Tahmoor and the Worrondilly
How the Bronze-winged Pigeon Came to
Foreword

Throughout the past two hundred years, society has come to regard the Koori Dreaming stories as something akin to the fairy stories they were told as children.

However, for thousands upon thousands of years, the stories in this book were used as a teaching tool to impart to the youngest members of the clans the laws which governed the cultural behaviour of clan members. The successive attempts to destroy the Koori culture and assimilate The People into the Euro-centric population were unsuccessful, and the Dreaming Stories were able to continue in their disguise as charming legends where animals became the heroes and the heroines.

Historians and anthropologists have studied the Koori culture since they first arrived on this continent, and have come to the conclusion that the D’harawal culture is dead. Of, course, this has been done without reference to the descendants of that culture, and without even asking the proper questions. The D’harawal culture is not dead, it is a strong, living, vital culture of the Sydney and South Coast regions that just had to go underground for a while to be able to survive. Now that the right questions have been asked, we have the key to unlock a vast wealth of knowledge of this part of the country in which we live.

It is difficult to explain to a society based on commerce fuelled by the profit motive, that D’harawal culture is not based on the ownership of tangible things like land and dwellings and possessions, but it does have a very strong sense of ownership of information. That information, particularly in story form, was not traded, but could be given, and given freely, but its ownership was respected, those stories were not told or passed on by those to whom they had been given, but the knowledge in them was used by the receiver whilst ever they walked in the Land of the D’harawals, This Land.

It is hoped that our present society is now mature enough to be able to accept the Koori Dreaming stories as they were, as they are, and as they were always destined to be; tools to teach the Children of The People about living with Earth, the Mother, in peace and harmony.

Each story contains several layers of knowledge, the first of which are the secrets. Which can only be passed on or discussed with persons of the same level of knowledge or higher than the story teller. These secrets are never told within a legend, but are remembered separately from the legend itself. These are very important components of any legend, and it is the knowledge of the secrets which determines the level of the person’s worthiness to ownership of that story.
The next layer of knowledge within the stories was the law, or laws, to be obeyed. The laws of the stories were told and often repeated after the telling of each story, after which the laws were discussed and their application in life demonstrated in a variety of ways.

The third layer of knowledge contained in each story was the lessons which could be learned from the story and the lessons were taught to all members of the group as well as visitors. These lessons introduced Peoples to the means to live in harmony with each other, and the land and its resources.

In this series of D’harawal Law Legends, there are many lessons to be learned. The D’harawals believed that children learned better and more quickly when they were encouraged to work through a problem, rather than be told the answer. By sharing the stories of our ancestors with you, it is hoped that not only will you recognise and learn the lessons and laws of the Peoples of This Land, but you will also come to understand and respect the culture of The People and our feelings and relationship with the land.

The stories do not in themselves act as an instruction manual - rather they point the way and encourage The People to think, to learn and to live. It is hoped that by sharing our stories, you too may be able to think, to learn and to live in This Land.

With understanding and respect for each other we can learn to more easily share This Land and live together in peace and harmony.

Frances Bodkin
A long, long time ago, the D’harawal did not have firesticks, and the only fire they had was that given to them by the Spirits of the Lightning. Because it was a long time between visits of the Lightning Spirits, the one who was called D’haramuoy, or Tahmoor, as it is said today, was given, not only the duty the see that the D’harawal had fire to keep them warm, but also to provide fire to those less fortunate people who were not of the Gwaigul.

To ensure that the fires never went out, the one who was called D’haramuoy always carried the burning black rock, called Worron, inside the skull of a bunyip, within a basket woven of waratah stems.

But there came a time, when the Spirits of Great Cold visited Gwaigul, and ice laid on the ground for many seasons. Despite the fact that the sun’s own fires burned dimly, the People were comfortable, and were grateful to D’haramuoy, who worked hard to see that all the clans were provided with fire.

One night, D’haramuoy was very tired and curled up in his shelter beside the warming embers and fell into a deep sleep. Whilst he was sleeping, the war-like Gundangurra came down from the mountains and stole the basket of burning black rock.

During that night, cold rain and sleet extinguished the fires of The People, and they sought out D’haramuoy in his small cave to request his help. There they found D’haramuoy still sleeping soundly, but where his basket of burning black rock should have been, there was only a depression in the sand.
They awakened D’haramuoy, who cried out in alarm when he learned that his fire burning black rock had gone. He searched around his shelter and found the tracks of the Gundangurra warriors, and turned to The People.

“I will follow these Gundangurras and I will return with the fire.” He told them. “Stay together and keep warm until I return.”

The People watched as he disappeared into the misty morning, and returned to their own shelters to await his return.

D’haramuoy followed the Gundangurra across the great valley where they Spirits fought the Giant Kangaroo, and into the valley leading to the caves of the Ancestral Turtle.

