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FOOD, ITS DISTRIBUTION, RESTRICTION, etc.

MURCHISON AREA

FOOD

ITS DISTRIBUTION, RESTRICTION, ETC.

MURCHISON AREA

In the early days, before the white man's arrival, there were strict laws regulating the food supply, its consumption and distribution.

The list of foods forbidden in all tribes to the young people of both sexes was a formidable one, and included almost everything that was succulent in meat and vegetable foods.

Until the boy had become mijarn (fully initiated) he could not eat any of these foods, nor could the young girls until she had been initiated and allotted to her husband.

Occasionally the restriction from some special food would be removed from the boy between the periods of his circumcision and subincision, but until the prohibition was removed, the boy although he could hunt and kill the animals, was not allowed to eat any of them until his mother's brother or some kamiju removed the prohibition.

In the large area in and beyond Fraser Range and Balladonia, dog totem people (dwerdawuk) will not eat dog, but will partake of all other foods. Opossum totem people will not eat opossum but will eat dog. This rule however appears to be observed only in those districts which, for want of better knowledge of them, have been called "Totemic."

Every portion of a kangaroo or emu was relegated to certain members of the hunter's family. Amongst the Marduwonga, when a kangaroo was killed, the yago (mother) was given the back, kurda (brother) the leg, ngaba (father's mother) the tail, which she shared with ngabaiju (grandchildren), kundan (mother's mother) leg, kombarnu (mother's brother) and maraiji (father's sister) ribs and head, ngabari (brothers-in-law) danel (thigh) and side, mango (sisters-in-law) share leh with kurda.

The distribution of emu was still more rigorous, as every adult man in camp must receive a portion. "Brother will fight brother for emu," is a saying that is common amongst all the tribes, the emu being evidently the favourite animal food.

Every kind of animal and bird food, except the smallest birds and animals, is eaten, and the methods used to catch them are by trapping in pits, placing stupefying plants in their waterholes, spearing and clubbing and decoying by means of feathers attached to the ends of spears and waved about in the semblance of smaller birds. This method is employed to catch hawks and eaglehawks.

In the sandy parts of the Murchison district a kangaroo pit was dug to a depth of seven or eight feet, the natives "cottering" the earth that had been thrown out. They then placed two or three pointed sticks about three feet high sticking up in the bottom of the pit, and then the hole was covered over with small sticks, grass and a little earth. Some Murchison traps had no stakes at the bottom.

The nyingari, a small, plump, greyish coloured bird, was caught in the following manner: The larger waterholes which these birds frequented were covered up and a number of small rockholes were filled with water. Into these small holes they placed a few branches and seeds of a native bush called n̄raga and balbin which possesses some stupefying qualities, and then moved into cover. Soon the nyingari came in hundreds to their watering place, and as they drank the impregnated water, they one by one collapsed, until over fifty lay upon the ground, too stupefied to move. When the natives thought there were sufficient for their purpose, they rushed out of their hiding place and gathered the drugged birds, placing them in their belts to carry them the more easily. This method has also been used to catch emu. When the natives have gathered more nyingari than they can consume, they cook and pound the remainder into a sort of mince, when it will keep for days.

The Fraser Range natives had an ingenious method of catching lizards. One native made a small fan of feathers about four or five inches long, which he fastened to a long thin rod. When a lizard ran past, the fan was agitated in front of it, when its attention was at once drawn to the object. Another native accompanying the "fan wielder" speared the animal as it stood and

gazed. The fan was also used to catch other ground game in the Fraser Range district.

