

PUBLISHED VERSION

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'Inventing' a Colonial Dark History: The Derby Boab 'Prison' Tree

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'Inventing' a Colonial Dark History: The Derby Boab 'Prison' Tree

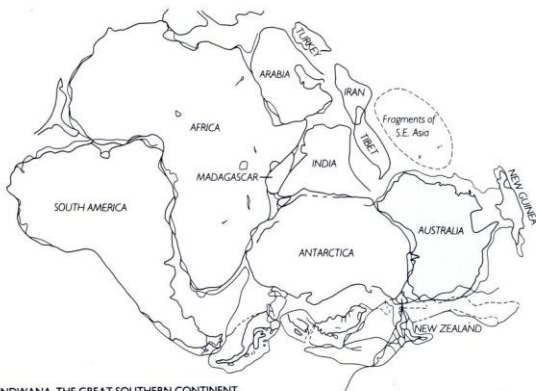
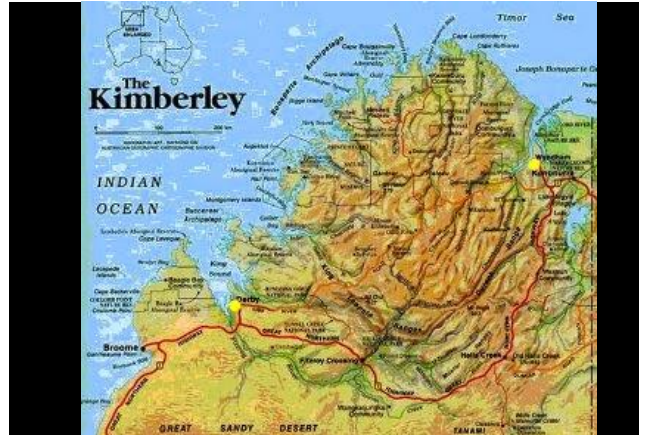
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'Boabs' of the Kimberley



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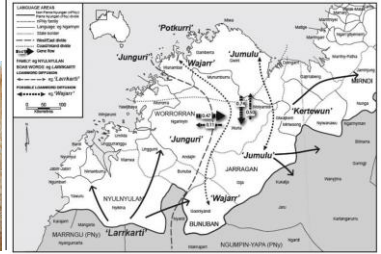


GONDWANA, THE GREAT SOUTHERN CONTINENT.



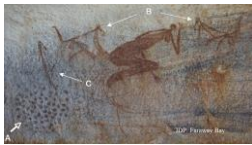


Aboriginal peoples relationship to 'Boabs'



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Aboriginal uses for Boabs



The trees are regarded by the Aboriginal people as cherished individuals with unique personalities. There is a strong mythology attached to each individual Boab tree and they often feature in Aboriginal rock art and Dreamtime stories.

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Aboriginal uses for Boabs



Some trees were landmarks for wayfinding or places for ceremony. Others were used as ossuaries where ancestral remains were placed.

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Aboriginal uses for Boabs



The Boab tree was an important food source for the Aboriginal peoples. All parts of the tree - nuts, seeds and roots are edible. A mature Boab tree can reputedly hold 100,000 litres of water in its soft fibrous trunk.

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Aboriginal uses for Boabs



The seeds and bark were harvested for medicinal and nutritional purposes. The seeds have anti-bacterial properties and yield diet-enriching calcium and Vitamin C. The bark was used to treat fever. Modern science has demonstrated it has properties similar to Quinine, an effective and life-saving anti-malarial agent.

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Aboriginal uses for Boabs



Rope, baskets, mats and nets were made from the fibrous inner bark of the Boab.

A red dye, obtained from the tree roots is used in traditional artworks.

The seed pods were used for storage or carved for ceremonial purposes.

