



Bush Tucker, Boomerangs & Bandages

Traditional Aboriginal Plant Use in the Border Rivers and Gwydir Catchments



A guide to the common plants of the catchments with important use and meaning to Aboriginal people

Compiled by Michelle McKemey
and Harry White



CARING
FOR
OUR
COUNTRY



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Welcome and Acknowledgement

The Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA takes this opportunity to acknowledge the traditional owners and people from within the Kamilaroi, Anaiwan, Banbai and Ngarabal nations and the various tribes that live within those nations.

The Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA also acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future Aboriginal Elders from those nations.



Message from the Chair

The Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Management Authority holds in great respect the traditional knowledge of our Aboriginal People and sees this knowledge as an integral component of land management for future generations. The knowledge of plants, their uses and their role in sustaining ecosystem processes that the aboriginal people have accumulated over millennia is fundamental to understanding and managing our landscapes for future generations.

Individuals usually value an item when they understand its use and role in their life.

In this book Michelle and Harry have brought together information provided by research and the traditional owners of the Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment to increase our understanding of the plants of the Catchment and how they were used by the traditional owners. This information increases our understanding, recording it so that it can be passed on to future generations. The better understanding promoted by this book will encourage individuals to better value plants in the Catchment, while to the younger aboriginals it will provide a sense of pride in carrying on the knowledge essential to managing their country.

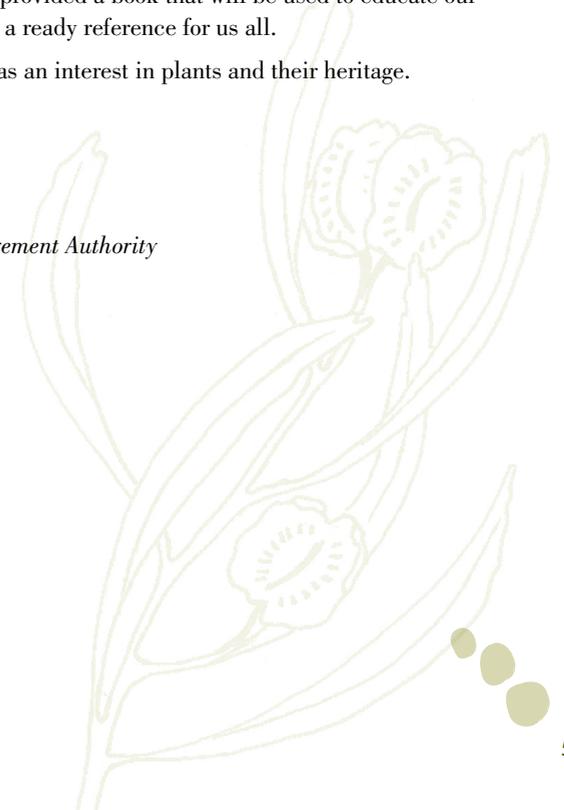
By providing this information on the plants of our Catchment in such an accessible and readable form Michelle and Harry have provided a book that will be used to educate our children and grandchildren and provide a ready reference for us all.

I recommend this book to anyone who has an interest in plants and their heritage.

Dr Bob Crouch

Chair

Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Management Authority





Introduction

This book has been prepared to inspire interest in the Aboriginal cultural heritage of our catchments. It will assist people to identify and understand the uses and meanings of some common plants to the Aboriginal people of the Border Rivers and Gwydir catchments of northern New South Wales.

There are four principal Aboriginal nations within the Border Rivers and Gwydir catchments. These are Kamilaroi, Ngarabal, Banbai and Anaiwan nations. Various tribes are recognised within these nations.

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Border Rivers and Gwydir catchments and thank them for sharing their knowledge and culture with the wider public.

The information presented in this book has been sourced from information that is available in the public domain in the form of public and general knowledge, publications and personal communication (reference information provided where possible).

Funding was provided by the Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Management Authority and the Australian Government Caring For Our Country Initiative.



