


# Cultural Adaptation

Tasmanian Aboriginal people have been responding to changing circumstances for millennia. They have adapted to these changes and continued their cultural practices. The following article evidences this ability to respond and adapt.

## CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

 Sustainability


## CONTENT AREAS

**H** History

**G** Geography

**T** Technologies

## GENERAL CAPABILITIES

 Intercultural Understanding

 Critical and Creative Thinking

 Personal and Social Capability

## KEY CONCEPT

Cultural adaptation is a relatively new concept used to define the specific capacity of human beings and human societies to overcome changes of their natural and social environment by modifications to their culture.

Anthropology iresearchnet

## SUPPORTING CONCEPTS

- › primary and secondary sources
- › innovation
- › technology
- › revival
- › knowledge systems
- › colonisation
- › cultural practice

## GUIDING QUESTION

How do cultures adapt and continue over time?

This printed material is **to be used with Stone Tools – a Living Cultures multimedia curriculum resource** that can be found at [www.theorb.tas.gov.au](http://www.theorb.tas.gov.au)

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

# Introduction

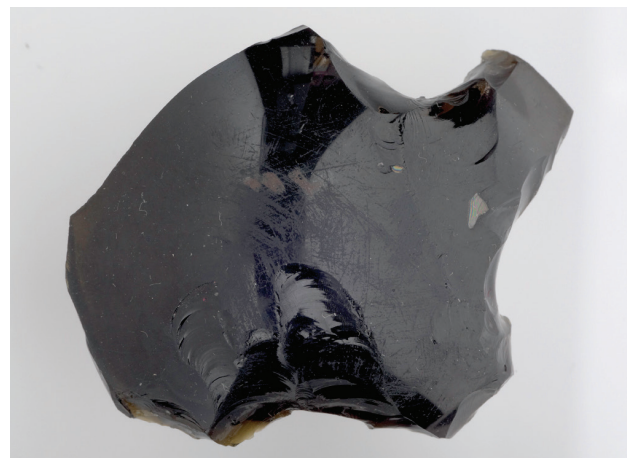
Caleb Pedder talks about contact sites not in terms of an interaction between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal people but as evidence of Aboriginal people's response to changing circumstances and the availability of new materials resulting from processes of colonisation.

---

## New Materials

Below is a range of primary and secondary sources that evidence Aboriginal people responding and adapting to changing circumstances.

In 1938, Mr F.D. Maning found a Tasmanian implement at Kempton Tasmania, which had been made from the base of a glass bottle of old-fashioned type... The implement is of well-defined Tasmanian type, and the material used dates the making of it to somewhere within the last two centuries. It would be of interest to know if it could be ascertained whether the glass is such as was used in English bottles of the early nineteenth century or whether it could be attributed to the Dutch or other voyages of still earlier times.



Tindale 1942: 1-2

Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, M2828

This rare example of a glass artefact crafted by Tasmanian Aborigines symbolises some of the many aspects of two cultures at the interface.

The wide range of rocks used by the Aborigines in chipped implements reflects the varied geology of Tasmania (Spry and Banks, 1962). Ground stone artefacts of non-Tasmanoid facies from Tasmania (Scott, 1942) are of uncertain origin. Glass, china and porcelain were sporadically used following European contact (e.g. Tindale, 1942; Bryden, 1960; Plomley, 1966; B. H. Brimfield, pers. comm.; author's pers. obs.). An aboriginal midden, just N.W. of Scotts Hill, N. of Ansons Bay, contained worked pieces and fashioned implements of china, porcelain, stoneware, thick "ship's" glass, thin instrument glass and bottle glass. These were associated with a "ship's spike", copper nail and a 1816 George III shilling (suggesting a maximum date for the implement manufacture); the material does not appear to derive from any known European settlement in the area and may have been collected by the aborigines from an unrecorded ship wreck (P. Giles, pers. comm.).

