3.1 Overview

3.1.1 Links with Our Times

The history, culture, beliefs and rituals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples stretch back to distant time. Scientists estimate that the story of Aboriginal Australia began between 60,000 and 120,000 years ago. This is a story of the world’s longest continuous culture.

The epic history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lies carved into the rock faces and beneath the soils of this ancient land. The remains of tens of thousands of years of human occupation provide modern Australia with a connection to the past. At archaeological sites such as those at Lake Mungo in New South Wales and Badu Island in the Torres Strait, evidence is revealed of the life and culture of ancient communities. Archaeologists have discovered sites of human occupation on the Australian continent from at least 60,000 years ago and evidence of human activity in the Torres Strait dating to 4,000 years ago.

Through the ages, the relationship between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their land survived and continues today in stories, songs, dancing and art. Today, archaeologists conduct their research in partnership with local communities, drawing on the knowledge held by the traditional custodians of the land.

Big Questions

As you work through this topic, look for information that will help you to answer these questions:

1. Who were the people of ancient Australia?
2. How did Australia’s geography shape ancient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their culture?
3. What evidence exists about Australia’s ancient past?
4. Why is conservation of Australia’s ancient past important?
5. Why is the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples important to modern-day Australia?

Starter Questions

1. When did the human occupation of Australia begin?
2. How do you think people from pre-literate (without reading and writing) societies recorded their history and beliefs?
3. Suggest ways in which archaeologists today could work with the traditional custodians of the land.
3.2 Examining the evidence

3.2.1 How do we know about ancient Australia?

The history and beliefs of ancient Australia were not written onto clay tablets or scrolls of papyrus. Modern archaeologists often begin their study of the life and culture of ancient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by talking and consulting with the traditional owners of the land.

**From oral tradition and archaeology**

Our ancient past was remembered through the spoken word. This oral history was passed down through the generations. As such, the archaeological record of our ancient past is incomplete. Archaeologists gather their evidence from ancient occupation sites such as camps, **quarries**, **shell middens** and fish traps, burial areas, ceremonial and sacred sites. Archaeologists interpret layers of sediment, charcoal, clay and sand. Sites, such as Lake Mungo in the Willandra Lakes region of western New South Wales, are studied and interpreted not only by archaeologists, but also geologists, palaeontologists and anthropologists.

**SOURCE 1** Newspaper account of archaeological excavations at Barrow Island, Western Australia

Boodie Cave on Barrow Island is yielding an ancient secret of global significance: resourceful, well-fed humans were living in its limestone chambers more than 50,000 years ago, several thousand years earlier than archaeologists had estimated.

The startling evidence has been unearthed in surgically excavated pits on Barrow, Western Australia’s second largest island, 50km off the Pilbara coast. Thousands of tiny artefacts lie in sediment dated to 50,000 years old . . . There are even older dates of 53,000 years from grains mixed in with fragments of a shellfish meal. . . . “People talked about it, and dates of 47,000 for Aboriginal occupation have been well accepted, but there was no hard data before.”

Barrow Island was once part of the original coastal plain of northwest Australia, now drowned. For three years, teams from UWA, the University of Queensland, James Cook University and Sacramento University have dug pits in the cave floor, unearthing evidence that early Australians lived off marine and terrestrial life along the limestone ridges until sea levels rose and Barrow became an island 7500 years ago.

And they dined well in a stunningly productive landscape, Veth says. “You take off the sterile soil surface and . . . in layers below are (the remains of) turtle, oyster, crocodile, porpoise, sea urchin and freshwater mussel. It’s like a seafood basket, only 50 times richer. There are also the bones of marsupial carnivores and kongaroos — these people were eating better than we do.”

Several traditional owners also helped, such as Eden Bobby from the Kuruma Marthudunera Aboriginal Corporation. “It was a privilege to see first-hand how archaeologists use scientific techniques to understand how the old people of this land lived tens of thousands of years ago,” he said.

Most intriguing are material clues to a resourceful people who harvested food and traded items over possibly hundreds of kilometres. “Heating stones” were nestled among ancient turtle remains, large quartzite pebbles carried back from inland gorges to act as cooking agents. Baler shells show signs of being shaped into spoons or incised with mysterious markings . . . “One of the big questions of Australian archeology is ‘When did Aboriginal people get here?’” “To jump over that 50,000-year mark, with the reliable results of Peter and his team, will attract a lot of international interest in this find.” So when exactly did the First Australians make landfall? “That’s the big question,” McNiven says. “We’re now able to say it’s at least 50–53,000 years ago. It’s getting earlier and earlier all the time.”

Lore and museums

‘Caring for country’ is a very important responsibility taken on by many Indigenous Australian communities. To Aboriginal people ‘country’ refers to the traditional land to which a person belongs, or the land of their Dreaming. In caring for their country the traditional owners of the land share knowledge and pass on the lore.
Non-indigenous people and government institutions, like museums, also have a very important role to play in protecting and conserving the heritage, culture and artefacts of ancient Australia. Museums are the places where the stories of many people, places and times can be told. The National Museum of Australia preserves and displays collections of artefacts that represent our history from ancient to modern times.

Artefacts become wonderful sources of information when they are given a background. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and objects come to life when they are interpreted by people who have traditional knowledge and understanding. Connecting the oral traditions with the museum objects helps us to see the images and hear the voices of ancient Australia. What survived from the ancient past can then give us a glimpse of the world as it was for the first Australians.

I look at the feathers that the women would have collected, made and danced with. I wonder what song they were singing while they danced. Rightfully, this should have been handed down to someone's daughter and the story handed down too. It's sad that we don't have the whole meaning of them, that they are just objects.

### Source 2
Denise Lovett of the Gunditjmara people (western Victoria) explaining the importance of connecting artefacts, such as the emu-feather skirt made by her ancestors, with the object's cultural background.

### Source 3
An emu-feather dance skirt, made and worn by Wendy Berick of the Dja Dja Wurrung people (Melbourne, Victoria).

### 3.2 Putting It All Together

**Check Your Understanding**

1. What is an artefact? Give an example.
2. Why do modern archaeologists talk to today's traditional owners of the land?

**Using Historical Sources as Evidence**

3. Suggest why the sources we have from archaeology may not give a complete picture of life in ancient Australia.
4. Why is the evidence found at Boodle Cave in Source 1 described as ‘startling’?
5. What were some of the ‘material remains’ that were found at Barrow Island (Source 1)?
6. What assumptions could you make about resources used by people in ancient Australia from an examination of Source 3?

**Determining Historical Significance**

7. ‘Artefacts from ancient Australia can only reveal their true meaning if their cultural background is also considered.’ Explain what you understand by this statement. Sources 2 and 3 may help you to do this.
8. Consider the ways we can learn about ancient Australia as presented in this subtopic. Rank them from most useful to least useful as a way of learning about ancient Australia's past. Justify your ranking.

### Did You Know?

Stone tools are the longest lasting objects that archaeologists find because organic substances such as plants and animals perish after only a few hundred years. Nature sometimes preserves objects such as the wooden boomerangs that survived in the waterlogged peat bog of South Australia’s Wyrie Swamp for over 10,000 years and the 20,000-year-old bone tools at Devil’s Lair in Western Australia.

**Artefact** an object made or changed by humans.
3.3 The first people of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands

3.3.1 The peopling of an ancient continent

For the last two million years the Earth’s climate has gone through periods of change. During the Ice Ages the level of the ocean dropped up to 150 metres below the present level. From 80 000 to 10 000 years ago the sea levels remained so low that Papua New Guinea, the Torres Strait Islands and Tasmania were linked to the Australian mainland.

Scientists generally believe that the first Australians made the journey from South-East Asia sometime during a long Ice Age period. It would have been possible to walk much of the way and still stay in sight of land when crossing the water. It is thought that the ocean levels were at their lowest approximately 55 000 years ago. Later, as the climate became wetter and warmer the sea levels rose and the land bridge between mainland Australia and Papua New Guinea flooded and formed the Torres Strait.

**SOURCE 1** Possible migration routes of the forebears of Australia’s Indigenous peoples. The lowest sea levels in the last 120 000 years occurred about 20 000, 70 000 and 90 000 BP (Before the Present). Sea levels were lower then because large amounts of water were locked up as ice at the Earth’s poles.

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Ice Ages: long periods during which glaciers covered much of the northern hemisphere.

BP (Before the Present): a term used by archaeologists instead of BCE (Before the Common Era) for when time periods are vast. See subtopic 1.2 for more information.

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62 Jacaranda History Alive 7 Victorian Curriculum
Aboriginal peoples

Archaeologists do not agree on the length of time people have lived on the Australian continent. The beginning of human occupation of Australia is generally agreed to date back to the Pleistocene Period, a vast period in time lasting from approximately 2.5 million years ago until 10 500 BP. During this period there were great changes in climate and sea levels. The natural environment and landscape were constantly being reshaped.

In the early 1960s it was commonly believed that Aboriginal people had inhabited Australia for only 9000 years. By 1980, radiocarbon dating had pushed the dates for settlement of our continent back a further 30 000 years. Scientists and archaeologists continue to debate the topic as new evidence and research technology develops. The remains of tools found in Victoria support a date of occupation in that region as far back as 70 000 years ago.

It is possible that the Aboriginal settlement of Australia occurred over many generations and that the first Australians travelled along different routes. Scientists continue to debate and question the theories of Aboriginal arrival and occupation of our continent. There are currently three main theories:

1. Joseph Birdsell, an American anthropologist, suggested that small groups of people settled the inland areas of Australia first and then spread rapidly across the continent as their population increased. Birdsell’s fast-track model estimated that within 3000 years the settlement would have extended all the way to the eastern and southern coasts.

