



# The Journey Cycles of the Boonwurrung

Stories with Boonwurrung Language  
by Carolyn Briggs

2nd Edition

First published 2008  
Second edition 2014

© The Boonwurrung Foundation Ltd. 2014  
P.O. Box 18064  
Collins St East  
8003

Written By Carolyn Briggs

Published by Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL)  
295 King Street  
Melbourne  
Victoria 3000



The stories in this edition are adapted from a text edition by John O'Meara, courtesy Bayside City Council  
Sculptures on cover and photographs by Glenn Romanis: *The Barraimal* (emu), and *The Ancient Yarra River with Bunjil's Eggs*, 2008. Bayside City Council Art and Heritage Collection: Coastal Indigenous Trail.  
Etchings © Vicki Couzens, commissioned by Bayside City Council 2010. Digital images reproduced courtesy of Bayside City Council.

Design and layout for 1st edition by Ali Edmonds

Design and layout update for 2nd edition by Jacob Tolo

This project is supported by the Australian Government  
through the Indigenous Languages Support Program from the Ministry for the Arts.



#### National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

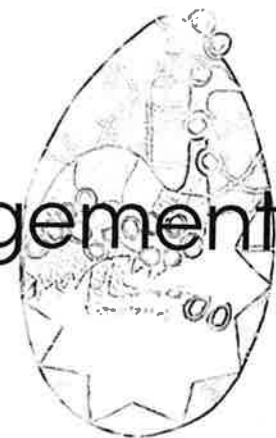
Author: Briggs, Carolyn, 1948-  
Title: *The Journey Cycles of the Boonwurrung: stories with Boonwurrung language* / Carolyn Briggs.  
Edition: 2nd ed.  
ISBN: 978-0-9924696-1-0 (pbk.)  
Subjects: Boonwurrung (Australian people) — Victoria — History.  
Boonwurrung (Australian people) — Victoria — Social life and customs.  
Boonwurrung (Australian people) — Victoria — Folklore.  
Dreamtime (Aboriginal Australian mythology).  
Dewey Number: 305.89915



Welcome	
An Interview with Carolyn Briggs	viii
Preface	xi
Spelling Note and Alphabet	xxvi
<b>Introduction to the Journey</b>	xxix
The Kulin Nation	1
The Boonwurrung People	2
<b>The Journey</b>	
The Boonwurrung Landscape	5
The Ochre Pits	7
The Natural Resources of the Boonwurrung	9
Bullarto Nye-wiinyth (Plenty of Sun)	14
The Journey of Boonwurrung <i>Bagurrk</i> through Bayside	18
The Time of Chaos	21
The Time of Change	24
The Last Arweets — Derrimut and Benbow	27
Louisa Briggs — Living Across Two Worlds	31
<i>The Barraeemal</i> (Emu)	34
The Journey of the <i>Iilk</i>	36
<b>Boonwurrung Word List</b>	
Words in the Stories	41
Boonwurrung Seasons	47
Names and Places on Boonwurrung Country	48
Maps	49

*To the continuing of a journey of the Boonwurrung women  
reconnecting Louisa's journey cycle.*