The following method of catching fish was used in the Gascoyne district : A floating platform, made of large sheets of paperbark, is constructed at one end of the pool which is to be dragged. The platform is about five feet long, and three feet wide, hollowed like a dish, with a "back" to it about three feet high. To each end of the platform is fastened a "rope" ten or twelve feet long, formed of the trailing branches of the cajjeput tree, bound together with strips of the inner fibrous bark, or with rushes. These ropes are from nine inches to one foot in diameter, tapering towards the end. A thick curtain of branches of cajjeput is fastened to the under side of the rope, so as to hang down and block the fish from swimming underneath. Then all the natives taking part join in dragging the raft from one end of the pool to the other, thus driving all the fish before it. When the fish get into the shallow water, the men make a great splashing along the ropes, thus causing the fish to try and leap back over the platform into the only place where the water is undisturbed. They strike the back of the platform and fall into the dish-shaped body of it, where they are promptly killed.

Fish was preserved in the following manner : The flesh was shaved off the bone by a cutting flint, or torn off with the fingers. It was then dried and pounded between two stones, and carried in a kangaroo skin, or a piece of bark, until required. Another method was to pound the dried strips into a very fine mince, which was then slightly moistened and rolled into balls, which were sometimes made to bind together with crushed seed. These balls were again dried and could be carried about for some time before they were eaten.

Marrjilla, a species of seagull, is caught in this fashion : A native puts some wal'jooroo (long bean creeper) round his head, and going into the water he waits for the marrjilla. Presently several seagull come over the water towards the waiting native, who throws three or four lanjii successively at them killing at least two or three.

They will kill a bird as it flies from the nest by first

sending the spear through the nest from underneath, and then, as the bird flies out, striking it down with the club. Pigeons, quail and other small birds are caught in this way.

Fires may also be started in thick scrub in order to drive the animals into the open, and a "batten" may take place where there is a suitable cul-de-sac into which kangaroo can be driven.

Hawks are always attracted by fire as it drives our the ground game or burns it. A native of some of the inland districts when hawk hunting, digs a hole in the sand some four or five feet deep, sets a certain area on fire, and jumping into the hole, pulls a few partly burnt bushes over it and crouches there, dangling a mouse or a rat impaled on a short stick. The hawk swoops down to seize the rat and is caught and either choked or knocked with a stick and flung into the hole. A dozen or more hawks may be caught in a short time in this manner.

Reptiles, land tortoises and river fish, also grubs of many kinds, were eaten. The Waianwonga natives will sometimes make a triangle of sticks, against which hot ashes will be piled. The bird is placed within the sticks, hot stones are placed inside it, the entrails having been extracted, and the feathers singed or plucked off. When ready, the skin is pulled off, leaving the flesh clean and free from ashes.

Fish, crabs, crayfish, dugong, iguanas, lizards, snakes and birds are all roasted over the coals. Turtle is generally roasted whole in the oven. What is not eaten is cut into strips and dried in the sun. This turtle meat is then carried by the natives on their journey, and before being eaten it is moistened with water and pounded on a millstone.

Large game, like kangaroo, emu, turkey, have their entrails taken out and the space filled with stones, and cooked whole by being covered up with ashes and hot coals.

Meat foods must, however, have been always rather scarce, since the consumption of human flesh has always been more or less customary, and indeed has only recently been stopped in the settled districts through the police arresting on a charge of murder those

who were found eating human flesh. Cannibalism is however still indulged in amongst the tribes east of the Waianwonga and Ngaunwonga and amongst the Wirdinya people.

In the Balladonia and Fraser Range districts, when an initiated young man died, his scars (worma) were cut off, roasted and eaten by his male relatives, who also sucked the blood from his veins, and sometimes from his cheeks. The eating of the worma and the drinking of blood were supposed to give them increased strength and also to lessen their grief for the dead.

All the people of this district are baaduk - blood drinkers - and drink the blood of the beasts they kill. (No'dee's, Jimmer's and Marrale'a's information, Balladonia.)

Vegetable, root and seed foods were very plentiful in the Murchison area, the kulyu having as extensive an habitat in that district as the warain has in the south. The kulyu, or kuld, as it is called in some districts, is a vine creeper, whose roots are as abundant as potatoes. I have seen a large taga filled with the roots from one vine - about ten pounds of kulyu from one root. The kulyu is the kurdaru of the local groups within whose districts it grows.