2. Sandra Bowdler, an Australian archaeologist, believes the first Australians were a seafaring people who selected coastal areas for their first settlement communities. Bowdler’s theory has the spread of the population moving gradually from the coast and along the river systems to avoid the harsh deserts. Central Australia would have been the last place of occupation.

3. David Horton, an Australian biologist and archaeologist, points to the adaptable and varied nature of traditional Aboriginal communities to suggest that a wide variety of coastal, river and woodland environments would have been the starting place for groups of early settlers who progressively spread across the continent.

Torres Strait Islander peoples

The rising sea levels at the end of the last Ice Age created Australia’s modern coastline and the islands of the Torres Strait. The Torres Strait Islands are located to the north of the Australian mainland where the Coral and Arafura Seas meet. The islands of the Torres Strait vary greatly in landscape and were mainly formed from the remains of:

- the isolated tops of a range of plateau land extending from Cape York, the northern tip of the Australian continent, to the low hills of the southern coast of Papua New Guinea. These are the rocky islands because they are the remains of the former land bridge and are an extension of Australia’s Great Dividing Range
- the extinct volcanoes of Mer, Erub and Ugar located on the eastern side of the Torres Strait and the northern end of the Great Barrier Reef. These islands supported large gardens because of the rich volcanic soil
- coral reefs in the central area. These are mostly cays with poor quality sandy soil and little water
- mangrove mud flats in the top-west. These were formed by silt deposits from the large rivers of Papua New Guinea and are rich in wildlife.

Land bridges would have been a migration route and possible place of settlement for early peoples during the Ice Age. The earliest archaeological evidence of permanent settlement of the Torres Strait Islands dates to 4000 years ago. Earlier evidence has been destroyed by powerful tides created by rising sea levels. However, by 2500 years ago a robust seafaring culture was well established on many of the islands.

The people of the Torres Strait Islands are the second group of Indigenous Australians, and are not Aboriginal people who live on the islands of the Strait. According to Torres Strait Island legend, the settlers of the eastern islands had come from the Fly River region of Papua New Guinea. Islanders believe that the people of the western and central region had their origin in the rivers and coasts of Papua New Guinea’s southern region. The Torres Strait Islander people generally share the features of Melanesian culture with the people of Papua New Guinea. Scientists believe that the first inhabitants of Papua New Guinea and the Torres Strait came from Wallacea (modern Indonesia) approximately 70 000 years ago.

radiocarbon dating a way of dating objects of plant or animal origin according to the amount of carbon left with them

DID YOU KNOW?

It is believed that Aboriginal Australians crossed the land bridge that connected Tasmania to the mainland more than 30 000 years ago. When sea levels rose and covered the land bridge to form Bass Strait, these early Australians remained isolated in Tasmania.

plateau a high, flat topped landform

cay a small island found on coral reefs

mangrove area in a tropical or subtropical climate where vegetation grows in salty or brackish water

silt fine sand or earth particles carried and deposited by running water

Melanesian belonging to the island groups of the South Pacific, north-east of Australia

Topic 3 Ancient Australia
The Torres Strait contains 247 islands and hundreds of cays, reefs and sandbanks. This image shows part of the Murray Islands in the Torres Strait: Waier Island (foreground) with Murray Island in the background. The Murray Islands are the vents of volcanoes that were flooded by rising sea levels 8000 to 10 000 years ago after the last Ice Age.

**SOURCE 2**

3.3.1 Activities

**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

1. State whether each of the following statements is true or false.
   a. Archaeologists agree on the exact time Australia was occupied by humans.
   b. Scientists believe that the Torres Strait was formed when sea levels rose and the land bridge between mainland Australia and Papua New Guinea was flooded.
   c. Evidence for human occupation of Victoria can be dated back to over 90 000 years ago.
   d. Archaeologist Sandra Bowdler believes central Australia would have been the last area of the continent to be occupied by Aboriginal Australians.
   e. Australia was once connected to Papua New Guinea by a land bridge.

2. Briefly describe the various landscapes of the Torres Strait Islands.

**USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE**

3. Using the map in **SOURCE 1** and the information in the text, describe how the Ice Age changed Australia and from where archaeologists believe the migration of ancient people to Australia came.

4. How do you think the location and geography of the Torres Strait Islands would have influenced occupation of this area by early humans?

3.3.2 Explaining creation — the Dreaming

As human occupation of the Australian continent proceeded, hundreds of different spiritual beliefs and cultural traditions as well as hundreds of different languages developed. However, despite these regional differences, Aboriginal communities did share a common belief in a time known as the Dreaming. The Dreaming explained creation and the nature of the world, the place that every person had in that world and the importance of ritual and tradition. The Dreaming also taught people about their country and where water, food and shelter would be found.
The Dreaming was handed from one generation to the next through stories, music, dance and art. It told of the time that the ancestral beings moved across the continent creating and moulding the land and its rivers, lakes, mountains and all living creatures. As the ancestral beings travelled across the landscape they left a trail that could be understood as mountains, waterholes, plant formations and other features of the geography. This trail marked out the traditional land and boundaries of each tribal group. The landforms provided ancient people with their evidence of the Dreaming. After the ancestral beings had finished creating the world they were transformed into trees, rocks, rivers and all the natural features of country. These became the sacred places of Aboriginal culture.

**SOURCE 3** From Regina McKenzie, *Towards a New Dreaming*

Dreaming gives us our history, our origin, where we started from. They are not made up stories, they are factual events from long ago. Our people have made them into stories so that they are easier for children to understand.

The Dreaming established the laws and the nature of the relationships between different groups of Aboriginal people. The links between people were built upon their connections to the land and to the Dreaming. Aboriginal tradition taught people that the place of their birth and their clan established the country they belonged to.

The belief in the Dreaming cannot be accurately translated into English because there is no equivalent set of beliefs in non-Indigenous society. Many Aboriginal words describe the idea of the Dreaming, according to the language group a person belongs to:

- **Ungud** — the Ngarinyin people of the Kimberley region in Western Australia
- **Kulbul** — the Yaraldi people of the lower Murray region of South Australia
- **Wongar** — the Yolngu people of northeast Arnhem Land

Some Aboriginal people claim the origin of their ancient ancestors in Australia, at a time when humans formed with the landscape. Their Dreaming beliefs provide stories of an Aboriginal presence on the continent since the beginning of time. This Dreaming belief explains the origin of all life in Australia and denies theories of the arrival of people from South-East Asia to Australia during a previous Ice Age.

**SOURCE 4** Sacred Wandjina rock art painted on the wall at Bachsten Creek in West Kimberley. The Wandjina are ancestral beings of the Kimberley region and the bringers of rain, who made and controlled the weather and fertility.

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**ancestral beings**
gods or deities who taught people how to live and the rules of society and who are regarded as the direct ancestors of Aboriginal peoples living today

**clan**
a group of people of common descent or ancestry
Tagai was a great fisherman. One day he and his crew of 12 were fishing from their outrigger canoe. They were unable to catch any fish, so Tagai left the canoe and went onto the nearby reef to look for fish there. As the day grew hotter and hotter, the waiting crew of Zugubals (beings who took on human form when they visited Earth) grew impatient and frustrated. Their thirst grew, but the only drinking water in the canoe belonged to Tagai. Their patience ran out and they drank Tagai’s water.

When Tagai returned, he was furious that the Zugubals had consumed all of his water for the voyage. In his rage he killed all 12 of his crew. He returned them to the sky and placed them in two groups: six men in Usal (the Pleiades star cluster) and the other six Utimal (Orion). He told his crew to stay in the northern sky and to keep away from him.

Tagai can be seen in the southern skies, standing in a canoe in the Milky Way. His left hand is the Southern Cross holding a spear. His right hand is a group of stars in the constellation Corvus holding a fruit called Eugina. He is standing on his canoe, formed by the stars of Scorpius.

### 3.3.2 Activities

**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

1. Fill in the blank spaces.
   
   The __________ is a __________ system that is shared by Aboriginal peoples. It describes a time when __________ beings moved across the continent creating the features of the __________ and all living __________.

2. How was the Dreaming handed down to successive generations of Aboriginal peoples?

3. Explain why the belief in the Dreaming cannot be accurately translated into English.

4. Why are the stars so important to Torres Strait Islander people?

**USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE**

5. Read **SOURCE 3**.
   
   a. Why was the Dreaming made into stories?
   
   b. How does the Dreaming connect people with nature?

6. **SOURCE 4** shows a representation of a creator god for many Aboriginal communities. Describe how the ancient artist portrayed this ancestral being and why it would have been important for ancient peoples to express their stories through their art.

7. Write a brief recount of the Dreaming story in **SOURCE 5** and explain what such stories could teach a listener.

### 3.3 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

**USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE**

1. What evidence do scientists examine in developing their theories on the human settlement of Australia?

2. Suggest reasons why archaeologists have developed different theories explaining how Aboriginal people occupied the continent.

**ANALYSING CAUSE AND EFFECT**

3. a. List all the dates and events mentioned in this subtopic in chronological order from earliest to latest and draw a timeline.

   b. Are there any events you can say led i) directly and ii) indirectly to another? Why is this task difficult?

**IDENTIFYING CONTINUITY AND CHANGE**

4. Write a short paragraph explaining why the acknowledgment of the Dreaming as a set of creation beliefs is important in modern Australia.

