

An unusually beautiful book

The Grampian Ranges in western Victoria were known as Gariwerd by the original inhabitants, the Djab wurrung and Jardwadjali people.

Gib Wettenhall, whose family has been associated with the Grampians since early settlement, tells us that the name 'Gariwerd' is composed of the local words for nose (*gar*) and shoulder (*werd*), "aptly describing the classic Grampians range profile of steep cliff (nose) facing east, with back slope (shoulder) dipping gently west".

The book begins with five short essays by Wettenhall, after a prologue by John Landy (a naturalist and photographer, as well as an Olympic medallist and former governor of Victoria).

Wettenhall's first essay, "The Hand of Creation", explains the formation of the Grampians; the next describes the factors that have led to the Grampians becoming "an ark of flowers", with close to a thousand different flowering plants.

Other essays study the difference between the way the indigenous peoples lived in the landscape, building elaborate eel traps and using firestick farming to encourage the growth of sweet yams, and the introduction of European systems of agriculture, with mass clearing, water harvesting and so on.

Good though Wettenhall's essays are, Pouliot's photographs are the stars of the show. These gorgeous images are presented very simply, usually one per large page, with no text.

Despite the lovely cover shot of thunderclouds over the mountains, the images are by no means all landscape shots. Instead, Pouliot looks at the Grampians in unexpected ways, from many angles, and often from close up.

One image, for example, shows spider eggs, and others a single native orchid, or a moss carpet, or waterweeds at the surface of a river, demonstrating the power of surface tension, or a marbled gecko blending into the rockface.

The pictures of flora and fauna are undeniably beautiful, but I particularly love the many photos of old, eroded rocks, often with wonderful iron oxide patterning. They make me want to reach out and touch the weathered sandstone.

There are four pages of endnotes for the photographs, with little thumbnail images and their pleasingly precise descriptions, for example "Mineralisation brought in by seeping water along micro-relief edges in a cave", or "Spikes of austral grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea australis*) after flowering".

This is an unusually beautiful book, which should help Australians to appreciate and celebrate our magnificent landscapes and the unique animals and plants that inhabit them.



PRODUCT DETAILS

Product name: Gariwerd: Reflecting on the Grampians

Reviewer: Jenny Blackford

Author: Words by Gib Wettenhall, Images by Alison Pouliot

Publisher: Em PRESS

Price: \$75

Size: 128 pages

G Rating:

