

Speaking To “T’otherside”

Through the latter portion of the 1800s the more settled eastern half of Australia was labelled in local vernacular as “t’otherside” and people who came from there were “t’othersiders”. Until the mid 1870s communication with t’otherside was difficult and frustratingly slow – that is, until the advent of the east–west telegraph line.

The original line followed the coast and was completed in 1877. Twenty years later, following the massive rush to Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie, another line was constructed, linking Coolgardie with Eucla, on the South Australian border. The first post and telegraph master, Mr RW Lloyd, took charge in Norseman on May 31st, 1896, but it was field operator SJ Giles who sent the first messages.

Lacking a dedicated telegraph room, he established himself at the end of Prinsep Street with a case of beer for a desk – and by this rudimentary means nearly 3000 telegrams were transmitted and received!

The Government built a shelter with a rainwater tank every 50 km (30 miles) along the line for the maintenance crews who often spent months in the field. Each shelter had a square iron tank which contained rations of flour, tea, sugar and tinned meat. Maintenance workers often travelled by bicycle or camel, and became skilled bushmen as a matter of survival.



An early linesman on the job, somewhere between Norseman and Eucla. Courtesy Battye Library.



The Israelite Bay Telegraph Station as it was in its hey-day. Courtesy National Trust (WA).

Repeater stations were constructed at a number of points along the line, though few are in as good condition as the Norseman ‘Post and Telegraph Office’ which is still in use as the post office and residence.

A substantial building, it was never subject to the scepticism that greeted the construction of the line itself. One local is reported to have looked at the posts being installed and said: “Look at those stupid fellows putting up that fence – it’ll never work! The wires are too high to keep the kangaroos out!”



The Israelite Bay Telegraph Station, in 2004. Courtesy National Trust (WA).



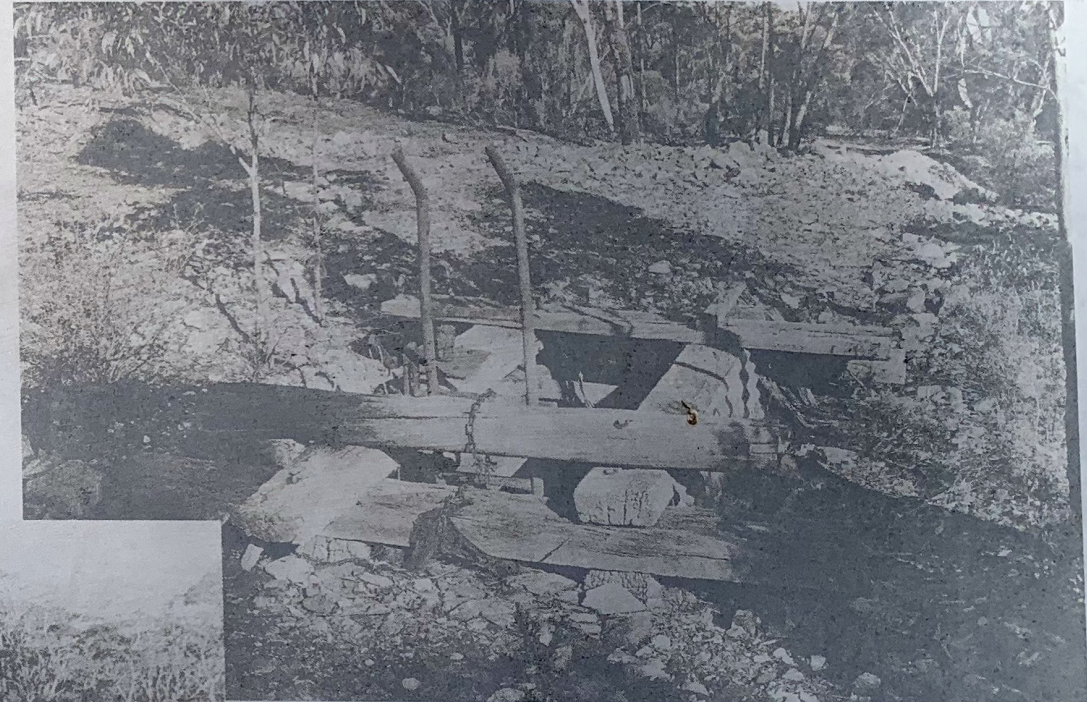
The May Bell - First Find In The Fields

In 1890 William Moir of Fanny's Cove, west of Esperance, came inland in search of fresh pastures for his sheep. While exploring the area around the Dundas Hills he picked up some nice 'colours' of gold in a creek bed where he had camped. This chance discovery ultimately led to the opening up of the whole of the Dundas goldfields.

