

Walking Together at Myall Creek: Dreaming Beyond ‘A Cult of Forgetfulness’

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ABSTRACT: Against the ‘silence’ or ‘forgetfulness’ of the many massacres of Aboriginal people, the Myall Creek Massacre holds a special place due to its detailed presence in the public record. Rather than simply reasserting the truth of the many massacres, this article then records an attempt to move beyond such denials/assertion. Recording testimony to the spirit of the land, the site of Myall Creek becomes significant for both memorial and for memory.

In 1968, W.E.H. Stanner delivered a Boyer lecture entitled ‘The Great Australian Silence’, in which he argued that the history of invasion, including theft of land and massacres had been ignored, and that this ‘silence’ was ‘structural’, for ‘a view from a window ... has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of landscape’. (Stanner 1969, pp. 22-25). Over time, this had turned into ‘a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale’.¹

‘Deathscapes’ of the Australian Frontier

Although the viewpoint contested during the history wars and described as a ‘black armband’ view of history (Windschuttle 2003), most historians would concur that the Australian landscape is replete with massacre sites, to think otherwise is to wear a ‘white blindfold’ (Attwood and Foster 2003). Whilst the theme of massacres is only one narrative of the ‘Frontier’, and one that ignores ‘more subtle and complex understandings of the frontier’ (Griffiths 2003, p. 148), it is certainly one of immense significance for black-white relations. The colonial frontier was a place that Michael Taussig (1987, p. 4) described as a ‘death-space in the land of the living’, a place where ‘Cultures of terror’ were ‘nourished through the intermingling of silence and myth’. Although the use of terror was never legally sanctioned, pastoralists were able to shroud what must be public knowledge locally in ‘a mantle of silence’ to the outside world (Rose 1991, p. 24).

¹ Stanner, W.E.H. (1969) *The 1968 Boyer Lectures: After the Dreaming*, Sydney, ABC Radio.



Myall Creek Memorial Walk, taken by Julie Collins, 7 June 2015.

The convenient myth-images of Aboriginal people, as brought by white settlers to the frontier, were of the 'Debased savage', who was murderous and revolting, and of the 'Noble savage' who was stone-age and therefore destined for imminent extinction (*ibid.*). Denholm (1979, p. 29) described the destruction of Aboriginal societies in the south-east using the imagery of the graveyard, referring to the 'drear dread deathscape in the Australian heart'. Deborah Bird Rose (1991) used the

term ‘deathscape’ to describe areas of the Victoria River region of the Northern Territory, where, as elsewhere in Australia, death occurred through massacre, disease, and the increased warfare between neighbouring tribes that resulted from the displacement and contraction of territories. Tatz (2014) argued that the killing era was for many akin to removing non-human pests from their land rather than warfare resulting from colonial invasion. Noel Pearson (2014) described a ‘casual parsimony’ of killing on the frontier of Queensland, noting that ‘the killing of Aboriginal people was no more profound an act than killing a wallaby’ (Pearson 2015). Often suppressed by the settlers, the memory of massacres was kept alive by Aboriginal oral tradition, becoming part of their mythology of place.

In the 1980 Boyer lecture, Bernard Smith suggested that Australian culture is haunted by the dispossession and violence done to Aboriginal people, like ‘a nightmare’, which ‘continues to haunt our dreams’ (Smith 1980, cited in Griffiths, 2003). Both Stanner and Smith urged fellow Australians to interrogate ‘the great Australian silence’:

Not only to reveal suppressed facts about the frontier but also as part of an essential exploration of the white Australian psyche (Griffiths 2003, p. 138).

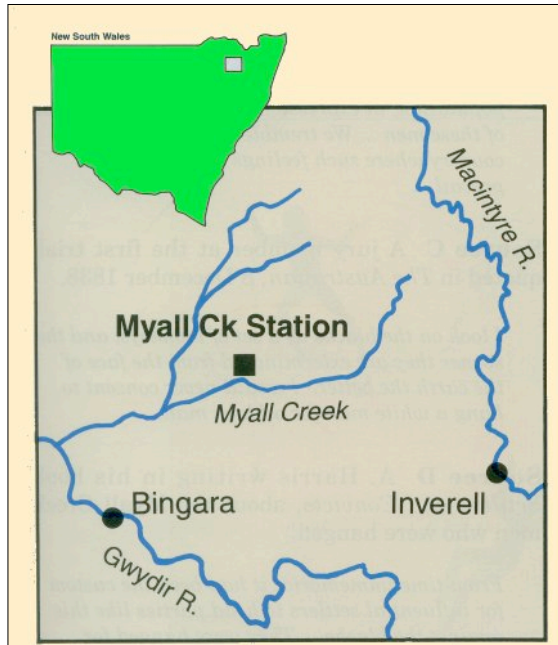
As the process of reconciliation has gathered momentum, the silence has been broken in many places. The commemoration of a massacre site by Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians at Myall Creek, acknowledges a shared history, and the beginning of a new healing narrative of place. On this common ground, people from both sides of the ‘Frontier’ remember and oppose the silence.

