

# VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL LIFE AND CUSTOMS

THROUGH EARLY EUROPEAN EYES

DAVID FRANKEL

JANINE MAJOR



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**WARNING:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers should be aware that this book contains images and names of people who have since passed away.

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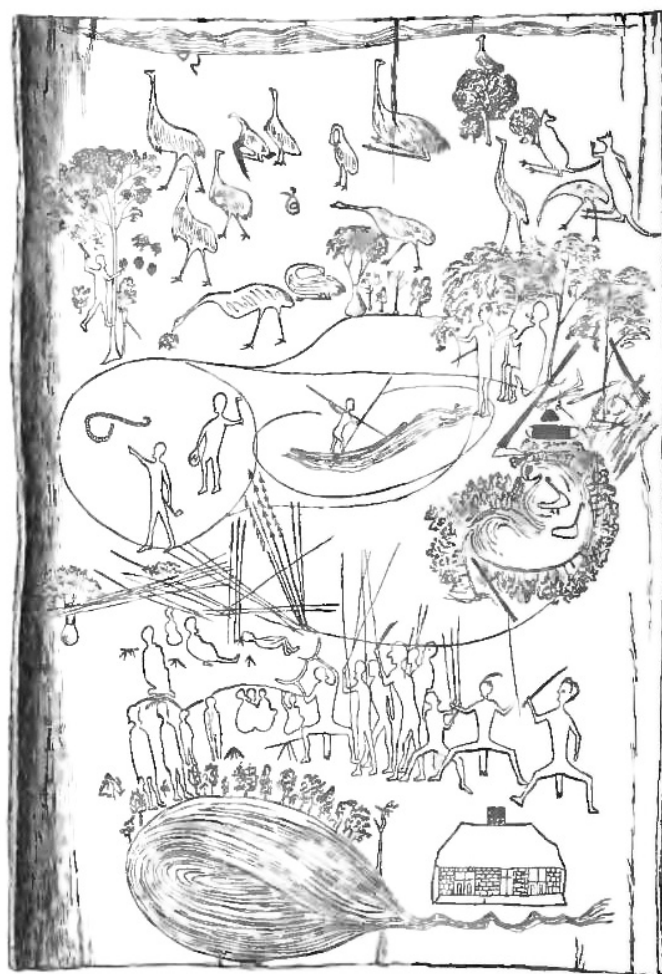
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## Acknowledgments

We are grateful to colleagues who encouraged this project, made suggestions for entries and provided opinions and advice. In particular we would like to thank Richard Broome, Ian Clark, Jillian Garvey, Beth Gott, Isabel McBryde, Russell Mullett, Lynette Russell and David Thomas for their valuable comments even where we have been unable to follow their suggestions.

An earlier, unillustrated, version of this book was published as *Kulin and Kurnai: Victorian Aboriginal Life and Customs* (Messmate Press, 2014). We would like to thank Fiona Salisbury, Kathy Russell and all the others in the La Trobe University Library who enthusiastically helped transform it into this improved form and to make it available as a freely downloadable e-book. We would also like to thank the copyright holders who have given permission for us to include so many illustrations.

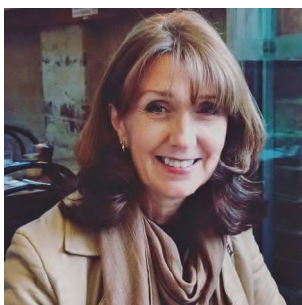


'ABORIGINES OF VICTORIA' FACE: 286' BY ROBERT BROUGH SMYTH FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0

## About the Editors



Emeritus Professor **David Frankel** studied archaeology at the University of Sydney and Gothenburg University, where he specialised in Cypriot prehistory. After some years in the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities, The British Museum, he returned to Australia in 1978 to take up a lectureship at La Trobe University. Retiring after 35 years at La Trobe, he maintains a close connection with the Department of Archaeology and History. In 2015 he was awarded the Rhys Jones Medal by the Australian Archaeological Association. His primary research interests are in Australian Aboriginal archaeology with particular reference to south-eastern Australia and in the archaeology of Bronze Age Cyprus. He has excavated a range of sites in Australia and Cyprus and published extensively on the archaeology of these areas. His latest book is *Between the Murray and the Sea: Aboriginal Archaeology in South-Eastern Australia* (2017).



**Janine Major** studied a Bachelor of Arts majoring in archaeology at La Trobe University before completing a PhD on Natufian (Epi-palaeolithic) images in the ancient Near East in 2012. She has undertaken archaeological fieldwork in Cyprus and Jordan as well as historical and Aboriginal sites throughout Victoria and New South Wales. Over many years she has taught a variety of subjects in the Archaeology Department at La Trobe University including cultural heritage management. She held the position of Manager of the Archaeology Team at GML Heritage Consultants before taking up her current role with the Office of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, Aboriginal Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

# General Notes



## Language

We have left these extracts as they were originally written or published. Names of groups are as these were understood at the time and may not match current usage. Some terms in common use by Europeans in the nineteenth century may now be regarded as inappropriate or unacceptable. Similarly, the way in which people and activities are described may sometimes, at first sight, appear offensive. This was more often than not far from the writers' intentions. We trust readers will judge the style and wording as representative of their time, not of ours, including that which appears on the title of paintings and images used to support the text.

The original style and spelling have been retained, so there is some variation from one entry to another. This is most noticeable in the reporting of Aboriginal words and names. We have, however, replaced outdated or incorrect botanical taxonomic identifications following Beth Gott's invaluable database on Indigenous use of plants.

## Organisation

The source of each extract is given at the end of the text, linked to the full bibliographic information.

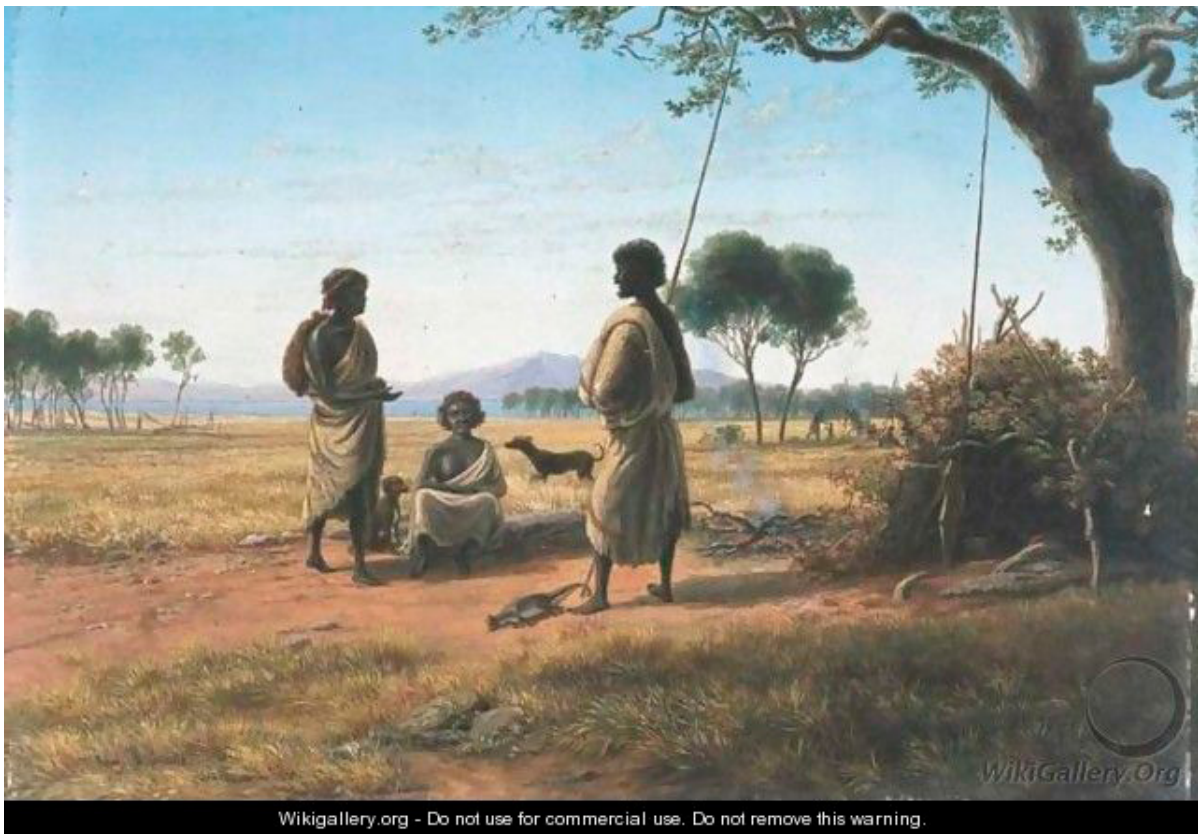
Extracts are grouped under 19 major headings with some subdivisions within each. Naturally some could have been placed in two or more sections. A good example of this are accounts of the access to, manufacture, exchange and use of stone hatchet-heads, which can be found variously under Sites (Quarries), Social Organisation (Disputes), Tools and Technology (Axes; Bark; Stone and quarries), Trade and Exchange (Stone). Here we hope the Index will provide a useful key.

At times the area where observations were made is readily apparent in the abstracts. Where this is not the case, further information may be found from the reference; this varies from the specific to the general locality. Where precise dates are known, these are also noted. In a few cases there are differences between the transcriptions and editing of manuscript sources: the version used is generally that given first in the Notes.

## Major sources and reading

This brief list includes the more accessible and substantial sources we have used as well as additional reading on the broader context of Aboriginal society and history in Victoria.





'ABORIGINAL GROUP NEAR GEELONG' FROM WIKIGALLERY USED UNDER CC0

### **Ethno-historical sources**

Harry Allen (ed.), Australia. William Blandowski's Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2010.

Thomas F. Bride, Letters from Victorian Pioneers. Government Printer, Melbourne, 1889 (2nd edition, Currey O'Neil, South Yarra, 1969).

R. Brough Smyth, The Aborigines of Victoria: With Notes Relating to the Habits of the Natives of Other Parts of Australia and Tasmania. Government Printer: Melbourne, 1878.

Michael Cannon, M. (ed.) Historical Records of Victoria, Foundation Series. Government Printing Office, Melbourne, 1981–1983.

Edward M. Curr, The Australian Race: Its Origins, Languages, Customs, Place of Landing in Australia, and the Routes by which it Spread itself over that Continent. Government Printer, Melbourne, 1886.

James Dawson, Australian Aborigines. The Languages and Customs of Several Tribes of Aborigines in the Western District of Victoria, Australia. George Robertson, Melbourne, 1881



(facsimile edition, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1981).

Alfred W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*. Macmillan, London, 1904 (facsimile edition, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1996).

Ian D. Clark (ed.), *The Port Phillip Journals of George Augustus Robinson: 8 March–7 April 1842 and 18 March–29 April 1843*. Monash Publications in Geography 34, Monash University, 1988.

Ian D. Clark, G.A. Robinson's 1841 Expedition. *Memoirs of the Museum of Victoria* 1: 97–129, 1990.

Ian D. Clark (ed.), *The Journals of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, Volumes 1–6*. Heritage Matters, Beaconsfield, 1998, 2000.

Gary Presland (ed.), *Journals of George Augustus Robinson. Records of the Victorian Archaeological Survey* Volume 5, 1977; Volume 6, 1977; Volume 11, 1980.

Ron Vanderwal (ed.), *Victorian Aborigines: John Bulmer's recollections 1855–1908* compiled by Alastair Campbell. Museum of Victoria, Occasional Papers, Anthropology & History 1, 1994.

## General

Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: A History since 1778*. Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2010.

Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: A History since 1800*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2005.

Ian D. Clark, *Aboriginal Languages and Clans: An Historical Atlas of Western and Central Victoria, 1800-1900*. Monash Publications in Geography 37, Monash University, Melbourne, 1990.

David Frankel, *Remains to be Seen: Archaeological Insights into Australian Prehistory*. Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1991.

David Frankel, *Between the Murray and the Sea. Aboriginal Archaeology in Southeastern Australia*. Sydney University Press, 2017.

Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*. Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2011.

Beth Gott and John Conran, *Victorian Koorie Plants*. Yangennanock Women's Group, Aboriginal Keeping Place, Hamilton, 1991.

Ian Keen, *Aboriginal Economy and Society. Australia at the Threshold of Colonisation*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004.

Pascoe, Bruce. *Dark Emu Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident?* Magabala Books, 2014.

Gary Presland, *First People. The Eastern Kulin of Melbourne, Port Phillip & Central Victoria*. Museum Victoria, Melbourne, 2010.

Gaye Sculthorpe, *Guide to the Victorian Collections in the Museum of Victoria*. Museum of Victoria, Melbourne 1990.

Nellie Zola and Beth Gott, *Koorie Plants Koorie People: Traditional Aboriginal Food, Fibre and Healing Plants of Victoria*. Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne, 1992.

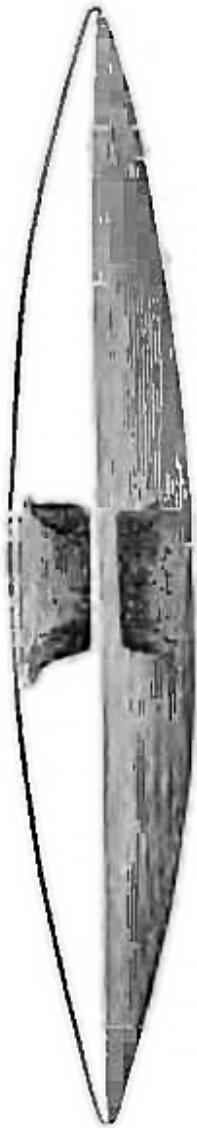
## Units of Measurement

Imperial	Abbreviations	Metric
inch	in, “	2.54 cm
foot (12 inches)	ft, ‘	30.5 cm
yard (3 feet)	yd, yrd	91.44 cm
mile (1760 yards)	mi	1609.34 m
acre		0.404 ha
ounce	oz	2.8 g
pound (16 ounces)	lb	0.45 kg

WARNING: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers should be aware that this book contains images and names of people who have since passed away.

Readers who are interested in learning more about Aboriginal cultural heritage in their local area or areas referred to in this book are encouraged to contact the relevant Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAP), or Traditional Owners in areas where there is currently no RAP. RAPs have legislated decision-making responsibilities for protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage in their areas under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006. Contact details for RAPs can be found at: <http://www.vic.gov.au/aboriginalvictoria/heritage/registered-aboriginal-parties.html>

# Introduction



This selection of observations of Aboriginal life in nineteenth century Victoria presents comments by European invaders of the peoples they were displacing. Despite the inherent limitations of any such views from the outside these extracts provide us with an important source of information. A selection of contemporary illustrations, which range from rough sketches to professional paintings have been included where appropriate images are available. Artefacts in museum collections, archaeological evidence and the traditions and knowledge retained by Aboriginal people today can provide other perspectives on many issues.

We have not attempted a comprehensive review of all the available sources but have selected short extracts which, we feel, will serve a valuable role in teaching Indigenous Studies, Victorian history and as a resource for Aboriginal communities. We hope it will also encourage renewed interest in the wealth of material available and serve as a starting point for further research on themes, issues and regional patterns of behaviour.

We have limited ourselves to material from the nineteenth century and predominantly from within the State of Victoria, although obviously its borders had no meaning for Indigenous communities.

In making our selections we have deliberately left out comments and discussions of interaction between Indigenous people and settlers: that important area demands general recognition and deserves an equivalent set of readings of its own. Instead we focus on descriptions of traditional practices which give glimpses of a rich and complex world. In doing so we have preferred straightforward accounts to those where opinions, analyses and explanation intruded into the author's descriptions and narratives. We have also left out material that might be culturally sensitive. Our own background as archaeologists may account for any bias toward aspects of material culture, technology and economy.

In many places several descriptions of similar activities or events are included. Sometimes these mirror one another: where these are independent observations they provide a measure of reliability. Where they differ this may reflect differences in what was understood by the observers or real variations in customs or practice in different parts of the state or by individuals. Here it is important to emphasise that while there was much in common, Aboriginal people in different areas of Victoria had many local customs and patterns of life influenced by the varied environments and available resources.

Our extracts are taken from a wide variety of sources. Some are official documents prepared for government reports, others are personal diaries written at the time or reminiscences compiled long after events took place. Some are casual descriptions, others more considered discussions contributing to anthropological debates of the time. The writers were explorers, government officials, missionaries and settlers whose abilities and interests differed and whose observations vary in reliability. We must therefore consider the experience, knowledge

and preconceptions which influenced how individual Europeans perceived events and what they chose to report, especially considering problems of language and communication and innumerable cultural filters. In this regard we should note that all but one of these reporters were men, so that attitudes toward women prevalent in European society were at times projected onto Indigenous society. We must also bear in mind when descriptions were written and distinguish between direct personal observations and later second-hand accounts. While the earliest observers saw Aboriginal people still leading traditional lives, none of them were entirely unaffected by the invasion.

The rate of European settlement and the speed with which the colony developed is remarkable. Within a few years Europeans had moved into most areas of the state, transforming the landscape and setting in place patterns of settlement, attitudes and practices which still affect us today. The impact on Indigenous communities was immediate, and in some cases even preceded the arrival of settlers, especially where introduced infectious diseases decimated communities.

Most settlers gave little thought to Aboriginal custom, seeing local people as a troublesome problem, but from the earliest period others developed an intense interest in the subject. By the later nineteenth century this was tinged by nostalgia for a 'lost' society, and by a feeling that it was important to document, so far as was possible, information on Aboriginal Victoria. This led to the official commissioning of substantial reviews such as R. Brough Smyth's two volume *Aborigines of Victoria* (1878) as well as individual retrospective descriptions exemplified by James Dawson's *Australian Aborigines* (1881) or Christina (Mrs James) Smith's *The Booandik Tribe* (1880) and compilations such as Edward Curr's work on languages (*The Australian Race*, 1886). Other major studies, such as those of Alfred Howitt, notably his *Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, also served the growing interest in anthropology in Europe, often focusing on kinship and social relations, which were seen at the time to be a key to understanding social evolution.

Many modern researchers have made use of these data, often providing summaries compiled from numerous accounts but also as the basis for describing aspects of life and colonial encounters in particular areas. Perhaps the best examples of the general use of ethno-historical sources is to be found in Isabel McBryde's edited volume on New England (1978) and Sylvia Hallam's *Fire and Hearth* (1975). But locally we have important studies such as Beth Gott's comprehensive compilation of detailed information on Koorie plant foods, Ian Clark's documentation and detailed analysis of Kulin clans and languages (1990), Marie Fels study of the Mornington Peninsula through the notes and journals of William Thomas (2011) and Mick Woiwood's (2012) database of ethnographic accounts of the Wurundjeri. Especially valuable is the work both Ian Clark and Gary Presland have put in to make Robinson's manuscript journals available to all.

Finally, we recognise that this type of book can be dangerous. Each extract could be contextualised within a complex analysis of implicit colonial, ethnocentric, paternalistic, chauvanistic and racial biases. Such critical studies have their place. Here our aim and approach is different: to provide glimpses into past activities, often removed, to be sure, from their broader context, but allowing the nineteenth century observers, if not the people they observed, to speak for themselves.

## Some Key Figures

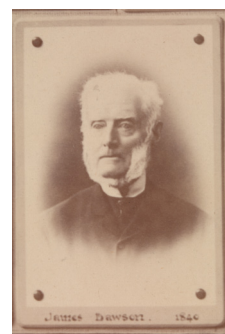
The European observers whose words we have included came from a variety of backgrounds, with levels of knowledge and with different motivations. Some indication of this diversity can be seen in these brief notes on some of the more significant writers.



'GEORGE AUGUSTUS ROBINSON' FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0

**George Augustus Robinson (1788–1866).** From 1829 Robinson worked with Tasmanian Aborigines, eventually setting up the ill-fated settlement at Wybalenna on Flinders Island. His diaries are a major source of information on Tasmanian Aboriginal life. Between 1839 and 1849 he was employed in Victoria as Chief Protector of Aborigines to mediate between Aboriginal communities and European colonists. Apart from his official reports, his private diaries of travels through parts of Victoria provide invaluable information both on aspects of Aboriginal life and also the effects of European settlement.

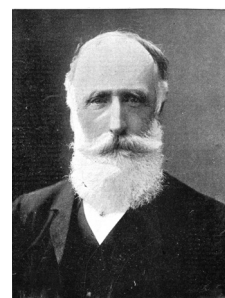
**James Dawson (1806–1900)** had a property near Port Fairy between 1844 and 1866. He then lived for a time near Melbourne before moving to Camperdown. From 1876, when he was appointed Local Guardian of the Aborigines, he, together with his daughter Isabella collected much information from Aboriginal informants in the area around Camperdown which were published in 1881.



'JAMES DAWSON, 1840' BY JOHNSTONE, O'SHANNESSEY & CO. FROM SLV USED UNDER SLV TERMS OF USE.

**Peter Beveridge (1829–1885)** settled near Swan Hill in 1845 at the age of sixteen. He became fluent in several Aboriginal languages and over many years observed and documented Aboriginal life along the Murray, Murrumbidgee and Darling River which he published in a series of studies on different customs.

**Alfred W. Howitt (1830-1908)** Famous as an explorer, Howitt led the expedition to rescue Burke and Wills. He held a variety of official positions in Victoria and developed a serious interest in Victorian Aboriginal customs between 1877 and 1907, collecting much information from Aboriginal informants such as William Barak. His



'MR. A. W. HOWITT, AUDIT COMMISSIONER' BY JOHNSTONE, O'SHANNESSEY & CO. FROM SLV USED UNDER SLV TERMS OF USE.

work (some together with Lorimer Fison) made a significant contribution to the developing discipline of anthropology in the late nineteenth century.

**R. Brough Smyth (1830–1899)** Smyth was an official in the mining industry and prepared many reports and catalogues. From 1860 he was the Honorary Secretary of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines. In this capacity he collected information from numerous sources which were included in the two volume *The Aborigines of Victoria* published by the Victorian Government in 1878.

**John Bulmer (1833–1913)** Motivated initially by observations of the bad treatment of Aboriginal people on the goldfields and elsewhere, Bulmer began work on Church of England missions, initially at Yelta near the Murray and later at Lake Tyers. His notes and recollections provide a major source for the history of the area and of Aboriginal life in Gippsland.

**James Dredge (1796–1846)** was a Wesleyan Methodist preacher. Following a period of work as Assistant Protector of Aborigines along the Goulburn (or North Eastern) District he maintained his involvement in community activities in Geelong.

**William Thomas (1793–1867)** was Assistant Protector in the Port Phillip, Western Port and Gippsland districts from 1839 to 1849. He remained deeply involved in Aboriginal affairs until his death, especially as an advisor on government policy. His reports, other contributions and unpublished notes and journals are a major source of information.



'WILLIAM THOMAS' BY DAVIES & CO. FROM  
SLV USED UNDER SLV TERMS OF USE.

**William Blandowski (1822–1878)** spent ten years in Australia from 1849, working as a surveyor and gold-miner. He organised a major scientific expedition to the Murray River in 1856–1857, collecting specimens, taking photographs and making drawings of natural history and Aboriginal life. His major work, originally published in German in 1862, is now available in an English edition (edited by Harry Allen). This includes numerous images of Aboriginal people and activities.



## CHAPTER ONE

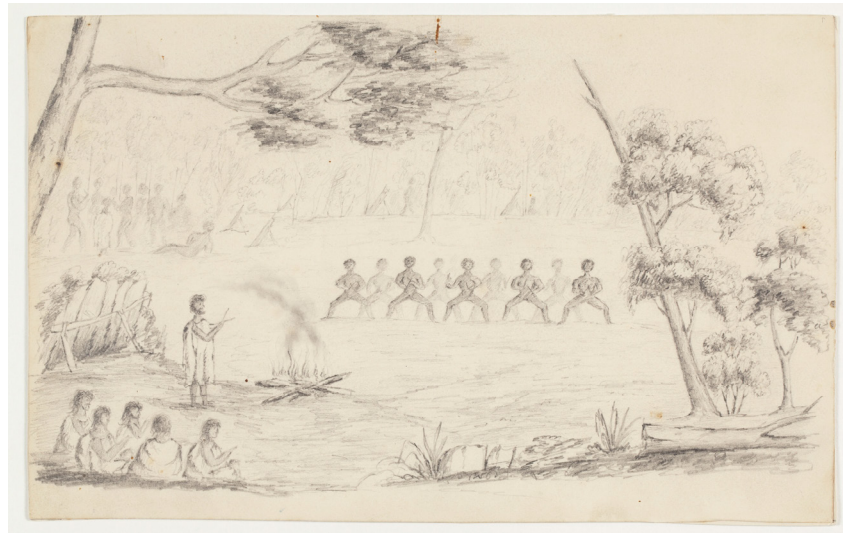
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# Ceremony





## Ceremonies and Initiation



"WILLIAM THOMAS, PROTECTOR OF ABORIGINES, PICTORIAL MATERIAL: IE922700 FROM STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES USED UNDER CC0"

1

The Jibauk ceremonies were held periodically where Melbourne, Geelong, Bacchus Marsh, Seymour, Bendigo, the Delatite River, Benalla, the Buffalo River, Echuca and other places now are.

When the ceremonies were held by the Wurunjerri, a screen of boughs was made some two or three hundred yards from the main encampment, with a large fire in front of it. The boy's Guritch or his Kangun, that is, his mother's brother, took him there, having first covered him with a rug, the corner of which hung over his face. Having joined the others who were to be "made men", a number of men's kilts (Branjep), which had been collected from the men at the camp, were tied round his waist. His hair was cut quite short, excepting a ridge, like a cock's comb, along his head from front to back. Mud was thickly plastered over his head and shoulders, and a wide band of pipe-clay was painted from ear to ear, across his face. Another band was from the Branjep in front over his head to that hanging behind.

He carried a bag slung round his neck, in which was a live opossum which he had caught, and from which he had plucked the fur as if for cooking. He never moved away from the Jibauk place without a fire-stick and this bag containing the opossum.

**Howitt 1904: 611**

2

In the Woi-worŭng tribe of the Yarra River it was the headman who summoned the assemblies for initiation. He sent a messenger to the headman of the local groups, who carried a man's belt hung on a reed.

**Howitt 1884: 439**

3

[Ceremony of Tanderrum/Freedom of the Bush] There is not, perhaps, a more pleasing sight in a native encampment than when strange blacks arrive who have never been in the country before. Each comes with fire in hand (always bark), which is supposed to purify the air – the women and children in one direction, and the men and youths in another. They are ushered in generally by some of an intermediate tribe, who are friends of both parties, and have been engaged in forming an alliance or friendship between the tribes; the aged are brought forward and introduced. The ceremony of Tanderrum is commenced; the tribe visited may be seen lopping boughs from one tree and another, as varied as possible of each tree with leaves; each family has a separate seat, raised about 8 or 10 inches from the ground, on which in the centre sits the male and around him his male children, and the female and her sex of children have another seat.

Two fires are made, one for the males and the other for the females. The visitors are attended on the first day by those whose country they are come to visit, and not allowed to do anything for themselves; water is brought them which is carefully stirred by an attendant with a reed, and then given to drink (males attend males and females females); victuals are then brought and laid before them, consisting of as great a variety as the bush in the new country affords, if come-at-able; during this ceremony the greatest silence prevails, both by attendants and attended.

**W. Thomas nd, *Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix (Bride 1898: 434–435)***

4

[Ceremony of Murrum Turrukerook/Female Coming of Age] There were (at the one I am describing) two large fires of bark made (no wood of any kind save the bark) at about 100 yards from the encampment at which was one aged lubra sitting down pensive. Bungerrook, the young woman (daughter of the Chief Billibellary) was brought forth in the encampment covered all over from head to foot with kunnundure (charcoal powder), except white spots all over her face and body, which gave her a singular appearance. She was attended by her mother, and another who led her. Her mother aided her up on a log, where the young woman stood silent and sad as though doing penance. She held a small branch in her hand, every leaf taken off, and on each twig was a piece of bread. About twenty young men went up to her slowly; each threw a little stick at her – merely a twig; the young men then drew near, and each bit off a bit of bread from the twig of the young damsel, and then spat it into the fire, and turned back and approached a second time, stamping and making the earth shake under them as they do in corroboree, and raving and stamping out the fire. The same two lubras, who were her attendants, gathered the twigs thrown at her by the young men, and buried them deep in the earth. (This was to prevent her kidneys from wasting and falling into other's hands.) The twig held by the damsel was then demanded by the one who had charge of the fires, who gathers up the ashes and covers up the little twig when it is burned. She is then handed down from the log by her mother, who, with the other attendants, takes her to her

father's mia-mia. A corroboree, if it is a chief's daughter, as was this case, takes place at night, at which the father leads the dance. The young men before alluded to alone corroboree. She is after this of age to have a koolin, not before.

**W. Thomas nd, *Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix (Bride 1898: 435–436)***

5

[Ceremony of Tib-but/Males Coming of Age] The young men have all the hair cut close from their heads, save a narrow streak from the front of the neck to the forehead, which gives them a raw-headed appearance. This is performed by a married man, and one of influence. The hair is first cut with scissors, the head then scraped with glass. The head is then daubed over with mud, closely put on like plaster, the streak of hair being raised up, which gives the youth a still more beastly appearance; there are strips of old rags, string, slips of opossum skin, and old rope, and all the variety of stripes with which a fringed apron girdles his body all round, flapping round his bottom, his face and body daubed over with motley daubs of clay, mud, charcoal powder – in fact, every mess. To add to his beastly appearance, he is not allowed to have a blanket to cover him or anything night or day, and it is generally the winter season selected for this purpose. He goes through the encampment calling out “Tib-bo-bo-but”. He has a basket under his arm, which contains all the filth he can pick up, not even omitting soil. In this plight, night and day, he is occasionally going through the encampment. He is not molested by any one. He frightens and bedaubes all he meets with some beastly commodities contained in his basket, but must not touch any who are in their mia-mias, or lubras on the way getting water, but in every other case he is at liberty to annoy and frighten all he meets; the children are awfully frightened at him, and will fly, screaming, to their parents. He must, when he is on the move, continually cry out “Tib-bo-bo-but,” which is the only warning the poor creatures have of escaping him. I have been often struck at the fear created by him, though the encampment knows what it is, and think there must be more in the meaning than I am acquainted with. When his days are over, which last some time – till appearance of hair begins to show itself, he is washed, and the females stripe his face with certain charcoal streaks mingled with werup (red ochre), and dance before him.

**W. Thomas nd, *Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix (Bride 1898: 436–37)***

6

The only distinctive mark whereby there can be no mistake made as to the sex is that all the men have the two upper front teeth knocked out. This operation is performed when the boys arrive at the age of puberty. For three months after this torturing ordeal the youths are not permitted to look upon a woman young or old, as the sight of one during this probation would be the means of entailing countless misfortunes, such as the withering of the limbs, loss of eyesight, and in fact general decrepitude.

**Beveridge 1889: 28–29**

7

We had not been viewing the proceedings in the camp long from our recumbent position when the aboriginal footlights, or fire, which served the same purpose, were freshened up, and the lyoors (who were seated in a semi-circle a short distance from the fires, and whose duties consisted in the orchestral portion of the performance) gave a few spasmodic thuds on the Mullangies [possum skin drum] by way of calling the performers to the front; birraworie [time-sticks] in hands, which he clinked in concert with the mullangie thuds, at the same time beginning a tchowie [song] in a low monotonous tone which ere long gradually swelled in volume. At the end of the first bar the lyoors chimed in, and the dancers sprang into the lighted space, flourishing their weapons in savage glee as their lithesome legs quivered in time to the savage music. The hoary leader of the band, becoming warm to his work, rushed backwards and forwards along the crescent row of lyoors, singing out the tchowie, apparently for bare life, while flakes of foam spirted from his lips, as it might do from the mouth of a hunted boar, by reason of his exceeding fervidness. The lyoors, taking their time from him, became equally energetic in their performance upon the mallangies, and their high, shrill treble, mingling with the leader's bass, made altogether the most hideous accord that it was ever our ill-luck to listen to. Meantime the dancing had become as vehement as the music, for the quivering and writing of forty pairs of legs, strung up to high pressure by their tchowie and its barbarous accompaniments, made such an exhibition as it seldom falls to civilised man's lot to now-a-days to witness.

***Beveridge 1889: 149–150***

8

Circumcision is not known among the Victorian or New South Wales tribes, but is common among those on the north coast.

***A.A.C. Le Souëf (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 296)***

9

Mr. John Green, of Coranderrk, Upper Yarra says respecting the initiation of boys and girls:-  
“1st. When a boy was about thirteen years old, he was taken away by the old men of the tribe a considerable distance from the camp, where they made a mi-mi, and remained for about one month, during which time they boy was instructed in all the legends of the tribe. At the end of that time several of the men took hold of the boy, and held him until two others knocked out one of his front teeth; this was done by first loosing the flesh from around the tooth with a piece of sharp bone, then one knocked it out with a piece of wood, used as a punch. He had now to cover his nakedness with pieces of opossum skin; he then returned to the general camp, and was known as a Wang-goom.

2nd. When about eighteen, he was again taken to some distance from the camp by the old men; this time he was painted as a warrior; about sunrise one of the old men struck him, and told him to take off the covering of skin, that he was now a Geebowak. He had now no longer

to hide his nakedness, and might take a wife at any time. He had now to go and find something to take to the general camp for them to eat, and on his approach to the camp all who were there ran and hit themselves, because they were ashamed to look upon him naked; he then found them all, and gave them something to eat, and then they were no more ashamed.”

The initiation of girls into womanhood was as follows: - “When a girl came to puberty, she was taken away some distance from the general mi-mi by some of the old women. They then tied cords round several parts of her body, very tight. These cords were left there for several days, which made the whole of the body to swell very much, and caused great pain. She was not to remove them until she was clean. When clean, she got the cords off, and got a covering to her nakedness of emu feathers, and then returned to the general mi-mi, and was now a Ngarrindarakook – that is, marriageable, and might be married at any time when her friends thought fit.

***Smyth Vol. 1 1878: 64–65***

10

[Bangerang] At about sixteen years of age the kogomoolga underwent a secret ceremony (which I never witnessed), and became a panoopka, a young man. This was the great turning point in his life, and he seemed thoroughly to appreciate the dignity conferred upon him. In conjunction with a certain shyness (which occurred at no other period of his life), his bearing now became staid and dignified. The games in which he used to join were indulged in less frequently, and, in their place, he began to devote himself to the vanities of dress. He now affected the use of red ochre, adorned his head with plumes, and made himself an opossum-rug, which he scored and coloured in the approved way.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 117, Bangerang***

11

When about arriving at puberty, it was considered that the young people should take their place in the community. They were no longer to be children. The old people talked it over; not only the old men, but the elders both male and female. If, after counsel, it was found that the young people were sufficiently numerous, the initiation was determined upon, and the first steps taken. Two messengers were sent from the division or the clan taking the initiative to the division or the clan nearest to it. These men were called lewin, or specially lewinda-jerra-alla, that is, messengers of the jerraeil or initiation. Their functions were to convey the news only to the next division, or clan, which then sent out two lewin of its own people, and so on until the whole of the Kurnai were informed.

***Howitt 1880: 192***

12

Along the Murray, Murrumbidgee, and Lachlan, and in New South Wales, all the males, on arriving at manhood, have either one or two teeth knocked out of the left side of the upper-

jaw, as a distinguishing mark; and at certain seasons of the year certain ceremonies are gone through at a distance from the main body of the tribe. These ceremonies occupy several days, are performed in cover-in wirleys, where only the initiated are admitted, and from which the females are most carefully kept a long way off.

***J.M. Davis (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 313)***

13

Among the Gunnai the young men were made as follows. They were in a circle surrounded by the women. When the old men approached and took them, a bed of leaves was prepared for them on which they were put by their attendants – boolerwrang. This name was given from the peculiar way they were painted white around their eyes, making their eyes look like those of a black duck, hence the name for eyes like a duck. While the young men were on the bed covered up with their rugs, they were not allowed to move, or get up on any pretext and without permission. Should they require to get up they had to signal their attendants, they were then lifted out of bed and afterwards carried back again. They would sometimes lie for two or three days, at all events they were under the control of the initiators. After they had lain on the beds, some of the old men approached with turndun [bullroarers], a piece of oval shaped wood with a string attached to one end. This was swung around, and a boomerang noise was made. As the old men were approaching uttering words which I cannot write even in their language, sufficient to say it was all in keeping with the blackfellows' character, and was calculated to make the young men true blackfellows in every respect.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 3–4)***

14

A most Singular Ceremony installing the Youths to Probity. I was not aware of any ceremony taking place previous to the Men going (Hunting or Shooting) however I observed one (Lively) take a large Ember alight & go from the Encampment behind the Bushes at some little distance. I followed him at a Distance he caught my eye as I approached said smiling Marminarta but seemed disconcerted, then spoke a few words together but I was not at all interrupted in beholding one of the most singular Ceremonies (in fact my footing is now so among them that if I am not able to suppress, and permitted to behold, which I believe till I have been among them they were very tenacious of).

A fire was made, the Blacks set down as I thought promiscuous, to take another snak before they went off & one opened his Knapsack for so I shall call that, took out 2 or 3 Birds wings, then made little bundles of feathers, a stick in the middle about 2 or 3 inches long, & stuck it into their own hair, then Burrenun, & Nerenunin commenced with cutting the hair off the heads of 5 youths who by this time was setting most solidly, no Farquar could more steadily be in a position. As the hair was cut 4, 6, or 8 Kangaroos Teeth were tied for the [unclear] time into their heads. 3 small pieces of Bark not more than a foot long were set light to at the end of the feet of the 6 youths, the 6 forming a semicircle. The hair of each was burried



separately, & then the Bodies from head to feet were greased well over then garlands of Bush were put round the neck of each like a horses collar well tied in the middle so each came out as low down as the naval. They sit in an easy position their hands folded holding 2 ends of the Garland, & the eyes immovably fix'd towards the earth, the Seniors with a small bough keeping the flies &c off their fresh greased back that there might be no motion in them & they were streaked from the forehead to mouth white. This done the Elders took each a bush held it before him strip'd naked & went as tho' they were going to surprise the Lubras with three [unclear] &c. I follow'd them when they got to the Encampt not 50 yards the Lubra's had all apparently disappear'd, but were all hurdled together face-to-face on the ground kneeling in a prostrate form their old blankets &c over them so that, as they were appear'd like bundles with clothes thrown over them. The Men threw their bushes on the Lubra's (& not till they rose had I the least idea that the heap I saw was them) & run back to the Young Men. The Lubras arose their faces had all been black'd from their Eyes to the chin & under & so had their sticks which were 3 or 4 against one tree & 2 or 3 against another tree with the principle of their bush at top fasten'd with string or cord & not Bark as were the Mens Garland. The Seniors each then with a fresh branch touch'd each of the Young Men on the head & shook it over, said something & [unclear] arose (each having by one of the Seniors his napsack put on him to avoid any stir of the body before resting) each taking up the [unclear], of his fire Ember, Billy Lonsdale, Devilliers & another then the 6 Young Men the others followed all single about 30 yds. They gave a war hoop noise still walking – calling out how! Kow! Kow! The women and string exactly to sound &c how! (a pause) Kow! Kow! about 10 times then the Men shaking voice Hoowee Hoowee which the women ans'd. The Scene was over, the women then fix their sticks in the Manner where describing when they had prostrated in a heap throwing the bows. The men left, at their feet & leaving a fire as described.

***W. Thomas Papers, 13 February 1840, Mitchell Library MSS 214/2 Item 1, Microfilm CY 2605 Transcription commencing Frame 58 (Byrt 2004: 32, CD WT Ceremony 2605, Frame 58)***

15

The mode of making young men among the tribes was various, and here I may remark since our mission was formed there has been no regular ceremony among the Gippsland tribes except once the late Dr Howitt got up a sort of ceremony among the tribes.....Their mode of procedure was first to dress the young men with all the ornaments they possessed. In the presence of all the men and the women they were well rubbed with red ochre, their hair was combed and well greased and afterwards they were smuggled away into the bush, when the real initiation ceremony began. One of the young men told me that the old men plucked the hair from their heads, beards and bodies, after which they were kept away for a month or two.

They were not allowed to see a woman, and were only brought into the camp at night, but carefully taken away early in the morning... A very intelligent man from the Wimmera told me ... that the ceremony of jerail was as follows. The old men publicly decorated the young man. They put raddle and grease all over their bodies, and put a band of kangaroo teeth

round their heads, a necklet of reeds cut into short lengths was put on, strips of the skin of the kangaroo rat was tied round each arm. After this they were taken away and plucked the same as the Murray young men. They were fed on the flesh of the female possum which had been denied them during infancy. They were each under the care of an old man called gnarap, young men were called genitch.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 2–3); Woiwood 2012: 38***

## Corroborees, Dance and Music

16

It has been stated by some writers that their Corroberrys are sacred, performed only at a New and full Moon, such however is not the case, they however generally do Corroberry at new and full Moon, but not in any sacred light, my Blacks tell me it is only because glad when New Moon come and get big.

***W. Thomas letter to Mr Duffy, 1 August 1858. Mitchell Library MSS 214/24 Item 1–11, Microfilm CY 3131, Transcription commencing Frame 18 (Byrt 2004: 192–193, CD WT Songs 3131, Frame 34)***

17

My first clear recollection of the natives of this country was in the early fifties in the Kilmore district, and in the year 1845 I witnessed their great national event, the Coayand. I suppose there would be from 150 to 200 of the Goulburn Valley, Kilmore and other tribes, and the place of meeting was in the ranges east of Kilmore. We crept through the bushes until we got to about a hundred yards from them, and witnessed a scene that would have rivalled Tam o' Shanter's dance of witches. Fires burned brightly, the spectators were ranged in groups, and on a space cleared of grass painted and naked warriors (except for a girdle round their waist and small neat bundles of boughs round their ankles) danced backwards and forwards along the lines of spectators. The women supplied the music and kept wonderful time, their instruments being opossum rugs beaten with small sticks, whilst there was a chorus of not at all unmusical voices.

***Hamilton 1981 [1914]: 96–97***



18

Observed a small bundle of emu feathers tied up very neatly. I asked the owner, Cor.rer.mur.re.min for what purpose he carried them and was informed for the dance, Corroborree. I requested an exhibition, to which he readily assented. He first divested himself of his rainment, then tied a cord tight around his abdomen and hooked the feather on behind. And then went through a variety of antics which appears to me to resemble some animal, probably the emu, ... and he made a low bellowing or murmuring noise, brandishing at the same time his two native weapons...

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 12 May 1841, 'Great Swamp', Portland Bay area (Presland 1977b: 93; Clark 1998b: 203)***

19

After tea the overseer and Adams proposed to go to the corroboree which the natives had said they would have. I followed after them and saw the corroboree. A large party of natives had joined the camp after I left. There must have been at least 100 natives at it. The natives were painted and had leaves round their legs and the corroboree was in every respect the same as any other. The song might have been different.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 26 April 1841, Port Fairy (Presland 1977b: 56; Clark 1998b: 151)***

20

Corroborees are common as to the northward, but very different in the diagram or plot. The dances are alike, but the song by which they are led differs at the fancy of the singer. It may be about a kangaroo hunt or emu, or of anything that has interested them, a white man or anything relating to him.

The women sit with their backs to the fire, and simultaneously beat a roll of opossum cloaks, which produces a sound something like a drum. The leader, as indeed have all the dancers, has a short stick (barongain) in each hand, which he strikes together at first in slow measure as the subject of the song is introduced, the women keeping time with him on their drums. The fire at first burns dimly, and the dancers make their appearance one by one at a distance, emerging in the dark from among the bushes and trees; as the song proceeds and the subject begins to develop itself, the fire is made to sparkle, the measure quickens, the sticks and drums are beat louder and louder, and the actors advance until they gradually draw round the leader close to the fire, which now blazes up, who becoming warmed with his subject, increases the rapidity as well as force of the blows (all keeping time as if the sound was produced by a single blow), until a sign being made, they all make a sort of grunt, strike their sticks once more, and then silently vanish off in a twinkling behind the bushes, and are shrouded by the darkness of the background in which they are ensconced, until a new song gradually commences and recalls them on to the stage.

The whole has quite a dramatic effect. Their bodies are painted over with white stripes of

pipeclay (bobal), and round the ankles are small boughs or branches of trees (kerang), which as they move make a rustling noise, which they increase with the measure of the song. The muscular movement of the legs, particularly the thighs, during the dance is most extraordinary, but so violent that it is not kept up at a time beyond a period of a few seconds.

***Diary of Captain Phillip Parker King, 3 March 1837 (Jones, 1981: 112–113)***

21

The corroboree is common to all Australian tribes, although there is a great difference in the way in which it is danced. The following is the manner in which it is usually performed by the Victorian tribes.

It is generally danced when two tribes meet, one dancing one night, the other the next. The lookers-on congregate about the large fires made to light up the scene, and admire or criticise the performers. The women seat themselves in a body, with their opossum cloaks tightly rolled up before them, on which they beat with their right hands, keeping perfect time, at the same time chanting one of their corroboree songs. One of the oldest men, generally a man of note, acts as leader. Suddenly, through the gloom, the dancers one by one glide upon the scene, each man painted with white streaks of pipeclay on his face, legs, and body, and a large bunch of green leaves tied tightly round his ankles, which make a peculiar rustling noise as he dances. They commence by beating time simultaneously with their corroboree-sticks (short pieces of green wood which give out a loud ringing sound when struck), and shaking or quivering their extended legs in the manner peculiar to the corroboree. As the performers become excited, the vigor of the dance increases, and, with loud shouts, they advance in a body towards their leader, who, chanting at the top of his voice, with his face turned to the dancers, slowly retires before the advancing mass – vigorously beating time meanwhile – until the large fire is reached. The dancing now ceases, and the men, rushing into a compact body, stamp with their right feet until a cloud of dust arises, when, with a wild shout, each one at the same moment throws up his arms above his head, and they then retreat to commence again. The perfect time that is kept is wonderful. If fifty men are dancing, they strike the corroboree-sticks as if they were but one pair, and they exhibit extraordinary degree of elasticity and grace in their movements – indeed some seem to have no joints in their legs, so supple and pliant are they. Sometimes they perform with spears in their hands, but not often; and sometimes around the rude figure of a man cut out of bark. This latter dance is connected with some of their superstitions.

***A.A.C. Le Souëf (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 293–294)***

22

The ordinary dance of the natives of Victoria – the Ngargee or corroboree – has been carefully described by Mr. Thomas. A number of males, twenty or thirty, or more, if three or four tribes have assembled for this dance, are selected as the principal performers, and, as a preliminary, they retire to the bush, away from the light of the fire, and decorate themselves,

each according to his taste – not, as a rule, consulting one another, and yet no two appear exactly alike, except as regards the faces, which are generally painted pretty much in the same manner. The sockets of the eyes are white, a white ring surrounds the sockets, white streaks are drawn down the nose, and parallel streaks appear on the forehead. On their bodies the lines are arranged fantastically, but always according to some plan in the mind of the performer. During the time the men are thus engaged, a native prepares a blazing fire, and others employ themselves in cutting branches and gathering sticks and leaves, making a heap, so that the fire may be quickly and conveniently fed during the ceremonies, and without occasioning unseemly interruptions. As the flames leap up and the light flashes through the trees, the dancers may be seen emerging from their retreat. They wear boughs around their legs, just above the ankles, and a sort of apron made of dressed skins. They form themselves into groups as they wait for the signal to commence their feats of jumping and dancing.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 167***

23

“The corroboree,” says the Rev. Mr. Bulmer, a Missionary at Lake Tyers, in Gippsland, “is a simple affair. The tune is the best part of it. In fact the tune is the chief feature, the poetry being generally poor. The song which made a great stir at the last corroboree I witnessed was composed of about five words. It was of a language I did not understand, and indeed the blacks themselves did not understand it; but that did not matter to them. All they desired was the tune and the figure of the dance.”

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 170***

24

Amongst the Narrinyeri (Lakes Alexandrina, Albert and Coorong, and the Lower Murray River) “there are many kinds of corroborrees, but the main thing in all of them is the song and dance. Skin rugs rolled up tightly, and beaten by fist, as they lie in front of the beater, who squats on the ground. These are called planggi, and the drumming is called plangkumbalin. The men knock two waddies together; these are called tartengk, and this practice is called tartembarrin. By these means they beat time to the song or chant.”

***Mr. Hodgkinson (Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 172)***

25

They have various kinds [of dances] – day and night. Although a stranger, after seeing one, may think the whole alike and merely a monotony of sounds and motion, such is not the case; the song and words are to the motion of the body, like our country dances and reels.

***W. Thomas nd, Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix (Bride 1898: 402)***

26

In the evening attended corrobbery of the Malle condeets. Was very interesting. They had mardong and tails and boughs on legs and one in each hand. The women sat in front beating

rugs and singing and a man sat with them beating two sticks and keeping time. The native men, 12 in number, stood in a row and keeping time with the tune, remained at the same spot only moving their heads, first one way and then reverse slinging back the boughs on their shoulders at the same time. They then corroborated the usual way. At the conclusion they had another corroboree, both men and women singing together.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 29 November 1842, Mount Willum parramall/Jem Crow (Clark 1998c : 112)***

27

Corroborees are always held at night, and if possible, where there are some large gum trees. The blacks after being out hunting all day, meet in the evening, at a given point, where they camp for the night.

First of all the lubras (women) go to work, and make mia-mias, which are composed of pieces of bark, sticks, and boughs, and built in the shape of a half moon; each lubra makes one of these for her cooley (husband), and if he has two or more wives so much the better for making the mia-mias, as “many hands make light work.”

A fire is then made, and ‘possums thrown on it to roast, and when these are about half cooked, the men ‘fall to’ and tear off a leg or head, gnaw at it for a bit, and then throw it to his lubra, after which he will take another portion of the ‘possum and do likewise with it. The lubras never get “first bite.”

When supper is over, the men retire to a short distance among the trees. In the meantime the lubras fold up the ‘possum rugs, into as small a compass as they can, skin side out. They then sit in a half circle, on one side of the fire. Some men sit at both ends of this circle and close to the lubras. The men have two round sticks about eighteen inches long, one in each hand. Now the band is complete, the men start the music by striking their two sticks together, the lubras join in by striking the rolled up ‘possum rugs with open hands.

To me, and I believe to all white people also, it would seem like music without charms, but quite different to the blacks, for they enjoy the noise amazingly.

They are certainly very correct as to time, for a person with a most sensitive ear for music could not detect the slightest mistake in this respect. At a distance of three hundred yards, if a person could not see the performers, he would think the thumping on the rugs, and clicking of sticks, was caused by one blow, whereas it was caused by about thirty men and women, so very exact are they in keeping time.

Very shortly after the; music strikes up, the onlooker would perceive an object coming from out the trees and darkness with a boomerang in one hand and a waddie in the other. He

advances to the fire, which is small, giving just light enough to see him by, and gives a spring extending his arms with the weapons in each hand, and strikes an attitude by spreading his legs wide apart, and by an extraordinary movement causes his knees to shake, keeping his feet firmly set on the ground.

At every twitch of the knees, he makes a noise through his lips, something like that made by a groom when he is cleaning a horse. This noise, and that caused by setting the feet firmly on the ground, together with the shaking of the knees, are made to the exact time of the “music.” He will now retire to the darkness again, and very shortly two or three more will appear, give a few shakes of the knees; and then come more and more from out the darkness. Dry boughs are now heaped on the fire, and the flames rise higher and higher, then comes the most unearthly scene one can imagine.

All these fellows are painted with pipeclay, and dry boughs with rustling leaves are tied round their ankles. There will now be from twenty to thirty of them, with nothing on but an apron each.

They are painted thus:— A white mark half an inch wide is made along each rib, the breast bone is also ticked out with the same material, the arms have a similar mark of the same width, extending the whole length, and inside both legs and thighs they have the like, but the white stroke is wider on these limbs than on any other part of the body. They also have white strokes about the eyes and cheeks.

All this time the thumping and clicking is to time, and the noise made through the lips, coupled with that made by the dry leaves round their ankles, is also in correct time with the music.

It is a most fiendish sight to behold. When the dance is at its height the dancers are in line and two or three deep. The flames now mount higher and higher, caused by heaping on more dry boughs. Then again the flames become lower and lower until all is nearly in darkness.

In addition to the thumping of rugs, and clicking of sticks, both men and women of the band sing a monotonous song, which to a white person would seem to have no tune whatever in it.

***Kirby 1895: 115–117. Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840s***

28

Songs & dances among Aborigines like among civilised are either sacred or profane, or more properly stating for pleasure or sacred and traditional, the two latter are generally accompanied by Effigies which bears some rude resemblance representation or Hyroglyphic figure of what intended to be represented, the Aboriginal songs are numerous, and the modern ones go by the names of the authors or Bards; tho’ rhyme and measure is out of the

question – The Songs or drones of the leaders of their common dance is generally according to the caprice of the leaders, tho' these are some of the regularly settled upon and known by heart.

**W. Thomas letter to Mr Duffy, 1 August 1858. Mitchell Library MSS 214/24 Item 1–11, Microfilm CY 3131, Transcription commencing Frame 18 (Byrt 2004: 192–193, CD WT Songs 3131, Frame 18)**

29

Their songs I at first considered nothing more than a tissue of unmeaning sounds but on more a particular attention found that they were full of meaning, and from the few words in them considered them a senseless sound of repetitions – they are indeed repetitious but all in accordance, like our country dances, only that the leader sings the motion to be performed, those who understand their language will find all in perfect accordance the following are a few some named after their authors.

Ko-ro-al-bo, Yan-non-ner, Myng-gar-boo-dee, Sub-bo, Mung-ō this ō is sung very long, till it comes down to a mere distinguished sound so peculiar to the Aboriginal cadence – this Song or dances as it is used as such is merely a motion of the head, eyes, backside, and feet, and which forms tho' so few words a very accurate dance.

**W. Thomas letter to Mr Duffy, 1 August 1858. Mitchell Library MSS 214/24 Item 1–11, Microfilm CY 3131, Transcription commencing Frame 18 (Byrt 2004: 192–193, CD WT Songs 3131, Frame 20)**

30

But to return, a great fire is made, by which stands the leader who is also furnished with two sticks like those the dancers use, but always appear in his opossum rug and no way daubed like the dancers by his side is seated a number of lubras naked with their opossum rugs folded up which they hold on their left-hand in their laps and beat time most accurately with their right-hand stick striking their rounds, it is astonishing that a muffled up rug would make such a perfect sound like muffled drum, so many beating at once, and all in time, contributed with the sonorous singing sometimes elevated to the highest pitch then gradually lowering as tho' to give merit to the dead muffled sound of the opossum rugs, the leaders note is a mere whining hum, the leader and lubras often commence 3 or 4 minutes ere the dancers make their appearance (like a flourish in an orchestre) when a loud united stroke is heard in the distance upon the dancers sticks, this is a signal that they are on the move, and the lubras in an elevated strain as tho' vying with each other strike up, the strange grotesque band always in a straight line may be seen knees and legs extended and bent about half heighth advancing slowly towards the leader, the accuracy of the movement, altho' 30 or 40 may be engaged baffled any attempt at description in fact civilization can in no way compete with the Australian dance, as to time and motion, as tho' all their feet, boughs on their legs, and sticks in their hands were by machinery set in motion at one and the same time, a body of



30 or 40 Soldiers on parade marching, their feet move not near so exact as the demisemi moves of the Aboriginal dances, gradually tho' with continued quiet moves they approach the leader when within about 20 yards they break the straight line gradually and in a promiscuous group all apparently as close as they can be raising their bodies gradually to an erect position as they draw near still dancing, beating the sticks over their heads, when they arrive at the leader the dance is turned to a united jumping which makes the very forest shake under them it is surprising how they can continue using their sticks without hitting each other, at this stage of the dance, they however do mysteriously not strike each other and conclude with a deliberate single knock, and then expulsion of the breath, when they without order fly back to the dark distance whence they came from, and will continue this round for hours till even to the stranger it becomes a tedious monotony perhaps the most attractive appearance is the light of the blazing fire shining upon their strange daubed bodies – they have however in all their Corroberry's a decency, their back and the front parts, having a kind of apron made of opossum skins, but cut out in narrow strips of an inch wide from about 2 inches from the top, and a girdle about the loins, and I may add that the lubras (who occasionally) if much elated will 3 or 4 of them rise up to dance, rising up, they always have a very fine girdle of Emu feathers which goes completely round them at the waist about 2 feet deep in their breasts...

***W. Thomas letter to Mr Duffy, 1 August 1858. Mitchell Library MSS 214/24 Item 1–11, Microfilm CY 3131, Transcription commencing Frame 18 (Byrt 2004: 192–193, CD WT Songs 3131, Frames 23–27)***

31

Wool-woork-Bur-lum-bur-lin is a day dance, in the forenoon generally, a few married lubras, 8 or 10 will make each a small fire, and their husbands also make each a small fire at a short distance within sight of each other – the lubras seated will commence each beating their opossum rug and singing Yan-gee, Yan-gee, Ma-lar, as in a Corroberry their husbands merely striking their sticks gently, while the men (others invited to the dance by the married) at a considerable distance prepare themselves, they are not daubed with promiscuous daubs, but thinly rubbed over with red ochre which improves their appearance much in fact gives the men a handsome look, they have leaves round just about their ankle as in common Corroberry, only smaller and a wonguim or mulga in hand they approach by very short paces figuring, turning round and putting themselves in the droleest of attitudes and occasionally rushing to & fro with stern countenances as tho' leading on to combat, then suddenly stopping short & kneel, – the singular quivering of lips of the dancers in this dance while kneeling is surprising, the lips move as a child would when pulling the fingers over the lips or burring but so quiet and soft and withal the sound produced tallying precisely with the noise made by the leaves on their legs has a singular musical effect, the women now stand up, shake their breasts, and strange all sounds are alike, the lubras breasts, the lips, and leaves on the legs of the men all one simultaneous musical burr like thousands of butterflies or moths fluttering about, the lubras naked as in a Corroberry (they also being all cover'd with red ochre had really a handsome appearance) advance, when the men stop, they stop, thus by short paces

they progressively proceed till they arrive altogether at the spot or group of married lubras who are mere spectators of the scene and dance round them, and on a sudden at a sound from the married men not engaged, the actors respectfully retire to the starting point, and then if inclined to go thro' another dance however one dance seldom concludes before 20 or 30 minutes.

