

and practices of their own group, tend to accept the ways of their group as natural and right, and to judge the ways of other groups as inferior. Ethnocentrism is this tendency to judge other groups by the values and assumptions of one's own group. As Aboriginal people soon became a minority in their own land their culture was regarded as inferior.

This attitude was intensified by the influence of a school of thought which developed in Western Europe at the time when Aboriginal people were in the early stages of contact with Europeans. This approach, often referred to as Social Darwinism, applied the theory of evolutionary development of biological species to human societies. It assumed that all societies passed through a sequence of stages of development from lower to higher forms. Aboriginal societies were assumed to be examples of an early and lower stage in this development. Words such as primitive were applied to them. The complexity of Aboriginal social structures, language structures and mythology were overlooked. While the Social Darwinist approach has been superseded in the study of human societies, stereotypes of Aboriginal people arising from it persist today. They are reflected at times in Letters to the Editor in newspapers and in the attitudes of many other Australians.

An eminent scholar of that period, Edward Taylor, the first Professor of Social Anthropology at Oxford University, defined the subject matter of anthropology as being culture. In 1871, he defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." Since then many attempts have been made to improve on this definition. A more recent definition is that of I.M. Lewis. Culture is "the sum of learned knowledge and skills that distinguishes one community from another and which, sub-

ject to the vagaries of innovation and change, passes on in a recognizable form from generation to generation." (Lewis, 1976: 17)

Culture therefore refers to human behaviours which are learned in a social environment. Cultures are systems developed as human groups adapt to their environments. Some approaches to the theories of culture emphasize the role of environment in shaping cultures while others place more emphasis on the role of human thought in manipulating these conditions. Theories of culture draw attention to the distinction between cultural and instinctive behaviour. Instinctive behaviour refers to automatic impulses directed towards meeting biological needs. The distinction is important as statements are made frequently that Aboriginal people act in a certain way because of instinct, when in fact the behaviour is influenced by social training and is cultural.

Reference is made often to Australian Aboriginal culture. While there are many features of Aboriginal life which are common throughout Australia, this can draw attention away from the fact that as Aboriginal groups adapted to a variety of environmental zones in Australia there are many Aboriginal societies, each with its own culture.

This book can present insights into only some of these common features, and materials from a few only of these cultures. Hopefully it will motivate readers to seek further knowledge from other works which provide more detailed information about various groups. I have sought to provide a link throughout the book by emphasizing two important concepts in traditional Aboriginal societies, The Dreaming and relationship. Through the first, Aboriginal people express their understandings of the origin and purpose of social life. The second is a guiding principle in much of their interaction in daily life.

W.K. Edwards: An Introduction to
Aboriginal Societies
CHAPTER 1

RELATING TO THE PAST - Part One

Australian Prehistory

The Origin Of The Aborigines

SINCE THE FIRST CONTACT by Europeans with Australian Aborigines there has been considerable speculation arising from attempts to answer two questions:

1. Where did the Aborigines originally come from?
2. How long have they lived in Australia?

Two different types of approaches have been followed in seeking to provide answers to such questions. The first type can be referred to as the scientific approach. Under this type of approach use is made of the various skills, understandings and techniques developed in branches of Western science. In this chapter some of the findings based on this type of approach are presented. The other type of approach I refer to as the mythic. Aboriginal people themselves had no doubts about the answer to these questions. Throughout Australia they had a comprehensive mythology which had been passed on from generation to generation over thousands of years. This mythology gave them an assurance that they had originated from their land in a period of creative activity, often referred to as The Dreaming. This conception of origins will be examined in Chapter 2.

While Aboriginal people have had no doubts about their origins, we are unable to arrive at firm conclusions in seeking to answer the above two questions on the basis of scientific evidence. Despite developments of new techniques and expansion of knowledge in the fields of linguistics, genetics, archaeology and other sciences we are still the realm of speculation when attempting to answer the questions. However,

exciting discoveries made in recent decades have extended greatly the estimates given for the length of the period of Aboriginal residence in Australia. In The Australian Aborigines, first published in 1938, Professor Elkin referred to Professor J.W. Gregory's estimate that the Aborigines had been in Victoria for about four hundred years, and added that "we do not yet know whether the Aborigines have been in Australia one or many thousands of years." (Elkin, 1956: 9) Hart and Pilling (1960: 3) haz-

arded the conclusion that they must have left the Asiatic mainland before the spread of the bow and arrow to that area and that they must have been in Australia for 17,000 years. As a result of discoveries made during the past two decades it is now generally assumed that the figure should be at least 40,000 years.

This drastic revision of the estimates is based on archaeological research. Before outlining some of the discoveries in this field reference will be made to some of the other areas of enquiry followed in attempting to provide answers to our questions.

Race

DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY emphasis was placed on racial classifications and attempts were made to explain human behaviour in terms of race, and to trace the origins of such peoples as the Aborigines through supposed racial characteristics. Earlier attempts at racial classification divided the peoples of the world into three main racial groups; Caucasoid, Mongoloid and Negroid. As some groups such as the Australian Aborigines and Aboriginal peoples in Sri Lanka, Malaysia and India did not

fit into these classes, a fourth was introduced to include them - Australoid. Suggestions were then made that Australian Aborigines must have shared common origins with one or more of these groups.

E.M. Curr, a Victorian pastoralist who wrote a four volume work, *The Australian Race*, (1886) argued on the Tasmanians were of African origin. He suggested that mainland Aborigines were also African origin but had crossed with a lighter-skinned people on route to Australia. A.W. Howitt and others suggested on the basis of hair and other physical characteristics that the Tasmanians were related to the Andaman Islanders from the Bay of Bengal. Some writers suggested that the Tasmanians had entered by way of northern Australia and been pushed southwards by a later migration of another group of people. In 1869 T.H. Huxley commented on physical similarities between mainland Aborigines and the Dravidian people of South India and linguistic and material culture evidence was used to support this theory.

The theory of waves of migration by different groups was refined by an American Physical Anthropologist, J. Birdsell. Following a visit to Australia in the 1930's he argued that there had been three waves of migration from south-east Asia. According to his theory, the first migration was made by a group of Oceanic Negroes who resembled New Guinea highland people. This group were the ancestors of the Tasmanians and of a small group of people who had survived in the Cairns region of north Queensland. These people were shorter in stature and lighter in colour than other Aborigines. The second migration was by people classified by Birdsell as Murrayians who lived in the Murray Basin region of the south-east of Australia. Birdsell compared them with the Ainu people of the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. The third migration was by people named Carpentarians. They were taller than the Murrayians and resembled people from southern India and Sri Lanka and their descendants inhabit northern regions of Australia. This the-

Languages

LANGUAGE SIMILARITIES ARE another indicator of relationships between groups of people. Languages of the world are grouped into language families such as the Indo-European language family which includes many of the languages of Europe. Another language family closer to Australia is Austronesian which includes most of the languages of Indonesia, Melanesia and Polynesia. It comes as a surprise to many Australians to learn that there were approximately 600 Aboriginal dialects in Australia at the time of white settlement. Research suggests that they all belonged to one language family, although there is insufficient surviving information about Tasmanian languages to be sure whether they belonged to this family. The finding of similarities between Aboriginal languages and languages in the Austronesian family or other language families in the South-East Asian region would suggest the possibility of a past link between Aborigines and the group of people speaking the other languages; and of a possible migration route. However, the study of Aboriginal languages has provided no evidence to support the possible relationship of Aborigines to other peoples. The family taken as a whole shows no particular affinity with other language families of South-East Asia or the Pacific." (Vallopp: 1982: 31).

