human brain' frightening<sup>30</sup>. His reverence for the Bundanon landscape empowered his efforts to protect the environment from development and contamination caused by human activity. Having prevented sand-mining on the Shoalhaven River in the Land and Environment Court in 1982, he was dismayed in 1985 by the intrusion of high-powered speedboats on the river. The water-skiers and speedboaters represented for Boyd an irresponsible assault on the peaceful Shoalhaven: they eroded the riverbank, churned up the river, brought noise pollution to the valley, threatened bathers and traumatised wildlife including platypus, echidna and goannas.

While he was unable to prevent the speedboats using the river, Boyd had his revenge on the speedboat 'hedonists' in a series of paintings begun in 1985. In *Hanging Rocks with Bathers* (1985), the sun-bathers decamped from speedboats are painted a lurid, raw red. Having disrespected the natural environment, they have been punished by the sun, leaving them grotesque lobster-red figures out of proportion to the river and surrounding landscape. Boyd had been disgusted by the selfishness of the water-skiers: 'The hedonists think they're fulfilling themselves—living for the moment, but they're not fulfilling themselves, it's a dying business, an ending.'<sup>31</sup> In these paintings, the sun has scalded the 'hedonists', damaging their skin just as they have damaged the natural environment with their thoughtless pursuit of pleasure.

## Heavy Metal

Arthur Boyd painted the mineralised landscape of Bundanon with colours that were themselves formulated from earthy compounds and exotic metals, milled to a fine paste in linseed oil and turpentine. Nigel Helyer's work *Heavy Metal* (2016), first installed in Arthur Boyd's studio at Bundanon, invites us to interact with one of Boyd's paintings. *Heavy Metal* unveils a hidden world of elements and minerals in an experience that is simultaneously chemical, visual and musical.

The initial concept for *Heavy Metal* arose after spending time on-site at Bundanon with environmental scientist Mark Patrick Taylor. Taylor and his students had been surveying the mineral composition of Bundanon, looking for traces of human activity that, for example, derived from farm and workshop activities, but also searching for the effects of upstream mining for gold and other heavy metals (this research is detailed in Chapter Two). While taking environmental samples, Taylor and Nigel Helyer visited Arthur Boyd's studio with a portable mineral analysis machine, with the aim of rethinking Boyd's work and its relationship with the landscape through chemical analysis. The starting point was that Boyd was situated in this landscape, painting the physical features, and using (or making himself) colours that were substantially minerals (originally extracted from the earth), thus forming a metaphorical circuit.

Taylor was surprised by the massive levels of heavy metals in the materials used by painters and was keen to collaborate, proceeding to analyse the mineral composition of the entire colour range that Boyd used in his studio. To generate the data programmed into *Heavy Metal*, a hand-held X-ray fluorescence spectrometer operated by Taylor was directed at paints used in the unfinished oil painting *Return of the Prodigal Son* (c1997) by Arthur Boyd, situated in the Artist's Studio at the Bundanon homestead. The user of the *Heavy Metal* installation is able to activate the mineral analysis of the painting by moving a video camera aimed at the canvas; the screen interface displays a highly magnified colour 'target' area from the painting, along with the RGB values and the predominant minerals present, which are shown as elements of the periodic table. The camera vision system then translates the stream of mineral data into sound, sampled from the Steinway piano at the Boyd homestead.

Working with colleague Jon Drummond, an expert in data sonification, Helyer created a computer-driven audio-visual system able to read the video stream from the camera facing Boyd's unfinished painting. The sound is layered in two components: a generalised harmonic chord structure that corresponds to the colour, overlaid by cascades of individual note highlights that are indexed to the distribution of the



Arthur Boyd's studio, Bundanon

most prominent minerals. The computer monitor gives feedback on the area of interest, colour ratios and a graphical display of the minerals detected in the painting.

Taylor makes the following conclusion from the analysis of paints used by Arthur Boyd:

*The spectrometer analysis of the paints used on the unfinished Arthur Boyd painting revealed that the paints contained up to 35% (350,000 mg/kg) cadmium and 60% lead. While paints such as these are stable on canvas, Boyd mixed many of his own paints from powder and, in doing so, may have inadvertently contaminated himself in the process.*<sup>32</sup>

Boyd frequently painted with his fingers, and was quoted many times on his preference for using his hands rather than brushes. He was convinced that painting with his fingers, palm and heel of his hand gave him a greater control of the paint, particularly in creating the landscape paintings he produced at Bundanon. He also relished the earthiness involved in using bare hands to mix and spread the paint: 'It comes from my early years working with pottery,' he said in 1989. 'I love the sensual feeling of my hands right in the raw material.'<sup>33</sup> The paint brush was often considered by Boyd an unwelcome interloper between the artist and his materials: 'The brush gets between you and the thing,' he said.<sup>34</sup> Friends worried about 'the potential cocktail of poisons which might get under





his skin' due to his constant physical contact with the paints and chemicals.<sup>35</sup> His studio assistant at Bundanon, Anna Glynn, had been taught by Boyd to paint with her hands, but she ceased the practice after a year, complaining that 'all the skin peeled off my neck from the fumes from all the solvents'.<sup>36</sup>

Boyd's health declined quickly from 1997, leaving the *Return of the Prodigal Son* painting unfinished. In the last two years of his life, he suffered seizures, dementia and a general enfeeblement. Doctors advised against toxins such as alcohol, but Boyd's biographer Darleen Bungey notes that the damage from toxins had already been done from 'a lifetime spent breathing poisonous fumes, absorbing poisonous minerals'.<sup>37</sup> Arthur Boyd, the great Australian landscape painter, appears to have been contaminated by the very minerals contained in the paint, which he used to depict the Bundanon landscape he loved.

## My Dear Prime Minister...

One of Arthur Boyd's motivations in donating Bundanon to the Commonwealth was a determination to protect the environment he had come to revere. He had a passionate commitment to ensuring the landscape would be preserved, and that all Australians could enjoy Bundanon as he had done. He told journalist Janet Hawley in 1989:

*I love this place and I want it to remain intact for everyone to share. It will be a tragedy if after I die, it has to be sold, and some developer bulldozes it into subdivisions, totally destroying what is here.*<sup>38</sup>

Boyd had been devastated when the family home of his childhood at Murrumbena had been sold and demolished by developers. Murals painted by Boyd family members in his mother's bedroom had been destroyed in this process. He resolved that Bundanon would not meet the same fate. While living at Bundanon, he built up a collection of artworks by family members, which adorned the homestead. These included works by his father Merric and his mother Doris, by his grandfather Arthur Merric and grandmother Emma Minnie, by his children Jamie, Lucy and Polly, as well as his uncle Penleigh, brother Guy and brother and sister-in-law David and Hermia. All these artworks by members of the Boyd family remain in the Bundanon homestead today.

