
Reintroducing Traditional Land Management Practices Draft

Trialling a Methodology proposed by Rodney Mason

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Cover: Photo of trial burning at the Fourth Indigenous Values in the Landscape workshop at Garuwanga,

The project



Rodney (Rod) Mason is a respected Ngarigo elder and describes himself as a “Traditional Land Manager”. Most of his family avoided living on Aboriginal reserves and from some of his family members, Rod learnt their traditional methods of living. He has devoted himself to learning, teaching and sharing Traditional Land Management Practices and it has been his Dream to have the current landowners and land managers (the current Custodian of Country) reintroduce Traditional Practices.

Thanks to the efforts of Geoffrey Simpson, then Head of the Indigenous Unit, Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authority (MCMA), a ten year Cultural Heritage Agreement was signed in 2007 between the MCMA and the owners (Margaret Ning and Geoffrey Robertson) of Garuwanga (a property near Nimmitabel). ‘Garuwanga’ is Ngarigo for Dreaming.

Rod was a key element in formulating this agreement, and in early discussions of the agreement, the idea of holding a series of workshops on “Indigenous Values in the Landscape” was conceived. It was Geoffrey Simpson who initiated the discussion to make these workshops a reality and eventually, in 2010, Friends of Grasslands (FOG) successfully applied for and received a MCMA Community Partnerships Grant.

As part of that grant, four two-day workshops, titled “Indigenous Values in the Landscape”, facilitated by FOG and delivered by Rod took place in 2011, with a fifth and final workshop to be held in April 2012. Two half-day field trips, one to the Cascades (near Numerella) and one to Kooranbool (Bullocks Flat, near Jindabyne), were held in November 2011.

In 2011, Kosciuszko to Coast, applied for a MCMA Communities Partnership Grant to reintroduce Traditional Land Management Practices into Rod’s Country. This grant is funding this Project.

The assumptions underlying the Project are:

- An understanding of Traditional Land Management Practices will provide insights into our current understanding of landscape function and biodiversity.
- Adoption of Traditional Practices will improve biodiversity and farming outcomes.
- The project is therefore aimed at the Custodians of Country, farmers, reserve managers, and anyone actively involved in land management.
- The success of adopting Traditional Land Management Practices can be measured scientifically, and it is hoped that ecologists might start to consider how this may be done.
- As we are attempting to take Traditional Practices and adapt them to a somewhat new situation, and as many of the concepts and practices will be new and challenging to those who participate in the project, we propose that the Traditional Practices outlined in this document should be trialled on a small scale basis, before being adapted and applied more widely.
- Embracing the Practices outlined in this document will lead to a better understanding of, and respect for, Traditional values and will hasten the realisation that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people belong to country and, in turn, the process of Reconciliation.

The aims of the Project are fourfold:

- To develop a draft methodology,
- To engage up to 12 landholders in the K2C region and to trial the various methods with them,
- To finalise the methodology, and
- To prepare a report on where to from here.

The project will involve several workshops to outline and demonstrate Traditional Practices, property visits to assess trialling particular Practices, developing plans with landowners and land managers, actual trialling, monitoring and reporting on outcomes.

This booklet has been put together to explain the Project and its background. Rod has provided most of the material and is the author of the methodology. Geoffrey Robertson and

Lauren Van Dyke (respectively, President and Facilitator of K2C) are working closely with Rod in developing this booklet.

This Project has been designed by Friends of Grasslands, the Indigenous Unit (MCMA) and Kosciuszko to Coast in consultation with Rod. It is being managed by Kosciuszko to Coast and is being funded by the MCMA, Community Partnerships Grants.

About Rod Mason



There is a Myth that Traditional Knowledge in south-east New South Wales has been lost. It is true that many Aboriginal people, throughout Australia have lost Traditional Knowledge for many reasons, and the behaviour of non-Aboriginal people has contributed to this loss. Non-

Aboriginal society continues to underestimate the importance of Traditional Knowledge. Rod Mason is a living example that shows the Myth is not true. He demonstrates that Traditional Knowledge and Practice, two sides of the one coin, is alive and well.



