

SPIRIT OF PLACE

Uncle Warren Taggart
Carol Carter
Allan Chawner

Front cover image: CAVE SHOWING ARTWORK AND ENGRAVED CIRCLES, YENGO NP, 2021 (Detail)

Opposite Image: HAND PRINTS IN RED OCHRE, WOLLEMI NP, 2021 (Detail)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to acknowledge the traditional people of this beautiful land, the Wonnarua people. Our elders would walk with us, sit with us and tell stories. We would listen, watch and learn in order to understand our culture, our lore.

Every part of this traditional land of the Wonnarua people tells a story and through the eyes of ancestors and elders we can see it, we can feel it. Our land is a part of us and always will be.

Our ancestors have walked this land for thousands of years and still walk it today. Our ancestors' footprints are left behind so others can follow to keep our culture and dreamtime alive.

I acknowledge my people, the Wonnarua people, who are the traditional owners of the land. I extend my acknowledgement to all Aboriginal people from the surrounding lands: the Darkinung, Worimi, Awabakal and Dharug.

I wish to share knowledge of our land and culture with all Australians.

I pay my respect to all my elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, traditions, culture and stories of this land, mother earth, that we love, work, play and live on.

On behalf of myself, as a Wonnarua elder, I welcome you to our land and may you have Ka-wal watching over you, protecting you on your journey forward.

Uncle Warren Taggart





VIEW OF MT YENGO, 2016 (Detail)

SPIRIT OF PLACE

Uncle Warren Taggart is a Wonnarua elder and teacher of Aboriginal culture. In 2021, he collaborated with photographers Carol Carter and Allan Chawner to publish 'Spirit of Place: Aboriginal Sites of the Hunter Region', a beautifully presented book which documents important Aboriginal sites through a large section of Country – Wonnarua, Darkinung, Awabakal, Dharug – in the Hunter Region. This exhibition at Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre presents many of the fascinating photographic images that are included in 'Spirit of Place' alongside a selection of cultural objects from Uncle Warren's personal collection.

'Spirit of Place' began through Uncle Warren's commitment to recording significant sites in the region. The 2021 book was dedicated to his father, Stan 'Tommy' Taggart, who passed on his knowledge of caves and rock engravings, his warmth, and his great love of Country.

When I sit in cave shelters that are covered in hand stencils and drawings, I think about the people who were there before who made these marks. Were they just walking through the country and stopped on their way? Were they camped with their family? Was it raining and they sought shelter? In some caves the hand stencils show the visits of many adults and children. There are stencils of tiny children's hands and sometimes their small feet. Dad said that vertical lines represented the number of groups travelling through the area, and if this were the case, there were many people. This is their history seen through their drawings, overlaid in time going back thousands of years.¹

Professor John Maynard's² essay in 'Spirit of Place: Aboriginal Sites of the Hunter Region' refers to the deep meaning of spiritual connection that is felt on Country, the transcendent grandeur of the bush, and the long cultural significance of the rock engraving and cave art found in the Wollombi, Watagan and Singleton mountain ranges. He writes:

You step lightly, quietly and move with respect through this landscape. It is possible to just sit and listen to the earth in these landscapes. It makes the hair on the back of your neck prickle with anticipation, and you feel an all-encompassing relaxing of body and mind. The heavens, sun, wind, birds, trees—everything is interconnected in this shared rich spiritual environment. It is the network of life.³

Uncle Warren's collaboration with Carol and Allan emerged from his desire to share Wonnarua culture and the significance of these sites, recognising that photographic images would allow the public to view important locations without harming them. Allan Chawner is an established photographer and former Associate Professor of Fine Art at the University of Newcastle. Also a photographer, Carol Carter has worked in Visual Arts education and photographed engraving sites in the early 1980s, working closely with the Awabakal Cooperative. The group is conscious of the importance of photographically documenting sites as a means of preservation. In 'Spirit of Place: Aboriginal Sites of the Hunter Region', Uncle Warren reflects on the fragility of the sites the group visited, noting that many of the drawings and engravings are gradually disappearing:

In less than 50 years most will be gone. The caves are affected by natural weathering such as wind, water seepage and bushfires. The engravings are fading as lichen, leaf litter, rain and bushfires break down the surface of the sandstone. People and their vehicles also cause

*problems, so I don't say where sites are for the protection of the sites. Most sites are difficult to get to and this book allows people to see these places without physically going there.*⁴

Dr Jillian Huntley of the Place Evolution and Rock Art Heritage Unit at Griffith University notes that the oldest dated rock art in the Sydney Basin is in Wonnarua country, and that Aboriginal rock art is protected by state and federal legislation. She also states that surviving rock art is not stable, expanding on the importance of photography in archiving sites for the custodians:

