Welcome to the third issue of Yarnupings for 2020

This issue focuses on the theme of food. There may have been an extra kilo or two sneak up on us during Covid time, so we thought we’d take a look at food from Aboriginal Australia. We write about the amazing Saltwater Women of Sydney, look at some tools used in the collection of food, ponder the way we view food and what to do if you’re out in the field and are recording food found in the archaeological record.

This issue provides many resources and references which you can use to expand your knowledge and learnings.

Please enjoy the third edition of Yarnupings for 2020.

The AHO Team— Dave, Karen, Phil, Susan, and Samaka.

In this issue…

- Naidoc Week ........................................... 2
- Picture of serenity ........................................ 3
- AHO in Action ............................................ 4
- Food ............................................................. 5
- From the Museum .......................................... 6
- Saltwater Women .......................................... 7
- Food—More than what you eat ....................... 9
- Photographing Middens ................................ 11
- Berry Island ................................................. 11
- Book Review .................................................. 12
- Crossword ..................................................... 13
- Quiz .............................................................. 14
- Bush Tucker Recipe ....................................... 15
Keep an eye out for event details.

On the web search:
https://www.naidoc.org.au/

This gorgeous photo was taken by our very own Samaka Isaacs on a field trip to monitor the sites at Lane Cove with Phil Hunt, the AHO’s Senior Archaeologist.

Scientific studies show that simply looking upon a lovely serene image of nature will help to lower stress. So, in these strange Covid times, where you may not feel like you are able to get outside as much as you may like, take a moment or two to breathe deeply and enjoy the image. It’s good for you.

Full image for you to enjoy on the next page.

Breathe and relax

We would love to share your amazing photos of the incredible place where we live. There are so many beautiful locations across the Northern Beaches, North Sydney, Lane Cove, Willoughby, Ku-ring-gai and Strathfield.

You never know, you just might inspire someone to take a walk in their local neighbourhood, go adventuring to a new area or to simply remember the great Aboriginal land upon which we live. Email your photos to: susan.whitby@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au.

Do you have a photo you would like to share?
The AHO in Action

Karen—Education

It was very exciting this year to mark our 20th Birthday. A party was planned, but COVID-19 cancelled that party and many of yours I am sure. Working from home I have been reflecting on these 20 years and have realised that an extraordinary amount of work has happened, that the support from Council has been constant, the feedback from schools and the community has been humbling and the staff at the AHO have been passionate about their work.

During the AHO office closure, the Education Officer began working from home and our work in schools and community had to stop by necessity. This did not stop but I went to work writing an Education Series and learning to navigate online presentations.

The Yarnuping Education Series is found on the AHO website. There are 11 Yarnupings in the series.

Phil—Archaeology & Samaka—Museum

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the AHO team has been very busy monitoring many sites, most recently around Lane Cove Council. Many sites around Sydney are in close proximity to people so it makes protecting them one of our main priorities. Phil Hunt our senior Archaeologist with over fifteen years of experience in the heritage work with the AHO, has updated site cards for most of the Lane Cove area. As you may know the Museum has been closed so Samaka Isaacs our Museum Officer has been accompanying Phil on his journeys. Here is something Samaka has said about the monitoring work. And the photos show it’s hard to hide from a 360° photo!

“I love working with Phil and exploring many sites around Sydney and learning all about my own people as well as the hidden landscapes within our busy city. There are many challenges about visiting the sites which help make no two days the same. I would strongly recommend anyone wanting to learn more about Indigenous people or has a strong sense of adventure to sign up to our volunteers program.”

Karen—Education

This is how many of you have seen me these past few months… via Zoom. We have had an influx of volunteers joining our Volunteer Site Monitoring Program and it has been a joy and delight getting to chat with each and every one of you. We’ve had lots of laughs and excited chats about the amazing sites across the Northern Beaches, Willoughby, North Sydney, Lane Cove, Ku-ring-gai and Strathfield.

Susan—Volunteers
Food

For most people, the plants and correct cooking methods used for bush foods are still a mystery. But Aboriginal people have been eating bush tucker for at least 60,000 years. They found ways of surviving that required detailed knowledge of their environment. Aboriginal people used plants for medicine, healing and tools. Their diets and food preparation techniques depended upon their region, season, and climate.

An average of five hours a day was spent gathering food, hunting for animals, digging for roots, and collecting vegetables, nuts, fruits and seeds. They also spent time making spears, fish hooks, and fish nets and preparing food or performing other tasks that would ensure food supply.

