

Jakarta Wuka
(Too Many Stories)

SUP Preview

Jakarda Wuka

(Too Many Stories)

Narratives of Rock Art from Yanyuwa Country
in Northern Australia's Gulf of Carpentaria

li-Yanyuwa li-Wirdiwalangu (Yanyuwa Elders)

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*Wabarrangu ngalangarna a-buyi, a-wurrumbarra marda jina barra yuyu
ajinjala mirnaji, kulu ki-yangama yurrngumantha nilharrku barra nilharrku
yurrngumantha nya-ngatha nya-biyi karnyilu-ngunda ngarna-mi.*

A long time ago when I was a small girl, and a young woman too, I saw all of these things in the caves and they would change, all the time, again and again they would change, my father gave me the eyes to see all of this.

Dinah Norman a-Marrngawi, Borroloola, June 2019



Graham Friday Dimanyurru
1959–2021



Leonard Norman Wungunya
1962–2021

DEDICATION

This book would not have been possible without the tireless and supportive work of Graham Friday Dimanyurru (1959–2021) and Leonard Norman Wungunya (1962–2021). From the very outset of this project – which saw us traverse the Sir Edward Pellew Islands, through the hot and humid wet season, through rough seas, helicopter flights, chilly cold-season mornings and sublime clear days of calm seas – these two men were with us. Telling us the stories passed from their parents and grandparents, they made us aware of the places we could visit and those places where we could not go, and negotiated with other families so that we could safely go to parts of Country to document what the western world typically describes as “rock art”. It was never “rock art” to these two men; there was a much deeper sense of being with the images they confronted and explained to us. This was done with much care and humour. We dedicate this book to these two knowledgeable men and brilliant teachers.

Yurrngumantha kanawula-linginmanthanima bawuji.

We will remember these two men with great fondness.

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Style note

We deliberately capitalise the term “Indigenous” in reference to the first peoples of Australia (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders). We have also chosen to use the preferred Indigenous convention of capitalising “Country” as it refers to Indigenous peoples’ sovereign lands and waters. We do this to show respect and to highlight the importance of this word and its meaning to Indigenous peoples. It also signals that Country is an official designation and denotes the ancestral lands and waters of a specific Indigenous language group.

Capitalisation is also used for the spiritual beings, the Dreamings, who traversed and created Yanyuwa Country; hence, wundanyuka for “sea turtle”, but Wundanyuka “Sea Turtle” Dreaming. Note also that Yanyuwa words are presented in plain text, followed by their translation, close English equivalents, in double quotes.

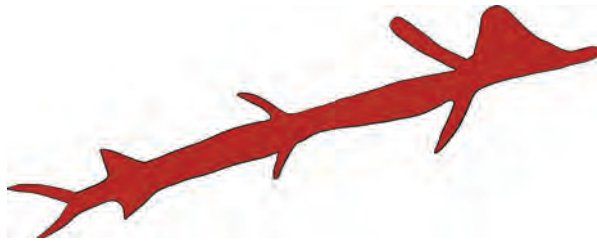
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a-Mukarra “Barracuda”

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Chapter 1

A STORY ABOUT SALTWATER PEOPLE AND THEIR ROCK ART

Kaji yamulhu! li-Maramaranja kalu-wingkayaninya bajiwuthu aya, nalu-maliji nyalunga barra nalu-yuyu.

Hey, what did you expect!? The Dugong Hunter Dreaming, they travelled in that direction, westwards, the hands are theirs, their prints.

In April 2010, senior Yanyuwa woman Dinah Norman a-Marrngawi spoke these deceptively simple words, offering an education into the ways of Yanyuwa Country. She was speaking of the many hand stencils and hand prints that are found at a place known to Yanyuwa as Limiyimiyila on Black Craggy Island in the Sir Edward Pellew Islands in tropical northern Australia (Map 1.1). On this occasion, our research team (li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers, archaeologist Liam M. Brady and anthropologists John Bradley and Amanda Kearney) had come to speak with Dinah and seek her insight, as a senior knowledge holder for this place. We had just returned to base camp at Lillardungka on the central north coast of Warnarrwarnarr “South West Island” where Dinah and other senior Yanyuwa men and women were keenly awaiting an update on the team’s search for rock art made by the li-wankala, the “old people” who are deceased kin (Figure 1.1).

When Dinah asked us what we had found, we replied, “hands, only hands, lots of hands” (Figure 1.2). Hand motifs are one of the most common forms of rock art found across the globe and have been interpreted and studied in many ways (identity markers, signatures of visits to rockshelters, classified according

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Map 1.1. The Sir Edward Pellew Islands, southwest Gulf of Carpentaria, northern Australia.

to sex, production techniques etc.).¹ Some examples have been dated to close to 40,000 years old,² and most are typically stencilled or printed onto rock walls, in rare instances they appear as engravings, and on even rarer occasions they are found decorated with linear and geometric designs.³ Yet for Dinah, the hands are much more than stencils, prints or designs, they are the marks of one of the major creative ancestral beings for the Yanyuwa – the li-Maramaranja or Dugong Hunters of Excellence.

In Aboriginal Australia, the “Dreaming” or “Dreamtime” was a time of creation before humans existed. The creative ancestral beings are known as “Dreamings” who undertook epic journeys across the landscape and seascape, shaping and naming the land, sea and waterways as well as transforming parts of their bodies and knowledge into landscape features and natural phenomena.⁴ Indeed, everything in Yanyuwa Country such as creeks, rivers, a stretch of sea, reefs, bays, hills, caves,

1 For example, Chaloupka 1993; Gunn 2006; Mulvaney 1996; Snow 2006; Walsh 1983.

2 Aubert et al. 2014.

3 For example, Brady et al. 2022; Fage and Chazine 2010; Gunn 1998; May et al. 2020.

4 We acknowledge the terms “Dreaming” or “Dreamtime” have been critiqued for their inappropriateness in referring to times of creation and creative ancestors in Aboriginal contexts (see, for example, Wolfe 1991). Other terms used to reference these entities are,

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Figure 1.1. Leonard Norman Wungunya and Liam M. Brady recording rock art at Limiyimiyila on Black Craggy Island.



Figure 1.2. Hand stencils recorded from Limiyimiyila on Black Craggy Island.

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birds, fish, insects and stars have a name, a story or even a song derived from Dreamings. These beings also established the Laws or rules by which humans are expected to live. In doing so, they gave meaning and structure to Country.

The Yanyuwa people have a specific word for the Dreaming – yijan – and recognise a great number of Dreamings who continue to dwell in Yanyuwa Country, on the land, in the sea, and in the sky (see Foldout or online Poster). Musso Harvey Bankarrinu, a senior Yanyuwa man, once explained to John about the Dreaming:

White people ask us all the time, “What is Dreaming?” This is a hard question because Dreaming is a really big thing for Aboriginal people ... The Dreamings made our Law or narnu-yuwa. This Law is the way we live, our rules. This Law is our ceremonies, our songs, our stories; all of these things came from the Dreaming. The Dreamings are our ancestors, no matter if they are fish, birds, men, women, animals, wind or rain. It was these Dreamings that made our Law. All things in our Country have Law, they have ceremony and song, and they have people who are related to them.

Dreamings continue to be respected and cared for and are capable of responding to the actions of their human kin. Patterns of communication exist between Yanyuwa, their Dreamings and the places where Dreamings reside. Yanyuwa will often speak of their Country as being “healthy” and “warmed” when people visit. Country can also be made strong when it is sung, talked about and moved across, but it can also be “low down” when these forms of engagement are absent. The presence, mood and actions of Dreamings residing in Yanyuwa Country can also be read in different ways. For example, increases or decreases in species numbers, anomalies in weather patterns, the wellbeing of people and the presence or absence of rock art are all attributed to Dreamings. These relationships between people, place, actions, emotions and the ancestral world are critical to understanding its rock art. Thus, in Dinah’s statement about the li-Maramaranja, she is referring to their travels across the breadth of Yanyuwa saltwater Country, known today in English as the Sir Edward Pellew Islands (hereafter “Pellew Islands”). Placed in this context, Dinah’s statement reveals a world of Yanyuwa knowledge that is anchored in ways of knowing that reference, at one level, the actions and events of the li-Maramaranja, but when we delve deeper, are also implicated in many

for example, “Ancestral Beings”. However, “Dreamings” is the common term used in Aboriginal English spoken at Borrooloola and thus used throughout this book.

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other interrelated aspects of Yanyuwa life such as human kin, song, language and relationships to Country.

This world of relationships is complex and oftentimes difficult for non-Yanyuwa to comprehend. This complexity became apparent when senior Yanyuwa men and women asked the research team to record one of Lillardungka's rock art sites that people remembered camping at in the past. The team had been told we would find a painting of a yirrikirri "donkey", an animal introduced by Europeans. But upon visiting and recording the site's rock art, the painting could not be found. We expressed our sadness that it had likely deteriorated because of the elements, the wind and rain that batter the rockshelters in the cyclonic wet seasons. Yet another explanation emerged for its absence, one connected to the health and wellbeing of the community. Dinah explained to John:

*Kurda! Li-wankala kalu-wajkirra barra, kalinyamba-mirra wiji warriya!
Bawuji mili nyarrku barra wuka jirna-nanji, jina barra yuyu ji-wardimanji
kurdardi nganthawu jilhan-bayi waykaliya ngaliyu mili ngandarra barra?
Li-wankala kalinyamba-mirra wiji li-ngatha li-mimi, li-ngatha li-ngabuji,
li-ngatha li-murimuri kulu li-ngatha li-kuku warriya li-luku kalinyamba-
mirra, alu barra li-wunungu kalu-manhanthaninya jina barra awara,
waliyangu baki antha kalu-manhanthaninya kurdandu, bawuji kalinyamba-
mirra kulu jina barra yuyu ja-wardimanji kurdardi nganthawu jina barra
awara ji-rarrinji barra kalngi.*

Oh dear! Old people must have taken it away, too many of them [old people] have died you know. There are more words I can tell you about this painting. They are getting faint, they are hard to see, they are falling off the rocks, why is this happening? It is because the old people have all died, my mother's father, my father's mother, my father's father and my mother's mother's brothers, they have all died, all of those strong people that once held this Country, the islands and the sea they held this Country with an intensity, now they have all died and the paintings are fading, they are hard to see, truly this Country is lamenting them.

In this instance, Dinah's words highlight how people and kinship, not the weather or other forces in the natural environment, are implicated in understanding why and how a painting known from memory has become invisible. While speaking to the realities and hardships faced by the Yanyuwa community today, Dinah's words also challenge non-Yanyuwa people to see and come to know the extraordinary images inscribed on Yanyuwa Country as something other than "rock art".

These images are part of a world where they can feel, see, smell, hear and respond to the actions and events of the Yanyuwa people. It is statements and sentiments such as these that go to the core of what this book is about: to tell the story of how the Yanyuwa come to know and understand their rock art, and to discover what frames people's encounters and interactions with the many images spread across Yanyuwa Country.

Approaches to studying rock art

For decades, studies of rock art from across the globe have employed a range of disciplinary strategies to explore its meaning and significance, with the most well known being archaeology and anthropology. Similar to the hand motif examples noted above, archaeological insights are used to learn more about the lifeways of people from the deep and recent past. In an archaeological context, meaning and significance can be derived from any number of methods, including analysing motif styles to understand their role as symbols of people's relationships to religion, ritual and landscape; dating pigments to determine when specific motifs were created; documenting panels containing layers of paintings (superimpositions) to discover different motif styles and explore how they changed over time; and using depictions of introduced subject matter to better understand the nature of cross-cultural interaction – especially between Indigenous peoples and Europeans.⁵ While anthropological endeavours have been less frequent, they too have yielded important insights into meaning and significance especially in the context of developing new understandings into the relationships between specific motifs, social and cultural behaviour and Indigenous belief systems.

