

Waljeers,

Pulling on the reins for Mother Earth



Hay Public School



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/

Petaurus Education Group

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

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

Waljeers, Pulling on the reins for Mother Earth

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Waljeers lies between Booligal and Hay on the One Tree Plain. It is a beautiful property. It is a dry, dusty landscape that can be transformed to a lush, wet river flood country with wildlife in great numbers. Birds like swans (Dhundhu) and pelicans (Gulambali) inhabit its lake beds and swamps. Emus, kangaroos, goannas, lizards and snakes roam its saltbush plains and hidden meandering river bends. There are seven kilometres of river for every one kilometre of distance.

The main water source for Waljeers is the Lachlan River. The Lachlan winds its way slowly and anciently through acres of lignum bush in the middle of the property. A magical part of Waljeers is its lake – Lake Waljeers.

This beautiful expanse of water is 1200 acres and has sandy edges, majestic gum trees and shimmering water. Peppermint Swamp in Waljeers also adds to the properties water points. The land on 'Little Lake' also contains the creek system of the Muggabah. The country is magical for its waterways and its wildlife.



Waljeers is a large property that is situated on the western side of the Cobb Highway between Booligal and Hay. The Station consists of two properties. The first is Waljeers on the western side of the Lachlan River in the Balranald shire comprising of 16,000 acres as well as 16,000 acres on the Eastern side of the river in the Hay shire. The other property is known as Little Lake which is situated north west of the western portion of Waljeers. Altogether there are 64,000 acres.

Waljeers

by Max Spence

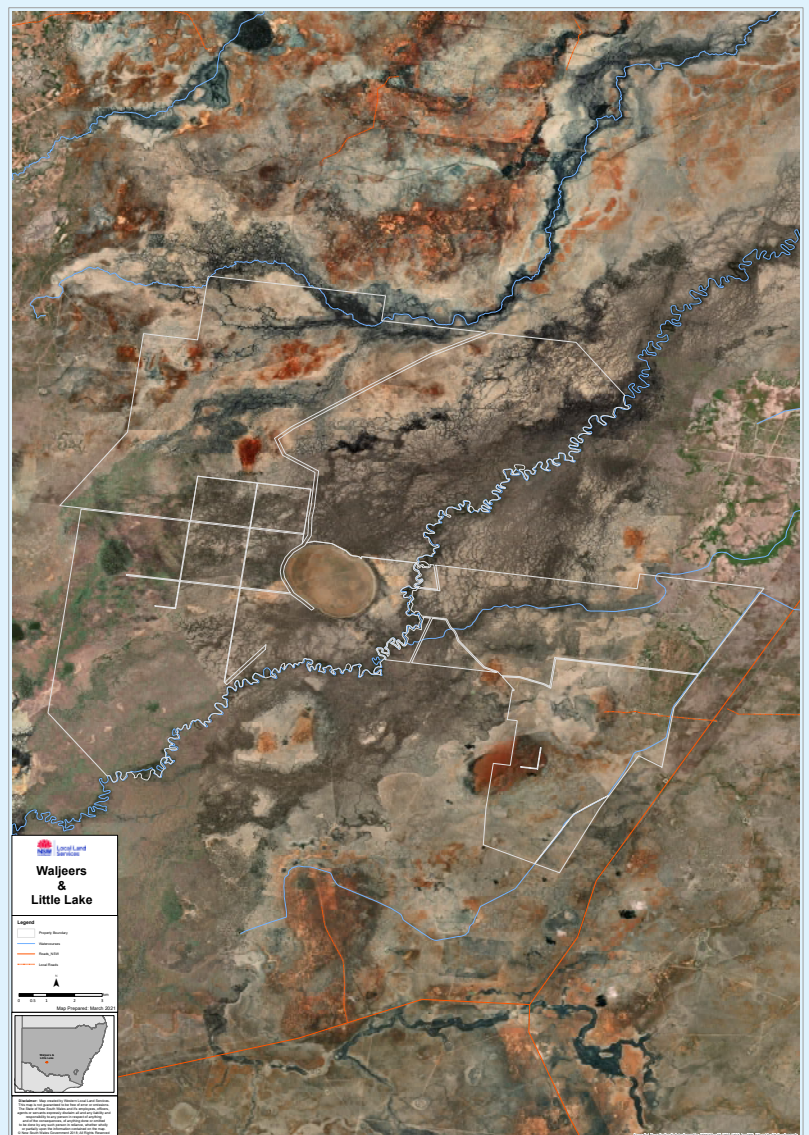
Lovely lake Waljeers
Yindyamarra Mother Earth
Wonderful country.

Water coming in
Majestic birds flying by
Wiradjuri land.

Now cattle can drink
The country can now be used
Wonderful country.

Wiradjuri land

Sheep wandering free
Running away from the bike
Wonderful country.



Hay and Hell and Booligal

by Andrew Barton "Banjo" Paterson

"You come and see me, boys," he said;
"You'll find a welcome and a bed
And whisky any time you call;
Although our township hasn't got
The name of quite a lively spot --
You see, I live in Booligal.

"And people have an awful down
Upon the district and the town --
Which worse than hell itself the call;
In fact, the saying far and wide
Along the Riverina side
Is 'Hay and Hell and Booligal'.

"No doubt it suits 'em very well
To say its worse than Hay or Hell,
But don't you heed their talk at all;
Of course, there's heat -- no one denies --
And sand and dust and stacks of flies,
And rabbits, too, at Booligal.

"But such a pleasant, quiet place --
You never see a stranger's face;
They hardly ever care to call;
The drovers mostly pass it by --
They reckon that they'd rather die
Than spend the night in Booligal.

"The big mosquitoes frighten some --
You'll lie awake to hear 'em hum --
And snakes about the township crawl;
But shearers, when they get their cheque,
They never come along and wreck
The blessed town of Booligal.



"But down to Hay the shearers come
And fill themselves with fighting-rum,
And chase blue devils up the wall,
And fight the snaggers every day,
Until there is the deuce to pay --
There's none of that in Booligal.