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A Massacre at Myall Creek

Myall Creek Station, established in 1837 by Henry Dangar, is a site where Indigenous and non-indigenous cultural landscapes and history converge. According to oral history, gathered by the late Len Payne of Bingara, the Gwydir exploded in an outburst of violence known as the ‘Drive’ or the ‘Bushwhack’ early in 1838 (Milliss 1992). Aboriginal people of the *Wirrayaraay* tribe of the *Gamilaraay* language group, had sought refuge with the four men who worked at Myall Creek Station. However, on the 10 June 1838 stockmen rode into Myall Creek station and brutally murdered 28 unarmed women, children and old men. The

young and able-bodied *Wirrayaraay* men were away cutting bark on the neighbouring station.



*Site of the Myall Creek
Massacre*

http://www.janesoceania.com/australia_europeans/index.htm

Eleven of the twelve men who carried out the massacre were arrested, tried and acquitted. In a second trial, seven of them were found guilty and hanged. Myall Creek was

just one of many massacre sites in the New England and north-west region (Blomfield 1992; Milliss 1992), but it gained added notoriety because several of the perpetrators were brought to justice. Hailed as a turning point in black-white relations, a more cynical interpretation could point to the fact that those found guilty were ex-convicts, the most 'disposable' elements of the white community, while a squatter involved in the massacre was never brought to trial. Further, shortly before the Myall Creek massacre, a much larger slaughter of Aboriginal people was purported to have occurred in north-western NSW, at a site subsequently known as Waterloo Creek (Milliss 1992; Ryan 2003). For this massacre, perpetrated by Major Nunn and his troops, no-one was brought to justice. A legacy of Myall Creek was that those responsible for subsequent massacres became much more secretive about their actions, the conflict became cloaked in silence (Blomfield 1992; Goodall 1996). Massacres continued throughout Australia until at least 1928, when the last recorded massacre occurred at Coniston, although some would argue that massacres continued at least until the 1930s (Pearson 2015).

Feeling the Spirit of the Land

Many Aboriginal people have spoken to me about their experience of the interconnectedness of the Physical World and the Spirit World. Thus

massacre sites not only reflect the violence of contact history, but are dark places where the Spirit World strongly impacts upon the Natural World. I was once fortunate enough to be taken on a National Parks Discovery Tour of the Apsley Gorge area near Walcha by two Traditional Owners, Sue Green and her son Eddie Green, and renowned Aboriginal artist and National Park Ranger from Mutawintji in Western New South Wales, Badger Bates. The significance of this area, one associated with the Rainbow Serpent Dreaming and a Medicine Man's Site, has been further emphasised by the presence of a reputed Massacre Site, where many local Aboriginal people were driven off a cliff to their death. Sue Green described the site:²

Sue Green: ...It's one place where most people experience stillness, because nothing lives there, there's no breezes in the trees, there's no noises like you hear here, once you go past a point it's just dead, silence, a few white people have noticed that... there's no movement in the trees, it could be windy over this side but there's nothing moving over that side.

...

Sue: At that massacre site, where it happened, no water goes over that anymore, because everything sort of just stopped.

The sensitivity of Aboriginal people to massacre sites is exacerbated by what Eddie Green described as getting 'a blast':

Eddie: It gives what's known as a 'blast'... we went to this area and I don't think we were meant to be there and I started feeling very strange.

When Aboriginal people do inadvertently or otherwise make an unauthorised visit to a place, they often experience an unpleasant physical sensation, described here as a 'blast', indicating that they should leave the area instantly. This ability to feel the spirit of the land is something that Badger Bates described as innate to Aboriginal people:

Badger: It doesn't matter if we were taken away from our family, if we came to a place we'd get feelings that that's out of (our) boundary.