As he approached the great caves he could hear the voices of the Gundangurra, laughing and singing echoing from the openings, and he could see the flickering of the fire in the darkness.

Silently he made his way to the entrance of the cave, and watched as the Gundangurra danced around the flames.

It was with great concern he saw scattered around the fire the remains of the skull in which the burning black rock had been kept. The Gundangurra had spilled the burning black rock, smashed the skull and destroyed the basket of waratah stems.
D’haramuoy looked around, but could find nothing to use as a container for the burning black rock. But he had to retrieve the burning black rock and return them to his own people.

He waited until the Gundangurras had grown tired of their merrymaking and had fallen asleep, then silently made his way down into the cave, scooped the burning black rock up into his arms, and began on his long journey back to Gwaigal.

A young woman of the Crested Pigeon totem, who had long admired D’haramuoy, had followed him to the Valley of Sweet Water, now known as Nattai Valley, and waited for him to return. Whilst she waited she prayed and prayed to the Spirit Woman that he return to The People.

On the third day she saw him, making his way across the valley. As she ran down to meet him, she realised that he carried the burning black rock in his arms, and had not stopped for food or water since stealing the burning black rock back from the Gundangurra.

Taking her coolamon, she lined it quickly with waratah leaves and stems and helped D’haramuoy carefully place the burning black rock into the makeshift carrier.

When they returned to the shelters of The People and gave them burning black rock, she helped D’haramuoy into his cave and put cooling leaves on the horrible burns on his arms. Several burning black rocks had burned their way into his flesh but try as she might, she could not remove them.
The young woman, who had not yet received her adult name, cared for him, night and day, but he grew sicker and sicker, despite her prayers. He told her that she must keep the burning black rock alive, otherwise The People would die, and although desperately ill, he taught her the secrets of bringing the burning black rock back to life.

The young woman continuously prayed to the Spirit woman for help, but to no avail. D’haramuoy died from the burns he received by carrying the burning black rock back from the cave of the Great Turtle. As she rubbed the ashes of mourning on her face, she heard a mystical song and saw a pigeon slowly arise from the body of D’haramuoy.

It was a large pigeon, larger than any she had ever seen before, with bright, dark eyes.

Then it spread its wings, and the young woman saw the burning black rock glowing brightly amongst the feathers, and she knew then that the Spirit woman had indeed answered her prayers, but not in the way that she would have wished.

Because D’haramuoy had given her the secrets of the fire, The People gave the young woman his name, and she became the next Keeper of the Fire.

Whenever the D’harawal People see the Bronze winged Pigeon flying through the tree tops, they remember the story of D’haramuoy, and of how he died to save the lives of many, many future generations of The People. Without the Keeper of the Fire, The People would not have survived the time of Great Cold.
That is why the D’harawals always carry their fire with them, never allowing the burning black rock to grow cold, and it is the responsibility of the one called D’haramuoy to ensure that the Fire Spirit does not die.

The lesson to be remembered whenever one sees the Bronze-winged Pigeon is that there are times when one must act for the good of The People without thought to the safety of oneself. Without the brave actions of the first D’haramuoy, there would be none here to care for Gwaigul, or to tell the stories of the D’harawal, the People of This Land.

The last D’haramuoy was born in 1804, and was one of the survivors of the 1816 massacres of the D’harawal people. He died in 1860 and was buried on the banks of the Nat-tai River at its confluence with the Wollondilly River. In the 1890s his remains were dug up and transported to the Australian Museum, Sydney, for study. They have never been returned.

Some Information about Tahmoor:

BRONZE WINGED PIGEON

Scientific Name: *Phaps chalcoptera*

Common Bronzewings are medium-sized, heavily built pigeons. They have a clear white line below and around the eye and patches of metallic green, blue and red in the wing, characteristic of all bronzewings. The male has a yellow-white forehead and pink breast. Young Common Bronzewings are duller and browner than the adults and the metallic wing patch is absent or not easily seen.

Common Bronzewings are one of the most plentiful and commonly seen pigeons in Australia and are found in almost every habitat type, with the exception of the most barren areas and densest rainforests.

Common Bronzewings are normally seen alone, in pairs or in small flocks, and are rarely found far from water. These small groups need to drink frequently, and visit waterholes during either the day or night. It is a cautious bird, and rarely allows close approach and if startled, it flies away with a clatter, keeping low to the ground.

The Common Bronzewing feeds on seeds and other vegetable matter found on the ground.

They build an untidy nest of sticks and twigs, placed low down in a tree or bush, but may be up to 20 m above the ground. Both adults incubate the creamy-white eggs and also share the care of the young birds, which are born naked and helpless and are completely dependent on their parents. Like other pigeons they secrete a special milk-like substance from their crop, which is fed to the young chicks.

The common call is a deep "oom", repeated several times.

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