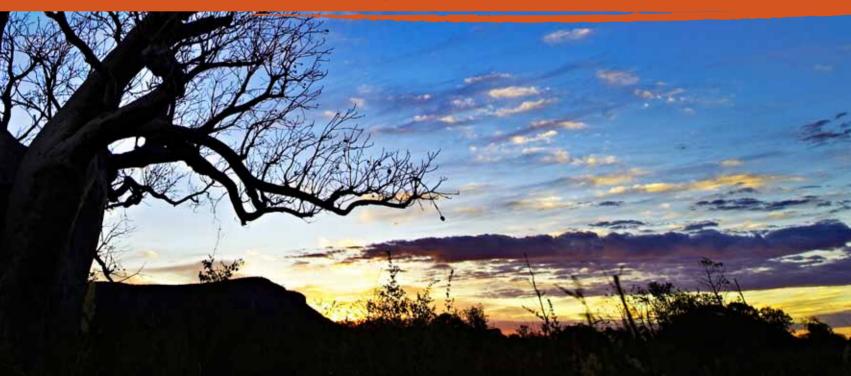


Australian Government

Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities

One Place, Many Stories: West Kimberley



This publication draws on the Australian Heritage Council final assessment of national heritage values of the west Kimberley.

For more information on the National Heritage List and to view the Australian Heritage Council final assessment, visit www.heritage.gov.au

Front cover: Boab tree at sunset, located on El Questro Station

Photo credit: Tourism Western Australia

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Design: www.WhiteFox.com.au



inagine a list of the places which define Australia. The west Kimberley simply belongs there

Tony Burke, Environment Minister

The west Kimberley is one place with many stories. Renowned for its dramatic landscapes and rich Indigenous culture, the region weaves together a remarkable account of the evolution of the Australian continent with Aboriginal history dating back more than 40,000 years.

These stories are part of an iconic living landscape that features sheer escarpments, pristine rivers cutting through sandstone plateaux and ancient coral reefs, creating spectacular waterfalls and deep gorges. Its remoteness has created a haven of biodiversity that supports plant and animal species found nowhere else on the Australian continent. This biodiversity has been sustained by thousands of years of Indigenous land management practices such as looking after country through fire burning and cultural maintenance activities.

The west Kimberley also tells the story of European exploration and settlement, from William Dampier's landing at Karrakatta Bay to the development of rich and vibrant pastoral and pearling industries that continue today.

The National Heritage List recognises and celebrates places of outstanding heritage value to our Australian nation. The west Kimberley is like no other place in Australia – like no other place on earth. Its extraordinary Indigenous, historic, aesthetic, and natural heritage values make it worthy of inclusion on the National Heritage List – Australia's highest form of heritage recognition.

The west Kimberley National Heritage area encompasses the iconic Kimberley coast from La Grange south of Broome, north to the Dampier Peninsula east to Cambridge Gulf, the Kimberley plateau and country south to the Oscar and Napier Ranges and the mighty Fitzroy River.

This book provides a snapshot of some of the outstanding heritage values that make the west Kimberley such an integral part of Australia's history and identity.



The Hon Tony Burke Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities

What makes the west Kimberley special?

The west Kimberley is one of Australia's special places. It is a vast area of dramatic landscapes of great biological richness, relatively undisturbed since European settlement, with important geological and fossil evidence of Australia's evolutionary history. The region is home to a rich living Aboriginal culture and a proud pastoral and pearling tradition.

Ancient geology

Biological richness

1,800 million years ago the Kimberley was a separate land mass that collided with the ancient Pilbara and Yilgarn, forming the core of the future Australian continent. The King Leopold Ranges are the remnants of massive mountains thrown up by the collision and their folded and crumpled rocks tell an important story of the shaping of Australia.

The Oscar, Napier, Emmanuel and Pillara Ranges – now high and dry in the landscape – are the remains of a vast coral reef, similar in scale to the Great Barrier Reef, that existed nearly 400 million years ago. The Gogo fish fossils from this ancient reef system provide a rare insight into the evolution of life on Earth, including the earliest four-limbed vertebrates. The rugged Kimberley plateau, western coastline and northern rivers continue to provide a vital refuge for many native plants and animals that are found nowhere else or which have disappeared from much of the rest of Australia. In addition, Roebuck Bay is internationally recognised as one of Australia's most significant sites for migratory wading birds.

The west Kimberley is one of Australia's special places.



A rich and dynamic living **Aboriginal culture**

Aboriginal people have lived in the west Kimberley for at least 40,000 years and today it continues to be home to Aboriginal groups practising traditional law in the world's oldest continuous culture.

