


Cultural Revival

Many Tasmanian Aboriginal people are involved in processes of reviving cultural practices. The following article provides information on some of the ways that people are going about this.

CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

 Sustainability

CONTENT AREAS

T Technologies

S Science

H History

G Geography

GENERAL CAPABILITIES

 Intercultural Understanding

 Critical and Creative Thinking

 Literacy

 Personal and Social Capability

KEY CONCEPT

Cultural Revival is the formation of group identity around a common culture, where aspects of culture with which the group identifies have been recovered after losses due to colonisation, forced or voluntary relocation, oppression, or modernisation.

Encyclopedia.com

SUPPORTING CONCEPTS

- › cultural practices
- › customs
- › artefacts
- › oral histories

GUIDING QUESTIONS

What strategies are people using in the revival of cultural knowledge and practice?

How do these processes of relearning cultural practices demonstrate Aboriginal people's resilience in responding to historic and contemporary impacts of colonisation?

This printed material is **to be used with Fibres – a Living Cultures multimedia curriculum resource** that can be found at www.theorb.tas.gov.au

The Living Cultures Fibres resource and this supplementary printed material have been designed to foster culturally responsive practice when learning about Tasmanian Aboriginal Histories and Cultures.

Introduction

Many cultural practices are being revived by some contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal people who have been relearning, maintaining and transmitting cultural knowledge and skills. They are drawing on the knowledge and experiences of the living community, the historical record, artefacts, and their own experiences in country.

Everything we had was made from natural materials so what was hidden [by] our people, because they didn't want the white people to see it, was still hidden, and it went back to country.

Dave Gough, 2017

This statement shows the importance of being able to refer to a range of sources due to the fact that the actual fibre artefacts do not survive intact over long periods of time in the environment.

Lughrana (throwing sticks) and Spears

Dave Gough refers to artefacts and journals in his process of learning how to make throwing sticks.

So we are our own culture here, 12,000 years of our own culture and as far as I can tell – cause there's three of these [throwing sticks] in the museum that I've looked at and analysed, tried to work out, and how they throw them... Through journals and people saying, oh he carried this: *bungana Mannalargenna* was an expert at throwing the stick. So the ones in the museum, I look at them and they're notched on this end. How did they do that? Stone tools and chipping away, notching it, gives you a handle [and] pointed at this end.

Dave Gough, 2017

To the right are images of the *lughrana* that Dave is referring to. It is believed that they were collected by George Augustus Robinson, so-called conciliator of Aborigines, while undertaking the Friendly Mission (1829-1834). It is believed that they may have belonged to *Mannalargenna*.

Lughrana QVMAG Collection, donated by PL Brown, 1987. | QVM.1990.H.0157, QVM.2016.H.0425, QVM.2016.H.0426



Below is a description of how the *lughrana* was thrown as well as an account from Dave Gough about his experience of learning to throw a spear.

One of the most interesting observations as to the way the lughrana was thrown is that of Backhouse, who states that they threw it "with a rotatory motion." This is confirmed by Breton, who says: "It can be thrown with ease forty yards, and in its progress through the air goes horizontally, describing the same kind of circular motion that the boomerang does, with the like whirring noise."

It is, therefore, absolutely certain that the lughrana was primarily a missile, which was thrown horizontally, or almost horizontally, with a rotatory motion like a boomerang. This can only be done if it is gripped at one end, and not in the middle. The lughrana was therefore, when used as a missile, thrown quite differently from the way the spear was thrown, and its character appears, therefore, to be quite different from the latter weapon.

Noetling, F, 1911

One of my biggest passions is making spears and relearning that craft. It's part of my DNA, it's part of who I am. As you start working the materials it's just like switching it on. It's all about me learning how to throw them. Sometimes when I'm throwing them, and you'll go: wow that went around. It's not just a straight throw, it's actually the way that the front of them are kind of hooking in. So there's a whole lot more that I've still got to learn and while I'm doing that I can teach it.

