



Yeperenye Sculpture

The Yeperenye Sculpture, celebrates the *Yeperenye* (Ayepe-arenye) Caterpillar, a major creative ancestor of *Mparntwe* (Alice Springs). The sculpture is a community public art project linking arts, Aboriginal, tourism, cultural and educational organisations.

There was intensive consultation with Indigenous traditional owners of *Mparntwe* regarding what would be the most appropriate subject for the sculpture. The overwhelming consensus was that it was an important opportunity to celebrate the Yeperenye and build a permanent reminder for visitors and locals.

In the Arrernte language the name yeperenye (ayepe-arenye) derives from ayepe (tar vine) and arenye (belonging to).

Aboriginal spirituality is intimately connected to the land and its natural features. In Arrernte tradition, every mountain peak, hill and creek of *Mparntwe* holds spiritual significance. These sites were established during the *altyerre* (creation period) when powerful ancestral beings shaped the land.

The caterpillar ancestors were the major creative forces for this area, and three powerful caterpillars, *yeperenye*, *utnerrrengatye* and *ntyarike* are amongst the most sacred and important of all Arrernte totems. These ancestors came from many different places and travelled widely across central Australia.

Groups of caterpillars travelled from *amperrkngge* (Central Mt Stuart) in the north, *urlatherrke* (Mt Zeil) in the west, *atula* to the east and *apwetele* on the Finke River to the south, converging at *Mparntwe*, the epicentre of caterpillar culture. The spectacular mountain range formations to the west of *Mparntwe* represent some of these travelling caterpillars. They join head to tail as they come from the east, just as real caterpillars often do when travelling.

The creation ancestors, their struggles and adventures, are preserved and celebrated through oral tradition and the maintenance of sacred sites. At *Mparntwe*, the *yeperenye* fought pitched battles with the *irlperenye* (green beetle men). *Yeperenye* hurled insults at the 'stinky' beetle men and the *irlperenye* retaliated, beheading many of the intruders. *Irlperenye* and *yeperenye* have been mortal enemies ever since and the green 'stink' beetles are often seen attacking the juicy caterpillars with great ferocity.

In olden times, old people used to get all the yeperenyees and prepare them in a certain way, I remember that. They put them in a specially dug hole and they get rid of all the insides in a ceremonial way. Then they make a fire and cooking the yeperenye they have a certain way of cooking it up and gathering them and putting them in a coolaman. They wait around until it cools and they would share it out with their families, first to the traditional owners, then to the kids, then to everyone else. They were tasty and fatty, more like prawns.

Rosie Furber, traditional owner of *Mparntwe*



Metal sculptor Dan Murphy worked with local Indigenous participants to build the sculpture which is 18 metres long and three metres high. Dan, an Alice Springs based artist is renowned throughout Australia for creating larger than life bush animals from metal His Brolga is on display in the Sculpture Garden at Araluen Arts Centre. Approximately 100 community-generated panels developed through mentoring based workshops with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children decorate the inside of the caterpillar. School children from the local Aboriginal Yeperenye Primary School participated in the first workshops. The students were drawn from town camps and remote communities.

I have been working as a sculptor with metal and found objects for ten or so years. On this project it's been exciting to communicate ideas and see them develop.

Dan Murphy, artist

A majority of Aboriginal families live on remote communities or in town camps on the fringes of Alice Springs. Inadequate housing with few or no amenities can be part of everyday life. Life for many of these Aboriginal people, (particularly young people) can be very difficult; substance abuse and violence are common. Art is often seen as the only link to the future, a way towards economic development. Participation in a project like this offers opportunities for empowerment, skills development and pride.

Dan was assisted by the Alice Springs based Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT), an Indigenous organisation, providing appropriate technology services in remote communities. Students from CAT's fully accredited nationally recognised ATWork (Aboriginal Technical Worker) program participated in the project as part of their coursework.

Working on this project gave us more experience for work. It also gave us a chance to learn more about the Yeperenye Dreaming. I, myself didn't know much about it. It's important because my family's from around here.

Calvin Swan (CAT Student working on the sculpture)

Whilst the sculpture was being constructed, Dan was continually asked by people where it was going to be placed 'after it was finished'. At the opening Dan took a big stick and hit the side of the sculpture with a ringing blow 'It's like Aboriginal Culture' he said, 'It's here', (another blow) 'It's strong' (another blow) 'and it's here to stay'.

The project was made possible through the generous support of the Grand Circle Foundation who donated \$54,000 for the creation of the sculpture. Each year Grand Circle Foundation contributes to community projects all over the world. The Alice Springs project is the first Grand Circle Foundation Project in Australia.

The embryo of idea hatched into a stunning piece of public art, involving a cross section of the community sharing skills to create a sculpture that is so relevant to the Alice Springs region and to the Arrente people in particular.

Jane Barclay, President, South Pacific, Grand Circle Corporation (September 2001)

