

Lesson 1: The First Nations Peoples of the Wimmera region

People of the Wotjobaluk Nations have been living in the area we now call the Wimmera for at least 40,000 years. Over centuries, close links have been made by various kinship groups with numerous features of the landscape such as the Grampians mountains, Mount Arapiles and the Wimmera River. Wherever and whenever people moved and settled, they needed above all else, a reliable supply of water. The same is true of all peoples but is most obvious in drier places such as north Africa, central Asia and inland Australia.

Task 1

Access the interactive map at <https://achris.vic.gov.au/#/onlinemap>.

This is a GIS map that allows you to turn layers off and on. To use all the features of this map you need to be authorized to do so but there are some publicly available layers that are useful.

These layers can be accessed using the button shown below.

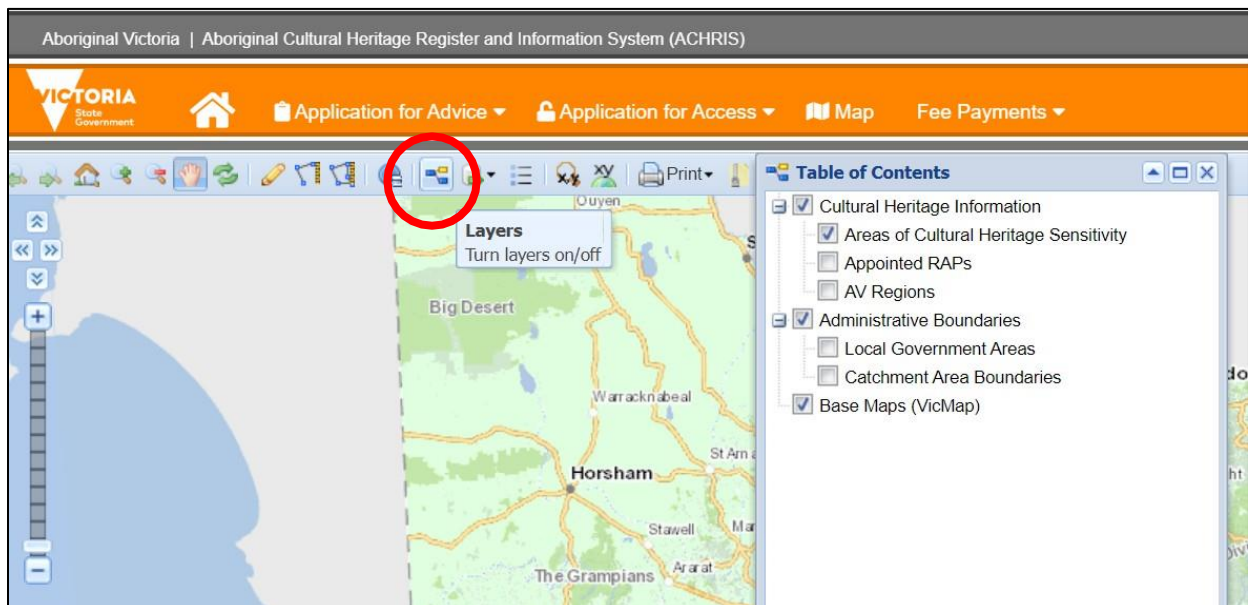


Figure 1. A screen shot of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Register and Information System map.

Source: <https://achris.vic.gov.au/#/onlinemap>

1. Using this tool, identify the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) for the Wimmera region of north-west Victoria.
2. What is the RAP for the region in which you live?

Language is important

On the map, the name given to the RAP for this region is Barengi Gadjin Land Council. The phrase 'Barengi Gadjin' can also be used for the Wimmera River (Barringgi Gadyin) and associated water features including streams, wetlands, billabongs and underground water that are connected to the Wimmera River. This is a Wergaia word, one of the five Traditional Owner groups of this region. The other four are the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali and Jupagulk peoples. These five groups are collectively referred to as the Wotjobaluk Nations. The Eastern Maar peoples, whose traditional lands lie in Southwest Victoria, also have RAP status for lands that stretch into the Wimmera region.

3. Turn off all layers (except the base map). Zoom into the map using the slider on the side of the map. How many different types of water features can you find in this region?

Task 2

Read the following passage from [Growing What Is Good Country Plan Voices Of The Wotjobaluk Nations](#) and complete the activities that follow it.

People have been living in the Wimmera for at least 40,000 years, in inter-connected local groups, each of which was associated with a particular tract of the Country. A person belonged and shared rights to the resources of the local group of his or her father; however, the groups were part of a shared cultural system. People enjoyed social connections and access to resources beyond their local group.

The availability of particular foods across the land encouraged people to move from season to season. Wirrengren Plain in the Mallee and Lake Buloke in the Wimmera were important areas for large gatherings and for trade of items such as stone axes, spears and possum skin rugs. Interaction with surrounding groups took place and firm connections were established through trade, marriage and kinship.

Water was essential and the Barringgi Gadyin (Wimmera River) provided abundant food. Small sources of water were important too, such as soaks,

clay pans, rock holes and the roots of different kinds of Mallee eucalypts and Hakeas. Plants were used for food, medicine and for trade, and supplemented a diet of birds, fish and mammals. Fire was traditionally used as a tool to manage and look after Country. The cultural use of fire assisted people with hunting, the gathering of edible tubers and roots and helped ease movement through densely vegetated areas. The mosaic of burnt and un-burnt areas that arose from cultural burning practices also minimised the spread of damaging wildfires and promoted diversity in the landscape.

The taking of lands by pastoralists brought rapid and devastating changes to Wotjobaluk Peoples. Our ancestors sought refuge at 'friendly' pastoral runs, where a familiar sense of local-group life was maintained. People moved around, but could be associated with particular runs and families. Through these associations many of our ancestors took on the European family names of these pastoral families.

Source: <https://www.bglc.com.au/bglc-country-plan>

1. What were some of the reasons for the movement of people in this region?
2. How did First Nations people use and manage the food resources?

Task 2

First Nations connection to water

Refer to [page 5](#) of the [Growing What Is Good Country Plan Voices Of The Wotjobaluk Nations](#) which depicts an artwork by Aunty Nancy Harrison, a respected Wotjobaluk Elder and artist. Look carefully at the painting and her description beside it.

1. In small groups, identify all the features on the painting as described by the artist.
2. In her description, Aunty Nancy states that her goal is to show that 'all things are connected.' How does this painting show that people are connected to features of the natural landscape such as rivers and animals?

Task 3

Tchingal: The Killer Emu!

Like many people groups all over the world, the Wotjobaluk Peoples pass on stories of creation that help to explain the natural features of the landscape including the plants, animals, birds, rivers and mountains. One of the stories from Wotjobaluk Country includes Tchingal, a ferocious killer emu who feasted on flesh, including that of humans!

1. [Listen](#) to the story of Tchingal. While you listen, make a list of all of the features of the landscape whose creation is explained in this story.

2. Describe the creation of the Wimmera River from this story.