

Rockhopping

By Trace Balla

April 2016

ISBN 9781760112349

hardback picture book

Summary

The first time Uncle Egg took me on an adventure canoeing, it was his idea.

This time, the adventure was my idea – or maybe it was both of ours....

The characters in this stand-alone sequel to *Rivertime* return to take readers on an exciting journey set in Billawin, the mountain ranges known as the Victoria Range.

Curiosity and adventure fill their days and nights as Clancy and Uncle Egg set out on their six day hike to find the source of the Glenelg River. Along the way Clancy discovers much more than he imagined.

Clancy tells his story in a beautifully crafted and detailed novella-style presentation. Every page is filled with detailed flora and fauna, the sounds and sights of Gariwerd (the Grampians), inspirational thoughts and wonderings and exhilarating learning.

Rockhopping is a book that reminds us about being in touch with the earth, gaining independence, building trust and connecting to each other and the surrounding world. It is suitable for 8 to 12 year olds...and adults whose spirit takes them back to their childhood.

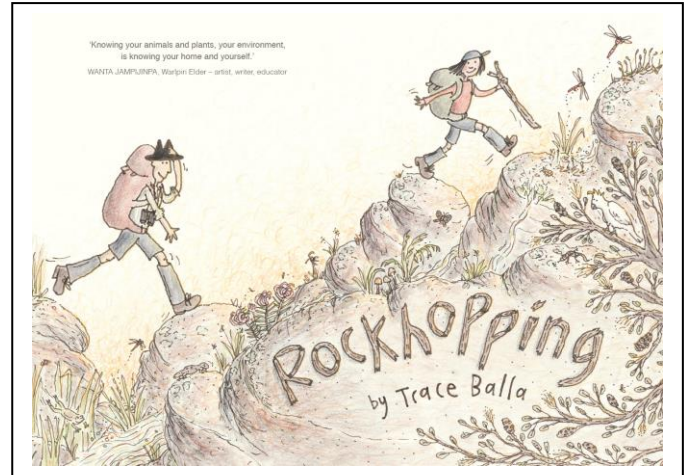
Trace Balla: *I was a bit sad to finish working on Rivertime as I felt close to the characters. It has always been the intention to take them on further adventures, and it seemed natural that they, like I, would be curious to find the source of the Glenelg River from Rivertime. So it was lovely to do this story next. The same readers may like to read both. It seems to be popular amongst primary students, but also all ages. It is really my story, after all.*

A story develops...

Trace Balla: *When I worked on Rockhopping I had so many ideas I wrote them on coloured sticky notes and then stuck them all over the wall, moving them around till they seemed to fit. It was like a jigsaw and suited my way of thinking. I also used a landscape drawing like a map, to work out where the action would unfold. Then after that I could start to make more of a storyline from all the ideas.*

I did a lot of research about original indigenous place names too, which was fascinating, and felt very respectful to refer to those original names and add comment about that in the story.

I took five or six trips to Gariwerd / The Grampians, to research the book, as well as to talk about content with some indigenous people there. Some of the story was already planned before the trips: for example, it was to be about the characters finding their way to the source of the Glenelg River. Our trip to do that enriched my process so much, for example travelling through recently burnt land, as well as one particular other trip where a group of us got lost for a while. It was a fantastic opportunity to catch some story. And I certainly did! Let's say I just twisted the truth!



Visit <https://www.allenandunwin.com/resources/for-teachers> for free down-loadable teachers notes, reviews by teachers, extracts and more. And sign up to the Allen & Unwin e-newsletter to receive monthly updates on new resources!

Contact Carolyn Walsh, Education Marketing Coordinator,
Ph: +02 8425 0150 Fax: 02 9906 2218 Email: CarolynW@allenandunwin.com

In the classroom...



Words, images and ideas

Trace Balla: *I like to keep a pen and paper by my bed and in my bag, so if an idea comes I am ready. I naturally combine words and images, so the graphic novel style suits me well. I love to sketch in nature. The more you sketch, the more you slow down and have a really good look and start to appreciate so much more.*

I really like combining words and images, so creating a book where it's about storyboarding from early on suits me. I did a lot of sketches at Gariwerd /The Grampians, just in my journal, with a Uniball waterproof pen and watercolor pencils (and an aquabrush that I sometimes use). These initial sketches have been really useful material for making the final images. I love colour – the Australian bush is so beautiful to me – and I want the book to capture some of that colour. I used sepia Pitt pens and a sepia ink wash and then coloured pencils for the book. I like using simple tools that are quite immediate. It's nice to be able to get kids to have a go too when I visit schools.

