

## Construction of the Buildings

The design of the building [at Shearwater] itself is a daily reminder to students of the particular place in which they live. (Upitis 2007:7)

Following assistance from the Commonwealth Government Block Grant Authority (BGA), loans from various lending authorities and individual parent loans to purchase 'The Willows', Shearwater was able to obtain further funds to commence a coordinated building program. Baxter & Jacobson completed the Shearwater Master Plan in 1995 and building of Stage 1 (2 x Primary School Craft Rooms) started shortly after.



The White Deciduous Fig tree which provided the focus around which the buildings of Shearwater was designed and built. The structure in the background is the southern face of the Administration building.

Continuing with Shearwater's place-based approach to development, it employed its place-makers to construct the school. Where these were unavailable, it would use local tradesmen and contract local services and purchase materials from local businesses. From the outset, the school maintained a policy of only using sustainable materials.

The school administration chose to project manage the first stage of the building program, allowing it to employ skilled builders from the parent body. This would also give the school management on-the-job experience of administering construction projects (of which there were many more to come) and to save on contract costs.



Stage 1 of the Shearwater Building Program in the process of construction, 1995. (Photo: Shearwater archive)

The project management team included David Jacobson (architect), Stan Sevens (administrator) and Frank Binckley (bursar). The original builders included Marc Boudin, a French-Algerian boat builder, Rainer Hartlieb, a German trained precision machine maker and Paul Pattinson, a local carpenter. Design Technology teacher, Greg Parkes was employed to detail and install blackboards, cupboards and

shelving, Alan Gillard, the partner of one of our founding teachers installed the electricity and Majita, a future parent, put on the roof.

The project was completed on time and without budget blowout and the standard of construction finish was of a high standard (D Jacobson 2011 pers. comm., 12 April).



Part of the Stage 1 construction (Primary School craft rooms) completed in 1995. The Wetlands regeneration commenced in 2001.

The project management process proved such a success that the both Stages 2 (rooms for Classes 1, 2 & 3) and Stage 3 (rooms for Classes 4, 5, 6 & 7) were also managed and built by the same team with the addition of another parent builder, Peter Osborne.

Stage 2 was completed in 1997 and Stage 3 in 1999.



Stage 2 Class 3 room on Open Day, 2008. (Photo: David Jacobson)

When it came to the time in 2000 to construct Stage 3, the growth of school numbers and the demands entailed, saw to it that the need to project manage the building program was no longer a practical necessity. The construction of the school administration, movement room, a library and a classroom was put out to tender. Ontrac won the contract, a small Sydney based building concern owned by Trevor Holdsworth. He came highly recommended by David Jacobson, who had worked with him on buildings completed for Lorien Novalis and earlier, Aurora Meander, a small Steiner School near Richmond, New South Wales.



Building Stage 3, completed in 1999. Rooms for classes 4, 5, 6, and 7. (Photo: David Jacobson)

Trevor was happy to employ the members of the previous building team including, Paul, Marc, Rainer and Peter and added parent builder Mark Holbeck. The trade contractors were also included: Alan (electrical) and Majita (roofer).

Trevor eventually moved from Sydney to the Byron Shire and went on to build Stage 5 (facilities for Visual Art, Visual Design, Design and Technology, Science and a Classroom) in 2005 with the same team.



Aerial photo of the school following the completion of Stages 1, 2, 3 & 4. Note the waste water transpiration trench at the top of the photo (eastern boundary). (Photo: Shearwater archive)

Land Purchase (The Willows)	1993
Land Purchase (adjoining property and house)	1994
Master Plan Completed (Mark 1)	1995
Stage 1 (2 x Primary School Craft Rooms)	1995
Stage 2 (rooms for Classes 1, 2 & 3)	1997
Stage 3 (rooms for Classes 4, 5, 6 & 7)	1999
Stage 4 Administration/staff area, Movement room, Library, and Class 8 room.)	2000 – 01
Stage 5 (Visual Art and Design, Design and Technology, Science and a General Purpose Learning Area (Classroom).	2005-6
Land Purchase (adjoining property and house)	2007
Stage 6 (4 x classrooms, Science, Computing, staff facilities, covered way).	2008
Stage 7 School Hall (Building Education Revolution (BER) funding.	2012

**Table 2.** Dates of Shearwater land purchases and summary of the staged schedule of building construction.

*At the back of my property, I check the sewerage trench. It is ageing and will, some time soon, require replacing with a more efficient and sustainable process. It has been relatively dry this normally wet summer season known to the Bundjalung as Kamar and there is no sign of overflow. The back of my property slopes down to Mullumbimby Creek and I worry that any seepage would end up in the creek. Sewerage disposal is not something that many of us give much thought to, but in the Byron Shire, a moratorium on development was put in place for over fifteen years until the Shire had put in place an effective and sustainable waste process that would cope with further numbers. I have come to*

