

## 1. Aboriginal Society



The Denmark Shire lies in the Bibbulmun cultural area which is part of the wider Noongar country region, although the area just west of the Hay River is typically an area of overlap where, prior to European settlement, both Bibbulmun and Minang groups met regularly for ceremonial and economic purposes. As such, Noongar Elders now consider it important to consult representatives from both groups on cultural heritage and natural resource management activities in Denmark town and the eastern part of the Denmark Shire.

Bibbulmun and Minang country is deep in the Noongar cultural bloc. The Noongar people are the traditional people of the southwest region of Australia with their own distinctive language and cultural practices, as distinct from their semi-desert dwelling neighbours. In their evidence to the Federal Court hearings (Federal Court of Australia 2006:38), the Noongar claimants noted that the southwest region:

*... was occupied and used by Aboriginal people who spoke dialects of a common language and who acknowledged and observed a common body of laws and customs. Those Aboriginal people recognized local and regional names within the broader society but shared a commonality of belief, language, custom and material culture, which distinguished them from neighbouring Aboriginal groups and societies. Responsibility for and control, particular areas of land and waters, were exercised by sub-groups or families, but the laws and customs under which the sub-groups possessed those rights and interests were the laws and customs of the broader society.*

The Bibbulmun and Minang people represent regional sub-groups of the broader Noongar cultural bloc. The Bibbulmun people speak for the country stretching from Denmark, north-east toward Nannup and inland to include the Manjimup area. The Minang are from the King George Sound area that roughly encompasses the City of Albany municipal boundaries. As such, Denmark was an area of cultural interaction between the Bibbulmun and Minang people.

These cultural affiliations to Denmark are very important. The sense of belonging to ancestral country is very personal and deeply rooted in traditional culture, reinforced by generations of spiritual and physical connection to the area. Traditional rights of access and use were, in this sense, embedded in a socio-cultural system in which both 'rights' and 'obligations' were inherited and transferred variously through ceremony, genealogical succession and affiliation to particular stretches of country over long periods of time.

The Denmark River and Wilson Inlet are the focal points of a large catchment area and home to complex and varied ecosystems. Wilson Inlet and its tributaries formed a focal point for Noongar people who managed and utilised the Inlet and its abundant natural resources during the later Holocene period (anytime from around 6000 years ago after the

Inlet formed), though they would have inhabited the area long before this time. Extensive archaeological material and sites at multiple locations in and around the Wilson Inlet foreshore and throughout the catchment attest to its economic and cultural significance prior to European settlement as a significant eco-cultural landscape. Fish traps, lizard traps, gnamma holes (man-made granite waterholes), burials, stone artefacts, tool making sites and ceremonial materials all exist at different locations around Wilson Inlet and its tributaries today as physical manifestations of the ways in which Noongar hunter gatherers occupied the area. None of the archaeological features exist in isolation from one another or from the ecosystems and natural features of which they are a part. The features are all important components of a cultural landscape now, just as they were components in a cultural system in the past. Noongar cultural systems in the Denmark region in the past were interwoven with the landscape and its ecosystems, just as today the cultural landscape is an inherent part of the natural landscape.

In other words, if we are to recognise and value the Noongar cultural sites associated with the Denmark region we need to understand how each and every feature is part of an extended eco-cultural landscape. The term “eco-cultural landscape” refers to the interaction of natural and cultural features within the landscape. In isolation, archaeological remains represent a static record of past activities. In their full natural context however, cultural features exist as part of a living, changing landscape and living culture. That is, information on past land-use activities and cultural materials (archaeological remains) is interacting with changing natural processes and land-use practices to form a living cultural landscape. Archaeological evidence of past cultural systems is static but the interaction of modern Noongar people with this cultural landscape is dynamic and forms the basis of a living cultural landscape.

Like all hunter-gatherer societies, Noongar people had a limited material culture compared to Europeans but were affluent in many other ways, adapting to their environment and using resources that were in abundance and available to everyone. In the context of a semi-nomadic lifestyle, in which people moved from place to place according to the seasons, having too many material possessions to carry was a burden. Above all, traditional hunter-gatherers across Australia valued food and resource sharing among kin over and above storage, accumulation and production for future exchange.

Typically, traditional artefacts and stone tools were made and discarded depending on the availability of resources, the value of specific items, and the extent to which they were used on a regular basis in the food quest. Men and women produced and carried small tools and wooden artefacts, as well as adornments and sacred material used in the conduct of ritual and ceremonies. Men carried spears, spear throwers, boomerangs, knives, axes and throwing/hitting sticks. Women, being responsible for babies and small children, carried materials essential for child rearing, gathering and digging bush foods.

Traditional clothing in the cooler months of the year consisted of kangaroo skin cloaks (bukas) made by sewing three or more skins together, using a bone needle made from the hind leg of the kangaroo





as an awl and sinew or bullrush strands as the thread (Berndt 1979). The buka was worn with the fur inwards for warmth and protection from rain in the cooler wet months and reversed during the hotter dry season. It was also used as a blanket at night. Both men and women occasionally used ochre (wilgie) and animal fat as a sunscreen and to ward off insects. The men often wore hair string belts (to carry small tools while walking) and headbands made from possum fur and bird feathers for decorative purposes (Tilbrook 1983).

Due to the perishable nature of plant remains, wooden artefacts, bark, cloaks, adornments and organic materials used to sew and weave food carrying baskets have mostly decomposed or been taken by collectors. It is unusual to find anything other than bone and stone artefacts and stone structures during archaeological investigations. More recent activity may also be evidenced by scarred trees, remnants of temporary shelters (i.e. kwornt or mia mias) and fire hearths, as well as glass, metal and ceramic material that Noongar people have utilised as a raw material since European settlement of the South West. The scarred or modified trees demonstrate the traditional practice of carving or stripping large sheets of bark or wood from the trunk of trees to manufacture shields, carrying dishes or coverings for the kwornt. The shelters were built on a regular basis at camp sites, either by gathering or pulling branches together to erect a new shelter or by adding new brush or bark to old shelters left from previous visits to the area. Examples of these structures are commonly constructed today by Noongar tour guides for public demonstration and interpretation purposes.

Stone tools form the most common evidence of past Aboriginal occupation. In most cases this consists primarily of waste material (e.g. debitage like flakes, broken flakes, and chips and cores) that were left behind during the process of tool making. These generally form at least 90% of all artefacts located in most archaeological sites. The remainder of stone material located on sites typically consists of utilized flakes and a variety of formal tool types, including scrapers, adzes and occasionally backed blades. These formal tool types are sometimes found as isolated artefacts, where they have been lost or discarded because they are broken or worn out. Such formal tool types may originally have been attached to wooden implements that have subsequently disintegrated but occasionally still show evidence of the Xanthorrhoea based gum with which they were hafted.

More obvious are grind stones that as well as being used for grinding seed (and in some places, ochre) often show multipurpose usage with evidence of secondary use as hammer and/or anvil stones. Such grinding material is often the most easily recognisable of Aboriginal stone tools and therefore been removed from sites in the past by landowners and travellers. It is not uncommon for broken fragments of such grindstones to be found amongst other artefact material.

Artefact assemblages in the South West of Western Australia are often dominated by quartz although various cherts and silcretes are also found at some sites. Grinding material was generally made from dolerite. In some cases stone for artefact making can be found near or at the sites that they were located whereas others are likely to have been brought in from other locations or surrounding areas. Bremer Bay is known as a chert source, and there are increasing numbers of chert quarry sites being located in inland areas off the coast.

