

**Andrea Lane**  
Guest Editor

**Nine artists, selected for their affinity with the environment, walked The Great South-West Walk earlier this year as part of a project that aims to present a body of new work at Portland Arts Centre in 2007. The diversity of their practice will ensure a rich interpretation of the experience. It is hoped the work will tour regionally and interstate.**

IMAGE, RIGHT: **Ilka White, drawing (detail), 2006**

## Great South-West Arts Walk

### The Great South-West Walk

Beginning and ending at the Visitor Information Centre in Portland, the 250km long Great South-West Walk is billed as one of the world's greatest out-door experiences. The walk encompasses many naturally occurring land formations, sea scapes and places of profound beauty. Notable features include Lawrence Rocks, the Enchanted Forest, Bridgewater Bay, the Blowholes, the Petrified Forest, the rugged Southern ocean along Discovery Bay and the Cobboboonee Forest.

The idea for the arts walk began early in 2005 when artists Ilka White and Carmel Wallace experienced a section of the Great South-West Walk.

Ilka, a Melbourne-based textile artist, had been selected several years earlier for the Portland *Art Company's* first Emerging Artist Residency Program and had since been involved in Birds Australia's Newhaven Project. Both experiences made a strong impact. Carmel, a local artist and printmaker who has made her home territory the subject of her artwork and her PhD thesis 'Art and Environment', also had several successful arts projects under her belt.

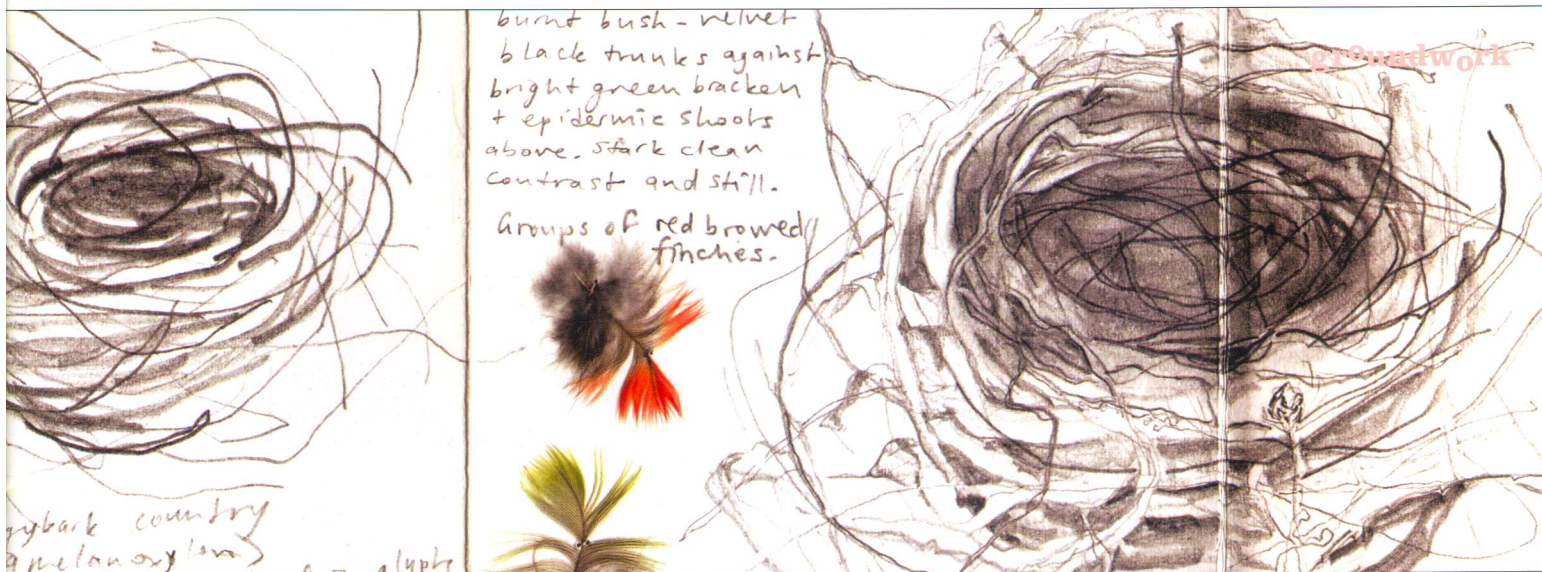
The community support was very strong. An in-kind contribution of a dedicated Communication Officer from Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority was a huge help in the administrative and logistic effort of sourcing

artists' availability for three whole weeks, feeding and accommodating them and keeping them dry. The pair also needed to arrange for speakers, field naturalists, friends of the GSWW, historians and conservation volunteers to provide support to the artists en route.

"It was really important that the whole experience be orchestrated in advance, to round out the experience for everyone involved, and to make sure that as artists we were as informed as possible about the land," explained White. "Involving so many people with a deep concern for the environment, a love of the country, was fundamental to the project."

The artists selected for the project were all known for their affinity and concern for the environment as demonstrated through their art practices. This would be an extraordinary





opportunity to immerse themselves in their passion.

