



I CONNECTING TO COUNTRY

Aboriginal Design Principles

Kleins Road Cycling Corridor Study // WSP Indigenous
Specialist Services // March 2024

*This document
acknowledges the
Burramattagal of the
Darug language
group Elders, past and
present who are the
traditional custodians
of this site*

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Front image South west view of Parramatta in New South Wales, 1814,
by James Whittle & Richd. H. Laurie, National Library of Australia

Aboriginal Design Principles

Aboriginal design principles

Aboriginal led/ Aboriginal people (designers, elder and community members) should be leading or co-leading the Indigenous design elements.

Community involvement/ The local Aboriginal communities to be engaged in this process; can we use their patterns? Can they design patterns for the project?

Appropriate use of Aboriginal design/ All Aboriginal design elements must be approved by consulted Indigenous elders and community members. If approval is not given, the knowledge will not be used on the project.

Design approach

Image - Signage/surface treatment/ walls/art/ Signage tells the Country and its people's story. Surface treatments use local Aboriginal design knowledge, commissioned from artists, or urban designers who engage with community for approval.

Space - Indigenous space/ landscaping/ Aboriginal Space. A space or landscape where Aboriginal culture can be celebrated, including cultural land-management practices, firestick farming, daisy yam propagation, and the like

Language - Using language in the built environment to use it and keep it alive.

Country focused design

Overall, Aboriginal Australia has a simple but quite different hierarchy when it comes to their connection to nature. It is best contrasted against human-focused design, depicted below.

How might this shift or enhance current practices?

**Country, over
Community, over
Individual**



Country focused design

This document aims to

1. Provide further cultural context and competency for anyone with interest in the Aboriginal people of Parramatta.
2. Propose principles that align with important guidelines, such as the Connecting to Country Guidelines by the NSW Government Architects Office, The International Indigenous Design Charters Principles, and the 3 tenors of the Reconciliation Australia of Respect, Relationships and Participation.
3. Consider high level concepts for how project might engage and co-design with Aboriginal people.

This document has been produced with information sourced from publicly available desktop research on Country, people and culture and will develop / change based upon ongoing consultation with Aboriginal people with connections to the area.



Country, People, Culture

This section covers publicly available knowledge about Country people and culture as a introduction to understanding Country

Country of Beauty

A Country of beauty. Early settlers 'found environments which reminded them of the manicured parks of England, with trees well spaced and a grassy understorey'. The country west of Parramatta and Liverpool was described in 1827 as:

'a fine-timbered country, perfectly clear of bush, through which you might, generally speaking, drive a gig in all directions, without any impediment in the shape of rocks, scrubs and close forest'.

Parramatta is the first place to be given its original name by the Europeans.

After the penal colony was founded at Sydney Cove in January 1788, Governor Arthur Phillip organised exploring expeditions up the Parramatta River. When more fertile land near the head of the river was found, which is now Parramatta Park, he decided to set up a second settlement known as Rose Hill. But on 2 June 1791, Phillip renamed it Parramatta, using the locality name used by the Burramattagal people.



Joseph Lycett. C1820 Watercolor and gouache



View at Rose Hill c1791, Watercolour Artist unknown. The evenly spaced trees and little under foliage indicates cultural land management through various techniques, most of all firestick farming. Managed Country with clearly spaced out trees with little under foliage, indicate firestick farming.

Language Groups

Language Groups

The Sydney basin region is traditionally inhabited by people of several language groups, including Darug (Dharug) and Dharawal (Tharawal). Within these language groups it is estimated there were at least 36 clans.¹ The language name of the eastern groups within the basin was not recorded due to the fast pace of colonisation and displacement of Aboriginal people in this area. As a result, some prefer to use the term 'Sydney Language' when referring to the traditional language of this area., others like to use the term Coastal Darug. Darug is broadly accepted as the language used in the western portion of the basin.

Harbour Clans

The harbour clans were bound together by women, who married between clans. This means that the groups of Aboriginal people who lived on a daily basis in this area were made up of a mixture of clans. Each person was also bound by complex webs of spiritual and family connection to areas beyond that of their clan through marriage, by the clans of the parents and grandparents, and by their place of birth. Aboriginal people travelled widely and regularly to meet their cultural obligations and to trade items of importance to each of the tribes.²



Artist impression of clan groups within the eastern Sydney Basin, Michael Hromek

Darug Country

Country

The Country that Parramatta sits within is a transition zone between Saltwater Country and Freshwater Country, it is sometimes referred to as 'Bitter-water, and is an estuarine / brackish water habitat.

