



Australian Aboriginal

Cultures News - Ground Floor

investigation < science



Australia's Aboriginal people belong to one of the world's oldest continuous living cultures. Over thousands of years they have successfully adapted to a changing environment. They have developed a unique way of life; a deep spiritual attachment to their country, a strong sense of community, and an ability to draw upon their traditions and respond to change in creative and innovative ways.

The Regional Focus Displays form a spine that curves around the ground floor of the gallery including Adelaide, South East, MacDonnell Ranges and Cooper Diamantina.



Technologies used by Aboriginal people are located along the walls around the gallery. Important **themes** are represented in focus displays around the gallery on the **Ground Floor** and include Food Quest, Water Quest and Antiquity.

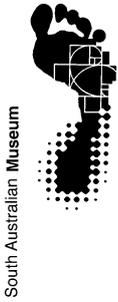
The **Speaking Land computer touch screens** are located in the gallery. They feature over eighty storylines comprised of artefacts, photographs, films, artworks, maps and extracts from collectors' journals. The content is divided into **Surveys** and **Regions** and then broken down into themes eg. Play or Art.

Archival film screens are found throughout the displays. They show films from the museum archives. Look at some of these films that show Aboriginal people in their communities across Australia. They often reveal aspects of their traditional lifestyles.

The **Contemporary Voice film screens** that are located at the introduction to each Regional display, show Aboriginal people who live in these regions, telling their own stories about their histories and culture today.

Low light levels in the gallery mean you will need some time to allow your eyes to adjust when you enter. **Fragile canoes and paintings** are on display so please move carefully, and look at them but don't touch them.





Regions - Ground Floor

Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery

The museum selected the following four regions to display on the Ground Floor: Adelaide, South East, Cooper Diamantina, MacDonnell Ranges.



Did you know ?

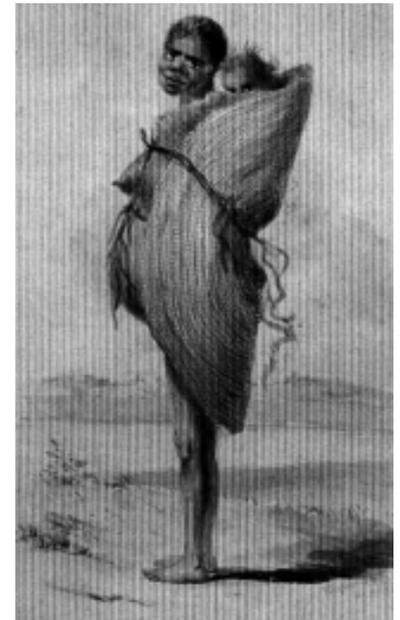
.....Before the impact of European settlement in Australia, there were about 300 distinct Aboriginal language groups. Today, Aboriginal communities exist throughout Australia, including the tropical, desert and temperate regions.

Adelaide

Aboriginal people who lived in the region where the city of Adelaide now stands, were the first in South Australia to feel the full impact of British colonisation from 1836. Previously represented in a number of land-owning groups, today their descendants identify themselves as Kurna people.

The Aboriginal people of the Adelaide Plains were moved away by the authorities from their homes to distant Aboriginal reserves on the West Coast and in the Lower Murray of South Australia. Kurna people were no longer permitted to hunt and gather on the Adelaide Plains.

Today, there are few identifiable Kurna artefacts remaining. European collectors rarely recorded an object's Aboriginal maker or owner, so their names will never be known. The records of the missionaries' Teichelmann and Schurmann and the watercolour paintings of colonial artists George French Angas and William Cawthorne, are crucial illustrations of Kurna ceremonial life and material culture.





Regions - Ground Floor

Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery

South East



The South-eastern temperate region of Australia is full of water courses and lakes. This water supply meant Aboriginal population levels were high in comparison to other parts of Australia. Since the early 1830's the Ngarrindjeri people have survived the massive dislocation wrought by European colonisation of South Australia.

Drawings by Yertibrida Solomon and William Barak show aspects of Aboriginal culture of this region before photography was available.