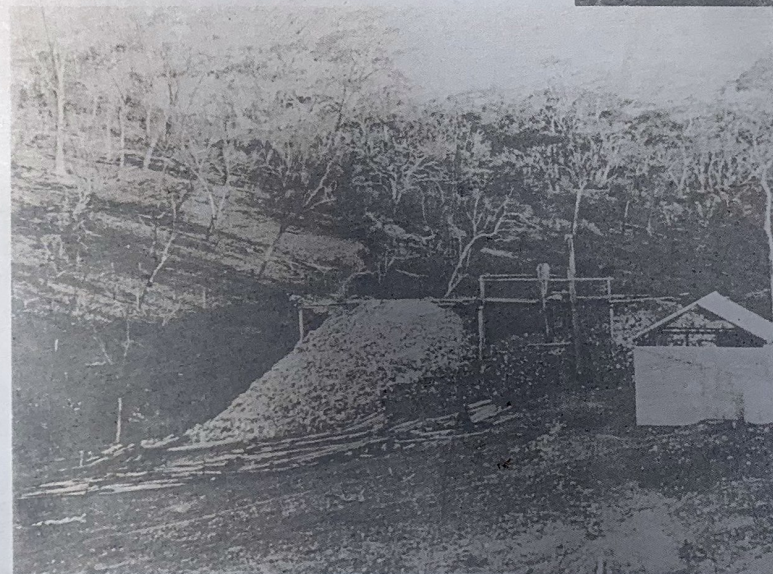
His find was not spectacular though – certainly not compared to others being reported from elsewhere in WA at the time. Two years passed before anyone came back to the area, and then it was Moir again, with a prospecting partner by the name of Stennet. They failed to find worthwhile gold, but others had followed their lead and came looking in these hills to the west of Lake Dundas.

Late in 1892 prospectors Mawson and Kirkpatrick 'struck it rich' a few hundred metres south-east of here. The nearest warden's office was at Southern Cross and it was there that they lodged their 'Mawson's Reward' claim on November 15th of that year. Soon after, the Great Dundas and Scotia mines were discovered and by August 1893 the Dundas Goldfield was proclaimed.

The mine on the Mawson's Reward claim was known as the May Bell. It was floated in London in 1894 with a capital of £60,000 in £1 shares (about \$120,000), and then went through a stage of rapid on-site development. Curiously for a mine with such an auspicious start, the gold that issued from it was of notably poor quality. It contained large quantities of silver, and lesser amounts of bismuth, lead and copper, all of which are detrimental to normal means of treatment.



The original May Bell shaft in 2004 – perhaps the first to be sunk on the Dundas fields. Courtesy Jesse Brampton.



The nearby Bon Accord Mine – typical of so many in the 1890s. Courtesy Phototone Colonial Library.

It too, has been reworked in recent years, and the lease surrounding it has been the subject of substantial exploration. Both the channel from which the May Bell drew water from the lake and the original shaft remain in reasonable condition, providing a tangible link to the very origins of the Dundas goldfield.

