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– RESEARCH REPORT –

Updated Recording of Rock Art at Cerito B and Sandy Creek in Jangga Country

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Abstract

Fieldwork and archival research in 2023 updated records for two rock art sites in Jangga Country, northern Central Queensland: Cerito B and Sandy Creek. Comparison with surveys undertaken in 1974 and 1996 documented both continuity and loss. A red handprint at Cerito B appears stable, whereas two stencils formerly recorded at Sandy Creek were no longer present and part of the art-bearing surface may have been removed. Jangga oral history identifies the stone arrangement beside Cerito B as a ceremonial and inter-clan gathering place. The study establishes a baseline for future collaborative documentation, monitoring and conservation.

Keywords: Jangga Country; rock art; Central Queensland

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1. Introduction

Rock art in Jangga Country in northern Central Queensland remains poorly documented. Helen Brayshaw recorded three sites - Cerito B, Cerito D and Cerito E - in 1974, and Elizabeth Hatte recorded the Sandy Creek shelter in 1996 (Brayshaw 1977a, 1977b, 1990; Hatte 1996). In 2023 we revisited Cerito B and Sandy Creek to update their records, compare surviving motifs with earlier documentation and assess visible changes in condition. We also examined Brayshaw's archival slides and incorporated Jangga knowledge of the Cerito B ceremonial ground. This report presents the results and establishes a baseline for future monitoring and research.

The ancestral lands of the Jangga People extend from approximately 50 km west of Collinsville to south of Charters Towers and include parts of the western Great Dividing Range and the Desert Uplands towards Barcaldine (Figure 1). Jangga Country comprises elevated plateaus, rolling hills and extensive plains. The Suttor River and its seasonal tributaries drain the region, which has a tropical climate with marked wet and dry seasons. Before extensive vegetation clearance began in the 1960s, much of the area supported Acacia and Eucalyptus closed woodland; substantial areas remain intact (Sattler and Williams 1999). Metasedimentary rocks of the Tasman Fold Belt dominate the local geology (Jell 2013).

Archaeological research in the region has been limited. Brayshaw's work in the Herbert-Burdekin district remains the principal study relevant to Jangga Country (Brayshaw 1977a, 1977b, 1990). She recorded rock art as well as shell middens, stone arrangements, culturally modified trees, fish traps, wells, quarries and rock shelters, and synthesised historical and ethnographic sources for the region (Brayshaw 1990: 211-248). Rock art in Jangga Country has nevertheless received little subsequent attention.

2. Research Context and Approach

The 2023 fieldwork focused on two previously recorded sites that could be relocated and accessed during the project. Recording comprised visual inspection, measured shelter descriptions, digital photography and notes on site condition and associated features. No excavation, pigment sampling or other invasive work was undertaken. The new observations were compared with Brayshaw's publications and colour slides from 1974 and with Hatte's 1996 survey report. Differences in photographic coverage and image quality limit the precision of some comparisons.

Interpretation of the Cerito B ceremonial ground draws on knowledge shared by Colin McLennan, a senior Jangga Traditional Owner and co-author, including information passed to him by his grandmother and his knowledge of the local pastoral landscape. The project therefore combines field observations, archival records and Jangga oral history while keeping archaeological and oral evidence distinct where their relationship remains uncertain.

3. Cerito Sites and Bluegrass Ceremonial Ground

Brayshaw recorded Cerito B, D and E along Bluegrass and Rockingham Creeks on Cerito station (Figure 2). The approximately 3,000 square kilometre property has operated as a cattle station for more than 140 years (Land Court 1923). The areas in which the sites were recorded remain

uncleared and retain Acacia and Eucalyptus woodland. Jangga people continued to live and work on stations in their Country. McLennan grew up on neighbouring Glen Eva station, then owned by his grandmother, and later worked with his brothers as a stockman across the Mount Coolon district. Brayshaw's publications do not record consultation with Jangga Traditional Owners during her fieldwork.