**W. Thomas letter to Mr Duffy, 1 August 1858. Mitchell Library MSS 214/24 Item 1–11, Microfilm CY 3131, Transcription commencing Frame 18 (Byrt 2004: 192–193, CD WT Songs 3131, Frames 28–30)**

32

Mur-run-a-wā another day dance, say 12 young men, and 12 young girls their faces and breasts male and female slightly rubbed over with Red ochre and a broad white circle round their navel, each has a boughs in both hands they have a male leader who was equipped as the others but with a wreath of slips from boughs round his head if the Mamoza is in blossom the wreath is formed from it which gives the leader a gay appearance. He stands and with his boughs begins divers motions sometimes oblique raised, then oblique falling at other times wavering to & fro, the whole facing each other male & female about 30 yards off, & the leader on one side so that all could catch every motion, as he sang they sang the male and female voices at one and the same time in the still forest has actually a cheering effect as the female voices are very harmonious, there is a degree of horseness however in the male Aboriginal voice something like seafaring men which I attribute to the same cause being perpetually expose to the open air, this however does not affect the female voice tho' exposed in like manner, which is as clear as European ladies, they dance before one another till they have gone through every move that Savage genius can devise, the men and women singing continuously at length the leader with both boughs up flourishing them over his head so rapidly, which is performed by the others they then retrace every move but backward giving through their revolutions the males and female gradually draw back to back then gradually wheeling round formed at length to near a circle save a few paces where the leader stands. This dance is not much unlike at this juncture to the European peasants dance round the May Pole.

The greatest astonishment in this and all their dances, is that time in motion is so exact as the leader and all moved by one spring. The song on this occasion like all others is the surrounds they move their boughs Mur-run-a-wā, Kar-bo, Ming-o, Ner-rim, Nurm-bul, Port-bo, Ying-ā, Yan-ner, Karl-bo, Ming-o, Ner-rim, Mur-run-o.

**W. Thomas letter to Mr Duffy, 1 August 1858. Mitchell Library MSS 214/24 Item 1–11, Microfilm CY 3131, Transcription commencing Frame 18 (Byrt 2004: 192–193, CD WT Songs 3131, Frames 31–34)**

33

The natives furnish, in these exhibitions, examples of tragedy, tragi-comedy, comedy and farce; and the skill they evince in producing their pieces – all their own composition, and not



seldom, of late years, representations of scenes they have witnessed when in contact with the whites – sufficiently prove that in mimicry and in invention they are not surpassed by any race.

***Smyth 1878 Vol 1. 1878: 175***

34

The songs are very numerous, and of varied character, and are connected with almost every part of the social life, for there is but little of the life of the Australian savage, either in peace or war, which is not in some measure connected with song. Some songs are only used as dance music; some are descriptive of events which have struck the composer; some are comic or pathetic. There is also an extensive class of songs or chaunts connected with the practice of magic, and of these many are what may be called “incantations” – words of power chaunted in the belief that supernatural influence is not asked but compelled by the influence for evil or for warding off evil. Connected with this class are songs which are used at the Initiations, and which are therefore not known to the uninitiated or to the women.

***Howitt 1887: 328***

35

The makers of the Australian songs, or of the combined songs and dances, are the poets or bards of the tribe and are held in great esteem. Their names are known to the neighbouring peoples, and their songs are carried from tribe to tribe, until the very meaning of the words is lost as well as the original source of the song.

***Howitt 1887: 329***

36

With some songs there are pantomimic gestures or rhythmical movements, which are passed on from performer to performer, as the song, is carried from tribe to tribe. Such an instance is a song which was accompanied by a carved stick painted red which was held by the chief singer. This travelled down the Murray River from some unknown source. The same song, accompanied by such a stick, also came into Gippsland many years ago from Melbourne, and may even have been the above-mentioned one on its return.

***Howitt 1887: 330***

37

In the tribes with which I have acquaintance I find it a common belief that the songs, using that word in its widest meaning, as including all kinds of aboriginal poetry, are obtained by the bards from the spirits of the deceased, usually their relatives, during sleep in dreams. Thus the Biraark of the Kurnai professed to receive their poetic inspirations from the ghosts (mrart), as well as the dances which they were supposed to have first seen performed in ghostland. An interesting example of such an “inspired song” is found among the Woiworung. According to my informant, Berak, it was composed by the headman of that section of the

Woiworung tribe which was located about Mount Macedon, and in the males of whose family, from one generation to the other, was the custody of the quarry from which the surrounding tribes obtained the stone for their tomahawks. The bard who composed this song came of a poetic stock. His father and his father's father before him are said to have been "the makers of songs which made men sad or joyful when they heard them." The old man who sang this song to me was moved almost to tears by the melancholy which the words conveyed to him as he chaunted it.

***Howitt 1887: 330***

38

There are other poets who composed under what may be called natural influences as distinguished from supernatural. Umbara, the bard of the Coast Murring told me that his words came to him "not in sleep as to some men, but when tossing on the waves in his boat with the waters jumping up round him."

***Howitt 1887: 331***

39

I have mentioned songs which are accompanied by rhythmical gestures or by pantomime which greatly adds to the effect. A favorite one which I have seen describes the hunting of an opossum and its extraction from a hollow log by the hunter, who is the principal singer, and his assistants. Every action of finding the animal, the ineffectual attempt to poke it out of its retreat, the smoking it with a fire, and the killing of it by the hunters as it runs out, is rendered not only by the words of the song but also by the concerted actions and movements of the performers in their pantomimic dancing.

***Howitt 1887: 332***

40

Besides the men who were the bards of the tribe, there were also men of lesser poetic faculty, who devoted themselves to some branch of "art magic," and who used songs therein. The songs which they used were rather charms, chaunted by themselves alone, or with others who joined in the intention of producing some ill to another, or to alleviate or remove some ill done by another person. In many cases these chaunts are invocations of some supernatural being, as when the wizards call upon "Daramulun" at the Kuringal, or when the eponymous ancestors, Yeerung and Djeetgun, are called upon by the Kurnai at their Jeraeil. Such chaunts can scarcely be called songs, but they are part of the vocal efforts by which the aborigines seek to amuse, to benefit, to protect themselves, to injure their enemies, or to incline powerful supernatural beings to their good, or to the benefit and instruction of the young novices

***Howitt 1887: 333***

## CHAPTER TWO

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# Clothing and Adornment



*Plate 3: Group of Aboriginal tribesmen, probably from Gippsland, 1858 (photographer: Antoine Fauchery).*

## Cloaks and Rugs

41

The Kurnai in their primitive state usually went about without any covering. But they made what are now called “opossum rugs”. These were made of the dried pelts of the opossum sewed together with sinew. They did not dress the skins but merely tied them, and to make them more pliable cut markings on the skin side by means of mussel shells (nanduwung). These marking are called waribruk, and each man had his own.

**Howitt 1904: 741–42**

42

In warm weather the men wear no covering during the day time except a short apron, not unlike the sporran of the Scotch Highlanders, formed of strips of opossum skins with the fur on, hanging from a skin belt in two bunches, one in the front and the other behind. In winter they add a large kangaroo skin, fur side inwards, which hangs over the shoulders and down the back like a mantle or short cloak. This skin is fastened round the neck by the hind legs, and is fixed with a pin made of the small bone of the hind leg of a kangaroo, ground to a fine point.

**Dawson 1881: 8**

43

Women use the opossum rug at all times, by day as a covering for the back and shoulders, and in cold nights as a blanket. When they are obliged to go out of doors in wet weather, a kangaroo skin is substituted for the rug. A girdle or short kilt of the neck feathers of the emu, tied in little bunches to a skin cord, is fastened round the loins.

**Dawson 1881: 8**

44

The rug is worn round the shoulders with the fur side inwards, and is fixed with a wooden pin in front. As every woman carries on her back, outside her rug, a bag suspended from her shoulders by a belt of kangaroo skin, a pouch is thus formed for her baby in a fold of the rug above the bag; and to give the bag solidity, and thus prevent the child from slipping down, stones are sometimes carried in it, in addition to the articles which it usually contains.

**Dawson 1881: 39**

45

The original clothing, both of men and women, seemed to be two mats, made of skins joined together, the one hanging before, the other behind.

**T. Winter, 1837 probably (Bride 1898: 395)**

46

In dress there is not the least difference between that of the male and the female. The opossum rug is the only covering of both sexes, and in both it is worn in exactly the same manner – that is, somewhat after the fashion (as seen in paintings) of the Roman Toga, across the shoulder, with one arm free... The men wear a belt round the loins under the cloak, whilst the women wear a band round the same portion of the person, said band having a thick fringe all round it of about a foot in depth. The fringe is made of innumerable strips of opossum or wallaby skin. Of course neither of these bands or belts are seen unless the rugs are thrown off. Both sexes wear armlets made of opossum skin on the upper portion of both arms, and a netted band of around an inch and a half wide around the brow. This band is coloured red by means of ochre mixed with fat. Round the neck both sexes wear strings of reeds cut into sections of an inch long, which when carefully dried, are of a clear pale straw colour, admirably calculated to form an agreeable contrast to their glossy, ebon-hued necks and shoulders. They also make necklets from the antennæ of the lobster, which when the fishes have been cooked, are of a bright red. These, with a kangaroo tooth or two dangling from the hair by the sides of the head, and a bone or short section of reed through the middle cartilage of the nose make up all the ornaments with which they feel proud to decorate themselves. These ornaments are not donned on great occasions, such as high days and holidays (not having any such festive periods in their calendar), but merely as the whim takes them, or for want of other occupation.

***Beveridge 1889: 27–28; Beveridge 1883: 26***

47

A good rug is made from fifty to seventy skins, which are stripped off the opossum, pegged out square or oblong on a sheet of bark, and dried before the fire, then trimmed with a reed knife, and sewn together with the tail sinews of the kangaroo, which are always pulled out of the tail, and carefully dried and saved for thread. Previous to sewing the skins together, diagonal lines, about half-an-inch apart, are scratched across the flesh side of each with sharpened mussel shells.

***Dawson 1881: 9***

48

In wet weather the [possum] rug is invariably worn with the fur to the weather. Worn in this manner they are almost impervious to rain, whereas when the flesh side is exposed to the wet the cloak becomes saturated and consequently unpleasant in a very short space of time.

***Beveridge 1889: 156–157***

49

A fine Aborigine, his wife and two boys, about nine and 11 years old, paid us a visit. The two boys threw the boomerang (here called wonguim). We tried but made no fist of it. It makes a singular evolution. The blacks sent it almost out of sight and it returned nearly to the spot where they stood. We gave these blacks some tea, sugar and tobacco. The woman was dressed

comfortably and had a good opossum rug on, close wrapped round her....

***Journal of W. Thomas, 14 January 1839 (MacFarlane 1983: 436)***

50

The opossum rug, called Waller-wal-lert. It hung loosely about the body, had a knot at each upper corner, and was fastened by a small stick thrust through holes made by the bone-needle – Min-der-min. It could be cast off in a moment. It was carried or worn when travelling, but in the camp it was usually kept in the miam... The [possum] rug was usually ornamented on the inside. Lines straight, of herringbone pattern, or sometimes representing men and animals, were drawn with a sharp bone-needle, and filled in with color.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 271***

51

As I sat on the log to rest I got a great start on seeing a big black fellow, with only an opossum rug over his breast and left arm and a number of spears in his hand, coming towards me. Two lubras were with him, and whatever fears I had were soon allayed, for, sticking his spears in the ground, the lubras sat down alongside them while he, with a broad smile on his face, came up to me.

***Hamilton 1981 [1914]: 97***

52

The black fellows remained with us during the day and were not a little importunate for almost everything. Three of them were fine young men, habited in opossum skins, having a number of pigeon and other feathers stuck in their hair, and on their backs and arms were a number of weals of different dimensions, they had lost their front teeth. The other was a youth whose teeth were complete, and his body less marked.

***J. Dredge (MacFarlane 1983: 423)***

## Headdress

53

Saw an old woman with a bonnet or hood made of long tussocks of grass, which she wore on her head. They were tied together at the upper part as a shelter from the rain; primitive and wretched covering.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 21 April 1841, Tarong (Presland 1977b: 43; Clark 1998b: 141–142)***

54

The natives ornamented their hair with white feathers at Port Fairy.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 29 April 1841 (Presland 1977b: 64; Clark 1998b: 162)***

55

A band of plaited bark surrounds the head, and pointed pins, made of wood or of the small bones of the hind foot of the kangaroo, are stuck upright at each side of the brow, to keep up the hair, which is divided in front and laid over them.

**Dawson 1881: 8**

56

The natives of these parts make frequent use of ligatures, as they say for strengthening the muscles of their arms. And some are at times so tight that after worn a few days it cuts through the skin. The natives, I observed, decorate their hair with pieces of reed.... They are fastened on by drawing the hair through the hollow of the reed. I have nowhere observed this sort of decoration. Kangaroo teeth I find worn as ornaments among nearly all the tribes I have visited. They are bound in pairs. And form angles... The pieces of reed are an inch long and worn single. It is surprising what large bones and reeds they (the men and women), thrust through the cartilage of their nose.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 6 June 1841, Western District (Presland 1980: 47–48; Clark 1998b: 252; Sculthorpe 1990: 33)**

57

The band around the forehead, called Leek-leek. In this band is placed a feather from the native companion, the eagle, or the lyre-bird. Sometimes the native put his tomahawk, or some other small article, in this band; but the tomahawk was usually carried in the belt that is worn about the waist.

The Leek-leek was usually made of the sinews of the tail of the kangaroo, but often of the sinews of other animals, if these could not be obtained. The Leek-leek was fashioned by the women, as a rule; but young men often amused themselves by making this ornament.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 271**

58

[Lower Murray tribes] The band tied round the head, extending from the occiput over the parietal bones to the place of the frontal suture, [is] called Mar-rung-nul ... This ornament is closely woven, and to the eye resembles a thick coarse cloth, but it is really soft and pleasant to touch. It is made of the fibrous root of the wild clematis (Mo-u-ee). It is exceedingly strong. The length of the band is twelve inches, and the breadth one inch and a quarter. Dr. Gummow says that these bands are usually made by the women. Wing feathers of the cockatoo are stuck in the band, one on each side of the head. The feathers are called Wyr-rin-nay. This band is worn by males only...

The band of network ... Dr. Gummow says is named Moolong-nyeed. It is worn across the forehead, with the kangaroo teeth as pendants, which, when lashed together, are known as



Leangerra. When stretched, as it would be when on the head, the broader part of the network is nearly twelve inches in length and three inches in breadth. The open network on each side up to the knot is four inches in length. The material is the fibre of some aquatic plant, twisted and formed into a fine, hard, durable twine. The teeth are fastened neatly with the tail sinews of the kangaroo (Wirr-ran-nee). It would not be easy to find anywhere a more highly-finished piece of work of its kind than this. The wider part is beautifully knitted. This band was worn both by males and females.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 276–77**

## Necklaces, Amulets and Other Items

59

After having shaken hands with us all, he thought it necessary to go through the same form with the horses, and shook the bridles heartily. The only ornaments he wore were three hands of men and women, beautifully fully dried and preserved.

**A. McMillan, 25 August 1853, Near the River Avon (Bride 1898: 207)**

60

Gave a blanket to a Waverong native with one eye for a necklace made from the sinew of the emu.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 8 April 1839, Port Phillip (Clark 1998a: 25)**

61

The Murray River women make pretty but delicate necklaces with the small bones of fresh-water lobster.

**P. Chauncy (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 251)**

62

The bone, or piece of reed, worn in the septum of the nose, called Noute-kower. The bone of some animal – generally a bone somewhat curved – three or more inches in length, was passed through a hole made in the septum of the nose, and carried joyfully, as something likely to gain favor with both sexes.

... Reeds cut into short pieces – of different lengths and different diameters – were strung on twine made of the wool of the opossum, or of some fibre, and hung round the neck in many folds, falling in some case quite down to the chest. The reed-necklace was called Kourn-burt. Another necklace, worn sometimes, was made of the sinews of the legs of the emu. This was formed into a kind of net and was called Kour-ur-run.

... Strips of the skin of some animal, ... were tied with some fibre around the loins, so as to

conceal the lower parts of the body in front and behind. These ornaments were called Murri-guile.

... A band made of the skin of a small flying squirrel (Tuin-tuin) was fastened around the arm to give strength.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 271**

63

I observed that my natives had, as on yesterday, put reeds through the cartilage of their nose and Eurodap on this occasion had daubed his head with clay.

**Journals of G.A. Robertson, 11 May 1841, Great Swamp, Portland Bay area (Presland 1977b: 91; Clark 1998b: 202)**

64

This necklace was very common many years ago; but the only examples I have seen have been obtained in the western districts of Victoria. It is formed of a long strip of well-dressed kangaroo skin, to which are attached the teeth (incisors) of the kangaroo. Each tooth is fastened to a small piece of skin by the tail sinews, and is neatly fixed to the long strip by knots passed through incisions. The skin is stained with red-ochre; and the contrast of colors is not unpleasing... The reed necklace commonly worn by the Australian females (and not seldom by the males) is named Jah-kul by the natives of Lake Hindmarsh, and Kor-boort or Tarr-goorn by the natives of the Yarra. The reed is called Djarrk. Pieces of reed – in length from half to three-quarters of an inch – are strung on twine made either of some fibre or the hair of the opossum; and, when extended, the necklace is thirty feet or more in length. In the example here figured there are four hundred and seventy-eight pieces of reed. This light and not inelegant ornament is greatly prized by young females, and they expend a great portion of their time making necklaces of this pattern.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 278–79**

65

I was forcibly struck with the mode in which some of the male Aborigines dressed. Their hair bedaubed with a pigment of ochre and grease, it was spun out into innumerable small ringlets hanging round their heads like the thrums of a mop, and covering half the face. A similar custom existed among the Natives of Van Diemens Land on the North Coast and in the Interior. Upwards of four hundred Natives during my sojourn visited the Bay among whom were eight fine half cast children: much useful information was obtained. Of the different amulets or charms in use among the natives the crystal of Telopar is most common. They are concealed by the men in a small bag and worn around the neck, the Women on no account are permitted to possess or see them; in their preparation, the top of the prism is ground or broken off.

**G.A. Robinson (Mackaness 1941: 20)**

66

To return to the womenkind, after their manner they had an idea of ornamentation displayed in large necklaces composed of short bits of hollow reed. Again opossum rugs were ornamented with fanciful designs drawn on the fleshside of the skins, when finished with red ochre, perhaps mixed with grease, was rubbed over the pattern.... In that decorative work... the instrument used was the bowl of an iron spoon ground to a sharp edge. She folded the skin, cut it slopingly, taking care not to slit though it, and on completion of markings from end to end of the pelt, taking another fold she proceeded until her task was accomplished ....

**Batey nd: 117**

67

On the Lower Murray I saw a necklace made of very fine reeds, with a curious pendant, greatly prized by its owner. The string was made of very fine fibre, and about 18ft. in length, making, as the wearer chose, several circlets round the neck. On the twine were strung very short pieces of fine thin reed, colored alternately white and red; the pendant being composed also of twine, on which were fastened downy feathers of the goose, shells, the mandible of a duck, the upper mandible of a swan, and tufts of human hair.

**Worsnop 1897: 158**

## Bags and Belts

68

The larger sized Mockoor Mockoor (bags), are used for carrying their various belongings from camp to camp, whilst the smaller ones take the place of the pockets of civilisation. Each male is provided with one of the latter, which is carried over the point of the shoulder, or round the neck as the fancy of the wearer inclines.

**Beveridge 1889: 77**

69

The sash or band of network, called Ni-yeerd, is worn as a belt round the loins. In it the native carries the Wan-nee (boomerang), or the tomahawk or other weapon. This specimen sent to me by Dr. Gummow, is not inferior to any other piece of network I have seen. The twine, formed of the fibre of some flag, is uniform, in thickness and evenly twisted; and the meshes are all the same size. It is very strong and elastic, and as well fitted for the purpose desired by the native as if it had been manufactured expressly to his order by the most accomplished Europeans.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 277**

## Body Painting

70

The Aborigines are very fond of anointing their bodies and their hair with the fat of animals, and toasting themselves before the fire till their skin absorbs it.

**Dawson 1881: 8**

71

They were all seated in one group with their spears and other implements of war in their hands. These whole persons were decorated or marked in different device with a yellow earth or clay. Their heads were completely bedaubed as indicating I believe of hostile feeling.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 11 April 1839, Port Phillip (Clark 1998a: 26)**

72

I was struck by the appearance of some of the natives; they had blacked their faces and had a white mark on their forehead.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 9 April 1841, Black's station (Presland 1977b: 28; Clark 1998b: 130)**

73

They [the women] were not unmindful of personal adornment, using red ochre on the cheeks, and, occasionally feathers in the hair for this purpose.

**Curr 1965 [1883]: 115**

74

... I was informed that each tribe had its distinguishing marks, some for corroborees. And all while remaining at their Worns or huts. This marking the face is called by the Jarncoort, Mur. dong.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 11 April 1841, Kilambete area (Presland 1977b: 30; Clark 1998b: 131)**

## Nose Piercing

75

About the same age, nearly every person has the cartilage of the nose pierced to admit some ornament. The hole is made with the pointed bone of the hind leg of the kangaroo, which is pushed through and left for a week. A short tube, made of the large wing bone of the swan, is then introduced to keep the hole open, and is turned round occasionally while the nose is kept moist by holding the face over a vapour bath, produced by pouring water over hot stones. When the wound is quite healed, the ring is removed. On occasions of ceremony, a reed about eighteen inches long is pushed through the opening and worn as an ornament.

**Dawson 1881: 82**

76

In the Kurnai tribe the perforation of the septum of the nose was usually made when the boy was growing up, but some time before he was initiated. Some of the men might notice him as growing up, or his young men friends might say to him, "You ought to have Ngrung; it won't hurt you." Ngrung, is short for Ngrung-kong or nose-hole. If he consents, he lies down on his back, and his friend takes hold of the septum of his nose, extends it, moistens it with saliva, and then rapidly pierces it with a sharp bone instrument.

**Howitt 1904: 740**

77

[Prior to the corroboree] The men and well-grown boys retire to prepare themselves for the dance. They paint their bodies and limbs with white stripes, in such a manner as to give them the appearance of human skeletons; and they tie around the ankles a number of leafy twigs, which touch the ground, and make a rustling noise as they move. Each dancer wears the reed ornament in his nose. When they stand in a row these reeds have the appearance of a continuous line.

**Dawson 1881: 82**

78

The ladies had their faces decorated for the occasion: Some had rubbed a little ochre over their visage, not like European ladies by rouging the cheeks, but this was all over their face, others had large reeds thrust through the cartilage of the nose. Some of these reeds were a quarter of an inch in diameter and 12 inches long.

**Journal of G.A. Robinson, 2 May 1841, Between Moyne & Merri Rivers (Clark 1998b: 181; cf. Presland 1977b: 70)**

79

The men were armed, and the women after their custom adorned by a profusion of red ochre rubbed over their face, and a thick reed thrust through the cartilage of their noses.

**G.A. Robinson, 1, 2 May 1841 (Kenyon 1928: 147)**

80

[Kurnai] The perforation of the septum of the nose was usually made while the boy was growing up, but some time before he was initiated. It might be that some of the men would notice him as “growing”. The young men, his friends, might say to him, “You ought to have ‘Ngrüng;’ it won’t hurt you.” He consents. He then lies down on his back, some friends takes hold of the septum of his nose, extends it, moistens it with saliva, and then rapidly pierces it with a sharp bone instrument. The patient must not show any sign of feeling pain. He then jumps up and extends his arms out quickly from the shoulder, and jerks each leg in succession. This proceeding being supposed to aid the “Ngrüng-Kong” in causing him to grow big and strong.

**Howitt 1880: 191–192; cf. Howitt 1904: 741, Gippsland – Kurnai**

81

One of the Tappoc [Mount Napier] natives I observed with a bone in his nose, instead of a reed.

**Journals of G.A. Robertson, 11 May 1841, Great Swamp, Portland Bay area (Presland 1977b: 93; Clark 1998b: 203)**

## Scarification

82

Both men and women are ornamented by cicatrices – which are made when they come of age – on the chest, back, and upper parts of the arms, but never on the neck or face. These cicatrices are of a darker hue than the skin, and vary in length from half an inch to an inch. They are arranged in lines and figures according to the taste or the custom of the tribe.

**Dawson 1881: 82**

83

[on viewing the body of a deceased Aboriginal] He was a fine young man, apparently of 22 years of age, well made and about 6 feet high... His back was cicatrized, having 2 rows one above the other... Two kangaroo teeth, worn as ornaments, were fastened to his hair.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 27 January 1840, Coliban area (Presland 1977a: 29–30; Clark 1998a: 143)**

84

The practice of raising scars on the upper parts of the body seems to be universal in Australia, but among the exceptions to this practice was the Kurnai tribe. Before the occupation of Gippsland by the whites, the young men were not scarred, excepting a very few, who had met the Manero Brayerak and had followed their fashion of ornamentation.

**Howitt 1904: 743**

85

In the matter of tattooing these people differ considerably from other savage races. The tattooing performed by most savages, more especially the New Zealanders, is more like the marking produced by pricking Indian ink or gunpowder into the skin, as practised by seafaring men, than anything else, whilst the tattooing of these natives is prominent enough, even in the dark. One ornament of this kind, which we have found common to all the aboriginal tribes, is the raising of hard, smooth lumps across the back from the point of one shoulder to the point of the other; these lumps graduate from the centre of the back, where they are longest, to each shoulder, where they are shortest. In the centre of an adult's back the lumps are about three inches long, by a thickness in the middle of about three-quarters of an inch, and the short ones on the shoulder are two inches in length, with a diameter in the middle of half an inch. These excrescences are ovate in form, and are placed at regular intervals from each other, which when seen at a little distance, looks like a broad ornamental band stretching from shoulder to shoulder. The excrescences do not show any scars, but are perfectly smooth, more so in fact than any other portion of the person, and when seen on a man inclined to be hairy their lack of capillary growth is most peculiar. These tattooings are formed by cutting through the skin and filling up the incisions thus made with opossum fat, previously mixed with fine, wood ashes; the wounds by these means are kept open for several months, and during all that time suppurate and slough considerably, but notwithstanding this fact the wished for excrescences continue to grow. [When] the growth is deemed sufficient, the fat is applied in a pure state, when, in the absence of the irritating ashes, the wounds soon heal up, and, strange to say, without leaving the faintest trace of scar behind. They also make bands of similar character, only less in size round the upper portion of the arm, the excrescences being parallel with the length of the limb.

***Beveridge 1889: 155–156***

86

... Three of them stood near six feet high and well proportioned. Their backs and arms and on their breasts were raised the length of the finger more or less about half an inch high from the other flesh. We counted 20 on one of their backs, the middle one the longest. These were carried down then gradually becoming smaller till appeared just marked like a dash. It is done by lacerating the flesh with a piece of stone or flint a certain depth and length and kept open for days.

***Journal of W. Thomas, 24 January 1839 (MacFarlane 1983: 437)***

87

The young men were not scarred; but some few obtained these marks from the aborigines of Maneroo, their neighbours. But the young women were scarred across the back and arms, the proceeding being intended merely as an ornament. The Kurnai say it is to make them le-en rūkūt, that is, nice-looking women.

***Howitt 1880: 192, Gippsland***



## CHAPTER THREE

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# Conflict and Fighting



## General Conflict



'GOULBURN RIVER, NORTHEAST, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA, 1895' BY CAROLINE LE SOUEF FROM MUSEUM VICTORIA USED UNDER CC0

88

In the afternoon of this day April 19th I took tea with Mr Dredge (one of the Protectors) and family in their tent, and in the evening he accompanied me to the ground where a large number of natives were assembled.

It appeared that some disagreement had induced several tribes to assemble on the bank to the amount of from four to five hundred to settle their disputes by fighting and corroborees (or dances) according to their custom in such cases. Upon their meeting, a few spears were hurled but without any serious consequences, and this assemblage of sable savage warriors terminated their disputes by a succession of corroborees for several nights.

It appears to be a part of their design in the native dances for the several tribes to corroboree or dance to each other as an extended mark of respect, the one tribe performing to time (which is regularly beaten by several of them) a thousand gesticulations, grimaces and shoutings, many of which are of the most ludicrous and appalling character, whilst the other tribe is seated on the ground paying the most profound attention, occasionally expressing their approbation by shouts and laughter.

On other occasions the whole of the tribes assembles in one general corroboree or dance. A large blazing fire is kept up to leeward of the dancers which enlightens this nightly scene of savage conviviality, and gives it a very inspiring appearance.

***Journal of Rev. J. R. Orton, 19 April 1839 (MacFarlane 1983: 457)***

89

All the tribes beyond the district of their friends are termed wild blackfellows, and when found within the district are immediately killed.

***W. Thomas nd, Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix – Laws (Bride 1898: 401)***

90

The natives are numerous and troublesome, indeed, they are the greatest drawback to the colony, since they cannot be trusted. Several murders have been committed by them, but not lately, and they seem to fear the white-man's revenge.

***T. Winter, 1837 probably (Bride 1898: 395)***

91

A large bunch of townspeople on the ground. The number of Aborigines were estimated at from four to 500 people. A large number of the lower orders were inciting them to mischief. A fight was about commencing between the Natives when I prevented it.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, (Clark 1998a: 19–21)***

92

In the fight Pejerrer and Thompson's black and chief of Elengemats had all been struck. In the fight some were wrestling; others single combat fighting with marl and leongile; others throwing spears and boomerangs; the women with myrnong sticks and vociferating at the top of their breath. Some in single combat and then all together clubbing and wrestling. When a boomerang was thrown at a group, the men would all stoop and the missile escape them. At intervals the fighting would cease and the combatants stand and taunt. A boomerang or spear would be thrown to provoke the combat and the battle renewed. It reminded me of a Hibernian fraca.

***Journals G.A. Robinson, 21 April 1841, Lake Terong (Presland 1977b: 43–44; Clark 1998b: 142)***

93

It often happens that one hamlet may have an altercation with another; a lubra may have been seduced, or what not. The two hamlets will settle the dispute early on the following morning, the other hamlets no more interfering than if nothing was on the carpet, precisely as in some of our courts and alleys in England when two neighbours quarrel, the others take no more notice than if nothing was the matter.

***W. Thomas, nd, Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix – Native Encampment (Bride 1898: 430)***

94

The crime of murder is of rare occurrence among them, a Chief has stated to me 'that he never knew one killing another of his own tribe'. They are taught to kill any unknown black who enters their district unattended or not introduced by messengers of a friendly tribe.

***Thomas to La Trobe, 1 June 1844, Public Records Office, Melbourne (Coutts 1981: 241)***

95

This fearful custom is traceable to a superstitious belief that the death of a relation is occasioned by an enemy, who, having found means of coming upon his victim unperceived, has infected his malicious vengeance, and effected his escape. Hence a strange black, if found within the country of another tribe, is suspected of such a design, and, if possible, killed to protect their friends from his malevolence, who consequently regarded the murderer as a benefactor to his race. Such is the origin, and such in their estimation, the virtuous act of a large class of those murders inter se which are continually occurring.

***Dredge 1845: 8–9***

96

In a minute the two tribes, about thirty men in each, stood opposite to each other. The conflict now commenced in earnest; spears and boomerangs whizzed through the air, then men shouted and yelled defiance, while the women hung on the outskirts of the combatants, lashing the ground with their yam-sticks and dancing like very maniacs – as they were for the time – taunting and spitting at the opponents, and urging on their respective tribes to the combat; every now and then the vixens would rush at each other, and smash each other's fingers with their long sticks. After a time the spears were thrown aside, and the men rushed on each other with their waddies and leangles, and a general hand-to-hand fight took place, and lasted for some time, until a third tribe, who were camped close by, but not mixed up in the quarrel, separated the belligerents, and succeeded in making peace after much loud talking.

When the fight commenced, I got behind a tree and watched the combat. I thought that some would have been killed; but, when quiet was restored, I found that no great damage had been done; one man was severely cut in the thigh by a boomerang, another had a spear through his leg, and a few broken heads made up the sum total of the casualties.

***A.A.C. Le Souëf (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 292–293)***

97

It has always been the practice amongst the Aborigines for the warriors of one tribe to make incursions into the territories of another, either to steal lubras, or to surprise and attack males, who after being struck down, had an incision made in their sides, through which the caul-fat was drawn, and which fat was carefully kept and used by the assassin to lubricate himself - the belief being that all the qualifications, both physical and mental, of the previous owner of

the fat were thus communicated to him who used it. On the Upper Murray, a cord, about the thickness of ordinary whipcord, was formed out of the sinews obtained from the tail of the kangaroo; this cord had a running noose at one end, also two small bones, each sharpened to a very fine point, so fixed that when the noose was drawn tight the points would enter the jugular vein at each side of the neck. Armed with one of these, a black would steal at night up to the camp of another tribe, and, having selected some sleeping man, slip the noose around his neck, strangle his victim, and depart with the coveted caul-fat, without creating any noise or alarm.

**J.M. Davis (*Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 313*)**

98

Sometimes – but rarely – a fight is arranged for the purpose of testing the strength of a tribe. As a rule, fights are brought about by the misconduct of the women, the unauthorized killing of game, the sickness of some member of a tribe, the death of a prominent man, the quarrels of children of different families, or, not seldom, by trivial differences arising out of imaginary grievances.

***Smyth 1878 Vol 1: 154***

99

Some half dozen blacks were encamped opposite the Wickliffe Hotel. I noticed them through the forenoon as being particularly noisy. At length three men walked off in fighting costume, armed with several boomerangs, the Iliangle and the narrow shield. They were much more excited, and one nearly naked fellow cut some wonderful pantomimic capers, brandishing his weapons, leaping in the air, vibrating his legs and arms in a rapid manner, and vociferating furiously. Following some neighbours, I walked on to the Hopkins bridge. There I saw another party of Blacks engaged in a violent dispute with the three new comers. All carried their weapons, and from time to time in the heat of the argument jumped aside to flourish their Iliangles. The lubras were no idle spectators. Each one bore in hand a long, heavy pole with a sharpened point.

There being no prospect of an amicable settlement of differences, war was declared. The contest was less of a melee than of single combats... In the mean while the lubras were going about the field with their poles cracking the heads of those opposed to their side, or who were thought to be taking an unfair advantage.

***Bonwick 1970 [1858]: 178–179***

100

Today Mr. Grylls and I walked to the Falls... We returned and as soon as we got a sight of the native encampment we found them just rushing to the onset, the Port Phillip tribe and the Jacka Jacka tribe against the Barrabool, who had just arrived. It commenced by letting fly a shower of boomerangs. There was a good deal of sparring, and after the interference of the

Protectors and others it was stopped. The women were the most infuriated.

***Journal of Rev. W. Waterfield, 11 April 1839 (MacFarlane 1983: 454)***

101

On visiting the Native encampment the other day, on the south bank of the Yarra, I was much surprised to learn, that a part of Aboriginal natives, among whom were Ning-kollerbel, Nunuptun and 15 others (Boonnerong and Waverong) had left on a war expedition into the interior, to avenge the death of two of their tribe (young females), who had been murdered, by the Barrabul or Manmit blacks...

***G.A. Robinson to C.W. Sievwright, 26 August 1829, Yarra River (Lakic and Wrench 1994: 98)***

102

In obedience to your verbal instructions of yesterday, I proceeded immediately to the country on the west side of this town, and succeeding in meeting Ningirinol and two other Aborigines, who were returning from the direction of Geelong. From them received a confirmation of the report which was prevalent yesterday that the tribes to the westward of Port Phillip, including the Barrubul, Mainmit, and Nilangwin tribes, were congregating together, and about to come into the neighbourhood of this town for the purpose of fighting with the tribes now assembled here. These western tribes were said to be assembled between Geelong and the mountain known as Station Peak, and might be expected in this neighbourhood on Monday or Tuesday next.

***E.S. Parker to G.A. Robinson, 14 December 1839 (Lakic and Wrench 1994: 103)***

103

The Colac tribe had a camp near at hand. Some seven men, accompanied by a couple of women, came to us, covered with white paint – a death warning, the women's faces torn and bleeding, the men carrying spears, langeels, and waddies. One spoke to Mr. Murray. Mr. Murray immediately told me their intention, viz. "to kill my boy, Bon Jon."

***Captain F. Fyans nd (Bride 1898: 188)***

104

A short time previous to my departure a few men with their wives from an adjoining tribe came to that amongst whom I was living, with an invitation to join them in a conflict which they meditated with an adjoining tribe; they sent two or three young men to the tribe to the westward, inviting them also to join in their warlike excursion (or foray) on the occasion.... Buckley said the time of their meeting was very uncertain, that it might happen in a week or two, or it might be put off for some months, but that the collision was almost certain to take place sooner or later. In these conflicts it does not often happen that many lives are lost, seldom more than one or two, and frequently all return from the fight alive, and no other mischief is done, save a few heads broken, or an impression made on their coatless backs by a club or spear, so expert are they in avoiding the missiles of their opponents; all feeling of



hostility ceases with the battle and cordiality again prevails...

**J.H. Wedge 1835 (Labilliere 1878 Vol. 2: 58–59)**

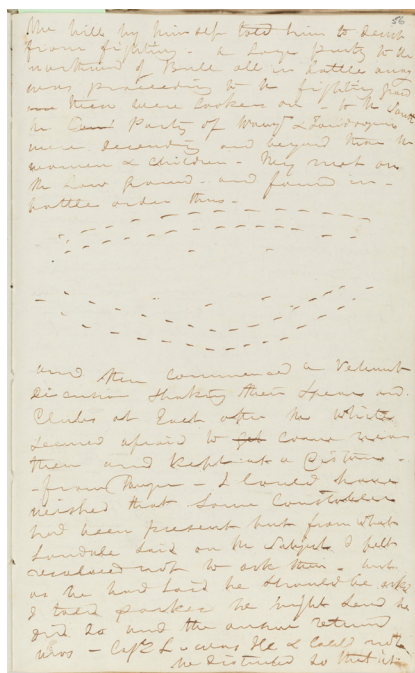
105

Nerrininin & Yal; Yal appeared in front the former with Red Cockatoos Feathers in his Head – the other with White, strip'd all over on thighs & body with white stripes, & brush on their legs above ancle. The Mother of the Young Man Yal Yal appeared first, naked beating the Ground & exclaiming against the Yarra Tribe for being sulky with her Son. The Yarra Tribe drew up.

The Mother of the murderd Boy was harangg the Yarra Blks & excitg them pleading the loss of her child & put herself in somewhat the same attitudes as the former but evidently while frantic the remembrance of her child absorbd her, & she drew back.

The father & Uncle of Boy then commenced a parlay, & after but few seconds commenced throwing Wonguims, the Father, Uncle, & Brother of Deceased Boy alone threw till they had discharged the whole then, a few of the principals threw a Wonguim or spear each. The 2 offenders not returning a single Wonguim or spear, but as occasionally a Wonguim or spear struck or almost struck the opposite party, they returned it, hence tho' when one undergoes a punishment, & is punished by the parties injured only yet terminates in a General fight – occasioned or arising from the occurrences aforementioned. The Lubras as is customary settled their Grievances & a fight took place.

**W. Thomas Papers, 14 September 1841, Mitchell Library MSS 214/2 Item 5, Microfilm CY 2605, Transcription commencing Frame 348 (Byrt 2004: 69, CD WT 2606, Judicial fight)**



\*A 7035/PART 1: GEORGE AUGUSTUS ROBINSON JOURNAL, PORT PHILLIP PROTECTORATE, 5 JANUARY-24 APRIL 1839. 1E156718 FROM STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES USED UNDER CC BY 4.0



106

About two o'clock, heard a tremendous yelling and saw every person running. At last I followed the crowd on being told that three different tribes had assembled and were fighting a battle on the other side of the River Yarra Yarra half a mile distant, from which the yelling proceeded.

The battle appeared to me to resemble a game, or perhaps an ancient Scotch tournament, rather than a fight between hostile tribes. A few (Aborigines) sometimes stepped forward out of the crowd, and every inch of flesh on their bodies shook in the most extraordinary manner, by some power which I cannot exercise. Then the chiefs gave them orders, and a general movement and shifting took place throughout the whole, and spears barbed with glass, flint or some hard metal stuck on with gum, were thrown at different times and in different directions, and when one was wounded on either side, the yelling commenced.

***Neil Black Diary, 15 April 1840 (Roberts 1986: 32); Woiwood 2012: 74***

## Weapons

107

Their war implements are:- (1.) The Wongium, thrown in battle and useful in the bush to knock down birds. (2.) Kurruk or throwing-stick, with which a reed spear is hurled out with great force. (3.) Worra Worra, a common club used in single combat. (4.) Leonile, the most dreadful hand weapon, used in single combat only. (5.) Kudgerin, a thick club – very weighty at the end, used in close combat only. (6.) Mulga, a shield used in single combat only, to defend the head from the hand-clubs 3, 4, and 5. (7.) Geam, a large shield used to ward off long spears. (8.) Tirrer, a reed spear used for distant objects. (9.) Tare, a long spear pointed at the end, used for distant combat. (10.) Nandum, a jagged spear – a dreadful weapon. (11.) Mongile, a double glass-jagged spear, the most fatal of their weapons. (12.) Wa-Voit, mostly used in play; it is thrown by the hand; the knob end bounds on the hard ground a considerable distance as a stone would do when thrown on ice. He whose wa-voit is the greatest distance is considered victor. (Spears 8-11 are from 8-10 feet long.)

***W. Thomas nd, Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix – Games (Bride 1898: 403–404)***

108

There is another kind of boomerang in use only by the tribe on the Ovens river, in Victoria. It is seldom thrown but is more generally employed in battle to strike and cut at the hands of the brave and experienced warrior than the boomerang previously described. The length from point to point is about 2ft. 3in., the greatest breadth of the blade is 5 ½in., the breadth of the lower part is 2in., and the thickest part (about the centre of the blade) is ½in. It is smoothed to a fine edge, and ornamented with lines in relief at one part where it was not practicable for the

maker to show the pattern by incision.

***Worsnop 1897: 131***

109

One description of challenge is by throwing a boomerang at a hut or worn, or into a group of natives, or a spear.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 21 April 1841, Kilambete (Presland 1977b: 44; Clark 1998b: 142)***

110

Sometimes a fight takes the form of a tournament or friendly trial of skill in the use of the boomerang and shield. Ten or twelve warriors, painted with white stripes across the cheeks and nose, and armed with shields and boomerangs, are met by an equal number at a distance of about twenty paces. Each individual has a right to throw his boomerang at anyone on the other side, and steps out of the rank into the intervening space to do so. The opposite party take their turn, and so on alternately, until someone is hit, or all are satisfied.

***Dawson 1881: 77***

111

The war boomerang is much heavier and more obtuse in the angle than the toy boomerang and on being thrown it does not return. The natives generally carry a weapon resembling a war boomerang, but longer and heavier, and somewhat like a scimitar in shape. It is used as a scimitar.

***Dawson 1881: 88***

112

They were fighting with long spears seven feet in length 1 ½ inches thick.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 11 April, Port Phillip (Clark 1998a: 27)***

113

The spear is the chief and most formidable weapon amongst the aborigines. There are seven kinds of spears, each of which is used for a special purpose. The longest and heaviest are the war spears, which are about nine feet long, and made of ironbark saplings reduced to a uniform thickness.

***Dawson 1881: 87***

114

Spears are warded off with the light shield, which is a thin, oblong, concave piece of wood about two and a half feet long, nine inches broad in the centre, and tapering towards the ends. It has a handle in the middle of the hollow side, which is grasped by the hand when in use, and the convex side is ornamented with the usual diagonal cross lines.

**Dawson 1881: 88**



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115

The natives were all frightened/fighting when I arrived at the camp. It was, as VDL Jack said, a big fight: spears, boomerangs, marls and clubs went to work. Several blows were given and exchanged. It had lasted two hours.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 21 April 1841, Tarong (Presland 1977b: 43; Clark 1998b: 141)**

116

From infancy they are taught to war; it grows with their growth and strengthens with their strength. Children may be seen with diminutive weapons (so also may the children of Europeans the sword, little canon) and when they grow to manhood each has his native weapons. And so have Europeans. The boys and girls as well as men and women among the natives have their sham fights they also are initiated to the chase.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 21 April 1841, Tarong (Presland 1977b: 44; Clark 1998b: 142)**

117

The leangle is a heavy, formidable weapon, about two and a half feet long, with a sharp-pointed bend, nine inches in length, projecting at a right angle. It is used in fighting at close quarters.

**Dawson 1881: 88**

118

... the Leawill is the most deadly-looking weapon. It is usually three feet long, and two inches and a half thick, having a pointed head, very similar both in shape and size to a miner's driving pick; in most cases sheoak (*Casuarina*) is used in the manufacture of this weapon; it is used in close quarters only, and is a most deadly instrument in the hands of a ruthless foe, or in a general melee such as a midnight onslaught.

**Beveridge 1889: 73**

119

The club or waddy called by the natives of the River Yarra Kud-jee-run or Kud-jer-oong is used mostly in single combat, when both combatants are provided with the strong shield (Mulga). Blows are aimed at the head only with this weapon. To strike at any other part would be deemed unfair. It is a heavy and strong weapon, and is made of the Burgan (mountain tea-tree, *Kunzea ericoides*) or box or red-gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*).

This club is called by some of the men of the Murray Koom-bah-mallee.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 299**

120

The form of the waddy varies with every tribe, and men of the same tribe have clubs very differently formed and ornamented. The upper part of some is pear-shaped, and in others like two cones placed base to base, and so fashioned as to present a cutting edge. Of this latter form there are various modifications. It is with the Kud-jer-oong that the natives usually chastise their wives.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 301**

121

The Warra-warra – or Worra-worra, as it is named by the Yarra and Western Port tribes, or Nulla-nulla of the Lower Murray – is made from a sapling. A young tea-tree (*Melaleuca*) is pulled up, cut short, and the root fashioned into a knob forming a weapon .... The root is called Kow-un-o. This instrument is sometimes used in a general fight, but more often in single combat.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 314**

122

The Lil-lil is used in battle. It is thrown very much in the same manner as the Wonguim,

but skill, only acquired by much practice, is necessary to give due effect to the weapon. It is believed by many to be even a more dangerous instrument in the hands of a brave and experienced warrior than the Barn-geet. The Barn-geet may wound severely, may cause a contusion, or even break the arm if it strikes that limb; but the Lil-lil, forcibly and skilfully directed, will break a leg, fracture the ribs, or penetrate the skull.

The weapon here figured... is a very old one, and is that used by the natives of the River Ovens and the Broken River, in Victoria. One of the men of the Yarra tribe who examined it informed me that the men of the Mitta Mitta tribe named the instrument Bun-jil.

Wye-wye-a-nine (of Kulkyne) says that the weapon is not usually thrown, but is employed in battle to strike at and cut the enemy, who defends himself with the heavy wooden shield (Mulga).

... The woods used for making the Lil-lil are Moe-yang (blackwood, *Acacia melanoxydon*), or ironbark (*Eucalyptus leucoxylon*).

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 314**

123

The instrument called by the natives of the River Murray Quirriang-an-wun is not generally used as a missile, but most often in close combat, just as a sword would be used by a soldier... It is made of very hard wood; the edges are sharp, and whether used as a sword or a missile, it is undoubtedly a formidable weapon.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 315**

124

The noose used for strangling an enemy – Nerum – consists of a needle about six inches and a half in length, made of the fibula of the kangaroo, and a rope two feet six inches in length. The cord is formed of twine of seven strands, which are five feet in length. The strands are doubled and twisted so as to form a loose rope of fourteen strands. One end of the rope is securely fastened to the head of the fibula by sinews (taken from the tail of the kangaroo), and the other end is made into a loop also securely bound by sinews. The loose rope is elastic and very strong... The Aboriginal carrying this noose tracks his enemy to his miam; and having marked the spot where he has gone to sleep, he approaches him stealthily, slides the bone under his neck, puts it through the loop, and quickly draws it tight, so as to prevent him from uttering the slightest sound. He then throws the body with a jerk over his shoulder, and carries it to some secluded spot where he can take securely and at his ease the kidney-fat.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 351; cf. Balfour 1901: 117–118**

125

Of shields they have two kinds, one for serious conflicts and the other for display merely. The

former is triangular and two feet six inches in length; in the centre of the angle a hole four inches long is pierced for the hand; the flat side opposite the handle is five inches wide, from whence it narrows down to a point at each end. The instrument is perfectly solid, therefore very heavy, as well as being strong. The handle is padded with opossum skin to save the knuckles during action. They are exceedingly dexterous in the use of this instrument; so much so indeed that nearly any aborigine will make a target of himself for any other aborigine to spear at, if only he be provided with one of these shields. This instrument is made of the stunted box (*Eucalyptus dumosa*), the inlocked grain of which is almost unsplittable, therefore the very thing to receive hard knocks with the least possible injury.

**Beveridge 1889: 71–72**

126

Of shields there are two kinds – the Mulga used for warding off blows given by the Kud-jee-run and Leon-ile, mostly in single combat, and the Gee-am for protection in a general fight against spears.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 330**

## Women

127

This morning a quarrel took place between 2 native women at their camp, 300 yards from Mr. Murry's hut. It first commenced by a woman walking to and fro or backwards and forwards before her hut with a long murrnong stick on her shoulder, about 8 feet long and 1 inch and ½ in diameter, vociferating in her own, I presume abusive, language, in her own tongue. At length another woman came forward with a weapon of similar description, a murrnong stick, and confronted her. The usual strokes and defences then took place, the one striking the other fending. When the stick was knocked out of the hand, then a stroke on the head or body was the consequence. They took it in turn to defend and to strike. When they tired of the quarter staff they took to scratching each other and tearing hair.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 27 March 1841, Murray's station, Lake Colac/Warion hills area (Presland 1977b: 7; Clark 1998b: 109)**

128

Native weapon fight: the women fight with their sticks before mentioned ..., holding them over their head to ward off blows given by their antagonist. These sticks are about five – six and six foot some seven foot in length and 1 ½ inches in diameter. They were short or chisel pointed at one end, and they were there to push off the gum from the trees.

**G.A. Robinson, 11 April 1839, Port Phillip (Clark 1998a: 27)**

129

Quarrels between tribes are sometimes settled by single combat between the chiefs, and the result is accepted as final. At other times disputes are decided by combat between equal numbers of warriors, painted with red clay and dressed in war costume; but real fighting seldom takes place, unless the women rouse the anger of the men and urge them to come to blows. Even then it rarely results in a general fight, but comes to single combats between warriors of each side; who step into the arena, taunt one another, exchange blows with the leangle, and wrestle together. The first wound ends the combat. This is often followed by another encounter between the women, who begin by scolding, and rouse each other to fury, tearing each other's hair, and striking one another with their yam-sticks and muurong poles.

***Dawson 1881: 77***



## CHAPTER FOUR

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# Cooking



## Ovens

130

Domestic utensils are limited in number; and, as the art of boiling food is not understood, the natives have no pottery or materials capable of resisting fire. Their cookery is consequently confined chiefly to roasting on embers or baking in holes in the ground; but as they consume great quantities of gum and manna dissolved together in hot water, a wooden vessel for that purpose is formed of the excrescence of a tree, which is hollowed out sufficiently large to contain a gallon or two of water. This vessel is placed near enough to the fire to dissolve the contents, but not to burn the wood. It is called 'yuuruum', and must be valuable, from the difficulty of procuring a suitable knob of wood, and from the great labour of digging it hollow with a chisel made of the thigh bone of a kangaroo.

**Dawson 1881: 14**

131

In the district of Meredith, midway between Geelong and Ballarat, there is a considerable number of mounds, locally known as Blackfellows' ovens. In the landscape they appear as ordinary irregularities on the surface of the ground, and in many cases would be passed by without arresting the least attention... As cooking was concerned, the necessity for ready access to water explains at once why so many ovens are to be found along the banks of creeks and rivers, as well as by the margin of lagoons and lakes... The collection of ashes, charcoal, and stones may be 20 or 30 feet in diameter, and 1 or 2 feet thick at the centre. But the real oven, formed of stones, is much smaller than what the foregoing figures indicate. The stone oven itself varies in size from 4 to 9 feet in diameter; 6 feet, however, may be taken as a common size in the whole of the Meredith District. This stone oven is usually slightly concave, or crater-like, with a central stone larger than those otherwise employed in the oven. Such central stone was obviously convenient for the process of cooking by steam.

**MacPherson 1884: 49-59**

132

Ovens are made outside the dwellings by digging holes in the ground, plastering them with mud, and keeping a fire in them till quite hot, then withdrawing the embers and lining the holes with wet grass. The flesh, fish, or roots are put into baskets, which are placed in the oven and covered with more wet grass, gravel, hot stones, and earth, and kept covered till they are cooked. This is done in the evening; and, when cooking is in common -which is generally the case when many families live together each family comes next morning and removes its basket of food for breakfast.

**Dawson 1881: 17**

133

On our side of the river had the mound resulting from a cooking oven, another bend lower

down had its old bakery. In 1846 these ovens had gone out of use. Mr Edward Page who left Glencoe in 1859 stated he had seen Aboriginals roasting meat in these primitive contrivances. The blacks excavating a hole in the ground, paved it with stones, lit a fire thereon, and when the fire had burnt down the ashes were raked out. Whatever game they had collected was placed on the heated stones, was covered with green grass, fresh gum leaves and hot ashes placed on top. The oven mounds would show to the present day if we had not plough them down. On alluvial flats on rare occasions in ploughing a stone hatchet is unearthed, whilst for flint flakes they are common enough. The greatest spot of old for these was the crown of a slope with basaltic rock just cropping out and just suitable for spalling lumps of flint brought from a distance as none of the material existed near at hand.

**Batey nd: 120–121**

134

Around these entrenchments are a number of large ovens or mounds for baking. These were at least (?) in the immediate neighbourhood. They were the largest I had seen. The one I measured was 31 yards long, 2 yards high and 19 yards broad. They cook their food on these. Here numerous fragments of quartz which they had used for sharpening and preparing their implements lay strewn about.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 9 July 1841, Mt. William area (Clark 1998b: 308)**

135

Passed several fireplaces of the natives or ovens... In these ovens or fireplaces, the natives bake their murrnong and emu and other animals. The round dots are stone, the intermediate is earth, that is, the stones are placed to keep up the earth.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 27 January 1840, near Coliban (Presland 1977a: 27; Clark 1998a: 142)**

136

Blackfellow's ovens, or cooking places, have been a fertile source of argument for many years, some holding that they are not cooking places at all, but a description of Tumuli, left by some race long since passed away, and quite forgotten; still, so far as the general public are aware, none of the writers on this point have had sufficient curiosity to dig into the mounds, and so set it at rest once and for all.

Blackfellow's ovens are not misnomers, but to all intents and purposes are genuine cooking places, and the following is the manner of their formation: A family, or perhaps several families, as the case may be, select a site for their next camp, where abundance of game and other sources of food exist, and are procurable with the least expenditure of time and trouble. Towards the middle of the afternoon the hunters drop into camp, with the result of the day's industry, consisting, in all probability, of all sorts and sizes; for our present purpose, however, we will imagine the game to consist of opossums only.

As soon as the hunters have seated themselves comfortably, they set to work skinning the opossums, whilst several of the lyoores (women) go off with their yamsticks. When they reach the spot which they had before selected for the purpose, they begin with a will to excavate a hole three feet in diameter and eighteen inches deep. During the digging of the hole, any pieces of clay about the size of cricket balls which are turned out are carefully placed on one side. When the hole has been dug sufficiently deep, it is swept or brushed out with some boughs, or a bunch of grass; it is then filled to the top with firewood (which the lyoores had previously collected for that purpose), upon which the selected pieces of clay are carefully placed. The wood is then ignited, and by the time it is all burned the clay nodules have become baked, until they are exactly similar to irregular sections of well-burnt brick; of course they are red hot. When this result has been properly achieved, the hot clay is removed from the hole; for this purpose they use two pieces of stick, about eight inches long, holding them both in one hand, and working them deftly, even as a cook-maid uses a pair of tongs. The natives now term these sticks tongs. Prior to the advent of white men, they had no name for them, other than kulky...

After the hot clay is removed from the hole, the ashes are carefully swept out, and a thin layer of grass slightly moistened, placed over the bottom, and round the sides, upon which the prepared opossums are nicely packed, and then covered over with more damp grass. The hot clay nodules are then spread equally over the top of the grass, when the whole oven is then closed with the finer earth which originally came out of the excavation. Should this covering be too thin to keep the steam from escaping, it is supplemented by earth, dug in immediate proximity (this supplemented soil accounts fully for the depressions always found about the bases of these ovens). Ashes are never employed for the outside covering, because, being fine, they would percolate through the interlining both of the grass and clay nodules, thereby adding an amount of grit which would not improve the flavour or appearance of the food. Before the clay nodules and the bottom of the hole has become exhausted, the opossums are beautifully cooked, as perfectly so indeed as though the operation had been performed in the most improved kitchen range extant.

When the cooking has been completed the covering is scraped off, and this debris, consisting of calcined clay, ashes and burnt earth, become the nucleus of a blackfellow's oven. This process being repeated at short intervals, over a series of years, perhaps indeed centuries, results in the mounds, which are in reality blacks' ovens, although frequently termed (most improperly so) tumuli.

***Beveridge 1889: 31–34***

137

Even now, as we travel through the country, we find but few indications of a previous race having occupied it. Two of these are, the marks cut on trees, which will soon disappear; and the "native ovens", or mirnyongs.

1. The marks on the trees are merely where pieces of bark have been cut out for various purposes, or where notches have been made to assist in climbing; of course, these will soon be obliterated, but, fortunately, the other monuments of a more durable description will remain.
2. These are the myrnyongs, called by the colonists "native ovens". They occur so far as I am aware, only in the eastern and south-eastern portions of Australia, where the soil is less absorbent and the climate wetter, and in some parts colder, than the sandy territory of Western Australia.

... they are found in the valleys of rivers and creeks, on the margins of lakes and lagoons, just inside the "points of timber" or portions of forest which project into the plains, on rising grounds in the plains, near the sea-shore, and in every locality where fish, game, or food of any description is to be found.

