



Cultural Landscapes

Tasmania has a long history of human habitation. There is evidence of the earliest and most southern human habitation of anywhere in the world. There are traces of the history of people in place, in the environment, and in the memories of people. The following article looks at some of these cultural landscapes.




CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

-  Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
-  Sustainability

CONTENT AREAS

- G** Geography
- H** History
- S** Science
- T** Technologies

GENERAL CAPABILITIES

-  Intercultural Understanding
-  Critical and Creative Thinking
-  Ethical Understanding

KEY CONCEPT

Cultural Landscapes are the combined works of nature and humankind, they express a long and intimate relationship between peoples and their natural environment. Certain sites reflect specific techniques of land use that guarantee and sustain biological diversity. Others, associated in the minds of the communities with powerful beliefs and artistic and traditional customs, embody an exceptional spiritual relationship of people with nature.

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SUPPORTING CONCEPTS

- › interconnections
- › place and space
- › perspectives and action
- › connection to country

GUIDING QUESTION

How can we understand the interconnections between country/place, people and culture?

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

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

Mapping a Cultural Landscape

Aboriginal people have lived in Tasmania for over 40 thousand years. There have always been many different Aboriginal cultures, customs and languages in Tasmania. Each of these different tribes or nations had different laws, ceremonial traditions, languages, knowledge, customs of survival, social rules and kinship obligations. The interconnections between these different people in different times with the landscape produced what we understand as cultural landscapes.

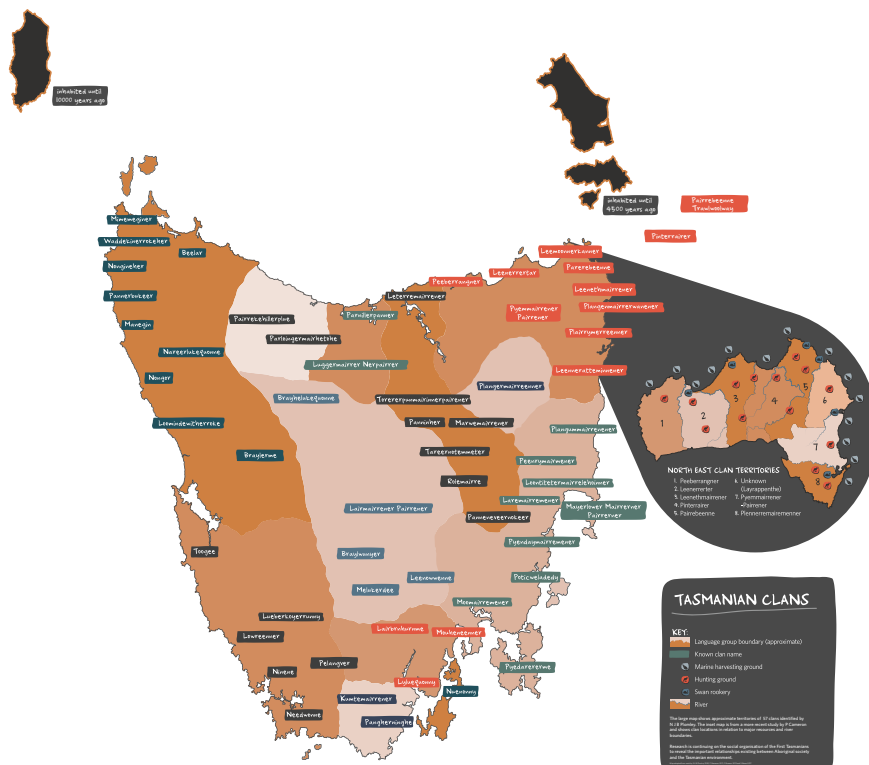
Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery

Over this long period of time Aboriginal people adapted to changing environmental conditions. They survived and thrived through extreme changes in the climate. Tasmanian Aboriginal people developed cultural practices that maximised the availability of, and access to, the natural resources (such as plants and animals) on which they depended.

Through the use of fire and very well-understood burning practices, they were able to make changes to the landscape that benefited them. These changes included creating conditions that made certain areas extremely good for hunting.