*know about sustainable sewerage disposal because it was something Shearwater was required to attend to before any Development Application would be approved.*

### **Reeds and Rushes Sewerage Treatment System**

From the outset, a condition of the School's Development Application with the Byron Shire Council was to be responsible for its own waste management. The existing sewerage system was never going to cope with the number of staff and children moving on to the property. In seeking a sustainable and eco friendly system of waste treatment, the School employed Scot Douglas and David Julian to develop a reed bed sewerage treatment system that had been approved by local shire councils.

A reed bed is essentially a basin that is lined with an impermeable membrane, filled with gravel and planted with macrophytes such as reeds and rushes. Wastewater (black - sewerage or grey – kitchen, bathroom) passes through the root zone of the reeds where it undergoes treatment via physical, chemical and biological interactions between the wastewater, plants, micro-organisms, gravel and atmosphere (Lismore City Council:2).

Douglas and Julian built a series of concrete bins and filled them with basalt cobble (150mm). These were planted with fast growing reeds (*phragmites australis*). These grow locally in the natural wetlands of the Brunswick and Richmond Rivers (C Higgins 2011, pers. comm. 20 May). The reeds were harvested twice every year and used as mulch and/or garden compost. Added to this system was a holding dam. A pump kept the wastewater in circulation in order to prevent stagnation and to stimulate aerobic bacteria, which would break down organic matter and eliminate unpleasant odours (Suchow 2010:40).

The system was to be upgraded two more times as the school enrolments and



property size increased. Stage 2 of the building program saw the pond removed and the further installation of reed beds. A 60 m. x 10m. transpiration bed (together with holding tanks and an aerated waste treatment system [AWTS]) was added and planted out with native flora. Rapid enrolment increases and problems with high rainfall demanded this expansion. With the acquisition of property on the school's western boundary, an extensive irrigation area (involving sand beds – 200 tons - and 500 meters of plastic irrigation hose) was developed. Back at the eastern boundary the reed beds were further doubled and a roof was built to cover them. This was to done in order to prevent the beds being flooded by the region's high rainfall. From here the treated water was pumped over to the irrigation area and dispersed underground. The fast growing pasture was mowed regularly and the grass also used as mulch and/or compost (C Higgins 2011, pers. comm. 20 May).

### **The Reed Bed Roof Cover Construction**

The reeds grow under a flat enclosure, an impressive timber structure with a translucent roof, designed and built by a class of Grade 11 students, the kinds of manual activities Whitehead (1929) and Mumford (1946) so heartily endorsed. (Upitis 2007:6)

Greg Parkes, the School's Design and Technology Coordinator initiated the roof cover construction for the reed beds. One of the early parents and one of the founding teachers, Greg was attracted to Shearwater as a teacher by the freedom it allowed its staff to develop creative programs. Working in local high schools as a Design and Technology teacher, he became frustrated by the restrictions placed on developing lessons by '... short-sighted principals who didn't wish to be troubled in negotiating departmental bureaucratic hoops' (G Parkes 2011, pers. comm. 22 May).

Being a hands-on learner myself, I had a number of students who were frustrated by theoretical knowledge about practical things. They just wanted to do things, test their bodies with hard work and see meaningful results from their labour. There was a job that needed to be done around the Tech building, the laying of a simple concrete slab. It was easy and I knew the boys would love to do something real. I took it to the boss [Principal], but he canned it. It just wasn't right. (G Parkes 2011, pers. comm. 17 June)

One of the units the of New South Wales Board of Studies (BOS) offered as part of their Stage 6 syllabus was Industrial Technology/Building and Construction, a two unit Board Endorsed Course (BEC) that appealed to students who had practical aptitude and interest. The first year of the two-year course (Year 11 Preliminary) required the students to learn building skills and to work on a collaborative project.

With the reed bed reconstruction, Greg (who held a builder's license) took the opportunity to take on the roof construction with his Industrial Technology/Building and Construction class. As the Director of Teaching, I encouraged the program and in consultation with Stan Stevens (Administrator), the design engineer (Greg Alderson) and the architect (David Jacobson), the go ahead to proceed was given. The school would cover the cost of the project. It all made sense. There was considerable educational merit and there was a construction cost saving. The project was scheduled to take four weeks and the students were expected to participate in all aspects of the building and construction.



