

Local Plants Used by the Bunurong People

UNDERGROUND HARVEST

Roots and tubers were staple foods, eaten all year round, some raw, some cooked. Many are rich in starch. The women, helped by the children, harvested the roots and tubers with digging sticks – but they always left enough for the plants to regenerate and provide food again next year. Their digging also took ash and organic matter into the soil and kept it soft and friable. The women and children also collected small creatures for food such as grubs, lizards, snakes, frogs and shellfish, while the men fished and hunted for larger game.



Murnong or Yam Daisy *Microseris lanceolata*: These dandelion-like flowers, once very common, are now almost extinct on the Peninsula, destroyed by sheep, cattle and rabbits. The tubers were usually cooked in baskets and were very good to eat.



Common Reed *Phragmites australis*: The underground shoots tasted like bamboo shoots. The leaves were woven into baskets.

The tall flowering stems made spear shafts, or were cut into sections as beads for necklaces.



Chocolate Lily *Dichopogon strictus*, **Milkmaid** *Burchardia umbellata* & **Vanilla Lily** *Arthropodium milleflorum*: Tubers of all these plants were roasted and eaten.



Small-leaved Clematis *Clematis microphylla*: Roots were eaten raw (they taste peppery) or cooked and kneaded into a dough.



Nodding Greenhood *Pterostylis nutans*: The small, soft starchy tubers were usually cooked.



Bracken-fern *Pteridium esculentum*: Underground stems (rhizomes) were roasted in the fire or ashes, beaten to a paste with a stone, and made into a kind of bread. The juicy frond tips (poisonous to livestock) were rubbed on insect bites to relieve them.

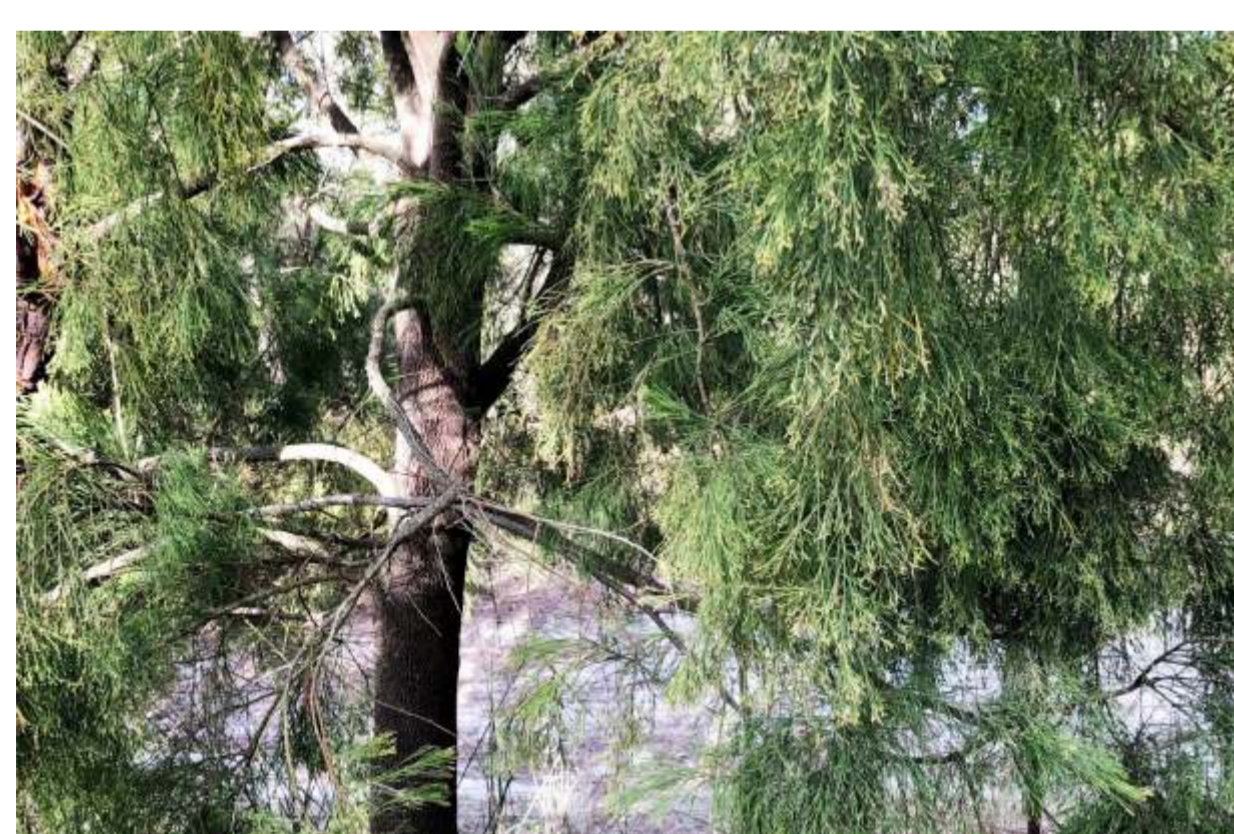
FRUITS & SHOOTS



Kangaroo Apple *Solanum laciniatum*: The soft fruits were eaten when orange and ripe. But unripe (green or yellow), they are poisonous.



Pigface *Carpobrotus* sp.: Young leaves were eaten raw or cooked, and the sweet red fruits were eaten raw, the pulp sucked out from the base.



Cherry Ballart *Exocarpos cupressiformis*: The juicy orange fruit stalk was eaten. The wood was used for spear-throwers.



