

## Section 3 Jawoyn culture

### In this section

Jawoyn people would like visitors to appreciate the rich cultural values of Nitmiluk National Park.

*Nitmiluk is steeped in Jawoyn Aboriginal culture that continues as Jawoyn people look after Nitmiluk's diverse natural values and maintain their rich culture.*

This section contains information about:

- caring for country
- Nitmiluk's cultural stories
- traditional Jawoyn lifestyle
- kinship (moieties and skin names)
- significant sites
- Jawoyn rock art.

### Caring for country

All Jawoyn people have prescribed cultural responsibilities to look after their land. This includes continuing traditional cultural practices such as hunting, gathering, harvesting, performing ceremony and using fire to manage country.

All senior Jawoyn have an obligation to educate other Jawoyn about their country. Their knowledge is highly valued and one of the greatest compliments one Jawoyn can pay another is to acknowledge that the person knows the country 'right through'.

Knowledge is passed on informally. Young people are educated in the course of their everyday lives by talking about country in casual conversation and participating in cultural activities like hunting, painting, collecting plant materials, weaving and ceremonies.

### Mowurrwurr (clans)

There are 23 mowurrwurr (clans) in the Jawoyn nation and Jawoyn is the language shared by them.

Mowurrwurr are groups made up of two or more families that have an area that they belong to and look after.

Traditionally mowurrwurr moved around their land as the seasons changed - following resources, performing ceremonies, maintaining their ties to the land and meeting with other mowurrwurr.

### What Nitmiluk tour guides need to know

What is Burr?

What are some of the significant events of Burr?

What is Bula's story?

What is Nabilil's story?

How was Nitmiluk named?

What is Bolung's story?

Who is Barraya?

What are the five Jawoyn seasons?

What are some of the characteristics of each Jawoyn season?

What plants along the river are used for firesticks?

What plants along the river are used to make string?

What is a calendar plant?

What food plants grow along the river and what parts of the plants are eaten?

What is moiety?

How does a person's skin name affect who they marry?

What can make a site significant?

Why was rock art painted?

How is rock art dated in Nitmiluk?

What are the four rock art periods defined by George Chaloupka and how did they affect lifestyle and art?

Why does the paint last so long?

What can you talk about at art sites without interpreting individual paintings?

Why is it important not to touch the paintings?

### Interpreting Jawoyn culture

What is Burr?

When is/was Burr?

What does Burr mean to Jawoyn people?

Where do many Jawoyn place names come from?

Sounds of the Jawoyn language

Pronounce:

**a** as in **arm**

**e** as in **egg**

**i** as in **bit**

**o** as in **pot**

**u** as in **put**

**j** as in **jet, church**

**n** as in **no**

**p** and **b** as in **bird, hop**

**t** as in **dog, hot**

**k** and **g** as in **go, sick**

**jj** as in **catcher**

**kk** as in **tricky**

**rtt** as in **barter**

**ng** as in **singer**

**rt** as in **part, card**

**ny** as in **onion**

**rl** as in **girl**

**rn** as in **corner**

**rr** as a rolled **rr** sound

### Jawoyn words and sounds

The Jawoyn words and sounds in this handbook are from Wijnjorrotj, P, Flora, S (dec.), Brown, ND (dec.), Jatbula, P (dec.) Galmur, J, Katherine, M, Merland, F and Wightman, G (2005) *Jawoyn plants and animals, Aboriginal flora and fauna knowledge from Nitmiluk National Park and the Katherine area, northern Australia.*

Before the arrival of non-Aboriginal people, membership of Jawoyn mowurrwurr was through:

- children belonging to their father's mowurrwurr
- participation in ritual and ceremonial obligations
- living on the land, hunting, foraging and caring for the country.

All the mowurrwurr now manage their lands as one entity referred to as the Jawoyn nation.

### Burr and Jawoyn Law

Law was given to Jawoyn in the time called Buwurr or Burr (Dreamtime) and Jawoyn describe their law as follows:

*This Law was given to us in the time we call Buwurr; often called Dreaming or Dreamtime. It was during this time that the world was made and the rules for proper behaviour were laid down. During this period, beings in the form of humans, animals and plants brought the landscape to life by 'putting themselves' into the country. They travelled the land above and below the ground, giving names to places and specifying dangerous areas and sites to avoid.*

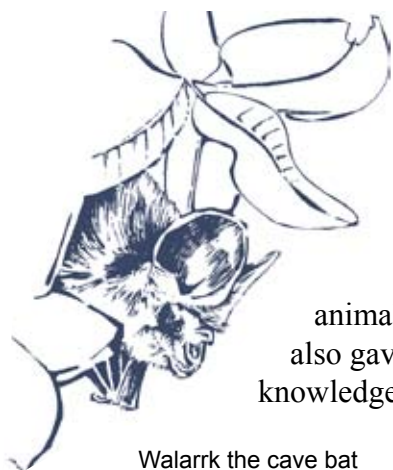
Burr encompasses all aspects of life and Jawoyn continue to look after the land and live off its resources according to Burr. Burr is the land (its gorges, trees, rocks and rivers) and it is the people and all living creatures. Burr is the past, the present and the future.

Creation beings also travelled through neighbouring clan lands and established relationships across language groups with sometimes faraway people. Jawoyn people tell of creation travels in stories and songs. Some of the stories are for public knowledge and others are not.

Jawoyn names for places often come from the activities of beings during Burr.

## Nitmiluk's cultural stories

Stories play a part in the heritage of all cultures. Where geographical locations in stories and religions have been identified, they are very important. For example, the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem is sacred to Jews, Muslims make a pilgrimage to Mecca, the Ganges River is sacred to Hindus and Jerusalem is important to many religions.



Walarrk the cave bat speared Nabilil, a being that journeyed across the landscape with a dilly bag containing water and firesticks.

Jawoyn and all Aboriginal cultures are strongly connected to the land. They have stories about the journeys of creation beings criss-crossing the country, their activities leaving hills, escarpments, rivers, gorges, billabongs, plants, animals and people. The creation beings also gave people their languages, knowledge to live off the land and rules to live by.

Mowurrwurr (clans) trace the activities of creation beings on their land by looking at the evidence left by them.

Because this evidence takes the form of features in the landscape, plants and animals, there are many important locations and Jawoyn culture cannot be separated from the land.

### The importance of stories

Stories and landscape are closely linked as the details of creation beings' activities and their locations are told in stories. These are often called 'Dreamtime' stories, but they are just as real as stories from the Bible, Koran or other books upon which religions are based.

'Dreamtime' stories contain information about law, food preparation, sacred and dangerous sites and codes of behaviour.

Often stories are told in layers or instalments. A simple story told to the youngest children may be elaborated upon and become more complex as they grow and learn and are able to accept responsibility for the knowledge. Many stories are not available to the general public because we cannot accept the responsibilities that come with the knowledge. So when a story sounds 'too simple' it is likely that you have only the children's' version.

### Interpreting Jawoyn culture

Why is land important to Jawoyn people?



Walarrk's spear killed Nabilil and pierced his dilly bag, the water from the dilly bag filled the river.

### Why should you interpret culture?

Visitor surveys show that visitors want to learn more about Jawoyn culture.

