

Gumbaynggirr people have passed down their teachings through many generations. Knowledge is power, and the Elders are the holders of knowledge, and young people had to earn the privilege of being trusted to learn powerful information.



There were no libraries, no television and no computers in traditional Gumbaynggirr times, and learning how to survive and be part of tribal life meant listening to the Elders and abiding by the Lore. Listen, and you could learn to read the yearly seasons, the monthly moon cycles and the winds and tides, to know when certain foods were ready, when to set small controlled fires to flush out animals, promote seed production, or clean the place up and get rid of ticks.

Campsites and Ceremonial Areas

Jewfish Point near Red Rock has always been known as a ceremonial area, a place for the 'Saturday night dance and the Sunday market', a place where the broлга learned to dance. It is amazing the length of time an oral tradition can keep such memories alive, as discovered when a section of the Jewfish Point Midden was excavated, revealing intensive use of the coloured ochres and radiocarbon dates of over 3,000 years old. Over how many generations has that story been passed on?

Did you know?

"Adults in our Aboriginal society today, [...] if they're wanting all this information, they also have to go through the test. Everything [can't] just [be] put on the table and spelt out. It's trust; you're trusting 40,000 years of tradition."
Uncle Tony Perkins



Photo

Uncle Michael McDougall assisting the University of New England archaeological excavation at Jewfish Point.

These days, things are very different. We go to school and are constantly fed information whether we want to know things or not. We are expected to be able to answer questions on what we have been taught in school. Many things we cannot ask our Elders about, such as computer studies. But if we do not ask the Elders, we may lose valuable information, as it is not written down.

Land and Sea Management

In 1991, when the Solitary Islands Marine Reserve was declared under the *Fisheries and Oyster Farms Act 1935*, the Arrawarra

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Headland rock platform became a sanctuary zone which prohibited all collecting, including traditional harvesting. Garby Elders were concerned as they were now unable to continue traditional practices, diminishing their ability to pass on important cultural knowledge to the younger generations.



◀ Photo

Oral history consultation often requires on-site visits to spark old memories and confirm place details.

Following the declaration of the Solitary Islands Marine Park in 1998 under the *Marine Parks Act 1997*, extensive consultation was undertaken with the Garby Elders regarding changes to the zoning plan. Elders shared many stories with the Marine Parks Authority, highlighting the cultural significance of the area, and stressing their need to access the area for resource use. The headland was subsequently declared a 'special purpose zone' for traditional resource use and research, and ongoing management of the area is guided by a Conservation Plan developed by Elders and the Authority.



◀ Photo

In order to teach the new generation about traditional life, men of the Garby Elders gather to share stories and have a yarn.

Rules and Protocols

There are rules about recording information on tapes, and digitally on CDs and computers. It is important to make sure that the Elder knows what you are going to use the information for. If you are going to circulate a story by writing out the words and using them in a school assignment or on the internet, it is best to go back to the person who shared the story and make sure that they are happy about it, or see if they want to correct any mistakes, change anything, or add more to their story.

Photos: Tim Cowan; Kathryn James; Margie Mohring; Dee Murphy.

"We still have an existing culture, it's still alive, and it'll always remain alive while ever we pass this onto these kids [...] Then they also will be able to pass this on; it will be a living culture [...] And it's the respect, too: by having the spiritual side documented, the kids then will be taught to place respect back to spiritual connection to their culture. That's what the aim is, to get that respect through education in Aboriginal culture."
Uncle Tony Perkins

▼ Photo

Uncle Bing Laurie and Uncle Keith Lardner checking drafts of the *Arrawarra: Sharing Culture* fact sheets.




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