From the Dampier Peninsula east along the north Kimberley coast, Aboriginal people used the unique double log raft, galwa or kalum, and their remarkable knowledge of tidal movement to travel to offshore islands and otherwise inaccessible coastal areas.

Painted images of creator beings, ancestors, plants and animals in rock shelters and caves represent a stunning visual record of an ongoing Aboriginal painting tradition that is considered one of the longest and most complex 'rock art' sequences anywhere in the world.

The beautifully executed Gwion-Gwion/Girrogorro rock paintings of the Wanjina–Wunggurr and Balangarra homelands provide an extraordinary insight into the material culture of Aboriginal society over thousands of years.

In the Wanjina–Wunggurr homeland, Wanjina and Wungurr creator beings, manifested in rock art figures, stone arrangements and landscape features, are central to the laws and customs of the Wanjina–Wunggurr people and guide every aspect of their lives.

The history of Aboriginal people in the Kimberley has been one of resistance, adaptation and survival in the face of dramatic change. In the 1890's, Aboriginal resistance fighter, Jandamarra and the Bunuba people's intimate knowledge of the rugged Oscar and Napier Ranges was crucial in their struggle to resist European pastoral settlement.

The dispute at Noonkanbah Station in 1980 between Aboriginal people, a resource company and the western Australian Government over oil drilling in a sacred area was a pivotal event in the struggle by Traditional Owners for their right to determine what happens on their country. The history of resistance, survival and adaptation has lead to the strong voice and living culture of Kimberley Aboriginal people today.

Right: Wanjina Wunggurr Dambimangari elders, Janet Oobagooma and Alfie Barunga celebrate the Federal Court Determination of Native Title at Yaloon on 26 May 2011. Photo: Kimberley Land Council. National Heritage Listing captures the stories of our culture, our people and our country from the past, present and future. We are one mob connected through the cultural landscape of the Kimberley

Janet Oobagooma, Kimberley Land **Council Cultural Adviser**



Early European exploration

The Kimberley coast was the scene of some of the earliest European exploration of the Great South Land. Privateer William Dampier's published accounts of his 1688 visit to the Kimberley were highly influential in the creation of European attitudes towards Australia and its people and stimulated later explorers such as James Cook. A carved boab at Careening Bay provides rare, physical evidence of the explorations of the eminent 19th century Australian hydrographer, Phillip Parker King.

A rich pastoral history

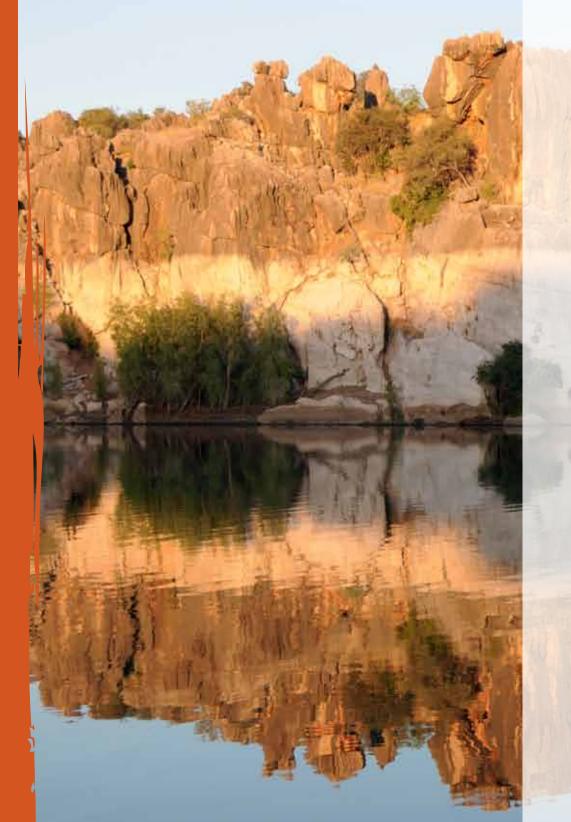
The west Kimberley has a proud pastoral tradition, involving both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Fossil Downs Station was established in 1886 by the MacDonald and MacKenzie families after a three year journey of more than 5,600 kms droving cattle from Goulburn, NSW – the longest overland cattle drive in Australia's history.

Pearling

The west Kimberley has a special place in the minds of Australians for the region's colourful pearling history.



The following pages outline the nine criteria used to assess the heritage Yalles of the west Kimperley and why it now has a place on the National Heritage List.



National Heritage Listing of the West Kimberley recognises that country is alive and strong, and so are the laws and cultures that Traditional Owners have followed in this country for thousands of years.

Frank Davey, Kimberley Land **Council Co-Chair**



The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in the course, or pattern of Australia's natural and cultural history.

The outstanding landscapes and rock formations of the west Kimberley provide an incredible insight into the evolution of the Australian continent, including the Devonian Reef which provides a continuous record of 20 million years of reef deposition.