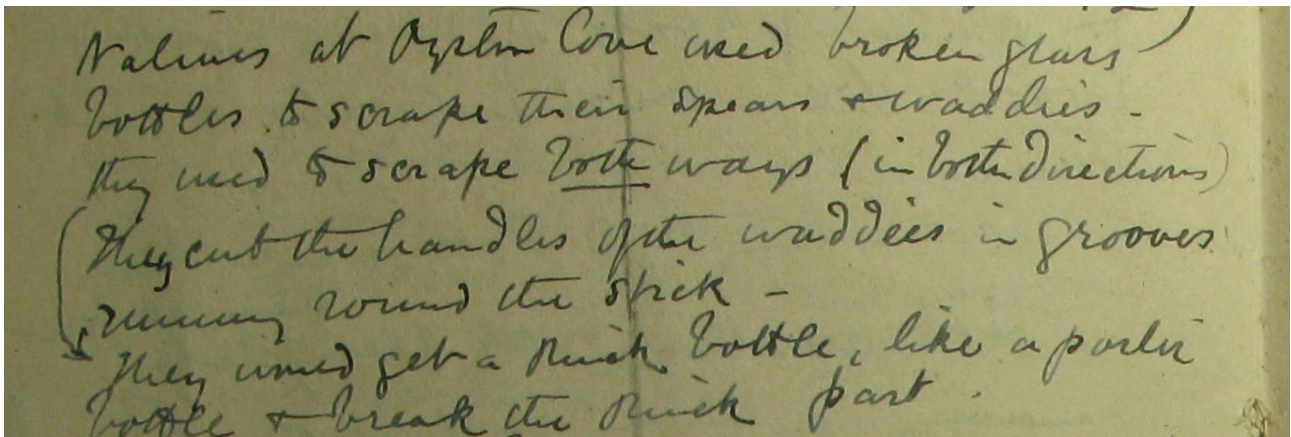
Sutherland 1972: 8

Englishman Ernest Westlake was in Tasmania from 1908 to 1909. He collected 13,000 stone tools and interviewed many people about their recollections and knowledge of stone tools. Rebe Taylor has written about Westlake's time in Tasmania.

Westlake wanted to know how the residents [at Oyster Cove] used stone tools. Sarah Hughes remembered how they had adapted their technology to a new resource, using 'broken glass bottles to scrape their spears and waddies'.

Taylor 2016: 80

---



November 1908 Westlake Pitt Rivers Museum: Manuscript Collections, Westlake Papers, 2. Image 16, WEST00002, Notebook 2 [Tasmanian Notebook 2: November 1908 - January 1909], Series 3

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › How did Tasmanian Aboriginal people adapt their technologies to the materials that were introduced through the process of colonisation?
- › What can these historical primary sources tell us about people's responses to changing circumstances?

---

## Contemporary Knowledge



Learning at the Karadi Stone Tool Making Workshop 2017 | Image: Dcnstrct Pty Ltd



Learning at the Karadi Stone Tool Making Workshop, 2017 | Image: Dcnstrct Pty Ltd

Historically, Tasmanian Aboriginal people used and adapted stone tool technology to live and thrive. In the contemporary context, the revival of these knowledge systems and practices is an expression of cultural identity and connection to the past. The stories told throughout the Living Cultures Stone Tools multimedia resources demonstrate people's resilience in responding to historic and contemporary impacts of colonisation.



The men learning together at the workshop | Image: Dcnstrct Pty Ltd

Throughout the workshop the men spoke about the value of the opportunity to learn these skills.

I've learnt a lot, a lot, of knowledge today. They probably don't understand how much I've learnt today so that is really important for me and my community as well to be able to carry that on.

Craig Everett, 2017

I've been fortunate enough to learn this with my daughter so that is pretty special to be able to pass this knowledge on to her and spend this time with her. And also working with the men, all us men together, empowering ourselves learning this knowledge we are actually revitalising and saying this is how it is done and bringing this back to community so it has been very valuable.

Luke Mabb, 2017

To see the guys getting in there and giving it a go it all makes it worthwhile as a community ... we need to be open to sharing our experiences

because we have a very rich and diverse culture and there are plenty of people who want to learn from us much as we need to learn from them.

Todd Sculthorpe, 2017

This is great I wish we could do this more often it is the first time I have been out doing this as a big group learning this.

Benje Allen, 2017

I'd just like to say Kim a huge thanks and especially not just from me but on behalf of my community and all of us here thanks very much for sharing this knowledge it is really important not only for us but for our culture. If this doesn't happen that is just another thing that we have lost.

Craig Everett, 2017

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › What can these contemporary stories tell us about people's responses to changing circumstances?
- › What does this tell us about who might have responsibility for sharing knowledge and skills in the process of reviving cultural practices?
- › What does this tell us about culture over time?

[www.theorb.tas.gov.au/living-cultures/stonetools/teacher-drawer](http://www.theorb.tas.gov.au/living-cultures/stonetools/teacher-drawer)

## REFERENCES

Image 16, WEST00002, Notebook 2 [Tasmanian Notebook 2: November 1908 - January 1909], Series 3, Pitt Rivers Museum: Manuscript Collections, Westlake Papers, 2. Accessed online via: Stories in Stone: an annotated history and guide to the collections and papers of Ernest Westlake (1855-1922)

<http://www.westlakehistory.info/viewer/WEST/item/WEST00002/16>

Sutherland, F.L., 1972. The Classification, Distribution, Analysis and Sources of Materials in Flaked Stone Implements of Tasmanian Aborigines. Records of the Queen Victoria Museum, No. 42, 1-46

Taylor, R., 2017. Into the Heart of Tasmania: A Search for Human Antiquity. Edition. Melbourne University Press

Tindale, Norman B (1941) A Tasmanian stone implement made from bottle glass. Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania. pp. 1-2. ISSN 0080-4703



State of Tasmania (Department of Education)  
Published: May 2018



**Aboriginal Education**  
Department of Education Tasmania  
knowledge | learning | empowerment