Factsheet 01 – Why have some trees become ‘living monuments’?

Australian Curriculum Links

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Quirky fact:
The first meeting of the Australian Labor Party was held under a gum tree in 1891.

Background Information

Historic trees are a living but very vulnerable part of our heritage. Even though trees may live for hundreds of years, they eventually die. Trees of cultural and historical importance to Queensland are listed on the Queensland Heritage Register. These trees are connected to milestone events and significant people in history.

The Tree of Knowledge at Barcaldine is perhaps Australia’s most famous tree. From early settlement days this majestic ghost gum, *Eucalyptus Papuana*, attracted special attention becoming popular as a community meeting place. The tree was first known as the ‘Alleluia Tree’, so called because local members of the Salvation Army congregated to worship under its branches. Bullock drivers who were constantly on the move throughout Western Queensland also used the tree as place to gather and swap yarns and news from along the trails.

However, the tree gained its enduring status as a historical landmark in May 1891, when Barcaldine became the centre for the ‘Great Shearers’ Strike’. Numbers vary, but it is thought that up to 3,000 striking shearers unified under the rebel ‘Eureka’ flag, to protest against poor working conditions and low wages. Thirteen of their leaders were subsequently arrested and sentenced to three-year terms of imprisonment. From this tumultuous period came the beginnings of what is now the Australian Labor Party.

There were no organised political parties in those days. Instead, politically-minded citizens formed alliances on different issues as they arose. The Labor Party changed this by forcing non-Labor politicians to form political parties to oppose it. The Australian Labor Party was the nation’s first political party and is one of the oldest political parties in the western world.

Beside the tree is a monument in the shape of a pair of shears which reads:

*Honour the men and women of the Labour movement who congregated in this area and, through their courage, determination and dedication to the principles, ideals and objectives of the labour movement, played a leading role in the formation of the Labor Party and further spearheaded the many reforms that resulted in the vastly improved way of life for the Australian people generally.*

Believed to be between 160 and 190 years old, the Tree of Knowledge was poisoned by parties unknown in 2006. The tree was removed and a sapling, propagated from the original, is now growing at the Australian Workers Heritage Centre. Ironically, the Tree of Knowledge also achieved National Heritage listing in 2006. A memorial has been erected to commemorate the history of the Tree of Knowledge and its significance to the Australian Labor Party, Barcaldine and Queensland.
**Other Trees**

Burke and Wills Dig Tree — Thargomindah  
Moonah Creek 'Hanging Tree' — Ardmore Station, Mount Isa  
Robber’s Tree — Cunnamulla  
Sir Sidney Kidman’s Tree of Knowledge — Glengyle Station near Birdsville  
Tree of Knowledge — Camooweal  
Hodgkinson’s Marked Tree — Mount Isa

**Points of Interest**

- **Australian Workers Heritage Centre, Barcaldine**  
The Australian Workers Heritage Centre is the only national attraction dedicated to celebrating the lives and proud heritage of ordinary working people – telling the stories of the railway workers and blacksmiths, the farmers, nurses and teachers who shaped the nation.

  Ash Street, Barcaldine QLD 4725  
  Cost: Fees apply  
  Hours: 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Saturday  
         10.00am to 4.00pm Sunday  
  Phone: (07) 4651 2422  
  Email: barcy@australianworkersheritagecentre.com.au  
  Website: www.australianworkersheritagecentre.com.au  

- **The Barcaldine and District Historical Museum, Barcaldine**
- **Wanpa-rda Matilda Outback Educational Centre, Barcaldine**
- **Australian Stockman’s Hall of Fame and Outback Heritage Centre, Longreach**
- **Qantas Founders Museum, Longreach**
- **Waltzing Matilda Centre, Winton**
- **Visit the Tree of Knowledge Memorial, on Oak Street in Barcaldine**

**Inquiry Questions**

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<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>Why are trees such an important part of both natural and built environment in the Outback?</td>
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<td>Why are fires and floods so significant in the Outback and how do people respond to them?</td>
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<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>Why have trees become symbols of significant events in this area?</td>
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<td>Which historic events from the Outback have national significance?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science</td>
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<td>What are the roles of trees in the food chain, and how have human activities affected this?</td>
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**FURTHER INFORMATION**

**Australian Workers Heritage Centre**  
PO Box 10, Barcaldine QLD 4725  
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Website: www.australianworkersheritagecentre.com.au

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**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- **Barcaldine Shire Council Library**  
  Phone: (07) 4651 1170  
  Email: barcylib@bigpond.com.au

- **Department of Environment and Heritage Protection**  

- **Barcaldine Shire Council**  
  www.barcaldinerc.qld.gov.au

- **Commonwealth Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities**  

- **FURTHER INFORMATION**

**REFERENCES**

- **New South Wales Department of Education**  
  www.cap.nsw.edu.au

- **Department of Environment and Heritage Protection**  