***P. Chauncy (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 232)***

138

As a general rule the natives do not erect their loondthals, on these cooking mounds. An exception to this exists, however, on the extensive reedy plains of the Lower Murray, which are annually inundated, and remain so for at least five months out of the twelve.

Of these wide-spreading reed-beds the blackfellows' ovens are of a larger size, and more numerous, than they are in any other portion of Australia, thus plainly denoting the at one time denseness of the population in that locality, as well as the abundance of food pertaining thereto.

***Beveridge 1889: 34***

139

The way in which these ovens were used was as follows: - When there was food to be baked, the women, with their hands and yamsticks, scooped a hole in the mound; if in doing so they came upon any lumps of clay (for there was no stone in those parts), they roughly lined the bottom of the hole with them. If none were met with, they quickly dug up a quantity for the purpose with their yamsticks, from somewhere near at hand. These lumps were about the size of a man's fist. The bottom of the hole being lined with them, a fire was made on top of them, and on the fire were thrown more lumps of clay. When the fire had burnt down, these last lumps were removed to one side, and the hot embers to the other. The hole being thus cleared of every-thing except its flooring of hot lumps of clay, the latter were strewn thinly with grass, or with the leaves of a herb called pennyroyal, green if possible, and well damped with water. On this were laid, neatly packed, the animals or roots to be cooked; then came another coating of wet grass, next the remaining lumps of heated clay, and then the burning embers. These were often covered with a sheet of bark, and on top of all these was a quantity

of earth. In an hour or two the food was taken out well-cooked and clean.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 108–109***

140

Food was often cooked in the coals of a fire but it was common all along the Murray to use ovens. I have not seen this mode of cooking in Gippsland.

They used ovens to cook the large quantities of food that needed to be cooked at once to prevent putrefaction.

They made a large fire containing a good many stones. When the stones were red hot they were spread out in the embers and covered with a thick layer of wet grass. The meat or other food was placed on this layer and covered with more wet grass, and on this the remaining hot stones were placed, and the whole oven mound was covered with earth. The food was very nicely cooked in about 2 hours. At the present day rather large mounds may be seen on the banks of the Murray which were made by the blacks in time gone by.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 53)***

141

... here and there about a mile apart large mounds of earth thrown up. On examining these mounds we found steam coming out of them, and on looking still further into them, discovered they were ovens for cooking the compung (the root of the bulrush which grows in the reed beds).

These roots are dug up by the lubras (women) with their yam sticks which are long and in shape like carrots; there are fibres running the whole length of the root, and between these fibres there is a substance which is not unlike the meal of a potato when cooked; this and the fine fish the blacks caught in the river formed very good food for them...

***Kirby 1895: 28. Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840s***

## Mammals

142

The cooking of the kangaroo was in general a very simple affair. The hair was singed, the body scraped, and the entrails removed, and it was then roasted.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 187***

143

In cooking them [possum] the natives are not very particular. In general, they are thrown upon a fire for perhaps a minute. Then the wool is pulled off, a hole is made in the stomach



with a stick, and the entrails are taken out. The body is then roasted slowly in the hot embers and ashes of the fire.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 188***

144

The wombat is roasted in his skin, and is said to afford most excellent meat. It is believed that this creature could be easily domesticated. The wombats of Victoria weigh as much as seventy pounds.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 190***

145

The natives may not skin the [native] bear [koala]. He is roasted whole in his skin. The flesh is said to taste like pork.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 191***

146

In cooking it [echidna], it is usually covered with clay and roasted in its quills. In Gippsland, the fat is severed from the lean and cooked separately.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 191***

## Birds and Aquatic Animals

147

The bird [turkey, *Otis Australasiensis*] is always roasted by the natives, either in an oven or on the embers of the fire.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 192***

148

The natives seldom stop to pluck the birds of their feathers before cooking, but placing damp grass on the hot stones of the oven, put the bird thereon, and laying on more wet grass and placing heating stones on it, cover up the whole with earth. In this way they are half stewed.

***Worsnop 1897: 116***

149

Fish were always cooked on the coals of a fire. It was worth seeing their method of cooking the large cod fish on the Murray. The belly of the fish was separated from the body and each part was cooked on different fires. The belly was positioned so that all the gravy was contained. When the fish was cooked, the gravy was used for steeping the body of the fish, and this they made a very nice dish.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 53)***



150

Besides these [crayfish], at the same time they catch immense numbers of young lobsters and shrimps, or prawns, all of which are mixed up together and cooked in the same condition as they are taken from the water. This dish is deemed a luxury of the highest order by the aboriginal epicure. The cooking of these small fry consists merely of boiling them very solely until the shrimps become red, when the dish is ready. The aboriginal pot made for this sole purpose is an elbow or knot of a tree scooped out until it becomes a mere shell of wood. This vessel is set upon cold ashes, which have been placed to a thickness of two inches over red-hot coals, so prepared for the purpose.

***Beveridge 1889: 92–93***

151

The fresh-water turtle (*Ptatemys Macquarie*), Ngart (Gippsland), Putch-poh (Lake Condah) is found in great numbers in many of the rivers, lagoons, and swamps of Victoria. It is caught the hand, and roasted in the shell. On the Murray, the natives take a great many of these reptiles during the summer season; and the flesh is said to be delicious.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 197***

152

Frogs were roasted and eaten in some parts of Victoria; and amongst these the natives Frogs were roasted and eaten in some parts of Victoria; and amongst these the natives probably took the common green frog (*Ranhyla aurea*), the smaller dark one (*Lymnodynastes Tasmaniensis*), and the tree-frogs (*Hyla phyllochroa* and *Hyla Verreauxi*).

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 199***

## CHAPTER FIVE

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# Country and Environment



## General

153

Desolations met with where are natives long resident — all trees are denuded and die .... and kangaroos, animals are destroyed, ground broken how different civilization is — increases and improves the soil. The natives require therefore much country to roam over etc.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson (Presland 1980; Coutts 1981: 240)***

154

I am informed from the respectable settlers that so run the kangaroos from that part of the country that scarce a kangaroo is to be met with from Cape Shank to Point Nepean in the one course, and from Arthurs Seat to the Point on the other.

***W. Thomas to G.A. Robinson, 20 September 1842, Public Records Office (Coutts 1981: 241)***

155

Native sports and bird catching destroyed: the natives i.e. several among whom Tulloh on the Grange and Edgar on the Grange, told me there were numerous places on the creeks where the natives used to catch birds but they destroyed and burnt them.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 8 June 1841 (Presland 1980: 51; Clark 1998b: 255)***

156

Mr Munro said there was millions of murnong or yam, all over the plain and that the kangaroos were so abundant that they came up to the door of the tent on one occasion and knocked down a child. Emu were also abundant and came near the tents. This was only 18 months ago; now there are none seen.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 22 January 1840, Munro station, Campaspe River (Presland 1977a: 18; Clark 1998a: 135)***

157

The kangaroo disappears from the cattle runs, and is also killed by stockmen, merely for the sake of the skin; but no mercy is shown to the natives who may help themselves to a bullock or a sheep. Such a state of things lead to the extirpation of the aboriginal natives, as in Van Diemen's Land, unless timely measures are taken for their civilization and protection.

***Mitchell 1839: 352***

158

Where the dairy station is there is a fine spring, the only water on the creek. The natives, therefore, are deprived of their water. A whole village, therefore, have been forced away from their ancient pool.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 9 May 1841 (Presland 1977b: 85; Clark 1998b: 195)***

159

White men hunting kangaroos: there is not a station home or outstation but the men and master have dogs to hunt kangaroos. Now as the blacks state, if the sheep belong to white fellow surely the kangaroo belong to blackfellow? Yet the white men take the blackfellows kangaroo but won't give him sheep for it. The whites under pretence of looking for cattle and sheep and any other trumped up story rush pell mell into a camp of natives scattering these poor people, driving them from their property and seizing upon the same. What would be said if the natives whilst in chasing the kangaroos or emu were to follow after them through a flock of sheep?

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 24 July 1841 (Presland 1980: 111; Clark 1998b: 326)***



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160

I would state here that the Aboriginal boundaries of countries are judiciously defined by mountains, Creeks and Rivers which I believe is general thro'out the Aborigines.

***W. Thomas, Mitchell Library Uncatalogued Set 214, Item 21.91-92 (Gaghwin 1988: 254)***

161

Though their habits are of so wandering a nature, each tribe has a particular location and boundaries beyond the limits of which they seldom go except on special occasions when they formally visit each other. Indeed they appear to be under very strong fearful apprehensions if by any circumstances they are induced to pass their respective line of territory: several proofs of which we have in the course of our travelling, in cases of natives whom we persuaded to accompany us, but upon their approach to the boundary of a foreign tribe they either openly avowed their determination to leave us, or otherwise slunk away unperceived.

***Rev. J.R. Orton to the Wesleyan Missionary Society, 18 July 1839 (MacFarlane Vol. 2A 1982:128)***

162

The entire country of the Waworong and Witowrong tribes, with scarcely any exceptions, is now sold or occupied by squatters. A considerable portion of the country ranged by the Jajowrong and Taouringurong tribes is also taken up by sheep or cattle runs. All available

portions of the tracts that remain will speedily be absorbed in like manner by stock. The very spots most valuable to the Aborigines for their productiveness – the creeks, water courses, and rivers – are the first to be occupied.

***E.S. Parker to Robinson, 1 April 1840, Mount Macedon District (MacFarlane Vol. 2B 1983: 692)***

163

In thus being obliged to quit their own district in search of that food with which it was wont abundantly to supply them, their local attachments for which they are so noted which confined the different tribes within their own immediate boundary are hence destroyed and eradicated: they are moreover obliged to intrude upon the hunting grounds and localities of strange tribes, and so are endangered, hostilities, amongst them, that unless checked, must end but with the extermination of the whole race.

***C.W. Seivwright, Report March to August 1839 (Lakic and Wrench 1994: 120)***

164

The right to hunt and to procure food in any particular tract of country belonged to the group of people born there, and could not be infringed by others without permission. But there were places which such a group of people claimed for some special reason, and in which the whole tribe had an interest. Such a place was the “stone quarry” at Mt. William near Lancefield, from which the material for making tomahawks was procured. The family proprietorship in this quarry had wide ramifications, including more than Wurunjerri people. On the one side it included the husband of Billi-billeri’s sister, one of the Headmen of the Kurnung-willam, who lived at Bacchus Marsh, and who was named Nurrum-nurrun-biin, that is, “moss growing on decayed wood.” On the other side it included Ningu-labul, and in another direction Bebejern, the son of an heiress in quarry rights, from whom an interest came to Berak through his father Bebejern. But it was Billi-billeri, the head of the family whose country included the quarry who lived on it, and took care of it for the whole of the Wuurunjerri community. When he went away, his place was taken by the son of his sister, the wife of Nurrum-nurmm-biin, who came on such occasions to take charge, when it may be assumed, like Billi-billeri, he occupied himself in splitting stone to supply demands. The enormous amount of broken stone lying about on this mountain shows that generations of the predecessors of Billi-billeri must have laboured at this work.

***Howitt 1904: 311–312***

165

Wherever one is born, that is considered his or her country.

***W. Thomas nd, Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix (Bride 1898: 399)***

166

The natives of the Darling had a mode of asserting their rights to the land they inhabited which seemed to surprise Major Mitchell. The “Spitting Tribe” caused the explorers to pour



out the water from their bucket into a hole which they dug in the ground; and when a river chief had a tomahawk presented to him, he pointed to the stream, and signified that the white men were at liberty to take water from it.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 145***

167

The Rev. John Bulmer informs me that the fact that an Aboriginal is born in a certain locality constitutes a right to that part, and it would be considered a breach of privilege for any one to hunt over it without his permission. Should another black have been born in the same place, he, with the former, would have a joint right to the land. Otherwise, no native seems to have made a claim to a particular portion of the territory of his tribe. Mr. Bulmer says he has found this birthright common to the Murray tribes, and he suspects it is common to most of the tribes of Australia. In old times a fight would ensue if any one wilfully trespassed on the land thus acquired as a birthright.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 146***

168

Besides the fact that the Bangerang territory was parcelled out between the two sub-tribes, and that fishing weirs on the numerous channels which conducted the flood-waters back into the Murray were owned by individuals, and descended to their heirs, I recollect, on one occasion, a certain portion of country being pointed out to me as belonging exclusively to a boy who formed one of the party with which I was out hunting at the time.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 111***

169

I here first saw the tracks formed by the natives in travelling over any particular pass. There was one across the Grampian Range, about 15 miles north of Mount William, leading up a wild romantic glen and over on to the source of the Glenelg. I found another through the tea-tree scrub of the Wannon, near Mount Sturgeon, from which, on each side of the river, other tracks diverged over the open ground; they were much like cattle tracks, except that they passed over places which cattle were not likely to attempt.

***C.B. Hall, 6 September 1853, Grampians (Bride 1898: 272)***

170

By what I can learn, long ere the settlement was formed the spot where Melbourne now stands and the flat on which we are now encamped [on the banks of the Yarra] was the regular rendezvous for the tribes known as Warorongs, Boonurongs, Barrabools, Nilunguons, Goulbourns twice a year or as often as circumstances and emergencies required to settle their grievances, revenge, deaths etc.

***W. Thomas (Mitchell Library Item 8. Letterbooks 8 April 1840 in Gaughwin and Sullivan 1984: 96)***

171

... they generally averaged 2 and a half miles in an hours good walking through the bush and dedect a quarter for going round and over dead logs which reduced travelling time thro' the day to less than 2 miles the hour, this may seem strange but such was the case in 1838, 39 and regularly understood by white bush travellers.

**W. Thomas (Mitchell Library Item 24. *Language and Customs of Australian Aborigines, Miscellaneous Papers: 10 in Gaughwin and Sullivan 1984: 93*)**

## Population

172

The powerful tribe once inhabiting this locality is becoming extinct. The river abounds with eels, and shell-fish is procured from the rocks, among which are the haliotus, muscles, oysters, and crawfish, to which the Natives are partial. The large number of Aborigines seen in particular spots have occasioned mistakes respecting their numbers. At Lake Boloke, during the eeling season, from eight hundred to one thousand Natives at one time have been seen; and hence this locality was represented, as being densely populated, whereas the actual inhabitants, the Boolucburrers, with whom I am personally acquainted are less than eighty. At Taro-rer, a large swamp a few miles east of Port Fairy, upwards of eight hundred natives during the whaling season have been collected, whereas the Tare-rer conedeets, the local inhabitants, are less than sixty. These masses are a collection of or representative of tribes, and the eeling and whaling seasons are wisely taken advantage of by them for holding their great social and political meetings. But for this singular provision such masses could not subsist; for, during the other parts of the year, there is bare support for the tribe of the locality. In every part of the country I travelled, fertile or sterile, all appear to have been once inhabited by human beings. Some tribes had a superabundance, while others scarcely subsisted. But, of all the places I saw, Lake Boloke was the most interesting. This spot, celebrated for its eels and its central situation, appears to have been fixed upon by general consent for the great annual meeting of the tribes of the interior, and it is for the same reason the sections in and near to the coast assemble at Tare-rer during the whaling season.

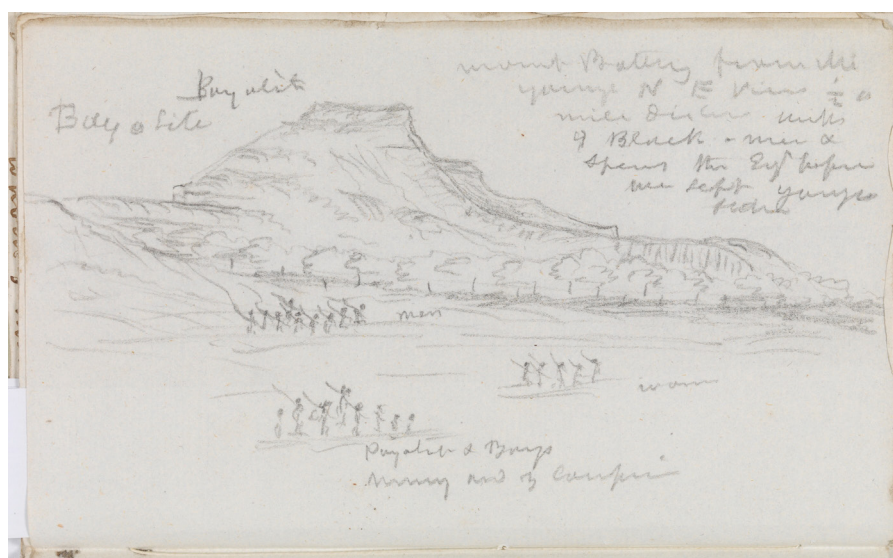
**G.A. Robinson, April 27 1841, Bolac, Western District (Clark 1990: 105)**



173

The Colac tribe of natives was not numerous when we came here – men, women, and children not numbering more than 35 or 40. From their own account, they were once numerous and powerful, but from their possessing a rich hunting country, the Barrabool, Leigh, Wardy Yalloak, and Jancourt tribes surrounding, made constant war upon them, and the tribe, from having been the strongest, became the weakest. The extent of their country was a radius of about 10 miles from Lake Colac except on the south, where in the extensive Cape Otway Ranges there was no other tribe.

**H. Murray, 18 August 1853, Colac (Bride 1898: 103)**



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174

They never were numerous at Buninyong or in the neighbouring district; though I remember hearing of a gathering of them at Mount Emu, which was estimated to amount to 500; but I think this statement to have been much over-rated. I should consider myself to be nearly correct if I set down the whole aboriginal population in the district around Buninyong at the time of its settlement – taking a radius of 30 miles from the mountain as a centre – at 300 souls; now probably there are not 30.

**T. Learmonth, 11 August, 1853, Buninyong (Bride 1898: 99)**

175

Although each tribe has its own district, and each family its portion, I never could perceive that they became in any way attached to a particular spot, or attempted to construct a dwelling having any greater claim to permanency than the common mia-mia. Nor have I ever observed the slightest semblance of religion among them. With respect to their number at the time the country was first occupied, it has been, in all account I have seen, very much overrated. I come to this conclusion from having counted their mia-mias when congregated, and do not recollect in any instance seeing more than about 30, nor do I think they would average more

than from four to five in a hut.

***T. Manifold, 30 August 1853, Warrnambool (Bride 1898: 139)***

176

The aboriginal population of Australia is generally thin and scattered, but in the vicinity of Port Phillip it may be considered comparatively great. It is very difficult to ascertain the amount with any degree of precision but, from the most correct information that I could obtain, it may be computed at about one thousand within sixty miles in each direction from the settlement, and in the same proportion entirely along the coast. They associate in tribes and are in constant habit of wandering, having no houses of any description nor fixed place of abode, though in their wandering they generally confine themselves to certain limits, beyond which they seldom stray.

***Rev. J.R. Orton to the Wesleyan Missionary Society, August 1836 (MacFarlane 1982: 82)***

177

I have heard that from four to five hundred of the native blacks (unaccompanied by females) have been seen in one body in that district; I have, however, never myself seen more than one hundred blacks together; but I have not been on the Gwydir, where they are most numerous.

***James Glennie of the Gwydir, Esq., 18 February 1839, Liverpool Plains district (Cannon & McFarlane 1991: 228)***

178

The Aborigines now sojourning in the vicinity of Melbourne belong to the three following tribes: the Waverong, the Watowrong or Witowra, and the Boonmoorong. The precise numbers I have been unable to ascertain, not having concluded my enquiries at the period of making this report.

The probable amount is

Waverong about	140
Watowrong ....	50
Boonmoorong...	12
Probable Total	202

The last named tribe from a statement made to be my Bodowar, a member of it, appears to be nearly extinct, not more than 3 or 4 families being at the present time in existence.

***E.S. Parker to G.A. Robinson, 13 March 1839, Melbourne (Lakic and Wrench 1994: 113)***

179

Where my tents are now pitched, I am in the centre of the district of the Wad-dow-ro or Barrubul tribe, who are from their own account the least numerous of any tribe, within a circle of 100 miles of Geelong. They may be estimated, men women and children at two

hundred and sixty souls...

The Wad-dow-ro or Barrubul tribe, occupy the range of country from the coast south of Geelong this is their principal hunting ground upon Indented Head, and the Balla river Hills; from this they range about twenty miles S. of the River Barwon, where the Lay-bourne falls into it and from the range of mountains called Kurdy-you ang [Flinders Peak] on the N.N.E. to the River Barwon on the S.W. they are principally found upon the banks of the Barwon. The Cal-li-jon tribe range from S.W. to W. inhabiting the country about Lake Colac and the salt water lake Kor-ang-a-mite...

From W. to N.W. are the Mian-mate tribe, upon the Wurdy Yallock, an inconsiderable river which in summer, is but a chain of water holes, from N.W. to N.E. is the run of the Nul-ang-gain or Bur-rom-beet tribe, inhabiting from Lake Bur-rom-beet to the western branch of the Mur-ra-bul.

***C.W. Seivwright, Report March to August 1839 (Lakic and Wrench 1994: 122–23)***

180

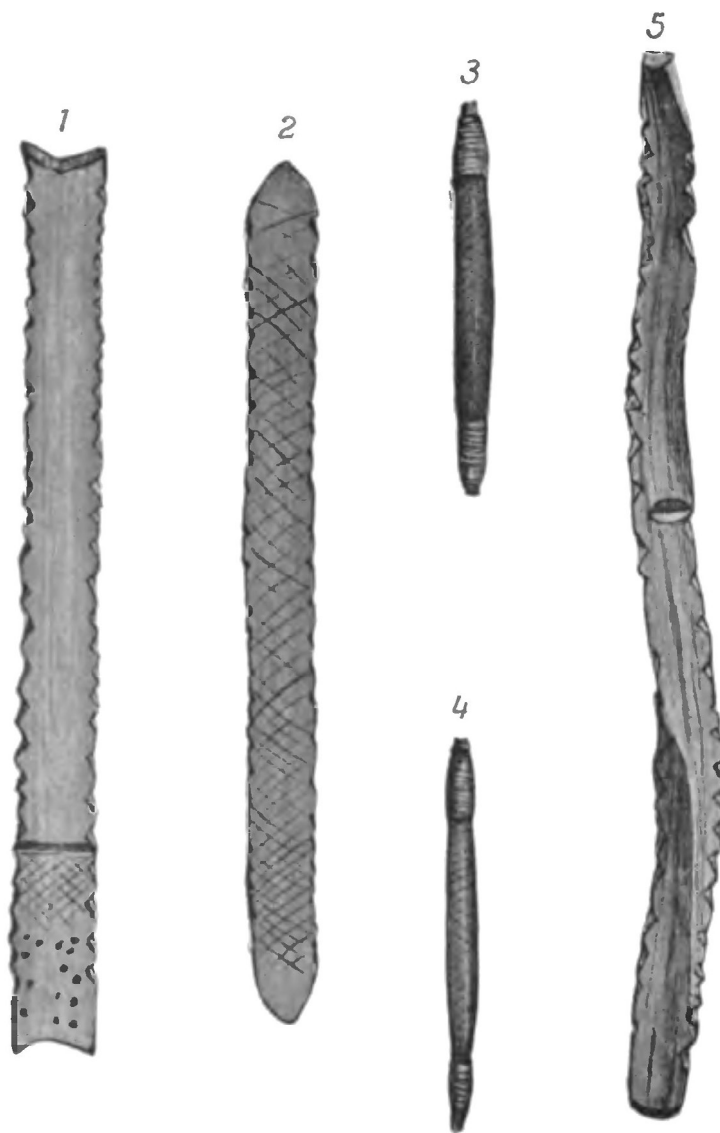
The author's father has told him of some two or three hundred having assembled to hold a corroberie, or native dance, on his station, not long after he went to it; and he himself can remember their coming round in considerable numbers perhaps at times as many as fifty or a hundred; but latterly never more than about half a dozen. For the last few years, however, before 1859, when he left the colony, they were never to be seen, and had become all but extinct in the neighbourhood.

***Labilliere 1878 Vol. 2: 332. Some personal recollections***

## CHAPTER SIX

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# Communication



## Messengers

181

In this tribe [Woiworung of the Yarra River] it was the headman of some locality who sent out messengers to collect people for festive occasions, for set-fights or for other matters concerning the tribe, and he did this after consulting with the other old men. The messenger was usually one of the younger men, and if possible one whose sister was married to some one in that part of the tribe to which the messenger was to go, for under such circumstances a man could go and return in safety, being known to and protected by the people he visited.

**Howitt 1889: 315**

182

In the Wotjobaluk tribes messages are sent from the old men by chosen messengers. This is also the case in other tribes of the same nation.

In the tribes of South-west Victoria there were messengers attached to each tribe who were selected for their intelligence and their ability as linguists. They were employed to carry information from one tribe to another, regarding the time and place for great meetings, corroborees, marriages, burials, and proposed battles.

Persons carrying these messages are considered sacred when on duty, and to distinguish them from others, they generally travel two together, and are painted according to the nature of the message, so that their appearance denotes the nature of their news before they come to the camp.

**Howitt 1904: 690**

183

Messengers are attached to every tribe, and are selected for their intelligence and their ability as linguists.

**Dawson 1881: 74**

184

[With respect to the Kurnai of Gippsland] It is not necessary that the message be carried by any particular person, but in most cases the messenger would be one of the younger men related to the sender. If, however, the message related to the initiation ceremonies, the messenger would be one of the older men. Such a messenger would carry with him a Bull-roarer as a token. If the message related to a set fight, the token might be a club or a shield, or if to gather a war party a man's kilt carried suspended from the point of one of the jag spears. This would be passed on from locality to locality until it had made its round.

**Howitt 1889: 315–16**

185

[With respect to the Wotjoballuk] The message stick is retained by the recipient, who carries it back when he goes to attend the meeting it calls together. The messenger meanwhile lives in the camp with some of his connections or friends until they all depart, when he accompanies them. Such a messenger would never be interfered with. No one would think of injuring a man who brought news. If any one were to molest him the whole of the people would take the matter up, but especially his own friends.

**Howitt 1889: 320**

186

One member of every tribe is devoted solely to the office of Ngallow Wattow (postman or messenger). He can travel from tribe to tribe with impunity, whether they should be hostile to his own people, or the contrary; he is employed carrying news backwards and forwards, and it is most wonderful how rapidly anything possessing interest to the aborigines is thus disseminated.

**Beveridge 1889: 186**

187

The Ngallow Wattows are always bachelors, consequently have to carry all their own belongings from camp to camp, as well as erect their own solitary Loondthals, bring wood and water, and, in short, do everything which a native having a Lyoor never thinks of doing. Physically these men are small in stature, as a rule, and in flesh spare almost to attenuation; they excel, however, all the other tribal members in physical endurance, especially as regards the powers of making long journeys on very short commons; their continual trappings from tribe to tribe keeps them in a state of perpetual training, as it were, and the frequent scarcity of food which they encounter on their weary travels has a tendency to keep down flesh, and makes long fasting sometimes bearable.

**Beveridge 1889: 188–189**

188

The messenger, on approaching the camp of the tribe to which he has to deliver his message, does not at once break in upon their privacy. He sits down at a considerable distance from the camp, usually within sight of it, and makes a very small fire of bark and twigs for the purpose of indicating his presence by the smoke. After the lapse of a quarter of an hour, one of the aged blacks approaches him, carrying in his hand a fire-stick or a piece of thick bark ignited at one end. The messenger presents his token to the old man, who scans it and orders his conduct accordingly. Some hours after, if the messenger has announced visitors, the members of his tribe arrive, and, if they are friendly, there is a corroboree at night. If the purpose is war, the messenger has to hold a debate with the old men of the tribe, which sometimes lasts into the night.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 133**

189

Like other tribes with which I have been acquainted, the Bangerang used to have messengers who went from one tribe to another to arrange the times and places of meetings and corroborees, and also to gather news. These men we used to call postmen.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 132***

190

Messengers are held Sacred, are allowed to pass from tribe to Tribe without molestation, are employed in making arrangements for General Meeting, entering into Compact, their pledge from Tribe is a Stick like what Corroby with. Messengers dare not go into what is termed Wild Blacks district.

***W. Thomas journal 4 March 1839. Mitchell Library MSS 214/1 Item 2. Microfilm CY 2604 Frames 39–44 (Byrt 2004: 14)***

191

... If the Tribes on parting agree to meet again, the time as well as the place is duly fixed, and to maintain the remembrance of the engagement, a very original species of calendar is employed. One of the young men is selected, and a red pigment prepared. The number of days being fixed, each of these are duly marked on the body of the young man, beginning with the forefinger on the right hand, passing up the arm and over the head to the forefinger of the left-hand; and as every joint of the finger, and every minute division of the human body, have their distinctive names, there is space enough for a considerable number of days. It is the duty of the living calendar, so selected and marked, to keep the Tribes informed of the lapse of time and the day of meeting ...

***E. Parker (formerly Assistant Protector of Aborigines) Lecture 10 May 1854. W. Thomas papers, Mitchell Library MSS 214/28 Item 2, Microfilm CY 3177 Frame 21. (Byrt 2004: 178)***

## Message Sticks

192

Taking Gippsland as a first example, it is to be noted that the Kurnai used the message stick in its most rudimentary form. For instance if a man desired to arrange with the men of another locality for a meeting at a certain time and place he might do as follows. I assume the message to be an invitation to meet for a corroboree at a place indicated by name to the messenger, that the time would be after an interval of “two moons” and that the persons to be invited lived in several distinct localities. The sender of the message in giving it to his messenger (Baiara) might, if he used anything to aid the memory, break off a number of short sticks from some tree or bush at hand equal in number to the localities to be visited, delivering them one by one



to the messenger as he named the places. The same method would apply to the enumeration of individuals.

**Howitt 1889: 315**

193

[As reported by Howitt's informant Berak] The notches on the upper right hand side of the stick represent the sender, and other old men who join with him in the message. Those on the under side represent the recipient and the old men with him. The remainder of the stick being notched along the whole length above and below means that all the men of both localities are to be present. The markings on the flat side at the right hand are merely ornamental, as are also the crescent-shaped ends of the stick. This message is supposed to be an invitation to some people at a distance to come to a corroboree.

**Howitt 1889: 318**

194

In the Gournditch-mara tribe message-sticks were used... The ends of such sticks were tied round with fine twine or sinews. If sent to a friendly tribe, it would be an invitation to a feast and dancing corroboree, and would be wrapped in a piece of kangaroo skin. If, however, it were sent as a call to attend a fight or a raid on another tribe, the messenger carried a barbed spear, in the point of which two emu feathers were fixed.

**Rev. J.H. Stähle (Howitt 1904: 699)**

195

When a chief has a matter of great importance to settle, and desires the advice and assistance of friendly tribes, he dispatches two messengers to the nearest chief with a message-stick. This message-stick is a piece of wood about six inches long and one inch in diameter, with five or six sides, one of these indicating by notches the number of tribes to be summoned, and the others the number of men required from each.

**Dawson 1881: 72**

196

... emblematic tokens are for instance the sacred humming instrument used in the initiation ceremonies, which is conveniently spoken of by its English name of Bull-roarer; the man's kilt which is carried on the point of a spear when the message calls an assemblage for war, and the lumps of pipeclay or red ochre which some messengers of death or of festivity also carry are likewise emblematic tokens.

**Howitt 1889: 315**

197

My informant, Berak, made a message stick such as was formerly used by his tribespeople. His explanation of it was as follows:- The notches on the upper right hand side of the stick

represent the sender, and other old men who join with him in the message. Those on the under side represent the recipient and the old men with him. The remainder of the stick being notched along the whole length above and below means that all the men of both localities are to be present. The markings on the flat side at the right hand are merely ornamental, as are also the crescent-shaped ends of the stick. This message is supposed to be an invitation to some people at a distance to come to a corroboree.

**Howitt 1889: 318**

198

[With respect to the Wotjoballuk] Having consulted together, and having arrived at a determination, as for instance that some other part of the tribe should be summoned to meet with their part of it on some festive occasion, or for some other purpose, the principal man among them prepares a message stick by making certain notches upon it with a knife. In old times the marks were made with a mussel shell (unio). The man who is to be charged with the message looks on while the headman makes the message stick (galk), and he thus learns the connection between the marks upon the stick and his message. A notch is made at one end to indicate the sender, and probably notches also for those who join him in sending the message. A large notch is made on one edge for each tribal group which is invited to attend. If all the people are invited to attend, the stick is notched on the edge from end to end. If part only are invited, then a portion only of the stick is notched. If very few are invited to meet, or referred to in the verbal message, then a notch is made for each individual as he is named to the messenger.

**Howitt 1889: 318–19**

## Smoke Signals

199

Sometimes, instead of dispatching men to give notice of a meeting, a signal smoke is raised by setting fire to a wide circle of long grass in a dry swamp. This causes smoke to ascend in a remarkable spiral form, which is seen from a great distance.

**Dawson 1881: 72**

200

Mr. Hutton said that the natives, when travelling, send up clouds of smoke to a great height. I saw some today. These are signals when travelling, to other tribes, and well suited to the flat country and may answer as regards them to the rockets used by us. By ascending a tree, they could see those signals at a considerable distance. And if sent up at a particular time agreed upon, as when the sun is vertical, or at any other time agreed upon, as when the sun is vertical, or at any other time as sun rise or –set, a great telegraph or semaphore would be effected. Said the way it is done is by stripping off the bark in one piece of a straight sapling, so as to form a

tube through which the smoke is made to ascend. As a substitute, what means are used when the sap is in the tree, I am not acquainted with.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, reporting observation by Mr. Hutton, 29 January 1840 (Presland 1977a: 33; Clark 1998a: 146)***

201

When engaged in hunting, when travelling on secret expeditions, when approaching an encampment, when threatened with danger, or when foes menaced their friends, the natives made signals by raising smoke. And their fires were lighted in such a way as to give forth signals that would be understood by people of their own tribe and by friendly tribes.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 153***

## Calls

202

Call or cries of the natives: my conversation with the natives.... was on the subject of the call of the natives or cry. I found they had all, that is each tribe, a different call and by the sound of the voice or call they would know the tribe the individual belonged to although they could not see the person.

***G.A. Robinson 31 July 1841, Western District (Presland 1980: 128; Clark 1998b: 340)***

## Pathways

203

The first indication we saw of blacks was footpaths which they made going up and down the riverside...

***Kirby 1895: 28. Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840s***

204

Trac'd minutely from Cape Shank to Point Nepean, also along the ranges of Hills, but could not discover the least appearance of Naive Encampment – travelled about 20 miles. Having made Point Nepean & along the NE Coast about 4 miles to Point Observation cross'd the Land and which is not more than 3 miles & fell in with 2 Native Paths but very faint only distinguishable on the ascent or descent of the Hills...

***W. Thomas Papers, 22–23 August 1839. Mitchell Library MSS 214/9, Microfilm CY 3082, Transcription commencing Frame 24 (Byrt 2004: 25, CD WT 3082 Summary August 1839)***

## CHAPTER SEVEN

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# Death and Burial



## Burials and Graves

205

Their modes of burial were various. Sometimes they would put the body into the hole of a tree, or upon a shelf made on a cherry tree (ballot). They would also bury them in caves, which abound in Gippsland, but if they were in a district where the ground was soft, they would dig a hole and bury them in the earth.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 31)***

206

This man was buried according to the custom of the Eastern tribes or Waverang, Boungerang and Wadoung - by being interred under ground. A grave was dug and corpse was wrapped in his skins and other garments and laid in the grave with all his war implements and a variety of other things, his own and many contributed. Two fires, one on each side the grave, was kept burning for 10 to 12 nights. Thus the custom of interring the dead extends westward to the centre of the Pyrenees, to the Bar conedeet, Carrac bulluc and Pellerwin bulluc, and from there westward they burn their dead. Towards Adelaide they put their dead up in trees. I visited the grave of this man, accompanied by the natives. It was quite recent, the ground is fresh. The grave is on a bank on the west side of the Wit.ter.be.car.rac and about 100 yards from where he was killed at his camp on the E side of the river.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 28 July 1841, Grampians area (Presland 1980: 120; Clark 1998b: 334–335)***

207

The dead are sometimes buried, sometimes burnt, and sometimes the bones are carried about by the friends of the deceased. White pigment is the emblem of mourning, and is worn for a considerable period. Other barbarous modes of expressing grief are frequently used, such as scratching themselves with shells, burning their bodies with firesticks, etc. At this time there are several tribes near the settlement, one from the NE of a formidable appearance. A fight took place a few nights since in which several were severely injured.

***Diary of Captain Phillip Parker King, 3 March 1837 (Jones 1981: 112)***

208

A youth had just been buried. His mother making a horrid figure of herself, her face scratched till her temples and cheeks nearly raw, six burns on each breast, her belly, thighs and legs were also burned till she was a perfect cripple, could hardly crawl, which with her head dreadfully plastered with mud or clay and daubs on her bloody forehead made her appear labouring under pain of body as well as mind.

In the evening I go round the encampment, visit the grave of the black. The grave had a solemn appearance, all the blacks had left. The grave was for 20 yards around it as clean as a

floor, not a blade of grass, and where the body lay was a conic rise, like as though a very large damper was in and covered with ashes. There were two fires lit up, which was intended to continue burning all night at the east and west points.

***Journal of W. Thomas, 15 August 1839 (MacFarlane 1983: 535)***

209

... much interesting ceremony in the disposal of their dead was observed; the corpse stretched at length was wrapped in flexible sheets of bark in the shape of a mummy and bound with bark ligatures it was then removed to a hut and watched for three days and nights, and when in an extremely offensive and foetid state, buried in a grave four feet deep in a sequestered part of the forest sheets of bark were laid on the body in the grave and small articles as presents thrown in. A chief man of a neighbouring tribe delivered an harangue in favour of the deceased and two warriors brandished their spears and with much gesticulation challenged any person to impugn the character of the deceased, their lamentations were exceedingly violent, the women beat and cut their heads with stones and the men theirs with tomahawks till the blood oozed out. The ceremony which was interesting occupied about two hours. A large assemblage of natives were present. In some instances especially when a chief man dies, the body is frequently kept eight or ten days, and carried by the tribe to the favourite resort of the deceased; the bodies of children are at times kept for an indefinite period. To appearance their grief was sincere and poignant...

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, Twofold Bay, NSW (Mackaness 1941: 19–20)***

210

When a person of common rank dies under ordinary circumstances, and without an enemy being blamed, the body is immediately bound, with the knees upon the chest, and tied up with an acacia bark cord in an opossum rug. Next day it is put between two sheets of bark, as in a coffin, and buried in a grave about two feet deep, with the head towards the rising sun. All the ornaments, weapons and property of the deceased are buried with him. Stone axes are excepted, as being too valuable to be thus disposed of, and are inherited by the next of kin. If there is no time to dig a grave – which occasionally happens in hot weather – or if the ground is too hard, the body is placed on a bier and removed by two men to a distance of a mile or two. There the relatives prepare a funeral pyre, on which the body is laid, with the head to the east. All the effects belonging to the deceased are laid beside the body, with the exception of stone axes. Two male relatives set fire to the pyre, and remain to attend to it till the body is consumed. Next morning, if any bones remain, they are completely pulverized and scattered about.

***Dawson 1881: 63***

211

When a man of the Wotjobaluk died, he was corded up with his knees drawn up to the chest and his arms crossed. Under these, on his naked breast, was placed his spear-thrower (Garik).

He was then rolled up in his opossum rug. An oblong grave was dug, about four feet in depth. A sheet of bark was placed on the bottom, and on this leaves, covered with strands of opossum pelt pulled asunder, so as to make a soft bed for the "poor fellow". Another lot of leaves and pelt was then laid on the corpse, over it bark, and the earth, being returned, was trodden tight. Logs were placed on the grave to prevent dogs interfering with it. A fire was then lighted at the grave for the ghost (Gulkan-gulkan) to warm itself at, and then the relatives returned to their camps. On the following day they went back to the grave and carefully cleared an oval space, some thirty paces in its longer diameter, with internal parallel ridges of soil, and within these the grave. The kindred went away from the place for three or four months, and when they returned, visited the grave to see that all was right. They thought that small fires could be seen at the grave by night at times, and these "corpse-candles" were believed to be fires lighted by the ghost.

**Howitt 1904: 452**

212

The Wurunjerri buried a man's personal property, such as it was, with him. His spear-thrower was stuck in ground at the head of the grave. At a woman's grave her digging-stick was also placed at the head. It is said that if the deceased was a violent man, who did injury to others no weapon would be placed with him. When there was no medicine-man there to tell them who had killed him, it was the practice when digging the grave to sweep it clean at bottom and search for a small hole going downwards. A slender stick put down it showed by its slant the direction in which they had to search for the malefactor. The male kindred of the deceased then went in that direction until they met some man whom they killed to avenge the dead, and might leave the corpse on a log for his friends to see and take warning by.

**Howitt 1904: 458**

213

Richard Howitt in 1840 remarked that the Yarra, Goulburn, Barrabool, and Port Phillip blacks buried their dead, while those of Mt. Macedon, the King, Ovens, and Murray Rivers generally burned them. After the flesh was consumed they gathered the bones and put them in a hollow of a tree some height from the ground. The grave was a small mound of earth, circular and gently and nicely rounded at the top, the soil bare and patted smooth. About five feet from the centre of the grave was a slight elevation and in it at short intervals were driven stakes, five feet high and twenty in number.

**Howitt 1904: 458**

214

Probably it was in 1856 that two of us hunting found ourselves on Djerriwarth Creek not far from where the stream junctions with the Werribbee. On clear ground we chanced upon an Aboriginal grave concerning which no mistake could be made. It was surrounded with a really substantial fence of fairly stout whitebox sapling pickets nailed to a toprail also secured



similarly to round posts. If not in error the enclosure was six-sided, within it every vestige of herbage had been carefully eradicated, but odd tufts of grass had sprung up. On what might be the grassy centre was an upright of round timber perhaps two feet clear above ground and banked to a few inches of the earth's surface. The bared portion of this stick was painted conjecturally with red ochre and grease. The colour was distinguishable, so taking that into consideration along with the state of the fence the interment had taken place perhaps half a dozen years previously.

**Batey nd: 122–123**

215

Visited the grave of a Won-nere-garerer, murdered a short time previous to my arrival by the Beeripmo-Bullucs. He was speared at night when sleeping in his screen of boughs. He was buried according to custom, wrapped in his opossum skin, and his little property with the contributions of his people beside him. In the disposal of their dead, the Aboriginal tribes have different customs. Some bury, others burn, some leave the bodies to be devoured by wild dogs, others place them on biers or raised framework on branches of trees and in cavities of rock. These various modes I have seen. The ashes of the dead, wrapped in skin, and the bones of the decomposed bodies, are worn as amulets.

**G.A. Robinson, 28 July 1841, Western District (Clark 1990: 116; cf. Clark 1998b: 334–335)**

216

The grave is finally completed by raising over it a mound of earth, which is generally twelve or eighteen inches in height, and about nine yards in length, and six yards in width. If the surface of the ground is level, a gutter is made to carry off the rain-water. The grass and weeds for a small space around the grave are cut with a tomahawk and removed, the roots burnt off, and the place is made smooth, and swept. Boughs of trees are placed around it as a fence, a fire is made at the eastern end of the grave, and the tribe then desert the spot.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 105–106**

217

In every large mound, and in some of the smaller ones, human skeletons were found about eighteen inches below the surface, lying on the side, with the head to the west, and the knees drawn up to the chest – a mode of sepulture not uncommon among the aboriginal inhabitants of England.

**Dawson 1881: 104**

218

Aboriginal skeletons are frequently discovered in the cooking mounds, hence the idea which generally prevails of their being tumuli. This fact can, however, be accounted for in a very simple manner. For example, a death takes place on one of these isolated spots, when their happens to be only a small section of a tribe located thereon; and as grave-digging is very

arduous when hands are few, and the implements merely yamsticks, the easiest method, therefore, of covering up the dead from their sight is at once adopted, and that is done by scraping a hole in the friable soil of the mound, in which the body is placed and covered up. Immediately after one of these hurried burials, the mound is vacated, and ere much time has passed, the defunct subject is entirely forgotten. Be it understood that this description of sepulture is only given to old women, or those who had been invalids of long standing, and who had become troublesome thereby to their unwilling attendants.

***Beveridge 1889: 36***

219

I might see the bones a-sticking up out of the ground close to the big fallen gum-tree, where they'd been stowed away all of a heap.

***C.B. Hall reporting conversation with a shepherd, 6 September 1853, eastern Wimmera (Bride 1898: 269)***

220

From one or two instances which came before us, I am inclined to believe that the blacks about the Grampians used to bury their dead in the hollow of trees. On one occasion I discovered my stockman manifesting a mysterious dislike to a particular vicinity, and on questioning him ascertained that, at the foot of a hollow tree, at the place in question, were the half-burnt remains of a human being. At another, a dead body was plainly perceptible high up the hollow of an old gum tree.

***C.B. Hall, 6 September 1853 (Bride 1898: 273)***

221

They prepare their dead for burial by wrapping them up tightly in the opossum cloaks which they wore during life, winding numberless piles of cord round the body to keep the cloak in place. This operation is performed as soon as the body becomes rigid, and when completed the body is borne to the grave at once. The graves are usually about four feet deep, and always bearing east and west. In the bottom of the grave a sheet of bark is placed, or, if bark is not to be had, it is thickly strewn with grass; the body is then let down, with the feet towards the east. All the property such as weapons, bags, etc., belonging to the deceased are laid beside the body, then sticks are placed across the grave, the ends of which rest on ledges a few inches above the body; over these, and crossing them at right angles, sticks the length of the grave are arranged; then bark, or a good thick covering of grass, hides the body from view, and prevents the earth (which is now filled in) from coming in contact therewith. When all this is properly completed, the relatives of the deceased fling themselves prone upon the grave – howling, tearing their hair out by handfuls, rubbing earth in quantity over their heads and bodies; ripping up the unhealed ulcers in the most loathsome fashion, until with blood and grime they become a hideous and ghastly spectacle. There is about an hour of this performance before the ceremony comes to an end. After it is finished, the mourners trudge back to the

camp in twos and threes.

***Beveridge 1889: 38–39***

222

Should the person buried have been esteemed of consideration in the tribe prior to death, a neat hut is erected over the grave; the covering thereof being generally thatch, made of hard knotty grass, having many joints, therefore probably akin to *Polygonum*. This thatch is firmly secured to the frame by means of cord, many hundreds yards of which are used in the process. Upon some occasions a net is made, having meshes four inches square, with which the whole hut is securely enveloped.

These mausoleums cover the graves entirely; they are five feet high, and are of oval shape. A small opening or doorway is left at the eastern end. These openings are never more than two feet high; in fact, they are only just large enough to allow a full-grown man to get in by creeping on hands and knees.

***Beveridge 1889: 39–40***

223

... In the month of November following a great storm of wind and rain swept through the country, and almost as soon as it had cleared off 'Georgey's' friends again presented themselves and begged for the loan of spade and shovel. In reply to my enquiry why they wanted these, I was told that 'poor fellow "Georgey" was too much cold and wet and miserable where he was buried,' and they wished to remove him. Having exhumed the body, they wrapped an additional blanket and comforter round it, placed it on a bier made of saplings, and carried it across the creek to another spot in the paddock, and placed it in a hollow tree, all the opening of which they carefully stopped with dead sticks, so that no animals could get in. The tree was frequently visited, and swept round about; and the wails of the women used to be heard on these occasions.

***W.H. Wright, MS 30 October 1876 (Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 108 notes)***

224

The Goulburn blacks made graves altogether different from those of the Yarra or Western Port tribes. For the burial of the body of a deceased warrior they dug a grave about five feet in depth, and from the bottom of it they made an excavation in a horizontal direction, about three feet in length and two feet six inches in height. A bed composed of leaves and small twigs was made in the cave thus formed, and the body was placed on it, and the spaces between it and the sides packed with leaves and twigs. The mouth of the cave was closed with a door, formed of a thick piece of bark, and was fastened securely by stakes driven into the ground. The grave was then filled in with earth. At the end of the grave most remote from the body, and at right-angles to it, was raised a low tumulus in the shape of a shield (Gee-am)

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 109***

225

As to the ways the blacks dispose of their dead, I will just state my own experience. One of the black boys we had, a smart young fellow, wandered into South Australia, and an unfriendly tribe tried to kill him. He got back to the station, but so badly wounded that he died in a few days. His own people dug a grave for him at the foot of a large box tree, and laid him in it, rolled up in his blanket, filling up the grave just as we do. The other case was different... an animated discussion took place, ending in a scene of great consternation, as the poor black fellow in his over-excitement had burst a blood vessel, and died almost immediately. Next day his people scooped out a large hole on a sandbank about a quart of a mile from the station, and laid him in a corner of it. This hole would be about six feet deep and the same in width, but some fifteen or twenty feet in length. They put no earth over his body, but made a sort of roof, covering it with boughs.

**Hamilton 1981 [1914]: 98–99**

226

I was at Bendigo, in the year 1854, at the diggings, and arriving late one evening, our party drew up near a log, which we intended to light for our fire, but discovering a newly made grave just behind the log, we lit our fire away from it, and used the logs for a seat. A party of blacks came and wanted us to shift from the place, as they had buried one of their number there late the evening before, and wanted to complete the arrangements. We told them we would not interfere in any way, so they set to work and put up a brush fence round the grave at a distance of about twenty yards, leaving an entrance at the furthest point. This done, they made a path from the entrance to the grave, clearing off every blade of grass and rubbish, and then with brooms made of boughs, they swept the path as clean as it was possible to make it.

**Hamilton 1981 [1914]: 99**

227

The Bangerang mode of burial had nothing remarkable about it. The dead were rolled up in their opossum-rugs, the knees being drawn up to the neck with strings, when the corpse was interred in a sitting posture, or on its side, generally in a sand-hill, in which a grave about four feet deep had been excavated. A sheet of bark was then placed over the corpse, the sand filled in, and a pile of logs about seven feet long and two feet high was raised over all. Round about the tomb it was usual to make a path, and not unfrequently a spear, surmounted by a plume of emu feathers, stuck at the head of the mound, marked the spot where rested the remains of the departed. Women were interred with less ceremony.

**Curr 1965 [1883]: 135**

228

Wherever one is born, that is his or her country. They have no regular burial places. Their bodies are deposited never at, but within a few yards of where they die. They make a fire at the east end and proceed on their way. Thus their bones lie soulus in every district.

***W. Thomas on the Yarra and at Westernport, Remarks, 29 February 1840 (MacFarlane 1983: 624)***

229

The manner in which the blacks perform the burial ceremony is very interesting. The grave is dug about three feet deep, and made quite round. A fire is made in it to warm the earth, but not hot enough to heat the body. The corpse is bent together, rolled in an opossum skin, and laid in the grave with the head toward the west. It is then covered with bark and the grave is filled up with earth. They have a superstition that the spirit, after death, goes somewhere to the sea.

***Smith 1880: 8, Southwestern Victoria–Lower South-East of South Australia***

230

For burial the body is doubled up into the smallest possible compass, and secured by suitable bindings. Soon after dark the male friends of the deceased seat themselves in a half-circle about the body; and after some hours of silent watching the “bo-ang” (spirit) of the one who caused his death will appear in a human form hovering over the body, and then suddenly vanish. It is recognised. Next morning a shallow grave is scooped out in a soft place, a little grass or dry leaves is burnt in it to warm it; the body is put in in a sitting posture, sticks are placed to keep the earth from pressing on it, and the grave is filled up and smoothed over. A few bushes are placed round the spot. The following day the smooth surface is examined, and the tracks of beetles, worms, or other animals are carefully noted. If they are recognised to be of the same tuman totem as the man already suspected, he must die.

***Smith 1880: 10, Southwestern Victoria–Lower South-East of South Australia***

## Cremation

231

When a married woman dies, and her body is burned, the husband puts her pounded calcined bones into a little opossum-skin bag, which he carries suspended in front of his chest until he marries again, or till the bag is worn out, when it is burned.

***Dawson 1881: 63***

232

Saw numerous indications where the natives had recently been: their fires, chopped trees, and where they had climbed trees, and a variety of other indications. Came to where the party

shot the black, the day previous. The natives had burnt the body of the deceased. The fire was burning, the bones were cinerated.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 27 January 1840, near Coliban (Presland 1977a: 26; Clark 1998a: 141)***

233

The people were very unwilling to tell Thomas where the dying woman was. He believed something was wrong. Thomas eventually found a funeral pyre alight, surrounded by women. He and his men tried to put out the fire out believing that the woman was alive. He was eventually convinced that burning the dead was normal practice for Mount Macedon and Goulburn people.

***W. Thomas papers, 29 April 1841. Mitchell Library MSS 214/2 Item 5, Microfilm CY 2605 Frames 269–271 (Byrt 2004: 58)***

## News of Death

234

In the Wiimbaio tribe a messenger of death walks in a dejected manner on nearing a camp, holding his spear in one hand and letting it rest in the hollow of his arm. When close to the camp he says “Dau” (death) twice, which is the formula suited to the occasion. His face is painted with a little pipe-clay. He walks through the encampment, repeating the word “Dau” at each hut, before he sits down, apart from the others, waiting till some friends bring him some food. After a time he again goes into the camp and delivers his news.

***Howitt 1904: 686***

235

The approaching death of a chief causes great excitement. Messengers are sent to inform the neighbouring tribes and all his relatives and friends come and sit around him till he expires. They then commence their mourning. They enumerate the good qualities of the deceased, and wail and lacerate their foreheads. Messengers are sent, with their heads and faces covered with white clay, to inform the tribes of his death, and to call them to attend his funeral obsequies.

***Dawson 1881: 64***

## Mourning

236

After the dead are finally disposed of, no amusements are permitted among the relatives of the deceased for two or three days; and if any levity is observed among them by the next of kin he is entitled to take the life of one of them. Even hunting for food is now allowed until the

brother or nearest male relative grants permission.

***H. Jamieson to Bishop Perry, 10 October 1853, Mildura, Murray River (Bride 1898: 382)***

237

In cases of sickness, much kindness and watchful attention is shown to male relatives. I have never seen a case in which they are neglected. When seriously unwell, they frequently express a wish to be removed from one place to another; the wish is complied with at all times, and they are removed either by means of a canoe or by a rude litter made for the occasion. In the case of sickness or death of a female, the attention paid is comparatively slight.

When death occurs, the lamentations and wailings are kept up during the night for some time; no allusion is ever afterwards made to the deceased, and, from the oldest to the youngest of the tribe, all betray a decided aversion ever to speak of the deceased, or to mention his or her name. They have also a superstitious dread of hearing the name mentioned even by a European.

***H. Jamieson to Bishop Perry, 10 October 1853, Mildura, Murray River (Bride 1898: 382)***

238

When men of consequence and consideration, or young people die, there is much mourning and grief in the tribe, and amongst those related by blood to the deceased. The mourning takes the shape of very violent physical suffering. At those times these (the relatives) score their backs and arms (even their faces do not always escape) with red hot brands, until they become hideous with ulcers. These ulcers stand them in good stead, however, in this way: if their grief is not sufficiently acute to induce a genuine cry, they have only to come against the ulcers roughishly, when they will have cause enough for any quantity of lachrymosity. At sunrise and sundown the one who is principally bereaved begins to cry, or howl, in a long, monotonous kind of yodling tone, which is taken up by old and young.

***Beveridge 1889: 37***

239

Each period of daily mourning lasts for about an hour; the rest of the twenty-four hours the mourners, to all appearances, are as free from grief and trouble as though no such evils had being. Of course, every member of the tribe has his or [her] head plastered over with a white pigment which is made by burning gypsum, and then mixing it with water, until it reaches the desired consistency. The face is also painted with the same stuff in such designs as best please each individual savage.

***Beveridge 1889: 37–38***

240

When an individual of the Kurnai [Gippsland] tribe died, the relative rolled the corpse up in an opossum rug, enclosed it in a sheet of bark, and corded it tightly. A hut was built over



it, and in this the bereaved and mourning relatives and friends collected. The corpse lay in the centre, and as many of the mourners as could manage to find room lay on the ground with their heads upon the ghastly pillow. There they lay lamenting their loss... and they would cut and gash themselves with sharp instruments, until their heads and bodies streamed with blood. This bitter wailing and weeping would continue all night; the less closely related persons and the friends alone rousing themselves to eat, until the following day. This would go on for two or three days when the corpse would be unrolled for the survivors to look at and renew their grief. If by this time the hair had become loose, it would be carefully plucked off the whole body and preserved by the father, mother, or sisters in small bags of opossum skin. They then again rolled up the body, and it was not opened until it was so far decomposed that the survivors could anoint themselves with "oil" which had exuded from it... sometimes the body would be opened, the intestines removed and buried, in order that the corpse might dry more rapidly. The ghastly relique, in its bark cerements, was carried with the family in its migrations, and was the special charge of the father and mother, of the wife, or of other near relatives or connections. Finally, the body having, after years, become merely a bag of bones, would be buried, or put into some hollow tree. Sometimes the father or mother carried the lower jaw of the deceased as a memento.

**Howitt 1880: 243–244**

241

Early visit the blacks. A youth had just been buried. His mother making a horrid figure of herself, her face scratched till her temples and cheeks nearly raw, six burns on each breast, her belly, thighs and legs also burned till she was a perfect cripple, could hardly crawl, which with her head dreadfully plastered with mud or clay and daubs on her bloody forehead made her appear labouring under pain of body as well as mind... In the evening I go round the encampment, visit the grave of the black. The grave had a solemn appearance, all blacks had left. The grave was for 20 yards around it as clean as a floor, not a blade of grass, and where the body lay was a conic rise, like as though a very large damper was in and covered with ashes. There were two fires lit up, which was intended to continue burning all night at the east and west points.

**Journal of William Thomas, 15 August 1839 (MacFarlane 1983: 535)**

242

There is no ceremony over the women or children, but over the men according to their degree of influence. An oration is given over the body by one or two males, while the lubras at a distance at intervals sing a mournful dirge, not inharmonious. The purport of the oration is to assure the dead that they, his tribe, are determined to avenge his death.