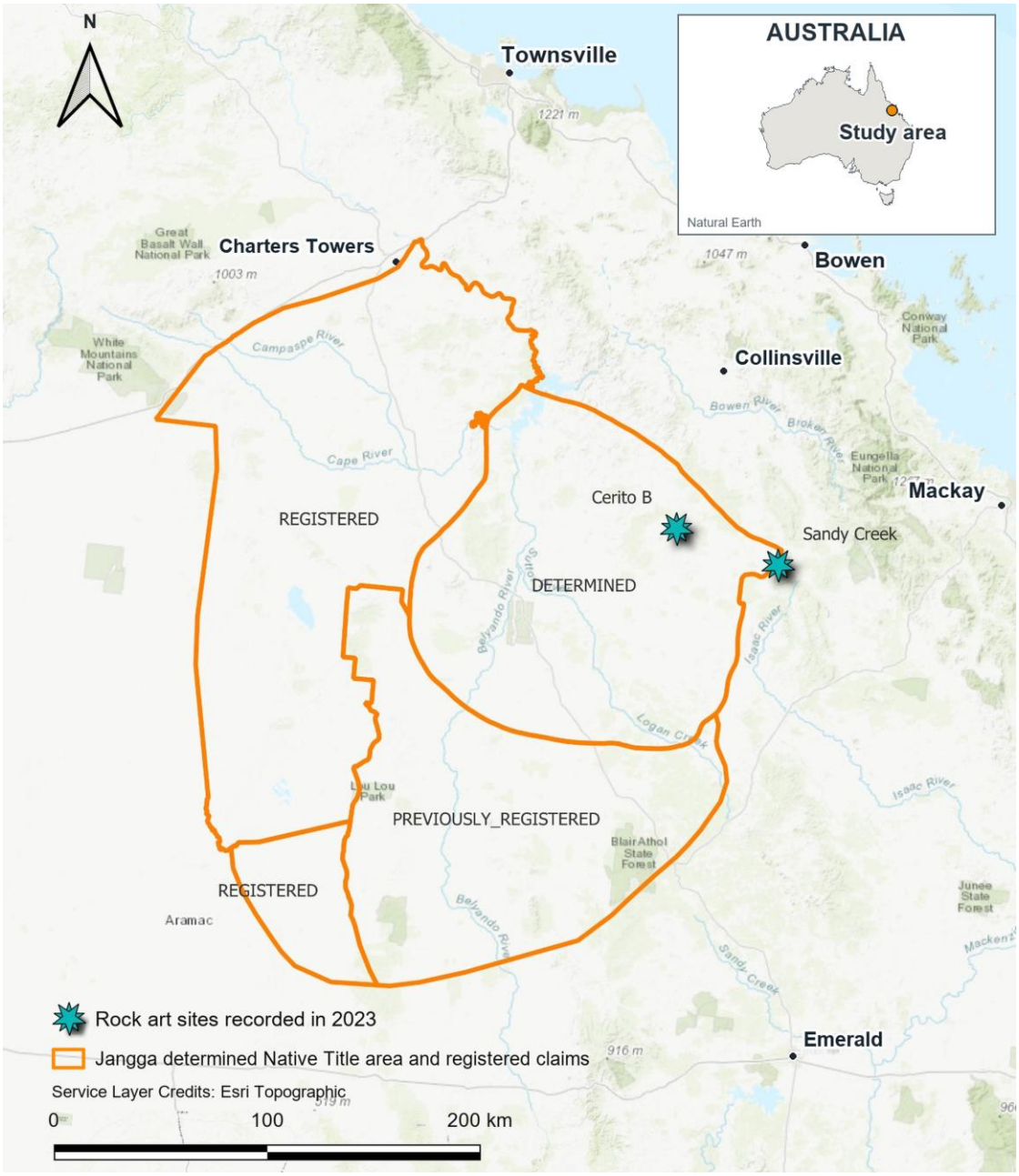

Figure 1. Location of Cerito B and Sandy Creek, the rock art sites recorded in Jangga Country, northern Central Queensland, in 2023. Orange outlines indicate the Jangga native title determination and claim areas. The inset shows the location of the study area within Australia.

