

## Unit 1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures

### Introduction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures

Thousands of years before ancient civilisations in Egypt, Greece and Rome developed, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were living successfully in Australia. In fact, **Indigenous Australians** are the oldest continuous cultures in the world – beginning at least 60 000 years ago and continuing to this day.

All over the harsh and dry continent of Australia, separate groups of Indigenous peoples developed different ways of living in harmony with the land. The natural environment provided the food and materials they needed to survive and prosper. It also shaped every aspect of their social and spiritual lives.



chapter

7

**Source 1** Indigenous Australians are the oldest continuous cultures in the world – beginning at least 60 000 years ago and continuing to this day.

7A

Who are the Indigenous peoples of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands?

- 1 There are two main groups of Indigenous peoples in Australia. Suggest two ways in which these main groups may be different.

7B

How do we know about ancient Australia?

- 1 Over the past 30 to 40 years, historians have learnt a great deal more about ancient Indigenous peoples in Australia and how they lived. How do you think this information was gathered?

7C

Why is it important to study Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures?

- 1 As a class, discuss why it might be important for modern Australian students to learn about the traditional cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. What can we learn from them?

#### Please note:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this chapter (and the resources that support it) may contain the names, images, stories and voices of people who have died.



# 7.1 The first Australians

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been living in Australia for at least 60000 years. They are sometimes called the **first Australians** because they were here long before the first Europeans arrived in 1788.

## The ‘Out of Africa’ theory

Scientists and historians believe that modern humans have existed on Earth for around 200000 years. They also have evidence that modern humans, or *Homo sapiens*, originally came from Africa. According to the ‘Out of Africa’ theory, about 100000 years ago, the first *Homo sapiens* started moving out

of Africa in search of new hunting areas and places to settle. They moved in different groups over many thousands of years (see Source 1). Some groups travelled north into Europe. Others travelled towards the Middle East and then into Asia. From Asia, they spread further south and also into North America.

The earliest Indigenous peoples are believed to have crossed from Asia into Australia at a time when a section of land known as a **land bridge** connected the two areas. Around this time, scientists believe that the sea level was 150 metres lower than it is today. Other groups may have travelled from Asia to Australia on boats or canoes.

Based on fossils, artefacts and ancient paintings, historians believe that *Homo sapiens* reached Australia at least 60000 ago. Many historians believe this date marks the beginnings of Indigenous cultures and peoples in Australia.

Aboriginal people in Tasmania are thought to have travelled down through eastern Australia up to 40000 years ago. At that time, the two areas were also connected by land. Tasmania became isolated from the mainland around 11000 years ago when Bass Strait was flooded at the end of the last ice age.

people came to walk the land. According to these stories, the **ancestors** of Indigenous peoples have lived in Australia since the beginning of time. Ancestor spirits came up through the earth and down from the sky in human form. As they moved through the land, they created everything that we see today, from the animals and plants to the mountains, rivers and oceans. Creation stories are part of the most central belief system in Aboriginal life – known as the **Dreaming**. You will learn more about the Dreaming throughout this topic.

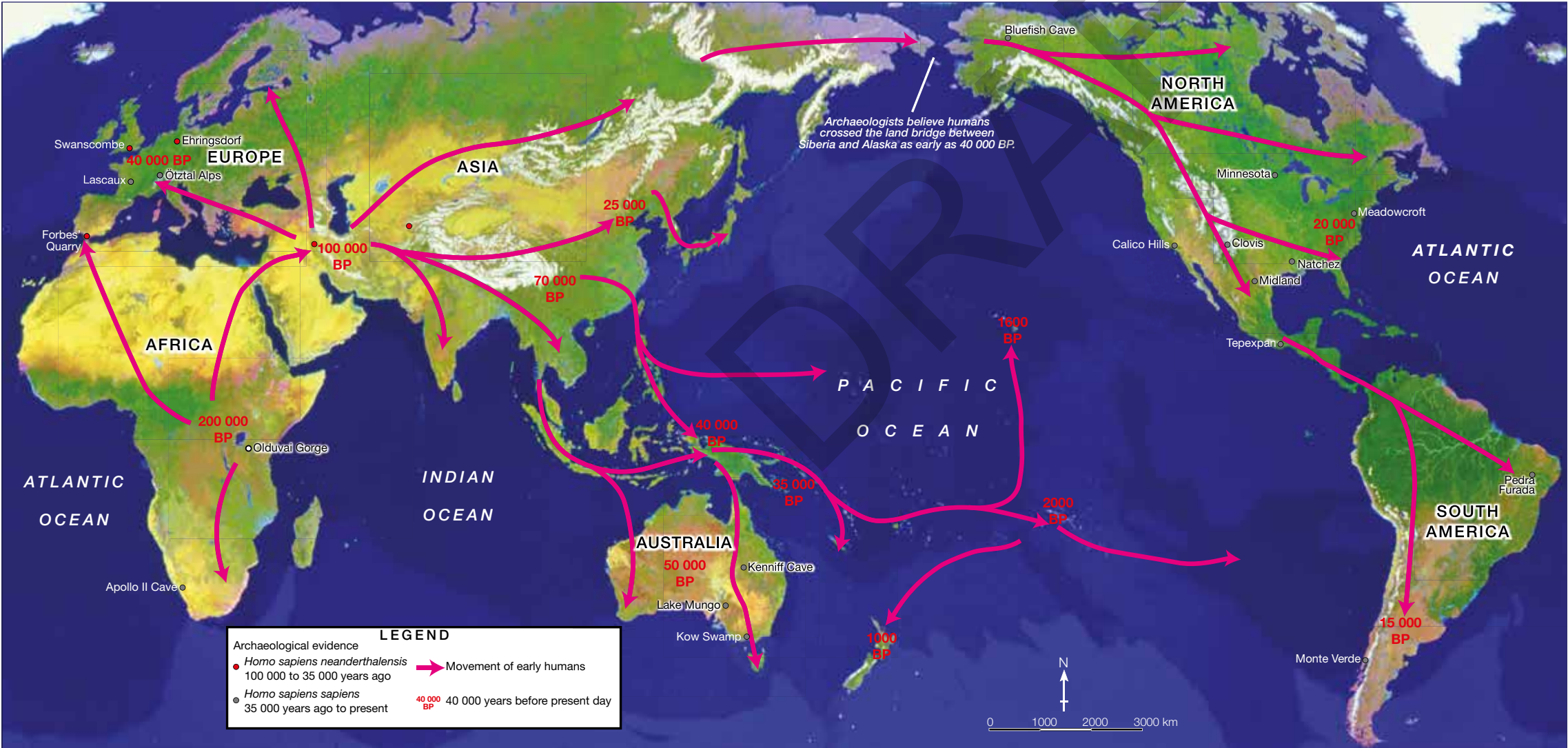
## Indigenous creation stories

The Indigenous peoples of Australia have a different view of how people first arrived here. Their creation stories tell of how the world was created and how



Source 2 Many Aboriginal rock engravings tell how ancestor spirits came to Earth in human form and created the land and all living things.