"Of course, there isn't much to see --
The billiard-table used to be
The great attraction for us all,
Until some careless, drunken curs
Got sleeping on it in their spurs,
And ruined it, in Booligal.

"Just now there is a howling drought
That pretty near has starved us out --
It never seems to rain at all;
But, if there should come any rain,
You couldn't cross the black-soil plain --
You'd have to stop in Booligal."

"We'd have to stop!" With bated breath
We prayed that both in life and death
Our fate in other lines might fall;
"Oh, send us to our just reward
In Hay or Hell, but, gracious Lord,
Deliver us from Booligal!"



Michelle and Dave Spence are the current custodians of Waljeers. Michelle and Dave bought Waljeers at the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009. They bought Little Lake in 2017. They sold 8,000 acres in 2018.

Dave and Michelle originally came from Victoria where they were in the timber business. Initially they had bought Waljeers as they thought it would be an important source of firewood and they thought that they could utilise that resource with any dead timber on the property. Eventually they sold the Victorian timber business.

The Spence's moved to Queensland so that Dave could get his helicopter licence. Dave and Michelle never intended to live on Waljeers permanently but realised it would be a good idea to move there for a little while they worked on improvements to the property. They moved and fell in love with the country.

Dave and Michelle have two sons, Lachie who was born in 2008 and Max who was born in 2009. Both boys had the good fortune of commencing and spending most of their primary schooling at the nurturing and wonderful environment of their local tiny bush school – Booligal Public School. Lachie is currently in year 7 at St Francis at Leeton and Max is in year 6 at Hay Public School.





Dave and Michelle have invested much time into enhancing Waljeers. They do have a license to pump water out of Lake Waljeers but have not used it as the country is not ideal for irrigation as it requires kilometres of channels to move the water around and most of the water would evaporate. Also the wildlife would eat any crop grown near the river.

Dave and Michelle built new sheep yards in 2015 next to the woolshed that was rebuilt in 1981 after the original one was burnt down in 1979 during the fires.



A visit to Waljeers

by Taylah Moore

The sound of the whispering children amongst the bleating sheep
grew louder as time passed.

I look out above the dusty plains while I run to stay warm.

My smell is focused on the dust that lurks from the
kicked up dirt caused by the stampedes.

The feel of the white fluffy wool from the sheep warms my fingers.

I taste the mouth watering sausage

As my stomach begs for more.



Michelle and Dave run sheep and cattle on Waljeers. They only breed sheep for meat, not wool and so therefore they run a breed of meat sheep called Dorpers.

Dorpers are sheep that are bred for meat. Dorpers don't have much wool – it is more like hair. The breed originated from South Africa. A dorper's diet consists of many things that merinos don't like or just can't eat. (Merino sheep are bred for wool). This might include tougher bushes, fresh twigs, leaf litter – they are much better foragers (which means that they are better at searching for food than merino sheep). Dorpers are poor hosts for lice and they don't get fly struck. This means that they are much better suited to the country of Waljeers than merino sheep.

Dorpers are also less work than a merino because unlike merinos, dorpers don't have to be shorn. Dorpers are brought into the shed at six to eight weeks old to get tagged. They are separated at weaning time into females and males. The males are called wethers and will grow until they are big enough to sell.





At times when it is dry the Spence's will destock (get rid of) some of their sheep and even sell some of the ewes.

With dorpers there is no shearing or crutching, no spraying or dipping. Dorpers get vaccinated as lambs. They have a shorter gestation period with ewes producing about three lambings every two years. Merinos usually just have one lambing a year.

Dorpers have many similarities to goats. They are tough on fences and they will eat tough food. The Spence family has therefore ensured that a large amount of time and money has been dedicated to replacing old fences and grids for gates to ensure that the dorpers remain in their set paddocks.

At the moment there are approximately 4000 sheep on Waljeers/Little Lake. Roughly 1500 are wethers and 2500 are ewes.





Michelle and Dave also run cattle. They trade cattle. This means they buy cattle in, fatten them up and then sell them when the market value rises.

Michelle and Dave call their cattle herd 'licorice all sorts' because they are always changing and because they trade, they don't just stick to one breed or stud of cattle.

The sheep are mainly run in the open country and the cattle are often run in the river country as they are easier to muster out of the river country. Also, in the river country, which lies in the north west, there are predators such as pigs that eat the sheep, especially the lambs. The open country is much easier management for sheep.

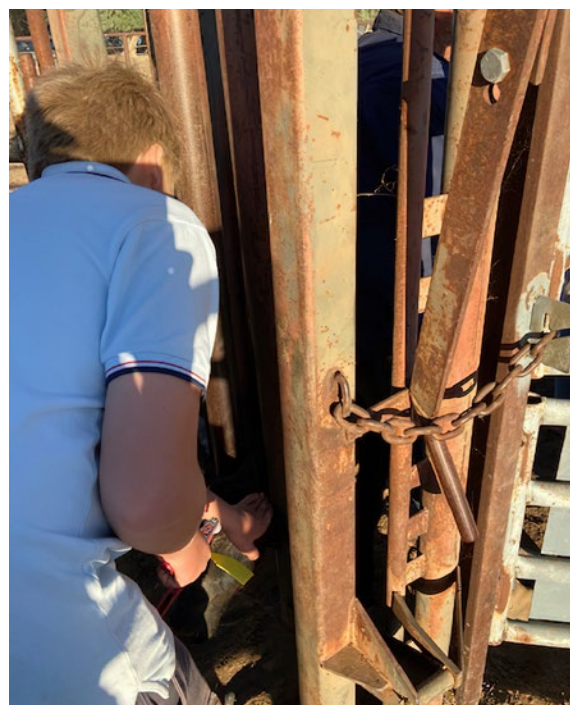


A helicopter is used to muster out the cattle. A lot of the river country is hard to muster on motorbike. Horses are better in this country as there are lots of obstacles for bikes such as lignum, fallen timber and sink holes. Having two brains – one for the horse and one for the rider makes it so much easier to negotiate mustering such difficult country. Horses can often see dangers before the rider, especially if the rider is busy scanning the country for stock. Dave and Michelle however use four wheel motorbikes and side by side buggies which are terrific in rough terrain.