**DETERMINING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

5. Does it matter that experts cannot agree on when early humans arrived in Australia? Explain your answer.
3.4 Managing an ancient land

3.4.1 The influence of the environment on ancient Aboriginal communities

The landscape and climate of ancient Australia was constantly changing. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities had to develop many methods of hunting and managing their challenging natural environment. Indigenous Australian communities are widely recognised as having gained an enormous practical knowledge of land and resource management. In traditional communities food was harvested very efficiently, leaving time for the development of cultural activities. The movement of camps was done according to the community understanding of patterns of climate, marine and insect life, plant growth and the habits of wild animals.

Firestick farming

Fire was central to Aboriginal life and eventually shaped much of the Australian landscape. Fire was a powerful tool that was a part of nearly every activity of daily life. SOURCE 2 shows the uses of fire.

Carrying a firestick appeared to be an ancient custom. Setting fire to the bush and the grasslands is a practice known as firestick farming. Aboriginal people would often carry firesticks or bundles of smouldering banksia branches to set fire to the dry leaves and grass and to burn ground vegetation. These small scale fires were lit during the cooler seasons when the weather conditions could ensure the fires did not burn out of control. Firebreaks were also put in place to contain fire.

SOURCE 2 Uses of fire in ancient Aboriginal culture

1. Cooking food and catching animals by flushing them from burrows and driving them into traps
2. Repelling insects and removing snakes from long grass surrounding campsites
3. Manufacturing tools such as spears and stripping bark from trees in the process of making canoes
4. Sending messages by smoke over long distances and clearing the ground through recognised travel pathways
5. Cleaning wounds and scarring the skin for initiation and ritual
6. Scaring off evil spirits and burning the bodies of the dead in regions where this was the funeral tradition
7. Lighting the night for community gatherings and providing warmth for sleeping
8. Regularly burning the forest undergrowth to prevent large scale bush fires
Aboriginal people knew that they could use fire to manage their land and to produce the foods they wanted. Fire changed patterns of plant growth and animal life across the many different landscapes of the continent. The grasslands were burnt to promote regrowth of lush new grass. This was done with the permission of the traditional owners during the season when the grass was dry and of little nutritional value. Thousands of years of burning increased the size of the open grasslands. This encouraged the populations of a variety of the grass-eating animals, such as the kangaroo. Fire increased the availability of food for people who hunted and foraged. Bush potatoes and other edible seeds and ground plants flourished in the more open environment left by small-scale fires. Scientists believe that small animals, like the bilby, were threatened with extinction when Aboriginal firestick farming was no longer being regularly practised.

**Source 3** Joseph Lycett, the early nineteenth century convict artist, painted images of Aboriginal life as it would have been in pre-European times. Lycett’s paintings show fire being used as a tool to catch animals and create grasslands. Early European explorers often noted open country with scattered trees that looked like well-tended parkland. Firestick farming created the landscape that Europeans found in 1788.

### 3.4.1 Activities

**Check Your Understanding**

1. Why did Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have to develop so many methods of hunting and managing the land?
2. How many seasons are shown in Source 1? List them and show beside each the corresponding months of our calendar.
3. Explain how fire increased food supplies for Aboriginal communities.

**Using Historical Sources as Evidence**

4. Use the information from the text and Source 3 to answer the following questions.
   a. How important was firestick farming to the Aboriginal way of life?
   b. What was the impact on the environment of firestick farming?
   c. What do you think were the consequences for the environment when firestick farming stopped?
   d. How reliable do you think Source 3 is in providing historians with evidence of ancient Aboriginal land-management practices? Give reasons for your answer.
3.4.2 Managing the land in the Torres Strait Islands

Archaeologists have found evidence of farming in Papua New Guinea dating back 9000 years. The people living in the fertile highland regions farmed the fertile soils of their tropical forests. These ancient farmers also used fire as a tool when **slashing and burning** to clear the land. The people moved each year to new parts of the forest to plant their crops. The soils of their gardens were left **fallow** for a decade before the people returned to plant again. In forest areas with poor soil the gardens were left fallow for up to 25 years. Farming was combined with a hunting and foraging way of life.

**Farming practices**

Farming was also practised in the Torres Strait Islands during ancient times. Crops and farming knowledge spread from the southern coast of Papua New Guinea to the people of the Torres Strait. The most common crop grown in modern times is the sweet potato, a food that came originally from Peru and was transported across the Pacific Ocean with the European exploration of the 1600s. Ancient Torres Strait communities cultivated a wide variety of crops, according to the particular geographic conditions of the island:

- People on the islands to the north-west, located close to the coast of Papua New Guinea, relied most heavily on agriculture for their food supplies. The people grew the **taro** plant as their main crop; they also established gardens growing bananas away from the tidal swamps on the surrounding uninhabited islands.
- People on the islands to the north-east, where the volcanic soil was moist and fertile, grew coconuts, taro, bananas and a variety of smaller fruits and vegetables.
- People on the islands on the west and closest to the Australian mainland, such as Muralag Island, only farmed on a small scale. Taro was grown as an addition to food supplies that were mainly drawn from the sea. The soils and climate of the rockier islands were not as well-suited to agriculture and so people continued to depend on a hunting and foraging lifestyle.

**SOURCE 4** A nineteenth century painting of village life at Erub (Darley) Island in the Torres Strait. Erub Island is located within the eastern region of the Torres Strait. Its rich volcanic soil supported the farming of taro, bananas and a range of vegetables. At the time of painting, the island supported approximately seven villages and 400 permanent residents.

**Fishing practices**

While the different island groups of the Torres Strait had different landscapes and ocean conditions they all developed a seafaring culture. Even those who depended on their farming took to the sea for food and resources. Fishing was central to the Torres Strait way of life. The shallow waters, complex tropical reef systems and huge beds of **seagrass** created a great marine **ecosystem**.
At low tide men, women, and children may be seen searching the reef for shellfish and fish which have become imprisoned in rock-pools, but as a rule this simple collecting is done more by the women and children. Although serious fishing is more particularly men’s work the women also take a part, but definite fishing expeditions and the quest of dugong and turtle are confined to the men. Practically the fishing of the women is limited to that which they can undertake on the fringing reef of their home island.

Islanders constructed a wide range of tools for fishing such as harpoons and spears, hooks and lines, fish scoops and nets. They built stone walled fish traps and harvested over 450 different species of marine life. Islanders developed techniques of drying and preserving turtle and dugong flesh so that it could be kept for later eating and trading. Dugong and turtle were very important to the Torres Strait diet and the subject of Islander myth and legend. Archaeological excavations on the tiny Central Torres Strait Island of Koey Ngurtai uncovered a burial ground of carefully arranged dugong jaws, ribs, skulls and ear bones. Archaeologists suggest the site is of a ritual burial and linked to a Torres Strait Islander belief in the power of the sea and the magic associated with the hunting of the dugong.

3.4.2 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
1. Put the following sentences into correct order and then use this as a short explanation of the importance of farming and hunting to ancient Torres Strait Islander people.
   a. Archaeological excavations on the island of Koey Ngurtai uncovered evidence of the ritual burial of a dugong suggesting the islanders’ strong spiritual connection with the sea.
   b. The particular geographic conditions of each group of islands influenced how and what people farmed.
   c. Torres Strait Islander people cultivated a wide range of crops such as taro, bananas and coconuts.
   d. Torres Strait myths and legends provide further evidence of the importance of the sea.
   e. Farming knowledge spread from Papua New Guinea to the islands of the Torres Strait.
   f. Despite the different landscapes all the islanders took to the sea for food and resources.
   g. Evidence of this can be seen in the wide range of tools for fishing such as harpoons and spears, hook and lines, fish scoops and nets.

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
2. Source 3 was painted by the English artist, Harden Melville. He was appointed the artist on board the HMS Fly and travelled extensively throughout the broader Pacific Island communities during the nineteenth century. Analyse the painting for the clues it gives you to life on the Torres Strait Islands. Describe the impression of lifestyle and the importance of the sea communicated by the artist in the painting.

3.4 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
1. How do the sources in this subtopic support the view that Aboriginal peoples lived in harmony with the land?
2. Imagine that you have accompanied one of the early nineteenth century explorers on their voyages across the continent and through the islands of the Torres Strait. Refer to the sources and text, and write a series of diary entries detailing some of the land management practices you have witnessed.

ANALYSING CAUSE AND EFFECT
3. Consider the geography and climate of ancient Australia and suggest reasons why Aboriginal communities remained small and why the family unit was of such importance.

DETERMINING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE
4. Management of land and natural resources was very important to all ancient Australian peoples. Explain how significant the natural environment was in shaping the beliefs and daily life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
3.5 Language and ceremony in ancient Australia

3.5.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages

As modern Australians, we are a multicultural people, as were the people of ancient Australia. The exact number of Aboriginal languages spoken when the Europeans arrived in Australia is unknown but it is estimated that there were approximately 250 separate language groups, with

SOURCE 1 Map depicting the language and social groups of Aboriginal Australia. Each separate group identified on the map may also contain within it smaller clan and dialect groups.

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hundreds of additional dialects of the main language groups. The spread of human settlement across Australia took generations; with so much time passing completely new languages had the opportunity to evolve. Ancient Australian communities developed varied cultural features and different languages because of the vastly different natural environments people lived in and the distances between them.

During the thousands of years of Aboriginal occupation of Australia the climate and conditions changed dramatically. Changes in climate would have affected water supply and where food could be hunted and collected. The rising Ice Age seas would have drowned many ancient communities and forced the first Australians to constantly adapt to the challenges of this shifting landscape. These different language groups could come into conflict with each other through population growth and competition for scarce resources.

