

Keeping Country



No country without people

Yirralka Rangers



Yirralka Rangers

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Wunungmurra from Wandawuy (on left) and Mudinymudiny Dhamarrandji from Yilpara.

Photo: Dave Preece

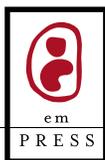
Keeping Country: No country without people

Yirralka Rangers

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Challenges for keeping people on Homelands



We believe that our connection to our country keeps us healthy and happy. Country is not just the land, but the spiritual world of that land. Our culture nourishes our souls and minds and our country nourishes our bodies. When we are away from our country we yearn to be back.

We know that life can be hard on a Homeland, but we also know that, whatever the hardships, we prefer those hardships to being away from Homelands. We know our people lose language and culture when they are away. We want to have strong Yolngu culture and live on country.

Laynha's mission is to maintain and sustain Yolngu living on Homelands. More than ever before, the challenge is how we can keep our young people on country and prevent them losing their language, culture and identity. We know that they have high expectations that we will provide leadership and a direction for them. We are doing this in two ways.

Firstly, we have to provide basic services in the Homelands. We have challenges with water and power; with maintaining our houses and buying food and other goods. We are cut off from the outside world because of no reliable internet connection. Our roads are bone-jarring in the Dry and often impassable in the Wet. This makes it difficult to travel back and forth between Homelands and hubs for hunting, ceremony, work, visiting friends and relatives.

Secondly, we must offer meaningful activities for everyone living on Homelands. This must be a mixture of 'Western' style work and Yolngu work. Tourism and hospitality offer some opportunities, but we must be careful to maintain a balance between Western and Yolngu ways that respect culture and country. We can, for instance, use our traditional knowledge to produce 'natural' health and beauty products from plants that everyone will want to use.

The Australian Government's funding of the Yirralka Rangers acknowledges that keeping our country and culture strong is important to our nation, not just Yolngu. Still, Yirralka Rangers only employs a few of our people. We have to do more to sustain a deep pool of people and knowledge, nurtured by living on country.

Education of the young by our elders must remain if our rich culture and intimate environmental knowledge are to continue down to future generations. We must be strong in telling government that sending our children to schools away from the Homelands will not improve our wellbeing or help our children. We must educate our children in the 'both ways' approach.

Yirralka Rangers is not just about those things that government sees as important. We are happy to help out, but we know that what we are really doing is keeping our country healthy, keeping our country safe and keeping our country secure – for now and for future generations of Yolngu.

Baruwaya Mununggurr

Chairman

Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation



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Laynhapuy Indigenous Protected Area



SOURCE: Map K14-7 001 compiled by Six Seasons Pty Ltd based on Geoscience Australia topographic map

- Homeland
- Stage 1 – Laynhapuy IPA
- - - Stage 2 – Laynhapuy IPA

Our country is in good shape because people are living on it



In Yolngu country, in an area almost the size of Wales, the 60 of us employed as Yirralka Rangers are in the front line protecting the environment, maintaining cultural sites, managing visitors, monitoring biosecurity and fishing. We do so from our decentralised ranger bases located on 16 homelands, which fall within the boundaries of the Laynhapuy Indigenous Protected Area (IPA).

Our country is in good shape because people are living on it. Research by the US-based Christensen Foundation has discovered that 80% of the world's most biodiverse regions are held within Indigenous protected zones. Why is this so? Because, the foundation concluded, Indigenous people have cultural values and a way of life that is connected to sustaining the health of the landscapes on which they depend. Those cultural values and how they conserve country are the subject of the **ART>ENVIRONMENT** sections of this second booklet in the *Keeping Country* series.

We can draw on our deep knowledge, learned as a consequence of our long and intimate association with a particular place. Living as we do throughout the IPA's extensive land and sea country of 17,320km², including 803km of coastline, we are ready and able to intervene where any threats arise to the fragile, but still largely pristine, natural and cultural heritage of north-east Arnhem Land. Background on the Yirralka Rangers is in the following story on pp. 4-7. Also, see our first booklet *Keeping Country: Putting both ways culture into practice* archived on our website – www.laynhapuy.com.au/services/yirralka-rangers



Abandoning country would lead, as it has elsewhere, to escalating numbers of pest plants and animals, plundering of land and sea resources, out-of-control bushfires, and desecration of cultural sites. Landcare principles recognise that conserving large intact landscapes ought to be a number one priority. Once lost, it is hard to find a way back.

Western consumer culture has left a heavy footprint on the land and sea, on all plants and animals. The time would seem ripe for paying attention to alternative, more sustainable ways of living. We are the people who can speak for the land and the sea. The dominant mainstream culture has much to learn from us.





Yirralka Rangers extends its reach west

The Yirralka Rangers has made a flying start after moving west beyond 'morning side.'

With five more homelands joining the Laynhapuy Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) in mid-2014 as part of Stage 2, the Yirralka Rangers responsibilities more than doubled. We now have to protect precious Yolngu cultural sites and care for pristine land and sea country in a vast swathe from Arnhem Bay to Blue Mud Bay and beyond.

In less than a year, the new rangers recruited from homelands around the Gapuwiyak area have already made impressive inroads in ticking off the classic suite of ranger activities, as well as lending a timely hand in the clean-up after last Wet season's two cyclones.

Skills training began immediately for the rangers and four cultural advisors so we could effectively do our jobs from combatting invasive pest plants and animals to learning mechanical skills and undertaking boat patrols. In keeping with the decentralised Yirralka Rangers model, we were recruited locally, ensuring that those of us out west live and work within our own homelands.

Learning about safe handling of chemicals has, for the first time, stopped the spread of invasive gamba and mission grasses around homelands. Each homeland has a spray backpack, although the most valuable tool in our armoury is the 400 litre spray tank on the back of a Toyota Landcruiser. Combined with late dry season burning and regular mowing, spraying has led to a visible reduction in weeds around our homelands.