A helicopter really does a clean muster. Mustering on motorbikes without a helicopter would not achieve a clean muster. In fact only about 80% of the stock would be found which would mean that stock left behind would not be marked and be more difficult to muster the next time.

Getting those extra 20% by mustering with a helicopter saves money. In 2014 the Spence's made \$60,000 on unmarked cattle. These cattle were cattle that had been missed in previous musters. The helicopter cost \$12,000 to hire, so well and truly paid for itself.

Cattle are worth a lot of money at the moment so it is important that the Spence's muster all of their cattle out of their country. The total numbers of female breeders nationally in Australia is usually about 30 million but at the moment is only 25 million so cattle are in demand.



Most of the water for the sheep country (the Hay Plains section of Waljeers) is delivered via a channel system known as the Wah Wah Scheme. The scheme was put together by a group of local farmers in 1956. It comes from the Barren Box Swamp where a lot of water is drained from the country and irrigation blocks in the MIA (Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area). The water goes through channels and pipes over a number of farms and many kilometres.

Over the last ten years the government deemed the open channels of the Wah Wah scheme (and similar schemes) inefficient and so have funded a new Gunbar Water stock and domestic scheme, which is a pressurised pipe system. Water meters measure how much water is extracted from the system by the landholders. Water is very expensive.



Dry as dust

by Bonnie-Ellen Matthews

The dirt's getting hard
Water turns into a gift
Soil becomes dust.

Fences turn to rust
Mother Earth tried to warn us
The lake water spoils.

The trees turn to ash
The trees lose leaves in sadness
They cry out for help.

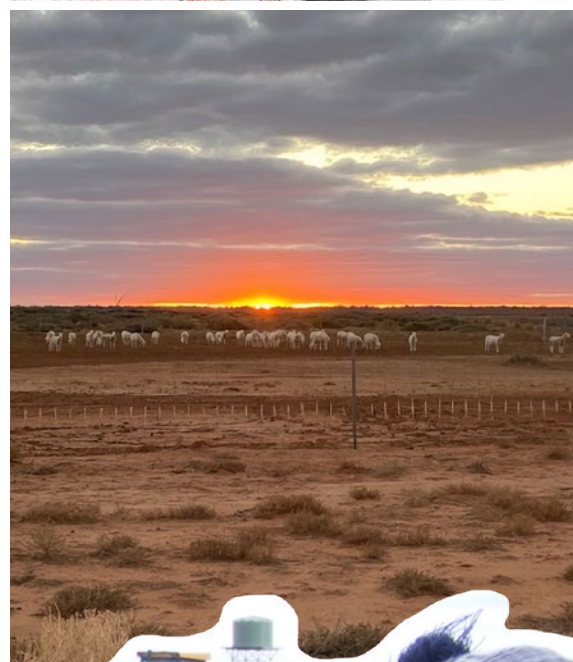
Cows start to get sold
Lambs are starting to get rare
Plains are getting stark.

Out here it's bare,
There isn't enough water to share.



Michelle and Dave have put in a bore. The bore pipe that goes down to extract the water is 150mm in diameter. The bore is sunk to 200m. It extracts 60 million litres per year. Dave and Michelle use the water in their troughs and they 'shandy' (mix) it with water from the Gunbar Water stock and domestic scheme. The salt in the bore water is pretty concentrated so they try not to use it in the ground tanks. Ground tanks look like dams but are called tanks out in country like Waljeers. They are called tanks because 'dams' block the water up from running straight through, whereas 'tanks' are filled from a channel or a pipe.

Dave and Michelle always try and keep their fresh water in ground tanks one-half to one-third full and try not to use the bore water in the tanks as the salt in the bore water becomes more concentrated as the tanks dry up. The tanks are still the preferred watering hole for sheep. Research shows that ewes have a much better percentage of lambs at lambing when they are walking in to drink from a tank, rather than a trough.



The original settler on Waljeers was a man by the name of Nicholson. In 1851 John Peters tendered successfully for Lake Waljeers. For some time Waljeers was owned by Albert Tyson, a relative of the famous James Tyson. James Tyson recognised the area as one of the best places to fatten stock. There were four Tyson brothers - James, Peter (Albert's father), William and John. Their father was in the rum corp and their mother was a convict. They married and settled at Appin near Sydney. The boys grew up on the farm and were good bush kids so as the country started to develop the four brothers went out droving. They were amazing stockman, droving livestock and keeping them together, even though the land had no fences, no bridges or roads. As time went on, they started taking stock further out into NSW and even Victoria.

As the Tyson's became more established they took up land in the reedbeds on the lower Lachlan. When the Bendigo goldfields opened the four Tyson brothers took stock to the goldfields and opened butcheries. As the population grew to over 100,000 within twelve months, some of the brothers stayed in Bendigo to manage the butcheries.

James Tyson travelled far and wide in search of stock for the butcheries to supply meat for the miners. The brothers eventually sold out and purchased a great deal of land in the Riverina in the 1860's including Tupra, Juanbung, Boyong, Bunumbutt, and Corrong .

Albert (Peter's son) left his children Peter, Ray, Arthur and Tuppy a property each including Ulonga and Waljeers (which was part of Corrong) and Little Lake.



Waljeers is made up of 70 land titles. These titles were created as a result of the Robertson Land Act in the 1860's where the country was split into 640 acre portions to try and encourage more people to move out to the bush. 640 acres wasn't very much land on which to make a living. Some people would build their houses in the middle corner of four adjacent titles so they could own four titles. Still that wasn't much land for what was needed to make a living. Eventually people sold their titles to other neighbours who gained more land. More acres of land was needed to make a living.

There were a number of staging posts along the Cobb Highway between Booligal and Hay – '11 mile,' 'One Tree' and 'The Quandongs'. At the staging posts the Cobb and Co coaches could stop, switch horses and feed them as well as have a meal and a bed for the night while they were in the middle of travelling.