Archaeology

HAVING FOUND NO FIRM evidence from studies of the fields of race, genetics and languages, in the search for answers to our questions about the origins of Australian Aborigines, let us turn to the field of archaeology. Archaeologists are concerned with the study of the past by examining the remains left by earlier societies. They study material evidence which gives clues about past human activities. This includes the study of human remains in burial sites, tools, remains of buildings and other structures which provide evidence of human activity, charcoal and cooking areas where

there is evidence of human use of fire and bones of animals and birds. The way in which bones are arranged or broken may indicate that they have been handled by humans. These material remains of human activity are examined in relation to the associated geological and other faunal or floral remains as this may give clues as to the period of activity. It is therefore important to examine each piece of evidence in the situation in which it has remained since being left by the original user. A tool or fireplace found in a particular geological strata may help to date the find as geologists may be able to estimate the period during which the strata was formed. The presence of a layer of the bones of an extinct animal may also give an indication of the date of the site as palaeontologists are able to estimate the period when the animal became extinct.

Archaeologists are therefore assisted by other scientists working in other fields and as methodologies in these fields become more refined, archaeologists are able to offer more information about the past cultural life of Aboriginal people. They are able to provide detailed information about the economic life of people who lived thousands of years ago as they examine the remains of foods they ate and tools they used. They are able to provide information about social customs as they examine campsites and estimate the numbers of people who occupied these sites. They are able to provide information about religious beliefs and rituals as they examine burial sites, ritual grounds, and art sites. They are able to trace changes in the way of life of groups as they note differences in the various layers of the remains.

Interest in Australian Prehistory was limited before 1960, although there were a few pioneering figures working in the field before that date. Since then there has been a greater interest in Australian archaeology and instead of being a backwater in world archaeological research, evidence from Australian sites is now forcing researchers in other lands to revise their theories. Exciting finds have been made in the past quarter of a century. Events that it was once thought could not have happened in Australia

30,000 years ago are now supported by archaeological evidence. It is now possible to date finds back to this period with greater accuracy because of the development of the radio-carbon method of dating. The application of this method to remains from Australian sites has pushed back considerably the estimates for the period of Aboriginal residence in the continent.

"The absolute age can be established by radiocarbon dating, if there are sufficient remains present such as charcoal or shell. Radiocarbon dating is based on the fact that the percentage of the radiocarbon isotope carbon 14, (C-14) in living organisms is equal to that in the atmosphere. When the organism dies, its C-14 begins to disintegrate at a known rate (one half every 5,570 years). The age of an organic object can be calculated by measuring the amount of C-14 left in a gram of organic material and comparing this with what is normally present in a modern sample or standard... Radiocarbon dating does not give a precise date as to when the death of an animal or shell occurred or exactly when a tree was cut down and used as firewood, producing the charcoal that is the most common material to be dated by this method. Thus radiocarbon years do not precisely equal calendar years or solar years. When a date is received from a radiocarbon dating laboratory, it will bear a statistical plus or minus factor and will be expressed in years BP, which means Before the Present - the present being 1950, when this dating method was first developed. For example in the date 4,000 ± 200 BP the 200 years represented one standard deviation and means that there are two chances out of three that the reading is between 4,200 and 3,800 years BP." (Flood, 1983: 19-20).

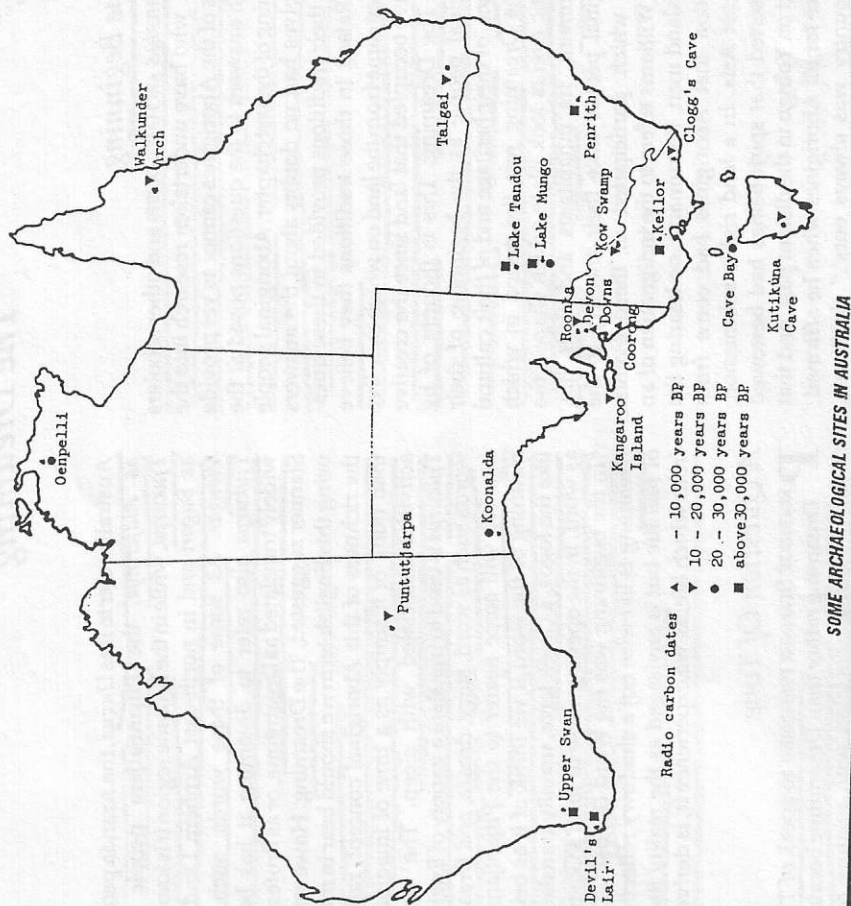
A description of the radio-carbon dating method of dating by Josephine Flood.

Amongst the pioneers in Australian archaeology were Norman Tindale and Herbert Hale who excavated in a rock shelter at Devon Downs on the lower River Murray in South Australia in 1929. They dug through 6 metres of soil and debris which had accumulated in this shelter in the limestone cliffs overlooking the river. The layers of material contained stone and bone tools left by Aboriginal people during 4,000 years of activity in the shelter. Tindale and Hale noted changes in the tools and suggested that there was evidence of three successive culture groups using the site. They excavated another site across the river and concluded, after examining tools and skeletal remains, that this site was occupied by an earlier group. During the following decade Tindale examined stone implements from Kangaroo Island and argued that they were left by a group who preceded all of the River Murray groups. He referred to this sequence as the kartan culture, Karta being the name given to the island by the mainland Ramindjeri people. Kangaroo Island was joined to the mainland until approximately 10,000 years ago and there is evidence that it was occupied by Aboriginal people until approximately 2,500 years ago. Archaeologists are still trying to solve a number of mysteries raised by discoveries on this island. Tindale's theories of cultural sequences in the south-east of South Australia were combined with Birdsell's theory of three waves of migration. While the theories are not widely accepted today they were early attempts to explain variations and changes in Aboriginal cultural patterns.

