

# D'harawal

## DREAMING STORIES

Frances Bodkin

Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews

*illustrated by Lorraine Robertson*

### Dahl'wah

### How the She Oaks Came to Be



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# Foreword

Throughout the past two hundred years, society has come to regard the Koori Dreaming stories as something akin to the fairy stories they were told as children.

However, for thousands upon thousands of years, the stories in this book were used as a teaching tool to impart to the youngest members of the clans the laws which governed the cultural behaviour of clan members. The successive attempts to destroy the Koori culture and assimilate The People into the Euro-centric population were unsuccessful, and the Dreaming Stories were able to continue in their disguise as charming legends where animals became the heroes and the heroines.

Historians and anthropologists have studied the Koori culture since they first arrived on this continent, and have come to the conclusion that the D'harawal culture is dead. Of, course, this has been done without reference to the descendants of that culture, and without even asking the proper questions. The D'harawal culture is not dead, it is a strong, living, vital culture of the Sydney and South Coast regions that just had to go underground for a while to be able to survive. Now that the right questions have been asked, we have the key to unlock a vast wealth of knowledge of this part of the country in which we live.

It is difficult to explain to a society based on commerce fuelled by the profit motive, that D'harawal culture is not based on the ownership of tangible things like land and dwellings and possessions, but it does have a very strong sense of ownership of information. That information, particularly in story form, was not traded, but could be given, and given freely, but its ownership was respected, those stories were not told or passed on by those to whom they had been given, but the knowledge in them was used by the receiver whilst ever they walked in the Land of the D'harawals, This Land.

It is hoped that our present society is now mature enough to be able to accept the Koori Dreaming stories as they were, as they are, and as they were always destined to be; tools to teach the Children of The People about living with Earth, the Mother, in peace and harmony.

Each story contains several layers of knowledge, the first of which are the secrets. Which can only be passed on or discussed with persons of the same level of knowledge or higher than the story teller. These secrets are never told within a legend, but are remembered separately from the legend itself. These are very important components of any legend, and it is the knowledge of the secrets which determines the level of the person's worthiness to ownership of that story.

The next layer of knowledge within the stories was the law, or laws, to be obeyed. The laws of the stories were told and often repeated after the telling of each story, after which the laws were discussed and their application in life demonstrated in a variety of ways.

The third layer of knowledge contained in each story was the lessons which could be learned from the story and the lessons were taught to all members of the group as well as visitors. These lessons introduced Peoples to the means to live in harmony with each other, and the land and its resources.

In this series of D'harawal Law Legends, there are many lessons to be learned. The D'harawals believed that children learned better and more quickly when they were encouraged to work through a problem, rather than be told the answer. By sharing the stories of our ancestors with you, it is hoped that not only will you recognise and learn the lessons and laws of the Peoples of This Land, but you will also come to understand and respect the culture of The People and our feelings and relationship with the land.

The stories do not in themselves act as an instruction manual - rather they point the way and encourage The People to think, to learn and to live. It is hoped that by sharing our stories, you too may be able to think, to learn and to live in This Land.

With understanding and respect for each other we can learn to more easily share This Land and live together in peace and harmony.

*Frances Bodkin*

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A long time ago, it was the men who used to make the string for hunting and fishing nets.

They gathered the fibres of the stringybark tree, or the inner bark of the Fig, or the Kurrajong, or even the leaves of the Gymea lily, and they twisted them together by rubbing them on their thighs. But men are impatient creatures. They did not like sitting around all days twisting string by rubbing it on their thighs. They felt they could be doing better things, like hunting kangaroos or wallabies, or using the fishing nets made from the string. Besides, twisting the string hurt them. You see, men have hairy legs, and twisting the string on their thighs pulled the hairs out by the roots. So the men decided that they didn't want to do this anymore, and they went to the women and threw down the fibres. "We must do the hunting now." They said. "You will twist the string to make the nets and the fishing lines."

The women looked up at the men and tried not to smile. "But you wanted to make the string." Said the women, "you told us that it was too difficult for us poor women to do."