LOCATIONS AND MOVEMENT OF EARLY HUMANS



Source 1 According to the ‘Out of Africa’ theory, the first humans started moving out of Africa around 100000 years ago. Scientists now believe that the first humans arrived in Australia at least 60000 years ago.

Source: Oxford University Press

## Check your learning 7.1

### Remember and understand

- 1 What is the ‘Out of Africa’ theory? According to this theory, when did people first arrive in Australia?
- 2 How do scientists think the earliest Indigenous people travelled from Asia to Australia?
- 3 Why did the earliest humans begin moving out of Africa around 100000 years ago?

### Analyse and apply

- 4 According to the beliefs of many Indigenous Australians, when did people first arrive in Australia? How did they arrive?

### Evaluate and create

- 5 Use the Internet to research the history of Indigenous people in Tasmania. List three ways in which their culture and way of life was different from groups on the mainland of Australia. What were the reasons for these differences?



# 7.2 Australia's environments and climate

Australia is a very large continent made up of many different regions (see Source 1). When most people think about Australia, they often just think about the mainland and Tasmania. In reality, Australia also has over 8000 islands within its borders, including more than 200 islands that lie between the northern tip of Queensland and Papua New Guinea – known as the Torres Strait Islands.

As you can see in Sources 1 and 2, each region of Australia has its own environment and climate. This means that the plants, animals and landforms in these regions are different. For example:

- Regions in the north – such as parts of Queensland, the Northern Territory and the Torres Strait – are tropical, meaning they are very warm and wet. They are covered with tropical forests and shrublands. There is plenty of water available.
- Regions in the south – such as parts of Victoria and Tasmania – are temperate, meaning they are cold and wet. They are covered with forests and grasslands. Most of the year there is water available.
- Regions in the centre – such as parts of the Northern Territory and South Australia – are dry, meaning they are hot and have little rain. Vegetation is sparse (thinly scattered) and there is very little water available.

## How environment and climate affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Differences in environment and climate around Australia influenced how different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lived. These factors played a big role in the types of food people could gather and animals they could hunt. Climate also influenced the types of shelter and clothing people needed. For example, Indigenous peoples in the tropical regions of Australia needed different clothing to the people in the colder regions of Victoria and Tasmania. Indigenous groups in the dry regions of Australia would have eaten different food and had different hunting techniques to groups in other places. Source 3 shows how different environments and climates influenced the lives of various Indigenous groups around Australia.