The accidental unearthing of a skull by a plough on the north-west edge of Kow Swamp in northern Victoria in 1925 encouraged other excavations in the area. This skull is known as the Cohuna cranium after a nearby town. It has been impossible to date it with any accuracy but it has attracted interest because of its large size and the thickness of the bone structure. Skulls of this type are classified as being robust. Excavations commenced in 1968, under the direction of physical anthropologist, Alan Thorne, led to the discovery of many burial sites in the area,

mostly on the east shore of Kow Swamp. Radiocarbon dating indicated that the Kow Swamp burials took place between 15,000 and 9,000 years BP. The size of the skulls and thicknesses of ridges places them within the robust classification. Many of the sites contain tools, red ochre, shells and marsupial teeth. These finds

dated to approximately 13,000 years BP. The features of this skull appeared to be much more modern than those of Cohuna and Kow Swamp. It was smaller, the ridges thinner, the forehead more rounded and the jaw less prominent. Skulls of this type have been classified as gracile. This distinction between robust and



SOME ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN AUSTRALIA

are similar to practices followed in the nineteenth century and provide evidence of continuity of customs over an immense period of time.

Another accidental discovery by a quarry worker was made in 1940 at Kellar, 16 kilometres north of Melbourne in Victoria, and

gracile types is of great importance as physical anthropologists seek to unravel the mysteries surrounding the early inhabitants of Australia. Later finds of stone tools at Kellar have led to the dating of associated charcoal deposits to at least 36,000 years BP.

CHAPTER 2

RELATING TO THE PAST - Part Two

The Dreaming

In The Beginning

WHEREAS ARCHAEOLOGISTS and other scholars who have undertaken research into the origins of the Aborigines cannot as yet provide us with answers to the questions posed at the beginning of the last chapter, Aboriginal people themselves had no doubts about the answers which their traditions provided to these questions. Raised in those traditions they believe that they came from the land on which they live and have occupied that land since the creative era of The Dreaming. This is thought of by Aboriginal people as the beginning of their existence, of their heritage and of their cultural life. The Dreaming was the period in which dramatic events took place which shaped the environment, its inhabitants and their life. Aboriginal people trace their ancestry to the beings which participated in these events. Nancy Williams refers to the indignation of an Elcho Island man, Burrumarra, on hearing the suggestion that Aborigines had come from south-east Asia. In a land rights submission, "He asserted that spirit-beings had bestowed the land on Yolngu in the distant past, and that he spoke for all Aborigines when he affirmed, 'This country was always ours'." (Williams, 1986: 29).

The Dreaming

BEFORE WE EXAMINE the ideas about these problems we need to consider some of the problems involved in discussing concepts that have had their meaning shaped in a different cultural environment. The various Aboriginal languages have their own words for The Dreaming. Ngarrinyim people in North West

Australia refer to it as *Ungud*, the Aranda people as *Altjeringa*, the Pitjantjatjara people as *Tjukurrpa*, while in the Broome region it is known as *Bugari* and in north-east Arnhem Land as *Wongar*. As some of these words, such as *Tjukurrpa* also refer to dreaming, it has been widely translated as Dreamtime, or as Professor Stanner suggested, The Dreaming. However in using this English term we should bear in mind the richness of this Aboriginal concept, rather than think of it simply as a time of imaginary activities associated with sleep. The word *Tjukurrpa* is used to translate a variety of English words such as word, story, dream, and Dreaming. We will come nearer to the Pitjantjatjara meaning of the word if we think of it as being like the logos, a Greek term, usually translated as word, in the opening verse of John's Gospel, "in the beginning was the Word (logos)." The Dreaming is likewise not a shadowy reflection of real life but is envisaged as the reality itself from which life, as we experience it, is derived.

A Question Of Time

PROFESSOR STANNER preferred to speak of The Dreaming rather than Dreamtime because of the problems associated with relating our words of time to this concept. I have referred to The Dreaming as a "period" and as an "era", but in using such words which reflect Western ideas of time we can miss out on understanding some of the significance of the term for Aboriginal people. The western terms are related to a linear view of time with an emphasis on beginnings, dates, eras and endings. The Western view is often contrasted with a cyclical view of time in which history is perceived as the regular recurrence of established patterns. The Aborigi-

nal conception of time is too subtle to be identified directly with either of these views. Their understanding of The Dreaming appears to point to a conception of time as circular rather than linear. (Williams, 1986: 28-30).

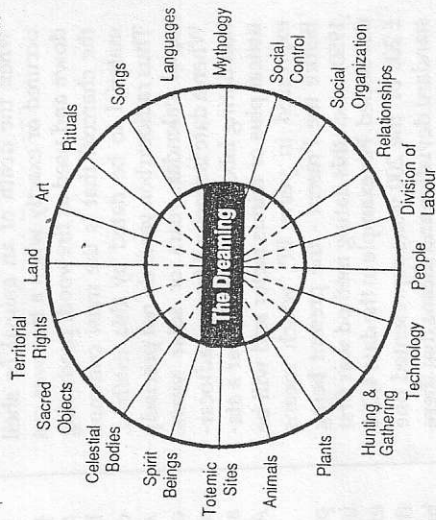
While The Dreaming may be viewed as a past era in which the creative activities took place and from which all life on earth has originated, there is also a sense in which all people have a direct link with this era through their conception, and people in each generation relive the activities of The Dreaming through their participation in daily and ritual life. Places and people today are conceived of as embodying the beings of that era. People in the present are therefore considered to be in much more immediate contact with the creative period than is possible under a linear view of history. Aboriginal people did not place emphasis on the learning of family genealogies as the did the people of, for example, Israel or Samoa. They emphasized their closer links with the Dreaming ancestors. T.G.H. Strehlow referred to the Aboriginal conviction "that there was no division between Time and Eternity". (Strehlow 1970: 132).

Creation

ALTHOUGH THE DREAMING is referred to as a time of creation it does not assume the creation of all existent things from nothing, a *creatio ex nihilo*. It assumes that there was a pre-existent but formless substance. People who live near the sea describe this substance as being watery, while inland people conceive it as a featureless plain. Spirit beings existed within this substance and they emerged from the water or land, took upon themselves a variety of forms and identities and moved across the face of the earth, at times entering again into the earth or water or moving into the sky to form the heavenly bodies. Some of these beings appeared in human form, others are identified as being both human and animal or human and bird, while others are understood as being both human and plant. In the stories which refer to them they are

described by such terms as kangaroo-man, shark-man, native fig-man, bowerbird-woman, crow-woman and snake-man. This does not mean that they are believed to have shapes similar to a Centaur, that is, half human and half animal or bird. Rather they are believed to be equally in essence, human, and animal or plant.

