SOUTHCOAST
NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY

Cultural Heritage Field Guide

South Coast Region

The Noongar people have been the traditional land-owners of Western Australia's south-west for more than 45,000 years. Their knowledge and deep cultural respect for the land or *boodja*, has been passed on by tribal Elders for countless generations. Noongars continue to demonstrate a strong connection to country, by respecting, caring and protecting the land through traditional sustainable practices.

This guide has been designed to assist with the identification of Aboriginal artefacts and places of former occupation and to help understand why these sites are of such high cultural importance to Noongar people.

The guide will be published under two themes. Cultural Heritage, which assists with the identification of past Aboriginal occupation while the second, Caring for Country, deals with the sustainable management of the land by Noongars.

CULTURAL HERITAGE
Tribal Boundaries
Six seasons
Artefacts
Significant Sites
Noongar Words (cultural heritage)

CARING FOR COUNTRY
Endangered Flora of South Coast
Endangered Fauna of South Coast
Totems
Bush Tucker
Noongar Words (fauna & flora)

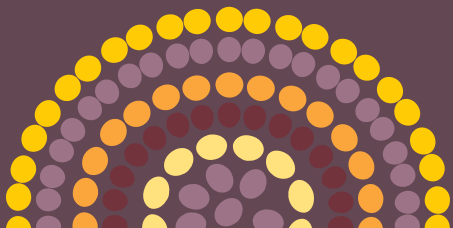
TRIBAL BOUNDARIES

Noongar country or *boodja*, extends from north of Jurien Bay, inland to north of Moora and down to the southern coast between Bremer Bay and east of Esperance.

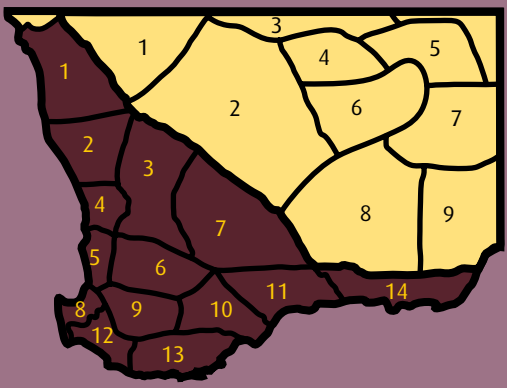
Boodja is defined by 14 different areas with varied geography, each with its own dialectal group.

Noongars' profound physical and spiritual connection to country relates to their beliefs and customs regarding creation, life and death and the spirits of the earth.

Spiritual connection to country guides the way Noongar people understand, navigate and use the land. It also influences their cultural practices.



TINDALE TRIBAL BOUNDARIES



NOONGAR GROUPS

1. Amangu
2. Juat
3. Balardong
4. Whadjuk
5. Pindjarup
6. Wilman
7. Njakinjaki
8. Wadandi
9. Kaneang
10. Koren
11. Wudjari
12. Pibelmen
13. Minang
14. Njunga

OTHER ABORIGINAL GROUPS

1. Widi
2. Kelamaia
3. Koara
4. Ngurlu
5. Waljen
6. Maduwongga
7. Tjeraridjal
8. Kalaako
9. Ngadjunmaia

Aboriginal groups
of Western Australia's south-west

SEASONS

Noongar people recognised six seasons

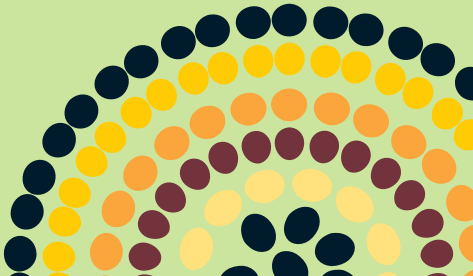
Birak, Bunuru, Djeran, Makuru, Djilba and Kambarang,

all of which were determined by weather patterns. Noongars used these seasons as a guide to inform them which animals were available to hunt and what plants were ripe and plentiful at any particular time of the year.

Noongars knew when it was time to harvest by signs in nature.

For example, a hazy summer sky foretold of salmon running or the blossom on paperbarks brought the mullet fish.

Noongar communities always took care to ensure the survival of animal and plant species. Honey was always left for bees to build on and when fish travelled upstream to lay their eggs, they were caught as food on their way back downstream.



Birak runs from December to January and is hot with easterly winds blowing during the day. During this season, Noongars would burn sections of scrubland to force animals into the open for hunting.

Bunuru is from February to March and very dry. During this season Noongars moved to estuaries to catch fish which formed a large part of their seasonal diet.

