

Dianne Recommencement Project - Western Yalanji Field Surveys

Introduction

Representatives of the Western Yalanji People participated in field surveys that included both cultural heritage and environmental surveys of the Dianne Recommencement Project. The field surveys were conducted between 7 - 12 November 2023 and 29 April – 3 May 2024 in parallel with the dry and wet season ecology surveys, respectively and as undertaken by Townsville based environmental consultants C&R Consulting. The C&R Consulting personnel did not provide advice in relation to this report and their ecology findings are provided in a separate report. The site field work included visual assessment of the Dianne Recommencement Project area proposed to be impacted by the project, by the Western Yalanji representatives. The field surveys focused on cultural and ecological values of the proposed area to be impacted by the project, the ecological values including traditionally used plants such as medicinal plants, food plants, calendar plants and uses of vegetation as habitat for key species and other ecosystem services and or significant environmental features. In addition to the culturally important ecosystem services and key species the cultural survey field surveys visual assessments included inspection for cultural heritage artefacts such as stone tools, scar trees, and occupation sites.

Background

The site visit was conducted by:

- Western Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation (WYAC) nominated representatives Danny Lee Cheu and Rene Simpson (7 - 12 November 2023), Cindelle Lee Cheu (29 April to 3 May) and Nathaniel 'Archie' Levers (1 - 3 May 2024).
- Map to Mine Chris Fleck provided logistical support, including support for daily recording of information after each days survey work, which form the basis of this report .

WYAC team members provided detail on their background and connection to Country, which is summarized as follows.

- Danny Lee Chue (Figure 1).
Danny is a Western Yalanji Elder, with both parents from this area. He has lived and worked on this land most of his life. His Country is just to the north, closer to Laura, and he has travelled this Country by horseback and camped all through this area as a young bloke - along the Palmer River, at Cannibal Creek and on various cattle stations, where Danny worked for many years as a station hand and ringer, being taught these jobs by his dad. Danny has previously worked at the Dianne Copper Mine site on cultural heritage clearance programs for the exploration programs over the last few years. These aim to walk the Country ahead of exploration work and if anything is found then to avoid those areas. Danny has significant and deep cultural knowledge of the Country in the project area. This includes the plants and animals, the important bush tucker, bush medicines, stories about Country, and how the old people lived on this Country. Danny shares some of these stories so the mining mob know what is important to talk about and the important connections to Country as how cultural values may be impacted by mining and other disturbance work. Danny also shared stories with the crew on site so that they can have a understanding of Country and how the environment works in this area. As an example, Danny has helped identify Cooktown Ironwood trees up in the Larramore Range area and assisted with the efforts to preserve these culturally important trees.

Danny's knowledge of the region includes knowledge of the flowing plants usual at this time of year once the wet season starts, noting that this year is a dry year with not much rain yet leading up to this survey. Danny is aware of the water holes along the Palmer River, and where some of the old river mining occurred.

- Rene Simpson.

Rene shared his story, he grew up and has lived mostly between Mount Isa and the Northern Territory (Mount Levi) with strong ties to the Mornington Island (Gulf of Carpentaria) and Cape York Peninsula areas, on his mum's side. His connection with Western Yalanji country is through marriage of family members (cousin-brother (fathers are brothers) and marriage through aunty of a Western Yalanji man) and by working with the Western Yalanji in a respectful way.

Rene has been involved in field survey work before and has used the knowledge he has learnt in other places about working in the bush, knowing plants and animals and their uses, by observing and being on Country, he has been on cultural heritage surveys before. He is in the process of learning more about Western Yalanji Country.

Rene is familiar with Cannibal Creek, Maytown and Country towards the north to Laura, and this survey was his first within the Dianne Mine mining leases.

Rene worked closely with Danny during the survey and asked Danny to confirm the identification of anything that he found, to check if it had any cultural significance. .



