



# YAGAN MEMORIAL PARK NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2010

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YAGAN MEMORIAL PARK

**DERBARL YERRIGAN COMMITTEE FOR THE  
REBURIAL OF YAGAN'S KAAT**



A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON OF

## **THE DERBARRL YERRIGAN COMMITTEE FOR THE REBURIAL OF YAGAN'S KAAT**

As a Whadjuk Nyoongar Elder it is my great pleasure to introduce this newsletter for the perusal of all Nyoongar people, who may know the story about Yagan or may not.

Yagan was a hero in the early days of settlement. Here in Western Australia he was likened to Wallace of Scotland (who was a resistance fighter against English invasion and considered a patriot and national hero), and I think that in a way it is a big statement by the early day settlers in saying that Yagan was a warrior of renown at that particular time.

As the Chairperson of the reburial Committee to rebury Yagan's kaat, I would like to praise the efforts of the Department of Indigenous Affairs during the late 1990s in helping us get over to England and to Liverpool to retrieve the head and bring it back to Western Australia. We brought back our hero, and he was given a hero's welcome on his return. I praise Ken Colbung, Robert Bropho and Mingili Wanjurri for being part of that delegation. The effort of us going over there and retrieving the kaat under the circumstances was outstanding.

Now there is a light at the end of the tunnel and finally we are in a position where we are getting funding and all the obstacles that were there in front of us have been overcome. We're moving ahead and within the next six months we will hopefully be able to produce a Memorial Park out on the Swan River in Upper Swan for Yagan's reburial.

We want to give him a hero's burial and a ceremony will be held and people will be invited to attend. We would like to see everybody attend and come along. It is very important, because I believe that, spiritually, once we rebury Yagan's kaat into the ground then his spirit will become one again and the spirit of Yagan will rise up in and amongst us. I believe, too, that the leaders will evolve within the Nyoongar people in the same way that he was. It was very important that we went to England, I believe, to bring the kaat back, to bury it and reunite him with Mother Earth and create future leaders.

I would like to thank past members who have been members of our Committee and people who have passed on in that time. I thank them very much and I remember their efforts and praise them. Thanks to their families for their participation and supporting them being on our Committee. The Committee has changed over time and has worked for the last 13 years towards this final countdown to rebury our warrior's kaat.

On behalf of the Committee I would like to make special acknowledgement of the late Mr Ken Colbung for his work and efforts to bring back the kaat, to be buried here in Western Australia. The Committee would also like to recognise the participation of the late Mr Shane Pickett, renowned artist here in Nyoongar country. Both contributed to the reburial of Yagan's kaat project and we appreciate their efforts.

Thanks to the Department of Indigenous Affairs and the City of Swan for their support, particularly our former Mayor, Charlie Gregorini, who unfortunately lost his life in an accident. Thanks to the Liberal and Labor governments for their help. I would also like to thank other individuals, who know who they are, for their efforts in helping us put this all together. They've been terrific and, not taking anything away from the Committee, without them we wouldn't have achieved what we've achieved, and we have worked very hard to achieve what we have.

Instead of having meetings to discuss all the information we have, we will send out these newsletters regularly, so I hope that you enjoy the newsletter and what we're doing.

I thank you very much, people, for supporting us, the Committee, and I know that you had to be patient with us because it has taken a long time. I can assure you that we have always kept trying to do the right thing to rebury Yagan's kaat. As Chairperson I thank you for your support.



**RICHARD WILKES**  
FEBRUARY 2010

THIS NEWSLETTER HAS BEEN DEVELOPED AT THE DIRECTION OF THE DERBARL YERRIGAN COMMITTEE FOR THE REBURIAL OF YAGAN'S KAAT TO PROVIDE THE NYOONGAR COMMUNITY AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC WITH UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION ON PLANS FOR THE REBURIAL OF YAGAN'S KAAT, AND ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENTS AT THE YAGAN MEMORIAL PARK.

## **THE DERBARL YERRIGAN COMMITTEE FOR THE REBURIAL OF YAGAN'S KAAT**

The Derbarl Yerrigan Committee for the Reburial of Yagan's Kaat (DYC) was formed in 1997, after the repatriation of Yagan's kaat to Western Australia. The aim of the DYC is to plan for the effective reburial of Yagan's kaat. The Committee is comprised of Nyoongar members and meets regularly. Richard Wilkes is currently the Chairperson of the DYC.