The west Kimberley also holds biological significance, rich with plant, animal, reptile and frog species. Many of the rivers that run through the west Kimberley, like the Drysdale, Prince Regent and Mitchell rivers, are home to a large number of freshwater fish and turtles, that are found only in this part of Australia.

A biological refuge

The region is important as a biological refuge for plants and animals that have survived changing conditions such as climate, invasive species and human beings.

The west Kimberley is regarded as a natural laboratory for the study of ecological and evolutionary processes.



Earliest evidence of 'art' Rock shelters and caves across the west Kimberley provide evidence of

Aboriginal occupation for at least 40,000 years.

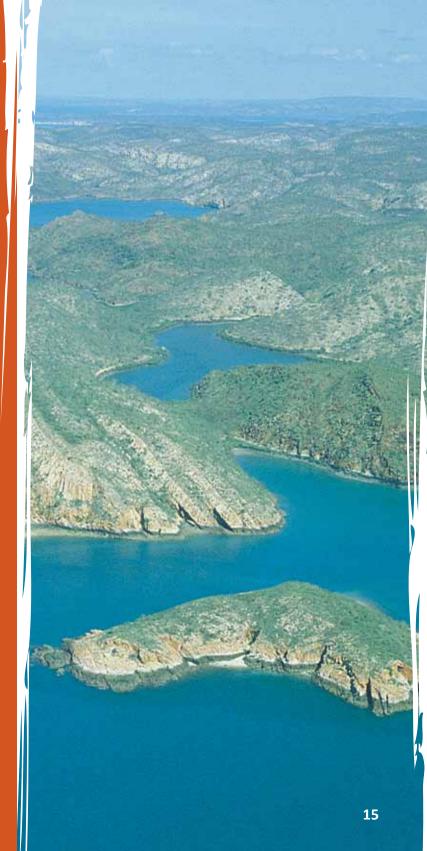
William Dampier

The west Kimberley coast is recognised for its association with early European exploration of the Australian continent. In 1688, Privateer William Dampier landed at Karrakatta Bay and spent many weeks exploring the Buccaneer Archipelago. Dampier's published observations of the people and the landscape were influential in shaping European ideas about Australia.

Kimberley Pearl shell

Pinctada maxima, the large and luminescent pearl shell found along the west Kimberley coast is highly valued by Aboriginal people in the Kimberley and across a large part of Aboriginal Australia as the 'emblem of life' for its potent correlations with water, and the power to regenerate, renew. and transform.

...the most widely distributed commodity in Aboriginal Australia

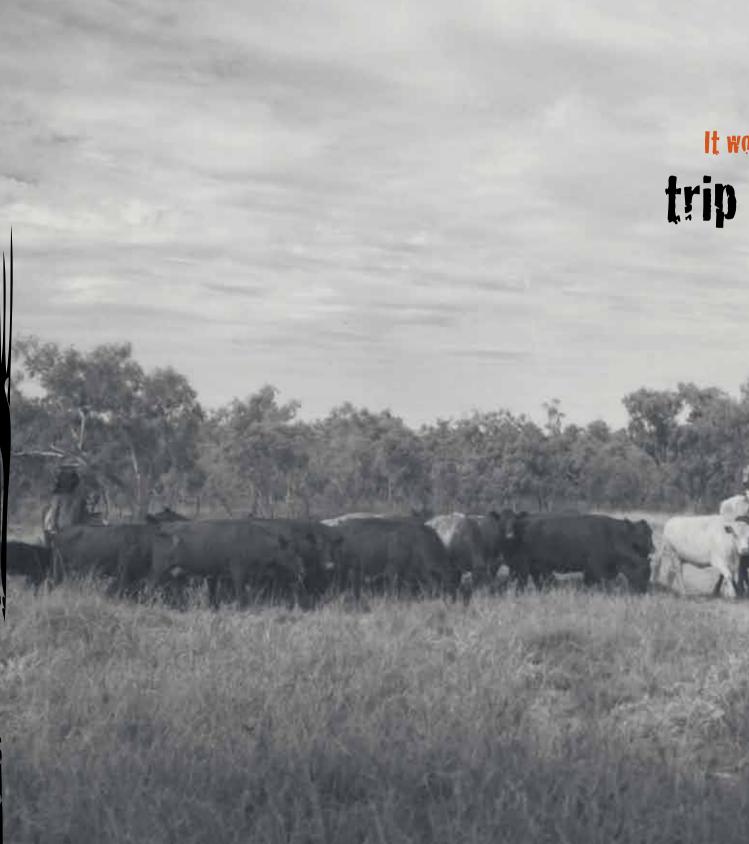


The Drove to Fossil Downs

The drove to Fossil Downs began near Goulburn in 1883, with 500 cattle, two teams of bullocks and 50 horses. Led by brothers, Charles and Dan MacDonald, it would be the longest droving trip across the continent, covering a distance of around 5,600 kilometres.