Figure 1 - Danny at Raw Water Dam 1 (note fauna trap in the water)

- Cindelle Lee Cheu

Cindelle is a Kuku Warra / Kuku Possum / Kunjen person (neighboring tribe to Western Yalanji) and her grandparents used to work around the area during the gold and tin mining, and Cindelle has worked in the area alongside Danny (her dad).

Cindelle was previously a senior ranger with Western Yalanji. Cindelle had previously attended site with Danny on an earlier visit where he provided site familiarisation and attending land clearing looking for artifacts and other cultural heritage.

- **Nathanial 'Archie' Levers**

Archie's connection to Country is through his great grandmother (Brad Grogan's grandfather and Archie's grandmother are brother/sister). Archie's great grandmother was taken away from Cannibal Creek in the early days and taken down to Mona Mona Mission in Karanda so also has connections into that Country. Archie is a Yidinji / Babram and Djabugay / Western Yalanji person.

Archie has been coming out to this area in 2020 when Cannibal Creek was reopened to the public for prospecting and has been involved with the Western Yalanji Corporation to help make it better for the future for the next generation. Archie has also spent a lot of time around Laura and out past Maytown and over the ranges.

Chris Fleck is a Field Supervisor and Senior Field Technician for Map to Mine, a specialist exploration, geological and camp management company.

Method

The field survey work included an ecological assessment and a cultural heritage survey. The field survey included Traditional Owners walking over the Country, to undertake a visual inspection that covered the existing disturbance area and proposed project disturbance areas within the mining leases (ML ML2834, ML2833, ML2810, ML2831, ML2832, ML2811). The survey work included both proposed disturbance areas for the project and adjacent areas to cover the majority of the mining leases. The site visibility was generally good due to limited grass cover in most areas after fires over the last few summers.

Logistics support was provided by Chris as required. On some of the days either or both the team would work with the ecology survey team, to both assist with their survey including both teams sharing their knowledge with the other, continue assessing the Country and learn from the ecological survey work (Figures 3 and 7).

The survey work included visual assessment of Country with a focus on assessment for

- stone artefacts such as stone tools, axe heads or potential quarry sites that were traditionally used in the region
- an ecological/cultural assessment of vegetation, for cultural values, checking for plants traditional uses, medicine and/or food plants
- ecological values of the project area such as habitat for plants or animals, including evidence of animals such as scats, resting places, tracks etc.

At the end of each day of the field survey work, verbal reports were recorded, which are summarized in this report. Prior to leaving site, Danny and Rene provided verbal sign-off of the content of this report, by listening to the recorded information, and Cindelle and Archi provided written sign-off of the content of notes and recordings which have been used in this report.

Results

The survey results confirm that no cultural artefacts or cultural sites were identified on the area proposed to be disturbed or within the existing project disturbance areas. Two Scar Trees were identified outside of the proposed disturbance area and will not be impacted by the project, locations shown below in Figure 2.



Figure 2 - Approximate Location of Scar Trees

Daily recorded field reports

Details of each day of the survey are as follows:

Tuesday 7 November 2023

- Survey area included the Pit Dam, waste rock area and up to the proposed leach pad area. The survey also included aquatic survey sites, and groundwater bores; and the valleys (Valley 1 and Valley 2) to the south-west of the existing disturbance area. Rene assisted with setting up of fauna cameras and assisting with navigation to sites.
- Observations included: tracks of echidnas (bush tucker), Lemon Eucalyptus (bush medicine), honey bags native bees (bush tucker and medicine). Whilst there are sources of bush tucker, it is unlikely to be a place to pull up for the night as limited shelter, and no big rock shelters, camps would be closer down the river. Danny noted that most of the area surveyed today was too dry for old mob (along the tributary of Gum Creek) as the old folks would stick on the river (Palmer River or Gum Creek) and walk that right to the top. All the old mob and kids

stayed along the big river (Palmer River) when they travelled, the younger fellas may have travelled off the river when hunting or scouting (“passing through Country”).

