

Aboriginal Cultural Values

Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area

lutruwita is the country of Tasmanian Aboriginal people and everyone has a responsibility to protect our heritage.



Louisa Bay, South West National Park, TWWHA.

The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) is a diverse Aboriginal cultural landscape comprising a variety of environments in which the cultural heritage of Tasmanian Aboriginal people is preserved. For tens of thousands of years Aboriginal people lived in the coastal environments, the valleys with freshwater rivers, open button grass plains and alpine mountains. The TWWHA is significant to Tasmanian Aboriginal people because of the rich cultural heritage still present there.

The TWWHA is also significant to Australia and the world community. It was recognized by the World Heritage Committee for its Outstanding Universal Value when it was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1982.

TWWHA as a Cultural Landscape

Cultural landscapes are physical areas containing natural features which have been physically modified and managed by human activity. Aboriginal people have lived in, used, managed and modified the landscape of the TWWHA for at least 35,000 years. The physical evidence of this connection is apparent today in elements such as the vegetation types and coverage within the TWWHA, which were managed and modified by targeted burning regimes implemented by Aboriginal people. Aboriginal cultural heritage sites provide further evidence of the long connection with the landscape.

Aboriginal cultural values are also evident in intangible knowledge associated with the TWWHA

including story, song, dance, language, kinship, custom, ceremony and ritual. Knowledge of these intangible elements are held by Tasmanian Aboriginal people and are often associated with physical places or features within the landscape with some, such as the creation story associated with Louisa Bay and Cox Bight, presented to the public in the form of an interpretative walking trail known as the Needwonee Walk at Melaleuca.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfXocUVYIFA>

Aboriginal Heritage Sites in the TWWHA

There are approximately 1000 known Aboriginal heritage sites within the TWWHA. The sites in the TWWHA are considered to have high cultural value to Tasmanian Aboriginal people



Rock markings, TWWHA.

as they represent important physical remains of ancestral Aboriginal life in the TWWHA. Many also have high scientific value as they increase our understanding of the Aboriginal life and activities.

Information on a number of the most important site types and significant sites in the TWWHA are detailed below:

Rockshelters

The TWWHA contains numerous rockshelters that date from the Ice Age (known as Pleistocene period) and are more than 10,000 years old.

Among these rockshelters are Warreen Cave and *Parmerpar Meethaner* which are the oldest known Aboriginal heritage sites in Tasmania. Archaeological excavation indicate that Aboriginal people occupied these sites from 35,000 years ago.

These discoveries show that the Aboriginal habitation of the TWWHA was the most southern human occupation at this time predating human occupation in South America by up to 20,000 years.

Rock markings

There are at least eighteen rock marking sites within the TWWHA with Riveaux and South Coast Cave among the most complex. Although

dating rock markings is problematic, these may have been created more than 10,000 years ago.

Riveaux contains at least 20 hand stencils, including both right and left hands that have been applied to the walls using red ochre. Among the rock marking are two small hand stencils, which may have been created by children.

South Coast Cave is located on the southern coastline of the TWWHA and contains approximately 680 individual images including potential representations of human footprints, animal tracks and other geometric designs.

Hut depressions

Among the most intriguing sites in the TWWHA are six hut depressions recorded on the west coast. Often associated with shell middens, these sites provide evidence for the construction by Tasmanian Aboriginal people of semi-permanent structures, and indicate possible semi-permanent or permanent settlement of Aboriginal people in specific locations. Evidence for such structure and settlement by Aboriginal people is rare in Australia.

The decision to settle in specific locations may have been for a variety of reasons including to benefit from locally available resources like food, cultural or societal change, or in response to environmental change. The sites emphasise the diversity of Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural practices in the TWWHA and ability to adapt and live sustainably.

Shell middens

Shell middens are a common site type in the TWWHA. Located in coastal and freshwater areas they contain the remains of edible shellfish that were gathered, cooked and eaten by Aboriginal people.

Middens can also contain

- charcoal and ash associated with cooking activities
- butchered animal bones
- stone artefacts
- human skeletal remains associated with burials.

A few middens in the TWWHA have had archaeological excavations. These date from approximately 3,000 years ago and provide a lot of information on Aboriginal food sources and cultural practices.

Aboriginal shell midden, Stephens Bay, TWWHA.



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