

# Aboriginal Rock Art Sites

## Northern Gariwerd

In the Gariwerd-Grampians National Park, the public can visit rockshelters where Aboriginal people camped and painted images of their life and law on the sandstone walls. **Gulgurn Manja (Flat Rock)** and **Ngamadjidj (Cave of Ghosts)** at the northern end of Gariwerd make an interesting visit, and there is easy access by road and walking trails.

### ACCESS AND FACILITIES

These sites are at the northern tip of Gariwerd, about an hour's drive from Budja Budja (Halls Gap).

**Gulgurn Manja (Flat Rock)** is located 5 kms south of the Western Highway near the Hollow Mountain camping ground. There is a 15-minute gentle walk to the site from Flat Rock Road.

Access to **Ngamadjidj (Cave of Ghosts)** is via Plantation Road. There is a 100-metre easy walk to this small rockshelter from the carpark.

### PLACE NAMES

In the last 150 years, European names have been given to Aboriginal places, but many of these are inappropriate. The 'Cave of Ghosts', for example, is not a 'cave', and there is no evidence to suggest that the white figures were meant to resemble 'ghosts'. Local Aboriginal words, which relate to features of the site or nearby places, have been chosen and are now preferred.

### THE SITES

The Jardwadjali (pronounced Yard-wa-jali) people lived in the northern and western Gariwerd ranges, and on the Wimmera Plains to the west. This region has only half the rainfall of central Gariwerd. As water is scarce in summer, this would have determined where the Jardwadjali could camp. Both the Gulgurn Manja and Ngamadjidj sites are on the edge of the ranges, from where the Jardwadjali had easy access onto the plains and were also able to utilise the water and food resources of the rocky uplands.



**Gulgurn Manja** (pronounced Gulkurn Manya) meaning 'hands of young people', is a rockshelter at the northern tip of Gariwerd. From here the small groups of Jardwadjali would have been ideally positioned to see the fires of other groups on the plains to the north. They also used the local fine-grained sandstone to make stone tools. Marks where stone has been broken from the walls can still be seen in this shelter.



*Detail from Gulgurn Manja*

The paintings at Gulgurn Manja include bars, emu tracks and handprints. Handprints such as these are only found in northern Gariwerd, and many here were done by children, hence the Aboriginal name for the site. These paintings were part of a unique local art style which was used to tell stories and pass on the law of the people.

**Ngamadjidj** (pronounced NG as in sing, DJ as in jaw) meaning 'white person', is on the western edge of the ranges near a small secluded waterhole. Remains of campfires and stone tools used by the Jardwadjali have been found here, which suggests it was a favoured camping place.

The paintings at this site are unusual because only white clay was used. Elsewhere in Gariwerd the paintings were mostly done with red pigment. The remnants of sixteen painted figures are on this panel, but some are becoming very faint. Unfortunately nothing is known about the meaning of these paintings. The traditional lifestyle of the Jarwadjali was destroyed before it could be recorded.



*Detail from Ngamadjidj*

## ROCK ART

**How is it made?** The Jardwadjali gathered special materials for their paints. Iron-rich clays (ochre) were quarried from around Gariwerd for red pigments. Kaolin clay was used for white. The pigment was ground, mixed with water, and applied either with a brush (made of bark fibre or the frayed end of a stick) or a finger. At Gulgurn Manja, handprints were made by pressing a painted hand against the rock – as opposed to the stencil technique used in southern Gariwerd, where a hand was placed on the rock then sprayed with a mouthful of pigment.

**How old is it?** Only a few sites in Gariwerd have been investigated, but these show that Aboriginal people have camped in rockshelters here for the last 22,000 years. We do not know exactly when the paintings were made. Research elsewhere has demonstrated that Aboriginal people have lived in the area now called Victoria, for at least 40,000 years.

## CARING FOR THE SITES

It is important to preserve these sites so we can learn about and appreciate the way Aboriginal people live. Today, such places serve as a source of pride to contemporary Aboriginal people, and are important to all Australians as examples of our continent's long history. The Aboriginal community has recently built the Brambuk Living Cultural Centre in Budja Budja, where they share the knowledge of their culture, both past and present.

Unfortunately the cages around the art are necessary to protect the sites against vandalism. On your visit, take care not to interfere with the sites in any way.

# Aboriginal Rock Art Sites

## Southern Gariwerd

In the Gariwerd - Grampians National Park, the public can visit rockshelters where Aboriginal people camped and painted images of their life and law on the sandstone walls. **Billimina (Glenisla Shelter)** and **Manja (Cave of Hands)** are two such sites located in **Billawin (Victoria Range)**, which make for an informative visit.

