



# NGANJARLI

Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation



**Ngayintharri Gumawarni  
Ngurrangga**

*We all come together for country*



## Message from our ancestors

**We want to share our story with you that reaches back thousands of generations**

It is a story about our land and our people. We hope that it helps you to see Murujuga the way that we do, through our eyes.

In the Ngurra Nyujunggamu (when the world was soft), the physical world that we see today was created. Manguin created the ocean and then the Marrga, the creation spirits emerged, pulled the land up from the sea and lifted up the sky.

Manguin worked with the Marrga to name and shape the Ngurra (Country). As the Marrga moved through the barren landscape, interacting with other ancestral

beings, each step carved the earth into hills, valleys, rivers and creek lines.

Once Ngurra was formed, the animals were put in place and Marrga created Lore for the Ngurra. Everything that was created was given Lore, a natural order that documents the rules of existence within the world. Murujuga is the place where Marrga first began to create the world and where Lore was first placed into the Ngurra.

After the creation of the world, people were spread across the Ngurra and given their own Lore, specific to the protection and management of the Ngurra on which they lived. As Marrga told the stories and made the Lore, he created thalu sites, Law grounds and sacred places.

Over time, the ancestral beings returned to the sky or became part of the landform they had created and Ngarda-Ngarli (Aboriginal people) were passed the responsibility and custodianship of the Ngurra.

The formation of the world and the Lore that governs it was not a singular event, nor one locked in deep time. For Ngarda-Ngarli, creation is an ongoing process and the creation spirits remain active in the world today.

The continuing practice of Law and Business keeps the creation spirits and ancestral beings alive so that they can continue to protect Ngurra.





## Welcome to Murujuga

Murujuga is the traditional Ngurra of the Yaburara Aboriginal people, located in the Pilbara region on the northwest coast of Western Australia.

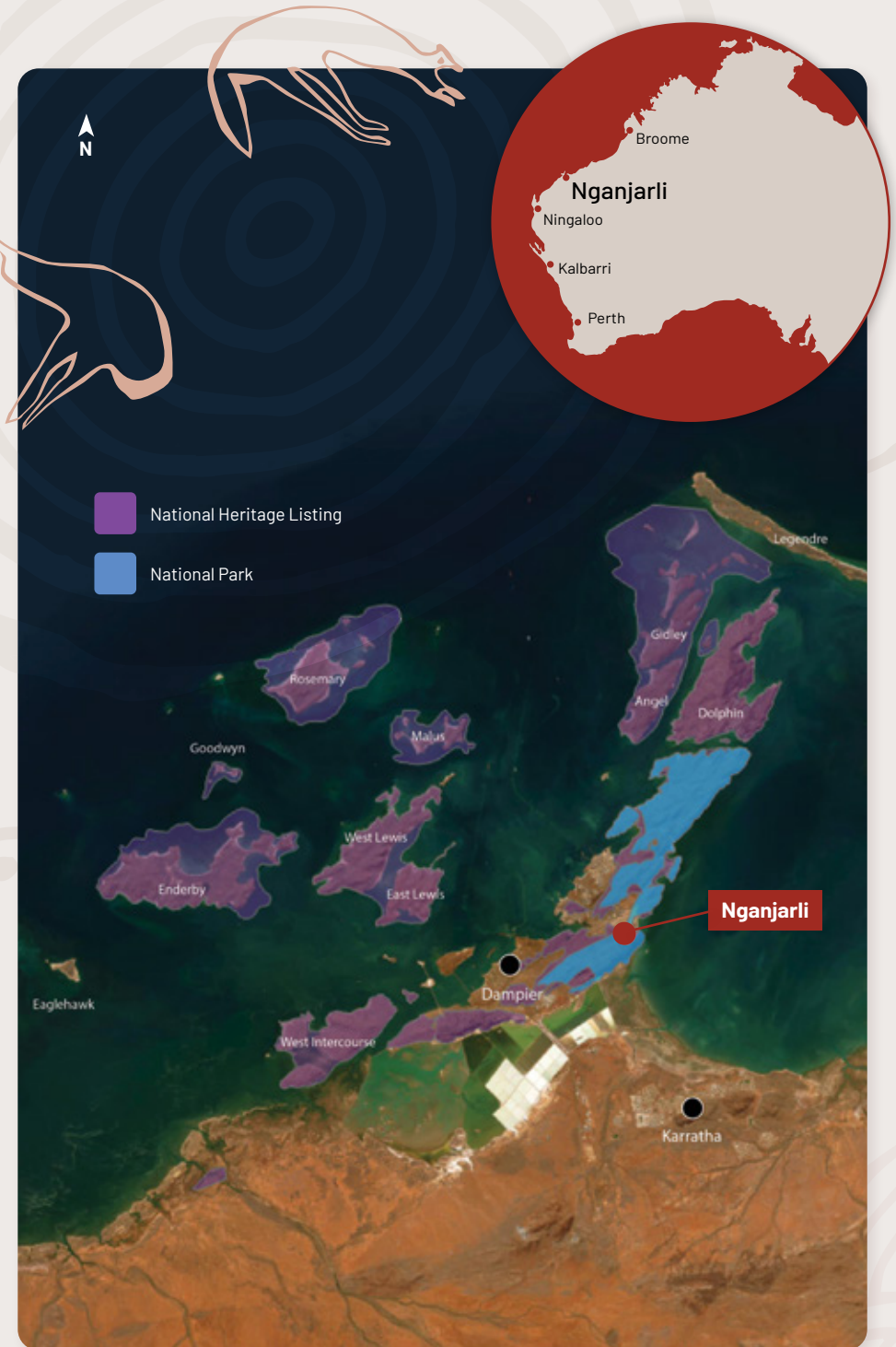
Murujuga is the traditional Ngurra of the Yaburara Aboriginal people, located in the Pilbara region on the northwest coast of Western Australia. When we talk about Murujuga, we talk about land and sea country that consists of the Burrup Peninsula, 42 islands, islets and rocky outcrops and the sea country that covers a now submerged landscape