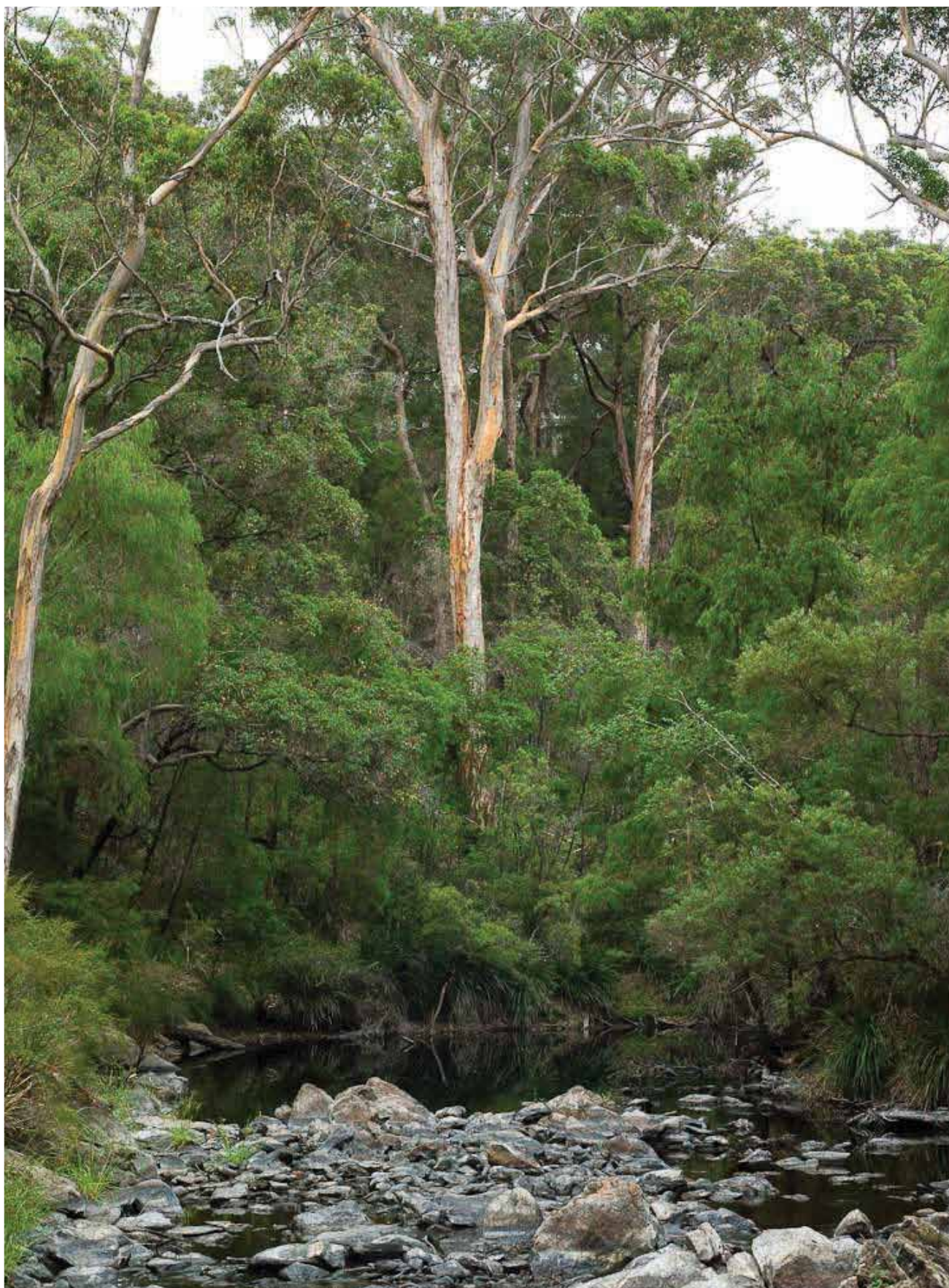
A significant feature of traditional life in the Denmark area was the adoption of patch or mosaic “fire stick” burning of grass lands and bush as part of traditional land management regimes. This was also used partly as a way of opening up paths and hunting areas (or eco-tones) adjacent to wooded areas where yonger (kangaroo) and the kwoor (brush wallaby) would graze on new grass shoots after rains and a low intensity burn.

Elders still maintain knowledge of the traditional practice of making marron nets from reeds and sedges, an important estuarine and river system adaptation in this area. Elders and Traditional Owners also retain knowledge of the operation of fish traps in the inlets and rivers. Fish traps are a prevalent feature of the Denmark heritage landscape, particularly in Wilson Inlet.

The fish traps are a good example of the ways that Noongar cultural heritage can provide valuable information for current and future land management. Through an understanding of the operation of fish traps and their reliance on tidal fluctuations, Traditional Owners can confirm that the Wilson Inlet sandbar was open during traditional times and that in years when it did not open naturally, Noongar people would have opened it by hand. This information has important implications for current management of the annual opening of the Wilson Inlet sandbar, a subject of some community debate.

Noongar cultural heritage is embedded within the landscape. This means that many natural features of the Denmark area hold important heritage values. Wilson Inlet, Nornalup Inlet, Frankland River, Styx River, Denmark River, Hay River and Blue Lake are all highly significant heritage features and are listed as such in the inventory. Conserving Noongar cultural heritage means conserving natural heritage as the two are completely intertwined. As such, factors impacting upon natural values such as development, dieback, invasive species, visitor impacts and erosion are also impacting upon Noongar cultural heritage values.

Traditional Owners and site custodians care deeply for the cultural heritage and natural heritage of the Denmark region. The aspirations of the Noongar community are to conserve the natural beauty, ecology and culture of the Denmark region as far as possible. The Noongar community is keen to be involved wherever possible with the conservation and promotion of their rich cultural heritage in the Shire of Denmark.



Photograph 1.– View of Frankland River from Sappers Bridge

## 2. European Arrival

One of the first European explorers of the Denmark district described a place of fine soil, towering timber and plentiful water. Giving such a description, Dr Thomas Braidwood Wilson showed he had great expectations for future settlers. Dr Wilson was one of the first European men to penetrate the new territory outside the King George Sound settlement that had been set up in 1826. In 1829, with the backing of Lieutenant George Sleeman, Commandant of King George Sound, Wilson took a party of men to explore the interior. Guided by the Aboriginal Mokare, the party came across and named many geographical features of the Denmark district. Such names as the Denmark and Hay Rivers, Mount Lindesay and Mount Shadforth still remain to this day. Wilson named the Denmark River after a medical friend. Alexander Denmark had played an influential role in Wilson's career.

Despite the positive nature of Wilson's reports about Denmark, subsequent exploration by Captains Collett Barker and Thomas Bannister in the early 1830s raised some unfavourable aspects of the district. Captain Bannister, in particular, thought that problems would arise for settlers owing to the thickly timbered nature of the land.

It is little wonder then that the majority of the early visitors to this region limited their visits to the coast. The beaches of the area, later to be Denmark, were frequented by whalers and sealers. Assistant Surveyor-General Alfred Hillman named William Bay in his 1823 exploration. After a friend WM Edward Parry. Visitors to the shores of Denmark would have found evidence of Aboriginal habitation in the area. Fish traps were built in the form of low stone walls in Wilson Inlet. The Aborigines left reminders such as ochre and dolerite quarries. Remains of stone tool making and cooking fires in caves have been found. Aboriginal names have remained in the district. Some examples are Mehniup, Owingup, Kordabup and Nullaki.

The structure of Aboriginal society was seriously threatened with the arrival of the Europeans. The traditional owners faced enormous pressure and disruption to their way of life. Despite initial friendly relations, contact with the new settlers was disastrous for the Aboriginal population. Many deaths resulted from conflict as well as from exposure to European diseases such as measles, influenza and smallpox. There are various rumours about a taboo placed on the Denmark region by Aboriginal people. This may account for the disappearance of the Aboriginal people from the Denmark district. However, this hypothesis has never been proven. An equally tragic and possibly related theory was that the many deaths leading from European-introduced diseases decimated their population and led to Aboriginal people to move to other locations.

Nevertheless, there are many individual examples in the journals and



Photograph 2.— A Baldwin Locomotive transporting a load of timber to Albany across the Denmark River 1900s.



Photograph 3.— Federal Boarding House in Denmark 1900s.



Photograph 4.— Butcher Shop and first store in Denmark 1900.

diaries of early European explorers of favourable encounters with the Bibbulmun and Menang people, across the whole breadth of what is now the Shire of Denmark. It was quickly obvious that the people encountered across the area were from different tribes, as their languages were not readily understood by Europeans who already had a smattering of vocabulary from the inhabitants of King George's Sound. William Nairne Clark, Thomas Bannister, William Preston and Collett Barker all wrote of examples of co-operation and friendly (albeit slightly suspicious) interaction between the two nations in their travels.

In later times, when European settlement and land clearance became prevalent, the Noongar attitude towards the settlers hardened, but, by this stage, their numbers had dwindled through disease and migration, so there was little active resistance to these activities. By the beginning of the 20th century, government policies such as the Aborigines Act (1905), had begun to reduce any existing rights of the Noongar people and this was followed by the forced removal of children and the establishment of missions. All these combined to reduce the Noongar population of the Shire of Denmark to a fraction of its former size.



