



Transcription:

History & Memory: Oral Histories and the Science of the Dreaming, Professor Patrick Nunn

Amanda Wells: 0:01

Please note that this podcast uses the audio of a lecture with Professor Patrick, for the history Council of New South Wales First Nations stories series produced by Katrina debate. For the full experience with slides, visit the history Council of New South Wales YouTube channel.

Katrina Dubé: 0:19

Hello, and welcome to the history Council of New South Wales 2024 First Nations stories series. Before we begin, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the different lands we are all on today. And I pay my respects to all elders past and present. Today we have with us Professor Patrick Nunn from the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland. And now I'll hand over to Patrick to present history and memory, oral histories and the science of the dreaming. Thank you, Professor.

Patrick Nunn: 0:55

Thank you very much, Katrina. And I'm going to just share my screen. Excellent. I'm getting thumbs up. So thank you all for coming today. And the title of my talk, as Katrina said, is history and memory, which is going to be about oral histories and the science of the dreaming. And I'm really honored to be here today, because I like nothing more than to talk to people who are interested in the things that I'm interested in. And I should point out that, as you may already have worked out, I'm not Australian, by birth I grew up in, in Europe and spent most of my academic career actually based in the Pacific Islands at the University of the South Pacific, which is an international university covering 12 Different Pacific Island countries. And there, I became immersed in Pacific Island cultures, and also very much in the idea that oral

histories and oral traditions were almost the same in terms of their capacity for holding knowledge. As a written history, it's and it's not something I learned overnight. It's something that came to me gradually over a number of years. But certainly when I then came to Australia, I became, I think I was able to view oral traditions, in a completely different light. To many people. I'm also a scientist, I'm a geologist by training. I have been a climate change scientist for the last, I suppose 25 years or so, and have applied my scientific understandings of the world to a lot of oral traditions in order to discover meaning in those oral traditions. So without further ado, let me also say that I'm very proud to live and work on the lands of the Kabhi Kabhi people up here in southeast Queensland and that this presentation derives understanding and inspiration from cubby cubby on all peoples in every part of the world with deep and enduring connections to place. And I think that, particularly as we're faced by so many challenges these days, particularly environmental challenges, we we undervalue those connections at our peril. There is an awful lot that we can learn from others, oral traditions and understandings of the world and to sideline those and to demean those, I think, is something that is really very unwise. So with that in mind, let me move first to New South Wales. And many of you, I'm sure will recognize where this is, this is the central part of Sydney. And there are two places here that I want to talk about by way of introduction. The first is Botany Bay that you can see there where Sydney Airport is today, and also Bate Bay. And you can see over there on the left, which is to the southwest, you can see George's River and where that comes out. So I want to tell you two stories, or I want to report two stories from First Nations Australian informants. The first one has to do with Botany Bay in the Georges river. And the second one has to do with Bay Bay. The first one then, Botany Bay. Long ago, when the Darawal people were living in what is called Botany Bay, it was all swampy land. It wasn't a bay, it wasn't filled with water. It was reportedly a fine place to live. And one day so grateful were the people that they went up into the hills to thank the Creator spirit for giving them this wonderful hand. They went up the Georges River, and when they returned, they found that instead of the swamps, there was a great bay there which hadn't been there before. If that is a story of land scape transformation, then it recalls a time when the ocean surface was at least nine meters lower than it is today, which last occurred about 8000 years ago, implying that that story that parallel story is or has been passed down from generation to generation for at least 8000 years, which is something incredible to