*Rod Mason taken at FOG
Indigenous Values Workshop.*

Rod Mason is a Traditional Land Manager and Scientist and one of a small group of people who has undertaken the Diploma of Natural and Cultural Resource Management (bachelor degree). He is a former Ranger with the NSW National Park and Wildlife Service where he trained staff and visitors on the Traditional Land Management Practices, landscape function and biodiversity.

While Rod is Ngarigo elder, he does not speak on behalf of the Ngarigo people. Like any Aboriginal person, he can only talk with authority about his family's and his own history and experience. However, those who listen to Rod will realise that much of what he says is also said authoritatively by many other Aboriginal people.

Members of Rod's family have imparted much knowledge to him about the past, including Story lines, stories of Captain Cook's arrival, and the location of burials and massacres. Rod's ancestors also come from many parts of Australia and hence he has an affinity not only with the K2C region but with country a long way distant.

Traditional Learning is very different from the non-Aboriginal way of learning. Our non-Aboriginal way of learning includes largely choosing what we want to learn, formal education where a teacher provides lessons, and being able to readily access education materials.

In Traditional society, a person is selected to learn about a particular animal, a particular skill, etc. Formal learning is not imparted. Story telling is an important element. Learning is largely undertaken by watching, doing, and by gaining experience. Young persons may be sent out to the bush for many days at the time to learn survival skills and/or a particular skill. Surviving and mastering a particular skill, for which one is chosen, is proof that one has learnt. There is no distinction between Knowledge and Practice - Knowledge is learnt through Practice. Throughout life, one will be chosen for particular roles, and new roles are assigned as one ages.

No one has access to all the Learning. Each group and person specialises. Rod's family are Water people and he believes that his family's spirits return to the Water when they die. Other peoples' spirits return to the land. Rod has a responsibility for water creatures and their management, e.g, he can provide duck for consumption by other people but he is never allowed to eat it himself.

Rod teaches using many of these methods. 'Show and tell' and 'story telling' are favourites. Much teaching is unstructured. Many of Rod's stories have many levels of meaning and it often difficult for a listener to absorb what is said at one sitting. Writing this booklet is in a way the anthesis of learning in a Traditional way. Words cannot fully convey the Experience that the words are trying to convey. Experience is gained by doing.

Rod is saddened by the loss of Traditional Knowledge (and Practice) of Land Management. This loss has been largely responsible for the loss of landscape function and biodiversity. He believes that it only by reintroducing the Traditional Practices can we can begin to recover our biodiversity and obtain better farming outcomes.

Rod has been involved in the successful campaign to return Lambie Gorge (near Cooma) to Aboriginal Management. He has been honoured by being awarded the title of Local Citizen of the Year in 2008 by the Snowy River Shire Council and by having his face on a postage stamp. He is also a talented Traditional Artist.

Country



The Aboriginal view is that people belong to Country and that Country teaches them what they need to know. If you can learn from Country (“ if Country speaks to you”), you belong to Country.

Rod shares this view and is ready to help landowners and land managers, the current Custodians of Country, to access to this Traditional Knowledge and Practice so that they may become part of Country.

If Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people belong to Country, respect it, and have a common view on its management, including recognition of the importance of Traditional Management, then we have taken an essential step in Reconciliation.

Knowing the Traditional history, beliefs and way of life of the Traditional Owners is an essential part of this. Rod Mason is happy to be a catalyst for this process.

Rod’s people arrived in this Country from the western desert bringing with them many of the plants and animals. Other peoples in the region, unlike Rod’s people, came from rainforest areas.

Rod’s people lived on the Coast in the cold season and travelled up the Escarpment onto the Monaro Tableland eventually arriving at Kosciuszko in the warmer months. Three particular important Camping Sites on the Tableland are:

- Tuross Falls, where people arrived after travelling up the Escarpment via the Cascades. This was the site of the first Friends of Grasslands field trip. On the way to Tuross Falls, we travelled near the Ancient Pathways via *Umumeralla* (Numerella). At the Cascades, Rod described the Traditional Journey from the Coast. At Tuross Falls he explained how various plants were cultivated and used: geebung, tea tree, bush

rice (Iomandra), mountain plum and Snowy Mountain plum, and more. He explained how and where fire was used to manage the 'gardens' where these plants grew.