At one stage the portion of Waljeers which is in the Hay Shire was part of a parcel of land owned by a man by the name of Tom Paterson. He was made famous by the poem 'All among the wool boys', which is also known as 'Flash Jack from Gundagai' edited by Banjo Paterson. He owned 250,000 acres and the land was known as Ulonga.



Flash Jack from Gundagai

edited by Andrew Barton 'Banjo' Paterson



I've shore at Burrabogie, and I've shore at Toganmain,
I've shore at big Willandra and upon the old Coleraine,
But before the shearin' was over I've wished myself back, again
Shearin' for old Tom Patterson, on the One Tree Plain.

CHORUS

All among the wool, boys,
Keep your wide blades full, boys,
I can do a respectable tally myself whenever I like to try,
But they know me round the back blocks as Flash Jack from Gundagai.

I've shore at big Willandra and I've shore at Tilberoo,
And once I drew my blades, my boys, upon the famed Barcoo,
At Cowan Downs and Trida, as far as Moulamein,
But I always was glad to get back again to the One Tree Plain.

CHORUS

I've pinked 'em with the Wolseleys and I've rushed with B-bows, too,
And shaved 'em in the grease, my boys, with the grass seed showing through.
But I never slummed my pen, my lads, whate'er it might contain,
While shearin' for old Tom Patterson, on the One Tree Plain.

I've been whalin' up the Lachlan, and I've dossed on Cooper's Creek,
And once I rung Cudjingie shed, and blued it in a week.
But when Gabriel blows his trumpet, lads, I'll catch the morning train,
And I'll push for old Tom Patterson's, on the One Tree Plain.

The bridge over the Lachlan River on Waljeers (that isn't used anymore) was built in 1967.

The one that is used now was built in 1985. In order to put the bridge in, the course of the river was changed. The river had a horseshoe bend. A channel was dug across the thinnest part of the horseshoe. Then a bridge was built over the empty channel. The bridge was made from two train carriages. When the bridge was completed the sides of the river facing into the horseshoe at the ends of the new channel were cut. The river was then able to flow along the channel. The earth that had been removed from the channel was placed into the river to block off the horseshoe. The horseshoe section of the river then eventually dried up and a new, shorter path for the river (complete with a bridge) was created.

Excavators were used to build the main bridge. There is an infamous story about a man called George Ham who was using gelignite to blow out the walls. Apparently he got down into one of the holes to blow the gelignite, lit it, then realised he couldn't get out because of the loose dirt! We are sure he scarpered up the side of the hole very quickly.

Healing Country

by Matilda Nisbet

Big blue sky among the dry.
Breaking trees in the breeze.
Birds flying
Land dying
Dust in the air.
Oh, this land is bare.
Kangaroos hopping around
Footsteps on the ground
Now it's up to you and me
To help this healing country.





Waljeers was owned for over fifty years by the Circuit family. Ted Circuit grew up on Ulonga. Waljeers was then part of Ulonga Station.

Ted's parents bought Ulonga (Waljeers) in November 1949. Ted's mother was from the Warialda/Moree region and his father was from the Hillston/ West Wyalong area. Ted's father had jackarooed around the Riverina country when he was young and thought it was great land.



Ted's father was a sheep classer. Ted's mother's father had a merino sheep stud and Ted's father had come to their property as a classer to help with selection of sheep. That was how they'd come to fall in love.

Ted and his brother Sandy and his sister Christina spent their childhood mustering cattle on horseback, watching the tracks of the animals and exploring the country.



Memories of growing up in the bush

By Christina Circuitt

Over the years we grew to love the plains and the wonderful sunsets. There were many challenging times for my parents which as children we thought interesting and often found very funny.

Our first Christmas holidays we arrived home from boarding school to find the property flooded. We were taken along muddy roads to a set of sheep yards where our horses were patiently waiting. We had to splash our way home through knee deep water, often having to swim the horses through washouts. Snakes were numerous and they used to stretch out over the water in the hope that the horses wouldn't tread on their tails. The wetland birdlife was amazing and in huge quantities – swans, stilts, pelicans and ducks of all varieties.



My father was quite a character, he always saw the situation as a challenge and an opportunity. I recall we were notified by the station master that a fully grown turkey gobbler was waiting at the Hay Railway Station for transportation to the station. He arrived at the sheep yards in the crate and the decision had to be made about how to get him across the last 7 km. The bird was removed from the crate and handed up to dad who was sitting on a very suspicious stock horse. The bird's feet rested on the pommel of the saddle and dad put its long neck over his shoulder and clung firmly to the body. The colour of dad's face and the turkey jowl's matched perfectly as he struggled with the big bird on the road home.

Another time 8–10 feet high two year old gum trees arrived, their roots wrapped in hessian plus a package of 6 pounds of butter. Jumbo, a large grey pack horse looked most uncertain as the trees were tied on his back as well as the butter. I will never forget the sight of 6 pounds of butter raining down as Jumbo started to buck. Amazingly the trees stayed in place and Jumbo decided to give in and carry them home.



There were many much loved pets. Edwine, an emu came to us in the disguise of a proposed omelette. As breakfast was being prepared we heard a knocking in the eggs. Three little baby emus emerged. Edwine settled in with the chooks. He roamed freely around the homestead compound and followed us everywhere even when we went mustering but we had to stop that as he chased the sheep in all directions. At one stage he became bossy and was banished to the back paddock but as kids we couldn't bear to leave him so begged dad to let him come home.



There were many wild pigs and we had plenty of adventures catching the little ones as pets and to feed the kitchen scraps to those we wanted to fatten up for the table. We learned to shoot while young and carried a rifle in a scabbard on the saddle.

During the droughts dust storms were constant. We would see a huge dark red cloud forming in the west and there would be a race to close all the windows. The whole sky would darken and you had to turn on the lights to see inside the house, but what excitement when the first huge drops of rain hit the dusty claypans and transformed the country with bountiful feed for the stock.