The Department of Indigenous Affairs facilitates the meetings and supports the Committee's work but does not have any input into Committee decision-making.

The work of the DYC has resulted in securing land in the Upper Swan region, at the place where it is considered Yagan's body was buried after his kaat was severed. In 1999-2000 scientific work via ground-probing radar was undertaken to locate Yagan's post-cranial remains. This work proved inconclusive.

The Department of Indigenous Affairs funded this investigative project, employing two consultant archaeologists to search for Yagan's skeletal remains. They identified four sites totaling about 7000 square metres in West Swan, using archival material – maps, plans, oral histories, and other information – in their effort to find the gravesite. Archival research showed these sites as the most likely places to find Yagan's burial ground and skeletal remains.

Ground-probing radar, surface scraping and hand excavation were the archaeologists'

investigation techniques. They looked for ground surface anomalies but despite extensive research did not find any skeletal remains.

The DYC has developed a plan to establish what is now known as the Yagan Memorial Park. It is here that Yagan's kaat will be reburied.



## **AN INTRODUCTION TO YAGAN'S LIFE AND LEGACY**

Yagan was the son of Midgegooroo, leader of a Whadjuk group of Aboriginal people living south of the Swan and Canning Rivers in a region known as Beeliar. Yagan was a young man when Governor Stirling established the Swan River Colony in 1829. In the following years the Colony continued to expand, denying local Whadjuk Aboriginal people access to their land. As the local people came into more frequent contact with the settlers, conflict arose over land and resources. Given their strong spiritual attachment to the land and its central place in their traditional way of life, the local Aboriginal people resisted this displacement none more so than Yagan.

In December 1831 some Whadjuk were found raiding a potato patch, and one of them, a member of Yagan's family was shot dead. Yagan and Midgegooroo avenged the death, as required under tribal law, by spearing a servant on the property.

Yagan and some other Aboriginals were involved in the alleged death of another settler at Kelmscott in June 1832. Yagan was declared an outlaw with a reward of £20 offered for his capture. In October, Yagan and his companions were apprehended, charged with murder and sentenced to death. However, a settler known as Robert Lyon interceded on their behalf, and put forward the argument that Yagan was defending his country and should be treated as a prisoner of war. Yagan's frustration at the impact of settlers was interpreted by George Fletcher Moore in 1833:

"Yagan stepped forward and leaning with his left hand on my shoulder while he gesticulated with the right, delivered a sort of recitation, looking earnestly in my face. I regret I could not understand it, I thought from the tone and manner that the purport was this:-

"You came to our country - you have driven us from our haunts, and disturbed us in our occupations. As we walk in our own country we are fired upon by the white men; why should the white men treat us so?"

In response the Government sent Yagan to exile on Carnac Island. Before long Yagan and his friends escaped Carnac in a dinghy and reached the mainland at Woodman Point. After that, the Government did not pursue them any further. In 1833, Yagan is reported as having met with Aboriginals who had arrived from King George's Sound (now the Albany region) and performed

corroborees with them in public performances.

In April 1833 Yagan's brother, Domjun was shot as he tried to steal flour from a Fremantle store, and later died from his wounds. The next day in what was considered a revenge attack, Yagan, Midgegooroo and another Whadjuk leader, Munday, were implicated in the deaths of two settlers. They were declared outlaws, with a reward of £30 posted for the capture of Yagan. On 22 May Midgegooroo was apprehended, and executed without trial. Munday successfully appealed his charge.

Yagan remained elusive until 11 July when he and a group of Aboriginals approached Bull's farm in Upper Swan looking for some flour. They were met by brothers William (18-years-old) and James (13) Keates, who had been friends with Yagan, and accompanied them for the rest of the morning.

The brothers had reportedly wanted the reward for a passage back to England. At the Swan River, Yagan declined to go any further with the group and William took this opportunity to shoot Yagan through the head. In the fight that ensued William Keates was killed and another Aboriginal, Heegan, was mortally wounded.

