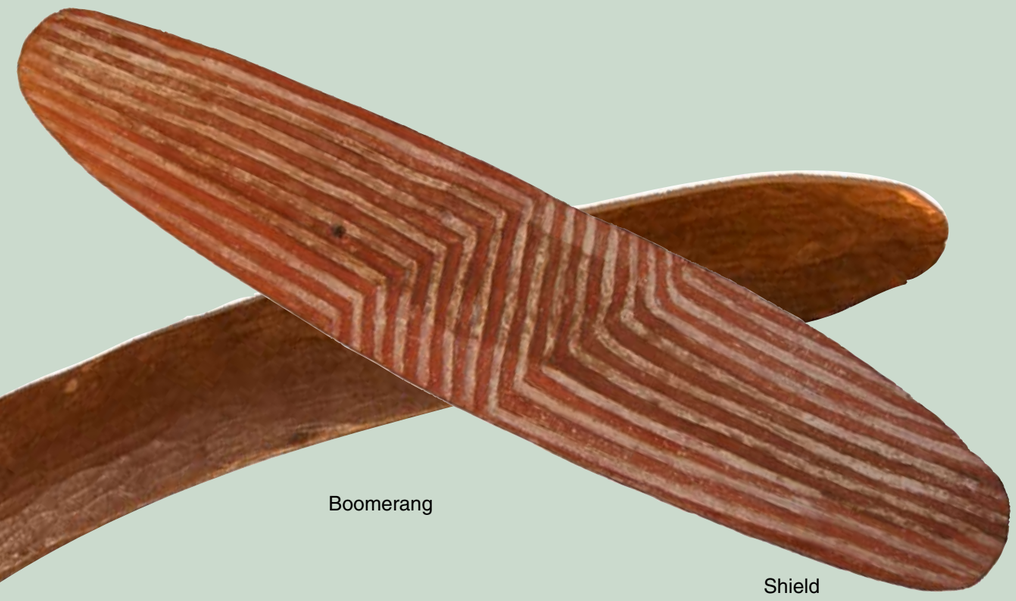
The bush tool kit

Traditional Aboriginal people were a nation of hunters and gatherers. Their way of life required an intimate knowledge of the land and its resources. Survival in this demanding environment depended on the skilful creation and use of a variety of tools. Most were made of wood, a material that was readily available in the Goldfields woodlands.

Different woods for different tools

To reduce the amount of work, Aboriginal people chose wood that resembled the shape of the tool they needed. Straight saplings or roots were used for spears and bent branches or trunks for boomerangs. The density of the wood was also important. For example, digging sticks were made from hard wood capable of breaking up hard ground.

