

# Nap Nap's whispers

## *From Nari Nari to now*



Hay Public School,  
Booligal Public School,  
Hay School of the Air



## Creative Catchment Kids

Creative Catchment Kids is an initiative of Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre. It aims to improve engagement between our funding partners and school students by providing opportunities for positive, cooperative activities that encourage students to learn about and respond to, natural resource management and the importance of agricultural production.

**[wirraminna.org.au/petaurus/creative-catchment-kids/](http://wirraminna.org.au/petaurus/creative-catchment-kids/)**

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Petaurus Education Group identifies, develops and delivers a range of learning and curriculum experiences, resources and initiatives for schools and community groups to connect with land, water, productive farming, sustainability and cultural issues at the local level. The group was established by Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre in late-2014 to support its operations and education activities.

**[petaurus.org.au](http://petaurus.org.au)**

## Enviro-Stories

Enviro-Stories is an innovative literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by PeekDesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area.

**[envirostories.com.au](http://envirostories.com.au)**

# Nap Nap's whispers

## *From Nari Nari to now*

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**Teacher support:** Fleur Cullenward

*The authors wish Mr Martin Armstrong  
a happy 80<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 24<sup>th</sup> November 2020.*

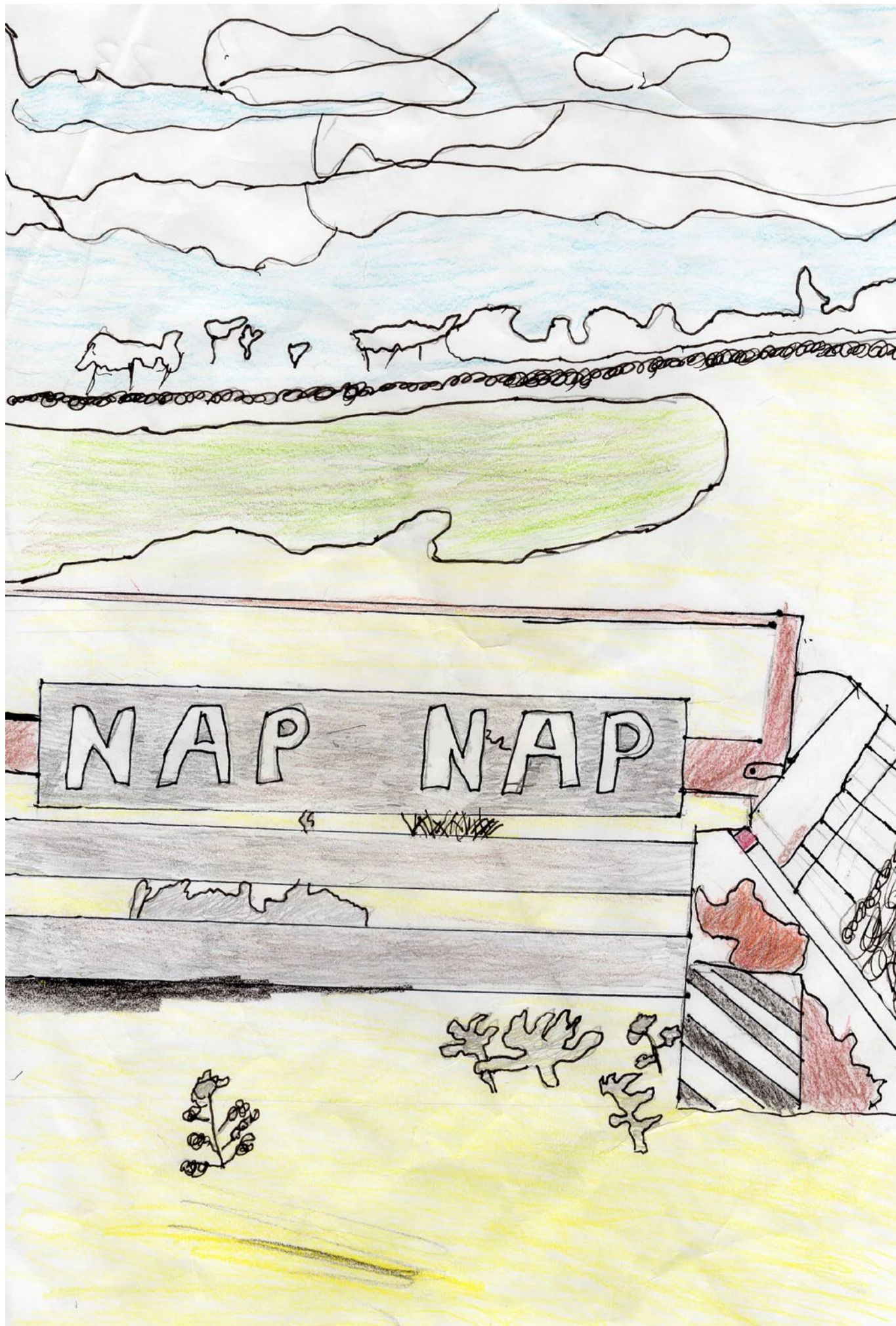


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The program was generously funded by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy.







# Foreword

Nestled amongst the peaceful gums that crawl and wind along the mighty Murrumbidgee, Nap Nap Station breathes the Hay Plains air and stretches out across the land into the fulvous country sunsets that colour the still evening sky.

This historical station has been passed down through many hands but the very first of them were the Indigenous Australian Nari Nari peoples. Incredibly, bones and skulls of the Nari Nari people have been found in mounds of dirt. The Armstrongs fenced off these areas to preserve and protect them from cattle trampling and camping on these precious remnants.

