

## MAKING MULLET SPEARS WITH DAVID NEWRY, KUNUNURRA, 6 MAY 2017

Photographer: Darren Clark

On Saturday morning I met with David Newry, one of the most respected elders from Kununurra. I had arranged with David to take him and his three grandsons down to the Ord River and make mullet spears for the morning.

We drove down dirt tracks, which wound their way through the thick scrub that lined the banks of the mighty Ord River looking for a tree to cut spears from. Unfortunately all the locations that David knew where the Wild trees grow were now choked out by neem trees, which are known to aggressively invade native ecosystems displacing native plants and animals. In parts of Africa it dominates large areas of the savannah and potentially could do the same in parts of Australia. In the Kununurra area, neem trees are starting to choke out native trees including Boabs. I found it really depressing to see the countryside around Kununurra dying from this introduced plant, which is now the dominant species.

We drove around for about an hour and found only one location where David cut a few fresh saplings to make spears from. Once he had enough we then headed down to the rocky river bank and set up under the shade of a tree at an old gathering ground called Fords Beach or in Mirima Jalinem and started making mullet spears the traditional way.

David began the process by stripping the bark from the sapling and removing any knots and lumps that would prevent the spear from sliding along the hand smoothly, once he had finished this he then started to scrape the sapling removing the sticky sap that the bark had left behind with his pocket knife blade which he held on a slight angle. The reason for doing this was so that the sapling would dry in the sun a lot quicker and not be slippery in your hand when throwing.

After this we lit a small fire and placed the sapling into the coals. Every few minutes David would remove the now warm sapling from the flames and with his foot bend it to straighten it, this process went on for about 15 to 20 minutes and once finished the sapling

was now beginning to look like a straight spear ready for the prongs to be fitted.

David pulled out a length of old rusty fencing wire from his bag and began to explain to me how he preferred the wire to be rusty so that when it went into a fish it stayed there instead of sliding out again like a new length of wire would. He then bent the wire into a U shape and placed one end into the fire and heated it up. Once it was red hot he removed it from the flames and began to beat the tip of the wire using a small rounded rock that fitted into the palm of his hand, he had also placed a larger flatter rock down on the ground to absorb the blow. Skilfully David twisted the wire around whilst beating it into a rough point and once he was satisfied with the point he would then rub it against the larger rock smoothing it into a finer sharper point.

Once this process was complete the points were placed back into the flames until red hot, removed and used to burn a neat hole just above the end of the spear which the wire was then pushed through until an even length was achieved on either side. David then beat the wire on both sides so as to fit tightly against the spear, and then saddle twine was used to tie the prong into place.

The whole process from cutting the sapling to tying the prongs into the spear and giving it a final sharpen before use took us about three hours and once David and the boys were down on the river bank it only took David a couple of throws before he had a small mullet on the end of the newly made spear.

IMAGE NO.	CAPTION	FORMAT	DATE	COMMENTS
BA2840/93	David Newry selecting straight saplings for mullet spears Kununurra 6 May 2017	Digital	6 May 2017 Kununurra	David Newry had trouble finding a spear tree to cut a few saplings from due to the neem trees that are now choking the landscape and killing all the native plants.
BA2840/94	Damien Newry removing the bark of a freshly cut sapling to make a mullet spear on the bank of the Ord River Kununurra 6 May 2017	Digital	6 May 2017 Kununurra	It was such a pleasing sight to see David Newry's grandson Damien learning the art of mullet spear making from his grandfather.
BA2840/95	Damien Newry beginning to remove the bark of a freshly cut sapling ready to make a mullet spear on the bank of the	Digital	6 May 2017 Kununurra	Damien Newry was fascinated all morning as he watched his

	Ord River Kununurra 6 May 2017			grandfather making him a mullet spear.
BA2840/96	David Newry teaching grandson Damien Newry the art of making a mullet spear on the bank of the Ord River Kununurra 6 May 2017	Digital	6 May 2017 Kununurra	David was so patient with Damien who was asking questions about the process of making a mullet spear all morning.
BA2840/97	David & Damien Newry shaping mullet spears on the bank of the Ord River Kununurra 6 May 2017.	Digital	6 May 2017 Kununurra	David explaining to Damien that no matter how hard you pushed the spear to straighten it you would not break it due to the fact that it was a green sapling.
BA2840/98	David Newry adding points to the prongs of a new mullet spear the traditional way 6 May 2017	Digital	6 May 2017 Kununurra	It was so interesting watching David using tools (eg river rocks) that his people has used for thousands of years to make mullet spears.
BA2840/99	David Newry burning a hole through the end of a new mullet spear to fit the prongs through on the bank of the Ord River Kununurra 6 May 2017	Digital	6 May 2017	The techniques that David used to make a mullet spear where so different that the ones I had seen in Northern Queensland, his technique made a much more aerodynamic and stronger, yet lighter spear.
BA2840/100	David Newry trimming the end of a new mullet spear to make it more aerodynamic when thrown with grandsons Damien and Steven looking on 6 May 2017	Digital	6 May 2017 Kununurra	I was amazed at the level of skill David demonstrated whilst making his spear, his craftsmanship was second to non.
BA2840/101	David Newry teaching his grandson Damien Newry who to tie the prongs on a mullet spear on the bank of the Ord River 6 May 2017	Digital	6 May 2017 Kununurra	David Newry eye for detail really impressed me and his grandson Damien Newry payed attention to everything he was being shown all morning

BA2840/102	David Newry sharpening the tips of a mullet spear the traditional way on the bank of the Ord River Kununurra 6 May 2017	Digital	6 May 2017	The excitement level began to rise as David sharpened the trips of the spear from a final time on a river rock.
BA2840/103	David Newry demonstrating how to use a woomera and spear to his grandsons on the bank of the Ord River Kununurra 6 May 2017	Digital	6 May 2017 Kununurra	When David placed the newly made mullet spear into his woomera the young boys screamed with excitement, they were about to go mullet spearing for the first time.
BA2840/104	David Newry hunting mullet in the Ord River Kununurra with a new spear he just made 6 May 2017	Digital	6 May 2017	David demonstrating the correct angle to throw a mullet spear into a river with rocks on the bottom.
BA2840/105	David Newry testing a new mullet spear on a passing school of mullet in the Ord River Kununurra 6 May 2017	Digital	6 May 2017	With his second throw of the new mullet spear David has a direct hit on a passing school of mullet. Impressive.
BA2840/106	David Newry testing a new mullet spear in the Ord River Kununurra 6 May 2017	Digital	6 May 2017	David proudly displaying a young mullet that he speared with his second throw.
BA2840/107	Damien Newry being taught to spear mullet by his grandfather David Newry in the Ord River Kununurra 6 May 2017	Digital	6 May 2017 Kununurra	David was so proud as he sat on the banks of the Ord River with the young boys teaching them to spear mullet, their first lesson was not to sit too close to the water's edge because the mullet could see you and change their direction and more importantly crocodiles live in the Ord.