Photograph 5.— Bert Saw, an early Bow Bridge Settler 1960s.

### 3. The Period 1829 - 1905 Settlement

European use of the land first began in the 1840s. Pioneer graziers such as the Hassell, Moir and Muir families, who farmed in the hinterland as far away as Kendenup and Cranbrook, began to use a small part of Denmark's coastal areas for grazing cattle. They were able to walk their cattle through the uncleared bush areas via informal cattle trails, to take advantage of the pasture on coastal heaths near the Irwin Inlet, and further west towards Walpole.

The cattle were walked south before the hot summer months and then returned to their normal pastures in autumn. The trails, while informal, were marked by blazed trees, stone ovens and river fords. The land, however, was not held by freehold title, but was either considered common land or leased from the government.

The first formal farm in the area was on land which bordered Wilson Inlet on the eastern side, leading towards the Nullaki Peninsula. This was Marbelup Farm, one of the oldest in Western Australia, which was started in the 1840s by Henry Tulley and later bought by David Young, who gave his family's name to the district of Youngs Siding. This farm



Photograph 6.— Clearing the land 1920s.



Photograph 7.— Clearing the land 1920s.



## Current Uses

The untouched nature, wildlife and scenic quality of the inlets provide a wealth of opportunities for nature-based tourism, canoeing, boating, water sports, nature appreciation and recreational fishing. A major attraction of the inlet system to visitors is the perception of 'wilderness' that can be experienced, particularly in parts of the Nornalup Inlet and the Frankland and Deep rivers. Management of the marine park focuses on research, monitoring, education and interpretation, and public participation programs. Such programs allow managers and scientists to gain a better understanding of the estuarine ecosystem, and to assess and manage the impacts of human activities in the area. The marine park protects the Walpole and Nornalup inlets system to the approximate limits of tidal influence in the Frankland, Deep and Walpole rivers. The environmental condition of estuaries is closely linked to the condition of surrounding catchments and tributary waterways. The proximity of the adjacent Walpole-Nornalup National Park provides an exceptional opportunity to manage the interconnected terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems as a single unit, so the indicative management plan is integrated with the management plan for the Walpole Wilderness Area and Adjacent Parks and Reserves. The marine park will protect the plants and animals and the wilderness character of the area, while allowing visitors to continue to fish, tour and holiday on and around the inlets ([DEC website](#)).

## ANTHROPOLOGICAL BACKGROUND (GOODE AND IRVINE, 2008)

Land use in traditional Aboriginal Australia is based on a religious view of the world and the position of people in it. This religious view is most often referred to as the Dreaming. The Dreaming is an ideological and philosophical basis for a close emotional connection between Aboriginals and their land (Machin 1996). The Dreaming refers to a distant past when the world had yet to be fully created. Dreamtime stories refer to mythic beings that roamed the Earth creating plant and animal species. During the struggles of these mythic beings many landforms such as hills and rivers were created. The landscape bears testimony to the struggles of creation and is studded with sacred sites recalling the Dreamtime. These sites are owned by or belong to one or more groups, and that shared spiritual significance brings together different groups.

### Traditional Boundaries and Rights to Land

Another function of these shared sites is that knowledge of the local myths created rights of use to the land.

"Rights are recognised through active social relations, a process symbolized through the possession of knowledge. That is, knowledge is only gained through participation in social relations and rights to the land are reliant on the possession of relevant religious knowledge" (Machin 1996:11).

Within the anthropological literature the South-West of Western Australia is considered to form a distinct cultural bloc, defined by the distribution of up to thirteen Noongar language groups sharing common beliefs, customs and practices (Bates 1985, Tindale 1974). Before the word Noongar was used as a group or linguistic name the South-West people recognised themselves, their language and culture, as Bibbulmun (Bates 1985). Daisy Bates recorded that the Bibbulmun people were the largest homogenous group in Aboriginal Australia. Their land took in everything to the west of a line drawn from Jurien Bay on the west coast to

Esperance on the south coast (Bates 1966). Bates also recorded that, within the Bibbulmun nation, there were more than seventy sub-groups that shared a common language with some local dialect variations.

“The inland tribes were distinguished by the character of the country they occupied. They were either Bilgur (river people, beel or bil-river), Darbalung (estuary people), or Buyun-gur (hill people – buya-rock, stone, hill), but all were Bibbulmun [Nyungar].” (Bates 1985)

According to Bates (1985) the Bibbulmun nation reached its widest point within this triangle between Augusta and Karlgarin, or very nearly as far east as Hyden. The eastern most Bibbulmun who occupy our study area were known as the Minung (after Bates) or the Kurin Bibbulmun. (Bates 1985:47) recorded that the term Minang Bibbulmun (Minang – meaning south) was applied to all the tribes east of the Darling Ranges, from about latitude 31° S, longitude 117° E, to the South Coast at about Albany. Bates (1985) described local group names applied to different dialect groups within the Minang Bibbulmun, with each dialect contained the name by which the dialect and the descent group were known. Bates (1985) noted that ownership of land in these areas differed from other Bibbulmun. The Minang Bibbulmun had a system of patrilineal descent whereas people on the coast and further west followed a matrilineal system.

The Bibbulmun people of the South-West were a distinct group in that their initiation practices varied markedly from their desert and semi-desert neighbours. Unlike the desert people to the east, the Minang Bibbulmun did not practice circumcision or sub-incision, but rather practiced a ritual of nasal septum piercing and cicatricision of the upper body (Bates 1985). The people who followed these ritual practices have been described by Berndt (1979) as being part of the “Old Australian Tradition”. Bates (1985) noted that despite these differences all people were of the Bibbulmun nation as they shared common customs, intermarried and spoke the same language.

Dortch (2002) and Ferguson (1987) also observed that the Noongar people who form the South-West cultural block and have a boundary with the desert people are also defined by being confined within the South-West Botanical Province.

“The change from the dense forest of the southwest to the low bush of the desert is a gradual one, but botanists use a line that follows the extent of the 175-millimeter winter (May to October) rainfall as a boundary dividing what they call ‘the southwest botanical province’ from the arid regions to the east and north. Significantly, the major cultural boundary that marks the extent of the Nyungar religious and ritual practices [circumcision line] follows this winter rainfall boundary, for over 1200 kilometres” (Ferguson, in Mulvaney and White 1987).

In relation to traditional Aboriginal ownership, Norman Tindale (1974) produced a map of territories based upon language variations. On this map Tindale recorded thirteen distinct linguistic groups in the South-West region. Tindale’s map identifies the majority of our study area as occupied by the Minang. The Kaneang occupy the inland and eastern portion of the study area with the Pibelmen to the west and the Koreng to the east.

On Tindale’s map (1974:248) the territory of the Minang is centred upon “King George Sound, north to Stirling Range, Tenterden, Lake Muir, Cowerup, and Shannon River. On the coast from West Cliff Point to Boat Harbour; at Pallinup (salt) River, at Mount Barker, Nornalup, Wilson Inlet and Porongurup Range.” Gibbs (1995:13) states that the Minang’s western boundary ran from Nornalup northward through to the area just above Lake Muir, with their eastward boundary near Cape Riche, making an area inclusive of Albany and most of the major South Coast inlets.

Tindale describes the Kaneang as “occupying the upper Blackwood area including the headwaters of the Warren and Frankland Rivers, with the northern boundaries running approximately from Collie and Katanning, and the southern boundary passing approximately from Nannup through to Manjimup and eventually to Cranbrook”. It was also noted that Tindale (1974:244) stated that in a later period this group’s boundaries expanded westward across the Darling Ranges to the coast (cited in Gibbs 1995:12).

Tindale (1974:246) describes the territory of the Koreng “from Gairdner River to Pallinup (salt) River, at Bremer Bay; inland to Jerramungup, Pingrup, Nampup (Nyabing), Badgebup, and Kibbleup near Broome Hill, south to Stirling Ranges, at Gnowangerup and Ongerup, west to Cranbrook and Tambellup.”

