ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HERITAGE TRAIL
Welcome to Ngunnawal Country

On behalf of the King Brown Tribal Group representatives, we welcome you to Canberra and the ANU. We hope through this Heritage Trail you will enjoy learning about our Country and our peoples.

Carl Brown, Ngunnawal Elder

Welcome to Ngambri Country

On behalf of my family and the Ngambri peoples of the Canberra region, both past and present, we welcome you and invite you to journey with us along the Heritage Trail.

Matilda House, Ngambri Elder

Welcome to Ngunawal Country

On behalf of the Buru Ngunawal Traditional Custodians of the Canberra Region we welcome you and hope that the Heritage Trail will raise an awareness of how rich and enduring our Ngunawal cultural heritage is. So, in keeping with our Ngunawal tradition, and in the true spirit of friendship & reconciliation treat everyone and everything on Ngunawal Country with dignity and respect, and by doing so it is our belief that our ancestors spirits will harmonise with your stay on Ngunawal Country. May the spirit of this land remain with you today, tomorrow and always.

Wally Bell, Ngunawal Elder

Welcome to Ngarigu Country

Through this Heritage Trail, we hope you take away a new understanding of the diversity and richness of the Aboriginal history and families of the Canberra region. Let’s journey together!

James Mundy, Ngarigu Carrawong Clan, Elder

Welcome to ANU, welcome to our Acton Campus & welcome to the ANU Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Heritage Trail.

We acknowledge and celebrate the First Australians on whose land we are fortunate to have built our campus and our history as Australia’s National University. We pay respect to the elders of the Ngunnawal/Ngunawal, Ngambri and Ngarigu people, past and present and extend this respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students and visitors to ANU. ANU is committed to reconciliation and to recognising and respecting the culture and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to our University.

Professor Brian P. Schmidt AC, Vice-Chancellor

This self-guided walking trail will take you across the ANU Acton Campus, highlighting the cultural significance of this place, the way in which Aboriginal people have used this area for thousands of years and the continuing culture and connection to Country. The trail also covers the different units and centres at ANU that research Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history, health, economics and education as well as areas that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students.

On this trail you can learn about the importance of Sullivans Creek and Black Mountain, navigation across Country, bush foods and medicines, ceremony and tradition and the way in which the local Aboriginal people managed their landscape. All four Representative Aboriginal Organisations (RAOs) in the ACT have been involved in the development of the content for the trail.

This is a dynamic and ongoing project. New stops and information will be added to the trail as it is discovered. We hope you will see your ANU campus from a different perspective.
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ANU would like to acknowledge the assistance of Mary Gleeson, Linda Roberts and Euruoka Gilbert from ACT Heritage for their assistance with this project.

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The National Centre for Indigenous Studies (NCIS) is an academic research centre which aims to produce high quality, high impact research that enriches public understanding of Indigenous Australian cultures and histories. It is a stand-alone centre within the ANU organisational structure.

NCIS’ team of researchers have a diverse array of academic interests and expertise including education, law, repatriation, governance, and social justice. The research produced by the Centre in each of these areas has helped to influence debate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, policy-makers and researchers about Australia’s shared past, present and future at the local, national and global level. NCIS is committed to working with Indigenous communities in honourable and sustainable ways, and has strong relationships with local community groups across Australia.

In addition to a research arm, NCIS has an active Higher Degree Research program, which supports students with a variety of interests to move to the highest levels of scholarship. In this way, NCIS is committed to helping develop and nurture the next generation of researchers in fields which are of relevance to Indigenous Australians.

Through commitment to scholarly research, public policy, and community engagement, NCIS’ ultimate goal is to ensure that Indigenous knowledge, perspectives and experiences are respected, valued, accessed, and incorporated into all learning environments at ANU and beyond.
SOUTH OVAL:  
A MANAGED LANDSCAPE

European settlers arrived in the Canberra region to a landscape that was not as wild and untamed as they thought. Aboriginal people had carefully managed and cultivated the land. The local Aboriginal people were self-sufficient hunters and gatherers with handcrafted tools; knowledge of bush foods and medicines; and sustainable practices for cultivating plants and managing the population of wildlife.