**W. Thomas on the Yarra and at Westernport, Remarks, 29 February 1940 (MacFarlane 1983: 624)**

243

The colour most commonly used during periods of mourning was white, but, as already stated, both white and red are used by different tribes. Amongst the natives living within the water-shed of the Murray, white alone, Mr. Bulmer thinks, is used. On the eastern side of the Cordillera, however, he has seen the bodies painted with a mixture of red-ochre and fat. The natives take the fat of the deceased, mix it with ochre, and smear their bodies. Both white and red are commonly applied at other times, for purposes of decoration.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 294**

244

Among the tribes of the Murray mourning was a very laborious affair for the widows, as they were to make themselves plaster caps for a long time after the death. So their time was taken up with collecting gypsum (copia), which was plentiful in the district, burning it to make the plaster. It was then made into a paste. They cut off all their hair and put a net over their heads (making the caps easier to remove). On this they plastered the copia to the thickness of 2 inches. This was worn until it was quite dry in a day or two. When the woman went to the tomb over which she had erected a shelter, after lying on the grave for some time she would take off the plaster cap and deposit it on the grave, and go home to begin her work of collecting gypsum *de novo*. This she would keep up for a long time, perhaps 3 months. I have seen a great many of these evidences of mourning at some of the graves near Yelta. The poor widow at these times complained of headaches and general debility, and no marvel, for I weighed one of these caps. When dry it weighed 14 lbs, when wet it must have been about 20 lbs. Not only did they wear the caps, but they put a thick coat of plaster on their bodies. A widow was supposed to keep herself isolated during mourning. Outwardly she did, but like many other customs of the blacks, they were broken secretly. The only crime lay in being detected.

**J. Bulmer Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 30; cf. Coutts 1981: 241)**

245

After burial the women keep on lamenting and mourning for the departed, chanting all his or her good deeds, and burn their hair and scratch their faces with their fingernails. The men sit silent and gloomy, meditating as to who could have put their friend out of the way, and pondering some means of vengeance. All that the deceased owned while in the flesh is burned, so that nothing shall be left to revive the sorrow of the relatives.

**Smith 1880: 9, Southwestern Victoria–Lower South-East of South Australia**

## Women and Children

246

Mourning by the Gippslanders was touching. The widow cried for her husband, mian etcha, my husband, repeated over and over again, and each person would show their connection with the dead man, as brammun, brother, too. When it was a child the cry was very plaintive, and always reminded one of David's lament, it was leethi, leethi, my child, my child. The mourning would always be accompanied with head chopping, the women tearing their faces, leaving permanent marks for the rest of their lives.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 28–29)***

247

In cases where a mother lost her child, she would not bury it for a long time, but keep it beside her in her camp, and carry it with them when they moved camp.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 31)***

248

When a woman or child dies, none but the bereaved exhibit sorrow. Ceremonies there are none. A grave is dug, and the body is buried, and one might suppose that the deceased was uncared for but for the fire which is lit near the tomb. In burying a young girl, they raise a tumulus, and make a fire on the top of it.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 108***

249

[Tribes of the Dalatite, Ovens Broken and King Rivers] The bodies of dead children were, in most cases, also placed in the hollow branches of trees. In thus disposing of the body of a child, there was neither negligence nor indecent haste. The hollow branch was cleared of rotten wood, and well swept. The bottom was lined with leaves and small twigs, well beaten down with a stiff piece of bark. Over those was placed a piece of bark, cut neatly, so as to fit the aperture. The body was placed in a rude bark coffin. This was made by peeling bark off a sapling, which formed a sort of tube, in which the deceased child could be securely encased. The coffin was placed in the hollow, twigs and leaves thrust in between the coffin and the sides of the hollow branch, more leaves and twigs over the top, and, finally a lid of bark so adjusted as to make a very close covering, almost impervious to rain.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 108–109***

250

When a first born child dies, should it be a son (if a daughter it is hidden out of sight as soon as possible), and under two years of age, instead of being buried in the usual manner, the body is tightly swaddled in an opossum cloak, and well fastened round with cords, until the body assumes the appearance of a long narrow bundle; not, however, showing the outline of the

figure, as is the case with a body prepared for burial, looking exactly similar to a bale of skins ready for despatch to market. This bundle the mother carries with her wherever she goes, and at night sleeps with it by her side; and this she continues persistently to do for six months, until from decay nothing but bones remain. After this, they (the bones) are put in the ground and forgotten.

***Beveridge 1889: 40***

251

When very old women die or wittals of long standing, of whom there are generally a few in each tribe, a shallow hole is merely scraped in the most convenient spot, having due regard to proximity and softness of soil, wherein the body is carelessly thrown without the slightest preparation or ceremony, covered up and forgotten, unless indeed, the shallow grave chances to be scraped out by the hungry dogs of the camp...

***Beveridge 1883: 30***

252

When one which she has loved dies, she keeps it still. Its little body is placed in a bag, and she carried it, together with all that her master and husband may order her to bear, for days and days through the forest, weeping now and again, as the senseless body beats against her sides, and seems to chide her for the roughness of passage. At the camp at night it is put in a safe place, and not the most frivolous amongst the young men would dare to exhibit by look or gesture his disapproval of the sacred duty of the mother.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 98***

## Other Practices

253

The modes of disposing of the dead, and the observances on the near decease of a member of a tribe who is esteemed or feared, are various. Not one tribe has exactly the same customs as another.

The northern tribes in the Colony of Victoria seem to have placed the dead body on a funeral pile, and, with prescribed formalities, lighted the dry wood, and thus consumed the corpse. Some placed the body in a running stream; some threw it across the limb of a tree, so as to be out of the way of the wild dog, but not secure from other flesh-eating creatures; some deposited the dead hunter in a cave; others wrapped the remains in rugs or mats, and placed them on an artificial platform, formed of sticks and branches – where the sentinel crow was sure to perch, and add a grim solemnity to the picture; many interred the corpse, or put it in an old mirrn-yong heap, or laid it with others – sacred in their memories – in a stone-lined trench cut in the ground.

Perhaps the most common of all methods, as practised by the Aborigines of this period, is that of interring the body.

The southern tribes have no appointed burial grounds for their people. The body is buried generally within one or two hundred yards of the spot where the death occurred.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 98–100***

254

If the death of a black occur after sunset, when there is not time to use all the proper ceremonials in the light of day, the body is left in the place where the spirit fled; and the nearest of kin – male and female – sit by the side of it during the long hours of night. Two fires are made, one at the east side of the corpse, and one at the west; and the male watches the east fire, and the female the west. Not until the glare of the morning light has turned the green tree-tops to gold does the camp move or the ceremonials begin.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 107***

255

Some tribes inhabiting the country to the north and north-east are said to be more than ordinarily scrupulous in interring the dead. If practicable, they will bury the corpse near the spot where, as a child, it first drew breath. A mother will carry a dead infant for weeks, in the hope of being able to bury it near the place where it was born; and a dead man will be conveyed a long distance, in order that the last rites may be performed in a manner satisfactory to the tribe.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 108***

256

Mr. Stanbridge, writing of the natives of the central part of Victoria, says that “when a young person dies of a loathsome disease, the body is burned; while that of a young person whose death is attributable to a different cause, is put into a tree to decay. The bones are afterwards collected and buried, the mother sometimes securing the small bones of the legs, to wear round her neck as a memorial. Persons of matured life, especially old men and doctors, are buried with much ceremony. The grave is made in a picturesque spot, to which the body is borne by relatives; and with it are interred the weapons and other articles belonging to the deceased...”

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 111***

257

The natives of the Murray and the Darling, and those in other parts adjacent, carved on the trees near the tombs of deceased warriors strange figures having meanings no doubt intelligible to all the tribes in the vast area watered by these rivers.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 286***

258

Under ordinary circumstances a corpse is kept in a wuurn one night; in very hot weather it is kept only a few hours; and, immediately on its removal, a large fire is kindled on the spot, and the wuurn and all the materials connected with it are burned. Even the grass and the leaves, if dry enough, are carefully gathered and consumed.

**Dawson 1881: 64**

259

Tchowies [songs] are not transmitted from one generation to another, because when the maker of a tchowie dies all the songs of which he was author are, as it were, buried with him, inasmuch as they, in common with his very name, are studiously ignored from thenceforward, and consequently forgotten.

**Beveridge 1889: 146**

260

The most remarkable custom in connection with the dead was that of the “Brett” or hand. Soon after death the hand, or both hands, were cut off, wrapped in grass, and dried. A string of twisted opossum hair was attached so that it could be hung round the neck and worn in contact with the bare skin under the left arm. It was carried by the parent or child, brother or sister. The belief of the Kurnai was, and even, I think, still in many cases is, that such a hand on the approach of an enemy would pinch, or push the wearer.

**Howitt 1880: 244**

261

During my journey to Seymour I met with a camp of Aborigines, by whom I was willingly accompanied to that place. Having observed an unusually large number of dead trees in a forest which we passed through, I was induced to inquire the cause of so peculiar a circumstance, and was informed, in reply, that it was the spot on which a once very numerous Goulburn tribe was overwhelmed by a still more powerful tribe, inhabiting the banks of the Murray. Each of the dead trees represent a member of the extinguished clan; and the custom is still maintained by those tribes neighbouring the Goulburn, and has its origin in the following superstitious ceremony.

Upon a youth arriving at manhood, he is conducted by three of the leaders of his tribe, into the recesses of the woods, where he remains two days and one night. Being furnished with a piece of wood, he knocks out two of the teeth of his upper front jaw; and on returning to the camp carefully consigns them to his mother. The youth then again retires into the forest, and remains absent two nights and one day; during which, his mother, having selected a young gum tree, inserts the teeth in the bark, in the fork of two of the topmost branches. This tree is made known only to certain persons of the tribe, and is strictly kept from the knowledge of the youth himself. In case the person to whom the tree is thus dedicated dies, the foot of it is

stripped of its bark, and it is killed by the application of fire; thus becoming a monument of the deceased. Hence, we need no longer be surprised at so frequently finding groups of dead trees in healthy and verdant forests, and surrounded by luxuriant vegetation.

**Blandowski 1855: 72**

262

They have no regular burial places. Over the men, according to their importance, an oration is delivered, the purport of which is that they, his survivors, will avenge his death, and begging the defunct to lie still till they do so. Over the women and children no ceremony is performed. After the body is interred, the encampment breaks up, leaving a fire at the east of the grave.

**W. Thomas nd, *Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix* (Bride 1898: 399–400)**

## Beliefs

263

Death is at all times by them attributed to human agency. When any black, whether old or young, dies, an enemy is supposed during the night to have made an incision in his side and removed his kidney fat. Even the most intelligent natives cannot be convinced that any death proceeds from natural causes.

**H. Jamieson to Bishop Perry, 10 October 1853, Mildura, Murray River (Bride 1898: 381)**

264

Mr. John Green says that the men of the Yarra tribe firmly believe that no one ever dies a natural death. A man or woman dies because of the wicked arts practised by some member of a hostile tribe; and they discover the direction in which to search for the slayer by the movements of a lizard which is seen immediately after the corpse is interred.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 110**

265

The Narrinyeri, inhabiting the Lakes and the Lower Murray, believe, when a death occurs, that sorcery caused it. When a man dies, his nearest relative sleeps with his head on the corpse, and dreams a dream and discovers the name of the sorcerer who has caused the death of his friend.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 111**



266

All aboriginal deaths, unless such as are caused by violence alone, and indeed every ailment by which they are stricken from time to time as well, are attributed to the malign powers possessed by hostile Baanglas, and all the arguments and ridicule in creation will not cause them to alter their belief one iota.

**Beveridge 1883: 70**

267

Now, all the blacks in a tribe were named after some animal, bird, creeping thing, or fish; and when a black or lubra died, the body would be buried in a sandhill, or some other place that could easily be dug out.

If the name of the dead black was (say) "Coramo," which in English means opossum, when the grave is finished the lubras will walk or shuffle over it with their feet as closely together as possible.

At sundown the grave is swept with boughs, or bundles of long soft grass. At daylight the following morning the lubras revisit the burial place, and make a long and very minute search for any tracks that may have been made during the night.

Supposing they discovered the track of an opossum, and the dead had been named "Coramo," they hurry back to camp and tell what they had seen.

They then have a great confab, and put their wits to work to find out if there is a black in some other tribe who is unfortunate enough to be called "Coramo;" and upon ascertaining that there exists such a person, they will, later on, attack that tribe at daylight some morning, and kill that black, and take out his kidney fat and anoint themselves with it, for they firmly believe that that black-fellow, just because he bore the same name as their dead friend, was the sole cause of his death.

**Kirby 1895: 76. Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840s**

## CHAPTER EIGHT

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# Fire



## Making Fire

268

I observed for the first time [how] natives in their original state get fire by friction from two pieces of wood. Kung-hine, a fine young man about 25 accompanied me to his camp – took 2 pieces of wood from his bag, one a round stick, a foot or 14 inches in length 1/2" dia, the other a flat or half a round a foot long 1 1/2 inch diameter with holes partly perforated through this and then sat on the ground laying the flat piece Bar-banoo X ways before him holding each end down with his feet in an horizontal position, under the hole he intends to work upon, he placed dry grass and pulverised stringy bark for the purposes of ignition. Placing a little charred wood powder in the hole placed one end of the round stick vertically into the hole holding upright or rather sloping between the palms of his hands and then a rapid gyration with the round stick as if perforating the flat wood beginning at the top downwards and then forcing it into the hole, renewed the motion in quick succession until the pulverised wood he had worn off by the motion ignited. Two or three minutes is sufficient for the purpose. I tried, produced the same effect, but [took a] much longer time about it. It is surprising how quick they will produce fire, some are more expert than others. I was presented with these materials in return. I gave him an order on the A.P. to get a blanket. The flat piece of wood I take to be grass tree.



'A 7036/PART 7: GEORGE AUGUSTUS ROBINSON JOURNALS, PORT PHILLIP PROTECTORATE, 11 MAY-1 JUNE 1840' IE148815 FROM STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES USED UNDER CC BY 4.0

Warrum called the round stick I got from Kunghine Taleroke and the flat wood mimmerroung. Kunghine said he got it on the mountains. To obtain fire by this means requires facility and exertion. It is perceptible that the holes are slightly made with a sharp instrument near the edge of the flat wood (barbanoo) a slight aperture is then made from the hole outwards, the round stick (taleroke) is then inserted vertically (the flat wood being horizontal) into one of the holes and forcibly and quickly twisted between the palms of the hands until fire is produced which is generally done in 2 or 3 [minutes ?]. I observed that the portion of pulverised wood worn off by the action of the vertical stick on the cross grain of the horizontal one was that which took fire, the small aperture in the side being for the admission of air and for the escape of the pulverised portion ignited, which fell on the dry grass or strings of bark placed underneath the wood for this purpose.

**G.A. Robinson, 13 May 1840, North Central Victoria (Sculthorpe 1990: 35; cf. Clark 1998a: 291–292)**

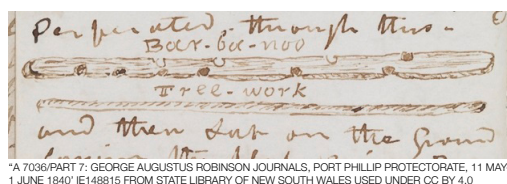
269

The Wurunjerri method of making fire was by drilling on a flat piece of the dry wood of the Djel-wuk which grows plentifully in the gullies of the Dandenong Mountains and of the Yarra River. The drill-stick is one of the young shoots, about thirty inches in length, which is carefully dried. The thicker end is pointed, and is inserted in a small cavity in a flattened piece.



A small notch is cut from the cavity to the edge of the lower piece. The drill is rapidly turned in the cavity, thus producing the fine dust, which first turns black then falls on to some frayed bark fibre which has been placed below the groove to receive it. Finally the abraded dust takes fire, and being folded up in the fibre, is blown into the flame. I have seen fire produced in this way in a minute, and I once, and only once, succeeded in doing it myself in a minute and a half.

**Howitt 1904: 771**



270

While travelling, the natives always carry burning pieces of the dry thick bark of the eucalyptus tree, to light their fires with, and to show the paths at night; but as these might be extinguished while they are far from any fire, implements for producing combustion are indispensable. These consist of the thigh bone of a kangaroo, ground to a long fine point, and a piece of the dry cane of the grass tree, about eighteen inches long. One end of the cane is bored out, and is stuffed with tinder, made by teasing out the dry bark of the messmate tree. The operator sits down and grasps the bone, point upwards, with his feet; he then places the hollow end of the cane, containing the bark, on the point of the bone, and, with both hands, presses downwards, and twirls the upright cane with great rapidity till the friction produces fire.

**Dawson 1881: 15**

271

Their method of generating fire, we imagine, to belong exclusively to the Australian aboriginal tribes, at least we never heard of the same system being followed by other races. Their *modus operandi* is as follows:-

A hard dry log is selected, having a sun crack in it about half an inch wide at the surface and about an inch and a half in depth, and this crack is filled to within half an inch of the lips with dry grass, well teased out to make it soft. Then the operator, having a piece of dry wood fourteen inches long and from two to three broad, fined down to a blunt edge on one side, holds it by one end in both hands and rubs the blunt edge backwards and forwards across the crack immediately above the part containing the dry grass. At first the rubbing is performed very slowly, but with considerable pressure; as the crack, however, begins to get filled with the filings the rate of motion is increased, until the filings quite fill the crack to the top; then, for the space of half a minute, the rubbing is done so rapidly, the rubbing stick cannot be distinguished. At this stage the operator suddenly, without lifting the rubber from the groove,

which by this time he has cut across the crack, and gently fans the filings under the rubber with one hand, and if the smoke continues to ascent the operator knows that the result is satisfactory and that fire has been procured; therefore, with great care, he lifts out the dry grass upon which are the ignited filings (it is these filings which take fire, and not the rubber as many would be inclined to suppose) enveloping them nicely with the grass, waves it gently in the air, and in a short time it bursts into flame.

***Beveridge 1889: 154; cf. Beveridge 1883: 67***

272

Should it be necessary to make fire when the timber had been saturated by continued rains the native cuts down the lock on which he intends to operate until he has got beyond the saturated portion, then he cuts a groove to take the place of the sun crack, and the rubber is split from the heart of a smaller log to ensure dryness. If it be raining at the time fire is required an opossum cloak is held over the operator until the desired end is achieved.

***Beveridge 1889: 155***

273

The Aborigines of the southern parts of Victoria obtain fire in the manner shown... A flat piece of wood, ten inches in length, and one inch and a half in width, is placed on the ground and held firmly in a horizontal position by the toes of each foot of the operator. In his hands the man holds upright, and with one end of it fixed in a slight depression previously made in the flat piece of wood, a stick about half an inch in diameter and two feet in length, which he twirls by a rapid motion of his hands. The stick held between the palms of the hands is rubbed rapidly to and fro, and some pressure is exerted downwards. When the hands nearly touch the flat piece of wood, they are suddenly raised almost to the top of the vertical stick, but so skilfully as to keep the stick in its place (and this is a movement not easy to Europeans), and then again the twirl and downward pressure follow, and the movements are repeated until the charcoal-dust ignites... When the sticks are dry, smoke and fire soon arise in the hole in the flat piece of wood. The native, having previously reduced to powder some dry leaves of the eucalyptus, which easily ignite, turns or tilts the flat piece of wood towards the powdered leaves at the moment when ignition occurs and gets a fire. The operation, under favorable circumstances, occupies only a few minutes in the hands of a skilful Aboriginal; but, if the weather is damp and the man is clumsy, it is hard work for many minutes, and success does not always follow the first attempt...

The inhabitants of the Lower Murray, near Swan Hill, procure fire by a different method. Out of a suitable piece of wood the Aboriginal cuts a knife – in shape almost like a butcher's knife – and in another piece he cuts a long thin slit. In the slit he places finely-powdered dry gum leaves, or powdered dry grass, or some other inflammable substance. Placing the stick with the longitudinal slit in it in a secure position, he rubs the wooden knife across at right-angles to the slit very rapidly, holding the knife generally with the right hand, and, for the purpose

of giving greater energy and steadiness to his movements, keeping his right wrist firmly in the left hand. Instead of preparing a second stick with the longitudinal slit in it, he not seldom takes advantage of the cracks in the trunk of a dry fallen tree. Some dry substance carefully reduced to powder by the hand is put into the cracks, and the wooden knife, used in the same manner as above described, soon produces smoke and fire. The latter is the mode I saw successfully employed at Coranderrk by a native of the Murray.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 393–394**

## Fire in Hunting



"ABORIGINES OF VICTORIA 01-P393-FIG231" BY ROBERT BROUGH SMYTH FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0

274

In summer, when the long grass in the marshes is dry enough to burn, it is set on fire in order to attract birds in search of food, which is exposed by the destruction of the cover; and, as the smoke makes them stupid, even the wary crow is captured when hungry.

**Dawson 1881: 93**

275

In the summer when the grass is long and dry they have been known to set fire to it in order to enclose their game in the bend of a river, or a tongue of land near the sea.

**Thomas LT 1176/6a:98–100 (Goughwin 1983: 71)**

276

In hunting the kangaroo, all the available men of the tribe went together. Each was armed with two or three spears, barbed with pieces of flint or in more modern times with broken glass and a marriwan for throwing them. They generally went in a very large circle, and gradually closed in, leaving a narrow opening for the kangaroos which were speared in passing. But in

summer they set fire to a large tract of country and speared the animals as they were escaping from the fire. They also got many after the fire, almost roasted enough for eating.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 50); Woiwood 2012: 97***

## Fire in Landscape Management

277

The face of the whole country had been burnt and the rushes of the swamp and the young grass, anchistiria, had attained to a growth of 7 or eight inches and a most verdant appearance. The land around the swamp is elevated and undulating, of good quality and lightly timbered.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 10 May 1841, Mt Napier vicinity Buckley's Swamp (Presland 1977b: 87; Clark 1998b: 197)***

278

Mere hunters, who absolutely cultivated nothing .... could have produced no effect on the natural products of a large continent. Nor did they; but there was another instrument in the hands of these savages which must be credited with results which it would be difficult to overestimate. I refer to the firestick; for the blackfellow was constantly setting fire to the grass and trees, both accidentally and systematically for hunting purposes. Living principally on live roots and animals, he tilled his land with fire and cultivated his pastures with fire, and we shall not, perhaps, be far from the truth if we conclude that every part of New Holland was swept over by a fierce fire, on an average every five years.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 88; Woiwood 2012: 69***



## CHAPTER NINE

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# Fishing



BARK CANOES ON THE RIVER MURRAY.—SEE PAGE 5.

## Traps

279

At the south-western point of Lake Condah... is situated one of the largest and most remarkable aboriginal fisheries in the western district of Victoria. The position has been very well chosen, as the small bay is the lowest point on the western side of the lake. Owing to the peculiar formation (open trap scoriae) along the eastern, southern, and part of the western sides of the lake, the water sinks very rapidly and becomes very low during the summer months, but as it receives the drainage of a large extent of country the water rises very quickly during the winter, and first flows into the scoriae at the point named, which has been facilitated to some extent by the channels formed by the aborigines for trapping eels, trout, &c. These channels have been made by removing loose stones and portions of the more solid rocks between the ridges and lowest places, also by constructing low wing walls to concentrate the streams. At suitable places are erected stone barricades with timber built in so as to form openings of from 1ft. to 2ft. wide; behind these openings were secured long narrow bag nets made of strong rushes. The mouths of the nets were from 2ft. to 3ft. wide secured to a hoop. They were of various lengths, some 10ft. long, the principal portion being about 4in. or 5in. in diameter. The smallest ends were made to open so that the eels, &c. could be easily extracted.

***Report by Mr. Alexander Ingram, engineer in charge of reclamation works at Lake Condah (Worsnop 1897: 104)***

280

Left early, attended by Pevay, to reconnoitre the country. In the marshes numerous trenches were again met with. These resembled more the works of civilized than of savage men. They were of considerable extent. One continuous treble line measured 500 yds. in length, 2 feet in width, and from 18 inches to 2 feet in depth. These treble dikes led to extensive ramified watercourses. The whole covered an area of at least 10 acres, and must have been done at great cost of labour to the Aborigines, a convincing proof of their persevering industry. These are the most interesting specimens of Native art I had seen. Thousands of yards had been accomplished. The mountain streams were made to pass through them. In fishing, the natives use the Arabine or eel-pot of plaited grass, from 9 to 12 feet in length. On the elevated ground were some of the largest ash-hills I had seen; they must have been the work of generations. One measured 31 yards in length, 29 in width, and 2 in height, with hollow cavities for the Natives bivouacs and camping-places.

***G.A. Robinson, July 2 1841, Gariwerd/Mt Sturgeon area (Clark 1990: 113)***

281

Saw a dredge for catching small fish. The manufacture same as that employed in making baskets but the shape like a canoe. It was five feet long and 18 inches deep the bottom was sharp and marked from a stick and called by the Tjarcote natives, 1. neer-rig-ger, 2. mol.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson 21 April 1841, Lake Kilambete (Presland 1977b: 42; Clark 1998b: 141)***

282

Crossed a creek connecting with the Hopkins. Here I observed a large weir at least 100 yards in length and though the first I had seen, I was assured by its structure and its situation before I reached it that it was the work of the Aboriginal natives. I called to Pevay my V.D.L. attendant who had passed it with one of the Tcharcote natives and pointed it out to him. He envinced surprise at it and the natives said it was made by black fellows for catching eels when the big water came and was by them called Yere.roc. He said they got plenty eels and then showed us how they did it by biting their heads and throwing them on shore. This weir was made of stout sticks, from 2-3 inches thick drove in to the ground and vertically fixed, and other sticks interlaced in an horizontal manner. A hole is left in the centre and a long eel pot made of basket or matting is placed before it and into it the eels gather and are thus taken. It is probable that 2 or 3 such pots are set in large weirs. This weir must have been 100 yards long, at least, and made with wings or corner pieces at the ends ...

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 24 April 1841, Hopkins River area (Presland 1977b: 49; Clark 1998b: 145)**



'A 7038/PART 4: GEORGE AUGUSTUS ROBINSON JOURNAL, PORT PHILLIP PROTECTORATE, 25 APRIL-18 MAY 1841' IE155833 FROM STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES USED UNDER CC BY 4.0

283

From conversations I had with the natives it appears that this was a favourite spot. It was the home of several families. [name illegible] took me to several spots where he had resided and had worns or huts. He also took me to a fine and very large weir and went through, with several other of the natives, the process of taking eels and the particular spot where he himself stood and took them. I measured this weir with a tape, 200 ft; 5 ft high. It was turned back at each end and two or three holes in the middle was left for placing the eel pots as also one at each end. The eel pots are placed over the holes and the fisher stands behind the yere.roc

or weir and lays hold of the small end of the arrabine or eel pot. And when the eel makes its appearance he bites it on the head and puts it on the lingeer or small stick with a knob on the end, .... or if near the bank, he throws them out. The fishing is carried on in the rainy season. Arabine or eel pot made of bark or plaited rushes with a willow round mouth and having a small end to prevent the eel from rapidly getting away.

There yere.roc or weirs are built with some attention to the principle of mechanics. Those erected on a rocky bottom have the sticks indented in a groove made by removing the small stones so as to form a groove. The weir is kept in a straightline. The small stones are laid against the bottom of the sticks. The upright sticks are supported by transverse sticks, verging or forked sticks .... These sticks are 3, 4 or 5 inches in diameter some of the weirs are in the form of a segment of a circle.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 30 April 1841, Kilgower's station, Port Fairy (Presland 1977b: 64–65; Clark 1998b: 162–163)***



'A 7039/PART 2: GEORGE AUGUSTUS ROBINSON JOURNAL, PORT PHILLIP PROTECTORATE, 5 JULY-6 AUGUST 1841' IE150734 FROM STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES USED UNDER CC BY 4.0

284

At the confluence of this creek with the marsh observed an immense piece of ground trenched and banked, resembling the work of civilized man but which on inspection I found to be the work of the Aboriginal natives, and constructed for the purpose of catching eels. A specimen of art I had not before seen of the same extent and therefore required some time to inspect it, and which the absence of transport enabled me to do. These trenches are hundreds of yards in length. I measured at one place in one continuous triple line for the distance of 500 yards. These triple water courses led to other ramified and extensive trenches of a most tortuous form. An area of at least 15 acres was thus turned over. .... These works must have been

executed at great cost of labour to those rude people the only means of artificial power being the lever the application and incentive of which force being necessary. This lever is a stick chisel, sharpened at one end and by which force they threw up clods of earth and thus formed the trenches, smoothing the water channel with their hands. The soil displaced went to form the embankment...

The plan or design of these ramifications was extremely perplexing and I found it difficult to commit it to paper in the way I could have wished. All its varied form and curious curvilinear windings and angles of every size and shape and parallels, etc; at intervals small apertures left and where they placed their arabines or eel pots. These gaps were supported by pieces of the bark of trees and sticks. In single measurement there must have been thousands of yards of this trenching and banking. The whole of the water from the mountain rivulet is made to pass through this trenching ere it reaches the marsh; it is hardly possible for a single fish to escape. I observed at short distance higher up, minor trenching was done through which part of the water ran its course to the more extensive works. Some of the banks were 2 feet in height, the most of them a foot and the hollow a foot deep by 10 or 11 inches wide. The main branches were wider.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 9 July 1841, Mount William (Presland 1980: 91; Clark 1998b: 308)***

285

About the Grampians they [fish weirs] were numerous at the time of my residence, and had apparently been much more so, judging from the traces left by them in the swampy margins of the river. At these places we found many low sod banks extending across the shallow branches of the river, with apertures at intervals, in which were placed long, narrow, circular nets (like a large stocking) made of rush-work. Heaps of muscle shells were also found abounding on the banks, and old mia-mias where the earth around was strewed with the balls formed in the mouth when chewing the farinaceous matter out of the bulrush root.

***C.B. Hall, 6 September 1853 (Bride 1898: 271)***

286

In the artificial-looking banks at irregular intervals there are drains three or four feet wide, through which, when the river commences to fall, the waters of the plains find their way back to their parent stream. As a matter of course the fish instinctively return to the river with the receding water. At those seasons the aborigines are in their glory, and no small wonder either, as these times are actual harvests to them. They make stake weirs across the drains, the stakes being driven firmly into the soil within an inch of each other, so that anything having greater bulk than that space must perforce remain on the landward side of the weir.

***Beveridge 1889: 89–90, Swan Hill, Murray River***



287

Saw numerous old native ovens, large some 15 feet in diameter. Passed several dieks [dikes] dug by the natives for draining the small lagoon into the larger ones for the purpose of catching eels, &c. These channels were from a foot to 18 inches deep and from one to 300 yards in length.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 8 July 1841, Grampians area (Clark 1998b: 306)***

288

The tribes along the Murray made splendid nets, which they used most successfully. The Billybongs which run inland for miles, and served as reservoirs to hold the waters which were brought down by the floods, had weirs placed carefully across their mouths in summer, when the water was very low; and these weirs, which were formed of stakes interlaced between little twigs, served most effectually to retain the fish which had passed over them during the floods, and which, when the water got low, were secured with ease.

***J.M. Davis (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 314)***

289

Lake Boloke is the most celebrated place in the Western District for the fine quality and abundance of its eels; and, when the autumn rains induce these fish to leave the lake and go down the river to the sea, the aborigines gather there from great distances. Each tribe has allotted to it a portion of the stream, now known as the Salt Creek; and the usual stone barrier is built by each family, with the eel basket in the opening. Large numbers are caught during the fishing season. For a month or two the banks of the Salt Creek presented the appearance of a village all the way from Tuureen Tuureen, the outlet of the lake, to its junction with the Hopkins. The Boloke tribe claims the country round the lake, and both sides of the river, as far down as Hexham, and consequently has the exclusive right to the fish. No other tribe can catch them without permission, which is generally granted, except to unfriendly tribes from a distance, whose attempts to take the eels by force have often led to quarrels and bloodshed.

***Dawson 1881: 94–95***

290

They had another mode of catching fish in the river. On either side of the river there was an embankment, but how or by whom made no one knows. We thought these banks were formed by the blacks, many years ago. At this time these banks were about two or three feet high; at short intervals there were channels cut through them about three or four feet wide, and when the river overflowed the water came through these channels out on to the reed beds, and remained there for weeks. The fish went through also, and when the water was receding, it would run back to the river through the same passages that it came out by.

As soon as the water began to run back to the river the blacks used to make a fence across these channels of thin sticks stuck upright, and close enough to prevent the fish going

through, but leaving a space at one side, however, so that when the fish found they could not get through the fence, they naturally made for the opening. A black would sit near the opening and just behind him a tough stick about ten feet long was stuck in the ground with the thick end down. To the thin end of this rod was attached a line with a noose at the other end; a wooden peg was fixed under the water at the opening in the fence to which this noose was caught, and when the fish made a dart to go through the opening he was caught by the gills, his force undid the loop from the peg, and the spring of the stick threw the fish over the head of the black, who would then in a most lazy manner reach back his hand, undo the fish, and set the loop again on the peg.

**Kirby 1895: 35–36. Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840s**

## Lines

291

Fish are caught in various ways, but the idea of a hook and line never appears to have occurred to the natives of the Western District. Large fresh-water fish are taken by tying a bunch of worms, with cord made of the inner bark of the prickly acacia, to the end of a long supple wand like a fishing-rod. The bait is dipped into the pool or stream, and, when swallowed by the fish, it is pulled up quickly before the fish can disgorge it. Fishing baskets, about eight or ten feet long, made of rushes in the form of a drag-net, are drawn through the water by two persons. Various kinds of fish are thus captured. The small fish, ‘tarropatt’, and others of a similar description, are caught in a rivulet which runs into Lake Colongulac, near Camperdown, by damming it up with stones, and placing a basket in a gap of the dam. The women and children go up the stream and drive the fish down; and, when the basket is full, it is emptied into holes dug into the ground to prevent them escaping.

**Dawson 1881: 94**

292

The lines, each twenty or thirty yards long, to which the baited hooks were attached were carefully coiled up in the hands of the fishermen and dexterously thrown towards the middle of the river, one small coil only being left in each canoe, these coils being left as tell-tales, for the moment the bait was taken, these coils running out immediately denoted the fact, so that a strong, quick pull was only necessary to hook the scaly victim; then a smart haul, hand over hand, soon placed the glistening fish safely in the canoe.

**Beveridge 1889: 97**

293

Saw numerous fresh tracks and small wells for natives had got water. Native camp. A stick called Lingeer for stringing fish on; a stick with a bit of root on and grass on it.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 31 March 1841, Bulluc (Presland 1977b: 14; Clark 1998b: 115)**



294

In summer they fished mostly on the coast, or at the mouths of rivers which run into the sea, as at this season the fish were either going to or returning from the sea. In winter they would more likely procure fish in the rivers with grass nets, and often with hooks of bone with a line made of the bark of the Yowan or lightwood. I believe they found the bone-hook as good for fishing as the hooks supplied by Europeans, though no doubt it would be very troublesome to make it, as it had to be scraped out with flint and shells.

**Rev. Bulmer, Lake Tyres, Gippsland to Smyth (Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 142)**



'ABORIGINES OF VICTORIA' 01-P391-FIG226' FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0

295

The blacks used to catch fish in the river with line and hook, but in the lagoon they used to spear them. Their hooks were made of two teeth of a Kangaroo tied together in the form of the letter V, one tooth somewhat longer than the other. Where the teeth—were joined they tied them together with string of their own manufacture and glued or gummed them over with a hard substance like gum that they got out of the box trees. These hooks did not answer very well for often the fish would slip off before they could land him. Their lines were made from the fibres of the bulrush, or compung as the blacks called it.

**Kirby 1895: 34. Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840s**

## Nets

296

This stone is said to be used by the natives of the River Murray when engaged in fishing with nets. When the nets are placed in the right position, the diver goes into the water at some point below the nets, and holding in each hand a stone of this kind, he makes a noise by striking them together, which frightens the fish, and they rush up stream and are caught.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 385**

297

The natives used hooks and nets as well as the spear in catching fish.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 388***

298

The hand-net which the Rev. Mr. Bulmer has sent to me is closely woven, and is made also of kangaroo-grass... The hand-net is used in procuring bait for fishing with the hook. It is stretched on a bow, is let down to the bed of the stream, and is drawn through the water by the women. This net is called Lowrn by the natives of Gippsland. Similar nets were used formerly in all parts of Victoria.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 389***

299

The lyoors drag the lagoons for the delicious crayfish, which they catch by the pailful. These delicate little crustacæ are highly esteemed by the aborigines because of their piquant flavour, which we imagine to be entirely due to the fact of their eating them without other cleaning than the mere removal of the outer shell. These little things being in so much request, the lyoors devote a considerable portion of their time to catching them.

They prepare the net for this purpose by tying a hoop round the bottom edge and two ends, which gives it the appearance of half an oval; the top of the net is eight feet long. It is worked by two women, each having a bag slung round her neck to receive the result of their labours. They go into the shallow lagoons, one at each end of the net and scrape it along the bottom. They do not make much disturbance in the water during the operation as very little noise would send all the crayfish within hearing distance into their holes, which, of course, would entail so much lost labour. They do not take the net to the bank to empty it; they merely raise it every now and again, and remove what ever spoil it may contain to the bags around their respective necks, and so they continue until they have captured what they deem sufficient. An hour's scraping frequently results in as many of these crayfish as would fill a six gallon measure.

***Beveridge 1889: 91–92***

300

The Murray abounded with fish of many varieties; the boorndo (large cod fish), boorndo boorndo (a small cod), the tilyigu or bream, and bangnalla a golden perch. In the spring, a small very nicely flavoured fish called the naambu abounded in the billabongs and large quantities were caught using a net. On the Murray the blacks used to dive with spear in hand and spear the fish underwater. This was relatively easy as the Murray Cod was so large, sometimes weighing as much as 120 lbs.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 49)***

301

For fishing in Gippsland, bone hooks, spears and both set nets and drag nets were all used. Set nets were preferred to drag netting as the nets were not very deep and were not very successful when dragged. In Gippsland bark was used for floats (plearts) and stones were used for sinking the net.

**J. Bulmer, *Papers*, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 49)**



## Spears

302

For night fishing in deep waterholes, a stage is formed of limbs of trees, grass, and earth, projecting three or four feet from the bank, and close to the surface of the water. A fire is lighted on the bank, or a torch of dry bark held aloft, both to attract the fish and give light. The fisher, lying on his face, spies the fish through a hole in the middle of the stage, and either spears or catches them with his hand. In shallow lakes and lagoons fish are caught during very dark nights with torch and spear. The torch is made of dried ti-tree twigs, tied in a bundle. The fishers wade through the water in line, each with a light in one hand and a spear in the other. Fish of various kinds are attracted by the light, and are speared in great numbers.

**Dawson 1881: 95**

303

When bent upon harpooning fish with this grained canoe stick, they select a stretch of shallow water, full of reeds and other aquatic plants, over which the wary fisherman propels his canoe, using the plain end of the stick for the purpose. Every now and then he thrusts the stick sharply to the bottom, thereby disturbing the feeding fish. As a matter of course they rush away from the disturbance, shaking the plants in their hurry, which at once tells the keen-eyed fisherman the position of his prey. After the plants have ceased shaking, the wily savage

pushes his canoe gently up to within striking distance of the plants which were last in motion, he knowing right well that at the foot thereof his game is resting. Poising his grained weapon but for a short space, he launches it with precision, and seldom fails to bring his scaly victim, quivering and glittering to the surface.

When sailing over deep water, both ends of the stick are used; it is held by the middle then, and each end is dipped into the water alternately.

***Beveridge 1889: 68–69***

304

The spear set aside entirely for killing fish, down in the depths of rivers and lakes, when the water is pellucid as crystal (as it becomes during the absence of rains in the summer months), is only five feet long, and an inch thick; it is perfectly smooth throughout the entire length. This spear is never thrown, but always used lance fashion.

***Beveridge 1889: 68***

305

The Murray River natives use spears for fishing made of the reed which grows in vast beds from Swan Hill downwards for thirty miles, and also at Lake Moira above the confluence of the Goulburn River. These spears are pointed with bones of the emu, or such substitute as they may be able to procure. They also use heavy jagged spears made of miall or other very hard wood for fishing.

***P. Chauncy (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 249)***



'INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN MEN STANDING IN AN EXPANSE OF WATER, IMAGE AN468336001' FROM THE BRITISH MUSEUM USED UNDER CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

306

[The Uje-koanie] is a fishing-spear of wood, used both in securing fish and for striking them when the native dives. It is commonly employed for taking fish in deep clear water-holes. A number of blacks at a given signal go down feet foremost, and as the cod, &c., pass them they spear them. The often spear them under logs also. The spear is from five to six feet in length. One end is brought to a fine point, and is smoothed and hardened and well polished, and the other is pointed but not sharpened. It is a handy weapon.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 307***

307

Besides catching fish and waterfowl in weirs and nets of divers forms and descriptions, it was the custom of the Bangerang in all weathers, when the river was not discoloured by floods, to enter the water with short barbed spears in their hands, with which they dived, and speared their finny prey in its own element. In this way they took large quantities of fish, of from half a pound to sixty pounds weight. They were, of course, all excellent swimmers, and dived á merveille.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 110***

308

With a small spear in his hand, the aboriginal eel-catcher walks slowly and cautiously about the shallow water, until he has trodden so gently upon the object of his search as not to awaken its attention. Although half buried in mud, its position is judged with such accuracy that, with one blow the eel is pierced by the native. Immediately he takes it out of the water and disables it by giving it a crush between his teeth ...

***Bunce 1859: 67–68 (Gaughwin 1983: 61)***

309

... two native blacks of Boonerang tribe – Niggererinal and a lad named Dol.ler came to my office and went to a lagoon about ¼ a mile distant in the paddocks, and in a very short time caught about 40 lbs of eels. I saw them catching or rather spearing them of which they are very expert. Their mode is as follows: they each had two spears ... Having the two spears grasped by the right hand, they go into the water and keep walking about at the same time jabbing their spears into the mud in a sloping direction before them if they jab in the spear which is ascertained by their feet they then turn it up on the end of the spear the second spear is jabbed into it while he lifts it down and thus kills it if not quite dead they bite the head and throw it on shore.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 29 January 1841 (Clark 1998b: 62)***

310

They did not use fishing lines in the lagoons, because the flags would entangle them; so their mode of catching fish was by spear and canoe.

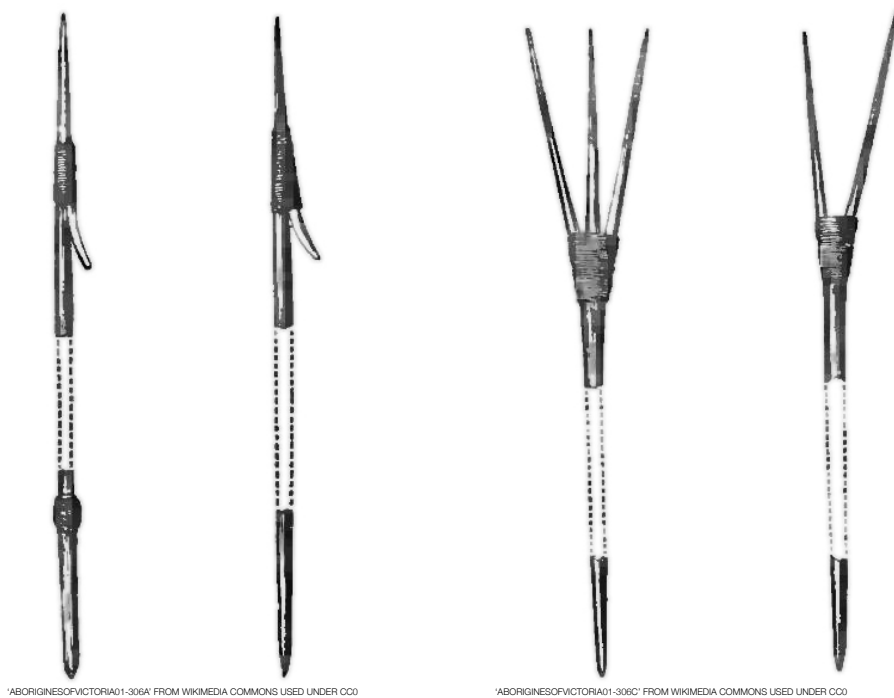
***Kirby 1895: 34, Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840s***

311

The spears used for catching fish were unlike those used for war or hunting purposes; inasmuch as they had three prongs very sharp and strong at the end, and these prongs were about four inches long.

When fishing, the black stands erect in the canoe and propels it very slowly through the flags which float on the top of the water; and although the black cannot see the fish, he knows from experience where to job his spear, because these flags grow from the bottom of the lagoon and their leaves float on the top; and whenever the black sees these flags or leaves move he knows it is a fish causing its movement, and he jobs his three pronged spear into the water and very seldom makes a mistake. He never lets the spear out of his hand; and is nearly sure to get a fish every time he jobs it into the water, and very nice fish they are, a kind of perch. The fish they caught in the river were chiefly codfish.

***Kirby 1895: 35, Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840s***



## Diving

312

Not a single muscle tremor was to be seen in any one of the expertant savage divers until the word was given by the king, when they simultaneously sank from sight, leaving scarcely a ripple behind to tell the spot from whence they had disappeared. After the lapse of what seemed to us an endless time, though by the clock it could not have been very great, the divers began to reappear, by ones, by twos, and threes, until the whole number were once more on the surface, some struggling with immense fish transfixed upon their spears, requiring considerable assistance to land them safely; others again, with lesser prey wriggling about on their spears like great entomological specimens on immense pins, required no aid in the landing, of their fish.

***Beveridge 1889: 99, 100***

313

... considerable quantities of muscles from the bottom of rivers and creeks. These ... are usually procured by the women who if the water be deep dive for them and take them from the mud with their hands and placing them in a net which is suspended to their neck. They will remain underwater about a minute, or a minute and a half.

***Thomas LT Box 1176/6a:94 (Goughwin 1983: 64)***



## CHAPTER TEN

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# Food and Drink



Natives Catching Crayfish. — [FROM A SKETCH BY W. A. CANTHORNE.]—SEE PAGE 125.

## Roots



'MICROSERIS LANCEOLATA (MURINONG OR YAM-DAISY)' FROM AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS (ANBG) USED UNDER ANBG LICENCE

314

The muurang, which somewhat resembles a small parsnip, with a flower like a buttercup, grows chiefly on the open plains. It is much esteemed on account of its sweetness, and is dug up by the women with the muurang pole. The roots are washed and put into a rush basket made on purpose, and placed in the oven in the evening to be ready for next morning's breakfast. When several families live near each other and cook their roots together, sometimes the baskets form a pile three feet high. The cooking of the muurang entails a considerable amount of labour on the women, inasmuch as the baskets are made by them; and as these often get burnt, they rarely serve more than twice.

**Dawson 1881: 19–20**

315

They had provided a good supply of murnong . . . This they had roasted and I eat some with them; this pleased them much. This root, when in season is a staple article of sustenance. It is very nutritious and tolerably palatable. They roast them in ovens ... The white's call them yams. The root might be cultivated in gardens. They had also freshwater mussel ...

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 27 February 1840, Mt Mitchell vicinity (Presland 1977a: 70; Clark 1998a: 181)**

316

Murr-nong or Mirr-n'yong, a kind of yam (*Microseris lanceolata*), was usually very plentiful and easily found in the spring and early summer, and was dug out of the earth by the women and children. It may be seen growing on the banks of the Moonee Ponds, near Melbourne.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 209**

317

...myrrnong hillocks...such as are seen on land held by the Sunbury Lunatic Asylum. Should the ground remain unbroken these relics will endure for the next 100 years even longer than that. There is a sloping ridge at the lower end of what was originally known as Sideline Gully. The soil on the spot referred to [land held by the Sunbury Lunatic Asylum] is a rich basaltic clay evidently well fitted for the production of myrnongs. On the spot adverted to are numerous mounds with short spaces between each, and as all these are at right angles to the ridge's slope it is conclusive evidence that they were the work of human hands extending over a long series of years. This uprooting of the soil to apply the best term was accidental gardening, still it is reasonable to assume that the aborigines were quite aware of the fact that turning the earth over in search of yams instead of diminishing that form of food supply would have had a tendency to increase it....This plant is a dandelion bore a large yellow blossom on a single stem. The roots were stoutish in form partake of the oblong and some might be the length of the little finger. At Sunbury they were small but at Glen Junction far larger. Young as I was at that station I have a vivid recollection of seeing lubras with bunches of myrnongs that had been washed, and as that operation removes the thin outer skins the things were beautifully white. They have an agreeable taste, are crisp, but are watery.

**Batey nd, Unpublished manuscripts, Royal Historical Society of Victoria, Melbourne (Frankel 1982: 43–44; Gott 2005: 1203)**

318

The bulb of clematis, “taaruuk”, is dug up in winter, cooked in baskets, and kneaded on a small sheet of bark into dough, and eaten under the name murpit. The root of the native convolvulus, also called taaruuk, is cooked in the same way, and forms the principle vegetable food in winter, when muurang is out of season.

**Dawson 1881: 20**

319

Today the native women were spread out over the plain as far as I could see them, collecting punimim, murrnong, a privilege they would not be permitted except under my protection... They burn the grass, the better to see those roots but this burning is a fault charged against them by squatters.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 24 July 1841, Western District (Clark 1998b: 326)**



\*A 7039/PART 2: GEORGE AUGUSTUS ROBINSON JOURNAL, PORT PHILLIP PROTECTORATE, 5 JULY-6 AUGUST 1841. IE150734 FROM STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES USED UNDER CC BY 4.0

320

The weeakk, resembling a small carrot, is cooked in hot ashes without a basket ... A tuber, called puewan, about the size of a walnut, and resembling the earthnut of Europe, is dug up, and eaten roasted. It has no stalk or leaf to mark its locality, and is discovered from the shallow holes scraped by the bandicoots in search of it, and from a scarcity of herbage in the neighbourhood.

**Dawson 1881: 20**

321

... the party of natives, women and children, visited us early and went on their way across the country to Cowie's station. They each carried long sticks, 8 feet long, with which they dig up roots.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 9 February 1840, Campbell's station, Western District (Presland 1977a: 43; Clark 1998a: 160)**

322

The great swamp abounds in rushes the roots of which are edible and afford the natives an ample supply and is one of their chief supports. When roasted in the fire is mealey and white, like flour. There is another root they get from the swamp called tar.roke.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 11 May 1841, Western District (Presland 1977b: 92; Clark 1998b: 202)**

323

The common small flowered yellow water-lily, which so plentifully fringes most of the colonial lakes and lagoons, is another source from whence they derive a desirable addition to their diet. The roots of this plant are formed of many tubers of about an inch and a half long by half an inch in diameter. The root of one plant will frequently yield as many tubers as a half-pint measure will contain. They are baked before being eaten, and are of a sweet mawkish taste, very gluey in appearance, not unlike what is termed a waxey potato They are called lahoor by the natives.

The sow thistle, dandelion yam, and a trefoil which grows on country which at times is inundated during their respective seasons are consumed in vast quantity.

**Beveridge 1889: 17**

## Fruit and Vegetables

324

The southern portions of Australia are remarkably deficient in native fruits and the only kind deserving the name is a berry which the aborigines of the locality call "nurt", resembling a

red-cheeked cherry without the pip, which grows abundantly on a creeper amongst the sand on the hummocks near the mouth of the River Glenelg. It is very much sought after, and, when ripe, is gathered in great quantities by the natives, who come from long distances to feast on it, and reside in the locality while it lasts.

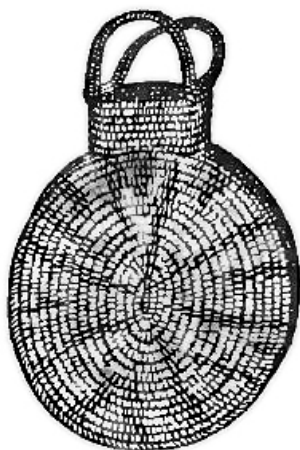
**Dawson 1881: 22; see also Gott 1982**

325

In addition to the fruits of the quandang, native currant, native raspberry, and native cherry, they had also in great quantities, in many parts, the fruits of the mesembryanthemum [Carprobrotus, pigface], and the mucilaginous seed of the native flax.

... Berries of several kinds were gathered by the natives of Victoria.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 214**



'ABORIGINES OF VICTORIA 01-P345-FIG158' BY ROBERT BROUGH  
SMYTH FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0

326

Dr. Gummow states that the fruits of the nardoo were used by the natives of the Lower Murray in Victoria; and the seeds and grasses, no doubt, were likewise ground up and eaten. Dr. Gummow mentions also, as vegetable food eaten by the people of the Lower Murray in Victoria, the sow-thistle, used as a kind of salad, the gum of the acacias, and manna. "The roots of the Compungya" he says in his letter to me, "are in appearance like sticks of celery, and when baked much resemble the potato, from the quantity of starch contained in them."

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 214**

327

As they require salt they used the pig face plant [*Mesembryanthemum*], which contained a good percentage of saline matter. This would be eaten mostly when eating fish and often it was also eaten alone. The fruit of the plant was very sweet, and formed an article of diet, and I daresay had a laxative effect.

**J. Bulmer, *Papers, Museum Victoria* (Vanderwal 1994: 52); Woiwood 2012: 66**

328

The Rev. Bulmer, in reply to my enquiries, has furnished me with a list of the vegetables commonly eaten by the natives of Gippsland. They are as follows:

Common name	Native name	How eaten
Sow-thistle	<i>Thalaak</i>	Always eaten raw
<i>Mesembryanthemum</i> (pig-face)	<i>Katwort</i>	Fruit eaten raw
Flag	<i>Toorook</i>	The root sometimes roasted, and also eaten raw
Water-grass	<i>Loombrak</i>	The root roasted in ashes; never eaten raw
Male fern (common fern)	<i>Geewan</i>	Root roasted in the ashes
Tree fern	<i>Kakowera</i>	The pith roasted in the ashes
Dwarf tree-fern	<i>Karaak</i>	The pith roasted in the ashes
Native cherry	<i>Ballat</i>	The fruit, when ripe eaten raw
White currant	<i>Yellitbowng</i>	Fruit eaten when ripe
Black currant	<i>Lira</i>	Fruit eaten when ripe
Large black currant	<i>Wandha-wan</i>	Fruit eaten when ripe
Kangaroo apple	<i>Koonyang</i>	Fruit eaten when ripe

**Rev. Bulmer (*Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 210*)**

329

As they require salt they used the pig face plant [*mesembryanthemum*], which contained a good percentage of saline matter. This would be eaten mostly when eating fish, and often it was also eaten alone. The fruit of the plant was very sweet, and formed an article of diet, and I daresay had a laxative effect. There were two kinds. The small leaf variety was called nakalu and a form with a larger leaf called karnbie [possibly on the Murray]. They also used a yam like root and the roots of wild convolvulus, which were roasted and eaten. The roots of a flag which is common in Gippsland were roasted, producing good food – tasting very much like the arrow-root plant.

**J. Bulmer, *Papers, Museum Victoria* (Vanderwal 1994: 52)**

## Seeds

330

The seeds of the *Portulaca oleracea* (the Purslane). These can be gathered by a blackfellow to the extent of many pounds weight in a day; and they can be baked into nutritious cakes, infinitely superior to cakes made of nardoo flour. The plant is pulled up, the sand and earth shaken off, and it is then placed on bark or on kangaroo skins. Soon the lid-like upper parts of the seed-vessel spring off by contraction whilst drying, the numerous though small seeds drop out, and they furnish, on account of their starchy albumen, a very wholesome food.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 213–214, from list of vegetables commonly eaten by Aborigines in Victoria prepared by Government Botanist for Smyth***

331

The natives are industrious in gathering the ripe seeds of plants in the whole of the large area drained by the River Murray.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 214***

332

In those portions of Australia where nardoo and other freely seeding plants containing farina in the seeds abound the natives possessed mills wherewith to bruise the seed into a coarse description of flour. These mills were made of quartz slates, shaped like an ellipsis, shelving gradually from the edges to the centre; in size they were two feet six inches long by eighteen inches broad, the pestal being a clumsy piece of the same material, shaped somewhat like a steelyard weight.

These mills were quite common from the north-western portion of Victoria right through to Cooper's Creek, on the confines of New South Wales, and thence to Lake Hope, in South Australia, but doubtless they are extant to this day in the regions remote from settlement.

The operation of milling was always performed by women, and the method thereof was by rubbing the clumsy pestal round and round on seed in the hollow slab, with, of course, an occasional thump or two.

This grinding or bruising, or in fact a combination of both motions, requires two operators, one to use the pestal and the other to stir the meal during the process. The meal would stick to the mill by reason of the thumping were it not constantly kept stirred. As the clumsy pestal, if wielded for long by one person, becomes fatiguing the lyoor millers change alternately from that implement to the stirring culk (stick).

They do not possess any means whereby the husks can be separated from the meal, it is therefore used as it leaves the mill. They seldom convert the meal into bread, but when they



do, it is formed into thin cakes and baked on the hot coals, as bush men do their leather jackets.

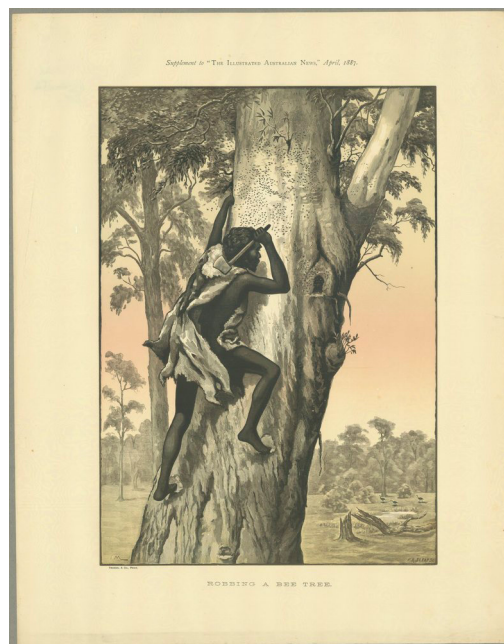
**Beveridge 1889: 158–159**

## Honey

333

The native not seldom adds to his usual stock of food by robbing a bee-hive. When he sees bees busy near a tree, he can tell usually at once where the aperture leading to the hive is, and he proceeds to cut open the trunk with his tomahawk and take out the honey. Sometimes large quantities of comb are taken from a hive. I have myself assisted in opening a hollow tree in which a hive had secreted its stores, and the quantity of honey that was found in it was surprising. It was peculiarly flavoured, but not at all inferior to the honey of Europe.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 206**



“ROBBING A BEE TREE” BY J. MACFARLANE FROM SLV USED UNDER SLV TERMS OF USE.