# Acknowledgements



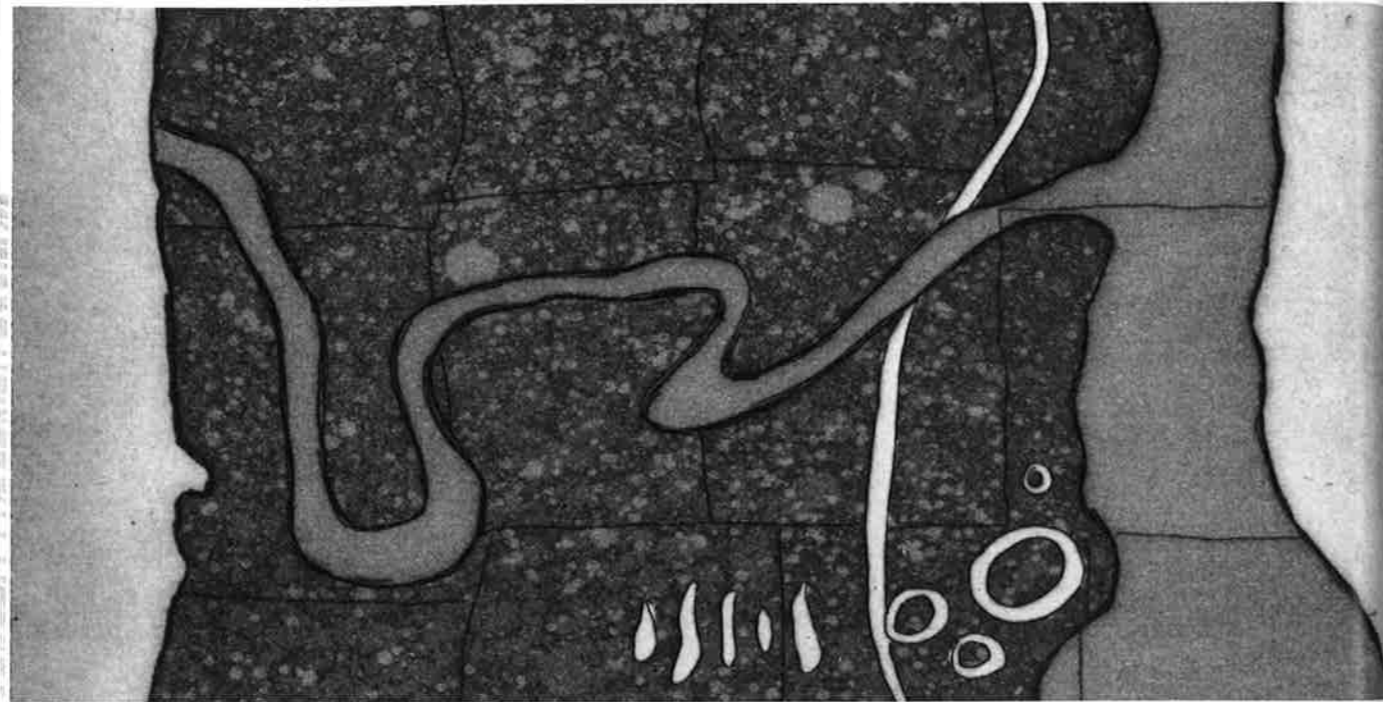
Thanks to the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation of Languages (VACL) for allowing me to voice the Boonwurrung legacy through stories and language in continuing our connection to our heritage.

Thanks to my mother, Carrie Briggs Oakley, for filling my head with the history and importance of my heritage and celebration of my life.

Thanks to my son, Jason Briggs, for his tenacity in research and re-awakening my journey through language and stories.

Thanks to Fay Stewart-Muir and her support in reconstructing the language as part of her rights to her heritage and Boonwurrung journey.

## The Journey of Boonwurrung Bagurrk through Bayside



Vicki Couzens, 2010: *Women's Journey*. Etching on paper

The coastal area of Bayside was part of the walking *barreeng* followed by the Boonwurrung *bagurrk* for many thousands of years as they journeyed to their meeting place.

One of the last journeys made through the area occurred in the 1830s, at about the time of the arrival of Batman and Fawcner at Melbourne.

Louisa Briggs was born some time in the 1830s. Her story lives today because she lived to a very *weegabeel* age and passed away in 1923.

Louisa and the other *bagurrk* journeyed along the coast to what is now known as Beaumaris and Black Rock, as was their custom. But on this occasion, these *bagurrk* never returned from their journey. They were kidnapped by sealers and taken to islands in Bass Strait where

they worked for the sealers.

The journey they made was about connection, creation and renewal — connection to *birrarang-ga*, connection to the great spirits of *Bundjil* and *Waang*, and connection with one other.