Arthur and Yvonne Boyd began making plans to make a gift of the Bundanon properties remarkably early. In 1981, only two years after buying Bundanon, Boyd developed a proposal to conserve the property and create a cultural resource at Bundanon 'of national significance'.<sup>39</sup> Negotiations with the NSW Government began in 1981, but after the state government failed to come to an agreement to administer Bundanon as an arts centre, as the Boyds wished, negotiations began with the federal government in 1988. Clyde Holding, Australian Government Minister for the Arts, visited the Boyds at Bundanon in 1989 and committed the Commonwealth to the Boyds' plan.

Holding proposed that the Government should provide funds to match the value of the Boyds' gift, but this funding of approximately five million dollars was not approved by Cabinet. The final stage in this long process occurred when Holding visited the Boyds in Italy in 1992, and encouraged Arthur Boyd to write directly to the Prime Minister, Paul Keating. This hand-written letter, imploring Keating to complete the gift arrangements and establish the Bundanon Trust, was personally delivered to the Prime Minister by Holding. 'My dear Prime Minister,' the letter began, 'forgive me for imposing on your time.' Boyd described his vision



for Bundanon once established as an arts centre and cultural resource:  
*I want Bundanon to provide a base for, and to stimulate and encourage our developing artists...It can provide a base for research whose use can be enriched by the beauty, the history, the landscape, the environment and by the energy and stimulation from social interaction with Australian creative artists.*<sup>40</sup>

Keating resolved to finalise the gift process: the official announcement was made soon afterwards on 28 January 1993. Keating declared that the Australian Government had accepted Arthur and Yvonne Boyd's gift of Bundanon, and that this gift would be developed with a Commonwealth Grant of \$5.43 million. The Bundanon Trust was established in March of that year; Arthur Boyd was made life-long artist-in-residence. Bundanon was opened to the public for the first time on 28 August 1993.

Arthur Boyd depicted the landscape of Bundanon in hundreds of paintings. But his greatest act of legacy towards Bundanon was in gifting the property to the Commonwealth. He had dreaded Bundanon being 'chopped up and ruined', he told journalist Paul McGeough in 1995; he could look back in satisfaction that he had protected and preserved this landscape. 'I wanted Bundanon made safe and secure,' he said, 'so all Australians can share this marvellous spot forever.'<sup>41</sup> In 1998, as he prepared to leave Bundanon for the last time before sailing to England, he told Janet Hawley that he had only ever been a 'custodian' of the place:

*...you can't really own a piece of the earth as beautiful as this, you're only its custodian. We were so privileged to find this stretch of paradise...and we want everyone to come here and let the landscape touch their souls.*<sup>42</sup>



Arthur Boyd with Prime Minister Paul Keating at Bundanon, 1995.  
 Bundanon Trust Archive

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- 2 Arthur Boyd, letter to Paul Keating, 3 October, 1992. Bundanon Trust Archive.
- 3 Janet McKenzie, *Arthur Boyd at Bundanon*, p. 14.
- 4 David Chalker, 'Figures in a Landscape: Arthur Boyd and Bundanon'. University of Wollongong catalogue, 1994. Bundanon Trust Archive.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Jenny Dennis, 'Boyd's Work Not Only Gift to Nation', *Illawarra Mercury*, 26 January, 1995, p. 8.
- 7 Letter from Frank McDonald to Arthur Boyd, 9 July, 1973. Bundanon Trust Archive.
- 8 Telegram from Arthur Boyd, 22 September, 1973. Bundanon Trust Archive.
- 9 Telegram from Frank McDonald, 17 October, 1973. Bundanon Trust Archive.
- 10 Letter from André Porebski to Arthur Boyd, 9 September, 1974. Bundanon Trust Archive.
- 11 Janet Hawley, 'Estate of the Nation', *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Good Weekend*, 4 March 1989, p. 44.
- 12 Janet McKenzie, *Arthur Boyd at Bundanon*, p. 14.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Arthur Boyd quoted in Darleen Bungey, *Arthur Boyd: A Life*, p. 494.
- 15 Brenda Niall, *The Boyds*, p. 176.

- 16 Ibid., p. 18.
- 17 Zara Stanhope, *Arthur Boyd: An Active Witness*, p. 65.
- 18 Janet Hawley, 'Leaving the Landscape', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 May, 1998, p. 32.
- 19 Zara Stanhope, *Arthur Boyd: An Active Witness*, p. 69.
- 20 Cecelia Cmielewski, 'Edges, Proximity and the Creative Leap', p. 32.
- 21 Janet McKenzie, *Arthur Boyd at Bundanon*, p. 42.
- 22 Ibid., p. 15.
- 23 Arthur Boyd quoted in Darleen Bungey, *Arthur Boyd: A Life*, pp. 505–506.
- 24 Arthur Boyd quoted in Janet McKenzie, *Arthur Boyd at Bundanon*, p. 42.
- 25 Darleen Bungey, *Arthur Boyd: A Life*, p. 528; Janet McKenzie, *Arthur Boyd at Bundanon*, p. 42.
- 26 Ursula Hoff, *The Art of Arthur Boyd*, pp. 67–68.
- 27 Darleen Bungey, *Arthur Boyd: A Life*, p. 561.
- 28 Ibid., p. 516.
- 29 Janet McKenzie, *Arthur Boyd at Bundanon*, p. 106.
- 30 Darleen Bungey, *Arthur Boyd: A Life*, p. 516.
- 31 Ibid., p. 518.
- 32 Helyer, Potts & Taylor, 'Heavy Metal: An Interactive Environmental Art Installation,' p. 11.
- 33 Janet Hawley, 'Estate of the Nation', p. 49.
- 34 Deborah Jones, 'Basic Boyd: A Great Australian Painter Sums Up', p. 12.
- 35 Darleen Bungey, *Arthur Boyd: A Life*, p. 528.
- 36 Ibid., p. 529.
- 37 Ibid., p. 551.
- 38 Janet Hawley, 'Estate of the Nation', p. 38.
- 39 The Bundanon Trust Heritage Management Plan 2007, Volume 1, 2.2.3.
- 40 Arthur Boyd, letter to Paul Keating, 3 October, 1992. Bundanon Trust Archive.
- 41 Paul McGeough, 'Portrait of the Artist as a Republican', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 January 1995, p. 8.
- 42 Janet Hawley, 'Leaving the Landscape', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 May 1998, p. 3