## Gum

334

The gum of the acacia, or common wattle tree, is largely consumed as food, as well as for cement; and each man has an exclusive right to a certain number of trees for the use of himself and family. As soon as summer heat is over, notches are cut in the bark to allow the gum to exude. It is then gathered in lumps, and stored for use.

**Dawson 1881: 21**

335

Gum, that they might not be without it when it was in season to have as much as 30 lb by them and a further precaution to plant in trees as much as 50 lb where they knew they would pass during the barren season.

**Thomas ML 24, Letter to Mr. Duffy, 28 April 1858 (Gaughwin 1983: 64)**

336

[Lerp] A sweet substance, called buumbuul (manna), resembling small pieces of loaf sugar, with a fine delicate flavour, which exudes and drops from the leaves and small branches of some kinds of gum trees, is gathered and eaten by the children, or mixed in a wooden vessel with acacia gum dissolved in hot water, as a drink. Another kind of manna, also called buumbuul, is deposited in considerable quantities by the large dark-coloured cicadae on the stems of white gum trees near the River Hopkins. The natives ascend the trees, and scrape off as much as a bucketful of waxen cells filled with a liquid resembling honey, which they mix with gum dissolved in cold water, and use as a drink. They say that, in consequence of the great increase of opossums, caused by the destruction of the wild dog, they never get any buumbuul now, as the opossums eat it all. Another sweet liquid is obtained by mischievous boys from young parrakeets after they are fed by the old birds with honey dew, gathered from the blossom of the trees. When a nest is discovered in the hole of a gum tree, it is constantly visited, and the young birds pulled out, and held by their feet until they disgorge their food into the mouth of their unwelcome visitant.

**Dawson 1881: 21**

337

Little is generally known of the manna of Australia. It was, however, at one time an important article of food; and in the western part of Victoria, the natives gather it in pretty large quantities still.

In summer the Aborigines of the Mallee country eat Lárap, Lárp, or Lerp – a kind of manna. It somewhat resembles in appearance small shells; it is sweet, and in color white or yellowish-white. It is gathered in December, January, February and March. It is a nutritious food and is eaten with various kinds of animal food.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 211**

338

One party of natives that arrived today, 6 men, had a small slender twig stuck in their hair on the right side of the head above the ear. This stick is called 1. gin and 2. in.yen and is used for the purpose of gathering and eating gum. It has a hook at one end... At the hook end it is sharp. The hook is thrust through the gum and by which it is then pulled off. The stick is then drawn through the mouth leaving the gum.

**G.A. Robinson, 18 July 1841, Western District (Presland 1980: 103; Clark 1998b: 319)**

## Eggs

339

In addition to all these, the blacks have for food the eggs of birds and reptiles; and indeed there is scarcely any living thing to be found in the earth, in the forests, on the plains, in the sea, or in the lakes, streams, or ponds, that they did not occasionally eat.

The eggs are named thus in Gippsland – those of the emu, Booyanga Miowera; those of the swan, Booyanga Gidi; those of the duck, Booyanga Wreng; those of the iguana, Booyanga Bathalook; and those of the turtle, Booyanga Ngerta. Eggs are never eaten raw. They are always cooked in the ashes until hard, and they are eaten in all stages of incubation.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 208**

## Mammals

340

Kangaroo tails are cooked unskinned, first singeing and scraping off the hair, and then toasting them before the fire till thoroughly done. By this method none of the juices of the meat escape; and what would otherwise be dry food is made savoury and nutritious. As the sinews, however, which are very strong, would render the meat tough, they are pulled out previous to toasting, and are stretched and dried, and are kept for sewing rugs and lashing the hands of stone hatchets and butt pieces of spears. Skulls and bones are split up, and the brains and marrow roasted.

**Dawson 1881: 17–18**

341

The several kinds of kangaroo caught and eaten by the natives of Victoria are as follows:

Kangaroo, Jirrah – *Macropus major*; weight about 150 lbs.

Wallaby, Tharogang – *Halmaturus walabatus*; weight about 50 lbs.

Rock wallaby, Wyat – *Petrogale penicillata* (of N.S. Wales only).

Red wallaby, Kénarra – *Halmaturus walabutus*.

Small wallaby, Dak-wan – *Halmaturus Billardieri*.

Padamelon, Bowey – *Halmaturus Billardieri*.

Kangaroo-rat, Bree – *Bittongia cuniculus*.

The red kangaroo (*Osphranter rufus*) is found in the interior from just north of the Murray.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 187–188**

342

Saw 3 old bark huts, also large trees, where the natives had cut out an opossum. They had cut through 8 and 9 inches thick of solid timber. Mr Lang, at Learmonth's station, mentioned

that he had seen trees in the forest on the plains, on their lower runs down the creek, where the natives had cut out opossum and which he thought must have taken them 3 or 4 days to accomplish. Mr Lang merely mentioned this as a casual circumstance to shew that the natives were there. This fact, however, shows the incredible labour these poor people must have to procure food and which trees, of course, could not be done, cut through, except by good tommyhawks.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 29 February 1840, Mt. Cole area (Presland 1977a: 74; Clark 1998a: 184)***

343

The animal on which the Bangerang and the Blacks of the southern portion of the continent generally were chiefly dependent for their supply of meat was the opossum, a nocturnal creature, weighing six or seven pounds, which hides himself by day in the hollow branches of the various eucalypti.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 121***

344

... in obtaining opossum, flying squirrel and the wild cat from the hollows of decayed trees they are particularly successful.

***Thomas, LT:93: 105 (Gaughwin 1983: 61)***

345

They are by no means destitute of prudence. I have known an Encampment on the move thro' a desert country for 2 or 3 weeks beforehand industriously collecting some hundreds of opossum and kangaroo rats then cure them which they do in a judicious manner by effectually drying after taking out their entrails. I have tasted after a fortnight an opossum as eatable as a bit of bacon.

***Thomas, ML 24, Letter to Mr. Duffy, 28 April 1858 (Gaughwin 1983: 61)***

346

In rough cold winter weather, which is the black spot of aboriginal life, when hunting is out of the question and food resources are of the smallest, these dingoes are converted into rations, and really, when well cooked in one of their ovens, these dishes of dog are tempting enough to look at, and I think there is small doubt about their tasting well, that is of course the reasoning from the gusto with which the aborigines consume them; I however, never had sufficient courage to partake of this dog meat, but I have seen plenty of it taken from the ovens, and it always looked white and delicate as chicken.

A puppy dingo, when in good condition, is esteemed quite a luxury, therefore an aboriginal having such a dish fancies that he is faring most sumptuously.

***Beveridge 1883: 59***

## Birds

347

Emu is considered the greatest delicacy. It is eaten, however, only by the men and grey-haired women; young women and children are not allowed to partake of it. No reason is given for this rule.

**Dawson 1881: 92**

348

The Aborigines preferred to hunt the emu at the beginning of summer after it had been feeding on the belka, a plant with a flower resembling that of the dandelion.

**J. Bulmer, *Papers, Museum Victoria* (Vanderwal 1994: 51)**

349

When endeavouring to find the lake called Bainenong, before spoken of, I shot an emu, which the blacks who were with us received as a great prize. They cooked and eat it in a style which amused us much. Having first roughly plucked it, they took off the skin, which they stuffed with tender gum twigs; thus prepared, it was delicately toasted at a slow fire, and then rich, yellow, oily lengths of what looked like the thickest and fattest possible goose-skin were trimmed off and swallowed, as the Lazaroni of Naples are said to such down macaroni.

**C.B. Hall, 6 September 1853 (*Bride* 1898: 273)**

## Aquatic Resources

350

Fish formed a very important article of diet during summer months. In Gippsland different fish were plentiful according to the season. At the beginning of summer they were able to spear the flounder and the fat mullet. Just before and after the lake opened to the sea (spring or winter), fish attempting to escape to sea were plentiful and many eels and mullet were obtained.

**J. Bulmer, *Papers, Museum Victoria* (Vanderwal 1994: 49)**

351

The aborigines occupying the country adjacent to the Barwon River, from the Indented Head, Barrabool Hills, Colac, and Yan Yan Gurt tribes. Their chief support was fish, caught in the river in the summer and autumn seasons, and in winter and spring they depended on their success in hunting, together with the root called "murrnong".

**G. Armytage (*Bride* 1898: 175)**

352

The lubras fished up crawfish from the shallow muddy water-holes with their toes and yam-sticks, and exchanged them for dainties of civilised life.

**C.B. Hall (*Bride* 1898: 271)**

353

Crayfish and crabs are caught by wading into the sea, and allowing them to lay hold of the big toe, which is moved about as bait. The fisher then reaches down and seizes the animal by the back, pulls off its claws, and puts it into a basket, which is slung across his shoulders.

**Dawson 1881: 95**

354

The lyoors and wirtiwoos were meanwhile all in the river, some of them on shallow shelving banks, digging away with their yamsticks most energetically, with the view to the exhumation of the great Murray lobster, whose delicate flesh was destined to tempt the voracious codfish, the brilliant golden perch and his silver-scaled congener, together with the ugly, but at the same time lusciously oleaginous catfish. Others, again, displayed their activity by diving into deeper water in search of mussels, which were also intended (after having been partially roasted) to facilitate opening of their shells to form baits for the hooks.

**Beveridge 1889: 96–97**

355

Passed numerous old camps of the natives and cooking or baking mounds, the muscle [mussel] shell lay strewn about. This river was a favourite resort of the natives. The large water holes afforded them mussels and other food and the bulrush was abundant, the root of which the natives eat.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson (*Clark* 1998b: 337)**

356

Eels are seldom eaten quite fresh; and, to impart a high flavour to them, they are buried in the ground until slightly tainted, and then roasted.

**Dawson 1881: 18**

357

The eels given to us by the Boloke natives were cooked and were very acceptable, as we had been out of meat and none was at the hut. They were of delicious flavour. The native from necessity were induced to adopt an excellent plan for cooking eels. They make a trench in the ashes and lay in the eel, cover it with ashes. The time necessary for baking is guessed with great precision. I saw several baked and in every case they have been well done. The flavour is preserved and the flesh is snow white; skin peels off. The eels of Lake Boloke are delicious.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson (*Presland* 1977b: 20; *Clark* 1998b: 123)**

358

More commonly eels were speared or caught by feeling for them with hands or feet.

**Thomas ML 29:53–56 (Gaughwin 1983: 62)**

359

They had a novel way of catching eels. They would wade in the mud in the Tooradin Creek when the tide was out, feel for the eels with their hands, seize them, and bite them at the back of the head, and throw them on to the bank. They were so plentiful that they could get a couple of sacks in a short time.

**Brett 1920: 380 (cf. Gaughwin 1983: 62)**

360

Of the aquatic mammals may be mentioned the whale (*Physalus Grayi* – McCoy), the species commonly stranded in Victoria, and eaten by the natives; and the porpoise (*Delphinus fulvifasciatus*); and the marine carnivorous mammalian, the sea-leopard (*Stenorhynchus leptonyx*) and the eared seal, *Otaria* (*Arctocephalus*) *lobatus*... The whale (Kaandha) and the porpoise (Kornon) are only procured when stranded. No efforts are made to catch them. The seal (Ngalewan) is killed on the beach.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 203–204**

361

Sometimes when a man was very hungry (wilke wilkanu, or in Gippsland tongue ganu ganook) he would take a bag and dive to the bottom of the river and get mussels. It would take 3 or 4 dives to fill his bag, but as soon as it was full he would quietly go ashore and roast his catch.

**J. Bulmer, *Papers, Museum Victoria* (Vanderwal 1994: 50)**

362

The river on which Campbell's station is on is called Merri and a tribe or section of natives bears the name and is called Merriconedeet, there is a large swamp on the E of the Port Fairy River where the natives get their chief support, roots etc., and near to a small eminence on the edge of this swamp, called by Campell's men Tower Hill, is a native village: an assemblage of huts. And along the coast near to the shepherds hut are reefs of rock abounding with the haliotus mutton fish, muscle, moreover crawfish and which must have afforded them a good supply as the camping place of the natives in the beautiful forrest of dwarf banksia abound with cinerated shells.

**Journals of G.A.Robinson, 28 April 1841 (Clark 1998b: 154; Presland 1977b: 61)**

363

[Lachlan River] When the fish is removed from the coals on which it has been broiled, it is laid on a piece of bark, and allowed to cool a little; the skin is then neatly withdrawn with the



fingers from one side, without moving the fish, and the flesh conveyed to the mouth in flakes, the bones being left behind; the fish is then turned over, and the process repeated, leaving the skeleton undisturbed on the bit of bark, to be tossed into the fire.

***Curr 1886 Vol. 1: 82***

## Reptiles and Frogs

364

The numerous reptiles, easily caught in every part of the country, supplied food during the summer season. Besides the smaller lizards, there is the large iguana (*Hydrosaurus varius*) – Bathalook (Gippsland) – which furnishes a quantity of excellent flesh; and, of the larger snakes, there are the death-adder (*Acanthophis antarctica*), the black snake (*Pseudechys porphyraicus*), the tiger snake (*Hoplocephalus curtus*), and the large brown snake (*Diemenia superciliosa*).

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 199***

365

I have seen [a woman] making a breakfast.... such as tadpoles roasted in the ashes, or white grubs, which she scooped up in handfuls.

***Hamilton 1981 [1914]: 101***

366

Frogs were eaten by the Murray tribes. They were secured by the women who dug them out of the ground with their yam sticks.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 52)***

## Insects

367

The Natives of the Low Country and of the Mountains assemble in large numbers in the fine season to collect the Boogong fly a species of moth found in myriads in the higher Altitudes of the Mountains. They are extremely nutritious and the Natives subsist during the Season entirely upon them they are called Cori by the Omeo, and Boogong by the Yass Blacks.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson (Mackaness 1941: 15)***

368

Natives cut hole in tree and found nests of small stink ants and eat them also eggs – the chief objects.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 7 May 1844, Tarwin (Clark 1998d: 58)***

369

The Waverong natives say that they have the Boogong fly at Tarerewait in their country; it is the only place and is on the highest rocks and are not numerous. They call it teberer, from Teberer the plains now occupied by Andrew Erwin under south side of Mount Buller, the Alps, this belongs to the Yowenillum. The Omeo blacks call the fly olleong, the Yowenillum call it teberer. The natives say that they make black fellows very fat all the natives go they put them in a bag and shake them to break their wings and legs; then tie them up in a piece of bark and roast them: are very good. I am not certain that the women go with Waverong to collect teberer....Bogong moth: teberer its Woi wurrung name, olleong its Bun wurrung name.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 14 June 1844, Shady Creek (Clark 1998d: 101)***

370

Here they made their food principally of the large ants called kalkeeth, which are found in hives within hollow trees. In order to ascertain where they are, the trees are struck with a tomahawk, and, at the noise, they show themselves at the holes ... they are taken out and put into baskets, being, at the proper season, as fat as marrow. These creatures are prepared for eating, by placing them on slips of bark about three feet long and one foot wide, and so, burnt or roasted. It is only for about one month in each year they can be had, for after that time they are transformed to large flies.

***Morgan 1852: 56–57***



'CSIRO SCIENCEIMAGE 15 HUDDLED MIGRATING BOGONG MOTHS' BY CSIRO FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC BY 3.0

371

The grubs are about the size of the little finger, and are cut out of trees and dead timber, and are eaten alive, while the work of chopping is going on, with as much pleasure as a white man eats a living oyster; but with this difference, that caution is necessary to avoid their powerful mandibles, ever ready to bite the lips or tongue. Roasted on embers, they are a delicate and nutty flavour, varying in quality according to the kind of tree into which they bore, and on

which they feed. Those found in the trunks of the common wattle are considered the finest and sweetest. Every hunter carries a small hooked wand, to push into the holes of the wood, and draw them out. With an axe and an old grub-eaten tree, an excellent meal is soon procured; and when the women and children hear the sound of chopping, they hasten to partake of the food, which they enjoy above all others. The large fat grubs, to be found in quantities on the banks of marshes, drowned out of their holes, in time of floods, are gathered and cooked in hot ashes by the women and children.

**Dawson 1881: 21**

372

... they eat the larvæ of several kinds of ants, some of which are tree-inhabiting insects, others are mound-raising ground ants. An immense grub they also consume in large quantities; it is two or three inches in length, and is found deep in the wood of the gum-tree. The natives are very expert in finding the trees in which these grubs are; in fact, they never err; yet to a casual observer, or even one with some acuteness, there is not the slightest difference in the appearance of a tree containing numberless grubs and one without any. These grubs are eaten with great relish, either cooked or raw.

During winter they are not in the least choice as to their food; anything having life, no matter how repulsive to European notions it may be, is most acceptable. At that time frogs are deemed good, snakes most toothsome, and the abominable wild dog is esteemed a luxury of the highest order.

**Beveridge 1889: 18**

373

All the grubs, says Mr. Bulmer, are named from the trees from which they are taken. Some natives prefer to eat the grubs raw; others cook them by placing them for a short time in the hot ashes of a fire.

The common grubs in Victoria are the *Zeuzera citurata* and *Endoxyla eucalypti* (found in the wattle), and *Endoxyla* n. sp. (found in the gum-trees).

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 207**

## Various Foods

374

The aborigines in this tract of country subsist chiefly on a variety of roots which are very abundant, opossums, small kangaroos (called cumma) which frequent the edge of the mallee scrub, an occasional emu, the fruit or flower of the stunted honey-suckle (very prevalent in the desert), and manna in the autumn.

**J.M. Clow nd, Wimmera district (Bride 1898: 360)**

375

Their natural food consists of the meat of the country when they can kill it, but chiefly roots, of which the favourite is that of a plant very much like dandelion. This they roast or eat raw.

**T. Winter, 1837 probably, Port Phillip (Bride 1898: 395)**

376

Their food consists of fish primarily, and of which for about eight months of the year they have an abundance; so large, indeed is their supply during those months, they cannot nearly consume it, consequently quite a moiety is allowed to go to waste.

To supplement the fish, they have kangaroo, emu, opossum and wallaby, and besides these nearly every kind of aquatic bird is found in the greatest profusion on the lakes and lagoons. The latter they capture in immense numbers by the aid of nets, manufactured for that purpose only, and during the breeding season they get eggs by the thousand. The canoes arriving at the camps at the time are literally laden down to the water's edge with eggs only; they are heaped up at both ends until there is barely room for the native to stand and paddle. It is of but small moment to them whether the eggs have birds in them or not; they are consumed with relish all the same, be they fresh or stale.

**Beveridge 1889: 16–17**

377

One variety of food was in use among the natives here which was new to me at the time. It was a portion of the grass-tree top. This was first pulled out of the stem, a few preliminary taps being made with the back of the tomahawk, and then a length of soft, white, succulent matter neatly twisted off the lower extremity, where it had been embedded in the rugged trunk; it reminded me of asparagus in the proportion of tender to tough.

I also observed them take a red-grub out from the grass-tree, which I was informed was “Merrijig” and “likit sugar”, with an assurance further, that I was a “stupid fellow” for not adopting it as an article of diet.

**C.B. Hall, 6 September 1853, Grampians (Bride 1898: 272)**

378

There food was abundant before the advent of white people – several kinds of kangaroo and opossum, bandicoots, kangaroo rats, the muscovy rat, which went in colonies, and lived in the ground, several kinds of mice, amongst them being a mouse as yellow as a canary, which they used to dig out of the sand. I think they ate all kinds of native animals, except the dingo, I never knew them to eat that sort of flesh.

**Hamilton 1981 [1914]: 103**

379

... chiefly opossum and koala varied occasionally with the flesh of the porcupine and wombat. The heart or crown of the tree fern, slightly roasted furnished us an acceptable dish. Native potatoes or roots of the Orchidaceae were not wanting; those of the *Gastrodia sessamoides* were exceptionally plentiful, large and well-flavoured.

**Bunce 1858 (Goughwin 1983: 61)**

380

The first in season is the murrnong resembling a radish in form and size, and the turnip in color and taste – the leaves and flower very much resemble the dandelion – whilst the plant is green this root is eaten raw; but when it becomes ripe it is roasted in the ashes before being eaten – this root is succeeded by a species of yam of an irregular form and reddish color and somewhat resembling the potatoe in size and taste – these are also roasted – In the unlocated parts of the country and such other places as have not been visited by the flocks and herds of the settler these roots are obtained in great abundance ... Roots of rushes and flags and the young stalk of a species of thistle are also greedily devoured. The women also procure and eat large quantities of the larvae of ants – In the Autumn the Mimosa tree exude a great deal of gum, this forms an article of food much relished by the blacks, they either eat it in a crude state or dissolve it in water.

**W. Thomas LT 1176/6a: 97 (Goughwin 1983: 66)**

381

Roasting is their universal mode of cooking and as it requires no utensils and they are never without the means of procuring fire, - when hunger presses them they no sooner secure their game than it is prepared for their stomachs – if it be an opossum, and the skin be in season, that is the fur does not fall off, it is immediately skinned, the bowels are taken out and just passed between the fingers and then laid on the coals or covered up in the ashes and forms the first mouthful – If the skin is not available, the fur is pulled off, the animal laid on the coals, after a little turning about, the entrails are taken out and thrown to the women or children – it is even further submitted to the action of fire but never remains longer than to be just warm when it is devoured – If distribution is to be made – which does not happen till the master of the family has allayed the cravings of his own appetite – the carcase is torn in pieces by the teeth with more facility than the division could be effected by an expert carver – and the

several joints are tossed around as if intended for dogs – The same partial mode of cooking is applied to the fowls, reptiles and fish which they procure – except the latter be large, this are submitted to the application of the tomahawk first; the backbone being wholly taken away before roasting. A somewhat different mode sometimes pursue in preparing kangaroos, or joints of beef or mutton for the table – A hole is excavated in the ground in which a good fire is made into the fire is thrown stones if they can be procured, if not lumps of earth, when these are sufficiently heated green boughs are spread on them on these is laid the meat which is covered over with a layer of green branches, then with pieces of bark, the whole with the earth which prevents the escape of the heat. The green boughs beneath prevent the heated stones etc. from scorching the joint and those above keep the earth from the meal which if allowed to remain a sufficient time is pretty well done. Hunger, however, is generally impatient and the repast is commenced before the cooking is half completed.

***W. Thomas LT 1176/6a: 98–100 (Gaghwin 1983: 69–70)***

382

In the commencement of October the Goulburn river falls to its proper level, the winter rains having then subsided; and the multitudes of fish which appear in its waters attract hither the tribes inhabiting the surrounding districts. At that season too, they subsist upon eggs, which may then be obtained in abundance; and upon turtle and river mollusca. Hence the reason why they regard with indifference their employment by the settlers. At other times of the year, however, when the bounties of nature are not afforded on so liberal a scale, they avail themselves largely of ants' eggs, which are collected when travelling through the forest. For this purpose the hollow trees, in which it is likely the ants have deposited their eggs, are carefully inspected and opened with a tomahawk, and the ants and their eggs abstracted from it. These are promiscuously thrown together in a kangaroo skin and are roughly shaken, by which the eggs, on account of their greater specific gravity, are precipitated to the bottom, and the ants, particles of wood, and other impurities on the surface, being then removed, the eggs are eaten raw.

***Blandowski 1855: 73***

383

I cannot learn whether or not the natives of Victoria used any plants as narcotics or sedatives, or whether any herb or shrub in the colony was chewed or eaten as a nepenthetic; but in Cooper's Creek district the blacks chew Pitcherie, which is believed to be a narcotic...

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 222 (cf. A.W. Howitt [Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 304])***



384

Their food consists principally of kangaroo and other animals, fish and roots of various sorts, black swans, ducks and many other birds and in fact there is scarcely any animal or bird that comes amiss to them-and many reptiles, amongst them a species of snake, come within their bill of fare.

**J.H. Wedge 1835 (Labilliere 1878 Vol. 2: 59)**

385

It was considered wrong to kill or use for food animals of the same totem as one's self. When forced by hunger, one might break this role by formally expressing Sorrow for having to eat one's friends, and no evil results followed; but sickness and death were the penalties of wilful wrongdoing in this particular.

**Smith 1880: x, Southwestern Victoria–Lower South-East of South Australia**

## Drink

386

When the trunk [of the Murn or Malleé-oak] attains a diameter of about six inches, it becomes pipy, thus forming a natural reservoir, in which the rains of the wet season are collected; the branches of the tree, which join at the top of the stem, acting as conducting-pipes. The narrow aperture prevents much evaporation, and the native know how to obtain water here, where an inexperienced traveller would never dream of searching for it. To procure this water, the native ties a bunch of grass to the end of his spear, and then climbing the tree, dips his primitive piston-rod – if I may so call it – into this singular well. Drawing it up again, he squeezes the water from the grass into his bark dish, and thus proceeds until he obtains sufficient for his present requirements.

**John Cairns, Esq. 1858 from On the Weir–Malleé, a Water-yielding Tree, &c. (Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 221)**

387

A sweet substance, called buumbuul (manna), resembling small pieces of loaf sugar, with a fine delicate flavour, which exudes and drops from the leaves and small branches of some kinds of gum trees, is gathered and eaten by the children, or mixed in a wooden vessel with acacia gum dissolved in hot water, as a drink. Another kind of manna, also called buumbuul, is deposited in considerable quantities by the large dark-coloured cicadae on the stems of white gum trees near the River Hopkins. The natives ascend the trees, and scrape off as much as a bucketful of waxen cells filled with a liquid resembling honey, which they mix with gum dissolved in cold water, and use as a drink.

**Dawson 1881: 21**



388

In the summer, when the surface of the ground is parched, and the marshes dried up, the natives carry a long reed perforated from end to end, which they push down the holes made by crabs in swamps, and suck up the water. When obliged to drink from muddy pools full of animalculæ, they put a full-blown cone of the banksia tree into their mouths, and drink through it, which gives a fine flavour to the water, and exudes impurities.

**Dawson 1881: 22**

389

The natives used also to compound liquors – perhaps after a slight fermentation to some extent intoxicating – from various flowers, from honey, from gums, and from a kind of manna. The liquor was usually prepared in the large wooden bowls (tarnuks) which were to be seen at every encampment. In the flowers of a dwarf species of Banksia (*B. ornata*) there is a good deal of honey, and this was got out of the flowers by immersing them in water. The water thus sweetened was greedily swallowed by the natives. This drink was named Beal by the natives of the west of Victoria, and was much esteemed.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 210**



"A 7036/PART 7: GEORGE AUGUSTUS ROBINSON JOURNALS, PORT PHILLIP PROTECTORATE, 11 MAY-1 JUNE 1840" IE148815 FROM STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES USED UNDER CC BY 4.0

390

Taarp is the excrement of a small green beetle wherein the larvæ thereof are deposited. These insects at certain time congregate in myriads and make their deposits on the young shoots of eucalyptus scrub, which has grown up from the stumps, being the residue of a previous season's bush fire. The deposits are made in such large quantities that an aboriginal can easily gather forty or fifty pounds weight of it in one day. During the tarp season the natives do very little else but gather and consume this substance, and they thrive on it most amazingly.

**Beveridge 1889: 142**

391

Besides sinking wells, they have other means of obtaining water in the deserts, where none is to be found on the surface of the ground. In the Mallee scrubs they find water in the roots of the narrow-leafed Mallee, but only in some of the larger trees, and it requires an expert to know which trees contain it. They trace a root that runs near the surface of the ground as far as possible, and then tear it up and let the water trickle out of it.

**P. Chauncy (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 246)**

392

At a clump or copse of tea tree saw a native well, about 2 ½ deep and water. The hole was about a foot wide at top. To get the water out of such holes the drinking reed is indispensable. Beside which, the water can be obtained without disturbing the sediment. Grass is laid in the well and the water filters through it. Saw a fine large double hut, 10 feet diameter with two entrances and 4 ft high in centre. I went in at one door and came out of the second. In the swamp abound several copses of tea tree and water also is [illegible].

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 10 May 1841, Mt. Napier area (Presland 1977b: 87; Clark 1998b: 197)***

393

For keeping a supply of water in dry weather, a vessel called 'torrong' – 'boat' is made of a sheet of bark stripped from the bend of a gum tree, about four or five feet long, one foot deep, and one wide, in the shape of a canoe. To prevent dogs drinking from it, it is supported several feet from the ground on forked posts sunk in the earth. A wooden torron is often used in the same way, and is formed from the bend of a gum tree, hollowed out large enough to hold from five to six gallons. As the water which they use is frequently ill-tasted, they put some cones of banksia into the torrong, in order to give a pleasant flavour to its contents.

***Dawson 1881: 15***

394

The natives carried a reed 2 feet and a half long which they use to drink water with out of the water holes.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 13 April 1841, Kilambete area (Presland 1977b: 32; Clark 1998b: 133)***

395

In their wild state they [Bangerang] never used salt or other condiments, and, except a sweet drink which they manufactured in the season by dissolving manna in water, water was their only drink. Their mode of drinking was also somewhat curious, for they commonly walked into the stream up to their knees, bent down their heads and threw water into the mouth with the right hand. At the camp they drank from the calabash.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 123***

396

... it frequently happens to the natives, when out in the Mallee country, that the water-holes, from which they had counted on obtaining a supply of water, have dried up; but they are never, therefore, at a loss. They select in the small broken plains some Mallee trees, which are generally found surrounding them. The right kind of tree can always be recognised by the comparative density of their foliage. A circle a few inches deep is dug with a tomahawk around the base of the tree; the roots which run horizontally, are soon discovered. They are divided from the tree and torn up, many of them being several feet in length. They are then

cut into pieces, each about nine inches long, and placed on end in a receiver; and beautifully, good, clear, well-tasted water is obtained, to the amount of a quart or more, in half an hour.

***Gummow to Smyth, 9 April 1872 (Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 220)***

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

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# Health



## Illness

397

The late Mr. Thomas states that this kind of leprosy, or itch [Djee-ball-djee-ball], was called by the natives of Victoria Bubburum; and that they had it always amongst them. He knew scarcely one above the age of twelve years of age that was not affected with it. He added – “All animals, dogs and cats, and even opossums, if kept by the blacks as pets, are soon affected with it; the animals lose all their hair, and soon show only a bare skin.”

Boils are common, too, amongst the natives in some parts. Mr Gason says that a disease – Mirra – afflicts every native once in his life – sometimes at three years of age, but more frequently at fourteen or thereabouts. The symptoms are large blind boils, under the arms, in the groin, or on the breast or thighs, varying in size from a hen’s egg to that of an emu’s egg. The complaint endures for months, and in some instances for years, before it is eradicated, and during its presence the patient is generally so much enfeebled as to be unable to procure food – indeed he is often rendered quite helpless. The only remedy employed is the application of hot ashes to the parts affected.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 258**

398

I consider the disappearance of the native tribes in this district to be owing, not to the result of encounters with the stockmen and early settlers, but to the vices introduced by the white men among them, and to the change in their habits, by which the active exertion of the hunter’s life was exchanged for the idleness and, commonly, the plenty they enjoyed in their new condition of beggars, thereby inducing diseases and catarrhal affections, to which they were not subject before.

**T. Learmonth, 11 August 1853, Buninyong (Bride 1898: 99)**

399

In December 1836 I was at great pains to muster all that were in the Geelong district, and gave each a blanket; they were Buckley’s tribe, and he assured me I had mustered the whole of them, amounting to only 279. They were always friendly; I was well known amongst them, and wherever I went they received me kindly. But, alas! the decrease has been fearful, chiefly from drinking, and exposure to all weathers bringing on pulmonary complaints. Since their connexion with the whites there has been little increase. When I first numbered them they had several children amongst them, but they decreased every year, and now in this tribe we have only 34 adults and two children under five years.

**A. Thomas, 20 March 1854 (Bride 1898: 132)**

400

It is now difficult to ascertain the nature of disease which existed amongst the natives prior to the colonization of Australia by the whites. Those that are now named as most fatal appear to be exactly of that character which would be influenced by the change of habits incidental to their contact with Europeans. For instance, it is stated by many writers that they are afflicted with rheumatism, colds, and pulmonary disease; but, in consequence of their association with the whites, they have altered their mode of living...all that can be collected now relating to diseases bears no reference to the time when the blacks were in a state of nature, and must consequently be received with caution. I have shown elsewhere that a native rapidly recovers from wounds that would prove fatal to men of other races, and this appears to me to be inconsistent with the statement that they are naturally of a weak constitution and of inferior vitality.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 256–57**

401

Ophthalmia was very common in the northern districts and along the Murray, but rarely met with among the coastal tribes. They had also, very prevalently, a loathsome cutaneous disease resembling an aggravated form of itch of mange. It was very contagious amongst themselves, but did not appear to be readily communicated to Europeans.

**Turner 1904: 219–220**

402

They believe that sickness is caused by an enemy who uses certain charms called the Yountoo and Moolee.

The Yountoo is made of a small bone taken from a leg of the dead body of a friend, either before or after burial; it is wrapped up with a small piece of sun-dried flesh, cut from the body of another deceased friend; string made with the hair from the head of a third friend generally serves as the tie. When this charm is required to be used it is taken to the camp where the enemy sleeps and placed in the hot ashes of a fire, with a piece of string tied to it, where it is warmed and then pointed at the person to be killed, a small piece of the bone being chipped off and thrown at the sleeping enemy. The Yountoo is taken away, and in about five weeks laid under the surface of the ground, and a fire lit over it which burns it gradually. The person at whom it has been aimed sickens after it has been burnt a little, and dies if the doctor does not suck out the piece of bone which is supposed to have entered the sick person's body.

**Bonney 1884: 130, Darling River**

403

In compliance with your official instructions communicated to me this morning by Mr. Assistant Protector Sievwright, I beg leave to say that I immediately visited the tribe of black aboriginal natives at present encamped on the bank of the river adjoining this township, and

it is my painful duty to report to you that I witnessed a most distressing scene of disease, destitution and misery.

The unfortunate creatures alluded to are labouring under dysentery (accompanied with typhus fever) of the worst description, and which occurring in subjects (for the most part) worn down by syphilis, rheumatism, (or more properly a [illegible] disease of the bones originating in the former disease) and acute catarrh (which has been lately very prevalent here), has already committed fearful havoc among them.

**Dr. P.E. Cussen to G.A. Robinson, 6 May 1839 (MacFarlane 1983: 461)**

404

As we went out of the boat eleven natives met us; they were very civil... There was one who appeared to be their chief. They handed us their spears to look at; one of them was barbed and one with two prongs... Two of them appeared to be marked with the smallpox.

**Journal of C. Grimes, 18 February 1803, Port Phillip region (Shillinglaw 1972 [1879]: 32)**

405

10 a.m. visited native camp at Clow's, 20 natives, most of them unwell. Two girls died. Rode to Thomas, Narre Narre Warreen. Mr. Murray, Goulburn black, went with me. Said the Boongerong killed his girl. She had died from fever. He believed they had killed her by incantations.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 3 October 1841, Dandenong (Clark 1998c: 11)**

## Treatment

406

On my return to the encampment, the old man had got under the native tor. He was brought out about three yards or more from his miam, laid bare on the grass. The doctor scraped up some dust and rubbed his feet as hard as though rubbing in salt to meat. When this was well done over the whole of the body, face excepted, he muttered for some minutes, then with one hand gathered the dust from the feet, walking straitway from the sick man, uttering as though he was invoking some spirit, and after going about 21 yards, threw the dust in the air, returned to the sick man without a muscle of his face moving, took the dust or ashes from his legs and went off in like manner, but further off, and at the end muttering and throwing dust in the air, then the thighs and lower part of belly was gone through in like manner. At the navel was a great labour. He, after rubbing it well round, not very mercifully took off the dust and muttered all along very angrily till he came to its [illegible] and with a hiss sent that dust up in the air. At the breast were some more muttering but at the mouth and nostrils the ceremony was so long that it was enough of itself to make a sound man ill, especially should the doctor



have a disagreeable breath, After all gone through the sick man was carefully removed his miam.

***Journal of William Thomas, 4 October 1839 (MacFarlane 1983: 549)***

407

Their friends before sunrise had made a large fire of pure bark about 200 yards from encampment, and cutting large pieces of bark to the number of young men whose strength had gone, each one after the other was borne away on the shoulders, as bearers would carry a corpse to the grave. They were one after another placed round this great fire of bark, and between them and the large fire was a small fire to each, also of bark. Each laying on the bark on which he was borne, the doctors commenced cutting off first the hair of the head, then scraping them from head to foot with glass, till not the least hair was to be seen on them, they panting and moving only as they were moved, they lay like paralysed. The hair was carefully kept one's hair from another.

After the hair was all shaved off them, for it was as clean taken off as though shaved, they were rubbed all over with fat, from head to soles of feet, and then commencing at their head was again rubbed fat and red ochre, not thick but well rubbed in. They really looked very pretty when done, the gloss and vermilion red made them appear delicately handsome, being all fine young men.

The doctors dug a deep hole by the side of each small fire and muttering a few sentences, buried each man's hair separate, the friends of the afflicted looking on, pensive the whole of the time. When all finished and hair buried, which lasted about three hours and a half, they pronounced the young men safe. They each got upon their legs, their friends fell upon their necks, wept or moaned for joy and left the spot and returned to their miams.

***Journal of William Thomas, 20 November 1839 (MacFarlane 1983: 564)***

408

They have in their natural state a firm belief in the methods of cure adopted by their own doctors. Mr. Wilhelmi says that amongst the diseases which afflict them most often are "sores, diarrhoea, colds, and headache. For removing these, or partially curing them for the time, they apply outward remedies, some of which appear to be effective. The chief ones are rubbing, pressing, and treading even upon the afflicted parts of the body, in particular the belly and the back; tightening of the belt, and also of the band which they usually wear round the head; bandaging the diseased part; sprinkling or washing it with cold water in case of fever or inflammation. Sores or wounds are generally left to take their course, or the utmost done is to tie something tight round them, or, if inflammation has ensued, to sprinkle cold water upon them. Bleeding of the lower arm they apply in cases of headache. A most extraordinary remedy against headache I saw applied in 1849, in the case of a woman, who submitted to having her head so cut up by another woman with pieces of broken glass that the blood

actually dropped through her thick bushy hair...”

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 260***

409

The Rev. Mr. Taplin refers to the vigorous squeezing and kneadings of the native doctors. Sometimes a patient will groan when he is under treatment, so severe are the manipulations and the cure is indeed often harder to bear than the niwirri (disease) itself. For rheumatic affections the Narrinyeri employ a vapour bath. They heat the stones in the same manner as for cooking, and the patient is placed on a sort of stage made with sticks. The hot stones are put under the stage, the sick person is covered with rugs, all but his head, wet water-weeds are put on the hot stones, and the space below the stage is made as close as possible. The steam ascends, and soon the sufferer is enveloped in it.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 261***

410

The doctor receives his special gifts while in a trance, lasting two days or more, when he visits the world of spirits. He is more reasonable in some respects than the doctors of the Lower Murray, Port Lincoln, and Cooper’s Creek. He occasionally administers a decoction of a fleshy-rooted geranium, the only root used medicinally; but, like them, he bleeds in the arm with a sharp flint. Incantations, however, to which all maladies are ascribed, are likewise the most powerful curatives.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 262, North-Western Victoria***

411

In nearly every tribe there is one member who is esteemed learned beyond the average aboriginal; his profession is that of Baangal (doctor or magician), and he is supposed to be endowed with powers far beyond the finite grasp of humanity in general; he is therefore looked up to by the rest of the tribe with considerable awe; no one would knowingly offend him, as the least slight even would be sure to bring condign punishment on him who offered it.

The function of these wise men are various, amongst which, bleeding and other surgical operations are not the least. As they elect to cure every ill to which aboriginal flesh is heir, from a simple headache up to the severest form of pulmonary consumption, they are seldom without a fair share of patients; the patients have the most perfect faith in their ministrations, consequently they are as passive and docile in their hands as any doctor could wish.

***Beveridge 1883: 68***

412

The natives in our district had no antidote for snake bite beyond sucking the wound, and knew nothing of tying a ligature. If one was bitten, he would watch the sun anxiously, and

when he felt giddy and confused in his vision, would lie down to die. For a deep cut or wound, the treatment was to fill it up with earth.

***Hamilton 1981 [1914]: 102–103***

413

As a rule the health of the Blacks in their wild state was excellent; they decidedly ailed less than Europeans. What they principally seemed to suffer from was rheumatism, headache, and an itchy eruption of the skin (shared with, if not caught from, their dogs) which by the Bangerang was called bora. This complaint prevailed most commonly in the winter, disappearing in great measure in warm weather, when bathing and diving for fish kept the skin clean. During winter, when much tormented by this complaint, opening with a sharp peg the innumerable little pimples which it occasioned was a great occupation in the camp, as also scratching; and I have known a man to walk forty miles to procure mussel-shells, with which to scratch himself comfortably. The treatment in bad cases of headache, which seemed to me to occur principally to the least intellectual, and between the ages of twenty and thirty, was slightly gashing the temples, whilst for rheumatism, friction and ligatures around the affected limb were had recourse to. Treatment for snake-bite I never witnessed, but a neighbour of mine informed me that one of a party of Blacks encamped at his hut, being bitten by a snake on the calf of his leg, he sat down by his fire whilst his friends covered the leg with ashes as hot as he could bear them. To this baking he submitted for some hours, when the evil effects of the bite were said to have passed away.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 133***

414

Amongst the tribes on the Lower Murray a system of steam bathing is practised, as follows:- a hole is dug in the ground about 1ft. deep, at the bottom of which is placed some lighted bark, and on this fire damp leaves are laid to a level with the top of the excavation; over the hole the patient is placed in a state of nudity. The portion of the body affected is placed immediately above the leaves, and these, acted on by the fire, emit a steam, which is not permitted to escape, as opossum rugs are heaped on the doctored patient, causing a strong perspiration to burst from every pore.

***Worsnop 1897: 140***

415

In every tribe there is a doctor, always an elderly man, and sometimes there are several; and there is no complaint they will not attempt to cure. For cuts or wounds, they apply bandages and often earth poultices, which, by-the-by, often have a marvellous effect. They are also skilled in the art of bleeding; they open a vein with a piece of sharp flint or shell; they often rub and knead with their knuckles the affected part. But if all their usual remedies fail, they proceed to incantations, in the hope of driving the evil spirits out.

***A.A.C. Le Souëf (Smyth Vol. 1 1878: 296)***

416

There are native doctors among them. I saw one who conjured with a rock-crystal like a small pigeon's egg. He seemed to swallow it, and bring it out of several parts of his body. This kind of conjuring-stone is called "Bulk" amongst the blacks in Gippsland. I believe they use it for "bewitching" other blacks.

**A.W. Howitt (*Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 307*)**

417

I have seen them use fomentations made from various herbs, but chiefly from the leaves of the Eucalyptus, but as a rule they were content to use friction, rubbing the parts with their hands, a very sensible procedure, and I daresay it did much good. This would be the idea of our modern massage.

**J. Bulmer, *Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 23)***

418

Sometimes an instrument called a turndun, a piece of wood oval shaped to which a string was tied at one end, was swung around for some time and then brought and held over the patient, allowing it to revolve till it was run down. This was repeated several times until the patient, expressed him or herself better. On the Murray, I once saw a man using it over his wife.

**J. Bulmer, *Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 24)***

419

Amongst the Bangerang [at the junction of the Goulburn and the Murray], I have seen the doctor, when engaged in effecting a cure, suck the skin of the sick person over the liver, heart, or other part affected, and, as he said, draw into his mouth, through the unbroken skin and from the suffering organ, bits of wood two inches long and as thick as slate pencils, which he said had been injected by sorcery into the patient by some hostile doctor. These bits of wood he, no doubt, held concealed in his hand when he first knelt beside the recumbent sufferer, and conveyed them unseen to his mouth, as he could very easily have done; more especially as the Blacks carefully abstained from prying into such things. Not the least remarkable part of the business was, I used to think, that the doctor when ill himself, would call in another doctor to go through the same mummeries and deceptions in his behalf which he habitually practised on others, and place full reliance in them..... Nothing, however, could shake their belief, though they admitted that their incantations were quite ineffectual in connection with us White men.

**Curr 1886 Vol. 1: 48**

420

Rheumatism and inflammation are the most serious diseases the natives have to contend against. When anyone is ill, the "pangal" (doctor) is sent for, and he examines the patient from head to foot, squeezes the muscles with his thumb, takes a mouthful of water and spouts it

all over the patient, and repeats a long chain of imprecations (which he speaks with great vehemence) till completely out of breath. This mode of treatment is believed to be infallibly efficacious in curing the patient. The pangal then sucks the sore part with his mouth, keeping fine grass between his teeth, so as not to leave the mark of his teeth on the skin; and continues hissing and grunting till at last he finds a piece of bone or broken flint in the flesh which he pretends he has taken out. While the doctor is operating, the patient is enduring extreme pain. The doctor pulls and drags the sufferer about most unmercifully, until he gets the foreign matter extracted, and then with great pride shows the patient the cause of the pain. A case of supposed cure by a pangal came under my own notice. An old woman named Kitty was blind for many weeks. We all thought it was owing to her old age, and that she would never receive her sight again. However, she did get her sight again, and she informed us that her good pangal performed an operation, or charm, as she called it, and brought out of her eye a long piece of grass.

**Smith 1880: 10–11, Southwestern Victoria–Lower South-East of South Australia**

421

Hot fomentations are very beneficial to them. They are applied to sprains in this way:– The patient heats a smooth stone, lays a lot of herbs on it, and then lays the sore part of his limbs on the hot herbs. This same remedy was found very efficacious to some of my family in allaying the swelling caused by sprains.

**Smith 1880: 11, Southwestern Victoria–Lower South-East of South Australia**

422

All their cures are performed by means of herbs. I have often seen the women who were ill with rheumatism completely enveloped in leaves. In any case when danger is anticipated, a fire is kindled in the middle of their clod wurln, all kinds of green leaves are heaped on top sufficient to bear the patient, sticks are laid across for him to be on, a bottle of water is poured on the fire, and the patient is laid on this rude construction to have a good steaming. Care is taken that he does not catch cold; and this operation generally succeeds in curing him.

**Smith 1880: 11, Southwestern Victoria–Lower South-East of South Australia**

423

I was once very ill with toothache, and I asked one of the pangals to cure me. He advised me to do as the women of his tribe did in such cases, viz., to place a coal to a lock of my hair and let it swing about my face. I did so, and informed him that I received no benefit from his cure. With a hearty laugh at my simplicity he said, “Mutua ee-ong tong-a-nua” (I don’t know the pain in your tooth).

**Smith 1880: 11, Southwestern Victoria–Lower South-East of South Australia**

424

The songs used by the doctors are merely spells chaunted over and over again, in fact “incantations” in the old sense of the word. Some of these chaunts are said to have been given to their possessors in dreams. Such an one I heard at the Kurnai Jeraeil when an old man endeavoured to cure his wife by it of some internal ailment. My attention was drawn to it by the extraordinary energy with which he was singing it, to a curious tune, ending with a complete explosion of the last word. He told me that it was a powerful charm which his “other father” (breba-mungan = father’s brother) had taught him in a dream.

**Howitt 1887: 334**

425

Besides the chiefs, they [the Kulin] have other eminent men, as warriors, councillors, doctors, dreamers who are also interpreters, charmers who are supposed to bring or drive rain away, and also to bring or send away plagues, as occasion may require.

**W. Thomas (Howitt 1904: 309); Woiwood 2012: 37**

426

The blacks have various kinds of doctors – for eyes, bowels, head, etc., and, like white physicians, are noted in proportion to the remarkable cures said to have been wrought. But the highest pitch of the profession is flying. Among the tribes who have visited the settlement there has been but one, that has come to my knowledge, possessed of this power, whose name is Malcolm, of the Mount Macedon tribes. I have known this man to be sent for 100 miles. The blacks say he has power to soar above the clouds, and to fly like an eagle...

**W. Thomas (Bride 1898: 428); Woiwood 2012: 37**

427

There are four families of blacks with us. One of them is the doctor of his tribe. I saw him cure one of the other blacks of a pain in his breast. He made the sick man lie on his back; kneeling by his side, he began to thump the fellow’s breast unmercifully. On a sudden he jumped up, showing us an immense nail, which he said he had pulled out of his breast. He then began singing and threw the nail into the sea, saying he had cured him. The patient (Cognomine Wougill, alias “Lively”) was sufficiently recovered to go kangarooing with me next day.

**Meyrick 1939: 133; Woiwood 2012: 37**

428

I also heard of one of these higher branches of medicine-men’s art in the Wurunjerri tribe. Soon after the white men came to Melbourne, a blackfellow living near where Heidelberg now is, was nearly dead. His friends sent for Doro-bauk, who lived to the west of Mount Macedon. When he arrived, he found the man just breathing ever so slightly, and his Murup (spirit, ghost) had gone away from him, and nothing remained in him except a little wind. Doro-bauk went after the Murup, and after some time returned with in under his ‘possum rug. He said

that he had been just in time to catch it round the middle, before it got near to the Karalk. The dead man was just breathing a little wind when Doro-bauk laid himself on him and put the Murup back into him. After a time the man came back to life.

***Howitt 1904: 387; Woiwood 2012: 37***



## CHAPTER TWELVE

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# Hunting



## Equipment

429

There is a lesser [bludgeon] Nulla Nulla which may, with more propriety, be termed a cudgel, common to all tribes. It is two feet long, one inch thick, with a small nob at the end; a few inches from the nob it has a slight curve. This instrument is used as a missile in hunting. Being thrown at the game it is hurled with amazing rapidity, and if the object aimed at be within anything like a reasonable distance and moving, it is pretty sure of being successful.

***Beveridge 1889: 28–29***

## Hunting Parties

430

When it had been agreed by the chiefs of the associated tribes to have a grand battue, messengers were sent all round to invite everybody to join. As each tribe left its own country, it spread out in line, and all united to form a circle of fifteen or twenty miles in diameter. By this means the kangaroos and emus were enclosed, in order to be driven to an appointed place - usually on Muston's Creek, a few miles from its junction with the River Hopkins. To this place the old people, women, and children of the several tribes had previously gone, and were there encamped. At a fixed time the circle was perfected by arranging the men so that they stood about two hundred yards apart. The circle then began to contract. As they drew near to the central camp both young and old joined them, and formed a line too compact to allow the escape of the game; which, frightened and confused with the yells and shouting all around, were easily killed with clubs and spears.

***Dawson 1881: 79***

431

The whole tribe seldom wander together but separate into families consisting of from ten to twenty persons, to scatter themselves for the purpose of obtaining food. The men hunt and fish for their subsistence. The kangaroo and opossum are the principal objects of their hunting pursuits, which they practise in a singular and artful manner. They usually cover themselves completely with green boughs of trees so as to resemble a bush, they then move gently along so as to be unperceived by the unsuspecting object of their prey, until they are within its reach by their spear, which they use with great dexterity and throw to considerable distance with amazing force and precision. Having struck the animal they throw off their disguise, advance and secure their game.

The women, during the hunting excursions of the men, are generally employed gathering succulent roots which are their only substitute for bread and form a principal ingredient of their food.

**Rev. J.R. Orton to the Wesleyan Missionary Society, August 1836 (MacFarlane 1982: 82–83)**

432

In hunting the kangaroo, all the available men of the tribes went together. Each was armed with two or three spears, barbed with pieces of flint or in more modern times with broken glass, and a marnwan for throwing them. They generally went in a very large circle, and gradually closed in, leaving a narrow opening for the kangaroos which were speared in passing. But in summer they set fire to a large tract of country and speared the animals as they were escaping from the fire. They also got many after the fire almost roasted enough for eating.

**J. Bulmer, *Papers, Museum Victoria* (Vanderwal 1994: 50)**

433

I found seven families of the natives residing in their huts around. The greater part of their tribe were absent at the time on a hunting excursion; but a boy came down with the white men to welcome us on our arrival; – an old man (Pewitt) and his two wives were at the huts, together with some young girls, who had been promised in marriage to the Sydney natives left by the first party. I soon learnt that the most friendly understanding existed with the natives – indeed I scarcely needed this information, for it was evident from the light-hearted playfulness of the boy and the cheerfulness of the old man, and the vivacious loquacity of the females, who came and shook hands with me on my arrival. They were evidently desirous to inform me by signs that the families who inhabited the several huts were out hunting and that they would come home in the evening.

**J.H. Wedge 1835 (Labilliere 1878 Vol. 2: 55)**

## Women as Hunters

434

2 lubras and 6 dogs fell in with us they had killed 2 kangaroos.

**Thomas, Ms. Mitchell Library Set 2, 23 February 1840 (Goughwin 1984: 27)**

## Dingoes in Hunting

435

They [dingoes] were also trained to hunt, which was their principal use. They were active and skilful in killing kangaroos, and seldom got cut with the powerful hind toes of these animals.

**Dawson 1881: 89**

436

The only animal the aborigines possess in a state of domesticity is the indigenous dog – *Canis familiaris Australis* – and of these quadrupeds they keep perfect packs. The aboriginal use them for running down game, and although not by any means particularly speedy of foot, are found very useful in following wounded animals, not sufficiently maimed to allow of their being easily overtaken by the hunters; besides, their sense of smell is very keen, thus enabling hunters to get quickly up with the game they are in pursuit of, which in the absence of the dog, would be a work of considerable time, as well as much labour.

***Beveridge 1889: 127; Beveridge 1883: 58***

437

When we first became acquainted with the blacks, they had a few dingoes domesticated; they used to follow the blacks from camp to camp, and also when out hunting.

***Kirby 1895: 68. Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840s***

## Mammals

438

The forest kangaroo is generally hunted by stalking, and is killed with the hunting spear. If the kangaroo is grazing upon open ground, where there is no cover to conceal the hunter, he makes a circular shield of leafy branches, about two or three feet in diameter, with a small hole in the centre to look through; and, with this in front, he crawls towards the kangaroo while its head is down, remains motionless if it looks up and, when he has got within throwing distance, transfixes it with a spear which he has dragged after him between his toes. The brush and wallaby kangaroos, unlike the foresters, frequent scrubby valleys and patches of brushwood, and are hunted with dogs and spears.

***Dawson 1881: 89–90***



'ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN MAN HUNTING KANGAROO' BY HENRY BRINTON FROM SLV USED UNDER SLV TERMS OF USE.

439

... they are astonishingly dextrous in the use of weapons employed by them in the defence of their persons, and in procuring food; and in tracking each other, as well as the kangaroo, and other animals they are very expert – the most trifling disarrangement of the grass, a broken twig or the slightest thing which indicates the direction of the object of pursuit is at once perceived by them, and they follow the track with ease at a brisk pace – on several occasions I witnessed their adroitness in this respect. In fact their perceptions in seeing, hearing, and smelling are surprisingly acute, – and in the pursuit of their game, they evince that patient perseverance so peculiar to man living in a state of nature.

**Wedge 1835 (Labilliere 1878 Vol. 2: 59; Campbell 1987: 150)**

440

The Aborigines are great mimics, they can imitate almost all animals Birds and Beasts and often entice them by their craft – I have known a party of seven or more young men go hunting when they have seen at a distance a flock of Kangaroo's, which literally was the case 19 years ago, I have seen a flat by Mt Eliza called from the flocks frequenting it Kangaroo Flat covered with them, some of the blacks would diverge and surround the Kangaroo's four or more of them would make noise like the Kangaroo's, the Kangaroo's would quickly feed up to the sounds of as they supposed their kine while the silent blacks in the more distant part would be drawing in upon them the deluded Kangaroo's when too late find out their mistake ceases grazing and looks about when on a sudden the hitherto silent blacks raises an awful yell, the Kangaroo's bewilder'd fly in all directions from where the noise issued towards their mimic's and seldom less than two thirds of their spears have had effect and four or five Kangaroos of sixty or 70 pounds weight have been born to the Encampment, what a Providential Father has meted out for their support.

**W. Thomas letter to Mr Duffy 22 June 1858. Mitchell Library MSS 214/24 Item 1-11, Microfilm CY 3131 Transcription commencing Frame 52 (Byrt 2004: 192 CD WT Traditions 3131, Frames 69–70)**

441

They excelled in climbing trees in search of opossums, but before making the ascent, the running up side was carefully scanned in order to ascertain if clawmarks were recent. Only once did I see an Aboriginal ascend a large whitebox tree at Red Stone Hill, and this is how he operated. He cut a notch through the bark partly into the wood placing the second joint of his great toe on this step, drawing himself up he stood erect on one leg, then cutting another notch in over to his left shoulder, he struck the longish narrow-bladed tomahawk into the trees bole above his head. Swaying on the handle to make certain it would bear a pull, and having placed his disengaged foot on the second cut, with the aid of the axe half he straightened up on his left leg – but in doing so he embraced the tree's bole with a spread-out left hand.

The process was repeated from left to right, and in a short time he was up — but in this case the marsupial was not at home.

**Batey, I. nd: 118–119**

442

Blackfellows in climbing trees supposing another had ascended it a few short months previously always cut new steps, thus for years afterwards the scars on the green bark gave evidence of ascents made at various periods of time. Reaching the years of understanding it appeared clear to me that our Aborigines, that is those frequenting our part, avoided as much as possible damage to opossum trees. Should a strip of bark be removed from such it was on the back and opposite side therefore where men or animals ascended it remained in its natural condition.

**Batey, I. nd: 119**

443

The common opossum supplies the aborigines with one of their principal articles of food, and the skin of this animal is indispensable for clothing... since the common opossums have become numerous in consequence of the destruction of animals of prey by the settlers, the hunter does not look for their tracks among the grass, but examines the bark of the trees; and, if recently-made scratches are visible on it, he immediately prepares to swarm up the bole. It may be seventy or one hundred feet in height without a branch, but he ascends without difficulty, by cutting deep notches in the thick bark with his axe. In these notches he inserts his fingers and his toes, and climbs with such skill and care that very few instances of accident are known. On reaching the hole where the opossum has its nest, he introduces a long wand and pokes the opossum till it comes out. He then seizes it by the tail, knocks its head against the tree, and throws it down.

**Dawson 1881: 90**

444

They also fed on the flesh of the native bear or sloth [koala]. They used their tomahawks to cut notches in the bark, which they used as toe holds to climb very high, straight trees. Sometimes they used a band made of stringy bark (yangoro) which encircled the tree and their bodies. This made it easier to cut the notches, avoiding holding on with their left hand while cutting the notch, and gradually to pull themselves up. However, the band was dangerous when climbing a high tree as they could not free themselves when at the top. It was used mainly climbing a tree to cut bark for a canoe.

