

• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that this story contains references to people who have died.



James Back listens to Auntie Lynette Knapp tell of the importance of the women's business area, Warrumbup, Weedon Hill. **Picture: PATRICIA GILL. See more in the Bulletin online.**

'True' Noongar tells it the way it really was

By PATRICIA GILL

MERNINGAR Elder Lynette Knapp feels for her country the same way as her family does: "Which is the way I taught them". A DNA test conducted through the Esperance Aboriginal Group 12 years ago showed her as having a 75,000-year 'proper' connection to Country, other Noongars tested being African or Asian-related. Auntie Lynette told a gathering

at The Cove on Wilson Inlet foreshore on Sunday that traditionally Noongars lived in family rather than tribal groups. The 'true Noongars' came from the 'green' tellerack (blue mallee) country within a 400km radius of Israelite Bay. "We're not all Noongars, though we call ourselves Noongars; they've got it wrong," Auntie Lynette said, referring to the people of Whadjuk country (around Perth). The location of the Six Sea-

sons Aboriginal and Cultural heritage talk at Weedon Hill area (Warrumbup) was significant for women's business. Warrumbup was once a big traditional campground with graves nearby towards Ocean Beach. Attendees were lucky to be on the 'special dreaming place' where trees burst from rocks associated with female kangaroos and possums. **• More page 7**

Old debates shaded in family tales

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When the people died they became totemic spirits embedded in the rocks, which were like a shrine.

"It's like going past a graveyard and seeing a tombstone," Auntie Lynette said.

"That's why we don't like anyone doing anything on the Porungurups at all (because of the rock formations).

"We call the mountains and the hills, Kaart, the same as our heads, we aren't allowed to be on the heads but we can be on the shoulders."

Her connection to Denmark dated back to her great-great-great grandmother Jakbum who with husband Wabbinyet and self-taught anthropologist Daisy Bates (1859-1951) compiled a vocabulary still used in Aboriginal studies today.

"Merningar (Menang) people go from the eastern side of the Denmark River to the Great Australian Bight," Auntie Lynette said.

"We know our country by the plant and animal life.

"We mark our boundary and the tallerack tells me I'm a coastal person - a shell or whale person."

Wabbinyet's country, Bibbulmun, extended as far as the Warren River.

The Merningar nation contained 'bits and pieces' of other tribal groups while the Bibbulmun nation covered 'all of us along the coast'.

The first question people would be asked was what was their family group and each had their own variation of the same or a related story.

"But everyone's arguing about which is the right one (story)," Auntie Lynette said.

"That's why there's so much arguing going on between Aboriginal people today."

Auntie Lynette said her family group marked eight rather than six seasons and one, a special time, was when the Christmas trees, *Nuytsia floribunda* or Mooja, flowered.

It was believed that during the flowering the souls of the people after they had passed sat in the branches of the Mooja tree.

"They wait for about four weeks and, if someone comes along behind them, they journey together to the land between the ocean and the sky," Auntie Lynette said.

"They come back white in a vessel which is why we believed that Captain Cook was a soul.

"When the Christmas trees come back (flower again) they are coming back to look after our country."

The emergence of boronia marked the first hint of spring, and the brief appearance of different plants and animals for the eight seasons seasons.

At the moment it was the season of the long-necked tortoise.

"We don't live like them Whadjuk (who mark six seasons)," Auntie Lynette said.

Trees such as those towering above the group on Sunday when burnt by a 'wrong' (too fierce) fire destroyed the spirits which had returned to the trees.

Auntie Lynette said she had found watching television coverage of bush fires with the upper parts of the tree ablaze unbearable.

Recently she and others had helped a 'Wadjela bloke' who couldn't sleep due to being haunted by a dead Noongar man.

"The man said 'I go to work and there is an old man waving to me, he follows me home, speaks to me, I see him everywhere'," Auntie Lynette said.

At the time the Christmas bush was not flowering - important to the ritual - so Lynette and friends gathered sticks and leaves from the trees.

"We went to his house and put sticks in every corner," she said.

"We told him when he got up early in the morning to pick up the sticks and put them in a bag and take them back to the tree."

Months later, the man was reported to have said that he had never felt so peaceful in his life.

"It works, and helps the oldies on their way," Auntie Lynette said.

"By putting sticks in the tree he (the soul) thought he was sitting there on his journey home."

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Jane Kelsbie

MEMBER FOR WARREN-BLACKWOOD

9848 3171

Jane.Kelsbie@mp.wa.gov.au

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