


Customary Practice

The following article provides insights into the deep meaning that ochre holds. This can be seen through the ways that Tasmanian Aboriginal people have continued to engage in customary practices related to ochre.

CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

 Sustainability

CONTENT AREAS

G Geography

E English

EB Economics and Business

H History

GENERAL CAPABILITIES

 Intercultural Understanding

 Critical and Creative Thinking

 Personal and Social Capability

KEY CONCEPT

Customary practice [refers to] practices inherited from the past that are accepted and respected by the members of a community.

Humanium

SUPPORTING CONCEPTS

- › ochre
- › trade
- › spirituality
- › body adornment
- › stories
- › ritual
- › custom
- › contemporary practice

GUIDING QUESTION

How do contemporary cultural practices reflect customs of the past?

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

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

Introduction

Early European observers may have misunderstood the depth of meaning that ochre held for Tasmanian Aboriginal people. This is demonstrated in Sagona's *Bruising the Red Earth*:

Yet there is no denying that somehow they missed the plurality of meanings that ochre had, spiritual, economic, cosmetic – and most vital of all, the Aborigines' own concepts of this plurality.

Sagona 1994: 2

The Significance of Ochre



Craig Everett and his son CJ at Irapuna, North East Tasmania | Image: Dcnstrct Pty Ltd

There is considerable mention in the historical record, and in other sources, of the significance of ochre to Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

Aborigines did not have many possessions, as everything had to be carried. They did take ochre with them as one of their prized items.

Living with the Land 1989: 18

Ochre was a precious resource for Tasmanian Aboriginal people and highly valued, as we can see from Robinson's journal. Robinson, a so-called conciliator, recorded many observations during the Friendly Mission (1829-1834).

The natives were extremely anxious to reach the place where the favourite colouring was to be obtained, as a proof of which when they arrived at the spot the first mineral they met with – they patted with their hands and kissed it.

27 April 1831

Robinson cited in Plomley 2008: 633

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › How do we know that ochre was a precious resource for Tasmanian Aboriginal people?
- › Why is ochre so precious to Tasmanian Aboriginal people?

Sourcing Ochre

From all over Tasmania people travelled to the ochre mines. The tribes which owned the mines traded ochre with visitors for the things they lacked.

Clark 1985: 17

Below are a few references that draw attention to the fact that there were systems in place to support the knowledge of and distribution of this valuable resource.

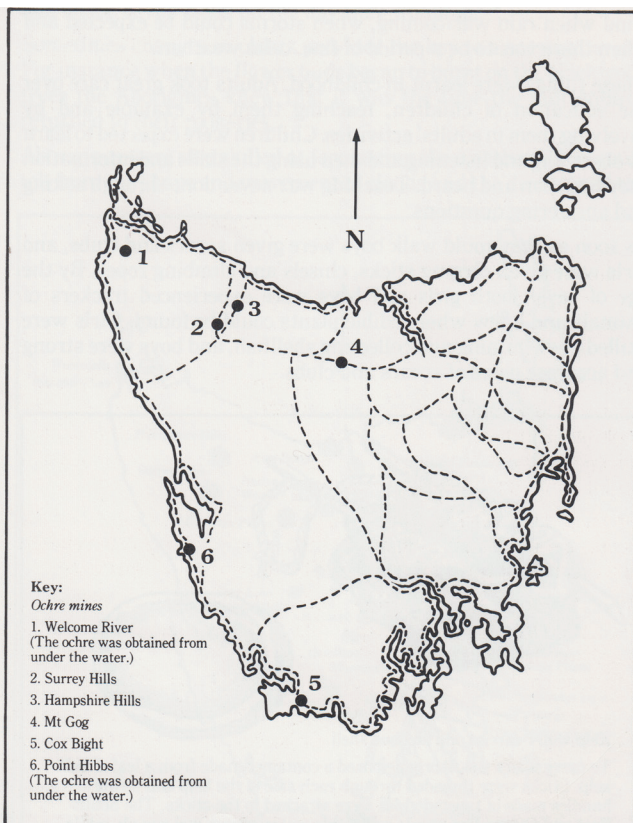
People from the North West tribe visited the North tribe to collect ochre and to hunt in the Surrey Hills.

