

Section 2 History of Nitmiluk and surrounds

In this section

Nitmiluk and the surrounding area have been through a lot of changes since the arrival of non-Aboriginal people. The newcomers have had a profound impact on the Jawoyn people. This section includes:

- a chronological history
- the establishment of Nitmiluk National Park
- the transfer of ownership back to Jawoyn.

Chronological history

Following is a chronological summary of the history of Nitmiluk since the arrival of non-Aboriginal people.

- 1862 John McDougall Stuart's expedition passed through the Katherine area and reported favourably on the pastoral potential of the area.
- 1863 The Northern Territory was annexed to South Australia, becoming the Northern Territory of South Australia.
- 1871 Gold was discovered near Pine Creek.
- 1883 Over 90% of the Northern Territory under pastoral leases.
- 1911 Separation of Northern Territory from South Australia.
- 1915 Government battery established to mine tin at Maranboy and Aboriginal people encouraged to move there to provide labour.
- 1917 Railway from Darwin extended to the northern bank of the Katherine River and town of Emungalan established.
- 1923 Six acre Aboriginal Reserve declared at Maranboy.
- 1926 Bridge over Katherine River completed and leases granted for agricultural development along the River.
- 1942 During World War II, Aborigines prohibited from remaining north of Edith River. Aboriginal compounds near Mataranka and Katherine established.
- 1951 Welfare settlement established at Bamyili (now Barunga).

What Nitmiluk tour guides need to know

Who was the first non-Aboriginal person to come through this area?

How did that person contribute to changes in the Katherine area?

How were Jawoyn people affected by the new settlers?

Why was Nitmiluk handed back to the Jawoyn people?

How has the return of their land benefited the Jawoyn people?

In what ways do Jawoyn people maintain their culture today?

Interpreting history

Can you remember the historical facts presented here?

How can you present historical facts in a memorable and meaningful way?

- 1962 Original Katherine Gorge National Park (227 km²) proclaimed.
- 1963 Edith Falls National Park (1.6 km²) proclaimed.
- 1964 Equal pay granted to Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry, but with ‘slow worker’s provision’.
- 1966 Guringji people walked off Wave Hill station demanding land title and improved wages and working conditions.
- 1967 Aboriginal people granted Australian citizenship.
- 1974 Kalano Association established as an Aboriginal resource centre.
- 1976 *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory)* granted independence, full wages and improved work conditions. Aboriginal employment on pastoral properties declining.
- 1977 Katherine Gorge National Park and Edith Falls National Park amalgamated into one Park with other lands (1804 km²).
- 1978 Jawoyn people lodge a claim under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* over lands including Katherine Gorge National Park.
- 1982 Hearing of Jawoyn land claim commenced.
- 1985 Jawoyn Association began.
- 1987 Certain lands, including the southern section of the Park, recommended for grant.
- 1989 Ownership of Nitmiluk returned to Jawoyn elders and Jawoyn people negotiated the establishment of Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park with the Northern Territory Government.

Exploration and settlement

In 1862, John McDougall Stuart was the first to successfully lead an expedition from the south to the north coast of Australia. It was his third attempt and his destination was the mouth of the Adelaide River, where an attempt at settling the north was later made.

Unfortunately longitude was not so easily calculated and Stuart ended up at the mouth of the Mary River instead of the Adelaide River. Consequently the Government was slow to provide the reward they had offered for his achievement.

What does interpretation involve?

Interpretation gives meaning to information by putting it in context.

However, the Government was quick to accept Stuart's favourable report on the pastoral potential of northern Australia. Stuart's report, in conjunction with Augustus Gregory's earlier reports in 1855-56, led to the decision to annex the Northern Territory to South Australia in 1863 (becoming the Northern Territory of South Australia).

Pastoralism

By 1883 pastoral developers had taken up 478 000 square miles (92%) of the Northern Territory. The establishment of major pastoral properties in the Katherine-Pine Creek region had far reaching effects on Jawoyn people.

Jawoyn people were forced off their lands and into a more sedentary lifestyle. Older Jawoyn today speak of the terror and the need to move to more populated places away from some cattle stations because they feared for their lives. However, many Aboriginal people in the region also came to work on cattle stations and became an integral part of the pastoral industry.

Mining

Gold was discovered near Pine Creek in 1871 and in August 1872 there were about 40 miners on the gold field.

Tin was found at the headwaters of Maranboy and Beswick Creeks and by 1915 a government battery was operating at the Maranboy tin field.

Incentives in the form of food and goods were offered to encourage Aboriginal people to live and work at Maranboy. Another incentive for living there was to avoid being killed on the pastoral properties. The result was large encampments of Aborigines from the southern Arnhem Land area around the tin field for lengths of time unprecedented in pre-contact history. A six acre Aboriginal reserve was declared at Maranboy in 1923.