On 3 June 1886, what was left of the party finally arrived, with around half the original head of cattle, and 13 of the original 50 horses, at the junction of the Victoria and Margaret rivers. They stopped near a tree which Alexander Forrest had marked F136. The trip had taken them three years. They renamed the place Fossil Downs Station after the many fossilised shells they found in the nearby outliers of the Devonian Reef.

In the years to come it would become the largest privatelyowned cattle station in Australia, at over a million acres. Fossil Downs is still owned by the decedents of the MacDonald brothers.



It would be the longest droving trip across the continent,

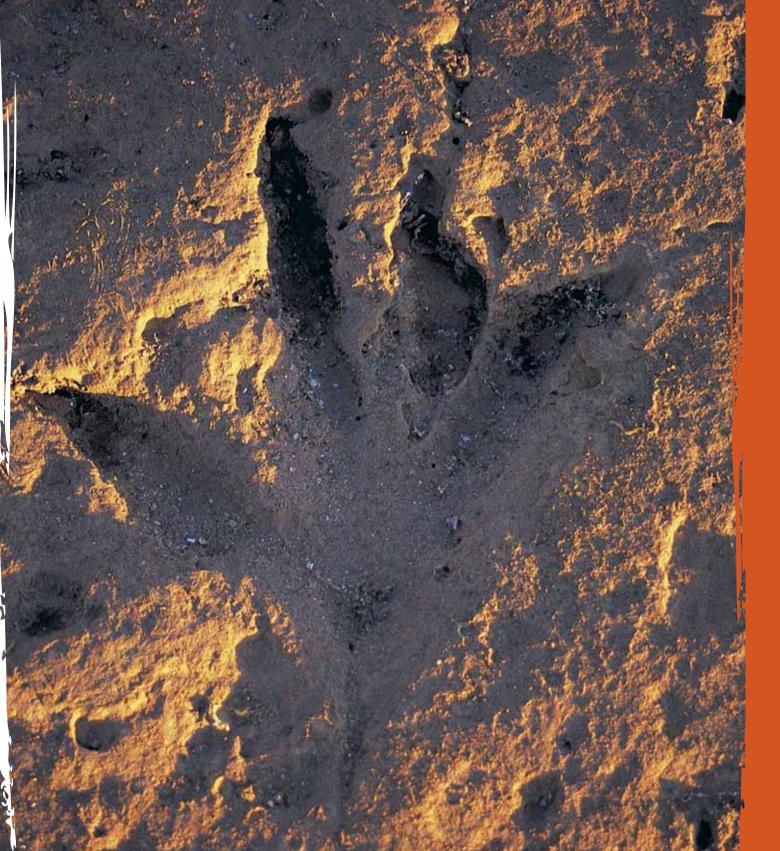
covering a distance of around 5,600 kilometres

The Noonkanbah Dispute

Noonkanbah is one in a series of important steps in the national struggle of Aboriginal people to have their rights to practice traditional law and culture, and their rights to traditional land ownership recognised. Yirrkala and Wave Hill in the Northern Territory, Mer (Murray) Island in the Torres Strait, Queensland and Noonkanbah each assume their own symbolic importance in the long, slow path towards the recognition of Aboriginal rights and the protection of Aboriginal heritage.

NO MININUTU SACRED LAN





The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Australia's natural and cultural history.

There are tracks and fossils in the west Kimberley that preserve a unique record of ancient life in Australia. The Broome Sandstone of the Dampier Coast contains the only sauropod prints found in Australia and is the most extensive evidence of dinosaurs from the western half of the continent.

There are also significant botanical remains in the west Kimberley including preserved wood shavings, seeds and plant fibres. These help us to better understand the impacts of climate change on flora through the ages and also some of the techniques used by Aboriginal people to gather plant life.

Dinosaur trackways and human footprints

The first Australians

The extraordinary preservation of plant remains in the archaeological deposits in limestone rock shelters in the Devonian Reef provides rare evidence of Aboriginal plant use and adaptation to changing resources over 40,000 years, contributing to our understanding of the impact of climate change on the ecology.

The sauropod prints found at Dampier Peninsula include some of the largest in the world, at 1.75 metres long, as well as some of the smallest. They are the only sauropod tracks known in Australia.