The Aboriginal people of this region are well known for their basket-making and wood-carving traditions. The use of designs and decorations differ quite markedly between cultural groups. Fishing was a major occupation throughout the region, often involving the use of bark canoes, fish traps and weirs.

Cooper Diamantina

For thousands of years this desert country in the Lake Eyre region was home to Aboriginal groups who were closely related by marriage and who shared Dreaming histories and material culture traditions. The Lake Eyre region was like a pulsating heart, with groups of Aboriginal people moving out into the desert in search of food after rain, and retreating back to the Cooper Creek and Diamantina River on times of drought.

For these people it was a Dreaming landscape rich in history and significance. The unique Aboriginal sculptures known as toas were made by people at Killalpaninna Lutheran Mission in 1904. They represent the places visited by their Dreaming Ancestors (Muramuras) who wandered throughout this country, and refer to events that occurred at these sites.



Mac Donnell Ranges

The heart of Arrernte country lies in the MacDonnell Ranges, where sheltered gorges and waterholes provide oases for many species of desert wildlife. The Arrernte people had a long and profound relationship with their country and this is reflected in their rich material culture, songs, ceremonies and Dreamings.



Technology - Ground Floor

Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery

Food Quest

This theme is divided into Hunting, Gathering and Fishing. Understanding this theme is essential for gaining an insight into traditional Aboriginal methods of harnessing the resources of the land. Aboriginal societies around the country have developed a flexible set of solutions, underpinned by shared basic principles and techniques, to the challenges imposed by the environment. An intimate knowledge of the rewards and risks contained in each local Australian environment is finely tuned with the ingenuity and sophistication of Aboriginal culture across the continent. In the daily search for food, Australian hunters and gatherers possessed a continent with variable seasons. Making a living meant knowing the signs in the landscape that signalled when to move and to where. Aboriginal people had a wide variety of food procuring techniques.



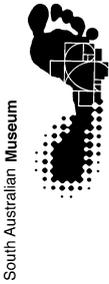
Water Quest

This provides a counterpoint to the themes relating to Aboriginal social relationships and aesthetic expression. It reveals the methods by which Aboriginal people located, contained and transported water according to their needs and their environment. This includes showing how important water resources were conserved and protected.

While the quest for adequate supplies of fresh water was a constant preoccupation in many regions, in others, Aboriginal people operated in conditions of water 'surplus'. This module also explores the religious, social and symbolic associations of water and the role of water, or its scarcity as a catalyst for contact and conflict on the Aboriginal/European frontier.

In arid and semi - arid regions, Aboriginal people had a range of ingenious solutions to the problem of obtaining enough drinking water. Here water sources were conserved and protected, often having important religious, social and symbolic associations.



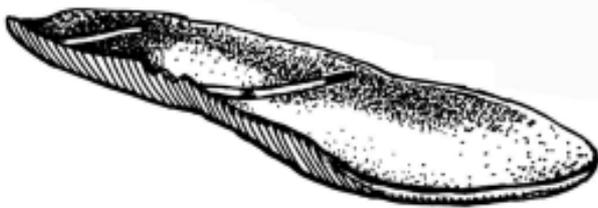


Technology - Ground Floor

Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery

Antiquity

This display illustrates the current state of knowledge regarding the antiquity of Aboriginal culture in Australia, and highlights some important changes that have taken place across the continent throughout time. Attention is focused on some notable research initiatives in Australian archaeology, and the South Australian Museum's past and present role in this area. While providing basic information about the length and nature of Aboriginal occupation of the Australian continent, it also enables visitors to understand that our knowledge of the past is still incomplete.