*Spending time revisiting and observing rock art sites are the primary means by which Aboriginal people can identify and track the things that are affecting its preservation. This includes going back through photographs of art over time to see how it is preserving.*⁵

In some cases, the photographic processes employed by the group reveal elements of the sites that are not easily viewed in daylight. Many of the stone engravings have been photographed at night with lights at low angles. As Uncle Warren states:

*The engravings come alive at night. I can imagine what it was like back then with the campfires and the brilliant night sky—stories told and seen in the engravings carved with stone axes into the sandstone.*⁶

Engravings are made by rubbing images into the rock after removing the stone surface by “pounding, pecking and abrasion”, while paintings and drawings are created through adding pigments to the stone surface.⁷ Pigments used include charcoal for black, and a range of coloured ochres from natural minerals, which are applied through blowing for stencils and with fingers and





ENGRAVING SITE, YENGO NP, 2016 (Detail)

brushes.⁸ Motifs that can be observed in 'Spirit of Place' include Ancestral Beings, such as Baiame, composite human figures, kangaroos and wallaby species, emus, koalas, snakes, eels, goannas and other small birds and animals.⁹ Stencils outline the hands of adults and children, but also tools such as spears, shields, boomerangs and stone axes. As Dr Jillian Huntley acknowledges, the cave art and engravings can have many layers of meaning.¹⁰

The exhibition of these beautifully photographed images at the Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre intends to provide visitors with the opportunity to respectfully learn more about the Wonnarua people, and to view these impressive Aboriginal sites without risking their deterioration.

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1. Uncle Warren Taggart, *Spirit of Place: Aboriginal Sites of the Hunter Region*, 2021, Allan Chawner & Carol Carter, p. 3.
 2. Professor John Maynard is Worimi, from the Port Stephens region of NSW and Professor of Indigenous Education and Research at the University of Newcastle.
 3. Professor John Maynard, *Spirit of Place: Aboriginal Sites of the Hunter Region*, 2021, p.1.
 4. Uncle Warren Taggart, *Spirit of Place: Aboriginal Sites of the Hunter Region*, 2021, p. 4.
 5. Dr Jillian Huntley, *Spirit of Place: Aboriginal Sites of the Hunter Region*, 2021, p.10.
 6. Uncle Warren Taggart, *Spirit of Place: Aboriginal Sites of the Hunter Region*, 2021, p. 4.
 7. Dr Jillian Huntley, *Spirit of Place: Aboriginal Sites of the Hunter Region*, 2021, p.7.
 8. Dr Jillian Huntley, *Spirit of Place: Aboriginal Sites of the Hunter Region*, 2021, p.8.
 9. Dr Jillian Huntley, *Spirit of Place: Aboriginal Sites of the Hunter Region*, 2021, p.8.
 10. Dr Jillian Huntley, *Spirit of Place: Aboriginal Sites of the Hunter Region*, 2021, p.7.

BAIAME

Dad told me the story of Baiame, which is the same as the one I tell to the kids today. Baiame is the creator of all. At the Baiame Cave, I explain all the different parts of the drawing of Baiame – his long arms that are the wings of Ka-wal, the eagle, and other details of his body, the stencils of weapons and hands and other marks.

I tell the story of how Baiame stepped onto Mount Yengo, flattening the top of the mountain. His journey across the land can be seen in the large feet engraved into the sandstone on the ridges around Mount Yengo. Ka-wal is the eagle who flies above to protect us on our life journey. He painted the sky blue with his wings. Mount Yengo is so important as everything seems to revolve around it. The flat top mountain can be clearly seen from some of the most significant engraving sites. It is important that Aboriginal kids understand that Baiame is their creator. It is also important that non-Aboriginal people share this understanding.