This area, now the South Oval, may have been intentionally cleared by Aboriginal people. Early survey maps demonstrate that a semicircular area encompassing the current location of South Oval was deforested prior to the European settlement of the area in the 1820s. The area was an open grassland, maintained to be free of trees and shrubs.

There are differing theories as to why this area may have been cleared by Aboriginal people. Professor Bill Gammage, eminent ANU historian, studied Robert Hoddle's original survey maps of the Canberra region to identify 'unnatural' features in the landscape. Gammage asserts that the area was cleared for harvesting of kangaroos. He suggests that a couple of weeks after a burn, the smell of freshly sprouted green grass would attract kangaroos to this area. Grey kangaroos can smell fresh regrowth from up to five kilometres away, and red kangaroos from up to 30 kilometres, depending on the wind. On the east side of the clearing (behind the R.G Menzies Building) the stand of trees was denser than it is now and surrounded the oval on both sides. With the creek on the other side, this belt of trees would slow kangaroos escaping from the clearing as they were ambushed by hunters. This may be one of many ‘hunting plains’ created by Aboriginal people in the region.

James Mundy, elder of the Ngarigu Currawong Clan suggested that the area may have been cleared for camping or ceremony by Aboriginal people, as it would have been an ideal area for residing - nearby water and sheltered by the belt of dense forest. Tina Brown of King Brown’s Tribal Group further proposed that the area may have been a type of ‘waiting room’, where tribal groups would await invitation (by smoke signal) to ceremonial or meeting sites nearby, such as those on Black Mountain.

“Here you’ve got the butchery, and over here you’ve got the vegetable foods. And you know, you don’t have to travel as far as we do to go to a supermarket to get everything you want.”

- Professor Bill Gammage, Historian and Author

Walk around the Oval, to the John Curtin School of Medical Research.

Kangaroo in the Dickson Road Wetlands, near Laurus Wing. (Jack Dunstan)
Over the past three decades, the science of genomics has advanced significantly. Analysis of human DNA helps us understand how diseases affect some groups of people more than others, or affects them differently. Currently we know a great deal about the genomes of people of European ancestry but much less about the genomes of people from other parts of the world, and almost nothing at all about the genomes of Indigenous Australians.

Here in the John Curtin School of Medical Research, the University holds a large repository of biological samples collected from Indigenous Australians which, with new genomic technologies, has the potential to help close the gap in the health outcomes which exist between Indigenous and other Australians.

The collection consists of blood and derived products collected in the latter half of the 20th century from approximately 7,000 people from 43 communities across northern and Western Australia. The collection includes a substantial body of associated documents and photographs.

The National Centre for Indigenous Genomics (NCIG) was established in 2013 to protect and manage the collection. Guided by an Indigenous-majority Governance Board, NCIG enables Indigenous Australians to become involved in genome science on their terms, in accordance with their cultural and social values, and in ways that they decide are important – bringing together the world's oldest living cultures with its newest science in a true partnership.

Since 2013, NCIG staff have visited communities in the Northern Territory, Queensland and the Kimberley of Western Australia where parts of the collections were made to seek their views of the future of the collection. A surprising number of the original donors have been located, or their families. Indigenous Australians have shown a keen appreciation of the potential value of the collection not only for medical and health research, but also for finding lost family links, and repatriation of ancestral human remains. Indigenous Australians are expressing their support for NCIG, for its respectful methodology and communication, and its aims.

In 2016 the ANU strengthened its commitment to NCIG by enacting the National Centre for Indigenous Genomics Statute 2016. The purpose of the statute is to establish an appropriate, long-term framework to ensure Indigenous governance of NCIG, and the application of best practice for any research using the collection.
Sullivans Creek holds significant cultural value to the Aboriginal people of the Canberra region. Water has a strong spiritual and cultural significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and is often linked to Dreaming and Creation stories.

Aboriginal people use creeks and rivers to navigate across the landscape. Sullivans Creek is a path to the Molonglo River, which in turn leads the way to the larger Murrumbidgee River. The creek also leads to important sites on Black Mountain, Capital Hill, the Acton and Black Mountain peninsulas, and to sacred areas along the Molonglo River (later dammed for the formation of Lake Burley Griffin).

