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# Introduction

This series of books is about the first peoples who lived in Australia. It explores their arrival, their culture and lifestyles and their contact with Europeans.

## First Peoples

Australia is an **ancient continent**. It has been inhabited continuously for many thousands of years. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lived in Australia long before the arrival of Europeans.


Aboriginal peoples live across the whole continent of Australia. Traditionally, Torres Strait Islander peoples lived on the islands in the Torres Strait, which is between the Cape York Peninsula on mainland Australia and New Guinea.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not one group of people. There are many different groups or nations. Each group has its own culture, customs and language. It has been estimated that over 250 different languages were spoken by Aboriginal groups across Australia before European arrival.

## About this Book

This book explores the arrival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. It looks at their arrival from a scientific point of view as well as from a traditional Aboriginal perspective.

**Archaeological** sites of early Aboriginal peoples are also investigated in this book. From these ancient sites, information can be gathered about traditional Aboriginal lifestyles, including the type of food that was eaten and the tools that were used. The culture and important traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are examined as well.



Cultural activities are an important way to keep traditions and customs alive.



# Dreaming and Creation

Many Aboriginal peoples believe their **ancestors** have been here since the beginning of time and have always been part of the land. Important stories of the Creation period, often referred to in English as the Dreaming, explain how the land, animals, people and plants were created. Dreaming stories are very different from scientific explanations about how the planet was formed and **populated**.

## Since the Beginning of Time

Dreaming or Dreamtime stories differ between different groups of Aboriginal people. They explain how the Spirit Ancestors moved across the land and created its features, such as hills or rocks, as well as its animal and plant life. Once the Spirit Ancestors created the world, they went back into the Earth, sea and sky. The land is **sacred** to Aboriginal peoples as they believe their ancestors are part of the land.

Aboriginal peoples often decorate their bodies for important ceremonies, such as ceremonies for boys and girls entering adulthood.

## Sacred Stories

Some Aboriginal stories are sacred and are not meant to be shared with everyone. Some stories can only be shared with adult men. Some women's stories are not to be shared with younger or unmarried women.



Storytelling is an important way for Aboriginal peoples to share their ancestral values. Stories are often told through art and dance.

## Custodians

Adults are responsible for handing down the stories through the **generations**. The storytellers are the **custodians** of the stories and must share them with the young. Stories have been passed down through families for many thousands of years.



# Aboriginal Migration

Scientists think that the human species **evolved** in Africa around 200 000 years ago, and then people **migrated** from Africa to Australia. Because it was so long ago, scientists do not have an exact date for this migration.

## Waves of Migration

**DNA** tests on an Aboriginal man's lock of hair in 2011 have given scientists new information about how people migrated out of Africa in waves and spread out across the globe. **Ancestors** of today's Aboriginal peoples first migrated from Africa around 70 000 years ago. These people migrated to Asia.

## Journey by Sea

During the last **Ice Age**, a large amount of water was locked up in **glaciers**. This meant that the sea level was about 150 metres lower than it is today. Because the sea level was lower, more land was exposed and Australia, Tasmania and Papua New Guinea were joined together in a supercontinent called Sahul.

The closest part of Asia was another great land mass called Sunda. The distance between Sunda and Sahul was only about 80 kilometres. Scientists think Aboriginal people crossed the sea in small rafts or canoes to reach the north-west coast of Australia.



This map shows how more land used to be above sea level, allowing Aboriginal people to migrate to Australia from Asia.

## Destroyed Evidence

At the end of the Ice Age, approximately 10 000 years ago, melting glaciers would have destroyed **archaeological** evidence left by the Aboriginal people as they moved along the coastlines of Sunda and Sahul.



Glaciers still exist today in colder parts of the world. This is Franz Josef Glacier in New Zealand.



# Spreading Across the Continent

Scientists have different **theories** about how the Aboriginal people **migrated** across Australia. Some scientists believe the migration happened rapidly and that people spread across the **continent** in only 3000 years. Other scientists think it took at least 10000 years for the whole continent to be occupied.

## Rapid Migration

Scientists who think the Aboriginal people migrated rapidly across the country suggest that animals and plants were **abundant**. If food was easy to hunt, the Aboriginal people would have had more time to explore the country and been able to support more children.

## Slow Migration

Scientists who support the theory that migration across the country was slow think the first people remained living near the coastline, only learning about their new environment slowly. They point out that the plants and animals would have been different from the ones they were used to in South-East Asia.

Very old rock paintings like this one are evidence that Aboriginal people have been in Australia for thousands of years.



## Dingoes and Tasmanian Tigers

It is thought that the dingo migrated to Australia about 3500 years ago. The dingo never reached Tasmania because the island had separated from the mainland after the **Ice Age**. The Tasmanian tiger survived only in Tasmania. This was because the dingo never reached the island, so the Tasmanian tiger had no natural **predators** there.

Dingoes are found in many parts of Australia.



The Tasmanian tiger is now **extinct**.