Marking Country: Mapping Deep Histories

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in conversation with Ruby Ekkel
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Despite a striking increase in attention to Indigenous history since the 1980s, Australian histories still frequently pivot around the dates of European 'discovery' and settlement. There remains a tenacious tradition of casting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as timeless prior to colonisation—as if waiting as part of unvarying cultural groups until history arrived in 1770 or 1788. *Marking Country: Mapping Deep Histories*, a digital mapping project that explores the deep history of Indigenous Australia, was partly born out of Professor Ann McGrath's frustration with this persistent sidelining of Indigenous history prior to colonisation. The collaborative creation of a team of senior and early career researchers, postgraduate students and collaborating scholars at the Research Centre for Deep History, *Marking Country* was launched in November 2022.[1]

Website visitors expecting a comprehensive atlas in the style of a familiar Australian map, with its straight state borders and static spatialities, may be in for a surprise. Instead, this impressive digital historical resource offers an immersive audiovisual experience in which art, music and storytelling combine to convey far more about the deeply storied spaces of the Australian continent than a conventional cartographical approach would have achieved. This engaging and often moving compilation reflects a practice of deep history concerned not only with extending historians' timeframes, but also with humbly paying attention to the 'unexpected resonances' and 'cross-cultural ontologies' that may allow us to see the past in startlingly different ways.[2] It acknowledges Indigenous temporalities

1 See website, re.anu.edu.au/.

2 Ann McGrath, Laura Rademaker, and Ben Silverstein, 'Deep History and Deep Listening: Indigenous Knowledges and the Narration of Deep Pasts', *Rethinking History* 25, no. 3 (2021): 308, doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2021.1966201.

that sit uneasily with entrenched Western concepts of linear time and the Gregorian calendar, and refuses to shy away from the complexities these clashes can bring to the surface.[3]

The project's presentation also reflects the centrality of collaboration with Indigenous knowledge holders in the process of researching and creating these unconventional 'maps'. As the following conversation makes clear, initial assumptions about the direction and shape of the project often needed to be abandoned or adapted when challenged by Indigenous participants' ideas, priorities and periodisation practices. Thus a story about a colonial pastoral station becomes a far more expansive exploration of an Indigenous understanding of place in which the station plays a profound but limited role in a deeper history. And a data-driven, nationwide atlas becomes a more intimate and subjective resource, driven by the diverse stories of different communities and locales.

I was privileged to conduct a virtual conversation with four leading members of the team behind *Marking Country*, shortly after the website's launch and symposium in November 2022. Ann McGrath, Ben Silverstein, Amy Way and Mike Jones kindly joined me for a reflective discussion about the project, and the possibilities of deep history and digital humanities in the history discipline and beyond.

Ruby: Thank you all for being willing to participate in this discussion. To start with, I'd love to know what you were hoping to achieve when you set out to create *Marking Country*. Did your vision for the project shift over time?

Ann: I hoped that our map would change thinking about the scale and scope of Australian history. It would depict a deep Indigenous history that stretched back up to 65,000 years or beyond.

The *Marking Country* project aimed to 'speak back' to the old Commonwealth maps that have been so ubiquitous on classroom walls. After all, Australian children were being taught to 'see' their world from a skewed historical vantage point.

European societies developed a tradition of mapping the earth and even the wider universe on flat surfaces, especially paper. Through history, mapping became a story that marked off the 'known' and the 'unknown'

3 Ann McGrath, 'What Is Deep History?', *Teaching History* 56, no. 1 (2022): 7.

world. It became a story of maritime empires asserting their authority over wider geographies. In creating Euro-centred visual narratives, the map-makers defined the future of the British Empire and its nations. Mapping has long proved a powerful and authoritative visual medium. It was an imperial and nationalist medium with an impact that historians have not yet adequately critiqued. Although mapping is generally seen as the realm of geographers, historians have regularly used maps in their monographs and in school textbooks.

Twentieth-century maps of Australia powerfully reinforced notions of British sovereignty over the vast continent. It was a story of conquering the land and taking it over. These maps told a story of European 'discoverers'—navigators and landed explorers—European entrepreneurs, European arrivals and surveyors who marked boundary lines, measuring longitude and latitude to divide up the lands into discrete colonies, which in 1901 became part of a federated nation. By this time, the coloniser state had already overlaid a continental geography of rivers, mountains, oceans and pathways/roads with the names of prominent colonial figures—generally British and European men. Many had never set foot on Australian soil, others were fleeting visitors.