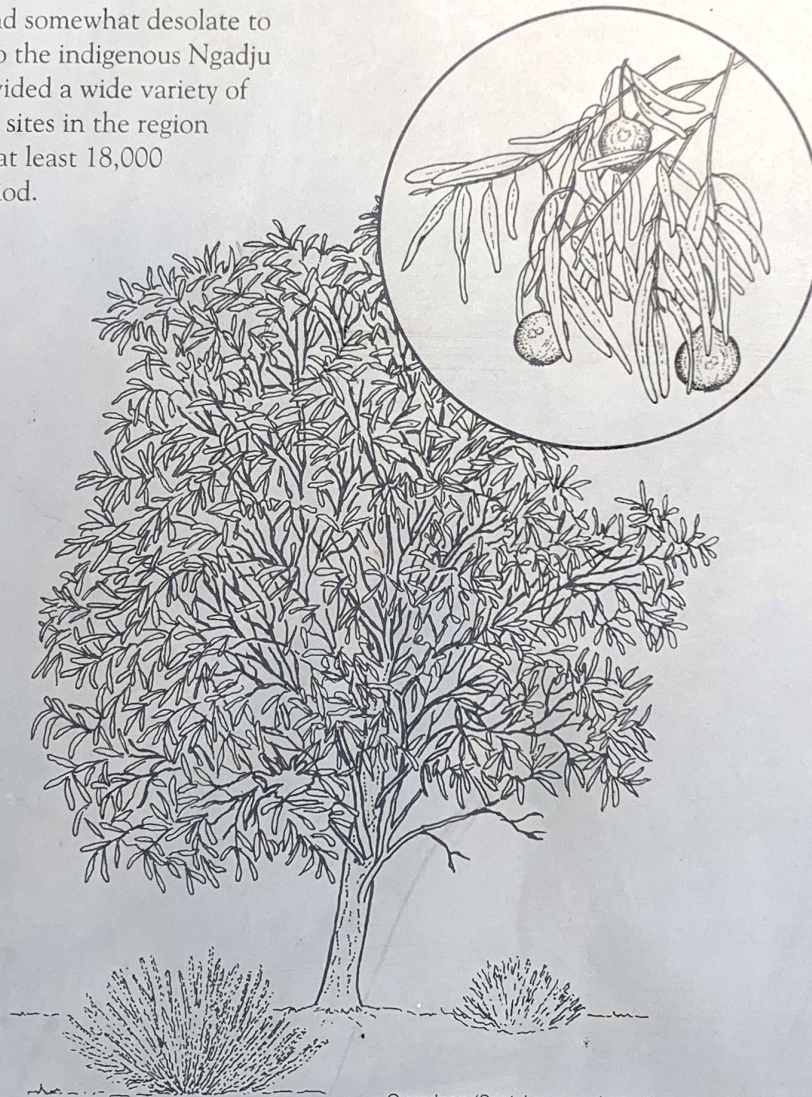


Currant Bushes And Quandongs

While this country might look dry and somewhat desolate to those of us of European ancestry, to the indigenous Ngadju people it was a well-stocked larder that provided a wide variety of foods and medicines. Artefacts from various sites in the region suggest that the Ngadju have lived here for at least 18,000 years and perhaps as much as twice that period.

Within just a few metres of this sign are two plants that provided important food and medicine over much of this period – and continue to do so today. *Scaevola spinescens* or currant bush is also known as maroon bush. It is a many-branched and often tangled shrub, usually of between one and two metres in height. Small bundles of leaves have an associated spine which gives the plant a slightly spiky appearance and feel.

It is known to be an important forage plant. The leaves contain up to 13% protein and are relished by stock. Perhaps more importantly, the Ngadju people (and other neighbouring Aboriginal communities) have long used the leaves to make infusions that ease the pain of various abdominal diseases. In recent years the currant bush has come under intense medical scrutiny as some people now believe it may provide a treatment for some forms of cancer.



Quandong (*Santalum acuminatum*)

Also nearby are a number of distinctive lolly-pop shaped quandong trees. The quandong (*Santalum acuminatum*) is one of Australia's best-known bush foods. The fruit is tasty and nutritious, and the kernels too can be eaten, either whole or ground up and made into flour. Early settlers used quandong fruit in jams, pies and jellies. They also dried the fruit like the Aborigines to keep it for future use.

Scientists have confirmed what Aboriginal people already knew – the quandong is a great food source. Perhaps in the near future science will also confirm the medicinal qualities of the currant bush. Then we Europeans too, might perhaps look on country like this as a store-house of valuable food and medicine – just as the Ngadju have done for millennia before us.



The echidna was considered excellent – if challenging – bush tucker.









HIGHWAY
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