



Victorian Reconciliation Network Forum on Wurundjeri Country

14-15 April 2018

Reconciliation Victoria hosted the annual regional Victorian Reconciliation Network Forum on Wurundjeri Country on 14-15 April 2018. Thirty-nine people attended despite the wet weather, including reps from twelve Local Reconciliation Groups (LRGs). We also welcomed thirteen individuals working outside of LRGs. The forum was held near Healesville on Saturday evening after a tour of important Wurundjeri sites beginning with a Welcome to Country by Uncle Bill Nicholson Junior at Dights Falls in Abbotsford.

From Dights Falls we went to Bolin Bolin Billabong in Bulleen, to hear Uncle Bill share stories of Wurundjeri culture before and during the early years of British colonisation. Heavy rain and gale-force winds ended the tour at Bolin Bolin and we retreated to our camp at Candelbark Farm near Healesville for dry clothes and our evening LRG forum.

On Sunday the group had a tour of Coranderrk with Uncle Dave Wandin, including the Coranderrk Cemetery where William Barak and many other members of the Coranderrk community are buried.

In what was a wonderful and inspiring weekend, Elders of the Wurundjeri Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Aboriginal Corporation, Uncle Bill and Uncle Dave, generously shared their deep knowledge of culture, history and practice relating to the clans of the Woi wurrung language group. We left with a much fuller appreciation of Wurundjeri Country past, present and future.

Our forum on Saturday evening began with a report on current issues including federal government rejection of the national Indigenous 'voice' proposal and the state government steps toward a Treaty. We then split into discussion groups: one made up of LRG members and one of non-LRG members.

With an ageing demographic across current LRGs this group discussed attracting younger members through project choices, social media outreach and partnerships with youth organisations. RecVic's recent LRG Grassroots Survey result was discussed, with a strong focus on the importance on community engagement, online media and engaging local Aboriginal community.

The non-LRG group reflected a younger demographic, and included individuals mostly working for reconciliation within their professional context. A number were teachers frustrated with structural barriers impeding existing commitments to teach more Aboriginal culture and history in Victorian schools. A call for better structural accountability and auditing of curriculum targets came from this group.

Dinner after the forum was alive with informal networking. Afterwards, the SBS documentary *Freedom for Our Lifetime* ("First Australians" Episode 3) was screened to end our day. Covering injustices visited on the Wurundjeri and others at Coranderrk Station and the incredible leadership of Wurundjeri Ngurangaeta William Barak, the film was good preparation for our tour the next day.

Sunday started with kinder weather and a trip to Coranderrk Cemetery to meet Barak descendent Uncle Dave, and a visit to William Barak's grave. Uncle Dave then toured us through one of the original parts of Coranderrk (returned to Wurundjeri control in 1998). Here Uncle Dave shared his vision for Wurundjeri to again successfully work this land as in Barak's day. He also talked of his small land management team that is again using traditional land management techniques on parcels of bush and grassland that have also come back to Wurundjeri control.

Our weekend ended on the Birrarrung (Yarra River) in Healesville with lunch, more networking and a special thank-you to Uncle Dave and Uncle Bill for sharing Wurundjeri knowledge with us.

Thank you to all who persevered without complaint despite the inclement weather.

Some relevant reading:

[William Barak: The history of one of the greatest men of this area...](#)

By Professor Joy Murphy-Wandin, Wurundjeri Elder.

For more about the work of the [Wurundjeri Land Council](#) and [Coranderrk](#)