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Early Reporting of the Derby Tree



Herbert Basedow, 'Narrative of an expedition of exploration in North-Western Australia' 1916-1917 Described the Derby Tree as being used as an assuary

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Anthropologist Basedow's notes

'It has even been suggested that the Derby tree was used by Aborigines as a resting place for the dead. The natives have long been in the habit of making use of this lusus naturae as a habitation; it is indeed a dry and comfortable hut. Some bleached human bones were lying upon the floor, which suggested that the tribe had also made use of the tree for disposing of the dead. A frontal bone of a skull clearly bore evidence that the individual had fallen a victim to the bullet of a rifle.' 1910



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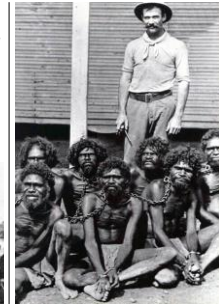


Policing in the Kimberley



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Policing in the Kimberley



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Policing and imprisonment in the Kimberley



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Wyndam Boab Tree



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The emergence ofthat old chestnut



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Coalescing 'truth' into 'fact'



In 1948, artist Vase Zanalis spent eight months camping at Derby and in the surrounding areas. The artist became intrigued with boab trees and Aboriginal subjects

One of the works later exhibited in Sydney entitled 'The Boab Tree' was described by the press as:
the well-known Boab Tree at Derby in the North West of this State. In the earlier days its trunk was used as a prison of a temporary nature until it was possible to transfer the prisoners to a more permanent abode... This tree has become a famous land mark

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Poems

Gifts Upon The Water



poems by Alec Choate

*Touch this gnarled wood, the scooped out
 Body of this boab tree
 And it answers stone, or steel,*

*Empty saved for the held air
 And the sun's blunt arrowpoints,
 That blur through the holed roofing*

*Can it ever remind us
 Of the alien heart heartbeats
 That took the place of its heart?*

*For here was a prison cell
 Here man was a kept shadow
 Today it is strange that leaves.*

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Recognition as a 'prison tree'



1988 - included in the Western Australian Register of significant trees

1995 - listed on State Register of Heritage Places.

The Prison Tree is significant as much because it has become a symbol for the town of Derby as for the history associated with it. It represents the harsh treatment prisoners often received in the north of Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

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Current Signage



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Current Signage



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The Pigeon Heritage Trail

The Prison Boab Tree

During the latter half of the nineteenth century many Boab trees were used as overnight cells for Aboriginal prisoners being escorted to the nearest town for trial. This tree provided the last stopover point before the Derby goal for offenders from the Fitzroy River area.

This particular tree is at least a thousand years old and has a girth of fourteen metres.

A widely used symbol, the Boab tree has great historical significance in the vital and colourful past of the Kimberley.

The Boab, often referred to as the Boobah, is a name of African origin applied to trees of the genus *Adansonia*. Two species are identified by botanists: the *adansonia digitata* which achieves immense size and bulk in tropical Africa and the *adansonia digitata* variety which is confined to the coastal areas of the North West and some areas of the Northern Territory.

The Pigeon Heritage Trail is a self-guiding driving tour based on the life of the 19th century Aboriginal known as Pigeon, and features significant sites in Derby and at Windiana George and Turrill Creek. Booklet guides for the trail are available from the Derby Tourist Bureau, West Kimberley Shire Office and Windiana George rangers.

A Commonwealth/State Bicentennial Project.

"New" associations to the pearling industry



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Boab Prison Tree

Before Derby was established in 1861, itinerant people were taken up from the West Kimberley, the Kimberley, known as blackfellers, were natives who were captured with the pearling industry. They would drive past and look for the pearling boats.

They would stop up, and then in chains and manacles stand in the road.

Some men have had their captives at the Boab Prison Tree while they waited for a boat.

Early pioneers behind the blackfellers because they thought that capturing the enemy was would capture general blackfellers from the other world blackfellers.

The blackfellers people named. A white named barbara Corbett was killed in December 1861. Prison trees come from Kimberley and look most people were.

In 1861, the Kimberley was taken over by Derby. The name Derby was given to the town of Derby. The name Derby was given to the town of Derby. The name Derby was given to the town of Derby.

The prison house in Derby was the Boab Prison. This name was given to the town of Derby. The name Derby was given to the town of Derby.

Current Signage



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Current Signage



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Touristic Treatment of a Sacred Place



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Touristic Treatment of a Sacred Place



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Touristic Treatment of a Sacred Place



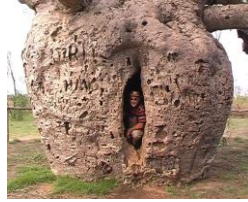
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Touristic Treatment of a Sacred Place



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Souvenirs



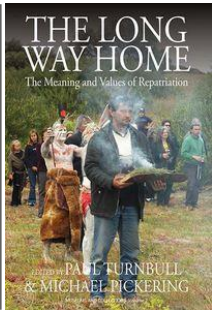
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Making amends



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Making amends



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Thank you



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