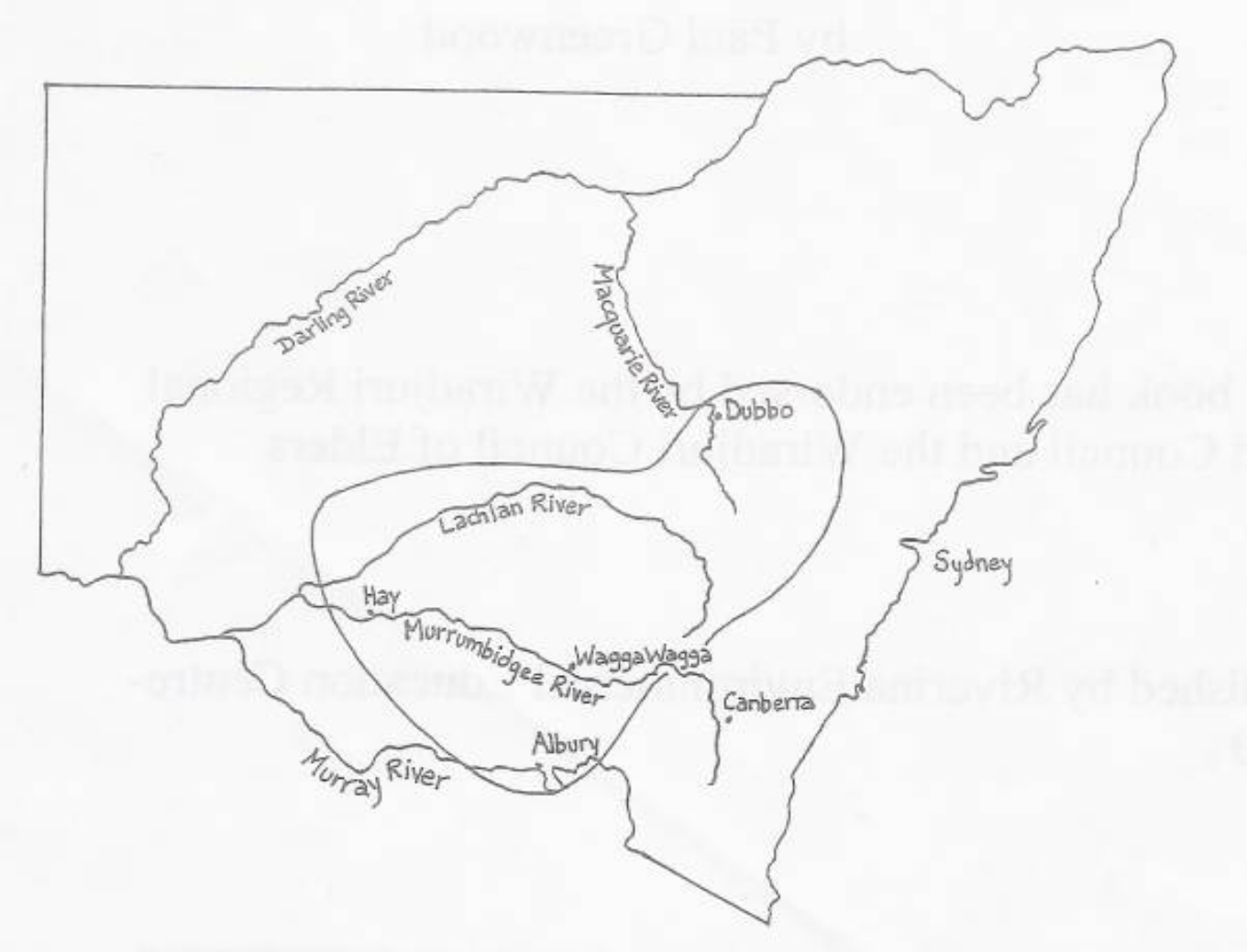
LAND OF THE



WIRADJURI

Traditional Wiradjuri Culture

By Paul greenwood

I would like to acknowledge the Wiradjuir Elders, past and present, and thank those who have assisted with the writing of this book.

A basic resource for schools made possible by the assistance of many people. Though the book is intended to provide information on Wiradjuri culture much of the information is generic to Aboriginal culture. Some sections may contain information or pictures from outside the Wiradjuri Nation.

Wiradjuri Country

There were many thousands of people who spoke the Wiradjuri language, making it the largest nation in NSW. The Wiradjuri people occupied a large part of central NSW. The southern border was the Murray River from Albury upstream towards Tumbarumba area. From here the border went north along the edges of the mountains, past Tumut and Gundagai to Lithgow. The territory continued up to Dubbo, then west across the plains to the Willandra creek near Mossgiel. The Booligal swamps are near the western border and down to Hay. From Hay the territory extended across the Riverina plains passing the Jerilderie area to Albury.

Wiradjuri lands were known as the land of three rivers;

- Murrumbidgee (Known by its traditional Wiradjuri name)
- Gulari (Lachlan)
- Womboy (Macquarie)

Note: The Murrumbidgee is the only river to still be known as its Aboriginal name

The exact border is not known and some of the territories overlapped with neighbouring groups. Places like Lake Urana were probably a shared resource as was the Murray River.

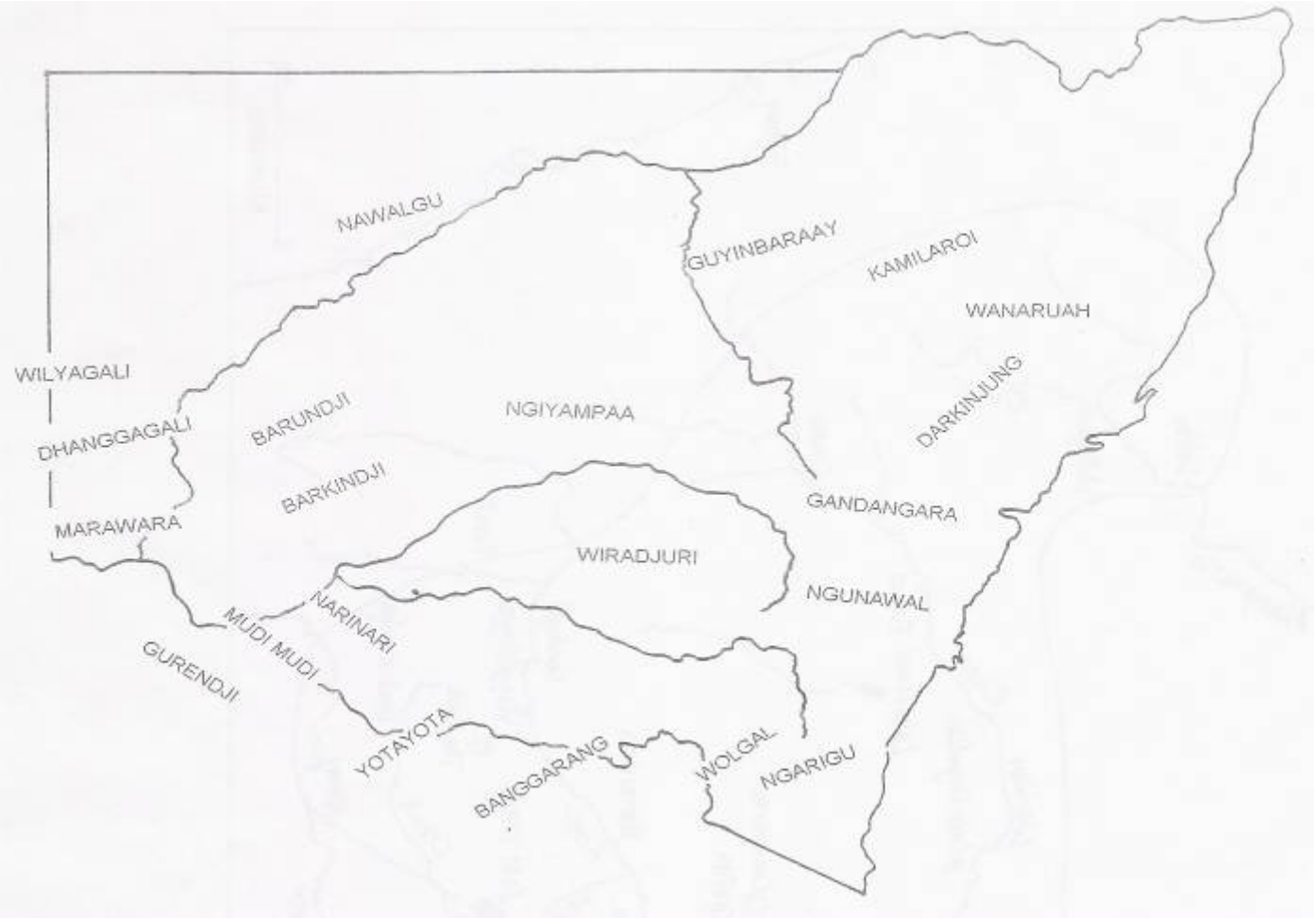
The territory covers hills in the east, river floodplains, grasslands and mallee country in the west. These environments provided all the materials necessary for survival as hunters and gatherers. On the floodplains there were rivers, creeks, billabongs, swamps and lakes which contained many fish, yabbies, mussels, crayfish and tortoises. The waterways were home to many wetlands birds, such as teal, wood duck, ibis and water fowl.
Following the winter floods there was plenty of food for a long time.