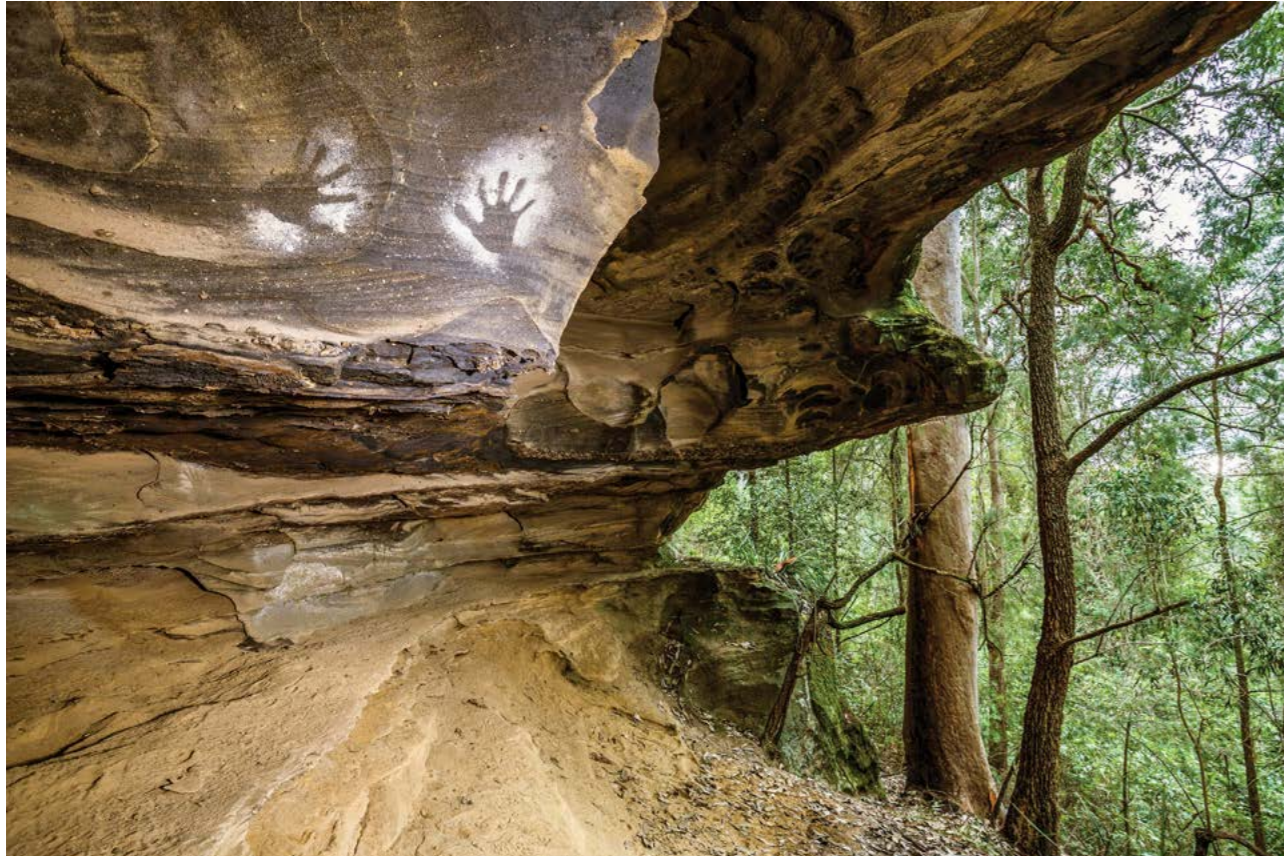
Uncle Warren Taggart





THE WORKS

CAVE SHOWING HAND
AND WEAPON STENCILS,
WOLLEMI NP
2020
Projection



**CAVE WITH HAND STENCILS,
BROKENBACK RANGE**

2016
100 x 150cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



**CAVE WITH HANDPRINTS IN
RED OCHRE, WOLLEMI NP**

2021
100 x 150cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



CAVE WITH DRAWINGS
INCLUDING DECORATED
FIGURES AND AN EEL IN
OCHRE AND CHARCOAL,
YENGO NP
2021
100 x 150cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



CAVE WITH HAND STENCILS,
NEAR PUTTY RD
2016
40 x 60cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



BAIAME CAVE, NEAR MILBRODALE
2018
130 x 400cm
Canson Rag Photographique 310 gsm



**DETAIL OF STENCILS AND
DRAWINGS IN WHITE OCHRE,
NEAR PUTTY**

2021

40 x 60cm

Canson Rag Photographique

310 gsm



**CAVE SHOWING STENCILS
OF A SHIELD, SPEARS AND
BOOMERANGS OVERLAID
WITH MANY HAND STENCILS,
YENGO NP**

2022

100 x 150cm

Canson Rag Photographique

310 gsm



CAVE WITH MANY HAND AND WEAPON STENCILS.
THERE IS A RICH OVERLAY OF DRAWINGS AND
STENCILS IN RED, WHITE AND YELLOW OCHRE AS
WELL AS CHARCOAL, SOUTH OF YENGO NP
2019
120 x 180cm
Canson Rag Photographique 310 gsm



CAVE WITH A MULTITUDE OF OVERLAID
STENCILS AND DRAWINGS, YENGO NP
2018
40 x 60cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