However, what has been much less studied is how Indigenous people today relate to and understand rock art.⁶ In 2012, anthropologist Howard Morphy pointed out that researchers have “largely neglected to study rock art as a contemporary phenomenon, as an integral part of people's worlds”.⁷ He also noted that this situation is likely due to the perception of rock art as an “incidental” or “minor” component of broader artistic and aesthetic practices of Indigenous peoples, especially in Australia. Of particular interest in this space are questions around the complexities of the interpretive and meaning-making process in contemporary

5 See, for example, Chippindale and Taçon 1998; David and McNiven 2018; McDonald and Veth 2012.

6 Brady and Taçon 2016.

7 Morphy 2012, 296.

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settings. While rarely studied, there are some notable examples in Australia on this topic. For example, anthropologist Francesca Merlan explored how kin-based frameworks were used by the Wardaman people from the Victoria River District (Northern Territory) to guide people's contemporary negotiations and interpretations of particular motifs, especially in cases where discrepancies or differences occurred.⁸ In Western Australia's Fortescue River region, anthropologist Kingsley Palmer relays how his Aboriginal teacher described the meaning and significance of engravings by situating them into a social and religious context (the Dreaming, ceremonies and rituals) but also referring to his own experiences, knowledge and expertise to interpret the form of an image.⁹ What underpins these, and the small number of other examples known from the literature,¹⁰ is the concern of viewers to situate their understanding of motifs within the social and cultural context that is considered appropriate at that time. People can draw on different elements of their social world as part of the meaning-making process. Building on these formative studies, this book takes a deep dive into the Yanyuwa world of creative expression, and the social and cultural contexts which are vital to how rock art's meaning is negotiated in a contemporary setting.

The Gulf Country

The Gulf of Carpentaria is a large, shallow sea in northern Australia, flanked by Cape York Peninsula to the east, coastal Arnhem Land to the west, and what is commonly referred to as the "Gulf Country" to the south. During times of low sea levels (>10,000 years), much of this area was dry land, the only notable feature being a shallow lake located in the middle of the Gulf and known as Lake Carpentaria with outlet channels to the Arafura Sea. When sea levels began to rise about 9,700 BP, the Gulf basin began to fill, covering the low-lying tropical landscape and creating a new marine environment (Maps 1.2, 1.3).¹¹

There is a Yanyuwa story that refers to this sea level rise and was told by Old Tyson Nguliya to John in 1982. There are perhaps some that might dismiss such stories because of the antiquity of these events and have the misapprehension that oral traditions cannot survive more than a few thousand years. However, studies

8 Merlan 1989.

9 Palmer 1991.

10 See Brady et al. 2016 for a review.

11 Chivas et al. 2001.



Map 1.2. Map of Australia during times of lowest sea levels during the Pleistocene and showing the present-day location of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands (courtesy of Michael Bird and Damien O’Grady).

have shown that Aboriginal peoples in coastal parts of Australia do indeed have stories referring to sea level rise dating to over 7,000 years ago.¹²

Old Tyson Nguliya described the sea level rise event after hearing a missionary linguist, Jean Kirton, describe the story of Noah. Old Tyson Nguliya then declared to John that the Yanyuwa had stories that came from a long time before Noah:

Wabarrangu ambuliyanynguwarra bibibi ngaliwa ka-ngundayaninya kari-nguthunda bibibi barra kumba-mayama wayathantharra alhibi ka-arrinjaninya

12 Nunn and Reid 2016; see also Lewis et al. 2013.

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*wurluburlu kulu yurrngumantha ankaya ankaya yurrngumantha kari-
nguthunda ka-wingkayaninya nya-mangaji alhibi kurdardi wabudawu alhibi
ka-ngundayaninya wiji awara ka-arri wurra ka-yinu wayathantharra kurda
wankala wuka, jina barra awara bijal rdiyangu nyuwu-mangaji ki-awarawu
ki-wanakalawu wurra jiwini ka-yinu. Bawuji barra.*

A long time ago, in the most ancient of times, day and night the sea kept rising, from the north, day and night the salt water all came together and it was at a really high level, continually it rose upwards, from the north it came that salt water, it was not fresh water, it was salt water. It kept rising and the Country was underwater, it was drowned utterly and completely. This is a story from long ago. This Country is a little bit new. That Country for the times long past is now deep underwater, it is drowned, that's all.

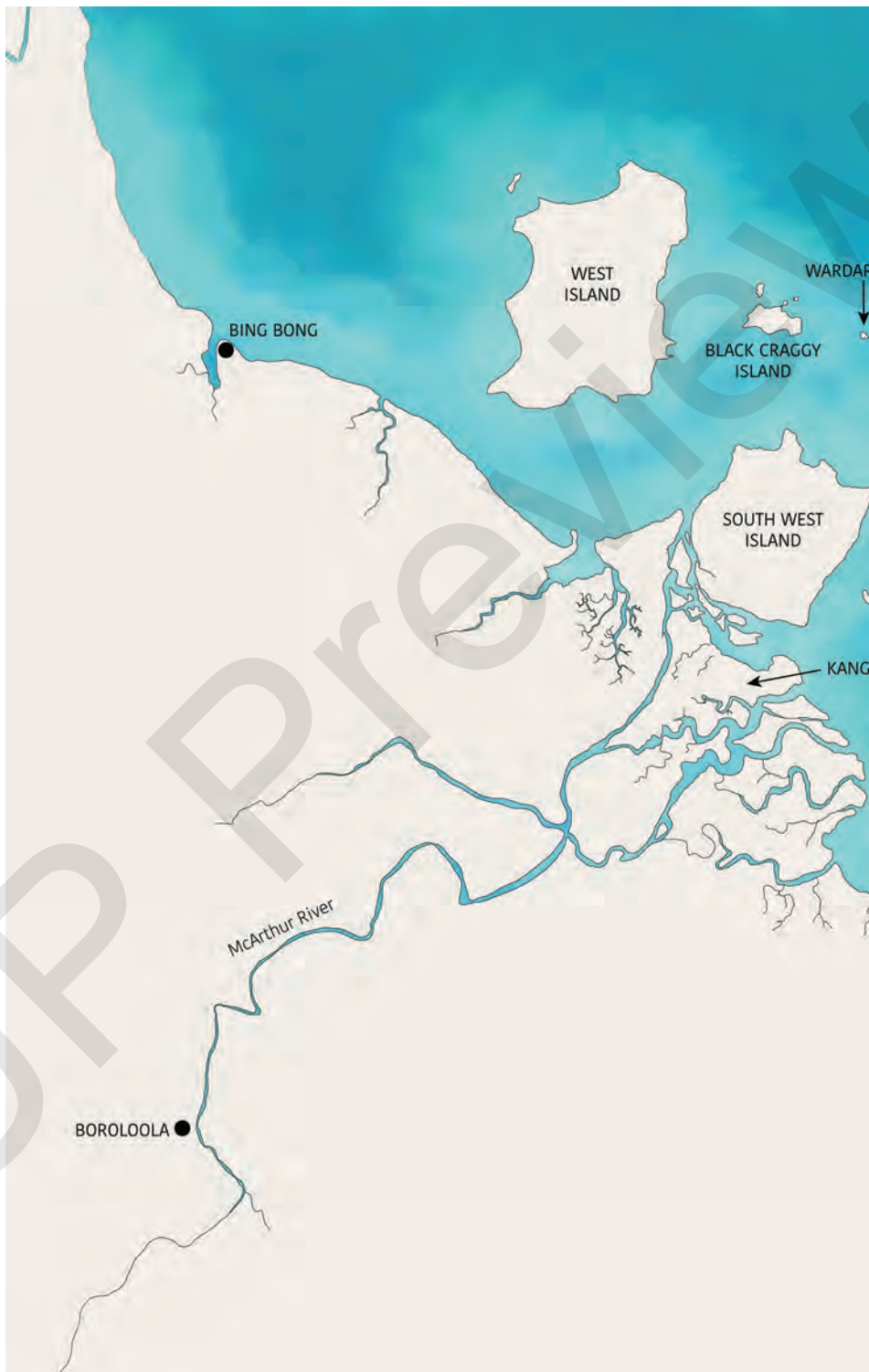
Old Tyson Nguliya, 1982

Today, the Gulf of Carpentaria is part of the tropical savannah of northern Australia (Figures 1.3, 1.4). Its near-pristine coastal zone is defined by distinct ecological features including aggregations of marine life (including several endemic species), high biodiversity, soft sandy seafloors and undersea pinnacles. This zone stretches from the west coast of Cape York Peninsula to the Limmen Bight in the southwest corner of the Gulf. The inshore waters support mangroves, seagrasses and coral reefs, and a rich maritime ecology of marine turtles (olive ridley, green, hawksbill and loggerhead), 16 species of sea snake, colonial and solitary seabirds (terns, frigatebirds, white-bellied sea eagles, osprey, brown boobies), dugongs and aggregations of fish and sharks. Small whales (false pilot whales) and various species of dolphins, sawfish (freshwater and green) and rare rays are also found here.¹³ The Gulf Country's climate is influenced by the northwest monsoon, which generally moves south into the region in the summer months. The climate is characterised by hot, wet summers and cooler, dry winters, with frequent cyclonic activity between December and April, often accompanied by prolonged rainfall events and occasional widespread damage from high winds.

The southwest Gulf of Carpentaria region was once home to six Aboriginal language groups: Yanyuwa, Marra, Garrwa, Gudanji, Binbingka and Wilangarra; however, only four of these groups – Yanyuwa, Marra, Garrwa and Gudanji – survive today as landholders and cultural presences in the region (Map 1.4).

13 Australian Government nd; Chatto et al. 2004; DEWHA 2007; Freeland and Bayliss 1989; Fry et al. 2001; Marsh et al. 2008; Poiner et al. 1987.

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Map 1.3. Yanyuwa Country.

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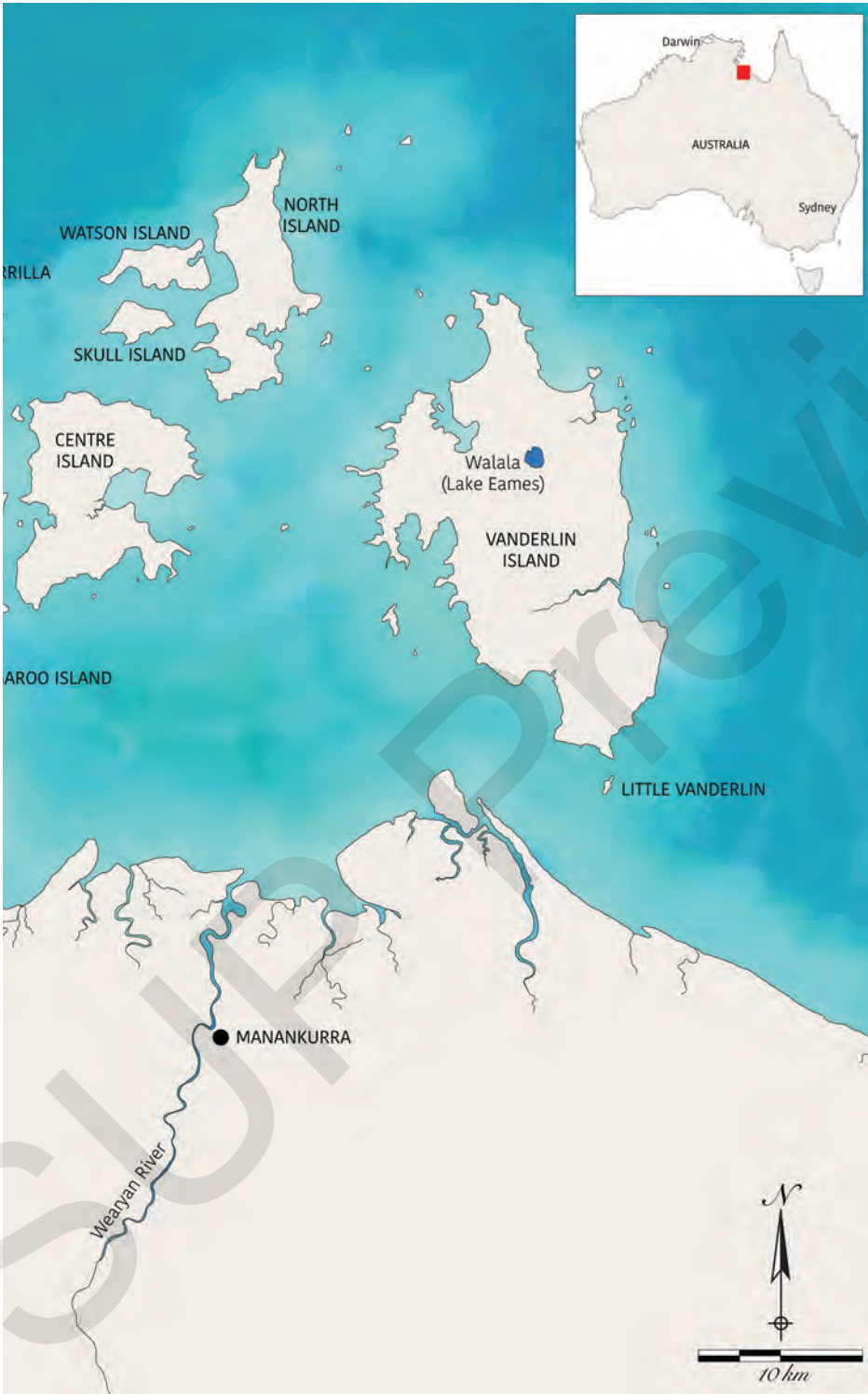