There were bushfires to be fought with neighbours all helping to save stock and contain the blazes. There were locust plagues with a giant cloud of insects descending on the lawns with their departure not leaving a single blade of grass or plant. We mustered the cattle out of swamps the sheep out of the saltbush, we used horses for work and pleasure and kept our own thoroughbred stallion.

After finishing school I undertook nursing at the Royal Melbourne Hospital. During this time I learned to fly at Moorabin. My brother and I and our next door neighbour purchased a Tiger Moth and flew it home on my days off. We could use it for cattle spotting during the musters and for bringing in supplies during the floods.

The memory of a wonderful childhood remains with me always.

A year after the Circuitts bought the place there was a huge flood. Moving the sheep was hard work as they wouldn't run onto the bridges and they kept getting caught behind water. Fortunately they didn't lose any sheep.

After the flood there were a number of good years and seasons for the land. The Circuitts bought shorthorn cattle from England. Eventually they sold them but they still remained as a stud in the Gippsland area in Victoria. Ted continued to keep shorthorns because they always stayed calm, were good calving cattle and had no eye problems like eye cancers.

The biggest flood was in 1956. In that flood the Lachlan and the Murrumbidgee Rivers joined at One Tree.

In 1973–1974 the floods were huge and ran over the bitumen road going from Booligal to Hay.



The Healing Country

by Hilton Hargreaves

Dry land no more – new life again
Birds prancing about – singing a tweet
Skies open up – we welcome the rain
Wildlife begin to find their feet

Abandoned sheep – look no more
Confidence blowing through the trees
Stock still suffering the unsure
Gums whistling in the breeze

A promise begins to bring new times
We breathe “Is this our call?”
Our land that is far from our prime
We will always survive every fall.





In 1979 there was a huge fire on Waljeers and the surrounding district. 400,000 acres were burnt in the area. The fire started on 29th November 1979 at Little Lake and continued until March 1980. The fire burnt in the lignum and it was impossible to put it out. It would constantly flare up.

A huge fireball went overhead near the house. The smoke was so thick that it was impossible to see anything. The fire burnt down the woolshed on Waljeers.

A new shearing shed was built in 1981.





Ted's parents both loved horses and either side of their family had kept mares and stallions so Ted's parents continued to run and breed horses on Ulonga/Waljeers. Horses are fabulous in river country and were perfect for mustering on Ulonga and Waljeers. The country has a lot of lignum which is impossible to get a motorbike through. There is also a lot of fallen timber from the vast tracks of redgums which a horse can step/jump over.

In 1978 the country was separated into two blocks – Sandy took custodianship of Waljeers, which was on the western side of the division and received a further 16,000 acres which was a portion of Ulonga on the eastern side of the river. Ted took custodianship of the balance of Ulonga. Ted took on the stud and the blood horses and Sandy took on the commercial cattle and sheep. Sandy and his wife Beth and their two children Lachlan and Kate lived for many, many years on Waljeers.

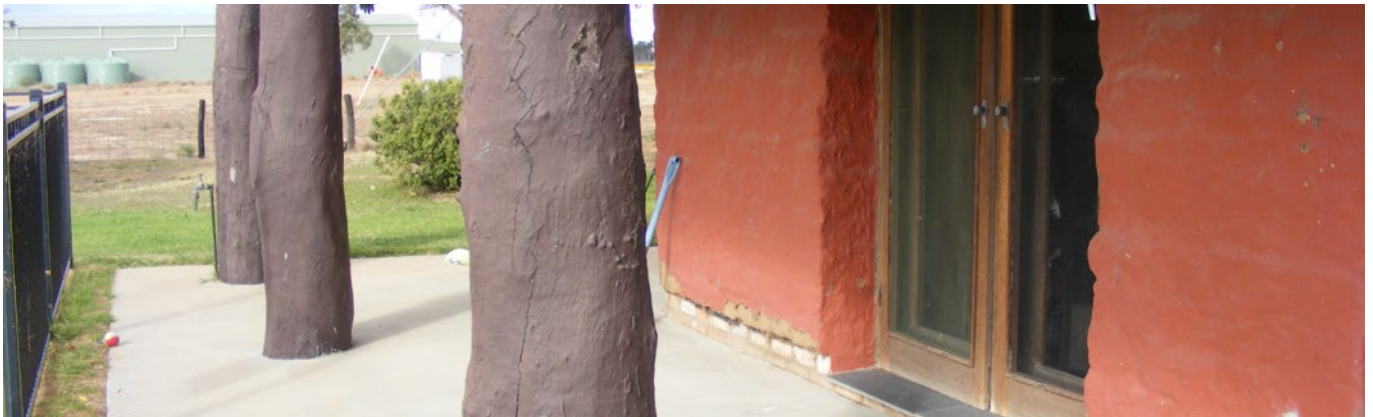
Eventually Ted sold Ulonga to the Barlow family before settling into Kangaroo, a property near Hay. Sandy and Beth sold Waljeers and moved to Hay.



Memories of Waljeers and Richard Alexander Perry Circuitt (better known as Sandy)

by Mrs Beth Circuitt

Sandy and I were married October 1979. Sandy owned Waljeers long before that, he had brought the acreages from his father Dick Circuitt. There was no house on the property until Sandy built the mud brick house that is there now. The build took 18 months finishing just before we were married.



In November 1979 lightning strikes along the Lachlan River from Booligal to Oxley burnt most of Waljeers country and fences and the old wool shed. After the fire, all fences had to be replaced and a new road graded direct to the Cobb Highway, better known as the Booligal Road, previously we had been driving through Ulonga. Sandy built a new bridge over the Lachlan River and three creek crossings, the road went past the new woolshed then to the highway, there were seven gates between the house and the mailbox on the Booligal Rd. Children arrived - Lachlan in July 1981, then Kate in April 1983.

