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## **New evidence reveals a millennium-old dingo was ritually buried along the Darling (Baaka) River**

Dingo burial site near Broken Hill reveals deep Barkindji connection as custodians work with archaeologists



Dingoes have lived with First Nations people in Australia for thousands of years. Photo: Adobe Images (under license).

A millennium-old dingo deliberately buried by Barkindji ancestors along the Baaka, or Darling River, is offering rare insight into the depth of relationships between First Nations people and dingoes in western New South Wales.

The dingo appears to have been buried with great care in a purpose-built midden, which continued to be tended and “fed” with river mussel shells for centuries, suggesting an ongoing relationship between the buried dingo and local people. This is the first time this “feeding” practice has been observed archaeologically anywhere in the world.

Project lead [Dr Amy Way](#) said: “While Barkindji people have always known about this cultural practice, this discovery is really powerful because it provides new details on the depth of that relationship between Barkindji people and dingoes.”

Dr Way, who holds a joint position as archaeologist at the Australian Museum and lecturer in

[Archaeology](#) at the University of Sydney, has been working closely with Barkindji custodians over the past five years, dating and recording Barkindji cultural heritage in Kinchega National Park.

The dingo, known as garli in Barkindji language, was discovered in a road cutting, its skeleton emerging due to erosion at a site in Kinchega National Park. The site is near the Menindee Lakes along the Darling River, about 100 kilometres south-east of Broken Hill. The male dingo was deliberately buried between 963-916 years ago within a riverside midden, as determined by radiocarbon dating.

“If garli were buried with the same care and respect we see for human ancestors, including mothers and elders, it tells us these animals were profoundly valued and loved,” Dr Way said.

Lead author and dingo specialist Dr Loukas Koungoulos from University of Western Australia said: “We know dingoes were tamed and lived alongside people as part of the community. This analysis details the depth of this relationship.”



The garli skeleton site before excavation, Kinchega National Park; garli articulated skeleton. Photos: Amy Way

### **First direct dating**

Working alongside Barkindji custodians, archaeologists from the University of Sydney, the Australian Museum, the Australian National University and the University of Western Australia have revealed new evidence of millennium-old ritual dingo burial practices along the Baaka.

The research includes the first direct dating of a dingo from the Baaka (Darling) River system, extending known burial traditions far beyond southeastern Australia.

Funded by the Australian Museum Foundation, the research is published in [Australian Archaeology](#) today.



Dave Doyle, Loukas Koungoulos and Amy Way excavating the garli. Photos: Sam Player, Barb Quayle

Analysis of the garli's remains shows that he was male and lived to an advanced age for a dingo (4-7 years). His teeth were heavily worn, suggesting a long life and extensive use, and he had healed traumatic injuries, including broken ribs and a broken lower leg, indicating prolonged care. The researchers believe the garli may have been out hunting and sustained severe injuries, consistent with being kicked by a kangaroo. He survived due to the care of the Barkindji people.

At the time of his death, the garli was buried in a midden that appears to have been newly initiated either shortly before or alongside the burial. The site continued to be added to for centuries after his death.

Barkindji Elders propose that these ongoing additions formed part of a "feeding" ritual that honoured the garli as an ancestor and was maintained across multiple generations.

### **Evidence of long life and care**

"What stands out about the garli is that he was old and well cared for," Dr Koungoulos said.

"The healed injuries, worn teeth and careful burial tell us this animal lived a long life alongside people, and that his death was marked intentionally and with respect."



Amy Way, Barb Quayle, Loukas Koungoulos and Dave Doyle looking at the garli before excavation.  
Photo: Sam Player

Analysis of the garli provides new evidence that ancestral dingo burial practices extended further north and west along the Baaka system than previously documented.

“This confirms these traditions were much more widespread than we once thought,” Dr Kougoulos said. “Dingoes like this garli weren’t simply tolerated around camps. They were tamed, lived with people and were embedded in daily life.”

The burial was first identified by Barkindji Elder Uncle Badger Bates and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) archaeologist Dan Witter several years ago as erosion exposed the garli’s remains. Excavation and analysis were carried out at the request of the Menindee Aboriginal Elders Council, which has guided the care of the garli throughout the research.



Return to country of the garli, which can be seen lying on paperbark on the table. Left to Right: Dr Amy Way, Aunty Cheryl Blore, Aunty Patsy Quayle, Uncle Badger Bates, Dr Sam Player, Dr Rebecca Jones, Aunty Evelyn Bates, Dr Loukas Kougoulos, Dave Doyle and Aunty Barb Quayle. Photo: Australian Museum

From the outset, Barkindji Elders emphasised the importance of ceremonial care. Earlier stages of the work included smoking ceremonies and earlier this year the garli was returned to Country.

“This research reinforces what Barkindji people have always known,” Dr Way said. “These relationships with animals, ancestors and Country were deep, deliberate and ongoing.”

#### **Interviews:**

**Dr Amy Mosig Way**, research archaeologist at the University of Sydney and Australian Museum

**Dr Loukas Kougoulos**, Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Western Australia and research associate at the Australian Museum

**Dave Doyle** (Barkindji custodian, research partner, and co-excavator of the garli).

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**Uncle Badger Bates**, Senior Barkindji Elder who initially discovered the garli (phone and email to be confirmed)

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**Media: note to please try and acknowledge:**

- Uncle Badger Bates who first identified the garli in 2000 with NPWS ranger Dan Witters.
- The Menindee Aboriginal Elders Council for its cultural guidance and for its partnership in the field and beyond.
- Dave Doyle (Barkindji custodian) and Barb Quayle (Barkindji Elder) who has partnered on this project since and co-excavated the garli.
- National Parks and Wildlife Service (West Darling Area) for their support of the project.

**Download** [photos, illustration of skeleton and video here](#). Paper on request.

**Research:** Author, N. et al 'Garli: A millennium-old dingo burial on the Baaka (Darling River), Kinchega National Park, Menindee Lakes, Western New South Wales' (*Australian Archaeology* 2026) DOI: 10.1080/03122417.2026.2650909

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