This suggests that even if an Aboriginal person had been removed from their family and had no knowledge of their Aboriginal heritage, they would still have the capacity to feel this sensation, as in certain instances

² All transcripts included in this paper are from: Collins, J. (2006), *Caring for Country in New South Wales: Connections, Identity, Belonging*. PhD thesis (unpublished), School of Environmental and Information Sciences, Charles Sturt University.

would some non-Aboriginal people. In the case of massacre sites, the Myall creek Memorial is an example of an attempting to neutralise negativity of place, by creating an entirely new commemorative ceremony and monument, combining Indigenous and non-indigenous spiritual practice, to pay tribute to those who died, hopefully, creating a space for reconciliation to occur.

Myall Creek Massacre Site

I first attended the Myall Creek Annual Commemoration ceremony in 2000. This was the first year that the Memorial Rock and serpentine walkway had been established to tell the story of the massacre through commemorative plaques and to provide a focal point with a huge memorial stone for an annual ceremony. It was amazing to approach along the Delungra Road and to see hundreds of cars parked in a paddock by the Myall Creek Memorial Hall (a memorial for soldiers killed in the 1st WW). It was as if commemorating this later tragedy had obliterated the earlier event! There was quite a buzz of anticipation in the crowd, with lots of high profile Australians like Indigenous Leader Linda Burney, Rick Farley (former head of the National Farmer's Federation), and John Anderson (the then Deputy Prime Minister) in attendance. It seemed like people had travelled from all over the State and beyond to be there. There was a euphoria and optimism apparent, arising from the Reconciliation walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge, where thousands of people, indigenous and non-indigenous had demonstrated their support for reconciliation on Sorry Day, 26 May.

We gathered under a soft grey winter sky, to hear members of the Memorial □ organizing committee introduce themselves and tell the story of how this day had come to pass.

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Here is an excerpt of Paulette Smith's welcoming speech (Paulette was a member of the Myall Creek Committee):

Paulette Smith: It's been 35 years since Lyn Payne, a Bingara resident, first proposed the erection of a memorial. In January 1965, the headlines in the Bingara Advocate said 'Memorial to be erected at Myall creek', a story followed describing Lyn Payne's desire to construct a memorial using the hinges and stick rails from the Myall Creek stockyards. The monument would take the form of a symbolic gate suspended from a concrete pillar on the site of the massacre. However, in the following week a Bingara resident wrote a letter to the *Bingara Advocate* condemning Lynn's proposal, and said 'the whole idea is ill-conceived, unconsidered, mischievous and an insult to the Bingara people'. Lyn attempted to reply to this condemnation but his letter was refused

publication. The Apex decided against supporting the memorial and the idea was banished.

During the 1980s Lyn met with Jim Millar (an Indigenous activist and former UNE Academic) and others from Armidale every June 10 to lay a wreath. Lyn never lost hope that one day a memorial would be built and up until his death in 1993 he continued to visit the site on every anniversary. In October 1998 a Conference on Reconciliation was held at Myall Creek at the suggestion of Sue Blacklock, a descendent of those who survived the massacre, and the group decided on that day to erect a permanent memorial. This was to acknowledge:

If we and our descendants are to live in peace in Australia, then we have to tell and acknowledge the truth of our history...we want Australia to be an inclusive society where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal are honoured and respect each other. This cannot happen until the history includes the stories of how Aboriginal people experienced history.

At our first big group meeting on March 20, John Brown, a Uniting Church Minister and Chairperson of the Committee, put a very important question to the group; he asked if the descendants of Myall Creek people wanted the participation of non-Aboriginal people in this project, or, would they like to take it on themselves. The group was unanimous in its support for a project involving both indigenous and non-indigenous people. The group decided that the memorial was also for the purpose of reconciling Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

But what I really want to talk to you about is the people. We started out as a group of strangers from all around this area, all united in the common ideal of truth, justice and reconciliation. As the meetings progressed, we became closer. I can remember the days when we all sat round the large table at lunchtime and shared food amongst us, the johnny cakes cooked by Carmine, the sandwiches from Moree, and the plates of fruit from Tamworth. Lyall (Munro) always kept us amused and Roger Knox enlivened our meetings because of his beautiful singing and his wonderful stories.