Every season has its special root and seed foods and every district will have some special food which ripens at a certain time and whither the local group will resort and gather the harvest. The bulibuli of the Mindula, Yalgoo district and Milyu (Field's Find), Wajari people, ripens about October, and is the occasion for an assemblage of local groups and the performance of initiation and other ceremonies and for exchange and barter.

Root foods are cooked in the ashes, seeds are pounded, and mixed with water, and sometimes eaten raw, occasionally a cooked "damper" will be made in readiness for the groups that collect to perform their various ceremonies.

Some water roots of the Waianwonga were : walyil - species of mulga root containing water, ngagar - species of tree root containing water, barndil - tree with waterbearing roots. Jandid'ulangu and Ngara-dara are the names given to two species

of plants, which are gathered and thrown into waterholes frequented by emus and other large game. The water stupefies the bird or animal that drinks it and renders them an easy prey to the watching native. Wajida stated that the plants do not poison the emus, otherwise they could not be eaten.

WATER

Water was obtained from wells, springs, rockholes, soaks, roots of trees, gnarled boles of river and other gums, roots of several species of mulga, acacia and other trees, and water may be obtained from the heavy dews that fall in the inland areas. I caught over a pint of dew with a sponge from a tree in the Upper Murchison district.

Ngamma holes are found in many places on the Murchison. The Wajari at Mindula have some deep mili-mili, quite round in shape, some of them quite 12 or 16 feet in depth and about three or four feet in diameter at the top.

In the Ngadawonga, Waian, Kurdu and Ngaiawonga territories, there are also many milyi-milyi as they are called in those districts. These form the chief pools of the local group in whose territory they are found. Baudawara's father's chief pool or camp was called Milyi-milyi and the chief pool of the Mindula local group was also called mili-mili.

The water-bearing trees of the Jargurdi tribes were : Walgan (water in roots), baji-baji (another species of mulga, water in roots), ngagar (a milky liquid in roots of ngagar tree), wira-wira, like the baji-baji (water in roots).

TuradaBarduwonga tribeNATIVE ROOTS, FRUITS, SEEDS IN DISTRICT

Mai-i - all vegetable food
 Mōlōlō wild grapes
 Ngalauwarda,
 tinba, bilu seeds
 Nyinir native fruit
 Jilga-jilga seeds from tree
 Burbur, mangirba
 manna from gum
 Kālgūla fruit of runner or vine
 Malada root " " " "
 Gō-ō, lebuin,
 kandal, mulgar-
 gura species of mushrooms

GAME HUNTING

Kangaroo, emu and turkey are the principal objects of the chase.

Methods for hunting and catching kangaroo are :-

- Urangaringu - bush fence or cul-de-sac created in some place much frequented by kangaroo - valley, gully, or waterhole.
- Bangu - Waiting at a waterhole to spear them as they come to drink.
- Kanangu - Spearing at night
- Wogalgua - Disturbing the herd and hunting and spearing them as they escape.
- Uradaigongu - Sneaking up under cover of bush
- Ura durdu durdu
- Duyu - Skalking game
- Bujin galgu, ngambarinu - Running down one or more kangaroo
- Nguliana garding, daminu -
Hunting together, a battue

Emus are usually speared at waterholes :-

- Gabinga wogalgua - Spearing at their waterholes

Small game is clubbed or speared.

Alli meat food = kuga

TuradaBarduwonga tribeNAMES OF TREES, etc. IN DISTRICT

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Korgo | Mulga tree |
| Yaliurba | Gum tree |
| Karining | Large gum tree |
| Milyiri | |
| Winjalga, bildara | Mirus are made from these |
| Jilga-jilga | Dirogo (clubs) made from wood |
| Dauc | Tree from whose roots the yujan spear is made |
| Wira, wogura, malimu | 3 species of gum tree |
| Burdarba | Wattle tree |
| Burbur, mangirba | Manna from gum tree |
| Walgu | Native peach |
| Munyun, walgal | Sandalwood tree |
| Baria, dalinga, buta | Species of spinifex |