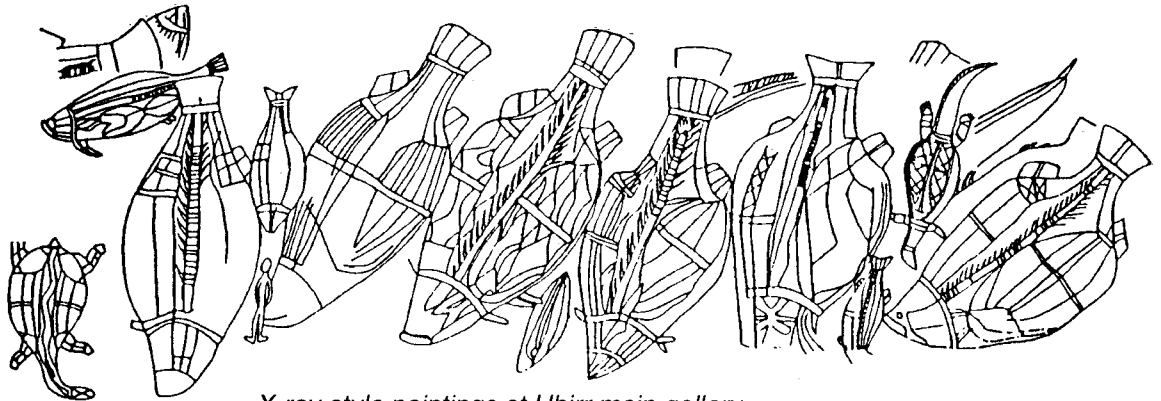


Park Notes



Ubirr



X-ray style paintings at Ubirr main gallery

Welcome to Ubirr.

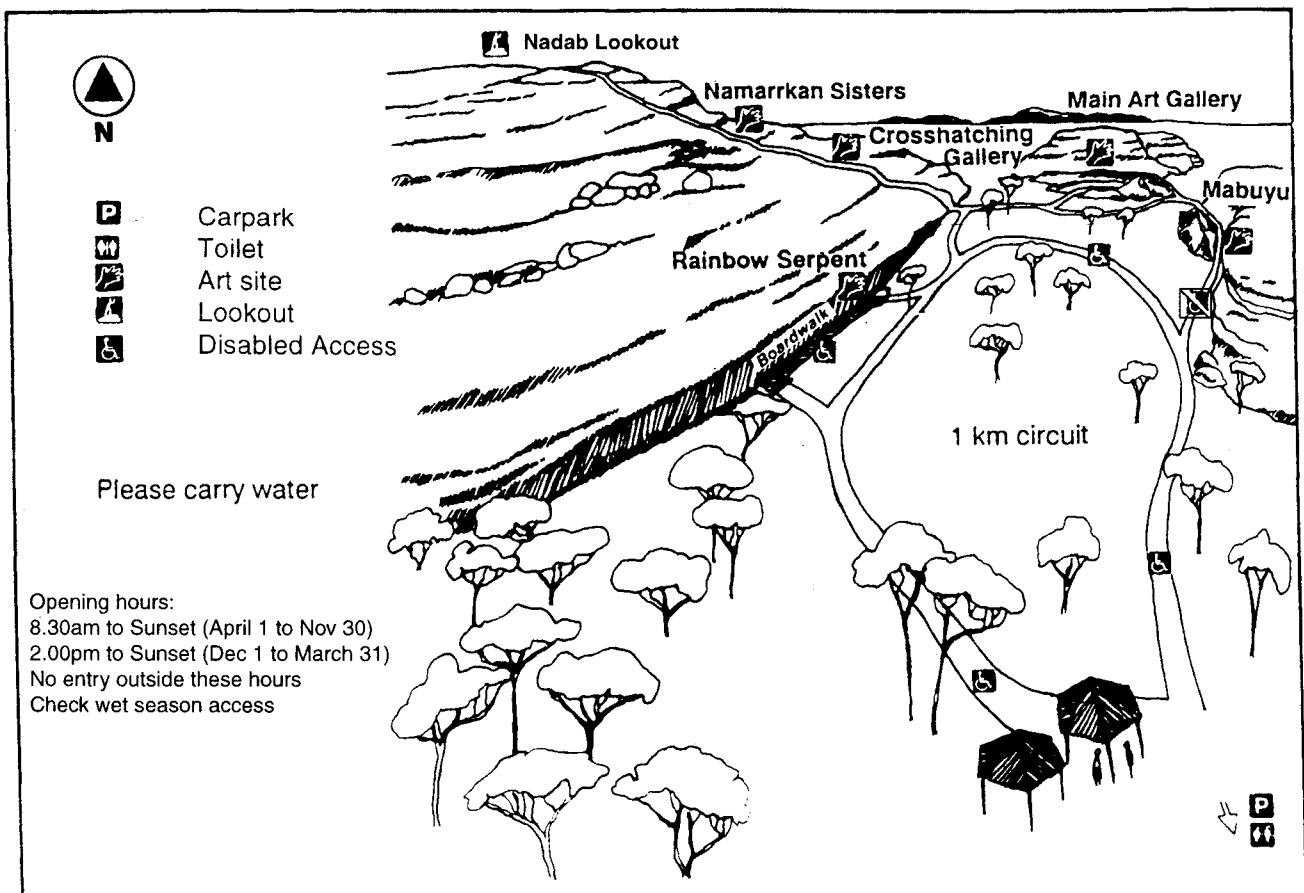
The art sites of Kakadu National Park are one of the greatest collections of ancient art. They are recognised as a major international cultural resource and are part of the reason that Kakadu is inscribed on the United Nations list of World Heritage properties.