Coxswains training has meant that we can take part in boat patrols with NT Fisheries and Water Police in search and rescue, as well as monitoring recreational and commercial mud crab and barra fishing in Arnhem and Blue Mud bays.

We have now qualified in first aid and marine radio operations, training in chainsaw and firearms use, OH&S, small engine mechanics, quad bikes and four wheel driving – all of which count towards achieving Certificate 2 in conservation and land management.

Much of our training proved timely when cyclones Lam and Nathan clearfelled trees, rendering roads into our homelands impassable. We estimate that ranger teams have personally chainsawn and hand pulled tree trunks and branches from more than 100km of road in the Gapuwiyak area.

The west side of the IPA contains vast flood plains. Unfortunately, wetlands are a favourite habitat of feral pigs and buffalo. Check out Wesley Wunungmurra's story to find out one spectacularly successful approach that Yirralka Rangers has taken to reduce buffalo numbers.

Other strategies are to set up photo monitoring of ferals as well as pig traps near homelands. We plan to fit a batch of Judas collars to buffalo and pigs, let them go, then trace the 'traitors' back to their unsuspecting families to build our knowledge of seasonal movements and improve management efficiency.





Islands to north and south are rich foraging sources for turtles, trepang, oysters and dugong. A helicopter survey of 'hot spots' for the rare, endemic snubfin dolphin found that Buckingham Bay had the highest density of all of their survey areas.

We are clearing the coastline of fishing nets and other debris, which entangle turtles, seabirds and other marine wildlife. Rangers are trained to use Cybertracker software on hand-held GPS devices so we can identify net types and host countries and login their beach locations to the Ghost Nets Australia website. The computer devices have a myriad of mapping opportunities for animal and plant locations, whether feral, bush tucker or rare and endangered.

Yirralka Rangers in the Gapuwiyak area are moving to mirror the 'morning side's' recreational areas strategy and are in the process of investigating the feasibility of a number of new sites. Offering composting toilets, tables and firepits, the dedicated campgrounds manage visitor movement and control access to sacred sites. The two already established at Dhalinybuy and Yilpara have acted as a much-needed source of income, generating over \$30,000 per campground per year.

Ranger *djama* gives us more than tools, technology, training, money and respect. Like an immense tree on a hillside, Yirralka Rangers shields our homelands, holding country and culture together. As rangers – old or new – we wear the yellow cap and *ganybu* badge with pride.

The buffalo that grew and grew at Balma

"When my father first came back to his homeland at Balma over 20 years ago, there were no buffalo. As a few spread from Bulman, he wasn't worried and thought they couldn't damage the land. He saved them for the safari hunting mob who paid good money.

"But the buffalo grew and grew. There was lots of water at Balma. It was perfect for them. They were messing up waterholes, walking on the riverbed, bringing up saltwater, trampling the sacred areas, eating all the water lilies and water chestnuts.

"Four years ago, Yirralka Rangers started shooting the buffalo from helicopters. We've done it four times now – twice in the west. It's made a big difference. Everything on the land is starting to come back."

Top right: Senior Cultural Advisor, Bandibandi Wunungmurra, talks about the big difference that the Yirralka Rangers have made to the buffalo problem at Balma.

Right: A camera trap captures buffalo wallowing.





How do Yolngu know when something is ready for eating?

The first question many visitors ask when we meet them at our recreation areas is how do we know when plants are ready for eating and animals for hunting? What is the source of our knowledge that when the wind blows from a certain direction or a plant comes into flower, it's time to go fishing or foraging.

As we're going to reveal in the next few sections, it's not magic. The source of our deep, locally intimate environmental knowledge comes from our culture and being on country. That's our secret. And it comes hand in hand with another one. If we don't live on our homelands and look after country, it will suffer and if our land suffers – so does our culture and ultimately – so do we as a people.

Learning about bush tucker and medicine, mastering artwork and the proper way to perform ceremony (*bunggul*) – these are the

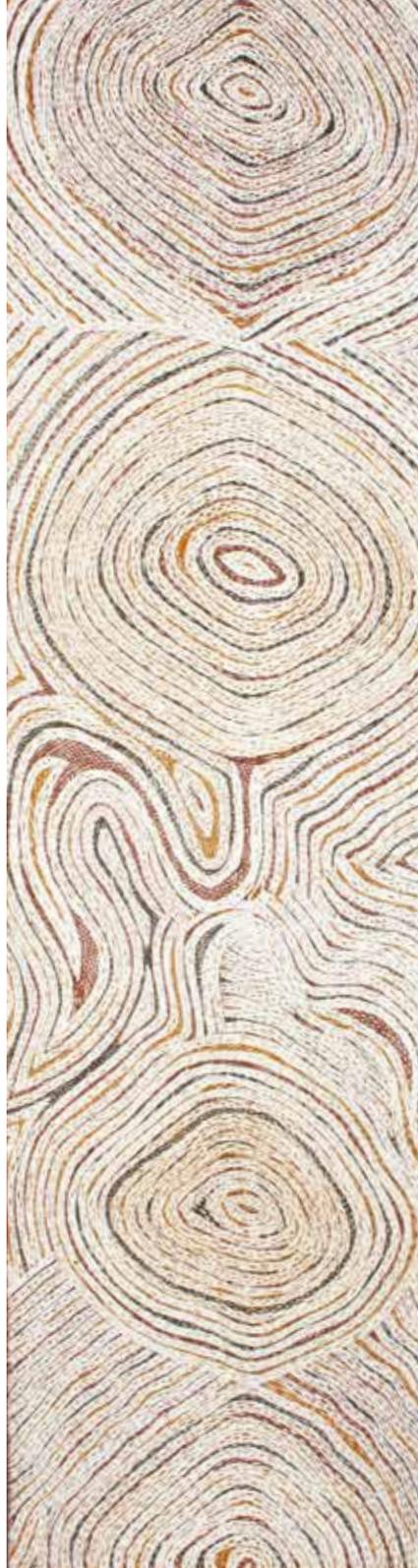
source of our power and identity. To show you how we Yolngu know the world, we're going to follow some of our stories from a number of ranger artists from a sample of homelands.

