

Bunjil the Eagle

Bunjil had two wives and a son named Binbeal, the rainbow. When Bunjil had finished creating the landscape and animals and instructing men, he became tired of staying upon the earth. So he gathered his family about him and told Bellin-bellin, the musk crow, who looked after the winds, "Open your bags and let out some wind". So Bellin-bellin opened one of the bags in which he kept the whirlwinds and let out a blast that blew great trees into the air, roots and all.

Bunjil said, "That is not enough, let out more wind". Bellin-bellin opened all his bags at once, and a huge wind came out and blew Bunjil and all his people to the sky, where they are now looking down on the world as stars. Bunjil himself became the star Altair and his two wives, the black swans, became stars on either side.

Bunjil is often depicted as the Wedge-Tailed Eagle. He assisted by six wirmums or shamans who represent the clans of the Eaglehawk moiety: Djurt-djurt the Nankeen Kestrel, Thara the quail hawk, Yukope the parakeet, Dantum the parrot, Tadjeri the brushtail possum and Turnong the gliding possum.

Bunjil's shelter is Victoria's most important Aboriginal rock art site. It is located in the Black Range State Forest at Gariwerd (or the Grampians). The Aboriginal custodians of Gariwerd are the Jardwadjali. You can see a giant statue of Bunjil in the Docklands in Melbourne.

Many years ago this land that we now call Melbourne extended right out to the ocean. Port Phillip Bay was then a large flat plain where Boon Wurrung hunted kangaroos and cultivated their yam daisy.

But one day there came a time of chaos and crises. The Boon Wurrung and the other Kulin nations were in conflict. They argued and fought. They neglected their children. They neglected their land. The native yam was neglected. The animals were killed but not always eaten. The fish were caught during their spawning season. As this chaos grew the sea became angry and began to rise until it covered their plain and threatened to flood the whole of their country.

The people went to Bunjil, their creator and spiritual leader. They asked Bunjil to stop the sea from rising. Bunjil told his people that they would have to change their ways if they wanted to save their land. The people thought about what they had been doing and made a promise to follow Bunjil. Bunjil walked out to the sea, raised his spear and directed the sea to stop rising. Bunjil then made the Boon Wurrung promise that they would respect the laws.

The place the Kulin then chose to meet as a means of resolving these differences is where the Parliament [of Victoria] is now located. The Kulin nations met here regularly for many thousands of years. They debated issues of great importance to the nation; they celebrated, they danced.

These stories have been sourced by CERES Community Environment Park.

