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NGAUWUDU – MITCHELL PLATEAU

The Ngauwudu landscape

Ngauwudu (pronounced 'now-woo-doo') is the name Wunambal Aboriginal people give to the Mitchell Plateau area in the far north Kimberley. At Punamii-Unpuu (the Mitchell Falls) spectacular gorges and waterfalls have been carved into the sandstone bordering the laterite-capped plateau by the Mitchell River and its tributaries.

The area is one of the most biologically important in the Kimberley. The landscape around the plateau varies from mangroves and swamps to woodlands and lush rainforest patches, accounting for the rich diversity of wildlife.

Livistona palm woodland is found on the lateritic soils of the plateau. Palm trees may grow up to 18 metres tall and some are thought to be up to 300 years old.

The rugged sandstone areas are home to rare residents such as the Monjon (the smallest rock wallaby), the rough-scaled python and the black grass-wren. The area is rich in Aboriginal cultural heritage, featuring the well-known Wandjina and Bradshaw art (also known as 'Gwion').

Wunambal country

Wunambal Aboriginal people have lived at Ngauwudu for thousands of years. Wunambal people refer to Wandjina (mythical beings depicted in rock art as human-like figures with large eyes and no mouths) 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 (Mitchell Falls area)

Punamii-Unpuu has cultural and spiritual significance for Wunambal people. Wunggurr travelled from various places, meeting up at Punamii-Unpuu which is 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 actively explored the area. William Easton led a State government expedition into the north Kimberley, naming the Mitchell River after Sir James Mitchell, Premier of Western Australia at the time.

In 1965, a mining camp was established on the plateau by Amax following the discovery of potentially commercial deposits of bauxite. Mineral exploration and evaluation ensued until the early 1980s. Currently there is no mining activity on Ngauwudu. Mining interests once held by Amax are now retained in a joint venture.

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, 170 kilometres north of the Gibb River Road junction. The track is maintained on an irregular basis only, and may have wash outs and corrugations. Drive with extreme care. Tracks north of the airstrip are rough while tracks north of Aunauyu (Surveyor's Pool) are very rough and may be impassable. Tracks and roads are usually closed during the wet season (November to April).

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 the local tourist centres for details and bookings. Further information is available at Punamii-Unpuu camping area.

Facilities

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

**Wunambal
Gaambera
Aboriginal
Corporation**



What to do

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

Punamii-Unpuu—Mitchell Falls Walk

The five kilometre return walk to Punamii-Unpuu (Mitchell Falls) from the camping area is moderate to difficult because it traverses rocky terrain. Take care near the many cliffs. The trail takes visitors past Mertens' Falls and Mertens' Gorge.

Wunambal people say Punamii-Unpuu is a powerful place for their Wandjina-Wunggurr law and is one of the main homes for Wunggurr. They ask that visitors 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 eight kilometre return walk to Aunauyu (Surveyor's Pool) from the car park. Aunauyu is also an important place for Wunggurr. The large white rocks found there are considered to be the eggs of the creator snake.

Swimming

Swimming is permitted but traditional owners ask that you do not swim in the deep pools at Punamii-Unpuu and Aunauyu. 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. Saltwater crocodiles are known to inhabit water below the falls. Freshwater crocodiles are common in creeks and rivers throughout Ngauwudu.

Aboriginal Sites

Aboriginal sites are of special significance to Wunambal 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. Permission is required before photographs or recording of sites can be published or used for commercial reproduction.

Camping

There are camping areas with toilets at Munurru and at Punamii-Unpuu. 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. Rubbish disposal points are at Drysdale River Station and Kalumburu. Collect firewood from designated firewood collection zones. Use gas or fuel stoves wherever possible and use firewood sparingly, as dead wood is an important ecological resource. An entry or camping fee may be applicable.

Pets

Pets are not permitted at Ngauwudu.

Rangers

A ranger is based at Punamii-Unpuu camping area from April to October.

Nearest Department of Conservation and Land Management Office

Kimberley Regional Office, Messmate Way,
PO Box 942, Kununurra WA 6743.
Phone: (08) 9168 4200 or (08) 9168 7300.

Wunambal-Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation

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