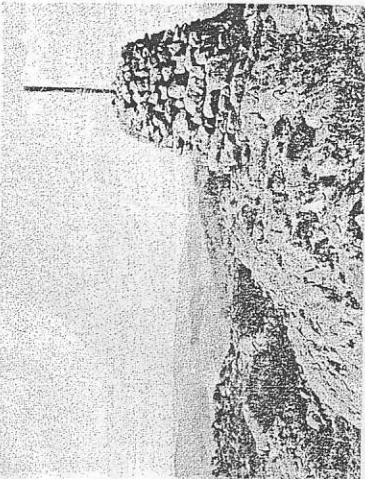
When these beings emerged they travelled over the face of the earth and as they travelled they performed the same kind of activities as are done in traditional Aboriginal life or by the species they represent. They gathered foods, ate, made weapons, fought, defecated, married, cheated, sang and performed ceremonies. At times they appear to be acting as humans, as when the kangaroo-man performs a ritual. At other times they appear to be acting as the animal of the particular species, as when the kangaroo-man hops across a sandhill and then eats some herbage. As they travelled and engaged in various activities they formed the



THE DREAMING AS THE BASIS OF ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE IN TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL SOCIETIES.
DESIGN LAYOUT: KEITH GOLDSWORTHY

earth, the rocks, the waterholes and the other phenomena of the environment so that the world as now known was shaped by their actions.

Their activities also provided the model for how life is to be lived. These beings were



MT. WOODROFFE, S.A.
THE PERENTIE-MAN, WATI-NGINTAKA. SEE PAGE 14

thought to be the ancestors of both the particular animal or plant species associated with the spirit-being and of the group of people associated with the area which was central to the story. Professor Stanner summed up his understanding of The Dreaming as follows. "Clearly, The Dreaming is many things in one. Among them, a kind of narrative of things that once happened; a kind of charter of things that still happen; and a kind of 'logos' or principle of order transcending everything significant for Aboriginal man. If I am correct in saying so, it is much more complex philosophically than we have so far realized." (Stanner, 1970: 305).

The beings who took part in the activities of The Dreaming can therefore be referred to as Ancestor Beings. The diagram on page 13 illustrates the relationship between the Ancestor Beings and all aspects of the physical, spiritual and social spheres of existence. In the remainder of this chapter this relationship will be illustrated with examples from some of the stories in which the activities of the Ancestor Beings are recorded.

Land

THE ABORIGINAL LAND RIGHTS movement has increased awareness of the significance of land to Aboriginal people, with its references to sacred sites or sites of significance. Aboriginal people have asserted their claim to ownership

of the land on the basis that the same spiritual forces which brought them into being also shaped the land and still inhabit it. Thus the land still embodies the sacredness of The Dreaming events.

Having studied Pitjantjatjara and Walpiri myths, Nancy Munn (1970: 142) referred to the relationship between the Ancestral Beings and the features of the country as the product of ancestral transformation. She identified three types of transformation:

1. Metamorphosis in which the body of the ancestor is changed into a material object;
2. Imprinting in which the ancestor leaves the impression of his body or of some tool he uses;

3. Externalization in which the ancestor takes some object out of his body.

The following examples of such transformations illustrate the way in which all parts of the landscape are viewed in this way.

MOUNTAINS. A high mountain peak may represent an ancestor who has stood up to



NEAR WALYITJATA, SOUTH WEST N.T.
ROCKS REPRESENTING KUTUNGU AND HER SISTERS.
SEE PAGE 15

look around the surrounding country. A rocky ridge may be the track left by an ancestor. For example, the highest peak in South Australia, Mt. Woodroffe, in the Musgrave Ranges, is said to be the body of the perentie-man who was travelling from the south-east and who reared up to look north towards Ayer's Rock. An iso-

beds are viewed as marking the progress of, and being formed by, the travels of The Dreaming beings. A dry winding watercourse at Kuny'jhanu in the north-west of South Australia was formed by the Wanampi or water-serpent as it fled from a party of cannibal men. The Clarence River in New South Wales is associated with the story of a woman, *Dimanguri*, who had hidden fresh water in her coolamon. Her son-in-law split the coolamon and caused the water to run out and form the river. The Murray River

was formed by a large Murray cod called *Pondarundi*. Rockholes in the gullies of ranges and soakages in the otherwise dry creekbeds of Central Australia were made by the Wanampi or water-serpents.

LAKES AND CLAYPANS. Lakes and the normally dry claypans which dot the inland landscape resulted from the activities of The Dreaming ancestors. The largest of these, Lake Eyre, was formed, according to Arabana people, when a boy named *Wilkuada* pursued a kangaroo. Assisted by an old man and his dog to kill it, he gave the meat to the old man and took the skin back to his own country where he threw it on the ground. It was then transformed into the lake. A large claypan near Mt. Connor was a camp of the *Kungkarangkalpa* or The Sisters whose travels covered extensive areas of Central and South Australia.



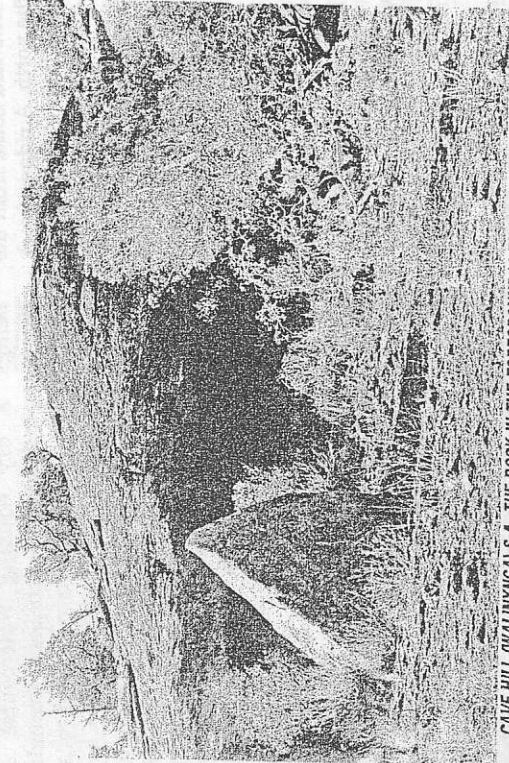
PULPALINGA, W.A. WATI-KANYALA, THE EURO-MEN ENTERED A TUNNEL LEADING FROM THIS SINK-HOLE. SEE PAGE 15.

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CAVE HILL (WALYJITJATA) S.A. THE ROCK IN THE FOREGROUND IS THE MAN NYIRUNYA, WHO PURSUED THE SISTERS, KUNGKARANGKALPA, WHO BUILT THE CAVE AS THEIR SHELTER. SEE PAGE 15.

places which are central to the various stories are regarded as sacred with access to many of them restricted to men. These places are the totemic sites which are included in the diagram. These examples show how Aboriginal people view the whole of the environment as the scene of the dramatic events of The Dreaming. The whole continent was dotted with significant sites, and criss-crossed with the tracks of the ancestors as they moved from site to site.