Away from the rivers the land was flat with few trees in the western area. The plains had many kangaroos and emus. When it rained the native grasses grew. Seeds of these grasses provided a reliable source of food. The roots of some plants provided good food.

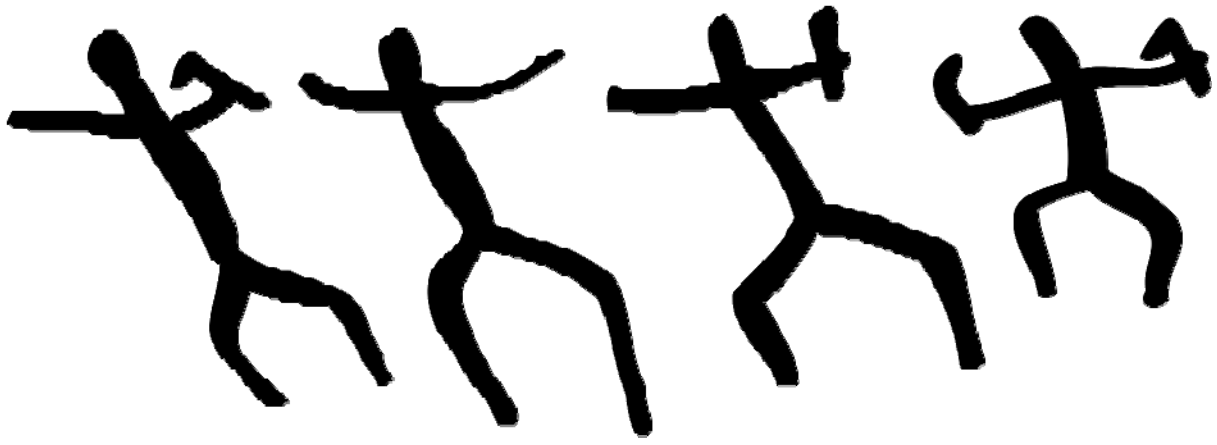
Each group had it's own area to live. The group of between 10 to 50 people would collect everything that they needed from the environment. They would move to a new camp when the food supply was getting low. As the seasons changed and animals hibernated or moved on, and plants became dormant, the group may have found it necessary to move to another site in their area.

Sydney
0
100
kilometres
Dubbo
Wellington
River
Macquarie
Cowra
Forbes
Lake Cowal
Lachlan
River
Lake Cargelligo
Tumut
Gundagai
Wagga Wagga
The Rock
Tumbarumba
Albury
Narrandera
Cocoparra
Griffith
Lake Urana
Creek
Jerilderie
Murray
River
Murrumbidgee
Creek
Yanco
Billabong
Hay
Booligal
Willandra Creek
Oxley

Neighbouring Aboriginal Areas



Note: Approximate location of each area.
The spellings used for different dialects vary.



Traditional Life

Wiradjuri have been custodians of the land for 40000 years
They have lived in harmony with the environment taking only what was needed
Groups of men, women and children travelled in groups following the seasonal availability of food and resources. Men and women would hunt and gather what they needed using many tools, weapons and methods.

Dreaming was very important. It is through dreaming that traditional ways were followed. Dreaming explains how the land, animals and plants were created. It also describes how people should act and behave.

People did not own the land but were responsible for looking after it. Each group had their own area to hunt and gather food. The size of the area varied according to the amount of food in it.

A group would consist of maybe 10 to 50 people depending on food supply and other things. Each group was based on family groups and relationships held to extended family groups. The Wiradjuri nation was made up of hundreds of groups living throughout the territory. These groups had the same language and the same beliefs. That is what made them a nation.

Each of the people had a specific relationship with the others in the group and the nation. The relationship rules came from the Dreaming and told them who they could marry and how they should live. It is how they got their totem. The dreaming also told of the ceremonial places that were sacred. The kinship rules meant that no-one would ever be alone without someone to care for them.

Society was built around religion and spirituality. **Baiame** was the creator and gave the laws for behaviour and custodianship of the land.

Once or twice a year the group would meet with others for ceremonies, corroborees and trading. Weapons, tools and decorations made by one group would be traded for things from another group. These meetings were important as they allowed peaceful gatherings between groups and nations.

Children learnt about life and ceremonies as they helped with the daily work. They would learn how to hunt and gather food by helping the women and men. As the children grew older they were taught more and more of the group's secrets. Education was a life long process. It was the women of the group who were responsible for teaching the children.

The group was semi nomadic and moved camp to follow the food supply of the seasons. During the cold time they wore a fur skin from a possum or kangaroo

around their shoulders to keep warm. Summers were hot so they wore a woven skirt or went naked.

The pattern of life was determined by the seasons.

For the boys an important time was their initiation. The initiation was carried out in a large ceremony called a **Burbung**. Invitations would be sent to neighbouring groups and even to other nations. Planning and preparation took many months. The burbung ground was prepared by clearing and marking trees. Guests arrived and camped facing their country. The ceremonies began when everyone arrived. The young boys were taken into the bush for training, testing and initiation into the next level of knowledge. Each boy would go through several initiations in their life before adulthood.

Corroborees were performed by each group. Bonds with each other and the spirits were strengthened. The Wiradjuri council would sit during this time to discuss important issues and set laws.

Burbungs were held at the seven mile near Narrandera, Yanco, Bundidgery Hill, Bald Hill (Charles Sturt University) and other places throughout the country.

There are many other sacred and important sites within the Wiradjuri area including ceremonial sites, carved trees, bora grounds, burial sites, dreaming sites and initiation areas
These sites were special areas where they could connect with the spirit of the lands

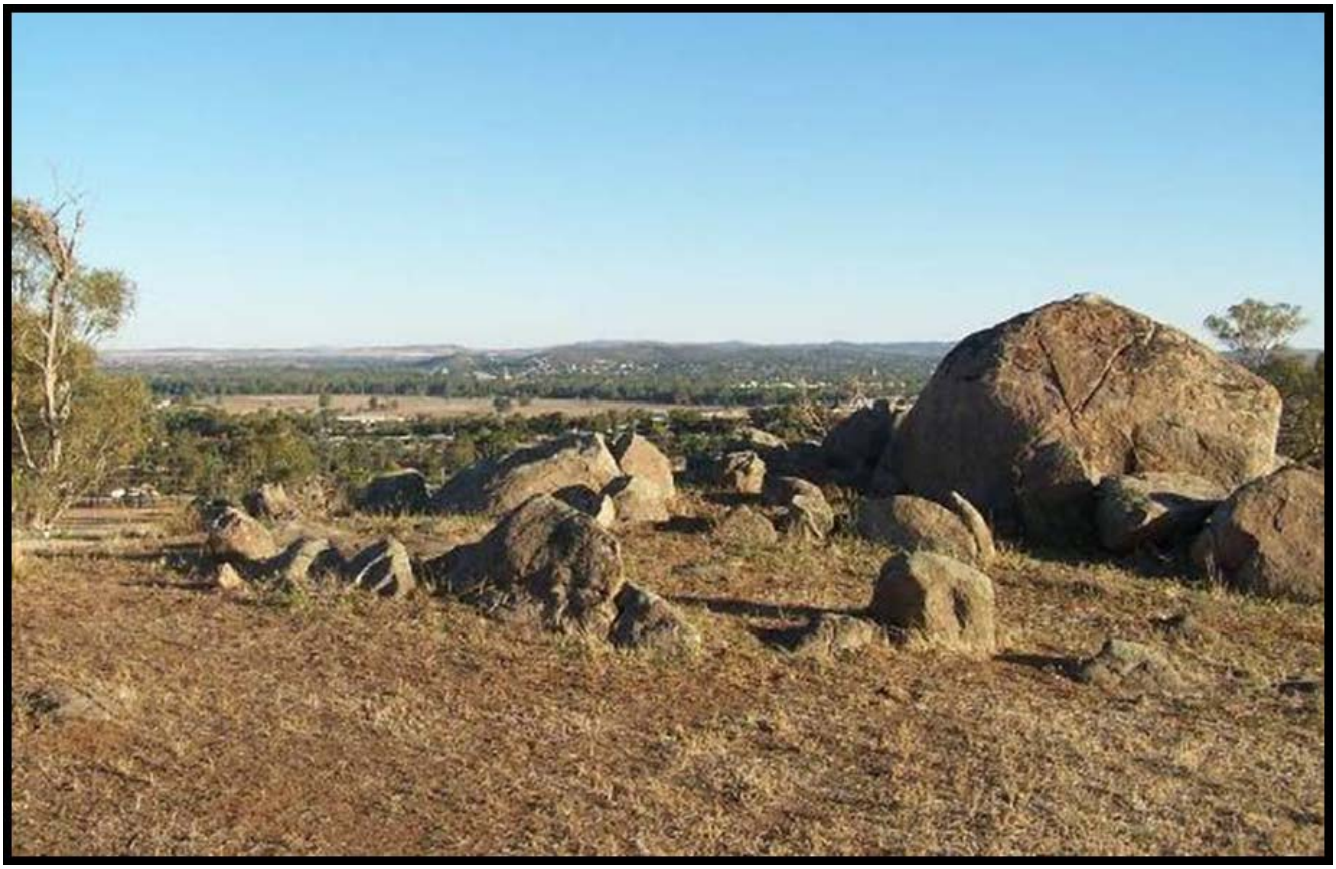
Water hole Manna Mountain

Indyamarra

The Wiradjuri people had many important places for ceremonies and meetings.