- The country visited by Western Yalanji representatives has been considered and discussed by all parties and nothing was noted of significant cultural value.



Figure 3 - Danny working with the C&R Ecology Team

Wednesday 8 November 2023

- Survey area similar to yesterday, included aquatic survey sites, existing site dams, and Gum Creek. In addition, the Western Yalanji representatives assisted with the night spotlighting and bird observations conducted by the ecology team.
- Specific observation: A Scar Tree (Figure 4) was observed to the north of the Settling Dam (Loc: GDA94 Z55/0234695E/8218395N), which holds cultural heritage significance.
- Observations included: any of the permanent water holes that hold water all year would have been be important. Rene looked for tools and tool making rocks / cutting tools near the water but didn't find any signs or evidence. Danny saw a water goanna, which he had not seen before.
- The country visited by Western Yalanji representatives has been considered and discussed by all parties and nothing was noted of significant cultural value aside from a Scar Tree which lies outside the project disturbance area and will not be impacted by the project.



Figure 4 - Danny and Rene at Scar Tree 1

Thursday 9 November 2023

- Survey area included the proposed disturbance area. In addition, the Western Yalanji representatives assisted with the night spotlighting conducted by the ecology team.
- Specific observation: A Scar Tree (Figure 5) was observed off the main access track (Loc: GDA94 Z55/0233959E/8218418N), which holds cultural heritage significance.
- Observations included: rainbow fish caught overnight at the Raw Water Dam, and saw a small water goanna. Other sites saw a few small fish and two red claws.
- The country visited by Western Yalanji representatives has been considered and discussed by all parties and nothing was noted of significant cultural value aside from a Scar Tree which lies outside the project disturbance area and will not be impacted by the project.



Figure 5 - Rene at Scar Tree 2

Friday 10 November 2023

- Survey area included the proposed disturbance area. In addition, the Western Yalanji representatives assisted with the night spotlighting conducted by the ecology team.
- Observations included: a number of small birds observed including a black crane. Not much around the area, a few bloodwoods. During the night spotlighting, observed a Tawny Frogmouths and previous nights had seen Masked Owls.
- The country visited by Western Yalanji representatives has been considered and discussed by all parties and nothing was noted of cultural significance.

Saturday 11 November 2023

- Survey area included the proposed disturbance area, with a focus on the north-eastern area and upstream areas, and reassessment of the new project area to confirm all areas covered. In addition, the Western Yalanji representatives assisted with the night spotlighting conducted by the ecology team.
- Specific observation: A honey bag tree (Figure 6) (GDA94 Z55: 0233096E/8218677N) was located outside of the project site, which holds traditional bush tucker uses.
- Observations included: Rene looked at all the larger trees on the hills, no signs of any scar trees, area likely too steep. Danny happy that nothing seen today (other than the honey bag tree), nothing there, especially where there will be disturbance in the valleys or where the water goes (i.e. the location of the proposed leach pads/dams). Need to make sure fences

are built to keep the cattle out of the dams and keep them down at the big dam, or build a small dam for them somewhere else so they can get to water.

- The country visited by Western Yalanji representatives has been considered and discussed by all parties and nothing was noted of significant cultural value aside from a honey bag tree which lies outside the project disturbance area and will not be impacted by the project.



