

An Introduction

If you are reading this anywhere between the Swan River in the south, Moore River in the north, Ellen's Brook in the east and the Indian Ocean in the west, then you're in Moore Country.

Moore is part of the greater country of the whole of the South-West of Western Australia inhabited by the Nyongar peoples. Nyongar means 'man' or 'person' and is spelt in various ways.

The Nyongar peoples have lived in this area for at least 40,000 years before the British colonists arrived. When the first ships of the British anchored off the coast, a man called Yelligonga was the chief elder of the people of Moore. He and his people walked throughout their land as the change of seasons brought different animals and plants into abundance. In the warmer months the people would live along the coast and when the weather cooled they would walk inland.

The people divided their year into six seasons. Brak corresponded with December–January; Bunuru with February–March; Djeran with April–May; Makuru with the coldest time in June–July; Djiilba with August–September; and Kamabagan with October–November. In the warmer months of the year, Yelligonga's people walked and lived along a string of lakes that ran the length of the coastal plain. Back then there were many lakes, all much larger, than there are now. The water of the lakes, said the

Nyongars, came from underground, from a subterranean river created by the Waungul, who is known in English as the Rainbow Serpent. 'It's all the same water,' they said.

The lake-linking trails of the land of Moore went from Derbal Yaranan (the Swan River) to Mam-bee-bee (Lake McNess at Yanchepp). The northern part, from Doondalup (Joonchalup) to Mam-bee-bee, was also followed by the colony's drovers as a stock route for their sheep and cattle, and by modern suburban settlers since it was bituminised and named Wanneroo Road. In 1988 the old people's walking-way was formally acknowledged by the City of Wanneroo and named the Yaberoo Budjera Heritage Trail.

The Nyongars of Moore used the water and land all along the Yaberoo Budjera. Many of these places are now registered Aboriginal Heritage Sites located around the lakes of Yanchepp, Nowergup, Neerabup, Joonchalup, Goollelal, Gwelup, Herdsman and Monger. There are also registered sites at Gnanagara and on the coast at Mullaloo and Innaloo.

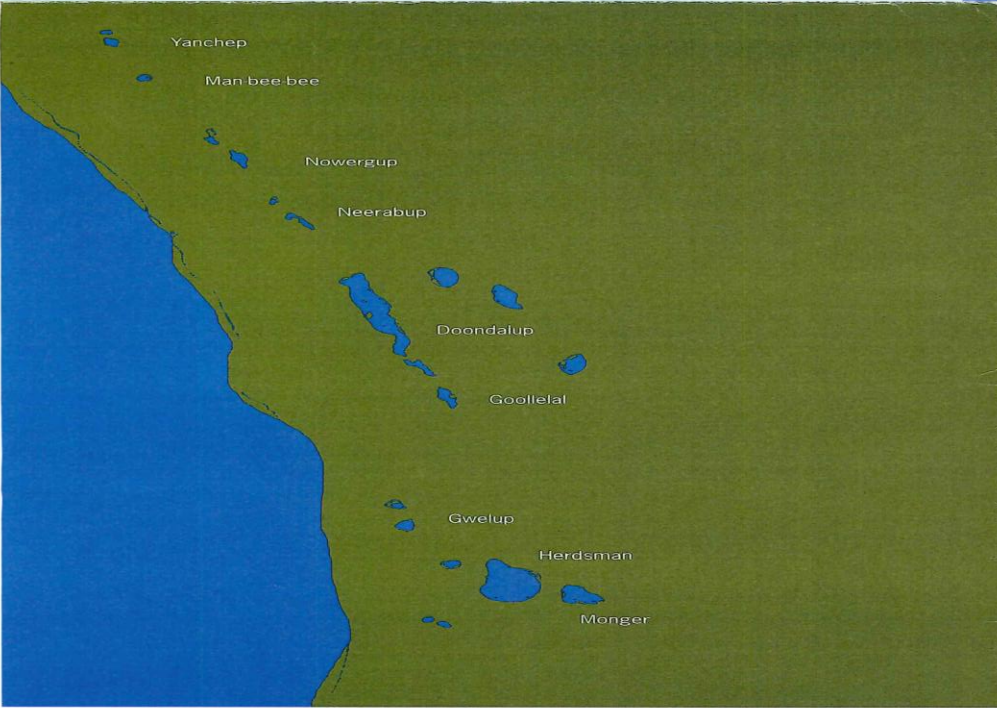
As the water bubbled up from the springs beneath the lakes, so the Dreaming stories about their ancestors, animals and spirit beings flowed through the gatherings, anchored and sent ashore their first boats.