- Lambie Gorge, is a rich natural area near Cooma, and it was on the route between Numerella and Kosciuszko. This area, their resources and management was described by Rod during the workshops.

- *Kooranbool* (near the skitube in Perisher Valley), was the destination of the second FOG field trip. This, and other nearby areas, was the great Traditional meeting place each summer, of many of the tribes in south east Australia. It was also a site for resource gathering and ceremony.

Most features and landmarks in the landscape have their own Traditional name. Rod's people saw and described the broader landscape as a set of north-south landscapes: *Wallaga* (coast), *Wadbillaga* (the area between the coast and the escarpment), *Nallaga* (escarpment country - mosaic of grasslands, woodlands and forest), *Narrawallee* (the tall grass country centred around Cooma), *Burrungubbagee* (foothill of the Snowy Mountains centred around Jindabyne) and *Tidbillaga* (Snowy Mountains).

Country provided all the resources that were needed for food, fibre, shelter, medicine, weapons, toys and ceremony. Throughout the workshops many of the plants and their properties and ecology, as well as their habitat values and how to manage them, were explained. Eventually K2C hope to sponsor a booklet on the plants and their traditional uses. Part of Rod's Dream is to have landowners and land managers to farm local plants and fauna on a commercial basis.

We believe that Reconciliation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is essential for the self respect of all Australians. Aboriginal people belong to Country, as do non-Aboriginal people, and it is understanding this one single fact and everything that flows from it, which is the keystone of Reconciliation.

Are Traditional Practices still relevant?



It is becoming increasingly accepted that when white people arrived in Australia they observed a managed landscape. Bill Gammage's recent book provides ample evidence of this. Early settlers observed that much of the landscape comprised grasslands and woodlands. The woodlands' understorey was essentially native grasses with patches of tidy shrubs. Often these observers described the country side as parkland. Water was retained in the landscape. This managed landscape was less fire prone, as management methods isolated shrub patches and burnt in such a way that the risk of fire going from the understorey layer to the crown canopy was minimised. However, within fifty years of the white peoples' arrival the landscape had changed.

The introduction of different farming methods, the plundering and destruction of natural resources (the wholesale fauna harvesting) and the destruction of Aboriginal societies resulted in parklands turning wild (woodlands became untidy, thick with trees and matted with shrubs), gullies appeared and became highly eroded (as natural vegetation was removed), pastures deteriorated (more nutritious grasses were replaced by less desirable species), the rapid decline of native species and many species extinctions. The introduction, mostly deliberate and sometimes accidental, of exotic plant and animal species did not assist. While now many farming and land management practices have improved (although better practice is not universal), management and landscape restoration could improve if our current Custodians adopted Traditional Practices.

The view is often expressed that Aboriginal Practice while good then, it is no longer relevant. Such statements are based on a misunderstanding of what Traditional Practice is and no doubt

a fear of the unknown. Actually, Traditional Practice has much in common with good farming and land management practice and, on a smaller scale, many good gardening practices. Traditional Practice also provides a middle course of action that may help to reconcile what appears to be opposing positions of farmers and conservationists.

The Traditional Aboriginal view, shared by farmers, is that Country is a resource to be used to sustain people. Plants and animals are viewed as important if they have a use. Most plants and animals have many uses, but if they don't their presence may not be considered useful or may be discouraged. Aboriginal people farmed land ensuring that animals and plants were placed where they could be easily harvested. Burning, using cool fire methods, was done strategically so that fresh grass was maintained in key areas and shrub and herb patches, which were harvested each year, were vigorous. Actually what was occurring here was weeding (removing unwanted competition) and soil enriching (by planting in areas of rich moist soil or by moving soil to sustain the plants - ash was also a fertiliser). Because Aboriginal people had great understanding of plants and animals, Traditional Knowledge of biodiversity and ecology cannot be rivaled. Conservation and sustainability were practiced.

Different people had different responsibilities, ensuring the abundance of species and at the same time preventing the over exploitation of species. Traditional Practice was not a fossilised knowledge - Traditional people were the first to adapt to new technology and in fact had numerous techniques to support their life style.