contemplate. But it's not the only example. So if we move to nearby Bate Bay, and you can see on the left of this slide, that's where Botany Bay is. There's a place called Jibbon head. And back in the 1920s, there was a Gunnamatta man who lived on the foreshore here. And he used to tell people that in the early days, the sea was a lot further out, and people used to gather over there. And the place he identified was about four kilometers or seaward of Jibbon head. You can see where that that is today. And my scientific experience suggests that if that oral tradition is accurate, then it recalls a time when the ocean surface was at least five meters lower than it is today, which last happened more than about 7000 years ago. So here we are, you know, in the heart of Sydney, and we have oral traditions that appear to be seven or 8000 years old, which is incredible. And if those were the only two examples from anywhere in Australia, you might think, Ah, it's an anomaly. You know, it doesn't mean anything. But there are many, many more examples of these kinds of stories, as we will see later in this talk. So, these two examples suggest that First Nations peoples are in Australia, there are memories can recall landscapes that last existed 1000s of years ago. But there are examples of such enduring memories in many other parts of the world. And here's an example from Fiji that I've worked on recently with one of my PhD students Loredana Lancini. It refers to Nabukelevu volcano, which you can see there on Kadavu Island in southern Fiji. It's right at the western tip of Kadavu island. It is a massive grade volcano. Its head is normally covered in clouds, as you can see here. And that volcano last erupted about 2500 years ago. And we went to at least we went to a whole number of communities that exist on kadavu Island today and oral traditions about this eruption 2500 years ago. We're well known in at least 13 communities and people like Petero Uluinaceva that you can see there on the right in the photograph, he was able to tell stories that his grandparents had told him that their grandparents had told them and so on and so on, about the eruption of this volcano. So that's another example. Here's an example from the western United States from Oregon. This is Crater Lake, which is a actually it's a caldera to geologists it formed from the collapse of Mount Mazama, about 7600 years ago, and over the last 150 years or so. Numerous Klamath oral traditions recalling the nature and the effects of this eruption have been recorded. So here you have unmistakable evidence indisputable evidence that the story is about an event that took place 7600 years ago, have been preserved in oral traditions from generation to generation, up until today. So what does all this mean? It's something that I would refer to as the

extraordinary longevity of human memory. Most literate people who can read and write, I think they are trained to undervalue the ability of people in oral societies to accumulate and organize and and to pass on knowledge. And these are some of the oral knowledge holders from different parts of the world. This is, this attitude is something that I've labeled the tyranny of literacy. And it's led us to marginalize and even trivialize our pre literate ancestors knowledge. But in the past, storytellers, would not just be entertainers. They were the librarians and they were the scientists. They were the teachers who enabled our ancestors to survive. You pass knowledge on to the next generation so that they could survive. With all the knowledge that you had about the world, they were able to navigate their way through the world and, and have children and allow those children to survive as well. So it's It's really not something that necessarily deserves to be trivialized. So what I want to talk about today are three things. The first thing is I want to talk about some more Australian memories of land disappearance, okay, why the sea level rose, why it caused the land to disappear, and how that land disappearance affected people. Then I want to talk about Australian memories of volcanic eruptions, places like Mount Leura, in Victoria, that you can see there on the right, where volcanoes erupted in Australia, and how those eruptions affected people in Australia. And then I want to talk finally, about the implications of all this for the understanding of what we call myths, which really are nothing more than long term human memories in many cases. So let me start with the first part, the Australian memories of land disappearance. And I'll get a little bit sciency, just for a couple of slides. But hang on, it's not going to be all like this. So here we have a graph that shows how sea level has changed over the last 150,000 years or so you can see that it was comparatively high, around 150 120,000 years ago, and then it gradually fell from left to right across the screen, and then rose again to the present day. So this is present sea level up here, the zero line 150,000 years ago there today is over there. So you can see how the graph is organized. And this shows the sea level on the left and feet and on the right in meters relative to today. So you can see that the coldest time of the sorry, you can see that the sea level reached the minimum around 20,000 years ago, of around about 120 530 meters lower than today. This was the last great Ice Age, which we call the last glaciers or the last glaciation. And the coldest time of the last Ice Age was down there. Around about 20,000 years ago, that's when the sea level was correspondingly lowest at its lowest. And since then, there's been a period of what we call post glacial sea level

