

Fleurieu Peninsula Swamps Aboriginal Values Sharing and Trading



Warkii/ Ramindjeri Elders and family members travel to sacred sites to learn about Tjilbruke and the origin of water resources in the eastern Fleurieu Peninsula. © Nicole Motteux, 2021

Fleurieu Swamps are some of the most biodiverse and productive habitats on earth and important to the survival of many species of birds, frogs, fish, insects, mammals and reptiles that live and breed in or around them. One indicator of this rich productivity is the five Indigenous language groups that lived in the areas surrounding swamps on the central and eastern Fleurieu Peninsula. Another indicator may be the use of these wetter, productive valleys and swamps as a meeting place during summer, especially for the Warkii, Peramangk, and Kurna people – evidence for which includes the shared *Tjilbruke* story. The area around Mount Compass, Yundi, Nangkita and Tooperang was viewed by the Warkii, Peramangk, and Kurna peoples as common ground. They would trade or interact in this place where plentiful fresh water and food were available all year round. This follows a similar pattern in other parts of Australia, where when there was a sufficient surplus of foods, neighbouring groups were invited “on Country” to feast and to hold joint ceremonies. Many Aboriginal people believe that the conservation and re-learning of knowledge about food sources is important for maintaining their identity.



Tanya Karpany is learning and sharing information about swamp medicinal plants used in Aboriginal remedies. © Nicole Motteux, 2021



Leon Dodd recording features of swamp plants valued by Aboriginal people. © Nicole Motteux, 2021

When the coastal areas dried out in summer and fresh, surface water from the *Tjilbruke* coastal springs dried up, the inland swamps and Finniss River provided secure water. The middle of Fleurieu Peninsula, where the swamps formed and secure fresh water was found, are at the boundary of several language groups and so was a space for meeting,

trading and sharing. Access to secure water, as well as abundant birdlife and plant foods provided a safe and peasant meeting place particularly in drought years such as during a La Niña event.



Ngarrindjeri Elders recall stories and lore, and share their memories with the next generation of land custodians.

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Our life is as strong today as it has always been. We have been privileged to have shared the lives of some very wise and deep thinkers who shared their ways and that of those that have been passed down through generations.

I remember spending time with Dad and my Nanna who taught me many lessons. I still rely on these lessons today.

I was lucky as I was a favourite amongst my dad and mums' families. Looking back, I learnt so much.

As a younger person our Dad took us all on a journey along the Coorong. At the time it was a good camping holiday but thinking back it was his way of passing down his knowledge when the opportunities to do so were taken away.

Text: John Fargher Images: @nicolemotteuxphotography

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