**CAVE WITH HAND AND WEAPON
STENCILS, YENGO NP**

2021

40 x 60cm

Canson Rag Photographique

310 gsm



**LARGE DRAWINGS IN RED
AND WHITE OCHRE, POSSIBLY
QUAIL, OVERLAID WITH HAND
STENCILS, WOLLEMI NP**

2018

100 x 150cm

Canson Rag Photographique

310 gsm



CAVE WITH MANY STENCILS AND
DRAWINGS. THE SANDSTONE AT
THE CAVE ENTRANCE HAS MANY
ENGRAVED CIRCLES, YENGO NP
2021
100 x 150cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



CAVE WITH HAND STENCILS
AND DRAWINGS, WOLLEMI NP
2021
100 x 150cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



**ENGRAVINGS OF EMU
TRACKS, YENGO NP**
2020
60 x 40cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



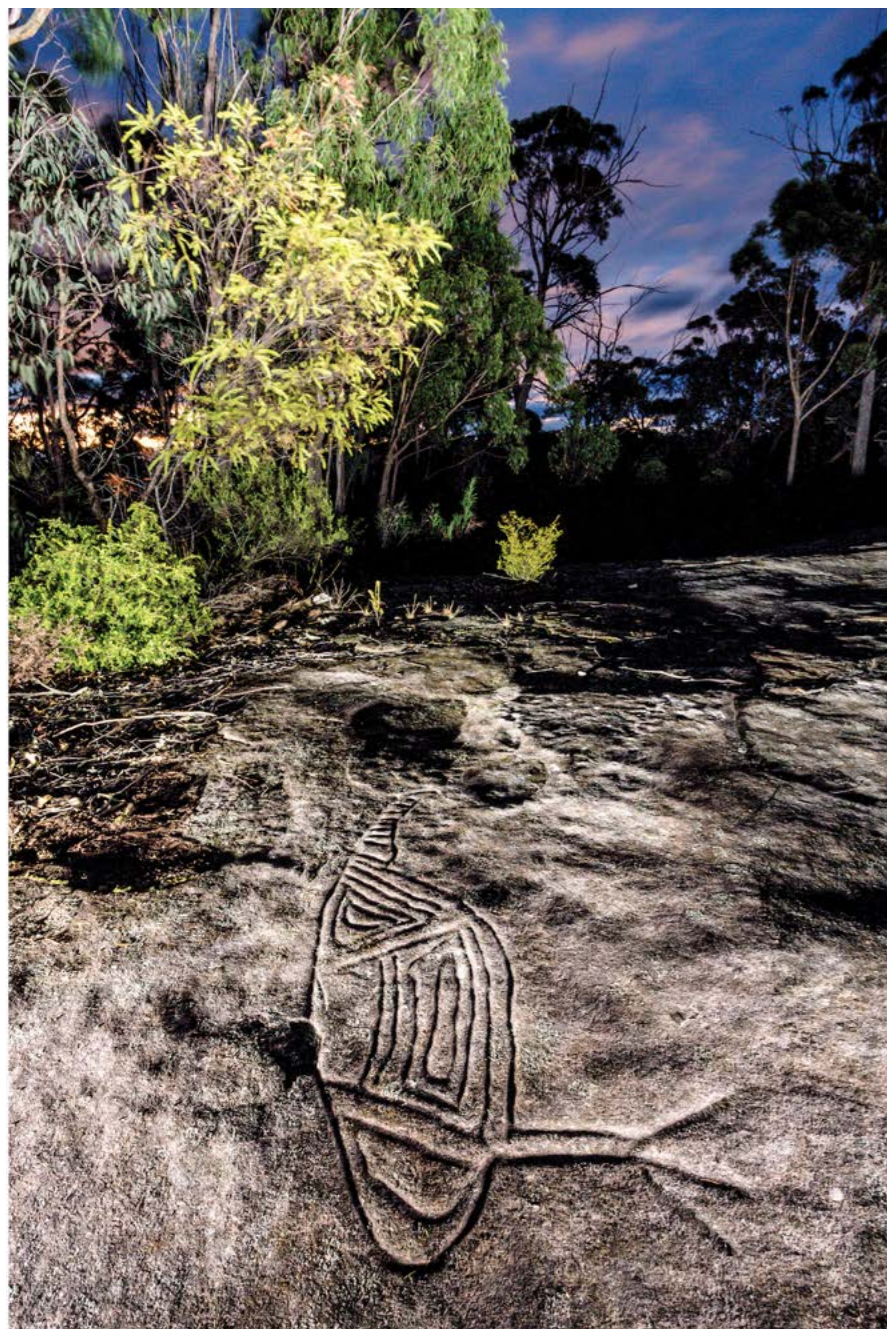
**NATURAL POOL SURROUNDED
BY GRINDING GROOVES,
YENGO NP**
2020
40 x 60cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