Figure 1.3. Present-day Yanyuwa sea Country, Vanderlin Island coastline. In the foreground is Wudangarramba, middle right is Mawurrnguwiji and the small islet at the top of the picture is known as Wawinda.

The Binbingka and Wilangarra peoples were killed in the early 1900s through colonial acts of violence, a history still recalled by Aboriginal peoples in the region today as “Wild Times”, and documented by historian Tony Roberts.¹⁴ Roberts noted that, by the end of 1881, the entire Gulf district was leased to 14 pastoralists who had three years to comply with the minimum stocking rate. It was during this time of expansion of cattle leases that a rapid sequence of killing occurred, resulting in “at least 600 men, women, children and babies, or about one-sixth of the population, [...] killed in the Gulf Country to 1910. The death toll could easily be as high as seven or eight hundred”.¹⁵ The remaining language groups identify separate parts of the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria as their ancestral lands and waters. These include Marra Country to the west, Yanyuwa Country in the central and coastal reaches of the southwest Gulf, Gudanji Country to the south as people of the inland rocky Country, and Garrwa Country to the east, across the mainland and freshwater Country, an area referred to by the Garrwa as “Stone Country”. Following the massacre of the Binbingka and Wilangarra people a territorial

¹⁴ Roberts 2005, 2009.

¹⁵ Roberts 2009, np.

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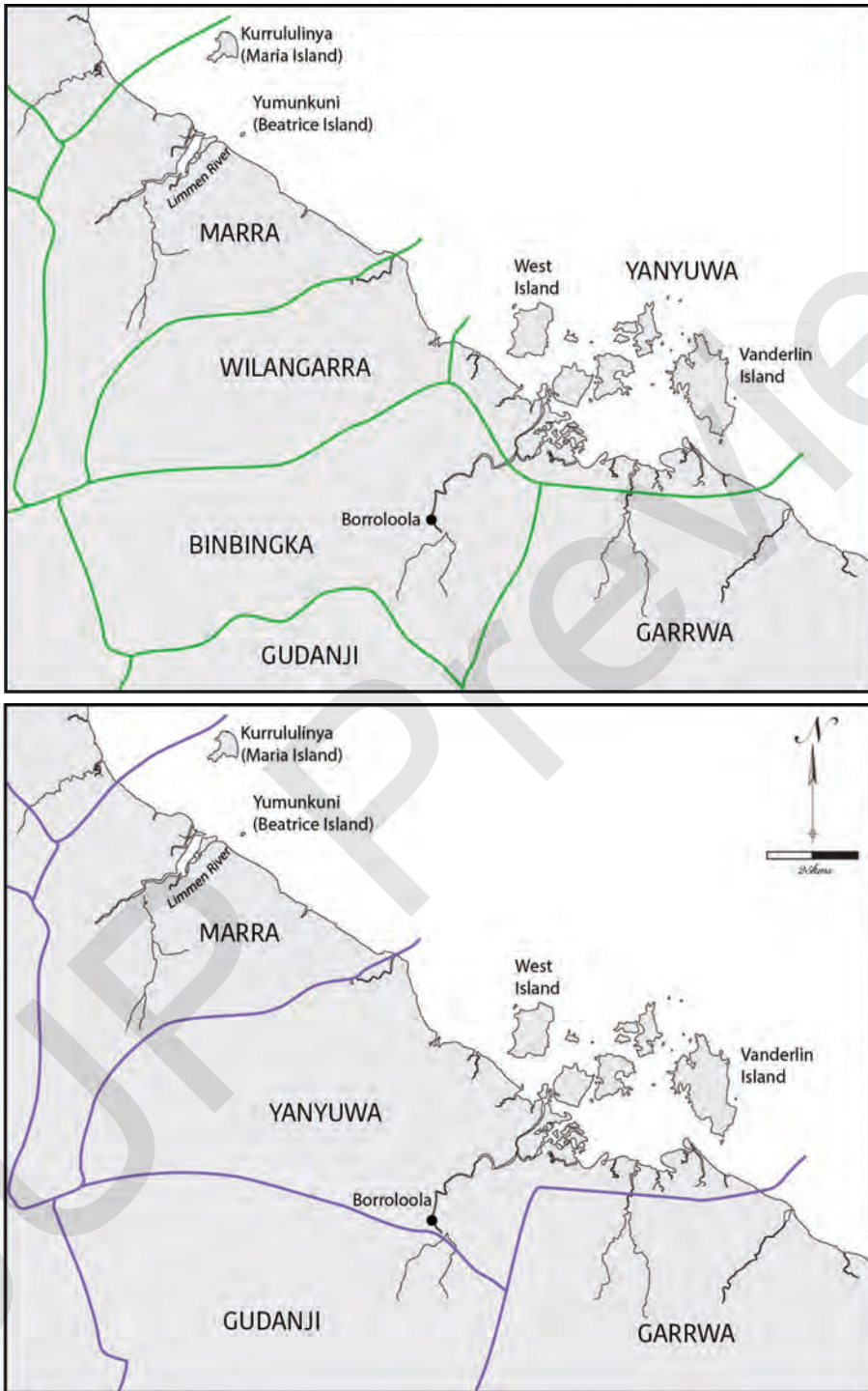
Figure 1.4. Present-day Yanyuwa coastal Country, mouth of the McArthur River. Rabunthu is the name of the east bank of the McArthur River, the small creek in the foreground is Ngulunankurra, the band of mangroves facing the sea is called Liwundalukuntha, and the two creek mouths at the top of the photograph are Kuluwurra and Wuthanda.

realignment took place in which the Yanyuwa, along with the neighbouring Garrwa, became caretakers and owners for Binbingka and Wilangarra Country, and these responsibilities to care for and maintain this Country continue today.

The li-Anthawirriyarra “People of the Sea”

Yanyuwa are the Indigenous owners of the lands and seas of the Pellew Islands, and coastal mainland areas under the sway of saltwater influences, stretching 13 kilometres inland. These areas include the delta region of the McArthur River and the saltwater limits of the McArthur and Wearyan rivers and the mouth of the Robinson River, and take in mangrove forests, salt pans, wide and expansive woodland and savannah grasslands (known as the tropical savannahs), and riverine environments. Yanyuwa have several terms to describe their existence and identity: li-Anthawirriyarra, translated as “those people whose spiritual and cultural origins are of the sea” (abbreviated to “People of the Sea”); li-Karinguthundangu (“those people from the north”), a reference to the sea and islands north of Borroloola;

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Map 1.4. The distribution of language groups in the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria (left: prior to 1900; right: post 1900).

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Figure 1.5. li-Maranja “dugong hunters” (photo courtesy of Scott Cane).

and li-Arnindawangu (“those people from the coastal Country”). Much like other coastal and island-based Indigenous communities around Australia,¹⁶ Yanyuwa have a deep and abiding relationship with their marine environment expressed through worldviews and knowledge systems that reference the sea and all that it contains, and are experts in maritime-based subsistence practices (dugong and turtle hunting, Figure 1.5) and technology.¹⁷

As Saltwater People, the centre of the Yanyuwa world continues to be the Pellew Islands. This area is rich in plant and animal species, and is environmentally diverse with islands, reefs, sandbars, vast saline flats, sand dunes and wetlands comprised of extensive mangroves, saltmarshes and adjacent seagrass beds.¹⁸ These habitats are the nursery and feeding grounds of many culturally important species for the Yanyuwa, in particular dugongs and sea turtles. The shallow nature of the sea in this area, the shape of the islands and the complex maze of creeks and channels fringed by dense mangroves all produce a great length of coastline for quite a small

16 For example, Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre 1999; Cordell 1989; McNiven 2004; Menzies 2016; Peterson and Rigsby 1998; Schneider 2012; Sharp 2002.

17 For example, Bradley 1997, 1998; Bradley with Yanyuwa Families 2010; Kearney and Bradley 2015; Yanyuwa Families et al. 2003.

18 Bradley and Yanyuwa Families 2007.

amount of land. The large area of shallow water and long coastline has enabled the Yanyuwa to develop an economy and cultural traditions that focus heavily on the marine and nearby terrestrial resources. The islands are of varying size; the largest is Vanderlin Island, with many smaller sand islets, isolated rocks and more than 20 known reefs. The islands are of generally low relief with the coastlines varying from rocky cliffs to tidal mudflats with mangrove fringes, sweeping beaches of coral, white sand and small sandy coves. In some places, imposing sand dunes have been formed on the eastern shores of the islands where currents, wind and wave-driven sand have accumulated against the rocky shorelines and headlands. The islands are made up of quartz-rich sandstone, dissected sandstone ridges and tall sandstone rock-stacks. Rockshelters are often found at the base of the ridges and rock-stacks on the larger islands.¹⁹ In the wet season (November to April), the islands' valleys are swamps or lagoons, but by the end of the dry season (May to October) the majority have evaporated. Vanderlin Island has a large and permanent freshwater lake, Walala (Lake Eames), and many islands have permanent springs or soaks that make habitation possible.

