

## Nourlangie art site

The name 'Nourlangie' is an anglicised version of Nawurlandja, the name of a larger area that includes an outlier to the west of Nourlangie. The upper part of Nourlangie Rock is known as Burrunggyu; the lower areas are known as Anbangbang.

The area was formed when two creation ancestors in the form of short-eared rock wallabies travelled through from east to west. They moved past Nourlangie Rock, across Anbangbang billabong, and up into the rocks at Nawurlandja, where they cut two crevices in the rock as they passed. These crevices are visible today and rock wallabies are often seen there in the early morning and at dusk.

There are three main sites at Burrunggyu: a rock shelter (Anbangbang shelter); several rock art sites, including the Lightning Man rock art site (Anbangbang gallery); and Gun-warddehwardde lookout. These sites can be reached by following a 1.5-kilometre circular walking track from the car park. The walk takes about an hour. The Lightning Man art site can be reached by wheelchair.

Nourlangie is open from 7.00 am until sunset all year.

## Anbangbang rock shelter

That's a place where people sheltered  
from the rain in Gudjewg (monsoon season).

A place for making tools, telling stories,  
doing string games while the tucker is cooking.

Go hunting down the river, when the water goes down a bit.

Hunting yams, kangaroos, sugar bag.

Waiting around until the dry season comes.

Today we got house and cook galawan (sand goanna) in the oven,  
but tastes better cooked on the coals of an open fire.

- Violet Lawson, Murumburr clan

Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre



An archaeological dig at Anbangbang rock shelter in the early 1980s revealed that Aboriginal people have been using the shelter for at least 20,000 years. Excavated layers of soil contained a variety of stone artefacts and implements that had been discarded over time. By examining the number of artefacts in each layer, researchers concluded that the shelter was used occasionally from about 20,000 to 6,000 years ago. It appears to have been used more frequently after this, probably as the area became estuarine and more food was available.



*The Anbangbang rock shelter is found on the southern side of Nourlangie Rock*

Organic materials, such as bones, string, shells and plant material were found only in the top layers of soil. Generally, organic material deteriorates quickly in tropical climates, but the organic materials found here were relatively well preserved. The materials found suggest that the shelter was probably used by a family group as a base camp in the wet and early dry seasons. The large rock overhang would have provided protection against both rain and sun. Animal and plant remains such as fish, magpie geese, freshwater mussels, water lilies, fruits, wallabies, goannas, flying foxes, echidnas and crocodile eggs illustrate the range of past meals. Pieces of string and spear-points of wood, bone and stone cast light on the manufacturing methods used at the time.

According to Aboriginal people, Anbangbang rock shelter was used primarily by the Warramal clan, who were traditional owners of the area, and by the neighbouring Badmardi clan, who moved down from the stone country to take advantage of lowland foods from the surrounding woodlands, creeks and billabongs. The Warramal clan has since died out and responsibility for the area has passed to Aboriginal traditional owners from surrounding areas.



## **The Main Gallery (Anbangbang)**

An understanding of art usually comes from interpreting it through things we are familiar with. For example, when we look at a painting of a western-style wedding such things as the minister, the church doorway, the church windows, the guests and the wedding dress help us to identify it as a wedding. Much of the information in the painting is specific to a western-style culture. Someone from a different culture would perhaps not realise they were looking at a depiction of a religious ceremony because they would be unfamiliar with the symbols used.

Similarly, Aboriginal art makes sense only to those with sufficient knowledge of the culture to recognise the information the art conveys. Although there are explanations of the paintings at the Lightning Man rock art site, the explanations are incomplete: non-Aboriginal people are not entitled to know the full story.

A number of figures at the Lightning Man rock art site were repainted by Nayambolmi (sometimes spelt Najombolmi), in 1963 and 1964. Repainting was part of the rock art tradition, although not all rock art was repainted. Only people who were 'authorised' or recognised as artists were allowed to repaint. Nayambolmi, probably born around 1895, was from the Badmardi clan and was highly respected as an artist. He was also a good hunter and angler, hence his 'white fella' name, 'Barramundi Charlie'. Nayambolmi worked for non-Aboriginal people for many years, but he visited his country and painted in shelters throughout his life. One of the last prolific rock art painters in the area, he died around 1967.

## ***Namondjok***



*Namondjok*

Aboriginal people from different clan groups have different stories associated with Namondjok (pronounced nar-mon-jock).

For some, he is a creation ancestor who now lives in the sky and can be seen only at night, when he appears as a dark spot in the milky way. For others, he is a creation ancestor who broke the kinship laws.

The story goes that Namondjok travelled through the Burrungguy (Nourlangie Rock) area and broke the kinship laws with his 'sister'. (Some Aboriginal people attribute this story to Nabilil rather than Namondjok.)

[Kinship laws dictate who Aboriginal people may and may not marry. Aboriginal people have a much broader and more complex kinship system than do people of European descent. An Aboriginal person's 'sister' also includes their mother's sisters' children and their father's brothers' children (cousins). Just as marriage between brother and sister is unacceptable in non-Aboriginal society, so it is in Aboriginal society].

A solitary boulder on Burrungguy is a feather taken from Namondjok's head-dress by his 'sister', after they had broken the kinship laws. The boulder is visible from Gunwarddehwardde lookout.

### ***Namarrgon***



### *Namarrgon*

To the right of Namondjok is Namarrgon, the Lightning Man. Namarrgon (pronounced narm-arr-gon) is an important creation ancestor who is still active today. He is responsible for the violent lightning storms that occur every wet season. The band around him from his left ankle, joining his hands and head, and down to his right ankle represents the lightning he creates. He uses the axes on his head, elbows and feet to split the dark clouds and make lightning and thunder.

Namarrgon's story in this area is part of a longer story, covering a journey beginning on the coastline of the Coburg Peninsula and ending in a rock shelter in the sandstone

country of the Arnhem Land plateau, where he remains today. During his travels he left his power behind at many places. On his last journey, when he approached the escarpment from the east, he looked over the sheer wall, then took out an eye and placed it high on the cliff at Namarrgondjahdjam (Lightning Dreaming), where it sits, waiting for the storm season. Lightning Dreaming can be seen from Gunwarddehwardde lookout.

### ***Barrginj, Namarrgon's wife***



#### *Barrginj*

The female figure is Barrginj (pronounced barr-jeen), Namarrgon's wife.

Their children are the Alyurr (Leichhardt's grasshoppers), who are very important to local Aboriginal people because they gave them their language, beliefs, values and the structure of their society during the creation time.

Alyurr, striking blue and orange grasshoppers that live on a particular plant, *Pityrodia jamesii*, that grows in the stoney country, are quite rare. The first specimens were collected by J.E. Dring, purser on HMS Beagle during surveys of the northern Australian coast, probably around 1839. The next specimens were collected by Ludwig Leichhardt on his journey through the region in 1845. Alyurr were not rediscovered by non-Aboriginal people until the 1970s. They are generally seen just before the wet season, when they come out and call to their father to bring on the wet-season storms.

## **Family group**

Beneath these three creation ancestors is a large group of men and women. Their elaborate dress suggests they are probably on their way to a ceremony. You may notice that a couple of the women have dashes painted on their breasts; this shows that they are breast feeding.



*Nabulwinjbulwinj*

## ***Nabulwinjbulwinj***

The single male figure on the side gallery to the left of the main frieze is Nabulwinjbulwinj (pronounced nar-bull-win-bull-win). He is a dangerous spirit who eats females after killing them by striking them with a yam.