We like to think that all of us are artists, because when Yolngu live on homelands we learn to dance, sing and play our part in ceremony. But those rangers featured here are special – they have mastered how to paint or how to sing in perfect pitch better than most, so let's hear what they have to say.

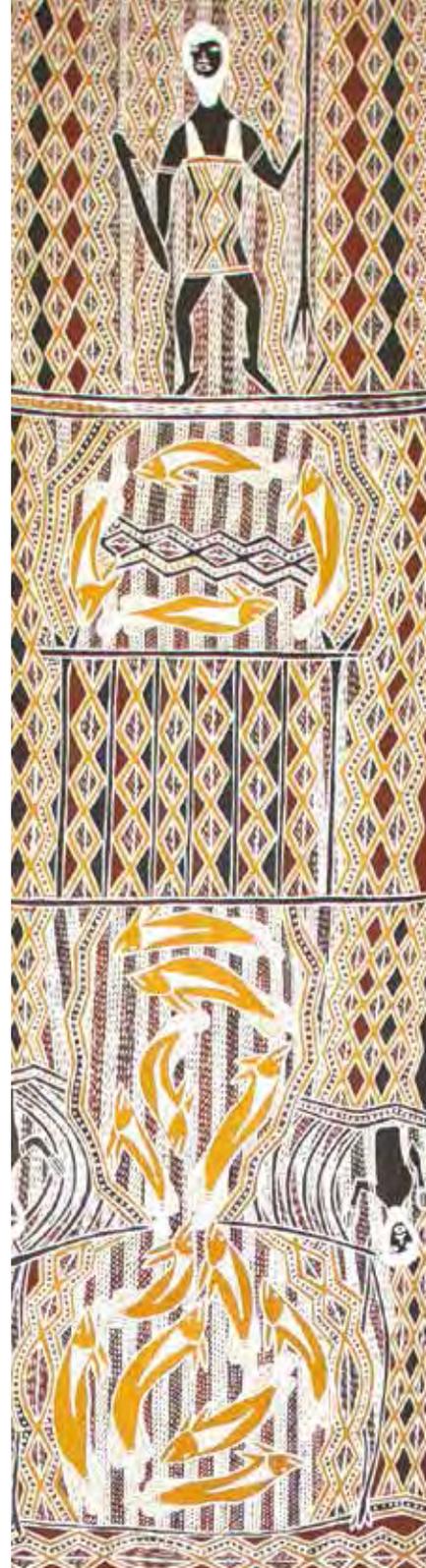




Yumutjin Wunungmurra,
Gurrumuru Homeland – see p.15



Gurrundul Marika,
Yilpara Homeland – see p.17



Yinimala Gumana,
Gangan Homeland – see p.18

Left: Hunting and foraging on homelands significantly boosts food types available to families, acting as another contributor to better health outcomes for Yolngu people living on homelands.



It's all about place

When you ask a Yolngu what's special about their homeland, we don't talk about the beautiful views or the great beaches, but how the land contains our birthright and our culture – our songlines, our painting and our history.

All of us born on country are given a name and a totemic guiding spirit associated with a particular place or event on our *wanga* or homeland.

Where Europeans talk about land as something that can be bought and sold, we Yolngu people have a much more intimate, reciprocal relationship with land and sea country. We are our land's custodians not its owners. Custodianship means we have a responsibility to nurture it, to care and cherish our land because it defines who we are as Yolngu.

Each child is given a totem – a plant, animal or natural object – that links him or her to the natural world. Totems act as our guides. They have to be shown respect and nurtured. For in our world, there is no hierarchy where human beings are at the top, with everything else existing merely to provide for the needs of humans.





On the contrary, everything has awareness and feelings. We see no distinction between humans and animals or even mountains and gullies, beaches or the sea. That rock at the top of the hill, the trees that clothe it, that flowing stream, the animals that drink there – all are living things with souls. We can communicate directly with them through speech, song and ceremony. In our world, everything belongs to one or other class of being (moiety), which was determined at the dawn of time in the Dreaming. We are born Dhuwa or Yirritja and must marry someone of the opposite moiety, which in turn determines what our children must become. Every thing in the landscape, big or small, living or non-living, has its own moiety, a specific marker of where it belongs in the world as made in the Dreaming, or as we call it, the Wangarr times.



My name Gurrundul refers to a big billabong on my clan estate on the Kololatong River, one of the largest rivers in Yolngu country. It's one of the places where the ancestral stingray bit the land as he journeyed inland from salt to fresh water.

The stingray is one of my saltwater totems along with dugongs and parrotfish. It's the one I like best because stingrays are my favourite food.

Gurrundul Marika – Senior Ranger and artist – Yilpara homeland

Gurrundul's saltwater clan design on left: clear water moving over and above a stingray.





Yinimala is the name of a particular beach in Blue Mud Bay. Gumana is the name of the tides coming in and out.

My saltwater *miny'tji* pattern and songline is associated with the tide flowing back and forth around a very powerful rock called Yindirwiyun that radiates spiritual force in all directions, stretching from the sea inland. Three Blue Mud Bay homelands share the same songline's knowledge and law.

Yindirwiyun was created by my ancestor being Barama on his journey from sea upriver to Gangan. We waded out to the rock when performing ceremony.