Through the series of FOG workshops, it became obvious that one does not have to choose between Traditional Practice or Modern Practice. Traditional practice offers a whole range of Practices for active management of our landscapes, vegetation communities, flora and fauna. We are advocating that land Custodians learn and trial Traditional Practices.

Bill Gammage has pointed out that our task may be different now. In 1788, Aboriginal people maintained a landscape already well laid out, but we have first to restore it. In particular localities there may be little difference between 1788 and now, but not everywhere. Sometimes much preparation may be necessary before reintroduction of Traditional Practices. With a forested area, Traditional Practice might be reintroduced after a big fire or control burn. Then the new forest paths can be cleared, refuges burnt etc and maintained as the forest regrows. As the forest grows, these areas may be maintained with trickle fires at the appropriate time. We also need to exercise care and ensure that in highly sensitive areas, such as areas containing threatened communities and small endangered critters, habitat is maintained. The trick in using Traditional Practice is to ensure that our multiple objectives are achieved. We now turn to what are some of those Practices and the reasons for re-introducing them.

Removing excess dead matter and litter, and pruning



The sign of a poorly functioning system is the excessive build up dead plant material or litter.

Grasslands and the understorey of grassy woodlands, if not adequately grazed and/or burnt, senesce, i.e., dry off and become rank, becoming less palatable. Their dormant roots make it difficult for fresh roots to grow. Their shading impact plus their heavy ground littering (as dead material falls off) prevent new plants from establishing in inter tussock spaces. Grazing animals will go elsewhere rather than eat poor quality food that rank grasses offer. Eventually nature takes care of such situations with the final death and collapse of such plants, or by fire. Well-targeted fire management, or other methods, may keep grasslands ticking over nicely.

Within forests, the excessive build up of ground litter is a sign that the litter is not breaking down fast enough. Build up of litter can prevent new plants establishing and, according to Rod, prevent trees breathing through their roots and sending out new flushes of growth.

Dead plant material in shrubs and herbs, if not broken down or removed, can likewise have a detrimental affect, occupying space that new growth may take up. Removing dead material, pruning and fire singeing, as gardeners know, will stimulate new growth.

Properly functioning forest floors or garden patches team with invertebrate life, the bottom of the food chain. Fresh growth will also attract the larger animals to feed on it.

According to Rod, bark on smooth-bark trees should be kept at grass height. Dead bark above the grass line is a sign of poor tree health and should be removed or singed off. Even lopping or removing most of the trunk could be considered.

Minimising fire risk



Excessive dead plant material and litter is a fire hazard. Aboriginal management aims to keep vegetation functioning and to minimizing fire risk. Aboriginal burning may have some features in common with ‘control burning’, however, it is more subtle and the emphasis is on cool burning.

Aboriginal fire management also resulted in mosaic burning. Use of cool, rather than hot burning, usually results in more patchiness in the burning. It is widely recognised that mosaic vegetation, where vegetation patches may be at different stages in their life circle, or comprised of different communities, encourages biodiversity by providing more food and habitat choices for plants and animals.

Today, it may not always desirable or practical to use fire management, and alternatives to burning may include grazing, slashing, weeding, removing litter, adding nutrients and pruning. These may be just as effective as fire or used in conjunction with fire. However, each method has its own consequences (e.g. grazing may remove rare grazing-sensitive plants) and so in choosing fire management or another management method, one needs to be aware of each method’s pros and cons.

Soil rebuilding



The removal of gardens and wicks has led to a decline in soil fertility. We are aware of how each plant species has different properties above the ground. We are less aware of the role each species plays below ground. Tea tree and wattles have important roles in soil building and nutrient cycling. Ash from their burning adds another dimension to soil building.

Aboriginal people moved soils around the landscape, often in subtle minor ways. Using soil to build gardens was, according to Rod, a widespread activity.

Aboriginal Land Management Practices are likely to be building up soil carbon, even though use of fire is involved. Whereas hot burning may destroy soil structures, cool burning should not impact on soils. Cool burning is likely to accelerate plant root growth below soil, resulting in plants discarding old roots and their incorporation as humus into the soil. Burning will also produce ash and charcoal, carbon sinks, that are added to soils.