Living with the Land 1989: 10

At Welcome River and Point Hibbs, 'ochre was obtained from under the water.'

Living with the Land 1989: 12

Appearing below and overleaf are two maps. The first is a map of the main roads and ochre mines accessed by Tasmanian Aboriginal people. The second map shows the territories of the tribes and bands as they are understood to have been before colonisation.



Main roads used by Aborigines and the location of some ochre mines | Living with the Land 1989: 12

Nation Boundaries and Clans



Table 1 Trouwunna: nations and clan locations

Nation	Clan	Clan location	
Oyster Bay	1	Leetermairremener	St Patricks Head
	2	Linetemairrener	North Moulting Lagoon
	3	Loontitetermairrehoinner	North Oyster Bay
	4	Toorernomairremener	Schouten Island
	5	Poredareme	Little Swanport
	6	Laremairremener	Grindstone Bay
	7	Tyreddeme	Maria Island
	8	Portmairremener	Prosser River
	9	Pydairerme	Forestier and Tasman peninsulas
	10	Moomairremener	Pitt Water, Risdon
North East	11	Peeberrangner	Piper River
	12	Leenerterter	Scottsdale
	13	Pinterrairer	Ringarooma
	14	Trawlwoolway	Mount William
	15	Pyemairrenerpairrener	Great Forester River
	16	Leenethmairrener	Ansons River
	17	Panpekanner	Cape Portland

Trouwunna: nations and clan locations | Reproduced with the permission of Allen & Unwin Pty. Ltd.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › Which tribes or bands were advantaged by having access to ochre mines?
- › What other commodities could be traded for ochre?
- › How closely do roads used today follow the main roads used by Aboriginal people?
- › What geographical features or landmarks might these roads be negotiating?

Ochre Deposits

Below are some photographs of some coastal ochre deposits in Southern Tasmania.



