



Cultural mapping builds skills on country

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THE Mitchell River Traditional Custodians Advisory Group (MRTCAG) is managed and driven by Traditional Owners from four Aboriginal clans from the middle and upper Mitchell River catchment - Mbabaram, Wokomin, Kuku Djungan and Western Yalanji.

"Skills on Country" is an innovative project initiated by these Traditional Owners for their young people.

This project has not been designed for Traditional Owners — this project is designed by them.

Funding for the project was provided through the Indigenous Land and Sea grant program.

MRTCAG chairperson Gerry Turpin is an Mbabaram Traditional Owner and ethnobotanist. He manages the Tropical Indigenous Ethnobotany Centre (TIEC), which operates at the Australian Tropical Herbarium at James Cook University, Cairns.

Skills on Country follows a previous land management course for young traditional owners run by MRTCAG.

These projects aim to give the participants the foundation skills required to work as Indigenous rangers, providing an employment pathways on

their own country.

The projects encourage young Aboriginal people to see a future for themselves on country through employment in the conservation of natural and cultural sites and landscapes and in culturally and naturally oriented tourism enterprises.

The skills gained in these projects are part of MRTCAG's long-term strategic plan to ensure a succession of Traditional Owners working on country and that the next generation of Traditional Owners has the skills to engage in natural and cultural resource management.

Skills on Country aims to kickstart a number of other project opportunities, particularly a ranger- or land-managers group.

Through a number of workshops, both on country and in-house, the project aims to act as a springboard for future cultural and natural activities on country by the traditional owners of country.

This will ultimately strengthen their connections to country with participants wanting a stronger involvement in managing their country.

Important cultural information gathered in this project plays an important part in re-engaging with traditional



Jordan Turpin with some discarded glass during an archaeological dig.

country and the passing on of cultural knowledge to younger generations of Mbabaram, Wokomin, Kuku Djungan and Western Yalanji people.

Identifying and registering archaeological sites plays an important part in the future protection of significant cultural places, for example, when mining activities impact on significant cultural sites.

To achieve these outcomes, MRTCAG has invited an archaeologist on to the project.

Dr Asa Ferrier and the Traditional Owners are building up a database of cultural knowledge and recording and registering new cultural sites.

Transparent and face-to-face communications between an archaeologist and the young participants allows for the transition to one day manage their own country less



Mbabaram Elder Aunty Jean Rosas extends a welcome to country.

daunting and more achievable.

Some of the participants may choose to continue this learning and acquiring new skills and enrol in TAFE training courses or University degrees in the future.

Other future aspirations include using the acquired cultural knowledge and skills for tourism opportunities such as guided cultural tours on country.

Some of the rock art sites will become a focal point in future guided tours on country.

For these reasons, Tim Daniel from Wilderness Expeditions, and Savannah Guides, provided training on various aspects of tourism to the participants.

Some of the outcomes from this pipeline project will be published in a journal article at a later stage.