

Connection to Country

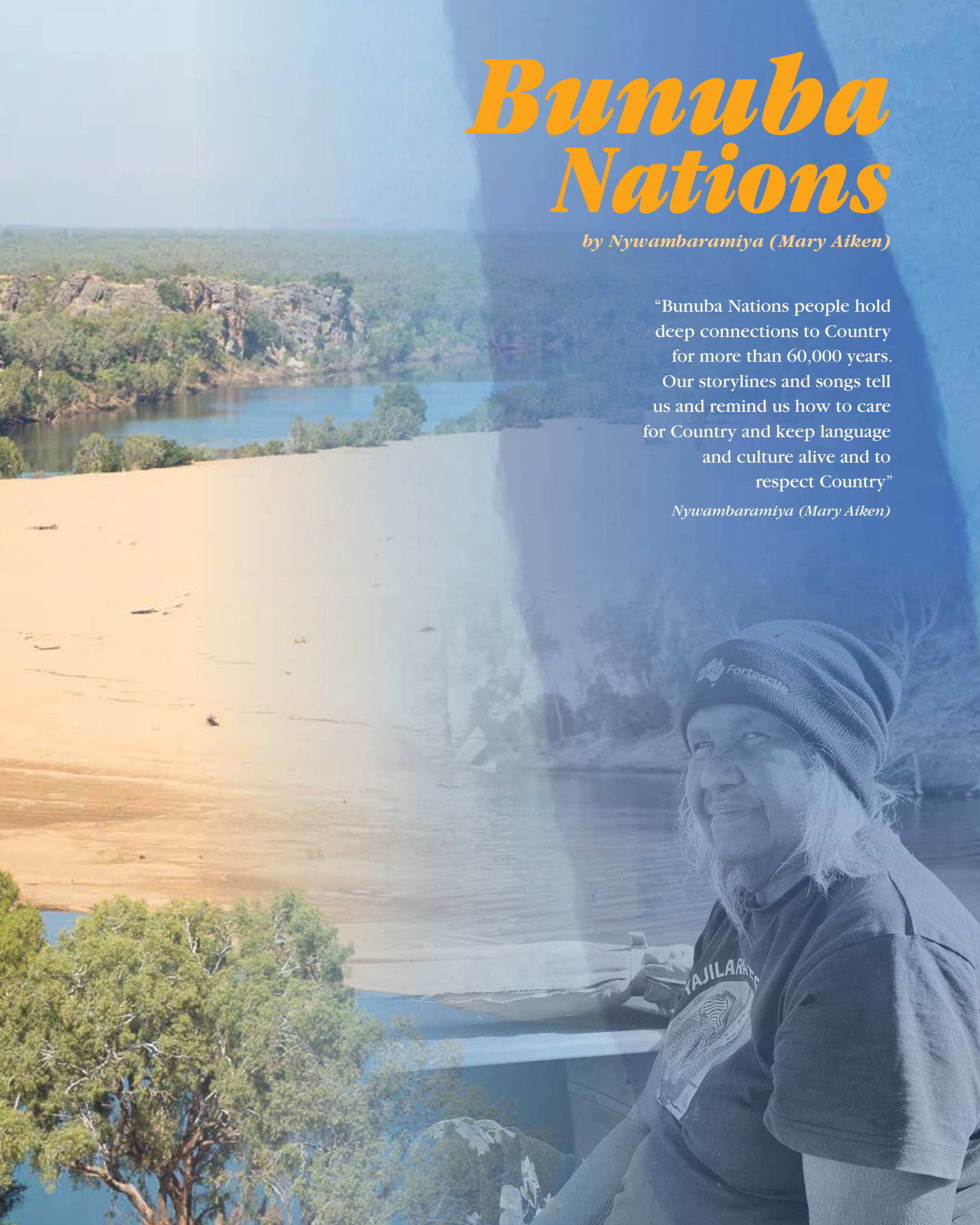


Bunuba Nations

by Nywambaramiya (Mary Aiken)

“Bunuba Nations people hold deep connections to Country for more than 60,000 years. Our storylines and songs tell us and remind us how to care for Country and keep language and culture alive and to respect Country”

Nywambaramiya (Mary Aiken)





Bunuba Country sits in the heart of the Kimberley, in northern Western Australia. Bunuba is not the name of our people, rather it is the name of our spoken thangani (language), and we are the speakers of Bunuba. The boundaries of our Country are defined by the reaches of our language, and it is within language that the knowledge and story of Country is held. Bunuba Country is made up of 18 interconnecting muwayi (Country or clan estates). People and families are linked to specific muwayi and are the dawangarri (people) of that muwayi. The name of each dawangarri is the same as its muwayi, as our people are an inseparable part of their Country.