T1-B1

# BUNDANON HOMESTEAD

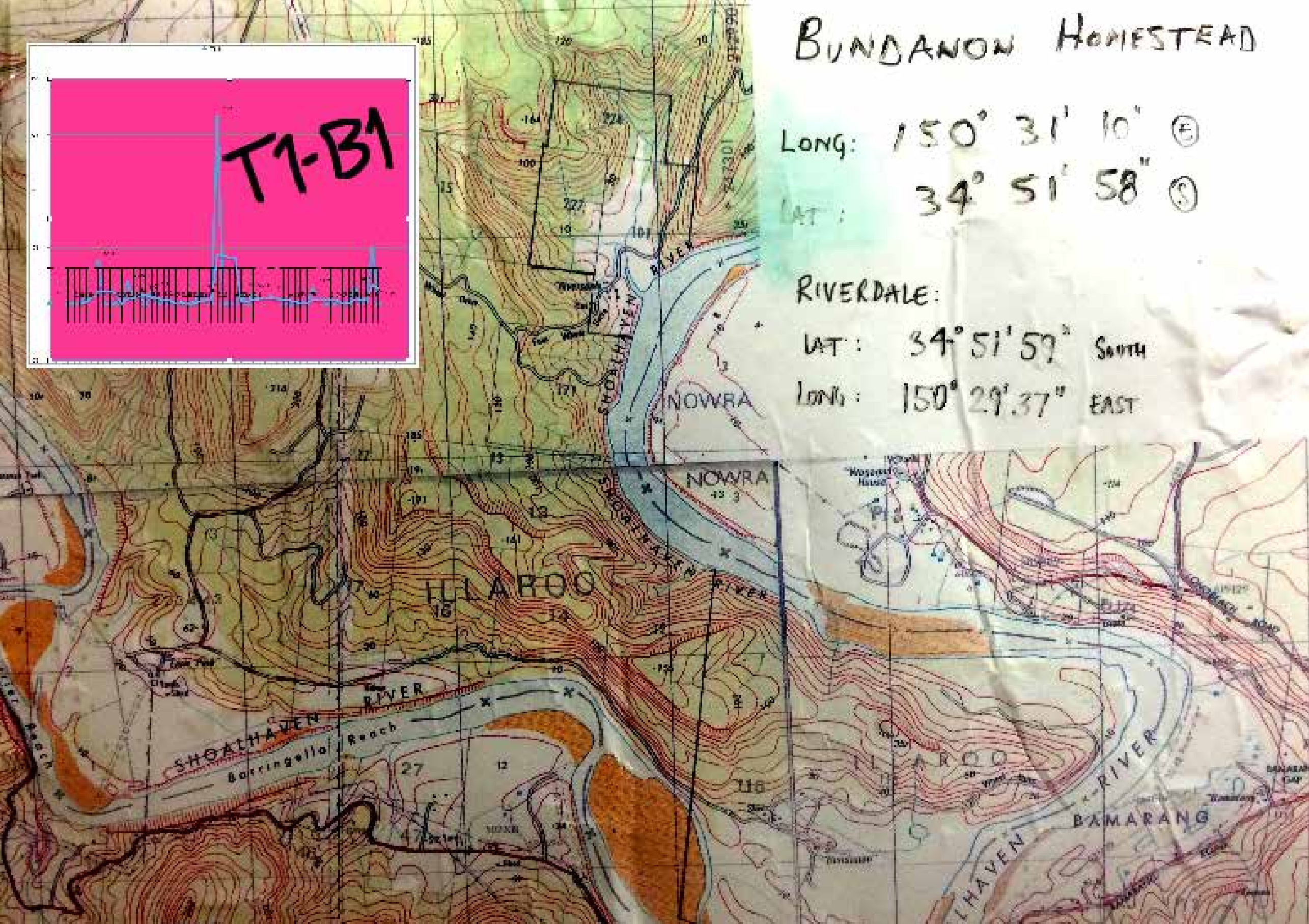
Long:  $150^{\circ} 31' 10''$  E

Lat:  $34^{\circ} 51' 58''$  S

RIVERDALE:

Lat:  $34^{\circ} 51' 59''$  South

Long:  $150^{\circ} 29' 37''$  East





# Five: Walking

There is no better way to know a landscape than by walking; to walk through and across a terrain is to gain an experience of being in a place. Walking through the countryside has worked its way into literature and art since the Romantic period, and is a feature of contemporary 'walking art'. In this final chapter, we consider the virtues of walking, before setting out for a number of walks at Bundanon.

## Walking, a Legacy

Homo Sapiens are by definition vertical and bipedal. As a species we have evolved to move slowly, consistently and in a sustained manner over the surface of the planet—and as we move we observe, we map, we remember and we think. Thanks to the hundreds of thousands of years that our hominid ancestors have paced the earth, the act of walking now takes very little of our mental capacity: it has, in contemporary terms, a low cognitive overhead. Walking places scant demand on our attention, which in turn liberates our minds to engage in creative and speculative thought.

Surprisingly, the equally pleasant occupation of—for example small boat sailing functions in stark contrast, in that it demands a high and constant level of attention. To sail on the open sea is to be totally absorbed with the nuances of balance and the forces of wind and water, calculating trim and helm. The mind is fully occupied and enters into an oblivion where philosophy is banished by a focus on the ever-changing moment.

In this respect walking is unique. We have evolved to function at walking pace and all other velocities tend to distort and disturb our perceptual, cognitive and imaginative thought processes. At walking pace conversation is possible, as it syncopates with the rhythmic cadence of the step and the lungs (whereas running renders conversation difficult or impossible). Moreover solitary walking offers the very special gift of imaginative reflection—and there are several convincing reasons for this.

One could be forgiven for assuming that the optimal situation for thinking is to sit quietly in focused meditation, but the efficacy of the sedentary state has been contradicted repeatedly by prominent thinkers throughout history. In 1851, Henry David Thoreau reflected on the direct connection between walking and thinking in his diary: 'Methinks that the moment that my legs begin to move my thoughts begin to flow.'<sup>1</sup>

There is nothing magical in this process: walking immediately increases the blood flow and thus supplies additional oxygen to



the brain. When undertaken on a regular basis, this activity has been demonstrated to stimulate additional neural connections, generating fresh neurones, increasing the capacity for attention and memory.

