

namadgi
national park



*Healthy Parks
Healthy People*



The Original Custodians of the Land

There is evidence that Aboriginal people have lived in the Canberra region for at least 21,000 years. In past times the ACT was a meeting place for people of different language groups including the Ngunnawal, Ngarigo and Wolgalu. Here they gathered to hunt and feast on the Bogong Moths.

Ngunnawal people today, as traditional custodians, have obligations to both their ancestors and their descendents to participate in the management of this area. Joint management of Namadgi National Park between the ACT Government and the traditional custodians is restoring connections to the land and facilitating a spirit of cooperation,

partnership and reconciliation.

Ngunnawal people ask that others respect the cultural protocols that they have developed for Namadgi. We all have an obligation to care for our country with our neighbours.

Yankee Hat

The only currently known Aboriginal art sites in the ACT occur in Namadgi National Park and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. The Yankee Hat art sites are located within Namadgi in the Gudgenby Valley, (approximately 30 km south-west of the township of Tharwa or 90 mins drive from the centre of Canberra) in a complex of boulders situated at the foot of Yankee Hat Mountain. Carbon dating of the camp-site deposits in the Yankee Hat rock shelter show that Aboriginal people began using the shelter earlier than 800 years ago. Evidence from nearby sites suggests that people were camping in the area, and presumably painting, as long as 3700 years ago.

The Rock

The shelter at Yankee Hat is a granite boulder which has been rounded off and under-cut by weathering. The rounding effect is sometimes called 'onion-skin weathering' caused by repeated heating and cooling. The painted surface can crumble—one important reason not to touch it. The cream coloured streaks on the rock are feldspar deposits washed down by rain. The black to grey deposits are probably organic in origin which may in future allow a more precise dating of the paintings.

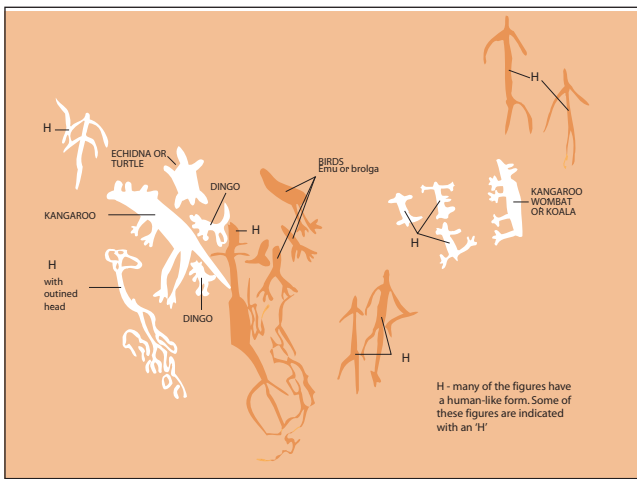
The Paint

The rock art site is protected from regular surface water flow by the high roof overhang. The white paint used at Yankee Hat is clay. The red paint is based on iron oxide or 'ochre'. The nearest known ochre quarries are at Michelago and Gungahlin. The different shades of red in the paintings may be the result of paint weathering or may have been deliberately caused by mixing some white clay with the ochre. Clay and ochre were normally mixed with a binding agent such as water, sap, blood or animal oils.

The Art

The paintings at Yankee Hat are well preserved and contain the first prehistoric (meaning before recorded history) drawings identified in the ACT. Some of the Yankee Hat figures represent animals but there are many abstract and human-like figures. Their meanings may have varied according to the viewer's level of initiation into tribal tradition.