Moore Country

"One Water
Many Lakes"

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Tales of Mooro Country

White colonists came by boat to begin the Swan River colony in 1829. At that time Mooro people were living on the land with their many elders. Two leaders that had much to do with the newcomers were Yellagonga and Yagan.

Yellagonga was the brother of Midgegooroo and uncle of Yagan. It is said he was born around 1780 so he would have been forty-nine when the first colonists arrived. He was a proud and respected Nyoonga elder. Robert Lyon, in the Perth Gazette, described Yellagonga as a most humane man, yet he added, 'when he is fully roused, no warrior, not even Yagan, dare stand before him'. Lyon claimed that it was only the peaceful nature of Yellagonga that kept the Perth settlement relatively free of violence. Lyon wrote, 'To him the settlers are greatly indebted for the protection of their lives and property'.

In June, 1829, it was Yellagonga and his family that witnessed Lieutenant Irwin stepping ashore from his boat onto the banks of the Swan River to establish the new colony. The site is located at Spring Street, where the Anglican Bishop's official residence is today. Yellagonga offered water to Lieutenant Irwin from the nearby spring and Lieutenant Irwin offered his hand.

Despite this welcome start, things did not go well. In 1833, Yellagonga's group was forced to withdraw from the new colony to Galup, called by the colonists Monger's Lake, where the authorities supplied them with meagre rations, a poor substitute for the food they were now restricted in catching from their land. As the town grew the group withdrew further to Joondalup. Within four years of colonisation the traditional Nyoongar way of life was severely disrupted, and by 1843 Yellagonga was dead. The Perth Gazette on 10 June that year printed a brief obituary titled 'The Death of the King of Perth'.

Another significant man in Mooro country was Yagan. He was not a Mooro man but he had much to do with the early settlement and Mooro people. Yagan was the nephew of Yellagonga and son of Midgegooroo. Midgegooroo was the chief elder of the people of the Beeliar country, south of Derbal Yaragan (the Swan River). Yagan was said to be born around 1808 and died a young twenty five year old man in 1833. Yagan and his father killed colonist Enion Entwistle in December 1831, in retaliation for the murder of one of their family. Six months later, Yagan killed another colonist, William Gaze, and was outlawed. He was eventually captured and imprisoned on Carnac Island, near Rottnest Island. After his release, Yagan killed two settlers in retaliation for the murder of his brother Domjurn. Yagan was outlawed again for this act, along with his father, Midgegooroo. Yagan sought refuge in Mooro with Yellagonga. Two British friends betrayed him and murdered him for the reward. His head was severed and sent to England. It has recently been returned to his family and a statue has been erected on Herrison Island in his honour.

Relationships between the newcomers and the old people were very mixed. Aboriginal people were relied upon to support the new colony and yet were feared and pushed away too. In 1833, four years after British colonisation began, Aboriginal guides frequently lead the search in Mooro for lost livestock and, sometimes, lost people, especially children. One Nyoongar man noted for this work was Migo. In 1833, Migo and Dommera led a successful search party for a lost bull owned by Leroux. The next year, Migo lead another search party looking for a lost boy. The boy was found 35 km away from his home.

White settlers began to spread out across the Mooro country and moved deeper and deeper into traditional lands. John Butler was the first British colonist to travel a significant distance from Perth. He travelled 55 km north of Perth in a party of four with two ponies, to Wanneroo, which means 'the place of the digging stick'. He was looking for lost cattle. Butler travelled along the eastern shores of Lake Joondalup, which means 'glistening waters'. He reported to the Governor that he had seen large lakes, an abundance of game of all descriptions and 'natives who were friendly towards us but we were cautious of letting them see our bread'.

Early expeditions like John Butlers increased the new settlers curiosity about their country and its people. They were keen to find more resources for the townspeople and farmers. So Lieutenant George Grey set off from Perth on 30 November in 1838 at noon with two Nyoongar men and two British men. They reached the western shores of Lake Mooloore in the country of Doondalup (Joondalup) at about 5pm. They halted for the night and were joined by four Nyoongars: Noo-gong-oo, Kurral, Jee-bar and Du-de-murry. The Nyoongars presented Grey and his party with 27 freshwater tortoises. Despite the help and support of Mooro people for the new comers, the settlers began to take more land and the subdivision of Mooro country into pastoral releases began that same year without any consultation with local people.

