

The One on a Log

Aunty Dale What looks familiar on this log to you? Billy?

Billy Them.

Aunty Dale Some people would call it a bush potato, and some people would say it's more like a radish. So I'm going to take the skin off. This is called a youlk.

Maddy A youlk. Ah.

Aunty Dale And this grows in Noongar country. In my country.

Alice I've also heard of it being called a bush carrot.

Aunty Dale Well because it's crunchy and because it's part of the carrot family, yes, it can be a bush carrot. So I'm going to cut this and you can see it's quite crisp.

Maddy It looks almost like a pear.

Lucy Smells like a pear.

Alice Thank you Dale. Does it smell like pear?

Aunty Dale Yeah, to me it smells like a carrot, but you know what, you've all been tasting it, so, I didn't tell you the golden rule about bush food before; which is always have a good local guide, and get them to eat one first.

Alice That's a good rule.

Aunty Dale So where I come from, we've got a really bright red vegetable called Bohn or Meen or Marja, which is a *Haemodorum* or Bloodroot. And that's very hot if you eat it raw. But if you cook it, it becomes milder. So that's like having a crisp potato and a nice onion together. But in the South West where I come from, we have more than 150 different tuberous plants that we could access through the year ...

Billy Whoa.

Alice And the words have kind of vibration, and feeling as well, so we call them onomatopoeia, words that sound the way that they look or feel. Something like youlk.

Aunty Dale Youlk.

Alice It's a stubby word, isn't it.

Aunty Dale Yeah. And youlk has two cousins, and one is called kahna and the other one's called coanna. And they all belong to the Platysace family. So they're all part of this tuber family.

Alice Do you see another tuber on this log?

Maddy This skinny one.

Aunty Dale This skinny little one here. This one is called a warrine. Now this one has a huge history for Aboriginal people who lived on Derbarl Yerrigan, the Swan River, in Western Australia. Because we had huge yam gardens, warrine gardens. If you looked at early settler maps, you would see that they mapped warrine holes. And you'd be forgiven for thinking that this referred to rabbits. But this is 1827, 1829, and we didn't have rabbits then. So they were referring to this tuber, which is the warrine. And we would eat it in Djeran, Autumn-ish, and Kambarang, late Spring.

I have dug these yams, in the wild, with my wanna, my digging stick. And they are very hard work to dig, just individually like that, because you have an aerial plant, with a little green tendril that goes into the Earth. You're digging your digging stick, like this, to loosen the ground, and you're scooping out the sand. And you mustn't lose sight of that green tendril. And that's going to go down up to a metre. And eventually, you will reach the top of the tuber. And Europeans have written down that up to 600 people would gather there, during Djeran, Autumn-ish, for ceremony. And they were fed from the yam gardens.

So, how big were those yam gardens, to feed 600 people for several weeks?

Billy Pretty big. Very big.

Aunty Dale Pretty big. And, you know, if you were to go online, and put in Lieutenant Grey, getting shipwrecked near Kalbarri, and having to walk back to Perth with his Noongar guide, you would find that, in his journal, he wrote, "Coming across yam gardens." This yam, the warrine, this is a *Dioscorea hastifolia*. And he wrote that those gardens were so extensive, that he couldn't see where they started. And he couldn't see where they finished. And they were four or five miles across.

Maddy Wow.

Lucy Whoa.

Aunty Dale They had roads through them. Wells were dug. And there were stone houses. So, here we're introducing some concepts that people don't always associate with Aboriginal culture. Agriculture, and permanent dwellings. The reason the Europeans said warrine holes, is because our old girls were really smart. They knew that digging that single yam, one by one, with a wanna stick was very hard work. So they would dig and leave the holes open, and that meant that, when they were away, Mother Nature would send in all the leaf litter, and all the water, to nurture the plants. And when we came back, we would just dig in from the side, and find the tubers.

If I take this tuber, see how juicy that is?

Maddy Wow.

Aunty Dale I'm just scraping that off.

Alice That's like peeling a young potato, or young ginger.

Aunty Dale We would just eat it raw. Why cook it, and destroy nutrients?

Aunty Dale You can eat it raw, or bake it in the ashes.

Maddy Baked warrine would taste delicious.

Aunty Dale I like it baked but, if you were just wanting a snack, you could just scrape that skin off, and eat it just like that. Just as you can with the youlk.