**Pronouncing Jawoyn words**

- Garrakla, GAH-rruck-lah
- Ngalenjelenje, NGH-len-gel-en-jeh
- Wurliwurliynjang, WAR-lee-war-lin-jang
- Yerreljirriyn, YEH-rreh-lih-jeerr-in
- Wun-Gurri, WOON-goo-rree
- Lumbuk, LOOM-book
- Birtjimbimulk, BIH-rih-ditch-bih-moolk
- Walarrk, WAH-larrk

**Some Jawoyn stories**

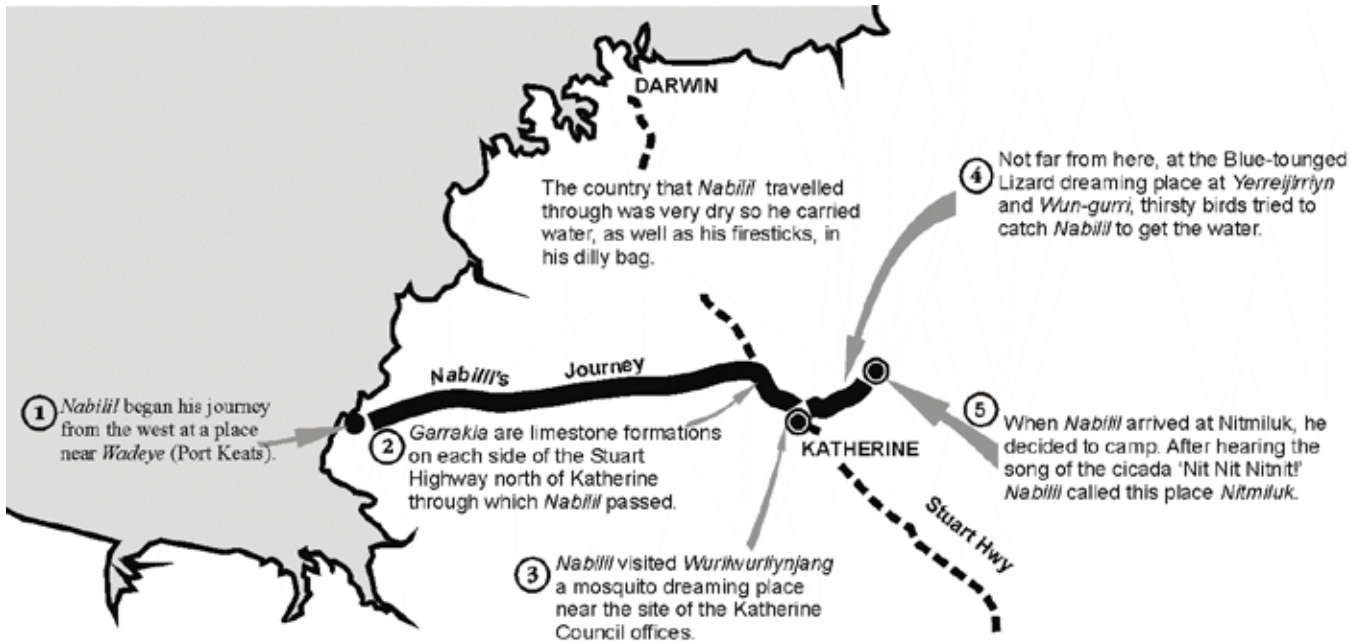
One of the reasons why Nitmiluk is so important is that culture is still alive in the Jawoyn people and their land. Following are some of the stories tour guides can share with their clients.

**Bula** (BOO-lah)

Bula came from saltwater country to the north. With his two wives, the Ngalenjelenje, he hunted across the land and transformed the landscape through his actions. Bula finally went under the ground at a number of locations north of Katherine in an area known as ‘Sickness Country’. It is called this because the area is very dangerous and should not be disturbed for fear that earthquakes and fire will destroy the world. Bula is regarded as the most important creation figure.

**Nabilil** (NAH-bill-ill)

Many places in Jawoyn country were named by Nabilil, a dragon-like figure who came from the west near Wadeye (Port Keats). He travelled carrying water and firesticks in a dilly bag under his arm. He passed through Garrakla and then on to Wurliwurliynjang

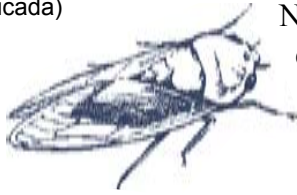


**Wakwak,**  
crow



Nabilil was travelling through country that was very dry. When he passed through the blue tongue lizard dreaming places at Yerreljirriyn and Wun-Gurri all the birds tried to catch him to get the water he carried. Lumbuk, the pigeon, Barraya the kookaburra, Wakwak the crow and Garrkkayn the brown hawk, all tried, but failed as Nabilil was too clever for them.

Nit Nit Nitnit  
(cicada)



Nabilil then came and camped at the entrance to the Katherine Gorge where he heard the song of the cicada and called this place Nitmiluk after the nit, nit, nit nit sound of the cicada.

After travelling up the Gorge, Nabilil finally came to a camp on Snowdrop Creek called Biritjimbimulk. Here Walarrk, the cave bat, hid himself in leaves so Nabilil couldn't see him. Walarrk then killed Nabilil with a stone tipped spear.

Walarrk's spear also pierced Nabilil's dilly bag, releasing the water, which filled the streams and the Katherine River where it flows to this day. The birds were happy now that they could drink. They also discovered Nabilil's firesticks growing along the water's edge so they could make fire to cook with.

**Nagorrggo** (NAH-gorrk-goh)

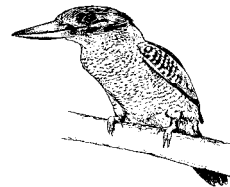
Nagorrggo was a very tall spiritual being who came from the saltwater in the north and walked along the upper Fergusson River and through what is today called Eva Valley to the east of Nitmiluk.

Nagorrggo taught Jawoyn much about proper behaviour and correct marriage relationships. It is through Nagorrggo that people belong to either Duwa or Yirritja moieties.

Nagorrggo also gave Jawoyn the Law about mowurrwurr (clans) and showed what foods different mowurrwurr could or could not eat.

**Barraya** (BAH-rrah-yah)

Barraya, the kookaburra, emerged at Barraya in the Second Gorge.



**Barraya,**  
kookaburra

**Gupu** (GOOP-boo)

Gupu, the Plains (Antilopine) Kangaroo, travelled across Jawoyn country. Gupu came from the north and then went east into Arnhem Land and south-east to the Roper River. From there he is believed to have travelled down to Uluru and into South Australia.



**Barrakbarrak,** Darter

**Barrakbarrak** (BHA-rruck-bah-rruck)

Upstream from the Gorge, male and female Barrakbarrak (Darters) collided with two cliffs at a notable spur on the river. They submerged on either side, leaving their name.

**Interpreting culture**

How many of the places in Nabilil's story do you know?

Where does the name "Nitmiluk" come from?

What do you think Nabilil's firesticks are? (Check the plant use information later in this section).

**Interpreting culture**

How does the story of Jeddah relate to Nagorrggo?



**Bemang**  
Frisled Lizard



**Bemang** (BEH-mung)

The series of hills along the road close to the Gorge is named after Bemang, the Frilled Lizard, who came from Rembarrnga tribal country and then travelled up towards Pine Creek.

**Gurri** (GOO-ree)

At Wun-Gurri the divided river represents Gurri, the female Blue-tongued Lizard. Jawoyn people are obliged to clear this site of debris and purify it by burning Marukal (Ironwood) leaves.

**Bolung** (BOH-loong)

Bolong the rainbow serpent resides in the deep green pools of the second gorge.