Attention is a limited (but thankfully renewable) resource; however it gradually diminishes over the course of the day. Again it has been well demonstrated that prolonged periods of sedentary work (which sadly is the norm for a large percentage of contemporary labour) is physically and psychologically damaging, diminishing the level of attentiveness, imaginative thought and memory. Even standing at a computer terminal is now widely recognised as beneficial as it remedies many posture-related issues of sedentary work, but importantly standing also engages the hormone regulating endocrine system (parts of which shut down while seated).

For humans, walking is a deep-seated evolutionary feature that embodies thought as action in the physical environment. Thought and memory are therefore not abstracted and deracinated, but are complex products that link memory and cultural knowledge with specific places. The many sensory attributes of such loci—their odours, visual markers and acoustic properties—subsequently serve as powerful associative triggers.





The expanded sensory inputs provided by walking (especially in natural environments) afford different modalities of thinking to those based upon extant knowledge, contained in books. Nietzsche was quite clear about his preferences when it came to thinking:

*We do not belong to those who have ideas only among books, when stimulated by books. It is our habit to think outdoors—walking, leaping, climbing, dancing, preferably on lonely mountains or near the sea where even the trails become thoughtful.*<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche, who thought and wrote while walking, was adamant about the virtues of this activity: ‘Only ideas won by walking have any value.’<sup>3</sup>

## Walking and Thinking: an Orientation

In 1851, Thoreau wrote in his essay ‘Walking’:

*If you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled your affairs, and are a free man; then you are ready for a walk.*<sup>4</sup>

Thoreau explains that in the middle ages, vagabonds would use the pretence of a pilgrimage to the crusades to ask for alms, claiming to be walking *à la Sainte Terre*, giving us the word ‘saunter’ for an aimless walk undertaken by idlers. The merit of walking through pastoral landscapes had earlier been emphasised by the Romantic poets, particularly William Wordsworth, who documented his many long walks through the English countryside with his sister Dorothy.

Wordsworth, his diarist and poet sister Dorothy, and frequent companion and close friend Coleridge, were indeed remarkable in going against the grain and following their passion for arduous, long distance walks, in the often unforgiving Northern English terrain. At the time, travelling by foot on the public highways and roads was a risky business, as they were peopled by paupers, vagabonds and footpads: only those who were forced by circumstance or trade would walk. In other words, the public highway was a contested and dangerous place. The wealthy restricted themselves to promenades in manicured gardens or leafy urban boulevards, where the purpose was to see and be seen rather than to commune with nature.

Wordsworth, in his coupling of the creative process with outdoor walking, is often credited as having initiated the English Romantic tradition; he has been described by the American author Christopher Morley as ‘one of the first to use his legs in the service of philosophy.’<sup>5</sup> The Wordsworths influenced one another: Dorothy provided material for a famous Wordsworth poem when she wrote in her journal in 1802:

*I never saw daffodils so beautiful they grew among the mossy stones about & about them, some rested their heads upon these stones as on a pillow for weariness & the rest tossed & reeled & danced & seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind that blew upon them over the Lake, they looked so gay ever glancing ever changing.*<sup>6</sup>

The Wordsworths’ extensive walks developed into extended expeditions all over Europe, encapsulating the Romantic tradition: walking in the service of the imagination and finding the sublime in nature.

In 1792, during his second trip to revolutionary France, William Wordsworth met an extraordinary countryman by the name of John ‘Walking’ Stewart. Stewart had spent thirty years walking throughout India, the Middle East, parts of Africa, Europe and the North American colonies, and had come to the attention of the public through his two publications *The Apocalypse of Nature* (1791) and *Travels over the most interesting parts of the Globe* (1792). These works espoused his own brand of materialist philosophy, based on his direct experience of the physical and cultural landscapes through which he had journeyed.

In the volatile atmosphere of revolutionary Paris, it is highly probable that the twenty-two-year-old Wordsworth was strongly influenced by Stewart, both by his depth of experience and by the dedication to the practice of walking as a source of knowledge and inspiration. Stewart may well have provided the impetus and the confidence to launch Wordsworth into the landscape. Shortly afterwards, Wordsworth’s first volumes of poetry *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* were published (1793).

Wordsworth fused a rigorous physical walking regime with the engine of his creative practice. In his lifetime he walked some 175,000 miles; if we estimate a generous 3 and a half miles per hour, we can calculate some 50,000 hours of reflection, much of which found its way into his poetry. His work resonates with subsequent generations of visual artists, notably the generation of painters that immediately followed. These were the Romantic painters who shared his subjective vision of the sublime in nature: Caspar David Friedrich, J.M. Turner and John Martin.

The Romantic tradition instigated by the Wordsworths involved a communion with nature through walking in the countryside. Walking, however, was not restricted to rural environments; it took place in the cities as well. By the mid-nineteenth century, sauntering had developed into a fashionable middle-class pastime, epitomised by the flâneur. The flâneur was the passionate spectator of Charles Baudelaire, who roamed the Paris boulevards taking in the endless urban parade. To walk without explicit purpose and time constraints is perhaps one of the most productive and creatively liberating things we can do; and Baudelaire made a precipitous suggestion in the fifth stanza of his poem *Le Voyage*, in the 1857 publication of *Fleurs du Mal*. His *vrais voyageurs* (or real travellers) foreshadow the spirit of the *dérive* or drift, a practice much vaunted by the Situationists in the mid-twentieth century—in effect a pedestrian free-fall into fate:

*But real travellers are those who just leave for the sake of leaving,  
Hearts as light as balloons, never avoiding their destiny,  
And without knowing why, they always say: 'Let's go!'*<sup>7</sup>

In 1955 Guy Debord, the principal protagonist of the Situationist International, defined psychogeography as 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.'<sup>8</sup> Psychogeography was for Debord 'the point where psychology and geography collide,' as Merlin Coverley has observed.<sup>9</sup> It was a form of wandering both informed and aware, with continuous observation, through city streets and varied environments. It could be sought at any time and could lead anywhere. In effect this was the flâneur turned forensic, with a *modus operandi* synonymous with those of the writer and the poet: acute observation and a prodigious capacity to recall events in-situ.