rise, a very rapid rise of sea level that you can see there on the right hand side of the graph. So going back to the original graph, the first people arrived in Australia, as far as we can tell, round about 65 70,000 years ago. And you can see that at that time, the ocean surface, the sea level was around about 60 meters or so lower than it is today. It went the sea level carried on falling and then it started to rise. And Australia was cut off from New Guinea about there. And Australia or mainland Australia was cut off from Tasmania, around about there. So those are a key events, if you like in the history of the interaction of people and changing sea level in Australia's history. And so if we go back to the last Ice Age, Australia looked a lot different to the way that it does today. That was the coastline, the pale orange there, the coastline during the last the last great ice age about 20,000 years ago. And I haven't shown the land connection to Australia, which is off to the top right there. Just because I wanted to keep it Australia focused. But the sea level has risen and chopped off all that land from the sides of Australia in the last 20,000 years. So around 23% Almost a quarter of the land area that existed in the last during the last ice age has disappeared from the coasts of Australia. Did people remember this happening? Of course they remembered it happening. There were people there people had been in Australia for 10s of 1000s of years. Of course they saw what was happening. So we now have a group of stories so to speak, recalling land disappearance that can be attributed to this post glacial sea level rise from 34 places all the way around the Australian coast. And clearly I'm not going to have time to talk about many of those today. We have talked about the so called stories from Bate Bay and Botany Bay in New South Wales. And I'm going to give you four more examples just to give you a sense of what kind of evidence there is in these stories. We'll start in North Queensland with the Wellesley islands in the Gulf of Carpentaria, then we'll move to Western Australia we'll talk about the Nullarbor fringe there. Then we'll move to Kangaroo Island and the Fleurieu peninsula and South Australia and find Finally we'll look at the Bass Strait, the area between Gippsland and coastal Victoria and Tasmania. So let's start with the Wellesleys, the islands in northern Queensland and the Gulf of Carpentaria. This is a map of the Wellesleys as you can see the mainland in the bottom left hand corner there. And Mornington Island is the largest of the so called Wellesley groups. And there are stories or traditions before they were written down. That talk about how in the beginning our home islands now called the North Welleseleys were not islands at all, but they were part of a peninsula running out from the mainland, so

they were connected. And then our people say that the channels were caused by Garnguur, a seagull woman who dragged a big raft back and forth across the peninsula and severed it. And this is from Dick Roughsey's magnificent autobiography, *Moon and Rainbow* published in 1971. So these are law deals stories that talk about how this whole area was transformed from being part of the mainland to being a group of islands here. Another example comes from the Nullarbor coast of Western Australia, places close to Eucla. And there are some stories here that talk about how sea level rise had caused such stress. That one day the people determined to act. And they poured over the Eucla escarpment, and once they reached the sea, they began piling 1000s of spears to stop the encroaching waters. I interpret this as the building of a kind of wooden palisade a wooden barrier to try and prevent the encroachment of the sea further onto the land when when the coast was further to the right of this diagram. And this is exactly the kind of thing that we do today. But this obviously occurred far, far longer ago, these bundles were very high and managed to contain the water the base of the Nullarbor cliffs. So this is from Scott Cane's work with the Wati Nyiinyii people and my apologies for not getting that entirely right. The third example is one that I've been working on with some colleagues recently and a number of Ngarindjeri people from this part of South Australia, and it refers to the formation of Backstairs passage, which you can see in the middle of this map between Kangaroo Island on the left in the West, and the Fleurieu peninsula, which is part of the Australian mainland, on the right in the Northeast. And there are a number of stories about Ngurunderi, and how he had two wives who fled from him. They they they came along the south coast of the Fleurieu Peninsula, his wives were about a day's walk ahead of him. And when his wives got to a what we now call Backstairs Passage, they were able to cross it at that time, by a combination of walking and wading. When Ngurunderi caught up with them, they were halfway across, and he got really angry and he summoned the waves to rise up and drown them. And their bodies were washed, se and became the pages the islands that you can see there. And since that time, Backstairs Passage has been submerged. And we've published quite a lot of research on this with Ngarindjeri elders. And we can demonstrate that this story probably dates from a minimum of about 10,100 years ago. And but more of that in a second. So the fourth and the final example comes from Bass Strait in Tasmania. And you can see Tasmania in the bottom of this diagram in the south of this map. It's not a diagram, it's a map. And

