Coranderrk… OUR STORY SO FAR…

Coranderrk Aboriginal Station was established in 1863 and at its largest, comprised 4,750 acres. It officially closed in 1924 but its stories did not end. They are stories of hope, vision, success, oppression, strength, power, resignation and survival. Above all, they are stories of community.

Our ancestors, Simon Wonga and William Barak and the many others who lived at Coranderrk worked hard to build a place of self-sufficiency and self-governance. They cleared the land, built homes, a kitchen, a store, a dairy, hops kilns, a school and a dormitory which became the hub of the village. They grew hay, maize, vegetables and flowers and produced award winning hops. They made cheese, jam, baskets, weapons, and rugs to use, but also to sell and make money. They lobbied government, instigated two inquiries, and appeared as witnesses at both to fight to retain the place they had created as their home. They developed friendships with people who helped them in their achievements and as much as possible, they retained their cultural identities. In 1924, all but a small group of people were moved to Lake Tyers. Most of the buildings had collapsed or were dismantled. Coranderrk passed into private ownership and lay dormant, waiting for its people to return.

In 1998, 200 acres of the original station including the superintendent’s house was purchased with funding from the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC). WEAC was established to manage Coranderrk. The cemetery also survives and is managed by the Wurundjeri Council. In 2013, WEAC members Brooke Wandin and Jacqui Wandin organised a festival to celebrate 150 years since the establishment of Coranderrk. This was the catalyst for many other projects focussing on caring for and improving the health of the land and waterways, and sharing Coranderrk stories through events and tours. Friendships and partnerships were established with organisations including Melbourne Water, Yarra Ranges Council, Yarra Valley Water, Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater, Landcare, Port Phillip and Westernport CMA and Indigenous Lands Corporation. A Property Management Plan has been developed which has guided the construction of new fences, a watering system and weed management program and almost 20,000 indigenous plants have been planted. Tours have taken place, and the play ‘We will show the Country’ was performed at Coranderrk in 2016. WEAC members share Coranderrk and cultural knowledge outwardly through speaking and working with schools, community organisations and government organisations. Friends of Coranderrk has now been established. This is a group of volunteers who come to Coranderrk on the second Sunday of each month to help manage the land. The next phase will consolidate and build on this foundation opening up opportunities for others to be involved through contributing, learning and sharing.

A MESSAGE FROM A CURRENT CUSTODIAN

“This ancient story connects the past to the present. It was the responsibility of my great ancestors to look after the land and waterways, and sharing Coranderrk stories through events and tours. Friendships and partnerships were established with organisations including Melbourne Water, Yarra Ranges Council, Yarra Valley Water, Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater, Landcare, Port Phillip and Westernport CMA and Indigenous Lands Corporation. A Property Management Plan has been developed which has guided the construction of new fences, a watering system and weed management program and almost 20,000 indigenous plants have been planted. Tours have taken place, and the play ‘We will show the Country’ was performed at Coranderrk in 2016. WEAC members share Coranderrk and cultural knowledge outwardly through speaking and working with schools, community organisations and government organisations. Friends of Coranderrk has now been established. This is a group of volunteers who come to Coranderrk on the second Sunday of each month to help manage the land. The next phase will consolidate and build on this foundation opening up opportunities for others to be involved through contributing, learning and sharing.

Brooke Wandin, 2018