

Ponnun Pulgi (Resting Places): Phase Two

Project update 15 July 2020



River Red Gums, Lindsay Island. Image courtesy of Creative cowboy films, 2018

Executive Summary

The Ponnun Pulgi Project has been broken into three phases. We are currently in Phase 2.

Phase 1

- partnership established – First People of the Millewa Mallee AC, Parks Victoria, People and Parks Foundation
- initial philanthropic funding secured
- Ancestral burial dune known as B16 largely restored (completed in Phase 2)

Phase 2

- additional philanthropic funding secured
- partnership governance developed
- recruitment of a Resting Places Coordinator
- development of an evaluation program and appointment of external evaluator
- additional Ancestral burial dune on ground works (B16 and First Dune)
- landscape scale program of works to be developed for Phase 3
- community development plan to be developed for Phase 3
- business case for funding to be developed for Phase 3

Phase 3.

- the funding and delivery of the landscape scale program of works and associated community development program as determined by the First People of the Millewa Mallee and their community.

Despite the challenges of the state of emergency declared lockdowns, we acknowledge the determination of the partners to continue critical on-ground works in the winter of 2020, particularly where significant Ancestral remains were known to be at great risk.

Phase 2 – Key Activities and Facts to date

Phase 2, Stage One (1 July 2019 – 16 December 2019)

June 2019: Governance documentation finalised, including Terms of Reference for the project's PSG (Project Steering Group), PMG (Project Management Group) and PWG (Project Working Group) and project finance protocols agreed by all partners.

August 2019: Site B16 remediation works completed.

- Manually covering each exposed Ancestor required 20-30 wheelbarrows of sand
- 30k tonnes of sand was relocated back onto the dune by machinery
- 100 complete Ancestral Remains were identified and covered at site B16, 100s of incomplete and fragmentary Remains were also covered
- Ancestral Remains at B16 are at least 5000 years old, though many could be older
- 2250m of fence line around B16 was repaired/replaced or reinforced
- Contractor Viking Bobcats contributed \$9600 in-kind through machinery and expertise to remediation works
- Private landowner Ivan Robertson contributed \$3300 in-kind to engage an agronomist and provide machinery/resource to remediation works
- PV's in-kind contribution to stage one was \$203,000

August 2019: Representatives from the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust and The Vizard Foundation joined FPMMAC, PPF, PV and private landowner Ivan Robertson for a visit to site B16. The partners thanked our funders for their support and demonstrated the outcomes of the project to date.

December 2019: PPF drafts evaluation objectives. The PSG approves the engagement of the evaluation partner. Natalie Moxham, of Leanganook Yarn is now leading the partners in the evaluation process and preparation of the Evaluation Report.

December 2019: Phase two, stage one completed progress report to funders submitted and accepted.



FPMMAC, PV, PPF, Ivan Robertson and Trustees from HMS Trust and The Vizard Foundation, August 2019

Phase 2, Stage Two (17 December 2019 – 15 December 2020)

June 2020: FPMMAC determined a new name for the project in language. Henceforth, the project in all of its phases will be referred to as Ponnun Pulgi (Resting Places). *Ponnun* means deceased/dead/passed away, *Pulgi* means cemetery/dwelling/house.

July 2020: The pivotal role of the Resting Places Coordinator was successfully recruited into FPMMAC. Uncle Tinawin, Chair of the FPMMAC has taken up the role, effective immediately.

July 2020: First Dune remediation works completed, barring further works in the Southern section of the site, to be completed in August 2020.

- 100 wheelbarrows of sand were used to cover approximately 50 Ancestors
- Ancestral Remains were covered with 300mm of sand
- Machinery (15 tonne excavator, 4 tonne excavator and 2 skids steers) moved 40,000 tonnes of sand back onto the dune to cover Ancestors
- Differences in the grade of sand and the drought-like conditions at First Dune compared to B16 meant more matting (1200m) was required to hold sand in place
- Matting was pegged over the sand using metal pegs to a depth of 200mm
- Over 5000 logs were laid to keep relocated sand in place
- Ancestors buried at First Dune are between 250 and 10,000 years old.
- Contractor Viking Bobcats contributed significant in-kind support
- At the halfway point in stage two, PV's current in-kind contribution to the project is approximately \$50,000.
- PPF has also contributed in-kind to the administration, stakeholder engagement, funds management, planning, development and project delivery in stage two.