Djeran, from April to May, is when the weather becomes cooler with winds from the south-west. Noongars continued to fish during this season and also collected plant bulbs and seeds for food.

Makuru runs from June to July. During this time, Noongars moved inland to hunt once the rain had replenished inland water resources.

Djilba, from August to September, is when the weather becomes warmer. Traditionally, roots were collected and emus, possums and kangaroos were hunted for food.

Kambarang, from October to November, is when families moved onto the coastal plains where frogs, tortoises and freshwater crayfish were caught.

SEASONS

ARTEFACT SITES

An artefact site is an area where human activity is identifiable through the presence of portable objects such as stone, glass, bone, or shell, which has been utilised or modified by Aboriginal people.

These site types include:

- Fish traps (stone or wooden)
- Man-made structures
- Ceremonial grounds
- Natural stone surfaces showing man-made grooves or grinding patches
- Middens or rubbish pits
- Caves with wall paintings
- Burial grounds
- Stone or ochre quarries

ARTEFACT SCATTER

An artefact scatter indicates a site of former Noongar occupation. They are generally found in the open landscape, in the topsoil of rock shelters or granite outcrops and areas disturbed through erosion. This is because the removal of top soil reveals items previously covered. Scatters provide valuable information about Aboriginal diet and can include stone and bone tools for skinning, cutting and wood-working, as well as axes and fish hooks.

FAST FACT

CORES

A core is a chunk of stone, usually the size of an adult's fist, from which flakes have been struck. A core will show evidence of flakes having been removed from its surface by marks known as negative flake scars. It is common to find cores in areas close to campsites or around quarries where material was sourced for toolmaking. Individuals kept cores until they were no longer big enough to break off flakes. The core was then discarded or used as a tool.

CORES

Cores and stone tools were traded from region to region. Archaeological surveys conducted on the South Coast show that a large number of artefacts found in this region were mined from quarries in northern Australia.

FAST FACT

FLAKES

Stone tools were created by hitting a core with a hammer-stone which removed a fragment or flake which was then shaped into a workable implement. Flakes are very sharp when they are first struck from a core, but when used as tools, quickly become blunt and have to be continually resharpened.

Noongars produced flaked stone tools quickly for numerous daily activities, including shaping wooden, bark and bone objects. Flakes were also used as spearheads, as blades to cut up meat and scrapers to prepare animal skins for making cloaks, containers and decorative items.

FLAKES

Noongars discovered the best type of material for toolmaking was hard, brittle and rich in silica, such as quartzite, chert, flint, silcrete or quartz. They quarried stone from outcrops of bedrock or collected pebbles from stream beds and beaches.

Many flaked artefacts found at Aboriginal sites are made from stone which does not originate from the area where they are discovered.

FAST FACT

POINTS

These are flakes with retouched edges converging to a point. They were either retouched on one surface (bifacial), or on both sides (unifacial).

POINTS

Points were usually attached to spears to penetrate the hard skin of kangaroos but were also used as cutting tools for skinning and toolmaking.

When Europeans first arrived, points were traded for food and bedding. Europeans also brought glass with them, which Aboriginals found very easy to manufacture into sharp tools.

FAST FACT

HAMMER-STONES

Hammer-stones were used to create flakes for tools from cores. Flaking required considerable force, so the edges of hammer-stones were frequently damaged due to this impact.

Most hammer-stones were originally angular-shaped rocks, but frequent use and handling gave them a softer, rounder shape. They can be found near rivers or waterways in areas where Aboriginal people once camped.

HAMMER-STONES

Hammer-stones were heavily used throughout the ancient world.

If you hold a well-used one, you will notice it feels ergonomic and comfortable to hold. This is due to the wear created through constant use.

FAST FACT

GRINDING-STONES

These consist of a large lower stone, which can be oval, round or rectangular, around 150mm – 700mm across and a rounded upper stone, small enough to hold in one hand.

The stones were used to grind and crush different materials, including plant bulbs, berries, seeds and insects and were the largest stone implements used by Aboriginals.

The lower grinding-stone will generally have a worn depression, which can be circular or a long thin groove. Grinding area depth can also vary and a hole may have formed where the stone is completely worn away.

GRINDING-STONES

A grinding-stone can look like an ordinary pebble, but closer inspection can reveal its previous industrial use. Grinding-stones are very important artefacts and help understand what food sources were available at the time they were being used.

FAST FACT

QUARRIES

An Aboriginal quarry is a place which shows evidence of man-made extraction of stone or ochre (earth pigment).

