CHAPTER III

This chapter is concerned with the food quest. First its importance in the lives of the natives and the influence of the environment upon it will be discussed, then a detailed description will be given of what foods were available, of the methods used to procure the different varieties, and of the manner in which the aborigines prepared their food for consumption.

The food quest was an extremely important factor in the lives of the Hunter Valley natives, forcing them, like those of other areas, into a nomadic existence. They were constantly on the move in search of food (1) and Dawson observed of the Port Stephens natives that they rarely stayed more than a few days in one place,

'frequently not more than one night.' (2)

Much of the Hunter Valley is subjected to flood and drought, and was similarly affected at the time of first white settlement, not being closely timbered on the alluvial plain even at that stage. Particularly in the area away from the coast the influence of drought would have been most noticeable. Naturally the aborigines would have suffered a diminution of their food supplies,

(1) Mr. W.F. Green attests to this, of the natives of the Upper Hunter.
(2) R. Dawson op. cit. p171.
but even in the worst drought it is unlikely that they would have had to endure conditions similar to those which prevailed in the dry interior of the continent.

Mr. Green suggests that in the Upper Hunter region about 200 the influence of drought was countered successfully by shifting camp more frequently, and Dawson believed that their constant moving was rather from the love of change than any need. (3)

Flooding may not have been so common or severe in the Hunter Valley prior to the advent of the whites, and the subsequent clearing of much of the higher land. Nevertheless it did occur, and undoubtedly caused the aborigines some hardship. It would be easy, however, to overestimate the ill effects of flood. (4) One can assume that on the Hunter although some supplies of food, such as fresh water fish, would be unobtainable, higher areas would not be adversely affected by the flood and perhaps would provide more game than usual because of the migration of animals from lower ground. (5)

Prolonged bad weather and heavy rain were more disruptive. Rough weather prevented them from putting out to sea or on the river in their frail canoes to fish, and

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(5) S.H. Sullivan suggested this, op. cit.: 33.
other inclement conditions often caused animals to seek shelter and made trees dangerous to climb for honey or opossums. Under these circumstances the search for food became difficult particularly as the aborigines avoided being in the rain as much as possible. (6)

Apart from these instances of poor hunting conditions (which, incidentally, often did not affect the gathering of vegetable supplies) the environment of the Hunter Valley appears to have been generally favourable, providing an abundance of food for the natives. Nevertheless, throughout the area, the better part of each day was devoted in some way to the procuration and preparation of food.

'The daily work of the men consisted in hunting kangaroos, wallabies, and other animals, and the manufacture of weapons. The daily life of the women consisted in fishing for mullet and whiting, in gathering oysters and other shell fish, in digging roots, in carrying wood and water, and in keeping the fires alight and cooking.' (7)

Food being abundant, and of considerable variety, the aborigines had the time and the stimulus to develop their material culture. (8) Even the women had some time to devote to craftwork - the making of intricate

(6) R. Miller op. cit: p152. They were very susceptible to chills, influenza and pneumonia, and other similar ailments.
(7) J.W. Fawcett loc. cit: p152.
(8) See below, Chapter IV.
netting and the sewing of rugs. This was so particularly
in view of the fact that, as we have seen, nomadic
movement in search of food was less and over shorter
distances than in arid areas.

Nevertheless, the food quest was always the basis
of the aboriginal economy, governing most aspects of
tribal life. Certain ceremonies were performed and
precautions were taken to ensure the continuing supply
of food. Thus in initiation ceremonies the accent was
upon the habits and methods of capture of certain animals,
as well as upon tribal law and lore. (9) Also, there
were certain dances, where animals such as kangaroos and
emus were imitated, and even whole corroborees devoted to
increasing the food supply (10). Much of the art seems
to have been directed to promoting successful hunting. (11)

Furthermore, certain groups were forbidden to eat
certain foods. In the Hunter Valley, as generally
throughout Australia, there was a system of totems, the
practice of forbidding food to particular classes of
people. Several early writers refer to this totemic
system. McMahan, describing that of the natives near

(9) See below, Chapter V
(10) "..." Thorpe loc. cit. p. 72.
(11) See below, Chapter VIII.
Raymond Terrace, wrote

'The members of the tribe looked with respect - even with a kind of reverence - on certain animals and birds; and would under no circumstances either kill such themselves or countenance the killing of them by others. I cannot obtain a complete list of these animals with certainty.... My informants are agreed that the opossum and a kind of parrot were two. It is equally uncertain how these animals or birds were distributed among the members of the tribe. Some of my informants assert that they are common to the whole tribe, while others say that some belonged to the men and some to the women. The only thing certain is that such sacred animals and birds existed.' (12)

As with so many of the settlers' observations this seems to apply only to part of the tribe, for Emily Caswell remarks that some natives near Raymond Terrace did eat the opossum. (13)

According to Fawcett totems were often associated with status within the tribe.

