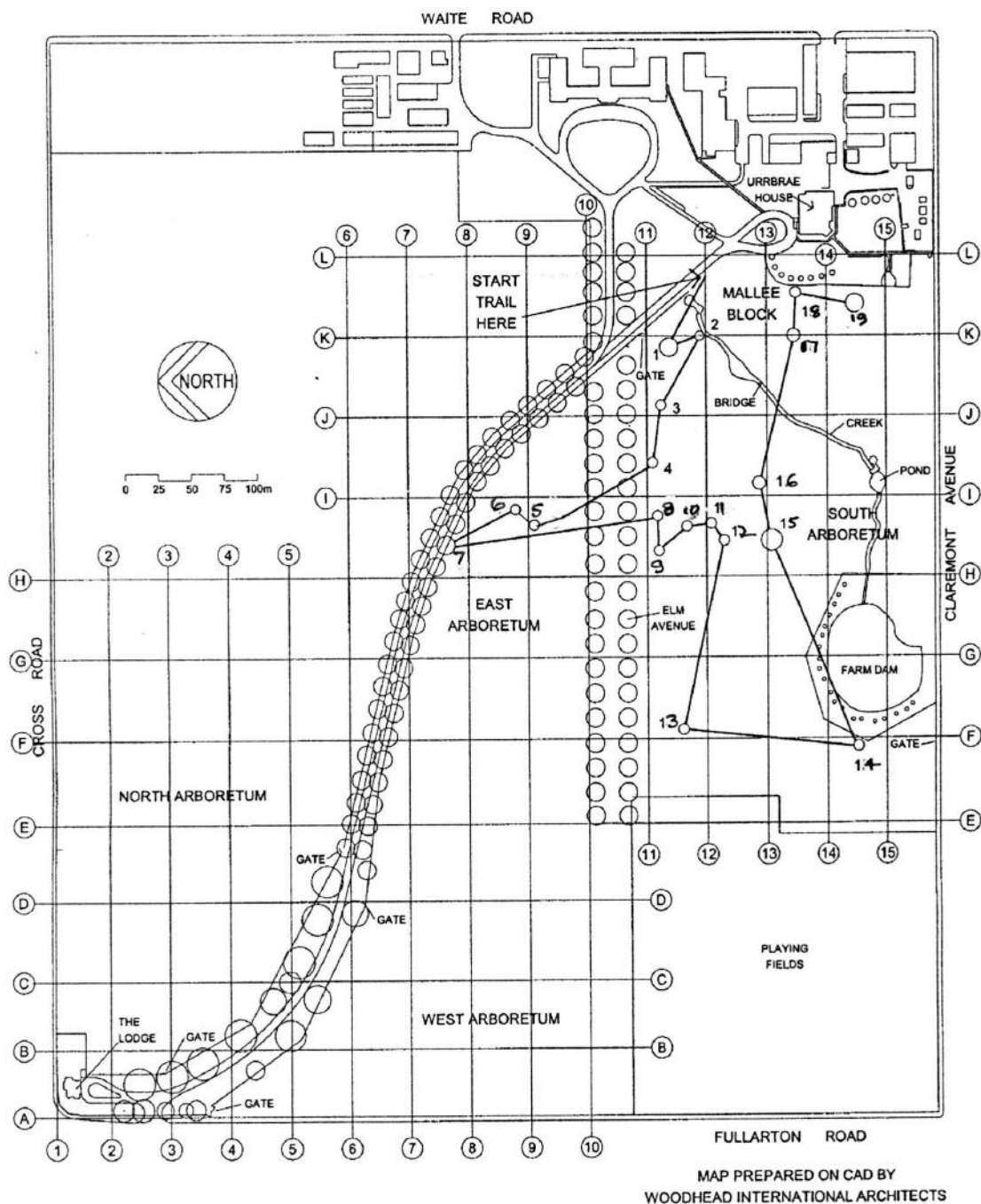


# THE WAITE ARBORETUM ABORIGINAL PLANT TRAIL



WAITE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE  
SITE PLAN GRID REFERENCES ABORIGINAL WALKING TRAIL

# THE WAITE ARBORETUM ABORIGINAL PLANT TRAIL

## Notes

### 1. Wilga *Geijera parviflora* (family Rutaceae) #4 (J11)

*Geijera*, an attractive tree from the arid lands, is an entirely Australian genus containing five species. Two of these, *G. linearifolia* and *G. parviflora*, are adapted to semi-arid conditions. *Geijera parviflora* is a beautiful tree with a dense, rounded crown and pendulous light green foliage. The small white or cream-coloured flowers occur from March–November. The tree is moderate to slow growing, is deep rooted, drought resistant and is an excellent tree for street planting, windbreaks, shade, honey and fodder. The Aboriginal people used the leaves as a topical anaesthetic.