Fossilised human footprints on the Dampier Peninsula are significant for being one of only three documented human track sites in Australia and the only evidence of human tracks in the west coast of Australia.

the west Kimperley is home to one of only three documented track sites in Australia



In 1820, Phillip Parker King careened his ship the Mermaid in Careening Bay on the Kimberley coast of western Australia. On this occasion a boab tree was carved with the initials HMC Mermaid **t**o mark the crew's stay on what was then a very remote area of the Australian coast. The Mermaid Tree is rare as the only known physical reminder of King's survey expeditions along the Australian coastlines.





The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's natural and cultural history.

The west Kimberley helps us to better understand Australia's natural and cultural history and provides insight into biological and geological processes and landscape formation that shaped our continent.

By studying the Devonian Coral Reef, we can gain an understanding of how reef communities react to climate change and to changes in sea level, both of which are key issues facing modern coral reefs like the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef. The limited archaeological research in the region shows a significant potential to provide new information on the early history of Australia and its people.

Research also links comets and tsunamis to Indigenous oral histories, painted rock images and stone arrangements. Further exploration of these phenomenon may shed light on the history of natural disasters on the west Kimberley coast and in particular, the nature and effect of mega tsunami events.

The west Kimberley helps us to better understand Australia's natural and cultural history

The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group.

The west Kimberley is an inspirational landscape full of spectacular scenery and vibrant colours, including the iconic reds of the pindan soils and sandstone gorges. The west Kimberley is commonly described as ancient, majestic, remarkable, iconic and grand.

Inspirational Landscapes

The west Kimberley is renowned for its dramatic and beautiful landscapes, including the towering cliffs, rocky headlands, sandy beaches, pristine rivers, spectacular waterfalls and thousands of islands off the remote sandstone coast. Inland lies the rugged Kimberley plateau, with its deep gorges and cascading waterfalls, the striking King Leopold Ranges and Windjana and Geikie gorges, which cut through the limestone of an ancient coral reef.

Stunning visual record of an ongoing Aboriginal painting tradition

and a committee

Agan margarante

CONTRACTOR OF STREET

The west Kimberley has some incredibly large, colourful and varied rock paintings, which are considered amongst the most spectacular examples of 'rock art' in the world.

Rock paintings, are both powerful and of deep religious significance to Kimberley Aboriginal people and represent a stunning visual record of an ongoing Aboriginal painting tradition in a substantially unmodified landscape.

> Traditional Owner Alfie White, next to paintings of Wanjina and the Wunggurr Snake at Ngallangunda Rock Art Site Ngarinyin Language Country. Photo: Kimberley Land Council

88 Rock pictures... should be seen not as art, but as images with energies that keep us alive. They were made during the Dreamtime, and it was necessary that the community ...look after the images so that life on earth will continue

Bungal (David) Mowaljarlai, Senior Ngarinyin Traditional Owner



The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance as part of Indigenous tradition.

Each Kimberley Aboriginal society has a rich body of religious narratives that concern the Dreaming. While such narratives are distinct for each of these societies, they all contain accounts of creator beings who 'gave' them their laws and customs. These narratives describe how ancestral creator beings have 'made' the Indigenous countries that comprise the west Kimberley. The relationship between Aboriginal people and country is one of reciprocity. While country is the source of their spiritual and physical well being, indeed their very identity, it is the responsibility of Aboriginal people to 'look after' or 'care for' it.

Such responsibilities are defined by the traditional laws of each Kimberley Indigenous society. They include acknowledging and respecting their country's resident spiritual beings, and extracting their country's resources in a non-wasteful way.

The relationship between Aboriginal people and country is one of reciprocity.





Wanjina-Wunggurr Tradition

The traditional homeland of the Wanjina–Wunggurr community in the north Kimberley includes members of the Worrorra, Ngarinyin, Unggumi, Umida, Unggarrangu, Wunambal and Gaambera language groups. Collectively, this community believes that they are themselves descendents of a single creator being called Wanjina.

Thousands of images of Wanjina occur in rock shelters across the region; a visual testimony of a complex association of socioreligious beliefs that continue to be central to the laws and customs of the Wanjina-Wunggurr community. In no other Indigenous society in northern or central Australia, does a single class of creator being, depicted as a distinct rock art motif, have such a significant and multifaceted role or set of associated meanings and practices.

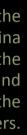
As an embodiment of the sacred Wunggurr life-force that permeates the cosmos, the Wanjina evoke the primordial but continuing era of creation called Lalai (the Dreaming). During Lalai, the Wanjina worked with the Wunggurr Snake and other animal helpers to make the country. The Wanjina gave their human descendents their laws and customs, and continue to instruct people in their dreams. As part of the ongoing reciprocity between the Wanjina spirit ancestors and their human descendents, senior law-men renew the Wanjina paintings in order to keep them 'fresh'.