Like Aboriginal peoples, the Torres Strait Islander people did not consider themselves a single unified group. Each group had their own language and traditions. There are two main languages spoken today:
• Meriam Mir in the eastern islands, which has two dialects and is related to the Papuan language called Kiwai. This language is spoken around the Fly River region of Papua New Guinea.
• Kala Lagaw Ya in the central and western islands, which has four dialects and is still widely spoken by Papuans and some Aboriginal communities.

3.5.1 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
1 State whether each of the following statements is true or false.
   a There were at least 250 Aboriginal languages spoken in Australia at the time of European settlement.
   b During the thousands of years of Aboriginal occupation of Australia there was little change in the climate.
   c Torres Strait Islander people all speak the same language.
   d The languages of the Torres Strait Islands show connections with both Aboriginal and Papua New Guinean peoples.
   e Ancient Australia was multicultural.

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
2 Source 1 shows very clear boundaries between the different language and social groups. Suggest reasons why the tribal areas were larger in the desert regions and smaller in the well-watered country.
3 If a person was to travel from modern-day Melbourne, in the land of the Woiwurrung people, how many language and social groups would the traveller pass through before arriving in modern-day Sydney, in the land of the Eora people? What conclusion could you make from your answer?

3.5.2 The role of ceremony in ancient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

Ceremonies are very important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies. Ceremony and ritual keep the knowledge of the Aboriginal Dreaming and Torres Strait Islander beliefs alive by expressing the connection between the people and their land. Ceremonies renew the connections between people and country by acting out and displaying ancestral lore and belief, and by teaching the ancient traditions to the next generation. Ceremonies encourage people to come together to recognise the past and the important role that tradition and belief continues to have.

The ceremonial leaders in Indigenous communities are the Elders. The Elders are the caretakers and keepers of sacred knowledge that must be passed down through the generations. Elders are not necessarily old people. The title is gained when a person is respected by the community and recognised as having an understanding of traditional lore, culture and spirituality.

Ceremonies also demonstrate respect and understanding. Welcome to Country is an ancient ceremony that recognised the boundaries of clan land which were clearly identified and understood by all clan members and their neighbours. While the details of the ceremony varied according to the traditions of each clan, the ceremony was conducted when members of one clan sought permission to enter another clan’s territory. The visitor was required to ask permission to enter country. This permission recognised that the custodians were agreeing to some sharing of the resources of their land, ocean, lakes or rivers.
When we talk about traditional country ... we mean something beyond the dictionary definition of the word. For Aboriginal Australians ... we might mean homeland, or tribal or clan area and we might mean more than just a place on the map. For us, country is a word for all the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with that area and its features. It describes the entirety of our ancestral domains.

SOURCE 2 The meaning of country, as explained by Aboriginal leader Professor Mick Dodson.

Before whitefellas came, it was the tradition of Aboriginals that when strangers came into their particular country to hunt or to gather, or to just pass through on their way to other places, that the host Aboriginals would go out to welcome them. When they met, there would be the formalities of greeting. Part of the ceremony of welcome could be the men sitting around and talking men’s business whilst the host women would take the visiting women and children to a women’s site to talk women’s business. When this was completed, the two groups would join again and the men would hunt for kangaroo, goannas or bush turkey — and the women would prepare an area for eating and would gather firewood and berries, fruit, nuts and lily roots for a meal. Then the ceremonies — the corroborees or jumbas would commence — and the dancing, the singing around the fire could well go on, not only all night, but sometimes for many nights in a row. Each jumba with a message — each with its own story — men, women and children taking part. Whilst during the day, the visiting tribe would be taken and shown the sites of significance and be told the stories of the spirit of the land they would be passing. In this way, the hosts believed that by the end of formalities, when the strangers were ready to move on — they would not be considered strangers but friends who now had the spirit of the country in their hearts — they carried the Wunggud with them — just like the people who lived there. They believed that once the spirit of the land was in their hearts then those people would never damage the land — they would love it and care for it like those whose home country it was ...
3.6 The ancient Australian economy

3.6.1 Trade tracks and songlines

Australia’s Indigenous peoples carefully managed their land and resources to ensure their food supplies were protected. Ancient language and clan groups remained largely self-sufficient. While food was not commonly exchanged, a complex trade network was established over thousands of years. The network extended over hundreds of kilometres, linking many clans and language groups together. The countless pathways of daily travel and trade crossed the continent and are known as the Dreaming tracks. The Dreaming tracks began with the stories told in ancient times of the journeys taken by the Dreaming ancestors. The pathways they took were marked out by the features of the landscape, such as water holes, hills and riverbeds. The people remembered these tracks as the *songlines*.

The *songlines*

As the ancestral beings travelled across Australia giving life, they created landmarks and named the geographical features of the land. The great rainbow serpent, commonly called Jarapiri in northern and central Australia, laid eggs that became the huge round boulders of Karlwekarlwe (the Devil’s Marbles). The serpent’s slithering and twisting created the rivers and waterholes. As the ancestral beings formed the land, they also established the laws and ‘sang’ the country into life. When they completed their work the ancestral beings returned to the sky, sea or land. The songs were the record of what they had done, and the means by which their story could be handed on to future generations of Aboriginal people.

The sequence of songs, or songlines, recorded the route the ancestral beings took on their journeys of creation. These routes, or Dreaming tracks, were the maps that gave Aboriginal people a detailed mental picture of their land and all the living creatures on it. Aboriginal Elders travelled the Dreaming tracks and taught their children how to sing their songlines in the correct order. This knowledge enabled people to make their way safely through country. The man with the best memory of the songlines was recognised as the clan songman and was responsible for ensuring the teaching of the songlines to young men through their years of initiation. The trade routes changed over long periods of time; nonetheless, the archaeological evidence of abandoned tools, shells and bones indicates the songline pathways were in continuous use by Aboriginal people for thousands of years.

**SOURCE 1** Donkeyman Lee Tjupurrula Kukatja’s artwork *Tingari Dreaming at Walawala* shows the landforms of the region around Kiwirrkura, approximately 400 kilometres west of Alice Springs. Aboriginal artists used symbolism as a way of creating a map of country and the sacred sites. These artworks are maps of the Dreaming places created by the ancestral beings, in the same way that the songlines formed a map, sung in short verses, of the ancestral being’s creative journeys.

![Symbols commonly used in Aboriginal art](image-url)
3.6.1 Activities

**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

1. Fill in the gaps.
   The pathways of daily travel and trade across the continent are known as ________. Travel pathways are marked out by features of the landscape and remembered by Aboriginal people as the ________. The songlines recorded the journey taken by the ________, as they travelled across the land. The ________ gave people a detailed mental image of their land that enabled them to travel safely through country.

**USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE**

2. Would **SOURCE 1** be considered a primary or secondary source? Explain.

3. In what way could you compare the symbols used in Indigenous art with, for example, Egyptian hieroglyphs or Sumerian cuneiform?

3.6.2 Trade networks

Archaeological sites across Australia have revealed evidence of the extensive trade networks that crisscrossed ancient Australia. Trade took place between neighbours and regional groups, but also with those who were vast distances away, serving both practical and cultural purposes. Many different items were traded:

- **Stone** was the heaviest trade item and was often carried in parcels of paper bark tied with string. Evidence of the harvesting and grinding of grass seeds to make flour has been found dating from 3000 BP. The flat-surface grinding stones were a major trade item. Suitable slabs of sandstone were carried by a relay of traders from north-west Queensland, across a distance of 500 kilometres, to reach the plains of Diamantina. The volcanic stone prized for axe heads came from a quarry on Mount William, north of Melbourne. The Wurundjeri mined it and traded it to the north where it was used to cut the bark for canoes that floated along the Murray River.

- **Ochre** from Pukardu in the Flinders Ranges was mined and traded 500 kilometres north along a network stretching across South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. Small decorated wooden objects called *message sticks* were sent ahead of the trade parties to the custodians of the mines suggesting goods suitable for ochre exchange. The Pukardu ochre was highly sought after because it was believed to have particular spiritual value and was used for body decoration on important ceremonial occasions. Ochre exchange gifts from the people of the north included black manganese paint, boomerangs and spears, nets and bags of grass seeds.

- A small shrub grown in Central Australia called *pitjuri* was traded from markets held on the banks of the Cooper, Diamantina and Georgina Rivers. Pitjuri is a nicotine-like drug used to relieve hunger, tiredness and pain. People from the north exchanged their spears, glue made from spinifex, stone knives and pearl shell for the pitjuri. From the east came wooden shields and spear shafts made from reeds, and from the west came ochre and light wooden spears. The people from the south exchanged weapons, stone axe heads and possum skins for the pitjuri plant. The trade of raw materials, such as ochre, wood and stone, was very important to ancient communities. The most common trade items were, nevertheless, the manufactured goods. The clan groups developed highly specialised skills that were widely recognised by other peoples across the land. The beautifully carved wooden bowls of Central Australia, for example, or the finest spears from the region around Alice Springs were highly valued trade items.