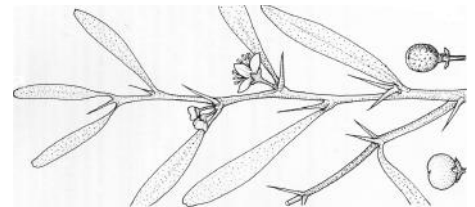
### 2. Native grape *Cissus hypoglauca* (family Vitaceae) #140 (K11)



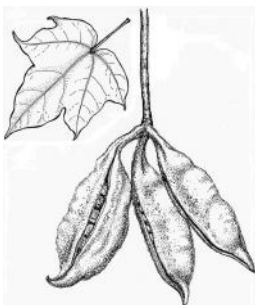
Native grape is a scrambling vine found in northern and eastern Australia. The fruits are edible but astringent and were used by the Aborigines to cure sore throats. The tubers of some species of *Cissus* were also eaten, after being roasted on heated pieces of termite nest or hot stones covered with a sheet of tea-tree bark.

### 3. Desert lime *Citrus glauca* (family Rutaceae) #163 (J11)

This desert plant produces plentiful tiny yellow fruits which are sour but rich in vitamin C. They are used to make a refreshing drink.



### 4. Bottle tree *Brachychiton rupestris* (family Sterculiaceae) #242 (I11)



The bottle tree derives its name from the extraordinary shape of its trunk which swells to an enormous girth of 6-10m, and is sharply constricted at the top and bottom. It contains a sweet edible jelly-like substance, as well as abundant water between the wood and inner bark. The tree, which can attain a height of 17m is found in the dry inland. Aborigines utilised the inner bark and bark from the roots as a source of fibre for nets and ropes: the women wore their teeth to the gums in chewing the fibre to prepare twine. The seeds of *Brachychiton* were eaten raw or roasted, or pounded into a flour which was eaten with honey or formed into bread. The boiled tuberous roots also provided food and were reputed to taste rather like turnips.

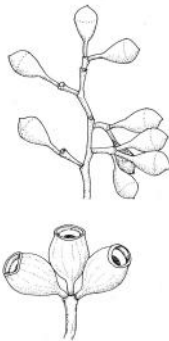
5. **Burdekin plum *Pleiogynium timorense* (family Anacardiaceae) #270 (H9)**



The large dark purple fruits of the Burdekin plum are much prized in north Queensland by both Aborigines and whites alike. The large woody stone is surrounded by a greenish-pink flesh which only becomes palatable some days after falling to the ground. Joseph Banks who accompanied Captain Cook observed that they tasted much like indifferent Damson plums.

6. **Sheoaks *Casuarina & Allocasuarina* species (family Casuarinaceae) #252 (H8)**

The Aborigines soaked the cones of casuarinas in their drinking water to give it a lemon flavour. At times when water was scarce, they chewed the needle-like stems. This made their saliva flow more and decreased the need for water. Some casuarinas develop hollows in their trunks which trap water. To get this the Aborigines would find a hollow tube to use as a straw or soak the water up with a ball of crushed grass. Sheoak wood is hard and suitable for making implements like spears, spear throwers, clubs, shields, digging sticks and clapping sticks. Returning boomerangs were carved from the roots, using the natural bends to advantage.



7. **Lemon scented gum *Corymbia citriodora* (family Myrtaceae) LG (I8)**

The lovely white trunked trees in the driveway to Urrbrae House are lemon scented gums. The leaves of this eucalypt yield a lemon scented oil. The gum or kino was used by the Aborigines as an antibiotic.

8. **Emu apple *Owenia acidula* (family Meliaceae) #230E (H11)**

The purplish-red round fruits have dark rich tangy pulp resembling a plum in flavour but are only palatable after they have fallen. Explorer Major Mitchell was among the first Europeans to taste the fruits which he found to be agreeable. The fruits are also very palatable to emus which swallow them whole and disperse the seeds widely. Indeed the seeds probably need to pass through an emu's gut before they can germinate.