UNCLE WARREN ON AN
ENGRAVING SITE SHOWING A
CIRCLE OF FIGURES, YENGO NP
2016
120 x 180cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



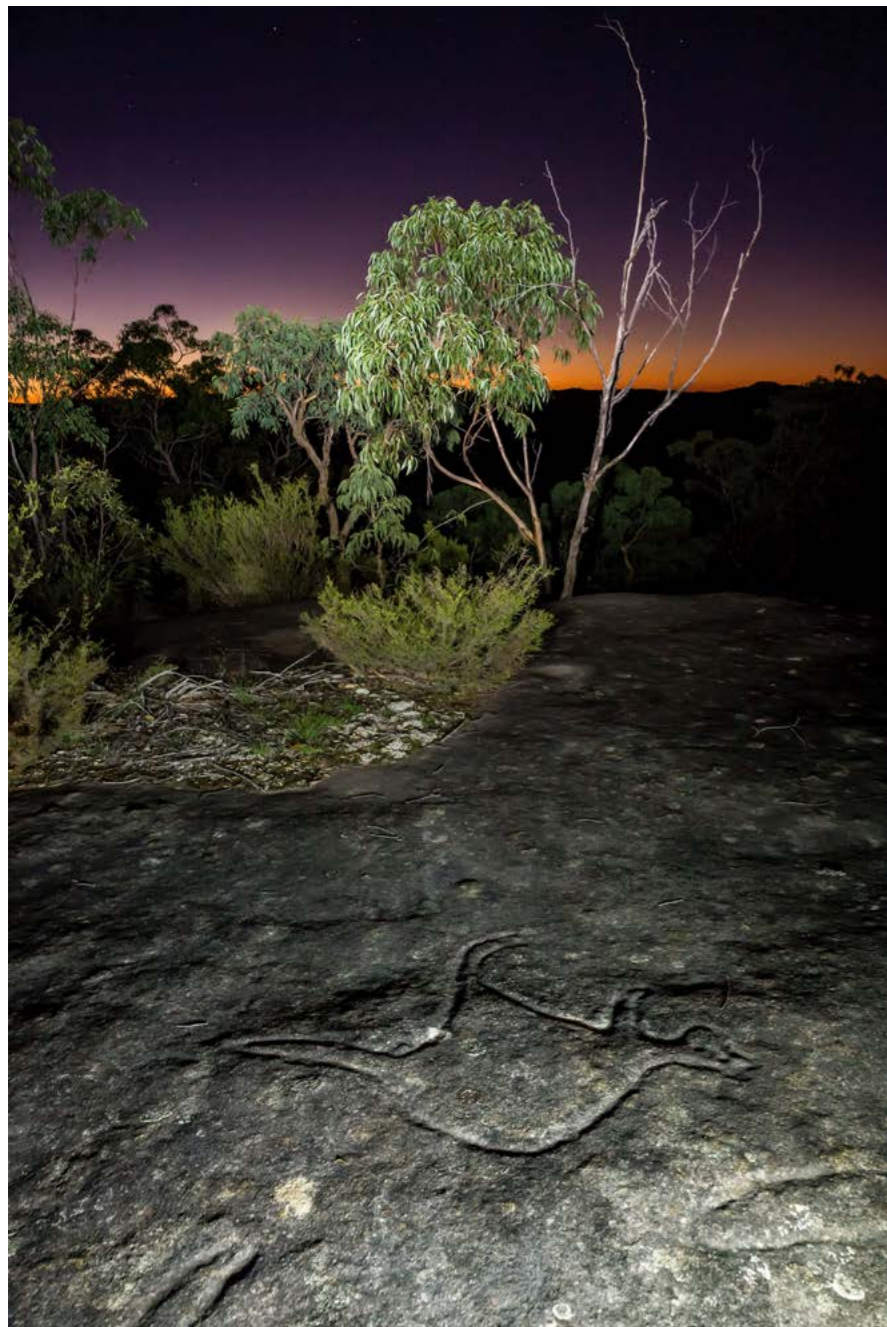
ENGRAVING SITE WITH TWO
FIGURES AND EMU TRACKS,
YENGO NP
2016
Projection



ENGRAVING OF A
DECORATED BUSH TURKEY,
BROKENBACK RANGE
2016
120 x 80cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