Fire management of gardens was a form of weeding, removing unwanted competing plants such as grasses from tea tree and bush rice thickets. There is some anecdotal evidence that fire may help suppress other unwanted plants.

Managing grassy ecosystems



Grasses were burnt to manage kangaroos and wallabies and other animals. Aboriginal people know that herbivores prefer fresh grass to hayed-off grass. On the Monaro, burning took place in late summer and early autumn and may be described as cool burns. These burns took place as Rod's people left the Monaro on their way to the Coast.

Managing woodlands and forests



Silver wattle provided products such as wax for glue, wattle seed for food, and long straight stems for spears and building shelters. They are also preferred by sugar gliders. Wattle thickets also enriched soils by fixing nitrogen and circulating nutrients and were known to produce good soils. Thickets of silver wattle were reinvigorated by burning to remove unnecessary competing plants. This encouraged new growth which attracted insects and hence restarted the food chain. Burning also produced ash, a product to enrich soil. Enriched soils could be moved and used to create or refurbish herbs and/or fruit-producing shrub gardens.

Smooth-barked tree forests were burnt to remove excess litter on forest floors, to restrict the bark at the base of trees to the height of the grass, and to burn off the bark higher in the trees. Removal of excessive litter allowed trees to breath through their roots and encouraged a flush of new growth. Again new growth, with its less toxicity, attracted insects, the base of the food chain, and browsers. New growth also attracts animals like brushtails, which are attracted to healthy trees and bring in new seeds, and hence increases the diversity of plants under the trees. Burning was also considered to be a fire safety issue.

Not all forests were burnt. It seemed that rain forests were left unburnt. Aboriginal people kept away from and did not burn forests of rough bark trees (e.g. peppermints) as such practices were considered dangerous.

Garden farming



Traditional Practice aims to establish, maintain and replenish gardens both for direct use by Aboriginal people and by indirect use, through the creation of food sources and habitat for animals. Over time many of these gardens have disappeared leading to a lessening of resources available to people, plants and animals. This may be part of the explanation for the decline of many native species. These gardens can be reintroduced to provide seeds, fruits and habitat for fauna.

The woodlands and forests provided “fruit gardens” and “seed orchards” that Aboriginals tendered carefully. Areas around camp sites were particularly well-maintained and each member of a group, individual men, women and children had a responsibility to manage a particular patch. If this wasn’t done well, one would earn the ire of the group.

Berries and seeds were food sources for birds such as pigeons and quail, which were valuable food sources. The shelter provided by gardens was also an important consideration. For example thickets of *persoonia* provided food and shelter for pigeons. The plants provide berries for food, and the fruit passing through the gut of the pigeons helps the new seed to establish, partly by corroding the seed casing and partly by providing accompanying nutrient. *Persoonias* grow rather thickly making it difficult for raptors to penetrate. Once the *persoonia* or birds die out, the niche ecosystem disappears.

Mountain berry (*Tasmania xerophila*), one of many native fruit trees, also provides an important source of fruit for humans and animals. Passing through the gut of animals is probably an important element in its spread.

Bush rice (mat rush or lomandra) was another favourite plant and its gardening was well attended. The rice-like seed is a staple and is used in making bread and cakes. Seeds from

such gardens could be carried away for later eating or planting elsewhere. The base of the leaves are also eaten, while the leaves are also good for making strings and baskets.

Herb gardens such as the production of yam daisies, where the root is a highly nutritious, were also cultivated.

Fringes around gardens were burnt to reduce fire risk, to prune off the excess dead plant material and encourage new growth, to provide ash as a soil nutrient, and for aesthetic reasons. Singeing shrubs also helped to prune them and make them more productive. Aboriginal people do not like wild and unkempt areas. Gardens might be enriched with soils from elsewhere.

Wicks



A wick is the root mass of plants that grow closely together. These roots become highly entwined to form a thick mat. This mat of plant material draws on and retains water, and then slowly releases the water in the landscape. Wicks provide important links between the higher and lower parts of the landscape and are important wildlife corridors.

Tea tree thickets form important wicks and apart from their water holding qualities, they form rich soils, high in nutrients. Additionally, they are an important food resource for invertebrates, the basis of the food chain, and important habitat for ring-tailed possums. Deep rooted grasses, mat rush and wattles also are examples of wicks.

