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How is it indexed?

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The *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* was published as a two volume work and a Macintosh version CD-ROM in 1994 by Aboriginal Studies Press, the publishing arm of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. This was a ground-breaking work, which has been recognised in the number of awards it has won for both formats. Reviewers comment on its attractiveness, its colourful illustrations, the quality of its sound.

It was the inspiration of David Horton who edited the encyclopaedia and together with Ian Howie-Willis wrote most of the 2000 entries.

Horton expressed his vision for the *Encyclopaedia* in the introduction.

'Among my key guiding principles in constructing this work have been an emphasis on people and a lack of objectification. Just as this is not an encyclopaedia of material culture or archaeology, or anthropology, nor is it an encyclopaedia of Aboriginal studies. It is an encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia, or an encyclopaedia of the Aboriginal people.

I have deliberately set out to create an encyclopaedia of Aboriginal society in its own right as a complete system, as distinct from its appearance in first chapters or introductions to books about the 'real' Australia.'... 'I intend this to be not only an encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia, but an encyclopaedia for Aboriginal Australia.'

There was considerable input from Aboriginal editors, contributors and advisors in the preparation of the encyclopaedia. The contents reflect the interests and priorities of Aboriginal people, with the emphasis on biographical information (450 of the 2000 entries are about people), individual language groups and communities, which account for well over half the encyclopaedia entries.

There are 18 main topics, Art, Economy, Education, Food, Health, History, Land ownership, Language, Law, Literature, Media, Music, Politics, Prehistory, Religion, Social organisation, Sport and Technology. Each topic has a major essay written by the editor for that section. Within the topic are shorter essays on major subjects and short entries of up to 250 words. 'See also' references at the beginning of each entry link the expected and unusual, for example prominent people associated with a language group or subject. These were chosen with care to gradually add to the reader's knowledge and to avoid dead ends. At the end of the entry, one or two bibliographic references allow the reader to further pursue the topic.

In the second volume, after an extensive bibliography, appendices give statistical, legislative and financial information, lists of winners of awards, bilingual schools, and the location of Christian missions.

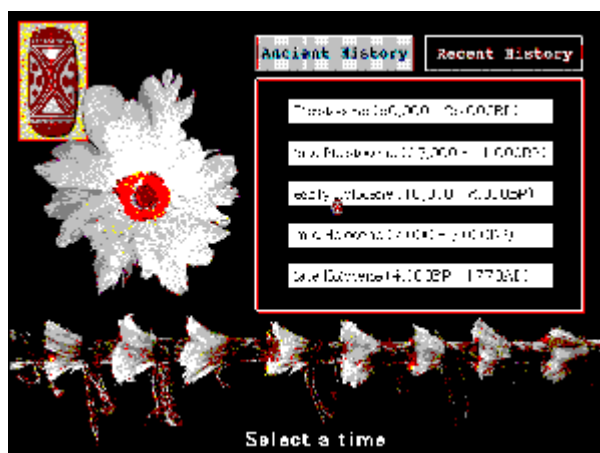
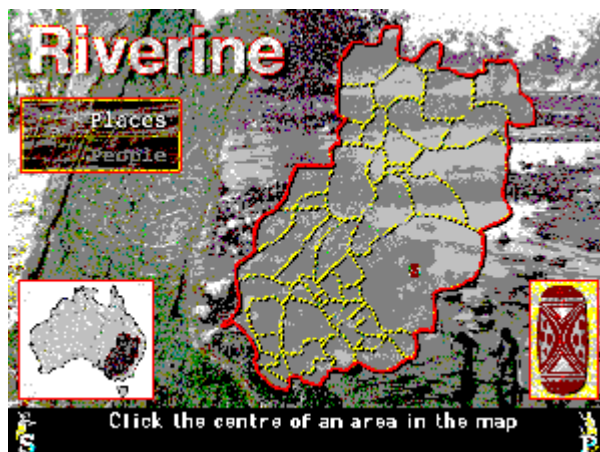
David Horton and film-maker, Kim McKenzie, designed and developed the CD-ROM - a colourful combination of text, pictures, sound, film and video. This has the same corpus of information and the 'See also' reference structure, enhanced by hypertext links on text and graphics. It is a particularly effective educational tool, which attracts the interest of all who view it.

The structure of the CD is as follows: over an image of the plateau at Kakadu, accompanied by the ululations of Central Australian women, the beginning screen gives the credits, customizes the sound and typeface, provides a help facility, and the start button. Pressing

the start button brings up the options of map, timeline, list of main topics, or typed in individual search topic. (Figure 1)



The map is divided into regions. Clicking on a portion of the map will show the relevant language group (Figure 2). The entry gives text, a reading list and possibly a relevant photograph, sound grab or video clip. 'See also' references and hypertext links refer to people, community, or a main topic. An alternative interface on the map lets the user access information on particular places within that region.