**9. Native capers *Capparis* species (family Capparaceae) #1152A (H11)**

Mitchell's caper or native orange, *C. mitchellii*, is a small compact tree, widespread in outback Australia. The round warty fruits are reputed to taste like passionfruit, and refreshing drinks may be made from them. The sweet fruit of another species *C. spinosa* var. *nummularia* is a significant Aboriginal food being rich in protein and vitamin B. *Capparis. mitchellii* is the larval food plant of the migratory Caper White butterfly *Belenois java* ssp. *teutonia*. The butterflies usually arrive in November, and this tree has been found to carry an estimated 40,000 eggs at one time. By December the tree is often surrounded by a cloud of butterflies.



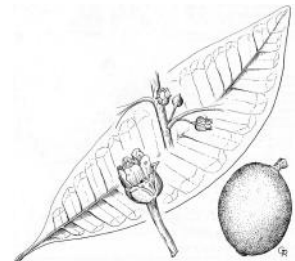
**10. Plum bush *Santalum lanceolatum* (family Santalaceae) #220 (H11)**



The parasitic genus *Santalum* includes the quandong, *S. acuminatum*, which is widespread but infrequent on calcareous soils, and sandalwood, *S. apiculatum*, which remains in only isolated remnants after intensive harvesting of its fragrant wood. The fruits of the plum bush are sweet and were widely eaten by the Aborigines. The wood was used to make boomerangs, and the leaves were burned as mosquito repellent as well as being used for treating boils, rheumatism and itching.

**11. Black apple *Planchonella australis* (family Sapotaceae) #213 (H12)**

The juicy plum-like fruits of this rainforest tree were eaten by Aborigines. The early white settlers also gathered them to make jellies and preserves.



**12. Weeping emubush *Eremophila longifolia* (family Myoporaceae) #205 (H12)**



The desert shrub or small tree *Eremophila* is one of the most widely distributed and diverse genera within Australia. 210 species have been recognised of which 76 are still undescribed. Because they are widespread, many Aboriginal tribes have used them, primarily for their medicinal properties, as well as for cultural rites. Of these, *Eremophila longifolia* was one of the most utilised and played an important role during the very early life of an Aboriginal infant. Some days after the birth, mother and child would sit in a trench in which green twigs of emubush were burnt. The fumes were inhaled and were considered to strengthen the baby, stop the mother's bleeding and increase her milk supply. The leaves, twigs and bark were also used as a decoction to cure headaches, insomnia and colds and an infusion of leaves was applied to sore eyes, boils and used as a counter-irritant.

13. **Australian fan palm or cabbage palm *Livistona australis* (family Palmae) #403 (F11)**

This is one of 52 species of palm native to Australia. Palms are usually found in swamps or rainforests but this one comes from the desert near Alice Springs where it is a relict of the days when the climate of central Australia was much wetter than it is today. It was the heart or growing tip of the palm that was eaten raw, boiled or roasted in ashes by the Aborigines and early white settlers. It is reputed to have the sweet taste of a Spanish chestnut. The leaves were also used for weaving.



14. **Illawarra plum *Podocarpus elatus* (family Podocarpaceae) #538 (E14)**



Illawarra plum or brown pine is a rainforest tree native to NSW & Queensland. It produces a false fruit which is really a fleshy stalk bearing a large round seed. The black juicy sweet stalk has a plum-like flavour and was highly regarded by local Aborigines and early settlers alike. The seed is also edible but has a resinous flavour.

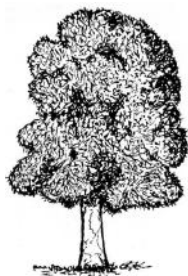
15. **Small-leaved Rock fig *Ficus brachypoda* (family Moraceae) #199 (H13)**

This is one of 13 species of figs in the Arboretum. Fruits of most of the fig species were eaten by the Aborigines. In central Australia, the Walbiri ate the fruits of *Ficus brachypoda* either raw or made into cakes by drying and grinding then mixing the paste with wild honey. Indeed, this species was so important to the early summer diet of these people that it was regarded as sacred. As well as the fruit of the fig trees, the bark was used to make rope, twine and blankets and the trunks were used to make dugout canoes.



16. **Prickly paperbark *Melaleuca styphelioides* (family Myrtaceae) #173 (I12)**

There are over 140 species of *Melaleuca* endemic to Australia. Melaleucas are sometimes called tea-trees, paperbarks or honey myrtles. The aborigines had many uses for melaleucas. The small, short branches were stripped of leaves and their ends chewed to make brushes for painting bodies. The nectar-filled flowers were soaked in water to sweeten it. The bark was rolled very tightly and used as a torch, which enabled the Aborigines to carry fire while walking. The oils in the bark kept the torch smouldering, and the smoke also acted as a mosquito repellent. The papery bark was used to make paint brushes, head dresses, knife sheaths and as a blanket too. The young leaves were bruised and soaked in water, with the liquid produced used to treat cold and headaches.