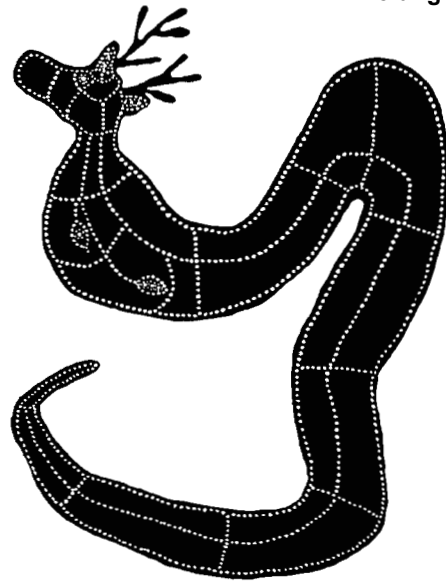
Jawoyn do not fish in the pools where Bolung sits. When fishing close to these pools, they take only a small portion of the fish caught and throw the rest back to appease Bolung for the fish taken.

Drinking water must not be taken from these deep pools, but rather from shallow pools.

Pregnant women and new initiates may not swim in the Katherine River for fear of disturbing Bolung.

While some Jawoyn creation beings like Barraya may be asked for help with hunting and foraging, Bolung is not spoken to and must be left undisturbed.

**Bolung**



**Tip**

Tell the stories you know as examples to support a point rather than as stand alone stories.

When you explain how stories are still in the landscape and Jawoyn culture, you are giving the stories context and showing their cultural value.

**What does interpretation involve?**

Interpretation involves conveying the significance of a site.

When you talk about Bolung, you are floating over his resting place!

**Jawoyn seasons**

Information provided about the Jawoyn seasons and plant uses in this handbook is from Wiynjorrotj, P, Flora, S (dec.), Brown, ND (dec.), Jatbula, P (dec.) Galmur, J, Katherine, M, Merland, F and Wightman, G (2005) *Jawoyn plants and animals, Aboriginal flora and fauna knowledge from Nitmiluk National Park and the Katherine area, northern Australia.*

**Traditional Jawoyn lifestyle**

Traditionally Jawoyn mowurrwurr (clans) moved about their country hunting, gathering and performing ceremonies on their land.

**Jawoyn seasons**

Jawoyn recognise five seasons while six seasons are recognised in Kakadu and further north.

Resources become available in different areas at different times of the year. This determined the traditional seasonal movements of mowurrwurr (clans) over their lands.

For example, certain places along the Katherine River just north of the current township were favoured as dry season camps, as they are today.

During the wet season Jawoyn moved around the higher country between Katherine and Leliyn (Edith Falls) and over towards Yulawem (Seventeen Mile Creek) where they hunted echidna, wallabies and other small game.

**Pronouncing Jawoyn words**

Leliyn, LEH-lin  
Yulawem, YOU-lah-when

**Jujja/Limpirri,**  
Merten's Water Monitor



**Interpreting culture**

Can you recognise the Jawoyn seasons in the weather and landscape?

What have you personally observed during your time at Nitmiluk?

**Guran (GOO-run)**

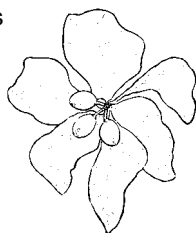
Hot and humid and rains begin. Goanna hunted. Black Plum ends and White Currant begins fruiting. Cocky Apple fruit ripen. Northern Kurrajong fruit collected, cooked and the seeds eaten. Emus eat Black Plums and White Currants.

**Jiyowk (GEE-yolk)**

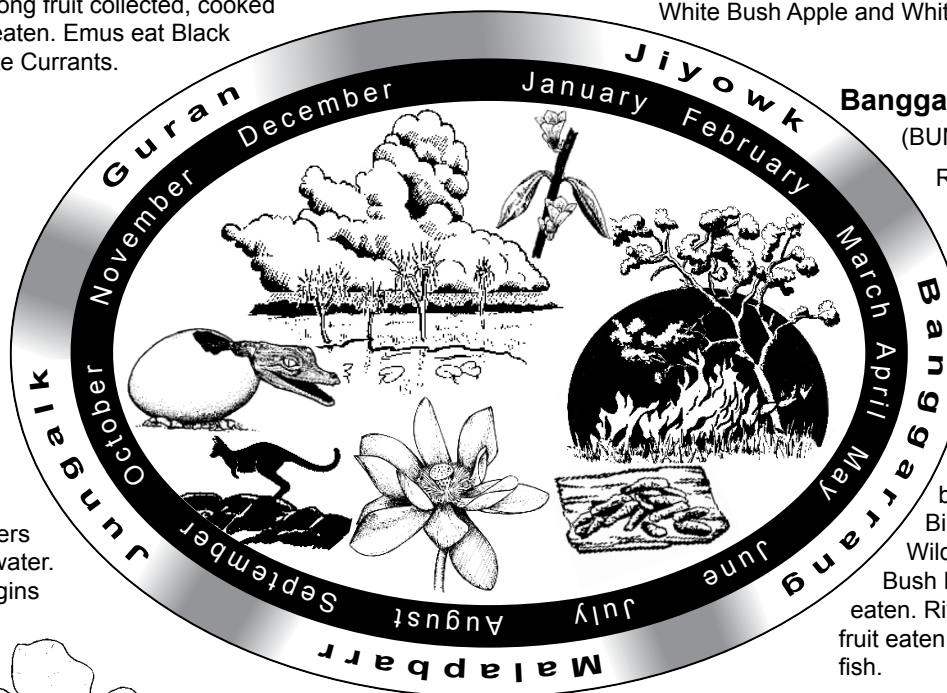
Heavy rain, waterways and wetlands full and flooding. Main plant foods are Black Currant, White Bush Apple and White Currant.

**Jungalk (JOONG-aalk)**

Ground is hot and sun burns. Changing time between wet and dry. Freshwater Crocodile eggs hatch and mothers carry young to water. Green Plum begins to fruit and paperbarks flower.



**Gurumal,**  
Green Plum



**Banggarrang**

(BUNG-gah-rrung)

Rains easing and stopping, fires lit to clean up areas and promote green shoots for kangaroos and wallabies. Snakes are aggressive. Frilled Lizards bury eggs. Billygoat Plum, Wild Grape and Bush Banana fruits eaten. River Pandanus fruit eaten by turtles and fish.

**Malapbarr (MAH-lup-barr)**

Cold weather time. Woollybutt flowering. Fires lit in low areas to promote fresh shoots for kangaroos and wallabies. Native beehive full of sweet honey. Emu and kangaroo fat and ready to hunt. Time for waterlily fruit and seeds and Fern-leaved Grevillea nectar. Cheeky Yam and Long Yam ready to be dug up. Yellow Kapok flowers signal Freshwater Crocodile and turtles carrying eggs.

**Goymarr**  
Freshwater Crocodile

**Tip**

When presenting your tour, share your personal observations of the seasons, not just what you have read about or heard from others.

Write your observations in a journal.