Lachlan started correspondence school from Sydney when he turned five years old, Mrs Watson was our first teacher. A box of school work and activities would arrive at the start of each month and we would post off each week's work on Fridays, so Friday was a day in town. We would tape record our lessons and the teacher Mrs Watson would tape back her response in the next week's post. Kate followed on with correspondence school when she turned five. School work was done at the kitchen table. Sandy would take his lunch on school days and stay out of sight until lessons were over. Lachlan preferred to be outside on the motor bike with his father. At the beginning of Lachlan's year two, he started at the Hay Public School, and became a weekly boarder at Claughton House Student Hostel in Lindsay St in Hay. I would take him in on Mondays and pick him up Friday after school. Kate continued with correspondence lessons until year two and she became a boarder at Claughton house as well. Still the same seven gates to open and close on our way to town, there was always a fight who would open and close them. The system we worked out was Kate would do the gates Mondays and Lach would do the gates Fridays, problem solved. On weekends, there was always motor bikes to ride, cubby houses to build and feral pigs to chase - a wonderful playground.

When the Lachlan River flooded Lake Waljeers would fill and summer holidays were filled with swimming, boating, sailing and water skiing with neighbours and townie's. Everyone was welcome at the lake, Sandy had three stipulations, ring before coming, close all gates and take your rubbish home. Fun times for everybody. Lachlan and Kate went away to boarding schools - Lachlan to Tudor House Mossvale, Year five then on to Kings and Kate - Frensham in Year seven. We all looked forward to the next school holidays.

Our main shearing was the first week of January and two extra workers was very handy, Lachlan would muster with his father and Kate would help me in the sheep yards drenching the sheep etc. some long hot days. Boating on the weekends was even more special, for Lach and Kate for them to catch up with friends.

After years of drought and very low rainfall we decided to sell Waljeers and retire into Hay. Not an easy decision to make, Lachlan was off to university to study nursing in Sydney and Kate went on to study marketing in Canberra, the timing was right.





Splinta Woods is a proud Wiradjuri man. Splinta's grandfather was a drover - Harold and his wife Mabel Woods. They worked with Ted's father on Waljeers and lived in a house next to the shearing shed. Remnants of the house can still be seen today. Splinta remembers the house and the separate kitchen. Kitchens were usually separate to the houses in those day as there was always an open fire in the kitchen and therefore if a fire broke out in the kitchen, it wouldn't reach the house. Ted remembers Harold as a great dog man and a remarkable stockman.

Waljeers is a beautiful property and consists of great cultural importance to the Wiradjuri people, particularly Lake Waljeers. Lake Waljeers is 1200 acres. It is one of many lakes around the Lower Lachlan. The Wiradjuri knew that each lake had its purpose. Lake Waljeers held its water longer than others and so allowed for migrating birds, goannas, snakes, kangaroos and emus to breed and flourish. Birds such as the Pelican (Gulambali), the Black Swan (Dhundhu) might move through the chain of lakes on the Lachlan. The system and the migration of the animals has been occurring for thousands of years.

Lake Waljeers has shared language – there are no boundaries, only overlapping nations and languages shared. Water is the greatest resource.

Healing Country, Waljeers

by Emily Taylor

Gulambali and Dhundhu
fly above the little lake,
Waiting for the sun to wake.
They swoop down trying to find food.
But they don't see clear like they used too.
All the goannas came out as well.
Then the snakes came out of their shell.
They were all looking for food too.
But all they saw was dry and dust
No food to fill them up.
Where did it all go?
Well, they don't know.

The Lachlan River is a slow and winding river. The land is so flat that water had to make its way slowly through the country until it ended up meeting the Murrumbidgee in the Cumbung Swamp, an area full of cumbungi and reeds - an area which to water is like the kidneys to the body.

The trees around the lake were managed by the Wiradjuri people. Smaller saplings were thinned out and removed to allow grass and food to grow underneath. This would in turn attract the animals and provide for the Wiradjuri people. It would also allow strong trees to grow to maturity providing shade and habitat for the animals and birds.

The Wiradjuri people had the way of thinking that the most important thing was Mother Earth - nothing else was as important. They knew that everything came from her and when she was healthy, everything would survive. If Mother Earth was neglected and became sick then everything would suffer.

The Wiradjuri people have a word 'Yindyamarra' which means 'respect'. They believe we need to treasure our way of living and look after country. Think about things before we do things, slow down, do things in a holistic way.

Splinta and the Wiradjuri people want us to ask what can we give Mother Earth, How can we help Mother Earth, NOT What can she give us.



Upstream on the Lachlan River is the Wyangala Dam. The Lachlan water has been regulated from Wyangala Dam since the early 30's. The dam was raised in 1973. The dam is a reasonably important management tool of the river and its water flows. However it restricts the flows downstream near Waljeers. The water used to make it to Juanbung but now it is rare as the water is held up in the dam mainly to sell, use and trade by those who hold water licences.

Lake Waljeers doesn't fill like it used too. In the past when the Circuitts were on the country, Lake Waljeers was full, rather than dry, nine out of ten years. Now it is the other way around.

At the moment there is a controversial issue of the state government wanting to increase the height of the dam wall. This will cause less flows to the Lower Lachlan River and therefore less flows into the runners, creeks, river and of course, Peppermint Swamp and Lake Waljeers.

The runners and creek systems and of course the swamps and Lake Waljeers need the floods to fill and replenish the country. Lake Waljeers only fills when there is a high river.

Healing Country, Waljeers

by Dan Jamieson

The wall is rising
The lake is dropping
The land is dying.

The old stockman says
We need to pull on the reins
Protect Mother Earth.

The dhundhu fly away
As the water disappears
They seek new country.

Goannas leaving
Searching for food on the plains
Resorting to plains.

We must help the land
We must protect the land
'Yindyamarra' land.





Lake Waljeers and the Lower Lachlan are getting no regular flooding. There are vast tracks of red gums that are dying.

Ted remembers in the mid 1990's seeing the trees on the outside creeks and runners starting to die. Some of those trees were huge trees which would have lived through the 1900s drought (known as the federation drought), the 40s and 60s droughts. Lack of water was also evident in the 1980s in the wells and bores on the property. Where water was initially drawn from bores from 40 feet, Ted's family started to have to add more columns until the bores were drawing from 80 feet.