Yanyuwa contact with outsiders

Yanyuwa interaction with non-Indigenous people first occurred sometime in the early to mid 1700s with trepang gatherers from Makassar on the island of Sulawesi in Indonesia. They sailed annually in their large, ocean-going prahus (prahu) to the north Australian coastline (from the Kimberley region in the northwest and eastwards as far as Mornington Island in the southeast Gulf of Carpentaria) to harvest and process trepang (*Holothuria scabra*) to sell at markets at Makassar.²⁰ They arrived each year at the beginning of the wet season (November) and returned home with their catch at the beginning of the dry season (May). Their visits ended abruptly in 1907 when the Australian Government denied them fishing licences in what was an era of increasing demands for a White Australia Policy.²¹ Their arrival brought new relationships, incorporation of new words into Yanyuwa language, and the introduction of new objects, implements and watercraft such as dugout canoes. Interaction with the trepang gatherers was not a fleeting occurrence but a close familiarity. Older Yanyuwa men and women often referred to them as li-Malayi ("the Malayan people"), li-Kariyangu ("those people that came from

19 Smith 1963.

20 Also known as sea cucumber, sea slugs and *bêche de mer*.

21 Macknight 1976, 125.

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the west”) and li-Tharribamara (“those people that desired the trepang”). Until the late 1980s, there were Yanyuwa men and women who remembered these visits, watched their relatives working with them, and in some instances had firsthand experience working alongside them.²² Yanyuwa traded the shell of the hawksbill turtle and trochus shell in exchange for tobacco, steel axes, steel harpoon points and cloth. At the end of each work season, they were also given the dugout canoes used to collect trepang from the shallow waters. Linguistic research into the Yanyuwa language reveals at least 22 words have a Makassar origin.²³ Various events and relationships involving trepang gatherers are also memorialised in Yanyuwa song, stories and kinship.²⁴

The first European to record Yanyuwa Country was the Dutch explorer Abel Janzoon Tasman who sailed through the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1644. He thought Vanderlin Island was part of the mainland and so he gave it the name Cape Vanderlin.²⁵ Matthew Flinders (1814) provided the first historical account of Yanyuwa people during his circumnavigation of Australia. In December 1802, he sailed through the islands, naming the group after the English naval commander Sir Edward Pellew, and giving individual names to each island. His journals also give the first written details about the Yanyuwa: making notes of people on, and paddling canoes around, Vanderlin Island. He also recorded other evidence of people on the islands including seeing the remains of a bark canoe, and decorated objects known among Yanyuwa to belong to important ceremonies such as Kundawira (see Chapters 3 and 6). While he did not interact with Yanyuwa, their visible presence on the islands was the first recorded account of the lives of the Yanyuwa people.

The Yanyuwa escaped most of the brutal frontier violence that characterised Aboriginal–European relations in the Gulf Country in the late 1800s and early 1900s (see above). Anthropologists Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen²⁶ noted in their visit to Borroloola in 1901 that Yanyuwa had survived this tumultuous time by removing themselves to the islands where their maritime-based economy could support and safeguard them.²⁷ Indeed, until the 1950s many Yanyuwa continued to live and travel among the Pellew Islands. Oral histories concerning events in the 1880s show that Yanyuwa, in some instances, engaged with Europeans in a hostile manner, conducting attacks on boats in revenge for Europeans shooting Yanyuwa

22 For example, Avery 1985; Baker 1989; Brady et al., forthcoming.

23 Evans 1992.

24 For example, Yanyuwa Families and Bradley 2016, 2017.

25 Heeres 1899, vi.

26 Spencer and Gillen 1904, 1912.

27 See also Baker 1989; Spencer 1901–1902.



Figure 1.6. Borroloola (Burrulula) and the McArthur River, southwest Gulf of Carpentaria, Northern Territory.

people for sport, and on Europeans sailing out to the islands to look for women to abduct.²⁸ Yanyuwa interaction with police was also violent, with police administering “punishments” to Yanyuwa by burning canoes, which impacted on the Yanyuwa’s ability to travel and hunt. Much like the Makassar-based trepang gatherers, some Europeans were integrated into the Yanyuwa kinship system, while many songs and stories started to include details of Yanyuwa interaction with Europeans.²⁹

Following the establishment of a ration depot at Borroloola (approximately 60 kilometres inland from the islands and close to 1,000 kilometres southeast of Darwin) by the Department of Native Affairs, and the passing of the Northern Territory Welfare Ordinance in 1953, the lives of Yanyuwa (along with the Marra, Gudanji and Garrwa) changed dramatically (Figures 1.6, 1.7). These developments at Borroloola resulted in a process of “bringing in” Yanyuwa people from the islands and centralising them at Borroloola.³⁰ While here, men were often “recruited” or sent away by the government’s Welfare Branch for pastoral station work on the Barkly Tablelands several hundred kilometres south, and also into central-western

28 Roberts 2005, 190–94.

29 See Yanyuwa Families and Bradley 2016.

30 Baker 1999; see also Bradley with Yanyuwa Families 2010.

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Figure 1.7. Photograph by Marie Reay at Borroloola, late 1950s/early 1960s, women and children at the ration depot (Australian National University Archives: Marie Reay Collection, ANUA 440-10-107, “Women waiting for rations”).

Queensland. They worked as stockmen during the dry season for little or no pay, and then were returned to Borroloola by station owners at the end of the dry season. Despite the pressures of centralisation from government agencies, Yanyuwa family groups have maintained their intimate connection with their sea Country, travelling to the islands and coastal areas for ceremonies, initiations and renewing their multifaceted relationships to Country. Today, many Yanyuwa, especially younger generations, are returning to the islands through activities as part of the work of the li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers, who carry out cultural and natural resource management activities, including working with co-authors Liam, John and Amanda to record rock art and other cultural sites.

Studies of Yanyuwa Country

Unlike many other parts of northern Australia, the archaeology of the southwest Gulf Country is relatively under studied. A series of archaeological excavations undertaken in 1999 and 2000 on Vanderlin Island and Centre Island revealed evidence of occupation from around 8,000 BP, followed by several phases of

occupation and abandonment of the islands.³¹ Baker's (1984) research in the early 1980s identified many places showing the remains of the visiting trepang gatherers (campsites, stone lines from fireplaces used for cauldrons to boil trepang) although the above-mentioned excavations failed to reveal any evidence of Yanyuwa–Makassan contact.³² Little else is known of the antiquity of occupation of the mainland around Borroloola and further east and west for many hundreds of kilometres.

Anthropologically, Yanyuwa people and their Country have been documented in varying degrees since the early 1900s. As mentioned above, the colonial ethnographers Spencer and Gillen visited Borroloola in November 1901 during the hot and humid “build-up” time to the monsoonal wet season. Their experiences, recorded in their personal diaries and field notebooks, did not paint the Yanyuwa, Marra and Binbingka people in an overly positive light.³³ They made frequent references to the difficulties they faced with trying to capture ethnographic information from people about ceremonies and other matters, and challenges understanding their kinship systems. They did however make quite detailed notes regarding canoe technology, kinship terms and names of local Dreamings, and highlighted the depth of Yanyuwa knowledge of their maritime environment. They also collected material culture objects, including a bark canoe, and took portraits of several Yanyuwa men and women, though no mention was made of rock art.³⁴

Following Spencer and Gillen were other anthropologists such as Marie Reay³⁵ in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Reay studied kinship, marriage and clan systems (see Chapter 2). Missionary linguist Jean Kirton³⁶ arrived in 1963 and stayed until 1988, and focused on the complex nature of the Yanyuwa language. John Avery³⁷ focused on the Yanyuwa kinship, subsection system and land tenure, along with aspects of the post-European contact period. Dehne McLaughlin³⁸ identified a number of archaeological and other cultural sites, and collected kinship and subsection data. Elizabeth Mackinlay³⁹ recorded aspects of Yanyuwa performance

31 Sim and Wallis 2008.

32 Baker 1984.

33 Bradley et al. 2014.

34 Spencer and Gillen 1904, 1912.

35 Reay 1962, 1965.

36 For example, Kirton 1971, 1988; Kirton and Timothy 1982.

37 Avery 1985.

38 McLaughlin 1975.

39 For example, Mackinlay 2000.

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(song, dance), while Richard Baker⁴⁰ explored Yanyuwa experiences with Europeans, especially during their forced removal to Borrooloola in the 1950s.⁴¹

In the early 1980s, a new phase of collaborative research began with John's ethnographic work into Yanyuwa relationships with their maritime environment, language and biological and zoological knowledge. A key part of this work was Yanyuwa taking an active role in sharing stories with him about their Law and culture, showcasing the pride in their maritime identity and knowledge, and offering other ways of seeing and knowing the world.⁴² Amanda's work with Yanyuwa began in the early 2000s and focused on Yanyuwa land rights, cross-generational knowledge exchange, and self-determined pathways towards communal healing.⁴³ Other work continues to build on these themes; for example, Phil Adgemis⁴⁴ recently worked with Yanyuwa to document aspects of social change, cultural continuity, and the cultural dynamics of Yanyuwa experience and knowledge transfer, and rock art research beginning in 2010 led by Liam.⁴⁵ It is this later phase of collaborative research and the generation of ideas that not only offers new insights into Yanyuwa identity, experience and knowledge but also acts as a catalyst for how we have approached learning about Yanyuwa rock art and presenting it to an audience as we do in this book.

Expanding the story of the Yanyuwa Country and Law

Of critical importance to making sense of the way Yanyuwa know and engage with their rock art is to move beyond simple binaries of western knowledge and Indigenous knowledge. For example, the separation that western knowledge makes between land and sea is one that Yanyuwa people do not make: the sea is not separate from the land, it is all Country, named, known and owned and therefore to be managed and cared for. Caring for mainland Yanyuwa Country is seen in no different light than caring for Yanyuwa sea Country, which includes caring for the moving bodies of water that flow over the offshore reefs, and for the places that reside in the sea. Yanyuwa, for example, consider that the sea starts some

40 Baker 1984, 1989, 1999.

41 For detailed reviews of the history of research among the Yanyuwa, see, for example, Bradley 1997, Yanyuwa Families et al. 2016.

42 Bradley with Yanyuwa Families 2010; Bradley et al. 2006; Yanyuwa Families et al. 2003, 2016.

43 Kearney 2009, 2014, 2017, 2021.

44 Adgemis 2017.

45 For example, Brady 2020; Brady and Bradley 2014a, 2014b; Brady et al. 2016, 2018a.

13 kilometres further inland than western maps indicate as the final resting place of the sea; that is, the high-water mark.⁴⁶ This area incorporates the vast saline flats and mangrove-lined creeks of the maritime environment, any parts of Country that themselves are under the sway and influence of the sea and of the Dreamings that moved through, within and across the expanse of this saltwater region. On extremely high tides this whole area is inundated, and it is therefore part of Yanyuwa sea Country. Binary oppositions also appear in discussions around plants. In their book on Yanyuwa ethnobiological classification, Bradley et al. (2006) describe how Yanyuwa classification of plants challenges the western scientific approach. For example, the grey mangrove, a prominent species of mangrove in Yanyuwa Country, is labelled, according to its exact genus and species, using western scientific taxonomic knowledge as *Avicennia marina*. Alternatively, Annie a-Karrakayny's description of the ma-warnjarrngu "grey mangrove" offers a very different classification for this plant, one that emphasises relationships and connections between Yanyuwa:

*Ma-mangaji ma-ngatha jamurimuri ma-wurrama ma-mangaji
ma-warnjarrngu kulu nganu li-Wuyaliya janinyamba-wundarrbanji
likilinganji-kirlakangku.*

That tree, the grey mangrove, is my most senior paternal ancestor, and we people of the Wuyaliya clan name ourselves as those people who are kin to the grey mangrove.⁴⁷

These different worldviews also extend to those aspects of Country that western scientists and researchers refer to as the "archaeological record".⁴⁸ There are many places throughout Yanyuwa Country where evidence of people camping and living can be found. This evidence can be in the form of stone artefacts, fish traps, standing stones, grinding stones and bases, rock art sites, log coffins and piles of shellfish that are the remains of people's meals. Archaeologists refer to these as middens, but in Yanyuwa they are referred to as liyi-wankalawu ("belonging to the old people") or mulhil ("rubbish", or "anything thrown away"). In addition, introduced materials coming from the trepang gatherers or Europeans who visited this part of the Gulf Country include flaked glass and metal fragments. Yet for the Yanyuwa these objects, much like the rock art motifs discussed throughout this

46 Bradley and Yanyuwa Families 2022; see also Trigger 1987.

47 Bradley et al. 2006, 1.

48 See Kearney et al. 2020.

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book, are not considered as “artefacts”, they are liyi-wankalawu and occupy central places within the Yanyuwa’s interconnected world. Everything on Country can be related through kinship and, in many instances, this evidence can be attributed to particular people or families who are known to have visited these places and camped there in the past.