Murujuga National Park land is held in freehold title by Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation and is the first jointly managed national Park in Western Australia.

Joint Management Agreements between Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation and

the WA Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions emphasise the protection of Aboriginal cultural values at Murujuga as well as the area's natural and recreational values. A combination of traditional Aboriginal skills and knowledge and western scientific knowledge is used to look after culture and country in this unique place.

The Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation represent the five traditional owner and custodial grounds who come together today to look after Murujuga - the Yaburara, Marthudunera, Ngarluma, Yindjibarndi and Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo people.





**Nganjarli** (Deep Gorge) means sacred place. It is a learning ground where Yaburara people used to come together to camp and carry out ceremonies

# A Gathering Place

Nganjarli has been an important place for thousands of generations. Families and friends came here to hunt, share food, carry out their ceremonial responsibilities for country and pass along knowledge through stories, songs and dance.

From the beginning of time, Ngarda-Ngarli have had responsibility for the care and protection of Murujuga.

More than 50,000 years ago, when people were first occupying this part of the country, Murujuga was an inland desert range, up to 160km from the coastline.

Around 18,000 years ago, the sea level began to rise rapidly, bringing the coastline increasingly closer to Murujuga until it reached the outer islands of Murujuga around 9,000 years ago. The sea level started to stabilise about 4,000 years ago and the archipelago began to form, taking its current configuration only about 1,500 years ago.

Throughout the entire history of Murujuga, Ngarda-Ngarli have applied a complex

system of management to protect their Ngurra (Country). The detailed ecological, social and creation knowledge that is held within Lore has meant that Ngarda-Ngarli have been able to continue to follow our Lore and use that knowledge to respond to the changing needs of Ngurra over time.

We can see through the rock art at Nganjarli how this Ngurra has changed over time. We can see through the artefacts and shell middens along the trail how our ancestors lived and thrived in this special place. And the plants, animals and sacred places that are still here at Nganjarli today show how our Lore remains a living thing today that continues to protect this Ngurra.



## Birrabira ... shell middens

**Birrabira (N)** or shell middens are the remains of shellfish where people sat and enjoyed a feed. The shellfish were put in the coals to cook and open for eating. Charcoal from cooking fires is also found in the middens.

Cooking and eating were done in the same spot, over many years. Some birrabira can be metres deep with thousands of shells. Birrabira are usually found near waterholes or mangroves where the shellfish were collected.

Some birrabira have only one kind of shell and other times they may have

the remains of many different shells. The ones at Deep Gorge are mostly made up of ark shells that are found in the mud at low tide. Other shells found are mud whelks collected from the mangroves and chiton shells from under rocks in shallow water.

You sometimes find the bones of fish, turtles and other marine animals in the middens. Pieces of baler shell have also been found and these were used to carry water.



# A Story Place

The engravings or petroglyphs at Nganjarli are an important record of the knowledge and traditional life of our ancestors. The rock art is also a permanent reminder of the Lore and how it should be followed.

It is estimated that there are nearly 2 million individual petroglyphs at Murujuga. The petroglyphs are made by removing the darker, weathered outer surface of the rock and exposing the paler colour of the interior rock.

