PechaKucha talks are world wide events in which speakers give a presentation on any subject for a duration of 6mins and 50secs, that is they must use 20 slides which go for 20 seconds each. Blue Mountains PechaKucha is run every 3 months at Katoomba. See http://www.pechakucha.org/faq

These are the presentation notes for the PechaKucha talk given at Katoomba on 24 September 2016 on the Budj Bim landscape at Mt Eccles and Lake Condah, Victoria. A place with a fascinating history of Aboriginal aquaculture and interesting developments in land management today.

PechaKucha – Budj Bim Landscape, Victoria

Slide 1 Introduction

Hello, I'm Nathan. I have recently done some trips to Central and Western Victoria, and was quite impressed by the things happening there, which included some exciting things with the Aboriginal world. One area which caught my attention in particular was around Lake Condah in South West Victoria, an area known as the 'Budj Bim' landscape, and I am going to share this with you…

Slide 2 Introduction part 2

Budj Bim around Lake Condah and Mount Eccles, has a fascinating landscape with heaps going on. There is a developing management process, with a lot of potential, including tourism.

Some things of particular highlight include,

- A pre European landscape of permanent stone hamlets and complex fish traps
- Uncovered ancient human occupation sites
- Land acquisitions and Co-management
- Language and Stories being made public and easily accessible

Slide 3 Slide 4 Background to Aboriginal Victoria 1, Pre 1830's

For some context, I will provide a very brief background to Aboriginal Victoria

In historical times, Victoria could be looked at in a series of broad cultural units.

In South West Victoria there were a group of tribes in which the marriage totems came through the mother, these being 'Krocitch' and 'Gamutj', or the Black and White Cockatoos.

Through Central and Northern Victoria is a group of tribes broadly known as the 'Kulin' people. Most of these had marriage totems from the father, 'Bunjil' and 'Waang', or the Eagle and Crow.

Gippsland had a group of tribes known as the 'Gurnai'.

There were the snowy mountains people, [Jaitmatang, Mogallumbitch,Ngarigo and Wolgal]

and the many Murray River tribes including Yorta Yorta and Wemba Wemba.

Slide 5 Slide 6 Background to Aboriginal Victoria 2, Post 1860's

By the 1860's, 7 missions had been set up in Victoria. These being
(A) Cummeragunja on the Murray River NSW border at Barmah, near Euchuca;
(B) Lake Tyers and (C) Ramahyuck in Gippsland;
(D) Corenderrk in the Yarra Valley near Healesville;
(E) Framlingham on the Hopkins River near Warrnambool;
(F) Lake Condah near Mount Eccles, and
(G) Ebenezer on the Wimmera River in Western Victoria.

These form a basic layout of post contact Aboriginal Victoria.

In addition there were 9 official camping reserves, and border towns such as Mildura, Swan Hill and Kingston (*SE*) are also important.

Slide 7 Background to Aboriginal Victoria – South West

As this talk is focussing on the Western Victoria people, one initiative really worth seeing is the Brambuk interpretive centre in the Grampians National Park, named after a story about the Bram brothers.

This is an excellent interpretive centre with so much information, and this is a great joint venture of the various Western Victorian Aboriginal Groups.

Slide 8 Landscape of South West Victoria - Volcanoes

Focussing on 'Budj Bim' I must talk about the landscape of South West Victoria to put this into context.

Much of Southern Victoria, from Colac to Mt Gambier in South Australia, is composed from very recent volcanoes which erupted from 35,000 to only 7,000 years ago.

This is from black basaltic molten material and the landscape today is really rocky with evidence of fresh volcanoes all over the place.

[Some examples here include Tower Hill near Warrnambool, which Eugene Von Gerrard painted, and Red Hill near Colac.]

Slide 9

This rocky landscape is teaming with rivers and creeks which are fairly saline, ...and is very good habitat for EELS.

The Short Finned Eel use these rivers in their amazing migratory life cycle, which includes spawning in the Coral Sea.

Eels were a particularly important food source for Aboriginal people in this part of Victoria……...

Slide 10

……In historical times, one location very famous for Eel gatherings was Lake Bolac, West of the Victorian goldfields.

All along 'Salt Creek' Aboriginal clans from miles around would gather every few years to feast on Eels, and these were big events.