Jawoyn culture

### Jawoyn plant names

**Woyal** (WOH-yaal), Black Plum

**Jurrijba** (JOO-rrich-bah), White Currant

**Mangal** (MANG-aal), Cocky Apple

**Butbut** (PUT-put), Northern Kurrajong

**Murrungkurn** (MOO-rruong-goorn), Black Currant

**Mamtakmorakmo**, (MUM-duck-moh-ruck-moh), White Bush Apple

**Barntingawarak**, (BARN-ding-ah-wah-ruck), White Currant

**Gurumal** (GOO-roo-maal), Green Plum

**Marlak** (MAR-luck)

**Warwij** (WAAR-witch), Billygoat Plum

**Magorlgorl** (MAH-goorl-goorl), Wild Grape

**Juluggurn** (JOO-look-goorn), Bush Banana

**Jem** (GEM), waterlily

**Wiwal** (WEE-waal), Woollybutt

**Yawk** (YAUCK), Cheeky Yam

**Jamburl** (JUM-boorl)

**Gayawal** (GAH-yah-waal), Long Yam

### Jawoyn plant uses

Jawoyn people have used plants in a variety of ways for thousands of years and many traditional uses continue today. Plant uses include:

- food - fruits, seeds, tubers, flavourings, nectar and gum
- source of animal foods - native bee honey and witchety grubs
- food storage and cooking
- seating, bedding and shelter
- medicines, poultices and bandages
- tools and weapons - boomerangs, fighting sticks, didgeridoos, spears and spear throwers
- baits and fish poisons
- insect repellents
- fibres – string, weaving baskets and mats
- calendar plants – flowering or fruiting indicating seasonal change and readiness of animal foods (like eggs and when an animal is fattest and best to eat)

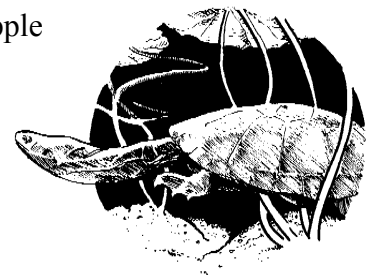
### Jawoyn uses of some commonly seen plants

**Jimjim** (JIM-jim), River Pandanus

(*Pandanus aquaticus*)

**Uses: Bait.** Segments of the fruit fall into the water attracting fish and turtle. Soft white inner flesh of fruit peduncle (stem the fruit pieces are attached to) may be eaten. Leaves can be used to make string but is poor quality compared with *Pandanus spiralis*. Stems cut in half and used as a float, or to support paperbark raft.

Ngart, turtle



**Woyoj** (WOH-yotch), White Bush Apple

(*Syzygium armstrongii*)

**Uses: food and bait.** Small ripe (white) fruit eaten. Fish and turtles eat fallen fruit.

**Belwarn** (BELL-waarn), White Bush

Apple

(*Syzygium forte*)

**Uses: food and bait.** Large ripe (white) fruit eaten. Fish and turtles eat fallen fruit.

**Yajja** (YATCH-jah) / **Gelpak** (KELL-

paak), Fern-leaved Grevillea

(*Grevillea pteridifolia*)

**Uses: food and timber.** Nectar sucked from flowers. Wood used for bondocks (woomeras), clap sticks and kangaroo spears.

**Yajja / Gelpak**  
Fern-leaved Grevillea



**Menyjel** (MEN-yell), Freshwater Mangrove

(*Barringtonia acutangula*)

**Uses: fish poison.** Bark is chopped off, crushed up and placed in small waterholes. The fish float to the surface where they are easily collected. The waterhole cannot be used again until it is flushed out by rain. This tree is also known as the Itchy Tree because of the itchy grubs that live in the canopy that cause severe itchiness when touched.

**Larruk** (LAH-rrook), Paperbark

(*Melaleuca argentea* and *M. leucadendra*)

**Uses: cooking, shelter, comfort and water craft.**

Bark peeled off in large sheets to make shelters, beds and rafts. Leaves used to flavour fish, turtle, kangaroo and other meats during cooking.

**Ginurk** (KEY-noorrk),

**River Fig**

(*Ficus coronulata*)

**Uses: food, firesticks and fibre.** Ripe (brown) fruit eaten. Turtles also eat the fruit. Dry straight stems and branches used as firesticks (bush matches). Inner bark stripped and made into string for dilly bags.

**Jirrib** (GEE-rip) / **Wowerlk** (WHO-werlk),

**Leichhardt Tree** (*Nauclea orientalis*)

**Uses: food, timber and shade.** Pale brown, soft fruit eaten. Large leaves used as plates. Spears made from stems of young plants. Coolamons made from timber. Large tree trunks made into canoes.

**Wij** (WITCH), **Turkey Bush** (*Calytrix exstipulata*)

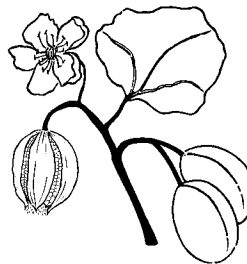
**Uses: timber.** Straight stems used to make spears for hunting fish, goanna and kangaroo.

**Bamjon** (BALM-john), **Yellow Kapok**

(*Cochlospermum fraseri*)

**Uses: food, decoration and calendar plant.** Tap root of young plants cooked in hot coals, peeled and eaten. 'Cotton' from dry fruit used as body decoration. Flowers indicate Freshwater Crocodiles and turtles are carrying eggs. Green fruits indicate that it is time to dig up the eggs for eating. When brown fruit has 'cracked open', so have eggs.

**Bamjon,**  
Yellow Kapok



**Bilangbilang** (BEE-lung-bee-lung),

**Native Lassiandra**

(*Melastoma malabathricum*)

**Uses: food.** Fruit eaten when brown to black.

**Tip**

During your tour, talk about plants and their uses when your audience can see the plants and, if possible, the parts of the plants that are used.

Have photo's and crafts to show groups.



**Larruk,**  
paperbark

**Jawoyn animal names**

**Talak** (TAH-luck), Sand Goanna

**Galwan** (GULL-waan), Gould's Goanna

**Turrk**, (TOORRK), Emu

**Goyarr** (GOY-marr), Freshwater Crocodile

**Ngart** (NGART), Turtles

**Bemang**, (BEH-mung), Frill-necked Lizard

**Giyowk** (KEY-yolk), fish

**Wam** (WAAM), native beehive

**Gupu** (GOOP-boo), large kangaroo

**Nagorik** (NAH-gorik), wallaby

**Gowarrang** (GOH-wah-rung), Echidna

**Garnpayn** (GARN-baan), **Fan Palm** (*Livistona inermis*)

**Uses: food and fibre.** Inside of central growing tip is eaten raw or cooked in a ground oven. New leaves can be split and made into string for dilly bags and other fibre crafts. Fruit eaten by emus.

**Jalkwarak** (JAALK-wah-ruck), **Spinifex**

(*Triodia microstachya*)

**Uses: medicine, glue, fish poison.** Liquid from boiled leaves used as a wash to treat colds and general soreness. Wax/resin also used as medicine in the same way and as a glue to fix heads to spears and hooks to bondocks (woomeras). Leaves used as fish poison.

**Werrng** (WHERE-ng) / **Galalajorn** (GAH-lah-lah-jorn),  
Spring Pandanus (*Pandanus spiralis*)

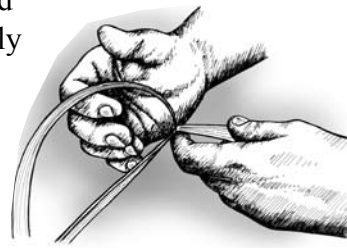
**Uses: food, fibre and firestick.** Seeds eaten. Stem remaining after fruit segments have fallen (peduncle) also eaten. Liquid from boiling the red fruit drunk as a tea. White basal sections of leaves eaten raw.

New leaves stripped and made into string for dilly bags, mats and baskets.

Dry, dead branches smoulder slowly and evenly and used to carry fire.



Young Spring Pandanus leaves are collected for weaving.



Pandanus leaves are split, dried and dyed in preparation for weaving.

**Molorrk**, Lollybush  
(*Clerodendrum floribundum*)

**Uses: bush matches, fish poison, medicine.** Dry straight stems ‘drilled’ to make fire. Dried leaves crushed and placed in small billabongs cause fish to float to the surface. Vapours from leaves in boiling water inhaled to clear blocked sinuses and liquid sipped to relieve cold and flu symptoms.