Spear



Boomerang

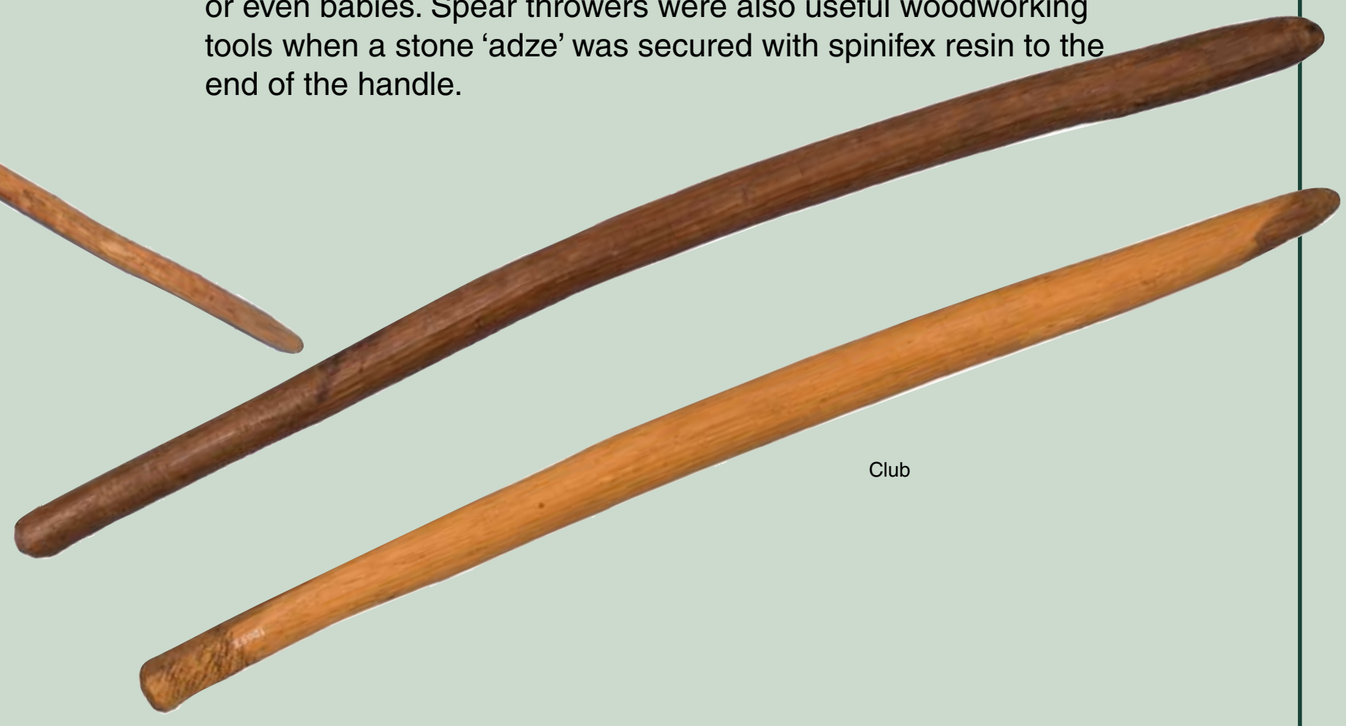
Shield

Digging stick

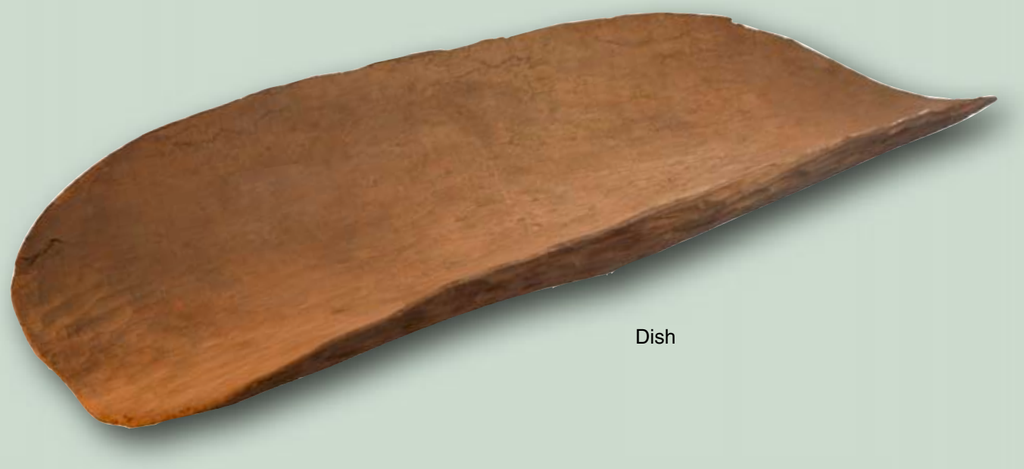
Travelling light

Living in a land where resources were limited and seasonally scarce meant that group mobility was important. When moving from one camp to another, or travelling to and from camp to collect resources, a kit of essential tools was carried.

Multipurpose tools reduced the number of objects carried. These included wooden dishes used as shovels, to dig or clear waterholes, or as bowls to collect water, winnow seed, carry food or even babies. Spear throwers were also useful woodworking tools when a stone ‘adze’ was secured with spinifex resin to the end of the handle.