Traditional Ecological Knowledge in the Border Rivers and Gwydir Catchments

Aboriginal people have lived in Australia for over 40,000 years, or since the beginning of the Dreamtime or Creation Era. In fact, Aboriginal culture is the oldest living culture in the world today. Over these many years, Aboriginal people lived with the land, taking everything they needed for their survival (medicine, food, shelter, clothing, spirituality) from the earth and the elements. Plants and animals were carefully harvested to ensure there was enough food left for the next generation. Totems and kinship rules meant that Aboriginal people lived sustainably, not taking more than they needed from the earth. Aboriginal people had a responsibility to look after their totem (usually an animal) and the habitat in which it lived (plant, water and so on).

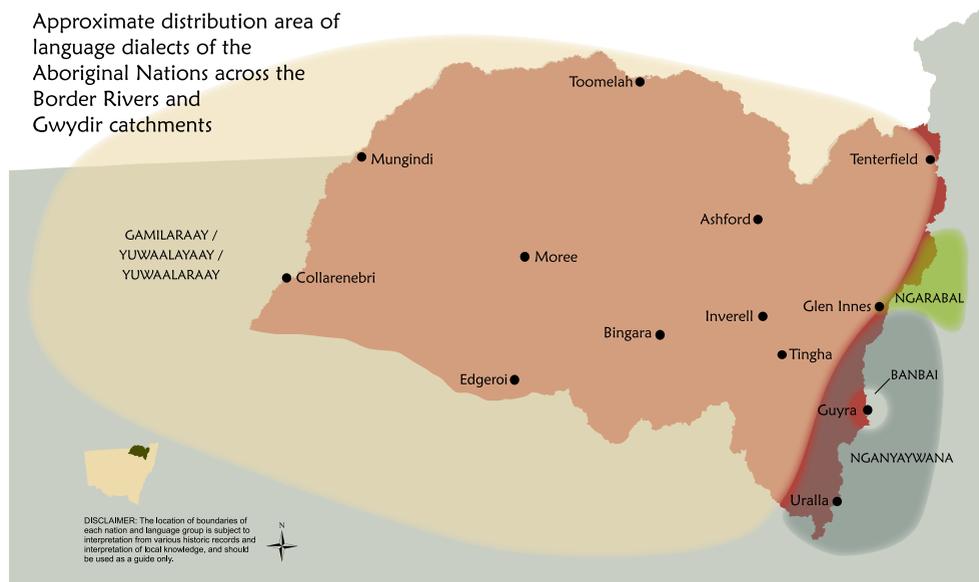
Aboriginal use of plants over thousands of years has led to an incredibly detailed and intimate knowledge base which is held within Aboriginal culture. In order to survive, Aboriginal people needed to know which plants could be eaten throughout the seasons of the year, which plants could heal diseases and help to fix broken bones, which plants could provide habitat for animals and a reliable place to hunt for meat and eggs, which plants could be used to make tools or shelter and which plants could be used to help people to carry out their spiritual obligations, such as ceremonies or funerals.

The Border Rivers and Gwydir catchments stretch from the cold, high country tablelands of the Great Dividing Range in the east, to the hot, dry plains of the outback in the west. The catchments contain a great variety of ecosystems, including swamps, rivers, lakes, woodlands, forests, grasslands and heath, providing habitat for over 2,740 species of plants (NSW National Parks and Wildlife 2010). Many of these plants were used by Aboriginal people for a variety of purposes. This book profiles some of the plants which were particularly important for traditional Aboriginal use, most of which can be commonly found in the Border Rivers and Gwydir catchments.