**More Jawoyn names**

- Ngawarak** (NGAH-wah-ruck), flowers
- Wurrk** (WOORRK), fire
- Darl** (DARL), coolamon
- Guluyambi** (GOO-loo-yum-bee), paperbark raft
- Garnpak** (GARN-puck), didgeridoo
- Bondock**, woomera/throwing stick
- Jamalak** (JAM-mah-luck), clap sticks
- Winja** (WIN-jah), kangaroo spears
- Mowmowurr** (MOH-warr-warr), clan

## Kinship (moieties and skin names)

Moiety and skin are an integral part of Jawoyn culture. Nagorrggo taught Jawoyn about proper behaviour and correct marriage relationships.

### Moiety

It is through Nagorrggo, a tall spiritual being who came from the saltwater in the north, that people belong to either Duwa or Yirritja moieties. Everyone and everything in the world is one of these two moieties. A child's moiety is inherited from his or her father.

Each moiety is associated with certain colours and proportions:

- Duwa - red, black, short
- Yirritja - yellow, white, long.

An important principle within Jawoyn society is the joining of Duwa and Yirritja moieties to bring balance within the natural and cultural world, for example:

- in the traditional marriage system, marriage can only be between people of opposite moieties
- in the ceremonial roles of Gidjan (owners) and Junggayi (custodians/workers) there are reciprocal rights and responsibilities whereby Yirritja people are Junggayi in ceremonies owned by Duwa, and vice versa.

### Skin

Duwa and Yirritja people are each divided into four skin groups. There are eight skin names as there are different names for males and females of the same skin. All people of the same skin are considered brothers or sisters, even if they are not blood-related.

Skin determines how people relate to each other. A person's skin determines who they have obligations or responsibilities to, how they must behave with people of other skins and who they can marry.

Skin is inherited from the mother. The diagram on the following page shows correct marriage relationships in the Ngalkpon social system and how skin names are inherited through a four-generation cycle from the mother.

### Kinship

The information provided in this handbook about moieties and skin names is from the Jawoyn Association and the Diwurruwurru-jaru Aboriginal Corporation.

### Pronouncing Jawoyn words

**Dhuwa**, DO-wah

**Yirritja**, YIH-rich-jah

### Tip

Only talk about the movie Jeddah during your tour if you have seen the movie and understand its cultural context.

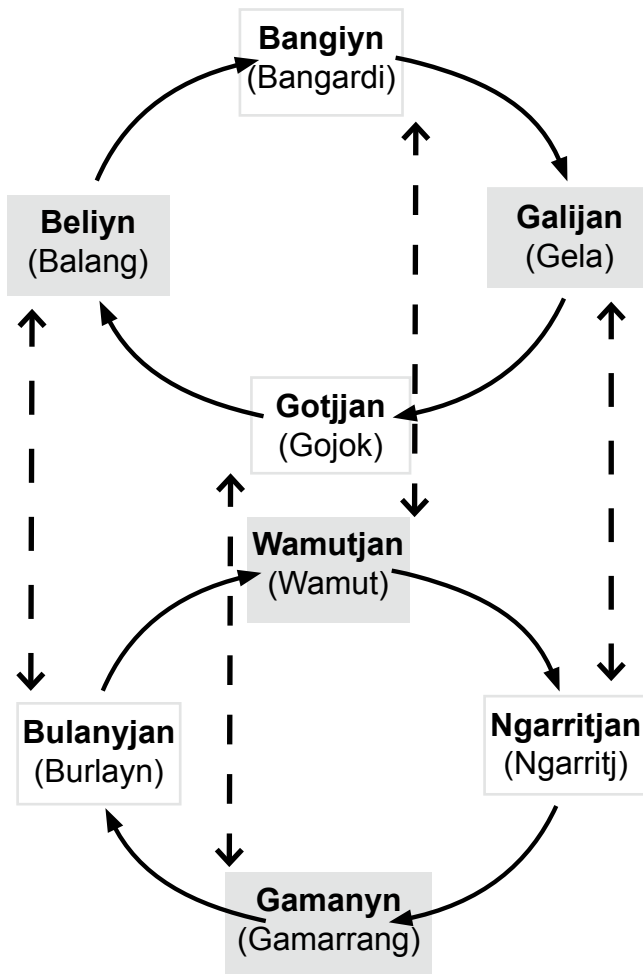
Kinship features in the storyline. If you focus on that aspect of the movie you can talk about Jeddah in a way that is meaningful to Jawoyn culture.

**Duwa**  
Female  
(Male)

**Yirritja**  
Female  
(Male)

Mother to child relationship →

First choice  
Junggayi relationship  
↑  
-  
↓



Following is an alternative way of showing these relationships that includes second choice marriage and Junggayi relationships.

Jawoyn culture

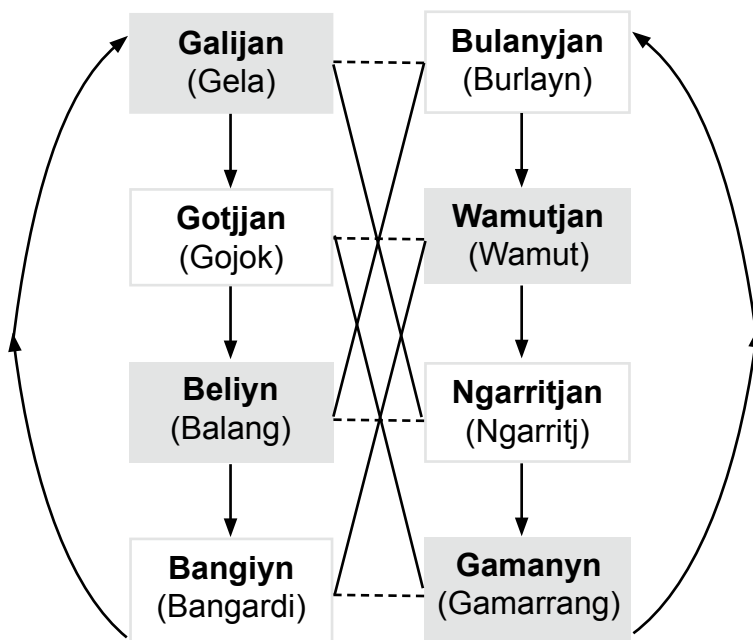
**Interpreting culture**

- Who is Burlaynjan's first choice husband?
- What skin names will Burlaynjan's children have?
- What is the skin name of Burlaynjan's mother?
- Who is Ngarritjan's mother?
- Who is Gamarrang's first choice wife?

Mother to child relationship  
↓ ↻

First choice relationships  
—

Second choice relationships  
- - -





## Junggayi

Skin names class people according to their relationships to each other. Each skin group has a primary custodial 'looking after' (Junggayi) relationship to another skin group in the opposite skin group circle.

A person's first-choice Junggayi is usually the brother or sister of their first-choice wife or husband. Choosing a Junggayi from an opposite moiety, but within the same skin group, ties families to each other and to ceremony.

## Skin relationships

Look at the diagram and see how Bangiyn relates to the other skin names:

- Bangiyn is Yirritja moiety and must marry someone of the opposite moiety
- her first choice marriage partner is Wamut
- her first choice Junggayi is Wamut's sister, Wamutjan
- her second choice Junggayi is Gamanyyn and marriage partner is Gamarrang
- her brother is Bangardi
- Bangiyn's sisters all share her skin name
- all those with the skin name Bangiyn are her sisters and all those with the skin name Bangardi are her brother
- all of Bangiyn's female children have the skin name Galijan and the male children, Gela
- Bangiyn's mother is Beliyyn.
- when Bangiyn's daughters, Galijan, have children, they will be Gotjjan (female) and Gojok (male)
- when Gotjjan has children they will be Beliyyn (female) and Balang (male). So Beliyyn's great granddaughter is actually her mother.

