

## **COLD WEST WIND AND ARTEFACT MAKING SEASON**

One of the little gems of information I remember my grandfather telling me when I was about eight, was that Aboriginal people defined the summer and winter periods by the prevailing winds. That is, the high summer period was named after the hot north wind, and the deep winter period named after the cold west wind.

These cold months were not conducive to travel, so it was more of a village based 'sit-down' period. It was a time conducive to the close instruction of children in various skills. As all Aboriginal births were planned to occur in September-October, this was also the time when women's pregnancies were developing.

This more indoors period was therefore also a time devoted particularly to artefact and tool manufacture, which also has to be ready for the active and bountiful spring period that was coming. Artefacts were of course able to be made throughout the year, but this and the teaching process involved was the major activity in this period of cold and inclement weather.

The 'Cold West Wind and Artefact Making Season' therefore occupied the sixth, seventh and eighth lunar months of the year. It started on May 11th following the one-month Burning-off Season, and closed on August 2nd, before the one-month 'Bark Harvest Season'.

This winter period was also a time when young boys coming on to puberty, who had been selected for initiation at the end of the year, would be groomed for their ceremonial induction to manhood. These boys were therefore usually aged between eleven and fourteen.

However it needs to be noted that selection for initiation was not just based on physical maturity, it was also based on individual aptitude and speed of learning. That is, the brightest students tended to get initiated at a younger age. For instance William Barak was I believe initiated at age eleven in 1834.

Although initiation tends to be seen as a single ceremonial event, it was in fact just the culmination of a process that began at the start of the Cold West Wind season. Boys nominated for initiation in late spring undertook the preparatory ceremony of 'Tibbut' over the winter and early spring period. This was a time of relative deprivation that prepared them for independence from their family.

Each boy was given a Mohawk style hairdo and had to fend for himself outside the perimeter of the camp and shun the presence of others. So each boy had to carry a basket of mud and chant 'Tibbobobobut' to warn all men to keep out of his way.

If the male didn't keep out of the way, the boy splattered them with mud, but he had to avoid all contact with women. This was to show his respect as well as demonstrate his

independence. By the time Men's Business Season began at end of October, the hair of the boys had grown back and they were now ready for their initiation pilgrimage.

During the Cold West Wind winter period, any breaks in the weather saw the playing of many traditional games. This included the tribal football game of Marngrook and the more limited children's versions of the game.

The first children's version of Marngrook was Parndo, which directly equated with the schoolyard game of 'markers-up'. This is where one child kicks to a group and the child who marks the ball then takes their turn to kick to the group. The only difference was that the child kicking the ball was encircled by the other children, who then rushed in to compete for the mark. The second of the games was Bidi which directly equated with 'kick to kick', where two groups of players kicked the ball between them.

These children's versions, like the adult game of Marngrook, emphasised kicking the ball high rather than long, and so encourage spectacular high marking by the contestants. Like the adult game, these children's games were open to both sexes.

The only restrictions in the adult game were that all opponents had to be matched by size, gender and totemic group. In other words a big person could not be matched with a small person, a man could not play against a woman, and you opponent had to be 'right-skin'. That is, the skin-group that you married into.

These tribal football games were not restricted to the winter season though, and were played year-round as the opportunity presented. This included in particular the inter-clan business period. However the reduction of grass following the burning off season and the lower temperatures made colder months the most conducive time for playing Marngrook.

The first flowering of Silver Wattles signalled the end of the Cold West Wind and artefact-making season and the arrival of the Morning Frost and Bark Harvest Season.