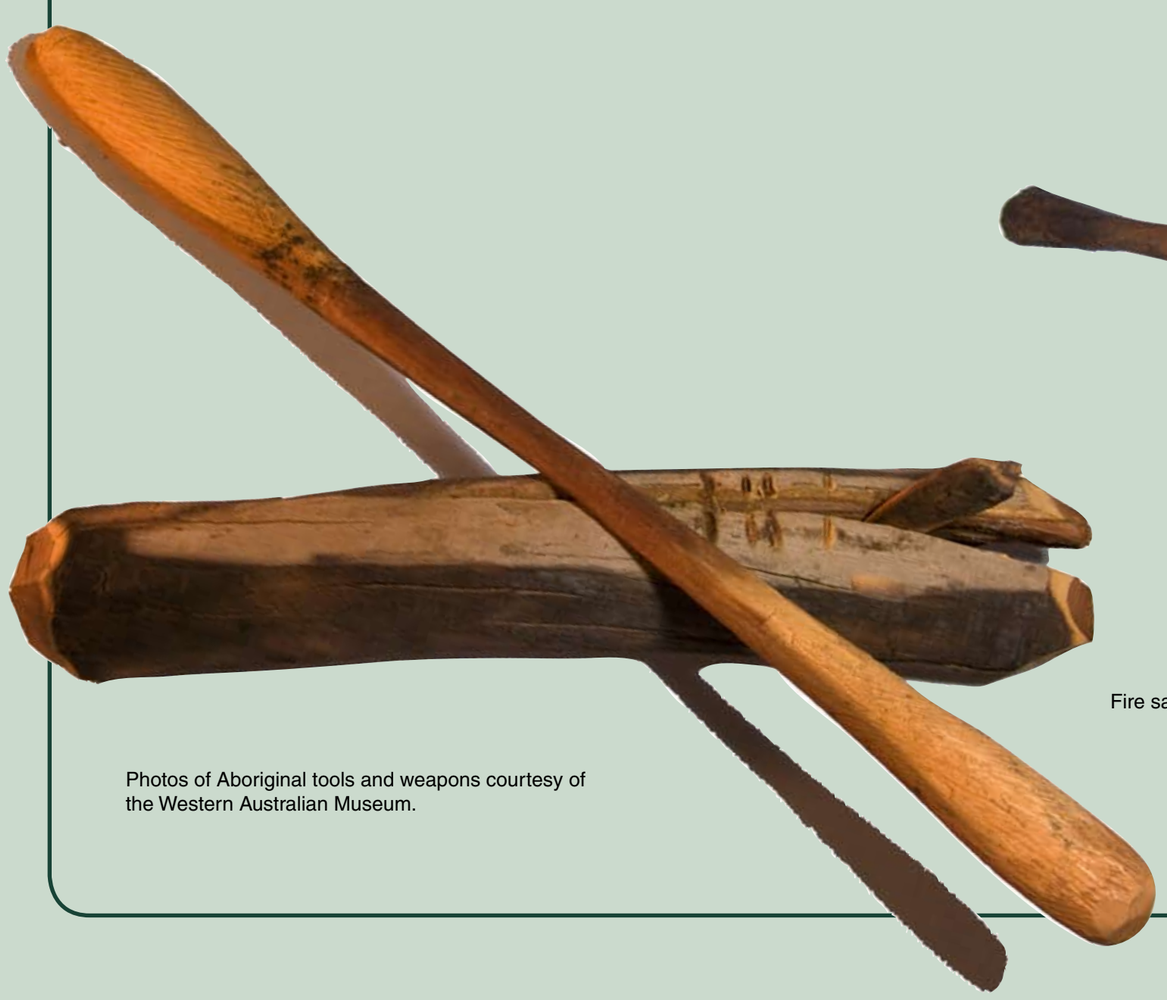


Club



Dish

Aboriginal people in the Goldfields Region no longer rely solely on hunting and gathering, but continue to visit traditional country, collect favoured foods and teach their children about living on the land and caring for their culture.end of the handle.



Photos of Aboriginal tools and weapons courtesy of the Western Australian Museum.

Spearthrower with woodworking ‘adze’ on end of handle.

Fire saw

Beating the heat

When conditions in the Goldfields are harsh, people and animals can move on. Plants however, are faced with the constant struggle to survive an environment where high temperatures, low rainfall and drying winds are a frequent challenge. Fire is yet another force to be reckoned with.

Fire at Burra Rock

The first flush of growth in areas recently burnt by fire is often dominated by fast growing species like acacias that regenerate from seed. It was a fire that swept through Burra Rock Nature Reserve in 2001 that stimulated the abundant growth of silver wattle near the reservoir. With time other kinds of plants will become established, creating a greater diversity of species on the apron of gritty soil circling the rock.

Strategies

Over millions of years, Australian plants have evolved strategies to survive fire. Some even depend on it. The thick insulating bark at the base of some trees protects living tissues from overheating. In a similar way, woody seedpods protect vulnerable seeds. The heat from fire is actually necessary for the pods to open. This ensures that seeds are released onto an ash bed rich in nutrients, where there is also plenty of space to grow.

Following fire, many plants sprout again from underground rhizomes, tubers and bulbs. The multiple stems that arise from large, woody underground 'lignotubers' give mallee eucalypts their distinctive look.

Silver wattle *(Acacia lasiocalyx)*

Blackbutt

Photo : Jiri Lochman/CALM

Goldfields York gum *(Eucalyptus loxophleba var. lissophloia)* is a mallee eucalypt.

The Southwestern Interzone (Coolgardie bioregion) is that part of Western Australia which lies below the 300 mm rainfall line and is a transitional zone between the southwest and the more arid interior. Eucalypt woodlands and rich kwongan (distinctive shrub vegetation of sandplains) are typical throughout the Coolgardie region. The understorey vegetation changes progressively towards the east to include arid-zone species such as saltbush, bluebush and spinifex. Greenstone belts with distinctive vegetation emerge as low ranges in places, surrounded by a gently undulating terrain of sandplains, valleys, extensive chains of salt lakes and occasional granite outcrops.

Coolgardie Bioregion