



### Where I work Chris Wilson

**A**s a proud member of the Aboriginal Ngarrindjeri, Kurna and Latje Latje Nations and an archaeologist at Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia, I am interested in walking the land. For me, that means working 'on country': talking to elders and learning about my community's cultural heritage as I explore the Ngarrindjeri Lands of the Lower Murray, Lakes and Coorong region of South Australia.

In this photograph, taken at Pomberuk, or Hume Reserve, on the River Murray, I'm sitting on what had been the base of a rainwater tank built by the local Aboriginal people between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. The Ngarrindjeri community is working with the local council to conserve the area, and is regrowing native plants such as umbrella bush (*Acacia ligulata*) to prevent erosion. Some are visible in the background.

In my PhD programme, I surveyed the River Murray's banks, excavating shell, animal bone, plant remains and stone artefacts. With Morgana Disspain, an

archaeologist at Southern Cross University in Lismore, New South Wales, I analysed otoliths, or ear bones, of the endangered Murray cod (*Maccullochella peelii*), Australia's largest freshwater fish. An otolith's size and structure can be used to estimate the length of the fish it came from, and how long it lived.

Aboriginal occupation in the region goes back 10,000 years, and I found stone artefacts, a bone point and a 5,500-year-old Murray cod otolith whose size indicated a fish about 2.2 metres long. That's evidence that the people living here were experts in fishing, using spears with hafted bone points. Elders, who can interpret our finds on site, associate large fish with important gatherings.

This site inspires me because my people have occupied this landscape for tens of thousands of years. As I go through the layers of excavation, I'm also pulling back the layers of my history, my culture and my identity.

**Chris Wilson** is an archaeologist at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia. **Interview by Josie Glausiusz.**

Photographed for *Nature* by  
Iain Bond.