

THE GRANITE NEWS



The Granite News - serving the communities of Caveat, Highlands, Hughes Creek, Ruffy, Tarcombe, Terip Terip & Whiteheads Creek.



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Welcome, Wumindjika & G'day

Spring has definitely sprung - The Granite News has had its usual 2-week hiatus and suddenly the email inbox is full to bursting with a plethora of activities, ads and announcements that all need to go into **THIS** week's issue, which is the biggest one ever!!

It is really gratifying to see what an important instrument TGN is for keeping the HCCC communities connected (as well as readers beyond). So many thanks to those of you who read it and also contribute.

Speaking of which there is an excellent article by Keith from Avenel in this issue about a recent trip to Arnhem Land and his very informative experiences there. For those of us who have largely lived our lives somewhat ignorant of the actions taken by indigenous communities, for almost 100 years - 1938 being a watershed moment in this story - (see p.10 for details) the Yirrkala Bark Petitions of 1963 may come as a complete surprise. But as these important historical documents are now on display in Parliament House and the National Museum in Canberra go to p.11 to find out more about this significant event in our country's history. Thanks Keith for sharing.



October also celebrates two Landcare essentials - Water Week and Bird Count. See p. 14 and p.7 respectively for more information.

It also sees the Hughes Creek Catchment Collaborative (HCCC) welcome local sitting member for Euroa - Annabelle Cleeland, MLA to its next meeting - Thursday 9th October at the TCC Ruffy at 7.30pm. It's not often that Landcare groups get an opportunity to chat with their parliamentary representatives so an interested attendance would be great.

Can't make it in person? Join in via the Zoom link here -

<https://zoom.us/j/98780693308?pwd=xeCftmFPpbBBCa9Zac2WFuIHEKAi4.1>

Please read on for another interesting issue, Pauline And Kenny? Was getting excited about Wilderhoods event - 16/10

Feedback? editor@tgn.org.au
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The Granite News is an open but moderated community forum. Readers are encouraged to contribute articles and we also encourage you to air your views on things that interest or concern you within our community. We certainly welcome feedback from you, positive or otherwise on anything that is published in The Granite News

"Unlike the stomach, the brain doesn't alert you when it is empty."

Arabic Proverb



Month	Highlands	Ruffy
Sept.	32mm	38 mm
2025 Total	500 mm	504.5 mm
Rainy Days	11 days	10 days

NB: Rainfall for Highlands was only 1/3 of September's usual amount.

Adventures in Arnhem Land - continued

It is a comprehensive system covering land and resource ownership as well as moral, social and religious laws and governing bodies. The Madayin system includes laws, instruments, oral traditions, song cycles and sacred sites and also defines the responsibilities of the 'owners of the law' (rom watangu walal). The Australian Government's excision of Yolngu land contravened Yolngu law.

The concept of terra nullius apparently still pervaded the minds of our political leaders in Canberra in 1963, so the rights of the indigenous people seem to have been regarded as inconsequential against the desire to exploit a valuable mineral deposit.

The Yirrkala Church Panels

A group of Yolngu clan elders responded to this disrespectful lack of transparency from the Australian Government by painting in 1963, the Yirrkala Church Panels at the Methodist Mission in Yirrkala. The paintings, commissioned by Rev Edgar Wells, the superintendent of the Mission, were originally located behind the communion table in the newly constructed Methodist Church at Yirrkala. At a later stage they were discarded by the church but fortunately were rediscovered and now have pride of place in the Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre (Mulka Museum) at Yirrkala.



The paintings represent ancestral stories and clan designs and were done on 2 large sheets of Masonite, one panel done by elders of the Dhuwa moiety and the other by the Yirritja. The Yirrkala Church Paintings documenting the Yolngu claim to the land through creation stories, are regarded as the first significant political claim by Aboriginal Australians and were a forerunner to the Bark Petitions and the quest for indigenous land rights that followed, across Australia.

The Bark Petitions

Labor Opposition members in the Federal Parliament, Kim Beazley Snr and Gordon Bryant, visited Yirrkala in June 1963 to hear first-hand about the grievances of the Yolngu, and Beazley Snr suggested that they should petition the parliament about their treatment.

A group of 9 Yolngu men and 3 women representing various clans at Yirrkala Methodist Mission, whose traditional lands were impacted by the mining, painted the Yirrkala Bark Petitions – Naku Dharuk ** – as a protest which they sent to the Australian House of Representatives. They were assisted by Rev Edgar Wells and other personnel at the Mission. The text in both English and Yolngu Matha was typed on paper, pasted onto bark and surrounded by traditional bark painting reflecting traditional Yolngu connection to land, and to their law.

The Bark Petitions were an attempt to respectfully communicate this disregard of Yolngu law to the Australian parliament. The Bark Petitions became the first traditional document recognised by the Australian Parliament and the first recognition of Indigenous People in Australian law. The Land Rights Movement was born - the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976.

However, progress for the Yolngu was far from smooth sailing. Submission of the Bark Petitions led to a parliamentary enquiry which recommended the appointment of a standing committee to provide oversight, including consultation with, and compensation for, the Yolngu. But this did not effectively happen and unfortunately for the Yolngu, their petitioning did not stop the mine. So, when the approach to parliament failed the Yolngu resorted to the courts and mounted Australia's first land rights case in 1971 - Milirrpum versus Nabalco Pty Ltd. The result was another setback, but this time with something of a silver lining.



The Yolngu lost the case when Justice Blackburn ruled that Yolngu land laws were not the equivalent to legally recognised property rights. The ability of the Crown to lease traditional land for mining was therefore legally justified under Australian law. However, Blackburn's judgement did acknowledge Yolngu law and their cultural connection to the land. Importantly, the judgement focused national and international awareness to the Yolngu cause.

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