Yet, the land had a deep Indigenous history that preceded this Eurocentric colonising vision. Every place had an Indigenous name, if not multiple names. It was a deeply storied land—one cherished and nurtured by many Indigenous groups through deep time. The Tindale–Horton map of Indigenous tribal boundaries published by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies had started to raise public awareness of different kinds of land divisions. An eye-opener to the sovereignty of Indigenous nations, that particular map was static—as if Indigenous history was frozen in time. And as if each linguistic group had a set boundary line like that of a European nation-state. Aboriginal nations had different kinds of geographical boundary markers. They had shared as well as discrete spaces, and intermarriage created much fluidity, with people fluent in multiple languages, and having multiple associations to land and Country through their mothers and fathers.

Our project, *Marking Country*, aimed to rewrite the narratives of Australian history through a new kind of history mapping—one that had endured long before the arrival of European invaders. Mapping songlines was an early option that was considered, but Indigenous stories hold great power

today, and consequently extensive and lengthy negotiations with all the Indigenous nations and key custodians of their intellectual property, their empowering stories, would be required. These would also be political, and the process could not be constrained by set timeframes. An archaeological map was briefly considered as a short-cut option, but we did not want to reinforce another European-style reading, for substituting explorers' journeys with archaeologists' 'discoveries' of deep time would reinforce yet another colonial discoverer narrative.

We are committed to foregrounding Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous agency in history-making, both via learning of their lived experiences over time and their ways of performing and remembering history. The digital medium offered a dynamic and interactive format. In COVID times, with closed state borders and with remote Indigenous communities being closed off from outsiders, we decided to restrict our project to people with whom we had, often, long-term relationships.

Such strategies would be a means of delimiting the project's scope to ensure feasibility within a limited timeframe. Given that maps are a visual medium, we would emphasise Indigenous 'markings' on Country, particularly rock art and Indigenous storytelling. To use our project timeframe efficiently, we would concentrate on certain regional locales where we had existing relationships. But this would not be a map on paper, or a digital version thereof. It would include voices, film, music and art as well as European-style maps as reference points.

As it turned out, the communities we worked with generally shared a much more holistic view of history. Art could not be isolated as one story; it was associated with a wider context of deep history narratives about how the land was formed, and kinship relationships with every animate and inanimate object within that land. Some groups wanted to emphasise other stories, and other ways of knowing history well beyond visual representations. It's been vital to work with knowledge holders who want to share and record their knowledge for future generations.

To guide us, it's also been important to have the advice of the Indigenous Advisory Committee of our Research Centre for Deep History. As our senior advisor, leading Indigenous historian Professor Jackie Huggins AM, who is very involved in Truth-Telling, Treaty and Voice, has provided excellent advice and support. Her participation with Uncle Fred in developing

a journey-based reflection on history at Carnarvon Gorge has led to a wonderful site, thanks in particular to the creative efforts of Dr Amy Way, one of the Laureate Program's postdoctoral fellows.

Mike: I have a background working on digital public history projects. I joined the Laureate Program in mid-2019 as I was interested in exploring how these techniques and technologies could be used as part of deep history work. The very idea of 'deep history' is relatively new—people tend to start by asking what it means—so there was clearly scope to develop a public digital resource that could help to communicate the work of the laureate, and the Research Centre for Deep History, to a broader audience. I was also conscious of the fact that, working with First Nations communities, we needed to remain responsive to the interests and needs of our collaborators.

My vision for *Marking Country* shifted significantly over the course of the project, shaped by circumstances, my colleagues and these local, community-based collaborations. At first, I had envisaged a data-driven project, with lots of structured information captured, curated and presented on an interactive national map. But, though I undertook some initial experiments in this area, it quickly became clear that different approaches were required. Deep history data are not readily accessible, and we could not simply mine the archives or other sources of historical information without consulting and engaging with specific communities. Then the pandemic and border closures restricted our ability to undertake any of this consultation work during the middle years of the program.