Tindale (1974:255) describes the territory of the Pibelmen as “the lower Blackwood River, chiefly on the hills between the Blackwood and Warren Rivers, east to Gardner River and Broke Inlet, on Scott River and inland to Manjimup and Bridgetown.” Within the ethno-historic literature four “tribes” (clans) are recorded as occupying the land around Albany. These were recorded by Browne (1856, cited in Le Souef, 1993) as the Murray, the Weal, the Cockatoo and the Kincannup. Bates (1985) recorded the tribes around the Albany area as belonging to the Minang Bibbulmun, who also called themselves Bid-kal or Kal-ip-gur. Nind (1831) gave the name Minanger for the Albany Aborigines, which he supposed was “probably derived from Mearn, the red root and anger, to eat.” Collie (1834) gave the name or title Mongalan of the Albany groups Nairne Clark recorded that the groups between Mt Barker and Kojonup as the Waal, between Wilson’s Inlet, Parry’s Inlet, Irwin Inlet, Deep River, Brook Inlet to Point D’Entrecasteaux, as the Murray men (Clark 1842, cited in Gibbs 1995:6). Hassell (1975:1) identified that to the east of the Stirling Ranges the land was occupied by the Corackerup tribe, and east of Bremer Bay the Wheelman while on the coast “the Bremer and Quaalup tribes.”

There is much dispute by many authors over the veracity of Tindale’s hypotheses of land ownership based upon linguistic differences. Berndt (1979:81) states that in formulating his map of South-West tribal boundaries Tindale was referring to often second-hand sources that were not detailed and anthropologically unsatisfactory. Berndt (1979) did however state that Douglas managed to verify eleven of Tindale’s South-West groups while conducting linguistic field work in 1967. Despite these problems much of Tindale’s work has now been accepted as the orthodoxy and is ultimately referred to when discussing Noongar cultural boundaries in the South-West.

What has become evident is that this orthodoxy is often now accepted by the Noongar community themselves, although there has been debate as to where actual boundaries are located. For instance, the Pibelmen are recorded by Tindale (1974) as occupying a part of the South Coast extending east to the edge of the Deep River. However, contemporary descendants of Pibelmen Noongar people believe their area extended much further to the east, to the Hay River near Denmark (Webb family pers. com., and supported in contemporary ethnographic surveys by the greater Albany Noongar community). Benson (1982:14) states that there is considerable historical evidence to support this view and that there is a clear ecological division at the Denmark River and that ecological zones often became the boundaries of cultural groups who specialized in the exploitation of these zones. Benson (1982) also states that observations from the region’s explorers suggest a division in ownership between the groups across the Denmark River. He says, for example, that when Mokare led Wilson’s group west of Albany he made a strong case not to cross the Denmark River saying that these were “bad lands”. Benson adds that contemporary Albany Noongars are also reluctant to cross this river (Wilson 1833:16, cited in Benson 1982:15). This ambiguity over the definite boundaries of different language groups may in some instances be attributable to a loss of knowledge, but it may also be a result of “boundaries” between groups being traditionally fluid in nature (Dortch 2002:4). According to Gibbs (1995:18) “in many respects the nature and degree of movement of Noongar groups, especially beyond the boundaries of their own communities, depended on their economic, social and kin relationships with their neighbours.”

It is clear that the study area at the time of settlement was occupied by a number of Noongar groups that shared a common language, custom rituals and practices. It is also apparent that these groups would come together at certain times of the year to conduct business and trade and as such can be seen as a coherent group or, as Bates (1985) refers to, as a Noongar nation.

### **Moeity**

Within the Bibbulmun nation, two primary moiety divisions existed, the Manichmat or “fair people of the white cockatoo class” and the Wordungmat or “dark people of the crow class”. These divisions were the basis of marriage between a further four matrilineal exogamous clans, the Tondarup, Didarruk, Ballaruk and Nagarnook (Bates 1985; Berndt 1979). Nind (1831) also recorded the terms Erniung and Tem as their moiety names. Berndt (1979) stated that these named sub-divisions had totemic associations. Ritual affiliation was inherited through the father. This ritual was focused upon totemic sites that had mythic connections to defined stretches of country. However, an individual could also belong to the moiety and totemic clan of his mother. This gave individuals rights of access to resources in other areas (Berndt 1979:82-3).

Bates (1966:24-25) describes the only lawful marriage between the groups to be “the crosscousin marriage of paternal aunts’ children to the maternal uncles’ children”, and states that the four clan groups and relationships, under different names, are “identical in every tribe in Western Australia, east, north, south and southwest”. The people of the west coast followed a matrilineal system of descent whereas those of the South Coast below Augusta and the Donnelly River observed patrilineal descent (Bates, 1985). This did not prevent marriage or other interactions taking place between the two systems. Noongar people were observed to marry outside of their immediate vicinity, and it seems likely that this served to reinforce alliances with neighbouring groups. “All along the borderline where the two lines of descent met, the tribes were friendly with each other, intermarrying and adjusting their ‘in-law’ relationships to suit the form of descent obtaining.” (Bates 1985).

### **Traditional Land Ownership**

Inherent in the marriage relationship was a system of reciprocity, which transferred rights and privileges between groups (Le Souef 1993). Instances of disputes within family groups over burning land to capture game were recorded by several early observers, such as Scott Isaac Nind (1831) and Dr Alexander Collie (1831, 1832 & 1834). While a group may be entitled to participate in a hunt they also had to seek the permission of that area’s owner or custodian before entering or firing one’s clan territory. Hallam (1979:32), citing Nind (1831:28) wrote that in King George Sound “The careful regulation of this pattern of land use was preserved by a mechanism Nind interpreted as ownership: ‘The presence of the owner of the ground is considered necessary when they fire the country for game.’” Each socio-linguistic group, sometimes referred to as the “tribe”, consisted of a number of smaller groups. Each of these smaller groups consisted of between 12 to 30 persons, related men, their wives and children, and at times, visiting relatives from other groups. These subgroups could be described as a family, a band or a horde. For every sub-group there was a tract of land with which they most closely identified themselves with. An individual or a group’s land was called their Kalla or fireplace (Moore 1884). This referred to an area of land used by the group and over which the members exercised the greatest rights to its resources. It was also the area for which the group would act as custodians. Other groups could have some rights of access and use gained through marriage.

“Ownership rights to land were held by groups of people linked through common descent; there was definite ownership of land in both social and personal ways. As well as belonging to a local descent group by birth each individual simultaneously belonged to an economic or food gathering group” (Le Souef 1993).

There are two forms of socially organised relationships to the land, a spiritual association and an economic one. Stanner (1965) used the terms “estate” and “range” to distinguish these different associations. He wrote that the “range” was that land in which the groups “ordinarily hunted and foraged to maintain life”. The “estate” refers to the spiritual country and which may be “owned” by an individual, the group, or part of the group. The relationship to “estate” is mostly religious; however there is also an economic benefit. The estate can be considered the country or home of a group. It is sometimes referred to as the “Dreaming place” and as such includes all religious sites, myths and rituals that occur on or about that land. In this way “estate” forms part of the Aboriginal ties to Dreaming and place (Stanner 1965). In the article entitled “Mokare’s Domain” Ferguson (1987, in Mulvaney & White:130-35) described Mokare’s family “estate” as chiefly the shores of Princess Royal Harbour while his family’s “range” extended to the Stirling Ranges in the north, to Wilson’s Inlet to the west and to the Manypeaks/Kojaneerup area to the east.

Dortch (2002) states that within the South Coast region a number of middle tier socioeconomic groups occupied an area and displayed a high level of inter-group reciprocity and cooperation as foraging units (as their range). These groups were made of a number of local descent groups who had ownership rights of mythic ritual sites.

“There is a clear relationship between the individual and the land, which is expressed in a number of ways. There is a direct link between the mythic heroes and spirits of the dreaming and the land. Relationships with these beings, which are transmitted through birth, descent and marriage (to a lesser extent), are a reciprocal arrangement of rights and obligations and they are vital for claiming rights to the land” (Silberbauer 1994).

The link between the individual and the land comes from the conception site, where the animating spirit enters the mother and thus there is a direct connection between the land, spirit and the identity of the individual (Machin 1996). The spiritual ties with the land strengthened economic rights and land usage involved both ritual and social connections (McDonald et al.1994). Nind noted that certain areas around King George Sound and inland were the “locations” of families, with those families having special rights to the use of that area and who are able to extend the privilege to visiting groups. Reciprocating rights are exchanged according to seasonal movement between neighbouring groups. “They are jealous as to encroachments on their property, and the land is divided into districts, which is the property of families or individuals” (Nind 1831).