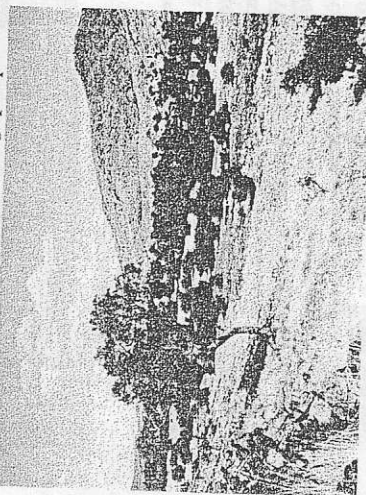
TREES. Trees are also seen as representing either the bodies of the ancestors or objects which they used. A small pine tree growing on top of a rock at the end of a hill at Walylitjata in the south-west of the Northern Territory is a man who was pursuing the first mother, *Kutungunya*, and her sisters. A bloodwood tree further east is a hunter who was standing to throw a spear at the euro-man.

CELESTIAL BODIES. The diagram on page 12 indicates that the activities of the Ancestral Beings were not confined to the earth but embraced the bodies seen in the sky. Some of them ascended to the sky following their wanderings over the face of the earth and star constellations are their final resting places. The story of the *Kungkarangkappa*, or The Sisters, has been referred to earlier. They were pursued by a man named *Nyirunya* and fled to the sky to become the Pleiades, the Seven Sisters of Greek mythology. According to the Kulin people who inhabited the area around Melbourne, a married couple, *Lo-an* and *Lo-an Tuka*, became the stars Sirius and Canopus.

Most of the ancestors finally entered into the ground to be transformed into rocks and these

"My Mother". The Aboriginal view of conception emphasized the role of spirit beings who entered the mother, rather than the role of the father. The same spirit being or forces which emerged from the earth in The Dreaming are still present in the land and their entry into a woman's body leads to the conception and birth of a child. This provides each individual with a direct link with the Ancestral Beings. As a woman becomes aware of her pregnancy she reflects on the first signs such as sickness and attributes the conception to the totemic ancestor of the place where this occurred.

The relationship between people and the spirit beings and sites is expressed in several ways. On one occasion I saw an old man point to rocks which represented the native figs and say, "That is my grandfather". The rocks were considered to be the metamorphosed bodies of the fig-men. Their spirit remained there and thus the man looked upon the rocks as being his grandfather. Some rocks or other features are seen as representing present day people. For example at an Emu site a small rock is identified with a living man of the emu clan. A rock at the *Kutungu* site referred to earlier is identified not only with the first mother of The Dreaming but also with a woman named *Kutungunya*. In these cases both the rocks and living people are



A BLOODWOOD TREE SAID TO BE A MAN WHO WAS AIMING A SPEAR AT WATI-KANYALA. THE EURO-MEN, WHO WERE TRAVELING ALONG THE DRY WATERCOURSE TO THE RIGHT. SEE PAGE 16.

embodiments of the Ancestral Being. Pijanijatjara people use the word *Tjukurpa* for both The Dreaming and for warts or birthmarks. A person may identify a mark on their body with an imprint left by an ancestor at a site and this establishes another link between the person, the site and the Ancestral Being.

I referred in the last section to the land as a stage on which the events of The Dreaming were played. In using this analogy we should not think of the people as an audience who look at this stage from a distance. They in fact thought of life as a re-enactment of The Dreaming events as they moved across the same stage and did the same things as had been done by the Ancestral Being. The Dreaming is therefore not confined to the remote past but remains as a present reality to the performers. Human life today is to be lived according to the pattern laid down by the ancestors.

Mythology

THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE had no written literature but treasured a vast store of oral narratives which were passed on from generation to generation. These stories are seen as derived from The Dreaming as they record the travels and activities of the Ancestral Beings. The term myth is applied to these stories. We will consider this term more fully in the chapter on religion. Meanwhile it should be noted that the word does not mean that stories are untrue, but rather is used to refer to those stories which give people an understanding of their origins and the purpose of life. Some of the stories were told to children as amusement, to warn them of dangers or to explain how some things came to be as they are. For example there are stories which tell why the crow is black, or why the emu cannot fly. Other stories are the property of the women and relate the activities of The Dreaming ancestor women. The knowledge of other stories is restricted to men and they are told to them only when they have passed through the stages of rituals which lead to manhood. The same story may have different

Kooli Yvonne

versions with deeper levels of meaning being revealed only to older men.

The stories reflect the different environments with which they are associated. Thus stories from the north feature beings such as shark-men, brolga-women, wild honey, canoes, and rain clouds. Stories from the desert regions feature kangaroo-men, lizard-women, wild fig-men, digging sticks and dust storms. Some stories are localized with the ancestors depicted as moving within a limited area. Others range over vast areas and pass through the territories of several dialect groups. A story cycle which passes through one area might then move in a similar cycle of events in another area with the story adapted to fit the environment in that region. The stories were important as aids in teaching people about the country and the knowledge of them assisted people in their movement from one water supply to the next as the stories reflected the movement of people in daily life. As Aboriginal people move across the land they constantly relate and share the stories as a way of ensuring the retention of the knowledge.

Songs

THE DIAGRAM ALSO SHOWS that songs are considered as a legacy from The Dreaming rather than as human compositions. The ancestors sang as they moved across the land and they left these songs as a record of their travels, teaching them to their human offspring. Song-cycles are sung at the sites or during ceremonies to recall the events of The Dreaming. They consist of many verses. One verse which records the events of a particular site in a couplet, is sung several times, before passing on to the next verse. Learning the songs depends on mastering the intricate techniques of the music and on memorizing a vast store of verse. All members of the society are expected to learn them and special honour is given to those who excel. The focal groups are the owners of the songs pertaining to their area and as each group preserves their songs the totality of the song-cycles

are remembered and passed on. As with the stories there are songs for children, others for women, and some known only by men.

Animals and Plants

AS ALREADY OUTLINED EARLIER many of the Ancestral Beings were identified not only with human but also with animal, bird, marine and plant species. As well as people the various species in the natural world were assumed to be descended from them. Thus kangaroos are descended from the Ancestral kangaroo-man, *wati maliu*, eels from the eel-man, *Girroo Gurrl* of Queensland and, wild figs from the *lit* or fig-men. All of these natural species therefore owe their existence to the same spirit beings who enliven human existence and have within them the same spiritual essence as is in humans. As people share a relationship with these species through this common descent they must observe restraints in dealing with those with whom their group shares this relationship. In some areas they are forbidden to kill this animal.

