

# Lesson 3: Ranch Billabong, a case study

## Task 1

### Ranch Billabong introduction and location

To the west of Dimboola lies the Ranch Billabong, a small body of water, now connected to the Wimmera River with a pipeline. This is a significant site for the Wotjobaluk Nations peoples and is managed by the Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC).



**Figure 1.** Ranch Billabong, Dimboola

1. Open Google Earth and enter 'Dimboola' in the Search bar.
2. Zoom into Dimboola and find the bridge that crosses the Wimmera River. This is Wimmera Road.
3. On the western side of the river, directly in line with the bridge in the bend of the river lies Ranch Billabong (see Figure 2).



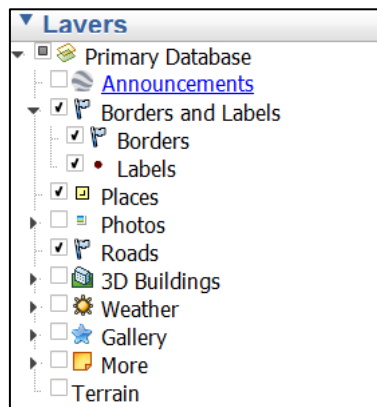
**Figure 2.** Aerial photograph showing the location of Ranch Billabong.

Source: Google Earth, Map data ©2024 Google.

### **Skill: Sketch mapping**

In order to record the location of important features, geographers often use a sketch map. When drawing a map, you will need to focus closely on the landscape. Follow these steps to draw a sketch of Ranch Billabong.

1. Using Google Earth, zoom and drag the image so that it shows the same area as that shown in figure 2.
2. In the 'Layers' menu in Google Earth, check the boxes for borders and labels, places and roads as shown in Figure 3.

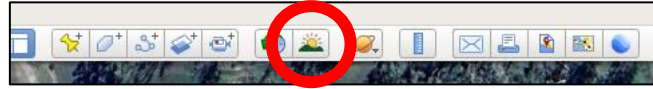


**Figure 3.** Layers menu from Google Earth.

Source: Google Earth, Map data ©2024 Google.

3. On a blank piece of paper, draw a rectangle the same shape as the border in Figure 2.
4. Sketch and label the Wimmera River on your map. Water features such as rivers are usually shaded blue.
5. Add an arrow showing the direction that the river flows.

6. Sketch and label Ranch Billabong.
7. Sketch the roads onto your map. Roads are usually shown as grey or black.
  - a. Label Wimmera Road and Horseshoe Bend Road.
8. Sketch and shade in green the treed reserve that surrounds Ranch Billabong.
9. Locate and label the town of Dimboola.
10. Click on the 'View in Google Maps' icon from the menu at the top of the page (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Menu at the top of Google Earth showing the Google Maps icon.

Source: Google Earth, Map data ©2024 Google.

This will take you to a map showing the same area as the Google Earth map that will still be open on your desktop. The map shows more features that you can place on your map.

11. Add other key features of this environment on your sketch map.



In Australia, small lakes such as these are known as billabongs and were probably once part of the nearby river. When the river flooded, water spilt into the billabong. Plants and animals such as fish, frogs and insects relied on this water to survive. However, when Horseshoe Bend Road was built it cut off the supply of floodwater to the billabong.

12. On your map, add arrows to show the likely path of floodwaters into the billabong that occurred before the road was built.
13. Finish your map with a north arrow, a legend showing any symbols or colours you have used, a title and the source of your information.

## History and significance

The billabong and the land either side of the Wimmera River have been home to Wotjobluk Nation peoples for many generations. The land, the river and the billabong provided a reliable source of fresh water, food and materials such as firewood. When Europeans arrived in the area, First Nation peoples were often displaced from their land and sent to live in missions, often run by religious groups. One such mission, Ebenezer mission, was located north of Dimboola. You can read about this mission [here](#).

When the mission was still operating but coming to an end, half the population was removed from Ebenezer and placed at Lake Tyres in Gippsland. Then after it closed completely in 1904, some of the group remained living in Antwerp at the reserve and the rest of the people moved in closer to Dimboola and lived around the billabong. Later on, a small tin shack was purpose build for transient community to come and go as the needed. The shack became known as 'The Ranch.' The building still stands and is recognized by the Victorian government as a significant place in the history of the state.



Figure 5. The Ranch. Source: [www.bglc.com.au%2Fbglc-country-plan](http://www.bglc.com.au%2Fbglc-country-plan)

Dylan Clarke from the BGLC lived at The Ranch as a boy and these are some of his memories:

*“A peaceful place of gathering, sharing and nurturing – that’s how I remember it. The Ranch/Billabong is one of few remaining places that connect with how our mob lived before and after settlement.*

*We were told stories of the area and how families lived and survived.*

*As kids you don’t really notice much around you, you’re more or less enjoying the moment - but as you get older you realise what the old people meant by their stories. I’ll always treasure the times our families spent at the Ranch/Billabong. I would love for future generations to experience that culture and history.*

*The place is in poor shape and needs to be restored, including a general clean up, revegetation of native plants and re-directing water back into the Billabong.”*

Dylan Clarke, Chair, Barengi Gadjin Land Council

Source: [https://vewh.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/word\\_doc/0007/515788/Reflections\\_2018-19\\_accessible-version\\_web.docx](https://vewh.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/word_doc/0007/515788/Reflections_2018-19_accessible-version_web.docx)

## **Task 2**

1. Find The Ranch building on Google Earth and add it to your sketch map.
2. Dylan Clarke would like to see some water returned to the billabong. Why would that be important for people and the environment?

## **Environmental watering**

When water is returned to the natural environment, such as Ranch Billabong, it is known as environmental watering. This can help to restore the natural ecosystems but not everyone considers it to be a good idea.

1. Watch this [video](#) and make a list of the benefits of environmental watering.
  
2. Why do you think some people are opposed to environmental watering? Discuss this with your classmates.

3. Read about the environmental watering that has occurred at Ranch Billabong using these links and make notes below.

[Environmental Water](#)

[The Wimmera System](#)

[Watering of Ranch Billabong](#)

4. How do you feel about the environmental watering that has occurred at Ranch Billabong? Give some reasons for your answer.

5. This type of watering is sometimes called 'cultural flows'. What do you think this term means?