“Those families who have locations on the sea coast quit it during the winter for the interior; and the natives of the interior, in like manner, pay visits to the coast during fishing season. Excepting at these times, those natives who live together have the exclusive right of fishing or hunting upon the neighbouring grounds, which are, in fact, divided into individual properties; the quantity of land owned by each individual being very considerable. Yet it is not so exclusively his, but others of his family have certain rights over it; so that it may be considered as partly belonging to the tribe. Thus all of them have a right to break down grass trees, kill bandicoots, lizards, and other animals, and dig up roots; but the presence of the owner of the ground is considered necessary when they fire the country for game.” (Nind 1831)

Territorial identifications were strong. In 1830 Collet Barker recorded that Dr. Uredale, Talwyn, Waiter, Coolbun all belonged to or had ownership of Cormo territory, which was distinct from King George Sound territory. Mokare, Nakina, Wapere, Perityat came back from Cormo territory and said it was good to be back at King George Sound, their home (Barker 1830). “The poor fellow [Nakinah] has not latterly got so

much from us to eat as he used & has become more importunate. I am under the necessity of refusing him lately as I fear he will become a constant hanger on, which our provisions will not afford. As the head of the family, however, whose ground we occupy, one must be indulgent to him" (Barker, 14 May 1830).

"Nakinah & several others asked for a boat to put them across in a few days to burn for Wallabi at Bald Head. He did not know about the exact day as it depended on Coolbun's arrival, whose ground it was, & their starting there without him would be considered stealing, 'Quippel'. They also required his presence or permission now to burn at King George's [Sound] as since Dr Uredale's death it had become his property. They might kill Wallabi but not burn for them. They were joking each other on the consequences of having burnt for Wallabi yesterday on some of Maragnan's Ground & talked laughingly of him spearing some of them for it. Females never possess ground, being considered a kind of moveables, liable by marriage to part their native place. The saying goes, 'Yoke wam watagolere; yonger artongmunong'. It is not even the custom to give ground to one who marries your daughter. If a man dies without leaving sons, or males of his family, his next neighbours have his ground.

Certain parts are often portioned out to sons as soon as they are born, but do not enjoy the possession until grown up and able to use it." (Barker, 13 Jan. 1831) Barker clearly believed there was ownership, rights, privileges and inheritance of land by the Noongar people. Other early observers also noted the clear ownership of land and that the Aboriginal people had rights and privileges to its use.

"That they have a right of soil is quite evident. The land about the settlement belongs to Mokare and his brethren." (Wilson in Cross 1833)

"... [Mokare's family land] included the entire west and south shores as well as the north shore of the harbour, all of the Vancouver Peninsula, and the shores of King George's Sound for some distance east of Frenchman's Bay." (Ferguson, in Mulvaney & White 1987:130).

### **Traditional Paths: "Runs"**

Barker recorded the following place names told to him by Mokare that may have formed a run or a part of a run – Popedayup – Moorul – Porrongen – Cogiunen. Mokare had knowledge of the land beyond his territory and Barker regularly questioned him about the nature of the country beyond the limited amount the Europeans had explored. Mokare told Barker about the people who lived to the east that did not wear Kangaroo skins but wore a piece of tree bark around their middle (Wongi?). He gave Barker several descriptions or accounts of the country to the north, where the water is scarce and often salty but where there were plenty of kangaroos and food. He also told Barker of about a "scented tree" that he had heard about but not seen [Sandalwood?]. During an expedition to the Wilson Inlet, Barker mentions that Aborigines who met with the party as far west as the Denmark River were friendly once they recognized Mokare and were prepared to travel with the Europeans and Mokare for several days. Barker also recorded that some runaway prisoners who were recaptured had met "King George Sound" men close to Augusta. Numerous comments recorded by Barker indicate that the Albany Minang had a considerable range and also knew something about the nature of the country beyond their own range.

"The Murray River District natives had a well defined road from their own run to their Kallipigur in Perth, South Perth, and elsewhere, and all along that road – which swerved from right to left according to the facilities (food, water, etc) for camping or hunting, which certain places afforded – names were applied, either indicative of the natural product to be found in the vicinity, or marking some peculiarity or commemorative of some circumstance attached to a particular locality" (Bates 1966). Although Bates is commenting on the Aboriginal paths or Bidi in the Perth district it is likely that the places located along the Aboriginal Bidi in the South Coast area would have been named in the same manner.

There are numerous references to Aboriginal pathways around King George Sound in the early journals of explorers. Ferguson has described the extent of the range of an individual of the Albany Minang based on

## REFERENCES

- Allen Consulting Group. 2007. *Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2007*. Regulatory Impact Statement for Aboriginal Affairs Victoria.
- Barker, C. 1830. *Journal of Captain C. Barker*. Unpublished manuscript, January 18, 1830 – March 26, 1831. Batty Library, Perth.
- Barker, C. 1830-1831, in Mulvaney, J. and Green, N. (eds) 1992. *Commandant of Solitude –The Journals of Captain Collet Barker 1828-1831*. Melbourne University Press.
- Bates, D. 1966. *The Passing of the Aborigines*. John Murray, London.
- Bates, D. 1985. *The Native Tribes of Western Australia*. I. White (ed.). National Library of Australia, Canberra.
- Berndt, R.M. 1979. *Aborigines of the South West*. In: Berndt, R. M. and Berndt, C. H. (Eds). *Aborigines of the West: Their Past & Their Present*. University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, Perth.
- Bird, Greta. 1988. *The Process of Law in Australia*. Butterworths, Sydney.
- Bishop, F. 2007. *Indigenous Histories of the Southern Forests*. A report to the Walgenup Aboriginal Corporation and Restoring Connections Project.
- Brearley, A. 2005. *Ernest Hodgkin's Swanland: Estuaries and Coastal Lagoons of South-western Australia*. University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands.
- Brown, S. 1980. *Oyster Harbour Fish Traps*.
- Byrne, Denis, Brayshaw, H., and T. Ireland. 2003. *Social Significance: A discussion paper*. Research Unit, Cultural Heritage Division, New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service. Hurstville.
- Clark, W.N. 1841 Journal of an expedition to Nornalup, or the Deep River of the sealers in the months of March and April 1841. "The Inquirer", 1 September 1842. Collie, A. 1834. Anecdotes and remarks relative to the Aborigines of King George's Sound. The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal. Albany Public Library Local Studies Collections.
- Clark, W.N. 'Journal of a second expedition to the westward of King George's Sound as far as Point D'Entrecasteaux' The Inquirer 29/9/1841-27/10/1841 BL 994.11/PER.
- Cross, 1833. *Journals of Several Expeditions made in Western Australia during the years 1829, 1830, 1831 and 1832: Under the Sanction of the Governor, Sir James Stirling*. J. Cross, London.
- Davis, Michael. 1996. *Indigenous Peoples and Intellectual Property Rights*. Parliamentary Library of Australia. Research Paper 20 (1996-1997). Information and Research Services, Department of the Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 30 June, 1997.
- Department of Environment and Conservation. 1987. *Shannon Park and D'Entrecasteaux National Park Management Plan 1987-1997*. (Then) Department of Conservation and Land Management, Management Plan No. 6.
- Dortch, C.E. 1974. A twelve thousand year old occupation floor at Devil ' S Lair. *Mankind* 9: 195-205.
- Dortch, C.E. 1976. Two engraved stone plaques of Late Pleistocene age from Devil's Lair, Western Australia. *Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 3:32-44.