Hunting And Gathering

ALTHOUGH THE ANCESTORS were identified with these various species most of their behaviour was said to be similar to human behaviour and reflected the daily events in the lives of people. As Aboriginal people depended on hunting and gathering for their foods the ancestors are portrayed as engaged in these pursuits in The Dreaming. Strehlow commented that in the myths we see the Aborigine "at his daily task of hunting, fishing, gathering vegetable food, cooking and fashioning his implements. All occupations originated with the totemic ancestors", (Strehlow, 1947: 35). The spirit man *Baitame* is reputed to have made the stone fish traps in the Barwon River near Brewarrina in New South Wales. The Kulin ancestor *Lo-An*, speared eels, which his wife cooked in an earth oven. The *Nyi-nyi* or zebra finch women ground the seeds of an acacia bush while their men were

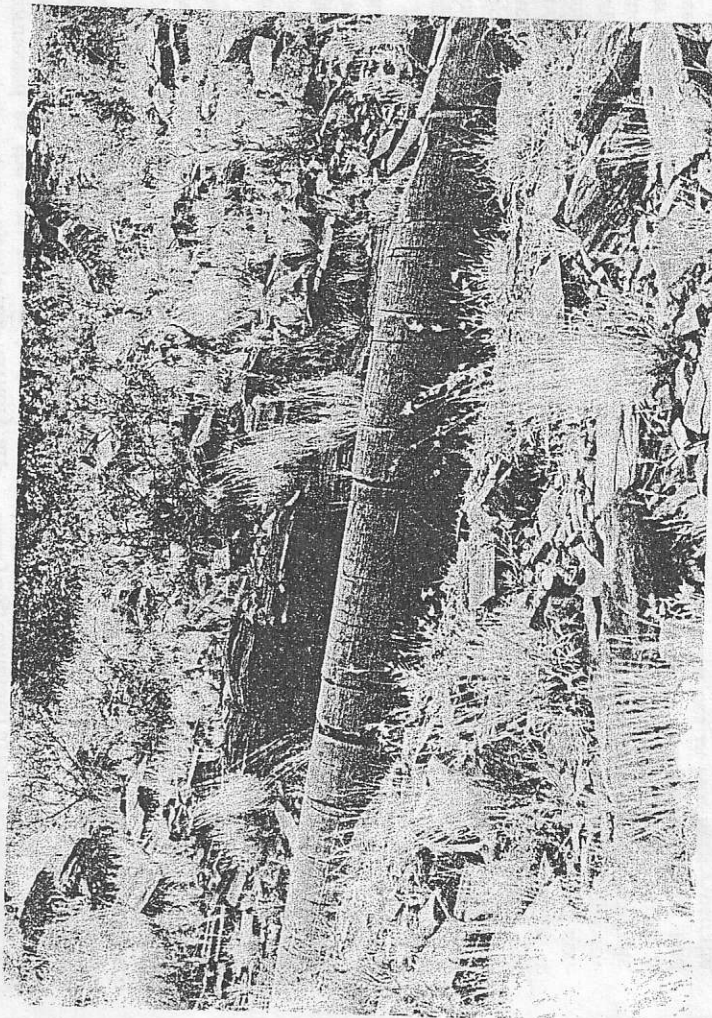
as following a lifestyle established by the Ancestral Beings and some tasks must be done in a certain way, as this was the way ordained by the ancestors. For example the kangaroo must be cut and cooked in a precise manner as this is how it was done in The Dreaming and to break this tradition would be dangerous.

Social Organization

MANY OF THE ASPECTS of social life which we will examine later were also accepted as following the pattern laid down by the ancestors. In all areas of life such as economic, social and religious there were different roles assigned to men and women and this division of labour was traced back to The Dreaming. Daisy Bates recorded that people living near the Great

out hunting. The ancestors used the same technologies as used by Aboriginal people in hunting and preparation of food. Aranda stories from Central Australia record that euro-men taught the bird-men how to make spears and spear throwers and how to cook meat which they had previously eaten raw.

In a later chapter we will see that fire was an important element in Aboriginal life and it features in many of The Dreaming stories. The creatures who possessed fire guarded it jealously while others sought to steal it from them. The Dalabon of the Northern Territory record that the rainbow bird seized a fire-stick from the crocodile and then spread fire around and used it to cook. The bright tail feathers of this bird are the fire-sticks he carries. As they hunt and gather foods, Aboriginal people see themselves



THE TAIL OF THE PERENTIE-MAN, WATI-NGINTAKA, WHICH WAS CUT BY THE LIZARD PEOPLE. SEE PAGE 20.

Australian Bight had a story of a group of women who hunted with man's weapons the animals normally hunted by the men. They were punished by a snake-man for breaking this tradition.

Relationships are of vital importance in Aboriginal society and members of language groups can identify their relationship to every other member of the society. The same kinds of relationships and the obligations which flow from them were accorded to the Ancestral Beings. In Aranda mythology the mulga parrots are aunts of the kangaroos. The aunts supply them with water and warn them if hunters approach. The stories of the *Ngintaka* or perentie and the *Kanyala* or euro that passed through Yankunjatjara and Pitjantjara territory are connected as the euro was uncle (mother's brother) to the perentie. Lizard women, whose grindstone was stolen by the *ngintaka*, were unable to catch him so they pursued the euro, as a mother's brother is responsible for the behaviour of his nephew. Many stories refer to the avoidance relationship which prohibited contact between mothers-in-law and sons-in-law. A snake like being, *Kurraa* pursued a warrior named *Toollalla*, across a lagoon near the Barwon River in New South Wales. By swimming towards the bumble tree which was mother-in-law to *Kurraa*, *Toollalla* was able to escape because *Kurraa* could not approach her.

In traditional Aboriginal society the rights and responsibilities of individuals were determined not only on the basis of their relationships to others but also because each person was placed in fixed categories by their descent and generation level. Each group was divided into categories known as moieties. Some groups were divided into four sections or eight subsections. We will examine these divisions in a later chapter but it should be noted here that Ancestral Beings were classified also as belonging to moieties and sections. This pattern of social life was seen as based on the model established in The Dreaming. Membership of a moiety and section determined the choice of a marriage partner. In north eastern Arnhem

Land it was believed that a rat-woman, *Balant-garr* had decreed in The Dreaming that members of the *Dhuwa* moiety marry a person from the *Yirritja* moiety and visa versa.

LAZUS

IT WAS BELIEVED ALSO that punishment for the breaking of the rules and taboos were derived from The Dreaming. Ancestral Beings had at times been guilty of these offences and they had been punished. Humans were to be punished in the same way. According to a Tiwi myth from Bathurst Island a young couple, *Kuparumi* and *Ikeigini*, who were in a brother/sister relationship, and thus prohibited from marrying, continued to play together after they had reached puberty. The father of *Ikeigini* was ashamed of his daughter and he took the youth hunting and told him to climb a tree to collect sugar-bag. He told him to cut the branch in such a way that it fell and the youth and the girl who had run to his aid were killed. A rock formation near Tingha in New South Wales is said to be the body of a young woman who married the wrong person. A mark in the rock was the result of a blow she had received in punishment. The stories and sites served as warnings to people to observe the rules of the society.

LANGUAGES

THE FORMS OF COMMUNICATION by which people passed on their traditions and interacted in social life through language, song, art and ritual were all understood as having their origin in The Dreaming. The Ancestral Beings had spoken, sung, painted and danced and people followed the patterns of speech, designs, symbols, rhythms and steps that they had created. A great mother figure, *Warumungundji*, had emerged from the sea in Northern Australia and as she gave life to groups of children she gave them the languages they were to speak. In other part of Australia the ancestors were credited with leaving the various dialects as they moved across the country.

of their cultural and social life and of the whole environment. These aspects of life will be examined at greater length in the following chapters as we look at the ways in which they adapted to the environment and developed their systems of economic, social, political and religious life. Although we view them as creations of human thought and effort the Aboriginal view of their culture was self-effacing. The credit for the achievements was given to the Ancestral Beings. They did not distinguish between a cultural and a natural world. Human life and achievement was part of a larger sphere in which the animals, plants and natural objects participated. The distinctions we make between the natural and spiritual and the secular and sacred were less sharp. The stories of the Dreaming gave a sacred significance to the events of everyday life.