Men were responsible for hunting most of the animals. These included kangaroos, wallabies, possums, birds, various types of seafood, and reptiles—even snakes and lizards. They used spears, harpoons, nets, traps, clubs and boomerangs.

Women were responsible for gathering plants, shellfish, fish, insects, and sometimes smaller game like quolls and kangaroo rats. They used specific tools and equipment for their daily tasks like coolamons, digging sticks, and dilly bags.

A coolamon is a bit like a wooden basket and can be made in different sizes. It is used for gathering food such as nuts, grass, seeds and shells, but it can also function as a cradle for a baby.

The digging stick is a hard wooden pole sharpened at one end to assist in finding food by digging up roots, bugs, and small reptiles. It was also used to dig earth ovens and strip bark off trees.

The dilly bag is a traditional Australian Aboriginal bag, generally woven from the fibres of the plant species Pandanus.

Aboriginal people were also able to make medicine from plants to treat diarrhoea, coughs, ear infections, head and stomach aches, eye infections, fever, warts and ulcers. They were also able to treat wounds, burns, insects bites and snake poison.

The interest in products unique to their environment is growing. Chefs have begun exploring new tastes and combinations using local ingredients. Perhaps the best known native plant is the macadamia nut, which was first commercially cultivated in the 1880s and has become extremely popular around the world. Fruits are also commercially harvested.
From the Museum

Due to Covid, our Museum has been closed, which means you haven’t been able to come and look at our amazing collection. So we’ve decided to bring our collection to you!
This month we are showcasing some items that were used in the collection of food.

A boomerang is a curved shaped flying tool used for hunting. The Boomerangs come in many shapes & sizes depending on their geographic or tribal origins & intended function.

A coolamon is a bit like a wooden basket and can be made in different sizes. It is used for gathering food such as nuts, grass, seeds and shells, but it can also function as a cradle for a baby.

A woomera is a tool used for launching spears into the air. This one has no hafting. The waist is quite harrow and thick with an etching. The back is widely spaced and the handle is circular and narrow in diameter.

We look forward to reopening the Museum at Freshwater and being able to see you all again and having a yarn.
10,000 years ago, during the Holocene, Earth underwent a dramatic climate change. It became warmer and wetter, with a rise in sea levels that changed the landscape of the Sydney region. North and South Head were joined and a small river ran west. With increasing sea levels, the heads eroded and the river became deeper and wider, resulting in the magnificent marine landscape of Sydney Harbour about 6,000 years ago. The culture of the people living in and around Sydney Harbour area evolved and changed with the rising sea levels. A culture of fishing and seafaring developed with both women and men becoming extremely proficient and skilled.

The fishing techniques and traditions of the Sydney people were documented by the members of the First Fleet. It was noted that women played an important role in fishing.

In 1788, John Hunter observed,

“The women are chiefly employed in the canoes, with lines and hooks; the lines appear to be manufactured from the bark of various trees which we found here, of a tough stringy nature, and which, after being beaten between 2 stones for some time, becomes very much like and the same colour as a quantity of oakum, made from old rope. This they spin and twist into two stands; in fact I never saw a line with more than two. Their hooks are commonly made from the inside, or mother of pearl, of different shells; the talons of birds, such as those of hawks, they sometimes make use of, but the former are considered as best.”

The hooks that the women were fishing with are known as a bara. A bara is a shell fish-hook most often made from turban shells. Pointed stone files were used to create the shape and then file down the edges to the recognisable form. In 1788, upon witnessing Barangaroo making a bara on the north shore, Watkin Tench remarked,
Saltwater Women continued...

“When we reached the opposite shore we found Abaroo and the other women fishing in a canoe, and Mrs Johnson and Barangaroo, sitting at the fire, the latter employed in manufacturing fish — hooks...Considering the quickness with which they are finished, the excellence of the work, if it be inspected, is admirable.”

William Bradley in 1788, also commented on the skill required to make the shell fish hooks.

“One of the women made a fishing hook while we were by her, rubbing the inside of what is commonly called the pearl oyster shell, by rubbing it down on the rocks until thin enough and then cut it circular with another, shape the hook with a sharp point rather than bent in and not bearded or barbed.”

Shell fish hooks found in the archaeological record will tend to be no older than 1,000 years old. This is a result of shell having a lower preservation rate than other archaeological materials. The small fish hooks are small and fragile, making them very rare.

Malgun was another custom of the fishing women of Sydney. Malgun is a finger-tip removal. John Turnbull wrote in 1800, that malgun was related to fishing.