The men told the women that it was not as difficult as they had first thought, but although they really enjoyed making the string, they had other duties to which they had to attend. They could not sit around all day long making string when there were boomerangs to make, and spears to sharpen, kangaroos to hunt, and fish to catch.

The women gathered up the fibres and sat around in a circle, dividing the fibres amongst themselves. They began to rub the fibres on their thighs, and burst into laughter as they realised the real reason why the men did not want to make string any more.

"What more do you expect from the men?" Said Naali, oldest and wisest of the women. "They would rather chase after kangaroos, running through the bush, getting all hot and bothered, cutting their toes on the sharp rocks, and not catching even a small lizard, than sit here in the shade and suffer a little bit of pain."

But one of the women, the mother of a son who had just been through initiation had an idea. She had made the bull-roarer which called the men together, and she had used the leaves of the Tam'nun (sandpaper fig) to smooth the wood so that it sang properly.

Gracefully she got to her feet and went to the tree and took some leaves from it. To each of the women she gave one of the leaves, and showed them how to rub it on their legs to remove the hairs.

Now, while this was happening the men were delighted with themselves. They had given to the women the duty of making the string, and waited, expectantly, to hear cries of pain as they tried to twist the fibres. But instead, when they surreptitiously listened all they could hear was the laughter and chatter of the women. They peeked out from behind the trees, expecting to see the women lazing around doing nothing.

Instead, the women were sitting in a circle, busily twisting the fibres while they were talking amongst themselves. The men shook their heads and wandered off, puzzled. They thought they had tricked the women into doing a painful duty, but, it seemed, they themselves had been tricked. Thus it came about that the duty of making string for the hunting nets and fishing lines fell to the women. It was a duty that the women loved, they would sit around in a circle and discuss the events of the day, their husbands, their children, whatever came to mind.

And as the women sat around talking, the children would gather around listening to them, enchanted by the stories they told of when they, themselves were children. As they worked pieces of the fibres fell to the ground, forming a soft mat upon which the children loved to sit, and sometimes on a cold day they would snuggle into the warm fibres and listen to the stories and the chatter. Sometimes they would fall asleep, and if they awakened suddenly out of a nightmare the old women would comfort them and scare the nightmare demons away. Sometimes, when children were lost they would listen for the chatter of the women and come to the circle to await the arrival of their mothers.

And so, the mothers instructed their children that if they became lost they were to listen for the chatter of the old women as they made their string and to go to them for safety. Eventually the old women died, and because of their kindness to the children the Creator Spirit turned them into trees, tall, straight trees, trees with leaves like no other, leaves that when they fell looked like the pieces of string that the women dropped as they worked, leaves that formed a mat on the ground. And, if you sit under these trees, and listen carefully you will sometimes hear the chatter of the old women.

Those trees became known as the Dahl'wah, and mothers teach their children that if they should become lost they should seek out the trees and remain there until they are found.

**They know that the old women who are now the trees will look after them, and sing them to sleep, and protect them from monsters in the night.**

# Information about Dahl'wah

**Scientific name: *Casuarina torulosa***

**Forest Oak She Oak**

**Distribution:** Coast and Ranges

**Niche:** On sheltered slopes or valley floors in the vicinity of water courses, on rich, moist, but well-drained, gravelly loams.

**Description:** An evergreen tree which grows to a height of 25m

**Stem;** erect, with gracefully arching branches, deeply furrowed bark and dark,. Greyish green, pendant branches.

**Leaves;** Leaf teeth occurring in whorls of 4 around branchlets. **Flowers;** Male – reddish brown spikes, terminal to 2.5cm long; Female – catkins to 2.5cm long, appearing spring

**Fruit;** Cones, to 3cm long, and 2.5cm wide, with rough protuberances.

**Uses:** The wood was used for the making of implements, weapons and ornaments.

The bark was used to make special parrying shields which captured the enemies' spears without breaking the points.

Children used the cones to frighten away nightmare demons.

Children were taught to seek out these trees when lost. The fallen branchlets provide insulation in cold, wet weather, and the trees provide cool shade in hot weather.

