

Vanessa Charles Nungurrayi

Born: 27/10/1971
Region: Central Western Desert
Community Centre: Laramba
Country: Laramba
Language Bloc: Arandic
Language: Anmatyerre
Social Affiliations: Nungurrayi subsection

Subjects: Bush tuckers

Water Dreaming

In the Dreamtime, Jangala and Jampijinpa, two Ancestral Beings of the Central/Western Desert tribes, went throughout the Western Desert of Central Australia teaching law and ceremony to Aborigines living at isolated camps.

They found many places where the waterholes and creeks had completely dried up, forcing people to leave their camps and wander through the desert trying to find water. Many died of thirst. These two ancestors sat down one day to consider how they could alleviate the distress caused by long periods of drought. They decided to create a special ceremony called Ngapa Jukurrpa (Water Dreaming), and called on the Lightning Man, boss of the storms, to send lightning strikes into the sky. The first people to see these flashes of light were so terrified that they took up spears and boomerangs to fight them. The ancestors then summoned the great Rainbow Serpent to growl continuously, causing loud thunder to roll across the sky, followed by heavy rain as its forked tongue pierced the stormclouds.

As rain poured down, the people dropped their weapons and began to sing and dance with glee. Waterholes were filled and creeks ran with fresh water. Grass sprouted underneath the sand and plants flourished. Animals came to drink at the waterholes, and provided a further source of food for the starving people. Later, the summer sun dried the stalks of edible plant and the wind lifted up seedpods and distributed them at places throughout the desert, thus ensuring food for the people living there. In rainmaking ceremonies all of these events are re-enacted by the performers in a series of song and dance cycles. Fire Dreaming is also the subject of a song and dance cycle. Aborigines regard fire and water as the two most important essentials to life. The two rain ancestors came to a place called Mikanji, a small waterhole just north of Yuendumu. Here they saw in the sand the tracks of other water/rain ancestors from the Anmatyerre and Pintubi tribes.

The combined presence of the Warlpiri rainmakers and the convergence of tracks of rainmakers from other tribes caused a great storm, which spread across the land. It was so heavy and continuous that two big floods started. One of these was at Thompson's Rockhole, 350 km south of Lajamanu, and the other was at Karlupurlurnu, a lake south of Lajamanu. The rains cascaded from waterhole to waterhole and down dry creek beds until all were filled to overflowing. The rain finished up and Wartapari. The two men separated at Yuendumu, and Jangala went north towards the sea. He saw the tracks of two Emu Ancestors in the sand, and together these three Ancestral Beings travelled across the Tanami Desert. They came to a waterhole where birds were pulling out snakes to eat. One of the birds flew away with water secured underneath its wings and dropped it in a place to the north called Papinya, creating a large lake. The flooded plains eventually linked Tanami Desert with the sea.

This painting depicts the main water holes (large circles) in different areas of the desert.



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