Indyamarra is just one of them. The Indyamarra site is located at CSU on the northern edge of Wagga Wagga. It is the top of a hill overlooking the floodplain of the Murrumbidgee river.

The meaning of Indyamarra is “Give honour, be respectful, polite, gentle, patient and honest with each other”



Totem

Each family has a special association with an animal, bird or fish. This is their Totem and each member of the family is linked to the totem through dreaming.

You can not harm or kill your totem. Strangers identified each other by totem, and could determine who was friendly and who was not friendly. A man would never consciously kill or hurt someone of his totem.

People with the same totem could not marry each other.

Some totems are listed below:

Giramul	Possum
Wagan	Crow
Birigun	Red Kangaroo
Yungai	Mallee Hen
Narrung	Jew Lizard
Gunir	Pademelon
Gular	Galah
Bidija	Chicken Hawk
Kukuburra	Kookaburra

Language

Wiradjuri was a spoken language, words were never written down. Most of the words were for outside things like sky, hills, plains, rocks, plants, animals and birds. Trees were not just called trees, there were different names for different types of trees eg, Cooba, Mugga. Some of these names have been adopted into English. There are many words to describe kinship and relationships. This shows that relationships were very important in traditional life.

There was no number system. People did not have to count large numbers of things. There were words for one, two and many, but no words for other numbers.

Quite a few Wiradjuri words remain but their meanings are not known. Other words have been adopted into present use, these are mainly place names.

This list contains some words and their meanings.

Baiame	Creator, sky ancestor
Karadji	Medicine man
Waaway	River spirit
Wirrigan	Clever man
Jerrabung	Old man
Burai	Boy
Migay, nirikai	Young woman
Lowanna	Young girl
Balli	Baby
Guni	Mother
Arana, Kara kara	The moon
Uloola	Sun
Kutu-mundra	Cootamundra clan
Narrung	Lizard
Narrungdera	Narrandera clan
Adelong	A plain near a river
Barellan	Meeting of waters
Boree	Fire
Cargelligo	Lake
Condobolin	Herbal hop bush
Gooramundra	Cootamundra, low lying
Currawarna	Pine trees
Grong Grong	Hot places (lots of ovens in sandhills)
Carcoar	Frog
Cobar	Red colour, burnt earth
Wallenbeen	Stoney hill
Dubbo	Head covering
Mibrulong	Rosella
Wantabadgery	Fighting
Tumut	By the river
Gundagai	Going upstream
Murray	Goes quickly
Murrumbidgee	Long water
Uardry	Yellow box tree
Gong	Water
Dadaloo	Storm, hail
Boona	Swampy country
Mogo	Stone axe
Animals	**Ballugan**
Mirri	Tame dingo
Patamba	Eagle
Crudine, guugar	Goanna
Nharrang	Frill-necked lizard
Wamboy, bandar	Kangaroo
Oorin, ngurring	Emu
Wandaiyallie	Echidna
Warramba	Turtle
Wilay	Possum
Guya, guuya, kuya	Fish
Ingar	Crayfish
Guddi	Snake
Jemalong	Platypus
Djirri-djirri	Willy wagtail
Guuguubarra	Kookaburra
Warrimoo	Eagle

Looking after the rivers and the land

Land and rivers were very important. There was no ownership of the land but instead people were the caretakers of the land. The environment was protected and respected as was tradition and law. By protecting the environment they ensured that there was always plenty of food and resources available.
Each area was looked after by a keeper called a Gunjung. This man of authority would protect the land from exploitation. He would stay in the area and make sure the rivers, the land and its animals were not exploited.

Some parts of the land was set aside as breeding grounds and sanctuaries areas where hunting was taboo. Parts of the plains near the rivers were left for birds that nest on the ground. Some of the lagoons and billabongs were set aside as waterbirds and fish breeding sanctuaries. An Emu breeding ground was Eunonyhareenyha near Wagga Wagga. Parken Pregan lagoon was a sanctuary for pelicans and swans. Curlews bred on the North Wagga flats. Other sanctuaries existed throughout the country. Cargellico and lake Cowal were bird and fish sanctuaries. Fish and crayfish were carried across land in coolamons to be put in other water holes for breeding.

Hunting or fishing could only take place in part of the area each year. Then next year another part of the area was used, never the same part 2 years in a row. Fishing was allowed on one side of a lake each year. Next year the other side was fished. Hunting during nesting season was banned. This ban lasted long enough for the young birds to fledge and become independent of the parent birds.

Fish traps and barriers were placed on some creeks. Lagoons, like Wollundry in Wagga Wagga were blocked off to hold fish in the lagoon for breeding and food. The bottom end of the lagoon was blocked with fallen trees and branches so fish could not be swept onto the floodplain during floods. Once the floodwaters receded any stranded fish on the floodplain were gathered up and placed back in the lagoon so they would not die.

When a Burbung (a large gathering of lots of people for initiations) was to be held, hunting and gathering in the area was banned for a long time before.

Shelter

The size of the group was determined by the amount of food available in the area and kinship relationships. Some groups were small with about 10 people, while other groups could have as many as 50 or even 100 members. Larger groups could only survive in areas with plenty of food supplies.

In the cooler season the group would chose a campsite with good water and plenty of food in the area. It was best to find a site that was protected from the westerly winds. Most campsites were near water because that is where the most food was to be found.

Central to the camp was a fireplace that was used to cook food and to keep warm. The fireplace was a hole in the ground and as food was cooked there, over time a pile of ash and scraps built up. There were other smaller fireplaces used by members of the groups for cooking or warmth located throughout the campsite, mainly near their gunyah.

Shelters were simple structures made with a frame of straight sticks and covered with leaves or sheets of bark. If Stringy-bark or paper-bark was around it was used. If there was no suitable bark then branches of leaves were used

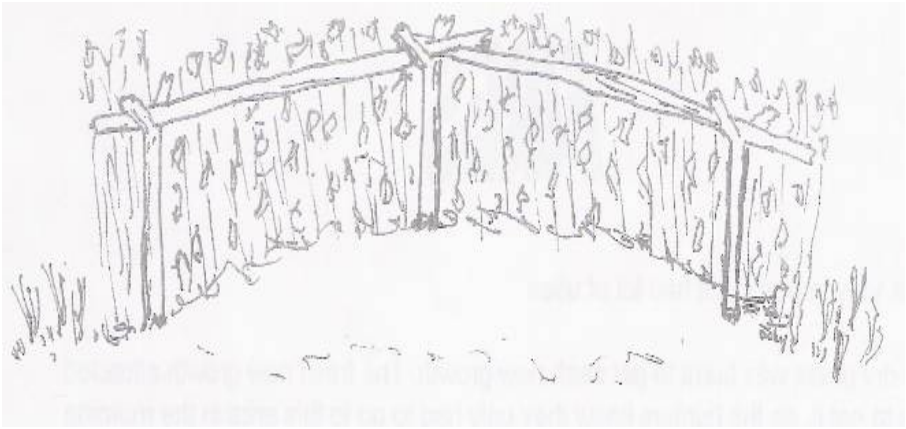
Each family had to **lean-to**, **mia-mia or humpy** (gunyah). Gunyahs were built on the south or western side of the camp so smoke from the fire did not blow into them. The lean-to was not big, just large enough for the family to sleep in. A forked stick was used at each end to place a pole along. Then other sticks and bark or boughs were leaned up against the frame.
If there was no natural shade on hot sunny days, a lean-to type of shelter was put up to provide protection from the hot sun.

Near some campsites you might find scarred trees, where coolamons were cut from them. Campsites near large bodies of water might have canoe trees nearby.
Campsites were never near initiation grounds because they were spiritual and you only went there for the initiation and then left.

