



Part One

The Country and Its Culture

LALAI AND THE CREATION OF THE COUNTRY

Our stories describe our country; what happened in Lalai time.

Donny Woolagoodja

Like other members of their generation who grew up in their homeland, Janet Oobagooma and Donny Woolagoodja have benefited from the store of knowledge and wisdom passed on to them by their elders. During the 1940s and early 1950s, they moved with their families between the mission at Kunmunya and their saltwater countries along the coast, where they spent periods of time hunting and gathering land and sea resources. *It's natural when you're out in the bush, reports Donny. When you're small, you just pick things up real quick. You're learning all the time. You learn from your uncles and your fathers.*

Adults took advantage of these times on country to teach their youth the stories associated with the country as well as the names for hundreds of places across the land and the sea. Some of these names refer to specific sites, among them places where Lalai beings such as Wandjina and Woongudd reside. Others designate larger areas of land and water, among them the local areas of country called dambeema. Young people learned that some of the names for places on country have a nested quality whereby a larger area is known by the same name as one of its constituent parts. For example, the large region known today as Laddinyoom takes its name from one of the dambeema within it. Malandoom is the name of a dambeema as well as the Woddordda name for that section of the Prince Regent River that flows through this dambeema.

For Dambeemangaddee people, their overall country has been formed by ancestral creator beings who derive from the ancient but enduring era of creation called Lalai.²² Often referred to in English as 'the Dreaming' or 'the Dreamtime', this is the cornerstone of Aboriginal world views across Australia. In contrast to views in the West, this Indigenous understanding of creation is non-linear in the sense that concrete

²² 'Lalai' is the term used by Woddordda and Wunambal language groups, while for Ngarinyin the term is 'Lalan'.



Preceding pages: The beach at Lang-gee in Loolim. Photo: Joh Bornman.

Above: Traditional Owners care for country in order to maintain it the way Wandjina and Woongudd created it in Lalai. This includes burning off the dry vegetation so that fresh growth can occur. Shown here is one of the High Cliffy Islands in Yawjabai country that Traditional Owners care for. Photo: Kim Doohan.

phenomena and forms of the present are said both to affirm and to re-enact the events of Lalai, and also to inform the events of the future. As with other concepts within the Wandjina-Woongudd belief system, Lalai is a complex, richly textured and multifaceted concept which Donny says is *very hard to explain to other people; they find it hard to get the real meaning of it*. He continues: *Lalai has a deep, deep meaning. It is not just ordinary dreaming that you have at night. For us it is about the creation of country, the finding of children, many other kinds of spiritual things and our way of life. It is about the future and what might happen*. Janet agrees that *Lalai is forever after*, and that *it is not a simple thing that whitefellas think when we use the word 'Dreaming'*.

So, too, there are characteristic ways in which Dambeemangaddee people understand and experience their country. The country is perceived as the embodied consequence of the actions of powerful ancestral creator beings rather than a landscape that has been altered through the actions of geological or climatic events, or by human agents. Country, including land, rivers, reefs, the sea bed and ocean waters, is enlivened with various kinds of sentient entities with whom humans daily interact. Country sustains its Traditional Owners but its resident beings can also harm them. *Sometimes Wandjina gets wild with us*, says Janet. *That's why we have to introduce ourselves and others we are taking [on country] with us*. Janet continues that when people are in their country they experience its spiritual essence:

This is called ngarrgulum; the spirit in us. It's when you feel good in your body, your tummy; then your spirit is good, your ngarrgulum is happy. You get that feeling when you come into the country and when you visit Wandjina and talk to the country and to the Wandjina and show respect. You feel happy and excited that your presence is there.

Above all, country must be respected and cared for. Donny stresses that it is important for people to visit country so that it does not 'get lonely' and lose its vitality. Nor must country ever be left empty without people to care for it:

Culture comes from the country. That's why we have to look after the country. Even the birds and animals understand what we're talking about. When people stop visiting country, the country cannot smell their malambad, the sweat of the body, the body scent; even the fish, they are half human too, and they miss the people. And then the country changes. Mangroves cover it over and the waterholes get dry because the people are not in their country.



