

Brewarrina Fish Traps

FACT SHEET

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The outback contains many hidden treasures. Some of these are still used by people who have lived in the outback for thousands of years - Aboriginal Australians. Long before Europeans arrived in Australia, the Ngemba people of north west New South Wales designed and built a complex series of rock traps to harvest fish at Brewarrina.

- **Ngunnhu** is the Ngemba word for the fish traps at Brewarrina.
- The Brewarrina fish traps are more than 40,000 years old - making them one of the oldest man-made structures in the world.
- Ngunnhu is a spiritual place for the Ngemba because **Baiame** the creator put them in charge of the fish traps he built. The fish traps are known as **Baiame's Ngunnhu**.
- There are many fish traps, so the fish can swim in any direction and still get caught.
- The fish were caught by hand or with spears. The most common native fish caught were Murray cod, Yellow belly and Silver perch.
- In and around Ngunnhu is used for shelter, feasting, medicine, trade and ceremonies. The river and fish traps were a 'shopping centre' for the local people to get a variety of food and medicine.
- The fish traps are a good source of food for the local bird life. Some bird species seen in the video are White-necked herons, Intermediate egrets and Little pied cormorants. Many other birds use the fish traps such as the Nankeen night heron, Great egret, darter and the Australian pelican.



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ACTIVITIES

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The Ngemba story of the Brewarrina Fish Traps tells us that **Baiame** (the Creator) and his two sons (**Booma-ooma-nowi** and **Ghindi-inda-mui**) built the traps for the Ngemba people because they were starving in a drought. **Baiame** cast his net over the dry river bed to design the fish trap. **Baiame** and his sons then gathered and dropped rocks into the dry river bed to form the weirs, ponds and waterways according to **Baiame's** design to trap the fish. **Baiame** taught the men how to call the rain and the fish. It then rained for days and filled the river, washing over the rock walls and filling the fish traps. When the rain stopped, the men drove the fish into the traps and caught them. **Baiame** appointed the Ngemba people as custodians of **Ngunnhu** (each trap is for a particular family group to maintain), and insisted that other tribes be allowed to use the traps.

1. Traditional oral history is all about telling a story from one generation to the next. How many stories have you heard from your teacher, parent, grandparent or guardian?
 - First, watch this retelling of the Brewarrina Fish Traps story. youtu.be/7uYKg1M6PRk
 - Second, retell this story to a group, such as a younger class or your parents, expanding on the narrative and making it exciting.
2. Describe in your own words how a fish trap works.
3. Brewarrina wasn't just a source of fish, there were other foods that could be found. What food items does Bradley Hardy talk about on the video?
4. On the video, Bradley Hardy talks about how Baiame's Ngunnhu is like a marriage. Describe what he means.

These stories belong to, and remain, the intellectual property of various Aboriginal communities within the western New South Wales.