Ken Ohlson with the reed bed roof cover constructed by the Year11 students.

Taking care of the Sewerage Treatment system was Colin Higgins, one of the school's groundsmen and also a parent of children at the School. Colin himself grew up on a local dairy farm his father ran in Ewingsdale. Later, Colin studied horticulture in Western Sydney and came into contact with Biodynamic farming while doing voluntary work at Warrah Farm in Dural (North-west Sydney). Based on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, the farm was connected to Warrah, a service provider for people who have an intellectual disability with moderate to high support needs. (Warrah webpage: <http://www.warrah.org/>). In Mullumbimby, Colin, together with Peter Wucherer, a school parent and neighbour, founded the local Biodynamic Association (C Higgins 2011, pers. comm. 20 May).

### **Wetlands – the Landscape Architecture**

As part of the flat expanse of the Mullumbimby Creek alluvial floodplain, the school site provides little change of contour. What remained of a former tea-tree swamp were shallow water channels. Following heavy rain, these flow and swell, draining the paddocks of low lying water to fill the swelling creek, which is always ready to flood as it meets incoming tidal water from the Brunswick River. As the waters back up, the Creek breaks its banks as sections of Left Bank Road disappear beneath floodwaters that reach a height of up to two meters.

In keeping with the School's architectural philosophy, the buildings were designed to nestle into the landscape, taking into account its idiosyncratic features. We kept in mind Glenn Murcutt's exhortation that ideally, buildings should be so designed, that if removed, not a trace of their footprint would remain (G Murcutt, c. 1984, pers. comm.).

With the deciduous fig tree as its focus, the Stage 4 (Administration/staff area, Movement room, Library, and Class room) was designed to straddle one of the deeper flood-ways that drained the site. Stage 4 was completed in 2001.

Working with the waterway, Steven Davies, a landscape designer (and parent of the school), designed a series of wetland areas to restore and rehabilitate what was once the pre-settlement environment of the alluvial plain swamp and rainforest. With minimal excavation, the meandering waterway was carefully shaped. A weir was constructed on the eastern end of the School property. The height of the weir was set to maintain the appropriate level of water retention, which would surround aesthetically placed islands of vegetation. Large columns of basalt, serendipitously retrieved from the excavation associated with the major upgrade of the Pacific Highway at Tyagarah would also find their way into this imaginative water feature. A footbridge was designed to cross the wetland feature at its narrowest point, affording pedestrian access to the Primary School classrooms.



Eastern view from the footbridge of classrooms and administration buildings through the wetland regrowth.



One of the waterways in flood following a heavy downpour. In the foreground are the Stage 5 & 6 teaching facilities. The Stage 4 complex can be clearly seen in the background.

Ken Ohlson, Shearwater's bush regeneration coordinator was brought onto the project. In 2003, he applied and received \$1,000 to plant native shrubs (melaleuca and callistemon) on the fig tree side of the wetlands. Along its banks he planted lomandra, and native sedges, rushes and reeds. He did this with the help of WWOOFers (Willing Workers On Organic Farms), volunteers working and learning on organic farms about sustainable living in exchange for food and accommodation. (WWOOF webpage, [www. Wwoof.org/](http://www.Wwoof.org/)). Between 2000-04, the project received further help from the Green Corps, an environmental 'work for the dole' scheme, where job seekers participated '...in work experience activities ... that benefit Australia's natural environment ... .' (Job Services Australia webpage, [www.deerwr.gov.au/](http://www.deerwr.gov.au/)). With these

workers, together with parent volunteers, weeds were cleared and thousands of reeds, rushes and sedge were planted.



The footbridge passing over the wetland landscaping.

In 2008 to complete the project, Ken Ohlson, organised the successful application for funds from the New South Wales Environmental Trust, receiving grants over three years, of \$22,000 to plant and restore the next 300 meters of the wetland on the western side of the property (K Ohlson 2011, pers. comm. 23 May).

In the course of writing this chapter, I have deepened my understanding of Tuan's (1974:211) comment that '[i]nterest in place and in the meaning of place is universal'. I can also safely say that I know more about the theory of place and place consciousness now than during the establishment of Shearwater. I am also certain that knowledge of the theory of place is no guarantee of its implementation.



Looking west along the most recent development of the wetland regeneration program. This is same watercourse as shown in second photo previous to this one.

I have come to realise that place making is a commonality shared by all of us. We are born into a body and with that body we live in the many and varied places on the Earth. As children, place is intimately embedded into our being as is our desire to make places. In contemporary times we are faced with the disruption and destruction of place. In the consciousness and conscience that it stimulates, many feel the need to cultivate practices of creative place making.

