



## Poker Work Wood Carving of the Pitjantjatjara people

Aboriginal people have been living on the Australian continent for more than 40,000 years, making theirs the oldest continuous living culture in the world. Pitjantjatjara is the name of both an Aboriginal people of the Central Australian desert, and their language. They are closely related to the Yankunytjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra and their languages are, to a large extent, mutually intelligible.

They refer to themselves as Anangu (people). Pitjantjatjara country is mostly in the north-west of South Australia, extending across the border into the Northern Territory to just south of Lake Amadeus, and west a short distance into Western Australia. The land is an inseparable and important part of their identity, and every part of it is rich with stories and meaning to Anangu.

They have, for the most part, given up their nomadic hunting and gathering lifestyle but have retained their language and much of their culture in spite of increasing influences from the broader Australian community. Today there are still about 4,000 Anangu living scattered in small communities and outstations across their traditional lands, forming one of the most successful joint land arrangements in Australia with Aboriginal Traditional Owners.

The goanna is also a totemic spirit that got its name because it resembles the iguana, it is a large lizard that lives in dry climates in Australia. Goanna and other lizards are a substantial part of central Australian Aboriginal people's food source. They are tracked down and dug from burrows using a special digging stick. For thousands of years, Aboriginal people have told creation stories or Dreamings to maintain their laws and customs and their relationship to the land. Today, in many areas, particularly remote rural places, the Aboriginal people keep their traditional and cultural ways. One way they do this is with their attachment to their land, expressed and reinforced by their ceremonies and their Aboriginal art.

They carve animals from dry wood or tree roots, often using the roots of river gum or mulga. Some sculptures are plain, while others, as seen here, have patterns and symbols relating to Aboriginal culture. The shape of the wood is used to structure models of animals.

