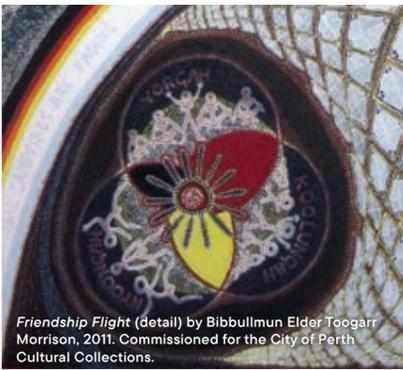




Gilgie (freshwater crayfish), 2008. Photo: Elizabeth Bright, courtesy of the National Museum of Australia.



Friendship Flight (detail) by Bibbulmun Elder Toogar Morrison, 2011. Commissioned for the City of Perth Cultural Collections.



View from Mount Eliza by Frederick Garling, 1827. Image courtesy of the Janet Holmes à Court Collection.



Yaagan (Long-necked turtle). Image courtesy of Sian Mawson.



Plan for the Townsite of Perth Western Australia (detail) by A. Hillman, 1838. City of Perth Cultural Collections.

# This city is WHADJUK COUNTRY

## Aboriginal heritage in the city of Perth before 1829

“Nitja boodjar koonyarn nitja koorl buranginy boodjar karluk maya koonyarn wah. Deman demangarmarn wiern kia moort koonyarn. Deman garmarm noonookurt, boodjar koonyarn karla koorliny. Koorlongka boorda geenunyiny. Those words say that this is my Country where I belong. This is demangarmarn, my grandmother and grandfather’s land, this is their land where their spirits move now. Boorda or later on, this is going to be the responsibility of my children and my children’s children, their home and this place will always be linked to their spirit.”

Sealin Garlett (Interview 3 September 2002, Murdoch University)

**The city of Perth is Whadjuk boodjar (Country). The lines between boodjar, moort (families) and katitjin (knowledge) cannot be untied, dissolved or squashed by buildings, infill and freeways. These lines are the legacy of the Whadjuk Nyoongar. The Whadjuk own them. Boodjar, moort and katitjin define ownership, connect resources and families, tell how to manage Country and keep it healthy, and are the lore. Boodjar linked to moort and katitjin is more productive, more useful, more shared. It has been this way for thousands of years.**

**The city of Perth is the area between Gargatup, the place down by the hillside (in Kings Park), and Matagarup (Heirisson island), the place of the leg holes, where Nyoongars would cross the river. This area, near the lowest and easiest crossing point on the Derbal Yerrigan (Swan River) at Matagarup, was an important communication and trade centre between the coast and the inland. Whadjuk Balardong custodian Tom Bennell referred to Perth as Beerit, meaning pathways, due to its importance for meetings, travel and trade.**

### 01: OLD TECHNICAL SCHOOL (137 ST GEORGES TERRACE)

Jeena middar boodjar — gathering feet dancing on this land

Jeena middar (corroborees) are songs and dances that record the katitjin, moort and boodjar of Aboriginal people. They were often held when families gathered together. For example, when two Minang Nyoongar people from Albany visited Perth in March 1833, a jeena middar was held to welcome the visitors to Whadjuk boodjar. It occurred on the site where the old Perth Technical School now stands (137 St Georges Terrace). The Whadjuk Nyoongar prepared for the jeena middar by painting themselves with ritual patterns. A newspaper report of the gathering described a kangaroo hunting song and suggested the charismatic Whadjuk Nyoongar boordiya (leader) Yagan was the ‘master of ceremonies’.

As well as greeting visitors to boodjar, jeena middar are also used to record and communicate how the land should be cared for, who has the right to use it, and who are welcome to visit and stay in the area.

### 02: THE ESPLANADE (BETWEEN HOWARD STREET AND SHERWOOD COURT, FACING THE SWAN RIVER)

Gumap — the place that smells like urine

From this location, you can see the Esplanade which wedjela (white people) reclaimed from the river in the 1870s and early 1880s. Originally, this area would have been a

mudflat. The Whadjuk Nyoongar name for it is Gumap, or the place that smells like urine. Despite its smell, this part of the river was important because it supported food sources like turtles, crabs and fish.

### 03: BARRACK SQUARE FACING TOWARD KINGS PARK (NEAR THE BELL TOWER)

Byerbrup — the high location above the water

Byerbrup is the name for both the Perth ridge between Gargatup and Matagarup, and the main camp of the Whadjuk Nyoongar. While not physically on this walk, the camp is particularly important to Whadjuk Nyoongar because it is the location of their karla (home fire), and therefore the place their family called home.

