



15-M-15½  
**Never Breed**  
NEVER IRON **CAMP** buy  
65% POLYESTER

**Sandon  
Point**

**East  
Timor**

**Cross-cultural  
Identity**

**Biennale**

**hon<sup>★</sup>soit**

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# S A N D O N

## N O H O U S E S : T H E S P I R I T O F S A N D

Sandon Point is a unique parcel of open space, coastal land located some 80km south of Sydney, just north of Wollongong. Lying at the base of a catchment fed by waters from the nearby Illawarra Escarpment, the Point is a natural floodplain, with three creeks and a number of wetland environments providing habitat for a diverse range of flora and fauna. Famous throughout the world for its surf break, Sandon Point is currently at the centre of a struggle between the local community and multinational developers Stockland. These Sydney-based land speculators are working in league with the Big Australian - BHP, part-owners of the land. Stockland and its partners are seeking to reap a \$100m profit from the residential development of the Sandon Point site. Since the late 80s the community had been calling on BHP to return the land to public ownership, and for it to be converted into a foreshore regional park. The calls have fallen on deaf ears.

In 1998 the community was further snubbed when Sydney Water sold a parcel of land to the developers - land which contained Aboriginal burial sites and which should have remained in public ownership. For thousands of years the Sandon Point area has served as a meeting place, campsite and burial ground for the local Aborigines. People from throughout Australia travelled up and down the coast, passing through the Point as they followed various Dreaming trails and attended sacred and cultural ceremonies. An ancient trail, descending the subtropical rainforests of the Illawarra Escarpment, brought travellers to rest by the creeks, lagoons and bay of the area. Here they were able to camp, rest, engage with their local

brothers and sisters, and replenish their supplies before moving on.

The site remains to this day the last large parcel of undeveloped open space land in northern Illawarra. Its 60+ hectares contains a diverse array of cultural, heritage and environmental assets. The local community has been fighting since the late 1980s to save Sandon Point from the ravages of bulldozers. They have been supported by a few Wollongong City Councillors, and political groups such as the Greens and Democrats. The ALP and Liberals have sided with the developers throughout.

In recent months the fight for Sandon Point has intensified. Arrests have been made and the battle lines are now clearly drawn. On 14 February - St Valentines Day - the developers gave the community a present when they attempted to bring the bulldozers on site. A contingent of over 200 supporters blockaded the entrance to the development. The NSW Police Force Tactical Response Group was called in to deal with this group of mums and dads, grandparents, children, students and locals, resulting in 53 arrests that day alone. The developer's equipment breached the blockade. However they were only on site for 30 minutes, when news arrived that a court injunction had been secured by the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, and the bulldozers were told in no uncertain terms to clear out. This was a huge victory for the community in its long fight.

Back in 1887 Sandon Point and the nearby town of Bulli was the scene of the first united feminist action in Australian history. A group of women - mostly the wives of local coal miners - proudly stood, with babes in

arms, before a steam train loaded with a cargo of scab labourers shipped in from Sydney to take the jobs of their husbands, sons, brothers, fathers and friends. On Monday, 17 January 1887, the woman rallied against the iron horse and repelled the scabs. By the end of the day the men were all on their way back to Sydney by coach or sea, never to return. On Wednesday, 22 May 2002, a young University of Wollongong student - Dominika Grossy - sat locked on to the attenuating arm of a monstrous bulldozer. Beside her, as a protector, stood an elderly lady, Jill Walker, chatting to the young girl and helping maintain her spirits while the scabs and goons of the developers looked on. Both women were courageous, brave, noble and strong as they defended the land from desecration and destruction. The spirit of 1887 lived on in those two women and their compatriots.

The bulldozer stood within a fenced area reminiscent of the Woomera Detention Centre. The ugliness and stark barbarity of the fencing, which stretched out for miles on the site, was a clear contrast to the beauty of the land and nearby ocean. Outside the fence stood local supporters, school students, the police, and media; by the end of the day another seventeen arrests had been made. The developers have called the defenders of the Point "vandals", "hooligans" and "criminals" who deserved to be put in jail. The outrage amongst the community intensified, as did the sadness and emptiness at the loss.

In 2002 the community is united against the development of Sandon Point. Arguments along the lines of "progress" and "job creation" by councillors and the business commu-

nity have fallen on deaf ears as the harsh realities of the destruction of the environment and Aboriginal and European heritage sites is brought home. These things, once destroyed, can never return. The Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy (SPATE) was set up on site in November 2000 to defend an ancient burial site and the cultural heritage values of the area. Uncle Ted "Guboo" Thomas, senior elder of the South Coast, gave his unequivocal support to the Embassy and declared "No Houses" at Sandon Point. Guboo passed away on Sunday, 19 May 2002. The following day a chilling icy wind and dark skies greeted Stockland's bulldozers as they turned the first sods of their egregious development.

In March 2001 a community picket line was set up at the Point. The picket was supported by the South Coast Labour Council and a Green Ban was placed on the site. Since that time the Picket has become a popular community centre, staffed around the clock by a diverse band of locals and people from throughout the Illawarra region. Thousands have visited the Picket - located as it is by the Wollongong to Thirroul cycleway, on a bluff overlooking the ocean and with a magnificent view to the north of the coastline.

The Picket and Embassy are defending a myriad of issues - Aboriginal and European heritage, endangered flora and fauna, threats of flooding, coastal recession and instability, community open space, contaminated lands, pollution, and traffic problems, to name but a few. The opposition to this valiant stand exists in the form of the developers - Stockland and BHP - and their political allies, such as Wollongong City Council, the NSW Land and Environment Court





# P O I N T

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(the 'Developers Court'), the ALP, and the local Chamber of Commerce. Greed drives the Sandon Point development, and the developers have spared no cost to push through their plans. There has been no compromise to the desires of the community to see cultural and environmental heritage protected and preserved.

For thousands of years the ancient burial ground has stood unmolested. The spirits protecting the land will ultimately decide the fate of this part of Australia. 'No Houses' may indeed be the final fate. Not through anything that the protestors or developers have done, but through the fact that this Country has a spirit and a soul which ultimately decided the fate of the human beings who dare to walk upon it. May the moon and stars shine over Sandon Point as clear as the air on a cool Autumn day. May the land and its secrets stay secure and untouched. May the spirit of Guboo prevail.

Michael Organ

guboo no doubt touched many people in different ways. you get that with empowering people; special people who leave their mark not only in their culture and people, but across the sands and cultural divides which so often shape this country.

for me, he prodded unknowings about aboriginal spirit, belief and culture. there was a wet, windy night at the embassy last february where he told amazing tales of the spirit of his land, his telepathy. with the eyes of a medicine man from dakota sitting beside him, he made the wind turn crazy and blow the tents almost inside out. all i could do was watch and listen with my eyes following the horizon over the point as lightening lashed it, over and over again. the rain passed and lightening stayed on all night; i stayed up watching it and time was nothing.

not only did he teach a young white australain girl cultural and spiritual anecdotes of a beautiful ancient culture, he showed also how wrong it is to destroy the ultimate spirit nesting in this land. as long as we continue to destroy the spirits which rest in these mountains, rivers, oceans and trees, we're gonna keep destroying the soul of ourselves as we live in this country.

no houses.

Ariane Lewis.