Geology

Kleins Road is located in Northmead, within the Sydney Basin. The Sydney Basin is a large depositional geological feature that spans from Batemans Bay to the south, Newcastle to the north and Lithgow to the west.⁷

The underlying geology are from the Triassic and Quaternary period. Higher elevated sections are generally underlain by Hawkesbury Sandstone and Ashfield Shale. Closer to foreshore areas consist of sediments, such as alluvial deposited sands.⁷

Parramatta Sand Body

Portions of Parramatta are underlain by a significant geological feature, the Parramatta Sand Body which is a significant archaeological resource with evidence of Aboriginal activities dating from the Holocene and Pleistocene epochs.⁷

The Parramatta Sand Body would have been an important and valuable resource, containing fresh water, food resources, shelter, woodlands and sandy soils suitable for campsites and burial.⁷

Parramatta sand body is clearly identified in this painting from 1908 *The landing place at Parramatta, Port Jackson, [1809?]* attributed to G.W. Evans, State Library of New South Wales



Topographical landscape surrounding Parramatta
Source: <https://en-au.topographic-map.com>

Darug Country

Cumberland Plain Vegetation

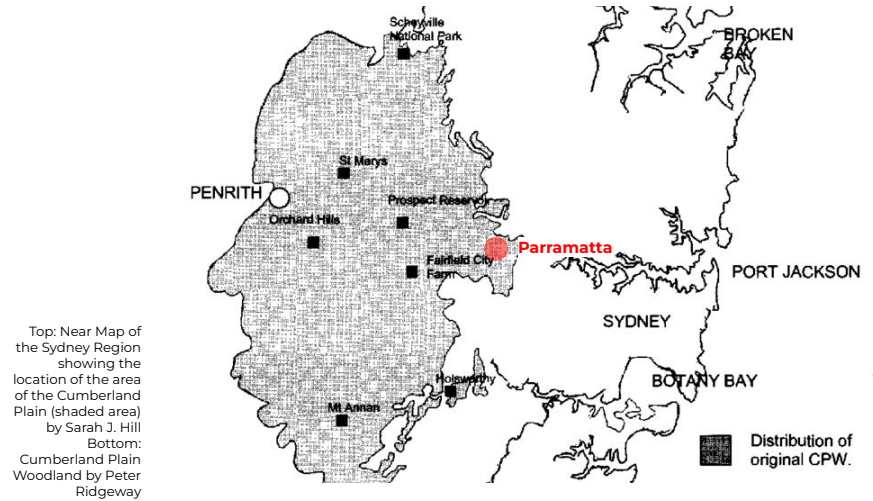
The main vegetation community surrounding Northmead is Cumberland Plain Woodland. Described as a tall sclerophyll open forest to woodland with a sparse mid-stratum of soft-leaved shrubs and small trees with a grassy ground cover on the undulating shale plains of western Sydney.⁸

In 1818, author and settler James Atkinson describes the plain as:
*"One immense tract of forest land extends, with little interruption, from below Windsor, on the Hawkesbury to Appin, a distance of 50 miles.."*⁹
1788, Governor Arthur Phillip describes:
*"The country through which they travelled was singularly fine, level, or rising in small hills of a very pleasing and picturesque appearance. The soil excellent, except in a few small spots where it was stony. The trees growing at a distance of from 20 to 40 feet from each other, and in general entirely free from brushwood, which was confined to the stony and barren spots."*⁹

Cumberland Plain Woodland is a savanna that features dry sclerophyll woodlands, grasslands and/or forests. Tree cover is mainly the eucalypts, grey box and forest red gum. Spotted gum (*Corymbia maculata*) is also known to have occurred in the Prospect area.¹⁰

These woodlands have been managed by Aboriginal people using cultural burning techniques for millennia, resulting in an open understory and widely spaced. This provided optimal hunting conditions and promotion of food plants, while reducing the prevalence of bushfires.¹⁰