you can see some of the islands in the Bass Strait there. And you can see mainland Australia that Gippsland area there in the top left of the map that's the northwest of the map. And the last route that was available for people to walk between what is now mainland Australia and Tasmania is shown there by the red line. And there are oral traditions from Palawa people on Tasmania that were collected in the 1830s that this land was settled by immigrants from a far country who came there on foot and the sea formed subsequently. Now these are perhaps the oldest traditions of landloss and land submergence from anywhere in Australia, we estimate them to be around about 12,500 years old, that would have been the last time that people would have been able to, to cross here. So if that memory is correct, and there's no reason to doubt that it is essentially correct, it has to date from around about 12,500 years ago. So without again, getting too sciency. You see here on the left, the blue envelope shows with error margins, how sea level has risen around the coast of Australia, over the last, what, 13,000 years or so. So if we plot the best straight depths, there 5657 meters lower, we can see that sea level would have been around 11,960 to 12,890 years ago, that's, that is a minimum age for the story of the crossing of best street. And by the same argument or using the same arguments, you can see that the well is the islands and the beat based story. The Bate Bay stories are at least 7450 years old kangaroo ones, the Kangaroo Island ones around about 10,100 and the Nullarbor ones, probably around the same kind of age. So while we recognize that this technique for putting a minimum age on oral traditions is not perfect, and that there are many potential sources of error, we still think that it is broadly appropriate. And so we are looking here at stories. And I use the word stories with caution, because everyone calls these stories or narratives, but they're not made up. These are memories of a time when the coastline was quite different. And it enabled people to do things that are quite different from today in the past. So these stories are clearly 1000s of years old and demonstrable, Lee. So interestingly, from the best straight, we think that the story is around about 12,500 years ago, there are also Palawa traditions from Tasmania that talk about sightings of the Great Southern Star Canopus, which would have last been visible from this area sometime between 16,011 1800 years ago. So that seems to be confirmation of the age of the story about people walking between Gippsland and Tasmania, that there seems to be astronomical knowledge, which is also of the same age as the stories about people walking, and this is work that's been done by Dwayne Hammacher of Melbourne

University. So let me move on to the second part of my talk today, which is Australian memories of volcanic eruptions. And when I talk to my students about this, they say, No, no, no, no, hold on. We don't have volcanoes in Australia. We don't have volcanoes that have erupted in Australia. Well, look, we do. None have erupted within living memory. But certainly within the last 10 15,000 years or so. There have been a number of eruptions in two different parts of eastern Australia. You can see there on the map on the left that some of these eruptions have been in far north Queensland. And some of those eruptions have been in what we call the newer volcanics province, in the southernmost part of South Australia and southernmost Victoria, you can see them there. So all those red circles are places where volcanoes have erupted within certainly within the time that people have been living in these areas. So let's start with a few examples. Lake Eacham in far north Queensland, it fills the crater of what we call a maar volcano that formed around about 2000 or sorry 9200 years ago. And a maar volcano is basically where you get liquid rock coming up from the Earth's interior encountering cold groundwater and you get these massive explosive eruptions that generally form craters of this kind. And these craters then become filled with water. And there are stories about the formation of Lake Eacham the camping places we can had to change the earth under the camp roaring like thunder, the wind started to blow down as if a cyclone were coming, the camping place began to twist and crack. While all this was happening, there wasn't a sky a Red Cloud of a hue never seen before. The people tried to run from side to side, but was swallowed by a crack, which opened in the ground. And this story was recorded back in the 1970s, from the Dyrirbal people. And it has to be around about 9200 years old. We can we can tell from geological research from radiocarbon and potassium argon dating, roughly how long ago these eruptions took place. So 9200 years plus or minus 50 is the date of the formation of Lake eacham. That is recalled in these stories. So clearly a memory more than 9000 years old. We also have an example another example from Northern Queensland of Kinrara volcano, which you can see there. And I have a PhD student Leigh Franks, who's working on this at the moment. Kinrara last erupted about 9000 years ago. You can see in the photograph, you can see the crater that was formed during this eruption. And there are Gugu Badhun stories about this eruption. There's one that talks about when the water courses caught fire, which is a memory of lava coming out of this crater and flowing down the places that were easiest for it to flow, which would have been the river channels in