Donny Woolagoodja visiting paintings of native honey bees at a rock shelter in Laddingoom in 2003. These bees are found only in Australia. Photo: Daniel Vachon.

Caring for country entails practical, ritual and metaphysical elements, such as the asking and giving of permission to access country or the performance of rituals that welcome, introduce or reintroduce people to country. It also involves burning off the dry vegetation to clear it away for new growth when the annual rains arrive. As described in Chapter 2, caring for country involves refreshing images of Lalai beings that are found in caves and rock shelters. Today, caring for country also includes removing litter that has been left at places visited by tourists and, importantly, making decisions about what can happen in country. Janet explains:

We say in Woddordda 'madja mooloomooloo'. That means 'I am looking after the country'. We are the carers of country because we do not destroy it and because we like it to be natural, the way Wandjina and Woongudd

created it. We do not destroy the country or the view; we cannot damage anything. There are songs on the land and the sea and a story for each important place. The birds and animals all have songs in the ceremonies too. If the country is damaged then we feel unhappy. Our country is rich and alive because we look after it; we are the carers of country.

Country adjacent to the Glenelg River in Woddordda country. Photo: Kim Doohan.



Woongudd

Beliefs about Lalai are intertwined with beliefs about Woongudd, which refers to the life force that pervades the entire Wandjina-Woongudd cosmos and also to a primordial creator Snake (described later). *There are two parts of the Woongudd*, explains Donny. *They are together but they are separate parts*. The Woongudd life force is the essence of all living things — including Wandjina, humans, animals and plants — and it permeates the land and the sea, including the mountains, rivers and stone formations that characterise the topography of the country.

Woongudd also refers to the ‘child-spirits’ that men ‘find’ in a dream and then pass to their wives in a further dream before a child can be born. These child-spirits generally take the form of an animal, a plant, a substance such as honey or wax, or in some cases an inanimate object. For each individual, being found as a child-spirit creates an inviolate connection to a place that is imbued with Lalai beings. People speak of themselves as being ‘that Fish’ or ‘that Goanna’ or ‘that Whirlpool’ from the place where they were found. Donny explains that *Woongudd is a spirit, but it has a human part to it. It can become a human when it's born*. The newborn child then comes to refer to the form their child-spirit assumed as their personal Woongudd. Alternatively, a married man may have an unusual experience that is analogous to this process of finding. For example, he may catch a fish which turns out to have such a foul taste that it is inedible. Later on, when his wife becomes pregnant, he will recall this event and deduce that the uneaten fish is the Woongudd of his unborn child. In some cases, a person's Woongudd child-spirit is the same child-spirit as that of a deceased ancestor. Such finding by a person's father gives rise — quite literally people say — to their individual Woongudd identity and their Woongudd name. This name is one of several names that individuals come to have during their lifetime. Janet adds that people also have a name from a long deceased ancestor, in which case they are said to ‘carry’ that name: *People get names from old people. Names carry on like that*. Some people also have a nick-name based on one of their characteristics or an event that has affected them.

The place where a person has been found is of great significance to them. People report that they *baree* from this place, as Janet describes:

‘Baree’ means where your spirit got up and jumped on your father’s shoulder. That is where your Woongudd is from. You get up with a name and call that name to your father. My name is that country, that Woongudd area. That is baree. And the baby might have a scar where the father speared it or stoned it. That leaves a mark so that we can see



Over the years a number of Dambeemangaddee people have been found in whirlpools in the sea (left) and waterholes such as the one shown here (right), which is located along the course of the Glenelg River. Photos: (left) Kim Doohan, (right) Joh Bornman.

where it came from. ‘What was she?’ they ask, and then they say: ‘Oh she was a snake or mullet or something like that’. They know from the mark what they were and where they came from. There are lots of baby spirits that come from the same area; the sea bed, ocean, creek, land, river and waterholes. It could be in another man’s country, maybe in Ngarinyin country or Wunambal country, even in the desert. It depends on where the father is travelling when that baby spirit sees him. The baby spirit might look at him a couple of times, then he says: ‘Oh, I like this man. I want him for my father.’ That baby spirit could turn into a lizard or a turkey or a kangaroo, or even a snake.

