

## Site visit to Victoria Park

Emily Mundzic

A damp Friday morning met the scheduled day of the first Aboriginal Political History field trip and I decidedly equipped myself with an umbrella because, above all, I was curious. Likely, we would huddle over to the University of Sydney to look at some archives I thought. I couldn't have been more wrong.

Thinking back, the site could only have been the resource rich and topographical Victoria Park. An enduring reminder of Aboriginal connection to the land epitomised in the mammoth fig trees whose roots run deep.

During the introduction, Jennifer spoke not only about her individual route to the park that morning but referred to similar pathways trodden by generations past. 'Rom Watangu: Law of the Land' spoke about song cycles telling "a person's life in relation to the past, present and future", a concept that interested me because I couldn't quite conceptualise the intersection of time and space. An example is the cultural exchange over large areas across Aboriginal Australia including ceremonies, songs, dances, words and ideas flowing back and forth along traditional routes such as this park (Reynolds 1990, p. 11). This reflective activity allowed me to tangibly comprehend the deep history of the site by dissociating my individual awareness to acknowledge the flow existences to and from the site.

Under the shaded canopy of the Moreton Bay figs, with roots that protrude from the ground in wave formations, we examined the paved walkway littered with fallen figs, many squished underfoot. Settled here was an incredible natural resource, that when dried would make an awesome snack for travellers. To the right of these gargantuan trees, the pond, usually occupied by ducks and people sprawled on the lawn, was fenced and drained for cleaning. Here again was another natural resource usually teeming with fish and eels.

Behind the pool we examined the paperbark trees, flaking and peeling off providing soft, waterproof sheets. Jennifer gave us rookie students another great survival tip. Go catch a fish (or buy one from the Fish Market), wrap it in some paperbark and cook it over a fire for a smoky, woody taste. I never realised how plentiful Australia's natural resources were and how extensively I could learn from the land.

Among the eucalypts, we examined varieties with buds and flowers, others with broad, firm leaves and still others that were supple and skinny. Jennifer passed around dried yet malleable tree sap that



Copyright 2018 by the author. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Unported (CC BY 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), allowing third parties to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format and to remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, provided the original work is properly cited and states its license.

can be used as a stopper. She then promptly plucked a eucalyptus leaf, folding it and popped it in her mouth for its peppermint taste. It was then that I realised, truly, what a site visit was. It should be about learning from the environment in almost intimate ways, by crushing and smelling, by tasting and feeling.

From the Eucalypt Grove, we observed that we were standing on the side of a curved basin the land had formed. I could imagine the expanse without the Broadway shopping centre, the UTS tower building standing like a leafless stump and the rumble of traffic. I could comprehend how valuable the site was for providing shelter, vantage, resources and trading for countless existences- something I hadn't considered before.



## References

Reynolds, H., 1990, *The other side of the frontier: Aboriginal resistance to the European invasion of Australia*, Ringwood, Vic, Penguin, pp 5-29.

Yunupingu. G., 2016, '*ROM WATANGU: The Law of The Land*', *The Monthly*, Issue 124, July, Melbourne, Schwartz Publishing Pty. Ltd.



© 2018 by the author. This article is distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).