Since colonisation and subsequent land clearing, less than 6% or 6400 hectares of the Woodlands remain. Cumberland Plain Woodland is listed as an Endangered Ecological Community under the Threatened Species Conservation Act. The greatest threats to the Cumberland Plain Woodland include land clearing for agriculture, urban sprawl and the introduction of harmful weed species.¹¹



Darug Country

River and Land Resources

Aboriginal people living in the Northmead area had access to freshwater and saltwater food resources such as: ducks, eels, shellfish, crayfish, fish and turtles. Terrestrial resources included woodland and grassland mammals such as: kangaroos, possums and flying foxes. The grassy woodlands would also have provided access to smaller animals and insects and to native fruits, berries, seeds, yams and roots.¹²

People shaped their natural environment, they created long-lasting campsites and built cooking/campfire pits with heat-retaining stones, which they left in place for when they came back to camp again. They also started to use locally sourced, heat-treated like silcrete for tools rather than importing stones from other river systems.¹³

Early settlers noted that shell middens were “numerous’ on the banks of the Parramatta River at Shepherds Bay, where enormous middens showed that mud oysters have been one of the principal resources of food.”¹³

Fishing Technology

Bark canoes called Nawi were used for travel and collection of water resources.

Watkin Tench observed that “canoes used in inland waters differed in no wise from those found on the seacoast.”

John Gardiner of HMS Gorgon noted: “four or five people will go, in the small things, with all their Spears & Emplements [implements] for procuring their subsistence.”¹⁴

Women sang as they fished, laughing and joking, they made and used hand fishing lines called **car-re-jun**, spun from the inner bark of the kurrajong tree (*Brachychiton populneus*). Women also made fish hooks- **burra** by chipping, grinding, shaping and smoothing seashells, such as the Turban (*Ninda torquata*) into a crescent shape, using a long, rounded stone file.¹⁴

Men caught their fish with a **mooting**, a long spear headed with either three or four hardwood prongs barbed with bone points.¹⁴



Watercolour illustration of a group of Aborigines [sic] fishing, ca 1790s - attributed to Philip Gidley King, State Library of New South Wales

Darug Country

Using Fire to Care for Country

Across the continent people used fire to care for Country and keep it healthy. Fire regimes consciously and deliberately shaped grass, trees and scrub into diverse ecosystems.

'Cool' fire was used in small patches or mosaics within the landscape, which ensured only small areas were burnt at once, leaving more established vegetation for animals to use. These mosaics were organised so that people knew where the animals would be and could go hunt them. The mosaics also provided different stages of regrowth as a resource throughout the year.

Early accounts from settlers and explorers often described the landscape as a "park", in the English sense of the word., that is, sparsely treed with open grassy understorey, that allowed travel easy even by horse and cart. This was due to long-term use of burning regimes over millennia.

Areas of dense forest were also protected from fire in some areas to maintain those animal species that require such habitats and for rainforest plant species.¹⁵

In this way the land was carefully managed with areas of fire and areas of no fire.

Near Looking Glass Point, a little downstream from Parramatta, settler William Bradley noted: *"We next proceeded to the Flats, where we landed and went 2 or 3 Miles into the Country, found the trees a considerable distance apart & the Soil in general good, Grass very long and no underwood."*¹⁴

Surgeon George Worgan of HMS Sirius was also struck by the landscape during an excursion along the river on 14 May 1788. Worgan admired the: *"gentle Slopes of the river banks, green to the water's edge... Trees are small and grow almost in regular Rows, so that together with the Evenness of the Land for a considerable Extent, it resembles a beautiful park."*

Bradley and Worgan were gazing at a landscape deliberately shaped by Aboriginal burning, a technique dubbed 'firestick farming' by anthropologist Dr. Rhys Jones. Constantly lit small fires created a mosaic of vegetation and encouraged new growth to attract small game.¹⁵

Settlers describe a park like setting with open and dense areas of vegetation. *West view of Sydney taken from Grose's farm, New South Wales, 1819*
Lycett, Joseph
National Library of Australia



Cultural burning to look after Country, Sian Hromek

Darug Country

Invasion

Parramatta was a focal point for Aboriginal occupation in the Sydney basin as the landscape was rich in resources. In 1788, Governor Arthur Phillip reported that bark huts, fire places, collected fern root and shells, hunted animals for bones and the fur of a 'flying squirrel' or possum were seen at a campsite at Parramatta. On another instance he also noted that, *...these parts are frequented by the natives... undeniably proved by the temporary huts which were seen in several places. Near one of these huts, the bones of kangaroo were found...'*⁷

The occupation of the Parramatta area was a true invasion, undertaken with military planning and support. A detachment of Royal Marines under Lieutenant George Johnston first occupied Rose Hill on 2 November 1788 when an earthwork fort was built on the ridge near the Crescent in today's Parramatta Park, close to Old Government House.¹⁴

The traditional lands of the Burramattagal people was appropriated by the colonists who claimed areas for settlement and agriculture. Natural resources such as water and timber were exploited by colonists, at the expense of the Burramattagal people.