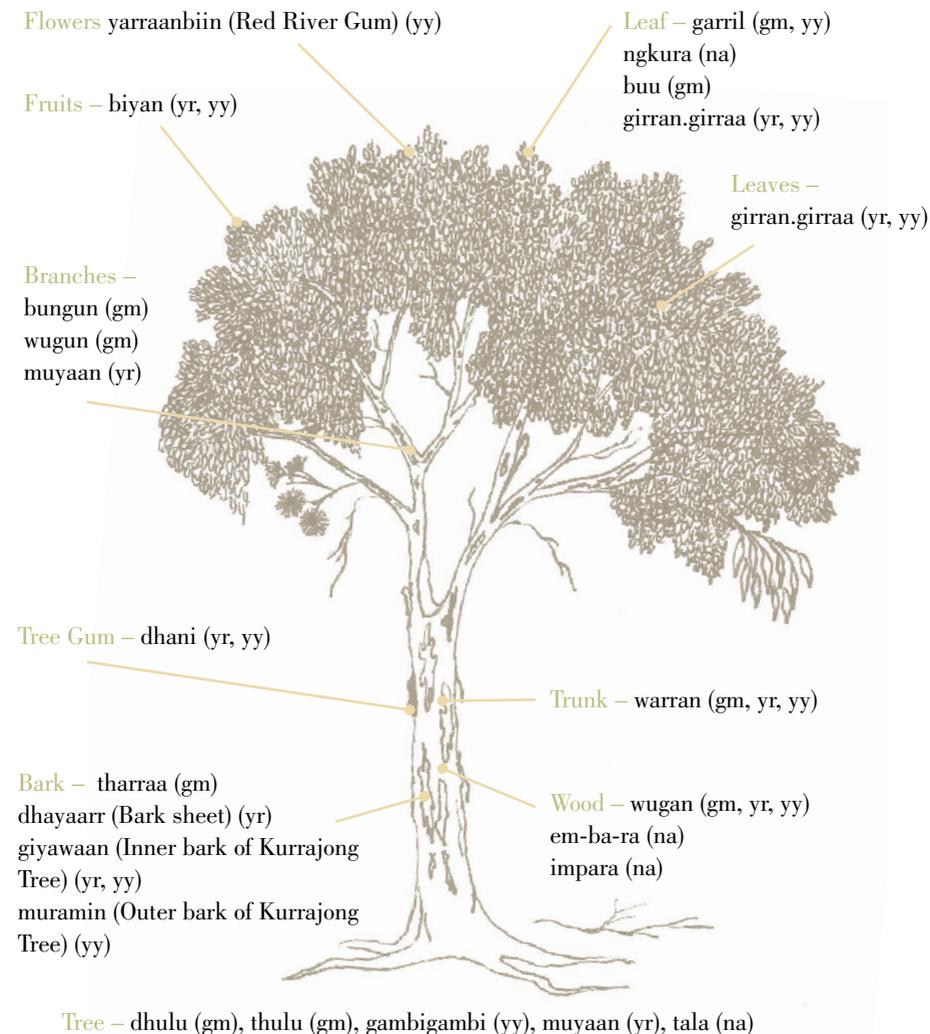
Map of Border Rivers and Gwydir Catchments



The Border Rivers and Gwydir catchments are located in northern New South Wales. Many Aboriginal nations have used this area over thousands of years and their people still live in the area today. This book provides information on a few of the language dialects which have been used across the catchment. Some language names have not been included, as at time of production, it was not possible to obtain accurate information in this regard.

The **gamilaraay**, **yuwalaraay** and **yuwalayaay** dialects are spoken by members of the **Gomeroi (Kamilaroi)** nation. Within the Border Rivers and Gwydir catchments, the land of the **Gomeroi** nation stretches from the western area of the catchment to the border with the **Banbai** nation near Guyra in the east of the catchment. The **nganyaywana** language is spoken by members of the **Anaiwan (or Eneewin)** nation, whose land extends south from the border with the **Banbai** nation (near Guyra) towards Uralla and towards the Tingha district to the north west. Other notable languages within the area include **yukumbal**, from the Bundarra area, and **ngarabal**, which was spoken around the Glen Innes area of the catchment. This book uses words and references primarily relating to the **gamilaraay**, **yuwalaraay**, **yuwalayaay**, **banbai** and **nganyaywana** dialects and languages.

Find your way around a plant using Aboriginal words





How to use this book

The aim of this book is to provide information on the traditional Aboriginal use of plants. It can also be used to help you to identify common plants that can be found in the Border Rivers and Gwydir catchments.