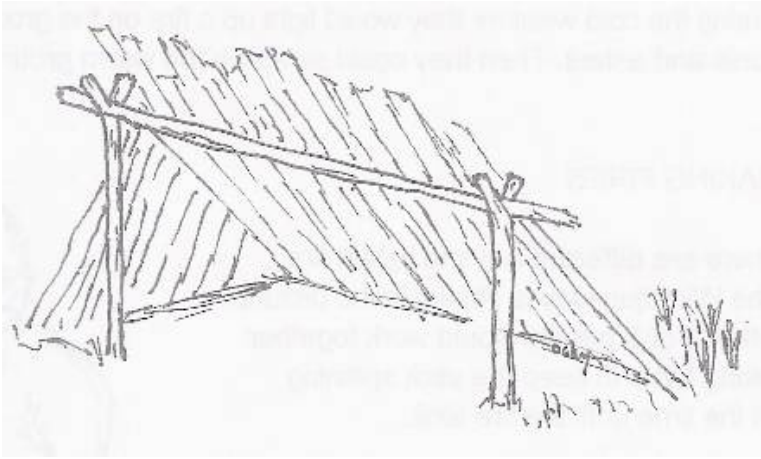
The campsite was left when the food supply ran low. This occurred at different times of the year with the changing seasons. By moving camps the food supply was never exhausted.
Some camps were almost permanent. The ones along a river with plenty of bush to support many animals and lots of fish in the water were semi-permanent.

In the warmer season, or while the group was on the move, only light shelters were needed. Windbreaks were made by placing branches in a semicircle blocking the wind. The group members slept behind the windbreak, often burning a fire to keep warm.

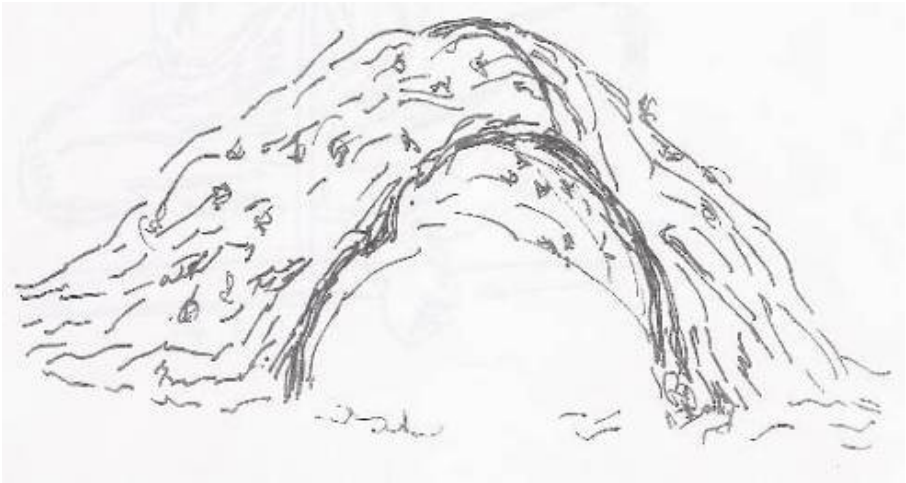
Windbreak – used in summer or while travelling. It could be set up quickly and left when the group continued on the next day.



Lean-to – the most common shelter.
Each family would have their own gunya in the camp.
It is waterproof. A fire could be lit outside for warmth.



Mia-mia – weatherproof shelter used in cold seasons. A family of 4 or 5 would sleep inside with a small fire at the front.



Examples of Shelters

Fire

Fire was very important. It had a lot of uses.

The old dry grass was burnt to get fresh new growth. The fresh new growth attracted animals to eat it, so the hunters knew they only had to go to this area in the morning or late afternoon and there would be some animals to kill. The animals would be taken back to the camp to be cooked up.

To keep warm they would light a few small fires, not big ones, around the group and sit between them. This was better than having one big fire because all the body was warm not just one side.

During the cold weather they would light up a fire on the ground then scrap out all the coals and ashes. Then they could sleep on the warm ground that the fire heated.

MAKING FIRES

There are different ways to light a fire.
The Wiradjuri used a fire drill stick. Often 2 or 3 people would work together taking turns to keep the stick spinning all the time until the fire tookhold. They used dry grass and very dry animal dung to get the fire started

FIRE STICK

When the group moved camp, it was someone's job to carry a burning stick and keep it alight. Often the group would stop to light up another stick as each one burnt up. This was much easier than lighting up a new fire using fire drill sticks.

Food

The land provided the group with everything they needed. They learned to manage the country so the resources were not used up. About half of the food eaten came from plants. Fish and birds were also important. It took about 5 hours every day to collect enough food for the group. The women, girls and young children would gather plant foods such as seeds, nuts and fruit. They also hunted small lizards and collected things like witchetty grubs. The men and older boys would catch larger animals and fish. In this way a variety of food was gathered for the group and everything was shared, cooked and eaten together. Everything of value was kept and used.

The particular plants that were eaten varied in different parts of the country.
Fruits, seeds and green vegetable plants were only available during the appropriate seasons.
Roots were an important food. They could usually be dug up all year round. The long roots (rhizomes) of Bracken Fern were chewed or beaten into a sticky starch. There are many native lilies with small tuberous roots which were collected for food, such as the Chocolate lily and Yam daisy. Along the rivers, Cumbungi or Bulrush was good nourishment, as was Water ribbons and Marsh Club Rush, which has hard tubers.

In the west, where it rains less, the plants are sparse. Here the groups relied more on the native grasses. Seeds were collected and ground into a flour to make into damper. Wattle seeds were eaten. There were also fruits of the 'bush tomatoes' and Quandongs.
Many Kangaroos and emus lived on the plains, though hard to kill, they provided plenty of meat.

The forest had plenty of possums that were not too hard to catch and they provided good meat.

Big old sugar gums could have as many as 50 witchetty grubs.

After the spring floods there was an abundance of food. As the water dried up the pools contained mussels, yabbies, fish and water reeds that could be eaten. Lots of bird eggs were collected and eaten during spring.

In dry seasons food was scarce, some of the edible plant species were dormant and grasses only grew after rain.

The cold weather in winter meant that many animals would hibernate and plants were dormant until the warmer spring weather. The cold weather made it difficult to gather and catch food. With frosts, fog and rain it was not pleasant getting food. This is the time that the group moved away from the river.

Emu and echidna was special tucker it was cooked in the ground. With the Emu, the gut was taken out and cleaned then stuffed with the heart, kidney and fat before it was placed in a separate part of the fire. Old men ate it. This delicacy was called **munku, puulpi or galingaar** depending on which part of the country you lived in. Kangaroo munku was good too. Female kangaroos (does) were eaten not bucks, the meat of the buck smells. Kangaroos were often cooked in the coals.

Seasonal changes in food

SPRING

Weather- Cool-

Rising river levels fill up Billabongs. Land animals move off flood plains

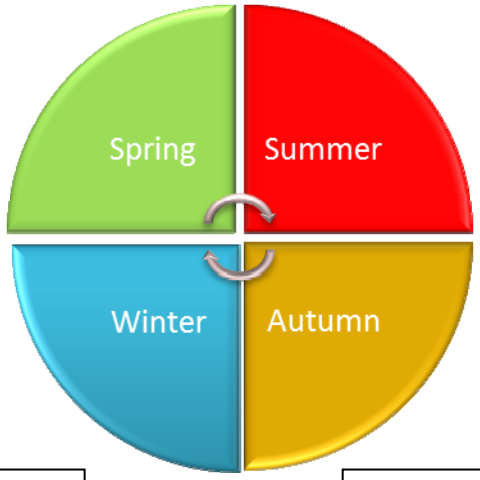
FOOD: Kangaroos, Emus and small animals such as lizards, possums, wombats, fish, mussels, yabbies, bird eggs, Witchetty grubs and water birds. Floods produced plenty of water vegetation such as native lilies with small tuberous roots- Chocolate lily, Yam daisy, Typha (Cumbungi), Bullrush, water ribbons and Marsh Club Rush which has edible tubers. Also plenty of seeds and roots

SUMMER

Weather- Hot and dry-

Water levels declining, many species of plants die off or lay dormant. Many grasses only grow after rain. Fish traps where made because of receding water. Clans would stay near the water ie; swamps, billabongs and rivers

FOOD: Fish, Crayfish, mussels, water birds, Typha roots (Cumbungi) and Wattle seeds to make damper



WINTER

Weather- Cold to freezing-

Hardest time of year to gather food as many animals hibernated, so they had to be dug out which took a lot of effort and time. The people had to move away from the rivers because it was too cold and foggy

FOOD: Wombats, echidna, snake, possum, kangaroo and Emu

AUTUMN

Weather-Cool to warm-

Rivers become very low. Animals return to the water holes and rivers because there was not a lot of vegetation on the plains

FOOD: Kangaroo, Emu, lizards, Typha (Cumbungi) and Wattle seeds to make damper

Cooking

Central to the camp was the **firepit**. A hole nearly a metre deep was dug. The main meals were cooked in this pit.

The main meal of the day was in the evening when the while group was in camp. A fire was lit to heat up clay balls that were made from the river clay. These balls were about as big as a cricket ball. If there wasn't any clay near the camp small rocks would be used.

The fire would heat up the clay then all but a few of the clay balls were dug out. Then leaves were put on them and the food was put on the leaves and covered with more leaves. The rest of the clay balls were added and the lot covered with ashes and dirt. The food would cook about two hours, then it was dug out and everyone could have a good feed.

