# Oyala Thumotang National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land)

# Management Statement

2013



Prepared by: Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS), Department of Environment, Science and Innovation

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The department is committed to respecting, protecting, and promoting human rights, and our obligations under the Human Rights Act 2019.

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The Oyala Thumotang National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) Management Statement 2013 has been extended in 2024 in line with the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (s120G). Minor amendments have been made. There has been no change to the statement's original management intent and direction.

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Park size:	379,552ha
Bioregion:	Cape York Peninsula
QPWS region:	Northern
Local government estate/area:	Cook Shire Council
State electorate:	Cook

#### Legislative framework

~	Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003
~	Environment Protection and Biodiversity
	Conservation Act 1999 (Cwlth)
~	Nature Conservation Act 1992
•	Cape York Peninsula Heritage Act 2007
~	Native Title Act 1993 (Cwlth)
>	Queensland Heritage Act 1992
~	Aboriginal Land Act 1991

#### Plans and agreements

•	Indigenous Land Use Agreement for Oyala Thumotang National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) and adjacent Aboriginal Land between Victor Lawrence, Allan Creek and Phillip Port and State of Queensland
•	Indigenous Management Agreement between Oyala Thumotang Land Trust and State of Queensland for Oyala Thumotang National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land)
>	China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
>	Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
>	Bonn Convention
>	1999 Burra Charter
>	Action Plan for Australian Bats 1999
>	Action Plan for Australian Birds 2010
~	Action Plan for Australian Marsupials and Monotremes 1996

The underlying tenure of this park is Aboriginal freehold land, owned by the Oyala Thumotang Land Trust.

Oyala Thumotang Land Trust and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service jointly manage this park.

Oyala Thumotang Land Trust is representative of the Ayapathu, Kaanju and Wik Mungkan Aboriginal people.

The land trust welcomes to country those people who will respect and take care of the land, water, native plants and animals. The land trust hopes visitors enjoy their time on the park and return home safely to their families.

#### Vision

The Oyala Thumotang Land Trust and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) will work together as joint management partners to provide best practice management of Oyala Thumotang National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) so that the diverse natural and cultural resources and values are protected for the benefit of all.

#### **Conservation purpose**

Oyala Thumotang National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land) [NP (CYPAL)], has been created by the amalgamation of two separate national parks that lie on the same latitude. The Archer Bend section (166,000ha) was originally gazetted as a national park in November 1977 and was one of the first national parks on Cape York Peninsula. The Rokeby section (250,000ha) was then created as a national park in November 1981. Both areas had previously been used for grazing.

The protected area conserves many important vegetation types and landscapes at a scale that gives a good opportunity to maintain them free of significant disturbance. In the west, there are extensive levee banks and flood plains supporting a range of vegetation communities. Woodlands and savannas on heavy clay loams and loamy shales are possibly the best examples of these ecosystems on Cape York Peninsula.

A band of gallery forest up to 8km wide can be found at the junction of the Coen and Archer rivers. In association with these forests are large areas of unique 'thorn scrubs' with representatives of south-east Asian forest elements.

The central section of Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL) contains landscapes of rolling hills, flats and river frontages that support a wide diversity of communities that have been maintained at a high level of integrity.

The east side of the park gives rapid rise to the escarpment and plateau of the McIlwraith Range with a corresponding transition in vegetation and habitat types. Elevated plateau rainforests contain many endemic species and examples of Gondwanan heritage, such as the hoop pine forests.

On 16 December 1994, Rokeby and Archer Bend national parks were amalgamated through re-gazettal to become Mungkan Kandju National Park. Subsequent additions and revocations occurred altering the area of the national park.

On 8 June 2012, Mungkan Kandju National Park was transferred as Aboriginal freehold land to the Oyala Thumotang Land Trust. This tenure change acknowledges the major Aboriginal cultural significance of the area and the strong cultural association that the Ayapathu, Kaanju and Wik Mungkan people have with their traditional country.

Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL) was then established over the land, together with two small areas of resources reserve.

Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL) will be used and managed jointly as a national park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) in perpetuity so the lands and culture stay healthy for the benefit of all people.

#### Protecting and presenting the park's values

#### Landscape

Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL) is bounded by long sections of the Coen and Archer rivers. The Archer River has an approximate length of 130km within or on the border of the park. These major waterways of central Cape York form moist corridors that facilitate the movement of some wildlife species from the eastern rainforests across to the west, replenishing and re-colonising remote small rainforest patches that are not large enough to sustain populations of some species in their own right. In addition to their role as corridors, these rivers also form links and biological reservoirs for many plant species that are relics from the historical connection with Papua New Guinea.

The headwaters of the Archer River and the multi-channelled Coen River are located in the eastern McIlwraith Range. Both rivers flow west through the park and generate important riparian zones, wildlife corridors and diverse alluvial floodplains.

Widespread flooding occurs in the wet season, but by the middle of the dry season stream flow ceases, leaving

large permanent freshwater waterholes and lagoons.

#### Regional ecosystems

Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL) is a large park that covers a distinct topographic and moisture gradient from east to west. This has enabled a wide array of regional ecosystems to be represented with the park. Over 110 regional ecosystems have been identified within the park. Many of these are unique variants on the more widespread regional ecosystem types. Fourteen are of concern communities (Table 1). The remaining 97 are not of concern at present.

Vegetation communities on the park can generally be classified into several habitat types including the Archer Bend flood plain, deciduous vine thickets of cracking clay soils in floodplain situations, open downs country, gallery forests of the Archer and Coen rivers, poplar gum *Eucalyptus platyphylla* woodlands in alluvial areas, cypress pine low woodlands and shrublands, vine thickets of rocky ground and foot slope situations on colluvium, stringybark *Eucalyptus tetradonta* tall woodlands and forests, mountain grasslands and the complex plant communities at the head of Culliban Creek.

The significance of many of these vegetation communities within the park is one of scale and representation. On Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL) these communities are present as almost entire systems.

#### Native plants and animals

Fifty-three species of state or national conservation significance (Table 2) and 14 species of international significance (Table 3) have been recorded for Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL).

All plants and animals will be protected through direct management activities.

#### Aboriginal culture

Historically, the park area was part of the Rokeby and Archer Bend cattle stations. During this time many Aboriginal families lived on the properties combining traditional lifestyles with pastoral work. This remained the situation until a short time prior to the pastoral holdings being transferred to national park. As a consequence a number of senior Ayapathu, Kaanju and Wik Mungkan Aboriginal people who were born on this country still have strong memories of this period and strong connection with this country.

Due to early European practices associated with gold mining, missionary and pastoral activities, many Aboriginal people not from this area were born, raised and came to call Rokeby station home. These people have an historic connection with this land.

Sites of material Aboriginal culture, such as massacre sites, scar trees and artefact manufacturing sites have been recorded on the park. Given the size of the park, the importance of the major rivers as movement pathways and inaccessibility issues, it is likely that many other unrecorded sites also exist.

As per the Indigenous management agreement (IMA), the land trust is responsible for protecting and maintaining the Aboriginal cultural resources and places on this NP (CYPAL). The land trust also determines what Aboriginal cultural information should be presented to the public and advises QPWS about matters concerning Aboriginal tradition.

#### Shared-history culture

From as early as the mid-1800s, explorers including Edmund Kennedy, William Hann, the Jardine brothers and Robert Logan Jack travelled through and camped in the Coen region. Today, many site names still pay tribute to their endeavours.

The first European land title grants occurred in the district between 1884 and 1888 over some land parcels now managed as Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL). Aboriginal people maintained connection with their lands via a number of avenues, including pastoral working relationships.