It was also about survival and agriculture, as the *bagurrk* cultivated the *murnong* and harvested the *biik* and the *warreeny*. The area was a place of birth and renewal — and the *bagurrk* made their pilgrimage there regularly. They were often accompanied by their *leewurruk* and *tutharrak* who had married into their neighbouring group, the Wurundjeri (Woiwurrung).

Young Boonwurrung *bagurrk* also underwent a ceremony of initiation on reaching puberty. The journey along the coast was as important as the final goal. This journey was part of the process of imparting the knowledge they would need as young *bagurrk*.

During their journey, the *bagurrk* would stop at the *laang baany* around Black Rock and Beaumaris and make *weelam*. They tended the *murnong* patches there and collected fresh *murnong*.

*Gurnbak* were caught and *iilk* collected. The *bagurrk* also preserved foods that could be stored for their return journey. Meats, including *guyeem*, were smoke dried, as were the *iilk* that travelled through the *wurneet* and *baany taageek biik*.

*Walert-gurn* protected the *bagurrk* from the cold and *munmut*. These *walert-gurn*, sewn together with the sinew of the *guyeem moeebo*, also served another purpose. Inside the *walert-gurn* were intricate drawings that included maps of the *birrarang-ga*. The stories drawn within these *walert-gurn* provided the stories the older *bagurrk* told their *manggeep* as they travelled along the coast. The *walert-gurn* included details of important landmarks such as *laang baany* and *barreeng*.

The journeys along the coast were also a time away — an opportunity for the *bagurrk* to laugh, gossip and practise their singing and drumming.

The Boonwurrung *bagurrk* were always part of the *Ngargee*, or celebrations, held near Rickett's Point. At the *Ngargee* the *bagurrk* adorned their *yarra* with the purple flowers of the kangaroo apple and the yellow flowers of the *murnong*. They used *guyeem* and *walert-gurn*, stretched tightly across their knees to form a drum. It was their drumming that set the pace for the dance which was performed by the *guleeny*.

The *bagurrk* also collected nuts, berries and herbs as they travelled along this strip of coast. Among these was the kangaroo apple — picked before it was ripe, it provided a strong contraceptive for the *bagurrk*.

This *barreeng* was part of a regular journey, undertaken over many, many years.

<i>baany tageek biik</i>	swamp
<i>bagurrk</i>	woman
<i>barreeng</i>	track
<i>biik</i>	land
<i>birrang-ga</i>	country ('river-location')
<i>Bundjil (SCS)</i>	eagle
<i>guleeny</i>	man
<i>gurnbak</i>	fish
<i>guyeem</i>	kangaroo
<i>ilik</i>	eel
<i>laang baany</i>	rock well
<i>leewurruk</i>	sister
<i>manggeep (W)</i>	daughter
<i>moeebo</i>	tail
<i>munmut</i>	wind
<i>murnong</i>	yam daisy
<i>Ngargee (SCS)</i>	dance, ceremony
<i>tutharrak</i>	cousin
<i>Waang</i>	crow
<i>walert-gurn</i>	possum skin cloak
<i>warreeny</i>	ocean, sea
<i>weegabeel</i>	old
<i>weelam</i>	camp
<i>wurneet</i>	creek, river
<i>yarra</i>	hair

## The Time of Chaos



Many years ago the *biik* we now call greater Melbourne extended right out to the *warreeny*. *Nairm* (Port Phillip Bay) was then a large, flat, grassy plain. The Yarra River, as it is known today, flowed out across this flat plain into the *warreeny*. For the Boonwurrung, this *wurneet* was known as *Birrang* (River of Mist).

This large plain was covered in *buath* and *tarrang biik* on which the Boonwurrung *guleeny* hunted *guyeem* and *barraemal*. The *bagurrk* cultivated the *murnong*. They collected food from the *warreeny* and the *wurneet* and harvested the *ilik* that migrated through there every year.

The Boonwurrung were the custodians of their *biik* but traded with and welcomed people from other parts of the Kulin Nation. They obeyed the laws of *Bundjil*, who travelled as an eagle, and *Waang*, who travelled as a crow.