The plan was for one man to climb up the tree and the other waited on the ground. After much labour they got to the top of the tree, sometimes a very giddy height, but they were perfectly cool and proceeded to kill their game. It often happened that the bear would get on to a very remote bough, when it had to be cut to let the animal fall, but there would be others

below to dispatch it. After all their labour I have seen the bear leap on to another tree, when they must begin their work again or leave it.

**J. Bulmer, *Papers, Museum Victoria* (Vanderwal 1994: 50)**

445

Kur-bur-er (or Bear of Australia)

Is an animal more of the Sloth kind, in laziness, sluggishness, and indifference. It makes its way to the top of a Gum or Box tree, and there remains till upper branch leaves are all consumed, he then with some reluctance (as the Blacks say) casts his eyes over the absent limbs of foliage he had consumed to see if they few leaves were left, then drops down to the next great branches, and there remains till he has cleared that floor & so on till he has consumed the whole foliage of a huge tree. This animal is so lazy that I have seen blacks ascend a tall tree before the black got to the 1st branch Kurberer's eye is on him but too idle to move, the black will get up to the bears very haunch & yet only just move his head when the black takes his Tommahawk from his fine ivory teeth, cracks him on his forehead while looking on his executioner and down falls the Australian Bruin which gives a fine family dinner and is not bad eating. The Blacks have many superstitious notions touching this animal, too long here to relate, one however is that they are invariably consulted on emergent occasions.

**W. Thomas, *Information sent to Exhibition, 11 November 1861. Mitchell Library MSS 214/17, Microfilm CY 3100, Transcription commencing Frame 108* (Byrt 2004: 213 CD WT 3100 Letter re exhibition)**

446

The wombat (naroot) provided the favourite meat and its flesh was generally fat. A skilled hunter of the wombat was honoured by the name Bungil Naroot. The wombat was secured in two ways. They watched its burrows on sunny days and shot it as it slept at the mouth of its habitation. They also dug a hole over its burrow and sent in dogs to drive it out. This entailed great labour. I once assisted an Aboriginal to dig out a wombat. We dug a hole about 14 feet deep, which took us nearly two days. At the end of the second day we were as far from capturing the animal as we were at the first.

**J. Bulmer, *Papers, Museum Victoria* (Vanderwal 1994: 50–51)**

447

The wombat, being a nocturnal animal, cannot be caught by daylight; and, being a deep burrower, cannot be got at by digging, except where the ground is soft. The burrow sometimes extends a long distance; but, as it is large enough to admit a man, the hunter crawls into it till he reaches the animal – which is harmless – and then taps on the roof to let his friend above ground know its position; a hole is then sunk, and the wombat dragged out. Should the burrow be under a layer of rock, the hunter lies quietly above its mouth, and, when the



wombat comes out after sunset to feed, he jumps into the hole and intercepts the frightened animal on its retreat to its den.

**Dawson 1881: 91**

## Birds

448

The emu, the turkey bustard, and the gigantic crane are stalked by means of a screen made of a bunch of plants held in front of the hunter. The plant used is the shepherd's purse, and a bunch of it is indispensable to every hunter on the open country, where branches of trees are not easily got. The hunter, concealed from view behind this screen, creeps up towards the game, and carries exposed to view as a lure a blue-headed wren, which is tied alive to the point of a long wand, and made to flutter. When the game approaches to seize the bait, it is killed with a waddy; or it is caught with a noose fixed on the point of the wand, which the hunter slips over its head while it is trying to catch the wren.

**Dawson 1881: 91**

449

Emus are frequently run down with dogs. They are sometimes trapped, during the dry weather, by digging a hole in a nearly dried-up swamp, where the birds are in the habit of drinking. The hole is about twenty-feet in diameter, and made very muddy and soft, with a little water in the centre. When the birds wade in to drink, they get bogged, and are easily captured.

**Dawson 1881: 92**

450

The locality of a drove of emus is noted, and such natural features as the country in the vicinity presents (such as the near convergence of a lagoon and lake, or a river and a lagoon) are utilised for side or guiding lines to the net, the latter being fixed at the nearest point of their convergence. As a matter of course, in all cases the ground between the converging side lines at the point selected for the fixing on the net must be narrow enough to be spanned thereby. The net is firmly fixed in position by means of good stout stakes. When all is in readiness several of the elderly natives hide themselves in the long grass at each end, whilst the younger members of the tribe stretch themselves out in two lines having the form of a V with the apex cut off, the narrow opening of this mutilated V fitting on to the natural converging lines. Previous to these lines being formed scouts, warily taking advantage of all the inequalities offered by tree and bush, stealthily creep round the unsuspecting emus. When their purpose has been achieved they await in ambush for the preconcerted signal to startle the game towards the net prepared for their reception.

**Beveridge 1889: 80-81**

451

The emu (*Dromaius Australia*) – Burri-mul (Yarra), Miowera (Gippsland) – is a large bird, affording a good deal of nutritious flesh. When in an ordinary position, the head is about five feet from the ground. He is very fleet and very strong, and is hunted by the natives much in the same manner as the kangaroo is hunted. In nearly all parts of Victoria he is speared, nets or yards not being used as a rule.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 191–192***

452

The Gippsland tribes hunted the emu with spear and throwing sticks, but on the Murray they used very strong nets. The net was spread between two trees not far from a watering place. The blacks formed themselves into a large circle, and as the emu came in sight it saw men on every side, for they were very gradually making the circle smaller. The only clear place was the vicinity of the net, to this it made its way only to get entangled, for the net came down and the emu was helpless. It was soon despatched by the clubs of the men.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 51)***

453

The native climbs a tree beneath which he knows this bird [emu] is in the habit of coming, and when the prey is immediately below him he pierces it with a spear about 12ft. long, specially made for the purpose.

***Journal of Mr. Hawdon, Swan Hill, 1838 (Worsnop 1897: 117)***

454

There are hiding places, made in the trees, that are situated in the gullies and where the natives used to conceal themselves and watch for the emu passing when they would spear them from the tree. I have seen in my travels a great number of these little bush huts in trees, mostly cherry trees. The natives, when the cherries are ripe, break off a large branch and lay it under the tree. He ascends before daylight and it is placed in the track of the emu. He then, with a strong and long spear made for the purpose, spears the bird.

***G.A. Robinson, 8 June 1841, Western District (Presland 1980: 53; Clark 1998b: 256)***

455

They [Manmate nation] had 1 small lean dog with them and also a variety of their native implements and some of their miserable weapons. The most curious implement was a snare and a shield for catching turkeys. The snare was the same I had seen before, only larger. It was a long light stick 12 feet in length with a loop at the end. The stick was ½ in in diameter and in two parts joined together and tied with a slip of kangaroo skin and 2 small wedges drove in to tighten it. The instrument is called But.ky.er.

The shield is curiously made of boughs and sufficiently large to cover the upper part of the

body. The boughs are worked from the centre. The outer were tea tree, the inner gum boughs. Two holes were left for peep holes to look through and a loop to put over the head. And it was thus suspended from the neck. And to keep it steady, the man also held it fast between his teeth. The legs of the sportsman are all that are seen. This instrument or shield is called Cur. re.bit.mart screened or secreted behind the shield of boughs and leaves with the snare held in his right hand, the sportsman proceeds to snare the birds, turkey. The birds in their habit appear very stupid.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 25 April 1841, Bolden's upper station, Hopkins River/Port Fairy region (Presland 1977b: 51–52; Clark 1998b: 147–148; Sculthorpe 1990: 43)**

456

The turkey bustard is sometimes killed without stalking, as it has a habit when anyone approaches, of lying down and concealing itself among long grass, like the grouse and partridges. In this way the hunter gets near enough to kill it with a waddy.

**Dawson 1881: 91**

457

When a turkey's nest is discovered, the great object of the hunter is to secure the mother as well as the eggs; and, for that purpose, he suspends a limb of a tree across the nest, supported at one end with a short stick, to which a long string is attached. This string reaches to a hole in the ground, which the hunter digs, and in which he sits, covered with bushes and dry grass. When the turkey returns to her nest, and seats herself in it, the string is pulled, and she is crushed by the log.

**Dawson 1881: 91**



'A 7036/PART 7: GEORGE AUGUSTUS ROBINSON JOURNALS, PORT PHILLIP PROTECTOR-ATE, 11 MAY-1 JUNE 1840' IE148815 FROM STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES USED UNDER CC BY 4.0

458

The turkey (*Otis Australasiensis*) – Brea-ell (Yarra), Korn-jinah (Gippsland), Parim-barim (Western district) – is a shy bird, but the natives are cunning in taking him.

In the Western district they make an instrument long and flexible, like a fishing-rod, and attach to the end of the thinner part the skin and feathers of a small bird, or a dead butterfly, and a running noose.

When the hunter sees a turkey, he slowly approaches the bird, holding in front a bush to hide his person, and swinging aloft the decoy with a peculiar motion characteristic of the bird or insect. The turkey's attention is at once arrested and wholly taken up with the movement of the decoy. He stares at it stupidly, turns round and stares again, but though it approaches, he does not move far. He continues to stare until the black gets near enough to slip the noose over his head and secure him.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 192**



'WILLIAM THOMAS, PROTECTOR OF ABORIGINES, PICTORIAL MATERIAL' IE922700 FROM STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES USED UNDER CC0

459

I saw native spears and a bird snare at Edgar's. The loop of the snare was made of twisted rush and 12 inches long. Used for catching turkeys. Of a similar description as those I got from the natives on the Hopkins, only that this latter was a small one and used for smaller birds.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 9 May 1841, Edgars' station, Western District (Presland 1977b: 83; Clark 1998b: 194)**

460

This creek is a favourite resort of the natives in the summer season for catching birds. Passed several waterholes where at which the natives had been catching birds. This creek contains, like most others, a chain of holes and in dry weather few contain water. The holes with water are then selected by the natives for catching birds. The method resorted to is by sticking boughs into the bank on the edge of the pond, the boughs overhanging the water... This is done to prevent the birds getting at the water. One end of the hole is left open and at this place two sticks, bent in circumference of a circle or form of a segment, is then placed in front of this opening – for the birds to perch on. The bird capturer then builds himself a hut of boughs of the smallest size in which he can crouch; the one I saw was 2 ft x 3. When he snares them

with his [blank]. This mode of catching birds indicated much ingenuity and I should think patience also.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 9 May 1841, Murphy's Creek (Presland 1977b: 84; Clark 1998b: 194–195)***

461

Swans are killed in marshes, by the hunter wading among the tall reeds and sedges, and knocking the birds on the head with a waddy.

***Dawson 1881: 93***

462

Ducks and the smaller waterfowl are captured among the reeds and sedges with a noose on the point of a long wand. The hunter approaches them under concealment of a bunch of leaves, and slips the noose over their heads, and draws them towards him quietly, so as not to disturb the others.

***Dawson 1881: 93***

463

It is curious to observe the skill shown by the natives in their pursuit of game. They catch vast numbers of ducks in an ingenious manner. The lagoons run for some length, narrowing at the end, where the trees close in; two or three blacks plant themselves near this narrow pass, having extended a large net from tree to tree; the others then proceed to the top of the lagoon, driving the ducks before them. As they fly by the ambushade, they throw their boomerangs whizzing over the heads of the birds, which, dreading that their enemy, the hawk, is sweeping at them, make a dash under the trees, strike the net, and fall as if shot, when the natives dash in after them. I imagine it is the panic that seizes the birds, for I have seen a hundred caught by such means.

***E.P.S. Sturt, 20 October 1853, Port Phillip side of the Murray River (Bride 1898: 371)***

464

Duck nets are usually one hundred yards long by two yards broad, the mesh being four inches wide. In making these nets the aborigines do not use a gauge, as is usual with Europeans. They simply judge of the size by the finger and thumb. The knot, however, is precisely similar to the one which European net-makers use. The meshes are as regular in size as though a gauge had been employed, and the finished net is as uniform throughout its length, and quite as strong as those made by men whose sole occupation it that of net-making.

... When a duck hunting expedition has been decided upon, all in the camp – men, women and children – get in motion early in the morning, and start off to the lagoon which has been selected for the scene of their operations.

... Four men (generally patriarchs in the tribe) go off with the net to the point of the lagoon they purpose fixing it. It is stretched across the lagoon, and close enough to the water to prevent the ducks from escaping underneath. In the meantime the young active men of the tribe range themselves at regular intervals along both side of the lagoon, and high up amongst the branches of the trees with which the margin is fringed, those in the trees having each a light disc of bark about seven or eight inches in diameter. When they are all properly settled, one who has been sent off for the purpose startles the ducks.

***Beveridge 1889: 83, 85***

465

A common method of catching ducks is by fixing a net, about sixty yards in length across a watercourse, a river, a swamp, or a lagoon – the lower part being three or four feet above the water. The ends of the net are either fixed to trees or held by natives stationed in trees. One man proceeds up the river or lagoon, and cautiously moves so as to cause the ducks to swim towards the net. When they are near enough, he frightens them, and they rise on the wing, and at the same time another native, near the net, throws up a piece of bark, shaped like a hawk, and utters the cry of that bird. The flock of ducks at that moment dip, and many are caught in the net. Four men are usually employed when this sport is pursued.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 193***

466

The Murray blacks cleverly trapped ducks, using nets hung across a stream One of the party went down the stream in a canoe, keeping a fair distance from the ducks, but driving them towards the net. When they were near to it the man made a peculiar sound by holding his lower lip between his finger and thumb. The sound resembled the noise a hawk makes, and the ducks then took to the wing, and they would fly against the net which would fall upon them. The Aborigines obtained large numbers of duck in this way. They had another way of getting wild fowl. A man tied grass over his face, and with a long stick in his hand on which he had made a noose. He goes into the water, just keeping his head out. As he goes very quietly, he does not disturb the flock. Indeed his head looks like a tussock of grass. As he gets near enough to reach the fowls he puts the noose over the head of one and drags it beneath the water. This is done so quietly that the flock is not startled. He will often get two or three fowls before they are alarmed.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 51)***

467

Mr. Chenery says that he has often seen the natives of the Goulburn catch ducks. A man swims under the water, breathing through a reed, and approaches a flock without creating any alarm. When he is within reach of a duck, he seizes it by the feet, drags it underwater, wrings its neck, and tucks it under his belt. In this way, quietly and noiselessly, he secures a great number of birds... Sometimes the natives sneak along the banks of a river, and, concealing

themselves amongst the reeds, get so near the water-fowl as to be able to spear them, or take them with a noose.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 194**

468

The natives, as a rule, are splendid swimmers, though there are tribes living in dry country who will not go near the water, and cannot swim a stroke; but among the River tribes water is second nature – children hardly able to walk swim like ducks. It is strange to watch a blackfellow catching ducks by diving. He drops down the stream with merely a small portion of his head above water. When he is close to the flock, he quietly dives, and draws one or two birds under the surface; these he at once kills and tucks them under his belt; he then rises to the surface, but only shows his nose; in a moment he is down again; and another duck or two disappear. I have seen a black take seven ducks in this manner without creating any suspicion in the flock. They are also expert in noosing wild-fowl.

**A.A.C. Le Souëf (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 298)**

469

Sometimes a waterhole is surrounded with a brush fence, in which an opening is left. Near this opening a small bower is made, in which the hunter sits; and, when the birds come to drink, he nooses them while passing.

**Dawson 1881: 93**

470

Small birds are killed with a long, sharp-pointed wand by boys, who lie in thickets and attract them by imitating their cries.

**Dawson 1881: 93**

471

When the hot weather prevails, birds are easily caught by them in the following manner:- They conceal themselves in an arbour of boughs, close to the small remnants of surface water, or at wells, and snare the birds by laying a gin (attached to the end of a rod) where the birds must or are most likely to stand when they come to drink. Having secured their victim, they draw the rod, they can set it again without leaving the arbour or frightening other birds away by showing themselves.

**J.M. Clow nd, Wimmera district (Bride 1898: 360)**

472

On the swamps and reedy banks of the Lower Murray, and on the lakes and south-east coast, snares are erected for catching small birds. This is the work of the young men and boys. They lie beneath a tuft of reeds, or within an artificial cover close by, and, by imitating the notes of the various birds as they come to the water to drink, allure them towards the snare. After



drinking, the birds alight on the framework, and are secured with the snaring rod, and drawn into the place of ambush.

***Worsnop 1897: 114–115***

473

Small birds which feed on the blossoms of the native honey-suckle, are snared in the mallee scrub in the following manner:- A hole is dug in the ground sufficiently large to admit of a man sitting in it comfortably, and over it a mia-mia or wurley is built of green boughs or twigs, whilst in front small sticks are stuck in the ground in a slanting direction. The native, with his thin stick furnished with a running noose, then takes his seat in the hole and imitates the chirping birds. When he secures one he used it as a decoy, fastening it by a cord to one of the long slanting sticks, when it attracts large numbers by its cries and the native cautiously ensnares one after another with his loop. Many birds are taken in this way by a patient hunter.

***Worsnop 1897: 116***

474

He and Mr Pettitt and Irvine had been to the Pyrennes and had surprised a native man fishing for birds. The man did not see them, they came upon him unawares. He was following up a creek. Had on a coat of green boughs and a short stick with a small bird fastened by the leg by a string. He had another large stick with a noose and when the hawks started down upon this small bird he pulled the noose on the hawk and caught him.

***Journals of G.A.Robinson, 12 February 1840 (Presland 1977a: 50; Clark 1998a: 166)***

475

In Gippsland the cockatoo (braah) and parrots of other kinds were not often killed by the boomerang. The natives generally took them when they were sitting on their eggs, or when too young to fly, or when moulting. The men used canoes to cross the lake when hunting moulting swans and ducks.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 51)***

476

They had the art here [Grampians] of catching birds with a long splendour stick like a fishing rod, at the end of which was a noose of grass twisted up. With this apparatus and a screen of boughs, they succeeded in putting salt on birds' tails to some purpose.

***C.B. Hall, 6 September 1853 (Bride 1898: 271)***

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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# Huts and Villages



## Camps

477

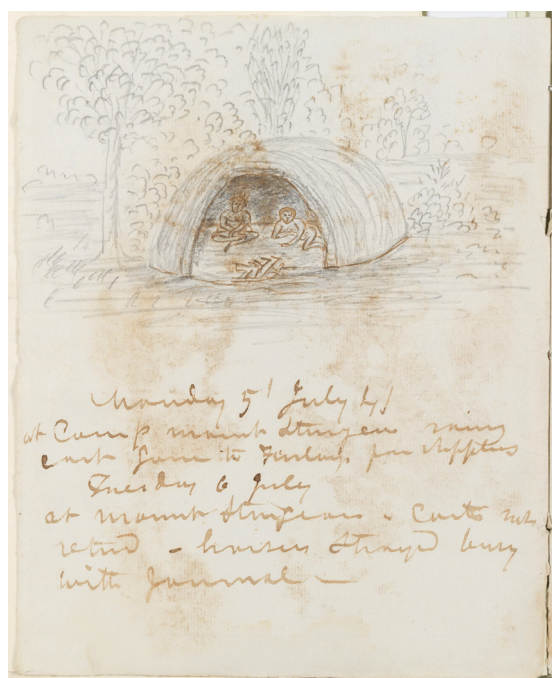
Another native village was discovered in Mustons or the Scrubby Creek which contained between twenty and thirty huts well built and capable of holding ten or twelve people numerous and well constructed. Dams (some fragments I understand may still be found) were in these creeks, the huts were of the first rate, and they are said to have woven straw huts of their own manufactory — in 1840 or early 1841 a sheep station was formed here and the village was deserted.

**W. Thomas to G.A. Robinson, 2 March 1844, (Coutts 1981: 241)**

478

Passed a deserted elengermat native camp of nine huts of recent construction; each hut was large enough to contain seven or eight persons (adults). They were made in the form of a cupola with bark and sods over them with a doorway.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 16 April 1841, elengo mat – Lake Elengermite (Presland 1977b: 36; Clark 1998b: 136)**



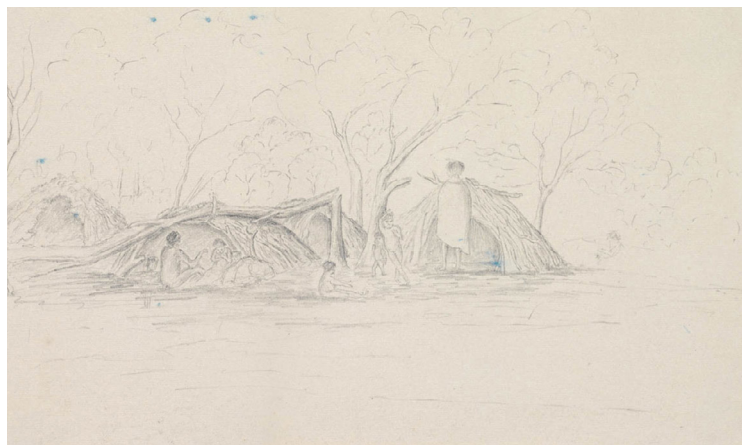
"GEORGE AUGUSTUS ROBINSON, GEORGE AUGUSTUS ROBINSON JOURNAL, PORT PHILLIP PROTECTORATE, 5 JULY-6 AUGUST 1841" FROM STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES USED UNDER CC BY 4.0

479

Proceeded up the creek and at a mile and a half discovered fresh indication of natives. This place, previous to its occupation by white men, was a favourite resort and as this was the only permanent supply of water, a village had been formed. I counted 13 large huts built in the form of a cupola. When seen at a distance they have the appearance of mounds of earth. They are built of large sticks closely packed together and covered with turf, grass side inwards. There

are several variations. Those like a cupola are sometimes double and have two entrances; others again are like a niech. Then there are some made of boughs and grass. And last are common screens. The permanent huts are those in form of a cupola. Three of these huts had been occupied a day or two previous to my visit. A shield, or in the language of the natives, por.ral, as also a bucket or po.pare.re, and a shield of boughs for catching birds were left at the huts.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 10 May 1841, near Mt. Napier (Presland 1977b: 85–86; Clark 1998b: 196)***



'GO' NATIVES OF PORTLAND BAY DISTRICT N.S.W., 1843 - VIEWS CHIEFLY IN VAN DIEMEN'S LAND, CA. 1843-1850 [ALBUM OF SKETCHES] IE3316417 FROM STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES USED UNDER CC0

480

The late Mr. Thomas believed that at one time, in some districts of the Colony of Victoria, the natives built and inhabited huts of a much more substantial character than the ordinary bark miams. His belief was based on information received from one of the earliest settlers in the Western district, who said he saw a native village on the banks of a creek, about fifty miles to the north-east of Port Fairy, composed of twenty or thirty huts, some of them capable of holding twelve people, and strongly built. Each hut was shaped somewhat like a bee-hive, was about ten feet in diameter, and more than six feet in height. There was an opening about three feet six inches in height, which was generally closed as night with a sheet of bark. There was also an aperture at the top about nine inches in diameter, through which the smoke of fire escaped. In wet weather this aperture was covered with a sod. These buildings were firmly built, and plastered with mud, and were strong enough to bear the weight of a man.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 125–126 (notes)***

481

“Tapoc”, the Mount Napier of Mitchell, is an isolated hill of volcanic formation. The crater is broken down on the west side to its base. The Great Swamp is skirted by low hills and well grassed open forest land. The Natives are still the undisputed occupants, no white man having been there to dispossess them. The people who occupy the country have fixed residences. At one village were thirteen large huts. They are warm and well-constructed. In shape of a cupola

or “kraal”, a strong frame of wood is first made, and the whole covered with thick turf with the grass inwards. There are several varieties. Those like a kraal are sometimes double, having two entrances; others are demi-circular. Some are made with boughs and grass. And last are the temporary screens. One hut measured 10 feet in diameter by 5 feet high, and sufficiently strong for a man on horseback to ride over.

**G.A. Robinson, May 12 1841 (Clark 1990: 108)**

482

The country round Lake Elengermite is densely wooded. Stringy bark and gum are about two feet through. Moved around to the west end and spread our viands on a fallen tree, close to which were several native huts – rude and constructed of bark and sticks. Two ovens were close by and in the hollow of two trees were concealed property – if the nature of perchis and sticks in the cavity of trees can be called concealment.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 17 April 1841 (Presland 1977b: 38; Clark 1998b: 138)**

483

... there is a large swamp on the east of the Port Fairy River where the natives get their chief support, roots etc., and near to a small eminence on the edge of the swamp, called by the Campbell's men 'Tower Hill' is a native village, an assemblage of huts. And along the coast near to the shepherds hut are reefs of rock abounding with the haliotus mutton fish, muscle, moreover crawfish and which must have afforded them a good supply as the camping place of the natives in the beautiful forest of dwarf banksia abound with cinerated shells.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 28 April 1841 (Clark 1998b: 154; Presland 1977b: 61)**

484

Although there may be 150 mia-mias (native huts) erected on the formation of a fresh native encampment, no altercation, to my knowledge, has ever taken place touching site, or trees to be barked. They know beforehand where the chief's mia-mia is to be, and the distance required for his immediate connexions – none asking his fellow permission or advice. They commence barking and building; in one half hour I have seen one of the most beautiful, romantic, and stillest parts of the wilderness become a busy and clamorous town, and the beautiful forest marred for materials for their habitation, and as much bustle as though the spot had been located for generations.

Although to a casual observer a native encampment may appear void of arrangement, such is not the case; if the whole or most of a tribe be present, it is divided into small hamlets of about six mia-mia each, distant from each other five or six yards, merely sufficient to prevent the fires of one from molesting the other. The hamlets are about twenty yards from each other, or more, according to the space of ground on which they are encamped.

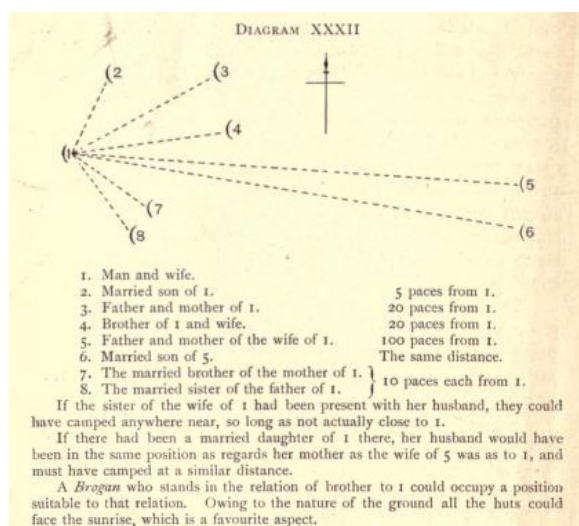
**W. Thomas nd, Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix – Native Encampment (Bride 1898: 429–430)**



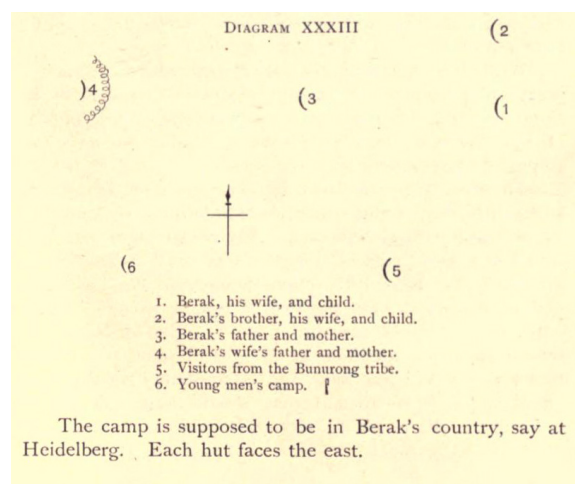
485

When evening arrives, and the splendid deep blue-purple and rose yellow tints of the anti-twilight cover the eastern sky, the leader, having well regulated the pace, comes to the site of a new encampment. He stops, throws down his kangaroo rug (Mogra), sticks his spear in the ground, and at once commences important duties. Immediately there is bustle and excitement, running hither and thither, and loud “cooeys” from the young men. The leader quietly and calmly surveys the forest, and seeing some stately tree having bark suitable to his wants, advances slowly towards it. He chops a hole for his foot, takes his tomahawk (Kal-baling-elarek or Karr-geing) between his teeth, and gravely ascends, chopping holes as he proceeds, managing the whole business easily and gracefully. When he has ascended to a proper height, he commences to notch the bark, descends and notches it also in the lower part, cuts the sides, and in a short time removes with some care a large smooth sheet (Koon-toom). Each head of a family in like manner procures bark, no one interfering with his neighbour; and in a short time a number of lean-tos are constructed.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 123**



“DIAGRAM XXXII” FROM INTERNET ARCHIVE USED UNDER CC0



“DIAGRAM XXXIII” FROM INTERNET ARCHIVE USED UNDER CC0

486

At an ordinary encampment the miams are arranged in such a way as to admit of each having a separate fire, and the fires are so placed that the embers cannot ignite the leaves or branches or bark of the miams. Accidental fires are of rare occurrence; but sometimes in a sudden squall the lighted sticks are blown about, and cause destruction of the frail dwellings.

In arranging the miams, care is taken to separate the young unmarried men from the unmarried females and the families, and it is not permitted to the young men to mix with the females.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 124**

## Huts and Their Construction

487

Habitations — wuurns — are of various kinds, and are constructed to suit the seasons. The principal one is the permanent family dwelling, which is made of strong limbs of trees stuck up in dome-shape, high enough to allow a tall man to stand upright underneath them. Small limbs fill up the intermediate spaces, and these are covered with sheets of bark, thatch, sods, and earth till the roof and sides are proof against wind and rain. The doorway is low, and generally faces the morning sun or a sheltered rock. The family wuurn is sufficiently large to accommodate a dozen or more persons; and when the family is grown up the wuurn is partitioned off into apartments, each facing the fire in the centre.

**Dawson 1881: 10**

488

The Twofold Bay or Nulliker Blacks are an industrious and intelligent race but diminutive compared with the Aborigines of the Interior. Their huts like the other Natives of the Coast are simple and rude being a mere sheet of bark in a trigonal shape with barely sufficient room to sit under. Their canoes like the Gipps Land Natives are folded at the ends and though, buoyant are very frail. The Natives occupy a kneeling position in their mudjerre or canoes and may be seen like floating specks off the coast spearing salmon; they are expert fishers.

**G.A. Robinson (Mackaness 1941: 19)**



'ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN MAN AND WOMAN IN CANOE ON LAKE TYERS, GIPPSLAND, VICTORIA' BY CHARLES RUDD FROM SLV USED UNDER SLV TERMS OF USE.

489

Native huts: at this camp the native (huts) were well constructed. They are in various forms, principally a half cupola. A strong and sometimes neat frame work of sticks are first made, then a covering of bark and turf laid over the whole with the grass side downwards. These are warm and durable and are sufficient to prevent a native weapon from penetrating.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 21 April 1841, Tarong (Presland 1977b: 44; Clark 1998b: 142)**



490

The Bangerang built their huts of boughs in fine weather, and of bark in winter.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 130***



AN ENCAMPMENT OF ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS ON THE BANKS OF THE YARRA BY JOHN COTTON FROM SLV USED UNDER SLV TERMS OF USE.

491

The native huts were like those on the west coast, in form of a neich. But the most singular huts or shelters were the most singular ... with a piece of thatch upon it.

[Samphire] Honeysuckle and a light wood trees prevailed, and plus stunted gum, E and perpendicular banks, in front of which were the native Worns or huts. And small light wood and box tree such as were declined, as had overhanging branches, were converted into habitations by having thatch laid on the top of the branches or crown....

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 1 April 1841, Lake Boloke (Presland 1977b: 14– 15; Clark 1998b: 119)***

492

Passed the frame of a small native hut; well made very substantial and neat and placed on the slope or declivity of a hill with an oven at the back. Mr. Edgar rode with me round the creeks and swamps. Saw several native worns or huts, one 10 feet in diameter.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson (Presland 1977b: 84; Clark 1998b: 194)***

493

Each little miam is built partly of bark and partly of boughs, or wholly of bark or wholly of boughs, according to the state of the weather or the whim of the builder.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 125***

494

They were always mindful of the seasons in selecting the localities in which to spend their time, taking into account not only the natural features of the ground, but the facilities for obtaining food. They constructed tolerably good bark willams in the winter, while in the summer they were content with such shelter as a few broken branches afforded. They were rarely without good fires.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 141***

495

In cold, rough weather the huts are made of bark, placed over a light framework of poles, which latter divides the front or open spaces of the habitation into two equal parts. Should bark be difficult to procure, the framework is covered with boughs or coarse grass, so as to be impervious to any moderate rain, but in boisterous bitter weather these offer but a sorry protection against the elements.

During the warm and mild weather each family merely puts a few boughs in a semicircular form round the fire, and this is done more with the view of preventing the fire from being blown about by the wind than for any shelter which they are supposed to afford.

The building of the loondthals fall entirely upon the shoulders of the women – that is to say, any man having women folks in their families would disdain to aid in the erection of their dwellings. With the enforced bachelors, and such youths as club together, the matter is very different. They, of course, have to build their own huts, as well as do every other domestic duty for themselves.

***Beveridge 1889: 116***

496

On the Murray River, where they used to cover their huts with bark, the young men often amused themselves with carving, or drawing with charcoal, on the inside of the bark, various objects and scenes in illustrations of any events which they desired to record, in the same way as I have known a gentleman ornament the walls of his boudoir with scene paintings.

***P. Chauncy (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 258)***

497

The natives make their huts by placing sticks resting together in a cone or one horizontal against which they place bark... Saw native huts. On the inside of the bark were rude sketches

of men and emu done by the natives. There were a great number of figures; ninety in the attitude directed (to) dancing.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 2 April 1843, Mount Hope area (Clark 1998c: 142)***



'ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS ON THE RIVER MURRAY' FROM SLV USED UNDER SLV TERMS OF USE.

498

Their habitation is frail but answers well their purpose, a few slabs of bark cut in a few minutes and erected is their habitation, these slabs of bark are about 6' long oblique raised to the angle of about 90 degrees windward, every alternate sheet is reversed so that no rain can enter, the sides are folded up with short pieces of bark and brush and a sheet of bark at the top ... A good Miam (a hut) will hold 2 adults and 3 children - they are not permanent are knocked down or burnt on breaking up the Encampment - they consist of one apartment only. In a large encampment they are divided into hamlets - some influential black taking charge of six or eight Miams, and so on say 5 Hamlets. These hamlets are 50 yds or more from each other, while miams in a single hamlet is (sic) not more than 3 or 4 yds apart merely sufficient to avoid danger from each others fires.

***W. Thomas and (Mitchell Library Item 21. Language and Customs of Australian Aborigines, Miscellaneous Papers: 88 in Gaughwin and Sullivan 1984: 84)***

499

In their migratory moves all are employed; children in getting gum, knocking down birds etc; women in digging up roots, killing bandicoots, getting grubs etc; the men in hunting kangaroos, etc, scaling trees for opossums etc. They mostly are at the encampment about an hour before sundown -the women first, who get fire and water, etc. by the time their spouses arrive . . . In warm weather, while on tramp, they seldom make a miam - they use merely a few boughs to keep off the wind, in wet weather a few sheets of bark make a comfortable house. In one half hour I have seen a neat village begun and finished.

**W. Thomas nd, *Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix* (Bride 1898: 399; cf. Gaughwin and Sullivan 1984: 93–9)**

500

Their habitations are of the most rude and simple construction, the materials with which they are made being the branches of trees laid with tolerable compactness and pitched at an angle of about 45 degrees-in shape they form a segment of a circle, and their size is in proportion to the number of inmates of which the family is composed.

**J.H. Wedge (*Labilliere* 1878 Vol. 2: 60)**

501

I have seen in half an hour a village comfortably housed from the bounty of Providence in the forest around. A few sheets of bark with a sapling and two forked sticks make at once a habitation; the sheets of bark six or seven feet long laid obliquely to the angle of about ninety degrees. Every alternative sheet is reversed, so that no rain can enter. Foliage and pieces of bark enclose the sides and top. Their miams are rudely formed and are made according to the proportions of their families, and formerly held two adults and three or four children.

**William Thomas (*Eidelson* 1997: 16)**

502

... I came upon what may be called an Aboriginal village. There were five huts, within sight of each other, where the bush was thick, two of them were large, and capable of containing fifty people each, they were compactly and solidly built, - in the form of a cupola – the beams were curiously though rudely interwoven with each other, forming a perfect dome, about seven feet high, there was a central prop, to sustain the roof which was made of a mixture of mud and grass, laid over beams and was of such strength and solidity that the boy rode his horse upon the top of one of these without it having the slightest effect of the building. There was an entrance to each, in the opposite direction of the prevailing wind, they were curious and wonderful specimens of primeval architecture, and must endure for years.

**Report from September 1839-May 1840 by Assistant Protector Sievwright to G.A. Robinson, 1st June 1840 (*Lakic and Wrench* 1994: 130)**

## Stone Structures

503

The natives formed these wind-breaks of stone, placed on edge in a circular form, some of them very perfect, leaving the entrance generally toward the east, the prevailing winds coming from the north-west and south-west. These circles are common on the plains or eastern parts of this property, where the branches of trees could not be procured for giving shelter. When we first occupied this country it was quite common for the natives to use these circles as camping places, always having the fires in the centre. The fires were very small, as they had frequently to carry the wood long distances. The circles were generally formed of large stones on their edges, and bedded in the ground close together, without any other stones on the top, thus forming good protection from the wind as they lay around the fire. The stones are of the common basalt, there being no other in the district. The situation selected was generally where water was convenient, or in some favourable place for game. The circles were about the size of ordinary mia-mys, that is from ten to twenty feet in diameter.

***P. Manifold to P. Chauncy, Western District (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 235)***

504

... crossed a swamp to some stony rises, and succeeded in conferring with the blacks; they had a sort of village, and some of their habitations were of stone. I passed several stone and wooded weirs for taking fish, also places for snaring birds; their dwellings are among rocky fragments and loose crags, thickly wooded and bounded by swamps. This country extends to the coast a distance of at least 30 miles. To remove the natives from these fastnesses by means of horsemen would be impossible, and footmen would find it difficult to travel.

***G.A. Robinson, 1842, near Lake Condah (House of Commons Sessional Papers 1844, 34: 209; reprinted Clark 1988: 9)***



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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# Marriage and Betrothal



## Marriage and Betrothal

505

Girls were promised when infants, and there was intermarriage between the Wiimbaio and the adjoining tribes both in the Darling and Murray.

Marriages were also brought about by elopement of girls who preferred other and younger men than those to whom they had been promised as children. In such a case the girl was pursued by her father and brothers, and the man she had eloped with would have to allow them to strike him on the head with a club, after which in some cases he would retain her.

**Howitt 1904: 194**

506

The girls are betrothed when very young, sometimes as infants; and at the age of thirteen or fourteen are taken possession of in a very summary manner by their future lords. If they will not go quietly to his mia-mia, they get a tap over the head with a waddy to enforce obedience. They are often promised to men of a neighbouring tribe. In that case, they are taken at some general meeting.

**A.A.C. Le Souëf (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 291)**

507

Female children are sometimes betrothed when they are mere infants – indeed it has been known that a child has been conditionally promised to a man before birth. If it should be a female, and the man should die before the girl attains a marriageable age, then she would become the property of his heir. As a rule, all such obligations are respected.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 78**

508

Concerning marriage ... there was no ceremony connected with it; that the bride had no voice in the matter, but was simply required to go to the hut of the man to whom her father, brother, or uncle, as the case might be, had given her. Girls were promised in marriage at a very early age – indeed sometimes provisionally before birth.

**Curr 1965 [1883]: 114**

509

The young Kŭrnia [Gippsland] could, as a rule, acquire a wife in one way only. He must run away with her. Native marriage could be brought about in various ways. If the young man was so fortunate as to have an unmarried sister, and to have a friend who also had an unmarried sister, they might arrange with the girls to run off together; or he might make his arrangements with some eligible girl whom he fancied, and who fancied him; or a girl, if she fancied a young man, might send him a secret message, asking, "Will you find me some food?" And this was



understood to be a proposal. But in every such case it was essential for success that the parents of the bride should be utterly ignorant of what was about to take place. It was no use asking for a wife excepting under most exceptional circumstances, for he could only acquire one in the usual manner, and that was by running off with her.

**Howitt 1880: 200**

510

In the spring of the year marriages become frequent amongst the natives, no doubt on account of the profuseness with which the gifts of nature are then distributed. As it might be interesting to know the mode in which this family affair is conducted, I have thought fit to subjoin the following short account.

The young man who wishes to marry, has first to look out for a wife amongst the girls or leubras of some neighbouring tribe, and having fixed his choice, his next care is to obtain her consent. This being managed the happy couple straightway elope, and remain together in the bush for two nights and one day to elude the pretended search of the tribe to whom the female belonged. This concludes the ceremony, and the young man then returns with his wife to his own tribe. He is, however, laid under this peculiar injunction, that he must not see any more his mother-in-law; and the following circumstance in connection with this fact, has been related to me by Mr. Grant, an eye-witness. "A mother-in-law having been descried approaching, a number of leubras formed a circle around the young man, and he himself covered his face with his hands; — this, while it screened the old lady from his sight, served as a warning for her not to approach, as she must never be informed by a third party of the presence of her son-in-law."

**Blandowski 1855: 73–74**

511

In bestowing daughters for wives, they are promised as soon as they are born, and on these occasions the parents receive presents of food, opossum and kangaroo rugs, clubs spears &c. from the person to whom she is betrothed; and this arrangement is considered to be binding, although it sometimes happens that these promises are broken by the parents, especially when the man, who has received the promise belongs to another and distant tribe. When this occurs it creates a feeling of enmity, and it is not unfrequently taken up by the whole tribe, who make common cause with the aggrieved party.

**J.H. Wedge 1835 (Labilliere 1878 Vol. 2: 57–58)**

512

The men are prohibited from looking at the mother of the girl given them in marriage. This singular custom is observed with the strictest caution, on passing the huts of the mother-in-law, or any place where they suppose her to be, they carefully turn their heads in another direction, and evince great concern, if by any chance they should see her - although I am not

aware of any penalty being attached to the offence save that of incurring the displeasure of the parents.

**J.H. Wedge 1835 (*Labilliere 1878 Vol. 2: 58*)**

## Male Role in Arrangements

513

The men engross the right of giving the women away; the women have neither choice nor will in the matter; they are the property of the father, if he is dead, of the brother; if there is not brother, of the uncle. There is seldom a marriage without much fighting, as there is a great preponderance of males over females, and the old chiefs' not being satisfied with less than two and sometimes four, increases the value of the women. Most females are purchased. The general price is two large koogrs (or opossum rugs), two or three dozen possums, and other trifles. The woman is handed over to her spouse, who has scarce got her when some others – those who were desirous to obtain her – may be seen naked, discharging wonguims, &c., at the bridegroom. A general family fight takes place, and the bridegroom seldom gets off without a broken head. At night the dame is sulky, and when her spouse is asleep generally creeps to her mother; and when he awakes and finds her gone, he claims her; her father in a rage knocks the poor girl about with his bludgeon or tomahawk, drags her by the hair of her head, where she gets another drubbing. This is often continued for two or more days, till the poor creature is regularly broken down. She resigns to her fate, and generally proves a constant and affectionate wife.

**W. Thomas nd, *Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix – Marriage (Bride 1898: 400–401)***

514

The males engross the privilege of disposing of their female relations, and it often happens that an old man of sixty or seventy will add to his domestic circle a young girl of ten or twelve years of age. If the father be alive, he alone can dispose of his daughters; if he be dead, the eldest son can dispose of his sisters; and if there be no brothers, then the uncle or cousin steps in, and exchanges the women for other who become his wives. In rare cases, the old men meet together and determine to whom a young woman shall be given.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 76**

515

Nothing in the shape of courting or company-keeping is practised by the prospective bridegroom and bride. The bridegroom and father, or guardian, as the case may be, of the intended bride, come to a proper understanding, and the latter simply desires the mooroongoor (girl) to pick up her belongings, and take herself off to the loondthal of her future lord and master. Should she demur, as is not infrequent, the coercion of a waddy is

resorted to, and it seldom fails to have the desired effect. There are not any ceremonies connected with this tie; it is merely a matter of mating, still it is binding enough, at least, so far as the woman is concerned. The man at any time, however, can cut the knot, and send the woman back to her people, by whom she is received readily enough, and there is not any trouble or bother about it.

***Beveridge 1889: 19–20***

516

A young woman's life is similar, full of trouble until she is married. Even then the troubles cease not if she does not get a good husband. At about the age of thirteen or fourteen she is marriageable; a yam-stick is given to her for protection, and this precaution is nearly always needed, for it would not be sufficient for her to say "no" to an important question. She drives away any young man who is smitten with her charms with her yam-stick. Matches are generally made up among the young men; the women never initiate matches, though they have a good deal to say when it becomes known that a young woman is sought after by some young man. The match is generally made between two young men who have sisters or some female relative over whose fate they may happen to have control. They follow a system of barter in their matrimonial arrangements. The young woman's opinion is not asked. When the young men have settled the business, they propose a time when one of them is to take a girl for his wife. The young man marches up to her equipped as for war, with his club (Kallak) and club-shield (Turn-man) in his hands, and indeed these are needed, if he does not wish to receive a blow on his head from the yam-stick which would perhaps prevent the further progress of his love-making. After a little fencing between the pair, the woman, if she has no serious objections to the man, quietly submits, and allows herself to be taken away to the camp of her future husband.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 84–85***

517

Girls are betrothed by the father, with the concurrence of his brothers, into some family which has a daughter to give in exchange. They term this "wootambau" (exchanging). As they grow up to maturity, the youthful pair are spoken of in terms of the warmest friendship and respect by all parties—especially by the female portion of the tribe. Presents are expected by the mothers, either directly or indirectly, from the lovers or their nearest relatives. This gains a goodwill towards the intended son-in-law - although the mother is bound not to mention his name as long as she lives. A pair of ducks, a leg of a wombat, or a young emu-whatever is eatable-is acceptable to the craving appetite. The father, of course, is the lord of the soil; and when the food is cooked in the hot ashes, or broiled, he receives his allotted share. He throws what he cannot eat over his shoulder to his female partner, who sits in-the dark shade.

***Smith 1880: 3, Southwestern Victoria–Lower South-East of South Australia***

## Ceremonies

518

The Wotjobaluk marriage ceremony was simply that the bridegroom's father, father's brothers, brothers, and male paternal cousins all went together to the bridegroom's camp. With them went the bride's father holding her by the arm. At about ten paces from the camp they sat down, and her father's sister said to her after this manner, "That is your *Manitch* (husband), he will give you food, you must stop with him." They then went away leaving the girl there. On the following day the girl's friends gave a dancing corroboree, at which the bride's relatives were present as spectators.

**Howitt 1904: 245**

## Exogamy

519

Although they do not live in any regularly formed society, and there are many tribes even without a chief, still their marriages are conducted in a systematic manner. The husbands and wives are generally from different tribes.

**H. Jamieson to Bishop Perry, 10 October 1853, Murray River, Mildura (Bride 1898: 383)**

520

In their matrimonial alliances great deference is paid to consanguinity, the very slightest blood relationship being a definite barrier to that connexion. In their sexual intercourse, however, they are not in the least bit particular, consequently incest of every grade is continually being perpetrated.

**Beveridge 1889: 22**

521

Amongst the Narrinyeri, the ceremonies, according to the observations of the Rev. Mr. Taplin, are as follows:

"When the beard of a youth has grown sufficient length, he is made Narumbe, Kaingani, or young man. In order that his ceremony may be properly performed, and the youth admitted as an equal among the men of the Narrinyeri, it is necessary that members of several different tribes should present on the occasion. A single tribe cannot make its own youth Narumbe without the assistance of other tribes. This prevents any tribe from increasing its number of men by admitting those who have not yet arrived at the proper age, and thus prevents them from making a claim for a greater number of woman than their proper share – an important consideration where every tribe has to obtain wives from those which are adjacent – as they

never intermarry in their own tribe, all the members of which are regarded as the same family.”

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 65–66**

## Polygamy

522

Polygamy is allowed to any extent, and this law is generally taken advantage of by those who chance to be rich in sisters, daughters, or female wards, to give in exchange for wives. No man can get a wife unless he has a sister, ward, or daughter, whom he can give in exchange. Fathers of grown-up sons frequently exchange their daughters for wives, not for their sons, however, but for themselves, even although they already have two or three.

**Beveridge 1883: 23; Beveridge 1889: 20**

523

A man is supposed to have settled his domestic affairs very comfortably when he has obtained three or four wives; two are far from uncommon; but some are obliged to be content with one.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 78**

524

[Bangerang] Few men under thirty had wives; the exceptions as a rule had widows as wives and the old men, young girls as second wives. Individuals had occasionally two wives, and even three wives, but only one as a rule.

**Curr 1965 [1883]: 114–115**

525

[Wa-imbio] I have known men to have two or three wives, but I have been told that some had four or five. Sometimes the parents had a difficulty in getting their daughter married to a proper person, within class limits; so that they would give her to a man who had one already, to obviate the difficulty. I think one wife was the rule, and the plurality the exception.

**Rev. John Bulmer (Howitt 1880: 290)**

526

Polygamy is common amongst them; few of the men having less than two wives and some of them four or more. The women as is the case with most savages are quite subservient to the men and are kept in excellent discipline - Chastisement promptly follows the least offence and a fire stick is not unfrequently the instrument of correction. The wealth of the men may be said to consist in the number of their wives, for the chief employment is in procuring food for their Lords.

**J.H. Wedge 1835 (Labilliere 1878 Vol. 2: 56–57)**

## Fidelity

527

The existing family system of the Brabrolongs was that single pairs cohabited. The man required exclusive fidelity from the woman, under the severest penalties, even death; but he recognised no reciprocal obligation towards the woman.

**A.W. Howitt, *North Gippsland* (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 325)**

528

[Kurnai] The husband expected strict fidelity to himself from his wife, but he did not admit any reciprocal obligation on his part towards her. In the event of a woman eloping with some other man, all the neighbouring men might turn out and seek for her, and, in the event of her being discovered, she became common property to them until released by her husband or her male relatives... In some respects the Kurnai differed as regards their women from some, if not from many other tribes. Each man not only expected his wife to be faithful to himself, but he on his part, never lent her to a friend or to a guest.

**Howitt 1880: 205, *Gippsland***

529

[Gournditch-mara] Not only was fidelity expected from the wife, but those were considered very bad man who lent their wives to others. When such occurred, it always occasioned a fight between the better-thinking of the tribe and the offender.

**Rev. J.H. Stähle, *Church Mission, Lake Condah* (Howitt 1880: 277)**

530

The men are jealous of their wives; should any intrigue be discovered, it would probably lead to the death of one or both of the offending parties, although if the husband receives what he considers to be an adequate compensation he is accommodating to his friends in allowing them the favours of his wives, and I have understood that these indulgences are always to be purchased by bestowing upon the husband a liberal supply of food. The women are not allowed to have a voice on these occasions, but must obey the dictates of their tyrants. I do not believe that infidelity is frequent amongst the women, unless sanctioned by the husband - during the whole time I was among them, I never observed any advances or levity of conduct, on their part, although it is not at all improbable that they are restrained by the dread of the consequences that would ensue were they to be detected in an illicit amour.

**J.H. Wedge 1835 (Labilliere 1878 Vol. 2: 57)**

## Exchange of Wives

531

[Kurnai] At times when there were great tribal gatherings wives were exchanged, but always within class limits. But they also resorted to this practice to avert some great trouble which they fancied was about to come upon them; for instance, they once heard that a great sickness was coming down the Murray, and the old men proposed exchanging wives to ensure safety from it.

**Howitt 1904: 195; Howitt 1880: 290, Gippsland**

## 'Stealing' Women

532

The modes of stealing lubras differ in various localities. In New South Wales and about Riverina, when a young man is entitled to have a lubra, he organizes a party of his friends, and they make a journey into the territories of some other tribe, and there lie in wait, generally in the evening, by a water-hole where the lubras come for water. Such of the lubras as may be required are then pounced upon, and, if they attempt to make any resistance, are struck down insensible and dragged off. There is also this peculiarity, that in any instance where the abduction has taken place for the benefit of some one individual, each of the members of the party claims, as a right, a privilege which the intended husband has no power to refuse. But in cases where one tribe has attacked another and carried off a lot of lubras, those unfortunates are common property till they are gradually annexed by the best warriors of the tribe.

**J.M. Davis (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 316)**

533

A very fat woman presents such an attractive appearance to the eyes of the blacks that she is always liable to be stolen. However old or ugly she may be, she will be courted and petted and sought for by the warriors, who seldom hesitate to risk their lives if there is a chance of obtaining so great a prize.

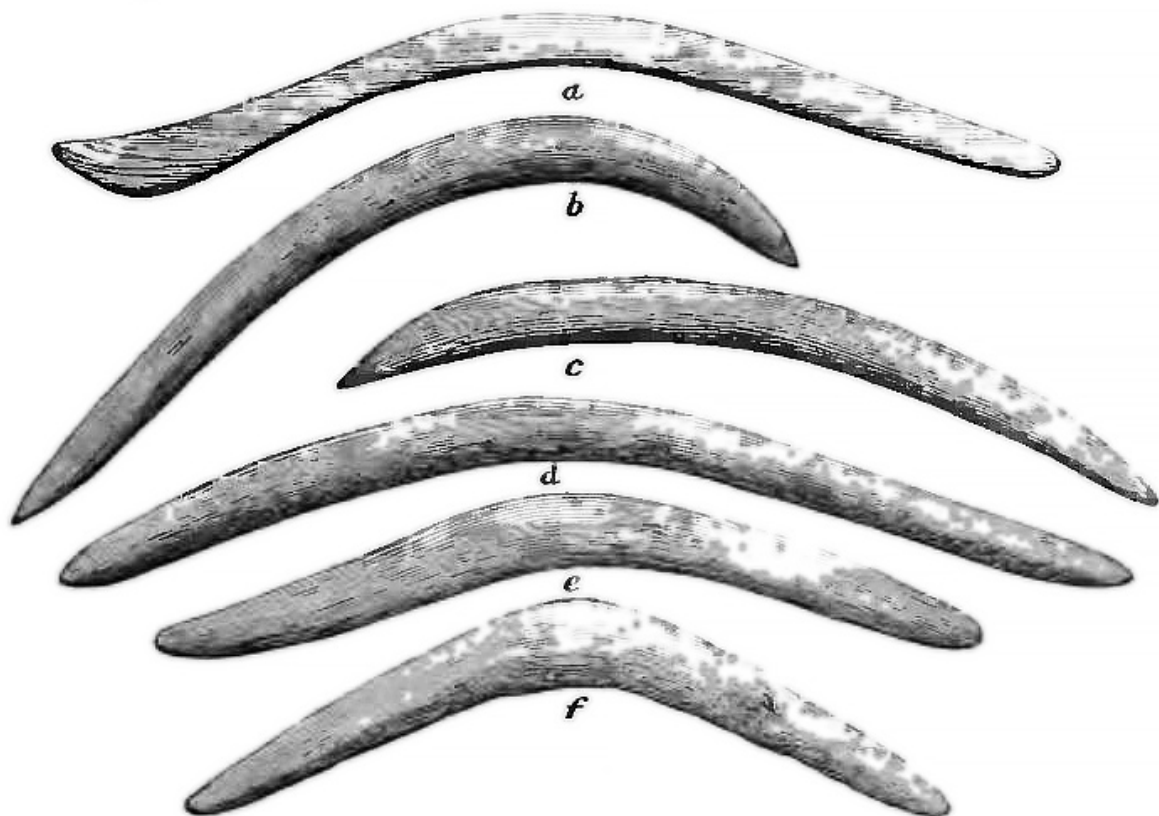
**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 79**



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

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# Recreation



## Music

534

When returning, music soft as the Eolian harp was, to my surprise, produced by my juvenile Aborigine from a slender twig which he waved to and fro in the air. It was the first incident of the kind I had met with. The outer bark from a small, flexible twig was taken off at the largest end, the inner slightly raised. When holding the small end in his hand, he waved it to and fro in the air, and produced the soft music alluded to.

**G.A. Robinson, 28 July 1841, Grampians area (Clark 1990: 116; cf. Clark 1998b: 334)**

535

The youth had a reed pipe, called by the Tcharcate, Al, long Cul.tone.done and Waddy, tome.dome, from which he produced pleasing sounds.

**Journal of G.A. Robinson, 2 April 1841, Lake Boloke area (Presland 1977b: 17; Clark 1998b: 121)**

## Ball games

536

A game of ball-playing was a favourite pastime of the Victorian tribes, of which Wotjobaluk, Wurunjerri, and the Kurnai will serve as examples. The ball used by the former was made of strips of opossum pelt rolled tightly round a piece folded up and covered with another bit sewn tightly with sinews. The ball used by the Kurnai was the scrotum of an “old-man” kangaroo, stuffed tightly with grass. This was called Turta jiraua.

The Wurunjerri called their ball, which was like that of the Wotjobaluk, Mangurt. In playing this game the two sides were the two classes, two totems, or two localities. For instance in a case which I remember in the Makjarawaint tribe, the Garchukas (white cockatoos) and the Batyangal (pelicans) played against each other. But this was in fact the class Krokitch against Gamutch. The Kurnai played locality against locality, or clan against clan, their totems being merely survivals.

Each side had a leader, and the object was to keep the ball from the other side as long as possible, by throwing it from one to the other. Such a game might last for hours.

**Howitt 1904: 770**

537

Ball playing is another game to which they are exceedingly partial. They make it much more boisterous and noisy than are the wrestling bouts, although it results in much fewer serious mishaps. The women participate in this game as well as the men. We have seen as many as two hundred – including both sexes – engaged in it at one time.

The ball is composed of old opossum skins, tightly rolled up, and covered over with a fresh and strong piece of skin, nicely and firmly sewn together with opossum tail sinews. Before they begin to play they arrange sides, each side having a captain, whose place it is to guide his often times unruly squad... They have not any goal to which the ball had to be driven, the whole of the play is merely to keep the ball in motion, and to prevent its coming to the ground; whilst the struggles of the game consist in trying which side can retain the ball longest in possession.