Using the same oven over and over meant that a large mound of ash, burnt clay, charcoal and debris built up. These are now called **oven mounds**.

Birds and small animals were cooked by throwing them onto a fire whole, with the feathers or skin still on them. They didn't take long to cook up a bit as they were turned a couple of times. Yabbies were cooked on the coals. These foods were often cooked in the small fires that each family had near their gunyah.

Campsite Firepit

Tools and Weapons

Everything had to be either made of traded from another group. Nothing was wasted.
Water was sometimes carried in containers made from **animal skins** and food in baskets made from woven reeds.

Grinding stones were used for grinding seeds into flour.

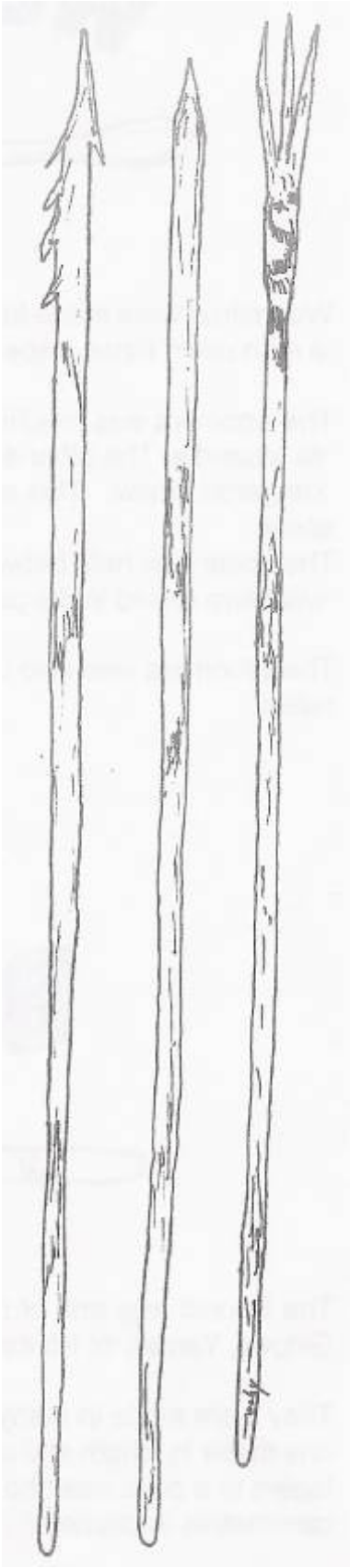
Canoes were important as they were necessary to transport people and things across water and were used in fishing. They were made from a single piece of bark cut from a tree, softened with fire and bent into shape. Clay from the river bed was used to plug holes.

Nets were used to trap fish, ducks and larger animals. Long mesh nets were strung across creeks or rivers to catch fish. Nets were dragged in shallow water by a few people to catch fish. Smaller nets were used to catch yabbies. A special net was made to catch Bogong Moths in summer
Duck nets were stung across creeks to trap the birds as they flew into them. A net was strung across a creek between two trees. Then some people would walk along the creek from the other direction and frighten the ducks. This made the ducks fly away. They always fly low along the creek and get caught in the net. When the birds became tangled the net was lowered to get them out.

Fish were sometimes caught with banks made of closely spaced stakes or stones placed across the mouth of a river channel, so that the fish were trapped when the floodwaters receded. Wollundry Lagoon and Parken Pregan Lagoon near Wagga Wagga were used for catching the holding fish in this way.
The Indigo plant was crushed up and placed in a pond of water. This would take the oxygen out of the water and the fish would float to the surface where they were collected. When they had enough fish they would stir up the water and the remaining fish would recover

Spear

Spears were always carried by men. They had several kinds of spears each one for a different purpose. Some spears were thrown by hand while others were thrown with a woomera.



Spears were usually 2-4 metres long, depending on the size of the owner.

Spears were made from Ironbark, Gidgee, Acacia (Wattles), Grass Trees, Cypress Pine, Mallee or common reed.

Each man would have hunting spears, fighting spears, fishing spears and ceremonial spears and he usually carried 3 or 4 spears at any one time.

Spears about 1.2m long made from the stalks of the common reed, with a wooden or bone point, were used to hunt small animals. For larger animals, long spears made from other wood were used. These were thrown by hand, or with a woomera.

Fishing spears were about 1.5m long. They were used to spear fish from a canoe or while swimming. Another tool used to catch fish was the **canoe stick**, a wooden tool shaped into a canoe paddle at one end and a spear at the other.

When making a spear the first job was to choose a suitable sapling. Once it was cut the wood was pulled through the hot ashes and gently turned so that it did not burn. This warmed the sap and made the wood pliable enough to be straightened. The next stage was to rub the shaft with a sharp stone, sand or shells to make it smooth, this job could take many hours. When almost completed it was smeared with fat, usually from a goanna or emu to preserve the wood

Spear sharpening grooves at Mount Manna

Woomera

Wommera is a tool used to throw a spear Woomeras were made from a piece of wood cut from a tree. Using a woomera a man could throw a spear very accurately over a long distance.

The woomera was roughly the length of the owner's arm. One end was used as a handle. The other end had a sharpened piece of wood tied with emu or kangaroo sinew. This sharp point was inserted into a hole at the end of the spear.

The spear was held between the thumb and forefinger, and the handles of the woomera held in the palm of the hand as the spear was thrown.

The woomera was also used as a boondi and as a shield when hunting or in battle.

Boondi

The Boondi was one of the most deadly weapons. It was made from Mulga, Gidgee, Yarran or Ironbark wood.

Boondis were made in different shapes, but was usually between a half to one metre in length and could be used as a club or throwing stick. The handle of a common Boondi tapers to a point near the handgrip. The other end widens into a bulb about 10 centimetres in diameter.

The shaping was carefully done, the length, weight and balance had to be just right. It was usual for a man to have several Boondis all slightly different.

Boondis were used for hunting and fighting

Shield

Shields were very important, they were used in ceremonies and fighting.
A man could become very skilled at using a shield to ward off spears and in fighting.

A fighting shield was made of hard wood with a strong handle

Stone Axe

Boomerang

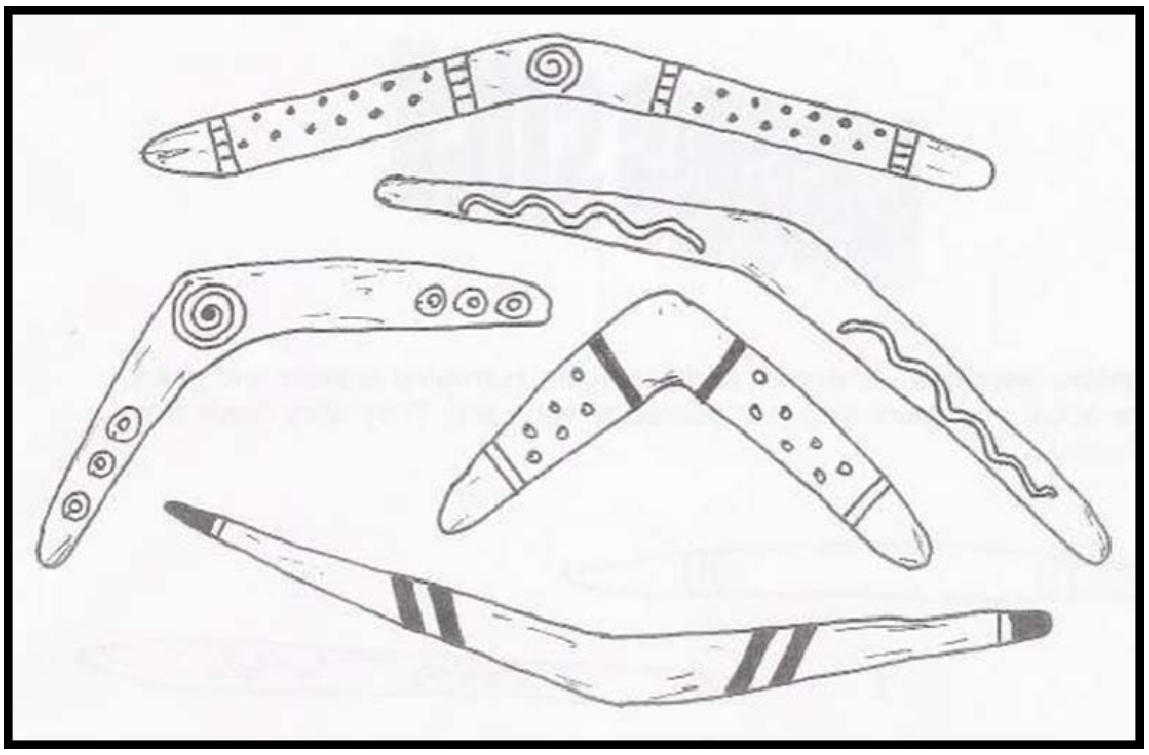
The Wiradjuri name for boomerang is "**Baddawal**".