The day that Des Black, a descendent of one of the perpetrators, arrived was memorable. We had not expected to hear from any of these descendants, but months later Buala Adams came to a meeting and when she and Sue Blacklock hugged we felt that we had really taken a step into the future. I feel that we have all been privileged to be part of the Committee and all the time and effort we've put into the memorial is insignificant compared to the personal gains we've made.

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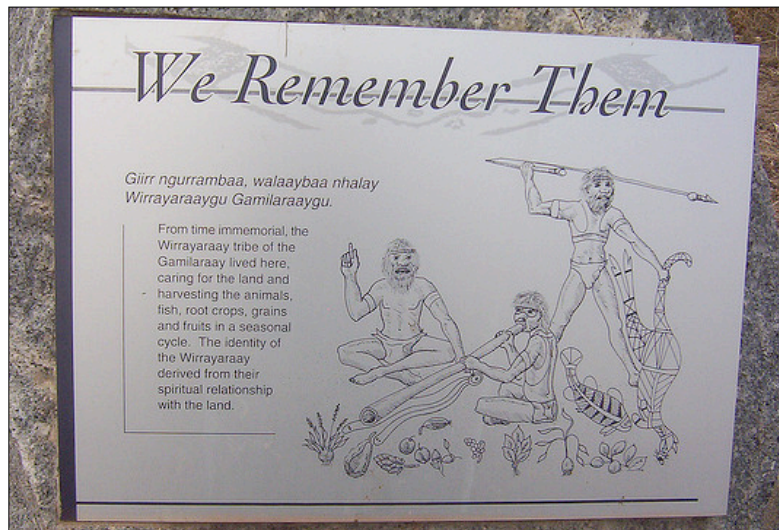
After Welcomes and Introductions, we were invited to take the short walk up the hill to the Memorial at the massacre site, remembering the day that those who had been massacred had made the same walk. I think the best part of the whole thing is the walking and the yarning. As you

walk, up the hill to the Memorial site or along the walkway, you talk and make friends, or deepen existing friendships.

At the beginning of the memorial walk, we were welcomed by the Nucoorilma Dancers, and a ceremony was conducted with woomeras and a Bull Roarer to call up good spirits. A ritual smoking for purification protected us. Along the walkway were seven smaller rocks on which plaques sequentially told the story of the Myall Creek Massacre. Each plaque was unveiled by an Elder, and its inscription read out aloud by a Committee or community member in English and by a linguist from UNE, Anna Ash, in the *Gamilaraay* language. The speaking of words in language was tremendously significant. The words were recorded in time and space, etched in memory for the future and reaching back in time to the spirits of those who had died there.

The first plaque emphasised the ecological and spiritual aspects of the Wirrayaraay people's relationship to the land and the importance of land to the Wirrayaraay identity:

From time immemorial, the *Wirrayaraay* tribe of the *Gamilaraay* lived here, caring for the land and harvesting the animals, fish, root crops, grains and fruits in a seasonal cycle. The identity of the *Wirrayaraay* derived from their spiritual relationship with the land.



Myall Creek Memorial Plaque, taken by Stephen Lark, 6 June 2008
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/slark/2577470394/>

The Ceremony



The Memorial Rock with John Brown and Ivan Roberts (honorary CEO of friends of Myall Creek), photograph by Julie Collins, 7 June 2015

At the end of the Walkway, at the Large Memorial Rock, we were greeted by Minister John Brown and Elder Sue Blacklock. The Memorial Rock is situated on a site overlooking the place where the massacre actually occurred, and the exact location is protected and only known to descendants and Traditional Owners. We then participated in a ceremony, involving the descendants of perpetrators and victims:

To witness the reconciliation between the descendants of those massacred and those who carried out the massacre as part of the ceremony was very moving, as was the involvement of local children, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

The following is an edited transcript of the ceremony that took place:

John Brown: We will now have a welcome to this place and ceremony from Sue Blacklock (applause)

Sue: I would like to thank everyone who came today. You know, as I came over that hill I felt like crying to see everybody here, and I wasn't expecting a very big crowd. But just thank you from the bottom of my heart for coming, and I hope that this day will be remembered, as we stand here today for years, you know, as years go by that we will never forget what's happening here today. And I just thank you all once again for coming, thank you (applause)

John: Let us keep silent for a moment

(In the background we can hear woomeras, the bull roarer and clapsticks.)