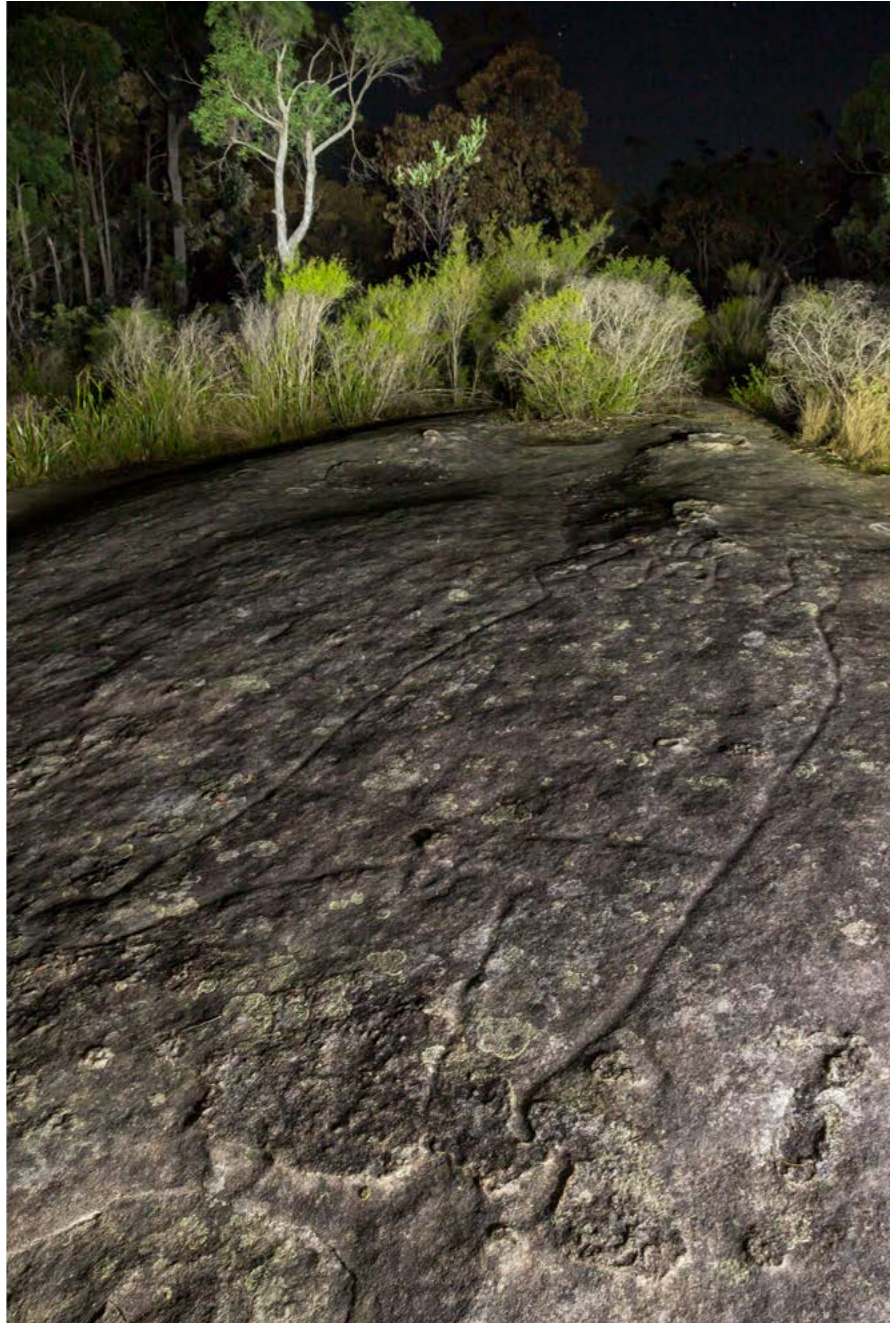
ENGRAVING OF A
KANGAROO OR WALLABY,
YENGO NP
2016
120 x 80cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