Logs laid in the northern section of First Dune, Lindsay Island, June 2020

Background

In north west Victoria, there are vast, sacred Ancestral Aboriginal burial places that have been cared for over countless generations. However, since white settlement, the introduction of modern agricultural practices and the effects of climate change, the environment has degraded considerably. Furthermore, since Traditional Owners were removed from Country and forcibly disconnected from cultural practices, these sacred sites have been left vulnerable to the elements.

Led by First People of the Millewa Mallee Aboriginal Corporation (FPMMAC), Parks Victoria (PV) and the People and Parks Foundation (PPF) are working in partnership with Traditional Owners to rehabilitate and repair the natural environment and protect these sacred Ponnun Pulgi (Resting Places).



PV Cultural Heritage Rangers holding a map of the north-west's priority cultural heritage places

On-ground works:

Since the commencement of Phase two, FPMMAC monitors and PV cultural heritage rangers, led by PV's Cultural Heritage Protection Specialist, Damien Jackson, have restored two highly significant Ancestral burial dunes. The Ancestors' Remains have been covered and the dunes repaired, revegetated and protected. Plans are in place to continue monitoring and managing these sites to ensure future protection. Controlling invasive plants and animals and visitation on sacred sites located on the PV Estate will be ongoing concerns in these highly sensitive areas and will require FPMMAC and PV to continue to work closely together in minimising any negative impacts on Ponnun Pulgi.

PV and local highly skilled contractors have provided support in the development of Traditional Owners' technical skills during these works.

Traditional Owners, facilitated by Parks Victoria staff, ensure smoking ceremonies are conducted at the end of each day to cleanse those who have worked on the site before heading home.



Smoking ceremony at B16, June 2018

B16:

FPMAC monitors and PV cultural heritage rangers commenced remediation work at the site known as B16 in June 2018. The work was completed in August 2019. In addition to the remediation works led by Traditional Owners and PV, the dilapidated fence around B16 had fallen in sections. Pest animals (rabbits, goats and pigs) and native animals (inc kangaroos and emus) were accessing the site and causing damage by overgrazing on native vegetation and creating ground disturbance. Private landowner Ivan Robertson led the repair and replacement works required to secure the fence perimeter, including making in-kind resource contribution to this activity.



Replacing fence posts at B16, August 2019



Fence repairs at B16 completed, August 2019

Traditional Owners and PV rangers plan to visit the site periodically to ensure dune-stabilising vegetation is successfully propagating. Despite adverse weather conditions up in

the north west over the summer months (hot and very dry with regular dust storms), the propagation of vegetation at site B16 between 2019 and 2020 has been very successful.

First Dune:

FPMAC monitors and PV cultural heritage rangers commenced remediation work at the site known as First Dune, located on Lindsay Island in Murray Sunset National Park, in July 2019. The work was completed at the end of June 2020. The remediation process at First mirrored the earlier work at B16, with some key changes.

Initial cover up works at First Dune brought forward (earmarked for Autumn/Winter 2020) due to rapid, continuing site decline (drought conditions). Site was of great concern to Traditional Owners, more Ancestral Remains risked being uncovered if no action taken quickly. However, Traditional Owners were concerned about the level of deterioration to the site by the summer of 2019. There were concerns that waiting another year would be potentially disastrous and cause further damage to already-exposed cultural values. It was agreed by the partners that stage 1 (manual covering of Ancestral Remains) should be brought forward by twelve months.

On recommendation from PV's Cultural Heritage Protection Specialist, the partners agreed that it was critical to complete the manual cover up work and lay matting and logs down quickly. This was an important lesson learned from B16 which saw much of the manual sand moving work being undone by dust storms over the summer of 2018/2019. Securing the site as much as possible between work seasons mitigated the negative impact of adverse summer conditions on the site and enabled work to resume in June 2020 without having to re-secure any of the initial cover up work completed in 2019.