**The pearl-shell trade**

Of all the goods traded across ancient Australia, the pearl shell probably travelled the furthest. The journey of the pearl shell began when the Ngaluma people collected the shell from their beaches and from the country of **SOURCE 2** The major trade routes of ancient Australia.
the Kariara and Ngarla people who lived to their north. People also set off on rafts made from mangrove wood to collect the shells from offshore reefs. The Ngaluma traded the shell with the Indjibandji, Njamal and Njangamarda-Iparuka people in exchange for spears made from mulga and witjuti wood. The shells were carefully wrapped in soft bark to protect them as they passed through many hands on their journey across the continent. When they reached the Fitzroy River they were at the crossroads of several trade routes that were under the control of the Koneyandi people. This opened up to trade with the western desert peoples. The prized pearl shells, flaked stone blades and spear points from the Kimberley were traded for boomerangs and beautifully carved spears. The pearl shell became more valued the further it travelled from the Kimberley coastline. Evidence of the distance of the ancient pearl-shell trade has been found across a vast area of Australia; from the tropics in the far north to the mallee scrub between Adelaide and the coastline of Victoria.

3.6.2 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
1 Briefly explain the importance of the following trade items to Indigenous communities.
- Pearl shell
- Ochre
- Grinding stones
- Volcanic stone
- Pitjuri

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
2 Referring to SOURCE 2, identify the region of Australia where the trade in greenstone began.
3 Greenstone was used for thousands of years by Aboriginal Communities to manufacture ground edge axes. Explain what the study of greenstone could tell archaeologists about ancient Aboriginal trade, travel and technology.

3.6.3 Trade practices
Aboriginal communities lived in small self-contained communities for most of the year. The seasons determined the availability of food and resources, and the paths people took through country. An important part of the yearly cycle was the annual gathering of the clans. These great gatherings always took place during times of plenty, when prized food was in good supply. The opportunity to feast on the large freshwater eels of Western Victoria or the Bogong moths in the high country of the Snowy Mountains provided the opportunity to conduct ceremonies, organise marriages, decide matters of law and exchange goods at the market place.

Clan gatherings
The clan gatherings always began with a formal invitation through an exchange of message sticks across country. The western district of Victoria was one of the most densely populated areas of the continent. The people of this region, such as the Yaadwa and the Yaara, shared their resources and engaged in trade when the land was able to provide for a sudden increase in population. An abundance of eels, kangaroo, mushrooms and a variety of root vegetables meant the land could cater for visitors, without bringing food shortages and hardship on the traditional custodians. With eel feasting came markets at Mount Noorat where exchanges took place of valuable items such as spear points, possum cloaks, acacia resin, seashells and net bags. The leftover eels became a takeaway product that was dried and wrapped in kangaroo skin for transporting.

Did you know?
Dr Builth, an archaeologist who studied the eel-farming practices of the Gunditjmara people in Victoria’s Lake Condor wetlands, has estimated that these farms could have fed up to 10 000 people.
of food was available with the melting of the snow. Emu, possum, snake meat and Bogong moths provided a rich diet. Every year the Ngarigo and Walgalu people would send out their message stick invitations to the neighbouring peoples. Many clans would gather at Jindabyne and on the Tumut and Wollondibby Rivers for the purposes of trade and ceremony. Groups of men travelled into the high country where the Bogong moths were smoked out of their resting places in the rock crevices. The moths were caught in nets and then cooked into rissoles that were transported down the mountain for all to enjoy during the ceremonial feasting.

The message sticks pictured belonged to the Yirandali language Dalleburra People, Queensland. The messages are written in symbols, not script.

3.6.3 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
1 State whether each of the following statements is true or false.
   a Message sticks were sent before the exchange of goods took place.
   b Trade often happened alongside ceremonial events.
   c Clans gathered when seasons were bad to exchange scarce food resources.
   d Aboriginal communities in ancient Australia understood how to preserve food.
   e Aboriginal clans generally shared food rather than traded it.

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
2 What do the messages on the message sticks in SOURCE 3 tell you about what was important to Aboriginal Australians?
3 Why might the messages on message sticks have been written in symbols, not languages?

3.6.4 Torres Strait trade

The farmers and fishermen of the Torres Strait Islands had more food than they needed at certain times of the year. Turtle and dugong could be dried, stored and traded with the Aboriginal people of Cape York and the coastal people of Papua New Guinea. A range of root vegetables were also well suited to trade because they did not deteriorate quickly in the tropical heat.

SOURCE 4 Dugout canoes swept along by two or three sails provided the transport for people and their trade goods between the Torres Strait Islands and the coasts of Papua New Guinea and the Australian mainland.
Islander people of each language group traded with their immediate neighbours. The Kaurareg people were the only Torres Strait Islander people trading directly with the Cape York communities. The trade between the two groups took place on tiny Morilag Island, which lay very close to the Cape York coastline. The Kaurareg acted as traders, exchanging goods on behalf of all the other islanders. The Kaurareg exchanged goods such as finely crafted Murilag Island dugong harpoons and small bamboo items for the spears and ochres from Cape York’s Gudang people.

Trade was critical for survival on the Torres Strait Islands. The canoes the islanders relied upon for fishing and transport were obtained through a complicated trade link with the Saibai people living in the estuary region of Papua New Guinea’s Fly River. Trees large enough for the construction of a canoe hull do not grow on the Torres Strait Islands. The Saibai traded with highly skilled canoe builders living in the heavily wooded forests further up river. The Saibai then adapted the single outrigger canoes that were only suitable for lagoon and Fly River journeys. They turned them into double outrigger canoes and then added masts and woven nipa-palm sails ready for the rough conditions of the open seas of the Strait. The Torres Strait Islander people exchanged shellfish and dried fish, turtle and dugong for their new double outrigger canoes, drums, sago, bows and arrows, cassowary and bird of paradise feathers.

3.6.4 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
1. Create your own mind map titled Torres Strait Island Trade. Identify the different trade relationships and the goods exchanged.

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
2. The Torres Strait Islander people and some coastal Aboriginal communities indicated direction by referring to the name given to the wind that came from that direction. The wind and the sea were central to the life in the Torres Strait. Referring to SOURCE 4, write two sentences evaluating the importance of the dugout canoes to life and culture of the Torres Strait Islander people.

3.6 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
1. Use the sources and text in this subtopic to write a paragraph describing the importance of trade in the economy of ancient Australia. You could begin your paragraph with the topic sentence: The trade practices of ancient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples demonstrate a thriving economy based on exchange and ceremony.
2. Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting the trade practices of ancient Aboriginal communities with those of Torres Strait Islander communities. Ensure you mention any similarities and any differences in your answer.

IDENTIFYING CONTINUITY AND CHANGE
3. Ancient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples used the natural resources of the land. What were these resources and how do we now value these in the modern Australian economy? What natural resources appear to be most valued in modern Australia?

DETERMINING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE
4. What impact do you think the arrival of Europeans would have had on the ancient economy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

3.7 Society, custom and culture

3.7.1 Kinship

Kinship today plays a much more important role in Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities than in Western society. Kinship relationships are more complex than the Western notion of family and involve strict rules and obligations. Kinship links are tied to spiritual belief as the Dreaming ancestors were considered to have genealogical links with living people and their land, and so are important in deciding each person’s kinship connections.
The kinship networks were strengthened through ceremonial exchange of goods. Younger men, for example, may be expected to give the gift of a spear to an older man from another clan who was connected through a kinship arrangement. The ties would be cemented by the older man’s involvement in the younger man’s initiation ceremonies. As trade took place over very long distances, possibly requiring movement through country belonging to different language groups, the kinship agreements were very complex. Trade goods were carefully given out to ensure all kin connections were recognised. Different traditions and ceremonies had to be learned and respected to make sure that alliances were protected and the exchange of goods could continue. The act of giving was part of ceremonial life and was very important in honouring kinship.

The kinship system was also a very important feature of life in the Torres Strait because conflict over scarce resources was more common. Trade was essential for people living in tiny island communities. Trade expeditions and negotiations were often very anxious occasions between communities where property and kinship rights were in dispute. Visiting trading parties kept their canoes near the shoreline to enable a hasty retreat if the kinship system failed to keep harmony among the different Torres Strait clans and language groups.

**SOURCE 1** Excerpt from a speech given by Bryon Powell, representing the Kulin National Heritage Organisation, explaining the clan links of the Kulin people, May 2000

The Kulin nation was made up of five Aboriginal tribes which took up a fair swag of land in Central Victoria, centring on Melbourne itself... They were made up of clans, family groups. And what happened with the five tribes, they had commonalities in language, custom, traditions, burial rights, and very strong trade links. And I knew the Woiwurrung and Boon Wurrung, they were exceptionally close, they actually inter-married to strengthen those ties, they traded between themselves...

**SOURCE 2** When outsiders were invited onto Wurundjeri lands a ceremony called Tanderrum was held. The ceremony granted safe passage through Wurundjeri country and a ritual exchange of gifts. The nineteenth century Charles Troedel painting shows Wurundjeri clan members fishing and camping at Merri Creek near Melbourne.

3.7.1 Activities

**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

1. Briefly explain what the kinship system is and why it is of such significance to Indigenous communities.
2. How are kinship and trade connected?
3. Why did visiting trading parties in the Torres Strait Islands keep their canoes close to the shore?

**USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE**

4. **SOURCE 1** is a modern explanation of what kinship means to Indigenous Australians. Identify the key beliefs and values expressed in the source that have continued to be of significance.
5. What does the artist of **SOURCE 2** suggest about the nature of Indigenous society, and how does this contribute to our understanding of the role of the kinship and ceremony in daily life?
3.7.2 Totems
The many language groups of ancient Australia reflected the great variety of cultural beliefs. The spiritual connection with the land was nevertheless shared by all. The spiritual beliefs of the Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal peoples shaped Indigenous lore across the land.

All life came from the land, and so Indigenous tradition and ceremony centred on fulfilling one's obligations to the land. As the land provided everything for the people, caring for the health of country was a great responsibility. Spirituality and the land were not separate. The Elders passed on their knowledge of the land and the lore through ceremony and the Dreaming stories.