Place making at Shearwater was encouraged and found willing place makers in the community who wished to participate in the development of the school. Through the active engagement of parents deeply interested in place making, unique skills were brought to Shearwater, and vision to contribute to its making. In being part of making and changing place, these participants have in turn been changed by the place in which they are working. This is what I would call, learning through doing, an active practice of place conscious education.

At Shearwater the culture of place making became part of the children's experience and learning. By engaging them in the practice of place conscious education, the school sourced that commonality of place making not only in the children and students but also in that, which resonates deeply within all of us.



# *Songlines of Learning*

## *My Learning Places 4*



View of the floodplain from the main Gallery at Ubir Rock.

## *Years as a Journeyman*

### *Kakadu National Park - Places of Art - Place as a Site of Learning*

In this concluding folio, I tell of my experiences of art and the significant role it played in giving expression to Indigenous culture, identity and place.

## **Places Of Art - 1**

### **Ubirr Rock, Nourlangie Rock**

#### **Kakadu National Park**

*On arriving in Darwin, I was keen to travel back into Kakadu National Park. I recall waiting restlessly for Dharratharramirri or early dry season for the floodwaters to subside before driving in on the Arnhem Highway.*

*Finally the rains eased and with a sea eagle circling overhead, Deirdre and I cruised in to the uranium-mining town of Jabiru. On entering the town, we were amazed to see the recently constructed Crocodile Motel, built in the shape of an estuarine crocodile. Later in the afternoon, we drove by the Ranger uranium mine and then past Jabiluka, one of the richest uranium deposits to be found in the world. Stepping from our air-conditioned car, we were impacted by the shimmering heat from the weathered sandstone outcrops.*

*We walked up to the main overhang gallery, not knowing which way to look: at the extraordinary display of rock art with its multi-layered applications of thematic ochre or out across the striking green-hued panorama of flood plain. I immediately understood the urgency of World Heritage Protection. 'This must not vanish,' I thought. After moments of stunned silence, we opted to sit down as countless inhabitants had done for thousands of years before us, enjoying the breeze and contemplating the magnitude of the work of the primal Creator Beings.*

*Back in the Main Gallery, we identify the buffalo hunter; a 'white-fella' in boots with his hands in his pockets, another with hands on hips and a third smoking a pipe, 'bossin' us Aboriginal people around' as Big Bill Neidjie described him (Cited in Breitner 1996:132). To the left we see a thylacine, more commonly known as the Tasmanian Tiger, long gone from the area and only recently extinct in Tasmania. Near the lookout is painted the Rainbow Serpent, a woman named Kuringali, whose identifiable stopovers on her journey are still respected by the local Gagadju people. Her appearance coincided with the end of the ice age and with it the subsequent rise in water levels.*

I was later able to meet and talk with George Chaloupka, the European Arnhem Land rock art specialist. Fleeing communism in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s, Chaloupka saw his first rock painting in 1958 while working with the NT government's Water Resource Division. The rock art of Arnhem Land became his passion and with the help of informed locals such as Nipper Kaporigi, he 'discovered' and recorded more than 3,000 rock art sites throughout Arnhem Land. Most of these sites are hidden in the Arnhem Land escarpment and not available to the general public. I recall George Chaloupka describing the rock art of Arnhem Land as a great history book. The paintings were layered, one over the other, an ancient form of palimpsest fifty thousand years old. (G Chaloupka 1989, pers. comm., c. July)

Through this method George was to ascertain a sequence of unbroken events, documenting changes to the physical, social ceremonial environment of the Aborigines from their time of arrival to the present. Based on his observation, Chaloupka proposed a classification of art styles and their sequence, which has been accepted by most authorities and implemented by the Australian Nature Conservation Agency as their preferred model (G Chaloupka 1989, pers. comm., c. July).

Although not possessing any formal qualifications in art or archaeology,

George was offered the position of Emeritus Curator of Rock Art at the Northern Territory Museum of the Arts and Sciences.