this area and filling them up. And you can see that today, you can go down the old river channels, and they're all full of solidified lava. So that's clearly something that happened. The Gugu Badhun stories also talk about a witch doctor who made a large pit and he stirred up the dust, and it's spread out across the land. As fixating people, they couldn't see where they were going. And that perhaps is a memory of a toxic gas eruption. And that's a detail that geology could never tell from looking at Kinrara volcano, we have no evidence for that. So the oral traditions of the Gugu Badhun are adding a layer of detail to this, that we wouldn't be able to get in any other way. And this again, also seems to be a memory that is around 9000 years old. And I have permission to use this, this artwork from three people from the Gugu Badhun who created it. And it's basically their story of the eruption of a volcano, how the bronze, wind, winged pigeon and the pheasant chased each other. And this resulted in the appearance of the kinrara volcano and the associated lava flows. So these stories are very much still alive. And that that really is incredible to think that they have lasted for so many 1000 years. Another example from Northern Queensland is that of Toowoomba volcano, and this is where the under Undara Caves are. This last erupted about 190,000 years ago, which is well before people arrived in Australia. So there are no stories. It's too old. And I think that this is also really important evidence for associating stories like those are the Gugu Badhun with Kinrara is that when people were here, there are stories. But when they were not here, there are no stories. And so it's like if you'd like sort of it's proof of another kind that these stories are authentic memories of volcanic eruptions. So move now to the south. This is Mount Leura that I showed before it last erupted about 5000 years ago. And in the 1870s we had indigenous residents who were telling stories about the volcanic bombs, the rocks, that just like the stones that their forefathers had told them had been thrown out of the hill by the action of fire. And that is a clear memory of a volcanic eruption in this case, one that took place about 5000 years ago. Similar from Mount Schank, in where is it in the southernmost South Australia. It's probably Australia's youngest volcano that erupted about just under 5000 years ago.

Unknown: 29:53

And there are stories that were written down in the 1880s about how Mount Schank was one of the homes of the giants named Craitbul and his family. They settled here and they used to bury their food in the soil bit, which was warm, so their food was

cooked in the soil. But wherever they went from one volcano to the next, they got the warning sign of this strange creature called the bullin, it was a kind of shriek, and it was terrifying. And they thought up, it's time to move on. We're about to be attacked by this demon. And it seems very likely that the oven that they talked about was the crater and that the bullin was probably the sound of escaping gas gas being squeezed out just before an eruption occurred. So again, I would interpret this as a memory of a recent eruption of Mount Schank, probably around about 5000 years ago. So those are some of the stories from Australia. I want to just end my talk today by talking about the implications of this for the understanding of myths and memories. I'm just gonna have a drink of water Thank you. So ancient submergence stories from Australia. From 34 places all around the coast of Australia. There are stories like those told by Kepten Wadity. And I've got permission to use this photograph of Kepten from Peppimenarti from Nick Reid, who got permission from Kepten himself when he was alive. There are stories from 34 places all around the coast of Australia that are saying essentially the same thing. Land which is today, underwater was once dry land. People walked across it. Today, what a now offshore islands were once part of the mainland. The ocean rose across the land, and it never receded. So elsewhere in the world, we have a lot of flood stories, we have stories about how a big wave came across the land, or the rivers broke their banks and flooded, but the waters eventually receded. But the key thing about these 34 groups of stories is that the water never receded. So these are submergence stories, and not flood stories. After the last Ice Age, the ocean surface around Australia was about 125 meters lower than it is today just over 400 feet lower. And it rose quite rapidly in geological terms to reach its present level around about 7000 years ago. So all of these submergence stories must have been passed down orally for at least 7000 years. That's the minimum because otherwise they would have made no sense. Which means that they've been passed across maybe 300 generations or more. passed across the generations as oral traditions, okay from grandparents or parents to children or grandchildren, consistently retaining the information that was contained in these stories. So submergence stories from Australia are between 7000 and about 12,500 years old. That's the Tasmania best straight stories. What about ancient volcanoes stories? Well, volcanoes erupted in several parts of eastern Australia during the 65,000 years or so that people have been living here. And most of these volcanoes, not all of them, but most of them have oral traditions that recall