The introduction of diseases such as smallpox also devastated the local population. In 1789, over half of the Aboriginal population in the Sydney region are believed to have died of smallpox, which had spread across the Cumberland Plain and over the Blue Mountains.⁷

Resistance

Two years after the arrival of the First Fleet, Bidjigal man Pemulwuy began to lead in the resistance to the incursion of white settlers onto his people's traditional lands.

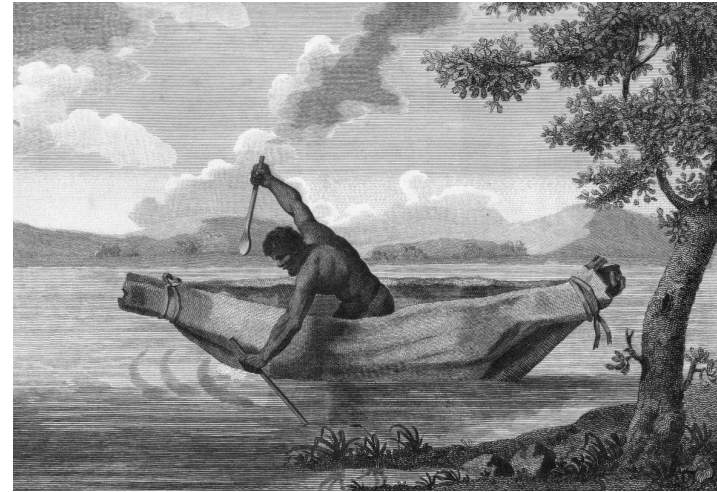
Pemulwuy was involved in the mortal wounding of John McIntyre on 10 December 1790. The attack was probably retribution for McIntyre breaking Aboriginal laws and for his violence towards Aboriginal people.

Phillip, who had been tolerant to Aboriginal people changed his position and called for a punitive raid, sending 50 soldiers and two surgeons equipped with head bags. When that party failed to return with corpses, he sent them out again.

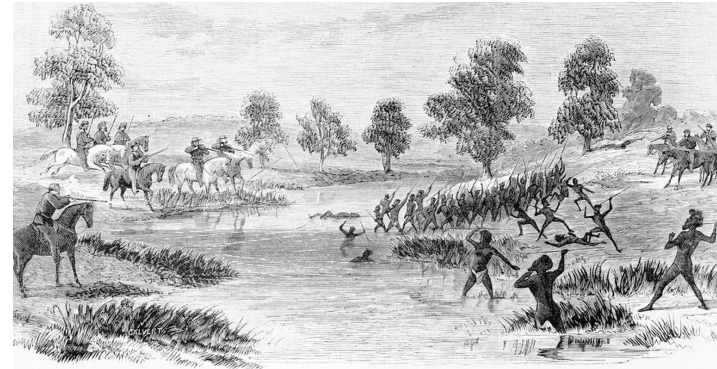
It was in response to this Pemulwuy led a series of raids from 1792. The raids took place on Bidjigal lands, and represent an attempt to retard the establishment of farming settlements. They burnt huts, stole maize crops and attacked travellers.

This culminated in the 'Battle of Parramatta'. Pemulwuy, with about 100 Indigenous warriors, marched into Parramatta and threatened to spear anyone who tried to stop them. Pemulwuy was wounded but managed to survive and escaped enhancing his already impressive reputation.

Pemulwuy eluded capture until 1802 when he was shot dead. Pemulwuy's head was cut off and sent to Sir Joseph Banks for his collection.¹⁷



Pimblo [Pemulwuy]: Native of New Holland in a canoe of that country, State Library of Victoria



Conflict on the Rufus. State Library of Victoria.

