

## GROUNDWATER STORIES FROM THE DREAMTIME, TJILBRUKE AND THE COASTAL SPRINGS (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 who lived on the Adelaide Plains in South Australia – The Kurna along the Fleurieu Peninsula.



**Kurna people lands, South Central Australia**  
Horton D R (1996)

### Tjilbruke and the Coastal Springs

"The Holdfast Bay area is the home of the Kurna people. Sites such as the Tjilbruke springs are of special significance. The spring was not only a source of drinking water but also significant in the Tjilbruke story. A monument was erected on the site in 1972.

The springs which dot the coast of the Fleurieu Peninsula are believed to have been created in the Dreaming by the great ancestral hero, Tjilbruke. Tjilbruke rose out of the ground near Mount Hayfield. During winter, he lived in the scrub at the camp of two women named Lepuldawi and Watiriorn, which today appear in the hills as two highest peaks. Tjilbruke travelled to the coast in the summer to fish and gather shellfish at Rapid Head. On day news came to Tjilbruke that his sister's son, Kulultuwi, had been killed near the Sturt River, at Marion. He travelled quickly to that place and found that the young boy had inadvertently killed an emu, his totem. This meant that the boy had broken a very strict tribal taboo, and as a result he had been struck down at the moment when he was taking the head of the emu from the fire.



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To Aboriginal people, the stories of the The body of the dead boy was taken to a place near Brighton where, in accordance with ancient custom, it was being smoked and dried. When he arrived at the beach, Tjilbruke seized the body and weeping, and crying, took it back to a spring on the beach at Marino (today this is located on the Kingston Park Reserve) and here Tjilbruke completed the smoking process. Tjilbruke then gathered the body in his arms and carried it along the coast until he came to a spot near Hallet Cove, where he rested with his burden. Tjilbruke was overcome with grief and tears streamed down his face and fell onto the ground. At the point where his tears struck the ground, a fresh spring of fresh water rose from the sand providing a permanent supply of water for successive generations of Aboriginal People.

Tjilbruke soon recovered sufficiently to continue his sad journey, but when he reached Port Noarlunga he broke into tears again, and yet again at Red Ochre Cove, and at both these places springs flowed from the soil where his tears fell.

Tjilbruke then went on to a place a few hundred yards south of the old Port Willunga jetty. The tide was out so he sat on the damp sand. But each time he rested, the thought of his young nephew caused grief to well up in him and his tears flowed again. To this day fresh water can be found by digging in the sand at this spot when the tide is low.

The old man carried the body onto the beach at Sellicks Hill, where he noticed a fine bay where sea salmon could be caught at night. He could not control himself and tears flowed down his face, bringing another permanent spring into existence. Tjilbruke's wearisome journey along the coast continued beyond Myponga to a spot just south of Carrickalinga Head where a small swamp marked one of his resting places. He then went to Kongaratingga where a small cave in the hillside provided him with a resting place. Before reaching the cave Tjilbruke sat down and cried, bringing forth another small spring. Tjilbruke travelled further south, along the coastal cliffs as far as Cape Jervis and from the cape he turned northwards, skirting the foreshore below the cliffs, eventually coming to another cave called Janarwing. He left Kulultuwi's body at the entrance while he walked into the darkness to find a suitable ledge where it could be left, as was the tradition.

He put up sticks to form a platform and the remains were carried in and placed on this and abandoned.

Tjilbruke was so full of grief he did not want to return to the outside world, but continued to merge into the hill until he saw the sun shining through a high crevice. He climbed up and as he slipped through the crack in the rock near a swampy lagoon, he transformed himself into an ibis, and today Tjilbruke may still be seen on this lagoon catching fish". (Kurna Tribe 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

**Research how this story is important to the local history of the area today. Plan an activity that will involve others in learning about this Dreamtime story and how the story is being told today.**



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