Exponents of psychogeography advocated the practice known as the *dérive* ('drifting'), defined by Debord in 1956:

*In a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.*<sup>10</sup>



A *dérive* was an unplanned 'drift' through a terrain, although Debord also claimed that it was not determined by chance. Any terrain, particularly an urban one of city streets, lanes and traffic rules, would play a role in shaping the course of a *dérive*: 'from a *dérive* point of view cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes'.<sup>11</sup>

Psychogeography has since entered into the literary sphere as the geospatial mappings of the literary imagination, manifest, for instance as physical tours which re-enact the trajectories of novels—the day's meanderings of Leopold Bloom around Dublin in James Joyce's *Ulysses*—or pastoral walking tours of the imaginative hinterland of the Brontës: a retro-fitting of the literary imagination.

## Walking Art

Wordsworth's practice of pastoral walking continues to resurface in contemporary culture, almost as if his legacy has given permission for the visual arts to embrace nature and landscape as a subject. The pursuit of walking in landscape re-emerged in the 1960s conjunction of conceptual art, land art and systems art. In the English context (where 'rambling' had





been something of a national pastime since the mid-nineteenth century) the de-materialisation of sculpture was manifest in the work of several artists, who began to devise long distance walks. These walks were mostly undertaken solo; the walk itself was the program (or conceptual activity). Byproducts of the walk could include ephemeral stone arrangements (produced along the route), documentary photographs, and text works; these were subsequent exhibitable or publishable forms.

At first appearance, the work of the British 'walking' artists such as Richard Long and Hamish Fulton may appear quite at odds, in their strict conceptualist formulation, with the subjective tableaux of Turner and Martin. Yet they are driven at heart by an embrace of a direct contact with nature, involving physical endurance and hardship, and often solitude.

Both Long and Fulton came through the Experimental Sculpture course at Central St. Martin's School of Art in London in the 1960s, under the tutelage of Peter Atkins.

During this period sculpture was at a cross-roads, dematerialising and engaging in conceptual and linguistic structures. In the case of both artists, this evolved into relatively simple task-based conceptual programs, with walking in the landscape as the core. Unlike the American

'Land Art' movement, which used landscape as a location and material source to create large terra-formed sculptural works (generally funded and on-sold by galleries) the English walkers travelled light. The conceptual program was often little more than a set of map co-ordinates (walking from John O'Groats to Landsend for example) and perhaps making ephemeral sculptural arrangements along the way—or creating short textual descriptions to accompany documentary photographs. These were not then performative works but direct personal experiences of the landscape; in fact the walks were not claimed as art in themselves but as events that engendered art—which was shown as evidence, or re-interpreted in a gallery at a later date.

Richard Long's work *A Line Made by Walking* of 1967 was an early instance of walking art. A black and white photograph revealed a long path through grass made by Long's feet. As Rebecca Solnit has observed, the work, despite its earthiness, contained an ambiguity: was the work of art the performance of walking, or the line made by walking, or the photograph of this natural sculptural form, or all of these? From that point, 'walking became Long's medium.'<sup>12</sup> A series of walks through landscapes was supplemented by sculptures of stones, sticks or mud—either in the countryside or in an art gallery—and documented in photography and books. *From Around a Lake* (1973) was an early art book ensuing from a walk by Long in the English countryside: the book documents Long's interaction with natural features on this walk, depicting leaves found by the artist on this particular route.

Long brought his walking art to Australia in 1977: *A straight hundred mile walk in Australia* was part of the seventh Kaldor Public Art Project by Long. The walk was unplanned and chosen intuitively by the artist: on a train trip from Sydney to Perth, he 'simply got off' the train outside Broken Hill when he saw country that he thought 'suitable'. Over eight days and nights, he used a compass to walk 100 miles in a straight line through the outback. Along the way, he made another work, *A line in Australia*, a line of red stones in an unknown location. This work remains in the interior, perhaps still in its original form, or perhaps subject to erosion. Long explained with regard to this 'line' that he was more interested in 'natural time patterns' than 'man-made historical patterns.'<sup>13</sup> Traces of these two works exist in the form of black and white and colour photography, which were incorporated into an art book and later into an exhibition in London.

It is ironic that although Long and Fulton appear to have initially eschewed the commercial gallery scene, heading off for the hills to create art, they have both enjoyed considerable public acclaim. Despite their insistence on a practice that would appear dematerialised in a



sculptural sense, both maintain a consistent output of lightly physical works: Long's mud-smearred walls and floor-based stone arrangements; Fulton's landscape photographs and cryptic texts. More recently, Fulton has made rigorously designed public communal walks that play with the ratios of time and distance, and which he orchestrates and views as sculptural objects. These are in effect highly structured conceptually-based group walking systems—as art experiences.

One addition to the 'walkers' is the gardener and poet Ian Hamilton Findlay. Rather than traversing the terrain, Findlay has remained firmly rooted in the soil of StonyBrook, the artist's garden in Dumfriesshire, Scotland, that he developed over several decades. Findlay combined landscape design, concrete poetry and an acute knowledge of history to form a living artwork which the visitor 'performs'—by walking the labyrinthine paths of the StonyBrook gardens, ponds and heathlands.

In the commercial frenzy centred on the YBA (Young British Artists), the land art movement produced a poster-boy in the guise of Andy Goldsworthy. He is of note for his delicate arrangements of leaves, ice crystals and other ephemera, situated before the camera in exotic, pristine expedition environments. Goldsworthy's extremely popular, well-publicised practice is also programmatic, but in the cool commercialisation of the sensibility pioneered by Long, Fulton and Findlay, here ephemeral art becomes a sediment in oversized coffee-table publications.

## Augmented Walking

In *The Art of Memory* (1966) Frances Yates paints a vivid picture of the ancient technique that enabled orators to place memory objects, such as lengthy quotations, within the labyrinthine spaces of classical architecture. By visualising an architectural interior, real or imaginary, a speaker might place here a red cloak over a sculpture and there, a sword on a table, each act of placement serving as a mnemonic trigger to locate a passage of rhetoric. By memorising a stroll through this virtual architecture, the orator could re-enact his steps and thus retrieve a vast amount of correctly sequenced material.

The capacity to associate thought and more specifically memory—be it a classical argument or the entire cultural history of a tribal group—with a geo-spatial location is frequently overlooked or under-rated. Ironically it may well be that this form of situated knowledge is not only vital to human society, but is also fundamental to many non-human species, being vital to navigation, and the successful location of breeding sites for migratory species.