All your senses and feelings shine right through at Nap Nap Station. You taste the sweet, icy cordial after you've been working in the sheep yards under the hot sun. You wake to the energizing sound of the iconic cockatoos. You see the dust lifting up into the big, blue canvas we all call the sky and disappearing into the horizon. You smell the refreshing and calming rain free-falling from the sky and hitting dusty soil, growing rich, green sheep feed.

All the lucky people that have had the pleasure of passing through Nap Nap, have nurtured and cared for it just like it has cared for them as it is a very special place.

Lottie Ryan, Hay School of the Air, 2020





# Introduction

Nap Nap Station is a property situated 15km west of the small township of Maude, and nearly 70km west of Hay in New South Wales. It lies along both sides of the Murrumbidgee River. The property is about 30,000 hectares (74,000 acres) with about 25,000 acres on the northern side of the River on country known as Gelam, Pibroch and Willowgrove. The remaining 49,000 acres lies on the southern side of the river and is known as the Nap Nap and Nimmie blocks.

The Station lies on what is known as the Lower Bidgee floodplain and so is often flooded by the river and the Nimmie and Waugorah creeks. There are many valuable environmental areas on the Station and areas that have been declared Protected Lands within the Floodplain Management Scheme.

The Station is also made up of sandy higher soil, river country, saltbush plains, open red gum forests and box swamps.







Nap Nap Station is a mixed farming enterprise producing cattle, sheep for wool and meat with four sets of cattle yards and two shearing sheds (one shed on each side of the river). Water is pumped from the Murrumbidgee River using extensive water licences and this water is used for irrigated cropping and water trading. At times, Nap Nap also has timber cutters in the river country. In the past, the property had flood irrigation for certified organic crops on the floodplain country, but that land was sold to the Federal Government in 2014 as part of the Murray Darling Basin water buy back scheme.

The property is owned by Martin and Toni Armstrong and their family. The Armstrong family are based in Melbourne and are passionate about Nap Nap, its country, enterprises and history. They believe in caring for the country and the history of those who came before them. They also believe in ensuring it is in good hands for those who come after them.





# Nari Nari People

The Nari Nari people walked this country for thousands of years, moving campsites according to seasons and availability of food. They lived on an inland sea, or at least a series of massive rivers all teeming with wildlife.

Nari Nari Country is small but plentiful as it contained permanent water and beautiful floodplains. Their land extended from Balranald to Booligal on the south side of the Lachlan, including the Yanga Lakes, Kerri Kerri and Nap Nap.

The old rivers and lakes have long since dried up, leaving only the lines of trees which twist through the landscape to mark their passing. Also left behind are a number of Aboriginal camp and burial sites, often situated on sand dunes and beaches of the now vanished inland lakes. The land changed and there still remains traces of *Acacia* and River Red Gum forests in areas where they no longer exist.

Along the old rivers, there are signs of habitation everywhere. These can be found in the built up mounds of campsites and the tool factories where the Nari Nari worked with the stone imported into the stoneless Hay plains from hundreds of kilometres away.

The Nari Nari recognise that Nap Nap Station has a special cultural heritage with many sites such as middens, scar trees and earth ovens. The country contains much history of the Nari Nari people in its ancient water courses.



