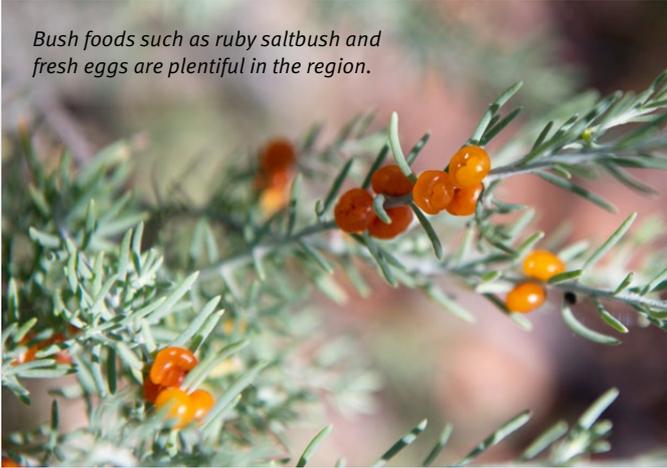


# Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in the Quilpie Shire



*Bush foods such as ruby saltbush and fresh eggs are plentiful in the region.*



The Quilpie Shire covers an area of 67,415 square kilometres – equivalent in size to the state of Tasmania – and lies on ancient floodplains known as Channel Country. The shire includes the small outback townships of Quilpie, Adavale, Cheepie, Eromanga and Toompine.

Quilpie Shire is also the ancestral home of the Mardigan, Boonthamurra, Bidjara, Wongkumara and Kullili peoples; their traditional lands traverse the Quilpie Shire's local government boundaries.

For many thousands of years, these tribes survived and thrived in this remote and rugged environment, maintaining the land and waterways, which provided a rich source of food and resources.



This booklet has been produced with the assistance of Mardigan and Boonthamurra Elders, Quilpie Shire Council, Acting Senior Constable Laurie Bateman of the Queensland Police Service, Miriam Airey from South West Hospital and Health Service, and Quilpie Shire Council.

The information in this booklet is a guide only. If you have questions about Aboriginal sites and artefacts in the Quilpie Shire or anywhere else in Queensland, please contact the Department of Seniors, Disability Services, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DSDSATSIP). Contact details are listed inside the back cover of this booklet.

*Front cover image: Hell Hole Gorge after heavy rainfall.*

*“Keeping my Mardigan history is very important because so much has been lost or destroyed over the years. What’s left is precious and needs to be saved for future generations.”*

Uncle Kevin Collins, Mardigan Elder



*Uncle Kevin Collins at the gravesite of his Great-great-grandfather, King Bismarck.*

## Recognising cultural sites and artefacts

The Quilpie Shire's unique geography at the heart of south west Queensland's Channel Country reveals archaeological sites and artefacts that offer insight into the story of this ancient land.

Before European settlement, Channel Country was an intersection for both dreaming pathways running north and south, and for long-distance Aboriginal trade networks that connected the continent. Family groups followed the seasons, carrying only what they needed, knowing that the tools they left behind would be waiting for them when they returned. This is why traditional stone tools are often found lying in the bush and near water.

The Quilpie Shire's rivers and floodplains, caves and sand hills are marked with sacred sites, resting places, birthing places, ceremonial grounds and stone quarries.

*An amazing feat of ancient engineering, Aboriginal wells were carved out of rocky ground, forming a catchment for collecting, filtering and storing rain water.*



## Some cultural heritage sites

- scar trees, where sections of bark have been removed to make canoes, containers or shields, or for markers for special sites such as initiation places or burial grounds
- ceremonial places such as bora rings, corroboree grounds and stone circles
- burial sites, often found in caves, rock shelters, sand hills and trees
- grinding grooves, used to grind seeds and sharpen stone tools are often found near a water source
- rock art including engravings, stencils and drawings

Many sites have been found in the Quilpie region and there are likely many more yet to be discovered.

