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AUSTRALIA G59

Australia is the world's largest island. Most of its towns and big cities are on the country's coast. This is because much of the land is desert. It is known as the outback and is a dangerous place to be stranded without the correct survival knowledge or supplies.





In the late eighteenth century European settlers began to arrive in great numbers. The country had previously been solely inhabited for almost forty thousand years by Aborigines.

Above: Uluru, one of the sacred sites of the aboriginal people.

The Aboriginal spiritual belief has been loosely translated into English as being called Dreamtime. It explains the creation of people, animals and landscape.



The spirits of Aborigine ancestors took on human forms then moved through the land. They created the animals and plants, decreed laws, customs, rules of marriage, the rituals of initiation and the ceremonies of death. When finished they became part of the land by changing into trees, stars and rocks. These places are sacred to the Aborigine and they do not see the land as belonging to anyone. Instead, everyone respects the land they live on and so respect their ancestors too.

Aborigines have lived for thousands of years on dry and arid land. This means that water and food are scarce. They are experts at finding the resources to survive. By looking after the land, it has helped them flourish.



European settlers explored Australia in the nineteenth century but were unable to endure long journeys in the wilderness. It was only with the help of Aborigines that expeditions to cross the vast country were able to succeed.

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Shield

Aboriginal shields were used in combat, ceremonies and dances. The narrowest shields, such as this, were used in hand-to-hand fighting. They were light, easy to handle and protected the owner from blows. A larger, broader shield would have protected the holder against spears.



The shield has been cut from tree bark. An example is shown in the picture below. It was necessary to regularly renew the shield because they soon became damaged through use.

The back of the shields are engraved with precise patterns, normally made with a possum-tooth. They are rubbed with white clay to enhance the designs. The face of their shields are often covered with fine grooves but this one has been worked to a smooth finish.

One of the Aboriginal names given to the thinner shield is a tamarang. There were once several hundred Aboriginal languages. The tribes differed just as much as European people with each having their own territory, language and cultures.

Making a shield.



A possum.



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Sword club



Imagine wielding and striking someone with this. This is the Aboriginal version of a sword. They did not have the skills required to make metal swords but made amazing woodcraft.

One side has a patterned design. If you look closely you might be able to see a reddish-brown colour. This is ochre and has been rubbed onto the sword club. The design on the back is very complicated. At first it might just appear to be lines, but look at how they continually swerve in patterns. There has been another design rubbed in on top of the lines as well. We don't know if the patterns on the sword club and the shield have any meaning.

Weapons such as the sword club and shield were originally used to fight other tribal groups that invaded their territory. The European settlers took ownership of the land, an idea that was contrary to the Aborigine Dreamtime. As European settlers increasingly took control of Australia they started to hunt Aborigines. They believed the Aborigines were second class citizens. The settlers had modern weaponry such as guns and the Aborigines had to use these weapons to defend themselves.