the nature and the effects of those eruptions. And again, important to note that like undara Volcanoes which erupted before people arrived have no associated traditions. So the volcanoes stories that we have are between 4934 Mount Schank a 9204 Lake eacham in northern Queensland, that's how long they have lasted. So we are forced to conclude that oral cultures can preserve knowledge for 1000s of years. Most anthropologists that you've talked to a saber is maybe a few 100 years, but this kind of evidence shows that to be a huge underestimate. And that knowledge in the right conditions not in every condition can be preserved for 1000s of years, maybe as much as 12,500 years. If we look at the Tasmania Bass Strait example. It's a revelation to most people to learn that knowledge can be passed on this way on across hundreds of generations, and what you've got there on the right is from hayseeds theogony, written about 700 years BCE, that should be not BC. So that's almost 3000 years ago. And he wrote about some of the oral traditions that were known in Greece, and what we call Greece at that time, almost 3000 years ago, and some of those involved people living in underwater worlds. They involved mermaids, they involved kings sea kings with with tritons, and things like that. Exactly the kind of thing that we find reproduced in The Little Mermaid cartoons. But while I'm not sort of bashing Little Mermaid cartoons, I'm saying that by sidelining or sort of trivializing these kinds of knowledge, we risk losing ancestral memories that can help us navigate the future, if we teach children, that the only meaning in these kinds of stories, is a kind of entertainment is a kind of fiction, then it really is not being true to the historical roots, the demonstrable historical roots of these kinds of stories. And I think it's not too, too much to say that in doing this, we also do our ancestors a disservice, wherever they lived in the world. Our ancestors were people who survived through the communication of oral traditions from one generation to the next. And to pretend that those oral traditions were somehow little fantasies or fictions with very little practical significance, does do them a disservice. Or are lessons hold sorry, oral knowledges hold lessons from the future. So in most parts of the world today, when we think about risk management, risk management, whether it's risk from erupting volcanoes, or from earthquakes, or from giant waves, or from drought or from tropical cyclones. This kind of environmental risk management is guided today by the understandings of Western science. In the past, oral societies, I would argue, were no less risk averse. And many oral traditions include lessons about how to avoid or minimize risk. And I think when we talk today about climate change in

particular, we sometimes forget that people in the past our ancestors, wherever they lived in the world, people in the past survived 1000s of 1000s of years of changing climate, and rising sea levels. And that shows us if nothing else, that future climate change is survivable, even if it requires adaptation. The story is that I have reported about land submergence from Australia. I've also been doing a lot of work particularly with scientists from Brittany, about similar kinds of stories in northwest Europe. And there are many types of stories all along the Celtic fringe or the Atlantic fringe of Northwest Europe, including the ones you can see there, the red crosses off the coast of Brittany. The you can see one there marked Ys- "y, s". These are stories from the Baie de Douarnenez , in Brittany, about a submerged land there, they often call it a submerged city, but they don't really mean city, but a submerged land. And we think we estimate that those stories are around about 8000 years old. So they have been passed down in Celtic cultures from one generation to the next, in the same way as they were in Australian cultures for 1000s of years. The stories of Lyonesse Off the coast of Cornwall, in southwest England, are again thought to be 1000s of years old. We have linked those stories as being most likely around 5000 to 6000 years old, when there was a period of very rapid sea level rise that cause some of the islands in that area to be divided up. So you've got small groups of islands and this would have been an incredibly traumatizing experience for the people living there. So they would have put their memories of that into their oral traditions which have come down to us today. And as you can see, there are also stories from off the coast of Wales and many from the coasts of Ireland and Scotland as well. So that's all I've got to say Um, I thank you so much for listening to me today. And I do have a website, which has various things on that you may find of interest. So thank you very much. Thank you,

Katrina Dubé: 40:15

Patrick. Thank you. The longevity of oral histories is amazing and so relevant for us today. Thank you so much for sharing with us. We have a couple of questions for you from our audience members. Patrick, if you could address those questions now. That'd be great. Thank you.