Namarrgon the Lightning Man. Rock Art at Nourlangie Rock, Kakadu National Park

*On the following day, we traveled to Nourlangie Rock, the other rock art site open to the public in Kakadu National Park. It includes the Anbangbang Gallery and the southern wall of the outcrop known as Burrunguy. Here were rock shelters that archaeological excavations have revealed as the longest continual site of occupation in the world.*

*In deep shade, protected from the rain and catching a cool breeze, it would have been welcome relief from the rigours of the flood plain. It is here we find the spectacular paintings of spirit figures; Namondjok, Nabalwinjbulwinj, Namarrgon, the Lightning Man and his wife Barrginj. At Nanguluwur we saw running figures expressed in exquisitely executed free-flowing lines, and ancient ancestral creator beings, including Alkajko, a fearsome associate of Namarrgon, with its four arms and antenna-like protuberances.*

## **Places Of Art - 2**

### **Art Arranged According To Place**

#### **The Collection of Aboriginal Art, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory**

As the name suggests, a museum is a depository for the natural history and art of its region, including South-East Asian art. I made my first, albeit indirect association with the museum through our next door neighbour in Kenthurst, the well-known Australian artist, Frank Hodgkinson, who had compiled a finely illustrated journal/book entitled: *Kakadu and the Arnhem Landers* (1987). He had been encouraged to visit the Top End by the Director of the Northern Territory Museum and Art Gallery (NTMAG), Dr Colin Jack-Hinton who came to visit the Hodgkinsons when he was required to be in Sydney. With the body of a bear, his spreading beard and blustery persona, he cut a larger-than-life, Falstaffian figure, whose hearty baritone often floated down the Kenthurst Creek valley late into the night.

The museum housed an outstanding and representative collection of Aboriginal Art of the Northern Territory. On our first visit to the museum, Deirdre and I were astonished by the variety, depth and cultural wealth of the various collections. It was arranged by place; Central Australian dot painting; the strong colours of the Walpiri in Lajamanu, the subtle, spiritually redolent songline paintings created in Yuendumu where the canvas dot paintings began; impressive Tiwi pukamani poles and bark

painting collected by Mountford: Oenpelli barks with their distinctive Mimi spirit figures, and then the astounding ‘baroque’ array of Arnhem Land bark painting and sculpture with their distinctive place variations; Maningrida, Milingimbi, Ramingining, Galiwin’ku, Gapuwiyak and Yirrkala. Like my first experience of Kakadu from the air, the wealth of detail displayed in the exhibition totally overwhelmed me.

I did, however recognise the place names as being communities from where many of the Kormilda students came. Perhaps these paintings were a gateway to understanding the culture of these communities and who they were?

After spending time with the students and pursuing research, we would return to the collections and realised that such was the case. Slowly we began to digest the information and recognise the major cultural expressions. There were the two major groupings: Central Australian canvas dot painting and their tribal differences, and the Top End figurative art with all their variations of location. The students identified themselves accordingly into ‘Freshwater’ and ‘Saltwater’ people. The blue-black skin of the saltwater Arnhem Landers differed from the brown skin of the Central Australian mob that took offence at being called black.

We continued to research (Sutton 1988; Ryan 1989; Brandl 1982; Ucko 1977) exploring Kakadu with its rock art sites, making new friends such as Kim Akerman (archaeologist at the NTMAG) and learning more about the students and their place identity. Then we revisited the museum. The collections became an indicator and active instruction tool for our learning. If we were ripe enough, the artwork would begin to speak the language of communication we experienced during the intermittent matrilineal visitations in our dreams of our restless Top End sleep.

After a time, I was able to clearly identify Tiwi pukamani poles as opposed to the burial poles of Ramingining and recognise the distinctive work of individual artists such as Paddy Freddy (Tiwi - Milikapiti), Yirrawala (Kununjku – Liverpool River), Johnny Bulun Bulun (Ganalbingu – Maningrida) and Nartjin (Manggalili – Yirrkala).

## Site As A Place Of Learning

### Kakadu National Park

To anchor Kormilda's Field Trip program we needed a location that was relevant to all students, including European students who in the course of time were also being enrolled at Kormilda. The obvious choice, directly on our 'back doorstep' was the World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park. A region of diverse eco-systems: coasts and estuaries; river lands; flood plains; monsoon rainforests; savannah and escarpment; with 50,000 years of unbroken human settlement, including ancient (and recent) rock art; controversial uranium mining and sustainable development programs including tourism, it was rich with living learning resources.

Focal to the program was the Field Trip.

In preparation for the Field Trip, relevant focus questions were investigated and studied. Models of various genre texts were analyzed, bibliographies of relevant learning materials were gathered and assessment task topics were examined and brainstormed. Armed with this information, students would be familiarized with what they could expect to see in the Park and be able to digest these experiences more fully and with deeper understanding. On returning to Kormilda, they would sort through their collected data and complete their assignments, hopefully wiser and their soul lives enriched.