As paintings, Wanjina take the form of human-like beings and also of animals and plants. They play a crucial role in Wanjina-Wunggurr society's ongoing social, economic and cultural life.

Along with their other expressions as features of land, sea and sky, paintings of the Wanjina are a distinct characteristic of the Wanjina-Wungurr homeland which plays a fundamental role in specifying geographical location.

As the spirit ancestors of the Wanjina-Wunggurr people, the Wanjina play a fundamental role in specifying the geographical location of the homeland and the nature and basis of the citizenship of its members.

The Wanjina-Wunggurr homeland, where the painted images on rock and other features in the land, sea and sky, including natural rock formations and man-made stone arrangements, are manifestations of the Wanjina and the Wunggurr Snake, are of outstanding heritage value to the nation because of their importance as part of Indigenous tradition.





The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of Australia's natural and cultural places or a class of Australia's natural and cultural environments.

The spectacular west Kimberley coast from King Sound near Derby to Bonaparte Gulf near Wyndham, is perhaps the longest stretch of predominantly rocky coast in Australia. It is a drowned river landscape spanning over 2,500 kilometres of intricate headlands and archipealagos, deep bays, impressive tidal effects and magnificent waterfalls, undisturbed by major development.

The major coastal landforms and habitats of the west Kimberley are unique. They are a series of places and environments that are significant to Australia. The Kimberley ria (rocky) coast, from the Helpman Islands in King Sound to Joseph Bonaparte Gulf, is the most extensive region of ria coast at more than 2,500 kilometres.

Roebuck Bay

Roebuck Bay is a hotspot for many different species of migratory birds because of its location and climate.

A rare tropical example of an intertidal mudflat system, Roebuck Bay has the highest number of bird species of international importance visiting its shores due to the seasonally abundant nutrients.



The Fitzroy River provides a rare window into the diversity of the traditions associated with the Rainbow Serpent.

Martuwarra (Fitzroy) River

The Martuwarra or as its known, the Fitzroy River provides a rare window into the diversity of the traditions associated with the Rainbow Serpent. Within the Fitzroy River catchment there are four distinct expressions of the Australiawide Rainbow Serpent tradition. In the jila-kalpurtu domain of the Fitzroy catchment on the northern edge of the Great Sandy Desert, water flows are principally underground and the Rainbow Serpent (kalpurtu) is said to exist in the underground structure of the channels, linking excavated waterholes and other water sources of significance.

Places like Kurrpurrngu (Cajibut Springs), Mangunampi and Paliyarra are exemplars of this expression of the Rainbow Serpent. The phenomenon of Galaroo, on the other hand is linked to flowing surface water, in the form of major rivers, and to long and deep permanent waterholes in broad river channels, like Geikie Gorge (Danggu). The Rainbow Serpent of the Wanjina-Wunggurr belief system has an especially strong association with discrete pools of water, and is also associated with the sea and Wanjina in religious narratives and painted rock art sites.

The Woonyoomboo-Yoongoorroonkoo narrative of the lower Fitzroy primarily tells the story of the creation of the lower Fitzroy River and its floodplains and its links to the sea. The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

There are a number of creative achievements in the west Kimberley that are worthy of national recognition.

For more than 40,000 years, Aboriginal people were sustained by the country and the waters of the west Kimberley.

They travelled long distances to hunt, trade and maintain social and cultural obligations. They built strong, light rafts called the galwa or kalum to navigate the treacherous waters of the west and north Kimberley coast.

These light, unsinkable log rafts were a unique marine technical innovation.

...from ancient and ongoing Aboriginal painting traditions to cleverly designed watercraft and the exquisitely decorated Sacred Heart Church at Beagle Bay.





Sacred Heart Church, Beagle Bay

The Sacred Heart Church at Beagle Bay is a testimony to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the Pallottine brothers and the Aboriginal residents of the mission who built and decorated it during the First World War. The brothers and the mission residents worked tirelessly: a kiln was constructed to bake the 60,000 clay bricks; and they collected thousands of shells from the beaches in bullock carts to be burned for the lime mortar and render. The interior details of the church are quite extraordinary.

The sanctuary and altar are decorated in thousands of pearl shell, cowries, volutes and olive shells. Whole pearl shell features in the sanctuary inlays and the light reflects off the shimmering shell surfaces with great effect. The side altars are inlaid with mollusc opercula and incorporate the Christian motifs of the lamb, the fish and the shepherd's crook with Nyul Nyul, Bardi and Nimanborr tribal symbols.

The use of pearl shell and other locally sourced materials to decorate the interior of the church, particularly the sanctuary, demonstrates a high degree of artistic excellence and technical finesse.