These rules ensure there is no marriage between biologically close relations and most people today still marry according to skin.

## Spelling Jawoyn names

Jawoyn is not a traditionally written language. Since linguists have begun to write Jawoyn and other Aboriginal languages, they have been looking for the 'best' way to spell the words.

Consequently spelling has changed over the years and you may see the same name spelled in different ways, depending on when it was originally written.

This handbook attempts to balance the 'current' spelling, which includes guidelines for pronunciation, with the wishes of Jawoyn representatives to retain the spelling that they are familiar with.

You may therefore notice differences between names in this handbook and Jawoyn books released in 2006:

Wiyngjorrotj, P, Flora, S (dec.), Brown, ND (dec.), Jatbula, P (dec.) Galmur, J, Katherine, M, Merland, F and Wightman, G (2005) *Jawoyn plants and animals, Aboriginal flora and fauna knowledge from Nitmiluk National Park and the Katherine area, northern Australia.*

Merlan, F and Pascale J (2005) *Jawoyn-English Dictionary & English Finder-list.* Diwurruwurru-jaru Aboriginal Corporation.

### What does interpretation involve?

Interpretation gives meaning to facts by stating them in ways that people can relate to.

For example, we say that the Jawoyn people have lived in the area for 50,000 years or more, but how long is 50,000 years? Below is an example of how we can help people understand.

### How long is 50,000 years?

Find a ruler or measuring tape with millimetres marked on it. Look at it as a time line where 1 mm is 1 year:

- a government term is 3-4 mm on that ruler
- how long is your age on the ruler?
- non-Aboriginal people have been in Australia for about 210 mm on the ruler
- freshwater floodplains have been here 1500 mm on the measuring tape
- the birth of Christ was just over 2000 mm ago on the measuring tape
- Jawoyn have lived here at least 50,000 mm (50 m) – about the length of a 3-trailer road train or an Olympic-size swimming pool.

## Significant Jawoyn sites

Many places within the Park have special cultural significance for Jawoyn people. These places may be associated with Jawoyn law and the events of Burr. They include ceremonial, camping and burial sites.

Most of these sites are not dangerous, but some have to be approached with care, or avoided completely. Some areas can only be visited by initiated men. There are also women's sites that must be avoided, except by those allowed under ceremonial law.

### Access to significant sites

Rights of access to places of cultural significance are determined by cultural tradition. It is important that sensitive places are not visited by the wrong people.

Jawoyn Law indicates the proper way to approach certain places. For example, at Jurrangluk a small monolith (rock) in Nitmiluk representing the head of the Jurrang (Taipan) must be rubbed with sweat from armpits. Care must be taken to call the name of Jurrang and to touch it gently, otherwise a plague of taipans may result.

### Sacred sites

Two sites in Nitmiluk National Park are registered as sacred sites under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*. A further 41 sites have been recorded by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority as having cultural significance.

### Sickness country

There is a large area in the Eva Valley Extension and north into Kakadu National Park where Bula resides. It is known as 'Sickness Country' and Bula must not be disturbed or major catastrophes could result.

### Archaeological sites

Archaeological sites reflect Aboriginal use of landscape. Sites in Nitmiluk are evidence of the long history of Jawoyn use and occupation of the land and are important to Jawoyn. They include flaked and ground stone artefact scatters, stone structures, quarries, scarred trees and occupation deposits in shelters and caves.

## Jawoyn rock art

The Jawoyn rock art region extends from Gunlom (Waterfall Creek) in Kakadu National Park, through the South Alligator River valley, across the upper Katherine River east to Snowdrop Creek, along the Waterhouse River south to Wugular, then west to Manyallaluk, Nitmiluk National Park, Fergusson River and then north back to Gunlom.

This region is rich in rock art sites and includes the styles and motifs represented in Kakadu and in other parts of the Arnhem Land Plateau. Nitmiluk's gorge, a minute segment of this vast region, lies on its very margins. To date over 400 art sites have been recorded in the Park and surveys are still finding new art sites. Up to 3,000 art sites are estimated to occur in Nitmiluk National Park.

Although not all of the art periods and styles are represented in the small segment of the gorge visited by 98% of visitors, they can be found in other parts of the Nitmiluk National Park and elsewhere in Jawoyn traditional lands.

The majority of paintings within the gorge are of the Pre-estuarine and the early Estuarine Periods. Images executed in more recent periods are also present and are usually found as weathered remnants of the original designs.

During low sea levels of the last Ice Age, the region was much drier than at present and the gorge with its permanent waterholes served as an important refuge for the local groups. This importance as a refuge decreased with the rising sea levels, increasing rainfall and major flooding.

It was perhaps during this later period that the stories now associated with the Nitmiluk Gorge area came into existence, to explain the significant environmental changes then taking place.

### Information about Jawoyn rock art

Most of the rock art information presented in this handbook is from George Chaloupka.

Chaloupka supplied some of this information directly in response to questions. Other information was researched from his contributions to various publications and his book:

Chaloupka, G (1993). *Journey in time*. Reed Books Australia.

## The paintings

Many paintings show the food available in an area while others have spiritual significance or have stories associated with them. Most Jawoyn art depicts human-like figures and local fauna like kangaroos and fish.

The cultural significance of paintings lies in the reasons for painting them:

- ceremonial or ritual
- record of significant events
- demonstrating a person's bond with the country
- story telling
- showing the food available in an area
- warning of places to avoid.

Hand stencils are found at many art sites.

## How was rock art done?

A range of techniques besides painting were used in rock art. They include drawing, stencils, prints, bees wax applications; and in making rock engravings, pecking and abrading.



Hand stencils were made by spraying pigment over a hand held against the wall. Hand prints were made by dipping the hand in the pigment and pressing it onto the rock. Prints of other objects, like grasses, were done by dipping the item in the paint and throwing it against the rock. Brushes made from bark or feathers were used to paint.

Hand stencils were made by putting the liquid pigment in the mouth and blowing it over the hand.

## Paints

Pigments (paints) were mostly local red and yellow ochres, haematite (iron oxide), white kaolin and charcoal. The harder pigments were ground on a stone palette in water, the softer ochres and kaolin were dissolved in water in bark dishes.

Haematite is the dominant red pigment you see in paintings. It is absorbed into the sandstone so paintings done with haematite can be thousands of years old.



## Protecting rock art

Silicone drip lines are placed above paintings to protect them by deflecting water away from them.

Haematite is naturally preserved due to its absorption into the rock. A weathering process that deposits a layer of silica over rock surfaces may also add to the protection of paintings in some places.

This deposition of silica takes place over thousands of years as the climate cycles between wet and arid. Silica cement in the sandstone dissolves during wet climatic periods and is drawn out and deposited on the rock surface during dry periods. The result is a layer of silica on the surface of the rock that preserves the paint underneath. This geological process is not currently taking place at Nitmiluk.

## Who created the rock art?

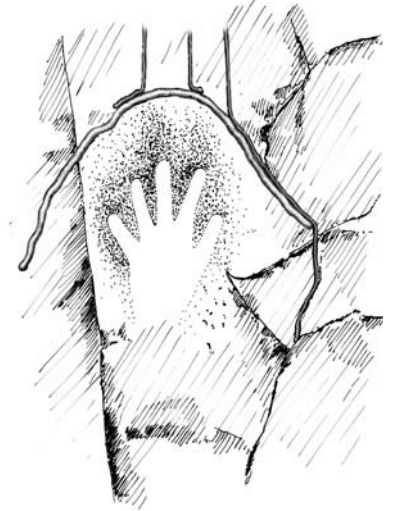
Jawoyn elders will tell you that rock art was done by both creation beings and Jawoyn people.