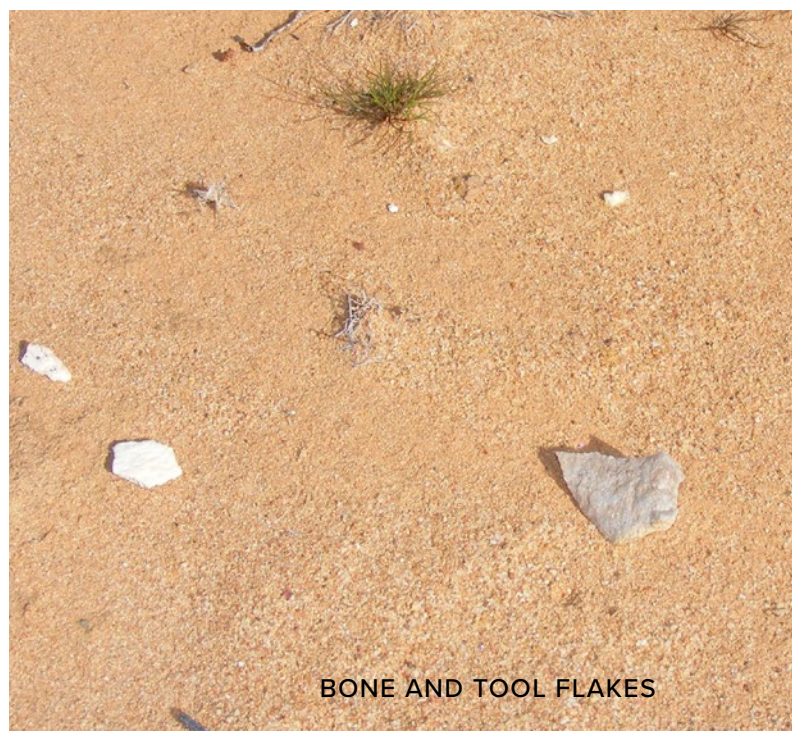




BURIAL SITE

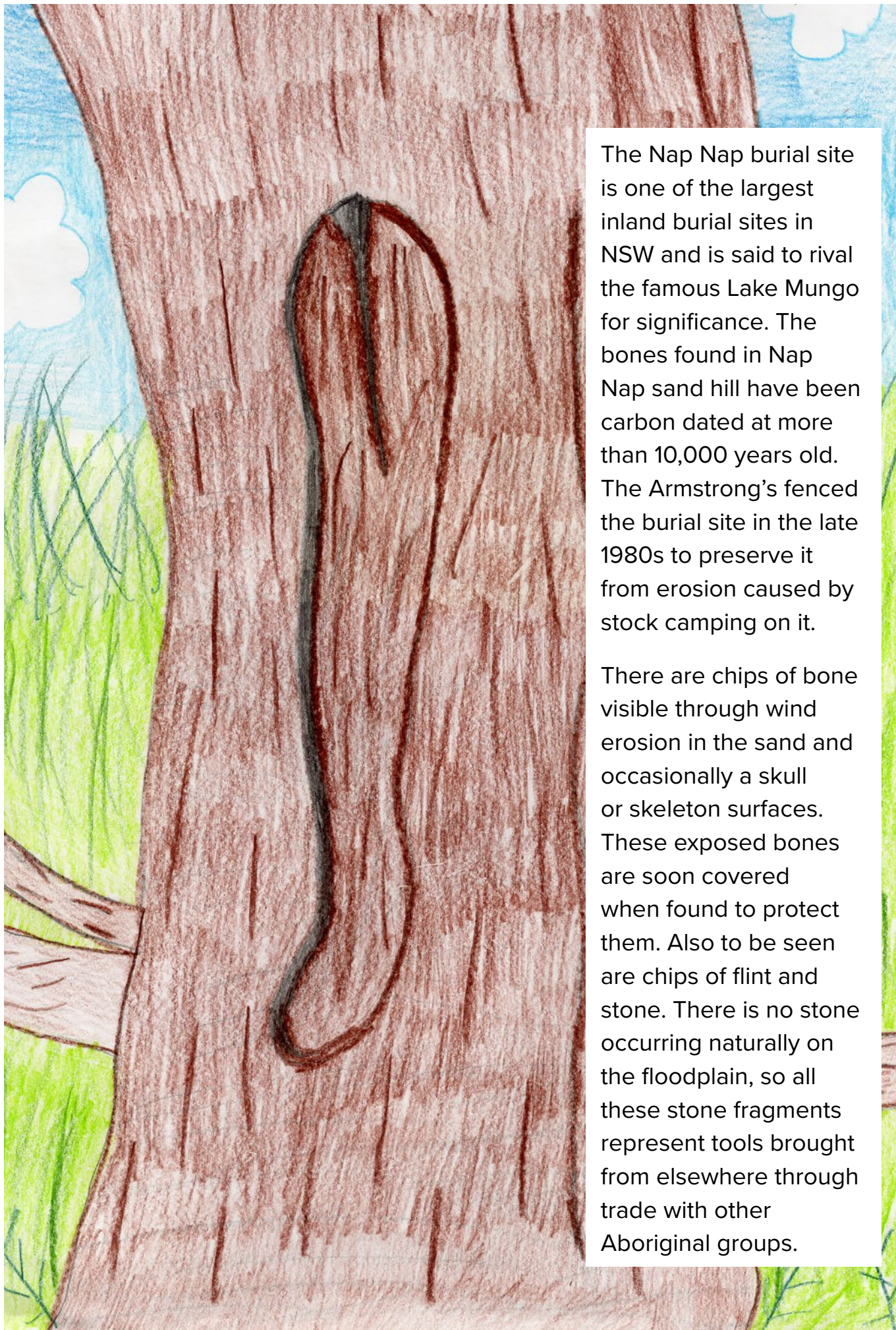
The Nari Nari people used fire as a farming practice. Burning off the country and river bends allowed a green pick to grow, which would attract animals such as the kangaroo. This made hunting easier. It also kept the saplings reduced so that the grass had room and light to grow. The country on Nap Nap had an abundance of food for the Nari Nari people as there were many water systems and timbered country. The country and water systems continually changed over thousands of years and the Nari Nari people learned to adapt to the changing seasons and conditions.

The Nari Nari people followed traditional cycles in nature, so they left many tools and implements in certain spots to be used again when they returned. Tools such as grinding stones were heavy to carry, so they remained at certain landmarks. These landmarks represented the Nari Nari's method of mapping their area.



BONE AND TOOL FLAKES





The Nap Nap burial site is one of the largest inland burial sites in NSW and is said to rival the famous Lake Mungo for significance. The bones found in Nap Nap sand hill have been carbon dated at more than 10,000 years old. The Armstrong's fenced the burial site in the late 1980s to preserve it from erosion caused by stock camping on it.

There are chips of bone visible through wind erosion in the sand and occasionally a skull or skeleton surfaces. These exposed bones are soon covered when found to protect them. Also to be seen are chips of flint and stone. There is no stone occurring naturally on the floodplain, so all these stone fragments represent tools brought from elsewhere through trade with other Aboriginal groups.



The site was gazetted as 'Nap Nap Burial Ground, Aboriginal Place' in 2012. This means that the site is protected for evermore. There has been 20 years of body recovery on the site and now lots of conservation work is being done to protect it, such as bringing in heavy black soil to re-bury some of the bones and bodies that have been exposed due to erosion. Natural wind and water erosion is always exposing more skeletal remains, as well as ancient fires and tools.

