

Thirty thousand years ago someone looked at a handful of grass seeds and said to her partner, 'Why don't we make a loaf of bread?' And he replied that it was a great idea and she should grind it into flour immediately, make a dough and bake it on the fire while he sat in the shade and protected her from predators.

Archaeologists found the evidence for this at Cuddie Springs in New South Wales in the shape of an ancient grinding stone which had been used to reduce grass seeds to flour.

It took Egypt 12,000 years to repeat the baking experiment.

Australian sovereign nations cultivated domesticated plants, sewed clothes, engineered streams for aquacultural and agricultural purposes and forged spiritual codes in a pan continental co-operation for the service of the soul, trade, agricultural enterprises, marriage and ceremony.

This was and is an incredible human response to the difficulties of fostering economic, cultural and social policies. It may be unique in its longevity but also in its ability to flourish without resort to war.

Australia's reluctance to acknowledge what was lost can be witnessed in our ignorance of the birth of baking, the gold standard of economic achievement.

Why is this? A malicious refusal to recognise the economic triumphs of the people from whom the land was taken or a simple cult of forgetting fostered by the bedazzlement of Australian resources and opportunities?

If we could rid ourselves of the myth of low Aboriginal achievement, wandering habits and absence of spiritual ethics we might move toward a greater appreciation of our land. We might begin to wonder about the grains Mitchell saw being harvested, we might wonder about the yam daisy monoculture he saw stretching to the horizon of his Australia Felix. These crops must have been grown without pesticides, chemical fertilizers and in harmony with the available climate. Surely they are worthy of our investigation.

If you search out the history of Australian research into yam daisies you inevitably come to one woman, Beth Gott, an honorary research fellow at Monash University. She has almost single-handedly led the interest in this wonderful plant. Inspired by her work a land care group and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people

in East Gippsland have begun field trials into the staple of the southern Aboriginal economy.

Similarly the fish traps at Brewarrina seen by Mitchell and other explorers created economic conditions that allowed the people to live in semi sedentary villages of over a thousand people. Mitchell marvelled not just at their size but also their comfort and elegance.

Since Mitchell's report, however, you will look in vain for later reference to these fish traps even though some archaeologists have speculated that they may be 40,000 years old and as such the oldest human construction on the planet. Even if you accept the most common date of 15,000 years these structures are still amongst the world's first. The sole publication about this phenomena was a tiny fifty page book published in Brewarrina in 1976.

When we eventually acknowledge the food plants adapted to Australian conditions and domesticated by Aboriginal people let's hope we don't just celebrate them every Baker's holiday but recognise the intellectual property Aboriginal Australia has vested in them.

Criticism of the accepted history of Australia is not un-Australian it is an invitation to rejoice in everything the land offers and not just those things we inherited from the British.