When travel became possible again, we recommenced fieldwork and started working closely with a small number of communities: Yawuru, Woddordda and Ngarinyin in Western Australia; Andilyakwa on Groote Eylandt; Western Yalanji and Bidjara in Queensland; and Mutthi Mutthi, Barkantji and Nyaampa in New South Wales. It quickly became clear that a 'national map' was the wrong approach. Apart from the lack of data at a national level, attempting to produce a unified picture would flatten and reduce local differences and interests in a problematic way. So the vision for the project moved away from a national, data-driven atlas to a series of local, map-based stories co-curated with community members to help tell the stories they wanted to tell.

Ben: I think the shifts Ann and Mike describe reflect our developing understanding of the spaces and communities with whom we worked. Mike notes that a national map was clearly the wrong approach for this, and I'm reminded of Ambelin Kwaymullina's deceptively simple comment that 'Australia is a continent, not a country.'[4] To produce a national map—a map of Australia as a cohesive and perhaps singular country—may have reproduced precisely the narratives that Ann mentioned that we intended this project to critique: narratives of colonial sovereignty and possession. Our turn to the local, rather, emphasises the different spaces around the continent, the different peoples responsible for their own Country and the different stories that animate the history of that Country.

But *Marking Country* also, I think, presents an interesting provocation towards considering the connections between places, considering some of the ways the continent of Australia is knitted together as (in Kwaymullina's terms) an international formation rather than as a single sovereign nation. Here a digital approach presents ways of potentially representing connections that are harder to represent in other formats that may be flatter or more static. I don't think we've departed entirely from the kinds of flat maps that are a staple of colonising mapping projects, but we've acknowledged the ways they are placed in potentially fruitful conversation with Indigenous ways of conceiving place and the relationships through which it emerges.

Amy: I joined the *Marking Country* project at the beginning of 2022 and worked across the final twelve months of its development. When I joined the team, much of the overall vision had been discussed and decided, and yet—as the others have mentioned—delays from the pandemic meant the project was reconceptualised significantly in the final year. From my perspective, this was an enormous strength of the team and the project itself. We allowed ourselves to be driven by the fieldwork and led by the Aboriginal communities we collaborated with. This was certainly the case for me and the subsection of *Marking Country* that I worked on, 'Walking Deep History: Carnarvon Gorge'.

I'd only been with the team for about a month when Ann invited me to join her on a research trip to Carnarvon Gorge in Central Queensland. We were to visit Professor Jackie Huggins, a prominent Bidjara Elder,

4 Ambellin Kwaymullina, 'Aboriginal Nations, the Australian Nation-State and Indigenous International Legal Traditions', in *Indigenous Peoples as Subjects of International Law*, ed. Irene Watson (Oxford: Routledge, 2018), 5, doi.org/10.4324/9781315628318-2.

distinguished historian and senior advisor on the *Marking Country* project. Jackie, in turn, introduced us to Uncle Fred Conway, a former ranger in the Carnarvon Gorge National Park and senior knowledge holder for the Bidjara community. Ann and Jackie had been planning for some time for Bidjara Country to feature in the *Marking Country* project, but it was only in that final year that the stars aligned.

Even though this left us with tight timelines for research and development, it also encouraged us to just get on and get in. Ann and I went into our fieldwork with no preconceptions, either about what we would learn or what the finished product should look like. We were entirely led by Uncle Fred and Jackie, and the stories they wanted to share. What we ended up producing was an immersive, experiential deep history, grounded in Uncle Fred and Jackie's extensive cultural knowledge and willingness to share that knowledge with others. I think it was being able to get out onto Country with our collaborators that really helped shift the project away from a data-driven atlas and into the local, community-grounded stories the Research Centre had always hoped to create.

Figure 1: Uncle Fred Conway resting and talking, Carnarvon Gorge, Queensland, 22 March 2022.

Source: Photograph by Amy Way.

Ruby: Can you tell me more about the role of digital history techniques in this project? What do you see as the advantages of this kind of approach to research and communication?

Mike: 'Digital history' can mean many different things, from the use of digitised archival and secondary sources to data visualisation, text analysis and other computational methods. The digital history techniques used for *Marking Country* were primarily those associated with capturing and presenting our research via a digital platform. In the end, *Marking Country* became a form of collaborative multimodal storytelling. In addition to text and still photographs, there are interactive maps, short films, audio recordings, digitised paintings, digital illustrations and animated elements, all presented as part of a custom-designed website built by our developer, Tabassum Fakier.

