

## Story of the Peramangk People

Peramangk Peoples (known as the “Fire Makers” and also “Red Ochre Peoples”), because of their use and access to Red Ochre, flint and mineral pyrites, lived on the eastern side of the escarpment of the Mount Lofty Ranges. Records indicate that approximately 600 Peramangk living around Mount Barker and at least 1,200 across its Nation and Claim areas at the time of European colonisation. There are still many descendants living today in South Australia. The whole language of these people has not survived, but there are still many words, names of places and names of the Clans that made up the Peramangk Nation.

The Peramangk people share close relationships, culture and some language with the Nations of the Kurna to the West, Ngadjuri to the north, Ngarrindjeri to the south and Meru to the east. The Peramangk lived in the strip of the county running north from Mount Barker through Harrogate, Gumeracha, Mount Pleasant and Springton to the Angaston district and south to Strathalbyn. There are also sites along the River Murray where Peramangk people had access to the River, Peramangk place names can still be found at these places Peramangk people had relations along the River Murray, Mannum and areas north of Manunka and around it to Swan Reach.

The Peramangk Clan Group of Mertingeragal, includes the areas around Mount Barker, the Mount Barker Summit, Brukunga, Native Valley, Harrogate up to the back of Mount Torrens and across to Kanmantoo. This is the land of my Father, his Father and our ancestors. The Summit and the smaller hill next to it where Ngeringa Cultural Centre now sits were both used by the Ngarrindjeri nation. The smaller hill was very significant for funeral Ceremonies and artworks kept at the Adelaide Museum capture the Smoking Ceremonies that were performed there by the Ngarrindjeri Peoples and is still a significant place of importance.

There was trading between the Peramangk and the Aboriginal people in adjoining Nations, with them supplying: Ochre, flint, quartz, supple whip-stick mallee spears, opossum skins and other items not found on the plains and lower lakes. They would remain at the campsite for several days before moving, this prevents over use of the area and its food supply/resources thus ensuring the environment stayed the same for future generations over thousands of years.

The Peramangk would return to the sites used in previous years depending on the seasons and the condition of the environment. The diet also varied according to the season with vegetables, seeds, honey, eggs, grubs, insects, lizards, snakes, fish, yabbies, opossums and larger game with kangaroos, wallabies and emus all included, but depended on traditional laws of season and permissions of access. Peramangk people wore very little clothing, especially in summer, but the women were more likely to wear a cloak of opossum fur or kangaroo skin.

Places names within the landscape mark a clear boundary of Peramangk Territories and their many Clans, even though they also shared many trade items and dreaming across common ground, water, sky and the stars. Arts sites along the eastern escarpment and the boundaries defined in the Tjilbruke and Ngarrindjeri song-lines that are also part of the Kurna dreaming.

The ancient beings that carved out this land and the dreaming stores of these beings is still a living presence and known by many of our Meruwatta – (Country men), Nepo-anna (neighbours) and adjoining Nations, our umbilical cord to cultural ways and country – This will never change... even when the surface of the earth we all stand on does. Access to Country by foot is part of who we are, we are bound to the land by our heritage, birth rites, dreaming and creator stories: we are in the same through our Totems and as the land changes and as it Dies we die with it.

**Summary by: Ivan Copley OAM 2006 revised 2015**