

# Caring for Bunya Mountains Country: Jimal Willmot's Wakka Wakka 20-year journey

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Jimal Willmot, Wakka Wakka Traditional Owner, over the last 20 years, embodies a passionate and personal agency in advocating for Caring for Country in the South Burnett area of southeast Queensland. As custodian of the land, he deeply values preserving historical and traditional sites with significant cultural importance to the Wakka Wakka community. A central element of Wakka Wakka heritage is the ancient songlines, and intricate pathways that hold spiritual significance and carry the

stories of their ancestors. These songlines play a pivotal role in maintaining cultural identity and a profound connection to the land. Among the traditional sites, the rock art at Maidenwell stands as a remarkable testament to the rich history of the Wakka Wakka People. These ancient images offer insights into their way of life, traditions, and spiritual beliefs, deserving preservation and protection. The Bunya Mountains near Kingaroy hold immense cultural significance for the Wakka Wakka People, as a site for traditional ceremonies and the annual bunya nut harvest, fostering cultural exchange among various Traditional Owner groups. Preserving the ecological integrity of the Bunya Mountains is a priority for Jimal and his community, ensuring the continuation of sacred practices and safeguarding their cultural heritage. In the Truth Telling process regarding the Frontier Land Wars, Jimal Willmot actively engages, acknowledging the violent conflicts and dispossession that marked Australia's colonisation.



This process seeks healing and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In pursuit of his aspirations, Jimal advocates for community-led cultural heritage and archaeological projects, actively participating in his own research and conservation efforts. The Wakka Wakka community is reclaiming their narrative, asserting agency to protect their heritage from misrepresentation or neglect.

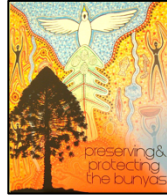
Over the past 20 years, Jimal Willmot, a dedicated Wakka Wakka Traditional Owner, has exemplified a profound commitment to Caring for Country in the South Burnett and

North Burnett area of southeast Queensland. As custodian of the land, he has been unwavering in his own personal efforts to visit and pay homage to historical and traditional sites that hold immense cultural importance for the Wakka Wakka community. Throughout these two decades, Jimal has taken on a role as a passionate advocate for the preservation of Wakka Wakka heritage, particularly the ancient songlines. Recognising their significance as intricate pathways that weave through the landscape, carrying the ancestral stories, Jimal has strived with limited resources, to ensure their protection and revival, with his family members who are key pillars in maintaining cultural identity and connection to the land.



Among the historical sites, Jimal's steadfast dedication has been focused on safeguarding the remarkable rock art at Maidenwell, which offers valuable testament to the way of life, laws, traditions, and spiritual beliefs of the Wakka Wakka people. His ongoing

efforts with his family members also contribute to the wider efforts by community members, in elevating the importance of these ancient artworks and highlighting their deserving preservation and protection. Throughout the 20 years, Jimal has also played a vital role in preserving the cultural integrity of the Bunya Mountains near Kingaroy. As a sacred place for traditional ceremonies and the annual bunya nut gatherings, Jimal and his community have prioritised efforts to uphold their cultural heritage and ensure the continued consideration of sacred practices, even as they face modern challenges to ecological integrity. Furthermore, Jimal's commitment to truth-telling regarding the Frontier Land Wars has been a central aspect of his advocacy.



Over these years, he has actively engaged in the process, acknowledging the violent conflicts and dispossession that shaped Queensland's history, working towards healing and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.



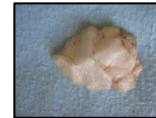
In line with his aspirations, Jimal has

consistently championed short-term or small-scale, community-led cultural heritage and archaeological projects. Over the past two decades, his active participation in research and conservation efforts, piece by piece, contribute to further the empowerment of the Wakka Wakka community, to reclaim their narrative and protect their heritage from misrepresentation or neglect, showcasing the true essence of custodial agency.



For the past 23 years, Jimal Willmot, a proud Wakka Wakka Traditional Owner, has been a tireless guardian of his cultural heritage in the South Burnett and North Burnett regions, with a special focus on the Bunya Mountains National Park area and nearby Maidenwell. As an individual and dedicated family member, Jimal has taken proactive steps to preserve and promote the rich legacy of the Wakka Wakka People.

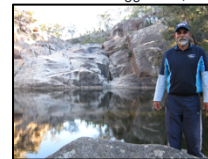
Jimal's journey involves regular visits to sacred sites, where he carefully checks on culturally modified scar trees, bora grounds, artefact sites, and the intricate songlines that weave through the landscape. His connection to the land runs deep, and he actively ensures the conservation of these vital elements that carry the stories of his ancestors.