Not all child-spirits are found by a person’s biological father. There are, for example, reports of a child-spirit being found by one man but either ‘given’, or even ‘stolen’, by another man before the child is born. This is what happened when Janet’s father, Artie Banjaroo, and her mother, Jean Woongoonid, were camping on a beach called Lang-gee in Loolim along with Jerry Jangoot and his wife, Rosie Bendja:

They say we, Mervin [Jangoot] and me, have the same father. He was the one who found me as a crocodile. And then the other dad [Artie] took me away, see. He stole me. And then I was born to mum and dad but I should have been born to him. The four of them was living at Lang-gee. They were camping on that sand beach there. My Woongudd name is Eewaambood, after that crocodile; it’s a medium sized one. They had a galam, two of them. And me as a crocodile I come along and stole the raft belonging to old man Jerry. I jumped on it and I was swimming around with it. He said, ‘Agh, I dreamt of a little baby. It was riding on the raft’. And then it was just like my dad was like a mabarn.²³ And he took me away [from Jerry]. Dad took mum and granny [Gertie Balanjayn Yaboo] to Broome and he left us there. I was born the day the Japanese bombed Broome, 3rd March 1942. So when I was born my parents took me in the cradle to old man Jangoot and Rosie and said, ‘This is your daughter’. So from that time on, they classed me as his daughter.

The giving of a child-spirit to another man, or when a man ‘steals’ a child-spirit from another man, appears to be a relatively common practice and one that has been largely ignored by anthropologists. Its consequences are significant: it is one of the ways whereby an individual comes to have two fathers, and it establishes a lifelong relationship between the individual and the father who initially found them.

The Stories of Lalai

For countless generations, adults have taught their youth about the events of Lalai through the oral accounts they call their ‘stories’ or their ‘histories’ when they are speaking English or the Australian creole language known as Kimberley Kriol.²⁴ Many of these events are linked to a particular part of the country. These accounts are extremely complex and for each one there are alternative versions that focus on one or more of its aspects. In any given telling, certain details may be omitted or merely implied. Nor do these stories typically conform to the linear structure that characterises storytelling in the West. It is not uncommon for an elder to begin with one facet of a story, for example

²³ A person with magical powers, sometimes translated as a sorcerer.

²⁴ Despite its similarities to English in vocabulary, Kimberley Kriol has a distinct syntactic structure and grammar, and is therefore considered a language in its own right.



A painting done by Donny Woolagoodja in 1999 conveys the story of a Wandjina and Lalai beings called Mola Mola who have their paintings at a site near the Glenelg River (see Chapter 13). Acrylic on canvas, 56 cm x 76 cm. Photo: Anthony Paz Blundell; courtesy Donny Woolagoodja.

its impact on humans — ‘Woodoi and Joongoon made the marriage laws’ — and to then circle back to provide the details of how this event came about. Such characteristics of Aboriginal oral culture explain, in part, the fact that alternative versions of the same account have been recorded by different researchers over the years.

Young people hear portions of a story many times as they grow up, and in this way they learn to fill in the missing material in a given account. They also see these stories portrayed through contemporary forms of art, including their enactment in the performances of song and dance called *joonba* (and sometimes called corroborees).²⁵ *Joonba tell the story*

²⁵ See V Blundell, 2003, ‘The art of country: aesthetics, place, and Aboriginal identity in north-west Australia’, in D Trigger and G Griffiths (eds), *Disputed Territories: Land, Culture and Identity in Settler Societies*, Aberdeen and Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press; Blundell and Woolagoodja, *Keeping the Wanjinis Fresh*.