- Dortch, C.E. and G. Gardner. 1976. Records of the Western Australian Museum 4(3):257-293. *Archaeological investigations in the Northcliffe District, Western Australia.*
- Dortch, C.E. 1984. *Devil's Lair – a study in prehistory.* Western Australian Museum, Perth.
- Dortch, C.E. 1997a. Prehistory Down Under: Archaeological investigations of submerged Aboriginal sites in Lake Jasper, Western Australia. *Antiquity* 71:116-123.
- Dortch, C.E. 1999. Archaeological assessment of Aboriginal estuarine fishing on the Southern Ocean coast of Western Australia. In J. Hall and J. McNiven (eds) *Australian Coastal Archaeology.* ANH Publication, Canberra, pp. 25-35.
- Dortch, C.E. 2002 Modeling past Aboriginal hunter-gatherer socio-economic and territorial organisation in Western Australia's lower South-west. *Archaeology in Oceania* 37:1-21.
- Dortch, J. And G. Kelly. 1997. *Further test excavations at Nookanellup Rock Shelter, Point D'Entrecasteaux, south-western Australia.* Unpublished report submitted to the Manjimup Aboriginal Corporation and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.
- Dortch, J. 1998. *Archaeological Site Survey of the Proposed Telstra Optic Fibre Line from Walpole to Denmark, south-west Western Australia.* Centre for Archaeology UWA report to Telstra.
- Dortch, J. 2000. *Paleo-environmental change and the persistence of human occupation in south-western Australian forests.* Unpublished PhD, Department of Anthropology, UWA, Perth.
- Ferguson, W.C. 1987. In *Australians to 1788.* D.J. Mulvaney & J. Peter White (eds). Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, Broadway, NSW.
- Ferguson, W. 1985. *A mid-Holocene depopulation of the Australian south-west.* Unpublished PhD. Department of Prehistory and Anthropology. Australian National University, Canberra.
- Fernie, L. & Fernie, G. 1987 Towards the West River: a record of settlement at the Deep River and Tinglewood Cottlesloe: L&G Fernie BL Q994.12FER.
- Gibbs, M. 1987. Aboriginal gatherings on the west coastal region of south-west Western Australia: an ethno-historical study. Unpublished BSc Honours thesis, University of Western Australia.
- Greenfield, P. 2007. *Report on the Excavations of Windermere Road Artifact Scatter, Albany, South West Australia.* Unpublished report prepared for the Albany Heritage Reference Group Aboriginal Corporation and Department of Indigenous Affairs (Southern Region).
- Golvan, Colin. 1992. *An Introduction to Intellectual Property Law.* Butterworths, Sydney.
- Goode, B. 1998. *Aboriginal Heritage Issues: Site Evaluation, Community Consultation and Site Specific Archaeological Survey, Denmark to Walpole.* Unpublished report for Telstra.
- Goode, B et al. 2005. 'Kinjarling' *The Place of Rain.* The City of Albany and Department of Indigenous Affairs Aboriginal Heritage Survey.
- Goode, B., Grenfield, P., Irvine, C., Gillies, V., Webb, W., Thomas, M. and M. Cockman. 2008. *Aboriginal Cultural Values Study of Water Resources for the South Coast Region of Western Australia.* A Report Prepared for the Department of Water.



- Guilfoyle, D. 2005. *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Regional Studies: An Illustrative Approach*. Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW), Hurstville.
- Guilfoyle, David R., Bill Bennell, Wayne Webb, Vernice Gilles and Jen Strickland. 2009a. Integrating Natural Resource Management and Indigenous Cultural Heritage: A Model and Case Study from South-western Australia. *Heritage Management* (in press).
- Guilfoyle, David R., Andrew Guilfoyle, and Doc Reynolds. 2009b. Participatory Action Research in Cultural Heritage Management for Indigenous Cultural Heritage: The Gabbie Kylie Foundation, Esperance, Western Australia. *International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations* (in press).
- Hallam, S.J. 1975. *Fire and Hearth: a study of Aboriginal usage and European usurpation in southwestern Australia*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
- Hallam, S.J. 1977. Recent Archaeological Research in Western Australia. *Australian Archaeology*, 6: 3-27
- Hallam, S.J. 1987. Coastal does not equal Littoral. *Australian Archaeology* 25: 10-29.
- Hands, D. 2004 Rest Point Remembered: the story of Rest Point, Walpole and the Swarbrick family and those that followed South Perth: Derek Hands BL B/SWA.
- Heritage Council of Western Australia. *A Heritage Tourism Strategy for Western Australia*. Prepared by the Heritage Council of Western Australia in partnership with Tourism Western Australia.
- Hodgkin, E.P and Ruth Clark. 1988. *Nornalup and Walpole Inlets and the Estuaries of the Deep and Frankland Rivers*. An Inventory of Information on the Estuaries and Coastal Lagoons of Southwestern Australia. Environmental Protection Authority, Perth Western Australia. Estuarine Studies Series – No. 2, March 1988.
- Howard and Heaver Architects. 2008. *Nornalup Character Study*. Report for the Shire of Denmark.
- Jones, M. 2006. Interviewed by David Guilfoyle and Ken Farr for the Walgenup Aboriginal Corporation Southern Forest Oral History Project, February 2006.
- Lennon, J. and S. Mathews. 2006. *Cultural Landscape Management: guidelines for identifying, assessing and Managing Cultural Landscapes in the Australian Alps National Park*. Jane Lennon and Associates [for] Cultural Heritage Working Group, Australian Alps Liaison Committee.
- Le Souef, S. 1993. The Aborigines of King George Sound at the Time of Early European Contact: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social Organisation and Territoriality. In de Garis, B.K. (Ed.). *Portraits of the Southwest: Aborigines, Women and the Environment*. UWA Press, Nedlands, Perth.
- Machin, B. 1996. *Ethnographic Report: Aboriginal Heritage Survey – Albany – Lake Grace Road Amelup Section SLK 83.5 to SLK 87.0*. Unpublished report for the Main Roads Department, Perth.
- Matter C.J. and Harris, J. 2004. *Archaeological Assessment of Proposed Expansion Areas for Boddington Bauxite Mine*. Prepared for Worsley Alumina Pty Ltd. on behalf of Artefacion Pty Ltd.
- McDonald, Hales and Associates. 1994. *Aboriginal Heritage in the Southern Forests Region, Southwest Western Australia*. Prepared for the Australian Heritage Commission.
- Moser, S., D. Glazier, J.E. Phillips, L. Nasser el Nemr, M.S. Mousa, R.N. Aiesh, S. Richardson, A. Conner, and M. Seymour. 2002. Community Archaeology, *World Archaeology*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 220-248.
- Neal Blake and Associates. 2003. *Shire of Denmark Coastal Management Plan*. Shire of Denmark.

- Nind, S. 1831 Description of the Natives of King George's Sound (Swan River Colony) and adjoining Country, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 6, 21-51.
- O'Connor, R. and Quartermaine, G., and A. Yates. 1995. *An Investigation into the Aboriginal Significance of Wetlands and Rivers in the Busselton – Walpole Region*. Prepared for the Water Authority of Western Australia.
- O'Halloran, C. & Spennemann, D. H.R. (2002). Wave Action Impact on Archaeological Sites in a Freshwater Reservoir at Lake Hume, New South Wales. *Australian Archaeology* vol. 54, 6–12.
- Rolfe, J. and J. Windle 2003, Valuing the Protection of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Sites. *The Economic Record*, Volume 79 (special issue), June, pp. S85–S95.
- Silberbauer, G. B. 1994. *A Sense of Place*. In Burch, E.S.J and Ellena, L.J. (eds). *Key Issues in Hunter-Gatherer Research*. Oxford: Berg.
- Smith, M. (1984). *Aboriginal Sites in Crown Land between Cape Le Grand and Cape Arid National Parks: A preliminary survey*. WA Museum.
- Smith, M. (1993). *Recherche a L'Esperance: A prehistory of the Esperance region of south western Australia*. PhD Thesis, University of Western Australia.
- Stanner, W. 1965. Aboriginal Territorial Organisation: Estate, Range, Domain and Regime. *Oceania*, 33(1).
- Tindale, N.B., 1974. *Aboriginal Tribes in Australia*. University of California Press, Berkley, U.S.A.
- Turney, C.S.M., Bird, M.I., Fifield, L.K., Roberts, R.G., Smith, M., Dortch, C.E., Grun, R., Lawson, E., Ayliffe, L.K., Miller, G.H., Dortch, J. & Cresswell, R.G. 2001. Early human occupation at Devil's Lair, southwestern Australia 50,000 years ago. *Quaternary Research* 55: 3-13.
- Western Australian Planning Commission. 2005. *Lower Great Southern Strategy*. Perth, Western Australia.
- Western Australia Planning Commission. 2007. *Augusta-Walpole Coastal Strategy*. Perth, Western Australia.

# ABORIGINES OF DENMARK

of Australia. Having been isolated from other races for such a long time, they had no inherited resistance to the common infectious diseases brought from Europe. Epidemics of influenza and measles were common in Albany during the 1830s when Noongars mixed freely with whites in the military settlement. Captain Barker recorded eight Noongar deaths from 'colds' within the space of a few days in 1831. The Noongars who frequented the Denmark area probably mingled frequently with those at Albany, so it is likely that these virulent diseases had reached Denmark before white settlement there in 1895.