Beyond exploration, Jimal has rolled up his sleeves as a bush regenerator, contributing to the environmental well-being of the areas he holds dear. Since 2008, he has played a pivotal role in the Bunya Rangers group, participating in workshops and meetings at the Bunya Mountains. These efforts underline his commitment to community engagement and collaborative initiatives aimed at preserving and showcasing Wakka Wakka cultural heritage.

Jimal's dedication extends to documentation, as seen in his work with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP). Collaborating with family members and DATSIP staff, he ensured the recording of a significant double-sided canoe scar tree on the cultural heritage database. This tree, unfortunately felled during the construction of Paradise Dam near Biggenden, stands as a testament to the ongoing challenges faced in protecting cultural sites.

In his mission to bridge understanding, Jimal actively engages with the broader community. Using his own resources, he promotes cultural awareness about the Wakka Wakka People and their country. By sharing his knowledge, and through the sphere of his own personal influence, Jimal fosters an environment of respect and appreciation for the Indigenous heritage that is an integral part of the South Burnett and North Burnett regions.



Currently, Jimal is undertaking a unique project— the repatriation of a 120-year-old boomerang. This artefact was originally gifted to a farming family in Kumbia near the Bunya Mountains. Through careful documentation, he is unravelling the history of this boomerang, a piece that carries the essence of his people. Jimal's aim is to pass this historical treasure back to his Wakka Wakka community and donate it to the museum at Cherbourg, in the South Burnett.

This dedication to repatriation is further highlighted by his decision to bring the boomerang to the AAA2023 conference. By showcasing and discussing this artifact, Jimal is actively participating in a broader dialogue about the importance of repatriation and the cultural significance embedded in these historical objects. His presence at the conference adds a personal touch to the broader narrative of Indigenous cultural preservation.



In essence, Jimal Willmot stands as an example of cultural stewardship, dedicating over two decades to preserving, documenting, and sharing the vibrant heritage of the Wakka Wakka People. His actions, from on-the-ground conservation efforts to engaging with wider audiences, reflect a profound commitment to ensuring the legacy of his people endures for generations to come.

Jimal Willmot's commitment to preserving the history of the Wakka Wakka People extends to the research and documentation of significant sites linked to the Frontier Land Wars. One of these sites is the MacTaggart burial site at Kilkivan, west of Gympie, north of Brisbane. Jimal recognises the historical importance of this location and is actively engaged in researching and recording it on the Cultural Heritage Unit's database. Documenting the details of the MacTaggart burial site, he seeks to honour the memories of those who may have been impacted by the Frontier Land Wars, ensuring that their stories are acknowledged and preserved.

Additionally, Jimal is involved in researching the Coomba Falls massacre site near Kingaroy, northwest of Brisbane. This site, now situated in a conservation area, holds the sombre history of a tragic event. Jimal is committed to recording the details of this massacre site on the Cultural Heritage Unit's database, shedding light on a dark chapter in Australia's history. His efforts contribute to the broader recognition of the Frontier Land Wars and the need for truth-telling and reconciliation.



Jimal's work in researching these sites not only adds valuable information to the cultural heritage records but also contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the historical landscape. By acknowledging and recording these locations, Jimal plays a crucial role in the ongoing conversation about the Frontier Land Wars, emphasising the importance of remembrance, respect, and healing in the reconciliation process.

Jimal Willmot, as a Wakka Wakka Traditional Owner, leverages his own agency and resources to actively visit, observe, and research significant sites throughout the Wakka Wakka cultural landscape. His proactive engagement underscores a commitment to community cultural heritage, ensuring the preservation of knowledge and fostering information sharing for present and future generations.



The Wakka Wakka People, recognised as the third-largest Aboriginal community in Queensland, initiated their initial native title claim in 1997. A 25-year legal battle concluded in April 2022, as the federal court officially acknowledged the native title claims of the Wakka Wakka People in southern Queensland. The recognised native title covers land and waters west of Maryborough and Gympie, northeast of Dalby, totalling 1,178 square kilometres, including Cherbourg. The court's decision affirms what the Wakka Wakka People have known for centuries – that this land has always been and will always be theirs. Justice Darryl Rangi highlighted the Wakka Wakka People's enduring struggle maintaining a hold on their identity and traditional lands and laws, since European colonisation in the 1840s.