Patrick Nunn: 40:33

Thank you, Katrina. So yes, I've got two questions here, one from Julie McIntyre at the University of Newcastle. And the question is, sorry, I'm reading it. Can you tell us

about volcanic eruptions and sea level rise on Awabakal country in the Newcastle area? And my answer is, look, I'm really sorry, Julie. But I don't know if any volcano on Awabakal country that might have erupted within the past few 100,000 years. doesn't mean there isn't one, but the chances are that we would know about it, if there was one. So there are of course, in the Newcastle area, many coal seams. And some of these do catch fire. Particularly when there's a lightning strike, particularly when there are bushfires these coal seams can catch phrases, even people set them on fire. And one of the most famous ones is not on our backhaul country, it's further inland. But this is Mount Wingen, or Wingen, W, I, N G, E, N, and that's been on fire for about 6000 years, you can see it when you go along the New England highway, you can see the smoke coming out of the hill. And that kind of thing may well have informed these kinds of traditions and sea level stories I've got, no, we've got stories now from 34 places all around Australia, and it doesn't include the Newcastle area. So if anyone does have these kinds of stories, you know, please get in touch with me and let me know. Because I think that, you know, the more information we can get about this, the more we can say. First Nations Australians were very acute and accurate observers of the environment, and the way that it changed. And those memories have clearly been passed down for 1000s of years. We also have a question from Amanda Wells. And thank you for that. Amanda, do you know of any instances of shared cultural memories across different First Nations groups, and she very helpful it gives me the example of the creation of the River Murray by Ponde, the giant Murray cod and the lawmaker Ngurunderi who I mentioned before. And I think that that really is a really good example. So you do have different First Nations groups there with a story that is not always exactly the same, but certainly is part of a narrative that flows from one country to the next. So I think that's a really good example. I would make the point at this juncture, that oral traditions are quite unlike written versions of a story. As soon as you write a story down. That's it, it's fixed. But in oral traditions, you can hear different stories from different families from different people, you know, on different days of the week. You know, the, the actual narrative is a dynamic thing that changes depending on who you're talking to. It's gendered, it's aged, it's all sorts of things. So oral cultures were far more dynamic in terms of their storytelling than literate once. And, you know, many people before me have made that point. But I want to just, you know, give Amanda a couple of more, a couple of better answers than than that. Some of the most memorable and persistent stories

have evolved from particular places where those events were witness to other places, where they become attached to similar stories, and I think submergence stories are a really good example. There seem to be borrowed elements in many of these submergence stories. And the ones I know best come from the Great Barrier Reef coast in northern Queensland, particularly around Cairns and up onto Cape York. And there are lots of stories there that talk about people fleeing from the rising waters and climbing up a mountain and heating up rocks and throwing those rocks in to the ocean, to stop the ocean from rising any further. And I think I know of about four versions of that story. Not all the same. Okay, but clearly elements that have probably been borrowed from, from different groups there. The other thing is that I was thinking about this, this clever question. And I was thinking that stories also evolve from Region back to particular places becoming adapted to local situations, and some volcano stories in Australia may be of this kind. And it's not that people recalled a volcano actually erupting, it's that they had a story from elsewhere. And they saw a feature that looked similar. And so they created a story around it, thinking that it must have evolved, that the landform must have evolved in that way. And it's the same example with a lot of meteorite craters in Australia. So again, Duane Hammacher from Melbourne University has done a lot of research on First Nations Australian stories of meteorite impacts. And the the craters that that form as a result, he has some stories about the formation of Wolf Creek crater in Western Australia. And I think it's in Western Australia. And those stories cannot be a memory of the formation of Wolf Creek, because that formed about 300,000 years ago, long, long before people could have arrived in Australia. So clearly, not clearly. But it seems likely that people witnessed a meteorite impact elsewhere. And then as they moved across country and encountered Wolf Creek, they thought, oh, it's the same kind of land from which it is. And so they, they transpose their story there to explain it. So, you know, I think what I'd say in conclusion is that, you know, working with oral traditions, and I'm not talking simply about Australian ones, I, I work a lot with oral, or what were oral traditions in northwest Europe and also in the Pacific Islands. I think one of the one of the takeaways is that once you understand how oral traditions evolve, and how they are passed down, that does allow you to sort of take away the layers and layers of embellishment to reveal the core, if you like, of the original story, the original memory. And my experience is that, you know, probably more than 50% of myths and legends about environmental change are or can be demonstrated to be

based on things that actually happened. And in many cases, things that can also be absolutely the only one that's doing it, I suppose, but thank you for definitely.

Katrina Dubé: 48:08

You can join us for more presentations in the history Council New South Wales First Nations stories series throughout 2024. So it's goodbye from me, Katrina Dubé. And from all of us at the History Council of New South Wales. Thank you

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