Our contemporary orientation to space has been transformed through the medium of recently developed technologies, which have



added a new virtual layer to our experience of space. These technologies—the digital computer, the internet, GPS (Global Positioning System) and the smart mobile phone—are components of the networked society, which superimposes a virtual network onto territorial space. In *The New Time and Space*, John Potts observes that 'the physical world is increasingly overlaid by the virtual network sphere: space is an overlapping of the virtual onto the geographical'<sup>14</sup>. The Pokemon Go 'augmented reality' app, launched with enormous success in 2016, was a highly visible instance of this overlaying of the virtual onto territory. The app 'augmented' reality by digitally overlaying features of the Pokemon game onto physical locations, resulting in thousands of smart phone users wandering city streets in search of virtual Pokemon delights.

Digital cartography—mapping with the means of digital technology, internet and GPS technologies—represents space as a virtual layering of information. Artists have used the possibilities of networked digital technologies and GPS to analyse geographical space, often with environmental themes. This 'geospatial' art uses mobile network technologies. Nigel Helyer's interest in walking as a spatial foundation for thought and the establishment of memory are demonstrated in a prequel to *Culturescape* which took up the conceptual model of the *Ars Memoriae* but transposed it into the realm of contemporary digital technology.



From 1997 to 2006 Helyer developed a series of collaborative cross-disciplinary art and science projects working with the concept of GPS-driven, location based audio cartographies designed to deliver an experience of a virtual audio world overlaid upon the landscape.

Two major project teams, *SonicLandscapes* (1998–2001)<sup>15</sup> and *AudioNomad* (2003–2010)<sup>16</sup> transposed the imaginary architectural metaphor of the *Ars Memoriae* into the cartographic space of digital maps, themselves functioning as a representation of the physical location of each project. The software delivered a *Sonic-Landscape*, by assigning sound files, trajectories, and other acoustic properties and parameters to multiple locations within this virtual domain ready to be triggered by the GPS position of a mobile listener.

Whereas the classical rhetorician would recall a walk through an imaginary architecture in order to retrieve the sequential elements of a speech, the participants in a *SonicLandscapes* or *AudioNomad* project could literally walk in a real environment. The walker's position and orientation data would drive a multi-channel soundscape, which software would deliver to them via surround-enabled headphones. In this manner the soundscape would appear to emanate from the surrounding landscape and its objects. Users experienced an uncanny parallel audio world in which (virtual) aural memories of particular sites were superimposed over contemporary audio reality.

Alternative developments departed from the basic mode of walking as the interactive soundscape was deployed to massive surround-speaker arrays mounted within large mobile platforms, as in the case of the ship-mounted works *Syren* for ISEA2004 in the Baltic Sea and *Syren for Port Jackson* 2006 on Sydney Harbour in conjunction with the Museum of Contemporary Art. Here the listener still moved through the landscape/seascape but as one transported both literally and metaphorically, on a ship. In a subsequent development for museum exhibitions, the system was configured to be driven from a console mounted interactive map, allowing the user to navigate a virtual mapped space and simultaneously drive a powerful, immersive, surround speaker array.<sup>17</sup>

## Feet on the Ground

Ironically the creative foundation for these sophisticated augmented audio reality works was always firmly rooted on the ground. For each project the audio content was painstakingly collected during hundreds of hours of field recording, amassing environmental and urban soundscapes as well as vocal and musical material. This is where the *location* of 'location-sensitive' really comes from—a gradually developed intimate knowledge formed by a process of deep listening to an environment, not to mention equally lengthy durations spent in the studio editing and designing the soundscapes.

*Culturescape* takes environmental readings of the Shoalhaven River Valley, in NSW, Australia, and makes them available to users of the interactive environmental map on the website, as described in Chapter Two. Sonic and visual representations of this environmental data, at specific geographical points, is also available to mobile users—walkers—on-site at Bundanon, through hand-held GPS devices. The mobile app, downloaded from the *Culturescape* website, allows users to experience an environmental and cultural portrait of the place as they walk through it.

## Walking at Bundanon, Ancient and Modern

At the beginning of this book we posed the simple question: how does one get under the skin of a place, of an environment? The Bundanon Trust landscape comprises 1100 hectares, with 12 kilometres of river frontage; it ranges from open pastureland, wooded ridges, rain forest gullies and human occupation sites. It is complex in the physical, biological and historical domains—so how to get to know the terrain in all of its many forms? The answer: walking.

Walking is encouraged at Bundanon; there are several designated walking tracks across the property. The *Haunted Point Loop Walk* is



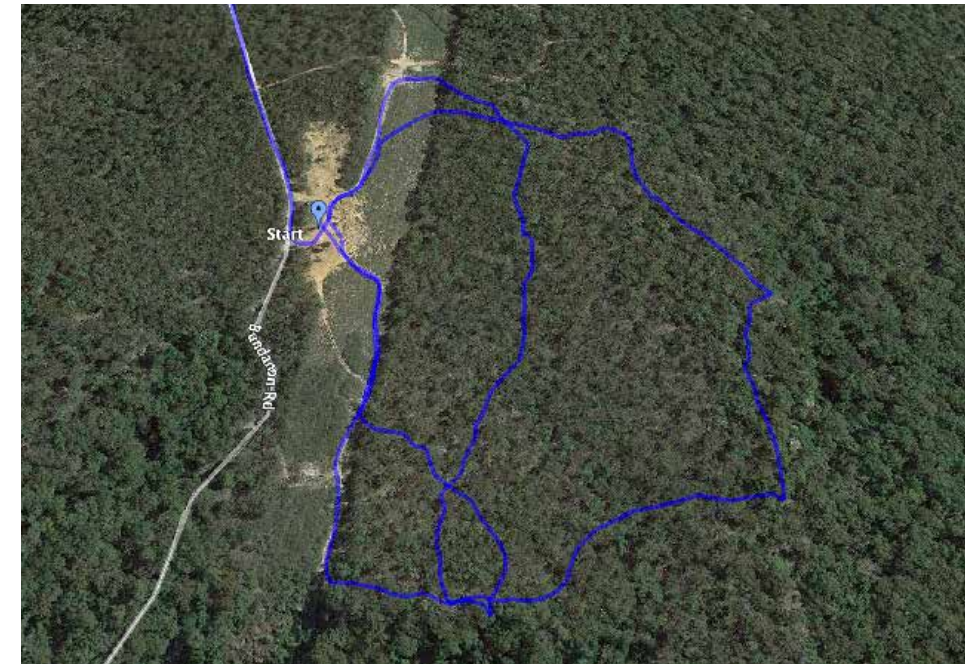
a 3.5 km loop, setting out from the Bundanon homestead and climbing to the natural rock amphitheatre, where native orchids bloom in Spring. This walk also passes the Singleman's Hut, originally built in the 1870s to accommodate farm labourers, and restored by Arthur Boyd in the 1980s. The walk passes through pockets of rainforest on the way to Haunted Point outpost.