One of the most striking examples of this comes from John’s discussion of Mawudawudawiji, “the place of the stone tools”, located on mainland Yanyuwa Country near Fletcher Creek. Here, stone tools made from the quartzite outcrops, and chert that has been brought in from elsewhere, were described in 1992 to John by senior Yanyuwa man Jerry Brown Ngarnawakajarra as:

*Ma-ja ma-jamurimuri ma-ngatha, Wurrundurla ma-ja, Wurrundula
na-Maymyngul barra, yiwa ambirrijungu. Kilu-yabimanthaninya kulu nganu
li-ngulakaringu, ma-ja ma-wudawuda wurrbingu yiku ki-Wurrundurlawu
kujika barra miku kujika nganinya:*

Warrakiwarraki

Warrakiwarraki

Kakami kakamayi Warndama

Warndamayi

Warrakiwarraki

Warrakiwarraki.

This stone tool is my most senior paternal grandfather, this stone tool is the Dingo, it is his fat, he was first to make these things, and we people came behind, these stone tools are truly the Dingo, the song verses for him we sing like this:

Well-made stone blades

Discarded flakes lay scattered

Flaking the well-made stone blade

The well-made blade

Discarded flakes lay scattered.⁴⁹

These examples of Yanyuwa knowledge and interpretations of what exists in their Country highlight that there are other ways of seeing, knowing and understanding

⁴⁹ Bradley 2008, 634; the quartzite outcrop itself is also Jerry Brown Ngarnawakajarra’s senior paternal grandfather.

the world, according to culture and Law. The Yanyuwa world is an interconnected one, where people are kin to everything and everywhere on Country. The examples also give tantalising glimpses into the way Yanyuwa structure and perceive their environment and relationships with people, places and objects – a process that impacts how rock art is also understood and placed into a schema of relations. As we describe in Chapter 3, rock art is frequently thought of and discussed according to western classification systems, which commonly seek out insights into its antiquity, function and symbolism. Yet, we argue, like others before us, that Indigenous knowledge about rock art, particularly in Australia, is critical to any interpretations of motifs. This knowledge is also dynamic and can change according to circumstances such as the age of a person, their gender, and the health and wellbeing of people and Country. Rock art can be and mean many things.⁵⁰ In this book we move away from western binaries and resist the habit of separating things out from one another – such a process would not reflect a Yanyuwa way of knowing. Rather, this book seeks to demonstrate how and why kinship and its relational world must be at the forefront of any attempts at building an understanding of Yanyuwa rock art.

Our project

Unlike the internationally renowned rock art of Western Arnhem Land, Kakadu National Park, the Kimberley, Murujuga (Dampier Archipelago), Cape York Peninsula and central Australia, Gulf Country rock art has escaped detailed study. Why this is the case could be related to many factors such as its remoteness, or its location on the savannah plain – a relatively flat and low-lying stretch of land that does not possess the massive escarpment Country typically associated with rock art. However, the collaborative work by Yanyuwa Families with John since the 1980s has highlighted many aspects of Yanyuwa rock art that drew attention to incredibly rich and complex stories about the multivocal nature of the art and the ongoing relationships people have with the images themselves and the places where they are located.

In 2010, Yanyuwa Families invited John, Amanda and Liam to work with them and the li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers to record in detail the rock art sites across Yanyuwa Country, and to have their knowledge about them recorded for, and passed

50 For example, Blundell and Woolagoodja 2005; Brady et al. 2016; Brady and Taçon 2016; Layton 1992; David 2002; Merlan 1989; Porr and Bell 2012; Taçon and Garde 1995.

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on to, future generations.⁵¹ Other objectives included developing management plans for their care and having younger generations of Yanyuwa re-engaging with their Country, and learning how to care for it through the guidance of senior men and women, and learning rock art recording techniques. There were also academic aims: to try and gain insight into the role of art and visual symbolism in the archaeological construction and characterisation of ancient seascapes. A key question that initially guided our project was exploring how Saltwater People used rock art as symbols to inscribe their maritime world. However, from the point of view of John, Liam and Amanda, the trips to rock art sites and the many conversations they had with Yanyuwa Families about rock art began to raise other questions, most notably, about the role of kinship in structuring and guiding the *processes* of Yanyuwa negotiation and engagement with these motifs and sites in contemporary contexts. From here it became apparent that “a painting is not just a painting”: a painting is part of Yanyuwa Law and an interconnected world that draws on stories, knowledge and kinship to derive meaning.

Using this foundational premise, our aim with this book is to reveal how Yanyuwa rock art is both magnificent and multidimensional. We will show how Yanyuwa rock art is connected to the travels, events and songs of Dreamings, the spiritual realm, ceremony, health and wellbeing of people and Country, and Yanyuwa identity and narratives concerning past and present-day events. Regardless of whether an “original” meaning or intention behind rock art is known or remembered, what is critical to developing this understanding of Yanyuwa rock art is its relational context. As we mentioned above, what frames people’s engagement and interaction with rock art differs from person to person depending on a whole range of factors, including their clan identity, ceremonial experience, age, gender, experience in moving through Country and broader interconnections derived through kinship, and it is these factors that symbolise how Yanyuwa rock art should be discussed and shared with readers. To do so, we begin this book by describing what a kinship-based approach looks like and what it requires of people in a day-to-day and also in a ceremonial sense. We explore Yanyuwa kinship, clan structure, and other organising principles that sustain Yanyuwa identity, and identify how these relate to discussions about the Yanyuwa social and cultural world. In Chapter 3 we present and explore the history of Yanyuwa

51 The recording process involved photographing all of the art (individual images and decorated panels), recording GPS points, and measurements and descriptions of the sites and images. Faded or heavily deteriorated images were digitally enhanced using DStretch and Adobe Photoshop in an effort to identify the image (see Brady and Bradley 2014a for recording methods; see also Brady et al. 2017).

visual arts traditions and earlier rock art research with particular emphasis on the various themes present. We then move to the rock art itself (Chapters 4 to 8), presenting and describing the Yanyuwa narratives that accompany rock art. These narratives reflect a Yanyuwa logic and show how kinship and the ancestral world are governing structures to their interpretation(s). We also dedicate attention to the relationship between rock art narratives, spiritual entities, ceremony, relationships with other language groups and kujika – the ceremonial songs or repositories of knowledge that contain information about the travels and events that each Dreaming undertook in the ancestral past.⁵² We conclude our book by emphasising the critical role that kinship can have in explorations of rock art's meaning, significance and symbolism and, finally, suggest new pathways for how rock art in Australia might be recorded and studied in the future, and more fully understood from an Indigenous cultural perspective.

52 See Bradley with Yanyuwa Families 2010.

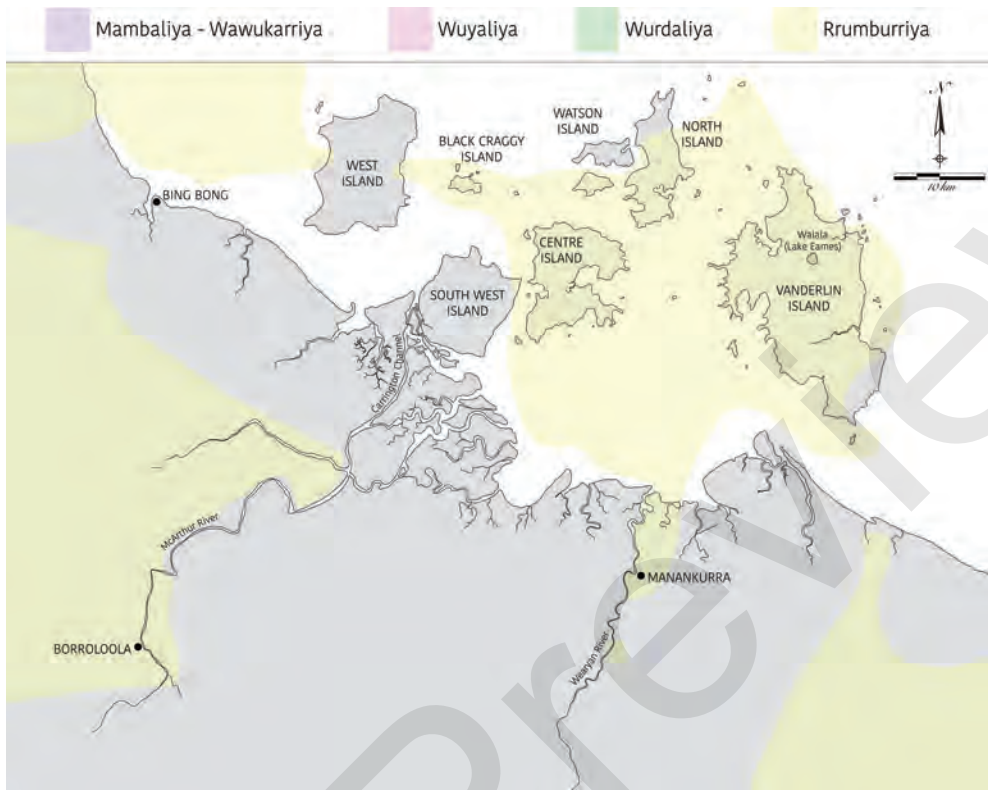
Chapter 6

ROCK ART OF RRUMBURRIYA CLAN COUNTRY

A vast area of Yanyuwa island and sea Country represents the ancestral reach and claim of the Rrumburriya clan (Map 6.1). To the east is Vanderlin Island, the largest island in the Pellew Islands, to the west is North Island, and to the southwest is Centre Island. Rrumburriya clan Country also includes Skull Island, White Craggy Island, Black Craggy Island, West Neck on the southwestern tip of South West Island, a beach on the central east coast of West Island, and a creek mouth on the north central west coast of West Island. Combined, this Country is distinguished by island ecologies, inclusive of tidal flats, sand dunes, salt flats, swamps and mangroves. It is rich saltwater territory.

We begin this chapter by mapping Rrumburriya clan Country for both sub-clan groups for we must know the actions, character and presences of Dreamings to better understand the rock art that occurs on Rrumburriya clan Country. There are two main Rrumburriya sub-clans and their kin that are ngimirringki for this island Country. The family belonging to Vanderlin Island call themselves likilinganji-Wurralhibi, “the people who are kin to the saltwater that rises from the depths of the sea”. The likilinganji-Wurralhibi are responsible for Vanderlin Island, its small surrounding islets, and Wurlma (Vanderlin Rocks; a reef approximately 4 kilometres northeast from the tip of the island). The second group is likilinganji-Jamarndarrka, “those people who are kin to the White-Bellied Sea Eagle, whose chest feathers shine”. The likilinganji-Jamarndarrka are associated with North Island, Centre Island, Skull Island, Black Craggy Island and White Craggy Island.

Jakarta Wuka (Too Many Stories)



Map 6.1. Rumburriya clan Country.

likilinganji-Wurralhibi Country

Vanderlin Island consists of rocky sandstone outcrops and dissected sandstone escarpment Country, which in Yanyuwa is called *jidalbirringki awara* (Figure 6.1). This kind of Country is common around Victoria Bay in the southwest and at Liwingkinya just to the south of the large inland lake known as Walala (Lake Eames). The interior of the island is open forest with stands of *budanja* “messmate” and *wakuwaku* “cypress pine”. The east coast is distinguished by long windswept beaches with sand dunes and broken sandstone Country and is associated with the travels of *li-Maramaranja* “the Dugong Hunters”, the major Dreamings for the *likilinganji-Wurralhibi*. As the Dugong Hunters travelled northwards in their bark canoes their dugong harpoon ropes trailed behind them, creating the many reefs and islets found on the east coast; these ropes are also responsible for “holding” Rumburriya clan Country together. Vanderlin Island’s east coast carries the name *Mungkuwarladajiya* – which refers to a specific form of *ma-warladaji* “seagrass” that is linked to the Dugong Hunters. The west coast is called *Wurlmakurlma awara*,

6 Rock art of Rrumburriya clan Country



Figure 6.1. The dissected sandstone Country of Vanderlin Island.

which means that it is Country which has lots of twists and turns, small bays and beaches and peninsulas. It adjoins the inland, broken sandstone Country among which grow mujbayi “cabbage palms” and stands of cypress pine. The west coast of the island was created by a very angry a-Buluwardi “Rock Wallaby” Dreaming, who upon meeting Nurdungurdu the “Tiger Shark” Dreaming, which travelled through this Country, was incensed and drove him away because she did not want him to put any of the cycad food he was carrying onto the island. Instead, she told him to take it to Manankurra on the Wearyan River so that people could come from everywhere for that food. Her anger is referred to as jijijirla – the action of leaping and smashing the coastline with her fighting stick (Figure 6.2).