Children were never buried alone. If a child passed away, their bodies were wrapped in mud and carried with the tribe, sometimes for many months, until an adult died and then the bodies were buried together. Bodies were buried traditionally with their arms crossed and their knees tucked in and then placed in the ground. The Nap Nap burial site also contains evidence of cremations. Cremation of a body was reserved for members of the Nari Nari nation that were high up in society, usually a law man or a spiritual leader in the tribe, such as the Feather Foot. The Feather Foot was the medicine man or law man, so named because he tied feathers around his feet so that his tracks were always covered up. He looked after the discipline of the tribe and fixed any problems or issues.

Women were (and still are) not allowed to touch the bones of other people. The men in the tribes did the burials. There was a strict ranking system of the burial routine.







L-R: HAMISH CULLENWARD, CAROLINE BOOTH, HOPE, EMILY, LLOYD SCHNEIDER, ALICE, JAMIE WOODS, SOPHIE, GRACE, DALLAS, SETH, HARRY, JACKSON, LACHLAN AND MAX.

The Nari Nari people often traded in stone and there is evidence of bluestone found in the area which would have come from western Victoria.

Scattered amongst the remains of the middens and camp fires are clay balls, which were used during cooking. The Nari Nari people would wrap food, such as fish and eggs, in clay and then cook them in the fire. There was an abundance of mussels, animals, fish and birds and the remains of the shells and cooking implements can be found on the many earth ovens and middens on Nap Nap.

Jamie Woods is a proud Nari Nari man. He and his father believe that in years to come, eventually many remnants of the Nari Nari will disappear and the Nari Nari people will continue to become part of the land. It is therefore very important that their stories and history are told. Exposure to the rain, wind and sun will continue to make the bones of the Nari Nari people become one with the land, in effect we will be standing on Nari Nari country and people.



EARTH OVEN REMAINS



# History

In 1845, Nap Nap was settled for the first time by George Hobler. Nap Nap was first known as 'The Lake' but after the shallow water dried out, Hobler renamed it to its current name. Nap Nap means 'much water' in the local language of the Nari Nari.

In 1848 Hobler sold his lease on Nap Nap to Thomas Barker. The control over Nap Nap was given to Duncan McKinlay who was the superintendent. McKinlay was shot by one of his shepherds; Sylvester Sherrif. Sherrif escaped, but was tracked by the native stockmen and his body was discovered in the Murrumbidgee River after apparently shooting himself to avoid capture.

The original homestead, west of the current one, was destroyed by fire in 1866. The same year that the building of today's homestead commenced. It is built on the site that was originally George Hobler's shepherd's camp. All bricks used in construction were sourced and fired right there on Nap Nap.

Nap Nap's present Homestead is the only brick homestead on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River to the west of Hay.





In 1867, Nap Nap was sold by William Kay and George Butchart to the Mcfarland family, who then sold Nap Nap to Macqueen and Co. in 1880. In 1879, Robert Wilson Ronald bought a share of Nap Nap from James McBain. Nap Nap was around 262,000 acres by this time. Robert's share began an unbroken period of over 100 years of the Ronald family passing through Nap Nap. The entire property was in the hands of the Ronald family by 1907.

Hugh and Wilson Ronald sold Nap Nap to the Armstrong family in 1986. For thirty four years the Armstrongs have been the custodians of Nap Nap. The Armstrongs employed Tony Cullenward as manager. He and his wife Francie managed the property and oversaw the massive restoration of the homestead and garden. When Tony retired, his son Hamish became manager.

In 1986, the property was about 42,000 acres compared to its original size of 262,000. In 1987, the Armstrongs purchased Nimmie Station, which was part of the original Nap Nap run. Over the next few years they added 'Gelum', 'Pibroch' and 'Willow Grove' across the river. The property was then about 90,000 acres.



WILSON AND ROBERT RONALD



LACHLAN AND JACKSON ARMSTRONG



CULLENWARD FAMILY



# Climate and Landscape

Nap Nap is essentially a floodplain, especially on the southern side of the Murrumbidgee River. The country is bordered by the Nimmie Creek system to the south and the Murrumbidgee River. In between, there is higher sandy country, swamps and a vast system of smaller creeks and runners (waterways that flow from the creek and river).

The last 20 years have seen extremes of climatic conditions. On average, the rainfall on Nap Nap is about 12 inches (300 mm) per year. The Millennium Drought in the late '90s and first decade of the 2000s saw the country decimated by lack of rain. Stock numbers were vastly reduced and much of the native vegetation, including Saltbush as well as vast tracks of River Red Gum trees, died through lack of water. Massive dust storms rolled over the property.

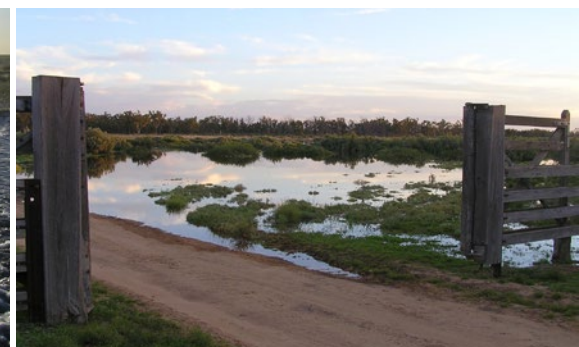






In 2010, the first of three floods came through the area. The first flood was a joy and welcome relief to the parched land. The feed and grass that grew after the flood was incredible and no amount of stock could fully stock the land. The March 2012 flood was a major flood with 60,000 acres of the country going under water for up to two months. The damage was immense with rotting vegetation as well as infrastructure, such as channel banks and cropping ground, destroyed.