One day — many, many years ago — there came a time of chaos and crisis. The Boonwurrung and the other Kulin Nations were in conflict. They argued and fought. They neglected their *biik*. The native *murnong* was neglected. The animals were over-killed and not always eaten. The *gurnbak* were caught during their spawning season. The *ilik* were not harvested.

As this chaos grew the *warreeny* became angry and began to rise. The *wurneet* became flooded and eventually the whole flat plain was covered in *baany*. It threatened to flood their whole *birrang-ga*.

The people became frightened and went to *Bundjil*, their creator and spiritual leader. They asked *Bundjil* to stop the *warreeny* from rising.

*Bundjil* was angry with his people, and he told them that they would have to change their ways if they wanted to save their *biik*. The people thought about what they had been doing and made a promise to follow *Bundjil*.

*Bundjil* walked out to the *warreeny*, raised his *tjeera* and directed the *warreeny* to stop rising. *Bundjil* then made the Boonwurrung promise that they would respect the laws.

The *baany* never subsided but stayed to create a large bay that the Boonwurrung called *Nairm*. Today it is known as Port Phillip Bay. The *warreeny* took away much of the *biik* of the Boonwurrung and much of their *birrarang-ga* was reduced to a narrow strip of coastline.

The Boonwurrung learnt from their mistakes. They returned to their old values and the laws of *Bundjil*. They took greater care of the *biik* of *Bundjil* and the *bubup* of *Bundjil*.

They met with the other Kulin people and sorted out their differences through sports, debates and dance.

One of the most important laws that *Bundjil* required to be obeyed was for Boonwurrung people to always welcome visitors, and to require all visitors to make a promise that they would obey the laws of *Bundjil*, not hurt the *biik* of *Bundjil* and not harm the *bubup* of *Bundjil*.

Today, the *wurneet* that once flowed through this large flat plain still flows under the *Nairm*.

<i>baany</i>	water
<i>bagurrk</i>	woman
<i>barraeemal</i>	emu
<i>blik</i>	land
<i>Birrarang</i>	Yarra River (River of Mist)
<i>birrarang-ga</i>	country ('river-location')
<i>buath</i>	grass
<i>bubup</i>	child (children)
<i>Bundjil (SCS)</i>	eagle (Creator)
<i>guleeny</i>	man
<i>gurnbak</i>	fish
<i>guyeem</i>	kangaroo
<i>lilk</i>	eel
<i>murnong</i>	yam daisy
<i>Nairm (SCS)</i>	Port Phillip Bay

<i>tarrang blik</i>	woodlands
<i>tjeera</i>	spear
<i>Waang</i>	crow
<i>warreeny</i>	ocean, sea
<i>wurneet</i>	river, creek



## The Time of Change

The *birrarang-ga* of the Boonwurrung covers the *biik* along the coast from the Werribee River *galen-barreem* to Wilsons Promontory. It goes inland as far as Dandenong. For many thousands of years the Boonwurrung walked this *biik* when the *biik* we now call Melbourne extended right out to the *warreeny*. Port Phillip Bay was then a large flat plain where the Boonwurrung hunted *guyeem* and cultivated the *murnong*.

The Boonwurrung people passed on their history from one generation to the next through story and drawings. They had survived many natural catastrophes including the great flood, earthquakes and ferocious *wiiny*.

There came a time in the late 1700s when the Boonwurrung made their first sightings of new visitors — strange white people in ships that looked like *goyeep goyeep*. It was about this time that a great sickness spread among their people. The Boonwurrung, like other Indigenous peoples, had little or no immunity to new diseases that came with European settlement.

During this time the population of the Boonwurrung began to decline from disease. They also lost some of their *bagurrk*, who were kidnapped by the sealers, who began their trade in *merreeng-mum* furs during the late 1790s.