This approach has many advantages when producing a public history resource. Some people simply find it difficult to engage with large amounts of text, punctuated by the occasional still image. The various media used support different styles of learning and engagement. Layers of information—including interactive maps and optional long-form videos—provide opportunities for people to either move quickly through the key messages contained within a story or spend time delving deeper into areas they find interesting. Seeing and hearing our community collaborators describe things in their own words avoids the voice of the invisible, omniscient historian, while also revealing more about the process and practice of deep history work. And the research process produces a wealth of images, recordings and other resources we can return to community for their own access and use.

Ruby: And were there any major challenges to this digital history approach?

Amy: I had very little digital history experience before joining the team, so this was an area of the project I was both excited and anxious about. But Mike and Tabassum were fantastic in the way they supported and trained me. Now, sitting on the other side of my first major digital history project, I agree wholeheartedly with Mike; a major advantage of using digital history for this project was being able to communicate histories built from diverse and nuanced archives to diverse and nuanced audiences.

Digital history allowed us to showcase the complexity of deep history across a variety of unique Aboriginal Countries. But, like Ben mentioned, a digital approach presents ways of potentially representing both differences

and connections that are harder to represent in other, more static formats. Digital history also allows for the presentation of history in ways that are engaging, immersive and impactful. This was really important for Ann and I in our work in Carnarvon Gorge, as this was how we had experienced deep history during our fieldwork. We knew as soon as we returned from our research trip that we wanted to communicate the sense of a physical journey through Country, and a relational knowledge of deep history, to the viewer of *Marking Country*. It was only the format of digital history that allowed us to do that: to pair videos and images of Country together with Uncle Fred and Jackie's voices and gestures—a combination that was crucial to the deep history of Carnarvon Gorge.

Jackie and Uncle Fred are committed to sharing their knowledge of Bidjara culture with as many people as possible, and digital history has allowed us to create a resource that can be accessed by anyone. Being on Country has huge significance for Jackie and Uncle Fred, but they also both spoke about how, when they are physically away, they remain connected to Country through story and relationships. I think digital history can help foster all kinds of connections and exchanges for people.

Ruby: I'd like to ask more specifically about the role of maps in this project. Can you speak to how they were conceptualised and developed, and what you see as their contribution to these deep history stories? How do you see them in relation to more familiar colonial maps that have been critiqued for their complicity in the imperial project?

Mike: As I said earlier, the way in which we conceptualised the role of maps in this project changed over time. Initially our discussions centred around the idea of a national map or atlas, but as the local focus emerged it became clear the types of maps used for each story would also need to be distinct. For example, Woddordda community researcher and language adviser Leah Umbagai wanted to emphasise the importance of various animals and other figures associated with particular places, and bring the names of places in Woddordda (rather than English) to the fore, so she painted her own map of her Country. This became a centrepiece for the Ngamardalee and Wudoo story. We then had Leah's painting digitised and converted it into an interactive map featuring information about each place. Rather than falling back on existing technologies and representations like Google Maps, this gave prominence to a Woddordda perspective on the region.