The maintenance of wicks are obviously important to maintain landscape function. They may be assisted by fringe burning to remove competition and to encourage new growth. Singe-burning of individual plants can burn off dead material and stimulate individual plants.

The removal of wicks leads to erosion gullies and the drying out of the landscape. Rod is an advocate for restoring wicks.

Reintroducing species



When a species drops out of an area, the impact may not be so obvious, but it may be profound. If a plant species, or a suite of species, drops out, the fauna dependent on them are likely to disappear. Similarly, if a fauna species drops out, some species of plant and other fauna may drop out.

Rod is a fan of emus. Emus played many important ecological functions on the Monaro. They ate many fruits and this enabled new plants to establish, because emu stomachs corroded the seed crust and their droppings provided manure. Rod eats native fruits to emulate the action of the emu. Emu also provided protection for other animals against predation, by warning of the presence of predators. They also kill cats and foxes - Rod regards emu as good fox and cat controllers.

Rod is a strong advocate of plant and animal reintroductions. It was common for Aboriginal people to move plant material around the landscape, partly to ensure that food and habitat were available for fauna. According to Rod we must seriously consider reintroducing emus. Another suggestion is to breed quail and release them.

New products and industries



Throughout the Friends of Grasslands workshops and field trips, Rod introduced participants to many plants, their ecologies and properties. Knowledge of these plants and their properties, as well as fauna, may offer us many possibilities for new foods, medicines, and other resources. Rod is a strong advocate of using local plants for all manner of purposes. He would like to encourage the use of bush rice as a food staple and many local fruit seeds as peppers. He suggests that there are, potentially, many Indigenous products that may be farmed. K2C would like to collate the material on plants that Rod produced at the Friends of Grasslands workshops and publish it.

Burning is cool



Using fire is an essential tool in Traditional Land Management. Essentially the method may be described as ‘cool burning’ as fires are lit on cool mornings, in late summer and early autumn, especially in foggy conditions when there is little or no breeze. While gaining experience, it is recommended that land owners and managers choose small safer patches, and learn the burning properties of individual plants and litter. Generally dead plant material and other litter will burn. However, some plants are very flammable (river tussock, mat rush).

Initially experimenting with burning should be done in groups with someone with proper experience on hand.

We suggest that you should follow the following steps in use of fire.

1. Have permission if required. In certain months, permission of the Rural Fire Service is required. You may also need to obtain permissions from the Office of Environment and Heritage if you are burning in or near vegetation that is a NSW Threatened Ecological Community.
2. Choose small safe sites. It is important to know how the plants and litter in the patch will burn, and, until experienced, avoid burning large sites with highly flammable plants.
3. Ensure the weather condition is correct (early, cool late summer or autumn morning, foggy, little breeze).
4. Determine direction (from breeze) fire will take and what should be the fire edge.
5. Have water and other equipment (rakes, shovels, wetted bags) available to extinguish and/or control fire.

6. Prepare the edge. The edge may be natural (road, path), or created by slashing, removing flammable material, removing plant material to expose bare soil, and/or wetting.
7. Around trees and shrubs, pull back heavy litter.
8. Rake litter to avoid hot spots and possibly remove excess litter all together.
9. Light, but intervene as necessary to keep fire contained. Put fire out if necessary.
10. Don't leave the fire unattended. If you need to leave the site, make sure the fire is totally extinguished.

The proposed methods



Eleven Traditional Management Practices have been chosen for trialing in the Project.

ACTION 1. Create a tea tree and wattle thicket

In this example we create both a tea tree and wattle thicket, but creating either is also a good option.

Choose a suitable sloped site beside a running creek or in a watercourse. Either burn a patch (on an appropriate day) about 10 x 10 metres (or larger), AND/OR dig patch to open the earth up. Use trailer loads of cut tea tree and/or silver wattle, chip it and spread over site. When dry, undertake a cool burn, or allow to mulch down. Distribute tea tree and/or silver wattle seed, or direct plant such plants, in the patch, making sure to put tea tree closer to the water and the wattles further up the slope. This should establish a tea tree and wattle thicket.