Changed Country

Colonial Impacts on Traditional Life

The traditional life of Aboriginal people in the Sydney region was severely damaged through the course of the early 19th century. The cumulative impacts of colonisation including dispossession of their lands and the effects of smallpox and influenza decimated the Aboriginal population, with individual epidemics killing large numbers of people.¹⁸

Early colonial settlement of traditional hunting lands deprived Aboriginal groups of sources of food and access to camping and ceremonial sites. Disrupting their way of life and consequently having negative impacts on their survival and culture. This forced individuals to either relocate into the potentially hostile lands of neighbouring Aboriginal groups, partially integrate into colonial society as fringe dwellers, or to resist and face consequences.¹⁸

Resistance by Aboriginal groups was often met with retaliatory action by white settlers and the colonial administration. A combination of these factors led to the demise of traditional lifestyles and a decrease in the Aboriginal population.¹⁸

Despite the damage done by colonisation to the various traditional ways of being, an evolution of culture, language and knowledge has survived and now lives on through the descendants of Aboriginal people.



Residence of John Macarthur Esq near Parramatta N.S.W., Joseph Lycett, Art Gallery of South Australia

Darug Design

Sydney's Aboriginal people expressed themselves visually across many different mediums including on wooden and stone surfaces, body scarification and painting, incised designs on weapons and tools, and etchings on skin cloaks.

Many other tools made of stone, shell and plant materials were used for making canoes, weapons and to collect food. Ornaments were worn in the hair and scarring of chest and arms served both ornamental and ritual purposes. Initiated men wore a waistband of plaited possum fur.¹⁹

Each clan distinguished itself from other clans in having different designs and decorations on their tools and weapons. They also distinguished themselves by having different body decorations – for example painted designs worn during certain rites and ceremonies, and the cicatrices (scarification) formed during initiation rites. Some groups also had distinctive hair styles.²⁰

French explorer Jules Dumont d'Urville in 1824 describes different Sydney groups gathering for ceremony. Their different body paint is a clear way to distinguish each group from the other: *'on high ground about two miles from the sea' (between Sydney and Botany Bay, and where there) 'were the people from Parramatta, Kissing Point, Sydney, Liverpool, Windsor, Emu Plains, Broken Bay, Five Islands, Botany Bay, and even from the Hunter River etc. All were distinguished by the designs of their body painting'.*²¹



^ Necklace worn by females, Fibre cord necklace made of reed pieces (*Phragmites australis*), Port Jackson, c1860s, British Museum

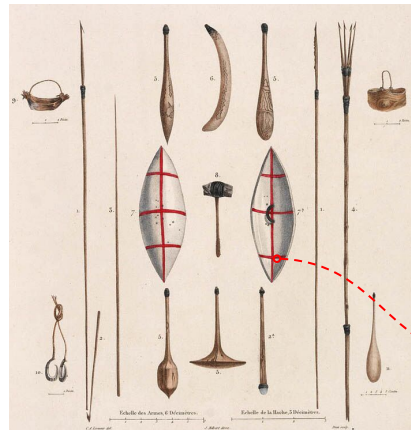
>Fish hooks of NSW, detail of plate from John White's Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales 1790. Image: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW (PXB513). (QRB/Q991/2A2).



>>Aboriginal woman with her baby, in a canoe fishing with a line c1805. Image: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW (PXB513).



Shane Smithers, Darug artist and academic describes the horizontal lines as representing Wiari, Mother Earth whom, along with Biari Father sky, is held in the highest respect. Together their generative power is the basis of Darug lore.



^ Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, *Indigenous Weapons - Sydney Region (1802-04)*, Australian Museum



Community Engagement

This section covers what Darug Knowledge Holders said about this site and its relationship to Country, people and culture.

Aboriginal Co-design Engagement strategy

Who:

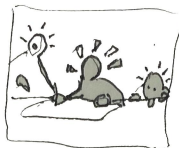
We plan to speak to **Relevant Aboriginal Knowledge Holders** who know about stories, themes, landscape, plants, torrents etc which are relevant to the projects scope. These themes will be translated into cultural outcomes for the project.

How:

- Digital Yarns over TEAMS
- Walk on Country / Meetings on site
- Meetings at the site, an elders place of choice (park, their house etc)

1. Engagement

The first step will be to engage with the relevant Aboriginal group (artist / elder, Lands Council etc), early and often, through a series of 'yarns' or conversations about the potential opportunities to incorporate the theming contained within the document (or other themes) into project outcomes.