In 1803 the Boonwurrung observed the first settlement of the white men, who arrived in their *birrarang-ga* in ships at what is now known as Sorrento. Among these visitors was a young boy named John Pascoe Fawkner, who in 1836 was part of the first settlement of Melbourne.

When the people saw the arrival of the white men they were frightened. They came in strange ships, there were only *guleeny* and no *bagurrk*. They wore strange clothes and carried

strange weapons. The Boonwurrung had heard about these people, through the stories told by other Indigenous groups and nations with whom they traded.

The people were frightened and went to the *weegabeel guleeny* and *bagurrk* of their clan to seek advice. The *weegabeel guleeny* and *bagurrk* retired away from the group to discuss the crisis that confronted them. When they returned to their people, they told them that they had seen a vision of the future.

In this vision, they had seen a time of great crisis. They had seen that these visitors had come, and not left. They saw that these visitors would break many laws of *Bundjil*: killing animals but not eating the meat, destroying the *murnong* crops, damming the *wurneet* and stopping the *iilk* from breeding. The *wurneet* would turn from *guyang* to *yaleen* and *wiiny* would rain down on their *birrarang-ga*. They saw death and pain for their people.

The people became even more frightened, and then became angry.

Then the *weegabeel* wise people told them that there was a second part of their vision. They foresaw a time, many years later, when the white men who stayed began to understand the laws of *Bundjil* and the Boonwurrung people. They saw a time when the spirit of the Boonwurrung would be reborn, a time when *wurneet* would run clean again, and *tarrang* and forests would regrow. The *weegabeel* wise people saw a time when the strong spirit of the traditional owners, their culture and their enjoyment of this wonderful landscape would be reflected again in this land.

<i>bagurrk</i>	woman
<i>biik</i>	land
<i>birrarang-ga</i>	country ('river-location')
<i>Bundjil (SCS)</i>	eagle
<i>galen-barreem (W)</i>	east
<i>goyeep goyeep</i>	bird
<i>guleeny</i>	man
<i>guyang</i>	blue
<i>guyeem</i>	kangaroo
<i>iilk</i>	eel

<i>Arweet (SCS)</i>	clan head
<i>beernban (TW)</i>	wife
<i>birrarang-ga</i>	country ('river-location')
<i>guleeny</i>	man
<i>mam</i>	son
<i>marram (W)</i>	body
<i>weelam</i> (in Fels quote, <i>willum</i> )	hut, camp
<i>WomIndjeka (SCS)</i>	welcome
<i>wurrung (SCS)</i>	language
<i>Yaluk-ut weelam</i>	Boonwurrung clan name

## Louisa Briggs — Living Across Two Worlds



The Boonwurrung consisted of six clans; they were known as the Yaluk-ut weelam, Ngurrak weelam, Mayune baluk, Boonwurrung baluk, Yawen djeerra and the Yaluk baluk.

The *bagurrk* regularly journeyed along the coast to visit what is now called Half Moon Bay and Black Rock, stopping off along the beaches and camping at the *laang baany*.

One of the last journeys made through the area occurred in the 1830s, at about the time of the arrival of Batman and Fawkner at Melbourne.

Louisa Briggs was born some time in the 1830s. Her story lives today because she lived to a very old age and passed away in 1923.

Louisa and the other *bagurrk* journeyed along the coast to Point Nepean, as was their custom. But on this occasion, these *bagurrk* never returned from their journey. Upon reaching Point Nepean, they were kidnapped by sealers and taken to islands in Bass Strait where they worked for the sealers.

Louisa married a Tasmanian direct descendant, John Briggs, and returned to live in her *birrarang-ga*. In 1878 Brough Smyth recorded:

*John Briggs, a half caste Tasmanian, who intermarried with a half caste Australian, has had ten children, of whom eight are now living — three boys and five girls. John Briggs was born in one of the islands in Bass's Straits. His wife is the daughter of an Australian woman, who, with her sister, was taken to Tasmania at the time that Buckley was removed from Port Phillip to that colony. (R. Brough Smyth, The Aborigines of Victoria Vol. 1. John Ferres, Government Printer, London, pg 94.)*

(With some key Boonwurrung words substituted, we could say instead:

*John Briggs, a half caste Tasmanian, who intermarried with a half caste Australian, has had ten bubup, of whom eight are now living — three yan yan and five*



murnmurndeek. John Briggs was born in one of the islands in Bass's Straits. His beernban is the manggeep of an Australian bagurk, who, with her leewurruk, was taken to Tasmania at the time that Buckley was removed from Port Phillip to that colony.)