Aboriginal rock art is naturalistic art, depicting the physical, social and cultural environment, and is a tradition that has continued in Kakadu for thousands of years. Explore Ubirr and you may come to appreciate the beauty of the art and the close personal relationship Aboriginal people have with the land and their spiritual

heritage. This relationship is also expressed in music, song, dance, ceremonial body painting, craft and story-telling.

The art sites at Ubirr can be reached by following a 1km long circular walking track from the carpark. This walk takes approximately 45 minutes return. The Main Art Gallery and Rainbow Serpent art sites have disabled access.

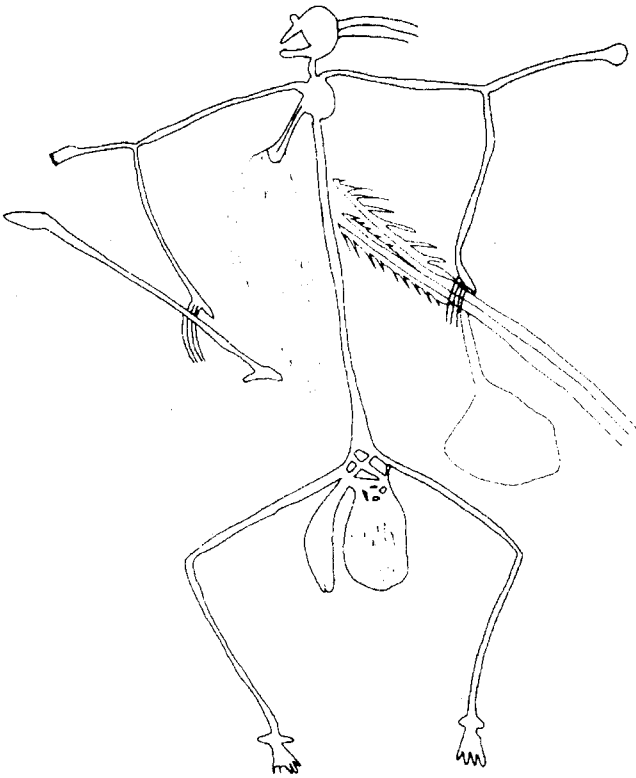
A branch in the track leads up to a moderately steep climb to further art sites and a lookout. This section is 250m long, so allow an extra 30 minutes.



The environment

The environment of Ubirr provided abundant natural resources for Aboriginal people including fish, waterfowl, mussels, wallabies, goannas, echidnas and yams. Groups of people camped in the rock shelters and exploited the rich food resources of the nearby East Alligator River and floodplain.

The cool rock overhangs provided shelter and living areas, and the smooth rock faces were an ideal surface on which to paint important events, animals, and spiritual figures. The paintings are often superimposed. They are both a record of past Aboriginal culture and an important part of Aboriginal life today.



Human figure with hunting equipment

Conservation

Rock art is extremely important to the Aboriginal owners of Kakadu. One such person, Bill Neidjie, remembers watching his father paint and listening to stories about his country. The art is also an important historic and scientific record of human occupation of the region.

Some of the paintings are extremely fragile and can be damaged by water, large animals, insects and people. Water washing over the surface or filtering through the rock is diverted away from the art by silicon drip lines. Prior to the reduction of their numbers, buffaloes damaged the art by rubbing against it and by stirring up dust. Wasps building mud nests, and other insects constructing tunnels across the rock surfaces can also damage the paintings.

Art styles

Different styles of rock art are represented at Ubirr. There are the relatively simple red ochre paintings, unadorned by other colours, for example the Tasmanian tiger and the stick-like mimi figures. It is believed that these are among the oldest paintings, X-ray painting, showing the internal structure of animals, is a more recent style. There are excellent examples of X-ray style paintings at the main gallery. A third style is contact art. It marks the arrival of non Aboriginal people, and people are portrayed with hands in their pockets and with axes and firearms. Illustrated explanations of rock art styles are displayed at Bowali Visitor Centre.

The rock art tradition has diminished since the arrival of Europeans. However the artistic tradition still flourishes among bark painters.

How old is the art?

The paintings cannot be dated exactly. However, the subjects and styles can be studied and arranged into a pattern and then compared to climatic, geological and archaeological evidence to estimate their age. Sites within the Park were occupied 23 000 years ago, and the evidence suggests that some paintings could be more than 20 000 years old, making them some of the oldest human works. Some paintings are as recent as 1985.

Further information on rock art is available from Bowali Visitor Centre.

How you can help

The thousands of people who visit Ubirr each year are the greatest potential threat to the art. To protect the paintings please:

- Do not touch the paintings or interfere with the silicone drip lines.
- Keep to the walking tracks and behind the fences.
- Do not enter prohibited areas or go behind barriers.

Any person defacing or damaging an archaeological site or artefact is liable to a \$5000 fine.

NOTE: Traditional owners request that you don't drink alcohol at Ubirr.

During the dry season, seasonal rangers conduct regular art site talks at Ubirr. Ask at Bowali Visitor Centre for program times or phone (08) 8938 1120.

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KAKADU NATIONAL PARK
is a World Heritage Area