2. Co Design

To kick off the co-design process design teams are given time to integrate the themes and ideas into the scope of the project



3. Co Design workshops

Engagement workshops with the relevant Aboriginal group will everyone gets in the room to co-design cultural solutions to project outcomes, yet Aboriginal voices should be given preference to ensure they are heard.



4. Endorsement:

All content that uses local Aboriginal theming will be endorsed by the Aboriginal group.



5. Other opportunities:

Should be highlighted and put forward to ensure the local Aboriginal community has opportunities, economic outcomes and better connections to their Country, through the project



Walk on Country

A Walk on Country was held with First Nations Knowledge Holders on the 23rd October 2023 to gain their initial thoughts about the Kleins Road Cycling Corridor Study. Participants from the Aboriginal community included Auntie Ros Fogg, Auntie Cheryl Goh, Uncle Paul Webb.

The Knowledge Holders made the following comments regarding First Nations perspectives for this project:

- They suggested the use of Dharug shields would be appropriate to incorporate into the design.
- There was support for the use of Dharug symbols in the design.
- Support for a story to connect with the bridge. This could be using colours of Country, or the use of sandstone and doesn't have to be a story. Embed with the actual design - river crossing or creek lines.
- Indigenous Specialist Services team to work with the design panel on naming the bridge and revert back to ASPECT and once report is done, it can be sent back to panel for reviewing.
- Dharug people were first impacted First Nations People. The first step for this project is doing the Walk on Country and share the outcomes with the project team. They suggested the project can show recognition of this early displacement. Sharing this history with people will support the healing process for the Dharug people.
- Integration of the bridge into landscape - eg are they going to have different sets of ramps?
- The area is ideal as a gathering place (South Creek)



Design ideas

This section covers high level ideas for how Darug knowledge and design might be implemented into the project to be considered by the design team and included where appropriate

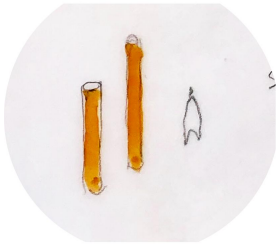
Potential use of Aboriginal design

Cultural design opportunities may include:

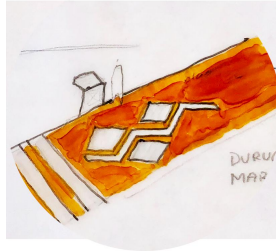
- Shared user paths
- Landscape, architecture and urban design
- Tram stop and other branding
- Sustainability initiatives
- Community involvement co-design, weaving, eel ceremony etc.



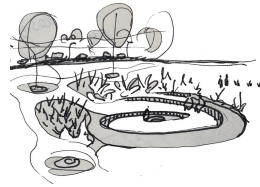
Bridge design patterns in ballasrade



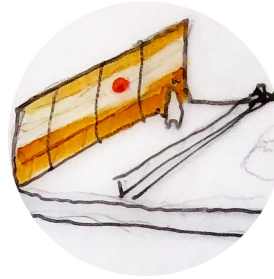
Sculptures or murals, message sticks, landscape communicating stories and design



Shared pathway with patterns in coloured asphalt



Resting place treatment in pavement, seating, landscape art.



Wall treatment, anti throw screens, abutments, noise walls etc



Iconic form to mark important gateway or zone and reflect culture



Columns and piers painted up in colours and patterns of Country

Aboriginal Naming

- From our research, this area is most strongly associated with **Toongabbie Creek to mean 'the meaning of the two waters'**:

The name "Toongabbie" is derived from an Aboriginal word, reported as meaning **'place by the water' or 'the meeting of the waters'**¹²³⁴. It was named in June 1792 after Governor Arthur Phillip asked the local Aboriginal people what they called the place¹³. Another interpretation suggests that it could mean **'land of the hills near the water'**⁴. These interpretations reflect the significance of water bodies in the area.

- We advise the use of Darug language to give this bridge a name
- Further engagement with Darug Knowledge Holders would be required at all stages of finding a name
- Established Darug naming principles stress the importance of using words that describe Country (i.e. place features, topography, animals you find there etc) vs highlighting an individual, which is a Western tradition.