We are the Danggu warra warra, the people of the Danggu muwayi. We are one of the river dawangarri, whose muwayi are shaped by the flow of Bandaralngarri, the mighty Fitzroy River. Each muwayi of Bunuba Country is named for a living water. Danggu is named for a place along Bandaralngarri where the river cuts in beneath the ancient baliji (limestone) reef that towers above. Here, where the white

rock sits, a stream of garuwa (water) feeds clear into the river, drawing deep from an aquifer that lies two kilometres below.

ANCESTRAL RESPONSIBILITY

We are bound in our relationship with Danggu through a set of responsibilities that have been passed down from our ancestors since time immemorial. Today we draw on our formal partnership with the Parks and Wildlife Service at the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions to support the realisation of our obligations to our muwayi. This living water place for which we are named, sits within the Danggu Geikie Gorge National Park. Although the park was first established in 1967, our relationship with the Parks and Wildlife Service and the recognition of our story is thanks to the late matriarch of Danggu, Ms Casey Ross.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, our ngarranyi (mother) and mimi (grandmother), forged a strong relationship with two park rangers—Ron Hollands and Noel Nannup. Through her

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Main Danggu Geikie Gorge National Park.

Photo – Cliff Winfield

Inset Nywambaramiya—Mary Aiken.

Above left The stunning geology of White Rock can be enjoyed from aboard the *Ms Casey Ross*.

Photos – Penny Purdie

Above Brolga (*Antigone rubicunda*).

Photo – Peter Nicholas/DBCA

patience and knowledge, she taught them the story of this place, the importance of Country and the life that it holds. With great foresight, Ms Casey Ross recognised that the establishment of the national park would protect our muwayi from threats posed by mining, pastoralism, or any other destructive developments. It was her great dream to see our people back on Country, caring for our muwayi.

GROWING PARTNERSHIP

Unfortunately, our ngarranyi and mimi passed before she saw her grandsons wearing the Parks and Wildlife Service uniform, working as rangers at Danggu. Their professional role at Danggu began in the early 2000s and was the precursor to the establishment of the Bunuba Rangers program in 2011. From the beginning, the Parks and Wildlife Service has invested resources into our ranger program, and

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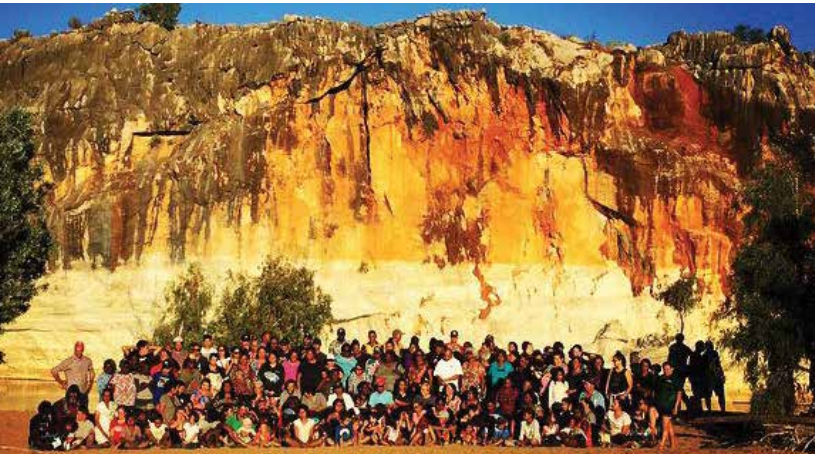
- Legend**
- Conservation park
 - National park
 - River - non perennial
 - Fishing from vessels permitted
 - Tour boat zone - no fishing from vessel
 - Sealed road
 - Unsealed road
 - Exclusion zone - paddle craft NOT permitted to land
 - TOUR Boat tours
 - H Bushwalking
 - B Boat landing
 - K Canoeing/kayaking
 - D Day use area ONLY
 - F Fishing
 - I Fishing from vessels
 - S Information shelter
 - P Parking
 - T Picnic tables
 - R Ranger station
 - U Toilet (universal)
 - N No camping
 - N No fishing in tour boat zone
 - R No rubbish bin provided
 - N No water skiing
- Walk trails**
- Balili Rarrgi Trail
 - Jarrambayah Trail
 - Bun.gi Trail
 - Larrgari Trail



Above Danggu Geikie Gorge.
Photo – Ru Somaweera



Right Painting of Ms Casey Ross and park ranger Ron Hollands.
Artist – Neil Carter



our ongoing care for Country through fauna and flora surveys, training, fire management, invasive species control and tourism. The support for and work of our rangers is not just confined to Dunggu. Our rangers work across all muwayi and within all parks on Bunuba Country.