Some paintings are referred to as Mimi paintings because they were done by the Mimi spirits. It was the Mimi who taught Jawoyn people how to paint.

Paintings up in high places that seem impossible to get to were done by the Mimi who were either tall enough to reach, or could stretch high and paint where the art is seen today.

There are also places where creation beings have placed themselves in the rock. These are not considered paintings, but the actual body of the being.

Silicone driplines protect paintings from water damage.



### Interpreting culture

What do paintings show?

What is important about the paintings?

Why were paintings done?

Who painted the paintings high above the ground?

### **Dating rock art**

While the age of rock art is not important to Aboriginal people, it is to most non-Aboriginal people so it is useful to understand how rock art is dated.

George Chaloupka developed the system that is used for dating rock art on the Arnhem Land Plateau. Chaloupka's system considers the style, content and layering of paintings in the context of the climatic periods that determined what lived and grew in an area.

The Jawoyn artists depicted changes in their environment and society through time. For example, the animals, weapons and headdresses painted are reflections of the times in which they were painted; and paintings of non-Aboriginal people, cattle, horses and buffalo depict their arrival.

Chaloupka's rock art dating system identifies the following sequence of rock art styles.

<b>Period</b>	<b>Style and subject</b>
<b>Pre-estuarine</b> Before 8,000 years ago	<b>Object imprints</b> - hand prints, grass prints, thrown objects.
	<b>Naturalistic</b> - large naturalistic animals and humans.
	<b>Dynamic Figures</b> - human beings, animal headed beings and other anthropomorphs, macropods, rock python, stencils, boomerangs, clubs, spears.
	<b>Post Dynamic Figures</b> - mainly human beings, some macropods.
	<b>Simple figures with boomerangs</b> - mainly human beings.
	<b>Yam figures</b> - anthropomorphised yam figures - flying fox, birds, turtle, Rainbow Serpent.
<b>Estuarine</b> 8,000 to 2,000 years ago	<b>Naturalistic</b> - estuarine fish (Barramundi, mullet, catfish), Estuarine (Saltwater) Crocodile, spearthrowers.
	<b>Bees wax designs</b> - human beings, anthropomorphs, non-figurative designs.
	<b>X-ray</b> - Lightning Man, stone-tipped spear, descriptive x-ray paintings of animals and humans. X-ray paintings become decorative.
<b>Freshwater</b> 1,500 to 300 years ago	Hook-headed human beings; Magpie Geese, water lilies, goose spears and goose-wing fan, didgeridoo, spear thrower.
<b>Contact</b> 300 years ago to present	Macassan vessels, European ships, guns, horses, buffalo, cattle, blue paintings.

### Interpreting culture

How is rock art dated?  
 How did the changing climate affect food sources?  
 How did the changing climate affect Aboriginal populations?  
 How did the changing climate affect rock art?  
 What are the climatic periods used to date rock art and when did they occur?

### Some more Jawoyn words

**Garnpak**, didgeridoo  
**Bondock**, woomera/spear thrower  
**Bamurru**, Magpie Goose

**Pre-estuarine Period - 20,000 to 8,000 years ago**

**Sea level:** Much lower than today and the coastline was much further north due to an ice age.

**Climate:** With the sea level about 150 m lower than at present and the coastline 320 km further north, the climate of the Arnhem Land Plateau was semi arid.

**Plants:** Plants were more spread out and lower (like the Tennant Creek area is now) due to the drier climate.

**Food supply:** With the coast further away, there was a larger area of land between the escarpment and the coast. Food sources were also sparser in the drier climate so clans had larger estates and covered more ground to hunt and gather food.

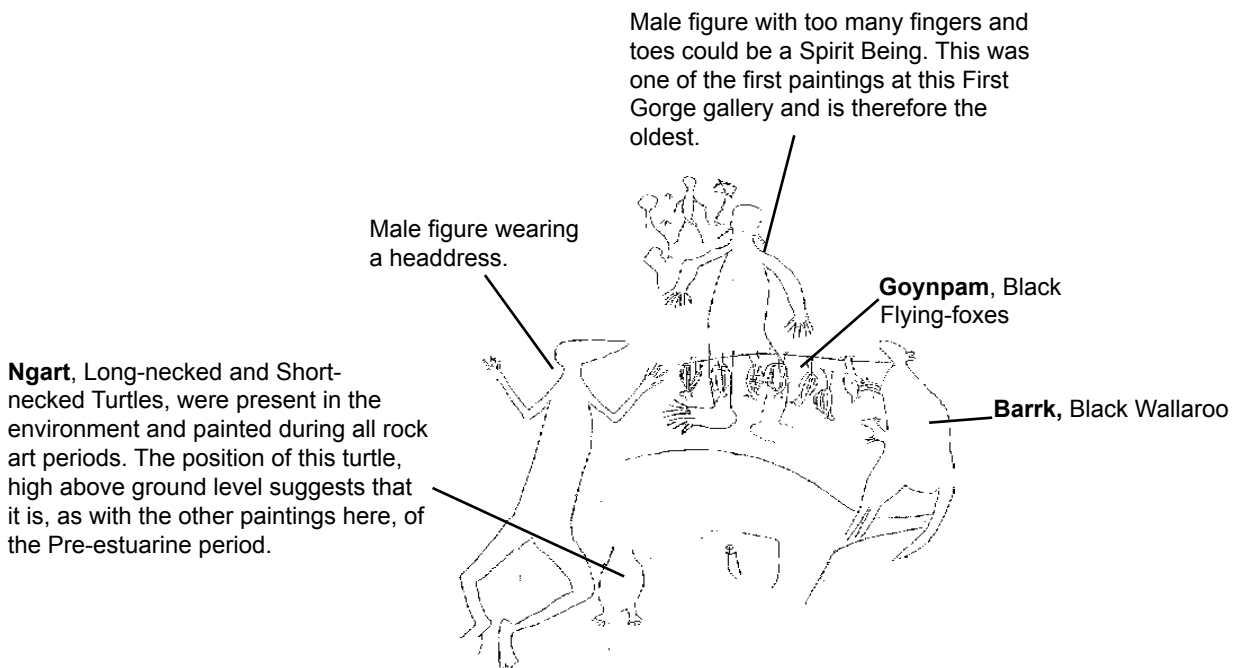
**Main foods:** The main animals eaten would have been kangaroos, emus, snakes and lizards.

**Hunting:** Boomerangs were effective hunting weapons in the lower and more sparse vegetation, although spears were also used.

**Painting subjects:** Human beings and various animal species. Paintings featuring boomerangs were done in this period when it was a useful hunting weapon.

**Painting styles:** Imprints of hands, grass and thrown objects were the first paintings. They were followed by large naturalistic figures and later by small, active depictions of hunters.

**Jawoyn rock art:** Large red silhouettes of human figures (many horizontal or inverted) and kangaroos.







### Dating rock art

According to Chaloupka, the tradition of painting larger than life size images of animal and human beings is typical of the Large Naturalistic Figures style at the beginning of the Pre-estuarine Period.

This antiquity is also implied by the position of the figures on the rock face - high above ground level, being painted from ledges that have since collapsed.

### **Estuarine Period - 8,000 to 2,000 years ago**

**Sea level:** As the Ice Age ended, the ice began to melt. Some 8,000 years ago the rising sea invaded the river valleys and reached its current level about 6,000 years ago.

**Climate:** With the rise in sea level came a change in climate to the monsoonal climate we have today. The current river systems were also established at this time although the lower reaches of rivers and their floodplains were saline.