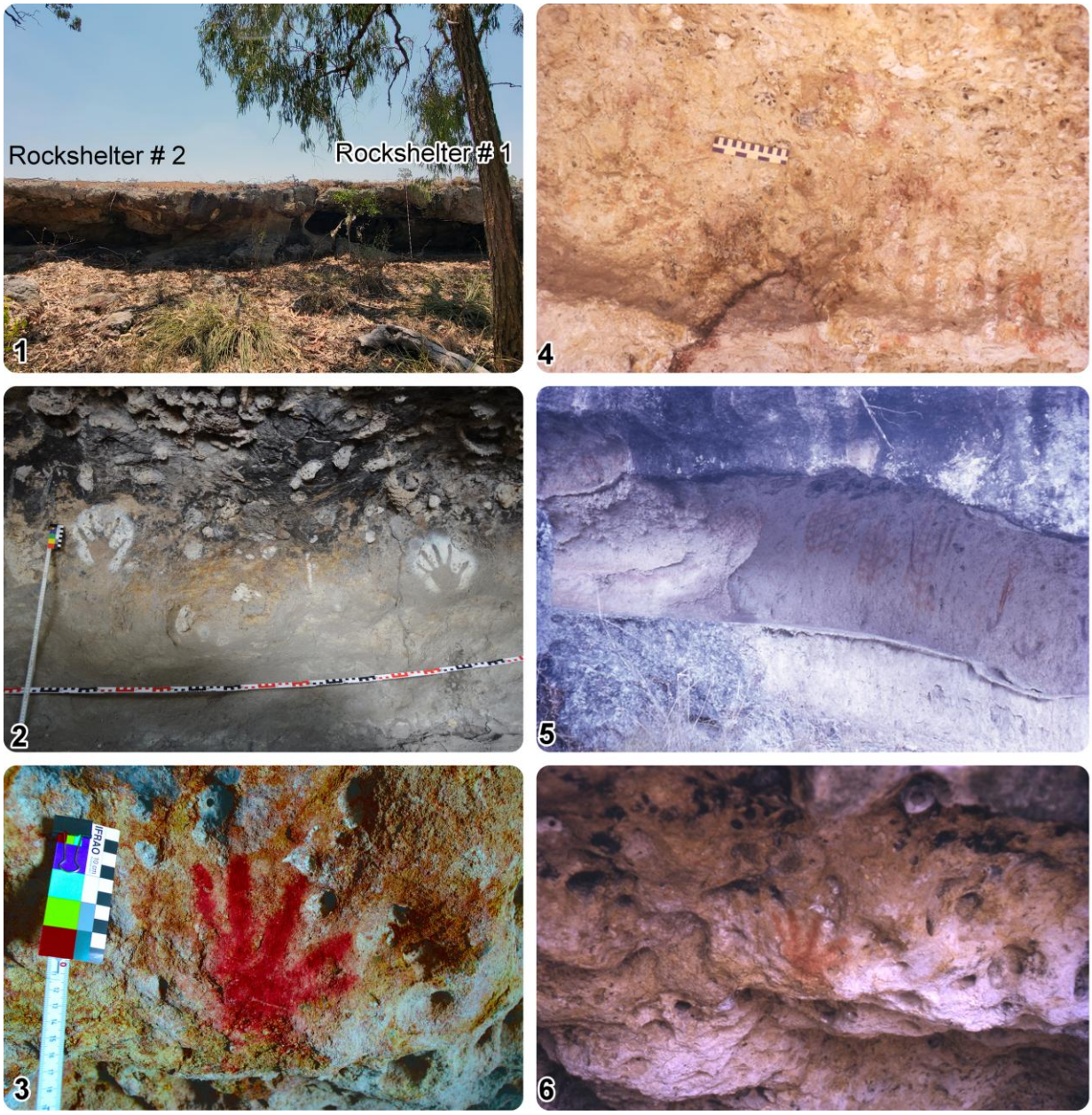

Figure 2. Cerito rock art: (1) general view of Cerito B, showing Rock Shelters 1 and 2; (2) white hand stencils in Rock Shelter 1; (3) red handprint in Rock Shelter 2, enhanced using the DStretch LRD filter; (4) rock art at Cerito D (image 057); (5) rock art at Cerito E (image 059); (6) the red handprint at Cerito B (image 054). Photographs by Irina Ponomareva (2023; panels 1–3) and Helen Brayshaw (1974; panels 4–6). Archival photographs: © Helen Brayshaw. Dr. Helen Brayshaw Photographic Collection, James Cook University Library Special Collections.