Relics of the park's history as a pastoral property remain in the form of a homestead and cattle yards at the Rokeby ranger base, a windmill and shed at the Jabiru Outstation and several antiquated vehicle remains spread across the area.

A small number of mining leases were held in the region.

#### Tourism and visitor opportunities

Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL) is only open in the dry season May to November, as it is inaccessible by road at other times. It provides a self-reliant visitor experience.

It is currently unknown how many visitors utilise Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL) each year. However, the park is popular with a wide cross section of the community from young couples through to retirees. Four-wheel-drive vehicle enthusiasts, nearby residents and Aboriginal groups access the NP (CYPAL) primarily to camp, fish and experience solitude.

Popular activities include camping, bird watching, wildlife spotting and fishing. Eighteen bush campsites are located adjacent to rivers and waterholes. Visitor facilities are not provided at these campsites. Recreational fishing is permitted in all watercourses, except Peach Creek.

Independent visitors primarily access the area by four-wheel-drive vehicles and motorcycles; however, due to improved road conditions a number of conventional vehicles are now accessing the park. There is also a growing trend in the number of vehicles towing trailers and caravans.

Commercial operators provide guided tours on the NP (CYPAL). Most commercial activities are restricted to visitor nodes such as Horsetailer Waterhole.

#### **Education and science**

Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL) protects numerous rare, restricted or biogeographically important species which are of educational and research interest.

Knowledge gained from research and monitoring programs improves knowledge and guides future park management and is an integral part of adaptive park management. Given the outstanding natural and cultural significance of the NP (CYPAL), collation of existing information and ongoing monitoring and survey work is a priority.

#### **Partnerships**

QPWS and the land trust manage Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL) in accordance with the Indigenous management agreement for the park and relevant legislation.

The joint partners maintain working relationships with neighbouring properties to ensure protected area values are appropriately managed. Where possible, pest and fire management activities are coordinated with neighbouring landholders.

#### Other key issues and responses

#### Fire management

Most of the vegetation on the NP (CYPAL) is fire-dependent. Planned burns are conducted to reduce hazards, protect life and property, maintain the ecological integrity of vegetation communities, enhance essential habitat for significant species and aid in the control of pest plant and animal species.

Only a very short window of opportunity exists in which to effectively conduct planned burns. It is therefore essential that joint managers have a good understanding of the function of fire in this landscape.

Appropriate fire management is necessary to protect all habitats within the NP (CYPAL). This is particularly the case for the protection of nesting habitat for ecotone (transition area between two different ecosystems) specialists, such as the palm cockatoo *Probosciger aterrimus*.

#### Pest management

#### Pest plants

Cassia *Senna siamea*, orchard tree *Bauhinia monandra* and custard apple *Annona squamosa* are considered significant threats to the integrity of the important gallery forests along the Coen River.

An emerging threat to the park's grasslands and woodlands is grader grass *Themeda quadrivalvis*. This aggressive, introduced grass has replaced natural grasses in large areas of northern Australia. It changes the way that fire behaves and alters the suitability of these habitats for native animals.

#### Pest plants

Three animal species recorded from Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL) are considered to be major environmental issues for the park. Feral pigs *Sus scrofa* have been identified as having a significant impact upon the wetlands within the park where they disturb the structure of the water bodies and impact the native plants and animals in those areas.

Feral cattle *Bos* spp. and feral horses *Equus callabus* impact a wider part of the landscape by accelerating erosion and affecting vegetation growth and species composition.

#### Other management issues

#### Safety

The natural environment presents the potential for interaction with dangerous wildlife, including estuarine crocodiles *Crocodylus porosus*. Warnings and information about these natural hazards are highlighted on information boards and signs within Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL) and in off-park materials.

#### References

Abrahams, H., Mulvaney, M., Glasco, D. and Bugg, A. 1995. An assessment of the Conservation and Natural Heritage Significance of Cape York Peninsula. Cape York Peninsula Land Use Strategy, Office of the Co-ordinator General of Queensland, Brisbane, Department of the Environment, Sport and Territories, Canberra, and Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage, Brisbane.

## Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines			
Landscape The health, diversity and integrity of regional ecosystems are protected and maintained.	Maintain the biodiversity and complexity of native vegetation communities, including important ecotone areas, through appropriate fire and pest management. Maintain the open eucalypt woodlands and the pockets of native grassland through appropriate fire and feral animal management.			
<b>Native plants and animals</b> Species of conservation significance and ecosystems with a significant biodiversity status are protected through direct and active management activities.	Implement fire regimes that maintain suitable roosting, foraging and nesting habitat in the woodland-rainforest ecotone areas for species of conservation significance. Focus management on species and ecosystems that have a limited distribution and are currently threatened by human impacts, fire, pest plants or pest animals. Conserve critical habitats for species of conservation significance and manage threatening processes. Collate existing information and conduct ongoing monitoring and survey work to improve knowledge of the joint managers and use the information gained to guide future park management.			
Aboriginal culture Places and species of cultural significance are appropriately protected and presented.	Manage the NP (CYPAL) to ensure the cultural sites, species, responsibilities, interests and aspirations of the Oyala Thumotang Land Trust and its members are acknowledged and respected.			
Shared-history culture Sites of cultural and historical significance are appropriately protected and presented.	Identify and record shared-history cultural heritage places within the QPWS ParkInfo database, including documentation of their significance if known.			
<b>Tourism and visitor opportunities</b> Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL) offers a range of sustainable recreational opportunities which are consistent with the character of the park and protect and promote its natural and cultural values.	<ul> <li>Develop a visitor management strategy for the NP (CYPAL) in cooperation with land trust, the local community, park neighbours, relevant government organisations and other interest groups that will: <ul> <li>review existing visitor facilities and explore the potential new recreational opportunities within the park</li> <li>identify future needs in relation to signage, brochures and public contact activities</li> <li>ensure camping and day use opportunities offered are appropriate, safe and managed at a sustainable level</li> <li>nurture partnerships with local Government and the tourism industry to ensure managed development of access and marketing for the area as a remote experience and</li> <li>provide for the monitoring and assessment of visitor impacts and identifies management strategies to ensure high-quality recreational opportunities can be sustained.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Maintain or improve visitor services and facilities in accordance with the visitor management strategy.</li> <li>Support Land Trust exploring and developing cultural tourism opportunities within the park and on their surrounding lands.</li> <li>Work with the land trust to protect places of particular cultural significance through mechanisms including the declaration of restricted access areas for cultural protection purposes.</li> <li>Highlight safety risks and hazards and emphasise the level of preparation and self-sufficiency required to safely visit the area, in written materials relating to the park.</li> </ul>			
Education and science Research and monitoring programs increase understanding of park values and provide information to improve management decisions.	Identify information gaps and natural and cultural research opportunities for the park. Support research activities where there are demonstrated benefits to the management of the NP (CYPAL), and no off-park alternatives exist.			