Yinimala Gumana – Senior Ranger – Gangan homeland

Yinimala paints two distinct creation stories that have different saltwater and freshwater clan designs. The wavy lines in the miny'tji pattern indicate powerful turbulence.

To us, the Wangarr ancestor beings are still here, part of earth and sea, waiting for us to animate them. Our extended family – known as a clan – is spiritually connected to our land and we gain kinship obligations to regularly visit and perform *bunggul*, which brings our land alive.



Passed down to me from my father, Yilpirr is the name of a particular rock holding the country firm, both at sea and inland. There are other rocks, some Dhuwa, some Yirritja, but only one Yilpirr.



Yilpirr Wanambi – Ranger – Gurkawuy homeland

Yilpirr's freshwater clan design consists of repeated patterns of flowering stringybark. The pattern resembles a branch as his family name Wanambi implies. But his first name has a far more specific source.

Each family inherits rights and responsibilities to a particular clan estate, both on land and on water: it could be a hill, waterhole or a rock underwater. This is our country, where we belong. As we grow, so does our reciprocal relationship linking us with place. Our cultural values not only contain knowledge about country, but also confer duties upon us to look after our land and water, and all plants and animals within their embrace. We sing about this to the plants and animals, to the land and sea, and everything in it.

The repeated patterns in our artwork are not there for decoration. Originally painted on our bodies at ceremony, the patterns are actually clan designs (*miny'tji*) that act like title deeds. Each of the Yolngu clans possess a unique clan design. Their repetitive patterns echo the geometry found in nature, whether of wavy lines representing sea grass beds and flowing water, or fields of diamonds meant to resemble a close-up of a crocodile's back.



I am a singer and leader in ceremony. My name Wanambi means branches of the stringybark and is bound up with the honey bee creation story of my clan and homeland. This is my Dreaming and my soul. Wherever I perform the honey bee story, people know who I am and it connects all of us singing and dancing together along the same songline.



Lulparr Wanambi – Senior Cultural Advisor – Raymangirr homeland

Lulparr is a senior ceremonial leader in the Gapuwiyak area, part of Stage 2 of the Laynhapuy Indigenous Protected Area, which as of last year falls within the Yirralka Rangers land management responsibilities.

Our inherited *miny'tji* patterns are 'talking sticks', central to our identity. They tell the world who we are, where we come from and what we own. Art and *bunggul* bring the clans together, working and speaking for land and sea. Without it we are nobody. Practising *bunggul* makes both our culture and country stronger.

We see water as the key creative force. At the dawn of time, the great ancestral heroes, such as Barama at Gangan, emerged from water, the salt and foam drying on their skin, displaying *miny'tji* body designs. Places where salt and fresh water mix together are sources of great spiritual power. When our cycle of life ends and we die, our spirit goes back to land and water.

We place no barriers between land and sea. When a wind blows or a plant flowers, its effects are felt on land and sea and among the creatures living there. Songlines of the journeys made by our ancestor beings connect totems in a seamless web from one side of the continent to another. Consequently, we inherit names and clan estates on land and sea, along with separate creation stories and *miny'tji* patterns for saltwater and freshwater.

While our names and *miny'tji* are clearly related to place, they have beneath the surface other hidden layers of meaning. At the root of all that we know, and we own, are our origins in the events of the Wangarr – as we will reveal in the next section.



In the beginning

We, Yolngu, like the *napaki* who came to our country, have our own creation beliefs and law, just as sacred and profound as those written in the Bible, the Koran or the four noble truths of Buddhism.

At the dawn of creation, in Wangarr times, it was our ancestor beings – some human, some beast – who brought what was previously barren land to life. At the end of their journeys across land and sea, the ancestor beings left aspects of themselves behind transformed into part of the landscape.

These journeys criss-crossing our country by ancestors such as Mana the shark, Guku the wild honeybee or the two dugong hunters who came to grief, together form our homeland and clan songlines, passed down from generation to generation by our parents and elders. As they journeyed, the Wangarr ancestors sang about their experiences and the creatures they encountered, giving out names and passing on knowledge, much of it essential to our survival.

Whether it's singing, dancing or painting, our art acts as the medium for linking clans, totems and moieties, and in maintaining the spiritual balance of the world. Our stories and songlines are written on land and sea.

These are not stories from a long gone past, but exist for us in the here and now. Each one of us who develops the ability to sing a songline or paint a *miny'tji* pattern gains a source of identity, power and a comprehensive map and archive of all that our landscape contains. As the Wangarr ancestors moved through the featureless land bringing it into being, their journey was imprinted on everything from the flight of a bird, to the sound of wind among casuarinas or the feel of a grain of sand.



If you went to Gurkawuy, Yirralka Ranger Yilpirr Wanambi could show you where the ancestor of his totem, the water goanna, entered the saltwater and how he left a trail of bubbles that have become rocks. At Raymangirr, the people living there can point to a freshwater spring emerging in the sea as the sacred site where honey spills into the ocean at the climax of their wild honeybee songline. At Gangan, a naturally occurring rock barrage in a waterhole is associated with a creation story about the first fishtrap made by Barama.

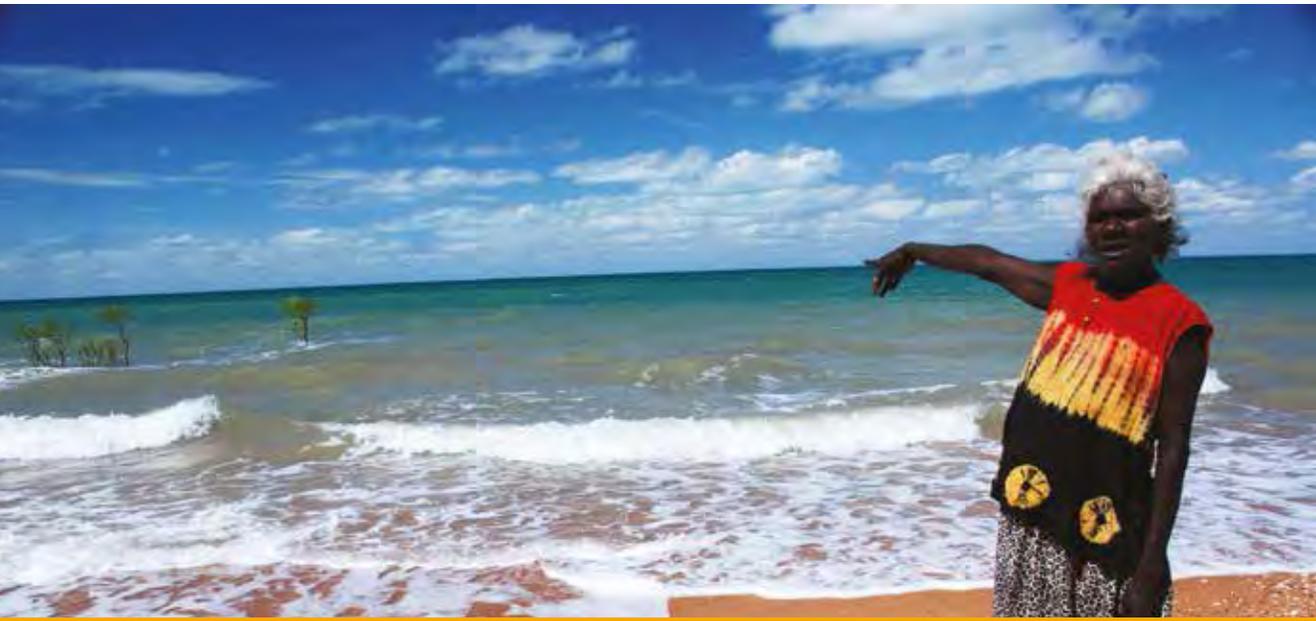


When I was a little boy, I was down by the river with my father and the ground was shaking and the trees were moving. I asked why and he told me that my totem spirit Manda the octopus lived nearby in the rainforest. My father said we were on the spot where Birrindji the warrior, who protects Manda, danced with knives and afterwards smoked tobacco and played cards and won money.

He heard this story from his grandfather and it shows how we knew about the Macassans long before the *napaki* arrived. The place where Birrindji danced with knives is still a ceremonial site.



Yumutjin Wunungmurra – Senior Cultural Advisor – Gurrumuru homeland
 With its images of knives and anchors, Yumutjin Wunungmurra's painting (in full on p. 9) depicts how a songline passed down by his father embodies knowledge about past trade with the seafaring Macassans over several centuries pre-European contact. Yumutjin is a clan leader and a high level Yolngu lawman.



Julie Yunupingu pointing at the freshwater spring off the beach at Raymangirr, the sacred site where honey spills into the ocean.

Our creation stories and songlines give a why as to the reason for existence and our place in it, as well as a map of how we are to live. They form the essence of our existence. Some examples follow and there are more in the ranger paintings and their associated creation stories.

The Wangupini thunderclouds, pregnant with rain, symbolise birth and herald the arrival of the Wet and once gave notice of the Macassans impending arrival. It was then that the monsoonal winds turned, allowing these Indonesian traders to sail from Sulawesi in their seagoing fishing *prau* boats to seek sea cucumbers, offering iron and tobacco to the Yolngu in return.





In the Wet, Mundukul the lightning snake stands on his tail spitting into the sky and flashing his tongue. His journey charts the movement of tides and currents.

In the dry hot season, two Wangarr sisters who became stars sit far apart. In the cooler months, they can be seen together, sitting around one big fire.

The rights to paint or perform creation stories in *bunggul* are inherited from our parents or relatives. In accordance with long-standing tradition, we are expected by our elders to stick to the bare bones of our storyline. This is particularly true when we are young and green. As our tree of knowledge grows older, we put out more and more branches, developing our own style and acquiring extra stories and songlines.



In my painting, you can see the clear water moving about the ancestor stingray and its tail biting at a resting place. As it journeyed inland, the ancestor stingray formed several billabongs that are the source of water for Yilpara today. It passed over what is now the site of the airstrip before returning to the sea and becoming a white rock.

In the 1960s, clan members cleared an area in the shape of a stingray at a place where two holes had traditionally been dug to collect sand for ceremony. These holes are now the eyes of the stingray sculpture.



Gurrundul Marika – Senior Ranger – Yilpara homeland

A senior community member, Gurrundul primarily paints the stingray story, (see painting on p.9) but she has acquired rights to paint other clan-related songlines, such as of the parrotfish and the yingapungapu sand sculpture she is pictured holding. She is the leader of the Miyalk (women's) Rangers for Yirralka Rangers.



The repeated *miny'tji* pattern on the side panels consists of flowering stringybark with the leaf in the middle. Mosquitoes smell the flowers and land on them.

In the central panel, fighting mosquito ancestors are attacking with spears, bursting the boil, releasing tension.

The bands between the *miny'tji* pattern are part of my style. They are there to hold the painting's composition together.



Yilpirr Wanambi – Ranger – Gurkawuy homeland

In the honey bee songline, the tree that contains the beehive is a stringybark (gadayka). This painting by Yilpirr references an interconnecting songline about ancestor mosquitoes, who are traditionally associated with places of spiritual danger that cause boils. (see painting in full on p. 25)



This is my freshwater story about the fishtrap at the sacred waterhole of Gulutji where Barama, who gave my people law, ceremony and sacred stories, emerged in the first morning. My people have always made fishtraps.

Barama is depicted carrying a symbolic law man's staff and a fishing spear, wearing our diamond *miny'tji* clan design, standing above the fishtrap.

