

THE LIFE OF THE UPPER MURRAY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE



Nikki Bowdler, Amy Eggleton, Sienna Jeffress,
Jemma Lorimer and Imogen Radford

Tumbarumba High School



Creative Catchment Kids

Creative Catchment Kids is an initiative of Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre. It aims to improve engagement between our funding partners and school students by providing opportunities for positive and authentic ventures that encourage students to develop creative solutions to agriculture and natural resource management issues.

www.wirraminna.org/creative-catchment-kids/

Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre

The Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre is located in Burrumbuttock, north of Albury in southern NSW. Since 1995, the centre, which is adjacent to Burrumbuttock Public School, has provided opportunities for discovery and learning about the natural environment, the ecology of the local woodlands and the beauty of native plants.

www.wirraminna.org

Enviro-Stories

Enviro-Stories is an innovative literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by PeekKdesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area.

www.envirostories.com.au

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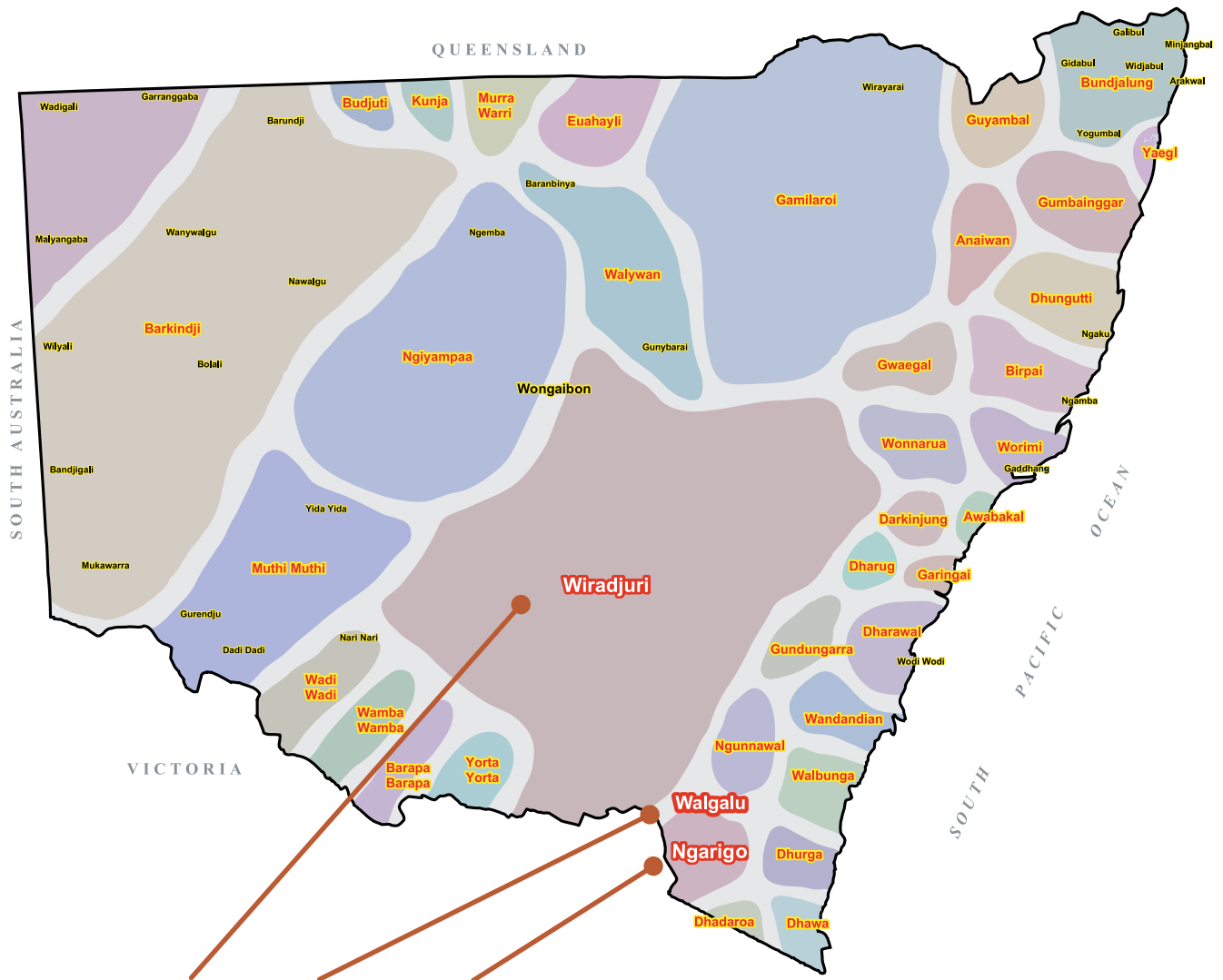
***We would like to acknowledge the traditional owners
of this land, the Walgalu and Ngarigo people.***

Our Culture

In 2016, students involved in the Creative Catchment Kids program researched and wrote stories about Aboriginal culture in their local communities. The program was generously funded by Murray Local Land Services, the Australian government's National Landcare Programme and Catchment Action NSW.

