NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

The 7th General Meeting of the Society for 1985 will be held in the

CONSERVATION CENTRE, 120 WAKEFIELD STREET, ADELAIDE

ON

MONDAY 23RD SEPTEMBER 1985

AGENDA

1. Apologies:

2. Minutes of the previous General Meeting:
   Minutes of the previous General Meeting, held in the Conservation
   Centre on Monday 26th August 1985, having been circulated in this
   Journal, to be confirmed.

3. Papers and Journals:
   Papers and journals received since the last meeting, from other
   societies and organisations, will be tabled at the meeting.

4. Business:

5. Speaker:
   Head of the Discipline of Visual Arts, Flinders University of
   South Australia, will address the Society. The title of his
   address will be :
   CONFRONTATION AND CO-OPERATION :
   The 1983 Rescue Excavations of Adelaide's Destitute Asylum.

6. Supper will be served.

R. Allison,
Hon. Secretary
c/o The Conservation Centre
120 Wakefield Street
ADELAIDE SA 5000
LANGUAGE AS HERITAGE: Vityurna (dried meat) and other stored food among the Adnyamathanha.

(In this article Dorothy Tunbridge continues the series on 'Language as Heritage' to show that language may be a window on a dying culture. Words 'die' some time after their referent ceases to exist. If they can be 'captured' before this happens, they open the memory of those who know them, enabling not only the word itself to be recorded, but all that word signifies in its cultural context. They are, as it were, the 'last stand' of non-material culture. The next stage is extinction. In this article we look through the 'window' on food storage, and in the process get a glimpse into ethno-botany and the recording of culture and mythology by place-naming.)

It is well documented that aboriginal people in Australia were traditionally hunter-gatherers who lived from day to day off the environment, eating well in a good season, tightening the belt when things became difficult. Elkin was not mistaken when he noted that 'the food-gathering and hunting economy was hand-to-mouth everywhere in Australia. There was no hoarding' (Elkin 1979:44). That is to say, he made an accurate generalisation. It may be therefore surprising to learn that the Adnyamathanha did practise 'hoarding' - putting something away for hard times.

Hoarding is of particular interest in that it suggests that nomadism was somewhat limited: storing food requires a fairly stationary existence, or at the most, range over a limited area. The Adnyamathanha people have lived a basically sedentary life for well over a hundred years now. Although we can be fairly sure food storage was practised prior to that, we can at this stage only guess as to the extent of it. There is nothing in our evidence to suggest that it was ever practised on a big scale. Some game and certain vegetable foods (varlu and mai respectively) are known to have been stored.

1. **Vityurna**: dried meat

The game chiefly used in the preparation of vityurna

---

1 This is not as metaphoric as may be thought. Schürmann notes that the Port Lincoln people, the Parnkarla, who like the Adnyamathanha wore hair belts (known by the Adnyamathanha as urnari), would tighten their belts 'especially when they are hungry, for the purpose, as they say, of staying their stomachs, or of rendering the craving of hunger less painful' (Schürmann 1879:212).
was kangaroo (*Macropus rufus*), wallaby (*Petrogale* sp., generally *P. xanthopus*) and emu meat. The whole animal was not used, as there were taboos for certain people regarding the consumption of specific parts of some animals. For instance, there were taboos on kangaroo head, tail and leg (including the hip-bone), and on wallaby filet, tail and stomach fat. Those parts of the animal subject to any taboo would be cooked separately, and eaten within a day or two by those who were permitted by law to eat them. In this way people were not placed in a position of inadvertently eating something they were not permitted by law to eat, and suffering the consequences which were expected.

The method of preparing the meat for drying was described to the author in relation to drying kangaroo meat, but it would have been much the same for any animal. After the removal of those parts subject to a taboo, the kangaroo was cooked in the ashes with its skin on, in the usual manner. This involved digging a hole in the ground which was to serve as an oven (ilda). A fire was made in this, and when it had burnt down to hot coals, the kangaroo with its intestines etc. removed was placed on top of the coals, and more coals were placed on top of the meat. When the meat was cooked, it was removed from the ashes, laid on fresh green boughs, and dusted with bunches of leaves. The skin was peeled off, and the meat was cut up with a meat stone (yarlu adnya) into manageable pieces. The meat was peeled off the bone in strips about 3-10 cms in length, and then placed somewhere to dry out, care being taken to keep the flies off it.

When the meat was completely dry, it was placed in a skin bag (yakutha) until it was needed. When it was taken out to be eaten, it was pounded between two large creek stones (vari adnya). It was then chewed, dry, when other meat was scarce. It was never reconstituted in any way. In recent times, under the influence of Europeans, salt was also used in the preparation of *vityurna*.

*Vityurna* was made quite commonly right up to the 1920s, Alice Coulthard being remembered as one person who used to make it. About the last time anyone remembers it being made was in 1925, at Mt. Serle.

---

1 This method of cooking kangaroo is still employed today, although it may alternate with other (European) methods of cooking it also.
2. Nguri: Wattle gum

The storage of wattle gum is encoded in a place name in the Gammon Ranges National Park, Nguriyandharlanha, which means something like 'the special ground/place of nguri'. Nguri is the name given to edible gum obtained from several species of wattle: *Acacia oswaldii* (= ylka), *A. rivalis* (which has the same name as the gum, nguri) and *A. victoriae* (= min-ga).