**17. River red gum *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* (family Myrtaceae) #1935B (K13)**



River red gums are widespread in Australia, growing in the hills and plains around Adelaide and south eastern South Australia and along watercourses in the arid interior. The gum obtained from this tree is called kino. Kino was dissolved in water to make a drink which was used as a treatment for diarrhoea. The oil from the leaves was also used for medicinal purposes as a decongestant, expectorant and counter irritant. Near the River Murray, Ngarrindjeri people cut huge slabs of bark from river red gums to make canoes. Red gum wood is hard and durable and was used to make boomerangs, shields, digging sticks and carrying dishes. Mature trees usually have many hollows providing homes for possums and birds such as parrots, wood ducks and kookaburras all of which could be hunted for food.

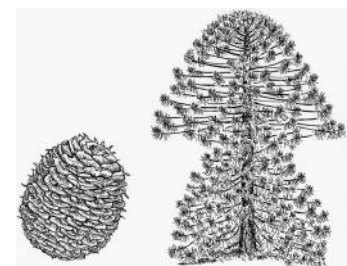
**18. Brush cherry *Syzygium paniculatum* (family Myrtaceae) #1887 (K13)**

The purple fruits of the brush cherry and also of the blue cherry *S. oleosum* nearby are succulent and edible. Joseph Banks recorded on 3 May 1770 that Captain Cook and Dr Solander brought home a plentiful supply which were eaten with much pleasure, though the fruits had little to recommend them but a slight acid. They are good for making jam.



**19. Bunya bunya *Araucaria bidwillii* (family Araucariaceae) #1880 (K14)**

Bunya bunya is native to Queensland and grows to a height of 45m. It has a distinctive silhouette with the crown a symmetrical dome, and prickly dark green leaves clustering at the ends of whorled, horizontal, unbranched branches. The female cones grow to an enormous size, up to 30 cm long, and 4 kg in weight and may take 14 years to mature. Each cone contains up to 150 large ovoid seeds with a milky flesh which was relished, either raw or roasted, by the Aborigines. The right to collect seed from a given tree was passed from father to son and these trees are the only known hereditary property of the Aborigines. Records exist of triennial gatherings of Aborigines in the Bunya Mountains for bunya nut ceremonies. The participants came from hundreds of kilometres away. The last such ceremony occurred in 1876. The common name is of aboriginal origin.



## Acknowledgements

### Illustrations:

*Araucaria bidwillii*, *Brachychiton rupestris* and *Syzygium paniculatum* by **Beth Chandler**;  
*Acacia peuce* & *Ficus brachypoda* by **Emma Kinnane**

**Text:** *Jennifer Gardner* August 1993

Revised by *Jean Bird & Jennifer Gardner* November 2006

### Sources of information and remaining illustrations

ADELAIDE BOTANIC GARDEN EDUCATION SERVICE. *Aboriginal Trail. a self guided trial for Junior Primary students.* Illus. G. Dashorst (1993) & *Aboriginal Trail. Upper Primary* by T. Sadler & A. Reddaway (1987).

BOLAND, D.J. et al. (1984). *Forest trees of Australia.* 4th ed. (Nelson & CSIRO, Melbourne).

BOOMSMA, C.D. (1981). *Native trees of South Australia.* (Woods & Forests Dept, Adelaide).

CHERIKOFF, V. (1989). *The bush food handbook* (Ti Tree Press, Balmain, N.S.W.)

GARDNER, J. (1990). *The Waite Arboretum: guide and catalogue of trees.* (Uni. Adelaide).

GARDNER, J. (1992). *The Waite Arboretum: Fossil Trail.* illus. B. Chandler.

HOLLIDAY, I. (1989). *A field guide to Melaleucas.* (Hamlyn Australia).

ISAACS, J. (1987). *Bush food: aboriginal food and herbal medicine.* (Weldons., Sydney).

JESSOP, J. (ed.) (1981). *Flora of Central Australia.* (Reed, Sydney).

LOW, T. (1988). *Wild food plants of Australia* (Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, N.S.W.)

MORELY, B.D. & TOELKEN, H.R. (eds) (1983). *Flowering plants in Australia* (Rigby, Adelaide).

RICHMOND, G.S. (1993). A review of the use of *Eremophila* (Myoporaceae) by Australian Aborigines. *J. Adelaide Bot. Gard.* 15(2): 101-107.

SERVENTY, V. (1981). *Plantlife of Australia.* (Cassell, North Ryde, N.S.W.)