A few bits of magic seemed to happen when I'm storyboarding, with the story starting to tell itself, which is really exciting. For example early on Clancy's mum gives him a gift of drawing tools and a sketch pad to take along. I wanted him to discover the magnifying glass in the pencil case and begin to look even closer at the environment. But later when I was storyboarding him making a fire it was great to suddenly realise he could use the magnifying glass rather than matches.

Use in the curriculum

Themes

The themes of nature, wonder, adventure, self-awareness and humour appear in *Rockhopping*.

Trace Balla: *When you stop trying to get anywhere and just be, a whole world of wonder can open up to you. And when you stop going with a plan and follow the flow, you may find a world of unexpected opportunities revealing themselves to you. The more you look the more you find out. It's also about realising we are part of the natural world, rather than separate to it, and that we are not alone, but surrounded by other life. Themes of growing up and realising what we are capable of are also explored.*

Australian Curriculum

These themes could be considered in conjunction with the following curriculum learning areas of the Australian Curriculum. States of Australia will have their own versions of the Australian Curriculum.

- Humanities and Social Sciences
- Civics and Citizenship
- English
- Science
- Maths
- Health and PE

The Cross Curriculum Priorities referred to in this story are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
- Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia
- Sustainability

The themes can also be developed with these General Capabilities in mind:

- information and communication technology
- ethical understanding
- intercultural understanding
- personal and social capability



In the classroom...

Rockhopping

by Trace Balla

Discussion Points and Activities

- Locate Jardwadjali and Djab Wurrung language areas on the [indigenous map](#)
- Before reading, use geographical tools, for example a globe, wall map or digital application such as Google Maps, to locate the Glenelg River in Victoria.
- Enlarge the map at the end of the book and follow it as the story progresses. Note the title, the key and compass direction.
- TRACE BALLA says...*I love to sketch in nature. The more you sketch, the more you slow down and have a really good look and start to appreciate so much more.*
Clancy's mum gave him a sketch book to take on his trip. Find any references in the story to slowing down, relaxing or the appreciation of nature.
- *'So is it true that Aussie Rules footy started near here?'*
'Sure is, bro. My mob used to play it with a possum-skin ball'
What sports or physical activities are mentioned in the story?
Discuss the importance of physical activity to one's health?
Investigate Marngrook, the indigenous football game.
- Turn to page 7 of *Rockhopping*. Assign a mass for each item in either Uncle Egg's backpack or Clancy's backpack. Remember to weigh in at exactly the weight of the belongings, 22kg for Uncle Egg or 8 kg for Clancy.
- How does Clancy feel about being left alone? Give an example from the story.
- There are a number of examples of bush food, remedies or solutions to problems. Find examples in the story.
- *My people understand these mountains were created by what happened in the Dreamtime, and white fellas talk about scientific ways.* Discuss the indigenous view compared to the scientific view of the area.
- If you were stuck in a storm in the middle of 'Woop Woop', who would you choose to be with and why? (Make sure students understand the term 'Woop Woop': a humorous slang name for any backward or remote town or district.)
- *'You and me are a bit like lichen,'* said Clancy. What did he mean?
- Clancy does a lot of wondering throughout the story. Give three examples.
- What is an ecosystem? Give an example from the book of an ecosystem.
- What do you think is the author's message or purpose in writing the story of *Rockhopping*?
- Showing initiative means you use your own imagination and common sense to solve a problem. *Rockhopping* has a number of examples of Clancy and others showing initiative. Give examples from the story.
- On pp. 70 – 71 the 'Day 5' panel is followed by seven panels of drawings. Elicit the term 'timeline' from the class by asking: What do they show? How are they ordered? Could the information be shown in another way? Approximately what dates might we label each panel with? Why and how might a Chinese gardener have come to the area?

In the classroom...



Activity Observation Hoops in the park

Resources: hoops and magnifying glasses.

In class, discuss the difference between seeing and observing. Explain that the students are going to the park to observe a small part of the environment. In pairs have the students place a hoop to mark a small section of ground. With their magnifying glasses get them to observe to find creatures moving across their 'landscape'. This could be done on an outing...

Activity Outing

Depending on where your school is situated, arrange an outing to a local Cultural Centre or National Park. In Victoria, Australia, there are these options:

<http://www.brambuk.com.au> Brambuk National Park and Cultural Centre in Gariwerd/Grampians – for an informative website and school camping opportunities.

[Ecolinc](#) Science And Technology Innovations Centre (Bacchus Marsh, near Melbourne). An award-winning facility that provides curriculum programs for P-12 students and teachers, addressing the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (AusVELS). It is set in a created indigenous grassy/woodland landscape featuring a model wetland.

[Gould League](#) (National organisation) Online resources and detailed learning programs, often based on excursions and the relevant state/national curriculum links.