During the Dreaming the ancestral beings created *totems* for the people. A totem is a special species of plant, insect, bird or animal that is held sacred and expresses the connection between the people and nature. The totem is inherited and represents the spirit world as it exists in daily life. A person has a totem shared with other clan members and an individual totem that is given to them around the time of birth. The totem identified the different clan and language groups of Australia. It also gave each individual a sense of place and cultural belonging.

The sacred places of country were protected by keeping the Dreaming beliefs and rituals alive. The Dreaming gave people the rules on where they could live, who they could marry and the animals they could hunt. The continued supply of natural resources depended on people respecting these rules put in place by the spirit ancestors. Areas of animal refuge, where hunting was prohibited, were set aside and so ensured conservation of animal species of great importance to human survival in harsh landscapes. Totems guided Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in managing their resources. The Dreaming gave people the totem they would honour for life.

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. State whether each of the following statements is true or false.
   a. Two Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people could not have the same totem.
   b. Totems were created by the Elders.
   c. Totems helped Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people to manage their resources.
   d. A totem was given at the time of a person’s birth.
   e. Totems were used for trade among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

2. Identify what totems were and why they would have varied from one community to another.

### USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE

3. Refer to SOURCE 3 for an understanding of the significance of the totem. How do the totems shown here reflect the natural environment?

3.7.3 Initiation ceremonies
Archaeologists have learned a great deal about life in ancient Australia by studying ceremonial places, called *bora grounds*. Bora grounds were built with mounds of earth in the shape of two rings. The inner ring was a space reserved for initiation rites.
A boy could not become a man or a girl accepted as a woman until passing through initiation ceremonies. Enduring tests and trials of physical and mental strength took the young from the carefree days of childhood to the responsibilities of the adult world. A general English translation of Indigenous initiation ceremonies was to be put through the law; meaning that initiation passed on the knowledge of the Elders, the sacred lores of the Dreaming and the right to participate in the ritual and ceremonies of country. Initiation taught young people codes of conduct, customs and good manners. A person gained status with initiation.

Initiation connected people to the Dreaming by challenging them in ways that the great spirits had been tested. The ceremonies differed according to the particular beliefs of country:

- In south-eastern Australia the Great Spirit Baiame had been forced to overcome hunger, fear and pain. The initiation ceremonies in this region expected the young to endure pain in silence, eat sparingly when hungry and contain fear when confronted with the mystical sounds of the bull-roarer in the dark of night.
- The Unambal people of north-west Australia told the Dreaming stories of the Wandjina — ancestral beings that came from the sky to create fire and all the natural features of the land. The Wandjina are closely associated with fertility and so initiation ceremonies involved male circumcision performed at the first sign of puberty. This was followed by incisions on the shoulders, arms and buttocks that were then filled with sand to create large decorative raised scars.

Initiation scars and practices, such as knocking out a front tooth (known as evulsion) or removing part of a finger, sometimes identified a person’s clan group or kinship relationships. The role each person played in the process of initiation was determined by their kinship obligations. The Elders were responsible for instructing the young through the stages of the initiation, which could have involved a number of ceremonies carried out over a period of years. Initiates had to be taught the lore, the totem history and the ceremonial rites. There were often strong taboos that had to be observed about aspects of daily life such as the food eaten and the people spoken to. Obedience to the Elders’ instructions was the key to initiation. Once the ceremony was planned the invitations were sent out to the members of kinship and clan groups to be witness to the ancient rites of passage.

SOURCE 4 A painting by the convict artist Thomas Watling of an initiation ceremony at the Sydney settlement of Farm Cove in 1795

SOURCE 5 An account of the initiation ceremonies of the Yuin people of New South Wales

For thousands of years, young Yuin went up the mountains (Mumbulla Mountain) as boys and came back as men. Painted with red ochre, they would leave the bora ring to follow the Dreaming track from one sacred place to another, which were all visited in proper order.

At each place there were special ceremonies with singing and dancing to tell the story of creation in the Dreamtime. There were special tests too of hardship and endurance to prove that they were worthy of becoming men. The law was explained to them, they learned about Darama, the Creator, who gave the law to the people. It tells of the peoples’ links with the land, our mother, from whom we are born and to whom we return.

The mountain represents the school where young men are taught discipline. Respect for Elders and about food and plants, herbs and medicines, hunting tracking and survival . . . all things are bound together and all are part of the Dreaming, where unity and harmony must be respected. They learn about the Yuin people, about their totem, Umbarra, the black duck.

3.7.3 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. When were initiation ceremonies held and what was the purpose?

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE

2. Imagine you are one of the Yuin boys about to go up the mountain to begin initiation. Write a short account of how you are feeling, the fears you may have, what you have heard about the experiences of other boys and why this ceremony is so important to you. Refer to the text and SOURCES 4 and 5 for your information.
3.7 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE

1. Using the sources presented in this subtopic write a paragraph about social customs of traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Remember to include a topic sentence, supporting evidence and a concluding sentence in your response.

ANALYSING CAUSE AND EFFECT

2. In ancient Australian communities there would have been more people that you would have called ‘brother’ or ‘sister’. Explain why this was and the effect this would have had on other aspects of Indigenous life and culture.

DETERMINING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

3. Develop a subset of questions you could ask if you were inquiring into this overall question: how important were kinship systems, totems and initiation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

3.8 Conflict and death in ancient Australia

3.8.1 War and weapons

The proudly independent and different language and clan groups of ancient Australia were sometimes rivals, fighting with each other over territory and resources. Men traditionally carried spears for hunting and defence when they moved away from their campsites. Museum collections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artefacts include hundreds of different designs of weapons of war such as spears, clubs and shields. Artefacts reflect the different geography and climate of the makers’ country. Coastal peoples, for example, used fishbone on the tips of their spears whilst desert people used stone. Ancient Australian tools and weapons are noted for their flexibility and adaptability, being objects that could be used for a variety of purposes.

- Clubs were used for throwing, stabbing, slashing and smashing. The wood of clubs was hardened through firing and then treated with ochre and oils to prevent weathering. Clubs came in a variety of shapes and sizes. Club heads varied in shape from being cylindrical or cone

SOURCE 1 A warrior advancing for combat, from a drawing by eighteenth century French artist Nicholas-Martin Petit, who visited Australia shortly after the arrival of the British
shaped to bulbous or hooked. Long straight clubs were used as fighting sticks and as defence against an opponent’s blows. In the north-eastern rainforests a two-edged club was used like a sword. It was carried with a large softwood shield. Large clubs, called *murrawirri*, were used in north-east South Australia for organised combat. At approximately 2 metres in length they were too big to be thrown. *Murrawirri* were usually owned by male Elders and were objects showing a person’s importance in the clan. They were also used as valuable trade items. In some communities the murrawirri clubs were considered to have special magical powers. Clubs were also used for ceremonial purposes, particularly in dances.

- **Boomerangs** had a variety of purposes such as fighting, fishing, hunting and ceremonies. Boomerangs were throwing sticks that were accurate at high speeds. They were made from a very hard wood making them a deadly blade when travelling with force through the air. The form and use of boomerangs changed according to where and how the boomerang was made. The returning boomerangs were mainly used in south-east Australia. Boomerangs made in the Kimberley and in Central Australia were large and broad and generally used in combat. These boomerangs did not return when thrown but moved in a powerful swerving line.

- **Spears and spear throwers** were also used for hunting, fighting, fishing and ceremonial occasions. Fighting spears were designed to inflict serious wounds with heads having up to 40 barbed tips attached and tiny stone or shell fragments set into the spearhead. The barbed spears could not be pulled back out without tearing at the wound. The small shell pieces remained lodged in the flesh of the victim. In the Cape York region a large number of stingray barbs were set into the head of spears that were then regarded as having special magical properties. Every region had its own style of spear and spearhead. The *woomera* is the name commonly given to the spear thrower. The *woomera* was not thrown with the spear, but remained in the man’s hand acting as a lever to project the spear with greater force.

- **Shields** provided defence from spears and clubs. Shields were often decorated with totemic designs and were objects of great beauty. In the region of Victoria a narrow hardwood shield was used as defence against clubs while a broad bark shield was used in spear fights. The bark was harvested when still green and so able to absorb the impact of the spears.

**Island warriors**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island weaponry were similar, with the exception of the bows and arrows that were commonly used in Melanesian communities. Bow and arrows and spears were the main weapons of the Islands. Clubs were constructed with star or disc shaped stone heads and stout wooden handles. The razor-sharp bamboo knives were particularly effective Torres Strait weapons. Some Torres Strait Islander communities had the fearsome reputation of practicing headhunting. The bamboo knives were used for ritualistic decapitation, with the heads then being hung on loops of cane passed through the mouth and out of the neck.
The people of the central region of the Torres Strait lived on flat islands with little natural defences. Raiders came from the east and the west to regularly plunder their gardens. The image of these violent warriors travelling the sea is the stuff of Torres Strait mythology. According to Island legend the warrior chief of the Mabuiag, Kwoiam, organised an army of sea pirates who led raids across the Straits and as far north as Papua New Guinea's Fly River.

### 3.8.1 Activities

**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

1. Match column A with column B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clubs</th>
<th>Called <em>murrawirri</em> in north-east South Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large combat clubs</td>
<td>Used for fighting, fishing, hunting and ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boomerangs</td>
<td>Used as a lever to help propel a spear with force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting spears</td>
<td>Often decorated with totemic designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woomera</td>
<td>Constructed with barbed tips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shields</td>
<td>Used for throwing, stabbing, slashing, smashing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE**

2. Briefly explain the features of Torres Strait Island weaponry and the difference between them and the weapons used by the Aboriginal communities. Refer to SOURCES 1 and 2 and the text.