... Day after day parties set off into the bush or to the coast to cut timber, cart sand, dig clay and gather tons of broken shells for lime. As the timber structure mounted, 60,000 double bricks were shaped and baked in stone kilns and thousands of live shells, mother of pearl and many other varieties from small cockles, cones and trochus to giant clams and bailers for holy water fonts were gathered in from a wide range of coastal waters and tidal reefs

> Mary Durack (1969) Australian author and historian

A rich Asian Australian society built up in Broome Bround

the pearing industry

The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

When the world's largest pearl oyster shell was discovered by European settlers in Roebuck Bay in 1861, it caused an international sensation. People flocked to the Kimberley from many nations, hoping to make their fortune. Aboriginal and other non-European labour played a pivotal role in the pearling industry. Aboriginal men and women worked as divers from the early days of pearling in the Kimberley, before diving apparatus was introduced. Without any protective equipment or oxygen, they descended to depths of up to ten metres to collect pearl shell. Aboriginal divers were credited with outstanding underwater sight, diving ability and local knowledge.

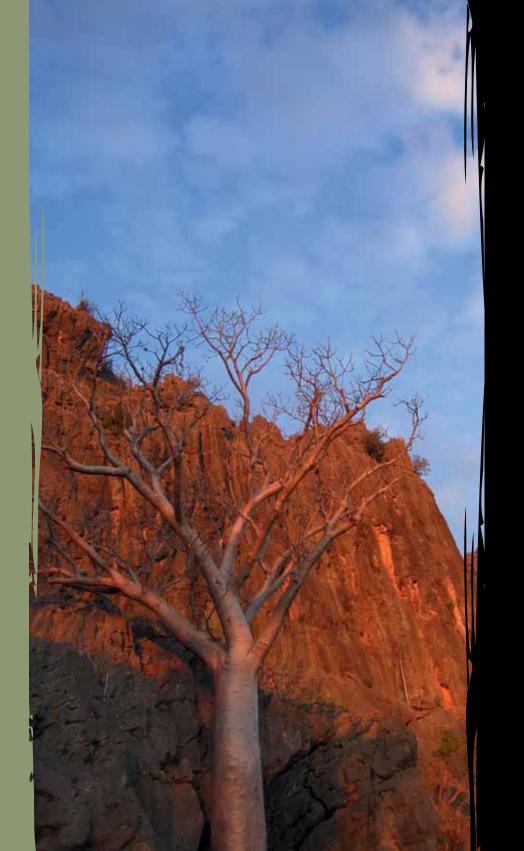
A rich Asian-Australian society built up in Broome around the pearling industry. The Asian population settled in the part of town now called Chinatown, where many people established retail stores, boarding houses, import agencies, laundries, market gardens, and hotels. During the wet season, when luggers returned to shore, the workers moved into Chinatown and Broome became a bustling town, full of activity, festivals and excitement.

Broome – Port of Pearls

The west Kimberley has a special association with the Australian community as an iconic place associated with the pearling industry, with Broome once the pearling capital of Australia. Visitors continue to be drawn to Broome and the nearby region because of the romance of Broome, its pearling history and cultural diversity. The people of Broome continue to celebrate and honour their pearling heritage with the annual Shinju Matsuri Festival.

The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Australia's natural or cultural history.

The west Kimberley has a long and varied history filled with accounts of European exploration and Indigenous resistance. The history and stories of the west Kimberley also provide accounts of individuals who have been significant to the shaping of Australia.



Jandamarra (aka Pigeon)

Jandamarra (aka Pigeon) led the Bunuba resistance from 1894– 1897. The timing of the last wave of European settlement and the impenetrable nature of the place itself helped create the man and the legend of Jandamarra - a man brought up in two worlds, whose detailed knowledge of European settlers and capacity to train his Bunuba countrymen and women, severely threatened the colonising project.

His ingenuity with European firearms even went as far as binding the leg sinews of kangaroo around .44 cartridges to make them fit the Enfield rifles that they carried. He also trained the Bunuba in tactics to pre-empt and counter European advances, devising strategies to ambush parties and capture weapons. While Jandamarra did not act alone, his abilities to disappear and avoid capture, and to appear to even cheat death itself, made him a much feared adversary to European settlers and a powerful leader amongst his own people.