It would take days to make a Boomerang. Finding a suitable piece of wood like a Red gum root, it was cut off the tree and the bark scrapped off. It was left in the water for a couple of months. Then cutting it into shape and scraping it with a mussel shell or sharp stone to make it smooth. Firing it to make it hard and to set it, then oiling it would take a long time, but the effort was worth it, because with 2 or 3 Boomerangs a man could get enough food to feed the family.

The returning Boomerangs were small and light, about 40cm long. They were used for games and to scare birds so they could be caught.

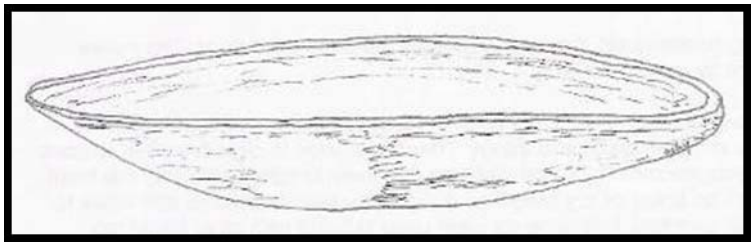
The bigger hunting Boomerangs (1m and 2kg) were the ones used most. They were made to fly straight for maybe 150m.

Boomerangs were used a lot. They were used to hunt animals and to dig up animals from in the ground or to get grubs and things. They were good to dig a fire pit or to scrap ashes onto what you are cooking. Some old men used them to light fires. They rub them across a log to light up grass or dry kangaroo dung. They can be used as clapsticks to make music or with a yadaki. Boomerangs were used in fights with other groups too.



Coolamon

A Coolamon is a dish like a bowl or pot.
Coolamons were used by women to carry water or food. Some women would balance them on their heads.



They were made from the elbow of a root or branch of a tree. Some were made of bark that was cut from a tree and the sides curved up by moulding it with fire.

The bark was cut with a stone axe
It took a while to cut off the bark.

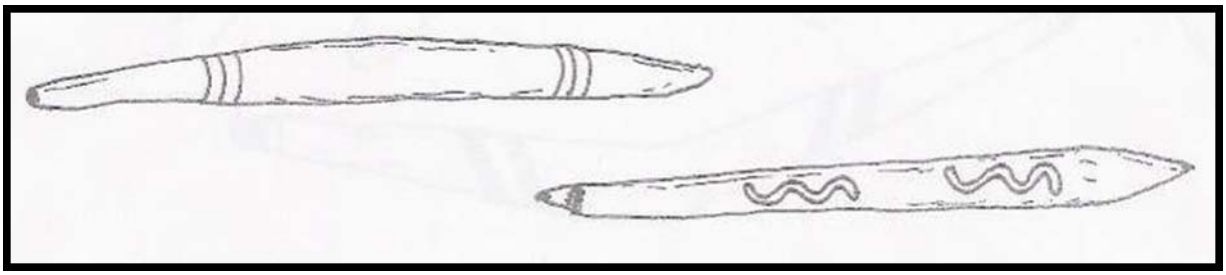
The Coolamon was lifted from the tree by wedging in a "lever" to prise it up. Stone axes or bits of stone were used to wedge out the piece. Sometimes Digging Sticks or the end of a Boondi was used. Whatever was around would be used.

The inside was smoothed by scraping it with a sharp stone or shells.

The tree is not harmed by taking bark for a Coolamon. The tree will have a scar where the bark was removed.

Digging Stick

Digging sticks were used by women to dig up roots, burrowing animals and grubs. They were about one metre long and pointed at each end. They were made from very hard wood. It took a long time to make a digging stick. First a suitable piece of hard wood had to be found. Then it had to be shaped and smoothed. Then it was preserved by rubbing in emu oil onto it.



Bullroarer

The Bullroarer is a flat piece of wood shaped and decorated by the owner. It was attached to a piece of string and swung around to make a unique sound.

It was used to warn people to stay away when men's business was taking place.

Children would sound the Bullroarer when they were playing in the bush to let their parents know where they were.

Weaving

A Traditional Women’s Dilly Bag

Women spent many hours weaving a variety of items used in everyday life. They used grass, water reeds, animal fur and other useful plants to make baskets, scoops, dilly bags, mats, mourning bags.

Selection of woven items by Aunty Kath Withers









Rope Making

Bark of the Stringybark Tree was used to make rope of various thicknesses. Men would cut the bark from a tree, separate the useful bits and weave it together to make very strong rope and string. The string was used to make nets for fishing or catching birds. The rope was used to build Gunyahs and many other uses.

Stringybark Rope, Raw Stringybark and Stringybark sheets

Message Stick

Traditional Message Sticks

When travelling through another groups area people carried a message stick.

The message stick explained who the person was and why they were travelling. It ensured safe passage, if you were caught in another groups area without permission there would be trouble.

Canoe

Bark canoes and rafts were used on rivers and lakes to get across the water. They were also used for hunting and fishing.

Bark was carefully cut from a tree using stone axes.
Using fire to soften the bark, it was rolled into shape. This had to be done very carefully as the bark could split easily. After the canoe was shaped animal skins and plant resin was used to plug holes so it would not leak.

Mostly the large River Red Gums were used as they had suitable bark and they grew along the rivers and lakes.

Cutting a canoe did not harm the tree, it left an oval shaped scar about three metres long on the tree. Many of these trees remain living today

ART

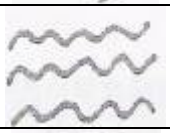
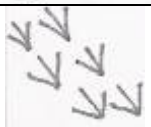
Art is a vital part of the culture. Art is an important component of ceremonies and rituals. Art was never just for the beauty of it. The practical or ceremonial purpose has always been more important than the aesthetic value.

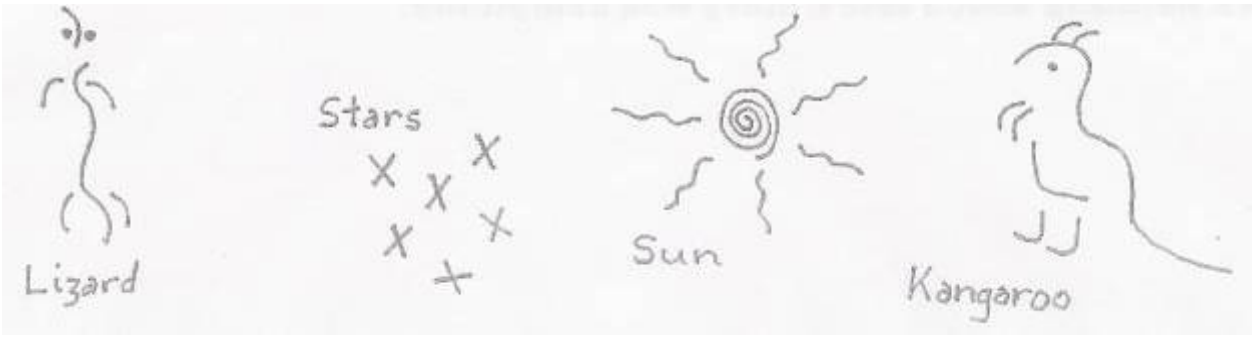
Tree carvings, ground designs and engravings were the main forms of art. Body painting was also an important art form, lots of ornaments and decorations were used.
In preparation for battles or corroborees the men used ochre to paint their bodies.

Ochre is a special type of clay that was collected or traded to get different colours. It is mixed with water to make paint.

A brush stroke method of painting was used. The end of a small green stick was flattened out like a paint brush by chewing on it. Then a painting which told a story was completed.

Examples of Art Symbols and their meaning

	Dots – meanings can be water, rain, people, places and tracks.
	Cross hatching – lines running into each other mean measuring distances and representing land.
	Rivers mountains, tracks, snakes, and also distances.
	Water sign has many meanings, Billabongs, waterholes, springs.
	Waterholes, special places, dancing grounds, whole area.
	Campsites, places of special importance.
	Campfire.
	Digging sticks, yams, coolamons.
	Bird tracks.



There are many more symbols

Scarred Trees

Trees were used in many different ways, but they were seldom cut down. Only the part needed was removed from the tree. This meant that the tree would survive and there was little effect on the environment, as a result some of these trees still exist today and we call them ‘scarred trees’.

There are different types of scarred trees:

- Trees which have some bark removed for use;
- Trees which have some wood removed for use;
- Trees which were cut in some way to make climbing them easier; and
- Trees which have a design carved on them. (This is covered later)

It took a while to cut off the bark and a lot longer to cut out a piece of wood. Stone axes or bits of stone were used to cut and wedge out the piece. Digging sticks and the end of a boondi was used sometimes. Whatever was around would be used.

Bark was cut off trees to make canoes. The canoes were used on rivers and lakes. Mostly the large River red gums were used as they had suitable bark and they grew along the rivers. Cutting a canoe left an oval shaped scar above three metres long.

Large sheets of bark were used to put on the lean-to shelter as a covering material. Bark was also used for coffins and wrapping the dead.