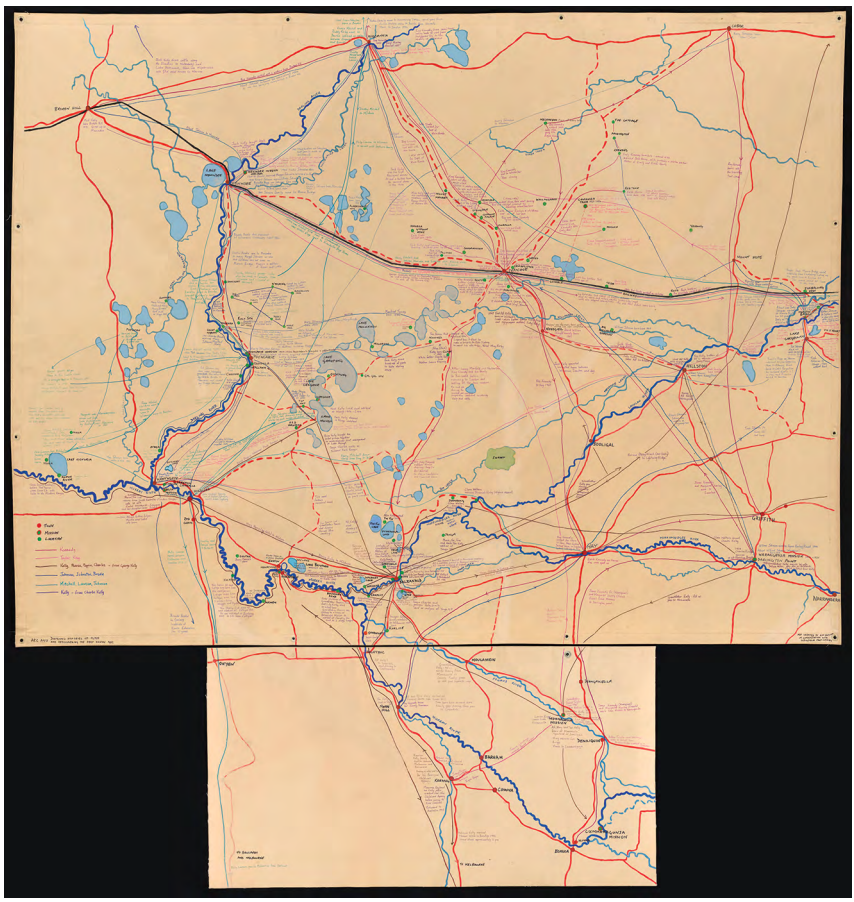

Figure 2: Willandra Lakes map.

Source: Created by Kim Mahood in consultation with Indigenous co-creators on behalf of The Australian National University projects 'Deepening Histories of Place' and 'Rediscovering the Deep Human Past'. Digitisation: National Library of Australia.

The Willandra Lakes story also features a wonderful painted map, produced by Kim Mahood working with Mutthi Mutthi, Barkantji and Nyaampa families over a number of years. This is the most data-rich map in *Marking Country*, containing information on places, people, and major life events like birth, marriage, children, work and the movement of people across the landscape. The original, physical map is huge, so, for the digital version, we needed to find a way to make it navigable online. We worked with the National Library of Australia's Trove Collaborative Services to photograph the physical map. Then, with a little help from an external consultant, I developed a digital version with each family story as a different layer. Users can now show or hide particular stories, helping them explore the detail of the map more easily.

The Yawuru story, 'Jangu yirr Janyjagurdiny', uses more familiar satellite imagery for its maps, but emphasises Yawuru knowledge and placenames. Satellite imagery is also used for the leaflet map included in 'Marardda: Stories from Ngarinyin Country', but, rather than pins or dots, the location markers are beautiful handpainted animals—a ring of catfish, a dingo, and a hawk—by Chloe Nulgit and Phillip 'Cracker' Duckhole. So each story has a distinct approach to maps, while all seeking to provide a way for users to explore and understand something more about the long and multilayered histories of these places.

Amy: The Carnarvon Gorge story I worked on didn't make much use of 'traditional' maps beyond a simple, progressive line drawing that contextualised the viewer's journey through Country. This was contrasted with a substantial collection of images, audio and videos that sought to convey how it felt to be *on* Bidjara Country, with landscape looming above and around, birdsong echoing throughout, and overlaid with the voices of Uncle Fred and Jackie explaining the cultural significance of each visual and aural element. Each story within *Marking Country* used maps in a different way; together, I think the project highlights how narrow (and perhaps constrictive) our concepts of maps and mapping can be. I like to think the journey we created in the Carnarvon Gorge story could be seen holistically as another form of map-making—of mapping a journey in place—but the word 'map' might still contain too many restrictive connotations to really make that a helpful framework. At the very least, the way *Marking Country* has used and conceived of maps opens the door to future conversation and experimentation.

Ruby: Could you speak to the role of Indigenous knowledge holders in shaping both the nature and—perhaps this is the wrong word—findings of *Marking Country*? What do you think changes when we try to create histories genuinely founded on Indigenous perspectives?

