

At home where two worlds collide

His students are considered “wild boys” and a hard group to crack, but Alice Springs lecturer **wayne barbour** is right at home among them.



text

Jason McIntosh

photograph

Jason McIntosh

above

Wayne Barbour

The Conservation and Land Management Lecturer has a special link with his students who are located in Tennant Creek, 500km north of his Alice Springs base. Wayne, who is of eastern Aranda descent, returned to his Central Australia birthplace which he left when he was removed from his family as a five-year-old and placed in Retta Dixon Homes in Darwin, managed by the Aboriginal Inland Mission.

The challenges of Aboriginal identity and the confusion of not belonging were elements of Wayne's life, but at a young age he also developed a passion for the environment and eventually became a highly successful cultural and natural land management specialist.

The land has been a consistent theme throughout his career which has included working in Top End Indigenous communities as a ranger co-ordinator, a stockman on cattle stations and as an Indigenous land management facilitator.

It was after relocating to Victoria in 2006, however, that Wayne soon felt an urge to return home. “There was an overwhelming and spiritual desire to go back to my ancestor country,” he said.

About the same time, a lecturing position at CDU's Alice Springs campus captured his attention and in late 2006, Wayne returned to Central Australia with his family.

“It was an excuse to return home and do something for my people, and to introduce my children to their Indigenous heritage which is so important for their life journey,” he said.

Wayne's first formal lecturing position involved a steep learning curve, but he said he has found great pleasure in helping his people and reconnecting with his family which is spread across Central Australia.

“I had to be myself and deliver subjects from their perspective. I found my cultural connection with these men made a huge difference,” he said.

This meant adapting his experiences and knowledge of Indigenous people in his backyard of Northern Australia to those in Central Australia.

“At first, it was a challenge. I had to think in a desert way and let go of my Top End experience, but once they got to know who I was the process changed because we developed the respect between us,” he said.

“Weed spraying is a classic example because to them (Indigenous people) killing plants doesn't make sense, some of them have a cultural value.”

His solution was to explain that dangerous bushfires were more of a threat to bush tucker. “It's all about final delivery and fitting education into the world they live,” Wayne said.

And the results have been impressive. His first group of Certificate I in Conservation Land Management students last year registered a 96 per cent pass rate. Many of them are now working with Wayne to complete their Certificate II in Conservation Land Management.

He said he was thrilled to see the efforts of his students, many of whom are his direct relations. “It gives me such a great feeling to see them work so hard,” he said.

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Conservation Land Management students in Tennant Creek Tony Junior Cutta (left) and Corey Hogan get to work.