### 3.8.2 Death and funerary customs

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples believed that with death a person's spirit would return again to the Dreaming ancestors. Funeral and mourning ceremonies differed according to clan and country, but they were all nevertheless elaborate rituals that could last for many months. The ceremonies were a time to recognise the deceased and the Dreaming ancestors. The ceremonies surrounding death in all traditional Australian Indigenous communities expressed the powerful link between people and country.

Mounds of earth, such as those built in the bora grounds, piles of stones and carved trees often marked the location of burial sites in the south-east of Australia. Funeral traditions and practices varied across Australia:

- simple burial in graves with bodies either stretched out or placed in a crouching position. Grave goods were sometimes placed with the body.
- cremation. Sometimes the charred skeletal remains were collected and later buried or placed in the hollow of a tree.
- drying out or smoking the body in a process called *desiccation*. The dried remains may have been kept for a period of time before being buried.
- leaving the body on tree platforms to decay. The bones were later collected and often finally buried.

Ritual always accompanied funerals, such as facing the body in a particular direction or burying personal items as grave goods. Sometimes bodies were painted with totemic images or covered in ochre. The Kulin people of Victoria tied the body in a crouching position and buried important members of the community with their possum rugs, stone tools and woven bags. Mourners painted their faces white, women cut their hair and sent the spirit of the dead on their way with singing and dancing.

Death was not usually regarded as being due to natural causes and was often believed to have been caused by evil and supernatural forces. Ritual combat sometimes followed the death of an important member of the clan, as the relatives of the deceased were expected to take revenge against those people held responsible.

Burial sites can tell us about the numbers of people living in ancient communities, their genetic background and family relationships, the way in which their society was organised and how these people lived and died.
Tiwi and tutini

The Tiwi people live on Bathurst and Melville Islands, located 80 kilometres off the coast of Darwin. For thousands of years the Tiwi had only very limited contact with the mainland Aboriginal communities because they believed that was where the spirits of the dead made their homes. A beautiful and distinctive art form developed from the Tiwi ceremonies associated with death, known as the *pukumani*. Performance of pukumani funerary ceremonies went through stages that took a number of months to complete.

- The first funeral ceremony occurred at the time of death, called the *iliana* by modern Tiwi Islander people. The body was painted with totem symbols and decorated with hair ornaments. Mourners painted their own bodies white.
- Elaborate grave posts called *tutini* were carved as expressions of the person’s life and as gifts to the spirit of the dead. The large poles were carved from the trunk of the ironwood tree and then erected around the grave site. The poles symbolised the importance of the dead person.
- The final pukumani ceremony took place approximately six months after burial at the tutini site. Performance of the ceremony enabled the dead to enter the spirit world. The mourners were painted in rich ochre designs and wore decorative head and armbands, called *pamajini*, as protection against a spirit that could still be angry. Dances and songs were performed during all parts of the ceremony that were drawn from the stories of the great Dreaming ancestor, Purukapali. After the death of his child, Purukapali had ordered the people to make grave posts and to sing and dance.
- With the ending of the ceremony the mourners departed from the grave leaving the beautiful tutini to rot away.
3.8.2 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
1 Briefly explain how burial practices differed between Indigenous communities.
2 What materials are tutini poles made from?
3 How long after burial did a pukumani ceremony take place?
4 Write out a short guide to the Tiwi funeral rituals for someone who is visiting the islands and keen to become familiar with the traditions.

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
5 Imagine yourself to be a family member participating in the funeral ceremony pictured in SOURCE 3. Describe the events that are happening around you; providing some details of the rituals associated with the funeral of your loved one.

3.8 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples used natural resources with great skill to create very efficient tools and weapons. Suggest reasons why the archaeological record of these artefacts is limited.

IDENTIFYING CHANGE AND CONTINUITY
2 Imagine that you are the producer of a documentary on the customs and culture of ancient Australia. Write a proposal for your documentary, convincing your investors that the ancient history of our land is something that all Australians should know about and celebrate. You are particularly keen to draw attention to the connection between our ancient culture and the traditions and beliefs that have continued into modern times. Your proposal should include what you intend to be the focus areas, such as the traditions of the Tiwi Islands. Don’t forget to include a title for your documentary.

DETERMINING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE
3 What evidence of a society can archaeologists find through the study of death and burial practices?
4 Look back at the sources in this subtopic and choose one image or account that you feel provides an insight into the culture of these ancient communities. Write a poem or story, or create an illustration expressing the significance of your chosen source.

3.9 Conserving the past

3.9.1 Investigating Australia’s ancient past
With all the fascinating information that archaeological and scientific study of ancient burial sites can give us, it is easy to forget that these sites are also places of great spiritual significance and that ancient Australia is not just a story of the past.

The traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait owners and custodians of the land continue to care for country, and all the generations who belong to it. Australian governments now recognise the rights that Indigenous communities have over human remains, artefacts and heritage sites. Debate over the control and correct treatment of human remains and heritage remains a very important issue for Australia.

The role of the archaeologist
Careful investigation of archaeological sites is where the collection of evidence begins. The sites are the source of information and the basis for our archaeological understanding of how people lived in ancient Australia. Most sites have been found through careful survey of the landscape. Pits and trenches are then dug so that excavation can begin to reveal the layers of history found in places such as middens and campsites.

The Kulin people
The Kulin people of Victoria left a variety of archaeological sites and a range of artefacts that are the record of life that archaeologists and scientists can observe and analyse.
- Quarries. The Kulin used many types of stone for a wide range of tools and weapons. Fine grained stone such as quartz was obtained easily and was used for making sharp tools. Axe heads needed a very hard rock so the Kulin used greenstone (diorite), which was found at only a few sites. Ten ancient greenstone quarries have been recorded. The main greenstone site was at Mt William in Central Victoria. Axe heads from this site were traded as far away as Queensland where axes were exchanged for highly valued objects such as possum skin rugs.
Scarred trees. Through the Victorian grasslands old trees have been found showing symmetrical scars that are the result of the removal of bark. The Kulin cut the bark for a wide range of purposes such as building shelters, lining graves and making water containers, shields and canoes.

Stone scatters. Kulin families once camped close to water sources such as rivers and lakes. Stone pieces have been found at these sites that were the remains of broken tools or the waste that came from the making of new tools. Different rocks were worked in different ways, for example, the strong greenstone was flaked roughly to shape and then ground on sandstone to gain a sharp smooth blade. Quartz was hit so that slivers off rock were sheared off.

Mounds and middens. In areas where a small area of ground appears to have been raised above the surrounding land, archaeologists have found campsites. The mounds are due to the accumulation of rubbish and earth that has been blackened by the ashes of fires. In the nineteenth century the Melbourne floodplain areas surrounding the Plenty and Maribyrnong Rivers and Darebin and Merri Creeks were reported as being the site of many cooking mounds. Ovens excavated there were large and probably used to cook for approximately 20 people at a time. Food waste such as the remains of shellfish built up at the sites because shell can survive buried in the ground. Middens have also been found on the banks of rivers, lakes and beaches containing shellfish remains mixed with charcoal, bones and tools. This material collects in layers that archaeologists then use for establishing dates of site occupation.

Ceremonial circles. Five Kulin earth circles have been found at Sunbury, west of Melbourne. The circles are approximately 20 metres in diameter and can be seen as a lower level in the ground indicating the earth has been scraped away. Archaeologists believe the area of the circles were used for initiation ceremonies and have found stone flakes and a large number of stone artefacts at the sites.

Ceremonial rocks. Special rocks associated with the Kulin Dreaming beliefs are located in the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges. A number of these rocks are said to represent the sons, Djarr-djarr and Tharra, of the creator spirit Bundjil. The rocks are also said to be connected to Dreaming stories about the making of fire. Archaeologists believe the rocks indicated sacred ground where activities such as hunting were not permitted.
• **Caves.** Cape Schank, located in Bunurong country, on the south coast of the Mornington Peninsula was of particular spiritual significance to the Kulin people. Dreaming beliefs and stories are connected to locations such as this. Bundjil was believed to have told the rocks to create the cave so that he could have shelter from a mighty storm. Underground caves that were shafts going deep into the earth were also regarded as locations of spiritual significance.

• **Rock wells and springs.** Cavities that were dug into the rock provided reliable water supplies in regions lacking in rivers and permanent creeks. These wells were used by generations of Aboriginal communities as they travelled through country.

• **Fish traps.** Along the coastal areas, Aboriginal people constructed tidal fish traps. The fish swam into the trap at high tide and were then caught at low tide. A stone or wicker basket system was used to trap fish in the rivers. Barriers across waterways would also direct fish into areas where they could be caught. At Toolondo in Victoria, the remains of approximately 4 kilometres of shallow drains and ditches remain as part of an Aboriginal system of eel or fish trapping. At Lake Condah another large system of Aboriginal fish traps was constructed consisting of stone weirs and channels. The Lake Condah trap has been dated to 3000 BP.
• **Burials.** Along the banks of Australia’s longest river, the Murray, numerous burial grounds have been located. The burial sites are sometimes connected to important resources such as stone quarries or fish traps. The number of Murray River burial sites also indicates large Aboriginal populations living in this region over long periods of time. The Kulin sometimes buried their dead in caves or placed them on platforms in trees. The archaeological excavation and study of burial sites is a matter of community concern because archaeology has not always been respectful in the treatment of human remains. Excavation and study of burial sites is no longer acceptable without ongoing consultation with traditional custodians of the land.

