



above: Students from Alexandria Park Community School; inset: The canoe at The Rocks Discovery Museum.

Aboriginal students make traditional canoe

A traditional indigenous bark canoe handcrafted by year 8 students has recently become a standout feature at The Rocks Discovery Museum.

The canoe, called a *nowey*, was made by students from Alexandria Park Community School and is a scale model of the traditional stringy bark canoes used on Sydney Harbour by the Cadigal people.

The canoe-building project was the result of a partnership between Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority and Sydney's Aboriginal community, aimed at paving the way towards a better understanding of Aboriginal culture.

"*Nowey* were originally used by the Cadigal people in the waters of Sydney Harbour for fishing, travel, trade and communication of messages and news," said Robert Domm, the Foreshore Authority's Chief Executive Officer.

"This curriculum linked project was designed to revive ancient Aboriginal skills and engender pride, knowledge and understanding in the mostly indigenous year 8 students.

"It also creates new cross cultural opportunities, as many non-indigenous students were involved and others from all around the world will see it for years to come in The Rocks Discovery Museum.

"The museum is about interpreting this area's original heritage and ensuring that Aboriginal culture is a living entity. This beautifully crafted *nowey* has taken pride of place in the museum as a symbolic piece, bringing the past together with the present," Mr Domm said.

The students also completed a full-scale canoe early this year, which led the parade of boats into Darling Harbour on Australia Day 2008, and was rowed by one of Alexandria Park Community School's year 12 students. The event marked the first time in more than 180 years that a *nowey* made in the traditional way had been paddled on Sydney Harbour.

Remaining true to the Aboriginal custom, the male students were largely responsible for hand-crafting the *nowey*, while the females created their own role by documenting the process through film, interviews and a picture gallery.

Visitors to the museum can view the footage and see how the canoes were built using traditional methods and materials, including bark sourced from the South Coast and Maitland districts and retrieved by traditional arborists. Artwork produced by the students as part of the project is also on display.

The Foreshore Authority, the Tribal Warrior Association, the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, State Forests of NSW and National Parks and Wildlife Services all worked together to assist the school to secure resources and materials and locate traditional arborists and canoe builders.

The Authority will provide ongoing funding to Alexandria Park Community School to continue the program.

The project was initiated as part of the 'Principles of Cooperation Agreement' between the Foreshore Authority and the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, which was formally signed in March 2008. The agreement will help

ensure that Aboriginal issues are given proper consideration in the future management of The Rocks, Darling Harbour and Barangaroo.

"The agreement is an important step forward for both parties. It promotes reconciliation and an understanding of the spiritual and cultural ties of the Land Council, while recognising the Authority's statutory obligations," Mr Domm said.

"It will guide the creation of formal communication and negotiation processes between the Land Council and the Authority, including ongoing consultation about the authenticity of indigenous exhibits at The Rocks Discovery Museum."