'The young of both sexes were prohibited from eating certain sorts of flesh, and many animals and birds were tabooed to both youths and females at different periods of life. Previous to the passing of the ceremonies of the bora by which the boys were initiated into manhood, their food was like that of the women, confined to female animals, and those only of special kinds. Flying foxes were esteemed great delicacies, and the dingo was reserved for the use of older men only.' (14)

This connection with status is substantiated by Matthews, although his description varies in detail.

(12) B. McKeehan loc.cit. p152.
(13) Emily Caswell, loc.cit.
(14) J.W. Fawcett loc.cit. p152.
'Generally... the laws of totoa do not apply to a woman - she is not thought of sufficient importance, but eats everything which is given her.' (17)

The implication here is that in reality her diet would be much as Fawcett suggested, for she would only be given inferior quality, female, items.

These totoas were strictly observed.

'When a man is out hunting, he will not kill his totoa animal, no matter what opportunity he may have of doing so, and if his totoa be an edible plant, it is likewise left uninjured by him.' (16)

It would appear that these restrictions provided a safeguard against starvation necesssary even in a relatively favourable environment; they had deep religious and ceremonial significance, but from a purely economic point of view, they supplied the children and old men, who were unable to hunt efficiently, with a certain amount of food. The system of totoas also helped to ensure some conservation of foods.

There is very little evidence concerning the extent to which hunting methods modified the environment. It is probable, however, that the aboriginal technique of burning off in order to attract game to a certain area would lead to the gradual transformation of the forest to open grassland. Thus while the aborigines' primary

(16) Ibid, p239.
purpose in burning off was the procuring of game; this
burning off may in fact have provided more favourable
conditions for larger game such as kangaroos and emus.

On the other hand there is some evidence to suggest
that emus were quite rare. According to Fawcett

"Emus and black snakes were,... reserved for
special individuals and reasons," (17)
reflecting a concept similar to our hunting seasons,
devised to protect game during the mating season, and
thus to prevent their dying out altogether.

Matthews states,

"It is manifest that this arrangement conduces (sic)
to preserve the supply of food by diminishing
the number of those in quest of it." (18)

The early settlers were agreed that the aborigines
could obtain as much food as they required with little
difficulty. Henry Danger noted in the Lake Macquarie
region that there were kangaroos, ducks, swans, quails,
pigeons, and fish, including oysters of a superior
quality, all of which were 'caught in great abundance.'(19)

On his journey to Port Stephens, Robert Dawson saw

"Flocks of kangaroos of every size on the flats."(20)

(17) J.V. Fawcett loc.cit: p172.
(18) R.A. Matthews loc.cit: p262.
Also Rev. C.C. Greenway loc.cit: p214.
(19) H. Danger loc.cit: p95.
(20) R. Dawson loc.cit: pp196, 204.
Although C. Foster noted that

'Both bird and animal life seemed to have disappeared at the advent of civilization,'

as late as 1847 in the Maitland district he was still able to observe

'plenty of kangaroos, which full grown stood 6 feet high.' (21)

Food was sufficiently abundant to enable several tribes, together for an initiation ceremony, to provide a sizable feast without undue inconvenience.

'Great hunts were arranged, in which large quantities of game were killed; the women spent much time in fishing and yam digging, and some of the men and boys went bee-hunting, and returned with large quantities of honey and honeycomb. Feasting and mirth and pleasure was (sic) than the order of the day for some time.' (22)

The facility with which the Hunter Valley natives were able to prepare for a large feast compares not altogether unfavourably with conditions on the Richmond River. There,

'next morning the two tribes were divided into two parties for the purpose of securing the necessary food... This hunting lasted for some hours... The next day, with a supply of food ample for the requirements for a whole week, the 'feast' celebrations commenced.' (23)

(22) J.W. Pawtett loc.cit: p153.
Tribal meetings, for entertainment or sacred ceremonies, could be more frequent and of longer duration than in Central Australia. Food was scarce in these areas, and such meetings, of necessity infrequent, were the subject of intense preparation and extensive economies. (24)

Thus the food quest was the all-important factor in the lives of the natives. It occupied most of their time and was the subject of many of their religious ceremonies. Supplies were sufficient, nonetheless, to permit catering for extraordinary occasions, such as tribal gatherings, without hardship.

