

Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape

VICTORIA



Sacred to the Gunditjmara people, the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape is home to the remains of potentially one of Australia's largest aquaculture systems.

For thousands of years the Gunditjmara people flourished through their ingenious methods of channelling water flows and systematically harvesting eels to ensure a year round supply. Here the Gunditjmara lived in permanent settlements, dispelling the myth that Australia's Indigenous people were all nomadic.

Dating back thousands of years, the area shows evidence of a large, settled Aboriginal community systematically farming and smoking eels for food and trade in what is considered to be one of Australia's earliest and largest aquaculture ventures.

This complex enterprise took place in a landscape carved by natural forces and full of meaning to the Gunditjmara people.

More than 30 000 years ago the Gunditjmara witnessed Budj Bim—an important creation being—reveal himself in the landscape. Budj Bim (known today as Mt Eccles) is the source of the Tyrendarra lava flow, which as it flowed to the sea changed the drainage pattern in this part of western Victoria, creating large wetlands.

The Gunditjmara people developed this landscape by digging channels to bring water and young eels from Darlots Creek to low lying areas. They created ponds and wetlands linked by channels containing weirs. Woven baskets were placed in the weirs to harvest mature eels.



These engineered wetlands provided the economic basis for the development of a settled society with villages of stone huts, built using stones from the lava flow. Early European accounts of Gunditjmara describe how they were ruled by hereditary chiefs.

With European settlement in the area in the 1830s came conflict. Gunditjmara fought for their land during the Eumerella wars, which lasted more than 20 years.

As this conflict drew to an end in the 1860s, many Aboriginal people were displaced and the Victorian government began to develop reserves to house them.

Some Aboriginal people refused to move from their ancestral land and eventually the government agreed to build a mission at Lake Condah, close to some of the eel traps and within sight of Budj Bim.

The mission was destroyed in the 1950s but the Gunditjmara continued to live in the area and protect their heritage. The mission lands were returned to the Gunditjmara in 1987.

The Gunditjmara manage the Indigenous heritage values of the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape through the Windamara Aboriginal Corporation and other Aboriginal organisations. A large part of the area is the Mt Eccles National Park, managed by Parks Victoria.

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