



Yamatji Marlpa ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Western Australia's 27,000 year old mine announced for National Heritage Listing

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This week the Weld Range in WA's Midwest joined other iconic Australian sites like the Great Barrier Reef, Uluru and the Sydney Harbour Bridge on the prestigious National Heritage List.

The Weld Range is situated approximately sixty kilometres north-west of the historic township of Cue in the Murchison district of Western Australia, and is of significant cultural importance to the traditional owners of the area, the Wajarri Yamatji people, as well as neighbouring Indigenous groups.

The 45ha area of the National Heritage Listing includes, Wilgie Mia, Little Wilgie Mia and the Marlu Resting Place. These sites contain sacred law grounds, dreamtime places, thousands of examples of rock art, extensive archaeological material, and the Wilgie Mia red ochre mine.

Ancient Ochre Mine

Wilgie Mia is thought to be one of the world's oldest mines, with estimates placing it at about 27,000 years old. The heritage listed area includes the red ochre mine at Wilgie Mia (Thuwarri Thaa), the smaller yet significant ochre mines at Little Wilgie, as well as a yellow ochre mine further to the west.

Ochre from Wilgie Mia has long been prized by Aboriginal Australians as being of exceptionally high quality, and it formed an important part of the Indigenous economy through trade networks before European settlement. Today, as in the past, ochre is important to Indigenous Australians for its use in ceremonies, art, healing practices and its religious significance.

Colin Hamlett, a Wajarri Yamatji man and traditional owner of the Weld Range, said, "Ochre from Wilgie Mia and Little Wilgie Mia is still used all the time... all the people around the region would get their Ochre from there. People say it's the best ochre in Australia."

Rock Art and Sacred Sites

The area around Wilgie Mia has the highest known density of pictographic rock art in Southern Western Australia. Made from the red ochre, there are huge numbers of paintings and handprints throughout the network of caves and breakaways around the base of the Weld Range. The area contains numerous sacred sites, signifying ceremony, corroboree and law grounds, to living areas, pictographic art sites, artefact scatters and secret sacred areas.

Wilgie Mia Creation Story

The creation story of Wilgie Mia and surrounding hills in the Weld Range involves the Red Kangaroo, or Marlu, with the ochre representing the Marlu's blood. "A Kangaroo was wounded down near the coast. It hopped back through the country and dropped spots of blood along

the way. It dropped quite a bit at Little Wilgie Mia, then it died at Wilgie Mia which left a lot of ochre. Then the spirit of the Kangaroo moved from Wilgie Mia to the hill right next-door to it,” explains Colin Hamlett.

Simon Hawkins, CEO of Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation said, “YMAC is very proud to have assisted the Wajarri Yamatji people gain this protection for their country.

The Weld Range remains an important place for Wajarri Yamatji families to camp, hunt and collect traditional bush food and medicine. With the protection afforded by the National Heritage List, the Weld Range can be protected from unsustainable development and enjoyed by future generations.”

The inclusion on the National Heritage List will assist Wajarri Yamatji people to manage the area effectively, alongside the growing mining and tourism industries in Western Australia.

About Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation

Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC) is the native title representative body for native title claims in the resource-rich Pilbara, Murchison and Gascoyne representative areas of Western Australia.

The organisation has a representative area of almost one million square kilometres and represents over 25 native title claims, all with their own language, culture and traditions.

YMAC is run by an Aboriginal Board and provides a range of services to its members including claim and future-act representation, heritage protection services, community and economic development and natural resource management.

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