

# tangled

## DESTINIES

### Interrogating the WATER BUFFALO exhibit

Here are two objects from the *Tangled Destinies* exhibition, both associated with water buffalo in Australia.



What can we learn from the water buffalo exhibit about the relationship between land and people in Australia over time?

- 1 Suggest what they are, and how each might work. (The answers are on page 10.)
- 2 Suggest why people might need to develop such innovations to deal with water buffalo in Australia.

A National Museum of Australia  
B National Museum of Australia

The water buffalo is not native to Australia. Like most introduced species, it has brought with it both benefits and harm. Read through the information on page 10 on the history of the water buffalo in Australia, and keep a note of these benefits and harm in this grid.

Aspect	Benefits	Harm
Tourism		
Environment		
Economy		
Aboriginal life		
National identity		
Food		
Commercial products		
Disease		
Other impacts		

- Water buffalo were introduced from Indonesian islands in the 1820s as a source of food. About 40 were imported at this time.
- By the 1980s there were an estimated 400 000 in northern Australia.
- Many of these became feral and were infected with tuberculosis and brucellosis, and threatened the health of those that were being domesticated for commercial purposes.
- A cull program in the 1980s eliminated the diseases, and there are now about 30 000 domesticated water buffalo, tuberculosis and brucellosis free.
- Breeders have now mixed two types — swamp and riverine. Swamp buffalo became a serious environmental problem in the Northern Territory when animals imported from Asia escaped and became feral.
- Riverine buffalo were introduced from North America in 1994, to set up a cross-breeding program to produce a new breed that had the best qualities of each type.
- Water buffalo have been imported from Italy and Bulgaria, for cheese (buffalo mozzarella) and even ice-cream.
- There are two principal products from water buffalo — meat and hides. There is also a niche market for milk.
- Some Aboriginal people, such as the Murrinhpatha, have incorporated the water buffalo into ceremonies and traditional painting.
- Organised hunting safaris for water buffalo bring tourism to the Northern Territory, and help keep the numbers of wild animals down.
- Water buffalo love to wallow in mud — which can be very destructive to the natural environment.
- Water buffalo are now farmed in all states except Queensland.
- The water buffalo is now an accepted image of the Northern Territory — part of its identity.



Btec Sign, Northern Territory  
 In use 1980s – 1990s donated by the Arid Zone Research Institute of the Northern Territory  
 Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries  
 National Museum of Australia



Made by Murrinhpatha people  
 Port Keats, NT,  
 National Museum of Australia

## Developing your ideas about land and people in Australia over time

A study of the water buffalo exhibit in the *Tangled Destinies* exhibition at the National Museum of Australia helps me to understand that:

Aspect	The idea you have developed
Environment	
Attitudes	
Innovation	
People	
Introduced species	
Agriculture	
Habitat	

### Answers from page 9

The vehicle is a water buffalo catcher. The driver is able to keep up with the water buffalo and trap its head and horns in the mechanical arm on the right-hand side of the vehicle.

The second object is a collar that contains a tracking device, and is fitted to a water buffalo had been caught and then released — to find out the location of that animal's herd.



Water buffalo caught with the 'bionic arm' on the catcher, 1970s  
 Australian Broadcasting Commission







DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY  
PRODUCTION

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**DISEASE CONTROL  
AREA**

TUBERCULOSIS & BRUCELLOSIS  
THIS GATE MUST REMAIN

**CLOSED**