It's built by driving stakes into the banks across the flow of water. Fish are driven into the trap and when they try to jump the barrier, they are caught in a paperbark basket.



Yinimala Gumana – Senior Ranger – Gangan homeland

As a Dalkarra or leader in ceremony, Yinimala – like Yumutjin and Gurrundul – has acquired rights and responsibilities to a wide range of creation stories and songlines. Yinimala is Chairperson of the art centre in Yirrkala, the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre. (See his painting in full on p. 9).

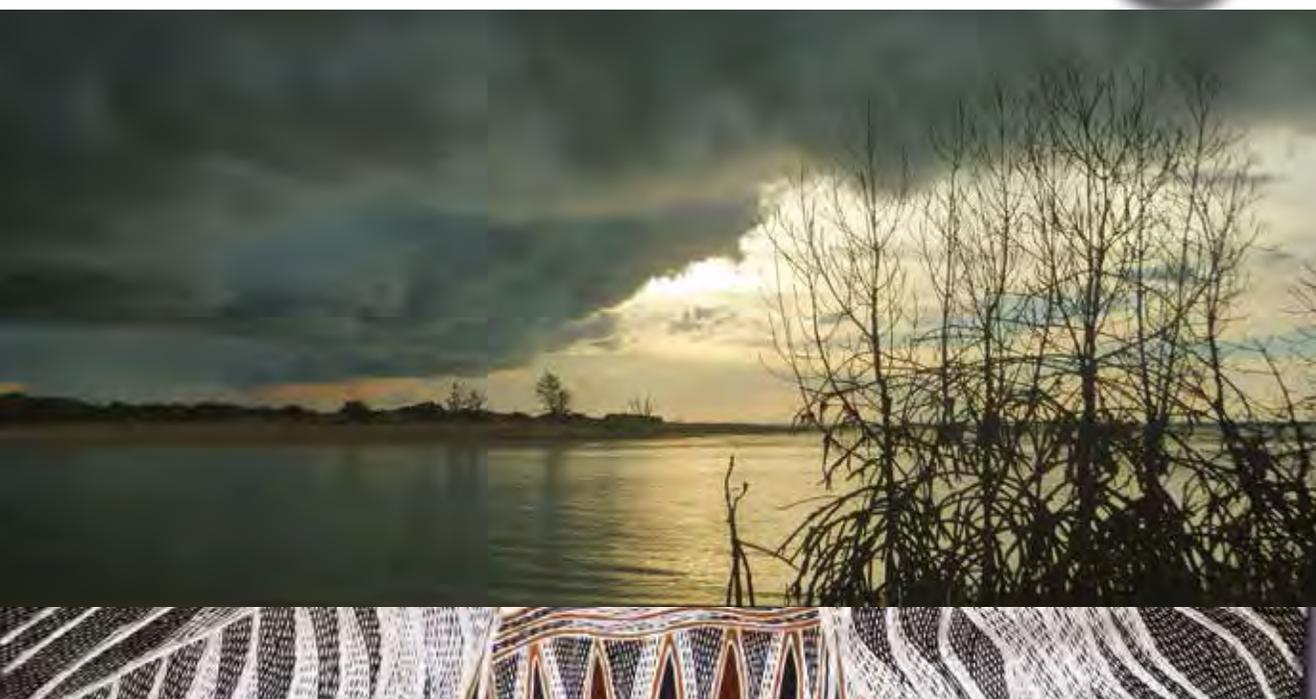


I paint on hollow logs, which has links to the Gapuwiyak creation story. In the Dreaming, two ancestor men Girkirwa and Gurrulan were camping out on the dry lake bed at Gapuwiyak. There was no water there, so they planted a hollow log and swung on the end of a string a piece of specially painted wood with sacred symbols, cutting the log at the top and bottom. This pulled little bit salty water out to form the lake and with it came animals like turtles and catfish and all the bush food we eat. They also gave us Yolngu law.

In these two paintings on hollow logs, you can see stories about bush food. On one log are long necked turtle and frill necked lizard. On the other are lily pads and the blue lines are their roots – good tucker.

Djupana Marrkula – Ranger – Gapuwiyak homeland

Djupana inherited his creation story from his father Guthitjpuuy Marrkula, also a Yiralka Ranger. The hollow log creation story is well known in Gapuwiyak and is represented in the school logo.





Acting as custodians



Thanks to our culture, land care is the major purpose of our life. As revealed in the previous two sections, every particle of land, sea and sky within our country lies on a songline, the corridor along which a particular creator being moved, bringing the country into being. We are duty bound by the Dreaming to maintain the world as it was created by our ancestor beings.

We have no such concept as wilderness. Every hill or soak, tree or tide was made in Wangarr times and is not merely interesting or beautiful, but represents the handiwork of the ancestors from whom we are descended. The whole countryside is our living, age-old family tree.

As custodians, our duty is to shepherd the land and sea and all creatures safely through the cycles of life and season. Our culture demands active intervention in the landscape. Totem responsibilities and songlines require us to conserve what we have inherited.

Practical and artistic knowledge are interwoven. Proper ceremony ensures that the cycles continue. Song, dance and painting make a map, which where it's known and understood, offer an immense depth of environmental knowledge about the ebb and flow of life within our landscape. On the one hand, a songline charts the journey taken by our ancestor beings. On the other, it provides us with the knowhow so we can survive and thrive. Each and every songline depicts in detail the nature of the country through which it passes, the names of the plants and animals within it and where the best habitat exists.