[Ceres](#) Community Environmental Park (Brunswick East, Melbourne). In/Excursions, PD, VELS programs

OR

Visit a local green area with bird, animal and plant recognition guide books/apps and practise using them to identify local flora and fauna. Take along some art equipment and invite students to draw indigenous plants using magnifying glass, water brush, water colour pencils and waterproof pen, as shown in the story.

TRACE BALLA says... *I've been finding out so much about the life forms researched for this book. Many I have chosen to include would be interesting for students to investigate, like the wasp and the orchid that the wasp thinks is a female and pollinates by mating it; the spotted quoll that has only recently been discovered after they thought it was extinct; the ancient greenling damselfly that is called a 'Living fossil'; the caterpillar fungi that feed off caterpillar...*

Activity Mini Things

Print [The Gariwerd mini nature guide](#). Cut the guide into picture parts then, in pairs, sort the pictures into groups of life forms. Group categories might be insects, animals, plants, those that live on water, those that live on land. Choose an animal from the mini nature guide or the book to investigate. Find out about its classification (reptile, mammal, marsupial etc.) its habitat, (swamp, rocks, river etc.) its young, its diet and include one interesting fact about the animal. Present as a report. (The author chose to include specific flora and fauna that have fascinating facts for kids to investigate.)

Activity Camp food

How familiar are your students with the food Uncle Egg and Clancy take with them? Using camping gear outdoors, assemble a cold lunch and/or cook a class dinner from items similar to those seen on p. 6.



In the classroom...

Rockhopping

by Trace Balla

Activity Sports Science report

This could be done after investigating forces and how forces are exerted by one object on another. The investigation should incorporate activities to develop an understanding of pushes, pulls, friction, gravity, magnetism and classification of these as contact or non-contact forces. Students brainstorm different sports that use these forces and develop a class display showing these different sports.

Case study: Rock climbing

Develop a presentation to explain how you would help athletes improve their performance in rock climbing. Include a description of the sport, how forces are important in the sport, a list of questions could you ask a sports scientist for improving rock climbing, i.e. planning for the sport, appropriate clothing, supplies, efficient actions.

Some possible questions:

What is rock climbing?

What is the goal of rock climbing?

What are the risks of rock climbing?

What are the contact and non-contact forces involved in rock climbing?

What forces are involved in the motion of a rock climber?

Or Clancy's question on p. 23, frame 2: 'What do you think of people putting hooks into the rocks, to climb on?'

In pairs, select an interviewer and a sports scientist to role-play your findings.

(If your school has a qualified bushwalker/orienteer, they could take the students on a walk where they 'get lost' and have to use compass, topographical features and map to find their way, which is harder than it looks! Things to observe along the way: geology, plants and animals including bush tucker, animal tracks and scats, any signs of past fires.)

From the author, Trace Balla

In my research what has been fascinating is the restoration of traditional place names. I am passionate about this and did my own discovery of place names.

It is mostly about respect and acknowledgement of history and culture, with the oldest European names only dating back to 1836, while the Koori names are maybe from 5–12,000 years old or older in the area. Some of the names may be very offensive or inappropriate, such as Halls Gap, in that Hall was associated with Koori killings, and Mt Piccanniny, now considered derogatory, and Mt Lubra, now racially offensive and meaning a female Aboriginal Australian.

Also of interest is that the name of the river changes as it moves through the landscape and different tribal language areas, Bochara—Bugara for example, for the river in the story. Also see [A Submission to the Victorian Place Names Committee](#)

for the Submission to Victorian Place Names Committee by Ian Clark, made on behalf of the Aboriginal people of the area.

In the classroom...



Related texts/Further reading

Links

[Flora and Fauna Western Plains App](#)

[A submission to the Victorian Place Names Committee](#)

[Wurundjeri-willam: Aboriginal Heritage of Merri Creek](#) – about the Merri Creek, referred to in *Rockhopping* and the digging stick, known by the Wurundjeri as Kannan.

[BIRDS in BACKYARDS](#) – many excellent resources are available at this site, including a downloadable Bird Observation Recording Sheet and a variety of classroom and outdoor activities across a range of curriculum areas.

Books

Leaf Litter by Rachel Tonkin, HarperCollins 2006

Marngrook: the long ago story of Aussie Rules by Titta Secombe, Magabala Books 2012. Teachers notes available <https://www.magabala.com/media/wysiwyg/pdf/Marngrook.pdf>

Rivertime by Trace Balla, Allen & Unwin 2014. Teachers notes available www.allenandunwin.com

Aboriginal stories of the Dreamtime that connect duty to country, Aboriginal custom and law

Curriculum recommendation, activities and discussion questions prepared by **Marilyn Snider**. Marilyn is a teacher and education consultant who worked with the Global Education Project. She presents at conferences, delivers professional learning, advises on curriculum, has written articles and blogs. Her website can be found at <http://www.bethinkglobal.com.au>