The bodies of Yagan and Heegan are said to have been buried a short distance from where they were killed. William Keates was buried in the local church yard. James Keates escaped and the following month claimed the 'dead or alive' reward and left the colony.

Before his burial, Yagan's head was severed and preserved by a smoking process, in which it was 'suspended' for three months in a hollow tree, over a fire made with the wood of the Eucalyptus' (Dale 1834: 17). Robert Dale, who had known Yagan personally, then took the head to England in September 1833 on board the *Cornwallis*. It was displayed as a curio, then passed on to the Liverpool Museum.

In 1964, Yagan's kaat was buried in a cemetery at Everton, Liverpool. In 1997 a group of Nyoongar Elders located and accompanied his kaat back home to prepare for its burial.

## PLANNING FOR THE REBURIAL OF YAGAN'S KAAT

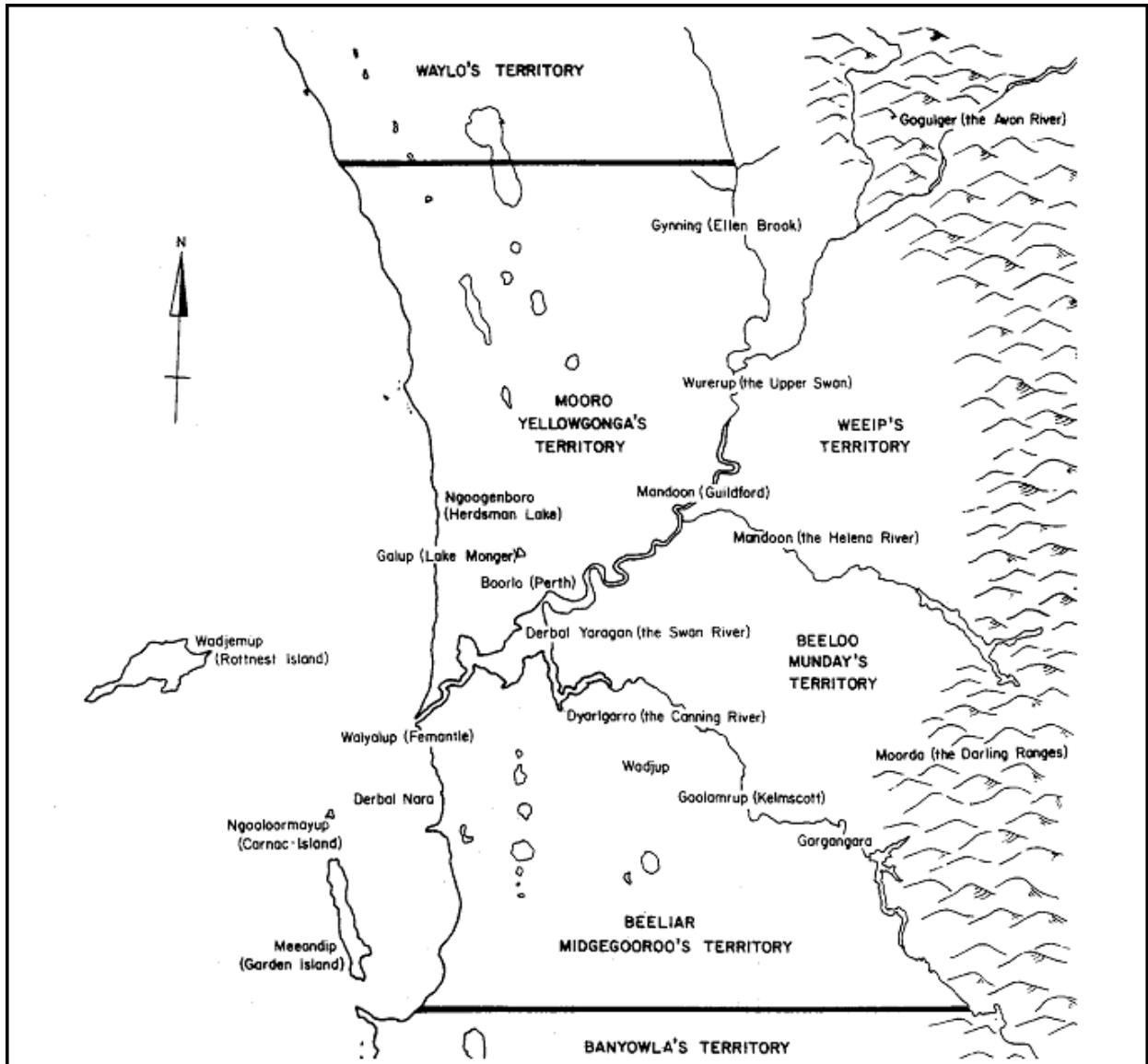
Yagan has become a powerful symbol of the resistance by Aboriginal people to the loss of their land and culture – a reminder to us all that this is Nyoongar land occupied during colonisation by force and in the face of brave resistance.