QUARRIES

To identify an Aboriginal quarry, there must be evidence material has been removed or the natural rock has modified surfaces in the form of negative scarring, crushing and excavation. The presence of implements used during and for extraction, such as hammer –stones, or fire-hardened sticks provide good clues.

FAST FACT

GNAMMA HOLES

Gnamma holes were created for collecting water and are usually found in granite outcrops. They were made by lighting a fire on the granite surface, which became weak due to the heat. A hole was then chipped away with a stone tool. Most gnamma holes were covered by a flat granite rock to help keep the water inside clean and drinkable.

GNAMMA HOLES

There are several large gnamma holes along the Styx River in Denmark. These were created using the burning technique but were left with a round rock at the bottom of the hole. During winter, rainwater would flow into the hole causing the rock inside to move around and grind away at the bottom and make the hole larger. Some of these holes are now 1.5m deep.

FAST FACT

SHELL MIDDENS

These are places where molluscs have been eaten and their empty shells have accumulated. These sites can also contain artefacts, fireplaces, burnt shell and bones.

To establish these shell build-ups are of Aboriginal origin, charcoal, stone artefacts, blackened shells or bones from other edible species should be evident. There should also be a demonstrable selection of edible, mature, shell fish species.

SHELL MIDDENS

Natural events such as storms can result in the formation of midden like features. However, these are distinguishable from man-made middens due to a lack of artefacts, burnt shell or their composition being made of non-edible mollusc species.

FAST FACT

LIZARD TRAPS

Lizard traps are a widely distributed and a well-known Aboriginal site feature. Generally they consist of a thin granite slab, around 100cm square and 10cm thick, propped up on one end to a height of around 10cm using one or more smaller stones.

LIZARD TRAPS

Lizards were a very important source of food for Noongars, so they built raised-slab traps in locations where reptiles sunned themselves. The raised slab created a crevice which the lizard could retreat to when disturbed. However, their long tails stretched outside the trap allowing Aboriginals to capture the animal by pulling on the tail and clubbing the reptile to death.

FAST FACT

FISH TRAPS

Fish traps and weirs are generally located on coastlines protected from strong tides and ocean waves at points and estuaries. They are very rarely found on open beaches. Those built in less protected areas or made from organic materials such as wood, have most likely disappeared.

FISH TRAPS

The most common type of fish trap wall was U-shaped. Most traps consisted of one or multiple pens. Fish and other aquatic fauna caught in traps were removed by hand or a variety of techniques including spearing.

FAST FACT

SCAR TREES

These are trees which have had their trunk or branch sapwood exposed through human interaction. Aboriginals created scars on trees by removing bark for making implements, shields and canoes.

Tree scars vary in size and are found on mature native species, especially paperbark (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*) and red gum (*Corymbia calophylla*). They often occur along major rivers, around lakes and on flood plains.

SCAR TREES

To establish a scar tree is of Aboriginal origin, it must be a mature, native species.

The scar base should begin above ground level, be roughly parallel-sided and fairly symmetrical in its overall shape.

The bark regrowth should be generally regular and the scar's terminations should be either squared off or pointed as a result of bark regrowth.

FAST FACT

OCHRE

Ochre is a crumbly hard type of rock heavily coloured by iron oxide. It was the most important painting material traditionally used by Noongars and was traded extensively across Australia.

There is evidence that some material travelled many thousands of kilometres from where it was mined to where it was used. It comes in a variety of colours from white to dark reddish-brown.

OCHRE

Ochre had many uses in Aboriginal culture.

It was used for ceremonial body painting and rock painting and was heavily traded.

Ochre is one of the most common finds in archaeological surveys and can help identify camp sites, or other culturally significant places.

FAST FACT

PAINTINGS

Aboriginal rock art is tradition stretching back thousands of years.

Some Aboriginal artwork is so ancient its true meaning is lost forever.

PAINTINGS

The engravings in WA's Pilbara and the Olary region of South Australia are some of the oldest known surviving Aboriginal art and are thought to be around 40,000 years old.

FAST FACT

CORROBOREE & CAMPSITES

A corroboree site was a piece of open ground where Aboriginals interacted with the Dreamtime through dance, music and costume. Campsites are not easy to distinguish, as their soil consistency has changed over time, allowing vegetation to grow lower than in the site's immediate surrounding area.

CORROBOREE & CAMPSITES

Sites were used over many generations and sometimes contain remnants of campfires and implements.

They are often found near useful resources such as freshwater.

FAST FACT

BURIALS

A burial site was a very significant place for Noongars and they generally buried their dead where the ground was soft. Sand dunes, middens, rock shelters and especially constructed mounds were used for burials. The dead were sometimes cremated or placed in trees or rock ledges.