ACTION 2. Wallaby grass hockey sticks

Here is a method to replace weeds, e.g., African love grass (ALG), with native wallaby grasses.

In the middle of an infested patch of ALG, dig a diagonal line down through big healthy patch of ALG plants, and at the bottom of the line continue back up the slope at a ninety degree angle (in the shape of a hockey stick). Ensure that you break up the roots of the ALG. In the hockey stick, seed with or plant wallaby grass. Leave for a few months and then undertake a cool burn.

ACTION 3. Enhancing ‘native bush rice’ gardens

Bush rice (mat rush or lomandra) has many desirable food qualities and can be used to make equipment such as strings and baskets. It is also important in Aboriginal gardens for making wicks and for soil building. Here is a way of cultivating bush rice gardens.

Enhance mat rush thickets through burning surrounding perimeter, thus enhancing, the establishment of a bush garden. Burning should take place in the early morning in cool foggy conditions. If you don't already have a mat rush thicket, you may plant a number of plants in a clump. They are readily established.

ACTION 4. Maintaining tree and understorey health and reducing fire risk

Healthy trees put on new growth to provide food for insects, brushtail possums etc. Trees need to breath (through their roots) and so it is important to remove excessive litter. Likewise excessive ground litter stops fruit shrubs from establishing and growing vigourously. Too much bark on trees and ground litter also provide a fire danger. Note: Burning in and around trees, is restricted to smooth bark trees. Also, rough bark on smooth bark trees should be contained to within about a metre (grass height equivalent) of the base.

Choose a small patch of say six trees, somewhat isolated from other patches, with the aim of reducing ground litter and excess bark on trees. Pull away any (excessive) litter immediately under the tree and burn this (if litter has built up too much it may be better to remove it altogether). Lightly scorch the tree to remove excess bark, or if bark is excessive, remove manually. Burning should be done in cool conditions when foggy. Depending on the community put a fire through every two or three years.

ACTION 5 Edge burning tea tree and silver wattle thickets

Tea tree and silver wattle thickets build soils, help retain water in the soil and provide habitat for fauna, starting with insects, the base of the food chain. However, tea tree and wattle growth can be hindered and their value can be reduced if they are allowed to become too woody and other plants (e.g., grasses and weeds) become excessive in the understorey. Hence weeding and pruning through fire, especially around the fringe of patches is encouraged.

In this method, areas on the fringe of tea tree and wattle communities are burnt to reduce other plants and to reinvigorate plant growth. If necessary remove excessive litter before burning and burn litter separately. Individual plants, especially in the centre of the patch, may be singed (or pruned) to remove dead wood.

ACTION 6 Create and maintain fruit gardens and seed orchards

Many shrubs provide important fruits. Recreating shrub gardens and/or caring for them with the burning techniques will assist to re-establish important food sources and habitat. Adding enriched soil will accelerate establishment and encourage better production. Gardens may be harvested for their fruit and/or seed.

For established plantations, removing excess litter and burn around fringe. Individual plants may be singed or pruned to remove dead material. Soil may be improved adding 'enriched soil'. To establish such gardens, choose suitable spot on edge of woods, add enriched soil, and plant or seed with appropriate plants.

ACTION 7 Create landscape wicks

Aboriginal people recognised the importance of 'wicks'. It is important that such wicks are not broken, or if broken are recreated.

Wicks may be retained through fringe burning and may be recreated through planting or through methods such as Action 1.

ACTION 8 Creating herb gardens

Herbs such as yam daisies are important food sources for Indigenous people. These may be created by collecting plants and planting them in a garden of enriched soil. This method may be used for other herb reintroductions.

Collect seed or plant material and plant in a specially prepared area where you have enriched soil (see Action 9). Such areas will also attract insects and butterflies.

ACTION 9 Soil transplant and enrichment

Encouraging plant growth, as any gardener knows, requires adding nutrients such as humus and natural nutrients. Some native plants are very good at providing mulch and increasing the availability of nutrients. Ash and charcoal, from burnt native vegetation are also important sources of carbon and other nutrients. Tea tree and silver wattle thickets, to mention just two, often provide pockets of rich soils which may be moved for use elsewhere.

