

Traditional hunting

'Men's business'

Large game hunting was Kulin work — 'men's business'. Bagurrk (women) would capture small mammals as they found them, and when men were away they would use their skills to track down and capture barrimal (emu) and marram (kangaroo) .

A successful return of meat expressed the prowess of the man. Men's hunting, like the entire Kulin society, was founded upon the seasonal ebb and flow of the Land. The movement of camps mirrored the presence of game and locally fruiting plants. In coastal areas the camps or wilams might remain for some time. The bagurruk would gather shellfish while Kulin men hunted game and fished the coastal waters, rivers and streams.

Hunting practices

A hunting party would take their tools of trade with them. Stone-tipped djirra (spears) bound together with kangaroo sinew, garrik or spear throwers, wonguims (boomerang) and possibly a gudjerrun (club) or stone garrgin (hatchet) carried in a belt of hair or fibre would be standard hunting equipment. Because hunters followed consistent time-worn routes, equipment would be stored throughout the countryside, hidden in appropriate places until required on their next visit through 'country'.

Seasonal variation and a regime of mosaic burning determined which animals were to be hunted but marram, bimbi, walert and barrimal, (kangaroo, wallaby, possum and emu) were most common. Native animals were not only taken for meat but for many other resources, for example bone provided awls and needles, skins, clothes and bags, and sinew provided binding material.

Wiin or fire was an essential element for successful hunting. Fire had many purposes — the most obvious being to drive animals to the hunters lying in wait. But it was the after-effects of fire that were of far greater importance. A burn stimulated new plant growth, which in turn attracted animals to feed on these areas of reinvigorated vegetation, and kept the land open. In this way vast tracts of country were easily accessible for the Kulin while simultaneously encouraging the very animals they wished to hunt.

The best hunters were masters of animal mimicry, human cunning and patience. Hides and leaves were important devices. For example, to capture barrimal (emu), a camouflaged hunter would hide behind a shield of boughs making the movements of the emu. Naturally curious, the emu would move to investigate, and from this secluded position a noose at the end of a hunting stick would be quietly slipped over the barrimal's head. Lunch!

Animals and Kulin culture

But animals were not just a resource of meat and skin. They were a deeply connected part of Kulin identity, actually completing the Kulin as a people. This was expressed in the form of totems or moieties. The two principal moieties for the entire Kulin nation are Bundjil — the creator of all, personified as the Wedge-tail Eagle and Waa — the Black Raven or Crow. These two birds and their powerful murrup, or spirit, define the Kulin. Many other animals became moieties and guides, dictating who the Kulin could marry, whether they were permitted to enter certain places, and establishing what they could or could not eat and even how it could be cooked. Animals guided the Kulin throughout their entire life, and were woven into the very fabric of the society.

'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.



Eucalyptus pauciflora
Snow Gum



***Eucalyptus* ssp.**
Eucalypts

The approximately 700 species of eucalypt native to Australia are so characteristic of the country that they are a symbol of Australia itself. With their wide distribution and character, it is not surprising that the Kulin used them for many different purposes — from antiseptics and disinfectants through to canoe making.

By preparing an infusion of eucalyptus leaves, notably of peppermint gum, a treatment was obtained for diarrhoea. Many eucalyptus leaves provided an antiseptic for wounds, cuts and sores. Among these was the most widely distributed eucalypt, the River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*). By boiling its sap in water until dissolved, an effective treatment for sores and cuts was obtained. But its most important value was in the use of its bark for canoes, shelter, containers, shields and for ceremonial purposes.

The bark from other eucalypt species was used for canoes but none was as durable as that of the River Red Gum. In flood time, canoes made from Stringy Bark or Red Gum bark were used. Those with a curved bole were preferred. The bark sheets, from 10 to 16 metres long and from 2 to 4 metres wide, were cut with a stone axe. First the outline of the canoe was scored on the trunk, then the bark was levered off by use of an axe. The bark was held over a fire so that the sides curled in the drying process. Each end of the canoe was tied with bark fibre ropes, and wooden stretchers were placed inside the hull to prevent the sides from collapsing. Canoe scars can still be identified on many trees — significantly the wounds are generally symmetrical and are on older trees dating from before European settlement. The explorer Matthew Flinders (1774–1814) recorded an Aboriginal canoe about 1.8 metres long, filled at each end with clay mixed with grass, being used to gain access to French Island (Westernport) to collect bird eggs.

Smaller wounds in tree trunks indicate where bark was removed to create shields or to provide bowls and dishes. In southern Victoria these bowls were called tarnuks and often had handles of rope for water carrying. Large burls that developed in Red Gums were often removed to make vessels to hold water.

A sugary exudant produced by *Eucalyptus pryoriana*, was widely collected and eaten by Koories. The sweet exudant was caused by damage from insect boring and would fall from the tree to the ground like 'manna from heaven' hence its common name of 'Manna'.

Danthonia caespitosa
Wallaby Grass



Danthonia caespitosa
Wallaby Grass

Buath (grass) : Woiwurrung

Wallaby Grass is one of the most widespread of native grasses and a major component of native pastures and grasslands. It is an important food source for the mammals hunted by Aborigines and is quickly revived after fire by the first rains. Common Wallaby Grass grows to 40 centimetres with flowering stems up to 1.2 metres. The dense tussocks become smaller if regularly grazed. Flower heads are formed from October to January and become very bleached by the end of summer.

Epacris impressa
Common Heath



Epacris impressa
Common Heath

Genineemoongoon : Woiwurrung

An upright shrub of heathland environments, the Common Heath is a familiar native plant. White, pink and red flowers are massed on the straggly plants. In the Mallanbool Reserve area it would have grown in higher, well-drained zones.