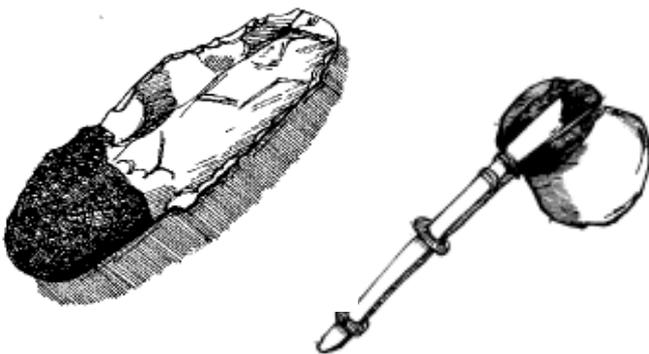
Watercraft

Many Aboriginal people living in coastal and riverine regions used bark canoes and rafts. Macassans (from the Malay Archipelago) and Torres Strait Islanders introduced seagoing dugouts a few hundred years ago. Aboriginal people in northern Australia have used them ever since, enabling them to reach offshore islands to hunt and gather food.

Spears and Spearthrowers



By using a spearthrower in conjunction with their spears, Aboriginal men were able to throw further and faster. This meant a better likelihood of success in hunting animals and greater access to different food, such as fish.



Glue

Aboriginal people possess a deep understanding of resources within their environment. The manufacture and use of adhesives and fixatives provided an efficient means of holding things together. The use of adhesives and fixatives produced strong and durable artefacts. The use of animal sinew is also covered in this module.

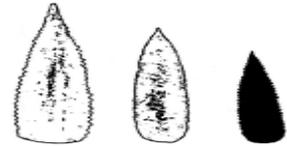


Technology - Ground Floor

Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery

Stone Tools

Tools of this kind lie at the centre of pre-conceptions relating to stone age and primitive culture. This module shows how Aboriginal people systematically made and used stone tools according to clear and rational principles, with a complexity that has little to do with stereotypes of primitive, uncivilised cultures. Stone tools were one of the fundamental elements of the Aboriginal tool kit; different stone tool technologies across the country, and their relative importance are explored, as well as the efficiency of tools. Aboriginal people (particularly woman, in this instance) developed a set of applied technologies used for the purpose of grinding seeds (particularly grass seeds) for making flour and for the purpose of milling or crushing a range of other foods and substances.

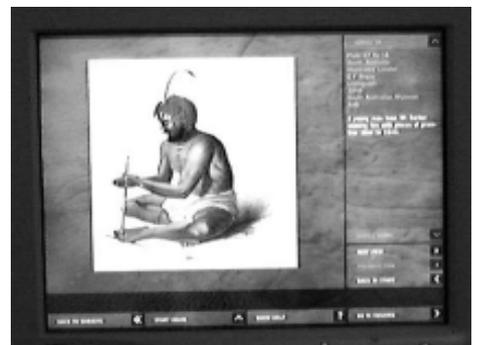


Drugs

Aboriginal people had a complex system of medical practices, remedies and diagnoses which had integral connections with religious and social systems within their societies. They made medicines from plants, animals and minerals. They also knew that some plants were narcotic or mind-numbing. These were especially useful for ceremonies and physical hardship. The module focuses on the drug pitjuri, showing how its use became a highly specialised activity, with its own material culture and rituals in eastern Central Australia.

Fire

Often overlooked or misunderstood, fire is one of the fundamental technologies which Aboriginal people used as carefully as any tool. This module explores the use of fire to construct hearths and cooking pits for cooking food; to achieve the best result in manufacturing objects, keeping warm through the night. Today Aboriginal people still use fire in some regions to keep the land 'clean'. In the past it made travel easier, removed spirits, encouraged plants to grow and helped hunters find animals.