At the end of the 1960s wheat quotas were put on in Australia, so many farmers switched over to wool. The sheep numbers grew and the stockpile of wool grew. The price of wool fell so many landholders looked for alternatives. Cattle prices plummeted in 1974 so a different type of enterprise had to be considered.

Many landholders had sleeper irrigation licenses so decided to use these licenses and develop irrigation on large scale. Many bores were sunk upstream on the Lachlan, tapping into the aquifers, which then in turn lowered the water levels in the wells and bores along the Lachlan below Booligal.



The original idea of the Wyangala dam was to keep the river flowing in dry times. The biggest controversial issue occurred when water became a commodity separate to the land and could therefore be traded even onto different rivers in the Murray Darling system. So water can be taken away from the land and used elsewhere.

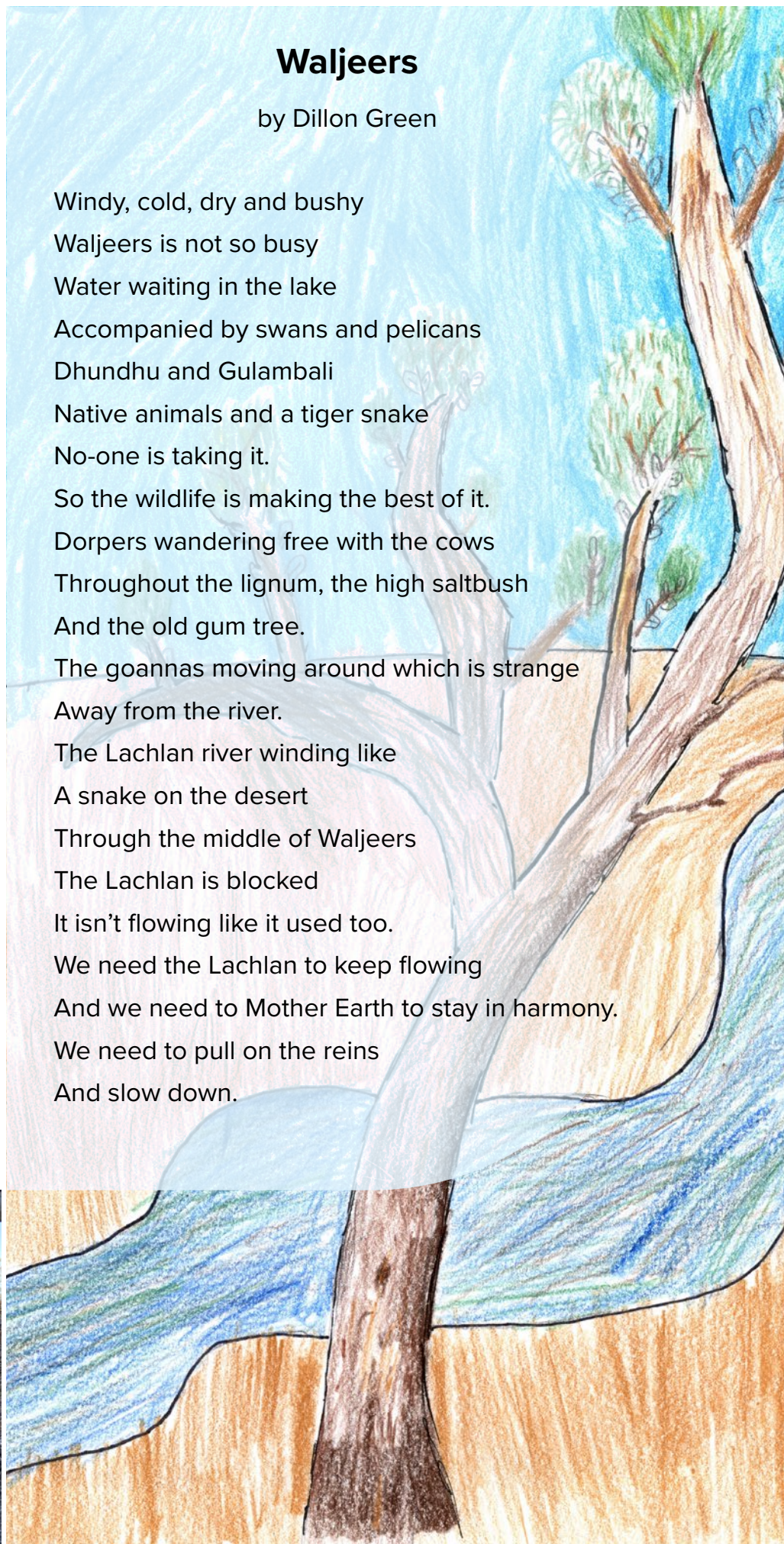
The State Government is talking about raising the level of the dam wall. Splinta, Ted, Dave and Michelle are all concerned that the water will be even more restricted on the Lower Lachlan. Governments and bureaucrats can have good intentions and make strong promises but all can be changed with a stroke of a pen. The increase in the height of the dam wall cannot be changed so easily.



Waljeers

by Dillon Green

Windy, cold, dry and bushy
Waljeers is not so busy
Water waiting in the lake
Accompanied by swans and pelicans
Dhundhu and Gulambali
Native animals and a tiger snake
No-one is taking it.
So the wildlife is making the best of it.
Dorpers wandering free with the cows
Throughout the lignum, the high saltbush
And the old gum tree.
The goannas moving around which is strange
Away from the river.
The Lachlan river winding like
A snake on the desert
Through the middle of Waljeers
The Lachlan is blocked
It isn't flowing like it used too.
We need the Lachlan to keep flowing
And we need to Mother Earth to stay in harmony.
We need to pull on the reins
And slow down.