*Treelines Track* is a walk devised by artist Janet Laurence at Bundanon in 2014. Visitors can follow this track, which traces the history of plants and plantings at Bundanon. The walk begins at the site of the original cedar homestead and passes the Singleman's Hut on the way to the homestead. A southern loop proceeds across the flood plain, reforested as part of the Landcare Living Landscapes plan, finally reaching the river.

These recent journeys, however, are but fragments when compared to the complex, ancient networks of Indigenous song and ritual which maintained the law and created the landscape. As Daisy Loongkoonan, elder of the Nyikina people from the Kimberley region has stated: 'Footwalking is the only proper way to learn about country.'<sup>18</sup> Traditional songlines situated cultural memories, knowledge and social organisation as shared narratives entwined across the landscape, or indeed performing the landscape. It is an unreconciled tragedy that European cultures have been all but blind to the intangible cultures of First Nation Peoples, especially in regard to their sophisticated concepts of singing up the country—an art that perhaps many cultures, including, the ancient Europeans, may once have practiced but long ago lost.

European footsteps on this ancient land carried flags, symbols of possession in a land deemed *terra nullius*. In short order flags were followed by the rational instruments of cartography, setting out a triangulation of ownership, of control and exclusion, enshrining paper boundaries that contained scant knowledge, but abundant information. For millennia it was otherwise: the land owned its people, people who had watched as the glacial climate transmuted the oceans, the landscape and every element of the ecology. They were both spectators and participants in cataclysmic acts of creation and transformation. The land-bridges between Australia and the rest of Asia came and went, the mega-fauna died out and forest-cover expanded or shrank according to the availability of water in the cool arid environment. People looked and remembered, the knowledge woven into the fabric of ceremony and song embedded in the landscape so that none of this was forgotten—an intangible cosmos too subtle for Europeans to fathom.

Tim Ingold has emphasised the significance of walking with bare feet, as was the practice of Aboriginal people for tens of thousands



of years. Ingold observes the connection between foot and ground, 'the space of social and cultural life and the ground upon which that life is materially enacted.'<sup>19</sup> Andrew Belletty continues on this theme, finding that 'walking with bare feet on country' was an everyday practice for Aboriginal people, 'a practice enmeshed with the health and ecological aspects of song and knowledge of country.' Walking with bare feet *affords a different sensory perception of the world, the surface underfoot providing dynamic feedback about the country, the visceral feel of the soil, grass, ash, water underfoot and the explosion of chemicals released by the footfalls to the nose allowing the country to enter the body through walking.*<sup>20</sup>

Much of this engagement with country has been lost. Even as the colonisers dispossessed the traditional owners of their land and their culture, the colonisers themselves became deracinated. By casting aside lineages, ancestry and cultural bonds with place, they became alienated in the very land they sought to possess.

In exploring the pervasive conditions of suburbanisation and automobilization, Rebecca Solnit in *Wanderlust* focusses on the increasing disembodiment of everyday life and a concomitant sense of isolation:

*Many people nowadays live in a series of interiors—home, car, gym, office, shops—disconnected from each other. On foot everything stays connected, for while walking one occupies the spaces between those interiors in*





*the same way one occupies those interiors. One lives in the whole world rather than in interiors built up against it.*<sup>21</sup>

By trading *being* for *having*, by the crude attachment to material culture, to speed and to a belief in incessant growth we are effectively debarred from contemplating alternative ways to understand the natural world and ways to form new relationships with it.

Consider the alternatives to walking. The *automobilised* individual is no longer a participant in the commons; is sundered from the public *vis a vis*; physical movement is restricted to minor foot and hand movements, amplified into a violence of speed. The eyes gaze through a screen as a panorama slides by too fast to be taken in by indifferent eyes.

The *digitised* individual has an even more sedentary existence, gazing, unblinking into the shallows of a screen—into a world one photon deep populated by ersatz relationships offering only the shadowy promise of a digital loneliness.

Dream for a moment: Pull on Thoreau's old leather boots and step through the door, alone or perhaps in company with Nietzsche, to walk an unknown path—*walking, leaping, climbing, dancing preferably on lonely mountains*. To walk and imagine a world unconstrained and unprescribed—to fall into an uncertain future but one full of potential.

## Our Bundanon Walks

One of our strategies in *Culturescape* has been to invite 'old hands' at Bundanon to take us on a walk. We invited a series of individuals who have long-standing relationships and specific knowledge of the environment in which the Bundanon Trust is situated. Each person was asked to decide on a route that contained points of interest linked to a thematic—some were focused on history, others on botany, some simply on magnificent views of the landscape, but all were intensely personal and all were different. The central concept of these psycho-geographies is that they are informal, unconstrained and designed by each individual. Each walk will help create a novel way of thinking about the social, cultural and ecological aspects of the area, based on individual insights and stories. The different walks focus on aspects of the landscape or history of the site that have a special meaning or resonance for each individual.

The residue of these walks—photographs, audio recordings and GPS tracks—form a mosaic of personal knowledges, memories triggered by and situated in landscape. This process combines serendipity with very specific and nuanced information forming an idiosyncratic ecology of memories, thriving in unique landscape niches, like hitherto unidentified species. It fleshes out the bones of the landscape and rattles the skeletons of history. Readers can watch videos of four Bundanon walks at: [www.culturescape.net.au/walks](http://www.culturescape.net.au/walks)

The gradual accumulation of these individual psychogeographies becomes an archive of memories and stories that reveal the Bundanon landscape. This builds upon the western tradition in which knowledge is inscribed, circulated and laid in store.