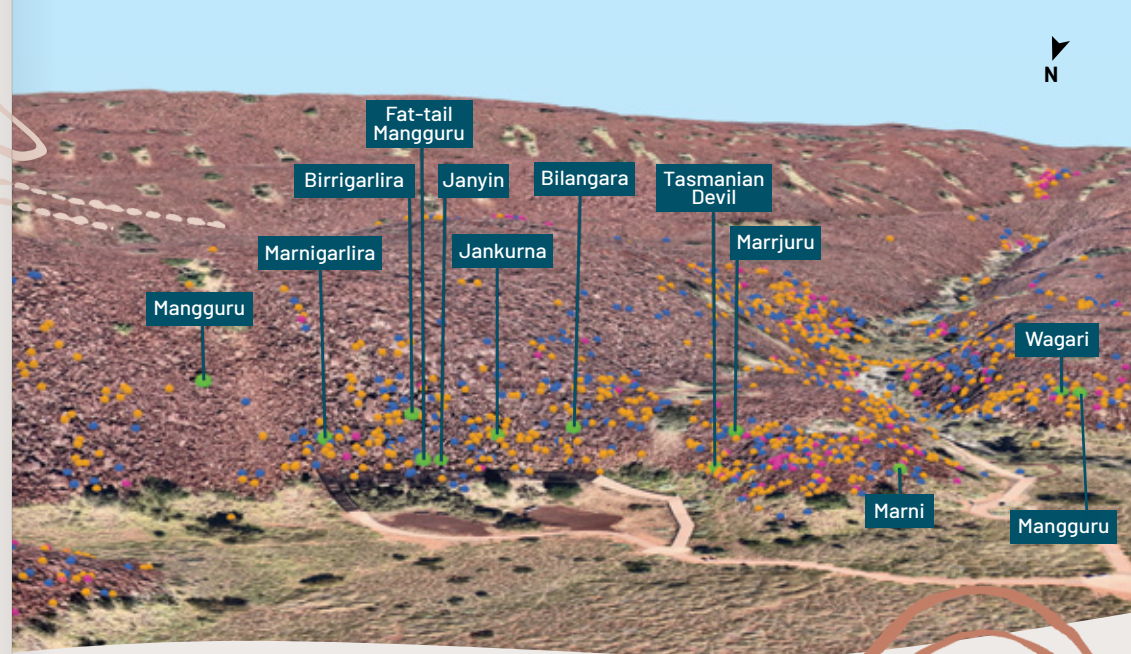
Petroglyphs are made by pecking (usually with a fine point), pounding (with a more rounded rock), abrading (rubbing or scraping), or scoring (carving) the very hard rock. In some cases, a combination of techniques was used to make a single petroglyph.

The difference in colour between the interior and the exterior of the rock provides a stark contrast and is highly visible when the petroglyph is first

made. Natural weathering and the slow development of patina over the engraved surface gradually reduces the contrast and helps to see the difference in age between petroglyphs that are much older and petroglyphs that are much more recent.

We can see older petroglyphs of animals that are now extinct and animals that used to be common at Murujuga when there were vast hunting and foraging plains surrounding Murujuga.

A lot of the more recent petroglyphs are of marine animals and sea birds that were probably placed at Nganjarli when the sea level was rising and the coastline was moving closer.



## LEGEND

- Story panels
- Animal motifs
- Track motifs
- Other designs

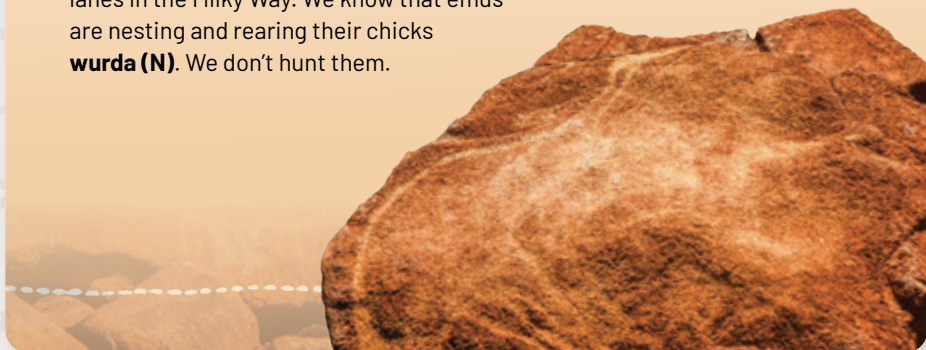
Drawn: Beckett 2022 | Sources: CRAR+M 2022, Landgate 2021 & Nearmap 2022

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## Jankurna

From April look up towards the Southern Cross and you may spot the emu **jankurna (N)**. The dark cloud between the stars is the head. The neck, body and legs are formed from dust lanes in the Milky Way. We know that emus are nesting and rearing their chicks **wurda (N)**. We don't hunt them.