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines		
	Manage the NP (CYPAL) jointly in accordance with the Oyala Thumotang IMA and relevant legislation.		
Partnerships	Further strengthen joint management relationships with the Oyala Thumotang Land Trust by:		
The Oyala Thumotang Land Trust and QPWS have a strong and positive collaborative working relationship, built on trust and respect for each other's knowledge and responsibilities.	<ul> <li>working with land trust members to inform QPWS on culturally appropriate management and decision making on the NP (CYPAL)</li> <li>cooperatively developing protocols for various park management activities in accordance with the Indigenous management agreement for the park</li> </ul>		
Relationships with neighbours are fostered and maintained and collaborative management occurs across the landscape.	<ul> <li>supporting the investigation and development of possible commercial tourism, employment and business opportunities for the land trust</li> <li>supporting the recording of cultural values in a form agreeable to the land trust and</li> <li>providing opportunities for cultural interpretation on and off park.</li> </ul>		
	Maintain good working relations with neighbouring landholders and where possible, cooperatively undertake fire and pest management programs.		
	Liaise with local authorities and catchment groups to manage pest plants and erosion along the roads adjacent to the NP (CYPAL), especially where known threats to the NP (CYPAL) and river catchment values exist.		
Pest management	Develop and implement a Level 2 Pest Management Strategy for all pest plants and animals, ensuring it encourages coordinated management of species across the landscape.		
The integrity of native plant and animal communities is maintained through strategic, sustained pest management.	Focus pest animal control activities on essential habitat areas and threatened ecosystems, such as native grasslands.		
	Focus pest plant management around visitor sites, such as campgrounds and road networks, and target new pest plant infestations in time to eradicate or contain them.		
	Encourage the joint managers and park users to implement pest plant hygiene measures.		
<b>Fire management</b> The integrity of native plant and animal communities is maintained through strategic, sustained fire management.	Develop and implement a Level 2 Fire Strategy for Oyala Thumotang NP (CYPAL), placing particular emphasis on the adoption of appropriate fire regimes within important ecotone areas, eucalypt woodlands and pockets of native grassland.		
strategic, sustained me management.	Coordinate fire management activities with park neighbours where possible.		
Gravel and water extraction Gravel and water extraction activities are formalised and managed to protect the	Maintain a working relationship with Cook Shire Council, Department of Transport and Main Roads and contractors to ensure gravel pits and old road alignments are appropriately drained, revegetated and closed at the end of their useful life.		
natural and cultural resources.	Provide a buffer between the road alignment and gravel extraction sites where possible.		

### Tables – Conservation values management

Table 1: Endangered and of	concern regional ecosystems
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Regional ecosystem number	Description	Biodiversity status
3.10.5a	Deciduous notophyll/microphyll vine thicket ± Gyrocarpus americanus on sandstone hills	Of concern
3.12.2	Araucarian notophyll vine forest with Araucaria cunninghamii on granitic ridges and mountains	Of concern
3.12.30	Imperata cylindrica ± Mnesithea rottboellioides closed tussock grassland on steep slopes	Of concern
3.12.34a	Rock pavements associated with mountains and river beds in Iron and Altanmoui Ranges	Of concern
3.12.36x3	Evergreen to complex evergreen mesophyll/notophyll vine forest and thicket on mountain ranges of Torres Strait Islands	Of concern
3.12.7	Eucalyptus brassiana, Corymbia clarksoniana open forest on McIlwraith and Melville Ranges	Of concern
3.3.38 (a)	Deciduous microphyll vine thicket ± Lagerstroemia archeriana on heavy clay alluvium	Of concern
3.3.44	Acacia ditricha, Albizia procera low open woodland on erosional plains	Of concern
3.3.66	Permanent lakes and lagoons, frequently with fringing woodlands or sedgelands	Of concern
(a, x1a)		Ciconcent
3.5.17a	Melaleuca stenostachya ± M. viridiflora low open woodland on flat plains	Of concern
3.7.1	Semi-deciduous notophyll/microphyll vine thicket on isolated lateritic hillslopes	Of concern
3.9.5	Corymbia papuana ± Eucalyptus leptophleba open woodland on rolling plains	Of concern

