

THE DREAMING

The Dreaming has different meanings for different Aboriginal people. It is a complex network of knowledge, faith and practices that derive from stories of creation, and which dominates all spiritual and physical aspects of Aboriginal life. The Dreaming sets out the structures of society, the rules for social behaviour and the ceremonies performed in order to maintain the life of the land.

It governed the way people lived and how they should behave.

Those who did not follow the rules were punished.

The Dreamtime or Dreaming is often used to describe the time when the earth and humans and animals were created. The Dreaming is also used by individuals to refer to their own dreaming or their community's dreaming.



During the Dreaming, ancestral spirits came to earth and created the landforms, the animals and plants. The stories tell how the ancestral spirits moved through the land creating rivers, lakes and mountains. Today we know the places where the ancestral spirits have been and where they came to rest. There are explanations of how people came to Australia and the links between the groups throughout Australia. There are explanations about how people learnt languages and dance and how they came to know about fire.

In essence, the Dreaming comes from the land. In Aboriginal society people did not own the land it was part of them and it was part of their duty to respect and look after mother earth.

The Dreaming did not end with the arrival of Europeans but simply entered a new phase. It is a powerful living force that must be maintained and cared for.

Dreaming Stories

What are Dreaming Stories about?

Dreaming stories vary throughout Australia and there are different versions on the same theme. For example the story of how the birds got their colours is different in New South Wales and in Western Australia.

Stories cover many themes and topics. There are stories about creation of sacred places, landforms, people, animals and plants. There are also stories of language or the first use of fire. In more recent times there are stories telling of the arrival of the first Europeans on ships or stories about trading with Macassan fisherman in Northern Australia.

The Tracks of Life

The journey of the Spirit Ancestors across the land are recorded in Dreaming Tracks. A Dreaming track joins a number of sites which trace the path of an Ancestral Being as it moved through the landscape, forming its features, creating its flora and fauna and laying down the Laws. One of these Spirit Ancestors is the Rainbow Serpent, whose Dreaming track is shared by many Aboriginal communities across Australia.

Rainbow Serpent



And that... is the resting place of the Rainbow Serpent, and all of the gullies and all of the lagoon itself was about the Rainbow Serpent created after he had created the universe and all the dry gullies is the tracks that he's made looking for a resting place.

Carl McGrady, Aboriginal Education Assistant, Boggabilla, describing the path of the Rainbow Serpent at Boobera Lagoon, northern New South Wales, 1996.

The Rainbow Serpent is represented as a large, snake-like creature, whose Dreaming track is always associated with watercourses, such as billabongs, rivers, creeks and lagoons. It is the protector of the land, its people, and the source of all life. However, the Rainbow Serpent can also be a destructive force if it is not properly respected.

The Rainbow Serpent is a consistent theme in Aboriginal painting and has been found in rock art up to 6000 years old. The Rainbow Serpent is a powerful symbol of the creative and destructive power of nature. Most paintings of Rainbow Serpents tell the story of the creation of the landscape particular to an artist's birthplace. Some aspects of Rainbow Serpent stories are restricted to initiated persons but generally, the image had been very public. Today, most artists add personal clan designs to the bodies of Rainbow Serpents, symbolising links between the artist and the land.

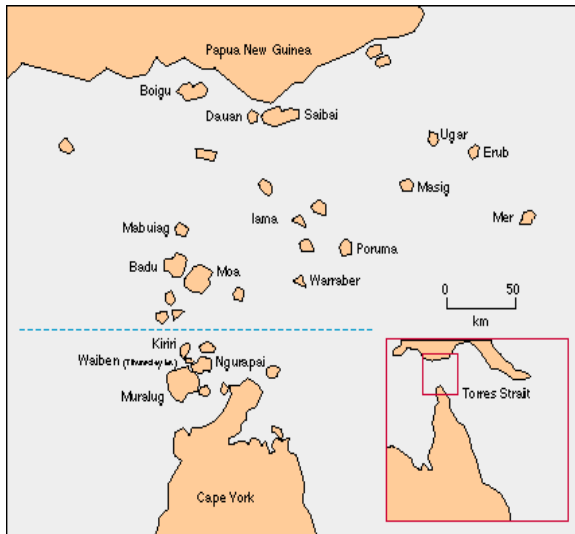
The Mimi Spirits

The Mimi are tall, thin beings that live in the rocky escarpment of northern Australia as spirits. Before the coming of Aboriginal people they had human forms. The Mimi are generally harmless but on occasions can be mischievous.

When Aboriginal people first came to northern Australia, the Mimi taught them how to hunt and cook kangaroos and other animals. They also did the first rock paintings and taught Aboriginal people how to paint.



The Tagai



I'm as much a Torres Strait Islander irrespective of where I live because my feelings of being a Torres Strait Islander live inside me. It is not predicated by what is outside me, it is determined with my feelings and my spirituality. Bilyana Blomely Academic Co-ordinator, Lismore 1996

The people throughout the Torres Strait are united by their connection to the Tagai. The Tagai consists of stories which are the cornerstone of Torres Strait Islanders' spiritual beliefs. These stories focus on the stars and identify Torres Strait Islanders as sea people who share a common way of life. The instructions of

the Tagai provide order in the world, ensuring that everything has a place.

One Tagai story depicts the Tagai as a man standing in a canoe. In his left hand, he holds a fishing spear, representing the Southern Cross. In his right hand, he holds a *sorbi* (a red fruit). In this story, the Tagai and his crew of 12 are preparing for a journey. But before the journey begins, the crew consume all the food and drink they planned to take. So the Tagai strung the crew together in two groups of six and cast them into the sea, where their images became star patterns in the sky. These patterns can be seen in the star constellations of Pleiades and Orion.

THE LAND

Aboriginal wisdom and spirituality are rooted in the land. As tribal elder Galarrwuy Yunupingu wrote, in *Aboriginal Spirituality*,

The goodness that is in the land - in the trees, in the water, in the rocks, in the beauty of the landscape and nature itself - enables us to breathe, live and enjoy. The land feeds and nurtures all the time.

He wrote that Aborigines enjoy a relationship with the land that is stronger than that experienced by other peoples.

We give land ceremonial names as a sign of respect....We acknowledge the land by giving it a title that is not used every day, a special name....Our relationship with the land is much closer spiritually, physically, mentally than any other relationship I know of.



The black represents the Aboriginal people, the red the earth and their spiritual relationship to the land, and the yellow the sun, the giver of life.