Cerito D and E have not yet been relocated. Brayshaw described hand stencils, red and black vertical lines and red oval grid motifs, as well as an associated stone arrangement (Brayshaw 1990: fig. 8-6). The available location description is imprecise, tracks have changed since McLennan last visited the area in about 1964, and the 2023 search time was limited. Brayshaw's original colour slides for both sites were located at James Cook University Library and provide the best surviving visual record (Figure 2: 4-5).

Elizabeth Hatte and Colin McLennan relocated Cerito B in 2008, after which it was entered in the Queensland cultural heritage database. We revisited it in 2023. The site consists of two small shelters in Locharwood Rhyolite on the edge of a rock platform, approximately 120 m southeast of a stone arrangement and ceremonial ground (Figure 3).

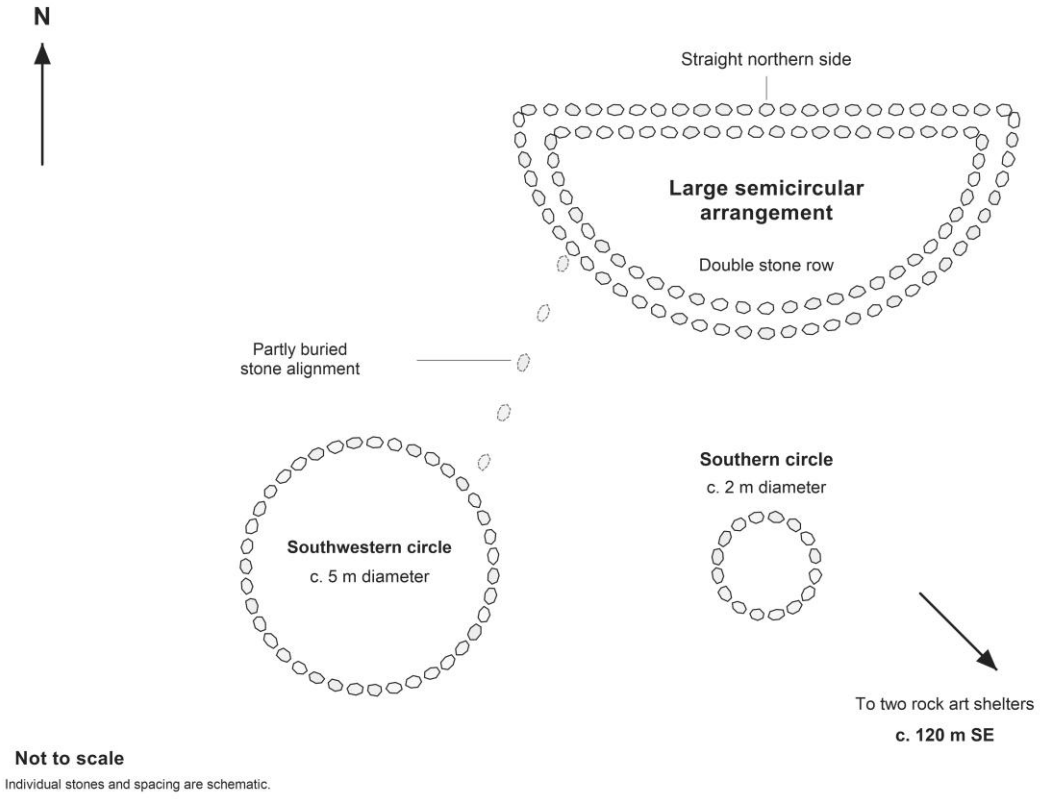

Figure 3. Schematic plan of the stone arrangement at the Bluegrass ceremonial ground near Cerito B, based on field notes, a field sketch and photographs from 2023. Not to scale.