Louisa Briggs returned to her *birrarang-ga* and travelled across Victoria during the Gold Rush period. She returned to settle at Coranderrk, where some of her kin still lived. In 1867 Captain Crawford Pascoe, a superintendent at Coranderrk, recorded:

*On Preservation Island was Jimmy Munro, who had held the title of King of the Straits and had been there then (1842) for thirty years. He had his lubra but no family of his own. She had one little girl, whom he had brought with the mother, but never knew what part they had been taken from till forty years after, when I met the 'little girl' at Coranderrk Aboriginal Station in Victoria as Mrs Briggs, then an old grandmother. Visiting this station, where I knew some of the blacks, Mrs Briggs said that she knew me when she was a little girl at Preservation Island, and remembered my having given her some biscuits. She told me that she and her mother were near Pt Nepean at the entrance to Port Phillip when Jimmy came in with his boat and carried them off. She told me the name of my vessel in proof of her memory, the Vansittart.*

Louisa and her family became very active in the struggle for their rights. She took over the role of midwife and carer for many of the *bubup* while at Coranderrk. In 1876 the Melbourne *Argus* reported on her:

*She is matron of the establishment, on a salary of 10 shillings a week, and manages the affairs of the children and young people 'in school' with the utmost vigilance and much success. She is their cook and laundress and general monitor and gouvernante [governess]. She is also the accoucheuse [midwife] in ordinary of the establishment, the general nurse in sickness, and a handy and vigorous all round administrator. Coranderrk could not be what it is without Mrs Briggs. (The Argus, Friday 1st September 1876, 'The Coranderrk Aboriginal Station')*

Louisa and her family were forced to leave Coranderrk because of Government policies and she moved with her family to Cumberagunja, a reserve on the Murray River. Here she lived out her life, often telling stories of her past and keeping her culture alive.

In 1924 she was interviewed by Hall and Taylor, a team from Sydney University. They recorded some of her history:

*Further conversations [with Louisa Briggs] lead her to tell us that her mother's full name was Mary and her grandmother's name Marjorie. The latter was a full blood*

*of Melbourne. In her childhood, Louisa was taken in a little sailing boat to Tasmania and lived in the 'highlands' there. She married John Briggs. The folks lived with stuck upright posts in the ground and roofed in the enclosure with grass. Louisa's father was John Strugnell, a white man, and her mother a half caste. She had returned from Tasmania to Melbourne when that city had more than three houses but was smaller than Cummergoonga and the exhibition ground was all forest, which had been about 1830-1837, which makes Louisa well over the century as she was at that time a married woman. (Cited in M. Fels, 'I Succeeded Once': The Aboriginal Protectorate on the Mornington Peninsula, 1839-1840. ANU E Press and Aboriginal History Inc 2011.)*

When Ellen Campbell, the *gugungdjaleek* *murnmurndeek* of Louisa Briggs, was interviewed in the 1960s, she identified Louisa as having been born in the coastal area south of Melbourne. This story shows the strength of the oral history tradition of the Boonwurrung people.

<i>bagurk</i>	woman
<i>beernban (TW)</i>	wife
<i>birrarang-ga</i>	country (river-location)
<i>bubup</i>	children
<i>gugungdjaleek murnmurndeek</i>	granddaughter
<i>laang baany</i>	rock pool
<i>leewurruk</i>	sister
<i>manggeep (W)</i>	daughter
<i>murnmurndeek</i>	girl
<i>yan yan</i>	boy