



Aboriginal Tasmanians

Aboriginal people have lived in Tasmania for at least 35,000 years – and possibly longer. If this is hard to imagine, then you might also be surprised about how different the Tasmanian environment was in those days.

During the last Ice Age, average temperatures were 6°C lower and annual rainfall was half of what it is today. Glaciers covered the Central Highlands and the sea level was 120 metres lower than today – allowing people to walk across what is now Bass Strait.

Computer modelling is being developed by the Aboriginal Heritage Office working with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land and Sea Council to understand how Aboriginal people interacted with their environment over this immense time period and where they were likely to have lived.

This will provide a valuable tool for predicting and managing Aboriginal heritage places. It will also suggest how people in the past have responded to large scale environmental changes – changes that Tasmanians will face again in the future.¹

The current sea level was reached about 6000 years ago, when most people lived on the coast or in hospitable river valleys. The groups of people who occupied these areas moved regularly with the seasonal changes in availability of the edible flora and fauna. These movements were timed by the arrival of birds and the flowering of plants.

The complex relationships of the groups and their movements cannot be fully conveyed by maps.

¹ Text from the Aboriginal Heritage Office website, at <http://www.tahl.tas.gov.au/aboriginalheritage.html>. We thank the Aboriginal Heritage Office for permission to use this text.