Mary Preece, Education Manager at Bundanon Trust, takes us on a walk that extends to the West escarpment view, on the property known as Eearie Park 2. Mary provides the following commentary on her walk:

*One of the things I like about this place is it has quite different flora to the lower, darker, wetter places on the Bundanon property. This morning I've been able to find a beautiful fringe lily, and it's the first time I've actually seen one of these not in a book...I can see another one over there, so this is obviously an area where they grow. It's a really beautiful delicate flower, pinky-purple colour, and the petals are fringed with this delicate fringe all the way around.*

Mary also finds growths of black bog rush:

*The long stems of this rush are quite distinctive, it has black flower bracts on the end. This rush normally grows in wetter environments, but it's possibly part of this plant community. We're right on the top here of the escarpment, and you get this hanging swamp effect especially when it rains,*

because of the sandstone rocks just beneath the surface. It's a shallow area of dirt. This plant is amazing, you can use it green or dry in basketry, which is my current arts practice. It's wonderful for coiling and it can be quite brittle when it has dried but has very long stems, so it's quite beautiful.

Mary is captivated by the sandstone of the escarpment:

*Growing up in Victoria, I developed a connection with rocks. I spent time with my father in the Grampians (Gariwerd). When I was in fourth year, I studied the rock art of the Grampians, and became fascinated by the Indigenous use of rocks for cultural and living spaces. Relocating to the Shoalhaven in 2008, I felt at home with all the sandstone.*

*Sitting here at the West escarpment, we're facing into one of the rock cliffs. You can see the iron stains that have leached through the layers of sandstone. You can see a few of the geological features that are typical of this area: the block gliding, where blocks have moved down and across, the fissures through the rock that have been weathered by wind and rain through the softer part of the rock, honey-cone patterns, small caves, a hole, and water-etched bowls at the top of the rock. It's an amazing place.*

Tim Wade is a volunteer at Bundanon Trust. Tim's walk sets out from the homestead and proceeds to the river. This walk inspires reflections on the central importance of the river for European habitation:

*The river in the early days was the lifeblood, it was the only way up here, until they built the road on the other side, and the punt across. But a lot of materials for the homestead were transported by barge up the river. Even the mortar in the bricks in the homestead you can see have shells in them: they were transported from Shoalhaven heads up to here to build the homestead.*

*From the journals that Boyd's family kept, one can get a great appreciation of Arthur's social conscience that is so evident in his paintings. When he moved here, he became a strong advocate for keeping the environment the way it is; he strongly objected to the high volume of power boats and the hedonistic lifestyle of the people who lived on them. In the mid-1980s there was a proposal to get sand-dredging here, and he was very active in getting that stopped.*

Our final walk at Bundanon is an augmented walk. The mobile app, downloaded from [www.culturescape.net.au](http://www.culturescape.net.au) onto your mobile phone, allows you to walk the route shown on our interactive environmental map. The difference ensuing from use of this app is that you will walk *through* the environmental map. As you pass through a designated point on the map, your phone will display a colour graphic denoting the mineral composition of the soil at that point. You will hear a musical representation of that soil composition as you pass through the point. As you walk through point D1\_S10, for example, you will hear a musical



representation of the elements found in the soil, including gold. You will hear, and see, traces of former habitation – in this case, mining – in the soil; these are the ‘footprints and fingerprints’ of European habitation at Bundanon.

At other points, your phone will supplement the visual graphic display with archival photographs. These photographs, from the Bundanon Trust Archive, correspond to the geographical points of our map, as those points appeared in the past. The photos take you back into history as you traverse the locations in the present. Point W2S2, for example, takes us back to the 1890s, and an archival photo showing kitchen and farm workers outside the old servants' quarters at Bundanon. The photo at point W3S12 is from 1920, showing former Bundanon resident Elinor Rothwell washing horses in the Shoalhaven River.

Your augmented walk, setting off from the homestead, navigating across the floodplain and down to the river, offers a musical journey and a route, of your choosing, populated with images of the past at Bundanon. We invite you to take this walk, encountering the past and present of this extraordinary place.



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- 1 Henry David Thoreau journal, 19 August 1851, in *The Portable Thoreau*, p. 1.
  - 2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 322.
  - 3 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 26.
  - 4 Thoreau, 'Walking', p. 98.
  - 5 Quoted in Frédéric Gros, *A Philosophy of Walking*, p. 209.
  - 6 Dorothy Wordsworth, *Grasmere Journal* 15 April 1802, *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, pp. 109–110.
  - 7 Charles Baudelaire, 'Le Voyage', *Fleurs du Mal*, translated William Aggerer, Digireads.com Publishing, 2015 [1857], p. 124.
  - 8 Guy Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography', p. 5.
  - 9 Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography*, p. 89.
  - 10 Guy Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive', *Les Lèvres Nues* No. 9, November 1956.
  - 11 Ibid.
  - 12 Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, p. 270.
  - 13 Sophie Forbat, 'Richard Long' in *40 Years: Kaldor Public Art Projects*, p. 136.
  - 14 John Potts, *The New Time and Space*, p. 51.
  - 15 [http://www.sonicobjects.com/index.php/projects/more/sonic\\_landscapes](http://www.sonicobjects.com/index.php/projects/more/sonic_landscapes)—ISEA is the International Symposium of Electronic Arts.
  - 16 [http://www.sonicobjects.com/index.php/projects/more/audionomad\\_syren/](http://www.sonicobjects.com/index.php/projects/more/audionomad_syren/), also see —Artful Media: The Sonic Nomadic: Exploring Mobile Surround—Sound Interactions published in the IEEE Multi Media Volume 16 Issue 2.
  - 17 <http://locative.articule.net/audio-nomad/> [http://www.sonicobjects.com/index.php/projects/more/syren\\_for\\_port\\_jackson/](http://www.sonicobjects.com/index.php/projects/more/syren_for_port_jackson/)
  - Run Silent Run Deep [http://www.isea2008singapore.org/exhibitions/air\\_run.html](http://www.isea2008singapore.org/exhibitions/air_run.html) and EcoLocated <http://www.sonicobjects.com/index.php/projects/more/ecolocated/>
  - 18 ABC Television News 11 April 2016, cited in Andrew Belletty, *Listening to Country: Energy, Time and Ecology in Aboriginal Worldmaking*, PhD thesis UNSW 2017, p. 53.
  - 19 Tim Ingold 'Culture on the Ground: The World Perceived Through the Feet', p. 321.
  - 20 Andrew Belletty, *Listening to Country: Energy, Time and Ecology in Aboriginal Worldmaking*, PhD thesis, p. 104.
  - 21 Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p. 9.

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