

ABORIGINAL ASTRONOMY

Victoria's Own Stonehenge?

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I've just returned from a trip to the UK and as usual the English summer rivalled the Melbourne winter, but this didn't stop hardy Brits from attending outdoor festivals in the pouring rain or celebrating the dawn of the summer solstice at Stonehenge when it was less than five degrees outside! While in the UK I researched some of the amazing prehistoric stone circles and earthworks that are found all over this part of the world. Circles, cairns, earth mounds, underground tunnels and springs, all connected by ley lines, criss-crossing the country like arteries and veins. Sacred energy channels linking magnetic terrestrial and celestial forces.

Inspired by the ingenuity and boldness of vision of these ancient Europeans, I decided to find out about Aboriginal astronomy. To my amazement, I discovered that we have our own mini-Stonehenge in Victoria, Australia! The Wurdi Youang stone arrangement near the You Yangs in the Geelong-Bacchus Marsh region was built by the Wathaurung people, thousands of years ago. Wurdi Youang translates as 'big mountain in the middle of a plain'. This egg-shaped ring of stones, about 50 metres across is built in an East-West alignment. At the Western end, at the highest point of the circle, are three large waist-high stones. Ray Norris, an astrophysicist from CSIRO has done extensive research on Aboriginal astronomy. He believes that some outlying stones to the West of the circle, as viewed from these three stones, indicate the setting positions of the sun at the equinoxes and solstices. Perhaps I shouldn't be amazed at this discovery - people all over the world have used the constellations and movement of the planets to track the passage of time for thousands of years – why would our Australian ancestors be any different?

Norris also tells us that some Aboriginal tribes used the sky as a calendar to tell them when it's time to move to a new location or new food supply, just as the ancient Egyptians looked to the heliacal rising of Sirius to tell them when the Nile would flood to fertilise their lands. The Boorong people in Victoria know that when the "Mallee Fowl" constellation (Lyra) disappears in October, to "sit with the Sun", it's time to start gathering her eggs on Earth and when Lyra reappears in March, the birds are about to build their nests.