The flowing water of Sullivans Creek was integral to survival. The water sustained abundant resources including fish, birds, platypuses, turtles, water rats and other reptiles. It attracted other wildlife and small game, such as kangaroos, to come and drink from the creek. The trees along the banks acted as shelter for Aboriginal people and also as a cover for hunting.

The creek supported water plants such as bulrushes and reeds that were used for both medicinal and ceremonial purposes, and to make musical instruments. The flow of water would have assisted in the creation of stone tools, using nearby grinding stones.

Wally Bell, Ngunawal Elder, explains that the ponds along the creek were used as fish traps. During times of lower water flow, stacked stones would have trapped the fish and crushed Indigofera (indigofera australis) would deprive the water of oxygen, forcing the fish to the surface. Aboriginal people only harvested what they needed, and the remaining fish would soon recover.

Initially known as Canberry Creek after the first pastoral station on the site, the creek was renamed after William Sullivan, an early pastoralist of nearby Springbank Station. The creek as we see it today was realigned in the 1960s, with its path initially looping through Union Court and in front of the Chifley Library. This area continues to support a wide variety of plant and animal species and remains an important natural and cultural feature of the ANU Acton campus.
Lake Burley Griffin is a new feature in this landscape. It was part of the Griffin plan for the design of Canberra, but it was not completed until 1964. The lake flooded a series of limestone caves, reported to contain early Aboriginal rock art, occupation areas and ceremonial sites.

Tyronne Bell, Ngunawal man, recounted that before the lake was constructed, members of his family would play in the limestone caves along the Molonglo River, where there were various rock art sites. These would have been some of the few intact rock art sites in this region.

According to Matilda House, Ngambri Elder, the sand flats along the Molonglo River (now under the lake) were used for camping and ceremony. These same sandflats were also the location of a racecourse in the early twentieth century. Matilda recounts that her great-grandfather Henry ‘Black Harry’ Williams raced on the course. Henry was an accomplished stockman in the region. He broke in, trained and exercised his own horses.
BLACK MOUNTAIN

From here, you can look back to Black Mountain – a sacred place to the local Aboriginal people. The Ngunawal people used the area as an important meeting and business site, predominantly for men’s business. According to the Ngunawal/Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, Mt Ainslie was predominantly a place of women’s business. Black Mountain and Mount Ainslie are often referred to as women’s breasts.

According to Tyronne Bell, Ngunawal man, Black Mountain was also used by the Ngunawal/Ngunnawal people as a site for initiation, with the mountain itself said to represent the growth of a boy into a man. Bell also suggested that when the Australian National Botanical Gardens were constructed in the 1960s, a major cultural site was lost.

There are varied ideas over the origin of the mountain’s name. According to the Ngunawal/Ngunnawal people, European settlers referred to the spur that is now Black Mountain peninsula as ‘Black’s Hill’ – as it was an important gathering place for Aboriginal people. Alternatively, ANU historian Bill Gammage notes that when Robert Hoddle first surveyed the area in detail, the mountainside had recently been blackened by fire and he used the colour of the landscape as a simple descriptor for the site.

Stories, places and ceremonies are used by Aboriginal people to pass on cultural practices and share important knowledge. Much of this knowledge is linked to the creation of life, cultural laws and traditions, and the continuous connection between land and sea, animals, people and culture – often referred to as ‘The Dreaming’. Stories are passed down through generations, through song, dance and other ceremonies. In Aboriginal culture, men and women are the custodians of different knowledge – men’s and women’s business. This business is sacred and secret. There are places of men’s business where women are forbidden to enter, and vice versa. Wally Bell, Ngunawal Elder, recounts a time when he came across a women’s business site and felt physically ill, quickly realising he should not be in the area. There are also special areas where both men, women and neighbouring groups can meet and conduct business and ceremony.

Continue along the foreshore for another 300m, looking for the grassy paths that lead up to Old Canberra House on your left. Please stick to the trails – this is a fragile ecosystem.
ACTON GRASSY WOODLANDS: ABORIGINAL LAND MANAGEMENT

This small remnant patch of White Box/Yellow Box/Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and derived native grassland is of national significance and gives us a glimpse of what the landscape of Acton was like thousands of years ago. This is the most biodiverse area on the ANU Acton campus, with more than 100 species of plants and animals recorded here.