With the support of the Department of Indigenous Affairs and in partnership with the City of Swan, the Derbarl Yerrigan Committee for the Reburial of Yagan's Kaat, is planning the reburial on land in the Upper Swan to be known as the Yagan Memorial Park. This property, Reserve 49493, was vested with the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority in 2008. Yagan Memorial Park will be a fitting tribute to this Nyoongar warrior. It will be a final resting place for the kaat, providing Nyoongar people and the wider community an opportunity to pay respect to the memory of Yagan and contemplate the events of his memorial day.

In 2009 the WA Government provided funds for the development of the Park and ongoing maintenance. The City of Swan has taken on the lead role of project managers and will also provide maintenance of the Park for the next five years. Additional funds for planned events have been sourced from other agencies including the Department of Local Government, the Indigenous Heritage Program and Lotterywest.



Members of the DYC, City of Swan and DIA at a cheque handover event



Robert Lyon's Map 1832  
(Green Broken Spears, 1984)

## REPATRIATION: THE RETURN OF YAGAN'S KAAT

The return of Yagan's kaat to Western Australia was the result of many years of effort by members of the Nyoongar community and supporting individuals and organisations.

In the 1990s applications were made to the UK authorities for permission to exhume Yagan's head. Eventually, after considerable delays, brought about by bureaucratic processes and opposition from members of the Nyoongar community, an Aboriginal delegation received Yagan's remains at a handover ceremony at the Liverpool Town Hall on 31 August 1997. The delegation escorted Yagan's remains back to Perth on 1 September 1997.

The repatriation of Yagan's kaat prompted many reactions from the broader WA community, including racist comments in the media, and the vandalism and beheading of Yagan's statue at Heirisson Island.

Yagan remains a powerful figure for Nyoongar people:

"The story of Yagan is an extremely powerful story: it is a story of invasion, of early contact between two cultures, of colonialism and its racist, bloody nature. It is to the dominant culture, a threatening story. And most of all it is the story of a great warrior who has come home. So the Nyungars at the airport are happy, and they feel the Nyungar spirit is strong. Yagan can be laid to rest and his spirit set free at last."  
(McGlade, Hannah. 1998. The repatriation of Yagan: A story of manufacturing dissent. *Law Text Culture* 4: 245–255).

Cressida Fforde has chronicled the events associated with the repatriation of Yagan's kaat in detail [www.nma.gov.au](http://www.nma.gov.au)



Kangaroo Cloak made for the return of Yagan's Kaat,

## YAGAN MEMORIAL PARK

The City of Swan commenced capital works for the Yagan Memorial Park in 2009.

