



An introduction to Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria

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First Peoples –
State Relations



Acknowledgement of Country

The Victorian Government acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of Country.

We respectfully acknowledge all First Peoples of Victoria and celebrate their enduring connection to land, skies and waters. We thank First Peoples for their care of Country and contributions to Victorian communities. We honour and pay our respects to First Peoples' Elders past and present.

*Cover image: Budj Bim.
Gunditjmara Country.
Image credit: Cameron Murray/Assemble Agency,
courtesy Tourism Australia/Visit Victoria.*

This document provides an introduction to what Aboriginal cultural heritage is and how we celebrate it.



For more information on the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* and the decision makers, parties and ways the Act protects Aboriginal cultural heritage see **The Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 explained** <<https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/the-aboriginal-heritage-act-2006-explained>>



For more information on the two main processes that protect and manage cultural heritage - cultural heritage management plans and cultural heritage permits - see **Processes that protect Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria** <www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/processes-that-protect-aboriginal-cultural-heritage-in-victoria>

Victoria is rich in Aboriginal cultural heritage. It represents Aboriginal Victorians' 65,000 years of continuing culture and enduring connection to land, water and sky.

Moyjil (Point Ritchie).
Eastern Maar Country.



What is Aboriginal cultural heritage

What is Aboriginal cultural heritage

Celebrating cultural heritage

Protecting cultural heritage

Aboriginal cultural heritage includes physical artefacts such as rock art, fish traps, scarred trees and stone tools. Victoria has some of the highest concentrations of rock art in Australia. Shelters that people lived in over 20,000 years ago have rock art that is unique to Victoria.

Cultural heritage includes burial places and Ancestral Remains. It is also significant places where customs, ceremonies, dance and stories are passed from generation to generation. It is the knowledge about how to care for Country and the plants and animals that live there. This is sometimes called intangible heritage.

First Peoples' culture holds living wisdom that all Victorians benefit from. Cultural heritage enriches the identity of all Victorians by showing us the complex living culture, history and spirituality of the first custodians of this land. The land on which all Victorians live.

'Recognising, supporting and celebrating First Peoples' culture strengthens and enriches the identity of all Victorians.'

**Natalie Hutchins,
Minister for Treaty and First Peoples,
Statement to Yoorrook Justice
Commission**



Image: Rock art at Billimina Shelter, Gariwerd. Country with shared connection to multiple Traditional Owner groups.

Celebrating cultural heritage

What is Aboriginal
cultural heritage

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Protecting cultural
heritage

As Victorians we all live on an ancient land that is home to the oldest continuing cultures in the world. First Peoples' cultures, knowledge and traditions continue to grow and thrive today.

Aboriginal cultural heritage is a significant part of Victoria's history, identity and future. Aboriginal knowledge shapes our shared traditions, from our music, art and stories to modern land management practices. One of our country's favourite sports, Australian Rules Football, is based on Marngrook, an Aboriginal game from western Victoria.

Victoria is rich in Aboriginal cultural heritage. There are over 40,000 places and objects currently recorded on the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register. These include internationally valued examples such as the Budj Bim cultural landscape. The United Nations declared this a World Heritage site in 2019.

The cultural heritage sites in Victoria are unique. They include the only known cave painting of Bunjil, the main Dreaming Being of south-eastern Australia. Bunjil produced many of the natural features of the landscape and provides the lore, customs and rites that organise Aboriginal society.

Learn about the
Aboriginal cultural
heritage in your area
and the places you
travel to for a deeper
connection and
understanding of
our shared history.



*Image: Rock art painting of Bunjil.
Bunjil's Shelter, east of the Gariwerd ranges.
Country with shared connection to multiple
Traditional Owner groups.*

Protecting cultural heritage

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Aboriginal people have a cultural responsibility to protect cultural heritage, inherited from their Ancestors. In Victoria we have statewide laws to protect Victoria's Aboriginal cultural heritage. This means we all have a role to play in protecting and preserving Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The laws recognise Traditional Owners as the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of cultural heritage.