Originally, most of the Acton campus was covered by eucalypt forests comprising Yellow Box, Blakely's Red Gum and Apple Box as well as native grasses and plants such as kangaroo grass, wallaby grass and many wildflowers such as the endangered hoary sunray and the cocoa-scented Chocolate Lily. Scarred trees in this area as well as early site survey plans show that parts of this area were likely cleared by local Aboriginal people, actively managing the landscape by felling trees, cultivating plants and through firestick management.

Firestick management or ‘cool burning’ is a traditional practice by which the landscape is burned at certain times of year (when the temperature and winds permit) to remove ‘fuel’ from the landscape, manage weed and animal populations and promote new growth. Historian Bill Gammage explains that Aboriginal people used this practice to prevent major bushfire events and to assist tree and soil health. New growth would also attract animals such as kangaroos to the area for hunting.

Through controlling the time, temperature and extent of the fire, Aboriginal people could ensure just the top layer of growth was impacted, leaving roots intact. This process also improved the soil quality of the ground, promoting new growth.

Cultivation of plants such as the ‘yam daisy’ was also a common practice, which is likely to have occurred in this area, as many cultivation sites were located nearby rivers to ensure ample access to water. Cultivation and harvesting was often undertaken by Aboriginal women, who were primarily responsible for gathering food from the landscape.

ANU actively manages this area of critically endangered ecological communities. This area represents less than 5% of this type of woodland and grassland community remaining in Australia. These grasslands form an integral part of education initiatives at ANU and in the wider community.

Professor Bill Gammage, Historian & Author

“This is a landscape that has been deliberately made by Aboriginal people...”

This is Lennox House, built from 1911 to house the first construction workers in the fledgling city of Canberra. When the ANU took over the complex in the 1950s it accommodated students, including many Indigenous students. It was an important place for Indigenous students from all over Australia to meet, live and learn from each other.

That tradition continues with the establishment of the ANU Indigenous Alumni network, which will enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and alumni to remain connected and engaged with each other and with ANU. As of 2016, close to 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have graduated from the ANU. This is a significant step towards building a strong cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics and professionals, who can individually and collectively have a powerful impact upon many fields in the Australian community.

Inaugural Patrons of the ANU Indigenous Alumni network include local Ngambri Elder Mrs Matilda House (who opened the Tjabal Centre in 1989), Ms Anne Martin (current Director of the Tjabal Indigenous Higher Education Centre) and Emeritus Professor Isabel McBryde, (instrumental in encouraging the University’s enrolment of Indigenous students and in supporting the development of an Indigenous Student Centre) and Professor Marcia Langton, the first Indigenous honours graduate in anthropology at the ANU.

Aspirations for our ANU Indigenous Alumni Network are:
- To seek out former Indigenous student colleagues and invite them to join the network;
- To hold an annual Alumni lecture and dinner to promote networking and collaboration between members;
- To offer advice and leadership to the current students of the Tjabal Centre and its administration;
- To promote the expertise of Alumni and recognise and highlight their individual and collective achievements;
- To offer the expertise of Alumni membership to the ANU to inform best practice for researchers and community partners involved in Indigenous fields of study; and
- To promote the employment of Indigenous researchers, and the development of curricula that fosters high standards of ethical community engagement.

The aims of the network will evolve over the coming years as the membership and support grows and the community and committee continue to develop. All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the University community are invited to join the Indigenous Alumni Network and are encouraged to get in contact and to get involved in the ongoing development and management of alumni.

Backtrack up the road, and continue down Liversidge Street. Turn right to reach the Pukamani poles near the front of the Coombs Building.
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ART

These Pukamani poles were sculpted by Benny Tipungwuti, from Bathurst Island, one of the Tiwi Islands north of Darwin, Northern Territory. Traditionally, these poles are set in bush clearings to commemorate the dead. After carving, the poles are scorched black and then often painted with intricate designs in red, yellow and white pigments. However, in the case of these poles commissioned by ANU in 1973, the artist left them in their fire-blackened state to accentuate their strong articulated forms.

