

## Chapter One

### *The Land of the Dreamtime*

DO you know what our Earth looks like? I'm sure that you can tell it is like a huge ball, spinning around in space. The "top" and "bottom" of this gigantic ball each has a thick covering, or cap, of ice. These ice caps are very important in the story of our world.

Long, long ago – when the world was very young – the two ice caps were much bigger and the Earth was a lot colder than it is today. Snow fell over the two frozen areas and the snow, too, became ice. It did not melt and flow back into the sea from where it had come. So much water stayed on the land in the form of ice that there was much less water in the oceans. As the level of water in the seas and oceans fell, some of the Earth's area that had been covered by water then became dry land. This was the time of a great Ice Age.





Can you see on the map that there are many islands between Australia and the mainland of the Asian continent? In the times of the great ice caps there was much more land exposed and less sea between Australia and Asia. It was quite easy for people to row across the narrow stretches of water. We believe that it was about that time that brown-skinned people began to cross from Asia to Australia. In dug-out canoes they came, bringing their weapons, dogs, and a little food. These people were the first Aborigines to live in Australia and they came many thousands of years ago. They came long before the birth of Christ or Buddha and even long before the pyramids were being built in Egypt.

The Aborigines tell many wonderful stories about these early times which they call the days of the *Dreamtime*. One of the stories told by the Aborigines was about Bohra, the Kangaroo.

There was once a time, so the story says, that Bohra moved about on four legs just like a dog.

Bohra used to like feeding at night and sometimes he would watch the fires of the Aborigines. One evening he saw many fires and heard the sounds of a great corroboree. There were the shouts of excited men, the click-click of sticks as they were tapped together and the thudding of hands on bundles of skins. As Bohra watched, a line of black painted figures came leaping into the light of the fire.

So excited did Bohra become that he could not resist a desire to stand on his two hind legs and try leaping like the men. Down to the fire he jumped and, balancing himself on his tail, Bohra bounded along behind the last man.

Faster and faster moved the dancers until, at last and quite suddenly, the sounds and movement stopped. The dance was over.

After the corroboree the Aborigines saw the kangaroo. Because he had come to their dance without being invited, the men declared he would have to be punished. It was decided the kangaroo would have to move always as he had that evening – jumping on his hind legs and balancing himself on his tail.