### Check your learning 7.2

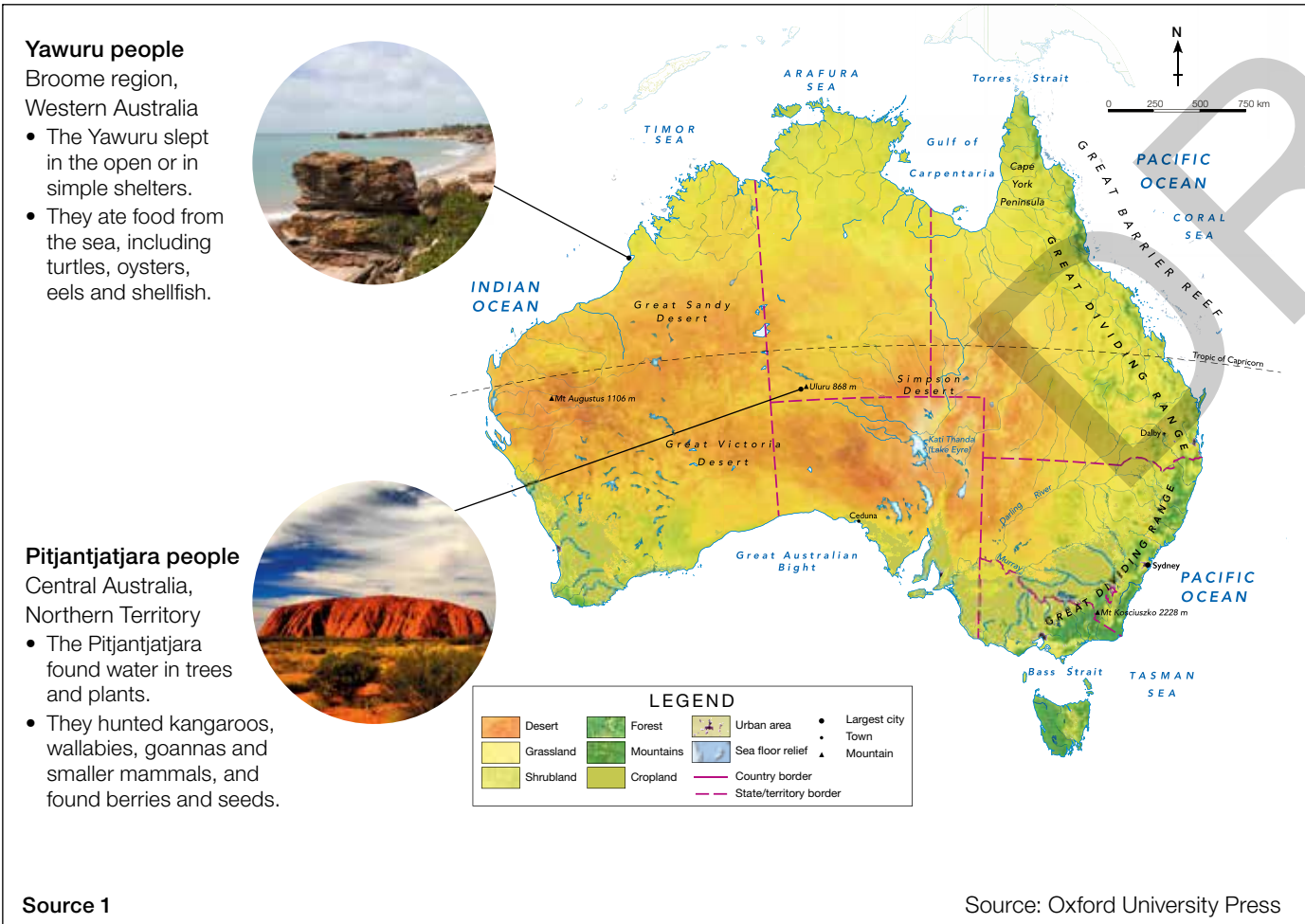
Remember and understand

- 1 Australia is made up of more than just the mainland and Tasmania. How many islands are part of Australia?
- 2 Where are the Torres Strait Islands and how many are there?
- 3 The Pitjantjatjara people live in a very dry region of Australia. How do they find water to drink?

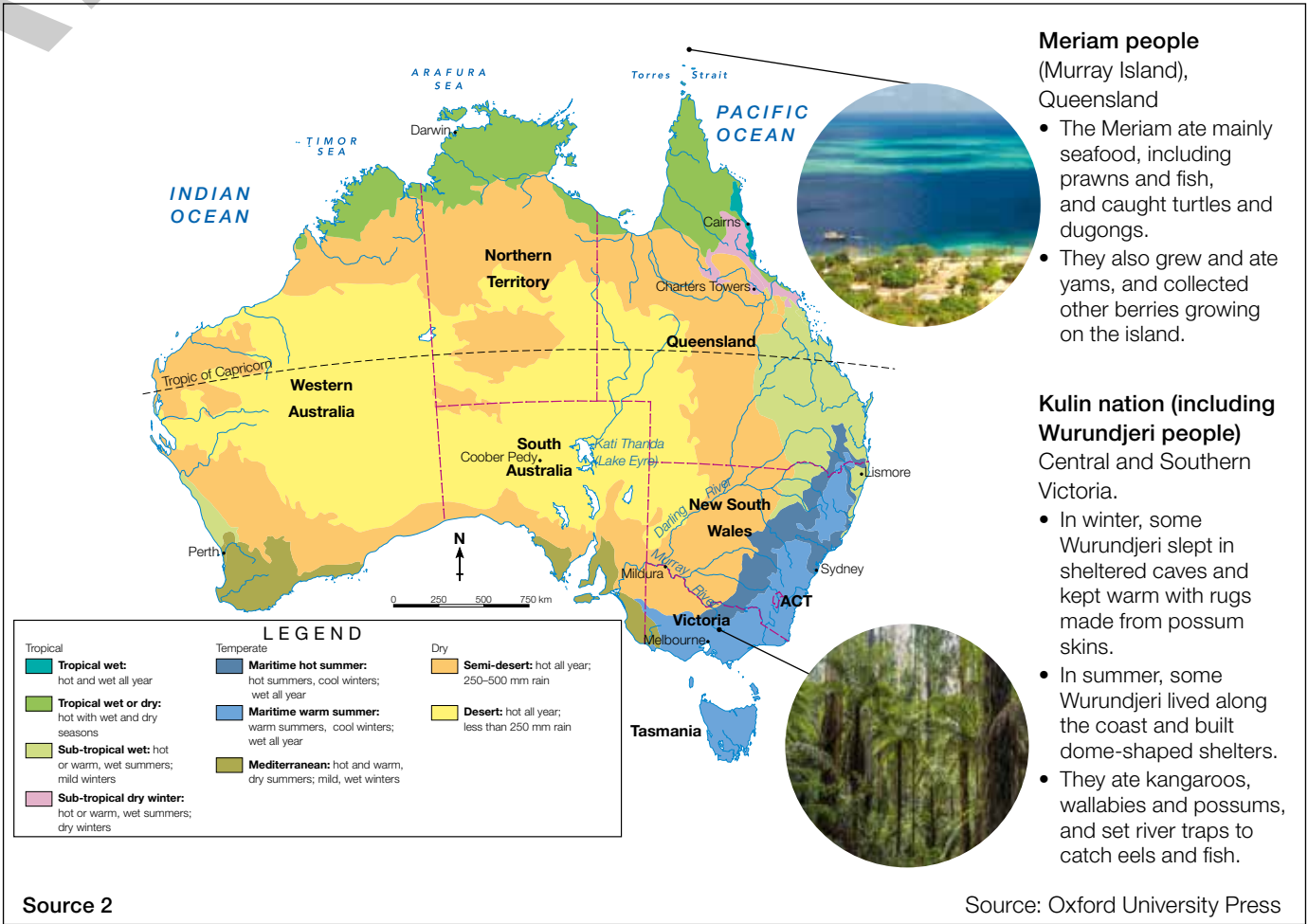
Analyse and apply

- 4 Australia has many different climate zones. What zone is Melbourne located in?
- 5 In your own words, describe how environment and climate in Australia influenced the way Indigenous groups lived.
- 6 Look carefully at Source 2. What are the main differences between tropical regions and temperate regions?

AUSTRALIA: ENVIRONMENTS



AUSTRALIA: CLIMATE ZONES





# 7.3 One continent, many nations

Although Australia is a single **continent**, the Indigenous peoples and cultures that developed here over thousands of years were complex and very different. They were not a single group of people, but many different groups. Most had their own distinctive languages, cultures and beliefs. For that reason, different Indigenous cultural groups are often referred to as nations. Historians believe that there were about 600 different nations around Australia when Europeans arrived in 1788.

