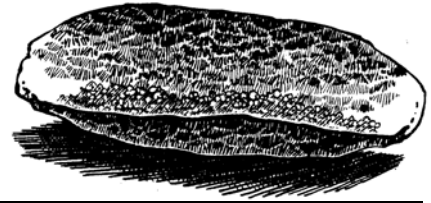




Aboriginal Trade in the Lake Eyre Basin



“It was possible for a Lake Eyre man who had brought ochre from the Flinders Ranges and pituri from the Mulligan River to own a Cloncurry axe, a Boulia boomerang and to wear a shell pendant from the Kimberleys.”

Trade has two main aspects:

Economic

Aboriginal people of the Lake Eyre Basin lacked good supplies of some necessary items, for example axeheads, soft-wood shields and red ochre. To obtain these they traded with neighbouring groups.

Social

Trading provided opportunities for Aboriginal groups to meet. They exchanged news, shared ceremonies, obtained wives and settled disputes. Trading was usually on a personal level, between “uncles” and “nephews”, members of the same totem groups, or special trading partners.

TRADE ROUTES

Aboriginal Australia was criss-crossed by trade routes. Trade routes usually followed rivers or waterholes and often represented the paths of Dreaming ancestors of the region.

Trading parties needed permission to travel safely through the territory of other groups. They had to follow designated pathways and were not permitted to hunt whilst on a trading mission. They could use water to drink, but were limited in how far they could travel by the amount of food they could carry.

A DESCRIPTION OF A TRADING ENCOUNTER

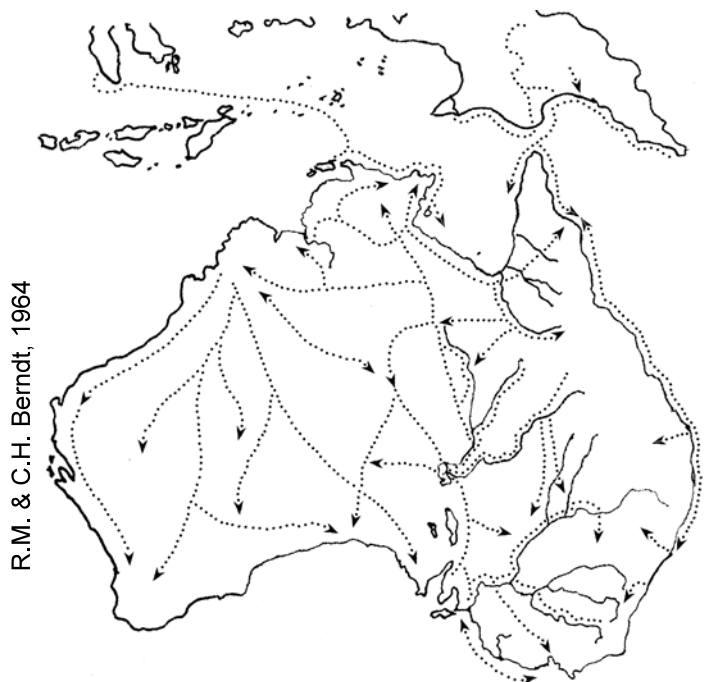
“All large gatherings were occasions for the exchange of goods. The main business of the meeting might be an initiation or a mourning for some person who had died a few months previously.”

Firstly, the air was cleared of all grudges and suspicions by a series of accusations and counter accusations, leading to a ritual battle. Calm was restored and the trading took place. This was itself a sign of the groups’ friendship.

The two trading groups stood opposite each other in two lines. Each man had a heap of goods at his feet. The man opposite would say he wanted such and such an article; this would be thrown over to him by the giver who would then announce his request, and so on.

The actual relative values of the articles did not seem to matter so much as the giving, the friendship, and the emotional excitement. All were satisfied. Eventually, the goods were passed on in the directions where they were unobtainable and were needed.”

from A.P Elkin “Aboriginal Trading Expeditions”, c1940



R.M. & C.H. Berndt, 1964

Trade Routes Within and Beyond Australia.
Culture traits as well as ideas spread gradually, from one area to another, often being modified in the process