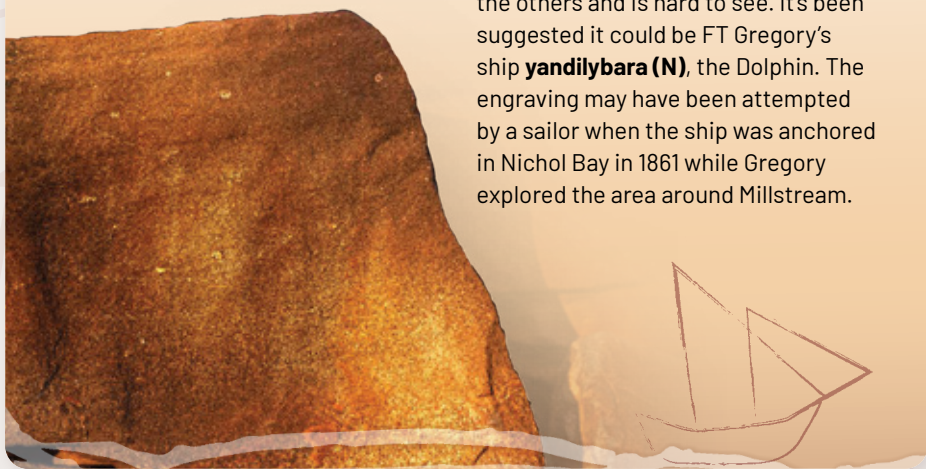
## Marrjuru

This artwork may be older than it looks as archaeologists believe it may have been 'touched up' over time. Most people believe it is a quoll **marrjuru (N)** as it has distinct spots on its back. Aboriginal people don't eat marrjuru. **Marrjuru** haven't been sighted on the Burrup Peninsula for many years.



## Yandilybara

Look closely. This engraving is not like the others and is hard to see. It's been suggested it could be FT Gregory's ship **yandilybara (N)**, the Dolphin. The engraving may have been attempted by a sailor when the ship was anchored in Nichol Bay in 1861 while Gregory explored the area around Millstream.



## Marni

These motifs or **marni (N)** are traditional Ngarluma tribal branding. They are painted around the base of a man's neck with ochre and worn when taking part in traditional ceremonies. They identify which group the wearer belongs to and where he comes from.





## Mangguru

Some people believe this could be an engraving of a fat-tailed kangaroo **mangguru (N)**, an extinct species that lived 40,000 to 50,000 BP (Before Present). With no supporting fossil records found in the area, it is unclear whether it is or not.

Similar motifs are found throughout the Pilbara.

## Birrigarlira

**Birrigarlira (N) gurrumanthu (Y)**

or sand goanna grows to two metres and is one of our favourite foods. Flakes or stone knives were used to remove the stomach before the body was cooked in the coals. **Jiribuga (N) jirriwi (Y)** or echidnas are also a traditional food we still eat.

## Janyin

The first of these engravings is a dancing stick **janyin (N)** or women's fighting stick **wanu**, the next a short punishment spear **margharndu** and then a hunting spear and thrower (**gurljarra** and **warlbarra**). Can you see them?

**Margharndu** was designed to inflict maximum pain to someone who broke the law. Spears were thrust into the thigh to teach them a lesson.

*These motifs represent ceremony sticks janyin.*

## Marnigarlira

Can you see the thylacine? You may know it better as the Tasmanian tiger. Look for the stripes or **marnigarlira (N)** along its back. This animal has been extinct from mainland Australia for over 2000 years. Artwork including animals like this, help indicate the age of some of the engravings.



## Plants and trees at Nganjarli

The ecological diversity that exists at Murujuga today is a direct result of 50,000 years of land and sea management and protection by Ngarda-Ngarli according to traditional Lore.

The outcropping hills of fractured granite and granophyre and deep sheltered gullies at Nganjarli create micro-habitats that support a wide range of plant and animal species compared to surrounding regions.

The diversity of plants at Nganjarli has provided Ngarda-Ngarli with reliable shelter, food, medicine and resources for subsistence and ceremony.

This is what allowed our ancestors to continue living on Murujuga through times of major climatic and environmental change. Our ancestors

have always had an extraordinary understanding of seasons, life cycles and uses of plants within their Ngurra.