Donny Woolagoodja and Janet Oobagooma on a beach in Woddordda country where there is a stone wall created by Jindeebirdj (Willy Wagtail). Women, especially grandmothers, play a key role in storytelling because fathers and grandfathers are often away. Photo: Joh Bornman.

of creation, explains Donny. *They tell what every country means*. Adds Janet, *We sing songs about country in joonba*. There are also joonba that call to mind events that happened in the past, such as accidents at sea. For example, a joonba performed at their native title determination is called the Baddawara Joonba. It portrays a group of people travelling in a canoe in Woddordda country who drowned because of rough water.²⁶ As with indigenous people in other parts of the world, these stories give meaning to places across their country and are part of what makes the country theirs. Other indigenous people have different stories and beliefs and their countries are inhabited by different spirits.²⁷

²⁶ The joonba was dreamed by Kenny Oobagooma, who gave it to his Oonggarddangoowai brother Sam Woolagoodja.

²⁷ See H Brody, 2000, *The Other Side of Eden: Hunter-Gatherers, Farmers and the Shaping of the World*, Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, p. 246.

Many of these stories of Lalai describe how ancestral beings, such as the Wandjina and Woongudd, carved out rivers, lifted up mountains or transformed themselves into paintings at the many caves and rock shelters that dot the West Kimberley landscape. Others describe how they made the laws and customs that form the moral foundation of Wandjina-Woongudd society. In some accounts Lalai animals possess most of the physical abilities which they now have but are also able to transform themselves into human form. The Dambeemangaddee forebear Elkin Umbagai once said that during Lalai, *animals and birds lived like human beings*.²⁸ People often begin their accounts by explaining that the animal portrayed, for example Dugong or Turtle, was a man or a woman in Lalai.²⁹ In contrast to views of creation in the West, the earth and its life forms are thought to have already existed. The world contained a great sea and, as Donny reports, the Wandjina played a key role in making this unformed space a meaningful place: *At the beginning the world was soft. Old folks say Wandjina made the land, what foods they have there, all the things for the people. They would say, 'Wandjina gave me that place, that area; Wandjina gave me language.'*

The events portrayed in these accounts are affirmed as people experience the cultural geography of their country. As they move across the land or travel on the sea, they see evidence of the creative labours of Lalai beings. A granny points to a group of Wandjina transformed into boulders on a sandy beach. A father tells his son how Jindeebiridj (Willy Wagtail) created a stone wall on an island in Woddordda country to hold back a flood.

Senior people also describe dreaming tracks that show the routes taken by Wandjina, Woongudd and the other Lalai beings. For example, as described in Chapter 24, Wandjina in the form of honey bees created a track that connects country on the Yampi Peninsula with the Prince Regent River area. Another track was made by a 'mob' of Woongudd snakes who travelled south along the coast from the Hunter River, in Wunambal country, to the mouth of the Prince Regent River, where Wunambal country meets up with Woddordda country.

28 P Lucich, 1969, *Children's Stories from the Worora*, Australian Aboriginal Studies no. 18, PMS 2278, Canberra: AIATSIS, p. 5, informant's English version. See Chapter 11 for a discussion of this Dambeemangaddee forebear.

29 See IM Crawford, 1968, *The Art of the Wandjina: Aboriginal Cave Paintings in Kimberley, Western Australia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, p. 98.

