**Dennis Rose -** Ngatanwarr. Hello and welcome in my traditional language. My name's Dennis Rose.I'm a Gunditjmara traditional owner from south west Victoria,I have been involved in Aboriginal land and cultural heritage management for in excess of 40 years.

I'm here today to talk about the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape, the Budj Bim lava flow, which was recently inscribed on the World Heritage list in 2019. Budj Bim was inscribed for its values of one of the world's oldest aquaculture systems that are still in existence today. Budj Bim first erupted 37 000 years ago and the lava flow spread out in a vast area. One of the aquaculture systems on the lava flow has a scientifically accepted date of 6600 years when it was first constructed. There aren't many things on the planet that are still around today that were constructed, that were older than that.

In this video you will see that Aboriginal design at Budj Bim reflected a great respect for the land with a focus on sustainability and harmony with the natural environment. There is the use of natural materials and traditional building techniques, incorporating traditional knowledge and cultural practices over many years.

**Greg Shelton -** My name's Greg Shelton. I'm a Gunditjmara man, Gilger Gunditj Clan This system here has been dated at 6700 years old, some 2000 years older than the pyramids. So Gunditjmara, we pretty much farmed eels, use the basalt rocks to build our stone houses and engineer fish canals channels. That way we had eels all year round, diversion nets put in the holding ponds and that way we could keep the eels there and then once the water started flowing back out after winter we could get another, you know, catch him in the baskets that the women wove so that could work both ways.

You can see here that the the channel is, is being constructed through the rock. This is the level of bedrock here. A fire was lit on the rock, on top of the rock. The rock got really hot. It was then smashed with other rocks and the rubble was pulled out. When it was time to harvest eels, an eel basket would be placed in the weir. So here’s one of our eel fish canals used to farm the eels.

So the way they would work, you'd have water running down stream and you put your basket in the middle of the canal. Centre a few rocks around it to hold it in place. So eels and fish would come in and we'd get a bigger eels in there and get them for a feed. It's got a smaller opening at the back of the basket, and that was to let the smaller eels travel further down the system because the eels eventually travel out to sea, right up to the Coral Sea. It was a very complex system that relied on great understanding of Country and great understanding of of the weather patterns of the climate of the habits of the fish as well.

On the Budj Bim lava flow, we have in excess of 200 stone house sites and in excess of 100 individual components of the aquaculture system spread throughout around about 6000 hectares. Here we have a reconstructed stone house site. When we talk about stone houses on the lava flow, we're talking about using stone as the foundation the rock is used to provide the stability for the timber frames. Then over the timber frames is earth and then branches and this one has tea tree in it for example.

The stone house site here is is very typical of how they are out on Country, the opening faces, the north east because the winds come from the southwest. So it's a protection here, a fire, generally speaking, was lit at the front of the place, not inside.

On one of our properties, the Allambie property, we have recorded 140 plus stone house sites on the property. We talk about having a village there, a couple and one or two children, over 140 sites, you're starting to talk about 5 to 600, 700 people. We had a sustainable lifestyle on the lava flow.

I think that's the really important message that needs to be put through here, that this defies the stereotypes of Aboriginal people as being nomadic and always on the move. We had a pretty much a permanent resident population on the lava flow because of the this great water supply which provided such a rich and diverse food resource, waterbirds, ducks, swans, other animals, kangaroos, wallabies, possums that would be attracted by the water and plenty of plant resource as well. So very rich supply of a food resource and the lava flow.

It enabled Gunditjmara people to spend more time on other activities such as education, such as the spiritual side of things looking after family. Our Gunditjmara ancestors used the stone that was available to modify the natural landscape, not to change it irreparably. And by doing so, ensured that a sustainable harvest of eels and other fish were available.

**Eileen Alberts -** My name’s Eileen Alberts. I’m a Gilger Gunditj woman from the Gunditjmara nation. And the Country that we're standing on at the moment is called Kurtonitj Weaving baskets traditionally belongs to the women. The only tool you’d need would be, perhaps, leg bone of a kangaroo sharpened at one end that would be your needle, so sewn into the back of the stitch, turn it into its tail and continue on.

So if I were to complete this basket. I'd use it for gathering of nuts, berries, plants. If you want to put white in the pattern you just turn the grass inside out. So there you have that white pattern throughout. this one made, I made it probably 11 years ago. So it started to go that golden brown dried out grass. And it's flopping because it hasn't been in the water for a long time. But if we were to put that back into water now and leave it for an hour or two they’d become very rigid again. The poonyard has that ability that no matter how long something's been left out and it’s dried, as soon as you put it in water, it becomes rigid. So here we are at the Lake Condah weir.

This was part of the Lake Condah sustainability project this work was completed in late 2009. It started off as the Elders wanting water to be in Lake Condahs so I put in the weir in, slows the water system, down and holds water in the lake all year round now. I’ll show you a bit on how it works. So it's electronic, we can change the level of the door down below there. Before winter we close it up a bit to hold more water in the lake. It comes through Darlot’s Drain through the weir and then it becomes Darlot’s Creek or Killara, what we call it. It’s one of the freshest streams in Australia. Real freshwater.

The aquaculture system in Budj Bim were recognised by Engineers Australia as one of Australia's national heritage landmark engineering places, along with places like the Snowy River Hydro Scheme and Sydney Harbour Bridge.

[Copyright Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Footer/Pages/Copyright.aspx) 2024