

28,000 Years of History at Raymond Creek 2 Rock Shelter, Mitchell River National Park, GunaiKurnai Country

In September 2018, GunaiKurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) rangers and Monash University archaeologists spent a week together doing archaeological research at Raymond Creek 2 rock shelter, in Mitchell River National Park, GunaiKurnai Country. We were trying to find out if the Old People had used the site for camping. There are many rock shelters in the Park. Finding out if archaeological evidence remains intact under the soil was important so that the story of the site could be told, but also to help manage the area given that visitors use the Park. This is what we found.

Summary of Results



Figure 1: Bradley Hood excavating with GLaWAC rangers Doug Harrison, Kieley Ratzman and Chris Mongta at Raymond Creek 2 rock shelter, 25 September 2018.

We only dug a very small rectangular area measuring 1 metre long by half a metre wide. The soil was 31 cm deep before bedrock was reached.

The soil has 15 different layers, although they were often hard to tell apart because of their similar colours. There is charcoal all the way down. We did carbon dating on some pieces of charcoal: the deepest levels are about 28,350 years old, but we don't know if that charcoal is from old camp fires or from bushfires, because we didn't find any artefacts near the charcoal. A bigger area would need to be excavated to find out for sure.

The deepest stone artefact came from 18 cm below the ground. It was dropped there by the Old People sometime between 5,900 and 14,950 years ago (between about 300 and 600 generations ago).

A fireplace was built around 1,400 years ago (about 60 generations ago), and another one 850 years ago (about 40 generations ago). That more recent one had a fish ear bone and fish scales near it. The fish ear bone was identified to have come from a medium-sized Australian bass, which live in the Mitchell River near the site.

Mussel shells were also found. The edge of one piece of mussel shell shows that it was used as a cutting or scraping tool.

Many small, broken animal bones were found, mostly from animals that had died in the shelter. An unusual find is of the Tasmanian pademelon (*Thylogale billiardieri*) which is now extinct on the Australian mainland but continues to live in Tasmania. Also found were remains of the long-tailed mouse (*Pseudomys higginsii*), which is thought to be now restricted to Tasmania. And there is also a tooth of the long-eared mouse (*Pseudomys cf. auratus*), not previously known from this part of Gippsland. The plains mouse (*Pseudomys australis*) and heath rat (*Pseudomys shortridgei*) are thought to be rare in East Gippsland; the teeth of each species were found in the excavations.

Raymond Creek 2 rock shelter is an average-size shelter in Mitchell River National Park. The archaeological excavation was tiny, covering only 1% of the site. Yet many findings were made, with evidence of camping activities by the Old People going back for thousands of years. And there is also evidence of animals that lived and possibly still live in this part of GLaWAC Country but that were thought to be extinct. This all shows that places like Mitchell River National Park need to be carefully co-managed with both cultural awareness and environmental knowledge in mind.



Figure 2: Raymond Creek 2 rock shelter. The automatic level on the tripod was used to record the depth of all the finds during the archaeological excavation.