Woongudd Snakes

Woongudd snakes figure prominently in the stories of Lalai, where they sometimes travel in mobs. Large stone arrangements are evidence of the Woongudd's presence.³⁰ The Snake can be male or female; for example, spear-shaped boulders are said to be the 'eggs' of a female Woongudd. Manifestations of the Snake are widespread throughout the country. For example, writing in his journal in 1928, Reverend Love described a flat rock located between Port George IV Inlet and Hanover Bay said to be a bark vessel left by a Woongudd gathering a fruit called *manjawara*. He reported that the stone was called Chimbalerri [Jimbaleedee], after the name of the bark bucket, and stones on top of the rock were identified as pieces of this fruit. 'Out at sea,' wrote Love, 'perhaps a mile away, is a round, black rock. This is the cake or ball of Munjawarra [manjawara] that the Woongguja [Woongudd] made. She made it for a Wonjuna [Wandjina] named Punullgurra.'³¹

As well as being present on the land, Woongudd appears in the sky, where a rainbow is seen as the body of the Snake as he emerges from the earth. Woongudd also comprises the earth's foundation, where he is thought of as a giant underworld serpent. The body of the Snake can be seen protruding onto the land in the form of boulders and rocky outcrops.

Along the coast, the undulating body of Woongudd breaks through the surface of the sea to form islands and reefs. *The tide is his belly and sometimes his back bone*, says Janet, *but you can't see it. We just see it is blue and green mixed. If they wanted to travel quickly in a canoe or raft, old people used to say, 'Catch that ingaloom, his tummy'*.³² White-topped rolling waves are Woongudd as a female. Rough seas occur when this female Woongudd engages in intercourse with her husband as she rides atop the larger waves which are her husband's back.

The Woongudd life force is particularly potent in whirlpools and waterholes, where the Snake is potentially dangerous. *That's his back*, explains Janet. *You can see where it goes round and round like that; it means it is taking you, it will spin you*. The foamy bit is the Woongudd's spit, called *jang-ngorj*. When people approach such places, they do so in a quiet and respectful way. *We're not supposed to make noise there, or swim there*, says Janet. *If you swim in a Woongudd area he will drown you*. There are powerful men who

30 See Love, 1938, 'Illustrations of the stone monuments of the Worora', *Records of the South Australian Museum*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 137-39.

31 Love, 'Handwritten journal', p. 72.

32 *Ingaloomb* means his tummy, *nyngaloomb* is her tummy and *ngungaloomb* is your tummy.

can ‘sing’ the Woongudd to make a person drown. Donny tells of his experience when his father found his younger sister’s child-spirit in one such Woongudd place:

When I was a kid I was travelling with my dad, Sam, and Artie, Janet’s father. We were sleeping on dad’s boat, the Windsong, and in the middle of the night at Hell’s Gate a big tide came and pulled us into the whirlpool. We woke up but she [the Woongudd] never drowned us. She kept us there because she is a whirlpool herself. Then my mother got pregnant after that. She pulled us in but looked after us too.

Montgomery Reef in Yawjabai country. ‘When it is a new spring tide you can see the deep hole in the reef where the Woongudd comes from,’ explains Janet Oobagooma. ‘She is watching you with her eye. That is the conception site of Donny Woolagoodja’s brother Monty Woolagoodja. They [Woongudd] were people too.’ Photo: Kim Doohan.



When Dambeemangaddee people learn that tourists have gone swimming in a waterhole where Woongudd is known to reside, they are deeply offended that their cultural protocols have been disregarded. They are also concerned for the safety of these outsiders.

Wandjina

Among the most powerful expressions of the Woongudd life force are the ancestral beings called Wandjina. Along with their presence as paintings at rock art sites, they figure prominently in the stories of Lalai. They appear as male and female, and many have individual names. In some accounts the Wandjina are said to have lived like people during Lalai, while in others they appear in other forms, for example as animals or plants, or as clouds and lightning. Dambeemangaddee people distinguish between saltwater Wandjina, called *Loolee*, who arrived on the coast from the west, and a group of Wandjina who took part in a great battle at the inland site of Wanaliddee in Ngarinyin country. After this battle, these inland Wandjina dispersed throughout the Wandjina-Woongudd homeland. Among them was the Wandjina Namaralay, who travelled to Malandoom and then to the coastal countries of Loolim and the Yawjabai, where he encountered the Loolee.