Some figures were painted in groupings which may describe relationships between the different figures. One example comprises the four white

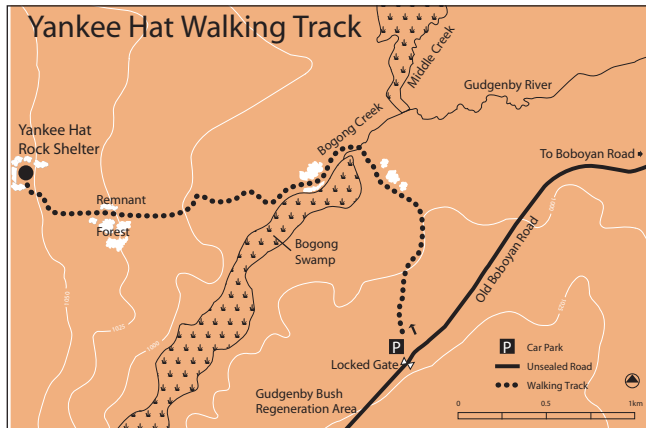


within the ACT and within the Southern Tablelands region as a whole. They are therefore invaluable at both a popular and academic level in understanding Aboriginal history and culture in the region.

Aboriginal rock art style is consistent throughout the Southern Tablelands and is similar to sites in central western NSW.

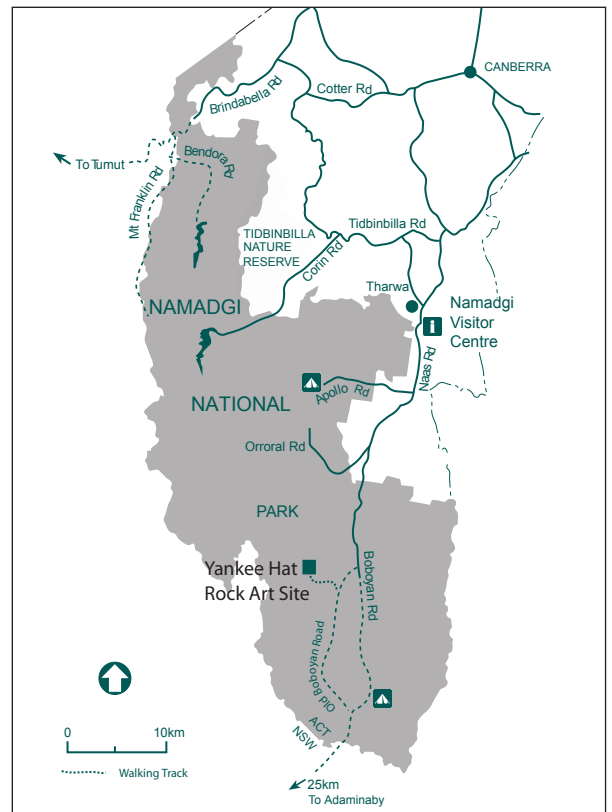
Protect Our Heritage

The Yankee Hat rock art is vulnerable. Make sure that you do not touch the art or the rock surface as oils from your skin will damage the painting. Please respect all heritage sites. It is an offence to damage, disturb or destroy Aboriginal heritage places including objects, whether registered or not.



Yankee Hat Walk 6 km return (2 1/2 hrs) Easy
Stroll through expansive grasslands dotted with kangaroos, to the Yankee Hat Shelter to view Aboriginal rock art. Easy grasslands walking with mountain views.

Yankee Hat Rock Art Site



figures on the left resembling a kangaroo, a turtle and two dingoes. Can you see any other groupings?

The figures were painted over a period of hundreds or possibly thousands of years. The earliest paintings are faint dark red/brown. The most recent are the well-preserved white and orange/red ones.

The names on the figures are based on the work of modern researchers, not on direct information from the people who painted at Yankee Hat. Traditional lifestyles in the Namadgi area were destroyed in the mid 1800s by European settlers taking the land and introducing diseases.

Art in the Region

We will never know the precise meaning of the paintings but we can be fairly certain that they were not random works of individual expression. The strict conventions in style over a very long period of time and across all sites in the area indicate great cultural importance attached to the art. Rock art sites are culturally significant to Aboriginal people as they provide evidence of the importance of the site to their ancestors.

The rock art sites are representative of a unique type

Canberra Tracks

For more insights into Aboriginal and European cultural history in the ACT, take the self drive *Ngunnawal Track*, the *Limestone Plains Track* or *Looking at Canberra Track* starting at Mt Ainslie. Information is available from the Canberra Visitor Centre and the TAMS website.



Further Information

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