South Australian Museum

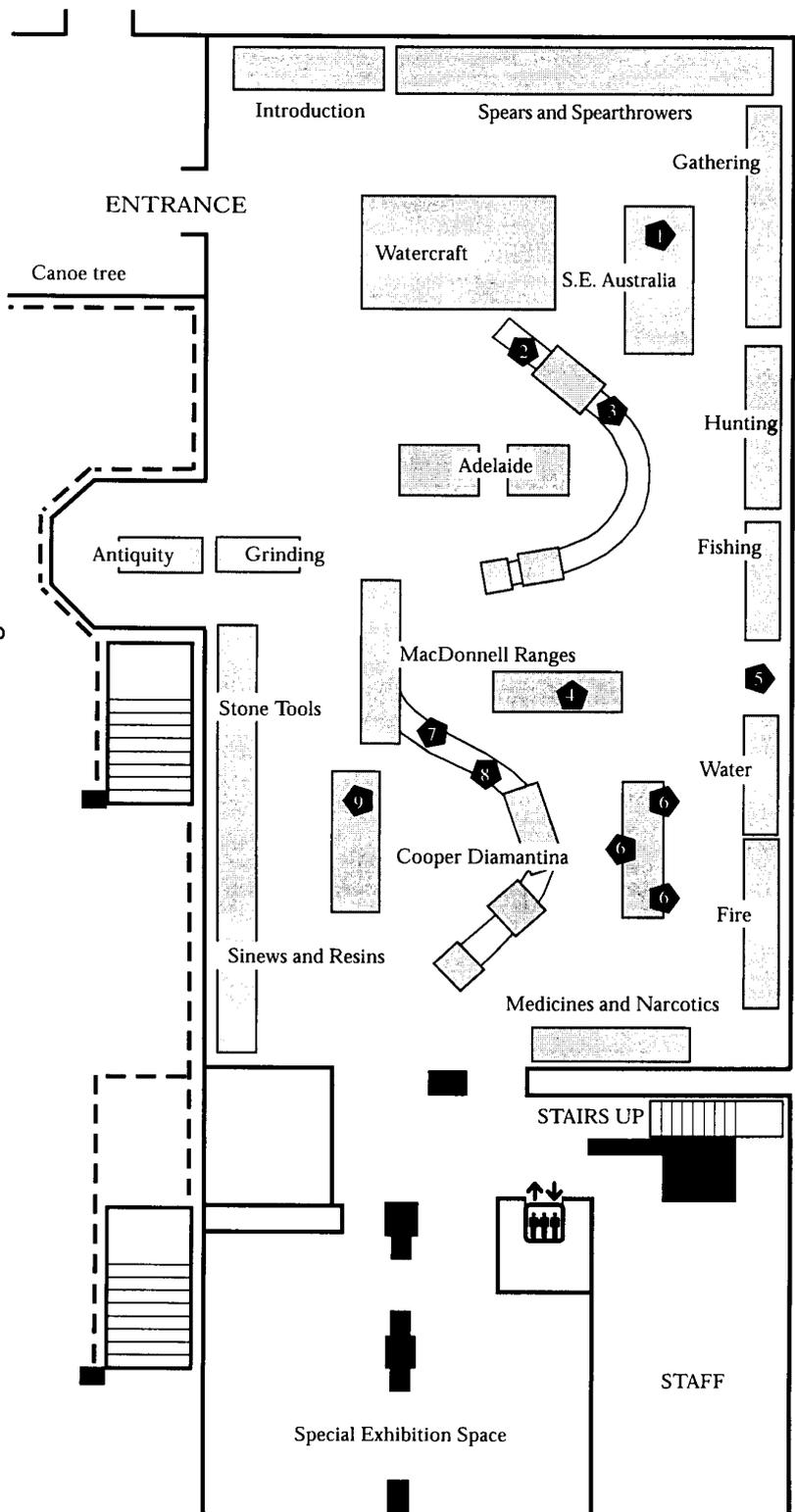
Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery Guide

www.samuseum.sa.gov.au

Open 10am to 5pm every day, except Christmas Day and Good Friday.



Ground Floor



Key

-  Lifts
-  Audio Visual
- 1 South East (Contemporary Voice)
- 2 Adelaide (Contemporary Voice)
- 3 South East (Contemporary Voice)
- 4 MacDonnell Ranges (Contemporary Voice)
- 5 Food and Water
- 6 Speaking Land interactive (Contemporary Voice)
- 7 MacDonnell Ranges (Contemporary Voice)
- 8 Cooper Diamantina (Contemporary Voice)
- 9 Cooper Diamantina