***Beveridge 1889: 46–47; cf. Beveridge 1883: 52–3***

538

The adult natives were seldom without employment – their wants being many – but they found time too for amusements. Some of their games were not unlike those which find favor amongst Europeans. The marn-grook, or game of ball, for instance, is thus described by the late Mr. Thomas. The men and boys joyfully assemble when this game is to be played. One makes a ball of opossum skin, or the like, of good size, somewhat elastic, but firm and strong. It is given to the foremost player or to some one of mark who is chosen to commence the game. He does not throw it as a white man might do, but drops it and at the same time kicks it with his foot, using the instep for that purpose. It is thrown high into the air, and there is a rush to secure it – such a rush as is seen commonly at foot-ball matches amongst our own people. The tallest men, and those who are able to spring to a great height, have the best chances in this game. Some of them will leap as high as five feet or more from the ground to catch the ball. The person who secures the ball kicks it again; and again a scramble ensues. This continues for hours, and the natives never seem to tire of the exercise.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 176***

539

The ball with which they play is named Dirrk. The material of which it is made is suggested by the name. It is part of the organs of an ‘old man’ kangaroo, blown out. The game is played by the ball being thrown, or kicked up with the foot. Whoever catches the ball oftenest, wins the game.

***Rev J. Bulmer, Lake Tyers (Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 179)***

540

They also had a game called dilk. This was played with a ball made from the purse of an old kangaroo. This would be thrown about, and the fun would be in catching it and evading those who wished to get it from them. The man who had it would generally hold it up and kiss it to tempt the others to come and get it. When they rushed for it it would be thrown up for anyone to catch.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 45)***

541

One of the favourite games is football, in which fifty, or as many as one hundred players engage at a time. The ball is about the size of an orange, and is made of possum skin, with the fur side outwards. It is filled with pounded charcoal, which gives solidity without much increase in weight, and is tied round and round with kangaroo sinews. The players are divided into two sides and ranged in opposing lines, which are always of a different 'class' — white cockatoo against black cockatoo, quail against snake, &c. Each side endeavours to keep possession of the ball, which is tossed a small distance by hand, and then kicked in any direction. The side which kicks it oftenest and furthest gains the game. The person who sends it highest is considered the best player, and has the honour of burying it in the ground till required next day.

The sport is concluded with a shout of applause, and the best player is complimented on his skill. The game, which is somewhat similar to the white man's game of football, is very rough; but as the players are barefooted and naked, they do not hurt each other so much as the white people do; nor is the fact of an aborigine being a good football player considered to entitle him to assist in making laws for the tribe to which he belongs.

**Dawson, 1881: 85**

542

The females have also a game of ball, but it is not played in the same manner as that of the males, above described. One throws the ball, and another catches it. The young children too, at times, find much amusement in getting together and beating opossum rugs and chanting or singing, in imitation of the lubras who perform in the corroboree.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 178**

## Throwing Games

543

The throwing of spears at a mark is a common amusement. Young people engage in the pastime with toy spears.

**Dawson 1881: 85**

544

The toy boomerang is much lighter and more acute in the angle than the war boomerang, and has a peculiar rounding of its sides, which has the effect of making it rise in the air when thrown along the ground, and return to the thrower when its impetus has been expended. It requires much skill, and study of the wind, to throw it aright. On dark nights this boomerang will sometimes be lighted at one end and thrown into the air, with an effect very like fireworks.

**Dawson 1881: 85**

545

The wuæ wuuitch is also used as a toy. It is a tapering wand about two feet long, with a pear-shaped knob on the thick end. It is held by the small end, whirled round the head, and projected with force along the ground, where it skips for a considerable distance. It is also used for throwing at birds. This toy is used in the games after the great meetings. Like football, it is played by opposing classes – kuurokeetch against kirrtuuk, kappatch against kartpærup, &c. – and the award is given to those who throw it to the greatest distance.

**Dawson 1881: 86**

546

Another of their games at which they spend considerable time is Wotchie; that being both the name of the game and the toy with which it is played.

The toy is made of an elongated oval piece of wood; its extreme length being five inches, and its greatest diameter an inch and a half to one of the long points. A slender wand two feet and a half long, made tough by means of fire, is firmly attached by gum and twine, and the toy is complete.

The game can be played by any number above one, both sexes, from eight years of age upwards, join in it. When they start from their camps to commence the game, they select a stretch of three or four hundred yards of flat smooth ground, at one end of which a mark is made by way of a starting point. Then the game begins after this fashion: - One takes a short run up to the starting mark, throws his Wotchie from him, so that it strikes the ground in a particular manner (an awkward cast is certain to result in a broken toy), when the tiny thing bounds away very quickly, the long tail-like wand being visible all the time that the momentum continues, twirling and twining above the grass like the tail of a kangaroo mouse when running away in a hurry. These toys sometimes go as much as four hundred yards in their eccentric running bounds. The game merely consists in each striving to make the Wotchie pass that of his fellows.

**Beveridge 1889: 47–48; cf. Beveridge 1883: 53**

547

The plaything called by the natives of the Yarra Wi-tch-wi-tch, We-a-wicht, Weet-weet, or Wa-voit, is one of the most extraordinary instruments used by savages, and in some respects is almost as interesting as the boomerang. The head – in shape like two cones placed base to base – is about four inches and a half in length and one inch in diameter; and the stem, not quite two-tenths of an inch in diameter, is about twenty-one inches in length... I had an opportunity to see this missile used when I visited the Aboriginal Station at Coranderrk, on the 15th January 1873. I had previously been making enquiries respecting the Weet-weet, and had asked one of the Aborigines to make me one; and as soon as the men saw the toy, the game of Weet-weet became once more popular, and several of them were provided with the

instrument when I visited them... In olden times this game was frequently played. The players stood in a row, and he who could throw the Weet-weet the greatest distance was accounted the winner. It is singular that so simple an instrument is not known and used amongst the young persons of civilized nations. It has been a plaything of the natives of Victoria probably for ages..

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 352–353**

548

Spear-throwing also induces much good-natured rivalry whenever the tribal chivalry may chance to meet for pastime. All the males, from those on the confines of pubescence, up to the hoaryest sage in the tribe, put forth their skill on these occasions, and proud is the victor who walks off triumphant master of the field after one of those friendly spear-throwing tournaments.

**Beveridge 1889: 48, 50; cf. Beveridge 1883: 54**

549

Throwing the boomerang is another of their amusements. They do not however compete in this exercise, not do they have any object of mark a[t] which to throw. It is merely thrown because of the whizzing noise it makes, and to witness its eccentric gyrations during flight, and notwithstanding the seemingly aimlessness of the pastime, many hours at a time are spent in the exercise.

**Beveridge 1889: 52**

550

Their favourite game of throwing the warewite seems also peculiar to these tribes. A twig of tea-tree is cut off with a joint at the end, this knob or joint being scraped with a knife or stone into the shape of a cue about three inches in length. The blacks exhibit great nicety and care in the preparation of the warewite. The game is played thus: five or six young blacks standing in a line, by a peculiar jerk of the [wrist] which requires practice to properly attain, send the warewite in a straight line with the force of arrow from a bow. He who could throw the furthest won the game.

**Colonial Secretary to G.M. Langhorne, 12 September 1837 (MacFarlane 1982: 174)**

## Wrestling

551

Games are held usually after the greet meetings and korroboræs. Wrestling is a favourite game, but is never practised in anger.

**Dawson 1881: 84**

552

They have many [games], all admirably adapted to strengthen and expand the corporeal powers, as running, jumping, throwing, &c.; but the most manual is wrestling; and certainly every one who has ever seen them at this exercise has acknowledged that it is equal to any description given of the ancients, and destitute of the brutality often resorted to by the ancients, to gain the mastery. The aborigines' is sheer, fair wrestling. They challenge each other by throwing dust in the air towards those they desire to strive with, which is answered by a return; they run towards each other; on approaching, each puts his hands on his antagonist's shoulder, and it is not till both are nearly exhausted that one is down.

**W. Thomas nd, *Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix – Games* (Bride 1898: 402–403)**

553

During summer, when food of all kinds is abundant, and procured with little labour, the friendly tribes have great gatherings together, at which wrestling and other games are the business of the season.

The natives are great wrestlers, and enter into the exercise with every zest. Their method is different from that which obtains in the wresting countries of England, or as far as we know, in any other country where the exercise is indulged.

**Beveridge 1889: 42–43; cf. Beveridge 1883: 51**

554

They are fond of wrestling, and, when two tribes meet, often amuse themselves in this manner. They all collect and sit or stand in a circle about a clear space, and the best wrestlers on either side try their skill. When a fall is given, a shout of approval greets the winner; but these games sometimes lead to serious results, as it seems to be thought a disgrace to be thrown three times in succession. On one occasion when I was a looker-on at a trial of skill of this kind, a native, named Davy, was thrown three times heavily by a man of another tribe named Long Bill. Davy took it all in good part until the third time; then, as he rose from the ground, he left his opponent, and walked towards his mia-mia, and an ominous silence at once settled on all present. I was standing in the circle, and Long Bill, seeing me, ran over to where I stood, and said – “You pull away, plenty boomerang fly about directly.” I took his friendly advice very quickly. On reaching shelter, I turned to watch. Davy had reached his mia-mia, and was again advancing with his weapons in his hand. The two tribes now rose and separated. As soon as Davy got near enough, he threw a boomerang right among Long Bill's tribe. They opened out in a crescent, and the missile passed through without striking any one. All now rushed for their weapons, and, in a few minutes, those who had just before been apparently such good friends were engaged in a fierce fight.

**A.A.C. Le Souëf (*Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 293*)**



555

This afternoon the natives amused themselves by wrestling. The combatants were the 2 Yane all conedeets against the 2 Millan conedeets. The wrestling was the same in every respect — the same as the natives to the eastwards. Excepting that these natives have a waddy which they stick in the ground. The object of the opposing party is to get possession of it which he attempts to do either by walking or running up to it. He is met by the one in possession of it and they wrestle. If the opponent gets possession of the waddy the contest is over.

**G.A. Robinson, 1 June 1841, Western District (Presland 1980: 39; cf. Clark 1998b: 245)**

556

The blacks had various ways of amusing themselves. The Murray people had wrestling contests. They would form a ring. When one who had not been beaten would stand in the centre, he would throw dust at the person he wishes to challenge. The men would then engage, and wrestle for some time until one was thrown. The vanquished would retire and thus it would be repeated until all had had their fight. The last man in the ring was the victor.

**J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 45)**

## Miscellaneous

557

Girls have for their amusement a wooden doll covered with opossum skin, and furnished with a little basket on its back in imitation of the mother.

**Dawson 1881: 39**

558

The girl had her amusements, she would imitate her mother. Her play would consist in dressing herself up like yakan, mother. She would enfold herself in the rug. Perhaps she might have a puppy in the camp, this would be put up for her baby and so she would go about. She would make a camp and would imitate in every respect her elders. She would have her little fire and cook some possum at it, and this play at house keeping preparing for the time when she would be a baangbert, owner of a camp. Thus all the amusements of the child fitted her for future life among her people.

**J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 2)**

559

Another amusement, called ‘Taratt’ in the Kuurn kopan not language, and ‘Wittchim’ in the Chaap wuurong and Peek whuurong languages, consists in stalking a feather, in imitation of hunting an emu.

**Dawson 1881: 84**

560

The boy would have a tiny set of implements, a boomerang, a shield, a spear, a throwing stick. He would thus become an expert in future use of arms. He would spend much of his time up to his knees in the water trying to spear fish, or he would have a stick with a loop at one end to catch birds. He would lie under the boughs of a tree and cleverly put the loop over the heads of the small birds, and so he became expert and fitted for his position as a brave. They would also have sham fights. Each would have his shield, and would be able to ward off any missile thrown at him.

**J. Bulmer, *Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 1–2)***

561

Another favourite amusement of theirs is the skipping rope – not the tiny clothes-line affair, with two handles of wood, which schoolgirls so much affect. No indeed, their skipping-rope is twenty to thirty feet long. It is usually made of a long duck net loosely twisted. It is worked by two young men, one at each end, and just far enough apart to allow the rope to touch the ground. As it is being swung round and round the skippers jump in one after another, until there will be as many as a dozen skipping away at once.

**Beveridge 1889: 52–53; cf. Beveridge 1883: 55–56**

562

Amongst the Bangerang there were also several pastimes and games in vogue. Occasionally, for instance, the men drew pictures of corroborees or hunting scenes, with charcoal, on the sheets of bark of which their mia-mias were composed. Then the boys had a game with a ball made of opossum skin, and mimic battles with toy spears and shields, to which in after life they owed entirely their dexterity in the use of their weapons. It was also common to practise their toy spears on round pieces of bark, the size of a dinner plate, which were bowled swiftly along the ground. The girls and women used sometimes to amuse themselves with a game resembling our “cat’s cradle”, with the difference that it was played by one person, who used her lips as well as her fingers in the conduct of the string. Occasionally the children amused themselves very cruelly with half-fledged birds and young animals, which they invariably killed when tired of the game.

**Curr 1965 [1883]: 132**

563

Their sport consisted of throwing spears, boomerangs, sham fights with waddies and blunt spears, the latter ward off by a long shield – called a Nulla Nulla – which had a handhole at the back of it.

**Hamilton 1981 [1914]: 103**



'ABORIGINESOFVICTORIA01-P352-FIG170' FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0

564

The blacks had various ways of amusing themselves. The Murray people had wrestling contests. They would form a ring. When one who had not been beaten would stand in the centre, he would throw dust at the person he wishes to challenge. The men would then engage, and wrestle for some time until one was thrown. The vanquished would retire and thus it would be repeated until all had had their fight. The last man in the ring was the victor. They also had a game called dilk. This was with a ball made from the purse of an old kangaroo. This would be thrown about, and the fun would be in catching it and evading those who wished to get it from them. The man who had it would generally hold it up and kiss it to tempt the others to come and get it. When they rushed for it, it would be thrown up for anyone to catch. They had great fun with this, but I think the favourite game amongst the Gippslanders was playing with the boomerang (wangen). This required skill and strength of arm.

Each man threw his instrument and that which went the greatest distance was the best boomerang. This of course not only depended on the skill of the thrower, but also on the make and condition of the boomerang. If the curve were too acute it would describe a circle, and come back to the thrower. This would be considered a run away boomerang (wangen). In their play they usually sent the boomerang in a straight direction, just as they did in fight. It was first thrown against the ground a few yards from the thrower, when it bounded for about 200 yards. The boomerang which went farthest was called a racer. Sometimes the boomerang was thrown into the air, when it was expected to return to the feet of the thrower, but this required very exact style in the throwing.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 45)***

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

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# Sites





## Mounds and Ovens

565

Native mounds, so common all over the country, are called 'pok yuu' by the Chaa wuorong tribe; 'po'ok' by the Kuurn kopan noot tribe; and 'puulwuurn' by the Peek whuurong tribe; and were the sites of large, permanent habitations, which formed homes for many generations. The great size of some of them, and the vast accumulation of burnt earth, charcoal, and ashes which is found in and around them, is accounted for by the long continuance of the domestic hearth, the decomposition of the building materials, and the debris arising from their frequent destruction by bush fires. They never were ovens, or original places of interment, as is generally supposed, and were only used for purposes of burial after certain events occurred while they were occupied as sites for residences — such as the death of more than one of the occupants of the dwelling at the same time, or the family becoming extinct, in which instance they were called 'muuru kowuutuung' by the Chaa wuorong tribe, and 'muuruup kaakee' by the Kuurn kopan noot tribe, meaning 'ghostly place', and were never afterwards used as sites for residences, and only as places for burial. There is an idea that when two persons die at the same time on any particular spot, their deaths, if not attributed to the spell of an enemy, are caused by something unhealthy about the locality, and it is abandoned for ever. It is never even visited again, except to bury the dead; and the mounds are used for that purpose only because the soil is loose, and a grave is more easily dug in them than in the solid ground. The popular notion of their having been ovens is refuted, not only by the unanimous testimony of all the old aborigines, but also by careful examination of the structure and stratification of the mounds.

**Dawson 1881: 103**

566

At two miles from woolshed came to an old sheep station near to which we saw a large mound of at least 4 feet high and 10 feet long and 5 wide. My native companions said it was a black man's house, a large one like white man's house. There were pieces of sticks among the earth, about 3 inches diameter, and it appeared that the whole had been burnt down. A short distance from this, was the remains of another hut of a similar description.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 24 April 1841, en route to Mt. Rouse (Presland 1977b: 48; Clark 1998b: 145)**

567

[Crossing] from Faries to Muston's passed several large mounds or ash hills. 3 were together and others at a short distance. 1 was 8 feet high by 40 feet wide, 50 long. Others I saw at a distance. It is not possible to look on them and say that the N[atives] were not a human race. They are near creeks or marshes.

**G.A. Robinson, 14 March 1842 (Clark 1988: 18)**

568

The mounds are the remains of old mia-mias and the accumulations of ashes. We lived in them. This is the testimony of several old people ... we used to cook the old kangaroos ... in ovens as they are termed - a hole made in the ground or ashes, which was made but with live embers, and sometimes hot stones ...

**J. Francis, 1868, *Condah Mission* (Williams 1988: 11)**

569

Black fellows' ovens are not by any means misnomers, as to all intents and purposes they are essentially genuine cooking places, or cooking places and kitchen middens combined, and following is the manner of their formation:— A family, or perhaps several families, as the case may be, select a site for their camp, where abundance of game and other sources of food obtain and are procurable with the least expenditure of time and labour....

... several of the lyors (women) go off with their yam sticks; when they reach the spot selected for the purpose, they begin with a will to excavate a hole about 3 feet in diameter and nearly 2 feet deep; during the digging of this hole any pieces of clay which they chip out, in size similar to ordinary road metal, are placed carefully on one side with a view to their future use.

When the hole has been dug sufficiently deep, it is swept or brushed out with some boughs or a bunch of grass; it is then filled to the top or a little above with firewood, which the lyors have previously selected for that purpose. On top of the firewood the selected pieces of clay are then carefully placed, the wood is then ignited, and by the time it is all burned the clay nodules have become baked until they are exactly similar to irregular sections of well burnt brick; of course they are red hot. When this result has been properly achieved, the hot clay is removed from the hole; for this purpose they use two pieces of stick about 8 inches long, holding them both in one hand and working them deftly, even as a cookmaid uses a pair of tongs.. [food and hot clay balls are placed in the hole and covered]...

When the cooking has been completed, the covering is scraped off, and the debris, consisting of calcined clay and burnt earth, becomes the nucleus of a black fellow's oven, such as are to be seen at the present day. This process being repeated at short intervals, over a series of years, perhaps centuries results in the mounds which are in reality black's ovens.....

As a general rule the Aborigines do not erect the loondthals (huts) on these cooking mounds; an exception to this exists, however on the extensive reedy plains of the lower rivers, which are annually inundated, remaining so for at least five months of the year.

**Beveridge 1883: 37–39**

570

All over the submerged country, cooking mounds stand up out of the flood, perfect little islands, looking bright, green, and refreshing to the eye, by reason of the great growth of succulent saltbush, dillines (edible berries), and giant mallow with which they are prettily dressed. These oven islands the natives utilise in the flood season for their village sites, conveying their firewood and other requirements over miles of water from the main land in their canoes. A village, or native encampment, will often times remain on one of these tiny islands for a whole month, feasting upon the oleaginous codfish and his congeners, taking ample toll from the great Murray lobster, as well as from his more delicate, though pigmy brother, the crawfish.

**Beveridge 1889: 35**

571

The sites for the *Mirrri-yong* heaps appear to have been chosen generally in localities near water; and whether because the site was the most convenient that could be chosen, or that it was always preferred because blacks had frequented it previously, is not known; but it is well ascertained that each site was used as a cooking-place by generation after generation. They are often found near or slightly within the margin of a forest or belt of timber; and the situation is nearly always well sheltered.

There are numerous *Mirrri-yong* heaps on the banks of the River Plenty, on the Darebin Creek, and the Merri Creek, near Melbourne; they are seen in all parts of the Murray basin, and on the coast; and there are large heaps in the Western district, some of which I have examined.

They are in general of an oval shape, about one hundred feet in length and about forty feet in breadth, and rising to a height of twelve feet or more. They are composed of burnt clay, a little soil, quantities of charcoal and ashes, burnt and unburnt bones, and stones. They enclose numerous fragments of black basalt, chips of greenstone, in some places whole and broken tomahawks, and in more than one have been found human skeletons, as if they had been used in later times as places of burial.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 239**

572

That blacks were numerous here at one time is pretty conclusively proved by the number of their stone tomahawks that were found in the scrub...Hollow mounds of clay about two feet in height, open at one side and plastered smooth within and burnt red were also found, and were supposed to be black's ovens.

**T. Coverdale 1920: 31, Gippsland area**



## Camps

573

Entered a lofty and close stringy-bark forest (Eucalyptus) about west from Mount William, with bare room to squeeze our horses through. Under the highest bluff of the Victoria on the banks of a rapid stream 8 feet in width (probably a tributary of the Glenelg), we found the camp, but the Natives were gone. Numerous weapons and articles of Aboriginal industry lay in the huts and emu shells about the fires. The Xanthorrhoea, the buckcup of the Natives, was scattered profusely at and around the camping place. The young roots are eaten by the Aborigines, the dried stems are attached to the spears called Haramal; and, from this wood, the Natives also in their pristine state procured fire.

**G.A. Robinson, 2 July 1841, Gariwerd area (Clark 1990: 112)**

574

Saw a vast number of old native encampments and huts, called in the language of the country, Worn. The top of the sand bank and at the base of the bank on the edge of the lake, were the sites chosen. On the top of the bank the natives had dug out round holes in the sand like a saucer after the manner of the west coast natives.

**Journals of G.A. Robertson, 1 April 1841, Lake Boloke (Presland 1977b: 14; Clark 1998b: 119)**

575

I rode on for a couple of miles alone and then halted, waiting for my party. I stopped at least an hour waiting and finding they did not come I proceeded to the great swamp to where it was proposed we should have our meeting. In my way I passed at least 20 well built worns or native huts. Some were placed near the river, others on acclivity of the hills, and some on the top of an eminence. One on the top of an eminence was erected on a mound of earth.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 11 May 1841, Western District (Presland 1977b: 91; Clark 1998b: 201)**

576

The Mammeloid Hills had a natural appearance when seen from the plains. And so the hills in the distance when viewed from top of Korertanger. The trees from Korertanger looked diminutive but when we came to the place found them large, 2 and 3 feet diameter at the butt, with large umbrageous branches. Well covered with foliage, they stood at a distance of from 20 to 40 and 50 yards and the whole, which was about half a mile square, had a park-like appearance. We saw the remains of from 30 to 40 screens or shelters of boughs where the natives had been. Also several of the native ovens or fireplaces where they baked their murrnong, some 10 feet in diameter; the same as those on the E. side of Alexander.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 14 February 1840, Ballarat area (Presland 1977a: 55; Clark 1998b: 170)**

577

... near a large waterhole in a fine permanent stream known as ‘The River,’ are the remains of an old aboriginal camping-place, the name of which is Narrarrabeen, consisting of about twenty stone foundations, of horseshoe from 4ft. to 7ft. in diameter, and opening towards the east, a point from which the wind rarely blows. They are built among the loose blocks of cellular basalt, and appear to have been made by piling the stones removed to level the floor into a dry-stone wall about 1ft. high on the western or windward side. On this foundation – Mr. Ingram learned from Tommy White, a civilised aboriginal ... – the ordinary mia-mia of branches and bark was erected.

**Worsnop 1897: 105, Lake Condah**

578

In the morass to north-east of the river we saw some 100 natives, who, upon our approach, burnt their camps and took to the scrub.

**A. McMillan, 25 August 1853, Avon River (Bride 1898: 207)**

## Stone Structures

579

The large heaps of earth, charcoal, and ashes – the cooking-places of the natives – the shell mounds on the sea-coast, and the stone-circles on the plains, show that this people have occupied the country for a long period – how long it is impossible to guess.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 238**

580

... Stones arranged in circular or semicircular form, are found in some places on the wide plains in Victoria. They appear to have been set up to afford shelter in places where there was no natural break-wind. This is probably, but by no means certain. Very little is known respecting these ancient stone-circles.

**Smyth 1878 Vol I: 242**

581

There are, however, still other memorials of the late numerous but now almost extinct inhabitants of the extensive basaltic plains of the Western district of Victoria. Some stone *mia-mys*, or shelters, may still occasionally be found; there are a few on the western margin of the Stony Rises, south of Lake Purrumbete.

In one of the Chamber's Tracts on The Monuments of Unrecorded Ages it is states that “stone-circles” are numerous in Victoria – that they are from ten to one hundred feet in diameter, and that sometimes there is an inner circle; also, that the Aborigines have no traditions regarding

them; that when asked about them they invariably deny knowledge of their origin.

***P. Chauncy (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 234–35)***

582

The stone-circles are made by the natives, and are always found in exposed situations where timber is difficult to obtain. The natives there formed these break-winds of stones, placed on edge in a circular form, some of them very perfect, leaving the opening generally towards the east, the prevailing winds coming from the north-west and south-west. These circles are common on the plains or eastern part of this property, where branches of trees could not be procured for giving shelter. When we first occupied this country, it was quite common for the natives to use these circles as camping-places, always having the fires in the centre. The fires were very small, as they had frequently to carry the wood long distances. The stones are generally formed of large stones set on their edges, and bedded in the ground close together, without any other stones on top, thus forming good protection from the wind as they lay around the fire. The stones are of common basalt, there being no other in the district. The situation selected was generally where water was convenient, or in some favorable place for game. The circles were about the size of the ordinary mia-mys, that is from ten to twenty feet in diameter.

***Mr. P. Manifold to P. Chauncy regarding stone circles in the Western District (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 235)***

583

On a little basalt islet in Lake Wongan, about seven miles north-east from Streatham, I observed an ancient Aboriginal work consisting of extensive row of large stones, forming passages up and down, like a maze, at the foot of a little hill. A semicircular walk, ten feet wide, has been made by clearing and smoothing the rough rocky surface up the hill and down again leading into the maze. This work was possibly executed for the purpose of carrying on some mystic rites, or probably only for the amusement of running between the rows of stones and up the hill and down again.

Also, Mr. A.C. Allan, Inspector-General of Surveys, has informed me that during a recent journey in the Tattiarra country, near the South Australian border, he noticed a number of stone walls, two or three feet high, which had been constructed by the natives, radiating from a little cave in the ground, and forming irregular passages.

***P. Chauncy (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 235–236)***

## Shell Middens

584

Middens are found on the banks of nearly all the rivers and large lakes and marshes in Victoria, and on the sea-coast; but it does not appear that they occur in every part of the north... Shell-mounds, some covering large areas, are common on nearly all parts of the coast, and may be seen everywhere at those points where rocks are uncovered by the tide and where it was easy for the natives to procure shell-fish.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 241***

585

It is nearly impossible to ascertain, even approximately, the extent of some of the ancient shell-mounds. The mussel-shells, and many of the smaller fragments of the haliotis, &c., have been blown about by the winds, and the area covered by shells is consequently much larger than would have been the case if they had remained in the place where the natives ate the fish. Some of the mounds in Victoria – measuring only the thicker, unmoved parts – are many yards in diameter, and they must have been the resort of the natives during very long periods.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 241***

586

The shell-mounds in Victoria are, as a rule, never opened by any one. few people know that they are formed by the natives; and there is therefore no wanton injury done to them. In one or two places I have seen a shell-mound cut through where a track to the coast has been formed; but the old middens are not interfered with; and future archaeologists will find abundant fields for their research, in all parts of Australia, when more attention is given to the habits of the natives and a deeper interest is felt in their earlier history.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 242; cf Fresløv and Frankel 1999: 239***

## Quarries

587

In some places in Victoria there are seen the quarries where in former times the natives broke out the trappean rocks for their hatchets. Large areas are covered with the debris resulting from their labors; and it is stated, on good evidence, that natives from far distant parts were deputed to visit these quarries, and carry away stone for implements.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 359***

## Fish Traps

588

About the Grampians they [fish traps] were numerous at the time of my residence, and had apparently been much more so, judging from the traces left by them in the swampy margins of the river. At these places we found many low sod banks extending across the shallow branches of the river, with apertures at intervals, in which were placed long, narrow, circular nets (like a large stocking) made of rush-work. Heaps of muscle shells were also found abounding the banks, and old mia-mias where the earth around was strewed with the balls formed in the mouth when chewing the farinaceous matter out of the bulrush root.

***C.B. Hall, 6 September 1853 (Bride 1898: 271)***

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

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# Social Organisation and Relationships



## Country and Access

589

By the word tribe I mean a number of men closely allied by blood and living in the strictest alliance, offensive and defensive, who, with their wives and children, occupy practically in common, and to the exclusion of all others, a tract of country which they claim as their own.

***Curr 1886: 61***

590

For instance, it not unfrequently happens that the lands of some of the men which are generally uninhabitable for want of water, but produce a certain amount of food, prove an asylum for the tribe at large during periods of inundation, when the country which is commonly in use is untenable for weeks.

***Curr 1886: 65***

591

Amongst the Bangerang there was not, as far as could be observed, anything resembling government; nor was any authority, outside of the family circle, existent. Within the family the father was absolute. The female left the paternal family when she became a wife, and the male when he took rank as a young man. The adult male of the Bangerang recognized no authority in anyone, under any circumstances, though he was thoroughly submissive to custom. Offences against custom had sometimes a foreign aspect, and brought about wars with other tribes. Within the tribe they usually amounted to wrongs of some individuals, and for every substantial wrong custom appointed a penalty. Anyone who had suffered a wrong complained of it, if at all, at night aloud to the camp, which was silent and attentive. Then the accused was heard. Afterwards those who chose, men or women, expressed their views on the subject; and if general opinion pronounced the grievance a good one, the accused accepted the penalty sanctioned by custom.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 112***

592

When out hunting, the game captured by each was his own property. If one of the party returned unsuccessful, he rarely asked for a share of another's game, nor did he take ill if none were given him; but, if a bachelor, he would get some roots from any female relative he might have in the camp. If an individual killed a kangaroo without assistance, it belonged to him, though it would certainly be shared with many others; but if several assisted in the capture, the animal was divided amongst the party, that man who first drew blood, I believe, receiving the skin (which was valuable) in addition to his share of the meat.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 123***

593

The territory belonging to a tribe is divided among its members. Each family has the exclusive



right by inheritance to a part of the tribal lands, which is named after its owner; and his family and every child born on it must be named after something on the property. When the boundaries with neighbours meet at lakes or swamps celebrated for game, well-defined portions of these are marked out and any poaching or trespassing is severely punished. No individual of any neighbouring tribe or family can hunt or walk over the property of another without permission from the head of the family owning the land. A stranger found trespassing can legally be put to death.

**Dawson 1881: 7**

594

I should remark that, when Tung borroong spoke of Borumbeet and the other localities of his own nationality he always added, 'thats my country belonging to me!' This is simple language but not the less forcible on that account.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 17 July 1841, Mt. Shadwell area (Presland 1980: 102; Clark 1998b: 318)**

595

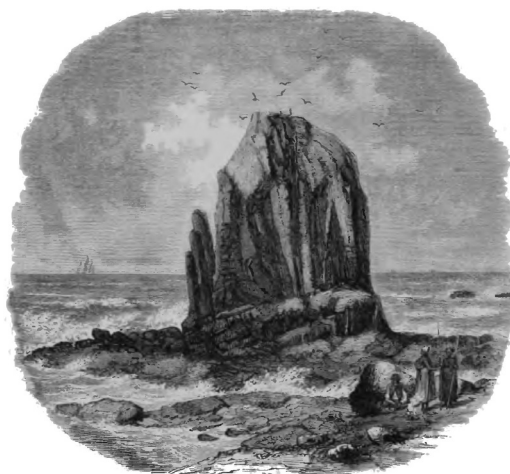
These natives like others, speaking of localities of their nationality 'country belong to me, country belong to me'.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 18 July 1841, Mt. Shadwell area (Presland 1980: 103; Clark 1998b: 318)**

596

The spot where this family was encamped was that on which Nan.de.low.win.dic and his family was born. And with much emotion and gesticulation, he stood up and, stretching out his arm, said 'my country, merygic, barburic, good country'. And verily is so. A finer country cannot be.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 27 February 1840, Mt Mitchell vicinity (Presland 1977a: 70; Clark 1998a: 182)**



\*PULPIT ROCK, CAPE SCHANCK BY ROBERT BROUGH SMYTH FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0

597

When I asked their names and where the country was they belonged to they were at the time seated on the ground on the heights a mile N and by W from F Henty's at a little fire — the man and boys in front, the usual custom, the woman behind — when the man with emotion struck the ground and said, 'here is my country, deen deen — here here'. And the old woman who had chronicled in her memory the long long history of her country took up the theme and waving her hands reiterated what her fine formed son had stated and in a garalous strain enacted a variety of events connected with the history of her country which had happened in their primitive state. And then in a dejected and altered tone deplored the loss of her country and its original enjoyment.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 20 June 1841, near Henty's station, Western District (Presland 1980: 65–66; Clark 1998b: 268)***

598

Mr Thomas, in a note dated 17th February 1864, states that, according to his observations, the Aborigines invariably adopted natural boundaries for their territories, as rivers, creeks, and mountains. The Wawoorong or Yarra tribe claimed the lands included within the basin of the River Yarra; all waters flowing into it were theirs, and the boundaries were the dividing ranges to the north, east and south. The Boonoorong or coast tribe claimed in the same way all the country lying to the south of the southern rim of the Yarra Basin, eastwards from the Tarwin River to Port Phillip Bay, and southwards to the sea.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 32 (notes)***

599

The blacks were at their camp. They consisted of one whole family and part of 2 others... These people, 9 in number, are *Gal.gal.bul.ucs*, a section belonging to the *Jargowerang* tribe. This tribe is divided into several sections or families. Their country comprises all that region where the Mammoloid hills are from *Lanjanuc* or *Leer/ye/muc Punnole*, on the E., to *Pel.ler.win Punnole* on the W., i.e. the latter is the Pyrenees and I rather think includes them. And from the country at Pettitt's and Learmonth's, on the S., to Mt. Frank range on the N.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson 27 February 1840 (Presland 1977a: 69; Clark 1998a: 180–181)***

600

Each tribe has allotted to it a portion of the stream, now known as Salt Creek; and the usual stone barrier is built by each family, with the eel basket in the opening. Large numbers are caught during the fishing season. For a month or two the banks of the Salt Creek presented the appearance of a village all the way from Tuureen Tuureen, the outlet of the lake, to its junction with the Hopkins.

***Dawson 1881: 94***

601

The duties performed and the ceremonies used in receiving and attending to the wants of a strange tribe have meaning quite intelligible to the Aborigines. When they welcome the strangers to the forest lands they signify that as long as they are friendly, and under such restrictions as their laws impose, they and their children may come there again without fear of molestation; the presents of boughs and leaves and grass are meant to show that these are theirs when they like to use them; and the water stirred with a reed is understood as a token that they may thereafter drink of it, and that no hostile spear will be raised against them.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 135***

602

It does not appear that there are any persons among them which have kingly authority over the rest. Yet each subdivision of a tribe has one or more leading man or men. And in all important matters which require the assemblage of the whole tribes these influential men debate upon Public Matters and decisions are come to by mutual consent. This kind of debating actually occurs in the evening when all are at their 'Miams Miams' and sometimes long and animated speeches are delivered.

***Thomas, LT Box 1176/6a:105 (Gaughwin 1983: 53)***

603

There was a kind of confederacy between the five tribes near Melbourne ... viz the Yarra, Coast, Barrabool, Goulbourne and Devils River tribes – the blacks do not marry from their own tribe, but must get a lubra from another, and this runs thro'out the tribes ... thus a kind of social compact is kept up against any far distant tribe who may in a body intrude on either of their country – these five tribes notwithstanding are (or used to be) in continual frays with each other mostly arising from lubras.

***Thomas ML 21:94 (Gaughwin 1983: 53)***

604

By what I can learn, long ere the settlement was formed the spot where Melbourne now stands and the flat on which we are now encamped, was the regular rendezvous for the tribes known as Waworongs, Boonurongs, Barrabools, Nilunguons, Goulbourns twice a year or as often as circumstances and emergencies required to settle their grievances, revenge, deaths, etc.

***Thomas ML 8 < 8 April 1840 (Gaughwin 1983: 53)***

605

... I find it impossible to attach myself to entire tribes, from the circumstance that the tribes are most usually broken up into small parties, often ranging widely from each other in search of food.

The only occasions when they assemble in any considerable numbers are when they resort

to particular spots where some kind of food may be abundant for a season, as to places abounding in fish of the mernon root; and when different tribes meet to settle disputes by conflict or otherwise; this appears to be almost invariably in the vicinity of Melbourne.

***E.S. Parker to G.A. Robinson, 1 April 1840, Mount Macedon District (MacFarlane 1983: 693)***

606

I have been out journeying with perhaps not 113 of the tribe for it is seldom that more than that number can keep together . . . asked them where the rest of their tribe is when they commenced and told me not less than 12 parts of the country and some may be 80 or 90 miles off. The Aborigines may be called truly a social compact community, they know too when each will return.

***W. Thomas nd, (Mitchell Library Item 22. Language and Customs of Australian Aborigines, Miscellaneous Papers: 334–336 in Gaughwin and Sullivan 1984: 92)***

607

I have the honour to forward as you requested the Geographical area of the two Melbourne Tribes viz the 'Woowoorong or Yarra River Tribe, and Boonoorong or Western Port Tribe.

2. The Geographical limits of the two Tribes, Melbourne from Eastward, SE by the Tarwin; Dividing range between the Yarra and Goulbourn River North, South by the Sea coast and the River Exe to the West.

3. Aboriginal boundaries are judiciously defined by Rivers, Creeks & Mountains, which I found was universal thro' the Tribes. I found as also the case through Gipps Land. For example

4th. The Woowoorong or Yarra Tribe claim all country South, & North of the River to the Dividing Range, on this reasonable ground that all Creeks or streams south of the Dividing range all flow into the Yarra.

5th. The Boonoorong or Western Report Tribe claim on the same ground all the country from the ranges south of the Yarra and Creeks because all these waters fall into the Sea to the Tarwin River.

6. I should (from Major Mitchell's Geography) state that the 2 Melbourne Tribes had on my coming among them in 1838 -- Three thousand six hundred and eighty-four square miles.

***W. Thomas Papers, 17 February 1864. Mitchell Library MSS 214/20 Microfilm CY 3105 Transcription commencing Frame 18 (Byrt 2004: 227 CD WT 3105 Melbourne tribe boundaries)***

608

The blacks above alluded to are divided into seven (7) principal tribes, and the following, as far as I have been able to ascertain, is the name of each, its chief, and the country it inhabits, viz.

Tribes	Chiefs
Yow Whamgetée	Murradannanuke
Wodewawow	Coralcurke
Geraltimié	Bodedoneuneuke
Bemgalité	Nullamboine,
Odeboligitcorong	Eugait,
Dutagalla	Jagagaga
Boatnaïro	Wodelanenuke

I am inclined to think it has not been sufficiently ascertained what distinguishing title the chief prizes most, but have been led to believe that they designate themselves as the chief of such a tribe, and not the king of such a country.

**G. Stewart, Copy of report to the Colonial Secretary at Sydney, dated 18th June, 1836 (Labilliere 1878 Vol. 2: 130)**

609

Their knowledge of where the whole of their tribe are has given me surprise, when I have been out with them journeying with perhaps not one third of their number, for it is seldom that more than that number can keep together, I have when quietly seated by our bush fire at night asked them where the rest of their tribe were when they have commenced and related perhaps in not less than 10 or 12 different parts of the country and some may be 80 or 90 miles off, the Aborigines may be called truly a social compact community, they know too when each will return.

**W. Thomas letter to Mr Duffy 22nd June 1858. Mitchell Library MSS 214/24 Item 1-11, Microfilm CY 3131 Transcription commencing Frame 52 (Byrt 2004: 192 CD WT Traditions 3131, Frame 75)**

610

3. Aboriginal boundaries are judiciously defined by Rivers, Creeks & Mountains, which I found was universal thro' the Tribes. I found as also the case through Gipps Land. For example

4th. The Woorwoorong or Yarra Tribe claim all country South, & North of the River to the Dividing Range, on this reasonable ground that all Creeks or streams south of the Dividing range all flow into the Yarra.

5th. The Boonoorong or Western Report Tribe claim on the same ground all the country from the ranges south of the Yarra and Creeks because all these waters fall into the Sea to the Tarwin River.

**W. Thomas Papers, 17 February 1864. Mitchell Library MSS 214/20, Microfilm CY 3105, Transcription commencing Frame 18 (Byrt 2004: CD WT Melbourne Tribe boundaries)**

611

The aborigines of the South-East were divided into five tribes., each occupying its own territory, and using different dialects of the same language. Their names were “Booandik,” “Pinejunga,” “Mootatunga,” “Wichintunga,” and “Polinjunga.” The Booandik was the largest, and occupied that tract of country extending from the mouth of the Glenelg River to Rivoli Bay (Beachport) for about thirty miles inland.

**Smith 1880: ix, *Southwestern Victoria–Lower South-East of South Australia***

## Social Hierarchy

612

There are neither castes nor grades amongst these people of any kind, all being equal in the matter of social status. This being, so there is not any cogent enough reason to cause one hut to be made more pretentious than another, as would not most undoubtedly be the case did gradations of rank obtain amongst them...

**Beveridge 1889: 117**

613

Their government is a kind of patriarchal. When they go in large bodies, two or three seniors direct their movements from encampment to encampment, giving instructions overnight or early in the morning the directions each is to take, and where to encamp the coming night. Thus they proceed from day to day totally regardless of sickness, death, births, &c.

**W. Thomas on the Yarra and at Westernport, Remarks, 29 February 1840 (MacFarlane 1983: 624)**

614

The Goulburn River they denominate Warring. The tribe is divided into a number of sections distinguished by place of their birth, or the locality in which they usually reside, viz., the Butherabulluks or those who live on the river, the Warring Yellams or those whose residence is usually high up the Warring; the Bearabuluks or those who resort to the creeks and lagoons; the Lookyellams, the Worrinellums, the Yarring Nellams and the Tenbringnellams – designations I am not at present able to define.

They all speak the same language and observe similar customs. They do not seem to be under the government of any particular chieftan, but each section has its principal personages who, when they assemble together, debate upon public matters.

**J. Dredge to G.A. Robinson, 29 February 1840, regarding the Goulburn River tribes (MacFarlane 1983: 721)**

615

.... there are, and were, men recognised as having control over the tribes-people, and whose directions are obeyed. Such men receive designations which, in some cases, may be translated "Elder" or "Great One." .... No doubt, in some tribes, their power and authority have been better established than in others, while in certain of them there is a tendency for the office of Headman to be transmitted from father to son, if the latter be found worthy.

**Howitt 1904: 319**

616

In the Wotjobaluk tribe the old men formed a kind of council, and the oldest man among them was their head. The place where these men met was called Jun, whether it was the meeting-place of the old men of a small local group or of those of the whole tribe when it met on some great occasion. The younger men are permitted to come to the Jun, but not on all occasions, and, if admitted, are expected to sit near and listen, but are not allowed to take part in the discussion.

The various Ngurungaeta of the Kulin tribes, when they met, decided when the great tribal meetings should take place, and also consulted about matters of tribal importance, such as the initiation of the boys, marriages, etc.

**Howitt 1904: 324.**

617

Mr. Harris was surrounded at the tent; and the blacks were taking away what they could from the boat. Mr. T[uckey] fired over them; they ran away a small distance but soon approached again with the king (who wore a very elegant turban-crown, and was always carried on the shoulder of the men)

**Journal of Rev. R. Knopwood, 23 October, Sullivan Bay/Hobert Camp, Port Phillip (Shillinglaw 1972 [1879]: 140)**

618

I never saw in the tribes I have been living among anyone who was looked upon as a chief. Every man seemed to be equal. There seemed to be no person who had general control.

**J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 13)**

619

In a case of war there would be one who would take the lead, this would be an old man who had experience. I remember once seeing an old man on the Murray instructing the rest as to the mode of fighting. He was in the middle of a large circle of men fully equipped for war. He was armed with a spear [kalkro], and shield [karragamm] and was well daubed with copiu [perhaps gypsum or white ochre]. He looked every inch a warrior. His name was Nangken, [nangkaroo] the pelican. He supposed he had an enemy before him and was on guard to resist



assault. The enemy was supposed to be rather slow at hitting so the old man would taunt him with the cry, *balka thean*, hit me. He would then ward off a blow, and with a rush pretend to put his spear through the enemy. This continued for more than half an hour, much to the amusement of the younger men, one of whom whispered to me Pelican knows how to fight and how the enemy fights.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 13)***

620

Political relation they are not strangers to forethought, it would seem however that the Western Port and the Barrabool tribes are sworn friends and not the Western Port and the Yarra tribe as might be supposed on account of their proximity. The Yarra and the Goulbourne Tribes are more attached to each other tho' at a greater distance, This may arise from the two former being Coast Tribes and the 2 latter inland tribes – to form a confederacy however the five tribes near Melbourne are united together altho' always fighting and quarrelling with each other, yet they understand each others language, to secure this confederacy the law is that not a black take a lubra from his own tribe but from one of the four tribes in confederacy with them Thus they become allied by blood as our royal Families with foreign blood these five tribes however unite in any great emergency against any distant tribe who may attempt annoying either of them, or in a body intruding on their country, which Aborigines have well-defined which consists of watercourses or ranges far more superior than Surveyors boundaries of Countries.

***W. Thomas letter to Mr Duffy 22nd June 1858. Mitchell Library MSS 214/24 Item 1-11, Microfilm CY 3131 Transcription commencing Frame 52 (Byrt 2004: 192, CD WT Traditions 3131, Frames 76–77)***

621

The blacks of Australia never had any kings or chiefs, although it has been told, written, and believed, that they had; and in the face of all this I have the assurance to say that they never had any such things. I know it and have had plenty of proof, not only on the Murray, but in many other parts of the colony, and I positively assert that they never had either kings or chiefs.

***Kirby 1895: 74. Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840s***

622

They had certain laws, or rather rules, among them, that they used to attend to. For instance if a raid or an attack were about to be made on another tribe, they would never think of doing so without consulting with the “old men” of their tribe, and after the matter had been talked over by the “old men” and they had decided that an attack should be made, in all likelihood an attack would be made, but it would not be compulsory; the tribe would still do just as they liked about it.

***Kirby 1895: 74. Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840s***

623

Many a white man has been gulled by the blacks about this “chief” idea.

The “new chum” in most cases had either read or heard that savages have chiefs; the school books also tell him that, and so when this new chum came into contact with the blacks of this colony his first question almost would be, “who chief” or “who king?” Some of the blacks just to please him would say, “Me chief,” or “Me king,” “Oh, you king! Eh?” “Yes, me king, me Billy.” The new chum will then go home to his wife, if he has one, and tell her that he has seen the blacks, and had an interview with their king Billy.

***Kirby 1895: 75. Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840s***

624

Among the Kulin there was a Headman in each local group, and some one of them was recognised as being the head of all. Some were great fighting-men, others were orators, and one who lived at the time when Melbourne was established, was a renowned maker of songs and was considered to be the greatest of all.

If a Headman had a son who was respected by the tribes-people he also would become a Ngurungaeta in time. But if he were, from the native point of view, a bad man, or if people did not like him, they would get some one else, and most likely a relative of some former Headman, such as his brother or brother’s son.

A Headman could order the young men of the camp to do things for him and they would obey him. He might, as I have heard it put, say to the young men, “ Now all of you go out, and get plenty of ‘possums and give them to the old people, not raw but cooked.” Similarly the wife of the Ngurungaeta could order the young women about.

Each Headman had another man “standing beside him,” as they say, to whom he “gave his words.” This means that there was a second man of somewhat less authority, who was his comrade, or rather “henchman,” who accompanied him when he went anywhere, who was his mouthpiece and delivered his orders to those whom they concerned. When the Headman went out to hunt with his henchman, or perhaps with two of them, if he killed game, say a wallaby, he would give it to one to carry; if he killed another, the other man would carry it, and it was only when he obtained a heavy load that he carried anything himself.

***Howitt 1904 : 308; Woiwood 2012: 54***

## Respect

625

The Wurunjerri serve as an example of the practice of the tribes which form the Kulin nation.

The old men governed the tribe, and among them were men called Ngurungaeta. If a man was sensible and, as Berak put it, “spoke straight,” and did harm to no one, people would listen to him and obey him. Such a man would certainly become a Ngurungaeta, if his father had been one before him. It was he who called the people together for the great tribal meetings, sent out messengers, and, according to his degree of authority, gave orders which were obeyed. Such a man was always of mature age, and possessed of some eminent qualities, for which he was respected.

**Howitt 1904: 307**

626

In the Kurnai tribe, age was held in reverence, and a man's authority increased with years. If he, even without being aged, had naturally intelligence, cunning and courage beyond his fellows he might become a man of note, weighty in council, and a leader in war; but such a case was exceptional and, as a rule, authority and age went together. The authority of age also attached to certain women who had gained the confidence of their tribes-people. Such women were consulted by the men, and had great weight and authority in the tribe. I knew two of them, who being aged, represented the condition of the Kurnai before Gippsland was settled. Together with the old men, they were the depositories of the tribal legends and customs, and they kept alive the stringent marriage rules...

**Howitt 1904: 316**

627

There was a large assembly of chiefs. The chief Mor.er.nut.cher, of the Mor.er.mor.rer.be.rap, was a venerable man, tall stout and well made. At the time he visited me he had sore eyes and as I had to confer a name upon him I called him Milton. These chiefs or delegates were shrewd and discreet men and great deference was observed toward them by the members of the other tribes. There was the chief of the Mor.rer.mor.rer.be.rap, Bullucbur, Larnaget, Poit bulluc and others.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 3 August, 1841, Grampians area (Clark 1998b: 363)**

628

The Aborigines everywhere, and on all occasions, pay great respect to old persons. If a number of strangers are going to a camp, the oldest man walks first, and the younger men follow. Amongst the Murray blacks it is considered a very great fault to say anything disrespectful to an old person.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 137**

629

The young men feared the old men who I think managed to keep the younger men in order by their supposed supernatural powers. When any question was before the tribe on the Murray all who had become young men by initiation were allowed to speak. I may here say that they

were natural orators. With a club or boomerang in their hands, they spoke very gracefully. Each generally commenced his speech with waimbio barm rod witenu – blacks all listen to me. The speeches of the old men were listened to with great respect, and I daresay their advice was generally followed, but still they laid no claim to superior authority. It was most wonderful to see how the young men obeyed their elders in every respect, both as to their diet and also in general conduct.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 13–14)***

## Family

630

A woman called her sisters' children her own, they were her leethi or little ones. The only distinction between her sister's children and her own were maak (real) leethi and leethi jutti. This was of course to distinguish them, but she treated them all alike, and if a woman was only the second wife she was mother to all the children and treated them so. Though there may be slight jealousy between the two women they never show it to the children. The father also considered his brother's children his own and the children would call their father's brother moongan [father], but when referring to him they would say preppa moongan. Preppa means another maak which means sometimes great or real. These adjectives are sufficient to show the relationships in families. During the sitting of the Royal Commission on the Aboriginal the late Sir W. Stawell being president, the question was asked me, what do they do with orphans. In reply I explained the above rule with regard to children, that under such a law there were no orphans.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 11)***

631

When a baby is about to be born, a nurse is set to help the mother, and watch her in case she attempts to harm either herself or her baby when it is born as they will sometimes kill it to avoid the bother of nursing it. The custom of the women is to retire to some pleasant part of the country to be confined, accompanied by a "moitnum" Her superstitious lord will not receive his spouse until her days of purification are over. On the journey home she has to sleep with her child in the open air, without any shelter, every night, till she draws near home; when the feat is performed, she lies at her cold savage husband's door, without a kind word to soothe her. The next night he takes his wife inside.

***Smith 1880: 5, Southwestern Victoria–Lower South-East of South Australia***

632

During their years of virginity among the blacks the girls from the age of six to ten wore a fringe made by their mothers of possum fur called kiung, named after the material. When this was removed, she was no longer considered a virgin. The kiung was worn around the loins

and was about 5 inches deep. This was the only article of clothing worn by the girls except in cold weather when they would have the possum rug. She had a few ornaments, as beads made from reeds, at about 14 years of age. The septum of the nose was pierced so that she might now wear a piece of bone or reed through her nose which would by no means enhance her beauty.

When a girls was at the age of puberty she was given a yam stick to defend herself. She was never allowed to go out alone, indeed even now the women never travel without a companion.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 5); Woiwood 2012: 50***

## Teaching and Learning

633

The intention of the ceremonies is evidently to make the youths of the tribe worthy members of the community, according to their lights. Certain principles are impressed upon them [the youths] for their guidance during life - for instance, to listen to and obey the old men; to generously share the fruits of the chase with others, especially with their kindred; not to interfere with the women of the tribe, particularly those who are related to them, nor to injure their kindred, in its widest sense, by means of evil magic. Before the novice is permitted to take his place in the community, marry, and join in its councils, he must possess those qualifications which will enable him to act for the common welfare.

***Howitt 1904 : 638-639***

634

The youths are instructed;

1. To listen and to obey the old men.
2. To share everything they have with their friends.
3. To live peaceably with their friends.
4. Not to interfere with girls or married women.
5. To obey the food restrictions, until they are released from them by the old men.

***Howitt 1904: 633***

635

There are also teachers attached to each tribe, whose duty is to instruct the young in the use of weapons, and in other needful information.

***Dawson 1881: 74***

636

The children do not receive any schooling; when old enough to run about they do just whatever seems mete to their savage instincts, without the slightest reference to anyone, their

parents never by any chance endeavour to guide them aright...

***Beveridge 1883: 25***

637

In the training of their children the blacks took care not to break their spirit, they were seldom beaten. It would have been thought a brave boy who would hit his father or indeed any man. They would very seldom return the blow, indeed it would be looked upon as rather funny. I remember one big boy who went round the camp hitting right and left which caused much merriment. A father or mother who struck their child would have to be in a great passion, then there was nothing like calm punishment inflicted, as when they did hit, it was sometimes severe, for which they would be sorry.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 1)***

## Social Competition

638

Several tribes were encamped on the ground and it would seem to be a custom with them on such occasions to try their muscular strength with opposite tribes. The miam.miam or huts were scattered over a beautiful eminence at the northeast corner of the township. Two Native men would start from a group to the ground appointed for the gymnastics. One would remain and one would return. They ran too and from the ground. The one that remained knelt on one knee. When if his challenge was accepted the same running accompanied by another was gone through the wrestling commenced. They both quietly embraced or grappled with each other, where a trial of strength ensued. They would try to lift each other off their feet and which when they succeeded they would try to tho' their antagonist and which they in general succeeded. Some times the person thrown would keep so firm a hold as to recover his feet and throw his adversary. Some times they would thro' each other two or three times together. When they were equally matched they would separate and return (running) to their respective huts. When a challenge was not received, the challenger after a reasonable time would get up on his legs and throw a handful of ashes towards his opponents (a token of defiance) and then return to his people or tribe. All this was done in good humour and not a word in my hearing was spoken.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 27 March 1839, Melbourne (Clark 1998a: 21)***

## Disputes

639

Each miam is placed under the control of the head of a family; whose duty it is to keep order and settle any differences that may arise between the members of the household or with those of any neighbouring miam.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 129***

640

Among the associated tribes a public executioner was employed to put criminals to death when ordered by the chiefs to do so

***Dawson 1881: 75***

641

Persons accused of wrong-doing get one month's notice to appear before the assembled tribes and be tried, on pain of being outlawed and killed.

***Dawson 1881: 76***

642

When two or more tribes congregate, they are ushered in by the messengers, who had been previously despatched with their diplomas, one of whom, some hours previous to the tribes' approach, will return, and state the success or ill-success of his mission. The new comers will sit down about half an hour, when the principal males assemble. If their meeting be hostile (which is known for days before), the war-cry is heard for a mile or more ere they arrive at the encampment. At length the party arrives; all males are seated together, their heads and faces daubed with clay; they look beastly and terrific. The one I shall describe took place 5th December 1844 at half-past four. The Barrabool blacks – close lined – ten lines, with eight and ten in each line, seat themselves W. of the Buninyongs. After half an hour, King William, chief of the Barrabool tribe, advanced and stated “that charges had been made against his blacks of killing two of the Buninyongs and stealing lubras; that his blacks were not afraid of them, and had come down and were ready to have the accusers' spears thrown at them.” While speaking, another advances, and brings charges against the Barrabool blacks, and bids them to come forward. This rouses the ire of the opposite tribe, when two step forward and rebut or acknowledge the assertions, remarking that they also are ready, in the presence of the other tribes assembled, to stand foremost and receive the spears of their opponents, &c. A general bustle may be seen now in both parties; the parties more particularly accused prepare themselves, if of murder undisputed, perfectly naked, and in mourning from head to foot, squatted on the ground, without spear or any other weapon save a shield to ward off the spears. In this case, it is more a judicial proceeding, or the law being carried into effect, and though the tribes are all under arms it is more to check any disturbance or interruption to the



execution of what they consider the sentence.

**W. Thomas nd, *Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix – Fight between Barrabool and Buninyong Blacks North of Melbourne (Bride 1898: 430– 431)***

643

As a good instance of the manner in which trespasses by a person of one tribe on the country of another tribe were dealt with, I take the case of a man of the Wadthaurung tribe, who unlawfully took, in fact stole, stone from the tribal quarry at Mt. William near Lancefield. I give it in almost the exact words used by Berak in telling me of it, and who was present at the meeting which took place in consequence, probably in the late forties.

It having been found out that this man had taken stone without permission, the Ngurungaeta Billi-Billeri sent a messenger to the Wudthaurung, and in consequence they came as far as the Werribee River, their boundary, where Billi-billeri and his people met them. These were the men who had a right to the quarry, and whose rights had been infringed. The place of meeting was a little apart from the respective camps of the Wurrunjeri and the Wudthaurung.

At the meeting the Wudthaurung sat in one place, and the Wurrunjeri in another, but within speaking distance. The old men of each side sat together, with the younger men behind them, Billi-billeri had behind him Bungerim, to whom he “gave his word.” The latter then standing up said, “Did some of you send this young man to take tomahawk stone?” The Headman of the Wudthaurung replied, “No, we sent no one.” Then Billi-billeri said to Bungerim, “Say to the old men that they must tell that young man not to do so any more. When the people speak of wanting stone, the old men must send us notice.” Bungerim repeated in a loud tone and the old men of the Wudthaurung replied, “That is all right, we will do so.” Then they spoke strongly to the young man who had stolen the stone, and both parties were again friendly with each other.

