

GROUNDWATER STORIES FROM THE DREAMTIME, ORIGIN OF NARRAN LAKE (NSW)

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.



Aboriginal lands, South Eastern Australia
Horton D R (1996)

The Origin of Narran Lake

"Old Byamee said to his two young wives, Birrahgnooloo and Cunnunbeillee, "I have stuck a white feather between the hind legs of a bee, and I am going to let it go and then follow it to its nest, that I may get honey. While I go for the honey, go you two out and get frogs and yams, then meet me at Coorigel Spring, where we will camp, for sweet and clear is the water there." The wives, taking their goolays and yam sticks, went out as he told them. Having gone far, and dug out many yams and frogs, they were tired when they reached Coorigel, and seeing the cool, fresh water, they longed to bathe. But first they built a bough shade, and there left their goolays holding their food, and the yams and frogs they had found. When their camp was ready for the coming of Byamee, who having wooed his wives with a nullah-nullah, kept them obedient by fear of the same weapon, then went the girls to the spring to bathe. Gladly they plunged in, having first divested themselves of their goomillahs, which they were still young enough to wear, and which they left on the ground near the spring. Scarcely were they enjoying the cool rest the water gave their hot, tired limbs, when they were seized and swallowed by two kurreahs. Having swallowed the girls, the kurreahs dived into an opening in the side of the spring, which was



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the entrance to the underground watercourse leading to the Narran River. Through this passage they went, taking all the water from the spring with them into the Narran, whose course they also dried as they went along.

Meantime Byamee, unwitting the fate of his wives, was honey hunting. He had followed the bee with the white feather on it for some distance; then the bee flew on to some budtha flowers, and would move no further. Byamee said, "Something has happened, or the bee would not stay here and refuse to be moved on towards its nest. I must go to Coorigel Spring and see if my wives are safe. Something terrible has surely happened." And Byamee turned in haste towards the spring. When he reached there he saw the bough shed his wives had made, he saw the yams they had dug from the ground, and he saw the frogs but Birrahgnooloo and Cunnunbeillee he saw not. He called aloud for them. But no answer. He went towards the spring; on the edge of it he saw the goomillahs of his wives. He looked into the spring and seeing it dry, he said, "It is the work of the kurreahs; they have opened the underground passage and gone with my wives to the river, and opening the passage has dried the spring. Well do I know where the passage joins the Narran, and there will I swiftly go." Arming himself with spears and woggarahs he started in pursuit.

He soon reached the deep hole where the underground channel of the Coorigel joined the Narran. There he saw what he had never seen before, namely this deep hole dry. And he said: "They have emptied the holes as they went along, taking the water with them. But well I know the deep holes of the river. I will not follow the bend, thus trebling the distance I have to go, but I will cut across from big hole to big hole, and by so doing I may yet get ahead of the kurreahs." On swiftly sped Byamee, making short cuts from big hole to big hole, and his track is still marked by the morilla ridges that stretch down the Narran, pointing in towards the deep holes. Every hole as he came to it he found dry, until at last he reached the end of the Narran; the hole there was still quite wet and muddy, then he knew he was near his enemies, and soon he saw them. He managed to get, unseen, a little way ahead of the kurreahs. He hid himself behind a big dheal tree. As the kurreahs came near they separated, one turning to go in another direction. Quickly Byamee hurled one spear after another, wounding both

kurreahs, who writhed with pain and lashed their tails furiously, making great hollows in the ground. Which the water they had brought with them quickly filled. Thinking they might again escape him, Byamee drove them from the water with his spears, and then, at close quarters, he killed them with his woggarahs. And ever afterwards at flood time, the Narran flowed into this hollow which the kurreahs in their writhings had made.

When Byamee saw that the kurreahs were quite dead, he cut them open and took out the bodies of his wives. They were covered with wet slime, and seemed quite lifeless; but he carried them and laid them on two nests of red ants. Then he sat down at some little distance and watched them. The ants quickly covered the bodies, cleaned them rapidly of the wet slime, and soon Byamee noticed the muscles of the girls twitching. "Ah," he said, "there is life, they feel the sting of the ants."

Almost as he spoke came a sound as of a thunder-clap, but the sound seemed to come from the ears of the girls. And as the echo was dying away, slowly the girls rose to their feet. For a moment they stood apart, a dazed expression on their faces. Then they clung together shaking as if stricken with a deadly fear. But Byamee came to them and explained how they had been rescued from the kurreahs by him. He made them beware of ever bathing in the deep holes of the Narran, lest such holes be haunt of kurreahs.

Then he bade them look at the water now at Boogira, and he said:

"Soon will the black swans find their way here, the pelicans and the ducks; where there was dry land and stones in the past, in the future there will be water and water-fowl, from henceforth; when the Narran runs it will run into this hole, and by the spreading of its water will big lake be made." And what Byamee said has come to pass, as the Narran Lake shows, with its large sheet of water, spreading for miles, the home of thousands of wild fowl" (Langloh Parker, 1998).

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.

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