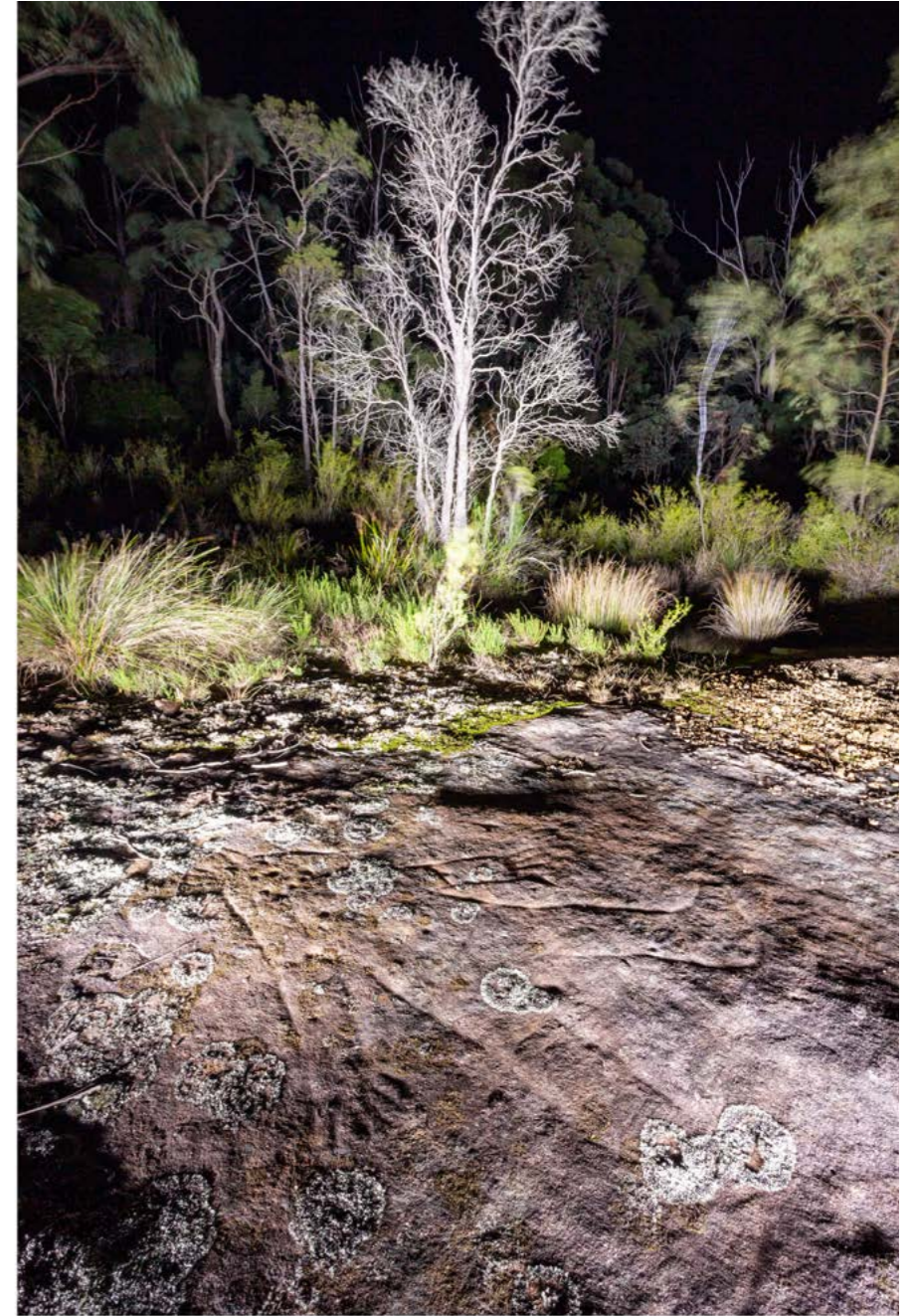
ENGRAVING OF A
KANGAROO OR WALLABY,
YENGO NP
2016
Projection



ENGRAVING OF AN
ANIMAL, POSSIBLY A
WOMBAT, YENGO NP
2016
120 x 80cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