Table 2: Sp	pecies of	conservation	significance
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Scientific name	Common name	Nature Conservation Act 1992 status	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 status	Back on Track status
Plants				
Acacia ommatosperma		Near threatened		Low
Archidendron hirsutum		Near threatened		Low
Arthragrostis clarksoniana		Near threatened		Low
Astonia australiensis		Endangered		Medium
Brachychiton grandiflorus		Near threatened		Low
Brachychiton vitifolius		Least concern	Vulnerable	Low
Cajanus mareebensis		Endangered	Endangered	Medium
Carmona retusa		Vulnerable		Low
Croton brachypus		Near threatened		Low
Crudia abbreviata		Near threatened		
Dallwatsonia felliana		Near threatened		Low
Dendrobium carronii		Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Low
Dendrobium johannis	brown antelope orchid	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Low
Dendrobium malbrownii		Near threatened		Low
Dockrillia wassellii		Near threatened		Low
Ectrosia blakei		Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Low
Firmiana papuana		Near threatened		Low
Gossia macilwraithensis		Near threatened		Low
Hoya macgillivrayi	red hoya	Near threatened		Low
Huperzia phlegmaria	coarse tassel fern	Near threatened		High
Margaritaria indica		Near threatened		Low
Pomatocalpa marsupiale		Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Low
Robiquetia wassellii		Near threatened		Low
Sarcochilus hirticalcar	harlequin orchid	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Medium
Senegalia albizioides		Near threatened		
Solanum angustum		Endangered		Medium
Syzygium macilwraithianum		Near threatened		Low
Syzygium malaccense		Near threatened		Low
Taeniophyllum muelleri		Least concern	Vulnerable	
Trichoglottis australiensis		Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Low
Vanda hindsii		Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Low
Animals	1	1	1	I
Accipiter novaehollandiae	grey goshawk	Near threatened		Low
Antaioserpens warro	robust burrowing snake	Near threatened	1	Low
Cyclopsitta diophthalma marshalli	Marshall's fig-parrot	Near threatened		Low
Dobsonia magna	bare-backed fruit bat	Near threatened		Data Deficient

Scientific name	Common name	Nature Conservation Act 1992 status	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 status	Back on Track status
Eclectus roratus macgillivrayi	eclectus parrot	Vulnerable		Low
Egernia rugosa	yakka skink	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Medium
Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus	black-necked stork	Near threatened		Low
Erythrura gouldiae	Gouldian finch	Endangered	Endangered	Medium
Haliaeetus leucogaster	white-bellied sea-eagle	Least concern		Low
Hipposideros cervinus	fawn leaf-nosed bat	Vulnerable		High
Hipposideros diadema reginae	diadem leaf-nosed bat	Near threatened		Low
Hipposideros semoni	Semon's leaf-nosed bat	Endangered	Endangered	Medium
Macroderma gigas	ghost bat	Vulnerable		Critical
Ninox rufa meesi	rufous owl (Cape York subspecies)	Near threatened		Low
Petrogale coenensis	Cape York rock-wallaby	Near threatened		Low
Probosciger aterrimus	palm cockatoo	Near threatened		Low
Pteropus conspicillatus	spectacled flying-fox	Least concern	Vulnerable	High
Rhinolophus philippinensis	greater large-eared horseshoe bat	Endangered	Endangered	High
Saccolaimus saccolaimus nudicluniatus	bare-rumped sheathtail bat	Endangered	Critically endangered	High
Spilocuscus maculatus	common spotted cuscus	Near threatened		Low
Tadorna radjah	radjah shelduck	Near threatened		Low

#### Table 3: Species listed in international agreements

Scientific name	Common name	BONN	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
Ardea ibis	cattle egret		~	~	
Ardea modesta	eastern great egret		~	~	
Plegadis falcinellus	glossy ibis	✓	~		
Crocodylus porosus	estuarine crocodile	✓			
Monarcha frater	black-winged monarch	✓			
Myiagra cyanoleuca	satin flycatcher	✓			
Pandion cristatus	eastern osprey	✓			
Rhipidura rufifrons	rufous fantail	✓			
Symposiarchus trivirgatus	spectacled monarch	✓			
Grus antigone	sarus crane		~		
Haliaeetus leucogaster	white-bellied sea-eagle		~		
Coracina tenuirostris	cicadabird			~	
Merops ornatus	rainbow bee-eater			~	

BONN – Bonn Convention

CAMBA - China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

JAMBA – Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

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ROKAMBA – Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
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