

Wiradjuri Canoe Tree



Many of you may already know that we live in Wiradjuri Country. The Wiradjuri people have lived in this region for many thousands of years. At the Museum of the Riverina Botanic Gardens site, we have a special Indigenous section which tells the stories of the early Wiradjuri people of this region. Just one of the highlights of the Wiradjuri collection is the Canoe Tree, which lives inside the Museum.

- Wiradjuri people cut bark from trees in order to make canoes. The river-red gum tree at the Museum of the Riverina shows the oval-shaped scar where bark was removed to make a canoe. As only some bark was taken from the tree, this meant it would live.
- Bark was removed using a stone or hardwood tool. Stone or wooden wedges were used to lift the bark from the tree. The bark was then dried and curled and with props and stretches moulded into the required shape. Small fires were used to evaporate the sap which caused the sides to curl up, keeping the water out when the canoe was afloat.
- Canoes of this type were widely used in south east Australia on rivers, swamps, lakes and billabongs for transport and fishing. A combination spear-pole or paddle was generally used.
- The Canoe Tree at the Museum of the Riverina came from a property near Collingullie and has been in the Museum since the 1970s. The canoe cut from it would have been about 2.8 metres long and probably carried one or two passengers.

Did you know?

There are two Wiradjuri Coolamons at the Museum, both made by Barry Walsh from the bark removed from trees outside the front of the Museum. The Coolamon was a versatile, multi-purpose vessel used by Wiradjuri to carry or gather food or water. It could also be used as a baby's cradle.