The trip we conducted was for five days and as my report relayed:

*The trip proved to be a valuable and enjoyable experience. The organised tours were an unqualified success as was the camping and recreational time spent at Barramundi Gorge. The students were subjected to a wide range of first-hand experiences in the park, from ancient Aboriginal rock-art to the sophisticated operation of the Ranger Uranium Mine (Korobacz 1989).*

## PLACE AS SITE OF LEARNING - 2

### Flood Plain Billabong

#### Kakadu National Park, 1989

*'Weren't those crocs deadly', muttered Sabrina. 'I'm glad we don't have them in the waterholes in the Tanami.' Sabrina was a well-built Walpiri girl from Lajamanu.*

*'Don't be silly, Sabrina, them crocs are salties. They couldn't live in them waterholes. They're full of good fresh drinkin' water,' replied her sister Athleta.*

*'I don't care, I 'm just glad they're here and not down home.' Besides I'm tired. Gettin' up at six o'clock this morning for the Croc Tour. It's too much,' continued Sabrina.*

*'Here comes the Coaster,' yelled Harry. 'The back seat's mine.*

*The Coaster with a Magpie Goose flying into a red sun with Wild Goose Tours emblazoned both sides, rolled.*

*'Go'day. I'm Alan,' he announced as we shook hands. 'That's Jenny and there's Belinda,' he said, indicating to the girls who jumped off the bus through the side door.*

*'Hi' they called, 'Hi kids! I'll just collect the magpie geese that Mick got yesterday and the salad from the kitchen. Then we'll be away. We are going to a billabong in the flood plain today.'*

*Sabrina was suddenly interested and climbed aboard the bus with the others. Belinda and Jenny returned with laden eskys and packed them into the aisle. Deirdre and I took the seat behind the driver.*

*Although spritely and wiry, Alan had a head of snowy hair and at a guess would have been in his late fifties.*



*He had always lived in the bush and talked about the economics of hunting magpie geese with guns.*

*'Often the cost of a bullet or a shotgun cartridge was greater than the return of a bird. We just didn't fire off into the air.'*

*He slowed and turned the bus onto a bush track that came to an abrupt end near a rocky sandstone outcrop. We emerged from the air-conditioned bus into the intense light and heat that was beginning to build. We were well into Rarranhdharr, the early dry and the vegetation was already yellowing and dry and smoke on the distant horizon indicated that managed burning had already commenced.*

*'We're walking down to a billabong. Could you give us a hand with the eskys?' he asked the boys. We walked to a low ridge.*

*'Now wait here a sec?' said Alan as he put down his esky and pulled out his axe and picked up a red plastic bucket.*

*'It can get parched out here in the lowlands during the Dry and if you're stuck out here without a drink, it's a problem. If you have local bush skills, it can save your life. See this tree?' pointing to a hardy looking trunk, 'Watch.'*

*He struck the bole with two deft blows and quickly placed the bucket under the cut. Water poured as if from a tap, rapidly filling the bucket with coloured water. He encouraged the students to try it.*

*'Not as good as stream water, but it could save your life.'*

*'What else can you see?' asked Alan.*

*We squinted into the bush, puzzled, except for Athleta and Doris who were peering at a pile of scattered bones.*

*'Must be an eagle's nest, muttered Doris. 'See the shadow?'*

*'She's right. It's a sea eagle's nest. The bones are from the*

*fledgling's dinner.' Unlike Doris and the girls, who were content with the shadow, we squinted up into the dead tree and saw a grand nest of twigs and sticks.*

*'Talking about dinner, let's get down the billabong,' urged Alan. The billabong stretched out to the far distance where the paperbarks stood and hundreds of water birds, mainly magpie geese, were noisily camped on its reedy surface.*

*A magnificent garden of sacred lotus grew to one side where jacana birds skipped and fed over the green pads on their impossibly long feet. Egrets, herons and a spoonbill waded at the water's edge.*

*Alan organised the boys to gather sticks and wood for a fire and Belinda and Jenny pulled out the magpie geese and began to prepare them for cooking.*

*'Keep away from the water's edge,' warned, Alan. 'Crocs live in these billabongs.'*

*The boys paled and retreated to higher ground.*

*'This makes them easier to pluck,' explained Jenny as she placed the magpie geese over the fire briefly. Everyone took turns to pluck the geese, which were then ready to cook.*

*By the time the geese were roasted, everybody was hungry. This was bush tucker and washing it down with billy tea, all agreed it was excellent fare.*