Just how many Noongars frequented the Denmark area is not known. Captain Barker estimated that only about 150 Noongars lived around King George Sound, so it is likely that the population frequenting the densely forested Denmark area would have numbered far less. A European disease entering such a small population base would have been devastating.

'Bumblefoot' is the only Denmark Noongar mentioned in oral histories for the period after the closure of Millar's timber industry in 1905. He does not figure in oral histories after 1911, but the late Maxine Fumagalli, herself a Noongar, had heard that he died at Monkey Rock about 1914. Thus, we must sadly assume that, by then, the Noongars who were actively present when the mill town of Denmark was established, no longer remained in the district.

Anna Haebich, in *For Their Own Good*, tells in some detail how, from 1915, Noongars were forcibly moved from various places to the Carrolup settlement, but none are listed as having come from Denmark.

There are widely differing stories and rumours of Noongars avoiding Denmark due to some sort of taboo. There is not space to deal with them here but one Albany Noongar, interviewed by the writers, said that she keeps away from Denmark because "it's not a good place for Noongars to be". Another believes that his great grandfather, along with some other Noongars, was murdered there by whites about 1905. Thus, although they recognise that disease would have been the main killer of their people, some Albany Noongars believe that some of their Denmark forebears were killed by whites. Nevertheless, some people of Noongar descent still live in Denmark.

Whatever the details, it must be acknowledged that 40,000 years of continuous Aboriginal culture and land ownership in the Denmark area was brought to a tragic end within less than 20 years of white occupation.

At a Denmark Reconciliation Group function held on "National Sorry Day", May 25, 1998, the Denmark Shire Council formally recognised the Noongars as being the original owners of the land in the Shire and expressed sorrow for all that has happened to them since British occupation.



Photo. Battye Library 706P

Gnanerandin, known to whites as Jimny, was a senior Elder of the Bibbulmun people. She is shown here leading her blind brother, Bobby Byden, in Denmark, 1898. Note that they are wearing the European style jacket and skirt in the manner of their traditional kangaroo skin cloak, the 'bukka', with one arm always free. These clothes, however, would have been no substitute for the reversible buka in cold, wet weather.

Opinions and interpretation of information in this pamphlet are the responsibility of the authors.

Comments or further information should be forwarded to:-

The Secretary,  
Denmark Historical Society,  
PO Box 54  
Denmark, WA. 6333.

or the writers: 08 9840 9232

© Denmark Historical Society  
First Published - April, 1994.  
Revised 1995, 1996, 1998.  
2003 and 2004.

#### References:

- Macquarie Dictionary of Aboriginal Words (Noongar) 1994.  
Peter Bindon & Ross Chadwick: A Nyoonar Wordlist from the South-West of West Australia, WA Museum 1992.  
Rose Whitehurst: Noongar Dictionary, Noongar Language & Culture Centre, 1992.  
Explorers' Journals: 1829, 1830 & 1833, Batty Library, Perth.  
Neville Green:  
Broken Spears, 1984, Perth.  
Anna Haebich:  
For Their Own Good, UWAP, 1988.  
Sylvia Hallam: Fire and Hearth, Canberra, 1979.  
RW Mumford: "Denmark - A History to 1905", DHS 1996  
Denmark Historical Society's Oral History Collection.
- Acknowledgements:**  
The following gave generous advice and assistance -  
Fiona Simpson and Jackie Watt  
Great Southern Aboriginal Corporation, Albany.  
Rose Whitehurst, Noongar Language Centre, Bunbury.  
Dr Charles Dortch,  
Archaeologist, WA Museum.  
Tim McCabe, Lecturer in Aboriginal Studies, Curtin Uni  
Maxine Fumagalli, Denmark.  
Wayne & Toni Webb, Walpole  
Jack Williams, Albany.

## notes on the ABORIGINES OF DENMARK

Enid & Ian Conochie

**E**arly Aborigines in the Denmark area left little for archaeologists and anthropologists to study. Also, for many decades of European occupation, no official records of Aborigines were kept - no census included them, births and deaths were not registered, burial sites were not marked. Only a few interested Europeans recorded anything of their culture.

This pamphlet presents the very sketchy information that the Denmark Historical Society has collected, so far, on the original inhabitants of the area we know today as Denmark.

### For thousands of years . . . . .

The origins of Australia's indigenous people are lost in the mists of time. Scientific opinion seems to be that they began their migration to this continent from Asia earlier than 50,000 BP (Before Present) during a glacial period when the sea level was about 150 metres lower than it is today and there was an almost complete land bridge between Asia and Australia.

Ancient stone tools have been found in *Devil's Lair* cave, near Margaret River and, as they date from about 40,000 BP, it seems likely that human occupation in the Denmark area would also have dated from that time. However, any traces of human occupation on the former coastal plain would have been submerged as the sea rose to its present level, about 4000BP.

An aspect of Aboriginal life that was well documented by European explorers and early settlers was their use of fire. By putting many such reports together, Sylvia Hallam (1979) showed that, over most of the continent, Aborigines developed a mosaic pattern in their burning of grassland, bush and forest in order to clear pathways for movement, to assist hunting and to regenerate new feed for native animals.

where a different Noongar dialect is spoken, the suffix '-ing', or '-in' replaces '-up'. The following place-names are selected from survey maps:-

**Caldyanup (Mt Frankland)** - "Place of fire"

**Cuppup** (Cuppup Creek) - probably from 'korpup', "Place of Charcoal".

**Koorabup/Koorrabup** (Denmark River) - As an example of their tragic loss of vocabulary, Noongars differ as to the meaning. We were first told that it means "Place of the Black Swan", then "Place of the Bush Kangaroo".

However, Tim McCabe, a non-Aborigine who is fluent in Noongar, explained that 'Koor' = return, 'ab' = my or our, and 'up' = place of. So 'Koorabup' means "The place we return to". What a delightful meaning!

**Koordabup** (Koordabup River) - "Koordaa" = 'husband', so the name probably means "Place of Betrothals"

**Kooryunderup** (Mt Hallowell) - "Place of many Bush Kangaroos".

**Kwikup** (Kwickup River) - "Place of Bones"

**Kwilalup** (Kwilalup School Site, 24 km west of Denmark on the highway). The locality must have extended south to the coast as it means "Place of the Shark".

**Mairet** (Wilson Inlet) - This name, recorded by JS Roe in capital letters, means "penis". The Noongar informant must have misunderstood Roe's question!

**Marbalup/Marbellup** (at east end of Wilson Inlet) - "Place of marbil, the black swan"

**Mehniup** (Mt Mehniup) - "Place of merni or mean" - the plant *Haemadorum*, the root of which was eaten by the Menang people; hence the tribal name of the Albany Noongars.

**Nornalup** - "Place of Norna" (yellow bellied snake, tiger snake)

**Nullaki** (pronounced *noolaky*) - "Seagrass"

**Peepetup/Beipiegup/Bebikup** (Mount Lindesay) - We think that 'Peepetup', carefully recorded by explorer JS Roe in 1831, has been misspelt as 'Peeoetup' on survey maps, and that 'Bebikup' and 'Beipiegup', are both versions of the name given to Roe by local Noongars.

As 'Peep' means 'breast', the meaning, "Place like a breast", is comparable to that of the Swiss mountain, 'Jungfrau' (young woman).

**Pooryungup** (Peninsula west of Wilson Inlet) - possibly corrupted from Boyoongup - "Place of large rock".

**Quarram** (Normalup Inlet) - probably means "Bush kangaroos".

**Wakundup/Wakoondup** (Mt Shadforth) - Possibly "Place of Wakoon" (a waterfowl).

**Warrumbup/Warroombup** (Weedon Hill) - "Place of Warroo" (female 'roo)

### What happened to Denmark's Noongars?

European diseases took a terrible toll of Aboriginal people throughout much

footed Noongar nicknamed 'Bumblefoot' whose camp was said to have been at the Hay River.

4. Octogenarians Isabel Malcolm and Jean Swingler, whose family settled on the farm, *Parkhead*, in Scotsdale Road, told us that they remembered 'Bumblefoot'. Their father, James Paterson, was told by him in 1911 that the hill on their farm was called "Doo-doo" (*which means 'dog' in one dialect*).
5. Isabel Malcolm also remembered the Noongar camp which was located on the east bank of the Denmark River not far from where the Angling Club slipway is today.