Attention will now be paid to what foods were available, including a discussion of area and seasonal variations, the division of labour and the methods used to procure the different varieties, and the way in which food was prepared for eating.

In the coastal region, fish was the main diet, mostly mullet (26) whiting (27) and eels (28), supplemented by other marine foods such as oysters (29) different shell

(27) J.W. Pawlett loc. cit: p152.
F.A. Fitzpatrick Peopling into the Past Cumberland Argus, Paramatta, Australia, 1974: p47.
fish (30) and turtles (31). Fern roots (32) and honey (33) were also eaten, and some animals, although not so many of the latter as in inland areas. (34) Fish were particularly important in river regions where the water was salt (35), but other items acquired more importance away from the coast. To quote Dawson,

'Their food consists of fish when near the coasts, but when in the woods, of oppossums, bandicoots, and almost any animal they can catch, and also a kind of grub (36) which they find in decayed wood; sometimes they spear a kangaroo. (37)

Fitzpatrick gives a list of some of the foods eaten.

'Their principal food was 'possum, bear, wallaby, kangaroo rat, bandicoot, porcupine, flying fox, lizards etc. I never knew them to eat frogs or mushrooms. (38)

The kangaroo (38A) was rare by the time Fitzpatrick was writing, but already we have seen that it was plentiful at the time of white settlement. He remarks that the porcupine was their greatest delicacy.

(30) J.R. MacGillivray _op.cit._: 44/6/1912, p11.
   F.A. Fitzpatrick _op.cit._: p49. Including "puppies, cookies, and crayfish".
(31) _Ibid._: p44. Also their eggs.
(33) P. Farrallier _loc.cit._: p31.
(34) R. Dawson _op.cit._: p39.
   A. Roswell _op.cit._: p9.
   W. Scott _op.cit._: p39.
(35) F.A. Fitzpatrick _op.cit._: p43.
(36) F.A. Fitzpatrick _op.cit._: 49.
(37) Possibly the "Cobber" or "Coboro" worm. _Ibid._: p21.
(38) R. Dawson _op.cit._: p67.
(38A) The most common species in the area appears to have been _Macronodus major_.
In the Upper Hunter region the variety was just as great.

'The men of the tribe, with their spears and boomerangs or throwing-sticks could bring into the camp kangaroos, wallabies, possums, native bears, carpet-makes, echidnas, and other game. They were expert hunters of the wild ducks, pigeons and brush turkeys. The girls and children hunted and captured the smaller animals, and sought out the hiding places of various grubs and the nests of the native stingless bees.' (39)

Other foods included in the native diet were yams (40), *Dioscorea transversa* (41); a large water lily (42), *Nymphaea gigantea* (43); the myall lemon (44), native berries (45), possibly *Astroloma* species (46), fruits (47), probably including *Vitis hypoglauca* (48); the edible seeds of certain grasses, *Typha* species (49); emus and black makes (50); lizards, caterpillars, and the lava of wasps and other insects (51). It cannot be assumed that this list is exhaustive, for it is unlikely that the settlers described all the foods.

(39) Mr. W.C. Green.
(40) W. Scott *op.cit.*: p41.
(42) W. Scott *op.cit.*: p41.
(43) J.H. Maiden *op.cit.*: p48.
(44) J.W. Fawcett *loc.cit.*: p152.
(45) F.A. Fitzpatrick *op.cit.*: p44.
(46) Mr. W.C. Green.
(47) J.H. Maiden *op.cit.*: p8.
(48) Mr. W.C. Green.
(49) J.H. Maiden *op.cit.*: p66.
(51) J.W. Fawcett *loc.cit.*: p152.
Their extensive menu' (52) no doubt contributed to the general health and physical well-being enjoyed by the natives. David Collins attributed the poor condition of the Port Jackson aborigines to the lack of variety in their diet. (53)

That at least part of the food supply was seasonal is implicit in Scott's observation that the big sea mullet 'appeared in schools at certain periods of the year.' (54)

Their presence may have been connected with spawning, but no indication is given as to what time in the year the mullet were present. Nor is it clear whether just the local aborigines availed themselves of these fish, whether they traded them with inland tribes, or whether the arrival of the fish occasioned the inland tribes to move to the coast. (54A) It is known that Singleton natives travelled to Brisbane Water in search of marine foods (54B), so it is possible that similar tribal movement took place at Port Stephens.

