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"Editorial" for *Environment and History* 4, no.2, Australia special issue (June, 1998)

Dargavel, John

Dargavel, John, "Editorial" for *Environment and History* 4, no. 2, Australia special issue (June, 1998): 127–128. doi:10.3197/096734098779555655 . There is an urgency and a fracture to Australian environmental history. Great areas of the continent are racked by dryland salinity, threats to endangered species - some are already extinct, polluted rivers, and many other problems. This is the white tale of pioneering and development, conservation and preser vation, and of finding place and identity in a new land. If we can understand it better, perhaps we can be reconciled with the past and walk forward with a lighter and more companionable step, or so the hope is. On the other side of the colonial fracture, 'Australia has a black history' as the slogan put it 200 years after Governor Arthur Phillip landed his slew of convicts, soldiers and settlers at Port Jackson (Sydney) in 1788. This other history evolved over 40–50,000 or more years during which the climate cooled and warmed, the seas rose and fell, vast inland lakes filled and disappeared, and ancient land bridges were lost leaving Tasmania on its own. The ecosystems shifted their boundaries and their species continued to evolve, creating the present high degree endemism, and the people adapted to the changes. For about 10,000 years, a mega-fauna of giant kangaroos and emus coexisted with the people but became extinct, we do not really know why. The black environmental history is one in which the features of the landscape, its plants, birds, animals and humans are seen as the creations of the beings of the 'dreamtime'. Place, ecology, identity and spirituality coincide. All rights reserved. © 1998 The White Horse Press

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