The camp was probably established as Noongars moved in to live on the edge of the town which was established in 1895. From there, they used to sell wooden artefacts and clothesline props to the townspeople and send boronia on the train for sale in Perth.

6. Bill Pinniger told how, early in the 20th century, 'Queen' Bess and some other Noongar women were hired by a Mt Barker grazier to mark out a track from the Muir Highway to Denmark. This track, he said, probably followed Noongar trails and later became the route of the Mt Barker-Denmark Road.

7. Eddie (Brady) Walters, born in Denmark in 1912, remembered Noongars sometimes coming from Albany to Denmark by train on a Friday morning from about 1918 into the 1920s. They'd spend a few hours in Denmark then return on the afternoon train.

He also remembered two Noongar women, Kate and Emma, who used to come to Denmark to catch possums in the 1920s. During the gazetted trapping season, they'd camp by the creek behind the present Denmark High School. They would have done well as possum skins were then fetching £6 a dozen.

8. Some visitors to the Denmark Historical Museum have stated that their parents, who lived in Denmark very early in the century, spoke of Noongars camping near the freshwater stream at Springdale.

### **Some Noongar place names in and around Denmark**

The meanings of local Noongar names are not always accurately known due, partly, to Europeans not having recorded the words accurately, but also due to the tragic loss of language suffered by the Noongar people as they were dispersed and their whole culture disrupted and degraded. On the positive side, Noongars today are doing their best to gather vocabulary from their old folk in order to rebuild the Noongar vocabulary and grammar. Several Noongar dictionaries have been produced and the language is being taught in some schools.

Note that the suffix '-up' means 'place', or 'place of'. In the Great Southern,

Thousands of years of such burning (termed "firestick farming" by Rhys Jones, 1968) has produced the dominantly fire-resistant plant assemblages that exist today over nearly all of the continent and much of Tasmania. Analyses of fossil pollens found in stratified varve clays at Lake George, near Canberra, indicate a fairly rapid change from casuarina dominance to eucalypt dominance around 40,000 BP.

An ironic result of the Aborigines having modified the vegetation for their own purposes is that this inadvertently prepared the way for the next wave of *Homo sapiens* to enter Australia, the Europeans. The grasslands and forests proved ideal for graziers and loggers, and many ancient Aboriginal trails became droving routes and roads.

'Ab origine' is Latin for 'from the beginning' and is the general term given by Europeans to the original people of a land mass. It is estimated by various writers that, at British settlement in 1788, there would have been about five hundred Aboriginal 'nations' on the continent, each comprising many sub groups. In WA, the Aborigines indigenous to the South West mostly speak Noongar (or Nyungar) and the Aborigines of WA's South West are known as Noongars, the name meaning, simply, 'man' or 'person'.

While WA has done well in retaining so many Noongar place names throughout the South-West, such as Kojonup, Katanning and Ongerup, many Noongar names have also been ignored in favour of European ones. Perhaps we could redress this by emulating Victoria where, in the Grampians, dual European/Aboriginal names are being promoted. Perhaps Denmark could become known as "Denmark"/"Koorabup"!

### **Archaeological evidence of Noongar occupation in Denmark**

1. **Fish Traps:** Some Noongar fish traps still exist in Wilson Inlet at Marbalup and at Jack's Island. Recent studies prove that they were set in place about 4,000 BP, their purpose being to trap fish on the ebb-tide or by droving shoals into them. After the initial massive effort of collecting and placing the stones, the Noongars were easily able to catch fish. Unfortunately, the traps do not work today probably because the tidal range has been dramatically reduced by sand accumulation in the tidal delta of the Wilson Inlet bar.

2. **Katelsia Rock Shelter:** The sandy bed of this rock shelter, in a cliff near Ocean Beach, has been archaeologically excavated by the WA Museum to reveal layers of carbon from cooking fires dating back to about 2,000 BP. The scientists named the shelter after the numerous *Katelsia* cockle shells found throughout layers. Bones of all the current inlet fish species were also found.

3. **Stone Artefacts:** Dolerite chippings, the waste product of stone tool manufacture, have been found at several former workshop sites, eg. at Poison

Point, the Petrified Forest and near the shore of Blue Lake.

4. **Berley Holes:** Small, unnatural depressions have been reported in granite rocks on the eastern shore of Nornalup Inlet. These holes are considered to have been formed as Noongars crushed rock-crabs for berley to attract fish, especially groper.

5. **Ochre Pit:** An ochre pit has been reported near Springdale on the north side of Wilson Inlet. Ochre, known to Aboriginal people as 'wilgie', is a form of iron oxide and was used for ceremonial body decoration and for colouring hair.

6. **Stone Circle:** A relatively small circle of large stones exists on the north shore of the inlet. This has been registered as a possible ceremonial site by the Aboriginal Sites Committee.

7. **Human remains:** Part of an Aboriginal skull was found during excavation of the Prawn Rock Channel in 1992. Its age is estimated by the WA Museum to be somewhere between 800 and 1,000 years.

#### **Explorer contact**

Dr Thomas Braidwood Wilson, in December, 1829, was the first white explorer to enter the Denmark area. Although accompanied by the Noongar guide, Mokare, Wilson met no local Noongars. So, not knowing any of the Noongar place names, Wilson named many landscape features after his friends and colleagues, eg Denmark River, Mt Shadforth and Mt Lindesay. These were then gazetted by the Department of Lands and Surveys.

Only two months later, however, Captain Collet Barker, Commandant of the King George Sound Settlement, did meet about a dozen Noongars around the southern shores of Wilson Inlet. Thanks to Mokare's interpreting, Barker and his party had no trouble communicating with them. Black and white even hunted together and shared barbecued kangaroo on the shore of the inlet.

Barker had been asked by Governor Stirling to check out the Wilson Inlet entrance to ascertain whether ships could enter, so he and his party walked there from Albany. On February 4, 1830, he recorded in his journal that his party had met two Noongar women, each with a small child, just west of the Denmark River mouth. The women, whom Barker described as being 'perfectly naked' were startled at first but, after Mokare spoke with them, they became more relaxed.

That evening, while camped at the base of a hill next to the inlet, Barker met a small group of Noongar men who told him the hill was called, "Warrumbup" (*now known as Weedon Hill*). Next day, several of the exploration party went hunting with the Noongars while Barker and Mokare inspected the entrance to the inlet. They found that the sand bar was breached

in the middle by inlet water flowing out to sea via a 30 yard wide channel. He recorded that there was no possibility of ships entering the inlet.

On their return journey, Barker and his party were joined for breakfast by several other Noongars near Crusoe Beach.

John Septimus Roe, WA's first Surveyor General, also had friendly contact with numerous Noongars during his 1831 & 1835 journeys through the Denmark area.

#### **Noongars in oral history**

1. Mrs Elizabeth Davey, née Hume, daughter of Edward Hume, engineer with Millars' sawmills in Denmark from 1896 to 1900, came to Denmark at the age of six and was about ten when her family left to establish the Hume Pipe Company. Mrs Davey is now deceased but, in 1979, she tape-recorded some of her memories of Denmark. She remembered:

- many Noongars living at Denmark in a camp on the east bank of the river..
- witnessing a corroboree near the present-day Boating and Angling Club slipway.
- a blind Noongar named 'Byden Bobbie' who used to be led around by a woman using a stick as a lead. (See cover photo).
- accusing a Noongar girl of being dirty because her skin was black, and receiving a very angry response.
- Noongar women being so fascinated by white babies that, whenever they heard of a new arrival, they would come to the house and wouldn't leave until the baby was shown to them.

2. Mrs Noreen Carruthers (from South Australia) told us how her mother, Adelaide Smith, who was born in Denmark in 1897, went missing one day when she was a toddler. After frantically checking with neighbours, Adelaide's mother walked over the railway bridge to the Noongar camp across the river (where the Boating & Angling Club slipway is today) and found little Adelaide being shown around by a Noongar girl to an appreciative audience. Adelaide had wandered from home to the river and the girl had taken her to the camp for safe keeping.

3. Arthur Gardiner, retired university lecturer, has written to tell how his father, as a boy in Denmark during the late 1890s, used to play with Noongar boys. One game was to place a coin in the fork of a stick stuck firmly in the ground and then, from a distance of about six metres, throw spears to knock the coin out. The Noongar boys were much better than he but, with a .22 rifle, he held his own.

Arthur's father, when a lad, used to shoot wallabies as food for a club-