LANGUAGE NAME/S:

**Barruru / Minabaru / Baru**

COMMON NAME:

**Gummy spinifex / Soft spinifex**

SCIENTIFIC NAME AND FAMILY:

***Triodia epactia* / Poaceae**



Baru is the plant. Birlaa is the seeds and Burrega is the resin (or wax).

**TRADITIONAL USE:**

Resin can be found at the base of the spinifex, wither in the ashes after the spinifex has been burnt or on the rocks after the ants have harvested it to cement their ant hills.

The resin can be heated up to become soft like clay or wax and was used like glue for hafting weapons. Burning the resin can create a forcefield around you to protect you from bad spirits.

The seeds can be ground and made into a flour, which can be mixed with water and cooked into a damper in the ashes. Women harvest the seeds by rubbing the seed heads between their hands so the seeds fall out.

The plant is a good fire starter. You can use balls of spinifex to cook bush onions or seeds very quickly and then retrieve the food from the ashes.





LANGUAGE NAME/S:

**Garrawa / Garrawarra / Jalyimarr**

COMMON NAME:

**Honey Hakea / Corky-bark Hakea**

SCIENTIFIC NAME AND FAMILY:

***Hakea lorea subsp. lorea***

Garrawa is the tree. Jayimarra is the fruit for the garrawa.

#### **TRADITIONAL USE:**

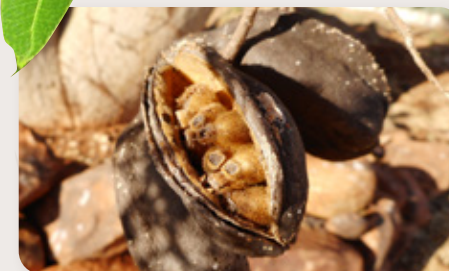
The yellow flowers are used for their nectar. You can suck the nectar out of the flower, it's like 'honey-suckle corn-on-cob'. It cures thirst and tastes like sugar. Or you can make cordial sweet water with it, put the flowers in water to extract the honey and it makes a sweet flavoured drink.

The bark is burnt to ash and used as sunscreen. During the time of the Stolen Generation, the old people would use the ash to cover the light-skinned children to make them appear darker so they wouldn't be taken away.

This plant tells us when to hunt. When the flowers are young buds, that means that the emus are nesting which means we don't hunt them during that time.

When the flowers turn yellow it means the eagles have hatched and grown feathers. When the flowers are brown and dead, the eagles have left the nest and are on the hunt – this means that the salmon are running and it's a good time to go fishing.

If you wave the branches in the air and talk to the country, talk to the spirits, it will bring wind on a still day when there is no air.



LANGUAGE NAME/S:

**Tharranggula / Yirrinu**

COMMON NAME:

**Northern Desert Kurrajong**

SCIENTIFIC NAME AND FAMILY:

***Brachychiton acuminatus***

**In the Ngurra Nyujunggamu** there was no such thing as death. When someone died, they always came back to life.

One day a man died and his body was placed under a kurrajong tree in the shade while they waited for him to come back to life, but he never woke up. After this happened, everyone became mortal.

That's why the Kurrajong tree got its name as the origin of death.

#### **TRADITIONAL USE:**

The green seeds from this tree were roasted and eaten. They are a good source

of protein. They can also be pounded into a flour after they are roasted and eaten with water and honey.

The roots of young trees can be cooked in ashes and eaten like a sweet potato.

Oil from the seeds is used to rub through hair to make it grow thick. The seed can be cooked on coals and crushed up and the ash rubbed through hair to make it black.

This tree is a dwelling place for spirits.

The tree flowers August to October and fruits November to May. When the tree starts flowering, the osprey and turtles start nesting.



LANGUAGE NAME/S:

**Gura / Gurra / Kurra**

COMMON NAME:

**Caustic grevillea**

SCIENTIFIC NAME AND FAMILY:

***Grevillea pyramidalis* subsp *pyramidalis***

There is a song about this plant. When the seeds of this plant start to look like cotton or feathers, it looks like it can fly away in the wind. That's the same time when the birds become fledglings and start to get the feathers to fly away.

**TRADITIONAL USE:**

The seeds are caustic and cause blisters. Ngarluma men use this for initiation ceremonies (Men's Business).

The milk (sap) is used by women to help with milk flow. When the milk won't come, the white sap from inside the bark is rubbed onto the breasts.

The white inner wood under the bark is used as a medicine to treat itchy skin and clean sores.



The tree is a birthing tree and if you give birth near this tree you will be protected (Women's Business).

When the seeds are starting to grow it means the birds are nesting. When the seeds are fully grown the birds have hatched and flown away. When the seeds have fallen, the birds have flown the nest and are on the hunt and that means it's time for fishing Barramundi.