Rock Shelter 1 lies about 340 m east of ephemeral Bluegrass Creek and faces south. Its opening is 4.5 m wide, with a maximum height of 1 m and a depth of 4.5 m. Fine, loose dark-brown loam covers the floor, but no surface artefacts were observed. The ceiling and rear wall carry three white left-hand stencils, white spots and white vertical lines. Two rear stencils show, respectively, a closed middle finger and splayed fingers. Beside one stencil are two circular spots and a vertical line; nine

faded vertical lines occur on the eastern wall. A third stencil with splayed fingers lies near the eastern corner. No archival image of this panel was identified.

Rock Shelter 2 is 13.5 m northwest of Rock Shelter 1 and also faces south. It is 6.5 m wide, 2 m deep and 0.7-0.8 m high. Its raised rock floor has no deposit. A single red left handprint occupies the centre of the ceiling and is visible from several metres outside the shelter. Comparison with Brayshaw's 1974 slide shows no obvious change in the motif (Figure 2: 6).

Three structures were readily identifiable in the stone arrangement during the brief 2023 visit. They are aligned west-east on a largely vegetation-free rock platform. A double line of stones forms a large semicircle at the eastern end, with a straight line on its northern side. A smaller circle approximately 2 m in diameter lies to the south, and a circle about 5 m in diameter lies to the southwest. McLennan calls the wider place the 'playground'. Knowledge passed down by his grandmother identifies it as a venue for weddings, boys' coming-of-age ceremonies and gatherings of several clans. He recalls accounts of five or six circles and a funnel-shaped arrangement used during dancing. During first-marriage ceremonies, the bride and groom sat within circles and were expected not to look at one another or consume food or water for three days. Visiting clans camped in areas aligned with the directions from which they had travelled. The last ceremonies were remembered as taking place in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

4. Sandy Creek

The Sandy Creek shelter is near Glenden in Queensland's Isaac Region, on the eastern bank of Sandy Creek (Figure 1). Hatte first recorded it in 1996 during a survey for the Eungella-Moranbah water pipeline (Hatte 1996). The west-facing shelter is formed in sandstone of the Clematis Group. It lies approximately 18 m east of the creek, 7-8 m above the bank and about 50 m below the hilltop. The shelter is 4 m wide, 5 m deep and 2 m high at the entrance, decreasing to about 1 m at the rear. Shallow silty deposits and organic matter cover the rock floor. The 1996 survey recorded a small pink silcrete artefact near the front and a sparse artefact scatter eroding into the creek west of the shelter.

The art consists of white pigment stencils (Figure 4). Hatte recorded three left-hand stencils and one left-foot stencil in 1996. Only two left-hand stencils survived in 2023, both near the northern edge of the entrance. The outer stencil was strongly faded, with only three central fingers clearly visible. Surface traces indicate that the block carrying the other two stencils may have been deliberately removed, although the cause cannot be confirmed. The shelter stands inside the fenced pipeline corridor, but fencing does not remove the need for continued monitoring.



Figure 4. Sandy Creek rock art site recorded in 2023: (1) general view of the shelter, with the damaged area indicated; (2) close-up of the damaged area; (3) white hand stencils in natural colour; (4) the same rock art panel enhanced using the DStretch LWE filter. Photographs by Irina Ponomareva.

5. Discussion

The two sites show different preservation histories. At Cerito B, the red handprint photographed in 1974 appears visually stable, although the available images do not support fine-grained condition assessment. At Sandy Creek, two of the four stencils documented in 1996 were no longer present in 2023, and the surviving outer hand stencil had faded substantially. These observations show the value of repeat photography and archival comparison for identifying change that would otherwise remain unrecognised. They also establish priorities for future condition recording, including consistent photographic viewpoints and detailed surface assessment.