### NOVEMBER 2009



Car park construction underway

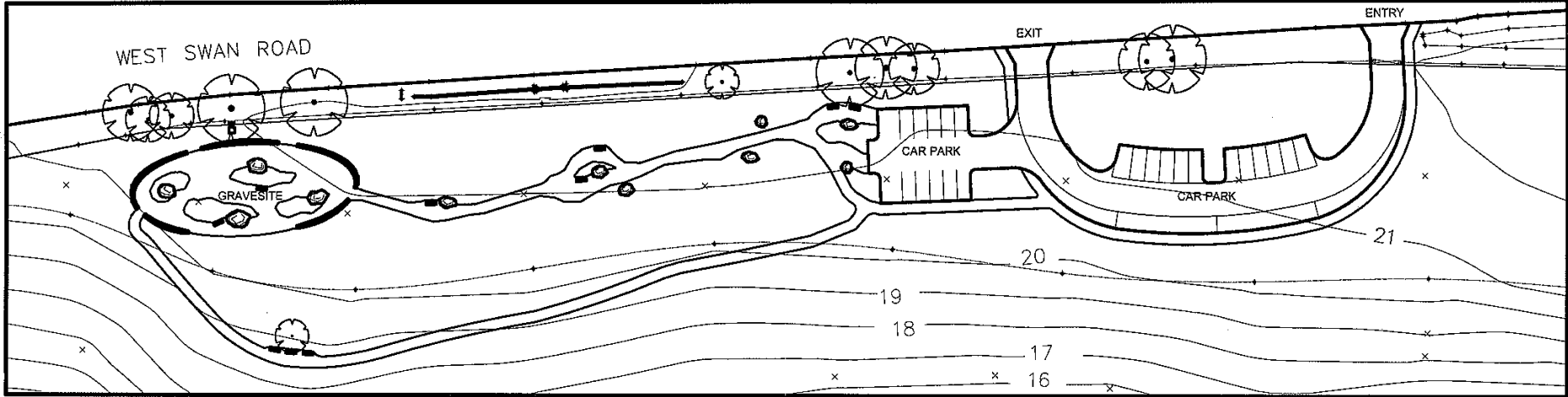


To conclude the last DYC meeting 2009, Elders and members visited the Yagan Memorial Park to give the Aboriginal trainees some encouragement, supporting their work and discussing the importance of this project for future generations.






### DECEMBER 2009
















**LIGHTING**

-  LARGE LED UPLIGHTS
-  SMALL LED UPLIGHTS
-  SMALL WALL MOUNTED LIGHTS

**LEGEND**

-  EXISTING TREES
-  LOCAL INDIGENOUS TREES
-  DRY GRASS AREAS
-  TOP OF SLOPE
-  CONTOURS
-  SITE BOUNDARY/ FENCE LINE
-  CAR PARKING AREA (Red Asphalt)
-  RAMMED EARTH WALLS
-  GRANITE BOULDERS
-  BENCHES
-  FOOTPATHS AND PEDESTRIAN AREAS (RM-8 Compacted Earth Construction)



NO.	REVISION	DATE	DESCRIPTION

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APPROVED  
 PROJECT MANAGER DATE  
 SCALE: 1:500  
 DRAWN: A.M.D.  
 ORIGINAL DRAWING SIZE: A0

APPROVED  
 DESIGN CO-ORDINATOR DATE  
 DESIGNED: M. SELVOUR  
 DRAWN: M. SELVOUR  
 CHECKED: J. BROWN  
 DATE DWN: 28/07/20

**YAGAN'S MEMORIAL PARK, DELHUS**  
 LANDSCAPE SKETCH DESIGN  
 DESIGN

city of swan  
 DRAWING NO: P316-

OPERATIONS

INCIDENT NO.



Yagan Memorial Park map – aerial photo with cadastral boundaries

## CITY OF SWAN ABORIGINAL HORTICULTURAL TRAINEES

The City of Swan engaged Indigenous Horticultural Trainees for some Park developments. Up to 10 trainees are currently employed. As part of their training, the DYC endorsed a heritage training program to provide opportunities for them to gain a better understanding of Yagan's life and legacy, the significance of the Park and skills in the identification of cultural objects.



The Heritage Training Course (five, two-hour sessions twice a week) concluded with a visit to Aboriginal sites at Walyunga National Park on 2 June. Trainees were presented with Aboriginal Heritage Training Participation Certificates by Richard Wilkes, Chairperson, DYC at the conclusion of this site visit.

Amongst their regular training operations, the trainees were involved in a range of activities at the Park including fencing, landscape construction and planting.



Aboriginal horticultural trainees from the City of Swan undertaking fencing works at Yagan Memorial Park

Thanks are due to THE DEPARTMENT OF INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS AND CITY OF SWAN.

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WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT  
DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
THE INDIGENOUS HERITAGE PROGRAM  
LOTTERYWEST

is most gratefully acknowledged

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