## Aboriginal peoples and cultures

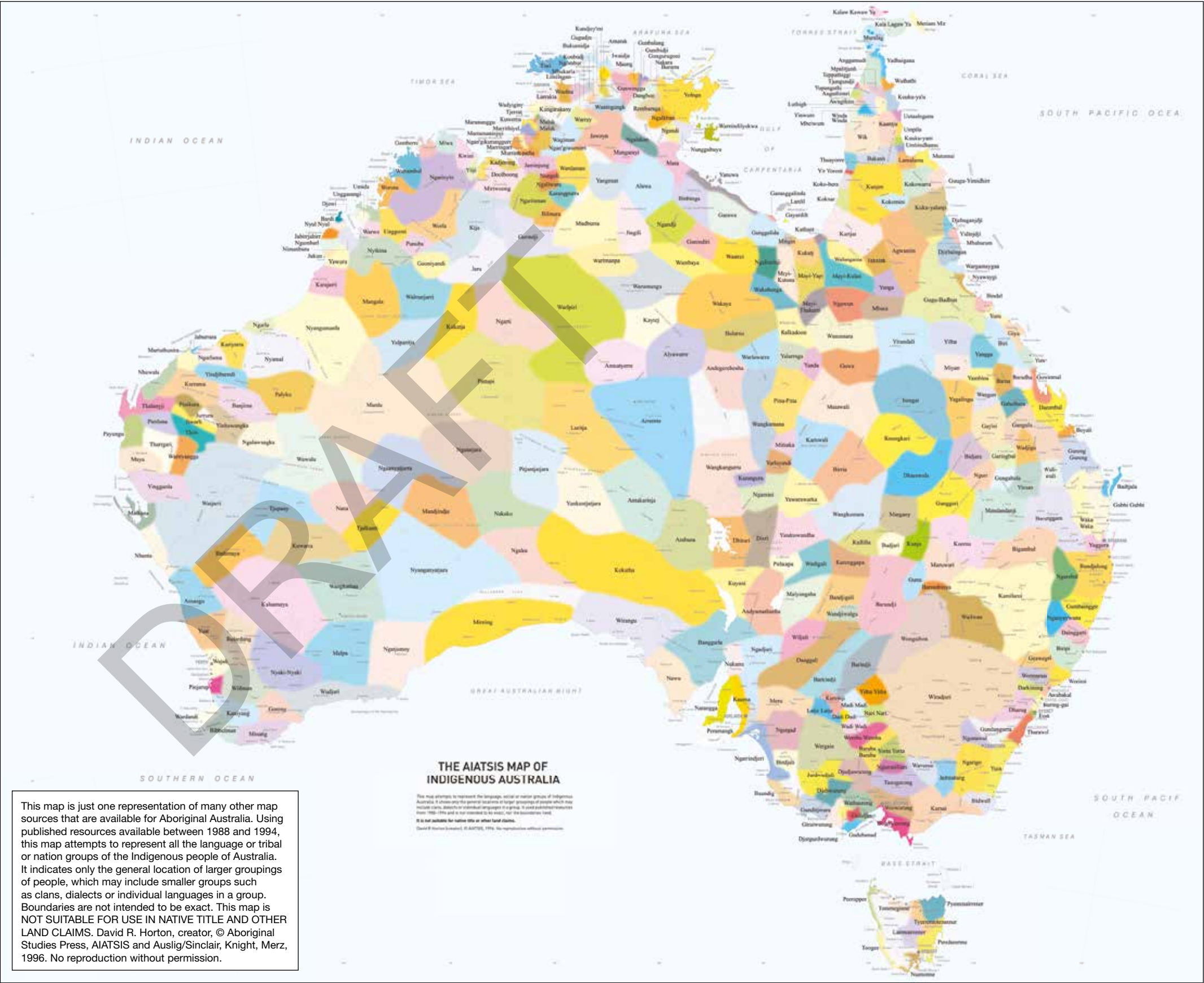
The term ‘**Aboriginal peoples**’ is used to describes all of the different Aboriginal nations and language groups that have lived on mainland Australia, Tasmania and many of Australia’s islands for thousands of years.

The earliest Aboriginal people are believed to have arrived in Australia at least 60000 years ago from Asia. At that time a land bridge connected the two continents.

Australia’s huge size meant that many Indigenous groups never came into contact with one another. As a result, the customs of these different groups – the languages they spoke, the foods they ate, the stories they told and the art they created – were very different. For example, there were around 250 Indigenous languages. Each had many different dialects, producing up to 700 varieties. This makes Aboriginal Australia one of the most linguistically diverse areas on the planet. In some districts, within a distance of 80 kilometres you could hear three languages as different as English, Russian and Hindi.

When Europeans arrived, there were approximately 750000 Indigenous people living in Australia. Most Indigenous groups were **hunter-gatherers**. This means they moved around with the seasons, hunting animals and gathering other foods such as fruits, nuts, yams and insects. Shortly after Europeans began colonising Australia, the number of Indigenous people declined dramatically. Today, there are approximately 450000 people in Australia who identify as Indigenous. Source 1 shows the location of Indigenous nations and language groups across Australia. It was created in 1996 and shows only the general locations of larger groupings of people (which may include clans, dialects or individual languages in a group).

AIATSIS MAP OF INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA



Source 1

Source: AITSIS map of Indigenous Australia, AITSIS (1994). A fully interactive version of this map can be found at <http://aitsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aboriginal-australia-map>



The Australian Aboriginal flag

The Aboriginal flag is one of the official flags of Australia. It was designed by Aboriginal Elder Harold Thomas in 1971. Since then, it has become a widely recognised symbol of the unity and identity of Aboriginal people. The flag is made up of three parts:

- The top half of the flag is black to symbolise the Aboriginal people of Australia.
- The bottom half of the flag is red to symbolise the earth and the colour of ochre – a natural pigment (colour) used by the Aboriginal people in art and body painting.
- The circle in the centre of the flag is yellow to represent the Sun.



Source 2 The Australian Aboriginal flag

Source 3 Aboriginal peoples have lived on mainland Australia, Tasmania and many of the Australia’s offshore islands for thousands of years. Before Europeans arrived, there were around 600 separate Aboriginal cultural groups (also known as nations).



Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures

The term ‘Torres Strait Islander peoples’ is used to describe people who come from the islands of the Torres Strait – a section of ocean that stretches from the tip of the Cape York Peninsula in Queensland across to Papua New Guinea. There are more than 200 islands in the Torres Strait, but only 17 of those are populated. Between 8000 and 10000 years ago, there was a land bridge between Australia and New Guinea that allowed ancient peoples to travel south from Asia and settle. Rising sea levels at the end of the last ice age flooded the area, leaving only the highest peaks above water. These peaks became the islands we know today.

It’s important to know that Torres Strait Islanders are not mainland Aboriginal people who just live on the Torres Strait Islands. Instead, they are a separate people with different cultural heritage and backgrounds. Unlike Aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islanders are of Melanesian origin. Melanesia is a region to the north and north-east of Australia that includes the countries of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji. This means that Torres Strait Islanders are more closely related to these cultures than Aboriginal cultures. Today, around 7000 Torres Strait Islanders live on the islands, but over 40000 live on the mainland, mostly in Queensland.



Source 4 Torres Strait Islander people come from the islands of the Torres Strait. Unlike Aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islanders are of Melanesian origin.



Source 5 The Torres Strait Islander flag

The Torres Strait Islander flag

The Torres Strait Islander flag is also one of the official flags of Australia. It was designed by Bernard Namok in 1992 and since then has become a symbol of unity and identity for Torres Strait Islanders.

The flag is made up of five parts:

- The green stripes at the top and bottom symbolise the land.
- The blue strip across the middle symbolises the water.
- The two black stripes symbolise the Indigenous people of the Torres Strait Islands.
- The central design symbolises the traditional headdress of the Torres Strait Islands, known as a *dhari*.
- The white star inside the *dhari* has five points to symbolise the five major island groups. The white of the star also symbolises peace.

Check your learning 7.3

Remember and understand

- 1 Why are separate Aboriginal cultural groups often referred to as nations?
- 2 Explain why Aboriginal Australia is considered one of the most linguistically diverse areas in the world.
- 3 How many islands are there in the Torres Strait? How many of them are populated?

Analyse and apply

- 4 In your own words, explain the difference between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- 5 Look at Sources 3 and 4. What differences can you see between the traditional clothing of the Aboriginal people and that of the Torres Strait Islander boy?

Evaluate and create

- 6 Look carefully at Source 1. Find the area where you live and give the name of the Indigenous people (or nation) who were the first custodians of the land. Use the Internet to collect some more information about this group and answer the following questions:
  - a How do you say hello in their language?
  - b What types of food did they traditionally eat?



# 7.4 Aboriginal culture and beliefs – the Dreaming

The Dreaming is a belief system at the centre of all Aboriginal cultures. It is a difficult concept for non-Indigenous people to understand. During the Dreaming, Indigenous peoples believe the spirit ancestors:

- came up out of the earth and down from the sky to walk on the land, where they created and shaped landforms such as rivers, mountains, forests and deserts. These were created while the ancestors travelled, hunted and fought
- created all the people, animals and vegetation, and laid down the patterns their lives would follow
- gave Aboriginal peoples the laws, customs and codes of conduct that they follow
- created the songs, dances, languages, ceremonies and rituals that are the basis of Aboriginal spiritual beliefs.

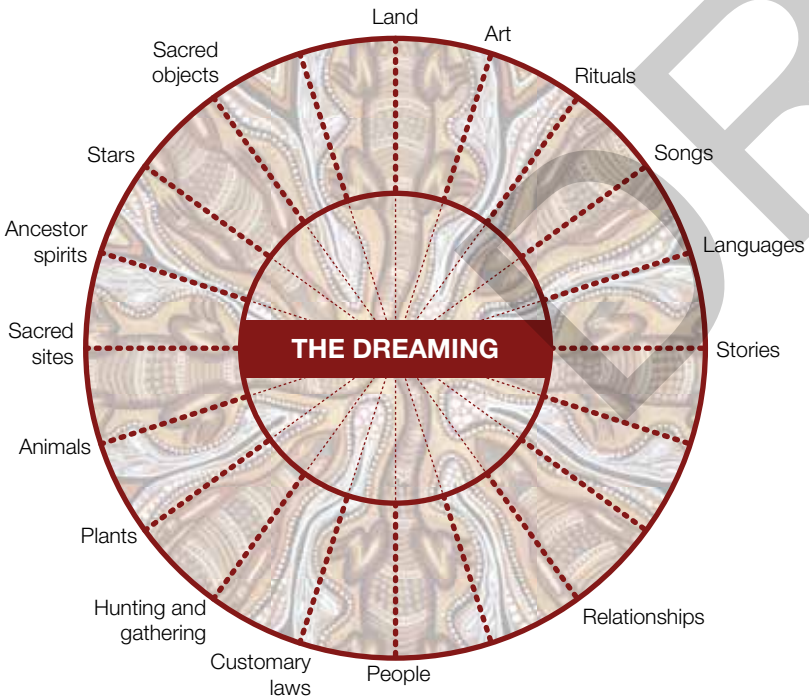
These ancestors were spirits who appeared in a variety of forms. When their work was completed, the ancestral spirits went back into the earth and sky, and also into the animals, landforms and rivers. The spirit ancestors are alive in the spirit of Australian Aboriginals. The Dreaming is ongoing – it began with the creation of the Earth and continues to the present day. For Indigenous Australians, all living things are part of the deep and spiritual tradition of the Dreaming.

## Dreaming and the land

Aboriginal people do not see themselves as separate from the natural environment. Instead, they see themselves as part of it. The land is not just soil and rocks, but the whole environment. The land sustains Aboriginal people and is sustained by them. They see themselves as custodians (caretakers) of the land, rather than owners of it.

The land is fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people and deeply connected to the Dreaming. The Dreaming and the land are so closely connected that they cannot be separated.

Aboriginal people use the word ‘Country’ to refer to the both the physical and spiritual features of the land. When an Indigenous Australian is in their Country, their spirit and the spirits of their ancestors live through the features of the land. In fact, they see Country as a living individual.



**Source 1** The Dreaming is a belief system at the centre of all Indigenous Australian cultures. It connects all aspects of Aboriginal life, culture, spirituality and law.