### ACCESS AND FACILITIES

These sites are about a 1-hour drive from Budja Budja (Halls Gap), along the Glenelg River Road, Lodge Road and Red Rock Road.

**Billimina** is a 15-minute, steady uphill walk from Buandik picnic and camping area.

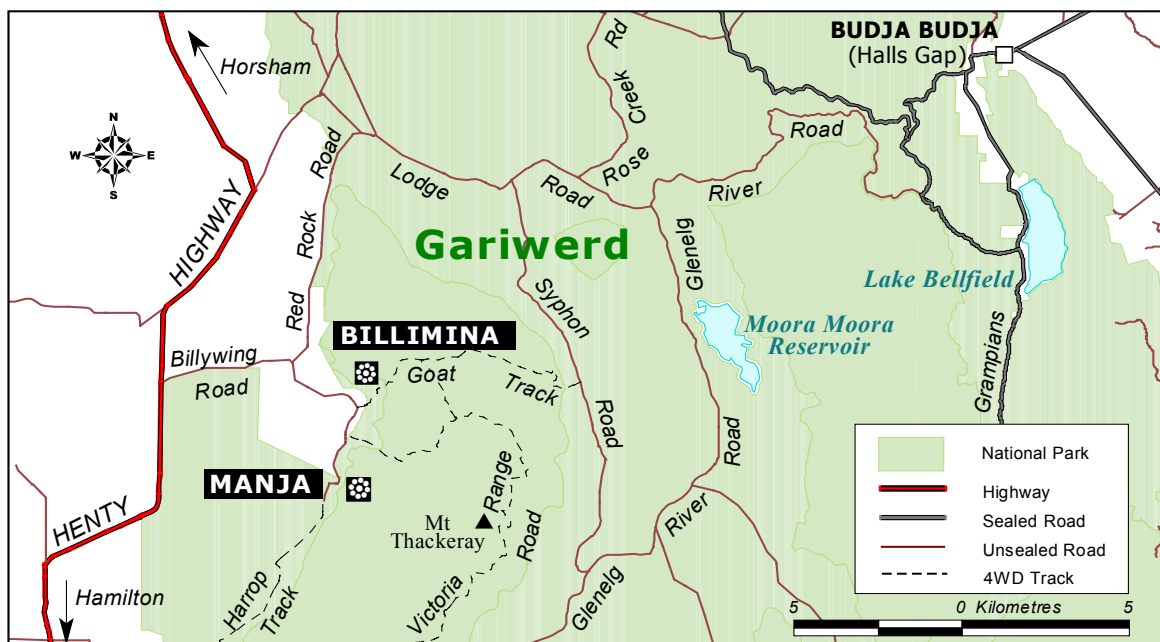
**Manja** is a further 10-minute drive from the Buandik camping area. There is a 20-minute uphill walk to the impressive sandstone outcrop from the carpark beside the Billywing Pine Plantation. There are no picnic or toilet facilities near the site.

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### THE SITES

The western slopes of the Billawin Range were regular camping places of the Jardwadjali (pronounced Yard-wa-jali) people. Here there were many rockshelters which offered protection from the rain and cold southerly winds. The Jardwadjali preferred to camp in shelters facing north or east around the creeks on the lower slopes of the range. From these places they had easy access onto the plains, but could still venture up onto the ranges to hunt or gather food.



**Billimina** shelter is an impressive rock overhang where Jardwadjali camped from time to time and left many red paintings. Archaeologists who excavated this site in 1976 found stone tools and the remains of plant and animal foods. These materials demonstrated that groups camped here from late winter to early summer and caught kangaroos and small mammals such as bandicoots, possums and bettongs. They also collected emu eggs and freshwater mussels.

The most interesting aspect of the paintings at Billimina is the many bars arranged in horizontal rows. We believe these marks were used to count events in retelling stories or to record the number of days spent at a place. While they are sometimes difficult to see, there are also emus, kangaroo and emu tracks, and 55 human stick figures painted here. Some of the human figures found in the middle panel are illustrated above, see if you can find them.

**Manja** (pronounced Manya) meaning 'hands', has some of the best examples of hand stencils in Victoria. A total of 90 stencils have been recorded in these two shelters. We believe hand stencils were used to record a visit to a site, and to renew the ties a person had to a particular place. At this site there are also animal tracks and many human stick figures.

Manja is located in an impressive sandstone outcrop. Have a walk around and try to imagine what it would have been like to live here before Europeans arrived.



*Detail from Billimina*

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