This piece is just one of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artworks that make up the ANU Art collection. Many of these items date from the establishment of the collection, such as paintings acquired by renowned anthropologist W.E.H Stanner from the Port Keats region, Northern Territory, in the 1950s.

Former ANU Chancellor H.C Coombs was a key player in the formation of the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council, and was a great collector and supporter of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. The H.C Coombs Creative Arts Fellowships were awarded to Aboriginal artists Narratjin and Banapana Maymuru in 1978. These were the first fellowships awarded to Aboriginal artists in any Australian university and since this time the fellowship has supported numerous other artists.

There are over 2400 items in the overall ANU collection, including sculptures, drawings, limited edition prints, ceramic and glass objects by significant artists. Of this, 340 items in the collection are by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. The collection includes significant works by artists including Rover Thomas, Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Gulumbu Yunupingu, Fiona Lee Foley, George Tjungurrayi and Sally Gabori.

There have been several major exhibitions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art at the Drill Hall Gallery since its opening in 1992, including the critically acclaimed ‘Streets of Pupunya’ which adorned the gallery on its reopening following refurbishment in 2016. It showcased artists from the Western Desert including Albert Namatjira, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, Charlotte Phillipus Napurrula and Martha McDonald Napaltjarri.

The next stop, the entrance to the Coombs Building, is just to the left.
ARCHAEOLOGY AT ANU:
AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE

The Coombs Building is a labyrinthine complex that houses a number of Schools and Centres from the College of Asia and the Pacific and the College of Arts and Social Sciences, including the renowned School of Archaeology and Anthropology.

ANU students and staff have been involved in ground-breaking research projects including Jim Bowler’s discovery of Mungo Man and Mungo Lady. Analysis of Mungo Man scientifically proved that Aboriginal people have occupied Australia for at least 42,000 years. Red ochre (hematite) had been smeared over his body. It is the oldest-known discovery of such a ritualistic burial.

These are the oldest-known human remains discovered in Australia, excavated from the shores of Lake Mungo (Willandra Lakes region) in western New South Wales, the traditional country of the Muthi Muthi, Ngyampaa and Paakanji/Barkandji people. Students have also had involvement in the notable work by Professor Rhys Jones in the Northern Territory and Tasmania including the excavation of Malakunanja II. This remains the oldest site with human activity in Australia, demonstrating that Aboriginal people were using grinding tools and ochre soon after they first arrived approximately 60-70,000 years ago.

Ethics, Indigenous engagement and research standards have changed dramatically since the 1970s. Many ANU archaeologists have been instrumental in pursuing greater ethical archaeological research standards and practice, developing ‘codes of ethics’ and encouraging Indigenous community-led heritage projects that benefit Indigenous custodians. Consultation with Traditional Custodians, seeking their ‘free, prior and informed consent’ regarding Indigenous research proposals, is an obligatory ethical standard today.

Following the lead of previous scholars (including Professor Isabel McBryde and Dr Betty Meehan), Dr Duncan Wright of the School of Archaeology is leading a program whereby Aboriginal communities are partners in research. This community archaeology approach realigns research away from a study of artefacts or the oldest sites, to one that starts with Aboriginal community priorities and stories and then works backwards. The approach makes it possible to explore the long term history of places usually restricted to researchers, reawakening the stories about ceremony centres, Dreaming trackways and past lives that have been buried for millennia.

Many of the first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at ANU came to Canberra to study archaeology and anthropology under some of the country’s most eminent scholars such as Professor Isabel McBryde, Professor John Mulvaney and Dr Johan Kamminga. Graduates include some of Australia’s leading practitioners and senior community members and Elders such as Professor Marcia Langton, David Johnston, Dr Ron Heron, Robyn Bancroft, Sam Wickman Jupurrula, Steve Free, Ricky Mullett, Mark Grist, Kellie Pollard and Rob Williams.

“In that ochre anointing, Mungo Man and his community expressed a connection with the Earth. It was a connection, not only to the climatically changing lake and dune environments of that time, but equally to the wider dynamic of sun in the day and blazing stars at night.”