An Aboriginal man from Arnhem Land, Silas Roberts has expressed his understanding as follows:

"Aborigines have a special connection with everything that is natural. Aborigines see themselves as part of nature. We see all things natural as part of us. All the things on earth we see as part human. This is told through the idea of dreaming. By dreaming, we mean the belief that long ago, these creatures started human society, they made all natural things and put them down in special places. These Dreaming creatures were connected to special places and special roads or tracks or paths. In many cases, the great creatures changed themselves into sites where their spirits stay. My people believe this and I believe this. Nothing anyone ever says to me will change my belief in this. This is my story and it is the story of every true Aborigine. All the land is full of signs, and what these great creatures did and what they left we see as very important." (Quoted in Cole, 1979: 161).

SOME EXAMPLES OF DREAMING MYTHS

ARKAROO'S DREAMTIME JOURNEY
(Flinder's Range, South Australia)

Back in the Aboriginal dreamtime a giant ser-

Art

THE VARIOUS ART FORMS of Aboriginal society were attributed also to The Dreaming. Ancestral Beings had painted the original design and the artist who painted on bark or drew in the sand was copying the designs inherited from the ancestors. Many of the paintings which adorn the walls of caves and rock shelters are said to have been painted originally by the ancestors and the responsibility of humans is to re-touch the paintings so that they remain clearly visible. An ancestor, *Miarwai* is said to have travelled around Arnhem Land, carrying ochres in a dilly bag. As he rested in caves he mixed the ochres and created the cave paintings. In the Kimberley region of Western Australia the distinctive *Wandjina* paintings are said to have been painted by the rainbow serpent, *Ungud*, who on completing other creative work painted the *wandjina* figures. Men qualified through ritual knowledge touch up the paintings and thus participate in the releasing of the powers of the *wandjina* spirits. Painting is therefore a form of ritual.

Ritual

OTHER FORMS OF RITUALS such as dance, initiation and burial are also viewed as imitations of rituals performed by the ancestors of The Dreaming. According to mythology in New South Wales the great spirit being, *Baiame*, called his two sons to prepare for their initiation, and the various groups from the area participated in the Bora ceremonies associated with initiation. A story from the Kimberleys tells of the death of a native cat, whose wife, a black-headed python, laid him to rest on a stone platform and then cut off her own hair and covered her body with charcoal as signs of mourning. These actions of The Dreaming dictated that the dead should be laid on platforms in this way and that widows must follow the same mourning practices.

Conclusion

IN THIS CHAPTER I HAVE illustrated the Aboriginal understanding of the origin of all aspects

pent known as Arkaroo who was living in the Main water Pound in the Gammon Ranges slithered to the plains to quench his thirst. Arkaroo descended upon Lakes Frome and Callabonna and drank them both dry, but the water was saline and he became bloated. He dragged his heavily-laden body back up towards the Gammons and, in doing so, he carved out the deep sinuous gorge that is now known as Arkaroola. On his way back he stopped at several places for a rest and while resting he formed springs and waterholes along the way. There are a few permanent water sources to be found along the gorge to this day.

He dragged himself up into the Gammon Ranges where he now sleeps safely in a hide-away at the Yacki Waterhole. Restlessly he sleeps on with his belly full of water and whenever he turns, the rumbling in his stomach sends out great noises that can be heard from time to time as minor earthquakes and tremors.

The Paralana Hot Springs were formed when two young warriors fought for the love of a young girl. The victor, after killing his opponent, plunged his firestick murder weapon deep into the Spring, so making it hot. Since then the water has emerged only slightly below boiling point.

Why can't the emu fly?
THE EMU AND THE TURKEY

The emu and the turkey were sisters. Both were able to fly and each had several young. One day the emu played a trick on her sister, the turkey. She placed all but two of her young under her wing and said to the turkey, "Look, I have only two children now to care for and find food for. I have killed the others."

The turkey did not want to be outdone by the emu, so she killed all but two of her young. After the turkey had done this the emu raised her wings showing all her young. She laughed at the turkey and said, "I still have all my young but you have now only two."

The turkey, decided to play a trick on the emu for what she had done. So she sat on the ground and folded her wings back under herself. Then

she called to the emu, saying, "Look what I have done. I have cut my wings for I am so tired of flying. I will just walk around instead." The emu decided that if the turkey could cut her wings then she could too. But when she had cut her wings the turkey unfolded her wings and flew into the air."

(Variations of the story are found in many areas of Australia)

These two stories are used with permission and are from Wilton, C., Coulthard, C., & Coulthard, D., In the Flinders Range: An Aboriginal View. Aboriginal Heritage Unit, Department for the Environment (S.A.) 1980.

THE CROW AND THE WHITE COCKATOO

(Western Desert, Western Australia)

The eagle had two wives, the crow and the white cockatoo. The crow would go and get termite-grubs and bring them back to camp. But as well as the grubs there would be bits of grass, leaves and dirt in the digging bowl. Not being skillful at yandyng she would leave it and eat it anyhow, pebbles and all. But the eagle wouldn't eat the crow's termite-grubs. However the white cockatoo would get termite-grubs and yandy them until there were no pebbles or leaves in the digging bowl - only grubs. The eagle would come and be very pleased to see them. He would get them and eat them all up.

The eagle would spear a kangaroo, bring it home and give the crow the back, the two rib sections, the bare arm bones and the two feet. He gave the poorest parts to the crow. But he would bring the best parts and give them to the white cockatoo. So the two wives would eat their meat and go off again next day for termite-grubs. The eagle went out, looked around, speared meat, brought it and gave it to them. But the crow couldn't give him her termite-grubs, for he would only eat what the white cockatoo brought and gave him. "Why, he always leaves mine", thought the crow. "Right now I'm going to really give her a good hiding".

So when the husband went out hunting

again the two wives were sitting in camp. The crow was picking up all the old bones and eating the meat off them. Then she made up her mind, hurried off, and getting a digging stick, came and gave the white cockatoo a good hiding and left her. The white cockatoo just crawled away being very sore from bruises on her shoulders, arms and legs.

The crow sat there until she saw the eagle come back from hunting. When he came and sat down, she went over and said to him, "Listen. The white cockatoo has got a little baby boy. It's just like you. Truly it's just like its father." So he gave the meat to the crow. "Take this and give it to her". The crow said, "I'll go and build a windbreak and light a fire."

So she went over there and made out to cry like a baby. The crow would eat all the meat and come back. Next morning she would go again and pretend to give the white cockatoo meat and water. She would sit there and make out to laugh and laugh, then come back and say, "The eagle's baby is a beautiful child." But the eagle was thinking, "My wife wasn't having a baby. She's lying to me".