Vanderlin Island is divided into five named areas: Wurralhibi, Yimantha, Mangkimangki, Warrawarra and Warungu. In times past, each of these areas were looked after by the senior men who held the right clan associations. The five named areas have a shared meeting point at Walala (Map 6.2, Figure 6.3). It is here that the kujika belonging to the Tiger Shark Dreaming from Manankurra, and the Warriyangalayawu “Hammerhead Shark” Dreaming from Wurlma are “put down” (which means placed into Country) or rested when they have been sung. Bujimala, the “Rainbow Serpent” Dreaming, also resides at Walala, where he sleeps in the cool deep waters of the lake.

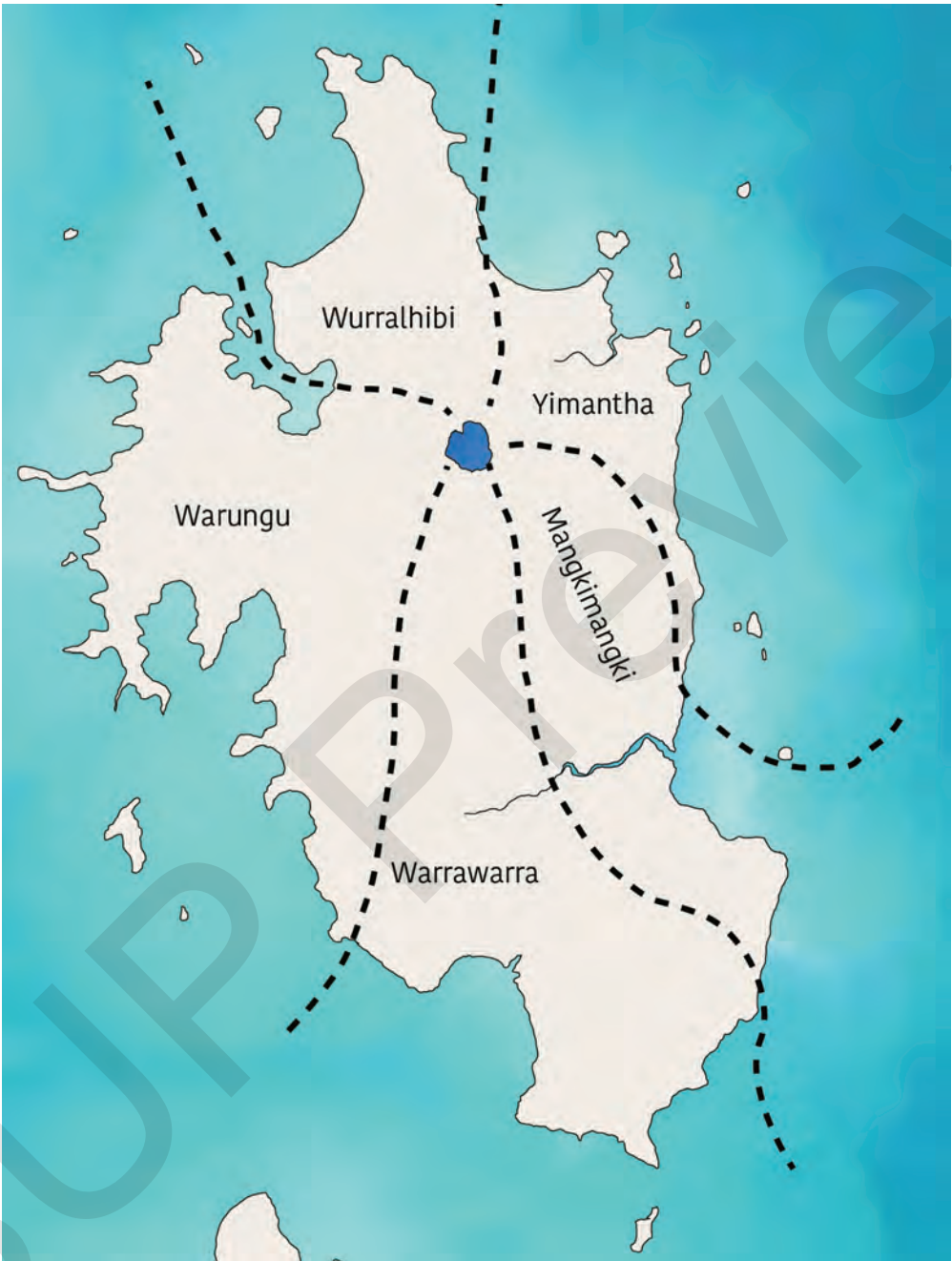


Figure 6.2. Screenshot of a-Buluwardi “Rock Wallaby”, who smashed rocks to create the coastline on the western side of Vanderlin Island (from *Ngurdungurdu “The Tiger Shark”* digital animation, designed by Brent McKee; courtesy of Wunungu Awara: Animating Indigenous Knowledges).



Figure 6.3. The freshwater lake in the centre of Vanderlin Island known as Walala (Lake Eames). Bujimala, the “Rainbow Serpent”, sleeps at the bottom of the lake. The lake is also where the kujika from Manankurra is put to rest after singing it all night.

6 Rock art of Rrumburriya clan Country



Map 6.2. The five named areas of Vanderlin Island.



Figure 6.4. View towards the large sand dune known as Muluwa at the northern tip of Vanderlin Island; the sand dune is the a-Rumu “Wave” Dreaming.

In addition to Walala, Muluwa is an important Yanyuwa place, located on the northern tip of the island (Figure 6.4). Muluwa is central to the Rumburriya clan identity since this is where several Dreamings come together to meet. The large sand dune that dominates Muluwa is an a-Rumu “Wave” Dreaming, and an a-Wirninibirninny “Sea Snake” Dreaming. Both are a-jibiya baji “just belonging to one place”, or stationary Dreamings; that is, they did not travel from anywhere else. The a-Kuwaykuwayk “Sorcery Stone Bird” Dreaming rested at Muluwa and left a nest that today is a place full of egg-shaped rocks. When she left Muluwa she flew across to Centre Island and came to rest on its west coast at Waynykuwa. The Namurlanjanyngku Spirit Beings travelled to Muluwa from Kamandarringabaya and Liwingkinya to the south and began their “calling out” to other spirit beings in the broader southwest Gulf Country to tell them to get ready for a major ceremony called Kundawira (see below).

Muluwa occupies a central place in the Yanyuwa knowledge of the islands. Sometimes Muluwa is used by Gudanji and Garrwa people as the name to refer to all of Vanderlin Island, as it is such a vital place and key part of the Dreaming story attached to this island Country. Muluwa is sung in the kujika of the Hammerhead



Figure 6.5. Screenshot of the Dugong Hunters (from *li-Maramaranja “Dugong Hunters”* digital animation of the Dugong Hunters and their canoe, designed by Brent McKee; courtesy Wunungu Awara: Animating Indigenous Knowledges).

Shark as it travelled through this part of Country. The Dugong Hunters (Figure 6.5) travelled directly through Muluwa, also singing it in their kujika:

Muluwayana
Marrujburr marrujburr

The Country of Muluwa is quiet
There is no wind, the sea is calm

Muluwayana
Marrujburr kanjiwurr
Malbinykarra

The Dugong Hunters are arriving at Muluwa
The Country is quiet, there is no wind
The sea is calm

Kalu-wangarra
Riyana wunyikunyiburr.

The dugong hunters are coiling
Their ropes
In the Country of Muluwa that is quiet and still.

If one looks northwards from the high sand dune at Muluwa there are a number of large rocks jutting out of the sea. Some of these rocks are metamorphosed

Dugong Hunters that did not want to or could not continue travelling with their other kin and chose to remain behind. One of these rocks is called Ngangangayu, which is the name given to the old Dugong Hunter who was blind. He is sung in the Dugong Hunter kujika:

Ngangangayu
Kanganganyma.

The old blind dugong hunter
His name is Ngangangayu
He is resting for all time
At Muluwa.

Many of these Dreamings are encountered in the rock art of the islands. They occur on Country that is home to their clan and also at places that are not associated directly with their clan-based kin, nor the journeys and actions of the Dreamings themselves. For example, and as noted in Chapter 4, the Sorcery Stone Bird painting found at Mandarrila on South West Island is located on Wuyaliya Country, but the Sorcery Stone Bird is Rrumburriya. Similarly, the image of the Arribarri “Wobbegong Shark”, a Rrumburriya Dreaming which is sung in a Rrumburriya kujika, is found painted in a rockshelter at Maabayny on West Island, on Wurdaliya clan Country. It is entirely reasonable that these Dreamings are found on the clan Country of another group, and when asked why this might be, Yanyuwa men and women express no issue with this; rather, they explain it as the actions of the Dreaming, actions which are not to be second guessed.

likilinganji-Jamarndarrka Country

likilinganji-Jamarndarrka Country is a broad expanse of walamakamaka “sea Country” and includes North Island, Skull Island, Centre Island, Black Craggy Island and White Craggy Island, and is often referred to as Barranyi (see Chapter 5). The name Barranyi is sung in the kujika of the Dugong Hunters when they arrive at Wurdalnguwa (Skull Island) and stand at its highest point to look over the islands and the sea:

Warajarra dunguju
Barranyi Barranyi

The Dugong Hunters stand on the shore
At Skull Island



Figure 6.6. The cliffs of Wulibirra on North Island. The rock monolith on the left is the body of the a-Karnkarnka “White-Bellied Sea Eagle” Dreaming.

They look over all their island and sea Country
They name it Barranyi.

One of the most significant places on North Island is Wulibirra (Red Bluff), a peninsula that juts out from the central eastern coast (Figure 6.6). Its northern face has large, steep arnarra “cliffs” that drop into the sea, while to the north of Wulibirra are large sand dunes that run into an open forest of messmate, cypress pines and cabbage palms. The rest of the island is gently sloping sandstone Country that runs down to the beaches and rocky foreshore. Centre Island and Skull Island have similar geographies. White Craggy Island is perhaps one of the most impressive and brooding islands in Yanyuwa Country, with its steep cliffs, rugged sandstone stacks and fallen stone slabs.

When he was a young man in the early twentieth century, Old Short Friday Babawurda (the father of Roy Friday Rijirringu, Roddy Harvey Bayuma-Birribalanja, Graham Friday, Ross Friday Kulabulma and Ruth Friday a-Marrngawi) composed two songs about his Rrumburriya clan Country. He composed them while stuck on the mainland, waiting for rough weather to end so he could once again travel

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in his canoe. In the first song, he used the term walamakamaka to refer to the wide expanses of the open sea of Barranyi:

Karna-wulkanala
Walamakamaka
Na-wurdu nguthundiya
Ja-riyanbayi.

I will see
The wide expanse of the open sea
The wave troughs to the north
They are calming.

He also calls the name Barranyi in the second song:

Nyimbala-karra!
Nguthundakarilu
Barranyi na-wuku
Ja-riyanbayi
Na-Rrumburrumba.

You two look
To the north!
Over the seas of Barranyi
It is calming
Over all of this Rrumburriya Country.

There are also two small areas of Rrumburriya clan Country on West Island. Yathangka, a small beach backed by a swamp on the central west coast of West Island, is known to be good for hunting murndangu “long-necked turtles”. This place was given its name by the Dugong Hunter Dreaming who stopped here before continuing their travels across the island. They are said to have travelled quietly because of the Wurdaliya “Osprey” and Sea Turtle Dreamings also present on that island. The Dugong Hunters came out on the north central west coast of West Island at a place called Lumiyinbiji, which is also Rrumburriya clan Country. The Dugong Hunters then travelled westward to Warrawarda (Rosie Creek mouth) and then further west to Wunubarryi (Mount Young) in the Limmen Bight, in Marra Country.