The distinctive appearance of the Dahlwah make them easy to locate from great distances.

**Associations with other organisms:** Symbiotic relationship with actinomycete *Frankia*

**Associations with other plants:** Tall Open Forest; *Syncarpia glomulifera*, *Angophora floribunda*, *Eucalyptus piperita*, *Eucalyptus pilularis*; Open Forest: *Eucalyptus crebra* *Eucalyptus punctata*

**Comments:** Resprouts from base after high intensity fire, which also releases canopy stored seed.

**Scientific name: *Casuarina stricta***

**Drooping She Oak**

**Distribution:** Coast to Upper Blue Mountains

**Niche:** On stony ridges and rocky outcrops in gravelly clays over shale

Description: An evergreen tree which grows to a height of 10m

Stem; erect, with spreading branches, greyish green branchlets, and dark brown, deeply fissured bark.

Leaves; Leaf teeth occur in whorls of 11 around branchlets.

Flowers; Male – brownish terminal spikes to 10cm long; Females – catkins to 2cm long.

Fruit; Spikey, ovate cones to 3cm long.

Uses: The cones were used by children to frighten away nightmare demons. The fallen branchlets were used as bedding for sleeping in damp places.

The bark was used to make special parrying shields which captured enemy spears without damaging the point.

Medicinal

The wood was used to make women's fighting sticks.

Children were taught to seek out these trees when lost. The fallen branchlets provide insulation in cold, wet weather, and trees provide cool shade in hot weather.

The distinctive appearance of the Dahlwah make them easy to locate from great distances.

Associations with other organisms: Seed eaten by Crimson Rosella

Symbiotic relationship with actinomycete Frankia

Associations with other plants:

Woodland - Eucalyptus botryoides, Leptospermum laevigatum, Banksia ericifolia ,OR Eucalyptus dealbata.

Comments: Killed by fire, but re-establishes from canopy stored seed.

**Scientific Name: *Casuarina suberosa***

**Black She Oak**

Distribution: Coast and Ranges

Niche: On rocky ground on ridges and hillsides.

Description: An evergreen tree which grows to a height of 12m

Stem; erect, sturdy, branching, with hard, deeply fissured bark and greyish green, pendant branchlets.

Leaves; Leaf teeth occur in whorls of 6-8 around branchlets.

Flowers; Male – occurring in spikes to 2cm long; Female – cylindrical, to 2cm long, appearing autumn.

Fruit; Cones to 3cm long, containing winged seed.

Uses: Bedding in damp places.

Children were taught to seek these trees when lost. The fallen branchlets provide insulation in cold, wet weather, and the trees provide cool shade in hot weather.

The cones were used by children to dispel nightmares.

The bark was used to make special parrying shields to capture enemy spears without breaking the point.

Associations with other organisms: Symbiotic relationship with actinomycete Frankia

Associations with other plants: Eucalypt Forest, Woodland, Scrub

Corymbia gummifera, Eucalyptus punctata, Angophora costata, Eucalyptus piperita, Corymbia maculata, Eucalyptus tereticornis.

Comments: Killed, but re-establishes after fire from seed stored in canopy.

**Scientific name:** *Casuarina glauca*

Swamp Oak Swamp She Oak Grey She Oak

Distribution: Coastal

Niche; In the vicinity of saltwater estuaries

Description: An evergreen tree which grows to a height of 20m

Stem; Erect and sturdy, with flaky bark and spreading branches. Leaves; reduced to leaf teeth arranged in whorls of bluish green, pine-needle like branchlets. Erect

Flowers; Male – brown, cylindrical, terminal on branchlets; female – red, globular catkins, appearing spring.

Fruit; Globular cones, to 2.5cm across.

Uses: Bedding

The wood was used for the carving of implements, weapons and ornaments.

Firewood

Canoes.

Associations with other organisms: Host to epiphytic orchid *Dendrobium teretifolium*

E root nodule forming actinomycete *Frankenia* aids in the uptake of nutrient.

Associations with other plants: Rainforest, Woodland

Comments: Resprouts from root suckers after fire, with vigorous regeneration from trunk and branches.