The floods meant that an enormous amount of organisation was needed to prepare for the rising water. Stock needed to be mustered out of the creek and river country and placed on the higher sandy ground in the middle of the property. Sheep needed to be shorn before the water hit, allowing them more chance if they did happen to be trapped behind water (thankfully this didn't happen as the stock were moved successfully). Banks needed to be built up and monitored around the houses and shed complex. Channels need be sandbagged to try and protect the pasture areas from being gutted by the force of the water. Stock needed to be fed out on the higher ground as the summer had just ended, so consequently there was no fresh feed, so the hay had to be organised before the floods hit. Then it was just a matter of holding on until the water levels subsided.







Again a third flood took place in late 2016. Although this was a smaller flood, sadly a great deal of the grass that had grown that year was destroyed through rot. The timing of the flood made it difficult as after the water receded, the summer heat arrived.

Most of the soil on Nap Nap is heavy black soil. Lack of water means that the soil cracks open making it difficult for vegetation to grow. The country is heavily reliant on the river flows and the floods to cover this soil, replenishing it with much needed water. The water then can remain in sub soil for a long time allowing the vegetation to return and thrive when the summer heat eventually disappears.





# Water

Nap Nap is part of the Lowbidgee Irrigation Region on the Murrumbidgee River. In the 1930s, a weir was put in place at Maude. This affected the natural flooding of the river below. The landholders at the time developed a system where water was diverted from the Maude Weir for controlled flooding.

The southern country of Nap Nap on the Nimmie Creek was part of the Lowbidgee floodplain irrigation system. This was where the country for organic cropping was dependent on flood irrigation. Before the floodplains were sold to the government in 2014, it was part of the largest group of organic growers on the eastern side of Australia.



Waterbirds sense the filling of the environmental areas on Nap Nap, such as the swamp and creek country, and the birds start arriving almost immediately. Thousands of ducks, black swans, spoonbills, ibis, herons, pelicans, cormorants and eagles start moving and breeding in nests in these waterways. The waterways are also home to the endangered Southern Bell Frogs as well as many other amphibians, insects and snakes, such as pythons, tiger, brown and black snakes. The Station is also home to the rare Grey Snake, which has not been found in good numbers and has not been recorded in this part of NSW before.





The other benefit is that after the flood waters recede, this country grows good feed for sheep and cattle.

Water is still delivered today from the river through a series of regulators. One of these is on the Nimmie Creek and the other on a man-made channel that runs through Nap Nap. These regulators are used to send environmental water down through the floodways to support the environment and wildlife.

There are also stock and domestic flows pumped down the system from the river, filling the numerous stock tanks on the property. This water is delivered through a series of pipes and channels stretching for kilometres to the very end of the property. Nap Nap Station has numerous water licenses, which they pay fees to use the water. They also trade in water as another business on the property.





# Sheep

In 1905, Mr. R.W. Ronald recorded that the 25 year average carrying capacity for the land was 5 acres per sheep. The carrying capacity of the country hasn't changed much in over 100 years. The dry country still supports, on average, 1 dry sheep to every 5 acres. The management of pastures and the purchase of water licenses for irrigation, has improved the carrying capacity in some areas of the property. The Ronalds were conservative managers and this philosophy has been continued by the Armstrong family. This has meant that the country is preserved and in good condition.

The main sheep enterprise includes the breeding of Merino sheep for wool. A proportion of the older ewes are joined to White Suffolk rams for fat lamb production (meat).

Recent drought years has again seen stock numbers depleted. In 2020, there are 3000 ewes lambing on Nap Nap with a lamb marking rate of 120%.







Rams are joined with the ewes in December. The annual shearing takes place in March with this year's fleece being around 130 bales. In an average year, the ewes are expected to cut about 6-7 kg of wool. Lambing commences in May. Lamb marking usually occurs in early July and lambs are weaned around September. The lambs are weaned onto the irrigation pasture. Lambs are shorn at 6 months.

In the month before lambing commences a poisoning program is carried out for foxes. Losses are also experienced from wild pigs. They are a massive problem, especially when the ewe is giving birth. The pigs are the main reason the Ronalds stopped producing sheep. The pigs are shot and trapped in an effort to reduce the number of lamb deaths. Lambs are also taken by Wedge-tailed Eagles, however they are a protected species and not harmed.



The dry climate of the area reduces disease in the sheep, such as worms and foot problems. Ewes are drenched before lambing and all sheep are drenched again off the board after shearing. Lambs receive their first vaccination at lamb marking and all sheep are treated with 'Click' against fly strike at crutching, towards the end of September.



