

MEDIA RELEASE

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Cultural and spiritual site near St. George one of many to be restored

The Weengallon Aboriginal Rock Wells, beside the Barwon Highway between Goondiwindi and St George, have recently been restored as part of a state-wide management plan.

The project was a joint effort between local Traditional Owner people, the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee (QMDC), and the Department of Main Roads.

Regional Coordinator for QMDC's Indigenous Program, Fiona Wellington, said "This project has led to the better management of a significant site for Aboriginal people."

"But it has also led to more Aboriginal rock well sites being identified for restoration works and the development of an Aboriginal Rock Well Cultural Resource and Values Management Plan," she said.

The Weengallon Rock Wells traditionally form part of a trail of Aboriginal rock wells extending to northern Queensland.

A further seven sites, so far, have been identified as part of the trail, with the next one beside the Moonie Highway, near Moonie, set to commence restoration in March 2007.

Fiona said that the site at Weengallon has held specific significance for the Goomeroi and Bigumbul peoples, and is still of cultural importance to Traditional Owners as far a-field as Mt. Isa.

Known in the local Aboriginal language as 'Ngaru-gi Gali' (to drink), there are six wells at the Weengallon site, some of which are up to three metres deep.

"The restoration began with the cleaning out of sediment and algae from the wells, using vacuum extraction, and clearing weeds around the site," said Fiona.

Road signs identifying the rock wells as a significant cultural area have also been erected, giving visitors some insight to the history and spiritual significance of the site.

"What is known of the history of the Weengallon rock wells is fascinating," Fiona said.

"They were a very important water source for Aboriginal people in the journey from across Queensland that many tribes used to make every three years to attend trading and ceremonial activities at Boobera Lagoon, near Goondiwindi."

Fiona said that an interpretive walk would also be installed in the area behind the wells that would include identification of bush tucker and other native species.

"This will mean that local Aboriginal people can share the rich history of the rock wells with the broader community, and show how Aboriginal people interact with and manage the landscape," she said.

"Over time we hope it becomes a popular stopping place for travellers to learn more of the cultural and spiritual significance of the area to Aboriginal people, as well as the wider community."

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Caption: Above, the Rock Wells lay empty until the restoration; and, below, after the restoration, the wells began to fill from under-ground, fresh water aquifers.