Dave Gough, 2017

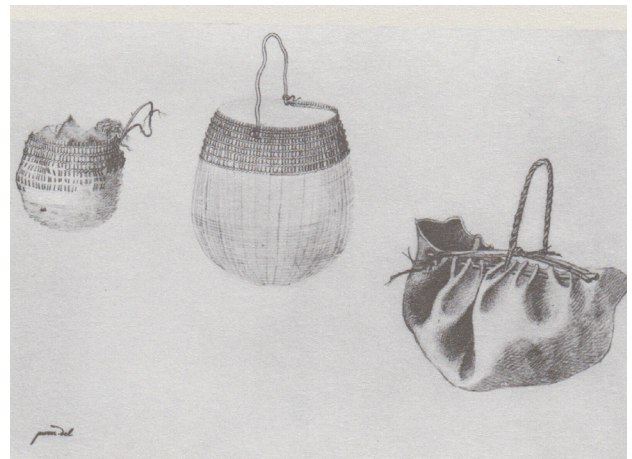
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › What is Dave's personal connection to the *lughrana* he studied in the museum?
- › How have Dave and Verna gone about reconstructing and reconnecting with cultural practices from the past?
- › Why is it important to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community that these practices are maintained?

Kelp Water Carriers

To the right is a sketch of various baskets and a kelp water carrier drawn by Jean Piron the draughtsman on the d'Entrecasteaux expedition of 1792. Until recently, historical sources such as these had been the only ones available for people to refer to.

Paniers et vase a eau. Cape Diemen
(Van Diemen's Land) | *tayenebe*: Tasmanian
Aboriginal women's fibre work, 2017: 9



DISCUSSION QUESTION

- › What can these early drawings reveal about the materials and techniques used to make baskets and water carriers?

Learning About Culture

Aunty Verna Nichols talks about the process of learning to make kelp water carriers as a child.

It was a very good experience and it was many years ago. It was with my cousin, as kids, she'd put us in the car and we wouldn't know where we'd end up. And this day she just fiddled around with the kelp and said "come on, I'll show you". And so we sat down and we made the kelp basket, the water carrier, and we packed it with sand and I carried it home. She's passed away now, but she was a very talented Aboriginal woman. She had the ability and the talent to drag from somewhere, at the back of her mind, "this is how they did it, Verna".

For Leonie and I, it was trial and error.

Verna Nichols, 2017

Verna talks about how, by drawing on different sources such as artefacts, she has refined her knowledge and skill in making kelp water carriers.

We have been making kelp water carriers for many years now, but just recently a photo emerged from the British Museum that depicted a water carrier donated in 1851. The image indicated it have been made in another way. My sister (Leonie Dickson) and I, after close examination of the photo made one just like it.

We discovered that they:

- › Sit better (more stable) when finished
- › Are certainly easier to make
- › Are quicker to make
- › Are easier to handle

Have we been making them the wrong way? Previously we only had drawings made by the early European explorers to go by... So after much discussion, thoughts and making, we feel that the new way as depicted in the photo is the right way to make our water carriers.

Nichols and Dixon cited in *tayenebe: Tasmanian Aboriginal women's fibre work*, 2017: 59

Below is the recently discovered artefact that Verna was referring to in her statements.



Kelp water carrier | Unknown maker ©The trustees of the British Museum

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › How has Aunty Verna's understanding of how to make kelp baskets evolved over time?
- › How important are early records in helping to revive cultural practice?

A Small Part of Our Culture

Aunty Verna also talks about learning together with other women.

We have lost a small part of our culture but the majority of it, I think has been asleep somewhere ... in the back of our mind, and when you get together with a group of women or a group of men, a word that your grandmother passed on or an aunty or your uncle – that comes and by the time those

12 women put it all together, wow, it comes back and you've got the culture, the women sitting together you have the talk and the laughing and it can do nothing but bring out the best in your piece regardless of what you are working on.

Verna Nichols, 2017



Trish Hodge and Dewayne Everett Smith teaching weaving at Margate, 2017 | Image: Dncstrct Pty Ltd

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › How does relearning traditional crafts contribute to cultural maintenance and revival?
- › How have Tasmanian Aboriginal people been able to source the evidence needed to revive cultural practices?

www.theorb.tas.gov.au//living-cultures/fibres/teacher-drawer

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