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# NGAUWUDU—MITCHELL PLATEAU

## The Ngauwudu landscape

Ngauwudu is the name Wunambal Aboriginal people give to the Mitchell Plateau area in the far north Kimberley. At Punamii-unpuu, the Mitchell River and its tributaries have carved spectacular gorges and waterfalls into the sandstone bordering the laterite-capped plateau.

The area is biologically important with landscapes around the plateau varying from mangroves and swamps to woodlands and lush rainforest patches, with diverse wildlife. Darnarna (livistona palm) woodland is found on the lateritic soils of the plateau. Endemic to the north Kimberley, darnarna (*Livistona eastonii*) may grow 18 metres tall. Some palms are up to 280-years-old.

The rugged sandstone areas are home to some rare residents such as the monjon (a small rock wallaby), the rough-scaled python and dalal, the black grasswren.



## Wunambal country

Wunambal Aboriginal people have lived in the vicinity of Ngauwudu for thousands of years. Wunambal people refer to Wandjina as Gulingi. They believe that Gulingi and Wunggurr creators travelled the land making the earth, seas, mountains, rivers, waterholes and all living things. The Gulingi and Wunggurr then gave the Wunambal people the land and the law for living in the land. Wunambal people welcome visitors to their country but ask that visitors respect their responsibility and authority for the land and the Wandjina-Wunggurr Law.



## Gulingi

Gulingi or Wandjina are associated with regeneration, creation of rain, renewal of resources and continuation of life. Gulingi left themselves throughout the region as landscape features and distinctive cave paintings.

## Wunggurr

Wunggurr are creator snakes: their winding travels through the country with Gulingi made the rivers. Many came from the seas, and now reside in deep pools and waterholes.

## Punamii-unpuu

Punamii-unpuu, the Mitchell Falls area, is culturally and spiritually significant for Wunambal people. Wunggurr travelled from various places to meet up at Punamii-unpuu which is now one of their main homes. It is also a creation place where the spirits of children and other living things yet to be born are found.

## European exploration

It was not until 1921 that Europeans explored the area. William Easton led a State government expedition into the north Kimberley, naming the Mitchell River after Sir James Mitchell, then Premier of Western Australia.

In 1965 a mining camp was established on the plateau by Amax Bauxite.

## Where is it?

The plateau is 350 kilometres north east of Derby and 270 kilometres north west of Wyndham by air. Vehicle access is via the Mitchell Plateau track (4WD only) from the Kalumburu Road, 172 kilometres north of the Gibb River Road junction. The track may have wash-outs and corrugations so drive with extreme care. Tracks north of the airstrip are rough while tracks north of Anuayu (Surveyor's Pool) are very rough and may be impassable. Tracks and roads may be closed during the wet season (November to April).

## Caution

In the Kimberley, travelling on tracks and roads other than major highways during the wet season (November to April) is hazardous and dangerous. This is particularly the case in this remote area. Check road conditions with Main Roads Western Australia (phone 1800 013 314) or the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley.

## Aerial access

Air charter companies fly to the airstrip on Ngauwudu. During the dry season (May to October) helicopter flights and ground tours are available. Contact local tourist bureaux and travel agents for details and bookings.

**Wunambal  
Gaambera  
Aboriginal  
Corporation**



**DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION  
AND LAND MANAGEMENT**

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## Facilities

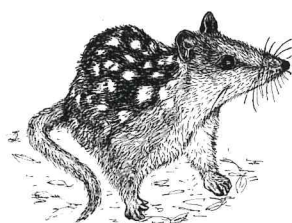
Visitors should be totally self-sufficient as this is a remote area with few facilities. Throughout the dry season (May to October), fuel, food and mechanical repairs are available from Drysdale River Station (phone (08) 9161 4326). Fuel and food are also available from Kalumburu.

## Camping

There are camping areas with toilets at Munurru (King Edward River Crossing) and at Punamii-unpuu (King Edward River Crossing) and at Punamii-unpuu. It is advisable to boil or treat water taken from creeks before drinking. Do not leave food or rubbish unattended where animals can scavenge. Please take your rubbish with you as there is no rubbish collection facility. Collect firewood only from the designated firewood collection zones. Use fuel stoves wherever possible and use firewood sparingly, as dead wood is an important ecological resource.

## Pets

Pets are not permitted.



## Rangers

A ranger is based at Punamii-unpuu camping area from May to October.

## Nearest CALM office

Kimberley Regional Office, Messmate Way, Kununurra. Phone (08) 9168 4200.

## Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation

Kandiwal, PMB 16, via Wyndham, 6740. Phone (08) 9161 4405.

## What to do

Walking, nature observation, scenic helicopter flights. Visitor activities such as guided walks are held periodically; check with the ranger.

## Punamii-unpuu—Mitchell Falls Walk

The 6km return walk to Punamii-unpuu (Mitchell Falls) from the camping area is moderate to difficult as it traverses rocky terrain. Take care near the many cliffs. The track continues past Little Mertens Falls and Big Mertens Falls.

Wunambal people know the falls as a powerful place for their Wandjina-Wunggurr law and one of the main homes for Wunggurr. They ask visitors to show respect, approach the area quietly, and stop for a moment to think about where they are.

## Aunauyu—Surveyor's Pool Walk

It is an easy to moderate 8km return walk to Aunauyu (Surveyor's Pool) from the car park. Aunauyu is also an important place for Wunggurr. The big white rocks found there are the eggs of the snake.

## Swimming

Aboriginal traditional owners ask that you do not swim in the deep pools at Punamii-unpuu (Mitchell Falls) and Aunauyu (Surveyor's Pool). Wunggurr creator snakes live in these deep pools and may punish for this disrespect. Only swim in the Mitchell River above the falls or in the creek above the falls at Aunauyu.

## Aboriginal Sites

Aboriginal sites are of special significance to Aboriginal people and important to the cultural heritage of all Australians. They are also protected by law. Do not touch paintings or engravings and do not disturb or remove artefacts.

