

GROUNDWATER STORIES FROM THE DREAMTIME, SPRING WATERHOLES IN THE FLINDERS RANGES (SA)

The content for this case study is taken directly from the Masters Thesis entitled "ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND GROUNDWATER" by Bradley J. Moggridge (University of Technology, Sydney, 2005). For full details, refer to the original thesis document, including a comprehensive set of references.

WARNING – THE AUTHOR OF THIS MATERIAL APOLOGISES TO ANY ABORIGINAL PERSON WHO MAY BE DISTRESSED BY THE MENTION OF THE NAMES OF PERSONS WHO MAY NOW BE DECEASED.

To Aboriginal people, the stories of the dreamtime represent the past, present and future.

Storytelling is an integral part of life for Australian Aboriginals. These stories are passed from one generation to another, usually by elders in Aboriginal communities both traditional and contemporary. The Dreaming or Dreamtime is an English translation of an Aboriginal concept that has many terms to describe. Dreamtime stories depict the very basic part of a long and complex event. Stories covered include: the creation of the land and life, protocols and tribal lore, life and death, warfare, hunting, linking every creature and every feature of the landscape, male and female roles, as well as sacred and public affairs.

These are stories of the history and culture of Aboriginal people, handed down in this way since the beginning of time and refer to all that is known and all that is understood. The stories indicate the linkages between surface water, groundwater, lakes and rivers, cave systems, natural springs, thermal springs, rain events recharging the aquifers and, in drought, excess discharge allowing culture heroes to move with watertable fluctuations. Many groundwater related sites would be dreaming sites because water that originates from below the ground, with Aboriginal people not knowing the full extent of hydrogeological processes, would deem it to be spiritually significant. The dreaming significance of these sites, for instance, would link surface and sub-surface waters through their culture heroes.

The stories are told in detail and re-enacted in ceremonies which capture the imagination of the young, primarily for educating. The teaching styles have proven to be inspiring and powerful tools in presenting the Dreamtime beliefs and cultural practices.

The following story is one of the few that remain of the people in the Flinders Ranges.



Aboriginal lands, Flinders Ranges, South Central Australia
Horton D R (1996)

The Formation of Spring Waterholes in the Flinders Ranges

"A family was walking from Curnamona to Barratta Springs. Because of dry weather there was no water and being so hot the family got thirsty. The old man told his family to walk along slowly toward Mount Victor while he went to Barratta Springs to wait for a kangaroo. He wanted to kill it and make a waterbag out of its skin to carry the water back to his family, which by this time would have been somewhere near Mount Victor.



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At Barratta Springs, the old man waited for the kangaroo which was coming from Murnpeowie. As the kangaroo hopped along, the old man could hear the thumping sounds. The next stop the kangaroo made was at Pepegoona Spring, near Wooltana Station. From there, the kangaroo hopped on to Nurowi Springs and made water. There was no water there, so he hopped onto Emu Bore, which is now an artesian bore. From Emu bore, the kangaroo hopped on to Limestone. He couldn't find any water there so he had a rest. The white ground at Limestone represents where the kangaroo rested. He then hopped to Glenwarrick Springs and from there he started hopping towards Barratta, but on his way he saw a big snake which now represents Tooths Knob Hill on the Martin's Well property. He got frightened so he went around toward Kemps Dam. There was no water there, so the only place he had to go was to Barratta Springs.

When he got there the old man killed him, got his skin and made it into a waterbag, filled it up with water and headed off towards Mount Victor to find his family. When he got to Mount Victor he saw his family lying on the ground. They were dying, so he quickly poured water on them. As he poured the water on them it spread and formed a swamp or a kind of a lake. When he saw them moving and starting to come around, he jumped into the middle of the water and he saw his family turning into ducks. He disappeared into the sky and formed the Morning Star.

His family couldn't find him, so they looked into the sky and yelled out, 'Look up there! That's our father looking down at us.' That is how the springs were formed from Pepegoona Spring in the north down the eastern side of the Flinders Ranges to Barratta Springs". (Eileen McKenzie, Flinders Ranges in Isaacs (1980).

Reference:

Horton D R (1996) creator **Aboriginal Australia Wall Map**. Aboriginal Studies Press, Australian Institute of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Canberra , Australia and Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz
 Isaacs J (1980) **Australian Dreaming, 40,000 Years of Aboriginal History**. Lansdowne Press, Sydney, Australia.

Going further

On a map of South Australia, locate the spring waterholes that are mentioned in this story.

Is there a pattern related to land use and the waterholes in the Flinders Ranges?