### **PLACES OF ART - 3**

#### **The Kormilda Art Rooms**

It didn't take Deirdre or James long to realise that teaching a conventional Western Art course to the Aboriginal students was inappropriate. Learning quickly about the rich cultural background of the students and their art, which was rapidly

commanding world attention, they felt uncomfortable imposing a conceptually oriented art course onto a pragmatic culture. The idea of preparing thumbnail and preparatory sketches, devising and layering concepts and maintaining a Visual Arts Process Diary seemed to the students to be unnecessary and a waste of time. Their art traditions, whether they were from Arnhem Land, the Centre or from the West were strong and well established. The idea of experimenting or trying do something new was foreign to them. To them it meant that you had lost your dreaming (connection to place) and sense of belonging and the ties to your culture. If you had culture, you put it straight onto paper, canvas, lino, ezi-cut or whatever your choice of medium. There was no intermediary process.

Deirdre and James decided to work the art rooms as a studio. They would provide the materials, introduce the media, teach them how to implement and allow them to work. It was a steep learning curve for both. As the students commenced their work, the expressive silence, which frustrated the language-oriented disciplines such as English, was finding voice in the beautiful line, form, colour and order of their art. The Tiwi students painted their traditional animal and distinctive crosshatched designs, the girls from the Centre created the 'dreamings' they had permission to paint in the familiar dot style and the Arnhemlanders worked in the traditional ochre colours of the 'barks' that were painted at home.

As with all of us, some of the students were more talented with art than others. The more gifted often came to the art rooms during lunch and recess to work.

Deirdre was most impressed by the intelligence and integrity of line that she said could only arise out of an uninhibited exposure to nature images and an education uncluttered by the interference of intellectualism during childhood. When a student from Milikapiti painted a dugong, the line depicting the essence of its form was exquisite. There was no recourse to copying or tracing a photograph in a book. As part of his community, the artist had seen the dugong in its natural environment; he or she had hunted, killed and eaten it. When they came to depicting it, they were drawing the

dugong from out of their rich and meaningful experience of it.

‘As artists we can’t compete,’ said Deirdre acceptingly. ‘This is the line Picasso saw in the caves of Lascaux and in the work of Yirrawala and knew he could never better it.’

#### **Places Of Art - 4**

##### **Jilimara**

##### **Milikapiti, Melville Island**

*The morning sun glistened off the pristine waters of Snake Bay.*

*‘That’s where Purukapali, his wife Bima and their son Impanali emerged from the sea,’ indicated old Paddy Freddy on the previous evening. Purukapali was the legendary figure of the Tiwi creation story. Waylaid by Tapara the Moon man, Purukapali’s wife, Bima neglected to care for their son who died of heat exposure. Furious, Purukapali hit her on the head with a hunting stick. She turned into a curlew calling and wailing for her dead child. Purukapali decreed that because his son died, all creatures must die, so death entered the world and introduced the people to the mortuary rites of the pukamani ceremony. Old Paddy Freddy was a respected and gifted Milikapiti painter and carver.*

*We walked down the gentle slope, through the town centre to the Jilimara workshops and Museum. We observed appreciatively the recently constructed, purpose-built workshop as James unlocked the large sliding door that led to a tidy printing studio, complete with wash down concrete floors and long printing tables required to produce the endless lengths of printed fabric. James opened up another sliding door opposite the one we had entered the building, allowing the Snake Bay*

*vista and sea breeze to cross through the studio. Bolts of cotton and silk were neatly stored as was an extensive range of meshed screen frames. Buckets of printing ink lined the walls where deep stainless steel sinks complete with spray nozzle hoses neatly coiled, stood ready to wash down used frames.*

*'Come look at these,' called out James, barely containing his excitement as he rolled out some printed silk fabric. Here were well-executed prints on silk of Tiwi bark painting designs that we had seen on display in the museum in Darwin. Here were 'Moon and Stars in their heavenly cycle' by Deaf Tommy Mungatopi. Here were the stories in image of turtles, dugongs, nurli worms and pelicans decorating silk fabric in a beautiful array of bright Batik Otaero colours: red and yellow ochre, green, magenta and deep marine blue.*

*'What I've done is selected some of the Tiwi designs taken from pukamani poles and the old Mountford bark paintings and had the artists paint them on canvas which we can sell. Then I've got them to execute print designs of them and using emulsion, transfer them on to the printing mesh,' explained James proudly.*

*Halfway through 1989 James had resigned from Kormilda and taken up the position of Art Advisor with Jilimara, the Art and Crafts enterprise operating out of Milikapiti. The driving and organizing force behind Jilimara was Anne Marchment, the wife of the local primary school principal. Recognizing the innate artist talent of the Tiwis, she helped found Jilimara, a Tiwi word meaning: 'to draw'. This enterprise was developed through an Adult Education initiative as an enterprise development project to promote and market the unique and renowned Tiwi art style. (Marchment, Murrakapuni Aboriginal Art Gallery flyer). Suiting him better than teaching, James accepted the position and set up residence in a donga at the top of the township.*