## Dreaming and the law

Stories from the Dreaming also pass on important knowledge, values and codes of behaviour for Indigenous people to follow. Over time, these stories developed into a set of laws that must be followed. Traditional Aboriginal laws are referred to as **customary law**. Customary laws are very similar to Australia’s national laws. If you break any of these laws, there are punishments you will have to face. The main difference between Australian laws and Indigenous customary laws is that they developed from different starting points.

Customary laws are based on stories passed down from the ancestor spirits during the Dreaming. Over thousands of years, all these stories developed into a set of rules for people to follow and obey.

## Different views of the world

More than anything else, the Dreaming influences how Aboriginal people see themselves and view the world. There are some key differences between the way Europeans and Indigenous peoples look at the world.



**Source 2** The land is fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people and deeply connected to the Dreaming. Aboriginal people see themselves as custodians (caretakers) of the land, rather than owners of it.

European view of the world	Indigenous view of the world
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Progress and change is valued – the world progresses and things improve.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continuity is valued – things stay the same.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People own the land – individuals own and use the land for their own gain. It is theirs to use however they like.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People do not own the land – individuals and groups are custodians (caretakers) of the land and then pass it to the next generation.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People own things – individuals or groups own property and decide if they will share or sell it.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People share things – groups use things but do not own them. Things are shared between members of the group.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Things are counted, measured and analysed – science forms the basis of society.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Things are spiritual, connected, cultural and environmental – the Dreaming forms the basis of society.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Written culture – things are recorded and written down.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Oral culture – things are passed down by word of mouth.</li></ul>

**Source 3** World views of Europeans and Indigenous Australians

## Check your learning 7.4

### Remember and understand

- 1 How do Indigenous Australians believe the mountains, rivers, forests and deserts were created?
- 2 When was the Australian Aboriginal flag created? What do its colours symbolise?

### Analyse and apply

- 3 In your own words, explain the concept of Country.

- 4 Look carefully at Source 3. How do the world views of Europeans and Indigenous Australians differ in relation to land and property?

### Evaluate and create

- 5 Conduct some research on the Internet to learn about the creation stories of Torres Strait Islander peoples. How are these stories different from those of Australian Aboriginal peoples?



## 7.5 Studying ancient Australia

Studying ancient cultures is never easy for historians. Over thousands of years, the **historical sources** that they rely on for **evidence** (such as paintings, pottery, carvings and tools) can be lost or damaged. This can make it very difficult to piece together the stories and secrets of ancient cultures.

### How we know about ancient Australia

When studying traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, historians have to overcome many challenges. For example:

- While many ancient civilisations left permanent structures behind (such as buildings and temples), most Indigenous cultures in Australia did not.
- While many ancient civilisations such as those

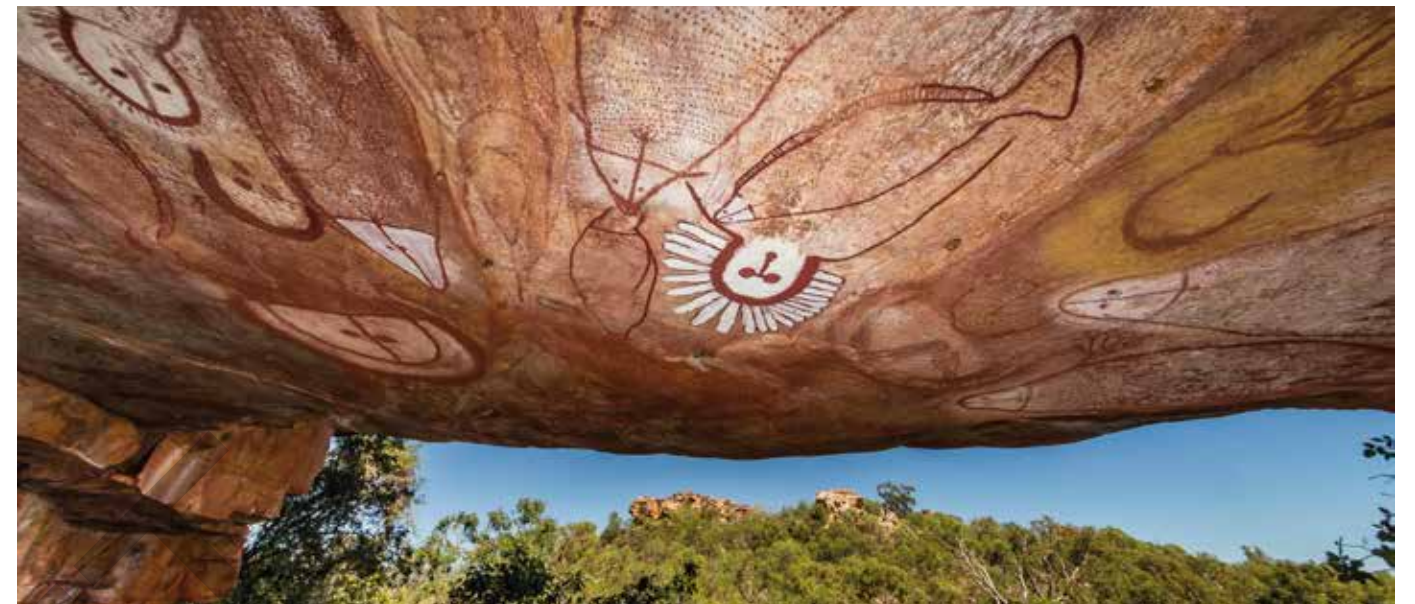
**Source 1** Aboriginal peoples have an oral tradition. Elders are responsible for passing down the stories, knowledge and beliefs of their people by word of mouth.

in Egypt, Greece and Rome left written records, Indigenous cultures in Australia did not.

- When Europeans arrived in Australia in 1788, many Aboriginal groups were forcibly moved off their lands, many died from Western diseases, and many more were killed. As a result, a great deal of cultural knowledge was lost.

So how is it that we know so much about ancient Australia?

The answer lies in a range of different historical sources. Some of these sources were created during the time being studied. These are known as **primary sources**. Others were created after the time being studied. These are known as **secondary sources**. A combination of primary and secondary sources must be used if historians are to create a more complete picture of what life was like in ancient Australia.



**Source 3** These paintings of Wandjina are located in sandstone caves at Raft Point, Kimberley, WA. They are a valuable source of evidence for historians investigating ancient Australia.