*Grinding grooves, formed from sharpening stone tools and grinding ochre and seeds.*

*Stone circles were an essential part of the daily and spiritual life of Aboriginal people. Stone arrangements can be found throughout the Quilpie Shire.*





*Scar trees are often found near rivers and creeks.*

## Why protect cultural sites?

The Aboriginal people who once occupied the area now known as Quilpie Shire left important evidence of their way of life before European settlement. There are hundreds of documented cultural sites across this region, many of which are under threat from development, vandalism and erosion.

It is believed that cutting down a scar tree, digging into the ground or clearing land may disturb the Spirit Ancestors, resulting in consequences for both the person causing the disturbance and for the Aboriginal people who are custodians for that place.

Please remember, these sites are fragile reminders of what remains of the past and the places that are sacred to the present. Once disturbed or destroyed, they are lost forever.



*Uncle Kevin Collins explains that scar trees are like pages from a history book. Here he demonstrates the use of bark for a large shield.*



*Stone cutting tool.*

## What to do if you find a cultural site or artefact

If you're lucky enough to come across something that you think may be from the past, please inform DSDSATSIP, who will notify the appropriate Traditional Owners or tell you what you need to do in any of the following circumstances:

- if you think you've found an Aboriginal cultural heritage place or object on any public or private land
- if you are given cultural material such as stone tools, spears or other cultural objects
- if you are aware of cultural material being disturbed
- if you want to excavate, clear land or carry out an activity that may harm a cultural site.

Many of the objects scattered across this landscape have major cultural significance and are not merely trinkets or curiosities to be displayed on a shelf or tossed into a drawer. Admire them and photograph them, but please don't take them.



*Grinding stones.*



*An Aboriginal rock well provided fresh water for people passing across the arid landscape.*

## Some dos and don'ts

- **Enjoy** exploring the Quilpie Shire's well-travelled paths that Aboriginal people have walked for thousands of years. But please remember to tread lightly, take nothing away and leave nothing behind.
- **Respect** the confidentiality of sites, places or other information shared with you by Aboriginal people.
- **Call the police** if you discover skeletal remains, or remains that could be human. If the remains are established as pre-colonisation, the police will inform the Traditional Owners who will know what to do.
- **Don't remove** cultural material such as stone tools. Often where something was made or left by people thousands of years ago is as important as the artefact itself.
- **Don't disturb** cultural sites by walking or driving over them, and please leave scar trees alone.
- **Obey** any signage or fencing that asks you not to enter a site.
- When in doubt, **please ask**. DSDSATSIP can direct you to the appropriate people and answer questions about Aboriginal heritage, sites and places.

Contact details for DSDSATSIP, Quilpie Shire Council and Quilpie Police can be found inside the back cover of this booklet



## Legislation and lore

All Aboriginal sites, including sites on freehold land, have legal protection under the *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003*. The Act is administered by the Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, which has a series of fact sheets and duty of care guidelines to help people understand their obligations. Contact details are listed inside the back cover of this booklet.

The Queensland Police Service respects cultural heritage and understands that it is a lived spirituality fundamental to the wellbeing of people and communities.

Traditional Aboriginal lore teaches that many of these sites were originally made by the ancestors, making them as old as there have been people on the Australian continent. Under Aboriginal lore and culture, there are consequences for breaking the obligation to care for Country.

*Hell Hole Gorge near Adayale is well known locally as a massacre site and therefore a place of great sadness for Traditional Owners.*

## To find out more



### **DSDSATSIP Cultural Heritage Unit**

Phone 1300 378 401

Email [cultural.heritage@dldsatsip.qld.gov.au](mailto:cultural.heritage@dldsatsip.qld.gov.au)

### **Quilpie Police**

Phone 07 4656 8181

### **Quilpie Shire Council**

Phone 07 4656 0500

For additional copies, please ask  
a local police officer who will contact  
QPS Media and Public Affairs.

*The photos in this booklet  
were taken on Country  
within the Quilpie Shire.*





"My people have a deep connection with the land and water, the animals and plants. Country is at the heart of our spiritual identity. We have a responsibility to protect not just the physical aspects of our heritage, but also our stories, language and lore."

*Uncle Kevin Collins, Mardigan Elder*