*'Since I've been buying local artwork on behalf of the Co-op, all these artists and carvers have been coming out of the woodwork and bringing me in these canvases, pukamani poles, carvings and tunga bags,' continued James, showing us an impressive range of freshly painted artifacts. 'I write up a description of the work and of the artist to authenticate it and then they are wrapped up and shipped them out to shops and galleries around Australia.'*

*We too had resigned from Kormilda and were saying our good-byes to James before leaving for Byron Bay.*

*Although Milikapiti was a thriving community (which together with the smaller settlement of Pularumpi numbered a thousand residents), James had informed us of its difficulties, shared by many of the communities in the Top End; alcohol abuse, health problems (usually associated with diet), violence and loss of much of their traditional lifestyle, due in part to the payment of 'sit-down-money' (dole) and the introduction, for better and for worse, of Western technology.*

*After nearly one hundred years of acculturation since the first contact with the murrantawi (white people), much of Tiwi ceremonial life and associated artistic efforts had disappeared. The major ceremonies of Kulama (the rites associated with yams and food source renewal) and Pukamani are still recognised and practiced.*

*The prolific output and variety of art works we saw demonstrated a vigour born of a rich cultural heritage and the inspiration of murrakapuni (home, country). Tiwi artists were courageously innovative, employing a variety of media (including batik, etching, and screen printing) and successfully adapting their designs to meet the demands of the medium and the tastes of non-Aboriginal collectors and buyers.*

*From the most southerly point down in Tasmania to the most northerly in Milikapiti, we were now intending to move to the most easterly point in Australia, Byron Bay.*

### **Moving Along The Songline**

#### **Returning to the Eastern Seaboard**

*'You've got to be a freak!' shouted Stan Scrutton, the Central Land Council member emphatically.*

*'As an Aboriginal to be recognised and accepted in Australian society, you've got to be a fuckin' freak; like Lionel Rose or Yvonne Goolagong, both world champions or Albert Namatjira or David Unaipon! Then you've got to be squeaky clean or the 'journos' will drag you through the mud.' He paused for thought as he sipped his beer. 'You've got to be able to live in two worlds, one black and one white. How many white-fellas do you know who can do that and are famous?'*

We were sitting in the backyard of John and Morag Hocknull's suburban home in Malak. John was Kormilda's Development Officer whose job it was to raise money, find sponsors and establish school enterprises for Kormilda. Before coming to Kormilda, I had never heard of a School Development Officer. When he first addressed the teachers as to his role. I sat incredulous and wondered where Peter Harris had found him and what on earth was he doing creating such a position. John spoke about benefactors and charitable trusts and sourcing financial gifts and other sponsorships other than the normal government channels of income. Despite my initial skepticism, I liked John's pragmatic approach to finance and ability to think laterally in areas, as a teacher, I had rarely traversed.

Morag was employed as an administrative coordinator for the Northern Land Council, working directly with its chairman Galarrwuy Yunupingu. There was a

meeting of Territory Land Councils in Darwin and John and Morag had invited them to a BBQ. Along with Derek Hunter, the Kormilda Principal, I was also invited. Stan Scrutton's response was prompted by a discussion about Aboriginal education.

*'Come and visit my place in Nhulunbuy and have a look at our two-way school in Yirrkala,' invited Galarrwuy. 'My brother is the principal.'*

Dr Yunupingu was also the leader of the Yolgnu rock band Yothu Yindi, which was making a name nationally and internationally.

*Galarrwuy was thoughtfully silent for a moment.*

*'My father told me I had to go to the white man's school to learn his ways if our culture was to survive. I went to a Baptist school in Brisbane. I hated it there. I was lonely. I had to wear shoes and a tie and I was homesick for my country. I'd come home for the holidays and throw off my shirt and trousers and go hunting, deep in the bush. I said to my father; 'I don't want to go back to school, all that writing, all that maths gives me a big headache.'*

*'You go back to school,' he'd say. 'You want this country,' he'd say pointing to the beautiful beach, 'Then you go back to school. You learn both ways.' He was right.*

*'That school was built for Aborigines and now they are taking it away from us,' he concluded.*

It wasn't long before what he predicted for Kormilda eventuated. It was to be



another fifteen years, however, before I would take him up on his offer of visiting Yirkala.