Nguriyandharlanha is a very beautiful rocky gorge, the sides of which feature a number of caves (or overhangs), and is an important mythological site. In the myth, a certain being (whose name some people prefer not to have mentioned, so we omit it here) had eaten too much kidney fat from a possum he had killed down at Lake Frome. He was on his way up to the Gammon Ranges carrying a bag full of nguri. Because of his overindulgence, he became sicker and sicker as he went up the valley, and by the time he reached Nguriyandharlanha (known in English as Davis's Spring), he was very ill indeed, and could no longer manage to carry his bag of nguri. He therefore left it in one of the caves at the spring, for collection at a later date. (Tunbridge 1984)

Nguri was generally simply picked off the bark and sucked. Today it is still very much enjoyed.¹ In times past, however, it was also stored (Mountford 30:65).

3. Mana / manatakata / awadi: manna, lerp

The terms mana and manatakata sound very much like the English 'manna' and 'manna tucker', the latter adding a syllable -ta, however.² As far as is known at the time of writing, mana and awadi are semantically equivalent terms, mana being the term commonly used today. Mana is thought by speakers of the language to be a Yura Ngawarl word, but given the existence of the word awadi, plus the homophony of mana with the English word, it is undoubtedly borrowed from English.³

There is a class of insects which extract juices from

---

¹ One of the treats for a visitor to the Nepabunna Aboriginal School is to be taken out to look for nguri.

² The significance of the added syllable -ta is not known: it does not conform to normal reduplication patterns, although it could represent a similar mechanism (repeating the first syllable of 'tucker').

³ The English term is most commonly heard in relation to the 'manna in the wilderness' of the Old Testament. Given the strong mission influence in Nepabunna, it is very likely that the term was introduced from the Old Testament.
leaves, exuding some because they have obtained too much. Evaporation leaves a white sugary substance on the leaves, which if there is an abundance of it, may also fall to the ground. This is manna. Insect larva utilise the manna to form a canopy under which they live. This is lerp. As far as is known to date, the Yura Ngawarla terms above cover both 'manna' and 'lerp'.

_Mana_ is a very popular Adnyamathanha food even today, although people say that there is not nearly as much available these days as there used to be (perhaps due to ecological changes which have been set in motion by the pastoral industry in the region over the last 130 yrs. or more, and the introduction of exotic flora and fauna).

In the Northern Flinders Ranges _mana_ which here appears on the Red River Gum (_Eucalyptus camaldulensis_) was very common earlier this century around Mt. Serle and Angepena, for instance. People say they could get 'big rolls of it'. They would shake it off the leaves by hitting them with a stick, onto a sheet of clean calico. (In earlier times, a skin rug would have been used.) In a short time one could obtain a bucket full. It was then rolled up and placed in a bag. The bag used in the past, _yakutha_, was made of skin. Gum leaves (_ulu_) were placed in the bag with the _mana_ to keep it moist. The bag was kept tightly closed, and from time to time the _ulu_ were changed. The _mana_ 'keeps for years' in this manner.

_Mana_ from eucalyptus trees was eaten by other aboriginal people, including those of the lower Darling region. (Cribb & Cribb 1975).

4. _Urti_ (Santalum acuminatum) quandong, native peach

The fruit of the _urti_ tree is as popular today with white people as it has been traditionally with aboriginal people throughout the continent, including the Adnyamathanha. It is a small fleshy fruit, 2-3 cm wide and with a stone (_urti muku_) in the centre. Adnyamathanha people have traditionally eaten both the flesh and the kernel of the stone.

Mountford was told about the storage of _urti_ by the Adnyamathanha during a visit he made to the region around the end of the 1930s. When the _urti_ were almost ripe, a fairly high platform was built up below the tree and covered with branches, in order to collect the fruit as it fell. The platform was needed to prevent the emu from getting the fruit first, as _urti_ are also eaten by this
bird.¹ The fallen fruit was dried and stored in a dry cave in a skin bag (yakutha). Later it was soaked in water to make a 'refreshing drink'. Presumably the reconstituted pulp and the kernel were also eaten. It seems that other aboriginal people also stored quandong fruit, as Cribb and Cribb note, this being 'an unusual practice for these people' - a point we have already noted.² (Cribb and Cribb 1975)

5. Wawa: grass seed

Mountford notes that Mitchell grass (Astrebla pectinata) was stored - presumably it was the seeds which were stored. Mitchell grass and a number of other grass seeds (and other seeds also) were winnowed on the curved wooden dish known as yardlu, and ground between two grinding stones (wadla), then made into a damper and cooked in the ashes. It seems likely that the seeds were stored when there was an abundance, in a good season. Another reason for storing the seeds, at least for a brief period, would be that some of them would have been obtained at some distance from the camp, and the gatherers would have brought in all they could carry, whether it was going to be used immediately or not.

As we noted above, there is no evidence that people traditionally stored food on a large scale. That they stored it at all is worth noting, however, given the widespread belief that aboriginal people throughout Australia lived from day to day on whatever was at hand, with no thought for tomorrow. We can only speculate as to how recently the practice began. It ended early in the lifetime of today's elderly Adnyamathanha, as white man's 'rations' became increasingly available.

---

¹ Cribb and Cribb cite a report from the Kimberleys which suggests that the urti were eaten whole by emus, and that aboriginal people were able to collect the seeds after they were voided, to obtain the kernels.

² Unfortunately Cribb and Cribb do not cite their source nor the name of the aboriginal people concerned.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Two Adnyamathanha women, Annie Coulthard and Pearl McKenzie, were of assistance to the author in providing some of the information contained in this paper, in part while the author was engaged in research for the three works cited below (6, 7 and 8). This research was made possible by the South Australian Department of Education, Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service and the (then) Heritage Conservation Branch, Department of Environment & Planning, SA. Written sources of information used were:


4. Notebook No.30, The Mountford-Sheard Collection, Libraries Board of South Australia (with permission). Cited as 'Mountford 30'.

5. Schürmann, C.W. (1879). The Aboriginal Tribes of Port Lincoln in South Australia, their mode of life, manners, customs, etc. in Woods (ed.) 1879.