The timeline is divided into Ancient History and Recent History. Ancient History, which has 5 options, is the period from Pleistocene, 60,000-26000BP to Late Holocene, 4000BP -



An ingenious navigation tool is the shield, the symbol of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. This provides an easy 4 way option. clicking at the top goes to homebase, the left side goes back, the right side searches, the bottom returns to the beginning screen and the quit button. Every navigation is recorded, allowing a quick return to a previous search.

How is such a mammoth work indexed (besides having entries ordered alphabetically)? There is no single highly detailed index to the whole work if an index is defined as

a detailed alphabetical key to names, places, and topics in a book with reference to their page number, etc. in the book' (Macquarie Dictionary,1981)

This does not seem an appropriate definition for a CD-ROM.

The printed version has an Entry Guide comprising lists of entries under subject, region, state, tribal groups, and author. A time line describes major events, and an 'index' gives references to preferred terms, many of which are variant spellings for language groups This means that indexing is only at the level of entry heading. These same lists underlie the CD-ROM navigation tools. For example, the variant spelling list operates for the search screen when a term is typed in, the region list underlies the map, and the Recent History time zones list events in chronological order (Figure 4)

Does the *Encyclopaedia* need an index? It was a deliberate decision on David Horton's part to choose a sophisticated 'See also' reference system and ordered lists of entries and not an index. This was not a decision made in isolation, for example, he consulted teachers who suggested regional or state lists of entries would be useful for teaching purposes.

I have some personal reservations. As a reference librarian, I use an *Encyclopaedia* as a ready-reference tool to provide information quickly on topics accessed through an index. Consequently I find the *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* useful for enquiries on people, language groups (although many are not represented), places and events, but can be frustrating when seeking specific information on other topics. For example when seeking to find out when Aboriginal people gained the vote there were no entries under Elections, Voting, Suffrage or other likely terms.

However the *Encyclopaedia* was not designed for someone like me who has worked in an Aboriginal studies reference environment for ten years and has built up my own network of finding aids. As quoted above, Horton's vision was of 'an encyclopaedia for Aboriginal Australia'. It is equally an encyclopaedia for anyone wanting to find out about Aboriginal culture and history. It is designed to be read, to lure the reader on to further discoveries. The CD-ROM begs to be played with, to test its audio-visual capabilities. The *Encyclopaedia* is not just a ready-reference tool.

Horton avoided the all-embracing key article on a topic used in some other encyclopaedia. These demand access to topics through a linear index. His *Encyclopaedia* challenges the

need for a printed index, in which disparate items follow in alphabetical order, not because of any relationship between preceding or succeeding terms.

The philosophy of the *Encyclopaedia* is one of exploration, of finding information within a context, of navigating a web of linked pathways and references. In many ways this corresponds to the Greek notion of an encyclopaedia as 'a circle of knowledge which a reader could enter at any point and follow around'. (Barnes, 1996).

Kim McKenzie, sees the way in which the *Encyclopaedia* has been designed for CD-ROM as being an index. As well as the 'See Also' reference system of the hard copy, hypertext links lead the user from maps, to topics, people, events and back again using as search terms the entry headings of the hard copy version, not free text. By pressing the appropriate button, the user may see Ernie Dingo in a video, hear language spoken, or the songs of an area, or read text against a background of a photo of a particular event. This would seem to embody the essence of an index, which is to guide the user from a specific term to the body of information to which the term refers.

Both versions have the advantage of integrating information so that the searcher can use different pathways to reach a piece of information. The permutations of these pathways are vast, even for a few search terms. Searchers learn the context of the information by navigating the linkages. The advantage of a CD-ROM is the speed that this can be achieved.

Does the Encyclopaedia work in the way it is constructed? Ask the Aboriginal people who visit the Institute Library, who, having found a map of their area on the CD-ROM, find information on their people, hear the sound of their songs or watch videos of events in their history. Teachers complain that they cannot get their students away from the CD-ROM to go to other classes. Students, new to Aboriginal studies, find the Encyclopaedia opens up a new world to them and refers them on to more specific areas of study. The final word should go to one of the Encyclopaedia's reviewers

'When the set arrived, I sat down to give the pages a preliminary flick-through to see what sort of task I'd undertaken and when I looked up, four hours later, I was mortified to discover how the time had just flown by. I use reference books in my work: they're a tool to inform and refresh the memory, and people turn to them for scraps of specific information, not a "read". So it's almost a confession then, that later the same night I was burning the midnight oil - unable to put down a volume of an encyclopedia. (Sykes, 1994)

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Bio

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