Emus and some snakes also were eaten only in some seasons (55). None of the sources states what type of snakes

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(52) F.A. Fitzpatrick op.cit: p143.
(53) D. Collins op.cit: p303.
(54) W. Scott op.cit: p144.
(54A) R. Dawson op.cit: p135 refers to trade occasioned by a paucity of possums in the coastal areas, but the trade was in skins, and not food.
(54B) P.D. McCarthy 'Trade' in Aboriginal Australia': p407.
(55) J.W. Fawcett loc.cit: p152.
these were. Doubtless the hunting season of these animals was related to their reproductive cycle.

The task of gathering food was divided between the men and the women, traditionally, with the women gathering plants (56), and sometimes honey (57), and preparing the food, while the men were hunting and doing much of the fishing. Thus Danger observed

'The men seldom do more than hunt and build their wigwams, while the women have innumerable offices to perform.' (58)

And Dawson;

'Although the men fish when it suits their convenience or pleasure, still it is the women who are looked to for the supply of the members of the family.' (59)

The men generally performed the deep water fishing, with lines, from their canoes (60), and took charge of operations in the season of the big sea mullet, although here they were assisted by the women. (61)

'These poor creatures are made to do all the drudgery, as is always the case amongst a rude and savage people. They carry the wood for the fires, make the nets for fishing, and carry everything else that they move about with, except their instruments of war.' (62)

(56) W. Scott op.cit. p.41.
(57) N.B. Tindale loc.cit. p.149.
(58) W. Scott op.cit. p.39.
(59) H. Danger op.cit. p.113.
(60) In contrast, on the Gwydir lakes were built by the women. E.L. Mitchell. Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia, London, 1839, vol 1: p77.
(61) H. Danger op.cit. p.113.
(63) W. Scott op.cit. p47.
(64) A. Dawson op.cit. p67.
A. Boswell op.cit. p7.
Economically, the men and women were of equal importance. It is easy to underestimate the importance of women in this respect; often, in poor seasons, theirs was the only supply of food.

Hunting of game was usually carried out in groups, often with all the men of a local group or participating. Fawcett describes the kangaroo hunt, which involved preparation at least a month beforehand.

'The mode of obtaining food varied according to the animals hunted. Kangaroos and wallabies were hunted by lattées (sic). The grass in certain districts was first burnt off, and about a month afterwards, when the young grass had sprung again, these animals all congregated there to eat the young pasturage. A day for the grand hunt was then fixed and at early dawn of the day in question the men and boys took their boomerangs, clubs and spears, and set out for this spot. There they formed a circle around the unconscious game, cautiously, silently, and slowly gradually (sic) closing in upon them, until the ring became so contracted that the animals became alarmed. In trying to break through they were met by the hunters, who by their loud cries so confused and bewildered the animals that they became an easy prey to the aborigines. The wallabies (the smaller and more active creatures of the two), were either clubbed or speared as they tried to dart through the lines of the hunters, whilst the kangaroos, driven to within a narrow circle, were easily killed by the boomerang or spear.' (65)

Fawcett goes on to say that kangaroos and wallabies were sometimes caught by means of a net, and that a net was

used to capture emus (64). These nets were most useful in the timbered country, where they were fixed in a semi-circle amongst the trees. The animals, frightened by the cries of the natives and the dogs, were driven into this area and quickly killed. In both the New England (65) and the Port Jackson (65A) areas these nets were observed to be large permanent fixtures, some hundreds of yards long.

A considerable amount of game was usually captured on these occasions. After the hunt a large fire was made on the "field of battle", in which as much game as could be eaten on the spot was cooked, and in spite of their 'remarkable gastronomic propensities' (66), sufficient remained for the natives to return to camp,

'more or less laden with the slaughtered game.' (67)

L.E. Threlkeld joined in a hunt for bandicoot in the Meitland district.

'On one occasion I went out with a party who were going to hunt a bandicoot. Eight or ten of them surrounded a grassy plot of ground, sending in their dogs amongst the high stuff. On the appearance of any game the men transfixed it with their spears, or ran after it with their cudgels and destroyed it. Some of the aborigines climbed the trees; others stood like statues on the stumps, with spears poised ready for discharge. They seldom miss their aim.' (68)

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(64) J.W. Fawcett loc. cit; p173.