The area known as Byerbrup starts on the western side of the Convention Centre and runs all the way up Spring Street to where the Western Australian Parliament now stands. In 1929, a wedjela called John Watson described it as:

...one of the beauty-spots of those days, plenty of Jarrah trees and gums were around a large pool of water that was always overflowing from this spring.

During the Nyoongar season of Djeran (in Autumn) Aboriginal people would gather at Byerbrup to feast. At other times they would come to the area to trade.

Byerbrup is also the home of Whadjuk Nyoongar leader Yellagonga and his family.

In 1833, Robert Menli Lyon, who was an early advocate for the recognition of Aboriginal rights, wrote:

The camp of Yellowgonga (sic), bearing this name, originally stood beside the springs at the West end

of the town, as you descend from Mount Eliza; and on this very spot did the 63rd (regiment) pitch their tents, when they came to take possession. So that the head quarters of the king of Mooro are now become the head quarters of the territories of the British King in Western Australia.

### 04: BANK OF THE DERBAL YERRIGAN (SWAN RIVER)

Creation — the Waugal, or the rainbow serpent, and the Derbal Bilya, the estuary of the river

The Whadjuk boodjar was shaped by the powerful spirit beings that are looking after boodjar today. The creators of the rivers are the Waugals, the giant rainbow snake spirits. The Waugal creation trails all connect together, forming the shape of the boodjar. As Yuat Whadjuk Bibulman Binjareb boordiya yorga (woman) May McGuire has described:

The Avon River starts around Narrogin and it comes all the way down into Beverley, York, Northam, and where it came to Northam, they had a big pool the Nyoongars called Burlong, and that was very secret to the children. The kids weren’t allowed to go there because it was very deep. It goes from there to Katrine into Toodyay, and in Toodyay turns into the Swan and goes down into the Swan Valley.

The wirn (spirit beings) watch over the boodjar. The Waugal is the guardian of all the fresh water sources. Piblemen Whadjuk Balardong boordiya yorga Doolann Leisha Eatts tells us that if the spirit guardians are not respected, they make trouble:

And their belief was that if a stranger was travelling through and thought I might get a drink, when he got there it was too dirty to drink. The Waugal would dirty the water up so he can’t drink. He wouldn’t let him drink at the well because it wasn’t the right person, it wasn’t his tribe. If someone was going through and they spoke to the family, and said we would like to have a drink out of your water, could you tell the Waugal, so you could get a drink of cool water, clean water.

### 05: ST GEORGES TERRACE (30 METRES FROM THE INTERSECTION WITH BARRACK STREET)

Boorang or totems — Yonga, the male Kanagaroo

In her early accounts, ethnographer Daisy Bates described the Whadjuk Nyoongar as yonga or male kangaroo people. In this way the sculpture outside

Stirling Gardens on St Georges Terrace, Kangaroos on the Terrace by Joan Walsh-Smith and Charles Smith, could act as a reminder of this Whadjuk Nyoongar totem.

A totem is a connection between a person and an animal, a plant, other natural objects or a place. Whadjuk Nyoongar have many totems that link them to the landscape, animals and each other in complex ways. Totems would determine who Whadjuk Nyoongar could marry, who to avoid, and still determine who has access to boodjar and who needs an invitation.

As a child, Doolann Leisha Eatts observed how her grandmother was linked to her totem:

One frog, the kweea Frog, had big eyes and it was big on top and it was my grandma’s dreaming. She knew it from Kings Park when she was a little girl. When I was a little girl I used to sleep with my grandma, and I saw it many times. She used to put it by her pillow and after sleeping I couldn’t find him. He used to disappear.

### 06: YANDELLUP (10-24 MURRAY STREET, TOWARDS ST MARY’S CATHEDRAL)

This area is known as Yandellup, which means the reeds are on and by this place (now a health heritage precinct). According to May McGuire, Yandellup was cultivated and harvested through an understanding of seasonal change:

The yanjid was a thing that you could eat as well, the bottom roots of it. But you could only do it in seasonal turns, not every day of the week. If you pulled it out certain times, it would cause storms. Big storms would come. That was the Aboriginal ways of acknowledging that rains were going to come. The fires were used for clearing the area so food can be plentiful the following year.

Karla is an integral part of Whadjuk Nyoongar existence. Only Whadjuk Nyoongar with responsibility for boodjar can burn it. The Whadjuk Nyoongar were fire-stick farmers. Burnings, which often occurred in summer, meant that travel and hunting was not slowed by the build-up of undergrowth. They also ensured that there was new growth for humans and animals (particularly kangaroos) to use and eat. Fire was used during hunting to flush out kangaroos and other game, making them easy targets.

