Aboriginal Tasmania

A TIMELESS AND TOPICAL JOURNEY

Go on a learning journey at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery with the new Tasmanian Aboriginal gallery - Ningenneh Tunapry: "to give knowledge and understanding". With the decision by the Federal Parliament to offer a formal apology to the Stolen Generation on February 13, 2008, the role of teachers in facilitating a better understanding of Tasmania's Aborigines has never been more timely. The TMAG exhibition is an easy way to enter this theme with students of all ages.

Shell necklace makers today such as Dulcie Greeno, Corrie Fullard and others keep the tradition strong and their creations have been exhibited around the world. Other practices such as basket making also have long lineages and continue today. Fibres from plants such as white flag iris, the blue flax lily, fine grasses such as Poa species, cutting grass, reeds and thin strips of stringy-bark and wattle bark are woven into intricate forms. Several baskets from the early 18th century as well as contemporary baskets from makers such as Colleen Mundy are displayed at TMAG.

Things to explore
- Many shells are found around the shores of Tasmania, but there are some specific ones that necklace makers utilise in their art. Find out what these different shell species are, where they are found and what they look like.
- The retrieval of "old" knowledge was expressed in the bark canoe project undertaken by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community in 2007 and culminating in the centrepiece of the new gallery. Research this project.
- Many excellent resources are available at the Aboriginal Education Unite.
- The arrival of the Europeans, especially the English settlers in Hobart in 1804 marked a huge upheaval for the Tasmanian Aboriginal people. It was also undoubtedly a major dislocation for the convicts sentenced to the other side of the world. In the ensuing years the clash of cultures resulted in a war being fought over Country and differing systems of ownership, governance and law. In 1829 Governor Arthur issued proclamation boards to try to communicate English justice to the Aboriginal people. These pictograms show white men being punished by hanging for killing black men, and vice versa. In reality things were very different. No white man in Tasmania was ever hung for killing a black man, even though there are documented cases of this crime occurring in Tasmania.

Paywota – long time ago

More than 2000 generations of Tasmanian Aboriginal people have lived on this island they called Trouwerney, now Tasmania — a long time to gather the knowledge and understanding of a landscape and climate unique in Australia. How have the Tasmanian Aboriginal people survived over such a long period of diverse conditions, from ice ages to extended droughts? A look at the technologies such as the bark huts, or gardown, that existed on the West Coast, gives an insight. Built of a range of materials such as stringy bark or paper bark, they formed villages of several family groups and provided shelter against the cold westerlies. On the East Coast such houses were not needed, the climate being relatively benign in comparison, and simple structures utilising caves, rocky overhangs and windbreaks of tree-boughs were enough.

Carner me malettenener – where is your country?

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Further Resources
- The Aboriginal Tasmanians, Lyndall Ryan, Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd. 1996.
- Many excellent resources are available at the Aboriginal Education Unit.

Visit www.tmag.tas.gov.au for information on free school programs and teachers seminars offered in conjunction with the Aboriginal Education Unit.