

## GROUNDWATER STORIES FROM THE DREAMTIME, FRESH WATER AND RAYMANGGIRR

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 Raymanggirr spring in Arnhem Land.



**Arnhem Land, North Central Australia**  
Horton D R (1996)

### The Fresh Water at Raymanggirr

"Raymanggirr is a place on the northern coast of Arnhem Land somewhere near Lake Evell. This story I'm telling you is about a spring at Raymanggirr.

The grandchildren of the old frill-necked lizard man were collecting honey. The frill-necked lizard heard, and stopped and listened. 'Aha! My grandchildren are collecting honey! He heard them chopping the tree to collect the wild sugarbag. 'That tree's going to fall down,' he said and so he ran to a rocky point in the sea and looked up at the land. He named that point Mayawalpalnga and then he ran on.



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Then his grandchildren called to him: 'Come here, you dear old thing! You can have the top part of the honey in the tree, we'll have the bottom part.' And they ate the honey. The lizard was eating his over there when he got something stuck in his throat. When we cook the frill-necked lizard, we still find these splinters in his throat. And he ran off into the bush calling, 'A bit of the tree has stuck in my throat.' He ran down to the edge of the sea water, into where the lily roots are. And here where the water runs into the sea, it is fresh. That old lizard man showed us where it is, and we can drink it today.

This is how the people collect it. They go down with a pannikin. When the tide's not full you can just collect it in a pannikin. But when the tide comes in and the spring is submerged, the water is collected in the mouth, sucked up into the mouth, and spat into a paperbark cup or pannikin. It's collected in the mouth. It is held in the mouth, carried over, and spat, and more is collected, and spat out, and more, and spat. Then it's carried to the camp and given to the people. 'Sorry, not much water! The tide's in. Too much salt water. We'll go back later when we can dip for water properly.'

If anyone objects to the spit, you can get a long hollow piece of wood like a bent didgeridu and the water will flow into it until it fills up. And another one, until that one fills up. Then carefully lift out the wood, and carry it to the camp and put it down. The water just flows by itself. When the tide's out, it runs down the beach. At Raymanggirr" (Manuwa, Milingimbi in Isaacs (1980).

### Reference:

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