### Primary sources

Primary sources from ancient Australia can be divided into three categories:

- oral traditions
- rock paintings and traditional works of art
- archaeological evidence.

### Oral traditions

The Indigenous societies of ancient Australia had an oral tradition. With no form of writing, their records were preserved in other ways. Instead of writing, the cultural and spiritual knowledge of the Indigenous Australians has been passed down over many generations through stories, music, dance, song, ceremonies and rituals.

The **elders** of different Indigenous groups passed important information to young men and women. An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Elder is someone who has a respected position in their group and has permission to pass on knowledge and beliefs. Aboriginal Elders tell stories of the Dreaming, which include explanations of how the Earth was formed and how humans came to be. Although the details of creation stories varied from place to place, there were many common themes. Many groups told that ancestor spirits had created the trees, rocks, rivers and mountains, and that they still live in the sacred places. Children and young people were taught

these stories. When they grew up and became Elders themselves, they passed on these complex and detailed stories to the next generation.

Thanks to oral traditions, most Indigenous people in Australia today still have a deep understanding of their cultural heritage.

### Rock paintings and traditional works of art

In addition to oral traditions, ancient Indigenous Australians left behind a huge amount of information about their lives and beliefs in paintings and carvings on rocks and cave walls. Traditional paintings, usually done in a natural pigment (dye) known as ochre, tell the Dreaming stories and show how people and animals lived. Dating these pictures can be very difficult, but archaeologists have identified pigments used in paintings at Cape York in Queensland dating back at least 30000 years.

An image frequently found on rock faces in the Kimberley region in northern Western Australia is the Wandjina. To the Mowanjumb people from this region, a Wandjina is a spiritual ancestor and supreme creator. Wandjina have large eyes and no mouths. They are to encourage rain and fertility. The oldest Wandjina images in the Kimberley are believed to be up to 40000 years old.



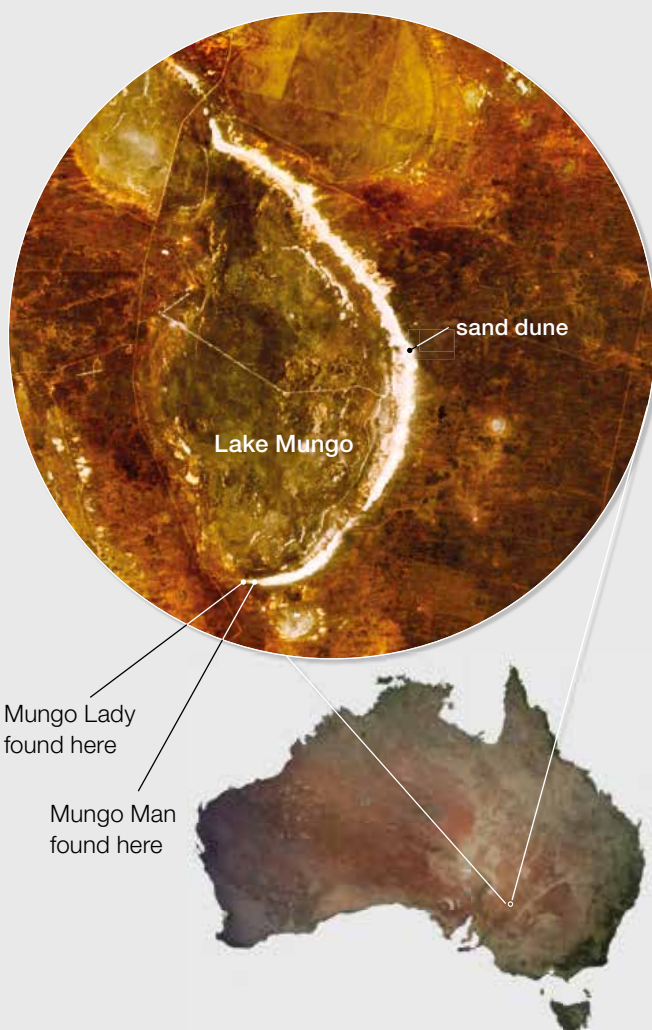
**keyconcept:** Evidence

## Mungo Lady and Mungo Man

Lake Mungo is a dry lake in the south-west corner of New South Wales (about 90 kilometres from the Victorian town of Mildura). Until about 10000 years ago, the lake was full of water and was used by Indigenous Australians as a source of food and water.

Archaeological evidence – in the form of human remains – found in the area in 1969 and 1974 supports the theory that Indigenous peoples have lived in Australia for over 40000 years. As well as helping to prove Indigenous existence in Australia, these discoveries provided important information about how ancient Indigenous Australians lived.

The first discovery was made in 1969. It was the cremated (burned) remains of a female – who became known as Mungo Lady. The second discovery was made in 1974.



**Source 6** Archaeologists carefully excavating the remains of Mungo Man in 1974

It was the bones of a male – who became known as Mungo Man. Both discoveries have added to our understanding of the lifestyle, diet, health and culture of the earliest humans in Australia.

From the remains, archaeologist Steve Webb has developed a profile of Mungo Man. He is believed to have been about 50 years old when he died. He was 170 centimetres tall. He ate a diet of meat, grains and grasses. He had worn and scratched teeth, and was badly affected by arthritis.

Less information is available about the life of Mungo Lady because her body was cremated and her bones crushed. Despite this, evidence suggests that her cremation was part of a detailed ritual. One theory is that her family prepared her body because they wanted her to rest peacefully. Another theory is that this burial practice was designed to prevent her returning from the spirit world to haunt the living.

For more information on the key concept of evidence, refer to page XXX of 'The history toolkit'.

**Source 5** The location of Lake Mungo and the area where Mungo Lady and Mungo Man were discovered.



**Source 4** Middens are ancient rubbish heaps where people have left the remains of their meals such as a shells and bones. This midden was found at Boulder Point in Tasmania. Middens are valuable archaeological sites for historians because they show what foods ancient peoples ate. The charcoal remains of fireplaces and other artefacts (such as tools) were also found at this site.