**Howitt 1904: 340–341**

644

They do not consider any offence criminal, unless it be that of murder; and when such has been perpetrated, the whole tribe sits in judgement upon the culprit. One of the old men generally prosecutes in these cases.

**Beveridge 1889: 121**

645

They had no acknowledged chiefs. Justice was administered by the convention of “murapena” (corroboree), by some of the old men. The subject in dispute would be loudly discussed and the strongest party would settle the matter to their own satisfaction.

**Smith 1880: x, *Southwestern Victoria–Lower South-East of South Australia***

646

Barrabools and Mt Macedons Corroboree; a 'fray of importance' between Barrabools and Goulburns. 'By what I can learn, long ere the settlement was formed the spot where Melbourne now stands, & the Flat on which we are now Encamped, was the regular rendezvous for the Tribes known as Waworongs, Boonurongs, Barrabools, Nilungerons, Goldborns twice a year in or oftener, as circumstances & emergencies required to settle their grievances, revenge deaths &c and I consider (however strange their Cabals may appear to us) that they are Judicial Proceedings (which as uncivilised beings in the absence of any code of Laws but what revenge has given rise to) is the only method they have of adjusting past grievances and settling their affairs. I cannot learn that either of the tribes aforementioned made any other use of the spot alluded to but for the purpose of settling their disputes, it certainly is a central position for that purpose. The Barrabools in general Encamped on the brow of the Hill where the burial ground now is, – The Mount Macedon where the Settlement is built, & the Goldbourns at the back or about the spot of the present Police Magistrates residence, while the Waworongs & Boonurongs Encamp'd on the South Bank of the Yarra till the spot was fix'd upon for the scene of action.

**W. Thomas, Letterbook 2, letter to La Trobe, 13 April 1840. Mitchell Library MSS 214/8 Item 2, Microfilm CY 2946 Frame 42 (Byrt 2004: 47)**

647

Their frays I understand are judicial proceedings which once a year or oftener they meet to settle at Melbourne, a spot always resorted to for its central position...

**W. Thomas journal 6 April 1840. Mitchell Library MSS 214/2 Item 1, Microfilm CY 2605 Frame 86 (Byrt 2004: 36)**

648

Murder is not considered any disgrace among them at all events they shew no disrespect whatever to him, he is not in the least discarded from Society he sits smokes and enjoys society as tho' he was not under punishment – According to their Notion they never (in our sense of the crime) commit murder, they say that they never kill without just cause, or when they are worked up in a fit of passion & know not what they do, a punishment attends the latter, but till that punishment takes place there is no difference in the murderers position in Society.

**Letter to Mr Duffy, 22 June 1858. Mitchell Library MSS 214/2 Item 1–11, Microfilm CY 3131. Transcription commencing Frame 52 (Byrt 2004: 192 CD WT Traditions 3131, Frame 87)**

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

# Tools and Technology



FIGURE 18.1

## Digging Sticks

649

Wal-len.duc the name of the lava stone used by the native women for sharpening their murnong stick. I saw one of them at work preparing the murnong stick. This they do by first chopping with tomahawk or other sharp instrument the stick, giving to it a dual edge. They then harden it in the fire and give it the finishing touch with the lava stones. Lar, iron stone. They use these iron stones for making or building their miamia, or ovens for baking their murnong. The Waverangs call murnong, parm.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 7 March 1840, Anderson's, NE Ballarat (Presland 1977a: 83; Clark 1998a: 197)***

650

The stick used by the native women is about seven feet in length, from one and a half to two and a half inches in diameter, and seldom less than three or four pounds in weight. It is named Kan-nan or Kon-nung. Saplings of any suitable tree furnishing a tough wood are used for making these instruments. The Kan-nan, when sharpened at each end, is hardened by placing the points in a mound of smouldering bark ashes. With this stick the women dig up roots, the Mirr-n'yong especially. It is the weapon with which they fight also.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 350–351***

## Twine and Sinew

651

Of fibre plants there are three, which are utilised by the aborigines in the manufacture of twine and cord. The Kumpung (*Typha Muellera*) root, furnishes the fibre most commonly employed in making thread from which waist-belts, brow-bands, and bags of all sorts and sizes are netted... The fibre is procured after a very simple and primitive fashion, thus:- After the root is cooked (it produces food as well as fibre), it is not cut up into short sections for convenience in eating, as doing so would render the fibre comparatively worthless by reason of its shortness; therefore each root is taken separately, the skin peeled off, and the remainder, consisting of both farina and fibre, is twisted up into a knot, often being larger than a good sized fist and these knots are crammed into the mouth agape for their reception – most ludicrously. Sometimes both hands are required in the performance of this feat. When one [of] these immense mouthfuls has been masticated sufficiently to extract all the farina, the residue, which is the fibre, is rejected in the shape of a small knot of beautiful white tow. These knots of tow, as they are formed, are carefully packed away in bags, which are then utilised as pillows, until the time comes round for twine making. When about to make twine, these two knots are steeped in water for twelve hours, which effectually softens any starchy matter they may contain. They are then teased out and scraped with mussel shells, until they are perfectly

cleansed. The clean flax is then tied up into small neat hanks, and is ready for the thread makers' operations.

***Beveridge 1889: 77–78***

652

The Fibre Rush is the next plant from which they procure flax. This plant is cut as close to the ground as possible, so that the fibre may be of a fair length. It is tied into bundles of about six inches diameter, after which it is soaked in water for twenty-four hours. After the soaking has been effected, it is placed in an oven and baked for four hours. It is then in a fit condition for the next process, which is the scraping. This is done by means of mussel shells, with the view of removing all the husk and pithy matter. Whilst the scraping is in progress the rushes are continually being dipped into water, and softening influence of which aids materially in the proper cleansing of the flax. When it is quite finished it is laid on the grass to dry, which it soon does, as it is spread out in small parcels, each parcel being merely sufficient to form one of the neat hanks of the correct size required in the manufacture of the cord or twine they may have in view. When dry it is made into the hanks, and stored away for future use.

From this fibre fishing lines and nets are made, as also nets for taking ducks.

***Beveridge 1889: 79***

653

The next and last of their cord-making plants is the giant mallow. The fibre from this plant is of a much coarser nature than those already described; therefore it is only employed for making thick cord, which is afterwards worked up into nets for capturing emus. The process of separating this fibre from the plant is the same as that adopted in the case of that derived from the rush, with this one difference – After the mallow is taken out of the oven it is well bruised with heavy clubs previous to its maceration and scraping.

***Beveridge 1889: 80***

654

Much ingenuity is displayed in the manufacture of nets by the Coast tribes and the natives of the Murray River, from string which, where bulrushes grow, is made from the fibrous root of that plant, called on the Murray Balyan. They peel off the outer rind of the root, and lay it for a short time in the ashes; they then twist and loosen the fibre, and by chewing obtain a quantity of gluten, somewhat resembling wheaten flour, which affords a ready and wholesome food at all times to the tribes which inhabit the vast morasses in which the reeds and bulrushes abound. They chew the root, until nothing is left but a small ball of fibre, which somewhat resembles hemp. These balls are then drawn out, and rubbed with the palm of the hand on the bare thigh of the operator, while a small wooden spindle twirled with the fingers on the other hand twists and receives the string.

***P. Chauncy (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 249)***

655

In Gippsland the net was made from tall kangaroo grass twisted into twine. It was made by a method similar to that used by Europeans, but the fingers were used instead of a gauge, consequently the size of the mesh was not as regular. Bark was used to float the top of the net, and stones for sinking the bottom. On the Murray a stronger net was made from the fibre of the kangaroo grass. They collected a large quantity of kangaroo grass and steamed it in one of their ovens. When well softened it was taken out and allowed to cool. It then went through the process of separating the fibre. This was done by the women, who chewed the grass till the pulp had all disappeared. It was then well washed and when dry was ready to be made into the twine required for the net. It was of course a very tedious process. The women made the twine by twisting the two strands on the thigh and very dexterously turning it the opposite way. They would not make more than 100 yards a day, but very good nets were made from it.

**J. Bulmer, *Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 57–58)***

656

When a kangaroo is killed, the native is careful to preserve the sinews of the tail. He rolls the sinews around some stick or weapon or ball, so as to keep them stretched and in a fit state for future use.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 187**

657

They used to eat this compung, when cooked, by rolling a long root of it up together so that they could put it into the mouth, and chew it until they got all the nutriment out, and then take the fibres from the mouth in a sort of a round ball. These balls they would take great care of, and when they had sufficient number for making a fishing line, or fishing net, they would begin operations by holding a ball in one hand, pulling some fibres partly from it for a start, and with the other hand twist it by rubbing it between the palm of the hand and the thigh. They were quite adept at this work, and in a surprisingly short time would make a string long and strong enough for a fishing line. With this kind of cord they made fishing nets, and also smaller nets which the lubras used to sling behind their shoulders for the purpose of carrying therein babies and other articles.

**Kirby 1895: 34. Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840s**

## Baskets, Bowls and Containers

658

The native females use a great many kinds of bags and baskets. They carry all their little treasures in the large bags when they are travelling. ... a large bag or basket, made of the leaves of the common reed (*Phragmites australis*) which grows abundantly on the banks of the River Yarra and Goulburn. The material is twisted into a rope, and arranged in loops... The net-bag



– Bel-ang or Pel-ling is made of the fibre obtained from bark, or of the hair of the native cat or opossum, and it is of all sizes. Some are no larger than a purse, and others almost like fishing-nets. The fancies or necessities of the women determine the size of the bag. When the fur is picked off the opossum or native cat, the woman sits down and works it into twine by rubbing it with her hand on the inside of the thigh. The bags are very strong and durable.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 343–344**



*WOMEN MAKING BASKETS* BY FRED KRUGER FROM SLV USED UNDER SLV TERMS OF USE.

659

The basket Bin-nuk, Been-ak, or Bo-ut, is of various sizes; and, in selecting the material to make it, due regard is had to the purpose to which it is required. Some are large and strong, in which the women can carry a child; and others are quite small, only sufficient to hold their bone-needles, hair, necklaces, and the like. Some are made of a kind of flag – Kur-ra-wan – which is split by the nail and made fit for weaving, and other of Poa and Lomandra longifolia. The large baskets are provided with handles, sometimes made of grass or the fibre of the stringybark, so as to admit of their being slung over the back; but the small baskets are not made with handles.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 345**



*ABORIGINESOFVICTORIA01-P344-FIG155* FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0



*ABORIGINESOFVICTORIA01-P344-FIG157* FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0



*ABORIGINESOFVICTORIA01-P343-FIG153* FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0



660

In making baskets the women commence by plaiting that part which is to form the centre of the bottom, and having completed this, they work around it, adding plait after plait until the full size of the bottom is attained. To steady and fix the work thus done, so that their hands may be free for weaving the sides of the basket, they use an implement named *Weenamong*. This most often is merely a flat smooth pebble picked out of the bed of a brook. It is usually about four inches in diameter, but for large baskets heavier stones are used. Whether large or small, the stone must be dense, and diorites and fine quartzites are accordingly employed.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 385***

661

The vessels used for holding and carrying water by the Aborigines of Victoria were commonly made of the gnarls of gum-trees, or of the bark covering the gnarls, or of a portion of the limb of some tree. The large tub – Tarnuk bullito or Tarnuk Bullarto – was either a hollowed log or a large gnarl hollowed by fire and gouging.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 346***

662

Found among the natives' utensils the *Haliotus* ear shell which they use as drinking cups, called munjer. Saw also a very primitive bucket made of the bark of the wattle tree. Thus, a piece of the bark a foot wide and 2 ft long is then doubled together and sewed up at the sides; and a rope and handle.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 21 April 1841, Tarong (Presland 1977b: 43; Clark 1998b: 141)***

663

For the purpose of holding or carrying water calabashes were used, which contained from one to two gallons. They were made out of the knots or excrescences which are common to both box and gum trees.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 133***



'ABORIGINESOFVICTORIA01-P347-FIG163' FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0

664

The Tarnuk bullito was used for pounding and macerating the blossoms of the honeysuckle and box, from which a beverage was obtained – sweet – somewhat like sugar and water, but with a flavor of its own. When it is difficult to get a limb of a tree, or a tree suitable for a Tarnuk bullito, the natives cut a thick piece of bark from off the curved limb of a gum-tree, heated it in ashes, and bent it so as nearly to resemble the shape of a canoe, and stopped the ends with clay. This was a temporary expedient most often resorted to on hurried journeys. The bark of the *Eucalyptus viminalis* was preferred for the purpose.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 347**

665

Tar-nuk. A native bucket used by the Aborigines in their Primitive State for carrying water in Journeying or when comfortably settled in their Miams for domestic use. It is made from the excrescent of the White, Red, or Blue Gum tree, the protruberance may be often seen by the Bushman in passing through the wilds of Victoria. The neatest of Tarnuks are made from the elbow of a limb ...

**W. Thomas, Information sent to Judge Barry to Exhibition 11/11/1861. Mitchell Library MSS 214/17, Microfilm CY 3100, Transcription commencing Frame 108 (Byrt 2004: 213 CD WT 3100 Letter re exhibition)**

## Skins and Cloaks

666

The road in passing through the wood country is frequently very fine, trees many of them of vast size not so much in height as in girth having enormous gnarled branches in fantastic forms and throwing a shade of large circumference. On many of these can be seen oblong pieces of the bark cut out about 2 feet in length by 18 inches wide, these having been cut by the natives to dress their opossum skins upon by nailing them down on the pieces of bark by a number of small wooden pegs until dried and kept to the original size. Here and there can also be seen notches cut by them also with their hatchets to aid them in climbing those trees that are straight and smooth and free from branches until a good way from the ground, when in search of the opossum in some hollow part of the trunk or upper branch.

**Diary of John Elder, extracts from 'Voyage from Scotland to Australia' written February 1850; Original held privately by family members in Victoria (Coutts 1981: 239)**

667

In preparing the skins... Blackfellows used a square of bark taken from a gumtree, at least I saw a native use it. It was a smooth even-surfaced sheet. As a beginning he had stretched the pelt much the same as we do, the only difference was that the task was so carried out that in cutting the skin for sewing there would be very little waste material. He had a bag of

short pegs, all of uniform length, beautifully round and bevelled to a point the same as lead pencils. Beginning at the bottom corner where a wooden nail was already driven, grasping the hide with forefinger and thumb he drew it very slightly beyond the first inserted spike and drove in another peg. He kept on repeating, I did not see him finish his slow task – but it is distinctly remembered that the pegs touched each other throughout. From what is minded of the sheets of bark the pelt had been drawn to an exact square and when removed would show perforations such as we see in postage stamps. On next visiting him the bark with pegged skin was seen placed just near enough to the fire to dry gradually. The Aborigines are very fastidious in their choice of skins for they only used those taken from the largest and best furred opossums.

**Batey nd.: 117**

668

One woman presented me with a [...], another with an opossum skin. Pegged out on sheet of bark with the fur inwards ..., for which purpose they carry about with them between 2 and 300 small pegs. One [o]possum skin that I counted and which had been so prepared had 200 holes, hence requiring 200 pegs. The skin is cut square and then pegged out. It measured 14 inches by 21 inches. These skins are then sewed together and made into rugs.

**Journals of G.A. Robertson, 20 May 1839, Port Phillip (Clark 1998a: 45; cf. Sculthorpe 1990: 3)**

669

In making an opossum rug some skill and knowledge are employed. In the first place, it is necessary to select good, sound, well-clothed skins. These, as they are obtained, are stretched on a piece of bark, and fastened down by wooden or bone pegs, and kept there until they are dry. They are then well scraped with a mussel-shell or a chip of basalt, dressed into proper shape, and sewn together. In sewing them the natives worked from the left to the right – not as Europeans do – and the holes were made with the bone awl or needs, and instead of thread they used the sinews of some animal – most often the sinews of the tail of the kangaroo.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 271**

670

When the nights began to get cold in autumn, and after the first fall of rain made the forests remote from the river – in which opossums abounded – accessible, it was usual for the men of the Bangerang to set about making new opossum-rugs; their old ones, in due time, being given up to the women, children, or aged persons. Whilst engaged in this business, the men hunted opossums during the day, skinned them on their return to camp, and, after feasting on their flesh, pegged out the skins, each on a small sheet of bark, which were then placed in front of the fire, so as to dry gradually. This done, the skins were scored with a mussel-shell in various ornamental patterns, and were then fit for use. When enough had been collected, they were sewn together, a sharp bone used as an awl to pierce them with; the sinews of the animal

itself, of or a kangaroo, serving very well for thread.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 131***

671

[Making possum cloaks] When an opossum skin has been thoroughly dried and all the fat removed it requires to be scraped to ensure pliancy; this part of the operation is performed by means of sharp-edged mussel-shells, and scraping so performed is generally done so as to represent a pattern of some kind. They succeed in doing this so well that the various portions scraped upon the separate skins join together most accurately when sewn into a rug... Should a rugmaker be entirely lacking in artistic taste he merely scrapes the skin diagonally. When the whole skin has been thus scraped he turns the skin round and again scrapes diagonally, this time, of course, the scraping crosses the lines first made, thus forming a lo[z]enge-shaped design. This latter method, as regards utility, is unequally by any other, for thus treated, if the pattern be a small one, the skins become pliant and soft as well-prepared doe-skin.

The prepared skins are sewn together by means of fine sinews, which are drawn from opossum tails, instead of thread; these sinews are used whilst in a damp state, therefore when well shrunk, which they become from drying, the seams formed by them are both strong and firm. Needles not being known to them in their savage state, a bodkin made of bone was the instrument by which the punctures to receive the sinews are made, and the quickness and dexterity displayed in the manipulation of these rude instruments and appliances is truly astonishing.

***Beveridge 1889: 156–157***

672

I could never induce a native to skin a wombat, and after considerable inquiry as to the cause assigned for this refusal, I was enabled to ascertain that it was owing to a supposed pernicious effect which it had upon the bones of the hand.

***Blandowski 1855: 68***

## Piercing Tools

673

The awls or nails used by the Aborigines for fastening the skins of animals to bark or wood when they are put out to dry in the sun are of various sizes. Those used for pegging down a large skin are long, and those for the skins of the opossum, native cat, &c., much smaller. They are usually made of the leg-bones of animals. Those made of bone are smoothed, polished, and brought to a fine point. They fashion nails or pegs also of hard wood, the points being made still harder by subjecting them to fire.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 350***

## Scrapers and Engraving Tools

674

The mussel-shell – *U-born* – is much used by the natives for the purpose of scraping and preparing skins for bags, opossum rugs, &c. It is a valuable tool. It is used ordinarily as it is taken from the living animal; but if a favourite and well-shaped shell becomes a little blunted by use, it is sharpened with a stone. When the whites introduced their manufactures, the natives eagerly seized on the worn-out iron spoons, which they found near their huts, and converted the bowls into tools which served them better for scraping skins than the mussel; but some of the old blacks even now use the mussel.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 349**

675

The tool with which the native used to ornament their wooden shields and other weapons is called Leange-walert. The lower jaw of the opossum is firmly attached to a piece of wood (which serves as a handle) by twine made of the fibre of the bark of *Eucalyptus obliqua* and gum. This tool, simple as it is, enables the black to carve patterns in the hard, tough woods of which his weapons are made with ease and rapidity. The front tooth is like a gouge or chisel, and with it he scoops or cuts out the wood with great facility... The instrument .....was made by Wonga, the principal man of the Yarra tribe, and was used by him in ornamenting weapons.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 349**

## Grinding Stones

676

There are two kinds of millstones, both formed of slabs of grey marble or grey slate, of an oval shape, eighteen inches long by twelve inches broad. One kind is hollowed out, like a shallow basin, to a depth of two inches; the seed is put into it, and ground with a flat stone of the same material as the mortar. The other kind is about the same size, but, instead of being basin-shaped, it is flat, and has two parallel hollows, each one foot long, five inches broad, and one inch deep, in which the seed is placed and reduced to flour by two flat stones, held one in each hand, and rubbed backwards and forwards.

**Dawson 1881: 15**

## Axes

677

[Stone axes] In putting one of these axes into a handle (it will be observed that the accepted order of things is reversed in this instance, usually the handle being put into the axe), a section of tough sapling, three foot long by an inch and a half thick, is procured; the wood preferred

being a species of acacia. This piece of sapling is split down the middle, one half only being required for the handle; this half is made pliant by a process of steaming, which is achieved by judiciously mixing hot ashes with a damp earth, wherein the wood is manipulated until it becomes sufficiently supple for the required purpose. It is then bent round the axe head until the two flat sides meet, when they are firmly lashed together by cord, combined with a good plaster of prepared gum.

**Beveridge 1889: 75**



TWO GREENSTONE HATCHET HEADS, PHOTO BY DAVID FRANKEL, USED WITH PERMISSION

678

In addition to the ordinary tomahawk, the natives of some parts of Victoria had large stone axes made of basaltic rock, which were used for splitting trees.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 361**

679

The wood of the silver wattle (*Acacia dealbata*) was used for making the handles of tomahawks. The native name of this wood is Ur-root. The piece of a bough chosen for a handle was pared on one side as far as the pith; it was then heated in the ashes of a fire, and bent with the hands. The gum used for fastening the handle to the stone was obtained from the silver wattle. The handle was tied with sinews (*Berreep*) from the tail of a kangaroo.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 378**

680

The Rev. Mr. Bulmer informs me that the natives of Gippsland never, as far as he can learn, got stone from a quarry for their tomahawks. They selected suitable stones amongst those lying on the sea-beach or in the bed of a stream. They shaped the cutting edge either with an old tomahawk or a piece of stone. They did this by striking it near the edge, so as to cause pieces in the form of flakes to fall off. As soon as the edge was thin enough, it was ground and polished on sandstone. The flakes called Kragan, used for jagged spears, skinning animals,

&c., were made in the same way, namely by striking the edge of a block of stone with an old tomahawk.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 378***

681

The stone hatchets were used to out saplings employed in the building of gunyahs, &c., and for stripping bark from trees, for various purposes. They were also used in cutting notches in trees for the purpose of climbing; in cutting the holes and hollow branches of trees to get out opossums and other animals, or to obtain the honey out of the native bees' nests. In cutting these holes, the natives always chopped with the grain of the wood, instead of across it as a European would do, widening the aperture laterally until it was large enough for the purpose required. This method was adopted because it was easier to remove the chips in that way by cutting across the grain, which would have been difficult with these primitive tools.

***Mathews 1894: 303.***

682

Stone tomahawks and axes are made either from waterworn pebbles or pieces split from larger blocks of stone. The former was the practice in Gippsland, where suitable material is very plentiful in the mountain streams. Both methods were used by the Kulin tribes. The material for the latter of the two was supplied by the stone quarry at Mt. William.

A Kurnai man having found a waterworn stone suitable for his purpose, first of all chipped or pounded the part intended for the cutting edge with a hard rounded pebble, then having brought it somewhat into shape, he rubbed it on a suitable rock in the bed of a stream until he had produced a good edge. This process was much more expeditious than might be expected. Pieces of grinding-stone which abraded quickly were kept, and even carried from camp to camp for the purpose of sharpening the edge when necessary.

***Howitt 1904: 312***

## Hammers

683

[The kadjo or stone hammer] of Victoria consists of one stone rubbed to an edge at one end, and resembles those of North Australia, as described by Sir Charles Lyell (*Antiquity of Man*, p. 113), while the kadjo is formed of two chipped stones stuck on the end of a stick of the common wattle-tree about twelve inches long and three-quarters of an inch thick. The stones are chipped, the one to an edge for cutting, the other is left blunt for hammering. They are fragments of whinstone, which occurs in veins running north-east and south-west through the granite of the Darling Range, and are stuck on each side of the stick with the resinous gum of the tough-topped grass-tree, or *Xanthorrhoea*. The strength of this gum is extraordinary,



for I have seen a native use his kadjo to cut large limbs off gum-trees without at all loosening the stones.

**P. Chauncy (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 249–50)**

## Cutting Tools

684

... I witnessed what I had not seen before — a truly primitive knife which the natives made use of to cut the meat I gave them. This was simply a reed a foot or a foot and a half in length, split in half lengthwise, and which they split by means of their teeth. The dentals supply the place of vice in striating spears and are the wedge in splitting the reeds. The sharp edge of the reed is the saw with which they cut their meat and it is surprising with what expedition it was accomplished. It was a small reed about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch in diameter.

**G.A. Robinson, 27 May 1841, Western District (Presland 1980: 26; Clark 1998b: 230)**

685

The blacks set to work at once, and with their mussel shells and stone tomahawks, cut the bullock up in pieces as big as one could conveniently carry on his head. It did not take them long to finish the job, for they cut through the hide and flesh with the shells, and with their tomahawks cut or broke the bones.

**Kirby 1895: 51. Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840**

## Spears

686

The eel spear is formed of a peeled ti-tree sapling, of the thickness of a little finger and about seven feet long, pointed with the leg bone of the emu, or with the small bone of the hind leg of the large kangaroo ground to a long, sharp point, and lashed to the shaft with the tail sinews of the kangaroo.

**Dawson 1881: 87**

687

The hunting spear, 'narmall' is about seven feet long, and is made of peeled ti-tree sapling, with a smooth, sharp point; to balance the weapon it has a fixed buttpiece formed of the stalk of the grass tree, about two feet long, and with a hole in the pith in its end to receive the hook of the spear thrower; but, as the hook of the spear thrower would soon destroy the light grass tree, a piece of hard wood is inserted in the end, and secured with a lashing of kangaroo sinew.

**Dawson 1881: 87**



'ABORIGINES OF VICTORIA' A01-P305A-F' FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0

688

There is also a smaller kind, the *Daar* spear, used in hunting, it is made of two pieces of wood, fastened together with the sinews of the kangaroo. They are very sharp at the point, and have a white flint stone on each side, fastened in, and on, with gum. These they throw an amazing distance and with great force seldom missing their aim at a kangaroo when bounding at full speed, and at fifty paces distance. There is also another kind of spear but it is chiefly used in warfare; it is a very dry piece of wood inserted into a piece of strong reed; it altogether, being nearly seven feet long, and bound together by the sinews of the kangaroo.

**Morgan 1967 [1852]: 45–46**

689

The reed spears had no jags and were always used for long shots. The jagged spears were meant for closer quarters. They could not throw the jagged spears more than about fifty yards, but the reed spears they could throw a hundred and fifty or more.

**Kirby 1895: 72. Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840s**

690

These spears [jagged spear kept for the adornment of the loondthals] are principally made from a tall-growing box (one of the eucalypti), which often attains to an altitude of over a hundred feet; it is indigenous to the north-western portion of the colony, and to Riverina; it has a fine wavy grain, consequently easily worked when in a green state. When well seasoned, however, it is nearly as hard as ebony. This weapon in general is nine feet long, barbed on two

sides for fourteen inches up from the point. The barbs are shaped exactly after the fashion of those on the arrow heads, which have been discovered in Central France, being the handiwork of primitive man who flourished in the post Pliocene period.

**Beveridge 1889: 64**



'ABORIGINES OF VICTORIA 01-P309-FIGS 89-93' FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0

691

The natives make a commoner spear, of the same size as the last [jagged spear], for everyday use. This spear is made from mallee saplings; the barbs thereof are not nearly so well formed as those in the show spear previously described, although the shape is exactly similar.

It would be a sad waste of time fashioning these useful weapons elaborately, as they nearly always get broken when successfully cast; they are only used for killing the larger kinds of game, such as kangaroo and emu, and when once fixed securely in the hunted creature, the barbs prevent their falling out; therefore, in the final struggle breakages are a certain consequence. These spears are not propelled by means of a throwing stick, but are hurled from the hand javelinwise. The natives can make pretty sure of striking with these spears at a distance of twenty-five yards – that is to say, if the game be in motion.

**Beveridge 1889: 65**

692

The reed spear is the missile most generally used in their daily foragings; this spear can be thrown with great precision fifty or sixty yards; it is propelled by means of the throwing stick. They kill all the smaller game, such as wallaby, duck, geese, swans, pigeons, &c., with this weapon, and as the spear is remarkably fragile, and easily broken, they commonly carry a bundle of them on their diurnal excursions. This spear is seven feet long, five feet of its length being reed, and the other two feet wood, hardened by fire. These wooden points are fixed

into the reed shafts by means of gum, which they procure from various trees, and prepare by baking for that purpose. The baking process which the gum undergoes rendered it tough, doing away with much of its brittleness, which is its natural characteristic when in a dried state.

***Beveridge 1889: 66***

693

A hard and tough wood is used for making spears of this kind [double-barbed, Mongile]. With a piece of quartz the native cuts a groove on each side of the upper end, and he inserts therein small chips of hard black basalt, or chips of some other suitable stone, and these chips are fastened and fixed in their places by Pid-jer-ong, a gum resembling pitch.

A gum called Jark, obtained from the *Acacia mearnsii*, is occasionally used for fastening the chips; but the blacks of the Goulburn had either a better gum or a better mode of preparing it than other blacks, because at one time they used to exchange their Pid-jer-ong for various articles with the members of neighbouring tribes.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 304***

694

The reed-spear – Tir-rer, Da-aar, Djer-rer, or Jer-aor... consists of a tough heavy piece of wood, rounded and brought to a fine point, and hardened and polished, which is fitted into a reed (*Phragmites australis*) which grows abundantly on the banks of the River Goulburn and other rivers. The wood is fastened to the reed by the sinews of the tail of the kangaroo, and the union is commonly made perfect with Pid-jer-ong. Sometimes a bone is substituted for the piece of hard wood.

This instrument is commonly used for spearing eels; but it is employed in battle also, and it is then thrown with the Kur-ruk. It is known and used in all parts of Victoria.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 305–306***

695

In almost all tribes large and small spears were in use, the larger either thrown by hand or used as lances, as circumstances required, the latter impelled by the wommerah. These spears were used on the Murray and in Western Australia.

***Worsnop 1897: 128***

696

The spear used for spearing fish was made from two pieces of sharpened bone from the leg of a kangaroo (jirrah). These were inserted into a long stalk or flower stem of the grass tree (kamma), then fixed with gum from the grass tree and tied strongly with kangaroo or possum (wadthan) sinews, or with string made from the bark of the light wood tree.

For hunting kangaroos they used spears barbed with pieces of flint, or in more modern times with broken glass. This was secured with the gum of the grass tree (kamma). On hunting days it was amusing to see every man busy – one was chipping the flint or glass, another scraping wood to get fine shavings to mix with the gum. Others were finishing off the spear points. The gum was softened and put on to the spear. The glass or flint was then stuck onto the gum, and the fine shavings were put on outside to keep the gum together. This made the spear a very formidable instrument, and it did not fail to secure a kangaroo, as it made an ugly wound when it hit. The work on the spears had to be repeated every hunting day as the barbs came off at once when hitting an animal.

**J. Bulmer, *Papers, Museum Victoria* (Vanderwal 1994: 58)**



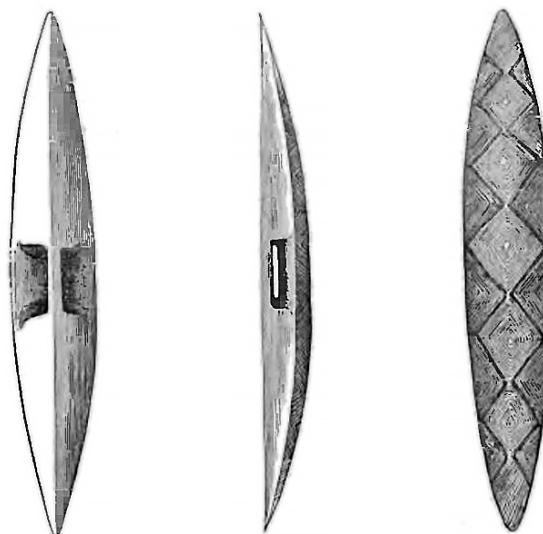
'ABORIGINES OF VICTORIA 01-P310-FIG94' FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0

## Shields

697

The wood preferred by the natives for making the Mulga is ironbark (*Eucalyptus sideroxylon*), but box (*E. leucoxylon*) is that most commonly used. Gum, peppermint, or indeed any hard wood, is taken if the necessity is great. Garron (wattle-tree, *Acacia mearnsii*) is not seldom employed for shields and other weapons.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 330**



'MULGA, FIG. 113-115, ABORIGINES IN VICTORIA' FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0

698

In making these shields [the Gee-am or Kerreem spear shield] some skill is necessary. After the bark is taken from the tree, and rudely shaped in the form desired, a mound of earth is raised some three feet in length, and about the breadth of the bark; hot ashes are placed on the mound, the bark is laid thereon, and it is covered with heavy stones and sods. The green bark, by the time the ashes are cold, has taken the curve of the mound, and the finishing and ornamenting of the weapon are pursued at leisure. The natives of Lake Tyres call this shield Bam-er-ook.

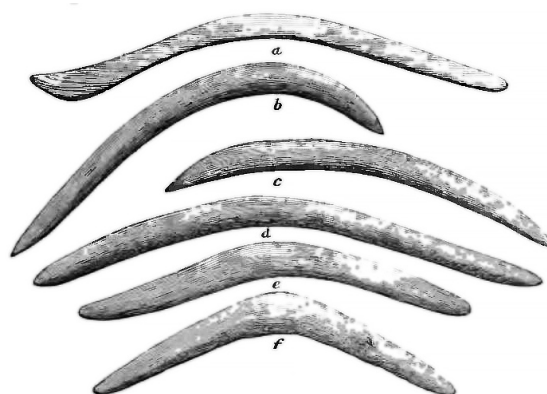
**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 332**

## Boomerangs

699

The reason why any two boomerangs are never seen with precisely the same curve is simple enough. Thee missiles are always made from branches, or roots having natural curves, and there are never two curves in nature exactly alike. When the instrument is finished, the grain of the wood follows round the curve, or rather, the curve follows round the grain of the wood, thereby giving the missile strength, which it would altogether lack were it made for a straight-grained piece of timber.

**Beveridge 1889: 63**



'ABORIGINES OF VICTORIA 01-315A-FIG99' FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0

700

The woods commonly used for making boomerangs are the limbs of the ironbark and she-oak, but the roots of the various kinds of eucalypti are in some places highly esteemed.

Very good boomerangs, of the class to which the Wonguim belongs, are sometimes made of the bark of gum-trees. The bark is cut into the right shape, and heated in ashes and twisted slightly. Weapons made of bark may have a good flight, but they are not so valuable as those made of hard wood. Even those made of wood are not seldom heated, softened, and twisted; but the best Wonguims are cut with a tool into the right shape. The eye of the maker guides

every stroke, and when the instrument is finished it is not necessary to heat it and bend it.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 311***

701

In Victoria [boomerangs] are sometimes made of the bark of the gum trees; this is cut into the right shape, heated in the ashes of the camp fire, and twisted slightly. These boomerangs, however, are defective in flight and not so valuable as those made of hardwood. The best kind is cut with a primitive tool into the right shape; infinite patience is exercised by the maker, whose eye guides and directs every stroke until it is finished. Some of these are occasionally used in war, and are also employed in the chase and in killing birds.

***Worsnop 1897: 129***

702

The womara, or throwing stick, is made of some light, tough wood, two feet in length. The handhold is round, and rather more than an inch in thickness. Immediately above the handle the instrument bulges out to the width of three inches, tapering from thence to the point, where it terminates in a hook. The broad portion of the instrument on the side the hook is, is slightly concave, the opposite side being correspondingly convex. The instrument is held in the hollow of the hand, and the hook inserted in the end of the spear, which, of course, makes the spear rest in the concavity, where it is held by the forefinger and thumb. As it stretches along the womara the arm is raised, and drawn back in readiness for the propulsion. When that force is being applied the finger and thumb release the spear, and the missile shoots forth like an arrow on its mission.

***Beveridge 1889: 66–67***

## Canoes

703

A more robust canoe was made in Gippsland from the bark of suitable trees available in the district – the stringy bark (yangoro) and the mountain ash (yowork). They secure a long sheet of bark from either of these trees and turning it inside out, they carefully make the ends thin by peeling off the rough part of the bark. By the assistance of a little fire they lift up the ends and carefully fold them together just as you would fold a bag for tying. They secure the end with a string made from the bark, and with two pieces of the bough of the tree they bend in to the end to form a rib. The canoe called gree, a word expressing all of a man's goods, is now finished. The Murray people who had only the bark of the gums could not make a canoe like this. The Gippsland canoe was fairly safe. I have seen one made big enough to carry three bags of flour and three men. Indeed it was wonderful to see the number of men, women and dogs which could get into a large canoe.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 57)***



704

...the natives were busily employed in stripping a sheet of bark from a gum tree, to form a canoe capable of carrying across the luggage and the men who were required to cut down a quantity of the opposite bank to give the cattle an opportunity of landing. The canoe was made of the bark from a tree having a bend or elbow in its trunk, when by the action of fire it was made into the most convenient shape, and the ends tied with bark, and stopped with clay, thus rendering it water-tight. Some of the canoes made by the Gipp's Land blacks must have been upwards of twenty feet in length, for we noticed several trees despoiled of their bark to that height. Our canoe, about ten feet in length, with a beam of two feet six inches .....

**G.H. Haydon, Tarwin (Mackaness 1941: 48)**



705

Saw abundance of swans and trees barked when natives of Gipps Land had made their canoes. These natives and Western Port natives cut the bark short across and take it of a straight tree... sew the ends together and gum it like Sydney blacks.

**Journals of G.A. Robinson, 27 April 1844, Gippsland (Clark 1998d: 49)**



706

Their canoes are made from the bark of the redgum tree; bark of other trees is also used, but merely for temporary use, as none but the former will stand the weather without curling or splitting. They are made in all cases from a single sheet, without tie or join. In making these vessels, trees with natural bends are chosen, as curves so obtained precludes the necessity of having to use fire to give the required rise, stem and stern.

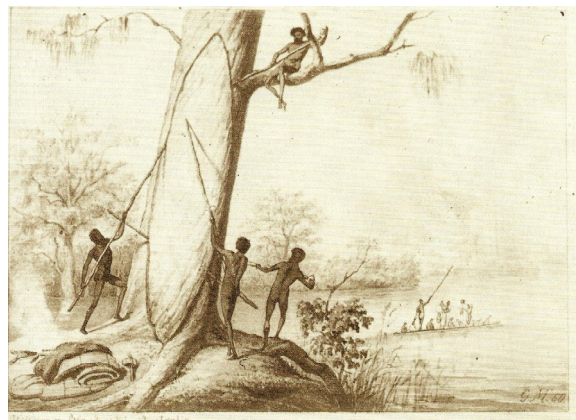
When the bark for a canoe is cut, stretchers are placed across it at intervals of three to five feet to prevent it from curling up. Short props are also placed under the bows and stern to keep them from becoming depressed by reason of their own weight. It at this stage the canoe should not have the exact shape desired by the maker, he places heavy billets of wood inside at those part which require pressing outwards, and the bark, being green, the pressure effects the end aimed at. After this, and whilst the weights are still in the canoe, and the props outside, a coat of well-puddled clay is spread over the interior, which effectually hinder sun cracks. In this condition, they are left in the sun to season. After ten to fifteen days' exposure, the bark has become so hard as to be able to retain the shape ever after, no matter how roughly it is handled. It is therefore launched without ceremony upon the water, where it is destined to float for the few brief years of its existence. After the lapse of two years the bark becomes heavy and sodden, therefore correspondingly unwieldy; so the owner in his rambles keeps his eyes about him, with the view of discovering a suitable tree from which he can take a canoe, wherewith to replace his now frail craft.

**Beveridge 1889: 69, 71**

707

The canoe used by the natives of Victoria are usually made of the bark of some species of gum-tree... According to the kind of bark used, the sheet is either put over the fire and turned inside out, or employed as cut, the ends being tied; or if the bark be thick – so that the ends cannot be tied – the stem and stern are stopped with clay or mud.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 407–408**



'CANOE MAKING' FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USED UNDER CC0

708

In fashioning a canoe, the natives take a large piece of bark, free from knots, and with their tomahawks cut it into the shape of an ellipsis, having its ends pointed, and with its transverse and conjugate diameters as three to one. When this is laid on the fire, it contracts, and doubles over into a cigar-shaped canoe. The end, which are subsequently tied together, curve up in such a manner as to be above the water-line when it is set afloat. The sides, which have a tendency to come together, are kept apart by stays. Should a leak occur, the hole is stopped with clay. In making large canoes, the bow is constructed as above described, but, in order to give greater strength and security, a semicircular piece of bark is fitted into one end. That end, when the piece is so fitted, is of course the stern.

***An account by Mr. Nathaniel Munro (Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 411–412)***

709

The canoes were made from the bark of gum trees; and any gum tree that had a bend in its trunk of the proper shape for making a canoe of its bark was highly prized; and if any of the tribe were to injure that tree, they would, if found out, be punished by death.

I have seen, and been in these canoes, that would carry eight persons across the Murray; but the majority would only carry two or three people.

***Kirby 1895: 34–35. Swan Hill area, reminiscences of the 1840***

## Stone and Quarries

710

The sharp flakes exhibited from Victoria were picked up by the writer at one of the quarries of the aborigines. The quarry was not a depression formed by the removal of tons of stone. In fact it was a little knoll where very hard flinty and quartz rock cropped up, and appeared in blocks. The space for a quarter of an acre was more or less covered with thousands of chips broken off the rock.

***MacPherson 1885: 116***

711

In some places in Victoria there are quarries where the natives in former times broke out the trappean rocks for hatchets. Large areas are covered with the debris resulting from their labors. In other parts of that colony there are sandstone quarries (where diorite or basalt are not to be found) from which hatchets were obtained...

At Mount William, near Lancefield, there is a large native quarry, from which was taken greenstone for the manufacture of tomahawks and spear-heads. It is extremely hard and tough, and well adapted for the purpose. My friend, Mr. R.E. Johns, of North Fitzroy, now of

Hamilton, Victoria, who supplied me with this information, adds that Mr. Derry, engineer to the Water Trust, found the site of a stone axe factory, marked by heaps of chips lying around large boulders, which appeared to have been used as anvils, at Wartook, in the Northern Grampians, near Horsham.

***Worsnop 1897: 99***

712

The ochre quarries are numerous, and disclose extensive excavations of this material, which must have been in use for untold ages, so general is it in all conditions of aboriginal life, whether in war or peace or in sacred ceremonies of their mysterious rites; in this colony there is one for red ochre on the Onkaparinga, and another between Willunga and Aldinga.

***Worsnop 1897: 99***

713

To.re.wurt is the high hill N and by E from F.H[enty] home station on the top of which I went yesterday ..... It is remarkable for red ochre and is resorted to by the natives for getting earth, several holes having been dug by them.

***G.A. Robinson, 20 June 1841, Western District near the Wannon River (Presland 1980: 66; Clark 1998b: 269)***

714

The celebrated spot which supplies the natives with stone (phonolite) for their tomahawks, and of which I had been informed by the tribes 400 miles distant; I was at this stage of my journey unable to trace out; but subsequently was fortunate to hit upon it .....

Having observed on the tops of these hills a multitude of fragments of stones which appeared to have been broken artificially, and which I recognised as phonolite or clinkstone, I was led to trace them to the source from which they appeared to have been proceeded, a spot three-quarters of a mile eastward, on somewhat lower ranges. Here I unexpectedly found the deserted quarries (kinohaham) of the aboriginals, which I had previously been unable to discover.

The phonolite (tadijem), as before mentioned, is that of which their tomahawks are formed. The quarries which extend over an area of upwards of 100 acres, present an appearance somewhat similar to that of a deserted gold filed, and convey a faithful idea of the great determination displayed by the aboriginals, prior to the intrusion of the white races. They are situated midway between the territories of two friendly tribes —the Mount Macedon and the Goulburn,—who are too weak to resist the invasion of the more powerful tribes; many of whom, I was informed, travel hither several hundreds of miles in quest of this invaluable rock.

The hostile intruders, however, acknowledge and respect the rights of the owners, and always meet them in peace.

**Blandowski 1855: 56–57**

715

...The stones used for making tomahawks were dug out of the quarries with a pole of hard wood. The stones were found in blocks, not much larger than the ordinary tomahawks, and the shape was given to the blocks by striking off flakes with an old tomahawk. The cutting edge was formed and polished by grinding and rubbing on a piece of sandstone. Sometimes a stone was found in the bed of a creek or river, or on the sea-shore, of the desired form, and this was ground and sharpened, and used as a tomahawk; but such a stone was considered as very inferior to the tomahawk of green stone shaped in the manner described. Pebbles were never used by the men of the Yarra tribe if they could get greenstone blocks. The greenstone was brought from a quarry near Kilmore, on a range called Mouwnt Hope by the Europeans, and known as *Wil-im-ee Moor-ring* (Tomahawk-house) amongst the natives.

**Smyth 1878 Vol 1: 378 (see also McBryde 1978)**

## Bark

716

The natives are compelled by their necessities to ascend trees very frequently, either for the purpose of catching animals or for honey, or for bark for their canoes or willams; and they are very expert and nimble in climbing to a great height, whether the tree be straight or crooked, or of large or small dimensions...The common method of climbing trees is well known. The native takes his tomahawk and cuts a notch in the bark of the tree about three and a half or four and a half feet from the ground. He puts the great toe of one foot into this, and, raising himself as high as he can, and grasping the tree with one arm, he cuts another notch a stage higher, and thus ascends. He works very rapidly; and it is rare indeed that a black misses his hold and falls to the ground. In the basin of the River Yarra and in the Western Port district and in many other parts of the colony, there are large numbers of old trees to be seen with notches in the bark, which the blacks have climbed for the purpose of catching opossums, or for getting bark.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 150–151**

717

Sacred and Tradition Dances, are generally accompanied by figures cut rudely from Sheets of Bark from the neighbouring trees on which is decorated by the Artist by the direction of the Priests or Doctors, who gravely sits smoking his pipe while giving instruction.

**Thomas letter to Mr Duffy, 1 August 1858. Mitchell Library MSS 214/24 Item 1-11, Microfilm CY 3131, Transcription commencing Frame 18 (Byrt 2004: 192–193 CD WT Songs 3131, Frame 35)**

## Pigments

718

A red pigment was obtained by the natives, either from decomposed rock, where it is found as clay, or by burning some trap-rock or porphyry. Yellow clays and yellow-ochre are not plentiful, and in some districts the pigment is not found at all. White is got in the areas occupied by granite and Palæozoic rocks almost everywhere; but in the large tracts occupied by Tertiary rocks, where white clays are not found near the surface, the natives collected gypsum and selenite, burnt the mineral, and produced a very good pigment. A black colour was made from charcoal or from soot. The charcoal or soot was mixed with fat and used as a paint.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 294***

719

A piece of trap rock, named Boo-boorn by the natives of the Murray is put in the fire and kept there until it becomes red-hot. When taken out, the native scrapes from the surface a red powder, with which he makes a paint to color his shields and other weapons, to dye his rug, and, if necessary, to ornament his person. The native name of the stone is, on the Lower Murray, Noo-ion-yoo-rook, and the name of the ruddle obtained from it is the same.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 386***

## Various

720

Saw a man making a marl or mulga. The hole for putting the fingers through about 5 inches by 1 1/2 or 2 inches through. He mortared with a gouge made from the leg bone of a kangaroo and which was made of a similar pattern to an iron gouge . . . This I considered a very primitive instrument. Found among the natives' utensils the Haliotus or ear shell which they use as drinking cups, called munjer. Saw also a very primitive bucket made of the bark of the wattle tree. Thus, a piece of the bark a foot wide and 2 ft long is then doubled together and sewed up at the sides; and a rope handle. I exchanged a handkerchief for one and the reed pipe with it. The husband sold it and thought he had made a good bargain. And so I thought, for the handkerchief was a large new cotton one. But his better half, though she rejoiced at first of the exchange, she muttered a good deal at the loss of this part of her domestic utensils. The reed pipe was not more than a foot long, which they use for drinking water out of the bark bucket.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 21 April 1841, Tarong area (Presland 1977b: 43; Clark 1998b: 141)***



721

The manufacture of weapons also used to occupy a considerable portion of the time not spent in eating, hunting and sleeping. Their arms were wonderful productions, when it is remembered they were wrought with stone implements, pieces of shell, bone, &c.; and it is remarkable that, though their fabrication was enormously facilitated by the iron tools they got from us, they fell off in beauty, and got to have a sort of slop look about them. The making of nets and baskets was left to the women; as also the spinning of yarn out of the fur of the ring-tailed opossum, which was done with a sort of spindle. This yarn was worn in many folds round the neck as an ornament. The manufacture of implements, clothes and weapons, as also cooking were all carried on seated.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 131***

722

In shifting camp the most work fell upon the women. If they were going to a great distance the load she would have to carry would be astonishing. She would have her rug on, then she would have a large bag containing the odds and ends required in camp. If you looked into a woman's bag you would see the following articles: a fishing line, a few sinews from a possum tail, a few possum skins, an old flint tomahawk, a few pieces of possum or wallaby flesh half wasted, or perhaps a kangaroo rat. On the top of this she might have the baby, a loose place being reserved there in which the little thing could look about and sleep.

***J. Bulmer, Papers, Museum Victoria (Vanderwal 1994: 44)***

723

Two ovens were close by and in the hollow of two trees were concealed the property -if the nature of perchis and sticks in the cavity of trees can be called concealment. It was apparent that few white men had visited this sequestered spot or the natives would not have been so careless in secreting it.

We examined the baskets (and which I should not have done but that as the customs and manners of these people were new to me I was anxious to embrace every opportunity for information) and parcels which were carefully bound up. They consisted a of the small leg bones a of the kangaroo , some sharpened into a point – and which are used for piercing the kangaroo and opossum skins for making rugs. Two I brought away. Also pieces of broken glass, bottle, [...] or pipe clay, ochre, pieces of lava or scoria, sinews, stick for stripping bark and a pair of old cord trousers and some pieces of European raiment. In one basket we found an amulet..... In return I left a new cotton handkerchief. I found a lead pencil whole in their basket and as I needed it, I took it away. There was also two or three pieces of iron hoop and a long drinking reed. Some provision was also left for them. Our native guide also took a ball of [...] or pipe clay.

***Journals of G.A. Robinson, 17 April 1841, Lake Elangermite (Presland 1977b: 38–39; Clark 1998b: 138)***



724

I have sometimes been a little surprised when reading of Australian implements to find unnoticed one very common in some parts of Victoria at least. There, a Black, when cooking, would often break off a couple of bits of stick six or eight inches long and as thick as one's finger, which holding in his right hand in a peculiar way he would use with great dexterity as tongs. Between them he lifted red hot coals one by one and placed them on the meat he was cooking.

***Curr 1886: Vol 1: 149***

## CHAPTER TWENTY

# Trade and Exchange



## Barter and Exchange

725

At the periodical great meetings trading is carried on by the exchange of articles peculiar to distant parts of the country. A favourite place of meeting for the purpose of barter is a hill called Noorat, near Terang. In that locality the forest kangaroos are plentiful, and the skins of the young ones found there are considered superior to all others for making rugs. The aborigines from the Geelong district bring the best stones for making axes, and a kind of wattle gum celebrated for its adhesiveness. This Geelong gum is so useful in fixing the handles of stone axes and the splinters of flint in spears, and for cementing the joints of bark buckets, that it is carried in large lumps all over the western District. Greenstone for axes is obtained also from a quarry on Spring Creek, near Goodwood; and sandstone for grinding them is got from the salt creek near Lake Boloke. Obsidian or volcanic glass, for scraping and polishing weapons, is found near Dunkeld. The Wimmera country supplies the maleen saplings, found in the mallee scrub for making spears. The Cape Otway forest supplies the wood for the bundit spears, and the grass-tree stalk for forming the butt piece of the light spear, and for producing fire; also a red clay, found on the sea coast, which is used as a paint, being first burned and then mixed with water, and laid on with a brush formed of the cone of the banksia while in flower by cutting off its long stamens and pistils. Marine shells from the mouth of the Hopkins River, and freshwater mussel shells, are also articles of exchange.

**Dawson 1881: 78**

726

Bartering was also practiced by the Wiimbaio, with the blacks from higher up the Darling River, who occasionally brought down wood of the mulga tree for spear points, slabs of stone, and hard and heavy pestles of granite for pounding and grinding seeds and tough tubers. These they exchanged for nets, twine, or fish-hooks.

**Howitt 1904: 717**

727

When the people who attended the great tribal meetings of the Wotjobaluk were about to depart their homes there was an assembly at the Jun, or men's council-place, where they exchanged the articles which they had brought for the purpose. These articles were such as the following: sets of spears, respectively called Guiyum-ba-jarram, or jag spear, and reed spears; opossum skin rugs, called Jirak-willi (opossum skin); men's kilts, called Burring-jun, made of the skin of kangaroo-rat (Goiyi), or padi-melon (Jalla-gur); armlets worn round the upper arm, called Murrumdat-yuk; wooden bowls called Mitchigan; in fact, all the implements, utensils, arms, and ornaments used by these people.

**Howitt 1904: 717**

728

These men [*Ngallow Wattow* – postmen] also negotiate all barter and trading required by their respective tribes. At the first blush it would almost seem that the aborigines could not have very much in the shape of goods to dispose of, but that would be an erroneous conclusion to arrive at; as the districts inhabited by the different tribes produce each their own particular class of commodities, and those alone; therefore, as the aboriginal requirements over the whole of the colony are very similar, the only manner in which many of their wants can be supplied is by means of barter. For example, the tribes inhabiting the mountainous regions have an abundance of stone suitable for making axes of; and the tribes which roam over the vast depression forming the Murray River valley have many miles of reed beds, from whence reeds are procured for making spears, and not having any stone for axes on their own territory, they procure it by exchanging reeds with the inhabitants of the stone country, where reeds stout enough for spears do not grow. The same mercantile relations obtain in the matter of gums, resins, ochres, etc.

***Beveridge 1889: 186–187***

729

In the extensive tracts occupied by sands and clays, and in which no stone fit for tools is to be obtained, the natives must have cast wistful eyes towards the more favored localities where all the best materials for stone implements are to be found; and one may conjecture how they would humble themselves and entreat those who could supply them with good materials. Their best feathers, their best wood, their favorite skins, and even their wives and daughters would be offered in exchange for the basalt and diorites which occur on and in the neighbourhood of the Great Range.

The stone tomahawk is all-important to the native, and in some district he could scarcely maintain existence without it.

***Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 360***

730

[Bangerang] Neither kissing, shaking hands, nor any other salutation of the kind was in use amongst the tribe, though frequently men of different tribes made exchanges of arms or articles of dress in token of good-will; and women, in like manner, exchanged ornaments.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 125***

731

Flints and tomahawks the Bangerang had, however, obtained from the Ngooraialum and Pinpandoor in exchange for beautiful light reed spears which were easy to carry and most effective in hunting, which they made in large quantities from the reed-beds in their territory. These reed spears of the Bangerang found their way to distant tribes, and were in much repute.

***Curr 1965 [1883]: 128***

## Stone

732

Turnbull took care of the stone quarry where tomahawks were procured. He took care of it for all the tribe. Hence he was called "Ningulabul = stone tomahawk".

***Howitt 1904: 311–312, Mount William quarry (cf. Howitt nd: 37 in McBryde 1984: 272)***

733

I came across a Lachlan Aboriginal... a young man of intelligence... Asking what distance reed spears could be thrown he said about 100 yards. In fighting with spears when hurled if eyes were not kept on their points shields would fail in warding off these missiles. Indication of how stone tomahawks were obtained he afforded information which from later personal investigation, combined with reading reliable authorities proved he was well informed of the subject. My query from where elicited the reply 'from a hill down in the Melbourne country'.... he drew from his pocket a fragment of stone, ground to an edge, apparently a portion of an axe. He observed 'When I get back I'll tell the old men that I have found one of their chisels'. I learnt from him that our Aboriginals went inland carrying stone implements with other things. What they brought was exchanged with remoter tribes for what they produced .... From this Lachlan native it is clear that his people knew well where stone suitable for certain purposes was to be had in Victoria. Conjecturally his native place was 300 miles in a direct line from Melbourne and probably diorite with flints found their way hundreds of miles beyond where he was born. That part of Riverina, wherein the writer dwelt for five years was seen to be an absolutely stoneless region, not a pebble was to be met with, the only stone I saw was a disc like grindstone evidently brought from a long distance. It was flat. In using it care was evidenced for all grinding was done on the outer edges which were worn to a bevel on both sides.

***Howitt, nd,: 34B reporting Barak's opinion on Mount William quarry (cf. McBryde 1984: 272)***

734

[Kulin] When neighbouring tribes wished for some stone they sent a messenger to Billi-billeri saying that they would send goods in exchange for it, for instance, such as skin-rugs. When people arrived after such a message they encamped close to the quarry, and on one occasion

Berak heard Billi-billeri say to them, "I am glad to see you and will give you what you want, and satisfy you, but you must behave quietly and not hurt me or each other."

**Batey nd.: 129–130**

735

The Murray and Lower Goulburn natives used principally reed-spears, the reeds being found in large quantities in certain parts of the rivers mentioned. In former years, there was a regular system of barter going on – the tribes owning the country about what is known as Lancefield used to exchange large quantities of greenstone, for making tomahawks, for reed-spears. There is a large native quarry still to be seen on Mount William, near Lancefield, where this stone was quarried. It is extremely hard and tough, and well adapted for stone tomahawks. The same kind of stone was universally used, and I have no doubt the Mount William stone found its way from tribe to tribe for hundreds of miles.

**A.A.C. Le Souëf (Smyth 1878 Vol. 2: 298–299)**

736

It would seem, therefore, that the natives of Gippsland either preferred the hard pebbles metamorphic rock, which are to be found abundantly in the beds of their streams, or had little commerce with the Western tribes, amongst whom the greenstone axes were common. The natives of Gippsland were always regarded by their neighbours as 'wild blacks' and it is possible that the interchange of weapons and implements, which in early times was quite an important business between the natives of the south and those of the north, was not carried on with Gippsland people. Other facts well known to the early settlers support this view

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 359**

737

It is certain that the natives often bartered skins, spears, shields, and other things for stone. Hatchets made of diorite are possessed by tribes occupying the wide Tertiaries which stretch north of the River Murray, where for many miles no rock is to be seen.

**Smyth 1878 Vol. 1: 359**

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