

# 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.



### Paywoota – long time ago

More than 2000 generations of Tasmanian Aboriginal people have lived on this island they called Trouwerner, 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 gardawn, 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.

#### Things to explore

- How long has your family been living in Tasmania? Think about this in terms of generations, roughly 20- 25 years long.
- Traditional Tasmanian Aboriginal people didn't use boomerangs, spear throwers or stone axes? What did their "tool kit" for hunting consist of?

Check out the resource from the National Museum of Australia [www.nma.gov.au/education/school\\_resources/permanent\\_exhibitions/telling\\_our\\_indigenous\\_stories/](http://www.nma.gov.au/education/school_resources/permanent_exhibitions/telling_our_indigenous_stories/)



### Tunapry pakana mapali – our people's knowledge

Tasmanian Aboriginal culture has a rich expression that has developed over thousands of years. It is beautifully expressed in the skills of the shell necklace makers who collect shells such as maireeners, cockles, black crows, oat and rice shells, and then polish and thread them onto sinew and plant fibres. It is a tradition that has been kept alive over a long time passing from mother to daughter.

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.



[www.users.bigpond.net.au/jandmgrist/Webshells.htm](http://www.users.bigpond.net.au/jandmgrist/Webshells.htm)

- 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.

<http://www.news.com.au/mercury/story/0,22884,22897745-3462,00.html>

### Carner me malettenener – where is your country?

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.

#### Things to explore

- Read John Marsden's and Shaun Tan's classic pictorial allegory *The Rabbits* and discuss the meaning of invasion and resistance from various perspectives.
- Map the pattern of early white settlement against the distribution of viable hunting grounds and Aboriginal trade routes. What might the effect of this displacement from traditional food sources have been?
- Research first contact accounts between Europeans and Aboriginals across Australia.



Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery



### Pakana palawa – Recognition

"Where the bad was we can always make it good". Aunty Ida West 1919-2003 Tasmanian Aboriginal Elder

The Federal Parliament's apology to indigenous Australians on February 13, 2008, marked a significant event in the Australian calendar. It is but one more step in a long and often difficult history of black and white relations in Tasmania. There are many key dates that resonate with both the white and black population of Tasmania such as:

- 1642** Aboriginal people see Tasman's ships sailing past Trouwerner
- 1798** Sealers establish a camp on Cape Barren Island – the first non-Aboriginal settlement south of Sydney
- 1803** British settlement of Trouwerner begins at Risdon Cove.
- 1830–34** Robinson rounds up Aborigines and incarcerates them on the Furneaux Islands. He accounts for 74 women living with sealers and removes some against their will.
- 1951-58** The Cape Barren Island Aboriginal Reserve is closed and the government's assimilation policy forces Aboriginal families to move.
- 1984** Legislation is passed to repatriate all ancestral remains held in Tasmanian museums.
- 1995** The Aboriginal Land Act is passed, returning 12 sites to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community
- 1999** Tasmanian Government apologises to the Stolen Generations –the first Australian parliament to do so.
- 2000** 25,000 Tasmanians support reconciliation by participating in the Walk for Reconciliation across the Tasman Bridge.

#### Things to explore

- View the media on the Australian Government apology to the Stolen Generation, and explore what this may mean for members of the Stolen Generations themselves. Does symbolism mean anything? Collect oral histories relating to the apology.



[www.abc.net.au/news/events/apology/](http://www.abc.net.au/news/events/apology/)

- Research in more detail what happened on the key dates mentioned above.
- What was promised by George A. Robinson to the Tasmanian Aboriginal People but never fulfilled?

#### Further Resources

- Keeping Culture Aboriginal Tasmania, Ed. Amanda Reynolds, National Museum of Australia Press, 2006.
- The Aboriginal Tasmanians, Lyndall Ryan, Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, 1996.
- Many excellent resources are available at the Aboriginal Education Resource Centre at Elizabeth College, Hobart

<http://library.eliz.tased.edu.au/collections/AbEd/>

Visit [www.tmag.tas.gov.au](http://www.tmag.tas.gov.au) for information on free school programs and teachers seminars offered in conjunction with the Aboriginal Education Unit.