Let us pray: God of many names, eternal creator, father and mother of all people, you spoke to our ancestors and to our ancestors in the faith, you've spoken to us in Jesus Christ. Be present by your spirit to confirm what is good and true in what we do. Forgive our shortcomings. We acknowledge the dismembering of our relationships over the past two centuries, as we remember those good people who died here and in other places, unnecessarily and shamefully. And those good people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who during our history together in this land have worked hard for justice, respect and understanding, unite us in our peace making, soothe our troubled breasts, may this ceremony of remembering bring hope and healing to all. Amen.

The Three Descendants of the Murderers: We are descendants of and represent all those who carried out murder and mayhem on the slopes below.

Sue *(standing with Lyall):* We are descendants of all those who survived the massacre.

All descendants: We acknowledge this our shared history, we seek reconciliation between our peoples and the healing of the wounds of the past

John: And let us say together 'This is the history of everyone, of us, we are all heirs and survivors, beneficiaries and victims of its injustices and misunderstandings. We too want reconciliation and healing.'

Both groups of descendants hugged each other and shook hands, there was applause and a big candle was then lit in front of the stone.

John: We light this candle in memory of those who died on the slopes below, needlessly, brutally and wrongly. Their spirits are with us here, they're glad that we remember them today. We also honour those who died all over the country, courageously defending their land or because they spoke the truth in the face of violent power and oppression. And we honour those good people who reported the massacre: William Hobbs, the Manager; Frederick Foot who rode to Maitland and on to Sydney to report the massacre; Edward Denny Day, the magistrate who rode up here to investigate the reports under instruction from Governor Gibbs; those who prosecuted and brought the criminals to justice.

We honour all those people who throughout our history have reached out to one another across the racial division and dreamed of a more just respectful and caring ways of sharing this land. We

acknowledge that violence continued at places all over the country for a hundred and forty years, that it was all part of the taking of the land without negotiation or payment. That Aboriginal people rightly defended their land, families, culture and heritage, that there was a war between laws and cultures and belief systems.

We grieve this lack of respect and negotiation in the taking of the land, the destruction of the culture and language, the breaking up of the families and their dispersal to land belonging to people with different stories, the forced separation of many children. We acknowledge that this destruction and evil continues to affect the lives of people now, to cause confusion, fear and violence, that some people direct the violence at themselves, their families and loved ones, or direct it randomly and go to jail. We acknowledge that oppression continues in the present: in racial discrimination; in employment; health care; schools and shops; in the inequity of access to, or use of the land; in the disrespect for Aboriginal culture and traditional custodians; in a history still told largely from the point of view of non-Aboriginal people. Can we light another candle? (*Another candle is lit.*) A candle of hope, healing and acceptance, for we've gathered today to honour both perspectives on the history and to renew our commitment to tell the truth to our children and to our grandchildren. We commit ourselves to the continuing search for more respectful, equitable and just ways of living together in the land. When a person's lot will no longer be determined on the basis of their ancestry or skin colour. When young people will no longer bear a grudge against the society because it treats their people and history and culture unjustly. When the history of 60 000 years is honoured together with the history of the last two centuries and when the glorious parts of the history are celebrated with pride and the dishonourable parts are acknowledged with shame.

(A bull roarer is heard from behind the rock.)

And we pray that the creator spirit will reward and bless our efforts and grant healing and peace in the land.

The plaque on the large stone was then unveiled by Sue Blacklock and Beula Adams. (Applause).

Sue and Beula: We dedicate this monument to the telling of the truth of our shared history and to the reconciliation of our peoples (applause)

John and all of the descendants join in: And together we will walk together and we will find more respectful and just ways of living together in the land.

...

Paulette: As you return back along the path, take a stranger by the arm and walk back in peace knowing that today you have taken a very big step towards justice, truth and reconciliation.

In 2000, everyone who attended had been invited to contribute to the final Memorial by bringing a rock to be laid at the Memorial stone. At the culmination of the ceremony, participants were asked to place the rocks they had brought in a circle around the main Memorial rock, symbolising their commitment to reconciliation. Slowly the ceremony broke up and we all made our way back to the Community Hall to have lunch, listen to more speakers and to be entertained by musicians and others.

Those rocks are still there, piled up against the stone and in a circle marking out a ceremonial area around the large memorial stone. Many are buried by dirt now but those rocks came from all over NSW and other parts of Australia, and they are a physical reminder that Myall Creek is symbolic of the history of all Australia and a part of all of us who live here today.