**Plants:** As the climate became wetter, vegetation grew taller and denser, becoming more like the woodlands in the Katherine area today. Mangrove swamps established alongside the lowland rivers.

**Food supply:** The rapidly rising sea level caused people to migrate further inland. There was also an increase in food supply with the higher rainfall so an area could support more people.

**Main foods:** Fish, including barramundi and other aquatic foods, became part of the diet.

**Hunting:** Boomerangs became useless for hunting in the denser vegetation. Spears and spear throwers were used more.

**Painting subjects:** Paintings depicted the new foods. Barramundi became a feature of paintings during this period. Alongside other evidence, such as rocky rubble under paintings now beyond reach, the absence of Barramundi is used to indicate paintings are Pre-estuarine rather than Estuarine. Boomerangs were no longer painted in the Estuarine Period.

**Painting styles:** Early Estuarine paintings were in the naturalistic style but developed into descriptive x-ray and then the decorative x-ray style.

**Jawoyn rock art:** Red silhouettes, some with white outlines. Includes depictions of kangaroos, zoomorphic figures, large human figures, Freshwater Crocodile, goanna and fish.

**Freshwater Period - 2,000 to 300 years ago**

**Sea level:** The current sea level and climate were well and truly established.

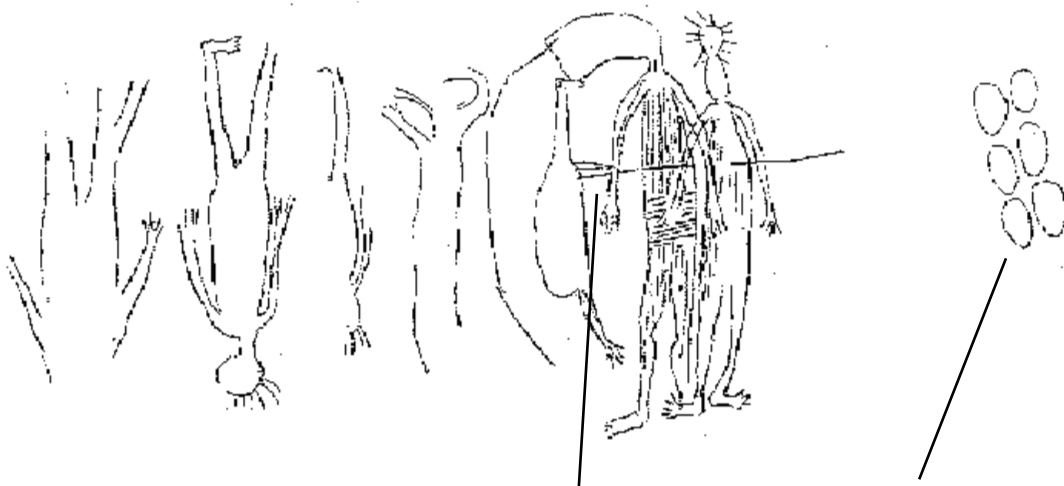
**Climate:** Over the years the annual rains had been washing sediment down the rivers and the mangroves trapped the sediment, building up the river banks in the lowlands. A point was reached where the saltwater no longer reached over the floodplains and they became freshwater environments.

**Food supply:** The new freshwater environments were very hospitable and supported an incredible range and abundance of wildlife. Aboriginal populations prospered and spent the wet seasons in the stone country.

**Main foods:** Freshwater plants and animals like goose, turtle, file snakes and lilies became part of the diet.

**Painting subjects:** Hook-headed human figures, Magpie Geese, water lilies, goose spears and goose-wing fan, didgeridoo, spear thrower.

**Jawoyn rock art:** Naturalist and x-ray phases - white outline or silhouettes, yellow outline or silhouettes, x-ray, human figures, hand stencils and hand prints, Bolung, kangaroo, emu, waterbird, Freshwater Crocodile, snake, long-necked turtle and fish.



This painting in the First Gorge shows a **Bornorrong** (Brolga) with a spear in it. Also shown are **Jalwak** (Bush Potatoes) that can be found in the side gorges. The Brolga is a bird associated with wetlands that established in the Freshwater Period.

**Contact Period - 300 years ago to the present day**

**Sea level:** No change.

**Climate:** Climatically we are still in the Freshwater Period, but in terms of Aboriginal painting, it is the Contact Period.

**Plants:** New plants were introduced (weeds).

**Food supply:** The same plants and animals as the Freshwater Period, but with new species like pigs, cattle and buffalo.

**Main foods:** The same, but with the addition of buffalo, cattle and pigs.

**Hunting:** The same for a while, but then guns came into use.

**Painting subjects:** There are two parts to the Contact Period. It began with the Macassans who came for Trepang (sea cucumber) during the wet season and left in the dry. Macassans first came in the 1600s and they were stopped by the South Australian Government in the early 1900s. Then Europeans started exploring and settling in the mid 1800s. Paintings of ships, horses, cattle and non-Aboriginal men (with hands in pockets and wearing boots) appear along with paintings typical of the Freshwater Period.

**Painting styles:** Painting on rocks may continue in remote parts of Arnhem Land today, but most painting on rocks has ceased. When it ceased varied, but paintings at Nourlangie Rock in Kakadu National Park were re-painted in 1963. Painting continues on canvas and other modern materials, and there are a range of traditional and more contemporary styles.

**Further reading  
about rock art**

Chaloupka, G (1993).  
*Journey in time*. Reed  
Books Australia.

**Further reading**

Wijnjorrotj, P, Flora, S (dec.), Brown, ND (dec.), Jatbula, P (dec.) Galmur, J, Katherine, M, Merland, F and Wightman, G (2005) *Jawoyn plants and animals, Aboriginal flora and fauna knowledge from Nitmiluk National Park and the Katherine area, northern Australia.*

Wightman, G and Brown, J (1994) *Jawoyn plant identikit: common useful plants in the Katherine area of Northern Australia*, CCNT, Darwin and Jawoyn Association, Katherine.

Naylor, J (1990) *Katherine NT, more than just the gorge: the visitors guide to natural beauty, Aboriginal culture, history, relaxation and adventure around Katherine.* Published by Y.Wienberg and J.Naylor.

Wynjorric, P (2001) *Plants, animals and people: ethnoecology of the Jawoyn people* (edited by Sonia Tidemann). Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education, Batchelor.

*Nitmiluk National Park Plan of Management*, October 2002.

Chaloupka, G (1993) *Journey in time.* Reed Books Australia.

Trugden, R (2000) *Why warriors lie down and die.* Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Incorporated, Darwin.

**Section 3 Assessment questions**

You must answer all of the questions at the end of each section of this handbook and complete a practical assessment before you can conduct launch (boat) tours on Katherine Gorge.

Following are the questions that you must answer as part of your assessment for this section.

**Please write your answers on the form in Section 9 of this handbook.**

1. What is Burr?
2. What are some of the significant events of Burr?
3. What is Bula's story?
4. What is Nabilil's story?
5. How was Nitmiluk named?
6. What is Bolung's story?
7. Who is Barraya?
8. What are the Jawoyn seasons?
9. What are some of the characteristics of each Jawoyn season?
10. What plants along the river are used for firesticks?
11. What plants along the river are used to make string?
12. What is a calendar plant?
13. What food plants grow along the river and what parts of the plants are eaten?
14. What is moiety?
15. How does a person's skin name affect who they marry?
16. What can make a site significant?
17. Why was rock art painted?
18. How is rock art dated in Nitmiluk?
19. What are the four rock art periods defined by George Chaloupka and how did they affect lifestyle and art?
20. Why does the paint last so long?
21. What can you talk about at art sites without interpreting individual paintings?
22. Why is it important not to touch the paintings?