Ben: In the part of the project with which I was involved, the process of working collaboratively completely transformed the project. The 'Jangu yirr Janyjagurdiny' story began, Mike and I thought, as a history of the Thangoo pastoral station. Our earlier attempts to represent that story took the station as our starting point, noting the much longer history of Yawuru Country but focusing much more on Yawuru and other Aboriginal people's experiences of working for colonisers, practising culture and engaging with that deeper history in the context of a pastoral invasion. It became clear that in doing so we weren't telling the story that community members

wanted us to tell. As we spoke more with the Yawuru people with whom we are working, we slowly learnt that the cattle and sheep station was a small part of the larger story. It had to be accounted for, but it couldn't be at the centre of the history. We weren't being asked to write about Thangoo Station; we were being asked to write about the part of Yawuru Country called Jangu, and the small area called Janyjagurdiny where the station homestead now sits. So, in the first place, it was Indigenous knowledge of deep history that shaped the structure of the story to be told. Rather than just noting a deep history at the beginning, we needed to explain it properly so as to register its importance in the everyday lives of Yawuru people today. And, rather than quickly moving on to pastoralism, a narrative shift that unfortunately and inevitably represented an all-encompassing invasion that overtook or overwhelmed that place, the story needed to establish the place as a Yawuru place, one shared with Karajarri, Nyigina, Mangala and Nyangumarta people long before it was shared with Europeans who sought to colonise land and people. I think that way of thinking, representing and storytelling poses important questions for us regarding the relationships between colonisation and deeper Aboriginal histories.

Amy: It bears repeating that the success of this project has come from its collaboration and co-curation with Indigenous communities. The part of the project I was involved in was entirely shaped and directed by the knowledge, generosity and hospitality of our Bidjara collaborating scholars, Uncle Fred Conway and Professor Jackie Huggins. The only way I can really express what that means, and how history changes when driven by Indigenous perspectives, is to recount part of our fieldwork conducted in Carnarvon Gorge.

Uncle Fred was particularly excited to show us the Art Gallery, an enormous rock art site about ten kilometres from the National Park Visitors Centre. Lockdowns and personal health challenges had kept both he and Jackie away from their Country for some time. Uncle Fred, who had walked the gallery track almost every day for thirty-three-and-a-half years, hadn't been back in the gorge for almost three years, during which time he had fought a fierce battle with cancer. This trip, then, took on an even greater significance in our minds.

As we walked towards the Art Gallery, Uncle Fred stopped frequently to point out a plant, a bird, a rock formation, or a tree, sharing their uses and significance in Bidjara culture. He told stories of previous visits to the gorge, shared memories of colleagues, family and friends, and, without fail, stopped

every single person we passed on the path to speak to them and welcome them to his Country. Even as I hung on Uncle's every word, I found myself fretting over time passed: would we make it to the gallery before sunset? How would it look in the photos? Would I be able to record the interviews we needed? It took longer than it should have for me to realise what was really going on during the walk, and I was embarrassed at how easily I had slipped back into my own frameworks and sense of time.

Deep history *was* the Art Gallery, an archive of Bidjara knowledge and story etched and painted over generations with a significance Uncle Fred could explain in meticulous detail. But it was also everything that surrounded it: the walking, the sitting, the thinking and the talking, especially that which took place when the cameras were off. It was Jackie and Uncle Fred *together*, on Country, sharing their knowledge with us and learning from each other. It was staying together at the nearby Wilderness Lodge and preparing meals in the communal camp kitchen. It was dinner each night, where we were joined by a different group of rangers, friends and relatives who made the journey to the gorge once they heard Uncle and Jackie were back.

Bidjara deep histories are experienced through being on Country and through story. They are stored in personal, familial and community memories—in the physical and spiritual archives of rocks, trees, Country and kin. Deep history, then, was an evolving practice of history-making and history-maintenance that strengthened and surrounded the entire process of being on, and simply speaking about, Country.

Jackie and Uncle Fred used diverse skills to share their deep histories. For Jackie, studying at university and becoming a professor of history helped her expose the lies of colonial narratives and gave her the tools to mark Country with words, publications and truth-telling, including in the many organisations she has served while working for historical recognition and justice. For Uncle Fred, escaping Woorabinda Reserve as a young man and working throughout Queensland showed him the depth of suffering and discrimination inflicted on Aboriginal peoples. Yet it also made him even prouder of his culture and more determined to share it with others. This is why he stopped every person we passed in the park:

> Anybody that comes here and asks me questions about my culture … when I talk to them and tell them 'I'm a happy man', that's keeping my culture alive. And that's what I love talking about, what I am.