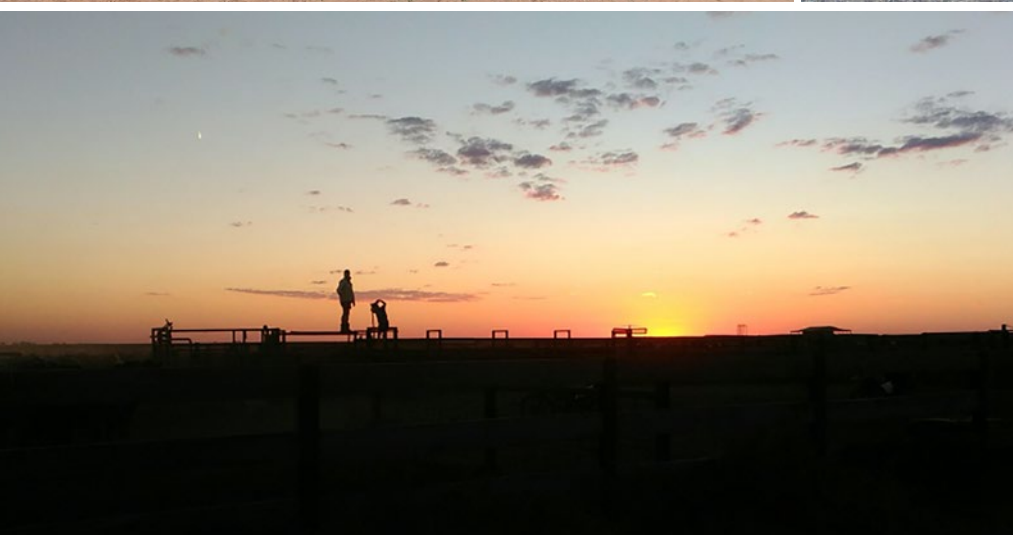


# Cattle

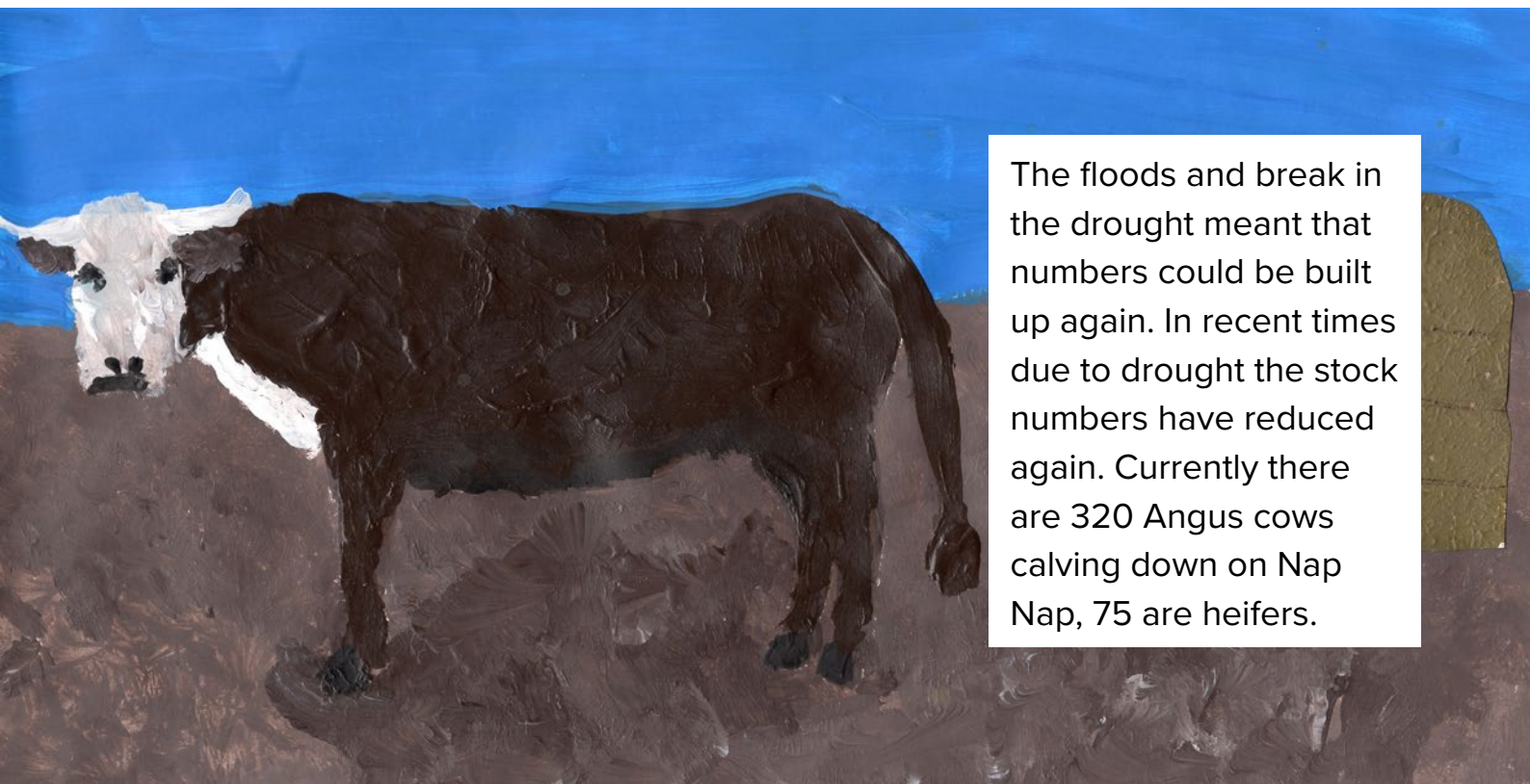
The Armstrong's early years with Nap Nap were good with river floods occurring in 1986, 1988, 1989 and 1991. This meant that there was an abundance of food through the river and flood out country and the majority of heifers (female cattle having their first calf) were able to be kept to build up the herd.

By 1992, 2000 Hereford cows were being joined and run in addition to calves and weaners. There were also 5000 ewes and significant cropping.

With the onset of drought conditions herd numbers were progressively reduced. A considerable amount of feeding took place. However the conditions did not improve so the older cows were sold first and then the herd was systematically culled until eventually in 2007 all the herd was sold. Many were walked off the property to a nearby feedlot on the property Hell's Gate.







