

## Tasmanian history - time and events before 1788

Twelve thousand years ago sea level was rising as the most recent period of global glaciation eased. The land mass now known as Tasmania was cut off and the Aboriginal people living here were isolated. They shared many traits with Australian mainland Aboriginal people but also developed physically and culturally into a distinctive population.

## Society and economy

The Tasmanians were hunters and gatherers. They made tools and containers from wood, bone, stone, seaweed, bark, grass and sinew. They managed their environment carefully, moving around their country to harvest seasonal food resources and using fire to maintain grasslands which supported an abundance of wallabies and kangaroos. Coastal people relied on the sea for much of their diet. Scalefish were eaten in the distant past but apparently not since about 3,500 years ago, however the women collected abalone, oysters, mussels and other shellfish. The remains of these make up enormous middens all around Tasmania's coastline. The Tasmanians made bark canoes to travel to offshore islands to harvest muttonbirds and seals during summer and autumn.

The people camped in family groups several of which formed a band, the land-holding group in Tasmanian society. Several bands spoke the same

language and there were nine language groups / tribes in Tasmania at the time of European contact. Bands with reciprocal arrangements intermarried and shared resources.

## Traditional culture

The Tasmanians had totems and taboos. Through stories and songs they passed on knowledge of how their world, the animals, plants and the people were created. They had knowledge of astronomy, and stone engravings in sites along the west coast are thought to be important symbols of the Tasmanians' religious beliefs.

The people used ochres and charcoal as pigments for body decoration and bark art inside their dwellings. The men dressed their hair with ochre and both women and men wore necklaces of shells and animal and plant fibres.



Tasmania 14,000 years ago showing the drowning of the Bassian Plain which isolated Tasmania



Map of Tasmania showing the boundaries of tribal areas at the time of contact



## Beliefs

Moihernee and the creation of Parlevar

Parlevar was the first Aboriginal. To make him, Moihernee took some earth up to the sky and fashioned a man who had a tail like a kangaroo and legs without knee joints. This meant that Parlevar could not lie down and had to sleep standing up. Dromerdeener, the great star spirit, saw this and decided to help Parlevar. He cut off his tail, cured the wound by rubbing grease on it, and made knee joints for Parlevar. When Parlevar sat down for the first time he said, 'Nyrerae' - it is good.

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.

Later Moihernee and Dromerdeener quarrelled. Moihernee was forced to leave the sky and came to live on the land near Louisa Bay in south-west Tasmania. There he fought with many evil spirits who lived in the ground at *Toogee Low* - the land near Port Davey. Moihernee's wife followed him and went to live in the sea. Their many children came down from the sky in the rain.

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