## Archaeological and historical evidence

Much of the information available to us about ancient Indigenous life has been collected by **archaeologists**. Archaeologists find and examine a whole range of artefacts such as ancient tools, animal bones, burial sites, rock carvings and **middens** (ancient rubbish heaps). These artefacts tell a story about how the first Australians lived. In some areas, archaeological digs have revealed many layers of different artefacts. Archaeologists use a technique known as **stratigraphy** to learn about changes and adaptations over time. For more information on stratigraphy, see page XXX of 'The history toolkit'.

## Secondary sources

In addition to primary sources, historians use a range of evidence collected by others who write about aspects of ancient Australia after they happened. These are known as secondary sources.

Early colonists recorded many observations about how Indigenous people lived from 1788 onwards. Until recent years, many of these writings were ignored. However, some modern historians are now re-examining these documents to build up a more detailed picture of Indigenous life in the early years of European colonisation. In particular, the early writings and paintings of early British colonists are being used as historical evidence. Many of these sources present a picture of the Indigenous people as clever and efficient land managers.

## Check your learning 7.5

### Remember and understand

- 1 How have modern Australians been able to gather evidence and information about how ancient Indigenous Australians lived?
- 2 What types of primary sources exist from Australia's ancient past?
- 3 What can rock paintings tell us about the beliefs of ancient Australians? What are the key features of the Wandjina figures shown in Source 3?

### Analyse and apply

- 4 How do you think the oral traditions of Indigenous Australians were affected by the arrival of Europeans in 1788?
- 5 What are middens and why are they used by historians?

### Evaluate and create

- 6 Conduct some additional research about Mungo Lady and Mungo Man.
  - a What other theories have historians developed about the daily lives of these people?
  - b Is there any evidence to suggest why Mungo Man's teeth were so damaged at the time he died?
  - c Where are the remains of Mungo Lady and Mungo Man located today?



## 7.6 Protecting and conserving Australia's ancient past

When Europeans first began colonising Australia in 1788, the Indigenous peoples of this land were treated very badly. The British declared Australia to be *terra nullius* (from Latin, meaning 'land belonging to no one') and set out taking the land for themselves. The British forcibly removed Aboriginal people from their lands and many more died from European diseases (to which they had no immunity). As a result of colonisation, the traditional cultures and lifestyles of the Aboriginal peoples were changed forever, and many sacred sites and ancient practices were stolen. Many negative attitudes towards Indigenous Australians carried on until the 1960s, when new laws and rights protected Aboriginal people and granted them control over their traditional lands. Since this time, a new respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures has developed, together with a renewed interest in protecting and conserving their **sacred sites**, cultural practices, art and artefacts.

### Conserving sacred sites and artefacts

Historical sources from Australia's ancient past can be fragile and rare, so it is important that we protect and conserve them. If not, they could be lost forever. Conserving ancient **artefacts** and protecting ancient sites ensure that future generations can access them. It also means that modern-day Indigenous Australians are given control over the artefacts and sacred sites that are culturally important to them. There are different ways of preserving sources, and



**Source 1** Traditional Aboriginal shields on display in the Ian Potter Centre, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

historians need to decide which sources are important enough to conserve, because it can be time-consuming and expensive.

Although Indigenous peoples lived in all parts of Australia, most people inhabited the coastal areas. This is where the majority of Australians live today, so a great many sites important to Indigenous Australians have already been destroyed by building and development that has taken place since British colonisation. In recent decades, however, there have been determined efforts by Indigenous groups, local communities and governments to preserve and protect sacred sites.

**Source 2**

Sacred sites are places within the landscape that have a special meaning or significance under Aboriginal tradition. Hills, rocks, waterholes, trees, plains, lakes, billabongs and other natural features can be sacred sites. In coastal and sea areas, sacred sites may include features which lie both below and above the water. Sacred sites derive their status from their association with particular aspects of Aboriginal social and cultural tradition. This body of tradition is mainly concerned with the activities of ancestral beings, collectively known as 'Dreamings' whose travels across the land and sea created the physical and social world that people now inhabit.

Source: Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (<http://www.aapant.org.au/sacred-sites/what-sacred-site>)

### Conserving culture in museums

The conservation of traditional tools and artefacts is a skilled and delicate business. Many items of traditional and historical significance are fragile and must be handled with great care. The national association Museums Australia provides museums and galleries around Australia with detailed information on consultation with relevant communities about artefacts, and on the care and preservation of sacred and important objects.

Museum displays are one of the main ways in which artefacts from Australia's ancient past are protected and preserved. At the Melbourne Museum, the Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre is dedicated to celebrating the history and culture of Aboriginal peoples. Every day, people come to learn more about the nations of Aboriginal Victoria from the time of creation to the modern day.

Rock and cave paintings are more difficult to protect and preserve because they are exposed to the weather. The Jardwadjali people are the custodians of some very important and valuable rock art at Gariwerd (the Grampians), about 250 kilometres west of Melbourne. The Jardwadjali have developed the Brambuk Living Cultural Centre where visitors can learn about the significance of the rock art figures and images. Rock art sites at Gariwerd are protected by mesh to ensure that they are not damaged or vandalised. Visitors to Brambuk can also learn about the Jardwadjali people's creation stories, songs and other customs.



**Source 3** Aboriginal culture and artefacts on display at the Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre



**Source 4** Traditional Indigenous rock art, such as this example found at Gariwerd (the Grampians) in Victoria, is difficult to protect and preserve because it is exposed to the weather.

### Check your learning 7.6

#### Remember and understand

- 1 How have attitudes to Indigenous cultures in Australia changed since the 1960s?
- 2 Read Source 2. In your own words, explain the meaning and significance of sacred sites. You may refer also to sacred sites in your own life.
- 3 Why is it important to conserve traditional Aboriginal artefacts and sacred sites?

#### Analyse and apply

- 4 Why do you think that museums and galleries are increasingly keen to include Indigenous art and artefacts in their collections?
- 5 Identify five examples of more respectful and inclusive attitudes towards Indigenous culture in today's society.

#### Evaluate and create

- 6 Find out more on the Internet about the Brambuk Living Cultural Centre. Use the information you collect to prepare a short segment for a TV travel show about the importance of Indigenous sites at Gariwerd. You may wish to film the segment or present it to your class.