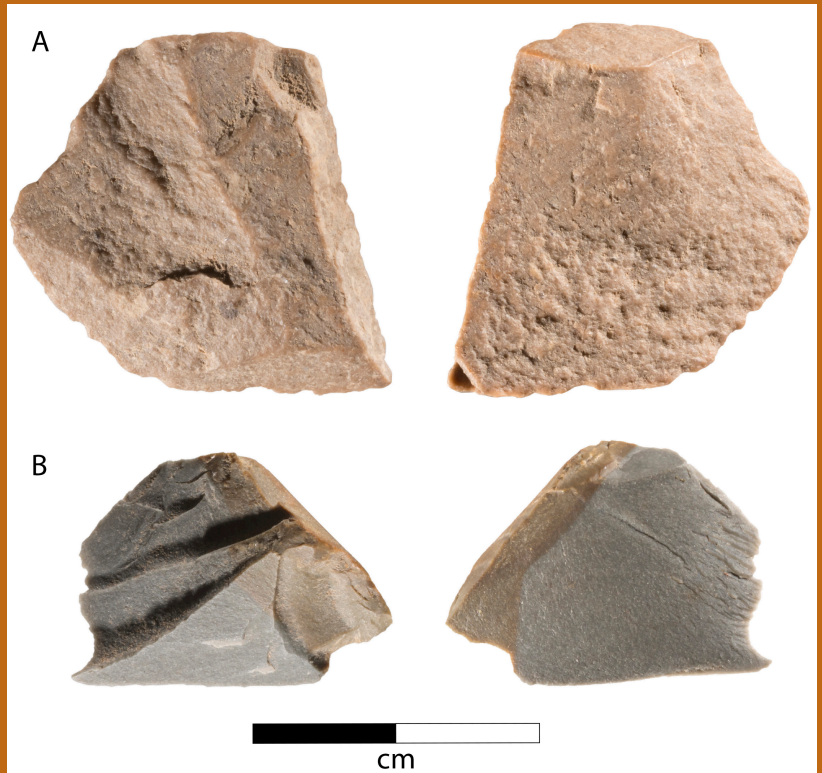


Figure 3: The two stone artefacts from Raymond Creek 2. The bottom one is about 1,400 years old, the top one between 5,900 and 14,950 years old.



Figure 4: Most of the bone is from small mammals, often the result of owls roosting in the cave. The oldest animal bone was found in sediment dated to about 28,000 years ago.



Figure 5: This mussel shell was used as a tool for cutting or scraping. It is about 850 years old.



Figure 6: An ear bone from an Australian bass fish, dated to about 850 years ago. This fish was probably caught in the nearby Mitchell River.

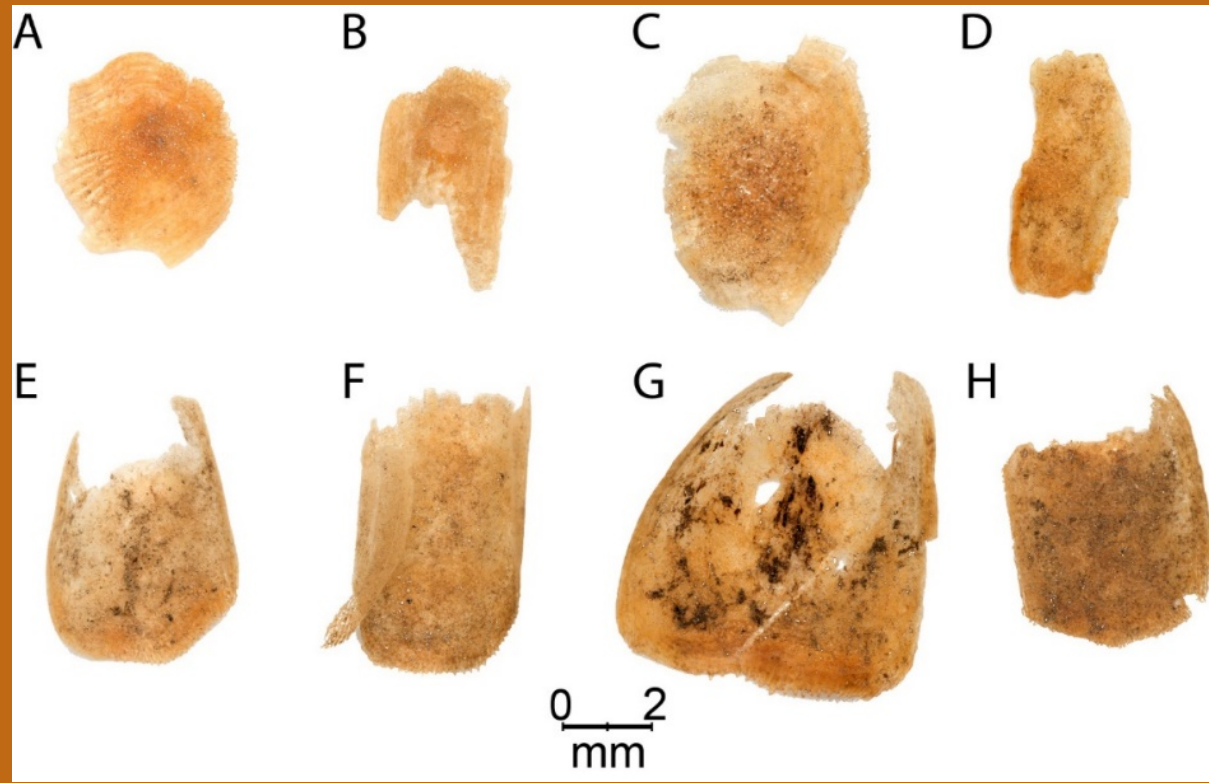


Figure 7: 850 year-old fish scales found in the excavation. They probably came from the same Australian bass as the ear bone (Figure 6).