



# North Head Sanctuary Foundation Inc

## Custodians of North Head

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### Education Room - Bandicoot Heaven

We are closed at present and will remain closed while lockdown is in place.

### Native Plant Nursery

Unfortunately, we are not planting out during lockdown but are watering our plants in the Nursery bays.

We are planning our year while we are in lockdown, and we have a new area to maintain.



When we are back at work, we will welcome more hands to help with planting and weeding our allocated areas. If you would like to join us, please call in any Tuesday or Friday morning between 8am and noon. For more details, email [northhead@fastmail.com.au](mailto:northhead@fastmail.com.au)

### Medicine in the Sanctuary?

Peter Macinnis

They say dreaming is a way of processing new information, but I process best in the hour before dawn. This morning, I woke up recalling the image below that flashed out from my screen saver (which, let me add, is no longer needed to save screens) yesterday.



Anyhow, this *Conospermum* came back as the noisy miners shouted outside. I recalled the sandgroper name for this plant, smokebush, which took me to some research being run, back when AIDS was new, and a chemical in smokebush was tried unsuccessfully as a counter to HIV. Pre-humans may have been using plants as medicine for 5 million years, the time gap since we split off from the chimps, which chew *Aspilia* leaves to deal with intestinal worms.

From there it was a simple step to Satish Kumar in Hyderabad, who recently found an antimicrobial protein in echidna milk. This was sensible: female echidnas ooze nutritious milk and their bellies make close contact with the soil, so their bellies should be alive with microbes. That work continues, and there is now an engineered *E. coli* making the protein in bulk.

From there, it was on to the surgeons of the First Fleet, who strove earnestly to find medicinal plants in Australia. Surgeon John White wrote in his journal:

*We have found another resin here, not unlike the balsam Tolu in smell and effect, but differing widely in colour, being of a clear yellow, which exudes from the tree.*

Arthur Bowes-Smyth explored this further in February 1788: and drew it

*... yellow Balsam from a tree or rather a Shrub wh. grows in great Nos. on the sandy hills near Botany Bay, call'd Balsam of Tolu at least there is no doubt of this Balsam possessing Medicinal virtues, as it has been repeatedly made use of by the Gentlemen of the faculty in the Settlement in the same Cases where they wd. have used the Bals: Tolu or any other Medicine in pulmonary Disorders, & wt. success.*



Aside from *Xanthorrhoea*, Bowes-Smyth believed he had found the lesser centaury, *Centaurium pulchellum*, but it



was probably an *Eriostemon* (now *Philothea*). Watkin Tench said the gum from a *Eucalyptus* (or *Angophora*) was similar to *sanguis draconis* ("dragon's blood") and could be of some use against dysentery,

usually when combined with opiates.

They never mentioned spiders or spider webs, but I'll come back to that.

### Life in Quarantine

This link will tell you more about Ian Lavering 's life at Quarantine [From the inside: growing up in Australia's quarantine stations | Newcastle Herald | Newcastle, NSW](#)

## Congratulations Aunty Fran Bodkin

We are pleased to offer our congrats to Aunty Fran Bodkin for recent recognition of her extraordinary achievements. On 25 June, Western Sydney University (WSU) awarded Aunty Fran an Honorary Doctorate of Letters – the most recent in a series of ways in which her life-long contribution to the community through teaching and promotion of Aboriginal culture, native plants and bush medicines have been recognised.



Aunty Fran at North Head  
Photo: Kathryn Ridge

Aunty Fran has been a good friend to NHSF. Her story-telling at our general meetings, her assistance in preparing our information on Aboriginal Uses of North

Head Native Plants, and her books on D'harawal Climate & Natural Resources and Dreaming Stories are valued by many of our visitors.

We are pleased to have recently found a source of her D'harawal books, so these are again available in our Bandicoot Heaven information room.

Aunty Fran's skills and knowledge across cultures is recognised through her role as an Elder on WSU campus and as a D'harawal Elder of the Bidjigal clan, in her academic degrees and university positions, and in the positions she has held in parliamentary research, and on various Boards and committees. One of her many amazing achievements is the 'Encyclopaedia Botanica' – a 1000+ page book providing information about some 11,000 native and exotic plants from across Australia.

Thank you and Congratulations Aunty Fran.



Red browed finch and  
kookaburras taken at  
North Head by Alan  
Ventress



## 'Knowing our Country'

Judy Lambert

At the recent NSW Nature Conservation Council bushfire & biodiversity biennial field day held on North Head the Northern Sydney Aboriginal Heritage Office's Archaeologist Phil Hunt, opened the session with a thought-provoking reminder of what it means to build knowledge of one's country.

Phil asked a set of questions of the 60 or so participants, to help them think about the very long time periods over which Aboriginal people have been learning how to 'read' their country so as to manage it in ways that keep it healthy.

Phil reminded everyone that 'knowledge' is '*an awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation*'. While some of us gain that knowledge through education, both theoretical and practical understanding are invaluable.

Phil's questions went as follows:

Q: Who in the room is not Indigenous?

Reminding us that only about 3% of people in Australia are original inhabitants, so their contribution to land management knowledge is precious.

Q: Who lives in the same place as they grew up in?

Who has been in the same place for 10 years or more? 20 years or more? 50 years or more?

By the time we get to 50 years, there are usually very few in the room who answer 'Yes'.

Q: Who lives in the same place as their parents? Their grandparents?

Again, especially in urban areas, this is usually very few of those present.

Q: Who works in the same career, in the same area, as they did 10 years ago? 20 years ago?

In most groups, responses these questions demonstrate the loss of continuity of local knowledge among people responsible for managing an area, and the contrast with traditional Aboriginal knowledge which is handed down from generation to generation over tens of thousands of years.

When we add to this the fact that for most Aboriginal people living anywhere except in remote communities, the whole landscape is no longer available for integrated management using traditional practices. And, layered over those changes are the changes being wrought by climate change in recent decades.

Since the disastrous summer 2019-2020 bushfires, there has been an awakening of the need to learn what we can from traditional Aboriginal burning practices ('cultural burning'), but we cannot expect that Aboriginal people can simply step in and provide 'the answers' to fire management in our changing landscapes.

Thanks to Phil for his generosity in sharing this and allowing me to share it with others who care deeply about North Head and its bushland.