



## GARMA CAMPUS COMES ALIVE!!!

31/08/2012



**A familiar morning view from the Garma dining area, the kitchen and shelter has been cyclone proofed and now boasts new timber benches**

Following Galarrwuy Yunupingu's key forum speech in 2010 Federal Minister Jenny Macklin promised funds to revive the original concept of the Garma Festival as a place of learning and education. Any change to a festival as wonderful and multidimensional as Garma is bound to involve dispute and controversy. But in 2012 the new Garma is, by any account, delivering something that will make the festival even greater than it has been before. It will also ensure that the Garma site becomes a 365 day a year training and education campus.

The concept of the Garma Institute and the idea of a Garma campus is coming alive.

The vision is being implemented in step by step, steady, practical way by Denise Bowden, the General Manager of the Yothu Yindi Foundation with the local assistance of the indomitable Klaus Helms at the direction of Yolngu elders. Denise has been a central force ensuring financial management and constant overseeing of the Gulkula site. Klaus has been on the site at 5am for weeks working with the local contractors delivering the infrastructure developments.

One of the big issues for the Garma board was occupational health and safety. The festival each year was uninsurable. Now thanks to a lot of planning and careful practical implementation the Garma site meets all official health and occupational health and safety standards. But the

changes at the Garma are also making the whole site sustainable as a venue and more functional and useful year round for the Yolngu community.

The Indigenous Land Corporation have assisted the Gulkula site by providing a grant to install the new 300,000 litre water tank. The tank is fed by a natural bore which in turn feeds a series of smaller tanks. Over 4 kilometres of water pipes have been buried with a series of pumps which relay water around the new Garma site.

When 2000 or more Garma festival attendees arrive the toilet system is placed under great pressure. Everyone will remember the pump out trucks arriving every few hours to relieve the pressure. Now all of the ablutions blocks are connected to a main sewerage system in which all waste is processed through a series of ponds well away from the key campus areas. All this has been carefully designed in consultation with the Garma board and traditional owners. Most luxurious to share with you dear readers - there are now **HOT WATER SHOWERS** fed by the latest technology water heating.



Some things never change... Garma tent village

The Garma kitchen and dining area is a much loved meeting place where many significant national conversations have been held over the years. The whole structure has been re-fitted while retaining all of the good features of the original structure with its wonderful views of the escarpment.

The dining area is now cyclone proof and should last another 30 years without any trouble or maintenance. Steel purlins hold the roof in position and timber bearers that were attacked by the regions notorious white ants have been replaced.

The kitchen has been completely refurbished and is now a fully functioning catering facility, ideal for training as well as catering for functions of 500 people or more. The commercial kitchen is driven by gas not electricity and everyone is delighted with its new facilities. These

developments have been a long time coming for the Yothu Yindi Foundation, given that this site is a significant Yolngu traditional ceremonial meeting ground, opened to the public for over 14 years.

One of the great new building developments on the Garma site is the new main forum venue. Garratjambal House is a beautiful facility to the south of the kitchen. The ILC were familiar with President Ramos Horta in 2011 giving a wonderful key note address at the old key forum structure whilst the Garma team ran about locating buckets to collect the rain water seeping in around him through the holes in the roof. Many of the audience was soaked but most managed to squeeze in to shelter from the shower. Garratjambal House, therefore is a major development onsite, nestled amongst the stringybark trees and shaded for most of the day. It catches the east wind breeze and can seat an audience of 300 comfortably. The facility has a permanent new stage which can cater for a range of different events from music to conferences.



**The new Garratjambal House**



The old main forum structure will become a coffee shop ready for the next Garma festival in 2013. Classrooms are also planned and will also be ready for utilizing during the 2013 Garma Festival.

The festival is usually held in the first week of August each year. In 2012 it is being held in the first week of September. Given the amount of building and infrastructure that has been done,

some thought that even the smaller event this year would not be possible. In fact the reduced Garma was in many ways more successful as the Yothu Yindi Foundation was able to target their audience which stemmed from long term supporters, and new corporate groups that are interested in potential business enterprise within the north east Arnhem region.

Once again Indigenous and non-Indigenous inmates from the Northern Territory Correctional facilities have been a winning factor here. General Manager Denise Bowden struck a working relationship with Corrections and she and the Director of the NT Correctional Services Ken Middlebrook trialed the inmate community working party in 2011. Given it was such a successful program, an increased presence from 15 to 30 inmates were secured and brought on board to assist with the physical labor. This program was applied to both the Garma Festival and the Garma Institute developments. Kilometers of crushed limestone paths with lighting have been laid. The site is clean as a whistle thanks to their efforts and everyone associated with Garma hopes that their participation will become a permanent feature each year. The inmates have a chance to put back into their own community and to contribute to their family members well being. They removed white ant damaged trees, venomous snakes, and removed debris from the site. They pitched up to 300 tents, assisted the timber mill with the shifting of timber beams from the mill site to Gulkula. They built permanent bough shelters around the bunggul grounds as preparatory work for Garma 2013.

The other great initiative that continues is the Gumatj Timber project which is now being milled by Yolngu workers continuously on the site of Duphuma College. All of the refurbishment of the Garma site has utilized the timber cut from the mill pictured below.



Gumatj Corporation Timber Mill currently utilising the Dhupuma College site to provide materials for the Garma Campus refurbishment

The role of the correctional inmates and the participation of local firms employing Indigenous labor such as Deltareef has meant that everything that was planned has occurred on schedule and the conference theme is **Australia's Resources Boom A Stepping Stone to an Indigenous Future** beginning Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2013.



Corrections did a fantastic job at Garma this year...  
the participants also enjoyed the experience of being close to country and elders

By the end of the year the *bunggul* ground is being carefully revisited. The main stage will become a permanent facility that will be available throughout the year for performances.

For information about Garma go to [www.yyf.com.au](http://www.yyf.com.au)