Figure 6 – Sugar Bag (Honey) Tree

Sunday 12 November 2023 and Survey Conclusions

- Survey area included rewalking areas of the proposed disturbance area as a final survey and assistance collecting ecology equipment. Walking of the fencing at front of the site.
- Observations included: picked up all the camera traps with the ecology team so rewalked all the Valley 1 and 2 areas and around the water sites, nothing new seen. Rene noted it's sad driving around at night that the birds aren't staying to sleep in the trees, they head off elsewhere, so shows nothing really of significance (other than the 2 Scar Trees), many of the trees are too young and small and not the right type of trees to have been used for anything. Some of the rocks may have been suitable to use for tools but no sign of any use. Rene notes with great confidence that there's no evidence of anything on site (other than the 2 Scar Trees), would have been used as a valley to pass through to other areas more suitable. Danny generally agreed, and noted there are a few bush tucker species around (such as yams after first rains and the honey bag tree). Positive to be working with the ecology team to tie together Traditional and Western knowledge, such as the listings of each of the species (threatened, etc.).
- The country visited by Western Yalanji representatives has been considered and discussed by all parties and nothing was noted of significant cultural value.



Figure 7 - Rene working with the C&R Ecology Team setting up Camera Traps

Monday 29 April 2024

- Survey joined at end of day to assist with the establishment of the bat monitoring equipment.
- Observations included: Nil
- The country visited by Western Yalanji representatives has been considered and discussed by all parties and nothing was noted of significant cultural value.

Tuesday 30 April 2024

- Survey area included the large dams and proposed disturbance area (40 camera locations across the entire site), including assisting the ecology team with bird surveys and camera traps/bat recording stations.
- Observations included: bush tucker species identified (Bally Yam (bush potato) [a small above ground stem and flower, yam is underground] and Bunda Berry [a small bushy plant with a brown fruit]) on a ridge crest in the south-western area at the edge of the proposed disturbance area, only a small amount. Cindelle also visited the Scar Trees previously recorded by Danny and Rene.
- The country visited by Western Yalanji representatives has been considered and discussed by all parties and nothing was noted of significant cultural value.

Wednesday 1 May 2024

- Survey area included the proposed disturbance area in the north at the farm dams, and general habitat and fauna observations including night fauna spotting along tracks across the study area and north to the Palmer River. Night owl spotting to the south-west section also undertaken toward the tributary of Gum Creek, no owls seen, only a couple of frogs. And a bit of walkabout around the Palmer River (away from the project site).
- Observations included: bush tucker species identified (Bunda Berry) in this area down near the river but only small amounts.
- The country visited by Western Yalanji representatives has been considered and discussed by all parties and nothing was noted of significant cultural value.

Thursday 2 May 2024

- Survey area included the southern and northern portions of the proposed disturbance area including current waste rock areas and farm dams, bird survey observations and camera trapping. Night observations and owl calls were also attended by the team. A general walkabout around the southern waste rock areas and proposed leach pad areas.
- Observations included: Lots of birds observed in the morning including finches, honey eaters, willy wag tails, and one Goshawk. One water monitor was spotted in the small farm dam (outside of proposed disturbance footprint). Spotted a Tawny Frogmouth off one of the tracks (outside of proposed disturbance footprint).
- The country visited by Western Yalanji representatives has been considered and discussed by all parties and nothing was noted of significant cultural value.

Results and Conclusion

The Western Yalanji People cultural heritage and environmental surveys of the Dianne Recommencement Project area completed in November 2023 and April/May 2024 provided detailed assessment on cultural and ecological values of the proposed project impact area. These surveys included an overall assessment of the site and a detailed visual assessment to confirm if any specific ecological or culturally important site or artefacts are present in the proposed disturbance area. It has been confirmed there are no cultural sites, cultural artefacts of cultural importance in the proposed disturbance area. It is also confirmed there are no significant ecosystem services identified during this survey that would be impacted by the proposed project. This report is intended to provide additional information to that from the standard ecological or cultural survey in order for more informed decisions to be made regarding disturbance in the traditional lands of the Western Yalanji People.

The recommencement of mining operations is generally supported by the Western Yalanji People, who are also the landowners of the Bonny Glen Station, on which the mining leases are located. The surveys confirmed cultural environmental values of the site, and the project disturbance area will not impact on any known sites. In addition, project clearing works will include Western Yalanji people as monitors to help support identification of any cultural artefacts that maybe identified through ground disturbance.