- Dr Jim Bowler, one of the ANU researchers who discovered Mungo Man.
ABORIGINAL SCARRED TREES

The trunk of this fallen tree remains here due to a cultural scar that may have been made by Aboriginal people. The Yellow Box (Eucalyptus melliodora) was estimated to be around 300 years old, a remnant of the grassy woodland that once covered this area.

What are scarred trees?
Scars are wounds from a range of natural, accidental or deliberate impacts to a tree that cause damage to living plant tissue on a trunk or limb. This damage will stop any further growth in the affected part of the tree and will result in a panel of exposed sapwood (called a ‘dry face’) which will dry out and ‘die’ after the bark has been torn or fallen away. (OEH Scarred Tree Manual 2005:6)

Aboriginal scarred trees
Aboriginal scarred trees are trees that have been scarred by Aboriginal people through the deliberate removal of bark or wood. There are numerous reasons why Aboriginal people took bark from trees, it being versatile and plentiful material that could be used for a wide variety of commonplace tasks, including the construction of shelters, watercraft and containers. Other forms of tree wounding include deliberate marking (such as tree carving), the removal of wood for artefact manufacture, and the cutting of the centre of the hollow tree for collecting food or the manufacture of holds for tree climbing. Bark was one of the natural materials most commonly used by Aboriginal people in forested parts of southern and eastern Australia. (OEH Scarred Tree Manual 2005:7)

Given the amount of development and ground and vegetative disturbance over the years, the recent discovery of scarred trees such as this one on the ANU Acton campus is significant both to the local Aboriginal community and to the ANU.

ANU Heritage is working closely with the local Aboriginal community representatives and ANU Gardens and Grounds to archaeologically record these trees, research their history and significance and to develop management strategies to conserve and interpret the significance of these rare and unique cultural landscape features.

ANU will also be carrying out further research on the landscape history of the local area as there are many factors to consider, identify and research.

Early European settlers adopted the techniques of bark stripping they observed from Aboriginal people, though for a more limited range of uses that included the weatherproofing of buildings and other structures. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish scarred trees resulting from ‘traditional’ Aboriginal activities from those made by Europeans. (OEH Scarred Tree Manual 2005:7)

The scarred trees identified on the campus were formerly part of a eucalypt forest which was cleared for pastoralisation and then the development of the Acton Campus.

Preliminary research and consultation with the local Aboriginal custodians, archaeologists and our ANU Arborist suggests that there are scars created on these trees by both Aboriginal people and later by Europeans.

There are a number of factors that indicate Aboriginal origins for some of these scars including the:
- old age of the trees and the scars;
- suitability of the tree species type (and its known use at other sites in the region);
- scar shape or morphology (identifiable for what the bark was to be used for);
- distance of the scar from the ground and positioning on the tree; and
- size, width and depth of the scars.

Preliminary investigations speculate that due to the close proximity of Sullivans Creek (Kambri/Canberry Creek) the scarred trees may be a result of the manufacture of small water rafts or floating coolamons (which occur elsewhere in the region) or even cultural markers. There are also signs of European scarring on a number of trees.
The Chancelry Building is the centre of ANU administration, including the office of the Vice-Chancellor and the University Executive. As a result, the building has been the scene of ground-breaking decisions and a centre for student activism. A framed copy of the 2008 apology by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (an ANU alumnus) to the Aboriginal people of Australia takes prominence in the foyer.

Take a look at the flags flying in front of the building – the Australian flag, the Aboriginal flag, the Torres Strait Islands flag and the ANU flag, with the ANU crest. The ANU crest was designed to be ‘distinctly Australian’ as decided by the University’s founders in the 1950s. The crest features the oceans that surround Australia; a boomerang, recognising Australia’s first people; and the iconic Southern Cross constellation.

ANU has a Reconciliation Action Plan which provides a whole-of-institution approach to enhancing engagement with education, research, employment and culture. All ANU Colleges and Divisions also have local area Reconciliation Action Plans and committees. These plans are part of a national program led by Reconciliation Australia. ANU is proud to be part of this program, committed to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
THE TJABAL INDIGENOUS HIGHER EDUCATION CENTRE

Close to 500 Indigenous students have graduated from the ANU and for many, the Tjabal Centre has been an important second home. This is especially true for students from remote parts of Australia. The Tjabal Centre provides a safe and nurturing space for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students of the university to meet and study. The Centre offers support and advocacy for students so they can achieve academic success in their chosen field. It is a place where all Indigenous students can share in an overall sense of belonging and identity.