The project also clarifies the strengths and limits of earlier documentation. Brayshaw's research remains foundational, but recording was uneven across the Cerito sites. Her thesis and monograph contain neither photographs nor drawings of Cerito B, while Cerito E is represented by a sketch. The rediscovered colour slides therefore add evidence not available in the published record. Bringing these images together with Hatte's 1996 report and the 2023 observations creates a more secure record, while the failure to relocate Cerito D and E demonstrates the continuing vulnerability of sites documented without precise spatial data.

Regional comparison remains provisional. Brayshaw noted oval grid motifs at Cerito E and at Parada in neighbouring Biri Country, and compared them with designs on shields from the Herbert-

Burdekin region. In the Central Queensland Highlands, Morwood related the distribution of some motifs and techniques to mythological tracks and local social groups (Morwood 2002: 228). Wade *et al.* (2011: 28), by contrast, described the Middle Park Station assemblage as relatively homogeneous and without clear internal stylistic divisions. More sites must be documented before comparable patterning can be evaluated in Jangga Country or connections to regions north and south can be assessed.

Comparative studies also caution against assigning a single social context to painted and stencilled shelters. Mortuary associations have been documented in the Central Queensland Highlands and Carnarvon Gorge (Morwood 1979, 2002: 224; Quinnell 1976: 227), whereas Wade *et al.* (2011) proposed a more open social setting for the Middle Park assemblage. No mortuary evidence has been recorded at Cerito B. Its significance here lies in the proximity of rock art, stone arrangements and a place identified in Jangga oral history as a setting for ceremony and inter-clan gathering. This association should guide future work without being used to infer a direct functional or chronological relationship between the art and the ceremonies.

The spatial association of Cerito B with the Bluegrass ceremonial ground is important, but it does not by itself demonstrate that the paintings and stone arrangement are contemporary. Comparative sequences place white pigment among relatively recent phases of art production in the Central Queensland Highlands and at Middle Park Station (Morwood 1984, 2002; Wade *et al.* 2011). The Jangga assemblage is too small, however, to assign the stencils to a chronological phase. McLennan's account provides a cultural history for the ceremonial ground without requiring the rock art to be attributed to the same activities. This distinction is important because ritual practices may leave limited material evidence (Brayshaw 1990: 49).

6. Conclusion

Re-recording Cerito B and Sandy Creek has produced an updated account of the known rock art, documented contrasting patterns of survival and loss, and connected archaeological observations with archival sources and Jangga oral history. The results remain limited to two sites, but they provide a practical baseline for monitoring and demonstrate the need to relocate and record other sites in Jangga Country. Future work should be planned with Jangga Traditional Owners and should combine systematic condition recording, archival research and culturally appropriate investigation of the relationship between rock art and ceremonial places.

Funding

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Data Availability Statement

Site coordinates and detailed cultural heritage records are not publicly available because they concern culturally sensitive places on Jangga Country. Requests concerning non-sensitive project data should be directed to the corresponding author and considered in consultation with Jangga Traditional Owners. Brayshaw's archival photographs are held by James Cook University Library and remain subject to the repository's access and reproduction conditions.

Partnerships

This research was undertaken in partnership with Colin McLennan, a senior Jangga Traditional Owner and co-author. He participated in locating and recording Cerito B, contributed knowledge of the Cerito pastoral landscape and provided the oral history of the Bluegrass ceremonial ground presented here. Colin McLennan has reviewed the manuscript and confirms that he has been informed of, and consents to, the publication of the Jangga cultural information and oral history attributed to him.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: I.A.P. and C.M.; investigation: I.A.P., C.M. and E.H.; methodology: I.A.P. and E.H.; resources: C.M. and E.H.; data curation: I.A.P. and E.H.; validation: C.M. and E.H.; visualization: I.A.P.; funding acquisition: I.A.P.; project administration: I.A.P.; writing - original draft: I.A.P.; writing - review and editing: I.A.P., C.M. and E.H.

AI Disclosure Statement

During the initial preparation and subsequent revision of this manuscript, ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used to assist with manuscript formatting, English-language proofreading (grammar, spelling and punctuation), and the preparation of schematic illustrations and map layouts based on author-supplied materials. The authors take full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript, including the text and figures.

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