As with all members of the Wandjina-Woongudd society, the Wandjina are considered the spirit ancestors of Dambeemangaddee people. They are credited with a huge number of creative acts. As they travelled across an unformed landscape and a pre-existing world sea, they carved out waterways, lifted up mountains and produced the salty content of the sea. *Wandjina made the mountains and the country*, says Donny. *They created all the different things, those Wandjina*. Janet adds that Wandjina made deep holes in reefs so that coastal people could sustain themselves by catching fish: *Wandjina made these things, not with his hands but with his mouth. The power is in his mouth. Wandjina just said the words*. Wandjina are also said to have ‘named’ (that is, created) the various animals and plants that people know today, and they invented important artefacts. Along with Woongudd, they are acknowledged as providing the child-spirits that men must find before a child can be born.

As well as their presence throughout the land and the sea, Wandjina are part of a complex skyscape that young people become familiar with as they grow up. As such, Wandjina are closely associated with water and are seen as the source of the annual rains that invigorate the land. As the bringers of rain that ensures the replenishment of species, Wandjina manifest as cumulonimbus, rain-bearing clouds called *aarja* that move across the country in the wet season, or *Wunjugu*, from December to April.



Wandjina at a rock shelter on the mainland just south of Doubtful Bay at the intersection of Jilan and Yawjabai country. Photo courtesy Kirk Woolagoodja.

Aarja is the *Wandjina* that starts the splash of the first rain, says Janet. Donny adds that *Wandjina* and *Woongudd* work together to create rain and cyclones: *Sometimes they can be dangerous like a punishment if people have done the wrong thing; other times they create cyclones and rain to make sure there is plenty of bush tucker to eat.*

In the heavens lives a *Wandjina* named Walanganda, also called Ngadjaya,³³ sometimes conceived of as the Milky Way *Wandjina*, sometimes as the Milky Way itself or, as Donny states, as the *spirit of the Wandjina*. In 1929 Love was told that a *Wandjina* named Chauloi, whose picture is in a cave called Ungudungurri or Nargoodba, put

³³ Ngadjaya is a Woddordda term while Walanganda is the name used by Ngarinyin, Wunambal and Gaambera and sometimes also by Woddordda. Love concluded that 'Wallangunda' [Walanganda] was the proper name while 'Ngajaja' [Ngadjaya] was a descriptive name meaning 'He who is high above us'. 'A man in an aeroplane is "ngajahm koonyingiri", i.e. "he is going high up over us"', wrote Love in his 'Handwritten journal', p. 23.

the sun in the sky: 'Before this', Love wrote, 'the clouds hung low like a roof. When Chauloi put the sun in the sky, the clouds went high up.'³⁴

Along with their animal partners the *Wandjina* are the source of the laws and customs by which their human descendants are meant to live. These laws affect the way in which people are connected to country, as well as the way in which they are connected to, and interact with, one another. In the various accounts regarding their creative labours and adventures, the *Wandjina* display a range of emotions and abilities, including anger when their laws are broken and the ability to communicate with people today. For example, they continue to instruct people by 'visiting' them in their dreams. *We live by the laws of Woongudd and Wandjina*, concludes Janet, *because it is the everlasting spirit of Lalai that flows through the country.*

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 77.

LALAI AND WESTERN VIEWS OF DEEP TIME

As described in this chapter, Dambeemangaddee people refer to Lalai, the Dreaming, as their history of the creation of the country by powerful ancestral beings during a time when the land was still malleable, still soft. Lalai speaks of momentous events as the ancestral beings made the land and seas as they are today, inscribed everywhere with signs of their presence. From the activities of Lalai came a system of law, of rules to live by, through which Dambeemangaddee people today are connected to their world of ancestral beings and ways of being.

