



Michael-Shawn Fletcher and Professor Lesley Head, *Plants: Past, Present and Future* (2022) I wrote a very detailed chapter on this photograph, with much valuable input from Uncle Badger Bates, Aunty Sarah Martin and David Doyle. This chapter goes into great detail about all of the many plants and their usage featured in the picture. Here I share a small snippet with you.



cumbungi

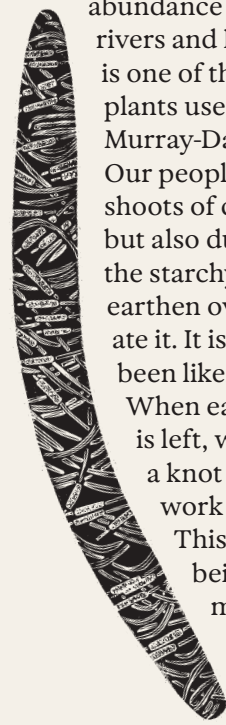
① cumbungi

To the right of Mary, resting on the roof of the shelter, is a large folded net. This net has been expertly made from string that has been made from plants. In this case, very likely cumbungi (*Typha domingensis*).

Growing in abundance along the edges of rivers and lakes, cumbungi is one of the most important plants used for food across the Murray-Darling river system. Our people ate the fresh flower shoots of cumbungi as a salad, but also dug out and collected the starchy root, steamed it in earthen ovens, then peeled and ate it. It is very tasty and has been likened to a type of potato. When eaten, a fibrous residue is left, which is twisted into a knot and later chewed to work into a useful fibre.

This remnant fibre, after being worked in the mouth, was dried on the roof of dwellings.

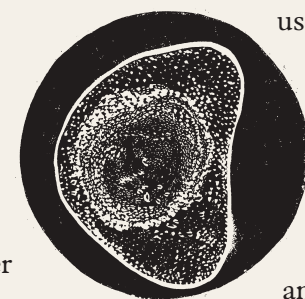
Once properly dry, it was then soaked and scraped clean using a shell, twisted into string and then woven to make tools such as nets, bags and body adornments.



cumbungi

② grindstone

If we look to the right, at Mary's hands, we can see that she is making something and that she is using what appears to be a sandstone grindstone to do so.



grindstone

Grindstones are an extremely important technology designed and developed by Australia's First Peoples,

allowing diverse groups to exploit and greatly benefit from their available resources. The development of grindstones has allowed us to make nutrient-rich pastes, and breads or dampers, and we know from various dating methods that this technology has been a part of the lives of the Indigenous peoples of Australia for tens of thousands of years. We are the world's first bread-makers.



purslane/pig weed

Abundance

Zena Cumpston

This photograph encodes many aspects of plants and our interactions with them over time on Barkandji/Barkindji Country, as well as our exceptionally well-honed skills in utilising plants and interacting with our Country to harness everything we need. Some of the plant usage is plain to see, but much is 'hidden in plain sight' – that is, only our communities, or those with extensive knowledge of our people and culture may be able to recognise it.

Zena Cumpston
Barkandji people, New South Wales

Abundance
Jacob, Mary and Doughboy
2023, Melbourne, Wurundjeri Country

1879, photograph by Frederic Bonney
inkjet print on canvas

Image courtesy State Library of NSW, PXA 562/p.10

This photograph was taken in 1879 on our Barkandji/Barkindji Country by Frederic Bonney, who came from and eventually returned to Staffordshire in England. Together with his brother Edward, Bonney annexed Momba Station, a western New South Wales pastoral sheep station, where this photograph was taken. The brothers worked on and around Momba between the years 1865 and 1881, at a time when the pastoral industry had very recently encroached on Barkandji/ Barkindji lands. This photograph is part of a series that feature many individuals, but in this particular photo Bonney's annotations tell us we can see Mary to the right, in the middle is her husband Jacob, and to the left is their daughter, Doughboy.

In the book I recently co-authored with Wiradjuri Professor