• **Rock art.** Rock art sites are found across Australia as patterns, images and designs on rock surfaces. The art can be painted on, using materials like ochre and charcoal, engraved or carved with a sharp stone or rubbed into the rock with a ground stone. An engraving or carving into the rock is called a *petroglyph*. Rock art is difficult to date and requires a range of techniques. Radiocarbon dating can be used on paint, while luminescence dating can be used on some sand and rock sites. Rock art provides a wonderful insight into how ancient people saw their world. The subjects that are depicted also give clues to the daily and cultural activities people were engaged in and the tools they used. Victoria’s Grampian National Park contains approximately 60 rock art sites, making it the most important rock art site in the state. The rock art sites feature images of people, human hands, animal tracks, birds and Dreaming spirits such as Bunjil.

### 3.9.1 Activities

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Match the Kulin archaeological site with its location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burial sites</th>
<th>Sunbury, west of Melbourne</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rock art</td>
<td>Cape Schank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish and eel traps</td>
<td>Plenty and Maribyrnong Rivers and Darebin and Merri Creeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceremonial circles</td>
<td>Mt William in Central Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mounds and middens</td>
<td>Lake Condah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarries</td>
<td>Grampian National Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceremonial rocks</td>
<td>Banks of the Murray River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caves</td>
<td>Foot hills of the Dandenong Ranges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE

2. The map in **SOURCE 2** shows artefacts and sites around Australia of archaeological significance.

   a. In small groups brainstorm all the challenges for the protection and conservation of these sites.

   b. Choose one site of particular interest to you, research it in more detail and then write a letter to your local paper explaining the significance of this site, the conservation threats it faces and what you think we need to do to protect the ancient heritage of our country.

### 3.9.2 Lake Mungo site study

The evidence of the lives of the ancient people who lived on the shores of the now dry beds of Lake Mungo, in the Willandra Lakes region of western New South Wales has been exposed by erosion. In 1968, wind erosion uncovered the charred remains of a young woman in the sand dunes near Lake Mungo. This skeleton, known as ‘Mungo I’, had been cremated and then the bones had been crushed before burial. The first archaeologists to study her remains estimate the burial had taken place 25 000 years ago, making it the oldest known cremation in the world. More recent studies have concluded that Mungo I is closer to 40 000 years old.

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

Bones and teeth leave a record of health and disease. At Roonka Flat in South Australia, people suffered from arthritis of the jaw and tooth loss. Archaeologists have connected this condition to chewing very stringy food and the use of the mouth as a tool. Chewing tough bulrush roots was part of the process of making the string necessary for the large hunting and fishing nets of the region.
Many other human remains and hundreds of artefacts have since been found in the eroded dunes of the vast Lakes region. Possibly the oldest human remains are the skeleton of a person, probably a tall man, who died between 38 000 and 42 000 years ago. Archaeologists have named him ‘Mungo III’. The body had been carefully laid out, with hands clasped together and knees slightly bent. Archaeologists believe that so much ochre had been spread over the body during burial that traces of it turned the surrounding soil pink. A sense of the dignity, ritual and respect for the dead were preserved for thousands of years in the remains of Mungo I and III.

Lake Mungo is one of the 17 lakes in the Willandra region, a series of fossil lakes that is a World Heritage Site because of its natural and cultural importance. The remains of fireplaces, shell middens and human burials provide evidence of a time when Lake Mungo was full of water and supporting an abundance of life. In 2003, another remarkable archaeological discovery was made when the 20 000 year old footprints of the Willandra people were found. Archaeologists working with Elders of the Paakantji, Ngiampaa and Mutthi Mutthi people were visiting country when Mary Pappin Junior, a Mutthi Mutthi woman, showed the footprints to archaeologists. Hundreds of the Pleistocene footprints had formed in soft muddy clay, dried and then became fossilised. Aboriginal Elders have interpreted the footprints as the record of a small group of adults and children walking on top of a thick layer of clay. Within a couple of days a band of hunters ran through the same area. The prints show that one Willandra man ran extremely fast while another was one-legged. Elders from the Paakantji, Ngiampaa and Mutthi Mutthi people continue to work with government in the ongoing care of the Lake Mungo archaeological site.
The Pleistocene footprints from the clay at Lake Mungo left a very human record of life in ancient Australia.

\[
\text{‘[Some of the footprints and stride lengths belong to a child and] show how the child walked, paused, turned and ran away from the groups they were with, before walking briskly back towards them. Perhaps the child was called back by an adult or older sibling. So seldom in open-site archaeology do we see such a personal and familiar signature.’} \\
\text{Harvey Johnstone and Michael Westaway, archaeologists}
\]

Appreciating our heritage

There are many sites in Australia today that are of historical, cultural and archaeological significance. In addition to this, the Australian government has established over 70 Indigenous Protected Areas. These areas are managed by the traditional owners who look after the plants, animals and any special sites. Indigenous rangers manage the impact of visitors, particularly tourists, who come to the area. In this way, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can keep their culture strong.

The Heritage Council of Victoria, for example, agreed in 2010 to principles of the Burra Charter, an agreement that is a guide for the conservation of Australia’s heritage sites. The principles are of particular importance to Australia’s fragile Indigenous art and settlement sites. The Burra Charter principles express the belief that:

- Heritage sites enrich all our lives because they help us to understand the past and the cultural richness of the world that we live in today.
- The cultural significance of a heritage site is in its location, the objects within it, its use and the meaning that it has to people today.
- Consideration of cultural significance, combined with careful analysis and study, must take place before any decisions are made that affect a heritage site.
- Careful records must be kept to ensure the care, management and understanding of heritage sites into the future.

DID YOU KNOW?

Victoria’s declared Indigenous Protected Areas include Deen Maar, Kurtoniti, Lake Condah and Tyrendarra. These areas include sacred and ceremonial sites and major Dreaming tracks.
3.9.2 Activities

**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**
1. Identify the artefacts and evidence of life found at Lake Mungo.
2. Why were hundreds of Pleistocene footprints preserved at Lake Mungo?
3. What are the principles of the Burra Charter designed to achieve?

**USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE**
4. Examine **SOURCE 3** and read the relevant text.
   a. What role did erosion play in discovering the evidence of early Aboriginal occupation of Lake Mungo?

5. Look at the photograph in **SOURCE 4**. What evidence of Aboriginal religious belief and funerary practices could an archaeologist gain from studying this source?

**3.9 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

**DETERMINING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE**
1. In 2003, Willandra Elders lifted a 20-year ban on further excavation of the archaeological sites of the Willandra Lakes region. Many Aboriginal communities believed they needed to protect their sites and history from archaeologists who had not previously respected human remains or the objects of sacred or traditional importance. In groups or as a class, consider the issues related to ownership and control of artefacts.
   a. Discuss the concept of a ‘shared heritage’ and decide what that should mean in modern Australia.
   b. Hold a debate on the topic that ‘all Australian Indigenous people’s remains and artefacts should be returned to the traditional custodians’.

2. The ability to identify with a person and their times is known as empathy. When we empathise we seek to understand, through imagination and knowledge, how others acted and thought. We show empathy when we read a novel, watch a movie, study a painting or listen to others. A child living 20 000 years ago left some of the footprints shown in **SOURCE 5**; they are evidence of someone’s life from long ago. These footprints provide only a glimpse of that child’s life but are nevertheless historically very significant. Write the inscription for a plaque erected near these footprints, explaining to visitors what they are looking at when they see these simple footprints. Convey a sense of the significance of the footprints and support this with some general information on the key features of life in this region during this distant time.

3. Prepare an information sheet to help record your excursion findings and details of site features. Include:
   - site name and location
   - details of site or artefact
     o shape
     o size
     o material
     o use or function.

Underneath each entry leave a space for your sketch of the artefact or site feature.

When you have completed your site visit prepare group presentations, reporting on your findings. Your presentation will need to provide background information explaining the features of the site. Remember that the environmental setting including the landscape, climate and natural resources are very important in understanding how people lived. Your presentation should highlight the value of the site to Australian archaeology and any heritage issues you have become aware of. You may want to consider the problems of managing and preserving the site for future generations. You may have noticed that site management and conservation plans have already been put in place. The area of the site may have barriers erected as protection against people and animals, or drip lines to direct running water away from wall engravings or paintings. Conclude your presentation with a statement expressing why you believe the continued study and management of archaeological sites is important, and what you have learned from your study of ancient Australia.
3.10 SkillBuilder: Developing a hypothesis

Developing a hypothesis: Interpreting the evidence of life in ancient Australia: Lake Mungo

In their work of studying the ancient past, archaeologists are dealing with evidence that is in tiny pieces. They must rely on the physical landscape and archaeological evidence to tell the story. Very little material from ancient Australia has survived the thousands of years between their time and ours. Shell, bone and teeth will endure; animal hides, plant fibres, feathers and hair will not.

Go to your learnON course to access:
- An explanation of the skill (Tell me)
- A step-by-step process to develop the skill, with an example (Show me)
- An activity to allow you to practise the skill (Let me do it)
- Questions to test your application of the skill (Applying skills)

3.11 Review

This final subtopic provides a range of opportunities for you to review and respond through:
- revising and checking your historical knowledge
- demonstrating your ability to apply historical concepts and skills.

Go to your learnON course to access:
- A key chronology of events relevant to the topic
- A summary of the key knowledge presented in the topic
- A ‘Big Questions’ activity
- A multiple choice topic test
- Short answer or extended writing responses