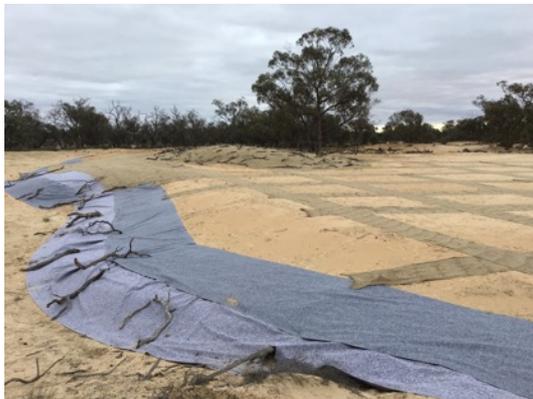


Figure...: Jute matting laid, June 2020



Figure ...: Logs have been laid at First Dune, June 2020

PV conducted drone flyovers at First Dune before on-ground works commenced to capture baseline data and model the pre-works state of the dune. PV will conduct a second flyover in Spring 2020 to demonstrate successful rehabilitation of the dune, enable future monitoring of the site and identify works required to maintain dune stability

On-ground works: the process:

Remediation works at most, if not all future sites identified by the Program of Works plan to be prepared by PV, drafted in consultation with the local Traditional Owner community, will follow the model set out in the B16 pilot project (June 2018 – August 2019) and again at First Dune (June 2019 – July 2020), based on a three-stage process:

1. Identify Ancestral Remains, manually cover with 300mm of sand using shovels and wheelbarrows with sand sourced from windblown drifts located in the activity area. Manually place up to 300mm of soil over any exposed Ancestral Remains. Extend the area covered by sand with an extra 300mm over any exposure to cover any potential subsurface Ancestral Remains. Place erosion control matting over the sand, using metal pegs, pegging to a depth of 200mm at the furthest corners to secure, carefully avoiding the burial area.



Manually moving sand at B16, June 2018

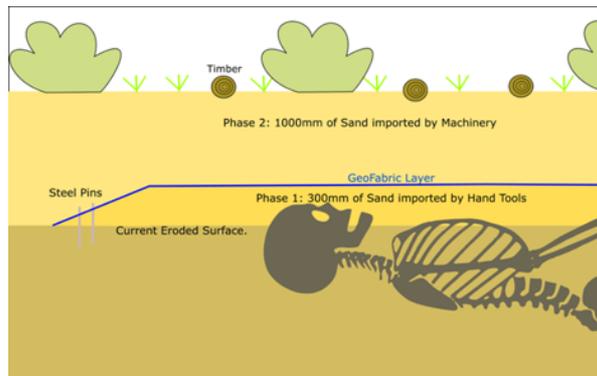


Jute matting and sand covers Ancestral Remains at B16, June 2018

2. After Ancestral Remains are covered by hand, deploy machinery to import additional sand from drift areas within the extent. Earth moving machinery with caterpillar tracks, skid steers and excavators were used to distribute the pressure of the machine over a greater surface area and therefore mitigate any impacts to the sand underneath. Use machinery to build a bridge for all machines to use during earthworks to ensure machinery cannot impact any surface or subsurface cultural heritage. Machinery places additional 1000mm of sand over the Geo-Fabric erosion control matting and hand shoveled sand, enabling reconstruction and reshaping of the dune, ensuring stability of works.



Building the bridge at B16, June 2018



Graphic demonstrating reburial process, courtesy of PV

3. Collect logs by hand and by machine from the surrounding area, ensuring no negative impact to scar trees and other cultural heritage/natural values. Place logs over moved sand in a formation and taking into account the prevailing wind direction that allows for maximum seed collection, to stabilise the area and trap

seeds, encouraging natural regrowth. Revegetate with native and endemic plants like blue bush, salt bush, rye grass and stipa grass by direct seeding. At B16, private landowner Ivan Robertson engaged an agronomist (an in-kind contribution to the project) to ensure the plants brought onto site were ecologically and culturally appropriate, and would survive the hot, dry months of summer.



Logs laid at B16, July 2019.



Revegetation at B16, July 2020

Cultural values mapped across Country

PV's Managing Country Together archaeologists and spatial mapping team have completed sufficient mapping of cultural values across the designated 100-120km stretch between Mildura and Lindsay Island. Further, more refined predictive modelling will be included in mapping priorities as further on-ground works are commenced and completed. PV has combined captured baseline data with increasingly sophisticated predictive modelling software and on-ground verification measures to map cultural values across Country. PV will use this mapping to inform the prioritisation of burial sites and build the Phase 3 Program of Works.

3D modelling and baseline data capture of B16 before and after work is now complete. Imaging shows sand losses and gains in works areas and demonstrates that the project has successfully re-established the dune by conducting earthworks, with logs and vegetation assisting to keep sand in place and stabilise the dune.

Mapping of cultural values and completing predictive modelling is ongoing across FPM Country, and is an iterative process based on all available data in the area. 3D modelling to refine predictive modelling through enhanced data collection will take place at specific Resting Places locations once the Phase 3 Program of Works has identified future priority sites.