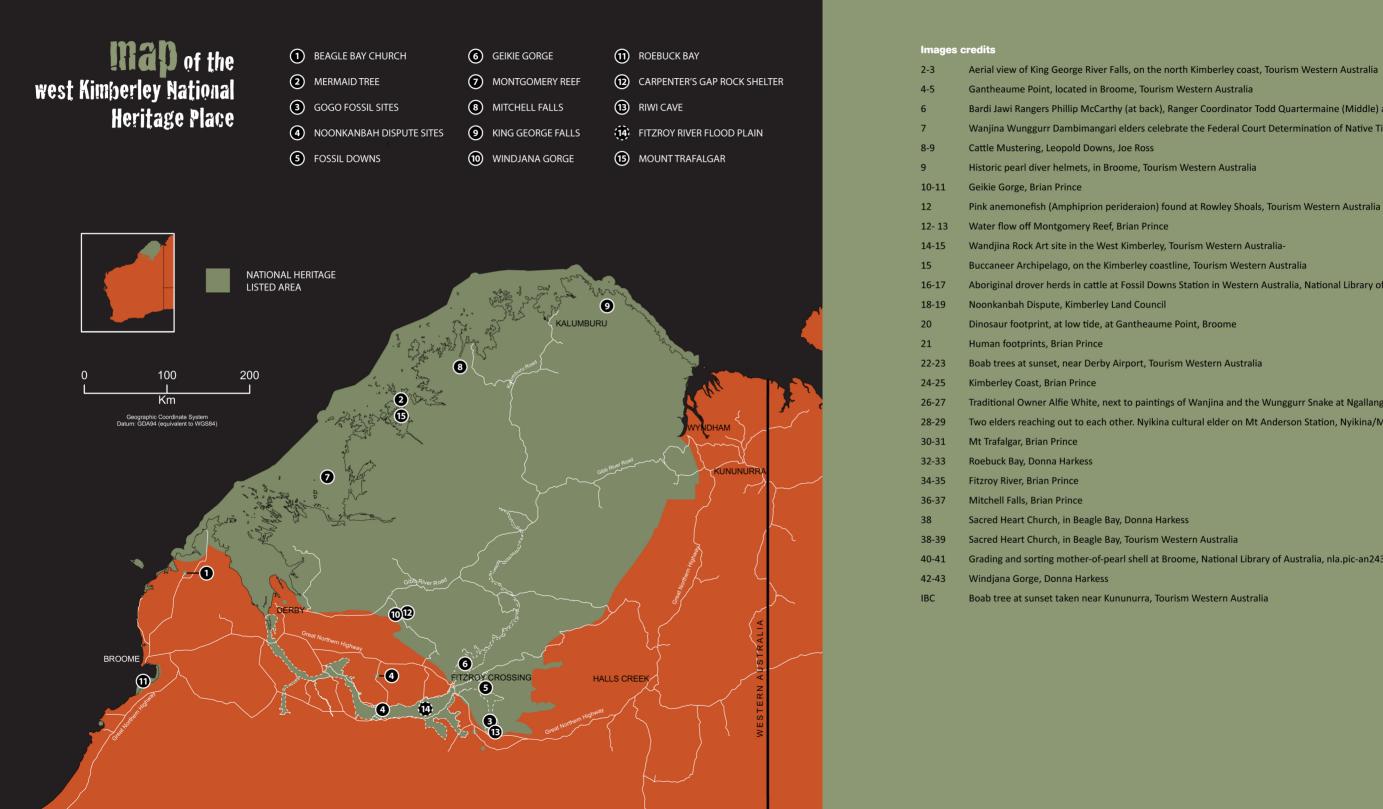
Jandamarra's ability to evade police capture and disappear into the limestone landscape gave him legendary status among his own people and the colony. Aboriginal people believed he had Jalnggangurru (magic) power. Contemporary accounts say he could 'fly like a bird and disappear like a ghost - he was two separate beings.

Jandamarra will always be a hero to the Bunuba people. Doesn't matter how people see it as good or bad, he'll always be a hero...who fought for the Bunuba People and for his country'

Dillon Andrews, senior Bunuba man.

Jandamarra's success brought a severe response from authorities who threw enormous resources into efforts to capture Jandamarra. His death in 1897 marked the end of large organised violent resistance by Aboriginal people.





- Bardi Jawi Rangers Phillip McCarthy (at back), Ranger Coordinator Todd Quartermaine (Middle) and Trevor Sampi (front).
- Wanjina Wunggurr Dambimangari elders celebrate the Federal Court Determination of Native Title at Yaloon on 26 May 2011. Kimberley Land Council.
- Aboriginal drover herds in cattle at Fossil Downs Station in Western Australia, National Library of Australia, nla.pic-vn4591130
- Traditional Owner Alfie White, next to paintings of Wanjina and the Wunggurr Snake at Ngallangunda Rock Art Site Ngarinyin Language Country. Two elders reaching out to each other. Nyikina cultural elder on Mt Anderson Station, Nyikina/Mangala country south of Derby. Darrel Combs.
- Grading and sorting mother-of-pearl shell at Broome, National Library of Australia, nla.pic-an24377849

Every day on the Australian continent ends with the sun shining on the west Kimberley.

Tony Burke, Environment Minister





www.environment.gov.au

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