The same system was used elsewhere on the coast, see

R. Davson op. cit; p3.

E.M. Curr vol III op. cit; p176.


(65) H. Gardner "Woronora and Western Districts of New South Wales" MS. Mitchell Library, 1854; p35.

(65A) B. Collins op. cit; p306.

(66) J.W. Fawcett loc. cit; p152 - "Some of them being able to cut the whole of a large kangaroo - that, too, and expelling - out of sight." (68)

(67) Ibid; p175. (68) J.H. Hansearow op. cit; p145.
Nancarrow describes several methods by which the natives used to fish.

'Their mode of fishing is curious; sometimes angling with hook and line, thrown by their hand as they are seated in their bark canoes; sometimes diving for small fish; sometimes standing in their frail bark, and darting their spears into the fish as they pass; or at other times using hand-nets, forming a circle in shallow waters, and enclosing the fish. But the most curious method is that of planting sprigs of bushes in a zig-zag form across the streams, leaving an interval at the point of every angle, where the men stand, with nets to catch what others frighten towards them by splashing the water.' (69)

Mitchell describes similar fish traps, made with 'osier' or willow shoots, on the Gwydir River. (70)

On those occasions when the large schools of sea mullet were close inshore, a special effort was made, and the whole tribe participated in their capture.

'The schools used to travel from west to east close inshore on the northern side of the harbour, (71) at high water, and it was a great time of fishing for all the blacks who consumed large quantities of the fish, never seeming to tire of it. The camp was made near the shore and the women were posted to give notice of the approach of a school and at the signal the fishermen, generally about half a dozen at once, would rush into the water up to their middles, with spears and woomboos all poised ready, then when the school was within striking distance, the leading fisherman would give the word "muh" (now) and the spears would all be launched together, and it was seldom any failed to strike a fish.' (72)

(69) J.W. Nancarrow op.cit.: p.11.
(70) T.C. Mitchell op.cit.: p.79.
(71) Port Stephens.
(72) W. Scott op.cit.: p.48.
Oysters, pippies, cockles, crayfish, and similar marine foods were procured by the women, diving off rocks into the sea. (73)

Honey gathering was, as a rule, a cooperative venture in which both men and women participated.

'The blacks seldom troubled to cut the tree down, preferring to climb it and cut a hole large enough to reach the combs, these as they were dropped were easily caught by the women in a bark vessel... the men calling "mih!" (now) each time as a signal. They never seemed to mind the stings, just rubbed a little honey on them when very thick. They ate very sparingly of the honey comb but freely of the brood comb and young bees!' (74)

The usual manner of climbing trees, in search of either honey or opossums, was to notch the bark with a hatchet, place the toes in these steps, and so proceed upwards. (75)

'A native can go up the smooth and branchless stems of the tallest trees, to any height, by cutting notches in the surface large enough only to place the great toe in.' (76)

Opossums were generally captured by chopping holes in the hollow branches where they lived. (77)

(73) F.A. Fitzpatrick op.cit: p45.
(74) W. Scott op.cit: p39. These 'stinging' bees were an imported species.
(75) J.H. Macarthur op.cit: p11.
A. Boswell op.cit: p6.
(76) R. Dawson op.cit: p19.
(77) Ibid: p68.
A. Boswell op.cit: p6.
In the Port Jackson district fire was often employed to smoke the opossums out of trees (78), and although this method possibly was used in the Hunter Valley, there is no available information confirming this.

The preparation of most foods consisted of roasting (79)

'They roast all the fish and animals on the ashes, skin and all, just as they catch them. When it is pretty well done, they divide it amongst themselves by tearing it with their teeth and fingers; and, excepting the bones, they devour every part, including the entrails.' (80)

The entrails were regarded as a delicacy (81), and often in the case of kangaroos and similar animals, the moment they, together with the head, were separated from the body they were thrown into the fire. There they were turned with a stick until about half done, and then eaten as an hors d'oeuvre. (82) Alternatively, they were removed during the cooking of the animal or bird, and upon such occasions the hole was stuffed with clean grass (83); and secured with skewers. (84)

Fish also were thrown into the fire immediately upon being caught, without being cleaned, for on cooking

'The inside comes out in a ball, and the skin peels off clean.' (85)

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(79) W.H. Breton op.cit: p197.
Mr. W.C. Green.
(80) R. Dawson op.cit: p68.
(81) Mr. W.C. Green.
(82) R. Dawson op.cit: p123.
(83) J.W. Fawcett loc.cit: p152.
(84) F.A. Fitzpatrick op.cit: p43.
(85) F.A. Fitzpatrick op.cit: p45.
Porcupines also were considered a great delicacy, and Fitzpatrick describes how they were prepared at Port Stephens.