Creative Catchment Kids is part of Enviro-Stories, a PeekKdesigns education program.





The Wiradjuri, Walgalu (Walgaloo) and Ngarigo people resided in the Snowy Mountains area for thousands of years before white settlers migrated to Australia. They lived off the natural resources the land provided, and would travel north to feast on the bogong moths in the winter months. They would also venture towards the coast leaving middens (made of charcoal from fires, bones and carcasses from animals they hunted and tools made from stone, shell and bone) so that when they returned they would know where they had once settled. From this we can see their resourcefulness and connections they felt to the land they lived on.





A coolamon is a natural carrier used by Indigenous people. Coolamons are shallow dishes of wood or bark, most often used as a carrying vessel. Generally, they are a similar shape to a canoe. Men often used them to carry food and tools, whereas the women used it to carry their babies.

The site where a coolamon would be carved from, was found in the fork of the tree, or from a burl. Foot holes were often carved out of the tree to climb and reach the prospective coolamon.





To retrieve the wood for the coolamon, an indentation would be created surrounding the shape. Using a stone axe and a hammer stone, the indentation would then be cut to produce a coolamon. Following this, both a stone wedge and a stick wedge would pry the coolamon off of the tree. Using ones hands, the coolamon would peel away leaving an unusual and unique scar on the tree. Many of these scars are still visible around the country today.





A burl is like a wart on a tree, trees everywhere have them in the high country. Indigenous people could turn a burl into a baby minder or into a coolamon. They used stone tools to get it off the tree; it would've been hard to use stone tools. When settlers came through 1824, many people reported that the Indigenous people were using steel axes.

The steel axes and other tools were traded, often by the white settlers back in Sydney.



If they worked, the Indigenous people were paid in all sorts of things. However, they most likely didn't want to be paid with very expensive things so instead they got paid with tools such as steel axes. An anthropologist saw Indigenous people hollow out a tree burl in the 1830s. They made small fires within the middle to burn out a rough shape. After ridding the burl of ash they would then burn it again and again until it was completely hollowed. Afterwards, it would be smoothed out using an axe and grinding stone.



These large coolamons could be used as a water carrier or a baby minder. When the women left to gather food, she would put the baby in the minder so that the baby wouldn't go anywhere.

The Tumbarumba Historical Society Museum has a great example of a coolamon made from a large burl of a tree, it is called the *Mundaroo Coolamon*.

Fire is very important to our Indigenous people, as they did not have the luxury of using matches or a cigarette lighter; they had to use the resources that were available around them.

TOOLS NEEDED: A grass tree (*Xanthorrhoea*); a base piece which is cut from the grass tree and has little notches cut into the side for the ashes to fall from the point and form an ember; the 'drill' is also sourced from the grass tree, only smaller and thinner.





The most important part of making fire is the actual tinder, which is usually dry stringybark crushed into a bird nest like shape.

When you spin the 'drill' on the base, you start with your hands on the top of the drill then spin your way down the 'drill' to about a little more than half way down, then start again. Once there are enough embers, they are placed into the tinder. You then gently blow into the tinder until there is a flame.

Traditionally fire was one of the most important resources used - apart from water. Fire helps harden tools, cook food and provide warmth.