In recent years a biennial Eel Festival has commenced at Lake Bolac, initiated by Neil Murray of the Warrumpi band, who was born there, and involves Aboriginal people associated with the Lake.

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Many of these rivers had relatively permanent Aboriginal populations that focussed around the abundant fish and eel resources. There were a number of historical records of permanent 'hamlets'. Here are some drawings from the 1840's, at Mustons Creek.

Remnants of these remain, although much was lost during early white contact, partly due to fierce conflicts in this part of Victoria, Some of these events were known as the 'Eumerala Wars'.

Slide 12

Another legacy from this intensive and relatively permanent settlement was sophisticated aquaculture, including fish and eel traps.

Here are some examples of Fish and Eel traps systems on Darlot Creek in the Budj Bim landscape.

There is evidence of swamps being joined together by channels.

Woven eel traps were also used.

Slide 13

So what is the ‘Budj Bim’ landscape? Mt Eccles, a recent volcano in South West Victoria, is known to the Gournditjmura as ‘Budj Bim’.

Lava flowed from this between 30,000 to 7,000 years ago, forming the rocky landscape we see today of the Darlot Creek system, including Lake Condah.

There is a Gournditjmara legend of a key creating spirit depicting these events.

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One thing of note in this landscape is a particularly elaborate fish trap system at Lake Condah.

Drawings were made in the 1880’s by the surveyor Alexander Ingram.

This system is still visible today, and is quite impressive.

Drainage projects last century have significantly reduced the water levels at Lake Condah and other areas, although this is slowly being rectified.

Slide 15

…..and it is all about EELS…. In the Budj Bim landscape, on Darlot Creek, there are ‘smoking trees’ in which eels were smoked, for both food storage, and for trade. Here is one at the Kurtonitj property.

There are numerous remants of stone hamlets in this landscape too.

Clusters of 2 to 16 were common, and some early contact reports describe villages of up to several hundred people.

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Some more background on the history. The South Western part of Victoria, including Lake Condah, has been occupied by a language group known as Gournditjmura.

A mission was established at Lake Condah in 1869. By 1919, the mission closed, and as with much of Victoria, people were pressured to leave.

Many people at Lake Condah resolutely stayed in the area.

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By 1980, a landmark native title case in Victoria, involving (Sandra) Onus and (Christina) Frankland, versus Alcoa, over an aluminium smelter at Portland, resulted in return of the Lake Condah Mission to the Gournditjmura people.

The process took several decades for full outcomes, but has resulted in advancements in how Victoria negotiates native title, including an approach of mediation, rather than fighting in courts. This is very different to other states.

[The Yorta Yorta co-management of Barmah National Park on the Victoria side of Murray River is an example of this mediation process. Being one of the first big cases under the Native Title Act after the Mabo decision of 1992, the Yorta Yorta land claim of crown lands in the central Murray River area was deemed unsuccessful after a decade in courts. In 2004 a resolution for co-management was achieved with the Victorian Government for relevant public forests in the Victoria side of the border].

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Today Mt Eccles National Park is co-managed by the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, and they also manage five (5) freehold parcels of land on the Darlot Creek and Eumeralla landscape.

This adds up to 10,000 ha, and includes remnants of aquaculture and stone huts.

In addition, the Gournditj Murra people have rights to 130,000ha of public land in the Glenelg region.

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There are further places of interest in this area. One in particular is 'MOYJIL', or Point Ritchie, on the mouth of the Hopkins River at Warrnambool.

Layers of sediment reveal ongoing human occupation for at least 7,000 years…

…However there is tantalising possible evidence, below the Tower Hill Volcano ash flows 35,000 years ago, of human occupation which could date up to 80,000 years.

Slide 20

This landscape is really exciting.

The Budj Bim area is currently being listed for World Heritage status, a process which Alcoa is helping to sponsor.

As mentioned, the process of managing this landscape with the Gournditjmura is still being developed. You can visit these sites, although the process for accessing most of these requires further maturation. Plans for organised tourism are happening and further things may be kicking off in the near future, …...Check it out!... this could go off……

Slide 20 A

…And another exciting thing, a lot of material is freely available, and found on the internet.

This includes language, historical background, culture and current land management.

This relatively 'open' approach to information is partly a conscious decision of the Gournditmura people, although there is material available that is Victoria wide.

Here are some links and material. LOOK THIS STUFF UP, IT'S GREAT!!