



Indigenous Culture in the Upper Murray

Fire Making Questions

For thousands of years, our Indigenous people had to use the landscapes around them for food, water, shelter and to make fire. Today, we use a match or lighter to start a fire. Aboriginal people had to use the materials around them and friction to create fire.

1. What were the three uses of fire that Shane mentioned for Aboriginal people?
2. What kind of plant material - which was once generally available throughout much of Australia - did Shane use to make fire?
3. As Shane demonstrated, what was the physical property used to generate fire?
4. In this case what did Shane use as an accelerant or "tinder" to encourage the production of flame?

Extension Questions

5. What other uses did Indigenous people commonly use the fire for?
6. What other source of fire, apart from physically producing it, do you think was available to the Aboriginal People?



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Fire Making Answers

1. Warmth, cooking and tool-making (Hardening timber by heat treatment).
2. The flower stems of the grass tree or Xanthorrhoea (Pronounced Zan-for-rhee-a). This plant had a multitude of uses for the Aboriginal people. Apart from fire making, the flower stems were also used for spear shafts. The heart of the leaf base (from where the fronds extend) could be extracted, roasted and eaten. At certain times of the year, the fronds of the plant could be individually pulled out and the base of the leaf eaten raw (it has a very sweet taste). The flower of the plant produced a sweet nectar. The grass tree was also a major source of resin which, when gently heated, could be used as an adhesive or glue. This resin is found on and within the black base or trunk of the grass tree.
3. **Friction** which generates heat which eventually causes wood or charcoal dust to smoulder. There is an old saying "Where there is smoke there is fire" and, with a little encouragement, smouldering charcoal can produce a naked flame.
4. The dried teased outer bark of the stringy bark tree. Fire was encouraged by blowing on the smouldering charcoal ash placed within the bark bundle.
5. Other uses of fire were for illumination (light), hunting, communication over long distances, fire stick farming (modification of landscape through cold burning - to produce clear forested country or open grasslands) and ceremony. eg. - The smoking ceremony used as part of 'Welcome to Country'.

The Aboriginal people long ago also realised that fish, unlike many other animals, were attracted to flame, or at least the light generated by it, and knowing this would often build a small fire in the front of their bark canoes to act as a beacon when night fishing. Of course precautions had to be taken not to damage the canoe so a thick protective layer of clay was usually placed on the floor of the canoe to insulate the bark floor from heat.

6. Lightning strikes.

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