Figure 3: Training workshop in July 2022 to curate the Wudoo/Wurdu website.

Shontae Charles (seated with back to camera), Sherika Duckhole, Maitland Ngerdu, Leah Umbagai, Brentisha Macale (standing), Mike Jones (ANU). Source: Photograph by Mary Anne Jebb.

Mike: Ben's reflections on the work he and I did with Yawuru storytellers is closely comparable to the experience Mary Anne Jebb and I had when we travelled to Derby. We ran workshops with Woddordda and Ngarinyin people at Mowanjum Aboriginal Arts and Culture Centre, starting with drafts of two stories we had prepared in Canberra. As soon as we started presenting to the workshop participants the focus and structure of the stories changed. Language was rewritten, and sections not considered relevant to the stories were removed. The people we worked with quickly understood what we had done and had very clear ideas for changes and improvements. Though our timeframes were tight due to COVID-19 delays earlier in the project, these workshops were vital—they were not 'sign-off sessions', they were co-creation processes, and I think the content and structure of the stories reflects that.

Working digitally also helps to facilitate this type of approach. We could prepare content, put it up on a screen for everyone to see, then add, move or change things in real-time. Workshop participants could see us being responsive, and at the end of the day I could produce a new version and take it back the following day to confirm we were on the right track. In that sense, the methods for working on digital public history resources and working with First Nations people align well. It's not an extractive research

process, followed by time spent writing a journal article or a book. You can't emerge from your office with a complete version for review, ask for sign-off, make a few revisions and then get a publisher to do the rest. It's an iterative and necessarily collaborative process, starting with mock-ups and proof-of-concept versions, revising, changing and sharing again. Then doing more revisions, and going back again, through multiple versions and iterations until you get where you need to be.

Ruby: What do you see as the possible broader political or cultural implications of *Marking Country*? What are the achievements of the Research Centre for Deep History in Australia's current political context?

Ben: We're working in an era of 'truth-telling', which is often parsed as signifying a demand to remember the violence of invasion and genocide, of frontier wars and massacres, and the long struggle for Indigenous rights over the past centuries. But I think we're also cognisant of the broader imperatives of truth-telling, and here I'm recalling the way Gabrielle Appleby and Megan Davis described Indigenous people's calls for a 'truth-telling that would inform a renegotiation of the political relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the rest of the nation'.[5] This kind of truth-telling demands of us a much deeper history, one that emphasises First Law or Indigenous sovereignties and that takes the meaning of Country seriously. Country is difficult to represent through the disciplinary conventions within which we work, and I wonder whether *Marking Country* as a web-based mapping project has allowed us to move a little closer to a form that represents some of this meaning. And whether this project, then, might be making some small contribution to a more capacious truth-telling process that provides a basis for that political renegotiation in a political moment of uncertain possibility.

Amy: I agree with Ben. I think by showcasing so many different stories, and using interactive, digital formats to do so, *Marking Country* has attempted to represent and communicate the complex meaning of Country. And hopefully that knowledge will reach and inform new audiences. This is a small but important part of the broader political moment in which we are living and working: an era of 'truth-telling', as Ben describes. We will be—and already are being—asked as a nation to think seriously about truth-telling as we approach a referendum on the Voice. But whether the referendum succeeds

5 Gabrielle Appleby and Megan Davis, 'The Uluru Statement and the Promises of Truth', *Australian Historical Studies* 49, no. 4 (2018): 503, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2018.1523838.

or fails, the project of truth-telling will be ongoing. I hope that projects like *Marking Country*, which prioritise Indigenous knowledges and voices, and complicate concepts of 'Australian history' through an engagement with the deep past, will make positive contributions to those broader political imperatives: to renegotiating the political relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the rest of the nation.

Ruby: This laureate project was concerned with rediscovering Indigenous Australian deep histories, and *Marking Country* plays with different ways to communicate them. I'm wondering whether the insights and approaches of the Centre for Deep History are specific to these contexts. If not, to what extent do you think the project can speak to broader, global histories?