Muluwa and Wulibirra – big brother, little brother

Island Rumburriya clan Country is linked to coastal Rumburriya clan Country (associated with Manankurra on the Wearyan River) through the travels of the a-Karnkarnka “White-Bellied Sea Eagle”, who flew from Nungkayirrinia on the east bank at the mouth of the Wearyan River to Arnarrijila on the west side of Muluwa. She carried with her important ceremonies including the powerful Kundawira ceremony, which belongs to the Rumburriya clan. At Arnarrijila she began dancing her ceremonies and, upon finishing them, she threw down her jarraji “feathered ceremonial pole”, which then became a large, white-barked tree. After performing her ceremonies, she left Muluwa and travelled to Wulibirra. Upon arriving, she flew past a beach she named Wilarrku and beat her wings very fast, creating a series of sand dunes. She then landed at Wulibirra where she made her nest. While sitting in her nest, she looked south to Munkumungkarnda on Centre Island and saw some flying foxes. As she rose up from her nest to fly to Munkumungkarnda, her eggs fell down onto the beach at Kandanbarrawuji (a place name which translates to “her eggs fell down”) (Figure 6.7). After capturing the flying foxes, she brought them back to her nest, cooked them in a ground oven and ate them. She then heard a-Kilyarrkilyarr the “Wedge-Tailed Eagle” Dreaming calling her from Marra Country in the west at Nawundulbi. He wanted some of her white feathers to decorate his body, for his were only black. The White-Bellied Sea Eagle lied, and called back that she didn’t have any, that she had used them all. She then danced her ceremonies including the Kundawira. She remains at Wulibirra today, continually watching the flying foxes at Munkumungkarnda.

While Wulibirra itself is the nest of the White-Bellied Sea Eagle, her body is a very large, tall boulder nestled among the steep cliffs on the northernmost side of the island. The hundreds of oval-shaped stones at Kandanbarrawuji represent her eggs, while the ground ovens where she cooked the flying foxes are the rock formations at the base of her body. Wulibirra remains an especially important place for the Rumburriya; it is kurdukurdu “secret and sacred”¹ in part because one main rockshelter contains hollow log coffins and bone bundle burials of deceased Rumburriya kin.

Yanyuwa men and women speak of Muluwa and Wulibirra as being tied together through the path of the White-Bellied Sea Eagle. It is her travels from Muluwa, the lands of the likilinganji-Wurralhibi, to Wulibirra, the lands of the likilinganji-Jamarndarrka, that bind both lineages and families together.

1 See Bradley and Kearney 2018.

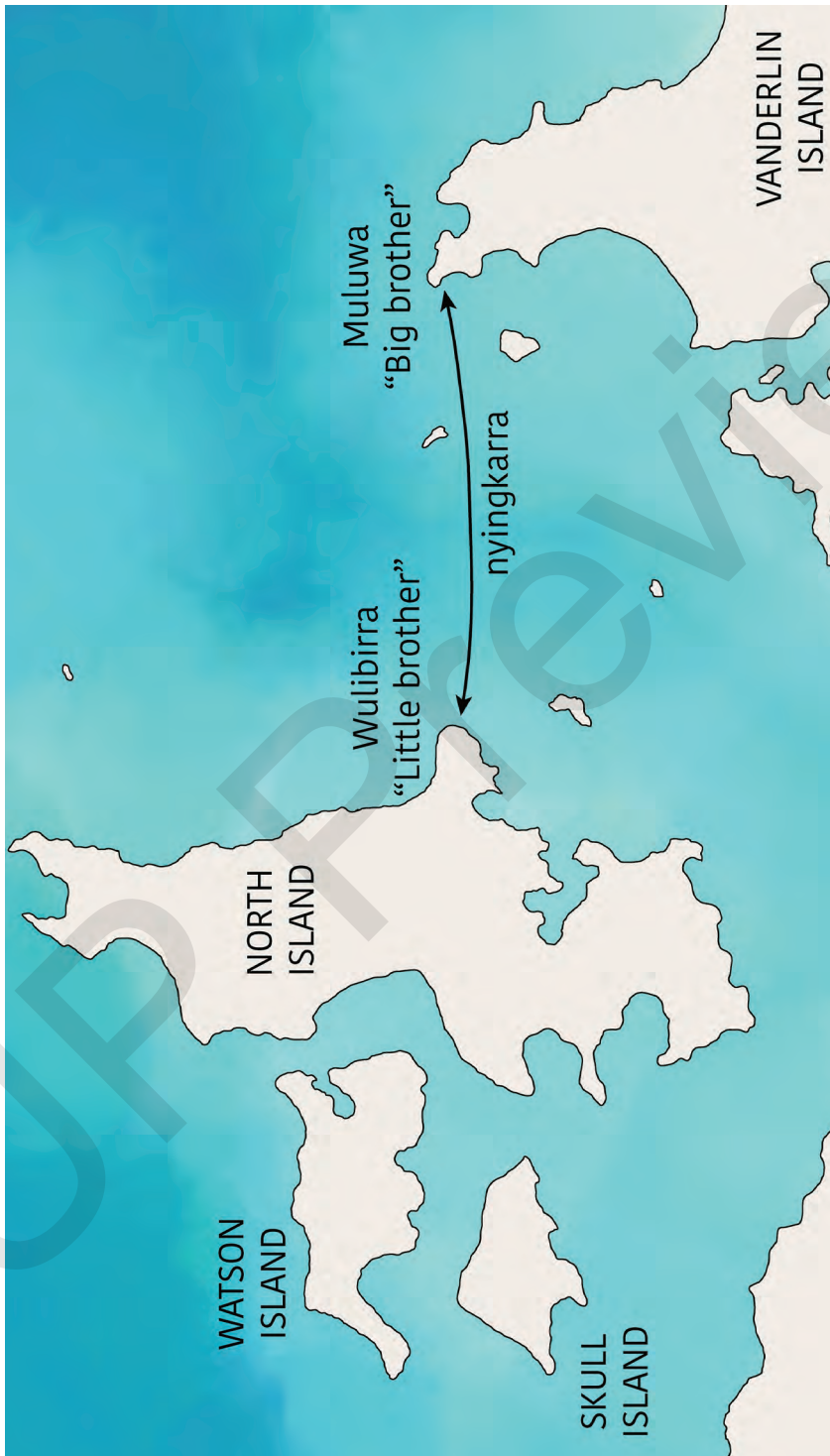


Figure 6.7. Kandanbarrawujbi at Wulibirra; the small rocks on the beach are the eggs of the White-Bellied Sea Eagle.

Their relationship has also been described as one of “two brothers looking at each other” (Map 6.3). Older Yanyuwa men and women would often describe the relationship as “Wulibirra kulu Muluwa nyingkarra barra jawulamba-wunkananji yurrngumantha karakarra baki kariya – Wulibirra is the little brother and Muluwa is the big brother, they are there looking at each other for all time, one from the east and the other from the west”.

This relationship was also reinforced during a land claim that was held on Centre Island in 1992. Annie a-Karrakayny, Dinah Norman a-Marrngawi, Ida a-Ninganga and Eileen McDinny a-Manankurramara composed a song to sing to the judge, Justice Peter Gray, describing this relationship:

*Ji-wandirrinji Wulibirrangu
Wayka karakarra
Muluwangu.*



Map 6.3. The “big brother–little brother” relationship between Muluwa and Wulibirra.

The cliffs of Wulibirra rise up
and there below, we see, from the east, Muluwa.²

The Muluwa–Wulibirra relationship is also expressed in the Dugong Hunter kujika, which sings the White-Bellied Sea Eagle:

Jalbarramba

Bularrku mindini

The White-Bellied Sea Eagle
Is gliding
Her white chest feathers
Shine in the sun

Jalbarramba

Ngadurrungadurru

The White-Bellied Sea Eagle
Soars high with wings outstretched

Jalbarramba

Ngangka kunindini

The White-Bellied Sea Eagle
Is calling out over her Country

Karnkarn manirla

Ngirlangirla

The White-Bellied Sea Eagle
Cries out
Her white feathers shining

Karnkarn ngalhi

Kundawira

The White-Bellied Sea Eagle
Crying out for her ceremony
Of Kundawira

2 Yanyuwa Families and Bradley 2016, 393.

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Karnkarn ngalhi
Nalanbalanba

The White-Bellied Sea Eagle
Returns to her nest
She is calling out from her nest

Baliwaru Kundawaru
Milijimiliji warlababaji.

The Kundawira ceremony
Belongs to this Country
The White-Bellied Sea Eagle rises
Up and flies.

Kundawira ceremony

The most important ceremony for the Rumburriya clan is the Kundawira. This ceremony has not been performed since the 1930s, and much of its content is very restricted. It is considered to be a “proper saltwater island ceremony”. The information we share here was told by the old Yanyuwa men and women who remember these times and is permitted to be presented here. Most importantly, the ceremony adds further details to the nature of the Muluwa–Wulibirra relationship. This ceremony is also central to understanding some of the rock art that can be found over Rumburriya clan Country.

The Dugong Hunters and the White-Bellied Sea Eagle are the central Dreamings for the Kundawira ceremony. In addition, Kandanbarrawujbi, where the eggs of the White-Bellied Sea Eagle lie, and Muluwa, where the Sorcery Stone Bird Dreaming left her stones, are vital to an understanding of the ceremony.

The ceremony is associated with the memory of deceased Yanyuwa kin. Yanyuwa are maritime Saltwater People. In times past, human fatalities would occur due to shark and crocodile attacks as well as drownings, with canoes having capsized or broken up mid-journey. Sometimes such events resulted in an inability to find the bodies of the victims. The ceremony involved the taking of stones from either of the two places mentioned above and decorating them with designs, representing a chosen Dreaming; for example, a ritual design, *barruwa*, denoting the eggs of the White-Bellied Sea Eagle, or the coiled ropes of the Dugong Hunters, or the stones carried by the Sorcery Stone Bird. These stones, referred to as Kundawira stones, are sung and transformed to take the physical place of the deceased’s body.

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They then became like memorial stones and may be placed at points across Yanyuwa territory to proudly stand in lieu of the deceased person's body as a testament to their ancestral presence in the world.³

Since the Kundawira ceremony is associated with the memory of deceased kin that could not be recovered, the ceremony was also used to replace the more traditional mode of burial, namely hollow log coffins. On completion of the Kundawira ceremony, the decorated stone – on to which designs had been worked with an adhesive of blood and red- and white-ochred shredded yiriny “feathers” – was returned to the Country of the deceased person. Old Tim Timothy Rakawurlma described this process to John in the following way:

Let that stone be standing in the Country of the deceased one. Let his nephew obtain that stone and place it there. The nephew of the deceased one will place designs on the stone and he will take it and stand in the home of the deceased one, he will talk to the stone, saying, “Remain here for ever, stay here and be warm in your Country, let the Country warm you”. It was in this way now that these stones of importance were taken and stood up in Country.

The process of acquiring the stones was in itself a socially structured affair. Reflective of the pivotal role of kinship in structuring Yanyuwa lives and individual histories, the stones were most often acquired by the sons of the deceased's sister. The role of nephews in their mother's brother's funerary or commemorative rites reflects a close personal relationship that was, and still is, found between relatives in the category of maternal uncle and nephew. Men who wished to obtain stones as symbols of remembrance and memory had to provide gifts to the senior ngimirringki and jungkayi for the rights to do so. Only the men concerned with the clan ownership of the stones' source locality had the capacity to carry out the transformative ceremony of Kundawira to turn these stones into the standing stones of men. Furthermore, those wishing to acquire a Kundawira also had to pay for the performance of the correct rituals that would transform the stone. While it is difficult to reconstruct the nature of these payments, older Yanyuwa men and women suggest that in the first instance they involved foodstuffs of authority,⁴ such as dugong meat and sea turtle meat. Material goods further used in the exchange included items such

3 Kearney and Bradley 2006.

4 There are three foods of authority in Yanyuwa Law: dugong meat; sea turtle meat; and cycad fruit; all of which has to be gathered/hunted, cooked and treated properly according to specific rules and regulations.