“Whilst the female child is in its infancy, they deprive it of the two first joints of the little finger of the right hand; the operation being effected by obstructing the circulation by means of a tight ligature; the dismembered part is thrown into the sea, that the child may be hereafter fortunate in fishing.”

There are still a few sites across the northern part of Sydney that show evidence of malgun. Art adorned rock shelters sometimes contain a hand stencil with the smallest finger absent. Not a mishap in the stenciling process but a fabulous record of times past.

For more in the Yarnuping—Education series head to:
In thinking about what sustains us, what we need first is air to breathe. Water is next in order of importance. If we take care of those two, it won’t be long before the subsequent priority is firmly in our sights. Food.

Every organism on the planet needs to make an exchange in order to exist in an active state. In a way the world is like a giant stock exchange where beings are doing deals in order to break even and hopefully make a profit. Plants seek to convert nutrients in the soil, from the sun and even the air, while insects and animals try to convert the plants and each other into something they can use. We humans are no different, although the amount of energy we expend to finesse some of this produce is extraordinary.

Given how important food is, it is no surprise that it has such a central place in our lives and cultures. Our daily activities are underpinned by an exchange that will facilitate our getting the food that we need and desire. The objects in our lives that help us earn a living are allowing us to get our daily bread.

Dining table, breakfast bar, café, cutlery, napkin, appetif, supper, cuppa, desert, freezer, can opener, drink holder, saucepan, take away – so many things physically, linguistically and culturally to facilitate the exchange of energy to allow us to keep going. And then we can specialise into specific implements and tools and techniques, even trade agreements, to define and explain how to get something from one place to where the processing is complete and the mouth is ready for the final conscious act of exchange. The body does the rest.

Our society has so many laws, regulations, policies and procedures guiding the production and provision of food. The clearing of land by farmers, how harvested produce is shipped (even if not by a ship), how it is stored, processed, labelled and sold. All this to make our personal energy exchanges as safe and transparent as possible.

We don’t know much about the rules that existed for the Sydney clans in the production, collection, preparation, sharing and consumption of food, but from examples elsewhere in Australia and insights from the historical records, we can assume they were equally comprehensive. From a landscape perspective people were managing the land with fire, providing a variety of vegetation communities that could supply the conditions for the quantity and seasonality of produce required. Individuals would have custodial responsibility for specific areas and years of training and as contemporary fire managers in other parts of Australia attest, this was strictly controlled:

Kuku-Yalanji people, we can’t go ahead and just light a fire, we got to wait for the right people ... I’m a boss for my country, if you’re coming into country and lighting a fire, I’ll kill you, no muck around, spear, I’ll kill you (Bobby Yerry)1

Strict laws direct where people sit at camp, who they talk to, how food is cooked and how it is shared. This is guided by spiritual aspects. What were the rules for the Sydney clans and how relevant are they today?

One example we can look at is malgun. (see Saltwater Women). We can only guess at the levels of rules and rituals involved from cradle to grave for these women.

Today it is easy to eat food with little thought about just how complex the food web is. We can take for granted the incredible journeys behind the arrival of morsels to our tongue. Are we the poorer for it? In the pursuit of fine dining and exotic flavours, have we somehow lost the actual wonder and the respect for food itself? In an era of personal freedoms and tastes, do we lose sight of our community responsibilities? Most of us follow ‘the rules’ but do we understand the purpose of them? In Kakadu an Aboriginal custodian, Mick Alderson, la-

References:
1. Bobby Yerry, from Robinson, Cathy et al; 2016, Protocols for Indigenous fire management partnerships, CSIRO, Brisbane
Food... continued

mented the differences in cultures and the difficulties of restricting fishing in a National Park where traditional owners still live and where visitors are allowed to fish:

*Bininj catch fish and go home and cook them. For some people that is their totem they respect these animals. If you catch them they need to be eaten, fish, turtle or crocodile. *Bininj* know that in October the fish are weak and bony, they don’t hunt them. *Bininj* fish for a feed, for Balanda [non-Aboriginal people] it is a sport.*

If we compare ourselves to the fisher women of the past, what would we do to ensure a successful catch? What would we be prepared to give up? A child who has part of her finger removed as a baby has no say in it, but having grown up she feels it important enough to do the same to her children. It is the adults who make the decisions that affect the next generations. History tells us, older people tell us, that to survive you have to give some things up. As Mick Alderson says:

*We look at the whole food chain, the whole experience. Don’t waste any part. Look after country and it will look after you. Don’t kill everything. Get enough for the table.*

But what happens if some members of our family, our community, or our leaders can’t or don’t want to see the benefits of rules and restrictions for the common good? Especially new restrictions for a new challenge. This, too, is nothing new. All communities face these issues.

