

# Aboriginal life - 1

## Aboriginal history

Aboriginal people have been in Australia for more than 40 000 years. They came from the north, travelling the last 100–160 kilometres by boat. Then, melting icefloes raised sea levels across the world, making the return journey too long and difficult. So these people were left isolated on the Australian continent.

## Traditional Aboriginal life

Aboriginal people lived in harmony with their environment. They believed that, like plants and animals, they belonged with the land; they were part of the land and it provided them with everything they needed. However, in some places, they lived in such a harsh environment that just surviving needed special skills and knowledge as well as hard work.

They moved around in small groups to find the food and water they needed. Having no permanent homes, they lived in simple temporary shelters made from locally available materials. They only took things they needed and could carry. Men hunted with spears and women gathered food. Very young children played, but also had to be taught how to look after themselves. Boys learnt to hunt and fish and girls helped their mothers and learnt how and where to dig and collect food.

Younger people also had to learn about spiritual matters. Their Dreaming stories were used to teach important information about the past. Their traditions were passed on from one generation to the next through songs and dances. In certain places and at times where and when food was easier to find, they would meet with other family groups. This was when their most important ceremonies were held.

## European contact

The first European who arrived in Australia seemed so strange and different that they were viewed with curiosity and interest. They were often made welcome and food and water were willingly shared with them.

But these new arrivals believed they could own the land because 'no-one else did' and they could do whatever they wanted with it. They didn't understand the Aboriginal people's sacred duty to protect it and their total dependence on it ... and many of them just didn't care.

By shooting large numbers of kangaroos and other native fauna, clearing land and fencing off important sources of water, pastoralists almost starved the local Aboriginal people. But when their stock were speared by these hungry people, they became very angry and killed some of them. Sadly, many more died because of the diseases like smallpox and measles the Europeans brought with them.

Without their lands, traditional life was almost impossible for Aboriginal people. They became more and more dependent for food, shelter and clothing on the growing number of Europeans spreading across their land. They traded their skills in tracking, medicine, droving, skinning, tanning, as guides for explorers and as police aides for these things and their daily lives changed forever.