Songlines weave our country together, offering a map, compass and a calendar. They recite countless local and seasonal associations, based on close observations of the interplay of cloud formations with weather, what happens when plants flower or how the movement of tides and currents affects an animal's abundance. They are our nature journals, recording the ever-revolving wheel of life. Some examples:

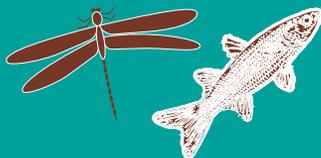
- When the stringybark flowers, wild honey hives are at their fullest;
- When dragonfly swarms hover on the water's edge, mullet are ready to hunt;
- Distant thunder and lightning in spring signals oysters are ready to collect.

A taste of Yolngu environmental indicators is presented in the seven season calendar found on the opposite page. We plan to produce a more detailed wall poster wheel calendar of Yolngu seasons and their seasonal indicators in 2016.

Snapshots from a Yolngu seasonal calendar

Midawarr

Monsoon – flat water
March – April



When dragonflies swarm, mullets fat

When sea grass on shoreline, dugongs fat

Dharratharra

Cool nights & fogs
May – August



When pandanus fruit falls, flatback turtle lays eggs

When paperbark flowers, bush & sea rich

Rarranhdharr

Dry & ground hot
September – October

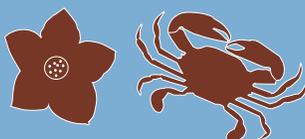


When stringybark flowers, wild honey hive full

When wattle flowers, barramundi fat

Dhuludur

True spring
October



When kurrajong flowers, mud crabs lay eggs

When distant thunder, oysters fat

Lungurrma

Cloudy & windy
November



When onion lily flowers, large stingrays ready

When green plums ready, young emus nearby

Wolmaya

Build up
December



When clouds build, magpie geese & kingfish fat

Bulunuya

The Wet – heavy rain
January – February



When bush sugar cane seeds, tern eggs ready

When white grape ripe, parrotfish fat



For those of us living on our homelands, striving to learn how the world works is fundamental to our body and soul. Teaching and testing begins from when we are old enough for a parent to carry us outside and point to a plant, animal or natural feature. We learn by seeing, touching, tasting, hearing – through the experience of walking through our country with our parents and family.

Knowledge to us is a source of power. When on country, we learn in minute detail who is responsible for each tree, waterhole or rock and how to exploit and care for associated plants and animals. We learn songs, dances, paintings and rituals so we can connect with each other and maintain the unity of all things.

Senior people in our communities are those who are constantly expanding their knowledge of place – spiritually and environmentally. In doing so, they are acquiring more and more rights to songlines, and ever widening responsibilities to sing country into life. They are the elders we look up to and respect.

A properly sung song cares for country and leaves the world as you found it. If you can sing a song, you can follow it, and neither your soul nor body can be lost.



The most difficult thing I had to do when young was walk long distances to hunting places. I was always crying when I was very young and made my father carry me.

Still, I understand now that my special knowledge about bush products and hunting comes from following my parents through country. Only then did I learn how to hunt and cook turtle and file snake, how to crush *nambarra* leaves for bush medicine, and how to dance at *bunggul*.

Bungamana Ganambarr – Ranger – Gangan homeland



My father used to say when we were out on country at certain places, “This is where my father taught me to paint.” When I visit those places, I remember this. He is always still there with me. He’d tell me our Dhuwa stringybark (*gadayka*) songline while cutting bark from the trees to make panels for paintings. There are many layers to the ancestor being’s stringybark journey and many uses derived from the tree. Young leaves are used for washing sores. Mothers drink a concoction from the bark and the inner bark is used in *bunggul*.

Yilpirr Wanambi – Ranger – Gurkawuy homeland



Two way toolbox

We recognise that by adding western science and technology, backed by appropriate skills training, we can increase our ability to maintain biodiversity and protect our sacred sites and songlines.

Ranger *djama* on homelands delivers the best of both worlds, acknowledging and respecting both Yolngu and western practice. Adopting what is known as the 'both ways' land management approach was the subject of our first booklet (*Keeping Country: Putting both ways culture into practice* [2014]) – archived at www.laynhapuy.com.au/services/yirralka-rangers

With its thirst for true knowledge of how the world works, western science holds an affinity with Yolngu culture. While coming from totally different perspectives, Yolngu cultural values are essentially aligned with key scientific values. Where scientists seek

to save threatened species, we see an interdependent web of totems and songlines, with even the smallest and rarest deserving a place, as determined in Wangarr times.

Western science can give us access to a toolbox, which holds the power to either support or destroy the ancestral forces of land and sea. Where our cosmology and western science become more closely aligned, we would, together, seem to have a better chance of maintaining the balance of the world.



The technical white man's knowledge helps us rangers perform our duty to manage and care for country. Culture and knowledge and country are twined together. If we don't look after our country, the land will die.

Yinimala Gumana – Senior Ranger – Gangan homeland



My name comes from a canoe paddle that plays a part in a songline stretching across Blue Mud Bay. I'm still paddling, looking after country, cleaning it up, keeping it healthy and strong.

Napaki really bring a lot of rubbish onto our land. They don't know our laws. Our laws are written on the land, the rivers and the sea. That's where our power comes from.

Yumutjin Wunungmurra – Senior Cultural Advisor – Gurrumuru homeland

Where the homelands cease to exist, both country and people will be lost

“Everything comes from the land and the sea. Learning my ancestors’ stories, language, songlines and art keeps country alive. If we don’t look after it, then land dies.”

Yinimala Gumana, Senior Ranger

“We have to take kids away from the silly stuff in town. It’s very important that young people learn to respect their elders and walk country like we once did.”

Yilpirr Wanambi, Senior Ranger

“When I left my country and lived in a big community, I saw many bad things. All our strength and power comes from our country.”

Yumutjin Wunungmurra, Senior Cultural Advisor

“Country without people. That’s our biggest fear, because then we lose culture and identity.”