Yet some people in the colony did recognise the contribution of the Mooro people to the settlement. In 1841 Lieutenant. George Grey mapped Bonorin Hill. It overlooks Lake Joondalup and the surrounding area. A cairn of stones, recorded in 1879 and 1890 in the Perthshire Town Plans, was placed there as a monument to Nyoongar people and their use of the site. Today a children's playground has been built over the cairn at Hilltop Park, Edgewater.

The pastoral leases led settlers out into the land and they required help to work the unfamiliar ground. In 1844 Reverend John Smithies started a Native Experimental Farm on a 56 acre block on the northeastern shores of Lake Goollelal. He used the labour of Nyoongar children and hoped to attract Nyoongar adults who camped and hunted in the area. The farm brought permanent farming and grazing to Wanneroo. Children from the Wesleyan Mission School in Perth were moved to the farm, which became known as the Mission Farm. The mission did not prosper and consequently in 1851 Reverend Smithies moved his operations to York. The vineyards of Luisini Wines now cover the Mission Farm block.

Mooro people were being pushed off the land as farms grew. Tommy Dower a Mooro Nyoongar, who guided Alexander Forrest to the Kimberley in 1879 and John Forrest on several survey expeditions, submitted a petition in 1886 with Johnny Carroll and others to Governor Sir Frederick Broome. They requested a grant of land for Nyoongar use in Wanneroo. A grant of 2,000 acres at Gnaragara Lake was recorded in the Government Gazette on 13 June 1887. On 12 April 1891 the Gazette recorded that the reserve was cancelled. The land was to be reallocated to colonists as homesteads. In 1976, some ninety years later, the Aboriginal Lands Trust bought 65 acres of land at Gnaragara Lake from Mr M.D. Lachberg. The land now belongs to the Nyoongar Community Inc.

"One Water" Following the trail from Mam-bee-bee to Derbal Yaragan

(Lake McNess to the Swan River)

You can drive, or walk, the path of the Nyoongars of Mooro, past the 'same water' as it appears in lake after lake.

Mam-bee-bee (Lake McNess) was, for the people of Mooro country, a very important place. Nyoongars from as far away as Gyngoorda (Moore River) and Derbal Yaragan would meet at the southeastern corner of the lake to hold corroborees and discuss matters of spiritual and organisational importance and, sometimes, initiate young men into adulthood and spiritual life. The old people say that the Waugul lives in Mam-bee-bee and keeps the Wagardi Springs flowing. Should the Waugul ever leave Mam-bee-bee the waters will dry up.

Coogee Swamp has a cave next to it that was probably the one shown by Nyoongars to the Britisher George Grey and his group when they set out to ride through the country in December 1838.

Nowergup Lake has archaeological evidence of Nyoongars living there.

Neerabup Lake also has a cave nearby, known now as the Orchestra Shell Cave. Archaeologists have dug in the cave and say that Nyoongars have used it for more than 6,000 years.

Doondalup (Lake Joondalup) was about as far north as Yellagonga's people walked. Even in summer it had fresh water, teeming with frogs, freshwater tortoises and shellfish. Archaeologists have found evidence of their feasts, a long time after dinner finished.

Goollelal Lake was a good place to camp for the Nyoongars. It was also the site of the Native Experimental Farm, started by the Reverend John Smithies in 1844, some 15 years after the British colonists came ashore. Reverend Smithies used Nyoongar children as labourers to bring 'permanent agriculture' and sheep and cattle grazing to the Mooro country.

Gwelup Lake was used by the old people as a good place to live right up until the 1930s. Those Nyoongars would get fish from the sea at Trigg and take them to Gwelup. But during the 1930s the police made the people move to the Moore River Native Settlement.

Jackadder Lake was a place to camp, too, its shady shores a welcome resting place.

Ngoogenboro (Herdsman's Lake) was even bigger than it is now in the days of Yellagonga, and it looked much different. Ngoogenboro was one of what the British called The Great Lakes. Daisy Bates writes in her book The Meeting of the Races that Yellagonga, chief elder of the Nyoongars of Mooro at the time of the British arrival, is buried there.

Galup (Lake Monger) was a sanctuary for Yellagonga and some of his people in 1833. The British handed out rice and flour to the Nyoongars living amongst the paperbark and tuart trees beside the lake. Neville Green, in Broken Spears, wrote that 'traditional foods were still plentiful at this time so the purpose of the food gifts would be to get Aborigines out of town rather than to keep them alive'.

Derbal Yaragan's banks at Byerbrup were the main camp of Yellagonga when, in June, 1829, he met Lieutenant Irwin of the 63rd Regiment. The Anglican Bishop of Perth's official residence now sits on the site.