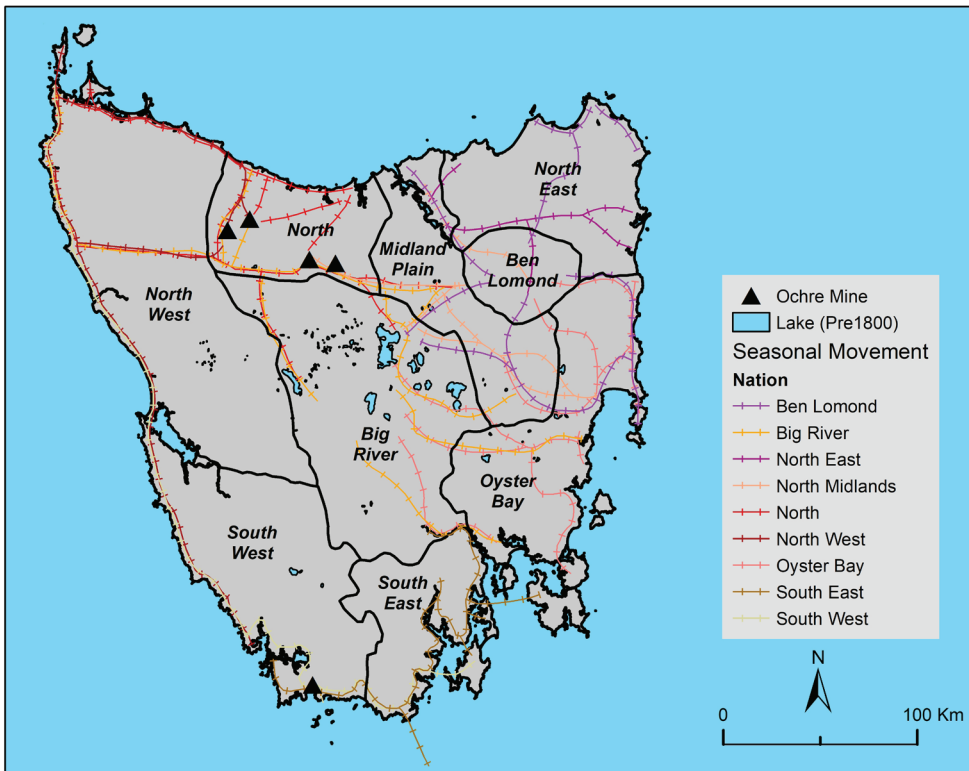
A lot of what we think of as natural environments are in fact very carefully created landscapes that suited the needs of Aboriginal people.

The Nation and Tribe map below left shows the different nations and tribes and their territories as best as can be understood at the point of contact with Europeans. There is extra detail provided of the territories of the North East Clan as this map was produced to be used in this area.



Nation and Tribe Map | Used with permission QVMAG

The Seasonal Movements map below provides more detail of the boundaries, seasonal movements, some natural features and resources particular to the territories of each tribe or nation. This map provides information that allows us to ask questions about the relationships that people had with each other and with different places, and the interconnections between cultural and natural systems.



Seasonal Movements of Nations | © Rob Anders 2018

The *Aboriginal Tasmania Story Map* below presents the cultural landscape using an interactive map.

Aboriginal Tasmania Story Map

<https://utas-spatial.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapTour/index.html?appid=8870d6229a93485b99b713d4435cc0a0>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › What can we understand about people and country/place from these maps?
- › What differences might you expect to see in the ways nations lived in their country?
- › What factors might influence the decisions people make about where and how to live?
- › What changes might happen in the landscape as a result of people being on country?

Interpreting a Cultural Landscape

Across all the Living Cultures multimedia resources Aboriginal people talk about their understanding of cultural landscapes: the connection that they have to places and people in the past and present, and the evidence of this past as being written into the landscape.

We have seen maps that describe some aspects of these cultural landscapes, which by one definition are:

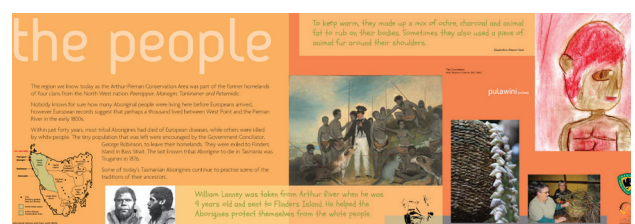
The combined works of nature and humankind, they express a long and intimate relationship between peoples and their natural environment.