Mike: I think, methodologically, there are useful findings here for other areas of history: working on digital public histories, co-creating multimodal stories and participatory workshop practices; holding ourselves accountable to our relationships with specific communities and ensuring they remain involved in the process throughout; stepping outside the archives and textual sources to incorporate oral histories, short films and digital storytelling techniques. These sorts of approaches are potentially relevant not just to Indigenous history more broadly, but also to other community-centred histories featuring LGBTIQA+, refugee, child welfare, disability or other marginalised histories. Which is not to say the approaches we took are unique to the Research Centre for Deep History. There are many parallels with work already happening in the GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) sector, and in public and community history-making more broadly. Our work can be placed alongside these fields, as well as being part of continuing disciplinary debates and shifts within academic history scholarship.

As for the field of deep history, there is a tendency for some deep history or big history work globally to focus on scientific developments, or even to become what is arguably a branch of the history of science. This has its place, but I hope our work speaks to the need to retain a focus on specific people, communities and places too, and to recognise that for many people (not least Indigenous and First Nations peoples globally) what some might call 'deep history' is also already (and always has been) part of continuing cultural practice. What some call deep history is, for many, a living and continuing history that extends into the future as well as into the past.

Ann: Global history still suffers from a Eurocentric framing of its narratives. Indigenous histories were lived out across the globe for tens of thousands of years, but these time periods are largely left out of national histories and they are missing in the big global narratives. *Marking Country* provides an opportunity for people to hear directly from Indigenous custodians, on their terms, about their history and their modes of historical practice. And it shows how some of their epic stories—of creation, of oceans rising, islands and constellations of stars forming—can be mapped across landscapes layered in meaning and rich human and kin connection. These stories are local, national and global. The history discipline needs to change to accommodate them.

Ruby: What do you hope will be the future of *Marking Country* and the work of the Research Centre for Deep History?

Amy: My expertise as a historian lies primarily in the history of science and ideas, which has led me to a fairly critical approach to the history and philosophy of white, Western or Northern European concepts of human antiquity, deep time and deep history. It's no surprise, then, that I think there are still challenges we face and questions that need to be asked of deep history as a discipline. Because deep history is at once an academic methodology, a period of the ancient past and an embodied, living history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' enduring connection to Country. But what work does the label of deep history actually do, and for whom? Is it just a way for non-Indigenous researchers to bring unique and diverse historicities under the umbrella of comprehensible European epistemological traditions? If so, is this good or bad? What is gained or lost in the interactions and coming together of different temporalities?

If my work with the Research Centre has taught me anything, it's that a concrete answer to these questions may not be possible, nor even preferable. Meaningful knowledge can be produced and discovered through the process, through exchange and relationship. I'm not sure what the future holds for deep history as an academic discipline, but the work our Research Centre has undertaken through *Marking Country* has reinforced for me the importance of interrogating our own frameworks and accepted historical narratives, questioning our categories of analysis, and the necessity of listening to and elevating the Voice and perspectives of First Nations' communities.

Mike: I hope that *Marking Country* becomes a useful and valued resource for the communities involved, and that other First Nations communities see the potential of sharing aspects of their history in this way. If that happens, I would love to see more stories added to *Marking Country* in the future. We have left behind the idea of a national map filled with data, but there are so many other histories that can be told. Beyond the communities involved, I hope people who visit the site find something useful here and that it helps contribute to the sorts of truth-telling Ben spoke of earlier. And, as an archivist as well as an historian, I know that the public site itself will likely not have a long life. *Marking Country* is a moment in time. The videos, photos, interviews and artworks featuring or created by the people who so generously shared their knowledge with us are where the ongoing value lies. I hope these valuable records are preserved, used and appreciated by their families and communities for many generations to come.

Ann: I agree with Mike; a priority is that it is useful for the communities who have created and co-curated these digital histories so that they can be passed down to future generations. Given its free and accessible format, I hope that *Marking Country* is also useful to schoolteachers and their students and is an enriching experience for university students. That it will help people realise that 'ancient history' goes much further back than the pyramids of Egypt, and that this is a history that is of today—immanent and powerful in the contemporary Australian landscape. *Marking Country*'s future will stand as living proof that Indigenous people around Australia had multiple ways of performing and constructing histories about and in their Country. Everyone can benefit from the lessons that Indigenous knowledge custodians share about their ways of visualising their past, present and future. That includes the history profession itself.

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