Enriched soil naturally occurs in tea tree and silver wattle thickets. Such soils may be removed and used to establish gardens elsewhere. Ash and charcoal may also be used to establish gardens.

ACTION 10 Grassland invigoration

Grasslands, especially in reserves, if not managed, may senesce. Grasses benefit from grazing and/or burning, provided they are not over grazed or burnt at the wrong time. To encourage grassland regeneration, Aboriginal people burned grasslands, which enabled the grasslands to regenerate by removing dead material and litter, unwanted plants, and opened up opportunity in the bare soils for new plants including forbs to establish.

Undertake cool burn during early mornings on cool foggy mornings.

ACTION 11 Reintroduce Emus and other fauna

Emus serve many functions, two in particular are important. First, they protect many other animals as they provide a good deterrent for foxes. Second, they distribute seed and, more importantly, they assist it to become active as it passes through their digestive tracts. Other animal introductions, such as quail, should also be considered.

Reintroduction of emu will require a suitable source of birds and obtaining the support from other land managers and authorities. Other animal reintroductions, where animals were once plentiful but are now rare, requires breeding up stocks for release.

How to participate



Landowners and land managers are encouraged to participate if they want to learn more and even entertain the idea of adopting some of the practices outlined in this document.

The Project will involve conducting a series of workshops with Rod to elaborate and explain the methods outlined in this document and explain how participants in the workshops may follow up on the workshops.

For those wanting to go further, the K2C team, including Rod, would be happy to visit your property, depending on the demand, to discuss natural values and the possibility of trialling Traditional Land Management Practices.

For those wanting to go yet further, K2C will devise a plan and provide assistance with the trials and monitoring the success or otherwise of the trial.

Further reading

The following references elaborate further on Rod Mason, his backgrounds and his teachings.

Rod Mason

Mason, Rod “Dyillagamberra, the local rainmaker” in “Resort Round Up: A newsletter for the resorts community of Kosciuszko National Park” Issue No 25 Winter 2007.

Mason, Rod and Darlington, Dave, “Indigenous land management techniques workshop”, Proceedings of the Aboriginal Co-management Meeting 2006, NSW Parks and Wildlife Service, www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/parks/mungoSection05.pdf.

News of Friends of Grasslands

Goonrey, Michael “The Cascades with Rod Mason”, Jan-Feb 2012.

Robertson, Geoff “Fourth Indigenous Values Workshop”, Jan-Feb 2012.

Robertson, Geoff “Indigenous Values Workshops Two and Three”, Sept-Oct 2011.

Robertson, Geoff “Indigenous Values Workshops”, May-June 2011.

Street, Phillipa “Kooranbool”, Mar-Apr 2012.

Van Dyke, Lauren, Eccles, Sarah, Elvin, Alison “Narrawallee (Long grass) Country”, Nov-Dec 2008.

ABC Rural <www.abc.net.au/rural/>

Informative references to Rod Mason may be found on this site:

Gosher, Keva “Rare Indigenous skills on in the Snowy Mountains” Dalgety 9/07/2010.

Gosher, Keva “Rare Indigenous rope making” Dalgety 14/12/2009.

Holman, Julia “Indigenous Land Management on Farms in the Monaro”, ABC Rural, Nimmitabel, 3 May 2011.

Youtube

Crombie, Steve “Natural Born Traveller - Ice -People”, 4 Jul 2011,
www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zK2M68AOV0.

Books

Two books that we would highly recommend are:

Gammage, Bill “The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Australia”, Allen & Urwin, October 2011.

Young, Michael “The Aboriginal People of the Monaro”, a documentary history, revised and explained”, Department of NSW Environment and Conservation, 2005.

Bill Gammage provides much validation of what Rod is telling us about Traditional Land Management Practices. Rod provided assistance in preparing the second edition of “The Aboriginal People on the Monaro” and the book also has a piece on Rod.

The Project will aim to improve information about Rod, his background and teachings.

The Traditional Land Management Project is being undertaken by Kosciuszko 2 Coast (a regional partner of Great Eastern Ranges) in partnership with Friends of Grasslands and the Murrumbidgee Catchment Authority (MCMA), Indigenous Planning Unit. It is funded by a MCMA Community Partnerships Grant under the Australian Government's Caring for Country.