Coastal ochre deposit in Southern Tasmania | Image: Dcnstrct Pty Ltd



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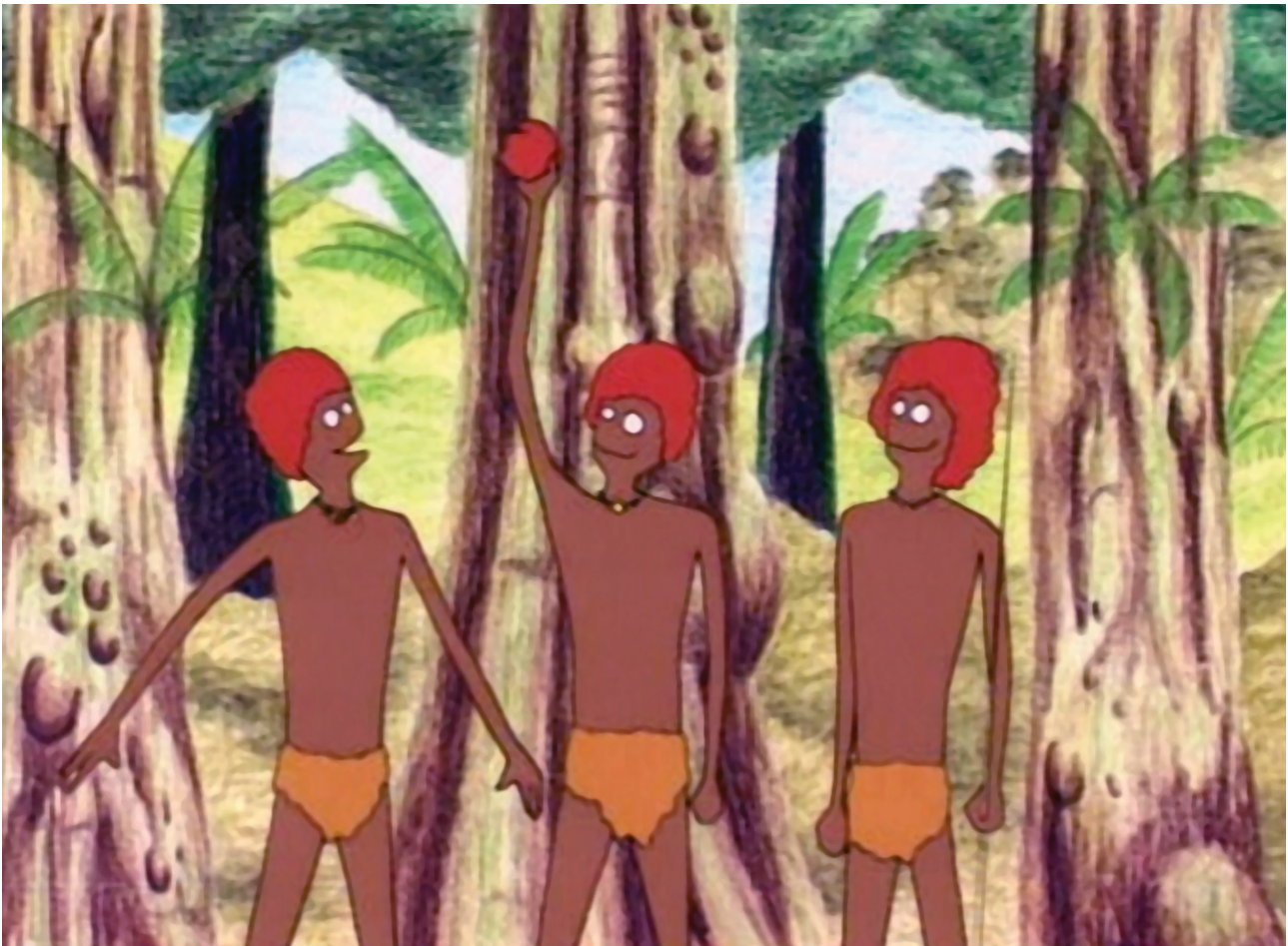
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › What is the significance of these ochre site to the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community?
- › Who should have access to these sites and why?
- › Should these sites be protected – why/why not?

Spiritual Significance

Tasmanian Aboriginal people today tell us that there is a powerful spiritual significance to ochre that links them to the past, present and future that is told through ancient and modern stories.

A link to *ballawinne* [Red Ochre] as told by Jim Everett is provided as evidence of the significance of ochre from an Aboriginal perspective.



A story from the *pallawah* people of Tasmania about *ballawine* [red ochre], and how it was spread all over the state. It is a story of how two tribes argued over the last *ballawinne* mine in Tasmania.

Ballawinne The Dreaming DVD: Series 2, Aboriginal Nations Australia 2004

Today, the *pallawah* can get crayfish from all of the creeks that run into Bass Strait and the *pallawah* have many ochre mines to access ochre for spiritual/cultural use.

Jim Everett cited in Ballawinne The Dreaming

DISCUSSION QUESTION

- › How do these stories maintain Tasmanian Aboriginal people's connection to country/place, culture and identity?

Contemporary Ceremony

Below are some images of ochre being used in a contemporary ceremony.



Jim Everett joins Nathan and Sky Maynard on their way to the Smoke Healing Ceremony to farewell the *kutalayna* site.

Image: Kelly Tall, 2011



Nathan and Sky Maynard performing in the Smoke Healing Ceremony, farewelling the *kutalayna* site as it has been known to their ancestors for 42,000 years.

Image: Kelly Tall, 2011

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › What traditional customs are being practiced here?
- › In what ways does the use of ochre reinforce identity and maintain a special connection to Country for Aboriginal people today?
- › Why is it important for Aboriginal people to maintain these customs and rituals?

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

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