The Yeuralba mineral field located on the former Eva Valley Station was worked for tungsten, tin and copper from 1924 to 1952. There were at least 50 Aborigines working and residing there.

Railway and agriculture

The steady undermining of traditional lifestyle gathered pace with the construction of the Pine Creek to Katherine railway line in 1926. At this time, leases were granted for agricultural development over Jawoyn dry season camping areas on the Katherine River. This resulted in Aboriginal people camping further back from the river, often on the fringes of European development.

Jawoyn words

Mam refers to non-Aboriginal people

Mungguay are Aboriginal people.

Kakadu words

Balanda refers to non-Aboriginal people

Bininj are Aboriginal people.

Jawoyn also changed their traditional seasonal movements as they stayed for longer periods and within range of European work and commodities. Many Jawoyn worked in peanut and other farming enterprises in the Katherine area.

World War II

World War II had a major impact on Jawoyn people. From August 1942, Aborigines were officially prohibited from remaining north of Edith River and Aboriginal compounds were established near Mataranka and Katherine. ‘Native Control Camps’ were also established at this time, including one at Maranboy.

This brought Aborigines from different areas into prolonged contact with each other and resulted in significant cultural exchange and the forging of long term relationships.

Remember Bolung?

Bolung, the rainbow serpent, inhabits the deep green pools in the second gorge.

Bolung is an important life giving figure who may also act as a destroyer in the form of lightning and monsoonal floods.

Katherine Gorge

In 1962, Katherine Gorge was proclaimed a national park. The constant presence of visitors before this time had forced Jawoyn to distance themselves from the Gorge. *Bolung* had been disturbed, food sources were depleted and the Jawoyn were generally wary of associating with non-Aboriginal people.

Wages

Until 1964, pay for Aboriginal workers was in the form of food, tobacco and clothing. In 1964 they were granted equal pay, but the ‘slow workers provision’ kept their pay rates well below that of their non Aboriginal counterparts.

In 1966 the Guringji people walked off Wave Hill Station (west of Katherine) demanding formal title of their land and improved wages and working conditions. They were joined in 1972 by people on Victoria River Downs, Humbert River, Montejinni and other stations.

Although Aboriginal people were granted Australian citizenship in 1967, it was the 1976 *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT)* that finally granted independence, full wages and improved work conditions.

A combination of the granting of Award wages and the introduction of new technologies, such as helicopter mustering and road transport, started a decline in Aboriginal employment on cattle stations. Consequently, by the early 1970s larger, more mixed and transient Aboriginal populations were evident in Katherine, Pine Creek and Barunga.

Interpreting history

What is important in the history of Nitmiluk and its people?

What historical information can you use to deliver the message about Nitmiluk’s cultural significance?

Accommodation

In 1974 the Kalano Association was established as an Aboriginal resource centre to address land, housing, transport and health issues for Aborigines in Katherine. Until this time camping areas had been slowly lost as Katherine expanded.

Today Jawoyn live in settlements at:

- Jodetluk, on the Gorge Road close to the entrance to the Park
- Rockhole on the Katherine River west of town
- Mayali-Brumby next to the Stuart Highway north of the Katherine River Bridge
- Werenbun, near Leliyn
- Manyallaluk, south of Katherine

Many Jawoyn are also scattered throughout Katherine township and living at Barunga and Beswick on Aboriginal land under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*.

Lifestyle today

Jawoyn continue to visit areas on and around their country and there is a continuing use of country, although a mobile lifestyle was replaced by a more sedentary one involving fewer, but longer, bush trips.

Jawoyn people have a continuous tradition of knowledge and use of country. They continue to hunt and fish both inside and outside the Park. Fish, turtles, goanna and wallaby are regular parts of their diet and there are temporary camping places throughout Jawoyn country.

Jawoyn people today may wear European clothes, drive cars and hunt with guns and use other modern tools and implements, but they continue to respect Jawoyn law in the tradition of their ancestors.

Establishing Nitmiluk National Park

Edith Falls and Katherine Gorge were popular recreation sites many years before their initial reservation as parks in the early 1960s and commercial tourism began.

The original 227 km² Katherine Gorge National Park was proclaimed in 1962 and the 1.6 km² Edith Falls National Park in 1964. The two areas were eventually amalgamated with other lands into one Park covering 1804 km² in 1977.

What does interpretation involve?

Interpretation involves weaving facts into a story, rather than telling the facts only.

The story has a message. In Nitmiluk that message is how Nitmiluk is steeped in Jawoyn culture and how Jawoyn people are looking after Nitmiluk and maintaining their rich culture.



Jawoyn people today continue to maintain their rich culture.