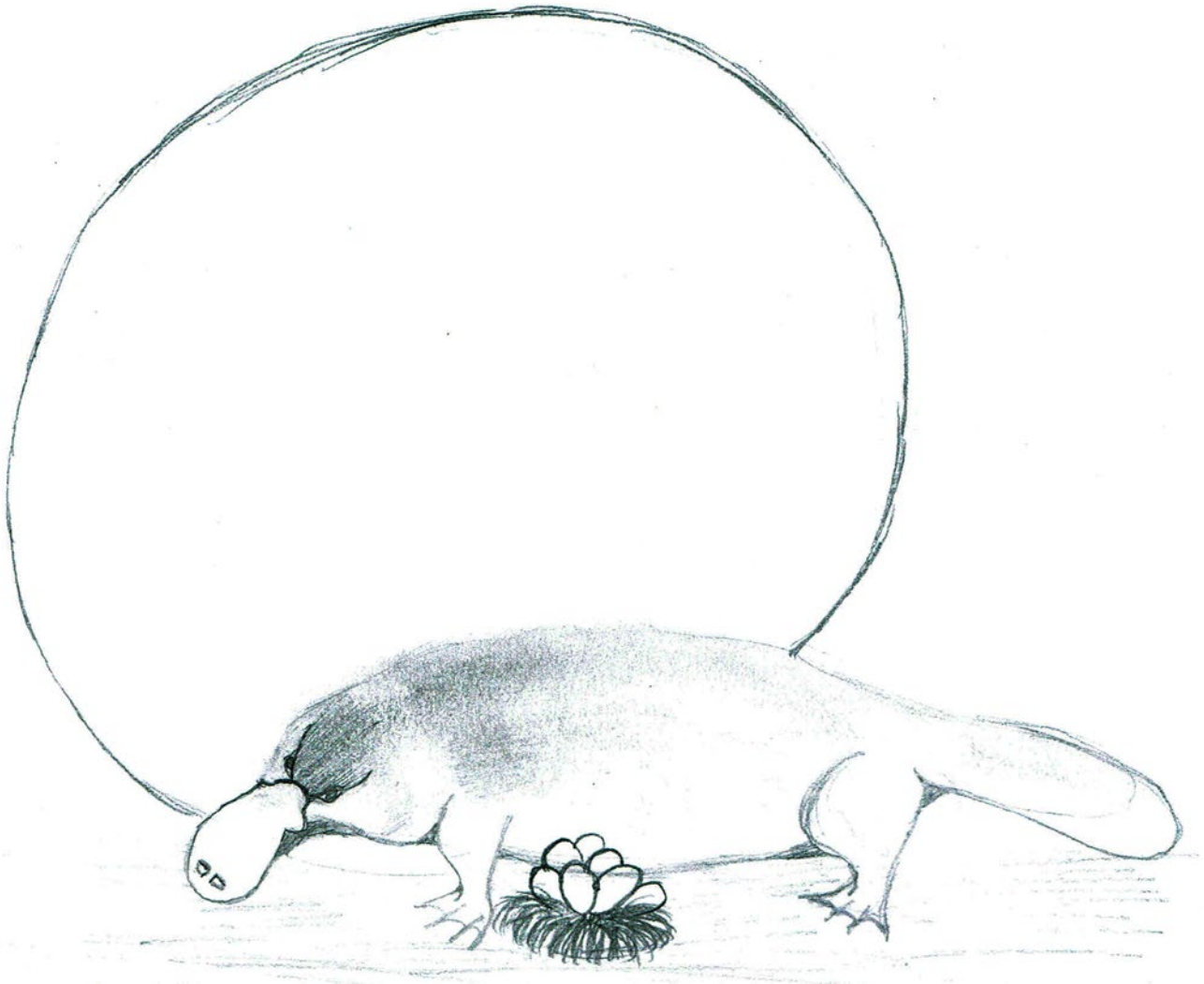
Indigenous people have many Dreaming stories, which outline and explain various happenings of their land and Earth. Many of these stories contain messages and lessons for children who were told the stories in their youth. One of these stories in particular describes how the rivers and creeks were formed many hundreds of years ago. This story is titled **“The Moon and the Platypus”**.

The Moon and the Platypus

Thousands of years ago, the animals of Australia discovered that all of their waterholes and creeks had suddenly dried up. Not knowing what or who, the animals gathered in a meeting to discuss what had happened. Up in the night sky, the moon was full and jeering at the animals below.

The emu volunteered to try to sprint across the plains to try and catch the moon, however he was unsuccessful. Next, the kangaroo tried and tried to jump really high to catch the moon, but again, he was unsuccessful.





All the birds then decided to fly up into the air to see if they could reach the laughing moon. They too couldn't grab him. After a long time trying to get to the moon, the animals once again came together in ceremony to further discuss what to do. At the meeting the platypus came forward stating that he knew what to do.

When the moon wasn't watching, the platypus began swimming along the dry creek bed up into the sky toward the sleeping moon. With his "digging stick", or spike on the platypus' foot, he wacked the moon and all of the water that the moon had drank fell back to earth, creating all of the different rivers, creeks and waterways.

"...without the platypus and his digging stick we wouldn't have the water we have today."

- SHANE HERRINGTON, NSW NPWS DISCOVERY RANGER

The bunyip is a water monster that the Indigenous people believed to haunt deep waterholes or lagoons, such as Heart Lagoon in the Upper Murray. Indigenous children were told these stories as a warning not to venture into dangerous waters.

