

Reading Explorer 2, Unit 4: Aboriginal Rock Art

Narrator:

Deep in the Australian outback, among modern-day camp sites, there are hundreds of ancient sites of ritual and ceremony. They offer a rare look into the fascinating culture of the Aborigines. Many of these places were lost for years, and are only now being rediscovered.

These ceremonial sites are home to rock paintings older than the pyramids of Egypt. Local anthropologist Adam Macfie is our guide.

Adam Macfie:

“We’re talking about art that possibly goes back some 40,000 years or more. It’s probably some of the oldest art in the world, and the world doesn’t know about it. That’s the other thing.”

Narrator:

It is generally accepted that Aborigines settled in Australia about 55,000 years ago. Their ceremonies were performed here right up until the 20th century. The area is like a living museum.

Adam Macfie:

“This is an example of what I mean by a master artist. You can only imagine the detail that’s missing here. But this is very, very fine work. Very, very fine indeed.”

Narrator:

The drawings show symbols and images of something the Aborigines call the Dreaming. Legends of the Dreaming describe the creation of the world— its rivers, its mountains, and its humans. The Dreaming forms the basis for many of the Aborigines’ beliefs and traditions.

One of the most important stories of the Dreaming is that of the Rainbow Serpent, the creator of everything we see. Respected local elder Margaret (Margret) Katherine explains what it means to her.

Margaret Katherine:

“It’s the spirit that looks after the river and the country. If I die, my spirit will be there.”

Narrator:

These legends have been passed down through time, and the paintings have no meaning without them. Together, they ensure the Aborigines’ link to the past, and its people. They are all part of the land.

Margaret Katherine:

“I feel really good when I’m here because I can feel the presence of my great-great grandfather. And he’s there.”

Narrator:

Sadly, there are fewer and fewer tribal elders, like Margaret Katherine, who speak the languages and know the ancient stories. For the Aborigines, to tell the story of the Dreaming is to create the world again and again.

Margaret Katherine:

“Don’t forget your culture and live on with it forever in your heart and mind.”