Throughout the area there are trees with small oval scars where bark was cut off to make Coolamons or Shields.

Some Coolamons were made by cutting off a gnarl caused by insects and hollowing it out.

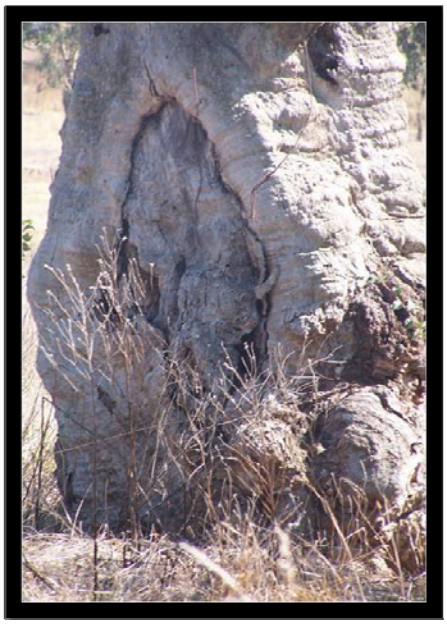
Wood was used to make all sorts of tools and weapons. Boomerangs were made from the elbow section of wood, like River red gum root that was exposed by the water washing away the soil.

Shields and Boondis were made of wood or bark. Spears and spear throwers as well as digging sticks were all made of wood and taking them off trees left scars on the trees.

Native bees and animals like possums live in old hollow trees. Someone would find the right tree by watching the bees or look for possum scratching on the trunks. Then one man would go up the tree, he would cut toeholds into the trunk as he went up to get the honey or catch the possum. Sometimes a small smoking fire was lit at the base of the tree to flush out the possum.









Tree Carving

Carved trees are the ones that have patterns cut into the bark or wood. The Wiradjuri were one of the main groups in Australia to develop tree carving as part of the culture. Actual designs were carved into the trees.

Most carvings were done on Box trees (a type of eucalypt) or Cypress Pine trees.

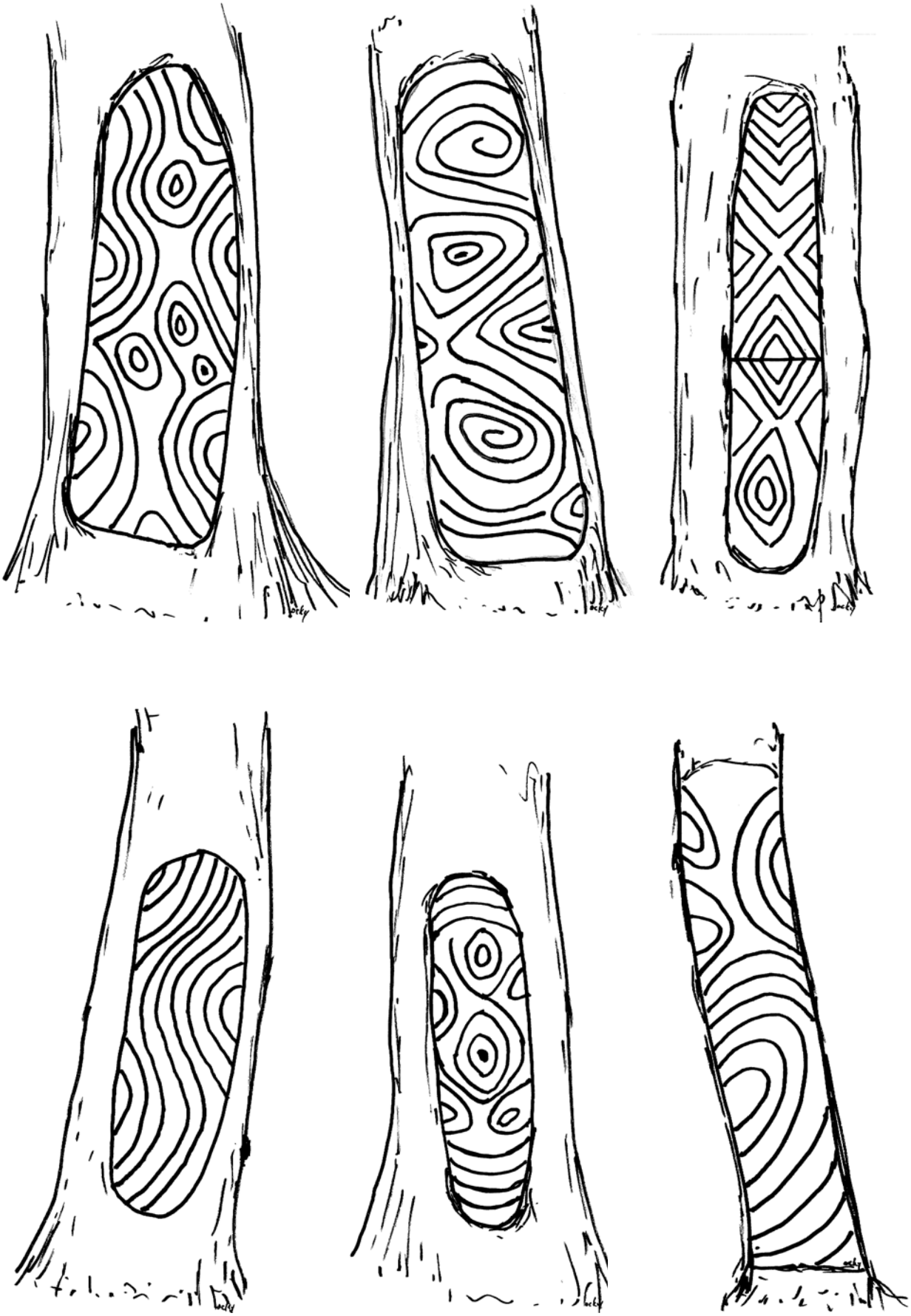
Tree carving was used to mark ceremonial grounds and burial sites of important people.
The initiation grounds were and still are very important and the carved trees warn people to respect them. Around the initiation ground several trees would be carved.

Wiradjuri carved complex designs to mark the burial sites of important men. The designs were associated with man and were thought to provide a pathway for his spirit. The carvings are like a headstone to identify the dead person's social standing. Mostly only one tree would be carved at a burial site but at some sites a few trees were carved with the carvings facing the burial site. The carvings were done by initiated men

A suitable tree was chosen and a piece of bark was cut off part of the trunk. Then the carving was cut into the wood. Most of the carvings are geometric designs with ovals, swirls and other shapes. Each tree was unique in its design.

Tree carving was a very skilful art. A stone axe was used to carve the design. It was difficult to cut the hard wood with the traditional tools.

Examples of Tree Carvings



Ring Trees

Ring trees were used to mark territory.
Young braches were bent and tied together. Over time the branches would grow together forming a ring.

This picture is **not** a ring tree but might help explain to students the concept. The location of any remaining ring trees is guarded to prevent any possible destruction

Resources

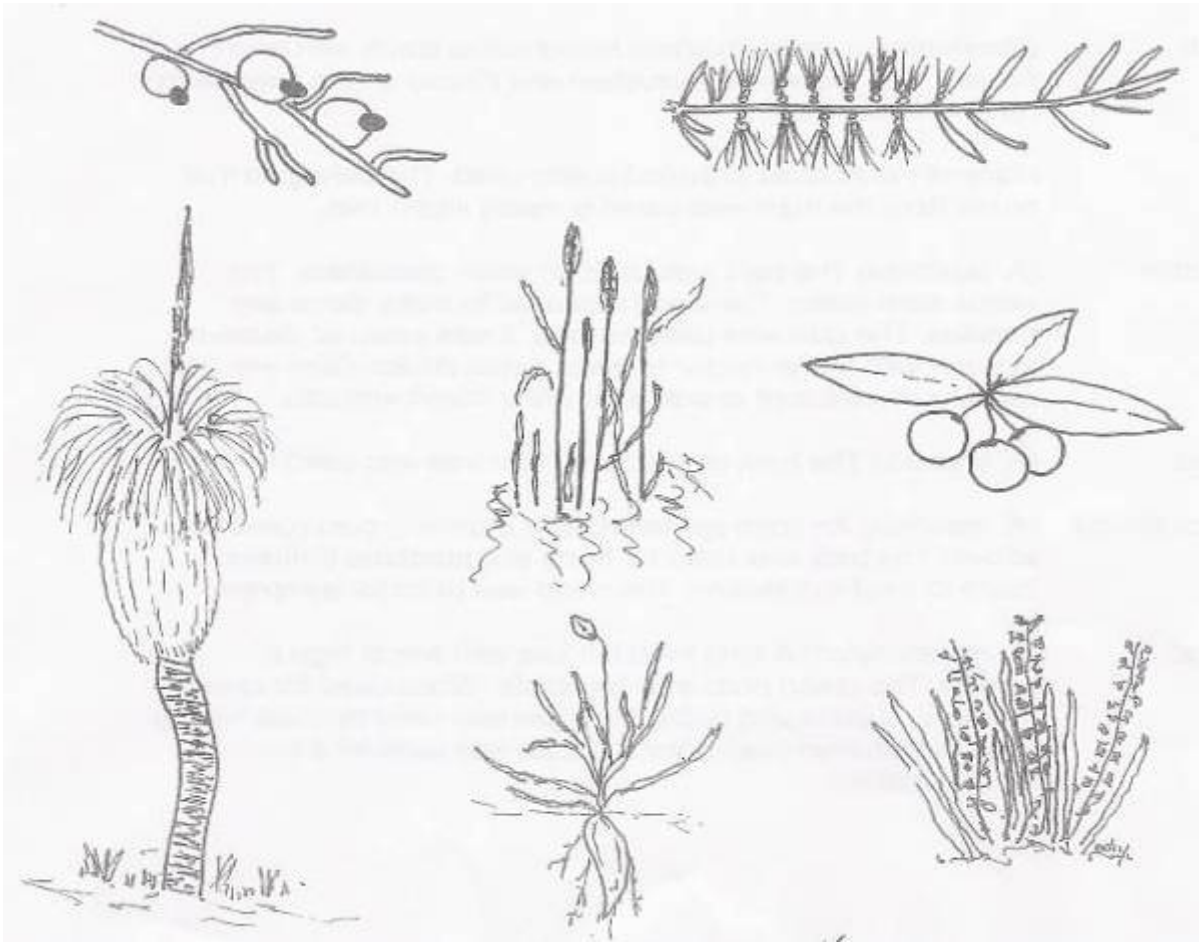
The land provided everything that was needed to survive. People were taught early to manage the rivers and land so that the resources were not used up.