Potential names:

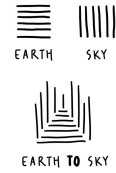
"Bula Badu Bridge" = Two Waters Bridge

Bula = Two. Badu = Water

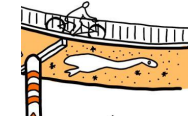
Bridge design

Ideas on how Darug design / patterns can be incorporated into the design of the bridge.

The design vernacular of Aboriginal Sydney



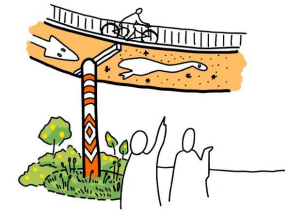
Patterns Bridging between Earth and Sky



Animals Important Totems



Connection to Ground
Ground plane Signage and Paving

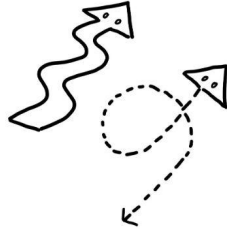


Bike Path Soffit and Structure
Treatment

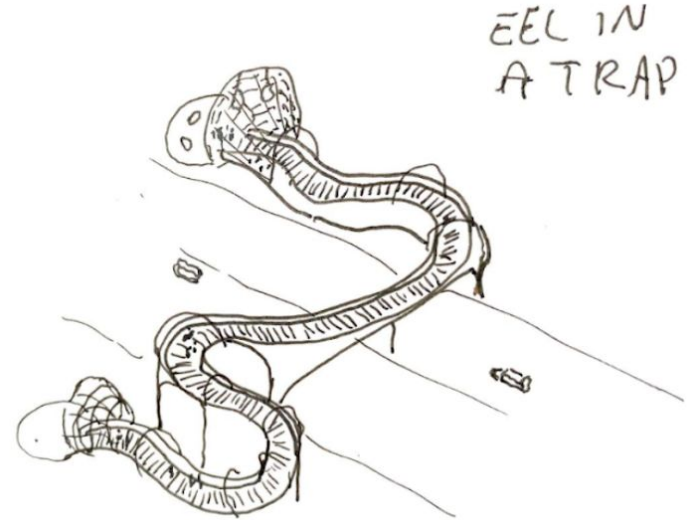
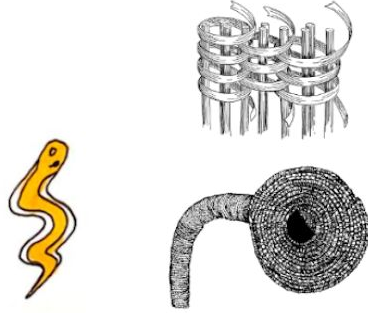


Connection to Bridge
Gateway Signage

Bridge design - Eel



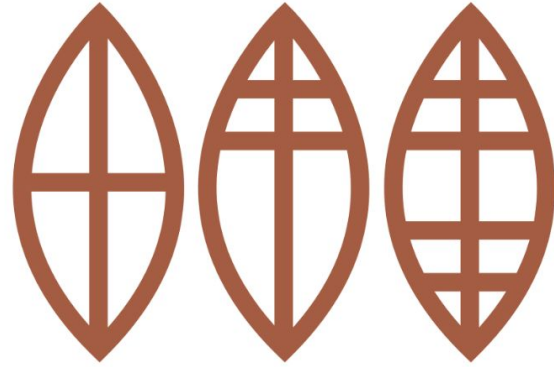
Eel Narrative



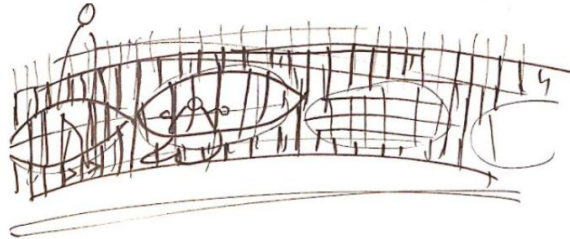
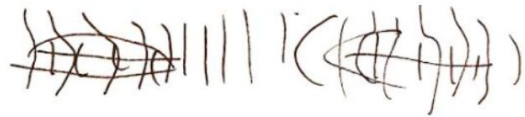
Bridge design - shield



