

Aboriginal Australia is divided into a number of nations, and then often into smaller tribal (Elders) groups. The Gumbaynggirr nation covers a large area of the mid-north coast of New South Wales, from the Nambucca River northward to the Clarence River and inland to the Northern Tablelands.



The Gumbaynggirr people have occupied this land for thousands of years, forming one of the largest coastal Aboriginal nations in New South Wales. They are renowned as the 'sharing people' because their land was so rich that food and other resources were commonly shared with other nations.

Did you know?

The traditional name of the Garby Elders was chosen by Uncle Keith Lardner. In the Gumbaynggirr language, **gaabi** means 'swamp wallaby'.

outstation at Corindi. The Garby Elders speak of the regretful interactions between their people and the Europeans, the most notable being the Red Rock Massacre of the 1880s. Europeans are said to have chased the Gumbaynggirr people from their camp at the river to the headland, where many innocent people lost their lives. Red Rock is referred to as 'Blood Rock' by the Garby Elders, who regard this as an extremely sacred site and a place for reflection. A memorial has been established on the headland to mark the event and recognise the brutality that occurred at the site.



◀ Photo

The Old Camp was situated at Corindi, near the banks of Pipe Clay Lake. More than fifteen families lived in this area.

The Garby Elders are a tribal group who recognise the lands and seas from Moonee northward along the coast past Wooli and inland to the east bank of the Orara River. Descendants of the original people still live in this area today. Arrawarra Headland, which lies at the heart of the Garby Elders' country, is a one-hour walk from the camps at Corindi Beach.

Crosscultural Relations

European settlement commenced in the area in 1848 with evidence of a pastoral

As land was given as freehold to the new settlers, and as fences, farms and houses were constructed, Gumbaynggirr people found it more and more difficult to travel from camp to camp. Many Gumbaynggirr people were forced onto Missions and Reserves. The Garby Elders remained free, however, and found ways to stay on the 'other side of the fence' in no-man's-land.

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Then in the 1930s, they were forced from their camp on Red Rock River, southward to threepenny gate, near Corindi. (The present-day Yarrawarra Aboriginal Cultural Centre is located on land directly adjacent to this site.) These camps were inhabited for approximately ten years. The main camps then moved to the banks of Pipe Clay Lake, Corindi Beach, where the Garby Elders still continue to camp.



◀ **Photo**

Gumbaynggirr women gather to tell stories, chat about their news, and do 'women's work', like making string, nets and baskets.

"If you draw a line across there, it's not necessarily in the right place because, our poor Old People, they never had satellite direction back in their day. They would have just walked and thought: 'Okay, I think I'm gone far enough', and they [would also] know, by language, [that it was a] different group."
Uncle Tony Perkins

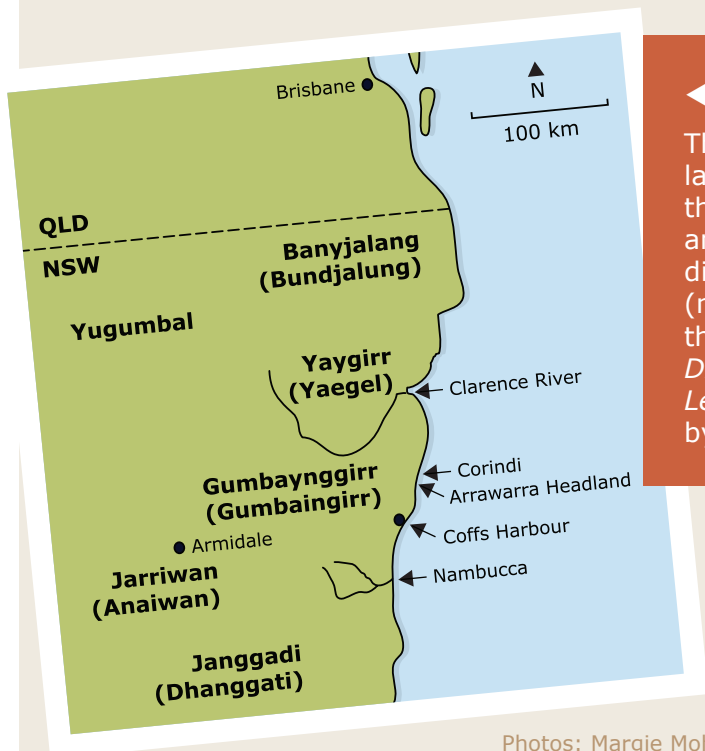
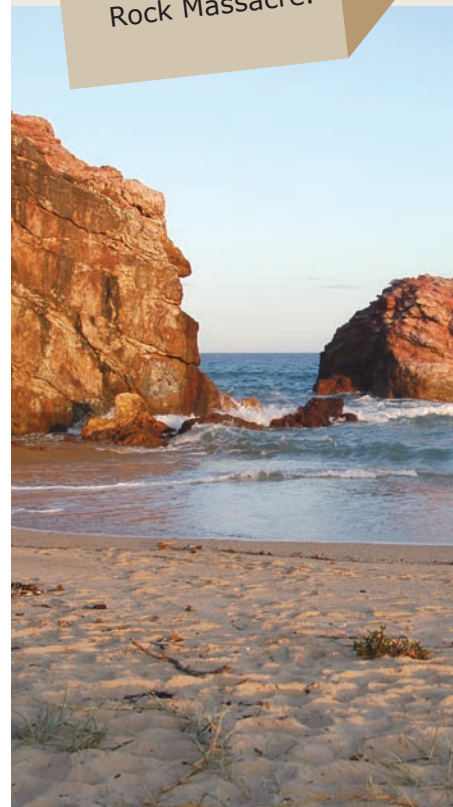
▼ **Photo**

Men of the Garby Elders regularly visit Red Rock Headland to pay their respects to those who died in the Blood Rock Massacre.

The Significance of Land and Sea

Aboriginal people believe they have occupied their land since the Dreaming, and stories of the Dreaming show the link between land and people. As Uncle Tony Perkins explains, cultural property and places are the "middle of a spiritual connection to Aboriginal culture. For thousands of years, we have [had these] areas; on beaches, on headlands. [You may not necessarily] see them, but that's why the word 'spiritual' is alive and well: 'cause that's part of our culture."

In the past, under the old laws, Elders held sacred objects from the Dreaming as title deeds. Today, the Garby Elders are entrusted with the task of maintaining and passing on traditional knowledge to future generations. A certain few are regarded as significant Knowledge Holders, who aim to ensure that this remarkable knowledge is never lost.



◀ **Illustration**

The approximate language regions of the Gumbaynggirr and surrounding dialect groups (modified from the *Gumbaynggirr Dictionary and Learner's Grammar* by Steve Morelli).

Photos: Margie Mohring; Steve Smith.
 Illustration: Kathryn James and Sasha Posthuma-Grbic.