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Below are some interpretive signs from the West Coast of Tasmania. They are another way to interpret, represent and communicate knowledge of an Aboriginal cultural landscape to the general public. These signs were created by school students in North West Tasmania.



The Approach to the Edge of the World Interpretive Site | Image: Nikki Brannigan



living areas

The coast was the living area for the south-west Aboriginal people. It is where they had access to food from both land and sea.

Did you know that the Needwonnee people and other families in this family group over many thousands of years in these places, the land beneath them was the shared work, home, treasure, culture and life, both, forming a mosaic. The middens here are the leftovers of the largest in Tasmania.

Middens are really important because we can't explore them and because they tell us about how the Aboriginals lived. Treat them with respect and definitely don't drink up them.

Some of their middens are huge! It must have been their favourite eating place for a VERY long time.

from the land

Middens, warrens, possums, bandicoots, bats, insects and a great variety of plants provided plenty of food for Aboriginal people. Some plants were also used as medicines and to make tools.

They prepared some parts of the muttonbirds' feet to make a soup to make it easy for them to eat. They also prepared muttonbirds to give, and the feet were given as gifts.

We practiced weaving a necktie using sedge.

Pigeon fruit tastes a bit like blue fruit.

from the sea

Aboriginal people hunted on many different types of shells and seabirds from the coast. You can tell by looking at a midden what the Aboriginals ate. The muttonbird shells and foot bones, which were used for many things, are the most common. They were used for many things, like making tools, and for the muttonbird's feet, which were used for many things, like making tools.

Some of the food that Aboriginal people ate.

They ate lots of different shellfish like muttonbirds, mussels, abalone and lobsters.

ceremony & celebrations

Aboriginal people from different nations met regularly for special ceremonies and celebrations using special dances. They would trade food, clothes and tools, and exchange women in marriage.

For the first time in the Tasmanian Park State Reserve, we have some extraordinary rock paintings on the coast. These paintings probably are one of the earliest Aboriginal art to be found in Tasmania. They were probably made at about the same time as the rock art in the south-west coast, but certainly later in Tasmania.

The original circles might have been the sun and the moon. They were probably made at about the same time as the rock art in the south-west coast, but certainly later in Tasmania.

huts

Unlike north and east coast Tasmanian Aboriginals, who had a very temporary bark huts, the Aboriginals of the west and south coast built more permanent huts to shelter them from the winter weather.

They had a dome-shaped hut and a high, thin, vertical post to support the roof. The huts were made from flexible branches, frayed to remove the bark, and the interior was lined with animal skins and furs and feathers for warmth. You can still see outside depressions where these huts were placed in some places along the coast - always near fresh water.

"In the vicinity of former we observed a very compact hut for shelter, made from short pieces of paperbark, tightly banded. They were sturdy enough to paddle across rivers and lagoons and even to go sealing and muttonbirding on nearby offshore islands, like Maczayker and De Witt."

We saw a hut depression where an Aboriginal hut once was.

This is the type of environment Aboriginal people lived in - by fresh water and in the shade of trees.

tools & transport

Some Aboriginal people used very few tools - stones, wooden and digging sticks, like water canoes, fish spears, knives and bones. But they were very good at what they did.

Some tools were made out of pieces of quartz, which is a type of rock that is very hard. Some tools were made from wood, like spears and paddles. Some tools were made from animal skins and furs, like muttonbirding gear.

Aboriginal people invented several Tasmanian fish traps to catch fish from other waters to use for food and to use material for tools and building when they needed to catch large muttonbirds or seal or off-shore sand to hunt seal or muttonbirds. The fish traps on the coast were made of paperbark or paperbark.

They made spears and digging sticks from the silky branches of small and medium trees, like paperbark.

They must have been really fit and strong people to walk everywhere.

Edge of the World interpretive signs installed at Arthur River | Used with permission Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service

The interpretive signs below are situated on the Needwonnee walk in South West Tasmania.

needwonnee

Welcome to the Needwonnee Walk. This short walk takes you through part of the homelands of our ancestors – the Needwonnee people. Here they lived a rich, harmonious and sustainable life for many thousands of years. Sharing some of their story helps us connect with our culture, keeping our past, present and future strong.