The science of geology shares with Lalai an interest in the broad scope of time and the formation of the land. But, unlike Lalai, geology is interested in linear chronologies and deep time sequences through which a place like the Kimberley was assembled over millions of years by physical forces; present landforms have been shaped through the movement of continental plates, shifts in climate and sea level, and the actions of wind, water and ice. In geological terms, the language of plate tectonics, progenies and cratons

signifies a world in which the land is still soft and is still being moulded by immense and inexorable forces. Geologists try to understand something of the nature of time and landscape by developing a linear scale that envisages earth's history through a set of units, eons, eras and periods, according to events that took place in each.

In this scale of time Dambeemangaddee land and people have a very long history. There is evidence of human occupation in the Kimberley from the Quaternary period, middle Pleistocene, around 40,000 years ago. In an overview of the Kimberley archaeological record, Michael Morwood described 'a long and complex prehistoric sequence including changes in land use, projectile technology and rock art', beginning 42,000 years ago as dated from red ochre deposits at Carpenter's Gap in Bunuba country. Archaeological sites in Dambeemangaddee country, at Koolan Island and in neighbouring country at Wijingadda, show human usage and evidence of trade in pearl shell 30,000 years ago. One site at Koolan Island (Koolan 2) shows well-preserved organic remains at all levels, providing evidence of environmental and economic changes over time. At a time when sea levels were much lower than the present, and the coast was approximately two hundred kilometres further out from where it is today, the existence of pearl and baler shell at Koolan indicates that people were occupying land that is now covered by water, known as the coastal shelf, and that inland and coastal groups were linked by long-distance exchange.

The small amount of archaeological field research in Dambeemangaddee country suggests that the colder and drier climate of the last ice age (c. 22,000–18,000 BP) had an impact on human populations and brought changing patterns of occupation, land usage and mobility. Recognising the scant nature of the archaeological record in the Kimberley, archaeologists have suggested that there might have been a period when human populations vacated large tracts of country as the climate became colder and drier. It is likely that coastal peoples also responded to changes in the climate by pulling back to places of refuge where survival was easier, continuing to visit

or live on more extensive areas of country, made possible by cyclic weather conditions.

As ice levels began to recede about 18,000 years ago, conditions along the coast of the Kimberley changed, leading to a period geologists call the Holocene. The climate grew warmer, sea levels rose and conditions for permanent human occupation improved. Over a period of thousands of years, the rising seas steadily inundated large tracts of land that had previously been available for human terrestrial occupation. In Dambeemangaddee country, where the tides and the daily cycle of sea-level changes continue to exercise a powerful influence on patterns of human occupation and land use, the slow but steady rise of the waters brought a different relationship with the land. It created sea country, where land that had previously been walked over was now covered with water and travelled by the double-log raft while remaining a vital part of the Dambeemangaddee home.

The massive but gradual changes to land and sea country over the Holocene period occurred over many human generations and were sometimes interspersed by more rapid and possibly catastrophic events. As recently as the seventeenth century, Morwood reports, a large tsunami generated waves powerful enough to reach far inland, possibly as far as the Great Sandy Desert. The tsunami's impact on the Aboriginal people who lived along the coast in Dambeemangaddee lands, and even those well inland, must have been immense.

Sources: Australian Heritage Council, *Final Assessment of National Heritage Values of the West Kimberley*, p. 9; CC Cotton, 1942, *Geomorphology: An Introduction to the Study of Landforms*, Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, p. 13; MJ Morwood, 2012, 'Archaeology of the Kimberley, Northwest Australia', in C Clement, J Gresham and H McGlashan (eds), *Kimberley History: People, Exploration and Development*, Perth: Kimberley Society, pp. 29–30; S O'Connor, 1999, *30,000 Years of Aboriginal Occupation: Kimberley, North West Australia*, Canberra: Australian National University; M Smith, 2013, *Archaeology of Australia's Deserts*, Cambridge: Cambridge World Archaeology, p. 129.