*You can’t stop it. People don’t like it when you stop them doing something they have been doing a long time [fishing in certain places]. Some *Bininj* are the same.*

Over 10,000 years ago the climate radically changed. In Sydney it began a process that transformed a rugged hinterland region into the coast and estuary paradise that the saltwater women would thrive in. But it took a long time. We are in another era of dramatic change where new strategies are required. Are we up to the challenge? If we take the 2018 failed attempt to create new marine reserves around Sydney as an example, then we are in trouble. Even though most fishers support reserves, which protect breeding grounds and improve coastal marine habitat and fishing stocks, noisy minorities can still sway the law makers.

This is an article about food, but when we look to the example of the saltwater women of Sydney, we can see that there is more to the story than meets the eye.
Photographing Middens

Many of the sites monitored by our volunteers are middens or contain midden material. As we know, middens contain a wealth of information and are exciting to monitor. However, they can sometimes be tricky to photograph. Quite often they are long, they can be too dark in a shelter or too bright along a coast edge. Below are some tips to photographing a midden.

1. Take a photo of the top and the base of the midden. If you can’t fit the whole midden in your photo, take a couple of photos, just overlap the image by 50%.

2. Take a photo of the whole midden. Even if the midden is large, take a photo of the whole midden. You may need to take multiple photos to capture it all and that’s ok. Just remember to overlap the images by 50%.

3. Pop a scale in the photo. It doesn’t have to be a professional photo scale, any scale will do. However, a Keson mini rod is pretty affordable at around $40 and can easily fit in a back pack— (6.5cm x 7.0cm). They extend to 2m and are 2.5cm wide.

4. Take a photo looking straight at the midden, or perpendicular to the midden. If you need to take a number of photos to capture the whole midden, that’s ok. This will really help show the stratigraphy, or the different layers of dirt, which can also provide a lot of information.

5. Take a ‘Feature’ photo. This is close up of the midden. This helps to identify shell species with the midden, identify bones that may be in the midden, or perhaps identify any insect activity that may be causing disturbance to the midden.

6. Take a ‘Context’ photo. This is simply a photo of where you are. This could help you locate the site next time, or it could help to help you remember where you took your photos from. This will help to see if there is any change to the conditions around the site.

7. And finally, take time to appreciate what you are looking at. Middens in the Sydney area can be up to 3,000 years old. That’s pretty amazing, if you ask us!

Reference: University of Maine.

Berry Island

If you’re not a Volunteer Site Monitor or don’t have midden material at the site you monitor, there are plenty of middens around Sydney that you can visit.

One such place is Berry Island, Wollstonecraft.

Take a self-guided walk around Berry Island on the Gadyan Track, which has interpretive signage detailing the rich Aboriginal History and heritage of the island.

‘Gadyan’ is the Aboriginal name for the Sydney cockle, a Shellfish common in the middens on the island. The signage takes you to rock engravings and describes the lifestyle of the Cammeraygal people.

The Aboriginal history of the island is indicated by the numerous shell middens, axe grinding grooves and the large engraving found here.

Bush regeneration has been carried out on the island since 1980

The walk around headland is less than a 1km but there plenty to see so leave 20 – 40 minutes. There are several walking tracks in the vicinity. Caution should be taken on unpaved foreshore tracks.

Reference: University of Maine.
The Sydney Wars – Conflict in the early Colony 1788-1817 by Stephen Gapps (Book Review)

(Published 2018 by NewSouth Books)

One of the most interesting recent books relating to Indigenous history in Sydney is *The Sydney Wars* written by Stephen Gapps. The book focuses on the active resistance of Aboriginal people to the colonial occupation of the Sydney region in the years 1788-1817.

The book builds on the pioneering work of Queensland historian Professor Henry Reynolds who documented the frontier wars and history of massacres of Aboriginal people that occurred, for over 150 years, as the colonists spread out and occupied aboriginal lands. This work exposes what is a brutal truth that has been ignored in Australian history until recent decades.

Stephen Gapps, as a military historian, expands on the work of Reynolds by looking at the military tactics and weapons used by both sides, with a particular focus on the resistance wars in Western Sydney led by the great Aboriginal warrior and leader Pemulwuy. He clearly proves that Aboriginal people were not passive victims of colonialism. Quite the opposite. They actively fought to defend their land, waters, food resources and families.

What is particularly interesting, and has not previously been explored, is the way aboriginal warriors adapted their tactics and weapons very quickly to combat the new weapons, particularly muskets, of the British armed forces. In fact, with this adaption the Aboriginal warriors were able to fight back and reclaim large areas of land in Western Sydney in the early 1800s.