Bower Spinach *Tetragonia implexicoma*: Young shoots and leaves were eaten as well as the sweet ripe fruit.



Coast Beard-heath *Leucopogon parviflorus*: The small white berries, with their single hard stone, taste sweet when ripe.

TREES HAD MANY USES



Black Wattle *Acacia mearnsii*: **Gum** from the trunk plus flower nectar, in water, made a sweet drink. Mixed with ashes or burnt shells, the gum made a 'super glue'. **Bark** provided fibre to make string. Infused in hot water, it was a remedy for indigestion.



Manna Gum *Eucalyptus pryoriana*: **Sweet treats**: Sugary white sap – 'manna' – forms on twigs from tiny holes bored by insects. Lerp – little sugar-filled shells on the leaves – are also formed by sap-sucking insects. Both these sugary delicacies were collected from the ground. **Wood** was used for shields, and hollowed-out burls for water vessels. **Leaves** were laid over a fire to smoke out a fever.



Coast Banksia *Banksia integrifolia*: **Flowers** were soaked in water, often with wattle gum, to make a sweet drink.



Drooping She-oak *Allocasuarina verticillata* & **Black She-oak** *Allocasuarina littoralis*: **Shoots and cones** were sometimes eaten when young. **Wood** is very hard and was used for boomerangs and other implements.



Blackwood *Acacia melanoxylon*: **Bark** was infused in hot water to bathe aching joints. **Wood**, hard and beautifully grained, was used for spear-throwers, shields and clubs.



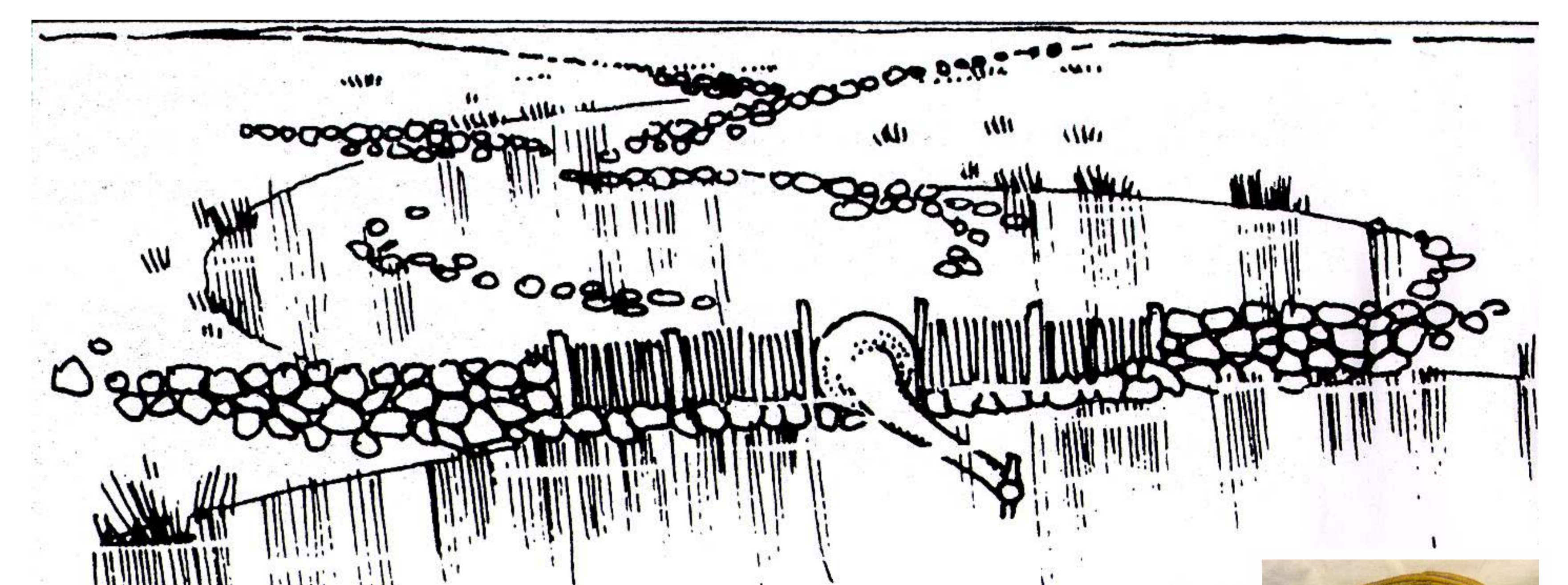
Paper-bark *Melaleuca* sp.: The long straight stems provided digging sticks, spears and clubs. Soft papery bark from larger trees was used to wrap babies.

STRING, BASKETS & NETS



Hand-crafted Eel Trap, made from natural fibre by artist Connie Hart, of the Gunditjmarra People.

Koorie Heritage Trust Collection.



Eel traps in a weir

Weirs of stone or wooden lattice were built across narrow sections of a creek, with eel traps set into them. The traps, woven from reeds or rushes, were tapered to trap the adult eels but let the juveniles through. Eels were abundant in the eastern swamps and creeks, and were easily caught, especially as they began their migration from these southern waterways to head north to the Coral Sea to spawn.



Woven Baskets traditionally had no handles



Acknowledgments & References
Victorian Koorie Plants, by Beth Gott & John Conran, 1991
Koorie Plants Koorie People, by Nelly Zola & Beth Gott, 1990
Koorie Heritage Trust
Bunurong Land Council



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