6 Rock art of Rrumburriya clan Country

as human hair-string belts, pubic tassels of spun possum fur, harpoon ropes and boomerangs.

Annie a-Karraykayny described the Kundawira ceremony to John in the following way:

I am telling you this story; my mother's brothers, Old Tim [Timothy Rakawurlma] and Banjo [Dindalhi] would tell these stories. When I was very young I saw these things happen, too. In the early morning, the men would come into the camp, and they would build a platform – it was higher than a man. They would build a platform and then leave. Soon after, one of the old men whose Dreaming Ancestor was the Wedge-Tailed Eagle would climb up on to the platform; he would sit there cross-legged looking into the east, where the ceremony ground was. A lot of men were there at the ceremony ground. That man would then sing out, he would sing out in really old Yanyuwa. This is the way he would sing out: “Kurryu Wurrwulhi! Kurryu Wurrwilhi! Wayi Jamandarrka?” “Hey, White-Bellied Sea Eagle! Hey, White-Bellied Sea Eagle! Do you have any white ochre and shredded feathers for body decoration?” The men at the ceremony ground would listen and they would shout back, “Waraba! Waraba!” “No! No!” This would go on all day without ceasing, with that man calling out and all the other men responding to him; all day they did this. In the late afternoon, the men would come from the ceremony ground and gather around the platform. The man on the platform would call out one more time and the men gathered around the platform would call out, and then it was over. All the men would go to the ceremony. Now this business Kundawira, I was really young when they danced that, long time ago, on the other side of the river, but my mother was there and this old lady here, they were there. But you know my uncles, Old Tim and Banjo, they tell me all the time how this ceremony would run. I'm jungkayi for that ceremony for that White-Bellied Sea Eagle, my full mother that one.

Judy Timothy a-Marrngawi, who was Old Tim Timothy Rakawurlma's wife and Annie's father's sister, further explained to John:

I will tell you, two women would dance holding jarraji [poles with feather plumes attached]. They would dance and all the other women would be kneeling down, hands like this [she indicated hands behind their heads]. They would sway to the west and then to the east, those two lead women. Two jungkayi women would dance alongside those women, one on the



Figure 6.8. Red and yellow painting recorded by Reay in the late 1950s and early 1960s at a site somewhere on Vanderlin Island. She identified the painting as a “shield” when it is actually a Yalkawarru motif (Australian National University Archives: Marie Reay Collection, ANUA 440-10-57, “Rock painting, shield”).

east side going south and the other on the west side going south. That two jungkayi women, they were the White-Bellied Sea Eagle, those other women were the flying foxes, they would be calling out, “Kiyinykiyiny! Kiyinykiyiny!”, just like the flying fox calls out. There is nothing like this today, this ceremony is finished.

Rock art on Rrumburriya clan Country

Vanderlin Island

Vanderlin Island is one of the richest islands for rock art. As mentioned in Chapter 3, researchers have recorded many sites from across the island (Figures 6.8, 6.9); however, in this section, our story focuses only on those sites and images that we have visited, recorded and discussed with the jungkayi and ngimirringki responsible for these places. Like with our discussions of Wuyaliya and Wurdaliya rock art,



Figure 6.9. Photograph by Marie Reay of William Johnston looking at rock paintings on the ceiling of a rockshelter somewhere on Vanderlin Island in the late 1950s or early 1960s (Australian National University Archives: Marie Reay Collection, ANUA 440-10-27, “Willie viewing rock paintings”).

we anchor Rrumburriya rock art in the journeys and actions of Dreamings (Maps 6.4, 6.5).

Kamandarringabaya

Mili nguthundiya awunga nyarrku ruthu, nya-mangaji ngabaya kumbayibarra ki-jangnykaa Namurlanjanyngku barra jakarda wuka, nya-mangaji Namurlanjanyngku ka-wajba yurrngumantha marniwuthu aya nyala akarrilu Wulibirra baki nguthundu Muluwa, ki-kujikala jiwini.

Again, there is to the north other kinds of things, where the spiritual entities placed themselves onto the rocks, the Namurlanjanyngku spirits, there are so many stories for them, they called out this way, a long way to the west and then again here to the west to Red Bluff and again to the north to Cape Vanderlin, that spiritual entity is in the songlines.

Dinah Norman a-Marrngawi, speaking to John at Borrooloola, 2019

One of the major Dreamings at Vanderlin Island are the Namurlanjanyngku Spirit Beings. The Namurlanjanyngku are responsible for creating much of the island's rock art. To begin our discussion of Vanderlin's rock art requires an understanding of the travels and actions of the Namurlanjanyngku. The Namurlanjanyngku are

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Map 6.4. Location of Rumburriya clan rock art sites and the paths of the Dugong Hunter and White-Bellied Sea Eagle Dreamings.

6 Rock art of Rumburriya clan Country





Map 6.5. Location of Rumburriya clan rock art sites and the path of the Namurlanjanyngu Spirit People.

6 Rock art of Rrumburriya clan Country



Figure 6.10. The Kamandarringabaya landscape, Vanderlin Island.

human-like, though tall, very skinny and deep red in colour. They live within the rocks of the large sandstone shelter known as Kamandarringabaya at the eastern end of Victoria Bay (Figure 6.10). They easily slip into the rocky crags and crevices that are in the area. The Namurlanjanyngku are a constant presence in the landscape. They run, sing, dance, paint and interact with li-wankala, the old people that are also on the islands. Like the ngabaya spirits living on Country, the Namurlanjanyngku also interact with their living kin, playing tricks, stealing and hiding things; however, they do not harm people. This is their story from the Dreaming:

Kamandarringabaya na-wini awara, Ngabaya na-yijan nya-mangaji awara na-ngalki Rrumburriya waraba barra na-Wurdaliyawu. Nya-mangaji Ngabaya jibiya baji nyarrku na-wini Namurlanjanyngku. Jibiya baji Kamandarringabaya kumba-yibarra na-maliji baji jarkarda barra nungku-ajinjala ki-jaynykaa barra, wayka arnindawa na-marnda yiku, jiwini ki-jaynykaa. Yiwa barra ka-wingka nguthundiya ngaliba Muluwa ka-alarri karanka wangarni rawungka baji kilakala aya, juju angula barra ka-arri nyarrku barra Ngabaya jibiya Wuyakiba yiwa barra ka-wajba yiku akarri, “Kuyuuu! Kuyuuu!” kulu nya-mangaji jibiya Kamandarringabaya jabarri yiwa ka-wajba yiku angula “Kaaawayi! Kaaawayi!” Minja kawulamba-wajba bawuji.

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Bawuji ka-walwani kari-nguthunda Wunumbarra Kamandarringabaya akarru barra narrku barra na-ajinja na-wini awara Warnngibangirarra, baji barra nya-mangaji Ngabaya kumba-yibarra ki-jaynykaa na-yijan barra na-yurrngu baji barra.

Kamandarringabaya is the name of Country [in Victoria Bay] and it is a Spirit Man Dreaming place. This Spirit Man is Rrumburriya; he is not Wurdaliya. The Spirit Man Dreaming belongs to that place and he has another name that is Namurlanjanyngku. He belongs to that place and he placed his hands all over the rocks in the cave that is there. Down at the shoreline are rocks that have his footprints. The Spirit Man went north to Muluwa [Cape Vanderlin] and stood high up on top of the sand dunes and he looked a long way westwards. He saw in the west another Spirit Man at Wuyakiba [to the north of the Roper River]. The Spirit Man at Wuyakiba called out to the east, “Kuyuuu! Kuyuuu!” and the Spirit Man from Kamandarringabaya then had a turn and called out to the Spirit Man in the west, “Kaaawayi! Kaaawayi!” They just called out to each other, that is all.

The Spirit Man came back from the north and close by to Kamandarringabaya. In the east is another cave that is called Warnngibangirarra; at this place, he put himself on to the rocks. It is his Dreaming place, and he is still there.⁵

Additional details to this story are provided by senior Yanyuwa jungkayi and ngimirringki for the island. After leaving Kamandarringabaya the Namurlanjanyngku travelled northeast to Liwingkinya where they again painted on many of the rocky outcrops. Their presence at Liwingkinya is sung in the Tiger Shark kujika as it comes from the south and gets ready to descend down into the depths of Walala:

*Namurlangajarra
Dirrinydirri*

The Namurlanjanyngku spirit beings
Move through the rocky Country of Liwingkinya

*Namurla ngajarra
Kumuyangu kumu
Dirrinydirri.*

The Namurlanjanyngku spirit beings
Dance in the caves

5 Yanyuwa Families and Bradley 2016, 415–16.

6 Rock art of Rrumburriya clan Country

As they move through the rocky Country
of Liwingkinya.

Upon reaching Muluwa, the Namurlanjanyngku are sung in the kujika of the
Dugong Hunters:

Kurrkuyiwa yani
Kirribul larralyi

The Rrumburriya spirit men
They are calling out
Far into the west they are calling

Kurrkuyiwa yani
Kirribul larralyi
Jarra larralyi.

The Rrumburriya spirit men
They are calling out
Far into the west they are calling
They are calling out to each other
To gather for ceremony.

In addition to calling out to the Spirit Man at Wuyakiba in the Country of the Marra and Wandarrang people to the west, the Namurlanjanyngku also called out to a Spirit Man at Namalawukanyi just north of the Towns River in the Limmen Bight, to another Spirit Man at Wunungka on the northwest coast of Maria Island, another at Yamindi on the Roper River, and another at Mayanjiyanji just to the south of Wuyakiba at the mouth of the Roper River. They were calling out to these other spirit beings to tell them that they should gather for the Kundawira ceremony. By calling out, the Namurlanjanyngku were also creating relationships with other language groups and clans, thus expanding the relational sphere between people. Upon leaving Muluwa, the Namurlanjanyngku moved south but did not return to Kamandarringabaya. Instead, they came to a place approximately 3 kilometres from Kamandarringabaya at Ruwuyinda where they again placed their hands on the rock walls. They were weary of travelling so they went a short way to Warnngibangirarra, where they placed themselves on the rock wall and remain still today.

Kamandarringabaya is a large, west-facing rockshelter approximately 40 metres upslope from the beach near Victoria Bay on the western side of Vanderlin Island (Figure 6.11). The importance of this place as a camping location for Yanyuwa was first recorded (in written description and photographed) in 1923–24 by



Figure 6.11. The Kamandarringabaya rock art site (courtesy of Phil Adgemis).

William E.J. Paradise. During his survey of the Pellew Islands, he photographed two bark huts (na-rlungungdu or na-wukun) and four people (two men, two women) on the beach in front of Kamandarringabaya (Figures 6.12, 6.13). The huts were held down with lines of stones that could still be seen in the 1980s. Old Tim Timothy Rakawurlma explained to John that people used to camp around Kamandarringabaya in the wet season and, depending on conditions, would alternate between camping in the rockshelter or building mosquito-proof bark shelters close to the beach. Later recordings come from Dehne McLaughlin during his research for the 1976 Yanyuwa land claim in which he documented the rock art and extensive shell midden, and in the late 1990s and early 2000s by Robin Sim, who undertook an excavation here revealing occupation began around 1,700 years ago.⁶

The rockshelter is surrounded by cabbage palms and measures approximately 40 metres long and 4.5 metres at its deepest point. There is also a second, small satellite site (a sandstone rock-stack) located approximately 20 metres northwest

6 Sim and Wallis 2008, 99.