Interpreting land ownership

Why do you think land ownership is important to the Jawoyn people?

What difference has land ownership made?

The Park now covers 2900 km² and is one part of a larger area of land over which the Jawoyn people hold freehold title. This includes parts of western Arnhem Land, Manyallaluk, Barnjarn and parts of Kakadu National Park.

Nitmiluk National Park has its own act, the *Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park Act* to guide its management and use.

People significant in establishing the Park

Many Jawoyn people were involved in the Jawoyn land claim and establishing Nitmiluk National Park, including some whose names are familiar to those working in the Park.

Peter Jatbula (deceased) was a founding member of the Nitmiluk Board of Management and was instrumental in negotiations between the Government and the Jawoyn people for the handback of Nitmiluk to the Jawoyn people. He played a similar role in Kakadu Stage 3.

Sandy Baruwei (deceased) was a founding member of the Nitmiluk Board of Management and was the keeper of many stories. He was the last person to have walked all of his country. Baruwei was a strong man in culture with important Jawoyn knowledge.

Other people important in establishing the Park include **Phyllis Winyjorrotj, Sarah Flora (deceased)** and **Nipper Baybilama Brown (deceased)**.

The Nitmiluk Board of Management

The Board is responsible for overseeing the management of the Park. It is involved in making policies and approving the Plan of Management, but not in the daily running of the Park. There are thirteen positions on the Board:

- eight members nominated by the Jawoyn Association, as per the Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation Constitution
- three members nominated by the Parks and Wildlife Commission
- one position nominated by the Mayor of Katherine
- one position is an Aboriginal person who is a member of the Kakadu Board of Management.

Interpreting history

Have you seen the names Jatbula and Baruwei used in Nitmiluk National Park?

Interpreting the Board

Do you really need to remember all of these details?

What is important about the Nitmiluk Board of Management?

Jawoyn Association

Jawoyn people established the Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation in 1985 to help them move towards self determination and economic independence.

The principal objective of the Jawoyn Association is to represent and advance the views and aspirations of Jawoyn traditional Aboriginal owners of land over the management, protection, control and development of Jawoyn traditional lands.

Transferring ownership back to Jawoyn

In 1978 Jawoyn people lodged a claim under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* over lands including Katherine Gorge National Park, and stated their intention to keep the area as a national park if the claim was successful.

Ownership of the Park was returned to the Jawoyn people in 1989 and they negotiated the establishment of the Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park Lease with the Northern Territory Government. During the transfer and lease back ceremony Ray Fordimail, a senior Jawoyn man, said:

It might not look like much but this piece of paper given to us today means a great deal to the Jawoyn people. Many people have worried that the Jawoyn were trying to take the Gorge away. I don't know where we were supposed to take it, but that's what they said. As you can see, it's still there.

Jawoyn people have been heavily involved in the management of Nitmiluk National Park since then. This has enabled them to maintain their culture and look after the land and its wildlife in accordance with Jawoyn traditional law. This includes maintaining ecological and spiritual knowledge, using natural resources and protecting sacred places.

Jawoyn people are actively involved in Nitmiluk National Park today. Some work in the Park and many live near the Park, actively participating in traditional activities including hunting, fishing, gathering and producing arts and crafts.

Traditional skills and knowledge are also used to complement contemporary management of the Park's natural values.

Further reading

Nitmiluk National Park Plan of Management, October 2002.

Trugden, R (2000) *Why warriors lie down and die*, Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Incorporated, Darwin.

Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976.

Jawoyn Land Claim, Australian Office of the Aboriginal Land Commissioner, Darwin 1987.

Jawoyn Land Claim – the claimants case NLC submission, Northern Land Council, Darwin 1984.

Outcomes of the Maud Creek, Eva Valley land claim, 1988.

The Katherine Gorge National Park – submission by the CCNT, Conservation Commission of the NT, Darwin 1984.

Bauer, FH (1964) *Historical Geography of White Settlement in Part of Northern Australia, Part 2: The Katherine-Darwin Region. Divisional Report No.64/1* Division of Land Research and Regional Survey, CSIRO Canberra.

Section 2 Assessment questions

You must answer all of the questions at the end of each section of this handbook and complete a practical assessment before you can conduct launch (boat) tours on Katherine Gorge.

Following are the questions that you must answer as part of your assessment for this section.

Please write your answers on the form in Section 9 of this handbook.

1. Who was the first non-Aboriginal person to come through this area?
2. How did that person contribute to changes in the Katherine area?
3. How were Jawoyn people affected by the new settlers?
4. Why was Nitmiluk handed back to the Jawoyn people?
5. How has the return of their land benefited the Jawoyn people?
6. In what ways do Jawoyn people maintain their culture today?