The floods and break in the drought meant that numbers could be built up again. In recent times due to drought the stock numbers have reduced again. Currently there are 320 Angus cows calving down on Nap Nap, 75 are heifers.

Nap Nap tends to be better country for cattle than sheep. The black soil and lignum scrub is difficult for sheep to manage as well as the pests such as pigs and foxes. The cattle are run in the river and creek country. This country is very difficult to muster, especially by vehicles or motorbikes. It has traditionally been horse country and in later years has been mustered by helicopter, horse and motorbike as the helicopter makes the muster much more time efficient and gives a cleaner muster of the paddock.

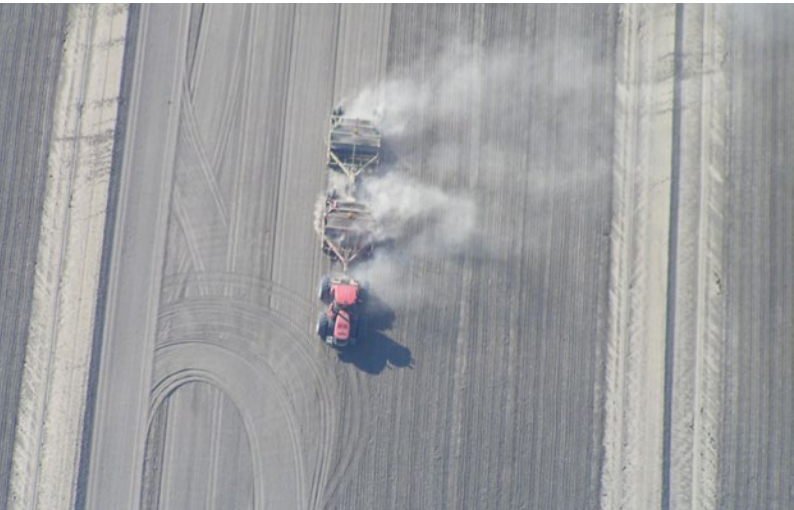


The cows are joined with the bulls in September and calves are marked in November when the bulls are mustered out. The calves are weaned about February/March. So the cattle are really only mustered in about twice a year - as little as possible. The best female calves are kept for future breeders for the herd. The other females and steers are sold either to feedlots or restockers. Older cull cattle are sold to abattoirs or feedlots.



# Cropping

Nap Nap has approximately 500 acres of irrigated cropping ground. In recent dry years the amount of this ground that has been sown for crops each year has been severely reduced due to lack of water allocation. The water is pumped from the Murrumbidgee River with water licenses.



Crops grown are generally winter cereals such as wheat and barley as well as producing Hay for our own stock. This year Nap Nap has sown only 200 acres of barley but due to lack of rain and low water allocations the crop has struggled and will be used for sheep feed.

There is a further 1000 acres capable of being floodplain cropped in flood years.

There is a further 260 acres of irrigated pasture near the homestead. Water again for this pasture is pumped from the river. In dry years ewes lamb down on this pasture which consists of a mix of clovers and rye grass. Lambs are also weaned and fattened onto this pasture in late September. The pasture is also used for holding sale sheep.







## Firewood

Firewood has been cut on and off the property for numerous years. Different teams have come in over the years and taken dead wood from the river bends. A huge benefit is that the river bends are cleaned up. Dead wood is removed from the ground allowing grass to grow and eliminating fire hazard build up. Currently there are no woodcutters on Nap Nap but they are expected to commence again later in the year.





# Homestead and garden

The homestead and garden are a great example of bush carpentry with the original bricks being made at Nap Nap and the timber water tank being built entirely from River Red Gum in 1895. The water tank (pictured) provided a supply of water for the garden and was filled from the river by a windmill driven pump. It was originally lined with pitch to retain water. Later a plaster cement lining replaced the pitch until a new tank was built which allowed the installation of some water reticulation by steel piping. Before the sprinkler system was put in, the garden was watered by buckets carried on yokes across the shoulders of Chinese workers.

The brick cottage (now housing jackaroos – pictured) was constructed soon after as the 'Manager's Accommodation'. It was then renovated and partly rebuilt in 1992.

Around the 1920s the homestead and barracks were extended, including the billiard room.

Then in 1956 the present Assistant Manager's house was constructed as a home for Wilson and Margaret Ronald.







The Armstrongs carried out major renovations on all Station buildings when they purchased the property. The homestead's verandas were rotted, having been originally built at ground level without ventilation. The roof leaked in many minor spots and had old chamber pots in the ceiling to stop the drips. There was a lot of damage to the house due to the harsh climate.

Work to renovate the homestead began in 1987 under the supervision of Peter Freeman, a Canberra based architect, and Gary Wilson, a builder from Griffith.

A plan was then developed to re-fit the machinery shed near the river as the 'Owner's Accommodation', as it was the most desirable position on the river for a new house. The rest of the sheds around that area were knocked down and the garden extended to embrace the new house. Matching bricks to the homestead were found from the demolished Anglican Church Hall in Hay, and also from the Toganmain Station homestead near Carrathool. A new office building was also constructed alongside the new house.





As you enter the Nap Nap homestead complex and garden you go through two huge timber gates, relics from the Newmarket sale yards in Melbourne.

The trees and the roses are the most dramatic features of the garden including the Nap Nap rose and the Mrs Ronald Rose. There are many trees in the garden including fruit trees that are over one hundred years old. Towering above the homestead roofs are three massive pine trees; two eastern whites and a hybrid pine which produces pineapple shaped cones of immense size.