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Significant Themes

An obvious rich point of this narrative is the whole concept that the Memorial of such a dark event as a massacre could provide an opportunity for healing and reconciliation. It seems counterintuitive that something so horrible to contemplate could produce such a positive experience for those involved in the ceremony, for the people who conceived of and executed the Memorial project and, and even more significantly, for the descendants of those people who were there that fateful day in 1838. What such a project indicated was a maturity in Australian society; to acknowledge the past, to take responsibility for what happened, to forgive, but not to forget. It was also indicative of the power of working together on projects that heal the land, both spiritually and physically, to reconcile and heal the people involved.

The fact that the earlier attempt to erect a memorial at Myall Creek by Lyn Payne was thwarted, reflected what Stanner (1968) described as ‘the great Australian silence’, an unwillingness to confront the colonial past. In contrast to the silence of the past, in more recent years, amongst the supporters of the Memorial and the wider community, there was a sense that the people of Australia cannot move forward unless there is an acknowledgment of the dark shared history. Without acknowledgment, there can be no closure. As articulated by Paulette at the beginning of the day:

If we and our descendants are to live in peace in Australia then we have to tell and acknowledge the truth of our history.

The massacre site at Myall Creek had evoked very unpleasant sensations in the Aboriginal people who have come here, an example of feeling the spirit of the land, and this has generated avoidance behaviour up until the creation of the Memorial. In essence, the massacre dispossessed Aboriginal people of any access to the site, more effectively than any landholder:

John Anderson (deputy Prime-Minister): Aboriginal people have not visited that area since 1838 because of the massacre of 27 Aboriginal men, women and children by seven whites.

...

Bob (Regional Manager ATSIC): Today is a very significant event. I've had a lot of dealings with Myall creek in the past, especially Lyn Payne. In 1965, I recall when he came across the hinges (of the original gates of Myall Creek). He showed me the hinges in 1960 odd ... and that was a very moving occasion when I came here in those times out in the bush. Just across the road there we searched... it was very spiritual, very eerie for me and today the same feeling was here...

The laying of the memorial was an attempt to lay the spirits of those massacred to rest. The site can then become a place that Aboriginal people no longer have to avoid, and a site to be visited with respect:

Sue Blacklock (Descendent of Aboriginal survivor of massacre): I said to my kids today when we were coming here, you know what this means to me, coming here we're coming to a funeral.

Coming together at the massacre site was presented as a cathartic ritual we could all share in, a cleansing and transforming experience, but particularly significant to the descendents of those massacred and to the descendents of the perpetrators of the massacre. It was a symbolic reconciliation between the two parties, which we could all witness and empathise with. The ritualisation of repentance and forgiveness and the spiritual overtones emphasised the communal and iconic nature of the encounter. The movement along the Memorial track, stopping to read the inscription on every stone, was reminiscent of the 'stations of the cross' as a concept. The traditional smoking ceremony further underscored the theme of cleansing and communality, and the use of the bullroarer and also the burning of candles, gave a ceremonial context. The two cultures came together to produce a hybrid ceremony, but with its own dynamic innovations, hopefully, meaningful for all the participants.

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The Placing of Personal Stones

The innovative request that those gathered at the ceremony bring their own stone to place at the main Memorial site, ensured that those present were fully implicated, becoming full participants, rather than voyeurs of the event:

John Brown: You who have brought stones in symbolising the fact that this history is part of the history of all of us.

The use of rocks as commemorative symbols was iconic not only of gravestones, but also of a sense of being at one with the land: like a traditional sacred site, the Memorial was part of the land. The fact that participants also brought stones, many from far away, gave the sense that their presence too would be forever remembered, with stones eternally bearing witness to the presence of many people from many places. On that day it became a place where a positive spiritual experience had occurred and been imprinted on 'country'. These stones eternally bear witness to the presence of many people from many places, sanctifying the sacredness of the site. It became a place where a spiritual ceremonial experience had occurred and could re-occur in the future. There was an optimistic feeling that the process, which had culminated on that day, was the beginning of a long journey of healing.

Bob: ...we've got to forget about the past, move on to the future in a journey of healing together.

The word reconciliation was mentioned often. The process leading up to the day of the commemoration was in this instance extremely important. The coming together of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to work towards the unveiling of a memorial had provided an opportunity for people to work towards a common goal. The process continues to this day, with annual commemorative events. The coming together of so many people on that day in 2000 had compounded and magnified the act of reconciliation, turning Myall Creek from a place that was shunned by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal locals, to a place of peaceful contemplation. It was as if that place that had such a horrendous history, was being transformed by all the positive energies of the people present.

