

Walkabout, The Aboriginal Rite of Passage

By: Juan Matias Inchaustegui and Miguel Martin Perez





An Aborigine Teenager during his preparation for the ritual with his family.

(Courtesy of: Walkabout in Australia)

What is a Walkabout?

Walkabout is a rite of passage ritual held in Australia. In this ritual, the Australian Aborigines will send thirteen year old boys to live in the wild for six months. The goal is to make them mature enough to survive by themselves. The teenagers have to trace paths that their ancestors took. This ritual reflects how 50,000 years ago their ancestors survived in different environments in Australia.

This rite of passage started before Australia was discovered, it was long ago. This ritual is famous in Australia and in the whole world. Even if the Aborigines aren't anymore the most populated ethnic group in Australia they still live in the valleys and are one of the most important natives in Australia.

How it originated?

They start this ritual because they wanted to honor their ancestors that trace their paths or song lines and survive; at that time they were heroes because 50,000 years ago they live this way and survived almost 30 years, which is a lot of time in that pre-historic age.

This rite of passage represents coming of age. The aborigines, the oldest civilization and people in Australia want to know if there 12-13 year old boys can survive by themselves alone without any help. Even if the Aborigines are only 2.4% of Australia's population this ritual is one of the most famous in the country and the continent.

How the Aborigines prepare for the ritual?

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They need to develop survival skills to survive in any place in the route they take. They travel around 1,000 miles in the 6 months. This is an approximation, sometimes is more and sometimes less. They don't have to follow an exact route by they have to follow the song lines that their ancestors made. Song lines and marks on the sky and on land. The goal is to survive like their ancestors did around 50,000 years ago.

The aborigines say that walkabout is not a simple celebration; they say it is a time of reflection, a deeply spiritual time of your life and a time you can think how can you improve in your life and what you did wrong during. Another part of the goal is to make you reflect about everything. Being 6 months alone leaves you and your mind a really big space for reflecting and thinking.

Before the teenagers make this ritual, they have to follow a certain preparation in order to get a chance to be in the ritual. First, their family or a tutor will help them creating survival skills and also the teenagers have to learn self-defense skills in order to protect themselves if they are threaten by an animal. This skills aren't required but if the parents of the teenagers that go on walkabout want them to survive

When they are ready and have everything planned and practice they have to tell the leader of the clan or tribe that they want their son to go walkabout. The term "going walkabout" is a return to Aboriginal life. The native aborigines aren't the only ones that do this, people who had ancestors go walkabout, they can live a normal life as an Australian citizen but they also make this ritual when they are teenagers in honor to their ancestors who were part of the civilization long time ago.



An aborigine teenager hunting for food in middle of the wildlife during his walkabout.

(Photo Courtesy of: Australian History)

How the ritual works?

The Walkabout rite of passage works by sending 12-13 year-old boys to the wild for six months. The goal is to demonstrate their coming of age by being mature enough to survive by themselves in the wild for six months. Also they want the teenagers to understand that their role on their community is starting to increase and they have to improve their role in their community.

It is really simple; they have to survive by themselves without any help for six months. They can be wherever they want but they have to survive and come back to the clan when the six months are over. They have to get their food and create a shelter to survive. Most of the teenagers build a strategy of which places they should go and which places not. They guide themselves using the positions of the Sun and using cardinal points to know where they are and where they are heading.

Most of the teenagers' plans are to find a valley. The valleys are the safest and the easiest place to survive. Valleys are the key to survive because the water is near them. The water access is easy and you can find water easily. Most of the teenagers go to valleys and stay there for most of the six months.

When they arrived after the six months, they celebrate with their families and state that their role in the community is bigger and that they have more responsibilities. There's also a ceremony when the clans congratulate their teenagers that finish the walkabout.



*An aborigine teenager hunting for food in the desert.
(Photo Courtesy of: Rights for Banjora)*

History about the Aborigines



This is a picture of one of the aborigines that live in these days.

(Photo courtesy of: The Burton Wire)

The aborigines are Australia's oldest civilization or tribe. They are the creators of the walkabout ritual and they have lived from 35,000 to 70,000 years in Australia. They also sailed to Asia; in fact they were the first people who arrived to Asia that were from another continent.

The Aborigines have all Australian territory; they were the owners until the Europeans arrived. They were really impressed about how their civilization worked and the infrastructure they had. Australia was the last continent discovered so the Aborigines had a lot of time to develop their civilization and conquer.

When the Europeans arrived to Australia, the Aborigines were peaceful and try to communicate with the Europeans but they couldn't. Taking in concern that the Aborigines were peaceful, specially the British conquered Australia. Since then the population of aborigines has been decreasing until now, which is 2.4% of Australia's population.

Due to the Europeans some ceremonies of part of the walkabout that exist before disappeared and today's walkabout is a simplified version of the walkabout before the British arrived in Australia. They used to have more rituals before the walkabout started but because of the population of aborigines decreased, all of the little rituals disappeared and today they aren't practiced anymore.

This ritual is really important for the Aborigines because it marks the stage of when the teenagers come of age and when their responsibilities are bigger and their roles on the community start increasing.

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