'First he would singe it so as to remove the sharp quills. Then he would take it off the fire, scrape it well, and remove the inside. He would have, during this delicate operation, a piece of well-chewed bark in his mouth, and with this bark he would sop up the gravy. The porcupine was then put in the fire again, and left till it was well cooked. Then it was skinned.' (86)

Turtles (87) and birds (88) were roasted, although their eggs were eaten raw.

Roots, including those of Marsilea quadrifolia (89), were either roasted or baked into bread (90). Seeds of the same plant were collected by the gins and

'Ground by them to form a kind of flour, then kneaded into cakes with water, and baked on heated stones.' (91)

The stalk of the water lily was also roasted, after having been soaked for a long time in water. (92) The Hyall lemon, eaten in coastal areas, was also soaked in water to remove the poison from the seeds.

(86) F.A. Fitzpatrick op.cit: p43.
(87) Ibid: p44.
(88) Mr. W. C. Green.
J.W. Fawcett loc.cit: p152.
(89) J.H. Maiden op.cit: pp42-43 This plant was widespread throughout Australia.
(90) J.W. Fawcett loc.cit: p152.
(91) Mr. W.C. Green
R. Miller loc.cit: p353. Describes an alternative to heated stones as cinders and lumps of clay.
(92) W. Scott op.cit: p41.
J.W. Fawcett loc.cit: p152.
'They took the ripe seeds and removed the shell, then gave them a slight pounding between two stones. When smashed up they put them into one of the nets or knitted bags made by the women. Then they were put into a running stream or in one of the falls of the river, with a stone on the bag to prevent it from being washed away. The water thus passed through the net and removed all the poison from the seeds. This process occupied about nine or ten days.' (93)

After the white men came to the Hunter Valley, the natives used to prepare a beverage from which they gained much pleasure.

'A bag, in which sugar has been imported from the Mauritius, and made of the leaves of a particular kind of tree that grows in the island, is steeped in water, by which means all the saccharine matter is extracted, forming a decoction of sugar.' (94)

'Around a vessel of this stuff they would sit in a circle, passing from hand to hand, or rather from mouth to mouth, a sort of sponge made of the pounded up, inner bark of the stringy bark tree. This they dipped into the [mixture] and sucked turn about until the vessel was dry - and strange though it may appear, they would by that time be quite hilarious, and in a state of semi-intoxication.' (95)

According to Dawson, they used to drink large quantities in this manner

'till they are fairly blown out, like an ox in clover, and can take no more.' (96)

As fire was such an important factor in the preparation of food, and often, indeed, in the capture of it;

(93) P.A. Fitzpatrick op.cit: pp34-43.
(94) W.H. Breton op.cit: p192.
(95) W. Scott op.cit: pp27-35.
(96) R. Dawson op.cit: p50.
it is pertinent here that some indication be given as to how it was made. Scott has a detailed description of the process.

'The blacks had a simple and quick way of making fire. They used two pieces of the dry flower stem of the grass tree, about a couple of feet long. One piece say of an inch in diameter, the other about half that. A strip was taken off the thicker piece exposing the softer interior - the pith in fact. The fire-maker then set on the ground holding this piece firmly with his feet; then placing the end of the smaller one on the side of the larger, where the strip had been removed, pressing it firmly down, and at the same time causing it to revolve swiftly between the palms of his hands, with the result that soon smoke began to appear; and by the time the larger stick had been penetrated some of the dust would be on fire, and the little spark falling on the soft bark, ready for its reception, was gently blown into a flame. It was done far more quickly than I can write of it - taking a very few minutes.' (97)

Care was taken to keep the fire alight, and a fire stick was carried when the natives were moving camp. A fire was lit on a clay hearth in the bottom of the canoes on which the fish were roasted as they were caught. (98)

The only evidence of conservation of food was the imposing of certain restrictions described earlier in this chapter. It appears that the environment was sufficiently favourable to render such conservation generally unnecessary. Vegetable life was efficiently
utilized, with systematic gathering from regular sources of supply; and the use of poisonous plants which implied lengthy and complex preparation shows considerable forethought. Aided by their wide range of implements the aborigines were able to exploit their environment effectively, and to safeguard themselves from absolute starvation even in the worst of seasons.