



Preservation

Aboriginal people talk about cultural heritage sites containing evidence of their ancestors and their ways of being in a place. They talk about these places as living sites and understand them as being cultural landscapes. The following article demonstrates the importance of preserving the knowledge of, and in, these places.




CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

-  Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
-  Sustainability

CONTENT AREAS

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

GENERAL CAPABILITIES

-  Intercultural Understanding
-  Critical and Creative Thinking
-  Ethical Understanding

KEY CONCEPT

Preservation: the act of keeping something the same or of preventing it from being damaged.

Cambridge Dictionary

SUPPORTING CONCEPTS

- › hut depressions
- › middens
- › cultural heritage
- › construction techniques
- › heritage values

GUIDING QUESTION

How can cultural heritage from the past or present be preserved for the future?

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.

Introduction

Hut depressions, which are predominantly located in coastal and estuarine environments, and the middens they accompany, provide incredible stories and information about how ancient Tasmanian Aboriginal people lived.

Living Sites

I don't really like to refer to them as midden sites, I'd rather call them living sites. This is where people lived and these are the remains of the food that they ate, but also around this area, there would have been babies born onto

this country, and old people passed away and buried on this country. That's why I'd rather be calling them living sites.

Dave Gough, 2017



Dave at a hut depression at *panatana*, 2017 | Image: Dcnstrct Pty Ltd

Hut depressions are large circular hollows that have been dug into the top of small hills, dunes or shell middens. These depressions are all that remain today of Aboriginal huts – large beehive shaped structures composed of wood and bark that could accommodate between

6–14 people. The unique beehive shape was specifically designed to withstand the harsh weather conditions of Tasmania's coastal environments, particularly along the west coast where they are more commonly found.

Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › Why does Dave make a distinction between 'middens' and 'living sites'?
 - › What can hut depressions tell us about the way that Aboriginal Tasmanians lived?
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Drawing on the Record

Early historical accounts can provide information on practices and technology, including the sophisticated and intelligent design of the dome huts. David talks about how these accounts and sketches assisted him in the re-creation of a dome hut.

Their huts are differently constructed from that of the Brune people. They are in the form of a semi-circular dome and are very commodious and quite weather-proof. They are called GAR. DOWN by the natives on the west coast. Some of these huts are from ten to twelve feet in diameter and eight feet in height. The door or entrance is a small hole fourteen inches wide by two feet high, and this aperture is made to answer the threefold purpose of door, window and chimney. I entered several and found them to be very comfortable dwellings.

Their huts or cottages are constructed by first placing a long stick in the ground and bending it over and forcing the other end into the ground at the distance required for the width of the hut. Other sticks are then stuck in the ground and bent over as the first, intersecting each other, and this is continued until they

have a sufficient quantity to support the weight of thatch that is to be put on. After this frame or skeleton of a hut is completed they put on the thatch, which consists of long grass which they call NEME.ME.NE. The whole when completed has a very neat appearance. Some of these huts are lined with the bark of the tea-tree and are remarkabl[y] warm.

5 April 1830

Robinson cited in Plomley 2008: 175

The huts were situated in a beautiful place near a fine stream of water. One of the huts was well built, lined with grass inside and covered with bark outside. A large and excellent basket was suspended from the roof and filled with shellfish and house-leek.

2 June 1830

Robinson cited in Plomley 2008: 199



Dome Hut Sketch after P Murray, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery | *Living with the Land*, 1989: 18

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › What knowledge and skills would people need to find a living site and to build and furnish their huts?
- › What construction techniques are in evidence?
- › Why are primary sources valuable to contemporary Aboriginal Tasmanians?

Re-creation



Dome hut at QVMAG constructed by David Gough | Image: Dcnstrect Pty Ltd

Contemporary researchers have used primary source material to construct a version of a domed hut in a museum setting. Contemporary reconstructions such as these allow for the preservation of Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural practice through exhibitions and educational programs.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › How does re-creating the domed huts strengthen and maintain connection to country/place, culture and identity?
- › How is Tasmanian Aboriginal culture preserved through the re-creation of traditional artefacts?
- › How can reconstructing such artefacts enhance broad understanding of how Tasmanian Aboriginal people lived?

takayna

The Western Tasmania Aboriginal Cultural Landscape (WTACL) on the *takayna*/Tarkine coast is 21,000 hectares of national heritage listed country that has priceless Aboriginal heritage value. Traditional Aboriginal use of coastal *takayna* dates back about 10,000 years and the cultural resources are still in use today.

The Australian Heritage Council assessed that the *takayna*/Tarkine coast has the greatest

number, diversity and density of Aboriginal hut sites in Australia. Dotted along the wind-swept coastline are the remnants of an unusual, specialised and more sedentary Aboriginal way of life which was based on the hunting of seals and land mammals, and the gathering of shellfish.

TAC 2016: foreword



Shell midden perfectly showcasing a fire place, a place of cooking, eating and living. A place of sharing, creating and continuing – a place of culture.



lunyi (hammer) stone; an essential tool for the creation of other tools.



A notched edge scraper used for sharpening spears, made from the rare stone Spongelite. The only known source of this stone is located on the north-west coast of Tasmania.



A lasting reminder of culture; opercula are an indicator of middens containing warrener and an ochre pebble, likely a left over from a ceremony and dance.



Kanikong (pigface); traditional resource, both edible and for healing (medicinal) use, with stone tools dropped at its roots, possibly left when last this particular plant was utilised.



Shell midden perfectly showcasing a fire place, a place of cooking, eating and living. A place of sharing, creating and continuing – a place of culture.

All images: Sharnie Everett

As I walk through the middens I find myself studying the many bones from past meals eaten here, looking for the remains of fire pits by finding layers of charcoal and ash. These layers don't just tell me this was a place where stories were shared, lessons were taught and life was lived. They represent a continuation of culture and generations of knowledge.

Sharnie Everett cited in TAC 2016: 15

Aboriginal heritage is a direct link to my ancestors. When I am at an Aboriginal heritage site, I can always find the human element contained within it. For example I'll find shells stacked up in middens; they were stacked by ancestral hands. When I look at an Aboriginal site I don't see it as an individual place, I look at it in the context of an area as well as in the context of other places, and what it tells me about what my ancestors did there.

Caleb Pedder cited in TAC 2016: 35

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › What is the significance of areas such as *takayna* to Aboriginal people?
- › Why is it important that such sites are preserved?

Protection



Aboriginal Midden at Ordinance Point North West Tasmania | Image: Ted Mead

Despite Parks and Wildlife installation of coastal fencing, many vehicles have pushed access through the scrub and have been frequently riding across the dune.

National Heritage listing has failed to ensure protection of the Aboriginal heritage values and they remain under damaging pressure from off-road vehicle access.

Our middens are an incredible gift, telling us much more than just what people ate, but showcasing an amazing array of information about time, place and of how people lived. Layers of shells representing generations of knowledge left for us all to learn from.

When these middens are crushed by the force of vehicles being driven over them it destroys this information, it changes the story, this damage is irreparable and irreversible – the story is lost forever.

Sharnie Everett cited in TAC 2016: 49

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › What is being preserved?
- › What are the consequences of the loss or damage of this heritage area for Tasmanian Aboriginal communities?
- › What are the consequences of the loss or damage of this heritage area for all Australians?

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

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