

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

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Bancroft, Robyne

Occupation Heritage consultant

Summary

Gumbaingerri born of Bundjalung/Thungutti descent, Robyne Bancroft's people come from the northeast coast of New South Wales. For many generations since colonisation, her family (matrilineally) have passed on their genealogies and oral traditions.

Details

Robyne Bancroft is a Goori Australian woman who has done much to bolster and broaden the identity of Aborigines, Archaeology and women in the ACT area and beyond. Gumbaingerri born of Bundjalung/Thungutti descent, Bancroft's people come from the northeast coast of New South Wales.

Proudly stemming from a strong matrilineal line, she is part of her family's many generations of women on the matrilineal side since colonisation who continue their genealogies and oral traditions. While early white male anthropologists sought to learn about the lives of Aborigines by consulting solely with men, a whole female tradition was neglected. In the 1960s Bancroft's grandmother, born in 1905 and fluent in three dialects, encouraged her to tell the tales to keep their traditions alive:

Now, they come to ask us our stories – now, when most of us have forgotten so much. We have been so caught up in living day to day, and now there are very few of us left. Look who's here – only three or four of us left. It's time for you to come home my girl, keep our stories going, and take over doing what I do – talking to everyone about Goori people and our heritage.

Perhaps tackling the field of archaeology and anthropology was a further way Bancroft could follow her grandmother's wishes and spread the ways of her people. Even if this meant undertaking studies at the Australian National University as a mature age, single mother with a family, she was not to be deterred.

Through her academic pursuits and as an Indigenous heritage consultant, Robyne Bancroft has striven to improve the understanding of Indigenous Australians by facilitating communication and consultation. Becoming a founding member of the Indigenous Archaeological Association (IAA), an independent archaeological body that represents the interests of indigenous archaeologists and provides a voice for Aboriginal people on archaeological issues is one such example. Her role as an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Officer with Forests NSW is another. Creating active consultation between State Forests and Aboriginal communities has aimed to develop systems that better consider the landscape context of sites, thereby offering more efficient protection with the concurrent benefit of Aboriginal communities becoming more fundamentally involved in decision making.

Bancroft strongly believes including Aboriginal people in consultative processes is the most effective way to develop policy which is most beneficial to Aboriginal Australians. Her positions on several cultural heritage committees, as the Aboriginal Representative on the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and her involvement in repatriation of ancestral human remains are some of the ways Bancroft contributes to a more holistic approach to Aboriginal Indigenous cultural heritage. As a founding member of the ACT Heritage Council and of the Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS), Australians for Reconciliation Coordinator for the ACT and region and as an adviser on indigenous issues to the ACT Chief Minister, Robyne Bancroft has contributed greatly to dialogue within the Canberra region and beyond.

As the cultural editor of *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, Robyne Bancroft has helped define Aboriginal heritage and identity for a worldwide audience and is widely sowing the stories of her people.

This entry was prepared in 2006 by Roslyn Russell and Barbara Lemon, Museum Services, and funded by the ACT Heritage Unit.

Published resources

Edited Book

The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture, Sylvia Kleinert, Margo Neale and Robyne Bancroft, 2000

Archaeologists and Aborigines Working Together, Iain Davidson, Christine Lovell-Jones and Robyne Bancroft, 1995

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition

From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg>

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