



How the Echidna Got His Spines



In one of the myths, Echidna seems to be thriving while all the other animals were dying of thirst. As it happened in the case of Koala in another myth, everyone believed that Echidna had a secret store of water and that he was keeping it for himself.

Bimba-towera, the Finch, was told to follow Echidna wherever he went, to find the location of the hidden **reservoir**.

“But he’ll see me,” Bimba protested. “He won’t go near the water if he sees me watching him.”

“Sooner or later he must drink,” they told him. “He can’t go without water forever. That’s when you’ll find where he keeps the water.”

So, Bimba followed his instructions. Everywhere that Echidna went, Bimba was close behind. The **wily** little anteater knew very well why he was being followed. He said nothing but began to burrow into the earth with his strong claws. Soon he was lost to sight. Bimba cautiously put his head into the hole but withdrew it in alarm as the soil collapsed.

He reported his failure to the animals, which were at a loss to know what to do next. Not one of them was equipped for burrowing beneath the earth, and it looked as though Echidna would keep his secret while everyone else perished.

Then Tiddalick the Frog offered to help. He was a cunning fellow. He had shrunk in size since the day he had swallowed all the water in the land and then **disgorged** it (a different story) and had been thirsty ever since. He was as eager to find where Echidna kept the water as anyone and much more cunning than Bimba in concealing his movements.

He made no attempt to follow the anteater, but browsed among the reeds, taking no notice of Echidna. For most of the time his back was turned. Seizing his opportunity when Tiddalick seemed to be **engrossed** in catching a fly, Echidna darted to his waterhole. It was concealed by a large flat stone, which he lifted and lowered himself into the hole.

In spite of his apparent inattention, Tiddalick had been watching Echidna’s every move. Immediately when the stone was raised, he jumped and covered the **intervening** distance in a single bound and dropped head first into the hole.

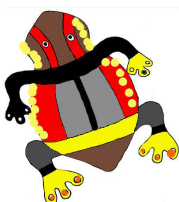
Echidna stared back as the water splashed up onto his face.

“What are you doing here?” Tiddalick asked before Echidna had time to open his mouth. “This water hole belongs to all the animals. You have no right to come sneaking up and stealing it when we were not looking.”

By this time all the animals had arrived. The first thing they did was to **slake** their thirst, after which they turned on Echidna and threw him into a thorn bush. When they left, Echidna dragged himself free, but was never able to remove the spines from his back.

Reader’s Dictionary

Reservoir	- a natural or artificial pond or lake used for the storage and regulation of water
Wily	- cunning
Disgorged	- to bring up and expel from the throat or stomach
Engrossed	- to occupy exclusively
Intervening	- to come, appear, or lie between two things
Slake	- to satisfy (a craving)



Tiddalik's Torrent

With their **amphibious** ways and their glistening skins, frogs are generally associated with water. Typical was Tiddalik, the biggest frog that ever existed. Waking one morning with a powerful thirst he drank – and did not stop drinking till he had drunk the whole world dry. All creation was soon shriveling up around him. At first the plants and then the trees started to die, the animals knew that they could not be far behind. So, meeting in council, they attempted to form a plan to get Tiddalik to release water. One scheme after another was raised and rejected – none seemed at all likely to work, until a wise old **wombat** came up with a plan all agreed stood a chance of succeeding. If the giant frog could be made to laugh, said the **sage**, the water would come pouring forth in a **torrent** from his mouth: their problems would at last be at an end.

In practice, though, making Tiddalik laugh proved no easy matter. The **kookaburra's** best jokes fell flat and died. The kangaroo and emu leaped about in **farce**, the lizard strutted comically, but Tiddalik sat stony-faced. Just as they were all despairing, however, the animals were joined by Nabunum the eel, who was only now driven from his home in the creek by the retreating water. He danced on his **sinuous** tail, assuming all manner of **improbable** positions, until at last the frog could no longer help himself but roared with laughter. The torrent gushed forth just as the wise old wombat had predicted: the land was watered, lakes, rivers and **billabongs** were all refilled.

Reader's Dictionary

Amphibious	- able to live both on land and in water
Wombat	- a stocky Australian marsupial resembling a small bear
Sage	- a wise person
Torrent	- a stream or gush of liquid
Kookaburra	- an Australian bird about the size of a crow that has a call resembling loud laughter
Farce	- comedy, silliness
Sinuous	- winding, curving, wavy
Improbable	- unlikely; not expected
Billabong	- a streambed; a channel leading out from a river