BURIALS

As Aboriginal people have lived in Australia for more than 40,000 years burials are seen as part of a continuing culture and tradition as well as offering valuable archaeological information.

Burials exist throughout WA and can be accidentally uncovered in construction work or become exposed through erosion.

If a skeleton is found it must be reported to the police.

FAST FACT

DIDGERIDOOS

Although some claim the didgeridoo dates back 40,000 years, archaeological research suggests the instrument is much younger. The evidence of this research is based on studies of cave wall paintings in the Northern Territory which date back 2,000 years and depict Aboriginals playing the didgeridoo. Before this time, there are no known images of didgeridoos or humans playing them.

Sometimes described as a natural wooden trumpet or "drone pipe", didgeridoos are usually made from native hardwoods, especially the various eucalyptus species. Generally the main trunk of the tree is harvested, though a substantial branch may be used instead.

DIDGERIDOOS

To make a didgeridoo, Aboriginals looked for suitably hollow live trees in areas with obvious termite activity.

Termites attack the living eucalyptus tree, removing only the dead heartwood, as the living sapwood contains a chemical which repels the insects.

FAST FACT

REGISTERED SITES & HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* specifies that a Register of Aboriginal sites must be maintained. The *Act* protects places and objects of importance and significance to people of Aboriginal descent in Western Australia. These places and objects may be identified as a site and recorded on the Register of Aboriginal sites.

Under current arrangements the Register of Aboriginal sites is held and maintained at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA).

Under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* the DAA works with Aboriginal people to protect and manage places of significance. The DAA provides advice to the public and private sectors and the community about Aboriginal heritage management and maintains a Register of Aboriginal sites.

As part of the State's project approval system, the DAA works with developers to ensure that Aboriginal heritage and engagement with Aboriginal people is built into development planning process. The Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee (ACMC) provides advice to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs on the management of sites of significance to the development process.

ABORIGINAL SITE DISTURBANCE

Under Section 17 of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* it is an offence to disturb a site.

You are disturbing a site when you excavate, destroy, damage, conceal, or in any way alter any Aboriginal site without prior authorisation of the Registrar of Aboriginal sites and/or consent of the Minister for Indigenous Affairs.

If you come across an alleged disturbance of a site, please contact a Department of Aboriginal Affairs office or the police.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND AN ABORIGINAL ARTEFACT

Do not disturb it or remove it from the site and check whether it has the typical characteristics of that particular type of artefact. If it does, record its location and write a brief description of its condition. Note whether it's under threat of disturbance.

Please help to preserve Aboriginal sites by reporting their presence to:

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs,
129 Aberdeen Street,
Albany, WA 6330

Telephone (08) 9842 3347.

NOONGAR WORDS

There are several different ways of pronouncing a particular word in Noongar language, which is dependent from which tribal group the word originated.

There are also different ways to spell a Noongar word. This is because Noongar was an oral language and not written down in any form.

Therefore, all spelling variations are derived from written interpretations of a tribal oral dialect.

Country ..... boodja or booja
Hello ..... kiya or kaya
Family ..... moort
Food/damper ..... merenj
Man or men ..... noongar
Woman or women ..... yorga or yok
Children .... koolangka, koolanga or kurrlongurr
Cloaks ..... bookas
Cloak pin for booka ..... birnt
Bag ..... chootas
Shelter ..... kwornt or mia mia
Campsite ..... kaleep
Message stick ..... boorna-wangkiny
Noongar Rainbow Serpent; from the Nyitting or Noongar Dreaming.....
.....waugal, waakal or woggle
Spirit ..... bardan
Taboo (sacred area)..... winnaitch

NOONGAR WORDS

Fire.....kaarla or karl
Ochre ..... wilgee
Tree bark .....boort
River .....bilya or beeliar
Freshwater ..... keip, kep or keipa
Estuary (where salt and fresh water mix) ....
.....gabbi darbal
Estuary..... darbal
Swamp or a lake..... binjar or pinjar
Ocean or sea .....yey-yey
Island..... goorda
Head/hill.....kart or kata
Rocks, stones .....boya
Rain ..... kinjarling

Tools, Hunting and Gathering

Axe .....kodja or koit
Flat grinding stone ..... mullers
Women's digging stick..... wanna or warna
Spear thrower ..... mirr or mirra
Knife ..... darp
Spear ..... gidjie or gidgee
Fish trap .....manga or mungah
To dig or catch ..... baranginy
Throwing sticks .....dowak

CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY

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