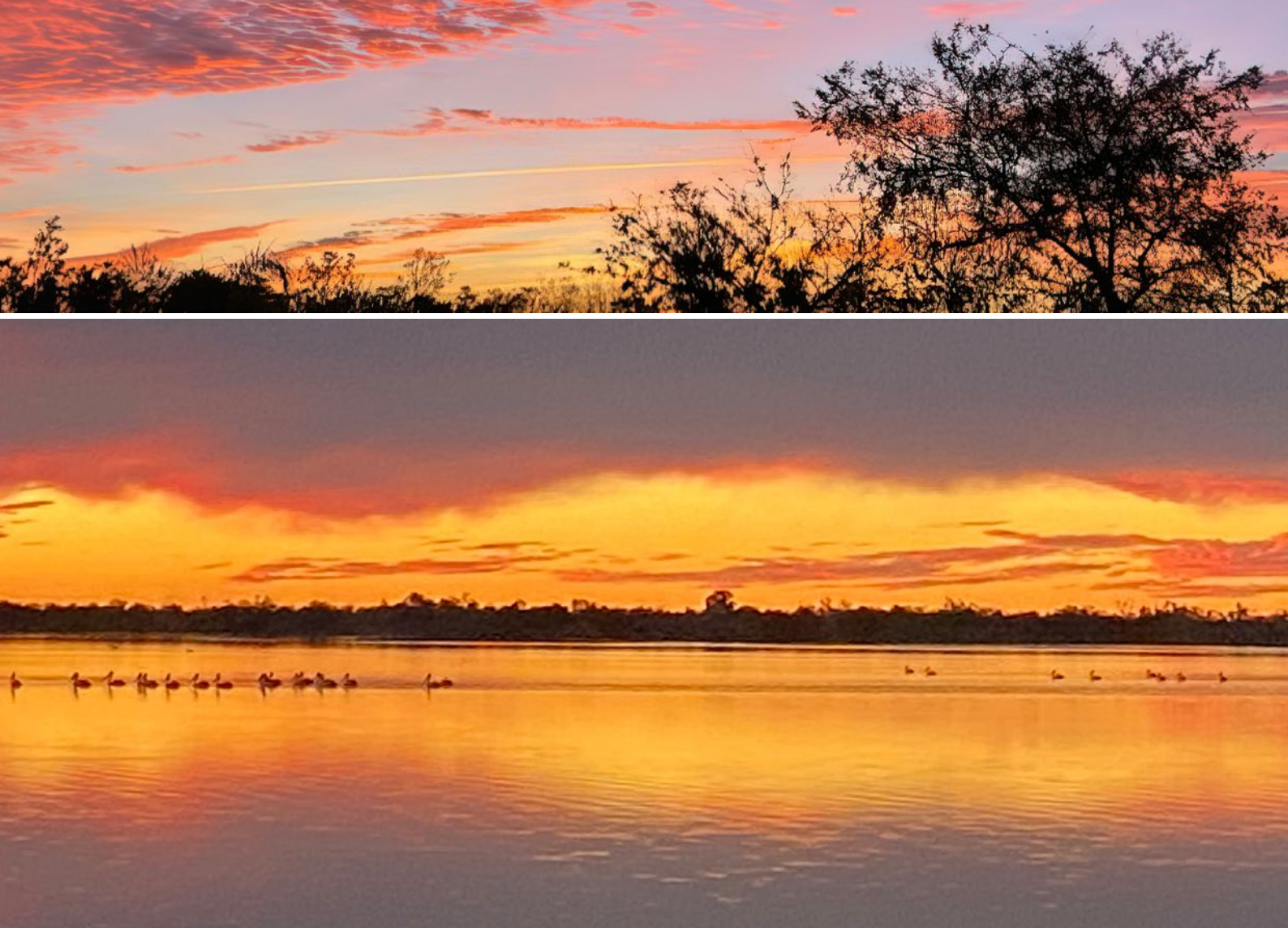


Dave and Michelle believe they and their children are very fortunate to live on such beautiful country and care for the country on which they stand.

Ted worries for the future. Is our path sustainable? After years of winding his way through the riverbends with his horses he has many questions to ask. Where are the frogs and their deafening noise? Where are the tadpoles swimming? Why are the Tiger snakes, that once were as thick as a man's arm, so thin? Why are there goannas out on the plains? Are they looking for the birds, fledglings and eggs that once inhabited the now dead redgums. Ted believes we need to slow down, we need to pull on the reins.

Splinta and the generations of Wiradjuri people who have come before him believe we should slow down, think about things before we act - consider mother earth – 'Yindyamarra' (respect).

All want to share their country and its sacred significance with the younger generation, so that it can remain forever more.




Healing Country

by David Caldow

Red gums cast fingers of shadows
Over the water filled lake
The Lachlan River is winding
Like a long tiger snake
Through the colour filled land.
Native animals roam free
Under the shadows of the old red gum trees.
If we want to keep it like this
We have to pull on the reins
And slow down.
Mother Earth depends on you.
The old stockman looks up to the sun
And says to his horse
“It’s getting dry”.
He notices a flock of pelicans fly away
And wonders if they will return.
Cattle are standing in the lake
To cool off from the heat.
Goannas are searching for food
On the hot dry bare plains
Slow down
Respect





Wiradjuri names for animals found on country surrounding Waljeers

Wanga – Black Cormorant

Dhundhu – Black Swan

Burralgang – Brolga

Gurugan – Cattle

Mirri/Mirrigan – Dog

Wandayali – Echidna

Dinawan – Emu

Guya – Fish

Gugabul – Fish (Cod)

Bidyin/Gagalin – Fish (Perch, Yellow Belly)

Gargalany/Baawan – Fish (Silver Perch or Bony Brim)

Gulaangga – Frog

Gugaa/Girawu – Goanna

Wambuwyun – Grey Kangaroo

Durrawiyung – Grey Teal Duck

Yarraman – Horse

Barrandhang – Koala

Guguburra – Kookaburra

Garra – Magpie

Ngugug – Mopoke

Gulambali – Pelican

Bandhaa – Red Kangaroo (Female)

Ganhur – Red Kangaroo (Male)

Dhugamang – River Crayfish

Dyumbag – Sheep

Gadi – Snake

Maliyan/Baga-daa/Yibaay – Wedge-tailed Eagle

Muraany – White Cockatoo

Dyirridyirri – Willie Wagtail



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Dillon Green, Hilton Hargreaves, Max Spence, David Caldow,
Dan Jamieson and Michelle Spence.

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