

Aboriginal connections with the kanamaluka / Tamar estuary

The TEER Program acknowledges and pays respect to the First Tasmanian Peoples as traditional owners and custodians of the land we walk on. We also pay respect to the custodians and their elders past, present and emerging, and recognise their care for land, sea and sky country over the past thousands of generations.

The following factsheet has been produced using information from the publication 'Aboriginal connections with Launceston Places', created by the City of Launceston. We thank the City of Launceston and Tasmanian Aboriginal people for contributing their knowledge and time.

ABORIGINAL CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

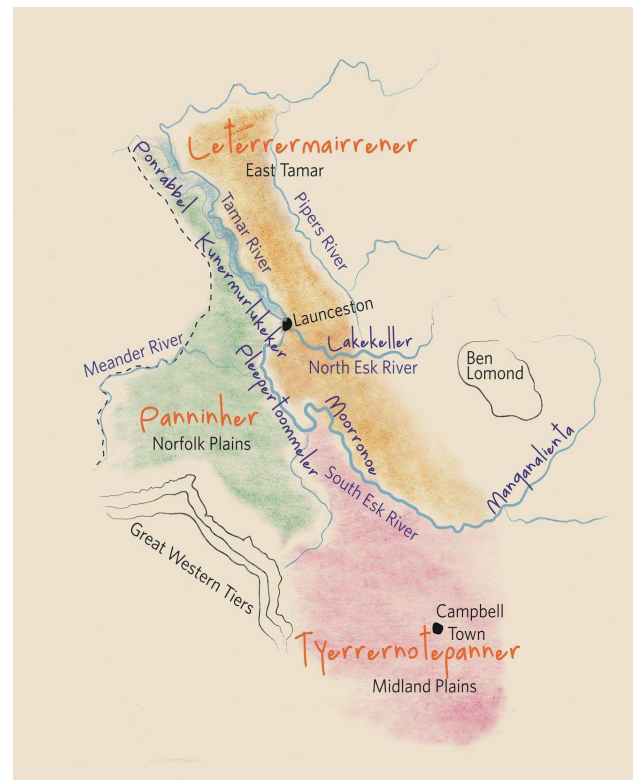
The First People belong to the oldest continuing culture in the world. They cared for and protected Country for thousands of years. They knew this land, they lived on the land, and they died on these lands. Aboriginal connection with the kanamaluka / Tamar estuary is an epic story, of major cultural adaptations made in response to dramatic changes in climate and geography. For much of the period from 60,000 - 10,000 years ago, what is now Bass Strait was a cold and arid placescape, with a large fresh-water lake at its heart, known to geologists as the Bassian Plain.

Although it was probably used as far back as 35,000 years ago, it is clear the Tamar basin has been used extensively from at least 7,000 years ago when sea level rose, and it became the drowned river valley we see today.

At the time of the British occupation of Port Dalrymple, in late 1804, the owners of the country on which Launceston now stands were the Leterrermairrener people. Their territory ranged from the current site of George Town along the eastern side of the Tamar River. It is also possible a separate band was based at York Town, on the western side of the Tamar opposite George Town.

The Leterrermairrener were also a part of what archaeologists have called the North Midlands peoples, also known as the Stoney Creek Nation, who consisted of three, up to perhaps five, clans including the Panninher people from Norfolk Plains, and the Tyerrenotepanner based around Campbell Town.

Seasonal gatherings of the three known clans took place at significant places close to the site of Launceston. In addition to the North Midlands clans, the Pyemairrenerpairrener people from the mouth of Pipers River made seasonal journeys to Windermere area.



Above: territory of the North Midlands peoples. Source: Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.

Similarly, the Plindermaihemener people from the western reaches of Ben Lomond made seasonal visits to Port Dalrymple, which were reciprocated by the Leterrermairrener people.

The Leterrermairrener worked extensively on/with Country - large numbers of artefact scatters and cultural living sites found in connection with the waterways of the Tamar and on the flood plains and tidal flats of the kanamaluka / Tamar estuary are evidence of this.

The Tamar flood plain and the swamp lands near Launceston were rich and reliable sources of food and game. The riverine marsh land was habitat for a wide variety of birds, mammals, reptiles, and frogs. Depending on the time of year, the Leterrermairrener and their neighbours had access to several species of duck, black swans, egrets, cormorants, and swamp harriers, and to their eggs. The drier hinterland hunting grounds provided ample emu, kangaroo and wallaby, the woodlands yielded possum, and the kanamaluka / Tamar estuary an endless store of shellfish, especially mud oyster, mussel, and chiton.

THE GORGE AND TASMANIA'S FIRST PEOPLES

There are many places along the kanamaluka / Tamar estuary and Esk rivers, including, Punchbowl gorge, Corra Lynn, and the Cataract Gorge that are culturally and spiritually important to Tasmania's First peoples.

Geologists estimate the Gorge may be up to 200 million years old; it is likely the first peoples were present in the country surrounding the Gorge, and perhaps the Gorge itself up to 40,000 years ago.

It is believed the Gorge formed part of the territory belonging to the Leterrermairrener people, and Tasmanian Aboriginal people connect with the Gorge as an important ceremonial place.

The significance of the Gorge to the traditional owners is highlighted in an account by Launceston historian, John West. When allowed to visit the Gorge on his way from exile on Flinders Island to imprisonment at Oyster Cove, Hobart, an Aboriginal 'chief' displayed intense excitement upon entering the Gorge. Described as "leaping from rock to rock, with gestures and exclamations of delight", it appeared he hoped and expected to find his people there. When there was no response, he was saddened and "returned pensively".

The Gorge continues to be important to Aboriginal people; a place to connect with Country and ancestors, of deep peace and comfort, and "awesome spiritual significance".



Above: vegetation, including that along waterways, provides resources for items such as spears which can be made from dogwood.

Top: view of the Gorge near Duck Reach.

Bottom: kangaroo apples (*Solanum laciniatum*) are a common native shrub, with its fruit, when ripe (yellow to orange) providing a food source.