The next morning he went and, after having a drink, followed the tracks. He said to himself, "Here are the tracks where the white cockatoo went. Why, she was so ill she had to crawl." So he left it, came back and said to the crow, "I'll go and look around for meat and come back." Then the eagle followed the tracks, thinking, "These tracks are old and faint." But he kept on following and he saw the white cockatoo on the edge of the water, just going into it.

The eagle thought, "What shall I do?" He went into the water and followed for a long time, but he couldn't catch her. The white cockatoo went right into the water and drowned. She died there in the deep water. Then the man sat down and cried for his wife. On his way back home the eagle saw a bobtail lizard, killed it, and brought it with him. Then, when he saw a rabbit burrow, he dragged the lizard around the opening of the burrow. He made it look as though a carpet snake had gone in there.

Then the eagle came home and saw the crow sitting there. He came up to her and said, "Listen, I saw a place where a carpet snake had gone into a hole". The crow was very pleased. They both had a drink, got up and went along until they saw where the carpet snake had gone in. So the crow started digging. She went on digging and digging and digging. Then the eagle lit some dry grass and quickly threw it down the hole after her, so that the crow died inside the hole. The fire burnt her right up.

Then the eagle went off and lived by himself. From Tjuma: Stories From The Western Desert. Translated and edited by Ameer Glass and Dorothy Newberry. Aboriginal Arts Board for the Warburton Community Council Inc. 1979. Used with permission.

THE WAGILAK SISTERS: A RAINBOW SERPENT MYTH

(North-East Arnhem Land, N.T.)

Ages ago two sisters, the *Wagilak*, came from the south. On their journey they gathered plant food and also killed animals for food. They spoke various languages and named the country as they went along. Because they came from the *Dhuwa* moiety or half of society, the land they passed over became *Dhuwa*.

The younger of the two was pregnant and on the journey gave birth to a child. Because she was a *Dhuwa* person, her son was in the *Yirrija* moiety. The older woman already had a son, whom she carried in a paperbark cradle.

As they journeyed they came to a large waterhole, the home of the great python. This python has a secret-sacred name and is regarded today as a high totem. The older sister made a fire to cook the plants and animals they had caught while the younger sister rested. Suddenly the plants and animals jumped out of the fire and ran into the waterhole.

When the older sister went out to collect bark to make a bed for her sister, she walked into the water at the edge of the great waterhole. Because she was menstruating, she polluted the waterhole. The python, sometimes called the

great father, smelt the blood and rose from the depths of the pool. He opened the bottom of the waterhole.

As the snake crawled slowly out of the well, he sucked up some of the water then spat it into the sky and cloud soon appeared. The water in the well also rose and covered the land. When the snake hissed, rain began to fall. The sisters were surprised by the sudden downpour and quickly built a shelter. This was the origin of the first wet season.

The snake was a brother to the sisters. He therefore called the children of the sisters, *wakui*, the same term they called the children.

The older sister went outside to see what was wrong. She became aware that the snake was going to swallow them so she started beating the ground with her yam stick. The two sisters sang many sacred songs to stop the rain and prevent the snake from swallowing them. These songs form part of the sacred rituals today. While all this was happening, all the snakes and other reptiles gathered around them because they heard the call of the python. As it was dark, the sisters did not see the reptiles.

When the women finally sang songs about the python himself, the snake crawled into their camp. The two women quickly fell into a deep sleep as a result of the snake's magic. He swallowed the four people, then at daybreak went a short distance into the bush. The snake raised himself like a tall straight tree so that his head reached into the sky. Immediately a great flood covered the entire earth. The python, while in the sky, sang all the sacred songs.

All the other sacred pythons gathered around. They were in the *Dhuwa* moiety, the same as the main python, but they were not as tall and powerful as him. As they spoke to each other, they discovered that they came from different parts of the country and spoke different dialects. The main python said that it would have been better if they all spoke the one dialect, but the situation could not be helped now. At least they could hold ceremonies together and share each other's totems.

The snake spoke about what they had eaten. The main python was reluctant to say what he had eaten but then confessed that he had eaten two women and their two children. Then he fell to the ground and left a deep depression in the earth that is still there today. It is a ceremonial ground for one of the clans. The python realized that the four people were dead inside him so he decided to vomit them up. He then returned to the waterhole but kept his head above the water to look around.

When some green ants bit the women and children they jumped up and were alive. The python picked up two clay sticks that are used in ceremonies and hit them on their heads before swallowing them again. The other snakes asked what he had eaten. When he replied "bandicoot", they accused him of lying. Finally he confessed to eating the two *Dhuwa* women and their two *Yirrija* children.

Again the python fell to the earth and made another ceremonial ground. The snake crawled into the waterhole and put a stone over the entrance to stop the flood of water coming out of the waterhole. In the underground waters he swam back to *Wagilak* country to return the women to their own country. There he vomited up the two *Dhuwa* women, who turned into stones that are still there today. Because their children were *Yirrija* and he was *Dhuwa* like their mothers, he kept the children inside him.

While all these events had been happening, two *Wagilak* spirit men had heard the snake's voice in the form of thunder and had seen the rain. They followed the women's tracks to the waterhole and also noticed the snake's track. When they saw the water in the waterhole shining like a rainbow, they knew a snake was in it. After dark they fell asleep. The spirits of the *Wagilak* women came to them and taught them the sacred songs and dances. They told the men that they must re-enact all the things that had happened. This the men did in ceremonies that are still performed today.

Adapted from *Discovering Aboriginal Culture*, Edited by Don Williams.

The Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra. 1982. Use authorized by Rev. Djinyini Gondarra.

THE ORIGIN OF FIRE (Victoria)

The story told by the Aborigines of the River Yarra is as follows: -

Kar-ak-ar-ook, a female (now the Seven Stars), was the only one who could make fire. She would not give any one any of it. She kept it in the end of her yam stick. But *Waung* (The Crow) fell on a plan to get it from her. *Kar-ak-ar-ook* was very fond of ants' eggs, and *Waung* made a great many snakes, and put them under an ant-hill, and then invited *Kar-ak-ar-ook* to come to the nest to dig up the eggs. After she had dug a little, she turned up the snakes, and *Waung* told her to kill them with her yam-stick. She accordingly struck the snakes, and fire fell out of the yam-stick. *Waung* picked up the fire, and went off with it. *Kar-ak-ar-ook* was afterwards set in the heavens by *Pund-jel* (the Maker of Men). *Waung*, however, was nearly as selfish as *Kar-ak-ar-ook*. He would not give fire to any one, but he would cook food for the people and keep the best pieces of meat for himself. Because of this, *Pund-jel* was very angry with *Waung*, and he gathered together all the people, and caused them to speak harshly to *Waung*, and *Waung* became afraid. To save himself and to burn them, he threw the fire amongst them, and every one picked up some of the fire and left. *Tchert-tchert* and *Trrar* took some of the fire, and lit the dry grass around *Waung*, and burnt him. *Pund-jel* said to *Waung*. "You shall be a crow to fly about, and shall be a man no more." *Tchert-tchert* and *Trrar* were lost or burnt in the fire. They are now two large stones at the foot of the Dandenong Ranges.

Adapted from Smyth, R. Brough, *The Aborigines of Victoria*. (Two Volumes). Melbourne. John Currey, O'Neil. 1876: 1.459.