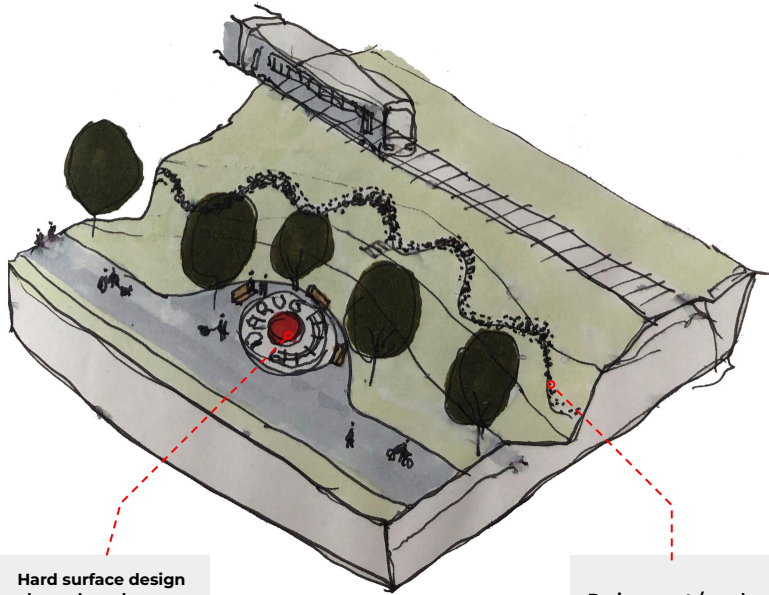
▲ Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, *Indigenous Weapons - Sydney Region* (1802-04). Australian Museum



The shield patterns and colours are from shields in the Sydney region. They can be seen on shields and in art depicting shields such as the engravings in sandstone

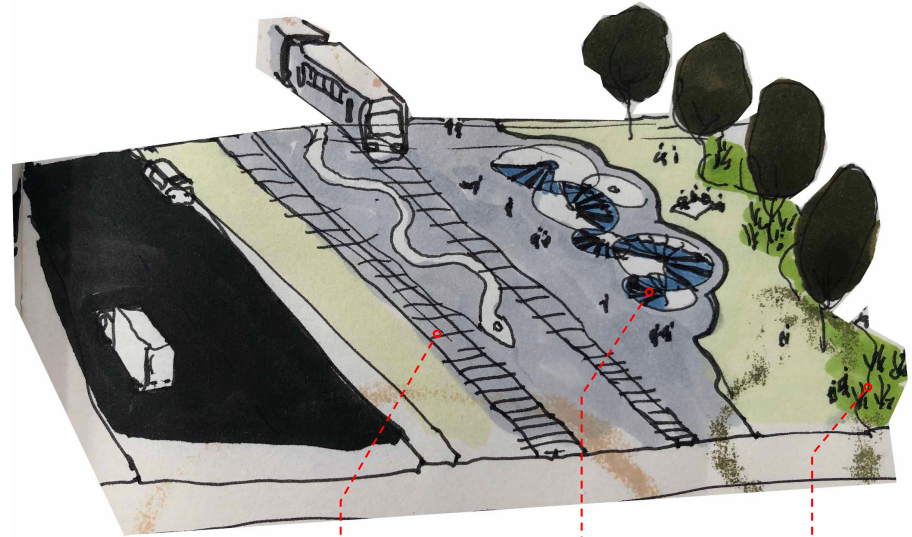


Hard and Soft Landscaping



Hard surface design along shared user path acknowledging Darug Country. Potential for community co-design, local aboriginal kids paint tiles, handprints etc.

Drainage art / swale drain rock placements which reflect Darug engineering and design and th totemic eel.



A representation of the Eel through different coloured cobblestone design

A water feature representing Darug fishing and land management techniques

Landscaping to support Aboriginal weaving and healing practices

Darug Design on architecture and structures



Shane Smithers work used as a surface treatment for admin / service / substation / buildings.

Note: Shane Smithers art is used only as an example and with his permission

References

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- 7 Artefact Heritage Services, Westmead to The Bays and Sydney CBD Environmental Impact Statement Concept and Stage 1 Technical Paper 4 Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment report, available- <https://ca-v2.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/tfnsw/syd-metro-west/Tech-Papers/Tech+Paper+4+--+Cultural+heritage+assessment.pdf>
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