If you want to identify a plant:

1. Find a plant specimen for which you would like to know the Aboriginal use. Pay close attention to its leaves, flowers, fruit, bark and overall appearance, as well as where you found it growing.
2. Work out what form of plant you are looking at: tree, shrub, grass, herb, sedge, rush or something else, then turn to the section where that type of plant is found. The sections are colour coded to make things easier:



Trees



Shrubs



Grasses



Herbs, Sedges and Rushes



Vines



Other plants

3. Have a look at the **plant photos** to see which plant species your specimen most closely resembles.
4. Read the **plant location** to see if that plant species is located in the area where you found your specimen. If not, try another plant.
5. Read the **plant description** to see if your specimen fits the description for the plant species you think it might be. If not, try another plant.

6. If you think the **plant form, plant photos, plant location** and **plant description** match your plant specimen, then look at the icons for plant use, which are:



Food - this means one or more parts of the plant were eaten.



Medicine - substances or materials from the plant were used to treat diseases or wounds.



Weapons, Tools & Implements - one or more parts of the plant were used to make a weapon, tool or implement which is used for a special purpose (such as a broom or material for a roof).



Habitat - the plant is used by wildlife (animals, plants or microorganisms) as a home, shelter, roosting site, food or breeding area.



Ceremonial, Spiritual, Decoration & Special use - this can mean many things, including one or more parts of the plant are important for spiritual purposes, undertaking ceremonies (such as corroborees or initiation ceremonies), providing decoration or other special uses, such as having a special use for women.

7. Last of all, read the information about **language name** and **traditional use**. You can try speaking the name, share the knowledge with your friends or ask a local Aboriginal person about how they might use that plant!

Do you know your plants? If you know the common, scientific or Aboriginal language name of a plant, you can look it up in the Index and turn to the right page straight away.

Aboriginal language names are written in bold and in lowercase text, and English language common names are written in plain text.



Disclaimer

1. Traditional names and usage for the plant species identified during this production, were current at date of production. In some cases, further consultation may be required with Aboriginal communities within the catchments.
2. Every attempt has been made to verify and include the appropriate language dialect or name for each plant species. In some cases, there is no known language record for a plant, even though there is a known traditional usage.
3. There may be several names for the same plant species, due to the various language dialects particularly within the Gomeri Nation. The use of the Banbai and nganyaywana languages, part of whose tribal area is within the Border Rivers and Gwydir catchments, have been included where applicable.
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are warned that this publication may contain names of persons who may have gone before us. We will always remember them, and openly share their knowledge, so that future generations may learn and pass on their information, as has been the case in traditional times.
5. Some plant species have been selected because of known use elsewhere and their occurrence within the Border Rivers and Gwydir catchments. These species may not have confirmed use by Aboriginal communities within the Border Rivers and Gwydir catchments in the past, but it is presumed to be reasonable, that what was a use in one part of the country (usually close enough to be influential such as Moreton Bay [Cunningham, Bailey records] or western Darling floodplain [Burke & Wills, Oxley]), may well be applicable to these catchments also.
6. The Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Management Authority agrees that all traditional ecological knowledge and cultural and spiritual knowledge remains the property of the Aboriginal knowledge holders. The Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Management Authority will only use this knowledge in the course of its operations as may be expressly agreed to by the traditional knowledge holders.
7. The Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Management Authority has compiled Bush Tucker, Boomerangs and Bandages: Traditional Aboriginal Plant Use in the Border Rivers and Gwydir Catchments in good faith, exercising all due care and attention. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this publication is accurate at the time of publication. However, as appropriate, you should obtain independent advice before making any decision based on this information. The Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Management Authority does not accept responsibility for any inaccurate or incomplete information supplied by third parties. The Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Management Authority shall not be liable for any damage which may occur to any person or organisation taking action or not on the basis of this publication. This document is subject to revision without notice and it is up to the reader to ensure that the latest version is being used. Readers should seek appropriate advice when applying the information to their specific needs.
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