Plants were used for many things besides food. The long leaves of sedges, rushes and lilies were collected to make baskets and mats, or soaked and beaten to free the fibres to make string. The bark of trees was used to make buckets, dishes and shields. River red gum was good for making canoes.

Medicines also came from plants. Native mint bushes were used to make remedies for coughs and colds, and the gum from gum trees, which is rich in tannin, was used for burns. Many plants were cultivated for their medicinal uses.

Nothing was wasted or destroyed the clan only collected what was needed. If they needed a piece of bark, it was cut off without killing the tree.

The following list shows how many of the plants were used:



Traditional Resource Plants of the Wiradjuri

Kurrajong	Slow growing tree. Seeds are high in protein & fat. They were eaten raw or roasted after the itchy hairs were removed. The gum and young roots were eaten. Young green pods were eaten to cure constipation.
Quandong	A difficult plant to grow. It is a parasitic plant. The fruit was eaten. The wood was used for fire drill sticks. Seeds were used as beads by women.
Native Cherry	(Exocarpos cupressiformis, E. aphyllus, E. sparteus) A small tree which is a root parasite. The fruit was eaten and the wood was used to make woomeras.
Casuarina	(She Oaks) The hard wood of the she-oak was used for making boomerangs, shields and clubs. Young shoots were chewed to quench thirst. The young cones were also eaten.
Native Indigo	(Indigofera australis) The leaves were crushed and put into pools of water to stun the fish so that they could be caught easily.
Mint Bush	(Prostanthera aspalathoides) An attractive shrub with bright flowers. The leaves were crushed and placed on the temples to relieve headache.
Wattles	Many of the Acacias provided edible seed. The pale gum that oozes from the trunk was eaten or made into drinks.
Silver Wattle	(A. dealbata) The bark was used for water containers. The seeds were eaten. The wood was used to make stone axe handles. The gum was used as food. It was eaten or dissolved in water with flower nectar to make sweet drinks. Gum was also used as an ointment or adhesive when mixed with ash.

Lightwood	(A. implexa) The bark of this 5m to 10m tree was used for fibre.
Late Black Wattle	(A. mearnsii) An open spreading tree provided gum (used as above). The bark was used for twine and medicine (infusion made to treat indigestion). The wood was used for weapons.
Blackwood	(A. melanoxylon) A long lived tall tree with seeds high in protein. The green pods may be edible. Wood used for spear throwers, shields and clubs. The fibre was used to make fishing lines. An infusion made from the bark was used as a treatment for rheumatism.
Umbrella Wattle	(A. oswaldii) A rare shrub with edible seeds.
Golden Wattle	(A. pycnantha) 2m to 5m shrub providing gum (used as above).
Creeping Saltbush	(Atriplex semibaccata) A groundcover with edible red fruit.
Inland Pigface	(Carpobrotus modestus, Sarcozona praecox) The salty tasting leaves were eaten fresh or cooked, or the juice squeezed out to drink. The sweet red succulent fruit ripen in summer when it was eaten raw.
Ruby Salt Bush	(Enchyena tomentose) A prostrate plant with tasty red button-like berries. Leaves were used as a green vegetable.
Thorny Saltbush	(Rhagodia spinescens) The red fruits were used to make paint for the face.
Nodding Blue Lily	(Stypandra glauca) The new shoots were crushed to obtain juice which was put on cuts to aid healing.
Flax Lily	(Dianella revoluta) A robust tufted spreading plant. The fibre was used to make baskets and nets. The shiny dark blue berries were eaten and used to obtain blue dye.

Chocolate Lily	(Dichopogon strictus) Tuberous roots were eaten, sometimes roasted.
Fringed Lily	(Thysanotus tuberosus) Tuberous roots were eaten.
Other Lilies	(Murnong, Bulbine and Vanilla Lilies) The tubers were dug up and eaten.
Old Man Weed	(Centripeda cunninghamii) A medicinal plant. Large bundles of the plant were boiled and used as a tonic for colds and as a skin lotion.
Cumbungi	(Typha species) Known as Bulrush by some groups. A multi-purpose plant. The roots were steamed. The young shoots were eaten raw. The fibre was used to make nets.
Phragmites	The tall bamboo-like stems made good spears, and were also cut up into short lengths to make necklaces. The leaves were used to make bags and baskets. The young underground stems were eaten.
Club Rush	(Bolboschoenus) The large underground tubers were roasted like cakes.
Tall Spike Rush	(Elocharis sphacelate) The young underground stems were eaten.
Nardoo	When the seasonal flood waters dried up, the hard sporocarps were collected and made into damper.
Mat-rush	(Lomandra longifolia) The long smooth leaves were used to make baskets and mats. The flowers provided nectar. Tufts of leaves were pulled from the clump and the white bases were chewed.
Basket Sedge	(Carex tereticaulis) The strong fibres along the stems were used for making baskets.

Native Broom	(Viminaria juncea) Used as a windbreak and for shelters.
Hop Bush	(Dodonaea viscose) Leaves were chewed to relieve toothache (the juice was not swallowed).
Bracken Fern	(Pteridium esculentum) Rhizomes were roasted.
Native Raspberry	(Rubus hillii, parvifolius) A bush similar to the blackberry. The red fruits were eaten. Small leaves were soaked in warm water and drunk to relive stomach upsets. Ripens in the December-January period.
Current Bush	(Leptomeria) Has edible fruit which is tasty when cooked.
Austral Mulberry	(Hedycarya mulberry) The most important use of this mountain shrub was as sticks for fire-drills (used to make fire). The sticks were traded from group to group from the mountains to the western plains.
Manna Gum	(E. viminalis) Where holes have been made by insects in the young branches, sap flows out and dries into hard sugary drops, this was eaten. The wood was used for implements such as shields and bowls.
River Red Gum	(E. camaldulensis) The bark was used for canoes. Suitable roots were made into boomerangs.
Red Box	(E. polyanthemos) Coolamons were made from this tree.
Cypress Pine	The resin was used as glue. Leaves were smoked over a fire and soaked to make a wash or mixed with fat to make an ointment for medicinal purposes.
Grevilleas	Nectar was obtained from the flowers.

Bottlebrush	(Callistemon spp.) Nectar was obtained from the flowers.
Grass Tree	(Xanthorrhoea) The bases of the leaves are sweet and nutty and the heart of the stem was eaten. Nectar was collected from the tall spike flowers. The dry flower stems were used for spears and fire-drill sticks. The tough leaves were used as knives to cut meat. Resin collected at the base and was used for glue. Large grubs living in the plant were collected and eaten.
Grasses	Seeds of many grass species were eaten. Fibre was used to make string for nets.
Kangaroo Grass	(Themeda triandra) Easy to grow tussocky grass. Seeds were ground and baked. The fibre in the leaves and stem was used to make fishing nets.
Wallaby Grass	(Danthonias) Easy to grow. Used as above.
Windmill Grass	(Panicum decompositum) In late summer and autumn the small seeds were roasted or baked into damper.

The following are not traditional Wiradjuri foods, but are useful in bush tucker gardens:

Lilly Pilly	(Acmena smithii or Eugenia smithii and Syzygium species) These are trees with dark green foliage and tasty fruit. The fruit was eaten and has been made into jams. This is an easy to grow tree with tasty fruit.
Phalaris	This introduced tussock grass was quickly utilised the seeds were ground and cooked.