Heart Lagoon is named after its strange heart shape, though the shape has become less distinct with time. A side of the water hole had to be dug up, so it no longer proved a hazard to livestock that lived on the property.





Indigenous people didn't write things like we do today, they used the environment to create ochre. Ochre is a painting material traditionally used for body paint, tools and weapons. Ochre is made from a type of clay from the ground, the different minerals in it change the overall colour of the paint. As well with the different minerals, mixing the clay with bird eggs, animal fats or sometimes blood or tree saps also varied the colour. Ochre is really good for your skin and can be used to help a stomach ache.


Aboriginal people use art to express their stories and to mark different types of country. There are different colours used in this area: white represents Wiradjuri people, yellow for the Wolgaloo people and red represents blood for battle and different ceremonies.

Traditionally, in ceremonies young girls would be painted with dots, while young boys would be painted with stripes.

Aboriginal people did not have tools like we have today, they used their surroundings to create tools out of rocks. Some tools include stone axes and spearheads. The rocks that are carved into tools are chosen specifically to fit into your hand, and to be flat depending on the tool that is being created. Stone tools are used for cutting out coolamons from trees.

Water rats and wombats have really strong teeth; their teeth are used for pressure flaking the rocks. This enables spearheads to be easily made. Aboriginal people would observe water rats feeding on the mussels, indicating their teeth had to be strong. From this, water rat teeth were then used to create spearheads.





To create a spearhead, you would need a flat rock then you bust off the edge with the teeth until the rock is pointy and sharp, flip the rock over and do so to the other side, afterwards it is attached to the top of a stick. Indigenous tools can be found at the Tumbarumba Historical Society Museum. It is unknown what area the rocks and tools may have come from, however, they were probably traded from the Khancoban area. It is very important that people follow rules and regulations of what to do when they find these tools.



Not only were trees useful to the Indigenous people but they were very symbolic, as trees played a very important role in the lives of Aboriginal people. A hole in the tree was often created with fire, hollowing out the centre, creating useful space for the Aboriginal people. The tree would act as a barrier and shelter from the rain, wind and sun and as a protection from various animals. As the women were out collecting food with their children, they would utilise the shelter whilst they were away, leaving their belongings protected inside the tree

A basic skill shared by the Indigenous people was how to weave. Taught by the women and used by both male and female, weaving was an important skill within their culture. To create string, or any other by-product of weaving, needle rush would be chosen from swampy areas that are wet all year round. Bags, baskets, decorations and nets would be created by the needle rush after being weaved into string.

The men would weave to make nets and various tools, while the women would create baskets, bags and various bodily decorations, such as bracelets. Large baskets would also be used to carry young babies and food. The baskets would also be used to strain foods, in either a creek or river. As well as different sizes of basket, there are various types of baskets too, one of which is the coil basket. This type of weaving procedure begins with a small coil at the bottom of the basket and then it would be weaved to the outside.





Ngarigo Elder, Mary Greenhalgh, shares her story of the indifference she, her siblings and her father faced growing up Indigenous in the Tumbarumba region. Though she had fairer skin and denied her Ngarigo heritage, Mary was tormented by the other children at school who knew she was Aboriginal. Her father grew up during the height of the Stolen Generation and was taken by his sister (Mary's auntie) to a house by the old Hume Highway, where he stayed for years until his father (Mary's grandfather) came and returned him to his country.



Back Creek, Maragle is a significant Aboriginal site that captures the history and culture of Indigenous people. There are signs of middens and fire pits, where meals were cooked and the ashes were dug out leaving a mark in the land. There is an overhead roof structure creating a hut, with dirt floors that were always kept very clean. These sites are dated to over thousands of years old; we can tell how old the fire pit is by looking at how deep it is. These were important gathering places for large family groups, with the huts holding up to forty people.

Food sources in the area include kangaroo, fish, possums and crops. The Aboriginal people would not stay in the area all year round as they would go further up the mountain to collect the bogong moths.

Greg Lyons, the landholder, inherited the land from his father who came to the area in 1948. The land has not been cultivated. He has found various Aboriginal artefacts throughout the area and would welcome an archaeologists to discover the period in which they are from. "It is very important that we conserve these significant Aboriginal sites, for future generations."



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2016 Year 8-10, Tumbarumba High School

Thank you to Shane and Talea from NPWS for sharing your information with us. Thank you Mary Greenhalgh for sharing your story with us.

Congratulations!

Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre and
the Creative Catchment Kids Program won the
National 2016 Yates Junior Landcare Team Award.



Local Land
Services
Murray



Australian Government