**ENGRAVING OF A LARGE
GUARDIAN FIGURE,
YENGO NP**
2016
60 x 40cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



**ENGRAVING OF A LARGE
MAN, BROKENBACK
RANGE**
2016
60 x 40cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



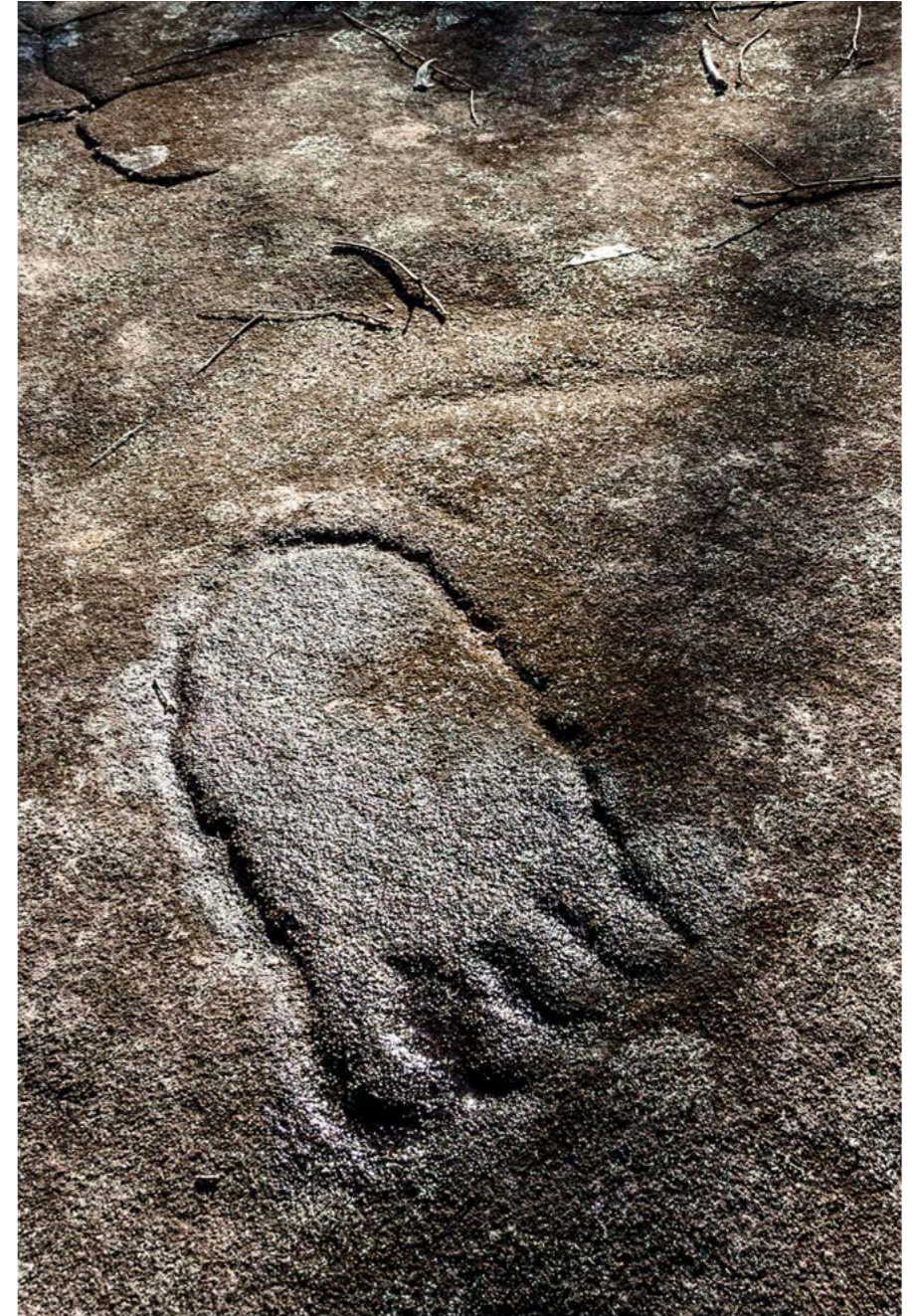
ENGRAVING OF A DINGO,
YENGO NP
2017
40 x 60cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



ENGRAVING OF A SMALL
FIGURE, YENGO NP
2016
60 x 40cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



**DETAIL OF ENGRAVED
GUARDIAN FIGURE,
YENGO NP**
2016
60 x 40cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



**LARGE ENGRAVED
FOOTPRINT OF BAIAME**
2016
60 x 40cm
Canson Rag Photographique
310 gsm



WONNARUA MESSAGE STICK
Date unknown
25 x 5cm
Wood



STONE AXE
Date unknown
48 x 15cm
Wood and stone



WONNARUA CUTTING STONE
Date unknown
10 x 6 x 6cm
Stone



**NORTH QUEENSLAND DILLY,
BAG FOUND AT RAVENSWORTH**
Date unknown
62 x 22 x 15cm
Natural fibres and ochres



STONE-CARVED WOOMERA

Date unknown
80 x 8 x 4cm
Wood, natural fibres and ochres

**FOUR CUTTING STONES MADE
BY UNCLE WARREN TAGGART**

2010
Various Sizes
Stone



**COOLAMON MADE BY UNCLE
WARREN TAGGART**

2020
62 x 23 x 8cm
Wood



**TWO SPEARS FROM THE COLLECTION
OF STAN 'TOMMY' TAGGART**

Date Unknown

180 x 2cm

Wood, bone, natural fibres and ochre



VIEW OVER THE SANDSTONE ESCARPMENT, SITE OF MANY ENGRAVINGS.

THANK YOU

Uncle Warren Taggart, Carol Carter and Allan Chawner would like to thank Jim Mitchell for his assistance in mapping and planning and Allan Graber for his help in the bush; Shayne Forty and the team from NSW National Parks and Wildlife Services; Prof. John Maynard from the University of Newcastle and archaeologist Dr Jillian Huntley; Dr Faye Neilson and Christopher Dewar for their support at Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre; Noelene Smith and her family for permission to film at the Baiame Cave, and Ian and Jan Hedley for permission to film on their property. Also thanks to the St Catherine's Aboriginal Dance Group 'Puwampi Unti Kunarr'.

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