This is a living, changing interpretive experience. Members of our community hope to return to refurbish the natural installations, add to our story and practice our traditions.

We hope you enjoy discovering our living culture.

THE TASMANIAN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

The Needwonnee were one of four bands that made up the South West Nation. Their homelands extended inland from the south coast, west to Port Davey and east to New River Lagoon.

For shelter, family groups built dome-shaped huts from local materials, framed with long, intersecting branches and thatched with long grass. Their huts were warm, comfortable and quite weather-proof. They were often clustered together near fresh water.

The land was regularly and deliberately burnt, creating the low and open tussockgrass moorland, making it easy for them to hunt and move around. Burning also encouraged fresh and diverse plant growth, attracting wallabies and other mammals and birds which they hunted.

Canoes were built from short pieces of paperbark, tightly banded. They were sturdy enough to paddle across rivers and lagoons and even to go sealing and muttonbirding on nearby offshore islands, like Maczayker and De Witt.

Out on the coast, vast middens – containing shells, bones, stone tools and ash – were created over thousands of years as generations of families shared food and stories around their campfires.

About the walk
The Needwonnee Walk takes you along a boardwalk across the moorland beside Melaleuca Creek to the junction of Melaleuca Inlet, Creek and Lagoon. It then winds back through the delightful paperbark forest bordering Melaleuca Lagoon. You will emerge from the forest at the bushwalkers' huts. Allow about 30 minutes to comfortably complete the circuit.

*"Ascended a lofty hill...
Saw numerous native huts..."*
(G.A. Robinson, Feb. 21, 1830)

Within a few decades of the arrival of the British in 1803, conflict between settlers and Aboriginals escalated. In response, the Government engaged George Augustus Robinson to find and remove all Aboriginal people from their homelands and relocate them to the Bass Strait islands. In the late summer of 1830, Robinson spent a month in the Melaleuca-Cas Right-Port Davey area. He failed to find any Needwonnee, although he saw many of their huts. Robinson's journal provides us with the only written account of the Needwonnee.

Interpretive Signage Needwonnee Walk | Used with permission Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service

The Needwonnee walk is a living, changing interpretive experience that was created by Working on Country Rangers from the Tasmania Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service trainee Aboriginal Rangers, Aboriginal artists and community members.

The Needwonnee were one of four bands that made up the South West nations. Like other bands that lived along Tasmania's south and west coast the Needwonnee lived in villages of huts, close to fresh water and food, with each family group having its own hut.

The installations below are interpretations of a Creation Story (drawn from Robinson's recorded version of Worrady's telling of the story).

Parlevar was the First Aboriginal man. To make him Moihernee, the Great Spirit, took some earth up to the sky and fashioned a man who had a tail like a kangaroo and legs without knee joints.

Without knee joints, Parlevar could not lie down. Dromerdeener, the Star Spirit, helped Parlevar. He cut off his tail, cured the wound with grease and made knee joints for Parlevar.

Parlevar stayed in the sky for a very long time. Eventually, he came to the land by walking down Laway Teeney – the sky road, or Milky Way.

The Needwonnee's homelands were (and still are) largely a landscape of low-growing buttongrass plains – a landscape intentionally created and maintained over many thousands of years by repeated, regular burning. Fire kept the landscape low and open making it easy for people to move and hunt. The burning also encouraged fresh and diverse plant growth, attracting wallabies and other mammals and birds which they hunted.

From Connecting and Sharing: Needwonnee

Later, Moihernee and Dromerdeener quarrelled. Moihernee was forced to leave the sky and came to live on the land near Louisa Bay.

Moihernee fought with many evil spirits who lived in the ground. His wife came down to live in the sea and their many children came down in the rain.

When Moihernee died he went to the land near Cox Bight. There he was turned into a large rock that stands majestically on a point of land near the sea.

From Connecting and Sharing: Needwonnee



Creation panels, Needwonnee Walk | Artwork: Verna Nichols. Used with permission Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › What do these interpretative signs tell us about the cultural landscapes of this place?
- › In what ways do they inform our understanding of the characteristics of place and the interactions people had with this place?
- › How could the people who created these signs have developed the understandings necessary to interpret and represent this cultural landscape?
- › What would be the best way to develop this understanding?

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

REFERENCES

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