Pemulwuy was also able to build new allegiances and coalition forces across several tribes to amass the numbers required to combat the enemy. This enabled Aboriginal warriors to fight at the scale required to combat the British and do so successfully.

There were brutalities on both sides and Gapps does not shy away from the truth in this area. He acknowledges the strong, Aboriginal warrior culture and highly militarized British occupiers. With these forces arrayed against each other casualties were certain and civilians often impacted on both sides.

The book is beautifully written and well researched. This is not surprising as Stephen Gapps is an historian who has won a number of awards and fellowships. It makes the book even more compelling as the evidence is strong and the truth that emerges turns much traditional understanding of colonial conflict on its head.

The Sydney Wars is a must read for people from all cultures who live in the Sydney region or who are interested in its history. It exposes many colonial myths and highlights the strength, bravery and ingenuity of Pemulwuy, his warriors and their families. A legacy that was to be carried on throughout Australia by great warriors like Windradyne in Western NSW, Jandamarra in Western Australia and countless unnamed warriors throughout this land who fought and died defending their land and their people.

Paul Griffiths
Crossword

Across

6. This island was formerly known as Pinchgut Island ________ ________
8. In 2013 this place was recognised as Australia’ 16th landscape ________ ________
10. The AHO Volunteer inductions have taken place here
12. This island was formerly known as Pinchgut Island ________ ________
13 NAIDOC Week is in which month
14. This fish is unique to Sydney Harbour
15. In 2013 this place was recognised as Australia’ 16th landscape ________ ________
16 The number of islands in Sydney Harbour

Down

1. An accumulation of shells produced by Aboriginal people
2. Australia’s oldest tool as made from this type of rock
3. This plant was commonly used to make dilly bags
4. Basalt is this type of rock
5. A common shell found in midden
6. The average number of hours per day once spent collecting food
7. The period after the ice age
8. The AHO education newsletter
**Quiz**

1. Which gorge was Australia’s oldest stone axe found? ________________________________

2. In 2020, which month will NAIDOC week be held? ________________________________

3. How many different types of boomerangs are there? ________________________________

4. Can you name the different types of boomerangs? ________________________________

5. What is an alternative name for the Screw Pine? ________________________________

6. How many different species of the Screw Pine are there? ________________________________

7. What type of bark was used to make canoes? ________________________________

8. Why were these types of trees chosen? ________________________________

9. Fish hooks were made from which type of shell? ________________________________

10. What is malgun? ________________________________

11. What were fishing lines made from? ________________________________

---

**Volunteer Site Monitor**

Help protect the Aboriginal sites across the Lane Cove, Ku-ring-gai, Northern Beaches, North Sydney, Strathfield and Willoughby regions by joining our Volunteer Site Monitor Program.

Inductions can take place in the comfort of your own home via Zoom.

For more information contact Volunteer Co-ordinator, Susan Whitby.

Susan.Whitby@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au

**Issue #2 Crossword Answers**

*Across*


*Down*

Chargrilled kangaroo fillet with Illawarra plum sauce - O'Reilly's Guest House

Serves 2

Ingredients

- 180 g kangaroo fillet
- 100ml sugar bag honey
- 100ml beer
- 1 bunch warrigal greens
- 200g Illawarra plums
- 100g sugar
- 200ml water
- 1 red chilli, sliced
- 1 tsp crushed garlic
- 1/2 onion, diced
- 1 tsp brown sugar
- 3 tbs macadamia nut oil
- Juice 1/2 lime
- Salt and pepper
- Pinch of wattle seed powder, for garnish (optional)

Method

- Slice kangaroo fillet into thin slices, and place into a bowl. Add honey and beer. Cover and refrigerate for 2 hours or overnight. In a small saucepan, add plums, sugar and water. Bring to the boil and allow to simmer for 20 minutes. Pour into a blender and puree.

- For the sauce, heat macadamia oil in a pan, add diced onion, garlic and chilli.

- Saute until transparent, add brown sugar and plum puree and allow mixture to reduce.

- Place fillet onto a very hot char grill or griddle pan, and brush with macadamia nut oil. Cook for 1 minute on each side, and season with salt and pepper. Do not over cook the kangaroo, as the meat will toughen.

- To serve, toss greens in a bowl with a sprinkle of cracked pepper, macadamia nut oil and lime juice. Centre on a serving plate, and place kangaroo over the greens. Drizzle sauce over kangaroo. Dust the rim of the plate with wattle seed powder.