In March 2006 nine handpicked artists gathered at the start of the Great South-West Walk to begin their three-week, 250km trek, to absorb, inhale and digest the unique beauty of the far south-west corner of Victoria.

#### THE ARTISTS:

**Carmel Wallace:** printmaking/drawing [Portland Vic]

**Ilka White:** textiles [Vic]

**John Wolseley:** drawing/painting [Bendigo /Melbourne Vic]

**Vicki Couzens:** mixed media [Koroit /Portland Vic]

**Peter Corbett:** video and installation [Portland Vic]

**Brian Laurence:** soundscapes [Vic]

**Nicky Hepburn:** jewellery and precious objects [Vic]

**Fiona Hall:** mixed media/sculpture [SA]

**Jan Learmonth:** sculpture [Vic]

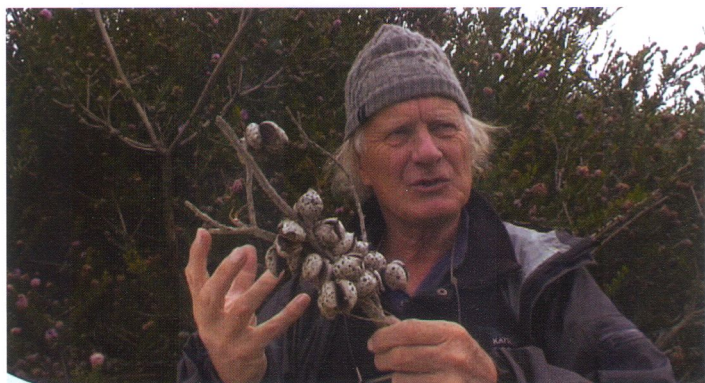
The artists' brief was to walk the *Walk* and then produce new art in response to that experience. The mix of artists was crucial to the experience. "We felt that bringing so many disciplines to the project meant that as artists we all benefited from being in the mix," explains Carmel. "This way the outcomes would be accessible to so many more people. Some people will be drawn to the textiles, some to the film, some to the drawings. We are envisaging a very comprehensive outcome."

The artists spent five days in each of the four sections of the *Walk*: the

Cobboboonee Forest, the Glenelg River and Gorge, Discovery Bay and Mount Richmond and Three Capes and Bays. Nearly all of the artists did almost all of the *Walk*, with a little juggling of plans to cope with some last minute emergencies.

Their journey began on March 21, 2006, celebrated with a smoking ceremony and a heartfelt speech from the Gunditjmara Elder who spoke of the significance of the project and 'walking this land together'.

The ability of artists to produce work en route varied depending on their practice. John Wolseley (drawing/painting) was producing work in situ from the start. "I did a lot of work in the Cobboboonee Forest section. I wanted my work to describe that sensation of how you walk



IMAGES:  
Stills from video by  
Peter Corbett

**John Wolseley**

**“It was a brilliantly imaginative idea...to experience the Walk not just with the usual two eyes and one nose, but with eight pairs of eyes and eight noses, all from different disciplines, was marvellous!”**

in a forest... scrambling, swaying scratching,” he said.

Video-maker Peter Corbett, with some purpose-bought lightweight equipment, also managed to get straight to work, shooting hours and hours of material that will ultimately be edited down to a more concise work of art, as well as a mini-documentary of the Walk.

Other artists were not so able to work in their usual way, but used the time to absorb the experience, examine the details, taking notes, collecting, sketching – and sharing their thoughts.

“It was a brilliantly imaginative idea,” enthused Wolseley. “To experience the *Walk* not just with the usual two eyes and one nose, but with eight pairs of eyes and eight noses, all from different

disciplines, was marvellous!”

The artists have now resumed their lives and begun their work. All were overwhelmingly positive about the experience – the concept, the execution, the *bon vivant*.

Vicki Couzens, an Indigenous artist who recently led the creation of 35 possum skin cloaks for the opening ceremony of 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, a project co-ordinated by Regional Arts Victoria, was particularly thrilled to walk through her grandmother’s Country. “I tried to look beyond the views, to see and feel the unseen,” she said.

Ilka White spoke of multiple epiphanies. “It truly changed my relationship with the world. And there was definitely a

feeling of returning to a secret childhood world. To lie cradled among the dunes being slowly buried by sand and swirling winds. To see views so beautiful that I didn’t know whether to run back and get the others or stay and keep it all to myself.”

One of the remarkable things about this walk, which every artist noted, is that it has been built, and is maintained, by volunteer effort, a mammoth task and an insight into the community’s passion for their patch.

#### Further information

<http://www.greatsouthwestwalk.com>  
<http://www.greatsouthwestwalk-art.com>  
<http://www.netsvictoria.org>



IMAGES:  
Stills from video by  
Peter Corbett



ABOVE:  
*Spiny-cheeked honey eater at  
Lake Monabeong*  
56 x 76 cms, watercolour and  
carbonised wood  
John Wolsley 2006  
photo: Terence Bogue

RIGHT:  
*Red Sea 2*  
120 x 120 cms, discarded red  
plastic cray-pot throats found at  
Discovery Bay and black plastic  
cable ties  
Carmel Wallace 2006  
photo: Carmel Wallace