The katitjin connections between the Nyoongar, karla and boodjar are so strong that karla is closely linked to comfort and home. Doolann Leisha Eatts explains why fire is greatly valued:

They always had a fire. It’s the first thing they would make. It kept the woodatjees away. It was for healing, it was for light, it was for comfort and it was for yarning. Talking about what they had to talk about. They had to have fire. Fire meant everything to them.

### 07: MURRAY STREET MALL (OPPOSITE FORREST CHASE)

Marnda or trading and exchanging

In Forrest Chase you will see people exchanging goods and services. This central location was also an important trading site for Nyoongar. Ownership of resources is linked to moort, or family ties, and katitjin, or knowledge of its presence and uses.

Daisy Bates wrote of a place where a wilgi garup (ochre pit) is located in Glendalough northeast of Perth. This was the property of Whadjuk Nyoongar boordiya yorga Fanny Balbuk (through her father’s line). Wilgi is a highly valued commodity for ceremonies used by Aboriginal people across Western Australia and was one of the items traded in this area. Wilgi from Perth has been rumoured to have travelled as far as the Yankunytjatjara Pitjantjatjara country that crosses the border into South Australia.

### 08: CULTURAL CENTRE WETLANDS (IN FRONT OF THE ART GALLERY)

Hunting and harvesting — the pinjar or lakes

The train station and the cultural precinct are situated on an ancient wetland, one of a series of pinjar (lakes) found between an area to the north of where the railway line is now and the Derbal Yerrigan (Swan River) to the south. This series of wetlands used to empty and fill with the changing rainfall.

You can see a wetland today outside the Art Gallery. Frogs and lizards are returning to a place where they once thrived. According to Balardong Whadjuk Nyoongar boordiya Cedric Jacobs, the pinjar were essential for gathering food:

This was a supermarket of the Nyoongar people. They’ve taken our campsites, our supermarket. They moved us around.

Harvesting different foods depends on the season and water. Popular animals are gilgie (fresh water crayfish), yaagan (turtles) and koolya (frogs).

George Grey, an early settler, watched Whadjuk yorga harvesting frogs and turtles when the swamps were nearly dried up. In 1841, he wrote:

...women with their long sticks, and their long thin arms, which they plunge up to the shoulder in the slime, manage to drag them out.

The wetlands are the reason why Perth has its long, skinny, rectangular shape. While the wedjela try to control the pinjar (wetlands) and beeliar (river) by filling them in and building river walls, Nyoongar people work with and take advantage of seasonal changes through their knowledge and by moving around their Country.

### 09: PERTH CULTURAL CENTRE (BETWEEN ROE, BEAUFORT, FRANCIS AND WILLIAM STREETS)

Boodjar, moort, katitjin — learning about Aboriginal Country, family, knowledge

The Byerbrup area and its surrounds is where Whadjuk Nyoongar live. As Cedric Jacobs says:

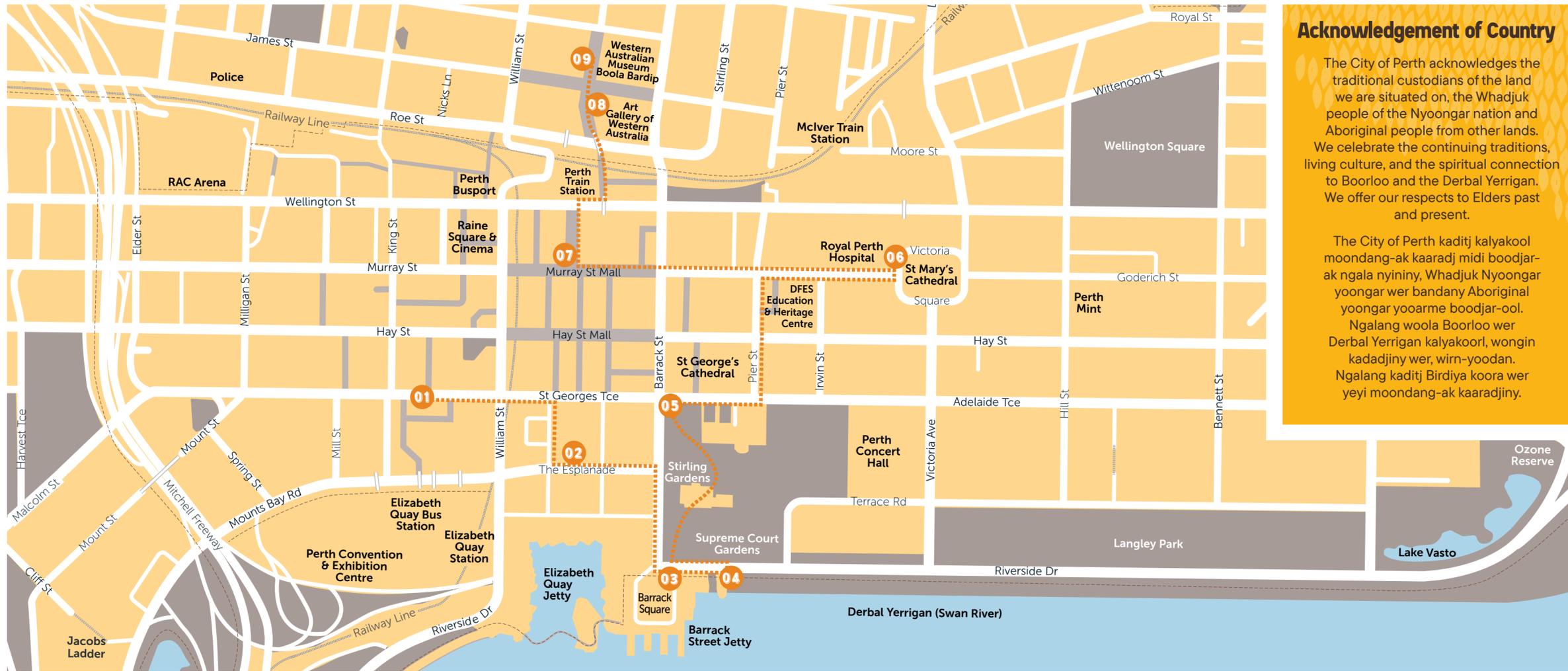
Where you find a family, you can find a whole system — economics, school, church — a whole system.