The Centre was officially opened on May 23, 1989 by local Ngam奔 Elder, Matilda House and the Centre’s first Director, Bob Randall. This major achievement in Indigenous engagement and recognition came about thanks to the hard work and persistent lobbying by Larrakia student, Gary Lee and others, who were supported rigorously in their quest for an Indigenous space at ANU by Emeritus Professor Isabel McBryde. The centre now has computers available for student use, a conference room, a quiet study area, and a 24 hour kitchen shared by both the students and the staff of the Tjabal centre.

“When we opened the Centre in 1989, there were only six of us students, we were so proud and grateful to Gary and the ANU. We supported each other and the Centre and its staff supported us too! Our friendships grew and continue today. In 2016, we came together again with other Alumni and launched the ANU Indigenous Alumni Network. For many of us the Tjabal Centre and its wonderful Directors and staff have been the key to completing our studies successfully.”

- Robyn Bancroft
ANU student 1988-1993

Tjabal Centre Artwork

“This piece uses colours which were in the sky above Canberra during a spring sunset as I painted it. The central band of colours shows the silhouette of the mountain visible from the Students Centre against a darkening sky. This particular mountain – Black Mountain – is a place in Canberra on which many sacred sites exist. It is a place of spiritual importance, for the Ngunnawal people in this area, and as such forms the foundation for the central design of the painting. The blue and white Dreaming tracks lead into a central meeting place, and it is along these paths that the students travel and meet at Tjabal, our Centre at ANU. From this central ground, students branch out into different areas of the University, into their places of learning. The different faculties are represented by the six smaller meeting places. These faculties are Arts, Law, Languages, Science, Fine Arts and Information Technology.”

- Danie Mellor, Artist
**UNION COURT: STUDENT ACTIVISM**

In late 1971, the ANU Student Union (then overlooking Chifley Meadow) hosted a growing group of Aboriginal people from all over Australia who were gathering in Canberra. Weary travellers set up camp at ANU, converging in the Union Building. Diana Riddell, Secretary of the ANU Students Association along with Bill Packard (of Bruce Hall) used hot water urns and salvaged food to keep a strong supply of stew cooking for those who were lodging on site.

On 26 January 1972, four young Aboriginal men erected a beach umbrella on the lawns outside Parliament House in Canberra and erected a hand written sign which read ‘Aboriginal Embassy’. Over the following months, supporters of the embassy swelled to almost 2000. Following a directive from the Federal Government, the police violently removed the Embassy from the lawn.

ANU students supported the Aboriginal protestors during this displacement of the Embassy. Many Aboriginal people were billeted, protest planning was conducted at the ANU Bar, and a bank account for the Embassy was opened through the Student Representative Council. ANU law students were also invited to examine the legal position of the Embassy and provide advice.

ANU students have been active in local, national and international politics since the very establishment of the University. With many identifying themselves as ‘political ratbags’, ANU students have been pivotal in major political movements and in standing up for their own rights and the rights of others.

During the 1960s and 1970s, ANU students played key roles in supporting Abschol – an organisation established to support university scholarships for Aboriginal students. When the Abschol committee realised that the shortage of applications was due to a lack of suitably qualified students, it began to consider other ways of encouraging Aboriginal tertiary education.

Through the 1960s, Abschol affiliated with the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI). It broadened its concerns, becoming a political pressure group concerned particularly about the issue of land rights. During winter 1968, a 24-hour national vigil was organised by Abschol for all capital cities in order to draw attention to the Federal Government’s failure to negotiate on the issue of land rights.

“White students and Aborigines, often encountering each other for the first time, shared their recreational activities and their grievances with the dominant culture. They shared their radicalism and their vision for change, and discussed their ideas of how best to effect such change in the given political environment.”

— Scott Robinson, *The Aboriginal Embassy (ANU thesis), 1972*
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