If tangible cultural heritage is destroyed, it is lost forever. That's why it's important we conserve and protect it.

Victoria's laws also protect intangible heritage. The stories, cultural customs and practices that are recorded by First Peoples in Victoria and passed on from generation to generation.

The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* includes a range of enforcement provisions including penalties for harming Aboriginal cultural heritage.

We protect Aboriginal cultural heritage for all Victorians just as we protect other forms of heritage, such as significant buildings, historic sites and precincts.

Aboriginal cultural heritage

Ancestral Remains

The remains of an Aboriginal person from the past. Victoria's laws recognise that First Peoples are best placed to care for Ancestral Remains and have the right to lay their Ancestors to rest on Country.

Tangible cultural heritage

Aboriginal places and objects such as rock art, fish traps, scarred trees and stone tools. Physical things that can be seen and touched, and important places where cultural heritage is found.

Intangible cultural heritage

Traditional Aboriginal knowledge including oral traditions, arts, stories, rituals, festivals, social practices, craft, and environmental and ecological knowledge.

Budj Bim

Gunditjmara Country

Budj Bim Cultural Landscape was the first site in Australia to be included by UNESCO on the World Heritage List exclusively for its Aboriginal cultural significance.

Budj Bim is one of the world's most extensive and oldest aquaculture systems, dating back at least 6,600 years. It is one of only 20 sites in Australia on UNESCO's World Heritage list.

It is a place that shows the cultural traditions, knowledge, practices and ingenuity of the Gunditjmara Aboriginal people.

Gunditjmara engineered a complex system of fish traps combining knowledge of seasonal water levels to provide food that sustained thousands of people for generations.

Image credit: Cameron Murray/Assemble Agency, courtesy Tourism Australia/Visit Victoria.



Budj Bim



Direl (Lake Tyrrell)

Country with shared connection to multiple Traditional Owner groups



Direl is the largest salt lake in Victoria. It's a place of outstanding beauty where the sky is 'mirrored' across the lake's surface day and night.

The name Direl comes from a Wergaia word for 'sky'. Aboriginal people have practiced astronomy and stargazing here for over 30,000 years.

The area is spiritually significant for its link to Creation Stories, ceremonies and rituals. The Dreamtime is viewed and experienced here in both the night sky and its reflections on the lake.

Image credit: Anne Morely, courtesy Visit Victoria.

Direl



Buchan Munji (Buchan Caves)

Gunaikurnai Country

Buchan Munji is limestone country. A central settlement location set in an ancient Gunaikurnai cultural landscape.

Gunaikurnai Ancestors used these caves for shelter during the last ice age and were present when Europeans arrived.

Evidence of a Mulla-mullung (doctor) practicing traditional ritual and magic has been found in one of the many caves. This cultural practice has been carried out over more than 500 generations. Both men and women were knowledge holders of Mulla-mullung practices.

The connection to this place endures, held strong by the Gunaikurnai community who continue to honour the ways of the Old Ancestors.

Image credit: Ben Savage, courtesy Visit Victoria.



Gariwerd (Grampians National Park)

Country with shared connection to multiple Traditional Owner groups



Gariwerd has the highest concentration of rock art in south-east Australia.

There are hundreds of sites throughout the mountain ranges. Billimina is the most prolific single rock art site in Victoria with more than 2,000 symbols. Gariwerd is also a place of scarred trees, stone quarries, mounds and artefacts.

Gariwerd has been the living, hunting, gathering, cultivating, ceremonial, Dreaming Country and territory of Jadawadjali and Djab Wurrung people for more than 22,000 years. Stories are passed down here about how the land was created, along with lessons on how to care for Country.

Gariwerd is on the National Heritage List as a place of outstanding significance to Australia.

Image credit: Robert Blackburn, courtesy Visit Victoria



For more information email
aboriginal.heritage@dpc.vic.gov.au

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