

Mallanbool Reserve — history

Kulin — the people of the Land

The site where you are standing is today called Mallanbool Reserve. The reserve occupies land that has been home to local Aboriginal families, the Kulin, for tens of thousands of years.

Over this time they moved through the area, following the rhythms of nature, hunting the native animals and gathering plants for medicine, food and fibre. The land sustained them in both body and spirit.

The Kulin had a familiarity and a deep, intricate connection with their country. They knew the songs of all their special places and had an equally profound knowledge of the seasonal cycles of nature. Their movements responded to these cycles as they travelled to collect the abundant native flora and fauna. Kulin management of these areas ensured that production was sustained. It was designed, through their respect for the land, to meet their community needs and was practised with an implicit acknowledgment of the wellbeing of future generations.

The arrival of ngamudji, the white settlers

The arrival and settlement of these lands by ngamudji, the white settlers, led to the disintegration of millennia upon millennia of traditional land use and connection in less than one decade.

Introduction of cattle and sheep meant plants used by the Kulin were lost, the diversity and migration patterns of native animals dimmed. In time even the very land was altered, as the once abundant wetlands were drained and special places erased by the grid of roads and houses.

European diseases previously unknown to the Kulin people were introduced and rapidly decimated this original civilisation. This same intervention left its silent mark through the Australian cultural landscape, touching the entire Aboriginal population of this continent at some level.

Added to this were the inevitable and often brutal conflicts over land. The European mindset of land ownership was inconceivable to Aboriginal society. Kulin were part of the land, and the land was part of the people — they were truly custodians of country.

'Honour the Land and its Spirit and it shall honour you and your descendents'

The traditional European system of fences and ploughing and utilising the land as a commodity smothered the old ways of ancestral connection, custodianship and knowledge. As indigenous foods became scarce the Kulin were forced to turn to a diet of introduced foods in order to survive. This led to a growing dependence upon European crops and practices at the expense of the traditional techniques and culture.

In a single generation the entire Kulin society and their complex traditional culture was shattered and forced into dramatic change. Yet even as they faced these immense upheavals Aboriginal people held on to a tenacious will to survive.



'We are here, we are part of this place'
The region now known as Melbourne is the ancestral lands of the Boonerwung and Woiwung (Wurundjeri) people of the Kulin nation.



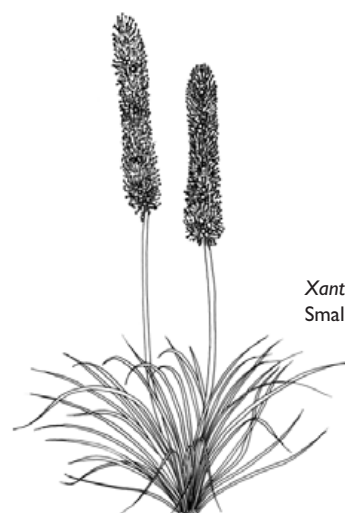
Leptospermum laevigatum
Coast Tea-Tree



Leptospermum laevigatum
Coast Tea-Tree

Coast Tea-Tree is likely to have grown in the vicinity of Mallanbool Reserve. The plant grows to a small tree, up to 8 metres, and develops a thick gnarled trunk base.

The local Kulin used branches for spears, clubs and tough digging sticks.



Xanthorrhoea minor ssp. lutea
Small Grass Tree

Xanthorrhoea minor ssp. lutea
Small Grass Tree
Dulemerrin : Woiwurrung
Baggup : Kulin

Small Grass Tree was once widespread in dry sclerophyll woodlands and Tea-Tree heath and was present in areas close to Mallanbool. The flower spikes grow to one metre and are common following fires. They are especially obvious when several spikes carry the strongly scented yellow flowers.

This was a plant of many uses to the Kulin. The grassy leaves have an edible base, the young roots are sweet and while the flowers provided nectar the flower stems were used as light-weight spears.

The larger species, *Xanthorrhoea australis* or Grass Tree, was much valued. A hard waterproof resin is produced at the base of its leaves. This can be melted by warming, and when cooled sets very firmly. It was invaluable for making tools — for example, gluing spear tips to spear shafts or stone heads to wooden handles.

Themeda triandra
Kangaroo Grass



Themeda triandra
Kangaroo Grass
Wuuloitch : Tjapwurung

This grass would have covered much of the land that is today known as Melbourne. Early colonial explorer Thomas Mitchell first described it as “resembling a field of ripe grain”. Aboriginal people in New South Wales collected and ground the ripe seeds before baking. Throughout Australia Aboriginal people wove many grass species into bags, nets, rope and twine.

Recent scientific analysis shows a surprising number of native grass seed to have similar nutritional value to wild rice varieties, however little scientific research of any type has been done, and many medical properties of indigenous plants have yet to be explored.



Poa sieberiana
Common Tussock Grass

Poa sieberiana
Common Tussock Grass

The name *Poa* is derived from the Greek word for ‘grass’. *Poas* are native to temperate regions around the world with 50 species found in Australia. The fibrous, often long, leaves of these grasses were utilised by Koories as a source of fibre and the Common Tussock Grass was no exception. Its fibrous leaves were used for baskets, mats, bags and nets.

This is another widely distributed grass found in many habitats around Melbourne, though its form varies as it passes from coastal to alpine habitats. For home gardeners this is a very drought tolerant grass, especially useful for growing in shade beneath eucalypts.