Bunduk Marika, Senior Cultural Advisor

“The hubs have pubs and diversions. Some Yolngu kids think in their heads that they are African Americans. They call each other ‘Ali’ instead of yapa or wawa (sister or brother). We could gradually lose our language and culture.”

YananyMul Mununggurr, former CEO
of Laynhapuy Aboriginal Homelands Corporation

“My parrotfish songline tells me exactly where to look for fish and how to cook it and bury its bones.”

Gurrundul Marika, Senior Ranger

“Where young people open their minds and learn from the old people, they will have a map and never get lost.”

Lulparr Wanambi, Senior Cultural Advisor



Yilpirr Wanambi,
Gurkawuy Homeland – see p.12

The Team - by homeland

Gangan

Ganawa Burarrwanga
Ranger

Bungamana Ganambarr
Ranger

Goninyal Gumana
Ranger

Yalapuru Gumana
Ranger

Yinimala Gumana
Ranger

Djurrayun Murrunyina
Ranger

Yilparr Wanambi
Ranger

Gurumuru

Djandi Gunhirr Ganambarr
Ranger

Yumitjin Wunungmurra
Ranger

Buykuwangu Wunungmurra
Ranger

Mayila Wunungmurra
Senior Ranger

Raymangirr

Nguwanguwa Ganambarr
Senior Ranger

Lulparr Wanambi
Senior Cultural Advisor

Yilpara

Bulbuyunawuy Dhamarrandji
Ranger

Mudinyudiny Dhamarrandji
Ranger

Batja Marawili
Ranger

Gamaliny Marawili
Ranger

Gurrundul Marawili
Ranger

Napunda Marawili
Senior Ranger

Napuarri Marawili
Ranger

Makungun Marika
Senior Ranger

Yalmakany Marika
Senior Cultural Advisor

Gawaratj Mununggurr
Ranger

Yallakun

Wulala2 Gurruwiwi
Ranger

Gurumuruwuy Wunungmurra
Senior Cultural Advisor

Yanapuy Wunungmurra
Ranger

Gapuwiyak

Waykala Guyula
Ranger

Yirrkala

Banduk Marika
Senior Cultural Advisor

Gurrundul Marika
Miyalk Ranger Facilitator

Burru

Guthitjpu Marrkula
Senior Cultural Advisor

Djupana Marrkula
Ranger

Butjiyanganybi Marrkula
Ranger

Wandawuy

Dindirrk Mununggurr
Ranger

Larritjpira Mununggurr
Senior Cultural Advisor

Gamanarra Wunungmurra
Ranger

Gambulaburr Wunungmurra
Ranger

Napurawuy Wunungmurra
Senior Ranger

Garthalala

Djurambil Mununggurr
Ranger

Lanydjana Mununggurr
Senior Ranger

Rrutjurrutju Munungurritj
Ranger

Bukudal

Lulpangi Mununggurr
Senior Cultural Advisor

Buymarr

Nyemburr Mununggurr
Ranger

Dhalinybuy

Banul Munyarryun
Senior Ranger

Bandumul Munyarryun
Ranger

Buwathay Munyarryun
Senior Cultural Advisor

Gidilpawuy Munyarryun
Ranger

Dhuruputjpi

Bandarr Wirrpanda
Ranger

Matjimawuy Wirrpanda
Ranger

Manman Wirrpanda
Senior Cultural Advisor

Balma

Bandibandi Wunungmurra
Senior Cultural Advisor

Banygada Wunungmurra
Ranger

Wutharra Wunungmurra
Senior Ranger

Birany Birany

Mangalay Yunupingu
Senior Cultural Advisor

Management Team

Dave Preece
IPA Manager (Yirrkala)

Mungurrapin Maymuru
IPA Cultural Manager (Yirrkala)

Andrew Falk
Senior Ranger Facilitator (Gapuwiyak)

Peter Teasdale
Ranger Facilitator (Yirrkala)

Greg Carroll
Field Services Officer (Yirrkala)

Tim Stacey
Field Services Officer (Yirrkala)

Ian Hutton
Learning on Country Coordinator (Yirrkala)

Emma Stocker
Administration/Project Support Officer
(Yirrkala)

“Everything comes from the land and the sea.
Learning my ancestors’ stories, language,
songlines and art keeps country alive.
If we don’t look after it, then land dies.”

Yinimala Gumana, Senior Ranger

Knowledge and power come from being on country

The first question many visitors ask when they come to one of the Yirralka Rangers’ recreation areas is: “How do Yolngu people know that when the wind blows from a certain direction or a plant comes into flower, it’s time to go fishing or foraging?”

As this second booklet in the series on *Keeping Country* reveals, it’s not magic. The source of the rangers’ deep, locally intimate environmental knowledge comes from being on country. From learning creation stories and songlines and all that they contain by walking through their homelands with parents and kin. By seeing, touching, tasting, hearing; by absorbing the fundamental connections between culture and country underpinning body and soul.

Learning about bush tucker and medicine, mastering artwork and the proper way to perform ceremony (*bunggul*) – these are the source of a Yolngu’s power and identity. To show you how Yolngu know the world, this booklet follows a number of ranger artists from a sample of their 16 homelands in north-east Arnhem Land.

In 2006, a group of Yolngu traditional owners agreed to incorporate a parcel of their high conservation and culturally significant land into Australia’s national reserve system as an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA). Subsequently, the elders formed Yirralka Rangers to care for land and sea country within the Laynhapuy IPA. Some 60 rangers now protect and manage an area almost the size of Wales.

From the outset, the Yirralka Rangers have pursued a ‘both ways’ bicultural approach integrating western skills and science with traditional Indigenous cultural and environmental knowledge. The ‘both ways’ approach was highlighted in the first booklet in the *Keeping Country* series – refer www.laynhapuy.com.au/services/yirralka-rangers



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