The fact that the signs were written in both English and *Gamilaraay*, and that a linguist spoke the words in language, indicated a desire to retain and revitalise language for present and future generations. Speaking the words was tremendously significant, even if the speaker was a non-Aboriginal person. The words were recorded in time and

space, etched in memory for the future and reaching back in time to the spirits of those who had died there. Each language bears a unique relationship to the land from which it has arisen, containing subtle and detailed knowledge of country. The ceremony was iconic of the ways Aboriginal people trace their cultural practice to the traditional past, but incorporate new motifs and practices that have gathered significance for them through the intervening years.

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The Ongoing Ceremonies

The Memorial site and ceremony is a tribute to the work of so many Myall Creek Committee members and the friends of Myall Creek; it is a symbol of reconciliation; and it is a promise for the future. I have attended the annual ceremony several times in the last fifteen years and the annual gathering has in no way lost momentum, although the focus may change. Guest speakers over the years have included former Indigenous Senator, Aiden Ridgeway, and former Politician and member of the Rock group Midnight Oil, Peter Garrett.

In 2012, I attended the ceremony and wrote a Blog³ for ABC Open. The theme of the ABC Blog site was *Now and Then*, the visual component was a comparison of photographs taken in 2000. Here is an excerpt from that blog:

This year (2012) on the 10th of June I came to Myall Creek prepared to share its story. With a team of friends we gathered video and also embraced the opportunity to take photos for ABC Open's Now and Then.

Armidale resident Brendan Blacklock⁴ captured images of people making the pilgrimage across Myall Creek, walking up the hill, and gathering around the stone matching them with the pictures taken in 2000.⁵

Over a decade on, the Now and Then images show just how far the process has come. With people returning or discovering the ceremony for the first time, the annual gathering has in no way lost momentum.

³ A Blog is a regularly updated website or web page, that is written in an informal or conversational style.

⁴ Brendan is also related to Sue Blacklock, one of the descendants of relatives of those massacred.

⁵ See hyperlinks embedded in this paragraph of the blog: <https://open.abc.net.au/discover>, <https://open.abc.net.au/explore/22434>, <https://open.abc.net.au/explore/22433>, and <https://open.abc.net.au/explore/22435>

To continue and extend the work of acknowledging and healing from these scars of our past, plans are afoot to develop a Cultural and Education centre at Myall Creek. I don't think there could be any better place to acknowledge the true history of this country (Collins, 2012)

And two of the responses it evoked:

Vanessa Milton: It's powerful to think how that has place has seen the worst, and now the best of humanity. A lot of my family come from up that way, and I remember my mum telling me the shocking story when I was young. I'm very happy to know that it is being commemorated in this way. More people need to know about it. I came across this website that gives a good background for people who don't know the story www.myallcreekmassacre.com

Lynette Muirhead: Julie, the opening of the Memorial was an extremely special time for our family. Walking up the hill carrying our stones, the sound of the Bullroarer at the start of walk, then side by side with other like minded individuals- magic. Then the ceremony...too precious to forget.



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Myall Creek Memorial Day Walk 2012. Photograph taken by Brendan Blacklock <https://open.abc.net.au/explore/22433>



Gathering around the Memorial stone. Photograph by Brendan Blacklock <https://open.abc.net.au/explore/22565>

In 2015, the centenary of Gallipoli, Aboriginal historian Professor John Maynard drew attention to the lack of recognition of the Indigenous soldiers in the Wars of the Twentieth century, also describing how the soldier land grants for non-indigenous soldiers after the First World War, led to a second wave of dispossessions of Aboriginal land held in reserves (John Maynard, Myall Creek Memorial Ceremony 7th June 2015).

Sadly the Memorial is not without contention and the stones were vandalized in 2005. But now there are plans to develop an Education and Cultural Centre of national and international significance at Myall Creek, with both a real and virtual presence. This is a place where people can together to learn about history, culture and healing. There could not be any better place to acknowledge the true story of this country. It represents some of the worst aspects of our history, the unacknowledged massacres, but also the best, the work of reconciliation that has gone on at Myall Creek since before 1988 when the first memorial ceremony occurred on the 150th anniversary of the massacre.

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