This professional relationship was formalised in 2017 with the signing of an

Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) that saw the co-vesting of all Bunuba parks through a Joint Management Agreement between Bunuba Dawangarri Aboriginal Corporation and DBCA. This partnership continues to grow, and in 2020 we signed another ILUA agreement with DBCA for the proposed Fitzroy River National Park. This new park will cover over 143,000 hectares of Bunuba Country, giving voice to our people in the ongoing care of our muwayi.

Our relationship with DBCA's Parks and Wildlife Service provides more than just conservation and economic opportunities. Our partnership is built in support of our cultural practice as we have access to our Country to connect and heal. Through our joint management we develop resources that ensure our language and culture are maintained and strengthened on Country. Here at Dunggu, the park is closed for occasions of ceremony. In the past couple of years, we have hosted a family reunion for all members of Dunggu warra warra, bringing home those descendants taken during the Stolen Generations. In 2021 we hosted the inaugural Yajilarra Festival, a two-day celebration of our stories, our songs, and Bandaralngarri, our river. Just

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Top Nywambaramiya (Mary Aiken) and Letisha Davies welcoming Parks and Wildlife Service staff to Dunggu.
Photo – Penny Purdie

Far above left Dunggu warra warra family reunion.
Photo courtesy Dunggu family

Above right Yajilarra Festival—Natalie Dean, Anita Dean, Uagamo Skeen, David Dodds and Ellyarnah Dean.
Photo – RIFT Photography/Wesfarmers

Above left Shae Parriman and Tyler Wade at Yajilarra Festival.
Photo – Russel James

Left Junba performance at Yajilarra Festival.
Photo – RIFT Photography/Wesfarmers



recently the park was closed to celebrate the wedding of Kerry Aiken, granddaughter of Casey Ross.

LIVING CONNECTION

Danggu is rich in its living culture. Bandaralngarri comes alive during bulurru (monsoon time) as its incredible flow spills out over the banks, racing over the plains and revitalising Country. Through all the seasons, we talk to the river through our thanganı (language), just as it talks to us in return. Our thanganı is our connection to Bandaralngarri, who we see not as a separate resource but a living member of our family who flows through our blood. We are further connected to all the birds, mammals, and fish as we are linked with them through our totem system. This living connection to Danggu is the basis of our obligations to our muwayi, as we care and look after all aspects of Country, as they look after us.

Danggu is also a place of great international significance. Bandaralngarri is listed on the National Heritage Register that recognises the natural and cultural values of the river. The 350-million-year-old Devonian Reef is of great international importance and provides a glimpse into

our planet’s fossilised past. Danggu is one of the best places to access this ancient reef system, where the flow of the river exposes a mosaic of colours ordinarily hidden deep within the baljı.

A visit to Danggu National Park is therefore a celebration of both our incredible Country and culture. Around the visitor centre and along the four walks, you will find records of our story and the knowledge of our muwayi. A one-hour guided boat tour cruises along Bandaralngarri, slipping under the towering walls of the ancient Devonian Reef. It is through the naming of this passenger vessel that we remember our late ngarranyi and mimi, Ms Casey Ross. This naming is a reminder that our connection to Danggu and our partnership with the Parks and Wildlife Service, is forged through strong relationships. As we

Top left Black kite (*Milvus migrans*).
Photo – Cliff Winfield

Above left Fruit of the screwpine (*Pandanus spiralis*).
Photo – Kevin Kenneally

Above The Ms Casey Ross guides visitors through the stunning Danggu Geikie Gorge National Park.
Photo – Jessie Kelly/DBCA

Below Freshwater crocodile (*Crocodylus johnstoni*).
Photo – Jiri Lochman

have known since the time of creation, our dawangarri is our muwayi, and our muwayi is our dawangarri. We are the Danggu warra warra, and this is the story of the Danggu muwayi we share with you today.



Mary Aiken is a Bunuba/Gooniyandi woman, Elder and Traditional Owner of Danggu muwayi. She has lived on Bunuba Country her whole life and is currently on the Bunuba Body Corporate Board as Cultural Advisor Director. Find out more about Bunuba Country at bunuba.com