On the river stands a great old river red gum - known as 'The Steamer Tree'. It is an amazing 800 year old river red gum. Paddle steamers tied to this tree when they called at Nap Nap during the winter river highs, to deliver supplies and to load wool for shipment back down the Murrumbidgee and up the Murray to the Port of Echuca.





## Conclusion

The Ronald family left the property shortly after being purchased by the Armstrongs. The history of the Ronald family is deeply entwined with Nap Nap and Nap Nap will always be with them.

The property has been managed by the same family, the Cullenwards, during the Armstrong's time. Today Nap Nap is managed by Hamish Cullenward who lives on the farm with his wife Fleur and their three children Darcy, Iona and Finn. They work with the other members of Nap Nap Station, Peter Thomson and Max Barr and his partner Lauren Argent.





The current custodians of Nap Nap, Martin and Toni Armstrong and their four children Nick, Lachlan, Toby and Chelsea, are passionate about Nap Nap. They believe they are so fortunate to be part of Nap Nap, its country and history. They realise the importance of passing on this knowledge to their grandchildren Jackson, Ziabella and Giselle.

All Nari Nari people believe that walking on Nap Nap means standing on the history of their people. Their people become part of the land and so do all those that pass through the history of Nap Nap.



MELINDA, NICK, TONI AND MARTIN



LACHLAN AND CHELSEA



MARTIN AND TOBY



JACKSON



ZIABELLA



GISELLE



# Nap Nap

*Long bendy trees stretch over the dark river,  
Shadows on the water still as statues,  
Big floating logs carrying algae,  
Drop-offs hide in secret caves,  
Silt piling up on dirty water,  
Shadows creeping up old gums.*

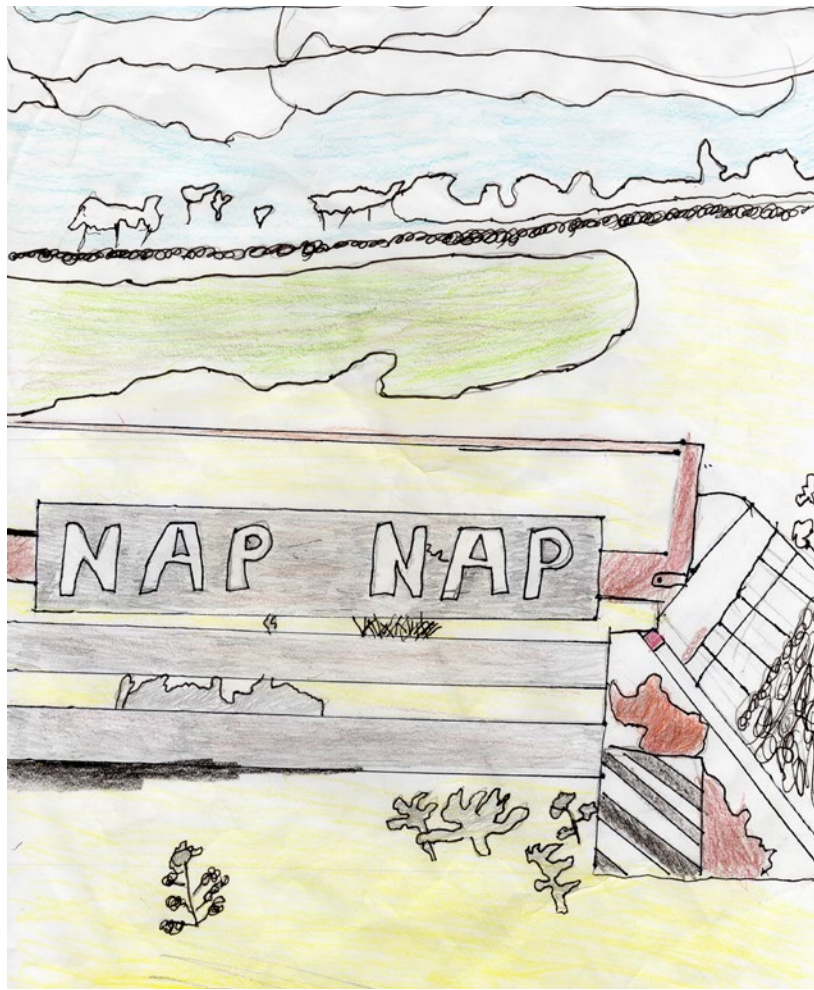
*Bell Frogs croaking, a chorus from the swamp  
Laughing kookaburras flying over head  
Warbling magpies make their mark,  
Cars on the dirt road roar in the distance  
High, squeaky branches wave above  
Wind sighs through the leaves.*

*Bumpy tree trunks hold firm  
Rough scattered bark crunches under our feet  
Lumpy old salt bush watching furiously  
Tough black soil underground  
Frosty grass lost colour from the cold nights  
Icy Bidgee teases my fingertips.*

*Smoke from the homestead in the scrub  
Campfire cooking hovers in the air  
Red gum blossoms burst into light  
Far off scents of rain fill dry mouths  
Eucalypt leaves carried on the wind  
Clumps of dirt fill our shoes.*

*Peacefully the river flows  
Box trees calmly stand strong  
Screeching cockatoos proudly converse  
Darting fish swim the racing waters below  
Custodians of the land  
This is Nap Nap.*

By Hope Job, Booligal Public School, 2020







Max Mijok, Dallas Harwood, Mrs Cullenward, Harry Duncan,  
Sophie Tapper, Emily Caughey, Alice Booth, Grace McLean,  
Seth Gray, Lachlan Spence and Jackson McClure

2020

