

Indigenous History of the Otways

*"We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Gadubanud country,
The Gunditjmarra people, Elders past and present."*

Aboriginal people have lived in Victoria for at least 30,000. The Gadubanud (Ktabanut) or King Parrot people have occupied the rainforest, estuaries, grass and wetlands, and coastline of The Otways for many thousands of years. Local estuaries such as the Barwon and Gellibrand rivers provided natural boundaries with other tribes. Wada Wurrung to the north east of the Barwon River, Guidjan to the north (Lake Colac area) and Girai Wurrung to the west of the Gellibrand River. The Gadubanud maintained complex ties with other aboriginal groups and had close linguistic and familiar connections with their northern neighbour the Guidjan.

There are five recorded clans within the Gadubanud tribe they are:

Bangura gundidj – location Cape Otway
Guringid gundidj – location Cape Otway
Ngalla gundidj – location Cape Otway
Ngarowurd gundidj – location north of Moonlight head
Yan Yan Gurt - location east head of the Barwon river

The Gadubanud successfully avoided initial contact with European settlers in the 1830's which lead settlers to believe that the Otways were uninhabited. The Gadubanud lived a mostly peaceful life; occasional violent clashes with other tribes gave them a reputation as being "wild" within neighboring tribes. It is known that they traded spear wood for Mt William green stone when tribes from across Victoria met at traditional ceremonies at Mt Noorat, Mt Napier and Gariwerd.



Middens found around the Otways suggest that Gadubanud had a varied diet that ranged from fish and shell fish to seals, eels and ducks. Animal protein came from native rats, snakes, lizards, frogs, birds and possums. In addition to being a food source, the possums hide was used to make cloaks for warmth. Vegetables were also a very important part of their diets. New Zealand spinach and berries were also readily available; the most consumed vegetable was tubers or yams. Cultivation of the yams took place through burning. Burning was the practice of using fire to clear corridors or pathways through the Otways, making traveling around the Otway area easy. Burning also assisted with game hunting, the new growth after the fire enticing animals such as wallabies to graze.

The first official European documentation of the Gadubanud was recorded in 1842 by Chief Protector Robinson at the mouth of the Hopkins River near Warrnambool. Historical records suggest that no recorded interaction was made between European settlers and the Gadubanud people after 1846. It was during this time that massacres and violent clashes between white settlers and tribes took place all over Victoria including the Otways. Notably the most significant massacres affecting the Gadubanud would have been the Aire River massacre. It is suggested that any surviving Gadubanud people joined other tribes at the **Buntingdale Wesleyan Mission** near Birregurra. Others may have sought protection at **The Framlingham Aboriginal Community** near Warrnambool.

Today descendants of the Gadubanud continue to live in Apollo Bay and The Otways.

"Here in Apollo Bay and The Otways we gather on Country which members and Elders of the local Indigenous community and their forebears have been custodians of for many centuries and on which Aboriginal people have performed age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal. We acknowledge their living culture and their unique role in the life of the region."

Country – A term used by Aboriginal people to refer to the land to which they belong and their place of Dreaming. Aboriginal language usage of the word country is much broader than standard English definition.

Dreaming - The Dreaming has different meanings for different Aboriginal groups. The Dreaming can be seen as an embodiment of Aboriginal creation which gives meaning to everything. It establishes the rules governing relationships between the people, the land and all things for Aboriginal people.

Tribe – or nations. Tribes are "language groups", made up of people sharing the same language, customs, and general laws. The people of a tribe share a common bond and in their own language, their word for "man" is often the word used for the name of the tribe

Clans –The clan is an important unit in Aboriginal society, having its own name and territory. A clan is a group of about 40-50 people with a common territory and totems, and having their own group name. It consists of groups of extended families. Generally, men born into the clan remain in the clan territory. This is called a patrilineal group.

Middens – A 'midden' is an occupation site where Aboriginal people left the remains of their meals. At some sites substantial deposits grew over generations of use of the same area, and some middens are a few metres deep. Oyster and cockle shells are most commonly found in middens, as well as animal bones, artefacts and tools made from stone, bone or shell.

Further information

Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative, Geelong- www.wathaurong.org.au

Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative, Warrnambool– 1800 629 729

Buntingdale Wesleyan Mission – Birregurra

Campfires at the Cross by Heather Le Griffon

The fascinating story of Francis Tuckfield's Bunting Dale Mission near Birregurra in western Victoria in the mid 1800s.

The Framlingham Aboriginal Community

The Framlingham Aboriginal Community is situated on Gunditjmara country on the western plains of Victoria, approximately 180 kilometres west of Geelong and 23 kilometres north of Warrnambool.

Cape Otway Lightstation – Indigenous cultural area

Clark, Ian D 1995, Scars in the Landscape: A Register of Massacre Sites in Western Victoria, 1803–1859, Aboriginal Studies Press

Niewøjt, Lawrence, 'The massacre of the Gadubanud at Aire River,' Victorian Historical Journal, Vol. 81, No. 2 (November 2010), pp. 193–213.

Photo: Language Boundary Map of the Otways – Colac Performing Arts Centre lawn, Mosaic Artist Libby McKinnon, Designed by Brendan Norman and Colac College Students 2000. Acknowledgements: Wathaurong Aboriginal Community and Framlingham Aboriginal Community

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