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As humans, we tend to measure time in relation to our own life span. Something fifty years ago may feel 'ancient'. Even Greek or Roman civilisation, a little over two thousand years old, can seem impossibly distant. Imagine then the discovery of a truly ancient culture, whose story has been buried in a dry lake bed for over 40,000 years.

Lake Mungo, situated in outback New South Wales, around 760 kilometres west of Sydney, has become one of the richest, most significant archaeological sites in the world. The discovery of human remains and stone tools has provided a rare glimpse into the lives of the Indigenous Australian people who inhabited the area.

Already, limited excavation of Lake Mungo's enormous sand dunes has unearthed some of the oldest human bones outside of Africa's Great Rift Valley. The remains of Mungo Man, found in 1974, suggest a sophisticated burial practice where the corpse was sprinkled with red ochre which must have been transported from 200 kilometres away.

Mungo Woman, found in 1969, has become a controversial figure in her own right. Her finding indicates a cremation ceremony where the body was burnt, then broken apart, then burnt again, and finally sprinkled with the same red ochre as Mungo Man. In her book, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime*, Dr Josephine Flood argues that the discovery of Mungo Woman, "at least shows that 26,000 years ago women were considered worthy of complex burial rites. What emotions inspired those rites – love, fear, or religious awe – we will never know but all show a concern for the deceased, which is the essence of humanity."¹

This is precisely why these fossil records have become so important to current Indigenous Australian people. Not only is it proof that they were the first to walk this great land; it also shows that many of their ancient beliefs and practices have continued down through the ages. It is also compelling evidence of the length and complexity of the Indigenous Australian story, a story that non-Indigenous people are just starting to understand.

1. cited in B Elder, 'Bare bones of history', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 March 2009, <http://www.smh.com.au/travel/activity/great-outdoors/bare-bones-of-history-20090318-91gp.html>

Read each question carefully and circle one answer.

1 What is the purpose of *Not just bones at Lake Mungo*?

- The purpose is to retell the events in the discovery of bones and tools at Lake Mungo.
- The purpose is to tell a story about the ancient Indigenous Australian people who lived at Lake Mungo.
- The purpose is to present one point of view about the importance of the findings at Lake Mungo.
- The purpose is to explain how archaeologists prepare a dig site.

2 How long ago were Indigenous Australian people first living at and around Lake Mungo?

- exactly 2,000 years ago
- less than 2,000 years ago
- There is no way of knowing.
- over 40,000 years ago

3 Which of the following best completes this sentence?

***Greek and Roman civilisation* ***

- is much younger than the evidence of Indigenous Australian culture discovered at Lake Mungo.
- is far older than the evidence of Indigenous Australian culture discovered at Lake Mungo.
- is about the same age as the evidence of Indigenous Australian culture discovered at Lake Mungo.
- cannot be compared to the evidence of Indigenous Australian culture discovered at Lake Mungo.

4 Which is the best description of Lake Mungo's location?

- near Sydney
- in outback New South Wales
- somewhere in Australia
- in the Rift Valley

5 What evidence of ancient human history has been unearthed from the sand dunes at Lake Mungo?

- a book about the Dreamtime
- plant fossils and engraved tombstones
- cave paintings and animal bones
- human remains and stone tools

6 What has been learned from the remains of Mungo Man?

- Ancient Indigenous Australian people must have travelled long distances or traded widely.
- The shores of Lake Mungo were once covered with red ochre.
- Ancient Indigenous Australian people buried their dead in red soil.
- Ancient Indigenous Australian people living at Lake Mungo had no contact with outsiders.

7 What has been learned from the remains of Mungo Woman?

- Her body was simply discarded in the sand dunes.
- She died when she was 69 years old.
- She was buried beside Mungo Man.
- Her body was cremated in a specific and deliberate manner.

8 What is Dr Flood referring to when she says "we will never know"?

- the names of the language groups who once lived at the Lake Mungo site
- the emotions that inspired the complex burial rites discovered at Lake Mungo
- Mungo Woman's name and language group
- the age of the remains of Mungo Man

9 Why are the discoveries of Mungo Man and Mungo Woman so significant?

- They show the length and complexity of Indigenous Australian history.
- They are older than any other human remains found in the world.
- They show that people died at Lake Mungo.
- They provide evidence to support the Dreamtime stories.

10 Which statement accurately summarises the last sentence in the text?

- The story of Indigenous Australian cultures is a short one.
- The evidence found at Lake Mungo doesn't prove anything.
- Non-Indigenous people have a lot to learn about Indigenous Australian history.
- Indigenous Australian people don't value their ancient traditions and practices.

Text type: Exposition

NAPLAN*-style questions: Reading

- 1 The purpose is to present one point of view about the importance of the findings at Lake Mungo.
- 2 over 40,000 years ago
- 3 much younger than the evidence of Indigenous culture discovered at Lake Mungo.
- 4 in outback New South Wales
- 5 human remains and stone tools
- 6 Ancient Indigenous Australian people must have travelled long distances or traded widely.
- 7 Her body was cremated in a specific and deliberate manner.
- 8 the emotions that inspired the complex burial rites discovered at Lake Mungo
- 9 They show the length and complexity of Indigenous Australian history.
- 10 Non-Indigenous people have a lot to learn about Indigenous Australian history.