You can find out more about the lives of Nyoongar and other Aboriginal people in the Perth Cultural Centre.

The Western Australian Museum Boola Bardip shows a permanent exhibition, Ngalang Koort Boodjar Wirn, Our heart, Country, spirit, that shares the stories of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Western Australia and of communities keeping culture strong in the midst of massive disruptions to their lives.

In the Art Gallery of Western Australia, many pieces of Aboriginal art are a testament to the relationship between moort, boodjar and katitjin. Many of the works record creation stories (often called dreamings) for the artist’s boodjar. These paintings are beautiful works of art and powerful statements about the ongoing strength of Aboriginal connections to Country. Highlights of the collection by Western Australian Aboriginal artists are Paddy Jaminji’s *Kimberley landscape* (c.1984), Rover Thomas’ *Wangkal Junction-Wulangkuya* (1988) and Alec Mingelmanganu’s *Wandjina* (1975).

If you have enjoyed this trail, make sure you pick up a copy of the other map in the Karla Yarning Series.



### Acknowledgement of Country

The City of Perth acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land we are situated on, the Whadjuk people of the Nyoongar nation and Aboriginal people from other lands. We celebrate the continuing traditions, living culture, and the spiritual connection to Boorloo and the Derbal Yerrigan. We offer our respects to Elders past and present.

The City of Perth kadij kalyakool moondang-ak kaaradj midi boodjar-ak ngala nyinyi, Whadjuk Nyoongar yoongar wer bandany Aboriginal yoongar yooarme boodjar-ool. Ngalang woola Boorloo wer Derbal Yerrigan kalyakoorl, wongin kadadjiny wer, wirn-yoodan. Ngalang kadij Birdiya koora wer yeyi moondang-ak kaaradjiny.

The City of Perth would like to advise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers that this brochure may contain historical photos, images, references or names of people who have passed away.

**Cultural warning**  
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This city is  
**WHADJUK COUNTRY**  
 Aboriginal heritage in the city of Perth before 1829

*The Nyoongar never call it Western Australia. Ngulla boodjar, our land, they call this ngulla boodjar our land. Nitcha ngulla koorl nyinyi. This is our ground we came and sat upon.*  
 Tom Bennell (1978).

Nyoongar means people and refers to the Australian Aboriginal people from the southwest of Western Australia. Whadjuk Nyoongar are the traditional owners of the Perth area. Karla means home fire in Nyoongar. Karla yarning is discussing and interrogating the Whadjuk Nyoongar homeland, the city of Perth. The information contained in this map was overseen by a group of senior Aboriginal people including Whadjuk boordiya moort (Whadjuk leadership families) assisted by non-Aboriginal and Whadjuk Nyoongar researchers. The statements of the Cultural Advisors included in this brochure were recorded during the consultation for this project between November 2013 and May 2014. Their purpose is to express the living koora, yeye, boodawan Berrit (past, present and future) of the city.



KARLA YARNING: STORIES OF THE HOME FIRES

**CITY OF PERTH**  
 City of Light

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 Aboriginal heritage in the city of Perth before 1829

